Catherine of Siena: Biography and "The Dialogue"

Biography
Dominican Tertiary, born at Siena, 25 March, 1347; died at Rome, 29 April, 1380. She was the youngest but one of a very large family. Her father, Giacomo di Benincasa, was a dyer; her mother, Lapa, the daughter of a local poet. They belonged to the lower middle-class faction of tradesmen and petty notaries, known as "the Party of the Twelve", which between one revolution and another ruled the Republic of Siena from 1355 to 1365. From her earliest childhood Catherine began to see visions and to practise extreme austerities. At the age of seven she consecrated her virginity to Christ; in her sixteenth year she took the habit of the Dominican Tertiaries, and renewed the life of the anchorites of the desert in a little room in her father's house. After three years of celestial visitations and familiar conversation with Christ, she underwent the mystical experience known as the "spiritual espousals", probably during the carnival of 1366. She now rejoined her family, began to tend the sick, especially those afflicted with the most repulsive diseases, to serve the poor, and to labour for the conversion of sinners. though always suffering terrible physical pain, living for long intervals on practically no food save the Blessed Sacrament, she was ever radiantly happy and full of practical wisdom no less than the highest spiritual insight. All her contemporaries bear witness to her extraordinary personal charm, which prevailed over the continual persecution to which she was subjected even by the friars of her own order and by her sisters in religion. She began to gather disciples round her, both men and women, who formed a wonderful spiritual fellowship, united to her by the bonds of mystical love. During the summer of 1370 she received a series of special manifestations of Divine mysteries, which culminated in a prolonged trance, a kind of mystical death, in which she had a vision of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, and heard a Divine command to leave her cell and enter the public life of the world. She began to dispatch letters to men and women in every condition of life, entered into correspondence with the princes and republics of Italy, was consulted by the papal legates about the affairs of the Church, and set herself to heal the wounds of her native land by staying the fury of civil war and the ravages of faction. She implored the pope, Gregory XI, to leave Avignon, to reform the clergy and the administration of the Papal States, and ardently threw herself into his design for a crusade, in the hopes of uniting the powers of Christendom against the infidels, and restoring peace to Italy by delivering her from the wandering companies of mercenary soldiers. While at Pisa, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, 1375, she received the Stigmata, although, at her special prayer, the marks did not appear outwardly in her body while she lived.

Mainly through the misgovernment of the papal officials, war broke out between Florence and the Holy See, and almost the whole of the Papal States rose in insurrection. Catherine had already been sent on a mission from the pope to secure the neutrality of Pisa and Lucca. In June, 1376, she went to Avignon as ambassador of the Florentines, to make their peace; but, either through the bad faith of the republic or through a misunderstanding caused by the frequent changes in its government, she was unsuccessful. Nevertheless she made such a profound impression upon the mind of the pope, that, in spite of the opposition of the French king and almost the whole of the Sacred College, he returned to Rome (17 January, 1377). Catherine spent the greater part of 1377 in effecting a wonderful spiritual revival in the country districts subject to the Republic of Siena, and it was at this time that she miraculously learned to write, though she still seems to have chiefly relied upon her secretaries for her correspondence. Early in 1378 she was sent by Pope Gregory to Florence, to make a fresh effort for peace. Unfortunately, through the factious conduct of her Florentine associates, she became involved in the internal politics of the city, and during a popular tumult (22 June) an attempt was made upon her life. She was bitterly disappointed at her escape, declaring that her sins had deprived her of the red rose of martyrdom. Nevertheless, during the disastrous revolution known as "the tumult of the Ciompi", she still remained at Florence or in its territory until, at the beginning of August, news reached the city that peace had been signed between the republic and the new pope. Catherine then instantly returned to Siena, where she passed a few months of comparative quiet, dictating her "Dialogue", the book of her meditations and revelations.

In the meanwhile the Great Schism had broken out in the Church. From the outset Catherine enthusiastically adhered to the Roman claimant, Urban VI, who in November, 1378, summoned her
to Rome. In the Eternal City she spent what remained of her life, working strenuously for the reformation of the Church, serving the destitute and afflicted, and dispatching eloquent letters in behalf of Urban to high and low in all directions. Her strength was rapidly being consumed; she besought her Divine Bridegroom to let her bear the punishment for all the sins of the world, and to receive the sacrifice of her body for the unity and renovation of the Church; at last it seemed to her that the Bark of Peter was laid upon her shoulders, and that it was crushing her to death with its weight. After a prolonged and mysterious agony of three months, endured by her with supreme exultation and delight, from Sexagesima Sunday until the Sunday before the Ascension, she died. Her last political work, accomplished practically from her death-bed, was the reconciliation of Pope Urban VI with the Roman Republic (1380).

Among Catherine's principal followers were Fra Raimondo delle Vigne, of Capua (d. 1399), her confessor and biographer, afterwards General of the Dominicans, and Stefano di Corrado Maconi (d. 1424), who had been one of her secretaries, and became Prior General of the Carthusians. Raimondo's book, the "Legend", was finished in 1395. A second life of her, the "Supplement", was written a few years later by another of her associates, Fra Tomaso Caffarini (d. 1434), who also composed the "Minor Legend", which was translated into Italian by Stefano Maconi. Between 1411 and 1413 the depositions of the surviving witnesses of her life and work were collected at Venice, to form the famous "Process". Catherine was canonized by Pius II in 1461. The emblems by which she is known in Christian art are the lily and book, the crown of thorns, or sometimes a heart—referring to the legend of her having changed hearts with Christ. Her principal feast is on the 30th of April, but it is popularly celebrated in Siena on the Sunday following. The feast of her Espousals is kept on the Thursday of the carnival.

The works of St. Catherine of Siena rank among the classics of the Italian language, written in the beautiful Tuscan vernacular of the fourteenth century. Notwithstanding the existence of many excellent manuscripts, the printed editions present the text in a frequently mutilated and most unsatisfactory condition. Her writings consist of

- the "Dialogue", or "Treatise on Divine Providence";
- a collection of nearly four hundred letters; and
- a series of "Prayers".

The "Dialogue" especially, which treats of the whole spiritual life of man in the form of a series of colloquies between the Eternal Father and the human soul (represented by Catherine herself), is the mystical counterpart in prose of Dante's "Divina Commedia".

A smaller work in the dialogue form, the "Treatise on Consummate Perfection", is also ascribed to her, but is probably spurious. It is impossible in a few words to give an adequate conception of the manifold character and contents of the "Letters", which are the most complete expression of Catherine's many-sided personality. While those addressed to popes and sovereigns, rulers of republics and leaders of armies, are documents of priceless value to students of history, many of those written to private citizens, men and women in the cloister or in the world, are as fresh and illuminating, as wise and practical in their advice and guidance for the devout Catholic today as they were for those who sought her counsel while she lived. Others, again, lead the reader to mystical heights of contemplation, a rarefied atmosphere of sanctity in which only the few privileged spirits can hope to dwell. The key-note to Catherine's teaching is that man, whether in the cloister or in the world, must ever abide in the cell of self-knowledge, which is the stable in which the traveller through time to eternity must be born again.

The Dialogue

24. The Vines That Are Tended by the Divine Gardener
You then are my workers. You have come from me, the supreme eternal gardener, and I have engrafted you onto the vine by making myself one with you.

Keep in mind that each of you has your own vineyard. But everyone is joined to the neighbors' vineyards without any dividing lines. They are so joined together, in fact, that you cannot do good or evil for yourself without doing the same for your neighbors.

All of you together make up one common vineyard, the whole Christian assembly, and you are all united in the vineyard of the mystic body of holy church from which you draw your life. In this vineyard is planted the vine, which is my only begotten Son, into whom you must be engrafted. Unless you are engrafted into him you are rebels against holy church, like members that are cut off from the body and rot.

It is charity that binds you to true humility—the humility that is found in knowing yourself and me. See, then, that it is as workers that I have sent you all. Now I am calling you again, because the world is failing fast. The thorns have so multiplied and have choked the seed so badly that it will produce no fruit of grace at all.

I want you, therefore to be true workers. With deep concern, help to till the souls in the mystic body of holy church. I am calling you to this because I want to be merciful to the world as you have so earnestly begged me.

26. The Bridge
On the cross, my Son drew everything to himself, for he proved his unspeakable love, and the human heart is always drawn by love. He could not have shown you greater love than by giving his life for you. You can hardly resist being drawn by love, then, unless you foolishly refuse to be drawn.

I said that, having been raised up, he would draw everything to himself. This is true in two ways. First, the human heart is drawn by love, as I said, and with all its powers: memory, understanding, and will. If these three powers are harmoniously united in my name, everything else you do, in fact or in intention, will be drawn to union with me in peace through the movement of love. All will be lifted up in the pursuit of crucified love. So my Truth indeed spoke truly when he said, "If I am lifted up high, I will draw everything to myself." For everything you do will be drawn to him when he draws your heart and its powers.

What he said is true also in the sense that everything was created for your use, to serve your needs. But you who have the gift of reason were made not for yourselves but for me, to serve me with all your heart and all your love. So when you are drawn to me, everything is drawn with you, because everything was made for you.

41. Love Experienced in Heaven
The just who die in loving charity and are bound by love can no longer grow in virtue once time has passed. But they can forever love with that same affection with which they came to me, and by that same measure will it be measured out to them. They desire me forever and forever they possess me, so their desire is not in vain. They are hungry and satisfied, satisfied yet hungry—but they are far from bored with satiety or pained in their hunger.
Although they are all joined in the bond of charity, they know a special bond of sharing with those whom they loved most closely with a special love in the world. Through this love, they grew in grace and virtue. They helped each other proclaim the glory and praise of my name in themselves and in their neighbors. Now, in everlasting life, they have not lost that love. No, it is shared by all their just companions, my beloved people, and by all the angels. When someone reaches eternal life, everyone shares in her good and she shares in the good of everyone.

Everyone is full with delight and can grow no more. Each finds joy in me and in all the blessed ones, tasting in them the sweetness of my love. Their desires are a continual cry to me for the salvation of others. They finished their lives loving their neighbors. They did not leave that love behind but brought it with them when they passed through that gate which is my only begotten Son. So you see that whatever bond of love exists as they finish their lives, that bond is theirs forever and lasts eternally.

What these blessed ones want is to see me honored in you who are still on the way, pilgrims running ever nearer your end in death. Because these blessed ones seek my honor, they desire your salvation. So they are constantly praying to me for you. I do my part to fulfill their desire, provided only that you do not foolishly resist my mercy.

I have told you of the good of the glorified body in the glorified humanity of my Son. This is the guarantee of your own resurrection. You will all be made like him in joy and gladness, eye for eye, hand for hand, your whole bodies made like the body of the Word, my Son. You will live in him as you live in me, for he is one with me. But your bodily eyes will delight in the glorified humanity of the Word, my only begotten Son. Why? Because those who finish their lives delighting in my love will keep that delight forever. Not that they can do any further good now, but they rejoice in the good that they have brought with them. In other words, they cannot do anything more deserving of merit, for it is only in this life, by the choice of free will, that one can either merit or sin.

The face of my Son will appear to them neither terrifying nor hateful, for they have finished their lives in love. They delighted in me and were filled with goodwill toward their neighbors. To them the Lord will appear with mercy and love.

55. Christ Is the Safe Bridge to the Father
When you are gathered together in my name, you are thirsty for living water. So you move forward and cross over the bridge, following the teaching of my Truth who is that bridge, Jesus. You run after his voice that calls out after you, "Let whoever is thirsty come to me and drink, for I am the fountain of living water."

I have told you that this is the way to climb onto the bridge. In this climbing, you are all gathered together and united, loving each other, carrying your hearts and wills like vessels.

This is the way you must keep, no matter what your situation in life. Every person gifted with reason has this obligation. No one can draw back and say, "My position or my children or other earthly obstacles keep me from following this way." Not can the difficulties you encounter along the way excuse you. You are not to talk that way, because I have already told you that every state of life is pleasing and acceptable to me if it is held to with a good and holy will.

All things are good and perfect, since they were made by me. I am supreme goodness. I made them all and give them to you to use them, not to embrace death, but to have life through them.

It is an easy matter, for nothing is so easy and delightful as love. What I ask of you is nothing other than love and affection for me and for your neighbors. This can be done any time, any
place, and in any state of life by loving and keeping all things for the praise and glory of my name.

64. Love Your Neighbor as I Love You
I would have you know that every good, whether perfect or imperfect, is acquired and made manifest in me. It is acquired and made manifest by means of your neighbor. Even simple people know this, for they often love others with a spiritual love. If you have received any love sincerely, without self-interest, you will drink your neighbor's love sincerely. This love is like a vessel you fill at the fountain. If you hold your vessel in the fountain while you drink, it will not get empty. Indeed, it will always be full. So the love of your neighbor, whether spiritual or temporal, is meant to be drunk in me, without any self-interest.

I ask you to love me with the same love with which I love you. Without me, you cannot do this, for I loved you without being loved. Whatever love you have for me, you owe me. So you love me, not gratuitously, but out of duty, while I love you, not out of duty, but gratuitously. You cannot give me the kind of love I ask of you. This is why I have put you among your neighbors: so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me—that is, love them without concern for thanks and without looking for any profit for yourself. And whenever you do this, I will consider it done for me.

66. Dialogue on Prayer and Good Works
Perfect prayer is achieved, not with many words, but with loving desire when the soul rises up to me with knowledge of herself, each movement seasoned by the other. In this way, she will have vocal and mental prayer at the same time, for the two stand together like the active life and the contemplative life. Still, vocal and mental prayer are understood in many different ways. This is why I told you that holy desire, that is, having a good and holy will, is continual prayer. This will and desire rises at the appointed time and place to add actual prayer to the continual prayer of holy desire. As long as the soul remains firm in holy desire and will, she will make it at the appointed time. But sometimes beyond the appointed times, she makes this continual prayer, as charity asks of her for her neighbor's good and according to the need she sees and the situation in which I have placed her.

The principle of holy will means that each of you must work for the salvation of souls according to your own situation. Whatever you do in word or deed for the good of your neighbor is a real prayer. (I am assuming that you actually pray as such at the appointed time.) Apart from your prayers of obligation, however, everything you do can be a prayer, whether in itself or in the form of charity to your neighbors, because of the way you use the situation at hand.

85. The Enlightenment of God's Love
The light given by grace, given to whoever wants to receive this light beyond natural light, shows us the Truth. Every light that comes from Holy Scripture has come and still comes from that light. This is why foolish, proud, and learned people go blind even though it is light, because their pride and the cloud of selfish love have covered and blotted out this light. So they read Scripture literally rather than with understanding. They taste only its letter in their chasing after a multiplicity of books, never tasting the marrow of Scripture because they have let go of the light by which Scripture was formed and proclaimed. Such as these, then, wander and fall to whining when they see so many uncultured and unschooled in biblical knowledge, yet as enlightened in knowledge of the truth as if they had studied for a long time. But this is no wonder at all, for they possess the chief source of light from which learning comes. But because proud people have lost that light, they neither see nor know my goodness or the light of grace that is poured out in my servants.
I tell you, therefore, that it is better to walk by the spiritual counsel of a humble and unschooled person with a holy and upright conscience than by that of a well-read but proud scholar with great knowledge. For one cannot share what one does not have inside oneself. Because some persons live a life in the darkness, they often share the light of the Holy Scripture in darkness. You will find the opposite in my servants, for they share the light within them in hunger and longing for others' salvation.

I have told you this, my dearest daughter, to let you know the perfection of this unitive state in which souls are carried off by the fire of my charity. In that charity, they receive supernatural light and in that light they love me. Love follows upon understanding. The more they know, the more they love. The more they love, the more they know. Each nourishes the other. By this light, they reach that eternal vision of me in which they see and taste me in truth when soul is separated from body.

This is that superb state in which the soul, even while mortal, shares the enjoyment of the immortal. In fact, she often attains such union that she hardly knows whether she is in the body or out. She tastes the pledge of eternal life through her union with me as well because her own will is dead. It is by that death that she realizes her union with me, and in no other way could she perfectly accomplish that.

These souls have then a taste of eternal life. They have let go of the hell of self-will. But those who live by self-willed sensuality have in that a pledge of hell, as I have told you.

110. The Mystery of Divine Presence in the Sacred Species
The sun never leaves its orbit, never divides. It gives light to all the world, to everyone who wants to be warmed by it. This sun is not defiled by any uncleanness. Its light is one. So is the Word, my Son, one with me and I with him. His most gracious blood is a sun, wholly God and wholly human.

This sun, this light, has in it the color of your humanity, the one united with the other. So the light of my Godhead became lightsome with the color of your humanity. That color became lightsome, fully divinized by the resurrection. The person of the Incarnate Word was penetrated and kneaded from one dough with the light of my Godhead, the divine nature, and with the heat and fire of the Holy Spirit. By this means, you have come to receive the light. To whom have I entrusted this light? To my ministers in the mystic body of holy church, so that you might have life when they give you his body as food and his blood as drink.

I have said that this body of his is a sun. Therefore, you could not be given the body without being given the blood as well. You could not be given either the body or the blood without the soul of this Word, nor the soul of the body without the divinity of me, God eternal. For the one cannot be separated from the other.... It is the whole divine being that you receive in that most gracious sacrament under the whiteness of bread.

Just as the sin cannot be divided, so neither can my wholeness as God and as human be divided. Even if the host is divided, I would be there, wholly God and wholly human. Nor is the sacrament itself diminished by being divided any more than fire. If you had a burning lamp, and all the world came to you for light, the light of your lamp would not be diminished by the sharing. Yet each person who shared it would have the whole light. True, each one's light would be more or less intense depending on what sort of material each one brought to receive the fire.

Imagine that many people brought candles. Each candle, the smallest as well as the largest, would have the whole light. Yet the person who carried a one-ounce candle would have less than the person whose candle weighed a pound. This is how it is with those who receive the sacrament. Each one of you brings your own candle, that is, the holy desire with which you
receive the sacrament. Your candle is unlit and is lighted when you receive the sacrament. It is I who have given you the candle with which you can receive the light and nourish it within you. Your candle is love, because it is for love that I created you. Without love, you cannot have life.

Your being was given to you for love. In Holy Baptism, which you received by the power of the blood of this Word, you were made ready to share this light. There is no other way you could come to share it. Indeed, you would be like a candle that has no wick and therefore can neither burn nor receive the light. So if you would bear this light, you must receive the wick that is faith. To this grace that you received in baptism, you must join your own soul's love. For I created your soul with a capacity for loving so much so that you cannot live without love. Indeed, love is your food.

It is with this love that you come to receive my gracious glorious light, the light I have given you as food to be administered to you by my ministers. But even though all of you receive the light, each of you receives it in proportion to the love and burning desire you bring with you.

So you see that in no way can the heat and color and brightness that are fused in this light be divided—not by the scant desire the soul brings to this sacrament, nor by any fault in the soul who receives it or in the one who administers it. It is like the sun, which is not contaminated by the filth it shines upon. Nothing can contaminate or divide the light in this sacrament. Its brightness is never diminished and it never strays from its orbit, though the whole world shares in the light and heat of this Sun.

So this Word, this Sun, my only begotten Son, never strays from me, the eternal Sun and Father. In the mystic body of holy church, he is administered to everyone who will receive him. He remains wholly with me and wholly you have him, God and man. Even if all the world would ask for his light, all would have it whole and whole it would remain.

113. The Dignity of the Ministers of Christ
O dearest daughter, I have told you this so that you may better know how I have dignified my ministers, and thus grieve the more over their wickedness. It is impossible to have a greater dignity than theirs in this life.

They are my anointed ones. I call them other Christs because I have appointed them to be my ministers to you and have sent them like fragrant flowers into the mystic body of holy church. No angel has this dignity, but I have given it to those I chose to be my ministers. I have sent them like angels, and they ought to be earthly angels in this life.

Just as these ministers want the chalice in which they offer the sacrifice to be clean, so I shall demand that they themselves be clean in heart and soul and mind. I want them to keep their bodies as instruments of the soul in perfect purity. I do not want them feeding and wallowing in the mire of impurity, nor bloated with pride in their hankering after high office, nor cruel to themselves and their neighbors—for they cannot abuse themselves without abusing their neighbors. If they abuse themselves by sinning, they are abusing the souls of their neighbors, for they are not giving them an example of good living.

114. The Desire That the Ministers Serve Well
I want them to be generous and not avariciously selling the grace of my Holy Spirit to feed their own greed. They ought not to do so. Rather, as they have received charity freely and generously from my own goodness, so ought they to give to everyone who humbly asks, lovingly, freely, and with a generous heart, moved by love for my honor and for the salvation of souls.
Nor ought they to take anything in payment for what they themselves have not bought, but have received gratuitously so they might administer it to you. But they may accept alms. So also should those who receive from the ministers give alms if they are able. My ministers ought to be provided for with material help in their needs. You ought to be provided for and nourished by them with spiritual gifts, the holy sacraments I have established in holy church to be administered for your salvation.

134. Catherine’s Prayer for the Church

Immeasurable Love! By revealing this, you have given me a bittersweet medicine so that I might rise up once and for all from the sickness of foolish indifference and run to you with concern and eager longing. You would have me know myself and your goodness, and the sins committed against you by every class of people and especially by your ministers, so that I might draw tears from the knowledge of your infinite goodness and let them flow as a river over my wretched self and over those wretched living dead.

Therefore, it is my will, ineffable Fire, joyous Love, eternal Father, that my desire should never weary of longing for your honor and the salvation of souls. I beg you, let my eyes never rest, but in your grace make of them two rivers for the water that flows from you, the sea of peace. Thank you for granting to me what I ask of you and for what I did not ask because I did not know how. You have given me both the invitation and the reason to weep and to offer tender, loving, tormented longings in your presence with constant humble prayer.

Now, I beg you, be merciful to the world and to holy church. I am asking you to grant what you are making me ask. Do not delay any longer in granting your mercy to the world. Bow down and fulfill the longing of your servants! It is you who make them cry out, so now listen to their voices.

Your Truth said that we should call out and we would be answered, that we should knock and the door would be opened to us, that we should ask and it would be given to us. O eternal Father, your servants are calling to you for mercy. Answer them then. I know well that mercy is proper to you, so you cannot resist giving it to anyone who cries out for it. Your servants are knocking at the door of your Truth. They are knocking because in your Truth, your only begotten Son, they have come to know your unspeakable love for humankind.

Therefore, your burning love neither can nor should hold back from opening to those who knock with perseverance.

Open, then, and unlock and shatter the hardened hearts of your creatures. If you will not do it for their failure to knock, do it because of your infinite goodness and for love of your servants who are knocking at the door for them. Grant it, eternal Father, because you see how they stand at the door of your Truth and ask. For what are they asking? For the blood of this door, your Truth. In this blood you have washed away iniquity and drained the pus of Adam's sin. His blood is ours because you have made it a bath for us. You neither can nor will refuse it to those who ask it of you in truth.

Give, then, the fruit of your blood to these creatures of yours. Put onto the scales the price of your Son's blood so that the demons may not carry off your sheep. You are a good shepherd to have given us your only begotten Son to be our true shepherd. In obedience, he laid down his life for the sheep, and made his blood a bath for us. It is this blood that your servants, hungry as they are, are asking at this door. They are asking for you, through this blood, to be merciful to the world, and make holy church blossom again with the flowers of good holy shepherds whose perfume will dispel the stench of the putrid evil flowers.

Your servants seek the honor and salvation of many souls. Give them the bread of life, the fruit of the blood of your only begotten Son, which they are begging of you for the glory and praise of
your name and the salvation of souls. It would seem that you receive more glory and praise by
saving many people rather than let them persist in their hardness of heart. To you, eternal
Father, everything is possible. Though you created us without help, it is not your will to save us
without our help.

So I beg you to force the wills of those who refuse you to want what they think they do not want.
I ask this of your infinite mercy. You created us out of nothing. So now that we exist, be merciful
and remake the vessels you created and formed in your image and likeness. Reform them to
grace in the mercy and blood of your Son.

148. Humans Are Created for Union with Each Other
Enlarge your heart, daughter, and open your mind's eye to the light of faith. See with what great
love and providence I have created and ordained humankind to rejoice in my supreme eternal
reward.

In this mortal life, so long as you are pilgrims, I have bound you with the chain of charity.
Whether you want it or not, you are so bound. If you should break loose by not wanting to live in
charity for your neighbors, you will still be bound by it by force. Thus, that you may practice
charity in action and in will, I in my providence did not give to any one person or to each
individually the knowledge for doing everything necessary for human life.

No, I gave something to one, something else to another, so that each one's need would be a
reason to have recourse to the other. So, though you may lose your will for charity because of
your wickedness, you will at least be forced by your own need to practice it in action. Thus, you
see the artisan turn to the worker and the worker to the artisan. Each has need of the other
because neither knows how to do what the other does. So also the cleric and the religious have
need of the layperson and the layperson of the religious. Neither can get along without the other.
So with everything else.

Could I not have given everyone everything? Of course. But in my providence, I wanted to make
each of you dependent on the others, so that you would be forced to exercise charity in action
and will at once. I have shown you my generosity, goodness, and providence toward people.
I have so ordered the charity of those in heaven that no one simply enjoys his or her own
reward in this blessed life without its being shared by the others. This is not how I have willed it
to be. Rather, their charity is so well ordered and perfect that the great find joy in the reward of
the small, and the small find joy in the reward of the great. I mean small in the sense of capacity,
not that the small are any less full than the great.

Thus, all of them in this joyous charity rejoice in each other's reward and exult in me with
jubilation and mirth without any sadness, sweet without any bitterness. This is because while
they lived and died they enjoyed me in loving charity through charity for their neighbors.

167. Catherine's Thanks to God
Thanks be to you, eternal Father, that you have not despised me, your handiwork, not turned
your face from me, nor made light of these desires of mine. You, Light, have disregarded my
darkness. You, Life, have not considered that I am death, nor have you considered these grave
weaknesses of mine. You, eternal Purity, have disregarded my wretched filthiness. You who are
infinite have overlooked the fact that I am finite, and you, Wisdom, the fact that I am foolishness.

For all these, and so many other endless evils and sins of mine, your wisdom, your kindness,
your mercy, your infinite goodness have not despised me. No, in your light you have given me
light. In your wisdom, I have come to know the truth. In your mercy, I have found your charity
and affection for my neighbors.
Let this same love compel you to enlighten the eye of my understanding with the light of faith, so that I may know your truth, which you have revealed to me. Let my memory be great enough to hold your favors, and set my will ablaze in your charity's fire. Let that fire burst the seed of my body and bring forth blood; then with that blood, given for love of your blood, and with the key of obedience, let me unlock heaven's gate.

I heartily ask the same of you for every reasoning creature, all and each of them, and for the mystic body of holy church. I acknowledge and do not deny that you loved me before I existed, and that you love me unspeakably much, as one gone mad over your creature.

O eternal Trinity! O Godhead! That Godhead, your divine nature, gave the price of your Son's blood its value. You, eternal Trinity, are a deep sea. The more I enter you, the more I discover. The more I discover, the more I seek you. You are insatiable, you in whose depth the soul is sated yet remains always hungry and thirsty for you, eternal Trinity, longing to see you with the light of your light.

Just as the deer longs for the fountain of living water, so does my soul long to escape from the prison of my darksome body and see you in truth. Oh, how long will you hide your face from my eyes?

O abyss! O eternal Godhead! O deep sea! What more can you have given me than the gift of your very self?

You are a fire always burning but never consuming. You are a fire consuming in your heat all the soul's selfish love. You are a fire lifting all chill and giving light. In your light, you have made me know your truth. You are that light beyond all light who gives the mind's eye supernatural light in such fullness and perfection that you bring clarity even to the light of faith. In that faith I see that my soul has life, and in that light receives you who are Light.

Who could reach to your height to thank you for so immeasurable a gift, for such generous favors, for the teaching of truth that you have given me? A special grace this, beyond the common grace you give to other creatures. You willed to bend down to my need and that of others who might see themselves mirrored here.

You responded, Lord. You yourself have given and you yourself answered and satisfied me by flooding me with a gracious light, so that with that light, I may return thanks to you. Clothe me with yourself, eternal Truth, so that I may run the course of this mortal life in true obedience and in the light of most holy faith. With that light, I sense my soul once again becoming drunk.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Here ends the book composed by the blessed virgin, the faithful spouse and servant of Jesus Christ, Catherine of Siena, dictated in ecstasy. She was clothed in the habit of St. Dominic. Amen.