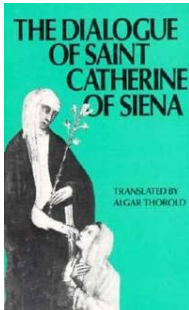


Treatise on Prayer St Catherine of Siena

The Book “The Dialog”



The 1906 Algar Thorold translation follows a misleading sixteenth-century custom of arranging Catherine’s writing under artificial “treatises,” and leaves out a significant portion of text.

Catherine’s powerful testimony of the Father’s love and of the saving blood of Jesus has recently been fittingly presented in a red leather edition from Baronius Press (2015). Their work of re-evangelization through beautiful editions of classic books like this may well help to save disenchanted souls otherwise put off by religious kitsch. It must be noted, however, that this is a reprinting of the edition which can be found in the Tan Classics series.



Giuliana Cavallini reconstructed a more probable edition of Catherine’s work in 1968, and Suzanne Noffke’s 1980 translation, following Cavallini, offers a much truer presentation of Catherine’s actual *Dialogue*. The Noffke translation, printed in the Paulist Press Classics of Western Spirituality series, is aesthetically inoffensive, but does not compare with the splendor of the Baronius volume.

The Person of St Catherine:

Born: 1347. (She was a twin, and the 25th child born to her mother)

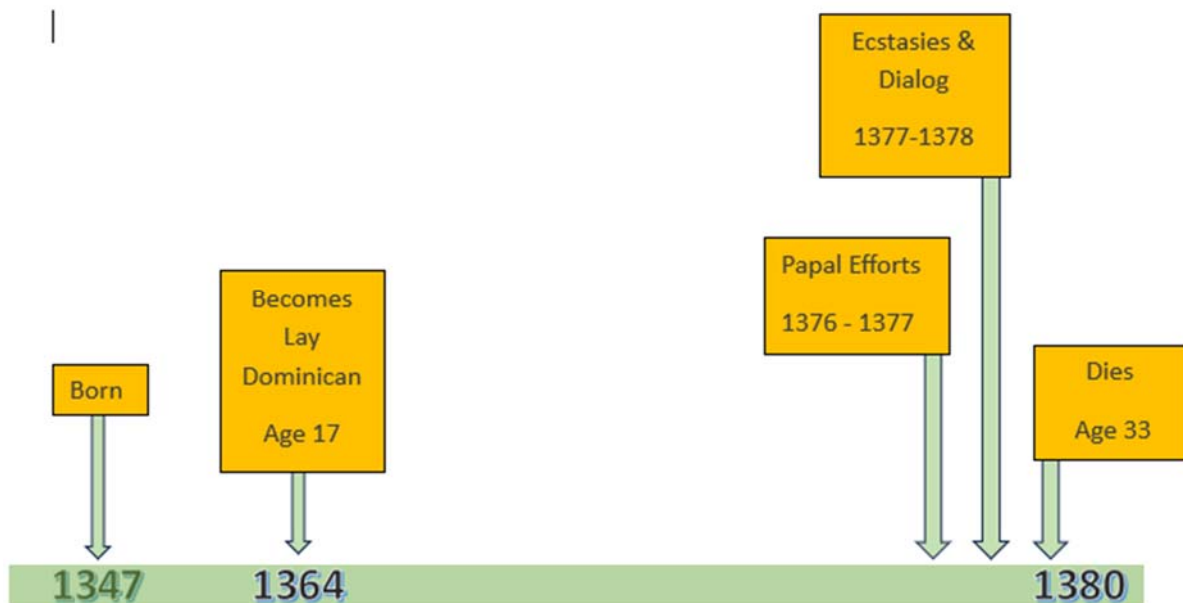
Died 1380,

Canonized in 1461,

Declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970

Life:

Despite Catherine’s religious nature, she did not choose to enter a convent and instead **she joined the Third Order of St. Dominic**, which allowed her to associate with a religious society while living at home. Her parents attempted to resist this move, to avoid marriage, but they were unsuccessful. Her fasting and her devotion to her family, convinced them to relent and allow her to live as she pleased. Catherine once explained that she regarded her father as a representation of Jesus and her mother as Our Lady, and her brothers as the apostles, which helped her to serve them with humility.



The Papal Efforts:

This work was produced during a time of immense political and Church upheaval, including the Avignon Papacy. During this period, from 1309 to 1376, seven successive popes resided in Avignon, France rather than in Rome. The situation arose from the conflict between the papacy and the French crown. **King Philip IV of France wanted to use the finances of the church to pay for his war with the English.** Pope Boniface VIII protested, leading to a feud. King Philip of France then pressured a deadlocked conclave to elect the archbishop of Bordeaux France as Pope Clement V in 1305. Clement, in 1309, moved his court to the papal enclave at Avignon France, where it remained for the next 67 years. The seven popes that reigned at Avignon were all French, and all under the influence of the French Crown. It became a time of political manipulation, thievery and violence among those involved.

St. Catherine took up the mantle of encouraging the pope to return home to Rome after the death of St. **Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373), who first exhorted the papal return in 1350 and spent twenty years trying to convince popes to move back** to the Eternal City. **The popes had lived in France for sixty-seven years**, all of Catherine of Siena's life and then some, when she decided to visit Pope Gregory XI (r. 1370-1378) in the summer of 1376. Catherine spent three months in Avignon tirelessly working to realize her dream of the pope's returning to Rome. Gregory resisted and demurred, but she persisted, and even startled him by telling him that she knew about the private vow Gregory had made before God that if elected pope, he would return the papal residence to Rome. Finally, the humble yet firm saint from Siena convinced him to fulfill his vow, and Gregory made plans to travel to Rome.

Successful in her mission, Catherine left Avignon and returned to France. Later that fall, she received reports that **Gregory, influenced by the French cardinals, was having second thoughts.** Catherine (who, though a Doctor of the Church, was illiterate) dictated letters urging the pope to

fulfill his promise and make the hard decision: "I beg of you, on behalf of Christ crucified, that you be not a timorous child but manly. Open your mouth and swallow down the bitter for the sweet".

She also encouraged him to cast fear aside and ignore the advice of his cardinals: I have prayed, and shall pray, sweet and good Jesus that he free you from all servile fear, and that holy fear alone remain. May the ardor of charity be in you, in such wise as shall prevent you from hearing the voice of incarnate demons, and heeding the counsel of perverse counselors, settled in self-love, who, as I understand, want to alarm you, so as to prevent your return, saying, "You will die." Up, father, like a man! For I tell you that you have no need to fear. Gregory XI listened to the pleadings and prayers of St. Catherine of Siena and returned the papacy to Rome on January 17, 1377. The scandal and shame of the Avignon papacy was at an end.

Ecstasies, Dialog and Treatises:

The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena (also known as The Dialogue of Divine Providence) was dictated by Saint Catherine between roughly October 1377 and November 1378 while she was in a state of mystical ecstasy. It captures a series of conversations between her soul and God the Father, focusing on divine providence, prayer, and spiritual life.

Dictation: **Catherine dictated these dialogues(conversations) to her followers/secretaries, including Raymond of Capua, during intense mystical experiences.**

Content: The book is structured around **four main treatises**:

- Divine Providence
- Discretion
- Prayer (the subject of this discussion)
- Obedience: this section deals with living under the guidance of an abbot, a priest, and to **anyone who has selected a spiritual director.**

The first three treatises offer direction for living a life of faith which moves a person to a closer spiritual relationship with God.

A Treatise of Prayer

"A Treatise of Prayer" is a core section of St. Catherine's larger work, "The Dialogue of Divine Providence" (completed c. 1370). This Treatise details the journey from vocal to mental prayer. It emphasizes that prayer should be a constant state of loving union with God, grounded in self-knowledge, humility, and the "cell" of the heart. She teaches that vocal prayer is a starting point, but it must lead to "mental prayer"—a quiet, intimate union with God. The "Cell" of Self-Knowledge: She advises keeping the "door of the heart" barred, using self-knowledge and **humility** to recognize one's own imperfections and God's goodness. Perseverance and Discretion: Prayer should be continual, not abandoned for anything except obedience or charity. She warns that the devil may cause distractions during prayer, which should be countered with persistence. It addresses how a soul, through prayer, moves from "imperfect" to "perfect" love. It features analogies such as the "Bridge" (Christ) and the "House of Self-Knowledge".

The Treatise on Prayer (Partial)

Of the means which the soul takes to arrive at pure and generous love; and here begins the Treatise of Prayer.

"When the soul has passed through the doctrine of Christ crucified, with true love of virtue and hatred of vice, and has arrived at the house of self-knowledge and entered therein, she remains, with her door barred, in watching and constant prayer, separated entirely from the consolations of the world.

Why does she thus shut herself in?

She does so from fear, knowing her own imperfections, and also from the desire, which she has, of arriving at pure and generous love. And because she sees and knows well that in no other way can she arrive thereat, she waits, with a lively faith for My arrival, through increase of grace in her.

How is a lively faith to be recognized?

By perseverance in virtue, and by the fact that the soul never turns back for anything, whatever it be, nor rises from holy prayer, for any reason except (note well) for obedience or charity's sake. For no other reason ought she to leave off prayer, for, during the time ordained for prayer, the Devil is wont to arrive in the soul, causing much more conflict and trouble than when the soul is not occupied in prayer.

This he does in order that holy prayer may become tedious to the soul, tempting her often with these words: '*This prayer avails you nothing, for you need attend to nothing except your vocal prayers.*' He acts thus in order that, becoming wearied and confused in mind, she may abandon the exercise of prayer, which is a weapon with which the soul can defend herself from every adversary, if grasped with the hand of love, by the arm of free choice in the light of the Holy Faith."

Here, touching something concerning the Sacrament of the Body of Christ, the complete doctrine is given; and how the soul proceeds from vocal to mental prayer, and a vision is related which this devout soul once received.

"Know, dearest daughter, how, by humble, continual, and faithful prayer, the soul acquires, with time and perseverance, every virtue. Wherefore should she persevere and never abandon prayer, either through the illusion of the Devil or her own fragility, that is to say, either on account of any thought or movement coming from her own body, or of the words of any creature.

The Devil often places himself upon the tongues of creatures, causing them to chatter nonsensically, with the purpose of preventing the prayer of the soul. All of this she should pass by, by means of the virtue of perseverance.

Oh, how sweet and pleasant to that soul and to Me is holy prayer, made in the house of knowledge of self and of Me, opening the eye of the intellect to the light of faith, and the affections to the abundance of My charity, which was made visible to you, through My visible only-begotten Son, who showed it to you with His blood!".....

"But do not think that the soul receives such ardor and nourishment from prayer, if she pray only vocally, as do many souls whose prayers are rather words than love. Such as these give heed to nothing except to completing Psalms and saying many paternosters. And when they have once completed their appointed tale, they do not appear to think of anything further, but seem to place devout attention and love in

merely vocal recitation, which the soul is not required to do, for, in doing only this, she bears but little fruit, which pleases Me but little.

But if you ask Me, whether the soul should abandon vocal prayer, since it does not seem to all that they are called to mental prayer, I should reply 'No.' The soul should advance by degrees, and I know well that, just as the soul is at first imperfect and afterwards perfect, so also is it with her prayer.

She should nevertheless continue in vocal prayer, while she is yet imperfect, so as not to fall into idleness. But she should not say her vocal prayers without joining them to mental prayer, that is to say, that while she is reciting, she should endeavor to elevate her mind in My love, with the consideration of her own defects and of the Blood of My only-begotten Son, wherein she finds the breadth of My charity and the remission of her sins.

And this she should do, so that self-knowledge and the consideration of her own defects should make her recognize My goodness in herself and continue her exercises with true humility. I do not wish defects to be considered in particular, but in general, so that the mind may not be contaminated by the remembrance of particular and hideous sins.

But, as I said, I do not wish the soul to consider her sins, either in general or in particular, without also remembering the Blood and the broadness of My mercy, for fear that otherwise she should be brought to confusion. And together with confusion would come the Devil, who has caused it, under color of contrition and displeasure of sin, and so she would arrive at eternal damnation, not only on account of her confusion, but also through the despair which would come to her, because she did not seize the arm of My mercy.

This is one of the subtle devices with which the Devil deludes My servants, and, in order to escape from his deceit, and to be pleasing to Me, you must enlarge your hearts and affections in My boundless mercy, with true humility.

You know that the pride of the Devil cannot resist the humble mind, nor can any confusion of spirit be greater than the broadness of My good mercy, if the soul will only truly hope therein.

Wherefore it was, if you remember rightly, that, once, when the Devil wished to overthrow you, by confusion, wishing to prove to you that your life had been deluded, and that you had not followed My will, you did that which was your duty, which My goodness (which is never withheld from him who will receive it) gave you strength to do, that is you rose, humbly trusting in My mercy, and saying: 'I confess to my Creator that my life has indeed been passed in darkness, but I will hide myself in the wounds of Christ crucified, and bathe myself in His Blood and so shall my iniquities be consumed, and with desire will I rejoice in my Creator.'

You remember that then the Devil fled, and, turning round to the opposite side, he endeavored to inflate you with pride, saying: *'You are perfect and pleasing to God, and there is no more need for you to afflict yourself or to lament your sins.'*

And once more I gave you the light to see your true path, namely, humiliation of yourself, and you answered the Devil with these words: *'Wretch that I am, John the Baptist never sinned and was sanctified in his mother's womb. And I have committed so many sins, and have hardly begun to know them with grief and true contrition, seeing who God is, who is offended by me, and who I am, who offend Him.'*

Then the Devil, not being able to resist your humble hope in My goodness, said to you: *'Cursed that you are, for I can find no way to take you. If I put you down through confusion, you rise to Heaven on the wings of mercy, and if I raise you on high, you humble yourself down to Hell, and when I go into Hell you persecute me, so that I will return to you no more, because you strike me with the stick of charity.'*

The soul, therefore, should season the knowledge of herself with the knowledge of My goodness, and then vocal prayer will be of use to the soul who makes it, and pleasing to Me, and she will arrive, from the vocal imperfect prayer, exercised with perseverance, at perfect mental prayer; but if she simply aims at completing her tale, and, for vocal abandons mental prayer, she will never arrive at it.

Sometimes the soul will be so ignorant that, having resolved to say so many prayers vocally, and I, visiting her mind sometimes in one way, and sometimes in another, in a flash of self-knowledge or of contrition for sin, sometimes in the broadness of My charity, and sometimes by placing before her mind, in diverse ways, according to My pleasure and the desire of the soul, the presence of My Truth, she (the soul), in order to complete her tale, will abandon My visitation, that she feels, as it were, by conscience, rather than abandon that which she had begun. She should not do so, for, in so doing, she yields to a deception of the Devil.

The moment she feels her mind disposed by My visitation, in the many ways I have told you, she should abandon vocal prayer; then, My visitation past, if there be time, she can resume the vocal prayers which she had resolved to say, but if she has not time to complete them, she ought not on that account to be troubled or suffer annoyance and confusion of mind; of course provided that it were not the Divine office which clerics and religious are bound and obliged to say under penalty of offending Me, for, they must, until death, say their office.

But if they, at the hour appointed for saying it, should feel their minds drawn and raised by desire, they should so arrange as to say it before or after My visitation, so that the debt of rendering the office be not omitted.

But, in any other case, vocal prayer should be immediately abandoned for the said cause. Vocal prayer, made in the way that I have told you, will enable the soul to arrive at perfection, and therefore she should not abandon it, but use it in the way that I have told you.

And so, with exercise in perseverance, she will taste prayer in truth, and the food of the Blood of My only-begotten Son, and therefore I told you that some communicated virtually with the Body and Blood of Christ, although not sacramentally; that is, they communicate in the affection of charity, which they taste by means of holy prayer, little or much, according to the affection with which they pray.

They who proceed with little prudence and without method, taste little, and they who proceed with much, taste much. For the more the soul tries to loosen her affection from herself, and fasten it in Me with the light of the intellect, the more she knows; and the more she knows, the more she loves, and, loving much, she tastes much.

You see then, that perfect prayer is not attained to through many words, but through affection of desire, the soul raising herself to Me, with knowledge of

herself and of My mercy, seasoned the one with the other. Thus she will exercise together mental and vocal prayer, for, even as the active and contemplative life is one, so are they.

Although vocal or mental prayer can be understood in many and diverse ways, for I have told you that a holy desire is a continual prayer, in this sense that a good and holy will disposes itself with desire to the occasion actually appointed for prayer in addition to the continual prayer of holy desire, wherefore vocal prayer will be made at the appointed time by the soul who remains firm in a habitual holy will, and will sometimes be continued beyond the appointed time, according as charity commands for the salvation of the neighbor, if the soul see him to be in need, and also her own necessities according to the state in which I have placed her.

Each one, according to his condition, ought to exert himself for the salvation of souls, for this exercise lies at the root of a holy will, and whatever he may contribute, by words or deeds, towards the salvation of his neighbor, is virtually a prayer, although it does not replace a prayer which one should make oneself at the appointed season, as My glorious standard-bearer Paul said, *'He who ceases not to work ceases not to pray.'*

It was for this reason that I told you that prayer was made in many ways, that is, that actual prayer may be united with mental prayer if made with the affection of charity, which charity is itself continual prayer.

I have now told you how mental prayer is reached by exercise and perseverance, and by leaving vocal prayer for mental when I visit the soul. I have also spoken to you of common prayer, that is, of vocal prayer in general, made outside of ordained times, and of the prayers of good-will, and how every exercise, whether performed in oneself or in one's neighbor, with good-will, is prayer.

The enclosed soul should therefore spur herself on with prayer, and when she has arrived at friendly and filial love she does so. Unless the soul keeps to this path, she will always remain tepid and imperfect, and will only love Me and her neighbor in proportion to the pleasure which she finds in My service."

Benedict Ashleys Guide

Cavallini demonstrates that, while the basic design of the Dialogue is based on the four petitions with four brief answers enclosed in an introduction and a conclusion, Catherine has also inserted into this framework of her vision a number of other "treatises," probably composed previously, since some of them have parallels in various letters of hers. Catherine somewhat forcedly made these separate treatises function as second, more detailed answers to the four petitions, already briefly answered in the basic framework. The reader should refer to the diagram (adapted from Cavallini) which I will now explain.

DIALOGUE OF SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA (numbers refer to chapters)

INTRODUCTION: Catherine's Four Petitions (1)
Catherine's Self-Offering (2)

A. THE HEAVENLY FATHER ANSWERS THE PETITIONS

First Petition: For Herself: *Doctrine of Discretion* (3-12) 12-Summary
Second Petition: For the Church (13-15)
Third Petition: For the Whole World (16-18)
Fourth Petition: For God's Providence Over All, especially her spiritual father, Raymund (19-20)

B. ELABORATION OF THE ANSWERS

Doctrine of the Bridge (21-87)
21-22 The Bridge—its Three Steps
23-24 The Vine and Workers in the Vineyard
25-30 Explanation of the Bridge
31-35 Evil Tree and Four Vices
36-50 Three Judgments, Temptations, Thorns
50-55 Three Steps and Three Powers of the Soul 55-Summary
56-76 Mounting the Three Steps, Three States of the Soul
78-85 Fourth State of the Soul
Doctrine of Tears (86-97), Five Kinds of Tears, Four Winds
Doctrine of Truth (98-109), Three Lights
Doctrine of the Mystical Body (110-34)
110-18 Dignity of Sacraments and Priests
118-Summary
119 Virtues of Priests
120-Summary
121-33 Sins of Priests
134 Prayer for Reform of the Church
Doctrine of Providence (135-53)
Doctrine of Obedience (154-65)

CONCLUSION: Summary of Whole Book (166)
Prayer of Praise (167)