

## St Catherine's Teaching on Christ

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

I remember a secular priest, in the course of a retreat at Oxford a good many years ago, politely chiding us Dominicans for not making more of St Catherine of Siena. The rebuke was, and is, worth attending to. St Catherine is always rated among the greatest figures in Dominican history, and there are those who would place her among the greatest women of all time. Yet it is now eighty years since the first, and last, really solid work on her life and teaching by an English Dominican—a nun, as it happened—appeared: the massive biography by Augusta Theodosia Drane, a very good work for its time and one unduly neglected. Since then there have been four books in English worth mentioning here: the two 'Lives' by Edmund Gardner and Alice Curtaigne, the translation of the *Dialogue* by Algar Thorold, and Vida Scudder's version of a selection of the Letters. All these authors were layfolk and one a Protestant. To bring out biographies and translations is not the only way of showing interest in a subject, but it is doubtful whether our ordinary preaching and teaching show much sign of St Catherine's influence. How often, for example, does one hear any reference to her very practical teaching on the importance of self-knowledge in Christian life? It must be admitted, I think, that we do not read her much.

There are reasons, of course, for this relative neglect on our part. The translations I have mentioned have long lost whatever freshness they ever had, and few of us know Italian. Again, St Catherine is not, in any case, an easily enjoyable author. Alice Curtaigne has described the shock of delight she received on first opening at random a volume of the *Epistolario*. 'From that moment I was committed . . . the letters were fascinating: the forceful phrasing, the direct hitting, the genuineness of that devotion poured over and over again in a torrent . . . I read through every page in the six volumes, copying into a notebook the passages that particularly appealed to me. For the first time in my life I was studying for the sheer love of it'.<sup>1</sup> And no wonder: the Letters rank quite

<sup>1</sup>The *Book of Catholic Authors*, ed. by W. Romig, p. 128.

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obviously among the most splendid things in Christian literature, and in their *genre* can bear comparison with St Paul's; at once so spontaneous and profound, so powerful and so sweet. But how much of their quality is lost in translation. And then, it must be admitted, St Catherine can be wearisome. She is always at full stretch; preaching, teaching, exhorting, page after page. She gives her readers no respite; she is prolix and repetitive; she is never playful, she never understates. Nevertheless, to new readers of St Catherine I would say, start with the Letters rather than the *Dialogue*. The *Dialogue* inevitably lacks some of the personal touch and tenderness of letters written to individuals, and much of its teaching may strike the modern reader as extremely grim. Of course, St Catherine's radical 'supernaturalism' is no more forbidding, essentially, than that of any genuinely Christian writer. But I refer to those features of her thought and imagination which may well strike one as typically medieval and which, I think most readers would agree, are more conspicuous, because less relieved, in the *Dialogue* than in the Letters—her stress on the omnipresent activity of devils, her efforts to envisage the pains of hell in detail, her pre-occupation with sin and damnation. Such matters are prominent in the *Dialogue*; they contribute to its strongly medieval colouring. The eternal Father himself, who speaks throughout to Catherine, blends only too easily in imagination with a bearded medieval sovereign with crown and sceptre. Remembering all this, I was hardly surprised to hear a priest say recently that he found the *Dialogue* a depressing book and one which most people would be well advised to leave alone. Yet that judgment was certainly a misrepresentation.

Long ago Algar Thorold described the *Dialogue* as 'an almost unique specimen of what may be called theological spirituality; for . . . from first to last it is nothing more than a devotional exposition of the creeds taught to every child in the Catholic poor schools'. A possibly misleading description, for the *Dialogue* is certainly no article by article *resumé* of the Catholic creed, and also because, though St Catherine was certainly a teacher with sound theology behind her, to insist on the theological character of her spirituality could lead people to expect from her more than, or other than, what she actually provides. It is a mistake, for example, to suppose that her teaching is in any way specifically Thomist. This may seem surprising in view of the Dominican setting of Catherine's religious life; and I have myself spoken elsewhere of her Dominican training. I do not withdraw that phrase now; nor, certainly, can I go all the way with the Italian Dominican,

Fr Alvaro Grion who recently brought out a learned but not altogether convincing book designed to prove that far and away the chief source for St Catherine in the Letters and the *Dialogue* was the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae* of the Franciscan 'Spiritual' Ubertino da Casale (1259-c. 1240)—a work well-known to students of those movements of reform which stirred and disturbed the Church in Italy in the early fourteenth century, but not hitherto associated with St Catherine.<sup>2</sup> Fr Grion also maintains that her chief master in her own lifetime was no Dominican, not Tomaso della Fonte nor even Bd Raymund of Capua, but the Englishman William Flete who was an Augustinian. In my view Grion has not proved the positive parts of his thesis; but with its negations I largely agree. St Catherine's doctrine was not miraculous, in the sense of coming directly from God, and in so far as she depended on written sources, these were only incidentally Dominican or Thomist. She could, by the way, certainly read Italian and probably also some Latin. Apart, then, from the scriptures (which she frequently quotes in the vernacular) and waiving for the present Fr Grion's theory about Ubertino, it is safe to say that Catherine's chief certainly identifiable sources were St Augustine, Cassian, St Bernard and the Dominican Domenico Cavalca (1270-1342) who died a few years before Catherine was born. This Cavalca wrote popular devotional theology and translated selections from the Bible and the Fathers. His emergence as a main source for Catherine is due to E. Dupré Theseider, the editor of the, alas, still uncompleted critical edition of the Letters.<sup>3</sup> But the importance of a source is not to be reckoned merely by the frequency with which it is cited or echoed, and I cannot believe that Catherine's great and original mind learned much of importance from the rather pedestrian Cavalca. In any case, Cavalca was not particularly Thomist. As for St Thomas himself, we know that Catherine venerated him; he is one of the three Dominican saints (the others being St Dominic and St Peter Martyr) who are mentioned in her panegyric of the Order in the *Dialogue* c. 139. Theseider claims to have identified, in the Letters, twelve citations or echoes from St Thomas, as against fifty and forty from SS. Augustine and Bernard respectively. This is not enough to prove that Catherine was familiar with the *Summa*. To be sure, some of her expressions (*essere, potenza*, etc.) have a scholastic ring, but this was natural given her environment. It would be absurd to suppose that she

<sup>2</sup>Alvaro Grion, O.P., *Santa Caterina da Siena: Dottrina e Fonti*. Brescia, Morcelliana, 1953.

<sup>3</sup>Only vol. I, containing 88 letters, has so far appeared: Rome, 1940.

understood the philosophy of Aquinas philosophically. She had no time for philosophy as such; she had other and deeper illuminations.

She was, it will be agreed, a mystic and a Christian mystic; the adjective must be emphasized. A mystic is someone who experiences contact with God. A Christian mystic is someone who experiences this contact in Jesus Christ—or at the least, one who consciously relates his religious experience, his God-contact, to a faith in Christ as the indispensable mediator between himself and God. Here we have, I suggest, two extremes between which lies the field of Christian mysticism. At the one end a maximum of experimental God-contact in Christ; at the other end a minimum of it. It may be objected that the distinction is arbitrary and unreal. Doesn't every Christian mystic by definition have his experience of God in Christ? How could the God of revelation be experienced otherwise? How indeed? But I am not suggesting that man's experience of God can ever be objectively independent of Christ; nor that, in the Catholic mystic, the essential pre-condition of the God-experience is not his faith in Christ, faith working through love. But it is plain that the writings of Catholic mystics show many varieties of emphasis in the way they refer to the Incarnation. For some Catholic mystics God incarnate is the object of a more explicit and intense attention than for others. Compare the *Confessions* of St Augustine with the Canticle sermons of St Bernard. In the *Confessions* Christ is the condition of the Christian experience described, rather than its direct object. One may call it a relatively 'theocentric' work; whereas the Canticle sermons are relatively 'christocentric'. Or again, compare the *Cloud of Unknowing* with our St Catherine; for if the *Cloud* is near to one extreme, Catherine is certainly at the other. She is manifestly 'christocentric', in the sense that the incarnate God is right in the centre of her vision; in the sense that her reflections on the soul's way to God are very largely a minute and extraordinarily physical, incarnational, study of Christ himself, especially of Christ bleeding on the cross. This fact cannot be over-emphasized.

For at whatever point we enter the mind of Catherine we at once encounter Christ crucified. I say 'at whatever point' remembering that students of her spirituality have taken different *points de départ*, corresponding to what they have taken to be its characteristic root or basis. Some find this in her doctrine of the 'inner cell' of self-knowledge and God-knowledge; and certainly for Catherine this double knowledge is the starting point of salvation from the human side. And here a further

difference can appear. Considering this double knowledge, one may stress the implicitly metaphysical principle that underlies it and is expressed in the famous words our Lord is said to have addressed to Catherine: 'I am that which is; you are that which is not'. On the other hand one might, and indeed one should, lay even more stress on the undeniable fact that in her writings St Catherine never rests in a merely ontological affirmation of her own nothingness and God's being, but always turns it into a moral affirmation of the creature's nothingness as a state of sinfulness (sin, she reiterates, *è una nulla*)<sup>4</sup> and of God's being as a saving goodness, an active love. From another point of view Algar Thorold found the quick of Catherine's soul to be an intuition of 'the forms of Beauty and Love'; a rather platonic interpretation which smacks of its period. Others again have stressed her magnificent awareness—and it is here by the way that she most resembles Dante—of the native greatness of the human soul, especially its inborn freedom from every finite compulsion. I myself have ventured the statement that 'her starting point is God our lover', adding that 'God's love she sees always in two facts', in the creation of man and his redemption from sin, in 'God's pouring out of being and God's pouring out of blood'.<sup>5</sup> Thus we circle round this radiant Christian microcosm, Catherine's soul, pointing now to this aspect and now to that. And in a sense we are all right.

But one factor, and a dominant one, in Catherine's thought has not yet been mentioned, the Trinity; and it was only, I confess, through reading Fr Grion's book that I became sufficiently aware of the structural all-inclusive importance of this mystery for an understanding of Catherine's mind. Grion himself would probably not have brought this out so clearly had he not approached Catherine, in the first half of his book, as a theologian rather than a psychological biographer. And this approach I found annoying at first. Fr Grion begins by constructing a formidable synthesis, starting with the Trinity and proceeding through the Incarnation to the Church. It is all very *a priori*; and yet it is valuable, for it does bring out, as perhaps no other method could have done so well, the fact that an idea of the Trinity underpins everything that St Catherine says about the human soul and Christ. So I was forced to go back to my own essay and revise it: every time the word 'God' occurs, I said to myself, read the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; this should bring you closer to Catherine's meaning.

<sup>4</sup>A good example is in *Dialogo*, c. 136.

<sup>5</sup>See *Life of the Spirit*, April 1961, p. 439.

With this correction in mind, then let us turn back, with St Catherine, to the absolute beginning of things, to the pouring out of being from the Triune God. It will not be long, even so, before we encounter the incarnate God to whom her gaze is always returning.

Perhaps the best word with which to convey St Catherine's thought on the creation is 'ecstasy', in the literal sense of a going out of oneself, a being 'beside oneself'. 'God, gazing into himself, fell in love with the creature's beauty';<sup>6</sup> and the result was creation, God's going out from himself by the force of ecstatic love. Thus man, 'the creature that has reason', is the eternally beloved, the darling of the deity. And man's inward essence is stamped indelibly with that divine origin. As it was a desire in Infinity that caused him to be, so he in turn, in his deepest essential self, is moved by an infinite desire, that is, a desire of the infinite good. This is a key-idea in St Catherine. It underlies her definition of sin as self-love, it is the driving force in her tremendous assaults on sensuality, on that *amore sensitivo* by which man imprisons himself within the finite, and so acts out a lie against both himself and his maker. The same idea commands, as readers of Book I of the *Dialogue* will remember, Catherine's practical teaching on the order of means and ends in the spiritual life. To impose this order is the function of *discrezione*, discernment; the soul, illuminated by the blood of Christ, that is by the expression of God's infinite love for her, sees in her turn that what God requires in the last resort is not good works or penances (which are but means to the end) but infinite desire. Thus God will explain to Catherine the value of suffering, of tears: 'I do not say that in this life your tears can be infinite, but I have called them infinite because of the infinite desire . . . whence they proceed . . . And inasmuch as desire is endless, it is never satisfied in this life, but the more the soul loves, the less she seems to herself to love . . . and with this desire the eyes weep . . . Thus is your desire infinite, and otherwise it would be worthless, nor would any of your virtues be alive at all if you served me with anything finite. For I, the infinite God, wish to be served with an infinite service, and the only infinite thing you possess is . . . the desire in your souls'.<sup>7</sup>

We shall meet this theme again, on the cross, where it is precisely the God-desire in Christ's soul that effectively redeems us. But first let us turn back to the other mark of God in the human essence, the image of the three divine Persons; after which, by way of Catherine's teaching

<sup>6</sup>*Orazioni*, v, ed. Gigli, IV, p. 343.

<sup>7</sup>*Dialogo*, c. 92.

on the Fall, we can proceed to consider her dominant image and theme of Christ crucified.

St Catherine's treatment of the image of the Trinity in the soul is a variation on the Augustinian tradition, and historically a very interesting one. Its intrinsic importance is of course spiritual rather than strictly theological: it provided Catherine with a conceptual basis for developing her teaching on the soul's return to God through the incarnate Word; a basis she accepted and thoroughly mastered for her purpose, but never attempted to explore by analysis and argument. A text from the *Dialogue* (c. 13) will illustrate her use of it. She is commenting *Genesis* 1. 26. 'Let us make man in our own image and likeness. And this you did, O high eternal Trinity, so that man might participate in the whole of you (*participasse tutto te*). So you gave him memory to remember your benefits; and by this he participates in your power, eternal Father: and you gave him understanding to know and see your goodness, and so to participate in the wisdom of the only-begotten Son: and you gave him will, so that he might love what his understanding saw and knew of your truth, and in this way participate in the clemency of the Holy Spirit'. Memory, understanding, will; corresponding to the creative godhead as participations of the Father (power), of the Son (wisdom), of the Spirit (clemency). This last term, *clementia*, is curious and raises historical questions which cannot be gone into here. *Clementia* in Thomist theology denotes a virtue in man rather than an attribute of God.<sup>8</sup> In St Catherine's writings it is generally used rather than the more usual 'love' for the divine attribute appropriated (as theologians would say)<sup>9</sup> to the Holy Spirit; as 'power' is the term she appropriates to the Father and 'wisdom' to the Son. And their respective reflections in the soul are the Augustinian triad of memory, understanding and will, united as a single image of the creator.

The fall of Adam broke this image in each of the three faculties: man now forgot his creator; no longer discerned the divine goodness; no longer returned love for God's love. Ideally, human life should chime in unison with the 'processions' in the Trinity—proceed, that is, from being or power into intelligence and love, both these acts bearing upon God. Now the harmony was broken. But the decisive act in the sin had been the will's free choice of the finite self instead of the self's infinite Origin. This choice, the original, prototypal sin, broke man off from God. And because that sin was consummated in the will, the

<sup>8</sup>*Summa theol.* 2a 2ae. 157.

<sup>9</sup>1a. 39. 7-8.

faculty of love, it disrupted in a special way man's relation to God the Holy Spirit; he fell into a state of war against the Trinity, and in particular against the Third Person. At bottom, it seems, for Catherine all sin is sin against the Spirit; it is finite love going against, instead of with, the infinite love. That is why the supreme virtue, sin's clean contrary, must be charity, a renewed love of the infinite good—or, better, of the infinite love. For, to speak in Catherinian terms, it is not enough to call charity even a love of the divine good; one must call it a love of love, a love in return for love. In her vision everything presupposes God's creative or recreative love; to which the Christian religion is simply the due response. And this, incidentally, is the root of her highly personal stress on the virtue of gratitude.

From this view of sin she seems to have drawn one consequence which may appear strange, when she touches the question why it was the Son, not the Father or the Spirit, who became man.<sup>10</sup> She saw a special inappropriateness in the notion of an incarnation of the Third Person, precisely because fallen man was in a state of particularly direct conflict with this Person. It is certainly hard to see how this consequence can be squared with what St Thomas says about the *convenientia* of the way the Incarnation really did occur (see the third reason in the *corpus* of the *Summa theol.* 3a. 3. 8). But the point is rather a fine one and not much to our purpose. It is more relevant to note Catherine's insistence that the incarnate Word united our nature with the whole deity: *tutta la deità ci fu*. 'Was it only your wisdom that came into the world?', she asks God. 'No, the wisdom was not without the power, nor the power without the clemency . . . the whole deity was there'.<sup>11</sup>

Another passage, a highly characteristic one, will display her general approach to the Incarnation and its consequences. 'O high eternal Trinity . . . godhead and love in one, we are trees of death, you the tree of life. O godhead, what must it be to contemplate in your own light the tree of the creature in its purity, as you drew it out from yourself, O most pure, and formed it of the slime of the earth. Freedom you gave it, and the branches which are the powers of the soul: memory, understanding and will; and the fruits of these powers: remembering, discernment, love. So pure was this tree as planted in the beginning! But, separating itself from innocence, it fell through disobedience and from a living tree became dead, a bearer of dead fruit . . . And there-

<sup>10</sup>For this point I depend on Grion, *op. cit.* pp. 24, 25, 37, 44.

<sup>11</sup>*Oraz.* xvii, ed. Gigli. p. 359.

fore, eternal Trinity, seeing this tree produce nothing but dead fruit because divided from you who are life, you found it a remedy out of the same love which moved you to create it; you grafted your god-head onto humanity's dead tree. What drove you to this? Only love. And was your love satisfied by this union with your creature? No; and so, eternal Word, you watered our tree with your blood, and the heat of the blood makes it bud again, if only man in turn, with his free will, graft himself into you, joining and binding his heart and desires with yours and following the doctrine of the Word'. The next phrase is very characteristic. 'For it is not the Father whom we can or ought to follow, *for in the Father is no pain*; it is in you, the Word, that we must be grounded and grafted, following the way of pain, of the cross, of holy desire'.<sup>12</sup>

The Incarnation, then, is a deed of love. This we knew already: but the general theme becomes particular and personal in the stress on the creative and recreative Trinity, and again, more especially, in the stress on the blood of the Word incarnate. The way to St Catherine's particular message lies through her declarations about the blood.

But before coming to closer grips with this theme, it will be as well to state or restate her teaching on the motives of the Incarnation. These in the main are three. First, to make amends for sin. God's becoming man was a work of both mercy and justice. This point she likes to repeat, unconsciously echoing one of Dante's greatest theological passages (*Paradiso* VII, 85-120). Mercy led the way, but primarily with a view to justice, to rendering satisfaction, to a reversal of man's disobedience by an act of obedience which should have infinite moral value or 'merit' by the fact that he who now obeyed was God in human nature. Following St Paul and in line with St Thomas, Catherine has no doubt that the Passion was most strictly a satisfying of justice through obedience, the 'obedience of the Word', as she loves to say. It is not fashionable nowadays so to stress this aspect of the Redemption; but if we would understand St Catherine we must allow it all possible weight. Secondly, the Incarnation is the declaration and showing of divine love, especially in the bloodshedding on the cross. And as love, for her, is always *active*, the blood of Christ expresses and symbolizes a positive active force; and to enter the blood is to enter the field of this force and so, *ipso facto*, to begin to be purified from the self-love which is its direct contrary. The force of Christ, so to say, is a God-love aimed at conquering self-love; and as his blood marks the expanding frontiers

of God-love, so to enter it willingly is to renounce self-love. But the process calls, essentially, for understanding on our part, for the blood is a *sign*, better it is *the sign*, of the way we may return to that condition of being a God-loving image of the Trinity which belonged to the 'pure tree' of humanity in the beginning. So she continually calls on us to 'lift the eye of the intellect' up to the crucified. Finally, the Word became flesh in order to give man a share in the deity itself. And perhaps it is this idea above all that finds expression in the best-known of Catherine's symbols for Christ: the bridge between heaven and earth; an image which continually blends, as we shall see, with that of a three-stepped ladder.

The second and third of these motives—the showing of God's love and the deifying of man—correspond respectively to Christ's teaching (*dottrina*) and his footsteps (*vestigie*). From the cross, as from a master's chair, he teaches the human race, with his blood, the lessons of love and obedience. Again, the cross is the medium or road along which we are called to follow Christ and, following, be transformed into him. This transformation will be at once a certain sharing in the god-head of the incarnate Word and a renewal in us of the original prototypal image of the Trinity.

We are now nearing the heart of the matter; St Catherine's insight into what, in the last resort, union with Christ entails. Now all that she has to say on this central theme corruscates with imagery (which does not make her commentator's task any easier). Catherine was a natural poet; she habitually thought with an unusual abundance of images; and, being a medieval Christian, her imagery shows a strong tendency to turn into allegory. This does not so readily happen, it is true, with the all-pervading image of the blood; and this because the blood-shedding on the cross was already an historical fact before it became for Catherine the great image of God's love for sinful man. But the images that were images from the start, so to say, the metaphors attaching to Christ which Catherine drew from the common stock of Christian tradition—or even maybe invented for herself—these, of course, she was more free to handle as she pleased, to use inventively to illustrate doctrine, to deploy as allegories. Thus Christ is a tree of life, a fountain, a lion, a knight, an eagle, and of course a lamb. He is a book, a bridge and a bed. Doctrinally the most suggestive of these images is the bridge.

As we approach this central image it is worth while bearing in mind certain features or characteristic stresses in what might be called Catherine's Christ-awareness. One notes, for example, the way she

<sup>12</sup>Oraz. x, ed. Gigli, pp. 350-1; *Dialogo*, c. 53.

insists that Christ's love for mankind was not satisfied by his Passion.<sup>13</sup> This it could not be because, being a love of the God-man, it was infinite. And its infinity was precisely why it was redemptive—or rather, becomes effectively redemptive in so far as Christ's infinite desire awakens a correspondingly infinite desire in us. From this point of view the historical Passion is as it were put in its place, subordinated to an infinite reality as its effect and sign. On the other hand—and here is a second characteristic 'stress', though it is characteristic of Catherine's epoch rather than of her individually—the Passion so dominates Catherine's consciousness as to leave hardly any room for explicit thought about the Resurrection. Her references to the Resurrection are relatively very infrequent. She shows little interest in its special doctrinal significance. Finally, there is the point already referred to, that Catherine sees the Incarnation as God's way of restoring in man the image of the Trinity which sin had defaced.

Now it is in the way that Catherine develops her complex image of Christ as the bridge between heaven and earth that this last theme comes out most richly and clearly.<sup>14</sup> This image acted in fact as a sort of precipitant around which the various elements in her thought crystallized in a synthesis. Without attempting to form a detailed picture of this synthesis, let us try to seize its main outline.

We start, as usual, with the figure of the crucified God-Man, 'the lamb drained of his blood'; and our meditation, following St Catherine's, moves in patterns governed by the number three. Within a general movement four patterns of three, at least, are discernible. (a) A meditation on three parts of Christ's body: the feet, the wounded side, the mouth. (b) To the soul's attention to these three parts of Christ's body correspond three stages in her progress towards union with him: purification, illumination and union; corresponding in turn to the stages of being a servant, a friend, and a friend who is now also a child, a reborn son of God. Again (c) our three spiritual faculties, memory, understanding and will, have each its particular correspondence with one of the above stages: memory to the stage of purification, understanding to illumination, the will to union. Finally (d) the whole pattern reflects the three Persons of the Trinity, inasmuch as the soul's imaging of the Trinity is more and more perfectly restored as she enters into ever deeper union with the crucified God-Man. The Father's

<sup>13</sup>Epist. II, 16, ed. Misciatelli.

<sup>14</sup>Dialogo, cc. 21, 26, 54-64. See the valuable synthesis in Grion, op. cit., pp. 104-35.

image is restored in the memory through a purifying fear and self-knowledge, which of course involve concomitantly a working of the other two faculties, understanding and will. The Son's image is restored particularly in the understanding at the stage of illumination, presupposing again the other two faculties, memory and will. Lastly the image of the Spirit is restored in the will at the stage of union, presupposing again the activities of understanding and memory. Such is the general pattern; expressed in concrete terms as a climbing up the Christ-bridge as up a ladder with three steps; the feet, the side and the mouth.

The feet stand for purification. The soul's feet, St Catherine repeatedly says—using an image that goes back to St Augustine—are her 'affections'. These are purified by meditating on the wounded feet of Christ as directing or leading us along the way of the cross. And because this initial turning towards Christ, and following him to the cross, entails of necessity a strenuous exercise in self-knowledge, that is, an ever keener realisation of one's own sinfulness and nothingness in the light of God's goodness and being, here particularly is the sphere in which memory must be active: the soul remembers God and his creative love, and at the same time her own apartness from him in her finite prison of self-love. With this stage also we can relate the virtue of faith.

From the feet, in the measure that the soul begins to be free from self-love, she climbs up to Christ's open side. Here it is not so much herself that she knows (as on the first stage) as the God-man revealing himself, especially in his saving *recreative* love of her. So it is here especially that Catherine develops her great theme of the blood. It is here perhaps, in her meditations on the open side and the wounded heart of Christ, that she most magnificently and individually expresses herself. It is here that she seems most 'inspired'—as in that famous letter to Bd Raymund concerning the execution of Nicolò di Toldo, which all readers of the Letters remember if they remember nothing else.<sup>15</sup> This is the special stage of illumination; which, as Catherine represents it, is above all an increasing consciousness of one's *being loved*; being raised to the status of a friend of God incarnate. Friendship means charity; yet, rather unexpectedly, St Catherine relates this stage of illumination particularly to hope. The explanation, I think, is to be sought in her own experience. To the preliminary stage of purification corresponded, in her mind, those early years she spent as a recluse in her

<sup>15</sup>Epist. IV, 273, ed. Misciatelli; I, 31, ed. Dupré Theseider.

father's house, self-enclosed from the world. Then she received her mission to go out into the world and declare the love of Christ, to declare, that is, her enlightenment by the blood. And for this new phase of apostolic activity the virtue of hope, with its concomitants of courage and endurance, was particularly appropriate and necessary.

Finally, the climb goes up to the mouth of Christ, and here Catherine leaves much to be understood; here her teaching is much less detailed and explicit than it had been with regard to the earlier stages of purification and illumination. In the explicit teaching of Catherine the themes most amply developed have to do with these two prior stages: the need for exercise in self-knowledge, the enlightenment that comes from the blood. As a teacher she is concerned more with the way than the end. As she approaches the end her eloquence falters, becomes less copious and more confused. But one word expressing this final stage should be noted: *pace*, peace. The kiss of Christ's mouth is a kiss of peace, expressing the fulness of charity. Associated with this stage, too, is the bold and striking, but somewhat confused, use St Catherine makes of the images of the bed and table and food. The godhead is the bed—coloured blood-red in some passages—on which finally we lie down and find repose. Again she will speak of the godhead as a table (the Father) at which we are to be served with divine food (the Son) by the Holy Spirit. She likes to speak of God as our servant, especially God the Holy Spirit. A long study might be made of her very individual use of such imagery; but I have not time for that now. Nor for another interesting topic emerging at the second stage of illumination; I mean Catherine's teaching on the three baptisms:<sup>16</sup> by water, by fire and by blood. 'Baptism by blood' she takes not only in the traditional sense of martyrdom, but also in two senses which, if not peculiar to her, are certainly characteristic: (a) in a general sense of our saving union with Christ as a consequence of his love for us (symbolized in the blood)—and this whether sacramentally through water or through desire of the sacrament (symbolized by fire); and (b) in a special sense inasmuch as she will call the sacrament of confession a 'baptism in the blood'. She loves to speak of the Church as 'holding the keys of the blood'.

I will conclude with a passage from the very end of the *Dialogue* (c. 167), because it expresses as well as any other what she found at the end of the way or the bridge which is Christ. She is addressing the Trinity. 'And now I have tasted and seen with the light of the understanding, and in your light, O eternal Trinity, I have . . . seen your

abyss, and therein I have seen the beauty of your creature. For, seeing myself in you, I saw that I am your image; my life coming out from your power and your wisdom shining in my understanding and my will—my will being one, now, with the Holy Spirit that proceeds from you and your Son, by whom I am able to love you. You . . . are my creator, I the work of your hands, and through the new creation you have given me in the blood of your Son, I know that you are in love with the beauty of the work of your hands, O abyss, O eternal godhead, O deep sea . . . (For) the waters of this sea are a mirror into which you bid me gaze, holding it with the hand of love that I may see myself therein . . . I in you and you in me, through the union which you made of your godhead with our humanity. For I know that this light represents myself in you, the supreme and infinite good. Beauty beyond all beauty, wisdom beyond all wisdom, wisdom itself. You, the food of angels, have given yourself to men in a fire of love'.

<sup>16</sup>*Dialogo*, c. 75.