

The Mystical Personality of St. Catherine of Siena

THE REAL ST. CATHERINE

IMPLICIT in any approach to great souls, especially the saints, is an abiding realization of their superiority. Today, more than ever, in the midst of the spiritual decadence in which we find ourselves, mankind seeks contact with eminent men and their works. Its purpose is the acquisition of a general and practical knowledge of their spiritual values, and self-discovery through friendly contact with those who are especially equipped to pass on what each of us desires and seeks vainly elsewhere. As happy, then, as it is timely, is our consideration of St. Catherine. Even after the lapse of six centuries this Dominican tertiary is the same vital and pulsating force so familiar to her contemporaries through her numerous writings.

That still current tradition of sympathy, paid her by those intent upon bettering the lot of mankind here below, is outside the scope of the present investigation. Fearful of having abdicated its prerogative over the works and biography of St. Catherine, criticism has succeeded, especially in the book of M. Robert Fawtier, in discrediting both. Thus, among students of the saint, there has arisen a chorus of reactions and counter-reactions, all of which have contributed to some definite conclusions. As Père Mandonnet expected, "particular points of detail have been set straight"; but Catherine has suffered no lessening of her personal greatness.

One cannot but regret the damage caused by the war in the suspension of the efforts of the International Society of Catherine Studies at the University of Siena. The present gloriously reigning Pontiff's solemn proclamation of Catherine, together with St. Francis of Assisi, as the principal patron of Italy, has not served as a sufficient incentive for

the resumption of these studies. We hope for it soon. May it be carried forward in a peaceable fashion!

A mere glance at the titles of the various works and studies, printed in the *Bollettino* of the Society and in *Studi Cateriniani* reveals at once how the various authors have, in their considerations of the Siense saint, concentrated upon her exterior aspect, which is her social work, rather than on her essentially mystical personality. Getto, Valli, and more recently, Levasti (we have not yet been able to secure the recent work of Fawtier, done in collaboration with Canet) have penetrated more deeply than others into the study of Catherine's soul. But no one has made the effort to study her as she stands revealed in her mysticism and her work from a historical viewpoint.

It is precisely that study which we are preparing and which, in its own time, will render results. Here we confine ourselves to the delineation of the Siense saint's personality as revealed in the sources most frequently cited.

MYSTICAL PERSONALITY

By the term "mystical personality" we do not restrict our treatment to a single aspect of Catherine and her work; rather would we penetrate to the very essence of her life of grace. We exclude not only the various titles applied to her personally, such as author, politician, and others of a similar nature, but also everything she shared in common with other saints. For us, "mystical" corresponds to "saintly"; hence, mystical personality is the equivalent of personal sanctity. Every saint, as a matter of fact, being an individual person, is likewise an individual mystic, distinguished by his own individual spiritual traits.

In such a treatment of St. Catherine of Siena we shall restrict ourselves to two types of relevant documents: her works and her biography, written by Blessed Raymond of Capua, who was her confessor and, like herself, a Dominican. (That biography has served as a basic work for all succeeding authors of the saint's life.) These, then, are the natural sources for the study of Catherine's mystical personality.

Blessed Raymond was not the saint's first confessor. Instead, he succeeded Thomas de la Fonte in 1374, when the saintly tertiary was about

twenty-seven years old, and had been so designated by the General Chapter of the Order of Preachers, held that year in Florence. It is necessary to keep this in mind, inasmuch as Catherine's biographer had not enjoyed first-hand evidence of all the mystical phenomena of which he wrote in his *Legenda Major*. Thus he merely recounts facts, recorded in various notes—now unfortunately lost—by Thomas de la Fonte, who was a relative as well as a friend of the saint. We shall utilize those facts which are concerned with Catherine's mysticism, that is, her "intimate personal experiences," as the basis and principle of her doctrinal position.

CATHERINE'S MYSTICISM AS REVEALED IN HER BIOGRAPHY

Although her biographer accords great importance to her first vision, which Catherine experienced at the age of six, that vision does not seem to be an exact indication of the direction in which the little girl's life was at that time clearly tending. While proceeding down the Valle Piatta toward her home, the child saw, upon the Church of St. Dominic, which was facing her, a throne on which was seated Jesus Christ, garbed in pontifical robes and extending His hand in the act of blessing her. After this vision, the biographer describes the change in the child's manner of life: her mortifications and penances, her fasts and her struggles against temptations from within and from without.

In our consideration of the saint, whatever happens always has an external occasion; from it follows a temptation of the devil or a good deed of Catherine. The hagiographer presents the following as a decisive fact. The saint had just vanquished a violent temptation by several devils. After their departure, on high appeared a great light, which illumined her small room. By it she saw Christ crucified, covered with blood, as when He embarked upon His holocaust of Himself. And addressing the holy virgin from the cross, He asked: "Catherine, My child, seest thou how I have suffered for thee? Fear not, then, to endure suffering for Me." From that moment, according to the hagiographer's account, Catherine's mystical experience is unalterably fixed; although not yet completely determined, it is always inseparably to the blood of our Redeemer.

Upon several subsequent occasions, Jesus Christ espoused her to Himself "in faith," but she vanquished both her interior and exterior foes "by the blood." One day she gave her clothing to a poor person; and during the following night her Spouse again appeared to her. With His own holy hands He drew from the wound in His right side a garment, the color of blood. On another occasion she did violence to her nature by drinking pus from the wound of an ulcerous person whom she was tending. And during that night, while she was at prayer, the Savior appeared and said: "As by that act thou hast penetrated beyond the bounds of thy nature, so shall I give thee a drink surpassing every human custom and the whole of nature." Placing His right hand upon the virgin's neck, He gently drew her toward the wound in His side, saying: "Drink, My daughter, of the drink which flows from My heart; by it thy soul will be filled with every sweetness; and thy body, despised for Me, will also be wonderfully filled." Aware that she had thus been afforded access to the very Source of life itself, she put her mouth to the most sacred wound of Christ's body—and even more with that mouth of the spirit—she drank, with as much avidity as abandon, the ineffable and inexplicable divine drink. Finally, at a sign from the Lord, she disengaged herself from the sacred spring, surfeited, and at the same time replied, "Satiety wearies neither spirit nor the thirst for suffering." This action was repeated several times.

From that time she no longer ate as before. The desire for Holy Communion increased in her, and she was continually occupied in actual contemplation. So complete was her contact with the Creator that the sensitive part of her nature was as if suspended, preventing external activity for an appreciable period of time. On one occasion she besought the Lord to prepare her for the worthy reception of the Sacrament of the Altar; "She felt as if there were falling upon her soul an abundant rain, much like a river, which was neither water nor any other ordinary liquid, but rather blood combined with fire."

Finally, on the same day, this event occurred: after Holy Communion the Spouse crucified Catherine with Himself and He imprinted the stigmata upon her body. This summit of the Christian life, not compatible with our present state, never left her. The Savior Himself,

it seems, brought her soul into His side, where He revealed Himself to her up to the mystery of the Trinity.

Authorities, both painstaking and numerous, leave no doubt concerning the content of "Catherine's experience": she is the mystic of the blood of Jesus Christ; she has tasted, short of the revelation of the Trinity. This is fully confirmed in the saint's work by the constant repetition of her mystical teaching.

ST. CATHERINE'S WORKS AND THEIR USE

Even after the siftings of the critics, there remain to us three classes of St. Catherine's writings: 382 letters, 26 prayers, and *The Dialogue*. Their doctrine is substantially the same; from each comes clearly into focus a confirmation of her confessor's testimony. Although the *Letters* lay stress rather upon the blood of Christ, and the prayers upon the Trinity, *The Dialogue* serves as a synthesis of the other two and is an illustration of the same mystical experience of Catherine. Only for greater clarity and convenience in translation do we make use of *The Dialogue*, to confirm the experience described by the biographer, the prayers, for the exposition of her mystical doctrine; and the *Letters*, to show the ultimate consequences.

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE ACCORDING TO *The Dialogue*

The principal passages of *The Dialogue* in which Catherine furnishes an insight into her mystical experience and the development of grace in her soul are but occasional.

One day the devil wished to deceive her. She put him to flight declaring: "I confess to my Creator that my life has indeed been passed in darkness, but I will hide myself in the wounds of Christ crucified and bathe myself in His blood, and so shall my iniquities be consumed and with desire will I rejoice in my Creator." And in another place, "In spite of all this [it is the eternal Father addressing her], the sense of the stench did not leave thy soul, nor the darkness from the eye of the intellect. But My providence provided for this, for at the moment when thou didst receive in Communion the body and blood of My

Son, wholly God and wholly man, as a sign that this is true, the stench left thee on account of the fragrance, and the darkness left thee on account of the light, which thou didst receive in this sacrament. And in an admirable way that was pleasing to My goodness, the odor and taste of the blood remained in thy mouth and palate for several days, as thou knowest."

Finally one morning, after a night filled with temptations by the devil, while the priest was pronouncing the words of consecration, the eternal Father declared to her: "I manifested Myself to thee, and thou didst see issue from My breast a light, like a ray from the sun which proceeds from the disk of the sun without being separated from it, and in that light, united to it, came a dove and hovered over the Host in virtue of the words of consecration which the minister pronounced. Because thy bodily eye was not strong enough to stand the light, the sight remained alone in the eye of thy intellect, and in it thou didst see and taste the abyss of the Trinity, hidden and veiled under this whiteness."

Her biographer and Catherine are then in complete accord in their testimony of her mystical experience, which is set down with the same essential features: the crucifix, the Trinity, and the blood.

THE PRAYERS: SOURCE OF HER MYSTICAL TEACHING

Some have been shocked by the proposal that Catherine's prayers should be cited to lend weight to her mystical teaching. Yet, as a matter of fact, her prayers are something more than simple expressions of selfish petitions; they are exalted out-pourings of the soul on the mystery of God and His providence. Catherine prays, by "raising her spirit to God," that she may see Him and see all things in Him, with a sense of the divine that would correspond fully to that desire which St. Paul expressed in his letter to the Philippians: "For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Ever present to the soul of Catherine were the Creator and His handiwork; she evaluated everything with the same measure as God does.

THE TRINITY IN GOD

God is the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; He is one in His essence and triune in persons. This divine essence is power, wisdom and clemency: God can do all things, He knows and wills all things. But power is especially attributed to the Father, wisdom to the Son, and clemency to the Holy Ghost. "I beg Thee, then, O God, since Thou canst do everything and knowest and willest all things . . . Thy power, eternal Father, the wisdom of Thy only Son . . . and the clemency of the Holy Spirit."

Catherine passes over the indivisibility of the three divine persons and the identity of the divine Being. However, in attributing to each His peculiar mission, it is never her intention to separate or exclude Him from the others. Isolated attribution permits her to approach each divine person in particular and to penetrate, in a certain way, to those riches which are proper to the being of God. This fact is demonstrated by the diverse symbols of the Trinity which the saint uses. Thus, at one time, the Trinity is compared to fire, a perpetual flame; at another time, to the sun, which shines forth, gives light, and causes growth again, It is seen as a plant or a vine which has three branches, like the tree of life.

CREATURES IN THE DIVINE TRINITY

Even before their appearance outside It, creatures were present in the Trinity: in Its power, wisdom, and clemency. God beheld them in Himself, was smitten with love of them, drew them from His bosom and created them. Before this creation, creatures were, of themselves, non-existent. Nevertheless they existed in the Trinity, which, by creating them, has given to each its proper place in the universe. By way of emphasizing their absolute dependence on the Creator, the "non-existence" of creatures is insisted upon by Catherine: whether much or little, whatever is theirs is a completely gratuitous gift of God. Hence to the divine liberality there corresponds an obligation on the part of the creature, which obligation is never made void.

Wherever the soul directs its gaze it is made aware of that obligation

in little things no less than in those which are greater, the soul discovers the greatness of the Trinity, for in everything it discovers power, knowledge, and clemency. If the Trinity had not the power, had not known others, or willed things, they would not have been created. But God has the power, the knowledge, and the will; and for that reason, has created all things.

And, in consequence of creation on the part of the Trinity, creatures are obliged to render to God what He expects of them, and in the manner established by Him. Nothing can be plainer than that.

THE THEME OF THE TRINITY'S TRANSLATION OF ITSELF
IN CREATION: LOVE

In the mysticism of St. Catherine a special significance is attached to the teaching on love, as the theme of God's role in all creation. It is God, the Trinity, who created with the power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and the clemency of the Holy Ghost. Although Catherine was well aware of the "non-existence" of creatures, in themselves before their creation, once they have been created they conformed to the image and likeness of the Trinity. Just as the Creator is power in the Father, wisdom in the Son, clemency in the Holy Ghost, so is each creature a reflection of Him in its essence: through its power, of the Father; through its wisdom, of the Son; through its clemency, of the Holy Ghost. "The creature is completely saturated with Thee," says Catherine, "and Thou with it, by creation, by the force of Thy will, by that fire with which Thou didst create." Each creature has found its place in the universe to the extent that it finds itself subject and united to the being of the Holy Trinity in its own being, as in the use of its own peculiar power, wisdom, and clemency.

The saint does not say so expressly; meanwhile she assumes the fact, together with its doctrinal position, which is reasonably interpreted by Thomas Aquinas: the Trinity is God, that is power, wisdom, and clemency; but God is powerful in the Father, knowing in the Son, clement in the Holy Ghost.

Thus, created reality itself, determined by the creative operation of

the Trinity, is possessed of its own distinctive appearance. As a matter of fact, it is like to God and adjusted in the universe, if it maintains itself in subjection to God and remains united with God with clemency and in the Holy Ghost. As the being of the Trinity terminates in the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who is subsisting Clemency, as They are subsisting Power and Wisdom; so too does the creature's perfection—in that order which has been stamped upon it by the creative Trinity—find its fulfillment in a clemency proceeding from a likeness to the Holy Ghost, together with the power and wisdom which are attributed to the Father and the Son. Here we have come to the very core of Catherine's mystical teaching. Whoever would understand her mysticism of love must reach that source.

In all creatures can be found this likeness to the creative Trinity; but in man especially. As a sign of his peculiar supremacy, man is God's very image. To that fact the saint attaches a special significance; there can be little doubt that this is an essential point of her mystical position as set forth in her teaching.

MAN IN THE IMAGE OF THE TRINITY BY NATURE

Without any equivocation, Catherine demonstrates her understanding of the human soul: "When I examine, in Thy light, the being Thou hast given us," she declares, "I observe that Thou hast given us a conformity to Thy image and likeness, to share with Thee, eternal Trinity, in the three powers of the soul." In what sense the word "power" is used matters little; it is certainly in accord with the technical terminology of mystical theology.

The Creator was moved to create by love, which is the clemency of the Holy Ghost. In declaring His intention He made use of two formulas of speech: for lower creation, "let it be done"; for man, "let us make man to our image and likeness." As God is one in the Trinity, so the soul is one in three separate potencies; hence it is like to an image of the Trinity. "Thou hast given him the form of the Trinity, eternal Godhead, in the potencies of his soul; by giving him memory, to give him Thy form, eternal Father. Yes, as Father, Thou dost possess and preserve all things in Thyself. Thou hast given man his memory so that

it may retain and preserve what the understanding beholds, comprehends, and knows of Thee, infinite Goodness, even as it participates in the understanding of the wisdom of Thy only-begotten Son—and Thou hast given man his will, the sweet clemency of the Holy Ghost."

Being a vital thing, that image has two functions: to be like to God and to achieve union with Him, through believing in that likeness. It makes man like the Trinity, by the powers which are in a soul, while the Trinity unites man with Itself so that he may "believe"; in other words, in order that the memory may resemble and unite itself to the Father, to whom is attributed power; that the intellect may resemble and unite itself to the Son, to whom wisdom is attributed; and in order that man's will may resemble and unite itself to the Holy Ghost, to whom clemency is attributed, which is the love of the Father and the Son.

Catherine was struck by the sublimity of the Creator's gift to man, making him in the image of the Trinity and showering upon him His gifts with so tender a bounty. "In the garden of Thy heart was man enclosed, eternal Father. Thou hast drawn him from Thy Holy Spirit, as a flower, truly distinct in the three powers of his soul. And Thou hast sown in each of these powers a seed, so that we may be enabled to bring forth fruit in Thy garden, rendering back the harvest which Thou hast likewise given. Thou hast made that tree free, Thou hast given it branches which are the three powers of the soul: memory, understanding, and will. And what fruit hast Thou given to memory? To remember. And to the intellect? Discernment. And to the will? Its fruit is love. O tree, planted in unsullied purity by thy Planter!"

MAN IN THE IMAGE OF THE TRINITY BY GRACE

In her prayers Catherine does not explicitly state, as elsewhere, that the theological virtues are the three powers of the soul elevated by grace: faith corresponding to the understanding; hope to the memory; and charity to the will. She takes this for granted on the part of her disciples and speaks of a "flowering," when the soul, through the use of its proper potencies, is called upon to yield the "flower of glory." She

expressly terms grace, which is the bud or beginning of glory, a "flower."

The movement of "transition" from creation of non-being to creation in the likeness or image of the Trinity ceases only with the achievement of its objective: to give glory to the Creator in its progress and in the fulfillment of the end for which it had been created. Man must know whence he came, where he is going, and especially why he is on his way. To be aware of the beginning and the end and the way of arriving at his destination is to join the powers of the soul to the persons of the Trinity: the memory to the Father, completely conscious of Himself as, first, the source whence flow all things and, also, of the same function for the divine persons of the Son and Holy Ghost; the intellect to the Word, the Son, understanding everything perfectly in its order of resolving all created things to their appointed end, which is the same principle ordained by the wisdom of the Word; the will to the Holy Spirit perfectly rendering love and clemency and knowing the theme of creation and of all graces. Thus does divine clemency make man happy and blessed.

Between the Creator and the creature there is a certain community of nature, endowed with grace, by which not only is the Trinity in man, but man also is in the Trinity. His fullness, which is happiness, is realized in the Trinity alone: at such a time his image is perfect in itself. Such was the objective of divine grace as conferred upon the human race in the persons of Adam and Eve.

THE RUIN OF THE IMAGE OF THE TRINITY THROUGH SIN

But the saint, contemplating the facts, is saddened. "And if I look to Thee, the Light, O eternal Trinity, I see that man lost that flower which is grace, through his own fault, because he was neither sufficiently capable nor was he able to render Thee glory in the manner and to the end for which Thou didst create him. Hence, through his failure Thou hast not received glory in the way which had been ordained by Thy truth."

If man, enriched by grace, had not sinned, the Trinity would have revived in him, replenishing him with its happiness; but through igno-

rance he sinned. In effect, all sin arises from an ignorance of the presence of the Trinity in himself and himself in the Trinity. Catherine saw herself as a sinner when she declared: "I knew neither Thee in myself nor myself in Thee, eternal God. It is wholly the ignorance of senseless men when they offend Thee, for had they but known this, they could not have but loved God. Such ignorance proceeds from the privation of the light of grace, a privation which comes of the cloud of sensible self-love. There is the root of all sin."

So far as sin is such a privation of grace and one's natural good, it "is not"; in a real sense it is "non-being." As a matter of fact, before the creation, the creature "was" in the Trinity and "was not" in itself. Once created, it is no longer God; it "is," so far as it has received from the Creator and is dependent upon Him. Then, whoever loves and works through God, loves everything created by Him, for all things are good and deserving of love, "sin alone excepted," which, not coming from Him, is unworthy of being loved. On the other hand, grace so strengthens the will that "neither demon nor creature can conquer unless we are willing": that is, free will in the hands to whom force has been granted does not give consent.

But man, of the good tree that was produced by the Trinity, abandoned innocence and fell into the disobedience of Adam. And "the tree of life became the tree of death." The Trinity, nevertheless, as if inebriated with love and infatuated with its creature, observing that that tree could yield only fruits of death by reason of its severance from divine life, furnished the remedy with that same spirit of love in which It had undertaken its creation. And that remedy was the grafting of divinity on the dead tree of our nature.

The garden of the Trinity was closed to man, and no one could receive God's fruits. So the Word, the only-begotten Son of the Father, was made the doorkeeper into whose human hand was entrusted the divine key, until the two, united, might open together the door of divine grace. Divinity would not of Itself open the door without humanity, which had closed the garden of divine grace by the first man's sin, nor could simple humanity open it without divinity, since its work was finite, whereas the offense had been committed against

divine goodness. From the fault had followed the punishment; there was simply no other adequate means as remedy for human failure.

RENEWAL IN THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

Mary was the instrument of humanity's union with divinity through the incarnate Word. She is the book wherein was inscribed the new covenant of the human race, the wisdom of the eternal Father; and was manifested man's force and freedom. "I declare that man's dignity declares itself, because in contemplating thee, O Mary, I trace the Trinity, inscribed by the finger of the Holy Ghost, and forming in thee the Word incarnate, the only-begotten Son of God. God has inscribed the Father's wisdom, His very Word. He has inscribed the (Father's) power, because so great a mystery had demanded might in its making; and He has inscribed the Holy Spirit's clemency, by which alone, through grace and divine clemency, the mystery had been wholly ordained and accomplished." A new plant to which we are indebted for the fragrant flower of the Word, who had been sown within her, Mary is a fruitful field. She is the soil and the plant, she who redeems the human race.

In the incarnate Word, Catherine beholds the grafting of divinity upon humanity and exclaims: "O sweet and mild grafting! Thou, exalted sweetness, hast deigned to unite Thyself to our misery; Thou, brilliance, with darkness; Thou, wisdom, with folly; Thou, life, with death; Thou, the Infinite, with us who are finite! Who compelled Thee thus to restore life to man after the creature had done you such monstrous injustice? Love alone . . . together with that engrafting by which death has been vanquished. Was Thy charity satisfied in having accomplished that union with it? No, Thou, eternal Word, hast watered that tree with Thy blood!"

Catherine had come to the point of crying out in anguish of soul and so she does not hesitate to exclaim: "O eternal blood, eternal I declare because Thou art one with the divine nature." She knows no separation of the incarnate Word from the divine nature of the Trinity, for she was loath to disturb a continuity, to her so precious, which flows from the Creator and enters intimately into every creature.

The personal mission of the incarnate Word, the atonement for the sins of mankind is accomplished in the name of Jesus Christ and is the amount of His blood. "Thy mercy had been unwilling that the spotless Lamb should atone for humankind with but a single drop of blood, neither with the suffering of a single member only; but rather with the suffering and the blood of His whole body, so that He might make satisfaction for the whole of humanity, which hath offended Thee. As we see that Thy creatures offend Thee, some with their feet, some with their hands, some with their head, and others with every member of their bodies, so had the human race offended Thee with all the members of its body. And so, also, because every fault declares itself through the will—without which there would be no fault—and since that will contains within itself the whole body, therefore the whole body offends Thee. For this reason Thou hast willed to render satisfaction with the whole body and every drop of Thy Son's blood, so that He may be enabled to satisfy fully for all by virtue of His infinite divine efficacy, united to finite human nature. Our humanity has endured the penalty through the Word, and divinity has accepted the sacrifice." Here Catherine has hit upon the heart of the matter; she has proclaimed the life of her soul, her mystical life. Henceforth the ultimate implications of her teaching are nothing more than conclusions from the principle already laid down.

SINFUL MAN KNOWS GOD'S MYSTERIES THROUGH THE REDEEMER'S BLOOD

The Trinity is lofty; man is infinitesimal. His lowliness does not ascend to God's greatness, "except when the affections and the understanding, together with memory, rise above the lowliness" of humanity, and in the light furnished by God's grace, they know.

If man examines into the greatness of the Trinity, all the flights of his soul are nothing but a dark night in comparison with the light of the sun; or as the moon in contrast to the sun, since mortal baseness is incapable of once again achieving immortal grandeur. Man is unable to behold the Trinity in its essence; although he can taste of It and examine it in a mirror, "by means of love." And this vision is in the perfection

of charity in proportion as one is able to see perfectly the effect of divine charity, not of course, after the fashion of genuine connoisseurs who are the blessed in heaven, but to the extent that is proper to pilgrims upon earth.

Catherine herself explains her thought by revealing when and how the effect of charity was brought about: that it had happened when the great Healer, the only-begotten Son of God, became incarnate; when the spouse of the divinity, the Word, was made one with the spouse of our humanity by means of Mary. She had clothed the eternal Spouse in her very own humanity. But that union and that love were, to a notable extent, concealed; as yet, souls did not sufficiently consider the greatness of the Trinity. Only at the time of the Passion of the Word did they arrive at a perfect knowledge of the effect of charity in the light of grace. "Then," declares Catherine, "the flame hidden under our ashes began to show itself fully, with the result that the soul's affection was drawn to higher things, and both the eye and the understanding contemplated the flame. Thou, eternal Word, didst will to be raised on high, whence Thou didst demonstrate love in Thy very blood; in that same blood hast Thou shown Thy mercy and Thy bounty. In that blood, too, Thou didst prove how grievous and how weighty is man's offense against Thee; with that blood Thou hast cleansed the image of Thy spouse, the soul, to which Thou art united through the union of divine nature with our human nature. In that blood Thou hast reclothed the soul after it had been stripped; with Thy death Thou hast restored to man his life."

Having spoken thus, Catherine gave the cause of all the effects; the principle of all her conclusions. "O eternal Truth, what is Thy teaching? and what is the way by which Thou wouldst have us come to the Father, by which it would be most proper to arrive at Him? I know no other way than that which Thou hast paved with the true and genuine forces of the fire of Thy charity. Thou, eternal Word, hast beaten that path with Thy blood; it is the way." "O eternal Godhead, and what shall we say of Thee? And what judgment shall we give—we against Thee? We shall declare our judgment that Thou art our sweet God, who wills naught but our sanctification; that is clearly evident to

us in the blood of Thy Son, who, for our salvation, has sped like a lover to the ignominious death of the most holy cross."

"In this Word, exalted, eternal Trinity, inestimable Love, Thou hast revealed Thyself and Thy truth to us by means of Thy blood. For we have seen Thy power, with which Thou hast been enabled to wash away our faults in the selfsame blood; and Thou hast shown us Thy wisdom, with which Thou didst use Thyself as the bait of the Godhead; Thou hast laid hold of the demon and withheld from him the influence he exerted over us. The blood likewise shows us Thy love and charity, since with the fire of love alone hast Thou redeemed us, having no need of us."

Through the union of the divine with the human nature, the blood of the Word is eternal; it renders satisfaction to the Trinity for the sin of humankind, it manifests to all men the effect of divine charity, much more by means of its work, the Trinity Itself.

THE REDEEMER'S BLOOD IN THE CHURCH

To the soul of Catherine the crucified Word is in reality the tree of life. It has been planted in the very center of the garden, which is the Church. Which garden, furthermore, is built upon the blood of Jesus Christ and watered by the blood of His martyrs, who have courageously pursued the sweet scent of His blood.

According to yet another symbol, the Church is a cellar wherein is to be found the precious blood and that of all the martyrs. The keys of this cellar are in the keeping of the cellarer, who is the pope, the vicar of Jesus Christ. In this same cellar of Holy Church are the sacraments, which have their efficacy "by virtue of the blood" shed by the Redeemer on the cross. Nor can we consider such a figure fantastic when we recall that all the Church's ministers "must administer the blood and body" of the spotless Lamb.

Not only has baptism its peculiar power from the blood of Christ, but penance as well: "Thou hast, moreover, recognized in Thyself that, following upon the infirmity from which Thou didst deliver us, man should again fall into sin through his own shortcomings; nevertheless Thou hast left him a remedy in the holy sacrament of penance, in

which the minister poureth upon the face of the soul the blood of our lowly Lamb." Nor could she speak of the Eucharist without recalling His blood: "O fire of love, was it not sufficient for Thee to have created us in Thy image and likeness and to have re-created us to grace in His Son's blood, without having given Thyself for our nourishment, Thou who art God, the divine essence itself? The body could not have been given without the blood; neither could body and blood have been given without the soul of the Word, nor the soul and body without the divinity."

Nevertheless the resemblance to a process of grafting must always, for this purpose, remain the most traditional and efficacious, not so much that of the Incarnation as that of the body of the incarnate Word upon the tree of the cross. "From that grafting proceeds the blood which, by its union with the divine nature, gave us life. In virtue of that blood we were cleansed from sin through the sacraments, which Thou hast deposited in the cellars of Holy Church, entrusting their keys and custody to Thy vicar on earth."

That tree which is man died through sin; he was a tree of death. But by its own warmth the blood enables that same tree to put forth fruits. If man, of his own free will, grafts himself upon the tree of life, upon the Word incarnate. Thus does he unite himself to God and knit his heart in affection, binding and hemming in the very engrafting with the bonds of charity, and pursuing His teaching. Neither are we able nor ought we to follow the Father, since the penalty does not fall upon Him. Rather should we be conformed to and engrafted upon Jesus Christ by means of sorrows, crosses, and holy desires. In such a way, through Him who is the life, are produced fruits of life, issuing with Him, since He who created us without our help, is unwilling to save us without our help.

"When we were grafted upon Thee," declares Catherine, "the branches that Thou hast given to our tree, bear their fruits. The memory is filled with the continual recollection of Thy benefits; the understanding reflects upon Thee; and the will wishes to love and to pursue whatever the understanding has seen and known. And so one branch proffers its fruits to the other through the understanding which man

has in Thee; the better he knows himself, the more he hates himself; that is, his sensuality." "O Love, unspeakable Love, the things Thou hast accomplished in creation are marvelous. And if Thou, eternal God, while man was a tree of death, didst restore him as a tree of life, grafting Thy very life upon him (although many men, on account of their defects, produced only fruits of death, because they are not grafted upon Thee, eternal Life), so now art Thou able to provide for the salvation of mankind what today I see grafting itself upon Thee. However, nearly all continue dead in their own sensuality, and no one comes to the source wherein he may find the blood to water the tree."

The soul grafted upon the tree of life is the recipient of a great measure and depth of dignity and enlightenment. The soul's three faculties present their fruits to one another. "And whence dost thou derive, O tree, these fruits of life, since of thyself thou art sterile and dead? From the tree of life, for if thou hadst not been grafted thereon, thou shouldst be incapable by thy strength of producing any fruit, being nothing." The incarnate Word has accomplished within us the effects of fire, of love, of light, and of prompt obedience. By virtue of the grafting of His divinity upon our humanity and of His body upon the wood of the cross, He has given them to us.

Whoever is possessed of the light of grace, freely given to every Christian at baptism, thus regards the Church and its mission. Grace cleanses the soul of original sin and furnishes sufficient light to lead to the final goal of happiness, unless one's eyes, enlightened by faith through baptismal grace, are blinded by the malice of excessive sensual love.

TO PERSECUTE THE CHURCH IS TO PERSECUTE THE BLOOD

Because the Church is rooted in the blood of Jesus Christ, every enemy of the Church is likewise an enemy of the blood, the fruit of the tree of the cross: the incarnate Word itself. For love of us He grafted Himself upon two trees: upon our human nature, that He might unveil the invisible truth of His Father; upon the tree of the cross, to make known the truth of His Father's will. The result of

that grafting was the blood which, by reason of its union with the divine nature, has given man life. For that reason the blood is "like the fruit of two trees"; working through the sacraments, His power purifies from sin. It is locked within the cellar of the Church, kept under lock and key by the gentle Christ here upon earth, the pope.

Among the Church's persecutors first place is held by "false Christians." "These, my Lord, are the persecutors of the fruit of Thy cross which is Thy blood—and especially those who have rebelled against Thy cellarer, with whom is stored Thy precious blood and the blood of all the martyrs, which has no value save in virtue of Thy blood."

Catherine, mystic of the Son's blood and enamored of the Father's work, is deeply disturbed by every deed of the Church's persecutors and prays thus: "Turn, merciful Father, turn the eye of Thy pity upon Thy Spouse and Thy vicar upon earth; shelter him under the wings of Thy mercy, so that the proud and wicked may be unable to harm him. And grant me the grace of distilling Thy blood and of pouring forth the marrow of my bones in the garden of Holy Church. I have a body, I offer it to Thee, I return it to Thee; behold the flesh, behold the blood; may my veins be pierced, may my bones be destroyed and numbered for those for whom I pray."

If she had not been the mystic of the blood of Jesus Christ in the Trinity, where would Catherine have acquired such ardor of expression? Everything that pertains to the Trinity pertained to her likewise in the blood of her Spouse. Hence it is possible, without fear of error, to understand the personality of St. Catherine of Siena from an examination of her prayers—and express such a conclusion thus briefly: Catherine of Siena is the mystic of the Trinity at work in the blood of Jesus Christ. Here is the substance of her entire teaching, identical in all its every literary form, in spite of the fact that stress may be placed upon one or another point.

THE DOCTRINE OF HER LETTERS: THAT THE ENTIRE GOOD OF MAN CONSISTS IN HIS HAVING BEEN WASHED IN THE BLOOD

The letters contain no other mystical teaching; they are concerned solely with the effects of the blood, even to their ultimate and practical

applications. To that extent do the letters serve to complete for us the characterization of the mystical personality of our saint, which was already partly determined in the experience of *The Dialogue* and the teaching of the prayers.

The saint is not content to begin her letters with "I am writing. . . ." Instead, she writes in the very blood. "I, Catherine, write you in the blood, with the desire. . . ." One gets an impression of the writer dipping her pen in the blood to give greater vitality to her physical handwriting in union with Him. But even more, one has the certainty of observing in the saint a sort of vessel filled with the blood and merits of the Redeemer which she distributes, by giving them in explanation of the points desired by the one to whom her letters are addressed.

She extends the effects of the blood to occasions and feelings apparently dissimilar from the desire of meriting for the recipient what she desires for him; whereas, to her mind, they are all, without distinction, enriched and made precious by the price of the blood. Again and again she repeats the same expression: "Drown yourself in the blood of Christ crucified," "Bathe yourself in the blood," "Rejoice in the blood," "Grow and be strengthened in the blood," "Lose your weakness and blindness in the blood of the spotless Lamb," "And in Its light, run, like a brave knight, seeking the honor of God, of His Holy Church, and the salvation of souls in the blood."

Continually there recur such terms as "to bathe," "to plunge," "to wash," "to nourish," "to fill," "to fortify," "to be drenched," "to lose oneself," "to be re-created," "to rekindle," "to be drowned," "to be clothed," "to become inebriated" in the blood; together with the expressions, "most sweet," "glorious and precious," "most plentiful" blood. In the mind of Catherine no circumstance, no human sentiment, is foreign to the blood of Jesus Christ. She has experienced it and in this experiment she has discovered, with an unspeakable relish, that in the blood of the Redeemer is every merit and every right of purifying creatures of their wretchedness to render them worthy of the Trinity in Jesus Christ. The various events of her life, such as are to be found in particular detail in one of her letters, should be convincing proof of that fact. Thus, whoever would verify the range of Catherine's mysti-

cal experience, not only in the essential details of her doctrine, but also in their ultimate vital implications, should read the *Letters*; in them the saint is more than ever a living personality and close to each of us.

CONCLUSION

There exists, then, no conflict between Catherine's biography, written by her confessor, and the works of the saint herself. From these two sources is most clearly evident the glorious Dominican tertiary's mystical personality, rooted in the Trinity, who labors in the world, but especially in man, by means of and in virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ.

The stages whereby Catherine of Siena's mystical experience achieved its perfection can be suggested as follows:

1. By conforming herself to His passion, the saint achieved a conformity with Jesus Christ crucified.
2. She arrived at that conformity by means of the Redeemer in the abyss of the Trinity.
3. The means and the symbol of these two transformations—or rather of her unique and total transformation—were Catherine's devotion to the blood of Jesus Christ, by which the Trinity has cured man's every ill.

Although other saints have nourished a like devotion, no one, in our opinion, has realized it in his experience and expressed it in his teaching with such a uniquely personal prerogative. Precisely there is Catherine of Siena's mystical personality incomparable; one cannot approach her without benefit to himself.

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Spiritual Growth through Retreats

THE aim of these lines is to point to the strong bond between the two terms of our title, and further to emphasize the tremendous and recognized importance of that bond in these our days. But first it will be helpful to consider each term in itself, and to that end we consider first, spiritual growth. Spiritual growth, of course, implies spiritual life, and that phrase is familiar. Spiritual life, as it is generally understood, is the interior life, the grace-endowed life of the soul. Father Farrell thus describes it in the June issue of *CROSS AND CROWN*: "He (man) lives by a shared divine life through grace. He guides his steps by divine wisdom given him in faith. His heart is crowded with the happiness of a divine love infused into his soul. He throws his life at towering goals, secure in a hope that rests on omnipotence; each moment of his life echoes in eternity because Christ died on a cross. His whole inner equipment of good habits for reasonable living in the human mode has been perfected to the end of divine living in a manner more than angelic; now his justice, his prudence, his courage, his zeal for beauty are driving powers whose goals go as far as the goals of God."¹

As we know, this life is the supernatural life, as distinguished from the grammatically correct "spiritual" life. This latter is really the life of a human being on the human level only; a life of thought and a life of love. It is, of course, a life worthy of our nature, but insufficient to lead us to the goal of perfect happiness, or union with God. It is this life upon which God's great gift of the supernatural is built, and for which it is an absolute necessity. We shall have occasion later on to mention both.

The life briefly described in the first paragraph, given to us at baptism, is all too seldom recognized. To so many whose religious knowl-

¹Father Farrell, *Cross and Crown* (editorial), June, 1949.