

Series Preface

“Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers Commentary Series”

Who Are the Apostolic Fathers?

THE LABEL “APOSTOLIC FATHERS” reflects a narrow collection of early Christian texts that generally date from the first and second centuries CE.¹ The works of the Apostolic Fathers offer a remarkable window into early (especially second-century) Christianity, as communities forged their religious and social identities within the broader Graeco-Roman culture.² As these early authors defined themselves and their readers in relationship to pagan culture, Jewish religiosity, and internal rivals, they ultimately influenced Christian movements for generations to come. Each book within the collection sheds unique light on the diversity of theology, worship, and life within nascent Christian communities.

The collection of “Apostolic Fathers” is an “artificial corpus” and a “modern construct.”³ Authors in antiquity did not use the label to describe such a collection.⁴ Some of the Apostolic Fathers appear in the fourth-

1. Clayton N. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: A Student's Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), xvii. Some scholars have dated the Letter to Diognetus or the Martyrdom of Polycarp into the third century. See Candida R. Moss, “On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* in the History of Christianity,” *EC* 1 (2010) 539–74.

2. Clayton N. Jefford, *The Apostolic Fathers: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005).

3. Paul Foster, “Preface,” in Paul Foster (ed.), *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, T. & T. Clark Biblical Studies (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), vii.

4. According to Robert Grant, the term “Apostolic Fathers” was employed by the Monophysite Severus of Antioch in the sixth century, but not of a collection of writings as now recognized. See Robert M. Grant, “The Apostolic Fathers’ First Thousand Years,” *CH* 31, no. 4 (1962) 21, 28.

century Codex Sinaiticus (Barnabas and Hermas) and the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus (1 Clement and 2 Clement).⁵ Some were read in public worship, were cited as “scripture,” or were mentioned in the context of early canonical discussions.⁶ Codex Hierosolymitanus (1056 CE), which was discovered in 1873, contains the Didache, Barnabas, 1 Clement, 2 Clement, and a long recension of the Ignatian epistles.

Jean-Baptiste Cotelier produced the first printed edition of a collection akin to the Apostolic Fathers in 1672.⁷ Cotelier’s Latin collection was titled *SS. patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt; Barnabae, Clementis, Hermae, Ignatii, Polycarpi*.⁸ Inclusion within the collection was thus associated with an assumed historical connection to the times of the apostles (*temporibus apostolicis*). Within the text of his work, Cotelier spoke of an *Apostolicorum Patrum Collectio*.⁹ In 1693, William Wake put forth an English edition of the Apostolic Fathers: *The Genuine Epistles of the Apostolical Fathers: S. Barnabas, S. Ignatius, S. Clement, S. Polycarp, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Martyrdoms of St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp*.¹⁰ In 1699, Thomas Ittig abbreviated Cotelier’s Latin title to *Bibliotheca patrum apostolicorum Graeco-Latina*.¹¹ Early commentators continued to insist that at least some of the Apostolic Fathers had contact with the original apostles.¹²

Andreas Gallandi added the Letter to Diognetus, extant material from the Apology of Quadratus, and the Papias fragments to the corpus

5. Dan Batovici, “The Apostolic Fathers in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus,” *Bib* 97 (2016) 581–605.

6. See D. Jeffrey Bingham, “Senses of Scripture in the Second Century: Irenaeus, Scripture, and Noncanonical Christian Texts,” *JR* 97 (2017) 26–55; M. C. Steenberg, “Irenaeus on Scripture, *Graphe*, and the Status of *Hermas*,” *SVTQ* 53 (2009) 29–66.

7. David Lincicum, “The Paratextual Invention of the Term ‘Apostolic Fathers,’” *JTS* 66 (2015) 139–48.

8. J. B. Cotelier, *SS. Patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt; Barnabae, Clementis, Hermae, Ignatii, Polycarpi: opera edita et inedita, vera et suppositicia . . .* (Paris: Petri Le Petit, 1672).

9. For this and related history, see J. A. Fischer, *Die ältesten Ausgaben der Patres Apostolici: ein Beitrag zu Begriff und Begrenzung der Apostolischen Väter* (Munich: Alber, 1974).

10. William Wake, *The Genuine Epistles of the Apostolical Fathers: S. Barnabas, S. Ignatius, S. Clement, S. Polycarp, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Martyrdoms of Ignatius and St. Polycarp* (London: Ric. Sare, 1693).

11. Clare K. Rothschild, *New Essays on the Apostolic Fathers*, WUNT 375 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 9. See Thomas Ittig, *Bibliotheca Patrum Apostolicorum Graeco-Latina* (Leipzig: J. H. Richter, 1699).

12. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, xvii.

of the Apostolic Fathers in 1765.¹³ The Didache, since its rediscovery in the nineteenth century, has regularly accompanied the collection as well.¹⁴ The scholarly work of J. B. Lightfoot, Theodore Zahn, and others elevated the “middle recension” of Ignatius’s epistles as the preferred form of the Ignatian correspondence.¹⁵

In the Anglophone world, the “most readily available” and “widely used” editions of the Apostolic Fathers are Bart Ehrman’s entry in the Loeb Classical Library (2003) and Michael Holmes’s thorough revision of Lightfoot and Harmer’s work, now in its third edition (2007).¹⁶ Both Ehrman and Holmes include the Didache, 1 Clement, the fragment of Quadratus, the seven letters of the middle recension of the Ignatian correspondence, Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians*, the fragments of Papias, the Epistle of Barnabas, 2 Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Martyrdom of Polycarp, and the Epistle to Diognetus. This list of eleven has attained somewhat of a quasi-canonical status within Apostolic Fathers studies, though a few works float in and out of the boundaries of investigations within the field.¹⁷ Although early modern scholars tended to insist upon the direct contact of the Apostolic Fathers with the apostles, contemporary scholars recognize the phenomenon of pseudepigraphal attribution within the corpus, and they acknowledge a diverse notion of “apostolicity” within the primary source texts themselves.¹⁸

13. Andreas Gallandi, *Bibliotheca veterum partum antiquorumque scriptorium ecclesiasticorum* (Venice: Joannis Baptistae Albritii Hieron Fil., 1765).

14. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, xix.

15. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan, 1890); Theodore Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1873). For a history of this debate, see Paul A. Hartog, “A Multifaceted Jewel: English Episcopacy, Ignatian Authenticity, and the Rise of Critical Patristic Scholarship,” in Angela Ranson, André A. Gazal, and Sarah Bastow, *Defending the Faith: John Jewel and the Elizabethan Church*, Early Modern Studies Series (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 263–83.

16. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, xiii. See Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols., LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

17. See Wilhelm Pratscher, “The Corpus of the Apostolic Fathers,” in Wilhelm Pratscher (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 1–6.

18. Taras Khomych, “Diversity of the Notion of Apostolicity in the Apostolic Fathers,” in Theresia Hainthaler, Franz Mali, and Gregor Emmenegger (eds.), *Heiligkeit und Apostolizität der Kirche* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2010), 63–81.

Why Are the Apostolic Fathers Important?

The works of the “Apostolic Fathers” represent a spectrum of literary genres, including a church manual (Didache), occasional letters (1 Clement, the Ignatian correspondence, Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians*), a theological tractate in epistolary form (Barnabas), apocalyptic and visionary materials (Hermas), a martyr narrative in epistolary form (Martyrdom of Polycarp), a homily (2 Clement), an apology with appended homiletic material (Diognetus), and fragments of both expository and apologetic works (Papias and Quadratus).¹⁹ The Apostolic Fathers also represent a wide range of geographical provenance and intended audience, pointing interpreters to early Christian communities in locations scattered throughout the Roman Empire, such as Corinth, Philippi, Rome, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syria.²⁰

The Apostolic Fathers reflect variegated facets of early church life and organization, theological and liturgical development, spirituality and prayer, moral instruction and identity formation.²¹ The Apostolic Fathers are important witnesses to the transmission and consolidation of earlier traditions, including the reception of the scriptures (both the Hebrew Scriptures and works now found in the New Testament).²² A number of the Apostolic Fathers draw from Jesus traditions and especially the Pauline letters.²³ For example, Papias hands on traditions concerning the origins

19. Simon Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers, Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (London: Continuum 2002); Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*.

20. See Christine Trevett, *Christian Women and the Time of the Apostolic Fathers (AD c 80–160): Corinth, Rome and Asia Minor* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006).

21. Helmut Koester, “The Apostolic Fathers and the Struggle for Christian Identity,” in Foster (ed.), *Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, 1–12; Kenneth Berding, “Gifts’ and Ministries in the Apostolic Fathers,” *WTJ* 78 (2016) 135–58; Clayton N. Jefford, “Prophecy and Prophetism in the Apostolic Fathers,” in Joseph Verheyden, Korinna Zamfir, and Tobias Nicklas (eds.), *Prophets and Prophecy in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, WUNT 2/286 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 295–316; C. F. A. Borchardt, “The Spirituality of the Apostolic Fathers,” *Studia historiae ecclesiasticae* 25 (1999) 132–52.

22. Wilhelm Pratscher, “Die Rezeption des Neuen Testament bei den Apostolischen Vätern,” *TLZ* 137 (2012) 139–52; Clayton N. Jefford, *The Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006); Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett, *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Richard A. Norris, “The Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic Writings: The New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers,” in Frances M. Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11–14; Oxford Society of Historical Theology, *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905).

23. Stephen E. Young, *Jesus Tradition in the Apostolic Fathers: Their Explicit Appeals to the Words of Jesus in Light of Orality Studies*, WUNT 311 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

of the Gospels, and Polycarp seemingly provides evidence of the reception of 1 Timothy, 1 Peter, and 1 John.²⁴ The Apostolic Fathers provide insights into biblical interpretation, as well as valuable assistance with linguistic and philological investigations.²⁵

The Apostolic Fathers do not delve deeply into philosophical theology but rather address specific pastoral concerns in particular contexts.²⁶ They reflect a diversity of theological perspectives and emphases, although sharing a common yet malleable core kerygma. The works assume the role of the one God as Creator and Ruler, and they proclaim Jesus Christ as the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord.²⁷ Relatively fewer texts discuss the Holy Spirit's continuing work in the *ekklesia*, while some warn of the continuing threats of satanic opposition.²⁸ The Apostolic Fathers underscore future resurrection and judgment. They center salvation in the person and work of Christ, although differing in their explanations of grace and human response.²⁹

2011); Andreas Lindemann, "The Apostolic Fathers and the Synoptic Problem," in Paul Foster, Andrew F. Gregory, John S. Kloppenborg, and Joseph Verheyden (eds.), *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 689–719; Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite (eds.), *The Apostolic Fathers and Paul*, Pauline and Patristic Scholars in Debate 2 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2017).

24. Jonathon Lookadoo, "Polycarp, Paul, and the Letters to Timothy," *NovT* 59 (2017) 366–83; Paul A. Hartog, "The Opponents in Polycarp, *Philippians*, and 1 John," in Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (eds.), *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 375–91.

25. Joseph W. Trigg, "The Apostolic Fathers and Apologists," in J. Alan Hauser and Duane Frederick Watson (eds.), *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 304–33. A valuable linguistic tool is Daniel B. Wallace, *A Reader's Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013).

26. J. Lawson, *A Theological and Historical Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

27. A. R. Stark, *The Christology in the Apostolic Fathers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912); John A. McGuckin, "Christ: The Apostolic Fathers to the Third Century," in D. Jeffrey Bingham (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 256–70.

28. I. Howard Marshall, "The Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Fathers," in Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker, and Stephen C. Barton (eds.), *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 257–69; Jonathan Burke, "Satan and Demons in the Apostolic Fathers: A Minority Report," *SEÅ* 81 (2016): 127–68; Thomas J. Farrar, "Satanology and Demonology in the Apostolic Fathers: A Response to Jonathan Burke," *SEÅ* 83 (2018) 156–91.

29. Christopher Todd Bounds, "The Understanding of Grace in Selected Apostolic Fathers," *StPatr* 48 (2013) 351–59; Michael R. Whitenton, "After ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ: Neglected Evidence from the Apostolic Fathers," *JTS* 61 (2010) 82–109; Christopher Todd Bounds, "The Doctrine of Christian Perfection in the Apostolic Fathers," *WesTJ* 42 (2007) 7–27. See also the influential but now dated Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948).

The Apostolic Fathers serve as a window into theological trajectories and themes that emerged in early Christianity. Specific developments include the incorporation of the “Two Ways” literary tradition (Didache, Barnabas), apostolic succession (1 Clement), the Eucharist as sacrifice and medicine (Didache, Ignatius), a three-fold ministry resembling monoepiscopacy (Ignatius), emphatic Sunday observance (Didache, Ignatius, Barnabas), baptism as a seal (2 Clement), stipulations concerning post-baptismal sin and repentance (Hermas), the metaphor of the church as the “soul” within the world (Diognetus), references to the “catholic church” (Ignatius, Martyrdom of Polycarp), and an incipient veneration of martyrs (Martyrdom of Polycarp). The Apostolic Fathers confronted so-called “docetic” and “judaizing” opponents (Ignatius, Polycarp), as well as pagan critics (Quadratus, Diognetus). The Apostolic Fathers illuminate differing courses of the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity.³⁰

What is the Apostolic Fathers Commentary Series?

The Apostolic Fathers Commentary Series (AFCS) proposes to offer a literary and theological reading of individual works among the Apostolic Fathers corpus. Although the compositional development and textual history of some of the texts are quite complex, the series offers a literary and theological reading of the final form text in an intelligible fashion for a broad audience.

Each volume in the series will offer a similar, two-part structure. Part one will include introductory essays, and part two will consist of exegetical, theological, and historical commentary on the final-form text in a section-by-section format. In the first part, each volume will include an essay on preliminary matters, such as historical placement, provenance, and social setting; an essay on the use of scripture; and an essay on themes and theology. All volumes will offer a fresh and readable translation of the text, along with brief textual notes.

The AFCS is designed to engage historical-critical scholarship and to synthesize such material for a wide range of readers. The series will make use of international scholarship, ancient languages (with English co-translations), and primary research, aiming to elucidate the literary form of the

30. Thomas A. Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways: Early Jewish-Christian Relations* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009); Pierluigi Lanfranchi, “Attitudes to the Sabbath in Three Apostolic Fathers: *Didache*, Ignatius, and *Barnabas*,” in Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, Harm W. Hollander, and Johannes Tromp (eds.), *Jesus, Paul, and Early Christianity*, NovTSup 130 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 243–59.

text for students and scholars of earliest Christianity. The exegesis of AFCS will engage grammatical, rhetorical, and discourse features within the given work. In particular, the series will expansively discuss the elements relevant to theological interpretation of the texts. The AFCS thus seeks to fill a niche by offering a theological and literary reading of the Apostolic Fathers in both an economical and accessible form for a wide readership.

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