LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR: 
THOMISTIC VIRTUE OF CHARITY IN CATHERINE OF SIENA´S DIALOGUE

Thesis
Submitted to
The College of Arts and Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of
Master of Arts in Theological Studies

By
Laura Sharon Norris
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
Dayton, Ohio
December, 2014
LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR:
THOMISTIC VIRTUE OF CHARITY IN CATHERINE OF SIENA’S DIALOGUE

Name: Norris, Laura Sharon

APPROVED BY:

______________________________
Sandra Yocum, Ph.D
Faculty Advisor

______________________________
William L. Portier, Ph.D
Faculty Reader

______________________________
William H. Johnston, Ph.D
Faculty Reader
ABSTRACT

LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR:
THOMISTIC VIRTUE OF CHARITY IN CATHERINE OF SIENA’S DIALOGUE

Name: Norris, Laura Sharon
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. Sandra Yocum

Saint Catherine of Siena wrote one of the most theologically orthodox works of mysticism, Dialogue on Divine Providence. Unlike other mystics of the later Middle Ages, Catherine’s Dialogue provided a highly doctrinal theology written in her own vernacular language. Catherine’s mystical theology demonstrates influence of several prominent schools of theological thought, most notably the moral theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Like Aquinas, Catherine emphasizes the habituation and practice of the virtues, above all the virtue of charity. Aquinas and Catherine both understood charity as directed towards the two same ends – God and neighbor for God’s sake – and as manifesting itself through outward spiritual and corporeal practices. Catherine, however, wrote with a very particular audience in mind – the increasing literate laity. As demonstrated in her own letters, Catherine understood her writing for a lay audience as spiritual instruction and therefore writing served as an act of charity for her.
Dedicated to my husband, Ryan, and my parents, Robert and Nancy
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special thanks are in order to Dr. Sandra Yocum, my advisor, for providing her time and guidance in the direction of this thesis, and for bringing it to its conclusion and successful defense with her patience and expertise.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to everyone who has helped me with this work, particularly Drs. William Portier and William Johnston, who served as my readers.
This thesis present an argument for Saint Catherine of Siena’s use of the fourteenth century Thomistic understanding of virtue and charity in her Dialogue, which she reinterpreted for her primarily lay audience in order to present a doctrinally sound theology of charity in a practical manner. In order to fully support this argument, a secondary argument must be made regarding Catherine’s understanding of charity in relation to her act of writing the Dialogue.

The first two chapters in this thesis provide the necessary contextual information. The first chapter, “Catherine of Siena: Background and Context,” examines the historical and theological backgrounds of Catherine of Siena’s world. This chapter discusses fourteenth century Europe, late medieval mysticism, lay sanctity, Catherine’s mysticism, her education, and her devotion to St. Thomas Aquinas. Chapter Two, “Dominicans, Mysticism, and Catherine of Siena,” continues this discussion and focuses more closely on important topics including Catherine’s life, the Dominican Order, the role of Thomas Aquinas in the fourteenth century, the influence of Aquinas on Catherine, and Catherine’s writing. The third chapter, “Charity as Love of God,” supports the thesis argument by closely examining the similar teachings of charity as love of God in Catherine’s Dialogue and Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae, with emphasis on the understanding of charity as friendship of God. The fourth chapter, “Charity as Love of Neighbor,” examines the topic
most heavily present throughout the *Dialogue*, which is love of neighbor for God’s sake. Chapter Four highlights the similarities in Catherine’s and Aquinas’ writings on the practice of charity, especially Catherine’s three practical expressions of charity and Aquinas’ three works of mercy. Close attention is also given in this chapter to the significance of Catherine’s teaching on charity as love of neighbor for the audience of her *Dialogue*. The fifth and final chapter, “Writing as an Act of Charity,” focuses on the secondary argument about Catherine’s practice of charity through her act of writing the *Dialogue*.

An important note must be made on the choice of sources for this thesis. The nature of historical study always requires a judgment call on the use of primary and secondary sources. For primary sources, this paper will rely on the writings of St. Catherine of Siena in their English translation. Her *Dialogue* and many of her letters, especially those from the last five years of her minister and life, will be used. The translations come from the renowned scholar of Catherine, Suzanne Noffke, O.P. St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* will be used in the translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Excerpts from Catherine’s biographers will also be used as primary sources, particularly the *Libellus de Supplemento* of Thomas of Siena (Caffarini), who provided more information on Catherine’s ability to write than did her first biographer, Raymond of Capua.

Because of the nature of historical study, combined with the brevity of this paper, secondary sources will be used to provide contextual information on the fourteenth century, the Dominican Order, and Catherine’s life. Secondary sources will also provide support for my arguments on Catherine’s theology and Aquinas’ theology. Most notably,
Suzanne Noffke’s writings on Catherine, especially her introduction to her English translation of the *Dialogue*, will provide significant reference. Bernard McGinn will be used both for his scholarship on Catherine and her theology, found particularly in *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism*, and for providing context on the spiritual and mystical currents of the time periods addressed. Jane Tylus’ study on Catherine’s literacy and writing provides a significant resource as well, especially for the final chapter. Karen Scott’s scholarship on Catherine’s role in the developing lay sanctity of fourteenth century Italy provides a strong basis, both in regards to Catherine’s ministry and the participation of the laity in her time period.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... iv

DEDICATION .................................................................................................................... v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. vi

PREFACE .......................................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER ONE: Catherine of Siena: Background and Context ......................... 1
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1
  Fourteenth Century Europe ............................................................................................ 2
  Late Medieval Mysticism .............................................................................................. 5
  Urbanization, Literacy, and Lay Sanctity ...................................................................... 10
  Catherine of Siena: Mysticism ...................................................................................... 13
  Charity in Catherine’s Theology ................................................................................. 15
  Catherine’s Dominican Influence .............................................................................. 17
  Catherine’s Education ................................................................................................. 19
  Catherine’s Devotion to Aquinas ............................................................................. 21
  The Dialogue and Her Apostolic Commission ......................................................... 23

CHAPTER TWO: Dominicans, Mysticism, and Catherine of Siena ................. 26
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 26
  Catherine of Siena: Biography .................................................................................... 27
  The Dominicans: Background and History ............................................................... 29
  Dominicans, Laity, and Women .................................................................................. 32
  Dominicans and Mysticism ....................................................................................... 33
  Mendicant Orders and Lay Sanctity ......................................................................... 35
  Thomas Aquinas and the Dominican Order ............................................................. 36
  The Dominican Order and the Start of Catherine’s Ministry .................................. 40
  The Dominican Order and Catherine’s Mysticism ................................................ 42
  Catherine’s Devotion to Aquinas ............................................................................. 44
  The Importance of Writing for Catherine ................................................................. 46
  Catherine’s Theological Knowledge ........................................................................ 48
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 49

CHAPTER THREE: Charity as Love of God ......................................................... 51
  Introduction .................................................................................................................... 51
  The Dialogue: Composition and Background ....................................................... 52
CHAPTER ONE
CATHARINE OF SIENA: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a strong historical, ecclesiastical, and theological background for the thesis. All these factors created the unique historical circumstance in which St. Catherine of Siena produced her Dialogue and thus must be attended to before discussing her theology and writings. Since the primary focus of this paper is Catherine’s theology of charity, significant attention will be given in this chapter to describing mystical theology across fourteenth century Europe. The significance of Catherine’s writing in her vernacular Tuscanese Italian requires a discussion about the general rise of vernacular literature, especially theological literature, during this time period.

The chapter also will introduce St. Catherine of Siena to the reader, with special attention to her entry into the mantellate (a group of non-cloistered women who committed themselves to service of the poor), her devotion to Aquinas, her education, and her sense of an evangelistic calling. Her Dialogue will also be introduced and the primary theme of her theology and this paper, charity, will be discussed. Thus this chapter provides a description of her life that will help the reader understand her theology and the significance of her work.
Fourteenth Century Europe

The rising fervor of mysticism and lay piety combined with socio-economic adversities and ecclesiastical corruption created a tension that characterized the late Middle Ages in Europe particularly the fourteenth century. As historical theologian Bernard McGinn describes it, the fourteenth century “witnessed a series of calamities, both natural and human-made, that crippled society, induced widespread discouragement and even despair, and provoked anguished reactions.”\(^1\) The Crusades ceased from the fall of Tripoli and Acre in the 1290s until revived efforts against the Ottomans at Nicopolis in 1396. Instead, Europe suffered during these years from famine, the Black Death, and ecclesiastical corruption, particularly in the relocation of the papacy to Avignon, France (1309 to 1378). The Black Death reappeared throughout Europe in 1347, which notably also is the year Saint Catherine of Siena was born. By 1350, it fatally claimed up to fifty percent of the population in many cities and towns.\(^2\)

Despite the lingering fear of Ottoman invasion, famine, and the return of the Black Death, “the thing that was subject of well-nigh universal agreement, at least among sincere Christians, was the need for the reform of the church ‘in head and members.’”\(^3\) The need for reform had already influenced the emergence of the mendicant orders in the twelfth century. Now, the desire for reform was reflected in theological writings of that time, especially in mystical treatises.

---

\(^1\) Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 5. McGinn supports this claim with a variety of sources, including Francis Oakley’s *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages*, Michael Jones’ *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, David Herlihy’s *the Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, Steven Ozment’s *Age of Reform*, and *Handbook of European History 1400-1600*.

\(^2\) Ibid 4.

\(^3\) Ibid 5.
The papal office experienced significant tumult from the late thirteenth century through the fifteenth century. For two years with a vacant papacy, the College of Cardinals continually encountered a deadlock. In 1294, they finally elected Celestine V into the chair of Peter. Yet the elderly Celestine found his home more in the humble hermitage than in the greatest position of power in medieval Europe, and thus, he resigned within six months of his election. The famous poet Dante Alighieri, who wrote in the same Tuscanese vernacular as St. Catherine of Siena, perceived the resignation as an act of cowardice and represented Celestine in *Inferno* as “the one who out of cowardice made the great refusal.”

Dante felt even greater disdain for Celestine V’s successor, Pope Boniface VIII, whom the poet would eventually designate as the Antichrist. Boniface did not shy from papal power; he engaged himself in political conflicts with France. His actions widened the gap between the clergy and the laity. His pursuit of political power culminated in *Unam Sanctam* (1302), in which Boniface exercised both his spiritual and secular swords of power. With King Philip of France in mind, the pope declared submission to the Roman Pontiff as absolutely necessary for salvation and asserted papal supremacy over secular kings and emperors. Thus the conflict between Boniface and Philip IV exploded; just as Boniface wrote a bull of excommunication, Philip sent forth his French armies to attack the papal palace.

---

5 Ibid.
6 Jane Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, and the Sign of Others,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 25. The recognition of Celestine V in the *Inferno* was made by Dante’s son, Piero, and is confirmed by many scholars.
7 Ibid, 24. This opinion, according to Tylus, was held by others in addition to Dante. Pope Boniface VIII was involved in the actions that lead to Dante’s exile from Florence.
8 Ibid 121.
9 Ibid 121-122.
The French king’s threat to the papacy continued after the death of Boniface. The next pope, Dominican Benedict XI, died in exile at Perugia, and the College of Cardinals faced another deadlock.\(^\text{10}\) Finally, the Archbishop of Bordeaux, a man without the status of a cardinal but instead with the approval of the French king, became the pope; he adopted the name Clement V, and assumed power of the papacy not in Rome, but in Avignon, France.\(^\text{11}\) Thus in 1309 began the Avignon Papacy or, as many called it, the Babylon Captivity of the Church. During this time, seven popes resided at Avignon, separated from Rome by both mountains and a monarchy. The population, especially in Italy, perceived the pope as subservient to the French monarchy, and too self-centered and corrupt to truly serve the Church and enact much-needed reforms.\(^\text{12}\)

As the pope concerned himself with foreign affairs and worldly power and the French monarchy loomed over the seat of Peter, tumult concurrently occurred in the realm of theology. In what Dom Francois Vandenbroucke described as “a certain weariness of spirit,” the fourteenth century experienced the discrediting of scholasticism’s emphasis on reason with the “excesses of the Nominalists” and the resulting steady decline of philosophical speculative theology.\(^\text{13}\) Yet in the place of speculative theology, mysticism flourished in the fourteenth century. Throughout mainland Europe, especially the low-countries, mystical theologians recorded their visionary experiences and revelations.\(^\text{14}\) Some distrust from the heirachy and laity arose regarding the more speculative and philosophical forms of mysticism, as in the case of

---

\(^{10}\) Ibid 122.

\(^{11}\) Ibid 122.


\(^{14}\) Ibid 407.
Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart. Yet mysticism based on visions and prophecies, such as that of St. Birgetta of Sweden, received acceptance for its emphasis on the love of God.¹⁵

**Late Medieval Mysticism**

From the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, various mystical movements arose across the landscape of late medieval Europe. The writing produced in these movements were in the vernacular language, rather than scholastic Latin; this distinguished these new mystical movements from the more monastic-based mysticism of the earlier Middle Ages. The movements usually varied according to region, and thus distinct brands of mysticism can be discerned across the Low Countries, the Rhineland, Italy, and England. Each of these movements became intimately linked to the increase in literacy and the desire for reform in the Church.

From approximately 1350 to 1550 AD, mysticism flourished in the Dutch and Flemish speaking Low Countries of Europe. Notable amongst the Dutch mystics are Jan van Ruusbroec and the *devotio moderna* founder Geerte Grooe, but the list expands far beyond these names. The proliferation of Dutch vernacular mystics serves as testament to heightened literacy of the newly urbanized Low Countries.¹⁶ Historian Thomas Mertes estimates that seventy to eighty percent of Middle Dutch literature was religious in focus.¹⁷ This prevalence of mysticism across the literary landscape of the Low Countries indicates a deep-set desire amongst the literate classes of the laity for spiritual literature.¹⁸ Trinitarian exemplarism, emphasis on humanity as made in God’s image, a central role of

¹⁵ Ibid 408.
¹⁷ Ibid 495.
¹⁸ Ibid 1.
the saving mysteries of Christ, an understanding of “superessential union,” and speculation about immediate vision of God in this life all characterized Dutch vernacular mysticism.\(^{19}\) With the spread of both traditional Latin and vernacular literacy, many Dutch mystical works were translated into Latin and spread throughout Europe.\(^{20}\)

Significantly, *devotio moderna* grew out of this atmosphere of Dutch mysticism, and its popularity throughout Europe helped spread the teachings of Low Country mysticism.\(^{21}\)

Across the Low Countries, along with France and Germany, a new movement of religious laywomen known as beguines spread. Beguines lived together in cloistered communities, although their lack of regulations made the beguines a varied and diverse group rather than a homogenous order. Many beguines received support from the mendicant orders, which allowed them to flourish despite suspicion from the hierarchy.\(^{22}\)

In the thirteenth century and forward, beguines became the target of inquisitorial investigations against mystical heresy. The heretical charges against beguine mystics can be seen in the trial and execution of Marguerite Porete, a fourteenth century beguine.\(^{23}\)

Porete composed her *Mirror of Simple Souls* in vernacular French and discussed the annihilation of the self into God. The self becomes one with God through love, according to Porete. Another notable beguine mystic was Mechthild of Magdeburg. The writings of Mechthild provide a glimpse into the religious life and mysticism of beguines. Mechthild recorded mystical visions of God, the Trinity, heaven, hell, and purgatory; her writings

---

\(^{19}\) Ibid 2. McGinn compiled this list, which does not cover all varieties within Dutch mysticism, based on Ruusbroec’s teaching. Ruusbroec’s teaching significantly influenced the following years of Dutch mysticism.

\(^{20}\) Ibid 1.

\(^{21}\) Ibid 1.


\(^{23}\) Ibid 63.
depict the centrality intense prayer and a concern about the ecclesiastical corruptions of
the Church in her visions.

Perhaps the most notable of late medieval mystics in Germany is Meister Eckhart,
whose life and works are closely connected to the beguine communities. Meister Eckhart
was a Dominican who received his education from Albert the Great and, later, at the
University of Paris. Eckhart recorded sermons in both Latin and German, thus
representing aspects of both the scholastic theology and the mystical theology of the
fourteenth century. As Eckhart provided pastoral leadership at the beguine community,
scholars argue that his writings reflected the theological and mystical currents of German
beguines. Unlike Catherine of Siena, Meister Eckhart presented a more philosophical and
metaphorical mysticism. Yet Eckhart only represented a portion of the proliferation of
mysticism in late medieval Germany, which expands far beyond the scope and length of
this paper.24

The political, religious, and artistic atmosphere of Italian strongly influenced
Italian vernacular mysticism. In addition to the Avignon papacy and corruptions of the
Church, fourteenth century Italy underwent unrest as the various city-states, duchies, and
kingdoms vied for power across the peninsula.25 Many writers, especially mystics,
focused upon this unrest in their writings, as can be seen even in Catherine of Siena’s
political activity and her extensive ecclesiastical commentary in her Dialogue. Yet during
this time, Italy experienced the nascence of the Renaissance, and this certainly influenced
the religious and artistic tone of Italian mysticism. This era produced mystical writers,
prophets, and poets, including St. Catherine of Siena, St. Birgitta of Sweden, Dante

24 Ibid.
25 McGinn, Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism 177.
Alighieri, who demonstrated the true diversity of Italian vernacular mysticism of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A number of Italian women who belonged to tertiary orders wrote mystical treatises, such as St. Angela Folingo. However, other mystics never associated themselves with a particular order, such as St. Catherine of Genoa. Thus Italian mysticism came from women of both religious orders and the literate bourgeoisie.

McGinn notes that, with the exception of Dante and the Renaissance Platonists, the most significant mystics of late medieval Italy were women.\footnote{Ibid 178.} Thus Italian mysticism of the late medieval period spanned across the lay and religious, male and female, celibate and married, royalty and bourgeoisie.

Even though England was more removed from the flourishing of mysticism in central and southern Europe, it too experienced a proliferation in mystical writing. McGinn lists Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich, and the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* as the most significant English late medieval mystics;\footnote{Ibid 331.} this list can be expanded to include Margery of Kempe, whose *Book of Margery Kempe* provides a significant piece of both late medieval mysticism and female authorship. These vernacular mystics followed upon a tradition of twelfth and thirteenth century monastic mysticism, which was written in Latin.\footnote{Ibid 332.} McGinn remarks how “The growth of mysticism was intimately connected with the emergence of vernacular theology…[which was] not only a new form of theology that employed the language of a specific linguistic region…but also one that appealed to a wide audience, including clergy and also significant numbers of the laity.”\footnote{Ibid 333.}
The laity across Europe eagerly received this mysticism, especially those of the emergent urban middle classes, who embraced it and adopted it in their own forms of piety. McGinn portrays mainland Europe in the fourteenth century as where “the towns continued to grow, and with them the urban middle class, who encouraged new forms of piety and made up much of the audience for spiritual and mystical literature.”

Perhaps the eagerness of this reception amongst the laity came from the prominence of lay figures in late medieval mysticism, such as Marguerite Porete, St. Angela of Foligno, and St. Birgitta of Sweden. These and other mystics likely made the mysticism that once belonged to the religious of abbesses and monasteries more accessible to the laity, since the lay members rightfully perceived more similarities between their own lives with these new lay saints. Besides the probable perceived connection between the common folk and the lay saints and mystics, the rise of literacy did indeed contribute to the rise of vernacular mysticism. W.A. Pantin argued, “The devout and literate layman was one of the most important phenomena of the period.”

Significantly, most of these “laymen” were actually women, thus indicating an increased literacy amongst women of this period. This rise in both lay sanctity and literacy created a new audience for mystical theology, an audience to which St. Catherine of Siena strove to introduce her nuanced, orthodox, and affective theology of charity.

Much like the mendicant movements of the century before, the mysticism of the fourteenth century sought to return to the core message of the Gospel, a message which, as it perceived, most of Christianity had neglected for some time. While the Franciscans

---

and the Dominicans developed out of clerics and religious seeking the vita apostolica, now this desire came from the faithful members of the laity. In their proliferation amongst the teaching positions at the prestigious universities, the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries Friars Preachers found themselves devoted to a world that was “intellectually and spiritually inaccessible to the more devout of the laity.” During these centuries, urbanization and increased trade fostered greater communication from town to town throughout Europe. New movements in spirituality thus spread more quickly, which produced greater interest and devotion from the increasing literate laity. However, with religious orders including the Dominicans becoming more involved with universities, they offered less relevant guidance to the changing laity.

**Urbanization, Literacy, and Lay Sanctity**

From the eleventh century into the fourteenth century, despite the Black Death and climate-change induced famine, the Western world experienced economic expansion, particularly in urban regions. Throughout the thirteenth century, the vast territory of the Holy Roman Empire divided into dozens of German and Italian city-states. This landscape was increasingly urbanized with the presence of medieval guilds, universities, and new technologies; significantly, this included growth of trade and increased commerce, both resulting in the nascence of a profit economy. With such urbanization emerged a new bourgeoisie class and lower nobility in the towns. Due to the factors of the presence of universities and smaller town schools, the new economy and wealth of

---

32 Vandenbrouke 409.
33 Ibid 409.
bourgeoisie, and the necessity of communications for trade, literacy rates increased.\textsuperscript{37} Notably, scholars such as McGinn believe that this “growing literacy of the laity” evidences the likelihood that many thirteenth and fourteenth century mystics were moderately literate, and that this literacy paved the way for the rise of vernacular theology prevalent amongst the German and Italian mystics, such as Meister Eckart and the Rhineland Dominicans, St. Catherine of Siena, and others.\textsuperscript{38}

Literacy was not the only notable trend amongst the laity in the later Middle Ages; sanctity and religious participation also experienced growth in that demographic. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the number of female saints and lay saints rose significantly; indeed, as Caroline Walker Bynum remarks, “the rise of the woman saint correlates most dramatically, however, with the rise of the lay saint.”\textsuperscript{39} Certainly the life, legacy, and canonization of one of the most famous medieval saints, St. Francis of Assisi, contributed to the rise of lay sanctity, for Francis was never ordained and thus preached as a layman. From the thirteenth century, new religious roles emerged in greater availability to both women and members of the laity, due to both the prevalence of the mendicant orders and the increasing urbanization of the medieval town.

This phenomenon, which will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter, starkly contrasted with the religious roles available for women in the earlier centuries of the Middle Ages. During the tenth and eleventh centuries, while more women occupied roles of religious power such as abbesses, few female monasteries existed in comparison to the number of male monasteries. These monasteries usually

\textsuperscript{37} McGinn, \textit{Flowering of Mysticism}, 4.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid 4.
\textsuperscript{39} Bynum 127.
restricted entrance to female members of the aristocracy. By the fourteenth century, the option of tertiary orders opened up to women, and often drew from members of the new urbanized bourgeoisie and lower nobility of the towns. The religious participation of the laity, especially women, was transforming; their increased presence in the medieval world and growing numbers of canonization into sainthood, however, required new forms of spirituality appropriate for those of high devotion beyond the walls of the monastery or cloister.

The increased spirituality of the laity predictably led to a sharp rise in the number of lay saints, whether officially canonized or venerated on a more local level. The prominence of lay sanctity across the medieval European landscape likely corresponded with the prevalence of mendicant preachers in towns and cities. This was especially true for the prevalence of women amongst these lay saints. Through their preaching, example of apostolic poverty, and spiritual guidance, the Franciscans and Dominicans regularly encountered the laity, thus providing them with concrete examples of sanctity outside of the cloister, monastery, or university. As they grew in size and presence, the Dominicans and Franciscans expanded to include tertiary orders, which granted membership to members of the laity. The third orders attracted immense numbers of lay women, especially virgins and widows who did not want to, or could not afford to, enter the convent. Indeed, scholars argue that the Third Orders characterized the late medieval rise of lay female sanctity. Furthermore, the acceptance of laity, especially women, in spiritual roles opened up paths for wider participation in the growing society of medieval

40 Bynum, 121-22.
41 Ibid 124.
42 Papi, “Mendicant Friars and Female Pinzochere in Tuscany,” 85.
43 Ibid, 85. Papi claims that the “female movement as a whole” was characterized by “the massive efflorescence of the Third Orders.”
cities. As Scott argues, “the cult of lay saints in Italy would seem to reflect a greater acceptance of lay participation in religious and political affairs there than elsewhere.”

Catherine of Siena: Mysticism

This was the world into which Caterina di Giacomo di Benicasa was born. Her birthplace, Siena, a town of Tuscany, suffered great devastations from the Black Death starting in 1347, her birth-year; and the plague regularly returned throughout her lifetime. As almost all fourteenth century Europeans, she was born and baptized into the Catholic Church; yet this Church, whose leaders embroiled themselves in foreign affairs rather than spiritual concerns, yearned for reform. This was also a world of significant flourishing in mysticism and lay spirituality, which particularly shaped the active life and mystical theology of the woman who would become patron saint of Italy and a doctor ecclesia. The increased lay sanctity in fourteenth century Italy established a background for Catherine’s political and ecclesiastical career. In the age when more literature flowed forth from the mouths of visionaries and poets in the vernacular rather than Latin, Catherine accompanied Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarch as the first prominent Italian writers. Her Dialogue, letters, and prayers are the first surviving works written by a woman in vernacular Italian.

St. Catherine’s brand of mysticism was exceptional even amongst the prevalent mystical current of late medieval religion and piety. Vanderbroucke describes the mysticism of the fourteenth century in the terms of contemplation that was “less intellectual and metaphysical, nearer to the gospel of love.” McGinn notes the rise of

---

44 Scott, “Catherine of Siena and Lay Sanctity in Fourteenth-Century Italy,” 78.
45 Scott 78.
46 Tylus, Reclaiming Catherine of Siena, 46.
47 Vanderbroucke 409.
female mystical writers in German Dominican communities during the first half of the fourteenth century. Rather than the speculations of Meister Eckhart, these Dominican women mystics wrote of individual experiences of God’s love and grace through visions. Like these women, Catherine recorded her visions, which spoke of the prominent mystical theme of union with God; however, significantly for Catherine’s work, the other Dominican female mystics based their writings upon the practices of cloistered life: liturgy, prayer, severe bodily penance, and obedience to vows. Their experience of the love of Christ was intimately related to their experience as contemplative women in a cloistered community. Such was not the experience of Catherine, who, even with her intense life of prayer and high Eucharistic devotion, wrote of her visions as she journeyed across Italy and France.

Centuries later, Catherine’s mysticism stands above that of other female Dominican mystics, because of her remarkable weaving of tradition and originality, the intellectual and the affective, and the contemplative with the active. The Dialogue focused upon charity in its many theological aspects: divine charity towards humanity, the infused virtue of charity as love of God, and the exercise of charity through love of neighbor. While Catherine addressed ecclesiastical corruptions, the call of obedience for both ordinary and religious people, and God’s providence, the central theme and image throughout the Dialogue is the Bridge. The Bridge joins heaven and earth through charity. The Bridge provides the way of truth to those who walk with charity; most significantly, Catherine imagined the Bridge as spanning up the body of Christ.

---

49 Ibid 299.
50 Ibid 300.
Thus the focal point of Catherine’s mysticism and theology is Christological; Christ incarnated God’s divine charity, and the human virtue of charity follows the path of Christ crucified.

**Charity in Catherine’s Theology**

Catherine’s theology, particularly in her discussions of the virtue of charity, demonstrates the incredible theological intellect that marks her mysticism. Although both humility and an awareness of her femininity lead her to speak repeatedly of her “ignorance,” Catherine expressed a thorough and astute knowledge of the theological tradition in all of her writings, especially her *Dialogue*. She refers to Sts. Augustine, Jerome, and “the glorious” Thomas Aquinas throughout parts of the *Dialogue* as “lamps set on a lampstand” with “the light of great learning.” She attributed her knowledge as a gift from God, not any formal learning. Out of charity for God and for neighbor, Catherine sought to teach others through her letters and *Dialogue*. McGinn described Catherine’s *Dialogue* as the key text for her teaching. In the *Dialogue* she wrote about the necessity for all Christians, regardless of their stations in life, to understand Christian doctrine, strive for virtue, and work for the salvation of all souls. The contemplative and religious solely pursued holiness as Catherine described, for this was the demand of their vows. For the laity in the midst of struggles and distractions of everyday life, Catherine sought to instruct them about this holiness through her image of the “bridge” of charity, the centrality of Christ’s sacrificial death, and practical expressions of love of neighbor.

---

52 In letter T272, to Raymond of Capua in autumn 1377, Catherine described writing as “a consolation I’ve never known because of my ignorance.”
53 *Dialogue*, 222, 155.
55 Scott 85.
Love, *carita* in Catherine’s Italian, occupied the central role in her *Dialogue*. Her book, her *Libro* as she fondly called it, rejected neither the intellectual nor the mystical aspects of fourteenth century theology. Rather, as I seek to argue here, Catherine reinterpreted charity for the practical use of the laity. In her *Dialogue*, she sets forth a simultaneously affective and highly doctrinal theology focused upon the virtue of charity. Charity for God and for neighbor could be sought and practiced at every state of life, regardless of religious vows. Catherine’s emphasis on charity, and her high demands for its fulfillment in the life of all Christians, paved a path of holiness as available to those in the everyday walks of life as much as those in the monasteries and universities.

The very content of the *Dialogue* expressed a concern for those across all states of the spiritual life, both clergy and laity, and her imagery of the redemptive bridge and other themes provided instruction for those in very ordinary situations of life. She recounted in the *Dialogue* the revelation that “every state of life is pleasing and acceptable to [God] if it is held to with a good and holy will.”

Thus she wrote with the concern for spiritual welfare of all, especially those not bound under religious vows. Central to this also was the mission of providing spiritual instruction to the laity, who may not receive as thorough spiritual instruction. The prominent scholar on Catherine, Suzanne Noffke, O.P., describes the purpose of Catherine’s *Dialogue* as “obviously the instruction and encouragement of all those whose spiritual welfare was her concern.”

Noffke notes that the content of the *Dialogue* bears striking similarity to Catherine’s letters; many of these letters were sent to members of the laity, as well as clergy and higher members of the Church hierarchy.

---

56 *Dialogue* 110.
57 Noffke, “Foreword,” xi.
Catherine’s Dominican Influence

St. Catherine deeply rooted her understanding of the spiritual life and her calling within the Dominican tradition. For her, the Dominican tradition represented great spiritual teachers, especially St. Dominic and St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus her spiritual life as a Dominican required, as she understood it, to also engage in teaching for the sake of salvation of souls. Her biographer Thomas of Siena (also known as Caffarini) recounted a vision that Catherine’s confessor recorded, which she received shortly before she adopted the Dominican habit. She saw Saints Dominic and Francis appear before her, and St. Dominic spoke to her, “My daughter, you are to take and wear this habit.”58 Throughout her Dialogue, her revelations from God extolled the virtues of St. Dominic above the other saints, particularly for his obedience, continence, true poverty, and pursuit of “the salvation of souls with the light of learning.”59 Catherine perceived Dominic’s service for the conversion, rather than the death, of sinners as an alliance with God’s Truth that created a “very spacious, gladsome, and fragrant, a most delightful garden.”60 She clearly expressed devotion to the founder of her Order, and particularly admired his mission for the salvation of souls, but it was a later Dominican who especially garnered her devotion and admiration.

McGinn characterized Catherine as devoted to St. Thomas Aquinas from a young age, even before her reception in the mantellate, a group of non-cloistered women who donned habits and served the poor.61 Aquinas appeared alongside God in many of

---

59 Catherine of Siena, Dialogue, 337.
60 Ibid 339.
61 McGinn, The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism, 200. McGinn states this in regards to Catherine’s vision that lead her to describe God as “pure being” – a very Thomistic manner of speaking about the divine nature.
Catherine’s visions, most notably her vision in October 1377 that precipitated her writing of the *Dialogue*. Her revelations in the *Dialogue* praised Aquinas several times as “the glorious Thomas” and established him as the epitome of the “mind’s eye,” which figured significantly into Catherine’s understanding of charity.

Catherine first drew upon the image of the “mind’s eye” in the “Prologue” of her *Dialogue*, and it reappears frequently throughout the rest of the book. In the “Prologue,” Catherine described four petitions of prayer and the start of her visions, God invited her to “‘Open your mind’s eye and look within me, and you will see the dignity and beauty of my reasoning creature.”62 Here the mind’s eye corresponds to a mystical vision that looks into the love of God towards humanity. In other passages of *Dialogue*, God calls the mind’s eye to contemplate “the fire of my charity” in Christ,63 for the pupil of this eye is “most holy faith.”64 Catherine intertwines the mind’s eye with her imagery of the Bridge, as the mind’s eye watches the pilgrims sojourning. Her other major theme, self-knowledge, also connects to this image of the mind’s eye, as self-knowledge allows the soul to open the mind’s eye up to God’s charity.65 The mind’s eye serves to connect charity with knowledge and faith: “The soul opens her mind’s eye with the light of faith and with her affection steeped in the fullness of my charity made visible in the sight of my only-begotten Son,” one of Catherine’s visions revealed.66 Catherine perceived the necessity of teaching others about God and divine charity so that others may lift their mind’s eye to God and develop the affection of charity. She described Aquinas as raising

63 Ibid 108.
64 Ibid 92.
65 The themes of the Bridge and self-knowledge will receive more explanation in chapters three and four, which analyze the *Dialogue* more in depth.
66 Ibid 123.
his mind’s eye to God in very similar language to how she describes her visions. This develops a parallel in *Dialogue* between his teachings and her visions. Thus the association with Thomas to the mind’s eye indicates the significance of the Dominican theologian for Catherine’s understanding of her teaching of her mysticism, for Aquinas provided an example for her.

**Catherine’s Education**

Certainly Catherine did not encounter Aquinas’ teaching through the universities or any scholastic training, yet she surrounded herself with learned Dominicans, including her personal confessors, scribes, and advisors, and likely encountered the theological ideas taught to Dominicans – including, significantly, those of Thomas Aquinas.67 Notably, her confessor and biographer Raymond of Capua later became Master General of the Dominicans, which indicates a high level of theological training and expertise,68 through their frequent exchanges of letters and visits, Catherine surely learned theology, particularly Thomistic, from him. As McGinn asserts, there can be no question of “the fact she was deeply influenced by friars who knew the teaching of Thomas and who doubtless told her much about his theology.”69 Catherine’s lack of formal education by no means indicates a lack of theological education, which she acquired through letters, conversations, and possibly her own reading.70

Debate exists as to whether St. Catherine can appropriately be considered Thomistic. M. Cordovani, Innocenzo Taurisano, and Adriana Oddasso-Cartotti, all notably Italian in pedigree, argue that Catherine’s theology was clearly Thomistic, and

---

67 McGinn, 217.
68 Ibid 199.
69 Ibid 217.
70 Ibid 216. Despite some scholarly disagreement, McGinn asserts Catherine could read some Latin and even more Italian.
thus could even be considered scholastic in a sense.\textsuperscript{71} Few argue that she was not Thomistic, and some, including Louis Canet and Michael B. Hackett, claim St. Augustine served as the primary theological influence on Catherine’s theology.\textsuperscript{72} Both Suzanne Noffke, one of the most prominent modern Catherine scholars, and Bernard McGinn, the author of the five-volume series on Christian mysticism, present Catherine as influenced by a multitude of theological sources, especially Sts. Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas,\textsuperscript{73} and Bonaventure, along with liturgical sources such as St. Jerome’s Vulgate Bible and the book of hours.\textsuperscript{74} While I agree she does not heavily depend upon one particular theologian or school, her deep devotion to Aquinas, her Dominican context, and Aquinas’ influence on later medieval mysticism indicate a particular Thomistic stream of thought present in her writing. Significantly, Catherine at times adopted the same stance as Aquinas on heavily debated theological issues of her time, such as her denial of Immaculate Conception.\textsuperscript{75} This demonstrates a particular alignment in her thought to the Thomistic teachings, which were more prevalent in her Dominican community that in the wider theological discourse of the day.

Suzanne Noffke, O.P., carefully notes in her annotations to Catherine’s letters and \textit{Dialogue} the similarities between Catherine’s theology and Aquinas’ \textit{Summa}. While Catherine most likely did not directly adopt passages of the \textit{Summa} into her own writing, these similarities indicate that Aquinas’ theology occupied significant space in the

\textsuperscript{71} Noffke, “Introduction,” 10. Noffke provides an overview of scholarship regarding the theological influences on Catherine’s theology, especially in the \textit{Dialogues}, in her introduction to Catherine’s \textit{Dialogue}.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Noffke 10.
\textsuperscript{74} McGinn 217.
\textsuperscript{75} McGinn 217.
theological and liturgical memory of Catherine, and thus shaped some of her theological ideas, such as the primacy of charity above all other virtues. One letter from the Rocca, written a couple months after Catherine began composition of the *Dialogue*, articulated her understanding of charity and a virtue that closely allies with Aquinas’ teaching.

“Every virtue has life because it is motivated by charity,” Catherine wrote to Pietro di Giovanni di Viva.76 She counseled him on the necessity of charity for the fruits of virtue, urging, “Without charity we would not receive the fruit of grace even though we might have an act of virtue. So we must be motivated by love in our acquisition of virtue.”77 In Noffke’s translation of this letter, she notes the striking similarity between this description of charity in relation to virtue and that in *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 23, a. 8.78 There Aquinas spoke of how “it is charity that directs the acts of all other virtues and that consequently gives the form to all other acts of virtue.”79 Catherine referenced charity with the exact words again in a letter from the same time to Niccolo de Nanni di Ser Vanni, so clearly this notion of charity featured prominently in her thought and counsel.80

*Catherine’s Devotion to Aquinas*

Beyond her theological similarities to Aquinas, especially in reference to the theological virtues, Catherine expressed clear devotion to the Dominican saint in her *Dialogue*. These references connect her devotion to Aquinas with her emphasis on the primacy of charity in the Christian life. The first explicit reference to Aquinas appeared

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid, footnotes.
79 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II q.23, a.8. Translation from Noffke.
about halfway through the *Dialogue*, in chapter 85 of “The Bridge.” Catherine was exploring the fire of charity that God sends into the human heart to draw close the heart, spirit, and mind’s eye to Him. This burning divine charity infuses selfless love in the human heart, as “their mind’s eye rises up and gazes into my Godhead, and love follows understanding to be nourished there and brought into union.”

God then revealed to Catherine how Aquinas was the prime example of charity, for when he lifted his mind’s eye to God, he received the light of Truth. “By this mind’s eye Thomas [Aquinas] saw me and there gained the light of great learning,” Catherine wrote in her *Dialogue*, thus identifying Aquinas’ knowledge with charity. This great learning manifested itself as charity for the salvation of souls as one of the “lamps to enlighten blind and dense understandings.” Thomas achieved great learning and brought Truth to people because of his great love for God and for others. Catherine’s devotion to Aquinas here derives from her own pursuit to see God’s love with her mind’s eye and her use of Thomas as a model.

While Catherine expressed certain disdain for the “well-read but proud scholars with great knowledge,” Aquinas’ knowledge transcended human study through the infusion of charity. As God explained to her the final stage of charity, he pointed to the Dominican scholar, saying, “Thus you know of glorious Thomas Aquinas that he gained his knowledge more from the study of prayer and the lifting up of his mind and the light of understanding than from human study.”

God extolled to Catherine the praises of Aquinas, for “he was a light that I sent into the mystic body of the holy Church to

---

81 Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 155.
82 Ibid 155.
83 Ibid 155.
84 Ibid 157.
85 Ibid 181.
disperse the darkness of error,” and set Aquinas on par with the light of St. John the Evangelist. Catherine understood her mission of preaching, prayer, and reform in a likewise manner, as Truth commissioned her to proclaim His light to the Church and the world. Her missions extended beyond the Church to unbelievers and the salvation of their souls. Like Aquinas as a light of understanding to those who are blind, Catherine also carried with her to good news of the Gospel to others. As the Dialogue described in regards to Aquinas, it was the blazing fire of charity and unitive love that brought forth this mission for her.

**The Dialogue and Her Apostolic Commission**

She wrote to Raymond in April 1376 about a vision, in which she “was immersed in the divine Being, along with the truly joyful, in union and love’s affection.” She recounted how she “saw the people, Christians and unbelievers, entering the side of Christ crucified. In desire and impelled by love I walked through their midst and entered with them into Christ gentle Jesus.” This vision affirmed her Dominican vocation, as she saw her “father” St. Dominic, along with St. John the Evangelist, who later joined Aquinas in other visions. The presence of great teachers of God’s love, especially the founder of her order, strengthened Catherine’s realization of her call to teach. She received the commission for her mission, for what Noffke calls her “mystical activism,” when Christ handed her a cross and an olive branch of peace. Christ instructed her to carry both the cross and the branch to believers and unbelievers alike. Catherine recalled, “And he said to me, ‘Tell them, ‘I am bringing you news of great joy!’” This vision

---

86 Ibid 181.
88 Ibid 92.
89 Ibid 92.
bestowed upon her the call to “give myself completely in seeking God’s honor, the salvation of souls, and the renewal and exaltation of holy Church,” which “by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit I intend to persevere until I die.”

Thus she envisioned herself, both before and when she composed the *Dialogue*, as one of God’s lights on earth; and when she described Aquinas, Augustine, John the Evangelist, and other saints God’s “lamps set on a lampstand,” they were those who accompanied her in that holy mission.

Catherine, perhaps in part due to her situation and her gender, perceived her mission as different from those of the others lamps, including Aquinas. Notably, while she depicted Aquinas as “the blazing torch…dispelling the darkness of heresies,” her own mission rested in the conversion of souls and the reform of the Church. It was a mission rooted in prayer, as earlier described for Aquinas, but also in spiritual instruction and service to others out in the world. The olive branch of peace she received, rather than the books of a scholastic or the habit of a cloistered nun, certainly demonstrated her calling out in the world, to bring peace and the joy of the Gospel into the everyday lives of the laity, despite the suffering from plague and famine and the corruption of the hierarchy. Most notably, she adopted in a new manner the mission of those other lamps of God whom she so admired. Rather than in the scholastic’s arguments and definitions of Aquinas, Catherine shone her light through the act of writing – an act which, as this thesis will later argue, she perceived as a manifestation of the virtue of charity.

Through both dictation and her own pen, she wrote prolific correspondence to people from all classes of medieval society and all states of life. This correspondence

---

90 Ibid 93.
91 Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 222.
92 Ibid 339.
particularly heightened during the time of her mission, as recounted in the vision
discussed above, and of the composition of *Dialogue*.\(^{93}\) Her writing portrayed the
universality of her mission, as she wrote to saints and sinners, to popes, cardinals,
bishops, clergy, and mendicants, to queens, kings, princes, and local authorities, and to
the common folk, members of the laity, and her own disciples.\(^{94}\) Repeatedly she
prayerfully urged her correspondents to cultivate virtue, love God, and aid their
neighbors, thus always maintaining the centrality of charity in her message. She upheld
the perfectly orthodox doctrines of the scholastics, as she had informally learned from her
disciples and confessors, and transformed it into a message at service for the salvation of
souls and the reform of the Church.

In conclusion, this chapter presents St. Catherine of Siena to the reader in light of
her historical, theological, and social context. Her context demonstrates the remarkable
accomplishments of Catherine of Siena and the importance of her mysticism to theology,
especially spirituality and practice. This chapter also establishes the connection between
St. Catherine and St. Thomas Aquinas, which thus provides the basis for Aquinas’
influence on Catherine’s emphasis on virtue in her theology. Finally, this chapter also
introduces the important argument about Catherine’s perception about the importance of
her writing as part of her apostolic commission to preach the Gospel.

\(^{93}\) McGinn 198.
\(^{94}\) Ibid.
CHAPTER TWO
DOMINICANS, MYSTICISM, AND CATHERINE OF SIENA

Introduction

This chapter builds upon the information of the first chapter in order to firmly establish the information necessary for central arguments of this thesis. In order to argue for St. Catherine of Siena’s repurposing of St. Thomas Aquinas’ teaching on the virtue of charity, a solid background on the influence of Aquinas in the fourteenth century, especially for the Dominicans, and then the influence of the Dominicans on Catherine, must be established. Catherine’s own personal devotion to Aquinas will also be examined. The chapter will first discuss Catherine’s entry into the Dominican Order, and then it will transition into a chronological discussion of the Friars Preachers, the role of women in the order, and the theological authority of Aquinas in the order. To support the central thesis of Catherine’s writing for the laity, the rise in lay sanctity will be discussed.

The chapter will then return to the discussion of Catherine of Siena by examining her education and the start of her public ministry. This chapter will establish background information on the life, ministry, and theology of Catherine for the reader to understand the close reading of her Dialogue and the arguments made in the following chapters. Finally, this chapter provides information on Catherine’s ability to write, which figures centrally into the major thesis argument about writing as an act of charity for Catherine.
Catherine of Siena: Biography

Of the Doctors of the Church, Saint Catherine of Siena remains one of the only who lived and wrote as a member of the laity. Although she belonged to the Order of Preachers, her status as a tertiary Dominican required no vows, even though she did consecrate her virginity to Christ at a very young age. In her brief but forceful thirty-three years, Catherine experienced mystical visions of union with God, fought for ecclesiastical and religious reform, and engaged in public corporeal acts of mercy throughout her town of Siena in Tuscany, Italy. Catherina di Giacomo di Benincasa was born in 1347 to parents Lapa and Jacopo and was one of the last born in a series of twenty-five children.95 The Benincasa “lived in reasonable prosperity, but had not political or social significance” in their little part of Tuscany.96 While legends surround her childhood, particularly concerning her early visions, Suzanne Noffke, O.P., describes the young Catherine as “a striking pleasant and outgoing youngster, imaginative and idealistic in her devotion,” as well as expressing “stubborn independence.”97 These characteristics of religious piety, visions retold through imaginative language, and independence, especial for a woman, shaped Catherine’s life and actions for the remainder of her years.

In 1363, when she approached the socially acceptable age of marriage in fourteenth century Italy, she entered the mantellata, which was a group of women amongst the laity, frequently widows, who chose to associate themselves with the

Dominican Order rather than give themselves in marriage. Catherine’s past actions provided precedent for this action; at the young age of seven she pledged her virginity to God, and at fifteen she cut off her hair in an effort to shun the prospect of marriage. While she, in her deliberate decision not to take official religious vows, remained a member of the laity, Catherine shunned the normal late medieval laywoman’s life of marriage and numerous children. In 1368 she experienced a notable vision during her time in solitary contemplation. She saw herself receiving a ring from Christ as his bride in a mystical espousal; this vision further fortified her decision not to marry. Yet something about this vision also informed her that she should not relegate her life to remaining behind the walls of contemplative isolation; and so, shortly the vision, after she returned to her family’s house. With this decision, she fully embraced a life of consecrated virginity and lay ministry, a unique combination during a time when most virgins entered cloisters and most lay people married.

In his description of St. Catherine’s embodiment of Dominican spirituality, Erik Borgman, a lay Dominican himself, describes Catherine as “a lay person in every sense of the word,” for “she occupied “no office in the church, no political power, no social pretensions, no social role and no specific skill or systematic training.” Yet for fourteenth century Tuscany, remarkably, a greater participation from the laity in the religious and political sphere was not completely radical. In her chapter on Catherine in Lay Sanctity, Medieval and Modern, Karen Scott remarks, “The cult of lay saints in Italy would seem to reflect a greater acceptance of lay participation of religious and political

---

98 Borgman 47.
100 Ibid 4.
102 Borgman, 50.
affairs there than elsewhere” in late medieval Europe. Other scholars such as Anna Benventui Papi in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* confirm this trend of lay participation. Papi states, “the thirteenth century saw the flourishing of lay sanctity,” which she directly associates with “the world and the problems of the artisan class, who through the exercises of their trades devised a new formula of sanctification.” Papi discerns a connection between this “new formula of sanctification” and the proliferation of the mendicant orders in towns and cities, and she claims the mendicants served as both the inspiration and the support for the prospering of lay sanctity. Whether this inspiration and support was deliberate, or Papi is retrospectively linking the two, historical proximity does exist between the rise of the mendicant orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans and the increased acceptance of lay sanctity, especially in medieval Italy.

**The Dominicans: Background and History**

In the early eleventh century, an earnest and prevalent re-reading of the Gospels permeated both Christians and heretical groups, such as the Cathars. As scholars claim, these Gospel-inspired movements were likely connected to the rise of trade and cities, as was the trend in lay sanctity. Living conditions improved for many, but the increasing urbanization also brought more people in closer contact with poverty. This situation, Borgman claims, “led to a profound re-reading of the Christian tradition and especially the New Testament.” This re-reading emphasized the attention the Gospels provides to those poor either materially or, as the Gospel of Matthew lists in the Beatitudes, those

---


105 Borgman, 31.
poor in spirit. As Borgman states, “a strikingly large number of [lay Christians] read with renewed attention the texts of the Gospels in which the poor and the little ones are said to be blessed.” While popes and kings increased in social power and, often proportionally, wealth, the laity discovered the Gospel message of poverty to provide them with spiritual refreshment. As many lay Christians found the new trade and technology to provide them with more stable lives, they adapted this message of serving the poor in their own lives as their own form of religious life. The cities allowed them with closer contact with the poor, and they shared in common with the poor the religious status of the laity. It was for them a way of serving God outside of the priest’s pulpit or the monk’s cell.

Some of these Christians took the renewed interest in the Gospel beyond the Catholic Church and broke off into groups that were soon deemed heretical, such as the Cathars of southern France. In a conversation with a Cathar innkeeper, Dominic de Guzman discovered where service to the materially impoverished could be joined with preaching to heretics. The Cathars perceived apostolic poverty as central to the Gospel message. Dominic’s emphasis on the poor and apostolic poverty appealed to the Cathars, and thus offered a path to reunite Cathars and other heretics with the Church through the very message that led them to break off. He realized that the life of a cleric, focused on liturgy, prayer, and masses, “was remote from the daily struggle to exist waged by ordinary people.” In 1203, the founder of the Order of Preachers turned away from the conventional life of a cleric in order to engage, in a manner true to the Gospels, with the

---

106 Ibid 31.
107 Ibid 31.
108 Borgman 25.
everyday needs, spiritual and physical, of those out in the world.\textsuperscript{109} Dominic directed this decision both to the established Church, in which he witnessed numerous abuses, and to the heretics, whom he believed left the Church to seek genuine practice of Christian faith.\textsuperscript{110} Dominic’s emphasis on preaching would heal the wounds of abuses, while also teaching the true practice of faith within the true Church, through adherence to the Gospel in word and action.

Since part of Dominic’s mission was to return people to the Church, he did not want to break away from the Catholic Church and thus required papal authorization of his small band of preachers. In 1217 Pope Honorius III granted Dominic and his companions permission to preach publically; this permission extended across the lands of Christendom. As Borgman notes, “Honorius evidently shared their view that there was an urgent need for good preaching combined with a credible presence,” and the Order of Preachers, as Dominic and his companions were named, did not fail to answer that need.\textsuperscript{111} Dominic loosely bound his companions under the Rule of St. Augustine and then sent them out in groups of two to preach. They broke from not only the walls of the monastery, but also from the standard of self-sufficiency. Rather, the Order of Preachers was a mendicant order, as it moved from city to city, depending on the kindness of others for food and shelter.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid 26.
Dominicans, Laity, and Women

As the Order of Preachers spread across the cities of Europe, preaching to the laity and receiving their support, their core ideas on the Christian life spread to the laypeople of Europe. With their message of a Gospel focused on care for the least of people, and their dedication to education in order to answer the difficult questions of quotidian life, the Dominicans attracted many listeners, especially amongst the middle and lower classes of the urban laity. Their spirituality especially left its mark upon the hearts and minds of thirteenth and fourteenth century laypeople, especially, later, upon the mysticism, service, and writings of St. Catherine of Siena.

Remarkably, the Dominican order included women from its founding. The groups of heretics that spurred St. Dominic to start preaching had many female followers. Some of these heretical groups, at least initially, appealed to women because of the new religious opportunities they offered. Even after many of these heretical groups developed more hierarchical structures, their spiritual impulses continued to appeal to women. The heretical groups emphasized affective spirituality, extreme penitence and asceticism, inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a very anthropocentric Christology, and, notably, a “bypassing of clerical authority.” As the Order of Preachers founders St. Dominic and his close companion Bishop Diego sought to return Christians from the heretical groups, “they quickly realized the necessity of winning the women,” for these women composed a significant number of the followers of heresies. As they preached, men and women from these groups returned to the Church with an attachment to the Dominicans.

---

113 McGinn, The Flowering of Mysticism, 292.
114 Bynum 124.
115 Ibid.
However, the number of women associated with the nascent Order of Preachers was not solely from the conversion of heretical groups; historical evidence indicates that St. Dominic “was concerned that women, no less than men, should play a role in the form of the apostolic life he envisaged.”\(^{117}\) Within a few decades of the inception of the Order of Preachers, women received from the pope the permission to receive recognition as members of the mendicant orders.\(^{118}\)

**Dominicans and Mysticism**

As the atmosphere of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries pervaded the mendicant orders, the Franciscans and Dominicans each developed their own mysticism. The early Dominicans maintained a devotion to the *vita apostolica*, and concentrated this devotion on the preaching of faith and morals.\(^{119}\) This emphasis on faith and morals led to the prevalence of Friars Preachers in the newly founded universities, most notably Sts. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. The Dominicans valued learned preaching, and with the universities, they could provide the highest education to their male members. Although Sts. Albert and Thomas were not mystics in the widespread definition of the time, their teachings significantly influenced the later Dominicans mystics, both the speculative mystics of thirteenth century Germany and the reform-minded mystics, including St. Catherine, who emerged in the fourteenth century.\(^{120}\) The pervasiveness of Christian neo-Platonism, specifically Pseudo-Dionysius, in the thought of Albert the Great found its expression in the Rhineland mysticism of Meister Eckhart and Henry Suso. Notably, this highly speculative mysticism manifested itself predominately in male mystical writings;

---

\(^{117}\) Ibid 292.
\(^{118}\) Ibid 293.
\(^{119}\) Ibid 295.
\(^{120}\) McGinn, *Harvest of Mysticism*, 12.
few, if any, Dominican female mystics espoused such mysticism, even if Meister Eckhart and others preached within communities of Dominican women.

As McGinn noted, “The Dominicans were inclined to be suspicious of attempts to define a single or unique Dominican spirituality or mysticism,” and this was most definitely true in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{121} The diversity of thirteenth and fourteenth century Dominican spirituality encompassed academic clerics, cloistered men and women, and the tertiary orders, sometimes also referred to as the penitential orders. Dominican women were members of the third orders and had the option to pursue the Dominican way of life without entering a convent or taking religious vows. They still often lived in cloistered communities or in groups with other tertiary women from their town. Cloistered and communal life directly impacted their form of prayer and mysticism; since the life of the Dominican tertiary orders centered on penitence, many of these women tended toward ascetical practices, which were frequently accompanied by mystical visions.\textsuperscript{122} Female mystical writing flourished in Dominican communities in the early half of the fourteenth century, particularly in German cloisters.\textsuperscript{123} Unlike the speculative mysticism of the Dominican men, the collective mysticism of the Beguines, or even the earlier monastic mystical texts focused on Scripture, the Dominican women’s mysticism recorded individual encounters with God’s grace. German Dominican women recorded these encounters in a notable collection of late medieval women’s religious writing. These cloistered women produced the \textit{Sister Books}, which overflowed with accounts of ecstasies, visions, and experiences of union with Christ.\textsuperscript{124} Significantly,

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid 12.
\textsuperscript{122} McGinn, \textit{Flowering of Mysticism}, 297.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid 298.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid 299.
many of these themes characterized the general tone of late medieval female mysticism, and these themes bear similarity to elements present in Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogue.*

Both within the cloisters and the cities, through the preaching and presence of the mendicant Dominicans, the laity encountered Dominican spirituality and teachings. Dominican spirituality was, indeed, a type of spirituality very accessible to the ordinary people of medieval towns and cities. The central notion of God’s nearness and involvement in everyday life, especially to those whom the Gospels called blessed for their littleness and poorness, appealed to the masses of the laity. Arguably, Dominic’s perception of the nearness of God was intimately intertwined with his decision to found an order of preachers who lived out in the world and reached out to the everyday people. If God can be encountered in everyday life, then preaching within the walls of a restless city offered a closer glimpse at God than did the walls of a stable monastery. As a result, many members of the laity experienced attraction to the Dominican spirituality and way of life and sought to join the Order of Preachers.

*Mendicant Orders and Lay Sanctity*

However, while St. Dominic’s spirituality had “lay people stand at the origin,” his order had to consist of priests, since they were the members of medieval society who could preach in public, study theology, and read Scripture. Consequently, Dominic’s outlines for trained preachers was that “only unmarried men could be full members of this Order,” and therefore, “the membership of women as contemplative and much later as active sisters, and the membership of the laity involved in the Order, ultimately

---

125 Borgman 31.
126 Ibid 34.
remained a derivative membership.”127 While the option still remained open for men to enter if they left behind their lay lives for the priesthood, women as a whole could not obtain full membership in the Order of Preachers. Women then could only either take religious vows and enter as a cloister, or, if they chose not to take vows, devote their lives to prayer and charity in their towns with other Dominican tertiary women.

It is not mere historical coincidence that a rise in female lay saints occurred concurrently with the spread of mendicant preaching. The mendicant orders, particularly Dominicans through their spirituality, brought the laity closer to the divine and invited them to find holiness in the everyday matters of their lives. For women they offered equality both in religious and societal practice, for even though they could never enter into the priesthood, they could carry out the Dominican call to contemplation of God through service to the common people. As Papi asserted, “what truly characterized this female movement as a whole was the massive efflorescence of the Third Orders” of the Dominicans and Franciscans.128 The nearness of God in the little sufferings and joys of everyday life also meant the nearness of sanctity; thus sanctity was as available to the laity as it was to those behind the walls of a monastery or cloister.

**Thomas Aquinas and the Dominican Order**

As referenced in the previous chapter, both the Franciscans and the Dominicans each suffered their own “prolonged identity crisis during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.”129 Historian Elizabeth Lowe notes how both mendicant orders experienced gradually loss of prestige, influence, and members over these periods, while also

---

127 Ibid 34.
128 Papi 85.
enduring threats of censorship and even condemnation from the higher ecclesiastical ranks.\textsuperscript{130} Condemnation especially threatened the Franciscan and Dominican theologians at the universities who regularly engaged in scholastic debates and argumentative writings. The new diversities in the theologies of these Orders, as encouraged by the universities, created internal problems, which manifested primarily through the rise of factions and conflicting interpretations within the Orders.\textsuperscript{131} Within the Dominican Order, the factions of the thirteenth century contested the theological authority of Thomas Aquinas.

In the quarter of the century after the Dominican theologian’s death, various groups in the Church divided themselves regarding Aquinas’ theological authority. As shortly after Aquinas’ death as 1280, some Dominicans began to identify Aquinas’ teachings as the official doctrines of their Order.\textsuperscript{132} While most of Aquinas’ early followers were Dominicans, most of the ecclesiastical authorities, including the pope and most bishops, the Franciscans, and the secular magistri of the universities opposed the Aristotelianism that defined Aquinas’ theology.\textsuperscript{133} Some scholastic theologians of the late thirteenth century even believed that the censures of the Condemnations of 1277 included the teachings of Aquinas.\textsuperscript{134} There were even members of the Dominican Order who opposed the teachings of Aquinas, and a debate regarding the doctrinal authority of Aquinas reached its peak in the Order between the years of 1307 and 1323.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid 1.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid 1.
\textsuperscript{132} Elizabeth Lowe, \textit{The Contested Theological Authority of Thomas Aquinas}, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 121.
\textsuperscript{133} Lowe, “The Dominican Order and Theological Authority of Thomas Aquinas in the Early Fourteenth Century,” 2-3.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid 2.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid 3.
By 1323, Aquinas’ authority had been ascertained fully within the Dominican Order and partially within the wider Church. Pope John XXII canonized Aquinas in 1323; even before this, the Dominican general chapters of 1309 and 1316 “identified Thomas’ teachings as the common and sane teachings of the Order.”136 Of Aquinas’ writings, *Summa Theologiae* and his commentary on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* were perhaps the most widely read during the fourteenth century.137 For the Dominicans of the fourteenth century, “Thomas’ authority was primarily magisterial, resting upon the widespread recognition of his eminent learning, the prodigious number of texts which his efforts yielded and his gift of teaching.”138 As the authority and prominence of Aquinas in the Dominican Order increased during the fourteenth century, other religious orders also came to view his teaching as doctrinally authoritative; these orders included the Augustinian and Carmelite Orders, but not the Franciscans.139

While many saints of the medieval period became the subjects of widespread popular devotion that led to their canonization, it was specifically the Dominican hierarchy that pressed for the canonization of Thomas Aquinas.140 Historian Elizabeth Lowe argues that the Dominican hierarchy actually discouraged popular devotion of Aquinas, and instead promoted the saint’s teachings and philosophy.141 This is not to say that no popular devotion existed to Aquinas; St. Catherine’s devotion to him certainly demonstrates lay devotion to the saint. Yet the Dominican Orders’ efforts did indeed shape fourteenth century devotion to Aquinas as intellectual. Based on written accounts

137 Ibid, 123. Lowe explained the writings of Dominican theologians of this period, such as Hervaeus Natalis, to see which works of Aquinas they most frequently referenced.
138 Ibid 125.
139 Ibid 132.
140 Ibid 133.
141 Ibid 133.
from the fourteenth century, Lowe asserts that those most familiar with Aquinas’ teachings were students and teachers at the major Dominican institutions of education.\textsuperscript{142} However, the Dominicans of the fourteenth century did not all remain in the universities; after all, the purpose of these medieval universities and even Aquinas’ \textit{Summa Theologiae} was the preparation of preachers. Thus the intellectual devotion to Aquinas would travel out of the university and into the public square, thus transforming into more public devotion of the Dominicans’ beloved teacher through the medium of preaching.

Evidence strongly affirms the authority of St Thomas Aquinas’ teachings over fourteenth century theology and spirituality, especially in the Order of Preachers. Elizabeth Lowe suggests that Aquinas’ teachings were most widely accepted and promoted at the Dominican education centers of Europe, thus spanning across different geographic, intellectual, and spiritual borders of the late thirteenth and fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{143} Most popular of Aquinas’ teachings was his moral theology as presented in the \textit{Secunda secundae} of his \textit{Summa Theologiae}. Many Dominican preachers and moral theologians adopted these moral teachings, which include the theological and moral virtues, for pastoral purposes.\textsuperscript{144} Teaching from the \textit{Summa Theologiae} of Aquinas was especially prevalent in early fourteenth century Italy, and most of the Italian Dominican provinces promoted Aquinas’ teachings even before the whole Order established his teaching as doctrinal.\textsuperscript{145} Since St. Catherine of Siena frequently corresponded, conversed, and confessed to Dominican preachers, it is very likely she came in contact with Aquinas’ teachings on the moral and theological virtues through this context. Recently,
scholars have argued for the understanding of a more mystical element present in Aquinas’ life and preaching. This push in scholarship provides evidence that Aquinas influenced mystics of the late thirteenth and fourteenth century, thus demonstrating the probability of his indirect influence upon Catherine of Siena.

**The Dominican Order and the Start of Catherine’s Ministry**

Such was the spiritual, political, social, and intellectual tone of the fourteenth century, the era into which Catherine of Siena was born. Inarguably these currents shaped the life and events of this woman who would exert influence so great that, centuries later, she would become the first female *doctor ecclesia*. Many scholars credit Saint Catherine of Siena’s popularity and power of persuasion to this background of mendicant orders and lay sanctity. Karen Scott credits the rise in lay sanctity in medieval Italy for Catherine’s success, arguing, “It is in part against this background of the relative acceptability of lay autonomy and participation in religious affairs in late medieval Italy that the career and thought of St. Catherine of Siena can be understood and explained.”

The mendicants brought sanctity beyond the walls of the monastery and into the walls of the growing medieval cities. Particularly late medieval Tuscany’s acceptance of active and conspicuous laywomen, in part due to the presence of the Dominican order and the roles they provided for women, made it possible for a lay woman to involve herself in the affairs not only of the Italian city-state, but also of the Church hierarchy.

It was within her status as a laywoman, an uncloistered and tertiary member of the Order of Preachers, that St. Catherine thrived in her holiness. Since she did not take

---

146 While McGinn discusses this in his chapter on Thomas in *The Harvest of Mysticism*, Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., presents this view throughout his series *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, especially *Volume II: Spiritual Master*.

147 Scott 78.
formal vows, a cloister did not confine her; she could live a life of both contemplation and charity from the house of her parents, inside the wall of Siena rather than a convent. The Dominicans particularly enabled her to live such a life; from the founding of the order onward, communities of sisters and brothers of poenitentia thrived, even if they depended to a certain degree on the priests and religious in the Order of Preachers.148

Around the age of 16, Catherine joined one of these communities, called a mantellata, of Sienese laywomen.149 Thus she became a soror de poenitentia in the Dominican order, and adopted the black mantle of the Order of Preachers.150

After her “mystical espousal” to Christ, Catherine withdrew from her solitude; she went out into the world and sought to speak the message of Christ, guide souls to salvation in Christ, and minister to the poor. Her visions both provided the imperative and the authority for this action, an action that fully reflected Dominican spirituality. In one vision, recorded by her biographer Raymond of Capua, Jesus told Catherine “to get out of the confines of her house and walk fully in the footsteps of Dominic.”151 She claimed her gender, her status as “the frailest of all” and a “poor creature” prevented her from a life like that of St. Dominic; yet Jesus replied, “Am I not he who created humankind, men and women? Can I not give the grace of my spirit to whom I will?”152 He told her, “for in me there is neither man nor woman, commoner nor nobility, all are alike in me.”153 Such was also the attitude of the Dominicans, who welcomed men and women from all states of life into their tertiary orders. Neither her gender nor her lay status could prevent her,
then, from following her divine call to live a life dedicated to love of God and love of neighbor.

Of her other visions, one in which she witnessed both Christians and infidels entering into the open side of Christ crucified “suggested or confirmed to Catherine that the most appropriate means for her to bring peace and salvation to all of humanity was to travel and to speak.” Catherine received what she understood as an apostolic commission and, with the same zeal that lead her to chop off her hair to maintain her virginity, began a life of public preaching and witness. While she could not become a full Dominican preacher, for her gender prevented this, she preached the mercy and love of God through her words and her actions. She thus shifted her focus from retreating from the world into contemplation, to attention to embracing the world, in all its suffering, for God’s sake. Her lay status allowed her to go out into the world and to attend to the sick, the hungry, the poor of Tuscany, while her mantle, fervent prayer, and piety marked her as a woman dedicated to God. Soon enough, her fellow townspeople learned her face, and associated her with spiritual and corporeal acts of mercy to all in need. “Catherine became known in her native Siena for her charitable activities on behalf of the poor and the sick and for her spiritual direction of lay and religious people.” This role, however, was neither typical nor socially acceptable for a woman of her time.

The Dominican Order and Catherine’s Mysticism

St. Catherine brought the penitential practices and the visionary mysticism of the Dominican tertiary women outside of the walls of the cloister and into the public square of Siena. Both lay citizens and her religious superiors expressed their discomfort with her

---

154 Scott 82.
155 Scott 79.
behavior, both for her penance through service to the poor and sick, and for her public acts of devotion.\textsuperscript{156} Even for all the new religious opportunities the mendicant orders had opened for women and laypeople, this behavior bore no precedent. Yet true to the Dominican belief that God is encountered in the world, there Catherine found Him; not within the walls of a cloister, in regulated hours of prayer, or in extreme penitential mortifications, but in her neighbors, in political prisoners, in hospitals, in all people everywhere she went.

Saint Catherine of Siena adopted the mysticism and charitable service that the Dominican tertiary women practiced and brought it into the public square. Her greatest repurposing of the Dominican tradition came about when she presented St. Thomas Aquinas’s teaching on the theological virtues and the centrality of charity into a mystical theology accessible to the laity. Thus she made the theology of charity from the greatest Dominican theological mind into a theology that could be practiced by those outside of the universities and cloisters, those in the everyday walks of life. Her mystical visions in \textit{The Dialogue} bore a practical note to her audience, as she received instruction from God on how to live out a life of charity. She carried this mysticism over into her own practice through her prayers, letters that aided in the reform of the Avignon Papacy, in her teachings on charity in \textit{Dialogue}, and in her service to towns throughout the Italian peninsula. The laity could, through the mystical lens of spiritual instruction of \textit{The Dialogue} and the example of Catherine herself, follow in her footsteps. Thus the laity could encounter for themselves the “friendship with God” through love of God and love of neighbor. This notion of “friendship with God” was not Catherine’s original idea, but

came from her beloved St. Thomas, who famously developed it in his *Summa Theologiae*.\(^{157}\)

**Catherine’s Devotion to Aquinas**

Saint Catherine’s interpretation of Aquinas’ scholastic teachings on the virtue of charity receives verification from her numerous visions in which Aquinas accompanied Christ. One of her hagiographers, Thomas of Siena, also referred to as Caffarini, recounted in his *Libellus de Supplemento* a vision she received in the years before her public ministry took on its most political and ecclesiastical charges. In this vision, which Catherine experienced on the eve of the feast of Epiphany, Catherine experienced herself passing through a narrow gate and then meeting Christ. As she passed through the gate, she lost her earthly garments, and so Christ reclothed her. Caffarini notes many saints accompanied Christ and bestowed gifts upon Catherine after Christ provided her new clothing. Of these saints, Thomas Aquinas was present, and he gifted her with light.\(^{158}\)

A letter Catherine wrote, in her own hand, to her confessor and later biographer Raymond of Capua, provided the account of another vision of Thomas Aquinas. With urgency, she wrote about a vision in which God, accompanied by St. John the Evangelist and St. Thomas Aquinas, visited her. By “his overflowing providence,” God endowed Catherine with reason and, as she expressed, “provided me the refreshment in the aptitude for writing, a consolation I’ve never known thanks to my ignorance…he fixed this aptitude in my mind in a marvelous manner, the way a teacher does when he gives

---

\(^{157}\) Dominican biographer Thomas McDermott notes that she was not “the author of a practical, step-by-step guide to sanctity” (McDermott, *Catherine of Siena: Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching*, xiv). I recognize McDermott’s claim, and I am not claiming here that *The Dialogue* was a step-by-step guide; rather, I am arguing that it is a series of visions, which she recorded as an act of charity, for the salvation of souls, and her particular audience was the laity amongst whom she served and preached.

his pupil a model.” Then, as she continued to tell Raymond, “Shortly after [God] left me, I began to learn with the glorious evangelist John and Thomas Aquinas, as if I were sleeping.” As the letter reveals, the occasion for the vision was God answering four petitions that Catherine had set forth. She wrote this letter in the fall of 1377, quite close in time to the composition of *The Dialogue*, which many scholars believe she began writing in October 1377. *The Dialogue* retells Catherine’s vision in which God answered four petitions; thus, a distinct and inarguable connection stands between Catherine’s greatest work, in which the virtue of charity is one of the most prominent themes, and a vision in which Aquinas helped deliver the gift of reason and writing to her.

Furthermore, it was both St. John the Evangelist and St. Thomas Aquinas who accompanied God when he gifted Catherine with the aptitude for writing and the endowment of reason. Why these two saints, out of the whole communion, even out of all the saints, such as St. Lucy, St. Agnes, and St. Dominic, who had also visited Catherine in her mystical experiences? Notably, Christian tradition upholds St. John the Evangelist as the Beloved Disciple, the disciple who had so intimately experienced Christ’s love. It is not his ordination as a Dominican priest, nor his great philosophical and theological arguments that partners St. Thomas with the Beloved Disciple in this vision; it is his teachings on the primacy of the theological virtue of charity, love of God and love of neighbor. Thus this vision in which Catherine learned reason and writing also instructed her, as many of her visions did, on the primacy of Christ’s love and the urgency of charity to one’s neighbors.

---


The Importance of Writing for Catherine

As will be explored in greater depth in a later chapter, writing figures prominently in St. Catherine’s Dialogues. Writing figured prominently in Catherine’s career and theology; one of the most contested questions surrounding her brief yet dynamic life concern her ability to read and write, both in her vernacular Italian and the language of the learned, Latin. Hundreds of letters are attributed to her name, if not her own pen; a few prayers were recorded, some by dictation, some by her own hand; and the Dialogue, her large theological work in which she revealed her visions, was written over the span from October 1377 to autumn 1378. Since Catherine was not born into a high-class or wealthy family, she did not receive a formal education in her youth; some scholars speculate she learned to read around age 16 or 17. Her biographer Raymond of Capua noted she could read Latin only with difficulty. Bernard McGinn assesses that she could read some Latin, but was more adept at reading her own Italian. According to her letter to Raymond in 1377, she did not learn to write well until she was thirty, but she demonstrated then an ability to write clearly and elegantly in Italian.

Since a majority of her letters, especially her earlier ones, came only from her lips and not her hand, Catherine received the assistance of scribes for most, if not all, of her career. When she entered into the public square, despite criticism and unease with her presence, she collected a circle of disciples, which included educated Dominican priests and wealthy, literate, and devout women. This circle only grew as she grew in her political and ecclesiastical influence, especially from 1376 to her death in 1380. Her own

161 Noffke.
162 Borgman 47.
164 McGinn, The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism, 216.
letters attest, as does historical research, that her disciples, those who closely received her spiritual instruction, served as her scribes.

Whether by dictation or her own hand, St. Catherine of Siena exerted significant influence in political and ecclesiastical affairs through her letters. Even as she tended to the poor and sick of Tuscany, she cultivated a conspicuous presence in both France and Rome through her frequent and heated correspondence to figures including Pope Gregory XI. As both a woman and a member of the laity, access to such esteemed circles of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was more than remarkable – it was unprecedented. Notably, scholars believe that many of St. Catherine’s scribes were women as well. In her groundbreaking study of literacy and presence in the life and career of Catherine of Siena, Jane Tylus describes Catherine’s writing during the peak of her involvement in the Avignon Papacy. After venturing into French territory and imploring Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome, Catherine catapulted herself not only into the heights of Church politics, but also into the culture of writing. This was, as Tylus describes it, her “way of asserting her own centrality as a woman of vernacular letters, becoming a clericus or a donna, in control of her own words.”165 Her scribes who aided her, devout and wealthy women wrote the salutations to her “fiery epistles,” were educated in writing but still regulated to certain quarters of society by their status as women and as laity.166

Women’s writing, however, had made remarkable progress in the two centuries prior to St. Catherine’s life. In the twelfth century, educated aristocratic women entered religious life, which could afford them significant power and access to tools for writing. Such was the case for the Benedictine abbess St. Hildegard of Bingen, who wrote, by her

165 Tylus 33.
166 Ibid.
own hand, three volumes of theology, including her account of her visions in *Scivias*,
music, medical texts, and moral dramas.\textsuperscript{167} Between the time of St. Hildegard and St.
Catherine, numerous other female religious wrote, by their own pen and not through
dictation, in order to record their visions. In fact, many female saints and visionaries of
this time cited a command from God as the reason they wrote.\textsuperscript{168} So when St. Catherine
claimed that God taught her to write so that, as she told Raymond, “when I come down
from the heights I might have a little something to vent my heart, lest it burst,”\textsuperscript{169} her
desire to record her vision emerged out of a tradition of female mystics. Yet what was
unprecedented was her status as a laywoman; most of these other visionaries had been
cloistered. Many Dominican nuns, since their incorporation into the Order of Preachers,
wrote manuscripts for each other as part of their service to God as vowed religious.\textsuperscript{170}
Catherine, though a Dominican tertiary, was not a vowed religious dedicated to
contemplation, but a penitential laywoman; so her dedication to dictating and writing was
quite unusual for her status in life.

*Catherine’s Theological Knowledge*

Catherine never received a formal education in writing but surrounded herself
with literate men and women and eventually learned to write herself. Furthermore, she
never received a formal theological education, but still encountered spiritual and
devotional writings through her *mantellata*. Tylus notes that Catherine “was steeped in
the culture of the *volgare*” and “heavily influenced by devotional works of the
Dominican order…[including] the translations of the desert fathers by Domenico

\textsuperscript{167} Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, “St. Hildegard of Bingen,” *Holy Women* (Huntington, IN: Our
\textsuperscript{168} Tylus 34.
\textsuperscript{169} Noffke, *The Prayers of Catherine of Siena*, 51.
\textsuperscript{170} Tylus 34.
Cavalco, [and] the letters of the recule Giovanni dalle Celle."\(^{171}\) Likely, due to the literacy of some of her disciples and her situation in fourteenth century Tuscany, Catherine would likely have had some knowledge of the vernacular works of her time, including the poetry of Dante Alighieri.\(^{172}\) While nothing can be certain of an informal theological education, Catherine’s writings, especially *The Dialogue*, overflow with allusions to many of the church fathers, including St. Augustine and St. Jerome,\(^{173}\) and medieval writers, including St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Bonaventure.\(^{174}\) She shows an astute awareness, especially for an uneducated woman, of the mystical and doctrinal tradition across the centuries of the Church. Suzanne Noffke, O.P., a Catherine scholar and translator, describes her as “completely immersed in the main current of Catholic teaching” and “impeccably orthodox in even subtle distinctions.”\(^{175}\)

**Conclusion**

This chapter provides the reader with the necessary information about the influence of the Dominican Order on Catherine of Siena and her theology. The thorough discussion of the Dominican Order and its spirituality from its conception, the authority of Thomas Aquinas for the fourteenth century Dominicans, and the mysticism prevalent amongst Dominican women support the primary claim of this thesis. The discussion of women’s writing during the late medieval period and Catherine’s education and writing in particular establishes the basis for the important arguments in this thesis about writing as an act of charity for Catherine. With Catherine’s writing, her theological influences,
and her biography and context in mind, her presentation of the Thomistic virtue of charity
in *Dialogue* can now be explored in depth.
CHAPTER THREE
CHARITY AS LOVE OF GOD

Introduction

After a brief introduction to the composition and context of the Dialogue, this chapter will explore the presentation of charity in Catherine of Siena’s Dialogue. Catherine presents the virtue of charity as twofold: charity as love of God above all things, and charity as selfless love of neighbor because God loves all people. Catherine employs a variety of images throughout Dialogue to convey her theology of charity, including the image of the bridge and the image of the cell of self-knowledge. This chapter will discuss how these images communicate Catherine’s theology of charity.

This chapter will begin the comparison of Thomas Aquinas’ teaching on the theological virtue of charity and Catherine of Siena’s theology of charity. This comparison will alternate between the Dialogue and of the Summa Theologiae, so the argument may be made for Aquinas’ influence on Catherine through each specific aspect of their theologies. The comparisons will examine Aquinas’ and Catherine’s understandings of charity as friendship with God, charity as selfless love of neighbor, charity as the highest virtue, and the relationship of charity to the other virtues. To further support the argument about Catherine’s repurposing of Aquinas’ moral theology, the influence of Aquinas’ teachings on Catherine’s image will also be examined.
The Dialogue: Composition and Background

Hagiography claims that St. Catherine of Siena composed *The Dialogue of Divine Providence* during five days of mystical ecstasy. However, the historical evidence from Catherine’s own letters and her biographers Raymond of Capua and Thomas of Siena (Caffarini) attests to a longer period of composition. Her letter to Raymond in October 1377, the same one in which she recounted the vision where Aquinas and John the Evangelist taught her to write, described the vision that set the foundation for the *Dialogue*. Since she never mentioned the Western Schism in her prayers for reforms, she likely finished composition before the end of 1378; Caffarini stated she completed it by November 1378. This letter, as noted in the previous chapter, linked her *Dialogue* with her devotion to St. Thomas Aquinas. The letter also emphasized the centrality of charity in *Dialogue*, through reference to the Beloved Disciple.

In this letter, St. Catherine described to Raymond four petitions that she offered up at Mass, and the vision she consequently received. These four petitions varied slightly from those listed in the *Dialogue*. In both the letter and *Dialogue*, Catherine’s prayers expressed concern for the Church and for the salvation of all souls. According to her letter, she prayed for the reform of the Church, the salvation of the whole world, for Raymond’s soul in particular, and, as she also mentioned in the *Dialogue*, for “something that had happened to a person I cannot name in writing.”

---

177 Ibid 13. A majority of scholars support this date for the composition of *Dialogue*.
Each of these petitions arose from Catherine’s intense love of others for the sake of God’s love for all of humanity. Charity motivated her prayers and opened her to God’s response in visions. In this letter and in Dialogue, she expressed charity, similar to how Thomist scholar Michael S. Sherwin summarizes Aquinas’ charity, as “a pleasing affective affinity for the goodness of God.”179 An intense love of God, love of others because God loves them, and an incredible awe at the goodness and mercy of God provided the basis for her prayers. Her charity towards her neighbors made manifest these particular petitions, thus creating an important role for love of others in her visions and Dialogue.

Within the first few pages of her letter to Raymond, charity emerged as a prominent theme in Catherine’s mysticism. Catherine recounted for Raymond how, in her vision, she was “spurred on by holy desire…, rose with greater effort, opened her mind’s eye, and looked at herself in the mirror of divine charity.”180 She continued on to describe how “there she saw and experienced how much we are bound and obligated to seek the glory and praise of God’s name in the salvation of souls.”181 Here immediately the two measures of charity, charity as intimate love of God and charity as love of neighbor for God, emerged as inseparable. Catherine introduced in this letter the central message of the Dialogue, that love for God must be expressed and acted through concrete love of neighbor for the sake of God.

180 Letters of Catherine of Siena, 497.
181 Ibid.
Charity in Dialogue

In her *Dialogue*, Catherine described numerous visions and recounted what God told her. The *Dialogue* is a piece of Christian mysticism and concerned not with wild visions or philosophical speculations but with the affective and practical aspects of the soul’s relationship with God. Despite its practical purpose, the *Dialogue* often presents and then represents the major themes, as Catherine weaved together numerous images with petitions for individual souls and the welfare of the Church as a whole. She discussed the need for ecclesiastical reforms, the priesthood and demands of the vowed religious, the dignity of the human as a child of God, the soul’s journey to union with God, sin, obedience, and virtue. Amongst these multiple themes and the layers of images, Catherine united them under the overarching theme of charity. Charity, for Catherine, bears multiple aspects under a single virtue: charity as God’s divine love, charity as Christ’s sacrificial love, charity as the soul’s love for God, and charity as the soul’s love for others.

Thus the “Prologue” introduces the dominant message of the *Dialogue*. This message defines charity as love of neighbor for God’s sake, and charity as friendship with God. Thus charity serves as the key to understanding St. Catherine’s visions. More significantly, the prevalence of charity throughout *Dialogue* also demonstrates how Catherine’s mysticism was rooted in the larger theological environment of the Dominicans of the later medieval period, since her perception of charity resembles those set forth in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. This chapter and the subsequent chapters will provide in-depth close readings of the manifestations in *The Dialogue*, namely charity as

---

182 For a more complete list of the themes present in St. Catherine’s *Dialogue*, see Noffke, “Introduction,” 16-19. Here, Noffke outlines all the chapters of *Dialogue*. 
love of neighbor and charity as friendship with God. The chapters will closely examine
the basis of these understandings of charity in Catherine’s world. From this, the argument
will be made for the influence of St. Thomas Aquinas’ theology of charity upon
Catherine of Siena’s theology in her Dialogue. However, as St. Catherine exercised in
theological thought outside the walls of the university and in the very midst of a
politically and religiously tumultuous period, she rephrased these ideas in her mystical
writings. As discussed in the previous chapters, mysticism provided a more accessible
and personal mode of theology to the laity, especially since many mystics like Catherine
were members of the laity. Thus Catherine was able to send a stronger message about the
significance and necessity of charity to the everyday Christian believer in her Dialogue.

Charity in Summa Theologiae

It is worth noting the importance charity took in Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae.
Questions 23 through 43 of Secunda Secundae are devoted to the topic of charity and its
corresponding sub-virtues and vices. It receives almost twice the attention that either
hope or faith in the section on theological virtues, and Aquinas frequently focused on
charity even in his discussion of different moral virtues. In his discussion of humility, for
example, Aquinas spoke of charity as “set above all the virtues.” Charity significantly
figured in Aquinas’ soteriology, as he understood salvation as coming through faith
formed through works of love.

From the Gospels and Epistles through the Augustinian tradition, Christianity had
emphasized the relational aspect of the virtue of charity. St. Thomas Aquinas did indeed
contribute something new to the Church’s teaching on charity, despite the centuries of
tradition that preceded him. While the notion of charity as friendship with God originated

183 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q. 161, a. 5.
in Scripture, Aquinas expounded upon it with new depth and meaning.\textsuperscript{184} Scholar Michael Sherwin notes, “Thomas’ definition of charity as \textit{amicitia} [friendship] marks the culmination of over a hundred years of scholastic reflection on the nature of charity.”\textsuperscript{185} Aquinas’ \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles} revealed his understanding of this friendship as based on holiness and obedience.\textsuperscript{186} In the \textit{Summa Theologiae}, he asserted that both God and reason must regulate charity, especially in the ordering of its objects.\textsuperscript{187} Ultimately, Aquinas presented in the Summa a multi-layered definition of charity that addressed friendship with God, one’s relationship with others, the infusion of charity through grace, and the practice of charity through external acts of mercy.

\textit{Images of Charity in Dialogue}

St. Catherine emphasized charity for its importance amongst the other virtues because of how love of God and love of neighbor form the foundation of the Christian life. Similar to Aquinas, she ordered charity as the highest virtue in \textit{The Dialogue}, a theme only obliquely discussed in her letter. She introduced the concept of virtue in this same paragraph, stating, “She has for some time exercised herself in virtue and has become accustomed to dwelling in the cell of self-knowledge in order to better know God’s goodness toward her, since upon knowledge follows love.”\textsuperscript{188} Along with tremendous love for God, Catherine’s virtuous life further qualified her for reception of the following revelations. Her practice of virtue especially included humility, which, as her writings later reveal, comes from the cell of self-knowledge, but above all her virtue

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{184} Sherwin, \textit{By Knowledge and By Love}, 148.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Ibid 148.
\item \textsuperscript{186} Ibid, 151.
\item \textsuperscript{187} Ibid 184.
\item \textsuperscript{188} Catherine of Siena, \textit{Dialogue}, 25.
\end{itemize}
developed out of her love. Thus, from the “Prologue,” charity emerged as the predominant virtue in Catherine’s mystical life.

St. Catherine also supplemented these major themes of charity towards God, charity towards neighbor, and charity as the mother of all virtue with a variety of images. McGinn notes how such use of imagery was common amongst mystics of Catherine’s era: “Like other vernacular theologians, Catherine makes heavy use of symbols and images, both as individual metaphors and as extended allegories to present her message.”\(^{189}\) These images included the bridge, the cell of self-knowledge, the “abyss of fiery charity,” Christ crucified, and an apostolic commission. Catherine weaves the bridge allegory throughout the whole of Dialogue as a central symbol. McGinn indicates the similarity between the mystical bridge and medieval Italian bridges, which ascended to an arched midpoint over a river and was lined with shops along the sides.\(^{190}\) Catherine employed the bridge as a heavily Christological image to describe the soul’s progress from imperfect love to perfect love on its journey towards God.

St. Catherine emphasized another image, the cell of self-knowledge, repeatedly throughout her Dialogue. Both of these images serve as mediators of charity in her visions. Significantly for her theme of the cell of self-knowledge, Catherine inseparably linked knowledge with love in this letter. She told Raymond of how God told her, as she prayed for Raymond’s soul, “you cannot live without love, and whatever you love you try to know better and serve better.”\(^{191}\) Self-knowledge guides the soul to a radical encounter with divine charity, for “in knowing yourself, you will come to know better the

\(^{189}\) McGinn, Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism, 215.
\(^{190}\) Ibid 228.
\(^{191}\) Catherine of Siena, Letters, 500.
overflowing generosity of my charity.”192 In knowing charity, one acquires the virtue of charity and directs it towards God in love, and then, because one loves God, the virtue of charity then increases and extends to those whom God created out of His infinite love. Thus, Catherine’s letter to Raymond established the primacy of charity and the inseparable measures of charity, which she then made central to her Dialogue.

Charity in the Prologue of Dialogue

Near the end of her letter to Raymond, Catherine spoke of God’s command. She recounted, “I am inviting you to ask me for mercy for those [in her petitions] and for the entire world. Conceive, my children, and give birth to this child, the human race with hatred and sorrow for sin and with blazing and yearning love.”193 Catherine interpreted this command as an apostolic commission, in which God sent her forth into even more fervent activity in the Church. This commission to seek mercy for the Church and the whole world compelled Catherine not only to write this letter to Raymond, but also to record her visions in the Dialogue, which would make her message of God’s infinite charity and mercy accessible to many.

Saint Catherine of Siena’s Dialogue introduced her mystical experience with a prologue written “in the name of Christ crucified and of Gentle Mary,” in which she established her authenticity through an explanation of how she received her visions.194 In the “Prologue,” she described her mystical visions primarily in the third person, and, as she continued to do through the entire work, referred to herself as “a soul.” Thus she began: “A soul rises up, restless with tremendous desire for God’s honor and the

192 Ibid.
193 Ibid 504.
salvation of souls.” Immediately, Catherine expressed her motives for writing this piece, that her love for God grew so immense within her that she loved all people with similar intensity, and thus desired for others what she desired for herself, eternal union with God. Just as with her letter, love of God above all things, which consequentially produces love of neighbor, emerge as the predominant theme from the very opening of *The Dialogue*. She explained that she received her visions because of the virtue of charity infused within her. With the help of grace, she expressed her love of God both through honor of Him and as love for her neighbor. Catherine described herself as “the soul united to God through love’s affection,” demonstrating that the intensity of her love for God led her to a close, intimate relationship with Him.

Because of her charity, which produces other virtues in the soul, Catherine nurtured a friendship with God. The “Prologue” demonstrated this, as she described her soul as “united with God,” and thus “by love’s affection the soul becomes another himself.” As Aquinas explained in his *Summa Theologiae*, friendship is “a certain mutual love…founded on some kind of communication.” Charity as love of God began with God’s love of the soul, for as revealed to Catherine in the “Prologue,” “God would not hide from her mind’s eye his love for his servants.” Rather, God first communicated to the soul His love, which inspired the tremendous desire of which Catherine spoke. Thus communication brought together God and the soul, as Aquinas stated, “there is communication between God and man, inasmuch as He communicates

---

195 Ibid, 25.
196 Ibid, 25.
197 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q 23, a1, co.
His happiness to us." Since communication formed the basis of friendship, communication also served as the basis for love between God and man. Although Catherine does not explicitly use the Thomistic language, her understanding of charity reflects the Thomistic definition of “charity is the friendship of man for God.”

St. Catherine’s intimate dialogue with God, as it developed from the “Prologue” and into the main chapters of Dialogue, certainly demonstrated these qualities of the Thomistic definition of charity as friendship with God. The Thomistic and Catherinean understandings of friendship with God will be discussed more in depth later in this chapter. For now, Catherine’s understanding of her friendship with God was significant because she believed such friendship to be the cause of her visions, especially the visions in Dialogue. After her soul mystically ascended to union with God, Catherine opened herself up through love to communicate with God. She offered Him prayers, particularly the four petitions outlined in the “Prologue,” and He returned with revelations.

**The Bridge: Christ Crucified and Charity in Dialogue**

St. Catherine of Siena asserted that friendship with God and love of neighbor first required the divine gift of the virtue of charity. In the early chapter “Way of Perfection,” which immediately follows the “Prologue,” God addressed Catherine’s beseeching prayer that she receive the punishment in this life for both her sins and the sins of her neighbors. Yet while Catherine requested penance out of her love for God, God reminded her, “Finite works are not enough either to punish or to atone unless they are seasoned with loving charity.” Indeed, all virtuous works, even penance, gained nothing if not proceeding from the true virtue of charity. She could not bear the suffering of any sins,

---

199 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q 23, a1, co.
200 Ibid.
201 Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 29.
even her own, if her soul drew not love from Christ. Christ’s crucifixion paid the price for all sin; as God told Catherine, “So I washed you and made you a new creation in the blood that my only-begotten Son poured out with such burning love.”

God’s love most clearly radiated from Christ crucified, and such love bore forth the forgiveness of sins. Thus effective penance occurs not upon its own accord, but when one embraces it with the virtue of charity, that is, charity as made manifest through Christ’s love on the cross. Love, not suffering, bestows efficacy upon penance. Thus it was charity, the true love of God, as Catherine discovered, that bore forth true contrition in the soul.

Since charity reflects the sacrificial love of Christ crucified, St. Catherine’s visions included meditations upon how charity first and foremost is a gift from God’s grace. Indeed, human charity to God and to neighbor cannot occur without God’s charity to the soul first. For St. Catherine, divine charity becomes realized through self-knowledge, and thus her discussion of charity is rooted first in self-knowledge, humility, and divine charity before addressing the soul’s possession of the virtue of charity. Throughout Catherine’s Dialogue, she continually returned to the theme of divine charity, which God especially expressed to her first in the discussion of contrition and sin in the earliest chapters of the book.

Human charity, according to God’s revelations to Catherine, has no value without the initiative of God’s grace through His Son Jesus Christ. Desire, not suffering, bestows value in the eyes of God upon human charity. Yet, as God clarified for his “dearest daughter,” human desire for God and His mercy only exist because of the divine desire for His creation. This divine desire manifests itself in the redemptive and unitive gospel of Christ crucified. God revealed to Catherine, “neither desire nor any other virtue has

---

202 Ibid.
value or life except through my only-begotten Son, Christ crucified, since the soul has drawn love from him and in virtue follows in his footsteps. In this way and in no other is suffering of value." Only by the example of Christ’s love can humanity learn to love God, and thus divine charity provides the foundation for the human virtue of charity. Love of God for Catherine was essentially Christological: through Christ we encounter God’s love, the love that creates the desire for God and lays the foundation for the virtue of charity. Notably, this letter introduced the motif of the bridge, which appears frequently throughout the Dialogue. The bridge represents the way to God through the mediation of Christ and the virtue charity. Charity for Catherine adopted a definitively Christocentric focus: Christ’s incarnation and the shedding of His blood manifested and revealed divine charity.

Although people cannot embrace another with the same intensity or pureness of Christ’s love, the inexpressible love of Christ crucified necessitated that the believer love all people through praying for their salvation. For Catherine, prayer for others is the most important manner in which human charity can mirror divine charity, for not only does the holy desire for the salvation of souls demonstrate love for neighbor, but also leads the soul to glorify God and thus love Him above all things. Charity directs all towards the ultimate end of God, both the soul and other souls.

St. Catherine provided further exploration on the initiative of divine charity in the section “The Bridge” in The Dialogue. Here, God showed Catherine in a vision how, through divine love, Christ formed a bridge from humanity to God. “I want to describe the bridge to you,” He said to Catherine in a vision. “I have told you it stretches from

---

203 Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, 29.
204 Ibid 64.
heaven to earth by reason of my having joined myself with your humanity, which I
formed from the earth’s clay. This bridge, my only-begotten Son, has three stairs.”205
Thus the bridge not only represented God’s charity for humanity, but also was God’s love
incarnate in Jesus Christ. With this bridge, with God become man, humanity could encounter God and cultivate love for God.

St. Catherine first presented her understanding of charity as a bridge through Christ crucified, thus intimately linking Christ’s sacrifice with charity, in this letter of Raymond. She then developed the theological theme in whole throughout her Dialogue. In her letter, she introduced this bridge as distinctly linked to the incarnate and crucified Christ, as God had spoke to her, “So [my Son] joined the height of heaven, the divine nature, with the earth of your human nature. You must, therefore, keep to his bridge by seeking the glory of my name in the salvation of souls.”206 God then clarified for Catherine how she could exercise the virtue of charity for the salvation of souls, as He told her, “by enduring all your labors and pain, by following in the footsteps of this gentle loving Word.”207 The footsteps of Christ the Word are the footsteps of divine charity, of selfless love for the other; so this is how human charity must function, in selfless love for God first and foremost, and then for others, selflessly for His sake.

The selflessness of charity became more apparent as God described the three stairs of the mystical bridge to St. Catherine. Built upon “the wood of the most holy cross,” the first stair was the feet of Christ, which symbolized the affections that carry the soul up from its selfish loves to God. 208 The second step, constructed from the same

205 Ibid 64.
206 Ibid 498.
207 Ibid.
208 Ibid 64.
wood, allowed the soul to peer into the heart of Christ from His pierced side. The third step arrived at the mouth of Christ. The second step figured most significantly in Catherine’s imagery of the bridge. Here, the soul encountered most immediately the divine charity of God through Christ, for here “when the soul has climbed up on the feet of affection and looked with her mind’s eye into my Son’s opened heart, she begins to feel the love of her own heart in his consummate and unspeakable love.”\textsuperscript{209} This love, as noted in the vision, was selfless love for humanity, and thus here within the radical encounter with divine charity through Christ’s sacrificial offering did the human soul learn how to love God selflessly and thus desire God in pure charity. The soul could only learn charity from God through Christ, Catherine relayed, for learning virtue came only through example. Thus she revealed, “the soul, seeing how tremendously she is loved, is herself filled to overflowing with love.”\textsuperscript{210} Having learnt the selfless love of charity from Christ crucified, the soul returned the same love to God.

In her vision of the three stairs of Christ in “The Bridge” chapter of \textit{Dialogue}, St. Catherine described the third step as the most perfect stage in the life of the Christian. This stair brings one to the mouth of Christ by way of the heart, and thus the soul at the third stair is at perfect union with Christ. At this stage of perfect union, which souls can only reach through “the exercise of holy prayer and other good works...[and] strengthening their virtue perseveringly,” the souls arrive at filial love.\textsuperscript{211} God told Catherine that this stage is where He “will love them as my children, because with whatever love I am loved, with that love I respond.”\textsuperscript{212} This included God showing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{209} Ibid, 64.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Ibid, 64.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Catherine of Siena, \textit{Dialogue}, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Himself to the soul, for filial love encompassed the love of friendship and, “secrets are shared only with a friend who has become one with oneself.”²¹³ Before arriving at filial love, the soul must first reach the love of friendship.

**Self-Knowledge and Friendship with God in Dialogue**

Catherine’s *Dialogue* described the love of friendship as achieved by charity and the other virtues. “Still,” God spoke, “servants can grow because of their virtue and the love they bear their master, even to becoming his very dear friend.”²¹⁴ Through self-knowledge, humility, and growth in the virtue of charity, the soul can turn away from selfish love and learn to love selflessly, and thus love in an imitation of divine charity. Then, “it will please me so much,” God’s vision to Catherine revealed, “that for this they will come to the love of friendship.”²¹⁵ This love of friendship was where God first showed Himself to the soul, according to Catherine. “And then I will show myself to them…those who love me will be one with me and I with them, and I will show myself to them and we will make our dwelling place together.”²¹⁶

Charity and friendship with God require, as all virtues do, habituation and progress in the soul. While Catherine asserted that the soul could not love without the gift of grace, the soul must follow the heart’s draw towards the love of God. To respond to the divine and climb the bridge, Catherine insisted, the soul must come to self-knowledge. For the soul to truly glimpse into the opened heart of Christ and to experience divine charity, the soul must have removed the veil of selfish love and pride. As God revealed to Catherine in chapter “The Way of Perfection” in the *Dialogue*, “this blood [of

²¹³ Ibid.
²¹⁴ Ibid 115.
²¹⁵ Ibid.
²¹⁶ Ibid.
Christ] gives you knowledge of the truth when knowledge of yourself leads you to shed the cloud of selfish love.”217 He instructed her that this is the way to eternal Life, which is “perfect knowledge and enjoyment of [God],” and He also advised to “never leave the knowledge of yourself.”218 “To attain charity you must dwell constantly in the cell of self-knowledge,” God explained to Catherine the importance of self-knowledge for charity and salvation: “For in knowing yourself you will come to know my mercy in the blood of my only begotten Son, thus drawing my divine charity to yourself with your love.”219 While divine love initiates human charity through Christ crucified, the human response must begin with the soul’s self-knowledge.

Catherine described the dwelling of self-knowledge as occurring in one’s “interior cell.” This image arose in both her letters and the Dialogue. In the Dialogue, she described it as where the soul must dwell in order to first know herself and, through gaining knowledge of her sins, exercise humility. Self-knowledge thus is the knowledge of one’s sins, which then removes all pride and sense of self-sufficiency from the soul. Humility produces the need for God’s mercy. Yet the soul must not leave the cell of self-knowledge even when she has become humble; “rather, she perseveres in her exercise with humility and remains locked up in the house of self-knowledge.”220 The soul thus then becomes receptive to God’s mercy and love and, while waiting for “the flame of love,” engages in continual prayer to keep a good and holy will.221 The soul that continues this practice of humility, prayer, and holy desire in the cell of self-knowledge will gain the virtue of charity.

217 Ibid 30.
218 Ibid 29.
219 Ibid 118.
220 Ibid 120.
221 Ibid 120.
Significantly for Catherine’s outreach to the laity, this cell of self-knowledge, reminiscent of a monastic cell, allows anyone, clergy or laity, royalty or peasant, to retreat from the world and practice contemplation. Catherine encouraged retreat into the cell of self-knowledge, for this helped the soul overcome selfish desires and thus grow in charity. Catherine indeed believed all people, whether they were vowed religious or members of the laity, must embrace this interior contemplation.\textsuperscript{222} Again she directly addressed the laity, those constantly engaged in the busyness, joys, and struggles of everyday life, and offered to them a means of contemplation more accessible and practical than that prescribed for religious and clergy.

According to St. Catherine, self-knowledge leads to humility, which also opened the soul up to God’s charity. Self-knowledge brings the heart to find “the knowledge of itself and its sins,” and the realization of its sinful nature “gives birth to hatred and contempt for sin and for the soul’s selfish sensuality.”\textsuperscript{223} Catherine noted a natural progression from hatred of sin to humility, for awareness of one’s own sinfulness and unworthiness before God removes pride and selfish love. In “the valley of humility,” the soul, now freed from the blindness of pride, perceives its sins and utmost need for grace. The soul sees itself not as living on its own accord, and living for itself, but as a creation and child of God. With self-knowledge, “put down as you are in the valley of humility you will know me in yourself,” God revealed to Catherine, “and from this knowledge you will draw all that you need.”\textsuperscript{224} Yet like charity directed towards God, this self-knowledge does not emerge from the soul itself, but rather, as charity developed from divine charity, self-knowledge comes from knowledge of God, who had revealed Himself

\textsuperscript{222} McGinn 235.
\textsuperscript{223} Catherine of Siena, \textit{Dialogue}, 29.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid 29.
by grace in Christ. Thus the vision described this experience of self-knowledge as an encounter with grace, for “[The soul] humbly attributes to me her discovery of this self-knowledge, because she knows that my grace has drawn her from darkness and carried her into the light of true knowledge.”\textsuperscript{225} Humility born of self-knowledge opens the human soul up for the virtue of charity, for it removed the pride that could interfere with filial love and friendship with God.

Catherine’s emphasis on humility as essential to charity, which is the greatest of the virtues, finds precedent in Aquinas’ answer to the question of whether humility is the greatest of all virtues. St. Thomas Aquinas devoted an article of the 

\textit{Secunda Secundae} of the \textit{Summa Theologiae} to the virtue of humility. Aquinas discussed humility under the larger moral virtue of temperance. Humility serves to “temper and restrain the mind, lest it tend to high things immoderately,” according to Aquinas.\textsuperscript{226} In a similar manner to how Catherine and her community spoke about humility, Aquinas associated humility with the soul’s knowledge of the self. To have the virtue of humility, one “must know his disproportion to that which surpasses his capacity,” and therefore, “knowledge of one’s own deficiency belongs to humility.”\textsuperscript{227}

Thus a connection emerged between charity and knowledge in Catherine’s theology. She clearly asserted in the \textit{Dialogue} that without self-knowledge, one could not properly receive or cultivate charity. Self-knowledge constantly reminds the soul of its sin and need for God’s charity and thus humbles the soul. It is when the soul has been humbled that charity leads beyond self-knowledge to the knowledge of understanding. In one of her earlier letters, Catherine wrote about the journey from self-knowledge to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{225} Ibid 36.
  \item \textsuperscript{226} Aquinas, \textit{ST}, II-II, q. 161, a.1, co.
  \item \textsuperscript{227} Ibid, II-II, q. 161, a. 2, co.
\end{itemize}
understanding. “And in humbling ourselves, we enter that flaming, consuming heart, opened up like a window without shutters, never to be closed...[there] we see and know that [God’s] will has become nothing other than our own sanctification.”228 As self-knowledge opens the soul up to charity, charity thus opens the mind’s eye to see and understand the workings of divine charity. A soul with the virtue of charity understands the sacrifice Christ made through His mercy and love. When the soul understands the infinite gift of divine charity, it seeks to imitate this love. Thus this compels the soul to love both God and its neighbors selflessly.

Understanding then deepens the soul’s capacity for charity towards both God and neighbor. “For as we understand, so we love, and when we love, we find ourselves united with and transformed in love, in this mother charity,” Catherine wrote.229 No matter one’s state of life, a person could come to intimate friendship and filial love of God through knowledge of God. This knowledge is not only accessible to those devoted to contemplation in the cloisters or those learning to preach at the universities; in the cell of self-knowledge, all people, especially the laity, could know and then love God. In Dialogue, Catherine praised those, both clergy and laity, who came to knowledge of God through self-knowledge and humility, rather than book learning and pride. God warned Catherine against those who pursued learning without self-knowledge or charity, those who “go blind even though it is light, because their pride and cloud of selfish love have covered and blotted out this light.”230 Yet those who know God through humility and

229 Ibid.
charity are “as enlightened in knowledge of the truth as if they had studied for a long
time.” 231

This light of knowledge, unlike the pride and vanity that threatened to accompany
other learning, is received with help of the soul’s love of God. This light of knowledge
then increases charity. “In charity they receive supernatural light, and in that light they
love me,” God revealed to Catherine. 232 “For love follows upon understanding. The more
they know, the more they [those who seek God with charity] love, and the more they
love, the more they know.” 233 Through outlining the importance of self-knowledge for
knowledge of God, Catherine provided a path for even the unlearned of the laity to know
and love God. They did not need the Latin books of the scholastics or monk; if they
practiced the virtue of charity with self-knowledge, they would come to know more fully
God and love Him more.

**Charity and Knowledge in Summa Theologiae**

Notably, Aquinas discerned an intimate link between charity and knowledge as
well. Citing St. Augustine’s logic that “none can love what he does not know,” Aquinas
argued that one could not love the good which is its object without knowledge of that
good. 234 He stated, “therefore love demands some apprehension of the good that is
loved…Accordingly knowledge is the cause of love for the same reason as good is,
which can be loved only if known.” 235 Therefore, in order to love God in the virtue of
charity, one must know God first. While Aquinas did not discuss self-knowledge directly,
his understanding of knowledge producing and deepening charity bore significant

---

231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.
234 Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q. 27, a.2, co.
235 Ibid.
similarities to her connection between love and knowledge. Both Dominicans asserted that in order to have charity for God, one must know God through love. Catherine interpreted this in a manner more focused on the experience of the human person, since God is ultimately unknowable. According to Dialogue, the soul must know itself as a child of God, and then it can progress to know God, as human limits permit, through the revelation of His divine love and the infusion of charity.

**Charity and the Other Virtues in Dialogue**

Even though self-knowledge and humility were necessary for the reception of grace and development of charity, St. Catherine described charity, not humility, as the mother of all virtues. “No virtue can have life in it except from charity,” God instructed Catherine, while noting “charity is nursed and mothered by humility.”236 Once the soul has obtained charity as it “catches fire with unspeakable love” from divine charity, it nurtured charity through humility; yet humility remained after the moment of self-knowledge because charity toward God kept the soul humble before Him. Since charity only came from God’s love through Christ, divine charity surpassed all other virtues, for as God reminded Catherine, “virtue is attained only through love of me.”237 Divine charity plants the virtue of charity in the humble soul, whence the soul conceives of other virtues, such as patience, generosity, and courage.

Catherine described the procession of other virtues from charity through the language of birth and motherhood. “Virtue, once conceived, must come to birth,” she revealed from her vision.238 “Therefore, as soon as the soul has conceived through loving

---

236 Ibid 29.
237 Ibid 36.
238 Ibid 36.
affection,” that is, charity for God, “she gives birth for her neighbors’ sake.” Charity directed towards God conceives virtue, and charity to neighbor brings charity from within the interior of the soul into practice in the world. Thus God informed Catherine, “the virtues, with innumerable others…are brought into the world in love of neighbor.”

Here the connection emerges, which will be explored more closely in a later chapter, of love of God and love of neighbor under the same virtue. Aquinas thoroughly defended the inseparability of love of God and love of neighbor in the virtue of charity in his *Summa*.

Beyond the language of birthing virtue, St. Catherine explained its habituation as raising a spiritual child. Virtue, especially charity, not exercised became no virtue at all; thus, love of God kept only the in the realm of thought, not practiced out in the world, renders one spiritually barren. God explained to Catherine in a vision, “If a woman has conceived a child but never brings it to birth for people to see, her husband will consider himself childless.” Similar to what Catherine experienced in an earlier vision in her life, in which Mary enjoined her to Christ in “mystical espousal,” God likened Himself as the spouse of the soul. Thus, if the soul did not continually practice virtue, she would be like a barren wife.

---

239 Ibid 36.
240 Ibid 37.
241 Ibid 45.
242 Noffke, 4.
Charity and the Other Virtues in Summa Theologiae

Aquinas classified charity as *excellentior*, that is, more excellent than the other virtues. In *IIae IIa* of the *Summa Theologiae*, he reasoned the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity are superior to the moral and intellectual virtue derived from the Greco-Roman tradition. He established a twofold rule for human acts in which “God is the first rule, whereby, even human reason [the second rule] must be regulated.” As also discussed in The Dialogue, the *Summa* asserts that God is both the source and the object of the virtue of charity. Indeed, Aquinas distinguished the theological virtues as those whose object is God, and thus “are more excellent than the moral, or the intellectual virtues, which consist in attaining human reason.” Since God is the final end because He is the most perfect Good, Aquinas therefore classified God as the highest and most perfect object of any virtue. Therefore, because charity is directed at God as its final end, charity is the most excellent amongst all virtues, according to Aquinas.

Beyond the *excellentior* quality of charity, Aquinas asserted that no virtue could exist without this virtue. Since God is the most perfect Good, all virtue must direct towards Him as its final end, or else virtue would not be a true good, for it would lose its relation to the ultimate Good. Thus Aquinas argued, “If, on the other hand, this particular good be a true good, for instance the welfare of the state, or the like, it will indeed be a true virtue, imperfect, however, unless it be referred to the final and perfect good.” Since God is the final and most perfect Good, and charity is the virtue most directly directed towards God, Aquinas reasoned, “no strictly true virtue is possible without

---

243 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q 23, a 6, co.
244 Ibid.
245 Ibid, II-II, q 23, a 7, co.
charity.”246 Even more so, Aquinas averred that charity provided the form and end of all other virtues. He wrote, “it is charity which directs the acts of all other virtues to the last end and which, consequently, also gives form to all other acts of virtue.”247 Without love directed towards the final end of God or towards neighbor for God’s sake, the virtue would have no true end. Charity provided “the foundation or root in so far as all other virtues draw their sustenance and nourishment,” and thus Aquinas set down the primacy of charity above all virtues for the Dominicans with his Summa.248

Catherine’s assertion that charity gave birth to the other virtues thus reflected this Thomistic understanding of charity. Her argument that virtue could not be birthed forth without the soul first obtaining charity through humility thus indicates a connection between her more mystical thought and the greater intellectual current of the late medieval Dominicans. As discussed in chapter two, Aquinas’ moral theology became dominant amongst Dominicans in the century after his death. The ideas of virtues thus circulated throughout many of the groups with which Catherine associated, including her confessors. It is therefore likely that she encountered in these groups the idea of charity as the primary virtue which sanctifies all other virtues, and she then used the common image of birthing to teach this idea to her readers.

Early in his examination of charity, Aquinas posed the question “Whether charity is something created in the soul?” After weighing the opinions of St. Augustine and Peter Lombard, he determined that charity must be some superadded form rather than a natural power of the soul, for “it is evident that the act of charity surpasses the nature of the

---

246 Ibid.
247 Ibid II-II, q 23, a 8, co.
248 Ibid.
power of the will.” Thus Aquinas deduced that “it is most necessary that, for us to perform the act of charity, there should be in us some habitual form superadded to the natural power, inclining that power to the act of charity, and causing it to act with ease and pleasure.” For Aquinas, the First Mover is and always is God, and thus Aquinas could declare, “the infinity of Divine power…is the author of charity.”

Catherine’s understanding of the origin of charity was simultaneously more mystical and practical. Rather than confusing her audience with scholastic definitions of forms and habits, she focused on how one could develop charity in his or her own soul, through her imagery of the cell of self-knowledge. Yet her mysticism and Aquinas’ scholastic theology overlap heavily in their discussions not of the origin of charity, but of its end. Both Dominicans discussed friendship with God as the manifestation of the virtue of charity. While Thomas upheld friendship with God as the highest possible expression of this virtue, Catherine asserted that it was both surpassed and accompanied by filial love.

Conclusion

Sts. Thomas and Catherine wrote their works both for the greater glory of God and for the instruction of other Christians. Aquinas strongly argued that love for neighbor could not be separated from love of God, and thus the virtue of charity required both. Catherine, as will be discussed in the next chapter, insisted that love of God be made manifest through active love of neighbor. Both theologians discussed the manner in which charity could and should be directed towards one’s neighbor; Catherine follows in Aquinas’ footsteps in specifically listing how Christians can love their neighbors, and

249 Ibid, II-II, q 23, a 2, co.
250 Ibid.
251 Ibid, ad 3.
demonstrating how charity does not require grand scale actions, but can be done at any station of life.
CHAPTER FOUR

CHARITY AS LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed St. Catherine of Siena’s emphasis on charity as love of God in her Dialogue and how her distinctions of friendship and filial love of God demonstrate the influence of Aquinas’ theology of charity. This chapter examines the other aspect of charity, love of neighbor for God’s sake, in Catherine’s Dialogue.

After a brief introduction to charity as love of neighbor in both Aquinas’ Summa Theologicae and Catherine’s Dialogue, this chapter will discuss thematically similar aspects in their respective theologies of charity. First is a discussion of the relationship of charity and salvation, as both emphasized charity for its role in salvation. Since Catherine closely connected charity for neighbor with her mission for the salvation of all souls, which she carried out through prayer, the chapter will then examine the role of continual prayer in Catherine’s understanding of charity. The connection between prayer, writing and knowledge in Dialogue will lead in this thesis to a discussion of charity, humility, and knowledge in both Aquinas and Catherine’s theologies. Both Catherine and Aquinas believed that knowledge served God through the instruction of others, and thus the discussion of knowledge leads to a discussion of why they valued spiritual instruction
about charity. The specific expressions of charity in the Christian life are finally examined as the main force of this chapter; the three practical expressions of charity in *Dialogue* (refrain from judgment, prayer, and individual counsel), and the expressions of mercy (almsgiving, beneficence, and fraternal correction) in the *Summa*.

**Charity as Love of Neighbor**

Love for neighbor emerged as the central theme in Saint Catherine of Siena’s development of the virtue of charity for the Christian in *The Dialogue*. Out of all of the virtues that for Catherine bear significance for the Christian life, Bernard McGinn and other scholars agree that “charity as love of God and love of neighbor is the lynchpin of Catherine’s teaching.” Patience, humility, and obedience certainly are not of reducible importance in Catherine’s *Dialogue*, but, as both *Dialogue* and her letters attest, charity defines the Christian life. She wrote in *Dialogue*, “love is the measure of all virtues and merit.” As discussed in the previous chapter, charity as love of God, which is a response through grace to divine charity, is the most important factor in the life of the Christian. Yet Catherine, as with many of the medieval period, sought to articulate how love of God could be concretely expressed. In a sense, her striving to articulate the meaning of the Gospel command to love God and love neighbor was a continuation of St. Dominic’s mission of apostolic poverty and return to the Gospel. Surely her distress concerning the corruption in the Church hierarchy caused her to question how the virtue of charity could become manifest in the Christian life, for, as she stated throughout the *Dialogue*, she understood those corruptions as contraindications of the virtue of charity.

---

253 Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 121.
This issue of the expression of charity had been addressed thoroughly by another Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas understood charity as one virtue with two acts – the act of loving God, and the act of loving others for God’s sake.254 “Love of our neighbor includes love of God, as the end is included in the means, and vice versa,” Aquinas argued.255 He thus asserted that charity manifested itself in a multitude of ways, beginning with one’s relationship with God, then with those closest to oneself, and then reaching out to others.256 Aquinas argued that those closer to one could be loved in more ways than one could love a stranger, since the connection of kinship and friendship referred to the end of charity and thus can be commanded by charity.257 Such order of charity is also evidenced in II-II, q. 44, a. 8, where Aquinas argued, “we ought to love most those of our neighbors who are more virtuous or more closely united with us.”258 However, Aquinas also asserted that a neighbor in grievous need surpassed family or friend in lesser need in regards to the obligation of charity.259

**Charity and Salvation**

Catherine adopted a much more universal understanding of her mission than Aquinas did, as she recorded a particular vision in which she saw both believers and unbelievers enter into the wound in the side of Christ. Her understanding of charity to neighbor conformed to such universality. Aquinas was writing to train preachers of the Christian faith, while Catherine understood her mission as extending to believer and unbelievers.260 Carrying both a cross and an olive branch from Christ, Catherine

---

257 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q. 26, a 7.
258 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q. 44, a. 8.
259 Floyd 460; see also *ST* II-II q. 31 a. 9.
260 McGinn 210-211.
perceived herself as an apostle of sorts, bearing Christ’s suffering while proclaiming the peace of the Gospel to redeem sinners.\textsuperscript{261} This was a very special authority, one bestowed on her by Christ Himself, which gave her the authority to direct even popes. Her \textit{Dialogue} expanded the message of charity from particular individual recipients of her letters to a much more universal audience in her medieval world.

The previous chapter examined St. Catherine’s understanding of charity as selfless love of God, which when perfected led to friendship with God and filial love. Inseparable from this aspect of charity is charity as love of neighbor for God’s sake. Souls can reach a unitive state of love with God, but this love must be concretely realized as much as spiritually realized. For Catherine, charity as friendship and union with God must be realized not only through selfless dedication to God, but also through an active love for one’s neighbors.\textsuperscript{262}

God told Catherine in “The Way to Perfection,” “The service you cannot render me you must do for your neighbors.”\textsuperscript{263} God instructed Catherine about the manner in which she could concretely express her love of God while here on earth. Since her encounters with God were mystical, yet she inhabited a corporeal world, God provided her, and all Christians, with “many paths and methods…to lead them back to grace so that my truth may be realized in them.”\textsuperscript{264} These many paths and methods, as later revealed, are as numerous as the people one knows. For it is in love of neighbor, both the particularly individual people and universally all people, that one practices the salvific virtue of charity as love of God by loving those whom God has created. The other virtues

\textsuperscript{261} Ibid 211. McGinn describes Catherine as a “co-redemptrix for both believers and unbelievers.”
\textsuperscript{262} McGinn 231.
\textsuperscript{263} Catherine of Siena, \textit{The Dialogue}, 36.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid 31.
aid the virtue of charity by, as will be discussed later, forming the soul to remain ready and able to live out love for neighbor in a practical and effective manner.

Indeed, charity for both God and neighbor for God’s sake bears connection to eternal salvation in Catherine’s visions. Catherine emphasized the other virtues, in addition to charity, as significant for the soul in salvation. These virtues include humility, patience, compassion, and obedience. The virtues, which develop a holy life in Christ, emerged from charity for God and for neighbor, were “brought to birth in love of neighbor.” The virtues accompany charity, as discussed earlier, and charity is, as frequently revealed in *The Dialogue*, necessary for eternal union with God. Catherine wrote about how God told her that “To have eternal life it is essential to love without regard for one’s own interest.” Charity unites the soul to God through love for God in earthly life, and thus will unite the soul perfectly with God in eternal life. The eternal bond of charity extends also between the soul and neighbors, for neighbors are loved in the same love as the soul loved God. “For when a soul reaches eternal life, all share in her good and she in theirs,” Catherine relayed from her vision. Thus charity, in its twofold expression of love of God and love of neighbor for God’s sake, creates on earth bonds that carry over to eternal life in heaven. Therefore, because such bonds must exist, charity needs to flourish in this life and, as Catherine so strongly emphasized, charity directed for God must be practiced in charity for neighbor.

God provided Catherine with clarity in her visions so she and those who read her visions could understand what exactly charity to neighbor for God’s sake entailed. First, according to her petition in which she beseeched God for the salvation of all souls, he

---

265 Ibid 37.
266 Ibid 114.
267 Ibid 83.
instructed her on how to practice general acts of charity towards all peoples. “In love you ought to help them spiritually with prayer and counsel, assist them spiritually and materially in their need – at least with your good will if you have nothing else.”268 The virtue of charity, as seen in moral theologies of Catherine’s era, including *Secunda Secundae* of *Summa Theologiae*, classified well-wishing for others’ well-being, especially their spiritual well-being, as one of the first and most general acts of charity. Hoping for salvation for all leads to love and mercy for the individual human person, especially mercy in the form of spiritual acts such as prayer, example, and counsel. The eternal and universal well-being of all people, both one’s neighbors and those whom one knows not, emerges as the primary goal of general acts of charity to neighbor in *The Dialogue*.

**Charity, Virtue, and Continual Prayer**

As discussed in *The Dialogue*, God placed each soul in its own particular situation, so that charity may be enacted on a particular level. Catherine wrote that God responded to her prayers by telling her that “the principle of holy will means that each of you must work for the salvation of souls according to your own situation.”269 Catherine could not serve all souls through direct service, yet she could love them generally through both continual prayer and specific petitions for all souls; yet she could, and must, reach out in specific acts of charity toward those whom she encountered in her situation. Her holy desire transformed her particular acts of charity towards her neighbors into prayer, for, as God revealed to her, “whatever you do in word or deed for the good of your

---

268 Ibid 33.  
269 Ibid 127.
neighbor is a real prayer.”\textsuperscript{270} Indeed, because of charity, particular acts of love towards neighbor for the sake of God evolved into continual prayer. Continual prayer in \textit{Dialogues} is when charity and prayer come together and transform everyday actions into petitions of prayer. Thus vocal prayer becomes a continuous action of the soul, for when actual prayer “is done with loving charity…this loving charity is continual prayer.”\textsuperscript{271}

One grows in the virtue of charity by increasing in holy desire and continually praying. God described to St. Catherine the charitable soul as one who “beyond a general love for all people she sets her eye on the specific needs of her neighbors and comes to the aid of those nearest her according to the graces I have given her for ministry.”\textsuperscript{272} Each soul, along with being placed in a particular situation, receives from God particular virtues to help her practice charity to her neighbors. Although all virtues are bound together, God distributes them in different ways to different souls, “so that one virtue might be, as it were, the source of all others” for that particular soul.\textsuperscript{273} The soul receives its own initial virtue, whether it be charity, justice, humility, faith, courage, prudence, or patience, according to that with which “the soul [was] most at ease with that virtue.”\textsuperscript{274} The soul develops love for its initial virtue, and, because all virtues were bound together, she would receive, love, and habituate the other virtues.

All of these individual virtues, after being received from God, are conceived in charity, and must be birthed through love of neighbor. “Your neighbors are the channel through which all your virtues are tested and come to birth,” especially charity, God revealed to Catherine. This occurs in two ways: through service to neighbor out of love,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid 127.  \\
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid 127.  \\
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid 37.  \\
\textsuperscript{273} Ibid 37.  \\
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid 37.  \\
\end{flushright}
and through bearing hardships that one encountered in fellowship of others. Although God called St. Catherine, and calls every Christian, to love others for God’s sake, one, including Catherine, would not always find neighbors easy to love.

Rather, the soul will endure persecution, cruelty, faithlessness, and other hardships from the neighbors it strives to love. Thus neighbors test the soul’s virtue of charity, as the soul submits itself more to charity than to its own selfish will. Likewise, the other virtues, which are intimately connected to charity and its practice, come to birth through the crucible of neighborly interaction. In *The Dialogue*, God advised Catherine, “you test the virtue of patience in yourself when your neighbors insult you. Your humility is tested by the proud... your compassion by the cruel,” and so on through a whole list of virtues.\(^2\) Patience, humility, and compassion, along with all the other virtues, aid the soul in performing particular acts of charity, for charity towards one’s neighbor in word and deed requires a humble, patient, and compassionate soul to serve others even when faced with persecution.

Thus St. Catherine presented charity for one’s neighbors as simultaneously spiritual and corporeal. Those who acquire the virtue of charity and increased it in their cell of self-knowledge must give to God, themselves, and their neighbors what is rightly due. What is due attends to both the spiritual and the bodily, because of both human nature and the fact of the Incarnation. God describes to Catherine in *Dialogue* how these charitable souls “give their neighbors what is due to them: first of all, loving charity and constant humble prayer – your mutual debt – and the debt of teaching, and the example of a holy and honorable life, and the counsel and help they need for salvation.”\(^2\)

\(^2\) Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 41.
for neighbor therefore must first and foremost concern their salvation and spiritual welfare; any acts of charity directed towards the physical must aim for the greater end of the spiritual.

Constant prayer figured significantly into Catherine’s theology of charity, as serving one’s neighbor both universally and individually. Prayer occupies a special role as a general act of charity, as “the general help that you ought to give every reasoning creature.”²⁷⁷ Prayer for one’s neighbors aims first and foremost at the well-being of their souls, at helping them arrive at eternal salvation. Holy desire, as God told Catherine, guided and perfected prayer, for “perfect prayer is achieved not with many words but with loving desire.”²⁷⁸ Love for God through the virtue of charity produces a holy desire for union with God and for the fulfillment of His will, and thus, as charity carries over from God to neighbor for God’s sake, desire follows. The soul grows in holy desire for the well-being of others just as it grew in holy desire for God’s will, because God desires holiness and well-being for all His people. This holy desire perfects prayer, as God explained to Catherine, through the transformation of a finite vocal or mental prayer into continual prayer. Catherine spoke of how God told her “holy desire, that is, having a good and holy will, is continual prayer.”²⁷⁹ Thus, holy desire for union with God becomes continual prayer, as does holy desire for the salvation of all people and the well-being of one’s neighbors. The general act of charity toward one’s neighbor, therefore, continually guides the soul to participate in continual prayer for others.

Charity and holy desire generate more general acts of charity in the soul, in addition to continual prayer. Reciprocally increased by continual prayer, charity and holy

²⁷⁷ Ibid 34.
²⁷⁸ Ibid 126.
²⁷⁹ Ibid 126.
desire effervescently bubble over from words into actions and thus bring specific acts of charity out of continual prayer. The soul “makes this continual prayer” for others “as charity asks of her for her neighbors’ good and according to the need she sees and the situation in which [God had] placed her.” The continual prayer constantly intercedes to God on behalf of one’s neighbors, and thus acts on charity on a general level; the actions, in which the virtue of charity becomes a real and living prayer, practice charity on a particular level.

For St. Catherine, prayer often was connected with the act of writing. Several of her own prayers survive in written form; according to her biographer Thomas of Siena (Caffarini), one of Catherine’s first writings in her own hand was a prayer. Her letters often overflow with prayers for her recipients.

Charity, Knowledge, and Humility

Her further discussion of charity as a “the debt of teaching” demonstrates the significance of St. Thomas Aquinas for Catherine and her theology. Returning to a passage discussed in earlier chapters, Dialogue portrays Aquinas, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and others as those who gained the “light of great learning” from the flame of charity and thus loved their neighbors through providing spiritual direction and theological instruction. Teaching in Dialogue focuses primary on the teaching of Scripture, where the soul encounters God’s love in His Truth. God told Catherine how Scripture “seemed darksome because it was not understood…[through] no fault of Scripture but of the listener who failed to understand.” Since most people lacked
understanding, souls perfect with charity love their neighbors by aiding them in understanding the truths of Scripture.

Yet Catherine’s vision warns against the attempt to teach Scripture without the virtue of charity. Since love brings forth the knowledge of understanding, one must have charity for both God and neighbor in order to properly and clearly teach the Truth of God to one’s neighbors. Those who teach with the intention of puffing themselves up with pride and vainglory thus fail to teach Scripture because the light of love does not guide them. “This is why foolish, proud, and learned people go blind even though it is light,” God told Catherine.”

282 The same necessity of perfect love of charity applies to those who provide example and spiritual counsel to their neighbors. If done out of pride or selfish love, then counsel and example do not bear the light of charity. “I tell you, therefore,” God instructed Catherine, “it is far 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.”

284 One cannot provide spiritual counsel without the virtue of charity because “one cannot share what one does not have in oneself.” Catherine’s visions thus promoted to her readers that those across all states of life, not just those of university learning, to practice charity and instruct others in spiritual matters. This message of hers greatly appealed to the laity, for it meant that their lack of

283 Ibid.
284 Ibid 157.
285 Ibid.
formal theological learning did not deprive them of this act of charity. Catherine herself
served as an example of an uneducated person acting in charity through providing
counsel and instruction. Catherine’s example was, however, exceptional for an unlearned
person, as she used writing letters and the Dialogue as a means to counsel and instruct
both the educated and uneducated of her world.

**Charity as the Perfection of the Christian Life**

Catherine’s understanding of charity for neighbor, as thus far articulated, reflected
Aquinas’ definition of charity in the *Summa Theologiae*. She likely was not directly
drawing from his writings on this, but more likely encountered this central teaching of
Aquinas through her Dominican confessors, scribes, and disciples. Especially given the
numerous other theologians whose teachings likely influenced Catherine’s theology,
Aquinas in his theology of charity has the most resonance with Catherine’s theology of
charity out of all of her sources and influences.

Both Aquinas and St. Catherine upheld charity as the perfection of the Christian
life, spiritually and morally. The primacy of charity in Dialogue clearly demonstrated
Catherine’s understanding that the Christian life achieves its purpose through both love of
God and love of neighbor. Aquinas demonstrated this as well near the close of the
*Secunda Secundae* of his *Summa Theologiae*. There he argued that, since “a thing is said
to be perfect in so far as it attains its proper end,” and the proper end for the human soul
is God, “the perfection of the Christian life consists radically in charity.”286 With the
utmost importance of charity for the Christian wayfarer in mind, Aquinas spent a
significant amount of his *Secunda Secundae* discussing the theological virtue of charity.

---

286 Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q. 184, a. 1, co.
Aquinas referred frequently to charity in his discussion of the cardinal virtues, temperance, and fortitude.

After examining charity as a virtue and the proper subject of charity, Aquinas presented a series of articles on the object of charity in II-II q. 25. In the first article of this question, he asked whether the love of charity ends with God or extends to human beings, namely one’s neighbors. Citing the First Epistle of John, he answered that the soul that loves God must also love its neighbor, as God has commanded. Aquinas then explained the reason for this command of charity, that “the aspect under which our neighbor is to be loved, is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbor is that he may be in God.”

A notable similarity here occurs that connects Aquinas’ understanding of charity for neighbor with that of Catherine. Aquinas argued that love for neighbor is commanded because that neighbor may be a member of the mystical Body of Christ. Catherine envisioned believers and unbelievers alike in the side of Christ, and thus part of the mystical body. This vision guided her as she asserted that Christians must love their neighbors as a concrete expression of their love for God, because since one’s neighbors are in the side of Christ, they offer a corporeal encounter with God through the mystical body.

Catherine’s understanding of the necessity of charity for neighbor corresponded to Aquinas’ distinction between perfect and imperfect love of God. Aquinas clearly stated that charity for neighbor only gained merit when inseparable from charity directed toward God. “Now the love of one’s neighbor is not meritorious, except by the reason of his being loved for God’s sake,” Aquinas declared, “Therefore the love of God is more

---

287 Ibid, II-II, q. 25, a. 1, co.
meritorious than the love of our neighbor.”\textsuperscript{288} Thus love for neighbor is not the virtue of charity unless a love of God precedes it and thus forms and guides it. The virtue of charity must be comprised of love of God, selflessly and above all other things. However, charity directed solely to God, with no regard to neighbor, is only an imperfect charity. Perfect charity thus comprises both love of God and love of neighbor in God, according to Aquinas. Aquinas distinguishes between perfect and imperfect charity in the \textit{Summa}, saying: “In this way [of charity] love of our neighbor includes love of God, while love of God does not include love of our neighbor. Hence the comparison will be between perfect love of God, extending to also our neighbor, and inadequate and imperfect love of God,” Aquinas argued.\textsuperscript{289} In order to perfectly love God, charity for neighbor was indisputably necessary for both of these Dominicans.

\textit{Charity and Mercy}

In true scholastic fashion, Aquinas carefully distinguished the virtue of charity as a whole from the subvirtue of mercy, which pertained to one’s neighbor. Catherine discussed mercy primarily as God’s action towards humanity, yet she also described charity towards neighbor as compassion that caused the soul to “weep in charity for [God] and her neighbors with heartfelt love.”\textsuperscript{290} Notably, Aquinas defined mercy as compassion, a “heartfelt sympathy for another’s distress.”\textsuperscript{291} He supported this definition with an examination of the Latin \textit{misericordia}, “denoting a man’s compassionate heart [\textit{miserum cor}] for another’s unhappiness.”\textsuperscript{292} Mercy is for Aquinas the “interior effect of

\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{288} Aquinas, \textit{ST}, II-II, q. 27, a. 8.
\item\textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{290} Catherine of Siena, \textit{Dialogue}, 163.
\item\textsuperscript{291} Aquinas, \textit{ST}, II-II, q. 30, a 1, co.
\item\textsuperscript{292} Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
charity, which directly relates to love of neighbor.”293 He did distinguish it as a subvirtue of charity, stating, “as regards man, who has God above him, charity, which unites him to God, is greater than mercy, whereby he supplies the defects of his neighbor.”294 Charity was the mother of mercy, according to Aquinas, and thus charity exceeds mercy because it relates to God; but mercy, as a subvirtue of charity, is the greatest of the virtues guiding person-to-person interaction.

**Catherine’s Three Practical Expressions of Charity**

In her *Dialogue*, St. Catherine presented three more practical expressions of charity. First, the soul must refrain from the passing judgment upon her neighbors, even if she thinks she does so out of counsel or spiritual correction. Bernard McGinn notes how “this message became more and more central to Catherine, because she was candid about how God had upbraided her for her natural inclination to rush to judgment on others.”295 Abstention from judgment of others exercised charity for both God and neighbor, as the soul loved God through seeking only His will for that person, and loved the person through treating them with holy compassion. God described His holy servants as those who “do not waste their time passing false judgment, either against my servants or the world’s servants.”296 He warned Catherine that judgment hindered the pursuit of union with God, telling her, “You must never pass judgment in human terms on anything you see or hear from anyone at all, whether it concerns you or someone else. You must consider only my will for them and for you.”297 Charity for one’s neighbors included

---

294 Ibid.
295 McGinn 238.
296 Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 190.
297 Ibid 191.
above all hoping and working for their salvation, and only God’s will, not human will, could aim towards that end.

God reminded Catherine how charity, being first and foremost between the soul and God, meant loving the neighbor for God’s sake. Therefore, charity towards neighbor must focus on the neighbor’s relationship with God and helping them achieve the union of friendship. This required, according the Dialogue, recognizing that only God can truly know whether a soul is increasing or decreasing in charity. “And if you should see something that is clearly a sin or a fault, snatch the rose from that thorn…offer these things to me in holy compassion.”298 This compassion involved never judging the heart of a person, for only God could do that, and therefore such judgment would be an act of pride, not of charity. Rather, God instructed Catherine to “assume that the offender does such a thing as an instrument commissioned by me. For often such a person’s intention is good; there is no one who can judge the hidden heart.”299

 Judgment brings the soul away from the perfection of charity, therefore harming one’s love of both God and neighbor. “When you cannot see clearly and openly whether the sin is deadly, you must not pass judgment in your mind, but be concerned only about my will for that person,” Catherine relayed from her vision.300 Even if one discerned a mortal sin, “you must respond not with judgment but with holy compassion.”301 Judgment bore the threat of contempt for the neighbor, and contempt would only harm one’s neighbor. “For you cast contempt on your neighbors when you pay attention to

298 Ibid 191.
299 Ibid 191.
300 Ibid 191.
301 Ibid 191.
their ill will toward you rather than my will for them.\textsuperscript{302} It clearly emerged here in the Dialogue that charity for neighbor must, in its primary concern for their salvation, recognize that God’s will supersedes all human acts in the attainment of salvation. Also in passing judgment, the soul would most likely assume superiority over its neighbor and thus commit the sin of pride and endanger its own virtue of charity. With pride instead of charity, the soul could not love and aid its neighbor.

St. Catherine continued in Dialogue to describe even more practically how one should refrain from judgment in charity for neighbor. She explained how she learned in her visions that “even if your neighbors’ sins are clearly shown to your spirit not just once or twice but many times, you should still not confront them with specific sins.”\textsuperscript{303} Here again, charity manifested itself in holy compassion, rather than judgment. “Rather, when they come to visit you,” which implies that charity never should seek to attack someone for their sins, “you should correct their bad habits in a general way and lovingly and kindly plant the virtues [in their place], adding severity to your kindness only when you must.”\textsuperscript{304} Since charity was, for Catherine, intimately linked to humility, being charitable to one’s neighbor always required acting in humility. Indeed, God explained to Catherine how humility and the kindness of compassion would change a sinner’s ways more than judgment and admonishment could. “Then if the vice is truly there, such people will change their ways all the sooner, seeing themselves so gently understood.”\textsuperscript{305}

Charity, as discussed earlier, leads to understanding – not only an understanding of God and His Truth, but to an understanding of His children.

\textsuperscript{302} Ibid 191.
\textsuperscript{303} Ibid 193.
\textsuperscript{304} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid 194.
Rather than passing judgment on others, Catherine urged in *Dialogue* from the example of her visions to pray for others and live the example of virtue. This was the second practical expression of charity for one’s neighbor. While warning Catherine to be careful in her judgment of sins as she prays for particular souls, God also commanded her to still pray for those souls and their salvation. “Give up judgment, which belongs to me” He instructed her, “and take up compassion with hunger for my honor and the salvation of souls.” As repeatedly discussed throughout the *Dialogue*, with the virtue of charity one can love God through expressing honor to Him in prayer, and also seek the salvation of souls through praying for them, universally and individually. This was the continual prayer of charity for one’s neighbor, and such continual prayer also manifested itself in the “word and deed for the good of your neighbor.” Charity for neighbor also included never ceasing to pray for the salvation of souls, meaning that one never despaired about a soul’s fate and neglected to pray for it.

Example and counsel also emerged in this section of *Dialogue* as the options of compassion instead of judgment. “And with restless longing preach virtue and reprove vice in yourself and in others in the manner I have described for you,” God reminded Catherine in this vision. Here charity for neighbor again is inseparable from charity directed toward God, for in living a holy life, the soul can provide an example to others and help them in their holiness, while also submitting perfectly to God’s will above one’s own judgments and the judgments of others. This then naturally led to the third...
expression of charity for one’s neighbor, which was reproving oneself from pridefully misdirecting others.

“Reprove yourself if ever the devil or your own short-sightedness should do you the disservice of making you want to force all my servants to walk by the same path you yourself follow,” Catherine said, repeating God’s caution from her vision.310 This expression, as with judgment, aimed to prevent pride from corrupting the practice of charity, for if one forced others to seek holiness in the exact same way, that soul would be elevating itself above all others. Here God also reminded Catherine that, both in her own practice and the counsel she provided to her disciples, that penance can and should vary according to the individual. To force every person to perform the same acts of penance would not be an act of charity, for it would not seek to guide each person individually and therefore do actual harm to some souls. Furthermore, such coercion would place penance as an end in itself, rather than as a means for acquiring and refining virtue. If one forced all people to do the same penance, penance would become the chief concern, and “if their penance becomes their chief concern rather than an instrument of virtue, they will often, by this sort of grumbling, sin against their own perfection.”311 Such would achieve the exact opposite of what charity for neighbor must seek to achieve.

Three Works of Mercy in Summa Theologiae

St. Catherine’s articulation of three practical expressions of charity resembled the same threefold division of the manifestations of mercy for Aquinas in the Summa. Aquinas discussed mercy’s “outward effects” in terms of beneficence, almsdeeds, and fraternal correction. As scholar Clark indicated, “external works of mercy are then also

310 Ibid 196.
311 Ibid 196.
acts of charity” for Aquinas.\textsuperscript{312} If charity is friendship with God, and one’s neighbors may be in God, then logically charity is also expressed through friendship with one’s neighbors. Beneficence, which Aquinas understood as an act of friendship, is thus also an act of charity “because the act includes goodwill whereby a man wishes his friend well.”\textsuperscript{313} Since one cannot possibly do good to all people, beneficence directs charity to the neighbors most closely connected to one, whether through kin, friendship, or situation.\textsuperscript{314}

Almsgiving, however, directs the charity to those most in need. Almsgiving is, according to Aquinas, “an act of charity through the medium of mercy,” since the compassion involved belongs to the subvirtue of mercy, while the love of one’s suffering neighbor pertains to mercy.\textsuperscript{315} Scholars distinguish two different types of alms in the \textit{Summa}, spiritual alms and corporeal alms.\textsuperscript{316} According to Aquinas, corporeal almsgiving pertained to the internal needs, hunger and thirst, the external needs, clothing and dwelling, and needs due to the special causes of sickness, imprisonment, and death.\textsuperscript{317} Spiritual almsgiving manifested either through petitioning for help from God, through prayer for others, or through human assistance addressing deficiencies of others in their intellects, the appetites, will, and actions.\textsuperscript{318} Thus spiritual almsgiving involved praying for others, instructing, counseling, comforting the grieving, reproving sin, and pardoning sinners. These spiritual and corporeal alms were also, as acts of charity, how the Christian could love their neighbor for God’s sake. Indeed, almsgiving was not only

\textsuperscript{312} Clark 422.
\textsuperscript{313} Aquinas, \textit{ST}, II-II, q. 31, a.1, co.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid, II-II, q. 31, a. 3.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid, II-II, q. 32, a. 1, co.
\textsuperscript{316} E.g. Clark 424-425.
\textsuperscript{317} Aquinas, \textit{ST}, II-II, q. 32 a. 2, co.
\textsuperscript{318} Ibid.
an expression of charity for neighbor but, for Aquinas, necessary for loving one’s neighbor.\textsuperscript{319} Much like Catherine, and a reflection of Dominican spirituality, Aquinas emphasized the excellence of spiritual almsgiving over corporeal ones. He enumerated the reasons for the simple excellence of spiritual almsgiving, including the higher excellence of the offering of spiritual gifts, the need to attend more to the soul than the body, and because spiritual acts in and of themselves are more excellent than corporeal acts.\textsuperscript{320} While Aquinas did admit that in particular cases, corporeal alms excel spiritual alms, such as in the case of feeding rather than instructing a hungry man.\textsuperscript{321} In his later discussion of prayer, Aquinas asserted that “charity requires us to pray for others,” and these others included even sinners, for “we ought to pray even for sinners, that they may be converted.”\textsuperscript{322} Therefore, Catherine’s emphasis on prayer as the highest expression of charity has precedent within the Dominican tradition, specifically in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Possibly, as she developed her prayer life through working with her Dominican confessors, she encountered this expression of prayer as one of the more excellent acts of charity.

While Catherine warned against judging others based on their sins in \textit{Dialogue}, she also asserted that guiding an individual to holiness was also an expression of charity. Similarly, but with different language, the Dominican tradition through Thomas Aquinas expressed fraternal correction as the third and final external act of charity. He argued, “fraternal correction also is an act of charity, because thereby we drive out our brother’s

\textsuperscript{319} Floyd, 459.
\textsuperscript{320} Ibid, II-II, q. 32, a. 3, co.
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{322} Ibid, II-II, q. 83, a 7, co and ad. 3.
evil, viz. sin, the removal of which pertains to charity...in so much as the contrary good of virtue is more akin to charity than the good of the body or of external things.\textsuperscript{323}

Fraternal correction must be acted in goodwill towards the sinner, and thus result in leading him to strive to act more virtuously and become holier.\textsuperscript{324} Aquinas’ discussion of fraternal correction implies, addressing each sin and sinner specifically and particularly, rather than providing a general formulation for correction. St. Catherine’s emphasis on individual spiritual guidance thus resembles this same ethos, one likely present throughout the Dominican Order of this time.

Aquinas directed his discussion of three external acts of charity – beneficence, almsgiving, and fraternal correction – with his students, who would become preachers and members of religious orders, in mind. The \textit{Summa Theologiae} was designed as a textbook for university students, and therefore, its audience was primarily educated and religious men of Europe’s universities. This demographic starkly contrasts Catherine of Siena’s broader audience, who, if her letters are any indication, span from members of the bourgeoisie laity, tertiary women like herself, queens, kings, and other royalty, members of religious orders, preachers, church leaders, and even the pope. Thus, while both Aquinas and Catherine wrote in order to instruct, those whom they were instructing widely varied; with this, their emphases, styles, and goals varied. Thomas spoke more philosophically in his discussion of charity towards neighbor, and concerned himself much more with precepts and guidelines for specific incidents, for these would aid preachers when they dealt with such situations. Catherine, on the other hand, was instructing the people, not just their preachers; and thus her guidelines overflow with an

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid, II-II, q. 33, a.1, co.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid, ad. 3.
emphasis on the mercy of God and a loving heart, seeking to both instruct and draw her readers to God.

Conclusion

St. Catherine of Siena’s three practical expressions of charity – refrain from judgment, continual prayer for souls, and guiding each person individually rather than forcing one path – all bring Catherine’s understanding of charity directly into the world of the laity. Certainly Catherine’s own practice of these activities through her assistance to the poor and the sick and her spiritual direction to lay and religious people exemplified how a member of the laity could engage in prayer and active charity for neighbor. Yet these activities as described in the Dialogue brought to the laity the expanding late medieval world of spiritual service. The commands and instructions from her visions in Dialogue provided a way for lay Christians to adopt an active role in salvation of the world.325 Unlike in past centuries, when the laity depended exclusively on the clergy for spiritual guidance,326 Catherine discerned changes across the growing urban spaces occupied by mendicant preachers. Especially in an Italy where the pope vacated the Roman chair for French courts, Catherine believed and taught, especially in The Dialogue, that the laity, with the cultivation of virtues, could care for the souls and physical well-being of their neighbors.

This meant that she also believed the laity, especially the contemplative laity, could foster the same friendship with God as the religious could.327 Through the divine gift of the virtue of charity, which the Dialogue clearly stated was given regardless of status or state of life, any Christian could grow towards union with God. Then, with the

325 Scott, “Catherine of Siena and Lay Sanctity,” 83.
326 Ibid.
327 Ibid 85.
virtue charity creating a disposition in the soul toward God, love of God would produce
love of neighbor for God’s sake. Because of this charity and its effects of well-wishing
for one’s neighbor, one could work for the salvation of others out of charity for neighbor.

As she stated in the *Dialogue*, St. Catherine believed providing a proper example
of acts of charity was itself an act of charity. As literacy, especially vernacular literacy,
increased across late medieval Europe, the written word offered the means to provide the
example of charity to a wide and diverse audience. Catherine’s visions in the *Dialogue*
instruct her readers, especially members of the laity, in how to live out the virtue of
charity. Her writing of her visions in the *Dialogue* describe to her readers what God
taught her in her visions about charity; thus her very act of writing the *Dialogue*, as will
be explored in the following chapter, was an act of charity itself, for she did it out of love
of God and for the good of her readers.
CHAPTER FIVE
WRITING AS AN ACT OF CHARITY

Introduction

In the previous chapters, the argument has been made for the influence of St. Thomas Aquinas’ theology of virtue and charity upon the theological thought of St. Catherine of Siena. Chapter Three examined Catherine’s understanding of charity as love of God above all things, and it argued for the influence of Aquinas on her emphasis of charity as friendship with God. Chapter Four discussed Catherine’s understanding of charity as love of neighbor for God’s sake. Chapter Four also examined Catherine’s three practical expressions of charity (refrain from judgment, prayer, and spiritual guidance) in relation to Aquinas’ three works of mercy (almsgiving, beneficence, and fraternal correction).

This fifth and final chapter addresses in full an argument that has been present throughout the previous chapters. St. Catherine of Siena not only wrote the Dialogue about the virtue of charity, but she also understood her act of writing the book as an act of charity. This chapter argues for Catherine’s understanding of writing as an act of charity. Some ancillary attention will be given to Catherine’s education and unique ability to write even though she was uneducated, yet the primary focus will be her act of writing and her audience in relation to love of God and love of neighbor.
Mysticism and Vernacular Literature

Two aspects of Saint Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogue* mark it as exceptional late medieval theology. First, unlike the scholastic texts for university theologians or the speculative mysticism often directed to cloistered religious, Catherine’s *Dialogue* occupied part of the growing movement in the late medieval period of laity writing and reading theological texts, especially the less academic and therefore more accessible mystical texts. As medieval mysticism addressed a variety of audiences, ranging from Meister Eckhart’s beguine nuns to the semi-mystical and widely popular *Imitation of Christ*, late medieval mysticism manifested itself in a variety of forms. *The Dialogue* thus does not resemble the speculative mysticism present in works such as Marguerite Porete or the heavily Neo-Platonic mysticism of the Rhineland and early Renaissance Italy. Rather, the *Dialogue* employed everyday symbols such as the bridge to reach people in the most ordinary walks of late medieval urban life.

In her *Dialogue* and her prolific correspondence, St. Catherine offered a practical and affective theology that provided moral guidance and comfort to her readers. As she wrote to people within the church hierarchy, royalty, urban mendicants, tertiary men and women, and ordinary Italian city dwellers and townspeople, her mysticism reflected her understanding of her universal apostolic mission. In addition to writing to people across all states and classes of life, Catherine stood apart from other late medieval mystics in regards of her astounding awareness of theological tradition. Unlike some medieval mystics who were charged with heresy, Catherine demonstrated remarkable awareness and adherence to Church doctrine. Her understanding of virtue, love, salvation, and the
mercy of God reflect the teachings of revered theologians such as St. Augustine, St. Dominic, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Her emphasis on these theological topics in her *Dialogue* made the teachings on virtue, love, salvation, and mercy accessible to the rising group of lay people literate in the vernacular language.

Her mysticism did not solely attest that she possessed remarkable holiness and closeness to God; her letters and mystical treatise guided others, especially the laity, in the pursuit of holiness through the growth of the virtue of charity. Both her *Dialogue* and her hundreds of letters demonstrate this mission to provide spiritual direction to people from all classes of society. Notably, the time in which she wrote the *Dialogue* and traveled as far as Avignon, Catherine also significantly increased the volume of her letter writing. Thus a connection exists between Catherine’s writing and her desire to provide spiritual instruction to others.

Secondly, Catherine’s theology presented a remarkable example of a laywoman’s vernacular writing for the period. Not only do her *Dialogue* and her letters provide sources of women’s vernacular writing, but they also demonstrate her understanding of the importance and role of her writing in late medieval Italy. In both *Dialogue* and her letters, Catherine demonstrates an outstanding ability to compose intelligent and eloquent prose, especially considering her lack of formal education. Her ability is even more noteworthy when the historical evidence indicates the strong likelihood that Catherine wrote a significant amount of the *Dialogue* and her later letters with her own hand. Catherine justified her ability to write as describing it as a gift from God, lest some think she was pursuing knowledge beyond her status. Her use of writing was an act of charity, for writing shared this gift with others for their good and the glory of God.

---

The literacy of lay people was on the rise in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and was certainly correlated with the rise of vernacular literature, yet most vernacular authors at Catherine’s time were not women. Catherine was the first woman to produce surviving written works in late medieval Italian vernacular. The survival of her works and the prolific printing of *Dialogue* indicate that her works were widely read and influential enough to be saved in libraries and churches over the centuries. Her writing developed concurrently with the late medieval proliferation of female vernacular writers such as Julian of Norwich, an early fifteenth century mystic who held devotion to Catherine, Margery Kempe, who lived and wrote during the fifteenth century, and the German Dominican *Sister Books*, which were composed in the fourteenth century.329

**Catherine’s Ability to Write**

Both St. Catherine herself and her biographers Raymond of Capua and Caffarini emphasized the miraculous origin of her ability to write. While it is inconclusive why Raymond and Caffarini claimed that Catherine did not learn to write but was given the ability as a divine gift, it is likely they spoke of her ability to write as such because of the purpose and context of their hagiographies of the saint. Likely, a divine gift of writing to an uneducated person indicated a miracle connected with her life, and thus it supported her cause for canonization.

It was still customary for lay townspeople and bourgeois women of this time not to know how to write. Even less common was the prolific nature of St. Catherine’s writing. She was, especially for women of her time and place, incredibly conspicuous

---

329 It is uncertain if, through her contact with other Dominicans, Catherine came in contact with these texts. Her own *Dialogue* was translated into German and English, so there was nothing preventing the spread of literature between these countries. Yet, for the sake of this paper, existing evidence does not speak on this, so it will not be assumed that Catherine had knowledge of such texts and their female authorship.
across the public landscape of medieval Europe, and some people regarded her public presence with distrust and discomfort. McGinn acknowledges that even some of Catherine’s fellow mantellata considered her political activities and public presence usual and even harmful.\textsuperscript{330} Evidence for discomfort about her prolific writing comes from Raymond’s \textit{Life of St. Catherine of Siena}. While Raymond covered many of the events of Catherine’s short life, notably absent are many events which Catherine herself recounted in her correspondence. McGinn suggests that Raymond probably overlooked these because he considered neither the events nor the frequency and intensity of her writing as fit for the “standard picture of a holy female worthy of sanctity.”\textsuperscript{331} Likely, her biographers discerned the necessity to authorize her prolific writing and the recipients of her writing, who included popes, with divine intervention. Likely reflecting the same culture, Catherine herself attributed her newfound gift of writing as a gift from God through the instruction of two male saints.

Her biographer Caffarini, in his \textit{Libellus de Supplemento}, described an earlier experience in Catherine’s life where she demonstrated the ability to write. He cited the source of this story from one of Catherine’s scribes, Father Dom Stefano Marconi of Siena, who wrote to Caffarini to explain “how the virgin learned to write miraculously.”\textsuperscript{332} According to this account, Catherine arose one day in the midst of her prayers and desired to write. Without hesitation, she sat and wrote in a letter in her vernacular Italian, which she then gave to Dom Stefano. In the conclusion of this letter,

\textsuperscript{330} McGinn, \textit{Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism}, 199.
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid 199.
she wrote, “Know, my dearest son, that this is the first letter that I have ever written.” 333
Separate from the story of Dom Stefano, Caffarini cited other scribes who told him that Catherine both learned to read and write through miraculous circumstances. He proceeded to describe an instance in which Catherine found a vase with a sinoper for writing and illustrating. She then picked up the quill, grabbed a small sheet of paper, and “although she had minimal training in writing, she sat down and began to write in clear letters in her vulgar tongue.” 334 She recorded her prayer, and Caffarini informed his readers that her “style and the form of the text…were such that they produced a clear sign of a miracle” for her writing produced similar results as those “produced only after long practice in spelling, calligraphy, and writing.” 335

Whether she learned from her scribes or solely through visions, Catherine possessed remarkable skill at writing in Italian. Most scholars now agree that Catherine could write and wrote parts of Dialogue and some of her letters. The designation of illiterate was not completely inappropriate in the fourteenth century, where literacy meant the ability to read and write in Latin; thus even though she could write in Italian, her limited Latin reading skills would have caused her contemporaries to see her as illiterate. Yet since she lived before the invention of the printing press, Catherine inhabited a world of oral culture. The popularity of mendicant preaching certainly attests to the popularity and influence of the spoken world in late medieval Europe. When Catherine took a pen and wrote with her own hand, she participated in the emerging world of printed books; yet she also still inhabited the world of the spoken world through her dictations of letters. Catherine’s sense of presence through the written word, even those which she dictated,

333 Ibid 184.
334 Ibid 183.
335 Ibid 183.
demonstrates an understanding of writing as an act of charity. The words still came from her mouth, onto paper, and into the lives of her readers.

*Writing as an Act of Charity*

As with her actions in the public square and the religious world, Catherine did not see writing as an end in itself. Rather, she understood it as a means to pursue her apostolic commission and exercise the virtue of charity. Through the act of writing, St. Catherine transformed spiritual acts of mercy into very corporeal ones. The Incarnation figures significantly in Catherine’s theology, and she frequently incorporates the image of Christ crucified with other images, particularly the Bridge. Spiritual instruction, counsel, and prayer for all souls take on corporeal form through Catherine’s words. Thus in providing spiritual guidance, she feeds souls hungry for love and quenches the thirst for union with God; her prayers, made manifest from thoughts into words, clothed her disciples and readers with comfort and hope. In her earnest desire to bring all souls to Christ, she wrote to reach people beyond the physical limits of her ministry.

Love of God and love of neighbor compelled Catherine to take up her pen and write, first her letters to specific recipients, and then her *Dialogue* to a much wider audience of religious and laity across all of Italy. Notably, as her physical presence increased across the towns and cities of Italy in her charity to the poor, hungry, imprisoned, and sick, so too did her written presence increase through her letters to members of the hierarchy of the Church and her counsel to laypeople across all classes. Catherine did not and could not separate her corporeal service to others from spiritual instruction, for her love of neighbor encompassed all aspects of all people.
In her 1377 letter to Raymond of Capua, St. Catherine referenced her fervent writing as “le mani e la lingua s’accordano col cuore,” that writing put her hands and her tongue into harmony with her heart.\(^{336}\) “Forgive me for writing so much, but my hands and tongue run along with my heart,” she wrote.\(^{337}\) Her hands, tongue, and heart already figured significantly in her mystical life and public ministry. Each of these physical parts engaged in a particular charitable activity. Her hands fed the poor and comforted the sick, her tongue provided spiritual counsel, and her heart poured forth love for God and others in her prayers.

It was through the act of writing that she united these actions together with the love of God and neighbor overflowing in her heart. She brought together her hands, tongue, and heart through the physical act of writing her words down for the recipients of her charity. As discussed in the previous chapter, Catherine understood individual spiritual guidance as one of the three key expressions of charity, along with prayer and refraining from judging others. She thus picked up her pen in order to perform this act of charity, spiritual instruction, for her wider audience, especially her lay disciples. Through words on a page she expressed her love of neighbor for God’s sake, thus joining her heart and hands in harmony. Writing also provided her the means for the preservation of her act of charity, lest her words vanish and bear no fruit in her neighbor.\(^{338}\)

During her most prolific years, St. Catherine shied away neither from the realm of public and Church politics nor from the culture of writing. Since her ministry by the end of her life spanned Rome, Siena, Pisa, Florence, and her letters reached far beyond the boundaries of Italy, writing made her present to her disciples and involved in the affairs

\(^{336}\) Tylus 164.
\(^{337}\) Catherine of Siena, Letters Vol. II, 506.
\(^{338}\) Ibid, 174.
of the Church even when the obligations of service in Italian towns denied her physical presence. Thus her activity ministry and charity towards others could occur in a variety of places within a short amount of time, because of her writing.

Jane Tylus describes Catherine’s fervent writing of letters and Dialogue as her way “of asserting her own centrality as a woman of vernacular letters, [thus] becoming a clericus or a donna, in control of her own words.” Each of her almost four hundred letters begins with the declaration “Io, Catarina, scrivo a voi” (I, Catherine, write to you). Writing became a way for Catherine to assert her presence in the social, political, and ecclesiastical world, and to extend her message of charity farther than she could through only public preaching. Most scholars agree that, while Catherine’s disciples were both men and women, many of her earliest scribes were women. Her scribes dictated many of her letters and, since they were able to write, likely taught her about writing. Tylus points out that, even though Catherine used scribes throughout her whole public ministry, she reread and edited her letters and Libro to ensure that her message of charity came across clearly each time. She was not only in full control of her composition, shaping the imagery of her visions through her own choice of words, but she also willfully chose the audience of her writing. Through writing in her vernacular Italian, rather than Latin, Catherine wrote specifically to an audience that communicated in the vernacular – the laity.

Her deliberate act of writing in the vernacular made her doctrinal and affective theology accessible to the laity. Her letters reached various members of the Italian laity;

339 Tylus 33.
341 Ibid 18.
342 Ibid 22. Tylus draws support on the assertion that Catherine edited both her writings and dictations from a variety of scholars, including Suzanne Noffke, Lino Leonardi, and Duphe Theseiden.
the quick publication of her *Libro* in Italian, with translations into Latin and a variety of other vernacular languages, soon allowed men and women as far away as even England to receive her spiritual guidance. Her choice of audience reflected not only her sense of an apostolic commission, as her prolific correspondence and the popularity of her *Dialogue* preached to hundreds, if not thousands, of more people than public preaching alone could have. Her writing also indicated firm belief that all Christians, from nobles to religious to the ordinary laypeople, could and must cultivate and practice the virtue of charity; this virtue and the related pursuit of holiness were not restricted to only those who were formally trained in Latin. St. Catherine’s writing provided spiritual counsel to many members of the laity whose literacy and demands of life differed from those of vowed religious; as she had listed spiritual counsel and example as an act of charity, thus writing manifested her virtue of charity to others.

**Writing and the Virtue of Charity**

Catherine discussed the relationship of words and charity in one of the early sections of her *Dialogue*, as she wrestled with the ends of human works in relation to virtue. Early in the *Dialogue*, God explained to St. Catherine the necessity for finite words to be joined with charity, and such is done through a comparison of finite works with words. “And in your mind I answered, ‘I am one who is pleased by few words and many works,’” God reminded Catherine.⁵⁴³ According to this quote, words and finite works have no value on their own; rather, they must work to bring virtue to fruition in one’s neighbor. Since Catherine’s *Dialogue* is a book of many words, yet God had revealed this to her, she must have believed her words were more than words. In this section of *Dialogue*, God also described “the fruits of action that I ask of the soul,” as

⁵⁴³ Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 42.
manifested when “virtue should prove itself in response to need.” This discussion of fruitful works versus empty words demonstrates Catherine’s understanding that her words were acts of charity for her neighbor. Her emphasis on fruitful virtue throughout the Dialogues indicates she does not want to produce words or works that immediately fade.

God continued to tell her, “I wanted to show you that I am not much pleased with one who simply shouts, ‘Lord, Lord, I would like to do something for you!” Rather, God requested from her “many works of patient and courageous endurance and of the other virtues I have described to you.” Her writing, both in her letters and Dialogue, demonstrated those virtues of patience and courage, which, as discussed in previous chapters, are born from the virtue of charity. The labor of composition, even through dictation, required patience; the act of writing, especially for an uneducated woman, required endurance and a sense of a great calling. Catherine’s Dialogue certainly was a work of patience, courage, and other virtues. She composed the Dialogue over the course of a year or more according to most historians and scholars. This feat in itself demanded the virtue of patience, especially as the demands of Church politics and her travels throughout the Italian peninsula constantly distracted her from her writing. As one of the first women to write in the Italian vernacular, Catherine certainly exercised courage to carve out her public presence and pursue her universal mission through this book.

As she asserted in the Dialogue, charity was the mother of all the virtues; thus, she likely understood charity as virtue that, above the others, motivated her to write her book. Her letter to Raymond supports this, for in that letter she wrote that God taught her

344 Ibid 42.
345 Ibid.
346 Ibid.
to write “so that when I come down from the heights I might have a little something to vent my heart, lest it burst.”347 She felt love of God bursting through her heart in need of expressions. As she emphasized in Dialogue, the virtue of charity required concrete and practical expression; writing to others offered for her a means of expressing charity, lest her heart burst from love of God. The action of writing, as she mentioned in this same letter, brought her hands in accordance with her heart. Charity as a feeling in the heart became charity as an action through writing her book.

Catherine’s revelations in Dialogue described actions born without the virtues as “a mere ‘shouting of words.’”348 These rather were “finite works,” as these actions, even if directed towards the good of one’s neighbor, did not bear the mark of “infinitely desirous love.”349 These finite works, like words, must not be the sole chief goal. Rather, God told Catherine, “I mean that finite works – which I have likened to words – must be joined with loving charity.”350 The virtue of charity endowed eternal merit to human words and works, because charity always was directed first towards God and thus towards an eternal end. Thus charity sanctified and transformed finite words into charity.

Writing and Spiritual Instruction

As discussed earlier, one of the major concerns in the Dialogue was the concrete expression of the virtue of charity through love of neighbor. As one grew in charity, Catherine emphasized the need for charity to be made manifest, particularly through love of neighbor. God constantly spoke of this to Catherine in Dialogue, saying, “I have already told you clearly that virtue cannot be perfect or bear fruit except by means of

347 Catherine of Siena, Letters, 505.
348 Catherine of Siena, Dialogue, 42.
349 Ibid.
350 Ibid 43.
Charity without practical and concrete expressions of love of neighbor was like shouted words, that fade away mere seconds after being spoken into being. At times when Catherine was away from her neighbors, especially those most in need, she needed a way to continually make her virtue of charity manifest. Writing provided a solution of that, for she could preserve her words on the page, lest they fall away or “lest [her] heart burst.” Catherine could also instruct her readers spiritually and guide them towards God, thus preventing her words from being only finite works. Writing provided Catherine with a manner of joining her words with the virtue of charity, as she sought to love her neighbors for God’s sake by writing to them to guide them spiritually.

St. Catherine’s immense devotion to St. Thomas Aquinas throughout the Dialogue and her other writings portrayed the significance she gave to spiritual instruction as a manifestation of charity. Aquinas exemplified spiritual knowledge, as in God’s Truth he “gained light beyond the natural and knowledge infused by grace.” By charity and grace he was thus “a light of great learning” to others. His Summa Theologiae lauded fraternal correction and other spiritual teaching as great acts of charity made manifest through the external acts of mercy. The Summa instructed preachers, so that they may in turn provide spiritual teaching to the laity. As discussed in the previous chapters, Catherine praised Aquinas for his teaching that arose out of charity and upheld him as a model of charity in her Dialogue. With the “glorious Thomas” as a model, she sought to also express her charity through spiritual instruction. In writing she could bind this desire of her heart with the action of her hands, thus creating works rooted in infinite desirous love through the medium of words.

Ibid 45.
Ibid 339.
Most significantly, the *Dialogue* sought to instruct its readers in the virtue of charity. While the Dominican friars’ preaching and Catherine’s own works of feeding the hungry and praying for others taught charity through example, example could all too often fade away. Through the means of the written word, Catherine’s written counsel on charity instructed many more people on charity than even she through only her physical presence. Through numerous descriptions and discussions of charity in all its aspects as she recounted her visions, Catherine tried to offer enough for people across all states of life, whether religious, royalty, or laity, to be able to receive guidance for their own spiritual journey. For example, in her extended motif of the bridge throughout the *Dialogue*, Catherine offered a general interpretation of the bridge’s three stairs for all believers and a special interpretation of stairs for those vowed to chastity, poverty, and obedience (vowed religious). In her discussion of the bridge, Catherine emphasized the way of common charity, a way open to all believers including married laypeople, as she wrote, “every state of life is already pleasing and acceptable to me [God] if it is held to with a good and holy will...what I ask of you is nothing other than love and affection for me [God] and for your neighbors.” Her writing about the way of common charity in her *Dialogue* and letters provided practical spiritual guidance for laypeople, and thus in her writing the *Dialogue* she acted out the virtue of charity towards her readers.

**Conclusion**

The act of writing therefore allowed Catherine to practice charity for her neighbor through providing a range of instruction on how to develop the virtue of charity both towards God and neighbor. Like St. Thomas Aquinas, Catherine upheld spiritual

---

354 Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 110.
instruction as the height of practical charity towards neighbor. Her presentation of charity in *Dialogue* and her other writings significantly resembled the Thomistic understanding of the virtue of charity, which permeated her Dominican circles. The message of charity in the *Dialogue*, in accordance with her mission for the salvation of all, was manifested particularly to the laity through the means of writing. As discussed earlier, her *Dialogue* was one of the first books printed in Italy, Spain, Germany, and England in the fourteenth century.\(^\text{355}\) As literacy increased across Europe, St. Catherine’s *Dialogue* became incredibly popular amongst the laity. She instructed the laity in theologically complex ideas, particularly the Thomistic understanding of the virtue of charity, in a mystical and affective manner that made these teachings accessible to them.

\(^{355}\) Noffke, “Introduction,” i.
CONCLUSION

This thesis argued for Saint Catherine of Siena’s repurposing of St. Thomas Aquinas’ theology of virtue and charity in her *Dialogue* for her primarily lay audience. While no historical proof exists to indicate whether Catherine of Siena ever read Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, the predominance of Aquinas’ moral theology on fourteenth century Dominican teachings, Catherine’s devotion to Aquinas, and her familiarity with Dominican teachings as a tertiary provide a sufficient case for the argument of her encounter with his teachings, whether directly or indirectly. This thesis argues for her familiarity with Aquinas and his teachings in Chapters One and Two. Chapters Three and Four successfully argued for the similarity between Catherine and Aquinas’ understandings of the two aspects of charity, love of God and love of neighbor. Chapters Three and Four also supported the claim that Catherine reinterpreted the theology of charity into a practical theology that the *Dialogue* made accessible to the increasing literate laity. Finally, Chapter Five argued for Catherine’s act of writing the *Dialogue* and her letters as an act of charity. She used writing to express her love of God and to practice love of neighbor through spiritual instruction, which, as stated in Chapter Four, she understood as one of the three practical expressions of charity.
This thesis thus provides significant insight on Catherine of Siena’s theology and her theological knowledge, two topics that are highly important in the field of studies on the fourteenth century saint and first female Doctor of the Church.

http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.i.html.


“The Mendicant Orders.” Virtual Medieval Church Page. University of St. Thomas


BIBLIOGRAPHY: CATHERINE OF SIENA


**BIBLIOGRAPHY: MEDIEVAL SPIRITUALITY**


