Contents
Table of Contents
Other Articles
Quiz
Top Contributors
Cite This Article
Feedback
Ask Google
Ask Google
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The scientific principles on which modern criticism is based depend in part upon viewing the Bible as a suitable object for literary study, rather than as an exclusively sacred text. Evaluation of the Scriptures to uncover evidence about historical matters was formerly called “higher criticism,” a term first used with reference to writings of the German biblical scholar J.G. Eichhorn, who applied the method to his study of the Pentateuch. In the 20th century, Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Dibelius initiated form criticism as a different approach to the study of historical circumstances surrounding biblical texts. The rapid development of philology in the 19th century together with archaeological discoveries of the 20th century revolutionized biblical criticism.

Church Father

Christianity

Alternate titles: Father of the Church

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By The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica • Edit History

Church Father, any of the great bishops and other eminent Christian teachers of the early centuries whose writings remained as a court of appeal for their successors, especially in reference to controverted points of faith or practice. *See* patristic literature.

Key People: Erasmus • Adolf von Harnack • St. Maximus the Confessor

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