

Last year we admitted a student into our PhD program last year to work with me, but since I've been on academic leave to write my next book, I haven't had the chance to teach her. That's obviously a problem, since I'm one of the reasons she's here! So we agreed that I would go ahead and do a one-on-one independent study with her this semester on an important topic, the Apostolic Fathers.

We meet once a week for three hours to translate Greek texts, discuss the books in question (see below), and talk about scholarly monographs that she is assigned to read each week. It's a lot. But, well, welcome to the PhD! For many students college is a big leap from high school; a master's program is a big leap from undergraduate; and a PhD program is a QUANTUM leap.

The "Apostolic Fathers" is a technical term for a group of 10 (or 11, depending on what you include) authors traditionally thought to have been writing immediately after the books of the NT were completed — that is, early second century — who stood within the proto-orthodox tradition. That is, these were the forerunners of what became standard Christian belief and practice, in Christianities early years, just after the New Testament. (So no "Gnostic" writings, etc.) In reality at least one of them was writing at the same time as the New Testament (the author of 1 Clement) and two are probably at the end of the second century (2 Clement and the Letter to Diognetus).

Some years ago I published a two-volume facing-page edition of the these authors, that is, Greek (and where there is no Greek, Latin) on the left page and my new translation on the right page. The books are highly significant for knowing about Christianity just after the NT period, and so I use the course (which I've taught a number of times) to get into key issues of early Christianity: heresy and orthodoxy, the development of church hierarchy, the role of women in the church, Jewish-Christian relations, persecution and martyrdom, the development of church ritual, etc. etc.

In any event, I thought you might be interested in what the Apostolic Fathers are, and what we are doing to discuss them. The books I've assigned her are either classics or cutting edge, on topics some of you may be interested in. So, here's the syllabus I gave her.

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