

Doctors of the Church

ISSUE: What does it mean to be a doctor of the Church? Who are the doctors of the Church?

RESPONSE: The doctors of the Church are certain men and women who are revered by the Church for the special value of their writings and preaching and the sanctity of their lives. Thirty-three saints have been declared doctors of the Church. The most recent addition is St. Theresa of the Child Jesus (a.k.a. St. Thérèse of Lisieux), who was declared a doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II in 1997.

DISCUSSION: The title “doctor of the Church” has been applied since the Middle Ages to certain saints whose writing or preaching is outstanding for guiding the faithful in every age.

There are three requirements for being named a doctor of the Church:

- (1) Great Sanctity. Only those who have already been declared to be saints by the Church may receive this title.
- (2) Eminent Learning. Those who are declared doctors of the Church are known to be great teachers of the Faith.
- (3) Proclamation by the Church. Typically, such proclamation is made by the Pope, as was the case when Pope John Paul II declared St. Theresa of the Child Jesus a doctor of the Church in 1997.

The four great western doctors are Ss. Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory. They were declared doctors of the Church in 1298. The original eastern doctors are Ss. John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, and Athanasius. Pope Pius V recognized these saints as doctors of the Church in 1568. The thirty-three saints who have been declared doctors of the Church are listed below.

The Doctors of the Church

St. Albert the Great (1200-80). Dominican. Patron of natural scientists; called Doctor Universalis, Doctor Expertus.

St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787). Patron of confessors and moralists. Founder of the Redemptorists.

St. Ambrose (340-97). One of the four traditional doctors of the Latin Church. Opponent of the Arian heresy in the West. Bishop of Milan.

St. Anselm (1033-1109). Archbishop of Canterbury. Father of scholasticism.

St. Anthony of Padua (1194-1231). Franciscan friar. Evangelical Doctor.

St. Athanasius (297-373). Bishop of Alexandria. Dominant opponent of Arianism. Father of Orthodoxy.

St. Augustine (354-430). Bishop of Hippo. First doctor of the Church and one of the four traditional doctors of the Latin Church. Doctor of Grace.

St. Basil the Great (329-79). One of the three Cappadocian Fathers. Father of monasticism in the East.

St. Bede the Venerable (673-735). Benedictine priest. Father of English history.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Cistercian. Called Mellifluous Doctor because of his eloquence.

St. Bonaventure (1217-74). Franciscan theologian. Seraphic Doctor.

St. Catherine of Siena (1347-80). Dominican stigmatist and mystic. Reconciled the Pope with the Roman Republic.

St. Cyril of Alexandria (376-444). Patriarch. Opponent of Nestorian heresy. Made key contributions to Christology.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-87). Bishop and opponent of Arianism in the East.

St. Ephrem of Syria (306-73). Biblical exegete and ecclesiastical writer. Called the Lyre of the Holy Spirit.

St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622). Bishop, leader in Counter-Reformation. Patron of Catholic writers and the Catholic press.

St. Gregory I the Great (540-604). Pope. Fourth and last of the traditional doctors of the Latin Church. Defended papal supremacy and worked for clerical and monastic reform.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus (330-90). Called the Christian Demosthenes because of his eloquence and, in the Eastern Church, the Theologian. One of the three Cappadocian Fathers.

St. Hilary of Poitiers (315-68). Bishop. Called "The Athanasius of the West."

St. Isidore of Seville (560-636). Archbishop, theologian, historian. Regarded as the most learned man of his time.

St. Jerome (343-420). One of the four traditional doctors of the Latin Church. Father of biblical studies.

St. John Chrysostom (347-407). Bishop of Constantinople. Patron of preachers and called Golden-Mouthed because of his eloquence.

St. John Damascene (675-749). Greek theologian. Called Golden Speaker because of his eloquence.

St. John of the Cross (1542-91). Founder of the Discalced Carmelites for men, following St. Teresa of Avila. Doctor of mystical theology.

St. Lawrence of Brindisi (1559-1619). Vigorous preacher of strong influence in the post-Reformation period.

St. Leo I the Great (400-61). Pope. Wrote against Nestorian and Monophysite heresies, and also against the errors of Manichaeism and Pelagianism.

St. Peter Canisius (1521-97). Jesuit theologian. Leader in the Counter-Reformation.

St. Peter Chrysologus (400-50). Bishop of Ravenna. Called Golden-Worded.

St. Peter Damian (1007-72). Benedictine. Ecclesiastical and clerical reformer.

St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621). Jesuit. Defended doctrine under attack during and after the Reformation. Wrote two catechisms.

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-82). Founder of Discalced Carmelite order and great mystical author.

St. Theresa of the Child Jesus (1873-97). Patroness of the missions. Carmelite nun who offered her life for the salvation of souls and the growth of the Church.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74). Dominican philosopher and theologian. Called Angelic Doctor. Patron of Catholic schools and education.

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