

## DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH AND SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

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**Abstract:** Every age has inspired people for the building up of the Church. Among them the 'Doctors of the Church' are prominent. So far there are 36 declared Doctors of the Church. Holy Spirit has moulded the Church through them. They were prophetically gifted people even to guide the Church hierarchy. For the organic growth of the Church, the Doctors of the Church made vital contributions in the life of humanity. Thus, they are 'wise scribes' (Mt 13:52), who could bring renewal of Christian life by updating the teachings and practices based on the older sources of biblical teachings. They make the face of Christ visible at all times, places and in all developments of the world situations. The length, breadth and depth of the Word of God are so unfathomable and the Word needs interpretation at different levels and at all times of the history of humanity. The Holy Spirit provides gifted people as guides and interpreters for all times. Their enlightenment and Christian witness generate a 'new Pentecost' from time to time. In that respect, the life and witness of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara amounts to that of a Doctor of the Church in many ways.

**Keywords:** Doctors of the Church; Fathers of the Church; building up of the Church; People of God; new Pentecost; Thomas Christians of India; St. Chavara, *Darsana veeedu*, *Thapasu bhavanam*.

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## 1. Introduction

The progress of the history of salvation is guided by the Holy Spirit according to the varying needs and levels of the reception of the divine economy by human communities in every age. In view of the continued realization of the promised salvation in every context, the divine economy provides inspired people for the building up of the Church through their teaching, guidance and exemplary active life patterns. These providential gifts of individuals are acknowledged and accepted officially as 'Doctors of the Church' from time to time.

Initially the great 'Doctors of the Church' in the West and East were acclaimed by the public than by any Church pronouncement. Thus, originally eight Doctors of the Church were accepted, four each from the West and the East; the four from the West are St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Gregory the great and St. Jerome;<sup>1</sup> the four from the East are St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Chrysostom.<sup>2</sup> Later, in addition to these eight doctors, others were added by Popes, starting with the addition of St. Thomas Aquinas by Pope St. Pius V in 1568. In the 20/21 centuries four female doctors were also added to the list. They are St. Catherine of Siena (by Pope Paul VI on 4 October, 1970), St. Teresa of Avila (by Pope Paul VI on 27 September, 1970), St. Thérèse of Lisieux (by Pope John Paul II on October 19, 1997) and St. Hildegard of Bingen (by Pope Benedict XVI on 7 October, 2012). The latest additions were that of St. John of Avila (by Pope Benedict XVI on 7 October, 2012) and St. Gregory of Narek (by Pope Francis on 21 February, 2015). Thus, at present there are 36 Doctors of the Church declared by the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Current List of the Doctors of the Church (up to 2019)

No.	The Doctors	Life	Year of Declaration
1	Athanasius	296 - 373	1568 by Pius V
2	Ephraem the Syrian	306 - 373	October 5, 1920 by Benedict XV
3	Hilary of Poitiers	315 - 367	May 13, 1851 by Pius IX
4	Cyril of Jerusalem	315 - 386	July 28, 1882 by Leo XIII
5	Gregory of Nazianzus	325 - 389	1568 by Pius V

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<sup>1</sup> Officially these four were declared by Pope Boniface VIII on 20 September, 1295.

<sup>2</sup> Officially these four were declared by Pope Pius V in 1568.

<sup>3</sup> The up-to-date full list of the 'Doctors of the Church' is given below.

6	Basil the Great	329 - 379	1568 by Pius V
7	Ambrose	339 - 397	September 20, 1295 by Boniface VIII
8	John Chrysostom	347 - 407	1568 by Pius V
9	Jerome	347 - 419	September 20, 1295 by Boniface VIII
10	Augustine	354 - 430	September 20, 1295 by Boniface VIII
11	Cyril of Alexandria	376 - 444	July 28, 1882 by Leo XIII
12	Peter Chrysologous	400 - 450	February 10, 1729 by Benedict XIII
13	Leo the Great	400 - 461	October 15, 1754 by Benedict XIV
14	Gregory the Great	540 - 604	September 20, 1295 by Boniface VIII
15	Isidore of Seville	560 - 636	April 25, 1722 by Innocent XIII
16	John of Damascus	645 - 749	August 19, 1890 by Leo XIII
17	Bede the Venerable	672 - 735	November 13, 1899 by Leo XIII
18	Peter Damian	1007 - 1072	September 27, 1828 by Leo XII
19	Anselm	1033 - 1109	February 3, 1720 by Clement XI
20	Bernard of Clairvaux	1090 - 1153	August 20, 1830 by Pius VIII
21	Anthony of Padua	1195 - 1231	January 16, 1946 by Pius XII
22	Albert the Great	1206 - 1280	December 16, 1931 by Pius XI
23	Bonaventure	1221 - 1274	March 14, 1588 by Sixtus V
24	Thomas Aquinas	1226 - 1274	April 11, 1567 by Pius V
25	Catherine of Siena	1347 - 1380	October 4, 1970 by Paul VI
26	Teresa of Avila	1515 - 1582	September 27, 1970 by Paul VI
27	Peter Canisius	1521 - 1597	May 21, 1925 by Pius XI
28	John of the Cross	1542 - 1591	August 24, 1926 by Pius XI
29	Robert Bellarmine	1542 - 1621	September 17, 1931 by Pius XI
30	Lawrence of Brindisi	1559 - 1619	March 19, 1959 by John XXIII
31	Francis de Sales	1567 - 1622	November 16, 1871 by Pius IX
32	Alphonsus Ligouri	1696 - 1787	July 7, 1871 by Pius IX
33	Therese of Lisieux	1873 - 1897	October 19, 1997 by John Paul II
34	John of Avila	1500 - 1569	October 7, 2012 by Benedict XVI
35	Hildegard of Bingen	1098 - 1179	October 7, 2012 by Benedict XVI
36	Gregory of Narek	951 - 1003	February 21, 2015 by Pope Francis

### 3. On-going Teaching, Sanctifying and Governing Ministry of the Church

Humanity has been endowed with the faculties of prophecy, priesthood and kingship in creation in view of the needed teaching, sanctifying and governing in the society. These faculties are to be developed and exercised in order to attain the desired goal of human life, individually and communally. In the communal level of the exercise of teaching, sanctifying and governing, the Holy Spirit calls out and anoints suitable persons for the building up of the redeemed humanity, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1Pet 2:9; Ex 19:5-6).

Jesus assured the assistance of the Holy Spirit to his Church. This assistance is provided also through the teachers and guides of the community of the faithful in the Church from time to time and for all peoples of all ages. Among all peoples there are individuals of wisdom and knowledge, guided by the Holy Spirit for molding the witnessful life of the Church. St. Paul speaks of various gifts and offices in the Church in 1Corinthians 12. In 1Thessalonians 5:19-23, St. Paul advises all to test everything and hold on to what is good so as to sanctify the whole human person, body, soul and the spirit.

Tertullian speaks about the teachers of the faith for the good of the community as those who cure and maintain the community properly.<sup>4</sup> Isidore of Seville, a Doctor of the Church, writes: "Just as skilled Physicians treat the body's varied illness with different medicines, there being diverse cures for the varieties of wounds, so too a doctor of the Church uses the fitting remedy of teaching for each and all, and will proclaim whatever is needed for each person, according to age, sex and profession."<sup>5</sup> Doctors of the Church have the duties of teaching and illuminating the minds of the faithful. For this purpose some receive special interior illuminating action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

From the early Church onwards, the bishops lived a life of witnessing, exercised their teaching commitment as well as good administration of the community with the help of gifted people as guided by the Holy Spirit. In the Church, the gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit, the

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<sup>4</sup> cf. Tertullian, *Against the Heretics*, 8

<sup>5</sup> cf. Isidore of Seville, *Book of Sentences*, Book, III.

<sup>6</sup> cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Suma Ia-IIae*, III. 4; cf. *Commentary on 1Corinthians 12*, Lesson 2.

services are guided by the Lord Jesus and all varieties of activities are activated by God, in and through the single economy (1Cor 12:4-6). So the teaching authority of the Church cannot be restricted to the institutional authority alone. There were people with specific charisma in the Church. The best medieval example is St. Francis of Assisi who was called to reform the Church in the 13<sup>th</sup> c. There were many such gifted and charismatically blessed individuals of the community. There were male and female members, both from the clerical and the lay states, who guided the community and built up the Church in their own periods from time to time (Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna, Robert Bellarmine, Thérèse of Lisieux, and others). Sometimes such teachers might have stood against some orientations of the official bishops also by their prophetic utterances and stance, in view of the radical renewal in the Church.

#### **4. The Transmission of Christian Faith and Tradition by the Doctors of the Church**

The period of the Fathers of the Church gave the basic foundation to the modes of Christian life. Even after that period the faith had to be transmitted and Christian tradition had to be molded appropriately according to the needs of the times and contexts of the world situations. It is because the history of salvation is ongoing and needs apostolic continuity and correct teachings. In such situations of the world, eminent people were called up and were anointed by the Holy Spirit with specific charisms and functions among the peoples of various Christian traditions from time to time. Those inspiring and illuminating leaders with their orthodox teachings and orthopraxis built up the Christian community, the Church, and they became inspirational models for the posterity as well. They have even reformed the Church traditions, as done by Theresa of Avila, Alphonse Ligouri, and others.

In the organic growth of the Church, the Doctors of the Church made vital contributions. They shaped Christianity in their own historical, cultural, social, ecumenical, dogmatic settings. The Church was raised in the inclusive patterns of human life, in embracing the whole humanity for the Kingdom of God. As Christianity spread far and wide from Jerusalem (cf. Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8), there emerged the need for preaching the Word of God in various social and cultural contexts for molding the needed modes of Christian witnessing life. Some prominent models for such witnessing life are given below:

St. Augustine (354-430) by his refutation of Manichaeism, Donatism and Pelagianism, laid foundation for solid Christian soteriology (against Manichaeism), sacramentology and ecclesiology (against Donatism) and anthropology (against Pelagianism). He is also a pioneer of Western monasticism on account of his way of ascetical life. He composed the monastic rules for the priests who lived with him. He also composed similar rules for the women ascetics. The book, *City of God*, by Augustine was the solution he found for the prolonged tension between the 'secularizing world and the sanctifying Christian way of life', he himself confronted in the Roman Empire. He found 'two loves', in two cities, the earthly love of self even unto the contempt of God and the heavenly love of God unto contempt of self<sup>7</sup> that are in need of integration. Finally, he established that true history is the unseen but real building of the 'City of God' by assuming and getting nourished by the salvific mystery of Christ, the centre of history. *Confessions* report the personal spiritual combat and growth of Augustine.

Pope Gregory the great (540-604), by his teaching, preaching and action, laid the foundation of *Christianitas*, the medieval foundation for the Christianity in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Gregory had a deep inner balancing between compunction and contemplation. The inner urge for tuning to God in contemplation and the outer fulfillment of the love of neighbour in actions that guided Gregory for his witnessful life.<sup>9</sup>

Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) mediated between the warring city states and the papal authority. Her illuminated mystical experience and realistic perception on social and political life, gave her the power and wisdom to counsel the Pope. Her vision of signs and symbols, such as, tree, book, river, etc., and the wider use of allegory and symbols in describing the mystery of redemption are famous. She is an icon of women enlightenment in the Church, especially in the context of Avignon papacy.

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) was an empowered Carmelite woman of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. By her active and contemplative life, Teresa enriched the world of spiritual realization by way of the ecstatic mystical way of Christian life. In the active sector she was a reformer of religious life, founder of convents with reformed orientation, and a prolific writer of mystical treatises and letters. She is an example of how God illuminates

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<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 14.28.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, Crossroad, NY 1999, 85.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, 86.

and guides people of specific generations through reform and contemplation.

Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) brings in a specific aspect of the building of the Church and Kingdom. She opened the 'Little Way' of perfection by way of total surrender to the love of God. Her mission in her own terms was to love God and make others love God. Her way was love of God and prayer for all. Her vocation of love and apostolate of prayer for all made her a role model to common people who live their faith in ordinary situations of life. She opened a new way of being Christian amidst rationalism, hedonism and material affluence.

### **5. Doctors of the Church as 'Scribes Trained for the Kingdom of God'**

The Word of God is multifaceted with power and energy for all times. Hence, the Church is blessed with charismatically gifted people to interpret and unveil the power and energy of the Word of God in all ages and circumstances for Christian action. Only by such Christian action, propelled by the power and energy of the Word, the transformation of the world into a 'new heaven and a new earth' (Rev 21:1) would take place. A Doctor of the Church can be described, as taught by Jesus in Mathew 13:52, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." The Doctors of the Church are 'wise scribes' who could bring renewal of Christian life by updating the teachings and practices from the older sources of biblical teachings and updating the Christian vision for the building up of the Church as required in their times.

With their charisms, the Doctors of the Church reflect over the needs of the Church, society and the human culture, so as to bring about the needed social transformation as salvific transformation for the world. They redefined the doctrines and traditions of the Church in the new contexts of the evolving world situations for the guidance of the believers. The on-going guidance of the Spirit through the Doctors of the Church are visible in the history.<sup>10</sup> The questions raised to Jesus and the old questions against Christian faith are reappearing in the modern world, in new age groups and other circumstances.<sup>11</sup> Such issues need purification, rectifications and proper solutions. Thus, they become

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<sup>10</sup> Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, p. xxvi.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 19 March, 2018, Chp. II; Nos. 37 & 40.

‘Pastors of the New Heaven and the New Earth’ by their translation of the Word of God into human and social actions by obeying the command of Jesus by ‘teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Mt 28:20).

#### **6. Doctors of the Church as the Visible Face of Christ to the World**

Making Christ visible, at all times, in all cultures, in all developments and at all times of crises, is the ministry of the Doctors of the Church. Here one must remember the prophecy of Simeon in the temple when Jesus was presented. He is set for the rise and fall of many (Lk 2:34). The ministry of Jesus was to preach the good news to the poor, release of captives, liberty to all who are oppressed and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19). In this respect the new interpretations given by Jesus to the Law in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ stand as an ever-dynamic paradigm. While keeping the spirit of the law, the body of human action has to be given shape. It is in the mode of ‘old wine in new wineskins’ (Mt 9:17), old wine of Christian doctrines has to be preserved and further given out with proper renewed interpretation in the new situations of the world.

The length, breadth and depth of the Word of God are so unfathomable and are not for one interpreter alone to comprehend totally. Word of God gives needed specific resources to each generation. Hence, there is the need of teachers and guides proper to each generation. Here, we are reminded of the teaching of Saint Ephrem:

Who is able to understand, Lord, all the richness of even one of your words? There is more that eludes us than what we can understand. We are like the thirsty drinking from a fountain. Your word has as many aspects as the perspectives of those who study it. The Lord has coloured his word with diverse beauties, so that those who study it can contemplate what stirs them. He has hidden in his word all treasures, so that each of us might find the needed richness in what he or she contemplates.<sup>12</sup>

The universal divine salvific will and plan for the world has to be made visible by teaching, preaching and Christian action in the world situations.

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<sup>12</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, 1, 18; cf. Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio, Aperuit Illis*, 30 September, 2019, § 2.



## 7. Doctors of the Church as Catalysts of Spiritual and Ascetical Life

The 'indwelling of the Spirit' in all generations has to be made effective as a 'new Pentecost'. Only by the guidance and work of the Spirit the embodiment of the will of God would take place. Mary prepared herself and the Holy Spirit came upon her and the embodiment of the Word took place (Lk 1:35). On the day of Pentecost when the apostles were assembled with Mary, the Holy Spirit came upon them in tongues of fire. They were empowered by the indwelling of the Spirit for preaching the good news everywhere. Likewise, the Doctors of the Church prepare the people and the society for the coming of the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost.

In developing and widening the consciousness of the people, the presence of Christ who is the way, the truth and the life, has to be made discernible (Jn 14:16). This has to be taught, experienced and lived in the society. Doctors do this and enhance the doing of this by their witnessing life and mission. From time to time, God has selected champions, leaders, teachers and models for the People of God. This factor has to be discerned, acknowledged, and accepted by all, especially in the case of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara. This acceptance itself is a model of growth. The Doctors of the Church were tuning the tradition by their noble vision, way of life, and thus opened new modes of life for the building up of the Church. So Doctors of the Church, as true guides, may be compared with the 'star of Bethlehem' (Mt 2:9) that guided the Magi to Bethlehem, to Christ Jesus, the embodied Saviour.<sup>13</sup>

## 8. Norms for the Declaration of a Doctor of the Church

In the initial stage, the doctors of the Church in the West and East were acclaimed popularly and subsequently they were recognized by the universal Church. But later, some general norms were set to identify and recognize the Doctors of the Church. In the search for the earliest guidelines for identifying the Doctors of the Church, one finds the work of Prospero Lambertini, *The Beatification of Servants of God and the Canonization of the Blessed* (in 4 volumes).<sup>14</sup> In the second book, he proposes three conditions required for a Doctor of the Church: *eminens doctrina* (eminent teaching), *insignis vitae sanctitas* (outstanding sanctity), and *Ecclesiae declaratio* (declaration by the Church).<sup>15</sup> It was for the first

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, p. xxx.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, Crossroad, NY 1999, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Lambertini had a long period of work experience in Vatican, in the Congregation for the Saints, dealing with canonization process and related

time that these norms were proposed. According to Lambertini (Pope Benedict XIV, pope from 1740-1758) the last norm is the declaration by the Pope or by a general council. But till date, no general council has declared any one a Doctor of the Church (Book 2, Chps. 11-12). But General Councils have taken the teachings of many Doctors of the Church as norms for their teachings.

Naming of female Doctors of the Church made the norm clear that no ecclesiastical office was needed for someone to become a Doctor of the Church. In 1997 Pope St. John Paul II declared St. Thérèse of Lisieux a Doctor of the Church. Then he declared that the love-centered teaching of St. Thérèse was an answer to the rationalism, materialism and hedonism of the modern period. According to John Paul II, the 'Church Teaching' in its wider context incorporates "contemplative study to which theologians are called", the "*magisterium* of pastors", and the "profound understanding of spiritual things given to saints". There are enlightened and inspiring individuals in the Church who have created effective history of the course of the Church in their own times. By their life and mission, they have taken seminal steps that were aimed at the current and later fruitfulness in the community of Christians and in the course of the history of the Church.

The case of St. Francis of Assisi is a concrete example of salvific tuning of the history of the Church. Doctors of the Church have many ways of teachings other than being mere doctrinal teachers. Hence, the recent perspectives on the Doctors of the Church are leaning to the power and modes of their work (in many respects) for the building up of the Church. This new perspective opens attention to the needed plurality in the aspects of teaching, sanctifying and governing modes of the Church as presented by eminent theologians, saints and pastors of the Church. Pope Paul VI once made it clear that it is not the Pope who creates the Doctors, but the Pope recognizes the ways of the Holy Spirit who works through such people in a distinguished way for the good of the Church.<sup>16</sup> In this respect, the working of the Holy Spirit through St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara among the Thomas Christians of India, and more specifically, in the formation of the present Syro-Malabar Church, has its own uniqueness, identity and specific contributions.

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issues. Thus his proposals have contextual significance and higher discernments.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Doctors of the Church*, Crossroad, NY 1999, 21.

## 9. Conclusion

The nature and function of the history of salvation makes it evident that Christianity in India, and within that spectrum, the Thomas Christians of India, had the guidance and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in their history. Such guidance and empowering were embodied and realized through the enlightened teachers and leaders of the land. One such instance and evidence is the appointment of St. Chavara as the Vicar General of the Syrian Thomas Christians at the time of the tragic ordeal and challenge from Roccas schism in 1861. The power and energy of the Holy Spirit in the Church worked through St. Chavara for the good of the Church, precisely in keeping the unity of the Church.

There were many such vicissitudes in the history of Thomas Christians of India. During all those times, the divine providence had supplied leaders, teachers, preachers and illuminated brave sons of the Church for the faithful. Among them St. Chavara stands as a prominent one in many respects. His spiritual realization is acknowledged by the Universal Church through the canonization. Now his powerful inspiration and the relevance of his teachings as well as his personal witnessing power and energy are to be acknowledged locally ('Father of the Church' in the Church *sui iuris*) and in the universal Church, as 'Doctor of the Church'.

The ministry of Chavara became fruitful through the pastoral (kingly) services; the religious/sacramental level ministry became fruitful through the priestly services; the spiritual level ministry became fruitful through the prophetic vision attained from the life in *darsana veedu* (house of vision) and *thapasu bhavanam* (house of austerity). Thus, St. Chavara had exercised his prophetic, priestly and pastoral (kingly) faculties/duties to the maximum possible, depending upon the divine providence with full cooperation to the divine call. In quite Indian terms, in the Indian context, St. Chavara became a highly sublime *Yogi* (one who has realized integration), by bearing witness to the Indian way of Christian life, through *Jñāna-mārga* (path of knowledge), *Karma-mārga* (path of action), and *Bhakti-mārga* (path of devotion).