THE QUESTION

Who were the Ante-Nicene Fathers?

Asked by a THF member on May 20, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 15 early Christian passages and 34 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/who-were-the-ante-nicene-fathers

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

The Ante-Nicene Fathers were the Christian writers of the church's early centuries, before the Council of Nicaea. The earliest learned from men who knew the apostles, as Irenaeus did from Polycarp. Writers named here include Justin, Tatian, Clement, Irenaeus, Melito, Origen, Tertullian and Hippolytus, who defended the faith and guarded what the apostles handed down.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 5

An early writer names the older teachers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Caius looks back to Christian writers older than the time of Victor. He names Justin, Miltiades, Tatian and Clement, who wrote against pagans and the heresies of their day, and the books of Irenaeus and Melito. He says all of them teach that Christ is God and man.

1

> "Besides that, there are writings by certain brothers older than the time of Victor, which they wrote against the heathen in defense of the truth, and against the heresies of their own time. I mean Justin, Miltiades, Tatian, Clement, and many others. In all their writings, divinity is ascribed to Christ. For who does not know the books of Irenaeus and Melito, and the others, which declare that Christ is God and man?"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Caius,** *Fragments* 1 (c. 200–220 AD) **Source 6, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 5

The earliest learned from friends of the apostles

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus speaks of the presbyters before him who knew the apostles. He remembers Polycarp, who told what he had heard from John and others who had seen the Lord. This shows how close the earliest of these writers stood to the apostles.

2

> "These opinions were not passed down to you by the presbyters who came before us and were acquainted with the apostles."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "I can describe where the blessed Polycarp would sit and speak, his habits, appearance, and the talks he gave to people. He would also talk about his close interactions with John and others who had seen the Lord, recalling their words."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 3, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 5

Origen calls Clement a disciple of the apostles

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Origen calls Clement a disciple of the apostles. Elsewhere he names this Clement as the one Paul praises in Philippians 4:3 as a fellow worker whose name is in the book of life.

3 “Clement indeed, a disciple of the apostles, mentions those whom the Greeks called Antichthones, and other parts of the earth, to which no one of our people can go, nor can any of those who are there cross over to us, and he also called them worlds, saying, "The ocean is impassable to men; and those are worlds which are on the other side of it, which are governed by these same arrangements of the ruling God."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 3 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

4 “Faithful Clement accepts that this happened on the trustworthiness of the accounts, Clement to whom Paul bears witness when he says in Philippians 4:3, "With Clement also, and the others, my fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on John* 6 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 11, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 5

They held to teaching handed down from apostles

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Origen says the church's teaching came down in order from the apostles and is still kept in the churches, and that only what agrees with it is truth. Tertullian argues the same way: what is earliest comes from the apostles and is kept in the churches they founded.

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5 “In the same way, since there are many who think they hold the opinions of Christ, and yet some of them think differently from those before them, the teaching of the Church, handed down in orderly succession from the apostles and remaining in the Churches to the present day, is still preserved. Therefore, that alone is to be accepted as truth which differs in no way from ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

6 “So then, if what is earlier is clearly more true, and if what is earlier is what is from the very beginning, and if what is from the beginning is what has the apostles as its authors, then this too will certainly be quite clear: what has been kept as a sacred deposit in the churches of the apostles has come down from the apostles.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 5 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 4, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 5

They defended the faith and answered heresies

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin Martyr writes to show outsiders that Christian teaching agrees with Christ and the prophets, and asks for a hearing because it is true. Hippolytus describes answering many heresies not by force but by the power of truth. Defending the faith and refuting error filled much of their writing.

7 “To make this clear to you: firstly, everything we claim aligns with what Christ taught us and the prophets before Him, and these truths predate all other writers. We seek acknowledgment not just because we share the same messages as those writers, but because we speak the truth.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 2, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

8 “After we have broken through the maze of heresies, not by violence, but simply by refuting them, or in other words, by the power of truth, we now come to the demonstration of the truth itself.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Refutation of All Heresies* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not define the term Ante-Nicene, give dates for these writers, or list everyone who belongs to the group.
- Being early does not mean every writer was right on every point; these passages do not show that they all agreed.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 15 early Christian passages and 34 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–15, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (source 16, in Bible order), then 33 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *15 passages from 9 writers*

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Other Fragments from the Lost Writings of Justin* (1885 English; on point 1) "and Irenæus, and Justin the martyr and philosopher, who, commenting with exceeding wisdom on the number six of the sixth day, affirms that the intelligent soul of man and his… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *First Apology* **Quote 7, page 4** "To make this clear to you: firstly, everything we claim aligns with what Christ taught us and the prophets before Him, and these truths predate all other writers. We seek acknowledgment not just because we share the same messages as those writers, but because we speak the truth." **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 3*

3 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "opinions, those presbyters who preceded us, and who were conversant with the apostles, did not hand down to thee… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Against Marcion* 5 (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** "being the work of apostles, they were prior, and coeval in origin with the churches themselves… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *On Prescription Against Heretics* 34 (1885 English; on point 4) "if they were free from any participation in condemned doctrine, they would stand already judged on the mere ground of time, being all the more spurious because they were not… [continues online] **read ›**

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Caius, *c. 200–220 AD · source 6*

6 *Fragments* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “then, besides, there are writings of certain brethren older than the times of Victor, which they wrote against the heathen in defense of the truth, and against the heresies of… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 7–8*

7 *Refutation of All Heresies* 23 (1885 English; on point 5) “the Noetians suppose that this Father Himself is called Son, (and vice versa,) in reference to the events which at their own proper periods happen to them severally… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Refutation of All Heresies* 1 **Quote 8, page 4** “of error will be shown in all their inconsistency when we succeed in establishing from where the definition of the truth has come. The truth has not taken its principles… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 9–11*

9 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** “seeing there are many who think they hold the opinions of Christ, and yet some of these think differently from their predecessors, yet as the teaching of the Church, transmitted… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 3 **Quote 3, page 3** “Clement indeed, a disciple of the apostles, mentions those whom the Greeks called Antichthones, and other parts of the earth, to which no one of our people can go, nor can any of those who are there cross over to us, and he also called them worlds, saying, "The ocean is impassable to men; and those are worlds which are on the other side of it, which are governed by these same arrangements of the ruling God."” **read ›**

11 *Commentary on John* 6 **Quote 4, page 3** “Faithful Clement accepts that this happened on the trustworthiness of the accounts, Clement to whom Paul bears witness when he says in Philippians 4:3, "With Clement also, and the others, my fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life."” **read ›**

Asterius Urbanus, *c. 232–250 AD · source 12*

12 *Extant Writings of Asterius Urbanus* 1 (1885 English; on point 5) “those first heretics, who from the heresy of Marcion are called Marcionites, allege that they have a great multitude of martyrs for Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 13–14*

13 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 5) “the Patripassians, Anthropians, Valentinians, Apelletians, Ophites, Marcionites, and other pests, and swords, and poisons of heretics for subverting the truth, confess the same Father, the same Son, the same Holy… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 5) “First of All, Fortifying Them Against the Deceits of These, He Exhorts Them to Constancy, and Instructs Them that Heresies Exist Because Christ, the Head of the Church, is Not… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 15*

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 4) “Alexandria, Annianus was the first, ordained by Mark the evangelist… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *1 verse, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

16 **Philippians 4:3** Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who labored with me in the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. **read ›**

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ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *33 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 49:4

Proverbs 1:2 · 30:20

Isaiah 35:5

Jeremiah 13:23

Daniel 1:2 · 2:10 · 7:13 · 7:25 · 10:20 · 12:2

Matthew 7:23 · 11:28

Luke 6:40 · 9:55

John 1:1 · 1:9 · 1:17 · 15:21

Acts 10:36 · 20:29

Galatians 2:4

Ephesians 4:13

Colossians 4:16

2 Thessalonians 3:2

2 Timothy 1:5 · 4:10 · 4:21

Philemon 1:10

1 Peter 1:1 · 2:3

2 Peter 3:3

Revelation 13:5

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Who were the Ante-Nicene Fathers?” on May 20, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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