

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 132 Early Church Fathers I

It has been a few months since we departed from our time line but we return. We are at around 180 AD. The first 400 years of Christianity show both growth and persecution. After centuries of strife and struggle eventually the Gospel message goes from being the faith of persecuted minorities to a faith that spans the Roman Empire and eventually becomes the faith of the emperor and all respectable citizens. That actually presents the church with a new and different set of problems.

It may be helpful to cover early church history from the perspective of early church leaders called 'Fathers'. For the sake of our discussion we will break the 'Fathers' into five groups and address each group separately, including notable historic facts associated with each of them or their group. This list is by no means exhaustive but instead is an overview.

Apostolic Fathers: called this because they learned directly from Jesus' apostles. Polycarp (69-155) Bishop of Smyrna in Turkey and student of the apostle John. Ignatius (35-117) Bishop of Antioch. Clement (30-100) of Rome, said to have been consecrated by Saint Peter and listed as the 4th of Rome's 266 Popes.

Early Apologist: Justin Martyr (100-165) Known for his theological writings, most of which are lost but his works titled "First Apology", "Second Apology", "Dialogue with Trypho" and fragments of the work "On the Resurrection" are available to this day. Tertullian (155-240) 31 of his works are still available today and cover many areas of the Christian faith.

The following were church fathers who, through their leadership and writings, contributed to the organizing and clarifying of what the universal Christian church believed, taught and practiced in accord with God's word.

Early Fathers Origen (185-254), Sextus Julius Africanus (160-240) known as the father of Christian chorography, Irenaeus (130-202) Bishop of Lyons.

Nicene Fathers Called that because they lived during the council of Nicea (325) the council in which the church adopted the Nicene Creed. Athanasius (296-373) Bishop of Alexandria Egypt, the man for whom the Athanasian Creed (later in the 4th or 5th century) is named because of his stand against the Arian heresy (which, in its modern form, is Jehovah Witnesses), Eusebius (263-339) a bishop and historian, wrote his famous church history in 303. Lactantius (c240-c325) Christian writer who became an advisor to Emperor Constantine. Hilary (c291-c371) Bishop of Poitiers and a Doctor of the Church. He was sometimes referred to as the "Hammer of the Arians".

Throughout history the church took the best works of all these Fathers and used them to better teach and project the faith into the world around them, and much of what they wrote we still use to guide us today.

Some other key events during this window of time would be the Edict of Tolerance for Christians in 260 by Emperor Valerian. Arius and the Arian heresy condemned at Alexandria in 318, debated and finalized at the Council of Nicea in 325. We will look at group five, the **Post Nicene Fathers**, in our next lesson.

Till next month Pastor Portier