The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden
Volume 2
The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden
Volume 2

Liber Caelestis, Books IV–V

TRANSLATED BY DENIS SEARBY
WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES
BY BRIDGET MORRIS

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While we were completing this volume, we were greatly saddened to learn of the death of Professor Sten Eklund in June 2006. He made an enormous contribution to Birgittine Studies during the course of his career in the Department of Classical Languages at the University of Uppsala; and he gave generously of his time to younger scholars, like ourselves, as we set out on an academic career. This volume is a tribute to him.
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<td>Add.</td>
<td><em>additio</em>, addition, addendum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birgittine-Norwegian</td>
<td>an early text of the Swedish vernacular tradition that displays elements of a pre-Latin version of the revelations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decl.</td>
<td><em>declaratio</em>, “explanation”</td>
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<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td><em>Diplomatarium Suecanum</em>, Svenskt diplomatarium, 1829–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ex.</td>
<td><em>Revelationes extravagantes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gh</td>
<td>first printed edition of the collected corpus of <em>Revelationes</em>, produced in Lübeck by Bartholomeus Ghotan</td>
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<tr>
<td>KL</td>
<td><em>Kulturhistoriskt Lexikon för Nordisk Medeltid</em> (Encyclopedia of the Cultural History of the Scandinavian Middle Ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KVHAA</td>
<td>Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien (The Royal Academy of Letters, History, and Antiquities)</td>
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<tr>
<td>int.</td>
<td><em>interrogatio</em> (Book V)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lat.</td>
<td>Latin</td>
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<td>QO</td>
<td><em>Quattuor orationes</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>rev.</td>
<td>revelation, <em>revelatio</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td><em>Regula Salvatoris</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td><em>Sermo angelicus</em></td>
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SFSS  Samlingar utgivna av Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet (Swedish Medieval Texts’ Society Series)
Sw.  Swedish (medieval or modern)
Söderwall  Ordbok öfver svenska medeltids-språket, ed. K. F. Söderwall et al. (Dictionary of Medieval Swedish), 1884–1973
The Entire Birgittine Corpus

All volumes are published in two series, by KVHAA and SFSS (ser. 2, latinska skrifter)

*Contained in Volume 1 of the present translation:*

Prologue of Magister Mathias of Linköping
Date: c. 1346

Book I (sixty chapters)
Mixture of early revelations
Date: Sweden years, 1344–49

Book II (thirty chapters)
Revelations on the knighthood
Date: Sweden years, 1344–49
Ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen† and Birger Bergh, 2001

Book III (thirty-four chapters)
Revelations on clerics
Date: Sweden and Rome years, mainly 1349–51
Contained in the present volume:

Book IV (144 chapters; includes the *Tractatus ad sacerdotes* chs. 131–35 and the *Tractatus ad pontifices* chs. 136–44)
Mixture of revelations on various subjects
Date: Sweden and (mainly) Rome years, 1344–71
Ed. Hans Aili, 1992

Book V (also known as the *Liber quaestionum*; a brief preface, sixteen questions and answers, and thirteen interspersed revelations)
Dialogue between Christ and a cleric
Date: Sweden years, 1344–49
Ed. Birger Bergh, 1971

Contained in Volume 3 of the present translation:

Book VI (122 chapters)
Mixture of revelations on various subjects
Date: Sweden and Rome years, 1344–71
Ed. Birger Bergh, 1991

Book VII (a brief preface, thirty-one chapters)
Revelations mainly on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem
Date: 1371–73
Ed. Birger Bergh, 1967

*Epistola Solitarii ad reges* (Prologue to Book VIII)
Date c. 1377
Ed. Arne Jönsson, in Aili, *Book VIII* (below)

Book VIII (also known as the “*Liber caelestis Imperatoris ad reges*”; sixty-one chapters)
Revelations concerning worldly leaders
Date: Sweden and Rome years, 1344–71
Ed. Hans Aili, 2002

Contained in Volume 4 of the present translation:

*Regula Salvatoris*
The Birgittine Rule, the “Rule of St. Saviour” (prologue and preface, thirty-one chapters)
Date: Sweden years, probably between 1346 and 1348
Ed. Sten Eklund, 1975

*Sermo angelicus de Virginis excellentia*
Matins readings for the nuns of the order (prologue, twenty-one chapters)
Date: Rome years, probably 1354  
Ed. Sten Eklund, 1972

*Quattuor orationes*
Four major prayers (preceded by preface)  
Undated  
Ed. Sten Eklund, 1991

*Revelationes extravagantes* (prologue, 116 chapters)  
Additional materials on a wide variety of subjects, including supplements to the Rule  
Date: Sweden and Rome years, 1344–71  
Ed. Lennart Hollman, 1956
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Book IV
Figure 2. Frontispiece to Book IV (depicting chapter 7) in the first printed edition at the press of Bartholomaeus Ghotan, Lübeck, 1492. Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.
Introduction

Book IV is the longest of the Books of *Revelationes*, and the most diverse in content. It originally contained 130 revelations, but another fourteen were added in later manuscripts, and they form a semi-independent collection. Most of the revelations in the book date from the years when Birgitta lived in Rome, from 1350 to 1373, but about twenty date from the years she spent near the Cistercian monastery at Alvastra in Sweden, in the 1340s, and a further thirty-four are undatable.

Private Devotions and Public Messages

Behind the editors’ revisions that produced the standardized version of the *Revelationes* for the canonization—the text of the revelations before us here—there are glimpses of the varied origins of Birgitta’s visions. In content they range from private devotions to political and public messages. Many begin in prayer, which is the state that is traditionally viewed as the first stage in the path of mystical union with God, and there are frequent reminders that the messages and locutions were received while Birgitta was awake, and not asleep (e.g., IV 7, 46, 52). One revelation reflects on the nature of dreams (IV 38), while another opens with a private petition (IV 75), or a prayer of praise (IV 21). Short private prayers are sometimes incorporated into a revelation, such as the final part of chapter 110: “Come like fire, Lord, and set my heart aflame! Though I am unworthy to receive you, yet for my part I need you. You will not be better because of me, nor do you need what I have, but I will become better through you, and, without you, I am nothing.” She also receives advice on
how to pray in IV 53 and IV 60. Her continual petitionary dialogue with the
divine was no doubt reinforced by the constant reading of the scriptures,
reciting the office, or contemplating the liturgy or psalms. From her state of
prayer, she enters into a deeper sphere of contemplation, and applies her mind
to dwell on some religious truth or mystery. Chapter 101, for instance, contains
a contemplation on Christ’s heart. After she receives a vision, she recalls and
recounts the image, in which process she sometimes expresses her difficulty in
understanding the intended message: “I am unable to grasp everything I heard
and saw” (IV 50); or else she reports that she can only comprehend the spir-
ituall meaning by means of images and likenesses (IV 58). In chapter 134 we are
told that Christ is opening the “eyes” of her understanding. There are also
poignant asides in which she meekly bids Christ not to be angry with her for
asking a question (e.g., IV 3, 37, 60, 127) nor to get upset at the thoughtless
behavior of the people whose petitions she brings.

One of the best expressions in Book IV of her private praise and devotion
occurs in the opening of chapter 77:

Honor to God almighty for all his creation! Praise to him for all his
virtue! May glorious service be rendered him for all his charity!
I, unworthy person, who have sinned so much against you, my God,
from my youth, I thank you, my most sweet God, and especially
because there is none so criminal that you deny him mercy, provided
he asks you for mercy with love and true humility and a purpose
of amendment.

O God most loving and sweetest of all! What you have done for
me is wonderful for all those who hear of it. Whenever you please,
you put my body to sleep—yet not with a bodily sleep but with a
spiritual rest. Then you rouse my soul to life as though from sleep so
that I hear and feel in a spiritual way. O, Lord, how sweet are the words
of your mouth! It truly seems to me, as often as I hear the words of
your Spirit, that my soul within me swallows them with an inde-
scribably sweet sensation like that from the sweetest food that seems
to drop into my heart with great joy and indescribable consolation.
It seems wonderful to me that while I listen to your words, I am made
both fully satisfied and yet still hungry. I feel satisfied because noth-
ing else pleases me but your words. Yet I feel hungry because my
appetite for them keeps increasing. So, blessed are you, my God, Jesus
Christ! Give me your help, Lord, so that I may be able all the days
of my life to do the things pleasing to you!

At the heart of many revelations there is also a concern for the spiritual
welfare of others. Guidance is given to individuals, sometimes in letter form,
the vestiges of which are occasionally seen in the surviving Latin text.¹ Chapter
33, for instance, contains an address “in the form of a query” to a papal legate,
who is referred to as “Reverend sir.” Chapter 78 addresses the pope through a
papal legate, “I have not sent this letter for the sake of any worldly honor or
favor . . . I have sent it because that same woman, to whom many other words
have been spoken in spiritual revelation, was commanded to make all this known to your Excellency.”

Birgitta’s commanding messages to high-ranking individuals occur throughout Book IV. Chapter 45 contains a personal message to the German emperor, Charles IV (“I make my complaint... before your majesty”), and chapter 46 is addressed to a Swedish nobleman named Björn, referring to him as “Sir,” and explaining toward the end that “I do not write you this on my own, for I do not know you, but because something happened to a person that compelled me to write out of holy compassion for your soul.” A woman of high birth is described with hair like a bramble bush in chapter 52, and there are other revelations about the excesses of the secular nobility (e.g., IV 85).

The criticisms are not all one-sided, however, and there are revelations that allude to attacks on Birgitta by those around her: the individuals behind the evocative imagery on the seven gems in her crown, in chapter 124, for example, refer to several men who had derided or otherwise criticized and abused her, physically as well as verbally. There are also those who criticize her exceptional spiritual gifts, such as the man in chapter 113 who tells her “you dream too much,” and in chapter 122 a man who doubts her prophecies.

Autobiographical Themes

In Book IV, as previously in Books I–III, Birgitta is given further admonishments and advice (e.g., IV 91, on four ways in which she should be humble), and she continues to record her uncertainty about adopting a public role (e.g., IV 60: “my time has been spent uselessly. My strength is not up to the task”). She also expresses fears about her calling to upbraid and teach others, rather than pursue a devout life for herself: “Tell me, my daughter, what is troubling you in your heart?” She said: ‘A thought occurred to me that said, “If you are good, your goodness is enough for you. Why judge and admonish and teach your betters, something that belongs neither to your state nor position?” This thought so hardens the spirit that it even neglects its own progress and grows completely cold to God’s love’” (IV 21).

In chapter 87 she speaks of a daughter’s love for her parents; while other revelations refer obliquely to her children. Birgitta was the mother of eight children, some of whom were very young when she experienced her “calling vision” in the 1340s. When she left Sweden to go to Rome in 1349, she made provision for them and turned her back on her family life. In chapter 11, using a touching image of a poor little old woman dwelling in a valley with a hen or a goose, she is consoled for surrendering her maternal love in pursuit of her vocation. In chapters 53 and 54 she prays for her two sons who lived to adulthood, Karl and Birger. Chapters 73 and 124 allude to a mistaken report of Karl’s death. Chapter 74 tells how Karl had neglected to fast on the vigil of St. John the Baptist, and St. John then appeared to Birgitta promising to equip her son with the necessary weapons to fit his knightly status. This is an important vision about knighthood that echoes some of the advice given in Book III.
Birgitta’s youngest child was a daughter, Cecilia (c. 1340–99), who received an early convent training in the Dominican house in Skänninge. She was not suited to monastic life, and Karl, at her request, removed her, in order for her to marry a magnate named Bengt Filipson who was involved in the political turmoil of the 1350s. Chapter 71, one of the central revelations in which the states of virginity and marriage are discussed, may be read as a commentary on Cecilia’s marriage. Birgitta had previously not received clear answers as to which path to choose for the girl, whether virginity or marriage, but now an unequivocal response is given, which endorses the state of marriage: “A devout and humble housewife is more acceptable to me than a proud and immodest virgin.”

Throughout Book IV there are other revelations on the subject of marriage, either practical (a husband should provide for his wife, in IV 83, and a married couple experiences mutual comfort but also requires a son to receive their inheritance, in IV 83), or physical (the bride stands before the bed-curtain, in IV 25) and metaphorical (the burning desire for God in the spiritual union, in IV 75). Behind these marriage visions Birgitta also reflects upon her own status, as the “mouthpiece” or “bride” of Christ. She constantly wonders what sort of woman is best for God, and reflects on the examples of strong biblical women whose model she followed, such as Judith in chapter 71. Such reflections often come through the voice of the Virgin as her mouthpiece, who calls Birgitta her daughter, or her son’s “bride.” Many revelations in Book IV also reflect her Marian devotion, the most noteworthy ones being chapters 18, 19, and 86, which are paeans of praise to the Virgin’s beauty, virtue, and wisdom. The Marian visions demonstrate the importance Birgitta attached to the Virgin in the work of salvation in the world, as stated explicitly in chapter 75, “Mary, the salvation of the entire world.”

Birgitta uses a range of striking imagery in Book IV, and many of her images are drawn from her own domestic world, or her shrewd observations on the natural world. There are everyday images: stopping an unleashed dog by placing something hard in its teeth (IV 14); a sluice gate of a water-mill siphons off good thoughts and desires from bad ones (IV 66); a man running in a “stadium of toil” (IV 127); a knight dressed in a twice-dyed scarlet cloth splattered with black spots (IV 81 [declaratio]); two ends of a broken piece of timber that cannot be fitted together when the wood has rotted (IV 102); and goats that run up against a wall (IV 47). One of her most famous domestic images is the description of God “as washerwoman . . . and a bleacher” in chapter 39. There are also natural religious images: Christ like a flower that grows alone in a field (IV 21); the Virgin like the dawn (IV 11); a mountain of angels (IV 11); a shepherd with a bunch of flowers (IV 12). There are also poetic and dramatic images: Christ like the strongest steel on the cross (IV 129); the devil like a coin-maker (IV 23); a sea-storm of tears (IV 55); overconfident sailors in peril even in port (IV 16); people like animals “that run into the nets of their own free will” (IV 22); and a dove that sees the reflection of a hawk on water (IV 82). With these striking and sometimes original images, an echo is heard of Birgitta’s own voice and imagined world.
The Model of the Saints

According to the canonization documents, Birgitta owned a copy in her native tongue of the saints’ lives. This book was probably a version of the *Legenda aurea*, written in c. 1260 by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine. A Swedish version, known as the *Fornsvenska legendariet* (*The Old Swedish Legendary*), was compiled between 1276 and 1307. It draws on, and makes free use of, various German and continental sources, and is arranged chronologically, starting with some comprehensive legends about the Virgin Mary, and including the lives of St. Dominic, St. Francis, and St. Elisabeth of Hungary, as well as a few Scandinavian saints.

The *Legenda aurea* is a cornerstone of medieval cultural and social history. It relates in broad terms to salvation history, and shows how God reveals himself through his many saints, entering into their earthly stories and making them into a part of what has been termed a “living doctrine.” Several of the chapters in Book IV provide allusions to some of the legends recorded in the *Legenda aurea* and the *Fornsvenska legendariet*: Chapters 1 and 23 mentioning the death of St. John; chapter 7 concerning St. Paul and St. Stephen; and chapter 30 concerning St. Peter and St. Paul. Chapter 71 refers to Judith, Susanna, and Thecla; and chapter 13 alludes to the legend of Pope Gregory and the emperor Trajan. Elizabeth of Hungary is mentioned together with St. Lucy, in chapter 4; the legend of St. Agnes is referred to in chapter 20; and chapter 131 describes the archangel Michael at Monte Gargano.

Throughout her life, Birgitta followed the model of the saints, whether it was in Sweden, where she revered the local saints (such as Brynolf, in Book II 30), or in Rome, where she visited the shrine of the famous churches (such as Santa Maria Maggiore, in IV 78), or further afield in Italy (such as Monte Gargano, which is associated with Michael the Archangel, in IV 131; or Bari, which is associated with St. Nicholas, in IV 114). Her regular reading of the lives of the saints constantly informed her devotion and inspired her ecstatic states, enabling her to focus on the exemplary aspects of the particular saint that she uses as her theme of contemplation. As she states in chapter 92: “My saints are aptly called my arm. You should become one of their members through the intention of progressing in virtue and by imitating them as far as you are able.”

Judgment and Purgatory

Justice, judgment, and the law lie at the heart of many of the visions in Book IV, and they are a mixture of actual Swedish custom and practice—much probably learned through Birgitta’s own family—overlaid with a style that is reminiscent of Old Testament justice. Three types of law—ecclesiastical law, imperial law, and common law—are discussed in chapter 111. But the dominating use of law in Book IV is in the judgment visions. These are frequently
visual, rather than locutional, set in a courtroom, hall, or palace, with Christ in judgment seated on a throne. The dialogue is generally conducted between a defendant (in the guise of an angel, a knight, or a good spirit), and a prosecutor (in the guise of a devil, or evil spirit). In chapter 7 it is the resplendent sun that is seated on the throne, and in chapter 51 the book of justice itself is the locutor. These visions also contain some graphic imagery, and perhaps now for the first time, in the judgment scenes of Book IV, we can see Birgitta’s fierce imagination at work: The admonishing and reforming style of Books I–III is replaced by a more explicit intensity. An apocalyptic tone is struck in some revelations, which employ some traditional, visionary images as well as unconventional ones: the plow and the wrath of God (IV 22, IV 37, IV 39); a priest’s voice that croaks like a frog (IV 62); demons like sparks from hot fire (IV 7); living crows that tear a soul to pieces (IV 113); God’s friends like the choice morsels in the cooking pot (IV 11); a woman’s bones pulled so thin that they resemble the thin thread used to thread a needle, and a chain that crushes her head so that her eyes are squeezed out of their sockets (IV 51); and a key of gold, a golden vase, a crown, and a snake in a nutshell (IV 108). The visions in Book IV also begin to show some of the fantastic features that have not been seen up to this point, such as a monstrous man, with mixed animal features in chapter 52, or the outlandish beast in chapter 2.

Normally in the Birgittine judgment scenes, the soul appears at the point of death, and is asked to account for his or her life and mistakes and sins. The individual may still be alive or mortally ill, which is sometimes made apparent in the explanation that follows and indicates whether the prophecy of the ending had been fulfilled. Chapters 7–9 contain three important visions concerning the suffering in purgatory of the high seneschal of Sicily and Naples, Nicola Acciajuoli:

The fire that you saw in the furnace burns in eternal darkness, and the souls burning in it do not all have the same punishment. The darkness that appeared around the furnace is called limbo. It comes from the darkness that is in the furnace. Yet both make up one place and one hell. Anyone entering it will never dwell with God. Above the darkness is found the greatest punishment of purgatory sustainable by souls. Beyond this lies another place of lesser punishment, where there is only a weakened condition as to fortitude, beauty and the like. It is like when people have been sick, and once the sickness and pain are gone, they have nothing left of their strength until they gradually recover it. Beyond that is a third place where there is only the punishment of the longing for God. . . . Hence all the souls dwelling in these three places participate in the prayers of Holy Church and in the good works done in the world, especially in those that they did in their lifetimes and in those that are done by their friends after their death.8

Birgitta’s notion of purgatory, outlined here, is far removed from the systematized exposition of her near contemporary Dante (d. 1321), yet it does
suggest a loosely conceived progress toward salvation, with three differentiated levels through which a soul can pass. Birgitta employs shades of light and darkness to convey the variations of judgment and the suffering of purgatory, with the bottommost level of purgatory in eternal darkness, above which is the deficiency of power, and then the longing for God. Elsewhere, she describes the purgatory of longing—where there is no pain but simply the longing for God (IV 127). In chapter 9 there is a further variation of the three levels of purgatory, this time envisaging six ages; whereas Book I 50 had described just two levels, one level with lighter punishments and the other with heavier ones.

The doctrine of purgatory—that the soul at the separation from the body at death must be cleansed from its many failings and cannot at once attain a state of blessedness, except in the case of the very few who become saints—was still only informally worked out in the medieval church in the fourteenth century. To make amends for an offense, the sin first had to be judged, and penance—comprising confession, contrition, and reparation—had to be made. The amends were owed not only to God but also to the injured parties, and to the church in general: Only then could the satisfaction of the sin be achieved, and that only by means of God’s grace. Theologically, the difference between purgatory and hell was that in purgatory the soul was on its way to salvation, whereas in hell all hope was lost. However, Birgitta’s vision concerning Nicola goes on to suggest, at the opening of chapter 8, that there was no certain outcome for a soul in purgatory: “The soul whose predicament you saw and whose sentence you heard finds himself in the most severe punishment of purgatory. This consists in his not knowing whether he will come to rest after purgation or whether he has been condemned.” This uncertainty led to a sense of disquiet and anxiety that was further heightened by an emphasis on the pains of purgatory.

The concentration on the bitter torments of purgatory had the effect of invoking pity and of awakening the fear of hell, and of shocking and disturbing the recipient of the vision. The purpose was not simply to invoke fear but also to chasten and reform those people who still lived in this life while it was not too late for them to convert. This idea, of course, is an integral part of the Revelationes as a whole, but it is crystallized and becomes more obviously apparent in the judgment scenes in purgatory.

In her purgatory visions, Birgitta is further performing her Christian duty to intercede for the redemption of the soul of another person. Not only did she wish to convert the living but she also wished for a deathbed conversion for the sinners she knew. The bond between the living and the dead in terms of the supplications that could be and were made for the soul of the dead was matched by a strong bond between family members and friends. This process was part of the active piety of the fourteenth century. Thus we can see how many souls in her acquaintance Birgitta intercedes for, or takes an interest in (“this man whom she knew” is a phrase that runs through all the Revelationes), or else during the judgment scene she recalls a mitigating deed that the person has performed in his or her lifetime. Other notable revelations in Book IV on purgatory are chapters 4, 40, 50, 52, 74, 102, and 134.
Also linked to the well-being of the departed was the widespread observance in the fourteenth century of pilgrimages, alms, fasts, indulgences, and petitions to the saints. Pilgrimage and indulgences are referred to at the end of chapter 4, and chapter 16 contains a discussion about indulgences and the absolution of sin. One great public indulgence was, of course, the Jubilee of the church, which Birgitta went to Rome to attend in 1350 (see for instance chapter 81, Explanation). But indulgences connected to special places and feast days were also important. Chapter 137 concerns a great indulgence granted by Christ to the future abbey church at Vadstena. It came to be of enormous significance for the Birgittine order, both economically and for the prestige and the popularity it engendered.

Criticism of the Clergy

Many of the individuals whom Birgitta describes as being consigned to their fate in purgatory belong to the priesthood or holy orders. In chapter 58, for instance, she comments that a priest is higher than an angel and in chapter 59 she outlines the duties and the importance of the office of the priest, asserting that good intentions are equal to good deeds. In chapters 61–63 there is a discussion about the real presence in the Eucharist, a current debate in the fourteenth century that seems to have troubled Birgitta. She may have had firsthand experience of this controversy in Sweden during her childhood, when a man named Botolf was tried for refuting the dogma and condemned to death for heresy in the parish of Ösby in 1311, by Israel Erlandsson, who was Birgitta’s father’s cousin. In chapters 61–63, she reacts to the story of a man who had spat out the host during communion, wondering about the theological implications for the priest as well as for the doubting man, and pondering over the divine reassurance that she was not to worry over seemingly “unbelievable” things (IV 62). Birgitta’s concern is less with the individual man than with the office of the priest, and the issue of whether he contaminates the sacraments by his sin, and with the essential nature of the doctrine (IV 61): “Hence, by means of an invisible effect and a visible form, I wish to reveal to the unlearned and humble what the visible form of bread is without the substance of bread, what substance is in its form, what division in form is without substance, and why I endure such indignities and outrages upon my body. It is in order that the humble may be exalted and the proud be put to shame.”

Some of these visions on the clergy contain a realistic acknowledgment of ordinary human weakness on Birgitta’s part; so, for instance, a priest is too idle or incontinent, a bishop is too vain or disobedient, and priestly simony is abhorred. There are also examples of her anti-intellectualism: “Many preachers nowadays say abstruse things” (IV 72), but the simple preaching of God’s word is “as sonorous as bronze in God’s sight” (IV 129), and she also expresses her disdain of “elaborately eloquent philosophers and orators” in chapter 129. In chapters 125 and 130 she makes a political comment, using apocalyptic
imagery of seven beasts, to say that bishops should be held in their place and have their power curtailed.

Swedish Politics

Birgitta’s interest in political matters, both at home and abroad, began early on, perhaps when she became magistra to the Swedish queen, Blanka (Blanche) of Namur (d. 1363), whom King Magnus Eriksson had married in 1335. In chapter 4 she warns the queen to resist the temptations of an evil spirit, and proposes ways in which she might lead a pious life.

Through her links with the royal court, Birgitta was able to observe national politics at close quarters. In 1332 Magnus had mortgaged the southern province of Skåne (Scania) for 34,000 marks of silver from its administrator, the count of Holstein. Skåne, with its neighboring provinces of Blekinge and Halland, was from the 1320s constantly an object of contention between Sweden and Denmark. The Danish king Valdemar IV (Atterdag) had a rightful claim to Skåne but he found it necessary to cede the southern Swedish provinces to Magnus in 1343. Magnus had also inherited the personal rule of Norway, creating a union between Norway and Sweden, which he began to dissolve in 1343 by having his elder son, Erik, elected king of Sweden (including Skåne), and arranging for his younger son, Håkan, to be acclaimed hereditary king of Norway when he came of age in 1355: This was in breach of the Norwegian law of hereditary succession by which the eldest legitimate son should succeed.

Chapter 3 alludes to these significant events. There is reference to the laws of heredity and election within the monarchy (“In one of the kingdoms the king is elected by hereditary right, in the other by popular vote” [IV 3.23]), and Birgitta implies that the succession should have been the other way around, arguing, legally, that the election (presumably of Håkan) was defective, due to three “incongruities” (Lat. “inconveniencia”) effected by those who elected him (IV 3.25). She further implies that there will be no prosperity until the rightful heir emerges on the paternal or maternal side (IV 3.32). She questions the fact that part of the kingdom was transferred as a donation, and asserts the rights of the successor to reclaim it: “If the elected king should want to transfer or reduce a part of the crown goods, surely the future king could and should reclaim it” (IV 3.9). This point echoes the section on kingship in the national law, Magnus Erikssons landslag, which states that the king may not reduce the rights of the crown for a later king, and if he does, his successor has the right to reclaim the rights; and further, that the king must also protect the possessions of the kingdom on behalf of those who succeed him. Raising issues on the nature of kingship, she says of the king that he is “not a master of the realm but the helmsman” (IV 3.14). The reference to the mortgage of the kingdom for a debt probably refers to the mortgage of Skåne (3.17–22). In 3.18 she mentions the elevation of another man, who might be Bengt Algotsson,
Magnus’s favorite and advisor, who was made duke of Finland and Halland, and governor of Skåne. He was despised by the spiritual and aristocratic magnates for his cruelty and for his sequestration of church properties, and the Hanseats also thought he was acting against their interests. His policies led to Erik Magnusson’s rebellion against his father in 1356, while all this time, in Denmark, Valdemar was waiting for his cue to exploit Magnus’s weakness.

It is worth noting at this point that in fifteenth-century England, this chapter was applied, not to Swedish politics at all, but to the English dynastic succession to attack the usurpation of the throne by Henry IV in 1399 and to urge the rights of Edward IV who assumed the crown in 1464. The preface given in two English manuscripts (MS British Library, MS Cotton Vesp. E. fol. 117, and Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 27) demonstrates the clearly propagandist position taken by its compilers:

And because nothing is to be acquired with injustice, and inasmuch as the kingdom of England [or France, MS Ashmole addition] in which rightful hereditary succession by voluntary election is obligatory, has been taken away from the older brother, the true heir, by means of fear and violence, and has been unjustly given to the younger brother, who is not the heir, therefore, the aforesaid kingdom of England is suffering its present affliction and desolation, as is well and clearly stated in Book IV of the Revelations.¹⁵

This is a good example of the various uses to which the revelations could be put, and an illustration of the way in which a rubric can be used to direct the way in which the vision is read. It also illustrates the lasting popularity of Birgitta’s visions well into the fifteenth century, not least because they could so easily be applied to suit different historical and political contexts.

Birgitta’s commentaries on the Swedish king show the gradual shaping of her ambiguous attitude toward him, which shifted from wholehearted support of his efforts in the 1330s and 1340s toward an outright condemnation of him in the 1350s—with her strictures by this time being issued from a safe distance in Rome. She loyally supported the cause of the aristocracy against the ever-increasing demands made on it by the king, and she grew increasingly suspicious of Magnus and constantly questioned his policies and his political purpose, which, for her, could never be divorced from moral intention.

France and England at War

As Birgitta’s revelations began to attract more interest, a delegation was sent in c. 1348 to the pope in Avignon with a group of revelations on foreign politics and on the papacy.¹⁶ It included some revelations that came to be incorporated in Book IV that proposed a tactical solution for an end to hostilities in the bitter territorial disputes of the Hundred Years’ War. In chapter 103 St. Denis, the patron saint of France, implores the Virgin for mercy for his country where
bodies are thrown to the ground like quarry, and souls flutter down to hell like snowflakes. In the following chapter, two wild animals are seen in combat symbolizing the warring kings, and in chapter 105 a marriage match is suggested whereby the kingdom can fall to the rightful heir: “given that one of the kings does have a just claim, I would have peace brought about by means of a marriage.” The king who has the most just cause attacks the “heart” or “breast” of his enemy, implying that he wages open warfare in the midst of the enemy. The potent imagery of this vision conveys the intensity of the respective claims in the disputes over territories and political power by Philippe VI of France and Edward III of England. Birgitta refers to one king—Edward—as having the juster cause (\textit{maiorem iusticiam}), and in law she appears to be on his side, although morally she takes neither side and depicts both men as voracious beasts.

Birgitta’s intervention in these events, though it fell on deaf ears, is an example of her close interest in dynastic power politics well beyond the boundaries of Sweden. Birgitta’s, and the Swedish monarchy’s, qualified support for the English may have been promoted by Queen Blanka’s family associations with England.\textsuperscript{17} The marriage proposal suggests that Sweden might have been courting political alliances with England in the mid-fourteenth century, even if economic links were few at this time, and dominated largely by Hanseatic trade.\textsuperscript{18} Years later, indeed, in 1406, Philippa, the daughter of Henry IV, was given in marriage to the Swedish prince Erik, Duke of Pomerania, and after this marriage Henry Fitzhugh, Lord of Ravensworth, began his initiative to have a Birgittine convent set up in England. Philippa showed a strong interest in the Birgittines, and expressed a wish to become a sister before she was buried at Vadstena in 1430.\textsuperscript{19}

Although the Avignon mission was ultimately unsuccessful, nevertheless it shows Birgitta’s purposefulness and her attempts at active involvement in Swedish foreign diplomacy at the highest level, in this case, with the pope and two foreign kings. The ripples from this enterprise may not have been strong, but they are a sign of her future resolve, shrewdness, and moral indignation concerning matters at the highest political level.

Chapter 2 covers a different aspect of Swedish foreign policy: Magnus Eriksson’s crusades to the eastern Baltic, which we have already discussed (see volume 1, p. 170). This strongly visual scene, with its evocative imagery, may be a deliberation on the expediency of the crusade. The even balance of the scales, in which two fantastic beasts are delicately weighed, may suggest that Birgitta is undecided about the intellectual debate that is projected in this vision. The three groups of people described represent the viator in the world, the type who is prepared to renounce the world if so instructed, and the type who is prepared to offer himself to death. They might represent Christian laymen, monks under rule, and crusading knights. Birgitta emphasizes the need for good intention if the crusade is to be carried out at all. This expedition caused enormous financial hardship at home, and led the nobility to turn against Magnus, as he began to raise taxes from them to support the campaign. A
specific example of Birgitta’s antagonism toward national financial policy is suggested in chapter 16, which concerns a bailiff from Östergötland, who visits Birgitta in Rome as a penitent pilgrim but returns to Sweden to become a tax collector, against her advice.

It was around the time of his crusades, at the end of the 1340s, that Magnus’s fortunes turned, and discontent turned to open revolt in 1356. In chapter 1 Birgitta names the king as a traitor, plunderer, and robber who has unjustly usurped the property of others. By this time she was resident in Rome, from where she continued to take an active, and now more openly critical, interest in Swedish politics. Magnus’s son Erik joined the rebellious magnates against his father and Duke Bengt Algotsson, and he took over the kingdom under the auspices of a council of the realm in 1356; Erik died three years later, however, and Magnus was returned with significantly reduced powers. After Skåne was lost to King Valdemar of Denmark in 1360–61, Magnus was deposed and Hákan was elected king of Norway and Sweden. Hákan, however, co-ruled with his father, and entered into an alliance with Valdemar, which was consolidated by the marriage between Hákan and Valdemar’s daughter Margareta in 1363. An approach was made by the disgruntled supporters of Erik and Hákan to offer the Swedish crown to Magnus’s nephew, Albrecht of Mecklenburg, and with Hanseatic support, Albrecht entered Stockholm and was legally accepted as king in 1364. Magnus was captured and Hákan withdrew to Norway.

Chapter 55 is a vision that might relate to the complex twists and turns of Swedish political life in the 1360s. In the addition, Birgitta refers elliptically to a man, possibly King Albrecht, who is represented by a cruel asp born of a viper and a sly fox. However, as ever in the Revelationes, the political events are shrouded in ambiguity and eclipsed by commonplaces, thus making them tantalizingly inscrutable as historical documents.

Rome and the Papacy

Another of Birgitta’s concerns was the sorry state of Rome as she found it when she went there for the holy year of Jubilee in 1350. For her, Rome was the very essence and embodiment of Christendom; and her ideal of it is expressed with illustrations of the saints and martyrs who lived and died there, such as St. Peter (IV 5, 16 et passim), St. Lawrence (IV 9), and St. Agnes (IV 11 et passim), and some revelations were clearly inspired by her visits to the shrines in Rome (e.g., IV 6 and 78). The reality of what the city was like when she arrived was very different, however. In 1346 and 1349 it had been afflicted by earthquake and plague, it had a drastically reduced population, and it was ruled by petty local tyrants, organized by a corrupt city administration, and affected by dissent, neglect, and turmoil. There were power struggles between the leading noble families, the Orsini and the Colonna (both of which were part of Birgitta’s circle of acquaintance), and tensions between the populace, the burghers and the nobility. Shortly before Birgitta’s arrival, the people of Rome,
under the charismatic lawyer Cola di Rienzo, had taken control of the city, and Cola expressed a desire to introduce a reinvigorated Christian rule in Rome.

Birgitta’s descriptions of the decay and corruption in Rome are therefore probably not exaggerated. In IV 5, St. Peter appears to Birgitta and comments in apocalyptic terms that it had once been the city of fighters (i.e., martyrs), where the streets were paved with gold and silver, but that the sapphires had lost their luster, its inhabitants had lost their right eyes and right hands, and toads and worms dwelled in them. Echoing the vision in which she was “called” to Rome, St. Peter also promises Birgitta that she will hear the cry “Long live the vicar of Peter” and see him in person, which she did when she met Urban V (see below). In IV 10 she attacks the Romans for their indifference and slackness in their observance of a Christian way of life. Chapter 33 is another important vision about “the pitiable state of this city,” which the clergy have let fall into neglect, and in IV 57 she compares it to a meadow overgrown with thistles, which needs to be weeded first with a sharp iron, then cleansed with fire, and plowed by a pair of oxen. Chapter 78, as mentioned already, is a letter to the papal legate in Rome (Cardinal Annibaldo Ceccano) concerning the dismal state of the Roman church in decline.

Although it was the historic seat of the papacy, Rome had been without a pope since the beginning of the fourteenth century when the Curia went into exile at Avignon. During this so-called Babylonian captivity of the papacy, which lasted until 1376, seven popes, of French nationality and largely dominated by French kings, presided over the church. The comfortable lifestyle of the Avignon popes, who were supported by an efficient but costly bureaucracy, was criticized in many quarters. In particular, the lavish-living Clement VI (1342–52) did much to affirm the French character of the papacy and its presence on French soil, and he made it unpopular throughout Europe, especially among France’s enemies. Although Clement VI’s successors—Innocent VI (1352–62), Urban V (1362–70), and Gregory XI (1371–78)—kept the institution in order, held expenditure in check, and dealt with clerical greed, they had not the political means to relocate the Avignon seat until Gregory XI brought about its resettlement in Rome. This event, however, was followed soon afterward by the Great Schism in 1378, and a full split in the papacy, with competing popes in Avignon and Rome. Thus, beset by the papal exile and bitter factional differences within the church, as well as civil unrest, Rome in the fourteenth century had lost much of its sacred character.

Yet for many ordinary Christians, Rome had far from lost its attraction. Despite the absence of a pope, vast crowds thronged to the city in the year of Holy Jubilee in 1350, a celebration that was used by the pope to rebuild the powerful image of the church as a means of gaining revenues and of instilling a sense of peace in the popular imagination. The reformers urging a return of the popes used it as an opportunity for reconciliation and a resolution of the intractable political differences within the church. Cola di Rienzo conceived of a universal peace and the dawning of a new, spiritual age, beginning in Rome at the time of the Jubilee when he wrote from Avignon to the Senate and People of Rome in 1343: “Rise again, o Roman city, for so long fallen prostrate;
put off your sad vesture of widowhood; clothe yourself in bridal purple; adorn your head with the diadem of freedom . . .”

St. Birgitta was not the least among those urging the papacy to return from its exile in Avignon. Her revelations on the papacy unremittingly urge the popes back to Rome, as suggested in IV 22 where she states that the papacy is not pleasing to God anymore:

It has been a long time since the Apostolic See, the head of the world, was pleasing to God by its sanctity of life and example, as it was in earlier times, and all the other members have therefore been made weak and listless. They do not consider the reason why God in his riches became poor and needy—in order to teach us to scorn perishable things and to love heavenly ones. Man is poor by nature but has become rich by means of false riches.

“Tractatus revelationum beate Birgitte ad sacerdotes et ad summos pontifices”

In Alfonso’s redaction of the Revelationes, prepared for the canonization, Book IV had 130 chapters, but the book was later augmented by other revelations that were incorporated gradually and with individual variations in different manuscripts. In Ghotan’s printed edition of 1492 (which the present translation is following in its arrangement) there are a further thirteen revelations. Chapter 131 is an odd revelation on the angels; then follow four on the weak morals of the clergy (IV 132–35). Finally, there are nine revelations (IV 136–44) on the papacy.

This final part of Book IV might have been intended as one of several ad hoc thematic collections that had started to be gathered together by the early editors after Birgitta’s death. The papal tract was first mentioned in Prior Peter’s testimony in 1380, where the distinction was made between the Liber caelestis (i.e., Books I–VII), the Liber caelestis ad reges (i.e., Book VIII), and a tract “de summis pontificibus.” Henrik Schück suggested in 1901 that it might have contained as many as fifty-seven revelations in total, a figure that is disputed nowadays. Given the subject matter, it is of course understandable that certain revelations that were critical of the clergy and the papacy should expediently have been suppressed by the editors of the canonization edition. The four revelations concerning the priesthood, for example, describe modern-day priests as being worse than Judas, who at least showed remorse for his crime. They accuse priests of keeping concubines, of being “as wild as predatory wolves” and “as unsteady as a stone in a weak wall,” and of dressing like whores and living a low life: “This is why they shall be sentenced as traitors and not as priests, unless they reform themselves.” It is perhaps noteworthy that these chapters are carefully omitted in certain manuscripts of the Swedish “retranslation” of the Revelationes on the grounds that they might scandalize the laity and that priests prefer to read the revelations in Latin; this point serves
to illustrate the continual process of revision for different audiences and readerships. But the tract as a whole might have had a more specific purpose. Arne Jönsson has argued that it is likely to have been compiled, at the outbreak of the Great Schism, to gain support for Urban VI in his conflict with the anti-pope, Clement VII, who was elected after the cardinals rejected Urban’s election in 1378. He writes that Birgitta’s “insistence on Rome as home of the popes, the vilification of everything connected with Avignon, the call for reform, the violent protest against simony and a clear anti-cardinalism were messages with renewed relevancy after the out-break of the great schism, and was particularly applicable after Clement’s departure for Avignon in the summer of 1379, when the anti-Avignon revelations again became relevant in a new context.”

There is a chronological ordering in the subsequent chapters dealing with the papacy, starting with a revelation concerning Clement VI in 1348. In chapter 136 Birgitta tells him he has a “grandiloquent tongue” and exhorts him to examine “the book of your conscience,” but the main political purpose of this vision is to help cement peace between France and England.

In the last part of chapter 136 she says that Clement’s successor, Pope Innocent VI (1352–62), is made of “better metal,” but again she hints that her divinely revealed messages were not heeded by this pope either. Chapter 137 is about Urban V (1362–70), who is likened to a golden thread within a ball that symbolizes worldly concerns; she instructs him to ratify the monastic (Birgittine) rule that has been sent to him, since Christ has equipped the monastery in Vadstena with spiritual gifts, and granted it indulgences. Chapter 138 also concerns Urban V, who had returned to Rome on 16 October 1367. Although his first year in Rome was full of promise, his continued preference for French appointments led to resentment and unrest in the neighboring states with which the Romans sided. Thus amid political and social unrest, in April 1370, he took refuge in Viterbo, and then went to Montefiascone, probably with the intention of returning to Avignon. It was here, in the summer of 1370, that Birgitta met with him in person, to make further appeals to him to stay in Rome.

Urban’s reluctance to stay in Rome was a disappointment to Birgitta, and in chapter 138 she issued a message foretelling his death if he returned to Avignon and criticizing his worldly aspirations. She revealed the revelation to Cardinal Beaufort, in the presence of Alfonso (the two Petruses were both ill in Rome). Beaufort was asked to take the message to the pope. However, he did not dare to do so, and instead, Birgitta was granted a personal audience with the pope. Alfonso reports on this meeting in his Informationes, a memorandum written probably in 1379, to defend Urban VI’s election:

She brought this revelation to Montefiascone, where the lord Pope was at the time, and there she disclosed it to Lord Cardinal Beaufort (who later became Pope Gregory) and myself, in order that he should hand it in secrecy over to the said Pope Urban. But this Cardinal Beaufort, my most dear lord, did not dare to do this at the time.
For that reason, the lady herself, by divine instruction, delivered by her own hand the said revelation written in my hand.\textsuperscript{32}

The message in chapter 138 urges Urban to strengthen the Catholic faith, establish peace, and thus renew the holy church. She accuses him of being weary of his spiritual work and tempted into material enjoyment, and she notes that he longs to go back to France, warning him that if he goes back, “he shall be struck with a blow that will knock his teeth out. His sight will become cloudy and darkened, and he will tremble in every limb of his body.” The pope took no notice of the message, and returned to Avignon on 27 September 1370, where, three months later, he died.

As stated by Alfonso, Cardinal Beaufort went on to become Pope Gregory XI (1371–78). Chapters 139–43 testify to an active correspondence between Birgitta and his papal court, and the involvement of several parties in the transmission of the message itself.\textsuperscript{33} Chapter 140 illustrates this point: Birgitta dictated her vision to Prior Petrus who wrote it down, and Alfonso made a copy in Latin. Birgitta corroborated it, and Latino Orsini took it to the pope in Avignon. Birgitta’s daughter Katherina says the pope was not sure about it, and he sent his concerns in a message back to Rome. The answer that was revealed by the Virgin Mary forms the first part of chapter 140.5–10. She gives instructions for Alfonso to deliver the message back to Avignon, and in chapter 140.16–20 he is instructed to seal the letter, make a copy, and show it to the papal nuncio, the Count of Nola. Alfonso was then to destroy the message when these men had received it. It is not clear why this message was to have been kept secret. The Count of Nola also reports on this mission. A further revelation then went back to the pope.\textsuperscript{34} According to the rubrics of chapters 141 and 142, Birgitta received these visions while she was in Naples, on her way back from the Holy Land. All of the revelations concerning Gregory continue the calls, with increasing frustration on her part, for the return to Rome. Alfonso’s rubrics in the tract are detailed and specific: For instance, he states that Birgitta did not send the message of chapter 141 to the pope as she had received no divine command to do so; and chapter 143 says that this is the fourth revelation that was sent to Gregory. The last vision contains a judgment of a deceased pope in purgatory, who, although unidentified, is probably Urban V, if we accept that this sequence of visions is chronologically ordered.

The first three books of the \textit{Revelationes} had shown Birgitta’s interests and ambition mostly within the sphere of Swedish affairs, but in Book IV the beginnings of her missionary purpose in the wider context can be observed. The subjects of many of the visions in this book concern high-ranking European clerics and political leaders, many of them harshly criticized and placed in judgment, and many of them set in contrast to the ideals of the saints. She turns such individuals into doctrinal examples, and holds up the saints as models to be emulated. Individually, many of the revelations in Book IV stand alone, as memorable and forceful messages in their own right, and as messages that could be taken and adapted to a whole range of circumstances, personal as well as political, in the centuries after Birgitta’s death.
NOTES

1. See further Öberg, *Kring Birgitta*, who considers the following revelations in Book IV originally to have been issued as letters: chs. 33, 78–80, 139, 140, 142–43. He suggests that there might be several more, but rejects Klockars’s suggestion (*Birgitta och böckerna*, p. 49) that ch. 4 is an answer to Queen Blanka. An example of the epistolary form of some revelations has already been discussed with reference to Book III 8–9.

2. Karl, a knight and lawman, appears to have been Birgitta’s favorite (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 264–65). The scattered references to him in the *Revelationes* suggest he was a worldly, pleasure-seeking man. He died in 1372 on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, allegedly after having had a liaison with Queen Johanna of Naples. Birger, also a lawman and councilor, traveled several times to Rome to visit his mother and he accompanied her to the Holy Land where he was knighted in 1372. He was more the epitome of the restrained, modest son, about whom the pope allegedly commented at their meeting at Montefiascone “You are truly your mother’s son” (see further Annerstedt, “Chronicon de genere et nepotibus Sanctae Birgittae,” p. 211). He accompanied his mother’s body back to Sweden in 1374, and later assisted in the building work at Vadstena monastery. He died in 1391.


4. On Birgitta’s reflections on marriage, see further Sjöberg, *Hustru och man*.


7. See Ryan, *Golden Legend*, p. 3. The *Legenda aurea* was originally known as the *Legenda sanctorum*, and it gained the name of the “Golden Legend” through its immense popularity during the Middle Ages.

8. IV 7.51–57, 67. This quotation occurs in the preface to the Lübeck edition of 1492. See also illustration on p. 2. It is worth noting that Alfonso uses the words *terrible*, *amazing*, *wonderful*, or *remarkable* in his rubrics to the purgatory visions in Book IV (as indeed he does here, in IV 7).

9. R. W. Southern has summed up the medieval idea of purgatory thus: “Any reasonably repentant, reasonably obedient, sinner could hope to go to Heaven via Purgatory. The purgatorial process was on its way to becoming an extension of the religious discipline of this world, rather than an upper crust of Hell: or, rather, given the accumulative tendencies of scholastic thought, it became *both*—like this world in function, and like Hell in imagination.” Southern, “Between Heaven and Hell.” See also McGuire, “Purgatory, the Communion of Saints,” in which he examines the Cistercian view and the role of visions in the representation of purgatory.

10. This point is made by Eamon Duffy: “St Bridget considered that such uncertainty was the worst pain of Purgatory, reserved to punish certain souls for the misuse of their ‘great wytt and discretion’ in their lifetimes. This view, which ran directly counter to the teaching of St Thomas and of the preaching source books such as the *Golden Legend*, was theoretically incoherent, but it persisted in certain quarters right up to the Reformation.” Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 345–46.

11. See, for instance, Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*.

13. In this role as mentor to the new queen, she gave guidance on court customs, and instructed her in Swedish (although French and German were probably also court languages). Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 528, 632; *Extravagantes* 59. Blanka (Blanche) was the daughter of Count Jean I of Namur, who had been involved in the struggle for the wealthy Low Countries at the beginning of the Hundred Years’ War and was connected to one of the foremost princely houses of Europe. He had strong economic allegiances with the king of England and his family took a part in the English campaigns in the Hundred Years’ War. Her mother, Marie of Artois, was an enterprising woman and wealthy landowner who largely ruled Namur while her husband and sons were on campaigns. Two of her brothers, Robert and Louis, did service for Magnus Eriksson for which they received payments in 1345 and 1353. Koht, “Magnus Erikssons giftermål,” p. 576. See too Paravicini, “Das Haus Namur.” See further Imsen, “Late Medieval Scandinavian Queenship,” and on Swedish politics in general, Helle, *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, pp. 392–410, 715.


16. See further volume 1, p. 41. A manuscript in Avignon from Gregory XI’s library in 1375 notes a volume that fits the description of the texts presented to Clement: “Item in volumine signato ccclxxiiii quidam liber, in quo continentur invocacio-

17. Edward was supported by Flemish leaders who were anxious to maintain their supply of English wool for their textile industries. In the previous decade the French king’s brother-in-law, Robert of Artois, having fallen out with the king, had sought refuge with Blanka’s brother Jean II of Namur, and then gone to England and fought on England’s side against the Scots, before being imprisoned in 1333.

lations and the Hundred Years’ War.” Another marriage proposal, almost cer-
tainly unrelated to the one proposed in Birgitta’s vision, but also involving Edward III, is made in a letter from Magnus Erikkson to Edward, in which the copyist writes: “In the year 1348 in October, the king of Sweden sent a letter to the king of England asking for one of his daughters in marriage.” (Our translation, MS 404, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.) Magnus can scarcely be asking for marriage for himself, as his wife was still alive, but he might have been making an inquiry on behalf of one of his sons, Håkan or Erik. The letter is supported by a reference to Birgitta’s divine calling, and mentions a revelation about the English king’s legal right to the French kingdom. See Stolpe, “Birgitta och politiken,” and Colledge, “Epistola solitarii,” p. 32.


23. At the end of IV 130 is written: “Explicit liber quartus celestis revelationum” or in some manuscripts “Et hic est finis quarti libri secundum Alfonsum.”

24. “Multe [i.e., revelaciones] continentur in libro celesti et multe in libro celesti imperatoris ad reges et multe in tractatu de summis pontificibus”; Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 524. The full title of the tract indicates that the revelations are addressed to popes Clement VI, Innocent VI, Urban V, and Gregory XI, and that they concern the return of the Papal See to Rome and the reform of the church. (“Reuelaciones infra-scriptas habuit in visione spirituali diuinitus deuota ancilla Christi sancte memorie Domina Brigida, principissa de regno Suecie, standing in oracione. Que diriguntur ad summos pontifices Clementem VI, Innocencium VI, Urbanum V, Gregorium XI. Que tractant de reducendo Sedem Apostolicam et Romanam curiam ad Romam et de reformacione ecclesie ex precepto Dei omnipotentis.” Jönsson, St. Bridget’s Revelations to the Popes, p. 63.)

25. Schück, “Några anmärkningar”; see further Jönsson, St. Bridget’s Revelations to the Popes, p. 16.

26. On the “retranslation,” see volume 1, p. 22: “Här näst sex nakat aff prestomen ok är theta ey stor nyttjo alla kännedombir lekmannom at vita, ok klärkanne älskaä meer at vita ok läsa latino thy for thera skuld scifwas thässö nästo capitula a latino.” [Next is said something about priests and this is not of any great use or learning for the laity to know, and clerics prefer to know and read Latin; therefore for their sake this next chapter is written in Latin.] Then follows the rubric, “Et ponitur hic in latino ne Clerus skandalizetur a laicis et dampnetur.” See Klemming, Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser, vol. 5 (fascicle 83), p. 147, who makes the observation that the Swedish manuscript in which the quotation occurs was produced for lay, rather than monastic, use.


29. According to the later account of the abbess at Vadstena, Margareta Clasdotter, she was accompanied by her two sons; see note 2 above.

30. See also Prior Petrus’s testimony of 1380, which refers to this message, in Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 517.

31. There may have been two meetings: see Colledge, “Epistola solitarii,” p. 25. Nicholas Orsini says he was the interpreter between the pope and Birgitta; see Collijn, Acta et processus, pp. 232–33.


33. According to Katherina Ulfsdotter, Gregory reportedly had a picture of Birgitta in his chamber. She states this in a letter to the archbishop of Sweden in 1378, expressing surprise that her mother was not better known in her native country; see Ekwall, Vår äldsta Birgittavita, pp. 99, 129–30. However, on his deathbed, Gregory appears to have regretted having been too attentive to the female mystics when he listened to their advice and returned to Rome, bringing about the Great Schism: “Placed here on his deathbed, he bore witness in the presence of them all, that they should beware of all persons, both male and female, who related visions from their
heads under the guise of religion. He himself had been led astray by such . . . with the result that he drew both himself and the church to the period of the now imminent schism . . .” (“Hic positus in extremis . . . protestatus est coram omnibus, ut caverunt ab hominibus, tam viris quam mulieribus, sub specie religionis visiones loquentibus sui sapitis; quia per tales ipse seductus esset . . . ut se et Ecclesiam ad discrimen schismatis tunc imminens traxerit . . .”) Quoted from Vauchez, The Laity, p. 328n37.

34. See on these references, Collijn, Acta et processus, pp. 90, 327, 519; Jönsson, Alfonso of Jaén, p. 188.
Book IV

HERE BEGINS THE DIVINELY REVEALED FOURTH BOOK OF THE
HEAVENLY REVELATIONS OF GOD TO BLESSED BIRGITTA

Chapter 1*

St. John Exhorts the King to Lead a Better Life

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

John the Evangelist’s words to the bride about how no good deed goes unrewarded, and about how the Bible excels all other writings, and about the king—robber, traitor, prodigal, and so forth, and about St. John’s advice to the king, and about how he should scorn riches and honors for the sake of God.

1 A male person appeared to the bride. His hair seemed as if shorn with reproach; his body was drenched in oil and completely naked, though he was in no way ashamed. 2 He said to the bride: “The scripture, which you call holy, says that no good deed will go unrewarded. 3 This is the scripture that is known for you as the Bible but which, for us, is as bright as the sun, incomparably more splendid than gold, bearing fruit like the seed that produces fruit a hundredfold. 4 Just as gold excels other metals, so the scripture, which you say is Holy though we call it Golden, excels all other books, because in it the true God is glorified and announced, the deeds of the patriarchs are unfolded, the inspirations of the prophets are explained.

6 Since, therefore, no good deed goes unrewarded, hear what I say: This king is a robber in God’s sight and a traitor of souls and a prodigal squanderer of riches. 7 As no traitor is worse than the one that betrays someone who loves him, so this king has in a spiritual sense betrayed many people by, in a bodily...

* This revelation is duplicated in Book VIII 25.

1. “A male person,” i.e., St. John the Evangelist, who, according to legend, was boiled in a cauldron of oil outside Rome, but left unharmed. The legend is alluded to by Tertullian (fl. 200 A.D.), De Praescriptione haereticorum XXXVI. See also Ryan, The Golden Legend, vol. 1, p. 51 (Legenda Aurea IX 15).

2. “Go unrewarded” (Matthew 10:42).


4. “We call it Golden”; this phrase, to describe the Bible, is also used by Hildegard of Bingen, Liber divinorum operum, I, visio 4, cap. 87; and twice by Bede (De templo, lib. II I, 1394, and De Tabernaculo li, III, II 965–70; see CCL 119A, pp. 227 and 118). See also the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Book I, by the Benedictine abbot Wolbero S. Pantaleonis “Sacra quippe Scriptura aurea est, quia fulgore sapientiae resplendet” (PL 195, col. 1076B). See also chs. 107 and 125 below, and in Extravagantes 3.

5. After “this king,” some manuscripts, and Gh, add “for whom you pray.” The “king” must be Magnus Eriksson.
sense, approving the unjust, unjustly exalting the impious, oppressing the just, ignoring transgressions that should be corrected. 8 Again, no thief is worse than he who betrays someone who lays his head upon his bosom. Likewise, the people of this land were, so to speak, in his bosom, but this king has wretchedly plundered them 9 by allowing the property of some to be taken away, by imposing unbearable burdens on others, by ignoring the abuses of still others, by always exercising justice in a remiss way. In the third place, no thief is worse than one who steals from his unwilling master who has entrusted everything to him and given him his keys. 10 Thus this king was given the keys of power and glory, which he has used in an unjust and wasteful manner, not for the glory of God. However, seeing that he has given up some of the things he likes out of love for me, I have three counsels for him.

11 The first is that he should be like the man in the gospel who left the pods of the swine\(^6\) and returned to his father. Let this king likewise scorn riches and honors, 12 which are nothing but swine pods compared to eternal goods, and let him return to his Father God with humility and devotion. Second, let him leave the dead to bury the dead,\(^7\) and let him follow the narrow path of the crucified God. 13 Third, let him leave behind the heavy weight of his sins and enter on the path that is narrow at the start but joyful in the end.

14 And you who see me, know that I am he who fully understood the golden scripture and in my understanding added to it. I was ignominiously stripped bare, but, because I bore it patiently, God has clothed my soul in immortal dress. 15 I was also doused in oil, which is why I now enjoy the oil of everlasting happiness.\(^8\) Because I was made the guardian of the Mother of God,\(^9\) I left the world in the easiest of deaths\(^10\) after her own, and my body is now in a place of the greatest rest and security.”

# Chapter 2

About a Fantastic Beast and a Fish

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The bride’s amazing and remarkable vision and God’s explanation of it. According to the explanation, the baptized are symbolized by an animal, the heathen by a fish, and God’s friends by three crowds of people.

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10. “Easiest of deaths”: according to the legend, he dug his own grave, got into it, prayed, and was bathed in light at the point of his death.
1 Then there appeared to the bride a balance, as it were, with two scale- 

pans hanging above the ground. Their tops and chains went up to the clouds, and their rings went into the sky. 2 In the first scale-pan was a fish. Its scales were razor-sharp, its look like that of a basilisk, its mouth like that of a unicorn spouting venom, its ears like the sharpest spears, like sheets of steel. 3 In the other scale-pan was an animal with a hide like flint. Its huge mouth spouted hot flames. Its eyelids were like the hardest swords. Its hard ears let fly sharp arrows as from a hard, taut bow.

4 Then there appeared three crowds of people on the earth. The first was small; the second was smaller; the third was the smallest. A voice called to them from heaven saying: 5 “O, friends, I have a violent thirst for the heart of this amazing animal, if only someone would present it to me out of love! I have also a most fervent desire for the blood of the fish, if only someone could be found to bring me it!”

6 The crowd answered with a single voice as though from the mouth of all: “O our Maker, how shall we present you with the heart of such a great animal, whose hide is harder than flint? 7 If we try to draw near to its mouth, we get burned by the flames of its fire. If we look at its eyes, we get stabbed by the sparks of its arrows. 8 And even if there were any hope of getting the animal, who will be able to catch the fish? Its scales are sharper than the edge of a sword, its eyes blind us, its mouth pours forth its incurable venom into us!”

9 The voice from heaven answered saying: “O, friends, the animal and the fish seem invincible to you, but it is easy for the Almighty. From heaven I shall supply wisdom and grant strength to anyone looking for a way to fight the animal. I shall give myself in reward to anyone who is prepared to die for me.”

10 The first crowd answered: “O great Father, you are the giver of every good thing. We are your work and shall gladly give you our heart in your honor. All the rest that remains outside our heart we will keep for the sustenance and refreshment of our body. 11 Therefore, since death seems hard to us and our bodily weakness burdensome and our knowledge slight, govern us inwardly and outwardly and receive graciously what we offer you. Reward us with as much and whatever you like.”

12 The second crowd answered: “We acknowledge our weaknesses and are aware of the world’s emptiness and fickleness. Therefore, we shall gladly give you our heart and surrender all our will into the hands of others, for we would rather submit to others than own even the least of worldly goods.”

13 The third crowd answered: “Lord, you desire the heart of the animal and thirst for the blood of the fish: We shall gladly give you our heart and we are

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1. “Scale-pans” renders “staterae”; cf. Sw. “skala” [scales]; the central image in this revelation is the balance with two evenly weighed pans.
2. “A fish”: This clearly fantastic fish might be based in part on the description of the Leviathan (Job 41:1–26). See also the woodcut and description of a monstrous fish by Olaus Magnus (OM Books 20 and 21), an example of medieval Scandinavian lore.
3. “Friends”: This term is used throughout the Revelations to denote groups of people who take up the reforming battle against those without faith or with a lapsed faith; see further volume 1, p. 169.
prepared to die for you. Grant us wisdom, and we shall look for a way to get at the heart of the animal.”

14 After this came the sound of a voice from heaven saying: “O, friend, if you want the heart of the animal, make a hole in the middle of your hands with a sharp bore. Then take the eyelids of a whale and attach them to your own eyelids with strong pitch. 15 Take a plate of steel and tie it to your heart, so that the length and breadth of the steel covers your heart. Then close your nostrils and hold your breath in your throat!

16 Go boldly forth against the raging animal with your mouth shut and holding your breath. When you get up to the animal, use both your hands to lay hold of its ears. Its arrows will not hurt you but will go through the open holes in your hands. 17 Run up to the animal with your mouth shut and, as you approach it, blow on it with all your breath. When you do so, the flames of the animal will not hurt you but will return on the animal itself and burn it. 18 Take especial care with the sword-edges coming out of the animal’s eyes. Latch on to them with your own eyes protected by the whale’s eyelids. As a result of their powerful connection, either the animal’s swords will be deflected or they will go through its heart. 19 Look carefully for the animal’s heartbeat and fix the edge of your mighty steel there and pierce the flint of its hide. 20 If the flint breaks, you can be sure that the animal will die and its heart will be mine. For every pound it weighs, I will give a hundred to the laborer. However if it does not break and the animal injures him, I will care for his wounds and revive him if he dies.

21 If anyone wants to present me with the fish, let him walk to the shore with a net in his hands—one that is made not out of cords but from very precious metal. 22 Let him enter the water but not more than up to the knees, so that the waves do not harm him. He should set his foot on a solid place where there is sand and no mud. 23 He should put out one of his eyes and hold it toward the fish. Then the sight of the fish, which is like that of a basilisk, will have no effect on him. 24 He should bear a shield of steel on his arm, and then the sting of the snake will not hurt him. Let him then cast his net over the fish with skill and might so that the fish will not be able to cut through it with its razors or break it or escape by any kind of powerful thrust.

25 When he feels he has the fish, let him hoist his net over above him, and if he holds it for ten hours above the waters, the fish will die. He should carry it then to the shore and inspect it with the eye that he did not put out, using his hands to open it along the backbone where the blood is more plentiful. May he thus present it to his Lord. 26 If the fish should escape or swim to the other shore and harm him with its venom, I will be able to cure the infection. Nor will there be less reward for the blood of the fish than for the heart of the animal.”

4. “Steel” renders “calibs” (a medieval Lat. term, recorded, for example, in texts from France); cf. Sw. “staal.” Steelmaking was an established industry, and steel an export commodity from Sweden by the fourteenth century; see KL “stål.”

5. “Length and breadth” renders “latitudo et planicies,” emphasizing the flat surface of the steel.
27 God speaks again: “The meaning of the scales of the balance is as if one were to say: ‘Be lenient and patient, wait and have mercy.’ It is to see another’s wrongdoing and admonish him continually to make him desist from evil. 28 Likewise, I, the God and Creator of all, sometimes sink down like a scale toward people and admonish them, being lenient and testing them with tribulations. Sometimes I rise up in people’s minds through my enlightenment, inflaming them and visiting them with special grace. 29 The meaning of the chains of the balance that go up to the clouds is that I, the God of all, uphold everyone, heathen as well as Christian, friends as well as enemies, and enlighten and visit them with my grace, in order to see if there are any who wish to respond to my grace by turning their will and affections away from evil. 30 The animal signifies those who have received holy baptism but, having reached the age of discretion and not imitating the words of the holy gospel, have let their heart and mouth slip away toward earthly things and do not bother about the spiritual life. 31 The fish signifies heathens adrift on the waves of concupiscence. Their blood, that is, their faith, is slight and their knowledge of God little. 32 Thus, I desire both the animal’s heart and the fish’s blood, should there be any persons found who would attempt to present me with them for the sake of love. 33 The three crowds are my friends: The first are those who make a reasonable use of the world; the second are those who give up what they have in humble obedience; the third are those who are prepared to die for God.”

* Chapter 3*

On the Rights of Succession in the Country

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

A wonderful conversation between God and the bride by way of question and answer. It concerns the king and his hereditary rights and those of his successors in the kingdom, and also how some territories should be reclaimed by the successors in the kingdom and some not.

1 “O Lord,” said the bride, “do not get angry at me for asking, but I heard it read out loud that nothing should be unjustly acquired nor should anything unjustly acquired be retained. 2 Now the present king has territory that some people say he holds by right while others deny it. And indeed it is strange that you tolerate in this man what you reproach in others.”

6. “Prepared to die for God”: The interpretation of this vision is further explored in ch. 129. See further on this vision Morris, “Swedish Foreign Policy.”

* This revelation is duplicated in Book VIII 41. See further p. 11 above.

1. “I have heard it read out loud” renders “Audiui ex scriptura.” Birgitta might be alluding to a statement from the Swedish national law, Magnus Erikssons Landslag: “thy at alt laghfangit er retfangit ok alt vlaghlikit er sum vfangit” [for everything acquired lawfully is acquired justly, and all that is unlawfully acquired, is as if it were not acquired]; see Wiktorsson, Magnus Erikssons Landslag, p. 54, lines 10–11.
3 God answered: “No people were left after the flood except for those who stayed on the ark during it." From these was born a race that went to the east, and among them some who went to Sweden. 4 Another clan went west and from these arose the people who went to Denmark. 5 Now those who first began to cultivate the land that was not surrounded by water did not occupy any territory belonging to the people who lived across the waters or on islands. 6 Rather, they were each content with what they found, as is written of Lot and Abraham. Abraham said, ‘If you go to the right, I will keep to the left,’ as if to say ‘Whatever you appropriate to yourself, this will belong to you and your heirs.’ 6 As time went on there came judges and kings who were satisfied with their boundaries and did not occupy the territory of the people who lived on islands or across the water. Rather, each remained within the boundaries and limits of their forefathers.”

7 She answered: “What if a part of the kingdom is transferred by way of donation, should not a successor reclaim it?” 8 God: “In a certain kingdom, crown goods belonging to the king were kept in safe storage for him. The people, thinking themselves unable to survive without a king, elected one and entrusted to him the crown goods to be guarded and reconsigned to the future king. 9 If the elected king should want to transfer or reduce a part of the crown goods, surely the future king could and should reclaim it, inasmuch as no reduction of the crown goods should take place. 10 The king can neither diminish nor transfer the crown of the kingdom in his day, unless, perhaps, for some prudent reason. What do the crown goods of the kingdom denote if not his royal authority? What is the kingdom if not the people subject to him? 11 What is the king if not mediator and savior of the kingdom and of the people? Accordingly, the savior and defender of the crown should by no means divide or reduce the crown goods to the detriment of a future king.”

12 The bride answered: “What if the king is forced by necessity or violence to transfer a part of the crown goods?” 13 God said: “If two men had a quarrel, and the stronger of them would not make any concession unless a finger of the other man were cut off, to whom would the cut-off finger belong if not to him who had suffered the damage? 14 This is also the case concerning the kingdom. If, due to necessity or captivity, a king should lose part of the kingdom,
the future king can certainly reclaim it, for the king is not master of the realm but the helmsman, and necessity does not make a law.”

15 She answered: “What if, during his lifetime, a king were to cede part of the crown goods to a lord, and, upon the king’s death, that lord and his successors were to retain the concession as though they owned it, should it not be reclaimed?” 16 The Lord: “That territory should certainly return to its legitimate owner.”

17 She replied: “What if a part of the crown goods were mortgaged to someone for debt and then, both after his death and after he had received income from it for many years, it should come into the hands of another person with no right to the land, since it had been neither ceded nor mortgaged to him but had accrued to him by chance, and if he does not want to give it up without being paid, what should be done?” 19 The Lord said: “If someone held a lump of gold in his hand and said to a bystander: ‘This lump is yours, if you like, for so and so many pounds,’ then that many pounds should surely be given to him. If land has been lawfully acquired and is held in peaceful ownership, it should be reclaimed with prudence and brought back after calculating the damages. 21 When a king is elected, he is lifted up on a stone seat to be seen by the people. This indicates that he has dominion and possession of the northern parts of the kingdom, and also that the southern parts belong to the kingdom both by hereditary right and by sale and purchase. The king shall accordingly safeguard the land that has been acquired in order not to lose his dominion and or suffer subjugation should he act otherwise.”

23 Again she answered: “O Lord, do not get angry if I ask just one thing more. The present king has two sons and two kingdoms. In one of the kingdoms the king is elected by hereditary right, in the other by popular vote. 24 Now, however, the opposite has been done, inasmuch as the younger son has received the hereditary kingdom, while the older son holds the elective kingdom.” 25 God answered: “There were three incongruities in the electors as well as a fourth that they had in plenty: inordinate love, feigned prudence, the flattery of fools, and lack of confidence in God and in the common people.”

8. “The helmsman” renders “rector”; cf. Sw. “rättare.” The description of him as the helmsman, rather than the master, of the crown suggests that Birgitta sees him as the trustee of sovereign power, but in no way absolute in his power, a view that might have started to be challenged in this time in Sweden.

9. “Necessity does not make a law” renders “nec necessitas facit legem,” echoing the well-known commonplace that implies that necessity knows no law, or that it breaks every law (“necessitas non habet legem,” “necessitas omnem legem frangit”). The suggestion is that notwithstanding Magnus Eriksson’s financial or political difficulties, as the custodian of the kingdom, it was his abiding duty to submit to the law.

10. “When a king . . . stone seat”; traditionally, the election of the king, by members of all the provincial legal districts, took place at Mora stones, which was situated in a field in Uppland, about 10 kilometers south east of Uppsala. Afterward, he traveled on his royal progress, visiting the northern parts (here, the “partibus regni superioribus”), and the disputed southern parts (“partibus inferioribus”). Olaus Magnus describes the place as a rock within a stone circle (although the stones had disappeared by the time he was writing) (OM 8:1): see KL “Mora sten.”

11. “The present king . . . two kingdoms,” i.e., Magnus Eriksson, and his sons Erik and Håkan.

12. “Common people” renders “communitas”; cf. Sw. “almogha,” denoting the commoners, that is, the people in general, or one of the four estates in medieval Sweden.
26 Hence, their election was against justice, against God, against the good of
the nation and against the welfare of the people. 27 Therefore, in order to
provide for peace and for the welfare of the people, it is necessary for the older
son to receive the hereditary kingdom and for the younger son to come to the
elective one. 28 Otherwise, if the earlier actions are not repealed, the kingdom
will suffer loss, the people will be afflicted, discord will arise, the sons shall
pass their days in sorrow, 29 and their kingdoms will no longer be kingdoms.
Instead it will be as is written: ‘The mighty will move from their seats and those
that walk upon the earth shall be exalted.’

30 Hear now: I will give you the example of two kingdoms. In one there
is election, in the other hereditary succession. The first kingdom, where there
is election, has been ruined and afflicted, because the rightful heir was not
elected. This was due to the electors as well as to the greed of the one who
sought the kingdom. 31 Now, God does not punish the son for his father’s sins
nor does his anger endure forever, but he works and maintains justice both on
earth and in heaven. 32 For this reason that kingdom will not return to its
previous glory and happy state until the rightful heir appears on either the
father’s or the mother’s side.”

# Chapter 4

The Struggle between a Good and a Bad Spirit in the Conscience
of a Lady

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

God’s words to the bride about two spirits, good and bad; and about
the remarkable and useful struggle in the mind of a certain lady
arising from the inspirations of the good spirit and from the temp-
tations of the evil spirit; and about what choice should be made in
these matters.

1 God speaks to the bride: “Thoughts and influences are suggested and
infused in human hearts by two spirits, that is to say, from the good spirit and
from the bad. 2 The good spirit urges people to think on the future goods of
heaven and not to love temporal goods. The bad spirit urges them to love what
they see, makes light of sin, offers the excuse of weakness, and adduces the
example of weak sinners. 3 Let me exemplify how each spirit inflames the heart
of that lady known to you.1 The good spirit tells her the following, suggesting it
to her thoughts: 4 ‘Riches are a burden, worldly honor is but air, carnal delights
but a dream, fleeting joy and all worldly things are emptiness, the future

1. “That lady known to you”; this revelation also occurs in Book VIII 13, where it is explicitly stated that the
lady referred to is the “queen,” presumably Blanka (Blanche) of Namur, wife of Magnus Eriksson (see further
above, p. 11).
judgment is inevitable and the inquisitor very harsh. It is too hard, then, it seems to me, to have to give a strict account of fleeting wealth, to win spiritual disgrace for the sake of air, to endure long-lasting hardship for momentary delight, and to render a reckoning to him to whom all things are known before they happen. For this reason, it is safer to give up much in order to make the account smaller rather than to get attached to much and then have to account for much.’

To counter this, the bad spirit replies with these inspirations: ‘Dismiss such thoughts, since God is mild and easily placated. Own things boldly, give liberally of your possessions. 8 You were born to have wealth. It has been granted to you so that you may win praise and can give to those who ask of you. If you give up your wealth, you will become a servant to your servants. You will lose honor and gain scorn, 9 for a poor person finds no comfort. It will be hard for you to adjust to new habits, to tame the flesh in strange ways, and to live without being waited upon. 10 So stay where you are with the honor you have received, and maintain your regal position. Manage your household in praiseworthy fashion so that you will not be accused of inconstancy should you change your state. Continue as you began, and you will be glorious before God and men.’

The good spirit again speaks to the woman’s mind and advises her: ‘I know two things to be eternal—heaven and hell. No one who loves God above all things will enter into hell. Those who do not love God will not gain heaven. The incarnate God himself trod the path to heaven and confirmed it with signs and by his death. How glorious it is to be in heaven, how bitter is the malice of the devil, and how empty are the things of the earth! 13 His Mother and all the saints imitated God: they preferred to endure every punishment and lose everything—they even despised their very selves—so as not to lose heavenly and eternal possessions. 14 Consequently, it is safer to surrender honor and wealth in due season than to hold on to them until the end. Otherwise, the memory of sins might perhaps fade away as the pain of old age increases, and those who care nothing about my salvation will carry off what I have gathered.’

The evil influence answered to the contrary: ‘Leave off thinking on these things. We are weak human beings, but Christ was both God and man. We ought not compare our deeds to those of the saints who had more grace and intimacy with God. 16 Let it be enough for us to hope for heaven and to live as befits our weakness, redeeming our sins through almsgiving and prayers. It is foolish and childish to take up unaccustomed practices and not be able to carry them through to the end.’

The good influence answered: ‘I am unworthy to be compared with saints. Nevertheless, it is quite safe to aim at perfection by degrees. What is to hinder me taking up unaccustomed practices? God is able to help me. 18 It often happens that some poor man follows in the path of a mighty and wealthy nobleman. Although the nobleman reaches the inn sooner and enjoys

2. “Honor” renders “honore”; cf. Sw. “hedher,” which reflects the reading of several manuscripts and Gh; but “homin” [husband] is the reading chosen by the editor (see Aili, Book VIII, pp. 35–36).
a delicious meal and rests on a soft bed, 19 yet the poor man reaches the same inn, though later, and there he partakes of the leftovers from the nobleman’s meal. If he had not followed in the nobleman’s path and sought the same inn, he would not have enjoyed his nobleman’s meal.

20 In the same way I say now that, although I am unworthy to be compared with saints, I do wish to follow along their path, so that at least I might be able to partake of their merits. 21 I am concerned about two things in my soul. The first is that, if I stay in my homeland, pride might get the better of me. The love of my parents, who request my help, makes me downcast in my mind; the abundance of servants and clothing is a burden to me. 22 The thought of coming down from my proud throne and humbling my body by going on a pilgrimage is more attractive and consoling to me than remaining in a state of honor and accumulating sin upon sin. 23 Second, I am concerned about the poverty of the people and their cries of discontent. Instead of helping them, my presence is a daily burden. That is why I need good advice.’

24 The bad influence answered: ‘Going on pilgrimage is characteristic of an inconstant mind. Mercy is more acceptable than sacrifice. 25 If you leave your homeland, greedy men, having heard of your reputation, will despoil you and carry you off. Then, instead of freedom, you will experience captivity; instead of wealth, poverty; instead of honor, shame; instead of quiet, tribulation.’ 26 The good spirit answered with an inspiration: ‘I have heard of a certain captive in a tower who found greater comfort in captivity and darkness than he had ever before while living in abundance and temporal comfort. 27 If it should please God to afflict me, it will be in order to increase my merit. After all, he is gentle in encouragement and quick to send help, especially as I am leaving my homeland because of my sins and in order to gain the love of God.’

28 The bad influence answered in turn: ‘What will happen if you should be unworthy of divine consolation and impatient about poverty and humility? 29 Then you will regret having taken such rigorous discipline upon yourself. Then you will have a staff in your hand instead of a ring, a cloth on your head instead of a crown, and lowly sackcloth instead of a crimson gown.’ 30 The good spirit answered in turn: ‘I have heard that Holy Elizabeth, 4 daughter of the king of Hungary, having been raised in luxury and nobly married, endured great poverty and abasement. 31 She obtained from God greater comfort in poverty and a more sublime crown than if she had remained in all worldly honor and comfort.’

32 The bad inspiration answered: ‘What will you do if God delivers you into the hands of men and your body is violated? 33 How will your sense of

4. “Holy Elizabeth,” i.e., Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–31), who married Louis IV of Thuringia in Germany in a political match and showed a strong ascetic leaning in her early marriage. Driven from the court on the death of her husband in 1227, she came under the strict spiritual direction of Conrad of Marburg, who ordered her to give up her children. She dedicated her life to the sick and the poor. Canonized 1235; feast day 19 November. See Stephens, Ett Forn-svenskt legendarium 2, pp. 803–4.
modesty allow you to endure? Will you not sorrow over your own stubbornness and be inconsolable then? Will it not scandalize your whole family and cause them to mourn? 34 Feelings of impatience, anxiety, and thanklessness toward God will surely surge up in your heart. You will want to end your days! And how will you dare to show yourself when you have been defamed in everyone’s mouth? 35 In turn the good thought answered: ‘I have heard it read⁵ that the holy virgin Lucy,⁶ when she was led off to a brothel, remained steadfast in faith and trusted in the goodness of God, saying: ‘However much my body may suffer, I am still a virgin and shall receive a twofold crown.’ 36 Seeing her faith, God preserved her unharmed. Thus I say: God, who permits no one to be tempted⁷ beyond their power, shall protect my spirit, faith, and my will. I entrust myself wholly to him. May his will toward me be done!’

37 Accordingly, since this lady is shaken by such thoughts, I offer her three counsels. First, that she should recall the honor for which she has been chosen; second, what love God has shown her in her marriage; third, how benevolently she has been spared in this mortal life. 38 I also give her three warnings. First, that she will render an account to God for all her temporal goods down to how the least obol was earned and spent; 39 second, that her time is very short and she will die before she knows it; third, that God does not show the lady of the house more leniency than the maidservant.

40 Therefore, I advise her to do three things. First, to repent of her sins, to make amendment after a fruitful confession, and to love God with her whole heart. Second, I advise her wisely to seek to avoid the pains of purgatory. 41 Just as a person who does not wholeheartedly love God deserves a great punishment, so too someone who does not atone for his or her sins while it is possible deserves purgatory. 42 Third, I advise her for a time to leave her bodily friends for God’s sake and to come to a place where there is a shortcut between heaven and death⁸ in order to avoid the pains of purgatory, 43 because indulgences⁹ are obtained there that offer souls advancement and redemption,¹⁰ which have been granted by the holy pontiffs and earned by the blood of God’s saints.”

⁵ “I have heard it read”: probably a reference to the Legenda Aurea; see p. 7 above; Stephens, Ett Fornsvenskt legendarium 1, pp. 556–57.
⁶ “Holy virgin Lucy,” i.e., St. Lucy of Syracuse, who, during Diocletian’s persecution in the fourth century, was denounced and forced to enter a brothel by the man to whom she had been betrothed by her parents. Martyred 303; feast day 13 December.
⁷ “Who permits ... to be tempted”; cf. James 1:13.
⁸ “A shortcut between heaven and death”: The phrase implies a place where there was the possibility, through indulgence, to go straight to heaven, without passing through purgatory first. Birgitta might be alluding to a specific place, like Rome, where indulgences might be obtained, or she might be advising the queen to make a pilgrimage to any place where an indulgence could be obtained.
⁹ “Indulgences”: The idea is that all sin must be atoned for either in the present life, through penance, or in the afterlife, by purification in purgatory. However, through the extra grace earned by the saints, an indulgence could be granted by the pope or his bishops, which would then substitute for the required penance.
¹⁰ “Advancement and redemption” renders “elevationes et redemptiones”; cf. Sw., which simplifies this clause: “thet är afflat ok syna forgiftise” [that is indulgence and the forgiveness of sins]. The suggestion behind what are probably two technical terms is that some souls advance to a higher level of purgatory, while others advance to full redemption, through the application of indulgences.
St. Peter Bemoans the State of Rome

The words of St. Peter to the bride about how he desired the salvation of peoples; and his advice to her about obtaining remembrance, and about the great miracles that are yet to be fulfilled in the city of Rome.

1 St. Peter speaks to the bride of Christ: “My daughter, you compared me to a plow, which makes wide furrows and clears away roots. This was indeed true. 2 I was so zealous against sin and so aflame for virtue that I was ready to spare neither life itself nor any effort in order to convert the whole world to God. 3 God was so sweet for me in thought, so sweet in conversation, so sweet in action that all things became bitter for me to think about apart from God. Yet God, too, was bitter to me, not because of him, but because of me. 4 How bitterly I wept as often as I thought about how I had offended and denied him, for I had learned by then what it meant to love perfectly, and my tears became as sweet to me as sweet-tasting food.

5 As to your request for a spirit of remembrance, I answer you: Have you not heard how forgetful I was? I may have been fully taught as to the way of God and had sworn an oath to stand and die with God, but I denied the truth when I was questioned by a woman. 6 And why? Because God had left me to myself, and because I did not know myself. But then what did I do? Then I really did consider what I was—nothing in myself. 7 Then I got up and ran toward the truth, toward God, and he impressed such a remembrance of his name on my heart that I could never forget him again either in the face of tyrants or of torture or of death.

8 So do the same thing yourself: Turn in humility to the teacher of remembrance and ask remembrance of him. He is the only one who can do all things. Yet I will help you so that you may be made a participant of the seed that I planted on earth.

9 Moreover, I will tell you: Rome was once a city of fighters, and her streets were paved in gold and silver. Now, however, her gemstones have turned into mud, her inhabitants are but few; 10 their right eye has been plucked out,
and their right hand cut off; toads and vipers dwell with them, and for fear of their venom tame animals dare not appear, nor do my fish lift their heads.

11 Yet fish shall gather in her, though not as many as before; still they will be as sweet and as daring—so much so that, through their cooperation, the toads and frogs will climb down, the snakes will be changed into lambs, and lions will be like doves at their windows.”

12 Again he added: “I tell you further that you will live to hear the words: ‘Long live the vicar of Peter!’ And you will see him with your own eyes, for I will cause the mountain of delights to fall and those sitting on it will come down from it. 13 Those who refuse to come down willingly will be forced down against everyone’s expectations, for God wants to be exalted with mercy and truth.”

Chapter 6

St. Paul Speaks of the Conversion of St. Stephen the Martyr

DATE: 1350S, ROME

St. Paul tells the bride the noble story about how he was called by God through the prayers of Blessed Stephen, and about how the wolf became a lamb, and about how it is good to pray for everyone.

1 St. Paul speaks to the bride of Christ, saying: “My daughter, you compared me to a lion that was raised among wolves but was rescued from them in a wonderful way. I was indeed a greedy wolf, my daughter, but God made a lamb out of the wolf for two reasons. 2 The first was because of his great love, for he makes the vessels of his grace out of unworthy materials, and he makes friends out of sinners. The second was because of the prayers of St. Stephen, the first martyr.

3 Let me describe how I was and what I had in mind at Stephen’s stoning and why I deserved his prayers. 4 I neither rejoiced nor delighted in St. Stephen’s sufferings, nor did I envy his glory. Still I wanted him to die because, to my mind, I did not see him as having the true faith. 5 When I saw his immense zeal and his patient endurance of suffering, I grieved terribly over his lack of faith—when in fact he was the truly faithful one and I altogether blind and faithless. 6 Out of compassion for him I prayed and begged with my whole heart that his bitter sufferings might bring him to glory and reward.
Chapter 7

A Soul in Judgment; and a Description of Purgatory

Date: 1365, Naples

A wonderful and remarkable vision about a soul who is to be judged and about the devil’s accusations and the glorious Virgin’s intervention. The explanation of this vision denotes heaven by a palace, Christ by the sun, the Virgin by a woman, the devil by an Ethiopian, the angel by a knight. It mentions two irremediable places of punishment and a third, a remediable one, as well as many other wonderful things, suffrages in particular.

1 A person who was keeping vigil in prayer and was not asleep had a spiritual vision. It was as though she saw an unfathomably vast palace where there were countless figures dressed in white and shining clothes, each of whom seemed to have his or her own seat. 2 In the principal part of the palace there was a judgment seat on which the sun seemed to sit. The rays that came from the sun were unfathomably long, deep, and wide. 3 Next to this seat stood a maiden with a precious crown on her head, and all the servants of the sun that sat on the seat praised him with hymns and songs.

4 There appeared then an Ethiopian, terrible in aspect and bearing, as though full of envy and burning with great anger. He cried out and said: “O, just judge, render judgment on this soul for me and hear his works! Little remains of...
his life. Allow me to punish the body along with the soul until their separation from each other.” 5 After he had said this, it seemed to me that there stood near the seat one like a knight in arms, pure and wise in his words and modest in his bearing. He said: “O, judge, see, here are the good works that he has done up to this hour.”

6 The voice of the sun seated on the seat was immediately heard: “There is more vice than virtue here, and it is not just that vice should be joined to the summit of virtue.” 7 The Ethiopian answered: “Then it is just for this soul to be joined to me, for while he has some vice in himself, there is total wickedness in me.” 8 The knight answered: “God’s mercy accompanies every person until death, until the very last moment, and then comes the judgment. Soul and body are still joined together in the man of whom we speak and he still has the power of discernment.” 4

9 The Ethiopian answered: “Scripture, which cannot lie, says: ‘You shall love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself.’ 5 Look how this man did all his works from fear and not from love, as he ought. 10 You will find that all the sins he confessed were confessed with little contrition. So he deserves hell, because he failed to deserve the kingdom of heaven. Thus his sins are made known here in the presence of divine justice, 11 because he has never until now felt any contrition due to divine love for the sins he has committed.” The knight answered: “He surely hoped to have true contrition and believed he would have it before death.”

12 The Ethiopian replied: “You have collected every good deed he has ever done, and you know all his words and thoughts for the salvation of his soul.” 6 The whole lot of them cannot be compared to the grace of contrition arising from divine love along with holy faith and hope, and they can hardly obliterate his sins. 14 God’s eternal justice ordains that no sinner may enter heaven without perfect contrition. It is therefore impossible that God should render a judgment against his eternally foreknown ordinance. 15 This soul is therefore to be sentenced to hell and joined to me for eternal punishment.” On these words the knight fell silent and gave no answer.

16 Then countless demons appeared, flying off like sparks from a hot fire and crying out with one voice. To him who sat like the sun on the judgment seat they said: 17 “We know that you are one God in three Persons without beginning or end. There is no other god than you. You are love itself along with
mercy and justice. 18 You existed in yourself from the beginning without loss or change, as is proper to God. Outside of you is nothing, and nothing outside of you has any joy. 19 Your love created the angels from no other matter than from your divine power. You acted as mercy dictated. 20 However, when we became inflamed with inner pride, envy, and greed, your justice-loving charity cast us together with our burning malice out of heaven into the unfathomable and shadowy abyss that is now called hell. 21 This is what your charity did then. Your charity even now cannot be separated from justice in your judgments, whether it is fulfilled according to mercy or according to equity. 22 We will go even further: If the one whom you love more than anyone, I mean, if the sinless Virgin who begot you had sinned mortally and had died without godly contrition, 23 your love for justice is such that her soul would never have reached heaven but would have been with us in hell. So, Judge, why do you not sentence this soul to us, so that we may punish him according to his works?”

24 After this a trumpet-like sound was heard at which those who heard it fell silent, and immediately a voice spoke and said: “Be silent, all of you angels and souls and demons, and hear what God’s Mother has to say!” 25 Then the Virgin herself appeared before the judgment seat, and it looked as though she were hiding some large objects beneath her mantle. She said: “You, enemies! You attack mercy, and you love justice but without charity. 26 Though these good works of this soul may be deficient and, for that reason, he should not enter heaven, yet look what I have beneath my mantle!” Then the Virgin opened the folds of her mantle on either side. On the one side could be seen a little church, as it were, with monks in it. 27 On the other side appeared men and women, God’s friends, both religious and others, all of them crying out with one voice and saying: “Have mercy, merciful Lord!”

28 There was silence then, and the Virgin spoke, saying: “Scripture says: A person with perfect faith can move the world’s mountains by means of it.” 8 What about the voices of those who both have faith and have served God with burning love? What can and should these be able to accomplish? 29 What will those friends of God do whom this man, seeking only the reward of heaven for his good works, has asked to pray for him in order that he might be saved from hell and reach heaven? 30 Are not all their tears and prayers able to snatch him and raise him up so that he can obtain God’s love and contrition before his death? 31 Besides, I will also join my own pleas to the prayers of all those saints in heaven whom he especially honored.”

32 Then she added: “O demons, by the power of the judge I order you to attend to what you in justice now see.” 33 Then all of them answered as with one voice: “We see that in the world a little water and a lot of air placate the wrath of God. So, too, by your prayer God is placated and inclined toward mercy and charity.” 34 Then the sun’s voice was heard to say: “Thanks to the
prayers of my friends, this man will yet receive enough godly contrition before
death so as not to go to hell, but he will be purged among those who have the
heaviest punishment in purgatory. 35 Once his soul has been purged, he will
receive a reward in heaven in the company of those who had faith and hope but
only small charity on earth.” Once this had been said, the demons fled.

36 Then it seemed as though a terrible and dark place was opened up before
the bride. In it there appeared a burning furnace. The fire burned on no other
fuel than demons and living souls. 37 Above the furnace appeared the soul
whose sentence was mentioned earlier. Its feet were affixed to the furnace, and it
stood upright like a man. 38 The soul stood neither on the uppermost part of
the furnace nor the lowest but, as it were, on one side of it. The shape of the
furnace was terrible and awesome. Its fire seemed to push upward through the
bottom of the soul’s feet, 39 as when water pushes itself upward through pipes,
and it went up over his head with such violent pressure that the soul’s pores were
like veins coursing with hot fire. 40 His ears looked like a blacksmith’s bellows
that continuously fanned the whole brain with their flapping. His eyes looked
like they were inside out, sunken all the way in and attached to the back of his
head. 41 His mouth was open, and his tongue was pulled out through his
nostrils and was hanging down to his lips. His teeth were like iron nails attached
to his gums. His arms were so long that they reached down to the feet. 42 Both
hands seemed to be holding and squeezing a greasy, tar-like thing that was on
fire. The skin that covered the soul looked like an animal hide just hanging over
his body, and he was dressed in a cloth that was like a sheet drenched with
sperm. 43 This cloth was so icy cold that anyone who saw it shivered. Pus oozed
out of it as from a wound with putrid blood. A stench came from it that was so
bad that it could not be compared to the worst stench in the world.

44 After the sight of this torment, the soul’s voice was heard to cry out
woe10 five times, weeping with all his might. 45 He said: “Woe is me, first of
all, because I loved God so little in return for his great virtues and for the grace
given me. Woe is me, second, because I did not fear God’s justice as I should
have. 46 Woe is me, third, because I loved the pleasure of my sinful body and
flesh. Woe is me, fourth, for all my worldly riches and pride. Woe is me, fifth,
that I ever laid eyes on you, Louis and Johanna!”

47 Then an angel said to me: “Let me explain this vision for you. The
palace you saw is an image of heaven. The great crowd of those who were
seated and dressed in white and shining clothes are the angels and the souls of
the saints. 48 The sun signifies Christ in his divine nature; the woman stands
for the Virgin who gave birth to God; the Ethiopian accusing the soul is the
devil; the knight reporting the good works of the soul is an angel. 49 The
furnace denotes hell. Hell is so hot inside that if the whole world and every-
thing in it were on fire, it could not compare to that vast furnace. 50 The

10. “Cry out woe”: Some of the details in this vision, such as the calling out in woe, and the description of
the furnace, the torment, and the icy cold, are reminiscent of the Visio Tnugdali, or Vision of Tundale, which
Birgitta may have known.
various voices heard in the furnace all speak against God. They begin and end their speech with laments. The souls look like people whose limbs are forever being stretched without relief or pause.

51 Know, too, that the fire that you saw in the furnace burns in eternal darkness, and the souls burning in it do not all have the same punishment. 52 The darkness that appeared around the furnace is called limbo. It comes from the darkness that is in the furnace. Yet both make up one place and one hell. Anyone entering it will never dwell with God.

53 Above the darkness is found the greatest punishment of purgatory sustainable by souls. Beyond this lies another place of lesser punishment, where there is only a weakened condition as to fortitude, beauty, and the like. 54 It is like when people have been sick, and once the sickness and pain are gone, they have nothing left of their strength until they gradually recover it.

55 Beyond that is a third place where there is only the punishment of the longing or God. To help your mind understand it better, I will offer you a comparison. 56 It is as when copper is mixed with gold, and the two are melted together in a very hot fire so long as necessary to purge it until the copper is consumed and only pure gold is left. 57 The stronger and thicker the copper is, the hotter the fire must be, until the gold flows like water and is all on fire. 58 The master then takes the gold to another place where it obtains its true form to be seen and touched. Afterward he puts it in a third place where it is stored to be presented to the owner.

59 This is also the case in spiritual matters. The greatest punishment of purgatory is in the first level above the darkness where you saw the aforesaid soul being purged. The demons can touch it there; poisonous vermin and wild beasts are symbolically present there. 60 There is heat and cold, darkness and confusion, all coming from the punishment of hell. Some souls are punished less there, some more, according as sins were atoned for or not while the soul remained in the body.

61 The master, that is, God’s justice, then carries the gold, that is, the souls, to other places where they only suffer from a lack of strength. There they dwell as long as necessary 62 until they attain relief either from their own special friends or from the continuous works of the Holy Church. The more help a soul gets from her friends, the quicker she convalesces and is released from that place. 63 After this a soul is brought to the third place where there is no other punishment but the longing to enter God’s presence and behold him in blessedness. 64 Many souls dwell there for a very long time, except for those who had a perfect longing to enter God’s presence and behold him while they still lived in the world.

65 Know, too, that many people die in the world who are so just and innocent that they enter right away into the presence and vision of God. 66 There

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11. “Poisonous vermin . . . are symbolically present there”; Birgitta appears to suggest a symbolic rather than a physical presence in purgatory.

12. “Presence and vision of God”; a phrase that is also employed by Master Mathias in his Homo conditus; see Piltz, Magistri Mathiae canonici Lincopensis, p. 150.
are also those who have made so much atonement for their sins with their good works that their souls shall know no punishment. However, there are few who do not come to the place of longing for God.\textsuperscript{13} 67 Hence all the souls dwelling in these three places participate in the prayers of the Holy Church and in the good works done in the world, especially in those that they did in their lifetimes and in those that are done by their friends after their death.

68 Know also that, just as sins are of many different kinds and forms, so too the punishments are of many and different kinds. Hence, just as a hungry man rejoices over a morsel of food that reaches his mouth, 69 a thirsty man over a drink, a sad man is gladdened by joy, a naked one by clothing, a sick one on coming into bed, so souls rejoice and participate in those goods that are done for them in the world.” 70 The angel added: “Blessed be the person in the world who helps souls with prayers and good deeds and physical labor. 71 God’s justice, which cannot lie, declares that souls must either be purged after death through the punishment of purgatory or released ahead of time through the good works of friends.”

72 After this many voices were heard from purgatory, saying: “O, Lord Jesus Christ, just judge, send your love to those who have spiritual power in the world, and then we will be able to participate more than now in their chants, readings, and offerings.”\textsuperscript{14}

73 Above the space from which their cries were heard there seemed to appear a house in which many voices were heard, saying: “May God reward those who send us help in our weakness!” 74 It seemed that the rays of dawn appeared in this house, and beneath the rays a cloud appeared that had nothing of the light of dawn, and from it came a great voice saying: 75 “O Lord God, through your unfathomable power grant hundredfold wages to each of those in the world who with their good works raise us up to the light of your divinity and the vision of your face!”

\# Chapter 8

\textbf{Further on the Revelation above, and the Sufferings of Purgatory}

\textbf{DATE: 1350s, ITALY}

The angel’s words to the bride about the meaning of the punishment of a man’s soul judged by God in the above chapter; and also about the lessening of the punishment because he had spared his enemies before death.

\textsuperscript{13} “Many people die ... place of longing for God”: Some elements of Birgitta’s description of purgatory are obscure or apparently contradictory, but the argument seems to be that many reach the vision of God immediately after death due to their innocence; that some reach it immediately thanks to all their good works; but the latter are few, since most people who have sinned (and thus do not belong to the category of the very innocent) must at least pass through the purgatory of longing (even if they have atoned for most of their sins with good works).

\textsuperscript{14} “Chants, readings, and offerings”: a reference to the commemorative masses and devotional exercises that could be made in atonement for a dead soul.
1 The angel said: “The soul whose predicament you saw and whose sentence you heard finds himself in the most severe punishment of purgatory. This consists in his not knowing whether he will come to rest after purgation or whether he has been condemned. 2 This is God’s justice, because this man possessed great knowledge and discernment, but he used them in a material way for worldly ends and not in a spiritual way for the sake of his soul, for he forgot and neglected God altogether while he lived.

3 Now his soul suffers from the burning fire and shivers from the cold. He is blind in the darkness, fearful of the horrible sight of demons, deaf from the devil’s howling, hungry and thirsty within himself, and clothed in shame on the outside. 4 Yet God granted him one grace after death, namely, that of not coming into contact with the demons. This was because he had shown leniency to his chief enemies for the sole sake of God’s honor. He pardoned their grave offences and made friendship with his chief enemy.

5 Know, too, that, in accordance with God’s just decision, whatever good he did, whatever he pledged and donated of his legitimate wealth diminishes and relieves his pain, especially with the aid of the prayers of God’s friends. 6 Any other, less legitimately acquired possessions that he gave away benefit their previous, legitimate owners, either in a spiritual or bodily way, provided they are worthy of it according to God’s dispensation.”

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Chapter 9

On Six Ages of Purgatory for the Soul Mentioned above, and His Voices of Woe; How His Time in Purgatory May Be Shortened

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The angel’s words to the bride about the judgment of God’s justice against the above mentioned soul, and about the satisfaction to be made in this life for this soul while in purgatory.

1 The angel speaks again: “You heard before that, through God’s love and thanks to the prayers of God’s friends, this man received contrition for his sins a short while before death, and that this contrition saved him from hell. 2 Accordingly, God’s justice decided that he should burn for six ages in purgatory after death, unless he obtains help from God’s friends in the world. These ages represent those that he lived from the first hour in which he knowingly committed a mortal sin until the time when he achieved fruitful repentance through God’s love.

3 The first age means that he did not love God for the death of Christ’s noble body and the many sufferings Christ endured for nothing other than the salvation of souls. 4 The second age means that he did not love his own soul, as a Christian ought, and did not return thanks to God for his baptism and because he was not a Jew or a pagan. 5 The third age means that he knew well enough what God commanded him to do but had little desire to carry it out. 6 The fourth age means that he knew well enough what God had for-
bidden to those wanting to reach heaven but that he dared to go against it, following not the motions of his conscience but rather his passions and desires. The fifth age means that he did not make proper use of the means of grace and of confession, although he had plenty of time. The sixth age means that he cared little about the body of Christ and did not wish to receive it frequently, since he did not want to refrain from sin, nor did he possess enough divine charity to receive the body of Christ until the end of his life.

Then a man of very modest appearance appeared. His clothes were white and shining like a priestly alb; he was girded with a linen belt and a red stole about his neck and under his arms. He commenced speaking in this way: “You who see this, pay close attention and commit to memory what you see and hear. You and all who live in the world cannot understand God’s power and what he established before time in the same way as we can who are with him. All those things that take place in an instant for God are incomprehensible to you except by means of words and images after a worldly fashion. I am one of those whom this man, now condemned to purgatory, honored with his gifts in his life. For this reason God has graciously granted me that if anyone will do what I advise, then this man’s soul will be transferred to a higher place where he will obtain his true form and know no pain other than such as a person would suffer after having had a great illness once all the pain has gone away, lying there like someone without any strength, yet full of joy in the certain knowledge that he would survive.

As you heard, the soul of this man cried out its woe five times. Therefore I have five consoling things to tell him. His first woe was that he had loved God little. In order to free him from this, let thirty chalices in which God’s blood is offered up be donated for his soul so that God himself might be more honored. His second woe was that he had not had any fear of God. To release him from this, let thirty priests be chosen, who are deemed to be pious, each of whom should say thirty masses whenever he can: nine masses of martyrs, nine of confessors, nine of all saints; the twenty-eighth mass is to be that of angels, the twenty-ninth that of Holy Mary, the thirtieth that of the Blessed Trinity. They should all have the intention of praying for his soul, so that God’s anger may be appeased and his justice turned toward mercy.

His third woe was because of his pride and greed. To release him from this, one must invite thirty paupers and humbly wash their feet and give them food, money, and clothing to comfort them. Both the person who washes and those who get washed shall humbly beseech God, for the sake of his humility and his bitter passion, to pardon this man’s soul for the greed and pride of which he was guilty. His fourth woe was carnal lust. If, then, someone should help both a virgin and a widow to enter into the convent and should, moreover, provide for a girl to join in true wedlock, giving them all enough property to allow them to eat and dress sufficiently, then God will pardon the sins this man committed in the flesh, inasmuch as these are the three ways of life commanded and chosen by God to be states of life in the world.

His fifth woe was that he had committed many sins that caused harm to a great number of people. In particular, he had made every effort to ensure
the marriage of the two persons mentioned earlier, who were as closely related by blood as if they both came from the same family. 1 Moreover, he procured their union more for his own sake than for the sake of the realm. He did so without asking the pope’s permission and against the praiseworthy ordinances of the Holy Church. 26 Many a person has become a martyr because he would not tolerate such deeds being done against God and his Holy Church and against Christian morality.

27 If anyone wishes to make reparation for so great a sin, he should go to the pope and say: ‘A certain man committed such and such a sin,’ without naming the person explicitly, 2 ‘but in the end he repented and obtained absolution though without atoning for the sin. 28 Therefore, impose on me whatever penance you want that I can endure, for I am ready to atone for that sin on his account.’ 29 Truly, even if no greater penance should be imposed on him than an ‘Our Father,’ it will suffice to lessen this soul’s punishment in purgatory.”

Chapter 10

A Complaint about the Inhabitants of Rome

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Christ’s complaint to the bride about the Romans, and about the cruel sentence Christ hands down against them, should they die in their sins.

1 God’s Son speaks these words, saying: “O, Rome, you repay me badly for my many favors. I am God, who created all things, and I manifested my great love through the harsh death of my body, a death I willed to endure for the salvation of souls. 2 Three are the paths on which I wished to come to you, and truly you wished to betray me on all of them. You hung a large rock overhead to crush me on the first path. 3 You placed a sharp spear on the second path to block my way to you. You dug a moat in the third path for me to fall into unawares and drown. 4 What I have said now should not be understood in a physical but a spiritual sense. I am speaking to the inhabitants of Rome who act in this way but not to my friends who reject their works.

5 The first path by which I am accustomed to enter the human heart is the fear of God. They have hung over it an enormous rock, 6 that is, the great presumption of a hardened heart that does not fear the judge whom none can withstand. They say in their hearts: ‘Should the fear of God come to me, the presumption of my heart shall crush it.’ 7 The second path by which I come is the

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1. “Closely related … same family”: The most important decisions on marriage were made by the Fourth Lateran Council, held in Rome in 1215. Consanguinity was an impediment to marriage, and marriage between siblings, cousins, second cousins, and third cousins was considered illegal. Dispensations could be obtained only by application to the office of the Penitentiary in Rome. See further Richter and Friedberg, Corpus iuris canonici 1, cols 1425–26.

2. “Without naming the person explicitly”: Note the point about anonymity; the phrase is omitted in the medieval Swedish translation.
inspiration of divine counsel, which often also comes through preaching and teaching. People block me from this path with a spear through their delight in sinning against my precepts and through their firm resolution to persevere in wickedness until they can no longer keep it up. This is the spear that blocks God’s grace from coming to them. 9 The third path is the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment in each person’s heart by which people can understand and ponder the nature and greatness of what I have done for them and what I suffered for them. 10 They dig a deep moat for me by saying in their hearts: ‘I love my pleasure more than his charity. 11 I’m satisfied by just thinking about the enjoyments of the present life.’ So they drown divine love and all my deeds, as it were, in a deep moat.

12 The inhabitants of Rome do all this to me, and certainly show it in their words and deeds. They count my words and deeds for nothing, cursing and insulting me and my Mother and my saints both in jest and in earnest, whether happy or angry, instead of giving me thanks. 13 They do not live according to Christian customs, as the Holy Church commands, having no more love for me than the demons. 14 The demons prefer to endure their wretchedness forever and hold on to their own wickedness rather than to see me and join me in perennial glory. 15 These are the people who refuse to receive my body, which is consecrated from the altar bread, as I myself established, and whose reception is a great help against the devil’s temptations. 16 How wretched they are who scorn such help while they are still healthy and reject it like poison, because they do not wish to refrain from sin!

17 I shall now come by a way unknown to them through the power of my divinity, bringing vengeance on the scorners of my humanity. 18 And just as they have prepared three obstacles on their paths to prevent my coming to them, so too I shall prepare three other obstacles for them, the bitterness of which they shall know and taste both dead and alive. 19 My rock is a sudden and unforeseen death that shall crush them so that all their merriments will be left behind, and their souls will be forced to come alone to my judgment. 20 My spear is my justice, and it shall separate them from me so that they will never taste of the one who redeemed them and will never behold the beauty of the one who created them. 21 My moat is the shadowy darkness of hell into which they shall fall, living there in everlasting wretchedness. All my angels in heaven and all the saints shall condemn them, and all the demons and all the souls in hell shall curse them.

22 Yet I take note of them, and I am saying this about those people with the disposition described above, whether they are religious or secular clergy or laymen or women or their sons and daughters old enough to understand that God forbids every sin, but who nonetheless voluntarily get caught up in sins and shut out God’s love and belittle the fear of him.

24 My will is still the same as it was when I hung upon the cross. I am the same now as I was then, when I forgave the thief his sins upon his asking for mercy and opened for him the gates of heaven. 1 For the other thief, how-

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ever, who despised me, I unlocked hell’s barriers, and there he remains, forever tormented for his sins.”

Chapter 11

St. Agnes Describes the “Wedding” of the Virgin; Birgitta’s Renunciation of Her Children; the World Is Like a Cooking Pot

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

St. Agnes’s words of praise and blessing to the glorious Virgin herself, and about how she prays to the Virgin for the daughter, and about the answer of the Lord and of his sweet Virgin and their consoling words to the bride, and about this world as symbolized by a pot.

1 Agnes speaks: “O, mother Mary, virgin of virgins, you can rightly be called the dawn lit by the true sun, Jesus Christ. Do I call you dawn because of your royal lineage or wealth or honors? Certainly not. You are rightly called the dawn because of your humility, the light of your faith, and your singular vow of chastity. You are the herald introducing the true sun, you are the joy of the righteous, you are the expulsion of demons, you are the consolation of sinners. For the sake of that wedding that God celebrated in you at the time, I pray that your daughter shall remain in your Son’s honor and love.”

4 God’s Mother answers: “What do you mean by this wedding? Tell me for the sake of her who is listening!” Agnes answers: “You are truly mother and virgin and bride. The most beautiful wedding was celebrated in you at the time when a human nature was joined to God in you without any admixture or loss in his divinity. Virginity and motherhood were united while virginal modesty remained intact, and you became at the same time both mother and daughter of your Creator. This day you gave birth in time to him who was eternally begotten of the Father and has wrought all things with the Father. The Holy Spirit, within and without you and all around you, made you fruitful as you gave your consent to God’s herald. God’s Son himself, who was born of you this day, was within you even before his herald came to you. Have mercy, then, on your daughter!

9 She is like a poor little woman dwelling in a valley with nothing other than some small living creature, such as a hen or a goose. She had so much

1. “Agnes”: a virgin saint who was martyred in Rome, c. 305; feast day 21 January. According to the Golden Legend, a prefect’s son in Rome fell in love with Agnes, who said she was betrothed to Christ; the prefect then put her into a brothel where the son visited her, only to be killed by the devil. She brought the son back to life with her prayer, and was consequently martyred as a witch. See Ryan, The Golden Legend, vol. 1, p. 103 (Legenda Aurea XXIV 29–46).

2. “Who was born of you this day”: Birgitta most likely received the revelation on Christmas day.

3. “Dwelling” renders “habitans,” which is added in one MS and in Gh, and is also reflected in Sw. “ther hon boddhe” [where she lived], but is omitted in the modern Latin edition.

affection for the lord living on the mountain of the valley that, out of love, she offered the lord of the mountain whatever living creature she had. 10 The lord answers her: ‘I have plenty of everything and have no need of your gifts. But are you perhaps giving a little something in order to receive something greater?’ 11 She says to him: ‘I am not offering this because you need it but because you have permitted such a poor little woman as myself to live with you on your mountain and because your servants show me respect. 12 Therefore, I give you the little comfort I have so that you know that I would do more, if I could, and that I am not ungrateful for your grace.’ 13 The lord answers: ‘Since you love me with such charity, I will bring you up to my mountain and give you and yours clothing and food each and every year.’ 14 Such is the disposition of your daughter now. She surrendered to you the one living thing she had, that is, the love of the world and of her children. Hence, it is for you to provide for her in your kindness.’

In answer the Mother says to the bride of the Son: “Stand firm, daughter. I shall ask my Son, and he will give you food each and every year and place you on the mountain where thousands upon thousands of angels are his servants. 16 Indeed, if you counted all the persons born from Adam up to the last one who will be born at the end of the world, you shall find more than ten angels for each human being. 17 The world, in fact, is no more than a cooking pot. The fire and ashes beneath the pot are the friends of the world, but God’s friends are like the choice morsels of food inside the pot. 18 When the table is ready, then the delicious food will be presented to the lord for him to enjoy. But the pot itself will be smashed, though the fire shall not be extinguished.”

Chapter 12

Advice to God’s Friends, and to Birgitta, with the Images of a Fist and a Shepherd

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Virgin Mother’s words to the daughter about the vicissitudes of God’s friends in this world, who are at times spiritually distressed and at other times comforted, and about the meaning of spiritual distress and comfort, and about how God’s friends must rejoice and be comforted in their time.

1 The Mother speaks: “In this world God’s friends must sometimes find themselves spiritually distressed, at other times spiritually comforted. Spiritual consolation means the infusion of the Holy Spirit, contemplating God’s great works, admiring his forbearance, and putting all this cheerfully into practice. 2 Spiritual distress is when the mind is involuntarily disturbed by unclean and vexing thoughts, when it suffers anguish over dishonor shown to God and over the loss of souls, when one’s heart is forced to occupy itself with worldly concerns for a good reason. 3 God’s friends can also at times be comforted with a temporal kind of comfort, such as edifying conversation, decent entertain-
ment, or other activities in which there is nothing demeaning or indecent, as you will understand from the following comparison.

4 If a fist were always held tightly closed, then either the muscles would be strained or the hand would grow weak. It is similar in spiritual matters. If the soul always remained in contemplation, then she would either forget herself and perish through pride, or else her crown of glory would be lessened. 5 The reason why God’s friends are at times comforted by the infusion of the Holy Spirit and are at other times, with God’s permission, distressed is that their distress tears up the roots of sin and firmly plants the fruit of righteousness.

6 But God, who sees hearts\(^1\) and understands all things, moderates the temptations of his friends in such a way that the temptations lead to their progress, for he does everything and allows everything to happen with due weight and measure. 7 Since you have been called in God’s Spirit, do not worry about God’s forbearance, for it is written that no one comes to God unless the Father draws him.\(^2\) 8 A shepherd uses a bunch of flowers to draw his sheep and entice them into the barn, and carefully locks the barn. The sheep, then, cannot get out but run around in circles because the barn is secured by means of walls, a high roof, and locked gates. In this way they get so used to eating hay that they become tame enough to eat hay out of the hand of the shepherd. This very thing has been done with you. 10 That which before seemed unbearable and difficult to you has now become so easy that now nothing delights you so much as God.”

## Chapter 13

On Tears and Almsgiving

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Christ’s words to the bride as to which tears are acceptable to God and which are not, and about what kind of alms should be requested or given to the poor for the sake of departed souls, and about Christ’s advice and exhortation to the bride.

1 The Son speaks: “You wonder why I do not listen to that man whom you see shedding many tears and donating a great deal to the poor in my honor. 2 I answer you in the first place: Where water flows from two springs, it frequently happens when they meet that the cloudy and muddy water of one source pollutes and defiles the purer water of the other spring. And who can drink such muddied water?

2. “No one … draws him”; cf. John 6:44.
1. “For the sake of” renders “pro” found in one manuscript and Gh; the editor follows the reading “et pro,” found in the majority of manuscripts, but this is unlikely to be correct. The point must concern alms given to the poor as a suffrage for the souls of the departed, and not alms given to the poor and for the departed.
3 It is similar with the tears of many people. Some people’s tears arise at
times due to the debasement of the inclinations of nature, at other times due
to worldly distress and the fear of hell. 4 Such people’s tears are muddy and
stinking, for they do not come from the love of God. Those tears are sweet to
me that arise from considering God’s kindesses as well as one’s own sins and
from love for God. 5 Tears such as these raise the soul up from earthly things to
heaven and bring about her new birth for eternal life. 6 There are two kinds of
birth, physical and spiritual. 6 Physical birth means a person is born from
impurity to impurity. It bewails physical damage; it gladly puts up with worldly
toils. The child of such a birth is not the child of such tears by which eternal life
is gained. 7 That other birth begets rather a child of tears and bewails the loss of
souls and takes utmost care that its child should not offend God. Such a
mother is closer to the child than the one who begets it physically, for blessed
life is gained through a birth like this.

8 Second, in regard to his giving alms to the poor, I answer you: If you
bought a cloak for your son with your servant’s money, would not the cloak
rightly belong to the one who owned the money? Of course it would. 9 It is
similar in spiritual matters. A man who oppresses his subjects or neighbors in
order to help the souls of his loved ones with their money rather provokes me
to wrath than placates me, because unjustly expropriated possessions benefit
their previous legitimate owner and not those persons for whom they are given.

10 However, because this man has been kind to you, kindness will be done
to him, both spiritually and physically—spiritually by the offering of prayers to
God for his sake. You cannot believe how much the prayers of the humble
please God. I will show you it through a comparison. 11 If someone were to
offer a great amount of silver to a king, any bystanders there would say: ‘What a
great present!’ However if the same person were to pray one Our Father for the
king, they would laugh at him. 12 It is the opposite with God. If anyone offers
one Our Father for another’s soul, it is more acceptable to God than a great
amount of gold, as could be seen in the case of good Gregory, who raised up
even a pagan emperor to a higher station through his prayers.

13 Again, tell him this: ‘Because you have shown me kindness, I pray to
God, the rewarer of all, to repay you in his graciousness.’ Tell him this as well:
‘My dear friend, I give you one counsel and I make one request of you. 14

2. “Debasement of the inclinations of nature” renders “ex humiliacione inclinacionis nature”; cf. Sw. “aff
thera ostadhelikhet oc naturinna boghelikhet” [from their unsteadiness and natural susceptibility].
3. “Tears such as these… eternal life”; cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10. “Tears” (Lat. “lacrimis”) is given by the
Swedish translator throughout here as “graat oc taarom” [weeping and tears]. The mystical gift of tears, an
essential criterion for evaluating sanctity, was thought to cleanse the heart and express both remorse for sin and a
longing for heavenly joy. Tears were an especially common feature in Cistercian spirituality. Birgitta, however,
does not overuse this motif.
5. “To a higher station”: According to medieval legend, Gregory brought about the salvation of Emperor
Trajan’s soul by his intercessions; he was a Roman emperor from 93 to 117, under whose rule the territory of
the Roman Empire extended to the full. See Ryan, The Golden Legend, vol. 1, p. 178 (Legenda Aurea XLVI 173–
79).
I counsel you to open the eyes of your heart through the consideration of the instability and vanity of the world. Think about how the love of God has grown cold in your heart and about how heavy the penalty will be and how horrible the future judgment. Attract God’s love to your heart by making use of all your time, temporal goods and works, affections, and thoughts for the glory of God, and entrust your sons to God’s plan and dispensation without letting your love of God grow any less for their sake. Second, I ask you to pray earnestly to God, who can do all things, that he may grant you patience and fill your heart with his blessed love.”

Chapter 14

The Devil Is Like a Snake, a Lion, and a Dog

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

Christ’s comforting words to the bride in her fear, telling her not to be afraid of what she has seen and heard, because it comes from the Holy Spirit, and about the devil as symbolized by a snake and a lion, the consolation of the Holy Spirit as symbolized by a tongue, and about how to resist the devil.

1 The Son says: “Why are you afraid and anxious that the devil may insert things into the words of the Holy Spirit? Have you ever heard of anyone who kept his tongue safe and sound by placing it between the teeth of an angry lion? 2 Has anyone ever sucked sweet honey from the tail of a snake? No, never. Now what does the lion or snake symbolize if not the devil—a lion in evil and a snake in cunning? What does the tongue symbolize if not the consolation of the Holy Spirit? 3 What does it mean to place one’s tongue between the teeth of a lion if not to utter the words of the Holy Spirit—who appeared in the shape of a tongue—in order to gain human favor and praise? 4 Anyone who speaks God’s praises for human gratification has surely been bitten and deceived by the devil, because those words, though they come from God, are not coming from a mouth that has the love of God, and so that person’s tongue, that is, the consolation of the Holy Spirit, will be taken away from him or her. 5 However, a person who desires nothing but God, and finds all worldly affairs bothersome, whose body does not seek to see or hear anything but what comes from God, 6 whose soul rejoices in the infusion of the Holy Spirit, such a person cannot be deceived, for the evil spirit yields to the good spirit and does not dare to approach it.

7 What does sucking honey from a snake’s tail mean if not waiting for the consolation of the Holy Spirit to come from the suggestions of the devil? 8 That consolation will never come, because the devil would rather let himself be slain

6. “Your sons”: There may be a transferred association in this vision with Birgitta’s son Karl, who is elsewhere alluded to as a Son of Tears (see Book VII 13), and whose death is described using childbirth imagery.
a thousand times over than offer any word of consolation to a soul the utter-
ance of which might lead the soul to the meaning of life. 1 9 Fear not, for God, 
who began a good work with you, will carry it through to a good end. 2 But know 
that the devil is like an unleashed dog that comes running to you with his 
temptations and suggestions when he sees you lacking the inspiration of the 
Holy Spirit. 10 However, if you should place a hard object in his way to hurt or 
paralyze his teeth, he will immediately leap away from you and will not harm 
you. 11 The hard object placed in the devil’s way signifies divine charity and 
obedience to God’s commands. 12 When the devil sees that these virtues are 
perfect in you, his teeth, that is, his attempts and his intention, will immedi-
ately be frustrated, because he sees that you would suffer anything rather than 
go against God’s commands.”

Chapter 15

A Parable about a Mother and Two Sons, and about God’s Prophecies

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Christ’s words to the bride about why the good suffer in this life while 
the bad prosper, and how God shows her through a parable that he 
sometimes promises temporal goods but that these should be taken to 
mean spiritual goods, and about why God has not predicted every 
single event to happen at particular times, although all times and 
seasons are known to him.

1 The Son of God says: “You are wondering why you have heard that a 
certain friend of God, who should be honored, is suffering hardships, while, on 
the other hand, you have heard that a certain enemy of God, who you thought 
should be whipped, has been honored, as was told you in another divine 
vision. 1 2 I answer: My words should be taken in both a spiritual and a bodily 
sense. What is the suffering of the world if not a kind of preparation and 
elevation to the crown of reward? And what does worldly prosperity mean for 
someone who abuses grace if not a kind of descent into perdition? 3 To suffer 
in the world is truly an ascension to life. But, for the unrighteous, prospering in 
the world is truly a descent into hell. In order to build up your patience by 
means of God’s word, I will tell you a parable. 4 Imagine a mother with two 
sons, one of whom was born in a dark prison, 2 knowing and hearing nothing,

1. “The utterance of which might lead the soul to the meaning of life” renders “cuius exitus tenderet ad 
finem vite”; cf. Sw. “thz häinne vare nyttelikit och holpe til eua ¨rdhelikit liiff ” [which might be useful for her and 
help her to eternal life]. The sense of the passage is that a word of consolation might put a person on the right 
path, which, as the Swedish translator implies, is the path that leads to eternal life.
2. “Dark prison”: A similar image is used in Book V int. 15.9.
only shadows and his mother’s milk. The other was born in a small cottage and had human food, a bed to rest on, and the attendance of a maidservant.

5 The mother said to the one who was born in prison: ‘My son, if you leave the darkness, you will have more delicious food, a softer bed, and a safer dwelling.’ 6 When the boy heard that, he left. If, however, his mother had promised him loftier things, such as galloping horses or ivory homes3 or a great household, he would not have believed it, 7 for he had never known anything but shadows and his mother’s milk. Similarly, God, too, sometimes makes a promise of lesser things but means something greater by them in order that people may learn to ponder the things of heaven by means of earthly ones.

8 But the mother said to the other son: ‘My son, what use is it to you to live in this disgusting cottage? Take my advice, and it will be to your advantage. I know two cities: 9 The inhabitants in the first experience endless and indescribable joy and everlasting honor. In the second city, fighters are in training, and everyone who fights is made a king, yet every loser wins.’ 10 On hearing that, the boy went out to the stadium, then returned and said to his mother: ‘I saw a remarkable game in the stadium: Some people were being knocked down and trampled upon, 11 others were being stripped and bruised, yet all of them kept quiet, all of them were playing, and no one raised his head or hand against those who knocked them down.’

12 His mother answers: ‘The city you saw is only the outskirts of the city of glory. In these outskirts, the Lord wishes to test and see who is fit to enter into the city of glory. 13 He gives a higher crown of glory to all those he has seen to be more vigilant in the contest. This is why there are people residing in the outskirts who make a test of the ones who are to be crowned in glory. 14 You saw the people lying prostrate being stripped and insulted but keeping quiet. This was because our clothes have been defiled by the darkness in our cottage. A great contest and struggle is necessary in order to wash them thoroughly.’ 15 The boy answers: ‘It is a tough thing to be trampled down and keep quiet. In my opinion it is better to return to my cottage.’ 16 His mother says: ‘If you remain in our cottage, vermin and snakes will come out of the shadows, and when you hear them your ears shall tremble, and their bite will freeze the very strength within you, and you will wish never to have been born rather than to live with them.’ 17 When the boy heard this, he felt desire for bodily goods, but his mother was thinking of it in a spiritual sense. Thus, he felt more encouraged each day and was spurred on to the crown of reward.

18 God acts in a similar way. Sometimes he promises and grants bodily or carnal goods, but really intends spiritual goods by them, so as both to spur the mind on in its fervor toward God by means of the gifts received and to keep it humble in its spiritual understanding so that it does not fall into presumption.

3. “Ivory homes”: an image of luxury; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 10:18–23. Ivory—whether imported elephant ivory, or the native whale or walrus ivory—was sometimes encountered in decorated objects and household items, but Birgitta may also have the inlaid ornamentation of Arabic architecture in mind here.
19 That is how God treated Israel. First he promised and gave them temporal goods, and also performed miracles for them, so that they might learn about invisible and spiritual goods by means of such things. 20 Then, when their understanding had attained a better knowledge of God, he used obscure and difficult words to speak to them through the prophets, adding at times words of comfort and joy, 21 as, for example, when he promised them a return to the fatherland, perpetual peace, and a restoration of all that was in ruins. 22 Though the people were carnal minded, and understood and desired all these promises in a carnal way, still God in his foreknowledge decided beforehand that some promises would be fulfilled in a physical sense, but others spiritually.

23 You might ask: Why did not God, to whom all hours and seasons are known, openly foretell that particular events would take place at specific times? And why did he say some things but with other things in mind? 24 I answer you: Israel was carnal and only desired carnal things and could only apprehend the invisible by way of the visible. Therefore, God deigned to teach his people in many different ways, 25 so that believers in God’s promises would receive a loftier crown due to their faith, so that students of virtue would become more fervent, so that slackers would become more fervently enkindled toward God, so that wrongdoers would more freely cease their sinning, 26 so that sufferers would bear their trials more patiently, so that those who toiled would persevere more cheerfully, so that the hopeful would receive a loftier crown due to the obscurity of the promise. 27 If God had only promised spiritual goods to the carnal minded, they all would have grown lukewarm in their love for heaven. If he had only promised carnal goods, what difference would there then be between man and beast? 28 Instead, in his kindness and wisdom, in order that they might govern their bodies with justice, with the moderation of those who are about to die, God gave humankind bodily goods. In order that they might desire the things of heaven, he displayed to them heavenly favors and wonders. 29 In order that they might fear sin, he displayed his terrible judgments and the possessions brought about by the bad angels. 30 So too, even today, God reveals spiritual decisions in bodily terms. When he speaks of bodily glory, he means the spiritual kind. This is in order that all teaching authority might be attributed to God alone. 31 What is worldly glory if not wind and toil and the loss of divine consolation? What is suffering if not a preparation in virtue? 32 To promise worldly glory to a righteous soul, what does that mean if not the removal of spiritual comfort? But to promise sufferings in the world, what does that mean if not the medicine and antidote for a great illness? 33 Therefore, my daughter, God’s words can be understood

4. “Why did he say some things but with other things in mind” renders “alia dixit, alia notauit”; cf. Sw. “hwipaghe gudh annat och mente annat” [why did God say one thing and mean another].
in many ways, though this does not imply any mutability in God but simply that his wisdom is to be admired and feared. Just as I expressed many things in bodily terms through the prophets, which were also fulfilled in a bodily fashion, while I expressed other things in bodily terms that came about or were intended in a spiritual sense, so too I do the same thing now. When these things happen, I shall indicate their cause to you.”

# Chapter 16

The Church and God Are Like a Goose and a Hen; and about Indulgences in Rome

Date: 1350, Italy

The Virgin tells the daughter how the devil often cunningly leads one and another of God’s servants beneath the veil of devotion in order to cause them distress, and to which people indulgences are granted, and she uses a goose to symbolize how the church is constituted and a hen to symbolize God, and she explains which people deserve to be called God’s little chickens.

1 God’s Mother says to the bride of Christ: “Why did you give hospitality to that man who has a boastful tongue, a strange way of life and worldly customs? She answers: “Because he was thought to be a good man, and I did not want to get into trouble for disdaining a man with a reputation for talking. However, if I had known beforehand that it was displeasing to God, I would no more have received him than I would have a snake.” 3 The Mother says to her: “Your goodwill set a guard and a restraint on his tongue and heart, so that he did not cause you any worries. The devil in his cunning brought you a wolf in sheep’s clothing in order to create an occasion of causing you distress and spreading talk about you.” 4 She answers: “He seems devout and penitent to us. He visits the saints and says he wants to keep away from sin.”

5 The Mother answers: “If you have a feathered goose, tell me, do you eat the meat or the feathers? Is it not so that the feathers are revolting to the stomach, but the meat provides true food and refreshment? 6 This can be applied spiritually to the arrangement and constitution of the Holy Church. She is like a goose in that she has within her the body of Christ, as it were, the freshest of meat. 7 The sacraments are like the inner parts of the goose. Its wings symbolize the virtues and acts of the martyrs and confessors. Its down represents the charity and patience of the saints, and its feathers symbolize the

1. “Give hospitality” renders “collegistis”; cf. Sw. “härbárgfadhin” [give shelter]; Birgitta offered hospitality to Scandinavian pilgrims to Rome; cf. Book VI 102, 115. This man visited Rome during the Holy Year of Jubilee in 1350 (see paragraph 27), which is also the year in which Birgitta arrived in the Holy City.

2. “And spreading talk about you”; see further on Birgitta’s detractors who voiced their doubts about her, ch. 113 add.; 122.8–10, 124.2; Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, pp. 136–59.

3. “Visits the saints,” i.e., he visits the traditional pilgrims’ shrines in Rome.
indulgences that holy men have granted and gained. 8 People who receive indulgences with the intention of gaining absolution for their previous sins while remaining in their previous vicious habits 9 only get the feathers of the goose. Their souls are neither fed nor refreshed. When they eat the feathers, they just throw up.

10 However, people who receive indulgences and are minded to flee from sin, to restore goods unjustly taken, to make satisfaction for wounds unjustly inflicted, not to earn a single penny through base profit, 11 not to live a single day except according to God’s will, to submit their will to God in fortune and misfortune, and to flee worldly honors and friendships such as these will gain pardon of their sins and be like angels of God in the sight of God.

12 The people who enjoy the absolution of previous sins yet do not have the will of giving up the previous vanities and inordinate affections of their mind, but who want to hold on to their unjust acquisitions, 13 who want to love the world in themselves and in their families, who blush for humility and do want not to flee from corrupt habits or to restrain their bodies from superfluity, for such as these the feathers, that is, the indulgences, only result in a throwing up. This means that they obtain contrition and confession 14 by which sin is thrown out and God’s grace is gained. Then, if they wish to cooperate in order to obtain it for themselves, and have an upright intention, they shall fly as if on wings away from the hands of the devil and into the bosom of God.”

15 She answers: “O, Mother of mercy, pray for this man, so that he may find favor in your Son’s sight!” 16 She says to her: “The Holy Spirit does visit him, but there is something rocklike in front of his heart that prevents God’s grace from entering. God, you see, is like a hen warming her eggs out of which come living chickens. 17 All the eggs under the hen receive her warmth, but not any other eggs lying about. The mother does not herself break the shell of the egg in which the chick is being formed, but the chick tries to break the shell with its own beak. When the mother sees that, she prepares a warmer place for her chick to hatch.

18 Likewise, God visits everyone with his grace. Some people say to themselves: ‘We want to keep away from sin and strive for perfection as far as we are able.’ The Holy Spirit visits such people more frequently, so that they are more perfectly able to do so. 19 Those people who entrust all their will to God and do not want to do even the least little thing against God’s love but imitate, instead, those others whom they see tending toward perfection, abiding by the counsel of humble persons, and struggling wisely against carnal tendencies, 20 these God places underneath himself, as a hen does with her chicks, and he makes his yoke light 4 for them and comforts them in difficulties. 21 Those people who follow their own will, however, and think that the little good they do is worthy of reward in God’s sight, and do not strive for greater perfection 22 but stay on in whatever delights their mind, using the

example of others to excuse their own weaknesses and the corruption of others as a way to lessen their own guilt, 23 such people do not turn into God’s little chicks, because they do not possess the will to break through the hardness and vanity of their hearts. Rather, if they could, they would prefer to live for as long as they were able to persevere in sin.

24 That good man, Zacchaeus,⁵ did not act so, nor did Mary Magdalene.⁶ Instead, insofar as they had offended God in all their limbs, they gave him all their limbs in reparation for their offenses. 25 Insofar as they had risen mortally in worldly rank, they lowered themselves humbly through the contempt of the world. Indeed, it is difficult to love God and the world at the same time, unless you are like the animal that has eyes both fore and aft, 26 and no matter how careful it is, such an animal will suffer. People who are like Zacchaeus and Magdalene have chosen the safer part.”

Explanation

27 This was a bailiff of Östergötland who came to the jubilee year more out of fear than of love. Concerning him, Christ says in Rome: “Everyone who has escaped some danger should be careful not to fall back again into it. Overconfident sailors are at peril even in port. 28 This man should thus beware of returning to his former office. Otherwise, if he is not careful, he will lose the object of his desires, the goods he has gathered will fall to strangers, his sons will not receive their inheritance, and he himself will die a painful death among foreigners.”

29 When he returned, however, he once again became a tax collector, and everything turned out as foretold.

‡ Chapter 17*

St. Agnes Describes a Proud Lady in a Carriage and Elaborates on the Symbolism of the Wheels

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

St. Agnes’s excellent instruction to the daughter about living in a good and praiseworthy fashion, and about avoiding a bad life displeasing to God. A carriage symbolizes here fortitude and patience; its four wheels symbolize these four virtues: the complete surrender of everything for God’s sake, humility, loving God wisely, and restraining the flesh discerningly. Certain other things are also added about members of religious orders.

* This revelation also occurs in Book VIII 15.
Agnes speaks to the bride of Christ: “Did you see Lady Pride in her carriage of pride today?” The bride answers her: “I saw her, and I got upset, because flesh and blood, dust and dirt was looking to be praised instead of humbling herself as she ought rightly to do. 2 Such a display means nothing other than a lavish wasting of God’s gifts, mere vulgar adulation, a trial to the righteous, a misery to the poor, a provocation to God, a forgetting of one’s nature, an aggravation of one’s future judgment, and the loss of souls.”

3 Agnes answers: “My daughter,1 be happy that you have been saved from things like that. Let me tell you about a carriage in which you can rest securely. The carriage where you should sit is fortitude and patience in suffering. 4 When people begin to keep the flesh in check and to entrust all their will to God, then either the mind is troubled by pride, puffing people up above and beyond themselves, as though they were righteous and had become like God, 5 or else impatience and lack of discernment break them so that they either fall back into their old habits or fail in strength and so become unfit for the work of God. 6 This is why a discerning patience is necessary so that a person does not relapse impatiently or persevere undiscerningly but, rather, adapts to his or her own capacity and circumstances.

7 The first wheel of this carriage is a wholehearted intention to surrender everything for the sake of God and to desire nothing but God. 8 Many there are who give up temporal possessions in order to avoid the bother but keep enough for their use and desire. 9 Their wheel is not easily steered or guided, for when they feel the pinch of poverty, they desire adequate comfort, and when problems weigh down on them, they demand prosperity. 10 When humiliation tries them, they murmur against God’s providence and seek to obtain honors. When asked to do something that goes against their inclinations, they desire their freedom. 11 Accordingly, a person’s will is pleasing to God when it seeks nothing of its own both in good times and in bad.

12 The second wheel is humility. This makes people regard themselves as unworthy of any good thing, keeping their sins in mind at all times and looking on themselves as guilty in God’s sight. 13 The third wheel is a wise love for God. A wise love for God obviously belongs to people who examine themselves and detest their vices, who are saddened by the sins of their neighbors and relatives 14 but rejoice in their spiritual progress toward God, who do not want their friends to live for enjoyment and comfort but to serve God, and who are wary of their friends’ worldly advancement, in case it entails offenses against God. 15 Such, then, is the wise love that detests vice, that does not fawn on people in order to gain favor or honor but loves those people more who are seen to be more fervent in their charity for God.

16 The fourth wheel is the discerning restraint of the flesh. A married person may reason in this manner: ‘Look, the flesh is pulling me about inordinately. If I live according to the flesh, I know for certain that I will anger the

1. “My daughter”: Agnes calls Birgitta her daughter here, reflecting Birgitta’s strong attachment to this Roman saint; see further, for example, ch. 20, ch. 124, and Book III 30.
Creator of the flesh, who is able to wound and enfeeble, to kill and to give life.\(^2\)

17 Therefore, for the love and fear of God, I will restrain my flesh with a good will. I will live in a decent and orderly way to the honor of God.’ A person with such thoughts, who also seeks the help of God, has a wheel that is acceptable to God. 18 If he or she belongs to a religious order and reasons thus: ‘Look, the flesh is pulling me toward pleasure, and I even have the place, the time, the means, and the age to enjoy it, yet with God’s help, and for the sake of my holy vows, I will not sin just to gain a momentary pleasure. 19 I made a great vow to God: I entered poor and shall depart poorer and undergo judgment for each and every action. 20 Therefore, I will abstain so as not to offend my God or scandalize my neighbor or do myself injury.’ Abstinence like that deserves a great reward.

21 Another person may be living amid honors and pleasures and may reason in this way: ‘Look, I have plenty of everything, but there are needy poor, and we all have one God. What have I done to deserve what I have or what have they done not to deserve it? What, after all, is the flesh but food for worms? 22 What are all these pleasures but a source of nausea and sickness, a waste of time and an inducement to sin? Therefore, I shall keep my flesh in check, so that worms do not run riot in it, and so that I do not receive a heavier sentence or waste my time of penance. 23 Perhaps my poorly trained flesh will not be easily bent to the coarse fare of a pauper, but I shall withdraw it by degrees from certain delicacies that it can easily do without, so that it gets what it needs but nothing beyond that.’ 24 Someone with such thoughts, and who makes an effort to act on them according to his or her ability, can be called both confessor and martyr, for it is a kind of martyrdom to have access to pleasure and not to make use of it, to live in honor yet to despise honor, to have a great reputation yet to think little of oneself. Such a wheel is very pleasing to God.

25 Well, my daughter, I have described for you the image of a carriage. Its driver is your angel, so long as you do not shake off his bridle and yoke from your neck, that is, so long as you do not dismiss his saving inspirations by opening up your senses and your heart to vain or obscene things. 26 Now I want to tell you about the kind of carriage in which that lady was seated. That carriage is obviously impatience—her impatience with God and with her fellow man and with herself. 27 She is impatient with God when she criticizes his secret decisions, for things do not go as well for her as she would like. She maligns her fellow man, for she cannot get at his possessions. She is moreover impatient with herself, for she impatiently reveals the hidden things of her heart.

28 The first wheel of this carriage is pride, in that she gives preference to herself and is judgmental of others; she despises the lowly and is ambitious for honor. 29 The second wheel is disobedience to God’s precepts. This leads her to make excuses in her heart for her own weaknesses, to make light of her guilt,
to be presumptuous in her heart and to defend her own wickedness. The third wheel is greediness for worldly possessions. This leads her to spend her possessions wastefully, to neglect and forget her own situation and the coming world, to fret at heart, to be lukewarm in the love of God. The fourth wheel is her self-love. This bars out reverence and fear of God and distracts her attention from her own death and judgment.

The driver of this carriage is the devil. He fills her with audacity and glee in every undertaking he inspires in her. The two horses drawing the carriage are the hope of a long life and the intention to keep on sinning until the very end. The bridle is her guilty fear about going to confession. Through her hope of a long life and her intention to persevere in sin, this guilty fear pulls the spirit from the straight path andladens it so heavily with sin that neither fear nor shame nor warning can make her get up. Just when she thinks she is on firm footing, she will sink down to the depths unless the grace of God comes to her aid.

35 Christ speaks of the same lady: “She is a viper with the tongue of a harlot, the bile of dragons in her heart, and bitter poison in her flesh. Her eggs will therefore be poisonous. Happy are they who have no experience of the burden of them!”

Chapter 18

Birgitta Praises the Virgin, and Is Prepared by the Apostles to Go to Christ on Behalf of All the Faithful

Date: 1350s, Italy

The daughter’s words of praise to the glorious Virgin, and the gracious response of the Virgin to the daughter. In it the Virgin grants her daughter many graces as well as many other good things both from herself and from the apostles and saints.

1 “O sweet Mary,” says the bride, “blessed are you with an eternal blessing, for you were a Virgin before childbirth, a Virgin after childbirth, a Virgin together with your spouse, an undoubted Virgin for a doubting spouse. 2 So blessed are you, for you are Mother and Virgin, God’s dearest one, purer than all the angels, the one most full of faith in the company of the apostles, alone in the bitterest sorrow of your heart, whose abstinence outshines that of all the confessors, whose chaste continence excels that of all the virgins. 4 So may all things up above and down below bless you, for, through you, God the

1. “A doubting spouse”; cf. Matthew 1:19. Joseph’s doubt in Mary’s virginity is expressed in the so-called Protoevangelium of St. James (ch. 13), a second-century work that exercised a considerable influence on devotions and on controversies in the later Middle Ages.
Creator became a man; through you the righteous find grace, sinners find pardon, the dead find life, the exiled return to their homeland."

5 The Virgin answers: “It is written that when Peter bore witness to my Son and called him the Son of God, he received the answer: ‘Blessed are you, Simon, for body and blood have not revealed this to you.’” 6 So I say now: This salutation was not revealed to you by your bodily soul but by him who was without beginning and is without end. Be therefore humble, and I will be merciful to you. 7 John the Baptist, as he promised, will be gentle to you; Peter will be mild, and Paul strong as a giant. John the Baptist is going to say to you: ‘Daughter, sit on my lap!’ 8 Peter will say: ‘My daughter, open your mouth, and I shall feed you with sweet food!’ 9 Paul will dress you and arm you with the arms of love. And I, who am the Mother, will present you to my Son.

9 But, my daughter, you can understand all this even in a spiritual sense. John, whose name means the grace of God, denotes true obedience. He was and is sweet and gentle indeed—sweet to his parents for his wondrous grace, sweet to humankind for his extraordinary preaching, sweet to God for his holiness of life and obedience. 11 He was obedient in his youth, obedient in fortune and misfortune; obedient, and constantly humble when he might have been honored; obedient, too, in his death. 12 This is why obedience says: ‘Sit on my lap!’ That means: Rise to lowly things, and you will have lofty ones. Give up bitter things and you will get sweet ones. 13 Give up your own will, if you want to be little. Despise earthly things, and you will become heavenly. Despise superfluity, and you will have spiritual abundance.

14 Peter denotes holy faith: the faith of the Holy Church. Just as Peter remained steadfast until the end, so too the faith of the Holy Church will remain steadfast without end. 15 This is why Peter, that is, the holy faith, says: ‘Open your mouth and you will have good food!’ This means: Open the intellect of your soul, and in the Holy Church you will find the sweetest of foods, that is, the very body of the Lord in the sacrament of the altar, the new and the old law, the teachings of the doctors, the patience of the martyrs, the humility of the confessors, the purity of the virgins, and indeed the foundation of all the virtues. 17 Accordingly, seek the holy faith in the church of St. Peter, keep in mind the sought-after faith, and then put it into practice.

2. “Body and blood have not revealed this to you”; cf. Matthew 16:17.
4. “John, whose name means the grace of God”: a common medieval interpretation of John’s name (see, for example, Ryan, The Golden Legend, vol. 1, p. 50 [Legenda Aurea IX 1]); literally, in Hebrew, it means “God has shown mercy.”
5. “Rise” renders “ascende,” following the editor; two variants have “descende” [descend], which fits the sense better.
6. “Peter denotes holy faith”: This is based on Matthew 16:16–18, where the apostle Simon is renamed Peter (meaning “rock”) after having professed his faith in Christ as the son of God. Although the association of Peter with faith has since become commonplace, it was not so in Birgitta’s time. For instance, the Golden Legend (see Ryan, vol. 1, p. 340 [Legenda Aurea LXXXIV 1–17]) lists several names of St. Peter with various interpretations, but none refers specifically to faith.
18 Paul denotes patience, for he was zealous toward those who fought against holy faith, joyful in hardships, long-suffering in hope, patient in infirmities, compassionate with those in pain, humble in virtues, hospitable with the poor, merciful toward sinners, the teacher and master of all, persevering in the love of God until the end. 19 Thus, Paul, that is, patience, will arm you with the arms of the virtues, for true patience, founded upon and strengthened by the examples and patience of Christ and his saints, enkindles the love of God in the heart, makes the spirit burn for strong action, renders a man humble, mild, merciful, zealous for heaven, mindful of himself, and persevering in the tasks undertaken.

20 And so I, the Mother of mercy, shall introduce to my Son everyone whom obedience nourishes in the lap of humility, everyone whom the faith feeds with the food of sweetness, everyone whom patience dresses in the arms of virtue, and my Son will crown that person with his sweet crown. 21 In him is incomprehensible strength, incomparable wisdom, unspeakable goodness, wonderful love. Then no one will be able to snatch that person away from his hand. 22 But, my daughter, though I am speaking to you, yet by you I mean all of those who follow the holy faith with deeds of love. Just as by the one man, Israel, all Israelites were meant, so by you are understood all the true faithful.”

On the Virgin’s Beauty; She Is Compared to a Goldsmith

Date: 1350s, possibly on the feast of the birth of Mary (8 September), Italy

The daughter’s words to the Lady in praise of her virtue and beauty, and the Virgin’s answer confirming her praise, and the Son’s comparison of his Mother to a goldsmith.

1 “Sweet Mary, fresh beauty, shining beauty! Come and listen to me, so that my ugliness may be purified and my love enkindled! Your beauty gives three gifts to the head. 2 First, the cleansing of the memory so that God’s words enter smoothly; second, the pleasant retention of the words heard; third, their zealous communication to one’s neighbor. Your beauty also grants three things to the heart. 3 First, it removes the heavy burden of sloth, when your love and humility are contemplated; second, it brings tears to the eyes, when your poverty and patient suffering are brought to mind; third, it gives the heart a sweet inner fire, when the memory of your devotion is sincerely recalled.

8. “By the one man, Israel”: the patriarch Jacob was renamed Israel; cf. Genesis 32:28.
1. “Sloth” renders “accedie”; cf. Sw. “ätinna,” the spiritual sin of sloth, which has a range of connotations, from the lack of spiritual rigor and compunction, a spiritual sadness afflicting the soul, indifference and negligence, to a restless inability to work or pray.
4 Truly, my Lady, you are the most precious beauty, the most desirable beauty, for you are the help given to the sick, the comforter in sorrow, everyone’s mediator. 5 Thus, all those who have heard that you would be born, and those who know you to have already been born, can surely exclaim: ‘Come, beauty most splendid, and light up our darkness. Come, beauty most precious, and take away our reproach. 6 Come, beauty most sweet, and lessen our bitterness. Come, beauty most powerful, and undo our captivity. Come, beauty most fair, and destroy our foulness!’ 7 Therefore, may such great beauty be blessed and revered, the beauty that all the patriarchs longed to see, of which all the prophets sang, in which all the elect rejoice!’

8 The Mother answers: “May God, my beauty,² be blessed! It is he who has given you such words to speak! And so I tell you that the most ancient beauty, the eternal and highest beauty, which made and created me, shall be your comfort. 9 The beauty that is oldest and yet new, renewing all things, which was in me and was born of me, shall teach you wonders. The most desirable beauty, which gives joy and delight to all, shall inflame the spirit of your love. 10 So trust in God, for when the heavenly beauty appears, all earthly beauty will crumble and be regarded as dung.”

11 Then God’s Son said to his Mother: “O blessed Mother, you are like a goldsmith preparing a beautiful object. All those who see the object are filled with gladness and present precious stones or gold in order to perfect it. 12 Thus, dear Mother, you offer help to everyone struggling to rise to God,³ and leave no one without your consolation. You can therefore well be called the blood of the heart of God. 13 Just as each member of the body receives life and strength from the blood, so too everyone comes to life again after sin and is made more fruitful before God through you.”

# Chapter 20

St. Agnes Encourages Birgitta to Stand Firm, and Alludes to a Corrupt Woman; God Is Like an Eagle

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

St. Agnes’s lesson to the daughter about not relapsing and not advancing properly, and about the right way to begin or continue with abstinence, and about what kind of continence is pleasing to God.

1 Agnes speaks: “Daughter, stand firm and do not relapse, for a serpent lies at your heels ready to bite. Yet, do not rush unduly ahead either, for the tip

². “God, my beauty,” renders “Deus, pulchritudo mea,” i.e., God who is my beauty.
³. “Dear Mother, you offer help to everyone struggling to rise to God”; cf. “Alma Redemptoris Mater,” one of the major Marian antiphons, particularly the line “succurre cadenti, surgere qui curat, populo” [assist you people who have fallen, as we strive to rise again]. See Klockars, Birgitta och böckerna, pp. 99–114, on Birgitta’s influences from the liturgy; and see note to ch. 86.1 below.
of a sharp lance is in front of you, and if you advance at the wrong speed, you
will be wounded. 2 What does a relapse mean if not letting trials lead to regrets
about having taken on a more austere and wholesome way of life and to a
desire of returning to old habits and delighting the mind with dirty thoughts? 3
Such thoughts, even if they give some pleasure to the mind, only obscure every
good thing and by degrees lead away from all goodness. Nor should you rush
unduly ahead, that is, punish yourself beyond your strength or imitate the good
works of others beyond your capacity. 4 God has ordained from eternity that
heaven should be opened to sinners through works of love and humility, yet by
preserving moderation and discretion in every way. 5 Now, then, the envious
devil persuades the imperfect man to fast beyond his strength, to promise to do
unaccustomed things that he cannot manage, to desire to imitate more perfect
models without considering his own strengths and weaknesses. 6 The devil
does this either in order that, when the man’s strength fails him, he should
continue with his badly begun vows out of human embarrassment rather than
for the sake of God, or in order that he should quickly give up the struggle
because of his indiscretion and weakness.

7 For this reason, use as your measure your own self, that is, your
strengths and weaknesses, since some people are stronger by nature, others
weaker, some more fervent by the grace of God, others keener due to good
habits. 8 Hence, regulate your life in agreement with the advice of God-fearing
men, so that the serpent does not sting you due to your thoughtlessness, and so
that the poisonous tip of the sword, that is, the poisonous suggestion of the
devil, does not delude your mind so as to make you want to seem more than
you are or long to become something beyond your strength and powers.
9 There are, indeed, some people who believe they can reach heaven by their
own merits, and God spares them from the devil’s temptations due to his
hidden plan. There are others who think they can make reparation to God for
their transgressions with their own works. The error of all of these is altogether
damning, 10 for even if a person were to kill his body a hundred times over, he
could not make up a thousandth of the account he owes to God, because it is
God who gives us the ability and the will, seasons and health, who fills us with
a desire for the good, 11 who gives us riches and honor, who kills and gives life,
raises up and lays low. 1 All things are in his hand. Hence to him alone should
all honor be given, and no one deserves to be counted for anything before God.

12 Since you are wondering about the lady who came for indulgences but
was corrupted, 2 I answer you: There are some women who have the virtue of
continence but do not love it. They experience neither a great longing for
pleasure 3 nor violent temptation. 13 If honorable proposals of marriage were
made to them, they would accept. However, since no great offers are made to

1. “Who gives us riches... raises up and lays low”; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 2:6.
2. “Corrupted” renders “corrupta est”; cf. Sw. “vardh smittadh oc valdfôrdh” [was corrupted and seduced].
3. “A great longing for pleasure” translates “delectatio”; cf. Sw. “storan skörlimmadz lusta” [a great
unchaste desire], i.e., an excessive sexual desire.
them, they look down on lesser offers. In this way, continence sometimes gives rise to pride and presumption, which, by divine permission, leads to a fall, such as you have now heard. If a woman were so minded as not to want to be stained even once, not even if the whole world were offered her, it would be impossible for such a woman to be left to shame. If, however, in his secret justice, God permitted such a one to fall, it would rather lead to her reward than to sin, provided that she fell against her will.

16 Know, then, that God is like an eagle that from on high views everything down below. If an eagle should see anything rising up from the ground, it immediately swoops down and snatches it. If it catches sight of something poisonous coming against it, it would pierce it like an arrow. If something unclean is dropped on it from above, it gets rid of it with a great shake just like a goose does. God acts like that as well. If he sees human hearts rising against him due to the weakness of the flesh or the devil’s temptations against the will of the spirit, he immediately swoops down through an inspiration of contrition and penance and brings it to naught, making the person return to God and come to himself again. If the poison of carnal desire or greed enters the heart, God quickly pierces the mind with the arrow of his love, so that the person does not persevere in sin and get separated from God. If some impurity of pride or the dirt of lust defiles the spirit, he shakes it quickly off, just like a goose, through constant faith and hope, so that the spirit does not become hardened in vice or the soul that is joined to God become stained unto damnation.

21 Therefore, my daughter, in all your feelings and actions, consider God’s justice and mercy, and always keep the end in sight.”

Chapter 21

Birgitta Is Encouraged to Keep Teaching and Converting Others

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The bride’s words to God concerning his virtue and splendor, and the Virgin’s consoling answer to the daughter, and about how God’s good servants should not stop preaching and admonishing people, whether the people convert or not; the Virgin shows this by means of a comparison.

1 “Blessed are you, my God, who are three and one: three persons in one nature. You are goodness and wisdom itself; you are beauty and power itself;
you are justice and truth itself. All things live and subsist through you. 2 You are like a flower that grows alone in a field. All those who draw near to it receive sweetness for their palate, an uplift for their spirits, a delight for their eyes and strength in every other limb. 3 Likewise, all who come near to you become more beautiful by leaving sin behind, more wise by following your will rather than the flesh, more righteous by seeking the advantage of the soul and the glory of God. 4 Therefore, most kind God, grant me to love that which pleases you, to resist temptations bravely, to scorn all worldly things and to keep you constantly in my memory.”

5 The Mother answers: “This salutation came to you through the merits of good Jerome, 3 who left false wisdom and found true wisdom, who scorned earthly honor and was rewarded with God himself. 6 Happy is such a Jerome, happy those who imitate his life and doctrine. He was a lover of widows, a mirror for those advancing toward perfection, a teacher of all truth and purity. But tell me, my daughter, what is troubling you in your heart?” 7 She said: “A thought occurred to me that said, ‘If you are good, your goodness is enough for you. Why judge and admonish and teach your betters, something that belongs neither to your state nor position?’ This thought so hardens the spirit that it even neglects its own progress 4 and grows completely cold to God’s love.”

8 The Mother answers: “This thought has also held back many advanced souls from God. The devil hinders good people from speaking to the wicked so that they may not be brought to feel compunction. He also hinders them from speaking to the good so that they will not be raised to a higher rank, for, when good people hear good doctrine, they are raised to a greater reward and a higher rank. 9 For example, the eunuch 5 who was reading Isaiah would have received one of the lesser punishments in hell, but Philip met him and taught him a shortcut to heaven and so raised him up to a level of happiness. 10 Likewise, Peter was sent to Cornelius. 6 If Cornelius had died beforehand, he would indeed have come to a place of rest because of his faith, but then came Peter and led him to the gateway to life. Similarly, Paul came to Denis 7 and led him to the reward of blessedness. 11 For this reason, the friends of God should not grow tired in God’s service but should labor on in order that the wicked may be made better and the good may attain a greater perfection.

12 Anyone with the will to whisper in the ears of every passerby that Jesus Christ truly is the Son of God, and who struggles as far as he or she can for the conversion of others, 13 even though no one or only a few convert, will still

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3. “Jerome”: church father, d. 420; creator of the standard translation of the Bible, the Vulgate. “False wisdom” refers to his rejection of classical learning following a vision in which he was told that he followed Cicero rather than Christ. His love “of widows” refers to his following among Roman noblewomen, including one named Paula and her daughter Eustochium, who followed him to Bethlehem and lived in a convent nearby.


7. “Denis,” i.e., Denis (Dionysius) the Aeropagite; cf. Acts 17:34.
obtain the same reward as if all of them had converted. I will show you this by means of a comparison. 14 If, on the order of their lord, two mercenaries dig through the hard rock of a mountain, and one of them were to find choice gold there, but the other none, both of them would be deserving of the same wages because of their work and their intention. 15 In the same way, Paul, who converted many people, and the other apostles, who converted fewer, were nevertheless all united in their intention. God’s dispensation, however, remains hidden. 16 One should therefore never give up, not even if only a few or none at all are open to God’s words. As the thorn protects the rose and the donkey carries his master, 17 so too the devil, like a thorn of sin, is as useful to the elect through the tribulations he causes as thorns are to roses. In this way, they are not stupidly overcome by the presumption of their hearts. Thus, just like a donkey, he conveys them to God’s consolation and a greater reward.”

Chapter 22

Various Messages about Present-Day Sinners

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

About how human malice in modern times surpasses the cunning of the devil, and about how people are now quicker to sin than the devil is to tempt, and about the sentence pronounced against such people, and how God’s friends should labor with courage and haste in their preaching; also, concerning the infusion of knowledge in God’s friends.

1 The Son speaks: “If I could get upset, I would rightly be able to say now: I regret having made humankind. 1. They have become like animals that of their own free will run into the nets. However much you cry out to them, they still follow their own selfish appetites. 2. And not all the blame can be put on the devil’s violent attempts on humankind—no, rather, the people themselves outstrip his malice. Like hunting dogs that are first led on leashes, but then, once they are accustomed to catching and devouring animals, speedily reach the prey ahead of their leader, 3 so also humankind, now accustomed to sinning and fascinated by it, is quicker to sin than the devil is to tempt. That is not strange. It has been a long time since the Apostolic See, the head of the world, 2 was pleasing to God by its sanctity of life and example, as it was in earlier times, and all the other members have therefore been made weak and listless. 4 They do not consider the reason why God in his riches 3 became poor and needy—in order to teach us to scorn perishable things and to love heavenly ones. Man is

2. “Apostolic See, the head of the world” renders “sedes apostolica, caput mundi”; cf. Sw. “värdinna howodh som är páfwans gardhir” [the head of the world, which is the pope’s court].
poor by nature but has become rich by means of false riches. This is what
everyone tries to imitate, and few are found who do not imitate it.

5 Hence, the plowman shall come from the Almighty. Whetted by the
wisest One, he does not seek property or beautiful bodies nor has any respect
for the power of the mighty nor fears the threats of princes nor is swayed by
human favor. 6 He shall sow human flesh and raze to the ground the homes
of spirits; he shall deliver bodies to maggots and souls to the ones whom they
served. 7 Therefore, may my friends, to whom I am sending you, labor with
courage and with haste, for what I am telling you will not take place in the last
days, as I said before, but in these very days. 8 Many of those yet living will see
with their own eyes the fulfillment of the scripture that says: ‘May their wives
be widows and their sons fatherless,’ and they shall lose all that they desire.
9 However, I, merciful God, shall receive all those that come to me in humility.
I shall give myself to those who fulfill the works of righteousness, for it is
right to clean out the house in which the king shall enter, to wash the glass so
that the drink may be clear, to thresh the grain briskly from its husks, and to
press down hard on whatever is being molded into a form so that it attains the
shape of the form. 11 As summer comes after winter, so too I shall grant con-
solation after their hardships to those who long to be as little children and who
place more value on the things of heaven than on those of earth. 12 However,
just as a man is not born and dies at one and the same time, so all this will be
fulfilled in its own time.

13 Know, too, that I intend to treat some people according to the common
proverb: ‘The whip will spur him on’—the pain will compel him to speed up.
I will treat others as it is written: ‘Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.’ 14
To a third set of people I shall speak soothingly and inspiringly: ‘Come, igno-
rant and simple persons, and I shall give you a mouth and a wisdom such as
the tongue-waggers will not be able to oppose.’ This is what I have already
done in these days: I have filled the simple with my wisdom, and they are proof
against the learned. I cast out the boastful and mighty, and they quickly sub-
sided. 16 That is no wonder: For I commanded the wise to cut off the serpents’
tongues, as you heard, and they refused. Not even their mother, who was the
scourge of the commons, was willing to quench their throats in order to
quench the fire of desire kindled in her children’s hearts, as I bade. 17 This is

5. ‘The homes of spirits,’ i.e., shrines to false gods and idols.
7. ‘The whip will spur him on’ renders ‘Percute eum in collo et curret’; cf. Sw. ‘slan a halsin oc lít lópan’ [hit him on the neck and let him run].
9. ‘To cut off the serpents’ tongues, as you heard’; cf. Book VI 32.25, concerning Albrecht of Mecklenburg and his wife, Euphemia, who are described as serpents.
10. ‘Scourge of the commons’ renders ‘virga communitatis’; cf. Sw. ‘almogans lime’ [scourge of the commons]; see also ch. 3 note 12. The meaning is unclear, but it might be a continued allusion to the political revelation of Book VI 32.
why I have cut them down in their season of happiness and have cut off their own tongues.”

† Chapter 23

St. John and the Virgin Discuss a Sinful Cleric; the Devil as Coin-Maker; and of Seven Signs; and the Man Is Identified in the Explanation as a Cistercian Who Repented

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

The words of John the Evangelist to the glorious Virgin about a mere sinful hypocrite, and the Virgin’s answer regarding his characteristics, and about the devil’s deceptions toward him, and about how the good spirit is recognized by seven signs and the bad spirit is discerned by as many signs.

1 John the Evangelist said to God’s Mother: “Hear me, Virgin and Mother of one Son, not several sons,1 Mother of the only begotten Son of God, the fashioner and redeemer of all things. 2 Listen, I say, as you surely do listen, to how this man has been deceived by the devil, how he is struggling to obtain something impossible, how and in what matters he has been instructed by the spirit of lies,2 how far he has removed himself from God in his sheep’s clothing but with his lion’s heart. 3 I taught that there are three who bear witness in heaven and on earth:3 the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. 4 The evil spirit, however, bears witness to this man that he has become completely holy.4 Yet the Father does not strengthen him with his power nor does the Son visit him with his wisdom nor does the Holy Spirit inflame him with his love. 5 That is no wonder, for he aspires to power against the power of the Father; he wants to be wise against the wisdom of the Son; he is inflamed but not as the Holy Spirit sets aflame. 6 So ask your Son either to take him away soon, so that no more souls may be lost, or to humble him quickly for his errors.”

7 The Mother answered: “Hear me, then, virgin,5 though you are a male and not a female person. You are the one whom it pleased God to call away

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11. See also Kerby-Fulton, Reformist Apocalypticism, p. 108, on this vision.
3. “I taught . . . and on earth”: cf. 1 John 5:7–8. The allusion is to the Vulgate, which reads: “And there are Three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one. And there are three that give testimony on earth: the spirit and the water and the blood. And these three are one.” The italicized words are today considered inauthentic and do not appear in most Bibles.
4. “That he has become completely holy” translates “quod totus est factus sanctus”; cf. Sw. “at han är allir hans” [that he is all his], which reflects two Latin manuscripts, “factus est suus,” which, indeed, makes better sense. See further Aili, Book IV, p. 50.
5. “Virgin”: John’s chastity is juxtaposed with the virginity of Mary, thus making him a suitable “new son” for her.
from the world through the easiest of deaths after my own. 8 Indeed, it was as though I had fallen asleep when my soul and body were separated, but then I awoke in everlasting joy. No wonder, indeed, for I had suffered more bitterly than all the others at my Son’s death, and it pleased God thus to separate me from the world through the easiest of deaths. 9 But you were closest to me among the apostles, and the object of greater signs of affection than all the others, and my Son’s passion was bitterer for you than for the rest, because you beheld it at a closer distance than others, and you also lived longer than the others, as if you became a martyr through the deaths of them all. 10 It therefore pleased God to call you from the world through the easiest of deaths after my own, for the Virgin had been entrusted to a virgin. Therefore, what you asked for shall be done without delay.

11 My daughter, let me show you what sort of person this man is of whom we are speaking. He is like a servant of that coin-maker, the devil. The devil melts down and then stamps his coin—that is, his servant—with his suggestions and temptations, until he has fashioned him after his liking. 12 Once he has corrupted and twisted a person’s will toward the pleasures of the flesh and the love of the world, he then impresses his image and signature on the person, and it becomes apparent enough from external signs who it is whom that person wholeheartedly loves. 13 When a man carries out in act the desire of his mind and wants to get more involved in worldly affairs than his state in life requires, and would do and desire even more things, if he were able, then he is shown to be the devil’s perfect coin.

14 You should realize, however, that God’s coin differs from the devil’s coin. God’s coin is of gold, shining, pliable, and precious. Every soul with the stamp of God on it shines with divine love, is pliable in her patience, and precious in her continual good works. 15 Accordingly, every good soul is melted down by God’s power and tested with many temptations. Through them the soul, contemplating her defects and her origins as well as God’s kindness and patience toward her, is rendered all the more precious to God, the more humble, patient, and conscientious she is found to be.

16 The devil’s coin, however, is of copper and lead. It is copper, because it bears a likeness to gold: It is hard and pliable, yet not the way gold is. 17 Likewise, the unrighteous soul seems to herself to be righteous, judges everyone, is more interested in herself than in others, is unpliant with respect to humble actions, soft in acting in her own interest, intractable in her own plans, admirable to the world, despicable to God. 18 The devil’s coin is also leaden in that it is ugly, soft and pliable, and heavy. 19 Likewise, the unrighteous soul is ugly in her lustful desires, burdensome in her longing for the world, as pliable as a reed that bends in the direction of whatever the devil

6. “The easiest of deaths”; see note to ch. 1.15.
7. “You beheld it at a closer distance than others”: John was present at the crucifixion; see 23.1 above.
inspires in her mind, sometimes, indeed, being even more ready to do it than
the devil is to tempt her to it. 20 This is the disposition of the coin-maker’s
servant. He gets bored in keeping the observances of his rule, as he vowed, and
thinks up ways of gaining people’s appreciation through a pretended holiness,
all the while feeding his body sumptuously. 21 The devil, then, soon filled his
head with lies at night.9 They deluded him into believing impossible things
that will not come to be. Instead, his life will be cut short, and he will not obtain
the honor for which he so longs.

22 Whenever one comes across an unknown coin, one sends it to a wise
expert who has sufficient knowledge of its weight and shape. But where will we
find such an expert? 23 Even if we did find him, he may care little or nothing
about whether the coin is counterfeit or genuine. There is only one solution in
such a case, as I will explain by way of a comparison. 24 If you handed a florin
to a dog, it would not bother to take it. But if the florin were coated with fat,
there is no doubt that the dog would take it then. 25 The present case is like
that. If you went to a theological expert and said: ‘That man is a heretic,’ he
would not be bothered, for his love of God is altogether grown cold.10 However,
if you said: ‘He has plenty of florins,’ then everyone would rush to him. 26
Therefore, it will soon be as Paul says: ‘I will destroy and humble the wisdom
of the wise, and I will exalt the humble.’11

27 My daughter, you can recognize both the Holy Spirit and the unclean
spirit through seven signs. First, the Spirit of God makes a man deem the world
worthless and consider in his heart all worldly honor as mere air. 28 Second, it
endears God to the soul, and all delight in the flesh grows cold. Third, it
inspires him to patience and to glorying only in God. Fourth, it stimulates the
mind to be loving and compassionate with one’s neighbor and even with one’s
enemies. 29 Fifth, it inspires him to all kinds of abstinence, even from licit
things. Sixth, it makes him trust in God in the midst of hardships and even to
glory in hardships. Seventh, it gives him the desire of wanting to depart and to
be with Christ,12 rather than to prosper in the world and become soiled.

30 The evil spirit has seven effects to the contrary. First, it makes the world
seem sweet, and heaven distasteful. Second, it makes a man seek honors and
forget about the meaning of his life. Third, it arouses hatred and impatience in
the heart. Fourth, it makes him bold toward God and obstinate in his own
plans. 31 Fifth, it leads him to make light of his sins and to make excuses for
them. Sixth, it inspires in him frivolity of mind and every carnal impurity.
Seventh, it inspires in him the hope of a long life and a feeling of shame about
going to confession. Guard your thoughts carefully, then, so that you do not get
deceived by this spirit.”

to the time when a monk is most prone to heretical thoughts and lapses in his faith.
11. “As Paul says . . . humble”; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:19.
Explaination

32 This was a priest of the Cistercian order who, after eighteen years of apostasy, repented and returned to the monastery. He said that it was impossible for anyone to be damned and denied that God spoke with anyone in this world or that anyone could see the face of God prior to God’s judgment. 33 When Lady Birgitta heard this, the Holy Spirit said to her: “Go and tell that brother this: ‘Brother, you do not see as I do how the devil still keeps your mind and tongue tied even in your old age. 34 God is eternal, and his reward is eternal. Therefore, return quickly and wholeheartedly to God and to the true faith, for you will assuredly not get up out of this bed but die. However, if you believe, you will be a vessel for God’s honor.’”

35 He was reduced to tears and thanked Lady Birgitta, and he reformed his life so perfectly that, when his brothers were called together at the hour of his death, he told them: 36 “O my brothers, I am assured that God all merciful has accepted my contrition and will grant me pardon. Pray for me, because I believe everything that the Holy Church believes.” Then, after having received God’s sacraments, he passed away.

† Chapter 24

The Brewing of Beer Is Likened to the Swelling of People’s Hearts

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Virgin’s words to the daughter about how God’s servants should behave toward impatient people, and about how pride is likened to a vat.

1 The Mother speaks: “When a vat of beer is heated up and starts to swell and rise, it steams and foams up, sometimes more, sometimes less, and then suddenly settles down again. 2 People standing around the vat understand that

13. “A priest of the Cistercian order”: In the 1340s Birgitta had contact with several clerics at Alvastra. See note to ch. 121.9 below.

14. “Denied . . . face of God”: a reference to the beatific vision—the vision of God as he is—that is given to the redeemed in heaven. In the early Middle Ages it was often doubted whether the beatific vision can be attained by humans before their bodily resurrection at the end of time. That it is in fact fully granted to saints immediately after their death was defined as Catholic doctrine by Benedict XII in 1336, in the bull Benedictus Deus. See also the note to ch. 131.2 below.

15. “Passed away” renders “obdormiuit,” literally “fell asleep.” The idiom is biblical; see, for example, Acts 7:59.

1. “Beer” renders “vinum” [wine]; cf. Sw. “öl” [beer], which is probably the original word that Birgitta used. Note that in paragraph 2, both terms are used in Latin “vini seu ceruisie” [wine or beer]. This is an example of how the text has been adapted in Latin for a continental audience, and of how in the constant process of textual revision the medieval Swedish text may sometimes present a reading that is closer to Birgitta’s original; see further Aili, St. Birgitta and the Text, and see also note to ch. 52.2.
these exhalations quickly sink down and that they arise due to the strength of the beer and are a way of releasing the heat. So they wait patiently for it to end and for the beer or the wine to be ready. 3 Two things happen when people standing around the vat put their noses too close to the bubbles: They suffer either a violent sneezing or a bad headache.

4 It is the same in the spiritual life. It sometimes happens that some people’s hearts swell and rise due to the pride and impatience of their minds. When virtuous men see such a swelling up, they understand that it proceeds either from spiritual instability or carnal motives. 5 Therefore, they put up patiently with that person’s insulting words and look toward the end, knowing that the calm follows the storm, and that patience is stronger than a besieger of cities,\(^2\) since it conquers the man within, which is the most difficult thing to do. 6 There are, however, those who are overly impatient, and they repay insult for insult. Paying no attention to the glorious reward of patience, nor to the contemptibility of worldly favor, 7 these people incur an illness of mind due to their impatient temptations—they bring their noses too close to the bubbling vat, that is, they take the insults, which are nothing but air, too much to heart.

8 So, whenever any of you see people being impatient, guard your tongues\(^3\) with God’s help, and do not leave off doing the good work you have begun because of impatient words. Pretend instead, and as far as justice allows, that you have not heard what you have heard, until those people who are looking for an argument\(^4\) say explicitly what they mean in their hearts.”

# Chapter 25

A Comparison of a Bride before a Bed-Curtain and Advice to a Man Who Was Steadfast

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s admonishment to the daughter about how a person should not pay attention to carnal desires but should nourish the body on a moderate diet of necessities, and about how a person should stand by his or her body but not in the body.

1 The Mother speaks: “You should be like a bride standing before the bed-curtain,\(^1\) ready to do as the bridegroom wishes as soon as he calls. This bed-curtain is the body that veils the soul and has to be constantly washed, tried, and tested. 2 The body is like a donkey that needs a diet moderate enough so as

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4. “Looking for an argument” renders “invenire volunt occasionem” [want to find an occasion]; cf. Sw. “som villa finna tilfälle mot jdhir” [who want to find an occasion against you].
not to become gluttonous, sensible work so as not to become proud, and constant beating so as not to grow lazy.

3 So, stand by the bed-curtain, that is, stand by the body but not in the body in the sense of attending to the desires of the flesh but nourishing the body on a moderate diet of necessities. 4 That person stands by the body and not in the body who keeps his or her body from unnecessary desire for food. Stand also behind the bed-curtain in the sense of scorning the lust of the flesh, doing honor to God, and spending your energies entirely for him.

5 In this way stood those who spread their bodies out like clothes for God, who were at all times ready to do as he wished, whenever it pleased him to call them. 6 They did not have a long way to go to him whom they kept ever present. Heavy burdens did not weigh upon their necks, for they scorned every burden and were in the world in body alone. 7 This is why they flew free and unimpeded to heaven. Nothing impeded them but a dry and well-disciplined garment, and when they had taken it off, they obtained their heart’s desire.

8 This man had a dangerous fall but wisely raised himself up. He defended himself like a man, fought steadfastly, and persevered with persistence. This is why he shall now receive an eternal crown and find himself already in the presence of God.”

### Chapter 26

**Virtues, Especially Obedience, Are Like Flowers on a Tree**

**DATE: 1350s, ITALY**

The Virgin’s admonition to the daughter about which virtuous acts merit eternal life and which do not, and about the great merit there is in obedience.

1 “A tree has many blossoms, but not all of them come to fruition. Likewise there are many virtuous acts, yet they do not all merit a reward in heaven, if they are not done with wise discretion. 2 For example, fasting, prayer, visits to shrines of the saints are virtuous acts, but if they are not done with the spirit of a person who hopes to enter heaven with humility, considering himself a useless servant in every way and showing wise discretion in everything, then they are of little value for eternity.

3 Consider the case of two men, one of whom is under obedience, while the other is free and unbound. If the one who is free fasts, he will get an ordinary reward. 4 However, if the one who is under obedience eats meat on a day of fasting in accordance with the ordinance of his rule and for the sake of obedience, though he would rather fast if it had not been against obedience, 5 then he will get a double reward: first, because of his obedience; second, because he put off his own desire and did not carry out his own wishes.

6 You should therefore be like a bride who prepares the bridal chamber before the bridegroom comes. Be also like a mother who prepares the baby’s clothes before it is born. Again, be like a tree that bears flowers before the
coming of the fruits. Finally, be like a clean glass ready to receive the drink before it is poured.”

‡ Chapter 27

A Man’s Counterfeit Devotion Is Compared to a Poorly Equipped Squire in Battle

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Virgin’s complaint to the daughter about a man of counterfeit devotion, comparing him to a poorly armed squire in a physical battle.

1 The Mother speaks: “That man there says he loves me, but he turns his back to me when he is serving me. When I speak to him, he says: ‘What’s that you say?’ and he averts his eyes from me and looks at other things more to his delight. 2 He is strangely armed. He is like a soldier in a physical battle who has the visor of his helmet at the back of his head\(^1\) and carries his shield on his shoulders when he should have it on his arm. 3 His scabbard is empty, for he had cast off his sword. His cloak,\(^2\) which should protect his chest and body, is lying under him on the saddle, and his saddle is not strapped to the horse.

4 This is the way this man is armed spiritually in God’s sight. Accordingly, he does not know how to distinguish between friend and foe nor how to inflict injury on the enemy. 5 The spirit that fights in him\(^3\) is like one who reasons as follows: ‘I want to be among the last line of soldiers in the fight, so that I can keep the thicket of the woods in sight, in case the first soldiers lose the battle. But if they win, I will run up front quickly so that I will be counted among the first soldiers.’

6 Thus, the man who gave up the fight acted according to the wisdom of the flesh and not for the love of God.”

‡ Chapter 28

On Three Types of Bread

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Virgin’s words about three kinds of hardship, symbolized by three kinds of bread.

1. “The visor . . . at the back of his head”: This image is also used in Book I 6.
2. “His cloak” renders “dyplois”; cf. Sw. “tröian,” most likely referring to the garment, or jacket, worn underneath the soldier’s armor. Cf. ch. 74, on the soldier’s armor.
3. “The spirit that fights in him” renders “spiritus qui pugnat cum eo”; cf. Sw. “andin som stridhe mot honom” [the spirit that fights against him]. We take it to refer to the poorly armed soldier’s own spirit.
1 The Mother speaks: “When you make dough, you have to knead and work it a lot. Fine wheaten bread is set before lords, but coarser bread is set before commoners, and an even worse kind of bread is given to dogs.

2 The kneading stands for hardship. A spiritual person suffers great hardship when God does not receive honor from his creatures and when there is little charity in them. 3 Those who suffer in this way are the kind of fine wheat in which God and all the heavenly host rejoice. 4 All those troubled by worldly adversity are like the coarser kind of bread. For many people, however, this coarser kind is good enough for them to reach heaven. 5 Those who suffer because they are not able to do all the evil they wish are like the bread of the dogs in hell.”

Chapter 29

Spirits of the Devil Hold Instruments of Torture

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the daughter about how there are devils to make people fall, others to slow down their progress, and still others to tempt them in fasting, and about the way to oppose these devils.

1 The Mother speaks: “All these beings that you see surrounding you are your spiritual enemies, that is, spirits of the devil. The ones who can be seen with poles that have nooses are the ones who want you all\(^1\) to fall into mortal sins. 2 Those whom you see with grappling hooks in their hands are the ones who desire to slow you down in God’s service and make you reluctant to do good. 3 Those holding the instruments with spikes like pitchforks to get a hold of and stimulate human desire are the ones who tempt you to take on good deeds that exceed your capacity—whether they are fasts, vigils, prayers, and toils or just spending your money in an unreasonable manner.

4 Since these spirits are so eager to harm people, you must have the intention of not wanting to offend God. Furthermore, you must ask God to give you aid against their cruelty. In this way, then, their threats will not harm you.”

Chapter 30

On the Need for Fine Apparel

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the daughter about how the precious and beautiful things of the world do not harm God’s servants, even though

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1. “You all” renders “vos” (plural), implying that several people were being addressed throughout this revelation.
they make use of them, so long as they use them in God’s honor, and she points to the example of Paul.

1 “It is written that Paul, that good apostle, said that he was a wise man in the presence of the prince who had arrested Peter, and he called Peter a truly poor man.\textsuperscript{1} Paul did not sin in this, because his words were for the honor of God.

2 This is also the case with those who desire and long to speak God’s words. Unless they are dressed in suitable attire, they cannot come before the lords. Thus, they do not sin by dressing suitably, so long as they do not in their heart and mind regard the gold and clothes and precious gems as being more precious than their old accustomed clothing, since all the things that seem precious are but earth.”

### Chapter 31

*Conversion Is Like a Grain of Gold in Sand*

**DATE: 1350s, ITALY**

The Mother’s words to the daughter showing her, by means of a comparison, that God’s preachers and friends will not receive a lesser reward in God’s sight if people are not converted by the preaching they have done with an upright intention than they would if the people do convert.

1 God’s Mother speaks: “Someone hires a worker for a job and tells him: ‘Carry sand from the shore and examine each load to see if you can find a grain of gold there.’ His wages will not be less if he finds nothing than if he uncovers a great amount.

2 This is also the case of a person who for the love of God labors in word and deed for the advancement of souls. His wages will not be less if he converts none of them than if he converts many.\textsuperscript{2} It is just as in the teacher’s example.\textsuperscript{1} He said, ‘A warrior who goes off to war on the orders of his lord, who is willing to struggle mightily but returns wounded and without having captured the enemy, will for the sake of his good intention receive no less a reward, though the battle was lost, than if he had obtained victory.’

4 It is the same with the friends of God. For each word and deed they do for God’s sake and for the benefit of souls, and for each hour of hardship they suffer for God’s sake, they will be rewarded, whether many convert or none at all.”

\textsuperscript{1} “It is written...truly poor man”; cf. Stephens, *Ett Forn-svenskt legendarium* 1, pp. 117–18.

\textsuperscript{2} The teacher’s example” renders “Magister dixit exemplum”; “Magister” is commonly used of Peter Lombard (d. 1160), a scholastic theologian and author of *Four Books of Sentences*, a standard textbook of theology for which he became known as the “Magister Sententiarum.” No connection can be made of his name with this quotation, however; nor is there any apparent connection in the writings of Master Mathias of Linköping. The Swedish translation omits mention of a teacher altogether.
Chapter 32

Reassurance for the Composer of the Prayer of Praise

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the daughter about her infinite mercy toward sinners and toward those who praise and honor her.

1 The Mother speaks: “You have an expression that says, ‘That sort of thing could make me leave my homeland.’ I tell you so now: Nobody in the world is so great a sinner—provided he says in his heart that my Son is the Creator and Redeemer of the universe and dear to him in his inmost heart—2 that I am not prepared to come to him immediately, like a loving mother to her son, and hug him and say: ‘What would you like, my son?’ 3 Even if he had deserved the lowest punishment in hell, nevertheless, if only he has the intention of not caring for worldly honors or greed or carnal lust, such as the church condemns, and desires nothing but his own sustenance, then he and I will right away get along quite well together.

4 Tell the man who composes songs of praise for me—not for the sake of his own praise or reward but in praise of him who is worthy of all praise because of all his works—that just as worldly princes give a worldly reward to the people who praise them, so I will give him a spiritual remuneration. 5 Just as there are many notes on a single syllable,² so it pleases God to give him a crown in heaven for each syllable in his song. It will be said of him: ‘Here comes the praiser, who did not compose his song for any temporal good but for God’s sake alone.’”

Explanation

6 This man had temptations concerning the Holy Trinity. In an ecstasy he saw what looked like the faces of three women.³ The first said: “I have attended many weddings, but I have never seen one to be three.” The second answered: “If there are three and one, it is necessary that one of them must be prior and another posterior, or else two in one.” 7 And the third added: “They cannot have created themselves, so who made them?” Then the Holy Spirit said

1. “The man who composes songs of praise,” i.e., Birgitta’s confessor, Master Petrus of Skänninge, who composed the office used by the Birgittine nuns in honor of the Virgin Mary (ed. Lundeén, Officium parvum). This revelation (without the explanation) also occurs in Extravagantes 7, where the rubric (“Mater Dei ostendit beate Birgitte, quam acceptus est Deo et sibi cantus sororum Ordinis Sancti Saluatoris”) makes specific that it concerns this work, known as the Cantus sororum.

2. “Many notes on a single syllable”: In liturgical plainchant, several tones may be sung to each syllable; Birgitta makes a rare comment on musical composition here.

3. “The faces of three women”: The Trinity is a subject that is sometimes debated in the Revelationes and is said to have been of special interest to Petrus of Skänninge; see Strömberg, “Magister Mathias’ ställning,” p. 315.

openly: “We will come to him and make our abode in him.”⁵ And when he awoke, he was free of the temptation.

8 After this, Christ said to Lady Birgitta: “I am one and three. I want to show you what the Father’s power is, what the Son’s wisdom is, what the Holy Spirit’s might is, in order to make known that I, God, am three and one: Father and Son and Holy Spirit.” This revelation is complete once it is preached from the pulpit.⁶

9 Christ said again: “Tell him that he gains greater merit in my sight through his illness⁷ than through his health. Lazarus⁸ grew brighter due to his pain, and Job⁹ more beloved due to his suffering. However, my chosen ones are not displeasing to me when they have good health, since their heart is always with me and their body remains in wise abstinence and pious works.”

### Chapter 33

**A Description of the Wretched State of Rome and of Its Clerics**

**DATE: 1350s, ITALY**

The bride’s notable words about the city of Rome. They take the form of an inquiry, pointing to the Romans’ earlier consolation, devotion, and good order, among both clerics and lay people, and asking why all this has now sadly been turned into desolation and disorder and abomination, as is clear from all the aforesaid, and about how unhappy Rome is both materially and spiritually.

1 Reverend Sir,¹ in addition to the other points of discussion, the pope² should be told about the pitiable state of this city. Once it was a happy city, both materially and spiritually, but now it is unhappy, both materially and spiritually. 2 It is materially unhappy, because its secular leaders, who should be its defenders, have turned into its cruelest plunderers. That is why its buildings lie in ruins. That is why many of its churches have been completely deserted, 3 in which are preserved the relics of the saints whose blessed bones shine with glorious miracles and whose souls have been crowned in God’s kingdom on high. With their ceilings fallen in and their doors removed, the temples of

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5. “We will come to him and make our abode in him”; cf. John 14:23.
6. “Once it is preached from the pulpit”: a rare reference to a revelation being “preached” in church. See further Sahlin, “The Prophetess as Preacher.”
7. “Through his illness”: According to the older version of *Vita domini Petri Olavi*, Petrus suffered a fall and was left lame (see Schück, *Två svenska biografier*, pp. 306–7).
1. “Reverend Sir”: most likely refers to a papal legate, as made explicit by the Swedish translation of the opening sentence, “Christi brudh sagdhe enom pafwans sändebudh” [Christ’s bride said to a legate of the pope]. See further p. 4 above.
these saints have been converted into latrines for men, dogs, and beasts. 4 The
city is spiritually unhappy, because many of the decrees issued in the church by
holy popes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God and the
salvation of souls have now been abolished. 5 In their place, alas, many new
abuses have been adopted under the inspiration of the evil spirit for the dis-
honor of God and the perdition of souls.

6 The Holy Church had decreed that the clerics who were to go on to holy
orders should follow a blessed way of life, serving God with solid devotion, and
presenting to others a way of life worthy of the heavenly homeland through
their good works. Ecclesial proceeds used to be given to such as these. 7 Against
this custom of the church, however, a grave abuse has arisen. This is that the
goods of the church are given to laymen who, because of their canonical title,
do not get married 8 but, instead, shamelessly keep concubines in their homes
by day and in their beds at night, asserting boldly: “We are not allowed to
marry, because we are canons.”

9 Priests, deacons, and subdeacons, once upon a time, greatly abhorred
the infamy of an impure life. Now, however, some of them are plainly de-
lighted to see their whores walking about with swollen bellies in the midst of
other women. 10 They do not even blush when they are told by their friends: “A
daughter or son will soon be borne for you, sir.” Such men are more justly
called the devil’s pimps than ordained priests of the supreme God.

11 The holy fathers such as Benedict and others established monastic rules
with the permission of the supreme pontiff. They built monasteries where the
abbots used to live together with the friars, devoutly celebrating the night-
hours and day-hours of the office and carefully forming the monks in a life of
virtue. 12 It was a pleasure, indeed, to visit monasteries then, when the chant of
the monks used to give honor and glory to God by day and night, when people
of evil living were set right by the very beauty of the monks’ lives, when good
people were strengthened by the godly teaching of prelates, and when the souls
in purgatory obtained a blessed rest through their devout prayers. 13 That
monk was then held in highest honor who observed the rule most carefully,
and he had the respect of God and men. A monk, however, who did not bother
to keep the rule knew without a doubt that he would incur scandal and dam-
nation. Moreover, everyone used to be able to see and recognize a monk by his
habit.

14 However, contrary to that excellent arrangement, a detestable abuse has
now sprung up in many places. Abbots dwell more frequently in their own
castles or wherever they like, whether in the city or outside it. 15 This is why it is
now painful to visit monasteries. Very few monks show up in the choir at the
time for the divine office, and sometimes none at all. There are few readings,
and sometimes no chants, and many days masses are not even said. 16 Good peo-
ple are disturbed by the bad reputation of the monks, and bad people are made
much worse by contact with them. Furthermore, it is to be feared that few souls
receive any alleviation of their punishments from the prayers of such as these.

17 Many monks live in town. Some of these have their own homes, and
when their friends come to visit, they pick up their own children with a joyful
hug, saying: “Here’s my son!” 18 A monk can scarcely be recognized nowadays in habit. The cloak that used to reach down to the feet now scarcely covers the knees. The long sleeves, which used to be decently wide, are now tight fitting and cramped. A sword hangs at their side instead of a stylus and writing tablets. 19 Hardly a single garment can be found on them to denote a monk, except for a scapular, which is often hidden from view as though it were some kind of scandal to be wearing a monkish garment. 20 It does not even embarrass some of them to have a coat of mail and other weapons beneath their cloaks so that they can do what they like after their drinking-bouts.

21 There have been saints who gave up great wealth and started monastic orders based on poverty, who practiced contempt toward any kind of cupidity and, consequently, did not wish to have anything of their own. 22 They abhorred all kinds of conceit and worldly pomp. They dressed in the poorest of clothes, utterly detesting the concupiscence of the flesh, and thus maintaining their purity of life. They and their followers are called mendicant friars, and the Roman pontiffs confirmed their rules with joy, seeing that they wanted to follow such a way of life for the glory of God and the benefit of souls. 23 Yet it is a sorrow to behold even their rules now converted into detestable occasions of abuse and scarcely observed in the way that Augustine, Dominic, and Francis prescribed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, rules faithfully observed by many a wealthy nobleman for such a long time! 24 To be sure, as rumor now has it, there are many men called wealthy who, as far as valuables and money are concerned, are poorer than those who have taken a vow of poverty. 25 Thus, most of them have their own possessions, which their rule forbids, and find greater joy in their accursed property than in holy and glorious poverty. They pride themselves, moreover, on having as expensive and precious material in their habits as found in the vestments of wealthy bishops.

26 Furthermore, blessed Gregory and other saints had convents built in which women could live in such seclusion that they were hardly to be seen even in daytime. 27 Now, however, there is so much abuse in the convents that their doors are kept open for clerics and laymen alike, whomever it pleases the sisters to let in, even at night. Accordingly, such places are more like brothels than holy cloisters.

28 It also used to be the church’s rule that no one was to receive money for hearing confessions, although, as was only just, penitentiaries were allowed to accept money from persons in need of testimonial letters. 29 A contrary abuse has now arisen according to which rich persons offer however much

3. "Mendicant friars," i.e., the Austin Friars, Carmelites, Franciscans and Dominicans.
4. "Augustine": The Augustine rule was not only the rule of the Austin Friars (or Hermits of St. Augustine) but was also at the core of the Carmelite and Dominican rules. The Augustinian rule forms the basis of the Birgittine rule, and therefore Birgitta might have had her future order in mind when considering the waywardness of the various present-day orders.
6. "The church’s rule": cf. Decretals of Gregory IX, 5, 1, 8; 5, 3, 42 (Richter and Friedberg, Corpus iuris canonici).
they like, once they have made their confession, while poor people, before their confession is heard, are forced by the penitentiary to come to an agreement. Indeed, when penitentiaries give oral absolution, they are not ashamed to take money in their hands and put it in their pockets.

30 It was likewise established in the church that at least once a year every person should confess his or her sins and receive the body of Christ. This applied to lay people, because clerics and religious did this more often during the year. Second, it was established that people unable to practice continence should live in matrimony. 31 A third rule was that, with the exception of those who were seriously ill or in great difficulties, all Christians were to fast during Lent and on ember days and the vigils of other feast days, which are still well known to almost everybody. 32 The fourth rule was that everyone was to abstain from any kind of worldly labor on feast days. The fifth was that no Christian should make financial or any other kind of profit through usury.

33 Contrary to these five excellent statutes, there have arisen five immoral and seriously harmful abuses. 34 The first is that for every one person who goes to confession and receives the body of Christ, not counting priests, religious, and certain women, there are one hundred who come of age and die here in Rome without ever having gone to confession or received the body of Christ any more often than genuine idolaters. 36 The second abuse is that many men take legally wedded wives, but, if they have a disagreement with them, they abandon them for as long as they like, without the requisite authorization from the church, and take mistresses in their wives’ place, loving them and holding them in honor. 37 Some of them do not even shrink from keeping a mistress in the same house as their wife, but rather rejoice to hear them both giving birth at the same time. 38 The third abuse is that many people in good health eat meat during Lent and very few are content with one meal a day. 39 Some, too, are found who do abstain from meat and eat Lenten fare during the day but indulge themselves with meat at night in secret taverns. Indeed, sometimes clerics do this together with laymen. They are just like the Saracens who fast by day and indulge themselves with meat at night. 40 The fourth abuse is that, while some laborers do abstain from work on feast days, there are wealthy men who do not leave off sending their hired hands to work in the vineyards, plow the fields, cut down trees in the woods, and carry the

8. “Second, it was established”; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1–7.
9. “Ember days,” i.e., the days at the beginning of the four seasons that were ordered by the church to be days of fast and abstinence: the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after 13 December (St. Lucy), after Ash Wednesday, after Whitsunday, and after 14 September (Exaltation of the Cross), respectively.
12. “Certain women”: Birgitta might include herself among these.
13. “Saracens”: refers to the Muslim practice of fasting during Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar).
wood home on feast days. In this way, poor people\(^{14}\) enjoy no more quiet rest on feast days than on workdays.\(^{41}\) The fifth abuse is that Christians practice usury just like the Jews, and, in fact, Christian usurers are greedier than Jewish ones.

\(^{42}\) Further, it was the custom of the church to bring such people as described above into line by means of anathema, but, contrary to this, the following abuse has now arisen. There are, namely, a great number of people who are no more afraid of being condemned than they are of being commended. Even if they know that they have been publicly excommunicated, they do not even bother to avoid entering the church\(^{15}\) or other dealings and conversations with people.\(^{43}\) In fact, few priests forbid excommunicates from going into a church. Few as well shun dealings and conversations with excommunicates, if they are bound to them by any kind of friendship. Nor is sacred burial denied to excommunicated people, if they are rich.

\(^{44}\) Accordingly, Reverend Sir, do not be surprised if I have described the city of Rome as unhappy due to such abuses and many others opposed to ecclesiastical statutes.\(^{45}\) Hence, it is to be feared that the Catholic faith will soon perish, unless some such man arrives who, with a real and not a counterfeit faith, loves God above all things and his neighbor as himself and abolishes all these abuses.\(^{46}\) Have compassion, then, on the church and on those of her clergy who love God wholeheartedly and abhor all these wicked customs. They have been like orphans due to the pope’s absence,\(^{16}\) but they have defended the see of their father like sons and have wisely opposed the traitors, persevering in the midst of much hardship.

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Chapter 34

About the Imminent Torture of a Man

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The bride’s vision about various punishments being prepared for a certain soul as yet alive in body, and about how all these kinds of punishments, if his soul should be converted before death, would be converted into the greatest honor and glory.

\(^{1}\) It seemed to me that I saw some people standing around getting ropes ready, while some were standing and getting horses ready, and others were busy forging tongs or constructing a gallows. \(^{2}\) While I was looking at all this, a maiden appeared who seemed to be troubled. She asked if I understood it all. When I answered that I did not understand, she said: “All this that you see is

\(^{14}\) “Poor people”: Birgitta here defends the rights of laborers to rest on feast days.

\(^{15}\) “Entering the church” renders “sancte Ecclesie introitum”; the adjective “sancte” [holy] is redundant as this must refer to the entering of a particular church building.

\(^{16}\) “The pope’s absence”: a reference to the papacy, which was still in Avignon.
the spiritual punishment being prepared for the soul of that man whom you
know.¹ ³ The ropes are for tying to the horse that will drag his soul. The tongs are for tearing his nose, eyes, ears, and lips off. The gallows is for hanging him.”

⁴ Since I was upset over this, the maiden told me: “Do not be upset. There is still time. If he wants, he will be able to break the ropes, knock down the horses, melt the tongs like wax, and remove the gallows. ⁵ Moreover, he can obtain such an ardent love of God that these symbols of punishments will become for him the highest marks of honor, so much so that the ropes that were to bind him in contempt will be turned into belts of gold for him. ⁶ Instead of the horses that were to drag him across the plains, angels will be sent to escort him into the presence of God. Instead of the tongs with which he was to be terribly mutilated, his nostrils will be filled with a fine fragrance and his mouth with a fine taste, his eyes with the loveliest of sights, his ears with the most delightful of melodies.”

Explanation

⁷ This man was a marshal² of the king. He came to Rome with so much humility and contrition that he would frequently go around the stations³ with bared head, praying to God and getting others to pray that he would not return to his country if that meant a relapse into his former sins. ⁸ God heard his petition. When he left Rome and came to Montefiascone,⁴ he fell ill and died there. Another revelation also concerns him: ⁹ “Daughter, see what God’s mercy accomplishes, what a good intention accomplishes. This soul was in the jaws of the lion, but his good intention snatched him away from the lion’s teeth, and he is now on the way to the homeland, and he will partake of all the goods that occur in the church of God.”

Ⅻ Chapter 35

An Excess of Material Possessions Is Discouraged

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The bride’s words to Jesus Christ about her desire for the salvation of souls, and the answer given her through the Holy

¹. “That man whom you know”: The revelation might be about Gustav Tunesson (1315–54), a lawman in Värmland (thus Steffen, Den heliga Birgittas uppenbarelse, p. 58). He was Birgitta’s brother-in-law, married to her husband’s sister Katherina, and he accompanied Birgitta’s daughter, Katherina Ulfsdotter, to Rome in 1350.

². “Marshal” renders “marscalcus”; cf. Sw. “marsk”; one of the highest offices of state within the “council of the realm” in Sweden. Gustav Tunesson is referred to as a holder of the office of marshal in Katherina’s canonization process (see Collijn, Processus seu negotium, pp. 131, 181).

³. “Stations,” i.e., the pilgrim sites of Rome, consisting of the great churches and basilicas, such as the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul.

⁴. Montefiascone: near Rome, overlooking Lake Bolsena; the summer residence, and often a safe haven, of the papacy.
Spirit, namely that people’s excesses and superfluity in food and drink are an obstacle to the visitations of the Holy Spirit given to them.

1 O sweet Jesus, creator of all that has been created! Would that these people knew and understood the warmth of your Holy Spirit! Then they would long more for heaven and abhor the things of the earth. 2 An answer immediately came to me in spirit, saying: “Their excesses and superfluity are an obstacle to the visitations of the Holy Spirit. You see, excesses in food and drink and in banqueting with friends prevent both the Holy Spirit from becoming sweet to them and their having had enough of worldly pleasure. 3 Excess of gold and silver, equipment, clothing, and income prevent the spirit of my love from inflaming and kindling their hearts. Excess of servants and horses and animals are an obstacle to the approach of the Holy Spirit. 4 No, indeed, they withdraw themselves from their servants, my angels, while their betrayers, the devils, draw near to them. They are therefore ignorant of the sweetness and the visitation by which I, who am God, visit holy souls and my friends.”

# Chapter 36

About Degenerate Monks and Knights

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

God’s words to the bride about how the religious used to enter monasteries out of holy fear and divine charity, but now God’s enemies, that is, false religious, go off into the world out of wicked pride and cupidity; similarly, about knights and their knightly service.

1 “Hear now what my enemies do as opposed to what my friends once did. My friends used to enter monasteries out of wise fear and divine charity. 2 But those who are now in the monasteries go off into the world out of pride and cupidity, following their selfish will and living for the pleasures of their body. 3 The judgment for those who die with such a disposition is that they shall neither experience nor obtain heavenly joy but only endless punishment in hell. Know, too, that those who live in a cloister but are forced by divine charity and against their own will to become superiors shall not be counted in that number. 4 Knights, moreover, who used to bear arms, were prepared to give their lives for justice and to shed their blood for the sake of the holy faith by helping the needy to obtain justice and by restraining evildoers and keeping them humble.

5 Yet, now hear how far they have turned away. Nowadays they prefer to die in war for the sake of pride and cupidity and envy, on the promptings of the devil, rather than to live according to my commands in order to obtain everlasting joy. 6 Therefore, the wages of a just condemnation shall be given to all those who die with such a disposition. This means that devils will be given to
their souls to be eternally joined with them as their wages. However, those who
do serve me are to receive their soldier’s wages\(^1\) together with the heavenly army forever without end.”

### Chapter 37

**God’s Anger toward the World, Which Is Like an Open Sack**

**DATE: 1350S, ITALY**

Christ’s words to the bride asking her how it stands with the world, and she answers that it is like an open sack to which everyone senselessly runs, and about Christ’s severe and just condemnation of such people.

1 The Son speaks: “Daughter, how stands the world now?” She answers: “Like an open sack to which everyone runs, like a man running without caring what he is following.” 2 The Lord answers: “Therefore, I am right to go with my plow\(^1\) over the earth, plowing over Gentiles and Christians, sparing neither old nor young, neither poor nor rich. 3 Each shall be judged according to his or her own righteousness, and each shall die in his or her own sin, and their homes shall be left without inhabitants. However, I shall not do this until the consummation.”\(^2\)

4 She replied: “O Lord, do not get angry\(^3\) if I speak. Send some of your friends to warn and admonish them about their danger!” 5 And the Lord said: “It is written that when the rich man despaired of his own salvation in hell, he asked that someone might be sent to warn his brothers so that they would not perish in the same way. 6 The answer to him was: ‘That shall in no way be done, for they have Moses and the prophets to teach them.’ 7 So I tell you now: They have the Gospels and the sayings of the prophets, they have the words and examples of the holy doctors, they have reason and intelligence. Let them make use of these things, and they will be saved. 8 If I send you, you would not be able to cry out loud enough to be heard. If I send my friends, there are but few of them, and if they cry out, they will scarcely be heard. However, I will send my friends to those I choose, and they shall prepare the way for God.”

\(^1\) “Soldier’s wages” renders “stipendium”; cf. Sw. “lönn” [wages].
\(^1\) “My plow”: cf. ch. 5.1 above.
\(^2\) “Not... until the consummation” renders “nec tamen faciam adhuc consummacionem”; but another reading might be, “However, I shall not yet bring about the consummation”; cf. Sw., which appears to lack a verb “tho skal ey än världin ändas” [yet shall not until the world ends].
\(^3\) “Do not get angry”: cf. Genesis 18:30. This phrase is sometimes used as an expression of diffidence by Birgitta in the course of her dialogues with Christ.
\(^4\) “It is written that... teach them”; cf. Luke 16:19–31.
Chapter 38

Birgitta Should Not Place Her Trust in Dreams, Which Can Be Happy or Sad

Date: 1350s, Italy

Jesus Christ’s words to the bride about not putting trust in dreams but, rather, being wary of them, no matter how happy or sad they are, and about how the devil mixes falsehoods with truth in dreams, because of which many errors occur in the world, and about how the prophets did not err, because they truly loved God above all things.

1 The Son speaks: “Why do happy dreams lift you up so much? And why do sad dreams depress you so? Did I not tell you that the devil is envious and can accomplish no more without God’s permission than a piece of straw beneath your feet? 2 I also told you that he is the father and inventor of lies and that he mixes some truth in with all his falsehoods. I tell you, accordingly, that the devil never sleeps but goes around looking for an occasion to ensnare you. 3 You must therefore be careful so that the devil does not deceive you, using his subtle knowledge to discover your inner states by means of your outer movements. Sometimes he induces happy moods into your heart to make you feel empty joy; at other times he gives you sad ones to make you omit in your sorrow the good deeds that you could do and to make you sad and wretched before anything sad has occurred. 4 Sometimes the devil also puts a great many falsehoods into the kind of deluded heart that desires worldly esteem and so deceives many people, such as false prophets. This happens to people who love other things more than God. 5 This is why it happens that a lot of truth is found in the midst of a great many false words, for the devil could never deceive anyone if he did not mix some truth in with the falsehood, as was clear in the case of the man you saw in a seizure. 6 Although he was confessing that there is one God, his indecent gestures and strange words showed that the devil was possessing him and dwelling in him.

7 Now, however, you might ask: Why do I permit the devil to lie? I answer: I have permitted and do permit this due to the sins of the people and of the priests who have wanted to know things that God did not want them to know, who desired success in areas where God saw that it was not beneficial to their salvation. 8 Thus, it is because of sins that God permits many things to occur that would not occur if humankind had not abused grace and reason. Those prophets who longed for nothing but God and did not wish to speak God’s words except for God’s sake, these did not fall victims to deception but spoke and loved the words of truth.

1. “The devil never sleeps”; cf. 1 Peter 5:8; see also Book V rev. 6.7.
2. “In a seizure”: Perhaps this man was an epileptic, or thought to have been possessed by the devil. Steffen, Den heliga Birgittas uppenbarelse, p. 59 compares him (with “his indecent gestures and strange”) to the doubting monk in Book V.
9 Yet, as not all dreams should be welcomed, so not all dreams should be rejected, since God sometimes reveals good things in dreams, including the hour of their death to bad people in order that they might repent of their sins. Sometimes he also reveals good things to good people in order that they might make greater progress toward God. 10 So, whenever and as often as such things occur to you, do not lay them to heart but ponder them and study them with your wise spiritual friends, or else dismiss them and shut them out of your heart as if you had not seen them, because people who delight in such things are very often fooled and become disturbed. 11 So, be firm in your faith in the Holy Trinity, love God with your whole heart, be obedient in failure as well as in success, do not think yourself better than anyone but tremble even when you do good, do not trust your own sense more than others but entrust your entire will to God, ready to do everything God wants. 12 Then you will not need to be afraid of dreams. If they are happy dreams, do not trust or desire them without considering God’s glory in them; if they are sad, do not be saddened but place yourself entirely in God’s hands.”

13 The Mother says then: “I am the Mother of mercy. I get the clothes ready for my daughter while she sleeps; I get food ready for my daughter while she gets dressed; I get a crown and every good reward ready for my daughter while she is working.”

# Chapter 39

On a Lamb in a Lion’s Mouth

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the Son about the bride, and Christ’s answer to his Mother. Then the Mother’s words about what is meant by the lion and the lamb, and about how God permits some things to happen because of human ingratitude and impatience that otherwise would not happen to them.

1 The Mother speaks to her Son Jesus, saying: “Our daughter is like a lamb that puts its head in the lion’s mouth.” 2 The Son answers her: “It is better for the lamb to put its head in the lion’s mouth and become one flesh and one blood with the lion than that the lamb should suck blood from the lion’s flesh and make the lion angry and then the lamb, whose food is hay, would get sick. 3 Yet, my dear Mother, since you bore all wisdom and the fullness of all intelligence in your womb, get her to understand the meaning of the lion and of the lamb.”

4 The Mother answers: “Blessed are you, my Son, who, while remaining eternally with the Father, came down to me, yet never separating yourself from the Father. It is you who are the lion of Judah’s tribe.1 You are the lamb without

stain whom John pointed out with his finger.\(^2\) A person puts her head into the lion’s mouth when she entrusts her whole will to God and has no intention of carrying out her own will, even if she is able, unless she knows that it is pleasing to you. 6 A person sucks the lion’s blood when she becomes impatient with the plan of your justice, wishing and striving to obtain other things than those that you have decided for her, or when she wants to live in a state of life other than that the one that is pleasing to you and beneficial for herself. God is not pleased with such desires but rather provoked to anger. 7 Just as the lamb feeds on hay, so too a person should be satisfied with humble conditions and a lowly state in life. It is because of human ingratitude and impatience that God allows many things to occur for the salvation of humankind that would not happen if people were more patient.

8 Therefore, my daughter, give your will to God. If sometimes you feel less patient, begin all over again\(^3\) through penance, for penance works like a good washerwoman does on stains, and contrition is like a good bleacher.\(^4\)

\# Chapter 40

On the Meaning of a Christian Death

Date: 1350s, Italy

Christ’s words to the bride explaining the meaning of a Christian death and in what way a person dies well or badly, and about how the friends of God should not be troubled if they see God’s servants dying a harsh bodily death.

1 The Son speaks: “Do not be afraid, daughter: This sick woman will not die, for her works are pleasing to me.” When the woman did die, the Son said again: “Do you see, daughter? What I told you was true: The woman is not dead, for her glory is great. 2 The separation of body and soul is for the righteous no more than a dream, for they wake up to life eternal. That which should be called death is when the soul lives separated from the body in an eternal death.

3 There are many people who, while not mindful of the life to come, do wish to die a Christian death. Now, what does a Christian death mean, if not to die as I died: innocently, willingly, and patiently? 4 Am I then contemptible because my death was contemptible and harsh? Or are my chosen ones foolish, because they had to bear contemptible sufferings? Or was this the will of fortune or did the movement of the stars cause it? Of course not. 5 I and my chosen ones did indeed suffer harshly, but in order to show by word and

\(^2\) “John pointed out with his finger”; cf. John 1:29.

\(^3\) “Begin all over again” renders “surge”; cf. Sw. “stat op” [get up].

\(^4\) “A good bleacher” renders “bona candidatrix”; cf. Sw. “tha¨n som klädhit thorkar oc bleke” [a person who dries and bleaches the clothes].
example that the way to heaven is difficult, and in order to make people realize fully how necessary purification is for the wicked, seeing that the innocent elect suffered so greatly.

6 Know, then, that a person dies a contemptible and evil death when he dies while living a dissolute life and with the intention of sinning, when he has worldly success and desires to live for a long time but does not remember to give thanks to God. 7 A person lives and dies happily who loves God with his whole heart, though he may be struck down by a despicable death or afflicted by a chronic illness, because his harsh death lessens his sins as well as the punishment for sin and increases his reward. 8 Look, I will remind you of two men, both of whom died a despicable and bitter death according to human opinion. Yet, if they had not received such a death through my great mercy, they would not have been saved. However, because the Lord does not twice smite the contrite of heart, both of them attained their crown.

9 This is why the friends of God should not be saddened if they suffer violent temporal pain or die a bitter death. It is a blessed thing to weep for a time and to be troubled in this world so as not to come to the heaviest purgatory, where there will be no escape and no more time for working.”

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### Chapter 41

**Even Sinful Priests Can Administer the Sacraments**

**DATE: 1350S, ITALY**

The Mother’s words to the daughter about how priests with lawful faculties of absolution, no matter what kind of sinners they themselves are, are able to absolve from sins; the same applies to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

1 The Mother speaks: “Go to him who has the faculty of absolution.1 No matter how leprous the doorkeeper is, he can still open the door as well as a healthy man, provided he has the keys. 2 It is the same with absolution and the sacrament of the altar. No matter who the minister is, provided he has a lawful faculty of absolution, he can absolve from sins. Therefore, no priest is to be rejected.

3 However, I would forewarn you about two things. The first is that he will not get what he so longs for in the flesh. The other is that his life will soon be cut short. 4 Just as an ant that carries its load of grain day and night sometimes falls down and dies right when it gets close to the nest, and the grain remains

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1. “The heaviest purgatory . . . no more time for working”: That is, tribulation in this world is desirable in order to avoid the lowermost level of purgatory; Birgitta is suggesting there are different gradations of purgatory. See further p. 9 above.

1. “To him . . . absolution,” i.e., the priest.
outside it, so too, right when this man has begun to reach the goal of his efforts, he will die and be punished, and his empty efforts will come to naught.”

† Chapter 42

God’s Friends Are Compared to Door Posts

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the daughter describing good character and righteous works in God’s friends as door posts; and about how God’s servants should stay away from disparagement.

1 The Mother speaks: “God’s friends are said to be like two door posts through which others can enter. Therefore, one must guard carefully against anything rough or hard or any other kind of obstacle getting in the way of those going in. 2 These door posts symbolize nothing other than the moral composure and righteous works and edifying words that should be found everyday in the lives of God’s friends. 3 One must therefore guard attentively against anything hard, that is, disparaging or coarse speech, being found in the mouths of God’s friends, or any worldly tendencies noticeable in their actions that may cause those seeking entrance to run away and shudder to enter there.”

† Chapter 43

Bad Pastors Are Like a Gnawing Worm

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the daughter likening bad pastors to a worm gnawing away at the roots of a tree.

1 The Mother speaks: “They are like a worm that sees excellent seed but does not care how much fruit is lost or falls off, so long as it can tear away at the roots or the parts closest to the ground. 2 In the same way, these men do not care that souls are being lost, so long as they can get their profits and earthly possessions. The justice of my Son will therefore come upon them, and they shall soon be taken away.” 3 She replies: “All the time that for us seems long is no more than the least grain of the balance before God. Your Son’s patience with evildoers is great indeed.” 4 The Mother replies: “I tell you truly: Their judgment shall not be delayed but shall come to them with horror, and they shall be dragged away from pleasure into shame.”

2. “The least grain of the balance” renders “momentum staterae,” as in Isaiah 40:15 and Wisdom of Solomon 11:22; cf. Sw., which paraphrases this passage, “allir time är ey nágudhi sua som een stund húr lankt är ná r” [all time is not to God even as a moment, however long it is to us]. Cf. Psalm 89 (90):4; 2 Peter 3:8.
Chapter 44

The Body Is Like a Ship

Date: 1350s, Italy

Christ’s words to the bride likening the body to a ship and the world to the sea, and about how free will can lead souls to heaven or to hell, and the comparison of earthly beauty to a glass.

1 The Son speaks: “Listen, you who long for the harbor after the storms of this world. Whoever is at sea has nothing to fear so long as that person stays there with him who can stop the winds from blowing, 2 who can order any bodily harm to go away and the rocky crags to soften, who can command the storm-winds to lead the ship to a restful harbor. 3 So it is in the physical world. There are those who lead the body like a ship across the waters of the world, bringing some people consolation but others distress, for human free will leads some souls to heaven, others to the depths of hell. 4 The human will is pleasing to God when it desires to hear nothing more fervently than God’s praise nor to live for anything other than God’s service, for God dwells happily in such a will and lightens every danger and smoothes away all the crags by which the soul is often endangered.

5 What do these rocky crags represent if not evil desire? It is delightful to see and own worldly possessions, to rejoice in the elegance of one’s body and to taste whatever delights the flesh. Such things often endanger the soul. 6 But when God is on board the ship, all these things grow weak, and the soul scorns them all, for all bodily and earthly beauty is like a glass that is painted on the outside but full of earth on the inside. 7 When the glass gets broken, it is no more useful than the dark soil of the earth, which has been created for no other purpose than to be used, if one owns any, in order to gain heaven. 8 All those people who no more desire to hear of their own or the world’s esteem than they do the noxious air, those who mortify every limb of their body and hate the abominable lust of their flesh, all these can rest here in quiet and wake up with joy, because God is with them at all times.”

Chapter 45

Four Virtuous Sisters Are Usurped by Four Worthless Ones

Date: 1368, Rome

The bride’s lamentation before the divine majesty, because the four sisters, Humility, Abstinence, Contentment, and Charity, daughters of Jesus Christ the King, are now, alas, regarded as worthless, and the sisters Pride, Desire, Excess, and Simony, daughters of King Devil, are now called noblewomen.

I make my complaint, not only on my own behalf but also on behalf of many of God’s elect, before your Majesty, concerning the plight of four sisters, daughters of a mighty king, each of whom held position and power within her inherited estate. All those who wished to look on the beauty of these sisters received solace from their beauty and good example from their piety. The first sister was called Humility in managing every deed to be done. The second sister was called Abstinence from all sinful intercourse. The third sister was called Contentment without any excess. The fourth sister was called Charity regarding the affliction of one’s neighbors. These four sisters are now regarded as worthless on their own inherited estate and scorned by almost everyone.

In their place four other, illegitimate sisters have been installed. Though they are the offspring of a fornicator, they are now called noblewomen. The first of these is Lady Pride, who lives to please the world. The second is called Lady Desire, who follows the body’s every appetite. The third is called Lady Excess beyond the limits of necessity. The fourth is called Lady Simony, against whose deception almost nobody can protect himself, since, whether things are rightly or wrongly acquired, she greedily takes it all in. These four ladies contradict the precepts of God, wishing to render them worthless, and they are an occasion of eternal damnation to many souls.

Therefore, act in accordance with the love that God has shown you, and swiftly help to raise up the four sisters called virtues, which proceed from the very virtue of Jesus Christ the high king, and which have now been laid low in the Holy Church, the inherited estate of Christ. Lay low instead the vices that are called ladies in this world, the traitors of souls, born of that traitor the devil, vice itself.

Chapter 46

A Man Is Upbraided for Acquiring Possessions Unlawfully

The bride’s warning to a certain nobleman about restoring unjustly acquired property, and about the voice of an angel announcing a harsh sentence against him.

Sir, I warn you about the danger your soul is in, and remind you that we read about a certain king in the Old Testament who felt a desire for another

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1. “Before your Majesty”: This revelation also occurs in Book VIII 50, where it is stated that it is directed at the “German Emperor” (Charles IV). He was born in Prague in 1316, and visited Rome for his coronation in 1355 and again in 1368. Possibly Birgitta met him in person, to appeal for help in the reform of the church and reconciliation in Europe. She allegedly received a relic from him, a splinter of the cross, that later came into the possession of the Birgittine house in Altomünster; see further Liebhart, “Birgitta of Sweden and Politics.” See also Book VIII 51, Extravagantes 8, and 41.

1. “Sir” refers to a Swedish nobleman by the name Björn (meaning “bear,” and given as “Ursus” in Latin in paragraph 10). Birgitta acknowledges that she does not know him, but is making the plea on behalf of someone, perhaps the person Björn has unjustly pressurized. The medieval Swedish translation opens with the clause: “sancta birgitta skreff til ena herra sighiande” [St. Birgitta wrote to a lord saying].
man’s vineyard and offered him the full price for it. However, since the owner did not want to sell it, the king was angered and unjustly expropriated it for himself with violence. The Holy Spirit spoke to him a little later through the mouth of a prophet, sentencing the king and queen to die a wretched death for their injustice. The prophecy was fulfilled in them, and their children had not the least benefit of the possession of that vineyard.

4 Now, then, since you are Christian and keep the whole faith and know with certainty that God is the same now in his power and justice as he was then, you ought to know, accordingly, that, if you have a desire to possess something unjustly, either by forcing the owner to sell it against his will or by not making a fair offer, that same powerful and just judge will be the avenger. 6 You, moreover, should fear for such a sentence overtaking you as is said to have befallen that queen. You should sorrow that your children will not be made rich by your ill-gotten goods but will rather suffer the distress of poverty.

7 By the passion of Jesus Christ, who redeemed your soul with his precious blood, I exhort and admonish you not to destroy your soul for the sake of fleeting possessions but to make full restitution to all those who have suffered loss at your hands or because of you. 8 Restore whatever you have wrongly acquired both to relieve those who now suffer sorrow and as an example for others, if you want to gain the friendship of God.

9 God is my witness that I do not write you this on my own, for I do not know you, but because something happened to a person that compelled me to write out of holy compassion for your soul. 10 For that person, not asleep but awake in prayer, heard the voice of an angel saying: "Björn, Björn, how over-bold you are toward God and toward justice! 11 Your willpower has so overcome the conscience within you that your conscience is completely silent, while your will speaks and acts. That is why you shall soon come to judgment in the divine court. Your will shall then be silent, and your conscience shall speak and condemn you in accordance with right justice."

# Chapter 47

People Are Like Goats, and Christ Is Like a Hen Protecting Her Chickens

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Son’s words to the bride about how we ought to beware of temptations from the devil, and his description of the devil as an enemy of the state, and of God as a mother hen, his power and wisdom as wings, his mercy as feathers, and the people as chickens.

2. “A certain king... vineyard”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 21:1–29.
3. “That... judge will be the avenger”; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:6.
1 The Son speaks: “If the enemy is battering at the city gates, you should not be like goats that run toward the wall or like rams that rear themselves up on their hind legs and butt against each other with their horns. Instead you should be like chickens that see a bird of prey in the sky aiming to harm them and take refuge beneath the wings of their mother and hide there. They are happy even if they only get hold of a single one of the mother’s feathers and take cover there.

3 Who is your enemy if not the devil, who looks maliciously upon every good deed and is wont to batter and agitate the human mind with temptations? Sometimes he batters it with anger and slander, sometimes with impatience and criticism toward God’s decisions whenever things do not turn out as one wishes. Very often he batters and upsets you with innumerable thoughts in order to draw you away from God’s service and cast a shadow over your good works before God.

6 Therefore, no matter what temptations you have, you should not abandon your position nor be like the goats that run up toward the wall, that is, to be hard of heart, or to criticize other people’s actions in your hearts, since a person who is bad today is often good tomorrow. Rather, you should lower your horns, stand still, and listen, that is, humble yourselves and be fearful, patiently entreating God so that bad beginnings may be changed into a happy ending. Nor should you be like the rams brandishing their horns, that is, paying back insult with insult and adding taunt to taunt. Rather you should stand steadily on your feet and remain silent, that is, check your passions, so that in your speech and responses you may show forethought and patient forcefulness, because the righteous man overcomes himself and restrains himself even from licit remarks in order to avoid loquacity and offensiveness. When a person is agitated in mind and lets go of everything he feels inside, he seems somehow to have vindicated himself and revealed the instability of his mind. This is the reason why he will be left without a reward, because he was unwilling to be patient for a time. Had he been patient, he would both have won over his offending brother and fitted himself for a greater reward.

11 What do the hen’s wings represent if not divine power and wisdom? You see, I am like a hen that powerfully protects from the snares of the devil those chickens that run to me when I call, that is, those who desire the shade of my wings, and I summon them to salvation through my wise inspirations.

12 What does the feather represent if not my mercy? One who obtains my mercy can feel as secure as a chicken sheltered beneath its mother’s wings.

13 So, be like the chickens running toward my will. In all temptations and adversities say both out loud and in your deeds: May God’s will be done!

14 For, I protect those who trust in me with my power; I refresh them with my

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2. “May God’s will be done”; cf. Matthew 6:10; 26:42.
Chapter 48

A King Must Honor God More, or Else His Kingdom Will Be Divided

Date: 1350s, Italy

The Son’s words to the bride about a king and how he should work to increase God’s honor and love for souls, and about his sentencing, if he fails to do so.

1 The Son speaks: “If this man wishes to honor me, let him first work to reduce my dishonor and increase my honor. My dishonor consists in the contempt shown for the commandments that I have commanded and the words that I have personally spoken, which are completely disregarded by almost everyone. 2 If he wishes to love me, then let him from now on show greater charity toward all souls for whom I opened up heaven with my heart’s blood. 3 If he longs to rest with God more than to enlarge his inheritance, then he will surely find greater desire as well as help from God in order to win back that place, Jerusalem, where my dead body lay.

4 Tell him, you who are hearing this: I, God, allowed him to be crowned king. This is why it is especially his duty to follow my will and to love and honor me above all things. 5 If he fails to do so, his days will be cut short. Moreover, those people who are emotionally attached to him will be painfully separated from him, and his kingdom will be divided into several parts.”

Chapter 49

Voices from Two Pulpits Exhort the Pope to Improve the Situation of the Church

Date: 15 October 1367, Rome

The bride’s symbolic vision of the church, its explanation, which concerns the moderation and attitude that the pope ought to maintain regarding his own person and regarding the cardinals and other

1. “This man”: This revelation also occurs in Book VIII 7, the Swedish translation of which refers to “a Swedish king.”

2. “To win back that place, Jerusalem”: With this crusading image, perhaps drawn from the Lives of the Saints, Birgitta likens the political instability of Sweden to that of the Holy City, and she urges the need to recapture and restore good government in its original form.

3. “Emotionally attached to him” translates “qui carnaliter eum diligunt”; cf. Sw. “som han kötlica älska” [who love him carnally]. This may refer to Magnus’s close family, but it may be a more slurring reference to his alleged homosexuality. Birgitta herself, in her autograph vision, refers to him as loving men “more than your own wife” (Book VIII 56 and Ex. 80).
prelates of Holy Mother Church, and especially about the attitude of humility.

It seemed to a certain person that she was in a large chancel, and a great, shining sun appeared. There were two pulpits, as it were, in the chancel, one to the right and the other to the left, with a long space intervening between them and the sun. Two rays of the sun fell upon the pulpits.

Then a voice was heard from the pulpit on the left side, saying: “Hail, eternal king, creator and redeemer, and just judge! Behold, your vicar, who is seated on your chair in the world, has now brought his chair back to its ancient and earlier place, where sat the first pope, Peter, prince of the apostles.” A voice from the pulpit on the right replied, saying: “How can he enter into the Holy Church when the barrels of the door hinges are full of rust and dirt? This is why the doors are inclining toward the ground, because there is no room in the barrels to receive the hinge-pins that should be supporting the doors. The pins have been completely bent outward and are not at all curved in such a way as to hold the doors in place. The floor is all dug up and has been converted into pits as deep as bottomless wells. The ceiling is smeared with pitch and burning with sulphurous flames, dripping down like dense rain. Thick, black fumes arising from the pits and the dripping of the ceiling have stained all the walls and made their color as ugly to look at as gory blood and pus. It is therefore not fitting for God’s friend to have his dwelling in such a temple.”

The voice from the left replied, saying: “Give a spiritual explanation of what you have described physically.” The other voice then said: “The pope is symbolized and represented by the doors; the barrels of the door hinges signify humility. This should be empty of all pride so that nothing is to be seen there except what pertains to the humble office of pontiff, just as the barrel should be completely empty of any rust. However, the barrels, that is, the insignia of humility, are now so full of excess and wealth and resources—kept for no other purpose than pride—that nothing seems humble, since all his humility has been converted into worldly pomp. Therefore, it is not surprising that the pope, represented by the doors, is inclining toward worldliness, as symbolized by the rust and the dirt. Accordingly, let the pope begin with true humility in himself: first of all, in his trappings—his clothes, his gold, silver, and vessels of silver, his horses and other equipment—getting rid of everything but what is necessary, and donating the rest to the poor and, especially, to those whom he knows to be friends of God. Let him then organize his entourage with

1. “A certain person”: Birgitta refers to herself in the third person. This is one of the so-called autograph visions, written in Birgitta’s own hand; see general introduction, volume 1, pp. 2, 17; Högman, Heliga Birgittas originaltexter. In certain manuscripts it is also included as one of the Tractatus revelations: It refers to Pope Urban V (see Jönsson, St. Bridget’s Revelations to the Popes, pp. 41–43). The heading in the Tractatus version states that the vision was received in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, and “one day before” the pope entered Rome, i.e., 15 October 1367.

2. “Pulpits” renders medieval Latin “sedes predicorum”; this is literally rendered in medieval Swedish as “predicara stola” [preachers’ seats]. A pulpit is still called predikstol in modern Swedish; see further Thors, Den kristna terminologien, pp. 134–35.
moderation and keep only those servants needed to protect him. Although it is in God’s hands to call him to judgment, still it is only right for him to have servants both in order to strengthen the cause of justice and so that he can humble those who rebel against God and against the holy customs of the church.

15 The hinge-pins attached to the doors represent the cardinals who have been bent outward and stretched as far as possible toward all pride, greed, and physical pleasure. 17 This is why the pope should take a hammer and tongs in hand and bend the hinges to his will by not letting them have more clothes, servants, and equipment than necessity and utility require. 18 Let him bend them with the tongs, that is, with his soothing words and divine counsel and fatherly love. Then, if they refuse to obey, he should take the hammer and display severity toward them, doing with them whatever lies in his power and does not go against justice, until they are bent to his will.

19 The floor represents the bishops and the secular clergy, whose greed is bottomless. From their pride and luxurious way of living come the fumes that make all the angels in heaven and all God’s friends on earth shun them.

20 The pope can improve the situation greatly by allowing them to have only what they need and nothing superfluous, and he should order each bishop to watch over the ways of his own clergy. 21 Anyone who refuses to mend his ways and live continently should be stripped of his prebends, because God would rather not have a mass said in a given place than let a whorish hand touch the body of God.”

## Chapter 50*

### Many People before the Seat of Judgment

**DATE: 1350s, ITALY**

The bride’s unfathomable vision of the judgment of a multitude of persons still in life, in which she heard: “If people would rectify their sins, I, too, will lighten their sentence.”

1 It seemed to me as though a king was seated on a judgment seat, and each living person stood before him. Each person had two beings standing next to him, one of whom appeared like an armed soldier, the other like a black Ethiopian. 2 A pulpit stood before the judgment seat. On it lay a book, arranged in the same way as I saw earlier when I saw three kings standing before him. 3 It seemed to me that the whole world was standing before the pulpit. Then I heard the judge saying to the armed soldier: “Call those whom you have served with love!”

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* This chapter occurs in the Birgittine-Norwegian text; see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, p. 442 line 25 through p. 443 line 15, “Christi brød hagde … til äwärdelikit ve.”

1. “As I saw earlier when I saw three kings”: See Book VIII 48.57–61. The kings are probably Magnus Ladulás Birgersson (1240–90), Birger Magnusson (1280–1321), and Magnus Eriksson (1316–74).
Those who were named fell down immediately. Some of them lay there for a longer while, others for a shorter, before their souls were separated from the body. 5 I am unable to grasp everything I heard and saw then, for I heard the sentences of many people still living but who will soon be called. 6 However, the following was said to me by the judge: “If people would rectify their sins, I, too, will lighten their sentence.” Then I saw many people being sentenced, some to purgatory, others to everlasting woe.

Chapter 51*

On the Soul of a Young Woman in Judgment

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The bride’s admirable and terrible vision about a soul led before the judge, and about the arguments of God and the book’s judgment against the soul and the soul’s evidence against herself, and about the various astounding punishments inflicted on her in purgatory.

1 It seemed that I saw a soul being led to the judge by the soldier and the Ethiopian whom I had seen earlier. It was said to me: “What you now see all took place in regard to that soul when she was released from the body.” 2 Once the soul had been escorted into the presence of the judge, she stood there alone, no longer in the hands of either of her escorts. She stood there naked and sorrowful, not knowing to what place she would come. 3 It seemed to me then that every word in the book gave its own answer to each and every thing the soul was saying.

4 In the hearing of the judge and of the entire host, the armed soldier spoke first, saying: “It is not right to bring up as a reproach against this soul the sins for which she has made reparation in confession.” 5 I beheld all this but realized then quite well that the soldier who was speaking already had knowledge of everything in God but spoke so that I would understand. 6 A reply then came from the book of justice: “Although this soul did perform penance, it was not accompanied by a contrition or true satisfaction proportionate to her great sins. She should therefore suffer now for those sins for which she did not make reparation when she was able.”

7 When this was said, the soul began to weep so violently that it was as though she had broken down completely, and yet, though her tears could be seen, not a sound could be heard. Then the King said to the soul: “Let your conscience now declare those sins that were not accompanied by a propor-

* This chapter occurs in the Birgittine-Norwegian text; see Klemming, Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser 4, p. 443 line 16 through p. 446 line 23, “Mik syntis...annars godhom gerningom.”

1. “To what place she would come” renders “ad que deueniret”; cf. Sw. “huart hon skulle komma” [whither she should come], perhaps in the sense of where she would take refuge.

2. “Every word in the book”: The idea of a speaking book reinforces the importance that Birgitta attached to the authority of the written word, whether biblical or legal.
tionate satisfaction." 8 Then the soul raised her voice with such force that it was as though it could be heard throughout the whole world. She said: "Woe is me that I did not act according to God’s commands, which I heard and knew!" Then she added in self-accusation: "I did not fear God’s judgment." The book replied to her: "You must therefore now fear the devil." 9 Right away the soul began to fear and tremble, as if she were melting away completely, and she said: "I had almost no love for God: That is why I did so little good." An immediate reply was made to her from the book: "That is why it is just for you to approach closer to the devil than to God, because the devil lured and enticed you to himself with his temptations."

10 The soul replied: "I understand now that everything I did was done on the promptings of the devil." A reply was made from the book: "Justice dictates that it is the devil’s right to repay your accomplishments with pain and punishment." 11 The soul said: "From head to heel there was nothing I did not dress with pride. Some of my vain and proud manners I invented myself; others I just followed according to the custom of my native land. 12 I washed my hands and face not only in order to be clean but also to be called beautiful by men." 13 A reply was made from the book: "Justice says that it is the devil’s right to repay you for what you have earned, since you dressed and adorned yourself as he inspired and told you to do."

14 The soul said again: "My mouth was often open for bawdy talk, because I wanted to please others, and my heart longed for all those things provided it did not result in worldly disgrace or disapproval." 15 A reply was made from the book: "That is why your tongue must be drawn out and stretched and your teeth bent in. And all the things you most detest will be set before you, and all the things you like will be taken away from you."

16 The soul said: "I enjoyed it immensely when many people took after my example and noticed what I did and copied my manners." 17 A reply was made from the book: "Hence, it is just that everyone caught in the sin for which you are about to be punished should also suffer the same punishment and be brought to you. Then your pain will be increased each time someone comes who copied your fashions."

18 After these words, it seemed to me as though a chain was wound about her head like a crown and then tightened so hard that the front and back of her head were joined together. 19 Her eyes fell out of their sockets and dangled by their roots at her cheeks. Her hair looked like it had been scorched by flames, and her brains were shattered and flowed out through her nostrils and ears. Her tongue was stretched out and her teeth pressed in. 20 Her arms were twisted like ropes and their bones broke. Her hands, with their skin peeled off, were fastened to her throat. Her breast and belly were bound so hard with her back that her ribs were broken and her heart spilled out together with all her entrails; her thighs dangled at her flanks, and their broken bones were being pulled out just like a thin thread is used to thread a needle.

21 After this sight, the Ethiopian replied: "O Judge, the soul’s sins have now been punished according to justice. Now join the two of us, this soul and me, so that we may never be separated!" 22 But the armed soldier replied:
“Hear, Judge, you who know all things! It concerns you now to hear the last thought and feeling that this soul had at the end of her life. At the very last moment she had the following thought: ‘O, if God would only give me enough life, I would gladly make reparation for my sins and serve him all the rest of my lifetime and never more offend him.’ O Judge, such were her last thoughts and wishes. Remember, too, Lord, that this person did not live long enough to acquire a fully understanding conscience. Therefore, Lord, think of her youth and treat her mercifully!”

A reply was then made from the book of justice: “Last thoughts such as these do not deserve hell.” Then the judge said: “Because of my passion, let heaven be opened up for this soul once she has undergone purgation for her sins for as much time as she is bound to suffer, unless she receives assistance from the good works of others still alive.”

Explanation

26 This woman made a vow of virginity in the presence of a priest, and then married later on. She died giving birth.

Chapter 52

On the Bestial Features of a Married Couple in Judgment

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The bride’s terrible vision of a man and woman, and an angel’s spiritual explanation to the bride concerning the amazing vision and containing many amazing points.

1 There appeared to me a man whose eyes were dug out and hanging at his cheeks by their two muscles. He had the ears of a dog, the nostrils of a horse, the mouth of a ferocious wolf, hands like the feet of a big ox and feet like a vulture. 2 I saw a woman standing at his side whose hair was like a bramble bush, whose eyes were at the back of her head, whose ears were cut off, whose nose was full of pus and gore, whose lips were like snake-fangs with a venemous barb on her tongue, whose hands were like the tail of a fox, whose feet like two scorpions.

3 I was awake and not sleeping while I saw all this, and I said: “O, what is this?” Immediately a sweet-sounding voice spoke to me so comfortingly that all my fear disappeared. It said: “You who are seeing this, what do you think it is?” I answered: “I do not know whether the beings I see are devils or beasts born

1. “Feet of a big ox” renders “pedum maximi bouis”; cf. Sw. “ögxa alla älghia fōtir” [the feet of oxen or moose]. The moose (elk) is an indigenous animal in Scandinavia; see KL “älg”; OM 18:1–2. In 52.12 below Lat. “bouis” is given as “moose” in Sw.; cf. chs. 125 and 130 below, where fantastical animals are mentioned. Cf. ch. 24 above, on cultural details that are rendered differently in translation.
with such a bestial nature or human beings formed that way by God.” 5 The voice then answered me: “They are not devils, since devils do not have bodies as you see these do, nor are they a kind of beast, for they are born from Adam’s stock, 6 although they were not created in such a form by God. Rather, they appear before God made ugly in their souls by the devil. It is this that you are seeing as if in bodily fashion, but I will reveal to you the spiritual meaning of it all.

7 You see the eyes of that man that look as though they were dug out and hanging by their two muscles. You should understand two things by the two muscles. The first is that he believed God to live eternally. The second is that he believed that his own soul would live on eternally for good or evil after the death of the body. 8 You should understand two things by the two eyes. The first is that he should have considered how he could have avoided sin, and the second is how he could have carried out good deeds. These two eyes have been dug out in the sense that he did not do good deeds out of a desire for heavenly glory and did not flee sin out of the fear of the punishment of Gehenna. 9 He has dog ears, because, as a dog is not as interested in his master’s name or in any other dog’s name so much as its own name, if he should hear it, so too this man did not care as much about the honor of God’s name as about the honor of his own name.

10 He has a horse’s nostrils, too, for, just as when a horse has got rid of its dung, it likes to put its nose to it, so does this man. When he has committed a sin, which before God is as vile a thing as dung, it seems pleasant to him to think on its stench. 11 He has a mouth like a ferocious wolf that, although it has filled its mouth and belly with the things it has already seen, still longs to gobble up any living creature its ears detect.

12 He also has hands like the feet of a strong ox. An angry ox destroys a weaker animal through the force of its wrath by trampling it down with its hooves indiscriminately, flesh and intestines and all, until the last bit of life is taken away. This man does likewise. When he is angry, he treats his enemy indiscriminately, without a thought about how the man’s soul might end up in hell or how his body will suffer in death, provided that he can take the man’s life away. 13 He has feet like a vulture. When a vulture gets something it likes in its claws, it squeezes it so tightly that the strength in its feet fails due to the pain and it lets go of what it was holding without even knowing it. 14 This man acts in the same way. He intends to keep his unjust possessions until death, but he will be forced to let go of them when his strength fails.

15 His wife’s hair was like a bramble bush. The hair on the top of the head that adorns a person’s face signifies a will that highly desires to please God the most high. 16 That is what adorns a soul in God’s sight. Because this woman’s will was highly set on pleasing the world rather than God the most high, her hair looks like a bramble bush. 17 Her eyes appear to be at the back of her head, because she turned her mind’s eye away from what God’s goodness had done for her in creating and redeeming her and in providing for her in her needs. Yet she gazes intently on that which is fleeting, though these things are
departing from her day by day and will vanish entirely from her sight in the end. 18 Her ears appear to be cut off in a spiritual sense, for she cares little about the doctrine of the Holy Gospel or about hearing sermons.

19 Her nose is full of gore, because, just as a sweet odor is pleasantly transmitted to the brain through the nose so as to comfort it, so she, too, in her passions, is delighted to put into effect whatever delights her corruptible body in order to comfort it. 20 Her lips are like snake-fangs, and there is a venomous barb on her tongue. Even when a snake holds its teeth together tightly so as to protect its barb from being accidentally broken, the filth of its mouth still flows out through the gaps between its teeth. 21 In the same way, she shuts her lips to true confession so as not to break the pleasure of sin, which is like the venomous barb of her soul, but the filth of her sin can still be clearly seen in the sight of God and his saints.”

Explanation

22 “I told you before about the judgment and rejection of a marriage that they had contracted against the statutes of the church. I shall now explain it to you more fully. You saw the woman’s hands were like [the tails] of foxes and her feet like scorpions. 23 This is because, just as she was undisciplined in her whole body and all her passions, so too by the lightness of her hands and her way of walking she excited her husband’s physical delight and stung his soul worse than any scorpion.”

24 At that very moment an Ethiopian appeared with trident in hand and three sharp claws on his feet. He shouted and said: “Judge, it is my hour now. I have waited and been silent. Now is the time for action!” 25 Immediately, I beheld a naked man and woman before the judge as he sat there together with his innumerable host. The judge said to them: “Though I know all things, tell us what you have done!” 26 The man answered: “We heard and knew about the ecclesial bond, and we paid no attention but disdained it.” The judge answered: “Because you refused to follow the Lord, justice says you must experience the malice of the executioner.” 27 Right then the Ethiopian thrust his claws into their hearts and pressed them together so tightly that they looked like they were in a winepress. And the judge said: “Look, daughter, this is what people deserve when they knowingly distance themselves from their creator for the sake of creation.”

2. “The tails” (Lat. “caudae”) is missing in most manuscripts except for one, and Gh; cf. Sw. “räfwa stärta” [fox tails].

3. “Ecclesial bond” renders “vinculum Ecclesie”; cf. Sw. “kirkionna band.” This phrase might refer to the public proclamation of the “binding” sacrament of marriage; or, alternatively, to a formal prohibition by the church, because the marriage had been contracted unlawfully.
28 The judge spoke again to the two of them: “I gave you a sack to fill with the fruit of my delights. What, then, do you bring me?” The woman answered: “O judge, we sought the delights of our belly and have nothing to bring but shame.” 29 Then the judge said to the executioner: “Let them have their just reward!” And he immediately thrust his second claw into both their bellies and wounded them so badly that all their intestines appeared to be pierced through and through. The judge said: “Look, daughter, this is what people deserve when they transgress the law and thirst after poison as though it were medicine.”

30 The judge spoke again to the two of them: “Where is my treasure that I provided for your use?” Both of them answered: “We trampled it underfoot, for we sought an earthly treasure and not an eternal one.” 31 Then the judge said to the executioner: “Let them have what you must and can give to them!” He immediately thrust his third claw into their hearts and bellies and feet in such a way that everything seemed to be like one big ball. 4 The Ethiopian said: “Lord, where shall I go with them?” 32 The judge answered: “It is not for you to rise or rejoice.” At that the man and woman disappeared with a wail from the face of the judge. The judge spoke again: “Rejoice, daughter, because you have been kept apart from such creatures.”

† Chapter 53

An Answer to Birgitta’s Prayer for Her Sons

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Virgin’s words to the bride about how she is prepared to defend every widow and every virgin and every wife in whom she sees an upright intention and a love for her Son above all else.

1 “Listen,” said God’s Mother, “you who are praying to God with your whole heart that your sons may be pleasing to him. Such a prayer truly does please God. There is not a mother who loves my Son above all else and who makes that same prayer to God for her children whom I am not at once prepared to help attain the object of her petition. 2 Nor is there a widow who steadfastly asks for God’s help to remain in the state of widowhood until her death for the glory of God whom I am not at once prepared to help carry out her will along with her. I myself was like a widow in that I had a son on earth who did not have a father in the flesh. 3 Likewise, there is no virgin yearning to preserve her virginity for God until death whom I am not prepared to defend and comfort, for I myself truly am a virgin.

4. “Big ball” renders “globus”; cf. Sw. “ett kringlot nysta alla ballir” [a tightly wound skein or ball], an image of the couple’s intestines.
4 You should not be wondering: Why am I saying this? It is written, you know, that David desired Saul’s daughter when she was a virgin.¹ Then he had the wife of Uriah while her husband was still alive.² David’s concupiscence was sinful, but the spiritual gratification of my Son, David’s Lord, is free from all sin.

6 Accordingly, as these three states of life—virginity, widowhood, and matrimony—provided physical pleasure to David, so too it pleases my Son to keep them for his most chaste gratification in a spiritual sense. 7 Thus, it is no wonder that I help to bring the spiritual gratification of these states of life to my Son to gratify him, for they do gratify him.”

# Chapter 54

About the Rebirth of a “Son of Tears”

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the bride about the happy spiritual birth of someone brought up in the worst kinds of sins and how it was obtained by the prayers and tears of God’s servants.

1 “See the son of tears¹ who has recently been born of the world in a spiritual sense! He had been first physically born of his mother in the world. 2 Just as when the woman who drew him forth from his mother’s womb first drew out his head, then his hands, then his whole body until he fell onto the ground, I have done the same for him due to the tears and the prayers of my friends. 3 I drew him forth from the world so that he is now spiritually like a newborn baby boy. Accordingly, he must be brought up both spiritually and bodily.

4 The man to whom I sent you must bring him up and protect him with his prayers and good deeds and counsels. The woman you were told about will pray for him and protect him spiritually and also attend to any bodily needs he may have, for he had fallen so deeply into mortal sins that all the devils in hell had been saying this about him: 5 ‘When he comes, let us open our mouths to crush him with our teeth and gobble him up. Let us reach out our hands to break and mangle him. Let our feet be ready to trample him down and kick him.’

6 This is why it was said to you that he had been born spiritually, because he has been freed from the power of the devils, as you could gather from the words you heard about how he loves God in his heart and body above all things.”

1. “It is written... she was a virgin”; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 18:20–21; 25:43–44; 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 3:13–16.
2. “Uriah... still alive; cf. 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 11:2–27.
1. “Son of tears”: See notes to ch. 13.5 and 13.15 above.
Chapter 55

A Boy Will Be Brought Up to Be a Good Soldier

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the daughter about how, due to the prayers of God’s servants, she wants to love a certain boy and equip him with spiritual weapons.

1 “Remember what is written about Moses: The king’s daughter found him on the water and loved him as her own son. It is also written in the Scholastic History that the same Moses conquered his land by means of the birds that ate up the poisonous snakes. 2 I am a king’s daughter from the family of David, and I want to love this boy whom I found on a sea-swell of tears shed for the salvation of his soul. His soul was enclosed in the ark of his body that will be brought up by those I told you about until he reaches the age in which I want to equip him and send him to gain the land of the king of heaven. 3 How this is to come about is unknown to you but known to me. I will prepare him in such a way that it will be said of him: ‘He lived like a man and died like a champion. He came to his judgment like a good soldier.’ ”

Addition

4 God’s Son speaks: “When a starving animal is driven away from its prey, it waits at a distance until it finds an opportunity to return to the prey. But, if it finds none, it goes back to its cave. I have dealt with the leader of this country in a similar way. 5 I admonished him through my kindnesses, I admonished him with words and blows. Yet, the more meek and mild I have shown myself to him, the more thankless and negligent he has become. I shall therefore summon him now beneath the crown and to the footstool, since he refuses to stay crowned. 6 Upon him and his yea-sayers I shall set a cruel asp

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2. “Moses...poisonous snakes”; cf. Peter (Petrus) Comestor, Historia Scholastica, Exodus ch.5 (http://la.wikisource.org/wiki/Historia_Scholastica_%C2%B028Exodus%29). The story is that Moses was asked to lead the Egyptian army against the Ethiopians, who had been laying Egypt waste. He led his army along the bank of the Nile, which was infested with snakes. Petrus Comestor writes: “Sed per loca plena serpentibus iter faciens, tullit in arcis papiereus super plaustra ibices ciconias, id est Aegyptiacas, naturaliter infestas serpentibus, quae rostro per posteriora immisso alvum purgant, castraque metaturus, praeferebat eas, ut serpentes fugarent, et devorarent, et ita tutus per noctem transplantat exercitus” [But since they traveled through lands full of snakes, he brought ibis storks, i.e., Egyptian ones, in papyrus cages on carts, which, being naturally inimical to snakes, put out their beaks at the back and purified the bank; when moving camp Moses let them go first so that they should chase away and devour the snakes, and so the army traveled safely by night].
3. “This boy”: Steffen, Den heliga Birgitta uppenbarelse, pp. 287–88, speculates that Birgitta is speaking of her own grandson, Karl Ulfsön, whom she saw as a likely candidate for the throne, rather than Albrecht of Mecklenburg, Magnus Eriksson’s nephew. However, she must have known that the successor had to be more closely connected with the royal family than her family was (she was only distantly related to the Folkung dynasty on her mother’s side).
4. “The leader of this country,” i.e., Magnus Eriksson. The criticism here is particularly scathing.
born from a viper and from a sly fox in order to molest the nation and to pluck the feathers of the simpleminded. He will ascend the heights of nations and cast off the boastful and trample them down. 7 However, I shall lead this boy, whom my friends will foster, along another road until he arrives at a place of greater glory.”

8 God’s Son spoke again: “It will, moreover, be said of this boy that, because he lived like a man and fought like an outstanding soldier, he shall be crowned as a friend of God. O, daughter, what are women thinking when they glory in their sons’ progress in pride? That is not glory but shame, for they are imitating the king of pride. 9 Real glory is when he is a soldier of glory who glories in giving honor to God with all his might and strives for higher things and is ready to endure whatever the Lord wants him to endure. Such a man is a soldier of God and will be crowned as such together with the soldiers of heaven.”

Chapter 56
A Father Sometimes Has to Beat His Son

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Mother’s Words to the Daughter about a Man Not Being Sادdened because of a Correction.

1 The Mother speaks: “Why is that man upset? A father sometimes deals his son light blows with a switch. He has no reason to be sad.”

Chapter 57
Rome Is Like a Field of Tares

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the daughter about how Rome must first be cleansed of the tares with a sharp iron sickle, then with fire, then with a pair of oxen.

1 The Mother speaks: “Rome is like the field in which the tares had sprung up. It must first be cleansed with a sharp iron sickle, then purged with fire, and afterward plowed by a pair of oxen. I shall deal with you like a person transferring plants to a different place. A punishment is being prepared for this city, as if the judge were to say: ‘Strip all its hide off, remove all the blood from its flesh, cut up all its meat into bits, and crush its bones so that all the marrow is drained off.’”

1. “Sharp iron sickle” renders “ferro acuto.”
Chapter 58

On Priests Who Administer the Sacraments, and on Seven Steps, Seven Vestments, and Seven Vices

Date: 1350s, Italy

Christ's figurative words to the bride, and their explanation in which Christ is described as a ruler on pilgrimage, his body as a treasure, the church as a house, priests as guardians. The true Lord has honored these priests with a sevenfold honor. Also about how God complains that wicked priests abuse him with a sevenfold abuse, and how they turn the seven vestments, which they should have, into seven vices.

1 The Son speaks: "I am like a ruler who fought faithfully in the land of his pilgrimage, and returned with joy to the land of his birth. This ruler had a very precious treasure. At its sight, the bleary-eyed became clear-sighted, the sad were consoled, the sick regained their strength, the dead were raised. 2 For the purpose of the safe and honest protection of this treasure, a splendid and magnificent house of suitable height was built and finished with seven steps leading up to it and the treasure. 3 The ruler entrusted the treasure to his servants for them to watch over, manage, and protect faithfully and purely. This was in order that the ruler's love for his servants might be shown and that the servants' faithfulness toward the ruler might be seen. As time went on, the treasure began to be despised and its house rarely visited, while the guardians grew lukewarm, and the love of the ruler was neglected. 4 Then the ruler consulted his intimate advisers concerning what was to be done about such ingratitude, and one of them said in answer: 'It is written that the neglectful judges and guardians of the people were ordered to be hanged in the sun.' However, mercy and judgment are your nature; you are lenient toward all, for all things are yours and you are merciful toward all.'

5 I am the ruler in the parable. I appeared like a pilgrim on earth by virtue of my humanity, although I was mighty in heaven and on earth by virtue of my divinity. I fought so hard on earth that all the muscles of my hands and feet were ruptured out of zeal for the salvation of souls. 6 As I was about to leave the world and ascend into heaven, I left it a most worthy memorial, my most holy body, in order that, in the same way that the Old Law could glory in the ark, the manna, and the tablets of the covenant, and in other ceremonies, so the new man could rejoice in the New Law—not, as before, in a shadow but in the truth, indeed, in my crucified body that had been foreshadowed in the law. 7 In

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1. The seven steps correspond with the clerical ranks that are represented by the four minor orders (porter, reader, exorcist, acolyte) and three major orders (subdeacon, deacon, priest), each with its own liturgical function. See also p. 268n5 below (introduction to Book V).


order that my body might be given honor and glory, I established the house of the Holy Church, where it was to be kept and preserved, as well as priests to be its special guardians, who in a certain way are above the angels by reason of their ministry. The one whom angels fear to touch due to a reverent fear, priests handle with their hands and mouth.

8 I honored the priests with a sevenfold honor, as it were, on seven steps. On the first step, they should be my standard-bearers and special friends by reason of the purity of their mind and body, for purity is the first position near to God, whom nothing foul can touch nor adorn. It was not strange that intercourse was permitted to the priests of the law during the time in which they were not offering sacrifice, for they were carrying the shell, not the nut itself. 9 Now, however, with the coming of the truth and the disappearance of the figure, one must strive all the more fully for purity by as much as the nut is sweeter than the shell. As a sign of this kind of continence, first the hair is tonsured, so that desire for pleasure does not rule over spirit or flesh. 10 On the second step, the clerics are ordained in order that they may become angelic men in all humility, for heaven is attained and the devil’s pride is overcome through humility of mind and body. As a sign of such a step, the clerics are authorized to cast out demons, for the humble man is raised up to heaven from where the lofty devil fell through his pride. 11 On the third step the clerics are ordained for the purpose of being disciples of God through the constant reading of Holy Scripture. For this reason, a book is placed in their hands by the bishops, just as a sword is given to a knight, so that they understand what they must do and strive through prayer and meditation to placate God’s anger for the sake of the people of God. 12 On the fourth step the clerics are ordained as guardians of God’s temple and watchmen of souls. For this reason, the bishops give them keys in order that they may be deeply concerned for the salvation of their brethren and encourage them by word and deed and incite the weak to greater perfection. 13 On the fifth step, they are ordained as stewards and caretakers of the altars and scorners of worldly things in order that they may serve at the altar, live by the altar, and occupy themselves with earthly matters only insofar as befits their position. 14 On the sixth step, they are ordained to be apostolic men who preach the gospel truth and make their conduct fit their preaching. On the seventh step, they are ordained to be mediators between God and man through the sacrifice of my body. In some way, at this point, priests rank above the angels in dignity.

15 My grievance now, however, is that these steps have fallen apart. Pride is loved more than humility, impurity is practiced instead of purity, the divine lessons are not read but the book of the world, negligence is to be seen at the altars, God’s wisdom is regarded as foolishness, the salvation of souls is not a concern. 16 As if this were not enough, they even throw away my vestments and scorn my weapons. On the mountain, I showed Moses the vestments\(^5\) that

\(^5\) “On the mountain...vestments”; cf. Exodus 28.
the priests of the law were to use. It is not as though there were anything material in God’s heavenly dwelling, but it is because spiritual things cannot be understood except by means of physical symbols. 17 Thus, I revealed a spiritual truth by means of something physical in order that people might realize how much reverence and purity are needful for those who have the truth itself—my body—given that those who were wearing but a shadow and a figure had so much purity and reverence.

18 Why did I reveal such magnificence in material vestments to Moses? It was, of course, in order to use them to teach and symbolize the magnificence and beauty of the soul. As the vestments of the priests were seven in number, so too the soul that approaches the body of God should have seven virtues without which there is no salvation. 19 The first vestment of the soul, then, is contrition and confession. These cover the head. The second is desire for God and desire for chastity. The third is work in honor of God as well as patience in adversity. The fourth is caring neither for human praise nor reproach but for the honor of God alone. 20 The fifth is abstinence of the flesh along with true humility. The sixth is consideration of the favors of God as well as fear of his judgments. The seventh is love of God above all things and perseverance in good undertakings.

21 These vestments, however, have been changed and are now despised. People love to make excuses and smooth over their guilt instead of going to confession. They love constant lewdness instead of chastity. They love work for the benefit of the body instead of work for the salvation of the soul. They love worldly ambition and pride instead of the honor and love of God. 22 They love all kinds of redundancy instead of praiseworthy thrift, presumption and criticizing God’s judgments instead of the fear of God, and the clergy’s thanklessness toward everyone instead of God’s love toward all. Therefore, as I said through the prophet, I shall come in indignation, and tribulation shall give them understanding.”

23 Then the Mother of Mercy, being present, replied: “Blessed are you, my son, for your justice. I am speaking to you who know all things for the sake of this bride. You want her to understand spiritual truths, but she is unable to grasp the spiritual meaning except by means of images. 24 Before you received a human nature from me, you once spoke as God, saying that if ten righteous men could be found in the city, you would be willing to show mercy to the whole city for the sake of those ten. There still are countless priests who placate you with the offering of your body. 25 Therefore, because of these priests, have mercy on those who have little good in them. This I beg, I who gave birth to you in your human nature. All your elect ask this together with me.”

26 The Son answered: “Blessed are you and blessed is the word of your mouth! You see that I pardon in three ways because of the threefold good in the offering of my body. 27 Three good things were revealed in me through the

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6. “As I said through the prophet”; cf. Isaiah 66:15.
effrontery of Judas. In the same way three good things come to souls through the offering of this sacrifice. First, my patience is to be praised because, though I knew who my betrayer was, I did not reject his company. 28 Second, my power was revealed when, in the presence of my betrayer, all those who were with him fell to the ground at a single word of mine. Third, the divine wisdom and love were manifested, since I transformed all the wickedness of Judas and the devil into salvation for souls.

29 Similarly, three good things come from the offering of the priests. First, my patience is praised by all the heavenly host because I remain the same in the hands of good as well as of bad priests, and because there is no partiality in me, and because this sacrament is brought about not by human merits but by my words. 30 Second, this offering benefits everybody, no matter which priest offers it. Third, it benefits those who offer it as well, however bad they may be. Just as the single phrase ‘I am’ made my enemies collapse physically on the ground, 31 so too when my words ‘This is my body’ are spoken, the devils flee from tempting the souls of the ministers, and they would not dare to return to them with such audacity, if the desire to sin was not there.

32 So my mercy shows pardon to them all and endures them all. However, my justice calls for retribution, for I cry out each day and you see well enough how many answer me. 33 Nevertheless, I will still send out the words of my mouth. Those who listen will complete the days of their lives in that joy that can neither be expressed nor imagined because of its sweetness. 34 To those, however, who do not listen, there will come, as it is written, seven plagues in the soul and seven plagues in the body. They will find this out, if they think and read about what has been done. Otherwise, they will quake and quail when they do experience it.”

# Chapter 59

**On the Priest’s Three Duties**

**DATE:** 1350s, ITALY

Christ’s words to the bride about how three duties belong to the priest: first, to consecrate the body of Christ; second, to have purity of body and spirit; third, to care for his congregation. Also about how he should have a book and oil; and about how a priest is an angel of the Lord, because his office is greater than that of an angel.

1 The Son speaks: “Three duties belong to a priest: first, to consecrate the body of God; second, to have purity of body and spirit; third, to care for his

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8. “There is no partiality in me”; cf. Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25.
10. “Seven plagues in the soul and seven plagues in the body”; cf. Leviticus 26:21; cf. chs. 62 and 132 below.
congregation. But, you may ask: ‘What good does it do to have a church if he
does not have a congregation?’ 2 I answer you: A priest who has the intention
of doing good to everyone and of preaching for the love of God has as large a
congregation as if he had the whole world, since, if he could speak to the whole
world, he would spare no efforts. His good intention is thus reckoned to him as
deeds. 3 In fact, on account of the ingratitude of the listeners, God often spares
his chosen ones the effort of preaching, but they are not robbed of their reward
due to their good disposition.

4 The priest should also have a book and oil. The book is for the instruction
of those who are imperfect, 1 the holy oil is for the anointing of the sick. 5 Just as
a book contains spiritual and physical learning, so too the priest should have
knowledge about disciplining his body so that it is not ruined through lack of
temperance, which would give scandal to the parishioners. He should know
how to flee from greed, which debases the beauty of the church, and how to
avoid worldly ways, which dishonor the dignity of the clergy. 6 Spiritual
knowledge involves instructing the ignorant, correcting the dissolute, urging
on the proficient. 7 The oil symbolizes the sweetness of prayer and good ex-
ample. As oil has a richer taste than bread, so loving prayer and the example of
a good life are more effective in attracting people and have a richer taste in
order to placate God.

8 I tell you truly, my daughter, it is a great thing to be called a priest. An
angel of the Lord is also a mediator, but the priest’s office is greater, for he
touches the unfathomable God, and in his hands the lowest things are joined
to the things of heaven.”

Chapter 60
A Prayer to the Lord, Who Is Like a Doctor
DATE: 1350S, ITALY
The bride’s words to God about a pleasing way of praying in God’s
sight.

1 “Blessed be you, my Creator and Redeemer. Do not be angry if I speak 1
to you as a wounded patient to the doctor, as a troubled soul to the comforter, as a
poor person to a rich and generous one.” 2 You see, the wounded patient says:
‘O, doctor, please do not shrink from my pain, for you are my brother!’ The
troubled soul says: ‘O, greatest of comforters, please do not despise me because
I am fraught with anxiety, but grant rest to my heart and ease my mind!’ 3 The

3. “Blessed be you …to a rich and generous one”: Klockars, Birgitta och böckerna, p. 231, suggests a
possible influence of the German mystic from the Rhineland, Heinrich Suso (c. 1300–1366). In particular she
notes the similarities between Horologium sapientae and a number of passages in the Revelationes dating from the
1340S.
poor person says: ‘O, you who are rich and lack nothing, look at me, for I am perilously hungry. See my nakedness, and give me clothing to keep me warm!’

4 In the same way I say now: O Lord, almighty and most high, I look upon the wounds of my sins that have wounded me from infancy and I sigh, because my time has been spent uselessly. My strength is not up to the task, for it has been wasted in vanities. 5 And so, as you are the source of all goodness and mercy, I beseech you: Have mercy on me; touch my heart with your loving hand, for you are the best of doctors; comfort my soul, for you are the good comforter!’

‡ Chapter 61

A Discussion about the Real Presence in the Eucharist

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

About how the devil appeared to the bride during the elevation of the body of Christ, speaking to her and trying to prove by argument that what was being elevated was not the body of Christ. An angel of the Lord appeared to her right away to comfort her and tell her not to trust the devil. Also, about how Christ appears and forces the devil to tell her the truth, and about how the body of Christ is received by the wicked as well as the good, and concerning the proper remedy in temptations regarding the body of Christ.

1 A monstruous creature appeared to the bride at the elevation of the body of Christ and said: “Do you really believe, silly woman, that this wafer of bread is God?” Even if he had been the highest of mountains, he would have been consumed long ago. 2 None of the wise Jews to whom God has given wisdom believes this, nor can anyone believe that God would allow himself to be touched and loved by a most impure priest with the heart of a dog. If you would ascertain the truth of what I say, well, this priest is mine and whenever I want—and he is at the point of it now—he will snatch him away to myself.”

3 Right then, a good angel appeared and said: “O, daughter, answer not a fool according to his folly! It is the father of lies who has appeared to you. But get ready, for our bridegroom is now near.” 4 Jesus the Bridegroom came and said to the devil: “Why are you troubling my daughter and bride? I call her daughter, because I created her, and I call her bride, because I redeemed her and have joined her to myself through my love.” The devil answered: “I am speaking to her so that she will grow cold in your service, because I have been given permission.”

1. “This wafer of bread is God”: In this and the following two chapters, Birgitta raises the dogma of the Real Presence in the Eucharist; see p. 10 above.
2. “He is at the point of it now” renders “iam in puncto est”; cf. Sw. “Oc nu är han i ytarsta punctenom” [and now he is at the extreme point]; meaning that the man is about to die; cf. 61.15.
5 The Lord said: “She experienced that last night when you pressed down on her eyes⁴ and the rest of her body and would have done worse, if you had been allowed. Instead, each time she resists your intrusions, her reward⁵ will be doubled. 6 However, devil, as you were saying that I would have been consumed long ago, answer me while she is listening with her physical sense of hearing. Scripture says that, when the people were perishing, a bronze serpent was raised up and everyone who had been bitten was cured upon looking at it.⁶ 7 Tell me whether this curative force came from the power of the bronze or the kind of snake or the virtue of Moses or was it a divine and hidden force?” 8 The devil answered: “The curative force came from nothing other than God’s own power and from the faith of a believing and obedient people who believed that God, having made all things out of nothing, was also able to do all sorts of things that had never been done before.”

9 God said again: “Tell me, devil, whether the staff was made into a serpent⁷ because Moses accomplished it or was it because God commanded it? Was it because Moses was holy or was it because God’s word said so?” 10 The devil said to him: “What was Moses but a human being weak in himself whom God had made righteous? At his word, because God commanded and allowed it, the staff became a serpent, inasmuch as God truly commanded it and Moses was his compliant servant. 11 Prior to God’s command and word, the staff remained a staff. When the true God ordered it, the staff truly became a serpent, so much so that even Moses was frightened.”

12 Then the Lord said to the bride who was watching all this: “This is what is now taking place on the altar. Prior to the sacramental words, the bread on the altar is bread. When the words ‘This is my body’ are spoken, 13 the bread becomes the body of Christ that people receive, both the good and the wicked, one person as much as one thousand, according to the same truth but not with the same effect, for the good receive it unto life, while the wicked receive it unto judgment. 14 What the devil said about God being defiled by the impurity of the offering minister is most truly false. It is as though a servant that is a leper were to deliver keys to his master, or if a sick person were to offer medicinal mixtures made from potent herbs, their condition would present no obstacle to the recipient of the service, inasmuch as the objects have the same power in themselves, no matter who brings them. 15 Accordingly, God is not made bad because of the badness of a bad minister nor better because of a good minister, for God is always unchangeable and always the same. The devil spoke truly about this man being about to die soon, though he knew this by means of his natural cunning and through external causes, but he will not be able to snatch him away without my permission.

4. “Pressed down on her eyes”; cf. a similar description for a possessed woman in Book I 16.11.
7. “The staff was made into a serpent”; cf. Exodus 4:2.
16 This priest does belong to him, however, unless he reforms himself. There are three reasons for this. The devil said as much when he said that he had stinking limbs and the heart of a dog. He really does stink and is sick with fever, for he has outer warmth but inner coldness, unbearable thirst, slackness of limb, a loathing for bread and a repugnance of every sweetness. He is indeed warm toward the world and cold toward God. He thirsts for carnal pleasure but has a repugnance to the beauty of virtue. He has no taste for God's commands but is full of fervor for everything carnal. 18 It is therefore not strange that my body holds no other taste for him than that of bread baked in an oven, because he does not meditate on or have any taste for spiritual work, but only for that of the flesh. 19 Once the Agnus Dei has been said, and my body has been received into his body, the Father's power leaves him and the Son's sweet presence disappears. Once he has taken off the sacred vestments, he no longer has the favor of the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of unity. Only the form and memory of bread remain for him. 20 However, you should not think that he or any other person is without God, however wicked he or she may be. God leaves him in the sense of not giving him greater consolation, but he remains with him by showing him tolerance and defending him against the devil.

21 Concerning what the devil said about how none of the wise Jews are willing to believe in this, my answer is: The disposition of these Jews is as though they had lost their right eyes. They limp along on both their spiritual feet and are therefore void of wisdom and will remain so till the end. 22 Thus, it is not strange that the devil blinds and hardens their hearts and induces them to shamelessness and to actions that go against faith. Therefore, whenever any such thought regarding the body of Christ occurs to your mind, have recourse to your spiritual friends and stand firm in the faith, because you may be completely certain that the body that I assumed from the flesh of the Virgin, which was crucified and now reigns in heaven, this very same body is on the altar, and that both the good and the wicked receive it.

23 Just as I showed myself in a different shape to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, and though I was true God and true man when I came to the disciples through locked doors, so too I show myself beneath a different shape by means of priests so that faith may have its reward and human ingratitude may be revealed. 24 That is no wonder: I am still the same now as when I revealed the power of my divinity by means of fearful signs and portents, and yet the people said at the time, "Let us make gods who can precede us." I also revealed my humanity to the Jews, and they crucified it. 25 I am the same each day on the altar, and they say: 'We are disgusted and sorely tried by this food.'

8. "Stinking limbs": The devil has not, in fact, made this assertion earlier; see paragraph 2.
9. "Agnus Dei": I.e., the song Lamb of God that accompanies the breaking of bread during the Mass.
10. "The bond of unity": in other words, the Holy Spirit is the love that binds the Father and the Son.
13. "We are disgusted and sorely tried by this food": cf. Numbers 21:5.
What greater ingratitude can there be than to try to comprehend God with one’s reason and dare to judge the secret counsels and mysteries in God’s own power and possession?

Hence, by means of an invisible effect and a visible form, I wish to reveal to the unlearned and humble what the visible form of bread is without the substance of bread, what substance is in its form, what division in form is without substance, and why I endure such indignities and outrages upon my body. It is in order that the humble may be exalted and the proud be put to shame.”

Chapter 62

About a Sinful Priest Who Buries a Man

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

In the bride’s presence, the Lord chides a priest who is burying a person who had died in patient suffering. About how Christ will come to wicked priests with seven spiritual plagues and seven bodily ones, and about how that soul obtained heavenly glory for the sake of her patient suffering and other merits.

1 When a certain priest was burying a person who had been sick in bed for three and a half years, the bride heard the Spirit saying: “My friend, what are you doing? Why do you presume to touch the dead with your bloodied hands? Why do you make loud appeals to the Almighty for this man’s sake with a froglike voice? 2 How do you presume to appease the Judge for his sake when your own morals and manners are more like a jester’s than those of a devout priest? It is the power of my words and not your doing that will profit the dead man. It is his faith and long-suffering that will bring him to his reward.”

3 The Spirit then said to the bride: “This man’s hands are bloodied in the sense that all his deeds are of a sensual nature. His hands are not worthy to touch the dead man in the sense that he is of no help to him by reason of his own worth but only through the nobleness of the sacrament. Good priests benefit souls especially in two ways: first, through the power of the Lord’s body and, second, through the love that burns in them. 4 His voice is like that of frogs in the sense that it is full of dirty deeds and sensual pleasure. 5 His moral behavior is like that of a jester. What else does a jester do but conform himself to worldly morality? What other tune does he sing but ‘Let us eat and drink and enjoy life’s pleasures’? 6 That is how this man acts. He conforms himself to everyone else in his dress and behavior in order to please them. He incites them all to excess by his own example and extravagance, saying: ‘Let us eat and drink, for the joy of the Lord is our strength. It is enough for us to reach the gates of glory. Even if I am not allowed to enter, it is enough for me to sit outside the gates. I have no wish to be perfect.’

7 This manner of voice and living is indeed serious. No one shall reach the gates of glory but the perfect or those who have been perfectly purified. No one shall possess my glory but those who perfectly desire it and perfectly struggle to
attain it while they can. 8 Yet I, the Lord of the universe, enter into this priest, though without being either enclosed or defiled. I enter as a bridegroom, I leave as the future judge, scorned by the receiver. 9 I will, therefore, as I have said, come to priests, bringing seven plagues. They shall be deprived of everything they held dear. They shall be cast out of God’s sight and sentenced in his wrath. They shall be handed over to demons to suffer without rest, scorned by all, lacking all good things and abounding in every evil.

10 They will likewise be scourged by seven bodily ills, as Israel was. Hence, you should not wonder when I am tolerant with the wicked or when any irreverence is shown to my sacrament. I endure it until the end in order to reveal my patience as well as human ingratitude. 11 Nor should you worry when offenses are committed against my body, such as when you heard about its being spat out. The sensible species show their deficiency as is proper to them, and yet, being transparent, they reveal human ingratitude and show people to be culpable and unworthy to receive holy communion.”

12 The Spirit spoke again to the soul of the dead man: “O, soul, rejoice and exult, because your faith has separated you from the devil. Your simplicity has shortened for you the way through purgatory. Your patience has brought you to the gates of glory where my mercy will lead you in and crown you.”

# Chapter 63

The Devil and Christ Argue about the Real Presence in the Eucharist

**DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN**

How the devil appeared to the bride with the intention of deceiving her through specious arguments in regard to the sacrament of the body of Christ, and about how Christ came to her assistance and forced the devil to tell her the truth, and about the assurance and beneficial instruction Christ gives to the bride concerning his glorious body in the sacrament.

1 A demon with an enormous belly appeared to the bride and said: “Woman, what do you believe? What great things are you thinking about? I, too, know many things and want to prove what I say with clear reasoning, but I would advise you to stop thinking about unbelievable things and to trust your senses. 2 Do you not see with your eyes and hear with the ears of your body the sound of the breaking of the material bread of the host? You have seen it being spat out, touched, shamefully thrown on the ground, and suffering many other indignities that I would never allow to be done to me. Even if it is possible for

2. “Its being spat out” cf. ch. 63.2, which is clearly on the same subject.
1. “Enormous belly”: On Birgitta’s descriptions of the devil, see further Bergh, “Birgittas djävulsskildringar.”
God to be in the mouth of the righteous, how can he stoop to come to the unrighteous whose greed is without limit or measure?"

3 She turned to Christ who had appeared in human form immediately after the temptations. She said: “O Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you for all things and especially for these three. First, that you clothe my soul with the inspiration of penance and contrition by which every sin is washed away, no matter how serious. Second, that you feed my soul with the infusion of your charity and the memory of your passion by which the soul is refreshed as though with the best of foods. Third, that you console all those who invoke you in the midst of hardship. Therefore, Lord, have mercy on me and strengthen my faith, for, although I deserve to be handed over to the deceits of the devil, still I believe that he can do nothing without your permission and that your permission is never given without consolation.”

6 Then Christ said to the devil: “Why are you speaking to my new bride?” The devil answered: “Because she is tied to me, and I still hope to ensnare her in my snares. She is tied to me when, by consenting to me, she has sought to please and has pleased me more than you, her Creator. I have watched her ways, and they have not yet escaped my memory.”

7 The Lord answered: “Are you a negotiator, then, and a spy of every highway? The devil answered: “Yes, I am a spy but in darkness. You made me dark.” The Lord asked: “When were you able to see and how did you become dark?”

8 The demon said, “I could see when you created me most beautiful, but, because I rashly thrust myself upon your splendor, it blinded me like the basilisk. I could see you when I desired your beauty. I could see you and knew you in my conscience when you rejected me. I also recognized you in your assumed flesh, and I did what you give me permission to do. I recognized you when you robbed me of your captives. Every day I recognize the power by which you mock and shame me.”

10 The Lord said: “If you know and understand the truth about me, why do you lie to my chosen ones, when you realize the truth about me? Did I not say that he who eats my flesh shall have eternal life? And you say that it is a lie and that no one eats my flesh. Hence, my people are more idolatrous than those who worship stones and trees. Although I know all things, yet answer me while this woman here is listening, for she is unable to understand spiritual truths except by means of images. Was my body that Thomas touched after my resurrection a spiritual or corporeal body? If it was corporeal, how did it pass through the locked doors? But, if it was spiritual, how was it visible to corporeal eyes?”

2. “New bride”: This may be one of Birgitta’s early visions, dating from the 1340s; cf. Book I passim, where she is frequently referred to thus.
3. “Basilisk”: cf. the note to ch. 84.3 below.
13 The devil answered: “It is hard to speak when the speaker is held in suspicion by everyone and he is unwillingly compelled to speak the truth. However, seeing that I am compelled, I state that you were both corporeal and spiritual after rising from the dead. It is because of the eternal power of your divinity and because of a special privilege of your glorified flesh that you can enter anywhere and be present everywhere.” 14 The Lord said further: “Tell me, when Moses’ staff was turned into a serpent,⁷ was it only the image of a serpent or was it completely a serpent both inside and outside? And tell me again, the leftover bread in those baskets,⁸ was it really and wholly bread or just the image of bread?” 15 The devil answered: “The entire staff became a serpent, what was in the baskets was entirely bread, and it was entirely done by your power and might.”

16 The Lord said: “Is it more difficult or more miraculous for me to perform a similar miracle now than it was then, if I please? Or, if my glorified flesh could pass through the locked doors then, why can it not be in the hands of the priests now? 17 Does it, perhaps, entail an effort for my divinity to unite that which is least with that which is heavenly, the earthly with the most sublime? Certainly not. But, father of lies, just as you excel in wickedness, so too my love is and always shall be upon all creatures. 18 Even if one person should seem to burn the sacrament with fire, or another to trample it underfoot, I alone know the faith of all and arrange everything in due measure and patience. I create something out of nothing and a visible thing out of an invisible one. I can reveal something through a visible sign and shape that, however, truly is one thing in what is signified, yet is seen as something else.”

19 The devil answered: “I experience the truth of this everyday when people who are my friends depart from me to become your friends. But what more shall I say? The slave left to himself shows well enough by his will what he would carry out in act if allowed.” 20 Then the Son of God spoke once more: “My daughter, believe that I am Christ, the restorer of life and not the betrayer, the true one, the very truth itself and not a liar, the eternal power without which nothing ever was or shall be. 21 If you believe that I am in the hands of the priest, even if the priest doubts it, then I am truly in his hands due to the faith of the believers and those present, as well as due to the words that I myself established and uttered. Everyone who receives me receives both my divine and human natures as well as the form of bread.

22 What is God if not life and sweetness, illuminating light, delightful goodness, judicious justice, saving mercy? What is my humanity if not an active body, the conjunction of God and man, the head of all Christians? 23 Therefore, those who believe in God and receive his body receive the divine nature as well, for they receive life. They also receive the human nature by which God and man are joined. Again, they receive the form of bread, because the One who is hidden as to his own form is received beneath a different form

⁷ “Moses’ staff...serpent”; cf. Exodus 4:3.
as a test of faith. 24 Likewise, wicked persons also receive the same divinity but
as a stern judge rather than an affectionate friend. They receive his human
nature as well, though less easily appeased. They also receive the form of bread,
for they receive the truth hidden beneath the visible form, but it is not sweet to
them.

25 Once they put me in their mouths and chew, the sacrament is fulfilled,
but I depart from them with my divinity and humanity, and only the form of
bread remains for them. It is not that I am not truly present in the wicked as
well as in the good due to the institution of the sacrament, but that the effect is
not the same for the good as for the wicked. 26 Life itself, God, is offered to
man in this sacrifice. So, life enters into the wicked but does not remain with
them, because they do not give up their wickedness. Thus, only the form of
bread remains there for their senses to perceive. 27 Yet, this is not because the
bread’s form behind the bread’s substance has any effect upon them, but
because they think no more of what they have received than what they see and
perceive of the form of bread and wine. It is as if a mighty lord were to enter
someone’s house and his appearance were to be noticed but the presence of his
goodness ignored.”

# Chapter 64
Christ Is Like a Poor Peasant Carrying Brushwood

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Mother’s words to the daughter comparing her Son to a poor
peasant, and about how troubles and persecutions occur to good and
bad alike, though they lead the good by patience toward purification
and reward.

1 The Mother speaks: “My Son is like a poor peasant who has neither ox
nor donkey but instead carries the wood himself from the forest as well as the
other tools needed to complete his work. Among his tools, he carries birch-
rods. He needs these for two reasons: in order to flog disobedient children and
to create warmth for cold people. 2 My Son, the Lord and Creator of the uni-
verse, made himself most poor in order to so enrich everyone not with fleeting
but with eternal riches. Carrying on his back the heavy weight of the bitter
cross, he cleansed and obliterated everyone’s sins with his blood. 3 Among his
various works, he selected tools of virtue, that is, virtuous persons through
whom the hearts of many have been inflamed with the love of God through the
operation of the Spirit of God, thus making the path of truth known.

4 He also selected birch-rods, which stand for the lovers of this world,
through whom the children and friends of God are flogged for their own
improvement and purification and for their greater precaution and reward.
The rods also warm the cold children, and even God grows warm by their fire.
5 How does this happen? Well, when the worldly cause trouble for God’s
friends as well as for those who almost only love God out of fear, these turn in
their troubles to God with greater fervor, considering the emptiness of the world. Then God has compassion on their troubles and gives them encouragement and love.

6 But what will become of the rods once the children have been flogged? They will surely be cast into the burning fire. God certainly does not scorn his own people when he delivers them into the hands of the impious. Rather, he is like a father who raises his children and makes use in this way of the wickedness of the impious as a means to their reward.”

# Chapter 65

Birgitta Should Be Like a Vessel; Christ Is Like a Ruler in a Castle

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The Mother’s admonishment to her daughter with a simile to show how God’s friends should not weary of nor leave off their work of preaching; also, about the great reward for such preachers.

1 The Mother speaks: “You ought to be like an empty vessel ready to be filled, neither so wide that it cannot hold what is poured into it, nor so deep that it lacks a bottom. This vessel is your body, which is empty when it is a stranger to desire. 2 It has the proper width when the flesh is prudently disciplined so that the soul is able to understand spiritual things and the body is strong enough to work. The vessel is bottomless when the flesh is not restrained by any form of abstinence and the body is not denied whatever the mind desires.

3 Now listen to what I have to say: My servant uttered an unfeathered word when he said: ‘What is it to me to be speaking about things that do not have to do with my state in life?’ Words like that are not fitting for a servant of God. Anyone who hears and knows the truth and is silent about it is liable to punishment, if not to being completely rejected. 4 A certain ruler had a strong castle in which there were four good things: undecaying food that chased away all hunger, healthy water that quenched every thirst, a sweet-smelling fragrance that drove away all poisonous vapors, indispensable weapons to weaken every foe. 5 While the ruler was attending to other matters, the castle was at last besieged. When the ruler found out, he said to his herald: ‘Go and proclaim the following with a loud voice to my soldiers: I, your ruler, shall free my castle. Anyone who follows me with a good will shall be with me in my glory and receive similar honor. 6 If anyone falls in battle, I will raise him up to a life without need or anxiety. I shall give him lasting honor and unfailing plenty.’ 7 The servant received his orders and made the proclamation, but he

1. “Makes use in this way of the wickedness...to their reward”; cf. Deuteronomy 8:5.

1. “Unfeathered word”: renders “verbum impennatum”; cf. Sw. “ofidrat ordh.” This probably ultimately derives from the Homeric simile “winged words”; the expression is not attested elsewhere in medieval Swedish except in this instance.
was not careful enough in doing so and the proclamation did not reach the ears of the most valiant soldier. So this soldier kept away from the battle. 8 What will the ruler do to this soldier who would gladly have fought but who did not hear the words of the herald? Indeed, he will be rewarded for the sake of his good will, but the negligent herald will not be exempt from punishment.

9 This castle is the Holy Church founded through the blood of my Son. In the church is his body that chases away all hunger. In it is the water of gospel wisdom, the fragrance of saintly example, and the weapons of his passion. 10 This castle is now beset by enemies, for many are to be found in the Holy Church who preach my Son with their voices but do not agree with him in their conduct. What they speak with their voices, they contradict in their intentions, for they do not care about their heavenly homeland but only want to gain their own pleasure. 11 Accordingly, in order that the enemies of God may decrease in number, the friends of God should be unflagging in their efforts, for their reward will not be a temporal one but the kind knowing no end.”

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Chapter 66

**Good Intention Is Exemplified by a Water Mill**

**DATE: 1350s, ITALY**

The Mother’s words to the daughter about how the prudent possession of temporal goods does no harm, provided that the desire to possess them is not disordered.

1 The Mother speaks: “What harm does it do if someone’s clothes get poked by a needle or a bit of iron so long as the skin is not injured? In the same way, a prudent possession of temporal goods does no harm, provided that the desire to possess them is not disordered. Therefore, examine your heart to ensure that your intention is good, because the words of God must be spread to others through you.

2 As the sluice gate of a water-mill blocks the water and then lets it flow whenever necessary, so too you must carefully examine the various thoughts and temptations occurring to you in order to get rid of vain and worldly ideas, while keeping continuously in mind divine ones. It is written, you know, that the lower waters flowed downward but the upper waters stood like a wall.1

4 The lower waters stand for carnal thoughts and useless desires. These should just flow off without attracting any attention. The upper waters stand for the inspirations of God and the words of the saints. These should remain in your heart like steadfast walls that no temptations can batter away from your heart.”

1. “It is written ... stood like a wall”; cf. Joshua 3:16.
Chapter 67

On Christ’s Foreknowledge about the Immutable Arrangement of the World

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

Christ’s words to the bride disclosing his magnificence, and about how all things proceed according to his designs, with the exception of sinners’ wretched souls. Figurative examples are given concerning all this. Also, about how the will must be guarded in one’s actions.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “I am one God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. All things were foreseen and established by my divine providence from the beginning and before the ages. All things, bodily as well as spiritual, have a certain plan and order, and they exist and move along according as my foreknowledge has ordained and foreknown. Three examples will help you to understand this. 2 First, you can understand it from living things as well as from the fact that the woman and not the man gives birth. Second, it can be seen from the fact that sweet trees bear sweet fruit, while bitter trees bear bitter fruit. Third, it can be seen from the stars, that is, that the sun and moon and all the heavenly bodies complete their course as predetermined in my divinity. 3 Rational souls are also foreknown in my divinity. I know beforehand what they will become, but my foreknowledge is in no way an obstacle or hindrance to them, for I have given them free voluntary motion, that is, free will and the power to choose whatever they like.

4 Consequently, as the woman and not the man gives birth, so too the good soul, God’s wife, should give birth with God’s help, for the soul was created in order to advance in virtue and grow fruitful through the seed of the virtues, so that she may be clasped in the arms of divine love. 5 The soul that falls away from her original excellence and from her Creator acts contrary to God’s plans and is therefore unworthy of God’s sweetness.

6 Second, God’s unchanging plan appears in trees, because sweet trees bear sweet fruit and bitter trees the opposite. A date has both a sweet pulp and a hard stone. Similarly, it has been foreseen from all eternity that wherever the Holy Spirit dwells, there all worldly delight turns vile, 7 and all worldly honor becomes burdensome. In such a heart, however, there is so much strength and hardiness from the Holy Spirit that it is not cast down by any adversity nor overly elated by any success. 8 It has been similarly foreseen from all eternity that wherever the devil’s briar is, the fruit will be red on the outside but all unclean and full of prickles on the inside. 9 Thus, while there is momentary and apparent sweetness in the devil’s delight, it is full of thorns and tribulations, because the more someone gets entangled in the world, the more heavily that person is weighed down by the burden of the account to be rendered.

And so, just as every tree produces its fruit according to the kind of roots and trunk it has, so too every person is judged according to the intention behind his or her deeds.

In the third place, all the elements keep to their own order and motion, as foreseen from eternity, and move according to the will of their Maker. Likewise, every rational creature should move and prepare itself according to the order established by the Creator. When a rational creature does the opposite, it is obvious that it is abusing its freedom of choice. So, while irrational creatures keep to their limits, rational human beings debase their original excellence and render their sentence heavier by not making use of their reason.

Thus, the human will must be guarded. I do no more injury to the devil than to my angels. As God requires that chaste, indescribable sweetness from his bride, so the devil looks for thorns and prickles from his bride. Yet, the devil can in no way prevail, unless the power of the will has been corrupted.”

Chapter 68
The Devil Is Like a Fox

The Mother’s words to her daughter about a fox, and about how the devil is like a fox, and about how the devil, like a clever fox, deceives people with many and varied temptations, and tries all he can to deceive all those whom he sees making progress in virtue.

The Mother speaks: “The small animal called a fox is very diligent and clever in getting everything it needs. Sometimes it pretends to be asleep or even dead so that the birds lose their caution and perch right on top of it, and the fox can then easily catch and devour the birds so uncautious as to perch there. It watches how the birds fly, and snatches and devours any it sees resting from their fatigue on the ground or under a tree. However, the birds that fly with both their wings confuse and frustrate him in his efforts.

This fox represents the devil. He is always following God’s friends and especially those who lack his malicious bile and wicked venom. He pretends to be asleep and dead in the sense that he sometimes leaves a person free from more serious temptations so as to deceive and ensnare him unawares more easily in small ones. Sometimes he even makes vice seem like virtue and virtue like vice, in order that a person gets caught and falls into a hole and comes to ruin, unless prudence comes to his aid. An example will help you to understand this.

Sometimes mercy can be a vice, namely, when it is practiced merely to please people. Rigorous justice can be injustice, when it is exercised because of greed or impatience. Humility can be pride, when one makes a display of it in
order to attract attention. Patience seems to be a virtue but is not in a situation where one would seek revenge if one could, but must endure an offense simply because there is no opportunity for revenge. Sometimes the devil also submits people to trials and tribulations in order to break them through excessive sadness. Sometimes, too, the devil fills people’s hearts with anxiety and worry so as to make them become lukewarm in God’s service or, when they are careless in small respects, to make them fall in greater ones.

8 It was in this way that the person of whom I am speaking was tricked by the fox. When he reached old age and had everything he wanted, and declared himself to be happy and to wish to go on living, he was then snatched away without the sacraments and without atoning for his life and deeds. Like an ant, he used to gather his stores night and day, though not in the storehouse of the Lord. But, when he had reached the entrance of the anthill where he was bringing his grain, he died and left his work for others. He who does not fruitfully gather in the time of harvest will not have the enjoyment of the corn.

9 It was in this way that the person of whom I am speaking was tricked by the fox. When he reached old age and had everything he wanted, and declared himself to be happy and to wish to go on living, he was then snatched away without the sacraments and without atoning for his life and deeds. Like an ant, he used to gather his stores night and day, though not in the storehouse of the Lord. But, when he had reached the entrance of the anthill where he was bringing his grain, he died and left his work for others. He who does not fruitfully gather in the time of harvest will not have the enjoyment of the corn.

10 Happy are those birds of the Lord that do not sleep beneath the trees of worldly delights but in the trees of heavenly desires. If ever a temptation of that wicked fox, the devil, lays hold of them, they quickly fly away on the wings of humble confession and the hope of heavenly assistance.’’

**Explanation**

11 Christ, the Son of God, speaks: “This provost is material for the episcopate. Whoever wants to climb the tree of sweet fruit should be free from every burden, girded and ready for gathering, having a clean vessel in which to put the fruit. Let this man seek eagerly now to decorate his body with virtues. He should supply it with the necessities but not the superfluities of life. He should flee the occasions of incontinence and greed and show himself to be a clean mirror and an example for imperfect men. Otherwise a horrible fall will come upon him, a sudden end by the stroke of my hand.”

13 All this came to pass.

# Chapter 69

**Springwater Represents the Conduct of Priests**

**DATE: 1350s, ITALY**

Christ’s words to the bride comparing the good conduct and good deeds of the clergy to clear water and their bad conduct and bad deeds to filthy, brutish water.

2. “The person off whom I am speaking”; The explanation says this is a provost who was to become a bishop.
1 The Son speaks: “You can tell that water from a spring is not good, depending on three things. First, if the water does not have the proper color; second, if it is muddy; third, if it is always stagnant and not in motion, letting in dirt but not getting rid of it.

2 By these waters, I have in mind the conduct and hearts of the clergy. In the goodness of their conduct, they should be like springwater that is sweet to drink, impervious to all the dirt of vice. Therefore, a priest’s proper color is true humility. The more he sees himself as obliged to work for God, the more he will humble himself in thought and deed. 3 The devil’s color is found wherever there is pride. Pride is like a leprous hand scooping up water from a spring and making the water itself seem repulsive to those watching. In the same way, a priest’s pride shows his works to be defiled.

4 The water is muddy if a priest is greedy and not content with the necessities of life. When he is anxious he is useless to himself and harmful to others through the example of his greed. Third, the water is unclean when it lets in but does not rid itself of any dirt. This arises both from its outlet being closed and because it has no motion. 5 A priest is thus unclean when he loves carnal pleasures in his heart and body and does not get rid of the unclean things that occur to him. Blemishes anywhere on the body are ugly but especially so on the face. In the same way, impurity should be hateful to everyone but especially to those who are called to higher things.

6 Accordingly, those priests should be chosen for my work who are not full of verbose knowledge but of humility and purity, who behave well in themselves and teach others by word and example. Even a leprous hand is useful for my work, provided the mind is good and the spiritual hand is not lacking.”

Chapter 70

A Vision of the Crucifixion

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Mother’s words to her daughter narrating in order the passion of her blessed Son, and describing her Son’s beauty and form.

1 The Mother speaks: “When my Son’s passion was near at hand, tears filled his eyes and sweat covered his body from fear of suffering. Next, he was taken from my sight, and I did not see him again until he was led out to be scourged. 2 He was then dragged along the ground and thrown down so cruelly and violently that it knocked his head about and broke his teeth. He was struck on his neck and cheek so forcefully that the sound of the blows reached my ears.

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1. “Pride”: We follow the reading “que” (“which,” referring to “pride”) in the manuscripts and Gh, which the editor emends to “quia” [since] (“Vbi enim superbia, ibi color est Dyaboli; que/quia sicut manus leprosi”).

1. “From fear of suffering”: This is the second of the three major crucifixion revelations; cf. also Book I 10 and Book VII 15; they are compared by Ellis, “The Divine Message.” The present version is more explicit in its detail than the other two.
At the command of the executioner, he undressed himself and freely hugged the pillar. He was bound with a rope and then scourged with barbed whips. The barbs caught in his skin and were then pulled backward, not just tearing but plowing into him so as to wound his whole body. At the first blow, it was as though my heart had been pierced and I had lost the use of my senses. Then, coming out of it, I see his whole wounded body—for his body was naked during the scourging. Then one of his enemies said to the executioners: ‘Do you intend to kill this man without a sentence and cause his death yourselves?’ He cut the ropes as he said this. Once released from the pillar, my Son turned first to get his clothes, yet he was not given the time to put them on but was led away while still putting his arms into his sleeves. The footprints he left at the pillar were so full of blood that I could easily make them out and see which way they led by the mark of his blood. And he wiped his bloody face with his tunic.

After the sentence he was led out carrying the cross, but, along the way, another man took his turn carrying it. Once he arrived at the place for crucifixion, a hammer and four sharp nails were ready for him there. He took off his clothes when ordered but covered his private parts with a small cloth. He proceeded to tie it on as though it gave him some consolation to do so. The cross was planted firmly, and the crossbeam was so placed that the juncture was at the center of the shoulder blades. The cross did not have any kind of headrest. The sign with his sentence on it was attached to each arm of the cross sticking out above the head.

On being ordered, he lay down with his back to the cross and, when he was asked to do so, first stretched out his right hand. Then, since his left hand could not reach the other corner of the cross, it had to be stretched out at full length. His feet were similarly stretched out to reach the slots for the nails and placed crosswise, and, as if they had been loosened from the shinbones, were fastened to the wood of the cross by two nails driven through solid bone, as had been done with his hands. At the first hammer stroke, I was thrown into a stupor of sorrow, and when I awoke I saw my Son already fastened to the cross. I heard men saying to one another: ‘What has this man committed— theft, robbery, or fraud?’ Others answered that he was a fraud. Then the crown of thorns was pushed down on his head so hard that it came down to the middle of his forehead. Streams of blood poured down from where the thorns sat and filled his face and hair and eyes and beard so that almost nothing at all

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2. “Proceeded” renders “adiuit” [went to], which is similar to “adiuvit”[helped], the reading in medieval Swedish.

3. “The cross did not have any kind of headrest”: possibly an echo of Matthew 8:20. This may suggest a tau, or T-shaped, cross; see Ellis, “The Divine Message,” p. 216.

4. “The sign with his sentence on it” renders “tabula tituli”; cf. Sw. “taflan som the fyra ordhin varu scrifwadh oppa” [the sign that the four words were written upon]. The “four words” referred to in the Sw. are “Iesus Nazarenus rex Iudaorum,” which appear in John 19:19 (often abbreviated I.N.R.I. in works of art). In this matter, medieval tradition tended to follow John rather than the other three Gospels, which render the inscription somewhat differently.
but blood could be seen. He could not even see me standing there by the cross without blinking to get rid of the blood.

14 After he had entrusted me to his disciple, \(^5\) he lifted up his head, raised his weeping eyes to heaven, and cried out with a voice from deep within his chest, saying: ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’ 15 Never was I able to forget that cry, not until I came to heaven, the cry that he uttered, moved more by my suffering than by his own. 16 Now the color of death appeared in those parts of his body that were visible beneath the blood. His cheeks cleaved to his teeth. You could count his thin, naked ribs. His stomach, emptied now of all its juices, was sucked in toward his back, 17 and even his nostrils looked thin now. When his heart was near to breaking, his whole body shook and his beard fell toward his chest. Right then, I collapsed lifeless to the ground. 18 His mouth remained open, as he had already breathed his last. His tongue and teeth and the blood in his mouth were visible to onlookers. His half-closed eyes had rolled backward. 19 His now dead body sagged downward, with his knees bent to either side, and his feet bending on the nails like hinges.

20 Meanwhile other people standing nearby were saying almost insultingly, ‘O, Mary, your son is dead.’ Others, more nobleminded, were saying: ‘Lady, your son’s suffering is now ended unto his eternal glory.’ 21 A little later, after his side had been opened, the lance was pulled out with blood that was brown in color showing on its tip, which meant that the lance had pierced his heart. That penetrating lance was also felt going through my own heart, and it is a wonder that my heart did not burst. 22 Though the others were going away, I could not go away. I felt almost comforted to be able to touch his body when it was taken down from the cross, and take it in my arms, and explore his wounds and wipe away the blood. 23 I closed his mouth with my fingers and shut his eyes as well. I could not bend his rigid arms all the way back to repose on his chest but only across his stomach. His knees could not be straightened out but pointed outward in the same position in which they had stiffened on the cross.’

24 The Mother speaks again: “Though you cannot see my Son as he exists in heaven, hear at least how he was in body on earth. He was so fair of face that no one, not even someone very sad at heart, could see him face-to-face without being cheered at his sight. 25 The righteous were cheered with spiritual comfort, but even the wicked found relief from the sorrow of the world for as long as they looked on him. For that reason, people who were sad used to say: ‘Let us go and see Mary’s son and at least find some relief as long as we are there.’

26 In his twentieth year of age, he was perfect in size and manly strength, tall for the men of medium height in those days, not fleshy but well built as to muscles and bones. 27 His hair, eyelashes, and beard were golden brown. His beard was a palm-width in length. His forehead was neither prominent nor

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sunken but straight. His nose was evenly built, neither too little nor too large. 28 His eyes were so limpid that even his enemies loved to gaze on him. His lips were not too thick and were bright red. His jaw did not jut out and was not too long but attractive and of a fine length. His cheeks were nicely rounded. 29 He was fair-skinned with traces of red, and he had straight posture. There was not a blemish on his whole body, as his scourgers can testify who saw him bound to the pillar completely naked. 30 There were never any vermin or knots or dirt in his hair.”

Chapter 71
A Discussion about Marriage

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Christ puts loving questions to the bride, and she gives humble answers to him, and about how Christ submitted three praiseworthy states to the choice of the bride: the state of virginity, the married state, and the widowed state.

1 The Son of God speaks to his bride: “Answer for me the four questions I ask. If someone gives his friend a fruitful vine but keeps it close to his own house so that he might have the pleasure of seeing and smelling it, what should the giver say if the new owner of the vine were to ask if he could transplant it to another place where it could bear more plentiful fruit?” 2 She answers: “If the friend gave him it out of love and was sensible and desired the good for his friend, then he would certainly allow him to do whatever he wanted with the vine, saying: ‘My friend, though it makes me happy to have the vine close by, still it does not yield me much fruit, and so I am happy if you can transfer it, if you like, to a more fertile spot.’” 3 The Lord asked a second time: “If parents were to give their maiden daughter to a young man, and she consented to the youth, but if the boy, when asked by the parents whether he wanted to have her or not, does not give an answer, is the girl betrothed then or not?” 4 She answered: “It seems to me that, since the boy did not express his own wishes, the girl is not betrothed.” 5 The Lord spoke a third time: “A noble youth in the company of three maidens proposed to them that whichever of them could express herself in a way that excited his love the most would obtain that which the youth loved the most. 6 The first girl answered: ‘I love this young man so much that I would rather die than disgrace myself with another man.’ The second girl said: ‘And I would rather suffer any kind of pain than utter a single word against his wishes.’ 7 The third answered: ‘I would prefer to suffer any kind of bitter pain or condemnation rather than see his least little scorn or condemnation.’” 8 Then the Lord said: “Tell me, which of these three maidens loved the youth most and should receive his preferential love?” She answered: “It seems to me that they all loved him equally, since they were all of one accord in his respect, and all of them equally deserve to have his love.”
9 The Lord spoke a fourth time: “A man once consulted his friend and said: ‘I have very fertile wheat. If it is sown in the ground, it yields a great crop. However, I am very hungry, so what do you think is more advisable: to eat it or to sow it in the ground?’ 10 His friend answers: ‘Your hunger can be stilled at another time. Now it is more useful for you to sow it in the ground.’” Then the Lord added: “My daughter, do you not think the same—should not the person experiencing hunger endure it and plant the grain so that it will be good for many people?”

11 The Lord said again: “These four examples apply to you. Your daughter is like a vine that you have vowed and given to me. Now, however, since I know a more suitable place for her, I want to transplant her where I please, and you should not be upset by this, since you gave your consent to the transplantation.”

12 The Lord said again: “You gave me your daughter, but I did not show you which would be more acceptable to me, her virginity or her matrimony, or whether your sacrifice pleased me or not. Therefore, the things that were done in uncertainty can be changed and corrected now that they are known with certainty.” 13 The Lord said again: “Virginity is good and most excellent, for it resembles the angelic state, provided it is maintained with wisdom and virtue. But if the one is missing from the other, that is, if there is virginity of the flesh but not of the mind, then that virginity has been deformed. 14 A devout and humble housewife is more acceptable to me than a proud and immodest virgin. A God-fearing housewife, who is in control of herself and lives according to the rule of her state, can win equal merit as a humble and modest virgin. 15 Although it is a great thing to stand the test of fire without burning, it is an equally great thing to remain outside the fire of the religious state but to be willing to be in the fire and to burn with greater ardor outside the fire than one does who is in the fire.

16 I offer you the example of three women—Susanna, Judith, and Thecla the virgin. The first was married, the second a widow, the third a virgin. They had different ways of life and made different choices, but they gained a similar reward by their meritorious deeds. 17 When Susanna was falsely molested by the priests, she preferred, out of love for God, death to disgracing her state in life. Because she feared me as being everywhere present, she deserved to be saved and to be glorified for the sake of her salvation. 18 When Judith saw the dishonor done to me and her people being lost, she was so troubled that she

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1. “Vowed and given”: As indicated at the end, this revelation probably refers to Birgitta’s youngest daughter, Cecilia, who was cloistered until she married. It is an important revelation on marriage.
3. “Outside the fire of the religious state”: Birgitta compares the desire for purity in marriage with the desire for purity in virginity.
4. “Susanna, Judith, and Thecla the virgin”: Susanna appears in Daniel 13 in the Latin Vulgate Bible (a chapter excluded from most English Bibles as being apocryphal); Judith appears in the book of the Vulgate that carries her name (likewise excluded from most English Bibles); and Thecla appears in the Acts of Paul and Thecla, a second-century work sometimes classed among the New Testament Apocrypha. See Stephens, *Ett Forn-svenskt legendarium* 3, p. 154.
not only exposed herself to blame and condemnation for the sake of her love for God, but was also prepared to suffer punishment for my sake. Finally, Thecla, who was a virgin, preferred to suffer bitter torments than to utter a single word against me. 19 These three women, although their actions were not one and the same, nevertheless were equal in merit. Therefore, whether virgin or widow, everyone is equally capable of pleasing me, provided that all their desire is directed toward me and that their life is virtuous.”

20 The Lord said again: “It is equally acceptable to me whether your daughter remains a virgin or marries, provided that it is done according to my will. What would it profit her if she perhaps were cloistered in body but remained outside the walls in her mind? Or, which would be more glorious: to live for herself or for the benefit of others? 21 I know and foresee all things, and I do nothing without a reason. Therefore, she shall not arrive at her destination by the first fruit, for that would be out of fear, nor the second fruit, for that would be out of lukewarmness.

22 She will, however, arrive in the middle state, for that has just the right warmth of love and fruit of virtue. However, the man who is to receive her should possess three things—housing, clothing, and food enough to receive her.”

Explanation

23 The Son speaks: “You are wondering why this virgin did not come to be married in the way you hoped. I answer by way of a parable. A certain nobleman arranged to give his daughter in marriage to a poor man. 24 This man, who was to have been betrothed to the maiden, broke the laws of the city and was dishonorably expelled by the citizens and did not get the maiden whom he desired. 25 I have acted in the same manner with the ruler of this country. I promised to do great things for him, but instead he joined my enemies and therefore did not obtain the things I promised him.

26 But you might ask: Could I not foresee the future? Of course, I foresaw it, in the same way as can be read in the case of Moses and his people. I have revealed and do reveal many things so that people can prepare themselves for good things and know what to do and wait patiently. 27 Know, however, that one woe has passed and another shall come upon the ungrateful people of this kingdom in order that my blessing may afterward come upon the humble persons who entreat my mercy. Know, too, that it would be better for this

5. “Whether virgin or widow”: given that three, and not two states, are being discussed in this passage, it is likely that the state of marriage was originally included at this point, but subsequently lost.

6. “She shall not . . . the middle state”: The sense is somewhat obscure, but “fruit” clearly refers back to the beginning of the revelation, where Birgitta’s daughter is referred to as a vine; and the “middle state” (rendering Latin “in medio”) we take as referring to the state of marriage, which lies between virginity and widowhood.

7. The explanation turns a personal example into a political one, relating the imagery to Magnus Eriks-son’s disobedience.
virgin to follow the advice of the wise and of me.” 28 This virgin is believed to have been Lady Cecilia, St. Birgitta’s daughter. Concerning her, see St. Birgitta’s biography below. 8

# Chapter 72

**About Mary and Martha**

**DATE: 1350s, ITALY**

The words of Christ concerning the sisters of the risen Lazarus, and about how (as I believe1) the sisters stand for the bride and her daughter, Lazarus for the soul, the Jews for envious persons, and about how God has shown the latter greater mercy than he did for the sisters of Lazarus, and about how people who talk much but do little become indignant against those who do good deeds.

1 The Son speaks: “There were two sisters, Martha and Mary,2 whose brother I raised from the dead. After his resurrection, he served me more than before. 2 His sisters, too, though they had been my servants and zealous in attending to me before their brother’s resurrection, showed themselves much more solicitous and devoted afterward. 3 I have treated you3 in a similar way spiritually. Thus, I raised your brother, that is, your soul that—fetid after being dead for four days—had separated itself from me by breaking my commandments, by base desire and delight in the sweetness of the world and of sins.

4 There were, however, four reasons that moved me to raise Lazarus. The first was that he had been my friend while he lived. The second was the love of his sisters. 5 The third was that Mary’s humility had earned such a reward when she washed my feet.4 She deserved to be gladdened and honored to the extent to which she had lowered herself for my sake in the sight of the guests. The fourth reason was to manifest the glory of my human nature. 6 These four reasons do not, however, apply to you, since you love the world more than they did. Therefore, my mercy toward you is greater than my mercy toward those sisters. 7 It is clearly all the greater inasmuch as spiritual death is more dan-

8. “St. Birgitta’s biography below”: Texts of the *Vita* were sometimes included in the Latin manuscripts of the *Revelations*, as suggested here. The passage alluded to is probably a difficult childbirth experienced by Birgitta (presumably with Cecilia). A woman dressed in white was seen to enter her chamber and touch her limbs so that she gave birth painlessly. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 79.

1. “As I believe”: Alfonso (the author of the heading) surmises that Martha and Mary in this revelation symbolize Birgitta and her daughter Katherina Ulfsdotter, who settled in Italy as her mother’s companion; see further Nyberg, “Birgitta som mor.”

2. “There were two sisters, Martha and Mary”; cf. John 11:1–46.

3. “I have treated you”: Note that the pronoun is plural, addressing more than one person throughout this revelation.

4. “When she washed my feet”; cf. Luke 7:38. Birgitta here identifies Mary of Bethany with the remorseful prostitute in Luke’s Gospel; the medieval Swedish translation adds an identification with Mary Magdalene. Both of these identifications rest on the authority of Gregory the Great and were commonly accepted in the Middle Ages.
gerous than bodily death, and the resurrection of the soul is more glorious than bodily resurrection.

8 Hence, since my mercy excels your deeds, welcome me, as those sisters did, into the home of your minds with most fervent charity, loving nothing as me, having total trust in me, 9 each day humbling yourselves along with Mary by weeping for your sins, unashamed to live humble among the proud, chaste among the unchaste, showing to others outwardly how much you love me inwardly. 10 Furthermore, like those sisters, you ought to be of one heart and one mind,\(^5\) strong in scorning the world and quick in praising God. If you do so, then I will raise your brother—your soul—for you and protect it from being killed by the Jews.

11 What would it have profited Lazarus to rise from a present death, unless, by living more virtuously in the present life, he might rise up more glorious to a second and lasting life? 12 Who are the Jews who sought to kill Lazarus if not those who become indignant because you lead better lives than theirs, who have learned to speak loftily but to do little, who, seeking the approval of others, scorn the deeds of their predecessors with all the greater scorn the less they themselves deign\(^6\) to understand the higher truths?

13 There are many such people. They know how to discourse on the virtues but not how to observe them by leading virtuous lives. Their souls are therefore in danger, because their words are many but their deeds are not to be seen. Did my preachers act in this manner? By no means! 14 They certainly did not admonish sinners with lofty words but with few and charitable words, and they were ready to give their own souls for the souls of sinners. Through their charity, others obtained charity, for the teacher’s zeal forms the mind of the listener more than mere words do. 15 Many preachers nowadays say abstruse things about me, but no fruit comes of it, because wood is not set on fire by merely blowing on it but only with the aid of sparks of fire.

16 I shall guard and protect you from these Jews so that you will not leave me because of what they do or say. Yet, I shall not protect you in such a way that you escape every suffering but that you may not succumb due to lack of patient endurance. Stick to your resolution, and I shall set your will on fire with my charity.”
A certain knight who was alive was declared to be dead. In a spiritual vision he was also shown to the bride to be as though he were dead and begging for help. Because this lady was upset by his death, the Mother of mercy said to her: “Daughter, you will find out in time whether or not the knight is dead, but we still want to strive so that he may live a better life.”

Chapter 74*

On the Knight’s Armor

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

Christ’s words to his bride; John the Baptist’s words of praise to Christ, and the devout prayers he pours forth in Christ’s presence on behalf of Christians and especially for a certain knight. Through John’s prayers, the knight, with his own hands and with the helping hands of the glorious Virgin and of Peter and Paul, is armed and decorated with spiritual weapons, that is, with the virtues. Also, what each of these bodily weapons signifies, and about praying well.

The Son of God was speaking to his bride, saying: “You set it down today that it is better to forestall than to be forestalled. Indeed, I forestalled you with my sweet grace so that the devil would not gain control of your soul.”

John the Baptist suddenly appeared and said: “Blessed are you, God! You preexist all things. There has never been another god together with you or besides you nor will there ever be any after you, for you are and were one God forever. You are the truth promised by the prophets. While yet unborn I rejoiced in you. I recognized you more fully when I pointed you out. You are our joy and our glory, our longing and our delight. The sight of you fills us with an indescribable pleasure, which none knows but the one who has tasted of it. You are our only love. It is no wonder that we love you, for you are love itself, and you love not only those who love you but, being the creator of all, you are even charitable to those who scorn to know you. Now then, my Lord, because we are rich through you and in you, we ask you to give of our spiritual riches to those who lack riches so that more people may partake of our good fortune, just as we rejoice not in our own merits but in you.”

1. “You will find out in time”: See ch. 124.14, which alludes to the false news of Karl’s death. The knight concerned is therefore probably Karl, Birgitta’s son.

* This revelation also occurs in Book VIII 34. It relates to Birgitta’s son, Karl.

1. “You set it down today”: Birgitta is probably referring to a Latin lesson, as suggested in the Swedish translation, which has the addition “j thina lækxe” [in your lesson]; cf. Book 3.27.

2. “It is better to forestall than to be forestalled”: Walther, Proverbia sententiaeque Latinaitatis, no. 14604a and 38186.


6 Christ answers: “You are indeed an uppermost limb alongside and next to the head. Yet the neck is closer and more excellent. As I am the head of all, so my Mother is like the neck, and then come the angels. 7 You and my apostles are like the joints of the backbone, for you not only love me, but you also honor me by helping those who love me. What I said therefore remains firm: The works that I do, you shall also do, and your will is my will. 8 As the head of the body does not move without its limbs, so too in your spiritual connection and union with me it is not one thing to wish and another to be able to do, but rather you have every ability to do what each one of you wishes. Therefore, your request shall be fulfilled.”

9 After these words were spoken, John brought a certain knight who was almost half-dead into their midst and said: “Here, Lord, here is a man who has consecrated his knighthood to you. He is trying to struggle but is not strong enough, for he is unarmed and weak. 10 I am bound to help him for a twofold reason, both because of his parents’ merits and because of the love he feels toward my honor. Therefore, for your own glory, give him a knight’s attire to keep the shame of his nakedness from being seen.”

11 The Lord answered: “Give him what you like and fit him out as you please!” Then John said: “Come, my son, and receive from me the first garment of your knighthood. Once you have it, you will more easily be able to receive and bear the rest of your knightly gear. 12 It is fitting for a knight to have a soft and smooth tunic close to his skin. The bodily tunic is soft and smooth, and likewise your spiritual tunic must be to keep God dear to your soul and delightful to your affections. 13 Delight in God comes from two things: the consideration of his kindnesses, and the remembrance of the sins you have committed. I had both of them as a boy. 14 You see, I considered what a grace God had prepared for me while I was not yet born, and what a blessing he had given me after my birth. I sighed to consider how I might worthily repay my God. 15 I considered, too, the instability of the world, and so I ran off to the desert where my Lord Jesus became so sweet for me that the thought of all the world’s pleasures wearied me and the mere desire for them became a burden. Come, then, and put on this tunic, for the rest will be given to you in due time.”

16 Then Blessed Peter the Apostle appeared and said: “John gave you a tunic, but I, who fell low but got up like a man, shall procure for you a coat of mail, that is, divine charity. 17 Just as chain mail consists of many iron rings, so too charity protects a man against enemy missiles and makes him more even-tempered in enduring the evils that threaten, more agile in honoring God and more fervent in divine works, invincible in adversity, calm in hope, steadfast in the tasks he undertakes. 18 This chain mail should shine like gold and be as strong as steel and iron, for everyone who has charity should be as malleable as gold in the endurance of adversity as well as shining in wisdom and discernment so as not to exchange heresy for sound faith nor doubt for certain truth.

19 The mail must be as strong as iron. Just as iron subdues all, so too a man of charity must be eager to humble all those who stand in the way of faith and good morals without yielding because of abusive language. 20 He must not bend due to friendships nor grow lukewarm for the sake of his own material comforts. He must not hide for the sake of bodily ease, nor be afraid of dying, for no one can take someone’s life away without God’s permission. 21 Now, though chain mail consists of many rings, nevertheless the chain mail of charity is woven of two principal rings. The first ring of charity is the knowledge of God and the frequent consideration of divine kindnesses and precepts. This makes a man recognize how he should behave toward God, toward his neighbor, and toward the world. 22 The second ring is the curbing of one’s selfish will for God’s sake. Everyone with a perfect and whole love of God keeps nothing of his own will for himself if it goes against God. Here, my son, God gives you this coat of mail, which I have won for you as was anticipated by God’s grace.”

23 Blessed Paul then appeared and said: “O, my son, Peter, the chief pastor of the sheep, gave you a coat of mail. Of love for God, I shall give you that cuirass that is love for your neighbor, a willingness to die freely for your neighbor’s salvation with the help of God’s grace. 24 Just as many plates are combined in a cuirass and bound together with nails, so too there are many virtues that come together in the love for one’s neighbor. Everyone who loves his neighbor is bound to feel sorrow, first of all, because not all of those redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ repay God with love in return. 25 He should feel sorrow, in the second place, because the Holy Church, God’s bride, is not in the most commendable condition. Third, because there are very few who remember God’s sufferings with anguish and love. Fourth, he should be on his guard so that his neighbor may not be corrupted by any bad example of his own. 26 Fifth, he should give his possessions to his neighbor cheerfully and pray to God for him that he may advance and become perfect in every goodness. The nails that hold the plates together are godly words. 27 When a charitable man sees his neighbor in trouble, he should comfort him with words of charity; he should defend him when unjustly attacked; he should visit the sick, ransom hostages, and not be ashamed of the poor. He should ever love the truth, put nothing ahead of the love of God, and never swerve from the way of justice. 28 I myself was outfitted with this cuirass, for I was weak with the weak, 8 unashamed to speak the truth 9 in the sight of kings and princes, and ready to die for the salvation of my neighbor.”

29 Then the Mother of God appeared and said to the knight: “My son, what do you still need?” And he said: “I have no helmet for my head.” The Mother of mercy then said to the guardian angel of his soul: “How did your

7. “Everyone who loves his neighbor… with love in return”; see Aili, Book IV, p. 46, in which he discusses a number of minor manuscript variants of this passage.
8. “I was weak with the weak”; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:22.
guardianship benefit his soul and what do you have to present to our Lord?"

30 The angel answered: “I do have something to present, but it is not much. Sometimes he gave alms and sometimes said prayers. Sometimes, too, he denied his own will for God’s sake, sincerely asking God to make the world become distasteful to him and God dear to him above all things.” 31 The Mother answered: “It is good that you have something to bring. We will then do what a skillful goldsmith does when he is about to make some grand object out of gold. If he needs gold and does not have it, he turns for help to friends who have it. His friends who have gold help him to complete his work. 32 If a person is making an object of clay, who will give him any gold? It is not fitting to mix gold with clay. Therefore, all the saints, rich in gold, will together with me earn a helmet for you to have. This helmet is the intention of pleasing God alone. 33 As a helmet protects the head from arrows and blows, so too a good intention directed toward God alone protects the soul so that the temptations of the devil do not prevail against it, and it introduces God into the soul. 34 The good knight George had this intention, as did Maurice and many others, including the thief who hung on the cross. Without it, no one can lay a good foundation or come to his reward. The helmet should have two openings in front of the eyes to allow one to see in advance anything approaching. 35 These openings are discernment concerning things to be done and caution concerning things to be omitted, for, without discernment and forethought, many things that seem good at the start turn out to be bad in the end.”

36 The Mother asked the knight again: “What do you still need, my son?” And he answered: “My hands are naked and have no armor.” 37 The Mother said: “I will help you so that your hands will not be naked. Just as you have two bodily hands, you likewise have two spiritual ones. The right hand with which the sword is held symbolizes the work of justice. There should be five virtues like five fingers there. 38 The first finger means that every just person must first be just to himself. This is done by guarding against anything in one’s speech, action, or example that might offend one’s neighbor so that one does not undo through one’s own disorderly behavior what one teaches to others or justly reprehends in them. 39 The second finger means not to carry out justice or the deeds of justice for the sake of human favor or worldly greed but for the love of God alone. The third means not to show unjust fear of anyone nor to dissemble anything out of friendship nor to swerve away from justice for anyone’s sake, rich or poor, friend or foe. 40 The fourth means to be ready and willing to die for the sake of justice. The fifth means not only to do justice but also to love justice wisely. The result of this is that the sentence shows both mercy and justice, and the person who commits a lesser sin is corrected in one

10. “George...Maurice”; St. George was a martyr who died c. 303; he was later thought to have been a knight and was seen as the model of chivalry. St. Maurice was a Roman officer and martyr who died c. 287; he is said to have commanded the Roman Theban Legion composed exclusively of Christians and martyred in its entirety.

way, while the person who commits a greater is corrected in another way, and
the person who sins from ignorance in one way, while the person who sins by
design or malice in another way. 41 Whoever has these five fingers should be
careful not to sharpen his sword through impatience nor dull it through
worldly pleasure nor drop it through imprudence or darken it through frivolity.

42 The left hand symbolizes godly prayer. This, too, has five fingers. The
first is a firm belief in the articles of faith concerning the divine and human
natures, putting it all into practice and believing all that the Holy Church,
God’s bride, professes. 43 The second is the refusal to sin deliberately against
God along with the desire to make reparation for all the sins you have com-
mitted through contrition and atonement. The third is to entreat God to turn
the love of the flesh into a spiritual love. 44 The fourth is living for nothing else
in the world but to give glory to God and to reduce the amount of sin. The fifth
is never to rely on your own strength in any way but ever to fear God and to
await death at any hour. There, my son, these are the two hands you should
have. 45 With the right hand you must brandish the sword of justice against
the transgressors of justice. With the left hand of prayer you must plead for
God’s help so that you never trust to your own righteousness nor become
insolent toward God."

46 Blessed Mary appeared again and said to the knight: “What do you still
need, my son?” He answered: “Leg armor.” And she said: “Listen to me, o
knight who once belonged to the world but now is mine. 47 God created
everything in heaven and on earth, but worthiest and most beautiful among
the lower creatures is the soul, similar to good will in her conceptions. 12 48 Just
as many branches shoot forth from a tree, so too every virtuous perfection
shoots forth from the soul through spiritual exercise and activity. 49 Therefore,
in order to obtain spiritual leg armor, you must, by the grace of God, begin with
good will. A twofold consideration must support your will, like two legs
standing on golden bases. 50 The perfect soul’s first leg is the following con-
sideration: that you would refuse to sin even if no punishment were to follow.
The second leg consists in doing good works with great patience and love of
God, even in the face of your own damnation. 51 The knees of the soul are the
cheerfulness and fortitude of a good intention. As the knees curve and bend
with the use of the legs, so too the soul’s intention should bend and stop in
obedience to reason according to the will of God.

52 It is written that spirit and flesh are opposed to each other. 13 Thus, Paul
also says: ‘I do not do the good I want.’ 14 It is as if he said: ‘I want to do good
according to the soul but I am unable because of the weakness of the flesh. Yet,
what happens when I am sometimes able to do them though not cheerfully?’
53 Shall the Apostle be deprived of his wages because he had the will but not

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12. “In her conceptions” renders “imaginacionibus suis”; the phrase is omitted altogether in the medieval
Swedish translation.
the ability, or because he did good things but not cheerfully? Certainly not! Rather, his reward will be increased twofold: first because, with respect to the outer man, the action was difficult for him due to the flesh’s resistance to the good; second because, with respect to the inner man, he did not always receive spiritual consolation. 54 Accordingly, many secular people work in the world but receive no reward for it, because they act out of carnal motives. If their work was a command from God, they would not be as eager to do it. 55 These two legs of the soul, then, the refusal to sin against God and the intention of doing good works, even should damnation follow, must be equipped with a double armor, namely, the discerning use of temporal goods and the discerning desire to seek heavenly ones. 56 The discerning use of temporal goods means possessing them for the purpose of a moderate subsistence and not in excess. The discerning desire for heavenly goods means the intention of earning heaven through good works and exertion. 57 The human creature has turned away from God through ingratitude and sloth and must therefore return to God by work and humility. So, my son, since you do not have these, let us turn to the holy martyrs and confessors who abounded in such riches and ask them to help you.”

58 Then the saints appeared and said: “O, Blessed Lady, you bore the Lord of life and you are the Lady of all creation. What is there that you cannot do? You wish, and it is done. Your will is always our will. You are truly the Mother of love, for you attend to everyone with love.”

59 The Mother appeared again and said to the knight: “Son, we still lack the shield. A shield needs two things: on the one hand, strength, and, on the other, the emblem of the lord under whom one is serving as a soldier. 60 The spiritual shield signifies the consideration of God’s bitter passion. This should be on your left arm next to your heart so that as often as carnal pleasure entices your mind, you may recollect the bruises of Jesus Christ. 61 Whenever the world’s disdain and opposition sting and sadden your mind, you should recall the poverty and ignominy of Christ. Whenever honors or a long life in the flesh entice you, you should call to mind Christ’s bitter suffering and death. 62 Such a shield should possess both the strength of perseverance in goodness and the breadth of love. The emblem on the shield should be of two colors, because nothing is seen more clearly at a distance than something composed of two bright colors. 63 The colors decorating the shield of the consideration of the divine passion are, on the one hand, self-control over disorderly emotions and, on the other hand, purity and restraint with regard to the promptings of the flesh. 64 Indeed, heaven is lit up by these two colors, and the angels see them and exult with joy, saying: ‘Behold the sign of purity and the token of our fellowship! We must help this knight.’ 65 The demons see the knight decorated with these tokens on his shield and exclaim: ‘What shall we do, fellows? This knight is fearful to encounter and gloriously armed. 66 At his sides are the weapons of virtue, behind him stands an army of angels, at his left he has a most watchful guardian, God himself, and all around him there are plenty of eyes attentive to our wickedness. We can do battle with him only to our shame, because we can in no way prevail.’ 67 How happy is that knight
whom the angels honor and in fear of whom the demons tremble! But, my son, since you have not yet acquired this shield, let us ask the holy angels who shine in spiritual purity to help you."

68 The Mother speaks again: "My son, we still lack a sword. A sword needs two qualities: first, it should have sharp edges and, second, it must be thoroughly sharpened. 69 The spiritual sword is trust in God in order to fight for justice. This trust should have two edges: upright justice in prosperity, as it were, on the right edge, and thanksgiving in adversity, as it were, on the left edge. 70 Good Job had such a sword. When he was prosperous, he offered sacrifice for his children and was like a father to the poor, and his door stood open for the wayfarer. He did not walk in the way of vanity nor covet the goods of others but feared God as the One who sits on the waves of the sea. Then again, he gave thanks in adversity. When he lost his children, when he was upbraided by his wife and afflicted with horrible boils, he bore it all with patience, saying: 'The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Lord.'

72 This sword should be kept thoroughly sharpened by crushing the assailants of justice as did Moses and David, by showing zeal for the law like Phinehas, by speaking firmly like Elias and John. O, how many people nowadays have a very dull sword! Even if they speak in word, they lift not a finger and pay no heed to God's glory in their quest for human favor. And so, because you have no such sword, let us ask the patriarchs and prophets who had such great trust in God, and a sword shall be given to us."

74 The Mother appeared again and said to the knight: "My son, you are still in need of something to cover your weapons and protect them from rust and damage from rain. This covering is charity, the readiness to die for God, and even—if it were possible—to be separated from God for the sake of the salvation of one's brethren. This kind of charity covers all sins, preserves the virtues, placates God's wrath, makes all things possible, frightens demons away, and is the joy of angels. This covering should be white on the inside and gleam like gold on the outside, for wherever the zeal of divine love is found neither the one kind of purity nor the other is neglected. The apostles were full of this charity. We must ask them to help you."

77 The Mother appeared again and said: "My son, you still have need of a horse and saddle. The spiritual signification of the horse is baptism. Just as a horse has its four legs and carries a man on the journey he must accomplish,

15. "Job...offered sacrifice for his children"; cf. Job 1:5.
20. "The Lord has given...Blessed be the Lord"; cf. Job 1:21.
22. "And even": The Latin editor begins a new sentence and paragraph at "et etiam si" ("and even if it"). We follow the punctuation in the medieval Swedish text.
23. "Separated from God...one's brethren"; cf. Romans 9:3.
so too baptism, as signified by the horse, carries a man in the sight of God and has four spiritual effects. 79 The first effect is that the baptized are liberated from the devil and bound to the commandments and service of God. The second effect is that they are cleansed from original sin. The third is that they are made God’s children and coheirs. The fourth is that heaven is opened to them.

80 Yet how many there are today who, having reached the age of reason, pull the reins on the horse of baptism and ride it off on a false path! 81 The baptismal path is true and rightly followed when people are instructed and upheld in good moral habits before reaching the age of reason and when, upon reaching the age of reason and carefully considering what was promised at the baptismal font, they keep their faith and love of God intact. 82 However, they ride away from the right path and rein the horse in when they prefer the world and the flesh to God.

83 The saddle of the horse or of baptism is the effect of the bitter passion and death of Jesus Christ, which gave baptism its efficacy. What is water if not an element? As soon as God’s blood was poured out, God’s word and the power of God’s outpoured blood entered into the element. 84 Thus, by the word of God, the water of baptism became the means of reconciliation between humankind and God, the gate of mercy, the expulsion of demons, the way to heaven, and the forgiveness of sins. 85 So those who would boast of the power of baptism should first consider how the effect of baptism was instituted through bitter pain. When their mind swells up with pride against God, let them consider how bitter their redemption was, how many times they have broken their baptismal vows, and what they deserve for their relapses into sin.

86 In order to sit firmly in the saddle of the baptismal effect, two stirrups are needed, that is, two considerations in prayer. 87 First one should pray in such a way: ‘Lord God almighty, blessed are you who have created and redeemed me. Although I am worthy of damnation, you showed tolerance for my sins and brought me back to repentance. 88 Lord, in the presence of your majesty, I admit that I have uselessly and culpably wasted all that you have given me for my salvation. I have wasted the time given for penance on vanities, lent my body to excesses, and used up the grace of baptism through pride. 89 I loved it all more than you, my creator and redeemer, my nourisher and protector. And so, I beg for your mercy, for I am wretched in myself. 90 Because I did not acknowledge your kind patience toward me or fear your terrible equity, I gave no thought as to how I should requite you for your innumerable good gifts. Rather, day by day I sought to provoke you with my wickedness. 91 Therefore, I have only one thing to say to you: Have mercy on me, God, according to your great mercy!’

92 The second prayer is like this: ‘Lord God almighty, I know that everything I have comes from you and that I am nothing without you and can do nothing without you other than what I myself have accomplished, which is
nothing but sin. Humbly, therefore, I implore your pity. Do not deal with me according to my sins but according to your great mercy. Send your Holy Spirit to enlighten my heart and confirm me in the way of your commandments so that I may be able to persevere in that which I have come to know through your inspiration and never be separated from you by any temptations.’

Therefore, my son, since you lack this, let us ask those who fixed God’s passion in their hearts with greater sorrow to share their charity with you.’

When this was said, a horse suddenly appeared equipped with gilt ornaments. And the Mother said: “The horse’s ornaments symbolize the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are given in baptism. No matter whether it is administered by a good or a bad minister, baptism takes away the ancestral offense, increases grace, pardons every sin, gives the Holy Spirit as a pledge, angels as guardians, and heaven as an inheritance.

See, my son, these are the trappings of a spiritual knight. A knight who wears them will receive the ineffable wages with which he can purchase perpetual joy, most peaceful honor, eternal plenty and everlasting life.”

The knight was Sir Karl, St. Birgitta’s son.

Chapter 75

On the Likeness of a Bride and Groom

DATE: 1350s, ITALY

The bride’s words of prayer and praise to Christ and the Virgin. The Virgin’s consoling reply to the daughter, showing her that God in his righteous decision often lets his power become more manifest through the lies of the devil. And about how tribulations lead to spiritual benefits.

1 “Blessed are you, my God, my Creator and Redeemer. You are the ransom through which we were freed from captivity, through which we are led toward salvation and share in the Unity and Trinity. Therefore, even if I blush over my own ugliness, yet I rejoice because you, having died once to save us, nevermore shall die. 3 You are truly he who existed before the ages, he who has power over life and death. You alone are God, almighty and awesome. May you be blessed forever!

4 But what shall I say of you, o blessed Mary, the salvation of the entire world? You are like someone who has a friend saddened over something he has lost and who puts that lost possession suddenly before his eyes, thus relieving his sorrow, increasing his joy and enkindling his whole spirit with gladness.

5 You, Mother most sweet, showed the world its God, whom men had lost. You

1. “Having died once to save us”; cf. 1 Peter 3:18.
gave birth to him who was born before time and at whose birth heaven and earth rejoiced. 6 Therefore, sweet Mother, I ask you to help me so that my enemy may not rejoice over me nor prevail against me with his machinations.”

7 The Mother answered: “I shall help you. But why are you upset because one thing was shown to you spiritually and another was heard physically—I mean because that knight, who was physically alive, was shown to you as spiritually dead and in need of spiritual help? 8 Hear now something that is certain. Every truth comes from God and every falsehood from the devil, who is the father of falsehood. 9 Yet, although truth is from God, nevertheless, through the malice and falsehood of the devil, which God sometimes permits according to his secret decision, God’s power is made more manifest, as I will show you by way of a comparison.

10 Once there was a maiden who tenderly loved her bridegroom, and he loved her similarly. God was glorified through their love, and the parents of both were happy. 11 Their enemy saw it and thought to himself as follows: ‘I know that bride and bridegroom come together in three ways—through letters, through mutual conversation, and through their bodily union. 12 Accordingly, I will fill all the roads with stakes, brambles, and hooks in order to block the access of messengers and letter carriers. In order to obstruct their conversation, I will raise a din and clatter to distract them in conversing. 13 In order to prevent them coming together naked in bed, I will appoint guards to watch every nook and cranny so that they will have no opportunity to come together.’

14 The bridegroom, more astute than his enemy, realized these things and said to his servants: ‘My enemy is setting traps for me in such and such places. Be on the lookout in those places, and if you discover it, let him go on working until he has laid his snares, and then swoop down on him but without killing him. Instead, shout and mock at him so that your fellow servants see the enemy’s wiles and become more careful in guarding and watching.’ 16 Something similar occurs in spiritual matters. The letters by which the bridegroom and bride, that is, God and the good soul, come together are simply the prayers and aspirations of good people. 17 Just as physical letters are an indication of the feelings and intentions of the sender, so too the prayers of good people enter into the heart of God and join the soul to God in a single bond of love. 18 The devil, however, sometimes prevents human hearts from asking for that which is conducive to the salvation of the soul or contrary to carnal pleasure. Moreover, he prevents those who pray for other sinners from being heard, since, being sinners, they do not seek any improvement for their own souls or ask for something of everlasting worth.

19 The mutual conversations through which bridegroom and bride become one heart and one soul stand for nothing other than penance and contrition. Sometimes the devil raises such a din between them that they

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cannot hear each other. 20 This din stands for nothing other than the devil’s base suggestion to the heart desirous of performing fruitful penance. He says this through his promptings: ‘O, my dainty soul, is it not hard to undertake unfamiliar and unaccustomed practices? Do you think everyone can become perfect? 21 It is enough for you to be one of the many. Why are you attempting to do greater things? Why are you doing what no one else does? You will not be able to persevere. Everyone will laugh you to scorn, if you lower yourself and become excessively submissive.’

22 Deluded by such suggestions, the soul thinks to herself: ‘It is a heavy thing to give up customary habits. I will just make my confession about past sins. It is enough for me to follow the path of the majority. I am not capable of becoming perfect. Surely God is merciful. He would not have redeemed us if he wanted us to perish.’ 23 By means of this kind of din the devil prevents God from hearing the soul. It is not that God does not hear everything but that he is not pleased in hearing such talk, when the soul consents more to temptation than to her own reason.

24 The naked union of God and the soul stands for nothing other than the heavenly longing and the pure charity with which the soul ought to burn in every hour. This charity gets impeded in four ways. 25 First, the devil urges the soul to do something against God that, though not counting as something serious, still delights her mind. Delight of this kind, since she makes light of it and does not bother about it, is hateful to God. 26 Second, the devil inspires the soul to do certain good deeds in order to please others and sometimes, out of fear or for the sake of worldly honor, to omit certain good deeds that she could do. 27 Third, the devil induces forgetfulness and listlessness in the soul with regard to the good deeds she ought to carry out, and her mind gets absorbed by this and grows weary of doing good. 28 Fourth, the devil makes the soul grow anxious about worldly cares or needless sorrows and joys or extravagant fears.

29 Such things, then, obstruct the letters, that is, the prayers of the just, as well as the mutual conversation of bridegroom and bride. However, though the devil is astute, God is all the more wiser and stronger in shattering the snares of his enemy so that the letters that have been sent can reach the bridegroom. 30 The snares are shattered when God inspires good thoughts, and when the heart desires to have the intention of fleeing base acts and of doing deeds that are pleasing to God. The enemy’s din gets dispelled when the soul is discreetly penitent and has the intention of not repeating confessed sins.

31 Know that the devil not only raises a din and clatter for people hostile to God but even for God’s friends. You may understand this better by way of a comparison. A maiden was once speaking with a man when a curtain appeared between them. The man saw it indeed, but not the maiden. 32 At the end of their conversation, the maiden lifted up her eyes and saw the curtain. Frightened, she said to herself: ‘God help me so that I may not be deceived by the snares of the enemy!’ When the bridegroom saw the maiden’s sadness, he removed the curtain and showed her the truth of the whole matter. 33 Similarly, perfect persons may receive divine inspirations, but then the devil raises a din whenever they get puffed up with sudden pride or become downcast with
excessive fear or tolerate the sins of others with inordinate condescension or grow weak through excessive joy or sadness.

34 Something similar has happened to you. The devil induced some men to write to you that he who was alive was dead, and you were therefore overcome with great sorrow. But God revealed to you his spiritual death, and so, for your consolation, God proved true in a spiritual sense that which was false in a physical sense as stated by those who wrote to you. 35 You see, it is true what they say about tribulations leading to spiritual benefits. If you had not been saddened due to the lie that you had heard, such great power and spiritual beauty would not have been shown to you. 36 For that reason, and so that you might understand God’s hidden dispensation, a kind of curtain was lowered between your soul and God as he spoke, for that man’s soul appeared in the shape of one in need of help, and God made this observation at the end of each locution: ‘You will know in due time whether he is dead or alive.’ 37 As soon as you were shown the spiritual beauty and adornment with which a soul must be equipped in order to enter heaven, the curtain was removed, and you were shown the truth, namely, that the man was physically alive but spiritually dead, and that whoever enters the homeland of heaven must be armed in such virtues.

38 However, the devil’s intention was to tempt you with lies and upset you in order to distract you from the love of God through sorrow over the loss of someone so dear. 39 But as soon as you said ‘God help me if this is an illusion!’ then the veil was removed and both the physical and spiritual truth were revealed to you. 40 The devil is thus permitted to afflict even the righteous in order that their reward may be increased.”

Chapter 76

On People’s Fickle Nature

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The Virgin’s words to the daughter showing her who God’s friends are. Also about how few of them are found in modern times, no matter whether one adduces the state of the laity or of the clergy. And about why God who is rich loves poverty, and why he chose the poor and not the rich, and for what purpose riches were conceded to the church.

1 The Mother is speaking to the bride of Christ: “Why are you troubled, my daughter?” She replies: “Because I am afraid of being sent to hardened sinners.” And the Mother said: “How do you know whether they are hard-hearted or friends of God?” 2 She said: “I do not know how to discern it. Certainly, I do not dare to judge anyone, for two men were shown to me. The first was very humble and holy in human eyes, whereas the other was prodigal and ambitious. 3 However their intentions and will did not correspond to their deeds. They were terribly frightening to my mind.”
4 The Mother answered: “It is permissible to the mind to make judgments based on clearly visible signs of badness in order to be able to show compassion or to make corrections. However, it is not safe for the mind to make judgments in doubtful and uncertain cases. 5 This is why I want to indicate to you who God’s friends are. Know that God’s friends are those who receive God’s gifts with pious fear, who are always thanking him for them and do not crave unnecessary possessions but content themselves with what they have been given. 6 But where are such as these to be found? Let us inquire first among the common people. Who among them says, ‘I have enough, I crave nothing more’? 7 Let us inquire among the knights and other lords. Which of them thinks as follows: ‘I inherited the goods that I have, and I require only a reasonable means of support from them as is appropriate before God and men. 8 I shall share the rest with God and the poor. But if I should discover that my hereditary goods were ill-gotten, then I shall either restore them or submit to the decision of God’s chosen spiritual servants.’ Such thoughts, my daughter, are rare here on earth.

9 Let us also inquire among kings and generals. Who among them is in a commendable state? That man is a king who is like Job in character, like David in humility, like Phinehas in zeal for the law,¹ like Moses in meekness and patience. 10 That man is a general who leads the king’s army and forms them for battle; who, like Joshua, has trust in God and pious fear; who, like Joab,² seeks the advantage of his lord rather than his own advantage; who, like Judas Maccabees, shows zeal for the law and wants the best for his neighbor. 11 Such a general is like a unicorn with a sharp horn on its forehead and a precious jewel beneath the horn. What does the general’s horn represent if not his manly heart with which he should fight vigorously and smite the enemies of the faith? 12 The jewel beneath his horn is the general’s divine charity that remains firmly in his heart and renders him agile and invincible in every undertaking. Nowadays, however, generals are more like rampant bucks than unicorns, for they do battle everywhere for the sake of the flesh, not for the sake of their souls or for God.

13 Let us inquire, then, among kings. Which of them does not burden his subjects in his pride? Which of them maintains his state according to the revenues of the crown? Who restores the property that the crown retains unjustly? Who is there that takes the time to carry out justice for God’s sake? My daughter, would that such kings might appear in the world to give glory to God!

14 Let us inquire, moreover, among the clergy who are obliged to love chastity, poverty, and piety. To be sure, they, too, have gone astray. What are priests if not God’s poor almsmen? Living on the divine offering, they should be all the humbler and more fervent toward God to the extent in which they have removed themselves from worldly cares. 15 The church rose up from

². “Like Joab”; Joab served as general under King David; cf. 2 Kings (2 Samuel).
hardship and poverty in the beginning so that God might be their inheritance, and so that they might not glory in the world nor in the flesh but in God. 16 But, my daughter, could not God have chosen kings and rulers as apostles, and then the church would have been enriched through their earthly inheritance? 17 He could have done so, of course, but God who is rich came into the world as a poor man in order to show that earthly possessions are fleeting, and so that men and women might learn from the Lord’s example and not be ashamed of poverty but rather hasten on toward the true riches of heaven. 18 Thus, he founded the beautiful organization of the church upon a poor fisherman and put him in his place to live in the world on divine providence and not on an inheritance.

19 Thus the church began with three goods: first, with zealous faith; second, with poverty; third, with the power of virtues and miracles. 20 These three things were found in the blessed apostle Peter. He had zealous faith, when he outspokenly proclaimed his God and did not hesitate to die for him. 3 He had poverty, too, when he went around begging and feeding himself through manual labor. 21 Yet he showed himself to be rich in spiritual goods, which is more important, when, for example, he gave the lame man the ability to walk (which no prince could do), though he had no silver or gold to give him. 4

22 But could not Peter, who had raised dead persons to life, have obtained gold if he had wanted it? Certainly he could have, but he had unburdened himself from the burden of wealth in order to enter into heaven unencumbered, and in order that the master of the sheep might give them an example of humility, showing that humility and poverty (whether spiritual or physical) make up the way into heaven.

23 Third, he had the power of miracles, for, apart from his greater miracles, the sick were cured by his very shadow. 5 Because Peter possessed in himself the perfection of virtues—to oneself with necessities—his tongue became the key to heaven and his name is blessed in heaven and on earth. 24 However, those who invoked their own names on earth and loved dung, that is, earthly things, are forgotten on earth and receive a terrifying description in the book of justice. 6

25 Yet God wished to show that the poverty of both Peter and the other saints was not coerced but voluntary. Accordingly, he inspired many souls to give generously to them. However, the saints themselves found their glory more in poverty than in the thorns of wealth. 26 Hence, the greater the poverty they lived in, the more abundantly their devotion increased. Is that strange? How could those who had made God their portion and their joy be without

him? 27 Or how could those who sought worldly delights find any delight in God? He was, rather, a poor pilgrim in their eyes. In the course of time, however, in order that God’s friends might be more fervent and ready to preach the word of God, 28 and in order that people might know that it is not riches that are bad but only their abuse, temporal goods were granted to the church under the papacies of Silvester and others. These were for a long time used by the holy men only for their own necessities as well as for those of God’s friends and for the sustenance of the poor.

29 Know, therefore, that God’s friends are those who are content with God’s dispensation. Even if they are not known to you, my Son has a keen perception of them. Gold is indeed often found in hard metal, and one can get a spark of fire out of flint. 30 Go on, then, without worrying. Clamoring comes before doing. Not even when my Son was in the flesh did he convert all of Judea at once, nor did the apostles convert the Gentiles once and for all. No, longer time is needed for carrying out the work of God.”

Chapter 77

Birgitta Is Given Reassurance

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

The bride’s words to Christ declaring the great mercy that he had shown her. Christ’s words to the bride confirming his same sweet mercy toward her. And about how he chose her as a vessel to be filled with wine in order to give God’s servants through her wine to drink. Also, the bride’s thankful and humble answer to Christ.

1 “Honor to God almighty for all his creation! Praise to him for all his virtue! May glorious service be rendered him for all his charity! 2 I, unworthy person, who have sinned so much against you, my God, from my youth, I thank you, my most sweet God, and especially because there is none so criminal that you deny him mercy, provided he asks you for mercy with love and true humility and a purpose of amendment.

3 O God most loving and sweetest of all! What you have done for me is wonderful for all those who hear of it. Whenever you please, you put my body to sleep—yet not with a bodily sleep but with a spiritual rest. 4 Then you rouse my soul to life as though from sleep so that I hear and feel in a spiritual way. O, Lord, how sweet are the words of your mouth! 5 It truly seems to me, as often as I hear the words of your Spirit, that my soul within me swallows them with an indescribably sweet sensation like that from the sweetest food that seems to

7. “Silvester”: pope, 314–35; that “temporal goods were granted to the church” under his papacy most likely refers to the so-called Donation of Constantine, an influential forgery from the Carolingian period according to which the Emperor Constantine had donated considerable lands in central Italy to Silvester and his successors. His story is told in The Golden Legend, vol. 1, pp. 62–71 (Legenda Aurea XII). For an account in medieval Swedish, see Stephens, Ett Forn-svenskt legendarium 1, p. 563.
Drop into my heart with great joy and indescribable consolation. It seems wonderful to me that while I listen to your words, I am made both fully satisfied and yet still hungry. I feel satisfied because nothing else pleases me but your words. Yet I feel hungry because my appetite for them keeps increasing. So, blessed are you, my God, Jesus Christ! Give me your help, Lord, so that I may be able all the days of my life to do the things pleasing to you!"

8 Christ answered, saying: “I have neither beginning nor end. All things were created by my power and arranged by my wisdom. Everything is governed by my decision, and nothing is impossible for me, and all my works have been established with love. For this reason, that heart is exceedingly hard that does not want to love or fear me, although I am the nourisher and judge of all. Yet people do the will of the devil, my own executioner and the betrayer of humankind.

10 He has given them such pestilent poison to drink in this world that a soul, once tasting it with pleasure, cannot live but falls down dead to hell and yet will live forever in misery. This is the poison of sin that, though it tastes sweet to many, yet in the end it will turn out to be horribly bitter. This venom is most assuredly drunk with pleasure all the time from the devil’s hand. Who ever heard of such a strange thing? People are offered life, and yet they choose and voluntarily embrace death.

12 However, I, the most powerful being of all, have compassion on their great misery and anguish. I acted like a rich and loving king who sent expensive wine to his intimate servants, saying: ‘Give this wine to many others besides yourselves to drink, for it is very healthful. It grants health to the sick, comfort to the downhearted, and a brave heart to those who are healthy. Nor is the wine sent without a flask. This is indeed what I have done in this kingdom. To my servants I sent my words, which can be compared to the best of wine, and they shall give them to others, because my words are healthful.

15 By the flask I mean you, who are hearing my words. You have done both things, for you have heard and delivered my words. You are my flask. I shall fill you whenever I like and drain you whenever I please. Thus, my Spirit will show you where you should go and what you should say. May you fear no one but me. You must gladly go anywhere I wish and boldly say whatever I command you, for nothing can withstand me. I will be there with you.”

17 Then the bride said: “I heard this voice, and I answered with tears: O, my Lord God, I who am like the least little midge in the face of your majesty, I ask your permission to reply to you.” The voice answered, saying: “I knew your reply before you yourself thought of it. But I give you my permission to speak.”

19 The bride then said: “I answered: King of all glory, infuser of all wisdom, worker of all virtue, indeed virtue itself, why for such a mission do you wish to select me, who have wasted my body in sin, who am no wiser than a donkey and incapable of virtuous action? Please do not be angry with me, sweet Lord Jesus Christ, because I put such a question to you. One should never be surprised about anything from you, for you are able to do whatever
you want, but I am surprised concerning myself, for I have offended you in many ways and made but little reparation."

21 The voice answered, saying: "I will answer you with a comparison. If various coins were offered to a rich and powerful king, and the king was then to have them melted down and recast into whatever shape he wanted, 22 such as crowns or rings from the coins of gold, plates and drinking glasses from the coins of silver, pots and pans from the coins of copper, which the king could then use for his own comfort and adornment, why should you be surprised if he had done so? 23 Therefore you should not be any more surprised if I take the hearts of my friends, which they have freely offered to me, and make what I want out of them. 24 Though some of them have more sense and others less, still, when they offer me their hearts, I use some of them for one thing, others for another, but all of them for my glory and honor, for the righteous heart is a coin that pleases me greatly.

25 Thus do I arrange the things that are mine in whatever way I like. And, since you are mine, you should not be surprised at the things I want to do with you. Rather, be steadfast and firm in perseverance and willing to do whatever I command. I am powerful enough to provide you everywhere with all the things you need."

# Chapter 78

A Letter Addressed to a Prelate

DATE: 1350, CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE, ROME

The bride’s divinely revealed words or, rather, words from the sweet mouth of the glorious Virgin, promulgated clearly, directly, and in an unveiled manner, instructing and comforting the bride, and about how these words must be transmitted to the pope, the vicar of the Lord, and how they warn of the downfall of the church.

1 Honorable Father, 1 I, a widow, declare that many, very amazing revelations were made to a certain woman while she resided in her homeland. 2 After having been submitted to the diligent examination 2 of bishops and learned religious and secular priests, these revelations were shown to have come from the holy and miraculous enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and from no other source. Even the king and queen of the realm acknowledged this on the basis of

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1. "To provide you everywhere with all the things you need": The revelation may belong to the early years of Birgitta’s calling, during which she often expressed doubts about her role as the conduit of the divine message.

2. "Honorable Father, I, a widow": the papal legate Annibaldo Ceccano, who died in July 1350. Paragraphs 5–24 also occur in Book III 10 (see volume 1, pp. 275–77), but here the revelation is presented in epistolary form, with an introductory and concluding formality, and with Birgitta referring to herself, unusually, as "a widow." See further, on the revelations as letters, Öberg, Kring Birgitta, p. 3.

2. "Diligent examination": refers to the Swedish commission that was set up to scrutinize the authenticity of the revelations during the 1340s; see volume 1, p. 41.
credible proof. Moreover, the same woman journeyed abroad to the city of Rome, where, when praying one day in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, she was caught up in a spiritual vision, while her body seemed to fall into a torpor, though not the torpor of sleep.

At that moment the most venerable Virgin appeared to her. The aforementioned woman was troubled with perplexity at the vision. Recognizing her own frailty, she feared some deception by the devil, and she inwardly besought God’s mercy not to let her fall into diabolical temptations. However, the Virgin who appeared to her said: “Do not be afraid of the things you are about to see and hear, thinking they come from the evil spirit. Just as light and heat accompany the approach of the sun but do not follow after a dark shadow, in the same way two things accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit into the heart: ardent love for God and a perfect illumination of the Catholic faith. You are experiencing both these things now: You feel that you love nothing but God and that not a single point is lacking to you of the wholeness of the Catholic faith. These two things do not follow upon the evil spirit, whom we can liken to a dark shadow.”

Then the Virgin went on and said to the woman: “You must send a message from me to a certain prelate.” The woman answered her with great sadness: “My reverend Virgin, he will not believe me but will, I think, regard my words with scorn rather than as divine truth.” The Virgin answered her, saying: “Although I know the disposition of his heart well enough and how he will delay in answering, as well as how he will end his life, you should still send him the following message.

I would have him know that the foundation of the Holy Church is so heavily deteriorated on its right side that its vaulted roof has many cracks at the top, and that this causes the stones to fall so dangerously that many of those who pass beneath it lose their lives. Several of the columns that should be standing erect are almost level with the ground, and even the floor is so full of holes that blind people entering there take dangerous falls. Sometimes it even happens that, along with the blind, people with good eyesight have bad falls because of the dangerous holes in the floor. Because of all this, the church of God is tottering dangerously. The result of this will shortly be seen. I assure you that she will suffer a downfall if she does not receive the help of repairs. And her downfall will be so great that it will be heard throughout all of Christendom. All this is to be taken in a spiritual sense.

I am the Virgin into whose womb the Son of God condescended to enter, without the least contagious trace of carnal pleasure. The Son of God was born from my closed womb, giving me solace but no pain at all. I stood next to the cross when he victoriously overcame hell through his patient suffering and opened up heaven with the blood of his heart. I was also on the mountain when God’s Son, who is also my Son, ascended into heaven. I have

3. “I was also on the mountain”: There is no biblical attestation of Mary’s having been present on the Mount of Olives, although it was a common assumption that was also reflected in medieval art.
the clearest knowledge of the whole of the Catholic faith, which he preached and taught to everyone desirous of entering heaven. 16 Now I stand over the world in continuous prayer, like a rainbow above the clouds that appears to bend toward the earth and touch it with both its ends.

17 I see myself as a rainbow bending down toward both the good and the wicked inhabitants of the earth by means of my continual prayers. I bend down toward good people in order that they may be steadfast in the commandments of the Holy Church, and I bend down toward bad people in order that they may not add to their wickedness and grow worse. 18 I would have the man to whom I send this message know that foul and horrible clouds are rising up in one direction against the shining rainbow. By these clouds I mean those who lead a life of carnal debauchery, those who are as insatiable as the ocean chasm in their greed for money. 19 They arrogantly and irrationally spend their means as wastefully as a torrential stream pours out its water. 20 Many of the overseers of the church are guilty of these three things, and their abominable and befouled sins rise up to heaven in the sight of God, as much opposed to my prayers as foul clouds are opposed to the bright rainbow. 21 These men, who should be placating God’s wrath along with me, are instead provoking it against themselves. Such men should not be promoted but rejected in God’s church. As the Queen of Heaven, I will come to the aid of 22 anyone who, knowing his own insufficiency, is willing to take on the task of making the church’s foundation stable and its floor level, and who desires to restore the blessed vineyard that God founded with his blood. 23 Together with the angels, I shall root up loose roots and throw each and every fruitless tree into the fire to burn, and I shall plant fruitful shoots in their stead. 24 By this vineyard I mean the Holy Church of God in which the two virtues of humility and divine charity must be restored.”

25 The glorious Virgin, who appeared to the woman, commanded that all this be sent to you, Reverend Father. I, who have sent this letter to you, swear by Jesus, true and almighty God, and by his most worthy Mother Mary, 26 that I have not sent this letter for the sake of any worldly honor or favor, so help me body and soul! I have sent it because that same woman, to whom many other words have been spoken in spiritual revelation, was commanded to make all this known to your Excellency.”

‡ Chapter 79

A Letter to a Priest in Rome

DATE: AFTER 1350, ROME

The noteworthy preface to the useful instruction about the conduct of life that Christ prescribed to the bride for a priest attached to her, containing many excellent points.

1 Praise and glory to almighty God for all his works! Everlasting honor to him who has begun to work his grace in you. 2 When the earth is covered with
snow and frost, we surely see that the seeds sown in it cannot germinate in any but those very few places warmed by the rays of the sun where plants and flowers spring up through the sun’s doing. 3 The nature and inherent virtue of the seeds can be discerned from these.

4 In a similar way, the whole world seems to me to be covered now with the hard frost of pride and greed and lust, so much so that, alas, there are very few people in whose hearts the perfect love of God can dwell, to judge from their words and deeds. 5 One can thus be sure that just as God’s friends rejoiced when they saw Lazarus raised from the dead for the glory of God, so too now God’s friends rejoice whenever they see someone rise from the three aforementioned vices, which truly constitute an eternal death.

6 One should also note that, just as Lazarus incurred a twofold enmity after his resurrection (for he had both physical enemies, that is, people who were God’s enemies and who hated Lazarus in a physical manner, and spiritual enemies, that is, the devils, who never want to be God’s friends, and these hated him in a spiritual manner), 7 so too all those who now rise up from mortal sins, wishing to keep chaste and to flee pride and greed, also incur a double enmity.

8 God’s human enemies want to inflict a twofold physical harm on them. The devils, too, try to injure and hurt them in a twofold way spiritually. 9 First of all, worldly people reproach them with their words. Second, if they can, they also cause them trouble with their deeds, trying to make them like themselves in their action and conduct and to draw them away from their good undertakings. 10 However, this man of God, newly converted to the spiritual life, can easily overcome these ill-willed people, if he remains patient in the face of the words directed against him, and if he then carries out his good deeds of a spiritual and divine character even more frequently and fervently in their sight.

11 The devils rely on two other methods of foiling him. Their great desire, first of all, is to make God’s new servant fall back into sin. 12 If they are unable to do this, then they apply themselves to the task of getting him to carry out his good works in an unreasonable and imprudent manner, such as imprudent fasting or keeping vigil beyond due measure. Their intention is to wear out his energy and thus make him weaker in God’s service.

13 The best remedy for the first danger is the frequent and wholesome confession of his sins and the true, inner contrition of his heart over his failings. The best remedy for the second danger is a humility of the kind that makes him rather obey some experienced spiritual director than make his own personal decisions about what to do and what penances to carry out. 14 This medicine is indeed so beneficial and excellent that, even if the giver of advice is less worthy than the receiver, one can have the very sure hope of the cooperation of divine wisdom, that is, God himself, to help that giver of advice to

give the advice most useful to the receiver, provided both of them have the
perfect desire of acting for the honor and glory of God.

16 Now then, my beloved friend, since both of us have gotten ourselves up
from our sins, let us ask God to deign to grant his help to both of us—to me in
speaking, to you in obeying. 17 We must beseech God for his help all the more
because you, who are rich, wise, and noble, have condescended to ask the
advice of me, who am unworthy, ignorant, and not very intelligent. I truly hope
that God shall want to have regard for your humility and make what I write to
you in his honor beneficial to you both in body and in soul.”

Chapter 80
Continuation of the Above Letter

DATE: AFTER 1350, ROME

Wise and profitable teaching to a certain priest concerning how he
should conduct his life both spiritually and bodily, given by the
bride of Christ, inspired in her by God.

1 I advise you first to stay in your lodgings close to your church of the Holy
Virgin Mary. You should have only one servant with you. After you have
subtracted the necessary expenses from your income, you should return
whatever is left over to your creditors and repay your debts in full. 2 It is not
right or reasonable to give a lot of money to the poor or to wealthy friends and
relatives until all your debts have been resolved. 3 Once you have completely
resolved your debts, then—after subtracting the expenses for you and your
servant—distribute everything that is left over to the poor and needy.

4 You should have good and serviceable clerical attire, taking good care of
it so no vanity or ostentation can be noted in the quality of the cloth or the style
of your clothes beyond honest necessity and physical usefulness. 5 Be content
with only two sets of clothes—one for feast days and one for ordinary days—
and no more than two sets of shoes and stockings. 6 Convert any superfluous
clothes that you have to other uses or use them to pay off your debts. This year,
give up linen garments altogether both at nighttime and during the day.

7 This year, consider your church, St. Mary’s, as a cloistered church for
the following three reasons. First because, if perhaps you ever remained there
before for any proud motive, so in the future you should reside there out of
divine obedience in honor of the most humble Virgin Mary. 8 And if perhaps
the canons and those holding benefices at this church ever led you with
shameful words away from the service of God and toward evil desire, you
should now try with God’s help and by using divine and spiritual words to lead
people away from evil desire and toward the delightful love for God. 9 If

1. “St. Mary’s”: The priest addressed in this revelation probably served one of many basilicas in Rome
dedicated to the Virgin Mary, perhaps Santa Maria Maggiore, or Santa Maria in Trastevere.
perhaps you ever before set a bad example to anyone who saw you behaving
yourself in an unpermissible fashion, you should now take care to present a
profitable and virtuous example to their souls through your good deeds and
upright behavior.

10 Next, my dear friend, you must plan your daytime and nighttime wisely
and efficiently for the glory of God. I have indeed noticed that your church bells
ring accurately at the appointed hours. 11 As soon as you hear them at night,
then, I advise you to get up immediately from your place and recall the five
wounds of Jesus Christ and the sorrows of his most worthy Mother with five
genuflections and five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys. 12 Afterward you
should begin the matins of the Blessed Virgin and say other prayers that you
like until the canons gather in the choir for chant. It is better that you come to
the church among the first rather than the last. 13 You should sing the matins
of the season devoutly, standing properly until the end and sitting whenever it
is correct to do so, but not speaking at all unless you are asked something, 14
and then only answering with a few quiet words and no sign of anger or
impatience if you can avoid it. 15 You would conduct yourself with proper order
if you were in the presence of some temporal or earthly lord. Likewise, with all
the more propriety and modesty and humble reverence, both inward and
outward, you should stand in the presence and service of the eternal King of
heaven who is always and everywhere present and sees everything. 16 If you
happen to be compelled by some necessity to speak about important matters
touching you or someone else during these half-hours, go out of the choir and
give your opinion in few words without raising your voice while outside it and
then return to your place there without delay. 17 If possible, arrange to have the
matter dealt with at another place and time in order not to diminish or impede
the divine worship and the glory given to God. 18 Take care not to wander
about the church as though you are taking a walk, promenading hither and
thither, while the hours are being sung. Such behavior belongs to an unstable
and wandering mind and a lukewarm spirit with little love and devotion.

19 In the intervening time, that is, between the singing of the hours,
devote yourself to prayer or read something devout or useful for your mind or
beneficial for others, making constantly sure, 20 from the hour in which you
get up out of your bed for matins until high mass has been finished, that you
do not become voluntarily involved in anything but chant, reading, prayer, or
study, unless it happens that you must discuss or deal with certain matters in
your chapter concerning the affairs of the church, either with improvements or
organization. 21 Once high mass has been celebrated, it is quite suitable to
speak and converse about the needs and comfort of the body or good and
virtuous recreations.

22 When you go to table, you should say grace. Whether you are someone
else’s guest or have guests yourself, speak first of God or his most worthy
Mother or some saint during the meal 23 for the edification and benefit of your
table companions as well as those serving the food—at least a word or two or
even ask the others something relating to God or his Mother or God’s saints.
24 Do likewise even when you are alone at table and your servant is attend-
ing you, and let some such reading be made of the kind customary among brothers dining together in a monastery. 25 Once you are done eating and have given thanks to God and to your benefactors, speak a short while with whatever upright individuals you please about any matters or business concerning yourself. 26 Afterward, go directly to your chamber, genuflect five times and say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys in remembrance of the wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ and the sorrows of his Mother. 27 Use half of the time remaining until vespers for studying or reading and some form of rest, unless you are hindered by your friends due to matters concerning them. 28 Use the other half of the same time period to take a walk for the proper relaxation of your body, so that you become stronger for the glory of God. 29 When it rings for vespers, enter directly into the choir of the church to chant the office in the manner described above. Once the complines have been said, pray the vigils each day for the dead along with the three readings before supper. 30 After supper, carry out the same practices as mentioned above after lunch. After you have said grace, take a walk and spend the time having a profitable and pleasant conversation until you feel like going to bed. 31 Even then, before going to sleep, place yourself in front of your bed and there pray devoutly five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys in remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ. After that, get into your bed and give your body enough sleep and rest that you are not overcome by sleepiness during times of vigil due to too little sleep and rest. 32 Every Friday pray the seven psalms and the litany with devotion, and on that day give five silver coins to five poor and needy persons in veneration of the five wounds of Jesus Christ. 33 Furthermore, my dear brother and friend, I advise you to keep abstinence in the following way this year in penance for your sins. 34 Every day throughout Lent and likewise during Advent, your fast should consist of only one meal of fish. On the eves of the feast days of Holy Mary, eat a meal of bread and water; on the eves of the feast days of the apostles, a meal of fish. Each Wednesday, let it be one meal of cheese, eggs, and fish. 35 Each Friday, let it be a meal only of bread and wine—and if you prefer to have water rather than wine, I will not dissuade you—and each Saturday, eat fish and oil for your one midday meal. 36 On Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, eat two meals of meat, provided the church has not prescribed fasting. 37 Please observe, dear brother, that I have decided to give you this advice and write all this to you for three reasons. First of all, in order that the envy and cunning of the devil may not induce you to wear yourself out so quickly that your strength and wits soon begin to weaken and make your whole life become of less service to God than it should be. 38 Second, if worldly people notice any failure of wit or strength in you due to overwork, or if they see you growing weary in the work you have undertaken, then they may take fright and shrink from subjecting themselves to God’s work. 39 Third, because I trust that your work will be more pleasing to God the more you submit yourself humbly to the advice of another than govern yourself according to your own personal judgment.
Chapter 81

Birgitta Prays for Three Men; and about Different Types of Tears

DATE: AFTER 1350, ROME

The Virgin’s reply, I believe,\(^1\) to the bride concerning three men for whom the bride was interceding before God. Tears that are meritorious and tears that are not. About how love for God grows through meditation on the humility of Christ. And how fear (not filial or initial fear) may be good.

\(^1\) “That man is like a sack of grain from which one grain is removed but ten are added. The man you are praying for is just like that. He gives up one sin out of fear but adds ten for the sake of worldly esteem. 2 Concerning the second man for whom you are making petitions, I answer you that it is not customary to add expensive seasoning to putrid meat. You may be praying for him to be given bodily tribulation for the good of his soul, but his own will is contrary to your petition. 3 He longs for worldly honors, you see, and desires great wealth rather than spiritual poverty, and sensual pleasure is sweet to him. This is why his soul is putrid and fetid in my sight. Therefore he has no right to the expensive seasoning that consists in the tribulations of justice. 4 Furthermore, concerning the third man in whose eyes you see tears, my answer to you is that you see his body but I behold his heart. 5 Sometimes you see a dark cloud climbing up from the earth and hanging in the sky beneath the sun, bringing on the triple precipitation of rain, snow, and hail. Then the cloud vanishes, for it has arisen out of the impurity of the earth. 6 Every man fed on sin and sensual pleasure up to his old age resembles such a cloud. When old age comes, then he begins to fear death and to think about his danger, yet sin still delights his mind.

7 Thus, as a cloud climbs up in the sky from the impurity of earth, so the conscience of such a man climbs up out of the impurity of the body (the impurity, that is, of sin) to self-examination and gives off three kinds of tears in his own regard. 8 The first tears may be compared to water. They are for the things the man loved carnally, for example, when he loses his friends or temporal goods or his own health. Because he feels bitter about God’s plans and the things he allows to happen, he sheds many unwise tears. 9 The second kind of tears can be compared to snow. When a man begins to think about the imminent danger to his body and the pain of death and the misery of hell, then he starts to weep—not from love but from fear. And so, just as snow quickly melts away, such tears, too, melt away quickly. 10 The third kind of tears can be likened to hail. When a man considers how sweet sensual pleasure has been and still is to him, and that he will lose it, and also what great consolation there is in heaven, 11 then he starts to weep over the price of damnation and of his own loss. He does not bother to weep over the dishonor done to God whenever

\(^1\) “I believe”: Alfonso, unusually, expresses uncertainty, as he does in ch. 72 above.
God loses a soul redeemed by his blood, nor does he care whether he will see God after death or not. He only wants to obtain some dwelling in heaven or on earth where he will not feel any pain but can have his pleasure forever. 12 Such tears are quite properly compared to hail, for the heart of such a man is exceedingly hard and has no warmth of love for God. Tears such as these do not bring a soul to heaven.

13 However, I will show you now the tears that do bring a soul to heaven. They may be compared to dew. Vapor sometimes arises from the sweetness of the earth and ascends in the sky, climbing up just beneath the sun. 14 It turns into moisture through the heat of the sun and descends again to earth, rendering all the things that grow upon the earth fruitful. You call this dew, and it can be seen on the petals of roses, which, exposed to heat, first give off moisture from themselves and then the moisture drips down.

15 This happens, too, in the case of a spiritual man. Each person who meditates on that blessed earth, that is, on the body of Christ, and on those words that Christ himself uttered, 16 and on the great grace he conferred on the world and the bitter pain he bore, moved by the fire of his love for our souls, then that person’s love for God rises up with great sweetness to his brain, which can be likened to the heavenly sky. 17 His heart, which can be compared to the sun, becomes filled with divine warmth, and his eyes with tears, weeping for his offenses against such an infinitely good and kind God, preferring to suffer any kind of pain for the glory of God rather than to have any kind of delight but to be without God.

18 Such tears may well be compared to the falling dew, for they provide the strength to carry out good deeds and lead to fruit in the sight of God. Just as growing flowers attract the falling dew, and the flower is embraced in dew, so too the tears shed out of the love for God enclose God in the soul and God attracts the soul to himself.

19 However, it is good to be fearful for two reasons. First of all, because such good deeds can be performed out of fear in such a way that they later introduce a spark of grace into the heart and thus obtain charity. You might understand this by way of a similitude. 20 It is as when a goldsmith places pure gold on the scales, and the collier comes and says: ‘Sir, I have the coal you need for your work. Pay me the price it is worth.’ 21 The goldsmith answers: ‘The value of coal is set at a fixed price.’ So the goldsmith pays the price in gold and uses the coal he needs for his work, while the collier takes the gold as his means to live on.

22 So it also is in spiritual matters. Deeds done without charity are like coals, and charity is like gold. People who perform good deeds out of fear but with a desire of earning the salvation of their souls through them, 23 even though they do not desire God in heaven but only fear being lodged in hell, still have deeds that are good, albeit cold and like coal in God’s sight. 24 God, however, can be compared to the goldsmith. He knows how to reward good deeds with spiritual justice and with what kind of justice the charity of God may be earned. 25 He arranges it so in his providence that, because of good deeds
done out of fear, people can be granted the charity that they may use for the salvation of their souls. Accordingly, as the charitable goldsmith makes use of coal in his work, so God makes use of cold deeds for his glory.

27 The second reason why it is good to be fearful is that people will be freed from punishment in hell for all the sins they have omitted out of fear. However, inasmuch as they lack charity, they do not possess the righteousness needed to ascend to heaven. 28 A person whose will is such that, if he only could, he would want to live forever in the world, does not possess love for God at all. God’s deeds are as if it were dark to him. He therefore sins mortally and will be sentenced to hell. 29 Nevertheless, he is not bound to burn in torment but will sit in the shadows, since he omitted sin out of fear. He will not, however, know the joy of heaven because he did not desire it while he lived. 30 For that reason, he will sit like a blind and deaf man and like a man without hands or feet, because his soul understands the evil of hell, yet very little of the joy that is in heaven.”

Explanation

31 This revelation concerns three knights. The first was from Skåne. The following revelation was made concerning him: Lady Birgitta saw a soul dressed as it were in twice-dyed scarlet cloth but splattered with a few black spots. As soon as she saw the soul, it vanished from her sight. 32 Again after three days she saw the same soul entirely red and shining with gems like glittering gold. While she was wondering at this, the Spirit of God said: 33 “This soul was held back by worldly cares but possessed true faith. He came for the indulgences obtainable at Rome with the intention of gaining divine charity and favor and with the desire of not sinning knowingly anymore. 34 Your vision of the soul dressed in twice-dyed scarlet cloth means that before the death of his body he did gain divine favor but only imperfectly. 35 That his soul was splattered with black spots means that he felt the pull of physical affection for his parents and the desire to see his homeland. However, he entrusted his entire will to me. His soul therefore deserved to be cleansed and prepared for more sublime things. 36 The gems glittering against the red color signifies that the soul was approaching its desired reward because of its goodwill as well as because of the effect of the indulgences.

37 See and consider then, my daughter, what good the indulgences of this city do for those people who come here with a holy intention for the sake of those very indulgences. 38 Even if a million years were granted to someone—as indeed they are granted because of the faith and devotion of those who come here—still it would not be enough to earn them divine charity without God’s grace. 39 This charity, however, is truly given and earned due to the indulgences that my saints merited with their blood.”
40 In regard to the second knight in the same revelation, who was from Halland, God’s Son says: “What did that pompous windbag tell you? Was it not that many people have doubts about the truth of the relic of my face cloth? 41 Reply firmly to him with the four things I tell you now. The first is that many people lay up treasure but do not know for whom. The second is that every person entrusted with the Lord’s talent who does not spend it cheerfully will incur a judgment. 42 The third is that a person who loves land and flesh more than God will not join the company of those who hunger and thirst for justice. The fourth is that every person who does not hearken to others will himself cry out and not be heard. 43 Concerning the relic of my face cloth, have him know that just as the sweat of my blood flowed from my body when my suffering was imminent and I prayed to the Father, so too sweat flowed from my face onto the cloth because of the quality of the woman who prayed to me and for the solace of future generations.”

44 The third knight in the same revelation was from Sweden. The following revelation concerns him: “It is written that an unbelieving husband is saved by a believing wife. The wife of this man ran and snatched her husband from the jaws of the devil with her own two hands. 45 She snatched him from the devil with one of her hands, that is, with her tears and prayers and works of mercy. She snatched him with her other hand, that is, with her warnings and example and instruction with the result that he already draws near to the way of salvation. 46 Accordingly, he should consider three things written in the common law. There are three sections in it. One is entitled ‘on owning,’ another is called ‘on selling,’ the third is ‘on buying.’ 47 In the first section on owning, it says that nothing is justly owned unless it is justly acquired. Any acquisition made by means of devious tricks or occasions of malice or at too low a price is not pleasing to God. 48 The second section is called ‘on selling.’ Sometimes a thing is sold due to poverty or fear, sometimes due to violence or unfair settlements. A person must examine his conscience to see if there is compassion and mercy in his heart. 49 The third section is called ‘on buying.’

2. “Halland”: at this time a northern Danish province, bordering on the Swedish province of Skåne (Scania), also part of Denmark.
4. “The relic of my face cloth”: According to legend, St. Veronica from Jerusalem offered her veil to Christ on the Via Dolorosa, to wipe the sweat off his face; his image was afterward imprinted on the cloth, and considered as a Christian relic.
7. “The common law ... three sections in it”; Birgitta is probably referring to the section (“balker”) on land law in Magnus Eriksson’s national law, which outlines various categories of ownership. Her emphasis here is on the rightful ownership of property, rather than the law itself; see further ch. 2 note 1 above.
Anyone who wants to buy something should look into the matter to see if the item to be sold has been justly acquired. It is not legally acceptable when something has been acquired by means of unjust exaction. So let this man examine these three matters in his mind. May he understand that he will render an account to me for everything and especially for the possessions left to him by his parents, if perhaps he has used them more for the world’s sake than for God’s and beyond their proper use. Have him understand that he will render to me an account of his knighthood—his intention in receiving it, the way he lived it, and the way he has fulfilled the vow that he vowed to me.”

Chapter 82

On the Qualities of the Bride

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her that a devout soul like a bride should have a lovely mouth, clean ears, modest eyes, and a steadfast heart. He gives a very beautiful spiritual explanation of all the body parts mentioned.

1 The Son speaks: “Like a bride, you should have a lovely mouth, clean ears, modest eyes, and a steadfast heart. A soul, too, should have the same qualities. Her mouth is her clean mind where nothing but what pleases me may enter. May her mouth, that is, her mind be lovely with the odor of good thoughts from the attentive recollection of my passion. May her mind also be like a mouth that is red with the fervor of divine charity so as to put what it understands into effect. As sure as no one longs to kiss a colorless mouth, neither does a soul please me at all unless she performs good deeds of her own good will alone. 3 Like a mouth, her mind should have two lips, that is, these two affections: a longing for heavenly things, and scorn for all earthly things. Her lower palate should be the fear of death that separates the soul from the body and fear of the state in which she will then find herself. Her upper palate should be a fear of the terrible judgment.

4 The soul’s tongue should keep itself between these two palates. What is the soul’s tongue if not the frequent consideration of my mercy? Therefore, when you meditate on my mercy and how I created and redeemed you, how patient I am with you, consider also what a strict judge I am and how I do not leave anything unpunished, and consider, too, how uncertain the hour of death is. 5 The soul’s eyes should be as innocent as those of a dove that sees a hawk close by the waters. In other words, may your thoughts be ever on my love and my sufferings, and on the deeds and words of my chosen ones. With their help

8. “Unjust exaction”; cf. ch. 3.1 above, where a similar point is made.
you will understand how the devil is capable of deceiving you, and so you never can be sure of yourself. 6 Your ears should be clean so that you do not wish to hear vulgar and ludicrous things. Your heart should be steadfast so that you do not fear death by keeping the faith nor blush at the world’s reproaches nor worry about the loss of your body for the sake of me, your God.”

### Chapter 83

**Christ’s Love for Birgitta**

**DATE: UNDATED**

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her that she should love him as a good servant loves his master, as a good son loves his father, and as a faithful wife loves her husband from whom she ought never to be separated. He gives a spiritual and profitable explanation of all this.

1 The Son speaks: “I love you as a good master loves his servant, as a father his son, as a husband his wife. The master says to his servant: ‘I shall give you clothing, proper food, and a moderate amount of work. 2 The father says to his son: ‘All I have is yours.’ 1 The husband says to his wife: ‘Your rest is my rest, your comfort is my comfort.’

3 How will these three respond to so much love? The servant, if he is good, will certainly say to his master: ‘My condition is that of a servant, so I would rather serve you than anyone else.’ 4 The son will say to his father: ‘I get every good thing from you, so I do not want to be separated from you.’ The wife will say to her husband: ‘I am supported by your work; I have the warmth of your breast and the sweetness of your words, so I would rather die than be separated from you.’

5 I, God, am the husband. The soul is indeed my bride, and she should be comforted in my rest and refreshed with the food of my divinity. For her part, she ought to bear every torment rather than be separated from me, for she can receive neither comfort nor honor apart from me. 6 Two things pertain to matrimony: first, the means a married couple needs for their support; second, a son to receive their inheritance—they may also have a servant to attend to them—for it is written that Abraham was troubled about not having a son. 2

7 The soul has her means of support when she is full of virtue. She also has a son when she possesses wise discretion in order to be able to discern between virtues and vices, and when her discernment is according to God. 8 She also has a servant, that is, her physical emotions. This servant does not live

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2. “It is written . . . not having a son”; cf. Genesis 15:3. In the Swedish translation, the clause about the servant comes after the statement about Abraham. However, this (improved) ordering is not supported by any of the Latin manuscripts.
according to the concupiscence of the flesh but for the benefit of the body and
the perfection of the soul.

9 I love you, thus, as a husband loves his wife, for your rest is my rest. It
belongs to you, therefore, to bear freely any hardship rather than provoke me to
anger. 3 I love you, too, as a father loves his son, for I have given you discretion
and free will. 10 I love you, moreover, as a master loves his servant, and I have
commanded you to maintain a moderate amount of necessary goods and a
reasonable workload. But that servant, the body, is so foolish that he would
rather serve the devil than me, and the devil 4 never gives him rest from the
cares of the world.”

## Chapter 84

### On Why Woman Should Be Subject to Man

**DATE: ROME, 1350S**

Christ speaks to the bride and describes three men who fell because
of women. The first is compared to a crowned donkey. The second
had the heart of a hare, and the third is compared to a basilisk. Woman
must therefore always be subject to man.

1 The Son speaks: “Three men are said to have fallen because of women.
The first was a king whose lover struck him on the face when he did not smile
at her. This is because he was a fool and could not restrain her nor cared about
his own honor. He was like a donkey wearing a crown—a donkey because of
his foolishness, a crown because of his rank. 2 The second was Samson who,
though the strongest of men, was beaten by a woman. 1 He had the heart of a
hare, 2 since he was unable to master a single woman. 3 The third was Solomon
who was like a basilisk that kills by a glance but is killed by a mirror. 3 Thus, the
wisdom of Solomon 4 exceeded all the rest, yet a woman’s looks slew him. 5
4 Woman must therefore be subject to man.”

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4. “And the devil” renders “qui Diabolus” [which devil] cf. Sw. “hulkin” [which]; but a variant is “quia
Diabolus” [because the devil]. Following the editor, we assume “qui” to be the original reading, despite the
clumsy repetition of “diabolus” after the relative pronoun.
2. “The heart of a hare”; cf. Book III 31, where the same image, and also that of the crowned donkey, is
used for Magnus Eriksson. This vision may therefore refer obliquely to Magnus’s relations with his wife, and be
part of Birgitta’s thinly veiled propaganda against the Swedish king.
3. “Basilisk . . . killed by a mirror”; cf. Isaiah 59:5. Pliny the Elder describes the basilisk as a serpent without
equal (Natural History, lib. 8:78). In the Middle Ages it was depicted rather as a monster with a deadly glance, an
emblem of the devil, which would die of fright if it saw its own reflection in a mirror.
5. “A woman’s looks slew him”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 11:1–8.
6. “Woman must therefore be subject to man”: this conclusion does not follow logically; possibly there is
some irony intended here, or else an implicit criticism of Magnus’s wife, Blanka (Blanche).
Christ speaks to the bride and tells her that two pages of a book are opened before him. Mercy is written three times on one page, justice on the other. He warns her to be converted to mercy while she still has time so that she will not afterward be punished by justice.

The Son speaks to the bride: “I am the creator of the universe. Two pages, as it were, lie open before me. Mercy is written on the one, justice on the other. Mercy is, accordingly, pronounced to anyone who repents of his sins and resolves to sin no more, for my Spirit shall inspire him to perform good works. Whoever freely desires to be separated from the vanities of this world is made more fervent by my Spirit. The person who is even ready to die for me will be so inflamed by my Spirit that he will be wholly in me and I in him.

Justice is written on the other page. This says: ‘The Father will not defend nor will the Son reconcile nor will the Spirit inflame anyone who does not rectify himself while there is time but who knowingly turns away from God.’ Therefore, while there still is time, meditate carefully on the page of Mercy, for all who are saved will be cleansed either by water or by fire, that is, either by a small amount of penance in the present time or by the fire of purgatory in the future, until they are purged.

Know that I showed these two pages of the book of Mercy and Justice to a man whom you know. However, he scorns the page of my mercy and thinks that the left side is the right side. Like a heron over sparrows, he seeks to rise above everyone else. So he should fear for himself because, if he does not watch out, he will die in his scorn and be taken away from this world along with the drinkers and scoffers.”

So it also turned out afterward. He got up contented from the dinner table but was killed at night by his enemies.

The Mother of God says that she is like a flower from which bees gather sweet honey. The bees are the servants and chosen ones of God

1. “Mercy is written on the one”: Note that the title states, in contradiction to this statement, that Mercy is written three times on one page.
2. “A heron over sparrows” renders “herodius super aues”; cf. Sw. “falkin owir anda foghla” [the falcon above other birds]; cf. Psalm 103 (104):17; in the Douay translation: “There [in the cedars of Libanus] the sparrows shall make their nests. The highest of them is the house of the heron.” Both the heron and the falcon are birds that fly very high.
who continually gather the nectar of grace from her and who have spiritual wings and spiritual feet and a spiritual sting.

1 The Mother speaks: “I am the Queen and Mother of mercy.¹ My Son, the creator of the universe, feels such sweet affection toward me that he has given me a spiritual understanding of all creatures. 2 I am thus very like a flower from which bees gather sweet nectar in the greatest abundance. No matter how much they gather from it, there still remains nectar on it. 3 So too I am able to gain grace for everyone and yet always abound in grace. My chosen ones are indeed like bees, for they love me with all devotion and care for my honor. 4 Like bees they have two feet,² for they have a continual desire to increase my honor and also labor assiduously for it, working all they can. 5 They have two wings as well, in that they consider themselves unworthy to praise me and also are obedient in all that refers to my honor. They even have a sting and die if they lose it.

6 Yes, the friends of God’s have the tribulations of the world that, for the safeguarding of the virtues, will not be taken away from them until the end of their lives. Yet I, who abound in consolation, shall console them.”

Chapter 87

Further on the Qualities of the Bride

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her that she should keep her body beautiful and unblemished. He compares all the parts of the body in a spiritual sense to the perfect love of God and of neighbor, especially of the friends of God. He adds that she should do in a spiritual way what the phoenix does in a physical way, that is, to collect wood and burn herself up.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “I told you earlier¹ that you should have limpid eyes in order to see the evil you have done and the good you have neglected to do. Let your mouth, that is, your mind, be clean of all evil. 2 Its lips are the two desires you should have: the desire to give everything up for my sake and the will to remain with me. These lips should be red in color, for red is the most becoming of colors and can be seen from farthest away. 3 Color signifies beauty, and all beauty is found in the virtues, because it is more

1. “Queen and Mother of mercy”: a common appellation of the Virgin, from the Marian antiphon “Ave Regina coelorum”; see also the note to ch. 19.3 above.
2. “Like bees they have two feet”: The bee, of course, has three pairs of segmented legs. Birgitta undoubtedly has a sharp eye for the world around her, but she is sometimes imprecise in the formulation of her naturalistic observations; cf. also Book I 44 (on the bumblebee) or Book III 15 (on the gadfly).
1. “I told you earlier”; cf. ch. 82, with some minor differences, e.g., “oculos pudicos” [modest eyes] in ch. 82, but “oculos serenos” [limpid eyes] in ch. 87.
acceptable to God when someone offers that which he or she loves the most and that which is more spiritually edifying for others. 4 Therefore, whether in affections or with deeds, a person should give to God that which he or she holds dearest. It can be read that God rejoiced when his work was completed. 2 God rejoices, too, whenever a person offers his or her whole self up to him with the intention of living according to God’s will whether in suffering or in joy.

5 Your arms should be flexible and agile with respect to God’s honor. The left arm represents the contemplation of my favors and the good I have done for you by creating and redeeming you, as well as of your own ingratitude toward me. 6 The right arm is a love so fervent for me that you would rather suffer torment than lose me or provoke me to anger. Willingly I take my rest between these two arms, and your heart shall be my heart, for I am like a fire of divine love, and I want to be loved fervently there in your arms. 4 7 The ribs that protect your heart are your parents—not your natural parents but my chosen ones whom you should love like me and more than you love your own parents. They are truly your parents, for they have caused you to be born again to life eternal. 8 The skin of the soul should be so beautiful as not to have any blemish. The skin here stands for your every neighbor whom, if you love him as yourself, my love and the love of my saints is kept inviolate. 9 However, if you hate him, then your heart gets injured and your ribs are stripped away, that is, the love of my saints will become smaller in you. Your skin should be without a blemish, for you ought not to hate your neighbor but to love everyone according to God’s will, for then my whole heart will be with your heart.

10 I was saying to you earlier that I want to be loved fervently, for I am like a fire of divine love. There are three marvelous things about my fire. First, it burns but is never enkindled; second, it is never extinguished; third, it burns but is never consumed.

11 In this way, my love for humankind existed from the beginning in my divine nature. When I assumed my human nature, it burned even more. It burns so intensely that it is never extinguished but renders the soul fervent, not consuming her but strengthening her ever more. 12 You may gather this from the example of the phoenix. 5 In old age she gathers wood on a high mountain. Then, once the wood is set aflame from the heat of the sun, she throws herself into the fire and, having thus died, comes back to life through that very fire. 13 So too the soul, set aflame by the fire of divine charity, emerges from it like the phoenix better and stronger than ever.”

3. “Should be”: renders “debent esse” of two manuscript variants; other manuscripts have “dicuntur esse” [are said to be].
4. “Willingly . . . in your arms”: a rare description of Birgitta’s divine ecstasy and the experience of the fire of divine love.
5. “Phoenix”: the legendary bird that is consumed by fire and then resurrected from the ashes; see also Book II 18.
Chapter 88

About People in Three Boats

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her that all creation is according to his will except for human beings. He also says that there are three kinds of men in this word. They can be compared to three boats traveling on the sea, the first of which runs into danger and perishes, the second of which is carried by the waves, the third of which is steered well.

1 The Son speaks: “I am the creator of all spirits good and bad. I am also their ruler and helmsman. Moreover, I am the creator of all animals and of each thing that exists and has life as well as of all each thing that exists but does not have life. 2 Thus, whatever there is in heaven, on earth, or in the sea, each and every one of them is according to my will except for humankind alone.

3 Know, therefore, that some men are like a boat that has lost both rudder and mast and gets tossed here and there on the swell of the sea until it runs into the cliffs of the island of death.1 There are on this boat those who, in despair, give their minds over to sensual pleasure.

4 Others are like a boat that still has its mast and rudder and an anchor with two cables. However, the main anchor is broken, and the rudder is on the verge of shattering whenever the force of the waves forces itself between the boat and the rudder. 5 Care must therefore be taken because, while the rudder and boat are still connected, they have, as it were, mutual warmth among themselves thanks to that connection.

6 The third boat has all its riggings and equipment and is set to sail whenever the time comes.

7 The first anchor, the main anchor that I mentioned earlier, is religious discipline that is lowered and lightened with the patience and fervor of divine love. 8 This anchor has been shattered, inasmuch as what the fathers laid down has now been cast underfoot, and everyone regards whatever he finds useful as a part of the religious profession. They are thus carried about like a boat upon the waves. 9 The second anchor, which, as I said, is still in one piece, is the intention of serving God. This is tied by two cables, namely by faith and hope, for they believe me to be God and place their hope in my will to save them. 10 I am their rudder, and so long as I am in the boat, the swell of the waves does not enter it, and there exists a kind of warmth between them and me. 11 I remain connected to their boat when they love nothing as much as me. I am attached to them by the three nails of godly fear, humility,

1. “The island of death” renders “insulae mortis”; cf. Sw. “dözsins skär” [the skerry of death]: the skerry, or a rock in the sea, of course was a familiar part of the Swedish landscape.
and the contemplation of my works. 12 But if they love anything more than me, then the water of disintegration enters, then the three nails of fear, humility, and divine contemplation disintegrate, the anchor of good will is shattered, and the cables of faith and hope are broken. 13 The people in this boat are in a state of great insecurity and are thus headed for dangerous places.

14 My friends are found on the third boat because, as I said, it is set for sailing.”

# Chapter 89

Two Prayers for a Knight in Battle; and on His Sword and Armor

DATE: 1350, ITALY

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her about the way a spiritual knight should behave in battle, namely, to trust in God and not in one’s own strength. He gives two short prayers for the knight to say daily. He also says that the knight should be armed with the spiritual weapons described here.

1 The Son speaks: “Whoever desires to be a fighter has to be noble in spirit and get up again if he falls, trusting not in his own power but in my mercy. A person who does not trust in my goodness has the following thoughts: 2 ‘If I make any attempts at restraining the flesh by fasting or struggling in vigil, I will not be able either to persevere or to keep myself from vices, for God does not help me’—that person deserves to fall.

3 Hence, a person who wants to be a spiritual fighter trusts in me and is confident that he will be able to achieve it with the aid of my grace. So he should have the intention of doing good and avoiding evil and of getting up again whenever he falls. He should say this prayer: 4 ‘Lord God Almighty, you who guide all souls toward the good, I am a sinner who has strayed far away from you through my own wrongdoing. I thank you for leading me back to the right path, and I ask you, gracious Jesus, who hung on the cross in blood and sorrow, to have mercy on me. 5 I entreat you by your five wounds and by the pain that passed from your shattered veins to your heart. Deign to keep me safe today, lest I fall into sin. 6 Give me the power to withstand the spears of the enemy and to get up again manfully, should I chance to fall into sin.’

7 In addition, in order that the fighter may be able to persevere in the good, let him pray in this way: ‘O, Lord God, for whom nothing is impossible and who can do all things, give me the strength to carry out good works and to be able to persevere in the good.’

8 After this, he should take his sword in hand, that is, he should make a good confession, which must be polished and gleaming. It must be polished by a careful examination of conscience regarding how and how much and where
he has failed and why. It should also be gleaming in the sense that he must not be ashamed of anything nor hide anything nor describe a sin in a way other than he has committed. 9 This sword should have two sharp edges, namely, the intention of no longer sinning and the intention of making up for the sins he has committed. 10 The point of the sword should be contrition. This slays the devil whenever a man who earlier delighted in sin feels contrition and sorrow for having provoked me, his God, to anger. 11 The sword should have the hilt of the consideration of God’s great mercy. His mercy is so great that no one is such a sinner that he cannot obtain forgiveness, provided he asks for it with a will to improve.

12 The sword of confession, then, must be held with this idea that God has mercy on all. However, in order that his hand may not be cut by the edges, a piece of iron is placed in between the edge and the hilt. A pommel1 prevents the sword from falling from his hand. 13 Similarly, a person who holds the sword of confession and hopes in God’s mercy for the remittance and cleansing of sin must beware not to let it fall by presuming on God’s forgiveness. To prevent this there is the bolt of godly fear that makes him afraid that God will take away his grace and display anger because of his presumption. 14 In order that his operative hand may not be cut or impaired, a piece of iron is placed between the hand and the edge. This is the consideration of God’s fairness, 15 for, though my justice is so great that I leave nothing unexamined or unpunished, yet I am also so merciful and fair that I demand nothing beyond what nature can bear. Moreover, I forgive great punishment for the sake of a good intention and great sin in return for a little reparation.

16 The knight’s coat of mail represents abstinence. Just as a coat of mail consists of many small rings of chain, so too abstinence consists of many virtues, for example, abstinence from immoral sights or things affecting the other senses, from gluttony and lust and superfluity, and from many other things that St. Benedict2 laid down as forbidden. 17 One cannot put this coat of mail on alone without another’s help. Therefore, my Mother, the Virgin Mary, should be invoked and venerated, for every good example and type of virtue are to be found in her. If she is steadfastly invoked, she will indicate to your spirit all the perfect types of abstinence.

18 The helmet stands for perfect hope. It has two openings, as it were, through which the knight can see. The first opening is the consideration of what things must be done, and the second that of what things must be avoided. 19 Everyone who hopes in God should always consider what must be done or avoided in accordance with God’s will. The shield stands for patience with the help of which one can cheerfully endure anything that happens.”

1. “Pommel” renders “tolus”; cf. Sw. “suärdhklotit” [the knob of the sword].
2. “St. Benedict”: Rule of St. Benedict, chs. 4 and 7; the imagery shifts now from knights in battle to monks under rule. See also ch. 33, on St. Benedict, and ch. 74, on the knight’s attire.
Chapter 90

Christ’s Friends Are Like His Arm

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks and says that his friends are like his own arm, for, like a good doctor, he cuts away any decayed flesh or noxious elements from them and adds healthy flesh to them by transforming them into himself.

1 The Son speaks: “My friends are like my arm. An arm has these five things: skin, flesh, blood, bones, and marrow. 2 I am like a wise doctor who first cuts away all the useless matter, then joins flesh to flesh and bone to bone and afterward applies healing medicine. 3 This is how I have treated my friends. First, I removed from them all worldly passions and illicit carnal desires. Then I joined my marrow to their marrow. 4 What is my marrow if not the power of my divinity? As a man without marrow is dead, so too that person dies who has no communion with my divinity. 5 I have joined my divinity to their infirmity when they taste my wisdom and it bears fruit in them, when their soul understands what to do and what to avoid. 6 The bones stand for my strength. I have joined it to their strength when I make them strong in order to do good. 7 The blood signifies my will. I have joined it to their will when their will accords with what I will, and when they neither seek nor desire anything but me alone. 8 Flesh signifies my long-suffering patience. I have joined it to their patience when they are as patient as I was when I had not a sound spot from the sole of my foot to the crown of my head. 9 The skin signifies love. I have joined it to myself when they love nothing as much as me, and when they wish to die for my sake freely and with my help.”

Chapter 91

Birgitta Must Be Humble in Four Ways

DATE: UNDATED

Christ admonishes the bride to humble herself in four ways, namely, before those who wield power in the world and before sinners as well as before the spiritual friends of God and before those who are poor in the world.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “You should humble yourself in four ways; first of all, before those who wield power in the world. One should defer to authority both because it is right for men to obey other men, inasmuch as humankind scorned to obey God, and because people cannot get on without

someone to direct them. 2 Second, humble yourself before those who live in spiritual poverty, that is, before sinners, by praying for them and giving thanks to God because, fortunately, you neither have been nor are one of them. 3 Third, humble yourself before those who live in spiritual wealth, that is, before the friends of God, by regarding yourself as unworthy to serve them or to be in their company. 4 Fourth, humble yourself before those who are poor in the world, by helping and clothing them and by washing their feet.”

# Chapter 92

**Birgitta, Like the Saints, Should also Become Christ’s Arm**

**DATE: UNDATED**

Christ admonishes the bride to make progress and to persevere in the virtues by imitating the life of the saints and in this way to become his arm. He shows how the saints become transformed into the arm of Christ.

1 The Son speaks: “I told you earlier” that my friends are my arm. This is true, for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and my Mother, with all the heavenly host, are in them. 2 My divine nature is like the marrow without which no one can live. The bones are my human nature, which was strong in suffering. The Holy Spirit is like the blood, for he fills and gladdens the universe. 3 My Mother is like the flesh in which were found my divine and human natures and the Holy Spirit. The skin is the whole heavenly host.

4 Just as the skin covers the flesh, so did my Mother excel all the saints in virtue. Though the angels are pure, she is purer still. Though the prophets were filled with God’s Spirit, though the martyrs suffered greatly, yet my Spirit was fuller and more fervent in my Mother, and she was greater than any martyr. 5 The confessors certainly practiced complete abstinence, but my Mother had still more perfect abstinence, for in her was found my divinity along with my humanity.

6 Thus, when my friends have me, there is found in them my divine nature that vivifies the soul. My human nature is found in them and makes them strong unto death. The blood of my Spirit is found in them and renders their will quick to perform every good action. 7 Their flesh is filled with my own flesh and blood when they refuse to sin and keep themselves chaste with the help of my grace. My skin is joined to their skin when they imitate the life and conduct of my saints.

8 In this way, my saints are aptly called my arm. You should become one of their members through the intention of progressing in virtue and by imitating them as far as you are able. 9 Just as I unite them to myself through the union

1. “I told you earlier”: cf. ch. 90.
of my body, so too you should be united to them and to me through my same body.”

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Chapter 93

An Idle Monk Is Punished; His Deathbed Confession

DATE: C. 1345, SWEDEN

Christ speaks to the bride and gives her three precepts, namely, to desire nothing but food and clothing, not to long to have spiritual benefits except according to God’s will, and not to be sad about anything but her sins and those of others. He also tells her that those who refuse to convert and purge their sins through austere penance in this life will be severely punished at the divine judgment.

1 The Son speaks: “I give you three precepts: first, to desire nothing beyond food and clothing; second, not to long for spiritual things except according to my will; third, not to be sad about anything but your own sins and those of others. 2 If you do feel sorrow, consider then my strict judgment, which you can fear and ponder from the case of a certain man who has already received his sentence. 3 He entered the monastery with three intentions in mind. He did not want to have to work, and he did not want to have to worry about food. In the third place, he thought to himself as follows: ‘If a temptation of the flesh should seize me, I shall be able to evade it by some means without intercourse.’ 4 On account of all this, he was afflicted in three ways. Since he did not want to work, he was forced to work by threats and blows. In return for his second intention, he suffered nakedness and lack of food. Third, he was despised by everyone to such an extent that he was unable to experience any pleasure in his sensuality.

5 When the time for his profession came, he thought to himself as follows: ‘Since I cannot live in the world without working, it is better for me to live in the monastery and work for God.’ 6 Because of his cooperative will, my mercy and justice came to him in order to cleanse him and bring him to my eternal glory. 7 Once he had made his profession, he was struck down with a grave illness and suffered so much that his eyes went out due to the pain, his ears could hear nothing, and he was destitute in his every limb, all because he had

1. “Those who refuse to convert and purge their sins through austere penance in this life” renders “Per austeritatem penitencie purgare et emendare noluerint,” which is the reading in Gh and certain manuscripts; cf. other manuscript variants “illi, qui in hac vita peccata sua non emendaverint,” which the Latin editor follows.
2. “By some means without intercourse” renders “per aliquam occasionem sine commixtione”; cf. Sw. “mz nakrom ámpnom ok tilfállom” [by certain ways and means]; both versions are euphemistic; the man is probably alluding to masturbation.
3. “Went out” renders “exierunt”; cf. Sw. “gingo vt” [went out], meaning, presumably, that he lost his sight.
not wanted to work. 8 He suffered greater nakedness than he had in his worldly state. When he had delicious food, he could not eat it. When his natural appetites pined for it, he did not have it. He was so physically wasted before he died that he was like a cumbersome log. 9 When he died, he came like a thief to his trial, because he had wanted to live in the religious state according to his own preferences and not for the improvement of his life. Yet it was not fitting for him to be sentenced like a thief, since, though he was childish and foolish in his reason and conscience, still he had faith and hope in me, his God, and therefore he was sentenced in accord with mercy. 10 Because his sin could not be fully purged by means of his physical punishment, his soul is now being so severely punished in purgatory that it is as though his skin had been peeled off and his bones placed in an oil-press so as better to squeeze the marrow out of them.

11 How those people will suffer who have spent their entire lives in sin and who never did or willed anything to the contrary! Woe to them, for they say to me: ‘Why did God die or what use was there in his death?’ This is how they repay me for redeeming them and saving them and giving them health and all that they need. 12 I shall therefore seek judgment from them because they have broken the faith that they pledged to me in baptism, and because they do wrong every day and scorn my commandments. I shall not let their least little dereliction of religious duty go unpunished.’’

Explanation

13 This brother had a secret sin and never wished to confess it. On the command of Christ, Lady Birgitta went to him and said: “Do more diligent penance, for there is something hidden in your heart, and as long as you keep it shut up, you will not be able to die.” 14 He answered her that there was nothing that he had not made known in confession. But she said: “Examine your intention upon entering the monastery and with what intention you have lived up to now, and you shall find the truth in your heart.”

15 Then he broke into tears and said: “Blessed be God who has sent you to me! Now that you have spoken of my secret, I am willing to tell the truth to those listening. I do have something hidden in my heart that I never dared nor could bring out. 16 As often as I have repented in confession of my other sins, my tongue was always tied about this one. An exceedingly great shame took hold of me, and I could not confess the secret remorse of my heart. 17 Each time I made confession of my heart, I invented for myself a new conclusion to my wording. I used to say: ‘Father, I confess my guilt to you concerning...”

4. “That it is as though his skin had been peeled off and his bones placed in an oil-press” renders “ac si cutis extracto osse in prelo poneretur”; cf. Sw. “suasom hudhin vare aff flaghin oc benin sat j stok alla präs” [as if his skin had been flayed and his bones placed in stocks or in a press]. There is some incongruity in the Latin text here, probably a result of an anacolouthon.
all the sins I have mentioned and even any others that I have not 
mentioned.’ I thought that in this way all my hidden sins would 
be pardoned. 18 But now, my Lady, if it please God, I will gladly tell 
the whole world about all I have concealed in my heart for so long 
a time.”

19 A confessor was called, and he made a complete and tearful 
declaration of his sins. He died that very night.

## Chapter 94

**On the Bride’s Prayers While She Dresses, Eats, and Sleeps**

**Date:** Undated

Christ teaches the bride beautiful prayers to say when getting dressed and when going to table and when going to bed. He admonishes her to be humble in the way she dresses, and virtuous and self-controlled in the use of her body.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride and says: “Exterior beauty symbolizes the interior beauty a person ought to have. So when you are putting on your veil\(^1\) to tie up your hair, you should say: 2 ‘Lord God, I give you thanks because you supported me when I sinned. Because of my incontinent life, I am unworthy to behold you, and so I cover my hair with a veil.’” 3 The Lord added: “Incontinence is so abhorrent to me that even a virgin who has the intention of indulging in lustful pleasure is not a pure virgin in my sight, unless she rectifies her intention through penance.

4 When you cover your forehead with the veil, you should say: ‘Lord God, you have made all creatures well and created man in your image\(^2\) excelling all others, have mercy on me! Because I have not used the beauty of my face unto your glory, I cover my forehead with a veil.’ 5 When you put on your shoes, say: ‘Blessed are you, my God, who commands me to wear shoes so that I may be strong and not lukewarm in your service. Strengthen me, then, so that I may be able to walk in the way of your commandments.’ 6 You should show humility in all the other clothes you wear and be virtuous and self-controlled in the use of your whole body.

7 When you come to table, say: ‘Lord God, if you would, for you are able to do so, I should ask you to allow us to subsist without food. 8 Now, however, because you have commanded us to take food in a reasonable way, I ask you, grant me temperance at meals so that, by your grace, I may be able to eat as my nature needs and not as my bodily appetite craves.’

9 When you go to bed, say: ‘Blessed are you, my God, who arranges the changes of time for our relaxation and for the comfort of soul and body! I ask

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1. “Veil”: Married women, widows, and nuns all wore a head covering.
you to give my body rest this night and to keep me safe from the power and
deception of the enemy.’”

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Chapter 95

On Christ’s Enemies in Battle

DATE: UNDATED

Christ tells the bride what kind of weapons belong to the wicked. He
explains to her that if they boast of their sin with the intention of
persevering in it, they shall be laid waste by the terrible sword of God’s
severe justice.

1 The Son speaks: “I stand here like a king challenged to battle. The devil
stands against me with his army. In truth, my intention and steadfast purpose
is such that heaven and earth and all that are in them could collapse before
I deviated in even the slightest way from justice. 2 The devil’s intention is such
that he would rather there be as many hells as atoms in the sun1 before
humbling himself.2 Some of the enemy are already drawing close to judgment,
and there is no more of a distance between us than a couple of feet. 3 Their
banner is raised, the shield is on the arm, the hand rests on the sword but the
sword has not yet been drawn. My patience is so great that I shall not strike
them unless they strike first.

4 The enemy’s banner shows three things: gluttony, greed, and lust. Their
helmet is their hardness of heart, for they pay no attention to the pains of hell
nor to how abhorrent sin is to me. 5 The openings of the helmet are carnal lust
and the desire to please the world. Through such they run all about and see
things that should not be seen. Their shield is the perfidy with which they
excuse their sins and ascribe them to the weakness of the flesh. 6 Thus, they
think they can ask pardon for their sins for nothing. Their sword is the in-
tention of persevering in sin. It is not yet drawn, because their wickedness is as
yet unfulfilled.

7 The sword is drawn each time they desire to sin as long as they can live.
They strike each time they boast of sin and wish to remain in the state of sin. 8
When their wickedness is thus fulfilled, then a voice in my army shall cry out
and say: ‘Strike now!’ Then the sword of my severity shall lay them to waste,
and each one shall suffer3 according as he is armed. 9 Their souls shall be
snatched away by demons who are like birds of prey and are not seeking
any temporal advantage but only souls whom they can endlessly mangle to
pieces.”

1. “Atoms in the sun” renders “athomi in sole”; cf. Sw. “solagrandhin” [specks of dust in the sun’s rays].
   Some manuscripts add “et unum cum alio sine fine sustinere” [and that he would suffer in each of them without
   end]; cf. Sw. “och at han skuli thola pino i thom allom samman” [and that he should suffer pain in them all].
Chapter 96
On the Distance between Two Feet; and a Half-Drawn Sword
DATE: UNDATED

The Bridegroom explains to the bride the meaning of the distance of two feet and the drawing of the sword spoken of in the above chapter.

1 The Son speaks: “I told you earlier\(^1\) that there is no more distance between me and my enemies than a couple of feet. Indeed they are now advancing a foot closer to the judgment. 2 One of these feet symbolizes the reward for the good works they have done for me. Accordingly, from now on their ignominy will grow, their pleasure will turn bitter, their joy will be taken away, their trouble and sorrow will increase. 3 The second foot is their wickedness, which is as yet unfulfilled. Just as people say that a thing is so filled it will burst, so too when their soul and body are separated, they will be condemned by the judge.

4 Their sword is their intention of sinning. It has been drawn out halfway because, when a man is on the wane\(^2\) and misfortunes occur, the wicked suffer more anguish but still remain eager to sin. Fame and fortune do not allow them to ponder over sin much. 5 As it is, they wish to live longer so as to achieve their lustful pleasure, and they are already adding to their sinning with even greater license. Woe to them, for, unless they rectify themselves, their perdition is already at hand!”

Chapter 97
A Prelate Is Like an Immobile Mill Wheel
DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride about a certain prelate. He tells her that a devout soul that loses the heat of devotion and of holy meditation due to her own pride and ambition and worldly entanglements can recuperate divine warmth and light and experience divine sweetness by humbling herself perfectly before God.

1 The Son speaks through the bride to a certain prelate and tells him: “You are like an immobile mill wheel. When it stands fixed and does not move, then the grain does not get ground in the mill. 2 This wheel signifies your will. It should be mobile not with respect to your own will and desire but to mine, and you ought to surrender yourself completely into my hands. 3 However, this wheel is very immobile toward my will, since the water of earthly consideration is troubling your mind too much. The contemplation of my works and my

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1. “I told you earlier”; cf. ch. 95.2.
2. “A man is on the wane” renders “decrescente hominis,” suggesting that human beings shrink in size with age; cf. Sw. “männin állis” [a man gets older].
passion is almost dead in your heart, for which reason you have no feeling or
taste for the food of the soul.

4 So break through the obstacle that obstructs the passage of the water! Let
the water flow so that it makes the wheel turn and become mobile again so that
the grain can be easily ground. The obstacle holding back the water is mental
pride and ambition. These obstruct the grace of the Holy Spirit and impede all
the good fruit that the soul should be producing. 5 Receive into your mind the
true humility through which the sweetness of my Spirit will flow into your soul
and earthly considerations will be washed away. 6 Humility will make your will
perfectly mobile with respect to my will, and then you will begin to regard your
works as seeds of grain and count my works as great.

7 What is true humility? Certainly not caring about human popularity or
disfavor. Rather, it is to tread my forgotten and neglected path, not seeking
after superfluous possessions but contenting yourself with simpler things. 8 If
you love this path, then you will obtain a liking for the spiritual life. Then my
passion and the path of my saints will seem sweet to your mind, and you will
understand how much you owe to the souls whom you have undertaken to
guide. 9 Now that you have ascended to the top of the wheel\textsuperscript{1} on the two feet of
power and distinction, you have become covetous because of your power and
proud because of your distinction. So come down now by humbling yourself in
your mind and by asking the humble to pray for you. 10 I shall surely send
upon you the rapid stream of my justice and exact the last farthing\textsuperscript{2} from you
along with an account of your affections, thoughts, words, and deeds. I shall
also exact an account of the souls whom I have entrusted to your care, those
whom I myself redeemed with my blood.”

[…]

Chapter 98

About Four Arrows

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride and says that sinners and the lukewarm will
be shot by four arrows, that is, by the four rebukes contained herein, to
make them repent and let themselves be humbly led back to the
reformation of their lives.

1 The Son speaks: “I shall give my friends four arrows. By the first shall be
shot the man who is blind in one eye; by the second the man who is lame in
one foot; by the third the man who is deaf in one ear; by the fourth the man
who lies stretched out on the ground.

2 The man blind in one eye symbolizes the people who see the com-
mandments of God and the deeds of the saints but pay them no attention. They

\textsuperscript{1} “The top of the wheel”: The prelate might have reached an elevated level in the church; perhaps he was a
bishop or a cardinal.

do see, however, the pleasures of the world and covet them. Such people
should be shot by saying thus: 3 ‘You are like Lucifer\(^1\) who beheld the utmost
beauty of God but who, because he unjustly desired what he should not have
desired, descended into hell. You, too, shall descend there, unless you come to
your senses, inasmuch as you understand the precepts of God as well as the
transient nature of everything in the world.\(^2\) 4 The best advice for you, then, is
to hold on to what is certain and let go of what is transient, so that you do not
descend into hell.’

5 The man lame in one foot symbolizes those who repent and are sorry for
the sins they have committed, but who strive to acquire earthly comforts and
worldly rewards. 6 Such people should be shot in this way: ‘You strive for the
comfort of a body that worms will shortly be consuming. Strive instead for the
profit of your soul that will live forever.’

7 The man deaf in one ear symbolizes those who desire to hear my words
and those of my saints but also keep their other ear open for coarse and worldly
speech. 8 Tell them thus: ‘You are like Judas who listened to God’s words with
one ear but they went out the other. What he heard did not do him any good.
Close your ears to empty words so that you may come to hear the angels’ song.’

9 The man stretched out on the ground symbolizes those who are ent-
tangled in earthly matters yet think on and wish to know the way by which they
can reform themselves. Tell them thus: ‘The time is short. It is but a moment.
Yet the punishment of hell is eternal and the glory of the saints everlasting. 10
In order, then, to attain true life, do not worry about taking up a heavy and
difficult load, for God is as just as he is kind.’

11 If the arrow comes out bloodied from the heart of anyone shot in this
way, that is, if he feels compunction and resolves to reform his life, then I will
pour into him the oil of my grace by which his whole body will regain its
strength.’’

# Chapter 99*

**Christ Is Like a Worm**

**DATE: UNDATED, GOOD FRIDAY**

Christ speaks to the bride and laments over his Jewish crucifiers. He
also laments over the Christians who scorn him along with his charity
and justice by presumptuously and knowingly sinning against his
commandments and by spurning the church’s sentences of excom-
munication under the pretext of God’s mercy. For this he threatens
them with the fury and wrath of his justice.

\(^1\) “Lucifer,” i.e., the fallen archangel, who was motivated by pride to rebel against God, and cast out of
heaven; cf. Isaiah 14:12.

\(^2\) After “Everything in the world” Sw. adds “oc aktir thz ey” [and you do not observe it].

* This chapter occurs in the Birgittine-Norwegian text, Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, p. 455,
line 24, through p. 458, line 18, “Ek kärir ... ginum mz swärðh.”
The Mother says: “At the time of my Son’s suffering, when his betrayer Judas approached, he bent down—for Judas was small of size—and gave him a kiss and said: ‘Friend, for what have you come?’ And some of those there seized him immediately, while others pulled him by the hair or defiled him with their spittle.”

Then the Son spoke, saying: “I am regarded as a worm, lying as though dead in the winter. Passersby spit on it and trample it down. This day the Jews treated me like a worm, for they held me to be the lowest and most unworthy of creatures. Even so do Christians scorn me, for they regard as meaningless everything I have done and endured for them out of love. They trample me down each time they fear and venerate man more than me, their God, each time they count my judgment for naught and fix the time and measure for my mercy according to their own conceptions. They strike me in the teeth whenever, having heard of my commandments and suffering, they say: ‘Let us do whatever delights us in the present, and we shall obtain heaven nonetheless. If God had wanted us to perish or to punish us eternally, he would not have created us or redeemed us at such a bitter cost.’ That is why they shall experience my justice. While not the least little good will go unrewarded, neither will the least little evil remain unpunished. They treat me with scorn, as though crushing me underfoot, whenever they disregard the church’s sentence of excommunication. As the excommunicated are shunned by others, so too such as these will be separated from me, inasmuch as excommunication, when it is known but scorned, causes more grievous injury than a physical sword.

Since, then, I appear as a worm to them, I will now come to life again through my terrible judgment. My coming will be so terrible that those who see it will say to the mountains: ‘Fall upon us, cover us from the wrathful face of God!’ ”

Chapter 100
Birgitta Should Be Like a Musical Pipe

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her that she is like a pipe of the Holy Spirit through which he makes lovely music in the world for

1. “Judas approached”: cf. Matthew 26:47–50. Judas was not known to have been small, but the allusion probably reflects his depiction in iconography as a man who was shriveled through his treachery and thus small in comparison to his fellow disciples.
2. “This day”: This is likely to be a Good Friday vision.
4. “Sentence of excommunication...are shunned by others”: The church imposed a censure on individuals by excluding them from the communion of the faithful. “Greater,” as distinct from “lesser,” excommunication is probably referred to here, by which a person was deprived of all the sacraments, except the last rites, as well as all communication with his or her fellow Christians.
his own glory and for the benefit of people. For this reason, he
wants to coat her with the silver of virtuous conduct and wisdom on
the outside and with the gold of humility and purity of heart on the
inside.

1 The Son says to the bride: “You should be like a pipe on which the piper
makes lovely music. The owner of the pipe coats it with silver on the outside so
that it will look more costly, but with durable gold on the inside. 2 You, too,
should be coated with the silver of virtuous conduct and human wisdom in
order to understand what you owe to God and to your neighbor as well as what
is expedient for the eternal salvation of body and soul. 3 You should be coated
on the inside with the gold of humility so that you long to please no one but me
and are not afraid of being displeasing to other people for my sake.

4 The piper does three more things for his pipe. First he wraps it in silk so
that it does not get dirty. Second, he makes a case to keep it in. Third, he makes
a lock for the case so that it will not be stolen by a thief. 5 You, too, should be
wrapped in purity so that you no longer wish to be stained by lust or desire.
Instead, struggle cheerfully to remain by yourself, because dealings with evil
men corrupt virtuous conduct. 6 The lock represents the diligent custody of all
your senses and inner faculties so that you guard against the devil’s deception
in all your actions. The key, however, is the Holy Spirit. He opens your heart,
exactly as I please, for my glory and the benefit of men.”

### Chapter 101

*On Christ’s Heart*

**DATE: UNDATED**

The Mother of God says that her Son’s heart is most sweet, most
clean, and most pleasant, so abounding in love that even if a sinner
were standing at the very door of perdition and cried out to him
with a purpose of amendment, he would be immediately freed.

One reaches the heart of God through the humility of true contri-
tion and through the devout and frequent contemplation of his pas-
son.

1 The Mother of God speaks: “My Son’s heart is as sweet as the sweetest
honey and as clean as the purest spring, for whatever belongs to virtue and
goodness flows from it as from a spring. 2 His heart is also most pleasant.
What is more pleasant to a sensible person than the contemplation of God’s
love in his creation and redemption, in his life of work and his teaching, in his
grace and long-suffering? 3 His love is indeed not fluid like water, but wide-
spread and durable, for it stays with a person until the very end, so much so
that if a sinner were standing at the very gates of perdition, even then he would
be rescued if he cried out with a purpose of amendment.
There are two ways to reach the heart of God. The first is the humility of true contrition. This leads a person to God’s heart and to a spiritual dialogue.\(^1\) The second way is the contemplation of my Son’s passion. This removes the hardness of the human heart and makes a person run toward God’s heart with joy.”

Chapter 102

On the Soul of a Monk in Judgment

DATE: AFTER 1350, ITALY

The bride is shown the judgment of the soul of a monk before Christ the judge. The Blessed Virgin intercedes for him and the devil accuses him savagely of grave sins.

1 The Mother of God speaks to the Son, saying: “My plea is great. Though you know all things, I am presenting it for the sake of her who is present here.” The Son answers: “All judgment is given to me, and it is necessary to me to render particular judgments.”\(^2\) Nine good characteristics belong to a righteous judge. First, to listen attentively; second, to distinguish the charges; third, the intention to render a just judgment; fourth, to inquire into the causes of the litigation; fifth, to inquire into how long the quarrel has lasted, for greater damage accrues with the delay of justice; sixth, to inquire into the qualities of the witnesses, if they are trustworthy, if they agree in their assertions, if one of the litigants has more witnesses than the other; seventh, not to be either rash or timid in judging nor to fear power or injury or loss of honor on behalf of the truth; eighth, to show no interest in anyone’s entreaties or bribes; ninth, to be fair in judgment, judging a poor man the same as a rich, a brother or son the same as a stranger, not acting contrary to the truth on account of any worldly benefit. Accordingly, dear Mother, say what you will!”

5 His Mother answered: “Two contend with each other, and two spirits are in them, a good spirit in one, an evil spirit in the other. They are contending over your blood’s acquisition, one in order to kill, the other in order to give life. Obedience and love are found in the one, hate and pride in the other. Accordingly, render your verdict!” The Son answered: “How many witnesses are with your friend and how many with the other?” The Mother answered: “My friend has few witnesses, while the other has many witnesses who know the truth, yet scorn to listen.” The Son answered: “I shall render a just verdict.” The Mother said: “My friend makes no plea. However, I, his Lady, do make a plea, in order that evil may not prevail.” The Son answered:

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\(^1\) “Spiritual dialogue” renders “colloquium spirituale” of most manuscripts, but some manuscripts have “speciale,” which is also reflected in Sw. “särlica” [special].

\(^2\) “All judgment . . . particular judgments”; cf. John 5:22.
“I shall do as you want. As you know, however, the physical verdict must precede the spiritual one, and no one should be convicted, unless the sin has been carried out.”

9 The Mother: “My Son, though we know everything, I am asking on behalf of her who is present, what is the physical verdict and what is the spiritual verdict in this case?” The Son: “The physical verdict is that his soul must quickly depart from his body, and his hand will be his death. The spiritual verdict is that his soul must hang on the gallows of hell, which is not made of ropes but of the hottest flames, for he is an unworthy sheep that has fallen far away from his flock.”

11 Then one of the Augustinian monks addressed the judge and said: “Lord, this man has nothing to do with you. You called him to a life of retirement, and he forgot it. His vow of obedience has been broken. His name has been removed. His deeds are none.” The judge answered: “His soul is not present in the courtroom to be able to respond.” 12 The devil said to him: “I will make a response. You called him indeed away from the storms of the world to a life of retirement, but I called from the highest peak to the deepest hole. He obeyed me promptly. His name is glorious to me.”

13 The Judge: “Explain your knowledge of him.” The devil said: “So I shall, though unwillingly. You called him from the stormy cares of the world to the quiet haven of the spiritual life, but he thought nothing of this, for he strove even more eagerly after worldly concerns. The highest peak is honest contrition and confession. A person possessing it converses with you, the almighty, and touches your majesty. I threw him headlong from that highest peak at the moment when he resolved to keep sinning until the end, at the moment when he thought nothing of sinning, but found your justice meaningless. The deepest hole is gluttony and greed, for, like a very deep hole, it cannot be filled. His greed was that insatiable! He bore the name of monk, and the name of monk implies self-restraint and abstinence even from licit wants. Yet this name was erased in him, and now he is called Saul. As Saul departed from the way of obedience, so has he as well. His vow of obedience has been broken. As two ends of a broken piece of timber cannot be fitted together when the wood has rotted, neither this man’s desire for heaven nor his love of God, which are like the two ends or points of union of obedience, could fit together in his obedience, for he only obeyed for the sake of worldly advantage and his own self-will. His deeds were also like my own deeds. Though I do not say mass or chant or do the other things he does, still when he does all of that in accord with my will, then he is doing my deeds, and his

3. “Augustinian monks”: There were several congregations living under the rule of St. Augustine in Italy; Birgitta seems to be describing an encounter with one such group. See note to ch. 33.23.
4. “This man has nothing to do with you”; cf. Matthew 8:29.
5. “As Saul departed from the way of obedience”; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 13:8–13.
deeds can be said to be mine. When he celebrates masses, he approaches you with presumption, and that presumption fills him all the more with my wickedness. He chants for the sake of human praise. When I turn my back on him, he turns his back on me. Whenever I wish, he turns his belly toward my belly, that is, he carries out his sensual desires just as I wish. Everything he does, he does because of the present life and because of his own self-will. Hence, his deeds are my deeds.”

Explanation

21 The same soul then appeared blind and trembling. An Ethiopian followed him in until he reached the judge who seemed to be seated on a great throne with a multitude standing by. 22 The Ethiopian said: “O Judge, give me your verdict on this soul. Now his soul is present in person and his physical verdict has already preceded.” [. . . ] 23 The Ethiopian said: “You said that his hand was to be his death. This has already been accomplished.” The Judge: “That can be understood in two ways. Either a wicked action became the occasion of his death or his physical hand cut short the life of his body.” 24 The Ethiopian answered: “True indeed. His shameful way of life killed his soul, and impatience opened the wound in his body by which he died.” 25 The Judge told him: “Your earlier accusation of this soul alleged that he followed your wishes in every way, that you had tried to throw him down from the highest height, and that he turned his belly toward you. Let us hear, then, what the soul herself has to say!”

26 Then the Judge turned to the soul and said: “Soul, you had the rational faculty of discerning between good and evil. Why did you trample your priestly honor underfoot?” 27 The soul answered: “I did have the rational faculty, but I preferred to follow my own will by not believing that something so great could lie hidden beneath such modest appearances.” 28 The Judge then said: “You knew that the monastic way of perfection meant humility and obedience. Why did you enter it as a wolf in the likeness of a sheep?” The soul said: “So that I could flee the world’s reproach and lead a quieter life.” 29 The Judge replied a third time: “Brother—but no brother of mine—and if you saw the example of your holy brothers and heard the words of the saints, why did you not follow them?” 30 The soul answered: “All those good things that I heard and saw were loathsome and onerous to me, for I had decided in my heart rather to follow my own will and my

6. “He approaches you with presumption”; that is, he celebrates Mass without proper humility, thinking he is worthy.
7. There is something missing at the end of this sentence that has been lost in transmission, especially since the Judge makes no reply to the devil’s argument; see Aili, Book IV, p. 51.
own ways than the ways of the saints.” 31 The Judge spoke for the fourth time: “Did you not frequently fast and pray and go to confession?” The soul: “I did frequently fast and pray, but I did it in the manner of a man who admits some lesser things in order to please but hides greater ones in order not to displease.” 32 The Judge: “Had you not read that each man must render an account even of a farthing," that is, even of the least little things?” 33 Then, as though wailing loudly, the soul said: “Indeed, Lord, I had read it and I knew it in my conscience, but I thought that your mercy was so great that you would not punish someone for eternity. 34 Accordingly, I did have the desire to repent in old age, but pain and death came upon me so suddenly that, when I wanted to go to confession, I had lost my memory, and my tongue was tied as if with a chain.”

35 Then the devil cried out: “Judge, this is incredible! I see that this soul is condemning herself! So let her confess her wickedness now to no avail. Yet I dare not lay my hand upon her without your sentence.” 36 The Judge answered: “It is over and done.” At that the Ethiopian and the soul disappeared, as though they were tied together. They went down with a great clap of thunder.

37 Then the Judge said: “All this took place in an instant, but, for the sake of your understanding, it appeared to take place in time so that you may see and know and fear God’s justice.”

# Chapter 103*

St. Denis Prays for France

date: 1345,/sweden

While at prayer, the bride of Christ saw in a vision how Blessed Denis prayed to the Virgin Mary for the kingdom of France

1 While I was at prayer, I saw how Blessed Denis¹ addressed the Virgin Mary, saying: “You are the Queen of Mercy.² All mercy is given to you. You became Mother of God for the sake of our salvation, we who are wretched sinners. 2 Therefore, have mercy on the kingdom of France, your France and mine. It is yours, because its inhabitants honor you in their measure. It is mine, because I am their patron saint and they trust in me. 3 You see how


* This revelation also occurs in Book VIII 26. See further, on this and the following two visions, introduction, pp. 13–14, above.

¹ “Blessed Denis”: Denis (Dionysius), third-century bishop of Paris and martyr. When he had been beheaded he walked with his head in his arms to his burial place. Feast day 9 October. See Ryan, The Golden Legend, vol. 2, p. 240 (Legenda Aurea CXLIX). Birgitta had already received revelations of him during her pilgrimage with her husband through France; see Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 80; Extravagantes ch. 92.

² “Queen of Mercy . . . Mother of God”: See note to ch. 86.1 above.
many souls are in danger in every hour, how men’s bodies are being struck
down like beasts and, what is worse, how many souls are falling like snow-
flakes down to hell. Comfort them, then, and pray for them, for you are the
Lady and Helper of all.” 4 The Mother of God answered: “Appear before my
Son, and let us hear—for the sake of this woman—what he will say in answer.”

‡ Chapter 104*

The Kings of England and France Are Like Two Ferocious Beasts

DATE: 1345, SWEDEN

Together with Blessed Denis and other saints, the Mother of God
entreats her Son on behalf of France and because of the war between
the two kings, who are compared to two ferocious beasts.

1 The Mother speaks to her Son, saying: “Blessed are you, my Son. It is
written that I was called blessed because I bore you in my womb.1 You
responded that a person is blessed who hears your words and keeps them. Son, I
am she who kept your words in my heart and memory. 2 Therefore, I recall to
you the word you spoke in answer to Peter’s question about forgiving a sinner
up to seven times. You said that a sinner is to be forgiven up to seventy times
seven times,2 meaning by this that you are ready to show mercy as often as a
person humbles himself with a desire to improve.” 3 The Son answered: “I
bear you witness that my words were as deeply rooted in you as the seed
planted in fertile earth3 that gives fruit a hundredfold. Even so, do your vir-
tuous deeds bear joyful fruit. So ask what you will!”

4 His Mother answered: “Together with Denis and the other saints of
yours whose bodies lie in the earth of the kingdom of France,4 though their
souls are in heaven, I ask you: Have mercy on this kingdom! I speak figura-
tively for the sake of this woman who is present in spirit. I see, as it were, two
most ferocious beasts, each of its own kind. 5 The one beast is excessively
greedy and will gobble up whatever it can get. The more it eats, the hungrier it
gets, and its craving is never sated. The other beast strives to rise up above all
the others. These beasts have three ugly traits. First, a horrible roar; second,
they are full of perilous fire; third, each of them desires to gobble up the other’s
heart. 6 One of them, with its teeth on the other’s back, is trying to find an
entrance to its heart by biting it to death. The other has its mouth against the
other’s breast and wants to get at its heart from there. 7 The horrible roar of
these beasts can be heard far away, and all the other beasts that come with

* This revelation is duplicated in Book VIII 27.
4. “The earth of the kingdom of France”: The great basilica of St. Denis in Paris contains the saint’s
remains, as well as those of many French monarchs.
mouths wide open will start burning with the fire from these two beasts and fall to their deaths. The beasts that come with their mouths shut will be stripped of their hides and go away naked.

8 These two beasts stand for the kingdoms of France and England. The one king is never sated, for he wages war out of greed. The other king is striving to rise above others. Hence, both are full of the fire of anger and greed. 9 The roar of the beasts says this: ‘Accept gold and worldly riches, and do not spare the blood of Christians!’ Each beast desires the death of the other, and each is therefore seeking some place where it can injure the other. 10 One of them is trying to injure it on the back, for he wants his unjust claim to be called just and the just claim of the other to be declared unjust. The second one is trying to injure the other’s heart at its breast, because he knows he has a just cause and is therefore inflicting a lot of damage without caring about others’ loss and misery and without showing any divine charity in his justice. 11 He seeks an entrance through the breast, inasmuch as he has a more just claim to the kingdom, but he has pride and anger along with the justice of his claim. The other has a less just claim and is therefore burning with greed.

12 The other beasts that come with mouths wide open are those that come to them due to their own greed. Men who are kings in name but are really traitors fill their open mouths. They cast abundant money and gifts into their mouths and make them burn for warfare so that they fall to their deaths. 13 Their property remains behind, but their bodies are received into the earth, and the devil’s maggots chew away at their souls. Thus, these two kings are betraying many of the souls redeemed by my Son with his blood. 14 The beasts that are stripped of their hides are those simple folk who are content with their possessions. They go to war in the intention and belief that justice is on their side and that they are waging a just war. 15 They are stripped of their hides, that is, their bodies, through death, but their souls are received into heaven. Therefore, my Son, have mercy!"

16 The Son answered: “Since you see all things in me, explain while this woman present is listening what just reason there is for these kings to be heard.” The Mother answered: I hear three voices. The first is that of these kings. One of them is thinking to himself thus: ‘If I can get what is my own, I would not care about having what belongs to others, yet I am afraid of losing it all.’ 17 Because of this fear, namely, his fear of the world’s reproach, he turns to me in prayer and says: ‘Mary, pray for me!’ The other king is thinking thus: ‘Would that I were as I was before! I am weary.’ So he, too, turns to me. The second voice is that of the common folk who pray to me every day for peace. 18 The third voice is that of your elect who cry out and say: ‘We do not weep over the bodies of the dead, nor the losses, nor the poverty, but over the
fall of souls who are in constant danger. Therefore, our Lady, entreat your Son so that the souls may be saved! For these reasons, my Son, have mercy on them!"

19 The Son answered: “It is written that to him who knocks it shall be opened, and to him who calls it shall be answered, and to him who asks it shall be given.” However, just as everyone who knocks is outside the door, so too these kings are outside the door, since they do not have me within them. All the same, for your sake, it will be opened to them who pray.”

# Chapter 105*

A Proposal for Peace between England and France

DATE: 1345, SWEDEN

Christ speaks to the bride about how peace should be established between the kings of France and England. If the kings do not heed it, they shall be punished severely.

1 The Son speaks: “I am the king to fear and to glorify. I shall send my words to them for the sake of my Mother’s prayers. I am true peace. Wherever there is peace, there am I assuredly. If these two kings of France and England wish to have peace, I shall give lasting peace to them. 2 However, true peace cannot be had without loving truth and justice. Hence, given that one of the kings does have a just claim, I would have peace brought about by means of a marriage.1 In this way the kingdom can attain a legitimate successor. 3 Second, I want them to be of one heart and one mind2 in spreading the holy Christian faith wherever this can be done to my glory. Third, they must remove their intolerable taxes and fraudulent schemes and love the souls of their subjects.

4 If the presently reigning king refuses to obey, let him know that he most assuredly will not prosper in his endeavors but will end his life in sorrow and lose his kingdom in the midst of heavy trials. His son and family will be left in such anger, reproach and shame as to astonish everyone. 5 If the king with the just claim is willing to obey, then I shall help him and fight on his side. If he will not obey, then neither will he achieve his desires but will be deprived of his attainments, and his sorry end will overshadow his happy beginning. 6 However, when the people of the French realm adopt true humility, then the kingdom will attain a legitimate successor and a noble peace.”

7. “It is written...it shall be given”; cf. Matthew 7:7.

* This revelation is duplicated in Book VIII 28.

1. “By means of a marriage”: Birgitta may be proposing an alliance between Edward’s and Philippe’s families; see further introduction, pp. 12–14 above.

Chapter 106

Birgitta May Break Her Fasting with Her Confessor’s Permission

DATE: UNDATED

Christ tells the bride not to be afraid to break her fast out of obedience to her spiritual father, because it is not a sin. He also admonishes her to stand firm, to resist temptations continuously, and to have the firm intention of persevering in the good example set by the Virgin Mary, David, and Abraham.

1 The Son speaks: “Why are you afraid? Even if you ate four times a day, it would not be counted as a sin for you, provided you did it with the permission of the person whom you are bound to obey. So stand firm. 2 You should be like a soldier who, though injured with various wounds in battle, inflicts worse wounds on his enemies and is all the more eager to fight the more he is chased by his enemies. 3 You, too, should strike back at your enemy and stand firm. You should also have the rational intention of persevering in the good.

4 You strike back at the devil each time you do not give in to temptation and resist it manfully, for example, by opposing humility to pride, restraint to gluttony. 5 You stand firm when you do not murmur against God in the midst of temptation but, rather, when you are grateful to God, cheerfully putting up with everything and blaming it all on your sins. 6 Your intention is rational when you do not desire a reward unless it is in agreement with my will, when you surrender your whole self into my hands.

7 Lucifer did not have the first virtue, that of striking back at the enemy, because he immediately gave in to his own thoughts. This is why he fell irredressibly. As he had no instigator of his wickedness, so too he shall have no redresser. 8 Judas did not have the second virtue, that of firmness. Instead, he despaired and hanged himself. Pilate did not have the third virtue, that of a good intention, since he was more eager to please the Jews and win his own honor than to set me free.

9 However, my Mother did have the first virtue, that of striking back at the enemy, since for every temptation she had, she hit back and opposed to it the contrary virtue. David had the second virtue, for he was patient in adversity and did not despair when he fell. 10 Abraham had the third virtue, a perfect intention, for, having left his fatherland, he was even ready to sacrifice his only son. You, too, should imitate these three as far as you are able!”

1. “Lucifer,” i.e., the fallen archangel, who was motivated by pride to rebel against God and was cast out of heaven; cf. Isaiah 14:12.
### Chapter 107

*On an Empty Nutshell, a Triple Path, the Struggling Conscience of a Cleric; and on How a Stone-like Heart Can Grow into a Spiritual Heart*

**DATE: 1360s, NAPLES**

Christ encourages the bride, that is, the soul, always and lovingly to maintain pure contrition, godly love, and unwavering obedience. He condemns those who despise obedience, abstinence, and noble patience. He also warns a spiritual man not to allow his conscience to become gradually coarse and blind under a pretense of light.

1. An angel of wondrous splendor appeared. Other angels were seen speaking with him and saying: “Friend, why are you offering an empty nutshell to our God?” The angel answered: “Though you already know everything, I will explain it for the sake of the woman who is here present. 2 I never grow sad in the presence of our God when I am carrying out his will for the good of souls, for I am never away from his presence. Even if I am not offering him a sweet-tasting nut, I am offering something delectable, a key made of purest gold, a golden vase, and a crown of jewels.

3. The key symbolizes pure contrition for sins. This opens God’s heart and lets a sinner enter. The vase symbolizes godly delight and love. God takes his sweet rest there with the soul. The crown symbolizes cheerful, unwavering obedience. These are the three things that my God seeks for in a holy soul.

4. Although this particular soul entrusted to my care has scorned these three things, still I am giving to God the things this soul has offered to him, and God’s glory will be no less. 5 The key of contrition is so onerous to this man that he does not even want to think about it. The vase of godly love is so bitter to him that he can in no way bear its smell. How can spiritual delight be sweet where the lust of the flesh has taken root? 6 Two contraries do not combine well in the same vase. Even the crown of obedience is too heavy for him to bear, since his self-will is so pleasing to him that it seems to him more pleasant to follow his own will than God’s will.

7. The angel then turned to God and said: “Behold, Lord, the vase and key and crown of which this soul made herself unworthy. Look, when you crack the shell, it is full of dirt inside, when it should be full of the sweetest honey. Instead, a snake is lying there in the midst of the shell. 8 The shell symbolizes the heart. When death cracks it, it is full of longings for the world, and these are like dirt. The snake is the soul. The soul should be brighter than sunlight, hotter than flame, but she has turned into a serpent full of venom, poisonous to no one but herself, unto her own perdition.”

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9 The Lord spoke then to the bride and said: “I will tell you what condition
that man is in by means of a comparison. It is as though one man were
standing and another came up and approached him. When they turn their
faces toward each other, the man who was walking says: 10 ‘Sir, it seems there
is a distance separating us. Show me the way by which I should go, for I see
that you are mighty without comparison, delightful beyond conception, and as
good as one from whom all goodness comes and without whom no one is
good.’ 11 The other answered: ‘Friend, I shall show you a triple path that,
nevertheless, leads in one direction. When you follow it, it is rocky at the
beginning but smooth at the end, dark at the head of the journey but bright as
you go on, harsh for a time but delightful in the end.’ 12 The other answered:
‘Just show me the way and I will gladly follow it. I see that there is danger in
delay and harm in mistaking the way but a great benefit if I follow it. So fulfill
my desire and show me the true path.’

13 I am the creator of the universe, who remains unchangeable and for-
ever steadfast. That person was approaching me when he was in love with me
and sought after nothing as he sought after me. I turned my face toward him
when I placed divine consolation in his soul, and the joy of the world and every
lust of the flesh became hateful to him. 14 I showed him a triple way, not by
speaking to him with a physical voice but by inspiring his soul in a hidden way,
as I am now inspiring your soul in an open way.

15 First, I showed him that he should be obedient to me, his God, and
to his superiors. However, he answered me, thinking to himself in his mind:
‘I won’t. My superior is difficult and uncharitable, and so I just can’t obey
him with a cheerful mind.’ 16 I showed him also a second way, that of fleeing
the lust of the flesh and following my divine will, fleeing drunkenness
and following abstinence. These ways lead to true obedience. Yet he answered
me: 17 ‘Never! I am weak by nature. So I shall eat and sleep enough. I
shall converse for the sake of good cheer and laugh for the sake of worldly
comfort.’ 18 I showed him also a third way, that of being nobly patient for my
sake, for this way leads to abstinence and encourages holy obedience. But he
answered me: 19 ‘I won’t do it. If I put up with those insults to me, I will look
foolish. If I dress more poorly than the others, I will be ashamed in front of
everyone. If my body is ugly in any way, I must make up for it by catering to
others.’”

20 “In this way,” said the Lord, “his conscience and I contended together,
until finally he drew away from me and turned his back instead of his face
toward me. In what sense did he turn it? 21 By wanting to obey only in the way
he liked, and by wanting to be patient only provided that it did not lessen his
friendship with the world in any way. Now the devil is struggling to make him
completely blind and mute. He is trying to tie his hands and bind his feet and
lead him off to the darkness of hell. 22 He makes him blind when the man

thinks as follows: ‘God redeemed me through his passion. He will not let me be lost, for he is merciful. God does not scrutinize sin so exactly, given that people are offending him all the time.’ 23 This proves that his faith is unstable. Have him search my gospel, then, to see what account I shall demand of words and how much greater an account\(^3\) of deeds. Have him also search there to find out that the rich man\(^4\) was not buried in hell because of theft but because of his misuse of the wealth granted to him. 24 Again, the devil makes him mute when the man hears the example and words of my friends and then says: ‘Nobody can live like that nowadays.’ This proves that he has very little hope. 25 I am, of course, the one who has given my friends the ability to live thus decently and chastely. I can also give him a like capacity, if he would only place his hope in me.

The devil ties his hands whenever the man loves something more than me, when he gets more eagerly concerned about the world than about my glory. 26 Let him therefore be cautious in order not to get tripped up by the devil while he seems so intent on the world, for the devil lays out his snares when one is least on one’s guard. 27 The devil binds his feet when the man pays no attention to his thoughts and affections, when he does not consider the form of his temptations, when he is so intent on gratifying his neighbor and his own flesh that he pays no attention to saving his soul. 28 Have him, therefore, ponder what I said in the gospel\(^5\) about how a man who puts his hand to the plow should not look back, and how he who has entered upon a more profitable way of life should not turn back. 29 The devil also enchains his heart, each time the man inclines his will to evil in such a way that he thinks about worldly honors and longs both to have them and to persevere in such a disposition. 30 The devil leads him toward darkness each time the man has such thoughts as these: ‘Whether I attain to glory or to punishment is of little concern to me.’ Woe to him who falls into such a darkness!

31 However, I would run to meet him as a father\(^6\) if he would but turn toward me. In what sense? By having the intention of doing as much as he can. 32 As it is not licit for the son of a man to take a woman to wife against her will, so it is not licit for the Son of the Virgin. The human will is like a tool by which divine love is introduced into the soul. 33 Just as a miller who wants to split stones first looks for cracks into which he first inserts his finer tools and then heavier ones until the stone is broken, 34 so too I first look for goodwill and then pour my grace into it, and then, as the person’s activity increases and his will makes progress, a larger amount of my grace is also added, until the stone-like heart\(^7\) is converted and grows into a heart of flesh, and the heart of flesh becomes a spiritual heart.’

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Explanation

35 This was a prior in the region of Sicily close to the volcanic mountain. The following revelation also concerned him.

Addition

36 The Son of God speaks: “This brother is wondering why my apostles, Peter and Paul, lay neglected for so long a time in the catacombs. 37 I answer you: The Golden scripture says that Israel was in the desert for a long time because the wickedness of the Gentiles whose lands they were to possess had not yet been completed. This was also the case with my apostles. 38 The time of grace had not yet come in which the bodies of my apostles were to be exalted, since first there had to be a time of trial and afterward of coronation, and also because those persons were not yet born who were to have the honor of exalting the apostles.

39 Now you might ask whether their bodies had any honor during the time in which they lay in the grave. My answer is that my angels took care of and gave honor to those blessed bodies. 40 The area of the catacombs was like a place where roses and plants are to be sown and that is carefully cultivated beforehand. The catacombs, which angels and men would rejoice over, were likewise prepared and honored long beforehand. 41 I assure you that there are many places in the world where the bodies of the saints rest, but none are like this place. If all the saints whose bodies repose here were counted, it would scarcely be believed. 42 Just as an enfeebled man is restored by the good smell and taste of food, so too the people who come to this place with an upright mind are spiritually revived and receive true pardon for their sins, each according to his or her faith and way of life.”

43 This same brother was very much moved to compunction by the words of Lady Birgitta. He heard a voice on three separate nights saying to him: “Hurry, hurry! Come, come!” On the fourth day, he fell sick and died in Rome after having received the sacraments.
Chapter 108

On the Abstinence and Fasting of the Virgin, John the Baptist, and Mary Magdelene

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her that three saints were most especially pleasing to him. These were the Virgin Mary, Blessed John the Baptist, and Mary Magdalene.

1 The Son speaks: “There were three saints who were most especially pleasing to me. These were Mary, my Mother, John the Baptist, and Mary Magdalene. My Mother, both at and before her birth, was so beautiful that there was no stain in her.”

2 The devils realized it and experienced such distress then that—figuratively speaking—it was as though their voices resounded from hell saying: ‘A virgin has come forth so virtuously and miraculously that she excels everyone on earth and in heaven and reaches all the way to God’s throne. Even if we attack her with all our snares, she destroys them all—they are broken like flax and fall apart like old ropes. If we come against her with all our evil and impurity, she cuts it all down, like grass cut down by a sickle. If we plant sensuality and worldly desires in her, they are extinguished like a spark by a torrent of water.’

3 When John the Baptist was born, it caused such displeasure in the devils that it was as though a voice resounded from hell saying: ‘A miraculous child has been born. What shall we do? If we attack him with pride, he scorns to listen to us and much less wants to obey our suggestion. If we offer him riches, he turns his back on us and refuses to look, and if we offer him sensual pleasure, he is like a dead man and cannot feel it.’

4 When Mary Magdalene was converted, the devils said: ‘How shall we get her back? We have lost a fat prize. She bathed herself so with the water of her tears that we do not dare to look upon her. She has covered herself so with good works that no sinful stain can come near her. She is so fervent and zealous in the service of God and in holiness that we do not dare to approach her.’

5 These three saints regarded the soul as ruler and the body as slave. The soul in each of them had three characteristics: First, it loved nothing but me; second, it would not act against my will; third, they each refused to neglect anything having to do with me. Although they had a soul such as this, still they did not despise the body or give it poison instead of food or thorns instead of clothing, nor did they lie down to rest on anthills. No, they had moderate nourishment for my glory and for the benefit of the soul, clothes for covering

1. “There was no stain in her”: a reference to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin; cf. Børresen, “Birgitta’s Godlanguage,” pp. 46–69. See also Book V introduction, p. 266.
3. “She bathed herself so with the water of her tears”; cf. Luke 7:45.
the body but not for proud display, and sleep for rest and a bed for comfort.
12 Nevertheless, if they knew it would have pleased me, and if I had given them
my grace, they would have been happy to accept the bitterest substances for
food and thorns for clothes, and they would have lain down on anthills.
13 Considering, however, that I am just and merciful in all ways, they were just
toward their bodies by restraining its illicit impulses, but they were also
merciful in indulging the body so that it would not collapse or be destroyed due
to harsh and severe labor.
14 You might ask: Since the holy hermits and fathers of old receive enough
grace to enable them to eat but once a week, and others, too, have enjoyed the
food and ministrations of angels, why did I not grant these three such a grace?
15 I answer: Those holy fathers were granted such fasting for three reasons.
The first was in order to exhibit my grace and power so that people might know
that, if I should please, I can sustain the body without food just as I sustain the
soul without corporal food. 16 The second reason was in order to set an ex-
ample to teach people that bodily toil and hardship lead the soul to heaven. The
third reason was the avoidance of sin, since unrestrained sensual desires lead
to punishment. 17 In order, then, that people might learn temperance and
moderation in living, I myself, God and man—though I could have lived in the
world without food—made use of food and other necessities for the body, so
that humankind might be thankful to me, their God, and possess moderate
comfort in the world and perfect liberty with the saints in heaven.”

Chapter 109

Nuts Are Like Good Works

The Mother says that spiritual persons, once they have been converted
through penance and charity and contrition and patience, ought to
buy back all the time they have lost earlier so that they do not offer
empty nutshells to God.

1 The Mother speaks: “Sometimes when nuts are offered to a lord, some of
them are found to be empty, and these have to be filled so as to become
acceptable to him. 2 It is similar in spiritual works. Many people perform many
good works, and their sin is diminished because of them so that they do not
end up in hell. 3 However, there may have been many empty moments before
those good works and in between them, and it is necessary to fill them, if there
is still time to work. Otherwise, contrition and charity supply every lack.
4 Thus, Mary Magdalene offered nuts—good works, that is—to God.
There were some empty ones among them, because she had had a lot of
time for sinning. However, she supplied all that was lacking with the help of
time, patience, and effort. 5 Likewise, John the Baptist offered filled nuts, as it
were, to God, for he had served God from youth and offered him all his time. 6
The apostles offered, so to speak, half-filled nuts to God, since a lot of their time
before their conversion was spent imperfectly. 7 I, God’s Mother, offered him nuts that were filled and sweeter than honey, for I was full of grace and was maintained in grace from my youth up.

8 I tell you, therefore, that, though people’s sins may be pardoned, they should redeem the earlier empty times of their lives through their patience and works of charity while they still have time.”

† Chapter 110

On the Good and the Bad Spirit

DATE: UNDATED

Christ instructs the bride about the difference between the good spirit and the devil’s deception, and about how one must respond to each of them.

1 The Son speaks: “How can one recognize my spirit, since there are two spirits,1 one good and one bad? I shall tell you: My spirit is hot and has two effects. First, he makes one desire nothing but God; second, he grants utmost humility and contempt for the world. 2 The bad spirit is both cold and hot: cold in that he makes bitter everything having to do with God; hot in that he inclines people to the lust of the flesh and worldly pride and rouses their desire for their own praise. 3 He comes like a smooth-talking friend, but is really like a dog that bites. He comes like a soothing charmer, but is really the worst of ensnarers. When he comes, tell him: ‘I do not want you, for your ends are evil.’ 4 When, however, the good spirit comes, tell him: ‘Come like fire, Lord, and set my heart aflame! Though I am unworthy to receive you, yet for my part I need you. You will not be better because of me, nor do you need what I have, but I will become better through you and, without you, I am nothing.’”

† Chapter 111

On Three Kinds of Law; and on a Further Law

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride about three kinds of law, namely, ecclesial law, imperial law, and common law. He admonishes her to live according to a fourth kind of law, namely, the divine, spiritual law, that is, to live in humility, in unwavering, perfect, and catholic faith and in divine charity, putting God ahead of everything. In this way, spiritual honors and riches in heaven are acquired in the glory of eternity.

1. “There are two spirits”; cf. Book I 54, and Book VI 38.
1 The Son speaks to the bride and says: “There are three laws. The first is ecclesial law. The second is imperial law. The third is common law.  

2 All these kinds of law are written on dead animal skins. However, there is also a spiritual law, which is not written on skins but in the book of life. This law is never lost or destroyed by old age. It is not wearisome to keep nor is it a difficult possession to have.  

3 Every good law should be ordered toward the salvation of the soul, the fulfillment of God’s commandments, the avoidance of evil, and the obtainment of those goods that ought to be desired with prudence. There is a phrase in the law written on skins that says ‘in order to obtain this or that.’ Thus, in order to obtain something, one of four conditions is necessary: It is either a gift made to someone out of trusted love and intimacy, or because of inheritance, or because of partitioning, or as compensation for humble acts of service.

5 It is similar with the spiritual law. The spiritual law is to know and love God and delight in him. In this law are found the spiritual honors and riches that consist in exchanging all creatures for the Creator, surrendering one’s own will to God, loving virtues and giving up the world for heaven. These riches are obtained in four ways. First, through charity: Just as a worldly ruler gives someone gifts out of charity, even without antecedent merit, so too I created and redeemed and daily maintain and honor humankind despite human ingratitude. Moreover, all those who wholeheartedly love me and desire nothing but me will have on earth the virtue that is written in the heart by God’s finger and in heaven have the honor that is written in the book of life, which is life eternal.

9 Second, spiritual honor is obtained through inheritance. Through my taking on a human nature and through my passion, I purchased heaven for humankind and opened it up to them with hereditary right. Man sold his divine inheritance to the devil, exchanging eternal joy for a puny fruit, the tree of life for forbidden food, truth for falsehood. Likewise, in obedience to the Father, I tore up the letter of disobedience. I made up for the sweetness of

1. “Ecclesial law,” i.e., the canon law of the church, the body of ecclesiastical laws that were imposed by authority in matters of faith, morals, and discipline. It consisted of pronouncements and decrees issued by the councils of the church and by the popes; most were universally binding, though some applied locally.

2. “Imperial law,” i.e., the Roman law code that was compiled by Emperor Justinian I (d. 565), Corpus iuris civilis.

3. “Common law,” i.e., the local law codes, such as the national, provincial, and town laws. A medieval lawyer had to be familiar with all of the three types of law.

4. “Dead animal skins,” i.e., parchment.

5. “In order to obtain this or that” renders “obtinere aliquid”; cf. Sw. “ett ord som six at fa nakat” [a word that is said to obtain something]. Although the formulation is vague, “word” in Swedish law can denote a legal formula, and the verb “to say” is very commonly used to cite cases and examples throughout the secular laws; thus this phrase is legally charged.


fruit by the bitter suffering of my heart. I earned the tree of life\textsuperscript{11} for human-
kind by my death. I brought humanity back and established all truth through
faith in my own humanity. \textsuperscript{12} Therefore, whoever believes in the words of my
truth and imitates me will obtain by inheritance both spiritual riches and my
grace.

13 Third, spiritual honor is obtained through partition. This occurs when a
person partitions or separates himself from every delight in carnal pleasures,
changing carnal lust into abstinence, wealth into poverty, reputation into lowly
submission, earthly relatives for the company of God’s friends, the vision of the
world for the vision of God. \textsuperscript{14} Fourth, spiritual honor is obtained by means of
humble acts of service. This happens when a person struggles patiently in
God’s service like a valiant soldier in battle, \textsuperscript{15} serving him in humility and faith
like a servant, dispensing the goods entrusted to him with mercy and justice
like a good steward, on the lookout for temptations like a good scout. \textsuperscript{16} Such
a person is worthy of the honors and spiritual riches that are written not on
animal skins but in the animate soul. The system of the threefold written law is
useful indeed for the carrying out of justice, but the spiritual law is agreeable
when it comes to earning a reward.

17 Hence, my daughter, seek to obtain spiritual honor through charity by
loving nothing as much as me. Seek it through inheritance by firmly believing
what the church teaches. Seek it through acts of humility by doing everything
for my glory. \textsuperscript{18} You have been called in my law. Therefore, you are bound to
keep my law. My law means living in accordance with my will. As a good priest
lives in accordance with ecclesial law, so you, too, should live in accordance
with the law of my humility by taking after my friends. \textsuperscript{19} Every temporal law
tends in part to the honor of the world and in part to its contempt. My law,
however, alone tends to heaven, for no one before or after me has as fully
understood how glorious is the delight of the heavenly kingdom as have I and
anyone to whom I wish to reveal it.”

\# Chapter 112

The Proud Are Like a Butterfly

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her to beware especially of the vice
of pride, not to be puffed up over her physical beauty or her
possessions or her family. The proud man is compared to a butterfly
with broad wings and a tiny body.

The Son speaks to the bride: “Do not be disturbed by their pride, for it will
quickly pass away. Among the species of flies there is one called the butterfly.\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1} “Butterfly”: cf. Book III 14, where a proud bishop is likened to a butterfly.
It has broad wings and a tiny body. It also has many colors. 2 First, it can fly high because of its lightness and thinness, but as it rises in the air, it quickly descends and lands on whatever is closest, whether rocks or wood, because it has so little strength in its body.

3 This species of fly symbolizes proud people. They have broad wings and a tiny body, for their mind is swollen with pride like a skin inflated with air. They think they have what they have because they deserve it. They put themselves ahead of others and consider themselves to be worthier than others. 4 They would spread their own name throughout the whole world, if they could. Yet they descend and fall, because they do not recognize that their life is brief and momentary. 5 Second, proud persons have many colors like a butterfly, for they are proud of their physical beauty, their possessions, and their family, and change their status with every contrivance of their pride. Yet when they die, they are but dust. 6 Third, when the proud reach the highest point in their pride, they descend rapidly and fall dangerously to their deaths.

7 Therefore, beware of pride, for it turns God’s face away from you, and my grace cannot enter into anyone whom pride possesses.”

Chapter 113
The Lowly Find Favor and Are Elevated; the Explanation Is about a Knight’s Ill Will toward Birgitta

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN (EXPLANATION, 1350s, ROME)

Christ admonishes the bride to live humbly and not to care about fame or a great name, for he did not choose great scholars to preach the gospel but humble fishermen.

1 The Son speaks: “Let whoever so wish read the scriptures, and they shall find that I made a prophet out of a shepherd\(^1\) and filled youths and simple people with the spirit of prophecy.\(^2\) It is true that not everyone has yet received my saving words, yet, in order to make my love known, my words have reached most people. 2 Likewise, I did not choose scholars to preach the gospel but fishermen. In this way, they could not boast of their own wisdom. Thus, everyone would know that, just as God is wondrous and inconceivable, so too his works are inscrutable, and that he works the greatest miracles with the least of means. 3 That person takes up a heavy load who runs after the world in order to get glory for himself and carry out his own desires.

4 I will give you the example of a certain man. He sought after the world with all his desire, acquired a great name for himself in the world and placed a

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1. “A prophet out of a shepherd”; cf. Amos 7:15; the words may refer to David, who was a shepherd before he became king of Israel. He was often regarded as a prophet in the Middle Ages, since many of the Psalms that were attributed to him were seen as prophetic.
heavy load of sins on his back. 5 Now, therefore, he has obtained a great name
in hell, a most heavy load instead of a reward, and a more prominent position
of punishment. Some descended to that place before him, some along with
him, still others after him. 6 The ones that descended before him are those
who, with their help and advice, encouraged him in spreading his wickedness.
The retribution for his deeds descended along with him. Those that will de-
scend after him are those who imitate his example.

7 The first cry out to him as though from a battle scene. They say: ‘Since
you listened to our advice, we burn more hotly because of your presence. May
you therefore be accursed and worthy of being hung where the rope does not
break and the fire remains forever. In return for your pride and ambition may
you feel the worst sort of shame.’ 8 His deeds cry out and say: ‘O, wretch, the
earth was incapable of feeding you with her fruit, because you wanted it all.
Gold and silver could not fill your desire, and you have therefore been left
empty of everything. 9 For that reason, living crows will tear your soul to
pieces—it shall be mangled but never diminish, decompose yet still live.’

10 Those that descend after him cry out: ‘Alas, that you were ever
born! Your sensual desire shall become for you such a hatred of God that you
will not want to speak a single word with which God might be soothed. 11 In
God’s love there is every comfort and noble delight and indescribable joy—
none of which we deserve due to imitating you—12 so may you have the
sadness and discord of the company of devils, deformity instead of honor, fire
in return for your lust, cold in return for your love, unrest in return for your
comfort-seeking. 13 Instead of the great name that you bore so unworthily, may
you have revilement. Instead of a glorious throne, may you get the most de-
spicable place!’

14 The story shows what rewards they deserve who get involved in such
things against God’s ordinance.’’

Addition

15 A certain knight was always eager to contrive new fashions, and
he led many people to perdition by his words and examples. He
felt ill will toward Lady Birgitta and, because he did not dare himself
to speak against her, he incited another person to say insulting words

3. “Living crows”: possibly a detail of old Scandinavian lore. The crow fed on animal flesh and was
associated with places of carnage and death; see KL “korp.”

4. “Contrive new fashions”: i.e., stratagems for corrupting people. According to Prior Peter’s testimony,
which is similar to the addition, the knight was named Nikolaus Ingevaldsson. “Jtem dixit iste testis, quod in
ciuitate Arbuga regni Svecie vidit et presens fuit, quando alius miles, videlicet dominus Nicolaus Ingeualdsson,
potens cum rege, qui non audebat jniuriam loquere contra dominam Brigidam, incitauit quendam, qui se
fingebat ebrium, vt eidem domine Brigide verba contumeliosa loqueretur, qui siquidem sic se fingens ebrium,
considente domina Brigida cum magnatibus, ingressus ad mensam dixit: O domina, nimis sompnias, nimis
vigilas, expedit tibi plus bibere et plus dormire, numquit Deus relinquit religiosas personas et cum superbis
personis mundi loquitur? Vanum enim est verbis tuis dare fidem” (Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 493).
to her while pretending to be drunk. 16 While she was at the dinner table and leading men were listening, this man said: “Lady, you dream too much.” You spend too much time in vigils. It would be better for you to drink more and to sleep more. Has God abandoned those in the religious life and converses now with the proud and worldly? It is vain to trust in your words.”

17 While he was saying such things, those present wished to punish him, but Birgitta did not permit them, saying: “Let him speak, for God has sent him. All my life, I have sought my own praise and blasphemed God, why should I not hear what is only right? He is just telling me the truth.”

18 When that knight heard about this, he repented and was reconciled with the lady. He came to Rome and went to his rest there in a praiseworthy death.

Chapter 114

Lust and Desire Are the Devil’s Roast; a Bear’s Prey; and about a Swedish Dean Who Visited Monte Gargano

Date: 1340s, Sweden

Christ warns the bride to beware of dealing with worldly people. That is called the devil’s roast. The Virgin Mary teaches her to have an upright intention in all her virtuous actions in order to give more glory to God, for many people serve God in their activity, but their wrongful intention casts shadows on all the good they do.

1 The Son speaks: “Watch out for the devil’s roast, the one he cooks on the fires of lust and desire. When fat is put on a fire, something necessarily starts dripping from it. 2 Sins proceed in this way from worldly dealings and worldly company. Though you do not know what is in a person’s conscience, external signs bring out what is hidden in the mind.”

3 The Mother speaks: “Your every action should be rational and your intention upright. This means that you should do whatever you do with the intention of giving glory to God and preferring spiritual gains to bodily enjoyment. 4 Many people, indeed, serve God in their activity, but their wrongful intention casts shadows on all the good they do. A comparison will help you to understand this. Take the animal called a bear. 5 When it is starving and catches sight of its desired prey, it brings one foot down on its prey and looks for somewhere to plant its other foot firmly so the prey cannot get or be taken away, until the bear has eaten it up and turned it to its desire. 6 The bear keeps

5. “Lady, you dream too much”: On Birgitta’s critics, see further Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 145.
1. “Roast” renders “affatura,” which is surely a mistake for “assatura” [roast steak]; cf. Sw. “stek.”
continual watch on its prey and does not look around for gold or fragrant herbs or trees, but only looks for some hidden and secure footing or something to grasp so that it can safely and securely hold on to the prey it has caught.

7 Many people serve me with prayers and fasting out of a kind of fear, for they have in mind the terrible punishment and also my great mercy. They seek me through certain exterior actions, but they go against the commandments of my Son in their intention. 8 Like the bear, these people set their whole intention on the lust of the flesh and worldly desire, but, because they are afraid of losing their life as well as of future suffering, they serve me with the intention of not losing grace or incurring punishment. 9 This is quite clear, for they never contemplate my Son’s passion, which is like the most precious gold, or imitate the lives of the saints, who are like precious gems, 10 nor pay any regard to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are like fragrant herbs. They do not give up their own will and perform the will of my Son, but they only want something on which to lean in order to sin more securely and gain success in the world. 11 Their reward will be slight, for their actions proceed from their cold hearts. Just as the bear, once it has consumed its prey, does not care anymore about a secure footing, so when the final hour comes for them, and their sensual lusts are over and done with, their secure footing in me will be of little value to them, 12 because they did not give up their own will to carry out my will, nor did they seek me out of love but out of fear. However, if their intention is perfectly corrected, their deeds will soon be revived and, if any deed is lacking, their good intention will be counted as a deed.”

Addition

13 This was a provost who lived according to his pleasure. When he came to Rome, he reformed his life in a very praiseworthy manner. When he had visited Monte Gargano and the shrine of St. Nicholas and had returned to Lady Birgitta, 14 whose advice he followed completely, he said that he wondered why the great and famous city of Siponte, 3 where the bodies of so many saints rested, had been destroyed.

15 On the following day, the Son of God appeared and said to the lady: “Your friend is wondering about the city that is destroyed. Truly, daughter, the sins of the inhabitants merited this. 16 Even other cities have merited similar things, but a friend of mine lived there. He had perfect love for me and rebuked and protested against their morals continuously. 17 When he saw their obstinacy, he tearfully begged me to let the place become desolate rather than let so many souls be in

2. “Monte Gargano... St. Nicholas”: This mountain in the southeast province of Puglia was associated with an apparition of the archangel Michael and was a place of pilgrimage, as was Bari, where the relics of St. Nicholas were preserved. See also ch. 131, which takes place on Monte Gargano. See further Book III 12, explanation.

3. “Siponte”: now Manfredonia, near Monte Gargano.
daily peril. I saw his tears, and since no one tried to placate me fully, I
allowed those things to happen that we are now speaking about.”

18 She said to him: “O Lord, it is sad that the relics and bodies of
many good persons lie there as though they were unclean and un-
protected.” 19 Christ answered: “Just as I have the souls of my chosen
ones within me, so too I take care of the relics of my friends—who are
my treasure—until they receive the twofold reward promised to
them.”

20 The lady spoke again. “My dear Lord, I do believe that many
graces and indulgences were granted in Siponte by the popes. Now
that the walls have been destroyed, have the graces also been abol-
ished?” 21 Christ answered: “What place is holier than Jerusalem
where I, God himself, left my footprints? What place is now held in
greater contempt than Jerusalem, inhabited and oppressed by infi-
dels? Yet whoever goes to Jerusalem will meet with the same graces
and indulgences as before. 22 It is likewise with Siponte: Whoever
goes there out of love and with a perfect intention will share in the
same grace and blessing that the city had in the time of its glory,
because of the faith of the pilgrims and their labor of love.”

# Chapter 115

Birgitta Is Like a Wheel, the Devil Is an Executioner; and on the Body’s
Repositories and Limbs

DATE: 1340s, sweden

Christ speaks to the bride about how to free a certain person possessed
by the devil. He tells her that the soul has inner, spiritual limbs just as
the body has outer, bodily limbs. The Lord gives a beautiful
explanation of all this.

1 The Son speaks: “You are like a wheel that follows after that which goes
before it. You should thus follow after my will. I told you earlier¹ about a certain
person whose soul was possessed by the devil. Now I will tell you in what part
of the body he is trapped. 2 I am like a man who says to his guard: ‘There are
three places of custody in your house. In the first are those who deserve to be
deprived of life. In the second are those who are to lose one of their limbs. In
the third are those who are to be whipped and to lose their skin.’ 3 The guard
says to him: ‘Lord, if some are to lose their life, others to be mutilated and
others to be whipped, why put off their judgment? If they are sentenced
quickly, they will forget their pain.’

4 The Lord answered: ‘I do not what I do without a cause. Those who are to
be deprived of life must wait for a time in order that good people might see

their misery and become better, and bad people might feel fear and become more careful in the future. 5 It is necessary that those who are to be mutilated should first experience anxiety so as to retract in their hearts the evils they have done and feel sorrow for the crimes they have committed. Those who are to be whipped should also be tested by sorrow so that those who had forgotten themselves in their delight may get to know themselves in their sorrow and become that much more careful not to commit such crimes the more difficult it is for them to gain their liberty.’

6 I am the Lord who has the devil as a guard, as it were, in order to punish the wicked according to their individual deserts. Power has been given to him over this soul, but I will now explain to you in what part of the body. 7 For just as the body is arranged in its outer limbs, so too the body ought to be arranged spiritually. As the body has marrow, bones, and flesh, and blood in the flesh and flesh in the blood, so too the soul ought to have the three faculties of memory, conscience, and intellect. 2 8 There are some people who understand lofty scriptural matters but have no reason. They are lacking a limb. There are others who have a rational awareness but no intelligence. 9 Still others have intellect but no memory. These are gravely sick. Those who are healthy in their souls have healthy reason, memory, and intellect.

10 The body has three repositories. The first is the heart. A slender membrane covers the heart as a protection against anything impure touching it. Even if only very small stains should touch the heart, a person would die right away. The second repository is the stomach. The third is the bowels by means of which harmful substances are purged away. 11 The soul should also have three repositories in a spiritual sense. The first is a godly desire. This is like the heart. It means that the soul desires nothing more fervently than me, her God. Otherwise, if any base affection, however small, should enter there, then the soul gets stained right away. 12 The second repository is the stomach, that is, the wise disposition of time and work. As all food is dissolved and digested in the stomach, so all time and every thought and deed should be disposed according to God’s plan in an orderly, useful, and prudent way. 13 The third repository is the bowels, that is, godly contrition, by means of which impure things are purged and the food of divine wisdom tastes better.

14 The body has three limbs with which it advances: the head, the hands, and the feet. The head denotes divine love. As all five senses are in the head, so in divine love there is a sweet taste for the soul of whatever is said or heard or seen of God, and whatever is commanded is carried out with constancy. 15 Just as a man without a head is dead, so too, without love, the soul, whose life is

2. “Three faculties of memory, conscience, and intellect”: The more normal triad (following St. Augustine) would be memory, intellect, and will.
3. “A slender membrane covers the heart”: The same image is used in Birgitta’s private meditation in medieval Swedish, dating from an early part of her life. It is quoted in volume 1, p. 7; see Morris, “Four Birgittine Meditations.” In ch. 120 below, she uses a similar image of a membrane that separates God from man.
God is dead to God. The hands symbolize faith. As there are several fingers on a hand, so there are many articles of faith, though there is only one faith. Through faith every divine intention is fulfilled, and faith should be operative in every good action. 16 As outward work is done with the hands, so too the Holy Spirit operates inwardly through faith. Faith upholds all the virtues, for where there is no faith, love and good works are abolished.

17 Hope is the soul’s feet. Through hope the soul comes to God. Just as the body advances on its feet, so too the soul draws close to God on the footsteps of divine desire and hope. The skin that covers the whole body symbolizes divine consolation that comforts the sensitive soul. 18 Although the devil is sometimes allowed to disturb the memory, and sometimes the hands and feet, still God always defends the soul like a fighter and comforts her like a kind father and heals her like a doctor so she does not die.

19 The soul of this man of whom I spoke to you was caught when she deserved to lose her hands due to her wavering faith, inasmuch as she did not have the right faith. 20 However, it is now time to show mercy for a twofold reason: first, because of my charity; second, because of the prayers of my chosen ones. Hence, let my friend read the above-mentioned words about him. 21 He should do three things. First, he should restore ill-gotten goods; second, he should procure absolution from the Roman Curia for his disobedience; third, he should not receive my body in the sacrament of communion before receiving absolution.”

Chapter 116
About Gentiles, Jews, and Bad Christians

Christ’s lament to the bride about the Gentiles and the Jews, but especially about bad Christians because they do not receive the holy sacraments with devotion and purity as they ought, and because they are not mindful of creation and redemption and divine consolation.

1 The Son speaks: “I will give you a figurative description of three men. The first of them might say: ‘I do not believe in you either as God or as man.’ Such a one is a pagan Gentile. 2 The second, who is a Jew, believes in me as God but not as man. The third, who is a Christian, believes in me as God and man but does not trust my words.

3 I am the one over whom the voice of the Father was heard to say: ‘This is my Son.’ In my divine nature I lament that men do not want to listen to me. 4 I cried out and said: ‘I am the beginning: If you believe in me, you will have

1. “This is my Son”; cf. Matthew 3:17.
eternal life, but they scorned me. They witnessed my divine power when I raised the dead and did much else, but they gave it no consideration.

5 On behalf of my human nature, too, I lament that nobody cares about the things that I established in the Holy Church. I placed, as it were, seven vessels in the church by means of which everyone was to be purified. 6 I established baptism for the purgation of original sin; chrism as a sign of divine reconciliation; holy unction for strength in the face of death; penance for the remission of all sins; the holy words with which the sacred offerings are consecrated and established; the priesthood in appreciation, recognition, and remembrance of divine charity; matrimony as the union of hearts. 7 These ought to be received with humility, kept in purity, celebrated without avarice. Nowadays, however, they are received with pride, kept in impure vessels, celebrated with avarice.

8 Moreover, my lament is that I was born and I died for the salvation of humankind in order that, even if people refused to love me because I created them, at least they would love me because I had redeemed them. Nowadays, however, they cast me out of their hearts as though I were a leper, and they shun me as though I were an unclean rag. 9 In my divinity, I lament again that they refuse the consolation of my divinity and give its charity no consideration.”

Chapter 117

God Comforts Those Who Truly Desire Him

DATE: 1340s, ALVASTRA

God himself runs out to meet those who truly desire him; he comforts them like a loving father and makes difficult things easy for them.

1 While someone was praying the Our Father, the bride heard the Spirit say: “Friend, I tell you on behalf of my divine nature that you shall have your inheritance with your Father, and, second, on behalf of my human nature, that you will be my temple. 2 Third, on behalf of the Spirit, I tell you that you will not have temptations beyond what you can bear. The Father shall defend you, my human nature shall assist you, the Spirit shall set you aflame.

3 As when a mother hears the voice of her son and she joyfully runs out to meet him, and as when a father sees his son struggling with his work and he runs out to meet him halfway and shares the load with him, so too I run out to meet my friends and make every difficult thing both easy for them and a joy to


3. “The things that I established”: Birgitta is speaking of the seven sacraments here, viz., baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, entry into holy orders, and matrimony.

4. “Chrism”: a mixture of balsam and olive oil, blessed by a bishop. It is used in certain sacraments and other rites of the church. Here, the reference is to the use of chrism in the sacrament of confirmation.

carry. 4 As when a person sees something delightful and cannot rest until he
gets close to it, so I draw close to those who desire me.”

Addition

5 This monk saw in the hands of the priest at the time of the
elevation of the body of Christ our Lord Jesus Christ in the form of a
child saying to him: “I am the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin.”
6 He even foresaw the manner and time of his death within a year,
about which one can read in several chapters in the legend on St.
Birgitta. The monk’s name was Gerekinus.

Chapter 118

How the Father Draws People’s Will toward Him

DATE: UNDATED

Christ speaks to the bride and says that the Father, by fulfilling their
good intention to do good, draws to himself those whom he sees gladly
changing their bad will to a good will through a desire to make
amends for past offenses.

1 The Son speaks: “Whoever wishes to join with me should convert his will
to me and repent his past offenses, and he is then drawn to perfection by my
Father. 2 The Father draws those people who freely change their bad will into
good will and desire to make amends for past offenses.
3 How does the Father draw them? He does so by fulfilling their good
intention to do good. If their desire were not good, the Father would not have
anything to draw. 4 Some people find me so cold that my ways do not please
them at all. Yet others find me so hot that they seem to be on fire whenever
they have to perform any good deeds. 5 Others, however, find me so agreeable
that they want nothing but me. To these I shall give a happiness that will
never end.”

1. “In the form of a child”: Intense devotion to the infant Christ and visions of the eucharistic host being
transformed into the Christ-child were especially common among the Cistercians; see further Sahlin, Birgitta of
Sweden, p. 89.

2. “Legend,” i.e., Birgitta’s Vita; see Collijn, Acta et processus, pp. 82, 619. See also Prior Petrus’s testi
mony, p. 545, and that of Magnus Petri, confessor general at Vadstena, p. 275.

3. “Gerekinus”: a devout long-standing resident at the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra, who was prone
to seeing heavenly apparitions when he spent his nights in prayer. Birgitta had taken up residence in the
vicinity of the monastery in her widowhood, and Gerekinus objected to her presence there: “Why does that
lady reside here in a monastery of monks, introducing a new custom against our rule?” He heard a voice telling
him that she had come in order that at the foot of this mountain (that is Omberg, where Alvastra is situated)
“she may gather flowers from which all people, even beyond the world’s end, shall receive medicine.” Cf. also
ch. 121 below.
Chapter 119

Christ Has Seven Good Things and He Endured Seven Things

DATE: UNDATED

The Mother describes seven good things in Christ and their seven opposites that people give him in return.

The Mother speaks: “My Son has seven goods. He is most powerful, like an all-consuming fire. Second, he is most wise, and his wisdom can no more be comprehended than one can drain the ocean. Third, he is most strong, like an immovable mountain. Fourth, he has the greatest virtue, like the apiarian herb. Fifth, he is most beautiful, like the shining sun. Sixth, he is most just, like a king who pardons no one in contradiction to justice. Seventh, he is most loving, like a lord who gives himself up for the life of his servant.

Contrary to these seven, he endured their seven opposites. Contrary to his power, he became like a worm. Contrary to his wisdom, he was counted as the most foolish. Contrary to his strength, he was bound as a child in swaddling clothes. Contrary to his beauty, he was like a leper, and contrary to his virtue, he stood naked and bound. Contrary to his justice, he was regarded as a liar. Contrary to his loving-kindness, he was put to death.”

Chapter 120

On Two Kinds of Delight

DATE: UNDATED

Christ tells the bride that there are two kinds of pleasure, spiritual and carnal; spiritual pleasure is when the soul delights in the kindnesses of God.

The Son speaks: “It is as though there were a membrane between me and that man. Because of it, my sweetness gives him no pleasure, for something else pleases him instead of me.” The bride heard this and said to the Lord: “Can he never then feel any kind of pleasure?” The Lord answered: “There are two kinds of pleasure, spiritual and carnal. Carnal or natural pleasure is when refreshment is taken as required by necessity. In that case a person should think as follows to himself: ‘O Lord, you who have commanded us to...”
take refreshment only when necessary, praise be to you! Grant me the grace not to let sin enter secretly as I take my refreshment.’ 4 If pleasure in temporal goods arises, a person should think as follows: ‘Lord, all earthly things are but earth and fleeting. Grant, therefore, that I may make such use of them as to be able to render an account to you for all of them.’

5 Spiritual pleasure is when the soul delights in the kindnesses of God, and makes use of temporal things and busies herself about them only unwillingly and by necessity. The membrane is broken when God becomes pleasant to the soul and when she keeps the fear of God continuously in mind.’

Chapter 121

The Monk’s True Cowl Is Obedience

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

It is not the cowl that makes the monk but the virtue of obedience and the observance of the rule. True contrition of heart along with a purpose of amendment snatches the soul from the hands of the devil, even if perfect contrition is lacking.

1 The devil appeared and said: “Look, that monk has flown away and only his shape remains.” And the Lord said to him: “Explain what you mean.”

2 The devil answered: “That I shall, though unwillingly. The true monk is his own keeper. His cowl is obedience and the observance of his vows. 3 As the body is covered by clothing, so the soul is covered by virtues. Therefore, the outer habit has no value unless the inner one is maintained, for it is virtue, not vestment, that makes the monk. 4 This monk flew off when he thought as follows: ‘I know my sin and I shall make amends and never sin again with the grace of God.’ With this intention he flew away from me and is now yours.’

5 The Lord said to him: “How is it that his shape remains?” The devil said: “When he does not recall his past sins nor repents as perfectly of them as he should.”

EXPLANATION

6 This brother saw in the hands of the priest at the time of the elevation of the body of Christ our Lord Jesus Christ in the form of a child saying to him: 7 “I am the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin.” He even foresaw the manner and time of his death within a year, about which one can read in several chapters in the legend.

1. “Shape” renders “effigies”; cf. Sw. “liknilsit alla skuggin” [likeness or shadow].
2. “In the form of a child”: paragraphs 6–7 are duplicated in ch. 117.5–6.
3. “Legend”: See note to ch. 117.6 above.
the sainted lady. The monk’s name was Gerekinus. 8 He lived a most pure life. When he was about to die, he saw writing in gold containing three golden letters: “P,” “O,” and “T.” 9 As he was describing it to the other monks, he said: “Come, Peter, make haste Olof and Thord.” 4 Once he had called for them, he went to his rest. The three monks died within a week following him.

10 Chapter 55 in *Extravagantes* is also about the same brother: “A monk of holy life, etc.”

## Chapter 122

*About a Man Who Scorns Birgitta*

**DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN**

About how the life of a certain dissolute and lukewarm man resembles a narrow and dangerous bridge, and about how, if he does not soon turn himself around by leaping onto the ship of life, penance, and virtue, he will be cast headlong by his enemy, the devil, down into the deep abyss.

1 “That man is my mortal enemy, for he mocks me with derision. He satisfies his every wish and desire as best he can. 2 He is like someone lying on a narrow bridge with a great abyss to his left. Anyone falling into it cannot climb out of it again. To his right there is a ship. If he leaps onto it and makes some effort to escape, he still has some hope of survival. 3 This bridge stands for his lamentable, brief life. He does not stand on it like a contender or even like a pilgrim, making daily progress and advancing on his way. Instead, he lies there lazily, longing to drink the waters of sensuality. 4 Two fates await him if he gets up off the bridge. Either he will fall into the abyss, that is, into deepest hell, if he turns to his left, that is, to deeds of carnality. 5 Or, if he leaps onto the ship, he will escape with an effort in the sense that, if he accepts the discipline and ordinances of the Holy Church, it will take him some effort but he will save himself by doing so. 6 So, may he turn himself around quickly, before the enemy casts him headlong off the bridge, for then, indeed, he will cry out without being heard and will be punished in eternity.”

### Addition

7 When this man saw that the king was unmoved and did not attend to him in his customary manner, he felt ill will toward Lady Birgitta. When she was passing through a narrow street, he poured water on her from a window above. However, she said to the by-

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4. “Peter ... Olof and Thord”: Such examples suggest that St. Birgitta’s presence at Alvastra may have brought about a renewal of the faith of the Alvastra community. See France, *The Cistercians in Scandinavia*, p. 149; McGuire, “Friendship in Birgitta of Sweden.”
standers, “May the Lord forgive him and not requite him for it in the next life.” Christ appeared then to the lady at mass, saying: “The man who poured water on you from the window out of ill will thirsts for blood. He has shed blood. He longs for the earth and not for me. He speaks out boldly against me. He worships his own flesh instead of me, his God. He has shut me out of himself and out of his heart. Let him beware lest he die in his blood.” The man lived for a short time after this, and then died with blood flowing out of his nose, just as she had foretold.

## Chapter 123

### About a Bride Whose Family Wishes to Reclaim Her

**DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN**

Christ defends his bride, Birgitta, that is, a soul converted from worldliness to the spiritual life, whom her father and mother, sister and brother tried to dissuade from his love and from chastity in marriage.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “I am like a bridegroom who has betrothed himself to a bride whom her father and mother, sister and brother want to have back.

2 Her father says: ‘Give me back my daughter, for she was born from my blood.’ Her mother says: ‘Give me back my daughter, for she was fed with my milk.’ Her sister says: ‘Give me back my sister, for she was brought up with me.’ Her brother says: ‘Give me back my sister, for she falls under my authority.’

3 The bridegroom answered them: ‘Father, she may have been born from your blood, but now she must be filled with my blood. Mother, you may have fed her with your milk, but I will now feed her with my delight. Sister, she may have been brought up according to your fashions, but she shall now live in my fashion. Brother, she may have been under your authority so far, but now she is under my authority.’

4 This is what has happened to you. If your father, that is, if the lust of the flesh demands you back, it pertains to me to fill you with my love. If your mother, that is, if worldly cares demand you back, it pertains to me to feed you with the milk of my consolation. If your sister, that is, if the fashions of worldly society demand you back, you must rather live in my fashion. If your brother, that is, if self-will demands you back, you are obliged to carry out my will.”

1. “She falls under my authority”: See further Sjöberg, *Hustru och man*, on the subject of marriage in the *Revelationes.*
Chapter 124

The Seven Stones in Birgitta’s Crown

DATE: AFTER 1350, ITALY

About how Blessed Agnes places on the bride of Christ a crown with seven precious stones, namely, the gems of patience in suffering.

1 Agnes\(^1\) speaks to the bride of Christ and says: “Come, daughter, and put on a crown made from seven precious gems. The crown stands for nothing other than the proof of patience, welded together out of hardship and adorned with garlands by God.

2 The first gem of your crown is jasper. It was put there by the man who jeeringly said that he did not know what spirit made you speak, and that it would be better for you to spin and sew after the fashion of women and not to discuss scripture. 3 Just as jasper sharpens one’s vision and brings joy to the mind, so too, out of hardship, God brings joy to the mind, enlightens the intellect in spiritual matters, and mortifies the soul from disorderly impulses.

4 The second gem is a sapphire. This was put there by the man who flattered you to your face but vilified you behind your back. 5 Just as sapphire is of a celestial color and preserves the health of parts of the body, so human malice puts the righteous to the test in order to make them celestial, and it preserves the parts of the soul so that they do not become puffed up with pride.

6 The third gem is an emerald. This was put there by the man who asserted that you said things that you had neither thought of nor spoken. 7 Just as the emerald is fragile in itself yet has such a beautiful green color, so too a lie is soon annihilated but makes the soul beautiful in a reward for her patience.

8 The fourth gem is a pearl. This was put there by the man who disparaged a friend of God’s in your presence. His disparagement upset you more than it would have done if it had been about yourself. 9 Just as the pearl is white and beautiful and eases the suffering of the heart, so too the sorrow of love introduces God into the soul, and tames the passions of anger and impatience. 10 The fifth gem is topaz. This was put there by the man that spoke harshly to you but to whom you, on the contrary, made a gentle answer. 11 Just as topaz is of the color of gold and preserves chastity and beauty, so nothing is more beautiful and acceptable to God than to love the one who hurts you and to pray for those who persecute you.\(^2\)

12 The sixth gem is a diamond. This was put there by the man who hurt you physically but whom you endured patiently and whom you did not wish to disgrace. 13 Just as a diamond cannot be broken by smashing but only with the blood of goats,\(^3\) so too it pleases God when a person overlooks and, for God’s sake, does not bother about physical hurts but is ever thinking of what God has

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1. “Agnes”: See note to ch. 11.1 above.
done for the sake of humankind. 14 The seventh gem is a carbuncle. This was put there by the man who brought the false message to you that your son Karl was dead,⁴ and you bore it patiently, entrusting yourself to God. 15 Just as a carbuncle shines in a house and looks very beautiful on a ring, so too one who is patient at the loss of something dear attracts God’s love and shines in the sight of the saints and is as pleasing as a precious gem.

16 Therefore, my daughter, be steadfast, for still more gems are needed to add to your crown. Consider that Abraham and Job became better and more renowned through their trials, and John became holier by bearing witness to the truth.”

Chapter 125

On Seven Animals That Represent Seven Bishops

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

God’s Mother speaks to her daughter, the bride of Christ, and offers a lovely allegory of seven animals denoting four kinds of immoral men and three kinds of virtuous men.

1 The Mother speaks: “There are seven animals. The first has enormous horns and is quite conceited about them. It wages war against other animals but dies quickly, because the enormous size of its horns does not allow it to run with any speed but gets it entangled in briars and branches.¹ 2 The second animal is small with only one horn² that has a precious gem beneath it. This animal cannot be caught except by a maiden. When it sees a maiden, it runs to her lap and is thus killed by her. 3 The third animal has no joints,³ so it rests leaning heavily against a tree. An attentive hunter cuts the tree midway, so when the animal tries to rest in its accustomed way, the tree falls down and the animal is taken. 4 The fourth animal seems gentle and does not attack anyone with its feet or horns. However, anyone who smells its breath becomes a leper, because this animal is by nature completely leprous inside. 5 The fifth animal is always fearful and foresees and suspects any traps. 6 The sixth animal fears nothing but itself. If it sees its own shadow, it runs away from it as from death. It always wants to live and dwell in darkness and in hiding. 7 The seventh animal does not fear anything, not even death, for it does not sense death ahead of time. This animal has four remarkable features. 8 First, it experiences an incredible inner solace. Second, it does not worry about food, for it eats the

⁴. “Who brought . . . Karl was dead”: cf. ch. 73 above, and Extravagantes, 112. Karl in fact died in 1372.
¹. “Briars and branches”: This animal might be a deer or moose; see further note to ch. 52.2.
². “With only one horn,” i.e., the unicorn, the legendary animal with a horse’s body and a single straight horn in its forehead. The horn was regarded as having medicinal or magical properties.
basest things on earth. Third, it never stands still but is always running. Fourth, it rests even while walking and makes its advance in a measured way.

9 The first animal resembles a man who is conceited about his own dignity. Because he is slow and heavy in running toward good deeds, he gets easily caught when he is not careful. 10 The second animal that is proud of the precious gem beneath its horn symbolizes the man who is confident in and presumptuous of the precious gem of chastity, who disdains to be moved by any warnings and regards himself as better than others. He has to be carefully on guard in order not to be caught by pride, which has the face of a maiden but a most powerful sting. 11 The third animal, without any joints, resembles the man who lacks the joints of spiritual feelings and so gets captured by the things that please him precisely when he is expecting to take his rest in safety. 12 The fourth animal, which is completely leprous inside, symbolizes the man who is completely leprous with pride. Anyone who joins with him in agreement becomes defiled.

13 The three other animals will be revealed in their time. The first animal is like a piously doubting Thomas⁴ and like a polished and square-set stone. 14 The second is like gold in the fire and like a golden pipe kept in the finest casing. The third is like a painting that is susceptible of even nobler colors. 15 If those immoral men denoted by the four animals above convert to me, I shall run out to meet them on the way and ease their burden. 16 If not, I shall send them an animal swifter than a tiger to consume them. As it is written, their days shall be few,⁵ their children fatherless, and their wives widows, and their honors shall be turned into reproach and shame.”

Explanation

17 The first animal, that is, the first bishop proud of his noble birth, was converted by the words of the Holy Spirit. He came to Rome and accompanied Lady Birgitta to Naples. While they were in Benevento,⁶ he was suffering seriously from a kidney stone. 18 The Holy Spirit spoke to him through the lady as he lay sick: “The king of Israel⁷ was commanded to put a poultice on his wound. Let this man do likewise: May he receive into his heart perfect love for God, which is the best medicine, and he shall immediately feel healthy.” 19 When he heard this, he made a vow and regained both his mental and physical strength. One can also read about this bishop in Book III 12.⁸

20 The second animal, that is, the second bishop, was a man of great purity, about whom see Book III 13.⁹ 21 The third animal, that is, the third bishop, who was compared to an elephant, made a change

⁵ “Their days shall be few”: cf. Psalm 108 (109):8.
⁶ “Benevento”: a province in the Campania region of Italy.
⁷ “King of Israel”; cf. 4 Kings (2 Kings) 20:1.
⁸ “Book III 12”: probably Thomas Johannis, bishop of Växjö from 1344 to c. 1376.
for the better. 22 Christ speaks again: “What did that elephant advise? Was it not to celebrate a marriage illegally so as not to waste expenses already made, saying that a dispensation could easily be acquired from the pope? 23 Listen now to what I say. Anyone who knowingly and deliberately sins against God, unless he shows very great contrition, will meet with God’s judgment and unhappiness in the world. 24 A person who places another’s sinful burden on his own back sins more seriously, for he has neither the fear of God nor seeks the salvation of the soul. What great presumption! What a lack of charity to have the keys of justice in one’s hand and to make an attempt against the keys and justice for the sake of some small corruptible gain! 25 May he therefore hasten to appease God and bring that couple to fruitful penance and fitting absolution! Otherwise his days will be shortened, and he shall come to my judgment, and the fall of his church will be so great that it will be rebuilt with difficulty, and his clergy will suffer, and their wishes will come to naught and they themselves will be held in contempt. 26 You, however, my daughter, shall write to the couple whom you know, and say that, unless they make amends and do something to deserve absolution, they will not bear long-lived fruit, and their children will not live many years, and that the goods they have collected will go to strangers.” 27 Again about the same bishop: “This bishop came to me as humble as the son who had spent his inheritance and eaten husks and returned humbly to his father. 28 Truly, daughter, those worldly concerns are like husks once the innermost grain, that is, God, has been expelled from the heart, when one desires meaningless and fruitless activity and prefers the world to God. 29 However, because this bishop is already starting to get to know me and himself, I will be like a loving father to him and forget the past. I shall run out to meet midway and give him a ring for his finger and shoes for his feet and a fatted calf to eat. 30 From this day on, my love will be more fervent in his actions, divine patience and wisdom will more perfectly be seen in him to attract his fellow men, 31 and he will more frequently and attentively receive and honor my body. My dearest Mother, the patron of his church, has gained this gift for him.” One can read about the same man at the beginning of chapter 130.

32 The fourth animal, that is, the bishop who continued in his leprosy was summoned hence suddenly and without the sacraments. About this man, see Book VI 97.

11. “The patron of his church”: Possibly this bishop was Ödgis (Egidius) of Västerås cathedral, dedicated to the Virgin with Child, as well as John the Baptist. He was a controversial figure who spent time in the curia in Rome; see further Ekström, Västerås stifts herdaminne, pp. 58–73, and Brilioth, Svenska kyrkans historia, pp. 78–82.
12. “Book VI 97”: The bishop is not identified.
33 The fifth animal was like a square-set stone, a man temperate and prudent in every way. About him, see Book III 33.13

34 The sixth animal, that is, the sixth bishop was a God-fearing and self-examining man who governed his church wisely and obtained exemptions for it from many duties. When he died, Christ said: “The Golden scripture14 says that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.15 That is true, but I say that the fear of God is also the goal of perfection. This bishop had it, and came to the way of salvation by a salutary shortcut.”

36 The seventh animal, that is, the seventh bishop was a man of great abstinence. He had zeal for God and did not keep silent about the truth, neither because of fear nor affection nor injury. He surrendered his spirit while at prayer. 37 There are several revelations about this bishop in the Life of St. Birgitta. He was the Reverend Lord Hemming, Bishop of Åbo and friend to the Blessed Virgin, as is clear from Extravagantes, chapter 104.16

38 A revelation about the bishop who was the successor to the second animal.17 The Son of God speaks: “Write to the bishop and tell him that rapacious birds have entered the land in order to build their nests in it. 39 This bishop should, therefore, work together with his friends to cut their claws, so that they do not gain possession of the summits of the land nor spread out their wings among the people. 40 Otherwise, they will use their beaks and claws to root up the fruitful areas and fly above the peaks and mountains and reduce the land to desolation and ruin.”18

## Chapter 126*

*A Blind Bishop in a Balance; and on How a Bishop Should Live*

**DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN**

The Virgin Mary spoke with the bride of her Son about a certain bishop for whom the bride was praying devoutly. Here she gives noteworthy instructions and offers a virtuous model according

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13. “Book III 33”: The person is not identified.
14. “Golden scripture”: See note to ch. 14 above.
16. “Extravagantes, chapter 104”: The person is not identified, although he is further mentioned in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 91, 521.
18. “To desolation and ruin”: Birgitta’s interpretation of this very political vision is further explored in ch. 130.

* This revelation is duplicated in Book I 1 (equivalent to paragraphs 36–77), 2 (equivalent to paragraphs 80–109), and 3 (equivalent to paragraphs 110–37).
to which true bishops should live and govern themselves and their subjects spiritually and devoutly.

1 The Mother of mercy was speaking with the bride of Christ: “What are we to do with this blind bishop? He has three characteristics. He works to please men more than God. 2 He loves not the treasure guarded by angels but that which thieves can steal. 3 He also loves himself more than his neighbor and more than his God.” 3 Right then the bride saw six pans of a balance, three of which were very heavy, pressed down by the weight. 4 The other three pans were so light that they were raised up all the way to the top, because nothing was to be seen in them but a weight as light as a feather. 5 The Mother said: “Look at this bishop. Though he does have the three aforementioned vices, still he is ever fearful. Because of his fear, which is conducive to charity, it was given to you to see his condition. 6 Those three heavy scale-pans symbolize his deeds against God that weigh down his soul. They appear as three to you, because he is sinking like a scale toward the world in his feelings, words, and actions. 7 The three other lightly loaded scale-pans are rising up to God. 8 However, his worldly affairs outweigh his spiritual ones, since he has a greater and more zealous interest in them, so much so that the devil is already pulling him by the feet, and his snare lies ready.”

9 The bride answered: “O good Mother, put something on the scales!” The Mother said to her: “Agnes and I have been waiting to see if the bishop might perhaps recollect our love, but he does not pay much attention to our solicitude for him. 10 However, we will do with him as would three friends sitting on the wayside who know the way and would point it out to their friend. The first would say: 11 ‘My friend, the way you have taken is neither straight nor safe. If you continue along that path, robbers will harm you and, just when you think you are safe, you will die.’ 12 The second would say: ‘The way you have taken seems to be pleasant, but what good will that do you if there is mental anguish in the end?’ 13 The third would say: ‘My friend, I see your infirmity. Do not be displeased, if I offer you some advice, and do not be ungrateful if I do you a special favor.’ 14 Agnes and I want to act in this way with this bishop. If he will listen to the first friend, the second will show him the way, and the third will lead him to the region of light.”

15 The bride was then shown the instructions that would be divinely sent to the aforementioned bishop, as follows. 16 The Mother speaks: “Say thus to the bishop: Though God can do all things, personal cooperation is needed in order to avoid sin and obtain divine charity. 17 Three things lead to the avoidance of sin and three things work together for the obtainment of charity. The three things by which sin is avoided are these: 18 faithfully repenting everything that...
nags one’s conscience, not wanting to commit them again voluntarily, and steadfastly making amends for the offenses committed and confessed following the advice of those who live in contempt of the world. 19 The three things that work together for obtaining charity are these: first, asking for God’s help to get rid of base pleasure and to be given the will to do what God wants. 20 Divine charity is not obtained unless it is desired, and the desire will not be rational unless it is founded on God’s charity. 21 Thus, a person has three things before charity enters, while three other things enter after the infusion of divine charity. 22 Before the infusion of God’s charity, a man worries about the coming of death, about the loss of honor and friends, about worldly setbacks and physical illness. 23 Once charity has been obtained, the soul experiences joy in the hardships she suffers in the world, while the mind is uneasy about worldly possessions and finds joy in giving honor to God and in suffering for the sake of God’s honor. The second thing that leads to charity is giving alms from one’s superfluous means. 24 When a bishop has the housewares and clothes appropriate for the needs of a humble prelate and not for ostentation and superfluity, then he should be content with them and distribute alms from what is left over. 25 When the poor household servants of prelates become rich and live luxuriously on the temporal goods and possessions of other souls, then other, truly poor people will cry out profusely for vengeance upon them. 26 The third thing that leads to charity is charitable work. For whoever would not pray even a single Our Father to obtain charity might thus please God, and divine charity would soon come to him.”

27 Again the Mother said to Christ her Son: “Blessed are you, Jesus Christ, best of champions, swiftest in running your course and strongest in waging battle. 28 It is written that David was a great and powerful champion, but he was nothing like you. David threw a stone at his enemy running up at a distance. 29 You approached your enemy on foot and broke his back. David took his enemy’s sword and cut off his head while he lay prostrate on the ground. 30 You took away your enemy’s sword while he was standing. Your patience overcame him while he was alive; you crushed the might of the mighty with your humility. 31 You are, therefore, the warrior of warriors. No one was ever or ever will be like you. From a mighty father, a stalwart son has arisen who has freed his father and brothers. 32 Hence, most loving champion, I ask that you may deign to grant to this bishop the knowledge of how to fight and the strength to run the course of warriors so that he may take his seat with the true champions who have given their lives for your life and offered their blood for your blood.” 33 The Son answered: “A charitable prayer is not to be neglected. Scripture says that no one comes to me unless the Father draws him. 34 Besides, if the object drawn is tied up, then it

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4. “It is written . . . powerful champion”; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 16:18.
5. “David threw a stone at his enemy running up at a distance”; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 17:41-58.
can neither help itself nor the person drawing it, should that person fall. If the object drawn is unclean, then it is loathsome to draw it. For this reason, it is necessary that the thing that must be drawn and wants to be drawn should first be cleansed and properly prepared, so that it becomes easy and pleasing to draw along by hand. 35 Due to my Mother’s prayers, however, whenever this bishop starts looking for the way, the right way will be pointed out to him.”

36 Then the Mother spoke some additional words to the bride: “Hear, daughter, you to whom it has been given to hear spiritual truths. I told you earlier that if the bishop looks for the way, it will be pointed out to him. I shall now explain the way to him. 37 If this bishop proposes to walk along the path spoken of in the gospel,7 and to be one of the few, he should first have three things before starting out on it. 38 He should first put off the burden8 that besets him and weighs him down—I mean his worldly desires and money bags—by not loving worldly superfluity and pride but by getting from it only the needs consistent with the decent and humble sustenance of a bishop and by putting everything else to use for the glory of God. 39 This is what that good man Matthew did. He left behind the heavy burden of the world, which he had not understood to be burdensome until he had found a light and pleasant burden. 40 In the second place, the bishop should be girded for the journey, to use the words of scripture. When Tobias was sent by his father to get the money, he found the angel standing there girded.9 What does the angel symbolize if not the priest and bishop of the Lord? He must be pure in body and affections, for, next to a prophet, a priest is the angel of the Lord of hosts,10 for God, whom the angels see and adore, has received him and consecrated him. 42 The angel appeared to Tobias girded for the journey because every priest and bishop should be girded with the belt of divine justice, ready to give his life for his sheep, ready to speak the truth in his words, 43 ready to point out the way of justice in himself, ready to suffer for the sake of justice and truth, not neglecting it due to threats and taunts, neither keeping silent out of false friendship nor practicing dissimulation on the advice of others. 44 To each bishop thus girded with righteousness and trusting not in himself but in God, Tobias, that is, the righteous man, shall come, and righteous men shall follow after him, for good example and good deeds are worth more than naked words.

45 In the third place, he should eat bread and water, just as we read about Elijah, who found bread and water at his head11 and was urged by the angel to eat, for a long journey awaited him. What is the bread eaten by Elijah from which he derived such strength, if not the material and spiritual goods given to him? 46 For material bread was given to him as a lesson to others, so that people might understand it to be God’s wish that they have a moderate amount

11. “Elijah, who found bread and water at his head”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 19:5–8.
of necessities for strengthening of the body. 47 Moreover, spiritual strength and inspiration was given to the prophet by which he was able to labor on for forty days so that people might know that man does not live by bread alone but by God’s every word.\(^\text{12}\) 48 For, if God had not given such consolation to the prophet, he would certainly have given up out of weakness, for man is weak in himself but strong in God. Everyone who stands firm and strong is strong and brave by reason of God. 49 Therefore, because this bishop is weak, we lay down that he should take the morsel of bread, that is, to love God above all things, with order, and purely, truly, perfectly. With order, so as to love the world without any superfluity. Purely, so as not to love any sin in himself or his neighbor or desire to imitate any base habits. 50 Truly, so as to allow no sin due to trusting to his own good works but so as to govern himself wisely in order not to succumb by being overzealous or to tend perhaps toward sin due to cowardice or the imitation of base men or nonchalance about guilt. Perfectly, so that nothing tastes as sweet to him as God. 51 We bid him also to take some water along with the bread of charity. What is this water if not to think continually on the bitterness of Christ’s passion? Who is able to meditate worthily enough on the agony of Christ’s human nature, the agony that he was undergoing at the moment when he prayed for the chalice of his passion to be taken from him\(^\text{13}\) and when drops of his blood\(^\text{14}\) came from his body? 52 That sweat was bloody indeed, because the blood of God’s human nature was consumed with the natural fear he was suffering in order to show that he was true man, not a phantasm nor immune to suffering. 53 So, have the bishop drink this water by considering how God stood before Herod and Pilate, what pain and scorn he experienced on the cross and how a lance opened his side from which flew blood and water.\(^\text{15}\)

54 Once the bishop has these three things, then it is useful for him to know how to order his time from the beginning of the day until night. 55 When the bishop first awakens after nighttime, he should immediately give thanks for God’s love in creation, for his sufferings in the redemption, for the patience with which he has for so long endured his own sins and habits. 56 Then, when he has got out of bed and put on his clothes, he should say this: ‘Ashes must with ashes be, dust with dust. Yet, since I hold the office of bishop in others’ sight by the providence of God, I am clothing an ass, you, my body, ashes and dust, not for the sake of ostentation but as a covering, so that you do not appear naked. 57 Nor do I care whether your clothing be better or worse, but only that the bishop’s habit be acknowledged out of reverence for God, and that through this habit others may recognize the bishop’s authority for the correction and instruction of the weak. 58 And so, kind God, I beg you to give me steadfastness of mind so that I do not take pride in my precious ashes nor foolishly glory

\(^{12}\) “Does not live by bread alone but by God’s every word”; cf. Matthew 4:4.

\(^{13}\) “He prayed for the chalice of his passion to be taken from him”; cf. Matthew 26:39.


\(^{15}\) “Blood and water”; cf. John 19:34.
in my colors. Grant me strength so that, just as a bishop’s garb is more respectable than that of others due to his divine authority, the garb of my soul may be more virtuous before you, lest I be thrust down all the deeper for having held authority in an unwise manner or lest I be ignominiously stripped for having foolishly worn my venerable garb to my own damnation.’ After that he should read or sing the hours, if he can. The higher the rank to which a person rises, the more he is obliged to give glory to God. However, a pure and humble heart pleases God as much in silence as in singing. After Mass has been said, or beforehand, he should fulfill his episcopal duties, whether of a material or spiritual nature, and show mercy in all his works, considering the glory of God, so that he may not be thought by the weak to care more about temporal than spiritual goods.

62 When he comes to the dinner table, this should be his prayer: ‘O Lord Jesus Christ, you will that this corruptible body should be sustained with material food, I ask you to help me to give my body what it needs in such a way that it does not grow sluggish from too much food nor weak from too much frugality. Inspire in me a suitable moderation so that when this man of earth lives on the things of the earth, the Lord of the earth may not be provoked to anger by his creature of earth.’ While at table, he may enjoy moderate comfort with his fellow diners, but in such a way as to avoid detraction and frivolity. Above all, he must avoid saying anything that might confirm others in their vices or be an occasion of sin. A person who is to be a light for others must consider what is fitting and proper before God, how to edify them, and what is profitable for their salvation. If bread and wine are missing from the material table, everything loses its taste. It is likewise at the spiritual table: Everything will be tasteless for the soul if the wine of spiritual joy and the bread of God’s doctrine are missing. Thus, the bishop should say something to the glory of God while at table in order to strengthen his fellow diners spiritually, or else he should see to it that something edifying is read, so that at one and the same bodily meal both the body may be refreshed and the soul may be instructed.

68 When the meal is ended and grace has been said, the bishop should make any expedient announcements or fulfill his episcopal agenda, or catch some sleep if he needs it for his health, or else peruse books of spiritual guidance. After dinner, though, he may entertain himself with the companions of his household in a respectable way, and comfort them, for if the bow is too tightly drawn, it is soon broken. In this way, moderate enjoyment for the sake of the weakness of the flesh is pleasing to God. However, the wise bishop should behave toward his companions as a mother nursing her child does, for she anoints her nipples with ashes or some other bitter substance until the child becomes used to more solid foods. He should make sure that he observes moderation in his enjoyments as well as gentleness in his restraint so as to attract his companions to God through God-fearing and humble speech. Hence, he should teach them to revere and love God, becoming in this way both their father through the divine authority in him and their mother and nurse through the well-meaning formation he gives them.
that anyone in his household is in the state of mortal sin and has not repented despite both lenient and strong admonishments, then he should separate himself from him and disown him. Otherwise, if he retains him out of convenience and worldly partiality, he will not be immune from the other’s sin.  

74 When he goes to bed, he should turn his heart to God and think over what his thoughts and affections have been that day, along with his deeds and decisions, and implore God’s help and mercy with a firm purpose of improving when he can. 75 When he gets into bed, he should pray as follows: ‘Lord God, Creator of my body, look on me in your mercy. Grant me your help, so that I do not grow lazy in your service by oversleeping nor weak in your service due to lack of sleep. 76 Give me that measure of sleep that you have prescribed for the temporal relief of the body. May the enemy not harm my body nor be allowed in your hidden judgment to get mastery of my soul.’ 77 When he gets up out of bed, he should wash away in confession any illicit things that might have happened during the night, so that the sleep of the following night might not begin with the sins of the previous. 78 As is written: ‘Do not let the sun go down on your anger’—nor on your thoughts and illusions, for sometimes a minor, venial sin can turn into a mortal one through negligence and contempt. 79 I advise him, too, every Friday to do penance for his sins by making a humble confession to a priest with the purpose of amendment. Otherwise, his confession is worthless.”

80 Again, the Mother of God added: “If the bishop sets out on this holy path, I warn him of three difficulties. The first is that it is a narrow path; the second, that it is thorny and sharp; the third, that it is uneven and rocky. 81 I will give him three remedies for this. The first is for him to put on clothes. The second is to keep his ten fingers in front of his eyes and look through them as through bars so that the thorns do not easily or suddenly scratch his uncovered eyes. 82 The third is that he should step cautiously and test each and every step he takes to see if his foot gets a firm hold, and he should not hastily set down both feet at the same time unless he has first assured himself of the path, whether it is slippery or level. 83 This narrow path symbolizes nothing other than the malice of wicked people and the hardships of the world that hinder and disturb the righteous on the path of righteousness. Against these things, the bishop should clothe himself in the garment of steadfast patience, for it is glorious to suffer insults on behalf of justice and truth. 84 The ten fingers held before the eyes symbolize nothing other than the ten commandments. The righteous should reflect on them everyday so as to hold God’s love in view whenever the thorns of insult make themselves felt. 85 Whenever one feels the thorns of malice, one should react with love of neighbor. Whenever one feels drawn to worldly and carnal love, one should look to the scriptural injunction, ‘You shall not covet,’ and put a brake on concupiscence and live moderation. 86 Where charity is divine, patience is there in hardships, and joy

16. “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Ephesians 4:26).
in sickness, and sorrow over superfluity, fear of honor, humility in power, and the desire of withdrawing from the world. 87 That the bishop should test each step to see if he has a firm foothold means that he should everywhere have an attitude of intelligent fear. A righteous person should have two feet. One foot is a longing for eternity. The other is a distaste for worldliness. 88 His longing for eternity should be circumspect, in the sense that he must not long for eternal things for his own honor more than for God. 89 His distaste for the world should be cautious, in the sense that it must not be the irrational result of impatience with life and his adverse fortune nor because of weariness in divine work. 90 Caution is thus needed so that this distaste should only be the result of his longing for a better life and his abhorrence of sin.

91 Once the bishop has both these feet, fearful even that those faults he has corrected have not been fully corrected, and if he proceeds along this narrow and thorny path, then I would warn him about three enemies along the way. 92 You see, the first enemy tries to whistle in his ears, while the second stands in front of him in order to scratch out his eyes, and the third enemy is at his feet, shouting loudly and holding a noose in order to ensnare the bishop’s feet when he jumps up at his enemy’s shout. 93 The first are those people or those diabolic impulses that make such suggestions to the bishop as these: ‘Why are you making your way with such humility on so narrow a path? Why do you take so much work on yourself? 94 Can it be that you want to be holier than other people so that you achieve what no one else has? Go off instead to the verdant path where many others are walking, so that you do not make a miserable failure of yourself. 95 What does it matter to you whether people behave well or badly? What good does it do you to offend those people who could honor and appreciate you, if they do not offend you or yours? 96 What concern is it of yours if they are offending God? It is better to exchange gifts! Make use of your position and of human friendships so as to win praise and to obtain heaven alike.’ 97 You see, this kind of enemy is whistling and has whistled in the ears of many persons. This is why many lamps that should be shining in the darkness have themselves become darkness, and much fine gold has been turned into mud.

98 The second enemy that tries to scratch out his eyes is worldly beauty and possessions, human privileges and favors. 99 When such things are offered and desired, the eyes of the soul and of reason are blinded, because it seems more pleasant to stand around with Samson at the millstone of worldly care than to stay with the bridal church and be disposed for pastoral care. 100 Moreover, even love for God, if there was any, grows lukewarm then, and sin is committed with confidence, and the committed offense is taken lightly because of this confidence in one’s power. 101 Therefore, when the bishop has what he needs for his household, the size of which is determined so as to maintain his honor and authority, he should be content. 102 This agrees

with the scriptural passage: ‘Let your manners be without covetousness, contented with moderate possessions,’\(^{19}\) for no wholehearted soldier of God gets involved in worldly affairs, except only reluctantly and for the glory of God.\(^ {20}\)

103 The third enemy carries a noose and shouts loudly as follows: ‘Why do you humble yourself so much, you who could be honored above many people? Make an effort to go up to a higher position. Then you will have plenty and can give more away. 104 Become a priest so that you may take your place among those of the first rank. Become a bishop and then an archbishop or even higher, so that you may obtain more relaxation, better service, and greater privilege. Then you will be able to help others and be more respected by others and receive many people’s encouragement.’ 105 When the heart is deceived by such suggestions, a foot is soon incautiously extended toward avarice, and one looks for a way to rise to a higher position. Then the heart becomes so entangled in the noose of worldly care that it can scarcely rise up. 106 Nor is this surprising, since scripture says that whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.\(^ {21}\) And what is that noble task? It is to work for souls and for the glory of God, to work for an eternal reward and not a perishable one. 107 Now, instead, many desire the honors but not the work, and yet these are not an honor but an affliction. Where the burden of divine work is not found, there follows no honor for the soul in God’s sight. 108 This is why the bishop should not seek a higher rank other than the one he holds, for there is a noose lying hidden on the ground that is a trap\(^ {22}\) for one who walks along the path. 109 It is therefore beneficial to remain in his position, until either it pleases God to provide otherwise or an ecclesiastical superior decides something else for the glory of God. This has been said as advice and as a loving warning.

110 We will now explain what the bishop should do for God. He must hold his miter tightly in his arms. He must not sell it for money nor give it up to others for the sake of friendship nor lose it through negligence and lukewarmness. 111 The bishop’s crown or miter signifies nothing other than the bishop’s power to ordain priests, to correct those who go astray, and to instruct the ignorant by his word and example. 112 To hold his miter tightly in his arms means that the bishop should reflect carefully on how and why he received his episcopal power, how he wields it, and what its reward will be. 113 If the bishop would examine how he received his power, he should first examine whether he desired the episcopate for his own sake or for God’s. If it was for his own sake, then he has reason to fear; if it was for God’s sake, then his desire was meritorious and spiritual. 114 If the bishop would consider for what purpose he has received his rank and power, let me tell him. It was in order that he might become a consoler and liberator of souls by reason of his merit. He lives on almsgiving so that he might nourish the poor and be like a father for the rich,

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to assist God in spiritual errands and be zealous on behalf of God. 115 If he wants to know the reward for his office, Paul says it well: 23 He who has carried out his ministry well will be esteemed worthy of twofold honor. It is twofold in the sense of being both corporal and spiritual. 116 Everyone who wears the episcopal garb but does not follow the episcopal way of life, who seeks the honor but neglects the work, will merit a double disgrace.

117 That the bishop’s power is not to be sold means that the bishop should not knowingly commit simony nor tolerate it in others if he finds out about it, 118 nor ordain or promote anyone for the sake of money and human favor, nor advance anyone whom he knows to be unworthy and of bad character because the worldly minded petition him to do so. 119 That he should not give up his power to others on account of human friendship means that the bishop should not disguise the sins of the negligent out of false compassion, 120 nor keep quiet out of friendship, nor, for any worldly reason, take on his own back the sins of others when he can, as he ought, correct them. 121 The bishop is God’s sentinel. The blood of the dead is the sentinel’s responsibility, if the sentinel saw the danger and did not cry out or if he fell asleep or did not care. 122 That the bishop should not lose his crown or miter through negligence means that the bishop should not delegate to others what he should and can do himself. 123 Nor should he, for the sake of his own lukewarm ease, transfer to others what he himself is better able to carry out. 124 Nor should the bishop be ignorant of the life and conduct of those to whom he delegates his tasks. Instead, he should inquire both privately and openly about their conduct and their manner of observing justice, for the bishop’s duty is not to rest but to work with solicitude.

125 In addition to taking good care of his miter as I have described, the bishop also ought to carry a bouquet of flowers under his arms in order to attract sheep far and near. A good shepherd entices his sheep to follow him by means of flowers and hay. 126 This bouquet of flowers signifies the godly preaching that pertains to a bishop. His two arms are two kinds of works, namely, good works in public for the sake of alluring others and good works in secret out of fear of God and as an example to one’s neighbors. 127 If his preaching is joined to these two good works, the bouquet of flowers will be most beautiful, and the nearby sheep in his diocese will gladly run after him. 128 Likewise, the faraway sheep, hearing of his reputation, will want to get to know him, both because of his words and because of the charitable works that accompany them. 129 These are the sweetest flowers for attracting sheep: doing deeds of virtue and teaching others, not with learned rhetoric but in few words full of charity. It is not right for a preacher of God to be mute nor for the sentinel of God’s house to be blind.

130 The bishop still lacks one thing. When the bishop reaches the gate, he must present a gift to the high king. We advise him to present to the king a

23. “Paul says it well”; cf. 1 Timothy 5:17.
vessel that is dear to him, an empty and ornate vessel. The empty vessel to be presented is his own heart. May he offer it to God all adorned with virtue yet empty of self-will and carnal love. When this bishop reaches the gate, the shining host of heaven will come out to meet him. The true God and man will receive him, and the angels will then say: ‘Lord God, this bishop was clean in body, pure in his priesthood, apostolic in his preaching, a bishop vigilant in his duties, manly in his conduct, humble in his office. Behold him whom we have longed to meet for his purity’s sake, and so we present him to you, for he longed for you for the sake of your charity!’ Then all the saints in heaven will say: ‘Lord our God! We have our joy in you. Yet, our joy is heightened by this bishop. He carried flowers on his lips and used them to call out to many sheep. He carried flowers in his hands to give refreshment to the sheep that came to him. He sent flowers to those that lived afar and so roused sheep who were sleeping. Thus, because the flowers of his words increased our chorus, we rejoice over him. Rejoice with us, Lord God, over this man and his honor, for he longed for you above all things.’

Then the Lord, the giver of glory, shall say to him: ‘Friend, you came to present to me the vessel of your heart emptied of yourself, and you longed to be filled with me. Therefore, come, I will fill you with myself. Be in me and I shall be in you. Your glory and happiness will have no end.’"

# Chapter 127

On an Aged Monk Who Has Recently Died; the Explanation Describes the Benedictine Habit

**DATE:** After 1350, Italy

The Virgin Mary tells the bride while she is praying for a hermit, a friend of hers, who had died, that, before his body is buried beneath the earth, his soul will be brought into heaven.

While the bride was praying for an old priest, a friend of hers, who had been a most excellent and virtuous hermit but who had already departed from this life and lay now in an open coffin in the church before being buried, the Virgin Mary appeared to her and said: 2 “Listen, my daughter, and know that the soul of this hermit and friend of yours would have entered into heaven as soon as his soul had left the body, if he had possessed a perfect desire at his death of coming into the presence and sight of God. As it is, he will now be held in the purgatory of longing, where there is no pain other than the sole longing of coming to God. Know, too, that, before his body enters the earth, his soul will be brought into glory.”

24. “He carried flowers in his hands”: This image is used of Bishop Alfonso of Jaén in Book VII 16.

1. “In an open coffin”: It was the tradition for a monk to lie thus until his burial; cf. the Birgittine rule, ch. 24 (Eklund, *Regula Salvatoris*, pp. 209–10).
4 “Tell that aged monk: For a long time you remained in the desert and bore fruit that pleased me, turning wild beasts into sheep and lions into lambs. 5 Remain now steadfast in the city whose streets are strewn with the blood of saints,² for you shall be heard at the court of judgment and behold your retribution.” Immediately after hearing this, he fell sick and went to his rest in peace not long after.

6 This Benedictine monk had asked Lady Birgitta to inquire of God how he could be certain about which habit to wear, since he was much troubled concerning the many abuses of the religious habit in the order of St. Benedict. 7 So, when the lady was caught up in the Spirit, the Son of God said to her: “I told you earlier (in Book III chapters 20 and 22) that my servant Benedict regarded his body as a sack.³ He had five garments. 8 The first was a rough shirt with which he tamed the flesh and its disorderly impulses in order that they might not run riot and exceed their bounds. The second garment was a simple cowl, neither elaborate nor full of folds, which was to cover, adorn, and warm the flesh, so as not to scare anyone seeing him. 9 The third was a scapular by which he would be found more prompt and ready for manual labor. The fourth garment was protective covering for the feet so that he might be more agile and humble in walking the path of God. 10 The fifth was the belt of humility, girded with which he would cut down on superfluous items and carry out more expeditiously the customary work enjoined upon him.

11 Nowadays, however, his monks want luxurious clothes and abhor asperity. They want garments that please others and that excite carnal thoughts. 12 Instead of a cowl, they put on a cape that has so many folds and is so wide and long that they seem more like conceited show-offs than humble religious. 13 Instead of a scapular, they have a small cloth in the back and front, and they cover their heads with a hood after worldly fashion in order to be like people in the world. And yet they are neither like people in the world nor do they work together with God’s humble servants. 14 They cover their feet and put on a belt as though they were ready for a wedding, not for running in the stadium of toil.

15 A monk who wants to be saved must, therefore, observe that my Benedict’s rule allows him to have a moderate amount of necessities,⁴ useful, not superfluous items, honest and suitable possessions, all of it in humility and not in pride. 16 What does the cowl symbolize if not...
being more humble than others? What does the cowl’s poor hood symbolize if not the rejection of worldly ways? 17 Why are the monks adopting a fashionable hood, unless because they are ashamed of humble ways and so that they can be like people living in the world? 18 What decoration or usefulness is there in a hood with a tail if not mere ostentation and fastidiousness that go against the beautiful rule of their religious order? What more does a plaited cape do than a cowl, except to make a wandering friar seem grander and more stylish to others? 19 However, if a humble and plain cape were worn for some needful and adequate reason, it would not be improper, though a humble cowl would be more suitable so that the religious order in which a monk has made his profession could be recognized from his habit. 20 However, if the monk has a headache or suffers from the cold, he does not sin if he wears a suitable and humble covering beneath the hood of his cowl—not on the outside, for that would be proof of frivolity and vanity.”

21 The lady answered: “My Lord, do not be angry with me if I ask something. Do the monks sin when they wear such a habit by permission of their superiors or because of a custom established by their predecessors?”

22 God said to her: “An exemption is valid if it proceeds from an upright intention. Some grant exemptions out of zeal for justice, others out of false compassion and unwise permissiveness, and others, again, out of their own moral frivolity and obsequiousness. 23 Others feign justice, being empty of divine charity. However, an exemption is pleasing to me if it is not opposed to humility, and the permission is valid only when it prudently allows for necessities but condemns superfluities even in small things.”

24 The lady asked again: “Lord, my God, what if some of them do not know what is better or more suitable according to the rule? Do they sin as well?” 25 Christ answered: How can a professed member of a religious order not know the rule that is read and heard every day? It is laid down in the rule that a monk should be humble and obedient and wear a habit made from rough rather than softer materials, an exemplary kind of habit and not a pompous one. 26 Who is so obtuse of conscience that he does not understand that he has taken vows of humility and total poverty? 27 The true Benedictine is one who obeys the rule rather than his flesh, who does not want to please anyone but God in his habit or customs, who daily longs to die and prepares himself for his exit from this world, and who is concerned about the account he must render concerning the rule of Benedict.”

5. “Do the monks sin…by their predecessors”: The point about current monastic authority versus tradition, and the importance of exemplary leadership within any community, is a point that Birgitta makes frequently elsewhere, as well as in her own monastic Rule.
Chapter 128

Spiritual Guidance for a Hermit

DATE: AFTER 1350, ITALY

The Virgin Mother’s answer to the question of her Son’s bride who was praying for a certain monk in a position of doubt as to whether it would be more acceptable to God for him to enjoy the sweetness of mental consolation by never leaving his place of hermitage, or to come down from time to time in order to instruct the souls of his neighbors.

1 The Mother speaks: “Speak to that priest and hermit who is my friend, the one who, against his own desires and the peace of his own soul, moved by faith and devotion to his neighbor, leaving his solitary cell and quiet contemplation behind, 2 from time to time comes down from his place of hermitage in order to be with people and give them spiritual counsels, whose example and saving counsel bring about the conversion of many souls and the advancement in virtue of the already converted. 3 He requested your advice with humility, humble about doubts caused by the cunning and fraudulent tricks of the devil. He asked you to pray for him 4 in regard to the matter of whether it would please God more for him to enjoy the sweetness of his contemplation alone or whether such charitable work on behalf of his neighbors would be more acceptable to God.

5 Tell him, then, from me that it is altogether more pleasing to God, as has been said, that he should sometimes come down from his place of hermitage and go to carry out such works of charity among his neighbors, sharing with them the virtues and graces that he receives from God, 6 in order that by this work they might be converted and attach themselves with greater fervor to God and become sharers in his glory, than that he should enjoy spiritual consolation alone in his solitary cell in the hermitage. 7 Tell him, too, that he will earn a greater reward in heaven for such charitable work, provided that he always carries it out in accordance with the advice and permission of a senior spiritual father. 8 Tell him, again, that I want him to receive as spiritual children to be directed under his guidance all those hermits, including nuns and female recluses, who were once the spiritual children of my other friend, the hermit who has died. 9 He should direct them all with loving guidance in a spiritual and virtuous manner, just as that man guided and directed them when he was alive, for it pleases God to have it so.

10 If they accept him as their father and obey him humbly according to the spiritual life of a hermit, he will be a father for them and I will be for them a Mother. 11 If, however, any one of them does not want to accept or obey him as a spiritual father, then it will be better for one not practicing obedience to leave them immediately than to remain any longer with them. 12 My friend, then, may go to them and return to his cell as often as it seems good to him, but always with the advice and permission of his senior.”
Chapter 129

An Explanation of an Earlier Vision about a Fantastic Beast and a Fish

DATE: 1340s, SWEDEN

Two years after the bride had the vision about the beast and the fish contained in Book IV 2 above, Christ appeared to her and gave a most clear and notable explanation of the very obscure vision: The beast and fish stand for sinners and heathen; those that catch it, for righteous and virtuous people.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “I told you earlier1 that I desire the heart of the animal and the blood of the fish. The heart of this animal stands for nothing other than the beloved and immortal souls of Christians, which appeal to me more than anything else that seems desirable in the world. 2 The blood of the fish is nothing other than perfect love for God. The heart should be presented to me with the pure hands, and the blood in an ornate glass vessel, for purity is pleasing to God and to angels. Purity is most fitting for every spiritual work, like a jewel on a ring. 3 The love for God should be presented in an ornamented vessel, because the heathen soul should shine like a glass vessel and burn with an ardent love for God, a love that unites faithful and infidel as in a single body with its head, that is, with God.

4 The heart of a Christian hardened in sin is like an animal without the hardness of obedience that runs about in vices and lives by its pleasures. Those who want to present me with the heart of such a one should make a hole in their hands with a sharp bore, for then neither swords nor arrows will prevail against them. 5 The hands of the righteous are nothing other than their actions, both physical and spiritual. The physical hand, that is, working and sustaining the body, is necessary indeed. 6 The spiritual hand is fasting and praying and the like. In order, therefore, for human activity to be sober and wise, one must bore through it with the fear of God. 7 A person must recall at all times that God is always present. He should also be afraid of losing the grace given to him, for no one can accomplish anything without God’s help, yet one can do all things with God’s love. 8 Just as a drill prepares the holes in which something is to be placed, so too fear of God solidifies all one’s actions and both prepares the way for divine love and attracts God’s help. One must therefore be fearful and prudent in all one’s actions, 9 for, although both spiritual and physical work are necessary, yet without fear and prudence, work is not useful. Imprudence and presumption ruin and confuse everything and take away the goodness of perseverance. 10 Accordingly, a person who wants to overcome the hardness of the animal should be unbending in acts of prudence and constant in godly fear and in the hope of divine aid, making as great an

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1. “I told you earlier”; cf. ch. 2 above. In his title, Alfonso specifically says that this vision took place two years after the first vision.
effort as possible. God will then offer his assistance and break through that hardened heart.

11 My friend should also use strong pitch to fortify his own eyes with the eyelids of a whale so as not to be killed at the sight of the basilisk.\(^2\) What are the eyes of the righteous man if not a twofold consideration he should make each day, namely, the consideration of God’s blessings and self-examination? 12 In thinking of God’s mercy and blessings, he should examine his own usefulness and his ingratitude toward God’s goodness, so as not to grow soft in considering God’s mercy nor despair in considering his judgment. 13 When he feels at heart that he deserves to be condemned, he should fortify his eyes with the consideration symbolized by the eyelid of the whale, that is, with hope and faith in God’s goodness, so as not to grow soft in considering God’s mercy nor despair in considering his judgment. 14 In the same way as the eyelids of a whale are neither soft like flesh nor hard like bone, so too a person must be balanced between God’s mercy and his judgment, steadfastly hoping for mercy and prudently fearing his judgment. 15 He should rejoice in God’s mercy and advance from virtue to virtue\(^3\) because of God’s justice. Hence, those people who stay between mercy and justice each day, in hope and in fear, have no reason to fear the eyes of the animal. 16 What do the eyes of the animal symbolize if not worldly wisdom and temporal prosperity? 17 Worldly wisdom, which is here compared to the animal’s first eye, is like the sight of the basilisk: It hopes for what it sees and is promptly rewarded, for it desires things that will perish. 18 Divine wisdom, on the other hand, hopes for that which is unseen; it pays no attention to worldly prosperity but loves humility and patience; it seeks only an eternal reward. 19 The animal’s second eye is worldly prosperity that is sought after by bad people who forget the things of heaven while they pursue it, becoming thus hardened against God.

20 Everyone desirous of his neighbor’s salvation should with prudence connect his eyes to the eyes of the animal, that is, of his neighbor, by proposing to him God’s blessed mercy and his judgment, withstanding worldly words with the words of God’s wisdom, 21 displaying a life of persevering continence to incontinent people, eschewing the riches and honors of the present life for the sake of divine charity, 22 preaching firmly and putting the preaching into practice, for a spiritual life gives proof of one’s words, and holy example accomplishes more than can wordy eloquence without efficacious deeds. 23 Those who keep God’s blessings and judgment always in mind are those who have God’s words continually on their lips and put them into practice and place their hope firmly in God’s goodness, who are not harmed by the sting of the swords of their enemies, 24 that is, by the treacherous devices of worldly people, but, rather, make progress and for charity’s sake convert the erring to God’s true charity. Those, however, that grow proud of the grace given them and seek profit from their eloquence are dead, though they live.

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2. “Basilisk”: See the note to ch. 84.3.

25 A plate of steel should be tied to one’s heart in the sense that one should always keep God’s love in sight through thinking about how God humbled himself by becoming man, how he endured hunger and thirst and toil during his preaching, how he hung upon the cross and rose again after his death and ascended into heaven. 26 This steel plate of love gets length and width when the mind is ready to endure freely any sufferings that come, when one does not grumble about God’s decisions nor become upset about hardships but, instead, puts one’s whole mind and body into God’s mind and plan. 28 O, daughter, I was like the strongest steel when I was stretched out upon the cross, praying for my enemies, practically oblivious of my own suffering and wounds.

29 You have to close your nostrils and run toward the beast with your mouth shut because, just as breath enters and exits through the nostrils, so too life and death enter into the soul through a person’s desires. 30 Therefore, you must guard yourself against desire as against death, so that they do not enter into your soul or, having entered, remain there. Anyone who proposes to take on arduous tasks ought to examine his temptations and be on guard against any lack of divine zeal due to inordinate desires. 31 Accordingly, you must run toward the sinner with all your desire, with divine zeal and complete patience, both in season and out of season, so that the sinner may be converted. Where the righteous man makes no progress through speech or admonishments, there he must exercise zeal and persevere in earnest prayer.

32 The animal should be grasped on top with both your hands. Now, it has two ears: one ear to hear the pleasant things it likes; another, which it blocks up, so as not to hear anything profitable to its soul. 33 It is useful for the friend of God to have two spiritual hands, just as before he had physical hands. However, he should have holes in them. 34 One hand is the divine wisdom with which he shows to the sinner that all the things of this world are fleeting and slippery, that one who delights in them is deceived and unsafe, for they were all given for one’s needs and not for excess. 35 The other hand is good example and good action, for the good person ought to do as he teaches in order to strengthen his listeners by his example. 36 Many teach but without setting an example. They are the ones who, in the coldness of their minds, build up a stone structure without using cement so that it quickly falls apart when the storm dashes upon it. 37 The animal’s hide is like flint and must be assailed with hammer and fire. The hide denotes the show and simulation of justice. 38 Wicked people, who do not want to be good, do desire to seem to be what they are not. Because they want to be called praiseworthy but not to live in a praiseworthy way, they make an outward show of holiness and feign justice, although they never give justice a thought. 39 This is how they become so proud and hard as flint in their appearance of simulated holiness that they are not softened by rebukes or clear reasoning.

40 Accordingly, God’s servant must use the hammer of harsh rebuke and the fire of divine prayer on such as these in order to convince the wicked with the word of truth and gradually soften them up from their hardness and warm them through their prayers and enkindle them with respect to knowl-
edge of God and of themselves, just as Stephen did. 41 He did not speak pleasing words but true ones, not soft words but hard ones. Moreover, he prayed to God for them, and this is why he achieved what he did, and many persons improved because of him. 42 Thus, whoever perforates the work of his hands with the fear of God and protects the eyes of contemplation with temperance and covers his heart with a plate of steel, closing his nostrils, and in this way presents the animal’s heart to me, 43 then I, God, shall give to him a most delightful treasure. The eye does not grow weary of its delight, nor does the ear tire of its pleasure, nor can one get enough of tasting its enjoyment, nor is any pain ever felt at its touch. No, rather, the soul enjoys happiness and everlasting plenty.

45 The fish symbolizes the heathen whose scales are very powerful, being hardened by sin and malice. Just as closely packed scales are a defense and prevent the wind from getting in, 46 so too the heathen, glorying in their sins and living on false hopes, protect themselves with defenses against my friends. They prefer their own cults, multiply terrors, threaten punishments. 47 So, anyone who wants to present me with the fish’s blood should cast the net of preaching over it, not the kind consisting in the rotten strings of elaborately eloquent philosophers and orators, 48 but in simplicity of speech and in humble deeds. The simple preaching of God’s word is as sonorous as bronze in God’s sight and powerfully attracts sinners to God. 49 My church began and developed not through eloquent teachers but through humble and ordinary people.

50 The preacher should be careful not to enter the water above his knees or to step anywhere where the sand is not solid, so that he does not lose his footing if the waves rise above his knees. 51 What is the present life if not, as it were, water in constant and unstable motion? In such water, one must not bend down on the knee of spiritual fortitude except only when necessary. One should set the foot of human affection on solid sand, that is, on the solidity of divine charity and the contemplation of the life to come. 52 Those people who stretch out the feet of their affections and use their fortitude for temporal ends are not steadfast in winning souls but sink beneath the waves of temporal cares.

53 The righteous man should also pluck out his eye and turn it toward the fish, for the eye is twofold, human and spiritual. The human eye instills fear when it sees the power and cruelty of tyrants but when the spirit, considering its own weakness, is afraid to speak out. 54 This eye of fear should be put out and plucked away from the soul through the contemplation of divine goodness, by considering and firmly believing that every person, who puts his or her trust in God and seeks to win over a sinner for the sake of God, shall have God himself as a protector. 55 The sinner, or any convert to God, should be examined with the spiritual eye of insight with careful attention as to how he

might be tempted and how he stands up in tribulations, so that he does not become overwhelmed by the exertion of adopting unaccustomed exercises, and so that tribulation does not make him regret having adopted a more austere way of life.

57 The righteous person, whoever he or she may be, should also consider the material sustenance of the infidels converted to the faith so that they do not have to beg or be oppressed in slavery or be deprived of their corresponding rights. 58 He should also take diligent care that such a convert should be continually instructed in the holy Catholic faith and in holy examples of virtue. It is indeed pleasing to me that pagan converts should see habits of holiness and hear words of charity. 59 Many Christians come to the pagans undisciplined and in a state of moral disorder, boasting that they kill the pagans’ bodies and gain their temporal possessions. 60 This pleases me about as much as those who sacrificed to the molten calf in the desert. 61 Therefore, anyone who desires to please me by going to the pagans, let him first pluck out his eye of avarice and worldly fear. But he should keep his eye of compassion open along with his understanding so as to win their souls, desiring nothing but to die for God’s sake and to live for God.

62 The righteous man should, moreover, have a shield of steel, that is, true patience and perseverance, in order not to be separated from God’s love by either words or deeds nor, worn out due to various mishaps, complain in any way about God’s decisions. 63 As a shield both protects and takes the striking blows, so too true patience is a defense in temptations. It also makes hardship easier and outfits people for every good deed. 64 The shield of patience should not be formed out of fragile materials but out of the strongest bronze. True patience must obviously be formed and tested by contemplating my own patience. 65 I was like the strongest steel when I preferred to suffer death rather than to lose souls and preferred to hear insults rather than to come down from the cross. 66 Hence, anyone who desires patience must imitate my constancy. For, if I, who was innocent suffered, what wonder is it that a person who deserves his sentence should suffer?

67 A person thus fortified with patience should spread out his net over the fish and hold it for ten hours above the waters. Then he shall get the blood of the fish. These ten hours represent nothing other than ten counsels that should be given to the convert. 68 The first is to believe in the ten commandments that I gave to the people of Israel. The second is to receive and venerate the sacraments of my church. 69 The third is to feel sorrow for past sins and to have the perfect intention of no longer committing them. The fourth is to obey my friends as often as they tell the convert to do something that goes against his own will. 70 The fifth is to despise all his base habits that go against God and good morals. The sixth is to have the desire of bringing as many people as possible to God. 71 The seventh is to display true humility in

his actions, avoiding giving bad example. The eighth is to have patience in adversity and not to complain about God’s decisions. 72 The ninth is not to listen to or keep company with those who set themselves against the holy Christian faith. The tenth is to ask God for the strength to persevere in love and to make a personal effort to do so. 73 Anyone converted from evil ways who observes and keeps these ten counsels will die away from love of the world and become alive to the love of God.

74 When the fish, that is, the sinner rescued from the waters of lustful pleasure, resolves to keep these ten counsels, he should be opened at his backbone where the blood is most plentiful. 75 What does the backbone symbolize if not upright actions and a good intention? His will should incline to God’s pleasure. Oftentimes, indeed, an action seems good in the sight of men but the agent’s intention and will are not good. 76 Thus, the just man, who seeks to convert a sinner, should examine the other’s intention in undertaking a good work as well as the intention with which he aims to persevere in it. 77 If he should discover some carnal affection in a spiritual work, whether toward relatives or with a regard to acquiring temporal gains, then he should hasten to cut it out of his heart. Just as bad blood brings on disease, obstructs movement, tightens the access to the heart, and impairs one’s appetite for food, 78 so too a bad will and a corrupt intention destroy love for God, provoke spiritual torpor, close the heart toward God, and make every spiritual good abhorrent to him. 79 However, the blood that I desire is fresh blood that gives life to the limbs. This means: a good intention and love directed toward God. This prepares the way for the faith, equips the senses for understanding and the limbs for action, and attracts the help of God. 80 This intention is preceded and infused by my grace. It is increased through prayers and through own goodness. It is perfected through good actions and through delight in me.

81 That is how the blood of the fish should be presented to me. Anyone who presents it to me in this way shall have the best of rewards. A river of every delight will flow into his mouth, perpetual splendor will light up his soul, and his salvation will be renewed without end.”

Addition

82 Note that Christ begins to speak of the fish and the animal in Book IV 2 of the Revelations and explains what they mean in this chapter 129.

Addition

83 The following revelation was made in Amalfi where St. Matthew lies buried.

7. “Amalfi”: The relics of St. Matthew are preserved, according to legend, in Salerno, some short distance from Amalfi, in the region of Campania, southern Italy.
84 Blessed are you, holy apostle Matthew! You were the best of money-changers.⁸ That is to say, you exchanged something earthly and found something eternal. You scorned yourself and obtained God. 85 You put away false prudence, despised physical rest, and took up hard labor. This is why you are now deservedly glorified in God’s sight.

86 St. Matthew answered: “Blessed be God who inspired this greeting in you! Indeed, so please God, I want to show you what kind of man I was when I wrote the Gospel and what state of reward I find myself in now. 87 I did indeed hold a public office, which I could not carry out without a public income. However, my intention at the time was such that I did not want to defraud anyone. Rather, I longed to find a way to separate myself from that office and devote myself wholeheartedly to God alone. 88 At the preaching of my lover, Jesus Christ, his calling to me burned like fire in my heart. His words were so sweet to me that I could no more think of wealth and honor than of chaff. 89 No, indeed, I wanted to weep and to rejoice, because my God wished to call so insignificant and so great a sinner to his grace. As I clung to my Lord, I began to fix his words in my heart ever more ardently and meditate on them, savoring them night and day like the most delicious food.

90 When my Lord’s passion was accomplished, I wrote the Gospel according to what I had seen and heard and experienced—not for my own fame but for the glory of my Redeemer and for the good of souls. 91 While I was writing it, such a fire of divine flame continued burning in me that, even had I wanted to keep silent, I would have been completely unable because of its intensity. 92 Now, however, many are trying to subvert and maliciously interpret what I wrote out of love and humility. They boast about having lofty, celestial knowledge whenever they encounter discrepancies. They prefer to argue about the Gospel rather than live according to its meaning. 93 The humble and lowly shall therefore enter into heaven, while the proud and clever remain outside. Why do the proud and presumptuous think that the God of such great wisdom was unable so to arrange his words that people would not be scandalized at them? 94 Yet it is only just that scandals come, and that those who feel an aversion for heavenly things should become attached to earthly things. However, with regard to my reward, rest assured that what scripture says is true: The heart cannot conceive it nor the tongue describe it.”⁹

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⁹ “The heart cannot conceive it nor the tongue describe it”; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9.
Chapter 130

An Explanation of an Earlier Vision about Seven Animals

DATE: AFTER 1350, ITALY

Many years after the bride had the vision about the seven animals in this same book (ch. 125), Christ explained certain things that were missing in the explanation of that vision, as follows.

1 The Son speaks: “I told you earlier about seven animals, one of which was like an elephant that leaned against a tree without noticing the tree’s fragility nor the brevity of time, which is why it fell down along with the tree precisely when it thought it could remain standing. 2 The walls of his church were to be so ruined by heat and water that there would be no one to rebuild them, because they had been built out of wicked people. The ground was to be torn asunder, and those that dwell there would seek death, but it would evade them, and the ungodly would rule over the righteous. All this has come to pass. 3 Know, too, that the second animal, which was proud of the jewel of its chastity, has now assumed the horns of a lamb. I shall therefore teach him how he must leap over the walls and continue in his honorable state. 4 The humility of this animal pleases me, and therefore I say to him that his church has already risen to its highest position and has long been in a state of pride. 5 Accordingly, this man should strive to make the clergy live more continent lives, reduce their lack of moderation in drink, put off greed, and put on humility and fear. Otherwise, they will be felled by hardships, and their fall will be so heavy and so great that people in other countries will hear of it.”

6 After the death of the bishop mentioned and the creation of his successor, the Lord spoke to me, saying: “Know that this bishop (the successor of the aforesaid bishop) who has now risen to episcopal rank was one of the five servants whom the king would not heed, unless they acquired clearer eyesight. 7 This bishop has now ascended, but let him make a good examination, and he shall see how he has ascended with respect to my judgment. I warn him of the fate of Joab. 8 Joab felt envy toward his betters and relied on his own counsels. He had great audacity and, hence, was presumptuous beyond his capacity. He preferred his own chosen one to the one God had chosen. 9 One piece of advice, however, is useful to a bishop. He should put a check on his own prudence and always pay attention not to what is possible but to what is honorable.”

10 When he was in doubt as to whether or not it would be good for him to go to Rome for the remission of his sins, he sought my advice. When I was praying, the Mother of God answered in this way: “If this bishop feels in his soul

4. “Fate of Joab”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 2:28–34.
that he needs the help of the saints, let him come to Rome for the indulgences, for there will come a time when it will be good for him. 12 Let him also attend to cutting back the claws of the rapacious birds that have already entered so that they do not settle down on the highest cliffs, because they will hurt the common folk more then, and he himself will not be immune from hardship.

13 Know, furthermore, that the animal that, as I told you, feels fear at seeing its own shadow and benefits itself by running, is the one who has zeal for souls and does not become dejected at heart by derogatory words spoken to him, 14 nor elated over words of assent and adulation. He is prepared to leave the world by dying and is also prepared to go on living for the sake of my glory, if it should so please me. 15 Therefore, I shall run out to meet him halfway, like a father with his son, and I shall take him out of custody, like a merciful judge, so that he does not have to see the evils to come. 16 However, the one who continued in his leprosy will die along with those who have their bellies full. He will be buried and sentenced along with the lepers, and he will not be seated among those who will judge the world.”

THIS IS THE END OF THE FOURTH BOOK ACCORDING TO ALFONSO

## Chapter 131

A Multitude of Angels Praises God on Monte Gargano

DATE: AFTER 1350, ITALY

A revelation given on Monte Gargano concerning the excellence of the angels

1 Lady Birgitta saw a multitude of angels singing praises on Monte Gargano1 and saying: “Blessed are you, our God, who are and shall be and ever were without beginning or end! 2 You created us spirits to minister to you and to comfort and protect humankind. We are sent to them for their benefit and yet are never deprived of the sweet consolation of the beatific vision.2 3 Because we were as though unknown to humankind, you wished on this spot to reveal this your blessing and the dignity given to us, in order that people might learn both to love you and to desire our help. 4 This place, which long was held in honor by many, is now neglected. The inhabitants of the land turn more to unclean spirits than to us, inasmuch as they follow their suggestions more eagerly.”

5 The lady answered: “My Lord, my Creator and Redeemer, help them to cease from sinning and to desire you with all their heart!” 6 God said to her: “They have grown accustomed to filth, and will not learn except by force.

1. “Monte Gargano”: in southern Italy, where, according to legend, the archangel Michael appeared in 493. A church was built on the spot, which became a place of pilgrimage and reverence to the angels. Birgitta may have visited here during one of her visits to the kingdom of Naples.

2. “Beatific vision,” i.e., the immediate knowledge of God that is enjoyed by angelic spirits and the souls of the just in heaven. See also note to ch. 23.32.
Would that they would get to know themselves through discipline and recover their senses again!"

**HERE BEGINS THE TREATISE OF ST. BIRGITTA’S REVELATIONS TO PRIESTS AND ROMAN PONTIFFS**

### Chapter 132

**On the Sinfulness of Priests**

**DATE: UNDATED**

Christ speaks about the five good gifts given to priests and their five opposites that bad priests do.

1. "I am like a man about to depart from this world who entrusts his greatest possessions to his dearest friends. When I was about to depart from this world, I accordingly entrusted the thing dearest to me, my own body, to priests whom I chose to be above all the angels and above all other men. I gave to them these five good gifts: 2 first, my faith; second, the two keys to hell and heaven; third, the ability to make an angel out of an enemy; fourth, the ability to consecrate my body, which none of the angels can do; fifth, the gift of handling my most pure body with their own hands. 3 Now, however, they treat me just as the Jews did who denied that I had raised Lazarus\(^1\) and performed other miracles, who instead spread the rumor that I wanted to be made king,\(^2\) that I had prohibited paying the tribute tax,\(^3\) and that I would rebuild the temple in three days.\(^4\) 4 In similar fashion, priests do not speak of my miracles or teach my doctrine but teach rather the love of the world. They preach their own pleasure and think nothing of what I did for them. 5 Second, they have lost the key with which they were to open heaven for the wretched. They love, however, the key that opens hell and keep it wrapped away in fine clean linen. 6 Third, they make a wicked man out of a righteous one, a devil out of the simple-hearted, a wounded man out of a healthy one—anyone who turns to them with three wounds receives a fourth from them. 7 If someone comes to them with four wounds, then he leaves them with five. Once a sinner has seen the immoral example of priests, he grows confident in sinning and begins to boast of the sin that he earlier considered shameful. This is why their condemnation will be greater than that of others, because they go astray in their conduct and hurt others by their example. 8 Fourth, they sell me, though they should be sanctifying me with their lips. They are worse than Judas. At least Judas recognized his sin\(^5\) and experienced

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1. "Denied that I had raised Lazarus"; cf. John 11:11.
Figure 3. Frontispiece to “Die Bürde der Welt,” a selection of revelations in German, printed in Nuremberg in 1481. Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.
remorse, however unprofitably. These, however, call themselves just and make a show of it. Judas returned the price for his services to the buyers. These, instead, keep it for their own use. 9 Judas sold me prior to the world’s redemption. These sell me after I have already redeemed the world. They feel no compassion about the blood I lost, which cries out for vengeance more than the blood of Abel. 6 Judas sold me for money alone. These, however, sell me for any kind of merchandise, since they do not approach me 7 unless they hope to gain something for themselves. 10 Fifth, they treat me like the Jews. What did the Jews do? They put me on the wood of the cross, but these put me in an oil-press and press down hard upon it.

11 You might ask: How does this happen, given that my divine nature is impassible as well as my human nature? I will tell you. My divine and human natures are impassible, 8 nor can sorrow or adversity affect God. 12 However, the intention of these priests to remain in sin is so adverse and bitter to me that it is as if I were placed in an oil-press, if that were possible. 13 These priests have two sins, namely, lust and greed, and they press me between the two. They may, perhaps, do penance for these sins, but, then, after having carried out their priestly office, they have the firm intention to sin again, and so it is as though they press down hard upon me in an oil-press. 14 Of course, they provide for women of ill repute and put them in a safe place so they can fulfill their lust and cast me out. They fawn on them and delight in them, but have no desire to see me who am the cause of their existence.

15 See, my friends, what sort of priests they are! See, my angels, the ones whom you serve! If I lay before you as I lie on the altar before them, none of you would dare to touch me. You would be afraid to do so. 16 These men, however, betray me like thieves and traitors. 9 Like whores they touch me. They are filthier than tar, yet they do not feel ashamed to approach me, who am the God and Lord of glory.

17 Accordingly, as it was said to Israel, ‘seven plagues shall come upon you.’ 10 Those seven plagues shall surely come upon the priests!”

# Chapter 133
How Priests Have Turned Away from God

DATE: UNDATED

Christ compares himself to Moses leading Israel through the Red Sea where the waters stood like walls to right and left, and about

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7. “They do not approach me,” i.e., my altar.
8. “My divine and human natures are impassible”: Christ was not born with an impassible body, for if he had been, he would not have suffered during the crucifixion; but his body is impassible after the resurrection, when he can no longer suffer.
9. “These men... like thieves and traitors”: an image that is used by Mathias of Linköping in Homo Conditus; see Piltz, Magistri Mathiae canonici Lincopensis 1, b, p. 2.
how Israel, that is, bad priests, neglect Christ and select the golden calf, that is, the world, and about how Christ honored priests by means of seven orders, from which they have turned away in seven ways.

1 The Mother spoke: “The enemies of my Son were so eager for his blood that they even inflicted wounds on him when he was dead. Get yourself ready, for my Son is coming with his great host to speak to you!” 2 Then he himself came and said: “Earlier, I likened myself to Moses when he was leading the people, when the water stood like a wall to right and left. 3 I am indeed like Moses, figuratively speaking. I led the Christian people, that is, I opened heaven up for them and showed them the way to walk, freeing them from their oppressor, the devil, as though from pharaoh.

4 They walked, as it were, between the two walls of the sea to right and left. One of these walls no longer was not meant to proceed; the other of them was not meant to recede; yet both were to stand firmly. 5 These two walls were the two covenants. The first was the old law, the one not meant to proceed. The second was the new law, the one that was not to recede. 6 Between these two, firmly standing walls, I went to the cross as though through the Red Sea, for my whole body was made red with my blood, and red was the once white wood, red the lance. I redeemed my captive people in order to win their love.

7 Now, however, Israel, that is, the priests, neglect me, and they select another god to love. In their passion for the world, as I said before, they love the golden calf. 2 It becomes desirable to them because of their lust and burns in them because of their passions, standing strong on its feet with its head and throat of gluttony. 8 Besides that, they treat me like an idol and lock me in so that I cannot go. They offer incense to me, yet do not please me by it, because they are not doing it for my sake but for themselves. They bend their knee of voluntary obedience to me only as it suits their desires, in order that I may buy them some temporal gain. They call out to me, but my ears do not hear them, because it is not from devotion, and they do not really mean it. 9 Hear me, my heavenly host and all my angels! I chose priests in preference to all the angels and other righteous people. To them alone I gave the power of handling my body. If I had liked, I could have chosen an angel for such an office. 10 Instead, I had so much love for my priests that I granted them this great honor, and I appointed them to stand before me in as it were in seven ranks. 11 They should be as patient as sheep, as steadfast as a solidly based wall, as courageous as soldiers, as wise as serpents, as modest as a virgin, as pure as an angel, as burning with longing as a bride for the marriage bed of her groom.

12 Now, however, they have turned from me in the worst way. They are as wild as predatory wolves that yield to none in their hunger and covetousness,

that give honor to none, that have no shame. 13 Second, they are as unsteady as a stone in a weak wall. They lack confidence in their base, that is, in God, in his ability to give them what they need and in his desire to sustain them. 14 Third, like thieves walking in the dark, they find themselves in the darkness of vice. They do not have the daring of soldiers to fight for the glory of God or to undertake a manly task. Fourth, they stand about like asses with their heads to the ground, so stupid and foolish, always thinking about earthly and present conditions and never about what is to come. 15 Fifth, they are as immodest as whores and approach me dressed like whores, keeping their bodies for lustful indulgence. Sixth, they are hideously stained with tar; everyone who comes close to them gets dirty. Seventh, they are as disgusting as vomit. It would be milder and better for me to approach vomit than to spend my pleasure with them. 16 They are so disgusting that the whole heavenly host is disgusted with them. What would be more repulsive than a naked man bringing his mouth down to his lower limbs and eating his own excrement and drinking his own urine? That is how repulsive they are in my sight.

17 When they clothe themselves in priestly vestments, which can be compared to the clothing of the soul, for those vestments denote how the soul should be, then they clothe themselves as genuine traitors. 18 When a man who has given his pledge to the enemy of his lord has to fight together with his lord against that enemy, he blunts his weapons so as not to injure him. In the same way, when these men clothe themselves in priestly vestments, which are the clothing of the soul, figuratively speaking, with which they should protect themselves against the devil, they keep everything blunted so as not to injure the devil and so that he need not fear them. 19 One might ask, How does that happen? Well, when they clothe themselves with the weapons of continence, they blunt them through lust and thus do not vex the devil. When they clothe themselves with the weapons of charity, the weapons do no harm, because they have been blunted through malice. The weapons, that is, the vestments, in which they clothe themselves, are not for their Lord’s protection but are only for show, just like traitors who act in one way but put on a different appearance.

20 O my friends, thus do these accursed, dissembling priests approach me like traitors. Yet I come to them all the same, I who am your God and the God of every creature in heaven and on earth, and I lie there before them on the altar, true God and true man. 21 As soon as they have pronounced those words ‘This is my body,’ I come to them like a bridegroom to share the delight of my divine nature with them, but I encounter the devil in them. So when they put me to their mouths, I take my divine and human natures and go away, and the devil, who had fled in terror at the presence of the Lord, returns then with pleasure.

22 Hear again, my friends, what dignity I conferred upon priests, beyond that of the angels and other men. I gave them five privileges. First, the power of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth. Second, I gave them the ability to turn my worst enemy into a friend, a devil into an angel of mine. 23 Third,
I gave them the power of preaching my words. Fourth, the power of consecrating and offering my body, something that none of the angels can do. Fifth, the privilege of handling my body, something that none of you would dare to do, if I were lying before you.

24 I make five accusations against them now. First, that they open hell and close heaven to those trying to enter. Second, that they make an enemy out of a friend and deal two wounds to the person coming to them with only one, who sees the shameful life of priests and thinks to himself: ‘If he can do it, even more so can I.’ 25 Third, they make nothing of my words and assert their own lies while denying my truth. Fourth, they sell me with their lips, though they should be sanctifying me. Fifth, they crucify my body more painfully than the Jews did.

26 My friends, see how those whom I have chosen and loved so much repay me. I joined them to myself with my own body, and they dissolve the bond between us. This is why they shall be sentenced as traitors and not as priests, unless they reform themselves.”

# Chapter 134

**Demons Hold a Priest’s Soul in Their Hands**

**DATE: UNDATED**

Christ says that he has given more honor to priests than to all the angels and other men, but that they provoke him more than all the others. Their damnation is illustrated in the soul of one priest eternally damned.

1 Mary said: “Remember my Son’s passion! He is coming now.” And there appeared St. John the Baptist who said to the Blessed Virgin Mary: “God’s anger at the world has not been so great for a thousand years.” 2 When the Son came, he said to the bride: “To me it is but an hour from the beginning, and how much time is that to you? All this time is to me but as a single hour. Regarding priests, I told you before that I chose them from among all angels and men, yet now they are more vexing to me than any others.” 3 Then there appeared demons carrying a soul in their hands. They said to the Judge: “Behold the warrior!” The Judge answered: “Though corporal beings cannot hear things of the spirit nor can the corporal eye see spiritual beings, yet for the sake of this woman standing here, the eyes of whose understanding I am opening, tell us, by what right do you own this soul?”

4 They answered: “We possess him by nine rights or, rather, transgressions. First, he was beneath us in three ways, equal to us in three ways, above us in three ways. Our first right to him lies in the fact that he was good on the outside but bad within. The second is that he was at times full of covetousness and gluttony but at other times fasted only for the good of the body or because of illness. 5 Third, at times he was severe in word and deed, but at other times his wicked severity was suppressed for the sake of some advantage to himself.
We do not have these defects, for we are on the outside just what we are within, and we are always wickedly severe and always equally covetous of evil.

6 He was our peer in three ways, inasmuch as we fell through the three sins of pride, covetousness, and envy, and he has these three himself. He was above and surpassed us in wickedness in three ways, as being a priest who handled your body. 7 The first was that he did not guard his mouth with which he was to proclaim your words. Instead, like a barking dog, he barked out your words. When he proclaimed your words, we felt the same kind of fear as someone hearing some terrible sound, and we fled from him in terror at once. However, he stayed on without any fear or shame. 8 Second, he did not guard his hands with which he handled your most pure body, but stained them in every kind of pleasure. Whenever he handled your body, which was the same body as that in the Virgin’s womb and on the cross, after the words of consecration had been spoken, then we felt the same kind of fear as a man whose whole body is convulsed with fear, though our motive was not divine charity but fear at your power and your great might. He, however, stood there unafraid and did not care. 9 When he put you to his mouth, which was like a filthy dirty vessel, we were like men who had lost all their might, like one lacking all strength, dead from fear even though we are immortal. Yet he felt no fear and did not tremble to touch you. 10 However, since it was not fitting that the Lord of majesty should enter into so shameful a vessel, you would take your divine and human natures and leave him, and he would remain alone, and we, who fled in fear each and every time, would return to him in a fury.

11 In all these ways he excelled us in evil, and this is why we rightfully own him. Therefore, since you are the just Judge, render judgment for us concerning him.” 12 The Judge answered: “I hear your demands, but you, wretched soul, while this woman is present, tell us what intention you had at the end of your life, while you still had the use of reason and bodily strength.”

13 The soul answered: “My intention was to sin unceasingly and never desist. However, because I knew that I would not live forever, I decided to sin up until the very last moment and that was my intention when I was separated from my body.” 14 Then the Judge said: “Your conscience is your judge.” The soul answered: “My sentence is the most bitter, wretched suffering to endure without end and with no mercy.” Then the devils went off with the soul after hearing his sentence.

15 Then the Lord said to the bride: “My bride, see how priests treat me! I chose them from among all the angels and other men, and honored them above them all. However, they provoke me more than all the Jews and Gentiles and more than all the demons.”

1. “Who handled your body,” i.e., the hosts consecrated in the Mass.
2. “Your conscience is your judge”: The same phrase is used in Book V int. 16.
Chapter 135

Priests Are Likened to an Adulteress to a Bridegroom

DATE: UNDATED

Christ shows how much kindness he has shown to priests. Yet they, as ungrateful as an adulterous bride, scorn Christ and love three other lovers, namely, the world, the flesh, and the devil. He demonstrates this with the example of a priest who had recently died and was eternally damned.

1 “I am like a bridegroom who leads his bride lovingly into his home. Thus did I join priests to myself with my own body, so that they might be in me and I in them. 2 However, they respond to me like an adulteress to her bridegroom: ‘Your words displease me. Your wealth is meaningless. Your desire is like poison. There are three others I prefer to love and follow.’ 3 Her gentle husband answered: ‘My bride, listen to me, wait a little longer, for your words should be my words, your will my will, your wealth my wealth, your desire my desire!’ 4 However, she was not at all willing to listen but went off to those other three. When she had gone far enough off so that the bridegroom could no longer be seen, the first of them, that is, the world, said: ‘Here the road divides and I can no longer accompany her, so I want to have all her wealth.’ 5 The second, that is, the body, said: ‘I am mortal and will become food for worms. She, however, is immortal, so I will leave her here.’ The third, that is, the devil, said: ‘I am immortal and endure forever. Because she did not want to stay with her man, she will follow me forever.’ 6 This is how these accursed priests treat me. They should be my limbs and be as outstanding among others as a finger on the hand, but they are worse than the devil. So, they will sink down lower in hell than all the devils, unless they reform themselves. 7 I call to them like a bridegroom. I do all I can for them, but the more I call, the farther off they go. My words displease them; my wealth is a burden; they detest my sweet words like poison. 8 I run after them, warning them like a kind father. I show them the forbearance of a gentle lord. I coax them with gifts like a good bridegroom. However, the more I call, the more they turn away from me. 9 They love their three friends more than me, the world and the body, and the third, the devil, who will take them in and never let them go. Woe to them, that they ever became priests and the limbs of my body! 10 That priest who died recently possessed three qualities. First, he had pride, for he dressed like a bishop. Second, he was celebrated for his wisdom. Third, he inclined his will to whatever he wanted and to whatever was pleasing to his body. 11 He practiced fasting for the sake of bodily health, and did whatever pleased his body, not what was according to my will. But what good has it done him now? As a reward for his pride, he stands before me like a man broken in two, stinking, covered with wounds and broken skin. 12 Because of his celebrity, he stands forgotten before me, and he will be forgotten by men. As a reward for his self-will, worms will take over his body, and demons will torture his soul without end.
13 Look at what the wretches love and how they act! Where are his friends, where are his possessions, his honor and glory? In return for them all, he will now have everlasting shame. 14 They purchase something small, worldly honor, and they lose something great, eternal joy. Alas for such as these, woe to them that they were ever born! They sink deeper into hell than anyone else.”

Chapter 136

A Letter to Pope Clement about the War in France and about His Returning to Italy; and a Message for Pope Innocent VI

DATE: 1348, SWEDEN (FIRST PART) AND AFTER 1352, ROME (SECOND PART)

A revelation touching on Pope Urban, received by the bride of Christ in Rome and concerning the confirmation of the Rule of the Holy Savior and the indulgences of St. Peter in Chains granted by Christ to the cloister of the Blessed Virgin in Vadstena. The pious handmaid of Christ, Lady Birgitta of blessed memory, received the following revelations in a divinely inspired vision while she was at prayer. They are addressed to the Roman pontiffs Clement VI, Innocent VI, Urban V, and Gregory XI. They deal with the return of the Apostolic See and the Roman Curia to Rome and the reformation of the church by command of almighty God.

(First Part) Two years before the Jubilee Year,2 Christ gives the bride the words contained here and orders her to send them to Pope Clement3 in order that he should establish peace between the kings of France and England and come to Italy and proclaim the Jubilee Year. The Reverend Lord Hemming, bishop of Åbo, and Brother Peter, prior of the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra in the kingdom of Sweden.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride, saying: “Write these words from me to Pope Clement: I exalted you and let you ascend through all the ranks of honor. Rise up and establish peace between the kings of France and England, who are like dangerous beasts,4 betrayers of souls. 2 Then come to Italy and

1. The first part of this revelation also occurs in Book VI 63 (on the differences, see Jönsson, St. Bridget’s Revelations to the Popes, p. 22). Corroborative facts are given on the date and background circumstances of the revelation in Alfonso’s Informationes (Jönsson, Alfonso of Jaén, pp. 185–86); and in his Conscriptio (Blie-metzrieder, “Un’altra edizione,” pp. 83–84). The first two sentences constitute a subheading.
2. “Jubilee Year” was a special year for universal pardon, indulgences, and pilgrimages that took place every fifty years. On the peace proposal for France and England, and Bishop Hemming’s and Prior Petrus’s role in the mission, see general introduction, volume 1, p. 41; and pp. 12–13 above, chs. 103–5.
3. “Pope Clement;”: i.e., Clement VI, pope in Avignon 1342–52; two manuscripts add “quinto” (Clement V, rather than VI), which cannot be correct.
preach the word there and proclaim a year of salvation and divine love! Look on the streets paved with the blood of my saints, and I shall give you an everlasting reward. 3 Think of times past when you had the audacity to provoke my anger, and I kept silent, when you did what you wanted and what you should not have done, and I was patient, as though I did not hear. 4 Indeed, my time approaches, and I shall require an account of you for the negligence and audacity of your time. In the same way as I let you ascend through the ranks, you will descend through other ranks that you will truly experience in soul and body, unless you obey my words. 5 Your grandiloquent tongue will be silent. The name by which you are called on earth will be held in oblivion and reproach before me and my saints. I shall also require an account of you as to how unworthily you rose through the ranks, though it was with my permission, which I, God, know better than your negligent conscience can recall. 6 I shall seek an account from you with regard to your lukewarmness in reestablishing peace between the kings and your preferential treatment of one of the two parties. Moreover, it shall not be forgotten how greed and ambition flourished and increased in the church during your time, or that you could have reformed and set many things right but that you, lover of the flesh, were unwilling. 7 Get up, therefore, before your fast approaching final hour arrives, and extinguish the negligence of your past by being zealous in your nearly final hour! If you are in doubt about to which spirit these words belong, that kingdom and that person are well known in which amazement and wonders have been wrought. 8 The justice and mercy of which I speak are drawing near everywhere on earth. Your own conscience tells you that my exhortation is rational and my proposal charitable. 9 Had you not been saved by my patience, you should have descended lower than all your predecessors. Examine, then, the book of your conscience and see if I am telling the truth!"

10 (Second Part) Christ’s words to the bride making mention of Pope Innocent the Sixth who was pope after Clement.

11 The Son speaks to the bride and says: “This Pope Innocent is of better metal than his predecessor and is a fit canvas to receive the finest colors. However, the wickedness of humankind demands that he should soon be taken from their midst. 12 His good intention will be taken into account for his greater reward and glorification. Nevertheless, if he listens to my words given to you and written down in books, he will become better, and those who bring those words to him will receive a more lofty reward.”

5. “Your preferential treatment”: Birgitta criticizes Clement for his partisan views in favor of the French cause.


7. The final paragraphs are a separate revelation concerning Pope Innocent VI (1352–62).
Chapter 137*

Pope Urban V Is Urged to Ratify the Birgittine Rule

DATE: 1360s, ROME

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride: “A person who has a ball of yarn containing fine gold inside does not stop unwinding it until he finds the gold. Once it is found, the owner uses it for his own comfort and honor. 2 This Pope Urban¹ is gold that is malleable for good ends but is surrounded by worldly cares. 3 Go, therefore, and tell him this from me: Your time is short.² Rise up and consider how the souls entrusted to you can obtain salvation. I gave you as coming from my very own lips the rule of an order that should be founded and begun in Vadstena, Sweden.³ 4 Now I want you not only to confirm it by your authority but also to give it the strength of your blessing, for you are my vicar on earth. 5 I dictated it and endowed it with a spiritual endowment by granting it the indulgences attracted to the Roman church of St. Peter in Chains.⁴ Approve, therefore, in the sight of men that which has been sanctioned in the sight of my heavenly host. 6 If you seek a sign⁵ that it is I who am saying this, I have already showed you that, when you first heard my words, your soul was spiritually comforted at the coming of my messenger. If you seek a further sign, none shall be given you but that of the prophet Jonah.⁶

7 You, my bride, to whom I showed this grace, if you cannot get the letter and favor of the pope and his seal upon the concession of the indulgences without payment in advance, my blessing is enough for you.⁷ 8 I shall approve and confirm my words and all the saints shall be your witnesses, and let my Mother be your seal, my Father your guarantor, and the Holy Spirit the comforter of those who come to your cloister.”

* This revelation is duplicated in Extravagantes, ch. 44.
1. “This Pope Urban,” i.e., Pope Urban V, 1362–70.
2. “Your time is short”; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:29.
3. “From my very own lips ... Vadstena, Sweden”: Birgitta is referring to the Birgittine Rule, for which she tried several times to obtain papal ratification. The original version, dating from c. 1346, was dictated to her by Christ, and written in the first person. A revised version was authorized by Urban V on 5 August 1370, but to be interpreted as additional constitutions of the Augustinian Rule. A further version (this time in the third person) was later authorized by Urban VI in 1378. See further Eklund, Regula Salvatoris, pp. 21–23.
4. “Indulgences ... St. Peter in Chains”: Birgitta indicates that Christ has already granted the future abbey church at Vadstena the same indulgences as had been granted to the church of San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome, and she is told here to command the pope to give them his official seal. The approval finally came in 1378, after the deaths of both Birgitta and Urban. See further Höjer, Studier i Vadstena klosters historia, pp. 97–99, 145–49, 173–81, 211–23; and Borgehammar, “Preaching to Pilgrims.”
5. “If you seek a sign”; cf. Exodus 4:8–9; and see ch. 143.2–5 below.
7. “My blessing is enough for you”: Birgitta hints that she knows she may be unsuccessful.
Chapter 138

Birgitta Prophesies Pope Urban V’s Death if He Returns to Avignon

DATE: 1370, ROME

This is a revelation that the bride of Christ received in Rome concerning the same Pope Urban before his return to Avignon in the year of the Lord 1370. She presented it to him herself in Montefiascone.¹

1 While the aforesaid person was at prayer during a night vigil, it appeared to her as if a voice came to her out of a ring of splendor like the sun. The voice spoke the following words to her.

2 “I am the Mother of God, because thus it was pleasing to him. I am also the Mother of all those who live in heavenly joy. Even though infant babies get what they need as they wish, still their joy grows with an increase of happiness when they see their mother’s gentle face. 3 So it pleases God to give all those in the heavenly court the joy and exultation of the purity of my virginity and the beauty of my virtues, even though they possess every good thing through the divine power in an incomprehensible way. 4 I am also the Mother of all those in purgatory, for all the pains they must suffer for the purification of their sins are in some way mitigated because of my prayers at any time. Thus it pleases God to decrease some of the punishments due them according to the strictness of divine justice.

5 I am also the Mother of all the justice that is in the world—the justice my Son loved with a most perfect love. As a motherly hand is always ready to ward off dangers in defense of her child’s heart should someone try to injure it, so too I am constantly ready to defend just people in the world and free them from every spiritual danger. 6 I am also like a mother to all sinners who want to reform and have the intention of not sinning anymore against God. I am willing to take such a sinner into my protection, just like a loving mother who sees her naked son encountering enemies armed with sharp swords. 7 Does she not then bravely step in the way of danger to free her son from the hands of his enemies and snatch him away and hold him joyfully in her arms? 8 This is what I do and what I shall do for all sinners who pray for my Son’s mercy with true contrition and love for God.

9 Listen and pay close attention to what I want to tell you concerning two sons of mine whose names I will mention to you. The first one I mean is my Son Jesus Christ, who was born from my virginal flesh in order to manifest his

¹ “Montefiascone”: a town in the province of Rome, overlooking Lake Bolsena, where the castle was often used as the residence of the papacy. This revelation was presented in person to Pope Urban V on 14 August 1370 in the presence of Alfonso and Cardinal Beaufort (later Pope Gregory XI), who was the only cardinal who learned about the message it contained. See further Alfonso’s Informationes (Jönsson, Alfonso of Jaén, pp. 187–88), and his Conscription (Bliemetzrieder, “Un’altra edizione,” pp. 85–86). Urban had returned to Rome briefly in 1368, but was eager to return to the stability of Avignon. In this revelation Birgitta advises him to stay in Rome. He ignored her advice and returned to Avignon where he died shortly afterward, in 1370. See further pp. 17–18 above.
love and redeem souls. Accordingly, he did not spare his body toil and bloodshed or disdain to hear insults and endure the pain of his death. He is God himself, almighty in eternal happiness. The second whom I count as my son is he who occupies the papal See, God’s see in the world, provided he obeys God’s precepts and loves him with perfect charity.

Now I want to say something about this pope named Urban. Thanks to my prayers, he received the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that he should go back to Rome and Italy for no other purpose than to carry out mercy and justice, strengthen the catholic faith, reestablish the peace and, in this way, renew the Holy Church. As a mother carries her child to the place she likes before uncovering her breasts for him, so I led Pope Urban by my prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit from Avignon to Rome without any physical danger whatever. What did he do to me? He turns his back on me rather than face me, and he intends to go away from me. An evil spirit has brought him to this by deceiving him. He is weary of his divine work and wants his own physical comfort. Moreover, the devil is attracting him with worldly pleasure, for he longs too much for his native country after worldly fashion. Likewise, he is led on by the advice of carnal-minded friends who think more of his likes and pleasure than he does of God’s likes and glory and the good and salvation of his soul. If it does happen that he returns to the country where he was elected pope, within a short time he shall be struck with a blow that will knock his teeth out. His sight will become cloudy and darkened, and he will tremble in every limb of his body. The fire of the Holy Spirit will gradually cool in him and depart, and the prayers of all the friends of God, who had decided to pray for him with tearful sighs, will grow sluggish, and their hearts will grow cold to his love. He will render an account concerning two things before God: first, what he did while occupying the papal See; second, what he omitted among the things he could have done for the glory of God by means of his great authority.”

Chapter 139

A Parable for Pope Gregory XI about a Mother and Her Son

The following is the first revelation sent to Pope Gregory XI through his Lordship Latinus Orsini.  

A person, who was watching in vigil, not sleeping but persevering in prayer, was carried off in spirit. At that moment, all the strength of her body

1. “Pope Gregory XI”: pope 1370–78. He was another of the Avignon popes, whom Birgitta repeatedly asked to return to Rome.
2. “Latinus Orsini”: a member of the Roman nobility, and a close friend of Birgitta’s who was a witness in the canonization proceedings (Collijn, Acta et processus, pp. 225–36).
seemed to fail, but her heart was inflamed and felt the exultation of burning love. Her soul was consoled, while her spirit was comforted with divine strength, and her whole conscience was filled with spiritual understanding.

2 The following vision occurred to this person. She heard a sweet-sounding voice speaking to her as follows: “I am she who gave birth to God’s Son, true God, Jesus Christ. 3 I told you some things previously that were to be announced to Pope Urban. Now I am giving you a message to send to Pope Gregory. However, in order that it may be better understood, I will tell you it by means of a parable. 4 If a loving mother saw her own beloved son lying naked and cold on the ground, having no strength to raise himself up, but, from a longing for her motherly attention and milk, wailing and weeping with mournful sounds, 5 she would then quickly run to her son with tender love and compassion and lift him up off the ground with her kind, motherly hands, caressing him gently and warming him soothingly with the motherly warmth of her bosom, and she would feed him sweetly with the milk of her breasts. 6 This is how I, the Mother of mercy, will treat Pope Gregory, if he would only return to Rome and Italy with a mind to stay there and with the good shepherd’s intention of bewailing with sighful tears the eternal loss and damnation of the souls of the sheep entrusted to him, and if he would decide to renew the state of the church with humility and due pastoral charity.

7 Then, indeed, like a loving mother, I will lift him up off the ground as a cold and naked son, that is, I will take him and his whole heart away from all the earthly desire and worldly love that go against God’s will, and I shall warm him sweetly with motherly warmth, that is, with the love in my bosom. 8 I will fill him with my milk, that is, with my prayer, which is like milk. O, how countless are those who are sustained and sweetly sated with the milk of my prayer! 9 I will sate him with the milk of the prayers I pray for him to my Lord and God, who is my Son, so that he may deign to share and unite his Holy Spirit with the inner blood of the heart of Pope Gregory. 10 He will then be sated with a true and perfect satiety to such an extent that he will no longer want to live for anything else in this world than to add to God’s glory with all his might. 11 See, I have now shown him the motherly love with which I will treat him, if he obeys, because it is God’s will, and transfers his see to Rome with humility. 12 Now again, in order that he may not later use ignorance as an excuse, I caution him with a mother’s love and tell him what will follow if he is not obedient to what has been said. Without a doubt, he will feel the rod of justice, that is, the anger of my Son. His life will be cut short, and he will be called to God’s judgment. 13 No might of worldly lords will then help him, nor will the wisdom and knowledge of medical doctors avail him, nor will the fresh air of his native country do him any good for the prolongation of his life.”

14 This means that if he comes to Rome and does not carry out the aforesaid things, his life will be cut short, and medical doctors will not do him any good nor will he return to Avignon where the air of his native country might be of benefit to him. Rather, he will die.
Chapter 140

A Letter Addressed to Pope Gregory XI, Instructing Him to Return to Rome

Date: 1370, Rome

Note the following four instructions to the pope: that he should come to Rome with humility, that he should have a mind to stay, that he should bewail the perdition of souls, that he should try to renew the church, etc. If he does not do all these things, his life will be cut short, as stated above after the words “Now again.” Thus, it is not enough for the pope merely to come to Rome, but he must carry out all four of the instructions above.

Here follows the second vision brought by his Lordship De Nola to the same Pope Gregory XI.

1 Praise and service to God for all his love, honor to the most holy and dear Virgin Mary, his Mother, for the compassion she shows to all those whom her Son has redeemed with his precious blood! 2 Holy Father, it happened to a person well known to you that, while she continued in a vigil of prayer, she felt her heart to be all aflame through the fire of divine charity and the visitation of the Holy Spirit.

3 This person heard a voice saying to her: “Hear, you who see spiritual visions, and speak what you are now taught, and write the words you now hear to the Roman pontiff Gregory. 4 I who now speak to you am the one whom it pleased God to choose as his Mother, and so he took his human body from my flesh. My Son did a great work of mercy for Pope Gregory when he had me explain to you his most holy will, which I intimated more fully to him when it was transmitted to him in the earlier revelation. 5 This work was done more because of the prayers and tears of God’s friends than of any earlier merit on his part. The devil, his enemy, and I fought a great battle over him. 6 I admonished the same Pope Gregory in the other letter to hasten with humility and divine charity to Rome or Italy and there establish his See and altogether to remain there until his death. 7 However, the devil and the pope’s other advisors counseled him to delay and to stay on in the regions where he is as yet, being motivated by earthly affections and the mundane delight and solace of his natural relatives and friends. 8 So the devil now has a greater right and opportunity to tempt him, since he chose to obey the advice of the devil and his worldly friends rather than God’s and my own will.

9 It is true that the pope wants to be ascertained of God’s will still further. Therefore, it is right that his desire be fulfilled. He shall know it with certainty.

1. “Now again”; cf. ch. 139.12. This rubric is not given in several MSS, or in Gh. It is not likely to be by Alfonso, the author of the other rubrics.

2. “His Lordship De Nola,” i.e., Nicolaus de Ursinis (Orsini) d. 1399, the papal nuncio. This revelation was received in answer to three questions (paragraphs 9–12, 13, 14–15) asked by the pope; see Alfonso’s Conscriptio (Jönsson, Alfonso of Jaén, p. 86).
to be God’s will that he himself should come without any delay to Italy or Rome, and that he should make his way and altogether hasten to come with such speed that he arrives personally in the city or in the province of Italy by next March or as soon as possible, by April at the latest, that is, if he still wants me for his mother. If he disobeys this, let him truly know that he shall never again enjoy any such consolation—any other visitation or revelation from me—in this world but shall, after his death, make an answer before the court of divine justice as to why he refused to obey God’s commands. If he does obey, however, then I will fulfill what I promised in the revelation that was originally delivered to him.

13 I also inform the pope that there will never be a peace in France so stable and serene that its inhabitants can enjoy complete security and concord until the people of that kingdom placate God my Son by means of great works of piety and humility, having hitherto provoked him to anger and indignation at their many immoral deeds and offenses. Accordingly, he must understand that the journey of those squires from the iniquitous societies of iniquitous men, which they intend to make to the Holy Sepulcher of my Son, is no more pleasing to my Son, the true God, than the gold that the people of Israel cast into the fire out of which the devil welded the molten calf, and this is because of their pride and greed. If they intend to go to the famous Sepulcher, it is more for the sake of pride and greed for money than for the love and honor of God.” At these words, the vision faded.

16 God’s Mother later gave me the following additional message: “Tell my bishop, the hermit, to close and seal the letter. He should then make another copy of it later on another piece of paper and show this unsealed copy to the abbot, the papal nuncio, and to Count de Nola, so that they may read it and know its contents. Once they have read it, he should give them the closed and sealed letter to send to Pope Gregory without delay. However, he should not give the unsealed letter to them. Instead, I want him to tear it up and shred it to pieces before their eyes. Just as the one letter will be torn into many small pieces, so too, if the pope does not come to Italy at the appointed time and year, the lands of the church, which now obey him in united obedience and submission, will be divided in many parts at the hands of tyrants. Know most assuredly that, by the increase of this very pope’s trials, he will not only hear but also see with his own eyes that what I say is true. Not even with all the authority of his hand will he be able to return those lands of the church to their earlier state of obedience and peace. What I am telling you now is not to be

3. “That was originally delivered to him”; cf. ch. 139.
4. “Those squires from the iniquitous societies of iniquitous men”: This is obscure, but it may refer to knightly orders who made pilgrimages.
6. “My bishop, the hermit,” i.e., Birgitta’s confessor, Alfonso, former bishop of Jaén. When he resigned his bishopric in 1368, he joined a community of hermits in the desert; he is said to have come to Rome “de eremo” where he met Birgitta for the first time soon after 1368; see Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 327.
said or written to that abbot, for the seed lies hidden in the earth until it brings forth grain.”

Chapter 141

Pope Gregory XI Is Like a Paralytic Man

Date: 23 February 1373, Naples

A revelation for the same pope given to the bride in Naples when she had returned from Jerusalem. She did not send this revelation to the pope, because no divine command was given to her.¹

1 Christ appeared to Lady Birgitta while she was praying for Pope Gregory XI. He said to her: “Listen carefully, my daughter, to what I tell you. Understand that this Pope Gregory is like a paralytic who cannot use his hands for working or his feet for walking. 2 The disease of paralysis is produced by corrupt blood and humor and by cold. In the same way, an immoderate love of his own blood and the coldness of his tepid mind toward me keep this pope encumbered, as it were. 3 Understand, however, that, by the help of the Virgin Mary, my Mother, he is already beginning to move his hands and feet, that is, to act after my will and for my honor by coming to Rome.² Be thus assured that he will come to Rome and initiate the way to future good there but will not finish it.”

Lady Birgitta then answered: “The Lord, my God, the queen of Naples³ and many others tell me that it is impossible for him to come to Rome, because the king of France and the cardinals and others are putting as many obstacles as they can in his way. 5 I have heard that many people have arisen there saying that they have God’s Spirit and receive divine revelations and visions⁴ that they use as a pretext to dissuade him from coming. Therefore I am very much afraid that his coming will be prevented.”

6 God answered: “You have heard it read about how Jeremiah lived in Israel in those days and had God’s Spirit for prophecy, and how there were many at the time who had the spirit of dreams and lies. The wicked king put his trust in them, which is why both the king himself and his people fell into captivity. If the king had put his trust in Jeremiah alone, my anger would have been withdrawn from him. 7 So it is now as well. Sages arise or dreamers or friends not of the spirit but of the flesh, and they use their persuasion on Pope

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1. According to one manuscript, this revelation took place on the “feast of St. Polycarp” i.e., 23 February; Birgitta was on her return from the Holy Land.
2. “Coming to Rome”; in the event, Gregory returned to Rome in 1377.
3. “Queen of Naples,” i.e., Johanna of Naples, who had given Birgitta hospitality while she stayed in Naples, and who testified in the canonization process; see Collijn, Acta et processus, pp. 303–52.
4. “Receive divine revelations and visions”: Birgitta here raises the question of false prophets, and of others who were claiming to speak with divine authority. See volume 1, general introduction, pp. 5–6.
Gregory and dissuade him from the opposite course of action. Nevertheless, I, the Lord, shall still prevail over them and bring the pope to Rome against their encouragement. 8 However, whether you will see him come or not, that is not permitted for you to know.”

Chapter 142

On Eleven Misdeeds of Pope Gregory XI

Date: February 1373, Naples

A revelation for the same Pope Gregory given to the bride in Naples and delivered to him by a hermit who had renounced the episcopacy.

1 Holy Father, that person whom Your Holiness knows well was praying in vigil when she fell into a spiritual rapture and fell into contemplation. She saw in spirit the likeness of a throne on which was seated the likeness of a man of inestimable beauty, a lord of unfathomable might. 2 A great multitude of saints and a countless host of angels stood around the throne. A bishop dressed in pontifical regalia stood at some distance before the throne.

3 The lord who was seated on the throne spoke to me and said: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me\(^1\) by my Father. Although I seem to be speaking to you with one mouth, I do not speak alone, for the Father and the Holy Spirit speak with me. We three persons are one in the substance of the divinity.”

4 Then he addressed the bishop and said: “Listen, Pope Gregory, to the eleven points I say to you, and attend carefully to what I tell you! 5 Why do you hate me so? For what reason is your audacity and presumption so great against me? Your worldly court is plundering my heavenly court. In your pride you are robbing me of my sheep. You unjustly extort and filch the ecclesiastical property that belongs to me as well as the possessions of the subjects of my church, and you give them to your temporal friends. 6 You snatch and unjustly receive goods from my poor and distribute them dishonorably to your rich. Accordingly, your audacity and presumption are exceedingly great, for you enter into my court so rashly and show no consideration for what is mine. 7 What have I done to you, Gregory? I patiently allowed you to rise to the pontificate. I explained my will to you beforehand by means of letters\(^2\) transmitted to you by divine revelation from Rome. I admonished you through them for the sake of your soul’s salvation, and I warned you in them about your great losses. 8 How have you repaid me for all these benefits? What are you doing?

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1. “All power... given to me”; cf. Matthew 28:18.
2. “By means of letters”: Birgitta implies there may have been other letters besides those in the present sequence.
about the fact that great pride rules in your court, and insatiable greed and detestable luxury and even the evil ruin of horrible simony?

9 Furthermore, you are stealing and plundering countless souls away from me. You cast into the fire of Gehenna nearly all those who come to your court, simply because you do not take diligent care of the things pertaining to my court, though you are the prelate and shepherd of my sheep. 10 It is therefore your fault, because you do not prudently consider what must be done or corrected for their spiritual salvation.

11 Though I could justly condemn you for all the aforesaid, yet I am again admonishing you out of mercy for the salvation of your soul to come to your see in Rome as soon as you can. I leave the time up to you. 12 Know that the more you delay, the greater will be the decrease in your spiritual and moral development. The sooner you come to Rome, the sooner you will experience an increase of virtue and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the more you will be inflamed with the divine fire of my love. 13 Come, then, and do not delay! Come not with your customary pride and worldly pomp, but with all humility and ardent love! As soon as you have thus come, uproot, pluck out and destroy all the vices of your court! 14 Separate yourself from the counsel of carnal-minded and worldly friends and follow humbly the spiritual counsel of my friends. Approach, then, and be not afraid. Get up like a man and clothe yourself confidently in strength! 15 Start to reform the church that I purchased with my own blood in order that it may be reformed and led back spiritually to its pristine state of holiness, for nowadays more veneration is shown to a brothel than to my Holy Church.

16 If you do not obey this my will, then you can be quite sure that you are going to be condemned by me before all my heavenly court with the same kind of sentence and spiritual justice with which one condemns and punishes a worldly prelate that is to be stripped of his rank. 17 He is publicly divested of his sacred, pontifical garb, defeated, and accursed. He is filled with ignominy and shame. 18 This is what I will do to you. I shall send you away from the glory of heaven. Everything that now gives you peace and honor will then be turned into a curse and your eternal shame. 19 Every demon in hell will snatch a piece of your soul, immortal and indestructible as it is, and you will be filled with an everlasting curse instead of a blessing. For as long as I still tolerate your disobedience, you will still prosper.

20 However, Gregory, my son, I admonish you again to convert to me with humility. Heed my counsel. I am your Father and Creator. If you obey me in what I told you, I will welcome you mercifully like a loving father.

21 Bravely approach the way of justice and you shall prosper. Do not despise the one who loves you. If you obey, I will show you mercy and bless and dress you and adorn you with the precious pontifical regalia of a true pope.

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I shall clothe you with myself in such a way that you will be in me and I in you, and you shall be glorified in eternity."

22 After this had been seen and heard, the vision faded.4

# Chapter 143

Birgitta’s Reply to Pope Gregory XI’s Request for a Sign

DATE: FEBRUARY 1373, ITALY

The fourth revelation sent by Blessed Birgitta to the pope in the month of July in the year of our Lord 1373. She wrote this to a certain hermit1 who had once been bishop and who was then with the pope in Avignon.

1 Our Lord Jesus Christ told me, Reverend Bishop, to write you the following words for you to show to the pope.

2 “The Pope seeks a sign. Tell him that the Pharisees sought a sign and that I answered them that just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and nights,2 so I, the Virgin’s Son, was dead in the earth for three days and nights. After the promised sign, I, God’s Son, suffered, died, and was buried and rose again and ascended into my glory. 3 Thus, Pope Gregory has received the sign of my exhortation to save souls. Let him do with deeds what belongs to my honor. Let him struggle to save souls and return my church to its pristine state and to a better condition. Then he will experience the sign and reward of eternal consolation. 4 He will also have a second sign. If he does not obey my words and come to Italy, he will lose not only temporal goods but also spiritual ones, and he will feel troubled at heart so long as he lives. Though his heart may sometimes seem to have some relief, the remorse of his conscience and his inner troubles will stay with him. 5 The third sign is that I, God, speak miraculously to a woman.3 What is the purpose of this? What is the benefit of it, if not the salvation and good of souls and the reformation of the wicked and the improvement of the good?

6 Concerning the dispute between the pope and Barnabò,4 I answer that it is loathsome to me beyond measure, for numberless souls are in peril because of it. 7 It is therefore my will that they should reach an agreement. Even if the pope were to be expelled from his papacy, it would be better for him to humble himself and come to an agreement, should the occasion present itself, than to

4. “The vision faded”: Clearly an editorial addition, this phrase is not used elsewhere to describe the close of a vision.
1. “A certain hermit,” i.e., Alfonso of Jaén; see note to ch. 140.16.
3. “Speak miraculously to a woman”: probably an allusion to Master Mathias’s prologue; see volume 1, pp. 47–52.
4. “Barnabò,” i.e., Barnabò Visconti (1319–85), ruler of Milan, a soldier and statesman and opponent of the papacy.
allow so many souls to perish in eternal damnation. 8 Concerning the betterment of the kingdom of France, it will not be made known until the pope himself arrives in Italy.

9 It is as though there were a gibbet from which hung a rope that a numberless crowd was pulling to one side while only one man was pulling it to the other. So it obviously is with the damnation of souls. A great many are working on it. 10 This pope should gaze on me alone, though everyone else is dissuading him from coming to Rome and resisting it as much as they can. He should trust in me alone, and I will help him, and none of them will prevail over him. 11 As chicks in a nest raise themselves up and clamor and rejoice when their mother comes, so I shall joyfully run out to meet him and raise him up and honor him in both soul and body.”

12 The Lord spoke again: “Because the pope is in doubt as to whether he should come to Rome for sake of the reestablishment of the peace and of my church, I will that he should come next autumn. Let him know that he can do nothing more pleasing to me than to come to Italy.”

‡ Chapter 144

On the Soul of a Deceased Pope

DATE: AFTER 1350, ITALY

The vision received by the bride of Christ concerning the judgment of the soul of a deceased pope.¹

1 The bride saw a person dressed in a pontifical scapular standing in a house spattered with mud from the streets. The roof the house was almost pressing down on the person’s skull. 2 Black Ethiopians with hooks and other instruments of torture were surrounding the house but were unable to touch the said person, though they filled him with the greatest of terror.

3 Then I heard a voice saying to me: “This is the soul of that pope whom you knew. This house is his spiritual reward. He dealt in worldly affairs, and his reward, therefore, is not yet a shining one, not until he has been cleansed in purgatory and made brighter with spiritual prayers and God’s love. 4 The roof is pressing down upon him. This is a mystical sign, for the roof symbolizes love for God. The wider and higher it is in respect to spiritual things and divine fervor, the greater love one has. 5 Because the love of this soul was ardent for certain worldly affairs and preferred to follow her self-will, the roof, which is bright and high in the case of God’s elect, is too low for her, until it is enlarged by the blood of God’s Son and the intervention of the heavenly court. 6 The soul is dressed in a scapular. This is a sign that he was eager to follow the religious life and his vocation, but his efforts were not great enough to be an example for advanced souls or a model for the perfect.

¹. “Deceased pope”: presumably Urban V.
7 Now, however, you are permitted to know three of the works that he did in his life on account of which he is now being punished. The first was that he was disobedient toward God and his own conscience, for which his conscience felt contrition and remorse. 8 The second is that he gave dispensations in some cases for the sake of carnal affection due to following his own self-will. The third is that he ignored some things that he might have corrected in order not to offend those he loved.

9 Know, however, that this soul is not in the company of those that descend into hell, nor with those that come to the more painful trials of purgatory. Instead, he finds himself with those who day by day hasten nearer to the grace and vision of the majesty of almighty God.”

THIS IS THE END OF THE FOURTH BOOK OF THE HEAVENLY REVELATIONS OF ST. BIRGITTA.
Book V
Figure 4. Frontispiece to Book V in the second printed edition at the press of Anton Koberger, Nuremberg, 1500. Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.
Introduction

In the Liber caelestis, Book V is also known as the Liber quaestionum, and it is exceptional in that it comprises a unified book and takes the form of a quasi-scholastic debate. The vision dates from the 1340s. It describes a ladder situated between heaven and earth, upon which stands a learned monk engaged in conversation with Christ. The dialogue comprises sixteen interrogationes, each divided into quaestiones and responsiones, totaling eighty-six in all. Periodically, comments by the Virgin, Christ, and finally by God, are interspersed into the main dialogue as separate “revelations” on seemingly unrelated subjects.

The prologue, written by Alfonso of Jaén some thirty years later, provides the best circumstantial information for the origins of the book, describing how Birgitta fell into a rapture while on a horse journey to Vadstena, and how her servants had to rouse her from the “divine sweetness” upon arrival at their destination. Afterward, she wrote down in her native tongue what she had heard and seen and her confessor translated it into Latin. The Vita adds the information that the vision lasted one hour.

The Interrogations

The debate contained in the Liber quaestionum may give some flavor of the main philosophical concerns of the Birgittine circle, as well as debate in mid-fourteenth-century Sweden. An approximate division of the interrogations into four major themes, spread across all the interrogations, can be traced. The first deals with the proper use of the created order of the world, and with the role of free will. The second concerns the measure of vicissitude and chance in creation, and
the existence of pain and injustice. The third concerns Christology and aspects of the Incarnation; and the fourth is the justice of God’s providence and divine grace. The general tenet of the answers is that everything in creation is ordered by the will of God and for the greater edification of humankind. The senses and organs are given for their proper use, to be used for spiritual ends, and reason and discipline should prevail in the created order of the world in order that humankind should learn to serve God freely and humbly.

Although the question-and-answer format may call to mind the scholastic quaestio (which involved a disputation on a problem, divided into questions, theses, and antitheses), the resemblance of Book V to contemporary works of formal theology is only superficial. The Bible is not extensively cited in authenticating arguments, nor are many authorities quoted as would be expected in a scholastic tract (although Aristotle is mentioned in int. 13.39). Only limited use is made of syllogisms, dialectic terms, and other standard rhetorical devices, and where they do exist, such devices are mixed into some discursive forms of exposition that are more in keeping with contemporary homiletic style and with the general style of the Revelationes elsewhere.

Whereas the scholastic theologian used technical questions to work out a detailed understanding of the deposit of faith, the questions in Book V proceed from a querulous monk whose purpose is to place Christ under judgment and to accuse rather than to understand. The argument centers on the way God’s good providence is constantly misunderstood and rejected by distrustful and self-centered human beings:

Who can fathom God’s purpose? Given that many seek me not according to knowledge but for the sake of the world, some of them having more fear than is right, others taking too much for granted, still others being proud in their own counsel, therefore I, God, working for the salvation of all, sometimes bring about that which a man fears most; at other times that is taken away which is loved more than is right, while at still other times things that are sought and desired overanxiously are delayed, so that people may fear, love, and acknowledge me as their God always and above all things. (int. 14.24–26)

The book can best be described as a work of Christian apologetics that discusses and defends a number of contemporary themes, many of which fall into the sphere of pastoral theology. In tone and argumentation, the discussion is in keeping with the questioning of the ordinary believer of the time, addressing doubts and unbelief, and attempting to provide Christian deliberations on—the largely existential—questions of faith, such as the presence of evil and discord in the world, the purpose of the natural order, the virtues, the sacraments, Christian doctrine, and the moral life. Surprisingly, perhaps, there is nothing on ecclesiology and the church, which is a common theme elsewhere in the Revelationes, although there is an insistence on justice and legalism, which are met elsewhere in Birgitta’s writings but were little in evidence in devotional writings of the period.
The essential interest of the interrogations lies not in the arguments advanced—they are unremarkable in themselves—but rather in the fact that they emanate from a woman who was untrained in formal theology, but who nonetheless succeeds in presenting a genuine debate about faith and doctrine. Her learning was most probably derived from continual discussions within her circle and with her confessors, as well as from her listening to the liturgy, catechetical instruction, and preaching in the vernacular.  

The Monk on the Ladder

The cleric standing on a ladder is the central image of this book. From the biblical tradition of Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:12–13)—which may be Birgitta’s main allusion—the ladder was a common motif associated with ascending or descending movement and illustrating progress in virtues, the purification of sin, and the union with God through vision of him.  

The monk in the vision in Book V, however, does not fit into this pattern of ascent through virtue, on a “scale of perfection” toward God, probably because, in Birgitta’s eyes at least, he was an iniquitous man who did not deserve to be seen ascending into heaven. He is stationary upon the ladder.  

It is only in int. 16 that the inert dialogue reaches a dramatic climax. Christ, who, up to this point, has been described as “mild and patient” (int. 12.40), and has, as it were, allowed himself to be put in the dock by the monk, now runs out of patience and comments that the man’s questions are based on his wickedness (int. 16.6). The monk acknowledges that although he has the ability to distinguish between good and evil, he allows his senses to govern his reason, for which, he is told, his conscience must be his judge (int. 16.34). In an aside to Birgitta, Christ says people do not resist temptations as they ought (int. 16.35); and the arrogant monk is unfavorably compared to Mathias of Linköping (int. 16.36–37). At the end, the Holy Spirit tells Birgitta that the man will die (int. 16.50–51).

The querulous monk expresses an inner conflict between his senses and his reason, and admits that his love of transient things leads him to allow his reason to be overcome by his desire for the world. He has difficulty in accepting a world full of imperfections, and implies that a perfect God should not have created a world so manifestly imperfect. He is also frustrated by the limits God has imposed on man’s knowledge; and he is a skeptic, who impertinently and arrogantly questions everything that has been ordained by God and who cannot accept that knowledge is hidden from man. His principal fault, in Birgitta’s eyes, is his intellectual presumptuousness, and he is an embodiment of Birgitta’s dislike of mere intellectuals who do not accept the limitations of human knowledge.

This very sudden condemnation in int. 16 strikes a personal tone, and suggests that this really was, in the phrase of the prologue, “a man still alive and known to Birgitta.” However, his identity has been judiciously obscured, and it is unclear whether he was indeed a monk, friar, or even a devout layman. He is
normally referred to in Latin as “religiosus” (Sw. “mwnker” [monk]).

Katherina Ulfsdotter’s testimony refers to him as “frater,” which might suggest a mendicant friar. The iconographical depictions show him in a variety of ecclesiastical dress, probably as a reflection of the different circumstances in which they were produced. In the earliest cycle of Neapolitan manuscripts he is depicted as a Dominican friar, wearing a black cope over his white tunic, whereas in the early fifteenth-century “Eriksberg” manuscript, he appears to be wearing a white Cistercian habit; and in the later, stylized, German woodcuts, he appears as a Benedictine, wearing a flowing tunic, girdle, scapular, and biretta.

The protagonist of the vision, then, was a learned cleric, close to, or even within, the Birgittine circle, a man of high birth, handsome, and wealthy (int. 7.2–3), who was still alive at the time Birgitta had her vision in the 1340s. Because of the centrality of this vision in Birgitta’s spiritual development, and because the attack on this man is so sustained and his fate so uncompromising, there has been much discussion as to his identity. The name most frequently associated with him is that of Mathias of Linköping. Some scholars have suggested that Mathias may have helped to write down the vision, while others have suggested that the protagonist of the vision was none other than Mathias himself, or else someone intellectually close to him.

Mathias’s relationship with Birgitta at the end of the 1340s is unclear, and there may have been a parting of their ways after the unsuccessful mission to Pope Clement VI in Avignon (see further volume 1, p. xix); Mathias may have joined the crusade to the Baltic and died, probably of the Black Death, in 1349, and was buried at the Dominican monastery in Stockholm; Birgitta, meanwhile, was preparing to leave Sweden in 1349 for Rome. At the same time, he had been her confessor and supporter during the 1340s, and her own theological outlook must have derived in no small part from her acquaintance with him. Mathias was without question Sweden’s foremost theologian of his time. Anders Piltz summarizes Mathias’s theology thus:

Mathias turned to Sacred Scripture, in order to regain the true theology of old. . . . His strongly anti-Aristotelian manifesto, inspired by Bonaventuran “narrative” theology, provides a key how to understand his message. He is, in the first place, a director of preachers; by means of God’s revealed Word in all its aspects, he wants to prepare them for the task of proclaiming the Gospel; to teach, to warn, to attract, to affect their listeners. Contemporary with Nicholas of Lyra, Mathias represents an impressive and consistent effort to revive biblical theology in the golden age of logic, at a time when theologians ran the risk of losing contact with the biblical littera in its own context.

The sudden, and seemingly unnecessary, introduction of Mathias into int. 16.36–37, where he is contrasted with the monk on the ladder, might suggest
that his name had started to be associated with the vision during Birgitta’s lifetime, and this comparison might have been a disclaimer inserted purposely to clear his name and to protect both his and Birgitta’s reputations. Equally, of course, the statement might be intended in a positive light, to make a comparison between Mathias’s robust resistance to heresy and the inquisitive monk’s intellectual arrogance; statements in praise of Mathias’s withstanding of heresy and handling of temptations, indeed, are found elsewhere in the *Revelationes*, e.g., Book I 3.

The Revelations

The interrogations are punctuated by thirteen revelations that are interspersed at more or less equal intervals throughout the text. Although many of these must have been part of the original vision (Alfonso suggests as much in his prologue), some are repeated or echoed elsewhere and may be later additions. For instance, a more elaborate, but similar, version of rev. 8 occurs in Book VI 19, which, according to the addition, concerns a Benedictine monk at the monastery of St. Lawrence in Rome.

Some of the revelations are very short. Revelation 1 outlines ten outward and inward virtues worth pursuing, and rev. 2 is on the necessity of bitterness before sweetness may be tasted. Several are autobiographical: Revelation 5 warns Birgitta about temptations and the acceptance of loss and criticism, and it encourages her to remain steadfast. Revelation 10 is about her interpretation of her divine messages and the fulfillment of prophecies. There are some revelations that contain a parable or likeness, such as rev. 4, on three different types of physician, or rev. 6 on the marriage of Jacob and Leah, which is used to illustrate how trials come unexpectedly in life. Revelation 7 uses the image of an indoor fire to demonstrate the necessity of confession, and rev. 9 uses the image of a poor house in which Birgitta, metaphorically, was brought up. Revelation 11 describes a bitter drink that relates to the growth of Birgitta’s spirituality, while rev. 12 compares two men, and gives a parable to explain why God’s words may not yet grow and bear fruit in the kingdom.

Revelation 4 is the only revelation in which Birgitta is not directly addressed, and it contains a eulogy of the Virgin. It is placed among the interrogations at the point where the dialogue moves from questions about the creation, to questions relating to the Incarnation. Its veneration of the Virgin may echo the Song of Solomon and St. Bernard’s spiritual commentary on it in his *Cantica Canticorum*, and the revelation is likely to have been inspired by other popular Marian literature of the time.

Revelation 13, the last in the book, is an important revelation that is referred to on several occasions throughout the canonization documents: in the *Vita*, in the deposition of Prior Petrus, and in the prologue to Book VII. The revelation may be read as a fulfillment of *Extravagantes* 66 in which Birgitta is given the assurance that she will see the places where the passion took place;
and Book VII 14–15 and 21–24 describe the actual fulfillment of the prophecy during Birgitta’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The first section is a parable about a servant and his master, echoing several New Testament nature parables, and emphasizing the need to wait until the time is ripe for harvesting. The servant wonders what he should do between spring and harvest, and the master describes five places in which five items—a vessel, a lion, a lamb, a snake, and an eagle—are to be found. The third part of the revelation contains an exposition on the symbolism of these objects, using juxtaposing contrasts: The vessel is the Virgin, for example, in whom there was not so much uncleanness as to fit on the point of a needle, “But the vessel was not clean in the sense that it came from the race of Adam and was born of sinners, though she herself was conceived without sin in order that my Son might be born of her without sin.”

Birgitta alludes here to what would later become the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which states that by a special gift of grace, Mary was kept free from the stain of original sin. Mary’s preservation from original sin was commonly held in the Middle Ages, although it was debated how it occurred, and when. Some thought that Mary was sanctified after conception at the time of the insertion of her soul into her body whereas Birgitta seems to side with those who held that Mary was conceived without original sin.

The remainder of the revelation contains an explanation of the four animals mentioned here. The lion, the lamb, the snake, and the eagle are Messianic titles, and they are traditionally associated with places and points in the life of Christ; possibly they were known through St. Gregory’s commentary on Job 39:5 where comparisons are drawn with a lamb, a lion, and a serpent. Birgitta’s associations of Christ with suffering, rather than resurrection, are of course characteristic of her incarnational theology and the spirituality of her time. The lion in Christian iconography is associated with strength, dignity, and victory, and thus Christ is more often described as the lion of the resurrection than of the nativity, as here. The lamb is the antithesis of the lion in the Old Testament (e.g., Jeremiah 11:19 and Isaiah 53:7), but in the New Testament it is the type of the crucified Christ (e.g., John 1:29). The emphasis on the snake is less on the place of the resurrection than on the ignominy of death before the resurrection (cf. John 3:14), and thus the snake is connected with suffering for the salvation of humankind. The eagle plays the role of heavenly messenger, and is depicted by the church fathers as a spirit of prophecy and a symbol of ascension and contemplation.

The Swedish “re-translation” deviates from the Latin tradition with regard to the revelations in Book V. Revelations 3, 4, 8, 10, and 11 are omitted. Furthermore, the Swedish tradition includes some revelations that are not associated with Book V in the Latin tradition at all. They include a paraphrase of parts of Book IV 141–42, which is about the slackness of the papacy; and two manuscripts have three further chapters, containing Swedish translations of Extravagantes 56, 32, and 31, which contain the vision in which Birgitta sees her husband, Ulf, in purgatory, an instruction to donate money to Vadstena abbey, and a description of the interior of the abbey.
Interpretations of Book V

Because of the centrality of Book V within Birgitta’s Revelationes, many scholars have offered interpretations of it. Hjalmar Sundén sees the book, in Jungian terms, as the expression of an inner struggle of Birgitta’s own spiritual self, a maturing process through which she works out her own theological position, struggles with unorthodox ideas, and breaks free from her intellectual dependence on her confessor. He discusses the symbols contained in rev. 13, and concludes that “the monk-on-the-ladder . . . is one aspect of Mathias, the doubting Mathias. . . . But at the same time the monk represents . . . a side of Birgitta herself, something that stirs in her subconscious, and that is personified in the figure of the monk.”20 Looking at the book more from a theological perspective, Anders Piltz argues that “whoever the monk is, we can assume that it is Birgitta’s own questions that he is formulating. He represents the subconscious expression of the party of opposition that can be found in every believer or doubter.”21 Helga Koch sees the discussion in terms of a struggle between good and evil, and the monk as Birgitta’s darker side in a struggle between darkness and light, or an angel and a demon.22 Tore Nyberg likewise views the book as a process of self-purification, arguing that the revelations interspersed within it play an integrated role in an overall trinitarian structure, which moves from the creation, through salvation, to sanctification.23

A further interpretation can be suggested here.24 The interrogations can be read as an embodiment of all that Birgitta finds distasteful in existing monastic orders, while the revelations that are interwoven into the dialogue between the iniquitous monk and Christ can be taken as a piecemeal spiritual biography of her early widowhood. She is given comfort and encouragement in general terms in revs. 1, 2, 6, and 7. There are comments on her transition to a spiritual life in revs. 5, 9, and 11, which appear to refer to the physical and material side of marriage, encouraging her to put all worldly things behind her. Further, there are implicit comments on the founding of a new monastic order, in her criticism of sinful clerics (revs. 3, 8, and 12), and in her veneration of the Virgin, who, of course, takes a central place in the Birgittine order (rev. 4). The final revelation, rev. 13, expresses her impatience for a new order to be founded, and she is told that the kingdom is not yet ready and that she will first go to the Holy Land. Thus, on the one hand, in the interrogations she is condemning the intellectual stance taken by the monk on the ladder, and thereby she condemns all like-minded men in holy orders; while on the other hand, in the revelations she is articulating a wish to find a practical solution to the slackness of existing monasticism by proposing to found a new order of her own devising.

The Liber quaestionum is at once a personal and a general document: it is a testimony to Birgitta’s own attitude toward contemporary monasticism, while at the same time it provides an unrivaled insight into some of the philosophical and eschatological issues that concerned her and her circle. The book is central to the Revelationes: literally, in its positioning among the other books, and
ideologically, because it conveys a sustained theological discourse in a manner that is not found elsewhere in the Birgittine corpus. It articulates a genuinely searching and reflective debate—by a woman—that encapsulates and embodies ordinary Christian life and morals in mid-fourteenth-century Sweden.

NOTES

1. It is unclear exactly when the book was first called the Liber quaestionum, whether it was during her lifetime, or at some point during the canonization proceedings; see further Bergh, Sancta Birgitta. Revelaciones. Book V, pp. 13–16.


3. For studies that touch on theological debate in mid-fourteenth-century Sweden, see Brilioth, Svenska kyrkans historia; Lindroth, Svensk lärdomshistoria, pp. 33–115; Kilstöm, Den katetetiska undervisningen; and Härdelin, Världen som yta och fönster.

4. In 1909, Richard Steffen observed that “Book V, which might well be her own learned work, testifies less to learning than to quick-wittedness, vacillating between shrewdness and sharp insight; but of real learning there is scarcely more than what might have been acquired through conversation, or that formed part of the whole theological atmosphere of the Middle Ages.” Steffen, Den heliga Birgitta, p. xxxvii (our translation). See further on this “unlearned” style in female mystics, Bynum, Fragmentation, p. 196.

5. St. Benedict associates the ladder with spiritual ascent in ch. 7 of his Rule, a work that Birgitta is certain to have known, at least from the time when she lived at the Cistercian monastery at Alvastra, and was conceiving plans for her own monastic order. Another work that Birgitta knew was the eleventh-century Speculum Virginum, which distinguished the five degrees of virginity (see Extravagantes 96). See further Mews, Listen Daughter: The Speculum Virginum. Other mystics such as Raymond Lull, Walter Hilton, and Jan van Ruysbroek also use the ladder as an image in their visions. St. Bernard in the twelfth century enumerated the twelve steps of humility and pride, and in the same century Honorius Augustodunensis wrote glosses on the steps of charity. Passing allusions are made to ladders elsewhere in the Revelaciones. In Extravagantes 93, humility is compared to a ladder of ascent toward God; and in Book IV 58 Christ tells of seven rungs on a ladder that represent his different gifts to priests, and using similar arguments to those in Book V, he laments the way priests are currently abusing these gifts.

6. Note that the prologue states that he is “mid-way,” whereas int. 1 suggests that he is “high upon a ladder”: The ladder may be seen as a symbol of pride, and his “high” position on the ladder might suggest that the monk had achieved a high rank in his career.

7. In other books there are frequent examples of other intellectual schoolmen whose learning Birgitta does not like (see, for example, Fogelqvist, Apostasy and Reform, pp. 70–72, 202–4).

8. The Swedish prologue has “renliifuis man” [chaste man], perhaps suggesting someone who had taken a vow of chastity, or any devout Christian, or more specifically, a member of a monastic or mendicant order. See further M. Hammarström, Glossarium till Finlands och Sveriges medeltidsurkunder; Söderwall; and Thors, Den kristna terminologin i fornsvenskan.

10. See further Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, pp. 65–68, 110, especially plates 2, 79, 80. The wall painting of the parish church of Knutby (Uppland) is based on the Gh edition; see Lindgren, *Bilden av Birgitta*, p. 109. Most of the illustrations place the monk halfway up the ladder of about sixteen rungs, which might suggest an association between each rung and each particular interrogation.

11. On these interpretations, see further Furuhagen, *Furstinnan av Närke*, p. 95; Jørgensen, *Saint Bridget of Sweden* 1, pp. 232–41; and Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna*, p. 19; Stolpe, *Birgitta i Sverige*, p. 179 writes: “probably a liberal theologian at Alvastra, where Birgitta had some enemies” (our translation). An association has also been made with Ragnvald, the Cistercian abbot of Alvastra (Steffen, *Den heliga Birgittas uppenbarelser*, p. 85).


14. The main protagonists of belief in the Immaculate Conception were the Franciscans. See Schmid, *Birgitta och hennes uppenbarelser*, pp. 95–97.

15. It has been suggested that Birgitta is actually describing a maculate rather than immaculate conception in this passage, and that she may not fully have understood the full theological sense of the doctrine; see Nixon, *Mary’s Mother*, pp. 75–76. Nixon also suggests (with reference to the work of Anna Nilsén, “The Immaculate Conception,” and Mereth Lindgren, “De heliga änkorarna”) that Birgitta may have been trying to reconcile marital sexuality with sanctity. See Book I 9; III 8; IV 19, 108; VI 49, 55, 56, SA 10–12, QO I, Ex. 94, where Birgitta also alludes to the doctrine.


17. See, for example, Gregory the Great’s *Homilies on Ezechiel*, lib. 1, hom. 4 (§ 2–3, on Ezechiel 1:10), ed. Adriaen, pp. 48–49.

18. Revelation 3 occurs as Book IV 146 of the Swedish text.

19. In the Old Swedish tradition, all the revelations are placed together at the end of the interrogations, although this arrangement does not reflect their original ordering. Furthermore, more than any other book of the revelations, the translation is paraphrased (which makes it hard to compare the Swedish with the Latin text linguistically). The paragraphs on heresy in int. 16.26, 31, 36–37 are omitted in the Swedish translation, perhaps to shield the nuns at Vadstena for whom the translation was intended. Similarly, certain of the passages throughout the book that deal with sexual matters (e.g., int. 3.4) are omitted or rendered euphemistically. See, further, on the nature of the paraphrase, Morris, *Book V*.


21. Piltz, “Medeltidskyrkans genrer,” p. 88 (our translation); “party of opposition (“oppositionspartiet”) is a metaphor taken by Piltz from political discourse.


24. See further Morris, “Från hustru till klostergrundare.”
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Book V

PROLOGUE

HERE BEGINS THE PROLOGUE TO BOOK FIVE OF THE HEAVENLY REVELATIONS, WHICH IS CALLED THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS

1 Book Five of the Heavenly Revelations of Christ to blessed Birgitta of the kingdom of Sweden is rightly entitled the Book of Questions because it proceeds by way of questions to which Christ the Lord gives wonderful answers. 2 It was revealed to the lady in a singular manner, as she and her confessors have often testified explicitly. 3 Once it happened that she was going by horse one day to her castle in Vadstena along with several of her household who were also on horseback. While she was riding, she began to lift up her mind to God in prayer. 4 Immediately, she fell into a spiritual rapture and continued on as though somehow outside herself and separated from her bodily senses, suspended in an ecstasy of mental contemplation. 5 She saw in spirit a ladder fixed firmly in the earth, the top of which was touching heaven. At its top in heaven she saw the Lord Jesus Christ sitting on a wonderful throne like a Judge in the act of judgment. 6 At his feet stood the Virgin Mary, and surrounding the throne was a countless host of angels and a vast multitude of saints. 7 Lady Birgitta saw a certain monk midway up the ladder, a man whom she recognized and who was still alive, a learned scholar in the science of theology but full of guile and devilish wickedness. 8 With his most impatient and agitated bearing he seemed more like a devil than a humble monk. 9 For the lady could see all the inner thoughts and feelings of the monk’s heart and how he disclosed them to Christ the Judge seated on the throne through his uncontrolled and agitated way of questioning, as follows below. 10 Lady Birgitta then saw and heard in spirit how Christ the Judge, with a meek and gentle bearing, responded to those questions briefly one by one with utmost wisdom, and how the Virgin Mary, our Lady, spoke a few words now and then to Lady Birgitta, as this book will explain below in greater detail.

11 In that one moment Lady Birgitta received this whole book in her mind in one and the same revelation. As she was now approaching the castle, her servants took hold of the horse’s bridle and then began to shake her gently and

1. “To her castle in Vadstena” renders “ad suum castrum Watzsteni”; thus also Collijn, Acta et processus, pp. 321, 522, but “ad villam Wastenam” [to the village of Vadstena], p. 86. The pronoun “her” is likely to be an anachronism, as Birgitta is not known to have owned a dwelling in Vadstena. On 1 May 1346 King Magnus Eriksson bequeathed his palace at Vadstena to be converted for monastic use, and as a place for royal burial; eventually these buildings were converted to the Birgittine abbey, but they were not a personal donation to Birgitta. See further Fritz, “Kung Magnus Erikssons planer.”

2. “Outside herself...mental contemplation”: Alfonso’s prologue contains one of the few descriptions of Birgitta in ecstasy; for further discussion, see Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, pp. 54–71.
to waken her, as it were, from her rapture. 12 When she came to herself again, she felt terribly sad over the loss of such divine sweetness. 13 The Book of Questions remained thus effectively fixed in her heart and memory, as though it had all been carved on a marble tablet. 14 She wrote it down in her own language straightaway, and then her confessor translated it into the literary language, just as he had been accustomed to translating the other books of revelations.

## Interrogation I

**Questions on the Mouth, Eyes, Ears, Hands, and Feet**

I saw a throne in heaven on which sat the Lord Jesus Christ as Judge. At his feet sat the Virgin Mary. Surrounding the throne was a host of angels and a countless multitude of saints. 2 A certain monk, a great scholar of theology, stood high up on a rung of a ladder that was fixed in the earth and whose top reached up to heaven. With an impatient and agitated bearing, as though full of wickedness and guile, he put questions to the Judge: 3 First question. “O Judge, I ask you: You gave me a mouth. May I not say what I please?” 4 Second question. “You gave me eyes. May I not look at what I like with them?” 5 Third question. “You gave me ears. Why should I not listen to what I please with them?” 6 Fourth question. “You gave me hands. Why should I not do what I want with them?” 7 Fifth question. “You gave me feet. Why should I not walk where I wish with them?” 8 Christ’s answer to the first question. Seated on the throne, the Judge, whose bearing was meek and gentle, answered him, saying: “Friend, I gave you a mouth in order rationally to speak words beneficial to your soul and body as well as words for my glory.” 9 Answer to the second question. “Second, I gave you eyes that you might see the evils you must flee and the healthful things you must preserve.”

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3. “In her own language,” i.e., in Swedish. The *Viita* and the testimonies of Prior Petrus, Katherina Ulfsdotter, Magnus Petri, and Alfonso make reference to the recording of the visions in Swedish (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 84, 270, 328, 384, 509, 512, 518). 4. “Literary language,” i.e., Latin. According to Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 523, the vision was written down by Prior Petrus, “et statim ipsa fecit, quod idem testis loquens illa omnia scriberet, de quo factus est liber questionum” [and immediately she made the witness (i.e., Prior Petrus) write down everything as she spoke, from which the Book of Questions has been made]. 1. “A throne...Christ as Judge”; cf. 2 Chronicles 18:18; Apocalypse 4:2. 2. “Friend” is used throughout the interrogations by Christ when he addresses the monk. Christ called Judas “friend” at the betrayal (Matthew 26:50), an association that might have an intended overtone here. Cf. also volume 1, p. 169 on Birgitta’s varied use of the term *amicus Dei*.
10 Answer to the third question. “Third, I gave you ears that you might hear that which pertains to truth and goodness.”

11 Answer to the fourth question. “Fourth, I gave you hands that you might use them to do that which is necessary for the body but not harmful for the soul.”

12 Answer to the fifth question. “Fifth, I gave you feet that you might leave behind the love of the world and go toward your soul’s rest and love and toward me, your Creator and Redeemer.”

# Interrogation 2

Questions on Temporal Goods, Free Will, Justice, and Tribulation

First question. Again the monk appeared on his ladder\(^1\) as before, saying: “O Christ the Judge, you bore the most painful suffering by your own free will. Why then should I not possess honor and be proud in the world?”

2 Second question.\(^2\) “You gave me temporal goods. Why then should I not own what I want?”

3 Third question. “Why did you give me the limbs of my body, if I may not move and exercise them at will?”

4 Fourth question. “Why did you give law and justice\(^3\) if not for seeking revenge?”

5 Fifth question. “You let us have quiet and rest, but why did you arrange for us to experience weariness and tribulation?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, human pride is so long endured as to exalt humility and show forth my goodness. And since pride was not created by me but invented by the devil, it must be shunned, because it leads to hell. But humility must be kept, because it leads to heaven. I, God, taught this by my word and example.”

8 Answer to the second question. “I have given and conceded temporal goods to people in order that they might make rational use of them and exchange created goods for something uncreated, that is, for me, their Lord and Creator, by praising and honoring me for my good creation and by not living in accordance with the desires of the flesh.”

9 Answer to the third question. “A person is given the limbs of the body in order that the soul might see in them a certain likeness of the virtues and so that they might be the soul’s instruments for duty and virtue.”

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1. “On his ladder” renders “in gradu suo” (strictly, “on his step”), which is a recurrent phrase at the opening of an interrogation; but 16.32 has “in gradu scale” [on the step of the ladder]; cf. Sw. “stegha” [ladder].

2. The questions and answers in Latin from this point on are introduced with the word “Item” [Again], which we have not translated. It is quite possible that Birgitta herself used “item” to subdivide her original recording of the vision. See Bergh, Book V, p. 70n4, where he also observes that in her letter in Swedish to her son Birger she uses “item” five times; see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 5, pp. 140–41.

3. “Give law and justice”; Sw. adds “to me.”

4. “I, God”: Here, as elsewhere, God is used synonymously for Christ.
10 Answer to the fourth question. “Justice and law were indeed established by me so that they might be fulfilled with supernatural charity and compassion and so that godly unity and harmony might be cemented among humans.”

11 Answer to the fifth question. “I gave people bodily rest and quiet in order to strengthen the weakness of the flesh and to endow the soul with fortitude and virtue.
12 But because the flesh sometimes grows thoughtlessly insolent, one must cheerfully endure tribulations and all other such corrective measures.”

# Interrogation 3

Questions on Sexual Pleasure and Earthly Delight

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his ladder as before saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why did you give us the bodily senses, if we are not to move and live according to carnal feelings?”

2 Second question. “And why did you give us the means of carnal sustenance, such as food and other delectable things, if we are not to live in order to sate the carnal appetite?”

3 Third question. “Why did you give us free will, if we are not to follow our own wishes?”

4 Fourth question. “Why did you give men and women the seed of intercourse and a sexual nature, if the seed is not to be spilled according to the carnal appetite?”

5 Fifth question. “Why did you give us a heart and a will, if not to choose that which tastes sweetest and to love the more enjoyable delights?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, I gave humans sense and understanding in order that they might meditate on and imitate the ways of life and shun the ways of death.”

7 Answer to the second question. “I gave food and other carnal necessities for the moderate sustenance of the body and so that people might exercise the virtues of the soul with greater strength without growing weak from excessive consumption.”

8 Answer to the third question. “I gave humans free will so that they might give up their own will for me, their God, and thus obtain a greater reward.”

9 Answer to the fourth question. “I gave them the seed of intercourse so that it might germinate at the right place and in the right way and bear fruit for a just and rational cause.”

10 Answer to the fifth question. “I gave humans a heart so that they might keep within it me, their God, who am everywhere and incomprehensible, and so that the thought of me should be their delight.”

Revelation 1

A Revelation on Five Attributes That Birgitta Should Possess

The first revelation in the Book of Questions made to Lady Birgitta by the Virgin Mary, in which the Virgin Mary informs her of five virtues that she ought to have within herself and of five others without.

1 The Mother speaks: “Daughter, you should have five attributes within you and five without. First without: a mouth pure from backbiting, ears closed to vain speech, chaste eyes, hands busy with good works, and the avoidance of dealings with the world. 2 Within you should have these five: loving God fervently, desiring him wisely, distributing temporal goods reasonably with a just and upright intention, fleeing from the world humbly, and awaiting my promises steadfastly and patiently.”

Interrogation 4

Questions on Worldly Wisdom, Honor, and Power

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his ladder as before saying: “O Judge, why should I seek the wisdom of God when I have the wisdom of the world?”

2 Second question. “Why should I mourn and weep when I have worldly joy and honor in plenty?”

3 Third question. “Tell me: why or in what way should I rejoice in the affliction of the flesh?”

4 Fourth question. “Why should I be afraid, when I have the strength of my own power?”

5 Fifth question. “Why should I obey others, if I have control over my own will?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, whoever is wise concerning the world is blind concerning me, his God. Therefore, in order to obtain my divine wisdom, one must seek it diligently and humbly.”

7 Answer to the second question. “Whoever has worldly honors and joy is troubled by various cares and gets entangled in bitter situations that lead to hell. 8 In order not to be turned aside from heaven’s way, one must be piously solicitous and pray and weep.”

8 Answer to the third question. “It is also very profitable to rejoice in the affliction and infirmity of the body, because my mercy comes to those

1. The five attributes echo the five “senses” mentioned in Int. 1; cf. Mathias, who uses a similar comparison of the five senses as the “portae cordis” [doors of the heart] in Homo Conditus (see Piltz, Magister Mathias. “Homo Conditus,” pp. 54–55). Mathias’s writings are a likely source for Book V, but they have never been studied systematically.

9. “One must be piously solicitous and pray and weep”: These are typical fourteenth-century expressions of private asceticism; see further, for example, Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls.
who are afflicted in body, and by my mercy they approach eternal life more easily.”

10 Answer to the fourth question. “Furthermore, whosoever is strong is strong because of me, and I am stronger than he. Therefore one must be ever fearful lest strength be taken away.”

11 Answer to the fifth question. “Whosoever holds his free choice in his hands should be fearful and should realize in truth that nothing so easily leads to eternal punishment as self-will without a leader. 2 Accordingly, anyone who relinquishes his or her own will to me, his God, in obedience to me, shall have heaven without punishment.”

# Interrogation 5

Questions on Danger and Pain

First question. Again the monk appeared on his ladder as before saying: “O Judge, why did you create worms that are harmful and useless?”

2 Second question. “Why did you create wild beasts that are also harmful to humankind?”

3 Third question. “Why do you let sickness and pain into bodies?”

4 Fourth question. “Why do you endure the wickedness of wicked judges who scourge and harass their underlings like purchased slaves?”

5 Fifth question. “Why is the human body afflicted even at the point of death?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, as God and Judge I have created heaven and earth and all that are in them, 2 and yet nothing without cause nor without some likeness to spiritual things. 3 Just as the souls of holy people resemble the holy angels who live and are happy, so too the souls of the unrighteous become like the demons who are eternally dying. 8 Therefore, since you asked why I created worms, I answer you that I created them in order to show forth the manifold power of my wisdom and goodness. 4 For, although they can be harmful, nevertheless they do no harm without my permission and only when sin demands it, so that man, who scorns to submit to his superior, may bemoan his capacity to be afflicted by lesser creatures, and also in order that he may know himself to be nothing without me—whom even the irrational creatures serve and they all stand at my beck and call.”

2. “Without a leader” renders “sine ductore”; cf. Sw. “Vthan mich ledhare” [without me as leader].
2. “I have created heaven and earth and all that are in them”; cf. Genesis 1:1.
3. “Without some likeness to spiritual things”: Birgitta echoes the common medieval view of the world as a reflection, seeing constant comparisons between physical and spiritual things; see also the note to int. 15.9–10.
4. “The manifold power of my wisdom and goodness”: Klockars, Birgitta och böckerna, pp. 219–20, compares this passage with a similar passage in Honorius Augustodunensis Elucidarium (PL 172 col. 1117), and speculates about this work as a possible background source for Book V.
10 Answer to the second question. “As to why I created wild beasts, I answer: All things that I have created are not only good but very good\(^5\) and have been created either for the use or trial of humankind or for the use of other creatures and in order that humans might so much the more humbly serve their God inasmuch as they are more blessed than all the rest. 11 However, beasts do harm in the temporal world for a twofold reason. First, so that the wicked may be corrected and beware, and so that wicked people might come to understand through their torments that they must obey me, their superior. Second, they also do harm to good people with a view to their advancement in virtue and for their purification. And because the human race rebelled against me, their God, through sin, all those creatures that had been subject to humans have consequently rebelled against them.”

13 Answer to the third question. “As to why sickness comes upon the body, I answer that this happens both as a strong warning and because of the vice of incontinence and excess, in order that people may learn spiritual moderation and patience by restraining the flesh.”

14 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why wicked judges are tolerated, this is for the purification of others and also because of my patience, in order that, just as gold is purified by fire,\(^6\) so too, by the evil of scoundrels, souls may be purified and instructed and held back from doing what they should not do. 15 Furthermore, I patiently tolerate the wicked so as to separate the devil’s chaff from the wheat of the good,\(^7\) and in order to fulfill their wishes according to my hidden, divine justice.”

16 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why the body suffers pain in death, it is just that a person should be punished by means of that in which she or he has sinned. If she sins through inordinate lust, it is right for her to be punished with proportionate bitterness and pain. 17 For that reason, death begins for some people on earth and will last without end in hell, while death ends for others in purgatory and everlasting joy commences.”

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Revelation 2

A Revelation about the Bitterness That Comes before Divine Sweetness

The second revelation in the Book of Questions, in which the Virgin Mary speaks to blessed Birgitta and tells her that a person who wishes to taste divine sweetness must first endure bitterness.

The Mother speaks: “Which of the saints had the sweetness of the Spirit without first experiencing bitterness? Therefore, a person who longs for sweetness should not run away from things that are bitter.”

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5. “Not only good but very good”; cf. Genesis 1:31.
6. “Gold is purified by fire”; cf. Proverbs 17:3; 1 Peter 1:7; Apocalypse 3:18; cf. the note to int. 15.36 below.
Interrogation 6

Questions on the Injustices That Occur in the World

1 First question. Again he appeared on his ladder as before, saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why does one infant emerge alive from the mother’s womb and obtain baptism, while another, having received a soul, dies in the mother’s belly?”

2 Second question. “Why do many setbacks occur to a righteous person, while an unrighteous gets everything he or she wishes?”

3 Third question. “Why do disease, hunger, and other bodily afflictions occur?”

4 Fourth question. “Why does death come so unexpectedly that it can very rarely be foreseen?”

5 Fifth question. “Why do you allow men full of deliberate wrath and envy to go to war in a spirit of vengeance?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, your inquiries are not made out of love but are made through my permission. So I answer you through the likeness of words. 7 You ask why one infant dies in the mother’s belly while another emerges alive. 8 There is a reason. All the strength of the child’s body comes, of course, from the seed of its father and mother; however, if it is conceived without due strength because of some weakness of its father or mother, it dies quickly. 9 As a result of the negligence or carelessness of the parents as well as of my divine justice, many times it happens that what was joined together comes apart quickly. 10 Yet a soul is not brought to the harshest punishment for this reason, however little time it had for giving life to the body, but, rather, it comes to the mercy that is known to me. 11 Just as the sun shining into a house is not seen as it is in its beauty—only those who look into the sky see its rays—so too the souls of such children, though they do not see my face for lack of baptism, are nevertheless closer to my mercy than to punishment, but not in the same way as my elect.”

12 Answer to the second question. “As to why do setbacks occur to the righteous, I answer: My righteousness is such that each righteous person obtains what he or she desires. However, that person is not righteous who does not desire to suffer setbacks for the sake of obedience and for the perfection of righteousness, and who does not do good deeds for his or her neighbor in godly love. 13 My friends, reflecting on the things that I, their God and Redeemer, have done and promised to them, and observing what evil there is in the world, willingly pray for worldly setbacks rather than for success as an act of prudence.

1. “Why do many setbacks occur...everything he or she wishes”; cf. Jeremiah 12:1.

2. “As a result...the mercy that is known to me”; the sense is not wholly clear. Birgitta is addressing the question of whether entry to heaven is restricted to those who have been baptized (see John 3:5), and she alludes to the popular solution of a marginal place where there is neither sight of God nor punishment; see further for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae 57, 3a Q 66–69, especially 68.11, on whether a child still in the womb can be baptized.
and for the sake of my honor and their own salvation and as a precaution against sin. 14 So I let trouble befall them. Although some people endure it less patiently than others, still I do not let it happen without a reason, and I stand by them in their trouble. 15 It is like a son who is chastised by a loving mother in boyhood and little knows how to thank her, since he does not understand the reason for the reproof. However, when he reaches the age of discretion he thanks his mother because, due to her disciplining him, he was led away from evil ways and grew accustomed to good manners and discipline. I treat my chosen ones similarly. 16 They commit their will to me and love me above all things. Then they experience troubles for a time and, although they may not fully understand my blessings at present, I am doing what is best for them in the future. 17 On the contrary, because they do not care about righteousness and are not afraid to inflict injury on others, and because they pray for transient things and love earthly delights, the impious prosper for a time and are free from distress due to my justice so that they may not commit further sin should setbacks befall them. 18 However, not all bad people get the things they desire, and this is in order that they may realize that it is in my power to give good things to whomever I want, even to the ungrateful, though they do not deserve it.”

19 Answer to third question. “As to why disease and hunger come, I answer: It is written in the law that one who commits theft should repay more than he has taken. 20 Since ungrateful people receive my gifts and misuse them and do not pay me my due honor, I therefore exact more bodily affliction in the present in order that their souls may be spared in the future. 21 At times I also spare the body but punish people in and by means of that which they love, so that the person who would not acknowledge me when glad may receive knowledge indeed and understanding when afflicted.”

22 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why death comes so unexpectedly, I answer: If someone were to know the time of his or her death, he or she would serve me out of fear and would succumb out of sorrow. 23 Accordingly, in order that people may serve me out of love and always be anxious about themselves but sure of me, the hour of their departure is uncertain, and rightly so. 24 When humankind foresook that which was certain and true, it was needful and right for them to be afflicted by uncertainty.”

25 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why I permit men to go to war full of wrath, I answer: Anyone who is wholly bent on harming his neighbor is like the devil and is a limb and instrument of the devil. 26 I would do the devil wrong if I took his servant from him unjustly. 27 Therefore, even as I make use of my instrument for whatever I please, so too it is right that the devil should act through the person who wants to be his limb rather than mine and should do what is in his right, either for the purgation of others or for the perfection of his own wickedness—yet only insofar as I permit it and as sin requires.”

Interrogation 7
Questions on Worldly Beauty, and on Self-Praise and Reward

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his ladder as before saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why are the words ugly and beautiful used in the world?”

2 Second question. “Why must I hate the beauty of the world, seeing that I am beautiful and of noble ancestry?”

3 Third question. “Why should I not exalt myself over others, seeing that I am rich?”

4 Fourth question. “Why should I not put myself ahead of others, seeing that I am more honorable than others?”

5 Fifth question. “Why should I not seek my own praise, seeing that I am good and praiseworthy?”

6 Sixth question. “If I do other people favors, why should I not demand remuneration?”

7 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, ugly and beautiful in the world are like bitter and sweet. Ugliness of the world, which is adversity and contempt of the world, is like a kind of bitterness conducive to the health of the righteous. Beautiful to the world is its prosperity, which is like a kind of ingratiating sweetness, false and seductive. Whoever, therefore, flees the beauty of the world and spits out its sweetness will not come to the ugliness of hell or taste its bitterness but will instead ascend to my joy. Thus, in order to escape the ugliness of hell and attain the sweetness of heaven, it is necessary to pursue the ugliness of the world rather than its beauty. Although I made all things well, and all created things are very good, great caution should be used toward the things that could present an occasion of damage to the soul for those who make irrational use of my gifts.”

8 Answer to the second question. “As to why you must not boast about your ancestry, I answer: From your father you received the ugliest filth and rot; in the womb of your mother you were as though dead and all unclean. It was not in your power to be born of noble or ignoble parents. Rather, my tenderness and goodness brought you forth into this light. So, you, who call yourself noble, humble yourself under me, your God, who let you be born of noble parents. Live in harmony with your neighbor, who is made of the same stuff as you, though by my providence you are of noble birth, as the world sees
it, while he is of humble birth. 15 In fact, o nobleman, you should be more fearful than the man of low birth, for the nobler and wealthier you are, the stricter will be the account demanded of you and the greater the judgment, inasmuch as you have received more.’’

16 Answer to the third question. “As to why you must not take pride in riches, I answer: The riches of the world only belong to you insofar as you need them for food and clothing. 17 The world was made for this: that man, having sustenance for his body, might through work and humility return to me, his God, whom he scorned in his disobedience and neglected in his pride. 18 However, if you claim that the temporal goods belong to you, I assure you that you are in effect forcibly usurping for yourself all that you possess beyond your needs. All temporal goods ought to belong to the community and be equally accessible to the needy out of charity. 19 You usurp for your own superfluous possession things that should be given to others out of compassion. However, many people do own much more than others but in a rational way, and they distribute it in discreet fashion. 20 Therefore, in order not to be accused more severely at the judgment because you received more than others, it is advisable for you not to put yourself ahead of others by acting haughtily and hoarding possessions. 21 As pleasant as it is in the world to have more temporal goods than others and to have them in abundance, it will likewise be terrible and painful beyond measure at the judgment not to have administered in reasonable fashion even licitely held goods.”

22 Answer to the fourth and fifth questions. “As to why self-praise should not be sought, I answer: No one is good in himself, except for me alone, God, and anyone who is good is good through me alone. 23 Therefore, if you who are nothing seek praise for yourself and not for me from whom comes every perfect gift, then your praise is false and you do me, your Creator, an injustice. 24 As all the good things that you have come from me, so all praise should be given to me. And just as I, your God, bestow on you all worldly goods—strength, health, knowledge, and discernment for considering what is to your advantage, and time and life—so too I alone should be glorified in everything, that is, if you make good and rational use of the things given you. 25 However, if you make bad use of them, then the fault is yours and the ingratitude is yours.”

26 Answer to the sixth question. “As to why temporal remuneration should not be sought for good works in the present, I answer you: 27 Whenever

5. “You should be more fearful . . . you have received more”; cf. Luke 12:48.
6. “All temporal goods . . . out of charity”: Either Birgitta is referring to the contemporary debate on monastic ownership and poverty (see further Fogelqvist, Apostasy and Reform, pp. 221–23), or else to her own renunciation of property (cf. Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 494). In either case, she argues against unnecessary ownership and for property to be distributed and owned according to need. See also Book VII 8.1–8, on Christ’s ownership of private property.
7. Unusually, a single response to two questions is given here.
8. “No one is good in himself, except for me alone, God” (Mark 10:18).
9. “Every perfect gift” (James 1:17).
someone does good to others with the intention of caring not for a human reward but only for such a reward as I, God, may wish to grant, then he or she will gain much in exchange for little, something eternal for something temporal. But a person who seeks earthly in exchange for temporal goods will get what he or she desires and will lose the everlasting good. Therefore, in order to obtain an eternal good for a fleeting one, it is more advantageous not to seek a human reward but one that comes from me.”

Interrogation 8

Questions on Why Angels and Devils Are Made Not Visible in the World

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his rung as before, saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why do you permit gods to be placed in temples and receive honor as yourself, even though your kingdom is nobler beyond all else?”

2 Second question. “Why do you not let people see your glory in this life, so that they may desire it more fervently?”

3 Third question. “Since your saints and angels are nobler and holier above all other creatures, why are they not seen by people in this life?”

4 Fourth question. “Since the punishments of hell are horrible beyond compare, why do you not let people see them in this life so that they may flee from them?”

5 Fifth question. “Since the devils are ugly and misshapen beyond compare, why are they not visible to humans, for then nobody would follow them or give them their consent?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “My friend, I am God, the creator of all, who does no more injustice to the wicked than to the good, because I am justice itself. It is in accord with my justice that entry into heaven must be gained through steadfast faith, rational hope, and fervent love.

A person ponders more frequently and adores more lovingly that which the heart loves more and loves with greater fervor. So it is with the gods that are placed in temples—though they are not gods nor creators, since there is but one sole creator, I myself, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But the owners of temples and people in general love the gods more than they love me, seeking to achieve worldly success rather than to live with me. If I were to destroy the things that people love more than me, and make the people adore me against their will, then I would certainly do them an injustice by taking away their free will and desire from them. Since they have no faith in me, and there is in their hearts something more delightful than me, I rea-

1. “Faith, rational hope, and fervent love”: The three theological virtues are frequently referred to throughout the Revelationes, e.g., Books II 6, 20; III 24; IV 115.

2. “Rather than to live with me”: Sw. adds “sälelegha” [in bliss].
sonably permit them to produce externally what they love and long for in their minds. 12 Because they love creation more than me, the Creator, whom they can know by probable signs and deeds, if only they would make use of their reason, and because they are blind, accursed is their creation and accursed are their idols. 13 They themselves shall stand in shame and be sentenced for their folly, because they refuse to understand how sweet I am, their God, who created and redeemed humankind out of fervent love.”

14 Answer to the second question. “As to why my glory is not seen, I answer: My glory is ineffable and cannot be compared to anything in sweetness and goodness. 15 If my glory were to be seen as it is, the corruptible human body would grow weak and fail as did the senses of those who saw my glory on the mount. 4 Besides, because of the soul’s joy, the body would leave off working and be incapable of physical activity. 16 Since there is no entry into heaven without the labor of love, and in order that faith might have its reward and the body be able to work, my glory is therefore hidden for a time, so that through desire and faith it may be seen more fully with greater happiness forever.”

17 Answer to the third question. “As to why the saints are not seen as they are, I answer: If my saints were openly visible and seen to speak, then honor would be given to them as to myself, and faith would have not merit. 18 Besides, weak flesh would not be capable of seeing them, and it does not accord with my justice that such great weakness should behold so splendid a sight. 19 Consequently, my saints are neither heard nor seen as they are, in order that I should receive all the honor and so that people may know that no one is to be loved more than me. 20 If my saints do at times appear, however, it is not in that form of glory in which they truly live, but rather in that form in which they can be seen without any confusion of the physical intelligence, with their full power remaining hidden.”

21 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why the punishments of hell are not seen, I answer: If the punishments of hell were visibly to be seen such as they are, people would be completely frozen with fear and would seek heaven out of fear rather than love. 22 Since nobody should desire the joy of heaven out of fear of punishment but out of divine love, the punishments therefore remain hidden for now. 23 Of course, just as good and holy people may not experience exactly that kind of indescribable joy prior to the separation of body and soul, nor can the wicked experience their punishments. But once the soul is separated from the body, then they discover those experiences they were unwilling to probe with their intelligence while they were still able.”

24 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why devils make no visible appearance, I answer: If their horrible ugliness were seen such as it is, the soul of the person seeing it would lose her wits at the very sight, and her whole body would quake and quail like someone trembling with fear, and her whole heart

3. “Because they love creation more than me, the Creator…fervent love”; cf. Romans 1:20–25.
would fail and die of fright, and her feet would not be able to sustain the weight of her limbs. 25 In order that the soul should remain steady in her senses and her heart watchful in my love and her body capable of laboring in my service, the ugliness of devils is therefore hidden—also in order to check their evil purposes.”

† Revelation 3

A Revelation about Two Doctors

The third revelation in which Christ speaks to his bride, blessed Birgitta, and teaches her through a parable about a true doctor who is a healer and a false doctor who is a killer, and about a man who only has an opinion. He tells her that a man who takes in sinners and gives them help or an opportunity for sinning, should they die in their sin, then God will exact the death of their souls at his hand. However, if he takes them in and they cease from sinning and are instructed by him in the virtues and improved by his teaching, both they and he will receive a great reward from God.

1 The Son of God speaks: “If there is a sick man in the house and an experienced doctor visits him, the doctor soon determines the nature of the sickness from the external symptoms. 2 However, if he recognizes the patient’s sickness but gives him medicine that results in death, then he is denounced as a murderer and not a true doctor. 3 A person who knows how to cure but practices medicine for the sake of worldly remuneration will get no wages from me. But if he practices medicine for love of me and for my honor, then I am bound to give him his wages. 4 If a person is not an expert in medicine but is confident that, in his opinion, this or that would be good for the patient, and gives him it with a kindly intention, he should not be denounced as a murderer if the patient dies, but only as a foolish and presumptuous man. 5 If the patient improves from the fool’s medicine, then he should not get the wages of an expert but only of an opiner, since he gave the medicine according to his opinion, rather than knowledge.

6 Now I will tell you what these things mean. Those people you know are spiritually sick and inclined to pride and cupidity by following their own will. 7 Therefore, if their friend, whom I compare to a doctor, gives them help and advice by which they grow in pride and ambition and die spiritually, I shall surely exact their death at his hand. 8 Although they die from their own


2. “Exact” renders “exigam,” as in the heading, to convey the demand of repayment, which is a theme in this revelation.
iniquity, yet he is the agent and cause of their death, and he will most assuredly
not be immune from punishment. 9 If, led by a natural love, he supports them
and helps them to advance in the world for the sake of his own convenience
and worldly honor, let him not expect any wages from me! 10 On the other
hand, if he considers their situation like a good doctor and says to himself:
‘These people are sick and need medicine. Therefore, although my medicine
seems bitter to them, yet it is healthy and I will still give it to them so that they
will not die a harsher death. 11 Accordingly, while restraining them, I shall also
give them food, so that they do not faint from hunger; I shall give them
clothing, so that they can make a suitable appearance according to their state;
I shall hold them to my treatment, so that they do not grow haughty; I shall also
provide for their other needs, so that they do not become proud and perish in
their presumption or have occasion to do harm to others.’ 12 Such a doctor as
this will receive a great reward from me, for this kind of corrective treatment
pleases me. 13 But if their friend thinks to himself in this way: ‘I shall give
them what is necessary, although I do not know whether it is beneficial for
them or not. Nonetheless I do not think I am displeasing God or harming their
health. Then if they die, or rather transgress, from what he gives them, their
friend will not be declared a murderer. 14 However, due to his good will and
kindly affection, though their friend will not get a full recompense, insofar as
he shows love for their souls, the sick will find relief and make progress toward
health, which they would have obtained only with difficulty without the aid of
his charity. 15 However, one piece of advice is necessary here. According to a
popular proverb, a dangerous animal is not dangerous when caged in. If it is
in a cage and has its needs met, then it grows just as strong and fat as an
animal that roams free. 16 Now, because these people are of the kind whose
heart and blood seek lofty things, and because the more their will grows
thirstier, the more it drinks, their friend should not give them any occasion for
transgression, since they desire to inflame their appetites but are not strong
enough to extinguish them.’

Interrogation 9

Questions on the Gifts Given to Mary; and on the Angels, Reason, and
the Natural Order

1 First question. After this was said, the monk appeared on his rung as
before saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why do you seem unfair in your gifts and
graces in that you gave preference to Mary your Mother before every creature
and exalted her above the angels?”

3. “Proverb”: The proverb has not been identified.

4. “Inflame” renders “incendere” of certain manuscripts, which is what the editor judges to be the
original reading (Bergh, Book V, p. 75). Other variants include “incedere” (to go, walk), “excedere” (to go forth, go
beyond, depart), and “intendere” (to stretch out, extend).
Second question. "Why did you give to the angels a spirit without a body and the state of heavenly joy, while to humankind you gave a spirit in an earthly vessel,¹ a tearful birth, a toilsome life and a painful death?"

Third question. "Why did you give humankind a rational intellect and sense, but did not give reason to the animals?"

Fourth question. "Why did you give life to animals and not to other insensate creatures?"

Fifth question. "Why is there not light at night as during day?"

Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: "Friend, in my deity are contained all future things and everything that will be done as well as everything that has been done, all of them being foreseen and foreknown from the start. Just as the fall of humankind was something foreknown and permitted by God's justice but not accomplished through God nor something that had to happen due to God's foreknowledge, so too it was foreknown from eternity that the liberation of humankind would be accomplished through God's mercy. You ask why I preferred my mother Mary above all others and loved her above every creature. This is because a special mark of virtue was found in her. As when several logs are piled up and a fire is kindled, that log which is most capable and fit for burning is more quickly set aflame and starts burning. It was the same with Mary. When the fire of divine love,² which in itself is immutable and eternal, began to kindle and be seen, and the deity wished to become incarnate, there was no creature more capable and fitter to receive this fire of love than the Virgin Mary, for no creature burned with such divine charity as she. And although her love has been shown and revealed in the last age, yet it was foreseen before the beginning of the world. Thus it was predetermined in the deity from all eternity that just as no one was found like her in charity, so too no one would be equal to her in grace and blessing."

Answer to the second question. "As to why I gave the angel a spirit without a body, I answer: I created spirits in the beginning, before times and ages, so that they might rejoice in my goodness and glory according to my will and of their own free choice. Some of them became proud and turned good into evil for themselves, making disordered use of their free will. They fell accordingly, because there was nothing evil in nature or creation except the disorder of self-will.³ Other spirits chose to remain in humility under me their God; accordingly, they earned a state of everlasting stability, for it is right and just that I, God, who am uncreated spirit and creator and Lord of all things, should have spirits serving me that are more subtle and swift than other creatures. Since it was surely not suitable for me to have my heavenly host diminished, in order to take the place of the fallen angels, I created

¹ "An earthly vessel" renders "vas terrenum"; cf. Sw. "iordslikin lechama och andha" [earthly body and spirit]. See also rev. 13.13 below.

² "Fire of divine love"; cf. Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:3. Fire as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit is widespread among mystical writers, although not particularly common in Birgitta's writings.

³ "The disorder of self-will": Moral disorder arises when actions are not ordered to their proper end, that is, to God; when they are ordered to the subject's own self, disorder follows.
human beings who, by their free choice and good will, could win that same rank which the angels had abandoned.\textsuperscript{4} 18 And so, if they had a soul without a body, they would not be able to win so great a good or to struggle for it. The attainment of eternal glory is the reason why the soul is joined to the body. 19 Hardships also accrue to them so that they might make trial of their power of choice as well as of their weaknesses so as not to grow proud. 20 Likewise, divine justice has also granted them a tearful entry and departure as well as a toilsome life, so that they might desire the glory for which they were created and make amends for their voluntary disobedience.”

21 Answer to the third question. “As to why animals do not have a rational intellect as humans do, I answer you: 22 All things, whatsoever have been created, are for the use of humankind, either for their needs and upkeep or for their formation and correction or for their comfort and humiliation. 23 If brute beasts had a human intellect, they would surely cause trouble to men,\textsuperscript{5} and would be of harm rather than of benefit. 24 Therefore, in order that all things might be subject to humankind, for whose sake all things were made,\textsuperscript{6} and in order that all things might fear them but that they might fear none but me, their God, for this reason a rational intellect was not given to animals.”

25 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why insensate things do not have life, I answer: Everything that lives will die, and every living thing is in motion unless impeded by some obstacle. 26 If insensate things had life, they would move themselves more against humankind than for it. 27 Therefore, in order that all things should be a comfort to humankind, the higher beings or angels were given to be their guardians with whom they share reason and immortality of soul. 28 Lower beings, both sensate and insensate creatures, were given to them for their use and upkeep as well as for their education and exercise.”

29 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why it is not always daylight, I answer with a comparison. There are wheels under every cart or wagon so that the load can be more easily moved forward, and the back wheels follow the front wheels. 30 It is similar in spiritual matters. The world is a great load, burdening humankind with trouble and strife. This is no wonder, for when humans disdained the place of rest, so it was only right that they should experience the place of toil. 31 In order that they might more easily bear the burden of this world, an alternation and change of times, that is, day and night, summer and winter, was given for their rest and exercise. 32 When contraries

\textsuperscript{4} The idea that human beings were created in order to replace the angels that had fallen was common in the Middle Ages. St. Thomas knows it, but does not embrace it: Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, 1.23, 2.7. It occurs also in Book VI 44 and VIII 56.

\textsuperscript{5} “They would surely cause trouble to men”: Birgitta’s rather quaint idea is different from one put forward by Thomas Aquinas, in \textit{Summa contra gentiles} II 82, who argues that beasts cannot have understanding because they live according to their natural urges alone, nor do they have souls that exist after death or share man’s craving for perfection and perpetuity of being.

\textsuperscript{6} “For whose sake all things were made”: Birgitta proposes a common anthropocentric viewpoint, placing man as a bridge in between the higher and lower orders in creation.
meet, such as strong and weak, it is reasonable to condescend to the weak part so that it can stand with the help of the strong; otherwise the weak would be destroyed. 33 So it is also with humankind. Although by virtue of their immortal souls, they could continue in contemplation and labor, they would nevertheless falter by virtue of their weak body. 34 Light was made so that humans, who partake of both higher and lower natures, might be able to maintain themselves, laboring by day and recalling the sweetness of the eternal light that they had lost. 35 Night was made for the sake of bodily rest, so that they might have the desire of reaching the place where there is neither night nor labor but perpetual day⁷ and everlasting glory.”

### Revelation 4

**A Revelation Describing the Virgin Mary’s Beauty**

The fourth revelation in the Book of Questions, in which Christ beautifully praises every limb of the Virgin Mary his Mother, giving them a spiritual and allegorical meaning by comparing them to virtues; he also declares the Virgin to be most worthy of a queenly crown.

The Son speaks: “I am crowned king in my divinity without beginning and without end.¹ A crown has neither beginning nor end; thus it is a symbol of my power, which had no beginning and will have no end. 2 I had another crown, too, in my keeping: I myself, God, am that crown. 3 It was prepared for the person who had the greatest love for me. And you, my most sweet Mother, won this crown and drew it to yourself through righteousness and love. 4 The angels and other saints bear witness that your love for me was more ardent and your chastity more pure than that of any other, and that it was more pleasing to me than all else. 5 Your head was like gleaming gold ² and your hair like sunbeams, because your most pure virginity, which is like the head of all your virtues, as well as your control over every illicit desire³ pleased me and shone in my sight with all humility. 6 You are rightly called the crowned queen over all creation—“queen” for the sake of your purity, “crowned” for your excellent worth. 7 Your brow was incomparably white, a symbol of the delicacy of your conscience, in which lies the fullness of human knowledge, and where the sweetness of divine wisdom shines on all. 8 Your eyes were so bright and clear in my Father’s sight that he could see himself in them, for in your spiritual

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¹. This revelation shows similarities with one of Birgitta’s four major prayers; see Eklund, *Quattuor orationes*, which may date from the 1340s. See also Collin, *Acta et processus*, pp. 78, 476 as examples of Birgitta’s Mariological interest. The revelation is duplicated in Book VIII 8.

². “Your head was like gleaming gold”; cf. Song of Solomon 5:11.

³. “Control over every illicit desire”: Since the Virgin was in a pure state of grace she did not have had any illicit desire. See further the note to rev. 13.17.
eyes and in your soul’s intellect the Father saw your entire will, namely, that you desired nothing but him and wished for nothing except as according to his will. 9 Your ears were as pure and open as the most beautiful windows when Gabriel laid my will before you and when I, God, became flesh in you. 10 Your cheeks were of the fairest hue, white and red, for the fame of your praiseworthy deeds and the beauty of your character, which burned within you each day, were pleasing to me. 11 Truly, God my Father rejoiced in the beauty of your character and never took his eyes away from you. By your love, all have obtained love. 12 Your mouth was like a lamp, inwardly burning and outwardly shedding light, for the words and affections of your soul were inwardly on fire with divine understanding and shone outwardly in the graceful carriage of your body and the lovely harmony of your virtues. 13 Truly, most dear Mother, the word of your mouth somehow drew my divinity to you, and the fervor of your divine sweetness never separated me from you, since your words were sweeter than honey and honeycomb. 14 Your neck is nobly erect and beautifully held high, because the righteousness of your whole soul is directed to me and sways with my will, since it was never inclined to any sin of pride. 15 Just as the neck inclines with the head, so too your every intention and act bends to my will. 16 Your breast was so full of every virtuous charm that there is no good in me that is not in you as well, for you drew every good thing to yourself by the sweetness of your character, at the moment when it both pleased my divinity to enter into you and my humanity to live with you and drink the milk from your nipples. 17 Your arms were beautiful through true obedience and endurance of toil. Your bodily hands touched my humanity, and I rested in your arms with my divinity. 18 Your womb was as pure as ivory and was like a space made out of gems of virtue, for your constancy of conscience and faith never grew lukewarm and could not be damaged by tribulation. 19 The walls of your womb, that is, of your faith, were like gleaming gold, and on them the strength of your virtues was recorded, your prudence and justice and temperance along with perfect perseverance, for all your virtues were perfected with divine charity. 20 Your feet were washed full clean as though with fragrant herbs, for the hope and the affections of your soul were directed toward me, your God, and were fragrant as an example for others to imitate. 21 Your womb was a spiritual and physical space so desirable to me and your soul was so pleasing to me that I did not disdain to come down to you from the highest heaven and to dwell in you. No, rather, I was most pleased and delighted. 22 Therefore, dear Mother, the crown that was held in my keeping, that crown that is I, myself, God, who was to become incarnate, should be placed on no one but you, for you are truly Mother and Virgin.”

4. “Your cheeks...white and red”; cf. Song of Solomon 5:10.
6. Klockars, Birgitta och böcker, p. 122, notes how the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, complemented by the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and underpinned by the idea of perseverance, are all interwoven into these sentences. See also the note to int. 8.7.
Interrogation 10

Questions on the Incarnation

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his rung as before saying: "O Judge, I ask you: Given that you are most powerful and beautiful and virtuous, why did you cover your divinity, which is incomparably brighter than the sun, with such a sack—I mean your human nature?"

2 Second question. "How does your divinity encompass all things in itself yet is encompassed by none, and contains all things yet is contained by none?"

3 Third question. "Why did you wish to lie in the Virgin's womb so long and did not emerge as soon as you were conceived?"

4 Fourth question. "Given that you can do all things and are present everywhere, why did you not immediately appear with the stature that you had when you were thirty years old?"\(^1\)

5 Fifth question. "Given that you were not born of Abraham’s seed through a father, why did you wish to be circumcised?"\(^2\)

6 Sixth question. "Given that you were conceived and born without sin, why did you wish to be baptized?"

7 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered him: "Friend, I will answer you with a comparison. There is a variety of grapes whose wine is so strong that it comes out of the grapes without the contact of man.\(^3\) 8 The owner waits for it to ripen and then just puts a glass\(^4\) under it. The wine does not wait for the glass but the glass for the wine. 9 If several glasses are placed under it, the wine runs into the glass that is nearest. \(^10\) This grapevine represents my divinity, which is so full of the wine of godly love that all the choirs of angels are filled up with it and all things, no matter what, partake of it. But the human race became unworthy of it through disobedience. 11 When God my Father wanted to manifest his love at a point in time foreseen from eternity, he sent his wine, that is, he sent me, his Son, into the nearest glass awaiting the coming of the wine, namely, into the womb of the Virgin, whose love for me was more fervent than that of any other creature. 12 This Virgin loved me and longed for me so much that there was no hour in which she did not seek me, yearning to become my handmaid.\(^5\) This is why she obtained the choicest wine, and this has three qualities. First it has strength, because I emerged without the contact of a man; second, a most beautiful color, for I came down in beauty from heaven on high ready to do battle; third, an excellent taste, intoxicating with the highest of blessings. 14 This wine, then, which I myself

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1. Thirty is the age at which Christ is said to have begun his ministry.
am, was poured inside the Virgin, so that I, the invisible God, might become visible in order to liberate the lost human race. 15 I could well have assumed another form, but it would not have been God’s justice, if form had not been given for form, nature for nature, a mode of satisfaction adapted to the mode of the offense. 16 Which of the wise could have believed or thought that I, God almighty, would want to lower myself to such an extent I should wear the sack of human nature, but for that unfathomable love of mine because of which I wished to live visibly among men? 17 And because I saw the Virgin burning with such fervent love, my divine severity was overcome, and my love was shown in order to reconcile humankind with myself. 18 Why are you surprised? I, God, who am love itself, and who hate none of the things I have made, arranged to give humankind not only the best of gifts, but even my very self as a ransom and reward so that all proud sinners and all the devils might be confounded.”

19 Answer to the second question. “As to how my divinity can encompass all things in itself, I answer: I, God, am spirit. I speak, and it is done. I command, and all obey me. 20 I am truly he who gives being and life to all, who, before making the sky and the mountains and the earth, exist in myself, who am above and beyond all things, who am within all things, and all things are in me, and without me there is nothing. 21 And since my Spirit blows where and when it will, and can do all things, and knows all things, and is swifter and more agile than all other spirits, possessing every power and seeing beforehand all things present, past, and future, accordingly, my Spirit, that is my divinity, is rightly incomprehensible, yet comprehends all things.”

22 Answer to the third question. “As to why I lay so long in the womb of the Virgin, I answer: I am the founder of all nature and have arranged for each and every nature a due measure and time and order of birth. 23 If I, the founder of nature, had emerged from the womb as soon as I had been conceived, then I would have acted against the natural arrangement, and my taking on a human nature would have then been fantastic and unreal. 24 Therefore, I wished to remain in the womb as long as other children, so that I, too, might fulfill my own wise arrangements of the natural order in my own case.”

25 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why I did not immediately assume the same stature at birth as I had in my thirtieth year, I answer: 26 If I had done this, everyone would have been full of wonder and fear, following me more out of fear and because of the miracles they had seen rather than from love. 27 And how then would the sayings of the prophets have been fulfilled?”

10. “The sayings of the prophets have been fulfilled”; cf. Genesis 35:19; Isaiah 1:3; Habakkuk 3:2; Psalm 71 (72):10–11; Malachi 3:1.
They foretold that I would be placed in a manger among animals, and adored by kings, and presented in the temple, and pursued by enemies. Therefore, in order to show that my human nature was real and that the prophecies were fulfilled in me, my limbs grew over intervals of time, although I was as full of wisdom at the start of my birth as at the end.”

29 Answer to the fifth question. “As to the question of why I was circumcised, I answer: Although I did not descend from Abraham through my father, yet I did so through my mother, although without sin. Therefore, because I established the law in my divine nature, I also wanted to endure it in my human nature, so that my enemies might not slander me by saying that I commanded what I myself was unwilling to fulfill.”

31 Answer to the sixth question. “As to why I wanted to be baptized, I answer: Anyone who wants to found or start a new way, must lead the way for others. The ancient people were given a way of the flesh, circumcision, as a sign of obedience and future purgation. Among the faithful observers of the law, this brought about a certain effect of future grace and a promise before the coming of the promised truth, that is, before I, the Son of God, came. With the coming of the truth, however, since the law was but a shadow, it had been eternally determined that the ancient way should fade and lose its effect. In order that the truth might appear, the shadow recede, and the way to heaven be more easily seen, I, God and man, born without sin, wished to be baptized as an example of humility for others and so that I might open up heaven for believers. As a sign of this, heaven was opened when I myself was baptized, and the voice of the Father was heard, and the Holy Spirit appeared in the likeness of a dove, and I, the Son of God, was revealed in my true humanity, so that all the faithful might know and believe that the Father opens heaven for the baptized faithful. The Holy Spirit is present with the baptizing minister and my human nature is virtually present in the material element, but the action and the will are one and belong to the Father and to myself and to the Holy Spirit together. On the coming of the truth, that is, when I, who am Truth, came into the world, the shadow immediately disappeared, the shell of the law was broken, and the kernel appeared; circumcision ceased, and I myself established baptism by means of which heaven is opened to young and old and the children of wrath become children of grace and eternal life.”

11. “Pursued by enemies”: refers to the flight into Egypt, in fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15.
13. “Heaven was opened... dove”; cf. Matthew 3:16.
14. “My human nature is virtually present in the material element” renders “virtus mee humanitatis in elemento”; cf. Sw. “Myns mandopms dygdh är j watneno” [The virtue of my humanity is in the water], i.e., the element or matter of the sacrament of baptism is the water.
Revelation 5

A Revelation about Four Deceitful Servants

The fifth revelation in the Book of Questions in which Christ speaks to his bride, blessed Birgitta, and instructs her not to be anxious about the care of earthly riches and teaches her to be patient in times of trouble and to have perfect self-denial and humility.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride saying: “Be sure to be on your guard!” And she answers: “Why?” The Lord says to her: “Because the world is sending to you four servants who want to deceive you. 2 The first is anxiety about riches. Tell him when he comes: ‘Riches are transitory, and the more they abound, the greater the account must be given concerning them. Therefore I do not care about them, since they do not follow their owner but abandon him.’ 3 The second servant is the loss of riches and the forfeiture of privileges conceded. Answer this servant thus: ‘He who gave riches has also taken them away.’ 4 The third servant is the tribulation of this world. Tell him this: ‘Blessed be you, my God, who allow me to suffer tribulation. 5 By tribulations I know that I am yours, for you permit tribulations in the present in order that you may spare me them in the future. Grant me, then, the patience and strength to endure.’ 6 The fourth servant is contempt and reproach. Answer them in this way: ‘God alone is good and all honor is due to him. 7 Why should there be any honor for me who have committed all kinds of bad and vile deeds? Instead I am worthy of all kinds of reproach, since my whole life has been a blasphemy to God. 8 Or in what way is honor worth more to me than reproach? It only stirs up pride and lessens humility, and God is forgotten. Therefore may all praise and honor be given to God.’ 9 So stand firm against the servants of the world, and love me your God with all your heart.”

Interrogation II

Further Questions on the Incarnation

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his rung as before saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Since you are God and man, why did you not reveal your divine as well as your human nature, and then everyone would have believed in you?”

1. “Self-denial” renders “annihilacionis.”
2. “Be sure to be on your guard” renders “Attende tibi diligenter”; cf. Sw. “wakta tich” [watch yourself]. “Attendere sibi” can also mean “examine oneself”; either way, this is a sentiment that is characteristic of Birgitta’s watchful and reforming vocabulary.
3. “He who gave riches has also taken them away”; cf. Job 1:21.
2 Second question. "Why did you not let all your words be heard in an instant, and then it would not have been necessary for them to be preached over intervals of time?"

3 Third question. "Why did you not perform all your works in a single hour?"

4 Fourth question. "Why did your body grow over intervals of time and not in an instant?"

5 Fifth question. "As your death was approaching, why did you not reveal yourself in your divine power, and why did you not show your severity to your enemies, when you said: ‘All is accomplished’?" 1

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: "O friend, I respond to you and yet not to you. I respond to you in order that the evil of your thoughts may be made known to others. Yet I do not respond to you, because these things are not revealed for your benefit but for the profit and warning of present and future generations. 7 Since you do not intend to change your obstinate attitude, you will not pass from your death into my life, because, while still alive, you hate true life. 8 Others, however, who have heard about your life, or rather your death, will pass over and fly on to my life. Indeed, it is written that, for saints, all things work together unto the good; 2 and God permits nothing to happen without cause. 9 So I answer you, but not as those do who speak in a human manner, because we are discussing spiritual things, but in such a way that your thoughts and feelings may be communicated to others by way of similes.

10 You ask, then, why I did not show my divine nature openly as I did with my human. The reason is that my divine nature is spiritual but my human nature is bodily. 11 Yet the divine and human natures are and were inseparable ever since they were first joined together. My divinity is uncreated, and all things that exist are made in it and through it, and every perfection and beauty is found in it. 12 If such beauty and perfection were visibly revealed to eyes of clay, 3 who would be able to bear the sight? Who could look upon the physical sun in all its brightness? 13 Who would not be terrified by the sight of lightning and the sound of thunder? How much greater the terror would be if the Lord of lightning and the Creator of all things were seen in his splendor! 14 My divinity was not openly revealed for two reasons. The first reason is the weakness of the human body, whose substance is earthly. 15 If any human body were to see the divinity, it would melt like wax before fire, 4 and the soul would rejoice with such exultation that the body would be reduced, as it were, to ashes. 16 The second reason is the immutability of divine goodness. If I were to show bodily

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1. "All is accomplished" (John 19:28, 30).
2. "It is written ... unto the good"; cf. Romans 8:28.
3. "Eyes of clay" renders "lutosis oculis" [to muddy eyes]; cf. Sw. "krankom öghom" [to sick eyes]; we take it as referring to the creation of man from "clay," i.e., to mortal eyes, although the Sw. has the suggestion of unhealthy eyes.
eyes my divinity, which is incomparably more radiant than fire and sun, I would then be contradicting myself. For I have said: ‘No one shall see me and live.’\textsuperscript{5} 17 Not even the prophets themselves saw me as I am in my divine nature. Those who did hear the voice of my divinity and saw the burning mountain were terrified and said: ‘Let Moses speak to us, and we shall listen to him.’\textsuperscript{6} 18 This is why I, merciful God, in order to be understandable to humankind, revealed myself to them in a human form similar to theirs, which they could see and touch and in which the divine nature is concealed, so that people might not be terrified by a form unlike their own. 19 Insofar as I am God, I am not bodily and cannot be portrayed in a bodily manner, but people can endure to see and hear me in my human nature.”

20 Answer to the second question. “As to why I did not utter all my words in a single hour, I answer you: 21 Just as it is materially impossible for the body to take in as much food in one hour as it could manage in a large number of years, so too it goes against the divine disposition for my words, which are the food of the soul, to be spoken all in a single hour. 22 As the food of the body is taken in a small amount at a time so that it can be chewed and then ingested, so too my words had to be uttered not in one hour but over intervals of time in proportion to the understanding of those who were to profit from them, so that the hungry might have something to fill them and then be stirred to higher things.”

23 Answer to the third question. “As to why I did not perform all my works in an instant, I answer: Some of those who saw me in the flesh came to belief in me, others did not. 24 It was accordingly necessary for those who did believe to be taught by words over intervals of time and to be stirred at times by example and strengthened by works. 25 For those who did not believe, however, it was right and just that their wicked disposition be disclosed and tolerated, as far as my divine justice could permit it. 26 If I had performed all my works in an instant, everyone would have followed me from fear rather than from love, and, in that case, how would the mystery of human redemption have been fulfilled?\textsuperscript{7} 27 Just as in the beginnings of the world’s creation all things were accomplished at different times and in different ways—although all the things to be made were immutably present together in my divine foreknowledge—so too in my human nature everything was accomplished rationally and distinctly for the salvation and edification of all.”

28 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why my body grew over a number of years and not instantaneously, I answer: The Holy Spirit, who is eternally in the Father and in me, the Son, revealed to the prophets what I would do and suffer when I came in the flesh. 29 Accordingly, it pleased God that I should

\textsuperscript{5} “See me and live”; cf. Exodus 33:20.

\textsuperscript{6} “And we shall listen to him”; cf. Exodus 20:18–19.

\textsuperscript{7} “How would the mystery of human redemption have been fulfilled” renders “quomodo tunc misterium redemptionis humane fuisset impletum”; cf. Sw. “Och haffde ey mankönsins atherløsen rathlega varit fulkomnath” [and man’s redemption would not rightfully have been fulfilled].
take such a body in which I could labor from morning to evening and from year
to year until the last moment of death. 30 Therefore, in order not to make the
words of the prophets seem meaningless, I, the Son of God, took a body like
Adam’s but without sin\(^8\) so that I would be like those whom I was to redeem.
In this way, man, who had turned away from me, might by means of love be led
back and, having died, might be raised up, and having been sold\(^9\) might be
redeemed.”

31 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why I did not reveal my divine
power and my true divine nature to everyone, when I said on the cross: ‘It is
accomplished,’ I answer: It was necessary that everything that had been written
about me should be fulfilled. 32 Accordingly, I fulfilled them all down to the
last detail. Since many things had also been predicted about my resurrection
and ascension,\(^10\) it was necessary that they, too, should be brought about. 33 If
my divine power had been revealed at my death, who would have dared to take
me down from the cross and bury me? And it would have been a small thing
for me then to come down from the cross\(^11\) and lay low my crucifiers—but how
then would the prophecy have been fulfilled or where then would my virtue
of patience have been? 34 And if I had come down from the cross, would
everyone have believed then? Would they not have said that I had done it all
by evil art? Given that they had been indignant when I raised the dead and
cured the sick, they would have said much more had I come down from the
cross! 35 Therefore, in order to set the captive free, I, who was free, made
myself captive; and in order to save the guilty, I, who was guiltless, stood
steadfast on the cross. By my steadfastness I steadied the unsteady and
strengthened the strengthless.”

# Revelation 6

A Revelation about Jacob and Rachel

The sixth revelation in the Book of Questions in which Christ speaks
to his bride, blessed Birgitta, and instructs her, saying that in the
spiritual life peace of mind and eternal glory are won through
vigorouss struggle and perseverance and humble acquiescence in the
advice of an elder and by bravely\(^1\) resisting temptations. He offers the
example of Jacob who became a servant in order to win Rachel. He

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8. “Without sin”; cf. Hebrews 4:15. It is not a novel idea that Jesus should have come into the world as an
adult: Adam did.

9. “Sold” renders “venditus”; this is the traditional idea of redemption, namely that atonement for the
human race was accomplished in terms of its being bought back from captivity under the devil. Cf. Book I 35.7.
on the world being “sold” for an apple.


1. “Bravely” renders “viriliter”: Male biographers (such as Alfonso, as here) sometimes praised women for
“virility,” and Catherine of Siena called upon other women to behave “manfully”; see Raitt et al., eds. Christian
Spirituality 2, p. 135; and Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 172.
says that some people experience the greatest temptations at the beginning of a conversion to the spiritual life, others in the middle or toward the end. It is therefore necessary to have a holy fear and humble perseverance in the virtues and in the struggle until the very end.

1 The Son speaks: “It is written that Jacob became a servant for the sake of Rachel, and the days seemed short to him due to his great love, for the greatness of his love made his work easier. 2 True, when Jacob thought he had obtained his desire, he was defrauded. Yet he went on working, because love does not make excuses for itself until it has got its wish. 3 It is the same way in spiritual matters. Many people struggle on bravely in prayer and deeds of piety in order to gain heaven. However, just when they think they have reached the peace of contemplation, then they get entangled in temptations, and their troubles multiply, and they find themselves to be quite imperfect precisely on those points where they had thought themselves to be almost perfect. 4 But this is nothing strange, because temptations exist that put people to the test in order to cleanse and perfect them. Temptations accrue for some of them at the start of their conversion to the spiritual life, and such people are rendered completely sound and stable in the end. 5 Others are more gravely tempted in the middle or toward the end, and such people should carefully examine themselves and never be presumptuous but struggle all the more vigorously. It is as Laban said: 6 ‘It is the custom to wed the older sister first,’ which is to say: ‘Toil and struggle first and then you will have the rest you desire.’ 7 Therefore, my daughter, do not be surprised if temptations accrue in your old age. While you still live, you can be tempted, because the devil never sleeps and because temptation is an opportunity for perfection and keeps you from presumption. 8 Look, I show you the example of two men. One was tempted at the beginning of his conversion but he persevered and went ahead and attained what he sought. 9 The other experienced grave temptations in his old age that he scarcely had known in his youth. He became so entangled in these that he almost forgot everything he had known before. 10 However, he persevered in his resolution and kept on struggling, despite feeling cold and lukewarm. Because of that, he gained his desire and peace of mind, realizing that God’s judgments are hidden and just, and that, if it had not been for those temptations, he would hardly have gained eternal salvation.”

3. “He was defrauded”: David was tricked on his wedding day into taking Rachel’s elder sister, Leah, as his bride. Rachel is the traditional symbol of the contemplative life, and Leah of the active life.
4. “Peace of contemplation”: The first stage in the mystic’s path to God, namely purity through prayer and contemplation, is suggested in this passage; cf. also Book IV 12. See further Dinzelbacher, “Saint Bridget and Mysticism”; and Morris, “Four Birgittine Meditations,” pp. 168–69.
Interrogation 12

Questions on the Birth of Christ

1 First question. Again the monk appeared standing on his rung as before and saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why did you prefer to be born of a virgin rather than of another woman who was not a virgin?”

2 Second question. “Why did you not show with a visible sign that she was a mother and a pure virgin?”

3 Third question. “Why did you hide your birth so that it was known only to a very few?”

4 Fourth question. “Why did you flee to Egypt because of Herod and why did you permit the innocent boys to be killed?”

5 Fifth question. “Why do you permit yourself to be blasphemed and falsehood to prevail over truth?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “O friend, I preferred to be born of a virgin rather than of a woman who was not a virgin, because that which is purest befits me who am God most pure. 7 While it remained in the order of its creation, human nature had no deformity. But once the commandment was transgressed, there immediately arose a sense of shame, just as happens to people who sin against their temporal lord, who are even ashamed of the very limbs with which they have sinned. 8 Along with shame over the transgression, there also sprang up a disordered impulse, especially in the reproductive organs. 9 Yet, in order that this impulse might not be unproductive, it was by God’s goodness turned to good, and the act of carnal union was established by divine commandment in order that nature might bear its fruits. 10 However, since it brings greater glory to act above and beyond the commandment, adding whatever good one is led by love to make, it pleased God to choose for his work the institution tending to greater purity and love, 11 and that is virginity. For it is more virtuous and generous to be in the fire of tribulation and not to burn than to be without fire and still want to be crowned. 12 Now, since virginity is like the fairest path to heaven while marriage is more like a road, it befitted me, God most pure, to rest in a virgin most pure. 13 Just as the first man was created from the virgin earth, not yet polluted by blood, and because Adam and Eve committed their sin while they were still in a sound state of nature, so too I, God, wished to be received in the purest vessel so as to transform everything by my goodness.”

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1. “Once the commandment was transgressed,” i.e., after the Fall of Man (cf. also 12.26).
2. “Adam and Eve committed their sin while they were still in a sound state of nature” renders “Adam et Eua peccauerunt in sanctitate,” which is the editor’s chosen wording; cf., however, Sw. “adam och ewa syndhadhen j natwrena heleligheth” [Adam and Eve sinned in the sanctity of nature], indicating that the translator read “sanctitate” for “sanitate.” Some sources have additional variants that suggest that Adam and Eve sinned through gluttony, “gula scilicet comedentes fructum vetitum” after “committed their sin”; and there is an additional gloss on “sanitate nature” in two sources: “id est natura generacionis permanente incorrupta et integra” [that is, the nature of generation remaining uncorrupted and whole] after “nature.”
14 Answer to the second question. “As to why I did not show by open signs that my mother was mother and virgin, I answer: I intimated all the mysteries of my incarnation to the prophets, so that these mysteries might the more firmly be believed the longer ago they had been foretold. 15 To prove that my mother was truly a virgin before and after childbirth, Joseph’s testimony was sufficient, inasmuch as he was the guardian and witness of her virginity. 16 Even if her chasteness had been shown by a more evident miracle, unbelievers would not out of wickedness have yielded in their blasphemy. Such people do not believe that a virgin could conceive by divine power, because they do not realize that it is easier for me, God, to do this than for the sun to penetrate glass. 17 And, of course, divine justice kept the mystery of God’s incarnation hidden from the devil and from men to be revealed in the time of grace. Now, in fact, I affirm that my mother is truly mother and virgin. 18 Just as wonderful as the divine power was in forming Adam and Eve, and just as their dwelling together was delightful and virtuous, so too there was wonderful goodness in the coming of my divinity to the virgin, for my incomprehensible divinity descended into a closed vessel without its violation. 19 And there was a delightful cohabitation with me there, inasmuch as I, God, who am everywhere in my divinity, was there enclosed in humanity. Wonderful, too, was the power shown there, for I, unembodied God, left the womb embodied, yet her virginity remained intact. 20 Therefore, since humankind is difficult about believing, while my mother is a friend to all humility, it pleased me accordingly to conceal her beauty and perfection for a time in order that my mother might deserve to be more perfectly rewarded and so that I, God, might be glorified all the more at that time when I should wish to fulfill my promises to reward the good and to punish the wicked.”

21 Answer to the third question. “As to why I did not disclose my birth to people in general, I answer: Although the devil lost the dignity of his first state, still he did not lose his cunning, which belongs to him for the trial of the good and for his own shame. 22 In order that my human form might grow and reach its determined age, it was necessary to hide the mystery of my religion from the devil, because I wanted to enter hidden into combat with the devil, and because I resolved to be despised in order to overthrow human pride. 23 Indeed, the very teachers of the law, which they read about in their books, despised me because I came as a humble man, and, because they were proud, they did not want to hear about true justice, which comes from the faith of my redemption. They shall therefore be confounded when the ‘son of perdition’ comes in his pride. 24 If I had come in the greatest power and glory, would

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3. “Truly a virgin before and after childbirth”: The perpetual virginity of Mary—the doctrine that Mary was always a virgin, thus making Jesus’ conception and birth miraculous—has been commonly held since the second century. See also Book VI 59, and Sermo Angelicus 15.

4. “The devil lost the dignity of his first state”: a reference to the fall of the archangel (Lucifer) who was cast out from heaven on account of his pride.


6. “Son of perdition”: cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 John 2:18–22.
the proud then have been humbled? Will the proud now enter heaven? Certainly not! 25 I came as a humble man in order that the people might learn humility. And I hid myself from the proud, because they wished to understand neither my justice nor their very selves.”

26 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why I fled to Egypt,” I answer: Before the commandment was transgressed, there was just one road to heaven, broad and bright. It was broad in the abundance of virtues and bright in divine wisdom and in the obedience of a good will. 27 Once that will was changed, two roads came into being. One led to heaven, the other led away from it. Obedience led to heaven, disobedience led astray. 28 And as the choice between good and evil lay in the human will, that is, to obey or not to obey, people sinned whenever they willed something other than what I wanted them to will. 29 In order to save humankind, it was just and right that someone should come who was able to redeem them, someone who also was perfectly obedient and innocent, someone towards whom those who wished could show love and those who wished could show malice. 30 However, it was not right for an angel to be sent to redeem humankind, because I, God, do not give my glory to others. Nor could any human person be found to appease me for his or her own sake, let alone for others. So I, God, the only Just One, came to make all just. 31 My flight to Egypt revealed the frailty of my human nature and fulfilled a prophecy. I also set an example for those to come, because persecution should at times be avoided for God’s greater glory in the future. 32 My escape from my pursuers shows that my divine plan surpassed human plans, for it is not easy to fight against God. 33 Furthermore, the slaying of the infants was a sign of my future passion, and a mystery of vocation and divine charity. 34 Although the infants themselves did not bear witness to me with their voice and mouth, yet they bore it by their death, as befitted my own infancy. Indeed it had been foreseen that the praise of God would be fulfilled even by the blood of innocents. 35 And although the malice of the unjust fell upon them, yet my divine permission, which is always just and kind, did not expose them to it with injustice but so as to disclose human malice and the incomprehensible purpose and kindness of God. 36 Thus, where unjust malice erupted against the boys, there merit and grace justly abounded, and where there was no verbal testimony or proper age, there bloodshed brought them the highest good.”

37 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why I permit myself to be blasphemed, I answer: It is written that when King David was avoiding his son’s persecution, a certain man cursed him along the way. 38 When his servants wanted to kill the man, David forbade them for two reasons: first, because he

12. “It is written”; cf. 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 16:7–23.
had a hope of returning; second, because he was mindful of his own weakness and sin and of the ignorance of him who had cursed him as well as of the patience and goodness of God. 39 I am David, figuratively speaking. People persecute me with their wicked deeds, like a slave who chases his master, and they throw me out of my own kingdom, that is, out of the soul that I created and that is my kingdom. 40 Then they find fault with me, like a criminal finds fault with his sentence, and they even blaspheme against me, because I am patient. 13 Because I am mild, I suffer their foolishness. Because I am the Judge, I wait for them to convert until the very last moment. 41 Finally, since people in general believe more in falsehood than in truth, and love the world more than me, their God, it is no wonder if the wicked are tolerated in their wickedness, for they wish neither to seek the truth nor to recover from their wickedness."

Revelation 7

A Revelation about Habitual Confession

The seventh revelation in the Book of Questions, in which Christ speaks to his bride, blessed Birgitta, and praises frequent confession, in order that people may not lose the grace of God that they have.

1 The Son of God speaks: “When there is fire in a house, a venthole is needed to let out the smoke and allow the inhabitant to enjoy the heat. 2 Likewise, for anyone who desires to keep my spirit and my grace, habitual confession is useful in order to let out the smoke of sin. 3 Although my divine spirit is in itself unchangeable, nevertheless it quickly withdraws from the heart that is not protected by the humility of confession.”

Revelation 8

A Revelation about a Man’s Three Inner Voices

The eighth revelation in the Book of Questions in which Christ speaks to his bride and says that the prayer of people who take their pleasure in carnal and earthly delights, neglecting heavenly desires, charity, and the memory of his passion and of eternal judgment, is

1 On David’s humility and patience, see also Book IV 76, 106.
2 “Venthole” renders Lat. “foramen”; cf. Sw. “vindögha,” literally an “eye” in the roof or wall to let out smoke and let in light; cf. English “window.”
3 “The smoke of sin”: This image is also used in Book IV 49 and Extravagantes 51, referring to smoke as signifying the physically and morally corrupt; cf. similar imagery in Book IV 13 (on the boy in the house).
4 This revelation is similar to Book VI 19, which has an explanation identifying the man as a dissolute monk of the monastery of St. Lawrence in Rome, who was murdered by his enemies and buried in the monastic church. It is possible, therefore, that the revelation dates from Birgitta’s years in Rome, and is a late addition to the book.
like the sound of colliding stones, and they will be thrust away with loathing from God’s sight like an abortion or an unclean menstrual cloth.

1 “That man was singing: ‘Deliver me, o Lord, from the unrighteous man!’ 2 His voice is in my ears like the sound of two stones colliding. His heart calls to me as if with three voices. 2 The first says: ‘I want to have my will in my own control, to sleep and to rise and to talk of pleasant things. I shall give to nature what it craves. 3 I want money in my purse, soft clothes on my back. When I get these and similar things, I count them a greater happiness than all other gifts and the spiritual virtues of the soul.’ 4 His second voice says: ‘Death is not too hard, and the judgment is not so severe as is written; harsh threats are made as a warning, but mild punishments are given out of mercy. 5 Therefore, so long as I can have my will in the present, let my soul make its passage as best it can in the future.’ 6 The third voice says: ‘God would not have redeemed us, if he had not wanted to give us heavenly things, nor would he have suffered, if he had not wanted to bring us back to our fatherland. Indeed, why did he suffer? Or who compelled him to suffer? 7 Of course, I do not understand heavenly things except by hearsay, and I do not know for sure whether I should trust the Scriptures. If I could only have my will, I would have it instead of the heavenly kingdom.’ 8 You can see what that man’s will is like and why his voice is like the sound of stones in my ears.

9 But, o friend, I answer your first voice: Your way does not tend toward heaven, nor is the passion of my love to your taste. Therefore hell lies open for you, and, because you love the low things of the earth, you will go to the regions below. 10 I answer your second voice: Son, death will be hard for you, judgment unbearable, and flight impossible, unless you mend your ways. 11 I tell your third voice: Brother, I did all my works out of love in order that you might become like me and so that, after having been turned away from me, you might return to me. But now my works are dead in you, my words are burdensome, and my way is neglected. 12 What awaits you, therefore, is the torment and company of demons, because you turn your back on me, you trample underfoot the signs of my humility, and you do not consider how I stood on the cross in your sight and for your sake. 13 I stood there in three ways for your sake. First as a man, whose eye a dagger would penetrate; 4 second, as a man whose heart would be pierced by a sword; third, as a man whose every limb would shake with the pain of pressing affliction. 14 My passion indeed was more bitter to me than a puncture in the eye; yet I suffered

2. “Deliver me …from the unrighteous man”; cf. Psalm 139 (140):1. These are the opening words of the tract (i.e., the solemn song before the Gospel) of the Good Friday Mass, which suggests that the revelation was prompted by the liturgy for Good Friday (see Kezel, in Tjader Harris, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 263n300). The fact that the man “was singing” suggests he was a priest or monk.

3. “Having been turned away” renders “auersus”; but cf. the variant in certain manuscripts “adversus” (turned to).

it out of love. 15 My mother’s sorrow moved my heart more than my own, yet I bore it. All my inner and outer parts, too, shook for a long time from pressing pain and suffering, yet I did not give up nor retreat. 16 Thus I stood in your sight, but you forget and neglect and scorn it all. You will therefore be thrust away like an abortion and a menstrual cloth.”

Interrogation 13

Questions on Some Discrepancies in the World

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his rung as before saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why is your grace withdrawn quickly from some people while others are tolerated in their wickedness for a long time?”

2 Second question. “Why is grace given to some people in youth, while others are deprived of it in old age?”

3 Third question. “Why do some people suffer excessive hardship, while others live more or less free from hardship?”

4 Fourth question. “Why is intelligence and an extremely quick mind given to some people, while others are like mindless asses?”

5 Fifth question. “Why are some people exceedingly hardened, while others enjoy wonderful consolation?”

6 Sixth question. “Why is more worldly success given to the wicked than to the good?”

7 Seventh question. “Why does one person receive his or her calling at the beginning, while another toward the end?”

8 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, all my works are from the start in my foreknowledge, and everything that has been made was created for the comfort and solace of humankind. 9 However, since people in general prefer their own will to my will, the good things gratuitously given them are therefore justly taken away from them, so that they may know that everything concerning God is rational and just. 10 And because many people are ungrateful for my grace and grow less devout the more gifts are given to them, the gifts are therefore soon taken away from them so as to reveal my divine purpose more quickly and so that people may not abuse my grace and receive a harsher sentence. 11 The reason why some people are tolerated in their wickedness for a long time is that many of them do have something tolerable to show in the midst of their evildoings. 12 They act either as a benefit or a warning to others. Saul, for example, when he was reproached by Samuel, seemed only to have sinned slightly in human eyes while David seemed to have

5. “Menstrual cloth”; cf. Isaiah 30:22; 64:6; see also Book IV 118.8.
2. “Comfort and solace” renders “solatium” to convey both the material and the spiritual nuance; cf. Sw. “hwghnadh.”
sinned more.\(^4\) 13 Yet, in that test, Saul turned disobediently from me, his God, and consulted the sorceress,\(^5\) whereas David grew more faithful in temptation, patiently enduring what happened and thinking it to have befallen him in return for his sins. 14 Both Saul’s ingratitude and my divine patience were revealed in my patient forbearance with him. Both my foreknowledge and David’s future humility and contrition were revealed through my election of him.”

15 Answer to the second question. “As to why grace is taken away from some people in old age, I answer: Grace is given to all in order that the giver of grace might by loved by all. 16 Because many people are ungrateful for my divine grace toward life’s end, just as Solomon was,\(^6\) it is right that the gifts that have not been carefully maintained before the end should be taken away at the end. 17 The gift of my divine grace is taken away sometimes due to the recipient’s negligence, because he does not consider the greatness of the gift nor what he should give in return, and sometimes as a warning to others, so that everyone in a state of grace may be ever on guard and fearful about the fall of others. 18 Even the wise have fallen through negligence, and even those who seemed to be my friends have been brought low because of their ingratitude.”

19 Answer to the third question. “As to why greater hardships are given to some, I answer: I am the maker of all things. Thus, no hardship comes without my permission, as it is written:\(^7\) 20 ‘I am God creating woe,’ that is, permitting hardship. Hardship does not befall the heathen without me and without a reasonable cause. 21 Indeed, my prophets made many predictions about the adversities of the heathen in order that those who had neglected and abused reason might be taught by suffering, and in order that I, God, who permitted it all, should be known and glorified by every nation. 22 Therefore, if I, God, do not spare pagans from suffering, even less will I spare those who have tasted the sweetness of my divine grace more plentifully. 23 There is indeed less hardship for some and more for others in order to turn people away from sin and so that those who suffer hardships in the present might be comforted in the future. 24 All those who are judged and who judge themselves in this age will not come into future judgment. As it is written,\(^8\) ‘They shall pass from death into life.’ 25 There are also some that are protected from suffering, but this happens so that they do not incur a harsher judgment by grumbling at their sufferings. Many there are who do not deserve to suffer in this world. 26 There are also some people in this life who are afflicted neither in body nor in spirit. They pass their lives as carefree as though God did not exist, or as though God is sparing them for the sake of their righteous works. 27 Such people should be filled with dread for fear that I, God, who spare them in the present, come suddenly and condemn them more harshly as being without

\(^{4}\) “David seemed to have sinned more”: probably referring to his adultery, 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 11–12.

\(^{5}\) “Consulted the sorceress”: cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 28:7–24.

\(^{6}\) “Just as Solomon was”: cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 11:4. Cf. Book I 51 8–9.

\(^{7}\) “As it is written”: cf. Isaiah 45:7.

\(^{8}\) “As it is written”: cf. John 5:24.
contrition. 28 There are also those who enjoy health of body but are troubled in their soul about the contempt of God,9 while others enjoy neither health of body nor inner consolation of soul and yet persevere as far as they are able in my service and honor. There are others, too, who are always sick, from their mother’s womb up until their death. 29 I, the God of all of these, regulate their sufferings so that nothing happens without cause or reward, for many people, who were asleep before their trials, have their eyes opened by suffering.”

30 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why some people are more intelligent, I answer: With regard to eternal salvation, abundant wisdom does not benefit the soul, unless she also shines with goodness of life. It is in fact more useful to have less knowledge but a better way of life. 31 Accordingly, reason is measured out to all persons in such a way that they can gain heaven, if they lead godly lives. Yet the reasoning faculty differs in many people according to their natural and spiritual dispositions. 32 Just as one person succeeds through virtue and Godsent zeal in perfecting the virtues, another can likewise fall into vanities through bad will and nature’s bad disposition as well as an immoral upbringing. 33 One’s nature is often damaged when one sins and struggles against nature. Therefore, it is not without cause that some people have a greater reasoning faculty but to no use, as in the case of those who have knowledge but not a corresponding way of life.10 34 Other people have less knowledge but make better use of it. In some people, moreover, there is harmony between their knowledge and way of living, while still others display neither reasoning nor a decent way of life. 35 This variation derives at times from my ordinary divine permission (either for people’s benefit or humiliation and edification), but at times it is the result of ingratitude and temptation or of a natural defect or of secret sin. 36 Sometimes, too, it occurs in order to avoid the occasion of a greater sin or because of limited natural capacity. Whoever, then, has the grace of greater understanding should beware of the danger of a harsher judgment if he or she is negligent. 37 Whoever lacks understanding and intellectual brilliance should take advantage of the little he has and do what he can—for he has been saved from many occasions of sin. 38 In youth even Peter the Apostle was forgetful, and John unlearned.11 Yet they grasped true wisdom in old age, for they sought the source of wisdom. Solomon was quick to learn when young, and Aristotle12 had a subtle mind.

9. “About the contempt of God” renders “de contemptu Dei”; cf. Sw. “aff gwdhz förmådlisse.” The phrase should be interpreted in a positive light, to suggest that these people are worried in their souls about showing contempt for God.


12. “Aristotle”: Birgitta makes a rare reference to a non-Christian writer here. The teachings of Aristotle (384–322 b.c.), which led to a materialistic view of the world, were viewed with suspicion by Christian theologians, even though Aquinas and others built their philosophical systems on Aristotelian foundations.
However, they did not grasp the origin of wisdom, for they neither glorified the giver of wisdom, as they should have, nor put into practice what they knew and taught, nor studied in order to improve themselves but to improve others.

Balaam, too, had knowledge but did not practice it, which was why the she-ass rebuked him for foolishness. And young Daniel was the judge of his elders.

Since, therefore, it is not scholarship that is pleasing to me but a good way of life, it is necessary to correct those who abuse their reasoning faculty, for I, the God and Lord of all, give knowledge to humankind, and I correct both wise and unwise.

42 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why some people are hardened, I answer: Pharaoh’s hardness of heart was his own fault, not mine, because he did not want to conform himself to my divine will. Hardness of heart is nothing other than the withdrawal of my divine grace, which is withdrawn when people do not give me, their God, their free possession, namely, their will. You can understand this by means of a parable. There was a man who owned two fields, one of which lay fallow, while the other bore fruit at certain times. A friend of his said to him: ‘I wonder why, although you are wise and rich, you do not take more care to cultivate your fields or why you do not give them to others to cultivate.’ The man answered: ‘One of the fields, no matter how much care I take, does not produce anything but the most useless plants that are seized by noxious animals that ruin the place. If I fertilize it with manure, it only insults me by growing wild because, though it does produce a small amount of grain, even more weeds spring up, which I refuse to gather in, since I only want pure grain. The better plan, then, is to leave a field like that uncultivated, since then the animals do not occupy the place or hide in the grass, and, if any bitter herbs do sprout, they are useful for the sheep, because, after tasting them, the sheep learn not to be fastidious about sweeter fodder. The other field is managed according to the nature of the seasons. Some parts of it are stony and need fertilizer; other parts are wet and need warmth, while still others are dry and need watering. Thus I organize my work according to the different conditions of the field.’ I, God, am like this man. The first field represents the free activity of the will given to man, which he uses more against me than for me. Even if man does do some things that please me, yet he provokes me in more ways, since man’s will and my will are not in harmony. Pharaoh also acted in this way when, although he knew my power by means of sure signs, nevertheless he set his mind against me and continued on in his wickedness. Therefore, he experienced my justice, because it is only just that a person who does not make good use of small
things should not be allowed to rejoice proudly in greater ones.\textsuperscript{18} 54 The second field represents the obedience of a good mind and the denial of self-will. If such a mind is dry in devotion, it should wait for the rain of my divine grace. 55 If it is stony through impatience and hardheartedness, it should bear chastening and correction with equanimity. If it is wet through carnal lust, it should embrace abstinence and be like an animal alert to its owner's will. I, God, can proudly rejoice in a mind like that. 56 The human will acting in opposition to me causes people to be hardhearted. I desire the salvation of everyone,\textsuperscript{19} but this cannot come about without the personal cooperation of each and every person in conforming his or her will to mine. 57 Furthermore, as to why grace and progress are not granted equally to all—that belongs to my hidden judgment. I know and measure out what is beneficial and appropriate to each one, and I hold people back in their designs so that they do not fall more deeply. 58 Many people have received the talent\textsuperscript{20} of grace and are capable of working but refuse to do so. Others keep themselves from sin out of fear of punishment, or because they do not have the possibility of sinning, or because sin does not attract them. Thus, some are not given greater gifts, because I alone understand the human mind and know how to distribute my gifts."

59 Answer to the sixth question. “As to why the wicked sometimes have greater worldly success than the good, I answer: This is an indication of my great patience and love and a testing of the righteous. 60 If I were to give temporal goods to my friends alone, then the wicked would despair and the good would grow proud. Instead, temporal goods are granted to all, so that I, God, the giver and Creator of all things, may be loved by all and so that good people who become proud may be taught righteousness by means of the wicked. 61 It is also in order that everyone may realize that temporal things are not to be loved or preferred to me, God, but are only to be possessed for the sake of sustenance, and in order that they may be all the more zealous in my service the less they rely on temporal possessions.”

62 Answer to the seventh question. “As to why one person is called at the beginning and another toward the end, I answer: I am like a mother who, seeing the hope of life in her children, gives stronger medicine to some and lighter medicine to others. And to those for whom there is no hope, she also shows compassion and does as much as she can. 63 But if the children just get worse from her medicine, why should she take further pains? 64 This is the way I treat my human children. The person who is foreseen to be more fervent in resolution of will and more steadfast in humility and perseverance receives

\textsuperscript{18} “It is only just … rejoice proudly in greater ones.” The point is obscure; it is omitted in Sw. although a secondary hand in MS Ups. G61 has inserted the proverb: “Ty huilkin ey nytar wel tz litzla han er ey verder tz mesta” [for whoever does not make good use of that little is not worthy of the most].

\textsuperscript{19} “I desire the salvation of everyone”; cf. 1 Timothy 2:4.


\textsuperscript{21} “Is called” renders “vocatur”; Sw. adds “eller dö” [or dies], which has been deleted and replaced by “til nadhena” [to grace].
grace in the beginning, and it continues to the end. A person who struggles against vice and yearns to be better deserves to be called toward the end of life. An ungrateful person, however, does not deserve to be admitted to his mother’s breast.”

Revelation 9

A Revelation about a Poor Home

The ninth revelation in the Book of Questions in which Christ speaks to his bride, blessed Birgitta, and shows her how she has already been rescued and delivered from the house of the world and of vices, and that she has already been brought to live in the mansion of the Holy Spirit. And he warns her to conform herself to that same Spirit by ever persevering in purity, humility, and devotion.

The Son speaks to the bride: “You are a woman who was raised in a poor home and entered the company of the great. In a poor home there are three things: stained walls, harmful smoke, and soot everywhere. But you have been brought to a home where there is beauty without stain, heat without smoke, charm that is everywhere and never fails to please. The poor home represents the world. Its walls are pride, forgetfulness of God, abundance of sin, lack of forethought for the future. These walls leave a stain, because they ruin good works and hide God’s face from humankind. The smoke represents the love of this world. It harms the eyes, because it darkens the understanding of the soul and makes her anxious about trifling vanities. The soot represents lustful pleasure, because, though it may provide temporary enjoyment, it never satisfies or fills anyone up with the everlasting good. You have been taken away from these things and brought to the mansion of the Holy Spirit, who is in me and I in him, and who also encloses you within himself. It is he who is purest and fairest and most stable, for he upholds all things. Conform yourself, therefore, to the inhabitant of the house by remaining pure, humble, and devout.”

Interrogation 14

Further Questions on Discrepancies in Creation

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his rung as before, saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why do animals suffer disease, though they will not obtain eternal life nor have the use of reason?”

2 Second question. “Why is everything born in pain, though sin is not involved in every birth?”

3 Third question. “Why does an infant carry the sin of its father, though it does not know how to sin?”

4 Fourth question. “Why do unforeseen events happen so often?”
5 Fifth question. “Why does a bad person die in a good death like the righteous while a righteous person sometimes dies a bad death like the unrighteous?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, your questioning does not come from love; however I answer you for the love of others. You ask why animals suffer infirmities. 7 This is because there exists a disorder in them as in the rest of creation. I am the maker of every nature and have given to each its own temperament and order in which each one moves and lives. 8 However, after man, for whose sake all things were made, set himself against his lover,¹ that is, against me his God, then disorder entered all the rest of creation, and all the things that should have been afraid of man began to set themselves against him and oppose him. 9 Because of this defective disorder many troubles and difficulties befall humankind as well as animals. 10 Besides, sometimes animals also suffer because of their own natural immoderation or as a curb to their ferocity, or as a cleansing of nature itself, or sometimes because of human sins in order that human beings, who have a greater use of reason, might consider how much punishment they deserve, when the creatures they love are plagued and taken away. 11 But if human sins did not demand it, animals, which are under human charge, would not suffer in so singular a manner. But not even they suffer without great justice. 12 Their suffering occurs either to put a quicker end to their lives and lessen their wretched toils that consume their strength or on account of a change in seasons or out of human carelessness during the process of work. 13 People should therefore fear me, their God, above all things, and treat my creatures and animals more mildly, having mercy on them for the sake of me, their Creator. 14 I, God, accordingly decreed the Sabbath² rest, because I care for all my creation.”

15 Answer to the second question. “As to why everything is born in pain, I answer: When humankind rejected the fairest pleasure, they immediately incurred a life of toil. 16 And because the disorder began in and through humankind, my justice causes there to be some bitterness even for other creatures, which exist for the sake of humans, so as to temper their pleasure and foster their means of nourishment. 17 For this reason, people are born with pain and make toilsome progress in order to render them eager to hurry to their true rest. They die naked and poor in order to make them restrain their disorderly behavior and fear the coming examination. 18 Likewise animals, too, give birth in pain in order for bitterness to temper their excesses, and so that they may be participants in human toil and sorrow. For this reason, insofar as humankind is so much nobler than are animals, people should love me, the Lord God, their Creator, all that much more fervently.”

¹. “His lover”: a term, for Christ, that is uncommon in Birgitta’s writings, although frequent among other mystical writers.
19 Answer to the third question. “As to why a child carries the sins of his father, I answer: Can anything clean come from that which is unclean? When he lost the beauty of innocence due to disobedience, the first man was thrown out of the paradise of joy and was enveloped in unclean things. There is no one to be found who can regain this innocence by himself. 21 For this reason, I, merciful God, appeared in the flesh and instituted baptism, by means of which a child is freed from perverse uncleanness and sin. Because of this, a son shall not carry the weight of his father’s sin, but each shall die in his own sin. 22 However it often happens that children imitate the sins of their parents. Sometimes, too, the fathers’ sins are punished in their children, not because their fathers’ sins go unpunished in the fathers themselves, although the punishment for sins may be put off for a time. Rather, each shall die in and be punished for his own sin. 23 As it is written, the sins of fathers are also sometimes visited upon the fourth generation, because it is my divine justice that, when sons do not try to placate my wrath either for themselves or for their fathers, they should be punished along with their fathers whom they followed against me.”

24 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why unforeseen events often happen, I answer: It is written that a man shall be punished by the very things in which he has sinned. Who can fathom God’s purpose? 25 Given that many people seek me not in accordance with knowledge but for the sake of the world, some of them having more fear than is right, others taking too much for granted, still others being proud in their own counsel, I, God, working for the salvation of all, sometimes bring about that which people fear most. 26 At times that which is loved more than is right is taken away, while at other times things that are sought and desired overanxiously are delayed, so that people may fear, love, and acknowledge me as their God always and above all things.”

27 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why a bad person dies a good death like the righteous, I answer: The wicked sometimes have some good to them and perform some works of justice, and for these they must be rewarded in the present life. 28 Likewise, the righteous do bad things at times, and for these they must receive punishment in the present or they must expect it. 29 As everything in the present life is uncertain, and all things are left to the future, and as there is only one entrance for everyone, so there must also be only one exit for everyone, though it is not the manner of their exit but that of their life that makes people blessed. 30 When wicked people make the same kind of exit as the righteous, it is because of my divine justice, because they themselves desired that exit. 31 Sometimes the devil, foreseeing the exit of his friends, announces to them beforehand the time of their death with a view to their

4. “As it is written”; cf. Exodus 20:5.
7. “One entrance . . . one exit for everyone”; cf. int. 9.20.
vainglory and presumption and deception (as one finds in the so-called apocryphal books\(^8\)) so that they may receive the fame of righteousness after death. 32 On the other hand, a sorrowful death sometimes occurs to the righteous with a view to their greater reward in order that those who were always concerned about virtue in their lifetime might be free to fly to heaven through an ignominious death, inasmuch as no offscourings\(^9\) to cleanse\(^10\) can be found in them. It is written\(^11\) that the lion killed the disobedient prophet but guarded the corpse without eating it. 33 That the lion kills the body—what else does it imply if not my divine permission that allows the disobedience of the prophet to be punished? 34 The fact that the lion did not eat the body was a proof of the good works of the prophet, so that, purged in the present, he would be found righteous in the life to come. 35 Let everyone therefore be wary of analyzing my decisions. For, even as I am incomprehensible in virtue and power, so too I am terrible in my judgments and counsels. And, indeed, some people, wishing to comprehend me in their wisdom, have been cut off from their hope.”

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\# Revelation 10

**A Revelation on How God’s Words Can Be Interpreted in Different Ways**

The tenth revelation in the Book of Questions, in which Christ speaks to the bride and warns her not to be disturbed if the divine words he has given her in revelations sometimes seem obscure or doubtful or uncertain. This is due to certain reasons explained here or because of God’s hidden justice. He advises her, however, always to await the results and promises of his words with patience and fear and perseverance in humility, in order not to lose the promised grace because of ingratitude. He also says that many things have been expressed in a corporeal fashion that will not be effected corporally but spiritually.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “Do not be disturbed if I express one thing more obscurely, and another more plainly; or if I now call someone my servant or son and friend and then he turns out to be the opposite. 2 My words can be interpreted in diverse ways: just as I told you of one man,\(^1\) that his hand would be his death, or of another, that he would no longer approach my table. 3 These things are said either because I am going to tell you why I said it or because you

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\(^8\) “As one finds in the so-called apocryphal books”: This reference is too general for closer identification.

\(^9\) “Offscourings” renders “perismata” (cf. Greek “peripsima” from 1 Corinthians 4:13); the entire clause is omitted in the Swedish translation.

\(^10\) “To cleanse” renders “mundanda”; but cf. “mundana” [belonging to the world] in two manuscript variants.

\(^11\) “It is written”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 13:20–32.

\(^1\) “Just as I told you of one man”; cf. Book IV 102; and VI 90.
will see how the truth turns out in actual fact, as is clear from the two cases just mentioned. 4 Sometimes I also say things in an obscure way, so that you may feel both fear and joy—fear in case they should turn out differently because of my divine patience (for I know how hearts change) but also joy because my will is always fulfilled. 5 So too, in the Old Law, I said many things that should be understood spiritually rather than corporally, for example, concerning the temple and David and Jerusalem—in order that carnal men might learn to desire spiritual things. 6 In order to test the constancy of faith and conscientiousness of my friends, I said and promised many things that could—according to the different effects of my Spirit—be understood in different ways by good and bad. This was also done so that individuals in different states of life might have occasion to be trained and tested and formed by me. 7 It is due to my justice that some things have been said in an obscure way, in order that my plan might remain hidden and so that each person might patiently await my grace and avoid becoming lukewarm while waiting—which might have happened if my plan had always been indicated with a definite date. 8 I have also promised many things that have been taken back because of human ingratitude. Many things, too, have been expressed corporally but effected spiritually, for example, concerning Jerusalem and Zion. 2 For, as it is written, 3 the Jews are the blind and deaf People of the Lord.”

# Interrogation 15

Questions on Useless Things, the Devil, Evil, and Sin

1 First question. Again the monk appeared on his rung as before, saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why are many things created that seem to be of no use?”

2 Second question. “Why are souls not commonly seen either remaining in the body or going out of it?”

3 Third question. “Why are the prayers of your friends not always heard?”

4 Fourth question. “Why are many people who want to do evil not allowed to do it?”

5 Fifth question. “Why does evil happen to some people who do not deserve it?”

6 Sixth question. “Why do those who have God’s Spirit sin?”

7 Seventh question. “Why does the devil stay close to some people and is continuously with them but never with others?”

8 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, just as my works are many, so they are also wonderful and unfathomable. Yet none of them, many though they are, is without a purpose. 9 Truly, humankind is like a child brought up in a dark prison. If he were told of the existence of light and

2. “Jerusalem and Zion”: The sense is that many prophecies concerning Jerusalem or Zion have been fulfilled in the church, or will be fulfilled in the heavenly Jerusalem.

stars, he would not believe it, because he has never seen it.\footnote{1} Likewise, after the human race had abandoned the true light, it did not delight in anything but darkness, as the saying goes: ‘a person who grows accustomed to evil learns to like it.’\footnote{2} Therefore, while human intellect may be darkened, yet there is no shadow or change in me. I arranged and continue to arrange all things in so orderly, wise, and honest a fashion that nothing has been made without cause or use—\footnote{12} not the highest mountain nor the desert or the lakes, nor even beasts or poisonous reptiles. Just as I provide for humanity, so I provide for the needs of other creatures.\footnote{13} I am like a man who reserves some places for strolling, others for the storage of utensils and tools, others for keeping both tame and wild animals, others for fortifications and secret councils, others adapted for the proper use of land, still others for the correction of human-kind.\footnote{14} Thus I, God, have arranged all things in a rational way, some for human use and enjoyment, others for the various haunts of wild beasts and birds, some to discipline and curb human greed,\footnote{15} others for the meeting of the elements, some for the admiration of my works, others for the punishment of sinners and the meeting of higher and lower beings, and still others for a cause known and reserved to me alone.\footnote{16} Look, a small, puny bee knows how to draw on many sources for the making of honey;\footnote{3} so too other tiny or large creatures surpass human beings in cleverness both in recognizing herbs and in considering their own advantage; and there are many things that are useful for them but harmful for humans.\footnote{17} What wonder is it then that man’s wits are slow to discern and understand my wonders, when he is surpassed even by the least of creatures?\footnote{18} Look, what is nastier than a frog or snake, or what is more contemptible than a burr or a stinging nettle or the like? And yet those things are very good for those who can understand my works.\footnote{19} And so whatever exists has some usefulness in it, and every thing that has motion understands how its nature can survive and grow strong.\footnote{20} Therefore, given the wonder of my works and how all things praise me, human beings, who are so much more beautiful and so much more highly placed than other creatures, should accordingly realize that they are that much more obliged to honor me.\footnote{21} If the onrush of the waters were not repressed by the mountain boundaries, where would people dwell in safety? And if animals had no place of refuge, how would they escape insatiable human greed? And if people got all their wishes, would they then yearn for heaven?\footnote{22} If animals did not toil or live in fear, they would grow weak and perish. Thus, most of my work is hidden, so that people will recognize and

\footnote{1}{“A child...he has never seen it.” This idea is reminiscent of Plato’s cave (Republic 7.1–3), possibly via St. Gregory’s Dialogues 4.1; cf. also Book IV 15. Klockars, Birgitta och böcker, pp. 215 and 232, draws a comparison here with the Dominican mystic Henry Suso’s (d. 1336) Horologium sapientiae, which makes frequent use of Platonic images; see KL “Suso.” Cf. also Book IV 15.4.}

\footnote{2}{“A person who grows accustomed to evil learns to like it”; cf. the Sw. proverb “man ma swa vaenias vidh ilt at onth aer fulgoth” [one may get so accustomed to evil that wickedness is all good]; see Koch and af Petersens, Östnordiska, p. 188.}

\footnote{3}{“Bee...honey”; cf. Ecclesiasticus 11:3.}
honor me, God, wonderful and unfathomable, out of wonderment at my wisdom in creating so many creatures.”

23 Answer to the second question. “As to why one cannot see souls, I answer: The soul is far better by nature than the body, because it is of my divine power and is immortal, having fellowship with the angels and being more excellent than all the planets and nobler than the whole world. 24 And because the soul is of a most noble and fiery nature, giving life and warmth to the body, and because it is spiritual, it can in no way be seen by bodies except through bodily images.”

25 Answer to the third question. “As to why my friends who ask me for something in prayer are not always heard by me, I answer: I am like a mother who sees her son asking for something against his health and puts off granting his request, checking his tears with a display of indignation. 26 This indignation is not anger but great mercy. In the same way, I, God, do not always hear my friends, because I see what is needful to their health better than they do themselves. 27 Did not Paul and others pray efficaciously and yet were not heard? 28 But why? 29 It is because my friends have defects in the midst of an abundance of virtues and aspects that need to be cleansed, and, therefore, their prayers are not heard. This is in order that they might grow all the more humble and zealous toward me the more lovingly they are kept unharmed and are defended by me in temptations of sin. 29 It is therefore a great sign of love that my friends are not always heard in their prayers, since it is for the sake of their greater reward and as a test of their perseverance.

30 Just as the devil tries, if he can, to spoil the life of the righteous through sin or an ignominious death, in order to weaken the perseverance of the faithful, so too it is not without cause that I permit the righteous to be tested, in order that their steadfastness may become known to others and so that they may receive a more sublime crown. 31 And just as the devil is not ashamed to tempt his own people, when he sees that they are very quick to sin, so too, for a time, I do not spare my chosen people when I see that they are ready for every good action.”

32 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why some who wish to do evil are not allowed, I answer: If a father has two sons, one obedient and the other disobedient, he opposes his disobedient son as much as he can so that his son does not sin in his wickedness. 33 He tests the obedient son, however, and encourages him on to greater things in such a way as to encourage even the disobedient son by the example of the other son’s readiness. 34 And so I often do not allow the wicked to sin, because, in between their wicked acts, they do some good, and either benefit themselves or others. 35 Justice accordingly demands that they should not be immediately handed over to the devil nor always be allowed to carry out their wishes.”

5. “Great sign of love” renders “indicium magne dileccionis”; but cf. Sw. “mykyn miskwundh” [great mercy].
36 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why bad things happen to people who do not deserve them, I answer: I alone, God, know all who are good and what each one deserves. Many things seem indeed to be beautiful but are not. Moreover, gold is tested by fire. 6 Consequently, the righteous sometimes experience difficulties so that they may give good example to others and earn their crown. Job was tested in this way, for he was good before his afflictions, but during and after his afflictions he was recognized as even more so. 37 Yet, as to why I afflicted him, who can examine it? Who can know it but I myself, who blessed him early on and kept him from sin and sustained him in his trials? 38 Just as I blessed him beforehand with my grace without any merits of his own, so too I tested him with justice and mercy, for no one is made just in my sight except by my grace.”

40 Answer to the sixth question. “As to why those who have my Spirit sin, I answer: The Spirit of my divinity is not tied down but blows where it will and withdraws when it will. It does not dwell in a vessel that is subject to sin but only in one that has love. 41 I, God, am love, and where I am, there is freedom. Accordingly, those who receive my spirit can still sin, if they want, for every human being has free will. 11 42 And when people set their will against me, my Spirit, which is in them, withdraws from them, or otherwise they are rebuked in order that they may correct their will. 43 Balaam wished to curse my people but I did not let him. Although he was a bad and greedy prophet, yet sometimes he said something good, not of himself but through my Spirit. 44 Often the gift of my Spirit is given to both the good and the wicked. Otherwise, those great and eloquent teachers would not have been able to dispute of such high things if they had not had my Spirit; and they would not have raved on so foolishly, if they had not turned their senses against me and fell into pride, wanting to know more than they should.”

45 Answer to the seventh question. “As to why the devil stays closer and is always with some people, I answer: The devil is like an executioner and a tester of the righteous. By my permission he torments some people’s souls, darkens the conscience of others, and torments even the bodies of others. 46 He torments the souls of those who, sinning against reason, subject themselves to every kind of impurity and infidelity. He disturbs the consciences and bodies of those who are tormented and cleansed for certain sins in this world. 47 These torments also occur to children of either sex, both to pagans and Christians, either due to the carelessness of the parents or to a defect of nature or to instill
fear and humility in certain people or because of certain sins. But my justice mercifully disposes that such as these who do not have occasion to sin either are not harshly punished or receive a more sublime crown. 48 Many such things also occur to brute beasts either for the punishment of others or for a sooner end to their lives or because of some imbalance in their nature. 49 Therefore it is by my permission that the devil sticks closer to some people and is nearer to them, either for their greater humility and as a warning, or because of their greater crown and their solicitude in seeking me, or in order to purge sins in the present life, or because some people deserve a punishment that begins in the present and lasts forever.”

Revelation 11

A Revelation about a Wholesome Drink

The eleventh revelation in the Book of Questions in which Christ speaks to his bride, blessed Birgitta, and tells her why and when he began to give her and pour into her the words of the divine revelations in spiritual vision. And he tells her that these words of the revelations, which are contained in these books, have principally these four virtues: they are spiritually satisfying to anyone thirsting for true love, they warm the cold, they cheer the troubled, and they heal sick souls.

The Son of God speaks: “A wholesome drink\(^1\) can be made with natural means, such as cold iron and hard stone, a dry tree and a bitter herb. 2 But how? Well, if steel were to fall heavily upon a sulfurous mountain, then fire would come out of the steel and ignite the mountain. 3 Its heat would cause an olive tree planted nearby, which is dry on the outside but is full of oil\(^2\) inside, to begin to flow so abundantly that even bitter herbs planted at the foot of the olive tree would grow sweet, and then a wholesome drink could be made from them. 4 This is a spiritual allegory of what I have done for you. Your heart was as cold as steel toward my love, and yet a small spark of love for me was stirred up in it when you began to think of me as worthy of all love and honor. 5 But that heart of yours then fell upon a sulfurous mountain,\(^3\) when the glory and delight of the world turned against you and when your husband,\(^4\) whom you loved above all others in the flesh, was taken away from you in

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1. “Wholesome drink”: a possible echo of Birgitta herself drinking a bitter drink of gall on Fridays; see Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 99. There are some similarities between this revelation and Book III 21, which describes the fat and warmth offered by an olive tree, a revelation concerning the renewal of the Benedictine order.


3. “That heart... sulfurous mountain”; cf. Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 24, which states that Birgitta could smell sulfur when she heard blasphemy or met people who had committed mortal sin.

4. “Your husband”: a rare insight into Birgitta’s own marriage and her state during her early spiritual calling is given here.
death. 6 In truth, lusty pleasure and worldly delight are well compared to a
sulfurous mountain, since they have within themselves the swelling of the
spirit and the stench of concupiscence and the fire of punishment. 7 And when
your soul was gravely pierced with disturbance at the death of your husband,
then the spark of my love, which lay as though hidden and enclosed, began to
go forth, for, having considered the vanity of the world, you surrendered your
whole will to me and desired me above all things. 8 Because of that spark of
love, you developed a taste for the dry olive tree, that is, for the words of the
Gospels and the discourse of those learned men of mine, and abstinence so
pleased you that everything that previously seemed bitter began to become
sweet for you. 9 And when the olive tree began to flow and the words of my
revelations came down upon you in Spirit, somebody standing on the moun-
tain\(^5\) cried out, saying: ‘By this drink thirst is slaked, the cold are warmed, the
troubled are cheered, the infirm recover.’ 10 I myself, God, am the one who
cries out. My words, which you hear from me frequently in spiritual vision, are
like a good drink satisfying to those who thirst for true love; second, they warm
the cold; third, they cheer the troubled; fourth, they heal those who are weak
in soul.’’

\# Interrogation 16

Questions on the Gospels, the Hour of Judgment, and God’s Plan for the
World

1 First question. Again the monk appeared as before standing on his rung
and saying: “O Judge, I ask you: Why does the gospel say\(^1\) that the goats are
placed on your left, the sheep on your right? Do you really delight in such
things?”

2 Second question. “Since you are the Son of God, equal to the Father, why
is it written\(^2\) that neither you nor the angels knows the hour of judgment?”

3 Third question. “If your Holy Spirit has spoken through the evangelists,
why is there so much variance in the Gospels?”

4 Fourth question. “Since your incarnation was so important for the sal-
vation of the human race, why did you delay so long in becoming incarnate?

5 Fifth question. “Since the human soul is so much better than the world,
why do you not send your friends and preachers always and everywhere?”

6 Answer to the first question. The Judge answered: “Friend, you do not
ask in order to know but so as to let your wickedness be known. There is surely
nothing of flesh or represented by flesh in my divinity, for my divinity is Spirit.
Nor can the good and the wicked live together in me, no more than light can
coexist with darkness. 7 There is neither right and left in my divinity, as the

\(^{5}\) “Standing on the mountain”; cf. Zechariah 14:4; Apocalypse 14:1.
\(^{1}\) “The gospel say”; cf. Matthew 25:33.
physical image portrays it, nor are those on my right happier than those on the left, but this is all said figuratively. 8 By ‘right hand’ is understood the sublimity of my divine glory, by ‘left hand’ the lack and privation of all good. 9 Furthermore, sheep or goats are not to be found in that wondrous glory of mine, where nothing is found that is bodily and soiled or changeable. Rather, human characters are often described by means of comparisons and by symbols of animals; for example, innocence is signified by sheep, impurity by goats. In other words, the incontinent man is signified as placed on the left, where there is a lack of all good. 10 You should understand that I, God, sometimes make use of human words and similes so that the little child may have something to suck on,3 and so that the perfect may become more perfect. It is also to fulfill the Scripture that says that the Virgin’s Son has been placed as a sign of contradiction4 so that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed.”

11 Answer to the second question. “As to why I, the Son of God, said that I do not know the hour of judgment, I answer: It is written5 that Jesus progressed in age and wisdom. Anything that progresses and regresses is changeable; but the deity is unchangeable. 12 Thus I, the Son of God, coeternal with the Father, progressed in the sense that I did so in my human nature. What I did not know was what my humanity did not know, but, according to my divine nature, I both knew and know all things. 13 For the Father does nothing unless I, the Son, also do it. Can the Father know anything unknown to me, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? Of course not. 14 But the Father alone, with whom I, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one substance, one deity, and one will, knows the hour of the judgment, and not the angels nor any other creature.”

15 Answer to the third question. “As to why, if the Holy Spirit has spoken through them, there is so much variance among the evangelists, I answer: It is written6 that the Holy Spirit is various in his operations in that he distributes his gifts to his chosen people in varied ways. 16 Indeed, the Holy Spirit is like a man with a balance7 in his hand, measuring and balancing the scales until the balance reaches equilibrium and comes to rest.8 17 A balance is handled in different ways by a person who is used to it and by one who is unused to it, by one who is strong and by one who is weak. So the Holy Spirit now rises like a balance in human hearts, and then sinks again. 18 He rises when he uplifts the mind through keenness of understanding and through the soul’s devotion and through the inflaming of spiritual desire. He sinks when he allows the mind to

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6. “It is written”; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7–11.
fall into difficulties and to be anxious about trifling vanities and upset by tribulation. 19 Therefore, just as the balance cannot reach equilibrium unless the weights are adjusted, and it is controlled by a guiding hand, so too measure and a good life, a simple intention, and discretion in works and virtues are necessary for the operation of the Holy Spirit. 20 When I, the Son of God, visible in the flesh, preached different things in different places, I had different kinds of followers and listeners. 21 Some followed me out of love, others in order to have an occasion for fault finding or out of curiosity. Some of my followers had a keener intellect, others a simpler. 22 Accordingly, I spoke simply to instruct the simple. I also spoke deeply to awaken the wonder of the wise. 23 Sometimes I spoke darkly in parables, which gave some people an occasion for commenting. At other times I repeated things said earlier and sometimes added to or simplified them. 24 So it is no wonder that those who arranged the gospel narrative recorded different but still true things, for some of them wrote it down word for word, others captured the sense but not the exact words. 25 Some wrote things they had heard but not seen; others placed earlier events later; others wrote more about my divinity; yet all of them as the Spirit gave them to speak. 26 However, I want you to know that only those evangelists are to be accepted whom the church accepts. Many people attempted to write who had zeal but not in accordance with my knowledge. 27 Recall what I said in today’s reading: ‘Destroy this temple and I shall rebuild it.’ 28 Those who testified to what they heard were truthful regarding the words they heard, but they were false witnesses because they did not consider the sense of my words, for I spoke concerning my body. 29 Likewise when I said: ‘Unless you eat my flesh, you shall not have life.’ Many hearers went away, because they did not consider the conclusion that I added: 30 ‘My words are spirit and life,’ that is, they have a spiritual meaning and force. It is not remarkable that they went astray, inasmuch as they did not follow me out of love. 31 Thus the Holy Spirit rises in human hearts like a balance, at one time speaking corporeally, at another spiritually. And he sinks when the human heart is hardened against God or falls into heresies or worldliness and is darkened.”

32 At that moment the Judge said to the monk who sat questioning him on the rung of the ladder: “Friend, you have posed subtle questions to me
several times already. Now, for the sake of my bride who is standing here, I ask you: Why does your soul, which can understand and distinguish between good and bad, love perishable things rather than heavenly ones and does not live in accord with its understanding?” 34 The monk replied: “Because I act against reason and allow my bodily senses to prevail over reason.” And Christ said: “Then your conscience shall be your judge.” 35 Then Christ said to the bride: “See, daughter, how great the effects in the man are not only of the malice of the devil but also of a deformed conscience! And this comes about because he does not struggle against temptation as he ought. 36 But the master known to you did not act in this way. Indeed the Spirit sank in him, tempting him to such an extent that it seemed as if all the heresies stood before him and said with one mouth: ‘We are the truth.’ But he did not trust his thoughts and did not think beyond himself. For that reason he was rescued and became knowledgeable all the way from ‘In the beginning’ to the ‘alpha and omega,’ just as it was promised to him.”

38 Answer to the fourth question. “As to why I delayed so long in becoming incarnate, I answer: My incarnation was indeed necessary, for through it the curse was lifted and all things were reconciled in heaven and on earth. 39 Yet it was necessary for people to be instructed first by natural law, and then by written law. 40 Through natural law it became clear what human love was and how much it was worth. Through the written law humankind understood its weakness and wretchedness and began to seek medicine. 41 It was right for the doctor to come just when the sickness was raging, so that where disease abounded, the medicine might even more abound. 42 There were also many righteous people under the dispensations of natural law and of written law, and many who had the Holy Spirit and made many predictions and instructed others in all virtue, and awaited me, the Savior. These approached my mercy, not everlasting punishment.”

43 Answer to the fifth question. “As to why, given that the human soul is better than the world, preachers are not sent always and everywhere, I answer: The soul is indeed worthier and nobler than all the world, and more lasting than all things. 44 The soul is more worthy, because she is a spiritual creature

16. “Distinguish between good and bad”: that is, the discernment of spirits; see Voaden, God’s Words, Women’s Voices. Note that this same phrase is used concerning Linköping to describe his struggle against heresy (see volume 1, p. 13n28), but it could equally refer to any man in holy orders.

17. “Master known to you,” i.e., Mathias of Linköping.

18. “We are the truth”: Mathias apparently underwent a struggle of faith at some point; cf. Book I 3 and Book VI 175; and Collijn, Acta et processus, pp. 530, 620.

19. “In the beginning... alpha and omega,” i.e., the entire scripture, from beginning to end; cf. Apocalypse 21:6; 22:13. This might also be a reference to Mathias’s most substantial work, an alphabetical concordance of the Bible, known as the Alphabetum distinctionum (today preserved only in fragments).


like the angels and made for eternal joy. She is more noble because she was made in the image of my divinity, both immortal and eternal. 45 Because humankind is worthier and nobler than all creatures, the human race should live more nobly as having been endowed with reason beyond all the rest. 46 If they abuse their reason and my divine gifts, what wonder is it if, at the time of judgment, I punish that which had been overlooked in the time of mercy? 47 So preachers are not sent always and everywhere, because I, God, foreseeing the hardness of many hearts, spare my chosen ones the trouble, so that they need not work in vain. 48 And because many, deliberately sinning with full knowledge, decide to persevere in sin rather than to be converted, they are not worthy to hear the messengers of salvation. 49 But now, my friend, I shall end my response to your thoughts here and you shall end your life. Now you shall see what good your wordy eloquence and human favor can do for you. O how happy you would have been if you had attended to your profession and vow!”

Then the Spirit said to the bride: “Daughter, this man, whom you saw asking so many questions—and such questions—still lives in the flesh but will not remain alive for one day more. 51 The thoughts and affections of his heart were revealed to you in likenesses, not for his greater disgrace, but for the salvation of other souls. And now his hope and life shall be ended together with his thoughts and affections.”

# Revelation 12

A Revelation about the Need to Wait for God’s Word to Be Fulfilled

The twelfth revelation in the Book of Questions in which Christ speaks to his bride, blessed Birgitta, and tells her that she should not be troubled by the fact that he does not immediately do justice in the case of a man who is a great sinner. For he defers the sentence of justice in order that the justice to be done in this case might be manifested to others. He also says that his divine words in this book of the Heavenly Revelations must first grow to full ripeness and bear fruit and, afterward, produce their effect and force in the world. These words are like oil in a lamp, that is, in a virtuous soul, in which the soul is steeped and made to burn and shine with a wonderful splendor with the coming of the Holy Spirit. He also adds that the words of the revelations shall first rise up and bear fruit elsewhere than in the

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22. “Profession and vow,” i.e., of a man in holy orders.
23. “The Spirit”: The Holy Spirit speaks here for the first time in the book. Katherina Ulfsdotter’s testimony confirms the death of the man; see Collijn, Acta et processus, p. 321, “ille frater non viueret postea per vnum diem, quod veraciter postea sic euenit” [this brother did not live afterward for a single day, which truly happened thus afterward]. The condemnation may echo rev. 8.16 above.
kingdom of Sweden, which is where they began to be divinely revealed to the same bride.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Why are you troubled because I put up with that man so patiently? Do you not know that it is a grave thing to burn eternally? I put up with him therefore to the very last moment so that through him my justice might be manifested to others. 2 Wherever dye-plants are sown, if they are cut down before their time, they cannot be used for dyeing as well as when they are cut at the proper time. 3 My words, which are to be manifested with justice and mercy, should in the same way grow and bear fruit until they are fully ripe, and then they will suit the object to which they are applied better and will color my virtue suitably. 4 But why are you troubled because that man does not put trust in my words without having the evidence of clearer signs? Did you give birth to him or do you know his inner life as I do? 5 This man is indeed like a lamp that burns and shines. As soon as tallow is added to it, the wick joins and sticks to it. He is thus a lamp of virtues, a lamp fit to receive my divine grace. 6 As soon as my words are poured into him, they liquefy fully and penetrate into his inmost heart. Is it any wonder that the tallow liquefies when there is a fire burning in the lamp that liquefies it and keeps the lamp burning? 7 This is truly the fire of my Spirit, which is within you and speaks to you, and this same Spirit is also within him and speaks to him, although in a more hidden and, for him, more useful way. 8 This fire kindles the lamp of his heart to labor in my honor. It also kindles his soul so as to receive the suet of my grace and my words that sweetly sustain and more fully fatten the soul when it comes to deeds. 9 Therefore, do not fear but persevere steadfast in faith! If these words came from your own spirit or the spirit of this world, then you would be right to tremble. 10 But because they are from my Spirit, the same as the holy prophets had, you should not fear but rejoice, unless you are more afraid of a vain worldly reputation than you are of the postponement of my divine words.

11 Listen further to what I say. This kingdom is mingled with great and long unpunished sin. This is why my words cannot yet shoot up and bear fruit here, as I will explain to you by means of a comparison. 12 If the kernel of a nut were planted in the earth and a heavy object were placed on top that prevented it from shooting up, then the nut, being of a good and fresh nature and unable to shoot up because of the weight on top that presses down on it,

1. The opening part of this revelation is similar to Book VIII 21, which, according to the title, urges the king to reprimand a nobleman who has derided Christ. Two unidentified men are referred to here, simply as “that man” (ille) and “this man” (ipse).
2. “This kingdom”: presumably Sweden.
3. “My words cannot yet shoot up and bear fruit here”: The idea that the kingdom is not yet ready for God’s message to be manifest there is echoed in the opening of the Birgittine Rule (Eklund, *Den Heliga Birgitta. Opera minora. I. Regla Salvatoris*, ch. 2), where Christ says that he will plant a new vineyard on new soil.
searches about in the earth for a less heavily weighed-down place where it can shoot up. 13 There it takes deep and stable root so as not only to produce the fairest fruit but also to break through every impediment with the strength of the trunk that grows up, spreading itself over everything that was weighing it down. 14 This kernel symbolizes my words that cannot yet shoot up properly in this kingdom on account of the pressure of sin. They shall shoot up and bear fruit first elsewhere, until the hardness of the earth in this kingdom is broken up and mercy uncovered.”

Revelation 13

A Revelation about Five Sacred Places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem

The thirteenth revelation in the Book of Questions in which God the Father speaks to blessed Birgitta and instructs her deeply concerning the power of the five sacred places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and about the grace received by pilgrims visiting those places with devout humility and true love. He says that in these places there was a vessel that was closed and not closed, a lion born that was seen and was not seen, a lamb shorn and not shorn, a snake placed that lay and did not lay, and where there was also an eagle that flew and did not fly. He explains all these images. There follows an explanation and clarification of the meaning of the imagery.

1 God the Father speaks: “There was a lord whose servant said to him: ‘See, your fallow-land has been plowed and the roots have been pulled out. When will the wheat be sown?’ 2 The lord answers him: ‘Although the roots look like they have been pulled out, there still remain some old stubble and stumps that will be loosened in the spring by rain and wind. Therefore wait patiently until sowing time comes!’ 3 The servant answers: ‘What shall I do then between spring and harvest?’ The lord says: ‘I know five places. All those who go to them receive fivefold fruit, if they come pure and empty of pride and burning with love. 4 In the first place there was a vessel closed and not closed, a vessel small and not small, a vessel bright and not bright, a vessel empty and not empty, a vessel clean and not clean. 5 In the second place a lion was born that was seen and not seen, heard and not heard, touched and not touched, acknowledged and unknown, held and not held. 6 In the third place there was a lamb that was shorn and not shorn, a lamb wounded and not wounded, a lamb crying and not crying, a lamb suffering and not suffering, a lamb dying and not dying. 7 In the fourth place a snake was placed that lay and did not lay, moved and did not move, heard and did not hear, saw and did not see, sensed and did

1. “Your fallow-land”: The parable is reminiscent of the New Testament nature parables, especially the parable of the tares, and to a lesser extent, the parable of the sower; see Matthew 13:3–9, 24–30, 36–43.
not sense. 8 In the fifth place there was an eagle that flew and did not fly, came
to a place from which it had never departed, rested and did not rest, was
renewed and was not renewed, rejoiced and did not rejoice, was honored and
was not honored.”

9 Explanation and clarification of the above images. The Father speaks:²
“That vessel about which I told you was Mary, daughter of Joachim,³ mother of
Christ’s humanity. 10 She was a vessel closed and not closed: closed to the devil
but not to God. Just as a stream desiring but unable to enter a vessel that stands
in its way seeks other entries and outlets, so the devil, like a stream of vices,
desired with all his stratagems to get near the heart of Mary. 11 But he was
never able to incline her spirit to the least little sin, for she was closed for his
temptation, since the stream of my Spirit had flowed into her heart and
filled her with a special grace. 12 Second, Mary, the mother of my Son, was a
vessel small and not small: small and modest in the humility of her lowliness,
but great and not small in my divine love. 13 Third, Mary was a vessel⁴ empty
and not empty: empty of every lust and sin, not empty but full of heavenly
sweetness and every goodness. 14 Fourth, Mary was a vessel bright and not
bright: bright, since every soul is created beautiful by me, but the soul of Mary
grew to such a perfection of light that my Son settled down in her soul, in the
beauty of which heaven and earth rejoiced. 15 But this vessel was not bright
among men in that she scorned the honors and riches of the world. 16 Fifth,
Mary was a vessel clean and not clean: truly clean because she is all beautiful,
and there was not so much uncleanness in her as to fit on the point of a needle.
17 But the vessel was not clean in the sense that she came from the race of
Adam and was born of sinners, though she herself was conceived without sin
in order that my Son might be born of her without sin.⁵ 18 So whoever comes
to that place where Mary was born and reared will not only be cleansed but will
become a vessel for my honor.

19 The second place is Bethlehem where my Son was born like a lion.⁶ He
was seen and held in his human nature, but was invisible and unknown in his
divine nature.

20 The third place is Calvary where my Son was wounded and died like an
innocent lamb⁷ according to his human nature, but remained impassible and
immortal according to his divine nature.

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2. “God the Father speaks”: God speaks here for the first time in the book.
3. “Daughter of Joachim”: Birgitta uses the patronymic, which was familiar in Scandinavia at this time; cf.
also *Extravagantes* 63.1–3.
4. “Mary was a vessel”: Birgitta often describes the Virgin as a vessel, for instance, in this book, in int.
12.10, and int. 15.40. She describes herself as a vessel in Book III 14; IV 26, 65; and Christ as a vessel in
*Sermo Angelicus* 3.
5. “Born of her without sin”: On the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, see above p. 266.
6. “Like a lion”: cf. Apocalypse 5:5 (“lion of the tribe of Judah,” as an answer to the question in Genesis
49:9: “who shall rouse him up?”). In Book VI 94, Birgitta uses the image of the lion as the resurrected Christ.
21 The fourth place was the garden where my Son’s grave was, and where his human nature was placed like a contemptible snake⁸ and lay there, though he was everywhere according to his divine nature.

22 The fifth place was the Mount of Olives from which my Son flew in his human nature like an eagle⁹ to heaven where he ever was according to his divine nature. He was renewed and rested according to his human nature although he was always at rest and always the same according to his divine nature.

23 Therefore, whoever comes clean and with a good and perfect intention to these places will see and taste the sweetness and goodness of me,¹⁰ God. And when you come to these places I will show you more.”

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9. “Like an eagle”: The eagle plays the role of heavenly messenger, and by the church fathers it is depicted as the spirit of prophecy and is a symbol of ascension and prayer; see, for example, Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezechiel*, lib. 1, hom. 4 (§ 2–3, on Ezechiel 1:10), ed. Adriaen, pp. 48–49.

Note: Scandinavian characters (which occur at the end of the alphabet in the Scandinavian languages) are listed as follows: å=aa, ä=ae, ö=oe, ø=oe.


Nilsén, Anna. “The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in Cult and Art during the Middle Ages with Special Reference to Swedish Material,” translated by Alex


**Electronic Resources**


The index includes names and subjects that are referred to in the Introductions and Notes, and provides a rudimentary list of the major themes and images that occur in Books IV–V. Full indexes of place names, personal names, biblical citations, subjects, and images will be included in Volume 4.

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