



The Saint of Pure Love:
Examining Catherine of Genoa's Mystical Doctrine of Purgatory

by
© Michael Barrow

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ABSTRACT

Saint Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) was a lay woman who underwent a mystical conversion at about the age of twenty-six. In this divine and transcendental moment, Catherine would come to understand God and the operation of God in her life as Pure Love. She continued to live in this divine condition throughout the rest of her life and, would eventually understand - through further divine infusion - that her mystical life was, in fact, a progression through purgatory that would lead her to the restoration of her true self in and as Pure Love. It is the objective of this study, therefore, to examine her doctrine of purgatory in its historical context, and theologically, through the religious element of "mysticism" in an effort to understand how the doctrine manifested itself in her life.

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INTRODUCTION

My examination of Saint Catherine of Genoa's (1447-1510) doctrine of purgatory deals with three acknowledged and predominant points:¹ first, that the doctrine is based a notion of pure love; second, that it has been recorded as a divinely infused revelation and, therefore, understood in terms of a "mystical theology"; third, that this doctrine manifested itself in the historical life of the saint, which has led scholars to conclude that the doctrine of purgatory is also the doctrine of her life.² As we shall see, these three points are interconnected; however, it is the objective of this study to stress the importance of understanding her theological teachings on purgatory through the religious element of "mysticism" and understanding *how* these purgatorial teachings on pure love manifested themselves in her life.

But what do we mean by "mysticism"? Questioning the meaning of "mysticism" has been a traditional exercise in numerous academic works because of the inherent mysteriousness and *natural* ambiguity of the word. As Bernard McGinn has said, "the word 'mysticism,' like 'time,' is both commonly used and resistant of easy description and definition."³ Michel de Certeau has pointed out that the word "mysticism" being used as

¹ In 1737, Saint Catherine of Genoa was beatified and then, just a few years later, canonized by Pope Benedict XIV. Her feast day is September 15th and she is patron of Italian hospitals and of her city of birth, Genoa ("Catherine of Genoa", *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, David Hugh Farmer. Oxford University Press, 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t100.e298>>).

² For examples see, Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion: As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2 vols. (London: James Clarke and Company Limited, 1961), vol. 1, 246-250; Donald Christopher Nugent "Saint Catherine of Genoa: Mystic of Pure Love" in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (London: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 70; R. H. J. Stewart, *Diversity in Holiness*, 2nd ed (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press Incorporated, 1967), 113.

³ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western*

a noun started only at the beginning of the seventeenth-century in France,⁴ while in the English-speaking world, the term "mysticism" only began to be used frequently near the end of the nineteenth century when the term entered modern academic discussion.⁵ It has been acknowledged that some aspects of the term have been linked with the Greek adjective *mystikos*,⁶ but that "no definition could be both meaningful and sufficiently comprehensive to include all experiences that, at some point or other, have been described as 'mystical'."⁷ Nonetheless, some general conclusions may be made when speaking of the "mysticism" in the purgatorial life and teachings of Catherine of Genoa.

In his *Christian Mysticism*, William Ralph Inge (1860-1954) defines "mysticism" as "the attempt to realise, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal."⁸ Moreover, he believed that "mysticism", as a form of religion, was based on the assumption that the soul, purified through the divine, can somehow partake of the divine who is understood as love.⁹

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) understood "mysticism" as "the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with transcendental order,

Christian Mysticism (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 266.

⁴ Michel de Certeau, "Mystique" au XVIIe: Le problème du langage 'mystique,' in *L'Homme devant Dieu: Mélanges offerts au Père Henri de Lubac*, 3 vols. (Paris, Aubier, 1964), vol. 2, 267-291; *ibid.*

⁵ As taken from McGinn, "in the Germanic world, serious modern treatment of mysticism began with Catholic Romantics such as Johann Joseph von Görres, whose four-volume *Christliche Mystik* appeared between 1836 and 1842, and theologians like Johann Sebastian Drey, whose article 'Über das Verhältnis des Mysticismus zum Katholicismus' was published in the *Teologisches Quartalschrift* in 1831" (*ibid.*, 421).

⁶ For additional information concerning the development or evolution of the term "mysticism", see especially, Louis Bouyer, "Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word," in *Understanding Mysticism*, edited by Richard Woods, O. P. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1980), 42-55; *ibid.*, 420-421.

⁷ Louis Dupré, "Mysticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 10, 245.

⁸ William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London: Methuen, 1899), 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-8.

whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood"¹⁰, or simply as "the life that aims at union with God."¹¹ Underhill understood that a Christian mystic was a person who had – in some degree – a direct experience with the divine and "realized God as an abiding Fact, a living Presence and Love; and by this their whole existence was transformed."¹²

In these terms, Catherine's life undoubtedly contains numerous examples and elements of mystical experiences and subsequent events in the saint's life are a form of "mysticism." Furthermore, Catherine's "mysticism" is centred upon the notion and presence of pure love, which is a conclusion shared by Pierre Debongnie, who heralded Catherine as "the doctor of pure love,"¹³ and Christopher Nugent, who entitled an article "Mystic of Pure Love: Saint Catherine of Genoa" in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*.¹⁴

It was in one such moment of "mysticism" – and we cannot stress enough that it was centred upon the notion and presence of pure love – that Catherine received her revelation on purgatory:

While still in the flesh this blessed soul [Catherine] experienced the fiery love of God, a love that consumed her, cleansing and purifying all, so that once quitted this life she could appear forthwith in God's presence. As she dwelt on this love, the condition of the souls of the faithful in purgatory, where they are cleansed of the remaining rust and stain of sin, became clear to her. She rejoiced in her union

¹⁰ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), xiv.

¹¹ Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³ Pierre Debongnie, *La Grand Dame de Pur Amour: Sainte Catherine de Gênes* (Paris: Desclee De Brouwer, 1960), xix.

¹⁴ Donald Christopher Nugent, "Mystic of Pure Love: Saint Catherine of Genoa" in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, edited by Katharina M. Wilson (London: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 67-80.

with God in this loving purgatory, and so did the souls in purgatory, she realized, who have no choice but to be there, and this because of God's just decree.¹⁵

The above scene describes a mystical experience of both divine union and divine inspiration through ecstatic, transcendental, and infused knowledge; that is, the saint's "mysticism" expresses itself in the form of "mystical theology," which, according to Dom David Knowles standard Christian neo-scholastic interpretation of the expression, is "an incommunicable and inexpressible knowledge and love of God or of religious truth received in the spirit without precedent effort or reasoning."¹⁶ Yet, as Denys Turner has shown, this incommunicable and inexpressible knowledge is just one aspect of a theological expression that still affirms something about the divine, which at every moment is both beyond words and explained by words.¹⁷ Accordingly, he says, "if these things are so, then theology [a discourse about the divine] in so far as it is theology is 'mystical' and in so far as it is 'mystical' it is theology."¹⁸

If we accept these conclusions, we can appreciate how Catherine was able to provide her own unique viewpoint and description of transcendent ideas and experiences of the divine and purgatory, even though she often admitted that what she was discussing was beyond her understanding and words. Moreover, since "mysticism" is often unexplainable, it makes sense that Catherine would attempt to comprehend, communicate, and demonstrate her divine knowledge and experience with a more practical approach through her own material life in bodily experience and action. In

¹⁵ Catherine of Genoa, *Purgation and Purgatory*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 71.

¹⁶ David Knowles, *The Nature of Mysticism* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1966), 13.

¹⁷ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 265.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

other words, as Bernard McGinn has said in his discussion of the mystical element in Christianity, we should understand Catherine's "mysticism" and "mystical theology" as "that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God."¹⁹ Here in this definition we have the basis to conclude and support the thought that Catherine's "mysticism" was not just in her theological words and teachings, but also in the way in which she lived her life; that is, her "mystical theology" resulted in a "theological life", and, therefore, we must examine the manifestation of the doctrine in her life to have a more holistic and improved understanding of her mystical doctrine of purgatory.

In order to examine both Catherine's life and teachings, then, we will take a theological and historical approach and make reference to each work in the *Vita e Opere di S. Caterina da Genova*, which includes her biographical account in the *Life*,²⁰ her internal biographical commentary and spiritual teachings in *The Spiritual Dialogue*,²¹ and her theological doctrine – which is better understood as her mystical teachings – concerning the souls in purgatory in the *Treatise on Purgatory*, that Serge Hughes aptly renamed *Purgation and Purgatory*.²²

In the first chapter, the discussion involves the historical and theological foundations of Catherine's life and teachings. First, we will take into account the

¹⁹ McGinn, xvii.

²⁰ The English translation that will be used is Mrs. G. Ripley's, *Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*, preface by Isaac Hecker (New York: Christian Press Association Publishing Company, 1907). However, some quotes from the *Life* will be taken from *The Mystical Element of Religion*, when the quote is related to a point or argument made by von Hügel.

²¹ Catherine of Genoa, *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory and The Spiritual Dialogue*, translated by Serge Hughes, (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 91-150.

²² Serge Hughes explains his reason for renaming Catherine's theological doctrine in "Notes on the Translation," in *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, 47-67; *Purgation and Purgatory*, 71-87.

historical context and external historical factors that influenced and contributed to the development of her mystical and purgatorial life and teachings. Second, the discussion will focus on the collective consciousness and emotion of the period, which likewise greatly influenced and contributed to the development of the doctrine. And, third, we will give a general overview of the theological development of purgatory and the religious, philosophical, and spiritual teachings associated with it, which undoubtedly had a profound effect upon the life and teachings of Catherine of Genoa.

The second chapter will begin with a discussion of Catherine's early life; that is, we will examine her historical background and events in her childhood that led to her "second conversion," which, we will learn, may be called the beginnings of her "mystical purgatory." Accordingly, we will describe specific events and circumstances in her life that contributed to her mystical and socio-religious purgatorial life and doctrine. And, because we are dependent upon Catherine's biographers for this historical information, hagiographic concerns and tendencies will be noted. Nonetheless, the focus will remain on Catherine's mystical and purgatorial life and teachings, as presented in the *Life*.²³

In the third chapter, we will discuss Catherine's conversion experience and her subsequent revelatory understanding of the divine and pure love. In this discussion, parallels will be drawn between Catherine's conversion experience and understanding of

²³ Unfortunately, it is out of the scope of this examination to explain or comment on the numerous arguments concerning the redaction of Catherine's life and teachings. Those intricate and insightful arguments have already been undertaken by Friedrich von Hügel in *The Mystical Element of Religion* and Padre Umile Bonzi da Genova in *S. Caterina Fieschi Adorno*, 2 vols. (Genova: Marietti, 1960-1962). It is the supposition of this examination that although there have been observed theological variations, additions, and refinements in the manuscripts, the differences are not disconcerting because they are only superficial changes that do not change the central teaching and purpose of her work. Moreover, these changes have been made by her followers who were responsible for the development of her life and teachings in the first place and only enlighten us more about her mystical and purgatorial life and teachings. Therefore, we will examine the entire corpus of work as presented and traditionally accepted today from the best English sources available as the study has been undertaken in English.

the divine with Augustine's, for there are significant similarities here and these similarities have been often overlooked. Accordingly, we will learn that she understood purgatory as pure love and arrived at this divine image and understanding at her "second conversion".

We will further explain, in the fourth chapter, that Catherine, following what she understood as the divine ordinance, entered into her purgatorial journey from the moment of this mystical conversion. Such a notion deviates from the commonly accepted idea that her purgatorial life on earth began in her later years with her physical infirmities in that period and experience classified as her bodily purgatory. Consequently, additional comparison will be made to Augustine's teachings when we describe her subsequent mystical ascent in pure love, through a purgatory that began in this moment of divinely infused conversion. Moreover, we will attempt some clarification about her conversion experience being "sudden," "perfect," and a moment of "death" in order to better understand how the beginning of her "mystical purgatory" on earth commenced at the moment of her "second conversion."

In the final chapter, we will discuss the manifestation of the mystical doctrine of purgatory in Catherine's life and show how she wholly purified and restored her soul's divine image *and* likeness in pure love. Accordingly, we will learn about her additional spiritual teachings and realize that the three observable periods within her life, noted by Friedrich von Hügel, are actually parallel divisions that follow the traditional threefold mystical path of purgation, illumination, and union. Hence, we will discuss her seemingly penitential actions, which can be considered her exterior mortification or purgation. We will then go on to discuss her interior struggles, fasts, dependence on the

eucharistic meal, ecstatic experiences, and her Christ-like and charitable actions, which may be considered as her interior mortification, ascetic practices, or period of illumination. Finally, we will discuss the last years of her life, when she believed the residue of selfhood or sin of self was completely annihilated due to a deeper union with the divine. Interestingly, this divine union was what was understood to have contributed to her becoming ill and going through what was termed her bodily purgatory, which can be considered her transcendent and unitive mortification. After all, that mortification led to her death – her absolute union with God.

In summary, it is the objective of this study to examine how the purgatorial doctrine is a mystical teaching understood through the notion of pure love that manifested itself in her life. An examination of her mystical teaching on purgatory will reveal how it is different from other concepts of purgatory, how she understood purgatory in her own unique theological terms, and how she incorporated and demonstrated those teachings in concrete ways in her life. Hence, if we understand her teachings as a mystical doctrine, we will discover the true nature of her doctrine of purgatory and how she realized the true nature of the divine and her self; that is, when we understand the mystical teachings on purgatory, we will understand how a sainthood of pure love was actualized in the life of Catherine of Genoa.

CHAPTER ONE: PURGATORY'S FOUNDATIONS

As Donald Christopher Nugent concluded, "Catherine is first and foremost a mystical theologian"¹ because her theological teachings were "infused, rather than acquired or scholastic."² Nonetheless, mystical teachings cannot be disconnected from the individual mystic and, in turn, that mystic cannot be disconnected from their historical circumstances and environment. Mystical teachings find their form and expression in the historical setting and those teachings have a subsequent and resounding effect upon the individual and existent environment from which they developed. As Evelyn Underhill remarked,

In reading the mystics, then, we must be careful not to cut them out of their backgrounds and try to judge them by spiritual standards alone. They are human beings immersed in the stream of human history; children of their own time, their own Church, as well as children of Eternal Love. Like other human beings, that is to say, they have their social and their individual aspects; and we shall not obtain a true idea of them unless both be kept in mind.³

Catherine of Genoa's mystical purgatory, acting as both a theological discourse and theological life, makes these remarks even more poignant because her teachings and life are intrinsically linked together. Therefore, a general discussion of the historical environment and historical development of the theological doctrine of purgatory is essential to an understanding of Catherine's mystical purgatory. The method of this

¹ Donald Christopher Nugent "Saint Catherine of Genoa: Mystic of Pure Love" in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, edited by Katharina M. Wilson (London: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 69.

² *Ibid.*

³ Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 17.

discussion will take inspiration from the structure of the *Vita e Opere di S. Caterina da Genova*; like the *Life*, there will be a discussion of the “external history”; like *The Spiritual Dialogue*, there will a discussion of the “internal history”; and, finally, like *Purgation and Purgatory*, there will be a discussion of the purgatorial after-life with a historical overview of the formation and expression of purgatory from the third to the fifteenth century.

External History: An Intermediate Era

Known by historians as an intermediate period, Catherine of Genoa's era was not the Middle Ages, but not quite the Renaissance either. As the name suggests, it was a period of transition. It was that time in history when the medieval system was rapidly breaking apart and society “in its depths was already modern, but not yet broken up into seemingly final, institutionalized internecine antagonisms.”⁴

Catherine of Genoa's teachings demonstrate the influence of the societal change. While her spirituality would be founded upon the standard and well known theological concepts of her tradition, it would also be manifest through the most progressive spiritual ideals of a more modern age. Her spiritual expression came about during a period of enormous change and conflict within the church, which made possible for new forms of spirituality to express themselves.

Of all the institutions in the Middle Ages – state, commerce, arts, church – the most important was the church because the church held unquestionable authority and

⁴ Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion: As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2 vols., (London: James Clarke and Company Limited, 1961), vol. 1, 94-95.

principal leadership within medieval society. The church's main motivation was the propagation of religion, but "that religion entailed creation of a complex jurisdictional and administrative system, comprising a series of courts, a system of taxation (of various kinds, and at all levels of the church), and an extensive bureaucracy."⁵ With such great authority, the ecclesiastical order would reach ever further into the life of medieval society: church dogma incorporated pagan practices, folk beliefs, and other forms of popular religion. The "religious life" became *the* prominent position within society for those otherwise living a common life; the social order would be affected through the education of clergy and the constant merging of religious and governmental affairs, which would greatly affect ideals of duty, honour, and property; and, most importantly, the church would affect medieval society through the seven sacraments, which communicated spiritual gifts of divine grace into something more material and tangible.⁶ Having such a determinative influence over the Middle Ages, the church was not only a part of society, it actually *was* the society; the medieval system was that of the church, which wanted to have dominion over the earth and create "the Age of Faith."⁷

What the church ended up creating, however, was an age of unrest and decline. Not since the years 250 to 700 C.E. was there as much transition experienced by the church as during the years 1300-1500 C.E.⁸ The ideals that characterized medieval society were disappearing as the church was gripped with much change and conflict. Nowhere else was this more evident than in Italy, where the history of the church reflected the history of the papacy.⁹ During the two hundred year decline of the church

⁵ R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c. 1215-c. 1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6.

⁶ Craig D. Atwood, *Always Reforming: A History of Christianity Since 1300* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2001), 7-15.

⁷ For more information about the historiographical concerns about this phrase, consult John Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as a Historiographical Problem," *Speculum* 91 (1986) 519-552.

⁸ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Medieval Christianity Prophecy and Order* (New York: P. Lang, 2000), 181.

⁹ Denys Hay, *The Church in Italy in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

there were many internal and external controversies being fought by the papacy. First, Pope Boniface's Bull, *Unam Sanctam* (1300) stated:

That there is one holy, catholic, and apostolic church we are bound to believe and hold, our faith urging us, and this we do firmly believe and simply confess; and that outside this church there is no salvation or remission of sins.¹⁰

This document challenged numerous medieval conceptions and brought those conceptions to the breaking-point. Next, there was the stark confusion and bleak state of the papacy during the seventy years of the Avignon exile (1309-1377). Afterward, there would be continued distraction through the thirty years of the Papal Schism (1378-1409).¹¹ The Great Schism would bring about much change in the ecclesiastical order: kings were able to reintroduce secular politics back into the church; the papacy was no longer held in high esteem by society; and with the rise of conciliarism¹², a general council of bishops held supreme authority instead of the pope. Eventually, the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438) would help return some of the political power and moral leadership once wielded by the papacy, but never again would the church have complete control over secular society.¹³

Apart from political problems, the papacy would face just as many challenges from burgeoning intellectual and religious ideals. The papacy had once supported new ideas, organizations, and even expressions of spirituality during times of growth and

1977), viii.

¹⁰ B. Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050-1300* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: 1964), 188.

¹¹ Von Hügel, vol. I, 94.

¹² More information regarding conciliarism, decline of the medieval papacy, and later medieval history are found in the following sources: Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), Walter Ullmann, *The Origins of the Great Schism* (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1948), Guillaume Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon* (New York: Harper, 1965), and Denys Hay, *Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Holt, 1966).

¹³ Russell, 184-186.

prosperity within the church. Now, coinciding with the decline of the church, there was a retraction of papal protection and approval of such spiritual trailblazers. Intellectual innovators such as William of Ockham, Marsilius of Padua, and Meister Eckhart, were condemned along with spiritual teachings like the Spiritual Franciscan's doctrine of extreme poverty and even the doctrine of the Beatific Vision set forth by Pope John XXII. The papacy feared extremism, along with the assertiveness and dominance of secular rulers, and popular movements of the urban centres, which jeopardized the authority of established institutions. These condemnations, however, only demonstrated the remarkable instability of the papal office. With such an unstable environment, the ability to control or guide these new movements and ideas became impossible. Instead, the papacy could now only show opposition, which did nothing to halt the development of new ideals and spiritual expressions, particularly in the urban centres.¹⁴

With the growth in urban populations, there was an opportunity for people to come together and express new ideas without fear of reprimand; people would have an easier time finding supporters with common interest within a larger community and would gain security and power in numbers. As well, urban centres themselves would find security and power through growing economic stability and political independence. In such an environment, radical opinions could join with urban innovations bringing about revolutionary change. In such a climate, idealistic notions about unifying Christian society were quickly dissipating, while notions of nationalism gathered much support in

¹⁴ R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1970), 44-45.

the urban centres, particularly in northern Europe and Italy.¹⁵ These nationalistic notions challenged the relevance and validity of the church's elaborate theories of universal papal rule and supreme sacerdotal lordship. In a society governed without theoretical pretence, religion would shift its focus towards elements of the secular life, understanding the community as the source for political and spiritual authority and the individual experience.¹⁶

A new period of history termed the Renaissance would develop through these monumental changes in politics, religion, and individual expressions. The Renaissance represented an expansive period of human thought, achievement and prosperity that involved the revival of classical eloquence in art and education with a return to the ancient classics. Of all the movements during the Renaissance, humanism would have the most profound affect upon society and best define the overall expression of the period. The humanist movement was deeply religious and was concerned with the religious renewal and reform of society. Early humanists, such as Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), called for a return to virtue and eloquence as exemplified by the teachings of Augustine. David S. Peterson elaborates:

Within this practical concern to balance the inner approach to God with charitable social action, the humanist Francesco Petrarca (1304-74) established the relevance of the pagan classics to Christian moral life. Responding to scholastic philosophers who derided him as 'a good man without learning', he ridiculed the pretensions of theologians 'whose time is spent in learning to know God instead of loving Him'. Setting moral philosophy above speculative theology, and embracing Augustine's anthropology of the will over the scholastics' Aristotelian faith and reason, Petrarch insisted that 'it is better to will the good than to know the truth' ... The 'studies of humanity' (*studia humanitatis*) were a rejection not of

¹⁵ Russell, 181.

¹⁶ Southern, 48-49.

religion but of theological speculation in favour of faith-based Christian moral engagement to which the classics could make a hortatory contribution.¹⁷

However, during the decline of the church, humanists wanted to replace faith with reason and became the harbingers of secularism.¹⁸

In diametric opposition to the decline of the church was the new prophetic spirit emerging from both the clergy and the laity. The character of religious reform expressed in the prophetic spirit would contain elements from the new current of humanist thought in society, but the purpose of reform was the restoration of the church.¹⁹ The Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation, although different in origin, purpose, and basic character, represented an attempt to return to the splendour and purity of the archetypal church. In addition, correcting the faults that caused the deformation of the church was an attempt to move back to the essential mode of being, Christ himself.²⁰ As a result, numerous individuals, many of them saints, would continue to apply biblical teachings and principles in an effort to ameliorate the church, which is the representative of the mystical body of Christ.

The life and teachings of Catherine of Genoa were firmly rooted in such practices: "her role at the genesis of the Oratory of Divine Love is such that it has been advanced that she 'began the effective reform of the Catholic Church' on the eve of the

¹⁷ David S. Peterson, "Religion and the Church," in *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1300-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 68-69.

¹⁸ Atwood, 68-69.

¹⁹ Russell, 187.

²⁰ John C. Olin, *The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), xiii-xvi.

Reformation.²¹ At the same time, her spirituality exemplified the religious currents of the Renaissance and provided an excellent demonstration of Christian practice for people living in urbanized communities.²²

Catherine's spirituality is thus both representative and demonstrative of this transitional period. It is an interesting parallel that her doctrine about an intermediate state (purgatory) was developed during this so-called intermediate period. Just as purgatory is a transitional state that contains elements representing opposing realities (heaven and hell), her spirituality would contain elements from both the Middle Ages and Renaissance. It would be formed through the ideals derived in the progressive urban centres that laid the foundations for the Renaissance, but it also reflected the theological traditions of the medieval church. As a result, she would take mutually exclusive aspects of spirituality that appeared in conflict and reconcile them into a balanced religious expression. What Catherine of Genoa will show over-and-over is that she was not only a product of her environment, but a woman who could not be constrained to one world alone.

Internal History: Death and Desperation

While official documents on the history of the period between the Middle Ages and Renaissance provide significant details about conflict and change in medieval society, material reflecting the collective consciousness and vehement emotions of the period is

²¹ Nugent, 67.

²² For more information about Catherine of Genoa's Renaissance spirituality and influence upon the Counter-Reformation, refer to Richard E. Marchese's, *The Role of St. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) in the Reform of the Church* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987).

somewhat lacking; and though historical records provide the most reliable sources for understanding the external events of the period, one must also examine the internal sensibilities for a more complete understanding of medieval society and "the extreme excitability of the medieval soul."²³ Hence, when historical record and literature are examined, the intimate connection between the external and internal elements of society must be recognized, for the internal perceptions and general mood of the era were greatly affected by external events, and that, in turn, influenced its spirituality.

What does historiography traditionally tell us about the period of transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance? In any period going through monumental transition, emotions are contrasted and heightened. The general assessment of these emotions during the autumn of the Middle Ages are best described in the title of the classic (though flawed) study by Johann Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*.²⁴ Life during the later Middle Ages was filled with violence and suffering, creating a period of gloom, sombre melancholy, and stark contrasts in emotion:

All things presenting themselves to the mind in violent contrasts and impressive forms, lent a tone of excitement and of passion to everyday life and tended to produce that perpetual oscillation between despair and distracted joy, between cruelty and pious tenderness which characterize life in the Middle Ages.²⁵

²³ Johann Huizinga. *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: Edward Arnold and Company, 1924), 11.

²⁴ Johann Huizinga's Dutch text *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* was written in 1921 and then translated into English as *The Waning of the Middle Ages* in 1924. It was then retranslated as *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), which indicates that the original title, which portrayed the overall mood of the era as very negative, has experienced much criticism and not been completely upheld by recent scholars.

²⁵ Huizinga, 2.

Medieval society would have clear understanding of the dichotomy between elements like pain and happiness, adversity and fortune, and as repeatedly expressed in *Purgation and Purgatory*, suffering and joy.

An interesting side effect of understanding these contrasting emotions is the notion of eliminating the extreme contrasts by annihilating the contradictions, and, therefore, being able to find positive outcomes in negative experiences. Catherine of Genoa is a primary example of how these extreme emotions were experienced, understood, balanced, and overcome, and she demonstrated a considerable deviation from the prevailing negative attitudes of her era. Her spiritual life and teachings provide much discussion about contrasting emotions, such as suffering and joy, and offer fascinating insights into the clash between traditional ecclesiastical teachings and the progressive spirituality of the emerging age. As Steven Fanning has mentioned with reference to Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Genoa, "for two lay women of the later Middle Ages, whose orthodoxy has been unchallenged, to teach in different way the mitigation of the fear of eternal punishment for one's sins in an age emphasizing hell's horrors is worthy of emphasis and study."²⁶ As a result, when consulting the traditional historiography, we should beware of drawing lines of demarcation too sharply, and, in consequence, we must also take care not to paint too bleak a picture when portraying the end of the Middle Ages.

²⁶ Steven Fanning, "Mitigations of the Fear of Hell and Purgatory in the Later Middle Ages: Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Genoa," in *Fear and Its Representations in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, vol. 6 of *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages*, edited by Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso (Turnhout: Brepols; Cheltenham: European SchoolBooks, 2002), 297.

Although there are optimistic and positive responses during the later Middle Ages, these responses are still often linked with an apparent backlash to the prevailing negative condition of the era. As mentioned above, medieval society was going through a transition created, not least, by papal scandals - i.e. the Avignon Papacy and Great Schism. These scandals contributed significantly to the development of the very pessimistic lay spirituality of the era.²⁷ Accompanied with many other societal problems – overpopulation, economic depression, environmental changes, and disastrous wars (such as numerous feudal wars and especially wars on the national level like the Hundred Years' War) – medieval society was in a state of shock. The declining years of the Middle Ages would “hardly likely to stir passions of nostalgia for a lost golden age,”²⁸ as medieval society was full of catastrophe, which divided and impoverished nations and contributed to the general feelings of fear, anxiety, and pessimism.

Natural disasters would cause much suffering and torment, while helping reinforce the dominate mood of medieval society – “that of a neurotic and all-pervading gloom.”²⁹ Medieval people were afflicted with tragedies and indigence through the great famines and pestilence that riddled and destroyed huge portions of the population. As with the contrasting of emotions, there was a striking contrast between environmental and circumstantial problems like winter and summer, poverty and wealth, illness and health.³⁰ Yet an even more devastating and calamitous event would affect the burdened and

²⁷ Dom Jean Leclercq, Dom François Vandebroucke, and Louis Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2 of *A History of Christian Spirituality* (New York: Desclée Company Incorporated, 1968), 481.

²⁸ Fanning, 295.

²⁹ Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 274.

³⁰ Huizinga, 1.

bewildered consciousness of medieval society: the Black Death (1348-1349). During those years, there was human annihilation on a profound scale and horrific scope. The devastation caused by the environmental phenomena of famine and plague is difficult to quantify, and it is equally difficult to describe the emotional or physical impact of these tragic events. However, traditional scholarship estimates the death of thirty million to forty million human lives, which took away at least one-third of the total population. Indeed, the plague expedited numerous economic and social changes.³¹

F. Donald Logan has studied the environmental and sociological effects resulting from the great plague:

Although Europe has seen the loss of human life on large, tragic scales, neither before nor since the Black Death has it suffered such a catastrophic loss of human life from natural causes. One economic historian has said that Europe at the time had an excess population and that the plague had a 'purgative' effect, a proposition, it is safe to say, that would not find much favour with the tens of millions who perished. It has also been said that in addition to the loss of these lives the most significant historical aspect of the plague was a massive psychological reaction, bordering on societal hysteria and that this was compounded by the fear of the plague returning, as, indeed, it did. Contemporary analysis, at one level, traced the plague to the wrath of God.³²

Catherine of Genoa could easily relate the 'purgative' function, where positive outcomes are found in negative experiences, save that the wealth of her positive purgation is noticed in spiritual, rather than economic terms. She also knew the real and actual effects of the plague since she herself contracted it. Consequently, Catherine could easily understand the deep psychological effect of the plague on a personal and social level.

³¹ David Knowles and Dimitri Obolensky, *The Middle Ages* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), 413.

³² F. Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 283.

As we have said, medieval society was primarily a community of religious believers recognized and symbolized in the institution of the church. It follows, therefore, that direct societal effects were chiefly noticed in the form of religious enthusiasm or hysteria. Religious expression exhibited itself during the plague: first, a focus on severe penance in reaction to the supposed wrath of the divine; second, rising eschatological concerns because death was always an immediate reality.

Since the Black Death caused so much suffering and mortality, it is hardly surprising that medieval society searched for answers about the origins of such a terrible and tragic event. Answers were sought from astrologers who claimed the disaster was caused by the alignment of the heavenly bodies; others looked for scapegoats and believed that foreigners such as the Muslims, and especially the Jews, poisoned the water supplies in an attempt to destroy Christendom. But the most popular perception, which did not have to refute the previous suggestions, was that the plague was divine punishment because of the sinfulness of the world.³³ If medieval society was to survive the divine wrath of the plague, it needed to acknowledge its sinful nature and pay the divine debt through contrition and penance. The most dramatic demonstration of such popular piety was by people who practiced public penance by scourging their flesh until they bled in an effort to purge the sinful nature of the flesh and to atone for their sins. Although Clement VI formally proscribed the movement in 1349, flagellants were not viewed as scandalous in the Christ-centred society of the Middle Ages. In addition, flagellation was practised before the onset of the Black Death in monastic houses, and the

³³ John Shinnars (ed.), *Medieval Popular Religion, 1000-1500: A Reader* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1997), 76.

Franciscans considered flagellation as a kind of sacred exhibition, a gestural imitation of Christ. Consequently, penitential scourging and other forms of penance gained much momentum during the plague with those who could easily identify with the extreme suffering of God's Son. As well, the divine wrath of the plague reminded many about the imminent end of life, which caused further thoughts about moral actions and their consequences and, obviously, thoughts about what happened after death.³⁴

Growing religious hysteria about the end of human life and consequent eschatological concerns are common societal effects linked with epidemics such as that of famine and plague. As Huizinga has said, "no other epoch has laid so much stress as the expiring Middle Ages on the thought of death. An everlasting call of *memento mori* resounds through life."³⁵ Preoccupation with death was an obsessive practice and was visible through the numerous images that adorned medieval society. Examples include tombs that had grotesque effigies sculpted underneath the peaceful looking sculptures, and tombs decorated with gruesome depictions of worms and toads eating the dead. In addition, concepts of death would take on fantastic forms in art and literature with popular woodcuts, 'dances of death', *The Art of Dying*, and the *Four Last Things*.³⁶ At the same time, mendicant orders had been restored and revived popular preaching, which warned about death and eternal damnation. Such popular preaching among the laity "gave rise to those vehement outburst of fervour and penitence which stamped so

³⁴ Margaret Aston, *Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion 1350-1500* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), 15.

³⁵ Huizinga, 124.

³⁶ Russell, 188.

powerfully the religious life of the fifteenth century."³⁷ Although Catherine of Genoa did not join the traditional flagellant expression of such piety, she did join the pilgrimage of penance, felt the psychological effects of death, and pondered the end of life and the nature of the after-life.

Overall, throughout the later Middle Ages, the dominant mood was one of bleakness, leaving people with a morbid perception of life, which by its very nature opened the door to extreme emotional responses. With numerous disasters bringing death and desperation, medieval society was reminded that they were in a continual state of danger and on the verge of eternal damnation. With such fear, anxiety, and pessimism in society, responses and answers to the overriding negative condition would take on numerous forms. During the declining Middle Ages there would be stark contrast in these responses:

In distinct contrast to the earlier and later periods, however, in the Middle Ages we see a clear separation made between enabling (i.e., those that benefit one's search for salvation) and disabling fears (i.e., those that inhibit salvation). Moreover, it is the social and cultural systems and - it cannot be emphasized too strongly - the religious systems, that give to the Middle Ages and Renaissance a unique expression of universal fears. The people and nations of these medieval and Renaissance periods, therefore, given their religious, political, aesthetic, and ideological differences from us, seem to have feared very different things from us, categorically, quantitatively, and qualitatively speaking. First and foremost, they feared - and with great fervor - things that were made plausible and possible, as objects of fear, through dogma, tenets, and proponents of Christianity.³⁸

³⁷ Huizinga, 161.

³⁸ Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso, "Introduction," in *Fear and Its Representations in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, vol. 6 of *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages*, edited by Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso (Turnhout: Brepols; Cheltenham: European SchoolBooks, 2002), xix.

People in medieval society feared that they were removed from divine grace, which is why they required confession and penance; people feared the burning fires of eternal damnation, which is why they feared death; people feared the wrath of God, which is why they feared many other religious problems that were responsible for bringing much death and suffering. As a result, people would experience a normal 'fight or flight' response, which was accomplished in both positive and negative ways. One of those plausible and constructed religious conceptions that people flocked towards that brought fear of additional suffering, yet eliminated the ultimate condition of suffering at the same time, was purgatory.

After-Life History: Popular Purgatory

Purgatory is a difficult topic to discuss because of the ambivalence of its evolution and its convoluted nature, which are bound up in the historical development of Christian spirituality, the day-to-day religious practices of the Middle Ages, and in a variable mixture of theological conceptions.³⁹ This conclusion is supported by the examination of the historical, spiritual, and theological foundations of purgatory found in Jacques Le Goff's work, *The Birth of Purgatory*.⁴⁰ While an in-depth examination of the origin and growth of purgatory is not now our concern, a general discussion of the foundations of purgatory and various purgatorial expressions is necessary because of the inevitable impact these concepts ultimately have on life and teachings of Catherine of Genoa.

³⁹ David N. Bell, *Many Mansions: An Introduction to the Development and Diversity of Medieval Theology: West and East*, Cistercian Studies Series: Number One Hundred Forty-Six (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications Incorporated, 1996), 10.

⁴⁰ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Even though the concept of purgatory did not flourish until the flowering of medieval civilization, its history has been traced all the way back to the early Christian fathers of the third century. Discussion about the after-life had strong roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition,⁴¹ but the concrete foundation of purgatory began with the Christian Fathers of the Greek East, Clement of Alexandria (d. prior 215) and Origen (d. 253/54). Using a combination of sources – Greek (Plato, Plutarch, Orphics, and the Pythagoreans), Biblical, and Judeo-Christian eschatology – these eastern Fathers stressed the punitive function found in the after-life and used symbols like the refinery of gold in their descriptions about the process of purification.⁴² Origen, in particular, disturbed by the concept of an eternal hell, taught the concept of *apokatastasis* (gradual purification through penance; punishment that led to the restoration of the soul in the divine nature), which made hell a temporary dwelling and purgatorial in character. He believed that righteous souls gained immediate entrance into heaven and just passed through the fires of judgment that burned in hell, while all other souls' sojourn in hell lasted because of

⁴¹ Judeo-Christian concepts about the after-life are found in Judaic eschatology (Sheol, Gehenna) and Roman eschatology (Hades, Tartaros, and Elysian Fields), which were then incorporated into Christian eschatology (heaven, hell, and, eventually, purgatory). New Testament references are found about the after-life, but often they are quite vague because the literature concentrates upon the Resurrection and the Last Judgment: Paul suggests in Philippians (1.22-23) and 2 Corinthians (5.1-10), that the dead will be immediately with Christ after death; the Gospel of Luke tells of the story of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom (16.19-31) and Jesus' words about heaven to the robber on the cross; 1 Peter (3.19) talks about Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison, which was probably derived from concern about those who died before the redemptive life of Christ alluded to in 1 Enoch (10.11-15); while Revelation provides the greatest and most detailed description of after-life in the New Testament. With regard to the question as to whether purgatory is prefigured in the Bible, the three most common references include 2 Maccabees (12.41-46), Gospel of Matthew (12.31-32), and the story of Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke (16.19-31). Jan N. Bremmer also points out that Le Goff mentions *The Apocalypse of Paul*, along with Tertullian and the *Passion of Perpetua* in his pre-history discussion about the birth of purgatory, but does not include the influence of Gnosticism on the Christian tradition with the *Apocryphon of John* (27.4-11) or the *Pistis Sophia* (144-147), for example (Bremmer, Jan N. *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Rad-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol*. London; New York: Routledge, 2002, 56-65). Hence, the Judeo-Christian origin and conceptual developments of the after-life is a complex matter that contains a significant amount of varied material.

⁴² Le Goff, 51-61.

their sinful nature. However, even sinful souls found entrance into heaven after going through their prescribed penitential purification because he understood that the existence of hell was only eternal in a temporal sense. Origen believed that there was a time outside of time and the eternal nature of hell is mentioned in temporal terms, and, therefore, is a temporal abode. It was a view that would be eventually condemned as heretical, but these eschatological contemplations that focused upon the nature of death, the different categories of souls and punishments, and purification through penance allowed for the logical invention of purgatory.⁴³

However, Augustine (354-430), the most authoritative voice in the western Christian tradition, should be considered the true father of purgatory. Although he fought against the idea that hell was a temporal place of restoration and stressed its eternal nature,⁴⁴ he did not deny an intermediate place or purgatorial condition after death. He believed that damned souls upon death would enter hell immediately, but that saved souls had to wait until they were reunited with their bodies during the general resurrection before the beatific vision of the divine could be fully experienced. Based upon the reading of Luke 16.23, Augustine believed that the righteous dead first went to a temporal place of happiness called *the bosom of Abraham*. Further evidence concerning his idea about an intermediary place for the righteous dead is shown through the prayers he made for his dead mother, Monica. Following Matthew 12.31-32, Augustine acknowledged

⁴³ Lauran Paine. *The Hierarchy of Hell* (London: Robert Hall and Company, 1972), 14-15.

⁴⁴ Augustine's views about what happens to the soul after death and the possibility of its restoration or redemption started to narrow in the year 413. Le Goff traces this stricter view of the saint as a reaction against the *misericordias* (followers of the Origen tradition, believed that all sinners would eventually be saved), growing millenarian ideas, and sack of Rome by the Alaric and the Ostrogoths in 410 (Le Goff, 68).

that the efficacy of prayer for the dead was only worthwhile for the virtuous and pious souls waiting in the *other world*.⁴⁵

The geographical and physical nature of the intermediate *other world* would also come from the creative mind of Augustine. In *The City of God*, Augustine discussed and classified ideas about the remission of sin that some souls could obtain in the after-life. He affirmed that there was a *real* purgatorial fire, which brought unspeakable punishment and pain for a small number of saved sinners between death and the Last Judgment, and found scriptural reference for his notion of purgatorial fire in 1 Corinthians 3.11-15.⁴⁶ Augustine then further applied the principle to the dead when he pronounced the punishment of fire in the *afterworld* in *The City of God* (21.13). According to Alan E. Bernstein:

In Enchiridion 69, Augustine extends the testing fire of 1 Corinthians 3.13 into the next world. If that purgatorial fire exists in the next world, 'in proportion as they have loved with more or less devotion of goods that perish, [the faithful will] be more or less quickly deliver from it' (18.69.76-78). Thus this purgatorial fire might exist after death to burn away any remaining loyalty to human works which once distracted one from the foundation of Christ. Here is a fire in the after life which is at once punitive and purifying, enduring only to the extent that the individual's misplaced loyalty kindles it. It would seem that this fire might be the punishment described in Enchiridion 110 through which the not very bad can be aided by the prayers and almsgiving of the living. If so, this purification, which punishes in proportion to the degree of wavering but fundamentally rooted loyalty, would parallel the punishment in hell, which punishes (as clear in Augustine Epistola 102) in proportion to the degree of deviation from the divine will.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Le Goff, 62-84.

⁴⁶ Augustine's interpretation on 1 Corinthians 3.11-15 is found in chapter 68 of the *Enchiridion*: Christ should be accepted with faith as one's foundation; individual works are likened to various materials like gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw; and only those who do not focus on their works and keep their focus on the divine Christ will be tried and saved, but not suffer through the fire. (Alan E. Bernstein. *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, 325-326).

⁴⁷ Bernstein, 326-327.

Hence, the infernal elements of penance and purification found in purgatory, which are distinct features in the geography of the after-life, are found in the teachings of Augustine.

Having firm foundations in the philosophical teachings of the early church Fathers, logical ideas about purgatory made their way into the Middle Ages and gained momentum with additional extrapolations by theologians, spiritual passions expressed by the general public, and dogmatic proclamations made by the medieval Church. Gregory the Great (r. 590-604), often labelled the founder of the medieval papacy and the chief communicator of Augustinian thought into the Middle Ages, propagated and further developed theological ideas about the purgatorial after-life: he provided extra geographical references with the development of lower-hell (an eternal place for condemned souls) and upper-hell (a temporary place for souls awaiting entrance into heaven); gave credence to the idea that purgatory could take place in the material world; and provided important testimonial stories that eventually helped the church popularize the doctrine of purgatory in the early Middle Ages.⁴⁸

Along with the popular notions of an individual's salvation and the pious practice concerning the treatment of the dead, interest in the idea of purgatory grew rapidly among the masses in medieval society. Death was an enormous problem for the people who lived in a society that was focused on obtaining eternal security for the soul. People had deep anxieties about the process of salvation, which included fears about being absolved from the most minuscule sins before the moment of death. Attempting to alleviate those

⁴⁸ Le Goff, 88-94.

fears and save departed souls, the laity focused upon accepted eschatological teachings and religious practices from the church Fathers, making popular the pious use of the Eucharist, masses, prayers, and alms-givings for the dead.⁴⁹

These commemorative practices and purgatorial considerations are exemplified in a popular piece of literature from the late twelfth century, *St. Patrick's Purgatory* (1184).⁵⁰ Written presumably by the English Cistercian, H of Saltrey, innumerable manuscripts circulated about the tale of the knight Owein's journey through the *other world*. What is interesting is that the journey into the *other world* is both real and visionary in nature. The *other world's* entrance is on earth, located on the Station Island in Lough Derg in Donegal, where legend tells of a forsaken place (some sort of round dark hole or cave) shown to St. Patrick by Jesus that would show the delights of heaven and the horrors of hell, while purging the penitent pilgrim. A person begins the journey through gaining permission from the bishop of the diocese. Then, much prayer is used in preparation and the contrite person must overcome all dissuasion before entering the *other world*. Only through faith and grace may the penitent behold and survive the visionary and purgatorial experience, which lasts for a twenty-four hour period. The Knight Owein took such a purgatorial journey where the boundaries between this world and the *other world* became blurred, making his purgatorial tale a tangible reality through a dual geography that no longer considered each plane of existence a completely separate reality. The *realness* of purgatory coupled with a new form of narration that told of the

⁴⁹ Logan, 294-295.

⁵⁰ The classic account of St. Patrick's Purgatory can be found in Daniel O' Connor's *St. Patrick's Purgatory: Lough Derg: its history, traditions, legends, antiquities, topography and scenic surroundings; with some account of its more notable pilgrims, and a detailed description of the authorised devotions performed at its venerable shrine; also an appendix* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1903).

dead asking for help from the living through suffrages are popular features that made the knight's purgatorial tale famous.⁵¹

With mounting pressure from the people, the church's acceptance of those popular practices concerning the dead became inevitable. The success of suffrages for the dead is "perhaps tied to the notion that the dead existed only through and for the living (for the living will join them in the future) and the future in society was ... not only chronological, but eschatological,"⁵² a doctrine that was proclaimed by Innocent III (1198-1216). Moreover, Innocent III provided credence to the new eschatological scheme with his quick response to the concerns of the laity: in a letter to the archbishop of Lyons (1202) and a sermon on All Saint's Day (1202) that included discussion about the two seraphim (symbolizing the Old Testament and New Testament), the three armies (the Church triumphant in heaven [praise], the Church militant on earth [combat], and the Church abiding in purgatory [through fire]), and the five places the individual spirit can occupy.⁵³ Additional pressure from the masses that had an eventual effect upon realizing an official theological doctrine of purgatory was the ever-beckoning call for renewal within the medieval system. The dissatisfaction expressed had nothing to do with ecclesiastical dogma, but with the worldliness and corruption found within the church. Innocent III would again listen to the voice of the people, and gather several hundred clerical leaders from across Europe to Rome. In a theme that would be played out time-and-time again in the Middle Ages - that of decline and renewal - the church searched for

⁵¹ Le Goff, 177-201.

⁵² Terje Oestigaard, *An Archeology of Hell: Fire, Water, and Sin in Christianity* (Staviksvägen, Sweden: Bricoleur Press, 2003), 70.

⁵³ Le Goff, 174.

answers in the perceived golden age of the tradition and restated the old truths in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).⁵⁴

What the Fourth Lateran Council achieved was the creation of a well-defined church for the Middle Ages through the detailed establishment of religious duties and practices for both clergy and laity. Of particular importance was Canon 21, which made mandatory the acts of confession and the Eucharist an annual obligation. Through that decree, everyone was now encouraged to practice the introspective examination of the conscience that had previously been limited to clerics and monks.⁵⁵ As a result, public discussion focused upon concepts of mortal and venial sins and what happened to people who could not complete the required penance for those sins before the moment of death.⁵⁶ While clamorous debate was taking place among the masses, the emerging scholastic theologians tackled the discussion of sins and purgatorial actions as well. Extraordinary scholars such as Peter Lombard (c.1100-1160), William of Auvergne (c.1180/90-1249), Alexander of Hales (c.1170-1245), Bonaventure (1221-1274), Albertus Magnus (c.1206-1280), and undoubtedly the most influential and prominent theologian of the time, Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274), further discussed the nature of sin and the space and time of purgatory because they understood how important those matters were in the overall functioning of the medieval system. Many details about purgatory were already accepted and believed before the scholastic period, but those learned theologians helped

⁵⁴ Shinnars, 4-10.

⁵⁵ Le Goff, 213-218.

⁵⁶ David Bell provides a clear and concise definition of both mortal and venial sins: "A mortal sin is not defined simply by the act involved, but by a combination of the act and the attitude of the actor. It must involve 'grave matter' (murder, for example, or adultery), and it must be committed with the full consent of the will and with a clear knowledge of its guilt... Venial sin is any sin less than this. It may certainly be very serious, but it does not involve a complete blockage of grace; and because some grace can still get through, a sinner who dies in venial sin goes not to hell, but to purgatory" (Bell, 348-349).

move the symbolism of purgatorial expressions into something more concrete, and systematized the concept of purgatory into a form that was eventually recognized in official church doctrine.⁵⁷

Another factor that might have contributed to the development of the doctrine of purgatory was the eschatological fervour of the period. People in the Middle Ages were "far from thinking they were in the middle of anything, medieval people - if they thought about it at all - either imagined they were living near the *end* of everything, or that the Roman Empire was still going on and nothing had changed,"⁵⁸ and apocalyptic thought answered those perceptions. Joachim of Fiore (c.1135-1202), the Cistercian abbot who refused to categorize himself as a prophet, popularized notions about the end times, just when purgatorial ideas started gaining a formal reputation.⁵⁹ As both apocalyptic and purgatorial spirituality focused upon the *end*,⁶⁰ it would be natural for them to share certain qualities: time was thought as both chronological and eschatological; the

⁵⁷ Logan, 292-293.

⁵⁸ Alexander Murray, "The Later Middle Ages," in *Christianity: Two Thousand Years*, ed. Richard Harries and Henry-Mayr-Harting (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 97.

⁵⁹ Joachim asserted that with the spiritual intelligence that was bestowed upon him by divine grace, he could observe the divine signs of history. Consequently, he divided history into three corresponding eras that represented each person of the holy Trinity. The last era, known as the Third Age or *Status*, Joachim declared would be brought forth through individuals of the new spirit. Moreover, during this Third Age of the Holy Spirit, these individuals will experience more divine illumination before the end of time, but only after experiencing the most horrible of tribulations (Marjorie Reeves, "Preface," in *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treaties and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-der, Joachim of Fiore, The Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979, xxi).

⁶⁰ The vision of the end in apocalyptic spirituality shares common ground with many other forms of Christian spirituality: "the term 'Apocalyptic' is, of course, used in different ways, but if, in this context, we think of it as centering 'on the relation between time and eternity, between man's life in history and the heavenly realm,' it is clear that much Christian spirituality is apocalyptic, for the soul's meditation on its own meaning and destiny cannot escape this dimension" (*ibid.*, xiv). The difference between purgatorial and apocalyptic spirituality, then, is that while both find an eventual end in the divine, purgatory deals with the end of the individual through material and spiritual death and apocalyptic spirituality deals with the end of the individual and, indeed, the end of the historical world. Moreover, while both purgatorial and apocalyptic spirituality bifurcates into two forms - social and individual - purgatory's prevailing form is individual and apocalyptic spirituality's prevailing form is social (*ibid.*).

individual soul wanted to find purpose and place in the time process; there is an element of waiting; acknowledging the end and final place of the soul contributes to moral actions; and there is a focus on fear and hope as the soul moves from its fallen nature towards its transcendent end. However, apocalyptic spirituality contained problematic expressions, as represented in millennial visions.⁶¹ Just as Augustine fought millennial visions in his purgatorial discussions centuries earlier, the suppression of such apocalyptic spirituality would coincide with the elevated discussion of purgatorial matters in the works of Bonaventure.⁶²

It is probable that the medieval church realized that the eschatological fervor of the masses found a more orthodox expression in purgatory, that needed less monitoring than apocalyptic spirituality. Nevertheless, the church could still take advantage of *end-time* mentality through the concept of purgatory and the use of indulgences. With the Jubilee of 1300 on the horizon, the concept of a "treasury of merits"⁶³ gained credence, where people could pay the church for a partial remittance of time spent in the painful purgatorial fires for themselves or loved ones. This would provide huge socioeconomic

⁶¹ According to Marjorie Reeves: "millennial visions raised so many problems in terms of fantastic materialist hopes of imminent millennium, which undermined the sober morality of waiting, that we see developing the counter view that the only important climax in history had already occurred in the incarnation, that the only redemption within the time process was that of the individual soul, and that the redeemed society belong essentially to the blessedness of eternity. The pilgrim Church, marching toward the end of time, did, indeed, already taste of its redemption, but could not be relieved from tribulation until translated into its supra-temporal state" (*ibid.*, xv).

⁶² William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View* (Oxford: Oxford University of Press, 1983), 312.

⁶³ Aston argues that the origins of this concept of a "treasury of merits" evolved from the patristic period, but did not receive definition until the Council of Lyons (1274). She states that the rising concern for salvation and the subsequent pursuit of the security of the soul, which "was perhaps the most common and binding passion of western Christendom in the later middle ages, and it owed a great deal to ecclesiastical formulation" (Aston, 7). In addition, "the doctrine of purgatory, though itself provocative of anxiety, also offered a means of relief to the living, who could both hope for the ultimate redemption of endangered souls and themselves assist that end" (*ibid.*).

benefits for the ecclesiastical order.⁶⁴ Le Goff also mentions socioeconomic phenomena influencing the development of purgatory during the twelfth and thirteenth century. Although he believes that purgatory was an element in the transformation of feudal Christendom and not a product of the transitional movement, the switch from a binary system (rich and poor) to a ternary system (rich, middle-class, and poor) helped with the popularization of the idea of the intermediate state, and, therefore, purgatory.⁶⁵

Amidst these significant changes within medieval society, popular notions about the intermediate place of purgatory found supreme authenticity through a pontifical definition promulgated by Alexander IV in 1254:

Since the Truth asserts in the Gospel that, if anyone blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, this sin will not be forgiven either in this world or in the next: by which we are given to understand that certain faults are pardoned in the present time, and others in the other life; since the Apostle also declares that the work of each man, whatever it may be, shall be tried by fire and that if it burns the worker will suffer the loss, but he himself will be saved yet as by fire; since the Greeks themselves, it is said, believe and profess truly and without hesitation that the souls of those who die after receiving penance but without having had the time to complete it, or who die without mortal sin but guilty of venial (sins) or minor faults, are purged after death and may be helped by the suffrages of the Church; we, considering that the Greeks assert that they cannot find in the works of their doctors any certain and proper name to designate the place of this purgation, and that, moreover, according to the traditions and authority of the Holy Fathers, this name is Purgatory, we wish that in the future this expression be also accepted by them. For, in this temporary fire, sins, not of course crimes and capital errors, which could not previously have been forgiven through penance, but slight and minor sins, are purged; if they have not been forgiven during existence, they weigh down the soul after death.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Le Goff, 220-227.

⁶⁶ "Purgatoire," in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, col. 1248. An English translation of the article quoted from Le Goff, which incorporates minor corrections made from the French version of the article found in the Le Goff's French version of *The Birth of Purgatory* (Le Goff, 280-281).

With this papal letter, purgatory had gained unequivocal support and legitimacy. It would eventually become church dogma after Thomas Aquinas further formalized and substantiated the doctrine in his work *Contra errores Graecorum* (Against the Errors of the Greeks), which was used in the polemical discussions of the Second Council of Lyons (1274).⁶⁷

Not many years after this council recognized an official purgatorial doctrine, an unforgettable and exceptional piece of literature was written about purgatory by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). Such a complex and marvellous masterpiece is Dante's *The Divine Comedy*⁶⁸ that an enormous amount of discussion and multifaceted scholarship indeed, has been undertaken to understand and decipher all the intricate messages in his work, which provides much information "about medieval literature, society, language, history, philosophy, and theology."⁶⁹ However, there are some distinctive characteristics pertaining to the purpose, presentation, and predominate themes found within the individual section *Purgatorio* and overall in *The Divine Comedy* that contribute to the development purgatory in a significant and unique way.

The Divine Comedy's addition to the development of purgatory must be understood within the context of the entire text and the life circumstances of the author. Dante, from an early age, developed an interest in the contemporary scene of medieval

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁶⁸ There are numerous translations of *The Divine Comedy*. A standard and dependable translation is C. H. Sisson's, *Dante: The Divine Comedy*, reprinted for Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶⁹ John A. Scott. *Understanding Dante* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 190.

society and from thirty years of age onwards became highly involved political affairs.⁷⁰

His political involvement led to his being exiled, but gave him the opportunity to amalgamate his philosophical ideas with the historical events of his time. Therefore, Dante's *The Divine Comedy* takes the form of a political protest and acts as a prophetic message. It includes his positive nationalistic desires for a unified Italy that he believed could only be achieved through the supranational aims of the Roman Catholic Church, which wished for an allied and peaceful Christendom.⁷¹ Although these political and social concerns serve as his dominant purpose, the poem contains a strong focus leaning towards an individualistic spirituality as well. Higgins' explains:

Dante's aim in writing *The Divine Comedy*, to 'lead men from a state of wretchedness into one of happiness' (*Letters X*, to Can Grande della Scala), was not merely evangelical. Happiness in this life, he believed, was one of mankind's two fundamental aims, and was contingent upon the maintenance of justice and order in a society ruled by one supreme monarch, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.⁷²

Once again, however, the spiritual nature of the work is brought back to the ideal of creating a new world that has overcome the moral and social chaos of his time and ultimately vindicates the high-minded and uncompromising moral priorities of Dante.

Acting as a poem of personal and political protest, *The Divine Comedy* takes on the forms of a pilgrimage narrative and spiritual autobiography. It is an exceptional epic that "stands at the pinnacle of a long tradition of visionary literature."⁷³ Dante is resolute

⁷⁰ David Higgins, "Introduction," in *Dante: The Divine Comedy*, reprinted for Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

⁷¹ Ricardo J. Quinones, *Dante Alighieri* (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 1-7.

⁷² Higgins, 18.

⁷³ Scott, 213.

in his textual efforts to have his poem and life based on the foundations of philosophical truth and achieves such a varied approach and progressive purpose through the use of literal and allegorical meanings.⁷⁴ On the literal level, the poem tells of Dante's journey through hell, purgatory, and paradise in search of his beloved lady who died ten years earlier, and, therefore, discusses the condition of the departed souls. Its allegorical meaning, derived from his own dedicatory letter to his patron Can Grande della Scala (*Letters X*), concerns "man as deserving the reward or punishment of justice, according to his merits or demerits in the exercise of free will." The sense of vision and allegory is didactic in nature and characteristic of the medieval aesthetic and humanist reform movement of his era. His journey through the after-life is a call for a return to the golden age, where civic and religious unity can be obtained, along with universal happiness for all humankind.

What becomes evident is that "*The Divine Comedy* is a poem, above all, of love. If religion and politics, civic life, literature and philosophy are important themes in the work, they are constantly developed and measured against the parameters of love."⁷⁵ However, that spiritual message of love is tempered by the theological influences of Thomas Aquinas.⁷⁶ Consequently, the spiritual nature of his poem that has been undertaken with historical and ethical concerns, is rooted in the supremacy of the intellect, which is enabled through the virtue of divine grace;⁷⁷ the noble intellect is the

⁷⁴ Quinones, 28.

⁷⁵ Higgins, 13.

⁷⁶ Atwood, 68.

⁷⁷ Quinones, 66-67.

pinnacle of the beatific vision and is the initial requirement for all desires and for distinguishing anything that appears to be good, which includes all ideals of love.⁷⁸

Dante Alighieri's uniqueness concerning purgatorial concepts is not demonstrated in his poetic style or social purpose; rather it is observed in his geography of purgatory. His purgatory is above ground, yet under the starry firmament in the southern hemisphere and located upon a steep mountain. The purgatorial mountain contains seven circles representing the seven deadly sins, and is the first purgatorial account to be situated next to the Earthly Paradise. It therefore links two essential episodes in the chronological and eschatological history of the Christian universe: humankind's fall from grace in the Garden of Eden and the redemption in Christ's crucifixion. Moreover, Dante shows ingenuity when he replaces the demons with angels in his purgatory, making the intermediate region of purgatory directed towards joy of paradise.⁷⁹ Where he shows the most innovation, however, is in his invention of an ante-purgatory:

Dante's originality in fact lies in his having imaged that, before entering the area in which the actual progress of purgation takes place, many sinners wait for a time in an ante-Purgatory at the base of the mountain. It may be that, as Purgatory was increasingly promised to those who merely made an act of contrition in extremis (a trend apparent even earlier, in the work of Caesarius of Heisterbach), Dante, inclined though he was to believe that God's mercy is bountiful, felt it necessary to establish this period of waiting as an additional trial to be endured before admission could be gained to Purgatory proper.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Scott, 203.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁸⁰ Le Goff, 342.

These concepts of purgatory are rooted in the traditional penitential actions of the twelfth century. Nevertheless, the multitude of unique expressions concerning purgatory found in *The Divine Comedy* would affect purgatorial perceptions for centuries to come.

According to Le Goff, purgatory as a concept reached its pinnacle in *The Divine Comedy*. Accordingly, Dante's after-life masterpiece was such a monumental work that it quickly attained considerable circulation, and the doctrine of purgatory naturally flourished amongst the public. During the later Middle Ages, constant trials and tribulations represented in societal transition, suffering, and death helped reinforce the belief in the purgatorial *other world*. However, as the eschatological passion grew, the end of an era was being reached and new period of reform would influence the concept of purgatory once again. As a result, the medieval doctrine of purgatory would merge with the burgeoning spirituality of the Renaissance. Such a unique circumstance provided a great opportunity for the development and refinement of new ideals in the doctrine of purgatory. Evelyn Underhill acknowledged the significance of those new purgatorial conceptions when she labeled Catherine of Genoa as being the only first-rate spiritual genius of that particular period.⁸¹

⁸¹ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), 467.

CHAPTER TWO: CATHERINE OF GENOA'S FORMATIVE YEARS

Having established the historical setting and theological construction of purgatory, we can now focus on the specific nature and development of the mystical purgatory presented in the *Life*, *The Spiritual Dialogue*, and *Purgation and Purgatory*. An overview of Catherine's childhood is given so that we may understand some of the direct events and influences in her life that helped develop her purgatorial propensity. Accordingly, hagiographic concerns must also be discussed as her biographers – in their efforts to edify her life and portray her life as being both a symbol of the purgatorial afterlife and an actual theological living example - had reverential tendencies to exaggerate moments in her life.

Catherine's Childhood: Early Years

The life of Catarinetta Fiesca, who would later be known as Saint Catherine of Genoa, began at the latter end of the year 1447.¹ She was the youngest of five children; her parents were Giacomo dei Fieschi and Francesca di Negro.² Catherine's birthplace

¹ Baron Friedrich von Hügel has done much research to uncover many particulars of Catherine of Genoa's early biography; but he was unable to discover the day or month of her birth. In addition, he was unable to find the baptismal register from the Duomo, her parish church, which would have contained her birth records. Subsequent scholarship has failed to uncover these dates as well (Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion: As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2 vols., (London: James Clarke and Company Limited, 1961), vol. 1, 93).

² Von Hügel discusses the probable source for the names given to the children of Giacomo dei Fieschi and Francesca di Negro in Volume One of his work: "There were three sons: Giacomo, named after his father, and Lorenzo and Giovanni, no doubt named respectively after the great Roman deacon, the titular saint of the Cathedral, and who already appeared upon his gridiron, on the quaint Mediaeval relief over its portal; and after the Baptist, whose reputed relics lay there, in the great Chapel, rebuilt for them

was a palace that stood in the Vico Filo, which was located close to the Cathedral of San Lorenzo in Genoa, Italy.³ The palace was one of many owned by the great Guelph family of Fieschi, who were nobles with a very distinguished lineage. Most notable of their ancestry was Sinibaldo de' Fieschi, who became Pope Innocent IV (1234-1254), the first of two popes in the family's lineage - the second being the nephew of Innocent IV, who ruled only for a few months under the title of Pope Adrian V (1276). With such religious and political influence, the family would gather much power, reaching the pinnacle of their success in the middle of the fifteenth century.⁴ The family possessed numerous fiefs in Liguria, Piedmont, and Lombardy; Catherine's cousin, Nicolo Fieschi, was a high ranking member of the College of Cardinals; and the family enjoyed much political sway in the Kingdom of Naples, as her father was a descendant of Roberto Fieschi, who was the brother of Pope Innocent IV and Viceroy of Naples.⁵ Catherine entered this world at the height of the family's worldly splendor, exactly a hundred years before their downward spiral, which began with the famous and disastrous conspiracy involving her family and the Dorias in 1547.⁶

Although Catherine's life began with much material wealth and social privilege, she would not be raised with just the concerns of nobility. The spiritual aspect of life was

soon after this time (1451-1496). Last came the two daughters: Limbania, named after a beatified virgin and contemplative, a Genoese Augustinian Nun of the thirteenth century, and Caterinetta, christened and in all the legal documents always called by this diminutive, presumably after St. Catherine of Alexandria, who had an altar in the Cathedral. And the Cathedral was their Parish Church" (*ibid.*, 97).

³ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 97.

⁴ Richard E. Marchese's, *The Role of St. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) in the Reform of the Church* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 34.

⁵ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 95-96

⁶ The conspiracy between the Fieschi and Dorias forms the subject matter of the play by Schiller. It is von Hügel's opinion that the play is considered well-known theatrical material and that the decline of the Fieschi's family happened after this conspiratorial event (von Hügel, vol. 1, 96).

of considerable importance to her family. While there are few details concerning these early years, the details that we can examine provide excellent examples that help us understand the development of her spiritual nature. However, these details about her early life and religious upbringing almost certainly contain embellishments made by her biographers in an attempt to fill in the blanks about her early years, while furthering notions about her extraordinary spirituality and conforming her to recognized religious models, which would eventually help her attain the title of saint.⁷ Nevertheless, even though these specific details of her life may be exaggerated through hagiographic zeal, they do not take away from the fact that she did come from a very privileged and religious background, which had an undoubted influence upon the rest of her life.

The most immediate and significant influence upon Catherine's life and spiritual development were the religious ideals instilled by her parents. She was taught that the richness of the spiritual life was worth more than the wealth of the world. As well, her upbringing consisted of spiritual simplicity and fierce devotion: she was raised to believe that having an ardent love for the divine and being able to demonstrate that love through service and self-sacrifice is more of an honour than the accolades of her lineage. Hers was a household that upheld the highest religious ideals for their children, having expectations of obedience, exclusive aspirations for the divine, and unchangeable hearts that were centred upon the love of God.⁸

Catherine's spiritual temperament was developed and encouraged through the teachings of her parents, but another important impact on her early life that helped

⁷ Paul Garvin, "Introduction," in *The Life and Sayings of Saint Catherine of Genoa* (New York: Alba House, 1964), 14.

⁸ Thomas Cowell Upham, *Life of Madame Catharine Adorna* (New York: Harper, 1858), 18-19.

develop her spiritual understanding was a painting of a Pietà, an image of the Crucified Christ being held in the arms of His Virgin Mother. We are told by her biographers that every time she walked into her room and raised her eyes to view the picture she would have a deep emotional experience. Her soul would fill with unbearable grief every time she saw the picture because it reminded her how much suffering the divine had experienced because of our sinful nature. A demonstration of such pious sentiment is an accepted and widely used component in traditional late medieval hagiography, but having such a delicate and affectionate personality, she would be unable to shake from her mind the image of Christ's unselfish and sacrificial love. Moreover, the Pietà had an undoubted influence because the austere image was the centrepiece of her room and was characteristic of her ascetic actions and spiritual nature: all the religious experiences that occurred later on in her life are founded upon the ardent love for the divine and the influence of that dramatic image of sacrificial suffering observed in the Pietà. In fact, the combination of love and suffering would be a concept that she would eventually make her own, in thought, word, and deed.⁹

These religious ideals and spiritual mindfulness would have a more fundamental effect upon her being than anything she would acquire from the social and economic benefits of being a noble. What the privileges of coming from an aristocratic background provided was an example of what she believed was wrong with the world, and she quickly developed great disdain towards nobles who had taken pride in living their luxurious lives.¹⁰ Even during her early childhood, she desired to withdraw from a

⁹ Von Hügel, vol. I, 99.

¹⁰ Marchese, 35.

society of external excess and begin a life of spiritual simplicity. Hence, when she was eight years old, she began to demonstrate her ardent religious ideals in the earnest exercise of bodily penance. One of the more notable forms of her many austerities during this time were her attempts to sleep upon a straw bed with a hard block of wood as her pillow.¹¹ The reason given for her initial penance was that she desired nothing more than to suffer greatly for the love of Christ.¹²

After years of demonstrating such a pious disposition, Catherine's religious temperament continued to develop with devout fervour and intense holiness as she learned to balance her ascetic practices with quiet prayer. Her biographers mention that she would practice sitting in silence, focusing her mind on the love of the divine, and contemplating the inseparable nature of love and suffering.¹³ Then, during her twelfth year of life, the divine gift of prayer was communicated to her during a powerful experience, which enabled her to become absorbed in divine contemplation. This experience, though momentary, conveyed a spiritual message that was understood experientially rather than rationally, for the divine nature of the revelation was something beyond her age and intellect. Catherine was absorbed in prayer when the core of her being was infused with ardent love from the divine, and she obtained experiential knowledge of the divine nature of suffering love found within the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Carol Lee Flinders likens this experience to a form of contemplation known as

¹¹ Carol Lee Flinders, *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco Publishers, 1993), 134.

¹² Frances R. Howe, *The Saint of Genoa: St. Catharine Flisca Adurna* (Chicago: Union Catholic Publishing Company, 1883), 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Mrs. G. Ripley, *Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*, preface by Isaac Hecker (New York:

"recollection," which is the typical teaching of a number of Spanish mystics such as Teresa of Ávila.¹⁵ If we understand "recollection" as "the act of perfect concentration, the passionate focusing of the self upon one point, when it is applied 'with a naked intent' to real and transcendental things,"¹⁶ and that such contemplation as "the necessary prelude of pure contemplation, that state in which the mystic enters into communion with Reality,"¹⁷ such parallels can readily be observed.

What we see after this moment of divine contemplation is Catherine's unrelenting acceptance and unabashed service of God. She decided, with the encouragement of her parents, to follow her elder sister into the religious life, since becoming a nun was the only significant and specialized role for devout women during her era.¹⁸ She waited until the age of thirteen to apply to the house of the Augustinian Canonesses of the Lateran. Due mainly to her youth, however, the Genoese convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie refused her application. Her family made a petition and it was supported by her confessor, but the Mother Superior still believed thirteen was too young for a person to enter the Order. Another reason for her exclusion might be that there were already a number of family members who were a part of the convent, and having too many family members within the same cloister could cause distressing problems in the tight-knit

Christian Press Association Publishing Company, 1896), 13.

¹⁵ Flinders, 135.

¹⁶ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), 48-49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁸ C.W. Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, volume seventeen of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, edited by Jill Raitt in collaboration with Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 121.

community.¹⁹ Her sister, Limbania Fieschi, and probable cousin, Simonetta di Negro, were already members of the Order, and therefore, even though she repeatedly asked to enter the conventual life over the next three years, she would never be accepted.²⁰

Catherine's Childhood: Adolescence

The *Life*, then, contains a standard biographical and hagiographical account common in the late Middle Ages. Hagiographers, wanting to elevate popular sentiments and meet certain religious criteria of holiness for a saint, often depicted the female saint as going through a gradual process towards sainthood and thus created the perfect child of religious practice and devotion.²¹ Such a convention has been observed in Catherine of Genoa's childhood. Another common convention is the conversion narrative, which is often linked with a significant death - usually the death of a parental figure. According to Weinstein and Bell,

The death of a parent abruptly ended this time of growth and telescoped the normal period of adolescence into the confines of a "sudden" conversion. Our information is only about those who became saints, but the crisis of youth cut short was a very common one in this age of early and sudden death. No doubt many adolescents took the death of a parent as a call to religion, even if only a few became saints.²²

However, when Catherine's father, Giacomo dei Fieschi, died at the end of 1461, when she was fourteen years old, her life did not follow traditional form. Her initial period of

¹⁹ Flinders, 135.

²⁰ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 100.

²¹ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 20.

²² *Ibid.*, 55-56.

spiritual growth did not end with her father's death because, it seemed, additional hardships were needed before the "sudden" change could be realized and she could express her unique spiritual disposition. Instead, the biographical account remains focused on her virtuous actions, expressing common late medieval hagiographic themes like penitent, charitable and miraculous practices. Any "sudden" conversion observed during her adolescent years came from her abrupt acceptance of marriage and her participation in the affairs of the world.

On January 13, 1463, the Fieschi and Adorni families made a political alliance through the marriage of their children, Catherine Fieschi and Giuliano Adorni. Giacomo Fieschi, Catherine's eldest brother, signed the nuptial contract. Marriage celebrations took place the next day in the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in the Cathedral of San Lorenzo in the presence of her uncle, Bishop Napoleone Fieschi.²³ Her marriage was an abomination to her from the very beginning, for instead of being created out of pure love, it was founded on worldly affairs. Motivation for the marriage was based upon the financial and societal advancements gained through the reconciliation between the Guelph and Ghibelline factions. Numerous conflicts between these factional adherents had been on-going for centuries, but the feud became more acute during this period of political upheaval in the city of Genoa.

Appearing as a microcosm of Christendom, the city of Genoa found itself engulfed in constant civil strife. As a place that had massive cultural and political diversity, the city was ripe for conflict, which became more prevalent because of the

²³ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 101.

differences between “noble and non-noble, between *popolani* and artisans and between contending families” that occurred “from the time of the exclusion of the nobility from government and the creation of the popular dogeship (1339).”²⁴ Such civil issues had a direct impact in the life of Catherine. In 1436, eleven years before Catherine was born, the dogeship of Filippo Maria Visconti (also known as the Prospero Adorno) was nullified when he was overthrown by Tommaso Fregoso (also known as Paolo Campofregoso) who became both Duke and Archbishop of Genoa.²⁵ Although both were of the Ghibelline house, the Adorni family needed to make a strong alliance to help take back their ducal throne from the Fregosis. Catherine’s marriage was meant to help resolve the civil issue: “by an alliance with the Fieschi, the most powerful of the Guelph families, the Adorni could hope, in their turn, to oust the Fregosi, and to reinstate themselves at the head of the great Republic.”²⁶ Hence, the marriage was created with no regard for the religious and spiritual principles in which she was raised: she had been taught that separation from the world and having concerns for the divine alone were of primary importance, and yet the purpose of her marriage represented the opposite ideal.²⁷

While Catherine’s marriage was a commendable match in social terms because both bride and groom were from noble lineage, it was a disaster to her spirituality. In terms of personality, as well, the match could not have been worse. Giuliano was the very opposite in nature to his wife: “his life was as unlike hers as possible; indolent, ill-

²⁴ Marchese, 15.

²⁵ Agostino Giustiniani’s, *Castigatissimi Annali Della Repubblica Di Genova*, 3rd edition, edited by G. B. Spotorno, vol. 1, (Genova: Il Libraio Canepa, 1854), 353ff, provides additional details concerning the political period.

²⁶ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 101.

²⁷ Helen Douglas Irvine, “Introduction,” in *Saint Catherine of Genoa: Treatise on Purgatory, The Dialogue*, translated by Charlotte Balfour and Helen Douglas Irvine (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), vi.

natured and spendthrift by nature, he was all that is comprehended in the word profligate."²⁸ Catherine's character, on the other hand, has been described as "quickly and intensely impressionable, nervous and extremely tense and active" physically and psychically "very affectionate, ardent, aspiring, impatient and absolute" in the "qualities and habits of her mind and will."²⁹ Indeed, "Catherine was not only temperamentally unsuited to Giuliano but to marriage itself."³⁰

Questioning Catherine's temperament and decision to enter into the covenant of marriage, Benedict J. Groeschel has asked "why did Catherine submit to this arrangement, since at the age of thirteen she already had a 'gift of prayer' and deported herself with 'prudence and zeal'?"³¹ Although Groeschel did not provide an answer to his question, the dramatic events surrounding her father's death provide clues about her seemingly inexplicable acceptance of marriage.

Her father's death had a profound impact in that her deep loss destroyed her innate sense of security formed through parental providence and enjoyed in childhood. Without her father's leadership, and having to live in a medieval world that worried about attaining security in both this life and the next, it was only natural that she would suffer from insecure feelings about her power to control the outcome of her circumstances. Moreover, rejection from the cloister compounded such insecure feelings that would influence that sense of control over the growth of her spiritual life. Hence, with her father's death and the death of her religious aspirations, any positive sense of 'self'

²⁸ Howe, 24.

²⁹ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 97-98.

³⁰ Sheila Kaye-Smith, *Quartet in Heaven* (Freeport, New York: Books For Libraries Press, 1956), 6.

³¹ Groeschel, 3.

established in childhood was disappearing. When she was a child, she comprehended death in the image of the crucified Christ, which she seemed to understand in a positive manner, and that helped develop notions of sacrifice and love. During her adolescence, death was seen as negative because she further contemplated the defects of her human nature and position within the world.

As Catherine comprehended death, she experienced insecure feelings, but also reaffirmed the virtuous ideals of her childhood. Nevertheless, she also realized she had little choice in her decision concerning marriage, and, therefore, should accept the arrangement with a demonstration of love, sacrifice, and obedience. Hagiographers could maintain the tradition of virtue recorded in numerous saints' lives with such an acceptance of marriage. Moreover, hagiographers also understood that virtue was established by participating in the church sacraments and (thankfully for them) the covenant of marriage had been elevated to a full-fledged sacrament during the Council of Florence (1438). All the same, virtue and religious expression were often limited in the hagiography of medieval women. C. W. Bynum explains:

Indeed, hagiographers operated with a somewhat inconsistent double model of the female adolescent. The virtuous girl might demonstrate her virtue either by insisting heroically on chastity (and thereby rebelling against family) or by obediently marrying at her parents' command (and thereby retreating from what the church argued to be a higher good); frequently, in saints' *Vitae*, she did both with no explanation of what the change from one behavior to the other meant to her or cost her. It is because women lacked control over their wealth and marital status that their life stories show fewer heroic gestures of casting money, property, and family away. But women's lives also seem less characterized by radical renunciations and reversals because women tended to use their ordinary experiences (of powerlessness, of service and nurturing, of disease, etc.) as symbols into which they poured ever deeper and more paradoxical meanings, and

because both men and women tended to see female saints as models of suffering, male saints as models of action.³²

However, Catherine did not follow such stringent dichotomous conclusions. For this woman who both contemplated and represented an intermediate state, her hagiographers also demonstrated an intermediate or third approach by using elements from both models of action. Hagiographers attempted to conform her to traditional medieval models of female sainthood, but did not deny the complexities and unconventional aspects in her life that started when she became married. What the hagiographers implemented was a more masculine model of sainthood, and, therefore, relied upon the classic conversion narrative.³³

Catherine's Early Adulthood: An Internal Biography

Even though the hagiographers converted to the conversion narrative, they still maintained the conventional characteristics of the weak and suffering mode of female saintliness. As von Hügel has noted, Catherine "possessed a congenitally melancholy temperament"³⁴ throughout all her life, but in the beginning of her marriage the domestic circumstances had a profound negative and morbid impact. She realized she still had no control over her situation and became withdrawn and isolated, suffering from an inconsolable sadness that was "in part caused by her husband's behaviour; not only was he wasting his fortune, but he was dissolute and unfaithful to the point of having a

³² Bynum, 130-131.

³³ Flinders, 131.

³⁴ Von Hügel, vol. 2, 28

mistress and child."³⁵ Although these particular instances of depravity caused much distress, being unable to affirm her religious mode of life because she was given a husband who was "entirely the opposite of herself in his mode of life,"³⁶ is what, we are told, caused her the most suffering. For these reasons she "spent the first five of these dreary years in sad and mournful loneliness, at first in her mother's house, and afterwards, at least in the winter-time, in Giuliano's own palace,"³⁷ as her religious lifestyle, developed from childhood, was being annihilated.

The depth of these psychological struggles for the affirmation of the values and virtues instilled during childhood are described in Catherine's "internal biography," *The Spiritual Dialogue*. This "internal biography" acts as supplemental material as it fills the gaps left from the historical account in her "external biography" – the *Life* – but it also provides a more unique and compelling account that reaffirms the psychological approach of her doctrine. In the first section, the *Dialogue* recounts the depression and pain caused by the conflict between the supposed divine nature of her childhood and the wayward nature of her husband's worldly life, forced upon her in marriage. The argument involves different characters or "realities," but in order to have a full comprehension of the discussion presented within the account, we need to say something about what these characters represent. Groeschel, using psychoanalytical terminology, provides an interpretation:

The Body seems to resemble Freud's concept of the infantile Id, the unformed and unrepressed complex of biological drives, needs, and energies. Human Frailty

³⁵ Groeschel, 3.

³⁶ *Life*, 8.

³⁷ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 102.

would appear to be this Id but already formed and controlled by discipline and the experiences of life. The complaints of Human Frailty, almost comic in their pathetic insistence on some quarter, suggest that, unlike the Body, Human Frailty is capable of cooperating with the spiritual endeavors of the Soul. The Soul resembles the Self of contemporary psychology, including elements of the Ego and Superego. The Spirit, on the other hand, corresponds roughly to Jung's concept of the numinous or transcendent aspect of man and since it is not tempted or prone to sin, is also seen as in the state of grace. The Spirit here also seems to correspond with the being described as the "Soul" in *Purgation and Purgatory*.³⁸

We will say more about Human Frailty and Spirit later, but another character, strong in the mind of Catherine, demands our immediate attention: Self-Love. This appears to resemble the same psychological Self known as the Ego, and, consequently, aspects of its character are comparable with the Soul. It is a component of our own unique essence that finds its purpose in selfishly acquiring the elements and attributes of the finite realm; it is the soul that in selfish pride has been infected with original sin and only loves itself and not the divine. Therefore, when Self-Love is compared with the Soul, it should be with the Soul as described in the later sections of *The Spiritual Dialogue*. In other words, it should not be equated with the apex of the soul (Spirit), which is both pure and divine, but with the Soul that has been corrupted in sin and now only contains traces of its former divine nature.

While the Body and Soul reference psychological characteristics, on a fundamental level, the Body also appears to be equated with finite material desires, and infinite transcendent desires are equated with the Soul. If we accept these conclusions, we can gain further insight into Catherine's state of mind throughout different events in her life. Yet, the events and discussions mentioned in the *Dialogue* do not follow the

³⁸ Groeschel, 22-23.

exact outline of the *Life*. In addition, the *Dialogue* has been broken into broad periods: the first section discusses the events surrounding Catherine's "second conversion;" the second section discusses that extended intermediate period in her life; and the third section discusses the events surrounding her death. In reference to the first section, her negative perceptions of the world that include the degenerate behaviour of her husband and weakness in character are understood through the Body and Self-Love, whereas pious inclinations and righteous perceptions can be linked with the divine desires represented by the Soul.

The Spiritual Dialogue's narrative begins with the innate disagreement in purpose and nature between Body and Soul. At the beginning of the discussion, Body and Soul argue about who has precedence in life's journey, and they decide to take a week each to discover their innate tendencies and what brings them happiness. The Body, agreeing that the Soul is more worthy, allows the Soul to go first, but convinces the Soul to find Self-Love to arbitrate so that they can both partake in their due share of joys.³⁹

What the characters come to realize is that they are inherently different and that there can be no real harmonious interaction between them because they are in direct opposition, which is comparable to the problems in Catherine's marriage. The Body desires things that are tangible in the created universe, but the Soul enjoys things that "are not visible nor do they have any taste."⁴⁰

³⁹ Catherine of Genoa, *The Spiritual Dialogue*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

During the first week, the Soul does what it thinks it was created for, and spends its time "in contemplation and looking down on things below,"⁴¹ but in doing so causes much discomfort for the Body and Self-Love. The first week is reminiscent of Catherine's childhood, those days when she was still presented as free from venial sin and believed that her own being or soul "was almost divine by nature for, drawn to contemplation of things divine, it wanted to eat its bread with that of the angels."⁴²

When the first week is finished, during the Body's week the Body and Self-Love hoped to avenge themselves for the pain that was caused by the Soul.⁴³ During the second week the Body and Self-Love do what they believe *they* were created for, but do so in a selfish manner, and show the Soul "all the joys the Body could experience."⁴⁴

Understanding these discussions on an allegorical level, we can understand something about Catherine's personal journey and psychological development through marriage and "second conversion." Arguments between the Soul and the Body reveal hesitation about marriage, the sense of having little control over her situation, and loss of holiness from childhood. The Body, arguing about its innate desires declares, "these goods would not be lacking as long as they were in this world, and since they were created for the Body they could be enjoyed without offending God."⁴⁵ Such an argument could be used for the acceptance of marriage and for Catherine's acceptance of her husband's behaviour. Moreover, other discussions between the Body, Soul, and Self-Love represent arguments both for and against the acceptance of marriage and

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

participation in the world. For example, if Catherine married and decided to take part in societal affairs, how could she keep true to the pious devotion of her childhood? The Soul makes a similar argument about meeting the needs of the Body:

To attend to the body's needs to such an extent
 gives me pause.
 I am afraid that I, too, will begin to find delight in them
 and, unaware of the danger, will settle for them.
 Watching you and the Body
 so hungry and so intent on what gives you joy,
 I sense that I too will become earthbound.⁴⁶

Catherine, against her better judgment, was convinced to accept marriage out of obedience and attempted to meet the natural needs of marriage, which included participation in the world. In a similar discussion, the Soul tells the Body and Self-Love:

Since I cannot do otherwise, I will provide for
 your needs.
 I am afraid, though, that you are both plotting
 against me.
 Your words are so utterly sensible on the
 surface
 that they force me to be understanding;
 yet, I wonder what you have in mind
 when you insist that without me you can do
 nothing.⁴⁷

It seems that as Catherine struggled to conform to the ideals of the world and move away from the religious aspirations of her childhood, she realized that she had an innate tendency to manifest the afterlife while still in this life. We see support for this

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

idea in the discussion between the Soul and Self-Love about the Soul's divine convictions:

It is because you were aiming so unreasonably
 high
 that you feel as if you are debasing yourself
 to come down to our level.
 With time, though, you will learn to moderate
 yourself,
 to be more sensible.
 Our company is not so bad as you seem to think
 at this point.
 Fear not, God will provide.
 You are to love God fully, not in this world but
 in the next.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, Catherine, like the Soul, started "adapting itself [herself] to the needs of the others"⁴⁹ because she believed that she could not regain that religious experience of childhood in marriage, just as the Soul is "incapable of achieving the freedom of its first week."⁵⁰ This would explain why those initial years in marriage became mired in depression for Catherine; the Soul in the *Dialogue* describes a similar position:

Nonetheless, intent on not yielding to melancholy and nostalgia for the goods for which it was created, the Soul sought peace and joy where it could. And listing with the wind, it said:

The beauty and goodness and joy of created
 things
 are means for knowing and enjoying things divine.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

In this statement we are given a pious reason as to why, during the first few years of marriage, Catherine became "devoted to external affairs, and feminine amusements, seeking solace for her hard life, as women are prone to do, in the diversions and vanities of the world, yet not to a sinful extent."⁵² But, just as Catherine was still unhappy with her marriage and social involvement, the Soul is unhappy with its circumstances:

I have never found the peace I sought,
though possessing all that I asked for on earth;
and all your appetites and joys heightened my
restlessness.
Still, I persisted in my confusion,
hoping in a worldly future that would satisfy
my craving.
In acceding to the desires of the Body, under
the guise of necessity
-a notion that led straightaway to that of the
necessity of the superfluous-
in a very short time I became enmeshed in sin.⁵³

Even before her conversion, Catherine understood that her marriage was an unhappy one in arrangement and practice because her ardent love and pious actions for the divine in childhood were becoming annihilated by sin. She became so distressed about her life situation that she fell into an even deeper depression, and became so filled with disgust towards anything of the world that she decided to avoid society altogether and became intolerant even of her "sinful" self.⁵⁴ Such is the condition of the Soul during the same period in the *Dialogue*: the Soul is being suffocated by the appetites of the Body and Self-Love, moving further away from the divine and growing proportionately more unhappy

⁵² *Life*, 14.

⁵³ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 106.

⁵⁴ *Life*, 14.

with its situation and gaining little solace through feeling remorse.⁵⁵ Any slight happiness the Soul does feel “occurred usually with thoughts of death. Once that fear of death was gone, however, so was that occasional prompting.”⁵⁶ What the Soul needs is “not knowing what it was I sought – and that was the prompting, the instinct for God, that was mine by nature.”⁵⁷ In other words, the Soul needs to “lose all confidence in itself and turn to Him”⁵⁸ before it can be transformed through a supreme death, which the *Dialogue* confirms: “fully conscious at this point of the spiritual and bodily death confronting it, of having become like an animal willingly led to slaughter, the Soul was overcome with fright.”⁵⁹

As we mentioned above, in traditional hagiography the conversion narrative is often linked with a significant death. The sudden change in the hagiographical approach and the sudden conversion within Catherine’s narrative are also both linked with a kind of death – the death of the *self*. In addition, the acknowledgement of Catherine’s participation in the affairs of the world, even though perhaps included with pious intentions, was a significant deviation from the female norm of sanctity, for traditionally hagiographers only recorded such worldly indiscretions in male biographies. Carol Lee Flinders provides a possible reason for the divergence:

Catherine’s departure from that norm reflects in part the far-reaching changes that all of Europe was undergoing: the Middle Ages, with its monolithically normative view of existence, was over. With the rise of humanism, an increasingly diversified picture of human existence had begun to emerge. As we will see, the

⁵⁵ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

hagiographers' views of Catherine were still heavily shaped by traditional assumptions: the old idealizing grid is still in place in their accounts. Nonetheless, a great many untidy, intractable, and delicious bits of personal data have slipped through, and they raise all kinds of intriguing questions.⁶⁰

Hagiographers continued with the conversion narrative, but also presented her as suffering and dependent like other female saints. However, Catherine's dependence was on the divine: she needed to have her desires centred upon an ardent love for the divine that she developed in childhood, or she had no reason to function both in physical and spiritual terms. As Friedrich von Hügel points out:

It can be said, in simple truth, that she became a saint because she had to, that she became it to prevent herself from going to pieces. She literally had to save and actually did save, the fruitful life of reason and love, by ceaselessly fighting her immensely sensitive, absolute, and claimful self.⁶¹

In essence, the ardent love for the divine she had possessed from childhood demanded a life of sainthood because an individual needs to actualize that love within themselves and demonstrate the nature of that divine love through their external life in order to achieve the inner harmony of that essence. The question remains, then, how did Catherine overcome her situation and alter the rest of her life to become a saint of pure love? As she came to appreciate, such divine love and divine transformation happened in death; she needed to bring the after-life into this life, and that happened through a mystical experience – a mystical experience that would be understood through a doctrinal revelation in Purgatory.

⁶⁰ Flinders, 131.

⁶¹ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 223.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PURE LOVE OF CATHERINE OF GENOA'S MYSTICAL CONVERSION AND PURGATORY

In order to understand Catherine of Genoa's unique notions about the nature of the divine and purgatory – which she understood as Pure Love – one must examine her conversion experience. However, as Groeschel has noted, “for some obscure reason, von Hügel overlooks the frequent and conspicuous similarity between the teaching of Augustine on the nature of God and the spiritual life and that of Catherine Adorna,” and “this similarity should be stressed.”¹ Thus, we will also present a brief account of “Augustinian mysticism” and discuss some of those similarities observed in Catherine's mystical teaching – though that discussion will span two chapters. In this chapter, the purpose of comparison is for a better understanding of her mystical conversion in Pure Love.

Catherine's “Second Conversion”: Pure Love-Centred Mysticism

On March 22, 1473, Catherine attended Lenten confession at the insistence of her sister Limbania. Knowing Catherine had suffered for about ten years from a miserable marriage and neurotic melancholy that was leaving her with the sole desire to die, her sister believed that the Lenten confession might alleviate her negative psychological condition. Although Catherine had no desire for Lenten confession or any blessing that

¹ Benedict J. Groeschel, “Introduction,” in *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory: The Spiritual Dialogue*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 24.

she might receive, she nevertheless went, and at the time of her confession, she experienced something that transcended all expectations:

The moment she knelt before him, she was wounded so forcibly with the love of God, and received so clear a revelation of her misery and faults, and of the goodness of God, that she had well nigh fallen to the ground. Overpowered by these emotions, and by her sense of the offences she had committed against her dear Lord, she was so drawn away by her purified affections from the miseries of the world, that she became almost beside herself; and without ceasing, internally repented to herself, in the ardor of love: "No more world, no more sin." And at that moment if she had possessed a thousand worlds, she would have thrown them all away.

Through the ardent flame of burning love with which she was enkindled, her good God, by his grace, impressed instantly upon that soul, and infused into it, all perfection, purging it of all earthly affections, illuminating it with a divine light by which she was enabled to perceive with her interior eye, his goodness; and in a word, united her with himself, and changed and transformed her entirely by the true union of a good will, inflaming her wholly with his burning love.²

It seems apparent that this scene of her second conversion was a mystical experience and the beginning of her "mysticism."

As McGinn has mentioned, however:

No mystics (at least before the present century) believed in or practiced 'mysticism'. They believed in and practiced Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism), that is, religions that contained mystical elements as parts of a wider historical whole.³

How then do we describe Catherine of Genoa's "mysticism?" Well, "whether or not because the subject ultimately addresses something ineffable, the student of mysticism is

² Mrs. G. Ripley, *Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*, preface by Isaac Hecker (New York: Christian Press Association Publishing Company, 1896), 14-15.

³ Bernard McGinn, "Introduction" in *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), xvi.

apt to have to acknowledge, eventually, that mysticism is best defined by a mystic."⁴ Catherine De Hueck Doherty, when discussing Catherine of Genoa in the preface to Serge Hughes's translation of *Purgation and Purgatory* and *The Spiritual Dialogue*, provides a definition of a mystic from the saint herself: "a mystic is simply a man or woman in love with God"⁵ who has taken the commandment of Christ to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15.12) and made God's law of love a part of their being.⁶ If we accept this definition, we can appreciate why Donald Christopher Nugent has called Catherine the "model mystic."⁷

An almost unending discussion, however, concerning "mysticism," what it means to be a mystic, and the nature of love could be undertaken. Therefore, when discussing Catherine's understanding of love we should realize that hers is not "a spirituality of love, but of pure love."⁸ *The Spiritual Dialogue* reaffirms the spirituality of pure love:

A ray of God's love wounded her heart, making her soul experience a flaming love arising from the divine fount. At that instant, she was outside of herself, beyond intellect, tongue, or feeling. Fixed in that pure and divine love, henceforth she never ceased to dwell on it.⁹

The essential principle in her understanding of pure love is that it is not only the fundamental characteristic of the divine, but that the divine and pure love are

⁴ Donald Christopher Nugent "Saint Catherine of Genoa: Mystic of Pure Love" in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (London: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 67.

⁵ Catherine De Hueck Doherty, "Preface," in *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), xiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁷ Nugent, 67.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹ Catherine of Genoa, *The Spiritual Dialogue*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 109.

interchangeable terms since God is Pure Love. As recorded by Ettore Vernereza in the *Life*, Catherine herself said: "I seem to see how that immovable mind of St. Paul extended much further than he was able to express in words; since Pure Love is God Himself; who then shall be able to separate Him from Himself?"; "the Divine love is the very God, infused by His own immense Goodness into our hearts"; "Love is God Himself"; and, "Pure Love is no other than God."¹⁰

Furthermore, the *Life* tells us that Catherine understood divine love through the teachings presented in the Letters and Gospel of St. John.¹¹ Thus, she would have appreciated and understood the following Johannine description concerning divine love: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4.7-8). Bruno Borchert elaborates on the interpretation of such Johannine texts during the Middle Ages:

Seen from our human standpoint, God is the same as "love." God longs for our love in response to His. This response is love that is from God, human love that is directed toward the innermost part of the soul, the ground existence from which love flows. The Lover lives in the deepest innermost part, awakens love there, and waits there from the person who, inflamed by love, desires to be united with Him. There, too, one learns to know God. This love is the eye of the soul.¹²

Catherine, inflamed with the divine, focuses on pure love more tenaciously than she did on the divine when she received the gift of prayer during childhood. Eventually, all her

¹⁰ *Life*, pp. 15c; 67c; 16a-9b; 53b; Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion: As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2 vols., (London: James Clarke and Company Limited, 1961), vol. 1, 265.

¹¹ *Life*, 10.

¹² Bruno Borchert, *Mysticism: Its History and Challenge* (York Beach ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1994), 200.

subsequent theological teachings and charitable actions originate from the transcendental and experiential knowledge she received in Pure Love,¹³ and, therefore, Pure Love becomes the most important theme and theological doctrine within her life and teachings.¹⁴ It weaves itself, like a golden thread, through all her life and thought, and "like a golden thread, the doctrine of Pure Love runs through the history of spirituality."¹⁵ Von Hügel goes even so far as to say that in theological matters, "she is completely penetrated by the great doctrine more explicit in St. John even than in St. Paul, that 'God is Love'."¹⁶

Benedict Groeschel unintentionally reaffirmed the prominence of the doctrine of Pure Love when he said, "the profound Augustinian-Platonic vision of God is the bedrock of Catherine's experience."¹⁷ Catherine was said to describe God as Light, Fire, Love, Peace, and an Ocean of Reality; for example, "Love, I want Thee, the whole of Thee"; "Peace; that peace which no man finds, who departs from Him"; "I am so placed and submerged in His immense love, that I seem as though immersed in the sea, and nowhere able to touch, see or feel aught but water."¹⁸ She also described God as the Living Fountain of Goodness, which is indistinguishable from the Augustinian image mentioned

¹³ Borchert traces the growth of "love" as a central theme in Christian mysticism as a theme that "grew out of the spirit of 'longing' cultivated in the cloisters before the 11th century," which then gained more credence during the twelfth century. He provides specific mention to the influence from the Cistercians, the Carthusians, and the School of Saint-Victor (Borchert, 200).

¹⁴ Gabriella Zarri, "Religious and Devotional Writing (1400-1600)," in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy: Selected Article*, translated by Margery J. Schneider, edited by Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 254.

¹⁵ Groeschel, 43.

¹⁶ Von Hügel, vol. 2, 84. For additional information regarding New Testament teaching on Pure Love, see von Hügel, vol. 2, 153-160.

¹⁷ Groeschel, 27.

¹⁸ These quotes have been taken from Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (New York: Schocken, 1964), 166.

in the *Confessions*.¹⁹ Following the teachings of Augustine, she understood that God could be equated with the Platonic and Neo-Platonic notion that the highest of all the forms in the universe is the idea of the Good.²⁰

It has also been said that much of Catherine's teaching on the divine is derived non-specifically from the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite²¹ and specifically from Jacopone da Todi,²² who himself was similarly influenced by Platonic, Augustinian, and Dionysian writings.²³ It is probable that she developed such knowledge through her intimate connections with members of the Augustinian Order and Franciscan Tertiaries.²⁴ Although Catherine does not always make specific reference to these sources, her clear knowledge of Platonic and Neo-Platonic terms and ideas is often and easily observed. Her use of abstract language, rather than personal language, confirms that her understanding of God as Pure Love – which she understands as the highest of all forms and expressions of things eternal, transcendent, and divine – is the fundamental expression of her Augustinian-Platonic vision of God.

So prominent is Augustinian-Platonic and Pseudo-Dionysian thought in Catherine's teachings, that Evelyn Underhill remarked, "St. Catherine of Genoa stands almost alone among the great Catholic women mystics, on account of the naturally Platonic bent of her mind."²⁵ Moreover, like Augustine, Catherine's "mysticism" should be viewed as more theistic than specifically Christian because her "mysticism" does not

¹⁹ Augustine called God the Living Fountain of Goodness in his *Confessions* IX, 10; (Groeschel, 27).

²⁰ Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church*, 166.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² For example, see *Life*, 25.

²³ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), 461.

²⁴ Groeschel, 27.

²⁵ Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church*, 166.

demonstrate notions of "Bridal mysticism"²⁶ nor "Christ-centered mysticism,"²⁷ but is rather "God-centred mysticism" because the divine is the centre of her devotion and is essential to humanity.²⁸ However, since Ray C. Petry argues that "Catherine's mystical doctrine finds its center in love,"²⁹ and Donald Nugent labels her as a "mystic of pure love,"³⁰ we may rightly understand and label her "mysticism" as "Pure Love-centred mysticism."

If we understand Catherine's concept of the divine and transcendent as "Pure Love-centred mysticism," we can see how she encouraged a balanced approach between the metaphysical understanding of the divine as an objective Reality and the highly individualized spiritual presence of the divine that is known in the Judeo-Christian tradition. An example of her balanced approach with "Pure Love-centred mysticism" is in her dual understanding of creation as an overflow of Goodness and Creative Love. Although von Hügel demonstrates that in the *Life* creation was understood as an overflow of Goodness,³¹ creation was also understood to emanate from Pure Love. As indicated in *The Spiritual Dialogue*: "God shows the creature that Pure Love in which He created it, the same love that brought into being the angels and Adam, a pure and intense love with

²⁶ As Nugent noted, "she cannot readily be characterized as a 'bridal mystic' (*Brautmystik*), the tradition descended from the Song of Songs, rich in loving devotion and replete with bridal imagery" (Nugent, 69). Moreover, von Hügel reaffirms that God nowhere appears as Bridegroom of the soul in her teachings (von Hügel, vol. 1, 229).

²⁷ Christ does have an important, but indirect role in her "mysticism", which will be discussed in the following chapters. However, her "mysticism" is not considered Christ-centered because there are no specific references to Christ in *Purgation and Purgatory*. While there are a few mentions of Christ in the *Life* and *The Spiritual Dialogue*, there are only two instances in which Catherine had "visions" of Him. Hence, Christ is not the predominant theme in her "mysticism".

²⁸ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 119.

²⁹ Ray Petry, *Late Medieval Mysticism*, The Library of Christian Classics vol. XIII, general editors John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), 393.

³⁰ Nugent labels Catherine of Genoa as the "mystic of pure love" in the title of his article (Nugent, 67).

³¹ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 260-261.

which He wished to be loved."³² Hence, creation can also be considered an overflowing of Pure Love, which demonstrates the Pseudo-Dionysian idea that creation is caused by an overflowing of love that is at once an act of love and an act of creative love because the divine is the source and origin of love. In other words, God Himself is the generator of love within God, which causes creation out of love, and, consequently, constitutes love in other beings as an image and likeness of Himself.³³

Understanding the universe's origins to be both an act of love (emanation) and an act of creative love (creation), we have unwittingly revealed certain and distinct characteristics of the nature of Pure Love, which is that Pure Love must be disinterested and reciprocal love. As Nugent noted, "pure love is love for love's sake (i.e. God's) sake. Pure love is purified of self-interest, including the dread of hell."³⁴ Therefore, Pure Love does not love for any reason other than to fulfill its own nature; Pure Love does not love for selfish reasons, Pure Love loves because it *is* Pure Love. As Catherine straightforwardly says, "Pure Love loves God without any for."³⁵ Hence, Pure Love not wanting to be selfish, overflows with pure love and instills that pure love into others; and, when others are filled with Pure Love, their pure love will not want to be selfish either and once again, being disinterested, will overflow, which means Pure Love's nature is also reciprocal love and will spontaneously be directed back towards Pure Love. The *Life* expands this thought:

³² *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 108.

³³ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1936), 275.

³⁴ Donald Christopher Nugent, *Mysticism, Death, and Dying* (New York: State of University of New York Press, 1994), 92.

³⁵ *Life*, p. 109a; von Hügel, vol. 1, 268.

He [God] did not put Himself in motion for any other reason than His pure love alone, and hence, in the same way as Love itself, for the welfare of the loved soul, does not fail in the accomplishment of anything, so also must the love of the loved soul return to her Lover, with those same forms and modes with which it comes from Him.³⁶

Like Augustine, Catherine's use of Platonic and Neo-Platonic expressions have been tempered with what Groeschel described as "a highly personalized development of a central New Testament theme in the Johannine and Pauline writings,"³⁷ which encouraged a filial imitation of God's Pure Love; God's wish that we should love Him with the love that created us goes beyond the initial impersonal actions of a transcendent deity. As Catherine understood, "He loves us and will not ever leave off doing us good. He does so in so many ways that the creature may well ask: Who am I that God has no concern but me?"³⁸ Hence, the emphasis upon this divine motive of creation provides further indication of an individualized and intimate relationship with the divine in our intended participation with Pure Love, God Himself.³⁹

Moreover, this divine motive of creation is a demonstration of humankind's original and unconditioned self-love, that is, humankind's true nature or true self. As the *Life* exclaims: "... the love of God is our true self-love, the love characteristic of, and directed to our true selves, since these selves of ours were created by and for Love Itself."⁴⁰ In other words, when we pursue human love and happiness, we find that true self-love and manifestations of that true self-love are found in the divine, for "the cause of

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61a; *ibid.*, 62.

³⁷ Groeschel, 28.

³⁸ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 108.

³⁹ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 261.

⁴⁰ *Life*, 76c; von Hügel, vol. 1, 262.

our love of God is God, for in creating us He created our love."⁴¹ As Catherine affirmed, "the proper center of everyone is God Himself"; "My Being is God, not by some simple participation but by a true transformation of my Being."⁴² Groeschel noted that Catherine's identification with this inner image as true self being equated with God was an equivalent psychological notion.⁴³ Once again, Catherine's introverted and individualistic "mysticism" demonstrates the marked influence of Augustinian thought, especially teachings derived from the *Confessions*⁴⁴ and *De Trinitate*.⁴⁵ A general discussion of "Augustinian mysticism," therefore, will not only provide comparison and reference, but a more detailed understanding of Catherine's own mystical theology.⁴⁶

Catherine's "Mystical Conversion": The Influence of Augustine

What we must first understand about "Augustinian mysticism" is that Augustine teaches that humankind participates in God. However, he does not hold onto the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation, but rather he accepts the biblical notions of creation.

⁴¹ Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, 274.

⁴² *Life*, 36b; von Hügel, vol. 1, 265.

⁴³ Groeschel, 31.

⁴⁴ Source used for this discussion: Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

⁴⁵ *De Trinitate* is in the *Bibliothèque Augustinienne* (vol. 15 edited by M. Mellet and Th. Camelot, vol. 16 by P. Agaësse and J. Moingt, Paris 1955). In English, J. Burnaby's *Augustine: Later Writings, Library of Christian Classics VIII* (SCM Press, 1955), which includes Books VIII - X, XIV, and XV has been consulted. In addition, Stephen McKenna's *Augustine: On the Trinity*, edited by Gareth B. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), which includes Books VIII - XV has been consulted.

⁴⁶ The question as to whether Augustine's spirituality is a form of "mysticism", "mystical theology", or even if he should be called a "mystic" is not of our concern. Much debate has occurred over this question with H. Meyer and Dean Inge leaning against the classification of "Augustinian mysticism", while others like C. Butler have been proponents calling him "Prince of Mystics" (C. Butler, *Western Mysticism*. London: Constable and Company 1967, 20) and Rufus Jones calling him "the real father of Catholic mysticism" (Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*. London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1909, 87). For additional information regarding this question, see A. Mandouze, "Où en est la question de la mystique augustinienne?," in *Augustinus Magister* 3 (1954): 104-164.

Understanding that humankind has been created by the divine, humankind will demonstrate characteristics of the divine nature, but that nature is only in image and likeness. This notion of humanity, termed *imago Dei*, was first described in Augustine's *Confessions* and said to be realized at the moment of his mystical conversion, when he discovered that the *imago Dei* existed all along in the human *mens* (mind).⁴⁷ Based on scripture,⁴⁸ Augustine's concept of *imago Dei* was a common theme in the theological anthropological studies of the patristic period and continued to hold prominence in the Middle Ages.⁴⁹ Catherine follows the Augustinian teaching that we are made in image and likeness, but with one significant exception. She interprets and expresses the Augustinian concept of the *imago Dei* as pure love, a concept that she also acquired at the moment of conversion.

While Catherine's *imago Dei* was a singular image and a product of her "Pure Love-centred mysticism," Augustine would reinterpret his understanding and expression of the *imago Dei* by no longer describing it in such singular terms; Augustine's *imago Dei* would become a trinitarian image and product of his "trinitarian mysticism,"⁵⁰ which was developed along with his most important accomplishment in speculative theology, *De*

⁴⁷ Inevitably, an examination concerning the *imago Dei* must discuss the notion of humankind's participation in True Being, which Augustine understood as God. Further discussion about the Augustinian notions on creation, participation, and being are to be found in most introductions on Augustine. See J. F. Anderson's *St. Augustine and Being* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1965) for more detailed information concerning these philosophical and theological issues.

⁴⁸ Quoted from the Book of Genesis: "God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1.26-27 The New Oxford Annotated Bible NRSV with the Apocrypha).

⁴⁹ Following McGinn, even though Augustine's discussion concerning this important concept is noted as second to none (see McGinn's note 76 in *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 413-414), a complete examination of all the implications of his *imago Dei* mystical theology will not be taken under the current scope of this study.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

Trinitate – a monumental work that uses an innovative synthesis of philosophical and theological principles that result in a truly unique study of the nature of the divine.⁵¹

McGinn reaffirms, “while the early works tend to speak of human nature conceived of as *imago Dei* in a general sense, Augustine’s concern in *The Trinity* [*De Trinitate*] is to investigate the way in which the human is the *imago trinitatis*, the image that participates in the inner life of the three Persons.”⁵² Hence, in the first seven books, Augustine establishes trinitarian theological notions about the divine and in the succeeding eight books he develops his most innovative contribution describing the soul’s ascent to God.⁵³ Accordingly, Augustine reinterprets the *imago Dei* and logically states that since the divine nature is trinitarian,⁵⁴ humankind must exhibit a trinitarian nature in image and likeness; more precisely, he finds God as Trinity and the *imago Trinitatis*⁵⁵ in

⁵¹ In *De Trinitate*, Augustine does not follow Platonic and Neo-Platonic exercises that help subdue the restless nature of the soul; instead, he changes the context of his search for the divine by looking for answers within the theological constructs of the Christian tradition. Consequently, he attempts to establish from biblical credentials what constitutes the nature of the divine and comes to understand that Plato’s divine Goodness is also the God of the Christian tradition who has revealed Himself in Scripture and the Church as Trinity (Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Demys*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, 146).

⁵² McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 244.

⁵³ Gareth B. Matthews provides a more detailed summary of *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate*): “Books I through 4 are primarily an exercise in biblical exegesis aimed at showing that this doctrine [Doctrine of the Trinity] is indeed to be found in the Bible. The next three books, 5 through 7, develop the metaphysical and epistemological distinctions Augustine thinks he needs to discuss the Divine Trinity. Then comes what is philosophically the most exciting part of the work, the last half. It is in that part, Books 8 through 15, that Augustine develops his remarkably original thoughts on the human mind” (Gareth B. Matthews, “Introduction,” in *Augustine: On the Trinity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, ix).

⁵⁴ Although Augustine conceives God as Being, his understanding of Trinity is much different from Platonic and Neo-Platonic notions concerning the nature of Trinity. As Gilson says in “Augustine’s Trinity, there is equality of the three persons, and unity in essence, that is in being. A theology of the One differs on every point from a theology of Being: a doctrine where the first three universal causes do not share in the same being (*ousia*), is in every respect other than a doctrine where the three divine persons are one single being, one single God” (Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1955, 70).

⁵⁵ The *imago Trinitatis* is a more specific concept of the *imago Dei*, which is the term most often used. Nevertheless, Augustine does use the term *imago Trinitatis* sporadically. As Bell has noted, for examples of the term *imago Trinitatis*, see *De Trinitate*, 15, 39; PL 42: 1088 and *Sermon* 52, 17; PL 38: 361 (D. N.

humankind's spiritual mind or rational soul.⁵⁶ It is in the soul's ascent towards the divine and journey through various trinitarian images that he developed what has been described as "trinitarian mysticism," and his journey began with a discussion of how humankind has been made in the image and likeness of God.⁵⁷

It should be noted that Catherine's mystical theology is not an explicit form of "trinitarian mysticism"; rather, any indication that she gives of "trinitarian mysticism" is implicit in comparison. While she does not describe the divine in trinitarian terms, she does not, of course, deny God as Trinity. What we must appreciate is her understanding of the divine in holistic terms: she sees the divine everywhere,⁵⁸ and her mysticism demonstrates a "rare thirst" and "imperious need for unification,"⁵⁹ which requires her to commit her soul wholly to God.⁶⁰ However, Catherine does acknowledge that the self or soul can be understood in trinitarian terms, commenting on the soul in terms of the Augustinian triad of intellect, memory, and will – she just desires to go beyond the joy of this spiritual understanding.⁶¹ In addition, she understands that the soul's intended journey is founded in the triple progression through the material world, purgatory, and into heaven. Moreover, even though her theological discourses do not extrapolate trinitarian

Bell, *The Image and Likeness: The Augustinian Spirituality of William of St. Thierry*. Cistercian Studies Series: Number Seventy-Eight. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1984, 37). McGinn argues that the basis of Augustine's "trinitarian mysticism" is found in this re-interpretative discussion of the *imago Dei* in *De Trinitate* (McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 228-262).

⁵⁶ Augustine considers the rational soul to be the full or true part of the soul because he believes "fully rational knowledge is true knowledge" (Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 76).

⁵⁷ It has been noted that books VIII - XV of *De Trinitate* are especially important for the development of Augustine's mystical thought because those books begin to discuss the soul's ascent towards the divine (McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 229).

⁵⁸ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 231

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁶⁰ Stewart, 114.

⁶¹ In the *Life*, Catherine references Augustine's trinitarian understanding of the soul (*Life*, 23-24); she also makes reference to it in her purgatorial doctrine (*Purgation and Purgatory*, 85).

images, her progressive journey in life towards the divine is described, realized, and manifested in tripartite terms. As will be seen in the next chapter, Catherine demonstrates a triadic scheme in the mystical path and acknowledges humankind's participation in each of the three Persons of the Trinity.

As well, we will see later that Catherine's "Pure Love-centred mysticism" echoes the same two-fold concern found in Augustine's "trinitarian mysticism": both mystical expressions are concerned, first with humankind's search for the true image of our true self and second, with the subsequent return or ascent of that self to God.⁶² What is more, Augustine's concern was with understanding the true nature of humankind through the doctrine of Trinity, rather than illustrating the doctrine of Trinity through his understanding of humankind.⁶³ Similarly, Catherine concerns herself with understanding her true nature (which is the same for all humankind) and through this understanding illustrated characteristics of God – which is a byproduct of the process of understanding our nature since we are made in His image and likeness.

While Augustine finds the answer to his concerns in his participatory understanding of the Trinity, Catherine, we will see later, finds the answer to her concerns in her participatory understanding of Pure Love: the instinctive search for her true image or self is done in pure love and from Pure Love; her true image or self is pure love and of Pure Love; the process of the return of that image or self is done with pure love and in Pure Love; and, consequently, understanding our image or self as pure love will reveal something about God as Love. Paraphrased, Catherine's universe and journey begins in

⁶² Louth, 146.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 148.

Pure Love and ends in Pure Love. Augustine, on the other hand, teaches that humankind's search begins in love and will find its end in the spiritual mind or rational soul with heartfelt contemplation on the divine image of the Trinity.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, both agree that because the rational soul has a remote and corresponding relationship with the divine, we inherently have a beginning point and ending point for the soul's journey towards deification.

This intrinsic and interconnected notion of deification is derived from Augustine's later teaching on the relationship between the soul and the divine, when he discovers that humankind's divine image is a trinitarian image, and, moreover an image understood as "the memory, understanding, and will converted to God the Father in the light of the Word and under the influence of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁵ As mentioned, Catherine's life and teachings acknowledge such an image, but it is not the prevailing image. Instead of focusing on the interconnected nature or wholeness of God as Trinity, she focuses on the wholeness of God as Pure Love. In Catherine's opinion, her image goes beyond Augustine's trinitarian image because her image suggests divine equality and encapsulates the interconnected nature or of the divine; and, paradoxically, it is above his image because hers has been stripped down into a simpler image, and, therefore, a purer image - as there is less chance of any unintentional bodily or spiritual pleasure being taken and impeding or misleading humankind's sinfully tarnished mind or soul from its own perfection.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁶⁵ Mary T. Clark, "Introduction" in *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 8.

⁶⁶ Catherine of Genoa, *Purgation and Purgatory*; translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press,

All the same, we will eventually observe and understand that Catherine's life and teachings were undoubtedly affected by the following Augustinian conclusion: humankind's ability for deification requires the entire Trinity. As Mary T. Clark has noted, for Augustine:

To free man for loving God there came one who humbled Himself and became obedient even unto death. Just as creation was a Trinitarian act, so was conversion or salvation. "It is only from God the Father, through Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, that men have the love of God through which they come to God." [Augustine, *Against Julian*, IV.3.33.] That is why mature freedom cannot be gained without Christ, who as Mediator, reorients man to God. The Father "draws" man to Him by showing Christ His Son, Wisdom Incarnate, the generous healer of souls, the Truth that makes man free. The more conscious the person becomes that Christ is Incarnate Love, the more spontaneously the will responds to His attraction.⁶⁷

Augustine's conclusion requires an understanding of the equality of the Trinity. His conclusion eventually gets rid of any subordinationist views that the human soul is only created *ad imaginem Dei* (the soul created according to the image of God), which was the accepted teaching according to Greek theology, Ambrose, and early Augustine.⁶⁸ He comes to understand that the Word of God is not the image of God, but rather the human soul, which was created in Trinity. As Louth states:

That is why in Genesis God says, 'Let us make man after *our* image, in *our* likeness.' The reason why Scripture speaks of man being created *after* the image

1979), 85.

⁶⁷ Clark, 31.

⁶⁸ These conclusions were made with a marked interpretation of Scripture: for example, Augustine argues that even though the Apostle Paul taught that the soul was made to the image of the Son of God and actualized in Him, we must not forget that reference to Jesus Christ is also a reference to the Trinity. As Christ has said: "I and the Father are one"; and the Spirit sent by Christ at His Ascension was spoken of as "My Spirit" (*ibid.*, 12).

is not because man is not actually the image of God (as earlier theology had argued) but because man is not a perfect, or equal, image of God.⁶⁹

Augustine's primary purpose, then, is to describe how the whole Trinity is needed in the restoration of humankind's trinitarian image, which, he teaches, is realized within humankind's divine capacity as *capax Dei*.⁷⁰ He logically deduces, then, that humankind's burgeoning potential for the divine is realized in a gradual process, which occurs in a trinitarian movement towards the divine. Appropriately, we will find that all these Augustinian ideas – the need for the whole of the divine, the human soul created in image and likeness from the divine and the gradual trinitarian movement of the soul towards God in divine restoration – are to be found in Catherine's purgatorial teachings.

In addition, Augustine and Catherine demonstrate further congruent notions as both teach that humankind's deification or *capax Dei* will be realized in the *imago Dei* that existed before the Fall. Augustine's desire is to restore the true image of humankind; he wants to attain the undefiled version of our innate spiritual mind or rational soul in memory, understanding, and will.⁷¹ Here Augustine is making a distinction between the modes of understanding the divine in the *mens* (mind or soul): there is *sapientia* (spiritual wisdom / superior reason), which is purely preoccupied with the transcendent, eternal, and divine reality and is in complete contemplation with that reality; and there is *scientia* (material knowledge / inferior reason), which is chiefly concerned with the material and

⁶⁹ Louth, 146.

⁷⁰ Humankind has an innate participatory connection with God, but it must be actualized by divine grace and free-will (*De Trinitate* 14.11; PL 42: 1044); Matthews, 153.

⁷¹ Augustine speaks so often about the restoration of the *imago Dei* and *imago Trinitatis* throughout his works that Agostino Trapé has concluded that the "essential task of Augustinian spirituality is the restoration of the image of God in man." (Agostino Trapé, "VI. Saint Augustine," in Joannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 4 volumes, Westminster: Christian Classics, 1983-1986), vol. 4, 454.

corruptible world that humankind perceives through the senses, and, therefore, knowledge of its egotistical actions within the finite and external reality.⁷² What Augustine wants to substantiate is our *sapientia* knowledge and understanding of *imago Dei*, rather than our *scientia* knowledge, which was a corrupted knowledge produced from our sinful Fall.

Andrew Louth explains:

As a result of the Fall the soul has turned from eternal trust to involvement in corporeal realities. But the Fall is manifested not simply in involvement in the senses, but in what the senses provide much opportunity for: selfish, or private, involvement in the senses. The world we perceive through the senses is, inevitably, a world perceived from our own point of view. That can be an indifferent fact, but it can become a principle of action, so that everything in the world is referred back to ourselves: 'the soul loving its own power, slips from what is universal and common to what is private and partial.' This is, in fact, the beginning of pride, *superbia*, the root of sin. Augustine therefore interprets the account of the Fall in Genesis by saying that the serpent's achievement was to persuade the woman to grasp a personal and private good, rather than the common and public good which is unchangeable.⁷³

As a consequence, original sin creates a new distorted image of our human nature or false self that has a trinitarian nature as well; because of pride, there is the selfish-mind (material mind or ego), self-knowledge, and self-love.⁷⁴ A parallel of this teaching is seen when Catherine laments the effects of humankind's selfish pride in the *Life*:

But let us consider more attentively this matter namely this human blindness which takes white for black and holds pride for humility and humility for pride, and from which springs the perverse judgment which is the cause of all

⁷² As taken from D. Bell: "In Augustine, the classical distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* is to be found in *De Trin.* 12, 25; PL 42: 1012: '... ut ad sapientiam pertineat aeternarum rerum cognitio intellectualis; ad scientiam vero, temporalium rerum cognitio rationalis'. For discussion, see Gilson, *Introduction* 149-163, Schmaus, *Trinitätslehre* 285-291, and most writers on Augustine's theology" (Bell, *The Image and Likeness*, 38).

⁷³ Louth, 153.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 150-151.

confusion. Let us see what pride may be. I say, according to what I see with the interior eye, *pride* is nothing else but *an elevation of the mind to things which surpass man and are above his dignity*, and whenever man abandons that which is, and which knows, and which is powerful, for that which in truth has neither existence, knowledge, nor power, this is not pride.

This degrades him, and it generates that pride accompanied by presumption, self-esteem, and arrogance which occasions so many sins against charity for the neighbor; for man believes himself to be such as he appears in his disordered mind which is so full of miseries. Therefore God says to this proud man: If thou seekest, according to the nature of the created soul, for such great things as seem at present to be good and for that happiness which belongs to earth, know that they are not, they cannot satisfy nor afford contentment seek rather in heaven, where pride is lawful, and where it is not placed in things empty and vain, but in those which are really great, which always remain and which cause a sinless pride; but if thou seekest after worthless things thou shalt never find them and shalt lost those which thou shouldst have sought.

If man's eyes were pure, he would see clearly that things which pass away so quickly as do those which in this world are esteemed beautiful, good, and useful, could not truly be said to be so, such words being suitable only for things which have no end. Hence, man, if he prides himself upon temporal things, becomes unable to attain those that are celestial and eternal, degenerates into a vile and humble creature whose greatness is lost and who is degraded to the condition of the things he has always sought.⁷⁵

Original sin, then, has infected our nature; the spiritual mind has been given a disingenuous understanding of the divine nature and its own nature, and, therefore, can no longer conform to the will of God. Catherine reaffirms these teachings in *Purgation and Purgatory*:

The source of all suffering is sin, either original or actual. The soul in its creation is pure and simple, free from all stain, and endowed with a certain instinct for God. Original sin weakens that instinct. Once actual sin weighs down the soul still more, the distance between the soul and God becomes greater yet; and it increases still more as the soul, moving further away from Him, becomes evil.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Life*, 25.

⁷⁶ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 73.

The disharmony between God's will and human will, then, is what causes the soul much suffering and is the sin of self-love and selfishness. Our selfish pride and individual acts of selfishness have distorted our *imago Dei* and made us depart from our original and intended purpose, which is to follow the divine will. As Catherine would understand, humankind has fallen away from the pure love that was established in its innate and true nature and Pure Love itself. Hence, the soul experiences deep anguish when it eventually perceives its own selfish nature that is in opposition to its innate image and likeness and the beloved divine, and even more so when the soul (blessed in pure love) realizes there are other souls who do not even know that they are in a condition of sin, suffering, and possible eternal damnation.⁷⁷

Catherine, like Augustine, believes in a divine grace, which has blessed humankind through an innately implanted desire or instinct for God. As Catherine said, "Joy in God, oneness with Him, is the end of these souls, an instinct implanted in them at their creation."⁷⁸ In other words, even though humankind has been tarnished in original and actual sin, we still have the latent potential for deification and an innate divine instinct because humankind was created *capax Dei* and in *imago Dei*. Mary Clark says that "because man was made by God as a capacity for God there is in him an unthematized basic knowledge, an unconscious force that activates the psychic longings of man until he raises this knowledge to consciousness. Not by its own light but by a

⁷⁷ Underhill, *Mystics of the Church*, 166.

⁷⁸ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 76.

participation in the highest light is the soul wise."⁷⁹ This Augustinian teaching is reaffirmed in Catherine's *Purgation and Purgatory*:

In its creation the soul was endowed with all the means necessary for coming to its perfection, for living as it ought to, for not contaminating itself by sin. Once sullied by sin, original or actual, it loses those gifts and dies. It can be brought back to life only by God.⁸⁰

Humankind cannot realize this true knowledge fully since our vision has been distorted in our sinful selfishness. Catherine said, "O wretched state of man, and all the more so since willful blindness will not recognize it!"⁸¹ But even though this true knowledge may be very mistaken, it will never disappear from our mind completely because in Augustinian thought, the mind is always present to itself.⁸² Catherine understood that pure love is always present to itself as well, and, therefore, pure love's own innate nature is what activates our divine instinct:

God illumines us with that love which has no need of us and which sustains us even though many of us, considering our inclination to evil, may rightfully be considered his enemies. Our sins, as long as we are in this world, do not ever make Him so wrathful what He ceases to do us good. Indeed, the more distance our sins put between us and God, the more insistent His call to us not to turn our backs on Him ... In this life, but not in its aftermath, that flaming love never ceases, no matter what the sins of man ... In this world, the rays of God's love, unbeknownst to man, encircle man all about, hungrily seeking to penetrate him.⁸³

No matter how far humankind has fallen away from the divine, humankind will still be able to feel this pull from the divine because the divine wants us to seek Him. As

⁷⁹ Clark, 19.

⁸⁰ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 80.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸² Louth, 151.

⁸³ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 108-109.

Catherine understood it, God has thrown a "rope of His pure love" of which "an end was thrown to her from heaven" and has lassoed humankind in pure love in an effort to tug humankind towards the divine in pure love.⁸⁴ Hence, in using these examples, she is also indicating her belief in "the Augustinians emphasis on the activity of God."⁸⁵

Although Christian spirituality teaches that the spiritual life is a balance between free-will and divine grace, the greater dependence is upon the grace of God. Anthony Kenny explains the need for this grace in his study of the God of Augustine:

Human freedom operated unhindered before the Fall: that is one reason for the gravity of Adam's sin. But when Adam fell, his sin brought with it not only liability to death, disease, and pain, but in addition massive moral debilitation. We children of Adam inherit not only mortality but also sinfulness. Corrupt humans tainted with original sin have no freedom to live well without help: each temptation, as it comes, we may be free to resist, but our resistance cannot be prolonged from day to day. We need God's grace not only to gain heaven but to avoid a life of continual sin (DCG 7).⁸⁶

Furthermore, Augustinian thought stresses the necessity of divine grace because humankind - as we discussed - has been gravely weakened in its ability to *understand* and *will* because of the Fall.⁸⁷ Catherine concurs: "whenever God can do so, he attracts the free-will of man by sweet allurements, and afterwards disposes it in such a manner that all

⁸⁴ *Life*, pp. 47c, 48a; von Hügel, vol. 12, 92. Von Hügel discusses this divine Chain or Rope under the sub-heading "symbols of God's action" where he describes how this symbol is linked with Pseudo-Dionysius, Platonic, and Neo-Platonic thought (*ibid.*, 92-93).

⁸⁵ Adolar Zunkeller, "The Spirituality of the Augustinians," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, edited by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 65.

⁸⁶ Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 282.

⁸⁷ Zunkeller, 66.

things may conduce to the annihilation of man's proper being,"⁸⁸ which then enables humankind to realize that the true end and being is in God.⁸⁹

Notwithstanding, God has created us with free-will and must preserve that free-will, and humankind must respond to Pure Love and use the divine gift of free-will before the final moment of death:

The passage from life determines the soul, in good or in evil, according to the nature of its will, for it is written, "Ubi te invenero"; that is, at the moment of death, with a sin-asserting will or a remorseful one. There is no remission of this judgment, for the freedom of the will is no longer reversible after death. It is fixed at that point.⁹⁰

How do we change our will before death? Catherine's answer is most probably derived from traditional Augustinian thought. As mentioned, Pure Love (God) instills and stirs that divine instinct within humankind, and, thereafter, humankind in pure love and with free-will must choose God, who then activates in pure love our true knowledge and allows us to co-operate or enslave our selfish-will and exclusively contemplate Him.⁹¹

Augustine teaches the possibility of exclusive contemplation, but he argues that such a formidable and transcendent undertaking can only be accomplished in a specific mental faculty: the memory or *memoria*. As Andrew Louth says:

Memory - *memoria* - is that into which Augustine enters. It means for him more than just a faculty of recollection: it really means the whole mind, both conscious and unconscious, in contrast to mind - *mens* - which refers only to the conscious mind ... The whole universe is embraced by his memory ... Memory, for Augustine, is the whole mind [*mens*, *notitia*, and *amor*; mind, knowledge, and

⁸⁸ *Life*, 25.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 74.

⁹¹ Louth, 153.

love] – it is potentially the whole spiritual world, for, to know anything is to have it in mind, to hold it in my memory.⁹²

It is in the *memoria* we discover God, which is actually the rediscovery of God.⁹³

Accordingly, when we have rediscovered and retrieved the image of the divine, we have rediscovered our true self in *memoria*.⁹⁴ At this juncture, humankind has reached the final step in the first stage of its ascent towards God: humankind has rediscovered the *imago Dei*, which was revealed in a mystical conversion as described in the *Confessions*. Augustine eventually reinterpreted his *imago Dei* in *De Trinitate* because, like the *Confessions*, this latter work is considered a retrospective hermeneutic discourse.⁹⁵ His reinterpretation, he claimed, was accomplished with additional divine illumination, which allowed him to find the true image of the divine in humankind within the rational soul as memory, understanding, and will: *imago Trinitatis*.

Catherine, in the first section of *The Spiritual Dialogue*, demonstrates a comparable individualistic and introspective account that leads to a mystical conversion and revelation of the *imago Dei*. As discussed, Catherine's theological discourses may be compared with Augustine's because she takes a similar psychological approach in her description of the divine and mystical experiences. Also, her mystical theology matches his mystical theology in hermeneutic principle: like Augustine, Catherine teaches about the divine's love for creation; about the soul's journey, which is returning to the divine;

⁹² *Ibid.*, 142.

⁹³ Speaking about the rediscovery of God, Denys Turner concludes, "in an important way Augustine held fast to the centrality of memory in the process of knowledge-acquisition, to the idea, on which the Platonic doctrine was based, that all knowing is a form of recognition" (Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 58).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

about how the true self can be found and remade in the divine; about how the false self is abolished and in a passive union a new person is called into being; and, similarly, how neither Augustine's nor Catherine's theological discourses are in any shape or fashion systematic analyse.⁹⁶

In summary, these mystical theologians diverge in feature, rather than kind. For example, Nugent has concluded that Catherine's conversion scene suggests her mystical theology is *affectus* and *intellectus*: "Love, is it possible that you have called me with such love and made me know in an instant that which language cannot express?"⁹⁷ Catherine's mystical theology appears, then, to stress that love holds prominence over illumination; Augustine, on the other hand, demonstrates the reverse notion in his mystical theology. As McGinn observed, "Given the importance of The Trinity in his mature thought, however, it is clear that is exploration of the *imago Trinitatis* in the human soul lays bare the ontological basis for that knowing and loving which leads to vision."⁹⁸ With an impressive understanding and utilization of trinitarian images, Augustine's approach should be acknowledged first as *intellectus* and then *affectus*, even though within his theological discourses the concept of love plays an important and fundamental role.

Interestingly, while Augustine's *intellectus* approach in mystical theology reveals numerous trinitarian images, Catherine's *affectus* approach in mystical theology reveals a wholly singular image:

⁹⁶ Serge Hughes, "Translation," in *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 47.

⁹⁷ *S. Caterina da Genova* (Genova: Presso Vita Francescana, 1954), vol. 2, 116; Nugent, 69.

⁹⁸ McGinn, 248.

I have always seen, and I am ever seeing more and more clearly, that there is no good except in God, and that all lesser goods which can be found are such only by participation; but pure and simple love cannot desire to receive from God anything, however good it may be, which is merely a good of participation, because God wishes it to be as pure, great, and simple as he is himself, and if the least thing were wanting to this perfection, love could not be contented, but would suffer as if in hell. And therefore I say that I cannot desire any created love, that is, love which can be felt, enjoyed, or understood. I do not wish love that can pass through the intellect, memory, or will; because pure love passes all these things and transcends them.⁹⁹

In mystical conversion, Catherine was illuminated to the *imago Dei*, but in her infused theological understanding she was not illuminated to the Augustinian *imago Trinitatis*; rather she realized what was above and beyond the trinitarian image and saw the holistic and singular nature of the Trinity as Pure Love. Therefore, we may conclude that God is Pure Love, our true self is pure love, and the succeeding process for humankind's restored image or deification is found in Pure Love. In other words, Purgatory, as we shall see, is Pure Love.

⁹⁹ *Life*, 23-24.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BEGINNING OF CATHERINE OF GENOA'S MYSTICAL PURGATORY

In the last chapter, we discussed how Catherine of Genoa's "second conversion" was a mystical conversion in Pure Love – with theological comparisons made to Augustine. In this chapter, we will again discuss some of those similarities observed in Catherine's and Augustine's mystical teaching, but this time to understand how her "second conversion" was the beginning of her succeeding mystical ascent in pure love, through purgatory. In addition, we will need to attempt some clarification about the conversion experience being "sudden," "perfect," and a moment of "death" in order to understand how the beginning of her "mystical purgatory" on earth commenced at the moment of her "second conversion."

The Sudden Beginning of Catherine's "Mystical Purgatory"

As recorded by Catherine of Genoa's biographers, in a "sudden moment" of mystical meditation, Catherine went above and beyond the mind and entered into God. Here, in divine contemplation and revelation, she was illuminated about the nature of Pure Love - a divine love that she believed had the power to transform her sinful self or soul into her divinely intended self or soul of absolute perfection. In other words, the account given in *Purgation and Purgatory* about the soul's journey towards complete

restoration and deification began in her actual life with her mystical "second conversion."¹

We will understand more clearly that the manifestation of *Purgation and Purgatory* in Catherine's life began with this conversion moment when we clarify and discuss a few notions concerning the nature of the conversion: first, when we discuss how the conversion experience was an unexpected and "sudden" moment, even though there was no desire for it; second, when we discuss how in her conversion experience she obtained a divine unification that imparted a "perfection," but still underwent a lifelong and arduous process of purification for union and perfection; and third, when we discuss how the conversion experience was an experience in death and, for Catherine, the beginning of a mystical purgatory.

Catherine's conversion scene has been described as an "all of a sudden" event, as if there were no expectations for the culmination of this event in a mystical union. However, when we keep in mind that the account was constructed by her hagiographers who presented her as a child of perfect devotion, we realize that the event was not "all of a sudden." To begin with, her childhood was filled with definite religious acts and dispositions that followed the traditional mystical path of purgation, illumination, and union. Hughes confirms these details when he elaborates about the remarkable religious and personal nature of the conversion narrative found in *The Spiritual Dialogue*:

Of the two dialogues, the first is the pearl. Again, though, the term "dialogue" is misleading. This is not a Renaissance humanist dialogue among Body, Soul, and

¹ Serge Hughes in his "Forward" describes the account of *Purgation and Purgatory* in similar terms (Serge Hughes, "Forward," in *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, xvi).

Self-Love in which reason and dialectic lead to impersonal conclusions. It is not a discussion of general philosophic import. An account of a critical turning point in the life of Catherine, the dialogue expresses the resolution of a long confusion that, beginning with a state of sin and indifference and progressing through a period of penitential and ascetical practices, culminates in joy. This section comes to its climax in a mediation on pure love, the theme of *Purgation and Purgatory*.²

Her penitential practices can be equated with purgation; her gift of prayer and ascetical actions would fall into the period of illumination; and the climax of pure love required that her transcendent and unitive experience be considered a revelation in Pure Love. Even more, before her conversion, she went through a period of severe depression that could be equated with the mystical period known as the "dark night of the soul."³

Von Hügel, arguing that her conversion was neither sudden nor visionary,⁴ puts forth a sensible consideration that the nature of the "suddenness" in her conversion is primarily a matter of temperament.⁵ Another, more probable explanation is the "suddenness" refers to the nature of the conversion itself.

According to Shelia Kaye-Smith, the ordeal of conversion is much like the ordeal of initiation experienced by the adherents of the old mystery religions; Catherine, like

² Serge Hughes, "Notes on the Translation" in *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory and The Spiritual Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 48.

³ The "dark night of the soul" is that desolate and often depressive period before mystical union and the most tormenting of all experiences that occur along the mystic path. As Underhill described it: "the consciousness which had, in Illumination, sunned itself in the sense of the Divine Presence, now suffers under an equally intense sense of the Divine Absence: learning to dissociate the personal satisfaction of mystical vision from the reality of mystical life. As in Purgation the senses were cleansed and humbled, and the energies and interests of the Self were concentrated upon transcendental things; so now the purifying process is extended to the very centre of I-hood, the will. The human instinct for personal happiness must be killed. This is the 'spiritual crucifixion' so often described by the mystics: the great desolation in which the soul seems abandoned by the Divine" (Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961], 170).

⁴ As mentioned, Catherine's conversion was an infused knowledge of Pure Love and was not a vision as she had in childhood of Christ Crucified.

⁵ For further information about the temperamental tendencies that could lead to the "suddenness" of her conversion, see Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion: As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2 vols. (London: James Clarke and Company Limited, 1961), vol. 2, 30.

these ancient adherents, was a good-living person who attended chapel and was “for want of a personal experience in which they obtain an individual assurance of salvation.”⁶ As has been noted, the sense of *mystikos* is linked with the mystical experience, and with this extra link, in conversion, we have the logical and consequential development of mystical conversion. Accordingly, with this sense of mystery in conversion, we have the tension between something hidden and revealed; there is a moment of insight, where in one moment we did not know and in the next moment we did know, which denotes a moment of sudden or dramatic change. Moreover, “suddenness” could indicate that transcendent and timeless moment of intersection between the infinite and finite time that is present within the mystical experience.⁷ In any case, Catherine’s journey towards her “second conversion” or “mystical conversion” was a long and arduous progression that was neither sudden nor visionary – as noted in the trials and tribulations of childhood before she was illuminated in divine union.

Purgatory’s Paradoxical Perfection

We now reach the well-documented conundrum concerning the mystical conversion itself: Catherine had obtained union and perfection, but having obtained that state or condition, still underwent a harsh cleansing process that was meant for the attainment of union and perfection. As Garvin noted, “Catherine’s biographers are at pains to create the impression that she became perfect from the moment of her

⁶ Shiela Kaye-Smith, *Quartet in Heaven* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press Incorporated, 1956), 10.

⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Place of Negative Theology,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, edited by Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 22.

conversion, while if ever there was a saint who achieved sainthood by unceasing effort and conquest of self, that saint was surely Catherine."⁸ Numerous scholars have tried to explain the paradox with various results. Flinders' explanation is that the mystical conundrum is just another one of the saint's "formidable paradoxes"; she just accepts the paradox as a part of the purgatorial process, explaining that purgatory is a paradox itself with "the co-existence in her experience of the most intense joy conceivable with the worst pain imaginable."⁹ As well, Frances R. Howe notes from a confessional standpoint that "she was all in one moment, yet she herself says that she was led on step by step,"¹⁰ and explains that the confusion is based upon both the nature of being a saint and the conversion: saints are examples for humankind and, when divinely inspired with grace and love, like Catherine, are kind enough then to go through these strenuous steps of purification – even when they are not personally required – for the benefit of humankind, in the hope that we might understand how to properly seek and follow the divine as well.¹¹

In a dual explanation, the erudite von Hügel tackles the views and truths concerning this conversion experience as well. Like Howe, von Hügel argues that the paradox is related to the nature of the conversion. Discussing the transcendent nature of the experience with reference to *time* and *being*, he says "such a moment is thus incapable of adequate analysis, in exact proportion as it is fully expressive of the depths of the

⁸ Paul Garvin, "Introduction" in *The Life and Sayings of Saint Catherine of Genoa* (New York: Alba House Publications, 1964), 13.

⁹ Carol Lee Flinders, *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco Publishers, 1993), 141.

¹⁰ Frances Howe, *The Saint of Genoa: Lessons from the Life of St. Catherine Flisca Durna* (Chicago: Union Catholic Publications, 1883), 91.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

personality and of its experience,"¹² and, therefore, we should accept that "such an experience is throughout as truly a work of pure grace, a gift, as it is a work of pure energy, an act."¹³ He believes that in an infinitesimal moment, Catherine did achieve perfection and union, which purified her and changed her from that point on, but that coming back down and living in the corruptible world, "she is not raised above the limitations and imperfections, the obscurities and conflicts, the failings and sins of humanity."¹⁴ Von Hügel's other argument is that the conversion scene has been excessively moralized by the zeal of one of the various writers who wrote the *Life* (either Ettore Vernezza or Cattaneo Marabotto), which left another writer (Battista Vernezza, whom he considered "the penultimate Redactor of the Life")¹⁵ to portray the rest of the saint's years as "one continuous widening and deepening and moving onwards of efforts, trails and pains, of achievements and ideals."¹⁶ Consequently, von Hügel proclaims, "it is clear that we must be careful to conceive this perfection as relative to her previous state or even to the final goodness of many saintly souls."¹⁷

Not rejecting these arguments, the paradoxical nature of the conversion scene may be better understood when we view the incident as a part of Catherine's overall mystical theology. As has been argued, the conversion scene is representative of the mystical theology presented in Augustine's *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*. Catherine, we have observed, followed the tripartite mystical path and arrived at her *imago Dei* (Pure Love)

¹² Von Hügel, vol 1., 106.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 105, 110-111.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

in her mystical conversion, which is a phenomenal occurrence because even the most outstanding mystics take most of their lives to reach this mystical apex. Moreover, after her "second conversion," she struggles her entire life in the pure love of purgatory to reform or restore her soul to its divine and original condition. Likewise, Augustine continued to emphasize the need to reform the illumined image that had been discovered in his conversion. As he recorded in *De Trinitate*:

This renewal, of course, is not brought about in the one moment of the conversion itself, as in Baptism that renewal is brought about in one moment by the remission of all sins, for there does not remain even one sin, however small it may be, that is not forgiven. But just as it is one thing to be free from fevers, and another thing to recover from the weakness which has resulted from the fevers; and, similarly, just as it is one thing to remove a spear that has been driven into the body, and another thing to heal the wound that has been made by it through the treatment that follows, so the first step in a cure is to remove the cause of the disease, which is done through the remission of all sins; the second is to heal the disease itself, which is done gradually by making progress in the renewal of this image.¹⁸

Although Augustine believed humankind will never be able to completely reform the divine image in this life, he still actively stressed that while in this life we should begin to deepen our awareness and participation in the Triune God. As Louth concluded, "it is not only reformation *by* God, but reformation *according to* God: the reformation into the image of God."¹⁹ Subsequently, as McGinn observed, "what we are striving to do here below, as several texts from the *Homilies on the Psalms* remind us, is to give back to God the coin he originally gave to us, that is, to restore the image given us at our creation."²⁰

¹⁸ *On the Trinity*, 14,17,23; McKenna, 162.

¹⁹ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 157.

²⁰ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 247.

And humankind, having fallen so far away from our original creation, will have to go through another long process to restore the illumined image. Augustine teaches that this happens in the exploration and reformation of our *imago Dei*, which, as we have discussed, was reinterpreted and understood as the *imago Trinitatis* – or in Catherine's purgatorial teachings, what can be considered the *imago Dei* of Pure Love.

For Augustine, this gradual, progressive, and restorative journey begins in the memory; more precisely, this journey begins in what Augustine has referred to as the spirituality of the *memoria*: a memory of the “spirituality of a journey which retraces the steps back towards a self lost sight of, but still present and active within the very acts of return,”²¹ leading the self back to its original purpose in deification and happiness.²² However, because humankind has only *scientia*, we have a distorted vision of the self and the divine and we can only gain further knowledge and illumination through divine grace as we progress towards the divine. A progressive illumination corresponds with the second stage in the soul's ascent, where humankind must return and remake this image of the divine, which we understand is a process and not merely an act: “the soul must learn what it means to be the image of God in its memory, understanding, and will, and learning that, learn how to pass beyond the image to God Himself in contemplation of Him.”²³ In other words, the spiritual mind's progressive journey towards the perfection of

²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

²² For Augustine Happiness (*Beata Vita*) is our divine end and in the *Confessions* he says, “In looking for you, I seek the happy life. It is ‘life for my soul I look for,’ since you vivify the soul as the soul vivifies the body” (*Confessions*, 10.6; Wills, 229).

²³ Louth, 152.

the image of God as Trinity is found only in our memory of the divine wisdom (*sapientia*) and begins with the same method of introversion.²⁴

Memoria, then, is an important image and has an intrinsic and integral role within "trinitarian mysticism." But how do we recall and contemplate God in His totality when our *mens* has been corrupted with sin? Augustine's answer is: through God Incarnate where Christ bridges the gap between humankind and the divine with His ability to give the eternal to the temporal; in Christ, the second Adam who is both divine and human, we can achieve both *scientia* and *sapientia*.²⁵

In the next chapter, we will see how Christ as Mediator is an important concept in Catherine's life and teachings. At this juncture, we should emphasize that Christ as Mediator in Augustinian thought is best represented and understood in the context of the entire Trinity - that is, with a holistic appreciation for the trinitarian divine with an undoubted sense of equality to be acknowledged within the Trinity. Hence, Augustine in *De Trinitate* teaches that the Son of God's image can be remade in the human person only by the Trinity who at creation made humankind to the image of the divine in holiness and justice.²⁶ Overall, Augustine's conversion becomes more than the rediscovery of the soul, it is the making of the soul. His is a divine revelation that began in the *Confessions* and re-envisioned in *De Trinitate*, which promotes the restoration or making of the soul, involving each Person of the Trinity. It is in these Augustinian theological discourses

²⁴ Augustine's second stage introverted search for the divine in *De Trinitate* includes the trinity manifested in humankind's perception of the material world, a trinity of faith, and his final eternal trinity of memory, understanding, and will found in the sublime and perfect of the image of God (*ibid.*, 152-158).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁶ Mary T. Clark, "Introduction" in *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 12.

about the soul's restorative and transformational ascent towards the divine image and God as Trinity (as understood as an equal and holistic image) that we have the firm foundations and progressive model for Catherine's mystical purgatory of pure love.

All these theological discourses – Augustine's and Catherine's – are epistemological inferences that describe a personal journey and ascent towards the divine, which leads to the discovery of the true self, and, subsequently, a spectacular spirituality of self-making in restoration.²⁷ Augustine teaches that humankind's renewal begins in baptismal conversion, whereas Catherine teaches that humankind's true renewal begins in a second conversion, which is a conversion in baptismal fire – that is, the beginning of purgatory. Along with Augustine, Catherine teaches that in the moment of renewal there is the remission of all sins: "As for blameworthiness, those souls are as pure as when God created them, since in leaving this world they grieved for their sins and were determined to sin no more."²⁸ However, when it comes to the process for the cleansing or healing of the soul, Catherine does not teach that purification and restoration are found in an introspective journey through the mind. She teaches that the soul's ascent is the gradual, progressive, and introspective ascent that happens above and beyond the mind because the soul is fixed not in the love of this world, but in the pure love of the purgatorial after-life:

I see my soul alienated from all spiritual things that could give it solace and joy. It has no taste for the things of the intellect, will, or memory, and in no manner tends more to one thing than to another. Quite still and in a state of siege, the me within finds itself gradually stripped of all those things that in spiritual or bodily

²⁷ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 71-72.

²⁸ *Purgation and Purgatory*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 75.

form gave it some comfort; and once the last of them has been removed the soul, understanding that they were at best supportive, turns its back on them completely.²⁹

The above passage from Catherine's writings indicates that mystical purgatory is a form of *nulla* ("nothing") mysticism: she reduces everything to nothing because there is an insatiable desire for nothing but God alone. Catherine goes beyond or, rather, abandons the trinitarian image of memory, understanding, and will, because she is afraid of anything – especially the self – that might prevent her from obtaining her unification with the divine. In the *Life*, her biographers quote her reaffirming:

I will have nothing to do with a love that would be *for* God or *in* God; this is a love which pure love cannot bear: since pure love is (simply) God Himself ... I cannot abide to see that word *for*, and that word *in*, since they denote to my mind a something that can stand between God and myself ...³⁰

Von Hügel concludes that these expressions in *nulla* mysticism can be summarized in Catherine's favourite expressions that deal with "self-adequation," that is, *nettezza*, which means, literally, "cleanliness" or the absence of all impurities.³¹ As observed in the *Life*, Catherine exclaimed, "Sweetness of God, Fulness of God, Goodness of God, Purity of

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁰ *Life*, p. 48b; von Hügel, vol. 1, 266.

³¹ As taken from von Hügel: "The fact of 'Nettezza' remaining at last her only term for the perfection of God shows plainly how comprehensive, definite, and characteristic must have been the meaning she attached to the word. The history of this conception no doubt begins with Plato's 'the Same'; and this, through Plotinus and Victorinus Afer's Latin translation of him, reappears as 'the Idipsum, the Self-Same,' as one of the names of God in St. Augustine; a term which in Dionysius (largely based as he is upon Plotinus's disciple Proclus) occurs continually, and, can there be still everywhere translated as 'Identity' or 'Self-Identity' ... But with Catherine the idea seems to have been approximated more to that of Purity, although I take it that, with her, 'Purit ' means the absence of all excess (of anything foreign to the true nature of God's or the soul's essence); and 'Nettezza,' the absence of all defect, in the shape of any failure fully to actualize all the possibilities of this same true nature. I have had to resign myself, as the least inadequate suggestions of the rich meaning of 'Nettezza' and 'Netto,' to alternating between the sadly general terms 'fulness' and 'full,' and the pedantic-sounding 'self-adequation,' with here and there 'clear fulness'" (*ibid.*).

God"; and, near the end of her life it was said that "she had continually on her lips the term '(clear) Fulness."³² Therefore, this "nothing" in *nulla* mysticism becomes "everything," which Donald Nugent believes is best described in her most dramatic and compelling statement: "My *Me* is God."³³

Purgatory as *nulla* mysticism is a gradual and progressive movement in the self's making "nothing" of itself and "everything" of the divine, but how can the self accomplish this within the current and material world? A solution is found in Augustine's "triadic schema of freedom:" a similar gradual and progressive movement in humankind's present life towards freedom, which is understood in trinitarian terms. Highly influenced by St. Paul's teachings in Romans 5.12-13,³⁴ Augustine learned that there is a triadic progression for human freedom and he commented on this movement in his letter *To Simplicianus*.³⁵ The first stage, Augustine teaches, begins in birth and with original sin. While in this stage, men and women are ignorant of sinful actions and abandon themselves to carnal and sensual pleasures. The second stage happens when humankind is illumined to the Law, and, therefore, know what they are doing is evil. Nonetheless, humankind is incapable of pure and proper action because there is no assistance from faith to overcome our innate sinful condition; humankind may try to avoid evil and make heroic efforts for doing what is right but, because we use our own free-will that has been infected with original sin, humankind cannot without grace do what is right. The third

³² *Life*, pp. 23c; 27a; (Ibid.)

³³ Nugent, "Mystic of Pure Love," 69.

³⁴ "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned - sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law" (Romans 5.12-13 The New Oxford Annotated Bible NRSV with the Apocrypha).

³⁵ Augustine, *To Simplicianus, on Various Questions*, PL.

stage is then a stage of divine grace, where humankind does what is right happily and perfectly because we are doing it with God's help.³⁶

With divine grace humankind begins re-making the self because free-will has been corrected and is rightly directed towards the divine, and only through following the divine will can humankind make "nothing" of the self and "everything" of the divine, which is the nature of self. Divine grace compensates for original and actual sin and mercifully corrects humankind's free-will, but that does not mean humankind will escape the temptation of sin while still alive in the material world.³⁷ As Augustine teaches though, humankind is unable to sin while fixed in divine grace: "Surrendering ourselves affectionately to His mercy we do not let ourselves be overcome by the delights of bad habits drawing us into sin. Still tempted by their allure, we do not, however, yield to them."³⁸

Catherine's purgatorial teachings draw comparison both with the third stage of human freedom and our ascent towards the divine:

The inclination to evil still remains in the soul revived by Baptism, and unless it is strenuously fought leads back to death. Afterwards, God revivifies the soul with a special grace of His. In no other way could the soul renounce its self-centeredness or return to the pristine state of its creation; and as the soul makes its

³⁶ Clark, 28.

³⁷ Augustine in *De Moribus Ecclesiae* analyzes "the vices into carnal desire, pride (meaning here not the spiritual sin, but delight in the pomp and vainglory of the world), and curiosity, and cites 1 John 2.16 ('the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life'), altering the order to bring it into line with the Platonic tripartition of the soul" (Andrew Louth, "Augustine," in *The Study of Spirituality*, edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, SJ, London: SPCK, 1986, 138). Mary Clark argues that these "temptations are not absent from the children of God, even those endowed with His glorious liberty of loving within the Trinitarian life and sharing that goodness with others" (Clark, 30).

³⁸ *To Simplicianus* 66.2; *ibid.*, 28.

way to its first state, its ardor in transforming itself into God is its purgatory, the passionate instinct to overcome its impediments.³⁹

However, understanding that the self is above the mind and the soul is beyond the world in the purgatorial after-life, she teaches a similar, but more dramatic concept about how humankind can be fixed in divine grace:

These souls cannot think, "I am here, and justly so because of my sins," or "I wish I had never committed such sins for now I would be in paradise," or "That person there is leaving before me," or "I will leave before that other one." They cannot remember the good and evil in their past or that of others. Such is their joy in God's will, in His pleasure, that they have no concern for themselves but dwell only on their joy in God's ordinance, in having Him do what He will. They see only the goodness of God, His mercy toward men. Should they be aware of other good or evil, theirs would not be perfect charity. They do not see that their suffering is due to their sins, for that awareness would be a want of perfection, and in purgatory souls cannot sin.⁴⁰

While humankind can be fixed in divine grace and have its free-will corrected in this life, in the purgatorial after-life humankind can enjoy the benefits of the annihilation of the temptation of sin. Such a joy is available in the next world as there is "nothing" left of the sinful self to be tempted with: we have absolutely rejected ourselves; our sin has been forgiven; and our former sinful self – now with nothing left of the self in it – has re-centred and redirected itself towards its proper self, which is God.⁴¹

Accordingly, *nulla* mysticism is an intrinsic and integral characteristic of purgatory because humankind is required to be "nothing" in order to follow the divine ordinance: when there is "nothing" of the self, humankind can be wholly and perfectly

³⁹ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 80-81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁴¹ Jane M.C. James, "Judgement and Purgatory in Newman's Dream of Gerontius and in the Treatise on Purgatory of St. Catherine of Genoa," in *The Downside Review*, vol. 118, no. 411 (April 2000), 142.

fixed in divine grace and follow the divine will, which is the only way we can achieve the purification needed in the restoration of the soul that enables our true end in beatitude or God Himself. Hence, Catherine has achieved what is known as a stability in faith;⁴² she has obtained a divine grace in her second conversion that has bestowed upon her the ability to overcome all the impediments of her sinful condition in a constant growth of spiritual freedom and illumination.⁴³

Augustine teaches that in this stability of faith, humankind achieves "perfection" because "perfection" is understood as a harmony of wills.⁴⁴ Consequently, Catherine, having "nothing" of self in herself, has achieved "perfection" because in her second conversion, she has obtained a mystical union and union in wills. All the same, following the teachings of Augustine, Catherine understands that love is the key to humankind's freedom; she realizes that "the first necessity of love is for union, and union in its closet sense is in the harmony of wills,"⁴⁵ and, subsequently, humankind "requires an education in that love which unifies the heart, making it whole."⁴⁶ In addition, she understands that since humankind is "borne on the current of divine love which flows through us and returns thence to its source, we can say with St. Augustine that to love God is to possess God."⁴⁷ However, humankind can only achieve a unification in love and possess the divine fully when we completely forget the self; that is, when humankind can "detach

⁴² Clark, 30.

⁴³ Similarly, Augustine describes the third stage of human freedom in Book X of the *Confessions*, which is when he obtained spiritual liberty in conversion (*Ibid.*, 30).

⁴⁴ John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 150.

⁴⁵ Clark, 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

⁴⁷ Gilson, 276.

himself [herself] completely from self in order to attach himself wholly to God."⁴⁸ As we have emphasized, in divine grace, Catherine has made "nothing" of the self in herself, has re-centred and re-directed her love towards the divine, and has obtained in mystical rapture God's love, which she understood is Pure Love. Hence, when she said "My *Me* is God" we can understand that she possess the pure love of the divine, which is humankind's true self-love and a love that as Pseudo-Dionysius teaches "transcends the knowledge of faith according to the common code."⁴⁹ Thus, we should realize that Catherine's "perfection" is not only realized in a harmony of *wills*, but in a harmony of *loves* as well.

A Mystical Moment of Death into a Mystical Purgatory

The *Life* clearly describes the second conversion as a "sudden" moment of "perfection," but accepting that the conversion moment is a form of mysticism, it should be acknowledged and described as a kind of "death" as well. Donald Christopher Nugent in his book *Mysticism, Death, and Dying*, argues that the mystical experience can be described as a form of death. He argues that while there are different forms of mystical union, he believes *full* union can only be realized in death because "the constitution of humankind is such that it cannot endure full union and survive."⁵⁰ It is for this reason that Doctors of the Church like Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Augustine "discuss the goal of the spiritual ascent under the rubric of *raptus* in this life and *beatitudo* in the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁴⁹ In *III Commentary on the Sentences*, d.24, a.3, q.2, dub.4; Bernard McGinn's "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries," in *Church History*, vol. 56, no. 1 (Mar., 1987), 11.

⁵⁰ Nugent, *Mysticism, Death, and Dying*, 14.

next"⁵¹ and "describe this goal in the language of union."⁵² Hence, mystical union is an anticipation of glorification in beatitude, a foretaste of heaven, and a foreshadowing of death because when we allude to such mystical rapture "it would seem that there cannot be a foretaste of heaven without a foretaste of death."⁵³ Catherine's conversion then, was not just a mystical moment of "suddenness" and "perfection," but of "death" as she crossed over into the after-life and was illumined to purgatory. In mystical union, Catherine was able in life to experience death, and, therefore, transport the purgatorial after-life into the material world. However, even though it was a mystical purgatory, it was a *full* purgatory because purgatory itself is a foretaste of heaven as it purifies and restores humankind in Pure Love to meet its end in Pure Love (God).

It is in mysticism that the second conversion becomes the beginning of a mystical purgatory. Mysticism brings the purgatorial after-life into the present life as one can pass over in a mystical death. As well, the "suddenness" in the mystical moment is representative of passing over into purgatory. As Catherine said in *Purgation and Purgatory*:

Were the sinful soul not there where the justice of God wills it, the soul would be in a still greater hell. Then it would be out of that divine order which is a part of God's mercy; the soul would not be suffering as much as it ought to. This is why, finding no other place more fitting, the soul of its own volition flings itself into its proper place. So it is with purgatory. Once separated from the body, the soul no longer in that original state of purity, aware that the impediment it faces cannot be removed in any other way hurls itself into purgatory.⁵⁴

⁵¹ McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity," 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Nugent, *Mysticism, Death, and Dying*, 14.

⁵⁴ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 77.

The soul suddenly flings or hurls itself into purgatory because of the soul's innate need and implanted desire to follow the divine will absolutely in purgatory. As mentioned, for the soul in purgatory to follow the divine will it must achieve a harmony of wills, which happens when the soul in divine grace re-directs or re-centres its free-will towards the divine alone. Evelyn Underhill points out that the second conversion is similar in nature:

It is certain that for St. Catherine, as for St. Francis, an utterly new life did literally begin at this point. The center of interest was shifted and the field of consciousness was remade. She "knew in an instant that which words cannot express." Some veil about her heart was torn away; so abruptly, that it left a wound behind. For the first time she saw and knew the Love in which life is bathed; and all the energy and passion of a strong nature responded to its call.⁵⁵

Because she had given herself freely and wholeheartedly over to God, God in return established His divine will in her through divine grace that enabled the "perfection" needed for the soul's ascent towards God. However, in "Pure Love-centred mysticism" this "perfection" is also understood as a harmony of loves. According to Catherine, such a "perfection" of love is in Pure Love: the soul becomes aware of the divine, realizes the futility of the self-hood, and the soul with free choice makes "nothing" of the self in order that it might be filled with Pure Love alone. In *The Spiritual Dialogue*, Catherine describes such a process in Pure Love:

On seeing the creature lose all confidence in itself and turn to Him, God comes to his aid. He is ready to knock at the door of the Soul, and when it is opened to Him He enters within and casts out all his enemies and restores to His creature its original innocence. He does this in diverse ways, as He sees fit. In this instance we will speak of how He does so with Pure Love.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), 182.

⁵⁶ Catherine of Genoa, *The Spiritual Dialogue* translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press,

In baptismal conversion, Catherine received in divine grace and union the divine image of Pure Love, which is the theme of *Purgation and Purgatory*: like the souls in purgatory, from the moment of her second conversion a new life in pure love began, which was a gradual process in purification and restoration of the soul that lasted until the end of her life when she made the final ascent to God. Therefore, Catherine's "second conversion" is the beginning of her "mystical purgatory."

CHAPTER FIVE: THE MYSTICAL MANIFESTATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY IN THE LIFE OF CATHERINE OF GENOA

Over the previous chapters, we have traced the life of Catherine of Genoa, seeing her move all the way from abhorring her sinful self, because of her sense of impurity in the acceptance of her “false self,” to a point where she received, in what she believed was a divine and transcendental moment of Pure Love, an image of her “true self,” which is, as she understood it, pure love. But, for her, it becomes more than just a mystical moment of Pure Love; it becomes the catalyst for her to manifest her purgatorial doctrine in a theological or mystical life – even though she was unaware that she was doing so until, near the end of her days, she received her divinely infused revelation of purgatory, which helped her reflect and understand that she had brought the purgatorial afterlife into this world. In this chapter, then, we will examine how the doctrine of purgatory manifested itself in concrete ways, as she followed the traditional threefold path of mysticism (purgation, illumination, and union), to rid herself of the “rust of sin” and, eventually, to restore her divine image and likeness in Pure Love. In so doing, we will discuss many traditional themes of medieval devotion or piety common to her era.

Purgatory's Purgation: Mortification

After much pain of the spirit and suffering of the body, Catherine, in a moment of sudden conversion and transcendental union, entered what may be best described as a mystical purgatory. However, all this pain and suffering was not an end in itself, because, for Catherine, the birth of mystical purgatory is just the beginning of her soul's

progressive and painful journey in purification, which ultimately leads to its restoration in the divine. According to Catherine, mystical purgatory is a gradual, arduous and long journey that occurs over a lifetime, and the first purifying stage in that journey happens along the mystical way of purgation, which is realized in the threefold path of repentance: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Mystical purgatory is intrinsically linked to this threefold path of *repentance* because it was born in *conversion*, and both these terms have concordant meanings: "Conversion or Repentance, for the two terms are nearly interchangeable, is simply the turning away from sin to God."¹ Therefore, mystical purgatory is also linked with the notion of *compunction*, which is experienced at that moment when the divine decides to awaken the soul with a prick or arrow of divine love that wounds the heart.² As recorded in the *Life*, Catherine was struck with such compunction: "she was so on fire and wounded with the love which God had interiorly manifested to her, together with the view of her miseries, that, as if beside herself, she went into a private chamber, and gave vent to her burning tears and sighs,"³ and declared, "oh Love! can it be that you have called me with so much love, and revealed to me at one view, what no tongue can describe?"⁴ Essentially, the birth of mystical purgatory, then, is the ultimate expression, and presence, of that prick of divine love: Catherine's heart was

¹ F. P. Harton, *The Elements of the Spiritual Life: A Study in Ascetical Theology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 160.

² As Harton describes, "this term is derived from the Latin verb *compungere* 'to prick,' and signifies the pricking of the soul. We are told that S. Peter's audience on the day of Pentecost 'were pricked in their heart and the Apostle recognized that pricking as the first sign of the Repentance to which he desired to bring them'" (*ibid.*)

³ Mrs. G. Ripley's, *Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*, preface by Isaac Hecker (New York: Christian Press Association Publishing Company, 1907), 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

not only pricked, but was wounded so forcefully that it was engulfed with Pure Love, giving her the immediate incentive to repent from all her sins.

Compunction inevitably leads to contrition: the visible display of remorse and sorrow for sin. The teaching and practice of contrition has a long and varied history in medieval tradition. Significant developments occurred, once "with papal involvement dating particularly from the seminal pronouncement *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, requiring all persons to attend confession at least once a year,"⁵ and then with the struggles of the religious leaders in the fourteenth century, dealing "with what they called 'scruples,' that is, the ever-present danger of a failure to balance acute awareness of sin with the acceptance of forgiveness."⁶ All the same, contrition begins after compunction: the soul, having fallen far away from the divine through selfish pride, has realized that there is a massive disconnect between itself and the divine, leaving it, the soul, to the futility of self-reliance. What is more, the soul with significant sorrow recognizes that the divine is the foundation of all being and that sin has caused the divine untold anguish and suffering because it, the soul, can no longer participate in its intended relationship with the divine.⁷ The *Dialogue* provides confirmation:

Unable to call out to the mercy of God, with no confidence in itself, the Soul nevertheless fought to ward off despair. Still, it suffered greatly, for it knew the weight it was carrying, the evil it had done; and in this distress the Soul [Catherine] was sick with heartache, unshed tears and sighs, sick unto death. She could not eat, sleep, or talk, nor had she any taste for things, either spiritual or earthly. She had no sense of where she was, in heaven or on earth, and would

⁵ Ellen Ross, "'She wept and cried right loud for sorrow and for pain': suffering, the spiritual journey, and women's experience in late medieval mysticism" in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, edited by Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 52.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

gladly have hidden from everyone. So alienated was she by the offense give to God that she looked more like a frightened animal than a human being.⁸

As Catherine realized, "meditation on sinfulness alone can lead to despair, the greatest of all medieval sins, unless contrition opens one's eyes to the merciful God who forgets sin from the time that one repents."⁹ Thus, contrition is at once an act of divine charity and independent repentance. But, as F. P. Harton has noted, "the only really adequate sorrow of Repentance is caused by the pain of having offended God and caused, in our measure, the Passion of our Lord."¹⁰

Accordingly, God in His divine mercy appeared to Catherine in spirit with a vision of Christ Crucified because she was interiorly inflamed with divine love and had sorrow for her sins. According to the *Dialogue*:

One day there appeared to her inner vision Jesus Christ incarnate crucified, all bloody from head to foot. It seemed that the body rained blood. From within she heard a voice say, "Do you see this blood? It has been shed for your love, to atone for your sins." With that she received a wound of love that drew her to Jesus with such trust that it washed away all that previous fright, and she took joy in the Lord.¹¹

Such an extreme vision of pain and suffering was a common theme in medieval devotion because "in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, attention to the humanity of Christ was increasingly directed to the sufferings of Christ."¹² As Kieckhefer emphasizes, "devotion

⁸ Catherine of Genoa, *The Spiritual Dialogue*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 117-118.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Harton, 161.

¹¹ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 118.

¹² Jill Raitt, "Introduction," in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 17 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, edited by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), xx.

to the passion heightened the conviction of guilt for one's sins: it was the sins of humankind, including those of the devotee, that caused Christ to undergo his torments."¹³ Interestingly, during this period of the Middle Ages, when there developed this emphasis on the agony (the passion) of Christ on the cross, rather than His death and victory over sin on the cross, a papal decree was promulgated, requiring annual contrition with confession.¹⁴

It is necessary, then, for contrition to lead to confession, which is what the *Life* records:

This vision made such an impression upon her that she seemed always to see with her bodily eyes, her bleeding Love, nailed to the cross. Very plainly too did she see all the offenses she had committed against him, and cried out continually: "Oh Love, no more sin, no more sin!" Her hatred of herself became so great, that filled with disgust she exclaimed: "Oh Love, if it be necessary I am prepared to make a public confession of my sins."

After this she made her general confession with such contrition and compunction, that her soul was at once cleansed of its sins, for God had pardoned them all, consuming them in the flames of love, with which he had already wounded her heart...¹⁵

As we can observe from this description, a real sense of remorse or contrition is needed for confession to have meaning. If a contrite soul did not confess with sincere sorrow, it might fall back into sin, which negates the act of confession: the soul's rejection of sin in the acknowledgment of its faults and holistic acceptance of the divine, because it realizes

¹³ Richard Kieckhefer, "Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion," in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 17 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, edited by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 102.

¹⁴ For more information regarding the foundations of late medieval penitential practices and spirituality in accordance with the growing devotion to the passion and the proclamation of the twenty-first canon in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, see Kieckhefer, especially pages 102-105.

¹⁵ *Life*, 9.

that without divine grace it does not have the ability to achieve immunity from sin.¹⁶ Once confession is complete, the soul's intention must be for satisfaction, and that is accomplished in the accepted penance.

With the vision of Christ Crucified ever present in her mind, Catherine's satisfaction "expressed many of the basic themes found in women's religiosity in its orthodox forms: a concern for affective religious response, an extreme form of penitential asceticism, an emphasis both on Christ's humanity and on the inspiration of the Spirit."¹⁷ It should not be surprising, then, that her reparation and penitent actions would take the form of severe mortification. Von Hügel summarizes:

And throughout this first period of four years, her penances were great. She wore a hair-shirt; she never touched either flesh-meat or fruit, whether fresh or dried; she lay at night on thorns. And by nature courteous and affable, she would do great violence to herself by conversing as little as possible with her relations when they visited her, and, as to anything further, paying heed neither to herself nor to them; and she acted thus for the purpose of self-conquest; and if any one was surprised at it, she took no notice.¹⁸

These simple acts of penance show that she had a pure intention to forsake sin and accept her part in the perfect and atoning offering, as she was crucified with Christ. As the *Life* affirms, "she was wounded at the feet of her confessor, she seemed to be drawn to the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in spirit beheld all the graces, means, and ways, by which

¹⁶ R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c. 1215-c. 1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.

¹⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 17 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, edited by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 123.

¹⁸ Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion: As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2 vols., (London: James Clarke and Company Limited, 1961), vol. 1, 131.

the Lord, in his pure love, had brought her to conversion."¹⁹ Having offended the divine and being the cause for Christ suffering upon the cross, she accepted these penances willingly because she wanted to accept her part of sin and be justly punished and crucified along with Christ: "yet, to satisfy justice he led her through the way of satisfaction, permitting that this contrition and self-knowledge should continue for nearly fourteen months."²⁰ Her penitential sacrifices and punishments, however, were not required, because her sins were already paid for upon the cross by the divine. Yet, she still performed penance, and in doing so, she imitated Christ in his sacrifice: like Christ, Catherine was now without sin, but still was crucified with Him out of pure love and divine justice.

It is the ideal of divine justice that led to an ever-deepening awareness of Pure Love alone: Catherine did not yearn for personal salvation, nor did she have to complete penance as punishment for her sins, but through her penances she demonstrated the disinterested and reciprocal nature of pure love. It is recorded in the *Life* that with this demonstration of pure love, "she felt herself drawn with St. John, to rest on the bosom of her loving Lord,"²¹ where she found numerous secrets about the pure love that was consuming her. *The Spiritual Dialogue* elaborates:

She was also granted another vision, more striking yet, beyond telling or imagination. God showed her the love with which He had suffered out of love of her ... In that vision, Catherine saw the evil in the soul and the purity of God's love ... The vision made her dwell constantly on the evil of man, which could not have been greater, considering the great love of God, a love that never ceased doing the soul as much good as it could; and turning her gaze upon herself, Catherine saw

¹⁹ *Life*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

how much evil there was in her. That experience made her think of man in terms of the very opposite of the goodness of God, and this thought made her almost despair ... Had God not tempered this vision, body and soul would both have perished.²²

With this vision, the motivation of penance switches from "punishment" to a severe mental anguish which is "guilt": the soul has an acute and horrible realization that it did not accept pure love and that it has committed the ultimate crime in escaping the divine ordinance and loving union with God; the soul realizes that it is not only corrupt and justly despised, but that sin has blinded its perception and knowledge of its weakened and calamitous condition. Essentially, the soul realizes it has caused the divine much suffering in its discord and the soul experiences more anguish as it realizes that it is being held back from the divine, which is a product of the aftermath of sin.²³

Accepting this just "punishment" and "guilt" for our sins becomes an important factor in the soul's ability to journey through purgatory. As *Purgation and Purgatory* confirms:

I see that the sufferings of the souls in purgatory are endurable because of two considerations. The first is the willingness to suffer, the certainty that God has been most merciful to them and of what God offers them. If God's mercy did not temper His justice - that justice which has been satisfied with the blood of Jesus Christ - one sin alone would deserve a thousand hells. Knowing, therefore, that they suffer justly, those souls accept the ordinance of God and would not think of doing otherwise.²⁴

²² *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 118.

²³ R.H.J. Steuart, *Diversity in Holiness* (New York: Books for Libraries Press Incorporated, 1967), 110.

²⁴ Catherine of Genoa, *Purgation and Purgatory*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 84.

Moreover, accepting "punishment" and "guilt" is an important factor for our repentance. As the *Life* records, "in this light she remained for more than a year, relieving her conscience by means of contrition, confession, and satisfaction;"²⁵ and the *Dialogue* says that "the two never left her,"²⁶ in reference to the two visions associated with these repentant elements. In addition, these elements of repentance are even more important and directly related in terms of confession and satisfaction, which were significant aspects in the development of purgatory. R. N. Swanson explains:

Acknowledgment had also to be made through punishment, both earthly and other-worldly. Sin carried two penalties: guilt (*culpa*), which the priest could alleviate by granting absolution, and punishment (*pena*), which was less straightforwardly expunged, but would be worked off through the penance imposed by the priest here, and hereafter in Purgatory. The rise of the notion of Purgatory, and the assurance of the effectiveness of absolution, eased some of the pressures of penance: whereas until the late twelfth century the penances imposed by the priests had often been extremely arduous, these new doctrinal developments were less demanding. Priest-imposed punishments could now be lighter and more tolerable - in part to ensure that they were performed (for it was pointless to impose harsh penances which would simply be ignored, and were a disincentive to further confession). Earthly penance had to be sufferable on earth, but was recognized as only a partial satisfaction of the punishment due. The penances to follow death would be of a totally different order, and totally unavoidable.²⁷

However, Catherine's "punishment" and "guilt" were not of a lesser quality, nor did she demand a less arduous route of satisfaction. As she advanced in holiness, so much deeper became her repentance as well. As Harton has noted, "even were we to attain to perfect sanctity, that attainment would bring with it such a realization of the horror of past sin

²⁵ *Life*, 10

²⁶ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 118.

²⁷ Swanson, 34-35

that we should feel that we had only begun to be penitent."²⁸ Hence, as she became more illumined through the light of the divine Spirit, her repentance should be ever-intensifying.²⁹

Concerning Catherine's adamant repentance, Groeschel comments that "she is engaged in a journey, a continued struggle for perfection, or, to use her favorite analogy, an endless battle between the false self and the true self."³⁰ These struggles were common in medieval piety: in the medieval mind there was a steadfast fear of the body, the senses, and the sin attached to the material world; but the thinking was that if you discipline the body, you could discipline the self, and, therefore, repentance in mortification denotes that it is a response to egoism.³¹ As Underhill confirms, "the object of mortification is to kill that old self, break up his egotistic attachments and cravings, in order that the higher centre, the 'new man' may live and breathe,"³² which means that "the object of mortification is not death, but life."³³ Harton notes that this new life is found upon the cross: "Jesus Christ is our example in mortification, as in all else; in the sacred Humanity we find perfect detachment, perfect mortification, perfect devotion to the will of God, perfect love of the Father; but He is more than our example – He is our life."³⁴ Therefore, mortification is a form of detachment, the denial of the "false self," the daily

²⁸ Harton, 164.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Benedict J. Groeschel, "Introduction," in *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory: The Spiritual Dialogue*, translated by Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 29.

³¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Good to Medieval Women" in *Representations* 11 (Summer, 1985), 13. For a more detailed discussion and additional information about sociological, economical, and gender issues concerning mortification, control of the self, and the environment, see Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

³² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), 216.

³³ *Ibid.*, 217.

³⁴ Harton, 170.

bearing of the cross which results in "the crucifixion of the old man that we may be filled with the life and love of Jesus."³⁵

Understanding mortification as a battle against the ego, Leuba concludes that Catherine's purgative period should be considered a period of mortification: "the first four years after conversion (1473-77), [were] years of extravagant asceticism and penances, of relentless struggle against the egoistic self."³⁶ Petry comes to the same conclusion: "in the first [of three purifying stages], the soul participates with God through its progressive detachment from all obstacles, inner and outer, by which it nourishes self-love and feeds rebellion against the divine."³⁷ Groeschel's conclusion was bolder: he entitled a category of Catherine's principal teachings as "The Soul, and the Lifelong Conflict between Self-Love and Pure Love."³⁸

Even though, at first glance, these conclusions may seem to be true, they are, in fact, inaccurate. In the first section of the *Dialogue*, there is the description of the soul's conflict with the body and the overwhelming victory of Pure Love. As the soul fights the body so that the body would not conquer the soul, we have a struggle that is representative of the doctrine of the two selves. As Groeschel noted, "the doctrine of the two selves is one that is dear to most spiritual teachers and is expressed in the words of Christ 'Whoever wants to save his own life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it' (Matt. 16:25)."³⁹ Humankind's vocation is to overcome these selves

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ James Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism*, 3rd edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 68.

³⁷ Ray Petry, *Late Medieval Mysticism*, The Library of Christian Classics vol. XIII, general editors John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), 393.

³⁸ Groeschel, 27.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

through detachment in mortification (Luke 9:23), which will allow us to love the divine with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37-38), and obtain our perfection in the divine (Matt. 5:48).⁴⁰ As described in the *Life and Dialogue*, Catherine accomplished her detachment in childhood and adolescence: she performed mortification, became illumined in prayer, and went through a depressive period known as the "dark night," which is the "last and drastic purgation of the spirit; the doing away of separateness, the annihilation of selfhood, even though all that self now claims for its own be the Love of God."⁴¹ Then, in her conversion moment, she was united to the divine and had her "false self" conquered as she was transformed in "good will," inflamed wholly with "burning love," and reached "all perfection" in Pure Love.⁴² Hence, after the *Dialogue's* first section reaches its climax in this union of Pure Love, there is no more struggle between the soul and body, nor with self-love; through the pure love of the divine, the soul has now defeated its dubious enemies and has made them its slaves. As *The Spiritual Dialogue* relates:

In the beginning, when I [Soul] wanted to attend to the needs of the spirit, I was in charge. Through your deceit, you [Body] then bound yourself to me and we agreed to do good together, to have neither lord it over the other. Gradually, however, you turned me into your slave. Now I will once more be in charge. If you wish to serve me, I will take care of all your needs; if not, I will still be mistress and be served. If needs be, I will compel you to be my servant- and that will put an end to all arguments.⁴³

⁴⁰ Harton, 169-170.

⁴¹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 396.

⁴² *Life*, 9.

⁴³ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 114.

Consequently, the self or self-love does not speak in the other sections of the *Dialogue* because there is no further need, for the egotistic self and self-love have been subdued or conquered by the Pure Love of God.

While God has been made the centre of Catherine's life, it does not mean that the immediate consequence of her union and subsequent mortification is about the annihilation of the self or self-love. Instead, we should understand that her divine selfhood or *Me* was accomplished in a similar fashion to that of St. Francis of Assisi, who through an expression of *nulla* mysticism – which was explained in the last chapter – became “nothing” or “empty.” Like Francis, Catherine wanted “nothing” of everything; she wanted to be “empty” so that she could be filled with God alone: she battled between the “false self” and “true self” and learned to “make oneself zero” through “gradually withdrawing all desires from short-term personal satisfactions and unifying them – focusing them all into a single driving need, the need, quite simply, to see God;”⁴⁴ she lost all trust in herself during the “dark night,” made “nothing” of herself, and like him a “new life” began at the moment of conversion.⁴⁵

In addition, there are examples of Franciscan spirituality being manifested in concrete terms in her life: she became celibate in marriage and she went through that sense of “emptiness” and “nothingness” in “poverty” and “humility” as her husband, Giuliano, became bankrupt. As well, the Franciscan need for naked love – a love that has no self or want in it – was expressed in the *Dialogue* when she said, “love must be

⁴⁴ Carol Lee Flinders, *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco Publishers, 1993), 139.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 140

naked."⁴⁶ However, becoming "nothing" is not annihilation: the self and self-love are still present, but now, with "nothing" in them, they can be bent towards God and be filled with Him. As Hellmann said of Francis: "he bent his own will to the will of his Father, the Father of his Lord Jesus Christ. In this he emptied himself of self-will and of the ways of the world in order to receive the inspiration and the gifts of the Lord through liberating Spirit."⁴⁷ In the *Dialogue*, Catherine makes a similar declaration:

With God's help I will no longer be deceived by you. Still, I hope to act in such a way that each will have what is due him. As you made me do what I should not have done, so I will have you do what you would rather not do. In this way, you may satisfy the spirit. I hope to subject you completely to me – that is, have you go against your natural bent.

Based upon these words, therefore, we should understand that there was a bending of the self in terms of the will and love because the soul had been "emptied" and made into "nothing" so that it could be filled wholly with the divine in pure love; that is, rather than the annihilation of the self and self-love in divine union and mystical purgatory, the self and self-love have been subdued, enslaved, and redirected towards the divine.

Although the will and love have not been annihilated, it does not mean there will be an ensuing lifelong struggle between self-will and divine will, self-love and pure love, the "false self" and "true self." As Catherine made "nothing" of herself, she was demonstrating divine humility and receptivity, which is a common theme found among women mystics whose attitude is one of openness to the divine and who expect positive

⁴⁶ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 122.

⁴⁷ J. A. Wayne Hellmann, "The Spirituality of the Franciscans," in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 17 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, edited by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 34.

results as they are made into vessels or extensions of the divine.⁴⁸ Such divine attitudes of humility and receptivity often lead to an encompassing quality in mystical union. As Wawrytko notes:

Another common theme among the feminine mystics is that of the transformation of the soul through the agency of divine love, by which God 'makes of her [the soul] another himself.' Hence, Catherine of Genoa declares, 'My Being is God,' not by some simple participation but by a true transformation of my being.⁴⁹

Therefore, Catherine's will is God's will because she had a mystical union in pure love and "mystic love is a total dedication of the will."⁵⁰ Moreover, Catherine's love is God's love, which is what her soul in deep sorrow came to understand during the fourteen months of mortification in pure love, which is described in *The Spiritual Dialogue*:

God sent her a ray of his love so burning and deep that it was an agony to sustain. Issuing from the fountain of Christ that love, wounding the soul, stripped it of all other loves, appetites, delights, and selfishness. The soul cried out, sighed deeply, and in its transformation was taken out of itself.⁵¹

The divine sent his pure love with such power that it seemed as if everything was being annihilated. As Catherine said, "And I see rays of lightning darting from that divine love to the creature, so intense and fiery as to annihilate not the body alone but, were it possible, the soul."⁵² However, because she has been transformed in union with pure love, there can be no battles against the "false self," self-love, or self-will: if her self is God, then annihilation of the self would be annihilation of God, which we are told does

⁴⁸ Sandra A. Wawrytko, "The 'Feminine' Mode of Mysticism," in *Mysticism and the Mystical Experience: East and West*, edited by Donald H. Bishop (Toronto: Associated University Press, 1995), 211.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 85.

⁵¹ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 119.

⁵² *Purgation and Purgatory*, 79.

not happen, as she understands her "My *Me* is God" and preferred to understand herself in terms of *We*.⁵³ If her own self-love is now pure love, then the annihilation of self-love would be annihilation of pure love, which does not happen again, since we are told "all that was not Pure Love meant nothing to her;"⁵⁴ and, if her self-will is the will of the divine, then the annihilation of self-will would be annihilation of the divine will, which does not happen because any deviation from the divine ordinance would be hell for her although, if need be, she would even go to hell to follow the divine ordinance.⁵⁵

Yet, Catherine experienced much pain and sorrow as "she waged resolute war on the self-love that survived in her," which was not alleviated until the divine accepted the extinction of all other loves in her after she went through fourteenth months of mortification. Why would she have to go through such pain and suffering if she was already in a union of Pure Love? Moreover, why did it take over a year before she realized – as we have argued – that her soul was now of pure love and in pure love since the moment of her "second conversion"? What we must understand here is that there is a distinction within the soul, which is described in the second section of the *Dialogue*. In the first section of the *Dialogue*, Catherine's soul was just called the Soul; after her conversion in Pure Love, however, Catherine's soul is called both Soul and Spirit in the second section of the *Dialogue*. The Soul is the lower part of the soul which is still covered in the "rust of sin" and is linked with Human Frailty, which is the lower self which has been "splattered with mud," that is, the subtle and sinful remnants of self-love. The Spirit, on the other hand, is the *apex mentis* of the soul. As discussed in the last

⁵³ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 118.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁵ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 77.

chapter, the Spirit or *apex mentis* is the highest and purest part of the human soul and the part of the self that can communicate with and participate in God. Thus, it is the Spirit that was infused, illumined, and transformed in divine union.⁵⁶ It was “the first to sin and to do so freely”⁵⁷ and the first to be cleansed. Unlike Human Frailty and the Soul, the Spirit has nothing of the self – that is, sin – left in it: while Human Frailty wanted death, the Spirit said “for me I hope neither for death nor for suffering;”⁵⁸ and, while the Soul was striving after pure love, the Spirit does not strive because in Pure Love it knows that “pure love does not attach itself to pleasure or feeling, bodily or spiritual,”⁵⁹ because “[those feelings] get in the way of Pure Love – for under the guise of Pure Love it is those emotional feelings to which the soul becomes attached.”⁶⁰ Having obtained perfection, the Spirit is like the souls in purgatory who “have no sin in them, nor is there any impediment between them and God,”⁶¹ and “their only suffering lies in what holds them back, that instinct which has not as yet fully manifested itself.”⁶² Therefore, in Spirit the soul is *completely* perfect and cleansed; but in Soul – which is what the soul is mostly comprised of when it begins its purgative process – the soul is not *completely* cleansed because there are residual effects of original and actual sin. One of those effects is that the Soul is covered in the “rust” or “mud” of sin, and, therefore, cannot see clearly into the divine. However, as the Pure Love of purgatory progressively cleanses the entire

⁵⁶ Von Hügel asserts that Catherine's Spirit follows completely the teachings of St. Paul on the Spirit. He explains how the Spirit can be both something of the self, yet something completely distinct from the self-seeking self, that is, something that is distinct from the divine, but still has a divine supplant or has the divine dwelling within it. For more information, see von Hügel, vol. 2, 67-70.

⁵⁷ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 125.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶¹ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 73.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 74.

soul, the lower soul sees more ever clearly and becomes more like the Spirit "as the soul grows in perfection."⁶³

Ultimately, what the Soul realizes in that first year of mortification is what the Spirit has realized from the moment of the second conversion: that Catherine was in perfect harmony with the divine ordinance and in a mystical purgatory of pure love. As *Purgation and Purgatory* describes:

They [souls in purgatory] see only the goodness of God, His mercy toward men. Should they be aware of other good or evil, theirs would not be perfect charity. They do not see that their suffering is due to their sins, for that awareness would be a want of perfection and in purgatory souls cannot sin. Only once do the souls understand the reason for their purgatory: the moment in which they leave this life. After that moment, that knowledge disappears. Immersed in charity, incapable of deviating from it, they can only will or desire pure love.⁶⁴

Yet she still continues on with mortification for another three years because, as Leuba explains, "ascetic practices began with the conversion-crisis, in response to the then accepted view that in order to be able to perform God's Will the flesh must be subdued and made subservient to the spirit by rigid discipline."⁶⁵ Because our humanity has been defiled by original and actual sin, the body and soul have become frail and developed "defects and bad instincts"⁶⁶ – this is the lower self, our Human Frailty.

All the same, Catherine, having obtained her divine *image* in Pure Love and now illuminated in Pure Love, can, must, and will cleanse her body and soul from the "rust of sin" and become restored in the divine *likeness* of Pure Love. The *Dialogue* reaffirms:

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁶⁵ Leuba, 73.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

"armed with this love, she was sure of overcoming any obstacles or devils for she was in her fortress, God. Trusting in His goodness she could endure the sight of her lower self."⁶⁷ Consequently, "there is a notable decline in the guilt motive of her penitential practices and a suggestion that she does these acts from some inner compulsion she thinks is the Will of God."⁶⁸ As the *Dialogue* indicates, "he [God] wants the Body to go where the Soul goes,"⁶⁹ and, subsequently, "God, who now ruled over her, took away the instinct for the things of the world and the self"⁷⁰ and "He gave her other and better preferences."⁷¹

Mortification during these three years, then, is not preformed to conquer or punish, but to cleanse and move the body and soul closer to the divine; for Catherine mortification denotes a positive quality as it is done in purification and restoration of the permanent elements of the body and soul's character or nature. As Underhill observed:

The mystic life has got to express itself in action: and for this new paths must be cut and new habits formed – all, in spite of the new self's enthusiasm, 'against the grain' – resulting in a complete sublimation of personality.⁷²

In other words, the soul's mortification is intended to help the new self in pure love to adjust to the new transcendent world in which it moves, which is purgatory. And, in the pure love of purgatory, the body and soul are being cleansed so that there will be no sin left within them. This process reflects the idea of the resurrected body and soul. As

Mary T. Clark summarizes:

⁶⁷ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 120.

⁶⁸ Groeschel, 5.

⁶⁹ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 125.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Underhill, *Mysticism*, 217

Then there is the state of man after death, when "there is absolutely nothing in man which resists the Spirit but all is harmoniously unified and coordinated in a stable peace." "That state will be realized when the mortal body will be vivified, 'when this corruptible flesh will put on incorruption, when this mortal flesh will put on immortality.'" This is the condition of the risen person. "But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you."⁷³

Consequently, only when *all* sin has been cleansed will all this mortification be at an end, which means *all* mortification will be at an end only upon death. Leuba, therefore, rightly concludes that, "the rest of her life may be regarded as a more or less regular progression towards a consciousness of sinlessness which we found her affirming two years before her death."⁷⁴ Overall, the lifelong struggle in both life and purgatory is better qualified as the battle between the *lesser* self (all that makes the body and soul less than they were in their origins – that is the residue of sin) and the *fuller* self (all that makes the body and soul fuller, as they were in their origins – that is in the Pure Love of God).

Understanding the concept that the soul is in pure love, growing in perfection, and being cleansed of all sins, we can have a fuller appreciation of why Catherine would not accept plenary indulgences. Catherine's rejection of indulgences was not completely due to the traditional view that is supported by von Hügel: he reads the *Life* and concludes that because she saw God (the Offended One) to be supremely good and herself (the offender) quite the opposite, she had such a hatred of self and a desire to be subjected to

⁷³ Mary T. Clark, "Introduction" in *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 28-29.

⁷⁴ Leuba, 73.

the divine justice that she therefore would not receive plenary indulgences.⁷⁵ Not denying these conclusions – as they relate to Catherine – quite the opposite is true for most souls because if the soul were to be granted a plenary indulgence, the soul would want that sense of punishment and guilt to be alleviated, and if that were to happen, it would be a demonstration of God's merciful grace and pure love. For this reason, we have a probable cause as to why Catherine still holds plenary indulgences in high esteem. But, as she warns in *Purgation and Purgatory*:

Do not rely on yourself and say, "I will confess myself, receive a plenary indulgence, and with that be cleansed of all my sins." The confession and contrition that is required for the plenary indulgence is such, and so demanding, that were you to realize it you would tremble in terror, more fearful of not having that grace than confident of being able to obtain it.⁷⁶

The obvious danger, then, of indulgences is that of self-hood, which may occur in the want of spiritual gifts and the belief that through our own efforts we can attain purification without full reliance upon the divine. As *Purgation and Purgatory* relates again:

And if the living were to offer alms for the benefit of the souls in purgatory, to shorten time of their purgation, still those souls could not turn with affection to watch, but would leave all things to God, who is paid as He wishes. If these souls could, in gratitude, turn their attention, that would be a self-seeking act that would distract them from the contemplation of the divine will - and that distraction would be hell.

However, Catherine, in perfect harmony with Pure Love, had subdued her lower self, and therefore could not have any need or desire for indulgences. She had no desire for these

⁷⁵ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 124.

⁷⁶ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 84.

spiritual gifts, and no need to perform mortification because she was *not* paying off the debt of sin. That debt has been forgiven in Christ, but "if contrition could purge it, the soul would turn to it in an instant and forthwith pay its debt; and it would do so impetuously, since it has a clear appreciation of the meaning of that impediment in its way."⁷⁷ Instead, we should understand that with an implanted and divine instinct, Catherine *wanted* to go through all of purgatory because she considered it a tremendous joy:

There is no joy save that in paradise to be compared to the joy of the souls in purgatory. This joy increases day by day because of the way in which the love of God corresponds to that of the soul, since the impediment to that love is worn away daily. This impediment is the rust of sin. As it is consumed the soul is more and more open to God's love. Just as a covered object left out in the sun cannot be penetrated by the sun's rays, in the same way, once the covering of the soul is removed, the soul opens itself fully to the rays of the sun. The more rust of sin is consumed by fire, the more the souls responds to that love, and its joy increases. Not that all suffering disappears, but the duration of that suffering diminishes. The souls in purgatory do not consider that punishment as suffering, for content in God's will, they are one with Him in pure charity.

Thus, Catherine not only *wanted*, but *needed* to go through all of purgatory because she was following the divine ordinance, which, in turn, was cleansing and restoring her wholly to her divine end in God.⁷⁸

All this mortification seems necessary for Catherine as there needs to be something to counteract the almost unbearable joy that was mounting inside the soul.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷⁸ There are numerous instances throughout *Purgation and Purgatory* where Catherine references the joy of suffering in purgatory. As Anthony Kelly noted, "what is remarkable in this saint's writings is the way she removed the purificatory suffering from any implication of divine punishment inflicted on the sinner from the outside, as it were. For her, the process of purification is freely and even joyously embraced for the sake of union with God" (Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*, New York: Orbis Books, 2006, 118).

Nonetheless, the soul must be careful when it tries to render satisfaction, further its purification, and obtain its restoration in the divine because the insistence for the soul to suffer all the torments possible can easily fall into a selfish love of achievement rather than the love that is to be appropriated to God alone.⁷⁹ Therefore, once Catherine's body had been sufficiently subdued, she was granted an experience that would lead her beyond exterior concerns. As we read in the *Life*: "Finally, her sweet and loving Lord drew her to himself, and bestowed upon her a caress, by the power of which she was entirely immersed in that sweet Divinity to which she abandoned herself exteriorly, so that she exclaimed: 'I live no longer, but Christ lives in me.'"⁸⁰ In an instant her severe mortification ended with this vision and "even had she wished to carry out such mortification, she would have been unable."⁸¹ Instead of focusing on exterior acts of mortification, the power of pure love now entered and subjected her mind and soul to nothing other than God alone.⁸²

Purgatory's Illumination: Asceticism

By God's most recent touch of Pure Love on her life, Catherine is awakened ever more to the consciousness of God. She responds to the moment marked with splendour and intensity as if it were another conversion experience, and it leads her to be possessed even more with pure love, which profoundly deepens her mystical and passionate life. As Underhill underscores, "the mystic has now a veritable foothold in that transcendental

⁷⁹ Paul Garvin, *The Life and Sayings of Saint Catherine of Genoa* (New York: Alba House Publications, 1964), 84.

⁸⁰ *Life*, 10.

⁸¹ *Life*, 13.

⁸² Flinders, 143.

world into which they penetrate now and again: enjoys a certain fellowship - not yet union - with the great life of the All, and thence draws strength and peace."⁸³ Yet purification is still required, and the process is again related to the correction, the cleansing, and the mortification of the ascetics and, in Catherine's case, there is an element of mystical piety.

With exterior mortification having reached its apex, an interior mortification now takes precedence with a focus upon the mind, heart, and soul. As Harton has noted, "this mortification is nothing less than the continual application of the will of God to the movements of the soul, and it depends on the enlightenment of the will by grace."⁸⁴ Catherine will demonstrate her own pure intention to pure love and the divine ordinance during what has been classified as her middle period, which can also be described as a period of illumination (1477-1499).

After Catherine exclaimed that "I live no longer, but Christ lives in me,"⁸⁵ her *judgment* was mortified through the infusion and presence of Christ's divine and human sacrificial suffering. The *Life* expresses her mortification of *judgment*: "She knew no longer whether her mere human acts were good or bad, but saw all things in God,"⁸⁶ and, subsequently, she could focus interiorly upon the divine without any other considerations. Next, in the mortification process, her *thought* was mortified. As the *Dialogue* relates, "the Spirit by now was able to discern the smallest imperfection in it and act on that

⁸³ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 233.

⁸⁴ Harton, 176.

⁸⁵ *Life*, 10.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

knowledge⁸⁷ and "it dealt with Human Frailty with dispatch and brooked no opposition."⁸⁸ With her thought mortified, she could be like the souls in *Purgation and Purgatory* and follow the divine ordinance with all her heart:

These souls cannot think, "I am here, and justly so because of my sins," or "I wish I had never committed such sins for now I would be in paradise," or "That person there is leaving before me," or "I will leave before that other one." They cannot remember the good and evil in their past nor that of others. Such is their joy in God's will, in His pleasure, that they have no concern for themselves but dwell only on their joy in God's ordinance, in having Him do what He will.⁸⁹

And, finally, she expresses the mortification of *desire* in *The Spiritual Dialogue*:

Pure Love does not attach itself to pleasure or feeling, bodily or spiritual. In the same way a spiritual attachment that seems good is dangerous: It can mislead the Soul into attaching itself not to God but to those pleasurable sentiments. He who seeks the naked love of God must flee these sentiments. Bodily sentiments, by contrast, are obviously opposed to the Spirit and the appearance of being good is not as persuasive - that is why they are less dangerous. Spiritual pleasures, however, are something of a poison against pure love of God. They are more difficult to eradicate once we become attached to them. Not to understand this is to be barred from the one perfect good - God pure and naked.⁹⁰

And, now with her *desire* mortified, Catherine is able to focus upon pure love and on God alone, and with no false self-love, she can love the divine with all her soul. It is as her biographers confirmed in the *Life* that she exclaimed, "Oh, Lord, I do not desire to follow thee for these consolations, but only for pure love."⁹¹ Essentially, all these efforts in interior mortification are preformed because the advancing soul must go through a

⁸⁷ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 122.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 71.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁹¹ *Life*, 11.

spiritual desolation and demonstrate the true essence of pure love, and love God without any thought of any reward. Amazingly, she was blessed with this realization and consolation one day after communion.⁹²

Although Catherine's life was an all-consuming experience of God alone - that awesome realization of His pure love - she did not reject the sacraments, and, therefore, did not reject the Church. For her, the sacramental Church is what sustained her during her painful journey through her mystical purgatory: she "took delight in hearing masses, bells, and offices, for the dead,"⁹³ and, above all else, she could not refrain from desiring the Eucharist.⁹⁴ Such delights and desires were common for devout followers in the late Middle Ages because, beginning in the twelfth century, sacraments were becoming ever more important in the everyday life of Christians in medieval society.⁹⁵ Of special importance were the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist: like the rise of the teaching of purgatory, these sacraments were gaining increased devotion and were being brought into ever closer connection.⁹⁶ In fact, the rise of these devotions was so significant that Richard Kieckhefer concluded that it is perhaps the most important development in late medieval Christianity.⁹⁷ Similarly, Swanson concluded that "the primacy of the mass and Christ in late medieval religion is well shown by the increasing number of feasts and

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, see chapter seven.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹⁵ James McCue, "Liturgy and Eucharist: West," in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 17 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, edited by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 428.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ As Kieckhefer noted, "in the last centuries of the Middle Ages, devotions of all kinds flourished in unprecedented profusion: pilgrimages, veneration of relics, Marian devotions, meditations on the passion of Christ, penitential exercises, and more" (Kieckhefer, 75); but, "the evolution of devotions out of earlier liturgical practice can nowhere be more clearly seen than in the eucharistic devotions of the late Middle Ages" (*ibid.*, 96).

devotions centred precisely on Christ and the Eucharist.⁹⁸ Of these, the most important was Corpus Christi, which was a feast commemorating and celebrating the unity of the Church as Christ's body.⁹⁹ However, as James F. McCue has noted, devotions and feasts like the Corpus Christi are practices that "did not replace the Eucharist, but they are a kind of purified expression of what was valued most intensely in the eucharistic celebration: the presence of God."¹⁰⁰ He realized that even though there were hardly any significant changes externally to the eucharistic liturgy between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, the theological arguments over the concrete or symbolic presence of Christ in the Eucharist during this period were of great importance "because for many of the exemplary holy people of the age, the presence of Christ – the presence of God – in the Eucharist was the center of their piety."¹⁰¹ Eucharistic piety, then, of the late Middle Ages was primarily a piety of divine presence, a sentiment recorded in the *Life* in this manner: "what she could not refrain from desiring, was holy communion; for the holy communion is nothing but God himself."¹⁰²

Accordingly, on the 25 of March, 1474, during the Feast of the Annunciation, God gave Catherine the desire for the sacrament of communion and this desire would grow throughout her illumination period and would never fail her throughout her life.¹⁰³ Here we observe a common occurrence along the mystical path. It is a progressive journey which is not however comprised of independent and sectioned stages; Catherine's divine

⁹⁸ Swanson, 142.

⁹⁹ For more information see, Miri Rubin's *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁰ McCue, 432.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Life*, 45.

¹⁰³ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 113.

craving for the Eucharist developed during the beginning stages of pure love in purgation and ascetic practices. That craving, that yearning – we will observe – continued throughout her illumination period as she struggled to keep her human frailty subdued. Nonetheless, it was during the middle period, these years of illumination, that she developed a regular pattern of eucharistic craving.¹⁰⁴ It is because, during these years, the presence of God is at the centre of eucharistic piety that God becomes the presence at the centre of Catherine's life, and, accordingly, the Eucharist becomes the presence at the centre of her love.

Actually, it is better to say that the Eucharist is the centre of her Pure Love because the Eucharist is not necessarily for the welfare of humankind, but rather for the worship of God.¹⁰⁵ If a devout and pious person focuses upon Christ's sacrifice and praises God for such grace, they are focusing on the love of the divine and directing their acceptance of the sacrament towards the presence of God alone. Such expressions are expressions of pure love, and it is in this way that Catherine receives the Eucharist – with no need or desire, focusing and directing her love towards the divine. As von Hügel emphasized:

Again, her Communion practice bears upon it the stamp of a staunch virility; of a constant emulation between her own generous turning-away from its sensible

¹⁰⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 182.

¹⁰⁵ According to McCue: "a sacrament was understood not so much as a ritual in which you took part or (using a later model) as the word addressed to you; rather, it was a power-filled act which, if the proper conditions were fulfilled, would have its effect on you. The Eucharist was an act performed by a priest in compliance with Christ's command on behalf of the people. It is striking that Peter Lombard, in a mid-twelfth-century work that was to become the standard theological textbook for the medieval universities, could call the Eucharist the *benedictio panis*, as though the words of the eucharistic liturgy were directed principally toward the bread, with the congregation presumably simply standing by. The important thing for the congregation was to mediate on the benefits to be derived from the Mass – primarily saving grace and on the source of the benefits – the passion of Christ" (McCue, 429).

consolations and the divine action, which seems to have maintained these consolations throughout her life; and of a determination to abstain even from such deeply consoling Communion, if such abstention were the more perfect for her.¹⁰⁶

Yet, for Catherine, it was important not to abstain from receiving the Eucharist because her abstaining caused her much suffering. As the *Life* confirms:

Catherine, for fear of doing wrong, abstained from communion, but with great pain; and the religious, finding that she thought more of doing wrong, than of the consolation and satisfaction of communion, directed her to make daily communion, and she returned to her accustomed way.¹⁰⁷

Uncharacteristically, especially for women during the fifteenth century, Catherine *would* be admitted to the rare and distinct privilege of receiving daily communion.¹⁰⁸ Daily reception was a practice that was normally reserved for priests, but as her biographers record, her ardent love and desire for the sacrament could not be denied. Moreover, she even suppressed her bashful instincts and characteristics and received the sacrament daily even though she knew she would be noticed for her actions.¹⁰⁹

It is important to note that women's devotion to the Eucharist has been understood as a reaction against being denied entrance into holy orders, which is what happened in Catherine's case. As Kieckhefer states:

If women could not consecrate the Host, they could at least have an extraordinarily close relationship to it in their visions and through miraculous

¹⁰⁶ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 116.

¹⁰⁷ *Life*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Shiela Kaye-Smith, *Quartet in Heaven* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press Incorporated, 1956), 18.

¹⁰⁹ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 115.

contact. What is important here is that most of these mystics wanted not merely to see but to receive the Eucharist, as frequently as they could.¹¹⁰

The *Life* records that Catherine was indeed envious of the priests who could *communicate* as many times as they wanted, but her envy was towards the fact that nobody would wonder at them for it. Thus, her envy was not out of selfish desire.

It is also noteworthy that she received the Eucharist daily when it was uncommon for a lay person to receive communion more than once a year. People in medieval society were terrified of receiving the Eucharist while in a state of sin because that would be an even graver sin. Therefore, it was safer just to look upon the Eucharist since all sins must be forgiven beforehand.¹¹¹ Consequently, devotional attention was concentrated upon Christ's Passion with the elevation of the consecrated host.¹¹² In late medieval society, the Eucharist became another ubiquitous demonstration of devotion to the Passion of Christ as it became a steadfast reminder of the physical body of Christ.¹¹³ Hence, the Eucharist was seen as an imitation of the Passion of Christ, making the Eucharist's purpose not just about sharing in divine communion, but also about making one's own unselfish and loving sacrifice.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Kieckhefer, 99-100.

¹¹¹ As McCue observed of the Middle Ages, "reception of communion during the Mass had become quite rare during this period, but it was still possible for a 14th century Franciscan writer to observe 'the Eucharist is the sacrament on which the piety of the people is nowadays is mostly based'" (McCue, 430). It is perhaps because "in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the mere act of seeing the consecrated Host was sometimes enough to have a kind of magical effect" (Kieckhefer, 97). As McCue reported, "for those who had not adequately repented of their sins, seeing the Host could inspire in them a love for God and the proper disposition for repentance" (McCue, 431), which of supreme importance in a society concerned about securing the salvation of the soul.

¹¹² Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 228.

¹¹³ Kieckhefer, 83.

¹¹⁴ Constable, 195.

In addition, the Eucharist would be the heart's food within and would provide Catherine with the ability to interiorly focus and direct the soul's attention upon the pure love of God.¹¹⁵ As the *Life* relates:

When she was at mass she was often so occupied interiorly with her Lord, that she did not hear a word; but when the time came to receive communion she accused herself, and would say: "Oh! my Lord, it seems to me that if I were dead, I should come to life, in order to receive thee, and if an unconsecrated host were given to me, that I should know it by the taste, as one knows wine from water." She said this, because, when consecrated, it sent a certain ray of love into the very depths of her heart.

As Giles Constable noted, "this type of absorption in the life and body of Jesus was characteristic of the spirituality of the late Middle Ages, and especially of Francis of Assisi and the so-called Franciscan school."¹¹⁶ What this spirituality means is that Christ is the way: "Christ the sacrament, at once the source and terminus of the divine processions to us, and both the vehicle and the goal of our return."¹¹⁷ Accepting the Eucharist as spiritual food and a vehicle for return to the divine, humankind can increase in divine grace, but it is even more than that: in receiving Christ's body and blood, we receive nothing less than Christ Himself; as Harton says, "we possess the whole Christ, His very soul and divinity"¹¹⁸ – it is the centre of Christian life.¹¹⁹ The aim in the

¹¹⁵ Harton 205; von Hügel 115.

¹¹⁶ Constable, 192.

¹¹⁷ Jean-luc Marion, "The Place of Negative Theology," in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, edited by Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 22.

¹¹⁸ Harton, 207.

¹¹⁹ These teachings are based upon theological work of Peter Lombard. As Bell says, "Lombard beings by telling us that the Greek word Eucharist means 'good grace', and that in this sacrament we not only experience an increase in virtue and grace, but receive entire him who is the fount and origins of all grace..." (David N. Bell, *Many Mansions: An Introduction to the Development and Diversity of Medieval Theology, West and East*, Cistercian Studies Series: Number One-Hundred and Forty-Six (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications Incorporated, 1989, 295-296).

sacrament of the Eucharist, then, is to achieve the qualities of Christ; in the Eucharist, humankind has an omnipresent and direct grace to attain salvation, that is, freedom from our original sin and liberty from the "rust of sin." The sacrament incorporates the real and ever-living presence of God, and, therefore, participation in the eucharistic meal was understood "to be a sharing in the immortal life that the Lord already enjoys."¹²⁰

Thus, in Catherine's baptismal conversion, she died with Christ, but in the reception of the Eucharist she has been given a way of nourishing, purifying, and restoring herself through Christ Himself. As Peter Lombard teaches, the Eucharist is instituted as a kind of medicine for our daily human frailty – communion fights against the "rust of sin." And, as Bell has noted, "since we sin daily, we should receive our medication daily; because we daily fail, daily is Christ mystically sacrificed for us."¹²¹ Hence, participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist had to be renewed each day throughout the rest of her life, because in that sacrament she had the means to eventually win the battle against her human frailty and through its divine grace burn away the "rust of sin."

Medieval eucharistic piety, then, was considered a piety of salvation, purification, and restoration. A holy person, like Catherine, understood that, partaken of daily, the Eucharist could help annihilate – more and more – the "rust of sin." In her state of divine grace, the eucharistic meal was not a poison to Catherine; rather, it was the reception of Christ's body and blood that would help against the poison of original and actual sin. Accordingly, "the connecting link between St. Catherine's exterior life and her interior

¹²⁰ Constable, 147.

¹²¹ Bell, *Mary Mansions*, 298.

existence was, according to our notions of such matters, her devotion to the Holy Eucharist."¹²² Consequently, Catherine's communions – as recorded in the *Life* – produced numerous effects, both direct and indirect, that changed her bodily, mental, and spiritual condition. Nonetheless, we must conclude with von Hügel:

The spiritual effects no doubt grew, but of this growth we have no sufficient materials for pursuing in detail. Yet they have throughout this peculiarity, that, central and all-permeating as this Eucharistic influence no doubt was, yet it nowhere takes the form of any specially Eucharistic devotion or directly Eucharistic meditation or doctrine, outside the Holy Communion itself and of the immediate occupation with it.¹²³

As mentioned in the last chapter, Catherine's meditations and doctrine are centred upon Pure Love: that Pure Love, for Catherine, is God alone – it is theistic. All this emphasis upon the Eucharist demonstrates the often noted Christo-centric character of late medieval devotion.¹²⁴ But for Catherine, the Eucharist allows for a sharing in the Godhead; it has opened the door to God. Indeed, in the Eucharist, "all the operations of the intellect must be relinquished and all our desire turned to God,"¹²⁵ and this understanding denotes a pure love and theistic approach to the divine.

On March 25, 1467 (again on the Feast of the Annunciation), another spiritual gift had been bestowed by the divine which would increase Catherine's hunger for the Eucharist. She was given in divine grace the gift of fasting and was commanded by Pure

¹²² Frances Howe, *The Saint of Genoa: Lessons from the Life of St. Catharine Flisca Durna* (Chicago: Union Catholic Publications, 1883), 82.

¹²³ Von Hügel, vol. I, 116.

¹²⁴ Michael Goodich, "The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography," in *Church History*, vol. 50, (March 1981), 32.

¹²⁵ Bell, *Many Mansions*, 108.

Love to partake in great fasts during Lent and Advent.¹²⁶ These fasts were of no volition of her own and she suggested that others not partake in such fasts; in fact, she brushed off her own fasts because she did not see any particular spiritual merit in them.¹²⁷ All the same, the gift of fasting would last for the next twenty-three years and it was observed that during this time she would only hunger for the Eucharist.¹²⁸ At first, this great inability to eat troubled Catherine: "she appears to have worried about her inedia [starvation], fearing it might be pride or morbid self-punishment, for one version of the *Life* reports in passing that she asked her confessor, whether she should force herself to eat."¹²⁹ When she did try to eat during the time of her fasts she would purge any food she had eaten. But the severity of her fasts was not absolute: she would still be able to drink water, vinegar, and pounded rock-salt, and, overall, the *Life* records that she was in much better health during the time of her fasts.¹³⁰ It is important to note that partaking in great fasts during this period in history was not only part of the pious Christian tradition, it was also a demonstration of considerable penance; Catherine, being from a privileged family, did not have to experience the famine that was passing through Europe, but through pure love she decided to accept her divine ordinance.¹³¹

Nevertheless, as von Hügel notes, "these fasts, although beginning within her first period, are not characteristic of it; and her biographers rightly put them into a chapter

¹²⁶ The *Life* indicates that God "wanted her to keep the Forty Days, in His company in the Desert" (*Life*, p.10a; von Hügel 135).

¹²⁷ Flinders, 143.

¹²⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 183.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Life*, 11b; von Hügel, vol. 1, 135.

¹³¹ Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," 1-2.

distinct from her penances, properly speaking."¹³² And, as Groeschel argues, "these fasts were not seen as penances since she did not experience any hunger or discomfort from them, and they continued long after she admits that she had lost any glimpse of her past sins or guilt."¹³³ Consequently, during her times of fasting, she would separate herself from material-minded friends, not wanting to be noticed for performing some kind of marvelous penance. As Bynum argues, fasts attack the need for food and friends, and the symbol of hunger "becomes an image for excruciating, never-satisfied love of God."¹³⁴ Hence, even though not done as penance, these fasts mimic that "automatic" subduing of humanity, which allows her to inwardly focus on and be filled with Pure Love alone, and, subsequently, these fasts "continued through her life in direct proportion to the intensity of her ecstatic experiences."¹³⁵

During this illuminative period in her life, Catherine would develop a more intimate relationship with God, and, therefore, passed into frequent ecstatic states or love-trances.¹³⁶ The different manifestations of these ecstasies were numerous: she would decide to walk around quickly for no apparent reason; she would lie down and appear as though she was dead for six hours or more; and she would be found lying on the ground with her face in her hands, overwhelmed with incredible joy. All these moments of ecstasy were always private and she would be psychologically withdrawn from her immediate surroundings.¹³⁷ When she recovered, she would immediately try to tell those around her about her ecstasy, but would fail and this caused her much pain as she could

¹³² Von Hügel, vol. I, 137.

¹³³ Groeschel,

¹³⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 182.

¹³⁵ Flinders, 143.

¹³⁶ Leuba, 69.

¹³⁷ Groeschel, 7

not tell of the overwhelming joy and transcendent knowledge that was of Pure Love.¹³⁸ It is interesting to realize that because ecstatic moments happen in Pure Love, claims of Quietism have been raised against those who support the doctrine of Pure Love. Catherine, however, was not wholly concerned with these experiences. As von Hügel observed:

And she was full of the conviction, and cared much for the formal acknowledgment on the part of others, that the possession and the increase of the most perfect love is independent of any particular state or form of life, and is directly dependent upon two things only, the grace of God and the generosity of the human will.¹³⁹

Hence, even though Quietism seems apparent, it is not as pure love, and is not dependent on these experiences. Moreover, even though Catherine neglected the calls of the curious onlookers, she always responded to calls of charity.¹⁴⁰

Although Catherine favoured God alone, God spoke to her inwardly and He divinely inspired her to the service of humankind. The *Dialogue* indicates that God, noticing that her humanity was suffering while she was lost in ecstatic experiences of Pure Love, showed it a great mercy by giving her something to do and said:

...you will work for a living. You [Catherine] will be asked to do works of charity among the poor sick, and when asked you will clean filthy things. Should you be conversing with God at the time you will leave all and not ask who sends for you or needs you. Do not do your will but that of others. You will have the time you

¹³⁸ Kaye-Smith, 30; A similar characterization of the experience can be found in the sixth stage of ascent in Bonaventure's, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, which Bell summarizes in *Many Mansions*: "Love now takes over from rational thought and joy supersedes language. And just as the journey of the mind to God began with his gift - the gift of faith - so it ends with this gift - the gift of an ecstatic, experiential, and incommunicable knowledge of his nature" (Bell, 108).

¹³⁹ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 140.

¹⁴⁰ Groeschel, 7.

need, for I intend to crush all disordered pleasure and discipline you – and I want to see results.¹⁴¹

As Swanson has stated, “here the driving force was *caritas* - ‘charity’ or ‘love’, although neither translation conveys the word’s full meaning.”¹⁴² What charity provides is a penitential and restorative force within humankind: it is the core of all virtues; it cleanses and unites the soul; it illumines humankind with the divine; and this divine knowledge increases the soul’s vigour for good and God.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, devout, pious, and charitable works had to be undertaken in the right spirit. Here Catherine follows the Rule of St. Augustine, which stresses the practice of the spiritual gift of *caritas* – love for neighbour and God. Zumkeller explains: “according to the teaching of sacred scripture, Christian perfection consists basically in love (*caritas*) – love given to us, then given back to Him and others,”¹⁴⁴ but “without denying the merit of good works before God, the Augustinians liked to refer to the teaching of Augustine, that ‘all our good merits (*merita*) are only gifts of God’ (*Enchiridion* 107.28).”¹⁴⁵ Hence, *caritas* is not founded upon a self-centred love; rather *caritas* is disinterested, purifying, and reciprocal love done in sacrifice for others and the divine – it is a “love” of Pure Love.

Understanding that *caritas* is of Pure Love, Catherine could fulfill the two most important commandments of Christ: “and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” and “you

¹⁴¹ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 128.

¹⁴² Swanson, 206; For a wider definition of the word *caritas*, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 34: charity (2a2ae,23-33) (London and New York: 1975), 32-33.

¹⁴³ Harton, 54.

¹⁴⁴ Adolar Zumkeller, “The Spirituality of the Augustinians,” in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, vol. 17 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, edited by Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing Incorporated, 1987), 65.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

shall love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁴⁶ However, with an awareness of the dangers of the lesser self (the soul covered in the "rust of sin"), Catherine depended even more on Pure Love and was given divine rules which would guide her while she exercised charitable actions and eliminated that sense of self that could develop in those actions:

Her love once said to her interiorly: "My daughter, observe these three rules, namely: never say I will or I will not. Never say mine, but always ours. Never excuse yourself, but always accuse yourself." Moreover he said to her: "When you repeat the 'Our Father' take always for your maxim, *Fiat voluntas tua*, that is, may his will be done in everything that may happen to you, whether good or ill; from the 'Hail Mary' take the word *Jesus*, and may it be implanted in your heart, and it will be a sweet guide and shield to you in all the necessities of life. And from the rest of Scripture take always for your support this word, *Love*, with which you will go on your way, direct, pure, light, watchful, quick, enlightened, without erring, yet without a guide or help from any creature; for love needs no support, being sufficient to do all things without fear."¹⁴⁷

With these instructions, Catherine was able to find the balance between the roles of Quietism and active work. At any occasion, the mystic in the spiritual life must recognize the necessity of both internal and external good works to help them strive towards their divine purpose in God; and, as has been mentioned, paradoxically, these actions are from God alone.¹⁴⁸ Here we have another reason why Catherine had such a reliance upon the Eucharist: as Peter Lombard teaches, Christ instituted the sacrament to increase virtue, that is, charity.¹⁴⁹ Accordingly, in the pure love of *caritas*, she could volunteer "for

¹⁴⁶ Mark 12:30-31 The New Oxford Annotated Bible NRSV with the Apocrypha.

¹⁴⁷ *Life*, 14-15.

¹⁴⁸ Groeschel, 32.

¹⁴⁹ Bell, 298.

service in a Genovese hospital, heroically ministering to the sick and destitute, including ministering during a time of devastating plague"¹⁵⁰

In 1479, Catherine would move into the Pammatone hospital in Genoa and toil without any monetary resources or payment. She performed innumerable pious and charitable acts because Pure Love gave her the fortitude to leave her wealthy and privileged place in Genoese society; and, as the Spirit in pure love said to Human Frailty: "I want you to experience obedience. In this way you will learn to be humble and subject to others."¹⁵¹ Consistently, she would give herself – with an incredible fervour – to the work of the hospital and, through these works of mercy, she would demonstrate the reciprocal nature of pure love. Moreover, she demonstrated the disinterested nature of pure love as she suffered through complete emotional and physical exhaustion as she helped others in need. In addition, she would perform actions that would go beyond the duty of her position: she would take all the dirty clothes that were filled with loathsome disease and foul ordure and washed them for the sick patient; and, when she felt the nauseous from cleaning the most disgusting filth, she would take the dirt and put it in her mouth.¹⁵² Why would Catherine practice such harsh asceticism? Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach tell us:

The medieval sources tell us that such behavior was motivated by identification with Christ's passion, service to God, renunciation of the flesh, subordination of the physical to the spiritual, penance for the sins of other individuals or for all humankind, penance for one's own sins, and combat with the devil. Underlying these reasons were, to varying degrees, the desire to move closer to God and the

¹⁵⁰ Donald Christopher Nugent, *Mysticism, Death, and Dying* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 92.

¹⁵¹ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 122.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 133.

assumption that carnal thoughts and preoccupations interfered with the attainment of this goal.¹⁵³

Hence, Catherine performed these actions because they were caused by pure love, and, accordingly, pure love helped her keep her human frailty subdued so that she could surpass natural tendencies that would obstruct any attempt to help the sick to the best of her abilities. Thus, when the plague spread throughout the city of Genoa in 1493, she was able to demonstrate the ideal of "servanthood" within "sainthood" for which she became well known.¹⁵⁴

Now, as Flinders notes, "charitable work is sweetened for most people by 'warm feelings,' but it was not for Catherine."¹⁵⁵ This is because charity in Pure Love has no sense of self and, therefore, must be disinterested. Furthermore, if charity is meant to cleanse the soul of the "rust of sin," it must do so in the third way which God can cleanse humankind's body and soul, which is discussed in the *Life*:

The third mode, which is still more excellent than either of these, is when God gives his creature a mind so occupied in him, that neither interiorly nor exteriorly is it able to think of anything but God, and those things which are his. Even the works which it performs it does not think of or hold in any esteem, except in so far as they are necessary to the love of God; and hence it seems like one dead to the world, for it is unable to delight itself in anything or to understand anything, even if it wished to do so, either in heaven or on earth; there is given to it also such a poverty of spirit that it knows neither what it has nor what it does, nor does it make any provision for what it should do, either with regard to God or to the world, for itself or for its neighbor, because it is not shown how it may do so, but is always held by God in union with him and in sweet confusion.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17.

¹⁵⁴ Kaye-Smith, 3.

¹⁵⁵ Flinders, 148.

¹⁵⁶ *Life*, 43.

Thus, when she demonstrated the reciprocal nature of pure love, Catherine did so by loving everyone without love. And, to determine the purity of these charitable actions after eleven years of service in the hospital, Catherine was given a final test: she was appointed as the *rettora* or director of the hospital. With her humanity "empty of any support or refreshment within,"¹⁵⁷ she spent her days superintending, ordering and stimulating the severely strained workers and consoling and visiting the abundant numbers of fear-filled sick people.¹⁵⁸ Her work as the director of the hospital was meant to be the final stage in Catherine's spiritual asceticism or interior mortification as she demonstrated that in pure love she had annihilated the remaining stain of pride. This is because during her time as *rettora*, she would have to beg God to provide her with His strength. Without this divine strength, she understood that her body and soul would have been unable to complete the tasks set before them, and, therefore, she was given a certain corresponding love that would help her in moments of weakness. With a dependence on Pure Love, she was able to work at a quickened pace and was able to give herself more to the internal contemplation of pure love; and, the more she depended on pure love, the more she realized how much she needed it both physically and spiritually.

But, how was all the charity in Pure Love instilled in Catherine's life? Swanson, in a discussion about the nature of charity, gives us an answer: "essentially charity was not an act, but an impulse to act"¹⁵⁹ and "its greatest impact on human existence had come with the Incarnation."¹⁶⁰ Of Christ Incarnate, Anthony Kelly notes:

¹⁵⁷ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 119.

¹⁵⁸ Von Hügel, vol. I, 144.

¹⁵⁹ Swanson, 207.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

In him (Christ), we are confronted with the ultimate form of human existence. He is met as the "truth" fundamental to each one's unique identity. We become aware of ourselves as being made through him, for him, in him (Col. 1:15-18). In that piercing encounter, the distortions of our existence are made evident. With that meeting comes the realization that we are not yet in every aspect of our being wholly in Christ and fully subject to him.¹⁶¹

In the late Middle Ages, the humanity of Christ was a prevalent doctrine that served as the purest model for a perfect life on earth.¹⁶² Attempts to live this perfect life may be seen in the lives of monks and nuns. Although the ideal, to remain isolated within the confines of convents or monasteries was considered extremely important for the spiritual life, monks and nuns also participated in the material world. In accordance with the ideal of detachment, a new ideal of sainthood developed that would demand works of charity. Subsequently, monks and nuns in many convents and monasteries began caring for disadvantaged people of medieval society – particularly the old and sick. These acts of charity were representative of the actions that were constantly performed by Christ throughout his life. It is why Francis of Assisi stressed following the humility and poverty of Christ and, in a word, "compassion" became his life and love.¹⁶³ In a similar fashion, Catherine's illumination period is like Francis of Assisi's "the life of the Gospel of Christ";¹⁶⁴ she manifested and reflected the same sacrificial characteristics in an attempt to become more like Christ.

According to Constable, in the fifteenth century:

¹⁶¹ Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 124-125.

¹⁶² Constable, 169.

¹⁶³ Hellman, 43.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

The ideal of imitating Christ's Humanity is found in the works particularly of writers associated with the movement known as the *Devotio moderna*, and also in those by humanists, where it often mingled with the idea of man's creation in the image of God, which tended to stress his potential divinity.¹⁶⁵

As well, the traditional equation of the female with flesh tended to associate Christ's humanity with the feminine. Consequently, the imitation of Christ for women meant that they tended to manifest His actions through their physical being.¹⁶⁶ The imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*), with emphasis on the need to suffer with Him, was an action – even a lifestyle – taken so that the imitator might be glorified with Him. In addition, this suffering “sacrifice to Christ was addressed to Him as an intercessor, as one Person of the Trinity, to intercede with the Father,”¹⁶⁷ in order that we may procure our divine end. Partaking in the Passion of Christ would allow the soul to reflect the image of the infinite divine in finite being; accordingly, the imitation of Christ was linked with the theological doctrines of divine filiation and the image of God.¹⁶⁸

Because Catherine was Christ-like in her words and deeds, and received the Eucharist frequently throughout her life, her life and teachings can be compared with the aforementioned movements, especially that of humanism, which originally focused on charitable works and reviving Christianity through literary classics like those of the work of Augustine. However, concerning *imitatio Christi* in the purgatorial life and teachings of Catherine, Caroline Walker Bynum notes:

¹⁶⁵ Constable, 238.

¹⁶⁶ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 14.

¹⁶⁷ Swanson, 142.

¹⁶⁸ Constable, 146.

Catherine's purgatory is Christ's love, with which we can never fully join. It is *imitatio Christi*, but an *imitatio* never fully achieved. It expiates our sins and those of others, but it is not so much a place or a time as an experience of purging, and we could not wish it a moment shorter, for ourselves or for others.¹⁶⁹

The idea of the imitation of Christ was essentially a process of salvation, purification, and deification; God decided to manifest the divine Essence in a human being in order that human beings may become God. Therefore, with this emphasis, the imitation of Christ was thought to involve a human being's essence as well as their actions.¹⁷⁰ However, it would be through the experiential understanding of the pain and suffering of the human Christ that Catherine's soul would be led to an understanding of the importance of the divinity of Christ.¹⁷¹

If we follow Christ, we can be made into what He is: God. Like the early theologians, Catherine's concern is more with Christ's divinity rather than His humanity when it comes to salvation, purification and restoration as a process of deification.¹⁷² In other words, the imitation of Christ involves a continual assimilation and participation in our lost likeness to God and our original likeness must be regained before any soul can return to the divine. This achievement can only be accomplished through wholly expressing both natures of Christ.¹⁷³

According to the teachings of Aquinas, there is a difference between likeness and image: *likeness* refers to the relation between similar things, whereas the *image* refers to the relation between differing things. Hence, *imitatio*, in its inherent meaning, referred to

¹⁶⁹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 183.

¹⁷⁰ Constable, 146.

¹⁷¹ Ross, 50.

¹⁷² Constable 151.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 166.

differing things, and a complete imitation of Christ goes beyond His humanity to His divinity. Giles Constable expands and summarizes:

The humanity of Christ is the way by which the divinity is reached (*ad divinitatem pervenitur*), Thomas wrote in the *Compendium theologiae*, and 'We are joined and assimilated to God through Christ, in the *Exposition on the angelic salutation 'Ave Maria'*. In the *Summa* he wrote that 'The true beatitude of man and end of human life' is 'the full participation of divinity ... and this is granted to us through humanity of Christ'. He went on to support this conclusion with the pseudo-Augustinian dictum that 'God was made man in order that man might become God' which was also cited by Petrarch in his treatise *On the remedies of both fortunes*, where he said that God and man were united in Christ 'in order that [He Who was] made man might make man God.¹⁷⁴

Therefore, "imitating Christ was not so much a matter of copying His earthly life and passion as of participating in His resurrection and assimilating to Christ as the image of God."¹⁷⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius reaffirms in the *Celestial Hierarchy* that humankind obtains access to God through Jesus Christ, "the light of the Father."¹⁷⁶ Yet, Denis the pseudo-Areopagite speaks of the imitation of God rather than of Christ.¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, as we have observed, Catherine combines both approaches to the divine in her mystical purgatory: she understands the pure love of God and the light of God as inseparable. Thus, to know and love God is to become God; and, yet, the movement towards deification is the process in which the soul becomes saved, purified and restored through a corresponding participation with and in Christ, which enables it to partake in an indefinite union with God.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁷⁶ Marion, 15.

¹⁷⁷ Constable, 151.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

Purgatory's Union: Death

In 1496, Catherine of Genoa's health began to decline, and both exterior and interior changes occur as she makes the transition to the third and final stage of her mystical purgatory, which began in 1499.¹⁷⁹ During this time, "probably at Midsummer, perhaps at Michaelmas, Catherine, forced to do so by increasing physical infirmities, resigns her office of Matron."¹⁸⁰ Hence, Catherine's incredible fasts cease because "the driven force of her inner conflicts had been dissipated, and defensive behavior such as the great fasts was no longer necessary to preserve balance."¹⁸¹ As such, Catherine has reached the final phase of purgation: it is a phase which demonstrates the continued importance of the experience of pain and suffering in pure love; a phase when the soul goes beyond itself to cleanse and annihilate all that obstructs its *absolute* union with God. To explain how pure love has purified her to the point of absolute perfection, she uses an analogy of gold being purified in fire:

These rays purify and then annihilate. The soul becomes like gold that becomes purer as it is fired, all dross being cast out. This is the effect of fire on material things; but in this purification, what is obliterated and cast out is not the soul, one with God, but the lesser self. Having come to the point of twenty-four carats, gold cannot be purified any further; and this is what happens to the soul in the fire of God's love. Once stripped all its imperfections, the soul rests in God, with no characteristics of its own, since its purification is the stripping away of the lower self in us.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 155.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁸¹ Groeschel, 16; von Hügel argues that these fasts did not end as abrupt as the biographers have presented. For his argument, see von Hügel, 148.

¹⁸² *Purgation and Purgatory*, 79-80.

These divine rays of simple love manifest themselves through the essence of fire, making fire ultimately an expression of the overwhelming essence of pure love, which is central to her teaching.¹⁸³ Moreover, these divine rays of pure love contain such a penetrating power that they can apparently destroy anything that would hinder the progression of the soul's union with the divine; they contain such an immense and measureless power that they could consume the existence of hell.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, the soul is purified is through the constant bombardment of divine rays of pure love. The divine fire conforms the soul to the divine, which is the business of purgatory, and the soul, because of pure love, longs for the immense pains of the burning flames of pure love.¹⁸⁵ Accordingly, these burning flames of pure love create an exceeding joy which makes the human soul feel as if it has already acquired its absolute divine end in the beatific essence or union with God.¹⁸⁶

Of this divine end, Nugent has noted, "Catherine had prayed that 'Your pure love ... will annihilate me,' and in *her* terms this prayer seemed to have been answered";¹⁸⁷ "one of her foremost figures is fire (*fuoco*), and Catherine burned"; "Catherine had become, as it were, a holocaust."¹⁸⁸ Yet, as Catherine burned up in this divine holocaust she described the soul as gold. Gold is considered the most precious and purest of all metals: in material terms it is an incorruptible substance that never tarnishes and can endure all the tests of fire; in the spiritual terms, it has often represented the grandeur of

¹⁸³ Flinders, 141.

¹⁸⁴ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 79.

¹⁸⁵ Petry, 394.

¹⁸⁶ Donald Christopher Nugent, "Mystic of Pure Love: Saint Catherine of Genoa," in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, edited by Katharina M. Wilson (London: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 70.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

the divine and the aureoles of the saints.¹⁸⁹ Understanding the soul in these terms, Catherine realizes her soul to be an invaluable commodity that can withstand the divine and purifying fire of pure love, and, once purified, is incorruptible, stainless, and with an effervescent glow, participates in the splendour of the divine. The analogy of refined gold reminds us that it is not the soul – that animated self that drives our being – that finds its absolute annihilation in the divine fires of pure love, for the soul remains purified and refined. What is annihilated then? Catherine clearly states that it is “the lower self” or “the lesser self”; that is, as we have said, anything that makes the soul lower or lesser than it is meant to be as ordained by God, which is the “stain of sin” or the “rust of sin” left over from original and actual sin. Margaret Aston notes that in the purgation process, “fire eliminated the contaminated elements, freeing Christian society from pollution and sickness,”¹⁹⁰ and that the contamination and illness was sin. Therefore, what is consumed in the irreversible fires of pure love and reduced to dust and ashes is not the soul, but rather sin, which can never rise again because once the soul is perfect it will always be perfect – it will perpetually regenerate itself in the divine, being absolute both in image and likeness in perfection.¹⁹¹

If the soul does not go through this burning and purifying process of pure love, it will never regain its original and divine essence, and, therefore, it will never attain absolute union with God. Hence, the soul in purgatory is under the perception that it is an incredible mercy to be delivered by the pure love of God; with immense pain and joy, the

¹⁸⁹ Margaret Aston, *Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion, 1350-1600* (London and Rio Grande, Ohio: The Hambledon Press, 1993), 294.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 300.

fires of pure love destroy all natural faculties and the rust of sin is annihilated in order that the soul can now pass into heaven and experience an absolute union with God.¹⁹² Before, Catherine knew "My *Me* is God"; now her "*Me*" is actually becoming God in image and likeness. Her attainment of this new stage of perfection and union is described in the *Dialogue*:

Catherine's soul, like the seraphim, had penetrated into essential fire, because of which she would cry out many times. She would often turn tenderly to animals and say "Aren't you, too, creatures of God?" – and all this she did because of the fire in her heart. Though the Spirit now no longer considered her an ordinary human creature, since she was now without Human Frailty, nonetheless he subjected her to one last trial, to purify her still further. She died during this trial, the hardest one of all.¹⁹³

As von Hügel noted:

Five times the *Vita* [*Life*] compares her countenance, which, when she was deeply moved, had a flushed, luminous and transparent appearance, to that of an Angel or Cherub or Seraph; and it even gives a story, which purports to explain how she came to be called the latter.¹⁹⁴

Although these descriptions, based on eye-witness accounts, are definitely literary dramatizations and part of the hagiographic tradition, they are also theological considerations used to demonstrate that Catherine has reached a new perfection and union. Her soul – now pure in Pure Love – could now look up towards heaven and see the sights of heaven like the angels, faces of the divine, and joys of eternal life because

¹⁹² M. C. Jane James, "Judgment and Purgatory in Newman's *The Dream of Gerontius* and in the Treatise on Purgatory of St. Catherine of Genoa," in the *Downside Review*, vol. 118, no. 411, (April 2000), 141.

¹⁹³ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 133.

¹⁹⁴ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 161.

she was as perfect as she needed to be to enter the divine realm.¹⁹⁵ Yet, Catherine, now being able to see into the divine realm, could perceive purgatory as well:

And in her purified union with God and the fire she felt within, it was apparent that she had seen into the mirror of her spirit and humanity and had seen thereby the state of the souls in purgatory. That was why she spoke so well of the souls in purgatory, having herself been purified in the fire of divine love.¹⁹⁶

Here we understand that Catherine, now purged, illuminated, and purified to perfection in pure love, could finally perceive what was actually happening to her body and soul throughout her life. In addition, now perfected and full of pure love, Catherine's compassion – with a Franciscan-like quality – had passed beyond the suffering within humanity and encompassed all of God's universe: "she was most compassionate towards all creatures; so that, if an animal were killed or a tree cut down, she could hardly bear to see them lose that being which God had given them."¹⁹⁷ Consequently, because the universe was created out of pure love, she had a pure love for creation and became distraught by the destruction of nature, because the destruction of nature is the destruction of the manifested attributes that were created by Pure Love.

Accordingly, as Underhill realized:

In the development which was crowned by such convictions as these, we have an almost classical example of spiritual growth; moving out from the limitations of a selfish and unsatisfied naturalism, through purifying self-discipline and service, to the levels of full creative personality.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 140-141.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁹⁷ *Life*, 112.

¹⁹⁸ Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 165.

Here we come to the incredible realization that Catherine has fully conquered her human frailty, which the *Dialogue* confirms yet again: "she was so absorbed within that her humanity could not be concerned with any earthly thing."¹⁹⁹ And, von Hügel observes, "there was now the new intensity and closeness of interaction between soul and body, which must have made such lofty detachment from all but the spiritual realities a matter of the rarest grace and of the most heroic self-conquest."²⁰⁰ Numerous examples are given to show how she conquered human frailty: she could grab rose bushes, bite her hands, even burn her hands without experiencing any resistance from human frailty. She also spoke very little during this period because she was "too habitually absorbed in the consideration and contemplation of certain great spiritual doctrines and realities, to have the leisure or inclination for any such questions."²⁰¹ Nevertheless, because of the overwhelming and overflowing nature of pure love, Catherine would sometimes make cry out – without consideration for body or soul – of her experience:

Completely in charge of her person, the Spirit left her only the instinct for the Sacrament, which was never taken away from her. Utterly alone, within and without besieged and seeking to draw herself together, she seemed nailed to the cross. Her suffering was beyond telling. And yet, she experienced such joy and expressed it in such fiery words of love that all those who heard them wept.²⁰²

Here we observe an ever-deepening mystical contemplation, which could be considered a "dark night of the spirit": in spite of an absence of material temptations, passions, and distractions, there is a darkness within her interior and mind, and, therefore, she cannot

¹⁹⁹ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 143.

²⁰⁰ Von Hügel, vol. I, 165.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 164–165.

²⁰² *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 135.

perceive any action or reaction from God. Yet, there is a greater understanding of sin and aching desire for the divine because her whole being has been interpenetrated with the divine – which causes even more suffering as she is absorbed in this purified union.²⁰³

Going through this “dark night of spirit,” Catherine would need guidance. The person God appointed for her guidance was Don Marbotto, who took over for her as *rettora* of the hospital and could hear her confessions, say Mass, and give her the Eucharist at her convenience. As the *Life* mentions:

At the end of the twenty-five years, during which she had persevered in the way of God without the means of any creature, the Lord gave her a priest, to take care both of her soul and of her body; a spiritual man and one of holy life, to whom God gave light and grace to understand His operations within her.²⁰⁴

As von Hügel has said, “now the rare and profound isolation and independence of her middle period render this turning to, and finding of human help specially significant.”²⁰⁵ It was significant, because Catherine could no longer tolerate any more interior and exterior conflicts within her purified union with the divine.²⁰⁶ Moreover, without any sense of body and soul, Catherine needed human help to discern her being and experience in the material world; “his mere presence was enough to strengthen and reassure her, giving her the comfort and support her human frailty needed in these latter years.”²⁰⁷

Although Catherine did regularly confess to Marabotto till the end of her life, she often found it difficult to discuss or produce matters for absolution because she was

²⁰³ Harton, 271.

²⁰⁴ *Life*, 117b; von Hügel, 156.

²⁰⁵ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 156.

²⁰⁶ Flinders, 151.

²⁰⁷ Kaye-Smith, 35.

already in a purified union.²⁰⁸ Accordingly, von Hügel noted, "Marabotto's Direction consists, then, in giving her the human support of human understanding and sympathy, and, no doubt, in reminding her, in times of darkness, of the lights and trust received and communicated by her in times of consolation."²⁰⁹ Hence, in a state of divine grace, Marabotto would attempt to read the mind of Catherine; but he should be considered more of a disciple than a spiritual guide as the pure love of God alone was her spiritual guide. Marabotto would often have to guess the mind of Catherine because her understanding of her own transcendent or mystical experiences and the divine was *apophatic*, that is, beyond words and ideas. As with her previous mystical ecstasies, she was often unable to communicate her ideas; but when she was able she would use basic analogies in an attempt to explain the simple truth and love she was experiencing.

Out of all her mystical comparisons or analogies, obviously the most famous is her description of the souls in purgatory, but even within this description she admits that the "tongue cannot express nor heart understand the full meaning of purgatory."²¹⁰ Nonetheless, she still desires and attempts to share her divine understanding with even simpler analogies - like the aforementioned purification of gold. But even with these mystically infused descriptions and convictions Catherine concludes, "from what I have understood up to this point in life, ... by comparison all words, sentiments, images, the very idea of justice or truth, seem completely false."²¹¹

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁰⁹ Von Hügel, vol. 1 158.

²¹⁰ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 78.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

Because of Catherine's difficulty in explaining her mystical experience and divinely infused purgatorial situation, Underhill observes that "some of her sayings of this period are among the strangest which the Christian mystics have left to us, and seem almost to imply the claim to an actual transmutation of her personality; that, which is known in mystical theology as the 'transforming union' of the soul with God."²¹² But, in fact, this is exactly what Catherine is claiming, according to *Purgation and Purgatory*:

I am more confused than satisfied with the words I have used to express myself, but I have found nothing better for what I have felt. All that I have said is as nothing compared to what I feel within, the witnessed correspondence of love between God and the Soul; for when God sees the Soul pure as it was in its origins, He tugs at it with a glance, draws it and binds it to Himself with a fiery love that by itself could annihilate the immortal soul. In so acting, God so transforms the soul in Him that it knows nothing other than God; and He continues to draw it up into His fiery love until He restores it to that pure state from which it first issued.²¹³

Catherine, being completely *purified* in body and soul, can now enter into a "transforming union" with the divine, which will eventually lead her to be *restored* in the divine; that is, she is still experiencing an ever-deepening union with the divine as she travels along the unitive path, and, therefore, has not yet reached the unitive life – that final and flawless point or apex of all perfection, where her purified and perfected soul has reached the end of the unitive path, that is, where her soul has been restored to its divine end in God alone.²¹⁴

In this "transforming union," then, Catherine is still going through the "dark night of the spirit" because she has not yet reached that final *state* of wholly and holy perfection

²¹² Underhill, *Mystics of the Church*, 165.

²¹³ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 78-79.

²¹⁴ Harton, 324.

– that state which lies beyond death, that is, the soul's beatific end in heaven and God.²¹⁵ And, because the soul is in the "dark night of the spirit," it will still experience suffering, as affirmed in *Purgation and Purgatory*:

When a soul is close to its first creation, pure and unstained, the instinct for beatitude asserts itself with such impetus and fiery charity that any impediment becomes unbearable. The more the soul is aware of that impediment, the greater its suffering. The souls in purgatory have no sin in them, nor is there any impediment between them and God. Their only suffering lies in what holds them back, that instinct which has not as yet fully manifested itself. In considering how an impediment blocks our way to God, and for what just reasons the instinct for beatitude is impeded, the soul feels within it a fire like that of hell, save that it has no sense of guilt.²¹⁶

Although the soul can reach perfection in purgatory – being wholly in spirit and purified in God – it still suffers because the divine instinct has not as yet fully manifested itself: that is, Catherine is still alive. To explain the suffering, Catherine uses a highly feminine symbol which draws comparison with her passion for the Eucharist: the symbol of bread.²¹⁷ This illustration explains that Catherine suffers from a hunger to be gathered in the divine, in the same way that God has been hungering for all to be returned to Him; and, accordingly, she has responded to the divine's longing for her soul by longing to be with Him. But, as we have mentioned, this desire can only be satisfied after we expire.²¹⁸

Accordingly, Catherine feels stuck between two worlds: the material life and the afterlife. As the *Dialogue* describes, she feels as though she was being held in the air with her soul reaching towards heaven and the body innately holding onto the earth with a

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 332.

²¹⁶ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 74.

²¹⁷ See, *Purgation and Purgatory*, 76-77. Catherine also uses the symbol of bread in the *Life* to illustrate the process in which humankind - interiorly and exteriorly - becomes annihilated in God (*Life*, 46-47).

²¹⁸ Ross, 52.

nostalgic sentiment because, since it is corruptible it lacks the instinct for the divine.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, as the soul is moved closer and closer to the divine in its "transforming union," it begins to win the struggle, as the body – also gaining a foretaste of the joys of heaven – will eventually lose its evil inclination and resistance and begin to forgo its own very existence.²²⁰ Now, Catherine longs even more to die, but it is "not with morbid longing of bitterness and impatience, nor even with the pathological longing of exhaustion, but with a deep spiritual longing to be with her Love."²²¹ Accordingly, with this divine longing, she develops a desire for unction.²²² But it was a divine desire that could not be expiated because first she has to go through this last stage of love:

The last stage of love is that which comes about and does its work without man's doing. If man were to be aware of the many hidden flaws in him he would despair. These flaws are burned away in the last stage of love. God then shows that weakness to man, so that the soul might see the workings of God, of that flaming love. Things man considers perfect leave much to be desired in the eyes of God, for all the things of man that are perfect in appearance - what he seeks, feels, knows - contaminate him. If we are to become perfect, the change must be brought about in us and without us; that is, the change is to be the work not of man but of God. This, the last stage of love, is the pure and intense love of God alone. In this transformation, the action of God in penetrating the soul is so fierce that it seems to set the body on fire and to keep it burning until death. The overwhelming love of God gives it a joy beyond words.²²³

Only passively can humankind reach its divine end; it is all in the hands and mercy of God to restore us back into Him. All the same:

²¹⁹ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 137-138.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

²²¹ Kaye-Smith, 38

²²² A sacrament given at the end of life which is "to restore that harmony of organization between the soul and body which has been disturbed by evil, so that the soul may best fulfill its vocation (end in the divine) - not as often thought, simply bodily healing by spiritual means (it can benefit the body, but its end is wholly spiritual) - it does not deal with sin, but with the disorganization introduced by evil in the world" (Horton, 216-217).

²²³ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 81.

The more God draws the soul up to Him, the more He instills in it the desire to be drawn up; once God has led the soul to the last step, when He wishes to realize the soul and have it come home, the soul is so impatient to find itself in God that it experiences the body itself as purgatory.²²⁴

As the *Dialogue* relates again, "in the spirit of Catherine one saw paradise, and purgatory in her suffering body."²²⁵ Accordingly, in Catherine's mystical purgatory we not only have a theological life, we also have a theological death: in the last years of her life, as her health fails, we learn about all the crucifying details of her interior and exterior experience as she suffers from numerous physical, mental, and even, at times, spiritual disorders, which make the annihilation of her body and soul seem absolute.²²⁶

Like the soul in "mystical purgatory," the body is in divine grace, aflame with pure love and moving towards its divine end (which is death and eventual resurrection). Therefore, it should not only be acknowledged as a "bodily purgatory," but a "real purgatory" as well.²²⁷ Accordingly, we can appreciate why Groeschel suggests that "these experiences along with Catherine's conversion, were the most important in her life."²²⁸ As von Hügel noted, "nothing is more characteristic of her psychic state, during these years, than the ever-increasing intensity, shiftingness, and close interrelation between the physical and mental,"²²⁹ and the *Dialogue* confirms: "suffering broke that body from head to toe, so that there was no part of it that was not tormented by inner

²²⁴ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 138.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

²²⁶ Nugent, "Mystic of Pure Love: Saint Catherine of Genoa," 70.

²²⁷ As Nugent observed: "If you will, Catherine as naturalized purgatory as well as supernaturalized life. And she has put purgatorial purgation and mystical purgation on the same plane" (*ibid.*).

²²⁸ Groeschel, 18.

²²⁹ Von Hügel, vol. 1, 164-165.

fire,"²³⁰ and, "fires of love encircled her and many times it seemed as if she were about to die of them; especially in her last year when she ate in one week what a normal person would in a day."²³¹ From these descriptions, Leuba concludes that "she was ever translating her physical disorders and discomforts into spiritual terms, finding in them moral significance and using them as incentives to the perfect life."²³²

To list all the specific experiences and details of how Catherine suffered intolerably throughout her last few years is, unnecessary. What is important is that during these years she would describe, in various ways, how she perceived her body to be burning up in purgatory. As we have observed, theologically fire is considered the ultimate destroyer because it reduces the impurities of the body and soul to ashes, yet there is reclamation by destruction, restoration by annihilation, life by death, and so on. In addition, this all-consuming fire of pure love is "real," and, therefore, has "real" effects. Evidence of these "real" effects are numerous and extreme and include Catherine's inability to speak, see, move, sleep, or be touched. Moreover, "extremes meet: increasing joy multiplies the suffering, and the greater suffering leads to greater joy, so that it seems true to say that the pain of Purgatory is more intense the nearer the soul is to its deliverance."²³³ That is why, as Catherine approaches her physical death, she will experience greater suffering, but she will also have much joy because she understands that death is near, and that she will soon be fully restored and will finally obtain that most perfect and absolute union in God.

²³⁰ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 134.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

²³² Leuba, 71.

²³³ Stuart, 112.

Only when the soul has moved into that absolute union with the divine do pain and suffering end.²³⁴ Yet, as Catherine noted, "though this fire can be experienced in this life, I do not believe that God allows such souls to remain long on earth, except to show His mighty works."²³⁵ Therefore, after sixty-three years of life and just over ten years of extreme physical suffering during her final illness, when asked if she wished to receive communion, she provided a passive answer:

She answered by asking whether it was the usual time, and then pointed her finger toward heaven. The gesture implied that she was to receive Communion in heaven, where she would be perpetually united to that sweet Sacrament and her loving God.²³⁶

She understood that she was about to experience that excruciating moment of death, a transcendent or unitive mortification that would enable her to return to her Pure Love, God. Subsequently, in the last few moments of her life, she reflected the immense pain of the crucifixion by spitting up blood and symbolically positioning herself as though she was on the cross. After going through these extreme experiences of pain and suffering, she then expired in great peace without a word to say, because any final essence of the lesser self coated in the "rust of sin" was annihilated and she was fully transformed in an absolute union with God: "And this happy death occurred on the fourteenth of September in 1510, at the sixth hour, a short time before she usually received Communion."²³⁷

²³⁴ James, 140.

²³⁵ *Purgation and Purgatory*, 80.

²³⁶ *The Spiritual Dialogue*, 148.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

From her childhood to her dying days, Saint Catherine of Genoa felt the need for something more profound – that is for God. From the beginning of her life, she encountered and even longed for the pain of spiritual pleasure – the pleasure of oneness with Pure Love or God alone. In her latter years, Catherine experienced the pleasure of her pain – she attained, through joyful suffering, a spirituality that presented her sinless and absolutely pure before and, eventually, wholly in God. In addition, from her childhood and throughout the rest of her life, her desire for a virtuous and charitable life was an active and inherent aspect of her personality. In her adolescence, however, she needed an immediate or sudden change to transform her life; she needed a transcendental experience that would manifest itself into something concrete – she needed to find her true centre or self, and, subsequently, actualize wholly the ideals of Pure Love.

In her arduous search, she eventually concluded that she needed what best may be defined as a mystical doctrine of purgatory. Like many other descriptions of purgatory, her mystical doctrine of purgatory understood the afterlife as the supreme journey of the soul traveling towards the divine. Moreover, it was a purgatorial doctrine that allowed her to achieve the self-actualization of her nature that she desired. Nonetheless, constructing a spiritual discourse about the afterlife was not practical or significant enough to change her life in the here and now. Purgatory provided the necessary condition for that transformational experience, but that experience was left to the afterlife. The innate desire for profound and concrete change within her immediate life still needed to be remedied.

Catherine sensed a need for a divine purpose that extended beyond a mere "doctrine" of purgatory. The "mysticism" of purgatory provided the experiential change and spiritual mechanism required to fulfill this need. As we have observed, the mystical experience was her initial defence against her melancholy, and re-interpreting the doctrine of purgatory through the mystical experience was her mechanism for understanding and demonstrating the essence of her nature, which was found within that experience. Hence, her teaching about the doctrine of purgatory goes beyond a theological doctrine: in and through the religious element of "mysticism," hers is a doctrine that manifests itself as a theological life. Her example of a living purgatory comes from her belief that the spiritual journey is an unbroken condition and experience that occurs in both this life and the next; that is, not only is there life after death, but that purgatorial afterlife can be and should be experienced in this life, on the material earth. Unlike concepts of purgatory that were concerned with spatial conceptions and acknowledged purgatory as a completely separate life with its own story to tell, Catherine focused on the transcendent or mystical ideal that allowed for purgatory to be a present and living experience. One can experience the condition of purgatory while still alive because the distinction between life and death does not have to be dualistic; life and death can be understood as a dialectical reality. Therefore, death is anticipated in life, which means that there is more than just survival after death, but purgatory can now take place on earth. This is what Bonzi da Genova has described as Catherine of Genoa's "ultramundane catharsis" and Christopher Donald Nugent has considered as her "intramundane catharsis."¹

¹ Donald Christopher Nugent, "Mystic of Pure Love: Saint Catherine of Genoa" in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, edited by Katharina M. Wilson (London: The University of Georgia

For Catherine, her unique doctrine of purgatory would provide the ultimate symbol of the requirements of pure love, and her mystical experience would provide the ultimate form of pure love here on earth. Purgatory's purpose was to cleanse the soul to a state of absolute perfection, thus enabling it to achieve its divine ordinance: to obtain its pure and absolute union with the divine in heaven. Catherine achieved this by following the mystical path of purgation, illumination, and union in pure love, and, as we have seen, demonstrated many of the religious practices and ideals common to her era. Yet the quality of her thoughts and actions go beyond these traditional practices because of the demands of pure love: the degree to which she holds herself accountable is always held up against the divine measurements of purity and love. It is this type of extreme and transcendent purpose that innately forced Catherine of Genoa to become a saint of pure love: in order to go through purgatory on this earth and actualize her own divine nature, she would have to demonstrate the most righteous life, like that of a saint, and absolutely and wholly embody pure love – that is, Catherine of Genoa would have no choice but to become a saint of pure love.

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