

Editorial

No apology is needed for devoting a number of *The Life of the Spirit* to St Catherine of Siena, least of all in this year, the centenary of her canonization by Pius II on the 29th June 1461. The Church may have canonized greater saints—it is not for us to judge—but very few in whom the essence of Christian holiness, the transformation into a likeness of the incarnate Word, has so visibly and vividly appeared; and certainly Dominican history offers no clearer example of the Dominican ideal in action. It is at once paradoxical and strangely appropriate that the Order that is doctrinal par excellence, whose motto is Truth and special concern is theology, should have come to see in this young unlettered woman so authentic a representative of what it essentially stands for. Catherine is the supreme witness in our history, and perhaps in all Christian history, to the charismatic nature of Christian wisdom, to the truth that intellectual growth in the faith comes, essentially, from a love-union with Christ, and so from the Holy Spirit who 'gives to each one as he wills' for the common good of the Church. One can hardly think of her without recalling the great texts on this matter of her master St Paul; especially, perhaps, I Corinthians 1, 18-2, 16, and 12, 4-11. No one better than St Catherine can teach us, by example even more than by precept, that in theology the root of the matter is not a professional technique (however useful this may be) but docility to the Spirit: *non solum discens sed et patiens divina*.¹

A canonization is an event in history, conditioned more or less by human factors; and St Catherine's has a certain piquancy from the fact that the pope who raised her to the altars was the humanist Pius II. As Aenas Silvius Piccolomini this refined scholar and exquisite latinist had been a man of the world in every sense and also a near-schismatic. Yet he proved a worthy and devoted pope, in circumstances of great difficulty for the Church; and it is permissible to think that the prayers of Catherine his compatriot (for the Piccolomini were Sieneſe) played their part in this change. On the eve of the Great Schism she had offered her life for the unity of the Church; and he in turn gave himself to the same cause with a persistence that no other pope was to show before the outbreak of the Reformation.

Humanist pope and medieval saint, how far away in time they seem,

¹cf. *Summa theol.* 2a 2ae . 45 . 2.

how remote in their culture and social circumstances. Yet the spring that fed the saint's mind and heart—as servant of the Christian people, as intrepid explorer of the Christian mystery—this spring, this living source remains: Jesus Christ 'the same yesterday and today and forever'.

The Spirit of St Catherine of Siena¹

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We commonly think of St Catherine as the greatest of Dominican tertiaries; and so no doubt she is; it is as natural to think that of her as to think of St Thomas as our greatest theologian. Yet it is easier to assess the greatness of a theologian than the greatness of a tertiary. Theology is a science; being a tertiary is a vocation. You can compare one theologian with another in respect of qualities that are fairly evident, at least in principle, for they are intellectual qualities expressed in rational argument. A theologian is great in the degree that he gives satisfactory answers to the questions put by the human mind when it asks, what does the Christian faith mean? It is true that a theologian will not be able to give such answers with a clarity and profundity that deserve to be called great unless his intellect is docile to the Holy Spirit, that is unless he has the Gifts of understanding and wisdom to a high degree. But, this granted, his work is a definite body of expressed argu-

¹A lecture to the Congress of London Dominican tertiaries, 1960. Most of the quotations are from St Catherine's letters, and I have used the critical edition of these by E. Dupré Theseider, *Epistolario di S. Caterina da Siena*, Rome 1940. Unfortunately only volume I of this edition has so far been published; but as it contains 88 letters written between 1373 and January 1377—i.e., one half of St Catherine's short life as a writer—it is a fairly representative selection. For the convenience of readers I have added, in each case, to the number-reference to the Dupré Theseider edition the number of the corresponding letter in the better known Tommaseo edition (1860, and reprinted without alteration by Misciatelli in 1912). The former number is in Roman numerals, the latter in Arabic.