

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.

Fr. Rice is Vocations Director for the Paulist Fathers.

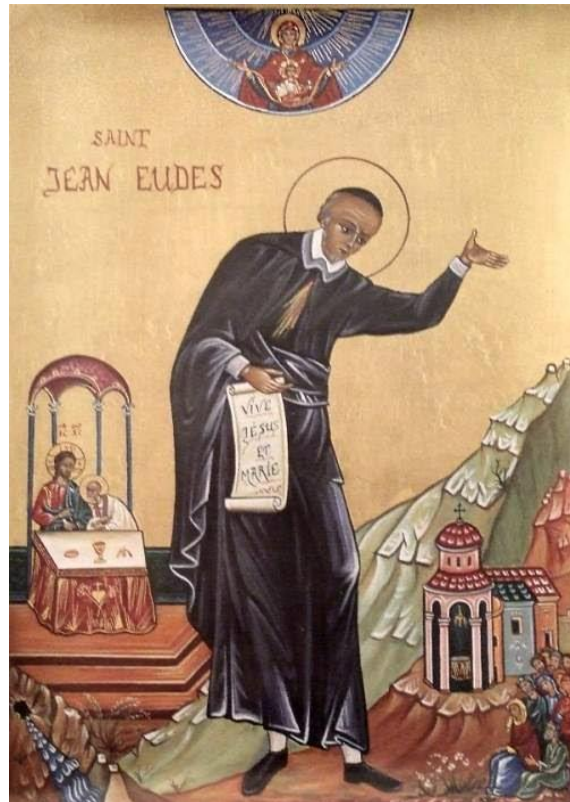
The Conference of Bishops in France Supports Saint John Eudes Being Declared a Doctor of the Church

Why declare John Eudes a Doctor of the Church?

§ What does it mean to be a “Doctor of the Church”?

Historically, the Church offers the faithful the witness of the saints that can serve them as guides in following Christ and in their understanding of the faith and of Christian life. Throughout the centuries the Church has granted the title of “Doctor of the Church” to men and women of different characteristics, whose sanctity of life and teachings (thinking and doctrine) constitute a richness and a reference to the lives of all baptized.

Currently the Church has bestowed the title of "Doctor" to 35 saints, of whom 31 were men and 4 women. In 1991, the Assembly of Bishops of France voted to support the cause of St. Therese of Lisieux, who was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II in 1997. The bishops of France, during their last meeting (November, 2014) gave a positive vote, thereby giving their support and backing to the cause of St. John Eudes as a Doctor of the Church.



§ Who is John Eudes?

A missionary priest, born in 1601 in Ri, near Argentan in the diocese of Sees, and died at the age of 79 years, John Eudes makes his journey of life in the "Great Century" – a tumultuous century, the century of academic research and ecclesial renewal, century of mystical quest. Contemporary with the end of the wars of religion, popular revolts, plagues, he was a witness and actor of the reflection on the Church itself, after the ruptures of the past century, and works in the Catholic revival of the seventeenth century.

After studying with the Jesuits in Caen, Jean Eudes enters a new community of priests founded by Pierre de Bérulle called the Oratory. Priest in 1625, his desire to proclaim the Gospel to all social strata of the population would make him a tireless preacher, preaching to the end of his life about 120 missions in urban and rural parishes.

Attentive to the poor of his time, he chose twice to live with the plagued of Caen, and in 1641 he founded the Institute of Our Lady of Charity to serve women prostitutes. In 1643, concerned with the missions bearing fruit, he founded the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (Eudists) serving the training of diocesan priests, who are the main players in an ever new evangelization. He also founded six seminaries in western France, as a response to the request of the bishops.

His whole life was animated by a deep desire to witness the baptismal life which is for all a way of union with Christ, to be with him one heart. Canonized in 1925, the Church recognizes him with this very special title: "Father, doctor and apostle of the liturgical cult of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary".

§ Works of St. John Eudes:

The writings of St. John Eudes (books and correspondence) are an important collection of 13 volumes. His greatest works were concluded a month before his death - *The Admirable Heart*, a treatise on devotion to the Heart of Mary and an entire book to the Heart of Jesus. The most widely read and reprinted work is entitled *Life and Reign of Jesus in Christian Souls* (1637; final edition, 1670).

For the use of the faithful, Father Eudes made another short manual *Exercises of Piety* (1636), as well as *Catechism* (1642), *The Contract with God through Holy Baptism* (1654), and other works. For priests he wrote *Good Confessor* (1666), *Memorial of Church Life* (1681), *The Apostolic Preacher* (1685), and other books.

We can criticize the author's style (Bremond), thinking of St. Francis de Sales and Bossuet; however, this is the most readable of the masters of the French school of spirituality ... and the doctrine is solid and practical: a saint who speaks of holiness because he knows what he's talking about...!

§ A Doctrine for All: Renewing Baptismal Life:

The experience of being a pastor and missionary gave John Eudes the insight to deepen the spiritual life of all of those he met. Also, he invites the baptized to become aware of the value and dignity of their baptism. In an original and strong way, he asserts to those who have become part of the Church through baptism that they cannot separate themselves from the communion with the Father, with the Son in the Spirit.

Since by Baptism, the baptized, as son of the Father, are in a fraternal relationship with the Son, the Spirit will seal this with its mark: "Whoever among you who has been in partnership as one of its members, the Son is forced to look at him, encourage him and treat him as a part of himself, and bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, spirit of her spirit and as someone who is one with him." Thus Baptism is the starting point and source of union with Christ. Every baptized person is called to "accept Jesus and be like him." Such views resound in the past Council where he emphasized that Baptism is the sign of the universal call to holiness and power of the common priesthood of all the baptized.

§ The Way of the Heart as the Means of Union with Christ:

One of the most significant developments in the spirituality of St. John Eudes was his spiritual doctrine concerning the heart. His teaching on the Heart, before the onset of Paray-le-Monial, defines its place in the heritage of the universal Church as the better spiritual journey. John Eudes calls people's attention to the aspect of love as the essential and primary reason for the action of God that continues to contemplate his life and mission. The love of God is the source of all reality: the love of God for man and the love that man has for the grace to offer back to Him.

Choosing the "heart", he uses a term, from Scripture and Tradition, which is simple and adequate to awaken in the lives of Christians the contemplation of the love of Jesus, which is the overflowing love of the Heart of Jesus that is outpoured to everyone as an everlasting source. John Eudes contemplates, after Pierre de Bérulle, Jesus dwelling in Mary; the Jesus that filled the life of Mary and that reigned in

her heart. Thus, the Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary are but an inseparable entity. John Eudes proposed to all Christians to liturgically celebrate (first in the Church) the feast of the Heart of Mary (1648), then to the Heart of Jesus (1672).

§ The Spiritual Fruitfulness of St. John Eudes:

In France, as well as in many other places in the world, the apostolic and spiritual fruitfulness of St. John Eudes has been a source of new dynamics in the history of the Church. Thus in 5 continents, testimony of various religious institutes whose founders like St. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier (Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd), Saint Jeanne Jugan (Sisters of the Poor), the venerable Amelia Fristel (Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary), and even more others, are enrolled in the spiritual vein that John Eudes in his charism of mercy is always on the side of the poor and people in need.

Soon, the canonization of Sister Maria Droste zu Vischering (Good Shepherd), which Pope Leo XIII invited to consecrate the world to the Sacred Heart (1899), will highlight and also show the history of the influence of St. John Eudes.

§ In Conclusion, a Missionary Life and Mystical Life:

"For Evangelization, there may not be mystical propositions without a strong social and missionary commitment, not even social and pastoral discourses and activities without a spirituality to transform the heart ... there is always need to cultivate an interior space to give a Christian meaning to the commitment and activity ". (Gaudium Evangelium 262). These proposals coming down from Pope Francis summarize what was the life and teaching of St. John Eudes: he inseparably lived the service of mercy, the Gospel and the teaching of Jesus in people's hearts.

Christians can find in John Eudes, the Master of Christian Life, the food and a deep spirit to fully live their Baptism as Missionary Disciples of Christ and witnesses of mercy. Modestly, but surely, Saint John Eudes, this simple missionary priest, could not be one of the Doctors of the New Evangelization? . . .