

Benedictine Sisters
Federation of Saint Scholastica

916 Convent Road Northeast • Cullman, AL 35055 • 256-615-6115

2 April 2018

His Holiness Pope Francis
House of St. Martha
Piazza S. Marta, 00120
Vatican City State

RE: Postulation of St. Gertrude the Great as a Doctor of the Church

Most Holy Father,

As the President of the Benedictine Sisters of the Federation of St. Scholastica, I want to express the full support of our member monasteries and my own support of the Postulation of Saint Gertrude the Great as a Doctor of the Church, an undertaking led by the Cistercian Order, the Cistercian Order of Strict Observance and the Benedictine Congregation of Solesmes, which received the support of the Synod of Benedictine Abbots in 2013, and the support of many monasteries and monastic congregations around the world signifying the help and friendship between monasteries which follow the Rule of Saint Benedict.

The Federation of St. Scholastica, a monastic congregation, was established in 1922 and received a decree granting temporary approbation from the Sacred Congregation of Affairs of Religious on 25 February 1922. At the time of its origin it was known as the Congregation of St Scholastica and was composed of ten (10) monasteries of women in the United States. On June 10, 1930, the Sacred Congregation of Religious issued a decree granting final approbation to the declarations and constitutions of the Congregation of St. Scholastica. Currently the Federation of St. Scholastica, whose most recent constitutions received final approbation from The Congregation for Religious on February 10, 1988 (Prot. n.. L69-1/83), consists of twenty (20) monasteries from California on the west coast of the USA to New Jersey on the east coast of the USA, and down to Mexico City, Mexico in the south of the North American continent. The federation traces its roots to St. Walburg Abbey in Eichstätt, Bavaria (Germany) which sent three of its Sisters to the United States in 1852 to respond to the growing needs of the Church here. From those first few Sisters who settled in St. Marys, Pennsylvania and established St. Joseph Monastery, many other monasteries were founded and eventually became autonomous monasteries, now united as members of the Federation of St. Scholastica.

St. Gertrude the Great is commended to you for your consideration to be named a Doctor of the Church. Perhaps her birth on the feast of the Epiphany foretold that she would be a great manifestation of the mystery of God through her devotion to the life of the church in the liturgy, and as an extraordinary student learned in the sciences as well as in theology. She had a great love of God's Word such that it became a part of her.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his presentation about the life of Gertrude the Great at the general audience of 6 October 2010, illustrates an important reason and justification for her being named a doctor of the church: St. Gertrude the Great “was an exceptional woman endowed with special natural talents and extraordinary gifts of grace, the most profound humility and ardent zeal for her neighbor’s salvation . . . St. Gertrude’s life lives on as a lesson of Christian life, of an upright path, and shows us that the heart of a happy life, of a true life, is friendship with the Lord Jesus. And this friendship is learned in love for Sacred Scripture, in love for the Liturgy, in profound faith, in love for Mary, so as to be ever more truly acquainted with God himself and hence with true happiness, which is the goal of our life.”


Renowned monk of the United States, Thomas Merton (known in religion as Father Louis), whom you yourself held up for the American people as someone to be emulated, wrote this about Gertrude the Great:

The love of the divine Heart for all is indeed the theme which dominates all others in the mysticism of Saint Gertrude of Helfta, and it is what makes her teaching so popular and so useful for religious and lay persons alike ... Her visions are all supremely optimistic, and her teaching exalts the mercy of God by reminding that we must not allow ourselves to become discouraged by our faults and imperfections, because the infinite tenderness of Christ will supply for all our weakness if we will only abandon ourselves to his Love and to his Mercy.¹

We enthusiastically endorse the postulation of St. Gertrude the Great as a Doctor of the Church to show the importance of her writings and her way of life in leading and guiding others as they seek to know the Lord more deeply. Her way of life was faithfully living the life of a monastic woman who embraced fully her God in his complete divinity as well as his humanity.

We are most grateful, Holy Father, for your unparalleled leadership in the simple way you live your life. It encourages all of us to seek to live simply and faithfully our own monastic way of life. We urge you to give favorable consideration to the petition to have Gertrude the Great declared a Doctor of the Church.

In Saints Benedict, Scholastica and Gertrude,


Sister Lynn Marie McKenzie, OSB,
Federation President

¹ Thomas Merton: "St. Gertrude, Nun of Helfta, Germany", article published in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38.4 (2003): 451-58.