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Church Fathers: A Door to Rome

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David Cloud, Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061

866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org

Many people have walked into the Roman Catholic Church through the broad door of the "church fathers," and this is a loud warning today when there is a widespread attraction to the "church fathers" within evangelicalism.

The Catholic apologetic ministries use the "church fathers" to prove that Rome's doctrines go back to the earliest centuries. In the book *Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic*, David Currie continually uses the church fathers to support his position. He says, "The other group of authors whom Evangelicals should read ... is the early Fathers of the Church" (p. 4).

The contemplative prayer movement is built on this same weak foundation. The late Robert Webber, a Wheaton College professor who was one of the chief proponents of this back to the "church fathers" movement, said:

"The early Fathers can bring us back to what is common and help us get behind our various traditions ... Here is where our unity lies. ... evangelicals need to go beyond talk about the unity of the church to experience it through an attitude of acceptance of the whole church and an entrance into dialogue with the Orthodox, Catholic, and other Protestant bodies" (Ancient-Future Faith, 1999, p. 89).

The fact is that the "early Fathers" were mostly heretics!

This term refers to various church leaders of the first few centuries after the apostles whose writings have been preserved.

The only genuine "church fathers" are the apostles and prophets their writings that were given by divine inspiration and recorded in the Holy Scripture. They gave us the "faith ONCE delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The faith they delivered is able to make us "perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We don't need anything beyond the Bible. The teaching of the "church fathers" does not contain one jot or tittle of divine revelation.

The term "church fathers" is a misnomer that was derived from the Catholic Church's false doctrine of hierarchical church polity. These men were not "fathers" of the church in any scriptural sense and did not have any divine authority. They were merely church leaders from various places who have left a record of their faith in writing. But the Roman Catholic Church exalted men to authority beyond the bounds designated by Scripture, making them "fathers" over the churches located within entire regions and over the churches of the whole world.

The "church fathers" are grouped into four divisions: Apostolic Fathers (second century), Ante-Nicene Fathers (second and third centuries), Nicene Fathers (fourth century), and Post-Nicene Fathers (fifth century). Nicene refers to the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 that dealt with the issue of Arianism and affirmed the doctrine of Christ's deity. Thus, the Ante-Nicene Fathers are so named because they lived in the century before this council, and the Post-Nicene, because they lived in the century following the council.

All of the "church fathers" were infected with some false doctrine, and most of them were seriously infected. Even the so-called Apostolic Fathers of the second century were teaching the false gospel that baptism, celibacy, and martyrdom provided forgiveness of sin (Howard Vos, *Exploring Church History*, p. 12). And of the later "fathers"--Clement, Origen, Cyril, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Theodore, and John Chrysostom--the same historian admits: "In their lives and teachings we find the seed plot of almost all that arose later. In germ form appear the dogmas of purgatory, transubstantiation, priestly mediation, baptismal regeneration, and the whole sacramental

systemâ€• (Vos, p. 25).

In fact, one of the Post-Nicene â€œfathersâ€• is Leo, the first Roman Catholic â€œpopeâ€•!

Therefore, the â€œchurch fathersâ€• are actually the fathers of the Roman Catholic Church. They are the men who laid the foundation of apostasy that produced Romanism and Greek Orthodoxy.

The New Testament Scriptures warns frequently that there would be an apostasy, a turning from the faith among professing Christians. The apostles and prophets warned said this apostasy had already begun in their day and warned that it would increase as the time of Christâ€™s return draws nearer.

Paul testified of this in many places, giving us a glimpse into the vicious assault that was already plaguing the work of God. Consider his last message to the pastors at Ephesus (Acts 20:29-30). Paul warned them that false teachers would come from without and would also arise from within their own ranks. Consider his second epistle to Corinth (2 Cor. 11:1-4, 12-15). The false teachers who were active at Corinth were corrupting three of the cardinal doctrines of the New Testament faith, the doctrine of Christ, Salvation, and the Holy Spirit; and the churches were in danger of being overthrown by these errors. Consider Paulâ€™s warnings to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:1-6 and 2 Timothy 3:1-13 and 4:3-4.

Peter devoted the entire second chapter of his second epistle to this theme. He warned in verse one that there would be false teachers who hold â€œdamnable heresies,â€• referring to heresies that damn the soul to eternal hell. If someone denies, for example, the Virgin Birth, Deity, Humanity, Sinlessness, Eternality, Atonement, or Resurrection of Jesus Christ he cannot be saved. Heresies pertaining to such matters are damnable heresies. The corruption of the â€œdoctrine of Christâ€• results in a â€œfalse christ.â€•

John gave similar warnings in his epistles (1 John 2:18, 19, 22; 4:1-3; 2 John 7-11).

In addressing the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, the Lord Jesus Christ warned that many of the apostolic churches were already weak and were under severe stress from heretical attacks (Rev. 2:6, 14-15, 20-24; 3:2, 15-17).

Thus the New Testament faith was being attacked on every hand in the days of the apostles by Gnosticism, Judaism, Nicolaitanism, and other heresies.

And the apostles and prophets warned that this apostasy would increase.

Paul said, â€œBut evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceivedâ€• (2 Timothy 3:13). This describes the course of the church age in terms of the spread of heresy!

Therefore it is not surprising to find doctrinal error rampant among the churches even in the early centuries.

Further, we only have a very partial record of the early centuries and the surviving writings have been heavily filtered by Rome. The Roman Catholic Church was in power for a full millennium and its Inquisition reached to the farthest corners of Europe and beyond. Rome did everything in its power to destroy the writings of those who differed with her. Consider the Waldenses. These were Bible-believing Christians who lived in northern Italy and southern France and elsewhere during the Dark Ages and were viciously persecuted by Rome for centuries. Though we know that the Waldenses have a history that begins in the 11th century if not before, their historical record was almost completely destroyed by Rome. Only a handful of Waldensian writings were preserved from all of those centuries.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the extant writings from the early centuries are ones that are sympathetic to Romeâ€™s doctrines. This does not prove that most of the churches then held to Roman Catholic doctrine. It proves only that those writings sympathetic to Rome were allowed to survive. We know that there were many churches in existence in those early centuries that did not agree with Roman doctrine, because they were persecuted by the Romanists and are mentioned in the writings of the â€œchurch fathers.â€•

A LOOK AT SOME OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

IGNATIUS (c. 50-110)

Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch in the early second century. He was arrested in about A.D. 110 and sent to Rome for trial and martyrdom.

He taught that churches should have elders and a ruling bishop; in other words, he was exalting one bishop over another, whereas in scripture the terms "bishop" and "elder" refer to the same humble office in the assembly (Titus 1:5-7).

He taught that all churches are a part of one universal church.

He claimed that a church does not have authority to baptize or conduct the Lord's Supper unless it has a bishop.

These relatively innocent errors helped prepare the way for more error in the next century.

JUSTIN MARTYR (c. 100 – c. 165)

When Justin embraced Christianity, he held on to some of his pagan philosophy.

He interpreted the Scriptures allegorically and mystically. For example, the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 is not a literal 1,000 years but stands for something else.

It is in Justin Martyr's writings that we first find the heresy of Replacement Theology. In Dialogue with Trypho, he applied the term "Israel" to the church (Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 2007 edition, p. 128).

Justin Martyr helped develop the idea of a "middle state" after death that was neither heaven nor hell. Eventually this doctrine became Rome's purgatory.

IRENÆUS (c. 125-202)

Irenæus was a pastor in Lyons, France, who wrote a polemic titled Against Heresies in about A.D. 185.

He supported the authority of the bishop as a ruler over many churches.

He defended church tradition beyond what the Scripture allows. For this reason he is claimed by the Roman Catholic Church as one of their own.

He taught the Catholic heresy of "real presence," saying, "The Eucharist becomes the body of Christ."

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (c. 150 – c. 230)

From 190 to 202, Clement headed the heretical school of Alexandria, Egypt, founded by Pantaenus, which intermingled the Greek philosophy of Plato with Christianity.

Clement helped develop the false doctrine of purgatory and believed that most men would eventually be saved.

He denied the unique Deity of Jesus and His atonement, saying, "The Logos of God became man so that you may learn from man how man may become God" (cited from Bernard McGinn, The Presence of God, Vol. 1 - The Foundations of Mysticism, p. 107). Jesus was, therefore, merely the supreme model toward the path of divinity.

TERTULLIAN (c. 155 – c. 255)

Tertullian lived in Carthage in North Africa (located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in modern Tunisia, between Libya and Algeria).

Though he fought against Gnosticism, he also exalted the authority of the church beyond that allowed by Scripture. He taught that the church's authority comes through apostolic succession.

He believed that the bread of the Lord's Supper was Christ and worried about dropping crumbs of it on the ground.

He adopted Montanism, believing that Montanus spoke prophecies by inspiration of God.

He taught that widows who remarried committed fornication. Thus he exalted the condition of virginity in an unscriptural way, and this heresy was adopted by the Roman Catholic in its monastic system of unmarried monks and nuns and in its doctrine that priests cannot marry. The New Testament encourages younger widows to remarry (1 Tim. 5:14).

He taught that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins.

He classified sins into three categories and believed in confession of sins to a bishop.

He said that the human soul was seen in a vision as "tender, light, and of the colour of air." He claimed that all human souls were in Adam and are transmitted to us with the taint of original sin upon them.

He taught that there was a time when the Son of God did not exist and when God was not a Father.

He taught that Mary was the second Eve who by her obedience remedied the disobedience of the first Eve. This was a stepping stone toward the Roman Catholic Church's many heresies about Mary.

CYPRIAN (? - 258)

Cyprian was the "bishop of Carthage" in Africa.

He was tyrannical and wealthy and he wrote against the Novatian churches for their efforts to maintain a pure church membership. He didn't care if church members gave evidence of the new birth as long as they conformed to external rituals.

Cyprian defended the unscriptural doctrine that certain bishops had authority over many churches and that all pastors must submit to them.

He supported the heresy of infant baptism.

No wonder Cyprian was made one of the "saints" of the Catholic Church.

ORIGEN (185-254)

Though he endured persecution and torture for the cause of Christ under the Roman emperor Decius in 250, and though he defended Christianity against certain heretics, he rejected the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and taught many gross heresies. Origen founded in a school in Caesarea from which he expounded his errors far and wide through his students and his writings.

Origen's character is described by the Lutheran historian Mosheim as "a compound of contraries, wise and unwise, acute and stupid, judicious and injudicious; the enemy of superstition, and its patron; a strenuous defender of Christianity, and its corrupter; energetic and irresolute; one to whom the Bible owes much, and from whom it has suffered much."

While we do not agree with Mosheim that the Bible owes Origen much, there is no doubt that it suffered much at his hands.

We agree with Joseph Milner who said that "no one had injured the church more than Origen" (History of the Church of Christ, cited from R.C. Shimeal, The Second Coming of Christ, 1873, p. 15).

Origen "disbelieved the full inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures, holding that the inspired men apprehended and stated many things obscurely" (Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney, I, p. 383).

He rejected the literal history of the early chapters in Genesis and of Satan taking the Lord Jesus up to a high mountain and offering him the kingdoms of the world (Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, Vol. III, p. 614). Durant quotes Origen: "Who is so foolish as to believe that God, like a husbandman, planted a garden in Eden, and placed in it a tree of life ... so that one who tasted of the fruit obtained life?" Origen denied the literal creation described in Genesis 1-2 and the

literal fall of Genesis 3.

He denied the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Origen's opinions on the Trinity veered between Sabellianism and Arianism. He expressly denied the consubstantial unity of the Persons and the proper incarnation of the Godhead (Dabney, I, p. 384).

He believed the Holy Spirit was the first creature made by the Father through the Son.

He taught that Jesus is a created being and not the eternal Son of God. He held an aberrant view on the nature of Christ, which gave rise to the later Arian heresy (Origen, Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics). That Origen believed Jesus Christ had an origin is evident from this statement: "Secondly, that Jesus Christ Himself, who came, was born of the Father before all creatures; and after He had ministered to the Father in the creation of all things,--for through Him were all things made" (Origen, quoted by W.A. Jurgens, The Faith of the Early Fathers).

He taught that man can become divine as Jesus is divine. "For Christians see that with Jesus human and divine nature begin to be woven together, so that by fellowship with divinity human nature might become divine, not only in Jesus, but also in all those who believe and go on to undertake the life which Jesus taught..." (Against Celsus, 3:28). This statement is grossly heretical on three counts: It teaches that Jesus' Deity is not unique but is a model for all men, that salvation is achieved by following Jesus' teaching, and that man can become divine like Jesus.

Origen taught baptismal regeneration and salvation by works. "After these points, it is taught also that the soul, having a substance and life proper to itself, shall, after its departure from this world, be rewarded according to its merits. It is destined to obtain either an inheritance of eternal life and blessedness, if its deeds shall have procured this for it, or to be delivered up to eternal fire and punishment, if the guilt of its crimes shall have brought it down to this" (Origen, cited by W.A. Jurgens, The Faith of the Early Fathers). "Origen evidently had no clear conception of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith" (Louis Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrines, p. 65). This is an important fact, because it means that the gospel Origen taught was a false gospel, and he therefore was under God's curse (Galatians 1:6-8).

He believed in a form of purgatory and universalism (all men will be saved), believing that even Satan would be saved. "Now let us see what is meant by the threatening with eternal fire. ... It seems to be indicated by these words that every sinner kindles for himself the flame of his own fire and is not plunged into some fire which was kindled beforehand by someone else or which already existed before him. ... And when this dissolution and tearing asunder of the soul shall have been accomplished by means of the application of fire, no doubt it will afterwards be solidified into a firmer structure and into a restoration of itself" (Origen, cited by W.A. Jurgens, The Faith of the Early Fathers).

He denied the literal fire of hell.

He believed that men's souls are preexistent and that stars and planets possibly have souls. "In regard to the sun, however, and the moon and the stars, as to whether they are living beings or are without life, there is not clear tradition" (Origen, cited by W.A. Jurgens, The Faith of the Early Fathers).

He denied the bodily resurrection, claiming that the resurrection body is spherical, non-material, and does not have members. "He denied the tangible, physical nature of the resurrection body in clear contrast to the teaching of Scripture" (Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Origen). He was condemned by the Council of Constantinople on this count.

Origen rejected the testimony of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:16-23 and lived as an ascetic. He even castrated himself in his foolish zeal for the alleged superior holiness of "celibacy" over marriage.

Origen was also one of the chief fathers of the allegorical method of Bible interpretation, which turns the Bible into a nose of wax to be twisted as the reader sees fit. He claimed that "the Scriptures have little use to those who understand them literally." He described the literal meaning of Scripture as "bread" and encouraged the student to go beyond this to the "wine" of allegoricalism, whereby one can become intoxicated and transported to heavenly realms. Origen's commentaries contained a wealth of fanciful interpretations, abounding in "heretical revisals of Scripture" (Frederick Nolan, Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate, p. 367).

As for Origen's character, he was "evidently dishonest and tricky, and his judgment most erratic." As a controversialist, he was wholly unscrupulous (Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney, I, p. 383).

EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA (270-340)

Eusebius collected the writings of Origen and promoted his false teachings.

Constantine the Great, who had joined together church and state in the Roman Empire and had thereby laid the foundation for the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, hired Eusebius to produce some Greek New Testaments. Many textual authorities have identified Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, the manuscripts so revered by modern textual critics, as two of the copies of the Greek New Testament made by Eusebius. Frederick Nolan and other authorities have charged Eusebius with making many changes in the text of Scripture.

Many of the noted omissions in the modern versions can be traced to this period, including Mark 16:9-20 and John 8:1-11. After intensive investigation, Frederick Nolan concluded that Eusebius "suppressed those passages in his edition" (Nolan, p. 240). These manuscripts also contained the spurious apocryphal writings, Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas. Origen considered these two fanciful books as Scripture (Goodspeed, The Formation of the New Testament, p. 103).

JEROME (Sophrionius Eusebius Hieronymus) (340-420)

Jerome was called upon by Damasus, the Bishop of Rome, to produce a standard Latin Bible. This was completed between A.D. 383 and 405 and became the Bible adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. It is commonly called the Latin Vulgate (meaning common).

Modern textual critic Bruce Metzger says that the Greek manuscripts used by Jerome "apparently belonged to the Alexandrian type of text" (Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, p. 76). This means they were in the same family as those underlying the modern versions. Kenyon and Robinson also affirm this (Kenyon, The Text of the Greek Bible, p. 88; Robinson, Ancient Versions of the English Bible, p. 113).

This means that the Jerome Latin Vulgate adopted by Rome represents the same type of text as the critical Greek text underlying the modern versions. These commonly remove "God" from 1 Timothy 3:16 and contain many other corruptions.

Jerome was deeply infected with false teaching:

Jerome was deeply committed to the heresy of asceticism, believing the state of virginity to be spiritually superior to that of marriage and demanding that church leaders be unmarried. "... no single individual did so much to make monasticism popular in the higher ranks of society" (James Heron, The Evolution of Latin Christianity, 1919, p. 58). He lived a hermetic life in disobedience to the Bible's command to go forth and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15).

Jerome believed in the veneration of "holy relics" and the bones of dead Christians (Heron, pp. 276, 77).

Jerome "took a leading and influential part in 'opening the floodgates' for the invocation of saints," teaching "that the saints in heaven hear the prayers of men on earth, intercede on their behalf and send them help from above" (Heron, pp. 287, 88).

Jerome taught that Mary is the counterpart of Eve, as Christ was the counterpart of Adam, and that through her obedience Mary became instrumental in helping to redeem the human race (Heron, p. 294). He taught that Mary is a perpetual virgin.

Jerome believed in the blessing of "holy water," which became a major practice in the Roman Catholic Church (Heron, p. 306).

Jerome justified the death penalty for "heretics" (Heron, p. 323).

As for his spirit and character, Jerome is described, even by an unwise historian who had high respect for him, with these words: "such irritability and bitterness of temper, such vehemence of uncontrolled passion, such an intolerant and persecuting spirit, and such inconstancy of conduct" (Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, III, p. 206).

Jerome had a particularly hateful attitude toward those that followed the simple New Testament faith and refused to accept the heresies that he and his fellows were preaching. His writings against these men were characterized by the most hateful, vicious sort of language. Vigilantius, Jovinian, and Helvidius were some of the men upon whom Jerome railed. These men rejected the false traditions that were being added by the early leaders of the Roman Church, including infant baptism, enforced celibacy, worship of martyrs and relics, and the sinlessness and perpetual virginity of Mary. Jerome heaped abuse upon these men, calling them dogs, maniacs, monsters, asses, stupid fools, two-legged asses, gluttons, servants of the devil, madmen, "useless vessels which should be shattered by the iron rod of apostolic authority." He said Helvidius had a "fetid mouth, fraught with a putrid stench, against the relics and ashes of the martyrs." Baptist historian Thomas Armitage observed, "The pen of Jerome was rendered very offensive by his grinding tyranny and crabbed temper. No matter how wrong he was, he could not brook contradiction" (A History of the Baptists, I, p. 207).

It is obvious that Jerome had imbibed many of the false teachings and attitudes that eventually became the entrenched dogmas and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

AMBROSE (339-397)

Ambrose was bishop of Milan, in Italy, from 374-397. Because of his commitment to many early doctrinal heresies, his writings have been appealed to by popes and Catholic councils. Ambrose had a strong influence upon Augustine. The Catholic Church made him a saint and a doctor of the church.

Ambrose used the allegorical-mystical method of Bible interpretation, having been influenced by Origen and Philo.

He taught that Christians should be devoted to Mary, encouraged monasticism, and believed in prayers to the saints.

He believed the church has the power to forgive sins.

He believed the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice of Christ.

He taught that virginity is holier than marriage and whenever possible he encouraged young women not to marry. His teaching in this helped pave the way for the Catholic monastic system.

He offered prayers for the dead.

AUGUSTINE (354-430)

Augustine was polluted with many false doctrines and helped lay the foundation for the formation of the Roman Catholic Church. For this reason Rome has honored Augustine as one of the "doctors of the church."

He was a persecutor and one of the fathers of Rome's Inquisition. He instigated persecutions against the Bible-believing Donatists who were striving to maintain biblical churches and require that church members give evidence of repentance and regeneration.

Augustine was one of the fathers of a-millennialism, allegorizing Bible prophecy and teaching that the Catholic Church is the new Israel and the kingdom of God.

He taught that the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of salvation.

The "council" of Mela, in Numidia, A.D. 416, composed of merely fifteen persons and presided over by Augustine, decreed: "Also, it is the pleasure of the bishops in order that whoever denies that infants newly born of their mothers, are to be baptized or says that baptism is administered for the remission of their own sins, but not on account of original sin, delivered from Adam, and to be expiated by the laver of regeneration, BE ACCURSED" (Wall, The History of Infant Baptism, I, 265). Augustine thus taught that infants should be baptized and that the baptism took away their sin. He called all who rejected infant baptism "infidels" and "accursed."

He taught that Mary did not commit sin and promoted her "veneration." He believed that Mary played a vital role in salvation (Augustine, Sermon 289, cited in Durant, The Story of Civilization, IV, p. 69).

He promoted the myth of purgatory.

He accepted the doctrine of **celibacy** for **priests**, supporting the decree of **Pope** Siricius of 387 which required that any priest that married or refused to separate from his wife should be disciplined.

He exalted the authority of the church over that of the Bible, declaring, **I should not believe the gospel unless I were moved to do so by the authority of the Catholic Church** (quoted by John Paul II, *Augustineum Hyponensem*, Apostolic Letter, Aug. 28, 1986, www.cin.org/jp2.ency/augustin.html).

He believed that the true interpretation of Scripture is derived from the declaration of church councils (Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, xxiv, p. 45).

He interpreted the early chapters of Genesis figuratively (Dave Hunt, *Calvin and Augustine: Two Jonahs Who Sink the Ship*, *Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views* by Dave Hunt and James White, 2004, p. 230).

He taught the heresy of sovereign election, in that God has pre-ordained some for salvation and others for damnation and that the grace of God is irresistible for the true elect. By his own admission, John Calvin in the 16th century derived his TULIP theology on the **sovereignty of God** from Augustine. Calvin said: **If I were inclined to compile a whole volume from Augustine, I could easily show my readers, that I need no words but his** (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chap. 22).

He taught the heresy of apostolic succession from Peter (Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, p. 230).

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (347-407)

Chrysostom was a leader in Antioch, in the Greek part of the Catholic church of that day, and became **patriarch** of Constantinople in 398.

He believed in the **real presence** of the mass, that the bread literally becomes Jesus Christ.

He taught that church tradition can be equal in authority to the Scriptures.

CYRIL (376-444)

Cyril was the **patriarch** of Alexandria and supported many of the errors that led to the formation of the Catholic Church.

He promoted the veneration of Mary and called her the Theotokos, or bearer of God.

In 412, Cyril instigated persecution against the Donatist Christians.

A WARNING OF THE POWER OF THE CHURCH FATHERS TO LEAD TO ROME

Having seen some of the heresies that leavened the **church fathers**, it is not surprising that a non-critical study of their writings can lead to Rome. That is where they were all headed! And for the most part we have only looked at the more doctrinally sound **church fathers**!

In the late nineteenth century JOHN HENRY NEWMAN (1801-90) walked into the Roman Catholic Church through the door of the church fathers. Newman, an Anglican priest and one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England, is one of the most famous of the Protestant converts to Rome. He said that two of the factors in his conversion were his fascination with the church fathers and his study of the lives of the **English saints**, referring to Catholic mystics such as Joan of Norwich. He converted to Rome in 1845 and was made a Cardinal by Pope Leo XIII in 1879.

In more recent days many are following Newman's lead.

SCOTT AND KIMBERLY HAHN, Presbyterians who joined the Roman Catholic Church, were influenced by the church fathers. In their influential autobiography, *Rome Sweet Rome*, Kimberly recalls how that Scott studied the **church fathers**

hersâ€ when he was still a Presbyterian minister.

â€Scott gained many insights from the early Church Fathers, some of which he shared in his sermons. This was rather unexpected for both of us, because we had hardly ever read the early Church Fathers when we were in seminary. In fact, in our senior year we had complained loudly to friends about possible creeping Romanism when a course was offered by an Anglican priest on the early Church Fathers. Yet here was Scott quoting them in sermons! One night Scott came out of his study and said, â€Kimberly, I have to be honest. I donâ€™t know how long we are going to be Presbyterians. We may become Episcopaliansâ€™â€ (Rome Sweet Rome, p. 56).

In fact, they became Roman Catholics, and the influence of the â€church fathersâ€ on that decision is obvious.

In 1985 THOMAS HOWARD became another famous Protestant convert to Rome. In his 1984 book *Evangelical Is Not Enough* Howard had called upon evangelicals to study the church fathers. Howard was a professor at Gordon College for 15 years and is from a family of prominent evangelicals. His father, Philip, was editor of the *Sunday School Times*; his brother David Howard was head of the World Evangelical Fellowship; and his sister Elizabeth married the famous missionary Jim Elliot, who was martyred by the Auca Indians in Ecuador.

The church fathers were also instrumental in the conversion of PETER KREEFT to Rome from the Dutch Reformed denomination. Kreeft, a very influential Catholic apologist, studied the church fathers as a student at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He writes:

â€My adventurous half rejoiced when I discovered in the early Church such Catholic elements as the centrality of the Eucharist, the Real Presence, prayers to saints, devotion to Mary, an insistence on visible unity, and apostolic succession. Furthermore, THE CHURCH FATHERS JUST â€SMELLEDâ€™ MORE CATHOLIC THAN PROTESTANT, especially St. Augustine, my personal favorite and a hero to most Protestants too. It seemed very obvious that if Augustine or Jerome or Ignatius of Antioch or Anthony of the Desert, or Justin Martyr, or Clement of Alexandria, or Athanasius were alive today they would be Catholics, not Protestantsâ€ (â€Hauled Aboard the Ark,â€ <http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/hauled-aboard.htm>).

Kreeft is absolutely right. Many of the â€church fathersâ€ do smell more Catholic than Protestant!

The books *Surprised by Truth* edited by Patrick Madrid and *The Road to Rome* edited by Dwight Longenecker and *Journeys Home* edited by Marcus Grodi contain many examples of this phenomenon. One of the testimonies is by SHARON MANN, who says,

â€I started reading the early Church Fathers and realized that whatever they believed, they surely were not Protestant. Catholic themes peppered the landscape of Church history. I couldnâ€™t deny it...â€ (Journeys Home, 1997, p. 88).

This is true, of course. Catholic themes do pepper the landscape of the â€church fathers.â€ What she should have understood is that they were not doctrinally sound and they have absolutely no authority. Whatever they were, they are not our examples and guides. Mann should have compared them to the infallible truth in the Bible and rejected them as heretics.

Instead, she allowed the â€church fathersâ€ to stir up her curiosity about Roman Catholicism and she ended up at a Mass. There she had a powerful emotional experience when the crowd knelt to idolatrously â€adoreâ€ the blessed host as it passed by in its â€monstrance.â€ She began weeping and her throat tightened and she couldnâ€™t swallow. She said:

â€If the Lord was truly passing by, then I wanted to adore and worship Him, but if He wasnâ€™t, I was afraid to be idolatrous. That weekend left a very powerful imprint on my heart, and I found myself running out of good arguments to stay Protestant. My heart was longing to be Catholic and be restored to the unity with all Christendomâ€ (Journeys Home, p. 89).

When she speaks of the Lord passing by, she is referring to the Catholic doctrine that the wafer or host of the Mass becomes the actual body and blood of Jesus when it is blessed by the priest and thereafter it is worshipped as Jesus Himself. Following the Mass the host is placed in a box called the tabernacle and Catholics pray to it. The host is the Catholic Jesus.

Roger Oakland describes an experience he had in Rome at the feast of Corpus Christi when Pope Benedict XVI worshipped at the Major Mary basilica:

“Finally, after almost three hours of standing and waiting, the pope and his entourage arrived. The pope was carrying the Eucharistic Jesus in a monstrance. Earlier that day during a mass at St. Peter’s, this Eucharistic Jesus had been created from a wafer that had been consecrated. Later in the day, the same Jesus was transported to St. John’s for another ceremony. Finally, for a finale, the pope transported Jesus to the Major Church of Mary. The pope took the monstrance, ascended the stairs of the church, and held Jesus up for the masses to see. Then this Jesus was placed on an altar temporarily erected at the top of the steps. A cardinal then opened the glass window of the monstrance, removed the consecrated wafer (Jesus), and hustled him inside the church where he placed Jesus in a tabernacle. This experience gave me a sobering reminder of this terrible apostasy” (Faith Undone, p. 126).

Mother Teresa exemplified this. She stated plainly that her Christ was the wafer of the Mass. Consider the following quotes from her speech to the Worldwide Retreat for Priests, October 1984, in Vatican City:

“I remember the time a few years back, when the president of Yemen asked us to send some of our sisters to his country. I told him that this was difficult because for so many years no chapel was allowed in Yemen for saying a public mass, and no one was allowed to function there publicly as a priest. I explained that I wanted to give them sisters, but the trouble was that, without a priest, without Jesus going with them, our sisters couldn’t go anywhere. It seems that the president of Yemen had some kind of a consultation, and the answer that came back to us was, “Yes, you can send a priest with the sisters!” I was so struck with the thought that ONLY WHEN THE PRIEST IS THERE CAN WE HAVE OUR ALTAR AND OUR TABERNACLE AND OUR JESUS. ONLY THE PRIEST CAN PUT JESUS THERE FOR US” (Mother Teresa, cited in Be Holy: God’s First Call to Priests Today, edited by Tom Forrest, C.Ss.R., 1987, p. 109).

“One day she came, putting her arms around me, and saying, “I have found Jesus.” ... “And just what were you doing when you found him?” I asked. She answered that after 15 years she had finally gone to confession, and received Holy Communion from the hands of a priest. Her face was changed, and she was smiling. She was a different person because THAT PRIEST HAD GIVEN HER JESUS” (Mother Teresa, Be Holy, p. 74).

It is a great spiritual blindness to think that the Lord Jesus Christ can be worshipped legitimately in the form of a piece of bread!

A more recent convert to Rome is FRANCIS BECKWITH, former president of the Evangelical Theological Society. In May 2007 he tendered his resignation from this organization after converting to Rome. His journey to Rome was sparked by reading the church fathers. He said, “In January, at the suggestion of a dear friend, I began reading the Early Church Fathers as well as some of the more sophisticated works on justification by Catholic authors. I became convinced that the Early Church is more Catholic than Protestant...” (Evangelical Theological Society President Converts, The Berean Call, May 7, 2007).

Again, he is correct in observing that the church fathers were very Catholic-like, but that proves nothing. The truth is not found in the church fathers but in the Bible itself.

This is a loud warning to those who have an ear to hear the truth. We don’t need to study the church fathers. We need to make certain that we are born again and have the indwelling Spirit as our Teacher (1 John 2:27), then we need to study the Bible diligently and walk closely with Christ and become so thoroughly grounded in the truth that we will not be led astray by the wiles of the devil and by all of the fierce winds of error that are blowing in our day.

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

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Re: Early Church Fathers - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2020/1/13 9:32

Brother,

I would ask that you do not keep posting David Cloud (way of life) materials on SermonIndex, though he can say some things right, he has a very strong judgemental attitude to most things and we do not want to encourage his teachings or website links on SermonIndex.

Some do not know I personally published 3 volumes on the early church fathers, sharing freely some of the simplicity of their writings, these are the 3 earliest church fathers who were ordained and disciplined by the 12 apostles themselves.

they are free on amazon kindle:

Early Church Father Series: St. Ignatius of Antioch
<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07N3TFJBW/>

Early Church Father Series: St. Polycarp of Smyrna
<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1999524829/>

Early Church Father Series: St. Clement of Rome
<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0995892687>

It is clear by reading these oldest writings of the disciples of the apostles that we learn what was valued in the early church.

Re: , on: 2020/1/13 10:38

This is the first and only time I have ever posted anything by David Cloud here.

I didn't find him to be judgmental, but even on websites that seem to be I find it is important to prayerfully examine and weigh the evidence.

Twenty-one years ago I met Dave Hunt of the Berean Call (whose ministry Greg does not like, as indicated by his remarks on the Orthodox Church thread). I have found Hunt's research and insights to be very helpful. Here are a few excerpts of what he has had to say on this matter:

"There names like Origen, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Justin Martyr, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Augustine, and others. These were men that had some things right and some things wrong. Okay? But all you have to do is read about them. Not that I am recommending that, but you will see their flaws and certainly their heresies. Now let me just take you down through some of these: Irenaeus believed that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Jesus, as did John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem; Athanasius taught salvation through baptism. Actually, most of the others did as well. Tertullian became a supporter of the Montanist heresies, and a promoter of a New Testament priesthood, similar to the Old Testament Jewish priesthood, as did his disciple Cyprian; Augustine was the principal architect of Catholic dogma that included his support of purgatory, baptismal regeneration, and infant baptism, mortal and venial sins, prayers to the dead, penance for sins, absolution from a priest, the sinlessness of Mary, the Apocrypha as Scripture, and so forth. And again, it's not that these men got everything wrong, some of them certainly went against the Catholic Church in terms of Catholic dogmas and so on, but overall, this is like a heretical mind field, so why would we seek them out?"

and

"Without a doubt. Among others, certainly it's a major part, as I said, of the Emerging Church movement. But let's give a couple of examples. Anthony the Great—now, he's known as the Father of Christian Monasticism, you know, like monasteries and so on, and he's the most revered of the Desert Fathers, so he would be a good example. Well,

according to Athanasius, now Athanasius is looked upon as an apologist for the Catholic Church, or one of the heroes of the faith. Anyway, according to Athanasius, the devils fought Anthony the Great by afflicting him with boredom, laziness, phantoms of women, which he countered by becoming a hermit and isolating himself for years in the tomb. Now, he communicated with the outside world through a crevice that allowed him to receive food, and sort of give advice to people that came along. Supposedly, the devil, upset with his holiness, would come and beat him unmercifully. Now in weeks past you talked about men who went to Mount Athos, same things happening today among the Eastern Orthodox monks and priests. Well anyway, so that would be the biggest name in terms of the Desert Fathers, but later mystics were no less bizarre, and more critically, they were not biblical, as you pointed out. Benedictine nun Julian of Norwich—now she's a favorite of evangelical mystic wannabes and also "Christian" feminists. She referred to God as Father/Mother God. But she believed in universal salvation, she was a pantheist, she believed that God was in everything, and she experienced many visions of heaven and hell and so on. Now, here is something interesting, particularly related to our past programs on "The Secret"—the positive mental attitude approach to getting things that you want. Anyway, she said: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

And the following is from a radio interview by Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon:

Origen was a Universalist, and he taught that God's going to save everyone in the end. He believed that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Irenaeus believed that the bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Jesus when consecrated, as did John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem. So, Dave, you know, I could go on with these guys, but let's take Augustine. This would be somebody that, you know, even the Calvinists turned to Augustine as one of the heroes of the faith.

Dave:
Well, he was almost a foundation of what John Calvin taught. Every few pages you've got the name, Augustine: Augustine says, and, I rely on Augustine for this, and so forth.

Tom:
Right, so you reconcile this for me. He's the principal architect, a doctor of the Roman Catholic Church, the principal architect of Catholic dogma. Well dogma, what am I talking about? The doctrines, his support of purgatory, baptismal regeneration, infant baptism, mortal and venial sins, prayers to the dead, penance for sins, absolution from a priest, the sinfulness of, the Apocrypha for Scripture and on and on and on.
" " " "

So, rather than a knee jerk, emotional response, let's examine the allegations set forth here. They are very serious.

Re: - posted by cup (), on: 2020/1/13 14:28

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch was the first of these so-called "Church Fathers," and helps us understand the others. Ignatius was a good and godly man who loved the Lord; But when you read his writings, you find him saying many good things ABOUT Christ and the Christian faith, but none of them did he write out from a personal knowledge of living inside of Jesus and Jesus inside of him. Rather, Jesus is far away, and totally separated from us. Thus causes us to leave the reality of Christ, of whom he speaks, to nothing more than an image of a false Christ in our mind.

Ignatius believed that it was his responsibility to "protect" the congregation of Antioch from "the wolves," and thus he was the first to make himself the sole human leader over the entire church in that city, the "Bishop." Believers in Jesus who wanted to be in good standing with the church, must acknowledge Ignatius as their overseer.

Look at what is happening, as Jesus alive inside of us and we inside of Him vanishes into the distance, no longer known, two things take His place in the life of His body. The first is an image of "Christ," an image that takes on "super" qualities, and a strong human leader standing in the place of Jesus in directing the lives of everyone.

Anytime one individual takes the position of solitary "protector" over many, the fact that Jesus IS doing all things well as head of every little one who belongs to Him disappears from knowledge, and the strongest of humans, no matter how "good," now take His place. As Lord Acton said, "Power corrupts." That's why God will never give power to us, only authority; all power is reserved only to God's Holy Spirit

It's not that these men cannot be good and decent Christians; it's that they, being blind, imagine themselves capable of being "above" the congregation, in-between these weak and foolish Christians and a faraway and someday "Christ." As Paul said, "Fakery." They pretend to know something that the average Christian does not know

ow; they pretend that they know "what it's all about and where they are going."

When any individual sees himself "above" other believers, He will think "Why don't these fleshy people do what they are supposed to do and why don't they stop doing what they are not supposed to do?"

They began to look down in rising contempt for the weak and the lowly, holding on to external word of the human mind, word that is NOT Jesus Himself in Person, word to command and to control others.

Do you see what comes next? The life of Jesus, Himself in Person, made manifest and visible in our mortal flesh, flesh of His flesh, has long vanished, and another "FLESH" rises to fill the void.

Look now at the result of this teaching "Jesus now is far away and someday. The ministry and God's instructions have now taken His place. Death is now the only way through which we will ever really be with Jesus. Right now, these fleshy people just are not under control. They are always doing the wrong thing. So then they conclude that "The flesh is our enemy. So long as we are in these bodies of flesh, God cannot do what He says in our lives."

The real truth is that person of Christ Himself actually dwells, lives and abides in you this very second. He is our ONLY hope of any glory.

Re: Church Father citations - posted by Gloryandgrace (), on: 2020/1/14 13:56

I enjoy reading the Early Church Fathers, no doubt there are errors amongst them. Yet before we begin to burn their books, we might turn around and look at what we are attempting to save.

Without out going into a detailed account of 21st century errors, excesses and sins...are any of those sins decryed by the Early Fathers? After reading them, I must say loudly they would absolutely condemn so many of the things we say and do without a second thought.

Oh how we should banish Athanasius for his doctrine on Mary, but lets banish ourselves for wasting our times on social media, phones and entertainments.

Which one puts you in hell quicker? Which one will you save? Will it be pastor Party at the 1st Church of entertainment? Or an Early father for his baptismal teachings?

Oh how far reaching the errors of our early leaders, and oh how far have our own errors run? God asked Jeremiah if the footman have made you weary, how will you contend with horses?

Are we wearied by baptismal doctrines? But we do not even try to outrun the worldliness chasing us at every media outlet.

The Early Fathers had a great deal of good to say and they should be read and heard. However, if we strain at a gnat of doctrine and swallow a camel of personal ungodliness how shall we escape judgment ourselves?

The truth is, we wont escape.

Re: , on: 2020/1/15 20:13

Marvin, we have the perfect Word of God in the canon of Scriptures. As for history, I am a student of it, and enjoy reading about Christian heroes and heroines of the faith wherever I can find them, past and present, as evidenced in a growing series of books I have illustrated. Nevertheless, many of these so-called early church fathers supported doctrines which were heretical, or led to greater heresies even to the present day.

In reviewing Polycarp's life, for instance, I have found no such strange fire. He studied under the apostle John and became the bishop of the church of Smyrna around the time Revelation was written, and was subsequently martyred. This is a man whose story I will count it a privilege to illustrate, Lord willing, in the near future. I wish that many of the other famed early leaders had a similar report.

Even in the Reformation there are precious few of the famed leaders who have an unblemished report. John Hus and William Tyndale are shining exceptions, and wonderful men of God.

Re: - posted by Gloryandgrace (), on: 2020/1/16 11:51

Hi Alec:

Was it Paul Washer that said "There are no great men of God, only men who serve a great God"?

I have studied 5 major topics since becoming a Christian
Evangelism, apologetics, theology, Church history, languages.

I know that the Church Fathers, some really good, others more laden with errors or heterodoxy. I have my faves and recommend them to others, but as you said, we have the word of God in scripture and it is the final authority, not the bishop of a city long past.

Nevertheless, unstudied critics will easily find some doctrine not to their liking then black-list the Early Father as if their pretense of doctrinal purity has the same substance with God as a devout and holy life which the Early Fathers lived.

God has preserved them for the Church for a reason...even the ones I consider so-so.

When we all stand before the judgment seat of Christ we will find out then how we stacked up next to the Early Father. But my suspicion is, the grace of God sweeps us in despite our century or our culture...and definitely despite beliefs that were errant.

Everyone sees through a glass darkly, because of that perfection is on its way, it has not yet arrived and as such entry in to God's heaven cannot be doctrinal perfection.

Re: , on: 2020/1/16 18:19

In the Bible we have some examples of great men of God who nonetheless made some terrible mistakes with lasting consequences. We do not revile these brothers, but the Scriptures make it clear that we are not to follow in their errors. Where the early church fathers were aligned with the Word I rejoice, but where they espoused error, whether knowingly or not, we should not follow suit.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2020/1/16 18:55

Quote:
-----Where the early church fathers were aligned with the Word I rejoice, but where they espoused error, whether knowingly or not, we should not follow suit.

Brother,

Unfortunately the cowboy mentality of current evangelicalism where everyone has a Bible "gun" and whoever wants to shoot down others can, does not work with the Early Church Fathers. The early Church was unified and if a major doctrinal difference came up they would gather in a local church council or larger ecumenical council. Also most that gathered were bishops or in our terminology famous pastors or influential leaders in the body of Christ.

The problem is also we are interpreting the scriptures 20 centuries later with no connection to the early apostles except their writings. So many views and interpretations can be made that have no alignment with historical views and therefore very well could be wrong views.

This is the main reason I published the 3 books of the earliest Christians who were disciplined by the Apostles themselves, this helps us see the continuity of truth and "how" they interpreted Scripture.

Re: - posted by CofG (), on: 2020/1/16 20:41

Brother Greg. Is there any information that would answer where the name "early church fathers" came from?

Re: - posted by drifter (), on: 2020/1/16 21:13

I really opened up a can of worms, didn't I?

It was not and never is my intention to create quarrels and divisions in the body of Christ. If I have done so, please accept my sincerest apologies.

The scriptures, and only the scriptures, must be my rule of faith. If something contradicts that, even if it was written by the angel Gabriel, I have to reject it. The Pharisees would tell you, if they were around today, that they descended from an unbroken line of priests straight from Aaron. They did. Jesus still called them whitewashed tombs and told them their traditions made the word of God void. I know Catholics and Orthodox say "their" traditions are from the apostles themselves, and they always use 2 Thessalonians 2:15 like a cudgel to "prove" their point. Matthew Henry's commentary proves very helpful here:

"As yet the canon of scripture was not complete, and therefore some things were delivered by the apostles in their preaching, under the guidance of the infallible Spirit, which Christians were bound to observe as coming from God; other things were afterwards by them committed to writing, as the apostle had written a former epistle to these Thessalonians; and these epistles were written as the writers were moved by the Holy Ghost. Note, There is no argument hence for regarding oral traditions in our days, now that the canon of scripture is complete, as of equal authority with the sacred writings. Such doctrines and duties as were taught by the inspired apostles we must steadfastly adhere to; but we have no certain evidence of any thing delivered by them more than what we find contained in the holy scriptures."

I respect the writings of the people commonly called the Early Church fathers; however, they are not binding to me. Their writings are not scriptural canon. I regard them with the same amount of respect I would to a book by A. W. Tozer or some other godly writer. They can be very helpful in a believer's walk and are excellent examples of faithful Christians.

I have to state again, emphatically:

I accept every brother and sister in every denomination as part of the body of Christ if they are truly born again.

If they are not born again but just members of a particular denomination, I cannot accept them as true believers.

If you're Orthodox and you truly love Jesus, praise God! You're my brother or sister.

But realize, I'm born again and I am not a member of the Orthodox church. I have not been and never will be chrismated. I don't believe communion (which I take as regular grape juice from my fridge and crackers from my cupboard) is actually the body of Christ, only a symbol. But I won't let our doctrinal differences get in the way of fellowship.

Re: - posted by Gloryandgrace (), on: 2020/1/30 13:30

Hi Brother Nigel:

You didn't open a can of worms brother, I thought your last post was well said and I think most folks here would agree with that.

I enjoy Basil, Athanasius, Tertullian, Athanagorus to name a few. These men as we all are are product of the times in which they live. They are affected by doctrines and practices in those centuries we haven't the faintest notion about because we are so far removed from that time and those manners. Their judgments are time specific, their words are anointed for or sure but not scripture-grade testimony.

Nevertheless those aforementioned men have said so much that I learned from and was challenged by.

I have gained much from the reading of their works and I would encourage others to read them as well. But just as you said...the scriptures are the final authority and the filter through which all the words of men should pass.

Re: - posted by twayneb (), on: 2020/1/31 15:37

I have very much enjoyed reading the writings of A.W. Tozer. I have also really enjoyed the transcribed sermons of Smith Wigglesworth and John G. Lake. I have listened to Paul Washer and really been blessed, challenged, and encouraged. But I have never patterned my life after any one of these men. I have accepted that they have had a fatherly role in the body of Christ, and I honor them for that position. But none of them have ever been, nor will ever be right about every aspect of scripture and doctrine.

I really think that is how we should also approach the early church fathers. Those apostles who were anointed by God to write what we now have as scripture were used by God to write something that is inerrant. But the early church fathers were not. We can learn a great deal from their writings. We can be blessed by them. At times, they got it wrong, just as we do. That is why, as much as we may be their students, we should much more be students of the Holy Spirit and spend the bulk of our time in intimacy with the word of God. Then we will have the wisdom to be able to discern the writings of the church fathers.

Re: - posted by Oracio (), on: 2020/1/31 21:22

brother Travis wrote:

Quote:
-----That is why, as much as we may be their students, we should much more be students of the Holy Spirit and spend the bulk of our time in intimacy with the word of God. Then we will have the wisdom to be able to discern the writings of the church fathers.

Vital point. We cannot fall into the same trap the Roman Catholic church has been gripped by for so many centuries, we cannot elevate the writings of any men in an unhealthy and unbiblical manner, no matter how influential they've been, and no matter how close they were to the Apostles, or how close of a walk they had with God. When we study the Scriptures themselves with diligence and a sincere and open heart and mind, there is more probability of attaining true insight into God's Word, as opposed to depending heavily on the writings of men of God as a source of authority.

That is why the Protestant Reformation was vital. It restored the ability of God's people to diligently and prayerfully search the Scriptures for themselves. And that is how certain vital doctrines were restored (e.g. salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone apart from the works of the law, and the need to forsake idolatry/aka saint veneration, etc.) on such a wide scale.

Re: brother Oracio - posted by CofG (), on: 2020/2/1 1:55

Good points Oracio.

What you said is exactly why I wondered why we call them "church Fathers." They were men of God taught by God through the teachings of the Apostles, a few in person and some through their writings. Not even everything the Apostles had to say outside the Scriptures is authoritative. Look at Peter and his behavior toward Gentiles when the Jews were around. Calling them Fathers gives their writings and interpretations of the apostolic doctrine a presumption of authority. If you go there, then we are left to either adopt all their interpretations or treat them in most instances as similar to other Godly and faithful theological men who may be right and sometimes wrong like Spurgeon, Edwards, Ryle, etc. The apostolic doctrine should be our devotion and men's interpretation not our guides but only helpers. Some give the Fathers a mystique that draws too many into a presumption of high if not outright interpretive authority.

Re: - posted by Gloryandgrace (), on: 2020/2/3 10:28

The Early Fathers who guided the Church in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries were 'fathers' in the sense that is how God started his Church. God sent 12 apostles into the world at the very start, the Church copying this very same 'authoritative personage' were not put off by the position and title of 'father'. Paul speaking to the Corinthians...1cor4:15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

Paul is not in this passage denoting a special group of men called 'fathers' but he is denoting himself as the man who brought them the authoritative word of God by which under his preaching they were born of God. In this sense Paul is a father to the Corinthians.

The early Church didn't have denominations, bible internet study groups, non-denominational leaders, it had Churches in the various cities and in those cities were bishops overseeing the Church there. Even those bishops gave place to men of God whose teachings and authority in Church matters were evident by their piety. The writings of many of the fathers are polemical, some treatise, some apologetic some theological. But those writings were directed to needs and difficulties they faced, which the Church by God's grace anointed them to address.

I hope you can see a shift, a paradigm shift from Paul's usage of 'father' to how the early Church used that title. Paul's claim to it was by his own Evangelistic efforts and mentoring/teaching over a period of time. The Early Fathers retained that title because among their flock it was due them. Rom 13:7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Early Church knew they had only one heavenly father as Jesus taught, but they knew too they had early fathers given to the Church as gifts for the perfecting of the saints.

Over time we know that term was horribly misused and taken by men who were no evangelists and who came with no authoritative word of God, they came with their own authority.

Remember, that title was originally offered to men who God used to birth believers in the pagan world. After time and error passed, misuses and heresies increased; that which was given by honor to those men whom God anointed was now a sought after title by power hungry men. The visage of having your name listed with great and godly men fed their equally hungry egos and satisfied their thirst for the praises of men.

Since the protestant reformation that term 'father' was corrected and its usage began to die a quick death among the truly born of God believers. Nevertheless, over time, in a great many places the term 'pastor' has replaced 'father' and that title and position is sought after by men who do not deserve such a title.

Re: - posted by CofG (), on: 2020/2/3 16:18

Hi Marvin. As I read Paul's use of the term, and John's, they considered themselves "Fathers" to certain congregations or individuals because they gave spiritual birth under their preaching or brought the local body to maturity through discipling (teaching and modeling) so if that is what you are saying, then I agree with you. Thus, can there can be "Fathers" in many local bodies. I sincerely don't think that is what the Roman Catholic Church defines these particular fathers to be nor their interpretive writings and the weight of authority given those writings.

Re: - posted by Gloryandgrace (), on: 2020/2/3 17:03

Hi Brother Robert: "they considered themselves "Fathers" to certain congregations or individuals because they gave spiritual birth under their preaching or brought the local body to maturity through discipling (teaching and modeling)"

I believe a good exegesis is (your above quote) and is the original intent of Paul's usage of 'father' and if we used it again within such a context we would be biblical.

But as I remarked further, the Church didn't continue to use 'father' in the restricted sense Paul gave, unfortunately it morphed after the early fathers into RCC definitions and was corrupted.

When the original intent is used, it is quite proper to express honor to whom honor is due.

I believe the early 'fathers' were on good ground in most cases, but as time moved forward 'father' was used for someone in high ecclesiastical authority whether or not they evangelized the lost or disciplined anyone.

Our 21st century thinking is quite the opposite, even the most ignorant of opinions carries equal weight with a Church Father regardless of doctrine. I believe secular humanism which instills as the basis of knowledge the approval of theological skepticism in everything. In short, every Church Father and their writings is now second guessed despite the absence of a fair comparison with scripture.

I am by no means rubber stamping everything written by a Church Father, I am saying I have read many opinions where what has been said by an early father has not been fairly considered or even set alongside scripture for review. Carte blanche dismissal is easier than diligent study for some who bad mouth the early fathers.

I just read yesterday some who disliked and disapproved of various men of God simply because those men didn't run in the same theological clothing as themselves.

In my mind, this kind of arrogance has much more stench than the loose and improper use of the term father.

rants over, thanks for the response.

Re: - posted by CofG (), on: 2020/2/3 17:35

Thanks Marvin.

Didn't perceive a rant.

You are right. We should not in the least dismiss their writings. We don't even know though, whether these Godly men were, under Paul's definition, "fathers" of any local assemblies. It is much wiser to just say "the writings of Tertullian". Then, everyone will give them their proper weight based on the content of those writings compared with Scripture and not on the basis of ecclesiastical adoption.