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GIVING BIRTH TO SOULS  
THROUGH INFINITE DESIRE:

SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD  
ACCORDING TO ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

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**PART I:**  
**GIVING BIRTH TO SOULS**  
**THROUGH INFINITE DESIRE FOR THEIR SALVATION**



## CHAPTER ONE: SALVATION OF SOULS

For St. Catherine of Siena, spiritual motherhood has as its end the salvation of souls. Thus one must first consider her soteriology beginning with her theology of Creation, the Fall, and Redemption. Beyond their objective need to be saved is the complicated issue of souls lacking the desire for their own salvation. This deficiency in desire must also be addressed as it constitutes an important key to understanding the need for spiritual motherhood.

### A. Why souls need to be saved

#### 1. So that God's truth may be fulfilled in them (Creation)<sup>1</sup>

The first truth to be considered in relation to the salvation of souls is the consummate beauty with which the human person was created. The eternal Father invites Catherine to contemplate this beauty in the opening pages of *The Dialogue*: “Open your mind’s eye and look within me, and you will see the dignity and beauty of my reasoning creature.”<sup>2</sup> Endowed with reason and will, the human person has the ability to turn her intellect to a consideration of this dignity and beauty. In doing so, she discovers the truth of her own dignity within God because she was created in his image and likeness: “In the gentle mirror of God she sees her own dignity: that through no merit of hers but by his creation she is the image of God.”<sup>3</sup> In prayer, Catherine draws out the implications of being made in God’s image:

You said, “Let us make humankind in our image and likeness.” And this you did, eternal Trinity, willing that we should share all that you are, high

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<sup>1</sup> The subheadings in this section represent an attempt to use Catherine’s own language to answer the question of why souls need to be saved.

<sup>2</sup> *Dialogue* 1, p. 26 (I): “Apre l’occhio dello ‘ntelletto e mira in me, e vedrai la dignità e bellezza della mia creatura che à in sé ragione.”

<sup>3</sup> *Dialogue* 13, p. 48 (XIII): “...e nello specchio dolce di Dio conosce la dignità e la indignità sua medesima, cioè la dignità della creazione, vedendo sé essere immagine di Dio, e datole per grazia e non per debito....”

eternal Trinity! You, eternal Father, gave us memory to hold your gifts and share your power. You gave us understanding so that, seeing your goodness, we might share the wisdom of your only-begotten Son. And you gave us free will to love what our understanding sees and knows of your truth, and so share the mercy of your Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

As can be seen in this text, Catherine follows the Augustinian notion of the three divine persons of the Trinity being reflected in our powers of memory, understanding, and will.<sup>5</sup> The memory is associated with the Father as a sharing in his power, enabling us to remember the truth of our being. The understanding is associated with the Son as a sharing in his wisdom, enabling us to understand the truth of our being. And the will is associated with the Holy Spirit as a sharing in his mercy, enabling us to love the truth of our being.

Marvelling at having been created with such dignity, Catherine ponders the cause: “Why did you so dignify us? With unimaginable love you looked upon your creature within your very self, and you fell in love with us. So it was love that made you create us and give us being just so that

<sup>4</sup> *Dialogue* 13, p. 49 (XIII): “...dicendo: «Faciamo l'uomo alla imagine e similitudine nostra». E questo facesti volendo tu, Trinità eterna, che l'uomo partecipasse tutto te, alta ed eterna Trinità. Unde gli desti la memoria acciò che ritenesse i benefici tuoi, nella quale partecipa la potenza di te, Padre eterno; e destigli l'intelletto, acciò che cognoscesse, vedendo, la tua bontà e partecipasse la sapienza de l'unigenito tuo Figliuolo; e destigli la volontà, acciò che potesse amare quello che l'intelletto vide e cognobbe della tua verità, partecipando la clemenza dello Spirito santo.” Sr. Mary Jeremiah notes Catherine’s use of the word “clemency,” *clemenza*, rather than “mercy,” *misericordia*, in reference to the work of the Holy Spirit within us: “Just as in the Trinity the Spirit is the interior bond between the Father and the Son who ceaselessly give themselves to one another, so too, the Spirit works to fashion the mysterious bond of union between the human person and the Trinity. Catherine uses the term ‘clemency’ to be more in keeping with the Spirit’s proper activity and being. Rather than ‘reaching out,’ we might say that the Spirit’s clemency ‘sinks deep within’ moving the heart and mind so that the sinner reaches out to God in order to seek, receive, accept the Divine Mercy.” *The Secret of the Heart: A Theological Study of Catherine of Siena’s Teaching on the Heart of Jesus* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1995), 118.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *The Trinity*, XV, xx, 39-xxiii, 43. Catherine’s encounter with Augustinian thought may have been through her friendship with William of Flete, an Augustinian hermit at the monastery of Lecceto, near Siena. Cf. Benedict Hackett, *William Flete, OSA, and Catherine of Siena: Masters of Fourteenth Century Spirituality* (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1992), 115: “The basis of her doctrine is Augustine’s comparison of the soul with the Trinity, one of his most acute and penetrating analyses of the soul in its threefold constitution, and described by him in masterly and unique skill in *The Trinity*. Nevertheless, he would not go the whole way with Catherine in identifying the memory with the power of the Father, the intellect with the wisdom of the Son, and the will with the love or, as Catherine most often calls it, the clemency of the Holy Spirit, but he does make the suggestion.”

we might taste your supreme eternal good.”<sup>6</sup> As love is the cause of our being, enjoying God’s goodness for all eternity is the good for which he had created us, the truth to be fulfilled: “What is this truth? That I had created them in my image and likeness so that they might have eternal life, sharing in my being and enjoying my supreme eternal tenderness and goodness.”<sup>7</sup> Thus the human person is endowed with beauty and dignity from having been created in the image and likeness of God, out of infinite love, to share in this love forever. Such is the origin, nature, and destiny of the human person. This is the truth of our being that must be fulfilled and that a spiritual mother longs to see fulfilled in her children.

## 2. Because of Adam’s sin, this truth was not fulfilled (Fall)

In his dialogue with Catherine, the eternal Father uses the image of spoiled clay to express not only our spoiled dignity, but also our lost destiny: “The clay of humankind was spoiled by the sin of the first man, Adam, and so all of you, as vessels made from that clay, were spoiled and unfit to hold eternal life.”<sup>8</sup> This image hearkens back to the creation of Adam from the clay of the earth into which God breathed the breath of his own life (Gen 2:7). Just as impurities in clay cause the vessel to crack in the kiln, ruining its capacity to hold water, Adam’s sin marred the beauty and dignity of our nature, ruining its capacity to hold eternal life.

Using a second image, the Father compares our lost eternal destiny with a broken road: “...by Adam’s sinful disobedience the road was so broken up that no one could reach everlasting life. Since they had no share in the good for which I had created them, they did not give me the return of glory they owed me, and so my truth was not fulfilled.... for sin closed

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<sup>6</sup> *Dialogue* 13, p. 49 (XIII): “Chi ne fu cagione, che tu ponessi l'uomo in tanta dignità? L'amore inestimabile col quale raguardasti in te medesimo la tua creatura e innamorasti di lei; e però la creasti per amore e destile l'essere, acciò che ella gustasse il tuo sommo eterno bene.” Cf. Sr. Mary Jeremiah, “Catherinian Imagery of Consecration,” *Communio* 17 (Fall, 1990): 363: “Catherine uses the bridal imagery of consecration to convey the depth of intimacy and union between God and humanity. According to Catherine, humanity was constituted as ‘daughter’ by the act of creation. Daughter, because it is made in the ‘image and likeness’ of the Creator. This creature of beauty issued from the loving desires of God. The element of love manifests God as not only Creator, but also as Father.”

<sup>7</sup> *Dialogue* 21, p. 58 (XXI): “Questa verità è che Io l'avevo creato a la imagine e similitudine mia perché egli avesse vita eterna, e participasse me e gustasse la somma ed eterna dolcezza e bontà mia.”

<sup>8</sup> *Dialogue* 14, p. 51 (XIV): “...perché la massa de l'umana generazione era corrotta per lo peccato del primo uomo Adam; e però tutti voi, vaselli fatti di questa massa, eravate corrotti e non disposti ad avere vita eterna.”

heaven and the door of my mercy.”<sup>9</sup> Here Adam’s sin of disobedience is identified as that which destroyed the path to our eternal destiny with God, the truth for which we were made.

Now we move to another image, that of a flood that ravaged sinful humanity, both internally and externally: “With sin there came at once the flood of a stormy river that beat against them constantly with its waves, bringing weariness and troubles from themselves as well as from the devil and the world. You were all drowning, because not one of you, for all your righteousness, could reach eternal life.”<sup>10</sup> This image of being tossed about by the waves illustrates the turmoil caused by our weakened ability to withstand temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. There has been a cataclysmic rupture from integrity, resulting in the loss of our destiny.

The images of the spoiled clay, the broken road, and the ravaging flood express the general state of fallen humanity in its rebellion towards God, as Catherine remarks, “Then I see how by our sin we lost the dignity you had given us. Rebels that we were, we declared war on your mercy and became your enemies.”<sup>11</sup> The Father explains to her how this rebellion against him had repercussions within the human person and the created world:

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<sup>9</sup> *Dialogue* 21, p. 58 (XXI): “...che la strada si ruppe per lo peccato e disobedienza di Adam, per sì fatto modo che veruno poteva giognere a vita durabile, e non mi rendevano gloria per quel modo che dovevano, non partecipando quel bene per lo quale Io gli avevo creati, e non avendolo non s'adempiva la mia verità.... e questo era però che la colpa aveva serrato il cielo e la porta della mia misericordia.”

Perhaps one reason for the complexity of her images is that Catherine is attempting to convey spiritual realities using physical images. Rather than accepting the limitations inherent in any one image, Catherine squares and cubes them to make her point. While the result can be confusing and even amusing at times, the reality described is no worse for the attempt. Cf. Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 230-231: “As it originates in the ‘imagining consciousness’ of both the author and the recipient, the primary function of the image/symbol is to create an interior symbolic space that mediates (not represents) some facet of an object, an event, a person, an experience. One of the secrets of the power of imagery is that it draws energy from that mysterious inner point where body, psyche, cosmos, and society meet. The body supplies the basic sensible forms through its interaction with the cosmos, the psyche transposes and combines these into images while at the same time participating in the communicated image world of human intercourse.”

<sup>10</sup> *Dialogue* 21, p. 58 (XXI): “E corse, di subito che ebbe peccato, un fiume tempesto che sempre el percuote con l'onde sue, portando fadighe e molestie da sé e molestie dal dimonio e dal mondo. Tutti annegavate, però che veruno, con tutte le sue giustizie, non poteva giognere a vita eterna.”

<sup>11</sup> *Dialogue* 13, pp. 49-50 (XIII): “Veggo che, per lo peccato commesso, perdette la dignità nella quale tu la ponesti; per la ribellione che fece a te cadde in guerra con la clemenza tua, ciò è che diventammo nemici tuoi.”

This sin sprouted thorns and troublesome vexations. My creatures found rebellion within themselves, for as soon as they rebelled against me, they became rebels against themselves. Their innocence lost, the flesh rebelled against the spirit and they became filthy beasts. All created things rebelled against them, whereas they would have been submissive if all had been kept as I had established it in the beginning. But they stepped outside my obedience and so deserved eternal death in both soul and body.<sup>12</sup>

By disrupting the divine order, man's disobedience wreaks havoc in his relationships with God, himself, and the world.<sup>13</sup> The creature who was made for eternal life is now condemned to eternal death.

While these images from *The Dialogue* convey the consequences of sin, they do not explain the nature of sin itself and why it has such calamitous effects. The Father addresses this directly when he tells Catherine, "I am the Creator of everything that has any share in being. But sin is not of my making, for sin is nonbeing. Sin is unworthy of any love,

<sup>12</sup> *Dialogue* 21, p. 58 (XXI): "Questa colpa germinò spine e tribolazioni con molte molestie, la creatura trovò ribellione a se medesima: subito che l'uomo ebbe ribellato a me, esso medesimo si fu ribello. La carne ribellò subito contra lo spirito perdendo lo stato della innocenzia, e diventò animale immondo, e tutte le cose create le furono ribelle, dove in prima gli sarebbero state obbedienti se egli si fosse conservato nello stato dove Io el posi. Non conservandosi, trapassò l'obedienza mia e meritò morte eternale ne l'anima e nel corpo." Cf. Cavallini, *Il Dialogo* XXI, 60n39: "The consequences of man's rebellion against God can be seen here at three levels: (1) general: humanity, divided from God, is rendered incapable of actualizing itself fully according to the 'truth' of the divine design; (2) personal: man finds that he is divided in himself and weak towards the attractions of evil; (3) cosmic: the created world, that God had subordinated to man, rebels against him."

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Marie Walter Flood, "St. Thomas's Thought in the Dialogue of St. Catherine," *Spirituality Today* 32 (1980): 34-35: "Catherine's teaching on original sin was close to that of the Angelic Doctor. According to St. Thomas, the cause of the first sin was pride which led to disobedience (II-II, 163, 1).... During Catherine's time, various theories of salvation were being preached, such as those of the 'rights of the devil' or 'vicarious suffering'; they frequently found their way into spiritual writings. Catherine's doctrine of salvation, however, remained singularly clear and orthodox (D15). That Catherine was able to move through the intricacies of Catholic doctrine without error testifies that, though she was under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, she had learned earthly teachers who were able to communicate to her the solid teachings of Thomas Aquinas which they had learned in their theological schools." The influence of Thomistic thought on Catherine's teaching is debated, however, even among Dominicans. Cf. Kenelm Foster, "St. Catherine's Teaching on Christ," *Life of the Spirit* 16 (1962): 311-313: "It is a mistake, for example, to suppose that her teaching is in any way specifically Thomist. This may seem surprising in view of the Dominican setting of Catherine's religious life; and I have myself spoken elsewhere of her Dominican training.... in so far as she depended on written sources, these were only incidentally Dominican or Thomist.... To be sure, some of her expressions (*essere*, *potenza*, etc.) have a scholastic ring, but this was natural given her environment. It would be absurd to suppose that she understood the philosophy of Aquinas philosophically. She had no time for philosophy as such; she had other and deeper illuminations."

then, because it has no part in me.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, only that which has being is good and therefore worthy of love.<sup>15</sup> As the source of all being, God is supremely good and most worthy of love. That is why he is offended by love of sin which, because it lacks the fullness of being that comes from virtue, is unworthy of love.<sup>16</sup> Thus man’s love of sin subverts the divine ordering of creation and impedes God’s truth from being fulfilled in him.

### 3. God sent his Word to fulfill his truth (Redemption)

Because man was incapable of restoring the broken road to the Father that now led to eternal death, God himself provides a way. Developing the image of humanity drowning in the river of sin, he provides a bridge across it in the form of his Son: “I gave you a bridge, my Son, so that you could cross over the river, the stormy sea of this darksome life, without being drowned.... I want you to look at the bridge of my only-begotten Son, and notice its greatness. Look! It stretches from heaven to earth, joining the earth of your humanity with the greatness of the Godhead.”<sup>17</sup> The bridge stretches from heaven to earth, not earth to heaven, indicating that it is the result of divine, not human, initiative.<sup>18</sup> It is the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Logos, the very Word of the Father who becomes flesh for our sake.

The Father explains to Catherine why humanity was not capable of bridging the distance:

The earth of human nature by itself, as I have told you, was incapable of atoning for sin and draining off the pus from Adam’s sin, for that stinking pus had infected the whole human race. Your nature had to be joined with

<sup>14</sup> *Dialogue* 18, p. 56 (XVIII): “...so’ creatore di tutte le cose che partecipano essere, eccetto che del peccato che non è, e però non è fatto da me. E perché non è in me, non è degno d’essere amato.”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ST* I, q. 5, a. 3: “Every being, as being, is good. For all being, as being, has actuality and is in some way perfect; since every act implies some sort of perfection; and perfection implies desirability and goodness, as is clear from a. 1. Hence it follows that every being as such is good.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ST* I, q. 5, a. 3, ad 2: “No being can be spoken of as evil, formally as being, but only so far as it lacks being. Thus a man is said to be evil, because he lacks some virtue; and an eye is said to be evil, because it lacks the power to see well.”

<sup>17</sup> *Dialogue* 21-22, p. 59 (XXI-XXII): “...v’o dato il ponte del mio Figliuolo, acciò che passando il fiume non annegaste; il qual fiume è questo mare tempestoso di questa tenebrosa vita. . . . voglio che raguardi il ponte de l’unigenito mio Figliuolo, e vede la grandezza sua che tiene dal cielo alla terra; cioè riguarda che è unita con la grandezza della deità la terra della vostra umanità.”

<sup>18</sup> This point is also made in McDermott, 95.

the height of mine, the eternal Godhead, before it could make atonement for all of humanity. Then human nature could endure the suffering, and the divine nature, joined with that humanity, would accept my Son's sacrifice on your behalf to release you from death and give you life.<sup>19</sup>

Our human nature was incapable of atoning for sin because it was too weakened by sin. Yet when our human nature is joined with the divine nature, it is capable of suffering for all of humanity and so atoning for sins, releasing from death, and restoring eternal life.

This image of humanity weakened by sin is further developed in comparing Christ to a physician and a wet nurse:

Now Adam's sin oozed with a deadly pus, but you were too weakened to drain it yourself. But when the great doctor came (my only-begotten Son) he tended that wound, drinking himself the bitter medicine you could not swallow. And he did as the wet nurse who herself drinks the medicine the baby needs, because she is big and strong and the baby is too weak to stand the bitterness. My son was your wet nurse, and he joined the bigness and strength of his divinity with your nature to drink the bitter medicine of his painful death on the cross so that he might heal and give life to you who were babies weakened by sin.<sup>20</sup>

As the nurse mediates between the medicine and the baby, Christ mediates between the redemption and us. The baby needs medicine, but cannot endure the bitterness, so the nurse drinks the medicine for the baby. We need redemption, but cannot drink the chalice of redemptive suffering on our own, so Christ drinks the chalice for us. Thus implicit in Catherine's reference to Christ's drinking the bitter medicine of his painful death on the cross so that he might heal us, is a parallel between the milk that has become

<sup>19</sup> *Dialogue* 22, p. 59 (XXII): "Pure di terra non si poteva fare di tanta grandezza che fosse sufficiente a passare il fiume e darvi vita eterna; ciò è che pure la terra della natura de l'uomo non era sufficiente a satisfare la colpa e tollere via la marcia del peccato d'Adam, la quale marcia corruppe tutta l'umana generazione e trasse puzza da lei, sì come di sopra ti dissi. Convennesi dunque unire con l'altezza della natura mia, Deità eterna, acciò che fusse sufficiente a satisfare a tutta l'umana generazione: la natura umana sostenesse la pena, e la natura divina unita con essa natura umana accettasse il sacrificio del mio Figliuolo offerto a me per voi, per tollervi la morte e darvi la vita."

<sup>20</sup> *Dialogue* 14, p. 52 (XIV): "Così la colpa d'Adam, la quale menò marcia mortale: venuto el grande medico de l'unigenito mio Figliuolo, curò questo infermo, beiendo la medicina amara, la quale l'uomo bere non poteva perché era molto indebilito. E' fece come baglia che piglia la medicina in persona del fanciullo, perché ella è grande e forte ed il fanciullo non è forte a potere portare l'amaritudine. Sì che egli fu baglia, portando con la grandezza e fortezza della deità, unita con la natura vostra, l'amara medicina della penosa morte della croce, per sanare e dar vita a voi, fanciulli indebiliti per la colpa."

medicinal and the blood that has become redemptive.<sup>21</sup> As a baby receives the medicine it needs through the milk of its wet nurse, we receive the redemption we need through the blood of Christ on the cross.<sup>22</sup>

Human nature by itself is not only incapable of drinking the chalice of redemptive suffering because of its weakened state akin to that of an ailing baby, it is also inadequate to atone for sin because of the gap between the finite and the infinite, as the eternal Father explains to Catherine:

For my divine justice demanded suffering in atonement for sin. But I cannot suffer. And you, being only human, cannot make adequate atonement. Even if you did atone for some particular thing, you still could make atonement for yourself and not for others. But for this sin you could

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 178-179: "Catherine's image of Christ as maternal, which had a long ancestry in twelfth- and thirteenth-century spirituality, must be understood against the background of contemporary physiological theory. Medieval natural philosophers thought that breast milk was blood. Thus blood was the quintessential food—and it was poured out as food or provided as the basic stuff of life only by female bodies. Therefore...the female body was an obvious image for a God who dies to give birth to the world and bled to feed all souls."

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gabriella Anodal, *Caterina da Siena: Patrona d'Europa* (Siena: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2004), 69: "Catherine's maternity appears also in her writings: boldly, especially for her times, she presents God also under the profile of a mother; illustrates in maternal terms the rapport between charity and the other virtues; derives many metaphors from the ambit of maternal life, using a lexicon interwoven with vocabulary belonging to the maternal sphere. Even Christ's death in its bitterness, comes to be presented with the metaphor of a wetnurse, who takes the bitter medicine for the baby that is too little, thus transmitting health to it through the sweetness of the milk." Also cf. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, "Il Linguaggio del Corpo in Santa Caterina da Siena," in *Dire l'ineffabile: Caterina da Siena e il linguaggio della mistica, Atti del convegno, Siena, 13-14 novembre 2003* (Firenze: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2006), 222: "Milk, flowing from the breast of Christ and of the Church, maternal beginning and absorption, expresses the sweetness of the union. Blood (often connected with fire), that runs as a river from the side of Christ, figure of the work of God in the soul, is the agent of transformation. Principle of life and sign of the salvific power of the Incarnation, it is the central symbol, the same mark of Catherinian mysticism as the experience of suffering and of love." It is important to recognize, however, that Catherine's comparison of Christ to a wet nurse is not a horizontal or even a vertical analogy, but a transcendental analogy, as Sr. Prudence Allen explains: "In transcendental analogies, while one analogate is taken from something in the world, something either observable through the senses or accessible to reason, the second analogate is accessible only by faith. It is outside the bounds of reason, and thus, even though there is a hierarchy of analogates as there was in vertical analogies, human reason cannot by itself grasp both analogates through the exercise of dialectic. Thus, this second analogate 'transcends' human experience, reason, and the world itself. Proofs for the existence of God are examples of vertical analogies, but descriptions of who God is involve transcendental analogies." *The Concept of Woman, vol. II: The Early Humanist Reformation 1250-1500* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 326-327.

not make full atonement either for yourself or for others since it was committed against me, and I am infinite Goodness.<sup>23</sup>

There is an incommensurability between the penalty and the sufferer: we, having bodies, can suffer but being finite cannot satisfy for an infinite offense, while God, not having a body, cannot suffer although he is infinite and can satisfy for an infinite offense. The solution is Christ, the Word incarnate, who by the union of the divine and human natures in himself makes the finite and the infinite commensurable, thus satisfying the requirements of divine justice.<sup>24</sup>

Divine justice was satisfied by Christ on the “anvil” of the cross “where this child of humankind could be hammered into an instrument to release humankind from death and restore it to the life of grace.”<sup>25</sup> Yet beyond the requirements of justice, the cross is proof of “his unspeakable love”: “He could not have shown you greater love than by giving his life for you. You can hardly resist being drawn by love unless you foolishly refuse to be drawn.”<sup>26</sup> Love is God’s sole reason for creating us and redeeming us. He creates us out of love, and when we sin, he draws us back by love for “the human heart is always drawn by love.”<sup>27</sup>

When the human heart is drawn by love to Christ crucified, the internal disorder caused by sin is healed by a reordering of our powers, as the Father explains to Catherine:

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<sup>23</sup> *Dialogue* 14, p. 51 (XVI): “Non potendo Io sostener pena, e della colpa voleva la divina mia giustizia che n’escisse la pena, e non essendo sufficiente pur uomo a satisfare - che se egli avesse pure in alcuna cosa satisfatto, non satisfaceva altro che per sé e non per l’altre creature che ànno in loro ragione; benché di questa colpa né per sé né per altrui poteva egli satisfare, perché la colpa era fatta contra a me, che so’ infinita bontà....”

<sup>24</sup> The notion of incommensurability is inspired by Euclid’s proof for the incommensurability between the sides and the diagonal of a right triangle which demonstrates that they have no common unit of measure. Applied to our redemption, what is incommensurable for us is commensurable for God through the hypostatic union of the human and divine natures, between the finite and the infinite.

<sup>25</sup> *Dialogue* 26, p. 65 (XXVI): “...facendone una ancudine dove si fabricasse il figliuolo dell’umana generazione, per tollargli la morte e restituirlo alla vita della grazia.

<sup>26</sup> *Dialogue* 26, p. 65 (XXVI): “...l’amore ineffabile.... Per forza dunque è tratto da l’amore, se già l’uomo ignorante non fa resistenzia in non lassarsi trarre.”

<sup>27</sup> *Dialogue* 26, p. 65 (XXVI): “...perché il cuore de l’uomo è sempre tratto per amore.” Cf. Sr. Mary Jeremiah, “Catherinian imagery,” 364: “The Word by taking on human flesh united humanity to himself forever. Thus, the Incarnation elevates humanity from the relationship of ‘daughter’ to that of ‘spouse.’ This change of imagery indicates the more intimate relationship made possible by the extraordinary mystery of the Incarnation. As the spouse of the human race, Christ’s love is extended not only to just a few elite souls, but it is poured out and offered to all who will accept it.”

I said that, having been raised up, he would draw everything to himself. This is true in two ways: First, the human heart is drawn by love, as I said, and with all its powers: memory, understanding, and will. If these three powers are harmoniously united in my name, everything else you do, in fact or in intention, will be drawn to union with me in peace through the movement of love, because all will be lifted up in the pursuit of crucified love.<sup>28</sup>

When our powers of memory, understanding, and will are integrated in Christ crucified by the drawing power of love, our human beauty and dignity in the image and likeness of God are restored, as is our destiny to enjoy God's supreme goodness for all eternity.<sup>29</sup> Thus the truth for which we were made that was left unfulfilled by Adam's sin is fulfilled in Christ, the new Adam, by the redemptive power of his blood, healing the ailing baby of humanity, rendering the finite and the infinite commensurable, and uniting all of our powers in himself. It is to this healing, atonement, and integration in Christ that a spiritual mother brings her children.

#### 4. He will not save us without our help (Salvation)

Creation was God's initiative; the Fall was our response. Redemption was his initiative; now salvation, to some extent, can be our response. All of salvation history can be read as this continual call of God and man's response to this call, a dialogue flowing back and forth between God and man. The eternal Father has spoken his response to sin definitively in his Son. What will man's response be? Each human person's cooperation with the grace of redemption constitutes the question of salvation.

While the Father has provided his Son as a bridge by which to return to him, this initiative requires something on our part: 'But my Son's having

<sup>28</sup> *Dialogue* 26, p. 65 (XXVI): "Disse dunque ch'essendo levato in alto ogni cosa trarebbe a sé, e così è la verità, e questo s'intende in due modi. L'uno si è che, tratto il cuore dell'uomo per affetto d'amore, come detto t'ò, è tratto con tutte le potenze dell'anima, cioè la memoria lo 'ntelletto e la volontà. Accordate queste tre potenze e congregate nel nome mio, tutte le altre operazioni che l'uomo fa, attuali e mentali, sono tratte piacevoli, e unite in me per affetto d'amore, perché s'è levato in alto seguitando l'amore crociato."

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Sr. Mary Jeremiah, "The Theological Anthropology of Catherine of Siena," *Communio* 20 (Fall, 1993): 461: "The secret to union with God is the union of the faculties within the soul. For just as the attributes of Power, Wisdom and Clemency are united within the Godhead as Trinity, so too, within the human being; the created reflection of the Trinity, the faculties of memory, intellect, and will must be united to form an integrated person. This is essential for Catherine because it is only as a *whole* person that one moves towards or away from God. The entire person is also essential for the perfect fulfillment of the double commandment of love of God and love of neighbor."

made of himself a bridge for you could not bring you to life unless you make your way along that bridge.”<sup>30</sup> It is up to us to make use of the bridge provided for our salvation, for “although he had created us without our help, he will not save us without our help.”<sup>31</sup> This Augustinian maxim expresses the need for our participation in the redemption wrought in Christ, the way to the Father.<sup>32</sup> Although we had no choice in being created, we do have a choice in being saved: we may take the way or reject it.

It is in baptism that the redemption won for us by Christ on the cross is first applied to our souls so that “only the scar remains of that original sin as [we] contract it from [our] father and mother when [we] are conceived by them.”<sup>33</sup> While “the inclination to sin, which is the trace that remains from original sin, is a weakness...the soul can keep it in check if she will.”<sup>34</sup> Once the spoiled clay of our souls has been restored in baptism, it is formed into vessels capable of holding grace. Grace increases within the soul as she loves and serves God through affection and desire.<sup>35</sup> It does not, however, determine the will; upon reaching the age of reason, the soul can choose to sin, even though she is no longer enslaved to sin as she was before baptism.<sup>36</sup> So long as we have not consented to it with our wills, there is no sin, as the Father explains to Catherine:

<sup>30</sup> *Dialogue* 22, p. 59 (XXII): “E non basterebbe a voi, ad avere la vita, perché il Figliuolo mio vi sia fatto ponte, se voi non teneste per esso.”

<sup>31</sup> *Dialogue* 23, p. 59 (XXIII): “...che egli ci aveva creati senza noi, ma non ci salvarà senza noi.”

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Sermon 169, 13: “So while [God] made you without you, he doesn’t justify you without you (*Qui ergo fecit te sine te, non te iustificat sine te*).” *The Works of Saint Augustine: Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 5:231. Also cf. Giuliana Cavallini, *S. Domenico e i suoi frati nella spiritualità di S. Caterina da Siena* (Napoli: Editrice Domenicana Italiana, 1993), 37: “The Redemption is not actualized without the cooperation of man because it is the work of love: it is the return of man from sin, that is not-love, to love. And love will be at first imperfect, then more perfect, and finally most perfect.”

<sup>33</sup> *Dialogue* 14, p. 52 (XIV): “Solo el segno rimase del peccato originale, il quale peccato contraete dal padre e dalla madre quando sete conceputi da loro.”

<sup>34</sup> *Dialogue* 14, p. 52 (XIV): “E lo inchinamento al peccato, che è la margine che rimane del peccato originale, come detto è, indebilisce, e può l'anima rifrenarlo se ella vuole.” Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 74, a. 3, ad 2: “The continual corruption of the sensuality is to be understood as referring to the ‘fomes,’ which is never completely destroyed in this life, since, though the stain of original sin passes, its effect remains. However, this corruption of the ‘fomes’ does not hinder man from using his rational will to check individual inordinate movements, if he be presentient of them, for instance by turning his thoughts to other things.”

<sup>35</sup> *Dialogue* 14, p. 52 (XIV): “Allora il vasello dell'anima è disposto a ricevere e aumentare in sé la grazia, assai e poco; secondo che piacerà a lei di voler disporne se medesima, con affetto e desiderio, ad amare e servire me.”

<sup>36</sup> *Dialogue* 14, p. 53 (XIV): “Unde, venuto il tempo della discrezione, per lo libero arbitrio può usare il bene e il male secondo che piace alla volontà sua.”

But such is the freedom of your humanity, and so strong have you been made by the power of this glorious blood, that neither the devil nor any other creature can force you to the least sin unless you want it. You were freed from slavery so that you might be in control of your own powers and reach the end you were created for.<sup>37</sup>

Yet despite “the power of this glorious blood” to free us from slavery so that God’s truth may be fulfilled in us, there are those who lack the desire to be saved.

### B. Why souls may lack the desire to be saved

Having seen the reasons Catherine gives for why souls need to be saved, we will now examine the reasons why they may lack the desire to be saved, prompting the need for spiritual motherhood. There are three main reasons that a soul may not choose the path to salvation: selfish sensuality, disordered love, and deadly sin.

#### 1. Selfish sensuality blinds the eye of the understanding

While “self-love,” “selfish love,” or “selfishness” (*l’amore proprio di sé*) is the disordered love of self that leads to sin,<sup>38</sup> “sensuality” (*la sensualità*) refers to bodily concupiscence:

There are, then, two aspects to yourself: sensuality and reason. Sensuality is a servant, and it has been appointed to serve the soul, so that your body may be your instrument for proving and exercising virtue. The soul is free, liberated from sin in my Son’s blood, and she cannot be dominated unless she consents to it with her will, which is bound up with free choice. Free

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<sup>37</sup> *Dialogue* 14, p. 53 (XIV): “Ed è tanta la libertà che à l'uomo, e tanto è fatto forte per la virtù di questo glorioso sangue, che né dimonio né creatura el può costrignere a una minima colpa, più che egli si voglia. Tolta gli fu la servitudine e fatto libero, acciò che signoreggiasse la sua propria sensualità e avesse il fine per il quale era stato creato.”

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 4: “As stated above (q. 75, a. 1), the proper and direct cause of sin is to be considered on the part of the adherence to a mutable good; in which respect every sinful act proceeds from inordinate desire for some temporal good. Now the fact that anyone desires a temporal good inordinately, is due to the fact that he loves himself inordinately; for to wish anyone some good is to love him. Therefore it is evident that inordinate love of self is the cause of every sin.”

choice is one with the will, and agrees with it. It is set between sensuality and reason and can turn to whichever one it will.<sup>39</sup>

Although sensuality is not sinful in itself, what is sinful is allowing sensuality to dominate over and against reason. This is what Catherine calls “selfish sensuality” (*la propria sensualità*). To act against reason is to act against one’s nature as a rational creature made in the image and likeness of God; it is choosing the way of falsehood over the way of truth.

Walking in the way of truth requires reason illumined by faith, as the Father explains to Catherine:

You know that no one can walk in the way of truth without the light of reason that you draw from me, the true Light, through the eye of your understanding. You must have as well the light of faith, which you possess as my gift from holy baptism unless you have put it out with your sins. In baptism, through the power of my only-begotten Son’s blood, you received the form of faith. If you exercise this faith by virtue with the light of reason, reason will in turn be enlightened by faith, and such faith will give you life and lead you in the way of truth. With this light you will reach me, the true Light; without it you would come to darkness.<sup>40</sup>

Although it seems incomprehensible that souls would choose the way of falsehood over the way of truth, they do “because they have blinded the eye of their understanding with the infidelity they have drawn over it through

<sup>39</sup> *Dialogue* 51, p. 105 (LI): “Avete adunque due parti in voi, cioè la sensualità e la ragione. La sensualità è serva, e però è posta perché ella serva all'anima, ciò è che con lo strumento del corpo proviate ed esercitiate le virtù. L'anima è libera, liberata da la colpa nel sangue del mio Figliuolo, e non può essere signoreggiata se ella non vuole consentire con la volontà, la quale è legata col libero arbitrio; ed esso libero arbitrio si fa una cosa con la volontà, accordandosi con lei. Egli è legato in mezzo fra la sensualità e la ragione: a qualunque egli si vuole vollere, si può.” Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 71, a. 2, ad 3: “There is a twofold nature in man, rational nature, and the sensitive nature. And since it is through the operation of his senses that man accomplishes acts of reason, hence there are more who follow the inclinations of the sensitive nature, than who follow the order of reason: because more reach the beginning of a business than achieve its completion. Now the presence of vices and sins in man is owing to the fact that he follows the inclination of his sensitive nature against the order of his reason.”

<sup>40</sup> *Dialogue* 98, pp. 184-185 (XCVIII): “Tu sai, sì com'io ti dissi, che senza il lume neuno può andare per la via della verità, cioè senza il lume della ragione. Il quale lume di ragione traete da me, vero lume, con l'occhio de l'intelletto e col lume della fede che io v'ò dato nel santo battesmo, se voi non ve'l tollete per li vostri difetti. Nel quale battesmo, mediante e in virtù del sangue de l'unigenito mio Figliuolo, riceveste la forma della fede; la quale fede, esercitata in virtù col lume della ragione - la quale ragione è illuminata da questo lume - vi dà vita e favvi andare per la via della verità. E con esso giognete a me vero Lume; e senza esso giognereste alla tenebre.”

their selfish love.”<sup>41</sup> This phrase, *l'occhio de l'intelletto*, “the eye of the understanding,” is one we encountered at the beginning of Chapter One, when the Father invited Catherine to open this eye to see within him the beauty and dignity of the reasoning creature. Now he speaks of infidelity as a cataract that has formed over this eye, blinding its ability to see the truth. To the eye of the understanding by which we gain knowledge by the light of reason, the pupil of faith is added at baptism.<sup>42</sup> This is the theological virtue that perfects our reason. Keeping the light of faith requires the exercise of virtue when the soul reaches the age of discernment, that is, the age of reason when she is capable of moral acts.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately, some souls forfeit the light of faith they have received: “[Their virtues] are dead because all their actions, being done in deadly sin and bereft of the light of faith, are dead.”<sup>44</sup> Dead virtues are acts that have the appearance of virtue but cannot merit for eternal life because they are performed in the state of deadly sin. The following passage from *The Dialogue* is a reference to James 2:17 that states, “Faith without works is dead”:

Of these, whose faith is not carried out in actions, it is said that their faith is dead. And just as the dead do not see, so they, with the pupil of their eye covered over as I told you, do not see. They do not know that of themselves they are nothing. They do not recognize the sins they have committed. Nor do they know my goodness to them, that I am the source of their very being and of every grace beyond that.<sup>45</sup>

Thus there is a threefold blindness these souls suffer: blindness regarding their contingency as creatures, blindness regarding their sins, and blindness regarding God’s goodness to them. Without faith, they do not know the truth about their being, and so stand in need of a spiritual mother.

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<sup>41</sup> *Dialogue* 46, p. 94 (XLVI): “...questo è perché ànno accecato l'occhio de l'intelletto con la infedelità tratta dall'amore proprio.”

<sup>42</sup> *Dialogue* 46, p. 94 (XLVI): “...nel quale battesmo fu messa la pupilla della fede ne l'occhio de l'intelletto.”

<sup>43</sup> *Dialogue* 46, p. 94 (XLVI): “Venuto il tempo della discrezione, se essi s'esercitano in virtù, costoro ànno conservato il lume della fede....”

<sup>44</sup> *Dialogue* 46, p. 94 (XLVI): “Morte sono, perché tutte l'operazioni loro sono morte, essendo fatte in peccato mortale, privati del lume della fede.”

<sup>45</sup> *Dialogue* 46, p. 94 (XLVI): “A costoro è detto, i quali ànno fede senza opera, che la fede loro è morta. Unde, come il morto non vede, così l'occhio: ricoperta la pupilla come detto t'ò, non vede né cognosce se medesimo non essere, né i difetti suoi che egli à commessi, né cognosce la bontà mia in sé, donde à avuto l'essere e ogni grazia che è posta sopra l'essere.”

## 2. Disordered love perverts the will

Due to the blindness caused by selfish sensuality, these souls become disordered in their love, as the eternal Father explains to Catherine: “Because they know neither me nor themselves, they do not hate their selfish sensuality. No, they even love it.... But me they do not love. And because they do not love me they do not love their neighbors, whom I love.”<sup>46</sup> Bereft of knowledge of the supreme good which is found in God, their love is directed to lesser goods.

The Father warns of the dangers of succumbing to a disordered love for created things:

They do not see except with blind eyes, since their desire is fixed on passing things, and so they are deceived and act like fools who notice only the gold and fail to see its venomous sting. Learn from this that the goods of the world, all its delights and pleasures, if they are got and had apart from me with selfish and disordered love, are just like scorpions.... [that] carry gold in front of them and venom in their tails.<sup>47</sup>

The gold is the temporal gain to be had from created goods which distracts these souls from the venomous sting of disordered love. Created things must be loved in God because, as the Father explains, “created things are less than the human person. They were made for you, not you for them, so they can never satisfy you. Only I can satisfy you.”<sup>48</sup> Seeking fulfillment in created things is futile as they are not equal to the task; because we were made for God, only he can fulfill us. As they are means to reaching the end for which we were created and not ends in themselves, created things loved apart from God impede us from reaching our true end. The venom is not in created things, but in our disordered love of them, which perverts the will.

As the sacrament of baptism is the remedy for the venom of original sin, the sacrament of reconciliation is the remedy for “the venom of a

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<sup>46</sup> *Dialogue* 46, p. 94 (XLVI): “Non cognoscendo me né sé, non odia in sé la propria sensualità anco l’ama.... Né me non ama: non amando me, non ama quello che Io amo, cioè il prossimo suo....”

<sup>47</sup> *Dialogue* 46, pp. 95-96 (XLVI): “E perché non veggono se non con l’occhio cieco, posto l’affetto loro nelle cose transitorie, però sono ingannati e fanno come stolti che raguardano solamente l’oro e non il veleno. Unde sappi che le cose del mondo e tutti i diletti e piaceri suoi, se sono presi e acquistati e posseduti senza me e con proprio e disordinato amore, essi portano drittamente la figura degli scorpioni.... che portavano l’oro dinanzi e'l veleno portavano dietro....”

<sup>48</sup> *Dialogue* 48, p. 98 (XLVIII): “Non avendo me non possono essere saziati, se essi possedessero tutto quanto il mondo, perché le cose create sono minori che l’uomo, però che esse sono fatte per l’uomo e non l’uomo per loro, e però non può essere saziato da loro. Solo Io el posso saziare.”

perverted human will, which poisons souls and causes them death, unless they vomit it up through a holy confession, tearing their heart and affection free from it. Such confession is a medicine that heals the effects of this venom even while it tastes bitter to selfish sensuality.”<sup>49</sup>

Setting one’s will on the goods of this world brings untold suffering. Indeed, the Father says “the will alone is the source of suffering.”<sup>50</sup> This is because “love always brings suffering if what a person has identified with is lost.... All the things they love sensually bring them only suffering loaded with purposeless fears.... Unless they reform, they go through life weakened in all sorts of ways, and in the end receive eternal death.”<sup>51</sup>

### 3. Deadly sin leads to eternal death

The selfish sensuality that blinds the eye of the understanding and the disordered love that perverts the will conceive deadly sin in the hearts of “those who drown by their own choice,”<sup>52</sup> rather than travelling on the bridge that leads to eternal life: “First they became weak, and this is when they conceived deadly sin in their hearts. Then they gave birth to that sin and lost the life of grace.”<sup>53</sup> Without some kind of intervention, the loss of grace in the souls of those who have succumbed to deadly sin leads to eternal death:

These are the ones who are hurt by the thorns of many troubles. They crucify themselves with their own perverse will. They are crossed soul and body; that is, they suffer pain and torment in soul and body but without any merit, for they bear their burdens not with patience but with outright impatience. They have gained possession of the gold and pleasures of the world but with perverted love. Bereft of the life of grace or any impulse of love, they have become trees of death, and therefore all their actions are

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<sup>49</sup> *Dialogue* 47, p. 98 (XLVII): “...del veleno della perversa volontà dell'uomo. Dico che ella avelena l'anima e dàlle la morte, se essa non el vomica per la confessione santa, traendone il cuore e l'affetto. La quale è una medicina che'l guarisce di questo veleno, poniamo che paia amara alla propria sensualità.”

<sup>50</sup> *Dialogue* 48, p. 98 (XLVIII): “solo la volontà dava pena all'uomo.”

<sup>51</sup> *Dialogue* 48, p. 99 (XLVIII): “... l'amore sempre dà pena, perdendo quella cosa con che la creatura s'è conformata.... Di tutte quante le cose che egli ama sensitivamente ne trae pena con molti disordinati timori.... In questa vita ne vivono infermi con molti diversi modi, se essi non si correggono, e ricevonne poi morte eternale.”

<sup>52</sup> *Dialogue* 31, p. 73 (XXXI): “costoro che volontariamente s'anegano.”

<sup>53</sup> *Dialogue* 31, p. 73 (XXXI): “Prima è che essi sono diventati infermi, e questo si è quando conceperono il peccato mortale nelle menti loro; poi el partoriscono e perdono la vita della grazia.”

dead. In pain they make their way through the river, drowning—only to reach the water of death.<sup>54</sup>

Having failed to recognize the beauty and dignity of being created in the image and likeness of God, this truth remains unfulfilled in them.

Thus souls may lack desire for their own salvation if they have allowed themselves to be blinded by the pleasures of this world to seek them as ends in themselves. Catherine calls it by various names: selfish sensuality, disordered love, perverted will. All of these lead to deadly sin, the loss of grace, and eternal death. It is the way of falsehood that keeps God's truth from being fulfilled in us.

### Summary

In St. Catherine of Siena's soteriology, souls need to be saved so that God's truth can be fulfilled in them. The truth of our creation is that the human person was made in God's image with memory, understanding, and will, out of infinite love to enjoy this love for all eternity. This truth, however, was not fulfilled because of Adam's sin. As rebellious children who have spoiled the clay of their humanity and broken the road to the Father, humanity stood in need of redemption. In sending his Word to fulfill his truth in us, the eternal Father provided a bridge stretching from heaven to earth, a doctor and wet nurse for our ailing humanity, and a way of making the finite and the infinite commensurable. The redemption wrought in Christ by the union of our humanity with his divinity is made available to us first through the baptism of water and then continually through the baptism of blood in the sacrament of reconciliation. Sustained by the life of grace, the soul is perfected in love as she grows in virtue, thus fulfilling the truth for which she was made.

Despite the immense measures taken by the Father to provide for our salvation, there are souls who do not desire to be saved. Such defect of desire is caused by selfish sensuality that blinds the eye of the understanding, clouding the pupil of faith. Blinded about the truth of their being, these souls seek their fulfillment in created goods. Desiring created

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<sup>54</sup> *Dialogue* 48, p. 99 (XLVIII): “Or costoro sono quelli che sono offesi dalle spine delle molte tribolazioni, crociandosi loro medesimi colla propria disordinata volontà. Costoro àanno croce di cuore e di corpo, ciò è che con pena e tormento passa l'anima e il corpo senza alcuno merito, perché non portarò le fadighe con pazienza, anco con impazienza, perché àanno posseduto e acquistato l'oro e le delizie del mondo con disordinato amore. Privati della vita della grazia e dell'affetto della carità, fatti sono arbori di morte, e però tutte le loro operazioni sono morte, e con pena vanno per lo fiume annegandosi, e giongono all'acqua morta....”

goods as ends in themselves perverts the will; it is the way of falsehood leading to deadly sin and eternal death. The plight of these souls in their disordered desires is what the spiritual mother seeks to remedy through infinite desire.

