

# ST. CATHERINE — DOCTOR O

The Holy Father presided in St. Peter's at the ceremony of proclaiming Saint Catherine of Siena a Doctor of the Church, on Sunday October 4th, the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. The ceremony was attended by festive crowds from Siena and all Tuscany, who celebrated the occasion with music and dancing in St. Peter's Square and all around Rome. The Holy Father spoke as follows in the Basilica

Spiritual exaltation bursts into Our soul as We proclaim the humble and wise Dominican virgin a Doctor of the Church. The loftiest comparison which We can make (and where its justification may be found) is with the purest joy which Our Lord felt when he "rejoiced in spirit", as the Evangelist Saint Luke tells us, and said, "I thank thee, Father of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to the simple. Yes, Father, for so did it please thee". (Lk. 10, 21; cf. Matt. 11, 25-26).

The truth is that when Jesus thanked his Father for having revealed the secrets of his divine wisdom to the humble, he was not thinking only of the Twelve whom he had chosen from among the uneducated people and whom he would one day send out as his apostles to instruct all peoples and teach

## Exterior activity of Catherine

The Master had already foretold God's preferential choice of what is negligible or even despicable in the world's eyes. He foretold it when he went sharply against earthly evaluations and called blessed the poor, the afflicted, the meek, those hungering for justice, the pure of heart and peacemakers. (cf. Matt. 5, 3-10).

It is not Our intention to linger over showing how the evangelical Beatitudes found a model of superlative truth and beauty in Catherine's life and exterior activity.

In any case, you all know how she was free of all earthly cupidity, how much she loved virginity consecrated to the heavenly spouse, Christ Jesus, how she hungered for justice and was filled with mercy

## Pope Paul VI Confers title on Siena mystic, October 4th

them what he had commanded (cf. Matt. 28, 19-20). He was also thinking of those who would believe in him. Among those innumerable souls there would be the least cultivated in the eyes of the world.

The Apostle of the Gentiles took pleasure in making this observation when writing to the community of the Greek city of Corinth, which was swarming with people who were infatuated with human wisdom. "For consider your calling, brethren", he wrote, "how not many who are wise in earthly estimation, not many powerful people, and not many noble have been called by God. But God has chosen that which is foolish to the world in order to confound the wise; he has chosen that which is weak in order to confound the strong. He has chosen that which is low and worthless in the eyes of the world, that which is not, in order to bring that which is to nothing, so that no creature may glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1, 26-29).

her greatest glory and will constitute a quite special claim to everlasting thankfulness on the part of the Church.

But We do think that this is the right moment to throw some light, though only briefly, on the second of her titles justifying the conferring of this Doctorate on this daughter of the illustrious city of Siena, in accordance with the Church's judgment. This second title is the peculiar excellence of her doctrine.

The first title is the title of sanctity. This was solemnly acknowledged, in ample measure and in the unmistakable style of the humanist that he was, by Pope Pius II, her fellow townsman. He did this in the Bull of Canonization *Miscorialis Domini*, which he himself wrote (cf. M.H. Laurent O.P., *Proc. Castel*, pp. 521-530, Italian translation by I. Taurisano O.P., *S. Caterina da Siena*, Rome, 1948, pp. 665-673). The special liturgical ceremony for it took place in St. Peter's Basilica on June 29th, 1461.

What then shall We say of the eminence of Catherine's teaching? In her writings, that is, her *Letters*, a large number of which have been preserved, in her *Dialogue of Divine Providence* or *Book of Divine Doctrine*, and in her *orations* we shall certainly not find the apologetic vigour and the theological boldness which mark the works of the great lights of the ancient Church both in East and West. Nor can we expect the uncultivated virgin of Fontebanda to give us lofty speculations which belong to systematic theology and which made the Doctors of the scholastic middle ages immortal. It is true that her writings reflect the theology of the Angelic Doctor in a surprising degree,

yet that theology appears there bare of any scientific clothing.

But what strikes us most about the Saint is her infused wisdom. That is to say, lucid, profound and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and the mysteries of the faith contained in the Holy Books of the Old and New Testaments. That assimilation was certainly favoured by most singular natural gifts, but it was also evidently something prodigious, due to a chivism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit, a mystic charism.

In her writings Catherine of Siena provides us with one of the most splendid examples of those charisms of *exhortation*, of the *word of wisdom* and the *word of knowledge* which Saint Paul describes as being in operation in some faithful belonging to early Christian communities. He desired that use of them should be well disciplined, and pointed out that such gifts are not so much for the benefit of those endowed with them, as for the whole body of the Church. In that body, he went on to explain, "the Spirit who distributes his gifts to each one as he wills (is) one and the same" (1 Cor. 12, 11). Hence the benefit of the spiritual treasures which his Spirit distributes ought to devolve to all the members of the mystical organism of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 11, 5; Rom. 12, 8; 1 Tim. 6, 2; Tit. 2, 15).

*Doctrina eius (scilicet Catherine) acquisita fuit; prius magistra visa est quam discipula* (*Proc. Castel*, 1, c). Her doctrine was not acquired; she was a teacher even before she was a pupil. This is what Pius II said in his Bull of Canonization: indeed, how many rays of superhuman wisdom, how many urgent calls to imitation of Christ in all the mysteries of his life and his suffering, how many efficacious teachings about the practice of the virtues proper to the various states in life, are scattered through the Saint's works! Her Letters are like so many sparks from a mysterious fire, lit in her ardent heart by Infinite Love, that is, the Holy Spirit.

## Mystic of the Incarnate Word

But what were the main features, the dominant themes of her ascetical and mystical teaching? It seems to Us that Catherine is the mystic of the Incarnate Word, above all of Jesus Crucified. In this she was in imitation of "glorious Paul" (*Dialogues* c. XI, ed. G. Cavallini, 1968, p. 27), whose bounding and impetuous style she sometimes reflects. She was one who exalted the redeeming power of the adorable Blood of the Son of God, shed on the wood of the cross in expanding love, for the salvation of all generations of mankind (cf. *Dialogue*, c. CXXVII, ed. cit. p. 325).

The Saint saw that Blood of the Saviour continually flowing in the Sacrifice of the Mass and in the Sacraments, thanks to the ministry of the sacred ministers and for purification and embellishment of the whole mystical Body of Christ. We may therefore say that Catherine was the *mystic of the mystical Body of Christ*, that is of the Church.

And the Church for her part was for Catherine a genuine mother to whom there is a duty to submit and to give reverence and obedience. "The Church", she dared to say,

"is nothing else but Christ himself", (*Letter* 171, ed. P. Misciattelli, III, 89).

What deep respect then and passionate love did the Saint not have for the Roman Pontiff We Ourself, the least of the servants of God, personally owe Catherine immense gratitude today, certainly not because of the honour that might redound to our humble person, but because of the mystical apologia which she made for the apostolic office of Peter's Successor. Who does not remember? In him she saw *il dolce Cristo in terra*—sweet Christ on earth (*Let.* 196, ed. cit. III, 211). To him is due filial affection and obedience, because "Whoever is disobedient to Christ on earth, who represents Christ in heaven, does not share in the fruit of the Blood of the Son of God" (*Let.* 207, ed. cit. III, 270).

Almost anticipating not only the doctrine but also the language of the II Vatican Council itself (*Dogm. Const. Lumen Gentium*, No. 23) she wrote to Pope Urban VI: "Most holy Father... you know the great necessity for you and for holy Church to keep this people (of Florence),



Many priests prepare to assist the Pope at the distribution of Holy Communion to the huge crowd at St. Peter's on October 4th.

# THE CHURCH



The Archbishop of Siena and the Master General of the Dominican Order present Pope Paul VI with the traditional gifts after the rite of proclamation in the Vatican Basilica.



The characteristic atmosphere of Siena was re-created on Sunday, October 4th, at the ceremony honouring St. Catherine. A parade down Via Conciliazione with bands playing, flags waving, and large groups in medieval costume lent a carnival air to the festivities.

in obedience and reverence to Your Holiness, since here is the head and beginning of our faith" (*Let.* 170, ed. cit. II, 75).

She also addressed pressing exhortations to Cardinals and to many Bishops and priests; nor did she spare them strong reproaches, but always with deep humility and respect for their dignity as ministers of the Blood of Christ.

Catherine could not forget that she was the daughter of a religious Order, one of the most glorious and active in the Church. She therefore had singular esteem for what she called "the holy religions". She considered them as a bond of union between the mystical Body, constituted by representatives of Christ

(according to a description of her own) and the universal body of the Christian religion, that is, the ordinary faithful. She demanded that religious should have fidelity to their lofty calling, through generous practice of the virtues and observance of their respective rules.

The lady were not lost in her maternal solicitude. She sent numerous lively letters to lay people, calling on them to be prompt to practise the Christian virtues and the duties of their state, and to be inspired with ardent love of God and their neighbour, for these too are living members of the mystical Body. "She" (the Church), the Saint said, "is founded on love and is love itself" (*Let.* 105, ed. G. Gigli).

## Her role in Church reform

And how could we forget the intense work she did for reform of the Church? She addressed her exhortations principally to sacred Pastors, for she was disgusted and had holy scorn for the indolence of more than a few of them, and she fumed at their silence while the flock entrusted to them was lost and ruined. "Alas, be silent no longer! Cry with a hundred thousand tongues," she writes to a high prelate; "I see that the world is spoilt through refusal to speak out, Christ's Spouse is pallid; her colour has been taken from her because her blood has been sucked out of her, that blood which is the Blood of Christ" (*Let.* 16

to the Cardinal of Ostia, ed. L. Ferretti, I, 85).

And what did she mean by renewal and reform of the Church? Certainly not the overthrow of its basic structures, rebellion against the Pastors, a free rein for personal charisms, arbitrary innovations in worship and discipline, such as some would like in our day. On the contrary, she repeatedly affirms that beauty would be given back to the Spouse of Christ and it would be necessary to make reforms "not with war, but with peace and quiet, with the humble and continuous prayers, sweat and tears of the servants of God" (cf. *Dialogue* chs.

## Pope's Message to Assisi on Feast of Saint Francis

On the occasion of celebration of the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, co-patron with Saint Catherine of Siena, of Italy, the following telegram was sent by the Cardinal Secretary of State:

To His Eminence  
Cardinal Silvio Oddi,  
the Holy See's Delegate  
for the Patriarchal Basilica  
of Saint Francis at Assisi

The liturgical feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, solemnly celebrated with special participation by region of the Veneto, representing all the Communities of Italy, offers Holy Father welcome occasion to renew expressions of his benevolence for the Italian people on this occurrence, this year rendered so meaningful by pro-

clamation of Saint Catherine as Doctor of the Church.

May all Italians look upon the bright examples of their Patrons and always keep intact inheritance of faith, of attachment to the Church, of unspoil moral virtue as a living flame, symbol of which is votive lamp offered for the venerated tomb of the Seraphic Patriarch in name of entire Nation.

With these prayers Holy Father implores continued divine graces for peace, prosperity and civil progress of beloved Italy. Imparis desired Apostolic Benediction to Your Eminence, to representative of Italian Government, Patriarch of Venice, Episcopate and Delegation of Venetian Region, to deserving Franciscan Orders, to ecclesiastical, civil and military authorities, pious and faithful gathered to pray in historical sanctuary.

CARDINAL VILLOI

XV, LXXXVI, ed. cit., pp. 44, 197). For the Saint, therefore it was a matter above all of interior reform, then exterior reform, but always in communion and filial obedience to Christ's rightful representatives.

Was our most devoted Virgin also a politician? Yes, undoubtedly? And in an exceptional way, in a wholly spiritual acceptance of the word. But she scornfully rejected the accusation of being a political meddler, which some of her fellow townspeople made against her. She wrote to one of them: "...And my

fellow citizens believe that negotiations are going on by means of me or the company that I have with me: they are telling the truth; but they do not know it, and they are prophesying; for I do not wish, and I do not wish those who are with me, to do anything but what is concerned with defeating the demon and depriving him of the lordship which he has seized over man through mortal sin, and to take the hatred out of his heart and bring him to peace with Christ Crucified and with his neighbour" (*Letter* CXXXII, ed. cit. II, 235).

## Offering her life

The lesson which this political woman *in genere* gives us still keeps its meaning and value, even though there is a more strongly felt need today to make the due distinction between the things that are Caesar's and the things that are God's, between Church and State. The Saint's political magisterium had its most genuine and perfect expression in this lapidary sentence of hers: "No state can be preserved in civil law and divine law in a state of grace without holy justice" (*Dialogue*, ch. XIX, ed. cit. p. 291).

Catherine was not content with having carried out an intense and most vast work of truth and goodness in word and in writing. She desired to seal it all with the final offer of her life, for the mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, at the still youthful age of 33 years. From her deathbed, surrounded by faithful disciples in a little cell by the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva at Rome, she addressed this

moving prayer to the Lord. It is a true testament of faith and most ardent love: "O eternal God, receive the sacrifice of my life for (the sake of) this mystical body of holy Church. I have nothing other to give but what thou hast given me. Take my heart, therefore, and press it out over the juice of this spouse" (*Let.* 371, ed. L. Ferretti, V, pp. 301-302).

This was a message of a most pure faith, of an ardent love, of a humble and generous dedication to the Catholic Church, as the mystical Body and Spouse of the divine Redeemer. This message was typical of the new Doctor of the Church, Catherine of Siena, to enlighten and give example to all who glory in belonging to the Church. Let us receive this message in a grateful and generous spirit, that it may be a light for our earthly life and a pledge of future secure membership of the Church triumphant in heaven. So may it be!

"Let us receive  
this message  
...as a pledge  
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—Pope PAUL VI



Giorgio Scarpati: «The Divine Comedy», Paradiso, c. XVII. Martyrs of the Faith.