

LETTER T272/G90¹

To Frate Raimondo da Capua, at Rome
10 October 1377, or shortly thereafter

Catherine refers near the beginning of this letter to the sense she had had of Raimondo's grief on the feast of Saint Francis (4 October). She also says that her concern has been relieved by letters she has received from both him and the pope. This letter must therefore be not only after 4 October, but it must also be after the following Saturday (10 October) or a succeeding Saturday, when she describes at great length her having taken four particular petitions to prayer.²

This letter clearly serves as a framework a bit later when *The Dialogue* is elaborated. I have noted the parallels as they occur without reproducing the passages. In many cases a sentence or two of the letter serves as the beginning of a "chapter" in the book. Interesting to note are the many embellishments to the *Dialogue* rendition of the bridge that are not present here: roof, walls, shops, etc. This may well indicate that that section of *The Dialogue* was written or at least elaborated while Catherine was in Florence in 1378, with the *Ponte Vecchio* only a short walk from the house where she was staying.

¹ MSS: Mo-a, P4 (partial), M, S5, S6, Pa, S2; translation based on Mo-a, with variants based on unpublished notes of Dupré Theseider. In P4 this letter is the first of those written to Dominicans, with a miniature at the head of the group.

² While the linguistic evidence strongly supports the placement of this letter during the Val d'Orcia period, and even more narrowly in October or November, it does not suffice to prove conclusively when the letter was written in relation to Let. T267. A good number of significant clusters within individual patterns do, however, begin and/or end between October and November 1377: ALLENT, AMASERVE, GERMTRIB, LAVFACCI, LEGGER, LUMNFOND, MARIAMAD, MENSDESI, MUOIO, NONPUO, PONSSED, PROPVOL, SPOSVERI, VERITCMP. (For ease of management, a number of wide-ranging and very frequent or redundant patterns have been deleted from the chart and from analysis for this very long letter: PERMANE, PERODISS, CIEC, DESVEDER, GESUCRST, ONORSAL, SOMETER, SVSCHIIV, GUERPHYS, FIOR.) The critics are in disagreement on the placement of this letter. Fawtier (II, p. 198) places it before Let. T226 (which he dates 14 April 1378), perhaps on 10 or 11 October 1377, given Catherine's reference to the eve of Mary's day, that is, Saturday. Dupré Theseider (unpublished notes) places it in early October 1377. Gardner (*Saint Catherine of Siena*, p. 226) would put the letter later, since Pope Gregory returned to Rome from Anagni only on 7 November (but it is not said when Gregory went there).

§

In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of gentle Mary.

Dearest and very loved father in Christ gentle Jesus,

I Caterina, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, am writing to you in his precious blood. I long to see you a follower and lover of truth, so that you may be a true son of Christ crucified (who is Truth itself) and a fragrant flower in our holy order and in the mystic body of holy Church. And this you must be. You mustn't let the thorns of persecution make you give up or turn back, because it would be absurd to give up the rose for fear of the thorns. I long to see you courageous, not afraid of anyone at all. And I'm certain that God in his infinite goodness will fulfill my desire.

Take heart, dearest father, where Christ's dear bride is concerned, for the more bitter troubles she experiences, the more divine Truth promises to make her overflow with sweet consolation.³ And this will be her sweetness: reform by means of good holy pastors who are flowers of glory, who give God glory and the fragrance of virtue.^a This reform concerns the flowers [only], her ministers and pastors.^b The fruit of this bride has no need of reform, because this is never diminished or spoiled by the sins of her ministers.⁴ So be happy about the bitterness, since Truth^c has promised to give us relief.

I experienced both bitterness^d and consolation when I received dear Babbo's letter and your own—bitterness for the harm done to holy Church and for your own bitterness, which I had sensed very intimately on the feast of Saint Francis; and happiness because you relieved me of my great concern.⁵ After I had read the letters and understood everything, I asked a servant of God to offer tears and sweat in God's presence for this bride and for Babbo's weakness.⁶ At once, by divine grace, there welled up in her a desire and joy beyond all measuring. She waited for morning, in

³ This passage parallels *Dial.* 12, p. 47.

⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 64, a. 6, says that so long as a priest has not been suspended from his ministry or excommunicated, those who receive the sacraments from him, even though he may be in sin, do not share in his sin, but rather "in the Church, from whom he has his ministry."

⁵ This is very probably the experience in prayer to which she referred in her earlier letter to Raimondo (Let. T267, in this volume): "I've heard from a servant of God who constantly holds you before God in prayer, that you have been experiencing tremendous struggles and that your spirit has been overtaken by darkness because of the devil's illusions and deceptions."

⁶ The "servant of God" is, as usual in these narrations of personal experience, herself. Babbo ("Papa") is Pope Gregory XI.

order to have Mass. (It was Mary's day.)⁷ When it was time for Mass she took her place with true knowledge of herself, ashamed of her imperfection in God's presence. And rising above herself with restless desire and gazing with her mind's eye on eternal Truth,^e she made four petitions as she held herself and her father in the presence of Truth, her Spouse.⁸

First [she asked] for the reform of holy Church.⁹ Then God, letting himself be compelled by her tears and bound by the cord of her desire, said, "My dearest daughter, look how [the Church] has dirtied her face with impurity and selfish love, with bloated pride and with the avarice of those who nurse at her breasts.^{10,f} But draw sweat and tears from the fountain of my divine charity; take them and wash her face.¹¹ For I assure you, her beauty will be restored not with the sword, nor with war or cruelty, but with peace, with continual humble prayer, sweat, and tears shed with restless desire by my servants. So I shall fulfill your desire with much suffering, and my providence will never fail you."

Although this prayer included the salvation of all the world, still she went on with a more specific petition for the whole world. Then God showed with what great love he had created humankind, saying, "Look now how everyone is attacking me.¹² See, daughter, with how many different sins they attack me, especially with their wretched and abominable self-centeredness. This is the source of all the evil with which they have poisoned the entire world. Now you, my servants, come before me with many prayers and so you will soften the wrath of divine justice."

"Understand that no one can escape from my hands. Open your mind's eye and look into my hand"¹³ Raising her mind's eye, she saw the whole world enclosed in God's hand. Then God said, "I want you to understand that no one can be taken away from me. Everyone is here either for justice or for mercy, so everyone is mine. And because everyone came forth from me, I love everyone indescribably much,^g and I will be merciful to them through the mediation of my servants."

Then, with the fire of desire growing, she was at once joyful and sad and gave thanks to divine Goodness as if she knew that God had shown her people's sins in order to compel her to rise up with more concern and

⁷ That is, Saturday, traditionally dedicated to Mary.

⁸ Cf. *Dial.* 1, p. 26, where this experience forms the beginning framework for Catherine's book.

⁹ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 14, p. 50.

¹⁰ The reference is not only to the clergy, but to all Christians.

¹¹ The parallel with *Dial.* continues at 15, p. 54.

¹² For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 17, p. 55.

¹³ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 18, p. 56.

greater desire.¹⁴ This holy and loving fire grew to such an extent that in her desire to see her body sweat blood, she thought nothing of the watery sweat she was pouring out. She said to herself, "My soul, you have frittered your whole life away, and this is why all these evils, great and small, general and particular, have come upon the world and holy Church! So^h I want you to heal them now with a sweat of blood." Then this soul, spurred on by holy desire, rose with greater effort, opened her mind's eye, and looked at herself in the mirror of divine charity. There she saw and experienced how much we are bound and obligated to seek the glory and praise of God's name in the salvation of souls.¹⁵

And this is what eternal Truth chose you for and called you to when he responded to the third petition, which was her hunger for your salvation.¹⁶ He said, "Daughter, I want him to seek this very conscientiously. But neither he nor you nor anyone else could have this without all these persecutions, in whatever way I choose to send them to you. Tell him that, since he longs to seeⁱ my honor in holy Church, he must conceive enough love to be willing to suffer with true patience. And by this I will know that he and my other servants are in truth seeking my honor. Then he will be my dearest son, and will rest on the breast of my only-begotten Son,¹⁷ of whom I have made a bridge so that you may all achieve the realization and enjoyment of the fruit of your labors."

"Understand, my children, that the road had been so broken up by Adam's sin and disobedience that none of you could reach your destination.¹⁸ And so my truth was not being realized, the truth that I had created you in my own image and likeness so that you would have eternal life, sharing in and enjoying me, supreme eternal Goodness. This sin sprouted thorns and brambles in the form of many difficulties, along with a river continually dashing with its waves. And that is why I have given you^j my Son as a bridge, so that you won't drown while crossing the river. But open your mind's eye, and see how this bridge reaches from heaven down to earth. Certainly, if it were of the earth it could never be made long enough to span the river and give you life.¹⁹ So [my Son] joined the height of heaven, the divine nature, with the earth of your human nature. You must, therefore, keep to this bridge by seeking the glory of my name

¹⁴ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 19, p. 57.

¹⁵ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 20, pp. 57-58.

¹⁶ The reference here is to Raimondo. "This" is "the glory and praise of God's name in the salvation of souls" just referred to.

¹⁷ Cf. Jn. 13, 23 (Vulg.): "One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved especially, was resting on Jesus' breast."

¹⁸ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 21, p. 58.

¹⁹ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 22, p. 59.

in the salvation of souls,²⁰ by enduring all your labors and pain, by following in the footsteps of this gentle loving Word. You are my workers, whom I have set to work in the vineyard of holy Church because I want to be merciful to the world.²¹

"But beware of taking the way down below, because it is not the way of truth.²² Do you know who they are who cross the river below the bridge? They are the wicked sinners for whom I am asking you to pray to me, and for whom I am asking your sweat and tears because they are lying in the darkness of deadly sin. They are making their way through the river, and unless they take up my yoke and put it on,^k they will come to eternal damnation.

"There are some who, because they are afraid of suffering, climb up from the river bank and leave deadly sin behind. They feel the thorns of difficulty, and that is why they come up out of the river. If they are not careless and don't fall asleep in self-centeredness, they set foot on the bridge and begin to climb by loving virtue. But if they persist in their selfish love and carelessness, everything hurts them and they don't persevere. One contrary wind is enough to make them return to their vomit."²³

When she had seen in how many different ways people were drowning, [God] said, "Look at those who are walking by way of the bridge of Christ crucified." And she saw many of them running along without any pain at all, because they weren't carrying the weight of their selfish will. These were [God's] true children. They had left themselves behind and with restless desire were on a single-minded search for God's honor and the salvation of souls. On the feet of their affection they were following Christ crucified, who was the bridge. The water was running on down below them, and the thorns were being crushed by their feet and so did them no harm.²⁴ That is, in their love they thought nothing of the thorns

²⁰ She often speaks of seeking God's honor *and* the salvation of souls. This is one of several places where she makes it clear that God's honor is realized *in* the salvation of souls.

²¹ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 23, p. 60.

²² For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 29, p. 71.

²³ Prov. 26, 11: "As dogs return to their vomit, so fools repeat their folly." Also 2 Pt. 2, 20-22: "When people have fled a polluted world by recognizing the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then are caught up and overcome in pollution once more, their last condition is worse than their first. It would have been better for them not to have recognized the road to holiness than to have turned their backs on the holy law handed on to them, once they had known it. How well the proverb fits them: 'The dog returns to its vomit,' and 'A sow bathes by wallowing in the mire.'" Cf. Let. T266 to Ristoro Canigiani (1378): "We act like filthy animals who think nothing of alighting on something rotten after leaving the sweetest honey. . . . For after sharing in the sweetness of [God's] charity we think nothing of settling into our own wretchedness by returning to the vomit of the world's corruption."

²⁴ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 45, p. 93.

of persecution, and they carried in true patience the worldly successes that are cruel and deadly thorns to souls who possess them with inordinate love. They despised these things as if they were poison. They were taken up with nothing but the delight of being on the cross with Christ, because he was their focus.

There were others who were going along slowly.²⁵ And why? Because they had their mind's eye not on Christ crucified but on the consolations they derived from Christ crucified. These consolations produced in them an imperfect love. They often hesitated in their walking, as Peter did before the Passion when he had kept before him only the pleasure of associating with Christ.²⁶ That is why he fell short when he was deprived of this consolation. But when did he become strong? After he had let go of himself and wanted to know and seek nothing but Christ crucified. In the same way these people are weak, and they slacken the pace of holy desire when they see their spirit deprived of the pleasure and selfish consolation that were their focus. Then later, when the prickings of temptation come, whether from the devil or from other people or from themselves because of their spiritual softness, and they see themselves deprived of what they loved, they become weak and stumble along the way of Christ crucified. For though they were in Christ crucified, they wanted to follow the Father—since the Father cannot suffer—and [so] experience the sweetness of all those consolations.²⁷ But the Son can suffer. This is why I said they were following the Father. But it is clear that there is no remedy for their weakness except if they follow the Son.

This is why eternal Truth said, "I say that no one can come to me except by means of my only-begotten Son; for he is the one who made the way you must follow. He is way, truth, and life."²⁸ Those who go by this way come to know and experience the truth. In the sufferings he bore for them they taste my ineffable love for them.¹ You know well that if I hadn't loved you I would not have given you such a redeemer. But because I loved you eternally, I gave up this only-begotten Son of mine to the shameful death of the cross. And he by his obedience and his death^m destroyed Adam's sin and the death of the human race.²⁹

"So they know my truth, and once they know the truth they follow the truth. And so they receive everlasting life, because they have kept to the way of Christ crucified. They have reached the gateⁿ of truth and

²⁵ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 60, pp. 113-115.

²⁶ Cf. the account of the Transfiguration (Mt. 17, 1-8), where Peter wants to build three tents to prolong the joy of the experience.

²⁷ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 75, p. 137.

²⁸ Cf. Jn. 14, 6.

²⁹ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 4, p. 29.

passed through it to find themselves in the peaceful sea with those who are truly joyful.³⁰

"And so you see, my daughter, that there is no other way for these [weak people] to become strong. Nor is there any other way except this for them to be capable of union with my Truth as their Spouse or to reach the perfection for which I have chosen them. Every other way but this is painful and imperfect, because the only source of pain is selfish will, whether spiritual or temporal. So those who don't have this selfish will are relieved of all crippling pain. The only pain they still feel is the unbearable pain of [seeing] me offended, [but even that pain] is ordered and moderated because it is seasoned with the charity that makes the soul wise, so that no suffering disturbs its harmony with my gentle will."

There were others who had begun to climb.³¹ They were beginning to recognize their sinfulness; yet they were abandoning sin only for fear of the punishment that follows upon sin, and fear of punishment is imperfect. She³² saw many of these running from imperfect to perfect fear, and these were going eagerly through the second stage and on to the last. But there were many who because of this slavish fear were sitting down apathetically at the entrance to the bridge. They had begun so spasmodically and so halfheartedly that they remained in their lukewarmness, without adding a spark to the fire of knowing themselves and God's goodness to them.^o

Gentle Truth said of these: "See, daughter, how impossible it would be for those who don't go forward by practicing virtue to keep from going backward. And this is why. You cannot live without love, and whatever you love you try to know and serve better. In knowing yourself, you will come to know better the overflowing generosity of my charity. But if you make no effort to know yourself, [you won't know me]. Because you don't know me, you won't love me. And because you don't love me, you won't serve me. As soon as you are deprived of me, you automatically return to your wretched selfish love for yourself, since you cannot live without love. People like this act like dogs that, after they have eaten, vomit, and later on because of their filthiness, when their eye lights on the vomit, they eat it, thus nourishing themselves on filth.

"So it is with these careless halfhearted people. In fear of the punishment they have vomited up the filth of their sins in holy confession and have begun to be just a bit willing to enter on the way of truth. But because they don't move forward they necessarily go backward. Turning

³⁰ It. *i veri gustatori*. Note the somewhat paradoxical imagery both here and in *The Dialogue*: at the end of the bridge over the stormy river is the peaceful sea.

³¹ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 49, p. 100.

³² That is, Catherine, still speaking of herself in the third person.

their mind's eye back to their vomit from before, they have shunned the sight of the pain and have turned back to look at sensual pleasure, and that is why they have ceased to be afraid. So they eat up the vomit again, nourishing their affections and desires on their own filth. They are, therefore, much more to be reproached, much more deserving of punishment than the others.

"This is how viciously I am offended by my creatures! This is why, my dearest children, I want you to increase, not diminish, your desires by nourishing yourselves at the table of holy desire. Let my true servants rise up and learn from me, the Word, to put the little lost sheep on their shoulders and carry them with pain and many vigils and prayers.³³ This is how you will pass over by way of me, the bridge, as I have said, and you will be spouses and children of my truth. And I will pour into you a wisdom and a light of faith that will give you perfect knowledge of the truth, from which you will acquire all perfection."

Since it pleased God's kindness and compassion to reveal himself and his secrets, desire goes on living in such restlessness that all our soul's powers shout out in unison their longing to leave the earth, filled as it is with such imperfection. (In the presence of such things, dearest father, language fails us. Understanding seems to be darkened, so weak is its vision.) Our soul's powers strain to reach their destination so as to experience the supreme eternal Trinity with the true citizens. There one can see God given glory and praise. There shine the virtues and the hunger and desire of true ministers and perfect religious who in this life were like lamps set on the lamp stand of holy Church to give light to all the world.³⁴

Oimé, *Babbo!* What a difference between them and the ministers and religious of today!³⁵ Of these [God] complained with truly just passion: "These people have descended to the level of the fly, such an ugly insect that it alights on something sweet and fragrant and then, after leaving it, thinks nothing of landing on disgusting and filthy things.³⁶ In the same way these wicked people are allowed to taste the sweetness of my blood, but they don't care. They abandon the table of the altar. They abandon the administration and guardianship of my body and the other sacraments

³³ She has subtly changed the speaker from God (the Father) to the incarnate Word, alluding here to the parable of the good shepherd (Jn. 10).

³⁴ Cf. Mt. 5, 15: "You are the light of the world. . . . People do not light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket. They set it on a stand where it gives light to all in the house."

³⁵ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 110, p. 205.

³⁶ This is the only place in which Catherine uses the image of the fly in this way. In every other instance, the reference is to the devil, who avoids the zealous soul as a fly avoids a boiling pot.

of holy Church, which are so fragrant and full of sweetness and mellowness that they give life to souls who taste them in truth. In fact, the soul cannot live without them. They leave all this, and then^p think nothing of wallowing in all the filth their minds and bodies do wallow in. Not only does such iniquity stink to me, but even the devils find this wretched sin repugnant.”

After divine Goodness had responded to the first three petitions in the way I've described, dearest father, he responded to the fourth.³⁷ This petition asked God's help and providence to take care of something that had happened to a person I cannot name in writing but whose name I will tell you in person—unless God would do me such a merciful favor as to let my soul leave this wretched body before I see you.³⁸ This body is a perverse law that is always fighting against the spirit.³⁹ And you know very well that I am telling the truth. So it would be a grace for me to be freed from it.

I said, and I say again, that eternal Truth digned to respond to the fourth petition and to the restless desire that was asking. He said, “Daughter, my providence will never fail those who are willing to receive it, and those who are willing to trust in me perfectly. They are the ones who call on me in truth, not only with words but with love and in the light of most holy faith. Those will never experience me or my providence who call on me only with the sound of words: ‘Lord! Lord!’⁴⁰ For unless they ask me with another sort of motivation I will not know them; they will be known to me not in my mercy but in my justice. So I am telling you that my providence will not fail people if they are willing to trust in me. But I want you to see with what great patience I have to put up with them and with others of my creatures whom I created in my own image and likeness with such tender love.”

So, opening her mind's eye in obedience to his command, she saw in the abyss of his charity that he was supreme eternal Goodness, and how for love alone he had created all people and redeemed them with the blood of his Son. And with this very same love he has given whatever he has

³⁷ For parallel passage, cf. *Dial.* 139, pp. 285–286.

³⁸ One can only guess who this person is. From what follows later, it is clear that he is someone who has been executed or assassinated. It could be Trincio da Fuligno, who was assassinated on 28 September 1377 and to whom Catherine had written just a few weeks earlier (Let. T253), encouraging him to conversion.

³⁹ Rom. 7, 22–23: “My inner self agrees with the law of God, but I see in my body's members another law at war with the law of my mind; this makes me the prisoner of the law of sin in my members.”

⁴⁰ Cf. Mt. 7, 21: “None of those who cry out, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

given, difficulties as well as consolation. Everything is given for love and to provide for our salvation, and for no other reason.

And he said, “The blood shed for you demonstrates that this is the truth. But those who are blinded by their self-centeredness and great unwillingness to suffer are scandalized. What I do for love and for their good, to save them from eternal suffering and to give them the wages of eternal life, they perceive as evil and hateful, harmful and ruinous. So why do they grumble about me and hate what they ought to reverence, and why do they want to pass judgment on my hidden judgments, all of which are just?⁴¹ They act like blind people who want to judge good and evil by their limited and inadequate knowledge, by the touch of the hand or sometimes by taste or the sound of a voice. They don't want to lean on someone who has a light, but foolishly want to walk by feeling about with their hands.⁴² Their sense of touch is deceived because it has no light to discern color. Taste too is deceived because it doesn't see the filthy insect that has alighted on the food. And their ear is deceived in its enjoyment of sound because it doesn't see the singer who, with that sound, can kill one who because of the enjoyment is off-guard.

“That is how these people act, as if they were blind. Having lost the light of reason, they touch worldly pleasure with the hands of sensual emotion, and think it is good. But because they don't see, they don't realize that it is a fabric with many thorns and the misery of anxiety woven into it, so that the heart possessing it becomes unbearable even to itself. It is the same with the mouth of desire that inordinately loves worldly pleasure. This pleasure seems exquisitely sweet when eaten, but there on top of it is the filthy insect of all the deadly sins that make the soul filthy. Unless [those who have eaten it] go by the light of faith to be purified in the blood, it will cause eternal death. What they hear is self-centeredness, and it sounds so sweet to them^a that they run after this love for their selfish sensuality. But because they don't see, they are deceived by the sound and discover that they have been led into the ditch, bound with the bond of sin in the hands of their enemies. For they are, as it were, blinded by their selfish love, and because they have put their trust in their own love and knowledge, they don't lean on me, their way and their guide, their life and their light.

“Those who follow me cannot be deceived or walk in darkness.⁴³ [But these people] do not trust me, though I want nothing other than that they

⁴¹ Ps. 118, 137 (Vulg.): “Just is the Lord, and right the Lord's judgments.”

⁴² Mt. 15, 14 (Lk. 6, 39): “Let them go their way. They are blind leaders of the blind. If one blind person leads another, both will end up in the ditch.”

⁴³ Jn. 8, 12: “I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness.”

be made holy.⁴⁴ I give and permit everything out of love, and they are constantly scandalized in me. Yet I patiently endure and put up with them because I loved them without their having loved me.⁴⁵ They are always harassing me with impatience, hatred, complaints, and with all sorts of infidelity. They want to set themselves up to investigate with their own blind sight and opinion my hidden judgments, which are all made justly and lovingly. They don't yet know themselves, and so they see falsely. For those who do not know themselves cannot know me or my judgments in truth. Daughter, do you want me to show you how greatly the world is deceived regarding my mysteries? Then open your mind's eye and look at me."

She gazed with restless desire as he showed her the condemnation of the one whose case she had prayed for. And he said, "I want you to know that to save him from eternal damnation (where he was, as you see), I allowed this to happen to him, so that with his blood in my blood he might have life. For I had not forgotten his reverence and love for my dearest mother Mary. So I did for him in mercy what the ignorant consider cruelty.

"All of this happens to people because of their self-centeredness, which robs them of light so that they do not know the truth. But if they chose to remove the cloud, they would know the truth and love it.⁴⁶ Then they would hold everything in reverence, and at harvest time they would gather in the fruit.

"But in everything, in this as well as in every other thing, my children, I will fulfill your desire, along with much suffering. My providence will be more or less near people in proportion to the measure of their confidence in me. And whatever I provide over and above what their measure holds, I do so to fulfill the desire of my servants who are praying to me for them. For I am not one to spurn those who humbly ask me, whether for themselves or for others. That is why I am inviting you to ask me for mercy for these and for the entire world. Conceive, my children, and give birth to this child, the human race, with hatred and sorrow for sin and with blazing and yearning love."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ 1 Thes. 4, 3.

⁴⁵ 1 Jn. 4, 19: "We for our part love God because God loved us first." The verb is in the past tense in the original ("I loved them"), implying that the first movement of God's love for the soul is not prompted by any love on the part of the soul.

⁴⁶ Cf. Let. T301 to Ristoro di Pietro Canigiani (1378 or 1379): "But you will say to me, 'If this knowledge is within us, how is it that we become attached also to what works against our salvation?' I answer you that this comes from the selfish love that has covered over this light, just as a cloud sometimes covers over the light of the sun. So our error isn't the light's fault, but the cloud's. Then our free will blindly chooses what is harmful to the soul rather than what is useful. The soul naturally always desires the good, but its error lies in this, that it doesn't look for the good where it is, because the darkness of selfish love has deprived it of light."

⁴⁷ Cf. Let. T259 to Tommaso d'Alviano: "Christ, then, wanted to show that the eternal

Oh dearest and sweetest father, when I saw and heard so much then from gentle First Truth, my heart felt as if it would break in two! I am dying and cannot die! Have compassion on your poor daughter, who is living in such torment because God is so offended, and who has no one to whom she can unburden herself—except that the Holy Spirit has provided for me interiorly by his mercy, and outwardly has provided me a diversion in writing.⁴⁸

Let's all take heart in Christ gentle Jesus, and let suffering be our refreshment. And let's eagerly and without hesitation accept the sweet invitation, dear father. Rejoice, because you have been called so sweetly. Suffer with great joy and patience, without being crippled by pain, if you want to be a spouse of Truth and comforter of my soul. In no other way could you have grace, and that would deeply sadden me. That is why I said I long to see you a follower and lover of truth.

I'll say no more. Keep living in God's holy and tender love.

Bless Frate Matteo in Christ gentle Jesus.⁴⁹

This letter and another I sent you I've written with my own hand on the Isola della Rocca,⁵⁰ with so many sighs and tears that I couldn't see even when I was seeing. But I was filled with wonder at myself and God's goodness when I thought of his mercy toward his human creatures and his overflowing providence toward me. He provided for my refreshment by giving me the ability to write—a consolation I've never known because of my ignorance—so that when I come down from the heights I might have a little something to vent my heart, lest it burst. Because he didn't want to take me yet from this dark life, he fixed it in my mind in a marvelous manner, the way a teacher does when he gives his pupil a model. Shortly after you left me, I began to learn in my sleep, with the glorious evangelist John^s and Thomas Aquinas.⁵¹

Father had given him the task of conceiving this child, the human race, through the impulse of love, and to give it birth on the wood of the most holy cross in true obedience."

⁴⁸ She will shortly describe—though in rather obscure terms—how she has come to know how to write.

⁴⁹ Matteo Tolomei, a Dominican. Catherine a bit earlier wrote Let. T120 to his mother Rabe, chiding her for demanding that her son return to Siena because his sister Francesca was ill. At that time he was apparently the only friar besides Bartolomeo Dominici with Catherine at the Rocca. Perhaps he had accompanied Raimondo to Rome.

⁵⁰ The Salimbeni fortress, where Catherine is a guest at this time. A modern resident of the town and guide at the fortress (now a historic monument) says that it is called the *Isola*, or "island," because its top levels are so often above the haze that rises from the valley below, like an island in a sea of clouds.

⁵¹ The Italian is not entirely unambiguous: *Unde subito che fuste partito da me col glorioso evangelista Johanne e Thomaso d'Aquino, così dormendo cominciai a imparare*. She seems to be describing a dream-like experience. Fawtier ("whatever one might say for or against [the letter's] authenticity") is not convinced that the ending of the letter implies that Catherine

Forgive me for writing so much, but my hands and tongue run along with my heart.

Gentle Jesus! Jesus love!

Textual Notes

- a. P4, M: *the fragrance and glory of virtue / glory ... virtue.*
- b. *and pastors* inserted by Mo-b above the line.
- c. *Truth (Verità)* written by *b* over an erasure of four letters.
- d. I have followed Mo here; other manuscripts break the sentence after *bitterness*, yielding "refreshment after bitterness."
- e. P4: *Life / Truth (vita / verità).*
- f. S2: *and is bloated with the pride / with ... pride.*
- g. M, S2: *faithfully / indescribably much (fedelmente / ineffabilmente).*
- h. *So* added in Mo by *b*.
- i. M: *longs for my honor / longs to see my honor.*
- j. M, S2: *have told you about / have given you (detto / dato).*
- k. S1, S2, M: *unless I put it on them / and put it on.*
- l. S2: *and taste the ineffable love I showed them in the sufferings he bore for them / and ... for them.*
- m. M, S2: *love / death (amore / morte).*
- n. M, S2: *way / gate.*
- o. *them (loro)* written by *b* over an erasure of two words.
- p. *b* adds *I say*.
- q. The text has: *Hearing and self-centeredness sound sweet (L'udire et l'amore proprio di sé che gli fa uno dolce suono).* Other manuscripts have *What they hear is selfish love, and it sounds sweet to them (L'udire è l'amore proprio. ...),* which in fact corresponds with the parallel passage in the *Dialogue*. This latter syntax makes more sense, so it is what I have followed.
- r. *b* corrects *la* ("the") to *dalla* ("from the").
- s. *John* is inserted above the line by *b*.

has learned miraculously to read. Grion (*Dottrina e Fonti*, pp. 165–166) agrees with Fawtier and with Hurtaud (*Dialogue de Sainte Catherine de Sienne*, Paris: Lethellieux, 1931) in rejecting this postscript (about Catherine's learning to write) as not being authentic. Dupré Theseider ("Sono autentiche le Lettere di S. Caterina?" p. 244) accepts it as authentic, but Grion finds Dupré Theseider's arguments inconclusive. Personally I believe there is sufficient anecdotal evidence in the sources to indicate that Catherine did at this time in some fashion (miraculous or otherwise) learn to write in at least an elementary sort of way. She is said to have written (in her own hand) Prayer 6 as well as Let. T367, which the Sienese scholar Celso Cittadini says he copied out from "a letter in St. Catherine's own hand given to me by Signore Hippolito Agustini, Knight Commander of Siena, and preserved today at Santa Lucia in Siena." Although there are originals of Let. T192 and T365 at Santa Lucia, the original of Let. T267 referred to by Cittadini is no longer extant.

LETTER T173/G134¹

To a brother who has left his order

In or near October 1377

The tone of this letter suggests that the friar to whom it is addressed is someone Catherine knows well. She says, "If I were nearby . . .," but this would be a clue to her whereabouts only if one knew where the brother is to whom she is writing.

The linguistic data would seem to place the letter in the Val d'Orcia period, most probably near October. Further, a number of themes are here developed much as they are in *The Dialogue*.²

§

In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of gentle Mary.

Dearest son in Christ gentle Jesus,

I Caterina, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, am writing to you in his precious blood. I long to see you enlightened by truth, so that knowing it, you will be able to love it. When you love the truth, you will clothe yourself in it and will hate all that is contrary to it and rebels against it. And what is within the truth, as well as whatever truth loves, you will love.

Oh dearest son, how we need this light! In it is our salvation. But I see no way for us to have this lovely light for our understanding without the pupil of most holy faith which is within this eye.³ And if this light is clouded over or darkened by selfish love for ourselves, our eyes have no light and therefore cannot see. And if we do not see, we do not know the truth. So you have to get rid of this cloud for your vision to remain clear. But what can we use to dissipate and get rid of this cloud? Holy hatred of ourselves [that comes from] knowing our sins and knowing how generously divine Goodness deals with us.

¹ MSS: Mo-a, M, S5, Ro, P4, Pa, Va, Bo2; translation based on Mo-a.

² All six letters sharing twenty-three or more of this one's one hundred six analyzed patterns are from October 1377 or later. Most convincing, however, are the significant clusters within individual patterns which begin and/or end in or very near October 1377: AMARVERI, ANDLUCE, ASPTMPSC, ATTPORT, COGNFOND, JERUSAL, MARETEMP, NUVOLPR, OBEDLUNG, PUPILFED, SPECUL, VISIOPAC, VITUPDIO. Both Fawtier (II, p. 214) and Dupré Theseider (unpublished notes) decline to date this letter.

³ For medieval physiology, the pupil is the light within the eye, not merely an opening which lets in the light.