

I. Saint Catherine, *The mystic of the Incarnate Word*, in the thought of the recent Popes

In his homily¹ delivered at the time of proclaiming Saint Catherine of Siena as Doctor of the Church in the year 1970, Saint Paul VI began by emphasizing in her the virtues "seemingly opposed", defining her as the humble and wise Dominican virgin.

Our Constitutions also speak of these virtues, expressing that “*it is necessary to embrace the practice of the seemingly opposed virtues, against all false dialectics; it is necessary to respect the essence of the virtues without mixing them...*”².

The Holy Father Paul VI, expressed that Our Lord Jesus Christ, at the moment of praising the Father for having revealed the secrets of His wisdom to the humble, did not have present in His spirit only the Twelve whom He had chosen among the uneducated masses to send one day to instruct and teach the people, but He also would have thought of so many others who would come to believe in Him, being less gifted in the eyes of the world, among whom is undoubtedly the Saint of Siena.

In describing the excelling uniqueness of her doctrine, he clarifies that there is not the apologetic vigor or the theological ardor in her writings that distinguish the works of the great luminaries of the ancient Church of the East and the West. Nor are there the high speculations proper to the theology of the doctors of medieval scholasticism. Nevertheless, reflected in a surprising way in her writings are the theology of the Angelic Doctor, although stripped of the scientific covering.

This feature of her doctrine, the Pope says, highlights precisely the infused wisdom, that is the clear, profound, and encompassing assimilation of the divine truths and the mysteries of faith contained in the Books of the Old and of the New Testament. An assimilation, truly favored with singular natural gifts, but also clearly extraordinary, due to a charism of wisdom of the Holy Spirit, a mystical charism.

And among the characteristic lines, the dominant themes of the mystical and ascetic teaching of St. Catherine of Siena, St. Paul VI was pleased to emphasize first that "she is the mystic of the Incarnate Word and above all of Christ Crucified."

In his Apostolic Letter "Amantissima Providentia"³, Saint John Paul the Great also emphasized her “Christocentrism” which is supported by the most expressive and extensive image of this teacher of truth, that is the image of “the Bridge”. "The bridge", which is the same Lord Jesus Christ. A Bridge that "*was raised over the immense abyss opened by sin and crossed by the muddy river of worldly corruption, to unite the shores of heaven and earth, when the Son of God became Incarnate, uniting in Himself the divine nature with the human; and that is the only way for those who truly desire to attain eternal life.*"

And the Holy Father Benedict XVI, in one of his catechesis, invited us to learn from the Saint the most sublime science: to know and love Jesus Christ and his Church, exhorting us to make our own the words of Saint Catherine that we read in *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, a conclusion of the chapter that speaks of Christ as bridge: “*out of mercy you have washed us in his Blood, out of mercy you have wished to converse with creatures. O crazed with love! It did not suffice for you to take flesh, but you also wished to die!... O mercy! My heart drowns in thinking of you: for no matter where I turn to think, I find only mercy*” (chapter 30, pp. 79-80)⁴.

II. Saint Catherine, *The mystic of the Incarnate Word*, in her own works

Undoubtedly, as emphasized by the Holy Fathers, the Person of the Incarnate Word is the source of inspiration, foundation, center and point of convergence in the thought and mystical experience of this extraordinary Saint.

¹ Cf. Homily of Pope Saint Paul VI, for the Proclamation of Saint Catherine of Siena as Doctor of the Church; Sunday, October 3 1970.

² Cf. *Constitutions SSVN*, n. 13.

³ Cf. Apostolic Letter “*Amantissima Providentia*”, of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, on the VI centenary of the death of Saint Catherine of Siena. April 29, 1980.

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, Wednesday, November 24, 2010.

The Incarnate Word overflows and pours forth from the lips of Saint Catherine, radiating everywhere and in many forms throughout her works the infinite mercy of such a God who for our love, *did not regard equality with God something to be grasped, emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness*⁵, to free us from sin.

The Incarnate Word exudes from her prayers and shines in the writings dictated by her, of which, for example, we quote here only a few:

An Enamored God⁶

“What reason had You for creating man in such dignity? The inestimable love with which You saw Your creature in Yourself, and became enamored of him, for You created him through love, and destined him to be such that he might taste and enjoy Your Eternal Good. I see therefore that through his sin he lost this dignity in which You originally placed him...

Therefore, You, moved by that same fire of love with which You created him, willingly gave man a means of reconciliation, so that after the great rebellion into which he had fallen, there should come a great peace; and so You gave him the only-begotten Word, Your Son, to be the Mediator between us and You. He was our Justice, for He took on Himself all our offenses and injustices, and performed Your obedience, Eternal Father, which You imposed on Him, when You clothed Him with our humanity, our human nature and likeness.

Oh, abyss of love! What heart can help breaking when it sees such dignity as Yours descend to such lowliness as our humanity? We are Your image, and You have become ours, by this union which You have accomplished with man, veiling the Eternal Deity with the cloud of woe, and the corrupted clay of Adam. For what reason? -- Love. Wherefore, You, O God, have become man, and man has become God. By this ineffable love of Yours, therefore, I constrain You, and implore You that You do mercy to Your creatures.”

Stones of a wall⁷

"This Bridge is built of stones... Do you know what these stones are? They are the stones of true and sincere virtues...and, by My power, these stones of the virtues were built into a wall, upon Him as the foundation, for there is no virtue which has not been proved in Him, and from Him all virtues have their life. Wherefore no one can have the virtue given by a life of grace, but from Him, that is, without following the footsteps of His doctrine. He has built a wall of the virtues, planting them as living stones, and cementing them with His Blood, so that every believer may walk speedily... for he is sheltered by the mercy which descended from Heaven in the Incarnation of this My Son.

...You see that the Bridge is walled and roofed with Mercy. His also is the Hostelry in the Garden of the Holy Church, which keeps and ministers the Bread of Life, and gives to drink of the Blood, so that My creatures, journeying on their pilgrimage, may not, through weariness, faint by the way; and for this reason My love has ordained that the Blood and the Body of My only-begotten Son, wholly God and wholly man, may be ministered to you.

The pilgrim, having passed the Bridge, arrives at the door which is part of the Bridge, at which all must enter, wherefore He says: *'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, he who follows Me does not walk in darkness, but in light.'* And in another place My Truth says, *'That no man can come to Me if not by Him,' and so indeed it is.*”

Form of an Eye⁸

My servants are blessed principally in seeing and in knowing Me, in which vision and knowledge their will is fulfilled, for they have that which they desired to have, and so are they satisfied...In this life then, they taste a portion of eternal life, when they enjoy that of which I have told you they will be satisfied.

"But how will they possess these beginnings of eternal life I reply to you, they have it in seeing My goodness in themselves, and in the knowledge of My Truth, which knowledge, the intellect (which is the eye of the soul)

⁵ Cf. Phillipians 2, 6.

⁶ Works of Saint Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue, Prayers and Soliloquies*, BAC, Madrid, 2011 p. 83.

⁷ Works of Saint Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue, Prayers and Soliloquies*, BAC, Madrid, 2011 p. 103.

⁸ Works of Saint Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue, Prayers and Soliloquies*, BAC, Madrid, 2011 p. 133.

illuminated in Me, possesses. This eye has the pupil of the most holy faith, which light of faith enables the soul to discern, to know, and to follow the way and the doctrine of My Truth -- the Word Incarnate; and without this pupil of faith she would not see, except as a man who has the form of the eye, but who has covered the pupil (which causes the eye to see) with a cloth. So the pupil of the intellect is faith, and if the soul has covered it with the cloth of infidelity, drawn over it by self-love, she does not see, but only has the form of the eye without the light, because she has hidden it.

Thus you see, that in seeing they know, and in knowing they love, and in loving they deny and lose their self-will. Their own will lost, they clothe themselves in Mine, and I will nothing but your sanctification...It is a good truth then that these do taste eternal life, receiving the earnest portion of it in this life, and that, though they walk on thorns, they are not pricked, because as I told you, they have known My Supreme Goodness, and sought for it where it was to be found, that is in the Word, My only-begotten son."

Conclusion

Blessed Raimundo de Capua recounts in his *Legenda Maior*, one of the many visions that were related to her, that after the fight that Saint Catherine had against the temptations of the devil, Our Lord told her: "I created you in my image and likeness and then I assimilated myself to you, taking your nature. And I will never cease to make you more like me every day while you do not offer me any obstacle; What I did during my mortal life, I will continue to do it in your soul while your existence lasts. Therefore, my beloved daughter, it is not by your virtue but mine that you have fought so generously and deserved such abundant grace. From now on, I will visit you more frequently and in a more familiar way than before. "⁹.

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin to obtain for us that we might also in more humble proportions, walk the same paths,¹⁰ traveled by such a great Saint, putting no obstacles to His Grace, so that He can also make us creatures each day more similar to Himself, so that we may be "like a new Incarnation of the Word"¹¹, throughout the duration of our existence.

⁹ Cf. Blessed Raymond of Capua, *Life of Saint Catherine of Siena, Legenda Maior*, Paoline, Milano 2013, n. 111, p. 133.

¹⁰ Cf. Prayer to Saint Catherine of Siena, for the Triduum.

¹¹ *Constitutions SSVM*, n. 31.