

## Spiritual Growth through Study: The Fathers and Doctors of the Church

### I What is Tradition?

The term *tradition* simply means a handing-on or handing-over.

So, in the Church, what is handed on?

“What was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes.” DV 8

This includes her liturgy, sacraments, moral beliefs and practices, etc.

Our minds are formed by our whole way of life, our key relationships, our habits of behavior and speech. But even more, by the work of the Holy Spirit, so that we’re able to believe the gospel, to understand the truth, to love the Lord with our minds.

At the same time, this is not magic. The Lord uses the normal means of reading, study, discussion with the wise, to form our mind. The key *monuments* or *documents* of Tradition.

1. Liturgy, which we touched on last time.
2. The teaching of the Magisterium, which we’ll look at next.
3. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church, our concern tonight.

### II The Fathers of The Church

Who are they?

The standard criteria: antiquity; holiness of life; orthodoxy of teaching; ecclesiastical approval.

The period generally runs in the East up to St. John of Damascus (d. 749) and in the West to Gregory the Great (d. 604), though it sometimes is extended even to Bede (d. 735).

Early pastor-teachers those who have contributed a decisive element to the Church’s life: faith, discipline, or general attitude.

Their aims were pastoral: building up the Church, proclaiming and defending the gospel.

Many of the Fathers suffered, or were even martyred – Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Polycarp, Maximus the Confessor are among the most prominent.

What did they write?

Homilies and orations (speeches)

Works of against false doctrine -- a big part of the battle in the early centuries.

Biblical commentaries

Catechetical works

Letters, e.g., Basil wrote 350 that we still have.

Sometimes – though not usually – topical works

The Great Western (Latin) Fathers: Ambrose; Augustine; Jerome; Gregory the Great

The Great Eastern (Greek) Fathers: Athanasius; Basil the Great; Gregory Nazianzus; John Chrysostom

Getting to know the Fathers

The Office of Readings

See selected works

### III The Doctors of The Church

Who are they?

36 spiritual writers who are named as universal teachers of the Church, the most recent, Gregory of Narek, in 2015. Out of the 36, almost half are counted among the Fathers also.

The criteria: holiness of life; importance and orthodoxy of their writings; recognition by the Church.

“The declaration that a saint is a Doctor of the Universal Church implies the recognition of a charism of wisdom bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church...” Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Many are important but not included, e.g., Duns Scotus, Francisco Suarez, John Henry Newman

What did they write?

A number of them were medieval theologians, who produced highly systematic works during the era when the Church was working hard to synthesize revelation and philosophy. Their contribution to the Church is enormous, but they are not generally easy to read.

A few are mystical writers, who draw heavily from their own spiritual experience, and sometimes from private revelations. (John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux).

Some are catechists (St. Peter Canissius) and guides to the spiritual life. (St. Francis DeSales,

IV How to Start, What to Read

Office of Readings (Rengers has an index of where to find them)

See selected works

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### **Suggested Works of The Fathers of The Church**

Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers* (up to Augustine)

*Church Fathers and Teachers* (up to Peter Lombard)

Ignatius of Antioch, *Letters*

Athanasius, *On The Incarnation*

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*

St. Basil, *On Social Justice*

*On Christian Practice*

Ambrose, *On The Mysteries*

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Festal Orations*

Augustine, *The Enchiridion On Faith, Hope and Love*

Letter 130, to Proba on Prayer

Cyril of Alexandria, *Homilies on The Gospel of Luke*

Pope Leo the Great, *Homilies for the feasts*

### **Some selected writings of Doctors of The Church**

Pope Benedict XVI, *Doctors Of The Church*

Christopher Rengers, OF.M. Cap., *The 35 Doctors of The Church*

St. Bonaventure, *The Six Wings of the Seraph (The Character of A Christian Leader)*

St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Three Greatest Prayers* (The Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Apostles Creed)

*Knowing The Love Of Christ* (Dauphinais and Levering)

St. Francis DeSales, *Introduction To The Devout Life*

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On The Love of God and Other Writings*

St. John of The Cross (Ralph Martin, *The Wisdom of St. John of The Cross*)

<https://www.renewalministries.net/shop/product/transformation-in-christ-the-wisdom-of-st-john-of-the-cross> )

St. Therese of Lisieux, *The Story of A Soul*