

## Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa



St. Catherine was born at Genoa in 1447, died at the same place 15 September, 1510. The life of St. Catherine of Genoa may be more properly described as a state than as a life in the ordinary sense. When about twenty-six years old she became the subject of one of the most extraordinary operations of God in the human soul of which we have record, the result being a marvellous inward condition that lasted till her death. In this state, she received wonderful revelations, of which she spoke at times to those around her, but which are mainly embodied in her two celebrated works: the Dialogues of the Soul and Body, and the Treatise on Purgatory. Her modern biographies, chiefly translations or adaptations of an old Italian one which is itself founded on Memoirs drawn up by the saint's own confessor and a friend, mingle what facts they give of her outward life with accounts of her supernatural state and doctrine, regardless of sequence, and in an almost casual fashion that makes them entirely subservient to her psychological history. These facts are as follows: St. Catherine's parents were Jacopo Fieschi and Francesca di Negro, both of illustrious Italian birth. Two popes Innocent IV and Adrian V had been of the Fieschi family, and Jacopo himself became Viceroy of Naples. Catherine is described as an extraordinarily holy child, highly gifted in the way of prayer, and with a wonderful love of Christ's Passion and of penitential practices; but, also, as having been a most quiet, simple, and exceedingly obedient girl. When about thirteen, she wished to enter the convent, but the nuns to whom her confessor applied having refused her on account of her youth, she appears to have put the idea aside without any further attempt. At sixteen, she was married by her parents' wish to a young Genoese nobleman, Giuliano Adorno. The marriage turned out wretchedly; Giuliano proved faithless, violent-tempered, and a

spendthrift. And made the life of his wife a misery. Details are scanty, but it seems at least clear that Catherine spent the first five years of her marriage in silent, melancholy submission to her husband; and that she then, for another five, turned a little to the world for consolation in her troubles. The distractions she took were most innocent; nevertheless, destined as she was for an extraordinary life, they had the effect in her case of producing lukewarmness, the end of which was such intense weariness and depression that she prayed earnestly for a return of her old fervour. Then, just ten years after her marriage, came the event of her life, in answer to her prayer. She went one day, full of melancholy, to a convent in Genoa where she had a sister, a nun. The latter advised her to go to confession to the nuns confessor, and Catherine agreed. No sooner, however, had she knelt down in the confessional than a ray of Divine light pierced her soul, and in one moment manifested her own sinfulness and the Love of God with equal clearness. The revelation was so overwhelming that she lost consciousness and fell into a kind of ecstasy, for a space during which the confessor happened to be called away. When he returned, Catherine could only murmur that she would put off her confession, and go home quickly. From the moment of that sudden vision of herself and God, the saints interior state seems never to have changed, save by varying in intensity and being accompanied by more or less severe penance, according to what she saw required of her by the Holy Spirit Who guided her incessantly. No one could describe it except herself; but she does so, minutely, in her writings, from which may here be made one short extract: [The souls in Purgatory] see all things, not in themselves, nor by themselves, but as they are in God, on whom they are more intent than on their own sufferings. . . . For the least vision they have of God overbalances all woes and all joys that can be conceived. Yet their joy in God does by no means abate th

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