

PROLOGUE

IN THE NAME OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED AND OF GENTLE MARY

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A soul rises up, restless with tremendous desire for God's honor and the salvation of souls. She has for some time exercised herself in virtue and has become accustomed to dwelling in the cell of self-knowledge in order to know better God's goodness toward her, since upon knowledge follows love. And loving, she seeks to pursue truth and clothe herself in it.

But there is no way she can so savor and be enlightened by this truth as in continual humble prayer, grounded in the knowledge of herself and of God. For by such prayer the soul is united with God, following in the footsteps of Christ crucified, and through desire and affection and the union of love he makes of her another himself. So Christ seems to have meant when he said, "If you will love me and keep my word, I will show myself to you, and you will be one thing with me and I with you."¹ And we find similar words in other places from which we can see it is the truth that by love's affection the soul becomes another himself.

To make this clearer still, I remember having heard from a certain servant of God² that, when she was at prayer, lifted high in spirit, God would not hide from her mind's eye his love for his servants. No, he

1. Cf. Jn. 14:21–23.

2. Catherine refers to herself in the third person throughout the *Dialogue*. (Cf. 2 Co. 12:2.) Almost imperceptibly at this point she changes from present to past tense, a perspective she maintains in the narrative passages throughout the rest of the work.

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would reveal it, saying among other things, "Open your mind's eye and look within me, and you will see the dignity and beauty of my reasoning creature.³ But beyond the beauty I have given the soul by creating her in my image and likeness, look at those who are clothed in the wedding garment of charity,⁴ adorned with many true⁵ virtues: They are united with me through love. So I say, if you should ask me who they are, I would answer," said the gentle loving Word, "that they are another me; for they have lost and drowned their own will and have clothed themselves and united themselves and conformed themselves with mine."

It is true, then, that the soul is united to God through love's affection.

Now this soul's will was to know and follow truth more courageously.⁶ So she addressed four petitions to the most high and eternal Father, holding up her desire for herself first of all—for she knew that she could be of no service to her neighbors in teaching or example or prayer without first doing herself the service of attaining and possessing virtue.

Her first petition, therefore, was for herself. The second was for the reform of holy Church. The third was for the whole world in general, and in particular for the peace of Christians who are rebelling against holy Church with great disrespect and persecution.⁷ In her fourth petition she asked divine providence to supply in general and in particular for a certain case which had arisen.⁸

3. *La mia creatura che à in sé ragione* is one of Catherine's favorite expressions for the human person.

4. In Catherine's writings *carità* and *amore* are often used quite interchangeably. However, I have consistently translated *carità* as "charity" and *amore* as "love" unless otherwise noted, to retain any distinction Catherine did intend.

5. S adds *e reali*. The adjective carries a range of meaning from "real" to "royal." As Catherine's context nowhere gives a clue as to which aspect of meaning she intended, I have consistently chosen the more neutral "solid" where the reference is to *vere e reali virtù*.

6. *Virilmente*. The etymological sense of "manfully" is certainly not alien to Catherine's thought, as she regarded "manliness" as a distinctly positive quality. A frequent admonition of hers was to "act like a man, not like a woman!" (E.g., Let. 344 to Raymond of Capua.) The translation "courageously" is, however, also legitimate, and I have chosen it throughout this translation for its broader connotations.

7. The conflicts, often bloody, between the Italian city-states and the papacy—Catherine had dealt with them firsthand in her journeys to Avignon and Florence—are the hard reality behind these words.

8. There is no clear evidence as to what this "certain case" was. Some have thought that the reference is to Niccolò di Tuldo, the youth Catherine accompanied to execution

THE DIALOGUE

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This desire of hers was great and continuous. But it grew even more when First Truth⁹ showed her the world's need and how storm-tossed and offensive to God it is. And she had on her mind, besides, a letter she had received from her spiritual father,¹⁰ a letter in which he expressed pain and unbearable sadness over the offense against God, the damnation of souls, and persecutions against holy Church. All of this stirred up the flame of her holy desire with grief for the offense but with gladness in the hope by which she waited for God to provide against such great evils.

She found herself eager for the next day's Mass—it would be Mary's day¹¹—because in communion the soul seems more sweetly bound to God and better knows his truth. For then the soul is in God and God in the soul, just as the fish is in the sea and the sea in the fish. So when it was morning and time for Mass she took her place with eager desire. From her deep knowledge of herself, a holy justice gave birth to hatred and displeasure against herself, ashamed as she was of her imperfection, which seemed to her to be the cause of all the evils in the world. In this knowledge and hatred and justice she washed away the stains of guilt, which it seemed to her were, and which indeed were, in her own soul, saying, "O eternal Father, I accuse myself before you, asking that you punish my sins in this life. And since I by my sins am the cause of the sufferings my neighbors must endure, I beg you in mercy to punish me for them."

(cf. Let. 273 to Raymond). However, there is no reference to the youth's devotion to Mary, which Catherine later mentions in regard to the response to this petition. Others have seen a possible reference to Frate Simone da Cortona, whose despair figures in a number of letters: "*F. S. al Pagliaresi*," "*Anonimo al Pagliaresi*" (Misciattelli VI, letters VII and VIII); Let. 56, 212, 226. Cf. also Jorgensen, pp. 275–277; note 25, p. 426.

9. *Prima Verità* and *prima dolce Verità* are among Catherine's favorite names for God and Christ.

10. Literally, "the father of her soul," Raymond of Capua, her director from 1374 until her death. The letter from him referred to here is probably the same mentioned by Catherine in her letter to him of October 1377 (272), the letter that contains the basic framework and content of the *Dialogue*.

11. Saturday, the day traditionally dedicated to Mary.