

St. Jerome

The Eastern Church has a special affinity with the Church Fathers. These men helped formulate Christian doctrine and wrote from the time of the Apostles to the Ninth Century. Their writings were spiritual gems and are worthy of reading and contemplation.

There is also another less obvious reason why we study the Fathers. They provide inspirational models for our lives. Some lived saintly lives from the beginning. Others like St. Jerome did not. Some, like St. Augustine were later converts from paganism. Some could be downright cantankerous. St. Cyril of Alexandria may have had an active part in the deposition of St. John Chrysostom from the patriarchal throne of Constantinople and his subsequent exile. St. Jerome was such a man of passion.

St. Jerome is such a study in contrast. He was a truly brilliant man, but quarreled with most of his contemporaries, including St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine. St. Jerome could be petty and petulant. No one could quibble with his intellectual power. He learned Greek and Hebrew in order to translate the Bible. For many years his translation of the Latin Bible, known as the Vulgate became the standard Bible used by the Western Church. His title for each of the Psalms is still used today. For example, Psalm 50, the great penitential psalm, is most often referred to as the Miserere. Jerome worked both in Rome, and in his later days in the Middle East near Bethlehem. He had a direct influence on the Eastern Church as St. Jerome

did not accept the Protogospel of James. This book provides much of our Marian information, including her Entrance into the Temple. His influence on this matter was decisive in the Western church.¹

Jerome had many famous quotations. The most famous concerned Arianism (“The whole world groaned and marveled to find itself Arian.”). Other famous quotes include:

- Never look a gift horse in the mouth.
-- *On the Epistle to the Ephesians*
- No athlete is crowned but in the sweat of his brow.
-- *Letters*
- No one cares to speak to an unwilling listener. An arrow never lodges in a stone: often it recoils upon the sender of it.
-- *Letters*
- The privileges of a few do not make common law.
-- *Exposition on Jonah*
- The scars of others should teach us caution.
-- *Letters*

¹<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?rcnum=9298>

Small minds can never handle great themes.
-- *Letters*²

There were many other. A poem colorfully captures
St. Jerome's character:

The Thunderer

God's angry man, His crotchety scholar
Was Saint Jerome,
The great name-caller
Who cared not a dime
For the laws of Libel
And in his spare time
Translated the Bible.
Quick to disparage
All joys but learning
Jerome thought marriage
Better than burning;
But didn't like woman's
Painted cheeks;
Didn't like Romans,
Didn't like Greeks,
Hated Pagans
For their Pagan ways,
Yet doted on Cicero all of his days.

A born reformer, cross and gifted,
He scolded mankind

² Quotes courtesy of
<http://historymedren.about.com/od/quotes/fl/Quotations-by-Saint-Jerome.htm>

Sterner than Swift did;
Worked to save
The world from the heathen;
Fled to a cave
For peace to breathe in,
Promptly wherewith
For miles around
He filled the air with
Fury and sound.
In a mighty prose
For Almighty ends,
He thrust at his foes,
Quarreled with his friends,
And served his Master,
Though with complaint.
He wasn't a plaster sort of a saint.

But he swelled men's minds
With a Christian leaven.
It takes all kinds
To make a heaven.

From "Times Three" by Phyllis McGinley³

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