

The Dialogue of Saint Catherine of Siena

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THE DIALOGUE OF SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA "Man is placed above all creatures, and not beneath them, and he cannot be satisfied or content except in something greater than himself. Greater than himself there is nothing but Myself, the Eternal God. Therefore I alone can satisfy him, and, because he is deprived of this satisfaction by his guilt, he remains in continual torment and pain. Weeping follows pain, and when he begins to weep, the wind strikes the tree of self-love, which he has made the principle of all his being." (Page 203). This work was dictated by Saint Catherine of Siena during a state of ecstasy while in dialogue with God the Father. Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) was declared a Doctor of the Church on October 4, 1970. **THE DIALOGUE OF THE SERAPHIC VIRGIN CATHERINE OF SIENA** DICTATED BY HER, WHILE IN A STATE OF ECSTASY, TO HER SECRETARIES, AND COMPLETED IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1370 TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HER DEATH BY AN EYE-WITNESS TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN, AND PRECEDED BY AN INTRODUCTION ON THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE SAINT, BY ALGAR THOROLD A NEW AND ABRIDGED EDITION Originally published in 1907 by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., London. **CONTENTS** INTRODUCTION A TREATISE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE A TREATISE OF DISCRETION A TREATISE OF PRAYER A TREATISE OF OBEDIENCE **THE DIALOGUE OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA** **INTRODUCTION** It would be hard to say whether the Age of the Saints, *le moyen âge énorme et délicat*, has suffered more at the hands of friends or foes. It is at least certain that the medieval period affects those who approach it in the manner of a powerful personality who may awaken love or hatred, but cannot be passed over with indifference. When the contempt of the eighteenth century for the subject, the result of that century's lack of historic imagination, was thawed by the somewhat rhetorical enthusiasm of Chateaubriand and of the Romanticists beyond the Rhine, hostility gave place to an indiscriminating admiration. The shadows fell out of the picture; the medieval time became a golden age when heaven and earth visibly mingled, when Christian society reached the zenith of perfection which constituted it a model for all succeeding ages. Then came the German professors with all the paraphernalia of scientific history, and, looking through their instruments, we, who are not Germans, have come to take a more critical and, perhaps, a juster view of the matter. The Germans, too, have had disciples of other nations, and though conclusions on special points may differ, in every country now at a certain level of education, the same views prevail as to the principles on which historical investigation should be conducted. And yet, while no one with a reputation to lose would venture on any personal heresy as to the standards of legitimate evidence, the same facts still seem to lead different minds to differing appreciations. For history, written solely *ad narrandum*, is not history; the historian's task is not over when he has disinterred facts and established dates: it is then that the most delicate part of his work begins. History, to be worthy of the name, must produce the illusion of living men and women, and, in order to do this successfully, must be based, not only upon insight into human nature in general, but also upon personal appreciation of the particular men and women engaged in the episodes with which it deals. With facts as such, there can indeed be no tampering; but for the determination of their significance, of their value, as illustrative of a course of policy or of the character of those who were responsible for their occurrence, we have to depend in great measure on the personality of

the historian. It is evident that a man who lacks the sympathetic power to enter into the character that he attempts to delineate, will hardly be able to make that character live for us. For in Art as well as Life, sympathy is power. Now, while this is true of all history whatever, it is perhaps truer of the history of the middle ages than of that of any more recent period, nor is the reason of this far 5 to seek. The middle ages were a period fruitful in great individuals who molded society, to an extent that perhaps no succeeding period has been. In modern times the formula, an abstraction such as "Capital" or the "Rights of Man" has largely taken the place of the individual as a plastic force. The one great Tyrant of the nineteenth century found his opportunity in the anarchy which followed the French Revolution. The spoil was then necessarily to the strong. But even Napoleon was conquered at last rather by a conspiracy of the slowly developing anonymous forces of his time than by the superior skill or strength of an individual rival. The lion could hardly have been caught in such meshes in the trecento. Then, the fate of populations was bound up with the animosities of princes, and, in order to understand the state of Europe at any particular moment of that period, it is necessary to understand the state of soul of the individuals who happened, at the time, to be the political stakeholders. It must not be thought, however, that the personality of the prince was the only power in the medieval state, for the prince himself was held to be ultimately amenable to an idea, which so infinitely transcended earthly distinctions as to level them all in relation to itself. Religion was in those days a mental and social force which we, in spite of the petulant acerbity of modern theological controversies, have difficulty in realizing. Prince and serf would one day appear as suppliants before the Judgment-seat of Christ, and the theory of medieval Christianity was considerably in favor of the serf. The Father of Christendom, at once Priest and King, anointed and consecrated as the social exponent of the Divine Justice, could not, in his own person, escape its rigors, but must, one day, render an account of his stewardship. Nor did the medieval mind, distinguishing between the office and the individual, by any means shrink from contemplating the fate of the faithless steward. In a "Last Judgment" by Angelico at Florence, the ministers of justice seem to have a special joy in hurrying off to the pit popes and cardinals and other ecclesiastics. For it is an insufficient criticism that has led some to suppose that the medieval Church weighed on the conscience of Christendom solely, or even primarily, as an arbitrary fact: that the priesthood, aided by the ignorance of the people, succeeded in establishing a monstrous claim to control the destinies of the soul by quasi-magical agencies and the powers of excommunication. Nothing can be further from the truth. Probably at no period has the Christian conscience realized more profoundly that the whole external fabric of Catholicism, its sacraments, its priesthood, its discipline, was but the phenomenal expression, necessary and sacred in its place, of the Idea of Christianity, that the vitality of that Idea was the life by which the Church lived, and that by that Idea all Christians, priests as well as laymen, rulers as well as subjects, would at the last be judged. When Savonarola replied to the Papal Legate, who, in his confusion, committed the blunder of adding to the formula of excommunication from the Church Militant, a sentence of exclusion from the Church Triumphant, "You cannot do it," he was in the tradition of medieval orthodoxy. Moreover, even though the strict logic of her theory might have required it, the hierarchical Church was not considered as the sole manifestation of the Divine Will to Christendom. The unanimity with which the Christian idea was accepted in those times made the saint a well-known type of human character just as nowadays we have the millionaire or the philanthropist. Now the saint, although under the same ecclesiastical dispensation as other Christians, was 6 conceived to have his own special relations with God, which amounted almost to a personal revelation. In particular he was held to be exempt from many of the limitations of fallen humanity. His prayers were of certain efficacy; the customary uniformities of experience were thought to be constantly transcended by the power that dwelt within him; he was often accepted by the people as the bearer to Christendom of a Divine message over and above the revelation of which the hierarchy was the legitimate guardian. Not infrequently indeed that message was one of warning or correction to the hierarchy. Sabatier points out truly that the medieval saints occupied much the same relation to the ecclesiastical system as the Prophets of Israel had done, under the older dispensation, to the Jewish Priesthood. They came out of their hermitages or cloisters, and with lips touched by coal from the altar denounced iniquity wherever they found it, even in the

highest places. It is needless to say that they were not revolutionaries -- had they been so indeed the state of Europe might have been very different today; for them, as for other Christians, the organization of the Church was Divine; it was by the sacred responsibilities of his office that they judged the unworthy pastor. An apt illustration of this attitude occurs in the life of the Blessed Colomba of Rieti. Colomba, who was a simple peasant, was called to the unusual vocation of preaching. The local representatives of the Holy Office, alarmed at the novelty, imprisoned her and took the opportunity of a visit of Alexander VI. to the neighboring town of Perugia to bring her before his Holiness for examination. When the saint was brought into the Pope's presence, she reverently kissed the hem of his garment, and, being overcome with devotion at the sight of the Vicar of Christ, fell into an ecstasy, during which she invoked the Divine judgment on the sins of Rodrigo Borgia. It was useless to attempt to stop her; she was beyond the control of inquisitor or guards; the Pope had to hear her out. He did so; proclaimed her complete orthodoxy, and set her free with every mark of reverence. In this highly characteristic episode scholastic logic appears, for once, to have been justified, at perilous odds, of her children. . . . *** Midway between sky and earth hangs a City Beautiful: Siena, *Vetus Civitas Virginis*. The town seems to have descended as a bride from airy regions, and lightly settled on the summits of three hills which it crowns with domes and clustering towers. As seen from the vineyards which clothe the slopes of the hills or with its crenellated wall and slender-necked Campanile silhouetted against the evening sky from the neighboring heights of Belcaro, the city is familiar to students of the early Italian painters. It forms the fantastic and solemn background of many a masterpiece of the *trecentisti*, and seems the only possible home, if home they can have on earth, of the glorified persons who occupy the foreground. It would create no surprise to come, while walking round the ancient walls, suddenly, at a turn in the road, on one of the sacred groups so familiarly recurrent to the memory in such an environment: often indeed one experiences a curious illusion when a passing friar happens for a moment to "compose" with cypress and crumbling archway. Siena, once the successful rival of Florence in commerce, war, and politics, has, fortunately for the more vital interests which it represents, long desisted from such minor matters. Its worldly ruin has been complete for more than five hundred years; in truth the town has never recovered from the plague which, in the far-off 7 days of 1348, carried off 80,000 of its population. Grassy mounds within the city walls mark the shrinking of the town since the date of their erection, and Mr. Murray gives its present population at less than 23,000. The free Ghibelline Republic which, on that memorable 4th of September 1260, defeated, with the help of Pisa, at Monte Aperto, the combined forces of the Guelf party in Tuscany, has now, after centuries of servitude to Spaniard and Austrian, to be content with the somewhat pinchbeck dignity of an Italian Prefettura. At least the architectural degradation which has overtaken Florence at the hands of her modern rulers has been as yet, in great measure, spared to Siena. Even the railway has had the grace to conceal its presence in the folds of olive which enwrap the base of the hill on which the city is set. Once inside the rose-colored walls, as we pass up the narrow, roughly paved streets between lines of palaces, some grim and massive like Casa Tolomei, built in 1205, others delicate specimens of Italian Gothic like the Palazzo Saracini, others again illustrating the combination of grace and strength which marked the domestic architecture of the Renaissance at its prime, like the Palazzo Piccolomini, we find ourselves in a world very remote indeed from anything with which the experience of our own utilitarian century makes us familiar. And yet, as we rub our eyes, unmistakably a world of facts, though of facts, as it were, visibly interpreted by the deeper truth of an art whose insistent presence is on all sides of us. Here is Casa Tolomei, a huge cube of rough-hewn stone stained to the color of tarnished silver with age, once the home of that Madonna Pia whose story lives forever in the verse of Dante. Who shall distinguish between her actual tale of days and the immortal life given her by the poet? In her moment of suffering at least she has been made eternal. And not far from that ancient fortress-home, in a winding alley that can hardly be called a street, is another house of medieval Siena -- no palace this time, but a small tradesman's dwelling. In the fourteenth century it belonged to Set Giacomo Benincasa, a dyer. Part of it has now been converted into a chapel, over the door of which are inscribed the words: *Sponsae Xti Katerinae Domus*. Here, on March 5, 1347, being Palm Sunday, was born Giacomo's daughter Caterina, who still lives one of

the purest glories of the Christian Church under the name of St. Catherine of Siena. More than 500 years have passed since the daughter of the Siennese dyer entered into the rest of that sublime and touching symbolism under which the Church half veils and half reveals her teaching as to the destiny of man. Another case, but how profoundly more significant than that of poor Madonna Pia, of the intertwining of the world of fact with the deeper truth of art. St. Catherine was born at the same time as a twin-sister, who did not survive. Her parents, Giacomo and Lapa Benincasa, were simple townspeople, prosperous, and apparently deserving their reputation for piety. Lapa, the daughter of one Mucio Piagenti, a now wholly forgotten poet, bore twenty-five children to her husband, of whom thirteen only appear to have grown up. This large family lived together in the manner still obtaining in Italy, in the little house, till the death of Giacomo in 1368. There are stirring pages enough in Christian hagiology. Who can read unmoved of the struggles towards his ideal of an Augustine or a Loyola, or of the heroic courage of a Theresa, affirming against all human odds the divinity of her mission, and justifying, after years of labor, her incredible assertions by the steadfastness of her will? There are other pages in the lives of the saints, less dramatic, it may be, but breathing, nevertheless, a naïve grace and poetry all their own: the childhood of those servants of Christ who have borne His yoke from the dawn of their days forms their charming theme. Here the blazing illuminations of the Revelation are toned down to a soft and tender glow, in which the curves and lines of natural humanity do but seem more pathetically human. The hymn at Lauds for the Feast of the Holy Innocents represents those unconscious martyrs as playing with their palms and crowns under the very altar of Heaven: -- *"Vos prima Christi victima Grex immolatorum tener Aram sub ipsam simplices Palma et coronis luditis!"* And so these other saintly babies play at hermits or monasteries instead of the soldiers and housekeeping beloved of more secular-minded infants. Heaven condescends to their pious revels: we are told of the Blessed Hermann Joseph, the Premonstratensian, that his infantile sports were joyously shared by the Divine Child Himself. He would be a morose pedant indeed who should wish to rationalize this white mythology. The tiny Catherine was no exception to the rest of her canonized brothers and sisters. At the age of five it was her custom on the staircase to kneel and repeat a "Hail Mary" at each step, a devotion so pleasing to the angels, that they would frequently carry her up or down without letting her feet touch the ground, much to the alarm of her mother, who confided to Father Raymond of Capua, the Dominican confessor of the family, her fears of an accident. Nor were these phenomena the only reward of her infant piety. From the day that she could walk she became very popular among her numerous relatives and her parents' friends, who gave her the pet name of Euphrosyne, to signify the grief-dispelling effect of her conversation, and who were constantly inviting her to their houses on some pretext or other. Sent one morning on an errand to the house of her married sister Bonaventura, she was favored with a beautiful vision which, as it has an important symbolical bearing on the great task of her after-life, I will relate in Father Raymond's words, slightly abridging their prolixity. "So it happened that Catherine, being arrived at the age of six, went one day with her brother Stephen, who was a little older than herself, to the house of their sister Bonaventura, who was married to one Niccolò, as has been mentioned above, in order to carry something or give some message from their mother Lapa. Their mother's errand accomplished, while they were on the way back from their sister's house to their own and were passing along a certain valley, called by the people Valle Piatta, the holy child, lifting her eyes, saw on the opposite side above the Church of the Preaching Friars a most beautiful room, adorned with regal magnificence, in which was seated, on an imperial throne, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, clothed in pontifical vestments, and wearing on His head a papal tiara; with Him were the princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, and the holy evangelist John. Astounded at such a sight, Catherine stood still, and with fixed and immovable look, gazed, full of love, on her Savior, who, appearing in so marvelous a manner, in order sweetly to gain her love to Himself, fixed on her the eyes of His Majesty, and, with a tender smile, lifted over her His right hand, and, making the sign of the Holy Cross in the manner of a bishop, left with her the gift of His eternal benediction. The grace of this gift was so efficacious, that Catherine, beside herself, and transformed into Him upon whom she gazed with such love, forgetting not only the road she was on, but also herself, although naturally a timid child, stood still for a space with lifted and immovable eyes in the public

road, where men and beasts were continually passing, and would certainly have continued to stand there as long as the vision lasted, had she not been violently diverted by others. But while the Lord was working these marvels, the child Stephen, leaving her standing still, continued his way down hill, thinking that she was following, but, seeing her immovable in the distance and paying no heed to his calls, he returned and pulled her with his hands, saying: 'What are you doing here? why do you not come?' Then Catherine, as if waking from a heavy sleep, lowered her eyes and said: 'Oh, if you had seen what I see, you would not distract me from so sweet a vision!' and lifted her eyes again on high; but the vision had entirely disappeared, according to the will of Him who had granted it, and she, not being able to endure this without pain, began with tears to reproach herself for having turned her eyes to earth." Such was the "call" of St. Catherine of Siena, and, to a mind intent on mystical significance, the appearance of Christ, in the semblance of His Vicar, may fitly appear to symbolize the great mission of her after-life to the Holy See. *** Much might be said of the action of Catherine on her generation. Few individuals perhaps have ever led so active a life or have succeeded in leaving so remarkable an imprint of their personality on the events of their time. Catherine the Peacemaker reconciles warring factions of her native city and heals an international feud between Florence and the Holy See. Catherine the Consoler pours the balm of her gentle spirit into the lacerated souls of the suffering wherever she finds them, in the condemned cell or in the hospital ward. She is one of the most voluminous of letter-writers, keeping up a constant correspondence with a band of disciples, male and female, all over Italy, and last, but not least, with the distant Pope at Avignon. Her lot was cast on evil days for the Church and the Peninsula. The trecento, the apogee of the middle ages was over. Francis and Dominic had come and gone, and though Franciscans and Dominicans remained and numbered saints among their ranks, still the first fervor of the original inspiration was a brightness that had fled. The moral state of the secular clergy was, according to Catherine herself, too often one of the deepest degradation, while, in the absence of the Pontiff, the States of the Church were governed by papal legates, mostly men of blood and lust, who ground the starving people under their heel. Assuredly it was not from Christian bishops who would have disgraced Islam that their subjects could learn the path of peace. The Pope's residence at Avignon, the Babylonish Captivity, as it was called, may have seemed, at the time when his departure from Rome was resolved upon, a wise measure of temporary retreat before the anarchy which was raging round the city of St. Peter. But not many years passed before it became evident that Philip the Fair, the astute adviser to whose counsel -- and possibly more than counsel -- Clement had submitted in leaving Rome, was the only one who profited by the exile of the Pope. Whatever the truth may be about the details of Clement's election, so far as his subservience to the French king went, he might have remained Archbishop of Bordeaux to the end of his days. He accepted for his relations costly presents from Philip; he placed the papal authority at his service in the gravely suspicious matter of the suppression of the Templars. Gradually the Holy See in exile lost its ecumenical character and became more and more the vassal of the French crown. Such a decline in its position could not fail to affect even its doctrinal prestige. It was well enough in theory to apply to the situation such maxims as *Ubi Petrus ibi Ecclesia*, or, as the Avignonese doctors paraphrased it, *Ubi Papa ibi Roma*; but, in practice, Christendom grew shy of a French Pope, living under the eye and power of the French king. The Romans, who had always treated the Pope badly, were furious when at last they had driven him away, and gratified their spite by insulting their exiled rulers. Nothing could exceed their contempt for the Popes of Avignon, who, as a matter of fact, though weak and compliant, were in their personal characters worthy ecclesiastics. They gave no credit to John XXII. for his genuine zeal in the cause of learning, or the energy with which he restored ecclesiastical studies in the Western Schools. For Benedict XII., a retiring and abstemious student, they invented the phrase: *bibere papaliter* -- to drink like the Pope. Clement VI. they called *poco religioso*, forgetting his noble charity at the time of the plague, and also the fact that Rome herself had produced not a few popes whose lives furnished a singular commentary on the ethics of the Gospel. The real danger ahead to Christendom was the possibility of an Italian anti-Pope who should fortify his position by recourse to the heretical elements scattered through the peninsula. Those elements were grave and numerous. The Fraticelli or Spiritual Franciscans, although crushed

for the time by the iron hand of Pope Boniface, rather flourished than otherwise under persecution. These dangerous heretics had inherited a garbled version of the mysticism of Joachim of Flora, which constituted a doctrine perhaps more radically revolutionary than that of any heretics before or since. It amounted to belief in a new revelation of the Spirit, which was to supersede the dispensation of the Son as that had taken the place of the dispensation of the Father. According to the Eternal Gospel of Gerard of San Domino, who had derived it, not without much adroit manipulation, from the writings of Abbot Joachim, the Roman Church was on the eve of destruction, and it was the duty of the *Spirituali*, the saints who had received the new dispensation, to fly from the contamination of her communion. An anti-Pope who should have rallied to his allegiance these elements of schism would have been a dangerous rival to a French Pope residing in distant Avignon, however legitimate his title. Nor was there wanting outside Italy matter for grave anxiety. Germs of heresy were fermenting north of the Alps; the preaching of Wycliffe, the semi-Islamism of the Hungarian Beghards, the Theism of the Patarini of Dalmatia, the erotic mysticism of the Adamites of Paris, indicated a widespread anarchy in the minds of Christians. Moreover, the spiritual difficulties of the Pope were complicated by his temporal preoccupations. For good or ill, it had come to be essential to the action of the Holy See that the successor of the penniless fisherman should have his place among the princes of the earth. The papal monarchy had come about, as most things come about in this world, by what seems to have been the inevitable force of circumstances. The decay of the Imperial power in Italy due to the practical abandonment of the Western Empire -- for the ruler of Constantinople lived at too great a distance to be an effective Emperor of the West -- had resulted in a natural increase of secular importance to the See of Rome. To the genius of Pope Gregory I., one of the few men whom their fellows have named both Saint and Great, was due the development of the political situation thus created in Italy. 11 Chief and greatest of bishops in his day was St. Gregory the Great. Seldom, if ever, has the papal dignity been sustained with such lofty enthusiasm, such sagacious political insight. Himself a Roman of Rome, *Romano di Roma*, as those who possess that privilege still call themselves today, the instinct of government was his by hereditary right. He had the defects as well as the qualities of the statesman. His theological writings, which are voluminous and verbose, are marked rather by a sort of canonized common sense than by exalted flights of spirituality. His missionary enterprise was characterized by a shrewd and gracious condescension to the limitations of human nature. Thus he counsels St. Augustine, who had consulted him as to the best means of extirpating the pagan customs of our English forefathers, to deal gently with these ancient survivals. He ruled that the celebration of the Festivals of the Sabots should if possible be held at the times and places at which the people had been in the habit of meeting together to worship the gods. They would thus come to associate the new religion with their traditional merry-makings, and their conversion would be gradually, and as it were unconsciously, effected. It was a kindly and statesmanlike thought. In this way Gregory may truly be looked upon as the founder of popular Catholicism, that "pensive use and wont religion," not assuredly in the entirety of its details Christian, but at least profoundly Catholic, as weaving together in the web of its own secular experience of man so large a proportion of the many-colored threads that have at any time attached his hopes and fears to the mysterious unknown which surrounds him. No miracle is needed to explain the political ascendancy which such a man inevitably came to acquire in an Italy deserted by the Empire, and, but for him and the organization which depended on him, at the mercy of the invading Lombard. More and more, people came to look on the Pope as their temporal ruler no less than as their spiritual father. In many cases, indeed, his was the only government they knew. Kings and nobles had conferred much property on the Roman Church. By the end of the sixth century the Bishop of Rome held, by the right of such donations to his See, large tracts of country, not only in Italy, but also in Sicily, Corsica, Gaul, and even Asia and Africa. Gregory successfully defended his Italian property against the invaders, and came to the relief of the starving population with corn from Sicily and Africa, thus laying deep in the hearts of the people the foundations of the secular power of the Papacy. It would be an unnecessary digression from our subject to work out in detail the stages by which the Pope came to take his place first as the Italian vicar of a distant emperor, and at length, as the result of astute statecraft and the

necessities of the case, among the princes of Europe, as their chief and arbiter. So much as has been said was, however, necessary for the comprehension of the task with which Catherine measured, for the time, successfully her strength. It was given to the Popolana of Siena, by the effect of her eloquence in persuading the wavering will of the Pope to return to his See, to bring about what was, for the moment, the only possible solution of that Roman question, which, hanging perpetually round the skirts of the Bride of Christ, seems at every step to impede her victorious advance. *** Nevertheless, it is neither the intrinsic importance nor the social consequences of her actions that constitute the true greatness of St. Catherine. Great ends may be pursued by essentially small means, in an aridity and narrowness of temper that 12 goes far to discount their actual achievement. History, and in particular the history of the Church, is not wanting in such instances. Savonarola set great ends before himself -- the freedom of his country and the regeneration of the state; but the spirit in which he pursued them excludes him from that Pantheon of gracious souls in which humanity enshrines its true benefactors. "Soul, as a quality of style, is a fact," and the soul of St. Catherine's *gesta* expressed itself in a "style" so winning, so sweetly reasonable, as to make her the dearest of friends to all who had the privilege of intimate association with her, and a permanent source of refreshment to the human spirit. She intuitively perceived life under the highest possible forms, the forms of Beauty and Love. Truth and Goodness were, she thought, means for the achievement of those two supreme ends. The sheer beauty of the soul "in a state of Grace" is a point on which she constantly dwells, hanging it as a bait before those whom she would induce to turn from evil. Similarly the ugliness of sin, as much as its wickedness, should warn us of its true nature. Love, that love of man for man which, in deepest truth, *is*, in the words of the writer of the First Epistle of St. John, God Himself, is, at once, the highest achievement of man and his supreme and satisfying beatitude. The Symbols of Catholic theology were to her the necessary and fitting means of transit, so to speak. See, in the following pages, the fine allegory of the Bridge of the Sacred Humanity, of the soul in viâ on its dusty pilgrimage towards those gleaming heights of vision. "Truth" was to her the handmaid of the spiritualized imagination, not, as too often in these days of the twilight of the soul, its tyrant and its gaoler. Many of those who pass lives of unremitting preoccupation with the problems of truth and goodness are wearied and cumbered with much serving. We honor them, and rightly; but if they have nothing but this to offer us, our hearts do not run to meet them, as they fly to the embrace of those rare souls who inhabit a serener, more pellucid atmosphere. Among these spirits of the air, St. Catherine has taken a permanent and foremost place. She is among the few guides of humanity who have the perfect manner, the irresistible attractiveness, of that positive purity of heart, which not only sees God, but diffuses Him, as by some natural law of refraction, over the hearts of men. The Divine nuptials, about which the mystics tell us so much, have been accomplished in her, Nature and Grace have lain down together, and the mysteries of her religion seem but the natural expression of a perfectly balanced character, an unquenchable love and a deathless will. *** The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena was dictated to her secretaries by the Saint in ecstasy. Apart from the extraordinary circumstances of its production, this work has a special interest. The composition of the Siennese dyer's daughter, whose will, purified and sublimated by prayer, imposed itself on popes and princes, is an almost unique specimen of what may be called "ecclesiastical" mysticism; for its special value lies in the fact that from first to last it is nothing more than a mystical exposition of the creeds taught to every child in the Catholic poor-schools. Her insight is sometimes very wonderful. How subtle, for instance, is the analysis of the state of the "worldly man" who loves God for his own pleasure or profit! The special snares of the devout are cut through by the keen logic of one who has experienced and 13 triumphed over them. Terrible, again, is the retribution prophesied to the "unworthy ministers of the Blood." And so every well-known form of Christian life, healthy or parasitic, is treated of, detailed, analyzed incisively, remorselessly, and then subsumed under the general conception of God's infinite loving-kindness and mercy. The great mystics have usually taken as their starting-point what, to most, is the goal hardly to be reached; their own treatment of the preliminary stages of spirituality is frequently conventional and *jejune*. Compare, for instance, the first book with the two succeeding ones, of Ruysbrock's *Ornement des Noces spirituelles*, that unique breviary of the Christian Platonian.

Another result of their having done so is that, with certain noble exceptions, the literature of this subject has fallen into the hands of a class of writers, or rather purveyors, well-intentioned no doubt, but not endowed with the higher spiritual and mental faculties, whom it is not unfair to describe as the *feuilletonistes* of piety. Such works, brightly bound, are appropriately exposed for sale in the Roman shop-windows, among the gaudy *objets de religion* they so much resemble. To keep healthy and raise the tone of devotional literature is surely an eighth spiritual work of mercy. St. Philip Neri's advice in the matter was to prefer those writers whose names were preceded by the title of Saint. In the *Dialogo* we have a great saint, one of the most extraordinary women who ever lived, treating, in a manner so simple and familiar as at times to become almost colloquial, of the elements of practical Christianity. Passages occur frequently of lofty eloquence, and also of such literary perfection that this book is held by critics to be one of the classics of the age and land which produced Boccaccio and Petrarch. To-day, in the streets of Siena, the same Tuscan idiom can be heard, hardly altered since the days of St. Catherine. One word as to the translation. I have almost always followed the text of Gigli, a learned Siennese ecclesiastic, who edited the complete works of St. Catherine in the last century. His is the latest edition printed of the *Dialogo*. Once or twice I have preferred the *cinquecento* Venetian editor. My aim has been to translate as literally as possible, and at the same time to preserve the characteristic rhythm of the sentences, so suggestive in its way of the sing-song articulation of the Siennese of today. St. Catherine has no style as such; she introduces a metaphor and forgets it; the sea, a vine, and a plough will often appear in the same sentence, sometimes in the same phrase. In such cases I have occasionally taken the liberty of adhering to the first simile when the confusion of metaphor in the original involves hopeless obscurity of expression. VIAREGGIO, September 1906. 14

A TREATISE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE *How a soul, elevated by desire of the honor of God, and of the salvation of her neighbors, exercising herself in humble prayer, after she had seen the union of the soul, through love, with God, asked of God four requests.* The soul, who is lifted by a very great and yearning desire for the honor of God and the salvation of souls, begins by exercising herself, for a certain space of time, in the ordinary virtues, remaining in the cell of self-knowledge, in order to know better the goodness of God towards her. This she does because knowledge must precede love, and only when she has attained love, can she strive to follow and to clothe herself with the truth. But, in no way, does the creature receive such a taste of the truth, or so brilliant a light therefrom, as by means of humble and continuous prayer, founded on knowledge of herself and of God; because prayer, exercising her in the above way, unites with God the soul that follows the footprints of Christ Crucified, and thus, by desire and affection, and union of love, makes her another Himself. Christ would seem to have meant this, when He said: *To him who will love Me and will observe My commandment, will I manifest Myself; and he shall be one thing with Me and I with him.* In several places we find similar words, by which we can see that it is, indeed, through the effect of love, that the soul becomes another Himself. That this may be seen more clearly, I will mention what I remember having heard from a handmaid of God, namely, that, when she was lifted up in prayer, with great elevation of mind, God was not wont to conceal, from the eye of her intellect, the love which He had for His servants, but rather to manifest it; and, that among other things, He used to say: "Open the eye of your intellect, and gaze into Me, and you shall see the beauty of My rational creature. And look at those creatures who, among the beauties which I have given to the soul, creating her in My image and similitude, are clothed with the nuptial garment (that is, the garment of love), adorned with many virtues, by which they are united with Me through love. And yet I tell you, if you should ask Me, who these are, I should reply" (said the sweet and amorous Word of God) "they are another Myself, inasmuch as they have lost and denied their own will, and are clothed with Mine, are united to Mine, are conformed to Mine." It is therefore true, indeed, that the soul unites herself with God by the affection of love. So, that soul, wishing to know and follow the truth more manfully, and lifting her desires first for herself -- for she considered that a soul could not be of use, whether in doctrine, example, or prayer, to her neighbor, if she did not first profit herself, that is, if she did not acquire virtue in herself -- addressed four requests to the Supreme and Eternal Father. The first was for herself; the second for the reformation of the Holy Church; the third a general prayer for the whole world, and in particular for the peace of Christians who rebel, with

much lewdness and persecution, against the Holy Church; in the fourth and last, she besought the Divine Providence to provide for things in general, and in particular, for a certain case with which she was concerned. 15 *How the desire of this soul grew when God showed her the neediness of the world.* This desire was great and continuous, but grew much more, when the First Truth showed her the neediness of the world, and in what a tempest of offense against God it lay. And she had understood this the better from a letter, which she had received from the spiritual Father of her soul, in which he explained to her the penalties and intolerable dolor caused by offenses against God, and the loss of souls, and the persecutions of Holy Church. All this lighted the fire of her holy desire with grief for the offenses, and with the joy of the lively hope, with which she waited for God to provide against such great evils. And, since the soul seems, in such communion, sweetly to bind herself fast within herself and with God, and knows better His truth, inasmuch as the soul is then in God, and God in the soul, as the fish is in the sea, and the sea in the fish, she desired the arrival of the morning (for the morrow was a feast of Mary) in order to hear Mass. And, when the morning came, and the hour of the Mass, she sought with anxious desire her accustomed place; and, with a great knowledge of herself, being ashamed of her own imperfection, appearing to herself to be the cause of all the evil that was happening throughout the world, conceiving a hatred and displeasure against herself, and a feeling of holy justice, with which knowledge, hatred, and justice, she purified the stains which seemed to her to cover her guilty soul, she said: "O Eternal Father, I accuse myself before You, in order that You may punish me for my sins in this finite life, and, inasmuch as my sins are the cause of the sufferings which my neighbor must endure, I implore You, in Your kindness, to punish them in my person." *How finite works are not sufficient for punishment or recompense without the perpetual affection of love.* Then, the Eternal Truth seized and drew more strongly to Himself her desire, doing as He did in the Old Testament, for when the sacrifice was offered to God, a fire descended and drew to Him the sacrifice that was acceptable to Him; so did the sweet Truth to that soul, in sending down the fire of the clemency of the Holy Spirit, seizing the sacrifice of desire that she made of herself, saying: "Do you not know, dear daughter, that all the sufferings, which the soul endures, or can endure, in this life, are insufficient to punish one smallest fault, because the offense, being done to Me, who am the Infinite Good, calls for an infinite satisfaction? However, I wish that you should know, that not all the pains that are given to men in this life are given as punishments, but as corrections, in order to chastise a son when he offends; though it is true that both the guilt and the penalty can be expiated by the desire of the soul, that is, by true contrition, not through the finite pain endured, but through the infinite desire; because God, who is infinite, wishes for infinite love and infinite grief. Infinite grief I wish from My creature in two ways: in one way, through her sorrow for her own sins, which she has committed against Me her Creator; in the other way, through her sorrow for the sins which she sees her neighbors commit against Me. Of such as these, inasmuch as they have infinite desire, that is, are joined to Me by an affection of love, and therefore grieve when they offend Me, or 16 see Me offended, their every pain, whether spiritual or corporeal, from wherever it may come, receives infinite merit, and satisfies for a guilt which deserved an infinite penalty, although their works are finite and done in finite time; but, inasmuch as they possess the virtue of desire, and sustain their suffering with desire, and contrition, and infinite displeasure against their guilt, their pain is held worthy. Paul explained this when he said: *If I had the tongues of angels, and if I knew the things of the future and gave my body to be burned, and have not love, it would be worth nothing to me.* The glorious Apostle thus shows that finite works are not valid, either as punishment or recompense, without the condiment of the affection of love." *How desire and contrition of heart satisfies, both for the guilt and the penalty in oneself and in others; and how sometimes it satisfies for the guilt only, and not the penalty.* "I have shown you, dearest daughter, that the guilt is not punished in this finite time by any pain which is sustained purely as such. And I say, that the guilt is punished by the pain which is endured through the desire, love, and contrition of the heart; not by virtue of the pain, but by virtue of the desire of the soul; inasmuch as desire and every virtue is of value, and has life in itself, through Christ crucified, My only begotten Son, in so far as the soul has drawn her love from Him, and virtuously follows His virtues, that is, His Footprints. In this way, and in no other, are virtues of value, and in this way, pains satisfy for the fault, by the sweet and intimate love acquired in the

knowledge of My goodness, and in the bitterness and contrition of heart acquired by knowledge of one's self and one's own thoughts. And this knowledge generates a hatred and displeasure against sin, and against the soul's own sensuality, through which, she deems herself worthy of pains and unworthy of reward." The sweet Truth continued: "See how, by contrition of the heart, together with love, with true patience, and with true humility, deeming themselves worthy of pain and unworthy of reward, such souls endure the patient humility in which consists the above-mentioned satisfaction. You ask me, then, for pains, so that I may receive satisfaction for the offenses, which are done against Me by My Creatures, and you further ask the will to know and love Me, who am the Supreme Truth. Wherefore I reply that this is the way, if you will arrive at a perfect knowledge and enjoyment of Me, the Eternal Truth, that you should never go outside the knowledge of yourself, and, by humbling yourself in the valley of humility, you will know Me and yourself, from which knowledge you will draw all that is necessary. No virtue, my daughter, can have life in itself except through charity, and humility, which is the foster-mother and nurse of charity. In self-knowledge, then, you will humble yourself, seeing that, in yourself, you do not even exist; for your very being, as you will learn, is derived from Me, since I have loved both you and others before you were in existence; and that, through the ineffable love which I had for you, wishing to re-create you to Grace, I have washed you, and re-created you in the Blood of My only-begotten Son, spilt with so great a fire of love. This Blood teaches the truth to him, who, by self-knowledge, dissipates the cloud of self-love, and in no other way can he learn. Then the soul will inflame herself in this knowledge of Me with an ineffable love, through which love she continues in constant pain; not, however, a pain which afflicts or dries up the soul, but one which rather fattens her; for since she has known My truth, and her own faults, and the ingratitude of men, she endures intolerable suffering, grieving because she loves Me; for, if she did not love Me, she would not be obliged to do so; whence it follows immediately, that it is right for you, and My other servants who have learnt My truth in this way, to sustain, even unto death, many tribulations and injuries and insults in word and deed, for the glory and praise of My Name; thus will you endure and suffer pains. Do you, therefore, and My other servants, carry yourselves with true patience, with grief for your sins, and with love of virtue for the glory and praise of My Name. If you act thus, I will satisfy for your sins, and for those of My other servants, inasmuch as the pains which you will endure will be sufficient, through the virtue of love, for satisfaction and reward, both in you and in others. In yourself you will receive the fruit of life, when the stains of your ignorance are effaced, and I shall not remember that you ever offended Me. In others I will satisfy through the love and affection which you have to Me, and I will give to them according to the disposition with which they will receive My gifts. In particular, to those who dispose themselves, humbly and with reverence, to receive the doctrine of My servants, will I remit both guilt and penalty, since they will thus come to true knowledge and contrition for their sins. So that, by means of prayer, and their desire of serving Me, they receive the fruit of grace, receiving it humbly in greater or less degree, according to the extent of their exercise of virtue and grace in general. I say then, that, through your desires, they will receive remission for their sins. See, however, the condition, namely, that their obstinacy should not be so great in their despair as to condemn them through contempt of the Blood, which, with such sweetness, has restored them. "What fruit do they receive?"

Saint Catherine of Siena, T.O.S.D, (25 March 1347 – 29 April 1380) was a tertiary of the Dominican Order, and a Scholastic philosopher and theologian. She also worked to bring the Papacy back to Rome from its displacement in France, and to establish peace among the Italian city-states. She was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1970. She is one of the two patron saints of Italy, together with Francis of Assisi.

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