

Reading Sacred Scripture like the Church Fathers

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” - St. Jerome

Who are the Church Fathers?

The Church Fathers, Early Church Fathers, Christian Fathers, or Fathers of the Church were ancient and influential Christian theologians and writers who established the intellectual and doctrinal foundations of Christianity. The historical period in which they worked became known as the Patristic Era and spans approximately from the late 1st to mid-8th centuries, flourishing in particular during the 4th and 5th centuries, when Christianity was in the process of establishing itself as the state church of the Roman Empire. Examples of Church Fathers include St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

They saw Scripture in and through Jewish tradition. Often, the Church Fathers are able to “connect the dots” of Sacred Scripture, understanding foreshadowing and typology. Typology is a method of biblical interpretation that relates the Old Testament to the New Testament. It is based on the idea that some events, persons, or institutions in the Old Testament are types that prefigure or foreshadow corresponding events, persons or institutions in the New Testament, which are called antitypes or fulfillments. For example, the Exodus is a *type* of the salvation in Christ, and David is a *type* of the Messiah.

4 Senses of Scripture:

The fourfold senses of Scripture—*the literal, allegorical, moral (tropological), and anagogic senses*—were first proposed by John Cassian (ca. 360-435). By way of example, Cassian wrote, “The one Jerusalem can be understood in four different ways, in the historical sense as the city of the Jews, in allegory as the Church of Christ, in anagoge as the heavenly city of God ‘which is the mother of us all’ (Gal 4:26), in the tropological sense as the human soul.”

Historical:

Literal Sense – thing in and of itself

Spiritual:

Allegorical Sense – Archetypes and symbols in Scripture – foreshadows the New in the Old

Moral Sense – applies the lessons of the biblical text to our lives – what’s the moral of the story?

Anagogic Sense – About End Times, next world – think of some parables of Jesus?

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Old Testament Breakdown:

TaNaK

Acronym for the 3 sections of the Old Testament:

1. Torah (The Law of Moses) (Instruction)
2. Nevi'im (Prophets)
3. Ketuvim (Writings) (Poetry)

Torah – 1st five books - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Nevi'im /Prophets - The Former Prophets are the books Joshua, Judges, 1st & 2nd Samuel, 1st & 2nd Kings. Later Prophets – 12 Major and Minor Prophets.

Ketuvim – Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, etc...

Types in early Genesis –

Adam and Eve / New Adam and New Eve

Tree of Life / New Tree of Life

Fruit / New Fruit

Garden- Paradise / New Garden- Paradise

Old Babel / New Babel

Old Abel / New Abel

Theme –

Rivalry (Sibling)

Trickery

Reconciliation

Promise and Fulfillment