

## St. Augustine and the Church Fathers of East and West

December 11th, 2023

- I. Church Councils and Church Fathers.
  - A. A major touchstone of Church life and teaching in antiquity.
    1. The special place of St. Augustine.
- II. Who are the Fathers of the Church?
  - A. “Father” in the sense of teacher — 1 Corinthians 4:15
    1. Four criteria: a.) orthodox doctrine and learning; b.) holiness of life; c.) antiquity (St. John Damascene is the latest); d.) Ecclesiastical approval
    2. Vatican I: “No one, therefore, is permitted to interpret Sacred Scripture contrary to this sense or contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.”
  - B. An overview.
    1. Basically Latin or Greek — Western or Eastern
      - a) Apostolic and post apostolic fathers — to ca. 250 A.D. The case of Origen (+254)
      - b) The Golden age of the Fathers — 4th and 5th Centuries
        - (1) Eastern: “The Cappadocian Fathers”: St. Basil of Caesarea (329-379), St. Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390), St. Gregory of Nyssa (332-394)
        - (2) Western: St. Prosper of Aquitaine, (390-455), St. Leo the Great, (400-461)
      - c) Later fathers — until 800: St. Maximus the Confessor, Monk (580-662), St. Isidore, Bishop of Seville (c. 560-636)
    2. What’s the difference between a Father and a Doctor?
  - C. The characteristics and contribution of the Fathers.
    1. Densely scriptural and “occasional”; The theological foundation for Catholic beliefs
  - D. Are there mothers of the Church?
- III. Four great Eastern and Four Great Western
  - A. Eastern: St. Athanasius (298-374), St. Basil (329-379), St. Gregory Nazianzen (330-390), St. John Chrysostom (349-407)
    1. St. Athanasius: the theologian of the Incarnation.
    2. St. Basil — Bishop of Caesarea
      - a) Wrote about Trinity and Incarnation; *On the Holy Spirit*; Apostle to the poor
    3. St. Gregory Nazianzan — the Christian Demosthenes
      - a) ‘The Theologian.’ His works were anti-Arian, Christological and Trinitarian.”
      - b) A great friend of St. Basil, their feast day is celebrated together
    4. St. John Chrysostom — The golden tongued preacher
      - a) Patriarch of Constantinople in 397
      - b) Especially at odds with the empress Eudoxia — he died in exile.
  - B. Western: St. Ambrose (339-397), St. Jerome (347-420), St. Augustine (354-430) and St. Gregory (540-605)
    1. St. Ambrose — the Great Bishop of Milan
      - a) Named a Bishop while still a catechumen; inspired St. Augustine
    2. St. Jerome - the Saint of Scripture
      - a) Pope St. Damasus I commissioned him to translate the Bible — the Vulgate
      - b) “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”
    3. St. Augustine — more to come
    4. St. Gregory the Great. Servant of the Servants of God.

- a) Prefect of Rome, then a monk, then Pope; Sent St. Augustine to England.
  - b) *Morals*, and the *Pastoral Rule*.
- IV. St. Augustine (354-430) — *Aurelius* Augustine
- A. The greatest Western Father.
    - 1. His life - A spiritual and geographical journey
      - a) Thagaste (Algeria), son of St. Monica and Patricius; a wayward life in Carthage, a student of rhetoric; a son, Adeodatus
      - b) Manichean — dualistic
      - c) In 383 he goes to Rome to start a school of Rhetoric
      - d) In 384 he moves to Milan; All this time his mother prays for him.
      - e) Book VIII of *The Confessions*: “I suffered from a madness that was to bring health...” — “Take and read” — *tolle, lege*. (Romans 13:13-14)
      - f) 395 Ordained a Bishop of Hippo Regius
  - B. Great works and controversies
    - 1. *The Confessions* “You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”
    - 2. And *The City of God*: Alaric sacks Rome in 410
    - 3. *On the Trinity* — “Processions” and the psychological analogy.
    - 4. Controversies
      - a) Manichaeans , Donatists, and Pelagians
      - b) Augustine is the Doctor of Grace.
- V. A renewed interest in the Fathers in recent years.

### Further Reading

- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin. Penguin, 1961.
- Benedict XVI. *Church Fathers*. Ignatius, 2017.
- Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*.. University of California Press, 1967.
- Duffy, Eamonn. *Sants and Sinners: A History of the Popes*. Yale, 1997
- Jedin, Hubert. *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: an Historical Outline*. Hassell Street Press, 2021.
- Vidmar, O.P., John. *The Catholic Church through the Ages, Second Edition: A History*. Paulist Press, 2014.
- Waugh, Evelyn. *Helena*. Back Bay Books; Reissue edition, 2012.

### Fathers of the Church Online

- New Advent website: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>
- Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>



St. Augustine of Hippo  
St. Peter's Basilica