Christian writers of the first and second centuries who are known, or are considered, to have had personal relations with some of the Apostles, or to have been so influenced by them that their writings may be held as echoes of genuine Apostolic teaching. Though restricted by some to those who were actually disciples of the Apostles, the term applies by extension to certain writers who were previously believed to have been such, and virtually embraces all the remains of primitive Christian literature antedating the great apologies of the second century, and forming the link of tradition that binds these latter writings to those of the New Testament .

The name was apparently unknown in Christian literature before the end of the seventeenth century. The term *Apostolic*, however, was commonly used to qualify Churches, persons , writings, etc. from the early second century, when St. Ignatius, in the exordium of his Epistle to the Trallians, saluted their Church "after the Apostolic manner." In 1672 Jean Baptiste Cotelier (Cotelerius) published his "SS. Patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt opera", which title was abbreviated to "Bibliotheca Patrum Apostolicorum" by L. J. Ittig in his edition (Leipzig, 1699) of the same writings. Since then the term has been universally used.

The list of Fathers included under this title has varied, literary criticism having removed some who were formerly considered as second-century writers, while the publication (Constantinople, 1883) of the Didache has added one to the list. Chief in importance are the three first-century Bishops: St. Clement of Rome , St . Ignatius of Antioch , and St. Polycarp of Smyrna , of whose intimate personal relations with the Apostles there is no doubt . Clement, Bishop of Rome and third successor of St. Peter in the Papacy, "had seen the blessed Apostles [Peter and Paul] and had been conversant with them" (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer., III, iii, 3). Ignatius was the second successor of St. Peter in the See of Antioch (Eusebius , *Church History*

III.36
) and during his life in that centre of
Christian
activity may have met with others of the Apostolic band. An accepted tradition, substantiated by the similarity of Ignatius's thought with the
ideas
of the Johannine writings, declares him a disciple of St. John.
Polycarp
was "instructed by Apostles" (Irenaeus, op. cit., III, iii, 4) and had been a disciple of St. John (
Eusebius
, op. cit., III, 36; V, 20) whose contemporary he was for nearly twenty years.

Besides these, whose rank as Apostolic Fathers in the strictest sense is undisputed, there are two first-century writers whose place with them is generally conceded: the author of the Didac he
and the author of the "Epistle of Barnabas". The former affirms that his teaching is that of the Apostles, and his work, perhaps the earliest extant piece of uninspired
Christian
literature, gives colour to his claim; the latter, even if he be not the Apostle and companion of
St. Paul
, is held by many to have written during the last decade of the first century, and may have come under direct Apostolic influence, though his Epistle does not clearly suggest it.

Read full article

Some of the Fathers

St. Iraenaeus   He was born in Proconsular Asia , or at least in some province bordering thereon, in the first half of the second century; the exact
date
is controverted, between the years 115 and 125, according to some, or, according to others, between 130 and 142.

Eusebius of Cæsarea b. about 260; d. before 341

St. Jerome   Born at Stridon, a town on the confines of Dalmatia and Pannonia, about the year 340-2; died at
Bethlehem

, 30 September, 420.

St. Basil the Great   Born probably 329; died 1 January, 379

St. Cyprian of Carthage c. 246

St. Cyril of Alexandria

St. John Chrysostom   Doctor of the Church , born at Antioch , c. 347; died at Commana in Pontus , 14 September, 407.

Tertullian

Ecclesiastical writer in the second and third centuries, b. probably about 160 at Carthage

Fathers of the Church

- The Appeal to the Fathers
- Classification of Patristic Writings
- Apostolic Fathers and the Second Century
- Third Century
- Fourth Century
- Fifth Century
- Sixth Century

- Characteristics of Patristic Writings
- Commentaries
- Preachers
- Writers
- East and West
- Theology
- Discipline, Liturgy, Ascetics
- Historical Materials

- Patristic Study

The Didache

A short treatise which was accounted by some of the Fathers as next to Holy Scripture . It was rediscovered in 1873 by Bryennios, Greek Orthodox
metropolitan
of
Nicomedia
, in the codex from which, in 1875, he had published the full text of the Epistles of St. Clement. The title in the
manuscript
is
Didache kyriou dia ton dodeka apostolon ethesin
, but before this it gives the heading
Didache ton dodeka apostolon
. The old Latin translation of cc. i-v, found by Dr. J. Schlecht in 1900, has the longer title, omitting "twelve", and has a
rubric
De doctrinâ Apostolorum
. For convenience the contents may be divided into three parts: the first is the "Two Ways", the Way of Life and the Way of Death; the second part is a
rituale
dealing with

baptism
,
fasting
, and
Holy Communion
; the third speaks of the ministry. Doctrinal teaching is presupposed, and none is imparted.

Father, the word and meaning

The word *Father* is used in the New Testament to mean a teacher of spiritual things, by whose means the soul of man is born again into the likeness of
Christ
: "For if you have ten thousand instructors in
Christ
, yet not many fathers. For in
Christ Jesus
, by the
gospel
, I have begotten you. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me, as I also am of
Christ
" (
1 Corinthians 4:15, 16
; cf.
Galatians 4:19
). The first teachers of
Christianity
seem to be collectively spoken of as "the Fathers" (
2 Peter 3:4
).

Thus St. Irenæus defines that a teacher is a father, and a disciple is a son (iv, 41,2), and so says Clement of
Alexandria
(*Str*
omata
I.1.1
). A
bishop
is emphatically a "father in
Christ
", both because it was he, in early times, who
baptized
all his flock, and because he is the chief teacher of his church. But he is also regarded by the

early Fathers, such as Hegesippus,
Irenaeus
, and
Tertullian
as the recipient of the tradition of his predecessors in the
see
, and consequently as the
witness
and representative of the
faith
of his
Church
before
Catholicity
and the world. Hence the expression "the Fathers" comes naturally to be applied to the
holy

bishops
of a preceding age, whether of the last generation or further back, since they are the
parents
at whose knee the
Church
of today was taught her
belief
. It is also applicable in an eminent way to
bishops
sitting in council, "the Fathers of Nicaea", "the Fathers of
Trent
". Thus Fathers have learnt from Fathers, and in the last resort from the
Apostles
, who are sometimes called Fathers in this sense: "They are your Fathers", says
St. Leo
, of the Princes of the
Apostles
, speaking to the Romans;
St. Hilary of Arles
calls them
sancti patres
;
Clement of Alexandria
says that his teachers, from
Greece
, Ionia, Coele-Syria,
Egypt
, the Orient,
Assyria

, Palestine, respectively, had handed on to him the tradition of
blessed
teaching from Peter, and James, and John, and Paul, receiving it "as son from father".