

Doctors of the Church

DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

What does it mean to be a “doctor of the church”?

Doctor of the Church (Latin: *doctor* "teacher"), also referred to as **Doctor of the Universal Church** (Latin: *Doctor Ecclesiae Universalis*), is a title given by the Catholic Church to saints recognized as having made a significant contribution to theology or doctrine through their research, study, or writing.

As of 2022, the Catholic Church has named 37 Doctors of the Church.

Among the 37 recognised Doctors, 28 are from the West and nine from the East; four women (three nuns, one consecrated Virgin; 19 bishops, twelve priests, one deacon; 27 from Europe, three from Africa, and seven from Asia.

More Doctors (twelve) lived in the 4th century than any other eminent Christian writers of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries.

The first church doctors were declared by Pope Boniface VIII in the 13th century: Sts. Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Pope Gregory the Great. The first women to be named as church doctors were Sts. Teresa of Ávila and Catherine of Siena in 1970 by Pope Paul VI.

The following is a list of all the doctors of the church in the order of when they were designated.

1. **Saint Ambrose** (c. 340-397), bishop of Milan, Italy, a major opponent of Arianism, wrote and preached extensively [named a Doctor of the church, 1298].
2. **Saint Augustine of Hippo** (c. 354-430), North African bishop, author of *Confessions*, *City of God*, and numerous treatises, countered heretical movements, one of the most influential theologians of the Western church, called “Doctor of Grace” [1298].
3. **Saint Jerome** (c. 343-420), translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin and revised the Latin translation of the New Testament to produce the Vulgate version of the Bible, called “Father of Biblical Science” [1298].
4. **Saint Gregory the Great** (c. 540-604), pope, strengthened papacy and worked for clerical and monastic reform [1298].
5. **Saint Athanasius** (c. 297-373), bishop of Alexandria, dominant opponent of Arians, called “Father of Orthodoxy” [1298]
6. **Saint John Chrysostom** (“Golden-Mouthed”) (c. 347-407), archbishop of Constantinople, homilist, writer of scripture commentaries and letters, patron of preachers [1568].
7. **Saint Basil the Great** (c. 329-379), bishop of Caesarea in Asia Minor, refuted Arian errors, wrote

treatises, homilies, and monastic rules, called “Father of Monasticism of the East” [1568].

8. **Saint Gregory of Nazianzus** (c. 330-390), bishop of Constantinople, opponent of Arianism, wrote major theological treatises as well as letters and poetry, called the “Christian Demosthenes” and, in the East, “The Theologian” [1568].

9. **Saint Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274), Italian Dominican, wrote systematically on philosophy, theology, and Catholic doctrine, patron of Catholic schools and education, one of the most influential theologians in the West [1568].

10. **Saint Bonaventure** (c. 1217-1274), Franciscan, bishop of Albano, Italy, cardinal [1588].

11. **Saint Anselm of Canterbury** (1033-1109), archbishop, called “Father of Scholasticism” [1720].

12. **Saint Isidore of Seville** (c. 560-636), Spanish bishop, encyclopedist, and preeminent scholar of his day [1722].

13. **Saint Peter Chrysologus** (c. 400-450), archbishop of Ravenna, Italy, homilist and writer, counteracted Monophysite heresy [1729].

14. **Saint Leo I, the Great** (c. 400-461), pope, wrote christological and other works against the heresies of his day [1754].

15. **Saint Peter Damian** (1007-1072), Italian Benedictine and cardinal, ecclesiastical and clerical reformer [1828].

16. **Saint Bernard of Clairvaux** (c. 1090-1153), French Cistercian abbot and monastic reformer, called “Mellifluous Doctor” [1830].

17. **Saint Hilary of Poitiers** (c. 315-368), one of first Latin doctrinal writers, opposed Arianism [1851].

18. **Saint Alphonsus Liguori** (1696-1787), founder of Redemptorists, preeminent moral theologian and apologist, patron of confessors and moralists [1871].

19. **Saint Francis de Sales** (1567-1622), bishop of Geneva, spiritual writer, patron of Catholic writers and press [1877].

20. **Saint Cyril of Alexandria** (c. 376-444), bishop, authored doctrinal treatises against Nestorian heresy [1882].

21. **Saint Cyril of Jerusalem** (c. 315-386), bishop, catechist, vigorous opponent of Arianism [1882].

22. **Saint John Damascene** (c. 675-749), Syrian monk, doctrinal writer, called “Golden Speaker” [1890].

23. **Saint Bede the Venerable** (c. 673-735), English Benedictine, called “Father of English History” [1899].
24. **Saint Ephrem the Syrian** (c. 306-373), counteracted Gnosticism and Arianism with his poems, hymns, and other writings [1920].
25. **Saint Peter Canisius** (1521-1597), Dutch Jesuit, catechist, important figure in Counter-Reformation in Germany [1925].
26. **Saint John of the Cross** (1542-1591), founder of Discalced Carmelites, called “Doctor of Mystical Theology” [1926].
27. **Saint Robert Bellarmine** (1542-1621), Italian Jesuit, archbishop of Capua, wrote Reformation-era doctrinal defenses, catechisms, and works on ecclesiology and church-state relations [1931].
28. **Saint Albert the Great** (c. 1200-1280), German Dominican, bishop of Regensburg, teacher of Saint Thomas Aquinas, patron of scientists, called “Universal Doctor” and “Expert Doctor” [1932].
29. **Saint Anthony of Padua** (1195-1231), first theologian of Franciscans, preacher, called “Evangelical Doctor” [1946].
30. **Saint Lawrence of Brindisi** (1559-1619), Italian Capuchin Franciscan, influential post-Reformation preacher [1959].
31. **Saint Teresa of Ávila** (1515-1582), Spanish Carmelite, initiated discalced Carmelite movement, prolific spiritual and mystical writer, first woman Doctor of the church [1970].
32. **Saint Catherine of Siena** (c. 1347-1380), Italian Third Order Dominican, mystical author, also active in support of Crusades and in papal politics [1970].
33. **Saint Thérèse of Lisieux** (1873-1897), French Carmelite, wrote a spiritual autobiography describing her “little way” of spiritual perfection [1997].
34. **Saint John of Ávila** (1499 or 1500-1569), Spanish priest, preacher, and mystic, was influential in spreading the faith in Andalusia and reforming the church in Spain [2012]
35. **Saint Hildegard of Bingen** (1098-1179), German Benedictine abbess and mystic, recorded her visions in writing, also wrote lyric poems, letters of advice and prophecy, and treatises on medicine and physiology [2012]
36. **Saint Gregory of Narek** (950-c. 1005), Armenian monk, Mystical Philosopher and poet, also recognized as a saint in the Armenian Apostolic Church [2015]
37. **Saint Irenaeus of Lyons** (130-202), Bishop, Theologian and Martyr, Doctor of unity (2022)

Each Doctor of the Church exhibited inspiring personal holiness during their life, had a deep

understanding of what it means to truly live the Christian life, and contributed to the theology and philosophy of the Church through their writings and teachings.

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