

## The College of Wooster Libraries Open Works

---

### Senior Independent Study Theses

---

2017

# Saint or Politician: A Gendered Analysis of Catherine Benincasa's Letters

Jacob Hailperin-Lausch

*The College of Wooster*, [jhailperin-lausch17@wooster.edu](mailto:jhailperin-lausch17@wooster.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openworks.wooster.edu/independentstudy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hailperin-Lausch, Jacob, "Saint or Politician: A Gendered Analysis of Catherine Benincasa's Letters" (2017). *Senior Independent Study Theses*. Paper 7556.

<https://openworks.wooster.edu/independentstudy/7556>

This Senior Independent Study Thesis Exemplar is brought to you by Open Works, a service of The College of Wooster Libraries. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Independent Study Theses by an authorized administrator of Open Works. For more information, please contact [openworks@wooster.edu](mailto:openworks@wooster.edu).

The College of Wooster

Saint or Politician:

A Gendered Analysis of Catherine Benincasa's Letters

By

Jacob Hailperin-Lausch

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by  
Madonna Hettinger  
Department of History

Spring 2017



## Abstract:

Over the nearly seven hundred years since Catherine Benincasa's death there has been a flow of almost continuous scholarly and spiritual work that has been written about her. Catherine is one of the few well documented women, of her historical period, in history. However, there is a large gap in the historiography of Catherine, and that is looking at the effect of her letters on her audience and possible implications of her letters on the political and spiritual landscape of her time and beyond. An important piece of looking at Catherine's spiritual and political career is using a feminist or subaltern methodology to understand how Catherine's gender influenced the outcome of her career. This thesis approaches the political and spiritual career of Catherine Benincasa through her many letters. In particular, this thesis will trace how she uses two particular rhetorical devices to call her audience to action. Further this thesis will examine how her audiences' gender impacted the meaning of the rhetorical devices she used.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Hagiography.....	9
Historiography.....	11
Methodology.....	14
Chapter I: Virility and Manhood.....	19
Chapter II: Virility and Womanhood.....	35
Chapter III: The Bride of Christ.....	48
Chapter IV: The Brides of Christ.....	60
Conclusion.....	70
Annotated Bibliography.....	76
Primary Sources.....	76
Secondary Sources.....	77

# Introduction

The letters of Catherine Benincasa truly embody Edward Bulwer-Lytton's famous line: "The pen is mightier than the sword." Catherine, as a Catholic saint, is better known for her miraculous acts of healing and demonic exorcism because these acts made her famous within the church community. However, what is lesser known and written about were her contributions to the "temporal" world, as opposed to the spiritual world. Catherine Benincasa is credited with nursing plague victims, making peace in Tuscany, and ending the Avignon Papacy. She wrote letters to children, laymen, women, kings, and popes. These letters changed the historical course of Europe and had profound effects on Christianity. These letters are important also because they represent Catherine's voice preserved for almost seven hundred years. This is a woman's voice.<sup>1</sup>

Catherine's letters are works of persuasive literature and this thesis will examine these letters and their author as persuasive political literature, not miracles sent by God. I want to look at Catherine the author, Catherine the persuasive author. Catherine of Siena used different rhetorical techniques, tailored to her various audiences, to persuade the different recipients of her letters. One constant throughout her letters is that they were all calls to action. She used similar techniques between men and women but these techniques took on different meanings depending on what groups she was addressing. How did the different voices of Catherine affect men and women in Catherine's efforts to call both groups to action? To men she repeatedly personified the Church as the bride of Christ; but, in her letters to women, Catherine called all women to be brides of Christ as a form of empowerment. To men she called them to "man up;" she called

---

<sup>1</sup> Catherine of Siena is known by several different names. One of course being Catherine of Siena or Catherine di Siena. This name denotes the importance of her city and or nationality, which is true for many Italians of her time. There is also Catherine Benincasa, which is her family name. After she was canonized she is now called Saint Catherine.

them to live up to their gendered roles in society. To women the same language was a call to be something better than their normal selves, to act extraordinarily, as women, and in extraordinary circumstances.

This was an extraordinary time to live in, it was a period of great chaos and suffering, but also a time of new beginnings and intellectual achievement. Catherine of Siena was born into a world filled with chaos and change. Her life, 1347-1380, straddled the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Italian Renaissance. She lived during a time when mercenary companies devastated the Italian countryside and when the Bubonic Plague still ravaged Europe. Her home of Siena, a city in Tuscany, central Italy, was not immune to these problems. Catherine grew up in an Italy devoid of a Pope and decimated, more than decimated, by the plague. During Catherine's youth the Pope had been in Avignon for almost forty years and a draconian papal legate had been appointed over the territory of modern Italy. After the failure of the Crusades, Rome was seen as the center of the Christian world. In fact, Catherine's home town of Siena had grown rich and prosperous partly because it was a major junction in the pilgrimage route to Rome. So Catherine must have felt the sense of loss, both spiritually and economically, that was felt across Italy when the Pope no longer resided there. Once Italy had been the center of spirituality; now the throne of Saint Peter sat empty and the Pope resided in Avignon, under the growing influence of the burgeoning French state.

During this period, the political environment of Europe was very different than it is today. There were few national boundaries. There were the beginnings of a French and an English state, but overall Europe was still divided into smaller areas of land that were ruled over by local lords. The era of feudalism was ending and people were moving into cities; at the same

time nations had yet to form. Most European peoples still owed their allegiances to two lords, their temporal lord, the Holy Roman Emperor, and their spiritual lord, the Pope.

The populations of central and northern Italy lived under this political framework. As Italy began to urbanize, the city-state began to develop as well. Florence, Milan, and Venice were the three most powerful city-states in Italy, and throughout the Renaissance they were consistently in conflict with each other. No one state could gain the upper hand over the others so throughout the Renaissance there was a sort of power equilibrium that was reached through the conflicts. There were also many smaller city-states in Italy that were sometimes vassals to larger city-states and sometimes independent, Catherine's home of Siena fell into this category of smaller city-states. At this time, there was no national idea of Italy as there is today. In Italy, everyone's identity depended on the city-state they belonged to. There were a few common threads between the Italian peoples but overall the strong ties were within cities and the surrounding farm land. Bonds were formed around local family and community ties rather than any larger national identity. Although the Italian city-states were subject to the powers of their temporal and spiritual lords, the city-state retained almost complete independence, often rebelling against the wishes of these lords or siding with one over the other. This led to conflicts within city-states as some of the people, the Ghibelline party, wanted to support the Holy Roman Emperor, and some, the Guelf party, supported the Pope. Florence especially suffered from a particular lack of a stable political situation, with the population split into several political factions. Florence experimented with almost every type of government during its period of independence from a larger ruling body.

Siena was similar in many ways to its larger cousins, as a kind of mix between an oligarchy and a republic. Catherine lived during the rule of the twelve, this was a period when



twelve elected aristocrats ruled Siena. Siena too had been devastated by the Bubonic Plague. Catherine often worked nursing the sick in the local hospital, Santa Maria della Scala, which is right across from the Duomo di Siena, the famous black(green) and white marble cathedral of Siena. Work had been stopped on a new addition to the cathedral because of the plague. Despite this Siena remained a place of vibrant culture and community, a place where close communal ties were strengthened by local neighborhood organizations called *Contrade*. During this period, Siena also had a large hermit community, most of them female. These women were a possible source of inspiration for Catherine in her formative years, who wanted to be independent from men.<sup>2</sup>

This period is also a great time of change for the roles of women in Italian society. Again, here it is important to note that not every Italian city-state operated in the same way. For example, Siena represented a more tolerant and progressive city-state when it came to women.<sup>3</sup> Several scholars argue that the Renaissance was not a Renaissance for women. Joan Kelly-Gadol was a trail blazing historian that challenged traditional views about women in the Renaissance; claiming in her essay: “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” that, contrary to the popular historiography of the time, Renaissance women had lost power compared to their Medieval counterparts. Samuel Cohn builds on Kelly-Gadol’s work and complicates it, he particularly argues that common women lost a great deal of agency, especially in legal conflicts, during the Renaissance. Women, in many cities, such as Florence were removed from some social roles and rights they had had during the Medieval period. Further the ability of women to be seen as a sexual person was diminished. The Church was no longer willing to turn a blind eye to

---

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Muessig, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle, eds. *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*. Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition, v. 32. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Kline Cohn. *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

adulterous sexual activity. Moreover women were removed from political positions they may have held. Women were expected to stay inside. They had to stay with a man, either their husband or father.<sup>4</sup> They could also enter a convent and stay inside the cloister. During Catherine's time, she was straddling these changes and she actively worked against these degradations of agency. Her problems with the Florentine government may be emblematic of these changes. Florence may have not wanted to accept female authority because of these changing ideas about gender roles during this time period. Many of Florence's politicians did not take Catherine seriously because she was a woman, however as her influence grew inevitably the Florentine government had to accept her and certain factions allied with Catherine.

This was the world Catherine was born into, a tired and bleak world that had seen centuries of warfare, disease, and death. However, she was also born into a world on the cusp of something great, the Renaissance, the rebirth of Italy. There was a renewed interest in art, literature, and science along with many new ideas about spirituality. Catherine was born into a middle class merchant family in Siena. Her father was a wool dyer and that allowed her family to live a comfortable life in Siena. According to Raymond of Capua, her confessor, close friend, and biographer, Catherine was unique from an early age. She was nicknamed Euphrosyne because she was always happy and smiling. Also from a young age she performed miracles and miraculous events were reported to have happened around her. She was once seen to have climbed a flight of stairs without touching them.<sup>5</sup> This is illustrative not of the fact that she had super natural power, but that even as a youth she was very different and her local community easily recognized this. It was not uncommon for medieval people to recognize miracles within

---

<sup>4</sup> Joan Kelly. *Women, History and Theory: Essays of Joan Kelly (Women in Culture & Society)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> George Lamb, and Raymond of Capua. *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*. New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1960, 28.

their population. This was a time when miracles were relatively common place and most people readily believed in them. They were a symbol of hope, a sign of God's presence, and a prerequisite for canonization. Miracles and the people who performed them were a necessary part of the community. She quickly abandoned the norms associated with youth. She did not desire to play or be silly. Instead she became more and more silent and contemplative in her youth.<sup>6</sup>

Catherine became increasingly concerned with the spiritual world or the "invisible world" as opposed to the physical world or "temporal world."<sup>7</sup> For Catherine, the connection to the physical world was tied directly to her consumption of food; at first she was just a vegetarian but by the end of her life she was barely eating.<sup>8</sup> Many scholars mention her diet as a major contributing factor to her early demise. Also, her negative relationship with food and general poor treatment of herself may have caused some of her visions and other physical manifestations of a connection to God. Raymond of Capua claimed that it was more painful for Catherine to eat than for a starving person not to eat.<sup>9</sup> Catherine was frequently feeding and nursing others and taking her nourishment from Christ in the form of the Eucharist. Bynum, in her work on the role of food or the lack of it in the lives of Medieval women, argues that this stemmed from her guilt about being chosen over her twin sister to be nursed by Lapa, her mother. While Catherine lived and her twin sister died, most of Catherine's life consciously, or unconsciously, was spent repaying this "debt".<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>10</sup> Caroline Walker, Bynum. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. The New Historicism : Studies in Cultural Poetics. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 167.

Catherine also would not conform to traditional gender roles. Catherine considered herself the bride of Christ. This commitment required her to remain a virgin. However, Catherine's parents wanted her to marry. Catherine was willing to do anything to stop this from happening. She would cut her hair short and not allow pox on her face to heal so she would be scarred.<sup>11</sup> This was all in order to make her harder to marry off. When Catherine was sixteen or seventeen, she finally convinced her father of her religious calling and he allowed her to retire from society to a cell, so that she might live alone with God.<sup>12</sup>

It was also around this time that Catherine joined the Dominican order as a tertiary member, a member that is not cloistered. This signifies in her mind giving up all of her worldly property in order to better serve God and those around her. After five years of relative seclusion and spiritual meditation, Catherine began to emerge from her cell. She felt compelled by God to serve the wider world. She went out into Siena and did charity work, mainly healing and nursing the sick. After being admonished for a lack of chastity by the Mantellate during her work healing, Catherine received a vision from Christ inviting her to drink from the spear wound in his side. This was a great mystical and empowering experience for Catherine. Raymond reported on the vision, of Christ's instructions to Catherine, that happened shortly after Catherine first drank from Christ's side.

Besides this, your heart will now be so filled with burning zeal for the salvation of souls that you will lay aside the conventional restraints imposed upon women, and break entirely with the habits of reserve in this regard which you have trained yourself in up to this. Indeed, you are now to plunge boldly into public activity of

---

<sup>11</sup> McDermott, Thomas. *Catherine of Siena: Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008, 7. This happened in 1362 when Catherine was fifteen.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. At this point in Catherine's life her mother, Lapa, was still trying to dissuade her from her religious convictions.

every kind with but one thought in mind, the salvation of souls, whether they be men or women.<sup>13</sup>

Two years later Catherine entered the world stage. In 1372 she wrote her first political letters and in 1373, with the Pope's approval, she began to write to powerful persons across Europe urging them to commit to a crusade. This was the beginning of her rise in political influence and two years later she continued to gather political and spiritual power. In 1375 she received the invisible stigmata in Pisa. This symbolized her growing spiritual connection with Christ. In 1376, she was sent as Florence's emissary to Avignon, Florence wanted her to moderate negotiations over the interdiction the Papacy had placed on Florence. However, while in Florence she pursued her own agenda with the Pope and with the help of her followers she spent the rest of that year persuading the Pope to move the Papacy back to Rome. She convinced George XI to return to Rome in January of 1377, thus ending the Avignon Papacy. Also in 1377 she started her work *The Dialogue*, this was her collection of theological ideas, it is claimed that she dictated its entirety while she was in ecstasy, the book gets its name from the fact that Catherine's soul was having a dialogue with God. Early in the next year, March of 1378, George XI died and Urban VI was elected Pope. However, later that year Clement VII was also elected as Pope in Avignon, which started the Western Schism 1378-1417. Catherine spent the last year of her life writing to people all over the Christian world, trying to convince them to support the, "true Pope," the Pope in Rome. Catherine died in Rome on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1380. Catherine was canonized in 1461, and made patron of Italy with Saint Francis in 1939. She was made the first

---

<sup>13</sup> Lamb and Capua, *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, 165. This is the pivotal moment in Catherine's life that this essay will focus on. This essay will be restricted to the last ten years of her life. More accurately, the last seven years of her life.

female doctor of the church with Saint Teresa in 1970 and in 1999 Saint Catherine was named a patroness of Europe.<sup>14</sup>

## Hagiography

The scholarship of Catharine Benincasa began shortly after her death when Raymond of Capua began putting together his work *Legenda Maior*.<sup>15</sup> Of course, this is not a work of unbiased scholarship. Raymond's work is also a persuasive work of literature; he was trying to convince his readers, mainly the Catholic Church, to canonize Catharine. This puts his work squarely in the genre of Hagiography, a biographical work about the life of a saint detailing the spiritual feats of a person that would qualify them to become a saint after death.

Overwhelmingly, hagiographies focus on the positive aspects of that person's life. As such Raymond of Capua's work focused on the miracles performed by Catharine and other holy deeds she performed. He did not focus as much on her political activism and other aspects of her life that were not important to the canonization process. Kienzle addresses this problem in her work, "Catherine of Siena, Preaching, and Hagiography in Renaissance Tuscany." She claims there is a divide between Raymond's *Legenda Maior* and how Catherine saw her life as described in her letters. Kienzle especially notes how Raymond's biography showed Catherine as closely conforming to the strict Dominican life style, when in reality she was more of a maverick, and he avoids her larger political context, presumably to side step any controversy that would impede her ability to be canonized.<sup>16</sup> Kienzle, a scholar who examines the hagiography of female mystics, says that Raymond was trying to tone down and moderate Catherine's, at times,

---

<sup>14</sup> McDermott, *Catherine of Siena*, 8-10.

<sup>15</sup> Lamb and Capua, *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*.

<sup>16</sup> Muessig, Ferzoco, and Kienzle, *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, 128.

eccentric ideas. John Coakley is another scholar who studies male hagiography of female saints. In his chapter “Managing Holiness: Raymond of Capua and Catherine of Siena,” of his book *Women, Men, and spiritual power*, he argues that in Raymond of Capua’s biography of Catherine, he inserts himself as much as possible, that his biography is in part very much his political and spiritual commentary. Coakley claims that Raymond of Capua’s work goes on to be a model for many other male hagiographers of female saints.<sup>17</sup>

There are other hagiographical books that are written later to other ends. For example in Pierson's, *Catharine of Siena, an Ancient Lay Preacher; a Story of Sanctified Womanhood and Power in Prayer* he was writing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to protestant women trying to get them to model their lives after Catherine.<sup>18</sup> As can be seen by these two examples, there is a branch of non-objective scholarship of Catherine that has its roots in hagiographical literature and has a goal of persuading its audience of the perspective saint’s worthiness of being canonized.

Hagiography is an inherently biased form of scholarship or historiography. This is because the base definition, a biography of a saint, does not encompass the literary tradition that has developed around this genre, that is the tradition of very positive, persuasive, and biased portrayals of the saints and their lives. Hagiographical writers are often devoted followers of the faith and absorbed by the (faith-based) *Ethos* emanated from saints. Another problem is that later hagiographers accept the legends that developed around a saint’s lives as fact. Therefore, hagiography does not fit neatly under historiography because ideal historical texts are written in the attempt to be non-biased; however, all texts will be biased, based on the author’s life,

---

<sup>17</sup> Coakley, John W. *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators*. Columbia University Press, 2006, 170.

<sup>18</sup> Pierson, Arthur T. *Catharine of Siena, an Ancient Lay Preacher; a Story of Sanctified Womanhood and Power in Prayer*. New York London: Funk & Wagnalls company, 1898.

experiences, outside influences, time in which she lives, and as such should be read with a critical eye. Though, hagiography makes no such attempt to conform to normal rules of scholarship, also much of the body of this genre was composed before such rules and norms existed, and as such must be read with a very critical eye.<sup>19</sup> One of its main uses is to argue for the canonization of a saint. This is the case with Raymond of Capua's work mentioned above. The Roman Catholic Church has very specific requirements for canonization. For example, miracles, must have been performed by the perspective saint. Proof of these miracles normally come from recorded accounts like those of Raymond. This first type of hagiography seems to recall the works of the gospels as the origin of the hagiography. Raymond and the *famiglia* may have seen themselves as a gospel writer and the disciples respectively. There are of course other types of hagiography. This type is exemplified by Pierson's work. This type of hagiography utilizes the already established legends that surround saints. Pierson wanted to convince people, in this case women, to follow his interpretation of Saint Catherine. He wanted them to accept his version of morality through the lens of Catherine's life.

## **Historiography**

There is also a more recent vein of scholarship about Catherine. This scholarship is fascinated by the strange Catherine, the Catherine who didn't eat, received Jesus's foreskin as a ring, claimed to be the bride of Christ, and sucked the pus from a tumor on a woman's breast. Several books were published on this topic during the 1970s and 1980s when anorexia and

---

<sup>19</sup> Powell, Hilary. "'Once Upon a Time There Was a Saint...': Re-Evaluating Folklore in Anglo-Latin Hagiography." *Folklore* 121, no. 2 (2010): 171–89, 171.



bulimia became recognized as a growing problem and a grave threat to public health.<sup>20</sup> These diseases were subsequently studied by not only the scientific community, but also by historians.

When historians began tracing the origins of the disease, although there are accounts going back to classical antiquity; they began to focus on Catherine of Siena as one of the most famous anorexics. In attempting to discover the roots of this disease, two historians analyzed Catherine of Siena. They attempted to determine what role fasting played in the religious life of women. *Holy Anorexia*, by Rudolf Bell, takes a somewhat more scientific approach to this analysis.<sup>21</sup> Bell goes into detail about brain chemistry and psychology. *Holy Fast Holy Feast*, by Carolyn Walker Bynum, takes the more literary approach although both draw heavily from the primary source material.<sup>22</sup> Bynum looks into the literary themes in Catherine's letters to tease out details about her struggles with food, especially looking at how Catherine wrote about blood. Both Bynum and Bell are fascinated by the possible causes of Catherine's anorexia, both tracing it to psychological trauma in her past.

Jane Tylus's more recent work *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena* most closely conforms with my approach.<sup>23</sup> Tylus, a professor of Medieval and Renaissance comparative literature, begins to lay the groundwork for this thesis in her third chapter, noting how Catherine uses gender in her letters. She utilizes some of the same letters that will be analyzed in this thesis.<sup>24</sup> Tylus sets out to look at Catherine not as a saint but as a human woman. Tylus wants to

---

<sup>20</sup> Emily, Deans. "A History of Eating Disorders." *Psychology Today*. Accessed October 22, 2016. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evolutionary-psychiatry/201112/history-eating-disorders>.

While it is often thought that the 1970s and 1980s were the height of anorexia and bulimia, Deans argues that especially bulimia is a large and ever increasing problem today. In either case the decades of the 70s and 80s are when these diseases most captivated the public's attentions.

<sup>21</sup> Rudolph M, Bell. *Holy Anorexia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

<sup>22</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

<sup>23</sup> Jane, Tylus. *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, And the Signs of Others*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

prove the earlier argument of Giralmo Gigli: that Catherine was a large contributor to the beginnings of the modern Italian. Tylus and Gigli argue that Catherine should be considered an equal to Dante and Petrarch in this respect.<sup>25</sup> Tylus claims that Catherine's works are often overlooked as miracles from God and not as important political and literary works, if not penned by her own hand, at least conceived in her own mind. Similarly I want to look at Catherine the author, Catherine the persuasive author. This is of course not to say that faith will not be an integral part of my analysis. Faith informed Catherine's life. Faith was the reason she cared so deeply about the Church and why she worked tirelessly in the attempt to reform the Church. However, I want to analyze Catherine's letters as a body of work that was written by Catherine for a specific purpose, each letter or a group of letters had a goal. I will argue that Catherine was not a tool of faith but, in fact, she used faith as a tool. Unlike Tylus, I will be looking at Catherine as a more isolated writer, not comparing her work to other contemporary writers and their combined role in shaping the modern Italian language, and I will also only be looking at Catherine's letters.

Most scholars of Catherine seem very aware of Catherine's influence on the "temporal world." Her impact on the politics of Europe are mentioned, but not thoroughly analyzed, in almost all modern scholarship. The hagiographical literature, however, rarely mentions this aspect of her life. In this paper I will be examining this often overlooked and underappreciated part of Catherine's life. I will be specifically looking at how she achieved her "temporal" goals and how these methods differed depending on the gender of the person to whom she was writing.

---

<sup>25</sup> Gigli's argument was Paraphrased by Tylus in her book.

## Methodology

Catherine not only lived during a time of change, a time between the Medieval world and the Italian Renaissance but, she also represents a change in how (Western) feminist scholars must work, in times, before widespread, attributed, female authorship, feminist scholars had to work in between the lines when researching women (and minorities). Women often did not leave behind any written accounts from their own perspectives. Scholars have to piece together what their lives were like from fleeting references in texts written and dominated by men. Scholars also must rely heavily on archaeological evidence to piece together the lives of women. Catherine's emergence as a writer represents the beginning of a sustained period of female authorship. In the scholarship of Catherine, the issue is not so much the lack of sources, but instead, the challenge of deciphering how a patriarchal society influenced her and how she influenced the society around her. How did those "gendered experiences" change her writing? How did the patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church affect her? How did Raymond of Capua and other male *Famiglia* affect her? How did societal expectations about gender roles affect her? These are all variables that must be accounted for in feminist scholarship. For any historical scholarship on almost any subject, the effects of the patriarchy on the society and individual should not be ignored. Sutherland writes about this issue in her essay: "Feminist Historiography: Research Methods in Rhetoric." Sutherland argues that using a feminist methodology or a social history methodology necessitates discussion of emotion and moving away from the strict scientific standards that history sometimes holds itself to. She mentions visiting the places where the person being studied lived; she argues for trying to emotionally and spiritually connect to

one's research subject.<sup>26</sup> Here Sutherland gives an example from her own research on Margaret Fell, an early Quaker writer.<sup>27</sup> Sutherland went to an old Quaker meeting house and while there she truly felt connected to Fell. Similarly I spent four months studying and living in Siena. As not being a woman or a very spiritual person, the level of connection I feel with Catherine is probably very limited. However, I can say that I have an appreciation for daily life in Medieval Siena. I walked everywhere, I shopped at local markets, and I ate the local cuisine. I visited the hospital where she nursed the sick. I saw where she lived in solitude and where she prayed. I was part of a *contrada*, and saw the importance of communal life in Siena. I learned about the political system. So I can understand and "connect with" the world Catherine comes from.

It is also important to understand that the literary works of St. Catherine are solely her own. Even though some of her letters and speeches have been filtered through her *famiglia*.<sup>28</sup> Catherine received no formal education. She taught herself to read and later she may have been able to write, but her abilities in both these areas were very limited at best. She also only knew the Tuscan regional Italian language, at this time there was no unified Italian, eventually Catherine's dialect would become the standard modern Italian. This meant that many of her interactions, with the world outside of Tuscany, had to be filtered through her *famiglia*, most commonly Raymond of Capua. She dictated all of her letters and her book *The Dialogue or The Treatise of Divine Revelation*. Yet, she could speak and give sermons to the common people. Much of her writing is in Italian as well; this made her work very accessible to the common people but of course she had to dictate it. This means that her exact message may have been lost, either through copying errors or because it was intentionally changed by the scribe. In either

---

<sup>26</sup> Christine Mason, Sutherland. "Feminist Historiography: Research Methods in Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2002): 109–22, 114.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Her *Famiglia* was how she referred to her disciples or the close group of her followers.

case, within all of her work there is the influence of another, often a male scribe. Even in her speeches there is often the influence of a male translator, again probably Raymond of Capua. When Catherine was in Avignon for the first time, she had to have Raymond translate her Italian (with a Tuscan dialect/accnt) into Latin for Georoy XI.

Catherine was on a mission from God. She lacked; however, many of the conventional tools that people use to solve large national and international problems. Mainly she lacked what she described as temporal resources. These of course would be things like money, man power, mineral resources, an army, tools that are traditionally available to powerful and wealthy individuals, and organizations, but mostly to nation states. Catherine did not have any of these resources available to her, nor would she have wanted them if they were available to her. She was more interested in the spiritual resources provided by her faith. However, her objectives required both spiritual and temporal resources. In order to convince powerful persons to bend their temporal resources to her will, Catherine used her spiritual *Ethos* in the form of letters to achieve this. Catherine's letters were her chosen method of conveying her spiritual *Ethos* and within them she used many different techniques or voices to bolster her arguments.

In many of the different scholarly works about Catherine, there are greatly varied ideas about what empowered Catherine of Siena, a woman. According to Raymond, God empowered Catherine. He understood Catherine as a conduit for God. Bell argues that Catherine was empowered by her Anorexia. That was the element of herself that she can control and that she used to break down societal norms. Similarly, it could be argued that Catherine was empowered by cutting her hair or letting her pox marks scar. A near contemporary preacher of Catherine, Bernadino di Siena, argued that women are empowered by staying in the home and keeping their

families in order.<sup>29</sup> Catherine argued the opposite; she thought that women are most empowered when they leave the home or the cloister and follow spiritual pursuits. Raymond of Capua suggested that God empowered Catherine to be able to have authority over men.

“I shall execute thy commands-my sex presents an obstacle, for Women have no authority over men, and propriety interdicts frequently [in or when having] relations with them.’ Our Lord answered, like the Archangel Gabriel, that all things are possible with God! ‘Am I not he who formed both man and woman? My spirit breathes where it will; to me there is no difference of sex or condition, it is as easy for me to create an Angel as the lowest insect, and a worm of the earth as a new firmament; ... and now I wish thee to know that in this age, the pride of men has become so great, especially among such as believe themselves to be learned and discre[e]t, that my justice can no longer endure them ,... Yes, I will give them[men] *women* ignorant and weak by their nature, but prudent and powerful through my grace, to confound their[men] arrogance.”<sup>30</sup>

Here Raymond gave his explanation as to why Catherine had the authority to not only live her life in public, in contrast to prevailing gender norms according Kelly-Gadol’s article: “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” but she also had the authority to “humble” men, even to call upon popes in the service of saving the Church.<sup>31</sup> Raymond may have seen Catherine as a mere conduit for God’s will and not an agent of change in her own right. I will argue that Catherine found empowerment in her writing, preaching, and speaking. Catherine Benincasa was empowered by the Pen. However, I am hesitant to argue this because I believe that only the woman herself can say what she finds to be empowering. In my research of Catherine, I find it doubtful that Catherine would agree with many modern scholars, including myself, about what was empowering for her and what was not empowering for her. Whether Catherine’s letters made her feel empowered is an important question, but unfortunately, probably an unanswerable

---

<sup>29</sup> Cynthia L. Polecristi. *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy: Bernardino of Siena and His Audience*. First Edition. Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Lamb and Capua, *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, 80-81.

<sup>31</sup> Kelly, *Women, History and Theory*.

one.<sup>32</sup> However, Catherine's letters gave her the power to shape the political landscape around her, whether this was empowering to her or not. Further, her letters to women, and some men, were filled with messages meant to empower them to act and even Catherine's legacy through her letters is one of empowerment.

---

<sup>32</sup> McDermott, *Catherine of Siena*, 35. In fact there is evidence that she felt most empowered inside her cell, away from the rest of the world. In her cell, she felt closest to God.

# Chapter I

## Virility and Manhood

Catherine wrote letters as a persuasive means to obtain support for her various causes. She used the same techniques regardless of whether she was writing to men or women, but there are subtle differences depending on which gender she was addressing. To further examine this theme, one must first look at how Catherine challenged men in her letters to live up to their gender. Catherine expertly and delicately utilized traditional societal and gender tropes, such as the expectations surrounding manhood and knighthood, to shame or embolden her audience to do what she thought God would want of them. This chapter will analyze three examples of this: first in her letter to Sir John Hawkwood; an English mercenary fighting in Tuscany, second, one of her letters to Pope Gregory XI; and third in a letter to Raymond of Capua. It is also important to note that this rhetorical technique, threatening the manhood of the recipient of her letter, will be mentioned later on in conjunction with other techniques.

It seems very strange that Catherine would write to an English mercenary. However, this letter is very telling of Catherine's attitude towards men. Catherine treated men with respect, even men whom she disagreed with or had betrayed her cause; however, she was not afraid to tell any man what she thought of them. Catherine knew what she wanted from the men she was writing to and she was not afraid to demand it in the name of God.

Sir John Hawkwood was an English mercenary general who was active in Italy during the life of Catherine Benincasa. Hawkwood was born in Essex and at a young age he left England to



fight for Edward III of France in 1338 to enforce Edward's claim to the French throne. During this campaign Hawkwood fought and commanded troops with some distinction and was thus knighted Sir John Hawkwood. After the war in France, Hawkwood and similarly situated mercenaries found themselves out of work.<sup>1</sup> Hawkwood left to fight in Italy and eventually formed his own mercenary company, a troop of hired professional soldiers who had no loyalties except for money, the White Company. During this period, Italy was ripe for Sir John Hawkwood and his company. Italian city-states preferred to hire mercenary companies rather than to have a standing army. Mercenaries came from all over Europe to fight for different city-states and often the Papacy. Italian city-states particularly preferred English companies because of their effective fighting style, which was the potent combination of the English mounted knight with a lance and archers with the English longbow. Hawkwood's company made a name for themselves as particularly brave fighters and their reputation for not routing.<sup>2</sup> However, the White Company was still a mercenary company, and there were major risks involved in the style of warfare adopted by the Italian city-states.

The war of Eight Saints (1375-1378) is an excellent case study to show these problems, and it was the war in which Catherine used her letters and the techniques therein to influence Sir John Hawkwood. Catherine had just helped Gregory XI return to Rome from Avignon, but Gregory XI's return caused increased tension between Florence and the Papal states. Both sides had been antagonizing each other for years; because of Florence's unstable political situation, it oscillated quickly between being on the side of the Papal States at one moment to being against them, the next. The Papal Legate in charge of Italy had imposed his

---

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth, Fowler. "Sir John Hawkwood and the English Condottieri in Trecento Italy." *Renaissance Studies* 12, no. 1 (1998): 131-48, 131-134.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

draconian rule over parts of Italy and had caused a grain shortage. Florence, in response to the grain shortage and in response to Gregory XI's impending return to Italy, formed a coalition against the Papacy, including many Italian city-states. The formation of this coalition sparked the beginning of the war. Gregory XI had Hawkwood in his pay at the time and Hawkwood had just finished with the Pope's war against the Viscount of Milan. Gregory XI reassigned Hawkwood to Tuscany to fight against Florence. Hawkwood went into Tuscany and began to plunder the countryside and threatened the city of Florence itself. Florence then paid him not to attack, but this left a force of mercenaries loose in the countryside, which was causing serious problems. Mercenaries represented various problems for Italian city-states. First, as happened here, their loyalties could change rapidly. When Hawkwood came to Tuscany he was being paid by the Pope to attack Florence, but all Florence had to do to stop Hawkwood was to pay him off. When Hawkwood's men had nothing to do, this caused another problem common to foreign mercenaries; they began to loot the countryside. Standing armies of this time suffered similar problems but not to the magnitude that mercenary armies dealt with. A standing army made up of Italian citizen soldiers would not want to loot their own farms or the farms of their neighbors, but English mercenaries often had no such ties. Therefore, they were unpredictable, at best, and often brutalized the populace.

It was in this context that Catherine sent a letter to Sir John Hawkwood begging him to stop killing civilians and pillaging the Tuscan countryside. She urged Hawkwood to instead focus his efforts on fighting the infidels (Turks or Ottomans) in modern day Greece and Turkey. Although Catherine often advocated for this crusade, her greater concern was for the cessation of atrocities against Christian (and Tuscan) civilians. In looking at her letter to Buonaccorso di Lapo her true agenda becomes apparent, it is possible that she thought a Crusade would distract

all Christians and necessitate an end to the Avignon papacy and to continued hostilities between Italian city-states and the Papacy. Throughout Catherine's letters she made a great point of making peace between Christians and turning them against the Muslim Ottomans. Catherine claimed that this crusade could have been Hawkwood's salvation. Again, she made it clear that it is an affront to God for Christians to fight Christians. She did not say it was wrong to take pleasure in combat; in fact she urged great zeal on the part of Hawkwood if he went ahead with fighting in the Holy Land.<sup>3</sup> Catherine's tone in this letter was very friendly, but she still mobilized Hawkwood by invoking his manhood and chivalry as reasons to follow her wishes. "It seems to me that you ought now, at this present time, to dispose you to virtue, until the time shall come for us and the others who shall be ready to give their lives for Christ: and thus you shall show that you are a manly and true knight."<sup>4</sup> Catherine was implying that if Hawkwood does not act virtuously and, when the time comes, to commit himself to the crusade, he will have lost his manhood and knighthood. When writing to men Catherine identified manhood as something to be lost in the performance of undesirable actions, like the killing of innocent Christians in the case of Hawkwood. His situation was unique because he not only stood to lose his manhood but also his knighthood. Although Hawkwood was not a vassal to any king or lord, and the age of feudalism was coming to an end, by all accounts Sir John Hawkwood still thought of himself as a knight and even thought of himself as chivalrous, historians point to his protest at the massacre of Cesena as evidence of this. Further he still considered himself a religious man, even though he repeatedly antagonized the Papacy. There is a scholarly debate as to what extent Hawkwood was an irredeemable monster. Fowler and Scudder do not deny that he and his men committed

---

<sup>3</sup> No major crusade happens due to Catherine's letters, although many powerful individuals promise their support.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine of Siena. *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*. Translated by Vida Dutton Scudder, 2005, 65.

horrible atrocities, but they do try to minimize them by pointing out some of the good deeds Hawkwood did. Caferro argues that modern scholars have overlooked many of Hawkwood's most brutal atrocities to soften his image, he supports his assertion with several graphic examples.<sup>5</sup> So losing his manhood, knighthood, and good religious standing even in the eyes of Catherine was not trivial to him.

Catherine seems to have been able to successfully use her spiritual influence to change the course of Hawkwood. It is unclear what convinced Hawkwood to change his course; was it Catherine's spirituality and the threat of damnation from disobeying the will of God? Or was it the fact that Hawkwood did not want it said of him that he was not worthy of his gender or knighthood? The answer to these questions is probably some of both. Catherine used this letter as a call to action. First and foremost she wanted Hawkwood to stop killing Christians. She accomplished this by holding Hawkwood to certain expectations, as man of God and as a knight. If Hawkwood did not meet these expectations, Catherine was liable to tell the world that he was not a true knight, possibly not only damaging his pride, but also his career and reputation in the process.

This letter is an example of Catherine's power over the opposite gender and of her ability to turn her spiritual resources and her social capital into temporal resources. Hawkwood had massive reserves of "temporal resources;" he not only commanded a formidable mercenary force, but he also had sizable reserves of money and land. Certainly, these resources, coupled with his military knowledge and ability to lead men into war, would have made him a potent force in Catherine's proposed crusades. Even though the crusade never took place, Catherine's

---

<sup>5</sup> William, Caferro. *John Hawkwood : An English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy*. Baltimore, US: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007, 23.

letters did convince Hawkwood to stop raiding the Tuscan countryside, an impressive accomplishment. A common woman, without nobility, wealth, or formal education, convinced an independent mercenary general to stop a profitable enterprise.

It must have been difficult for Catherine to have been actively supporting Gregory XI, while writing to Hawkwood, essentially telling him to not do the job he was payed to do by Gregory XI. Hawkwood was pillaging the Tuscan countryside, at that time the enemy of the Papacy. However, Catherine was often able to traverse difficult political situations, with seemingly effortless grace, through her letters. Catherine changed tacks in her other letters; with Gregory XI and Raymond she decided to use a lighter touch. However, she still used the same techniques.

Letters to Gregory XI presented a different challenge for Catherine of Siena; she had to thread the needle between deference to what she believed was God's vessel on earth, according to the Doctrine of Papal Succession going back to Saint Peter, and the authority that she had as a prophet and Christ's bride. Catherine also had to carefully tread the line between dulcet encouragement and strong reprimand to achieve her overall objective, which was to return the Papacy to its rightful place in Rome. Beattie identifies this dichotomy in her article: "Catherine of Siena and the Papacy."<sup>6</sup> Beattie argues that when Catherine first met Gregory XI she showed humility, but later she shows her authority granted to her by God, in demanding that Gregory XI rid the Church of its sins. This formula is followed both in her in person interactions as well as in her letters. She starts as a humble supplicant, in no position of authority, begging for her reader to listen to her words, but she ends as the bride of Christ.

---

<sup>6</sup> Muessig, Ferzoco, and Kienzle, *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, 83.

Catherine must give courage to Gregory XI; there were a great many obstacles to overcome if the Papacy was to be returned to Rome. Gregory XI would be returning against the advice of not only the French monarchy, but also the Papal hierarchy of cardinals. Gregory XI would be coming back to a hostile Italy, where many of the city-states were opposed to his return. Also in returning to Rome, Gregory XI would be returning to a swampy, festering, lawless city, where his safety could not be guaranteed. These were the obstacles facing Catherine's main objective, to return the Papacy to Rome. Despite the difficulty involved Catherine thought that overcoming these obstacles was important because she believed the throne of Saint Peter (Rome) was the ordained seat of the Papacy. This belief had been confirmed by the depravity and the corruption that Catherine had seen as a result of the Avignon Papacy.

In light of these obstacles, Catherine's objective was even harder to achieve. She had to use many different persuasive techniques. These techniques appear in her first letter to Gregory XI. She wrote this letter in 1375, before she had ever met Gregory XI. 1375 was an important year for Catherine; besides being the year in which she wrote her first letter to Gregory XI. 1375 was also the year in which she received her invisible stigmata in Pisa and the year in which the War of Eight Saints began. This was a year in which Catherine was coming into her own as an important figure in the Church; in receiving the stigmata she was rising further still in her closeness to Christ and therefore her spiritual power and influence within the Church. The stigmata are the five scars and/or wounds that Christ received while he was being crucified. Two where his hands were nailed to the cross and two where his feet were nailed to the cross. The final scar is where he was stabbed in the side with a spear. This is the wound that Catherine is allowed to drink from, the wound where the blood of Christ comes from. Catherine also received

these marks while she visited the church of Saint Christina in Pisa. However, there are some key differences between Catherine's stigmata and Christ's stigmata. Catherine's stigmata was invisible, Raymond is not clear as to why this was, her final mark was not in her side but over her heart, and her marks were not scars but points of light, again invisible until after her death.<sup>7</sup> These marks symbolized to Catherine, and those who believed she received a genuine stigma, that she was chosen and loved by Christ. Like Christ, Catherine's life was to be devoted to the betterment of mankind, even if this meant sacrificing her health or her life.

Meanwhile the Pope was being set upon from all sides by forces from within and from outside the Church about a possible move back to Rome. This was the ideal moment for Catherine to begin to intervene in the politics of the Church and in the more general European theater.<sup>8</sup> Besides the techniques being discussed in this thesis, she also used another common analogy in Christianity, that of the shepherd and his flock. Later in her letter Catherine utilized her rhetorical device that is being analyzed in this chapter. However, the connotations associated with her letter to Hawkwood are toned down to fit with what would be appropriate for a nun addressing the Pope and that would be consistent with her deep respect for him.<sup>9</sup>

I say that this is the very worst cruelty which can be shown. If a wound when necessary is not cauterized or cut out with steel, but simply covered with ointment, not only does it fail to heal, but it infects everything, and many a time death follows from it. Oh me, oh me, sweetest "Babbo" mine! This is the reason that all the subjects are corrupted by impurity and iniquity. Oh me, weeping I say it! How dangerous is that worm we spoke of! For not only does it give death to the shepherd, but all the rest fall into sickness and death through it... This is what I wish to see in you. And if up to this time, we have not stood very firm, I wish and pray in truth that the moment of time which remains be dealt with manfully, following Christ, whose vicar you are, like a strong man. And fear not, father, for

---

<sup>7</sup> Lamb and Capua, *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, 134-135.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, at this time the two were completely intertwined.

<sup>9</sup> She is not as respectful as a nun would normally be. She spoke her mind which would be very uncommon for just any nun, but she is a prophet figure which gives her more authority.

anything that may result from those tempestuous winds that are now beating against you, those decaying members which have rebelled against you.<sup>10</sup>

Catherine did double duty here in reassuring the Pope with her right hand, and with her left subtly prodding him to be the man, to be the Pope, to be the Vicar of Christ, basically to do his job. Catherine knew that for the transition back to Rome to go smoothly there must be a firm hand on the wheel and this was what she petitioned for, a leader. This letter was much gentler than her letter to Hawkwood, best seen in her calling Gregory XI Babbo the particular Tuscan vernacular for father, interesting that she used this word considering he didn't even speak Italian so the intimacy that this suggests may have been lost on Gregory XI. In the entirety of her first letter she attempted to impress the importance of leadership on Gregory XI, certainly a manly quality from the perspective of the people of that time. Like in the case of Hawkwood, Catherine was preying upon the pride of the Pope. Many men have this learned gender trait of being pridefully of certain perceived aspects of their gender and attacks leveraging this pride can be very effective. Also, in parallel to her letter to Hawkwood, not only did she prey upon the pride relating to his gender, but also to some degree upon the gendered nature of his position in society. Catherine was carefully criticizing the Pope for his current or imminent failure to do his job as pope. Only men could have been knights, popes, or priests and thus maybe in the eyes of Catherine they had a responsibility as men to be worthy of those positions.

According to Raymond of Capua, Catherine's in-person visit to Gregory XI may have had a more profound impact on him than this letter.<sup>11</sup> Still, this letter must have impressed upon Gregory XI the literary prowess of Catherine Benincasa, an uneducated woman from Siena. This

---

<sup>10</sup> Catherine, *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*, 75.

<sup>11</sup> Lamb and Capua, *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, 100-101.



letter was an important first step to get Gregory XI back to Rome. It was again also an example of Catherine using the new-found weight of her “Spiritual *Ethos*” to influence the affairs of men.

However, Catherine was not the first woman to write to Gregory XI on the topic of moving the Papacy back to Rome. In 1370 Bridget of Sweden wrote to Gregory XI on the very same topic, a letter that bears a striking resemblance to Catherine’s letter but was written five years earlier. Bridget was born in 1303, into a wealthy and pious family, that offered her an education. She was undoubtedly more educated than Catharine Benincasa. In 1316 she was married to her husband and lived happily with him and her eight children, one of whom would also become a Saint Catherine.<sup>12</sup> In 1344 Bridget’s husband died and she moved to Rome and stayed there for the rest of her life, except for pilgrimages.<sup>13</sup> During the period between 1344 to her death in 1373 she struck up a close relationship with Gregory XI, sending him several letters of advice, one of her last pieces of advice was to move the holy see back to Rome. Her advice did not come nicely or dulcetly packaged like Catherine’s; it came as a raw, bold threat.

However, the devil and the pope's other advisors counseled him to delay and to stay on in the regions where he is as yet, being motivated by earthly affections and the mundane delight and solace of his natural relatives and friends.... He shall know it with certainty to be God's will that he himself should come without any delay to Italy or Rome.... If he disobeys this, let him truly know that he shall never again enjoy any such consolation—any other visitation or revelation from me—in this world but shall, after his death, make an answer before the court of divine justice as to why he refused to obey God's commands.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Saint Catherine was the fourth daughter of Bridget of Sweden, 1331 or 1332 to 1381, she pushed for the canonization of her mother with Gregory XI and Urban VI; however, the schism in the Church prevented her quick canonization and was delayed until 1391. Gregory evidently had a close relationship with Bridget because of his urgency in her canonization.

<sup>13</sup> J.P., Kirsch. “CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: St. Bridget of Sweden.” Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02782a.htm>. I am concerned about this source, I think their research is good but I think they made some factual mistakes and made common errors about which pope ruled, during certain times.

<sup>14</sup> Denis, Searby, and Bridget Morris. *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume II*. Oxford University Press, 2008, 251-252.

Catherine's letters sometimes toed the line on what would have been considered impious, rude, blunt, and not a woman's place, but this passage from Bridget's letter sent in 1370 surely oversteps what would have been acceptable. One aspect of both Catherine's and Bridget's lives can help to explain why their irreverence to the Pope was at least somewhat acceptable, especially considering their genders. Both women were not considered agents unto themselves; they were objects or vessels for God's will. When either woman sent an impolite letter to the Pope it was not a woman sending that letter; it was God sending that letter. Both women were shielded from the limitations of their station and gender by the will of God, or at least the appearance that they were acting under the will of God. Coakley, in his chapter entitled "Managing Holiness: Raymond of Capua and Catherine of Siena" where he discusses the relationship between Raymond of Capua and Catherine, offers an alternate explanation as to why these two women had so much power and authority. Coakley suggests that in fact Gregory XI was looking for a successor to Bridget and thought that Catherine was suitable to take up Bridget's "mantle." Then logically this would suggest that Gregory XI approved of Bridget's activities and he was using both women to drum up support for himself. If this theory is correct Gregory XI thought Bridget was doing such a good job that he wanted a woman just like her in his corner. Coakley cites that fact that Bridget's confessor, Alfonso of Valdaterra, was sent to meet with Catherine, presumably in order to determine whether Catherine would have been a good successor to Bridget. Coakley further argues that Catherine was an ideal ally for Gregory XI because she could help him "pacify Italy."<sup>15</sup> Regardless of how Catherine was empowered, the fact remains that through her letters she gained greater influence and more importantly a

---

<sup>15</sup> Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 172.

voice. Even if Gregory XI “created” Catherine of Siena, surely, he got much more than he bargained for in Catherine Benincasa.

Catherine’s letters to Raymond of Capua are very different from many of the other letters she wrote to men. In her letters to Raymond of Capua, Catherine was not seeking anything. However, as seen above in Catherine’s letters to Hawkwood and Gregory XI, in both cases Catherine was calling the men to action on behalf of others, but with Raymond of Capua, Catherine was calling Raymond of Capua to action as a way to empower him.

In the Spring of 1376 Catherine sent Raymond of Capua to Avignon in advance of her (at that time) hopeful arrival later that year.<sup>16</sup> It can be assumed that Catherine sent Raymond to lay the groundwork for her arrival later that year. Raymond was the ideal choice because he was an important part of the Dominican establishment and therefore a respected part of the Roman Catholic Church. Raymond was also a learned man who spoke Latin, Italian, and probably a few other languages including French; this made him ideal for life at Avignon because the Pope did not speak Italian and few others at court would have spoken Italian. Catherine could only speak the Tuscan version of Italian so she would not have been able to readily communicate with the Pope. Instead, Catherine spent early 1376 in Florence convincing the government to make her an official emissary of Florence to the court at Avignon. Catherine succeeded and joined Raymond of Capua later in 1376.<sup>17</sup> This fact is contested and scholars continue to debate as to whether Catherine was an official emissary of Florence or not. Beattie in her article, “Catherine of Siena and the Papacy,” discusses this fact as possibly contested.<sup>18</sup> The scholarly consensus is that Florence did ask Catherine to go to Avignon on their behalf. Although Mollat disagrees and

---

<sup>16</sup> Muessig, Ferzoco, and Kienzle, *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, 85.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

argues that Catherine went to Gregory XI of her own volition.<sup>19</sup> It seems suspect that Florence would send an emissary with the specific purpose to bring back the Pope, when there was a major war brewing between Florence and the Papal states. The scholarly consensus is the more plausible explanation for two reasons: First, Florence was extremely politically volatile at this time in history and the Black and White Guelfs were competing for control in the city. Second, Catherine's appointment may not have seemed logical, but Florence may have wanted to give the appearance of finding a diplomatic solution, buying it valuable time, and keeping up appearances while simultaneously preparing for war. Essentially, they were using Catherine for their own political ends.<sup>20</sup>

As shown previously Catherine was in communication with Gregory XI as early as 1375 and even earlier.<sup>21</sup> These early letters were dictated to Raymond of Capua, who then probably translated them from Italian into Latin. However, with Raymond of Capua and other members of her *Famiglia* in Avignon, to whom then did she dictate her letters while she remained in Tuscany? The answer is most likely that one of the more literate members of her *Famiglia* stayed with her while she was in Florence.

Sending this letter was evidently a wise decision on the part of Catherine, because Raymond of Capua needed advice and encouragement while he was in Avignon. The tone Catherine used with Raymond of Capua was unique in her writings to men; while it still contained a strong call to action, the tone was really meant solely as encouragement. To other

---

<sup>19</sup> G., Mollat, and Janet Love. *The Popes at Avignon, 1305-1378. Translated from the 9th French Ed., 1949.* London, New York: T. Nelson, 1963, 166-167.

<sup>20</sup> Gene A., Brucker ed. "The War of the 'Eight Saints': 1375-1378." In *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378*, 297-335. Princeton University Press, 1962. Brucker goes into this debate in more detail in footnote 52 on pages 311-312.

<sup>21</sup> Catherine, *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*, 71. Scudder argues that Catherine may have had earlier contact (if indirect and through letters) with Gregory XI through his relative, Gerard du Puy, as early as 1372.

men Catherine had written with subtle and sometimes not so subtle tones of moral outrage, threatening, reprimanding and other tenors of a non-positive nature. In this case Catherine was writing to a dear friend who had done nothing wrong; he might have been floundering in the tumult that was the Papal court at Avignon, but he was trying his best. Catherine discerned that what Raymond of Capua needed most was a boost in confidence: “I say that these blows not only do not hurt us, but they shall be precious stones and pearls placed on this garment of most burning charity.”<sup>22</sup> Catherine encouraged Raymond of Capua, saying that these recent setbacks will soon abate and will leave him stronger. The modern idiomatic equivalent being “whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” In this letter, Catherine also employed some past techniques that she used in her earlier letter to Gregory XI; however, in this letter the same rhetorical device takes on a slightly different meaning. “When he has humbled and seen himself, he conceives hatred in such wise that he joys and exults in every pain and injury that he bears. Such a one is like a manful knight, who does not avoid blows.”<sup>23</sup> Again Catherine used the expectations attached to the male gender to convince Raymond of Capua to act, or in this case continue to act. In this epistle Catherine was not trying to engender a sense of shame in Raymond of Capua for failing to meet the expectation attached to the male gender. Instead, her intentions here are closer to what will be discussed in the next chapter, dealing with how Catherine utilized this technique in her letters to women. Catherine was trying to propel Raymond of Capua to new heights; she was trying to instill a sense of endurance, thick skin, and confidence in him. All of these could be considered traits ascribed to the male gender.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 84.

In all of the letters Catherine wrote using this technique, there was also a didactic element as well. She was teaching the will of God and in this letter maybe also reminding men the expectations surrounding societal gender norms. While this letter was written with the best intentions, there was also a small element of shame and insult. Even the vague insinuation of the loss of manhood would sting most men, and surely coming from Catherine would have hurt Raymond just enough to push him to continue his important work. The meaning of this letter was made more complicated by the relationship dynamics between Catherine and Raymond of Capua. First, as mentioned earlier Raymond of Capua had a large influence over what people perceive today as Catherine's literary tradition. Raymond of Capua was responsible for transcribing most of Catherine's letters and for writing her biography. So, while he did not write letters to himself, he still must have had a large part in developing and tweaking the themes that come across in Catherine's work. Considering a comparison between the education of Raymond of Capua and the education of Catherine, it could be said that the more traditional literary and formal elements of Catherine's writings may have been heavily influenced by Raymond. It is not a coincidence that the form of Catherine's letters, which can be seen in the openings, closings, and language of humility, conform closely to the protocol of the day. Second, there is an issue of power dynamics between Catherine and Raymond of Capua. Technically, Catherine had submitted herself to the authority of the Dominican order, which meant Raymond of Capua should have had control over her. He was, in fact, originally sent to Siena to exert some form of control over Catherine.<sup>24</sup> However, within a short time of meeting Catherine it became clear that Raymond of Capua was the subordinate to Catherine and not the other way around. Catherine seemed to be able to exert this type of control through her letters to many of the male figures she

---

<sup>24</sup> Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 171.

wrote to. Even to the Pope she had a sense of authority that is unprecedented. In the case of Raymond of Capua though, she had turned him into one of her disciples.

Even within Catherine's writings to men, using the language of virility, manliness, and knighthood, there is a great variety of subtly different meaning in each letter, catered to the audience and/or context of the letter. It is interesting that one recycled literary theme can attain so many different meanings depending on the circumstances. In her letters to men there was always an element of respect, but she still had to find a way to exert her will. Catherine had to resort to carefully employed rhetorical techniques to convince men of her ideas. It is possible that if Catherine were a nobleman, all she would have needed to do would have been to write a clear letter outlining her position and it would have been duly considered by the men she wrote to.

## Chapter II

### Virility and Womanhood

The worlds of men and women were very separate during the Italian Renaissance, Catherine being a notable exception. However, Catherine saw women's roles as equally important, if not always in temporal roles, then in spiritual roles. Women were able to attain their spiritual mandates through either the cell or experience in the wider world. In her early life Catherine, may have seen the cell as a more worthy of spiritual "achievement" but like Francis of Assisi she found, or was told to pursue by God, greater spiritual meaning in walking among and helping the common people. In the letters that will be discussed in this chapter, Catherine obviously valued spiritual experiences in both the cell and the wider world. The element that ties the following three letters together is the fact that in all three Catherine was compelling her readers to have a manly zeal for their spiritual enlightenment.

Catherine's letter to Sister Bartolomea is different from other letters that Catherine wrote to women. The imagery is much darker and including the character of the devil is unusual. Also the interpretation of this letter is much more difficult because the true meaning and context of the letter are more difficult to deduce.

Very little is known about Sister Bartolomea; she was a nun at the convent of Saint Stefano in Pisa and it is known that she had a correspondence with Catherine. More, however, can be said about nuns in general during this time. Many women during this time had one societal role, that of being a wife and mother. If this role did not suit the woman or other



circumstances forced her out of the primary role of that period, then occasionally a woman could leave her family to live in a cloister and become a nun. So, for an unknown reason Sister Bartolomea decided or was forced to leave her family for the cloister. The goal of the cloister for men and women was to close them off from the distractions of the outside world so that they could spend all of their time and energy in the pursuit of becoming closer to God. They lived in strict regimented communities and went without luxury or frill. The difference between monks and nuns was that monks could have been a part of public society had they chosen to be; whereas, nunneries were, for the lack of a better word, prisons, or refuges for women because in Renaissance Italy women were expected to remain indoors, either in the home or the nunnery. In some ways nunneries gave women something to do if they were not part of a household, taking care of the household and presumably raising children. A twist of irony is that in fact a way for women to participate in public life more than living a domestic life was to become a nun. Although many nuns were cloistered, not all were and even the ones that were, could be a part of public life, nuns often served the community as teachers or healers. Another largely female group that were similar to nuns was the large hermit population found in Siena. Allison Thurber, in her article: "Female Urban Reclusion in Siena at the Time of Catherine of Siena," argues that these hermits were highly influential to Catherine in her formative years. Thurber also says that hermits played similar societal roles to those played by nuns.<sup>1</sup> Being a hermit or a nun was a way for a woman to fill a societal niche without having to live the domestic life. Of course, some spiritual leaders during this period saw women's roles as purely domestic. Saint Bernardino was a near contemporary to Catherine, both Bernardino and Catherine lived in Siena and were charismatic members of the spiritual community. However, their views on the role of women

---

<sup>1</sup> Muessig, Ferzoco, and Kienzle, *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, 48.

were somewhat opposed. Bernardino believed that women were doing their spiritual duty by staying home and tending to their family.<sup>2</sup> Whereas Catherine saw a woman's role as far broader, they could be healers, teachers, nuns, advisors, and maybe even leaders. One historical theory as to why women were allowed to enter this profession is that it gave men a place to put unruly women, where they could be more easily controlled, the idea being to keep women occupied, but occupied with matters of little import while men dealt with more "consequential" matters.

Catherine, however, saw the cloistered life, and the life in service of God differently. Whether serving God in the cloister or outside as a tertiary, someone who was formally part of a religious order, but was not cloistered. A tertiary was free to live where they pleased.<sup>3</sup> Tertiaries were also allowed to wear certain elements of their particular order's habit. Catherine did not see a woman's role as lesser than a man's. She did not see a woman's place in the world as far from the center of attention as possible. That is why she called for women to "man up"; she did not want women relegated to the cloister or the home. Catherine's desire to see spiritual women empowered, followed from the great difference in power between men and women within the Church. Men, particularly religious men, could choose a cloistered life or they could choose a more public life. This is where the patriarchy cut both ways, as women were forced into the private sphere whether they wanted to or not. Increasingly men were forced into the public sphere whether they wanted to or not.

In Catherine's letter to Sister Bartolomea, she used the devil as a literary device, as a metaphor for all of the bad things in a woman's (or man's) life that could slow her down in her quest for achievement. The "devil" could instill weariness, laziness, fear, and doubt in women.

---

<sup>2</sup> Polecritti, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy*.

<sup>3</sup> Tertiary implies three levels, inside of the Catholic orders the first level is reserved for the cloistered male adherents to the order and the second level is reserved for the cloistered female adherents of that order.

Support for why the devil in this case was meant to be a metaphor is because it was not God or Jesus who was responsible for dispelling the “devil’s” ill effects; it was the woman’s responsibility, the idea being that the woman had to pick herself up again and continue her fight. She was responsible for self-motivation and shaking the temptations of the devil. In Catherine’s letter to Bartolomea she offers a warning on the subject of temptation.

the devil may say to thee: ‘How does this prayer uplift thee, since thou dost not offer it with any feeling or desire? It would be better for thee not to make it.’ Yet do not give up, nor fall for this into confusion, but reply manfully: ‘I would rather exert myself for Christ crucified, feeling pain, gloom and inward conflicts, than not exert myself and feel repose.’

...

the devil said: ‘What wilt thou do? for all the time of thy life thou shalt abide in these pains, and then thou shalt have hell.’ She then answered with manly heart, and without any fear, and with holy hatred of herself, saying: ‘I do not avoid pains, for I have chosen pains for my refreshment.’<sup>4</sup>

The inner dialogue with the “devil” here was supposed to represent fear, self-doubt, self-loathing, and maybe male/societal repression. The devil could represent the hardships of life, and even the particular hardships that women faced. The devil was representing that life is hard and full of struggles, but Catherine argued for the virtues of an ascetic lifestyle, the virtues of not taking the easy path and giving into societal pressures. Traditionally women were supposed to be meek and therefore more susceptible to the “devil’s” temptations to give up and give in. Catherine wanted to give women a powerful voice of their own. Interesting that Catherine had hit upon an element of modern psychology, the importance of an inner voice of self-love. The devil is self-deprecation and Jesus is self-love. In this situation, however, Jesus was not as much involved; it was truly women standing up for themselves. Catherine’s description of the scene

---

<sup>4</sup> Catherine, *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*, 97-98.

brings to mind a classic motif in Christian iconography, the angel on one shoulder and the devil on the other. When responding to voices of self-doubt (in this case personified in the form of the devil signified here with quotation marks “devil”), Catherine wanted women to have a strong internal response. This fact again brings up a discussion of gendered expectations, and how these expectations change the meaning of a literary device. The meaning changed upon whether the letter was addressed to a man or a woman. As seen in the previous chapter, Catherine took advantage of the societal expectations of the male gender, claiming that actions like bravery, perseverance in the face of strong opposition, chivalrous actions, and strong moral character were expected male traits. Thus, not living up to these traits was not meeting the expectations of society and God. The failure to meet these expectations was worthy of ridicule. For the female gender this idea was reversed; acting in a manly way was not part of societal expectations. In fact, in general, the expectation was that women would not participate in traditionally male roles in the temporal or spiritual world. So the traits associated with “manliness” were not very important for women to possess. That is why Catherine referred to them as “manly” traits and why she incites “manly” actions, rather than feminine actions or just leaving gender out of her letters, in the women to whom she wrote.

In Catherine’s letter to Sister Bartolomea Catherine was offering advice about a problem within the cloister and that said problem had created an inner crisis within Sister Bartolomea. With letters to men it is much easier to divine the historical context than it is when Catherine was writing to women. As discussed in the methodology section, Catherine was one of just a handful of female authors during her time, and writing about the female experience was just as infrequent. The advice in this letter also offers no clues as to the context of the problem within the cloister. This is true with most of Catherine’s letters; her advice is not specific. This is

especially true in her letters to women, where, unlike in her letters to men, she is not really addressing a specific event. This advice is part of what makes her letters stand the test of time: that her advice to sister Bartolomea is universal. In the face of fear and doubt according to Catherine, one must find a way to persevere, to push through hard times and accomplish something great.

Catherine wrote to many cloistered nuns. She had strong relationships with many nuns even though she was a tertiary. With several of the nuns in particular she had long correspondences with them. These letters show a very different side of Catherine to the letters she wrote to men. In these letters she was really concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of her sisters. Catherine tried to help them live fulfilling spiritual lives. From Catherine's letters, it is apparent that on one hand they were general and could have applied to any sister, but on the other hand Catherine showed that she knew each sister she wrote to very well, she sent them lessons that particularly applied to each woman. To Sister Bartolomea Catherine wrote about temptation and to Sister Daniella Catherine wrote about how to follow the path God has laid out before Sister Daniella and to an extent the path Sister Daniella laid for herself.

Catherine's letters to Sister Daniella are similar to the one she wrote to Sister Bartolomea, in that, first, Catherine was addressing a problem that a nun was having in her cloister and that, second, the advice Catherine gave was extremely general and could apply to many different people in different situations. However, the letters also differ in that the letters to Daniella were more intimate. Catherine had a continuing correspondence with Daniella and it seems that Catherine saw some elements of herself in Sister Daniella. She saw a fire and a need to change the world for the better even if that meant exiting the societal norms and doing things that were not acceptable to the prevailing authorities. Sister Bartolomea, Sister Daniela, and

Catherine lived in the same world. As elaborated above, the roles of women were severely limited during this period. First of course the society in general set up rigid gender norms and second, as a nun, additional rules were placed upon Sister Daniella, although this was traded against additional privilege gained by being part of a religious order. However, from Catherine's letters both Catherine and Sister Daniella wanted to operate outside of rules and social norms. Catherine managed to escape these norms and rules. She wrote to Sister Daniella in part about the morality behind breaking or bending the rules and about how to find the courage to break the rules.

Work, then, my daughter, in that field where thou seest that God calls thee to work; and do not get distressed or anxious in mind over what I have said to thee, but endure manfully. Fear and serve God, with no regard to thyself; and then do not care for what people may say, except to have compassion on them.<sup>5</sup>

From the contents of the letter it is apparent that Sister Daniella was worried about following her heart and what she believed God wanted her to do as opposed to what she was allowed to do or what her gender and station would make it socially acceptable to do. Catherine's response was that she should not care about rules and social norms; she should do what she was called by God to do. This dilemma echoed Catherine's youth. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, Catherine believed she was called by God multiple times to abandon her social obligations and her own desires to serve God. First, she convinced her parents to allow her not to marry and second she was called away from her cell and into public life by God. Similarly, Sister Daniella wanted to venture into the wider world to do good on behalf of Christ. From the contents of the letter it becomes obvious that Sister Daniella wanted to leave Orvieto and go to Rome. To accomplish this Sister Daniella would have to overcome obstacles, Catherine again said that, like

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 177.

Sister Bartolomea, Sister Daniella would have to adopt masculine traits to help her overcome these obstacles. Catherine called Sister Daniella to this masculine behavior asking her to “endure manfully.” This request was gentler and kinder than the similar language she used with men. This difference started with the phrasing of the comparison. Catherine asked women to “reply manfully” or “endure manfully” whereas she asked men to be knights or to prove that they are in fact knights. In Catherine’s letters men had something to prove, an expectation to live up to; whereas, women were encouraged to act like men for a certain period of time to accomplish something that would otherwise not be expected of them. Catherine’s letters to women were superb and rare examples of women writing to women to encourage one another to do things hundreds of years before they were common place for women to do. However, Catherine’s letters also show how she was still vulnerable to the societal expectations surrounding women. Catherine wrote “endure manfully” instead of “endure” or “endure womanly,” it is quite clear that no one, not even Catherine, expected women to be able to resist the devil or endure criticism of their choices. It was the belief that it was the female condition to be weak. It is ironic that Catherine disproved her own assumptions about femininity, in her life Catherine overcame her own assumptions about the weakness of her gender. Catherine’s life is one (of many) clear example that women are not weak.

It is also important to mention two other literary devices utilized in this letter by Catherine to help encourage Sister Daniella. First is the comparison of Sister Daniella to the bride of Christ; this device will be discussed later in the essay. Second is the use of light imagery in her letters. The three devices mentioned in this chapter together contribute to the conclusion that the path Daniella wanted to take was ordained by God, in the opinion of Catherine. The idea was that her path was literally illuminated by the “light of faith” or the “light provided by her

faith” and willed by her husband “Christ.” Catherine was saying that this was the correct path for her to take and that all she needed was the courage, a masculine trait, to be able to actually leave her home and follow the path that she was called to.

Cloistered nuns were not the only women Catherine wrote to; she wrote to any woman rich or poor, who needed encouragement or spiritual wisdom. As a tertiary of the Dominican order she understood the importance of doing God’s work outside of the cloister. She thought that going out in the world and helping people was a very important part of serving God and that one did not have to be part of a religious order or politically powerful to serve God, it is clear from her letters that all that is required to serve God is to live life in a virtuous and holy way. To help everyone achieve this goal, she wrote to a great variety of people and on various topics; she wrote repeatedly to low and high class women alike to encourage and help them better serve God. Catherine garnered influential political support through her connections with the powerful and elite. However, Catherine often wrote to common men and women as well. It tells a great deal about Catherine’s character that she wrote to her friends not only to get things from them, but she often wrote to them in hard times, to lend strength when it was needed most.

Before starting this section, it should be noted that the only way to differentiate this Monna Agnese from another Monna Agnese(s) to whom Catherine wrote, is to give the name of her husband, Messer Orso Malavolti. This fact of course is also an excellent starting point for the discussion of female nobility in the Italian Renaissance. As mentioned earlier Cohn and Kelly-Gadol discuss the general decline in rights that women experienced in this period. However, Cohn notes some exceptions to this rule. Noble women and widows tended to have more power than their poorer or married counterparts. Monna Agnese fell into both of these sub categories.



At the time this letter was written Monna Agnese was a recently widowed noble woman. Monna Agnese had also recently lost her child. This was an extremely difficult time for Monna Agnese, which is the reason Catherine wrote to her. Ironically, however, this unfortunate time in Monna Agnese's life was also the zenith of her power. In Cohn's "Last Wills: Family, Women, and the Black Death in Central Italy," he explains this phenomenon. Cohn argues that when men died during the Bubonic Plague and left widows, those widows were able to wield a lot of power, if not in life, then in death. They could write and amend wills, which in Renaissance society was hugely important. They could affect the flow of large amounts of wealth and cherished possessions.<sup>6</sup> Also Monna Agnese was a noble woman and Cohn notes in his essay, "Women in the Streets," that noble women were not subject to the same kind of diminishment of power as was seen in the middle and lower classes, especially as it pertained to a woman's access to legal defense or the right to confront men on the streets.<sup>7</sup> However, Kelly-Godal focuses on experience of noble women; she argues that Medieval noble women had far more rights and powers than did their Renaissance counterparts. While women in the Renaissance did often receive an almost equal education to their male counterparts, they were now expected to stay in the house. This societal model was based on the ancient Athenian system. This high quality of education of course also explains why Catherine could have such an in-depth correspondence with many women, which may not have been possible a century earlier; however, Kelly-Godal might argue that this comes at the cost of many of the freedoms that women enjoyed in the Mediaeval period.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Cohn, *Women in the Streets*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Kelly, *Women, History and Theory*.

Catherine wrote to many different kinds of people, from numerous backgrounds. So far in this chapter examples of letters to fellow members of religious orders, recognized members of the Roman Catholic Church, have been analyzed. However, Catherine did not see religion as something that necessarily stemmed from the Catholic hierarchy, even though she deeply loved and respected the system. As discussed earlier, she saw flaws in that system. Catherine thought that anyone could do God's work and as such wrote extensively about complex spiritual problems and about her own theology to many very religious persons, but who were not church officials. In part this particular letter to Monna Agnese followed this pattern, where Catherine used her personal letters to further her religious doctrine. In this letter, she wrote to Monna Agnese about the dangers of impatience. Patience as a virtue and impatience as a sin are themes throughout Catherine's letters especially to women, but often times to men as well. Here patience has a different meaning than it does today. It may be instructive to look back at the Latin roots of the word to understand its meaning in a spiritual and Medieval context. Patience comes from the Latin *patientia*, meaning suffering. So in this context it means to be able to endure suffering patiently. In Catherine's life of ascetic practices; patience played a large role in her life, she believed that enduring suffering brought one closer to God. Often when Catherine was writing about patience, especially to women patience took on a different but closely related meaning, it meant to resist sinful temptation, to fortify one's spirit against the temptations of the devil and the temptation to over indulge in the temporal world. There is also a much more personal element to this letter, as mentioned above Monna Agnese had lost her husband and child, and this letter addressed those losses. One of Catherine's greatest strengths in her rhetoric is her ability to bolster her audience's spirit, to give them hope, to push them to new heights. Instead of

commiserating with Monna Agnese over her loss, instead Catherine urged vigilance in the face of grief.

Since, then, this virtue is so excellent and pleasing to God and useful to us and saving to our neighbour, arise, dearest daughter, from the sleep of negligence and ignorance, casting to earth the weakness and frailty of thy heart, that it feel no suffering nor impatience over anything that God permits to us, so that we may not fall either into the common kind of impatience, or into the special kind, as we were saying before, but serve our sweet Saviour manfully, with liberty of heart and true perfect patience. If we do otherwise, we shall lose grace by the first sort of impatience, and by the second we shall hinder our state of perfection; and you would not attain that to which God has called you.<sup>9</sup>

In this letter, in particular one can see the tenderness and sweetness with which she wrote when she was writing to female friends and peers. While she wrote with similar sweetness to some men, most notably Gregory XI, in this letter she wanted nothing from Monna Agnese. Although it should be said that Monna Agnese and her late husband provided land for Catherine to set up a monastery, so it could be argued that this letter came out of political expediency, desire for unnamed future assistance, or obligation.

From most women Catherine wanted nothing from them, with the notable exception of Giovanna Queen of Naples; she only encouraged them to better serve God and looked to offer them advice and counsel. This was in stark contrast from the letters she wrote to men. This was reflected in the subtle difference in meaning connoted when she asked the recipient of her letter to act “manfully” To men the device was an insult, a slight to their honor, a refined and pointed threat that if they did not comply with her wishes they may have been labeled as not “manly”. To women it was a call of encouragement, a call to rise above what was expected, and a call to adopt traits normally, during the Renaissance, reserved for men. It is impossible to measure the

---

<sup>9</sup> Catherine, *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*, 31.

effectiveness of this device. It is not known what happened to most of the women to whom Catherine wrote and, while the men Catherine wrote to often ended up doing or promising to do what she wanted, it is impossible to know whether this device played any role in those decisions. It is actually impossible to know whether Catherine had a role in those decisions. All that is known for sure is that this rhetorical device that played upon the gendered expectations of the time was a common thread applied to letters to both genders and held a key position in Catherine's rhetorical arsenal, for she used it often and used it in subtle ways, in conjunction with other devices, to create some truly powerful and unique epistles.

# Chapter III

## The Bride of Christ

Similar to Catherine's other letters to men, she used different rhetorical devices in her letters to gain power over men, so that they might bend their will to her own. She had little compunction about subtly manipulating men to help accomplish her goals. In addition to questioning her recipient's manhood, Catherine repeatedly compared the Roman Catholic Church to the bride of Christ, a metaphor that had been used by authors of the Church before, but in Catherine's work the personification and feminization of the Church was brought to life in Catherine's letters. Catherine was also mystically married to Christ and often referred to herself, as well as the Church, as the bride of Christ. Catherine often almost conflated these two meanings of the bride of Christ to give herself authority to call men to action on behalf of the Church. Also, as mentioned in chapter two Catherine wrote to men in positions of power both in the Roman Catholic religious hierarchy, having a close relationship with two popes during her life time, and in more secular political arenas.

In Catherine's struggle to end the War of Eight Saints she did not only write to Sir John Hawkwood. While Hawkwood was very wealthy, powerful, and had a company of mercenaries at his disposal, he was still a pawn of the Italian city-states and the Papacy. To end this bloody war and to help ease tensions between the Italian city-states and the Papacy, Catherine wrote to the Florentine government. Catherine's end goal was to pave the way for Gregory XI's return to Rome. This already arduous feat would be undoubtedly made easier if half of Italy was not engulfed in War.

In 1376 while Catherine was in Avignon she wrote to Buonaccorso di Lapo, who lived in Florence at the time. From what is known about Buonaccorso di Lapo, he was a prominent member of the Florentine Republic at the time. Catherine was writing to him about the War of Eight Saints and Florence's rebellion against the Papacy. As noted earlier, it seems to be unclear as to Florence's intentions when they sent Catherine to Avignon as an embassy to the Papacy. This letter seems to have been part of Catherine's campaign to bring Florence and the other city-states in Florence's coalition back under Papal control. This letter was part of Catherine's larger political campaign to end the war. At the end of June in 1376 Catherine wrote to the Eight of War, a group of eight men charged with raising funds through taxation for the war, in that letter she demanded that Florence desist in its efforts to undermine the Pope. She said that Florence must humble itself before the Pope so that they may receive mercy and forgiveness. The letter to the Eight of War was a more general letter to Florence itself. However, her letter to Buonaccorso di Lapo seems to have been a more targeted approach, a more personal approach. It can be safely assumed that this letter was also written sometime in the summer of 1376. Her overarching goal with all of her writings surrounding the War of Eight Saints was to mend wounds between the Tuscan city-states and the Papacy, to support Gregory XI, and bring the Christian world together.

Catherine was very involved in Florentine politics. This letter was certainly a part of that struggle. Catherine was intelligent about how she used the chaotic nature of Florentine politics to her advantage. She knew that she could (and in fact did) garner political support amongst the prominent Black Guelph, supporters of the Pope's political power, families and politicians, while she needed to persuade the White Guelphs, people who opposed any increase in the political power of the Pope. The White Guelphs were particularly angry with the Pope because he ordered a papal interdict, and a grain embargo against Florence, which left the Florentine people both

literally starving and spiritual starving. It is likely that Buonaccorso di Lapo was a member of the White Guelfs.<sup>1</sup> The only mention of Buonaccorso di Lapo in other sources is the mention of someone with the same name(it could be him), twelve years after the war being painted in the genre of *Pittura Infamante*, a common method of shaming, where a person was painted hanging upside down with demons and snakes surrounding them. There was a fresco of Buonaccorso di Lapo painted on the Palazzo del Podesta to present him as a traitor to Florence for going over to Milan.<sup>2</sup> Before Buonaccorso di Lapo betrayed Florence he was a prior three times, one of the nine guild members at any one time that governed the city in the Palazzo della Signoria (Palazzo Vecchio) who were part of the city government (the Signoria) and twice a Gonfalonier (of justice), who lead the priori, and was in charge of the internal security of Florence.<sup>3</sup> Buonaccorso di Lapo would have had a great deal of power during this period and if Catherine could have convinced him to support her cause, she might have been able to succeed in her mission to end a bloody war ravaging the people she loved, while still supporting her Pope. To achieve this end, she used an interesting combination of literary devises that synergized, which gave her more authority over a man that had massive influence in one of the three strongest city-states in Italy.

Dearest brother in Christ sweet Jesus: I Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, write to you in His precious Blood: with desire to see you and the others your lords, pacify your heart and soul in His most sweet Blood, wherein all hate and warfare is quenched, and all human pride is lowered. For in the Blood man sees God humbled to his own level, assuming our humanity, which was opened and nailed and fastened on the Cross, so that it flows from the wounds of the Body of Christ crucified, and pours over us the Blood which is ministered to us by the ministers of Holy Church. I beg you by the love of Christ crucified to receive the treasure of the Blood given you by the Bride of Christ. Be reconciled, be reconciled to her in the Blood; recognize your sins and offences against her.... No more thus! For the love of Christ crucified! Hold not His Blood cheap! That which has not been done in past time, do it now. Do not feel bitter or

---

<sup>1</sup> Brucker, "The War of the 'Eight Saints,'" 333.

<sup>2</sup> George R., Brent. *Public Painting and Visual Culture in Early Republican Florence*. Cambridge University Press, 2017, 107.

<sup>3</sup> Janet, Ross. *Florentine Palaces & Their Stories*. J. M. Dent & Company, 1905, 220.

scornful should it seem to you that the Holy Father demanded what appeared very hard and impossible to do.<sup>4</sup>

To Catherine the figurative blood of Christ had power; it was a source of spiritual nourishment, and to Catherine it may also have been a source of temporal nourishment. To Catherine through transubstantiation the wine she received in sacrament literally transformed into the blood of Christ. The Church is a part of the larger conduit (the conduit is mainly made up of priests giving communion) for this blood as the bride of Christ. The Church is the source and that gives it additional power. Catherine ordered Buonaccorso di Lapo and his fellow lords (probably translated as Signori or Priori) to end the bloodshed. As seen in Catherine's letter to Gregory XI, Catherine saw the betrayal of Florence as a betrayal of not only Gregory XI, but also of the Church. She saw this as the ultimate act of ungratefulness. Florence was betraying the Church, which had given them spiritual nourishment. Not only must the Florentine lords, especially, Buonaccorso di Lapo, humble themselves before Gregory XI, but they have also offended the Church itself as the bride of Christ and must make amends to it. In fact she goes so far as to say that the Lords of Florence have sinned against the Church. The discussion of the blood alone offers a compelling reason to end the fighting. The juxtaposition of the figurative blood of Christ and the literal blood of the soldiers and civilians killed must have been particularly effective. Catherine was leveraging guilt as a major persuasive tool. In the subtext of Catherine's letter not only did the leaders of Florence have the blood of the dead on their hands, but they had also wasted and taken for granted the blood of Christ. Christ died on the cross for the sins of man; and, instead of doing their best to realize Jesus' vision of the world, the government of Florence squandered his gift by making war instead of peace and betraying St.

---

<sup>4</sup> Catherine, *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*, 107-109.



Peter's heir. It should be reiterated that the White Guelfs had good reason for forming a coalition and going to war with the Pope and that Gregory XI could have probably backed down, but instead continued his brutal campaign against Florence until they surrendered. The fault for the war was on both sides and Catherine recognized this in a way, in writing her letter to Sir John Hawkwood. However, it is clear who the traitors are, anyone who does not recognize the authority of her Pope.

The War of Eight Saints and the transition of the Papacy back to Rome were the first two major political crises that Catherine actively worked on. In her later letters she also used similar methods to deal with the continuing problems within the Church. Catherine had to find a way to carefully navigate the patriarchal hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church while the very institution was splitting in two before her eyes.

Shortly after Gregory XI made his return to Rome in 1377, he died a little more than a year later in March of 1378. Urban VI was elected to replace him by the College of Cardinals. However, the College of Cardinals did not do this of their own free will. As mentioned earlier, Rome, at this time, was a lawless city, ruled by weak and corrupt church officials. The city was falling into ruins; old Roman buildings were being pillaged and the remaining denizens of Rome were enraged by the series of foreign Popes. They wanted an Italian Pope and threatened the College of Cardinals if they did not elect one. So, the Cardinals acquiesced to save themselves and elected Italian born, Bartolomeo Prignano who was born in nearby Itri, as the next Pope, Urban VI. Shortly after the election many Cardinals fled Rome to head back to Avignon. In Beattie's article, "Catherine of Siena and the Papacy," she also analyzes the relationship Catherine had with Urban VI and claims that the Cardinals' flight from Rome was caused by Urban VI's unstable mental state and increasingly erratic and high tempered decisions.

In fact, in Beattie's article it was Urban VI who disposed of the old cardinals. In addition, many cardinals had stayed in Avignon to help move the papal court to Rome.<sup>5</sup> There they elected a new pope to rule Christendom in direct competition with Urban VI. The Avignon Pope was Clement VII and this is what caused the Great Schism in The Western Church. Catherine after working so hard to bring the Papacy back to Rome, the seat of Saint Peter, had to now defend her Pope against his competition in Avignon and by extension her competition. The Schism would consume the rest of Catherine's life. Except for a brief part of 1377 when Catherine took time away from papal politics to establish her monastery. In this last phase of Catherine's life, her aversion to eating became more extreme and she began to suffer from the ever-increasing symptoms of malnutrition. She was increasingly frail and spent the rest of her life in Rome. Catherine spent the last three years of her life in Rome helping to organize Urban VI's efforts against the "Anti-Pope" Clement VII.

In Catherine's first surviving letter to Urban VI, she wrote a masterful letter to guide Urban VI's first steps as the new Pope. The Pope was not only dealing with the fallout from the great Schism, having to choose all new cardinals and re-staff the Church from the desertion to Avignon, but he had to deal with unruly Romans and many Tuscan cities were still in revolt. This first letter was very general; it laid out how Catherine thought the Pope and, by extension the Church, should run. She wanted to avoid many of the old problems that plagued the Church under Gregory XI. Although times were tough, Catherine seemed to be approaching this letter with cautious optimism, as it turns out unfounded optimism. She wrote of high ideals for Urban VI and the Church to ascribe to and of mercy for any returning deserters. The tone of her letters would change towards Urban VI as the seriousness of the Schism sunk in. It is now notable that

---

<sup>5</sup> Muessig, Ferzoco, and Kienzle, *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, 87-88.

this letter is much more complex than some of Catherine's other letters. This letter is extremely rich with metaphors, which are drawn out to their fullest effect. Catherine had several tropes or literary themes that she recycled throughout her correspondences, of which in any given letter she might utilize one or two. In this letter, she used several and introduced some new ones.

Oh me, sweet my Babbo, bring us a remedy! And give refreshment to the desperate desires of the servants of God, who die and cannot die. They wait with great desire that you as a true shepherd should put your hand to correcting these things, not only with words but with deeds, while the pearl of justice, joined to mercy, shines on your breast; correcting in truth, without any servile fear, those who nourish them at the breast of the sweet Bride of Christ, the ministers of the Blood.

But truly, most holy father, I do not see how this can be well done if you do not make over anew the garden of your Bride, stocking it with good virtuous plants; taking pains to choose a troop of very holy men, in whom you find virtue and no fear of death. Do not aim at grandeur, but let them be shepherds who rule their flocks with zeal. And a troop of good cardinals, who may be upright columns of yours, helping you to bear the weight of many burdens, with divine help. Oh, how blessed will be my soul then, when I shall see that which is hers given back to the Bride of Christ, and those nourished at her breast regarding not their own good, but the glory and praise of the Name of God, and feeding on the food of souls at the table of the holy Cross. I have no question that then your lay subjects will correct themselves—for they will not be able to help it, constrained by the holy and pure life of the clergy. We are not, then, to sleep over it, but manfully and without negligence to do what you can, even unto death, for the glory and praise of the Name of God.<sup>6</sup>

This letter was a call to action, and the first few months of Urban VI's papacy were critical, Catherine knew that he needed to carefully guide this new Church or it would be doomed and one of Catherine's life projects would be a failure. Catherine urged Urban VI to carefully consider whom he placed in leadership positions and his new policies. She gave very general advice about what it is to be an effective leader. To this end she used a lot of gardening imagery and shepherding imagery. Catherine wanted Urban VI to cultivate a strong and healthy

---

<sup>6</sup> Catherine, *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*, 147-148.

church. This would require Urban VI to reform the hierarchy of clergy and to cultivate a new “crop” of virtuous cardinals. Comparing Urban VI to a shepherd and the Church to a flock was not only an apt metaphor, it was also a great compliment, Jesus was also often compared to a shepherd, so in an indirect way Catherine was comparing Urban VI to Jesus. Catherine also employed her virility rhetorical device here as well, although in the above passage Catherine was referring to herself and the Pope and her aim in this letter was not to directly chastise so the subtler meaning was not derogatory, as in to her letter to Sir John Hawkwood. In this letter this device’s purpose was to inspire, and this is more similar to her letter to Raymond of Capua. Earlier in the letter she also compares Urban VI to a manly knight.

Therefore it is extremely necessary for you to be established in perfect charity, wearing the pearl of justice, as I said; that you may not mind the world, nor poor people used to evil, nor any injuries of theirs; but manfully correct them, like a true knight and just shepherd, uprooting vices and implanting virtues, ready to lay down your life if needs be.<sup>7</sup>

This passage seems very comparable to the passage identified earlier in chapter II on page twenty five, when Catherine wrote to Gregory XI. As in that letter there was a tone of respect, admiration, and love, but also the slight hint of expectation and obligation. Catherine expertly played off of the societal expectations of the male gender, again similar to the earlier analyzed cases. In this letter, however, she paired the expectation of a strong male father figure with the expectations that surrounded maternal figures, the authority, and nurturing aspects of a mother, of the Virgin Mary. In one moment, Urban VI is both the strong and “in-charge” paterfamilias of the Roman Catholic Church and a boy suckling at the breast of his mother. This superb contradiction gave Catherine’s writing its uniquely persuasive quality. Catherine also desired to

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 147.

convey a sense of (non-sexual) intimacy with Urban VI by calling him the Tuscan word for Father “Babbo” just like she did with Gregory XI. There was also the intimate image of the church nursing Urban VI. Though this image did more than convey a sense of intimacy, it conveyed to Urban VI that the Church will provide spiritual nourishment. As Catherine’s anorexia and general asceticism became more intense, she cared less for the temporal world and more for the spiritual world. She drew this energy from nursing the blood from the side of Christ and in turn she invited Urban VI to draw spiritual strength from the Church in the form of milk. This figurative and intimate exchange of bodily fluids signified the transfer of spiritual energy from the source of Christ. Catherine was trying to show Urban VI that he had an obligation to the Church as his bride, the analogy being that just as one is wholly devoted to one’s bride, Urban VI must be wholly devoted to the church. Urban VI owed this devotion because of the nourishment the Church provided, again the analogy being that just as a mother provides nourishment to her child, the Church provides for Urban VI. Catherine had the difficult task of instructing Urban VI about running the Church and reminding him of his obligations to the Church without diminishing his pride. This letter accomplished that task. During this period in Catherine’s career she stressed that men should be grateful to the church for the nourishment it provided. The same themes can be seen in her letter to the Three Italian Cardinals.

Looking at the convergence between the Church as the bride of Christ and Catherine as the bride of Christ (through her mystical marriage), one can see where Catherine derived the authority to write to popes and proceed to tell them what to do. In Catherine’s mind, or maybe Raymond of Capua’s biography, she did not want this authority, she was told by God to use it to reform the Church. To Catherine and many others, she was merely a vessel for God’s will on earth. Throughout her letters to men, Catherine saw herself as the protector of the bride of Christ,

as the voice of the Church. Though, in her letter to the Pope her tone was less commanding, the undercurrent was still there, that since God had appointed her to protect and reform the Church, Catherine expected to see certain results. Catherine tasked the Pope to be a good shepherd and gardener so that when the Pope was tending to the Church's garden he could heal the Church's wounds. Catherine thought carefully about the structure of this letter, she knew how important it would be to the trajectory of the Church, that Urban VI have a good start to his papacy. To this end, Catherine implemented many of her rhetorical devices and strategies in this letter to achieve her goals.

Catherine had to deal with any obstacle to her goals for the Church quickly. She took a hard line with anyone who opposed her. However, as she stated in her letter to Urban VI, she was willing to offer mercy to anyone that would repent and come back over to the "true" Pope. With the Pope Catherine offers respect and sweetness, but to traitors the only thing they will receive from Catherine is mercy.

Catherine had to deal with the repercussions of the Schism for the rest of her life. She lived in Rome and was trying to advance the cause of the "True Pope" from afar through her letters. One of her most scathing surviving letters is written to three Cardinals that betrayed Urban VI for Clement VII. During Urban VI's election, many of the Cardinals were French, and, although French nationalism was just a budding idea and Italian nationalism was a far-off idea only conceived of by a few visionaries, there was still a perception of identity with what would one day be nations. For example, the mob in Rome, first wanted a Roman Pope, but compromised for a pope born in "Italy" All this to say that it is not surprising that many French Cardinals abandoned Urban VI, but it is somewhat surprising that the Italian Cardinals also abandoned Urban VI. This may be why Catherine was so incensed by their betrayal and why she

wrote to them to bring them back into the fold. If these were cardinals that were a part of the election of Urban VI, then these were three of the four “Italian” Cardinals in Italy at the time. There were sixteen Cardinals in total in Rome at the time and six remained in Avignon for a total of twenty-two cardinals.<sup>8</sup> To my knowledge it is not known which cardinals Catherine was specifically writing to. It was probably three of the four Italian cardinals in Rome, but it is possible that that there were three cardinals left in Avignon. Even though the specifics are not known about the individual cardinals. It is true that cardinals were important to the functioning of the Church and these men were critical to Catherine’s mission to reunite the Church. Similar to the other letters she had written that are analyzed in this chapter, Catherine talks repeatedly about the nourishment provided by the bride of Christ and the allegiance that is owed to the bride of Christ. In this letter Catherine also employed blood imagery and light imagery, drawing from earlier letters.

Where is the gratitude which you ought to have for the Bride who has nourished you at her breast? I see in us naught but such ingratitude as dries up the fountain of pity. What shows me that you are ungrateful, coarse, and mercenary? The persecution which you, together with others, are inflicting on that sweet Bride, at a time when you ought to be shields, to ward off the blows of heresy..... But if you will return to the fold, and feed in truth at the breast of the Bride of Christ, you shall be received in mercy, by Christ in heaven and by Christ on earth, despite the iniquity you have wrought.<sup>9</sup>

Catherine, turned again to the idea of taking in bodily fluids and the idea that without the Church the cardinals would have spiritually starved. Catherine thought that the betrayal of Urban VI was being ungrateful towards the nourishment that had been provided by the Church. It is interesting that not only was the idea of nursing connected with receiving spiritual nourishment, but also the second time it is mentioned it was a sign of submission and humility towards the

---

<sup>8</sup> Richard C., Trexler. “Rome on the Eve of the Great Schism.” *Speculum* 42, no. 3 (1967): 489–509, 504.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine, *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*, 166-168.

Church the that Cardinals had betrayed. Like in her letter to Urban VI she maternalized and feminized the Church. She wanted the cardinals to see how much they owed the Church. Catherine was relying on the guilt felt by a son who has not taken care of his mother or a husband who has not taken care of his bride. Here too Catherine preyed upon the gendered societal expectations of her audience to persuade them to accept her call to action. Men were expected to be devoted husbands and sons and to provide for their “weaker” female relations. One reason that Catherine personified the Church as female in letters to men was to give it the quality of vulnerability. Catherine was an expert at manipulating sexist, detrimental, and gendered expectations about women (and sometimes men) to persuade powerful men to help her. Even though Catherine was furious with the cardinals for betraying Urban VI, she still wanted them back and said that they would be granted mercy if they returned to the true Church. The theme of mercy seems prevalent in Catherine’s feminization of the Church. Where Urban VI might look weak for offering mercy to returning cardinals, Catherine again exploited her gender to do it for him.



# Chapter IV

## The Brides of Christ

When writing to women, Catherine often called women to action using the term bride of Christ; however, when Catherine wrote to women using this language she was not referring to the bride of Christ as a metaphor for the Roman Catholic Church. Instead Catherine said that any of the women she wrote to, presumably any woman in the (Christian) world, could have been a bride of Christ. In these letters the title or metaphor of the bride of Christ had the meaning of being wholly devoted to the Church. These women would have upheld and fought for the values of the Church. An important distinction should be made here that Catherine did not necessarily agree with all aspects of the Roman Catholic Church, Catherine saw the many problems the Church faced, in her letter to Urban VI she began to lay out a remedy for these problems. Catherine might have made a distinction between the spiritual church, a perfect church the direct will of God, and the temporal church, subject to the will of corrupt men. Catherine wanted women to fight for the values of the spiritual church.

Catherine had a loftier goal for the women she wrote to, she wanted to empower them to serve Christ and serve themselves. This goal was never achievable in Catherine's lifetime and is still being undertaken today. Catherine took on this monumental task one woman at a time and one letter at a time. Catherine tried to help women through her letters and she helped many and surely many more were inspired by the published works of Saint Catherine. One woman that Catherine took an interest in helping was Catarina di Scetto.

Nothing is known about Catarina di Scetto, nothing more than she was part of the order of Saint Dominic and that she was a woman (probably) living in Italy during the life of Saint Catherine. She may have been a cloistered nun or a nun working in a hospital or a tertiary like Catherine. This is of course the problem that is entailed in feminist historiography. All of the men Catherine wrote to have a legacy; they have had things written about them, good or bad, but many of the women Catherine wrote to only exist as recipients of Saint Catherine's letters. For all intents and purposes they do not exist in the eyes of history. It can be surmised that Catarina was a woman who had a deep faith in God, or else Catherine would not have been writing to her. It is difficult to deduce any wider context that this letter could fit into, because it is very general. There does not seem to be any particular problem that Catherine was addressing. Often Catherine wrote to women when they were having a crisis of faith or in their life, as seen in Catherine's letter to Monna Agnese. The themes of this letter were of love and charity to one's neighbor (i.e. human kind). Even when writing about a particular problem, Catherine addressed the problem in a very general way. This practice gives scholars a clear idea of Catherine's theological dogma, but provides very little in the way of context. This letter continues the pattern of generality, and in this letter the general nature is particularly prevalent. In fact this letter could be addressed to womankind or humankind in general and almost no meaning would be lost. The message is timeless, "Love thy neighbor as you would love yourself (or God)," Jesus' golden rule. In this letter the execution of this moral principal is particularized to women. Catherine specifically answers how women can fulfill this ideal.

Being thus—loving thy neighbour sincerely, without any falsity of love or heart, freely, without any regard to thine own profit, spiritual or temporal—thou shalt be a true servant, and respond by means of thy neighbour to the love which thy Creator bears thee; thou shalt be a faithful, not a faithless bride. Then does the bride fail in faith to her bridegroom, when she gives to another creature the faith which she ought to give to him. Thou art a bride, for Christ in His circumcision

showed that He would wed the human race. Thou, beholding love so ineffable, shouldst love Him without any means that might be apart from God. Thus art thou made the servant of thy neighbour, serving him in all things to the measure of thy power. Verily thou art the bride of Christ, and shouldst be the servant of thy neighbour. If thou art a faithful bride, since we can neither be of profit nor of service to God by the love which we bear Him, we ought, as I said, to serve our neighbour with true and heartfelt love. In no other way nor wise can we serve Him. Therefore I said to thee that I desired to see thee the true servant and bride.<sup>1</sup>

The first thing to notice is that Catherine's theology would suggest that anyone regardless of gender, could be a bride of Christ, she said that Christ wanted to marry "humankind" so theoretically a man could be a bride of Christ and yet whenever Catherine wrote to men about the bride of Christ, she chose not to compare them to brides of Christ. She compared the Church to the bride of Christ. It seems that Catherine thought of the comparison to the bride of Christ as a way to empower women. One possible explanation for why she never compared men to the bride of Christ was because she never wrote to men in order to empower them (with the exception of Raymond of Capua) also being compared to a bride might injure the pride of any of the men to whom she wrote, thus not being productive towards the theoretical end of empowering a man. In general men were not in need of empowerment and women were sometimes in desperate need. As seen in her letter to Sister Daniella. It is also interesting here to note that Catherine's mystical marriage to Jesus was not unique in her mind in regards to the figurative ring given to her (Jesus' foreskin). Also for all of Catherine's progressive notions about the roles of women in Renaissance society, Catherine still associated servitude with being a bride.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 58.

This letter follows in a continuity of themes with her other letters to men and women. It was a call to action; it was calling women to act, to help their neighbors and love them as one loves God. This message refers to basic Dominican (and Franciscan) dogma or theology; they believe in self-inflicted poverty and selfless service to others as a way to show their love and devotion to God. Catherine had an interesting justification for this world view; that since mankind's love for God will not profit him, (God does not need anything) instead mankind ought to show love for God by helping one another. This letter not only helped Catherine develop her theological theories; it also continued her subtle and long-running discussion about her conception of a woman's role in society. She may still have seen women primarily as servants, servants as wives, and mothers, servants of the poor, the sick, and servants of God. However, Catherine saw no indignity in servitude. Her male and female counterparts in the Dominican (and Franciscan) order(s) devoted their lives to servitude, even in the act of taking leadership roles (traditionally reserved for men). It is unclear whether Catherine saw that as empowerment. More likely she saw it as an opportunity to serve the Church. She reluctantly took up the mantle of serving her Church and her community; she would have preferred to stay in her cell contemplating God, according to Raymond of Capua, maybe he was reflecting his own feeling towards service and his involvement in Catherine's mission. Throughout this chapter, Catherine's letters to women show this theme of serving God through becoming a bride of Christ.

Catherine took a particular interest in the spiritual well-being and empowerment of her younger female relatives. She wanted to put them on the right path, so they too could be brides of Christ. Catherine never wanted to get married or have any children. However, these letters may have been a way to nurture a possible maternal side, that can be seen in her letters to Gregory XI

and Urban VI as well. She wanted to be able to teach and give advice to the next generation. Nanna, her young niece from her older brother who lived in Florence, was one such relation Catherine took a particular interest in.

Catherine loved to be around children, and was involved in taking care of them when she still lived at home in Siena. Her mother Lapa helped to raise at least eleven of her grandchildren in her own home, while Catherine was growing up. So even though Catherine was the youngest child of her mother, she still grew up around many children. She was also acutely aware of the vulnerability of children. She had to bury many of her relations and surely many other children. This was because of the Bubonic Plague that ravaged Siena during her life. Catherine had to bury eight of her eleven nieces and nephews that lived with Lapa around 1374, when Catherine was only Twenty-seven.<sup>2</sup> This experience may have made her want to put greater time and effort into her younger relations. This may also be compounded by the fact that Nanna was female; it was very important to Catherine that women were empowered at least spiritually, that they knew how to be a good servant of God or bride of Christ. Maybe Catherine saw that women did not have the same outlet for their spirituality as men did. That they did not have a doctrine that made sense in the context of being a woman in the Italian Renaissance. This letter certainly had to be one of the simplest explanations of Catherine's doctrine, especially as directed toward young women. Because Nanna was young the explanation necessarily had to be simple. This letter really encapsulates Catherine's ideas for a woman's role in spiritual life. Catherine's letter to Nanna is a lifelong call to action, a lifelong call to serve God in the best possible manner.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 37.

Catherine's entire letter to Nanna is an analogy. Catherine analogized a lamp to living a good spiritual life. For a lamp to function properly there are three components, according to Catherine, the lamp, the oil, and the light. All three parts are needed for the lamp to function properly. Catherine first discussed what makes a good lamp, that is it must be wide at the top and narrow at the bottom. This is a metaphor for the priorities one should have in life, or in Catherine's words, what one's heart should be like. The top is wide because one should let in a great deal of spirituality into one's life. The bottom is narrow because one should not be too concerned with earthy pursuits. The oil is one's humility and patience these are two virtues that Catherine valued very highly. Finally the light is the light of faith. Also, Catherine suggested that there is temporal virginity, i.e., bodily virginity, and there is something like spiritual virginity or the virginity of the senses or the purity of the senses. These mean not seeking the delights of the senses. Catherine gave an example of this. There were five virgins who maintained their bodily virginity but lost their spiritual virginity by seeking the praises of men. Assumedly they succumb to the pleasures derived from their ears. In this way they would fail to have humility. Interspersed through this letter was language about becoming the bride of Christ. This was a very straight forward explanation of how to become a bride of Christ.

I Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, write to thee in His precious Blood, with desire to see thee a real bride of Christ crucified, running away from everything which might hinder thee from possessing this sweet and glorious Bridegroom. But thou couldst not do this if thou wert not among those wise virgins consecrated to Christ who had lamps with oil in them, and light was within. See, then, if thou wishest to be a bride of Christ, thou must have lamp, and oil, and light.<sup>3</sup>

This letter was in many respects very personal. It was an intimate letter to Catherine's niece, but in many ways this letter was also very general. It could have been addressed to any

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 37.

young woman. Catherine did not want to see young women, like her niece, dragged down by earthly pursuits; she wanted them to rise above the temptations that exist on earth. Catherine thought that in this way she could help these young women live, from her perspective, a good life. It is clear from this letter that being a bride of Christ requires complete devotion. It is not an easy or light undertaking to become a bride of Christ.

But think that that sweet Bridegroom Christ is more jealous of His brides than I could tell thee! Therefore if He should see that thou didst love anyone more than Him, He would be angry with thee at once. And if thou didst not correct thyself, the door would not be open to thee, to the wedding feast which Christ the Lamb without spot holds for all His faithful.<sup>4</sup>

Catherine did make it clear that becoming a bride of Christ will require everything of Nanna; however, again in Catherine's mind this was a sacrifice that she did not flinch at making. She deeply loved Christ and would have done anything to be closer to him. All of the things she did in life, is at least in part, were in pursuit of this goal. This was how Catherine measured her success in life. She extended this goal to all Christian women, that they too could strive towards this goal. This was how Catherine went about molding and shaping the lives of the young women whom she influenced. Catherine always wrote to invoke a mission in her audience and here it is no different; however here the mission is lifelong.

Catherine did not think these lessons were only for young girls, she wrote similar letters to her older female relations as well. Of course, her writing reflects her audience: to her younger niece, Nanna, she wrote using simplified analogies and her writing was more light hearted. However, to her older audience her writing was more complex, her metaphors were less transparent and not as clearly spelled out.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 38.

In the Tuscan town of Montepulciano, located south east of Siena, Catherine had two older nieces, one named Eugenia and the other remains unnamed, both were daughters of Bartolo Benincasa. Montepulciano is another Tuscan hill town, very similar to Siena. Although Catherine was not a cloistered nun, she still felt very spiritually close to those who were. Catherine still obviously thought that whether cloistered or not, anyone (any woman) could live a spiritually fulfilling life. As stated earlier Catherine saw the merits of this life style; in fact before her mystical marriage to Christ, it was her preferred lifestyle. Both nieces were sisters in the Dominican nunnery founded by Saint Agnes. The life of Saint Agnes followed a very similar trajectory to the life of Catherine. Agnes started as a Franciscan nun, being called to help poor persons in her community and she desired to live a humble life to be close to Christ. Agnes loved contemplative prayer and was called to join the Dominican Order. She was asked to form a monastery at Montepulciano. Catherine had two nieces who were sisters of the Saint Agnes convent. This letter was only addressed to one of them, Eugenia. This may have been because one niece needed her advice and the other did not. Scudder in his introduction before his translation of this letter, claims that from his reading of this letter that Catherine suggested that Eugenia may have fallen from the correct path. This letter was a more complicated version of Catherine's letter to Nanna. This letter was a call to action and it was didactic. It taught nuns how to stay on the righteous path. It was different, however, because it followed a different theme to come to the same instructive conclusion: how does one (a woman) become a bride of Christ? The theme it followed was the theme of spiritual food or nourishment. In this case the most common phrasing of this idea in this letter was "angel food." However, this phrasing was also a deviation from the norm. The overwhelming image Catherine used was the exchange of bodily fluids to symbolize the transfer of spiritual energy from the holy host (Christ) to those receiving the



sacrament. In Catherine's other letters this exchange was also symbolized by men nursing at the breast of the bride of Christ, the personified Church. In this letter, Catherine was describing how to acquire the spiritual nourishment in whatever form it took and through that nourishment one could become a bride of Christ.

The soul receives and tastes this mother Prayer more or less perfectly, according as it nourishes itself with the food of angels—that is, with holy and true desire for God, raising itself on high, as I said, to receive it upon the table of the most sweet Cross. Therefore I said to thee that I desired to see thee nourished with angelic food, because I see not that in otherwise thou couldst be a true bride of Christ crucified, consecrated to Him in holy religion. So do that I may see thee a jewel precious in the sight of God. And do not go about wasting thy time. Bathe and drown thee in the sweet Blood of thy Bridegroom.<sup>5</sup>

In Catherine's discussion of how to become a bride of Christ, she used different analogies to come to similar conclusions. Catherine used the analogy of the lamp with her younger niece, Nanna, and with her older niece she used the analogy of "angel food" to create an outline of her theological doctrine. In this letter Catherine laid out her doctrine about self-control and the importance of prayer. Catherine laid out three different types of prayer. There is perpetual prayer, which a holy person does at all times, whatever they do either corporally or spiritually. There is vocal prayer, which is imperfect, and is very straight forwardly what the common person thinks of as explicit or spoken prayer. The third type of prayer is attained through the perfection of vocal prayer, this is mental prayer, this is the deep contemplation of Christ, something that Catherine saw as the privilege of nuns to do this every day. She saw mental prayer as a reward derived from perfecting vocal prayer. Like in her letter to Nanna, Catherine also warned of the dangers that stem from earthly delights and temptations and like Catherine's letter to Nanna this was different from her letters to men using the same metaphor.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 36.

To men she wrote to get something from them, to call them to action for her benefit. To women she still wrote to call her recipients to action, but instead of calling them to action in her own interest she called them to empower her female recipients. Catherine was (and still is) empowering women to live the life that she wanted for herself. She wanted to achieve closeness to Christ through deep mental prayer in her cell. It is clear to see that Catherine not only wanted to have a clear theological doctrine to leave behind, she also wanted to leave a legacy of other brides of Christ. Catherine wanted to ensure that the next generation would be secure and that she would have a cohort or young women to follow in her footsteps. These women may not have followed in her temporal political footsteps, but Catherine was hoping that they would follow in her spiritual footsteps: that they would be empowered to become brides of Christ.

# Conclusion

In a very broad sense this thesis tries to illuminate the fact that Catherine was a pioneer in women's agency. That Catherine was not only notable for her spiritual achievements, or a life spent in the service of others, especially the weak and the sick. She was also fighting and clawing for a foothold in a temporal and spiritual world dominated by men. Although many of her initiatives were unsuccessful, she was successful in the fact that powerful men listened to her, she was one of the few women of that period with a voice. Not only that but she inspired generations of women to follow in her footsteps. Her letters to men symbolize her struggle for agency in both the temporal and spiritual world. Her letters to women symbolize her true legacy, she wanted women to not be afraid to follow their own path and to strive for something greater.

Throughout Catherine's surviving letters there is a clear and gendered dichotomy between how she used the same rhetorical devices. Through her letters, Catherine was seeking to empower women and call them to action, not to further her own ends, but instead to help her fellow women to reach their goals and to bring them into a closer more intimate relationship with Christ. By contrast, in her letters to men, she called them to do things that forwarded her objectives and vision for the trajectory of the Roman Catholic Church.

There are two notable exceptions to this thesis which are in her writings to Raymond of Capua and Giovana of Naples. In her letters to Raymond of Capua, Catherine's use of the rhetorical devices that have been traced through this thesis more closely resemble the ways she used them when writing to women. This is because, like the women to whom Catherine was writing, her objective in writing to Raymond was to empower him, to urge him to reach for greater achievement. This exception also works in reverse with a letter that was not analyzed in

this thesis. The letter was to queen Giovanna of Naples, the queen had declared for the “Anti-Pope” and just like to many men Catherine was writing to someone with great power and privilege to call them to action to achieve Catherine’s end of uniting the Church. The letter to queen Giovanna was more similar to other letters that Catherine had written to men. Not all of Catherine’s letters fall neatly in the categories that were originally set out in this thesis, instead through this thesis patterns emerge that help categorize Catherine’s letters based on the gender she was writing to.

Over the course of writing, my original thesis changed as it pertains to Catherine’s letters to men when she used the literary device of the “bride of Christ.” Originally I saw this as a device of self-empowerment, that Catherine was calling herself a/the bride of Christ. I made this mistake because indeed Catherine does see herself as a/the bride of Christ. She was mystically married to Christ and like a good wife during the Renaissance she was completely devoted to him (and his other bride the Church). However, often in Catholic literature, the Church is considered the bride of Christ and in Catherine’s letters to men (and very occasionally to women) Catherine personified the Church in this way. She did not want the men to feel guilty about hurting or mistreating her, she wanted them to come to the realization that they were hurting the Church, the bride of Christ. In this thesis, I tried desperately to look at Catherine as a woman of the temporal world. As this thesis progressed it became clear there is no way to talk about Catherine, without delving deep into the recesses of Medieval and Reissuance spirituality. This was a world were miracles were very real and even common place. Catherine was steeped in this worldview, to Catherine her marriage to Christ was not metaphorical. Originally, I wanted to look at Catherine as a figure of political change, but it was inevitable that her spirituality informed her political viewpoints. To Catherine political affairs were also not of great

importance compared to one's eternal soul. Many of Catherine's letters were addressed to women, but the letters applied universally because they were related to the improvement of one's eternal soul, to Catherine this was far more important than anything that could happen on Earth.

The literary devices in this thesis, while heavily used and perfected by Catherine Benincasa, were not invented by her. Surely calling someone to man up had been used before and the comparison to the bride of Christ had long been in use in Catholic literature. Even the use of these devices in persuasive letters was nothing new. Dante Alighieri wrote an eerily similar letter to those produced by Catherine, except it was 1334 around forty years before she started writing about bringing the Papacy back to Rome. Another point of comparison is the purpose of Dante's letter, Dante was writing to Italian cardinals to convince them to help move the Papacy back to Rome. Dante was writing to Cardinals at the beginning of the Avignon Papacy and Catherine was writing at the end, but they had the same purpose and used the same literary techniques.

“Yet the wound will be healed (though it cannot be otherwise than that the brand and scar of infamy will have been burned with fire upon the Apostolic See, and will disfigure her for whom heaven and earth had been reserved), if ye, who were the authors of this transgression, will all with one accord fight manfully for the Bride of Christ, for the Throne of the Bride, which is Rome, for our Italy, and that I may speak more fully, for the whole commonwealth of pilgrims upon the earth; so that from the palestra where the contest has already begun, and which is gazed upon from all the shores of the ocean, ye fighting gloriously may hear, Gloria in excelsis; and that the infamy of the Gascons, who while burning up with so dire an avarice strive to arrogate unto themselves the glory of the Latins, may remain to posterity as an example for all future time.”<sup>1</sup>

The themes of the above letter made repeated appearances in Catherine's letters in fact in one sentence Dante used both literary devices that are being analyzed in this thesis. The message

---

<sup>1</sup> Dante Alighieri, 1265-1321, Charles Sterrett Latham, and George Rice Carpenter. *A Translation of Dante's Eleven Letters*. Boston, New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1891, 173.

was also the same, Dante was calling the cardinals to move the Papacy back to Rome for the good of the Church. This similarity in literary techniques can only be accounted for by looking to Raymond of Capua. Raymond of Capua would have been Catherine's access point for the prevailing scholarship (writing) of the time. Tylus shows in her book that Catherine and Dante are inevitably linked in the creation of the modern Italian language. However, on her own Catherine would have never known about Dante.<sup>2</sup> Raymond of Capua must have also served as something of a teacher for Catherine, exposing her to different ideas and thinkers who were or had worked on the same problems that she was working on. It seems from this letter alone it is easy to see the massive role that Dante played in Catherine's political life. In return Catherine helped finish what Dante had started. Not only did she help convince Gregory XI to move the Papacy back to Rome, and she defended Urban VI against Clement VII, but she also continued to popularize the modern Italian language.

As much as this thesis has focuses on the minuet literary details of Catherine's letters. The subtle methods of persuasion she employed. The unique challenges a woman faced when she wrote persuasively to men. These were not the things that Catherine was concerned with in her life. She was a woman of action, her life's ambition was not to write great letters, or to cement the burgeoning Italian dialect. Catherine wanted to make the lives of the common people better, she wanted to empower her fellow sisters, she wanted to end wars, cure the sick, unite and fix her Church. However, even in these lofty goals to which she devoted most of her life, she was torn in two different directions. Catherine was a reluctant participant on the world's stage. The story of Mary and Martha highlights the lifelong struggle and anxiety that Catherine faced.

---

<sup>2</sup> Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena*.

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. **39** She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. **40** But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’<sup>41</sup> ‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’”<sup>3</sup>

This anxiety of choosing between a temporal and spiritual life plagues both Raymond’s account of Catherine’s life and can be seen in her letters. To use the analogy of Martha and Mary: Catherine would have been happy to be a Mary. She undoubtedly heard this story and saw that she could be closer to Christ by living a contemplative and spiritual life. She desired to stay in her cell, to pray and to meditate on Christ, this was how Catherine could have been closest to the spiritual life. She wanted nothing to do with the temporal world, to this end of course she did not want to even eat. However, in her mystical interaction with Christ she was called to a life that conformed more with the life of Martha. A life in service to others, a life in service to the Church and in some ways a life spent farther away from Christ, was her sacrifice. Catherine was fully committed to this life. She worked tirelessly to reform the Church. Closer to home she also spent many long nights tending to plague victims. Doing the most humble jobs in Santa Maria della Scala, spending her time within sight of Christ but never quite there. There is only a small square that separates the hospital from the Duomo di Siena, but maybe that was the difference. The hospital representing everything that is temporal and the Duomo, everything that is spiritual. Catherine did have a spiritual refuge in the hospital. When she did get a chance to sleep she slept

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids, Mich.; New York, N.Y.: HarperTorch, 1993, Luke: 38-42.

on a stone slab in the hospital's chapel. Catherine was truly and deeply committed to serving her community, but also her world.

There were many ways in which Catherine went about serving her community and her world. Her letters were just one avenue, but they were arguably the most important avenue. They were the method with which she reached out to people, through class, gender, space, and time. Her letters speak for her long after she has died and some of her most famous quotes are contained in her letters. Probably her most famous quote comes from a letter she wrote to her close friend and member of her *famiglia*, Stefano Marconi. What she wrote can be loosely translated to "Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire." This was her empowerment; these letters were the way she left her mark on the world. This was her voice to her friends and followers. This was her voice to popes and kings. This was her battle cry for change within the Church. This was her roar against her enemies. These letters will be her eternal legacy and her message about living a spiritual life. This is a woman's voice!



# Annotated Bibliography

## Primary Sources:

Alighieri, Dante, 1265-1321, Charles Sterrett Latham, and George Rice Carpenter. *A Translation of Dante's Eleven Letters*. Boston, New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1891.  
<http://archive.org/details/translationofdan00dant>.

This is a translation of eleven of Dante's letters. Latham and Carpenter offer a translation and then a section on the context and analysis of each given letter. For this thesis, I will be looking only at the ninth letter, which was written directly after the death of Pope John XXII in 1334, after the formation of the Avignon Papacy and was written to the Italian cardinals in order to convince them to return the Papacy to Rome. Dante wanted to convince the cardinals that an Italian Pope should be elected as the next Pope. Dante's thought was that an Italian pope would move the Papacy back to Rome.

Benincasa, Catherine. *Letters of Catherine Benincasa*. Translated by Vida Dutton Scudder, 2005.  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7403>.

This is the book where I am drawing all of my primary source material for this thesis. Scudder has collected most of Catherine's important letters and translated them. Scudder also adds introductions with some context and analysis before each letter. This has been an excellent source; the translations are good and the other material is as well. This is also one of the more recent translations of Catherine's letters.

Lamb, George, and Raymond of Capua. *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*. New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1960.

This is a translation of the original Hagiography of Saint Catherine. This is the major biographical source utilized by scholars of Catherine. This source is actually less useful to me because as a hagiography this source is interested in Catherine's spiritual achievements and not her political or rhetorical achievements. With that being said this source still is very important to my thesis, because it reveals Catherine's motivations and spiritual development, which informed her political decisions. This source has to be read carefully because it has a clear objective to persuade its audience that Catherine is deserving of canonization.

Searby, Denis, and Bridget Morris. *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume II*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195166262.001.0001/acprof-9780195166262>.

Searby's translation is very similar to that of Scudder's translation of Catherine's letters. Searby curates a collection of St. Birgitta's letters. For my thesis, I only examined her letter on the topic of persuading Gregory XI to return to Rome. This piece is very valuable to my thesis because it is directly comparable to some of Catherine's letters on the same topic.

*The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids, Mich.; New York, N.Y.: HarperTorch, 1993.

For my conclusion, I wanted to tell the story of Mary and Martha, from the gospel of Luke. I wanted a modern and non-controversial translation of the Bible. This translation is well known and easily accessible.

## Secondary Sources:

Bell, Rudolph M. *Holy Anorexia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

In Bell's work he analyses Catherine as his primary example of holy anorexia, an anorexia as expressed by religious belief. He also traces the history of anorexia within the cloister and the home in Medieval and Renaissance Europe. He uses a very scientific methodology, drawing on modern psychology to explain instances of anorexia. I think Bell uses psychological analysis too liberally with persons (mainly Catherine) that he has never met, based on accounts of her that are not accurate enough to make a "diagnosis". However, overall this is a reliable scholarly source for the discussion of anorexia as a religious manifestation.

Bent, George R. *Public Painting and Visual Culture in Early Republican Florence*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Bent is particularly concerned with the public audience's interactions with public art in Florence. Bent not only looks at the wealthy elite's interaction with art, but also that of the common people. Bent analyzes public art, this means looking at art in and around the churches and the frescos on the palaces. This work is useful to my thesis because it is one of two accounts of the life of Buonaccorso di Lapo. Ross also comes to similar conclusions about Buonaccorso di Lapo. However, Bent is also interested in the public's interactions and perception of traitors pictured in frescos on the side of the public palace in Florence.

Brucker, Gene A., ed. "The War of the 'Eight Saints': 1375-1378." In *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378*, 297-335. Princeton University Press, 1962.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt17t75pr.12>.

For this thesis, I will only be utilizing the "War of the 'Eight Saints'" chapter. As this is a more general book about Florentine politics, this chapter gives a more general and yet a very thorough account of the War of Eight Saints. Brucker tries to stay neutral and provide both sides of any scholarly debate, for example he gives merit to both sides of the debate about whether Catherine was an official emissary from Florence. Brucker presents both sides but does not come down decisively on either side. This neutrality is emblematic of the entire chapter. Brucker also

utilizes a wealth of primary and secondary sources, showing a good scholarly techniques given the relative age of this work.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. The New Historicism : Studies in Cultural Poetics. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Bynum deals with a similar topic to Bell, but takes a different approach. She uses more of a traditional historical approach. She traces different stories of how food and women in Christianity interact. One of her main subjects is Catherine. Bynum compares Catherine of Siena to Catherine of Genoa. Both women were female mystics that relied on fasting for part of their spirituality. Like Bell, Bynum argues that Catherine's Anorexia stems from a guilt about the death of her twin sister. Bynum makes the comparison between communion (spiritual food) and Catherine's refusal of food (temporal food). This work is valuable for understanding the religious history of fasting. This work also has a good account of the history of women during this time period.

Caferro, William. *John Hawkwood : An English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy*. Baltimore, US: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10188519>.

Caferro gives a very thorough account of Hawkwood's life. However, he does not discuss Catherine's role in Hawkwood's campaign, except for a sentence or two in the beginning of his book. Like Mollat, Caferro seems dismissive of Catherine's role in the political affairs of men. Caferro also argues that Hawkwood was extremely brutal, which is certainly true. However, some other scholars of Hawkwood argue that he did have some redeeming qualities. Caferro thinks this is a mistake because it softens Hawkwood's image. Caferro's work is extremely well researched and comes from a reputable press, making it a reputable source.

Coakley, John W. *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators*. Columbia University Press, 2006.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/coak13400>.

For this thesis, I will only be utilizing one chapter of Coakley's book, "Managing Holiness: Raymond of Capua and Catherine of Siena." In this chapter Coakley examines Raymond of Capua's role as hagiographer to Catherine of Siena and more generally what they thought of each other. Coakley argues that Raymond really tries to insert himself into the story of Catherine's life and that his work becomes a model for other male hagiographers of female saints in the future. In Kienzle's article "Catherine of Siena, Preaching, and Hagiography in Renaissance Tuscany" found in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, Kienzle agrees with the conclusions of Coakley and cites his work. This was an excellent and reliable (Columbia university press) source for understanding Raymond's role as a hagiographer.

Cohn, Samuel Kline. *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Cohn's work is made up of seven essays about the life of common women in the Italian Renaissance. He writes as a social historian. He gathers data from archives and other sources to describe the lives of women. Cohn gathers much of his inspiration for this topic from Godal-Kelly's "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Cohn is essentially trying to answer the same question, he is trying to uncover the intricacies of common women in the Renaissance and since no direct written accounts exist he must analyze data about birth and death rates, where women were buried, what were women doing and in what numbers? This approach lends Cohn credibility because he is open to various interpretations. He has no overarching thesis to prove, he is merely collecting and analyzing data. In addition this book was published by a university press and Cohn is a well-known scholar in this subject area. This book has been useful because it details the world Catherine was living in and how her gender was treated in this time period.

Deans, Emily. "A History of Eating Disorders." *Psychology Today*. Accessed October 22, 2016. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evolutionary-psychiatry/201112/history-eating-disorders>.

This source provided me a quick reference to the history of eating disorders. Starting with classical Greece and moving through modern times with the recent (1980s and 1990s) epidemic of eating disorders, and the new scientific approach to treatment and understanding the disorders. This piece also discusses how Catherine fits into the larger history of eating disorders.

Fowler, Kenneth. "Sir John Hawkwood and the English Condottieri in Trecento Italy." *Renaissance Studies* 12, no. 1 (1998): 131–48.

This was an excellent reference source on Sir John Hawkwood. This source doesn't have all of the material that I needed but it gives a good chronology of Hawkwood's early life, his rise through the ranks of mercenaries fighting in France, and finally his work as the commander of his own company in Italy. This is also a great source for broader understanding of the warfare style in Italy during the early Renaissance. Fowler complicates the view of Hawkwood, as not solely a money hungry, evil mercenary, instead Fowler presents a somewhat merciful Hawkwood.

Hamburger, Jeffrey F., and Gabriela Signori, eds. *Catherine of Siena: The Creation of a Cult*. Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts, v. 13. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

This work is a compilation of fourteen essays by different authors on the creation of the cult that surrounds Catherine. Although this compilation sheds a lot of light on later perceptions of Catherine, these ideas do not directly contribute to my larger discussion. This work does put two authors in discussion about the importance of Catherine as an author. This work includes essays by Thomas Luongo and Jane Tylus. These authors discuss Catherine's contributions as an author, which is important to this thesis.

Kelly, Joan. *Women, History and Theory: Essays of Joan Kelly (Women in Culture & Society)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. [http://www.biblio.com/book/women-history-theory-essays-joan-kelly/d/859714202?aid=frg&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=product&utm\\_campaign=feed-details&gclid=Cj0KEQiA4JnCBRDQ5be3nKCPhpwBEiQAjwN1bpI5SNWQF8I7hID4CWuBzSb6BziiQmKkrFhZlwrjU8saAIRo8P8HAQ](http://www.biblio.com/book/women-history-theory-essays-joan-kelly/d/859714202?aid=frg&utm_source=google&utm_medium=product&utm_campaign=feed-details&gclid=Cj0KEQiA4JnCBRDQ5be3nKCPhpwBEiQAjwN1bpI5SNWQF8I7hID4CWuBzSb6BziiQmKkrFhZlwrjU8saAIRo8P8HAQ).

I am only using Chapter seven of this book, which is Godal-Kelly's famous essay, "Did Women have a Renaissance?" She answers this question with a resounding, no. Kelly challenges the traditional ideas about Renaissance women, and the assumption that their lives got better during this period. In fact, she argues that the lives of women got worse during this period. She cites the restrictions imposed on the institutions of sex and marriage. This article was helpful in understanding not only the problems women faced in the Renaissance, but also the trajectory of feminist scholarship of the Renaissance.

Kirsch, J.P. "CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: St. Bridget of Sweden." Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02782a.htm>.

The Catholic Encyclopedia is often a great source for basic knowledge on the different elements of Catholicism. This is especially true for basic background on the Catholic saints. I used this site for my thesis to get a better understand the life of Saint Bridget, especially as it compared to the life of Saint Catherine. I found that Bridget came from a wealthier background and she received an earlier more formal education. On this site, I did notice some minor factual errors, for example Kirsch confused Gregory XI with Gregory IX. However, this is a common error even for accomplished scholars.

McDermott, Thomas. *Catherine of Siena: Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008.

For this thesis, I utilized McDermott's chronology and his first Chapter, which details Catherine's early life and her religious experiences. McDermott's chronology is particularly helpful in determining when certain events happened in Catherine's life. Raymond of Capua's account leaves out many dates. McDermott's work is well researched, but when reading it for the purpose of historical scholarship one should be careful because he is a Dominican, writing about a Dominican saint, so he has obvious biases. His later chapters are very important for anyone interested in a deep analysis into Catherine's spiritual teachings, they simply do not pertain to this thesis.

Mollat, G., and Janet Love. *The Popes at Avignon, 1305-1378. Translated from the 9th French Ed., 1949.* London, New York: T. Nelson, 1963.

Mollat in this work created the seminal work when describing the Avignon papacy, all scholars mention his work when talking about this period. Even as old as it is, scholars still mention it as the key reference work to understanding this period in Catholic and European history. Although today some of his arguments are debated in scholarly communities. Mollat seems particularly dismissive of Catherine's role in the Papacy's return to Rome. Mollat's work is valuable because it is one of the few accounts of Gregory XI's term as Pope.

Muessig, Carolyn, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle, eds. *A Companion to Catherine of Siena.* Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, v. 32. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012.

This is a collection of thirteen essays by different authors, and each essay is about a different facet of Catherine's life. These essays are very different from one another and each uses a unique methodology. However, all come from reputable scholars and offer different perspectives on the same woman. This book has been useful to understand the breadth of Catherine's experiences and of the scholarly literature that has already been written about her. Beattie's essay on Catherine's interactions with Gregory XI and Urban VI, has been particularly useful because it is one of the few scholarly works that talks about Catherine's political entanglements.

Pierson, Arthur T. *Catharine of Siena, an Ancient Lay Preacher; a Story of Sanctified Womanhood and Power in Prayer.* New York London: Funk & Wagnalls company, 1898.

Pierson writes a unique hagiography of Catherine of Siena. This is a hagiography of a Catholic saint for a protestant audience. Pierson was a Presbyterian pastor who was deeply involved in the mission work going on in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pierson's account of Catherine's life mirrors that of Raymond of Capua's. However, Pierson uses the life of Saint Catherine as a platform to convince young women to go out into the world and do missionary work.

Polecritti, Cynthia L. *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy: Bernardino of Siena and His Audience.* First Edition edition. Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2000.

Polecritti's work focuses on Saint Bernardino as a public speaker and a public preacher. He was a charismatic Franciscan preacher living around the same time as Catherine of Siena. For my thesis I will be really only be using the first two chapters, which focus on Bernardino's larger sermons, the crowds he drew, and how he interacts with them. I am especially interested in his sermons about the role of women. While on the surface it may seem that Bernadino and Catherine have different ideas about the roles of women, Polecritti argues Bernardino sees an important spiritual role for women.

Powell, Hilary. “‘Once Upon a Time There Was a Saint...’: Re-Evaluating Folklore in Anglo-Latin Hagiography.” *Folklore* 121, no. 2 (2010): 171–89.

Powell looks at hagiographical accounts as parts of the folklore tradition in Medieval England. This topic does not exactly apply to my thesis. This work was most useful in developing a methodological framework for analyzing hagiographical literature. Powell underscores the importance of analyzing hagiography with a critical eye. This is seen in her methodology because of course she is drawing a comparison between hagiographies and folklore. Neither of these sources being good nonbiased historical sources of real events.

Ross, Janet. *Florentine Palaces & Their Stories*. J. M. Dent & Company, 1905.

Ross's work delivers what the title says: it tells the stories of Florentine palaces. It does this with no frills. Ross breaks his book into sections and each section is devoted to a palace. There is little else in the book. Ross uses both primary and secondary sources and presents a very developed research method even given the age of this work. Ross also makes good use of illustrations in his work. This work is only useful to my thesis in that it is one of two accounts of the life of Buonaccorso di Lapo. Both Bent and Ross agree on the perceived traitorous actions of Buonaccorso di Lapo.

Sutherland, Christine Mason. “Feminist Historiography: Research Methods in Rhetoric.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2002): 109–22.

Sutherland discusses her feminist methodology when she researches female figures who employ rhetorical techniques. Sutherland discusses the importance of emotion in feminist historical research and the importance of knowing one's subject. I am utilizing some of Sutherland's methodology for this thesis. For example, my knowledge of Siena will be helpful in understanding Catherine's daily life. Sutherland's work is very interesting although it does depart from traditional historical research, where the writer is emotionally detached from the subject.

Trexler, Richard C. “Rome on the Eve of the Great Schism.” *Speculum* 42, no. 3 (1967): 489–509. doi:10.2307/2851144.

Trexler argues that there has been a lot of scholarship about the turmoil in Rome during The Great Schism, the time period directly after the election of Urban VI, but there has been far less scholarship about the last fifteen months of Gregory XI's life. This is because there is not very much direct source material that remains. Trexler seeks to recreate this period by using Roman court cases from this period that do remain and other indirect primary source material. These materials give a great image of the turmoil that Rome was in during this time and Trexler manages to read between the lines to expose some details about the end of Gregory XI's life. Both of these points helped me inform my writing about the end of Gregory XI's life and the beginning of Urban VI's reign.

Tylus, Jane. *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, And the Signs of Others*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Tylus is one of the few scholars who writes about Catherine solely as an author. Tylus is a scholar of Italian studies and comparative literature at New York University. Tylus's approach has been very useful to me because it has helped model a methodology and provided an analysis of Catherine the author, instead of Saint Catherine. Tylus sets out to prove that Catherine should be held in equal esteem to Dante and Petrarch, when it comes to assigning credit for the creation and popularization of modern Italian. Tylus also argues that Catherine has been denied credit for her role in developing ideas of humanism in Europe. This work comes from a university press and is written by one of the more prominent scholars of Catherine, making this a very reputable work. Tylus' work is probably the closest in content to this thesis.