

St. Teresa of Jesus, Doctor of the Church

Written by Fr. Stephen Sanchez, OCD

The title 'Doctor of the Church' is an honorary title granted to those whom the Church considers as having made an important contribution to theology or better said – our theological understand of ourselves as Church of disciples in the Holy Spirit. This 'title' is based on charisms listed by St. Paul in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians (1Cor 12:28) where after Apostles, Prophets, he lists 'teachers.' St. Paul further explains (Eph 4:12) that the teaching is to equip the believers to serve and to build up the body of Christ. When the Church begins to examine the teaching of a particular individual 'teacher' they look for three required conditions: high degree of sanctity, eminent learning/teaching, and the proclamation by the Church (Supreme Pontiff or General Council). In the Western Church the four pre-eminent contributors to our theology were recognized in the Middle Ages as being St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Jerome; in the Eastern Church: St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, and St. Gregory Nazianzen. After these great teachers the Church recognized the universal value of the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, there have been since then others added to this list of contributors to the faith.

When given this honorary title of 'doctor,' many of the individual 'doctors' are given an epithet that expresses the nature of their teaching or area of expertise, e.g. , John of the Cross was named 'Doctor mysticus' (Mystic Doctor), when the Church conferred this title on Teresa of Jesus it was with the already popularly recognized title of 'Spiritualim Mater'- Mother of the Spiritual

The exceptional style of Teresa's teachings is that among the many spiritual writers on mystical/spiritual theology hers was not one based on 'speculative theology' – that is, taking a truth and working out the consequences of that truth – her teaching is intensely personal, based upon her own experiences coupled with the graces she received from God to be able to understand and explain the progress of spiritual growth.

Through the powerful intercession of St. Teresa of Jesus, Doctor of the Church may we be equipped to serve and to build up the Body of Christ.

In Him,

Fr. Stephen

On September 27, 1970 declared Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter *Multiformis Sapientia (The Manifold Wisdom of God)*:

“We have now conferred - rather, We have acknowledged Saint Teresa of Jesus’ title of Doctor of the Church...The meaning of this act is very clear. It is deliberately intended to be enlightening...the light of the title shows up on Teresa unquestionable values which have already been fully acknowledged to her...St. Teresa of Avila’s doctrine shines with charisms of truth, of conformity to the Catholic faith and of usefulness for the instruction of souls. And We might mention another particular point, the charism of wisdom. This makes Us think of the most attractive and at the same time most mysterious aspect of Saint Teresa’s title of Doctor: the flow of divine inspiration in this prodigious and mystical writer. From where did the wealth of her doctrine come to Teresa...from her response to grace; received in a soul that was extraordinarily rich and well prepared for the practice and experience of prayer...We are undoubtedly before a soul in which extraordinary divine initiative was active, and was perceived and described by Teresa simply, faithfully, stupendously.

...It comes to us just when we are tempted by the great noise and the great business of the world outside to yield to the frenzy of modern life and to lose the real treasures of our souls in the effort to win the seductive treasure of the earth. It comes to us children of our own time just when we are losing not only the habit of conversing with God but also the sense of the need and the duty to worship and call on him...We have taken care to see that, having adorned with this title of Master, she may have a more authoritative mission to perform...her perennial, ever present message-the message of prayer.”