

The First Women Saints "Doctors of the Church"

On the occasion of the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate held in Rome in 1967, Pope Paul VI publicly declared his intention of officially elevating St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) and St. Teresa de Avila (1515-1582) to the dignity of *Doctors of the Church*, a dignity conferred by the Church upon some of the Saints, because of the exceptional benefits and the excellence in doctrine which can be derived from their writings. Up to this time, this dignity has been officially conferred upon only *thirty saints, all of them, men*. After three years of lengthy and serious studies, it was finally announced that on September 27, 1970 St. Teresa de Avila and on October 4, 1970, St. Catherine of Siena will be *officially proclaimed* the first two women saints "Doctors of the Church."

The history of the Church amply exemplifies the fact that God commonly provides special help for special needs which arise from time to time in the Church. The peculiar pertinence or relevance of the life and teaching of these two women saints for their own day and age must be seen in function of the special needs of the Church at that time. The contemporary situation in the Church, the serious crisis she is moving through — a situation and crisis, sad to say, similar in many ways to that of gone-by centuries, make it eminently befitting that the traditional yet transitory in nature, "obstat sexus" argument, be set aside, and in the light of superior reasons, St. Teresa and St. Catherine be proclaimed officially Doctors of the Church in our day.

In this age of great material progress, of intense emphasis on knowledge, biblical scholars, popular theologians, etc., we are apt to forget certain fundamental truths, viz, that the "Church is a community of faith and lives by this faith. That the Church does not live by debate. A naive credulity in scholarship gives many the false idea that salvation comes from scholarship... The

Church was founded on the Apostles, and not on scholars"; that in order to prepare ourselves effectively to function in the secular society as well as in our efforts to be relevant to its problems and intelligible to its mentality, we have many lessons to learn today, none of which is more essential than the superior Wisdom of these two saints and their truly apostolic courage, who, in their daily lives, combined the highest contemplation with the most active, arduous labours in the service of "His Majesty" — (St. Teresa's familiar expression, and for the "sweet Bride of Christ" and "Christ on earth" — (St. Catherine's style).

Intense prayer, personal penitential life, true conversion of the heart to God, a deep humility which never ignores reverence are prerequisites and essential factors in Christian renewal or reform. Change of structures may well be in order, but that comes second in time and importance. Indeed, the true Christian reformers are the saints, and there is need for many of their kind in this post-conciliar age! Catherine and Teresa, true reformers, set forth the *inspirational example* to be followed in our own days.

These two outstanding women-saints-doctors of the Church are not for duplication, but for inspiration. Under the gentle influence of the Holy Spirit, the influence and inspiration of Teresa and Catherine can become almost compelling, irresistible. They speak to us all, to the Pope, cardinals and bishops, priests and laity alike. For, indeed, God reveals the mysteries of the Kingdom to "the Little Ones" (Mt. 11:25), and the "weak things of the world (He has chosen), to put to shame the strong" (Cor. 1:27)

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