

DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH:

What exactly is a doctor of the church? ~ The title "Doctor of the Church," unlike the popular title "Father of the Church," is an official designation that is bestowed by the Pope in recognition of the outstanding contribution a person has made to the understanding and interpretation of the sacred Scriptures and the development of Christian doctrine.

As of 2010, there are thirty-three male and female Doctors of the Catholic Church.

Three are women; Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and Therese of Lisieux.

Twenty-four are quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The eight not quoted are Saints Ephraem, Isidore, "the Venerable" Bede, Albert the Great, Anthony of Padua, Peter Canisius, Robert Bellarmine, and Lawrence of Brindisi.

There are three requirements that must be fulfilled by a person in order to earn title of "Doctor of the Catholic Church."

- 1) holiness that is truly outstanding;
- 2) depth of doctrinal insight/understanding; and
- 3) a collection of writings that the church sees as beneficial and true to the authentic and life-giving Catholic Tradition.

Between 300-600 AD, referred to as the Golden Age, there were eight Doctors of the Church whose work had widespread influence and therefore are called "Ecumenical Fathers." In some information in brief on each.

St. Ambrose, 339-397 ~ A fascinating story. St. Ambrose was born in what is now France, the son of the Roman prefect of Gaul. Following his father's footsteps, Ambrose embarked upon a career in law and politics and by 370 AD, he had become the Imperial governor of Northern Italy. When the Episcopal See of Milan became vacant in 374, the people demanded that Saint Ambrose be made their bishop. The neighboring bishops and the Emperor convinced him to accept this call as the will of God. Ambrose was only a catechumen at the time, not even a priest. He was baptized and ordained first deacon, then priest, then bishop, all in a single week! Now that's overnight success!

Ambrose knew his shortcomings and felt the weight of the responsibility, so he immediately began to pray and study. He had great oratorical skill and became one of the greatest preachers of that time. He was a fierce opponent of heresy, paganism, and hypocrisy. He battled to preserve the independence of the Church from the state. (Sounds like someone we need today.) Ambrose is responsible for two of the first great theological works written in Latin, *De Sacramentis* on the Sacraments and *De Spiritu Sancto* on the Holy Spirit. He was a strong opponent of Arianism. He converted St. Augustine and tutored St. Jerome and St. Gregory the Great. Each became Doctors of the Church. You can find more on St. Ambrose at: http://crossroadsinitiative.com/library_author/35/St._Ambrose.html

St. Jerome, 345-420 ~ Father of biblical science, a monk, studied Hebrew, a hermit, founded a monastery and dedicated himself to the study and translation of the scriptures from their original languages into Latin, known as the Vulgate used in the Latin Rite for over 1,000 years.

St. Augustine, 354-430 ~ Born of a Catholic mother and a pagan father, was a notoriously rebellious Catholic teenager who co-habited with a girlfriend, joined an exotic Eastern cult, and ran away from his mother; became a brilliant and renowned teacher of public speaking and was appointed by the emperor to teach in Milan, Italy; ultimately renounced his secular career, put away his mistress, and became first a monk, then a priest, then the bishop of Hippo, a small town on the N. African Coast. The voluminous writings of this Early Church Father span every conceivable topic in theology, morality, philosophy, and spirituality. Called a Doctor of Grace.

(Sidebar; All your worried parents about your children ~ there's hope.)

St. Gregory the Great (Pope), 540-604 ~ Son of a Roman Senator, followed his father's footsteps in a political career; rose through the ranks of civil service; became Prefect (mayor) of the city of Rome; discerned a call to deeper life with God; gave away his wealth to the poor; entered the monastery of St. Andrew and became abbot; first monk ever elected as Successor of Peter; put in order the affairs of a Church in chaos; his writings are more practical and spiritual than doctrinal or theoretical; established the standard of what a bishop should be; and was known for the "Gregorian Chant."

St. Athanasius, 295-373 ~ Father of Orthodoxy; best known for his tireless proclamation of the Council of Nicaea's profession of faith in the full divinity of Christ during the troubled period of the Arian heresy, which denied Jesus' equality with the Father; while still a deacon in his twenties, wrote a treatise, *On the Incarnation*; wrote on the Life of Antony, the spiritual classic which tells the story of St. Anthony of the Desert who initiated the monastic movement throughout the entire Christian world.

St. Basil the Great, 330-379 ~ Father of monasticism; helped defend orthodox Christianity against the Arian emperor, Valens; built a series of hostels and hospitals around Caesarea; wrote book "On the Holy Spirit" which laid the groundwork for the clarification of the Spirit's full divinity; three "Books Against Eunomius" which addressed the doctrine on Christ's full divinity.

Each and everyone of these Doctors of the Church and the ones to follow suffered great challenges and hardships. Some were exiled and some killed. As you read more, you can see that their works contributed to the fullness of understanding that was handed down through tradition by the original Apostles and the disciples who worked at spreading the Gospel of Jesus. Our history of the Catholic Church is rich and the proof is available as we begin to read about it.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, 330-390 ~ Called the Christian Demosthenes because of his eloquence and, in the Eastern Church, The Theologian; presided over the First Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 AD which completed the creed that we commonly call the Nicene Creed.

St. John Chrysostom, 345-407 ~ Bishop of Constantinople; Patron of preachers; earned title of "Chrysostom," meaning golden-mouthed because of his eloquent preaching on the Sacred Scriptures in beautiful but always practical explanation. (Sounds like my kind of preacher.)

St. Ephraem the Deacon, 306-373 (Syriac) ~ Biblical exegete (someone who can explain and interpret scripture) an ecclesiastical writer; called Harp of the Holy Spirit; wrote exclusively in poetry using Aramaic (language spoken by Our Lord and the apostles); wrote on many topics; taught on the absolute sinlessness of the Virgin Mary and Mary's Immaculate Conception.

St. Hilary, 315-368 (Latin) ~ leading Latin theologian against Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Christ; wrote extensive treatise "On the Trinity" which is perhaps his most famous work.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 315-387 (Greek) ~ banished from his Jerusalem see a total of three times for his bold proclamation of faith in Christ's full divinity during a time when many bishops and emperors favored various forms of the Arian heresy; one of the most important sources we have for how the church celebrated the liturgy and sacraments during the first few decades after the legalization of Christianity; responsible for 24 famous lectures commonly known as the Jerusalem Catecheses which instructs new Christians in the days immediately before and after their initiation into the life of the Church at the Easter Vigil; strong insistence on the value and efficacy of the sacrament of baptism; heavy emphasis on the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, 376-444 (Greek) ~ presided over the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus which defined the inseparable unity of the divine and human natures of Christ, and thus the appropriateness of invoking the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of "Theotokos" or Mother of God; Opponent of Nestorianism - the

Christian doctrine that Jesus existed as two persons, the man Jesus and the divine Son of God, rather than as a unified person; made key contributions to Christology - academic study of Jesus Christ: the branch of theology concerned with the study of the nature, character, and actions of Jesus Christ

St. Leo the Great (Pope), 390-461 (Latin) ~ one of the only two Popes in two thousand years to be called "the Great;" wrote against Nestorian and (Monophysite like Nestorian) heresies and errors of Manichaeism - a religious doctrine based on the separation of matter and spirit and of good and evil, like Buddhism; opposed heresy of Pelagianism which taught that grace was not necessary for salvation, but was rather a bonus that God granted to those who earned it by their good works; famous for persuading Attila the Hun to abandon his plans to sack the city of Rome; wrote the famous Tome, which consists of 143 letters and 96 sermons. Sounds like this Pope had his hands full of all kinds of false religions. And we think it's bad today?

St. Peter Chrysologus, 400-450 (Latin) ~ he successfully drove heresy and the remnants of Roman paganism from his diocese through pastoral care and very practical yet passionate preaching; Peter's always brief sermons were so inspiring that he was given the title "Chrysologus" (greek for "Golden-worded"); Writings on Adam and Christ; Epiphany - Magi, Cana, and the Jordan; Incarnation and Human Dignity; Prayer, Fasting and Mercy; Priesthood of the Christian. If you would like to read some of them, you can follow this link:

http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_author/11/St._Peter_Chrysologus.html

St. Isidore of Seville (last of the Latin Fathers), 560-636 ~ Archbishop, theologian, historian. Regarded as the most learned man of his time. Isidore was the first Christian writer to take on the task of compiling a summary of Catholic theology in the form of his most important work, the Etymologiae. Its title was taken from the method he used in the transcription of his era's knowledge. Everyone of the Doctors of the Church wrote extensively. Isidore was the same. He had a keen interest with the reformation of church discipline and with the establishment of schools, he exerted an influence on science entirely through writings intended as textbooks. He didn't write anything new, but he compiled material in useable format. His doctoral works were on Scripture, canon law, systematic theology, liturgy.

http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Saint_Isidore_of_Seville.aspx

St. John Damascene (last of the Greek Fathers), 676-749 ~ was a strong defender of the use of images (icons) in Christian worship against the iconoclasts and wrote a book "On the Orthodox Faith" that sums up the doctrinal heritage of the earlier Greek Fathers. He too wrote on the Trinity, Creation, and the Incarnation, the Sacraments, the real bodily presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, a fully developed doctrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary including her perpetual virginity, her freedom from sin throughout the whole of her life, and her bodily assumption into heaven. He also wrote on St. Joachim and St. Ann, the Blessed Mother's parents.

St. Bede "the Venerable," 673-735 ~ Benedictine priest Father of English history; entered the monastery at the age of 7; devoted himself from the time he entered the monastery to prayer, the study of Scripture and history, and ultimately teaching and writing after becoming a deacon and then a priest; renowned for the greatness of his biblical teaching and historical writing for which he is known as the father of British history; responsible for recording much of the early secular and ecclesiastical history of the British isles. Works include, Chosen Race, Royal Priesthood; Mary's Magnificat; Matthew the Tax Collector; St. John the Baptist, the Forerunner; Visitation, Mary's Soul Proclaims God's Greatness.

St. Peter Damian, 1007-1072 ~ His mother didn't nurse him as an infant due to an elder brother's protest that the baby was a drain on the family resources. He nearly dies, but a relative take charge to see that Peter lived. Shortly afterwards, he was left an orphan, but was adopted by an elder brother, who ill-treated and under-fed him while employing him as a swineherd. The child showed signs of great piety and of remarkable intellectual gifts, and after some years of this servitude another brother, who was archpriest at Ravenna, had pity on him and took him away to be educated. What a family huh! And we think we have dysfunctional families? There was much scandal going on within the church during his time. Pope Benedict

IX resigned, which made Peter happy and he wrote to the new Pope, Gregory VI, urging him to deal with the scandals of the church in Italy, especially with the evil Bishops of Pesaro. I tell you what, when you read about the history of the church and what reformer went through to help built and restore the church, it makes the old testament sound like an ongoing saga. Who ever said the Catholic Church is dull? He was present in Rome when Clement II crowned Henry III and his wife Agnes, and he also attended a synod held at the Lateran in the first days of 1047, in which decrees were passed against simony. Simony is usually defined "a deliberate intention of buying or selling for a temporal price such things as are spiritual or annexed unto spirituals". Reformation coming - sound familiar? Even more was happening, rapidly. Schisms were started and during the process, several Popes had died and new ones elected, plus we had an anti-pope. Talk about turmoil. Peter was an Ecclesiastical and clerical reformer, working to try and fix things. He wrote unceasingly on Purgatory, the Eucharist, and other theological and ascetical topics, but he also wrote poetry, and on the clerical misconduct in a book titled "The Gomorrah Book."
~<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=8072>

Most people understand the work required to earn a PHD. It's now wonder that these people are called Doctors of the Church. They earned the degree, as you will read in the brief stories below. There is much information on these very interesting people, but I tried to keep it as brief as possible in order to provide you a snap shot.

St. Anselm, 1033-1109 ~ In the history of theology, St. Anselm is accorded the distinction of being the first "scholastic" philosopher and theologian. Scholasticism is that theological movement in the Latin or Western Church which brought a rigorous application of logic to the reflection on the deposit of the faith. St. Anselm's theological work is famous for his "ontological" proof for the existence of God outlined in his Monologion and Proslogion and his "satisfaction" theory of the atonement, outlined in his book Cur Deus Homo ("Why God became Man"). Prayer of his, Lord God, I am Dazzled by Your Light; writings, Make Space for God, O Virgin Mary, Mother of the Re-created World.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090-1153 ~ one of the greatest preachers of all time; inspired by the example of a new religious congregation, the Cistercians, who had abandoned the relative ease and security of Benedictine monasticism of that day to live according to the primitive pattern of St. Benedict through hard manual labor, solitude, and rigorous prayer; magnetic preaching and exemplary character changed the lives of thousands and his writing continues today to inspire Christians everywhere. His words were so sweet that he came to be known as the Melifluous ("full of honey") Doctor; Works include, Annunciation and Mary's Fiat, Guardian Angels, Harden not your hearts, Importance of the saints, Love of Bridegroom and Bride, Mary, a Virgin full of grace and virtues, Mediate on the Mysteries, Our Lady of Sorrows, Seek Wisdom, Stages of Contemplation, Three Comings for the Lord, and Wounds of Christ. Makes you want to read them all doesn't it.

St. Anthony of Padua, 1195-1231 ~ So inspired by the martyrdom of five Franciscans who had been spreading the faith in Morocco that he decided to become one; met Saint Francis of Assisi; taught theology to the friars; great talent as a preacher; opposed Albigensian heresy (dualist theology, wherein there were two principle forces -- good and evil -- and the material world was considered evil); he denounced wicked people especially backsliding clergy and the oppressors of the weak. One of his great works is entitled "Preach Always." The best part of being Catholic is that we have not only these great teachers to be thankful for who defended the church, but also their original written work. What a treasure we have. Does any other Church have such?

St. Albert the Great, 1200-1280 ~scientist, philosopher, and theologian; this guy wrote enough volumes of material to constitute an encyclopedia set. A brilliant man. He's up there with St. Thomas Aquinas. Go here to learn about him <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01264a.htm>

St. Bonaventure, 1217-1274 ~became a professor at the greatest school of theology in the medieval world, the University of Paris where he taught alongside St. Thomas Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor." ; his theology is always written with holy passion, in the tradition of St. Augustine, and always directed towards

increasing the depth and intensity of the spiritual life; Works include, Journey of the Mind into God, Mystical Prayer, Sacred Heart of Jesus, Understanding Scripture and more.

St. Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274 ~St. Thomas' greatest theological work, the Summa Theologiae is, though unfinished, nevertheless a masterpiece of theology that covers all aspects of Catholic doctrine from the Trinity to Morality; he had St. Albert the Great as one of his principal teachers; highly educated, one of the great minds of all times; after he died, his work was attacked by a number of Catholic theological faculties and remained under a cloud until the time of Council of Trent some 300 years later. Some of his works, Good Shepherd, Life Everlasting Amen, Prayer after Mass, The Eucharist, The Way, truth, and the Life, and Why the Cross Exemplifies every Virtue.

St. Catherine of Siena, 1347-1379 ~she appears to have received visions and lived a life of strict prayer and penance; At the age of 16, she joined the Third Order of St. Dominic and gave herself to contemplation, the service of the needy, and the reconciliation of sinners; is know for her extraordinary devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus as well as for her book The Dialogue, which is one of the great spiritual classics of the Latin Middle Ages. Some Works include, Eternal Trinity Deep Mystery, God the giver of all Gifts, and Incarnation, Gift of Immeasurable Love.

St. Teresa of Avila, 1515-1582 ~First woman Doctor; interesting tidbit, Teresa's mother loved romance novels but because her husband objected to these fanciful books, she hid the books from him. This put Teresa in the middle -- especially since she liked the romances too. Her father told her never to lie but her mother told her not to tell her father. Later she said she was always afraid that no matter what she did she was going to do everything wrong; When she was 16, her father decided she was out of control and sent her to a convent. At first she hated it but eventually she began to enjoy it -- partly because of her growing love for God, and partly because the convent was a lot less strict than her father. When the time came for her to choose between marriage and religious life, she had a tough time making the decision. She'd watched a difficult marriage ruin her mother. On the other hand being a nun didn't seem like much fun. When she finally chose religious life, she did so because she thought that it was the only safe place for someone as prone to sin as she was. In her books, she analyzed and dissects mystical experiences the way a scientist would. She never saw these gifts as rewards from God but the way he "chastised" her. At 51, she felt it was time to spread her reform movement. She braved burning sun, ice and snow, thieves, and rat-infested inns to found more convents. She is the founder of the Discalced Carmelites. In 1970 she was declared a Doctor of the Church for her writing and teaching on prayer, one of two women to be honored in this way. St. Teresa is the patron saint of Headache sufferers. Her symbol is a heart, an arrow, and a book. She was canonized in 1622. Read more @ http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=208

St. Peter Canisius, 1521-1597 ~ was a leading figure of the Counter Reformation in Germany; blessed with many talents; called the "second apostle of Germany" in that his life parallels the earlier work of Boniface; at the age of 19 he received a master's degree from the university at Cologne; became widely known for his editions of the writings of St. Cyril of Alexandria and St. Leo the Great; taught in several universities and was instrumental in establishing many colleges and seminaries; wrote a catechism that explained the Catholic faith in a way which common people could understand; had great diplomatic ability, often serving as a reconciler between disputing factions. Don't you wish we had individuals like this today that could be Ambassadors for us to other countries.

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Saints/saint.aspx?id=1236>

St. John of the Cross, 1542-1591 ~A great Mystic that even protestant churches bear his name sake; a Carmelite monk; opened the first Discalced Carmelite monastery; as a Reformer, it caused friction within the order and led to his imprisonment, first in 1576 and again in 1577 at Toledo, where he wrote some of his finest poetry; escaping in August 1578, he later won high office in the order; best known work, "Noche," describes the process by which the soul sheds its attachment to everything and eventually passes through a personal experience of Christ's Crucifixion to his glory; his writings are deep and difficult for the average person to read; considered a super brain of all times; relished psychology; acquaintance of St. Teresa of Avila. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08480a.htm>

St. Robert Bellarmine, 1542-1621 ~ Italian cardinal and theologian, an opponent of the Protestant doctrines of the Reformation; taught theology in the Spanish Netherlands; took a prominent part in the first examination of Galileo's writings; thought it best to have the Copernican theory declared "false and erroneous," the church so decreed in 1616; took a personal interest in the poor, to whom he gave all his funds; died a pauper; lifetime of impartial attention to Protestant works; regarded as one of the most enlightened of theologians; most influential writings were the series of lectures published under the title *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos* (1586-93; "Lectures Concerning the Controversies of the Christian Faith Against the Heretics of This Time"). They contained a lucid and uncompromising statement of Roman Catholic doctrine. He took part in the preparation of the Clementine edition (1591-92) of the Vulgate. His catechism of 1597 greatly influenced later works. In 1610 he published *De Potestate Summi Pontificis in Rebus Temporalibus* ("Concerning the Power of the Supreme Pontiff in Temporal Matters"), a reply to William Barclay of Aberdeen's *De Potestate Papae* (1609; "Concerning the Power of the Pope"), which denied all temporal power to the pope.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/59745/Saint-Robert-Bellarmino>

St. Lawrence of Brindisi, 1559-1619 ~ A gifted linguist, he mastered several languages including Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac; Under Popes Gregory XIII and Clement VIII he was appointed apostolic preacher to the Roman Jews; accompanied Emperor Rudolf II's forces to victory against the Turkish army of Sultan Mehmed III; this victory was attributed in great part to the indomitable spirit of the saint, who had communicated his ardor and confidence to the Christian troops; fought against the rise of German Protestantism and founded Capuchin houses at Madrid and at Munich;

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/332989/Saint-Lawrence-of-Brindisi>

He said that the Savior would have become man even if the first man, Adam, had not sinned. No other doctor stated more clearly how much God desires to share love with us with these profound words. From this comment, we understand that God is a Lover first and afterwards a Savior. It is primarily through his love in the person of Jesus Christ as Savior that we know how to be saved. Jesus' coming reveals why we need to continue his mission with him and have a mission or purpose for others. Conversion and sanctification can be a life-long process acted out daily; Everywhere he completed a mission there were miracles and conversions. His words and example were always inspiring, simple yet profound. He was a person of enormous influence and his writings probably exceeded all the doctors.

<http://www.doctorsofthecatholicchurch.com/LB.html>

St. Francis de Sales, 1567-1622 ~is the Doctor of Authors and the Catholic Press; cared gently for his flock through practical solutions and assistance; Francis wanted all to understand clearly, through his ministry and pamphlet writings, that Jesus climaxed his career, leaving his employment, for about three years, but only to instruct his followers about some stories that his mother had taught him when he was growing up in Nazareth as a young boy; If we feel like giving up on life, alone, or are 'down' frequently, we might petition him; contributed extensively to the church's growth and development when heresy was rampant; two famous Christian classics are *Introduction to a Devote Life* and *Practice of the Love of God*; these books have been read by every generation because of his penetrating insight and guidance.

St. Alphonsus Liguori, 1696-1787 ~views on morality and the Mother of God are unmatched in history; writings on St Mary are masterpieces and include *The Glories of Mary*; brilliant lawyer-theologian-priest with insights into God's law made clear and precise; No other doctor wrote more books; books cover many subjects including the Blessed Sacrament, and *The Early Martyrs of the Church*; some of his significant theological writings are and listed in the *Dogmatic Constitutions of the Catholic Church from the Councils*; established the Redemptorist Order; best known for his moral theology, but he also wrote well in the field of spiritual and dogmatic theology; was afflicted with rheumatic pains at 71 but lived another 20 years in severe pain; suffered from scruples, fears, temptations and against every article of faith and every virtue and was a superb Christian model for all.

St. Therese of Lisieux, 1873-1897 (proclaimed Doctor of the Church by John Paul II 10/19/97) ~There is so much to say about this "little Flower," as she was called. Much is written about her, as she wanted to do nothing more in her entire life, other than to show her love for Jesus. There are short booklets about the highlights of her life that explain much about her short life. She died at the young age of 24, (1873-1897) but yet accomplished so much, all well being sickly most of her life. You have to read about this one on your own, but I will supply a link.

<http://doctorsofthecatholicchurch.com/TL.html>

I hope you enjoyed learning about the Doctors of the Catholic Church and that it demonstrated the trails, struggles and richness of our faith. It becomes more clear with each Report that if it had not been for the Catholic church, there would be no other Christian Churches in existence. Yes, they were all created on heresy, but they all walked away with a portion of richness from Holy Mother the Church. If the heretics had remained faithful, as the Doctors of the Church has been, they would have had so much more. Further, they would not have lead souls into falsehoods and away from the fullness of truth. Yes, the Catholic Church had and continues to have her challenges, missteps, and misunderstandings, but she remains God's Church establish my God Himself. No other church can make such a claim.

Know your faith and defend it. Do take time to learn more each week about your faith. Knowing our faith better will strengthen us for the journey home and provide a better understanding of why we believe and what we believe. The Doctors of the Church, the best minds of creation, have done the research and investigations for us. All we have to do is learn from them.

As you can see, if we spent equal time on each of the 33 Doctors of the Church, though very interesting, we would need months to report on each and their work. As it is, we may use two weekends just to provide a very brief summary of each person. They are so interesting, that this Reporter would be deficient in not providing a brief report on each of them.

The purpose of this weekly Report is to stimulate your appetite and bring you some basic knowledge of your faith and your church. If you use this link:

http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/128/Doctors_of_the_Church.html

Excerpts by Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D., Catholic Theologian and Speaker ~

Update: Two more have been added to the list of Doctors of the Church since 2010. On October 12, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI added Saints John of Avila and Hildegard of Bingen to the list. Your job is now to go out and find out what they contributed to the church and who exactly are these people.