

Excerpts from THE DIALOGUE OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

A TREATISE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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How a soul, elevated by desire of the honor of God, and of the salvation of her neighbors, exercising herself in humble prayer, after she had seen the union of the soul, through love, with God, asked of God four requests.

The soul, who is lifted by a very great and yearning desire for the honor of God and the salvation of souls, begins by exercising herself, for a certain space of time, in the ordinary virtues, remaining in the cell of self-knowledge, in order to know better the goodness of God towards her...

How the desire of this soul grew when God showed her the neediness of the world.

This desire was great and continuous, but grew much more, when the First Truth showed her the neediness of the world, and in what a tempest of offense against God it lay...

And, when the morning came, and the hour of the Mass, she sought with anxious desire her accustomed place; and, with a great knowledge of herself, being ashamed of her own imperfection, appearing to herself to be the cause of all the evil that was happening throughout the world, conceiving a hatred and displeasure against herself, and a feeling of holy justice, with which knowledge, hatred, and justice, she purified the stains which seemed to her to cover her guilty soul, she said: "O Eternal Father, I accuse myself before You, in order that You may punish me for my sins in this finite life, and, inasmuch as my sins are the cause of the sufferings which my neighbor must endure, I implore You, in Your kindness, to punish them in my person."

How finite works are not sufficient for punishment or recompense without the perpetual affection of love.

Then, the Eternal Truth seized and drew more strongly to Himself her desire, doing as He did in the Old Testament, for when the sacrifice was offered to God, a fire descended and drew to Him

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25 the sacrifice that was acceptable to Him; so did the sweet Truth to that soul, in sending down the
26 fire of the clemency of the Holy Spirit, seizing the sacrifice of desire that she made of herself,
27 saying: "Do you not know, dear daughter, that all the sufferings, which the soul endures, or can
28 endure, in this life, are insufficient to punish one smallest fault, because the offense, being done
29 to Me, who am the Infinite Good, calls for an infinite satisfaction? However, I wish that you
30 should know, that not all the pains that are given to men in this life are given as punishments, but
31 as corrections, in order to chastise a son when he offends; though it is true that both the guilt and
32 the penalty can be expiated by the desire of the soul, that is, by true contrition, not through the
33 finite pain endured, but through the infinite desire; because God, who is infinite, wishes for
34 infinite love and infinite grief. Infinite grief I wish from My creature in two ways: in one way,
35 through her sorrow for her own sins, which she has committed against Me her Creator; in the
36 other way, through her sorrow for the sins which she sees her neighbors commit against Me. Of
37 such as these, inasmuch as they have infinite desire, that is, are joined to Me by an affection of
38 love, and therefore grieve when they offend Me, or see Me offended, their every pain, whether
39 spiritual or corporeal, from wherever it may come, receives infinite merit, and satisfies for a guilt
40 which deserved an infinite penalty, although their works are finite and done in finite time; but,
41 inasmuch as they possess the virtue of desire, and sustain their suffering with desire, and
42 contrition, and infinite displeasure against their guilt, their pain is held worthy. Paul explained
43 this when he said: If I had the tongues of angels, and if I knew the things of the future and gave
44 my body to be burned, and have not love, it would be worth nothing to me. The glorious Apostle
45 thus shows that finite works are not valid, either as punishment or recompense, without the
46 condiment of the affection of love."

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47 *How desire and contrition of heart satisfies, both for the guilt and the penalty in oneself and*
48 *in others; and how sometimes it satisfies for the guilt only, and not the penalty.*

49 "I have shown you, dearest daughter, that the guilt is not punished in this finite time by any pain
50 which is sustained purely as such. And I say, that the guilt is punished by the pain which is
51 endured through the desire, love, and contrition of the heart; not by virtue of the pain, but by
52 virtue of the desire of the soul; inasmuch as desire and every virtue is of value, and has life in
53 itself, through Christ crucified, My only begotten Son, in so far as the soul has drawn her love
54 from Him, and virtuously follows His virtues, that is, His Footprints. In this way, and in no other,
55 are virtues of value, and in this way, pains satisfy for the fault, by the sweet and intimate love
56 acquired in the knowledge of My goodness, and in the bitterness and contrition of heart acquired
57 by knowledge of one's self and one's own thoughts. And this knowledge generates a hatred and
58 displeasure against sin, and against the soul's own sensuality, through which, she deems herself
59 worthy of pains and unworthy of reward."

60 The sweet Truth continued: "See how, by contrition of the heart, together with love, with true
61 patience, and with true humility, deeming themselves worthy of pain and unworthy of reward,
62 such souls endure the patient humility in which consists the above-mentioned satisfaction. You
63 ask me, then, for pains, so that I may receive satisfaction for the offenses, which are done against
64 Me by My Creatures, and you further ask the will to know and love Me, who am the Supreme
65 Truth. Wherefore I reply that this is the way, if you will arrive at a perfect knowledge and
66 enjoyment of Me, the Eternal Truth, that you should never go outside the knowledge of yourself,
67 and, by humbling yourself in the valley of humility, you will know Me and yourself, from which
68 knowledge you will draw all that is necessary. No virtue, my daughter, can have life in itself
69 except through charity, and humility, which is the foster-mother and nurse of charity. In self-

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70 knowledge, then, you will humble yourself, seeing that, in yourself, you do not even exist; for
71 your very being, as you will learn, is derived from Me, since I have loved both you and others
72 before you were in existence; and that, through the ineffable love which I had for you, wishing to
73 re-create you to Grace, I have washed you, and re-created you in the Blood of My only-begotten
74 Son, spilt with so great a fire of love. This Blood teaches the truth to him, who, by self-
75 knowledge, dissipates the cloud of self-love, and in no other way can he learn... In others I will
76 satisfy through the love and affection which you have to Me, and I will give to them according to
77 the disposition with which they will receive My gifts. In particular, to those who dispose
78 themselves, humbly and with reverence, to receive the doctrine of My servants, will I remit both
79 guilt and penalty, since they will thus come to true knowledge and contrition for their sins. So
80 that, by means of prayer, and their desire of serving Me, they receive the fruit of grace, receiving
81 it humbly in greater or less degree, according to the extent of their exercise of virtue and grace in
82 general. I say then, that, through your desires, they will receive remission for their sins. See,
83 however, the condition, namely, that their obstinacy should not be so great in their despair as to
84 condemn them through contempt of the Blood, which, with such sweetness, has restored
85 them.”...

86 *How very pleasing to God is the willing desire to suffer for Him.*

87 "Very pleasing to Me, dearest daughter, is the willing desire to bear every pain and fatigue, even
88 unto death, for the salvation of souls, for the more the soul endures, the more she shows that she
89 loves Me; loving Me she comes to know more of My truth, and the more she knows, the more
90 pain and intolerable grief she feels at the offenses committed against Me. You asked Me to
91 sustain you, and to punish the faults of others in you, and you did not remark that you were really
92 asking for love, light, and knowledge of the truth, since I have already told you that, by the

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93 increase of love, grows grief and pain, wherefore he that grows in love grows in grief. Therefore,
94 I say to you all, that you should ask, and it will be given you, for I deny nothing to him who asks
95 of Me in truth. Consider that the love of divine charity is so closely joined in the soul with
96 perfect patience, that neither can leave the soul without the other. For this reason (if the soul
97 elect to love Me) she should elect to endure pains for Me in whatever mode or circumstance I
98 may send them to her. Patience cannot be proved in any other way than by suffering, and
99 patience is united with love as has been said. Therefore bear yourselves with manly courage, for,
100 unless you do so, you will not prove yourselves to be spouses of My Truth, and faithful children,
101 nor of the company of those who relish the taste of My honor, and the salvation of souls."

102 *How every virtue and every defect is obtained by means of our neighbor.*

103 "I wish also that you should know that every virtue is obtained by means of your neighbor, and
104 likewise, every defect; he, therefore, who stands in hatred of Me, does an injury to his neighbor,
105 and to himself, who is his own chief neighbor, and this injury is both general and particular. It is
106 general because you are obliged to love your neighbor as yourself, and loving him, you ought to
107 help him spiritually, with prayer, counseling him with words, and assisting him both spiritually
108 and temporally, according to the need in which he may be, at least with your goodwill if you
109 have nothing else. A man therefore, who does not love, does not help him, and thereby does
110 himself an injury; for he cuts off from himself grace, and injures his neighbor, by depriving him
111 of the benefit of the prayers and of the sweet desires that he is bound to offer for him to Me.
112 Thus, every act of help that he performs should proceed from the charity which he has through
113 love of Me. And every evil also, is done by means of his neighbor, for, if he do not love Me, he
114 cannot be in charity with his neighbor; and thus, all evils derive from the soul's deprivation of

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115 love of Me and her neighbor; whence, inasmuch as such a man does no good, it follows that he
116 must do evil.” ...

117 “I say, you are all obliged to help one another by word and doctrine, and the example of good
118 works, and in every other respect in which your neighbor may be seen to be in need; counseling
119 him exactly as you would yourselves, without any passion of self-love;...

120 “The mental injury is already done when the sinner has conceived pleasure in the idea of sin, and
121 hatred of virtue, that is, pleasure from sensual self-love, which has deprived him of the affection
122 of love which he ought to have towards Me, and his neighbor, as has been said.”... Sometimes it
123 is seen that he brings forth cruelty, and that both in general and in particular.

124 "His general cruelty is to see himself and other creatures in danger of death and damnation
125 through privation of grace, and so cruel is he that he reminds neither himself nor others of the
126 love of virtue and hatred of vice. Being thus cruel he may wish to extend his cruelty still further,
127 that is, not content with not giving an example of virtue, the villain also usurps the office of the
128 demons, tempting, according to his power, his fellow-creatures to abandon virtue for vice; this is
129 cruelty towards his neighbors, for he makes himself an instrument to destroy life and to give
130 death...

131 "Oh, miserable vice of cruelty, which will deprive the man who practices it of all mercy, unless
132 he turn to kindness and benevolence towards his neighbor!...

133 "Against whom does pride bring forth evils? Against the neighbor, through love of one's own
134 reputation, whence comes hatred of the neighbor, reputing one's self to be greater than he; and in
135 this way is injury done to him...Oh, dearest daughter, grieve for the offense against Me, and
136 weep over these corpses, so that, by prayer, the bands of their death may be loosened!

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137 "See now, that, in all places and in all kinds of people, sin is always produced against the
138 neighbor, and through his medium; in no other way could sin ever be committed either secret or
139 open. A secret sin is when you deprive your neighbor of that which you ought to give him; an
140 open sin is where you perform positive acts of sin, as I have related to you. It is, therefore,
141 indeed the truth that every sin done against Me, is done through the medium of the neighbor."

142 *How virtues are accomplished by means of our neighbor, and how it is that virtues differ to*
143 *such an extent in creatures.*

144 "I have told you how all sins are accomplished by means of your neighbor, through the principles
145 which I exposed to you, that is, because men are deprived of the affection of love, which gives
146 light to every virtue. In the same way self-love, which destroys charity and affection towards the
147 neighbor, is the principle and foundation of every evil. All scandals, hatred, cruelty, and every
148 sort of trouble proceed from this perverse root of self-love, which has poisoned the entire world,
149 and weakened the mystical body of the Holy Church, and the universal body of the believers in
150 the Christian religion; and, therefore, I said to you, that it was in the neighbor, that is to say in the
151 love of him, that all virtues were founded; and, truly indeed did I say to you, that charity gives
152 life to all the virtues, because no virtue can be obtained without charity, which is the pure love of
153 Me.

154 "Wherefore, when the soul knows herself, as we have said above, she finds humility and hatred
155 of her own sensual passion, for she learns the perverse law, which is bound up in her members,
156 and which ever fights against the spirit. And, therefore, arising with hatred of her own sensuality,
157 crushing it under the heel of reason, with great earnestness, she discovers in herself the bounty of
158 My goodness, through the many benefits which she has received from Me, all of which she

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159 considers again in herself. She attributes to Me, through humility, the knowledge which she has
160 obtained of herself, knowing that, by My grace, I have drawn her out of darkness and lifted her
161 up into the light of true knowledge. When she has recognized My goodness, ... in no other way,
162 can she act out the truth she has conceived in herself, but, loving Me in truth, in the same truth
163 she serves her neighbor.

164 "And it cannot be otherwise, because love of Me and of her neighbor are one and the same thing,
165 and, so far as the soul loves Me, she loves her neighbor, because love towards him issues from
166 Me. This is the means which I have given you, that you may exercise and prove your virtue
167 therewith; because, inasmuch as you can do Me no profit, you should do it to your neighbor. This
168 proves that you possess Me by grace in your soul, producing much fruit for your neighbor and
169 making prayers to Me, seeking with sweet and amorous desire My honor and the salvation of
170 souls..."

171 "... learn, that, in many cases I give one virtue, to be as it were the chief of the others, that is to
172 say, to one I will give principally love, to another justice, to another humility, to one a lively
173 faith, to another prudence or temperance, or patience, to another fortitude. These, and many other
174 virtues, I place, indifferently, in the souls of many creatures; ... the soul draws to herself all the
175 other virtues, which, as has been said, are all bound together in the affection of love; and so with
176 many gifts and graces of virtue, and not only in the case of spiritual things but also of temporal. I
177 use the word temporal for the things necessary to the physical life of man; all these I have given
178 indifferently, and I have not placed them all in one soul, in order that man should, perforce, have
179 material for love of his fellow. I could easily have created men possessed of all that they should
180 need both for body and soul, but I wish that one should have need of the other, and that they
181 should be My ministers to administer the graces and the gifts that they have received from Me.

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182 Whether man will or no, he cannot help making an act of love. It is true, however, that that act,
183 unless made through love of Me, profits him nothing so far as grace is concerned. See then, that I
184 have made men My ministers, and placed them in diverse stations and various ranks, in order
185 that they may make use of the virtue of love...

186 *How virtues are proved and fortified by their contraries.*

187 "Up to the present, I have taught you how a man may serve his neighbor, and manifest, by that
188 service, the love which he has towards Me. "Now I wish to tell you further, that a man proves his
189 patience on his neighbor, when he receives injuries from him. "Similarly, he proves his humility
190 on a proud man, his faith on an infidel, his true hope on one who despairs, his justice on the
191 unjust, his kindness on the cruel, his gentleness and benignity on the irascible. Good men
192 produce and prove all their virtues on their neighbor, just as perverse men all their vices; thus, if
193 you consider well, humility is proved on pride in this way. The humble man extinguishes pride,
194 because a proud man can do no harm to a humble one; neither can the infidelity of a wicked man,
195 who neither loves Me, nor hopes in Me, when brought forth against one who is faithful to Me, do
196 him any harm; his infidelity does not diminish the faith or the hope of him who has conceived his
197 faith and hope through love of Me, it rather fortifies it, and proves it in the love he feels for his
198 neighbor. For, he sees that the infidel is unfaithful, because he is without hope in Me, and in My
199 servant, because he does not love Me, placing his faith and hope rather in his own sensuality,
200 which is all that he loves. My faithful servant does not leave him because he does not faithfully
201 love Me, or because he does not constantly seek, with hope in Me, for his salvation, inasmuch as
202 he sees clearly the causes of his infidelity and lack of hope. The virtue of faith is proved in these
203 and other ways. Wherefore, to those, who need the proof of it, My servant proves his faith in
204 himself and in his neighbor, and so, justice is not diminished by the wicked man's injustice, but

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205 is rather proved, that is to say, the justice of a just man. Similarly, the virtues of patience,
206 benignity, and kindness manifest themselves in a time of wrath by the same sweet patience in
207 My servants, and envy, vexation, and hatred demonstrate their love, and hunger and desire for
208 the salvation of souls. I say, also, to you, that, not only is virtue proved in those who render good
209 for evil, but, that many times a good man gives back fiery coals of love, which dispel the hatred
210 and rancor of heart of the angry, and so from hatred often comes benevolence, and that this is by
211 virtue of the love and perfect patience which is in him, who sustains the anger of the wicked,
212 bearing and supporting his defects. If you will observe the virtues of fortitude and perseverance,
213 these virtues are proved by the long endurance of the injuries and detractions of wicked men,
214 who, whether by injuries or by flattery, constantly endeavor to turn a man aside from following
215 the road and the doctrine of truth. Wherefore, in all these things, the virtue of fortitude conceived
216 within the soul, perseveres with strength, and, in addition proves itself externally upon the
217 neighbor, as I have said to you; and, if fortitude were not able to make that good proof of itself,
218 being tested by many contrarities, it would not be a serious virtue founded in truth."