“This holy virgin has no need of my sermons, for she herself preaches and proclaims herself sufficiently.” Catherine of Siena’s biographer, Raymond of Capua, reported that a Master of Sacred Theology uttered these words when he could not make himself heard over the crowds who jammed the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva to see the holy woman’s body during the three days after her death in 1380. The Master’s words, literally: she herself preaches herself sufficiently (ipsa seipsam sufficienter praedicat) provides the point of departure for an analysis of the biographer’s language when he describes the authority of Catherine’s speech during her lifetime. In this case he chooses the verb, praedico [preach], which is generally reserved for the preaching of authorized male clergy, to describe
Catherine’s commanding spiritual authority after her death. But how does he deal with the speech of the living holy woman?

Scholars have explored Raymond of Capua’s accounts of Catherine’s public ministry and signaled how Catherine’s own voice and emphasis in her writings differ from Raymond’s narrative in the *Legenda*. Catherine’s perspective differs from Raymond’s on crucial points: the voiced awareness of the limitations of her gender, the description of her ascetic practices, and furthermore, the account of her mystical experiences of death and the exchange of hearts with Christ.² Raymond carefully balances action and contemplation in the *Legenda*, seeking to conform Catherine’s life to the Dominican model.³ Furthermore, Raymond tones down the political implications of Catherine’s actions and words, although they belong to the rich context of her family connections and Sienese politics.⁴ Yet, more can be said about Raymond’s shaping of the account of Catherine’s life and, notably, about how he controls the language of preaching.

In the concluding chapter of the *Legenda maior*, when Raymond advocates Catherine’s canonization, he makes explicit the purpose that has been evident throughout the text and that drives his ordered reconstruction of the events of her life:

I have said these things for only one reason: that when all the things above were written, they were either dictated or written by me so that the sanctity of this virgin may become known to the holy Catholic Church and its authorities.⁵


⁵ See *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Kearns, 3.5.397, p. 363. Note the different chapter number in Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior*, III.6.396.951E: “Hæc pro tanto dixerim: quia cum omnia quæ superiæ scripta sunt, sint per me dictata et scripta, ut