



Pope Leo I
Collected Works

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The Collected Works of

POPE LEO I

(c. 400-461)



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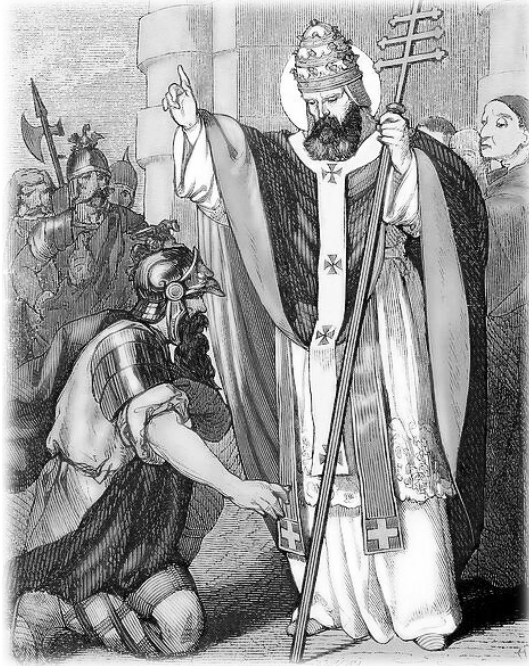


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POPE LEO I



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Collected Works of Pope Leo I



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The Translations



A view of the Chianti countryside, Tuscany — Pope Leo I was born in Tuscany in c. 400.

Brief Introduction to Pope Leo I (1911)



From '1911 Encyclopædia Britannica', Volume 16

Leo I., who alone of Roman pontiffs shares with Gregory I. the surname of the Great, pope from 440 to 461, was a native of Rome, or, according to a less probable account, of Volterra in Tuscany. Of his family or early life nothing is known; that he was highly cultivated according to the standards of his time is obvious, but it does not appear that he could write Greek, or even that he understood that language. In one of the letters (*E*) of Augustine, an acolyte named Leo is mentioned as having been in 418 the bearer of a communication from Sixtus of Rome (afterwards pope) to Aurelius of Carthage against the Pelagians. In 429, when the first unmistakable reference to Pope Leo occurs, he was still only a deacon, but already a man of commanding influence; it was at his suggestion that the *De incarnatione* of the aged Cassianus, having reference to the Nestorian heresy, was composed in that year, and about 431 we find Cyril of Alexandria writing to him that he might prevent the Roman Church from lending its support in any way to the ambitious schemes of Juvenal of Jerusalem. In 440, while Leo was in Gaul, whither he had been sent to compose some differences between Aetius and another general named Albinus, Pope Sixtus III. died. The absent deacon, or rather archdeacon, was unanimously chosen to succeed him, and received consecration on his return six weeks afterwards (September 29). In 443 he began to take measures against the Manichaeans (who since the capture of Carthage by Genseric in 439 had become very numerous at Rome), and in the following year he was able to report to the Italian bishops that some of the heretics had returned to Catholicism, while a large number had been sentenced to perpetual banishment "in accordance with the constitutions of the Christian emperors," and others had fled; in seeking these out the help of the provincial clergy was sought. It was during the earlier years of Leo's pontificate that the events in Gaul occurred which resulted in this triumph over Hilarius of Arles, signalized by the edict of Valentinian III. (445), denouncing the contumacy of the Gallic bishop, and enacting "that nothing should be done in Gaul, contrary to ancient usage, without the authority of the bishop of Rome, and that the decree of the apostolic see should henceforth be law." In 447 Leo held the correspondence with Turribus of Astorga which led to the condemnation of the Priscillianists by the Spanish national church. In 448 he received with commendation a letter from Eutyches, the Constantinopolitan monk, complaining of the revival of the Nestorian heresy there; and in the following year Eutyches wrote his circular, appealing against the sentence which at the instance of Eusebius of Dorylaeum had been passed against him at a synod held in Constantinople under the presidency of the patriarch Flavian, and asking papal support at the oecumenical council at that time under summons to meet at Ephesus. The result of a correspondence was that Leo by his legates sent to Flavian that famous epistle in which he sets forth with great fulness of detail the doctrine ever since recognized as orthodox regarding the union of the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. The events at the "robber" synod at Ephesus belong to general church history rather than to the biography of Leo; his letter, though submitted, was not read by the assembled fathers, and the papal legates had some difficulty in escaping with their lives from the violence of the theologians who, not content with deposing Flavian and Eusebius, shouted for the dividing of those who

divided Christ. When the news of the result of this oecumenical council (oecumenical in every circumstance except that it was not presided over by the pope) reached Rome, Leo wrote to Theodosius “with groanings and tears,” requesting the emperor to sanction another council, to be held this time, however, in Italy. In this petition he was supported by Valentinian III., by the empress-mother Galla Placidia and by the empress Eudoxia, but the appeal was made in vain. A change, however, was brought about by the accession in the following year of Marcian, who three days after coming to the throne published an edict bringing within the scope of the penal laws against heretics the supporters of the dogmas of Apollinaris and Eutyches. To convoke a synod in which greater orthodoxy might reasonably be expected was in these circumstances no longer difficult, but all Leo’s efforts to secure that the meeting should take place on Italian soil were unavailing. When the synod of Chalcedon assembled in 451, the papal legates were treated with great respect, and Leo’s former letter to Flavian was adopted by acclamation as formulating the creed of the universal church on the subject of the person of Christ. Among the reasons urged by Leo for holding this council in Italy had been the threatening attitude of the Huns; the dreaded irruption took place in the following year (452). After Aquileia had succumbed to Attila’s long siege, the conqueror set out for Rome. Near the confluence of the Mincio and the Po he was met by Leo, whose eloquence persuaded him to turn back. Legend has sought to enhance the impressiveness of the occurrence by an unnecessarily imagined miracle. The pope was less successful with Genseric when the Vandal chief arrived under the walls of Rome in 455, but he secured a promise that there should be no incendiarism or murder, and that three of the oldest basilicas should be exempt from plunder — a promise which seems to have been faithfully observed. Leo died on the 10th of November 461, the liturgical anniversary being the 11th of April. His successor was Hilarius or Hilarus, who had been one of the papal legates at the “robber” synod in 449.

The title of *doctor ecclesiae* was given to Leo by Benedict XIV. As bishop of the diocese of Rome, Leo distinguished himself above all his predecessors by his preaching, to which he devoted himself with great zeal and success. From his short and pithy *Sermones* many of the lessons now to be found in the Roman breviary have been taken. Viewed in conjunction with his voluminous correspondence, the sermons sufficiently explain the secret of his greatness, which chiefly lay in the extraordinary strength and purity of his convictions as to the primacy of the successors of St Peter at a time when the civil and ecclesiastical troubles of the civilized world made men willing enough to submit themselves to any authority whatsoever that could establish its right to exist by courage, honesty and knowledge of affairs.

The works of Leo I. were first collectively edited by Quesnel (Lyons, 1700), and again, on the basis of this, in what is now the standard edition by Ballerini (Venice, 1753–1756). Ninety-three *Sermones* and one hundred and seventy-three *Epistolae* occupy the first volume; the second contains the *Liber Sacramentorum*, usually attributed to Leo, and the *De Vocatione Omnium Gentium*, also ascribed, by Quesnel and others, to him, but more probably the production of a certain Prosper, of whom nothing further is known. The works of Hilary of Arles are appended.



Miniature depicting Leo I, contained in the Menologion of Basil II, Vatican Library, c. 1000



A relief from the Sarcophagus of Stilicho, sculpted in c. 385, believed to represent Flavius Aetius, a general and statesman of the closing period of the Western Roman Empire. He was a military commander and the most influential man in the Empire of the 430's and 440's. Near the end of the reign of Pope Sixtus III, Leo was dispatched to settle a dispute between Aetius, one of Gaul's chief military commanders, and the chief magistrate Albinus.



Depiction of Attila the Hun, Chronicon Pictum, 1358. Leo is best known today for having met Attila the Hun in 452 and persuading him to turn back from his invasion of Italy.



Raphael's 'The Meeting between Leo the Great and Attila', which depicts Leo, escorted by Saint Peter and Saint Paul, meeting with the Hun king outside Rome, Vatican Museums, 1514



Bust of Theodosius II in the Louvre. Theodosius (401-450) was Roman emperor from 408 to 450. He was proclaimed Augustus as an infant and ruled as the Eastern Empire's sole emperor after the death of his father, Arcadius. In 450, Theodosius II, in a letter to Pope Leo I, was the first to address him as the 'Patriarch of the West', a title that would continue to be used by the popes until the present day.

The Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great (1885)



Translated by Charles Lett Feltoe, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II, 1885

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Prefatory Note.



EXCEPT FOR SUCH valuable help — chiefly however in the way of comment and explanation — as Canon Bright's volume (S. Leo on the Incarnation) has supplied, both the selection and the translation of the Letters and Sermons of Leo Magnus are practically original. It is even more difficult to feel satisfied oneself, than to satisfy others either with a selection from a great man's works or with a translation of them. The powers of Leo as a preacher both of doctrine and of practice are very remarkable, and in my anxiety to keep within the limits imposed by the publishers, I have erred in presenting too few rather than too many of the Sermons to the English reader. Only those that are generally held genuine are represented, though several of the doubtful ones are fine sermons, and those translated are in most cases no better than those omitted. Even when the same thought is repeated again and again (as is often the case), it is almost always clothed in such different language, and surrounded with so many other thoughts of value, that every sermon has an almost equal claim to be selected.

With regard to the Letters, the series connected with the Eutychian controversy — the chief occupation of Leo's episcopate — is given nearly complete, whereas only specimens of his mode of dealing with other matters have been selected for presentation. With one or two exceptions, however, I feel more confident about the Letters than about the Sermons that the omitted are less important than the included. I wish I could make even a similar boast about the merits of the translation.

The text rendered is for the most part that of the Ballerinii as given by Migne (Patrologie, Vol. LIV.), though a more critical edition is much to be desired.

Charles Lett Feltoe.

Fornham All Saints', *Eastertide*, 1894.

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