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Knowledge in Catherine of Siena (1347–1380)

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For Catherine of Siena, knowledge of God and knowledge of self are reciprocal. The more deeply one knows God, the more deeply one knows oneself, since the human self is made in the image of God. The more deeply one knows oneself, the more deeply one comes to acknowledge God, who is the ultimate source of the self and its spiritual powers. Catherine describes this mutual growing knowledge as a type of circular movement, compared to a tree (the human soul) moving more deeply into the water (God's grace) that sustains it. Addressing the human soul, God the Father explains this reciprocal movement: "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 [God], who like the circle have neither beginning nor end (...). This knowledge of yourself, and of me within yourself, is grounded in the soul of true humility, which is as great as the expanse of the circle (which is the knowledge of yourself united with me, as I have said). But if your knowledge of yourself were isolated from me there would be no full circle at all. Instead, there would be a beginning in self-knowledge, but apart from me it would end in confusion" (*Dialogue* 10). As the soul acquires self-knowledge in "the mirror of God," the soul acknowledges her own dignity as *imago dei*, but also begins to acknowledge the sins by which she has disfigured the divine image.

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