

The Librarian's Guide to the Apostolic Fathers

by Clayton N. Jefford

INTRODUCTION

Sandwiched between the New Testament and the ensuing works of second-century apologists stand various texts that reflect the struggle of early church leaders to envision an acceptable ethical lifestyle and to establish what it means to be “church.” These writings are the “in-between” literature of the earliest patristic period, works that scholars of ecclesiastical history often brush past with little recognition that they provide a foundation for later doctrine and theology.

Many of these writings are now known as the “Apostolic Fathers,” a designation that is attributed to Jean-Baptiste Cotelier, who in 1672 culled writings that were thought to preserve the teachings of the first apostles into a secondary grouping under that heading.¹ Use of the phrase as a formal title did not occur until some twenty years later, though, in the 1693 English translation of William Wake.² The Apostolic Fathers were first linked with the literary traditions of Clement and Hermas of Rome, Ignatius, Barnabas, and Polycarp. But by 1765 the corpus grew to include the *Epistle to Diognetus*, fragments of Papias, and the *Apology of Quadratus* as envisioned by Andreas Gallandi.³ The final writing to be added was the *Didache*, which was included soon after its discovery toward the end of the nineteenth century.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Since the Apostolic Fathers is not an “official” collection in any sense, its growth reflects the haphazard progression of individual choices. The corpus has taken various forms over the years, often leaving a reader confused about the nature of the works themselves. Older volumes typically include the Apostolic Fathers as a subset of early patristic literature. This suggests that its status among early patristic scholars was not well defined, and a perusal of collections up to the end of the nineteenth century bears this out. But the Apostolic Fathers have been published separately from other patristic literature in the last century, and this has helped to solidify the writings as a collection.

Readers may recognize the Apostolic Fathers from many publications. The most widely known translation appears scattered throughout the ten-volume set of Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson's *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1867-1873).⁴ Despite the antiquated style of its prose, this publication appears widely across the Internet, since it no longer bears copyright protection.⁵ In rivalry with this traditional approach in which the Apostolic Fathers are grouped together with other early patristic writings is the translation of J. B. Lightfoot. Lightfoot's publication

¹ *SS. Patrum qui temporibus apostolicis floruerunt: Barnabae, Clementis, Hermae, Ignatii, Polycarpi* (Paris, 1692).

² *The Genuine Epistles of the Apostolical Fathers, S. Barnabas, S. Clement, S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, The Shepherd of Hermas, and the Martyrdoms of St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp* (London, 1693). See H. J. de Jonge, “On the Origin of the Term ‘Apostolic Fathers,’” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 29 (1978): 503-505.

³ *Bibliotheca veterum patrum antiquorumque scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Graeco-Latina* (14 vols.; Venice, 1765–1781 [2nd ed., 1788]).

⁴ Initially edited by A. C. Coxe (Edinburgh: Clark, 1885). For relevant volumes, see vol. 1 (Clement, *Diognetus*, Polycarp, Ignatius, Barnabas, and Papias), vol. 2 (*Hermas*), vol. 7 (*Didache*), and vol. 8 (*Quadratus*).

⁵ See, e.g., <http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html>; <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene>; and <http://www.bible.ca/history/fathers>.

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in 1889-1890 focused on Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp and offered extensive commentary for each work. The Lightfoot edition, minus the commentary, was eventually “completed” and edited in 1891 by his colleague, J. R. Harmer,⁶ whose own work was subsequently reshaped a generation later through various editions by Michael W. Holmes. It is likely true to say that the Lightfoot-Harmer-Holmes tradition represents the most widely read English translation today.⁷

Apart from a few other limited editions,⁸ the only true rival to these two collections is the Loeb Classical Library of Harvard University Press whose original offering was a 1912-1913 translation by Kirsopp Lake. This two-volume set was popular among readers until 2003, at which point the editors turned to Bart D. Ehrman for a fresh translation to replace that by Lake.⁹ Ehrman’s rendition is used today alongside that of the Holmes edition, each featuring the writings of the Apostolic Fathers in Greek and Latin together with English translation.¹⁰ Any informed scholar of patristic studies might expect a well-stocked library of early Christian literature to include both editions among its holdings.

Slightly parallel to the English evolution is the German tradition, whose scholars were among the first to favor the Apostolic Fathers as a collection. An early standard is the 1876-1877 edition of Oscar de Gebhardt and Adolf Harnack, which features the Greek texts of the Apostolic Fathers translated into Latin.¹¹ By 1924, Karl Bihlmeyer produced another version based on the work of F. X. Funk that evolved along two different avenues of publication. The first of these was edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher (1956).¹² A second, more popular edition with contributions by Molly Whittaker was edited by Martin Dibelius and D.-A. Koch. This latter work was reissued by Andreas Lindemann and Henning Paulsen and is the most commonly used translation in German today. Apart from its acceptance by German scholars, most readers are unaware that the Funk-Bihlmeyer tradition is the foundation for Ehrman’s Loeb translation, thus giving it international impact.¹³ Otherwise, the 1984 translation of Klaus Wengst should be considered an important contribution to the study of the Apostolic Fathers.¹⁴ Its careful text-critical analysis of the manuscript tradition, typical of older studies, is widely used by scholars today.

Finally, significant translations of the Apostolic Fathers exist in French and Italian, though most are published as individual studies within expansive publication series that are broader in nature. Perhaps most widely used

⁶ *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan, 1891); reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956.

⁷ *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007). Holmes has offered several versions of this text over the years beginning in 1989, several in English translation only.

⁸ See, e.g., James A. Kleist, *The Didache...* (ACW 6; Westminster, MD: Newman, 1948); Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation* (New York: Harper, 1950); and Jack Sparks, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Nashville: Nelson, 1978).

⁹ The Lake and Ehrman editions reflect parallel bibliographic information (*The Apostolic Fathers* [LCL 24-25; London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press]), though the Lake translation was jointly published with William Heinemann.

¹⁰ Also popular is Andrew Louth’s 1987 revision of Maxwell Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), largely because it is inexpensive and easily accessible.

¹¹ *Patrum apostolicorum opera* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1876-1877).

¹² *Die Apostolischen Väter* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1956).

¹³ *Die Apostolischen Väter: Griechisch-deutsche Parallelausgabe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

¹⁴ *Schriften des Urchristentums* (Munich: Kösel, 1984). The Wengst volume is restricted to only four sources in the Apostolic Fathers—the *Didache*, Barnabas, 2 Clement, and *Diognetus*.

in French are the older collection of Hippolyte Marie Hemmer, Gabriel Oger, and A. Laurent¹⁵ and two more recent translations, the first by François Louvel, Louis Bouyer, and Claude Mondésert (1963)¹⁶ and the second by Dominique Bertrand (1990).¹⁷ In Italian, one finds the editions of Guido Bosio and Daniel Ruiz Bueno to have been among the most influential.¹⁸

FROM TEXT TO UNDERSTANDING

While the textual history behind the Apostolic Fathers corpus is important, it is even more essential to understand the background of individual tractates. Many translations include some form of overview (e.g., Holmes and Ehrman), though efforts to provide free-standing introductions have arisen in recent years. The attention that scholars and publishers alike have given to this endeavor indicates a rising interest in the Apostolic Fathers among many who specialize either in biblical studies or ecclesiastical research.

The first of these introductions is the 1989 volume of Simon Tugwell,¹⁹ whose review of the Apostolic Fathers considers seven works in the collection. Typical of introductions in general, Tugwell omits the actual writings themselves, opting to address individual issues with respect to each work within the group. My own introduction in 1996 seeks to introduce even more of the corpus than is studied by Tugwell (and hopefully with a more balanced perspective), with a design that is carefully crafted for a broader range of readers.²⁰ This “student’s introduction” features the contributions of several students who worked in the classroom setting in order to complete the project. Further consideration of the writings eventually led to a briefer publication in 2005 that many beginners find helpful.²¹ A more methodical introduction was published in German by Matthias Günther at roughly this same time (1997).²² The Günther volume relies heavily on studies from Germanic scholarship. He is careful to identify each study as he offers observations about works within the Apostolic Fathers. As a somewhat unique, free-standing introduction beyond the world of English literature, this publication reveals a broadly perceived need among continental readers for an overview to the corpus.

Beyond these efforts, two more recent volumes have appeared that feature the research efforts of diverse scholars who specialize in individual works of the Apostolic Fathers. The first was edited by Paul Foster in 2007, drawing together a series of introductions that appeared individually in the *Expository Times*.²³ This collection’s thoroughgoing approach is designed for advanced students to address the details of individual works. Not to be outdone, the Foster volume finds its German parallel in a publication that was edited by Wilhelm Pratscher in 2009. Some readers will recognize its subsequent translation into English (2010).²⁴ This work is also the product of a team of researchers, chiefly representing the views of continental Europeans with a focus on each work’s theology.²⁵ Such

¹⁵ *Les Pères Apostoliques* (TDEHC 5, 10, 12, 16; Paris: Picard, 1907-1912).

¹⁶ *Les écrits des Pères Apostoliques* (Chrétiennes de tous les temps 1; Paris: Cerf, 1963).

¹⁷ *Les écrits des Pères Apostoliques* (Sagesses chrétiennes; Paris: Cerf, 1990 [2001]).

¹⁸ *I Padri apostolici* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1940-1942), and *Padres apostólicos* (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1950 [1974]), respectively.

¹⁹ *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Chapman, 1989).

²⁰ Clayton N. Jefford (with Kenneth J. Harder and Louis D. Amézaga, Jr.), *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996). A second edition is scheduled to appear in 2012 under the imprint of Baker Academic.

²¹ *The Apostolic Fathers: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005).

²² *Einleitung in die Apostolischen Väter* (ARGU 4; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1997).

²³ *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers* (London and New York: Clark, 2007).

²⁴ *Die Apostolischen Väter: Eine Einleitung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); ET = *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (trans. E. G. Wolfe; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).

²⁵ Though the reader should be aware that the same person, Jonathan Draper, has provided the introduction to the *Didache* in both the Foster and Pratscher volumes!

“composite” introductions as these edited by Foster and Pratscher offer a judicious view into the corpus and will surely stand the test of time. More notably perhaps, the mere presence of such introductions, beginning in 1989 and continuing till today, have spurred an interest that did not exist previously among students of ecclesiastical history. This awareness has made itself most evident in two types of publications: commentaries and individual studies.

COMMENTARIES AND STUDIES

Unlike the many works that have been devoted to scripture during the last century, few commentary sets focus on the Apostolic Fathers. The reasons are obvious: fewer scholars specialize in this area and publishers see restricted sales for such volumes. For the English reader, the now dated six-volume *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*, edited by Robert M. Grant, is perhaps most widely recognized. Produced from 1964-1968, this collection offers significant contributions by (at that time) young authors on the core writings in the collection as identified by Cotelier and Wake. Many readers know the volume on the *Didache* and *Barnabas* by Robert Kraft,²⁶ and perhaps that on the Polycarp tradition by William Schoedel.²⁷ Otherwise, there is no other collection in English.

This having been said, librarians should be aware of a forthcoming series by Oxford University Press (Oxford Apostolic Fathers) whose first volume on *2 Clement* by Christopher Tuckett is scheduled for publication in the latter part of 2012. Other works in the series have been assigned to a variety of scholars, featuring an international flavor. Additional volumes on the *Epistle to Diognetus*, *Didache*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, and Polycarp tradition are in production. These studies promise to be dynamic analyses of the Apostolic Fathers with a focus on wide-ranging issues that should impact English readers for years to come.

Another essential commentary series not to be neglected is the highly erudite German *Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern* published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.²⁸ Highly technical with a decided focus on texts and intertextual concerns, this series offers the finest of continental scholarship and will serve as a mainstay of contemporary research for German readers. Its primary focus is directed toward a consideration of individual manuscript traditions behind each work, with extensive passage-by-passage commentary that has no parallel to date.

Beyond these “sets” of studies are individual commentaries that have made or will make significant impacts. Several now appear in the *Hermeneia* series (Fortress), including a 1998 English translation of Kurt Niederwimmer’s *Didache* commentary (from the KAV above). Niederwimmer’s volume marked a turning point in the field of *Didache* studies at the time of its appearance. Working away from J.-P. Audet’s earlier emphasis on parallels between the *Didache* and the Dead Sea Scrolls (see below), the author placed more emphasis on the divergent nature of the work’s sources. Also to be found here is a widely used book on Ignatius of Antioch, again by William Schoedel (1985). Most scholars who work in the field of Ignatian studies make extensive use of this volume. Finally, Carolyn Osiek’s more recent 1999 volume on the *Shepherd of Hermas* also stands as a monumental work, though its impact is yet to be fully appreciated.²⁹

²⁶ *Barnabas and the Didache* (Apostolic Fathers 3; New York: Nelson and Sons, 1965).

²⁷ *Polycarp, Martyrdom of Polycarp, Fragments of Papias* (Apostolic Fathers 5; New York: Nelson and Sons, 1967).

²⁸ Contributors to date include Kurt Niederwimmer (vol. 1 on *Didache* [1993]), Horacio E. Lona (vol. 2 on *1 Clement* [1998]), Wilhelm Pratscher (vol. 3 on *2 Clement* [2007]), Reinhart Staats (vol. 4 on Ignatius [forthcoming]), Johannes Bapt. Bauer (vol. 5 on Polycarp [1995]), Gerd Buschmann (vol. 6 on *Martyrdom of Polycarp* [1998]), Norbert Brox (vol. 7 on *Shepherd of Hermas* [1991]), and Ferdinand-Rupert Prostmeier (vol. 8 on *Barnabas* [1998]).

²⁹ Additional volumes on *Barnabas* and *2 Clement* are likewise in production for the series.

Apart from Hermeneia, several significant volumes now appear in the Sources chrétiennes (Cerf)³⁰ and *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Mohr Siebeck)³¹ series that are worthy of investigation and should not be overlooked. As to the former, volumes on the *Didache* and Ignatius are especially well known, while Andreas Lindemann's work on *1-2 Clement* in the latter series is quickly becoming a classic.

Otherwise, several distinctive commentaries stand apart within their respective fields of research. Henry G. Meecham's 1949 volume on *Diognetus* remains unsurpassed among English texts despite its age.³² This work exceeds the quality of previous English commentaries on the text, including such classics as those of L. B. Radford and E. H. Blakeney.³³ Since the time of Meecham, however, several stimulating studies have appeared, especially the now classic exploration of H. I. Marrou in French³⁴ and the monumental German studies of Rudolf Brändle and Horacio E. Lona.³⁵ The Lona volume appears within a series on early Christian apologies and is not classified with the Apostolic Fathers, thus to indicate the flexibility that the work still holds for those who classify early Christian literature. Finally, not to be overlooked is the recent work of Charles E. Hill, whose highly provocative investigation into the work's possible connection with Polycarp of Smyrna has advanced research on the topic of *Diognetus* specifically and the Apostolic Fathers in general.³⁶

Elsewhere among the Apostolic Fathers are studies that are devoted to authors from the region of Asia Minor. For example, Ulrich H. J. Körtner's volumes on Papias stand front and center as some of the best research in the field.³⁷ Several independent works on Ignatius of Antioch are widely recognized among scholars, including the often-referenced commentary of J. Rius-Camps³⁸ and the well-known study of Christine Trevett.³⁹ Ignatian research has attracted special attention in recent years because of the bishop's witness to the historical roots of much ancient Christian tradition. The end result has been studies that have explored Ignatius within his political sphere,⁴⁰ and others that seek to place the bishop more firmly within his local context.⁴¹ The roster of such works within the Apostolic Fathers is wide-ranging, even when one considers only those volumes from the last half century. So too, several recent volumes on Polycarp, his writings, and the tradition that surrounds his legacy have gained a wide

³⁰ Specifically, vols. 10 bis (Ignatius and Polycarp), 33 bis (*Diognetus*), 53 bis (*Shepherd of Hermas*), 167 (*1 Clement*), 172 (*Barnabas*), and 248 bis (*Didache*).

³¹ Specifically, Andreas Lindemann, *Die Clemensbriefe* (vol. 17, 1992) and W. Bauer and H. Paulsen, *Die Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochia und der Polykarpbrief* (vol. 18, 1985).

³² *The Epistle to Diognetus* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1949).

³³ *The Epistle to Diognetus* (London: SPCK, 1908) and *The Epistle to Diognetus* (London: SPCK; New York: Macmillan, 1943), respectively. The Radford volume is now available as a public domain source on the Internet.

³⁴ *A Diognète* (2nd ed.; SC 33 bis; Paris: Cerf, 1965).

³⁵ *Die Ethik der "Schrift an Diognet"* (ATANT 64; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975) and *An Diognet* (KFA 8; Freiberg: Herder, 2001), respectively.

³⁶ *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp* (WUNT 186; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

³⁷ *Papias von Hierapolis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des frühen Christentums* (FRLANT 133; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) and co-authored with Martin Leutzsch, *Papiasfragmente—Hirt des Hermas* (SU 3; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998).

³⁸ *The Four Authentic Letters of Ignatius, the Martyr* (Xristianismos 2; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1979).

³⁹ *A Study of Ignatius of Antioch in Syria and Asia* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992).

⁴⁰ See esp. Allen Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Second Sophistic* (STAC 36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) and *Ignatius of Antioch* (London and New York: Clark, 2007).

⁴¹ John-Paul Lotz, *Ignatius and Concord* (PS 8; New York: Lang, 2007) and Thomas A. Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009). Robinson's study is a traditional defense of the belief that Ignatius represents mainstream Christian views early in the second century rather than the more recent perspective that the bishop was an innovator within the tradition.

reading. One should include here especially studies that seek to appreciate the bishop in light of his reading of New Testament scriptures, an approach that offers new insights into the study of the Christian canon in the second century.⁴² So too, studies into the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* have shed considerable light on the tradition in recent years.⁴³

Beyond these volumes, two significant works have appeared on the text of *Barnabas* in recent years as free-standing studies. The first is the widely used commentary of James Carleton Paget.⁴⁴ The second and more recent is the published dissertation of James N. Rhodes, who seeks to link the work with scriptural tradition, as in the case of Polycarp above.⁴⁵ Here, however, Rhodes pursues an Old Testament motif associated with the Deuteronomic tradition. Such works stand apart for their contributions within the field of the Apostolic Fathers.

In addition to commentaries, one may add several collected essays. For example, L. W. Barnard's papers on the Apostolic Fathers⁴⁶ is now a classic in the field. Barnard represents an older approach to the Apostolic Fathers that was more typical of an earlier generation of scholars who wrote broadly within the corpus. Similarly, recent publications from Oxford that mark the centennial anniversary of the research of "the Oxford Committee" into the use of scripture in the Apostolic Fathers (1905)⁴⁷ indicate the breadth of interest in these works that many scholars now have.⁴⁸ Such volumes demonstrate the research focus of scholars who otherwise have not produced individual volumes of exploration. Other such books are widely available with respect to the *Didache*, which will be discussed below.

In addition to these volumes, scholarship has also worked through the Apostolic Fathers to explain cultural developments within the early church. For example, James Jeffers has used the literature to better understand the growing church of first- to second-century Rome,⁴⁹ a setting that is not otherwise known with pronounced clarity. So too, Allen Brent has viewed Ignatius a la the Roman empire's political situation in Asia Minor.⁵⁰ Still others have seen the Apostolic Fathers as an avenue by which to find the roots of the Christian ministerial tradition, a trajectory that otherwise is defined primarily by the presumptions of the tradition.⁵¹ Little other ancient literature is available by which to undertake such examinations. Thus, the corpus holds significant influence among biblical researchers and church historians alike so as to make it impossible to measure its collected impact for scholarship.

⁴² See, e.g., Kenneth Berding, *Polycarp and Paul* (VCSup 62; Leiden: Brill, 2002); Paul Hartog, *Polycarp and the New Testament* (WUNT 2.134; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002); and Frederick W. Weidmann, *Polycarp and John* (CJAS 12; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1999).

⁴³ See esp. here the late Boudewijn Dehandschutter, *Martyrium Polycarpi* (BETL 52; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979) and most recently his *Polycarpiana: Collected Studies* (BETL 105; Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

⁴⁴ *The Epistle of Barnabas* (WUNT 2.64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994).

⁴⁵ *The Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomic Tradition* (WUNT 2.188; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004). So too, the *Barnabas* volume of the Hermeneia series has been assigned to Rhodes.

⁴⁶ *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background* (New York: Schocken, 1966).

⁴⁷ A Committee of the Oxford Society of Historical Theology, *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905). This volume is typically referenced under the name of "the Oxford Committee" by scholars, since no further delineation is given to the contributors.

⁴⁸ See Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett, eds., *The New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (2 vols; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴⁹ *Conflict at Rome* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

⁵⁰ *A Political History of Early Christianity* (London and New York: Clark, 2009), 166-208.

⁵¹ See Ray Robert Noll, *Christian Ministerial Priesthood* (London and San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1993) and Harry O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (ESCJ 11; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002).

For the moment, it may be useful to conclude with a quick glance at how recent studies on a single writing in the Apostolic Fathers, the *Didache*, reveal the speed with which the literature has reshaped scholarly interpretations within the field.

HOW THE *DIDACHE* HAS RESHAPED CONTEMPORARY VIEWS

Though only “rediscovered” by chance in 1873, the *Didache* posed a riddle for the roots of patristic Christianity and gained late entry into the Apostolic Fathers. Early commentaries by Paul Sabatier (1885), Charles Taylor (1886), J. Rendel Harris (1887), Adolf von Harnack (1896), and Paul Drews (1904) indicate the degree to which the text stimulated a new generation of scholars. But for numerous years there was confusion about where to locate the work within ancient Christian literature and how to appreciate its contribution to early patristic history. The work was allotted variously from the first generation of Christians to the fourth-century Manicheans. With the eventual discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the late 1940s, however, new insights about the evolution of the writing suggested that special attention be given to Jewish history, culminating in J.-P. Audet’s landmark commentary in 1958.⁵² Audet detected fragmentary traditions from a divergent Jewish tradition that he believed had come to form the text of the *Didache* through layers of additions over time. The observations of Audet had significant impact for subsequent researchers, as may be seen in part in the commentary of Robert Kraft (see above), as well as for those of Stanislas Giet, Willy Rordorf and André Tuilier, and, most recently, Marcello del Verme.⁵³

In recent decades, interest in the *Didache* has taken an impressive leap forward as contemporary scholars have come to identify the antiquity of the work’s traditions and the impact that they may have for the interpretation of Christian origins. This movement has been especially evident among American and British scholars who have participated in the twelve-year *Didache* section of the Society of Biblical Literature. Included here are a variety of essays—many of which have been collected into published volumes⁵⁴—that seek to portray the diversity of opinion about the work as well as those elements that have drawn broad agreement.

Most intriguing are studies that have pushed the text back into the first century of Christianity’s development. This process began with forays into the facets of the work’s background, focusing on sayings of Jesus,⁵⁵ the so-called “two ways” tradition,⁵⁶ divergent liturgical rites,⁵⁷ and the question of the writing’s ultimate form and purpose.⁵⁸

In certain respects the quest for the antiquity of the *Didache* arose with Helmut Koester’s venture into the oral tradition background of the Apostolic Fathers in general.⁵⁹ Koester was firmly convinced that the traditions that are now preserved in the Apostolic Fathers, whether sayings or liturgical rites, are firmly rooted in oral recitations

⁵² *La Didachè* (ÉBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1958).

⁵³ Respectively, *L’énigme de la Didachè* (PFLUS 149; Paris: Ophrys, 1970); *La Doctrine des douze apôtres (Didachè)* (SC 248 bis; Paris: Cerf, 1978); and, *Didache and Judaism* (London and New York: Clark, 2004).

⁵⁴ Clayton N. Jefford, ed. *The Didache in Context* (NovTSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 1995); Jonathan A. Draper, ed., *The Didache in Modern Research* (AGJU 37; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Huub van de Sandt, ed., *Matthew and the Didache* (Assen: van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), and with Jürgen K. Zangenberg, eds., *Matthew, James, and Didache* (SBLSymS 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2008).

⁵⁵ John S. Kloppenborg, “The Sayings of Jesus in the Didache: A Redaction-Critical Approach” (masters thesis, University of St. Michael’s College, 1976) and Clayton N. Jefford, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles* (VCSup 11; Leiden: Brill, 1989). And most recently, David E. Young, *Jesus Tradition in the Apostolic Fathers* (WUNT 2.311; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

⁵⁶ Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache* (CRINT 3.5; Assen: van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 55-270.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Schwiebert, *Knowledge and the Coming Kingdom* (LNTS 373; London and New York: Clark, 2008).

⁵⁸ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache* (New York and Mahwah, N.J.: Newman, 2003); Nancy Pardee, *The Genre of the Didache: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

⁵⁹ *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den Apostolischen Vätern* (TUGAL 65.5.10; Berlin: Akademie, 1957).

rather than literary sources. This conviction formed the backbone of later discussions of the *Didache* itself, as first argued in scattered journal articles and essays by Jonathan Draper and Ian Henderson, but ultimately framed into a single commentary by Aaron Milavec.⁶⁰ The contention of Milavec is that the core community behind the *Didache* is among the most ancient witnesses to the early church setting and that the writing itself preserves the oral traditions of that context. This view has been subsequently championed by further briefer commentaries in which Milavec's position has been understood as essential to a true reading of the text.⁶¹

As a result of such investigations, scholars are gradually abandoning the time-honored sobriquet of the “idiosyncratic” nature of the *Didache* and are now recognizing that the work testifies to some of the earliest roots of Christian faith. This includes a completely new way of envisioning the writing, even to acknowledge the possibility that the Gospel of Matthew may have employed the *Didache* itself!⁶² Furthermore, students now seek to locate the work with greater certainty around the regions of Antioch and eastern Syria, the home of the apostle Paul's missionary travels.⁶³ Such activity has forced New Testament scholars to consider the potential role that the *Didache* and its traditions may hold for the formation of the scriptural tradition, witnessed for example in Vicky Balabanski's study of early Christianity's concern for eschatology and for Alan Garrow's consideration of the *Didache* as a liturgical source behind the book of Revelation.⁶⁴ There is little question that, as scholars further identify and locate the ancient traditions that reside within the framework of the *Didache* as distinct sources of the New Testament world, this particular text may be a non-canonical key to a clearer elucidation of the roots of Christianity.

CONCLUSIONS

Readers typically assume that what can be known of the roots of the ancient church is best gained through the study of the New Testament alone. But what is evident from the work of scholars in the field of the Apostolic Fathers is that much derives from a careful study of those materials that did *not* make it into the biblical canon. In many respects, we stand on the cusp of a new generation of insights into ancient Christianity that promises to open the lives of first- and second-century faith experiences as never before. Many of those insights find their keys in the Apostolic Fathers. And for most readers, the board on which such keys hang is only accessible in a practical sense to the extent that libraries are able to make these publications readily available.



⁶⁰ See note 56.

⁶¹ See, e.g., William Varner, *The Way of the Didache* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007) and Thomas O'Loughlin, *The Didache* (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010).

⁶² This is the linchpin argument behind the published dissertation of Alan J. P. Garrow, *The Gospel of Matthew's Dependence on the Didache* (JSNTSup 254; London and New York: Clark, 2004).

⁶³ See esp. Michelle Slee, *The Church in Antioch in the First Century CE* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2003) and Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁶⁴ Vicky Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (SNTSMS 97; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Alan J. P. Garrow, *Revelation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). See also Charles Thomas Brown, *The Gospel and Ignatius of Antioch* (SBL 12; New York: Lang, 2000).