

Who were the Church Fathers?

These were church leaders and teachers who followed the apostles in the early centuries of church history. They are normally denominated as follows (italicised names indicate historical importance in my view, but not necessarily my theological agreement; the list is not exhaustive):

Apostolic Fathers

Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Hermas, Barnabus of Alexandria, Papias, Polycarp. All lived between 30-160.

2nd Century Apologists

Quadratus, Aristides, *Justin Martyr, Tatian*, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Melito, Hegesippus.

3rd century fathers

Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Julius Africanus, *Origen, Cyprian*, Gregory Thanmaturgos.

Nicene and Post Nicene (The Council of Nicea was held in 325.)

Lactantius, (west), *Eusebius* (east), *Hilary* (west), *Athanasius* (east), *Ephraim the Syrian* (east), Didymus of Alexandria (east), Cyril of Jerusalem (east), Epiphanius (east), *Ambrose*, (west), *John Chrysostom* (east), *Jerome* (west), *Augustine* (west), Cyril of Alexandria (east).

In this group is also a trio of excellent theologians known as **The Cappadocian Fathers** (east): *Basil of Caesarea*, his younger brother *Gregory of Nyssa*, and his lifelong friend *Gregory of Nazianzus*. They made the decisive contribution to the orthodox Trinitarian argument. Coming from an aristocratic, cultured background, all three were drawn to the monastic ideal, and Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus achieved considerable literary distinction. The Cappadocians succeeded in overthrowing Arianism in the radical form in which two acute thinkers, Aëtius (d. c. 366) and Eunomius (d. c. 394), had revived it. They also formulated the conception of God as three Persons in one essence, which proved universally acceptable.

Some of these are known as the Great Fathers, such as Basil or Augustine; many of them are considered by the Roman church to be saints. Several of these writers are very useful in certain ways, though many entertained errors as well. The lives of a few, such as Athanasius, involved deep tribulation but great constancy and fortitude for truth, setting a fine example to all believers.

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