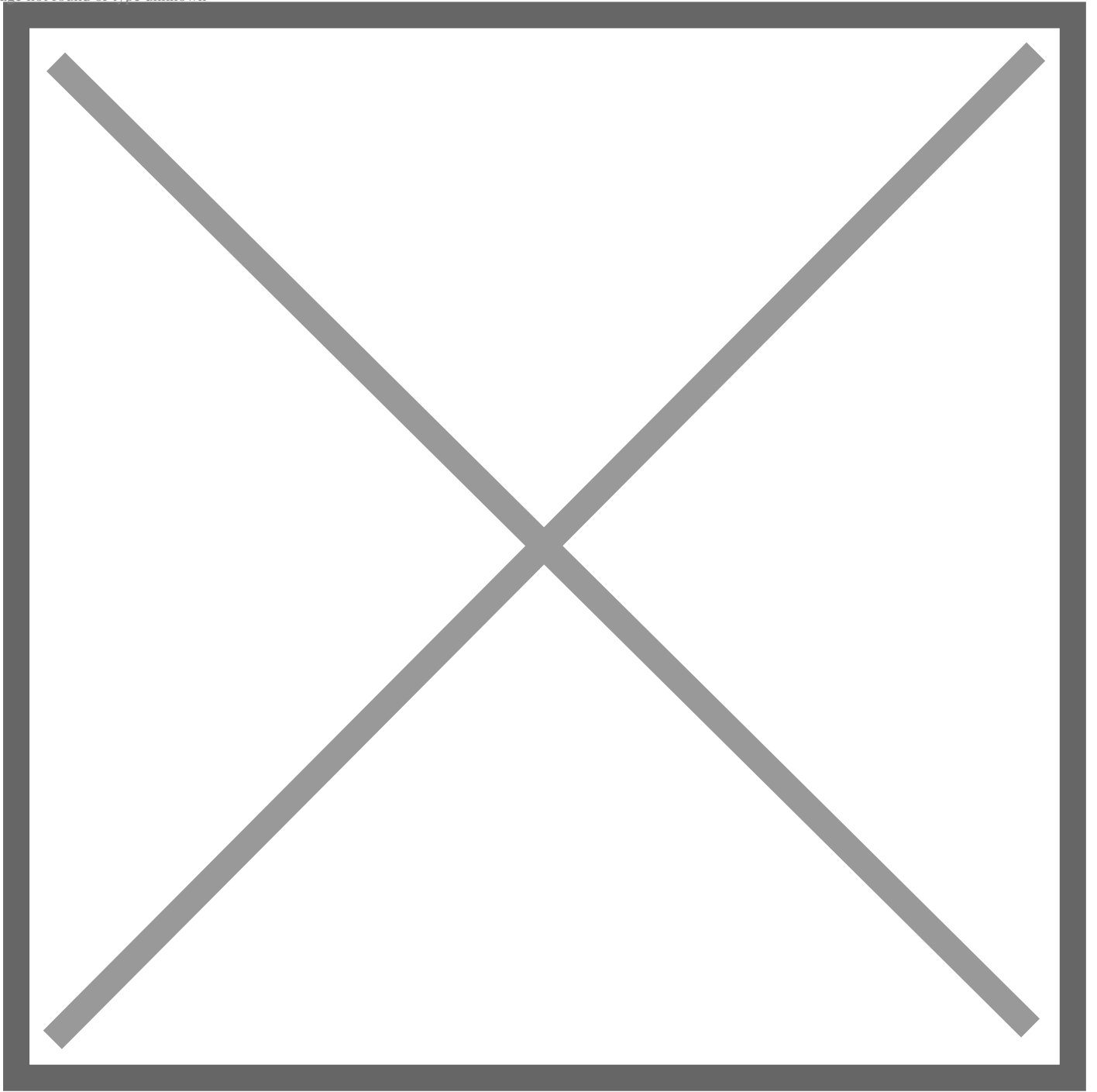


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Saint Anastasius I

SAINT OF THE DAY

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Saint Anastasius I († 401) became Pope on 27th November 399. Although his pontificate only lasted two years, he played a decisive role in the defence of orthodoxy, earning the admiration of his contemporary Saint Jerome, exalting his sanctity and richness in poverty. Born to a noble Roman family, according to the *Liber Pontificalis* he had the basilica Crescenziana built on the site where today stands San Sisto Vecchio.

One of his earliest initiatives was the vigorous action against the Donatists, for whom validity of the sacraments depended on the dignity of their ministers. The Donatist heresy was tearing apart the northern provinces of Africa and was also being opposed by Saint Augustine. It had already been refuted by Saint Optatus of Milevis († 385), who had explained that the sacraments are effective *ex opere operato* (i.e., "by the very fact that the action is performed") because Christ himself acts in them ("sacramenta per se esse sancta, non per homines", wrote Optatus), regardless of the moral qualities of the mediating ministers. Anastasius publicly and formally condemned

Donatism, ratifying the decisions taken in the year 400 by the first council of Toledo.

The pontiff's wisdom was also crucial to the resolution of the so-called First Origenist Crisis, arising from the controversies over the writings of the influential Alexandrian theologian Origen (185-254), which contained some errors that Jerome pointed out to Anastasius through some of his friends. The Pope was also urged by letters and ambassadors coming from the bishop of Alexandria, Theophilus and, considering the irreconcilability of some of Origen's doctrines with Catholicism, he condemned the "blasphemous propositions" presented to him. On Origenism he wrote several letters, one of which was addressed to the bishop of Milan, Saint Venerius, while little remains of the vast correspondence addressed to personalities from different countries. In addition to Jerome and Augustine, Anastasius showed great appreciation and sensitivity towards St. Paulinus of Nola, which confirms Anastasius's holy predisposition and his influence on Christianity.