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**ASPECTS OF IMAGERY IN CATHERINE OF SIENA  
FROM A JUNGIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether or not the imagery of Catherine of Siena can be interpreted from a Jungian perspective. It takes a lead from other studies, notably one on Teresa of Avila and Jung. Reading of medieval literature suggests that medievals applied the use of symbols and imagery in ways that are at times baffling to people of our time. Carl Jung was no stranger to imagery and symbol. In our current age with its renewed emphasis on the insights of spirituality, and to some extent its disenchantment with aspects of traditional psychology, there is room for a dialogue between the two disciplines of mysticism and psychology across a six-hundred year divide. The use of imagery, as a window to the soul, in the Christian tradition is examined. Catherine of Siena is situated within her own medieval context, one of upheaval in the church, but also an age of mysticism and spiritual/religious phenomena strange to our own time. Catherine is introduced against the background of her world and against the backdrop of the Dominican tradition. A discussion of some of her major imagery demonstrates her aim of union with God. An understanding of conscious aspects and of unconscious aspects of the self is shown as key to Jung's view of the psyche. Elucidation of some archetypes and a discussion of Jung's dream analysis demonstrates how Jung believed the unconscious becomes conscious, and how individuation becomes a possibility. Key Catherinian images are examined from a Jungian perspective. Catherine has relevance for the twenty first century, and we are invited to be challenged by the mysteries and truths to which her images point us.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter One

**Catherine's Medieval World**

Chapter Two

**Towards a Jungian Understanding of Self**

Chapter Three

**Key Catherinian Imagery**

Chapter Four

**Catherine's Relevance for the Twenty First Century**

Conclusion

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Why a study on Catherine of Siena?

#### 1.1 My own Interest in Catherine of Siena

As a member of the Dominican Order, and specifically of the Dominican Congregation of St Catherine of Siena of Oakford, Natal, I am greatly interested in Dominican spirituality as it has been experienced throughout the history of the Order. Catherine of Siena holds a fascination for me in various ways. She, uneducated and illiterate, is one of only three women doctors of the Church. She broke through the boundaries and barriers imposed by society on women of her time despite herself holding many of the values and norms of her society. This was long before the days of feminism.

In many ways her time, Catherine's fourteenth century Italy, may be compared with our own time. The Black Death, political upheavals, wars and hostilities between peoples, poverty and oppression, changes in the Church of Catherine's time have their echoes in our own time as we face the challenges of AIDS, as people struggle to live together, as poor people become more marginalised, and as the Roman Catholic Church continues to struggle with the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council. My religious congregation was perhaps slow in some ways to claim Catherine's patronage, despite our name, but over the years since the Second Vatican Council there has been renewed interest in reclaiming our religious charism, and in taking inspiration from one of the greatest Dominican women saints.

#### 1.2 Catherine's Life

As a young person growing up in a Dominican parish in Siena Catherine was drawn early on to the spirituality of Dominic Guzman the founder of the Order of Preachers. As a young woman she joined the Mantellates, a group of Dominican lay women who performed works of charity and who lived Dominican spirituality. Had Catherine joined religious life as a Dominican she would have become an enclosed nun, clearly not the right path for one whose active mission in the world was to become her trademark. Catherine never shunned the contemplative dimension of the Dominican

life, and in fact spent three years in her 'cell', a room in her father's house where she lived for some time in disgrace because of her refusal to marry a man chosen for her by the family. It was the Lord himself who called her from her 'cell' into active ministry. But although Catherine never again had the kind of privacy afforded her when she lived a withdrawn life, the idea of the 'cell' never deserted her, and was in fact to become one of the key symbols she employed in her preaching and prayer. After her time of solitude Catherine at first found herself active in the kinds of service provided by the women of Siena. But in time she found herself called to wider forms of ministry, and she became involved in peace-making and political events of Italy, as well as in attempts to have the papacy return to Rome from Avignon. Catherine suffered greatly because of the western schism in the Church (during which time Western Christendom was divided between two, and later three papal obediences). Certainly on a human level much of what she set out to do was not successful, and in many ways her life's work can be deemed a failure.

Some of the other key influences on Catherine's life include a vision of Christ when she was very young which made her decide to give her life to God and to work for the renewal of the Church; her vow of virginity; her experience of mystical espousal; and mystical experiences culminating in mystical death.

### 1.3 Writings

The theology Catherine offers us in her writings comes from mystical knowledge, from the influence of the Dominican preachers, from popular theological and devotional books read in her home, and from conversations she had with the theologians among her followers. Reflecting on what she received from others, she developed it and clothed it in her own language, images and insights. The *Dialogue*, her *Letters*, and her *Prayers* are her three written works. They do not present a logically developed doctrinal system, but show that her thought has its own inner consistency and unity, its own organization and sequence. The central theme is the love of God for humankind manifested in Christ crucified. In the light of this mystery she discusses the Trinity, creation, redemption, the Church, grace, life after death.

## 1.4 Catherine's Theology

The context in which Catherine develops her theology is her quest for self-knowledge. It is in this cell that she understands and gains new appreciation of all the great truths concerning God and humanity that nourish her faith. This self-knowledge is a knowledge of self gained by looking at ourselves in the light of the one who created us. She sees that we can never arrive at self-understanding without seeing ourselves through God's eyes since we are made in the divine image. Through self-knowledge we come to appreciate our dignity and our nothingness. As we grow in knowledge of ourselves and of God, we grow in our ability to love God and others. Much of Catherine's style is spontaneous and passionate. Attempting to communicate an inexpressible experience she relies, like so many mystics, on images to help open deeper human and divine truths. Her images come from her own environment and her own experience. Her language is distinctly her own, at times anthropomorphic (God is 'mad and drunk' with love), always a testimony to the inadequacy of human language to speak about the divine.

Catherine's *Letters* can be considered one of the most important forms of apostolic activity. She writes to a wide variety of correspondents, representing the famous and the infamous, men and women. She delights in the uniqueness of each person, meeting people where they are in life, writing words helpful to each one. Through her letters, she finds a way to bring together her love of God and her love of neighbour. The love she communicates to others is an overflow of the love she receives in her own prayerful relationship with God.

Her *Prayers*, transcribed by her followers, impress by their simplicity, their concentration on God, and their desire for the salvation of others. They have a sound theological base, being rooted in the truths of Christian faith. She was clearly a great intercessor, with the importance of her intercession increasing as her union with God and her concern for others increased. This shows us how intercessory prayer belongs in a very particular way to the life of contemplative union with God.

The *Dialogue* is a compendium of all Catherine's theological teaching. Its contents are in the form of a dialogue between Catherine and God. She addresses God as

“father”, and she is addressed as “daughter”. There is great familiarity between the two, and she feels free to “babble” on because she is sure of being listened to with love and mercy. Catherine makes four petitions to God, for herself, for the Church, for the whole world, and for the assurance of God’s providence in all things. The rest of the book is taken up with God’s response to the four petitions, with every now and then an interjection from Catherine. It seems to follow a recurring pattern of petition-response-thanksgiving. Not an easy book to read, it is one to be dipped into and prayed with to discover its treasures.

### 1.5 Catherine’s Spirituality

Influenced by the Dominicans, Catherine was steeped in the prevailing spirituality of the time, that of Augustine. Dominic had adapted the Rule of Augustine for his Order of Preachers, and the Rule of the Mantellates emphasized a Dominican spirituality of interiority. Catherine adapted in her writings symbolic representations of the spiritual life familiar in her day, the ‘bridge’ and the ‘tree of virtue’ of St Gregory the Great, and the iconographic imagery of the cross as tree or ladder dating back to the *Vexilla Regis* of Fortunatus in the fifth century. (cf Meade 1991: 19). Her wide use of scripture discloses a dependence on an aural familiarity from homilies and conversation. Writers and preachers of the time, e.g. the Dominican Domenico Cavalca noted for translations of lives and legends of the fathers and early saints of the Church, influenced Catherine’s piety and thought. *The Golden Legends* of the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine was also known to Catherine, and especially dear to her were stories of Catherine of Alexandria and Mary Magdalene whose lives emphasize women preaching and teaching with skill and wisdom, sustained by heavenly food rather than by human nourishment.

The mythic imagination of the middle ages lent itself to the language of mysticism. Symbolic images coming from the historic language of the Church, archetypal symbolism, symbols from nature, and from daily life were bound together with a practical homely expressiveness which created a new language, echoing from the recessed depths of the psyche. The expressions Catherine used were pristine in their clarity. Visions took place in her own mind and understanding came through faith. This combination resulted in a knowledge, intuitive yet infused by the grace of the Spirit, which pierced the boundaries of human reason to touch the wisdom of the divine. (Meade 1991: 53).

Catherine's spirituality is representative of a commonly held medieval worldview, and her journey to union with God is accomplished through her non-corporeal mind and soul. Put differently, it was as though Catherine did not need her body to pursue mystical union with God. Spiritually she pursued her God, in spite of human limitations.

### **1.6 Catherine's Use of Symbolism**

The association in the middle ages of creating and visual perception led to a preoccupation with vision and sight directly connected to the awe late medieval people had for mystics who transcended the limitations of human sight to see mystically. Scholarly language was laden with visual imagery and symbolic representation, a language essential to the mystic who spoke of what was seen in the mind. The mystic's vision was seen as a human transcendence of the barriers of the corporeal world to share in God's likeness. Developments in iconography, the visual symbolism of the artist, intensified the importance of sight and vision. The faithful had a ready capacity to interpret symbols in painting techniques. Legend and literature too spanned the boundaries between the physical and spiritual worlds. Even when journey literature utilized secular, political and spiritual themes, the language of their expression was highly symbolic. Features common to physical and mythical journeys illustrate unique medieval concepts of time and space. Attuned to the literature of journeys rife with symbolism, the medieval mind was equally receptive to accounts of the spiritual journeys of mystics. Description defied human language, necessitating the use of symbol and metaphor. Raymond of Capua in his biography of Catherine used the symbolic artistic devices of his world as if they were concrete experience. His description of the Catherine's mystical marriage is described as if it actually happened. This symbolism, an archetypal image of the most intimate union between a human being and God, was a popular theme in the religious painting of the day.

It is her habitual use of symbols to convey meaning, a device typical of mystics and of the literary expression of her time, that lends a timelessness to her story because metaphor provides an inclusive language decipherable in every age. Though Catherine borrows many symbols from a long historic tradition, her treatment of them is profoundly integrative in its layering and confirms the

harmony of her intellect and spirituality. She communicates with a creative power that is both rhythmic and generative, causing her symbols to transcend conventional interpretation... Continually shaping, forming, and expanding, she focuses meaning, then layers on new images that communicate higher levels of interpretation. The tree of virtue gives way to the tree of the cross, for example, while climbing the stairs carved out of Christ's suspended body becomes a continuous spiralling process in which her rational powers – memory, understanding, and will – gradually become one harmonious functioning unit. (Meade 1991:74).

## 1.7 Catherine and Jung

It is Catherine's use of imagery and symbol that fascinates the medieval mind, but our own time as well, even if we are not as adept as were the medievals at understanding the meanings and layers hidden in the word pictures. This study makes an attempt at exploring something of the universal significance of the symbols and images employed by Catherine. Clearly as has already been indicated Catherine did not invent her symbols. Rather they were drawn from Christian tradition, and from even before Christianity, and it is suggested that they have archetypal meaning and significance, perhaps beyond what Catherine herself understood.

Carl Jung is considered one of the foremost proponents of the significance and meaning of symbolism, and it is he who put forward the idea of the collective unconscious. Here people are exposed to archetypes and symbols which have meaning far beyond what any individual on his or her own may have experienced. So, for example, symbols representing the hero or the mother draw on the collective meaning ascribed to them in myth and legend and folklore down through the ages. What a dreamer dreams may in fact have roots deep in the history of humankind. A recent study on Teresa of Avila and Jung shows that Teresa's symbol and imagery can be viewed from a Jungian perspective. Welch's book *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila* suggests ultimately that what Teresa describes in her *Interior Castle*, her journey to union with God, is very similar to what Jung means when he writes of individuation, the coming to maturity called for in each person.

Welch's study has in some way prompted this one. Teresa lived later than did Catherine and in different circumstances. She too was a mystic and a reformer, and she too was declared a doctor of the Church in 1970. Her symbolism, superficially,

appears to be different from Catherine's. At one level her journey through the castle appears to have elements in it readily comparable with archetypal imagery and symbolism as described by Jung, and as often experienced in dreams of people. Yet, while Catherine usually does not employ the images and symbols often thought of in connection with Jung's work (those for instance applying to personages), she too describes a journey into the self. There are obvious and distinct differences between Teresa and Catherine in their use of imagery, but nonetheless it is the thesis of this study that Catherine's images too may be interpreted from a Jungian perspective.

### **1.8 Spiritual Pilgrims. Jung and Teresa of Avila**

Welch's study is a useful guide in what follows in this dissertation. Before we investigate Catherinian imagery and symbolism from a Jungian perspective, we present here as background a brief summary of Welch's study indicating that Teresa's imagery can indeed be interpreted from a Jungian perspective. In our own study the case will be made for looking at Catherine's imagery from a similar perspective. Welch (1982) presents Teresa speaking of eternal realities confirmed in the experiences and writings of Jung. Jung sometimes appears to be far removed from the Christian way, and certainly has ambiguities in his final answer. Welch's book is about Christian individuation, the movement into the wholeness of one's personality as union with God deepens. Both Jung and Teresa were perceptive observers of human interiority, Teresa writing about the soul, the human person in his/her relationship with God, and Jung writing about the psyche and the relationship of the person to his/ her own depths. Image is the key for entering their writings.

Teresa's *Interior Castle* presents numerous images (castle, water, journey, serpents, devils, butterfly, marriage, Christ), the primary expression of her inner experiences. Welch examines each of these from a Jungian perspective, for example seeing the castle in terms of Jung's fascination with the mandala, circular image of the self; or water which according to Jung is the most common symbol for the unconscious. Serpents are seen by Jung as potentially destructive when lived out unconsciously while the devils are viewed as the personification of the inferior side, the shadow. Teresa's butterfly is an image of dying and rising in union with Christ, and her mystical marriage is indicative of the intimacy of spiritual union with God. Jung

maintained he couldn't differentiate symbols for self from symbols for God and was critical of the Christ image.

Overall the *Interior Castle* is a document of Christian individuation. Teresa is entering more deeply into the unconscious part of the psyche. The journey through the castle is a pilgrimage to the centre, the self. The language of pilgrimage is symbol and myth. The inner journey puts us in touch with the neglected figures of our unconscious, the shadow. Serpents and devils represent the dark side of the journey through the castle. There are pre-occupations which pull one away from God. The archetypes may be destructive if they are unconsciously lived out. Teresa used the butterfly to symbolize the healing experienced in union with God. Jung too saw in the image of the butterfly the healing power of the psyche as the self emerges through transformations. As one primary source of unconscious material, Jung mentions dreams. Another source is spontaneous fantasies. The marriage of the masculine and feminine is an archetypal expression of wholeness. In Jung's psychology it refers to a union of the conscious and unconscious roles of personality. What takes place in the experience of Teresa's spiritual marriage is beyond the power of her description. The effects of the spiritual marriage give evidence of a wholeness of personality, and the image of marriage testifies to personal integration.

### 1.9 Imagery

Jung understood that the human psyche thinks primarily in images, and saw his inner world as a cosmos as large as the outer world. For him it is a fundamental premise to have no preconceived meanings when dealing with dreams which speak to us of our deepest selves. The point of attending to dreams is to develop communication with depths within oneself. A second source of imagery is the world around us which 'catches' our projections. Once we have images to hold on to, we can begin reflecting on them in order to grow in understanding and insight. (Welch 1982: 7-14).

Teresa's story is a network of images, closely connected to her experience; she has been called a psychological mystic. Her journey to God is also a journey to self. Her images are pregnant with meaning, and possibly the meaning of the symbol is not located entirely in her original experience. Some images may have meaning in

themselves as a result of conditions prior to her personal experience. (Welch 1982: 20-21).

It would be very tempting to continue to develop themes from Welch's book comparing Teresa of Avila with Jung. However, our subject is Catherine and our task is to examine some of her use of imagery in the light of Jung. Having seen that imagery and symbol point ultimately to other and deeper realities, we now examine in broad outline some of the influences on Catherine of Siena in her use of imagery and symbol.

Taking inspiration, then, from Welch's study on Jung and Teresa, our own study will attempt first to examine Catherine's medieval worldview as a background to her use of symbol and imagery. Chapter two will present a broad examination of how Jung himself views symbol, and how he regards the individuation process. Chapter three will discuss key Catherinian imagery and begin to make links with Jung's understanding. Finally, within the context of Catherine's relevance for our own day, we will see how her imagery too can be interpreted from a Jungian perspective.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CATHERINE'S MEDIEVAL WORLD

#### 1. Some Background to the Christian Mystical Experience

##### 1.1 Neo-Platonic and Patristic Influences

Our study of aspects of imagery in Catherine of Siena, while examining the Jungian perspective, will begin with a brief historical look at some of the influences on Catherine. These can be traced back to Neo-Platonic and Patristic influences.

A neo-Platonic worldview dominated medieval thought, resulting in a cosmology that assumed direct interaction between human, physical and sense-oriented existence and a divine, imaginary and spirit-oriented world. St Augustine, an influence throughout the medieval period, laid the foundation for a Christian worldview emphasizing the unity and interconnectedness of all creation. This worldview permeated religious and speculative thought to create a climate in which mysticism flourished.

Macrobius (c 360 – 435), the primary exponent of the neo-Platonic schema, gave serious attention to the question of seeing and perceiving. One of his five dream categories, a prophetic vision, reveals the easy medieval interchange between vision and dream, and asserts the capacity of sight to penetrate the unknown. Augustine expanded this particular category of dreams by depicting three levels of sight directly reflecting the neo-Platonic conceptions of corporeal and non-corporeal. Even eight hundred years after Augustine, deliberations about ways of seeing remained the subject of intellectual consideration. The mystic's vision was seen as a human transcendence of the barriers of the corporeal world to share in the likeness of God.

Notwithstanding the impact of Thomas Aquinas, who was both a Dominican and a scholastic theologian, the broader Dominican tradition was "Augustinian" (patristic), rather than scholastic, and was framed in categories of Augustine's mysticism. Augustine's impact on Dominican spirituality was far-reaching. Augustinian thought pervaded the Dominican sermons Catherine heard in Siena. Augustine's discourses

were also readily available to her through her disciple Tommaso d'Antonio. The principles of Aquinas' *Summa*, also grounded in Augustinian thought, were familiar to her. Catherine's is a spirituality of the Word, apostolic, directed towards ministry. "Her spirituality is intensely ecclesial, constantly occupied with the renewal of the Church and the world." (Ashley 1979: Internet).

## **1.2 Some Historical Influences on Catherine of Siena**

Not surprisingly given the religious circumstances that influenced Catherine's growing up in the city of Siena, Catherine drew on her Christian and Dominican heritage.

Like Dominic, Catherine grew under the influence of the desert fathers and mothers...[The] spirituality of the desert was part of Catherine's formation from an early age; the life of the physical desert was not for her, but like the desert fathers and mothers, she knew the need for being alone with God as essential for contemplation. Her image of the sea in the fish and the fish in the seas draws on the desert tradition. And her rootedness in the Dominican contemplative apostolate led her away from following the desert calling literally. (Munro 1991:31).

Union with God, and the attempt at expressing something of what this union meant for her, remained continually at the heart of Catherine's communication and speech.

## **1.3 Some Insights from Eastern Mystical Theology**

While Catherine clearly stands in the Western tradition of Christianity there are insights too from the Eastern tradition that have bearing on our understanding of what mysticism is about, and where Catherine in particular stands in the mystical tradition of the Church.

Lossky (1957) writing of the Eastern mystical tradition provides us with a useful introduction to some aspects of mysticism. It is suggested that the mystic reaches a realm inaccessible to understanding, that the mystic's aim is union with God, and that the imagery so often found in mystical writings is a means towards understanding something not easily explicable.

Mysticism is frequently opposed to theology as a realm inaccessible to understanding, as an unutterable mystery, a hidden depth, to be lived rather than known; yielding itself to a specific experience which surpasses our faculties of understanding rather than to any perception of sense or of intelligence. (Lossky 1957:7).

Catherine too had a strongly developed Trinitarian theology, very specifically, and in particular a theology of union emphasizing unity within the Trinity and our union with the Trinity.

Trinitarian theology is... a theology of union, a mystical theology which appeals to experience, and which presupposes a continuous and progressive series of changes in created nature, a more and more intimate communion of the human person with the Holy Trinity. (Lossky 1957:67).

It can be suggested that aspects of Catherine's theology, especially in relation to the Trinity, may be interpreted from an apophatic view. For example, applying the image of the ocean to the trinity, Catherine finds that the more we plunge into this mystery the less we know. Clearly she is using imagery to describe the unfathomable, the unknowable. Here Catherine is seen to be within the apophatic tradition which emphasizes silence and darkness and takes us beyond what we can grasp, involving the *via negativa*, the way of ignorance.

This is not to say that a theology of the Trinity cannot also be cataphatic when it sometimes affirms something positive about God. The cataphatic way emphasizes the way of images and a positive evaluation of creation. However, what seems to be more evident in Catherine is the apophatic way where her use of images is what she finds best to describe the unknowable mysteries of God experienced mystically.

The apophatic or negative outlook characteristic of Eastern theology is expressed in the great variety of images given us by the Greek Fathers so that our minds may be lifted up to contemplate the work of Christ. (Lossky 1957:151).

Imagery and symbol attempt to express in words something of the profound experience of union with God.

## **2. The Late Medieval Period**

### **2.1 Medieval Worldview**

Catherine of Siena was a product of the late medieval world with its attendant worldview.

Medieval cosmology depicted several distinct categories of existence, with the divine the highest realm of being. Human beings occupied a lower, corporeal level, but could participate in the non-corporeal through the spiritual part of their being, the mind. In between these two was a world of spirits, good and evil, and below the three was inanimate creation. The link connecting all levels was “sight”, a capacity of mind. Visual metaphors became a vocabulary to express the interaction that medieval thinkers observed among the levels of being. An intellectual pre-occupation with vision and sight had a direct connection to the awe late medieval people had for mystics who saw mystically, transcending the limitations of human sight. (cf Meade 1991: 57ff).

It is not within the scope of this dissertation to develop this in detail. Suffice it to say that this worldview permeates Catherine’s writing, and, more to our purposes, her use of imagery which is clearly influenced by her cosmology.

### **2.2 Late Medieval Italian Women**

At some level Catherine was very like the women mystics of medieval Italy. Much of her experience is comparable with that of other women. And yet her experience went further. She was indeed a mystic par excellence, but one with her feet on the ground. On the other hand, on occasion she misread situations, and was not always attuned to the realities around her. Being a mystic did not guarantee that on a human level she always made the best decisions!

From the twelfth century to the sixteenth, women assumed public roles of unprecedented prominence in the religious culture of their time, exercising deliberate choices within the range of available options and despite social and cultural

constraints. They were not mere pawns manipulated by men in the sociopolitical game of marriage alliances. Catherine of Siena was one such woman.

To become a woman saint, one had to transgress somewhere, if only in order to become visible. At the same time, such transgression had to meet with God's approval in some demonstrable way. (Petroff 1994: 166).

To put it differently, had Catherine not been a mystic and a saint, she would not have been able to wield the kind of political and ecclesial power she did in fact yield. Her role would have been confined to that exercised by women in medieval Italian society in general. While she may have been able to perform the kinds of charitable works performed by the Mantellates, her influence would have been very limited.

Italian women lacked political, legal, familial, and religious authority. They could not become priests or higher ecclesiastical figures. Nevertheless, in a society in which the Roman Catholic Church was powerful and omnipresent, women were extraordinarily active, influential, and creative when established authorities, including ecclesiastical authority, were in disarray, even chaos... In brief, late medieval and early modern Italian women are a complex example of the exercise of the powers of the weak. These powers are energetic, fertile, resilient, and limited. ( Stimpson in Bornstein and Rusconi 1996:viii-viii).

The greatest irony at some level is that although she became involved in political and church activity, her knowledge of situations, events, facts, what needed to be done, was limited. Humanly speaking her life was a failure. She did not prevent the schism within the Western Church. She did not live in physical harmony with her body.

If Catherine

were to fit into any tradition it would be the phenomenon of women formed by mystical experience who then became influential in the politics of the time as well as in the spiritual guidance of church officials, and eventually became influential in the spiritual currents of their day." (Villegas 1986:32).

Catherine interacted with her contemporaries in surprising ways:

... her public 'career' was remarkable for a late medieval woman of her artisan class... Regardless of how objectively successful she was, she is important to the history of women because she, a woman, tried to solve the great problems of her time, as she perceived them, and because her contemporaries basically

let her do it... She shows that her society accepted more of a public role for women than one might have imagined. (Scott 1989: 568-569).

Catherine was a woman of her time, and more. She broke taboos, and challenged expected codes of behaviour, becoming a mystic at the service of her brothers and sisters. One of her greatest contributions to Christian spirituality is her insistence on the truth that love of God and of neighbour are inseparable. She had not wanted to leave the cell that had been her home for three years, but was called by God to go beyond the limits of her four walls, first into the city of Siena, and ultimately into the sphere of Italian and church political activity. A contemplative in action, a woman from an ordinary middle class family, she was a person whose life of prayer and service was to have far-reaching influence.

### **2.3 Medieval Women's Mysticism**

Medieval women were different from us in their attitudes and practices, their language and imagery. The social, ecclesial, intellectual and cultural world of the middle ages is different from that of our time. Medieval attitudes towards the body and matter reflected the dualism of Christianity's influence by Greek philosophy. These women too were interested in the human rather than the divine Jesus. They encountered Jesus as a tender lover. They struggled with themselves, their roles in society and Church, with lack of self-confidence, feelings of depression and sadness.

The characteristic spirituality of many lay religious women of medieval times was mysticism, attractive to town dwellers emotionally prepared for intense religious experience. The emotional content of urban piety and the non institutional forms of religious expression permitted to holy women were important. Holy women frequently chose a solitary existence so that they could be absorbed in a personal experience of God. Their piety encouraged imaginative meditation before paintings and icons. Elaborate stories of holiness contributed to a highly cultivated imagination.

Because of their direct experience of God in prayer, holy women were seen as a divine gift to the community, a mediating presence before God for those who struggled to remain above the sinful realities of life or repent of them. They

drew townspeople like a magnet once they came to public attention. (Meade 1991: 51).

The mystic's identification as a genuine religious figure freed her from conventional female roles. Women mystics were thus accorded more power and authority than were male ecclesiastics. They were a vital force in medieval culture, but were rarely mainstream figures. The mystic knew God and herself: the double consciousness of self and God became the content of her teaching. The kind of meditation taught to women was visual and creative, not intellectual and abstract. The conditions of their lives led to visions, and visions gave individual women a voice, and a belief in themselves.

Female mystics, unlike their male counterparts, did not usually modify their lay status: they were and remained laywomen, at most formalizing their religious zeal by joining one of the Third Orders. They were almost always married and had children... [Mystical] marriage was experienced with a concreteness of perception and sensation to be expected from women whose bodies had known these impulses and acts... The lives of female saints were thus models for lay people... Precisely because the people fed on images and not on books – they attended church, observed paintings, and listened to their exposition in sermons, but did not read the bible for themselves – the substance of their spiritual life came from this world of images. (Frugoni 1996: 135).

To attempt an understanding of Catherine, and her use of imagery, from a twenty first century perspective has decided limitations. One must of necessity recognize the medieval milieu and worldview. Any understanding of a medieval worldview must take into consideration the influences on it from early centuries of pre-Christian and Christian tradition. The Dominican tradition itself was greatly indebted to patristic, Augustinian and earlier influences. Mysticism in both the Eastern Church and the Western Church had already a long established tradition. And scholarship has shown that women's mysticism in medieval Italy was not simply a pious practice. Rather, women mystics were held in high regard in an otherwise patriarchal church, and their influence had far-reaching consequences and effects.

## 2.4 Symbolism and Imagery

The branch of the Dominican Order originally open to women was that of enclosed contemplative nuns who supported the work of the Dominican friars by their lives of prayer. Catherine was a Mantellate, a member of the then Third Order of Dominicans, and thus a lay woman, not a religious. Historically, Mantellates can be considered the fore-runners of the branch of the Dominican Family known today as active sisters. Technically she was illiterate, though eventually she did learn to read and write.

The use of images was a characteristic feature of the laity. Female mystics were often uneducated. The religious practices of female mystics depended primarily on memorization, and the use of images served a similar mnemonic function. Images were important as an aid to mystical meditation. They inspired visions and helped communicate experiences.

Mystics of both sexes were particularly attentive to images drawn from their everyday experiences, the seedbed for their interior meditations. Even changes in the standard iconography were faithfully noted in their visions. (Frugoni in Bornstein and Rusconi 1996: 133).

The modern mind may struggle to understand that for medievals the symbol is in fact the real thing. It is suggested however that one of Jung's great contributions is his demonstration of the realism of the symbol as a means of communicating profound truth. We need further to examine the nuance between symbol as the 'real' thing and interpretation of symbol conveying a deeper truth.

Particularly in the case of the uneducated, the symbol is taken for the object it represents. Religious paintings were a primary source of education for those unable to read. That they would see these paintings as actual representations is quite likely. (Von Behren 1973: 129).

Developments in iconography intensified the importance of sight and vision. People were prepared to respect the mystics whose high degree of religious involvement led to the naked experience of God in visions.

## 2.5 Medieval Food Practices

Self-starvation, the deliberate and extreme renunciation of food and drink, seemed to medievals the most basic asceticism, requiring courage and holy foolishness. Eating God in the eucharist was a kind of audacious deification. To religious women food was a way of controlling as well as renouncing both self and environment. Abstaining from food, ecstasies and stigmata were signs of sanctity. Bodily penances, fasting, and illness were seen as a form of service and prayer for the salvation of others.

The theological identification of woman with carnality meant that images and ritualized gestures of eating and not-eating were specially prominent in women's devotional acts and religious language. (Bornstein 1996:9).

Some may argue that Catherine was able to induce a form of mysticism or at least an altered state of consciousness because of her renunciation of food. Others have proposed an eating disorder such as anorexia. It would seem, however, given the medieval understanding of asceticism, and the influence of the lives of people given to asceticism on medievals and on Catherine in particular that one needs to guard against too simplistic an interpretation of the effects of food deprivation.

In both Eastern and Western mysticism renunciation of bodily needs and pleasures is regarded as the way to prepare for the mystic union. Sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, meditative disciplines and fasting are acknowledged today by psychologists as ways to alter the state of consciousness and open the door to the mystic experience. (Von Behren 1973: 189).

In a medieval and patriarchal society women controlled food and their own intake of food. In a society concerned with particular forms of piety, and with the positive effects of mysticism, the control of food-related behaviour was paramount.

Food-related behaviour was central to women socially and religiously not only because food was a resource women controlled but also because by means of food women controlled themselves and their world. Bodily functions, sensations, fertility and sexuality; husbands, mothers, fathers, and children; religious superiors and confessors; God in his majesty and the boundaries of one's own 'self' – all could be manipulated by abstaining from and bestowing food. (Bynum 1987:193-194).

The theological notion of eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, and becoming that body, is understood in a profound way.

Not only did medieval women deny themselves food, they also *became* food – in their own eyes and in the eyes of their male admirers. And when they ate God, they were not merely focusing their hunger sensations (otherwise unrecognized) on the eucharist. They were also reversing their ordinary cultural role of food preparers and food abstainers. They were ‘eating’ a God whose edible body – a nursing body – was in some sense seen as female and therefore as food... Such fasting can be understood only if we understand the late medieval notion of *imitatio Christi* as fusion with the suffering physicality of Christ, and late medieval notions of the female as flesh. (Bynum 1987: 206-207).

This study will not examine in detail the horrors (to our modern-day thinking) of Catherine’s eating habits. More importantly for our theme of study is to begin to understand the medieval notion of becoming food to others, and of eating and becoming Christ.

Bynum ( 1987: 165-180) in her excellent study on medieval food practices has shown that there is in Catherine a concentration on eating and drinking, on bread and blood, as the crucial images for encounter with God. Obsessive fasting and eucharistic piety were key elements in her religious practice. Fasting and feeding became lived metaphors for her. Regardless of the interest Raymond and other males had in images of feeding and nursing, Catherine’s own words make clear the centrality of food in her spirituality. She began fasting as a child, taking the Desert Fathers as models. From about sixteen she began giving up food. Her mature understanding of her eating infirmity was of an infirmity rather than a voluntary practice or a delusion of the devil. Her chief miracles were of cures of illness and miraculous feedings. She saw her suffering, including her inability to eat, as service. Accounts of her life accentuate food abstention and feeding of others, and underline her substitution of the filth of disease and the blood of Christ’s agony for ordinary food. She substituted frequent communion for ordinary eating. To eat for her is to be, to become, to take in, to love. She understood union with Christ as taking in and on, a becoming, of Christ’s flesh itself.

Not eating was a central element in Catherine's behaviour, and eucharistic piety was at the core of her religious practice; blood as food was the central metaphor in her writing. Another favourite metaphor is the image of the nursing Christ. Most fundamentally for Catherine *to eat* and *to hunger* have the same meaning: one eats but is never full, desires but is never satiated. (Bynum 1987: 175).

One of the key symbols of Catherine, to be discussed in a later chapter, is that of blood. Blood as food unites her with the passion of Christ.

As the writings of Catherine of Siena make clear, to eat Christ is to become Christ. The Christ one becomes, in the reception of communion and in the *imitatio* of asceticism, is the bleeding and suffering Christ of the cross. The flesh of Jesus – both flesh as body and flesh as food – is at the very center of female piety. (Bynum 1987: 245).

Medieval food practices cannot lightly be dismissed as having “mysticism-inducing” characteristics, or as being evidence of a psychological disorder. Certainly there were aspects of asceticism and control over bodily functions open to the women who engaged in bodily penances and fasting. The way was opened for women such as Catherine to altered states of consciousness, and to union with Christ whose body she ate in the eucharist. For her to eat Christ is to become Christ, and to put herself at the service of the world.

### **3. Catherine's Fourteenth Century World**

#### **3.1 Saint-Making: the Role of the Confessor**

Women depended on the approval of male clergy for survival, physically and historically. Raymond of Capua was the first to write a biography of Catherine.

The life of Catherine of Siena written by Raymond reflects the worldview of his time: the neo-Platonic cosmology shaped his worldview. Pivotal in his spirituality, and in Catherine's, was the interconnectedness between the physical and spiritual worlds, the influence of good and bad spirits, and the essential significance of vision as the integrating element in the ordering of all things.

Raymond's work is a clever defense for the canonization of a female Saint remembered as both mystic and activist. It does indeed offer insights into the kind of person she was. Certainly she gained influence by convincing men in power through her persuasive arguments. Raymond's portrayal of her as a communicator of divine messages to politicians made sense in the fourteenth century. They assumed that God chooses to speak important messages to his people through unexpected intermediaries. (Scott 1989: 100- 126).

Catherine's self-understanding was not quite Raymond's presentation of her. Her ascetic and mystical qualities are more evident in the hagiography. He felt he had to defend her as a woman to an audience which did not approve of her activism. While she herself may have de-emphasized the supernatural dimensions of her life, it is probably true that her correspondence presents a more reliable and complete portrait of her than the hagiography. Some mystical experiences (mystical marriage, reception of stigmata, exchange of hearts), were narrated by Raymond, not Catherine herself. (Scott 1989: 33-46).

### **3.2 Catherine's Levels of Consciousness**

Catherine's spirituality is representative of a commonly held medieval worldview, and her journey to union with God, her transcendence from the human level to that of the divine, is accomplished through her non-corporeal mind and soul. According to the neo-Platonic custom she makes clear distinctions regarding the levels of consciousness which constitute her experiences. Some incidents, clearly occurring in sleep, she labels dreams. Others, experiences while awake, she describes as taking place in her 'mind's eye'. Finally, to indicate a higher category or revelation, she speaks of what she sees with 'the eye's pupil, most holy faith.' (cf Meade 1991:69)

To understand Catherine's willingness to lose her physical life, we must remember that what most people consider the supernatural world, is a very real world to Catherine. She has a consciousness that this invisible world exists right alongside of the visible, an assurance that this world is populated by divine or supernatural beings with the power to intervene at will and in different ways not only in her personal life but also in the natural and ordinary course of events. She knows this because she believes that she has had direct

contact with this world and its inhabitants through her ecstatic experiences. (Von Behren 1973: 155-156).

### 3.3 Symbols, Imagery and Mnemonic

Catherine like other mystics cannot express herself without symbol or image. She uses images to stimulate the dormant intuition of her readers. Her images come from her own experience, her language is distinctly her own, much of her teaching has universal relevance since she draws on the truths of Christian theology, making them her own. Her use of imagery in her letters is more varied than in the *Dialogue*. Imagery helped her remember the main points of her theological system. Her attitude towards the written word was that of an illiterate person. Her illiteracy made theological discourse problematic for her. In that sense God was the only possible source for her knowledge.

The mythic imagination of the middle ages lent itself to the language of mysticism. Symbolic images coming from the historic language of the Church, archetypal symbolism, symbols from nature, and from daily life were bound together with a practical homely expressiveness which created a new language, echoing from the recessed depths of the psyche. The expressions Catherine used were pristine in their clarity. Visions took place in her own mind and understanding came through faith. This combination resulted in a knowledge, intuitive yet infused by the grace of the Spirit, which pierced the boundaries of human reason to touch the wisdom of the divine. (Meade 1991: 52-53).

Catherine was certainly not original in her use of symbols. Many, such as the bridge, blood, the tree of life, the mirror, are found in the history of Christian spirituality. But the meaning she gives symbols, the interpretations she makes, and indeed the slipping from one symbol to another, is her very own.

Though Catherine borrows many symbols from a long historic tradition, her treatment of them is profoundly integrative in its layering and confirms the harmony of her intellect and spirituality. She communicates with a creative power... causing her symbols to transcend conventional interpretation. (Meade 1991: 74).

At some level Catherine's imagery almost defies any form of harnessing; as fast as one grasps one image, Catherine is on to the next. And yet, it is becoming clear that

imagery and symbol is central to Catherine's system and that we have here the main elements of a conversation with Jung who has brought to the modern consciousness a reappraisal of images and symbols as windows to the psyche.

### 3.4 Catherine's Self-Image

According to Catherine herself, her call to speak and write gave her an important role in world salvation and in political and ecclesiastical affairs. She viewed herself as an activist and a mystic, inspired by a passionate desire for God and a concern to have an impact on the lives of people and the affairs of her time.

When Catherine died the active side of her life began to fade from other people's consciousness of her. She habitually talked with God to learn absolute truths about him and to influence him to be merciful to the world. The self she made public was meant to serve as a model for the most basic characteristics of the spiritual life.

For Catherine

The real self is not the physical body, it is the inner person, whether we wish to call it the ego, the soul, the personality or the mind. Her relationship to biological drives and instincts is antagonistic... She has set herself a tremendous task and we cannot say she succeeded completely in suppressing either her physical body or her egotistical self. To become another Christ is neither easy nor simple. (Von Behren 1973: 226-227).

Catherine can be said to have anticipated the current value placed on interior wholeness when she emphasized the integration of the human faculties of memory, understanding and will. She taught that all can achieve the connective harmony leading to union with God. Her life exemplifies the strength of character and purpose flowing from self-knowledge derived from the knowledge of God.

Self-knowledge for Catherine is not a mere psychological self-understanding. Rather it is a knowledge of self gained by looking at ourselves in the light of the one who created us. We never arrive at the deepest self-understanding without seeing ourselves through God's eyes. Self-knowledge is thus a double knowledge, of ourselves acquired by looking at God, and of God by reflecting on God's goodness to us. Love follows knowledge: we need to know in order to love.

Self-realization is not the same as ecstatic union with God:

To be a Christ can mean to achieve unification of self and thus self-realization. Catherine does not share our modern viewpoint which would say that what this means, is not to imitate Christ literally, but to fulfill the potentialities of your own individual self, just as he did. To Catherine, to follow Christ meant follow (sic) his pattern – not your own... Basically what Catherine is describing in her instructions is the way and the promised goal. She has tasted this goal in the ecstatic union, but the way to attain it is not without obstacles. (Von Behren 1973: 181).

Catherine views the whole of Jesus' life through the optic of Christ crucified. Her letters have passionate insight into the central dogma of Christianity, the union of godhead and manhood in Christ. She tends to identify herself as another Christ.

### **3.5 Catherine's Apostolate and Activism**

Catherine's desire to save everyone was part of her reaction to ecstatic union. To show her love and gratitude, she would stop at nothing to 'repay' Christ for those experiences. She combined the highest reaches of the mystical life with active participation in the world. Her petitions to God are for herself, as God's instrument in the world, for the church's reform, and for the world. She campaigned actively against abuses in the church. Hers was a missionary mysticism, a mysticism of apostolate. The love of Christ and neighbour is inseparable from the love of God.

In Catherine's case... it is the ascetic and mystical dimension which she shared with other female Saints of her time that is the important topic for study... Yet... it would be misleading to identify Catherine only with her practice of traditional penances. Because so much of her time was taken up in her public apostolate, the types of suffering she endured were quite different from those of other holy women. (Scott 1989: 75-76).

Catherine was a true contemplative in action. She clearly did not live the life of an enclosed nun, and was thoroughly immersed in her ministry. Yet at no time did her life lack a contemplative dimension.

Catherine

lacked the introspection of... other famous religious women: perhaps she was less drawn than they were to seeking God within herself, or perhaps she was brought by the forces of events to dedicate her energies more to solving external problems in her church and in her world... Rather than discover and explore within herself Teresa's intricate 'interior castles'... or instruct others about how God draws them to great spiritual heights or comes to inhabit their souls, she wrote to request that her correspondents change their moral behavior or undertake an action in society (Scott 1989: 186-187).

Catherine understood in her life that contemplation needs to bear fruit in action:

*Contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere.* Contemplation on its own without action says the Dominican tradition is incomplete. So too is action which does not continually draw strength from the quiet focus of contemplation. Every Dominican, indeed every Christian, knows the tension that results from learning to balance in our lives the demands of both contemplation and action. We can learn from Catherine. Even after she left her 'cell' and became actively involved in the demands of her apostolic calling, she was clearly totally steeped in contemplation.

### 3.6 Catherine's Mystical Marriage

Raymond makes a clear connection between the mystical marriage and Catherine's active life. The mystical marriage is necessary because of Catherine's sex and activity. She was chosen as an ignorant woman as an instrument to confound the learned. She was given the role of spouse of Christ, traditionally applied to a conventual nun. The union of love and the mystical marriage are in essence the same. By becoming the spouse of Christ she is acting in a very feminine fashion. She chooses the most powerful man in her world. She is answerable to no one but her spouse. Identification and separation are present at the same time. This is why the mystics like to speak of spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage, using metaphors that bring out unity and separation, two in one flesh.

Tommaso... sees the exchange of hearts as one of the three signs indicating that Catherine was a favorite with Christ; the first being the mystical marriage, the second, a purifying bath of Christ's blood covering her from head to foot, and the third, the physical exchange of hearts. (Von Behren 1973: 127).

Again Catherine's experience of mystical marriage is not unlike that of other women mystics, Teresa of Avila, and Catherine of Genoa among them.

Tommaso of Siena makes it quite clear when he speaks of Catherine's union with God he means literally... Catherine, too, has turned a symbolic relationship – the spouse of Christ – into a concrete role. The reality of the union of love in ecstasy becomes a real marriage relationship. (Von Behren 1973: 129-130).

Catherine's experience of mystical marriage to Christ appears to have had a sexual dimension.

Although the involvement of sexual experiences in religious ecstasy is a controversial subject, ... in Catherine's case we cannot deny that sexual feelings do play a part in her emotional response... Stating that there was a sexual element in the marriage relationship with Christ, by no means implies that the sexual element is the only emotion involved. (Von Behren 1973: 210).

One does not easily define ecstasy and union with God:

There is no general agreement among modern investigators in the psychological and religious fields as to what actually happens to the self in the unitive state of ecstasy... The mystic may well feel that his own self is lost or annihilated in the unitive state... My own position based on the fact that Catherine does recall and relate the context and emotions of her ecstatic and unitive state leads me to agree with Arberman's definition of the ecstatic union as a 'state of intensive and clear intellectual consciousness with a fully retained and distinct ego-consciousness.' This consciousness he compares to dream consciousness during which one is fully and clearly conscious of one's self, one's experience... This differs in no respect from ordinary waking consciousness. (Von Behren 1973: 112).

Catherine's mystical marriage emphasizes the symbolism of unity and separateness, two in one flesh. The espousal was similar to that experienced by conventual nuns, but also not unlike the mystical marriage of lay women such as Catherine of Genoa. The symbolism was interpreted literally by Catherine's contemporaries to the extent that the marriage was seen as real and concrete. Clearly her mystical marriage was an experience of unitive ecstasy, an experience of oneness with God.

### 3.6 Catherine's Exchange of Hearts

Raymond, rather than Catherine herself, writes about the exchange of hearts that took place between the Lord and Catherine.

Catherine experienced an exchange of hearts with Jesus, focussing on the overwhelming immensity of God's love for all creation. She moves easily from an awareness of mystical nothingness to total immersion in God and in the abyss of the soul. The mystical grace of exchange of hearts is really an exchange of wills with the Lord, manifested in a vision. In Catherine's vision, the Lord took her heart and replaced it with his own. The grace symbolized is the exchange of wills. The old self is put off, and renewed in the spirit of the mind. The soul is transformed into God, becoming one with him. Mystical union is a real identity with God, a real absorption into his divine life.

The annihilation of our will as a source even of good actions is accomplished in adoration... He often keeps us waiting so that we will the more completely empty ourselves, renouncing our will to be filled with him... Thus our Lord kept Catherine of Siena waiting several days after accepting the offer of her heart before he gave her his own heart." (Hinnebusch 1999b:55).

A mystical exchange of hearts is a symbol of grace at work in the life of a person:

Theologians unanimously agree that the mystical exchange of hearts is a symbol of a profound work of grace in the person. It is a prodigy not of the natural and physical order, but of the spiritual and mystical order. It indicates a transformation worked in the person's will. It is a grace which gives the will a marvelous new perfection of divine charity... The grace brought [Catherine] into that state in which the soul and God are one, because the soul and God have but one will... The mystical exchange of hearts, then, indicates an exchange of wills. The perversity of the human will is replaced by such perfect charity that the soul loves only what God loves. (Hinnebusch 1999a:4-5).

Catherine's exchange of hearts with the Lord suggests total immersion in God, manifested in her vision, an absorption into his life. It suggests a symbol of the work of grace in her, transforming her into Christ.

We now examine in broad outline aspects of Jung's archetypal imagery, his understanding of individuation as the task of maturity, and his interpretation of

dreams as a means of accessing the contents of the unconscious with a view to a modern interpretation of Catherine if this is possible.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TOWARDS A JUNGIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SELF

#### Overview

This chapter will examine certain aspects of Jung's understanding of the 'self' and in particular his use of symbols and images as media of communicating the deeper workings of the psyche, with a view to establishing a conversation with Catherinian imagery of the mystical movements of the soul.

#### 1. Symbols

##### 1.1 Symbols and Images

A symbol is an image of a content that largely transcends consciousness. An authentic symbol can never be fully explained. A symbol is a picture of something which is truly real but which transcends merely intellectual comprehension. The symbol belongs to two worlds, of every day and of the unconscious. Symbols and myths of religion give meaning to the deepest human longings. The unconscious uses symbols tailor-made for the individual. Symbols have different meanings for different people. Edinger, a scholar of Jung, has this to say:

Modern man's most urgent need is to discover the reality and value of the inner subjective world of the psyche, to discover the symbolic life... Man needs a world of symbols as well as of signs... A sign is a token of meaning that stands for a *known* entity... A symbol, on the other hand, is an image or representation which points to something essentially unknown, a mystery. (Edinger 1972: 109).

Jung understood that symbols, as dream language, do not disguise the meaning of the dream but express exactly what is intended to be the message. His contribution to depth psychology was to look for the wider, deeper meaning of symbols. Jung would say an actual symbol is the best possible description of a relatively unknown but posited thing. A symbol is capable of uniting opposites. Symbols are spontaneous products of the archetypal psyche, and have legitimate effects only when they serve to

change our psychic state or conscious attitude. So, Jungian psychotherapy aims to make the symbolic process conscious.

It is hard to separate symbols from myth in Jung. The story is the dream, and within that dream reside the clarifying symbols. The symbol sustains the core of the myth, and although the individual perceptions of myth are important in literature and society, neither the collective nor the personal contains the whole truth.

Psychologists tell us that symbols are polyvalent. This means that the same symbol can have a variety of meanings – though usually interrelated meanings – for different minds, or even for the same mind. But it means also that the meaning of a true symbol is not exhausted when we have found some rational formula which will define or ‘explain’ it. A living symbol is very much more than a shorthand device for what can be expressed more fully and accurately. A symbol cannot only be thought about and restated conceptually, it can also be imagined, intuited, seen or heard, felt. A symbol... ‘does something to us,’ it moves us, shifts our centre of awareness, changes our values... Jung saw that it... was the very instrument which, just because it was polyvalent, transformed consciousness itself and thereby the sick personality. (White 1952: 233-234).

Symbols are not limited by time and space. Symbols are universal, as Ponce asserts:

The universality of images in the form of symbols occurs because of the manner by which consciousness is impacted on apprehends phenomena, ‘internalizes’ the apprehensions in accord with the group’s agreed upon meaningful ontological answers, and then ‘externalizes’ these answers as its own truth. (Ponce 1990:6-7).

When we consider that symbols point to the inexplicable, that they transcend consciousness, that they facilitate a meeting between the everyday and the unconscious, and that they point to mystery, we note too from our brief overview so far that Catherine’s use of symbols can be compared with the use of symbols as understood by Jung. Symbols have different meanings for different people, and in Catherine’s case it is clear that even the same symbol can have several meanings. Jung is adamant that symbols are the language of dreams. From what we have seen it would also appear that symbols are the language of mystics. One needs to caution against equating dreams with mysticism. And yet at one level it can be said that there

is a similarity between what happens in dreams, and what happens in a mystical experience.

## 1.2 Symbols in Myth and Religion

Myths and legends of primitive societies preserve the symbols and images found in the unconscious and in the collective unconscious, or in the dreams of people. The symbol is never thought out consciously, but comes usually as a revelation.

Mythological themes and symbols rooted in the universal history of mankind indicate the participation of the deepest strata. Symbols have a particularly important place in the world's religions. Even Scripture is a composite of material going back to various sources, drawing on contemporary evocative symbol. We note this too in the use of image and symbol in the parables of Jesus.

Symbols function in human and religious development, and symbolic images can act as a releaser and transformer of psychic mystery. Symbols are bridges between the ego and the big self, between personal/cultural and transpersonal, and between the sacred and the profane. The symbolic process links the conscious to the unconscious and the strange to the familiar. It isn't easy for us to grasp the significance of the symbols that come down from the past, yet it is only their forms that change, not their psychic meaning.

The city is a maternal symbol. Water has maternal significance, the sea is a symbol of generation, and in dreams signifies the unconscious. The visible father of the world is the sun, heavenly fire. God, Father, Sun, Fire are mythologically synonymous. Christian legends attribute many fire and light symbols to the saints. In some mythology the fire is the messenger of the gods. Water, wood of life, tree of life, earth are mother symbols.

Yet, according to Jung

The great religions of the world suffer from increasing anemia, because the helpful numina have fled from the woods, rivers, and mountains, and from animals, and the god-men have disappeared underground into the unconscious... Our present lives are dominated by the goddess Reason, who is our greatest and most tragic illusion... We are so captivated by and entangled

in our subjective consciousness that we have forgotten the age-old fact that God speaks chiefly through dreams and visions. (Jung 1964, 1978: 91-92).

Religious symbols give meaning to the life of people. The cross expresses a multitude of aspects, ideas and emotions, and is not merely a sign of death. Natural symbols are derived from the unconscious contents of the psyche. Cultural symbols have been used to express eternal truths in many religions. The rationalism of modern people has destroyed their capacity to respond to numinous symbols. Stripped of numinosity, things are no longer holy.

While Christ is acknowledged as the central Christian symbol, there are in him as symbol, as shall be noted, problems for Jung. The central Christian symbol is Jesus Christ, embodying the symbol of the creator, of the mystery within all that exists. Bryant suggests it would be truer to say not that Christ is a symbol but that in him many archetypal symbols meet and merge. (1983:84). Certainly there is power in the figure of Christ to fulfil many archetypal themes; the symbol of the crucifix is a window through which we can look into the heart and mind of God.

Clearly myths and legends have been shown to preserve the symbols of humankind, and clearly too some of these myths and legends are deeply ingrained within the Christian tradition itself. We have already noted that Catherine was influenced by the Christian tradition she inherited, and that some of her symbols can be traced to some of the legends that built up around the lives of saints. Interestingly, some of the key images Catherine employs are in fact key archetypal images. We will later on examine, e.g., her image of God as fire, some of her various images of water, her image of cell (turning into house, turning into city), and her image of blood (clearly linked to food and to union with the divine).

## **2. The Personal Unconscious and the Collective Unconscious**

### **2.1 The Unconscious**

Jung discovered that something of which we are not conscious has the power to interfere with our conscious intentions. He gives the inner and psychic process a value

equal to the outer and environmental one. The unconscious is the matrix of consciousness. What is seen as impossible by consciousness can take place in the unconscious. The ideal goal for human life involves an interplay of conscious and unconscious dimensions of life. The unconscious of a Christian appears to be much less Christian than his/her conscious system is.

The unconscious is neither a location nor a container, but merely an aspect of consciousness the dynamics of which are concealed and denied by our identifying it as the parameters of another order of being – and that the concept of the unconscious simply illustrates the operation of an archetype. (Ponce 1990:34).

Jung suggested that the unconscious doesn't think rationally to begin with, but symbolically, in images. This explains the difficulty we have with dreams because we don't know how to think symbolically. "Man's worst sin is unconsciousness, but it is indulged in with the greatest piety even by those who should serve mankind as teachers and examples." (Jung 1972: 131; 455).

Water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious. The unconscious might be compared to the sea, the matrix out of which consciousness grows. For Jung the unconscious is the source of the experience of the numinous. The cave is a place of rebirth. Everyone has a cave in himself in which takes place the unconscious process of transformation. The shadow always represents that aspect of a person's system which is refuted, rejected, repressed and which he/she hides from other people. It is represented in dreams by a person of the same sex. It belongs to the personal unconscious.

Catherine would not have used language connected with the idea of the unconscious. On the other hand her whole life was about finding her self, and finding God, and about becoming increasingly united with God. In much the same way that on a psychological level we are invited to wholeness, and to exposing and bringing to light what is not conscious in the psyche, so too on a spiritual level, we are invited to go beyond the experiences of this life, and to seek union with the divine. While one needs to caution against too easy an equation of bringing aspects of the psyche to consciousness with finding self and finding the divine, it can be said that psychology

and the study of mysticism are invited to a dialogue. Of particular note is the fact that the unconscious thinks in symbols. Mysticism too employs the language of symbol.

## 2.2 The Collective Unconscious

There is an important distinction between the personal unconscious and the various levels of the collective unconscious. The contents of the collective unconscious are the shared possession of humankind. The collective unconscious is a culturally produced perspective of a society's world-view concerning the origin and nature of the values its predecessors held, an image of the past that explains the present. Jung saw the collective unconscious as a level of unconscious functioning in our psyche. The archetypes convinced him it was real.

It is in this primordial image of the world, the *archetype* called the collective unconscious, where, Jung informs us, other archetypes *per se* are located, where they have crystallized to become 'the ruling power, the gods, images of the dominant law and principles, and of typically recurring events in the soul's cycle of experience.' (Ponce 1990:37).

Archetypes are unconscious. And because myths are an expression of the collective unconscious, they are found in similar forms among all peoples. We can never cut loose from archetypal foundations. Consciousness is far from covering the psyche in its totality. Normally the unconscious collaborates with the conscious without friction or disturbance.

Catherine was aware in her own life of moving between levels of consciousness, and was in fact able to write about them. Some of what she experienced was not unique to her, but could be said to be part of what happens to people moved on the level of the collective unconscious. Her symbols were not unique to her, but were the shared inheritance of the tradition to which she belonged, and in particular to the tradition of medieval mysticism. The symbols she describes in her visions and experiences of ecstasy belong explicitly to the kind of archetypal symbols which describe union with the divine and journeys to self-knowledge.

### 3. Archetypes

#### 3.1 Archetypes: Primordial Patterns and Myths

'Archetype', in use before the time of St Augustine, is synonymous with 'Idea' in Platonic use. Archetypes are disseminated not only by tradition, language and migration, but can arise spontaneously at any time, without any outside influence. Archetypal experiences are characterized by a numinous quality. Archetypes function as bridges between the big self and the ego. An archetype is a concept devoid of form and content, not a datum. An archetype is bipolar, having a positive and a negative attitude.

Jung employed the term archetype in speaking about the built-in patterns of human becoming, relating, behaving, being. He saw the archetypal dimension of the psyche as the source of growth and development in the second half of life, with the Self becoming the integrating force bringing conscious and unconscious into a wholeness.

Usually we speak of the archetypal images of personages (e.g. witch or hero). More rarely do we speak of birth and death, or the passage from one stage of life to another. Archetypes create myths, religions and philosophies that influence and characterize whole nations and epochs. The universal hero myth, e.g., always refers to a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil, and who liberates his people from destruction and death. The further we delve into the origins of a collective image, the more we uncover a seemingly unending web of archetypal patterns.

In themselves, archetypal images are among the highest values of the human psyche; they have peopled the heavens of all races from time immemorial. (Jung 1959, vol 9, part1:84).

Archetypes are not innate inherited images, but are dispositions to the formation of images. They are encountered indirectly through symbols. They are centres of energy, of immense power and laden with significance. Their moral laws cannot be broken with impunity.

Jung outlined the meaning of many non-human images important in understanding dreams. The sea is a favourite symbol for the unconscious. It often symbolizes the vast unconscious out of which man's conscious life emerged and from sustenance still comes. Many people dream of the house that is their personal dwelling representing conscious life and ego, as against hotels and trains speaking of group life and mores. Animals often stand for the instinctive life within us. Many images are not clear until their original, often religious, meaning can be found. Journeys often represent one's inner quest. But symbols can never be studied from a book since dream interpretation is always an evolving process.

A striking feature of Catherine's symbols is that they are not by and large symbols to do with personages. So while Jung might have the dreams he writes about peopled with heroes, tricksters, mother or father figures, and children, this cannot be said of Catherine's images. Her symbols as we have already noted come from her personal life experience in Siena, and from the Christian tradition. Yet the significance of the bridge as a symbol uniting the profane and the divine, people and God, obviously has archetypal significance. And her description of the sea in the fish and the fish in the sea points us to an integration of the conscious and the unconscious.

### **3.2 The Archetype of Self**

Every archetypal image carries a partial aspect of the Self. In the unconscious there is no separation of different things. Everything merges with everything else. The Self is the union of the conscious and the unconscious. Its development is individuation.

There are many parallels between Jung's 'self' and the traditional symbols of Christ. Yet despite the parallels, the 'self' represents a purely human wholeness. An existential link must be forged with God and the cosmos. The archetype of the self is fundamental to his understanding of religion. By the self, he meant the total personality termed the ego, and the unconscious, both personal and collective unconscious. He saw the mandala as symbol of self, of wholeness, appearing to find it hard to distinguish the experience of the self and that of God. Jung's concept of the self accords closely with the Christian mystical tradition, especially in 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Here spiritual guides teach that God who is present everywhere is to be

found within the individual's own soul. Old spiritual guides understood self-awareness largely as becoming aware of sinful tendencies, while sin in the vocabulary of modern psychologists hardly has a place. The spiritual journey has largely to do with being oneself.

Certainly archetypes points to a built in pattern of becoming and relating. It is possibly in the arena of the archetype of the self, and specifically of Christ as the archetype of the self, that one finds it most difficult to find links between Catherine and Jung. Catherine's quest for self-knowledge had as its aim knowledge of God. Catherine's understanding of union with Christ, and of trying to emulate him in her own life, is not what Jung understood when he spoke of Christ as the archetype of the self. Jung struggled with the notion of Christ as archetype of the self because of Christianity's belief that Christ has no shadow. How then does he model integration and coming to harmony within the self?

#### **4. Contents of the Unconscious**

##### **4.1 The Shadow as Archetype**

Jung found the shadow, an archetypal form, represented over and over again in the characters that people our dreams. The shadow is a dark and threatening figure, usually someone unknown to the dreamer, sometimes a 'Negro' (for a white person), or the trickster. The shadow represents the inferior or undeveloped side of man/woman left behind in our attempt to become rational and moral. Its real value cannot be found until one looks at the elements objectively, instead of projecting them on to some other person who is hated and feared. Jung uses the idea of the shadow to explain what he means by evil. Rejected elements of the personality are the shadow, forcing itself on the conscious personality in dreams. Projecting our shadow on to others we render ourselves incapable of seeing them as ordinary human beings. For Jung then repentance has to do with change of direction and of heart. And so we need to bring to light our conscious lapses and failures, and the unacceptable things in ourselves of which we are unconscious.

The term shadow does not imply something evil, but simply refers to what is thrown into the 'shade' by that which stands in the 'light' of consciousness. When something is approaching consciousness from the unconscious, it comes into a field of evaluation that might be called a field of moral choice. (Hall 1986:19).

The primary task of mid-life adults is to come to terms with their shadow. The shadow is the personal unconscious. The development of the shadow runs parallel to that of the ego. It may be manifested in an inward, symbolic figure or in a concrete figure from the outside world. To confront the shadow means to take a critical attitude towards one's own shadow.

Whether the dark night be the night of the shadow of typology, or of my own taboos, or of the new awareness of archetypal evil in oneself and others, there is new life born of this mid-life archetypal process of dying to one's ego and letting go of this too tight grip and control. This exploration through the Shadow into the self is really exploration into God, and so it is a surrender that is active and creative. (Brewi and Brennan 1988: 146).

Catherine recognized personal sin in her life, and social sin in her society. Her whole life was a struggle with coming to terms with the evil she experienced, and with integrating the parts of herself that needed redemption. She spoke of herself as 'she who is not', and of God as 'he who is', recognizing her finiteness and humanity. She aimed at becoming another Christ, so totally immersed in the blood of Christ, and so at one with his will. No mean feat for a strong-headed woman who often prefaced what she had to say with "*Io voglio*" (I want it, I expect it).

#### **4.2 Anima/Animus**

Another content of the unconscious is the 'image of the soul' which Jung calls 'anima' in males and 'animus' in females, the image of the other we carry in us. Animus and anima emerge in mid-life. In projected form the anima or animus usually falls on a person of the opposite sex.

Jung called the anima and animus 'soul images,' because when the ego is out of touch with them it can feel like the state that in some primitive religious systems is called 'loss of soul' (Hall 1986:43).

The anima exists in the psychic unconscious of a male and personifies the contrasexual elements which express certain so-called feminine qualities. Anima and animus are counterparts in the dreams of men and women. These two dream images come from something real and insistent in men and women. The unconscious feminine within a man and the masculine traits in women are rooted in our physical structure and our culture and are carried by our genes and chromosomes, as well as by our psychological structure and our culture. It is difficult to face and come to terms with these realities. It is not easy to bear the burden of the shadow. We prefer to see these things in other people. These images do not stay put when they are unconscious and only projected. Through dream experiences these elements can come into consciousness within a person, though at a cost. The man who comes to terms with his inner feminine qualities finds even deeper values. When one does not deal with the shadow and the anima-animus, one is led into the cult of war or into idolatry.

The concept of the anima is empirical, its sole purpose being to name a group of related or analogous psychic phenomena. When projected, the anima always has a feminine form with definite characteristics. One normally comes to realize the power of the archetype of the other sex through falling in love. Some friendship with the opposite sex is a way of encouraging men and women to come to terms with the contrasexual elements of their own being, a step in the process of individuation.

Like the people of her time Catherine had trouble with accepting femininity, presumably because of constraints laid upon women. And yet she saw Christ as a nursing mother, feeding the world on blood from his side. She struggled with aspects of her sexuality. Having taken a vow of virginity very young, she also experienced a mystical espousal with Christ, and as has been suggested already experienced a sexual element to her mystical union with Christ. It would seem that in her own life there was a constant struggle as she gradually came to terms with the contrasexual elements in her personality.

## 5. Individuation

### 5.1 The Process of Individuation

There is an overarching concern for wholeness animating the Jungian corpus. The goal of individuation is wholeness or holiness of the Self. The deep structures of the symbols guiding the process coincide with the deep structures of the world's central religious symbols. Individuation is the manifestation of one's innate potentialities. Strictly speaking the process is real only if the individual is aware of it and consciously makes a connection with it. Jungian psychology is not about directing people towards a goal. Individuation means every individual finds his/her meaning as best he/she can.

The processes of individuation begin with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it. Often the urge towards individuation appears hidden in the overwhelming passion one may feel for another person. Finding the inner meaning of life is more important to the individual than anything else.

Individuation aims at the achievement of optimum synthesis of conscious and unconscious processes and fantasies. It leads a person to experience his own individual uniqueness together with the recognition that there are forces both within and without him that transcend his personal and conscious understanding. In consequence, the process of individuation encompasses the process of individualization though it moves a person beyond this essentially ego-building process and on towards the search for values, meaning and self-transcendence. (Gordon 1978: 302).

Individuation is the process of development marked by crises by which an individual learns to live out what he truly is. A person is required to face and enter into a creative relationship with his unconscious energies and drives. The individuation process of maturing is about human growth and development. The believer sees this movement as a way the creator guides people towards their fulfilment. Jung compares human life with the course of the sun from its rising to its setting, divided into four main stages: childhood, youth, maturity and old age. He is convinced that the meaning of the second half of life is to be found in the service of culture.

Individuation is ultimately a mysterious process that leads naturally into questions of religion and the meaning of life... Individuation is the term used in Jungian psychology to describe the process by which potentialities of a particular psyche unfold in the course of a life history... Dreams are in the service of the individuation process... The spiral is an excellent symbol for the path of individuation, because it combines the sense of movement along an inner axis with the image of circumambulating a center. (Hall 1986:48-49).

Perhaps it is in the area of individuation that one sees most clearly the link between Catherine and Jung. Catherine set out on a journey towards wholeness and holiness, into the cell of self-knowledge, in search of God. Her life was very short, but it is certainly in its second half that one can most clearly see her maturing process. She was no longer concerned only with developing a relationship with Christ and spending time literally in the cell in her father's house. One sees instead a movement outwards, reaching out to the needs of people and the world around her. Coming to maturity is about moving away from self-centredness, and becoming other-centred, even as one grows in wholeness. Catherine's journey towards holiness is similar to what Jung calls individuation. Yet ultimately the mystic goes further, since the goal is self-transcendence and union with God not merely self-realization.

## **6. Dreams**

### **6.1 The Significance of Dreams**

For Jung the symbolic language of dreams presents some aspect of the present state of affairs of the unconscious. Any obscurity of the dream is due to our ignorance of its symbolic language. Dreams are a device by means of which the unconscious seeks to bring home facts overlooked. Many have a sexual aspect or express erotic conflicts.

Dreams express meaning. They picture what is not present in consciousness, and bring memories, experiences, images that can reveal the unconscious element in a person's relationships. They can represent a function of compensating for one's view of life. Or they can simply emphasize the conscious attitude, also suggesting a process of compensation. The unconscious is quite capable of speaking consciously as well as symbolically. Where attention is given to dreams over a long period of time, a process of development occurs in the personality itself. This is the process of

individuation, by which a person becomes at one with his own individuality, with humankind. To bring together the dream world within and the outer world of real people and things is a living process that is demanding. Jung stressed the religious nature of this process. (cf Kelsey 196:208-211).

The language and people of the unconscious are symbols, the means of communication are dreams. The dreamer's unconscious communicates with the dreamer alone. Dreams are an accessible source for investigating a person's symbolizing faculty. In the primitive world things do not have the same sharp boundaries they have in "rational" societies, and many dreams present images and associations that are analogous to primitive ideas, myths and rites. In dreams symbols occur spontaneously. We cannot lay down general rules for interpreting dreams. Jung discovered that the psyche contained its own healer activated by the process of exploring dreams and fantasies. Often the dream suggests in images what the conscious life lacks or needs to get back into balance.

There are also experiences of the numinous dream, one that is enlightened by a special light and power and quality, telling us that we stand in a holy place. One finds oneself in the presence of God. Something incomprehensible has taken over. Such dreams are as meaningful as a waking religious experience. The symbols of the unconscious may even slip away and we know the one who gives us our dreams.

Jung understood the unconscious as more than the repository of forgotten childhood experiences. He saw it also as a generator of creative fresh ideas, perspectives and images. He linked the symbolism used in religions throughout the world with the symbols emerging from individual's dreams. He was convinced that an inner motivation of the psyches to search for God or religious experience is as powerful as other drives. Archetypal dreams originate from the collective unconscious, and are concerned with collective issues, attitudes and values, and are often meant for a group. Dreamers are in touch with Something, Someone greater than themselves. These archetypal dreams are often part of the initiation of a holy person. Ordinarily our nightly dreams originate from the personal unconscious. The unconscious uses the language of symbols, and can open the possibility of realizing one's own shadow

side. Working with dreams means forming a relationship between our conscious understanding and our unconscious experiences. (Martigny 2000:4-5, 47-48).

In all religions and in all early civilizations, dreams have been considered an important gateway between the everyday world and another world – the spirit world, the world of the gods, the archetypal realm. Dream interpretation is the most direct road to an appreciation of the unconscious mind. Jung treated dreams as facts, not just an imaginary experience. Dream images are to be understood symbolically. Dreams are symbolic in order that they cannot be understood. A dream is an involuntary psychic product. Dreams bring hidden conflicts to light, express hidden wishes, are forward-looking. “Dreams *prepare* the psyche for death. But dreams seem to view death in no more dramatic terms than a journey, a marriage or some other major change in life.” (Hall 1986:133).

The only rule Jung made around the interpretation of dreams was to listen to the unconscious, to approach it without deciding beforehand what it has to say. Dream-images can only be understood as they are seen rising out of a total life. To understand dreams one must live widely and well, and one must know God. Jung’s approach to the psyche offers people a way by which they can find the lively religious meaning that once welled up in Christian life. Through the symbolic they can know that God still speaks out of the depth of the human soul. Archetypal dreams are universal, part of the inherited endowment of the human psyche. The means of establishing the meaning of these symbols are to be found in primitive religion and folklore, mythology, fairy tales and poetry.

It is an established fact in religious tradition that God does in fact use dreams to communicate with people. Mystical experience is not the same as dreams, and yet what happens in dreams can in some ways be compared to what happens in mystical experience. Catherine was aware of different levels of consciousness, and some of what was communicated to her may have been within the experience of a dream-like state. As has been noted the language of dreams is the same as that of the mystics.

## **7. Jung, Religion and Psychology**

### **7.1 Archetypal Psychology**

Archetypal psychology can perhaps be said to originate with Jung, though it is more accurately a post-Jungian movement. Post modern movements reject tenets of the modern worldview, e.g. mechanism, sensate empiricism and a divine presence. Jung's entire system is based on the reality of non-sensory perception. He rejected the individualism of modernity. He became agnostic about God if not atheistic, and remained critical of the traditional doctrine of God.

Jung's psychology, perhaps more than any other psychology... brings modern science to the very frontiers of the realm traditionally held by theology. More exactly, it brings the methods of empirical science into the heartlands of that territory – the territory of the human soul. (White 1952: 81).

Jungian psychotherapy is a system of education and spiritual guidance. He broke with the linear causal thinking of the old psychology. His psychology is neither a religion nor a philosophy. As a depth psychologist his understanding of self-actualization as the quest for meaning and wholeness gives psychological grounding to Hegel's metaphysics of the Absolute. Open to the metaphysical side of the unconscious he respected reason and the scientific attitude.

### **7.2 Jung and Religion**

The formulation of his own heterodox concept of God seems to have arisen out of his struggles with the problem of evil. He believed God to be the source of all evil as well as of all good. His idea of God is problematic. While the archetype is seen as central to the Jungian concept, a problem arises from his equation of the collective unconscious with God. Jung declared his allegiance to Christianity, but was considered an outsider. Jung has been accused by some of undermining Judaism and Christianity. Others have seen his work as a challenge and help to the development of doctrine. He was above all a doctor of souls, concerned with negative psychological effects of the practice of some unhealthy kinds of religion.

Jung tells us that the most powerful experience a man or a woman can have is a religious experience. The numinosity that accompanies a religious experience lifts one out of oneself and connects one to the deeper realities in oneself and outside of oneself, to Wisdom itself...At the heart of a religious experience is the meaning of one's life, one's essence and relatedness. (Brewi and Brennan 1988: 235).

Jung came to be suspicious of religious ideas and beliefs in which he had been brought up, though all his life he was concerned with knowing God. He was critical of theologians for being out of touch with the needs of people in the contemporary world. He made a distinction between psychological truth and objective or absolute truth. Various features of Jung's thought are difficult for a Christian. For Jung God is both good and evil. And Jung vests almost as much authority in dreams, myths and alchemical writings as he does in biblical writings.

### **7.3 Jung's Critics**

People have objected to Jung's seeming ability to appreciate the religious necessity for maintaining God's absolute transcendence. Some have seen him as a modern gnostic, emphasizing knowledge over faith. Another group sees him as a hermeneutical revivalist who frequently expressed the view that the symbols of Christianity no longer capture the imagination of modern people. A third group sees him as a doctor of souls. And a fourth group sees him as a post-Christian modern man, grappling with the central problems of modernity. Murray Stein chooses to view Jung's relationship to Christianity as a psychotherapeutic one. He sees Jung's attitude to Christianity as that of a therapist to a patient; certainly there was in Jung a lifelong ambivalence towards Christianity, its doctrines, its representatives, its symbols. So, he interprets the Trinitarian doctrine of God as he would the dream of a patient. He sees the Trinity as rooted in archetypal factors and patterns. His realization that the Christian doctrines of Christ and the Trinity exclude the dark side of reality lies at the heart of his psychological critique of Christianity. Thus he suggests including evil within the doctrine of God. And so the Christian symbol for wholeness, its God-image, is seen as having lost its power. (Murray Stein 1985: 3-131).

Bryant (1983:105- 125) thinks Jung can help us to experience the God in whom we believe. His special wisdom is his power to illuminate the inner signs. His teaching about stages of life has direct relevance to Christian prayer. His teaching leads us to look out for and note the symbols and images that awaken echoes within. His contribution to our self-understanding lies in his personification of the inner forces of the psyche. He believes there's a God archetype latent in all people awaiting a suitable object to summon it into activity. The search for individuation is complementary to the quest for union God, although Jung did not regard the Christ of Christian devotion as a wholly satisfactory symbol of the self since in the Christian imagination there is no darkness in Christ. For Bryant there's truth in this in that a Christian could have a false or inadequate conception of Christ, all too easily fashioning him in one's own ideal. On the other hand Jung's criticism is not valid against a deeper understanding of Christ as the divine Word through whom the universe came into being.

One function of religious symbols and rituals, according to Jung, is to shield the soul against the terrible aspect of direct contact with the God within. White did not agree with this. The truth of archetypal images including the image of God is always metaphorical and symbolic for Jung. He sees the shadow of human consciousness revealing an equivalent shadow in the image of God. He claims, ambivalently, not to know anything of God directly. His inclusion of evil in the image of God conflicts with predominant Christian teachings. He cautions that the Christian Self-image, Christ, is missing the shadow side that belongs to the archetype. How, asks Jung, can Christians maintain that the nature of God is absolutely good, when evil is such a power in God's world? As a symbol Christ has little to do with the real life of the man Jesus who was mortal. (Lammers 1994:passim).

One cannot according to Kelly (1993:195) follow Jung in his insistence on the essential unknowability and empty form-like quality of the archetype in itself. What must also be rejected is the claim that the meaning of the process of individuation cannot be grasped in terms other than the symbolic productions to which the process gives rise. Occasional inconsistencies in his formulations call out to be re-articulated.

From the above discussion on Jung and religion it is clear that Catherine, with her deep religious affiliations, would part company with Jung. Yet, in my view, it would be a futile exercise within the scope of this study to try to squeeze Catherine into every aspect of the thought of Jung. This is not our aim. Continuing studies of Jung are bringing fresh insights into the relevance of his critique of religion. Be that as it may, the main purpose of this chapter, while trying to do justice in the briefest presentation to the vastness of Jung, has been to isolate some of his thoughts on symbol and imagery with a view to interpreting Catherine's own use of imagery in a more modern idiom, namely that of the psychology of Carl Jung.

We now move to a broad examination of some of the major images used by Catherine of Siena in her *Dialogue*, her *Letters* and her *Prayers*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### KEY CATHERINIAN IMAGERY

#### Overview

We turn now to an examination of some of Catherine's key imagery. There are so many images and symbols employed by Catherine, and often almost mid-sentence one image can turn into another, that at first glance it would appear quite difficult to choose which among them to delve into. On the other hand, some images are definitely more important than others in Catherine's theology (and perhaps psychology if we examine them from our own twenty first century perspective). The *bridge* imagery is key since much of the *Dialogue* is in fact given to its development as Catherine's understanding of the redemption offered by Christ. One needs to understand her bridge imagery if one wants to understand her Christology. *Blood*, on the other hand, can be seen as the essential core (i.e. Christ crucified) of Catherine's mysticism. Clearly the symbolism is also key to her teaching on the Trinity and the paschal mystery, and to her ecclesiology since for her the Church exists in function of Christ's blood. At the same time blood is a clue to self-knowledge. *Fire*, it is suggested, is Catherine's favourite image. For her God is fire. Fire is a God-image, a Spirit-image and a Christ-image. She sees her own nature of fire as reflecting God's nature, and for her fire is a symbol of final union with God. *Water*, so key an image of the unconscious in Jung, is key too in Catherine. Christ is the fountain of living water, the Trinity is a deep sea in which the soul is nourished. We become empty if we do not drink from the fountain. Finally we examine the image of the *cell* of self-knowledge, the central component of Catherine's spiritual way. The cell, including knowledge of oneself and of God, is at the centre of Catherine's mystical experience. The enlargement of the symbol into that of the house and that of the city represents an enlargement in her horizons of self-knowledge, and it is within the context of the quest for self-knowledge that her theology is developed.

## 1. The Bridge

### 1. 1 The Bridge as the Way to Christ

Much of Catherine's *Dialogue* is given to developing the imagery of the bridge.

The bridge is an evocative symbol with almost universal appeal and meaning. Myths and rituals in relation to the bridge appear all over the world. The bridge at the beginning of time linked earth to heaven. Rivers and bridges figure importantly in the pictography of the world after death. It is basic to the idea of the bridge that it allows and presupposes separateness and uniqueness, but without isolation or rupture.

The bridge allegory puts together in a single picture Catherine's entire understanding of Christ's redemption and the soul's participating in it. It can be said that Catherine enters into her public life along the bridge in response to the divine mandate to love her neighbour freely.

...the fundamental theme which is woven into *The Dialogue* is that Christ is the bridge upon which humanity can mount in order to participate in and taste the Eternal Goodness of God. It is through walking upon the bridge, in the footsteps of Christ, that God's fellow workers participate in the apostolic vocation to bring glory to God for the salvation of all people... (Orsuto 1990:53-54).

Catherine's presentation of Jesus as the bridge who unites in his person, and through the redemption, God and humanity is based on her understanding of Jn 14:6 "I am the way..." An understanding of this teaching on Christ as the bridge is necessary in order to understand her Christology. People had been created in God's image and likeness for eternal life, but because of sin had never reached this goal. With sin came the flood of a stormy river, and people drowning. God stooped to the earth of humanity, bridging the chasm and rebuilding the road. Jesus is the Way in the image of a bridge. He is Truth, he is Life. Those who fail to use the bridge, drown in the waters beneath. Jesus has shown God in showing himself.

Possibly the “bridge” which Catherine sees is one of those covered bridges of Tuscan cities, with shops and taverns on either side of a thoroughfare. Catherine develops the symbol of the bridge into a parable of the Incarnation. Only the incarnate Truth can bridge the separation. Initially we obey out of fear. Then we come to act out of love still tinged with selfishness, and finally Christ speaks the truth and claims us. The way of truth is the way of Christ.

## 1.2 The Bridge is Christ

For Catherine the bridge of salvation is Christ, built with the stones of the virtues, mixing his blood into the lime of his divinity, allowing all to reach their goal and receive the fruit of their labours.

... Christ actually made for us a staircase of his body. If you look at his feet, you see that they are nailed fast to the cross from the first stair... Reflect that we can never have any virtue at all if we don't climb this first stair... At this second stair, his open side, you find a shop with fragrant spices. There you find the God-man. There your soul is so sated and drunk that you lose all self-consciousness, just like a drunkard intoxicated with wine... Then, aflame with desire, you get up and climb to the next stair, his mouth. There you find rest in quiet calm; there you taste the peace of obedience. A person who is really completely drunk, good and full, falls asleep, and in that sleep feels neither pleasure nor pain. So too the spouse of Christ, sated with love, falls asleep in the peace of her Bridegroom. (*Letter* 62; Noffke 1988:198-199).

Fresen (1995: 251-252) points out that the image of Christ as the bridge finds its meaning within the symbol of the blood. Catherine uses it to concretize aspects of the blood symbolism. It is her image of the Christian journey within the blood of Christ. The bridge is the image of Christ's crucified body stretching from heaven to earth across a great chasm. The bridge is Catherine's integrating Christological symbol, for the bridge is Christ, as are the stairs and the nourishment served en route, and Christ is the gate at the end.

Let us examine some of Catherine's understanding of the bridge as expressed in her own words. Firstly, the image of the bridge is also an image of the cross. (Some

artists have attempted to depict Catherine's image, showing a fusion of the bridge and the cross by means of the stairs.)

[The bridge] stretches from heaven to earth by reason of my having joined myself with your humanity, which I formed from earth's clay... The bridge, my only-begotten Son, has three stairs... The first stair is the feet, which symbolizes the affections... [Though] this bridge has been raised so high, it is still joined to the earth. Do you know when it was raised up? When my Son was lifted up on the wood of the most holy cross he did not cut off his divinity from the lowly earth of your humanity. (*Dialogue 26*).

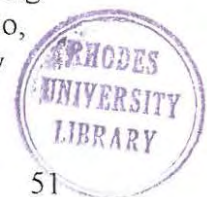
This is how Catherine describes the first step. But the crossing of the bridge has only started. Christ is no longer physically among us, but he has left us his teaching. This enables believers to continue to follow the way of Christ across the bridge.

When my only-begotten Son returned to me forty days after his resurrection, this bridge was raised high above the earth... [Then the Spirit] came to make even more firm the road my Truth had left in the world through his teaching... So first I made a bridge of my Son as he lived in your company. And though that living bridge has been taken from your sight, there remains the bridgeway of his teaching... (*Dialogue 29*).

Jesus the Truth is the bridge, and we are invited to walk to him on two feet, along the bridge rather than by any other way: "...the two feet that carry the soul into the love of my Truth, of whom I have made a bridge for you, are affection and desire". (*Dialogue 49*).

A very rich picture is painted of the kind of Tuscan bridge with which Catherine was familiar. Along it were shops at which travellers could purchase refreshments. For Catherine these shops become an image of the Church providing pilgrims with the nourishment of the eucharist along the way to the gate at the end of the bridge, the gate which is Christ. Again we are reminded of the gospel: Jesus is both the good shepherd and the gate to the sheepfold.

This bridge has walls of stone so that travellers will not be hindered... [These stones] are the stones of true solid virtue ... [No one] can have any life-giving virtue but from him, that is, by following his example and his teaching... So, you see, the bridge has walls and a roof of mercy. And the hostelry of holy



Church is there to serve the bread of life and the blood, lest the journeying pilgrims, my creatures, grow weary and faint on the way...At the end of the bridge is the gate (which is, in fact, one with the bridge), which is the only way you can enter. This is why he said, 'I am the Way and Truth and Life'...But those who do not keep to this way travel below through the river – a way not of stones but of water. And since there is no restraining the water, no one can cross through it without drowning. (*Dialogue 27*).

The following excerpt is a good example of how Catherine mixes her images. People cross the bridge, inebriated with blood and aflame with the fire of love, seeking union with God, the peaceful sea. One senses the urgency of her great commitment to the way offered by Jesus to union with him and to self-knowledge. Rest comes only in union with God, certainly not before.

...once souls have risen up in eager longing, they run in virtue along the bridge of the teaching of Christ crucified and arrive at the gate with their spirits lifted up to me. When they have crossed over and are inebriated with the blood and aflame with the fire of love, they taste in me the eternal Godhead, and I am to them a peaceful sea with which the soul becomes so united that her spirit knows no movement but in me. (*Dialogue 79*).

Some people believe they have no need of any kind of assistance. They believe they have no need of Christ. They choose to cross the river under the bridge and through the water, despite the redemption brought by Christ.

How foolish and blind are those who choose to cross through the water when the road has been built for them!...They are fools indeed who scorn such a good and choose instead to taste even in this life the guarantee of hell by keeping to the way beneath the bridge. For there the going is most wearisome and there is neither refreshment nor any benefit at all, because by their sinfulness they have lost me, the supreme and eternal Good. (*Dialogue 28*).

Foolishly such people because of self-centredness and an apparent fear of commitment to the way of Christ choose an apparently easier path. In some ways this is reminiscent of the gospel passage in which Jesus warns against taking the wide road to destruction, and exhorts us rather to follow the narrow path.

[Those who drown themselves down below in the river] have no concern for anyone or anything but themselves...it seems to them that following me, that is, keeping to the bridge of my Son's Word, would be a great burden. So they

draw back, afraid of the thorns. This is because they are blind, and they neither see nor recognize the truth. (*Dialogue* 44).

The picture just painted for us is very clear. Some people attempt a crossing of the river without using the bridge, somehow going their own way, not making use of the accompaniment provided along the bridge, and by Christ himself. On the other hand, those who choose to follow the way of Christ can no longer be content with attempting to cross the river through the water. They find their way across the river by making use of the bridge, accompanied by Christ himself.

...my servants' chief happiness is in seeing me and knowing me. This vision and knowledge fills their will... Having lost their own selfish will they clothe themselves in mine. But I will nothing less than your holiness. So at once they set about turning their backs on the way beneath the bridge and begin to mount the bridge...(*Dialogue* 45).

### **1.3 Symbol of the journey from sinfulness to holiness**

The stages of love along the bridge are symbolized by the feet of Christ (first stage, mercenary and dominated by sin). The second stage is symbolized by the wounded side if Christ is the place of the knowledge of God's love. Only by waiting in the cell of self-knowledge and knowledge of God for the Spirit to come can one reach this perfect state of filial love. The progress in love culminates in a profound union with the Triune God. The symbol here is that of the mouth. The fourth stage is characterized by an eager desire to suffer for the glory and praise of God. (Orsuto 1990: 60-62).

Catherine... has an analogical vision of the growing self-knowledge which takes place as one climbs the three stairs of the bridge. At each level the quality of self-knowledge is different. (Fresen 1995: 254).

Catherine communicated primarily in images and symbolic language to bring to light her deep understanding about the person in relationship with God. Her images usually have several meanings. A central theme of her writings is that of progression in the spiritual life. The 'bridge' section of *The Dialogue* contains the essence of Catherine's thought on spiritual progression. (Villegas 1986: 28-29).

One set of images of progression is that of Christ as bridge and Christ's body as stairs. These two images are congruent as the stairs *are* the bridge. The three stairs of Christ's body, the feet, side and mouth represent different levels of perfection and are to be climbed by one progressing in spiritual development. At the same time, Jesus is the bridge one must walk along in order to pass over from sinfulness to being in God. (Villegas 1986:30-31).

Villegas goes on to say:

The image of the bridge highlights the need for grace from Christ in order to enable the process of transformation from sinfulness to perfection... Christ as the Bridge is the mediator of growth in perfection/holiness... The journey from the human... to the divine can occur only by traveling by way of Christ, the Bridge... Those attempting to cross the river beneath the Bridge are those who are alienated from their divine potential, those whose orientation is primarily sinful. (Villegas 1986:40-41).

Catherine speaks of the bridge as the fourth stage of the spiritual life, a permanent one. Climbing and reascending the stairs provide continuous opportunity to grow more perfect. The bridge between heaven and earth is available to everyone desirous of eternal life. Christ's teaching as well as his body is the way promised in the scripture. The bridge terminates in the gate to heaven. The symbolism of the bridge verifies the significance of the Trinity in Catherine's thought; the Son teaches and gives example. The Spirit loves, protects and oversees, and the Father is the path, the gate and the goal of the journey. Running along the bridge, Catherine responds publicly to the divine mandate to love her neighbour.

Christ is lifted up from the earth as a bridge lifts off one side of a chasm to reach the other. Sin had created a chasm: a road that was there before was now entirely broken up and impassible, in its place a raging torrent that no one can cross without drowning. The bridge is the crucified Christ, arching over the chasm in stairs on which we rise through love – our love, but really his love... We advance from his and our feet (affect, energy, motivation) to his and our heart (the secret of love) to the meeting of two mouths in the kiss of peace and union. This bridge is paved with the stones of Christ's virtue, cemented with the 'living lime' of God's love, the very Godhead, and with his blood... Christ is himself the living stone upon which *we* must be added to the structure with the same mortar of living lime and blood. The shops and hostelrys along the bridge... provide the food and rest and companionship we need along the journey. Christ is bridge and stairs and refreshment; he is the gate at the far end, the sea of peace beyond. Catherine emphasizes that the

'all' Christ draws to himself is singular, for only what is integrated can be drawn. (Noffke 1996: 47).

The bridge symbolizes Christ as necessary mediator of grace through whom alone perfection can be achieved. It also symbolizes the journey from sinfulness to holiness.

#### **1.4 The Bridge and Jung**

It would appear that Catherine's imagery of the bridge can be looked at from a Jungian perspective. The bridge is clearly an archetypal symbol emphasizing the journey motif which is so important in the individuation process, and in the process of coming to self-knowledge. The bridge, we have noted, is the way, the way is Christ, and the journey is one towards self-knowledge and union with Christ. Bridge symbolism, while possibly having different connotations in different cultures, speaks of a unifying factor, between the conscious and the unconscious, between the known and the unknown. As noted previously symbols themselves are bridges, and hence the interpretation of the bridge itself as a symbol is potentially very powerful. Jung would, it is suggested, go a long way with Catherine in understanding her bridge imagery as the way, as a journey, as a process towards self-knowledge and individuation. What he would have difficulty with, it is supposed, is her understanding that Christ himself is the way, that the bridge besides being the way to Christ is in fact Christ, and that final union with Christ is the goal of whoever undertakes the journey along the bridge.

We move on now to a second key image in Catherine's thought and writing.

## **2. Blood**

### **2.1 Blood as Food and Drink**

The essential core of Catherine's mysticism is Christ crucified. Linked to this is the salvific nature of the blood of Christ.

A concentration on eating and drinking, on bread and blood, as crucial images for encounter with God, and fasting and feeding became lived metaphors for Catherine. Catherine's followers saw not eating, eating, and feeding as significant aspects of her impact on others. She saw her suffering as literally merged with Christ's agony on the cross and with the pains of purgatory. She substituted the blood of Christ's agony for ordinary food. Raymond associates her cravings for Christ's blood with a nursing Christ. The image of the nursing Christ is one of her favourite metaphors and is closely associated with the eucharist. According to her we marry Christ not with gold or silver, but with the ring of Christ's foreskin, given in the circumcision and accompanied by pain and the shedding of blood.

Metaphors of eating, drinking, hungering and vomiting, of food, blood, tables and servants are central in Catherine's writings. Blood is her central image. It is food or life to her, rather than only a symbol of washing away of sin.

The whole mystery of redemption is symbolized for Catherine by the blood. It stands for the mystery of the cross and resurrection... From the outset, she links the symbol of the blood with self-knowledge and with truth..." (Fresen 1995: 246-247).

## **2.2 The meaning of blood**

Intrinsic to Catherine's teaching on the Trinity and the Paschal Mystery is her focus on the blood of Jesus. It resonates with Judeo-Christian tradition with regard to blood symbolism. Jesus' blood shed on Calvary serves as a medium for intimacy with the Father. Blood symbolizes the mystery of Christ's love, and the love of the Triune God manifested in the Passion. Since blood testifies to the boundless love of God, it has a transforming power. (cf Orsuto 1990: 67-76).

Blood from earliest times, has been associated with mystical, life-giving properties. The blood of martyrs feeds the Church... Blood in its life-giving sense is very close to semen. Drinking from the side of Christ can be interpreted as having sexual implications. (Von Behren 1973: 207-208).

Blood was in general a more public and social symbol than bread, and also more ambivalent. Bread symbolized household and charity and support of life, while blood symbolized war, strife and executions. It was the support of life because it coursed through the veins as life itself. Catherine's craving for blood was a craving for what was denied her socially and politically: the chalice, the power of the clergy, the public arena. But she also craved blood because she craved identification with the humanity of Christ. She understood union with Christ not as an erotic fusing with a male figure but as a becoming of Christ's flesh itself. (cf Bynum 1987:178).

Mary provided the menstrual matter from which the Spirit fashioned Christ's human body. Catherine called Christ's wound a breast and to her Christ was a nursing mother more often than a bridegroom. Medieval natural philosophers thought that breast milk was blood. Thus the female body was an obvious image for a God who died to give birth to the world and bled to feed all souls. Catherine noted that the female body is food and therefore an appropriate image for both male and female self-sacrifice. At the heart of her understanding of 'eating', 'hungering' and 'bleeding' was identification of serving with suffering because Christ had become flesh that by bleeding and dying saved the world. (cf Bynum 1987: 178-179).

Catherine's symbol of blood... holds together her entire theology of salvation and redemption. The blood of Christ is the source of life and the symbol carries with it the rich overtones of an archetypal blood symbol: blood being spilt or shed, representing death, while it is also life, health and energy... The symbol of the blood integrates her theology into a system, a structure of interconnected thoughts and images. (Fresen 1995:240).

The image of the blood of Christ is connected with ancient thought and practices, and has carried numinous implications. Blood was considered the seat of life, and there was a natural and inevitable equation of blood and life.

The blood is also the centre of Catherine's ecclesiology, for she sees the Church existing *in function* of Christ's blood... The blood of Christ... is the integrating Christological symbol for Catherine. Within this symbol, Catherine places the image of Christ the bridge. (Fresen 1995: 249-250).

### 2.3 Blood as a clue to self-knowledge

The blood of Jesus is the medium through which we can know the truth of God, God's desire to give us his own glory and joy. The blood is the clue to the whole meaning of humankind, a clue to a kind of ultimate self-knowledge.

The tears symbol is the most self-contained and the one least obviously connected with the blood... The tears symbol depicts five spiritual stages. These correspond to the stages of spiritual growth in the movement along the three stairs of the bridge. Progress along the bridge, or through the kinds of tears, indicates growth in self-knowledge, including, as always, growth in knowledge of God... The final stage of tears is that of union with God, corresponding to the fourth stage on the bridge. It is through ever-deepening self-knowledge that the soul is brought to this point, when she has seen and tasted... God's goodness and greatness in her. (Fresen 1995:272-275).

Fresen clearly sees a connection between Catherine's use of the image of blood and the image of the bridge:

Catherine's primary analogue is the blood of Christ. It flows from his crucified body which forms the bridge spanning the gulf between God and humankind. His blood is the source of life, the source of salvation and truth for us... Catherine's symbols are Christological and Trinitarian, in that they lead through Christ to the Trinity. (Fresen 1995: 234-235).

Ultimately it would appear from Catherine's understanding of the blood image that we need to see blood as an image for encounter with God, and linked very obviously to the eucharist. At the same time redemption itself, the paschal mystery, and not simply a washing away of sins, is intrinsic to the symbolism, and to archetypal aspects of it. Christ as a nursing mother feeds his followers on blood from his side. And finally the image of blood is connected with that of the bridge.

The symbol of the blood draws together all Catherine's other images, including the fire imagery. For the fire is one with the blood and water... The blood is the symbol of the redemptive love of God, which is imaged as a fire of love and in that sense the two are fused... God's love that split open Christ's body on the cross. (cf Fresen 1995: 267-269).

## 2.4 The Image of Blood and Jung

Jung has demonstrated that the figure of Christ is a symbol of the Self. The image of the blood of Christ is connected with the seat of life or soul, blood and life are equated. Hebrew myth and ritual merges with Platonic thought in evolving the Christian symbolism of the blood of Christ. The blood of the covenant becomes the blood of the communion meal which cements relations between people and God. (One notes again a link between bridge and blood). Christ's action of offering blood as drink is an expression of the positive mother archetype. Blood cleanses from sin and releases one from unconscious guilt. The redeeming blood of Christ conveys the archetypal meaning of existence.

Aspects that Catherine develops in her theology of blood which would appear to hold an interest from Jung's perspective are the idea of blood as food and drink, the nursing Christ as a mother image, the washing away of sin, the link to self-knowledge and truth. Again it is noteworthy that self-knowledge, both as means to a goal, and as the goal itself, is never far from Catherine's understanding, just as the process of individuation was close to the heart of Jung.

A third archetypal image we now examine is that of fire.

## 3 Fire

### 3.1 Fire is Catherine's Favourite Image

God is understood by Catherine in fire imagery. She exhorts God to burn and consume whatever isn't pleasing to God, whatever is in any way preventing union with God.

You are a fire always burning. Yet, though you always consume all that the souls possess apart from you, you never consume the things that are pleasing to you. Burn with the fire of your Spirit and consume, root out from the bottom up, every fleshly love and affection from the hearts of the new plants you have kindly seen fit to set into the mystic body of holy Church. (*Prayer 7*).

God is completely “crazy” over creation, compelled to love us despite our sinfulness. God cannot do otherwise but give us being, just as fire cannot do otherwise but burn.

You saw yourself compelled by the fire of your charity to give us being, in spite of the evil we would commit against you, eternal father. It was fire, then, that compelled you... [You] are nothing but a fire of love, crazy over what you have made. (*Prayer 13*).

Christ, the Truth, is fire, giving us being, drawing us towards himself, awakening even the hardest spirit, melting us with his love.

*Oh blazing fire ever burning, you are indeed a fire!* This, it seems, is what the mouth of Truth said: I am fire and you are the sparks. He says that fire always wants to return to its source, and so it always goes back up. *Oh charity, ineffable delight! How truly you speak, for certainly we are sparks! This is why you want us to humble ourselves.* Just as sparks receive their being from the fire, so let us acknowledge that our being comes from our first source. That is why he said, I am fire and you are a spark. So let your souls not rise up in pride, but like a spark, let it first go up and *then* come back down. The first movement of our holy desire ought to be into the knowledge of God and his honor. Then let's come down to know our own poverty and indifference, but only after we have gone upward. Oh you who are asleep, wake up! There, when we find ourselves in the abyss of his charity – *there* we be made humble! Oh gentle mother charity! There is no spirit so hardened or so asleep that it would not be awakened and wholly melted by such a fire of charity! (*Letter 21*).

God's fire makes our own fire grow since alone we do not know the way to God. God is fuel for the fire and fire itself.

[The] light of faith nourishes the fire within the soul and makes it grow, for we cannot feel the fire of your charity unless the light shows us your love and affection for us. You, light, are also the fuel for the fire, since it is you that make the fire grow in the soul. Just as wood makes a material fire grow and become more intense, you, light, are the fuel that makes charity grow in the soul, for you show the soul the divine goodness. (*Prayer 14*).

The fire of God's love is what caused God to create us in the first instance. God loved us even before having created us to share eternal life and goodness.

For God looked within himself and fell in love with the beauty of his creature and so created us. He was moved by the fire of his ineffable charity to one purpose only: that we should have eternal life and enjoy the infinite good God was enjoying in himself. (*Letter 17*).

And as so often in Catherine images are linked and interwoven. Fire and food (or blood) are seen as being connected: “You were driven by the fire of your charity, and with that same fire you left us yourself as food.” (*Prayer 12*).

### 3.2 Consumed by Fire

Fire is the sun, fire is God, fire is water, each of them an archetypal image, each of them intertwined with various other images, each of them inviting us forward and onward to greater understanding and knowledge of ourselves.

No image occurs more frequently in Catherine’s writings than the image of fire. Fire, as the sun, is the warmth of love and the light of truth; fire is God, who is Truth and Love. Fire is the Spirit of love. Fire is thus also the water, the fountain of life, the milk of charity that flows from the breast of Christ. It is fire that shed the blood of Christ ‘in blazing love’; ‘there is no fire without blood, no blood without fire,’ and so Christian love *must* be redemptive love. Fire is honest love, while selfish love, love that is less than honest, is a dark cloud that blocks the sun, a cataract on the eye of understanding, a veil over the pupil of faith. Darkness is the absence of being, the absence of God’s truth. (Noffke 1996: 46-47, cf *Dialogue 26*).

Fire is a God-image, and more particularly a Spirit-image:

Fire, for Catherine, is most often a God-image, although she uses it also as a Spirit-image and a Christ-image... While Catherine speaks of (or to) God as a fire, the fire images relating to the Spirit are specifically related to the action of fire. (Fresen 1995: 270).

Catherine writes in her letters, suggesting that her correspondents be drowned in the fire of God’s love and in Christ’s blood so that purification in the furnace can take place. It would appear that she is writing, in Jungian terms, of coming to terms with the shadow, of letting go of aspects of self-centredness on the way to wholeness and holiness.

I long to see you swallowed up – drowned – in the fire of God’s blazing charity, stripped of your unfit clothing and completely covered, clothed, in the fire of the Holy Spirit. That garment is so strong and tough that nothing weakens its fiber.” (*Letter 29*, to Bartolomeo Dominici).

And

I long to see you engulfed and drowned in the sweet blood of God’s Son, which is permeated with the fire of his blazing charity... I am saying that unless you are drowned in the blood you will not attain the little virtue of true humility and so come forth in the most perfect purity as iron comes out purified from the furnace. (*Letter 31*, to Raymond).

Allowing oneself to be burned by God’s fire means that one is transformed not just into God’s likeness, but into God. We become one with God, we come to know ourselves as we shed our selfishness, and we too become “drunk” (as is God already) with Christ’s blood.

I long to see you so totally ablaze with loving fire that you become one with gentle First Truth. Truly the soul’s being united with and transformed into him is like fire consuming the dampness in logs. Once the logs are heated through and through, the fire burns and changes them into itself, giving them its own color and warmth and power. It is just so with us when we look at our Creator and his boundless charity. We begin to experience the heat of self-knowledge – which consumes all the dampness of our selfish love for ourselves. We are then sharing in his warmth and in his power, in that we begin at once to feed on and savor souls. ... Let the fire of boundless holy desire grow, [till you are] drunk with the blood of God’s Son. (To a disciple, *Letter 45*).

People are urged to throw themselves into the fire in order to become one with it, with Christ. Fire changes us, fire purifies us, fire gives us an understanding of who we really are, fire makes us know that we need nothing other than Christ.

### **3.3 Catherine’s Own Nature of Fire**

Catherine discovers her own nature of fire in the reflection of the divinity. She imaged final union as a coal immersed in fire, fused into the fire itself, into the ‘blazing furnace of charity.’ The profundity of this identification emerges as we study her perception of God as fire. Fire is likewise an image of Catherine’s prayer as it

expands to include not only personal relationship with God but also concern for the world around her. Catherine's prayer is filled with Christ's own desire, to renew the face of the earth. (cf Meade 1991:167-171).

Catherine's own nature is fire because God's nature is fire, and Catherine is created in God's image. And again there are hints thrown out by Catherine of the idea of knowledge of self being linked to knowledge of God.

In your nature, eternal Godhead, I shall come to know my nature. And what is my nature, boundless love? It is fire, because you are nothing but a fire of love. And you have given humankind a share in this nature, for by the fire of love you created us. (*Prayer 12*).

Union between God and the soul (Catherine, and by extension us) takes place in the fire. The idea of the fusion of wills points to a movement towards integration and wholeness.

You who are fire share the fire of your charity with [the soul], and in the fire you fuse your will with hers and hers with yours. (*Prayer 11*).

The idea of this union brought about through the action of fire is expressed elsewhere as well. Clearly union with God is never far from Catherine's thoughts. It is through the action of God's Spirit that this union comes about.

Tender mercy of the Holy Spirit, enflame my heart and unite it to yourself!... And I proclaim, eternal gentle goodness of God, that the mercy of the Holy Spirit, your blazing charity, wants to enflame my heart and everyone's and unite them with yourself. (*Prayer 5*).

Union is expressed by a kind of immersion. When the soul is immersed in God, the soul's own nature disappears, and its understanding is expanded in such a way that self-knowledge helps bring about the transformation. In the arena of transformation of the self, Catherine's imagery of fire is very powerful:

You know the only thing that can bind a person is a bond; the only way to become one with the fire is to throw oneself into it that not a bit of oneself remains outside it... Once we are in its embrace, the fire of divine charity does

to our soul what physical fire does; it warms us, enlightens us, changes us into itself. Oh gentle and fascinating fire! You warm and you can drive out all the cold and of vice and sin and self-centredness! This heat so warms and enkindles the dry wood of our will that it bursts into flame and swells in tender loving desires, loving what God loves and hating what God hates. And I tell you, once we see ourselves so boundlessly loved, and see how the slain lamb has given himself on the wood of the cross, the fire floods us with light, leaving no room for darkness. So enlightened by that venerable fire, our understanding expands and opens wide. For the light from the fire lets us see that everything (except sin and vice) comes from God... Once your understanding has received the light from the fire as I've described, the fire transforms you into itself and you become one with the fire... How truly then we can say that he is a fire who warms and enlightens and transforms us into himself! Our soul's three powers are in harmony in this fire; memory holding fast God's blessings, understanding, knowing (as I've said) his goodness and his will, and our will expanding to love in such a way that it cannot love or want anything apart from him. (Letter 51, to Apostolic Nuncio to Tuscany).

### **3.4 The Image of Fire and Jung**

Fire is undoubtedly an archetypal image, one clearly that Jung would recognize, and as in the case of so many images in Catherine already examined, it does not stand alone. Rather we see it intertwined with some images, and overlaid by others, providing us with a rich tapestry of meaning. Catherine makes it clear that because God cannot but love, and God as love continually draws us to union with God, making the fire within ourselves grow, calling us to purification and transformation, we are invited to immersion in the fire (as in water) and to final union. Clearly fire is never far from sun, God, water, never far from the myths and legends of more primitive societies than our own. Jung would recognize much of Catherine's symbolism around fire as emerging from the collective unconscious of her own society, from the myths and legends of earlier ages. Again one surmises that he would question Catherine's understanding of final union with God. He would, it is suspected, given his problematic understanding of Christianity, balk at the self-transcendence and immersion in God so central to Catherine's mystical life.

We now turn to the image of water.

## 4. Water

### 4.1 The Fountain of Water, the Well, the Sea

Another favourite image was that of the fountain of living water. Catherine encourages us to drink from this fountain to overcome our immoderate love of creatures and become more perfect in our love for God. We become empty if we do not drink from the fountain. Prayer and self-emptying allow the love of God to flow unhindered into our hearts and those of our neighbours.

Water is found not only in the fountain, but also in the sea. Catherine moving in the *Dialogue* from the image of fire to that of the sea, expresses gratitude “O eternal God. O deep sea. What more could you have given me than the gift of your very self?” (Dialogue 16). Again we note that water, something comparable to the unconscious as understood by Jung, like fire, as an element in which Catherine wishes to immerse herself in order to attain the God she seeks.

Another image also used by Catherine to develop the water symbolism in her attempt to illustrate the process of coming to self-knowledge is that of the well. The quest for self-knowledge is compared to the process of digging a well. “Let us plunge into the well, where we cannot but know ourselves and hence also the goodness of God...” (Foster and Ronayne 1980: Letter 1). Once again water, this time in a well, provides the medium through which we are invited to find God and ourselves.

### 4.2 Christ is the fountain of living water

For Catherine, Christ is the fountain of living water and our salvation. In her imagery of the still water at the base of the fountain we see our image, the image of God, and the water in which we are washed clean of sin. This also reminds her of the waters of death, the waters beneath the bridge of Christ, and the water of life the pilgrim can drink in the hostelry on the bridge. (Noffke 1996: 49-50).

Catherine seems to recognize what Jung would probably describe as integrating the shadow aspects of ourselves. As we grow in real self-knowledge so too we grow in humility.

As soon as your understanding pays attention to such goodness a living fountain of grace, a spring of the oil of deep humility, will be born within you that will let you neither fall nor be puffed up with pride because of any status or glory you may have. (*Letter 51*).

Coming to wholeness can happen only if we draw from God's fountain. And it is in this fountain that we learn to see our world through God's eyes rather than selfishly from our own perspective. God invites the thirsty, not the self-sufficient to this water of life.

For through compassion alone you gave up the Word your Son to death for our redemption. And that compassion sprang, as from a fountain, from the love with which you had created your creature. (*Prayer 15*).

A link is made by Catherine between the fountain/water and justice, indicating among other things that our growth and development as human beings is linked to the efforts we put into growth and being committed to the process of coming to maturity. "You are the very fountain of justice rewarding each of us according to our deeds." (*Prayer 15*).

Just as some people choose not to walk along the bridge which is Christ, and try to cross the river through the water, so some choose not to come to the fountain of life, not to drink of Christ's blood. In some instances this may be a deliberate choice that people make away from facing the truth. In others, it may be related, in Jungian terms, to the fact that people are not in touch with the unconscious elements of their lives. [Some people] "are persisting in their death of selfish sensuality and none of them come to the fountain where there is blood to water their tree." (*Prayer 17*).

Catherine paints a picture of our needing to be utterly steeped in the fountain, God, the living water, lest we find that apart from God our vessel becomes empty and we are not in fact growing in God's love. One has a sense perhaps that some people

choose to leave unconscious material in the unconscious rather than face it head on and deal with it.

Be a vessel which you fill and drink at the fountain. Even though you draw your love from God who is the fountain of living water (cf Jn 4:10;7:37), if you do not drink it continually in him, your vessel will soon become empty. This is a sign that you are not drinking it fully in God: if you suffer pain from the person you love, either because of a conversation you have had, or because you are deprived of some familiar consolation or because of some other accidental cause. If you suffer because of this, or because of anything else except an offense against God, it is a clear sign that your love is still imperfect, and that you have drawn away from the fountain. (*Letter 49*, cited by O'Driscoll 1983: 25-26).

Elsewhere Catherine again picks up this idea of the vessel or the cup that needs to be filled by God who is the source of all love.

Be a drinking cup that you fill, and drink, in the fount. Granted that you may have drawn your love from God, who is the fount of living water, yet unless you continued to drink in him your cup would soon be empty. And the sign that you are not drinking fully in God will be when you find yourself pained by the thing you love. (*Letter 133*, Foster and Ronayne 1980: 150-151).

The fountain is a place to meet God, a place where we are invited to look at and work with the shadow side of ourselves, to drink from the only source which can slake our thirst, to become a vessel in order that we may drink abundantly, and not just once. The fountain is the source of 'First Truth' in which the soul's dignity and beauty is discovered. We see everything in the fountain of God's goodness, and in him we love what we love. We are invited to bring the vessel of our free will, and to discover the knowledge of God and of ourselves as we draw out the water of divine grace.

### 4.3 The Trinity is a Deep Sea

It is possibly Catherine's image of the sea that is her best known water symbol. God is the sea, and we need to rest in God alone, always and not only at the time of death.

[At her death]: Do not be cast down my darling children, at my passing. Rather share with me in my joy and congratulate me, for now the time has

come for me to rest in the peaceful sea, the eternal God. (Raymond III, 4, cited by O'Driscoll 1994: 6).

Someone who is in the water cannot be expected to see too much else besides what is in the water. By the same token someone so immersed in the sea which is God comes to see God in everything, and everything in God. Immersion in God brings about the kind of wholeness and integration associated with Jungian individuation.

A person who dives down into the sea, and is swimming under its water, does not see or touch anything except the water of the sea and the things that are in the water. If things outside fall in or on the water, then the diver sees them, but only in the water as they look in the water. In a like manner, the soul who plunges totally into God is so transformed into God that all her thoughts, understanding, love and memory are taken up exclusively with God and are busy with God alone. She sees herself and others only in God, and she thinks of them exclusively in God. (R1,10,100; O'Driscoll 1994:17).

Seeking the Trinity, seeking knowledge of God and of self, thirsting and hungering for God are what the Christian life is about. And we come to know Christ better, and we better come to know him.

You, eternal Trinity, are a deep sea. The more I enter the more I discover, and the more I discover, the more I seek you... in whose depths the soul is satisfied, and yet remains always hungry for you, thirsty for you, eternal Trinity, longing to see you with the light of your light. (*Dialogue* 167, cited by O'Driscoll 1994:35).

Seeking self-knowledge within the well, and coming to know God and ourself better, is the essence of the journey undertaken by the believer.

[The soul] is a well which has water and earth within it. We know our misery in the earth. We realize that we are nothing... We, therefore, enter into the depths of this well, dwelling within and knowing ourselves and the goodness of God. (Cavallini 1996:55, cited by Woods 1998:100).

The image of the sea as a place to which we can go for nourishment and union is expressed in Catherine's prayers. "The soul dwells – like the fish in the sea and the sea in the fish". (*Prayer* 20).

The image of the peaceful sea is continued elsewhere:

Eternal Godhead! I proclaim and do not deny it: you are a peaceful sea in which the soul feeds and is nourished as she rests in your love's affection and union by conforming her will with your high eternal will. (*Prayer 2*).

In another prayer, Catherine returns to the same image:

O agreeable, peaceful Passion! You make the soul sail on in tranquil peace over the waves of the stormy sea! (*Prayer 19*).

We are always in danger of being led by the false self. We need, each in his/her life, to love and do things for the sake of God. The soul recognizes how fully it is loved by God when it perceives itself in the sea of God's being and recognizes its image. We "can see neither our own dignity nor the defects which spoil the beauty of our soul, unless we look at ourselves in the peaceful see of God's being in which we are imaged." (Letter 226, cited by O'Driscoll 1983:36).

#### **4.4 The Well of Charity; the River**

Catherine saw in prayer that God's heart, a 'deep well of charity,' has fallen so 'madly in love' with us that he seems unable to live without us. (*Dialogue 25*, cited by Fatula 1987: 145).

Our tears and our blood become a river in which others can be cleansed and refreshed. Catherine's image of blood and water flowing from the side of Christ is related to the mystery of mercy and grace, and to that of infused contemplation. We receive his Spirit and are drawn to gaze on him.

The image of Jesus with blood and water flowing from his pierced side is an icon of unfathomable mystery...[The] horror of suffering strangely becomes the wonder of a blessing beyond our comprehension. (Miyake 1999: 107).

## 4.5 Water Imagery and Jung

We have already noted the importance for Jung of water as a symbol of the unconscious. In Jungian terms we are invited to drink of the fountain, to immerse ourselves in the water as a way of bringing to consciousness what is as yet unconscious. There is the chance that some people choose not to drink from God's fountain, not to bring to consciousness what lies hidden in the unconscious. (Earlier on we noted that some people choose not to cross the bridge which is Christ). Those, on the other hand, who have their vessels filled at God's fountain find themselves on the way to self-knowledge, to wholeness and integration. Immersed in the fountain, they are aware of the dangers posed by the false self, and of not tackling the challenges of the unknown.

We turn now to the image of the cell of self-knowledge.

## 5 The cell of Self-Knowledge

### 5.1 Knowing Oneself

Catherine's anthropology recognizes our complete dependence on God for our very being. She recognizes her ontological poverty and she recognizes God as the 'One who is'. The image of the inner cell is developed as a well. Later it changes to that of an abyss. The chasm is spanned by Christ the bridge. What we do in the cell is eat souls (win them for salvation), and get to know ourselves. One who stays outside the cell dies, like a fish dies out of water. To live one needs to remain in the cell of self-knowledge.

A word image in the style of medieval iconography is that of the cell of self-knowledge, the central component of Catherine's spiritual way, symbolized as a circle of soil outlined in the ground. Within this circle, self-knowledge and knowledge of God interact. Catherine adds a description of the circle as two chambered, a mirrored place wherein she sees her own reflection and that of God. Her use of the mirror symbol, an archetype common in medieval writing, emphasizes imitation and reflection as the interior work which will lead her to perfection. (Meade 1991: 89).

There are three parts involved in knowing oneself: true knowledge of self, knowledge of the goodness of God in us, and the combination of these two parts. That this knowledge of oneself should lead to confusion and desperation is understandable. Few people can honestly face up to what they are. That is why Catherine joins with true knowledge of self, the knowledge of the goodness of God in us. According to Catherine, knowledge of oneself is found in the 'casa' or 'cell'. Her use of the cell as a symbol for the inner self is indicative of the traditional medieval view that the ideal religious life was withdrawal into a cell.

Catherine's steps... appear to begin with a very great desire for the honor of God and the salvation of souls. This desire is followed by a period of self-examination in the cell of knowledge of self, in order to understand better the goodness of God in herself. (Von Behren 1973: 100).

Or as Catherine expresses it:

I don't think it is possible to have virtue or the fullness of grace without dwelling within the cell of our heart and soul, where we will gain the treasure that is life for us; I mean the holy abyss that is holy knowledge of ourselves and of God. (Letter 1).

We are to enter the depths of the well and dwell there to come to know both ourselves and God's goodness (cf Letter 3). The more we come to love and serve our neighbour, for Christ's sake, the more we come to know our neighbour:

The more fuel we put on the fire (I mean the wood of self-knowledge), the more intense grows the heat of our love for Christ and for our neighbors. Stay hid, then, within self-knowledge, and don't be caught outside yourselves. (Letter 65, to Raymond and companions).

Self-knowledge is essential to experiencing God's love and acquiring perfection, necessary in order to learn and experience charity. It is the knowledge of one's sinfulness, and the knowledge of one's dignity. Self-knowledge is the other side of the coin of knowledge of God. Prayer coming out of self-knowledge is described by her as continuous prayer, a sign of holiness and part of the process of growth in perfection. (cf Villegas 1986: 65-69).

## 5.2 The cell of self-knowledge

Fresen (1995) shows how Catherine's symbol of the cell unfolds. Images of the well and the abyss point to going into the depths of the self. Her early references to the cell meant her physical cell, but in time she came to see that we take the inner cell wherever we go. The cell of self-knowledge is in fact Catherine's expression for the mystical experience of God. It is the pivotal symbol, at the centre of her mystical experience, it is within the open side of Christ. First we pass through the outer cell, then into the inner cell. The cell of self-knowledge includes knowledge of oneself within God and of God within oneself. In the cell of self-knowledge the blood gives us the knowledge of truth. We have the cell of self-knowledge with us always. (cf Fresen 1995: 164-165).

I long to see you making your home in the cell of self-knowledge, so that you may attain perfect love, for I know that we cannot please our Creator unless we love him, because he is love and wants nothing but love. If we do know ourselves we find this love... here is what I want you to do... to love God's goodness within yourself, and his immeasurable charity, which you will find in the cell of self-knowledge. In this cell you will find God. (Letter 73).

Desert ascetics of the fourth century were the classical cell-dwellers of Christianity. They influenced medieval women saints in general, and Catherine in particular. One similarity is that of solitude and fasting. The spirituality of the desert ascetics was part of the 'horizon' of hagiography for the fourteenth century. The stamp of the desert hermits on Catherine's spirituality is to be seen in dwelling in a cell, extreme fasting, giving a 'word', spiritual authority and freedom, body/soul dualism. (Fresen 1995: 72-83).

One of the fundamental practices and sayings of the desert Fathers and Mothers – that God is to be found in one's cell – was the foundation on which Catherine built. For the first few years, she understood this literally, and through her very fidelity she was led to a different level of awareness and understanding. Catherine's cell was then to become the inner cell of the heart in which one comes to knowledge of self and of God interdependently...

Catherine's 'cell of self-knowledge' is in fact a complex concept which, in the spirit and style of the fourteenth century, owes a great deal to the early eremetical tradition and of the Mothers and Fathers of the desert. (Fresen 1995: 79-80).

The symbolism of the cell suggests beginnings, promise, unfolding and going forth:

For Catherine, the cell becomes the centre, from which we go out: it is the well which is the source of water and hence of life. It is the temple which is the sacred place where we find God. It is home, a place of rest and refreshment where God is our bed, our food and even our waiter... Paradoxically, the cell of self-knowledge is also the abyss, the dark void of all that separated us from God, the shadow side of the self... The symbol reveals the pattern of light and darkness which is part of human experience as well as the cosmic pattern. (Fresen 1995: 242-243).

The way to God, for Catherine, begins in the cell of self-knowledge. In herself she had discovered both human creature and God. "We discover God in ourselves by discovering our good and holy will." (Letter 84). With ease she passes from self-knowledge to the contemplation of God. The task of self-knowledge is to unmask self-love.

Be careful never to leave the cell of self-knowledge, but in this cell guard and spend the treasure I have given you. This treasure is a teaching of truth founded on the living rock, the gentle Jesus Christ, clothed in a light that can discern darkness. (*Dialogue* 166).

Augustine was, as has been noted, one of the major influences on Catherine, particularly on her theology of the cell of self-knowledge. To him she owes the Trinitarian and Christological foci of her mysticism.

### **5.3 The house of self-knowledge**

Jung's tower by the lake, and Teresa's castle cannot be far from our mind as we turn to Catherine's image of the house of self-knowledge. Catherine's cell symbol expands into that of a house. The house of self-knowledge is the Father's house, the place of prayer. Her favourite 'casa' text is John 14:2 (in my Father's house there are many

mansions). It is within this inner dwelling place that God is revealed and in this revelation we come to see all the different rooms there are in the home of the eternal king.

'Casa' images in Catherine's writings show that the house of self-knowledge is where we find the ineffable love God has for us. And finding God's love, we cannot help loving. Alessa, a friend, is encouraged to shut herself up in the house of self-knowledge, a place of refuge and safety, the place in which we ought to remain to wait for the gift of the Spirit. The purpose of keeping doors closed is continual prayer. In the house of self-knowledge humility, patience, charity, and obedience are learnt. The house on the side of the road is a house of holy self-knowledge which we enter by entering into ourselves. Here in the house of self-knowledge we learn to pray. Prayer made in the house of self-knowledge draws together, for Catherine, nearly all the main elements of her spirituality.

The fruit and effect of prayer is the unitive state, says Catherine, where you become so united with God that you see yourself no longer in reference to yourself but to God, and your neighbours in reference to God, and God in terms of the infinite divine goodness. This serves as a good definition or description of what Catherine means by knowledge of oneself and of God... [It] is prayer that locks us into the house of self-knowledge and keeps us there. ( Fresen 1995: 206)

The Lord himself in the *Dialogue* tells us how important prayer is: "Oh how delightful to the soul and pleasing to me is holy prayer made in the house of self-knowledge and knowledge of me!" (*Dialogue* 66).

The 'casa' symbol suggests Catherine's sense of the diversity and variety in the spiritual experience, and her concern that people called to be people of prayer should not desecrate themselves by worldly concerns and the neglect of spirituality. The 'casa' symbol is wider than the 'cella'.

The symbol of the cell expands into the symbol of the house, with all its overtones of a space in which we are at home, of coming and going freely and possibly even inviting others in... The house is a symbol of the self, of the freer, expanding self-image of one who is becoming more at ease with herself, and is coming to know herself as deeply loved by God. (Fresen 1995: 243).

One hears overtones of John's gospel in the following excerpt from the *Dialogue* in which the Lord tells Catherine that she will need to shut herself up in the house of self-knowledge if she is to acquire perfection, if she is to kill selfishness, and if she is to root out all that separates her from God.

And I withdraw my presence from you so that you will shut yourself up in the house of self-knowledge, where you will acquire all perfection. But then I return to you with even greater light and knowledge of my truth, so long as you give credit to grace for having been able to kill your selfish will for my sake, and do not leave off cultivating the vineyard of your soul and uprooting the thorn bushes of evil thoughts and laying the stones of virtues that are built up with the blood of Christ. (*Dialogue* 64).

The house, with its archetypal overtones of a place where one finds knowledge of oneself along the way, where one finds and learns love, where one learns to pray, where selfishness is eradicated, suggests more than does the cell in terms of Catherine's expanding self-image. And still she takes the image further into that of the city, which suggests even greater expansion.

#### **5.4 The city of self-knowledge**

The city like the tower, like the castle, has archetypal overtones. Catherine's 'city' would have been modelled on Siena and on other Italian and French cities she knew. After Catherine came to leave the cell in her father's house, and indeed after her imagery had expanded because of her widened worldview in Siena and beyond, she was stretched even more. Her cell and her house became a city in which she met God, and grew in self-understanding. "Self-knowledge is the dwelling in which we discover our own lowliness, and this makes us humble." (Letter 38).

In her experience of mystical self-knowledge, the 'cell' soon broadens out into a 'house' of self-knowledge, the place of prayer where she waits, with other

disciples of Jesus, the gift of the Spirit. And even the house is not big enough and the image becomes the 'city of the soul' – a harmonious, well-ordered, well-defended city in which life is full and productive. The relationship with God is still central, but relationships with others, in discipleship and in ministry, have become the necessary counterpart of an inner life of intense mystical experience. (Fresen 1995: 27).

Catherine's image of the city of the soul suggests ever-widening circles as love and ministry call us forth. The enlargement of the symbol reflects an enlargement in her horizons of self-knowledge, representing her development from an isolationist spirituality to the ecclesial and social awareness characteristic of mature spirituality. Her city of the soul is a medieval walled city with many gates, in constant danger of attack, and in need of defense. The city must be surrendered to God. The symbol is largely a positive depiction of the mature, integrated self. Boundaries (walls and gates) are strong and well-defended. (Fresen 1995: 214- 223).

The city symbolizes, for Catherine, the internal harmony of the self. Well-defined and in control of who enters (symbolized by the walls, gates and army), the self is integrated and in harmony... The city is... a predictable symbol for Catherine as she seeks to express the growing sense of self and self-knowledge which she experiences... The progression in Catherine's symbolism from *cella* to *casa* to *citta*, and her use of all three symbols contemporaneously in her writing, express the enlargement of the boundaries of the self and the gradual integration Catherine experienced. This was the integration of paradoxical elements in herself and her life. (Fresen 1995:245-246)

## 5.5 Self-knowledge and knowledge of God

The quest for self-knowledge is the context in which Catherine's theology is developed. In the cell of self-knowledge she gains appreciation of all the great truths concerning God and humanity that nourish her faith. It is a knowledge of self gained by looking at ourselves in the light of the one who created us. It is a knowledge of ourselves acquired by looking at God, and a knowledge of God acquired by reflecting on God's goodness towards us. Through self-knowledge we come to appreciate both our dignity and our 'nothingness'. Our dignity comes from the fact that we are created in the image of the Trinity, our smallness from the fact that we are capable of

thwarting God's plan. Knowledge leads to love, love in its turn to greater knowledge. (cf O'Driscoll 1993:13-15).

A foundational dynamic in Catherine's spirituality is that of knowledge of God and knowledge of self. Self-knowledge is for Catherine a cell, or a house; it is the place of prayer, where we come to see the goodness of God, where we study eternal truth, where we realize that the cross is both our redemption and our call to live for the redemption of the world. "To attain charity you must dwell constantly in the cell of self-knowledge. For in knowing yourself you will come to know my mercy in the blood of my only-begotten Son." (*Dialogue* 63).

Catherine emerged from her self-imposed exile in her room with a clearer knowledge of both herself and God; of her own reductionist spirituality and of the uncontainable, ineffable, almighty God who is the Source of all that is and in whose presence we live and move and have our being. (Fresen 1995: 38).

Fresen also reminds us that

Catherine's self-knowledge and knowledge of God is an unfolding and development of the fundamental human experience of God and of the self in God... Catherine knows her finitude experientially as she comes to know herself in God... Catherine keeps insisting that knowledge of self and knowledge of God are two aspects of one mystery. (Fresen 1995: 13-14).

Catherine wants "first to strip myself of my own will by coming to know myself" (*Prayer* 12), stripping herself of her "disordered selfish will", knowing that this knowledge will take place in the Lord who as descended "from your Godhead's great exaltedness to the very lowliness of our humanity's clay" (*Prayer* 13).

In the excerpts from *The Dialogue* which follow the Father points out to Catherine that

You cannot arrive at virtue except through knowing yourself and knowing me. And this knowledge is more perfectly gained in time of temptation, because then you know that you are nothing, since you have no power to relieve yourself of the sufferings and troubles you would like to escape. And you know me in your will, when I strengthen it in my goodness so that it does not consent to these thoughts. (*Dialogue* 43).

One comes to knowledge of the truth through self-knowledge. But self-knowledge alone is not enough: It must be seasoned by and joined with knowledge of me within you. (*Dialogue* 86).

You cannot arrive at virtue except through knowing yourself and knowing me. And this knowledge is more perfectly gained in time of temptation, because then you know that you are nothing, since you have no power to relieve yourself of the sufferings and troubles you would like to escape. (O'Driscoll 1993:99. *Dialogue* 43).

These passages clearly illustrate the same ideas around self-knowledge, this time from the point of God, as do earlier passages cited from the *Prayers* and *Letters* in which Catherine prays for self-knowledge or encourages her followers.

It is in the context of self-knowledge that Catherine developed her theology and spirituality. Not 'who is God?', but 'who am I?' is the first question. She explains paradoxically that we will never come to a deeper self-knowledge if we only look at ourselves. To know who we are, and the meaning of our lives, we need to go to the God who made us. We can never arrive at the deepest and richest self-knowledge without seeing ourselves through God's eyes, without gazing in the 'gentle mirror of God'. The quest for self-knowledge is compared to the process of digging a well. We need to accept our own inadequacies and imperfections. At the bottom of our well we rejoice in God who is all. The best way to understand our sinfulness is to gaze into the 'gentle mirror' of God. We are limited and needy creatures, but also people who possess extraordinary dignity. We gain self-knowledge by gazing at our creator. If either self-knowledge or knowledge of God is missing 'there is no full circle at all'. (O'Driscoll 1994: 21-22).

## 5.6 The Cell of Self-Knowledge and Jung

It is possible around the image of the cell that one can make most immediate connections between Catherine and Jung, given that in both of them their quest had to do with knowledge of self. We have noted above the similarity that can perhaps be drawn between Jung's tower, Teresa's castle and Catherine's cell/house/city. What is of particular interest here about Catherine's understanding of self-knowledge is that no one symbol is in fact sufficient to describe it, and so she jumps from the abyss to

the well to the circle, while it is clearly the cell that is the dominant image. Striking, as we noted above, is Catherine's having drawn on the desert fathers and mothers for whom "cell" imagery was important. The city symbolizes the internal harmony of the self on its journey to self-knowledge and to knowledge of God. All along Catherine recognizes her nothingness, and God's "all". Again it is suggested that Jung recognize the archetypal overtones of the symbolism, coming from even before the time of Christianity, and that his own journey to individuation held many similarities regarding self-knowledge.

## **6. Catherine's Mysticism**

### **6.1 Catherinian symbolism and imagery**

Imagine a circle traced on the ground, and in its center a tree sprouting with a shoot grafted into its side. The tree finds its nourishment in the soil within the expanse of the circle, but uprooted from the soil it would die fruitless. So think of the soul as a tree made for love and living only by love... The circle in which this tree's root, the soul's love, must grow is true knowledge of herself, knowledge that is joined to me... This knowledge of yourself, and of me within yourself, is grounded in the soil of true humility. (O'Driscoll 1993: 97-98. Dialogue 10).

Like all mystics, Catherine writes of depth experiences of reality, and makes use of imagery and symbol. The use of image and symbol is the human way to express mystery. From time immemorial, humankind has been creative in finding images and symbols for transcendent realities. Catherine uses intuitive symbolizing which is abstractive and which embodies a concrete whole in which everything is related to everything. The interrelatedness of her symbols defies logical description. She understands the symbols of her faith community more profoundly as her own experience of God deepens. From her personal experience of God, the interaction with traditional symbols comes to life.

The mystics speak in symbols since symbols reveal what is beyond human experience. Catherine's symbols express her experience of the Real, of God, and they structure that experience into a meaningful system. From an experience of the source of all being flows mystical imagination. Images are not tied to time and place, and are

in one's present perceptions, thoughts and feelings, not imagined. They constitute a mode of knowledge in which there is interplay between the imagination and intellect. Images lead to intellectual insight, and the thinking process conjures up images. Symbols are images organizing reality into coherent networks. Without symbols reality and experience would consist of unconnected bits and pieces. Symbols are necessarily limited, expressing only some aspect of what is symbolized. (cf Fresen 1995:230-234).

Noffke (1996:15) points to the conviction of God as truth and Love as determining the quality and character of Catherine's life and spirituality. God, contemplating the infinite wealth of divine being sees how beautiful we are, and so falls in love with us that Love creates us, generates our being in the divine image. Sin thwarts the truth, and to re-establish truth in us, God takes our image, Jesus lives the truth even to the point of death for us. God's will is the realization of divine truth in us in love and in freedom. As Truth Jesus is the way and shows us the way to life.

Jesus crucified and risen is "Way" for Catherine in so many wonderful images. He is the well-lighted road, the bridge across the chasm created by our sin. He is a stairway up which we are drawn by love. He is our rule, the book of life, whose scarlet-initialed chapters are so plainly written that even the most ignorant and near-sighted can read him – written on a parchment of lambskin, the very Lamb of God.

It is significant that Catherine's symbols of spiritual progress are all open-ended, leaving room for 'ultimate enlargement'. The bridge has three stages. Beyond that is a fourth which opens out into an extension of itself, opening out beyond imagining, beyond symbols. The stages depicted by the various kinds of tears, too, have a further stage beyond the unitive stage. This is the stage beyond physical tears, when the Holy Spirit weeps tears of fire in God's presence for the mystic and for all for whom she intercedes. (Fresen 1995: 275-276).

## 6.2 Mystical spirituality

Catherine's spirituality was mystical; it denoted direct experiential knowledge of God. Seeking the key to a holy dedicated life with uncommon attention and intensity, she learned the importance of self-knowledge, the development of personal virtue, and intimate personal knowledge of the divinity residing within her. The selflessness of unrestricted love which motivated her search brought about a transformation of her whole being. Catherine receded, and God became paramount; the love which motivated her became unrestricted compassion for God's people. To medievals, the indefinable essence, the inner power which drew people to her was a revelation of the mystic presence of God among them. Theologians of today acknowledge it to be the *conjunctio oppositorum*, the true mystical marriage in which the individual has become fully integrated, fully in tune with anima and animus, with body and spirit, with God and self. (Meade 1999: 53, citing William Johnston).

Catherine brings a receptive, contemplative attitude to spirituality. Her upbringing focussed on the domestic skills needed for being a good wife and mother. She received profound mystical graces from childhood. In her writings she shares her own religious experiences, emphasizing growth in union with God. The symbolic, spiral style of Catherine's writings is very connective. She aspires to growth in charity through growth in self-knowledge and knowledge of God. Catherine's petitions are for herself as God's instrument, for the reform of the church, and for the whole world in general, but especially for the peace of Christians. She is concerned with the importance of the sacramental life, and upholds the centrality of the church, Christ's mystical body. The mystic does not withdraw from the world, but is immersed in it, and unified with God. The more mystical her experience became, the more active became her apostolate. Faith appears to be the animating idea of her doctrine, and of her life, the clue to her mystical integrity and her spiritual creativity. Hers was a missionary mysticism, a mysticism of apostolate. The cell of self-knowledge goes along the journey throughout the active pilgrimage in the world.

Mystical self-knowledge is at the same time knowledge of self and knowledge of God. It is a depth experience, an experience at the core of one's being. Many mystics have found images for the deepest recesses of the self, where God dwells... Teresa of Avila [speaks] of the inner castle... It is in the mystical experience of the deepest part of the self, what Catherine calls the 'cell of self-knowledge', that she comes to knowledge of herself in God. (Fresen 1995: 16).

The cell of self-knowledge is the foundational symbol of Catherine's spirituality in general and her mystical experience in particular. It expresses what is, for Catherine, the core reality: the mystical knowledge of self in God and of God in oneself. Catherine shows, in both her lived experience and her teaching on self-knowledge, that the movement 'downwards' into the depths of the self where God is, is accompanied by a movement 'outwards' to others. The *Dialogue* expounds many of the central precepts of the mystical life, articulating the soul's eager response to God's call of love, stressing a life of the imitation of Christ and of prayer, which leads to increasing knowledge of self and of God, and love of God.

### **6.3 Discernment**

Genuine self-knowledge must be some kind of discerning, in and through oneself, of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Catherine passes easily from self-knowledge to the contemplation of God. Her discourse with God concerns some of the prime requisites of the mystical way: discernment, rooted in knowledge and love and resulting in true judgement of spiritual stirrings. Continuous and ever-deepening life of prayer; holy fear; the counsel and guidance of an experienced spiritual director. Faith received in baptism makes possible our discerning and following the way and the teaching of the incarnate Word. Reason gives light and direction in the way of truth. Catherine is convinced that people wish to be good, but are deflected by self-love.

When Catherine introduces the concept of discernment as a graft on her tree, she implies that it has a character that is more than human... As discernment enters into the tree of virtue to forever alter its nature, so too the divine light of grace enters into the darkness of Catherine's mind to change her way of perceiving. (Meade 1991: 98-99).

For Catherine discernment means finding the truth which is about making correct judgements and acting accordingly. Her teaching on discernment is found throughout her works and is not presented in an organized or systematic manner. Light enables discernment of what is virtuous from what is sinful as well as discernment of the cause of sin. The most fundamental form of discernment involves knowledge of self.

Light enables discernment of truth about oneself. Discernment involves knowing the truth about God and about oneself. These forms of knowledge must be experienced in relationship to each other. When knowledge of God and of self are present in proper balance, then humility is present. When blinded by lack of self-knowledge, when one's vision of truth is distorted by selfish self-love one falls into pride and pride distorts discernment. Lack of self-knowledge and knowledge of God lead to false judgements of others. The ability to judge what is more pleasing to God gives the desire to grow in holiness.

Knowledge of God, knowledge of self, humility and charity are all essential components of discernment. Discernment comes from knowledge of ourselves and of God. Catherine's spirituality focusses on what discernment is. She would hope to be living in the light which would reveal God's will, and growing away from selfish self-love.

#### **6.4 The stripping of illusion**

One of the major trials of the mystical life is the ever-present danger of the devil, necessitating a stringent discernment of spirits on the part of the soul. A second trial is the spiritual aridity and desolation when God has withdrawn his presence from the soul. Suffering is a positive expression of love for neighbour and God. Ultimately Catherine's message concerns the wonder of God's love for humanity.

Dreyer (1999) affirms that the term truth had special meaning for Catherine. She had something to teach about touching truth in our own lives, facing up to and confronting the illusions and defenses. Her own encounter with God produced a trust and conviction that we can experience the light even in hard times. She would have us discover God's goodness towards us. Do we honestly want God?

The task of self-knowledge is to unmask self-love. The interplay of error and self-love, of darkened mind and twisted desire, is at the root of sin. The state of spiritual blindness and disordered loving had its origin in the sin of Adam. Catherine's motivation was the stripping of illusion, the removal of whatever was inauthentic in

herself, of whatever separated her from the God who wanted her for himself alone. Here Jung would recognize the coming to terms with one's shadow which might otherwise allow illusions to dominate.

The basic principle of the spiritual life of Catherine of Siena, taught to her by the Lord himself in his famous words to her, 'I am he who is, you are she who is not', is a hard saying to most of us. We admit it in theory, but deny it in practice. (Hinnebusch 1999b: 55).

Our study moves now towards drawing some conclusions about how Catherine's use of imagery and symbol may be seen from a Jungian perspective.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CATHERINE'S RELEVANCE FOR THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

#### Overview

This chapter will discuss what the mystical life and mystical union is about, and how Catherine challenges us in our time to let go of self-centredness. Catherine's symbols, as we have seen, fit Jung's categories of archetypal symbols. We have noted too the importance in Jung's work given to dream interpretation and to exploring symbolism as a way into the unconscious. Ultimately dreams tap into the unconscious, and perhaps it can be said that the mystic at some level goes through the same kind of experience that the dreamer has. Mysticism and psychology do have something to say to each other across a long divide of history. Psychology needs to turn to the mystics whose experience long predates the discoveries of psychology. Clearly too Catherine urges us to intimacy with Jesus and to self-transcendence, beyond a call from depth psychology to exploring the unconscious.

#### 1. Mysticism

##### 1.1 The Mystical Life

The mystic in all cultures apprehends a truth that is beyond the grasp of the rational intellect. (Johnson 1986: 21).

One could perhaps ask whether mysticism is a phenomenon of a bygone age, one simply to be studied and researched, but one with little bearing on our own age and time. I would suggest that spirituality, and by extension mysticism, is finding a new place in the hearts of people of modern times. Whether or not they know it people are in search of meaning in life, and of the divine, and mystics like Catherine of Siena who have already walked along the way have something to offer our world.

Christian spirituality is the daily, communal, lived expression of one's ultimate beliefs characterized by openness to the self-transcending love of God, self, neighbour, and

world through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit. Active involvement in the world can be seen at the core of the spiritual journey, and contemplation can be experienced as profoundly cosmic, relational, engaged and committed to the world. In all Christian mysticism there is a movement towards greater simplicity and stillness and a growing realization of the inadequacy of human images for God.

There is in the historical understanding of mysticism much that still applies in our time. The essence of searching for union with God challenges and invites us across the divide of centuries. The medieval use of imagery may superficially at least turn us off. But as Jung has reminded us, we are a people not in tune with the numinous in the ways our forebears were. Too much else demands our attention.

Some definitions of mysticism stress the soul's contact in full awareness with 'transcendental reality'. A call to renunciation seems to hold a key to the mystic way. The end is the vision of God, communion with the Divine. Asceticism is at the source of mysticism. Many spiritual authors examine the triple mystic route of purgation, illumination and union. Recurring aspects associated with this are, i.a., awakening, self-knowledge or purgation, illumination with its attendant voices and visions, surrender and on occasion the dark night, and finally union or consummation.

Because of human limitations the mystics, and we ourselves, employ the use of imagery to express what cannot easily be expressed in ordinary language. One does not readily put into words an experience of the numinous. Looking at it from a Jungian perspective, one might simply say our dreams are concerned with the things we don't talk about because often enough the issues are not sufficiently in our consciousness.

The flame of love is the centre and core of Christian mysticism. To foster this reasoning and thinking are abandoned. It is religion which provides the symbols we need for spiritual nourishment. Symbols are of the very essence of religion and of mysticism, and can carry us to mystical levels of awareness and to states of unconsciousness unknown to theology.

The above discussion reminds us that mysticism continues to hold a place today since ultimately what is being talked about is an openness to the transcending love of God and a search for union with God through asceticism and self-knowledge. In Jungian terms we are invited to deal with the shadow and delve into the unconscious, attempting to live more and more at a conscious level.

## **1.2 The mystic's experience of union**

Clearly not everyone believes in the authenticity of mystical union with the divine, or wants in one way or another to water it down. Mystical union is not just simply a psychological 'kick' or an altered state of consciousness (such as may be induced by drugs). Catherine herself as we have seen recognized different levels of consciousness, and was able to write of them. Her short life was all about coming to terms with the shadow side of herself, about integrating different parts of herself. Jung, I would suggest, would see her as having come to individuation, despite some decisions and experiences in her life which humanly speaking point to lack of insight and a problem of on occasion an unrestrained ego. He would perhaps have wondered about her food practices, and about her sheer determination to do some of what she set out to do in a political sphere. We noted earlier on her *Io voglio!* (I want it). Jung believed in the integration of various parts of the self, in the recognition of the shadow, and in dealing with the unconscious aspects of ourselves which, unchecked and unnoted, bind us in their grasp of unfreedom.

Mystics fall in love with God, and are allowed no peace until they are irrevocably united to God and transformed into God's own life. They feel a deep need of penance and purification. They turn inward, forget the self and attend to God's loving self-communication. God communicates himself to the mystic's spirit, soul, psyche, emotions, and body through mystical experiences to encourage a deeper surrender to and communication with God. God and the mystic become one through the mystical marriage, but remain distinctly two. Nothing can touch the peace and freedom at the deepest core of the mystic's being. The more deeply the mystic experiences union with God, the more deeply union with God's creation is experienced. Heroic virtue and service to the world are outward expressions of union with God. The Christian mystics point the way to fully authentic human life by illustrating what it means to be

a human being. The genuine mystic is purified and illuminated by, and eventually united to, a personal God. Mysticism in the best of the Christian tradition is never reduced to the psychological level nor dissociated from its biblical, liturgical, and sacramental level. (Egan 1991:xvii-xxiii).

Christian mysticism is a way of life that involves the perfect fulfillment of loving God, neighbor, all God's creation, and oneself. It is the fundamental human process through which one becomes fully authentic by responding throughout life to a God who gives himself unconditionally as love and as the ultimate destiny of every person. It is an ordered movement toward ever higher levels of reality by which self awakens to, is purified and illuminated by, and is eventually fully united with, the God of love. (Egan 1991:xvii).

Union with God is the precondition of all spiritual development, rather than simply its deepest level. The deep union of Catherine led her into greater activity and service of others. Christian mystics seek God, not experiences of self-actualization. Intimacy with Jesus is central. Pseudo-mysticism intersects with illusion, helping us fabricate a false self.

Both Western and Eastern mysticism regard renunciation of bodily needs and pleasures as the way to prepare for the mystic union. And today sensory and sleep deprivation, meditative disciplines and fasting are seen by psychologists as ways to alter the state of consciousness and open the door to mystic experience. The mystic experience and its accompanying phenomena do not necessitate neurotic or pathological origins. So also an individual mystic may have hysteric or pathological symptoms, just as a non-mystic may. One must consider the whole personality and the fruits of the ecstatic experiences. (Von Behren 1973: 189-198).

Catherine herself prays for union:

And as we image, so may we find union: through our memory, image and be united with the Father, to whom is attributed power; through our understanding, image and be united with the Son, to whom is attributed wisdom; through our will, image and be united with the Holy Spirit, to whom is attributed mercy, and who is the love of the Father and the Son. (*Prayer 4*).

Splendidly explicit as she always was about her love for God Catherine must have had an inward experience of him that was hers alone. But the *image* from which her meditations commonly began was the familiar one presented by any crucifix. At

whatever point we enter her mind we encounter Christ crucified, and in particular the thought of his blood. The blood shed on the cross became for her the supreme sign and pledge of divine love and the chief motive for ours. Catherine's union with God enabled her to share more profoundly the Church's mission. Her sense of mission is never absent.

Each image portraying Catherine's spiritual journey describes an initial inward movement that eventually thrusts outward... [Burning] compassion leads Catherine to the choice incumbent upon every true mystic, to bring her deep interior experience to bear upon the world in which she lives... Prayer and service, contemplation and action become equal manifestations of worship. Loving and serving the neighbor is loving and serving God. (Meade 1991:129).

While we note that mystical union with God is not simply something that can be turned on psychologically, or not just an altered state of consciousness, we do see from the above discussion that the mystics go a long way in teaching us what it means to be a authentic human being. Union with God has a practical visible side seen in activity in the world and service of one's fellow human beings. There may well be renunciation of bodily needs linked to this becoming authentic. What Jung sees as individuation can look much like what one would expect to see in the life of the mystic, and as has been suggested already symbols expressing this growth in authenticity may well be the same in psychology and in mysticism. We are however reminded that while there is a dialogue between them the two disciplines are not completely interchangeable.

### **1.3 Letting go of self-centredness**

Catherine's works are full of references to self-knowledge and knowledge of God. We too gain self-knowledge by inner reflection and honest self-assessment. For Catherine, in a pre-psychological age, self-knowledge is the cell or dwelling in which we discover our own lowliness that makes us humble. God is infinite charity. We are sinful. This experience produces the fruit of humility in our hearts. Catherine links lack of knowledge with sin. Her insistence on self-knowledge bears the mark of her personality. She constantly juxtaposes her sinfulness and that of the world with God's loving mercy.

The mystical life can be described as a journey into the depths of one's being, a journey to the true self and through the true self to God, who is the center. Down, down I go through the alternate layers of light and darkness, meeting all the shiny monsters and frightening demons that inhabit the subliminal world. And if I progress far enough, I meet not only my own little monsters; I meet the monsters of the human race... I meet archetypal evil. (Johnson 1984: 61).

If we are trying to let go of self-centredness, we look into the open heart of Christ crucified, and begin to love this truth of God. Then there is room for truth to make its inroads. Catherine knows that "the soul must strip herself of her selfish will if she wants to be clothed perfectly ...just as one turns one's garment inside out when one undresses" and that "Once we come to know it, we dispossess ourselves of our own will" (*Prayer 11*).

She knows too that

until I strip myself of myself, of my disordered selfish will, I cannot see you. Therefore you have taught me first to strip myself of my own will by coming to know myself. In that knowledge I find and come to know you, and in coming to know you my soul is more perfectly stripped of myself and clothed in your will. You want me, then, to rise up in the light to come to know myself in you. (*Prayer 12*).

Ashley (1995:144) reminds that according to the Dominican writers the two great dangers to the spiritual life are a lack of courage and constancy leading the Christian to turn back from the straight path, to cease prayer and the practice of virtue and to engage in the distractions and sins of the world. And pride leading one to trust one's own holiness rather than the grace of God, to become self-righteous and contemptuous of others, to be unwilling to obey God and those he gives as guides.

Catherine was ...attuned to another kind of illusion in which we think we are not capable of living an authentic life. She counsels some monks not to let their souls give in to sadness or discouragement, since this is exactly what the devil wants... The darkness and confusion of spiritual sadness is also a form of illusion we must flee with God's help. (Dreyer 1999:69).

It was suggested above that Catherine's at times unrestricted ego was an obstacle to her growth in maturity and as an authentic human being. The following quote seems to illustrate this:

[Catherine] did manage to fulfill many of her needs – to be important, to achieve recognition, to gain attention, to influence and control events and people, through service to God and her imitation of Christ... I suspect that the accusation 'vainglory', meaning that she found personal satisfaction in her work is well-founded. This probably was one of her devils. Was she really only doing all this only for Christ? (Von Behren 1973: 228).

Yet Catherine's honesty and commitment to growth in Christ, in knowledge of herself and of God, set her on the path to integrating within herself the shadow-side of herself. And she invites us to do the same.

Catherine's sharp awareness of sin was grounded in her vision of God, a God of such incredible love that even the slightest affront was unbearable. When egotistic preoccupations hold centre stage in our relationships with God and others, we are forced to admit that we are not as perfect as we pretended to be. Every human being, has to learn that one's ego often stands in the way of authentic living. Catherine's life was about coming to an ever deeper knowledge of self and of God, and about dealing with what she could see as sin in her life and in the world. Jung's understanding of coming to terms with the shadow in his own life can be seen as linked to this. He was also deeply attuned to archetypal evil, found in the collective unconscious of all people, as we have seen.

Catherine's belief that sin is linked to a lack of self-knowledge is an important one. She understood that we need to strip ourselves of 'self' and to become attuned to illusions. We need to grow in self-knowledge if sin is to be conquered. In fact we need to deal with what Jung so many years later called the shadow, the part of ourselves that keeps us from knowing ourselves fully, and from really knowing God.

## **2. Catherine's Spirituality**

### **2.1 Catherine's Challenges**

Unless you are drowned in his blood, you can never acquire the little virtue of true humility born of self-hatred which, in turn, is born of love, for a soul comes out of it with perfect purity, as iron is taken dross-free from the furnace. So, lock yourself into the open side of the Son of God, that fragrant storehouse where even sin becomes fragrant. There the sweet bride reclines on the bed of blood and fire,

and the secret of the heart of God's Son is laid bare. (*Letter 9*, to Raymond; Foster and Ronayne 1980:71-72).

Strange ways indeed of expressing her longing to be united with Christ, and yet it would seem that Catherine is in touch with the refining that needs to happen in her life, with the integrating of the shadow side of herself, with coming to terms with aspects of sexuality.

Catherine shared her society's ideas about femininity, and strongly advised against being feminine (!). Her followers had difficulty in reconciling within themselves what she was doing and saying, and the fact that she was a woman. Her unconventional behaviour was justified as being commands of Christ. She appears as a self-taught mystic, convinced that her will is Christ's, no longer her own. As Catherine perceived it, the way to God is a lived dynamic of knowledge and love for the crucified Christ. The summit is not only union with God but also an insatiable hunger for the salvation of others. Hers is a mystical contemplation in action, a mysticism that expressed and fulfilled itself sacramentally in social and political activity.

Catherine's spirituality was mystical; it denoted direct experiential knowledge of God. Seeking the key to a holy dedicated life with uncommon attention and intensity, she learned the importance of self-knowledge, the development of personal virtue, and intimate personal knowledge of the divinity residing within her. The selflessness of unrestricted love which motivated her search brought about a transformation of her whole being. Catherine receded, and God became paramount; the love which motivated her became unrestricted compassion for God's people. Theologians of today acknowledge it to be the *conjunctio oppositorum*, the true mystical marriage in which the individual has become fully integrated, fully in tune with *anima* and *animus*, with body and spirit, with God and self. (Meade 1991:52).

Catherine, perceiving the oneness inherent in the love of God, self and neighbour, discerned that contemplation promotes action. Her harmonious view of life, her personal experience of God is powerful in its application to the world of her day and our own. She promoted the integration of her human faculties of memory, understanding and will, believing that all can achieve the connective harmony leading to union with God in whatever life circumstances they find themselves. Her spirituality has a universality relevant in every age.

Catherine's understanding of self-knowledge is complementary to psychological self-knowledge. From a psychological point of view, self-knowledge means becoming conscious of major relationships and life events... Self-knowledge in Catherine includes the knowledge of one's potential as created by a loving God in his image and knowledge of God's love and mercy... [A] spiritual self-knowledge would give a person the inner freedom to develop psychological self-knowledge... Catherine teaches that selfish self-love orients one's desire towards goods that are illusory and false. (Villegas 1986: 247-248).

Catherine has plotted a course leading to freedom. Through a knowledge of the God who is 'Gentle Truth' and through a knowledge of this God and of self, she invites us to learn to see the world with God's loving gaze, and to be able to choose love. She holds us accountable to choose the good, to use freedom wisely. We lose sight of truth when we give in to pseudo values, to self-deception rather than laying down our lives for the other following the God named Truth. (Dreyer 1999:93-110).

Catherine emphasizes freedom in all her writings. It is a very important element in her understanding of the spiritual life. She describes the human person as having three gates – memory, understanding and will. In order to lead us towards a more perfect love, according to Catherine, God allows us to be tempted in the first two areas, but never in the third. No enemies can open up the gate of the will, which is the main gate guarding the city of the soul. The guard at this gate remains free to say yes or no as he pleases. But if he says yes to sin, then the enemy of selfish love and all the other enemies that accompany it follow after and come into the soul. Catherine's idea of the spiritual life is one of adult maturity and responsibility. When the soul is old enough to discern good from evil she can choose one or the other in freedom as it pleases her. (Dreyer 1999:88).

The will of God had called Catherine to be a passionate word of truth in the world, and everything in her responded without reserve. Catherine became a living sacrament of truth's power to draw the human mind and heart with its beauty. She learned the depth of our human desire for integrity rather than deception, for the truth of God who embraces within his goodness our own meaning and destiny. Passion for the truth of God pushed Catherine, and pushes us, to the heart of the world where we allow the pain and suffering of others to become our own. (cf Fatula 1987: 70).

From this discussion it would seem that we are shown that mystical self-knowledge, among other things, allows the mystic to achieve psychological self-knowledge as

well along the way. Catherine's 'humility' and 'self-hatred' are on a psychological level about being refined and integrating shadow aspects of herself. Her contemplation in action and working for the salvation of all suggests a desire for integrity rather than deception, making God paramount in all. Her language of symbol and myth, giving expression to this, is Jungian language.

### **2.3 Symbols of Intimacy with Jesus**

Being made in God's image means that we are called to live in the fullness of intimacy with God. And for Catherine this fullness is reciprocal. Yes, we are made in God's image, but when God became man in Jesus, God chose to be made in our image as well! (Dreyer 1999: 69).

The union of love and the mystical marriage are essentially the same. By literalizing the mystical marriage, a concrete role for women, the spouse of Christ, is formulated. Union can be attained by both men and women. By becoming the spouse of Christ Catherine can be compared to the woman who desires to marry the most powerful man in her community. In the eyes of society she has prestige, and she is answerable to no one but her spouse. Her desire to save everyone was part of her reaction to an ecstatic union. She would stop at nothing to 'repay' Christ for those experiences. Her consciousness that the invisible world exists alongside of the visible, that the world is populated by divine or supranatural beings with power to intervene at will in her life and in the course of events, is a result of her ecstatic experiences. (Von Behren 1973: 143- 156).

Catherine's ring is symbolic; Raymond of Capua has made it a concrete object, yet invisible to anyone but Catherine. The expansion of the Christ-Catherine relationship into a realistic sweetheart relationship is again putting in concrete form what is suggested by Catherine. The details of kissing help to establish the reality of this relationship. The concept of 'romantic love' derived from the courtly love literature undoubtedly is showing its influence, both in Catherine's idealization of the spouse relationship and in her biographers' descriptions. Tommaso of Siena makes it quite clear that when he speaks of Catherine's union with God he means literally...Catherine, too, has turned a symbolic relationship – the spouse of Christ – into a concrete role. The reality of the union in ecstasy becomes a real marriage relationship. (Von Behren 1973: 129-130).

For Catherine Christ crucified is at the centre of her life and teaching. She is given a mission to offer her life in self-sacrificing love, patterning her life on that of Christ crucified. His desire for the salvation of humanity is infinite. His passion reveals the heart of the Trinitarian mystery for Catherine. What happened on Calvary is the result of the fiery love of the Triune God. In keeping with the spirituality of the time Catherine doesn't focus extensively on the resurrection. She does present the risen Lord as the one who makes available Trinitarian communion for us all. Catherine demonstrates a disdain for death, an ability to heal in the name of Christ and willingness to experience humiliation and attacks of all kinds, typical of the early Christians. Frequently, as we have seen, she uses the image of being inebriated by the blood of Christ.

Not eating, as we have noted, was a central element in Catherine's behaviour, eucharistic piety was at the core of her religious practice, and food, especially blood as food, was the central metaphor in her writing. Her craving for blood was a craving in Christ for all that was denied her socially and politically, and for identification with the humanity of Christ.

From among the symbols and doctrines available to them, women and men chose different symbols – men renouncing wealth and power, women renouncing food. They used symbols in different ways...In their symbols women expanded the suffering, giving self they were ascribed to by their culture, becoming ever more wonderfully and horribly the body on the cross. They became that body not as flight from but as continuation from self...Thus they gloried in the pain, the exudings, the somatic distortions that made their bodies parallel to the consecrated wafer on the altar and the man on the cross. (Bynum 1987: 295-296).

Catherine's food symbolism is very rich, as we have noted above. God hungers for souls, and we are called to do the same:

[The Lamb] has made himself, for us, a wine cask, the wine itself, and the cellarer. Thus we see that his humanity is the cask that concealed the divine nature, and that fiery hands of the Cellarer, the Holy Spirit, tapped the cask on the wood of the cross. And that sweet Wine, Wisdom, the incarnate Word, deceived and overcame the devil's malice, catching him with the hook of our humanity...Open the eye of your understanding [and] fix it on God's hunger for the food of souls... Be the kind of man who eats and savours souls, as this

is the food God calls for. (Letter to the bishop of Florence; Foster and Ronayne 1980:80-81.)

In similar imagery, Jesus is seen as food and servant, while the Holy Spirit serves at the table which is the Father:

[At the glorious wedding feast] we dine at the table of the Lamb, where the Lamb himself is both our food and our servant. The Father, you see, is our table, bearing everything that is – except sin, which is not in him. The Word, God's Son, has made himself our food, roasted in the blazing fire of charity, while the servant at the table is that very charity, the Holy Spirit, who gave and gives us God with his own hands. (*Letter 14*, Foster and Ronayne 1980: 91).

God feeds us and hungers for our redemption:

The divine Goodness has placed you in the mystical body of holy Church and let you feed at her breast solely in order that you may eat the food of God's honour and the salvation of souls at the table of the most holy cross. He does not want it eaten anywhere but on the cross, by bearing both bodily fatigue and countless anguished desires as the Son of God himself simultaneously endured physical torment and the agony of desire... The desire was his hunger for our redemption. (*Letter 32*, Foster and Ronayne 1980: 148).

Some of the dominant symbols of intimacy with Jesus in Catherine, we have seen, revolve around mystical marriage with her spouse, and around eating and drinking and becoming Christ. The symbolism is powerful, for while it employs images relating to everyday experiences, the realities described have to do with experiences beyond the everyday, experiences of the divine life within herself, experiences of the real self she had been called to uncover and discover. Marriage and food images are archetypal, expressed differently in different cultures perhaps, but pointing to human experiences now often shrouded in the mists of time, or lost in myths and legends of the past. Jung knew from his dreamwork of at least some of the elements that Catherine so richly describes.

### **3. Psychology and Mysticism**

#### **3.1 Self-Transcendence**

Depth psychology has gone beyond the conscious into the unconscious self and found stored there what the conscious self has forgotten or blocked out. The mystics, however, go much further than the psychologists; they

experience the transcendental, mystical self, the self in union with God... Catherine calls this 'losing' herself... The 'knowledge' attained in the cell of 'self-knowledge' is the highest state of human consciousness, in which narrow selfhood is transcended and there is consciousness of union with the divine. It is an immediate rather than a reflective self-knowledge, which is an important distinction between mystical and ordinary self-knowledge. (Fresen 1995: 17-19).

Jung's concept of the self comes close to the self as the archetypal image leading to unity. Neumann suggests that the final and mature phase of mysticism centres upon Jungian individuation, self-realization, the transformation into the self, the person's ultimate wholeness. In its supreme form it preserves the tension between the ego and the self. Modern investigators do not agree on what happens to the self in the unitive state of ecstasy. The mystic may well feel his/her own self is lost or annihilated. Because Catherine does recall and relate the context and emotions of her ecstatic union her consciousness can be compared to dream consciousness during which one is fully and clearly conscious of one's self, one's experience.

Fascinated by psychology, many people identify mystical experience with the altered state of consciousness, be it ecstasy or trance... This is a snare... *What makes Christian mysticism to be Christian mysticism is the orientation to the mystery of Christ in a scriptural and sacramental context.* (Johnson 1984: 20).

Some commentators equate mysticism with irrationalism or impracticality in dealing with daily living, others associate it with parapsychological phenomena. Some reduce mysticism to moments of ecstatic rapture, or dilute mysticism. The mystic too may settle for less than God if he is trapped by the self. Obviously one can mistake self-realization for God-realization.

The silent prayer of contemplative love, seemingly so restful, is in fact a tremendous effort of concentration which cannot fail to make its impact on the psychic life. And it is a well-known psychological fact that a starved portion of the psyche may rebel, or that the whole organism may revolt against one-sided strain. It is hardly surprising, then, that subliminal elements should surge into consciousness with surprising violence. (Johnson 1970: 35-35).

Johnson takes this idea further. What the mystic experiences, in prayer and in union with God, because he or she is on a journey to self-knowledge, may well be a coming to consciousness of aspects of the self previously hidden in the unconscious:

As the deep subliminal powers are awakened and come into consciousness they impede discursive thinking... In authentic Christian contemplation, while the discursive faculties are silenced and put to rest, an immense fire is burning at the core of one's being... One is asleep at the rational level of consciousness; but at the level of the heart one is very much awake. (Johnson 1988: 66).

Elsewhere Johnson is adamant that though there is comparison between contemplation (engaged in by the mystics) and psychotherapy (a product of psychology), and although in both one may be brought face to face with the shadow, the two processes are not identical.

The contemplative process has much in common with psychotherapy. In both cases one is painfully and inescapably brought face to face with one's shadow. But the mystic is healed by calling with faith on Jesus the savior... [Psychologists] will never understand the human psyche with all its altered states until they look carefully at the mystical journey towards wholeness. (Johnson 1984:46-47).

Catherine learned to embrace God's will in her life, as the abyss of love enfolding her in mercy. Wanting to be one with God's will drove her to sacrifice her life and her reputation. She realized her deepest call was to communion and ministry, not to isolation. During her time as a recluse Catherine was brought face to face with the self she hadn't known, the part which desired ease and comfort rather than penance and dedication to God. Her journey was obviously not described in Jungian terms, but the experience of individuation she experienced Jung could recognize.

### **3.2 Exploring Dreams**

Freud was the first modern scientist to connect the unconscious and dreams. What he found was that understanding the elements of dreams enabled a person to see what was going on in the part of himself of which he was not aware, to come to terms with himself, and so recover from neurosis. He saw that much of dream material is obnoxious to the conscious personality unless it is distorted. So original dream thoughts are condensed and turned into images, and some objectionable ideas or wishes are replaced by associations. Jung broke with Freud, not accepting his systematic doctrine of sexuality. Also he suggested that the unconscious does not

think rationally to begin with, but rather symbolically, metaphorically, in images. The task of dream interpretation, according to Jung, is that of learning to understand the symbolic communications of the unconscious, the language of art, literature, mythology and folklore. He saw no attempt on the part of the unconscious to deceive or distort. The mind, he sees, is flooded by new images, symbols of something that has been unknown or laid aside and forgotten. He showed the importance of this kind of thinking in approaching the unconscious, coming to an understanding that the best of reality is found in these depths. It is also a reality that demands a religious attitude, and it is found only when one allows oneself to be led by the thinking of the unconscious, symbolic thinking found in fantasy, dream, myth and story. (cf Kelsey 1968: 193-199).

Jung was careful to show that a dream is a way of self reflection. It is important to see oneself in the dream. Dealing with dreams is not simple because it involves the individual in a realm of experience beyond him- or herself. Symbol from mythology and the history of religion suggest deeper, universal meanings. Such dreams reveal powerful realities that have their being in the unconscious, realities we have seen Jung called archetypes. The most significant of these archetypal forms are images of the shadow, the anima and the animus. But there are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. (Kelsey 1968:199-210).

Religion and depth psychology have need and use for each other, but neither should usurp the functions of the other. Jung recognizes religion as a necessary fact of human experience. The world of symbols links the world of the psyche and the world of religious experience, with symbols including both unconscious motivations and spiritual intimations. The psyche deals with figures of dreams, worlds of fantasy across levels of consciousness.

It is suggested that Jung's understanding of the content of dreams, the dream material, can throw light on the imagery and symbols used by mystics. As has been seen, archetypes are the symbols experienced in dreams. So too, some of Catherine's imagery is archetypal. In dreams, in report on the mystical state, other levels of consciousness are touched into. Experiences of the numinous dream tell us that we stand in a holy place. While it may be possible to understand certain attributes of

these numinous contents, we also know that something incomprehensible has taken over. The symbols of the unconscious may even slip away and we may know the one who gives us our dreams. Whether everything, or even anything, that Catherine experienced could be described as a dream remains open to question. As noted previously, she was aware of different levels of consciousness within herself. But it is clear that her experiences could indeed be said to have in them elements that Jung would recognize from dream interpretation.

### **3.3 Mysticism and psychology**

Both depth psychology and Christian theology deal with our daily experiences. They share a concentration on the hidden depths of human experience. The contents of primordial experience are chiefly made up of unconscious materials. Primordial experience invades and all but effaces the boundaries between depth psychology and theology both of which focus on our experiences of meaning and value. Primordial experience for religion is the encounter with original mystery, with God. For depth psychology it is what gives the sense of meaning and purpose to human life.

Ulanov (1975) suggests that theology and depth psychology converge in five areas: a focus on history fills both disciplines with ardour for a life lived fully in the present. There is concern for community because of central values held in common. The divine and the human meet, and revelations create rapport between the conscious and unconscious levels of the psyche. Vocation is a summons to become a whole self, and is one of the most powerful ways we know God. Religion and depth psychology meet in the area of mortification inviting one die to all that conflicts and competes with one's central purpose.

Yet there are differences. The way to consciousness is a way of purgative stripping, but no depth psychology attempts to unite the psyche and the ground of all order and being. Both disciplines focus on human beings and their profound meaning for us. But they are not identical. The religious world had no indication of the obscure and secret symbolism that requires the special training of the analyst to penetrate. The fullness of dream was not grasped, though religion gave more serious attention to

dream life than any other discipline did before the advent of depth psychology.  
(Ulanov 1975: 13-23).

No direct description of spiritual experience is or can be possible to people. It must always be symbolic, allusive. The greater the suggestive quality of the symbol used, the more truth it will convey. Good symbolism will use to the utmost the resources of beauty and passion. Its appeal will be to the desirous heart. For the mystic the act of contemplation is a psychic gateway, a method of going from one level of consciousness to another. It is as though another 'sense' is liberated which has access to emotion, intellect and will. Paradoxically, the passivity at which the mystics aim is really a state of the most intense activity. Where it is wholly absent no great creative action can take place. In it, the superficial self compels itself to be still to liberate another more deep-seated power. A person's personality is deeper and more mysterious than the sum of his conscious feeling, thought and will. The ego hardly counts in comparison with the depths of being it hides.

Underhill (1910), a great student of the mystical way, reminds us that whilst we may find it convenient and indeed necessary to avail ourselves of the symbols and diagrams of psychology in tracking out the mystic way, we must not forget the large and vague significance which attaches to these symbols, and the hypothetical character of many of the entities they represent. Nor must we allow ourselves to use the 'unconscious' as the equivalent of man's transcendental sense. (Underhill 1910: 53).

She goes on to suggest that:

In mystics none of the self is always dormant. They have roused the Dweller in the Innermost from its slumbers, and round it have unified their life... Only the mystic can be called a whole man (sic), since in others half the powers of the self always sleep. (Underhill 1910:63).

Ulanov (1975) is convinced that

the ancient wisdom of religion and the constantly enlarging understanding of depth psychology offer in combination an extraordinary source of knowledge of

human interiority, and, more than knowledge, a way of accepting it. (Ulanov 1975:8).

In the conclusion that follows we suggest that Catherine's imagery can indeed be interpreted from a Jungian perspective, but that it also goes further.

## CONCLUSION

Can Catherine's imagery be interpreted from a Jungian perspective? It would appear, as we bring the insights of traditional psychology to bear on aspects of spirituality, that it can be. Are we justified in seeing Catherine's journey into the cell of self-knowledge as comparable with what Jung would describe as a journey into the unconscious? Again, from the evidence presented in this thesis, it would appear so.

Our study has indicated that throughout the ages mystics have used imagery and symbol to express their union with God. We are made to mirror the mystery of the triune God. In the middle ages in particular people fed on the richness of images. For the medievals sight was a capacity of mind, and vision the integrating element in the ordering of all things. Archetypal symbols, we have noted, come from nature and from daily life, appealing not to the brain but to the heart. Images of God are images of the self. The real self is the inner person. Being Christ is achieving a unification of self, and thus self-realization. The medieval understanding of the exchange of hearts is total immersion in God, a symbol of the work of grace. Religious growth is seen as accompanied by psychological growth. While individuation in a Jungian understanding is about the establishment and then the breakdown of the persona, it would also seem that the marriage of masculine and feminine is an archetypal expression of wholeness. The spiritual marriage is a metaphor of unity and of separation, of two in one flesh. What we see, then, in Catherine is spiritual growth that from our perspective today can be couched in Jungian terminology of wrestling with the contents of the unconscious and moving towards individuation.

Symbols, says Jung, transcend consciousness, and point to the unknown. Symbols have a certain universality, but it is not easy to grasp archetypal symbols, the language of dreams. Yet symbols unite opposites and give meaning, and God speaks through dreams and visions. The unconscious thinks symbolically in images and, according to Jung, the contents of the collective unconscious are the shared possession of humankind. Archetypes (often personages, more rarely symbols of birth and death), found in dreams, form a bridge between the self and the ego, and are encountered through symbols. Dreams, often indistinguishable from visions, are the state of affairs of the unconscious. They express meaning, they are from the personal unconscious.

They attempt to tell meaning by symbols, they are the gateway to the spirit world. There is in Jung a concern for wholeness so that confrontation with the shadow (the undeveloped side of the personality, the personal unconscious), is an expression of the search for self-realization. There are parallels between Jung's symbols of the self and the symbols of Christ. Individuation as the task of maturity is the manifestation of innate potentialities, the reconciliation of opposites, the realizing of oneself as an individual, bringing human growth and development. Again, while Catherine would not have known the Jungian language, this study is confident in suggesting that Catherine achieved in her life much of what Jung described in his own life and in his work. That Catherine went further, embracing God even in this life, in mystical union, does not detract from the fact that she wrestled with the same kinds of demons he describes. She too confronted the contents of the collective unconscious, and she too in an attempt to describe her experiences used archetypal imagery.

The mystics use symbols to express what is beyond human experience, namely their direct experiential knowledge of God. They reach a realm inaccessible to understanding. Discernment is about finding the truth and comes from knowledge of ourselves, from the unmasking of self-love. The bridge, Catherine's integrating Christological symbol, is Christ, the Way, built with virtues, a bridge of teaching, expressing the stages of love as one climbs the stairs. It expresses spiritual progression, and provides the opportunity to grow as it mediates grace. The soul progresses from imperfect to perfect love. Blood, also an integrating Christological symbol, has a salvific nature, is food and is linked with self-knowledge. It has mystical life-giving properties and as an archetypal symbol it represents death. Fire, one of Catherine's favourite images is sun and warmth, it is a God-image. Catherine sees her own nature as fire, and final union with God is viewed as a fiery coal. In the fountain of water we see our God. Blood and water flow from the side of Christ. The inner cell develops from that of the well and the abyss. There is an unmasking of self-love, in the cell, in the house, in the city, and in the ever-widening circles there comes an internal harmony of self. The Catherinian images examined in this study are not those of personages so often found in the dreams of Jung and his clients. Yet, as we have noted, they too have deep roots in the collective unconscious of humankind, and Jung would know them as archetypal symbols. Catherinian archetypal imagery has links with symbols and myths deep in the unconscious of humankind, and gives

meaning to our deepest human longings. Her imagery is thus not unconnected with that found in the myths and legends and dreams of people everywhere. Jung would see her as having wrestled with the contents of the unconscious, both personal and collective.

Catherine set herself a tremendous task and we cannot say she succeeded completely in suppressing either her physical body or her egotistical self. She anticipated the current value placed on interior wholeness when she emphasized the integration of her human faculties of memory, understanding and will. Her life exemplified the strength of character and purpose which flows from the self-knowledge derived from the knowledge of God. She was an uncompromisingly honest searcher after the Truth and Love that is God in Jesus. It was not her truth or her will that triumphed in the end but her struggle to bring the world closer to realizing God's truth and love. She invites us to be truthful about ourselves in all our sin and glory, not giving in to pseudo-values, to self-deception. Her idea of the spiritual life is one of adult maturity and responsibility. When we remove the psychological overlay associated with the term *self-knowledge*, we recognize that for Catherine self-knowledge makes us humble. Her sharp awareness of sin was grounded in her vision of God. She was not afraid to face her dark side.

Catherine does part company with Jung. For one thing, we need to exercise caution around Jung's God-ambivalence especially when for Catherine the goal of self-knowledge is God. Yet a dialogue is possible. The ways Jung and Catherine view life's central tasks have much in common, especially in the use of imagery as we have seen. Psychology in our time, (and in the case of this study, that of Jung), has something to offer medieval spirituality.

We turn at the conclusion of this study to Catherine's own words capturing the complexities around self-knowledge, and reminding us yet again of the importance to her of imagery. Catherine sees herself in God's own mirror. She sees her own dignity, and she comes to deal with her shadow.

As the soul comes to know herself she also knows God better, for she sees how good he has been to her. In the gentle mirror of God she sees her own

dignity: that through no merit of hers but by his creation she is the image of God. And in the mirror of God's goodness she sees as well her own unworthiness, the work of her own sin. For just as you can better see the blemish on your face when you look at yourself in the mirror, so the soul who in true self-knowledge rises up with desire to look at herself in the gentle mirror of God with the eye of understanding sees all the more clearly her own defects because of the purity she sees in him. (*Dialogue*, cited by Dreyer 1999: 64).

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