Denis Vincent Wiseman, O.P.

**Jesus Christ Crucified and Gentle Mary**

*Salvation and Mary in the Life and Writings of Catherine of Siena*

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Chapter 3

MARY IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF CATHERINE OF Siena

"In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of gentle Mary." With these words, Catherine begins her book, Il Dialogo, as well as all but a few of her three hundred eighty-two letters, indicating the close link that Catherine makes between gentle Mary and her crucified Son. Catherine’s birth on March 25 in 1347, a year in which the customary date of the Annunciation coincided with Palm Sunday, might seem to have anticipated the close relationship Catherine would draw between Mary and the Redemption. For Catherine, Mary is not a passive or peripheral figure to the story of salvation but one who is vitally involved in its decisive moments.

As has been seen, Catherine, unlike a number of medieval authors, emphasizes the Incarnation as the beginning of the redemption. Thus, she writes:

This Word was engrafted in her flesh, this blessed and sweet field of Mary, as the seed that is cast on the earth. Through the warmth of the sun, it germinates and grows out the flower and the fruit, and the shell remains on the earth. So, truly, [It was] through the warmth and the fire of divine charity which God had for the human race, casting the seed of His Word in the field of Mary. O blessed and sweet Mary, you have given us the flower of the sweet Jesus! And when did that blessed flower produce the fruit? When He was grafted on the wood of the most holy cross. Then we received perfect life. 1

1 "Al nome di Gesù Cristo crocifisso e di Maria dolce." 2 "Questo beneedetto e dolce campo di Maria fuso in lei questo verbo incutato nella carne sua, come il seme che si gitta nella terra, che per lo caldo del sole germina e trae fuora il fiore e il frutto, e il frutto rimane sulla terra. Così veramente, per lo caldo e fuoco della divina carità che Dio ebbe all’universa generazione, gittando il seme della parola sua nel campo di Maria. O beato e dolce Maria, vi ai dono di frutto del dolce Gesù! Quando produsse il frutto questo benedetto fiore? quando fu incutato in sul logro della santissima croce; allora ricevemmo vita perfetta." (Letters 144, II, 392). This letter was sent to Monna Pavana in very early July 1375. A similar passage may be found in Catherine’s letter to Don Roberto da Napoli. Cf. Letter 342, V, 136. In Il Dialogo, Catherine shows the same connection between the Incarnation and the Redemption: “This mystery descended from heaven in the Incarnation of My Son. With what was it opened? With the key of His Blood.” “La quale meraviglia di Dio in la incarnazione di questo suo figliuolo. Con che aperto? Con la chiave del sangue suo” (Il Dialogo, XXVII, 73). We find the same relationship between the two mysteries in a prayer: “You grafted Yourself as a fruit on two trees. The first, to our human nature that You might show us the invisible teeth of the eternal Father, which truth You Yourself see. You made the second grafting with Your body upon the tree of the most holy cross, upon which tree another the nails nor any other thing held You except the immovable love that You had for us.”

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According to Catherine, Mary’s cooperation in the redemption is not confined to giving birth to the Savior. Mary is involved in the major moments of the redemption. If Christ crucified is Catherine’s central focus, then it is not surprising that Catherine places Mary beside the cross. She affirms that Mary, like her Son, has been “wounded by the arrow of love for our salvation.”

Mary not only consents to Jesus’ death for humanity but she “wishes that He die” because she is so eager that the salvation of humanity be accomplished. Mary seeks to prolong on earth Jesus’ desire for “the honor of God and the salvation of souls” by prodding the apostles to take up her Son’s ministry after Pentecost. In heaven, Mary, as the “advocate, mother of grace and mercy,” is still vitally involved in aiding souls to accept the fruits of Jesus’ death. Catherine considers Mary to be particularly present to those who carry on her Son’s mission for the salvation of souls. Catherine continually relates her reflections on Mary to the mystery of salvation.

Since Catherine did not write in a systematic way, we will glean her thought on Mary from her various writings and we will rely on indices recorded in the early biographical accounts to illustrate her beliefs. Catherine’s theological understandings of Mary are rooted in the Christian tradition. Yet, it will be clear that Catherine’s intense evangelical zeal frequently gives a unique emphasis to the truths she received.

While Catherine’s understanding of Mary has not been treated extensively, some authors have discussed aspects in various articles. Antonia D’Achille has examined the presentation of Mary in Catherine’s writings.6 Roberto Moretti and Innocenzo Vuchić, O.P., have investigated Mary in Catherine’s prayers.7 Giacinto D’Urso, O.P., has analyzed Catherine’s treatment of Mary in Letter 141.8 The book, Maria, Caterina e altri, published by Il Centro Nazionale di Studi Caterianiani, contains four chapters on elements of Catherine’s perception of Mary. Authors, elsewhere, have treated Catherine’s monologs in general,9 while some have touched upon Mary’s relationship to the passion and death of Christ in particular.10

It is my impression that Catherine’s references to Mary have not been studied as a totality. This chapter will attempt to compile all of Catherine’s references to Mary as well as the references of her early biographers regarding Catherine and Mary. We will try to discern Catherine’s Marian theology from this assortment of references. This chapter will consider Mary as she is seen both in Catherine’s life and in her thought. The particular concern will be to show how closely Catherine’s thought on Mary relates to her thought on Jesus’ saving mission. This connection will be more obvious in some references than in others. Nevertheless, the fact that this relationship pervades Catherine’s thought on Mary should become quite evident.

The first section of this chapter will describe Catherine’s thought by reviewing Mary’s place in the general culture and devotion that pervaded Catherine’s environment. We will look at Catherine’s Marian practices and the Marian devotion to which she makes reference, as well as the ways in which Catherine experienced Mary’s care in her own life and ministry.

In the second and third sections of the chapter, we will explore Catherine’s own Marian understandings. These two sections will be divided between Catherine’s thought on Mary in relation to the objective redemption and Catherine’s thought on Mary in relation to the subjective redemption, relying on a common distinction used by theologians.11 We will consider how Catherine connects Mary with the ob-

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10 “If we are objectively redeemed by Christ’s sacrificial death, then the concrete form of our subjective redemption, and thus of every single case of subjective appropriation of objective...”

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jective redemption, that is, Mary's role in Jesus' Incarnation and in His death. In this section, we will also discuss Catherine's position on the Immaculate Conception, although this does not bear directly on the central proposition of this chapter. Nevertheless, this best-known teaching of Catherine on Mary does illustrate the fourteenth-century Church's struggle to understand how the redemption affected Mary herself. The final section will explicate Catherine's understanding of Mary's role in the way that redemption is applied to believers.

The occasional nature of most of our sources, particularly Catherine's letters and prayers, does not allow us to reconstruct Catherine's complete understanding of Mary. Nevertheless, by reviewing all the extant references, we hope to decipher the key elements of her Marian teachings. We hope to demonstrate that, in a very distinctive way, Mary, in Catherine's writings, continually serves both the objective and subjective aspects of the mission of Christ enunciated, which is the mystery that pervades all of Catherine's thought.

Mary in Catherine's Life

Catherine's thinking is always grounded in reflection on experience. Thus she asserts: "The soul acquires every virtue and grace in the knowledge of itself." Before examining Catherine's teachings on Mary, it would be helpful to explore Catherine's own experience of Mary. We will begin by identifying briefly particular Marian practices and beliefs which are adverted to in Catherine's writings or are identified with her in the first biographical writings. We will then review the incidents in which Mary is an active presence in Catherine's life.

Marian Devotions Evident in Catherine's Life

A number of references made by Catherine and her disciples testify to Marian devotional customs and to the theological assumptions about Mary that existed in the Tuscan city of Siena during a thirty-three year period (1347-1380). They illustrate attitudes towards Mary during an important time of cultural transition as Europe began to move from the Middle Ages into the early Renaissance. In addition to the specific historical data of the Marian customs of her time and milieu, the concepts underlying these practices provide us an indication of Catherine's fundamental attitudes towards Mary.

In many ways, Catherine imbibed the Marian attitudes of her family, her city, and the local Church in Siena. The warmth and piety of her family life offered Catherine an environment in which her inclinations to devotion easily flourished. Rosmundo recounts an example of Catherine's early Marian devotion: "And when she was about five years old, having been taught the Angelic greeting of the glorious Virgin, she repeated it frequently. And inspired by God, she began to genuflect on each stair, as she was going up and down, saluting the blessed Virgin at the same time, as she herself confessed when she discussed the matter with me in the secrecy of confession."

Francesco Valli states that the practice of repeating the Hail Mary, sometimes with salve (praises), and sometimes with genuflections, had become customary possibly by the end of the thirteenth century and certainly by the first half of the fourteenth century. These practices are documented in Siena, although they do not seem to have originated there.

Caffarini indicates that this practice of genuflecting on the stairs in honor of Mary was not unique with Catherine but was a Sienese devotion, related to the dedication of the city to Our Lady. Caffarini writes: "It is thought, moreover, that it [the practice of genuflecting while saying the Hail Mary] came from the devout greetings, which were the custom to observe in a place which was especially devoted to the Mother of God." In 1560, the city of Siena was dedicated to Mary, and the

14 "Cumque quinquennium peregret vict oriam, redacta salutationem Angelicam virginis gloriæ ipsum repetere frequentia et cristina inspirata, repetit ascendendo seu descendendo per gradus, et quomodo gradus flos gaudiæ, semel beatam Virginem sacratum præst ipse in secrétum confitentium misit, dum istorum se minister, est confusa."" Raymond du Vair (de Capua), Vita S. Catharinae Sienens, I, 1, xxvii, 1139. Tommaso Caffarini, in S. Catharinæ Sienen, ii, 182, makes similar mention of this practice: "Indeed, in her fifth year, and only before the figure of the glorious virgin Mary, but even on the steps of the staircase, she uttered the ' Ave Maria,' going up and going down, bowing her knee on each step." "Anno quinto eius illius aetatis, non tantum ante figuram virginis gloriosæ Marie sed etiam in gradibus scalaeus, tunc ascendendo ipsum descendendo, 'Ave Maria' non flores gaudiæ gradum gnomebat exprimere." Thomas Antonio de Samsè [Tommaso Naccì Caffarini], Saneale Catharinae Sienensis legenda minor (Rome: Verula), I, 1, E. Franconio, vol. X, Fontes ritus S. Catharinæ Sienens historiaci (Milano: Borea, 1948), 110.

15 Francesco Valli is one of the scholars who helped prepare the Fontes ritus S. Catharinae Sienens historiaci, the critical edition of documents related to Catherine.


17 "Excubationem autem est ejus rei in eo dominatiubus, non aequo conseruerat in latu loco sedut Diu geniculata devota precipua." Thomas Antonio de Samsè, Legenda minor, 1, 10 (Romaio Verula).

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Catherine manifests an awareness of the special significance of the Marian feasts. One of her twenty-six prayers was given on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1379, which was Catherine's thirtieth birthday. In this prayer, she asserts: "But today I ask boldly because it is the day of graces." This particular prayer considers especially the Marian aspects of this feast. At the time when this prayer was given, Catherine was living in the vicinity of the Dominican Basilica, St. Maria sopra Minerva, dedicated to the Annunciation. She is buried under the altar of this basilica. We will examine this prayer more closely as we study Mary's cooperation in the Incarnation.

Another feast day that Catherine alludes to is that celebrated on February 2, which, according to the practice of the time emphasized Mary's purification. In her last letter to Rainondo, Catherine writes: "Then, the day of the Purification of Mary, I wished to hear Mass. Then, all the mysteries were renewed." Quite frequently, the liturgical feasts were occasions of particular graces for Catherine. On this feast, which took place three months before her death, Catherine experienced a vivid perception of the great needs of the Church, especially in Rome, and of her call to intercede for the Church.

The anonymous author of the only biographical source written during Catherine's lifetime, I Miraculi, when describing Catherine's fasting, alludes to her efforts to make a special celebration of the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady: "She did not eat nor drink, except for the feast of Our Lady in September 1374. She said that she wished to make a Passover, and she only put some fruit into her mouth in a usual way, and took a sip of water; but then she did not eat or drink any more."
Catherine considers this feast of Mary important enough to dispense with her daily fasting.

Although the Assumption was not officially defined by the Church in Catherine’s time, it was celebrated liturgically. St. Thomas, while not elaborating on the doctrine, makes reference to it somewhat obliquely in the Summa Theologica, showing by way of reference to Pseudo-Augustine that there are truths, such as the Assumption of Mary’s body into heaven, which are not found in the Scriptures. 26

The importance of this feast for Catherine can be seen from an incident reported by Caffarini. Being sick, she was unable to go to church on this feast. Nevertheless, she was, in some mystical way, conscious of the liturgy being celebrated in the “ecclesia major.” This church would be the Cathedral of Duomo, which had been dedicated to the Assumption when it was consecrated in 1179. Caffarini writes:

When, however, she was not able on certain days to go to church, she desired greatly to receive communion. One morning, while she was at the home of her companion, she saw the walls of the major church of Siena. She thanked God that He had made her worthy of this vision of which she did not judge herself worthy. When, however, she looked back at those walls, she heard there the singing of the preface of the Blessed Virgin. When, indeed, those words were said, “And You, in the Assumption of the blessed Mary, ever virgin, at once, rapt in spirit, she saw our most blessed Lady and she felt herself to be wholly bathed in Divine Ely, and Our Lady there began to speak to her the sweetest words than others drawn up in scripture.” 27

Caffarini also records Catherine’s reactions when her confessor asked her about Jesus’ welcome of Mary into heaven upon her Assumption:

And she responded, saying that when the Virgin Mary died, Christ came to her and said to her, “Come, My champion and Mine, My Lord! And I will prepare a place for you...” And she considered with how much desire Mary cast herself into God so that about this the virgin wept while at the same time she laughed. This happened as she explained to her confessor on the feast of the Assumption of the blessed Mary and the confessor saw it in part. 28

Catherine is overwhelmed by Mary’s total self-giving to God upon her reception into heaven. Catherine’s thought quickly moves to the unitive aspect of the dogma.

Besides indicating the importance of the Marian feasts for Catherine, her writings also demonstrate particular Marian customs. One such practice which Catherine makes reference to is that of dedicating Saturday to Mary. The origin of this custom is unknown, although Alcuin (d. 804) includes two devote Masses for Our Lady on Saturday in his Liber Sacramentorum. The practice of fasting on Saturday came to be associated with Mary. The medieval collections of legends of Our Lady, known in German as Martenlegenden, did much to popularize the practice of honoring Mary on Saturdays. 29 Saturday, for Catherine, was “the day of Mary.” Significantly, the original inspiration for Il Dialogo took place at Mass on Saturday, Catherine recounts this in the prelude to her book: “This day was the day of Mary.” 30 She records this connection in her letter to Raimondo which details the origin of her book, informing him that the inspiration came to her when she went to Mass “on the day of Mary.”

Catherine considers Saturdays to be appropriate days for fasting. Trying to moderate the zeal of her friends, the bishop’s wife in Florence, Monica Agnese, Catherine advises: “And other times do not fast other than Saturday when you feel you are able. When this heat is passed, fast on the days of Holy Mary, if you are able.”

26 “sed sect Augustinian rationaliter argumentatur quod eos corpore sit assumpsit in caelum, quod tamen scriptura non tradit, ita eius rationaliter argumentatur prorsus quod fuit sanctificatus in statu.” Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologia, III, 27, 1, vol. 51, trans. Thomas H. Heith, O.F.P. (London: Kyte & Spottiswoode, 1969), 6. For the text of Pseudo-Augustine, see “De Assumptione Beatae Mariæ Virginis”, PL, 80, 1114-1128. Also, Thomas, in his In Salmaticum Angelorum Exposition, states that Mary did not experience bodily corruption: “The Blessed Virgin was immaculate from this, because she was assumed with her body into heaven. For we believe that after death she was restored and carried into heaven.” “En hac modo immensus fuit Brata Virginio, quia eum corpus assumptionis el caelum. Credimus enim quod post mortem sanctificavit, et parta in caelum.” S. Thomas Aquinas, In Sacramentum Angelorum Expositio, in Opusculi Theologici, II (Roma: Marietti, 1958), 303, 231.

27 “Cum aeternum non poteramus aliquando diebus venire ad ecclesiam et multum frutilem communione, existimauimus nos sine domo omnium uniue esse vides pariter rerum novarum de Sana et regeneratue Dom regina salutis de hac viruine factum esse dignum de qua se non esse dignum indicere. Cum aeternum esse quietem pariter illius, adhibuit simul tantum cardinalem prestantum de hac Virgine. Cum vero declareret illud verbum: ita in sanctissima beata Marie semper virginum,” etiam nupta in quieti vidi heaemae Dominam inscitam et se sequam sequam sequam divino igne tulam perfidum. Et Domine in ecept ipsum aliquae diuinem verum que rerum non facient in scriptura.” Thomas Antonius de Sina, Libelin de Supplicatione, II, vii, 80.


30 “Et quod ibi ero et ibi ibi Maris” (Il Dialogo, II, 53). “Che ero il di di Maris” (Letter 274, IV, 192). This letter to Raimondo was written between October 10, 1377, or shortly afterwards. For the fuller text see Appendices, note 2.
and no more."" She counsels Ristoro Canigiani, another Florentine disciple: "And Saturday fast in reverence of Mary." 110

Catherine also directs Ristoro to an additional form of Marian devotion. Under the influence of Catherine, Ristoro had made serious attempts to change his life, even forgiving his enemies. To stabilize his spiritual growth, Catherine directs him to a more ordered prayer life by means of a Marian Office. The Marian Offices were modeled after the Divine Office. They can be found in the thirteenth century and seem to have undergone some formulation by St. Peter Damian and others in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Dominican Friars recited the Marian Office daily in addition to the Divine Office. Catherine urges Ristoro to recite this Office: "And I beg you that, if you do not say it, that you say the office of the Virgin every day in a manner that she may be your refuge and advocate before God for you. To put your life in order, I beg you to do this." Catherine believes that daily devotion to Mary will order Ristoro's life and that Mary will be his refuge and advocate. Catherine's own awareness of Mary is evidenced by the Marian invocations in her writings, especially the formula, "In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of gentle Mary," found in almost all of her writings. In a series of letters, written between the close of 1375 and mid-1376, she uses a variation on this invocation. This variation may be seen in her letter to the Florentine Cardinal at Avignon, Pietro Corsini, where she begins: "In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of sweet Mary, another of the Son of God." 111

She makes use of other variations on occasion. For instance, she opens her letter to a prostitute in Perugia with the words: "Gentle Jesus, Jesus love, Mary sweet

32 "E altro tempo non diggieremo altro che "l'abito, quando ti senti da polvere. Quando questo vestito è passato, e tu diggiam la Sante Maria, se tu pensi e poi no" (Letter 174, III, 38). Nolfo recomenda a date between August 29 and 31, 1378, for this letter.
33 "E l'abito diggiam a rovescia di Maria" (Letter 228, IV, 109). Nolfo puts this letter between August 2 and 10, 1378, shortly before the preceding reference to fasting on Saturday, found in Letter 174.
35 "E pregare che, se voi vedete, che voi si dilette ogni giorno della Vergine, sì che ella sia nel vostro cuore, e avvocata d'essa a Dio per voi. E direstate la vita vostra, di questo si verghe che facciamo" (Letter 228, IV, 99-100).
36 "Ai nomi di Gesù Cristo crocifisso e di Maria dore" (Letter 228, IV, 93-99).
37 "Ai nomi di Gesù Cristo crocifisso e di Maria dore, acerel del Finglino di Disc" (Letter 177).
For this variant, see D.I, XI, 251. Nolfo situates this letter near Palm Sunday, April 6, 1376.

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Mother."" Her letter to the Jewish man, Consiglio, begins: "Praised be Jesus Christ crucified, Son of the glorious virgin Mary."" By invoking Mary with Jesus as she begins her writing, Catherine is entrusting each instance of her communication to the blessing of Jesus and His mother. Catherine used heads but not as part of a Marian devotion. Raimondo makes an allusion in his Vita to Catherine having a string of beads. Raimondo explains that the heads are called "Pater Nosters" because they were used to count the repitions of the Lord's Prayer. The use of beads in the repetition of prayers is one of the practices that contributed to the development of the Marian rosary. Practices of devotion related to Mary such as the use of the Hail Mary, attention to Mary's feasts, remembrance of Mary on Saturdays, fasting in Mary's honor, praying the Marian office, and invoking Mary's help are, for Catherine, part of the ordinary life of the serious Christian. Devotion to Mary is intimately imbodied in Christian living. Catherine accepts, uses, and encourages the use of the Marian practices of her time.

Catherine's Personal Experience of Mary

For our accounts of Catherine's personal experiences of Mary, we will rely especially on incidents recorded by Catherine's early biographers. Two unstated convictions underlie these accounts. The first is that Mary is actively involved in Catherine's life. Catherine prays to Mary with confidence that Mary will help her. At times, Mary's help is experienced by a vision. The second conviction is that Mary's actions draw Catherine to Jesus, and, on occasion, Mary brings Jesus to Catherine.

In recording an early incident in Catherine's life, Raimondo shows us the confidence that Catherine had that Mary would assist her in discerning her unique vocation. She was about seven years old when she determined to imitate Mary's virginal consecration, considering Mary to be the initiatior and the model of consecrated virginity. Catherine relied upon Mary to support her in making this decision:

She thought therefore, and she knew through God's revelation, that the most sacred Mother of God was the first of those who came to the virginal life, and who vowed her virginity to God. So she began to have recourse to her about this. And when she

38 "Gesù dolce, Gesù amore, Maria dolce e amor" (Letter 228, IV, 186). This letter was written at the request of one of the woman's brothers. Nolfo considers this letter to have been written between late January and early May 1376.
39 "Laudate omni Deo Christo crucifisso, fulgente de la gloria virginis Maria" (Letter 15, I, 49).
came to her seventh year, not as a seven-year-old but almost as a seventy-year-old, maturely and for a long time, she considered making this vow, praying continually to the same Queen of virgins and of angels, who mercifully was helping her, that she might be able to obtain from the Lord the perfect direction of her spirit, by which help she might do that which was more pleasing to the Lord, and more efficacious for the salvation of her soul, always offering her desire before her, that she anxiously sought to lead a life both angelic and virginal.\footnote{42} Catherine prays "continually" to Mary to help her to do what was "more pleasing to God." Catherine constantly reviews her self-giving by "always offering her desire before her." Catherine entrusts her desires to Mary, confident that Mary will aid her to please God in the celibate vocation that she adopts in imitation of Mary.

The idea that Mary is the model of virgins is deeply rooted in the Patristic tradition. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 387), in his Catechetical Lectures, asserts that "The virgins have their portion with Mary the Virgin."\footnote{43} Gregory of Nyssa (d. ca. 394) states that the physical presence of the Lord in Mary is also true in a spiritual way of all virgins.\footnote{44} Ambrose (d. 397) proposes Mary as the example for all who choose virginity.\footnote{45} Jerome (c. 419) depicts Mary as the "mother of many virgins."

In a later incident, Catherine returns to this idea of Mary as the example of those who choose the celibate life. Andrea, a cancer-stricken Manetella, whom Catherine nursed, slandered Catherine apparently out of possessiveness for her attention. Catherine reminds God of the delicacy of a celibate's reputation, alluding to the care given to Mary. "Most powerful Lord and my most loving Spouse, you know the reputation of any virgin to be delicate and the modesty of your spouses excessively susceptible to stain, so you wished your glorious mother to have one considered a spouse."

After Giacomina, her father, had imposed heavy domestic obligations upon Catherine to break her resistance to a potential marriage, Catherine used her imagination to bolster her awareness of the presence of Jesus and Mary. Raimondo states: "She also said, at that time, she had imagined that her father represented our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and her own mother represented His most glorious mother, Mary... because of this imagination she was joyful and served everyone in such a conscientious way that everyone marveled."\footnote{46} Catherine is convinced that Jesus and Mary want her to accept with joy the humiliating work imposed on her. She finds strength in visualizing Jesus and Mary, believing that as she serves her parents she is serving her Savior and His mother. Through her imagination she pictures the reality that she knows to be true by faith; in serving her neighbor she is serving Jesus (Mt. 25:45). Catherine extends this presence to include Mary being represented by her mother.

Catherine believes that Mary is not only present but is also able to intervene in situations. Thus, she gives Mary credit for obtaining a director for her. Catherine's confessors and her superiors among the Manetella were, not surprisingly, often conferred by her unusual ways. The resulting misunderstandings were a source of great suffering to Catherine and she petitioned Mary for a guide who could comprehend her unique needs. Stefano Maccon, in his testimony for the Processus, states: "The most blessed virgin Mary, bodily appearing to this most holy virgin Catherine, promised to give her one most faithful and devoted to her as father and confessor, who would give her much more consolation than she had from her other confessors up to that point, and, afterwards, the proofs proved it.

Catherine was asked by the Dominicans to come to Florence on the occasion of the Dominican General Chapter in 1374.\footnote{47} While in Florence, Catherine attended a conference on the Dominican General Chapter in 1374. She was present at the conference, which was held in the Dominican Church of the Annunciation in Florence. She was accompanied by her confessor, Stefano Maccon, and by a group of Dominicans. The conference was held in the Dominican Church of the Annunciation in Florence. She was present at the conference, which was held in the Dominican Church of the Annunciation in Florence. She was accompanied by her confessor, Stefano Maccon, and by a group of Dominicans. The conference was held in the Dominican Church of the Annunciation in Florence. She was present at the conference, which was held in the Dominican Church of the Annunciation in Florence. She was accompanied by her confessor, Stefano Maccon, and by a group of Dominicans. The conference was held in the Dominican Church of the Annunciation in Florence. She was present at the conference, which was held in the Dominican Church of the Annunciation in Florence. She was accompanied by her confessor, Stefano Maccon, and by a group of Dominicans.

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\footnote{43} Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VIII, II, 'De Christo Trifida et Sepulti,' 34, PG 32, 766.

\footnote{44} Gregory of Nyssa, De Virginity, I, 46, PG 46, 331 B.


\footnote{46} "Emobilis virgo Morte corporali apparens ipsa sanctissima virgo Katherine promulgi ei deum amnem fidelissimum devovum num in patre et confessoribus, qui dixet ei valde fidelissimum pater, quem amнос admirabantur." Raymundus de Vinicio (da Capua). Vita, I, II, 475.

\footnote{47} "Hollandia virgo Morte corporali apparens ipsa sanctissima virgo Katherine promulgi ei deum amnem fidelissimum devovum num in patre et confessoribus, qui dixet ei valde fidelissimum pater, quem amNos admirabantur." Raymundus de Vinicio (da Capua). Vita, I, II, 475.
Nest at which Raimondo assisted and she inquired that he was the director whom she had petitioned from Mary. Shortly afterwards, the Dominicans resolved to provide supervision for this young Maidentate, whose way of life was stirring some discussion. The Master of the Order commissioned Raimondo to guide Catherine and assigned him to the priory at San Domenico in Siena, where he remained for the next five years. Caffarni, in his Libellus de Supplemento, testifies to Mary’s role in the choice of Raimondo. He attributes this information to the notes of Catherine’s original confessor, Fraile Tommaso dalla Fonte. Caffarni states that this new director was “plenius Frater Raimondo de Capua, of his Order of Preachers, whom the Mother of God appearing once to the virgin had even promised her sometime before.

Catherine’s letters have references to this incident. She alludes to Mary’s involvement in this choice when writing to Raimondo in February 1376: “To you, most beloved and dearest father and son in Christ Jesus, given by that sweet mother Mary.” The Master of the Order may have thought he was appointing someone to monitor Catherine, but Catherine experienced Raimondo to be not only a father, but an ally, a friend, and a disciple. Occasionally, she even forgets the Master’s original intention, as when she writes to Raimondo: “Oh my son, given by that sweet mother Mary.”

In her last letter to Raimondo, she challenges him to struggle on behalf of the Church, appealing to the bond between them, initiated by Mary: “Now I beg and constrain you, father and son given to me by that sweet mother Mary...that you may cast yourself into this ship of the holy Church.” In this letter, written three months before she died, Mary’s role in their relationship has retained its significance for Catherine.

Some of the incidents in Catherine’s life that involve Mary are associated with unusual mystical experiences. Great mysteries, such as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, caution us that it is necessary to distinguish between the divine and the natural aspects of such occurrences, as even mystical experiences, such as visions and locations, may be affected by natural influences or by imagination. Some of Catherine’s experiences raise theological questions, such as Catherine’s inspiration that Mary had original sin momentarily. We do well to remember that even the insights of the saints must be measured by the rule of faith preserved in the Church.

What is clear is that Catherine’s perceptions took on a sharpened clarity through her mystical experiences. Our purpose in examining Catherine’s experiences will be to identify the essential truth about Mary that Catherine captured in a mystical way, without speculating on the nature of the visions or locations.

J. Mirov recovers an experience of mystical espousal early in Catherine’s life. According to the account, Catherine, as a young girl, had hidden herself in a secluded place outside of Siena:

Bowing to the earth and with a fervor of immense love she calls upon the mother of Christ, and with a girlish simplicity she asks that she may give her Son, Jesus, as her spouse. While praying, she felt herself being lifted from the earth somewhat into the air. And presently, the Virgin Mary appeared to her with her Son in her arms. He espoused the girl with a ring, and immediately disappeared and she was placed back, set on the ground, and returned to Siena and to her house.”

Catherine believes that Mary is able to give Jesus to her as a spouse. In the apparition, Jesus is a child whom Mary literally brings to Catherine. Jesus espouses Himself to Catherine which implies that henceforth, Catherine has a deeply personal and singularly loving relationship with Jesus.

Catherine had repeated encounters with Christ and with Mary during the three years in which she lived as a reclus. Raimondo relates: “Then the Lord appeared

35. “L’Agnello” in terrà e con uno fregio di nimbo amante chiama la madre di Cristo, e con una pretesa similitudine che ella le dì a per suo sposo il suo fregioło. E così orando si sentì levare da terra sproposito in aria. E di presente lìgiar la Vergine Maria col suo fregioło in braccio, il quale con uno nimbo inopaco la circonduce, e subito aprir, e ella si ritrovò riposta in terra e fermata in Siena e in casa sua.” Annonzio Florentino, J. Mirov, 4. For Raimondo’s account of Catherine’s actual vow, see Appendix, note 5.
to her most frequently, and remained alone with her longer. Sometimes He brought with Him His most glorious mother and sometimes blessed Dominic, and at times both. 34

Caffarini, in his testimony for the Processus, likewise indicates Mary's presence in the mystical events that took place at this time: "Since in such a degree and so effectively in the manner described, the virgin was united with God and the saints that nothing in any way separated her from such union during that time... The virgin not only was caught up with God but also many times with the Mother of God and other saints and heavenly citizens." 35

During this period Catherine had an acute awareness of the presence of Mary and of the saints. Catherine, who was inspired by the legends of Mary Magdalene's thirty-three years of penitential life, had a particular attraction to this saint. Raimondo relates that the Lord and Mary gave Mary Magdalene to Catherine as a teacher and mother. 36

Raimondo states that Mary nursed Catherine: "Now, moreover, the glorious Mother appeared to her, and satisfied her with milk from her most sacred breasts and she filled her with ineffable sweetness." 37 Raimondo describes Catherine being fed by Mary's own body very simply, although contemporary readers might be startled by the image. The essence of the account is that Mary nurtures Catherine from her own substance, implying that there exists between them the very personal relationship of a mother and a child.

However, as a mother would also do, Mary corrects Catherine. On one occasion after Catherine was momentarily distracted during a vision of St. Dominic, the Blessed Virgin reproached her. Caffarini remarks: "Of this distraction, she said that the most gentle Virgin Mother Mary, reprimanded her so harshly that she was scarcely able to bear the shame." 38 Mary wants Catherine to be totally focused on God. "The most gentle Virgin Mother" forcefully impresses upon Catherine the responsibility to be attentive to the special graces God is giving her.

A couple of Catherine's mystical experiences related to the Eucharist have Marian aspects. Il Dialogo recounts that, on one instance, while watching Mass being celebrated "at the altar of Mary," Catherine experienced the Trinity in the Eucharistic host. 39 Catherine's indication at which altar this experience happened implies that there is a connection between the Eucharistic vision of the "altar of Mary." The Marian altar, representing Mary's close relationship with Christ's gift of Himself in the Eucharist, indicates Mary's relation to the involvement of the entire Trinity in the Eucharist.

On another occasion, the Eucharistic experience has a more specific relation to Mary. Mary sustains Catherine physically as she receives Jesus. Caffarini informs us that this happened while Catherine was at a Mass said by her confessor: "On a certain vigil of the Circumcision which was a Sunday... [Catherine] not being able to stand upon her feet, the blessed Virgin Mary held her hand upon her body, and held her by the hand until the Mass was finished. And then she herself received communion with such a sweetness the like of which she was never able to express." 40 Mary holds Catherine's weakened body with her hand, enabling her to partake at Mass and to receive communion. Catherine's reception of Jesus in communion on that occasion is an act of gratifying that Catherine cannot express it in words. Supported by Mary, Catherine receives Jesus.

Raimondo relates an incident in which Catherine is literally clothed with Christ by Mary. On this occasion, Catherine had been greatly disturbed by her attraction to a silk dress offered her by the devil. Catherine turned to prayer. Raimondo relates:

Her words completed, the Queen of Virgins, the Mother of God, appeared to her. She seemed to her to be drawing a very beautiful garment from the side of her crucified Son, which she herself ever adorned with bright and gleaming jewels. Then as she clothed her with the decorated garments, saying: "Be certain, daughter, that the garments that come from the side of my Son exceed all clothes in beauty and adornment." 41

6 1 "a furtura de Maria" (Il Dialogo, CXL, 315).
6 2 "In quantum vigilia circumcisionis que facta dominica... Et stante non valde super pedes suis, but Super Maria respectissime tenit manum super corpus eam, et amas tentabilis eam neque dimo multa fult complete. Et tunc ipsa communio cum tanta dulcedine quod ipsa multitudines potest explicare..." Thomas Antonii de Sens, Libellum de Supplandom, III, xxi, 110-111.
6 3 "Iste necesse cunctum, et leges virginum Mater Dei, quae de latera Filii crucifixi poliherentur vestem trabere videtur, quam ipsa etiam omnibus venantibus et cunctissimis genitis, et deinde virginem illa decora vestris induit, etsine Scelus solus, sibi, quod vestes quae de latera Filii sui providit, nonnus alius vestes excedunt in palatibusque et decore..." Raymundus de Viriaco (da Capua), Vitis, III, ordinin. 99. Caffarini, in the Libellum de Supplandom, gives the same

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Catherine's experience of being clothed with garments from the side of Christ evokes Paul's words: "Every one of you who has been baptized has been clothed in Christ" (Gal. 3:27). While Paul is referring to baptism, Raimondo is recording a post-baptismal gift of grace given to Catherine. For Catherine, being clothed with Christ means that the individual has been deeply affected by the "life and the gift of the blood." Such clothing denotes a close bond with Christ which neither the devil's power nor human powers can break. To be clothed with Christ means to be as He was, "conformed with God," seeking what Christ sought and not the choices of the world. For Catherine, this clothing implies a conformity with Christ's teaching such as eschewer Paul, who was clothed with the "garment of Christ crucified, that is perseverance in His doctrine."

Catherine's use of the words "clothed with Christ" appear to be the same as being "clothed with the wedding garment." In fact in Letter 160, both expressions are found. The wedding garment can refer to both the gift of grace and the rejoicing account of Mary's visit: "This is the most blessed Virgin appeared to her and showed her a very beautiful garment, that she had drawn from the wound on the side of the crucified one. She [Marry] herself adorned this garment with golden ornaments and jewels. And she drew her, saying: 'Be certain that no other garments exceed in beauty those which come forth from the side of my Son.'" "Dieu ditte, mon beaute Virgina apparez sile et estendit alti vestem paloverrum quae exiit de lateri vulnerum crucifabil, quam etiam ipse sanctius auriga ornatorum atque grammitis. Et tandem eam inultum divinum scientia quaedam onus vestent alia cecredi in paulonum illi quae ornarevi de lateri fuit mi," Thomas Antonio de Sienna, Libellus de Supplemento, I, 4, 13-14.

64 "Quasi vi trouaret affigatis et vestiti de fide et del duos vel duorum Filiihuo di Dieu" (Letter 146, II, 291).
65 "Vestiti, vestitio di Cristo dolce, mirabilis, et in se facit vestito, vestito non dimitto vestito." (Letter 146, II, 319).
66 "Vestiti, vestitio di Cristo dolce, mirabilis, et in se facit vestito, vestito non dimitto vestito.
67 "Nec si detinuimus vestitio di Cristo, scintilla di Jesu Christo, scritto a voi nel precioso sanguis suo con divinita di vederlo speciale di questo, e effetto vostro del mondo e di vostro stesso, perequato in altro modo non si poteste vestire di Gesu Cristo incarnato. Perche il mondo non ha conformita con Dio... Egl' esseri essere, stato e grandezza, e Dio benedice lo specchio, abbraccianto le vangue, acherus, e dominio, face, ete, feudo e caldo impono indifferentemente delle cose; e correnti armi monti onere ad piere e mi furono restituiti a Grazia. Egl' esseri essere, stato e grandezza, e Dio benedice lo specchio, abbraccianto le vangue, acherus, e dominio, face, ete, feudo e caldo impono indifferentemente delle cose;... Egl' esseri essere, stato e grandezza, e Dio benedice lo specchio, abbraccianto le vangue, acherus, e dominio, face, ete, feudo e caldo impono indifferentemente delle cose; e correnti armi monti onere ad piere e mi furono restituiti a Grazia.
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69 "Vestiti, vestiti di Cristo dolce, mirabilis, et in se facit vestito, vestito non dimitto vestito."

As she said that, there appeared the most glorious Virgin, His mother, the most blessed John the Evangelist, the glorious apostle Paul, and the most holy Dominic, father of her Order, and along with all these, the prophet David, having his horse in his hand. As the sweetest music was sounding, the Virgin Mother of God took the right hand of the virgin in her most sacred hand and, extending her fingers to the Sun, she asked that He might deign to expose Himself to her in faith. The Only Begotten of God most graciously assenting, He brought forth a gold ring, having around it circle four pearls and the most beautiful diamond encrusted in its center. Then, placing His most holy right hand on the ring, to the right hand of the virgin, He said: "Behold, I expose you to Me, your creator and savior in faith."

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In the vision, Catherine is surrounded by three favorite saints, John, Paul, and Dominic. It is Mary who extends the fingers of Catherine’s hand and asks Jesus to espouse her. Mary brings Catherine to Jesus and solicits Jesus’ assent to the proposal. Mary is the officiating person at the union of Catherine and her Son in a relationship of intimacy comparable to marriage.

On other occasions, Mary also gives Jesus to Catherine literally. Christmas was one of these occasions. Caffarini reports in the Libellus de Suppletore:

On a certain night of the Nativity of Christ, as she contemplated when the blessed Virgin gave birth to the Saviour, she perceived such sweetness that she was not able to speak, so much so that she did not have strength to say the office. Afterwards, she asked the blessed Virgin if she might hold her little son. Responding “willingly,” she gave Him to her, and she herself received Him in her arms and for a long time held Him with immense delight. After she had come to that good which was so great, she was not able to speak, except that she said it was full of all good. And that night with great consolation she told one of the companions with her, that she received and received so many and such great consolations through the Virgin, that she never wished to be separated from her, since receiving her habit, that is of that Order of which the virgin herself was. In this account, Mary literally puts Jesus in Catherine’s arms and lets her hold Him for a long time. After the experience of receiving Jesus from Mary, Catherine confesses that since her vowing with Mary’s habit in the Dominican Order, she had never wanted to be separated from Mary because of all the consolations she had received through her relationship with her.

In the Libellus de Suppletore, Caffarini gives an account of another Christmas vision:

On a certain night of the Nativity of the Lord, the virgin comes to the church with great devotion, and set herself to the piazzetta near the altar and sang. The Blessed Virgin gave birth to Him, He was the fullness of eternal life for you [her]. And the Blessed Virgin gave her Son to her and she received Him in her arms and placed her face over the face of the boy, as sometimes a mother does to her son. And she said that the baby had in His chest the form of a cross. Again, Mary gives the newly born Jesus to Catherine. These two visions of Mary giving her child to Catherine took place at Christmas, the celebration of the occasion in which Mary physically gave Jesus to humanity. As Catherine holds the child, she realizes that the infant has a cross in His chest, symbolizing Jesus’ orientation to give His life on the cross even from the beginning. An incident that occurred immediately after Catherine’s death illustrates the association that Catherine’s disciples made between Mary and Catherine. According to Raimondus, Semis, one of the people in Rome who had been attracted to Catherine, went to sleep without realizing that Catherine died. She had a dream in which she saw Mary welcoming Catherine into heaven with extended arms. As Mary lifted Catherine, she gave her the kiss of peace, calling her “my most beloved daughter.” The fact that Raimondo records Semis’ dream at length, in the section following Catherine’s death in his biography, demonstrates that Catherine’s disciples considered the dream to be an appropriate interpretation of Catherine’s entrance into heaven, in which Catherine is recognized as Mary’s “most beloved daughter.”

In these instances from Catherine’s life, it is clear that Mary deepens Catherine’s relationship with Jesus. Early in her life, Catherine finds support for her unique vocation in Mary, to whom she turns in continuous prayer. Catherine believes that Mary provided her a director who was also her friend and her disciple. Catherine mystically experiences Mary nurturing her and guiding her to be more responsive to the special graces she receives. Catherine understands Mary to be close to Jesus when Catherine is shaken by her attraction to fine clothing. Catherine perceives that Mary espouses her to Jesus, physically supporting her in her receiving communion, and mystically placing the child Jesus in her arms. Mary supports Catherine in following Jesus and both brings Catherine to Jesus and to Catherine. From the framework of her own Marian experiences, Catherine develops convictions about Mary that she will give to others through her writing, teaching, and preaching.

29 “Quo(dim nocte dominus victoria virgo venit ad ecclesiam cum magne devotione, et posuit se in hanc vestiditiam prope altare et vidit quod quando hinciis venit filium sua istut istu vita eterna, et deit sita hincis venit filium sua et accepta eam in loco pietatis et paulatim formam suam super faciem partis, molere consuetudo etiam faciendo filiam sua, et dict quid prius habebat in pectore ad medium usque crux.” Thomas Antonii de Semis, Libellus de Suppletore, II, vii, 110-111. (Although awkward “ilsis” is erected, possibly addressed to the reader.)

30 “Domini nostri dominus et salutis nostrae Maria, impresum vestem diversam fila mea Catharina, et elevam eam, rectet eam ad orationem parvus.” Raymondus de Vinitis (de Capua), Vita, col. 134b, 955.