

# Fact of FAITH

## Doctors of the Church?

by Fr. Larry Rice



Is there a doctor in the house? Well, if that house is the Church, then the answer is “yes.” And we don’t mean medical doctors. Of all the various kinds of saints in the church— virgins, martyrs, religious, whatever—the least appreciated by most people may be the Doctors of the Church.

These saints are probably best thought of as doctors in the PhD sense of the word. Through their research, study, and writing, they have advanced the Church’s knowledge of our faith. To be declared a Doctor of the Church does not imply that all their writings are free from error but rather that the whole body of their work, taken together serves to advance the cause of Christ and his Church.

The title was first given in the Middle Ages, and originally, there were four great Doctors of the Church: St. Ambrose, 4th century bishop of Milan, St. Augustine, 5th century bishop of Hippo, St. Gregory the Great, who was pope at the start of the 7th century, and St. Jerome, the 5th century biblical scholar and translator. Over the years the church has added about 30 additional saints with the title “Doctor of the Church,” including St. Bonaventure, whose feast day is celebrated on July 15. Since 1970, four women have also been declared “Doctors of the Church”: St. Teresa of Avila; St. Catherine of Siena; St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who received the title in 1998; and St. Hildegard of Bingen, who was declared a Doctor of the Church in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI. Most recently, in February 2015, Pope Francis declared Armenian poet and monk, St. Gregory of Narek, a Doctor of the Universal Church.

All these Doctors of the Church advanced the knowledge of God through their writing on theology, spirituality, mysticism, or through their defense of the faith in the face of heresy and schism.

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