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Catherine of Siena: a Dominican political thinker in fourteenth-century Italy

Caterina Benincasa, known to Anglophone posterity as Catherine of Siena, has rarely been read as a political thinker. By contrast, Remigio de' Girolami, who died in 1319, twenty-eight years before Catherine was born, is one of the most well-known political thinkers of the fourteenth-century. Catherine is famed as a mystic who inspired the Dominican *Osservanza*, a movement for observant reform; Remigio was an influential voice in Dominican scholasticism, who applied Thomist *bonum commune* (common good) thinking to the problems of the Italian city. For a time, his emphasis on commune, rather than individual rights, made him notorious as an early theorist of the corporate – and, by some reckonings, quasi-totalitarian – state.¹

It is now a good twenty years since this interpretation of Remigio was debunked. It relied on a misreading of his treatise *De bono communi*, in which Remigio states that 'if... there could be punishment without guilt, man ought, through the virtue of ordered love, to prefer himself to suffer, with the commune immune'.² This was read as an endorsement of the controversial thesis that the good citizen should value the good of their city above their own salvation. In fact, as scholars such as Teresa Rupp have noted, Remigio advocated no such thing. He makes clear that his 'punishment without sin' does not mean damnation; it means any punishment, however great, *except* damnation, which always entails sin.³ Remigio's *De bono communi* is not a radical work of anti-individualism, but a meditation on where loyalty to the commune should be fitted into the 'order of charity' (*ordo caritatis*). The 'order of charity' was, as Rupp puts it, an important 'medieval political language', albeit one which has often 'been overlooked by scholars'.⁴ The *ordo* stipulated that relations with

¹ Most famously E.H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, 1957), 479.

² Remigio de' Girolami, *De bono communi* 18.11, in *Dal bene commune al bene del comune* (Florence, 2014), ed. E. Panella, 206: 'si... pena posset esse sine culpa, ex virtute amoris ordinati homo deberet potius ipsam velle pati cum immunitate comunis'.

³ T. Rupp, 'Damnation, individual and community in Remigio Dei Girolami's *De Bono Communi*', *History of Political Thought* 21 (2000), 233.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 223–24.

others must be mediated through divine love, *caritas*, and set out rules for prioritising different commitments according to how closely linked they are to one's relationship with God. Since the 1990s, scholars have grappled with the ramifications of placing the order of charity, rather than a theory of the corporate state, at the heart of their accounts of the *bonum commune*.⁵ There is now widespread recognition that Remigio should be read in the light of other scholastics writing on the theme of *caritas*. What has not yet been recognised is that Catherine of Siena was part of this tradition too.

For both Catherine and Remigio, the *ordo caritatis* offered a means of adjudicating civic conflict. Remigio used the language of *caritas* (divine love) to encourage the citizens of Florence to adhere to a higher standard of morality than law and justice. Florence had recently been wracked by factional conflict, frequently manifested in expulsions and seizures of property. In such circumstances, competing claims to property became a significant barrier to peace, threatening an unending cycle of revenge seizures and lawsuits. Remigio tried to persuade his Florentine listeners that foregoing their property rights was an act of *caritas* to their neighbour and, by extension, God. Several decades later, in late 1377 or early 1378, Catherine made remarkably similar arguments in a letter to the *anziani*, *consoli* and *gonfalonieri* who ruled Bologna.

The rule of Catherine's addressees was of recent vintage: Bologna had expelled its previous ruler, the papal legate Cardinal Guillaume de Noëlle, in an uprising on the night of 19–20 March 1376, before joining the War of the Eight Saints (1375–8) on the Florentine, anti-papal side. The War had been going well for the Florentines. Claims of papal incursions into Tuscan territory provided them with a pretext to stir up discontent over misrule in the papal territories, while at the same time securing and expanding their own dominions. Soon, however, the papacy hit back, placing Florence under Interdict and encouraging the rulers of Europe to expel Florentine merchants. Freed from papal rule, Florence's new allies started to fight amongst themselves; old factional rivalries and territorial disputes raised their head. In March 1377 the Bolognese abandoned ship, signing a truce with papal forces; by 4 July the peace treaty was confirmed.⁶ The

⁵ The essential work here is M.S. Kempshall's *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1999).

⁶ G. Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon, 1305-1378* (London, 1963), 166–172; O. Vancini, *La rivolta dei bolognesi al governo dei vicari della chiesa (1376-1377)* (Bologna, 1906), 6–70.

Bolognese agreed to pay an annual tribute and to acknowledge the pope's stewardship of their city, but they retained their new statutes, and thus their cherished 'stato di libertà'.⁷

The war left a legacy of disputed territorial claims, factional expulsions and mistrust.

Catherine's letter, which explores how the Bolognese can 'attend to the common good, and not to a particular good', deployed the language of the *bonum commune* in an attempt to offer a remedy.⁸

The letter features comments on damnation which bear substantial resemblance to Remigio's notorious statement in *De bono communi*:

Charity should be ordered: that is to say, a man ought not make himself guilty of sin in order to save even one soul; nor, were it possible, should he do it to save the whole world.

For it is not licit to commit a small sin to attain a great virtue.⁹

Catherine's warning that individual salvation is always paramount is phrased more clearly than Remigio's, and she was less interested than him in the commune as an entity. Nonetheless, Catherine used the category of 'the neighbour' to do similar work: providing a framework within which an individual's good could be balanced with the good of those around them. Like Remigio, Catherine deploys the *ordo caritatis* to make the case for relinquishing property rights: 'we ought rightly to sacrifice our corporeal life for the salvation of souls,' she admonishes, 'and our temporal possessions for the good and life of our neighbour.'¹⁰ This is not an abstract statement of principle, but rather a response to the concrete reality of a contested peace settlement: at papal insistence, members of the exiled Maltraversi faction, who had attempted a pro-papal coup in September 1376, were readmitted to Bologna on 29 September 1377. A further ruling of 22 October stipulated that property seized from the erstwhile exiles should be restored.¹¹ Catherine, a propagandist of the

⁷ Vancini, *La rivolta*, 62–4; treaty printed at 99–115.

⁸ All citations of Catherine's letters from Caterina da Siena, *Le lettere di S. Caterina da Siena*, 4 vols, ed. N. Tommaseo (Florence, 1860), using Tommaseo's numbering (T). Translations my own. T268, III, 455: 'attendere al bene commune, e non al ben particolare'.

⁹ T268, III, 453: 'la carità vuole essere ordinate: cioè che l'uomo non facci a sè male di colpa, per campare, non tanto che un'anima, ma se possibil fosse, di salvare tutto quanto 'l mondo, nol debbe fare; perocchè non è lecito di commettere una piccola colpa per adoperare una grande virtù'.

¹⁰ T268, III, 453: 'doviamo bene ponere la vita corporale per salute dell'anime. E la sustanzia temporale per bene e vita del prossimo'.

¹¹ Vancini, *La rivolta*, 65–67; 22 October decision printed at 115–16.

papal cause, was encouraging the citizens of Bologna to relinquish their claims to disputed property.

The letter to Bologna is just one example of how Catherine deployed the rich language of *carità*. Her works are characterised by frequent and forceful appeals to this intellectual framework, though they have often gone unnoticed. Unpicking what Catherine was doing promises new insight into the political potency of *caritas* theology and how it was applied in practice. It also reminds us that fourteenth-century political thought could be written in the vernacular, and by a woman.

I

Catherine's life was short and – whether judged by the standards of the fourteenth century or today – eccentric. Born in around 1347 to a family of well-off Sienese merchants, she died on 29 April 1380 at the age of only 33, following years of extreme fasting and over-exertion. From a young age, Catherine expressed her wish to remain celibate and followed a strict programme of religious vigils and fasts. Despite some familial opposition, she was soon received into the *mantellate*, the female secular Tertiaries of the Dominican Order. She spent the years 1363-66/7 living in seclusion, until she reported that Jesus had appeared to her in a vision and instructed her to go out into the world to help others. She became deeply involved in works of mercy in Siena and began to gather a 'famiglia' of dedicated followers. From 1373-4, Catherine's actions took a political turn: she wrote letters to notable figures such as Bernabò Visconti and Pope Gregory XI, and travelled widely in Tuscany, bringing her influence to bear in person. In 1376 she travelled to Avignon, and she spent the last seventeen months of her life in Rome with Urban VI. Her surviving works include more than 300 letters, 26 prayers and a book known as *Il Dialogo della Divina Provvidenza*.¹²

In 1461 Catherine was canonised and is to this day an object of Catholic devotion. She is most revered for her 'mystical marriage' to Jesus, a motif popular with Renaissance painters.¹³ Conversely, Catherine has long been a source of Protestant ridicule, a situation not helped by the

¹² For biographical details see Foster and Ronayne's 'Introduction' to *I, Catherine: Selected Writings of St Catherine of Siena*, eds. and trans. K. Foster and M.J. Ronayne (London, 1980), 11–40.

¹³ See, for instance, A. Roberts, *Dominican Women and Renaissance Art* (Aldershot, 2008).

persistent myth that Jesus's foreskin served as her wedding ring.¹⁴ Gibbon limited his comments to one dry footnote, 'I have not leisure to expatiate on the legends of St. Bridget or St. Catherine, the last of which might furnish some amusing stories.'¹⁵ Since the 1980s, old confessional divides in historiography have been replaced with a refreshing new interest in Catherine as a case study in mysticism, popular religion and the social role of women.¹⁶ Nonetheless, there has been longstanding reluctance to approach Catherine through the lens of politics. This stemmed from several causes, including discomfort over Catherine's popularity in Mussolini's Italy; most important, however, was the fact that Catherine's earliest biographers, Raymond of Capua and Thomas Caffarini, glossed over her political activities.¹⁷ Thanks to the path-breaking work of F.T. Luongo, Catherine has been restored to her rightful place as an influential political actor. Luongo's research reveals that Catherine was not as detached from partisan politics as it suited her and her biographers to claim: her well-connected family was deeply entangled in Sienese factional disputes. She had familial ties to the Dodici, a group of wealthy guild leaders who ruled Siena from 1355 until their overthrow in 1368, as well as a close relationship with the powerful Salimbeni family, who were outlawed in Siena along with the remnants of the Dodici for an attempted coup against the city's recently-formed Riformatori government (formed of various groupings including the poorer *popolo minuto*) in 1371.¹⁸ In Florence, she had links to the Parte Guelfa, which was, like the Salimbeni and Dodici, an out-of-favour, pro-papal faction, perceived as a threat to the city's anti-papal rulers.¹⁹ In the highly-charged context of the War of the Eight Saints, Catherine's choice to move in these circles was a political statement in itself.

But even Luongo has little to say on the intellectual content of Catherine's work; indeed, he notes that 'Catherine's letters are not intellectually innovative, but present her own highly

¹⁴ Catherine's reference to a foreskin ring is clearly metaphorical, see T221, III, 247. See also R. Mitchell, 'A Crisis of Representation: Celebrating and Criticising Catherine of Siena in Victorian and Edwardian Britain', unpublished paper, 'From Crisis to Criticism' Conference, Paris (2014).

¹⁵ E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London 1820), XII, Ch. 70, 360, footnote.

¹⁶ For example, R.M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago, 1985), 22-53; C.W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (London, 1987), 165-88; and, more recently, the wide-ranging *Companion to Catherine of Siena*, eds. C. Muessig, G. Ferzoco and B.M. Kienzle (Leiden, 2012).

¹⁷ G. Parsons, 'A National Saint in a Fascist State: Catherine of Siena, ca 1922-1943', *Journal of Religious History* 32 (2008), 76-95; F.T. Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena* (New York, 2006), 54.

¹⁸ Luongo, *Saintly Politics*, 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

personal, immediate, and energetic view on traditional teachings'.²⁰ There is some truth in this, but it does not do justice to the sophisticated way in which Catherine dealt with the intellectual traditions bequeathed to her. Work that has taken the content of her thought seriously has generally focussed on her theology rather than her politics.²¹ Unn Falkeid's recent book *The Avignon Papacy Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* has gone the furthest in locating Catherine within more overtly political traditions, though Falkeid's investigation focusses narrowly on Catherine's interpretation of the 'mystical body of the church'.²² There has been no effort to link Catherine's thought to major political discourses of the period such as the *bonum commune* tradition.

In part, the neglect of Catherine's engagement with *bonum commune* thinkers is a product of uncertainty as to how she, with her lack of formal education, could have been aware of their arguments. Whether Catherine could read and write, and in which languages, has been hotly debated.²³ Catherine herself claimed, in a letter to Raymond of Capua written in 1377, that John the Evangelist and Thomas Aquinas taught her to write while she slept. This same letter contains a description of a vision of God, which formed the basis for Catherine's book, the *Dialogo*.²⁴ In his *Legenda maior*, Raymond does not cite this letter, instead asserting that the *Dialogo* was dictated. Indeed, it was Raymond who named the text the *Diologo*, emphasising the act of speech; Catherine called it her *Libro*.²⁵ However, early manuscript copies of the letter of 1377 written by individuals close to Catherine attest to its authenticity, and Catherine's other hagiographer, Thomas Cafferini, firmly attests her ability to write, suggesting that Raymond's account was an act of hagiographical construction.²⁶ Whether we treat Catherine's dream as miracle or metaphor, it is highly plausible that she learnt to write. She could almost certainly read Tuscan dialect, and probably some Latin too. Raymond reports that God granted Catherine a miraculous ability to read Latin Scripture;

²⁰ Ibid., 72.

²¹ For a survey of works on Catherine's theological influences see Noffke's introduction to Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, ed. and trans. S. Noffke (London, 1980), 10.

²² U. Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested* (Cambridge MA, 2017), 146–171.

²³ J. Tylus, 'Mystical Literacy: Writing and Religious Women in Late Medieval Tuscany', in *Companion to Catherine*, 158.

²⁴ Luongo, *Saintly Politics*, 189–92.

²⁵ Tylus, 'Mystical Literacy', 173.

²⁶ Luongo, *Saintly Politics*, 193 and 207. For the hagiographical value of Catherine's 'illiteracy', see also A. Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature* (Cambridge, 2011), 120–21

between her highly-educated Dominican confessors and the cultured women such as Alessa Saracini who acted as her scribes, Catherine also had numerous learned individuals on hand to offer non-miraculous assistance.²⁷ Whatever Catherine's level of literacy, this was a period in which written and oral intellectual culture cannot be strongly distinguished: Aquinas himself dictated much of his work.²⁸ As we shall see, the oral religious culture of fourteenth-century Tuscany was especially vigorous, and ideas flowed between Latin and the vernacular.²⁹

However it was achieved, Catherine's work is deeply infused with the political discourses of her time. She engaged closely with previous scholastic thought, albeit whilst adopting very different literary forms. Her *Dialogo* is framed as a conversation between an ecstatic Catherine, who directs discussion with a few short questions at the end of each chapter, and God himself, who provides most of the dialogue by answering in detail; the structure bears more resemblance to humanist dialogues than the scholastic model of *pro* and *contra* seen in the works of Aquinas or Remigio. Catherine's rhetorical style involves frequent restatement of the same themes with new resonance; one editor compares the effect to 'the motifs of Wagnerian music – ever the same, yet woven into ever-new harmonies'.³⁰ This technique – more suited to oral than written delivery – can mask the complexity of argument. But despite appearances, Catherine's interpretation of morality and citizenship is underpinned by a substantial engagement with the works of more overtly intellectual contemporaries.

II

At the heart of Catherine's thought is the concept of *carità*. Though *carità* (and its Latin equivalent *caritas*) can be roughly rendered as love or charity, neither the English nor modern Italian conveys its full conceptual weight. For Catherine, *carità* is love of God, the only true object of love. All other objects of love – including one's self and one's neighbours – must be loved in the light of this greater love for God.

²⁷ J. Tylus, *Reclaiming Catherine of Siena* (Chicago, 2009), 56–7.

²⁸ J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Paris, 1993), I, 241

²⁹ See discussion below.

³⁰ V.D. Scuda (ed.), *The Letters of Catherine of Siena* (London, 1905), 36.

Catherine built on a long tradition of *caritas* theology: Augustine's *De civitate dei* had carefully defined *caritas*, on biblical authority, as a disposition 'to love God not according to man but according to God, and to love his neighbour even as himself'.³¹ His famous distinction between the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas Dei* rests on the opposition between *caritas* (love which is rightly directed) and *cupiditas* (love which is directed towards improper ends without reference to God): 'Two cities have been created by two kinds of loves: that is to say, the earthly city by a love of self extending even to contempt of God, but the heavenly by a love of God extending even to contempt of the self.'³² In the city created by love of God, the inhabitants 'serve each other by turns in charity [*in caritate*]'.³³ On earth as it stands, Augustine explains, there is a 'mixture of good and bad men'; the *civitas Dei* is mixed with the *civitas terrena*.³⁴ Good will only be fully separated from bad on the day of judgement when God will 'extract from his kingdom all offensive things [*omnia scandala*] and those who create iniquity'.³⁵

Already in the works of Augustine, *caritas* theology addressed the morality of human relations. This can be seen most clearly in Augustine's discussion in Book I of *De doctrina christiana* of what he calls the 'order of charity [*ordo caritatis*]'.³⁶ Augustine's explanation of the *ordo caritatis* aimed to clarify the relationship between the ultimate end of *caritas*, found in love of God, and the particular objects of loves found on earth, by placing them in hierarchical order: 'There are four things to be loved: the first which is above us [God], second that which we are ourselves [the self], third that which is close to us [our neighbours], fourth that which is below us [our bodies]'.³⁷ After it was quoted with the interpolations 'scilicet Deus', 'scilicet proximus' and

³¹ Augustine, *City of God*, IV, ed. P. Levine (Cambridge MA, 1966), Book XIV, Ch. 7, 286 and 292: 'amare Deum et non secundum hominem, sed secundum Deum amare proximum sicut etiam se ipsum'.

³² Ibid., Book XIV, Ch. 28, 404: 'Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo, terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, caelestem vero amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui'; L. Buisson, *Potestas und Caritas: Die päpstliche Gewalt im Spätmittelalter* (Cologne, 1982), 20.

³³ Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIV, Chapter 28, 404: 'serviunt invicem in caritate'.

³⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, VI, ed. W. C. Greene (Cambridge MA, 1969), Book XX, Ch. 5, 266: 'hominum bonorum et malorum... permixtione'.

³⁵ Ibid.: 'colligunt de regno eius omnia scandala et eos, qui faciunt iniquitatem'; Buisson, *Potestas und Caritas*, 21.

³⁶ A discussion probably inspired by Origen's commentary on Song of Songs 2.4 ('he ordered charity in me [*ordinavit in me caritatem*]').

³⁷ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book I, 23.22, 32: 'quattuor sint diligenda, unum quod supra nos est, alterum quod nos sumus, tertium quod iuxta nos est, quartum quod infra nos est.'

‘scilicet corpus’ by Peter Lombard in his *Sentences*, Augustine’s *ordo caritatis* gained widespread popularity across medieval Europe.³⁸

Inspired by a close engagement with Aristotle, the celebrated Dominican Thomas Aquinas explored in more detail the implications of *caritas* theology for political life.³⁹ His *Summa Theologiae* II.II addresses questions such as whether one should love God more than one’s neighbour or one’s neighbour more than oneself, which Augustine never discussed systematically.⁴⁰ Aquinas sets out the means by which relations with others are referred back to God; taking the case of the neighbour, he describes how ‘the reason that our neighbour should be loved, is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbour is that he may be in God. Hence it is specifically the same act whereby we love God, and our neighbour.’⁴¹ He states that there can be particular (non-eternal) goods towards which a virtuous action is said to aim. However, if this particular good is not also ‘referred to the final and perfect good’ (eternal salvation in God) it is not true virtue but ‘counterfeit virtue’ in action.⁴² The ‘good of the city’ (*conservatio civitatis*) is cited as an example of one such ‘particular good’ whose pursuit can entail ‘true virtue’ as long as the individual is also working towards a heavenly ‘final good’.⁴³ Aquinas restates and amplifies Augustinian *caritas* by emphasising its applicability to civic relations. Similarly, Aquinas discusses offences to *caritas* using the Augustinian language of *scandala*, but expands on the links between the abstract concept of *scandala*, and particular temporal evils. Having set out his definition of *caritas* in the *Summa Theologiae*, he goes on to discuss specific cases of *scandala*, including public disturbances such as war and schism, in Quaestiones 37-42, before discussing *scandala* more broadly in Quaestio 43.⁴⁴ The concept of *scandala* – the countervailing force to *caritas* – is a striking way of viewing the interface between the religious and political, which cannot be easily captured in another vocabulary: it merges the personal quest to create the clearest possible path to

³⁸ Rupp, ‘Damnation’, 223–24.

³⁹ For more on Aquinas’s use of the *ordo caritatis*, see S.C. Selner-Wright, ‘The Order of Charity in Thomas Aquinas’, *Philosophy and Theology* 9 (1995), 13-27.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, ed. altera Romana (Rome, 1894), Pars II.II, Quaestio 44, Article 8, 343; Quaestio 25, Article 1, 201-02; Quaestio 26, *passim*, 214-30.

⁴¹ Ibid., Quaestio 25, Article 1, 202: ‘Ratio autem diligendi proximum Deus est: hoc enim debemus in proximo diligere, ut in Deo sit; unde manifestum est, quod idem specie actus est, quo diligitur Deus, et quo diligitur proximus.’ The reasoning for the self is similar.

⁴² Ibid., Quaestio 23, Article 7, 182: ‘referatur ad finale, et perfectum bonum’, ‘falsa similitudo virtus’.

⁴³ Ibid.: ‘illud bonum particulare sit verum bonum, puta conservatio civitatis’, ‘erit quidem vera virtus’.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Quaestiones 37-42, 285-324, Quaestio 43, 324-35.

heaven with a hostility to causes of political upset. Every political event has the potential to derail one's own, or one's neighbour's, hopes of salvation.

Writers and preachers in the factious cities of fourteenth-century Italy soon recognised the political potency of the rhetoric of *caritas* and *scandala*. In a cramped urban environment, civic disputes could easily be understood viewed as *scandala* writ large. Goodwill over and above the level of the bare legal minimum was often needed to bring such disputes to a close. To this end, individuals like Remigio, who had been taught by Aquinas in Paris, encouraged the study of *caritas* theology at the Dominican *studium* of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.⁴⁵ Soon numerous Dominican preachers were applying its tenets to the problem of civic unrest; through their sermons, usually preached in the vernacular, *caritas* became *carità* and reached a wider audience.⁴⁶ The vernacular sermons of the early fourteenth-century Dominican preacher Giordano of Pisa (c.1260–1311) survive in manuscript form, while Dominicans such as Domenico Cavalca (1270–1342) and Jacopo Passavanti (1302–1357) wrote vernacular treatises.⁴⁷ Cavalca's *Lo specchio della croce*, which discusses the order of charity at length, is of particular interest. Catherine almost certainly read this treatise herself: the *Specchio* has been persuasively posited as a source for Catherine's discussion of tears in the *Dialogo*.⁴⁸ Whether Catherine engaged with the *bonum commune* tradition in Latin as well as the vernacular is difficult to ascertain. But even assuming her Latin was insufficient to read Aquinas or Remigio herself, Latin and vernacular discussions of *caritas/carità* substantially overlapped: Catherine could have gained a well-developed understanding of the *ordo caritatis* solely through vernacular sermons, texts and teaching.

Catherine too viewed the world through the prism of *carità* and *scandalo*. Citizens could harm their neighbours in manifold ways; they could 'take what belongs to others, by robbing the poor, and – sometimes by playing the overlord, sometimes by deception and fraud – by putting up

⁴⁵ C.T. Davis, 'An Early Florentine Political Theorist: Fra Remigio de' Girolami', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 104 (1960), 663.

⁴⁶ C. Delcorno, 'Medieval Preaching in Italy', trans. Benjamin Westervelt, in *The Sermon* (Turnhout, 2000), ed. B. Mayne Kienzle, 494.

⁴⁷ For the transmission of Dominican *bonum commune* thinking into the vernacular, see G. Allen, 'Vernacular Encounters with Aristotle's Politics in Italy, 1260–1600 (unpublished PhD thesis, Warburg Institute, 2015), 56–62; Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 112–17; C. Delcorno 'Predicazione volgare e volgarizzamenti', *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome* 89 (1977), 679–89.

⁴⁸ K.G. Hanson, 'The Blessing of Tears: The Order of Preachers and Domenico Cavalca in St. Catherine of Siena's "Dialogo della divina provvidenza"', *Italica* 89, (2012), 150.

one's neighbours' goods and often their very persons for ransom'.⁴⁹ In the *Dialogo*'s prologue, Catherine frames her first question to God around her fear that she is 'through [her] sins the cause' of 'the punishments [her] neighbour has to bear'.⁵⁰ In this world riddled with *scandali*, Catherine was interested in the mutual dependence of humans upon each other. Like Aquinas and Remigio before her, Catherine drew inspiration from Aristotle, but did not limit herself to his natural framework. She proposes – more clearly than either Aquinas or Remigio – a Christianised explanation of sociability. Catherine's God states that he has distributed all virtues 'in such a way that no one person has all of them' and that thus he has given 'cause, through necessity, for the practice of mutual charity'. Thus, whether 'man wills it or not, he cannot avoid the necessary exercise of charity', otherwise society will not function. However, here the charity being acted is not true charity linked to love of God, and 'if you do not do it for the love of me [God], this act is worth nothing in the realm of grace'.⁵¹ This account of sociability is distinctive yet very much within the Thomist tradition of applying Augustinian *caritas* to the problems of the city.

Thus, for Catherine, *carità* meant that one's neighbours became the site on which one's virtues and vices were enacted. She expresses this intertwining of lives through the metaphor of a vineyard, a biblically-rooted image which can often be found in the works of Catherine's Latinate and male contemporaries. However, as so often, Catherine molds the familiar image to provide her own powerful illustration of the workings of *carità*. Through *carità*, Catherine explains, one's actions affected the lives of one's neighbours too: 'while tilling your own vineyard, you also till that of your neighbour, for you cannot work the one without the other... each rational creature has their own vineyard. But each one is joined to their neighbours's vineyards without any dividing lines.' Thus these vineyards are 'so conjoined that no good can be done for oneself that is not done to one's neighbour, nor any evil that is not done to oneself'.⁵² The patrimony of all people in the

⁴⁹ *Dialogo* quotations taken from Cavallini's 1995 Italian edition; translations my own, but I am heavily indebted to Noffke's 1980 English edition. *Dialogo*, 19: 'tolle l'altrui, rubando le povarelle; e alcuna volta per atto di signoria, alcuna volta con inganno e frode, facendo ricomperare le cose del prossimo e spesse volte la propria persona'.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5: 'delle pene che debba portare il prossimo mio, io per li miei peccati ne so' cagione'.

⁵¹ Ibid., 23–24: 'tutte l'ò date in tanta differenza che non l'ò poste tutte in uno', 'acciò che abbiate materia, per forza, d'usare la carità l'uno con l'altro', 'Chè, voglia l'uomo o no, non può fare che per forza non usi l'atto della carità', 'se ella non è fatta e donata per amore di me, quello atto non gli vale quanto a grazia'.

⁵² *Dialogo*, 66: 'lavorando la loro, lavorano quella del prossimo, e non possono lavorare l'una senza l'altra' 'tutte le creature che ànno in loro ragione ànno la vigna loro di per sé, la quale é unita senza veruno mezzo col prossimo loro', 'sono tanto uniti, che niuno può fare bene a sé che non facci al prossimo suo, né male che no'l facci a lui.'

community is bound together; it is the fact that God has ‘joined and engrafted’ humans lives on to one another which underpins the idea of a common good.⁵³

The requirements of such a subjugation of one’s own will to the will of God were onerous. Catherine’s God makes striking comments about the implications for familial relations: ‘[the virtuous soul’s] will is in such great unity with mine that even if a father or mother saw their child in hell, or a child their mother, they would not care: moreover, they would be content to see them punished’.⁵⁴ *Carità* cuts through and recalibrates every human connection; no social bond, not even familial ties, can escape its effects. Even family can be loved incorrectly, and Catherine is concerned about individuals who claim they must commit sins ‘to condescend to friends and relatives’.⁵⁵ She often returns to the case of the ‘indiscreet man, who has no concern about offending God, nor about sacrificing his soul, to impulsively serve and please his neighbour, sometimes by keeping him company in wicked places, sometimes by bearing false witness, or in many other such ways’.⁵⁶ This ‘stupid and crazy use of charity’, which strays from the true *ordo caritatis*, has tangible effects on systems of justice through libel and perjury.⁵⁷ In the faction-riven Italian city, links of family and friendship could have insidious effects. Catherine promoted the language of *carità* as an antidote.

III

At the heart of *caritas* theology, then, lies the insistence that all human relations be subordinated to the love of God. Too often, this insistence is taken to mean that human society in this world was of little importance to the writers and preachers who employed it; their eyes were fixed too firmly on heaven. But for Catherine, *carità* increased rather than diminished the need to take an interest in the political life of the city.

⁵³ Ibid.: ‘uniti e innestati’.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 103: ‘in tanto è unita la sua volontà con la mia che, vedendo il padre o la madre il figliuolo suo ne l’inferno, o il figliuolo la madre, non se ne curano, anco sono contenti di vederli puniti’.

⁵⁵ T166, II, 559: ‘condescendere a’ parenti e agli amici’.

⁵⁶ T213, III, 191: ‘lo indiscreto, che non si cura d’offendere Dio, né di ponere l’anima sua per fare servizio e piacere al prossimo indiscretamente, quando con fargli compagnia in luoghi scelerati, quando con falsa testimonianza: e così in molti altri modi’.

⁵⁷ T266, III, 443: ‘usano una stolta e matta carità’.

For Catherine, *carità* theology offered a logic by which civic conflicts should be understood and resolved. To understand why she believed *carità* to be such a powerful lens through which to view the civic politics, we need to appreciate the way in which Catherine and her Dominican forebears responded to the Franciscan poverty disputes of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The century preceding Catherine's birth had seen Franciscan Spiritual writers and preachers promote a life of absolute poverty as the highest form of earthly perfection. The Rule of St. Francis (1223) instructed members of the Order to pass through the world as pilgrims and 'take nothing for the journey'; perfection was best reached by discarding property as a distraction.⁵⁸ These controversial claims offered a powerful critique of papal property ownership, which underpinned the power of the church. Successive popes battled to find an alternative to this Franciscan understanding. In 1322, Pope John XXII, having called for responses to the question of whether it was heretical to assert that Christ and the apostles had owned no temporal possessions, firmly endorsed a counter-argument offered by Dominican respondents, most notably Hervaeus Natalis (c.1260-1323).⁵⁹ Natalis argued that ownership of property was not in itself sinful; property only gained moral value, for good or ill, according to whether its owner used it in accordance with divine charity.

To make this case, Natalis developed a link Aquinas had made between the doctrine of the *ordo caritatis* and a scale of perfectibility.⁶⁰ Taking inspiration from Aristotelian metaphysics, Aquinas had argued that though there can be different degrees of perfection, an individual can in a sense be perfect if they 'love [God] as much as they can' in this life (while recognising that nobody can give God the infinite love he is truly due until the next).⁶¹ Natalis recognised the polemical potential of these ideas. Adopting Thomist language, he framed his answer to John XXII's question around the central problem of how poverty relates to perfection.⁶² He immediately linked *caritas* and perfection, writing that 'amongst the virtues, one pertains more to perfection than the others...

⁵⁸ J.D. Jones, 'Introduction', in Hervaeus Natalis, *The Poverty of Christ and the Apostles*, trans. J.D. Jones (Toronto, 1999), 2.

⁵⁹ J.G. Sikes, 'Introduction', in Hervaeus Natalis, 'De Paupertate Christi et Apostolorum', ed. J.G. Sikes, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen-âge* 12/13 (1937/8), 209.

⁶⁰ Aquinas himself never settled on a consistent position on the poverty controversy, see Jones, 'Introduction', 17.

⁶¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Pars II.II, Quaestio 24, Articles 5 and 8, 189-90 and 193-94, quotation 193: 'diligat tantum, quantum potest'.

⁶² Natalis, 'De Paupertate', 223.

namely *caritas*, which unites us most principally and powerfully to the highest good and state of merit'.⁶³ This approach was different to that of the Franciscan respondents, who tended to focus on *dominion* as the criterion for perfection.⁶⁴ In Natalis's opinion, the Franciscans missed the point, for 'the perfection of human life essentially consists firstly and principally in the habit and act of charity', not in any level of strictness over property ownership.⁶⁵ By placing *caritas* at the heart of his account, Natalis offered a scheme for how one might act in the world (owning and using property), while also acting in accordance with God's wishes; a marked contrast to Franciscan suspicion of participating in the world at all. Poverty was displaced by charity, opening up a seam of distinctively Dominican political thought.

At stake in this controversy were two different modes of viewing the political world. This implication would be drawn out not by Natalis, but by Catherine and others who applied them to the Italian political life. By eschewing property, Franciscan theology eschewed the city, which was composed of citizens with property rights. In Natalis's Dominican theology, by contrast, it was the will of the owner, not property itself, that caused problems. Catherine, a Dominican tertiary, had sympathy for Franciscan advocates of absolute poverty, noting that property could prove a distraction from God and that the most perfect souls seek to detach themselves from material things.⁶⁶ Echoing Aquinas's language of degrees of perfection, she praised Francis and his Order for pursuing the 'high perfection' of poverty, but also criticises the Order's later history, when its members 'decreased in virtue'.⁶⁷ Like Natalis, she emphasised that property is not bad in itself: indeed, material things are 'good' as they were 'made by [God]... the greatest Good'.⁶⁸ Thus the 'high perfection' of poverty was not the only route to salvation: 'those... who live in ordinary love without actually rising above material things (because they are not obliged to do so) do not thereby

⁶³ Ibid., 225-26: 'inter virtutes una magis pertinet ad perfectionem quam alia... scilicet caritas, quae nos unit summo bono potissime et praecipue quantum ad statum meriti'.

⁶⁴ See the anonymous Vatican scribe's 'Summary of Franciscan Positions', in Natalis, *Poverty of Christ*, trans. Jones, 121-147.

⁶⁵ Natalis, 'De Paupertate', 226-27: 'in quo consistat perfectio humanae vitae essentialiter', 'consistit primo et principaliter in habitu et actu caritatis'.

⁶⁶ *Dialogo*, 502.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 538, 539: 'alta perfezione', 'venuti meno in virtù'.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 126: 'buone... fatte da me... somma bontà'. For Catherine applying this logic to an individual case, see her letter to Bolognese Doctor of Canon Law, Lorenzo del Pino, T193, III, 99-105.

forfeit eternal life'.⁶⁹ Property ownership is 'no offence to God', as long as the owner remembers that they owe their first love to God.⁷⁰

A vow of poverty was not, therefore, required of a good Christian. Moreover, in both her *Dialogo* and letters, Catherine emphasised that a cloistered life too removed from the lives of others could also pose spiritual dangers. She is forthright in her criticism of those who get too caught up in their own penances and detachment from the world. Such individuals can be in as much spiritual danger as those who are active in the world, for although they might think they are doing their penances to please God, they often only do them to please themselves. Such people often excuse themselves from going to the aid of a neighbour in need, because 'It would make me lose the peace and quiet of my mind, and I would not be able to say my Hours at their right time'.⁷¹ The God of the *Dialogo* swiftly dispatches this 'pretence of virtue', saying that such individuals 'offend me more by abandoning charity for their neighbour for an appointed exercise and peace of mind than they would have by abandoning the exercise for the neighbour'.⁷²

The soul truly driven by *caritas* recognises that they cannot always do good at a place and time of their own choosing; their entanglements with their neighbours often demand a response. This entanglement might be with others within a monastic community, or with their neighbours in lay city life. The world outside the monastic cell is a hotbed of *scandali*, but this also furnishes opportunities to the virtuous soul: 'You cannot arrive at virtue except through the knowledge of yourself and the knowledge of me' which 'is acquired more perfectly at the time of temptation, because then you know yourself to be nothing, since you have no power to relieve yourself'.⁷³ Catherine's perfect soul 'loves [God] sincerely without any concern other than the glory and praise of [his] name, serving [him] not for her own pleasure, nor her neighbours for her own utility, but only for love'.⁷⁴ Such souls 'have done away with what causes them scandal, their self-will'; they

⁶⁹ *Dialogo*, 124: 'questi..., che stanno nella carità comune, non levandosi attualmente non perdono però vita eterna, perchè non ne sono tenuti'

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁷¹ *Dialogo*, 181: 'Io ne perdo la pace e la quiete della mente mia, e non dico l'ore mie all'ora e al tempo suo'.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 'il colore di virtù', 'm'offende più lassando la carità del prossimo per lo suo esercizio attuale e quiete di mente, che lassando l'esercizio per lo prossimo'.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 110: 'A virtù non si viene se non per lo cognoscimento di se medesimo e per cognoscimento di me', 'più perfettamente s'acquista nel tempo della tentazione, perchè allora cognosce sé non essere, non potendosi levare'.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 278: 'amando me schiettamente e senza alcuno reispetto altro che a Gloria e loda del nome mio, non servando a me per proprio diletto nè al prossimo per propria utilità, ma solo per amore.'

will not be distracted by *scandali* even in a world full of them.⁷⁵ True Christian virtue is not something otherworldly which can only be found away from the everyday realities of city life. It can be sought alongside – and indeed, through – entanglement in the political world.

Thus, *carità* theology provided Catherine with a legitimising framework for political action. She used it to justify her own political interventions, usually placing a plea to act in accordance with *carità* at the heart of her letters to powerful figures; her letter to Bernabò Visconti of 1373/4, for example, uses this language liberally, especially in its introductory passages.⁷⁶ *Carità* also formed Catherine's core justification for her involvement in papal politics. Remigio had raised the possibility of disobeying papal command in particular cases: though the end of the Church was more important than that of the temporal power, he claimed, in some circumstances it might nonetheless be necessary for the Church to put aside its claims for the sake of the common good.⁷⁷ Catherine took a harder line when discussing the Florentines placed under papal Interdict for attacking Church property during the War of the Eight Saints, saying that 'a person can do no more ruinous thing than assume the right to punish [God's] ministers'.⁷⁸ In letters to the conflict's protagonists, Catherine presented such rebellions against the Church as the ultimate *scandalo*, justifying her full efforts through letters and visits to bring the war to a swift close.⁷⁹ She deployed comparable arguments in the wake of the Schism of 1378, writing a forceful letter to the Italian Cardinals who abstained during the election of anti-pope Clement VII which accused them of failing to follow the dictates of the *ordo caritatis*. The Cardinals' actions are proof for Catherine that each of them 'loves himself and the things of the world in a disordered way', placing self-love ahead of love of God.⁸⁰ Catherine then links her understanding of the *ordo caritatis* to the broader political context, castigating the Cardinals as Italians who have failed to support an Italian pope. 'Could you not have been moved by a love of your *patria*, like the ultramontanes were [i.e. the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 279: 'anno tolta via quella cosa che lo' dà scandalo, cioè la propria volontà.'

⁷⁶ T28, I, 109–18.

⁷⁷ Kempshall, *Common Good*, 337.

⁷⁸ *Dialogo*, 324: 'Unde a maggiore ruina non può venire l'uomo che se ne fa punitore';

⁷⁹ See, for instance, her letter to the Lord defenders of Siena, August/October 1377, T121, II, 280.

⁸⁰ T310, IV, 151: 'disordinatamente ama sè e le cose del mondo'.

French Cardinals]?’ wonders Catherine, concluding that she can ‘see no cause’ for this omission ‘except self-love’.⁸¹

IV

Catherine also employed *carità* theology to set out a distinctive politics of knowledge. Her ideas would be echoed by exponents of the Dominican *Osservanza*, a reform movement aiming to return the Order to the purity of rule seen under its founder. The traditional account emphasises the way that Observant arguments from *carità* could be used to defend a narrowly Christian canon of authorities, and Catherine’s *carità*-based conception of knowledge has thus become associated with a religious and anti-political backlash against the secular, classicising impulses of early Florentine humanism. Yet Catherine’s politics of knowledge was not merely a conservative force; her emphasis on *carità* as the true source of knowledge undermined intellectual hierarchies based on status and education.

Catherine’s *Dialogo* certainly questioned the value of non-Christian authors. She offers some qualified praise for the ancients, suggesting that they put many Christians to shame with their embrace of poverty: ‘these [pagan] philosophers... knowing wealth was a hindrance to them, threw it off. But these people [later individuals claiming to be Christians] wanted to make from wealth a God’.⁸² However, poverty practised ‘without spiritual intention’ is ‘worth nothing’; thus pagan philosophers, who chose poverty out of a ‘love of knowledge’ rather than God would find that it brought them only ‘eternal death’.⁸³ Throughout the *Dialogo*, Catherine emphasises that a foundation in *carità* is a prerequisite for all true knowledge. She describes ‘burning charity’ as ‘a fire’ by the light of which ‘Thomas [Aquinas] saw [God] and gained the light of great learning’. Augustine, Jerome and other holy doctors, as well as the ‘apostles and evangelists, the martyrs and confessors’ gained their knowledge from the same light of *carità*, and were now ‘set like lamps in

⁸¹ Ibid., 159: ‘non vi poteva muovere la passione della patria, come gli oltramontani’, ‘cagione non ci veggo, se non l’amore proprio’.

⁸² *Dialogo*, 501–2: ‘questi filosofi... cognoscendo che e’ l’era impedimento, le gittavano da loro. E questi delle ricchezze si vogliono fare dio’. She makes similar points in relation to lust at 87.

⁸³ Ibid., 501–2: ‘senza la spirituale intenzione nulla lo’ varrebbe’, ‘amore della scienza’, ‘morte etternale’.

the holy Church'.⁸⁴ These figures have a special role in the interpretation of the Scriptures, which remain 'shadowy' until a person truly enjoying God's grace interprets them.⁸⁵ This is a hierarchical account of spiritual knowledge, but one governed by *carità* not scholarly education. Catherine criticises those learned individuals who 'wonder and fall into murmurs when they see so many people coarse and uneducated in biblical knowledge nonetheless as enlightened in the knowledge of truth as if they had studied for a long time'. In fact, however, she continues, 'this is no wonder at all, because they [the uneducated] possess the principle source of light from which learning comes'; thus 'it is far better to walk according to the spiritual counsel of a humble and uneducated person with a holy and upright conscience than by that of a well-read but proud scholar with great knowledge'.⁸⁶ This line of argument had radical implications, allowing Catherine – and others like her – to talk to clergyman and rulers far more educated than herself.

The most influential heirs to Catherine's conception of knowledge were those of her followers who pushed for 'observant' reform of the Dominican Order. The *Diologo* had set out a vision of how the Order should be reformed: Catherine had highlighted Dominic's choice of learning as the Order's defining characteristic, but she also makes clear that learning is only valuable within the framework of *carità*.⁸⁷ She criticised some Dominicans who 'pervert the light of learning... with the darkness of pride'.⁸⁸ For Catherine, a central requirement of a return to the purity of the Order was a return to the correct sort of learning, driven by *carità* rather than pride. The Tuscan Dominican Observants who built on these ideas have often been portrayed as a- or even anti-political mystics.⁸⁹ They agitated for nuns to be contained within their houses, criticised members of the regular clergy who advanced to the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 222 and 80: 'l'affocata... carità è un fuoco', 'mi vide Tomaso, unde acquistò il lume dela molta scienza', 'posti nel luogo della sancta Chiesa come lucerne'. 150. Cavalca's *Vite dei santi padri* appears to have been an important source for Catherine's knowledge of the fathers, see Hanson, 'Blessing of Tears', 147.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 222: 'tenebrosa'.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 225: 'meravigliano e cadranno nella mormorazione, vedendo molti grossi e idioti nel sapere la sancta Scrittura, e nondimeno sono tanto alluminati nel cognoscere la verità come se lungo tempo l'avessero studiata', 'Questo non è maraviglia niuna, perché egli anno la principale cagione del lume unde venne la scienza', 'che molto meglio è andare per consiglio della salute dell'anima a uno idioto umile con sancta e diritta coscienza, che a uno superbo letterato studente nella molta scienza'.

⁸⁷ *Dialogo*, 543.

⁸⁸ *Dialogo*, 541: 'la luce della scienza pervertono... con la tenebre della superbia'. See also 382–83.

⁸⁹ See for example, N. Debby, 'The Preacher's Agenda: A Dominican versus the Italian Renaissance', *The European Legacy* 20 (2015), 468–9; Herzig, 'Female Mysticism, Heterodoxy, and Reform', *Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, eds. J. Mixson and B. Roest (Leiden, 2015), 256–7.

and opposed incipient humanism – famously, if now rather outdatedly, linked to civic participation by Hans Baron and others – from the pulpit.⁹⁰ Recent scholarship, however, has noted that the sermons of leading Dominican Observants such as Giovanni Dominici (1357/8-1419) and Fra Antonino (1389-1459) display a strong interest in practical engagement with the fraught world of civic politics.⁹¹ The Dominican Observants were not anti-political, and in Catherine’s writings, we can see how a call for Observant reform could provide the intellectual foundations for more active participation in the political life of the city, all within a Christian idiom.

The most famous text of the Dominican Observant movement is Giovanni Dominici’s *Lucula noctis* (c.1405). The *Lucula* was dedicated to celebrated chancellor of Florence Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406) and is noted for its condemnation of the *studia humanitatis*. Dominici’s work has often been cited as the classic example of the anti-intellectual religious backlash faced by secular humanists; even recent scholarship frames the debate as one between Dominici’s pessimistic Augustinianism and Aquinas’s human, secular category of natural knowledge popular with more intellectual scholastics and humanists.⁹² In fact, Dominici immediately cites both Augustine and Aquinas and seemingly views their accounts of knowledge as compatible.⁹³ His opposition to the study of the classics bears substantial resemblance to Catherine’s discussion of knowledge as bound up with *carità*; he also explored similar themes in his *Libro d’Amore*, a commentary on I Corinthians 13.⁹⁴ The *Lucula* is structured as a long Quaestio in treatise form. In Chapter 13, the crucial chapter for the transition into counter-arguments against the *studia humanitatis*, Dominici asserts his central argument that without *caritas* all knowledge is useless.⁹⁵ Like Catherine, Dominici uses the metaphor of ‘light’, which runs through the book from the title onwards: light signifies true, *caritas*-inspired knowledge, while knowledge without *caritas* is

⁹⁰ J. Mixson, ‘Introduction’, *Companion to Observant Reform*, 14–15; N. Debby, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers* (Turnhout, 2001), 11.

⁹¹ D.R. Lesnick, ‘Civic Preaching in the early Renaissance: Giovanni Dominici’s Florentine Sermons’ in *Christianity and the Renaissance*, eds. I. Verdon and J. Henderson (New York, 1990), 208–225; N. Debby, ‘Political Views in the Preaching of Giovanni Dominici in Renaissance Florence, 1400–1406’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 55 (2002), 19–48; P. Howard, “‘You cannot sell liberty for all the gold there is’: promoting good governance in early Renaissance Florence”, *Renaissance Studies* 24 (2010), 207–233, esp. 210–11.

⁹² Debby, *Two Popular Preachers*, 92–3; Debby, ‘Preacher’s Agenda’, 468–71.

⁹³ Giovanni Dominici, *Lucula noctis*, ed. E. Hunt (Notre Dame IN, 1940), 1–2.

⁹⁴ P. Denley, ‘Giovanni Dominici’s opposition to humanism’, *Studies in Church History* 17 (1981), 110.

⁹⁵ Dominici, *Lucula*, 119–123.

represented by darkness.⁹⁶ With the exception of Plato, who is deemed acceptable for his condemnation of poetry, Dominici is suspicious of pagan authors whose works are not grounded in *caritas*.⁹⁷ As we have seen, Catherine had expressed disapproval for pagan writers in similar terms.

Dominici and Catherine did not object to ancient philosophy per se, but they objected to approaches to authority which did not take *carità* into account.⁹⁸ Salutati himself employed *caritas* theology in his writings, and he and Dominici may well have had more sympathy for each other's positions than is often assumed.⁹⁹ Both men saw shortcomings in the approach to authorities employed by earlier scholastic schoolmen and aimed for reform, though Salutati was more interested in escaping a Petrarchan 'dark age' while Dominici, like Catherine, was concerned with decline since the death of Dominic. Dominici was asked to give the oration at Salutati's funeral; this is not strange or ironic, but indicative of the cooperation that could flourish between Florentines of various intellectual backgrounds in this period.¹⁰⁰ Catherine's exploration of *carità* in her letters and *Dialogo* contributed to this flourishing, opening up civic politics to a broader range of discussants and questioning how far authority was relevant if not allied with *carità*. Catherine and Dominici's questioning did not take them in the same directions as Petrarch and Salutati, but all four figures shared the conviction that scholastic philosophy had lost its way and needed reform.

V

Catherine should be counted alongside other Dominican thinkers, such as Remigio de' Girolami and Giordano of Pisa: at times, she was more innovative than them. Her vision of politics directly engaged with the many of the same questions as her scholastic predecessors with sophistication and originality. Two of her arguments are particularly distinctive. Firstly, her suggestion that those living a cloistered life could be spiritually imperiled if they prioritised

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1-5. The title, *Firefly of the night*, refers to Dominici and his own small light of knowledge; this complements a flattering pun on Coluccio ['Colluceo' - I give out light] Salutati's name, 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 155. The 'Katerina' who Dominici cites in Chapter 2, 23, however, was Catherine of Alexandria, not Siena, see R.P. Oliver, 'A Late Mediaeval Plato', *The Classical Weekly* 35 (1942), 246.

⁹⁸ Dominici, *Lucula*, 3-4.

⁹⁹ *Caritas* is central to Salutati's, *On the world and religious life*, trans. T. Marshall (London, 2014), for example. I plan to write more on Salutati's use of *caritas*.

¹⁰⁰ Lesnick, 'Civic Preaching', 209.

contemplative calm over the pressing demands of charity for their neighbour. This was a deeply religious defence of the active life, which transformed the desire for salvation into a motor for political action. Secondly, her emphasis on the way that knowledge gained through *carità* could undercut intellectual hierarchies. Catherine's ideas on this score provided intellectual foundations for the Dominican Observant movement, which posed as much of a challenge to what its members saw as proud scholastic excess as it did to incipient humanism.

Historically, late fourteenth-century intellectual culture has been defined by the emergence of a secularising humanism, while the exponents of *carità* theology have been sidelined. But Catherine and the Observants represent more than an aberration or a religious dead end in political thought. Political action in fourteenth-century Florence was not just about the proponents versus opponents of the *studia humanitis*, nor an active versus contemplative life debate; *carità* was a richer pedigree on which all those wanting to engage in civic life could call. Catherine's was an important and authoritative voice, and her contributions to this period of political and intellectual upheaval deserve greater recognition.