

# Crossing the Stained-Glass Ceiling of Theology

## The Proclamation of the First Women as Doctors of the Church

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**Abstract** In 1970, Pope Paul VI proclaimed two women doctors of the Church, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. He therefore broke with a millenary tradition that excluded women from a title that recognized a form of magisterium in the universal Church. Indeed, teaching is the clergy's prerogative in the Roman Catholic Church. If the doctorate of the Church is a title given to saints who are already canonized, one can wonder if these first proclamations of 1970 legitimate a new position for women in theological teaching. It seems that they are contemporary with women's access to theological faculties, which were gradually opened to women after the Second World War, first as auditors, then as students, and finally as teachers. This article wants to interrogate these two concomitant events and to see whether the proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church opened a way for theological teaching in the Roman Catholic Church to women or not. After studying the way this novelty is presented by Pope Paul VI in his homilies of proclamation, the echo of the event will be put forward. Finally, discourse and practice will be confronted to see if the recognition of a posthumous title to women influenced women's condition in theology.

**Keywords** Women. Catholicism. Theology. Doctors of the Church. University.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Understanding Paul VI's Aim Through the Proclamation Homilies. – 3 An Ambiguous Reception of the Event by the Press. – 4 Confronting Discourse and Practice. – 5 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

In 1970, for the first time, two women were recognized as doctors of the Church. Hence, their writings were recommended to the universal Church as an important and sure contribution to the Christian doctrine. Indeed, this title inherited from the Byzantine Church was made official in the thirteenth century in order to promote models of both holiness and intelligence. It is a major event with regard to the long Church history of women and doctrinal authority but it was not perceived as such in a short-time context of crisis after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and of crystallisation of the relations between the radical feminism emerging and the Catholic Church. However, it may be understood as a gesture of recognition and encouragement towards women at a time when women's issues were becoming more important in the Catholic Church, since the 1960s. Since doctors of the Church are models given to theologians, one can wonder if this event could reflect a new access for women to theology. While most faculties opened their doors to women in the second half of the nineteenth century and welcomed them in greater numbers during the interwar period, those of theology remained masculine and clerical until the end of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> More or less before the Second Vatican Council, theology was conceived as a preparation to the sacerdotal ordination, and therefore reserved to the clergy. The proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church does not change anything to the position of women in the hierarchical structures, since it concerns the field of holiness. But as it is contemporary of the arrival of women in the faculties of theology, it may be useful to see to what extent it reflects the eventual difficulties women could have to access a new position in the field of knowledge and therefore of power. What does the proclamation of women as doctors of the Church in 1970 teach us about the new relationship between women and theology? Did Pope Paul VI make a feminist move by proclaiming Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena doctors of the Church? I will first present the homilies of the proclamation so as to understand the pope's scope. Then, a survey of the press will show how the event was received by the faithful. Finally, I will confront discourse and practice to see if the proclamation had an impact on women's presence in the theological field.

First of all, it may be useful to remind ourselves what the doctors of the Church are so as to understand what was at stake in 1970. The famous *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (1940) defines them as

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<sup>1</sup> Things are rather different in a Protestant context, theological studies opening to lays at the beginning of the twentieth century. But this article will focus on the Catholic context.

“ecclesiastical writers who have been honoured with this title by a solemn approval of the Church, on account of their holy life and perfect orthodoxy, but still more for their considerable science and profound erudition”.<sup>2</sup> Three conditions are required to be recognized as such: to be canonised, to have proposed an ‘eminent doctrine’ and to have been solemnly proclaimed by the pope or a council. Because of this title, doctors of the Church enjoy a special cult in the Catholic liturgy: for example, in the pre-conciliar liturgy, it was customary to recite the Credo to recall the services rendered by the doctor for the defence of faith. The title appeared in the Middle Ages and was used to distinguish the more eminent among the fathers of the Church thanks to a special cult. It was only in 1567 that the two categories were really differentiated when Thomas Aquinas was proclaimed, just after the Council of Trent. Since the eighteenth century, a real doctoral policy has been developed, as proclamations became more frequent, with a certain balance between the various religious orders and a kind of reflection of the evolutions of the theological field. It was not until the nineteenth century that the question arose for a woman: in their *Acta sanctorum* (1845), the Bollandists wondered if Teresa of Avila should be honoured as a doctor of the Church in view of the authority of her writings in the field of mystical theology.<sup>3</sup> As she had not benefited from a solemn proclamation by the pope, they considered that she should not. Moreover, she could not be proclaimed because of Saint Paul’s harsh words about the teaching of women in the Church: “Let Women be silent in the Churches” (1 Co 14, 34). Since the interpretation Thomas Aquinas had given in his *Theological Sum* (II<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 177, a. 2), this precept was understood as an interdiction for women to teach the Church. For the medieval theologian, they could teach in the private sphere, to their children, but never publicly. And the role of the doctors of the Church is precisely to teach the universal Church. It is probably for the same reason that Pope Pius XI answered negatively to the Carmelite Order who asked him to proclaim Teresa of Avila in 1923, a year after the University of Salamanca gave her a doctorate *honoris causa*, in a context of renewal and debate about mystics.<sup>4</sup> The answer was the same for Teresa of Lisieux in 1932, after a French Jesuit had proposed the idea of her proclamation in the first Teresian Congress: “*sexus obstat*”.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Valton, “Docteur de l’Église”, 1510.

3 Vandermoere, Vanhecke, *Acta sanctorum*, 109.

4 Macca di S. Maria, “Il Dottorato di Santa Teresa d’Avila”, 104. On the context: Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 47, 212; Minvielle, *Qui est mystique?*, 35-6; De Franceschi, “La défense doctrinale du système thomiste de la mystique étendue”.

5 Droulers, “Le Doctorat de sainte Thérèse de Lisieux”, 118. Since it is not the aim of this article to explain the failure of these first attempts to make women doctors of

## 2 Understanding Paul VI's Aim through the Proclamation Homilies

First, a study of the official texts accompanying the proclamations of the two saints in 1970 is necessary to understand in what sense the event can be seen as an improvement in the place granted to women in the formulation of faith. Indeed, as the title of doctor of the Church could be confused with the magisterial function devolved to the clergy, Pope Paul VI had to explain in what sense it could be given to women.<sup>6</sup> He does it in the homily of the Mass in which Teresa of Avila was proclaimed, on 27 September, a week before Catherine of Siena:

En primer lugar hay que notar que Santa Teresa de Ávila es la primera mujer a quien la Iglesia confiere el título de Doctora; y esto no sin recordar las severas palabras de San Pablo: 'La mujeres cállense en las Iglesia' (1 Cor. 14, 34); lo cual quiere decir todavía hoy que la mujer no esta destinada a tener en la Iglesia funciones jerárquicas de magisterio y de ministerio. ¿Se habrá violado entonces el precepto apostólico? Podemos responder con claridad: no. Realmente no se trata de un título que comparte funciones jerárquicas de magisterio [...].<sup>7</sup>

For centuries, the doctorate of the Church was associated with theology and priesthood. This may explain why it could seem inconceivable to proclaim a lay doctor of the Church in the interwar period. Pius XI may have been all the more reluctant to give the title to women at a time when the first feminist revendications appeared in the Roman Catholic Church, because of a possible confusion between proclaiming women doctors of the Church and opening priesthood to women. A parallel could be made with the devotion to the Virgin-Priest, encouraged by Pius X in 1906 and then condemned in 1913 and in 1927 because of this possible confusion.<sup>8</sup> In fact, between 1906 and

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the Church, I would like to refer to an article where it is exposed: Tesson, "Des femmes docteurs de l'Église?".

**6** To understand the way teaching is conceived in the Catholic Church, cf. Congar, "Pour une histoire sémantique du terme 'Magistère'"; Congar, "Bref historique des formes du 'Magistère' et de ses relations avec les docteurs".

**7** "Let us first notice that Saint Teresa of Avila is the first woman to whom the Church granted the title of doctor of the Church; and this fact does not go without recalling the severe words of Saint Paul: *Mulieres in Ecclesiis taceant* (1 Co 14, 34): which means, still today, that women are not destined to have hierarchal magisterial position of ministry. Has the apostolic precept been violated? We can clearly answer: no. It is not, in reality, a title that confers a hierarchal magisterial position" (Author's transl.). Paul VI, *Proclamazione di Santa Teresa d'Avila Dottore della Chiesa*.

**8** "Dévotions prohibées"; Laurentin, *Marie, l'Église et le sacerdoce*, 437 and ff.; Gazzetta, *Virgo et Sacerdos*; Galtier, "La dévotion à Marie 'Vierge-Prêtre'".

1927, seven protestant Churches had accepted women's ordination.<sup>9</sup> In 1922, the Holy Office had opened an inquiry on the matter, after publications were made in that sense in a German journal, *Die Frau*.<sup>10</sup>

In 1964, when the Carmelite Order made a request to Paul VI for Teresa of Avila, the answer was different, even if the claims for women's ordination were increasing in the context of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>11</sup> The pope commissioned four theologians to study the possibility of proclaiming women doctors of the Church and all of them answered positively.<sup>12</sup> These could benefit from the theology developed at the Council which allowed to distinguish the doctorate of the Church, which authenticates a charism – a grace given for free to any faithful for the increasing of the whole community – and priesthood, which is a sacrament. As one can see, Paul VI also refers to the conciliar theology in his homily:

Realmente no se trata de un título que comparte funciones jerárquicas de magisterio, pero a la vez debemos señalar que este hecho no supone en ningún modo un menosprecio de la sublime de la mujer en el seno del Pueblo de Dios. Por el contrario ella, al ser incorporada a la Iglesia por el Bautismo, participa de ese sacerdocio común de los fieles, que la capacita y la obliga a 'confesar delante de los hombres la fe que recibió de Dios mediante la Iglesia (*Lumen gentium* 2, 11)'.<sup>13</sup>

The notion of 'common priesthood' allows women to profess their faith and to contribute to a better understanding of it. Exposed in the

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**9** Cf. the table "La place de la femme dans le ministère des Églises chrétiennes non catholiques", at a time the question was now up to date in the Catholic Church: the Fraternité des Remontrants (1915), the Union Congrégationaliste d'Angleterre et du Pays de Galles (1917), the Union baptiste de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande (1918), the Église Presbytérienne d'Angleterre (1921), the Union Congrégationaliste d'Écosse (1929), the Église Évangélique Luthérienne aux Pays-Bas (1929), and the Église Libre Unie d'Écosse (1929).

**10** *Tendenze al Sacerdozio per le donne, voto del R.mo P. Drehmans (luglio 1922) e Supplemento al Voto dello stesso consultore (nov. 1922)*, in ACDF, Rer. Var. 1922, n. 7. The articles are the following: Adam, "Weibliche Geelsorger"; Poehlmann, "Zum weiblichen Priestertum".

**11** It is precisely in 1964 that six women publish a text intitled "We Won't Keep Silent!", in response to Saint Paul's famous interdiction. Heinzelmann, *Wir schweigen nicht länger!*.

**12** *Sacra Rituum Congregatio, Positio peculiaris*.

**13** "It is not, in reality, a title which contains a hierarchal position of ministry but we must underline at the same time that it does signify in any way a lesser esteem for the sublime mission of women in the midst of the people of God. On the contrary, women, by entering the Church through baptism, participate in the communal priestly ministry of the faithful, which habitates and obliges to 'profess before men the faith received by God through the intermediary of the Church (*Lumen gentium* 2, 11)". Paul VI, *Proclamación de Santa Teresa de Jesús como Doctora de la Iglesia*.

fourth chapter of the constitution *Lumen gentium* (1964), it relativises the distinction between the clergy and the laity by putting forward what is common between them: baptism.<sup>14</sup> Hence, any faithful is invited to worship God by offering him, as a sacrifice, his/her daily life. Even if the traditional opposition between the Teaching and the Taught Church remains, it becomes less important in ecclesiology whereas the image of the 'People of God' appeared. In that sense, the renewal of ecclesiology and the new place given to the laity made it possible to reconsider the question of proclaiming women doctors of the Church. In his homily, Paul VI does not speak of a new doctrinal function recognised to women but, more generally, he enhances the way the faithful contribute to the formulation of the Christian faith:

Y en esa confesión de la fe tantas mujeres han llegado a las cimas más elevadas, hasta el punto de que su palabra y sus escritos han sido luz y guía de sus hermanos. Luz alimentada cada día en el contacto íntimo con Dios, aún en las formas más elevadas de la oración mística, para la cual San Francisco de Sales llega a decir que poseen una especial capacidad. Luz hecha vida de manera sublime para el bien y el servicio de los hombres.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, Paul VI says nothing about a reconsideration of women's participation to theology but recognises a new way to consider the formulation of faith, nourished by prayer. And indeed, the two figures he proclaimed were not theologians *stricto sensu*: none of them studied and they did not produce a systematic and speculative doctrine but wrote letters or autobiographical writings. Rather than using abstraction and concepts, they talked about their spiritual experience and indeed, both were great mystics. Their proclamation sounds like a consecration of the pluralism of theological forms claimed by the 'New Theology' in the 1940s and 1950s, whose representatives were at the forefront of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>16</sup> Étienne Fouilloux wrote about the review *Dieu Vivant*, promoted by the French Jesuits in the 1940s-1950s:

On sait bien de quelle théologie *Dieu Vivant* ne veut pas: une théologie ancrée dans le substrat philosophique thomiste plutôt que

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**14** Paul VI, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*.

**15** "In this profession of faith many women have reached the highest summits, to the point that their words and writings have been a light and a guide for their brothers: a light which has been nourished each day by their intimate contact with God, and has reached the most noble forms of mystical prayer, for which Saint Francis de Sales does not hesitate to say that they possess a special capacity". Paul VI, *Proclamación de Santa Teresa de Jesús como Doctora de la Iglesia*.

**16** Gibellini, *Panorama de la théologie au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 429-35.

dans les sources du christianisme; une théologie qui sépare: philosophie et théologie, pensée et prière, action et contemplation, incarnation et eschatologie; une théologie spéculative, enfermée dans ses syllogismes et ses déductions logiques; une théologie à prétention rationnelle qui évacuerait miracle, mystère et aspiration à la sainteté; bref, une théologie dans laquelle l'intelligence de la foi prime sur l'humble adhésion de foi.<sup>17</sup>

This review precisely gave a major place to Thérèse of Lisieux and to her 'experiential theology'. In this research of a 'new theology' nourished by spiritual experience, new models of doctors could be promoted: both Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena can be linked to the spiritual theology, a new field appeared in the interwar period thanks to a fusion between the mystical and the ascetical theology.<sup>18</sup>

In his homilies and apostolic letters accompanying the proclamation, Paul VI did not insist on the femininity of the two saints. He rapidly explained why women could be recognised as doctors of the Church in Teresa of Avila's homily but did not say anything about encouraging women to study and teach theology and mostly justified his gesture thanks to the theology of the laity developed in the last decades.

### 3 An Ambiguous Reception of the Event by the Press

In the media, the event was mostly presented as exceptional because of its novelty: for the first time, the Catholic Church proclaimed women doctors of the Church. Although he did not speak a lot about this, Paul VI seemed to underline this aspect by choosing to give the title not only to Teresa of Avila, as the Carmelite Order asked him, but also to Catherine of Siena. The Order of the Preachers itself had not made any request for Catherine of Siena and was quite surprised to learn the pope wanted to make her a doctor.<sup>19</sup> It seems that Paul VI wanted to make clear that he did not only make an exception for Teresa of Avila. He also made of the proclamation a great event by innovating a new ritual of proclamation: whereas his predecessors used to write an apostolic letter, he chose to proceed to a solemn proclamation during a mass in the basilica of Saint-Peter, as for the proclamation of a dogma.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Fouilloux, *Christianisme et eschatologie*, 143-4.

<sup>18</sup> Castellano Cervera, "Presencia de santa Teresa de Jesús en la teología y en la espiritualidad actual".

<sup>19</sup> Ballestrero, *Autoritratto di una vita*, 212-13.

<sup>20</sup> De la Cruz, "Glosa a la bibliografía del doctorado teresiano".

For most of the people, the event was a sign that the Catholic Church recognised an equality between men and women in the spiritual values and the great contribution women had made in the Church's history. It appeared as a consecration of the equal rights between the two sexes the Second Vatican Council had recalled (*Gaudium et spes*).<sup>21</sup> The press did not say much about their contribution to the doctrine, but Paul VI himself had spoken more about their action for the Church than of their writings. In his homilies, he insisted on their "sense of the Church" and action for it. Indeed, many parallels could be made with the life of the two doctors and that of Catholicism in 1970. Both had lived at a time of crisis: the period of the Avignon papacy and many divisions in the Church for Catherine of Siena, and the Reformation for Teresa of Avila. At a time when many controversies and divisions emerged in the Church, after the Council, Paul VI emphasises the model of obedience and love for the Church they could represent. When he announced the proclamations, in 1967, he was very preoccupied with some innovations emerged in the context of reformation, such as the *New Catechism* of the Church of Holland, published in 1966, which contained ambiguous positions on the Virgin Mary, the role of the pope, etc. This explains why, for the first synod, gathered in 1967, the subject chosen was the "crisis of faith". In the religious orders, the combination of the conciliar reformation and the wind of Mai 1968 led to a major crisis.<sup>22</sup> Here is what Paul VI said about the reformation Catherine of Siena promoted at her time:

E che cosa intendeva essa per rinnovamento e riforma della Chiesa? Non certamente il sovvertimento delle sue strutture essenziali, la ribellione ai Pastori, la via libera ai carismi personali, le arbitrarie innovazioni nel culto e nella disciplina, come alcuni vorrebbero ai nostri giorni. Al contrario, essa afferma ripetutamente che sarà resa la bellezza alla Sposa di Cristo e si dovrà fare la riforma 'non con guerra, ma con pace e quiete, con umili e continue orazioni, sudori e lagrime dei servi di Dio' (Cfr. *Dialogo*, cc. XV, LXXXVI, ed. cit., pp. 44, 197). Si tratta, quindi, per la Santa di una riforma anzitutto interiore, e poi esterna, ma sempre nella comunione e nell'obbedienza filiale verso i legittimi rappresentanti di Cristo.<sup>23</sup>

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**21** Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, 2, 29.

**22** For the Order of Preachers in France, cf. Raison du Cleuziou, *De la contemplation à la contestation*.

**23** "And what did she mean by the renewal and the reformation of the Church? Certainly not the overthrow of the essential structures, nor the rebellion against ministers, nor the free opening up to personal charisms, not the arbitrary innovations in cult and in discipline, as some would wish for nowadays. On the contrary, she affirms many a times that the bride of the Church will be beautified and that we will have to re-



If two exceptional figures were presented to the faithful, Paul VI did not insist on the model of action they could be for women, but for all the faithful, at a time of crisis in the Church. Paradoxically, the feminine aspect of the proclamation was much more underlined in the press than Paul VI had done. Moreover, although Paul VI did not say anything of the sort, some of the faithful understood the proclamations as a reaffirmation of the traditional feminine values. For them, the proclamation allowed an underlining of the differences between men and women at a time when they would have been shaken by radical feminism. In a letter supporting the request made by the Carmelite Order, sent by the *Institución Teresiana*, a network created at the beginning of the twentieth century to help the young women who entered at university, it was said:

Además, en la Santa de Ávila el Doctorado que va a proclamarse no disminuyo en nada su feminidad, sino que se conjugo, sublimándose con los caracteres que la antropología y la sociología señalan para la mujer perfecta, madre siempre en el cuerpo o en el alma y elemento de armonía serena en la sociedad de que forma parte. La Institución Teresiana, que desea promocionar a la mujer, 'pero como mujer y no como hombre', en expresión de su Fundador, estima que la concesión del título de Doctora a Santa Teresa de Jesús será optima ayuda a su importante misión.<sup>24</sup>

As seen earlier, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena had a different style of writing than the other doctors, because they did not study theology. This was understood as a proof of an inherent difference in the way men and women teach: women would teach more personally and would not be able to produce systematic writings as Thomas Aquinas did. In the lecture he made at the occasion of the proclamation, Cardinal Garrone, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, explained the new doctors taught as only women could,

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form 'not through war, but through peace and calmness, through continual and humble prayers, in the sweat and tears of Christ's servants' (cf. *Dialogue*, chap. XV, LXXXVI, pp. 4, 197). Thus, it is that, for the saint, a reformation is before all else interior and then exterior, but always in communion and filial obedience to the legitimate representatives of Christ". Paul VI, *Proclamazione di Santa Caterina da Siena Dottore della Chiesa*.

**24** "Furthermore, for the saint of Avila, the doctorate which will be proclaimed has in nothing diminished her femininity, but, on the contrary, combines with it, to sublime its characteristics that anthropology and sociology designate for the perfect woman, always mother in her body or in her soul, and element of serene harmony in the society of which she is part. The *Institución teresiana*, which hopes to promote women, 'but as a woman and not as a man', according to the words of its founder, believes that the reception of the title of doctor for Saint Teresa of Jesus will be an excellent aid for its important mission". Postulatory letter sent by Cardinal Arcadio M. Larraona, 28 February 1968, published in *Sacra pro Causis Sanctorum Congregatione, Urbis et orbis concessionis tituli Doctoris*, 8.

“not only because they did not go to school and take degrees, but because they are women and have something else to do. Or rather the same thing, but differently”:

Elles ne seraient pas à l’aise dans un exposé doctrinal où on doit faire abstraction de soi, des autres, de la vie, pour ordonner logiquement des idées. Elles restent présentes quand elles parlent plutôt que de remuer des concepts. C’est en fait d’elles-mêmes qu’elles parlent, de leur propre expérience. Et en même temps, tout en parlant d’elles-mêmes, elles s’adressent toujours à quelqu’un, elles sont toujours en dialogue [...].<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, Catherine of Siena’s major writing is called *The Dialogue of Divine Providence* and is a discussion between the Father and her about diverse truths of the faith. Both saints have developed an intense correspondence, with all kinds of people. Cardinal Garrone continues his reflexion on the femininity of their writings:

Pourquoi dire qu’elles écrivent comme seule une femme peut le faire? L’Église dont elles parlent n’est pas d’abord vécue comme un système de pensée, bien qu’elle puisse en être un, mais comme une famille vivante, où on communique aux joies et aux peines de l’autre, où on ne peut se reposer quand la vie des autres est en péril. [...] Elles nous montrent un ‘climat chaleureux et humain de la maison de Dieu’, c’est ainsi qu’une femme, et elle seule, peut être le témoin de ce qu’est un foyer. Ainsi, leur apport ne peut en aucun cas être purement théorique, car elles ont toujours affaire directement à des êtres vivants qu’elles veulent connaître, aimer et servir, à commencer par leur Seigneur [...].<sup>26</sup>

Finally, one last feminine aspect is underlined:

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**25** “They would not be at ease in a doctrinal presentation where one must make abstraction of one’s self, of others, of life, to order ideas logically. They remain present when they speak rather than exploring concepts. It is, in fact, of themselves that they speak, of their own experience. And at the same time, as they speak of themselves, they always address someone, they are always in dialogue [...]”. Garrone, “Sainte Catherine de Sienne et sainte Thérèse d’Avila docteurs de l’Église”, 26.

**26** “Why say that they write as only women can? The Church of which they speak is not first experienced as a system of thought, though it may be one, but as a living family, where we communicate to the joys and sorrows of the other, where we cannot rest when the life of others is in danger. [...] They show us a ‘human and welcoming setting for the house of God’, it is thus that women, and only them, can be the witness of what a home is. Therefore, their contribution can never be purely theoretical, because they always encounter directly with living beings who they wish to know, love and serve, beginning with the Lord. [...]”. Garrone, “Sainte Catherine de Sienne et sainte Thérèse d’Avila docteurs de l’Église”, 26.

Ni l'une ni l'autre n'ignorent la force de séduction très pure et très réelle qui émane de leur personne. Elles ne s'étonnent pas de voir des âmes venir à elles, conquises par leur 'charme'. Mais elles ne gardent rien pour elles-mêmes. Chez elles, l'humain est merveilleusement mis au service du surnaturel. Leur charisme ne tue pas en elles la femme mais met toutes leurs richesses au service de la foi.<sup>27</sup>

Another example is an article of *L'Homme nouveau*, "The Doctorate of a Woman", which entitles a paragraph: "she stays a woman", as if there was a contradiction between the doctorate and femininity.<sup>28</sup> Teresa of Avila would stay a woman because she teaches as a mother does, without complicated concepts, but with simple words, by making herself close to her reader:

Elle n'est pas l'égale [des docteurs], elle est bien plus. Elle fut leur mère. Ils l'ont tous reconnue. Elle a exercé pour eux, elle doit exercer encore pour nous une fonction qui est le don inimitable de la femme. Elle fut d'une manière éminente l'éducatrice.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, in the Catholic world, it seems that the event was understood both as the recognition of an equal contribution of men and women to the understanding of the doctrine and as an example of their diversity, because of the non-systematic theology Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena offer. Women do have access to the doctorate, but they are at the same time invited to keep their feminine way of teaching. In the echo to the proclamation, one can therefore see a mirror of women's conception in Catholicism at that time: there is no doubt on men and women's equality, but it is a kind of equality in difference because of the importance of the complementary between the two sexes. This idea will form the basis of the 'new feminism' promoted by Pope John Paul II later.

Of course, there is also a more progressive wing in the Catholic Church, but it is not this one that was at the forefront in the

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**27** "Neither one nor the other ignore the very pure and very real force of seduction which emanates from their person. They are not surprised to see souls come to them, conquered by their 'charm'. But they do not keep anything for themselves. For them, mankind is marvellously put to the service of the supernatural. Their charism does not kill the woman in them but puts all of their richness to the service of the faith". Garrone, "Sainte Catherine de Sienna et sainte Thérèse d'Avila docteurs de l'Église", 26.

**28** "The Doctorate of a Woman", 20.

**29** "She is not the equal of [the doctors], she is much more. She was their mother. They all recognised her. She exercised for them, she must exercise for us a function which is the inimitable gift of women. She was in an eminent way the educator". "The Doctorate of a Woman", 20.

proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church. If one looks at the actors working behind the scenes, in collaboration with the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, one can be surprised to discover most of them were linked to the conservative wing at the Second Vatican Council.<sup>30</sup> This can be interpreted as a sign of change in the way of considering the ‘women’s question’ in Catholicism: where there was opposition to the proclamation of women as doctors of the Church in the interwar period, there was none in the post-conciliar period. But in the light of what has been said, one can think that the proclamation may have been accepted because it could be put at the service of a reaffirmation of traditional values such as obedience, pontifical absolutism, primacy of the spiritual order over the temporal one, femininity, etc. Moreover, since the title was given posthumously, it did not necessarily imply changes for women in practice.

#### 4 Confronting Discourse and Practice

One can therefore wonder if the recognition of Teresa of Avila and of Catherine of Siena as doctors of the Church reflects the end of an exclusion of women from academical theology. As it was just said, the title recognises an authority for women who lived centuries ago, and the pope did not present the proclamation as a step forward for women. However, it is concomitant with an evolution in the theological field, with the arrival of women in faculties which remained exclusively masculine for centuries. Therefore, it may be useful to have a quick look at the history of women’s access to theology as a discipline.

Since the thirteenth century and the institutionalisation of theology in a scholastic framework, women were excluded from the discipline *de facto* because they could not study at university. An important date would therefore be 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council imposed the cloister to nuns and the University of Paris was created.<sup>31</sup> Whereas women could play an important intellectual part in the monastic world, they became marginalised. The only language they could use to talk about God was therefore their individual experience, which was less and less valued. Michela Pereira has shown the progressive opposition between a rational, systematic theology, which has its own method inherited from Aristotelianism, while another kind of knowledge, linked to community practices, interior

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**30** Aniceto Fernandez, Anastasio Ballestrero, Cardinal Michael Browne, Cardinal Arcadio Larraona. The last two are mentioned as “sympathizer cardinals” by Roy-Lysencourt, *Les membres du Coetus Internationalis Patrum au concile Vatican II*, 79-89, 97-103.

**31** Scattigno, “L’esperienza religiosa”, 11.

experience, consciousness of the body, was developing. There was a progressive discrepancy between a masculine and professional theology and a mystical and feminine one.

But things changed with women's arrival at university at the end of the nineteenth century, and moreover in the twentieth century, with the growth of the apostolate of the laity. On the one hand, there was an increasing demand for doctrinal formation from women, who were no longer satisfied with the piety that was proposed to them in the previous century. A good example is the *Cercle thomiste féminin*, created in 1925 by Emile Peillaube (1864-1934), a Marist father who taught at the Catholic Institute of Paris, whose aim was to base the spiritual life on dogma. It was a success and in the next few years, the Parisian model was imitated in other cities and the audience expanded to men.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the growth of women's activity in the public sphere justified giving them a stronger formation. In 1923 a special course was created at the University of the Sacred Heart in Milan to form women movement leaders, after Agostino Gemelli and Armida Barelli founded the *Gioventù femminile di Azione Cattolica*.<sup>33</sup> Specific structures were created, since theological faculties remained closed to women, at a time when they became more numerous at university. More generally, the apostolate of the laity grew and, in these national and international structures, women could take more responsibilities. One can think about Rosemary Goldie's case and about the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Apostolate of the Laity, created in 1952.<sup>34</sup> This Australian woman gave a presentation on the formation of the laity in 1953, spoke in front of the Catholic Action leaders of Portugal in 1957 and became the assistant of Vittorino Veronese, the Committee's president. In virtue of this function, she used to dialogue with many theologians associated with the preparation of those congresses.

On the other hand, the Holy See became aware of the need to offer a stronger doctrinal formation to nuns after the Second World War. The renewal of religious life was studied in various congresses held in Rome: the first International Congress of Religious (26 November-8 December 1950), the first International Congress of Educator Nuns (4-14 September 1951), and the first International Congress Superiors General of Institutes and Congregations of Pontifical Right (September 1952). This latter gave birth to the International Union of Superiors General.<sup>35</sup> A leitmotiv of all these congresses was

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**32** Jacquemet, "Cercle thomiste".

**33** Garutti Bellenzier, "La spiritualità delle donne nelle organizzazioni laicali"; Della Sudda, "Les défis du pontificat de Pie XI".

**34** Minvielle, *L'apostolat des laïcs à la veille du Concile (1949-1959)*, 301.

**35** Nardin, Rocca, "Unione Internazionale delle Superiore Generali (UISG)".

the necessity of creating new structures of formation, adapted to the needs of the religious. This explains that the first decision taken by the International Union of superiors general was the foundation of the institute *Regina Mundi*, in 1954, whose aim was to welcome and help nuns from all over the world who came to study in the Roman universities.<sup>36</sup>

In this decade, many institutes of religious sciences were created in many countries. These are intermediary structures: founded because faculties of theology remained reserved to the clergy's formation, they were often related to them in a second step. For example, *Regina Mundi* was aggregated to the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1970, in the faculty of theology. The same process has been studied by Madeleine Sauvé for the *Institut supérieur de sciences religieuses* of Montréal.<sup>37</sup> She noticed this institute was created in 1953, independently from the faculty of theology, because the latter could only award grades in theology and that in this time, it was not possible to award them to laics. Indeed, an important point to keep in mind is that in canon law, the laity includes all the faithful who have not received the sacerdotal ordination. Even if they made religious vows, nuns are part of the laity.

If we lack a precise chronology on this subject, we can say that the faculties of theology started opening to women in the 1940s, but only marginally. The first doctor in theology would be the Benedictine Anna von Bolschwing in 1946, in Vienna.<sup>38</sup> It is mostly in the German area that pioneers appear in this field, in the 1960s: Herlinde Pissarek-Hudelist in Innsbruck, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza in Münster in 1962, Helen Schüngel-Straumann in Bonn in 1969. In France, the faculty of theology of the Catholic Institute of Paris was authorised to admit women in 1958, and that of Lyon in 1963.<sup>39</sup>

The emphasis put by the Second Vatican Council on the necessary formation of the laity (*Apostolicam actuositatem*)<sup>40</sup> may have encouraged this movement. It is in 1966 that the first woman arrived in the faculty of theology of the Pontifical Gregorian University, as an auditor. The next year, she could register as a student. In Italy, it was only in 1970 that a woman, Nella Filippi received a doctoral degree, at the Angelicum.<sup>41</sup> What is interesting regarding our matter is that Paul VI intervened personally on her behalf, since it seemed to be still

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**36** Avonts, "Regina Mundi".

**37** Sauvé, *L'Institut supérieur*, 28-69.

**38** Capozza, "Voci inattese in lingua tedesca", 177.

**39** Bressolette, "L'Institut catholique de Paris", 49; Moulinet, "L'université catholique de Lyon", 59.

**40** Paul VI, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity Apostolicam actuositatem*, 6, 29.

**41** Valenziano, "Una narrazione 'parzialmente' autobiografica", 146.

complicated for women to be recognised as theologians in Rome. It seems that he had already played a role in Rosemary Goldie's nomination as a teacher in the Pontifical Lateran University in 1967. She had no academic title and had no scholastic formation in theology but had a good field experience in the theology of the laity she was invited to teach. It was first an experiment, at the Institute of Pastoral theology, and then it became a real discipline and Rosemary Goldie became a full professor in 1976. Once again, one can see the role of the increasing place recognised to the laity in the progressive 'de-clericalisation' of theology. In the Pontifical Gregorian University, the first woman teaching in the faculty of theology was Kari Børresen, as an invited professor, in 1977. Then, it was only in 1984 that a woman was nominated as a permanent professor.

Even if Paul VI himself made no link between these two interventions in favour of women in the academic field and the proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church, one can understand these two events as related. The second one did not directly influence the arrival of women in theology but can be seen as a gesture to encourage a better contribution of women. Pope Francis presented it in this way in his speech at the award ceremony of the Ratzinger Prize in 2018:

It is necessary that this contribution be encouraged, and that it finds a wider space, in keeping with the growing presence of women in the various fields of responsibility of the Church, in particular, though not only, in the cultural field. Since Paul VI proclaimed Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena Doctors of the Church, no doubt may be permitted regarding the fact that women can reach the highest peaks in the understanding of the faith. John Paul II and Benedict XVI also confirmed this by including the names of other women in the series of Doctors: St. Therese of Lisieux and St. Hildegard of Bingen.<sup>42</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

Theology has been a clerical – and therefore masculine – discipline for centuries, since its institutionalization at university, of which women were excluded. They were more generally put apart from doctrinal teaching in the Church because of Saint Paul's harsh words (1 Cor. 14, 34) which were quickly understood in a strict way. Since teaching is a function linked to the pastors, it was feared women would ask for more if they were granted a certain form of public

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<sup>42</sup> Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis*.

teaching, according to the famous myth of the Pandora box. It was therefore taken for granted that women had to transmit the faith and not to define it.

In view of this traditional conception of magisterium linked to pastorship in the Catholic Church, the proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church in 1970 may appear as a major change. Two main reasons may explain this rupture. On the one hand, women's arrival at university and the new needs for formation created by their increasing action in the public sphere progressively conducted to their access to doctrinal formation. On the other hand, the promotion of the apostolate of the laity in the twentieth century and a renewal of ecclesiology at the Second Vatican Council tended to reduce the distinction between the Teaching and the Taught Church.

Could the proclamation therefore be understood as a sign that the 'stained-glass ceiling' of theology has been crossed? There is nothing surer since the proclamation was not so much the occasion of recognizing a new role to women but to highlight a new way to conceive theology in the Catholic Church. Even more, for some Catholics, it was an occasion to reaffirm traditional feminine values such as maternity, docility, etc. The fact Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena were both considered as 'spirituals', more than as theologians, have been seen as a rebalancing of theology. Women's contribution to theology would be teaching 'by the heart', whereas men would be on the side of rationality.

If the proclamation of 1970 was perhaps considered by Pope Paul VI as an encouragement given to women in theology, they were no direct consequences of his gesture. Indeed, if women were now able to study theology at university, it remained difficult for them to become teachers, still today. The situation varies among countries: where theological faculties are integrated to the State's universities, it seems easier for laics to have access to theology, whereas things are more complicated when they're not. Indeed, in this last case, teaching positions are more accessible to the clergy or to religious who benefit of their community's support. Moreover, putting their competences at the service of the Church may be still difficult for women theologians. It is only in 2014 that some of them were appointed to the International Theological Commission and only in 2018 that some of them integrated the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as experts.<sup>43</sup> Even if Pope Paul VI gave a clear sign of gender equality in the theological field by proclaiming Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena doctors of the Church, one can see a 'stained-glass ceiling' remains for women who want to contribute to the doctrinal function in the Roman Catholic Church.

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<sup>43</sup> Senèze, "Pour la première fois, le pape nomme des femmes".



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