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POWER AND SAINTHOOD THE CASE OF BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN

Päivi Salmesvuori



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PREFACE

The Pulitzer-winning biographer Robert Caro has said that power does not always corrupt but it always reveals. This notion seems to be exactly the case with Birgitta of Sweden as well. This is a book about how saintly women, and particularly one woman, Birgitta of Sweden, exercised power in practice in the Middle Ages. Examining her exercise of power led me to new findings concerning the history of gender, authority, and cultural currents between Central Europe and Scandinavia. The process has also made me conscious of how similarly power and authority work today: it is difficult to be listened to if you do not have access to direct power. However, the project with Birgitta of Sweden has also shown that there are many ways to exercise power, most of them actively used even today.

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I also thank Werner Williams-Krapp and Bridget Morris for encouraging and valuable remarks on my work. Professor, dean of the Faculty of Theology, Aila Lauha was head of the department of Church History, when I began my work with Birgitta. I am truly thankful for her support and particularly for her ability to create an inspiring atmosphere to work. I am indebted to colleagues from the department for invaluable support and good, big laughs.

While finishing my dissertation on Birgitta of Sweden, I was planning a new research and got happily involved in the project *Finnish Women Writing on Gender and Religion*. This project also got funding from the Academy of Finland and provided me the required funding to spend an academic year in the University of Oxford. For this I owe my deepest thanks to Terhi Utriainen, leader of the project, and to Helena Kupari and Anni Tsokkinen, the other fantastic members of this project.

I am glad that not all literature or sources concerning Birgitta of Sweden were electronically accessible from my home university in Helsinki. This gave me the opportunity to visit the libraries of the University of Oxford and the Royal Library in Stockholm, only to mention the two most useful. I am also grateful for the time I was able to spend in Villa Lante, the Finnish Institute in Rome. I cordially thank the personnel in these libraries and institute for their help. Finally, I thank the National Library in Helsinki and its staff. They not only help but also really understand even the weirdest requests of scholars. For help with the English language, I warmly thank Marlena Whiting.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Acta Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte
DCP Depocicio copiosissima domini prioris de Aluastro

DS Diplomatarium Suecanum Ex. Revelaciones Extravagantes

FBR "The Fifth Book of Revelations"

GL The Golden Legend

LCM The Life of Christina of Markyate
LOB "Life of Blessed Birgitta"
LOM Life of Marie d'Oignies
PMM Prologue of Master Mathias

Prol. Mathie Prologo magistri Mathie

PVita Vita b. Brigide prioris Petri et magistri Petri (Process Vita)

QO Quattuor Oraciones

Rev. Revelaciones
RS Regula Salvatoris
SA Sermo Angelicus

SBR "The Seventh Book of Revelations"

SLOM Supplement to the life of Marie d'Oignies

SVMO Vita Mariae Oigniacensis, Supplementum

VMO Vita Mariae Oigniacensis

HOW TO STUDY POWER AND SAINTS

Birgitta of Sweden (1302/3–1373) was a mother, visionary, counselor to a king, inventor of her own rule, saint, and one of the best-known medieval women in history. This study focuses on Birgitta of Sweden as an exerciser of power. I will concentrate on the beginning of her career when she still lived in Sweden; my main interest lies in the years between 1340 and 1349. This was an important period for Birgitta as a visionary, since she received the greater part of her recorded revelations during these years. She left Sweden for Rome in 1349 and lived there until her death. The main sources for my study are Birgitta's revelations. Birgitta and her collaborators started to record her revelations in 1344, and approximately seven hundred of them survive. Most of her revelations were written down in Sweden between 1344 and 1349.

I argue that Birgitta was a living saint who succeeded in gaining authority and exercising power, uncommon among women. I maintain also that the crucial factor behind her authority was that she was able to convince her different audiences by performing her sanctity successfully. My central questions are the following: What do power and authority mean in Birgitta's case? What were the conditions for her exercising of power as a woman and how did her use of power function in practice? I am particularly interested in investigating how Birgitta succeeded in establishing her status as a visionary and how she used power and authority. My approach is to contextualize Birgitta and her revelations historically as far as possible and to find out case by case how Birgitta exercised power during her early career. Although the chapters are built around certain themes, they are arranged chronologically. In this way Birgitta's development from a wife and widow to a powerful visionary will be investigated so that the significance of the context can be better clarified. Central concepts for my study are the notions of the living saint, performance, power, and authority.

The Living Saint

Saints were such an everyday phenomenon in medieval times that Thomas Heffernan has proposed that "it is fair to assume that virtually everyone in the Middle Ages was exposed to the lives of the saints in one form or another." Consequently, Werner Williams-Krapp has observed that people perceived sainthood as a broader category than that established by canonization. Many people, even the "illiterati," could venerate a person as saint even if she or he was never officially canonized. Usually medieval authors and scribes introduced the putative saints with the help of a biography, known as a life, or a vita. Revelations of the saint were typically a part of the life.² The hagiographical production contained many genres, for example, lives of martyrs and confessors, lives of ancient and recent saints, and lives written for the first time as well as rewritten lives. From the perspective of a historical approach, the recent or new saints' lives are the most interesting. The eyewitnesses were still alive when they were recorded.³ In Sweden, in Birgitta's time, both ancient and recent saints were well known and the general features that defined sainthood were public knowledge. The same characteristics could be applied to living saints as well. To recognize a saint in their midst, people had to know what was meant by a saint.

The Italian historian Gabriella Zarri introduced the term "living saint" in her famous article "Le sante vive: Per una tipologia della santità femminile nel primo Cinquecento" in 1980.⁴ She defined living saints as persons whom their contemporaries saw as saintly figures when they were still alive. According to Zarri, their prophecies and revelations could assure them an irreplaceable political and social role.⁵ Aviad Kleinberg adopted the concept and developed its definition further in his famous study *Prophets in their Own Country. Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*:

The living saint could be given no formal (papal or other) recognition, for one could never be certain about his or her future activities. The saintly status of a living person was never established once and for all; the tacit "pact" between saint and community had to be constantly renegotiated.⁶

One could not become a living saint in an isolated place, in solitude. The saint needed followers, devotees, and supporters, who determined whether he or she was a saintly person. Interaction between the saintly person and her or his audience created the living saint. Unlike the status of a canonized saint, the status of a living saint was not permanent; it could be called into question at any moment. Consequently, the living saint had to renegotiate and confirm her position. It is this interplay—the

activity between Birgitta as the living saint and her audience—that occupies a major role in my study. In this respect, the most interesting situations are the ones that involved conflicts of some kind between Birgitta and other people. These cases are useful for showing what elements of power were at play. However, there are surprisingly few descriptions of such situations among Birgitta's revelations. It was therefore necessary to widen my approach and seek manifestations of Birgitta's power among all kinds of revelations. In doing so, I paid particular attention to those revelations that seemed to be addressed to specific persons.

Anneke Mulder-Bakker represents one type of idea of the living saint in her book, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*. The anchoresses in question are the mother of Guibert of Nogent (her name is not known), Yvette of Huy, Juliana of Cornillion, Eve of St. Martin in Liège, and Lame Margaret of Magdeburg. These women lived in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Lowlands of northwest Europe. These five cases resemble the life of Birgitta in many aspects.⁸ I argue that, similar to the recluses in Mulder-Bakker's study, performing saintliness formed an important part of Birgitta's day-to-day life as a living saint.⁹

Birgitta's gender and the prevailing gender system were significant in determining the possibilities that Birgitta had and how she was perceived. My view on gender, shared with many other scholars, could be described as constructionist. I find the definition that Samantha Riches and Sarah Salih give in the introduction to their book, Gender and Holiness, especially useful: "Constructionist theories of gender need objects which are distanced in time or space in order to trace other constructions: it must be assumed that 'male' and 'female' are not constants." They also suggest that "the boundaries between 'maleness' and 'femaleness' are permeable, and that individuals could move on occasion between genders or adopt the attributes of another gender." This is apparent, for example, in cases where women imitate male saints as their role models. In Birgitta's case, it is not only "womanhood" that is constructed as a social concept but also the understanding of what constitutes "widowhood" and "virginity" is negotiated. They are modes that define and confine Birgitta's identity and options. Nevertheless, although the conventional limits frame women's lives, it is also possible, within those limits, to create new opportunities for women to act in public, especially as widows.¹¹

The age at which many medieval visionaries had their public break-through has recently been discussed in detail. There were many medieval women who, like Birgitta, were in their 40s when they began their public career, for example, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–d. after 1438). Anneke Mulder-Bakker says, regarding

the possibilities for these women in their 40s: "The examples show that many women from the Middle-Ages to the seventeenth century experienced the prime of their lives when they had reached maturity, while still not being of old age." The reasons for why the age of 40 is said to be the turning point in the lives of many women include the following: (1) since women were no longer of reproductive age, they were not physically important in this regard; (2) in their 40s the social life of women changed: for many their children had left home and many had become widows; and (3) in consequence, these women had the time and sometimes the opportunity to begin something different from their earlier life. If

Following the same line of thought, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski draws the following conclusion about the newly widowed Birgitta:

[Birgitta] began a "second career" after her husband's death when she had reached the age of forty-one. Although she had had her first vision at age ten, it was only in her widowed and post-menopausal state that she began to receive divine revelations in great numbers and spoke out on many political and moral issues. She confidently put the state of widow above that of virgin and thus derived her authority form her age and widowed state, though her aristocratic family background also played a role in the great recognition granted to her.¹⁵

Indeed, becoming a widow could mean a change for the better for a woman. She could be more independent and gain more power than earlier. This could happen, for example, by her taking over a part of her husband's business. Religious writers emphasized that remaining a widow could mean newfound respect for a woman. However, remarriage was not uncommon, especially if the widow was young. If she was over 40, the question of remarriage was not seen as important, because conceiving children was no longer necessarily possible. However, if the widow was wealthy, she naturally became more attractive in the eyes of potential husbands or relatives. ¹⁶

These are relevant issues for understanding Birgitta and her power after her husband's death. Nevertheless, I would be more cautious than Blumenfeld-Kosinski in regard to how easy Birgitta's transition to her "second career" was. The following questions are important to my study: How did Birgitta's career as a visionary begin? How did widowhood and her past as a married woman affect her with regard to her wish to be noticed as a living saint? I will also seek to find out what the elements in her success as a visionary were. Was the key factor the fact that she was an aristocratic widow?

Power and Authority

The issue of power has been discussed time and again in studies concerning medieval women, but there is no ready structure for the analysis of women and power in the Middle Ages. A general supposition is that, in a patriarchal society, women did not have access to "direct power," which usually means being in charge of ideological, political, economical, or military power.¹⁷ Consequently, in order to exercise power in male dominated areas women had to develop suitable strategies. Birgitta has been regarded as a powerful woman. But if she did not have access to "direct power," how, then, did she exercise power in practice? I will seek the answer to that question with the help of research that has been done on power and authority.

The issue of power and medieval women has been touched upon in many studies and compendia. ¹⁸ Usually they do not provide a definition of power itself but allude to different aspects related to power. David Aers and Lynn Staley even deliberately decided not to offer any definition of power. They explained their decision as follows: "We are analyzing some extremely diverse relations of power and resistances to power, of domination, subordination and rebellion in thoroughly different, if related, domains of life; thus in our book the term power will develop a range of inflections as we respond to different materials and questions." ¹⁹ Although I find this approach quite sensible I would not cease searching for definitions too easily. Even if these historians see defining the term "power" as futile or difficult, nevertheless, they use studies and concepts that derive from attempts at definitions. Although resisting definitions, the language that is used in scholarly discourses is not unaffected by the existing definitions.

For some scholars, generalizing women's relation to power is unproblematic. Daniel Bornstein states that although women were barred from political office and subjected to the authority of their male relatives from around the year 1100 onward, they assumed public roles of unprecedented prominence in the religious culture of the time. Bornstein boldly maintains that active participation in religious life supplied women with access to power in all its forms, power that was otherwise denied them. "By carefully exploiting the institutional church...and by astutely manipulating religious precepts, which were principal source of the ideology of female inferiority, women were able to carve out for themselves broad areas of influence." Judging from the numerous studies about medieval women, Bornstein is in the right when he states that, although subjected to male authority, women did get access to power and influence. This did, indeed, often happen through exploitation and manipulation, but the question of how this was actually possible still remains unanswered.

As these few examples show, scholarly output concerned with the issue of power uses the term "power" in various ways. This reflects the multifaceted nature of both power and the sources. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, the editors of *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, suggest that while power has usually been equated with "public authority," scholars have now started to uncover many different dimensions and power relations. Instead of offering any direct definition of power, Erler and Kowaleski propose that female power is women's agency in power relations and influence on other people. The important question of the conditions under which the female exercising of power is possible is addressed in their essays. Erler and Kowaleski, as do all the contributors in that volume, challenge the old dominant function of the so-called master parrative:

Whatever stance scholars adopt in analyzing changes in women's power and influence, however, the current trend—itself an outgrowth of post-structural inquiry—is to criticize the prevailing master narrative for its excessive reliance on political and institutional themes, its adherence to periodization that privileges clearly demarcated transformations in public authority, and its inattention to gender as a category of analysis.²¹

Although a great deal of research on women and, gradually, on gender as well²² has been conducted over the last 30 years,²³ rewriting the master narrative of the Middle Ages so that it includes women as well as other neglected social groups will still take time. Specialized studies on issues that have been left out of the old narrative—whether affecting elite members of society or larger groups of people—are needed. In the best case, it will be realized that the old master narrative can be replaced with many new narratives, all equally significant for understanding the human being in his or her social contexts. Although the power narrative is not the only one lacking, it is still an important one.

The problem with different theories is this: it is impossible to find a definition that would be applicable to all cases. As Steven Lukes puts it, "It is more likely that the very search for such a definition is a mistake. For the variations in what interests us when we are interested in power run deep... and what unites the various views of power is too thin and formal to provide a generally satisfying definition, applicable to all cases." Therefore, in what follows I will present those theorists who I think are most helpful in my search for a working definition of power and women in the Middle Ages. The sociologist John Garrard defines power in a more general way as "the ability to achieve intended effects." Another, somewhat similar definition is given by Michael Mann: "Power

is the ability to pursue and attain goals through the mastery of one's environment." Michel Foucault, who is perhaps the most famous scholar in current discussions on power, emphasized that he was more interested in what makes a human being a subject than in power. However, he soon realized that a human being is placed in very complex power relations. Therefore, power is active in any relationship in which one wishes to direct the behavior of another. Foucault also suggested, echoing Max Weber's idea of resistance, ²⁷ that "in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations." Of particular interest for the Middle Ages is Foucault's idea of what he called "pastoral power." According to him this was more typical in Christianity than any other religion. Pastoral power is defined by the following features:

- 1. It is a form of power the ultimate aim of which is to assure individual salvation in the next world.
- 2. Pastoral power is not merely a form of power that commands; it must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock. Therefore, it is different from royal power, which demands a sacrifice from its subjects to save the throne.
- 3. It is a form of power that does not merely look after the whole community, but each individual in particular, during his entire life.
- 4. This form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies knowledge of the conscience and the ability to direct it.²⁹

Through these four aspects, Foucault manages to describe important aspects of the spiritual power of pastors in the Middle Ages. The importance of considering the afterlife, individual salvation, and knowing the inner thoughts of people were important ingredients of that power. The last issue connects knowledge and power, which is central in the exercising of religious power.

Foucault understood that power is always present in human relations and he emphasizes that when he uses the word "power," it is usually shorthand for "the relationships of power." Following Foucault's ideas is Bruce Malina's definition of power in the context of early Christian asceticism: "By power here I mean the social recognition of a person's ability to control the behavior of others based on the implied sanction of force." In this definition, it is essential that other people recognize a person's power. The implied sanction of force is equivalent to what Foucault meant by assuring one's salvation in the next world. These

aspects are also relevant when applied to fourteenth-century Western Europe: any probable sanction Birgitta could impose would have been of the spiritual type, the ultimate sanction being the destruction of one's immortal soul. The transcendent dimension was strongly present and most people took it seriously.

To investigate Birgitta's exercising of power it is important to discuss how she used it in practice. In order to do this I will concentrate on the manifestations of her power having first established where such manifestations are to be found. ³³ The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories are particularly useful in identifying these manifestations. Bourdieu is less interested in the normative political theory, "public authority," than understanding socially instituted limits on ways of speaking, thinking, and acting. ³⁴ In Bourdieu's terms, the power that Birgitta had could be identified as "symbolic power," which Bourdieu defines as follows:

Symbolic power—as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical of economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization—is a power that can be exercised only if it is *recognized*, that is misrecognized as arbitrary.³⁵

For Bourdieu, symbolic power takes place in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it. The belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them creates this power.³⁶ In this respect, Bourdieu's view resembles Foucault's idea that power is always relational.

Some of Bourdieu's other concepts, such as habitus, symbolic capital, and field, are also useful in studying medieval women and power. According to Bourdieu, an individual's habitus is an outcome of his or her social background and personal experience. It can be described as internalized modes of thought and behavior and it changes from situation to situation.³⁷ In Birgitta's case, her rank, upbringing, education, and experiences of the world all contributed to her habitus.

Habitus is similar to symbolic capital, which consists of social networks, artistic abilities, and cultural knowledge. The field is a hierarchically structured social arena. Often the different fields overlap each other. Bourdieu calls the actors in the fields as "players." To succeed in different fields requires "a feel for game" because the circumstances are changing continuously and the players need a talent for innovation. ³⁸ As regards the religious field, Bourdieu maintains that theologians exercised power over

lay people. In his opinion, agency was limited to religious professionals, whereas the laity did not have any instruments of symbolic production.³⁹ The laity is seen as a group of passive objects. This, as will be shown, is far too simple a picture of the laity's role in the religious field.

Many definitions of power contain overlapping aspects. Bourdieu's "players" might be defined, as Amy Allen does when searching for a definition for power, as using "power-over," "power-to," and "power-with." Allen has sought to provide a working definition of power by combining the ideas of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Hannah Arendt. Her aim has been to find a concept that illuminates domination, resistance, and solidarity. She suggests that concepts of power-over, power-to, and power-with should be defined as follows: Power-over is "the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way." Power-to means "the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends." Power-with is defined as "the ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of an agreed-upon end or series of ends." Allen draws this last definition from Hannah Arendt's idea of power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert." It is important to note that all three aspects may be present in the same situation.⁴⁰

As I have pointed out above, the precise configuration of power varies from one context to another. To sum up the discussion thus far, my own starting point concerning Birgitta best resembles Foucault's definition of power: power means an individual's ability to act and to influence people to do as he or she wants. Allen's definitions of power-over, power-to, and power-with also succeed in capturing the dynamic and complex nature of power. The critical moment for those seeking power is whether their claim to power is recognized by an audience. This brings me to the concept of authority and its relation to power.

It sounds self-evident that a person who has power usually also has authority. But it is seldom asked what authority means. In her study of bishops in the early Christian period, Claudia Rapp has divided authority into three categories; this division may be useful for the study of medieval women and authority as well. Rapp calls the first type "spiritual authority." Its source is outside the individual; it can be called a *pneuma*, a gift of spirit given by God. This authority is self-sufficient in the sense that it exists in an individual independent of its recognition by others. But in order to exercise power with this kind of authority, the individual has to convince others. Second in Rapp's list is "ascetic authority," which is accessible to all. This form of authority is visible and depends on the recognition of others. It becomes manifest in an individual's appearance and lifestyle. The third type is "pragmatic authority," which is based on

action. These actions should benefit others. The public recognition of this type of authority is thus dependent on the extent and success of a person's actions.⁴¹ I will keep in mind Rapp's three aspects of authority in my analysis of how Birgitta's authority was constituted. What was the role of Birgitta's experience of God or other heavenly creatures in regard to spiritual authority? And what kind of roles did ascetic and pragmatic authority play in how Birgitta was perceived?

Through examining the sources, I have come up with a simple working definition of how authority manifests in action: to have authority means to be listened to. This means that one not only attracts attention but also is paid attention to. This definition is especially helpful when determining whether a person has power or not. It helps the "measuring" of power because it shows whether the actions of a person had an effect or not. As regards the living saints, they had authority because people listened to them and believed in them. Their speech and other utterances were found to be significant by the audience, and this provided them with authority.

Grace Jantzen has posed the rhetorical question, "What better basis for authority could possibly be claimed than a direct vision from God?" However, the mere claim to be spiritually inspired has never been sufficient to convince others. To gain public acceptance the living saint had to induce her audience to accept her authenticity. For this to be successful, social networking was valuable. Women in particular needed help from other people, particularly from theologians. As Bernard McGinn states about the medieval context, "It was virtually impossible for a woman to create new ways of living the gospel without the cooperation and approval of men." ⁴³

In the Middle Ages, spiritual authority was identified with the ability to teach *ex beneficio*, by the gift of grace. Henry of Ghent's (d. 1293) writings illuminate what this meant. He was concerned with the question of "whether a woman can be a doctor of theology." In practice, the issue was whether a woman could teach theology in public. Henry wrote a treatise on this subject in 1290. His conclusion was that there are two ways of teaching, *ex officio* teaching, which was purely a male domain, and *ex beneficio* teaching, in which the laity could also take part. Women were naturally allowed to enter the latter arena only, but there were two conditions: the woman had to have sound doctrine and only teach other women.⁴⁴

Henry's position meant that any woman who claimed to speak on God's behalf should be investigated theologically. If the woman passed the test, only then she should be listened to. In other words, women had to prove to the theologians that their calling was genuine. The prerequisite that

women should only teach other women was not always followed, since often the divine inspiration delivered messages to all people, regardless of their gender. This was in accordance with the definition of prophecy in the New Testament: it should benefit the whole Christian community (1 Cor. 15:1–5).

Therefore, the discernment of spirits, discretio spirituum, which was stressed already in the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:10; 1 John 4:1) and which had always been important in the history of Christianity, became extremely popular during the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries. 45 The reason for this was that both learned clerics and the mystics themselves wanted to be on a sure footing about whether their visions were authentic. In his Literal Commentary on Genesis, Augustine distinguished between three kinds of seeing: corporeal, spiritual (imagistic), and intellectual. John's visions in Revelations were an example of imaginative visions but, according to Augustine, the highest seeing was "through a direct vision and not through a dark image, as far as the human mind elevated by the grace of God can receive it."46 Barbara Newman has observed that, in practice, as regards visions in the Middle Ages, Augustine's hierarchy of visions is not useful. Almost all the visions fell into the middle category, visio spiritualis. Visions of this type could be either false or true compared to intellectual visions, which were always true. In the intellectual visions, the soul could not be deceived.⁴⁷

The importance of *ex beneficio* teaching for Birgitta was that it provided an official way for her to make her voice—and divine truths as she believed them to be—heard. An interesting question in my research is how the theologians around Birgitta related to this teaching, which they presumably knew well.

The aforementioned conditions belong to the so-called background perspective, as feminist theorist Amy Allen defines it. She suggests that a distinction between foreground and background perspective ought to be made. According to her, "from the foreground perspective, the aim is to describe the power relation that exists between individuals or discrete groups of individuals"—which, in Birgitta's case, was her and her audience. The background perspective offers a larger aspect, allowing the particular power relation to be situated in its historical and cultural context. The following issues could be considered as belonging to the background perspective: First, what kind of subject positions were available for individuals? Second, what kind of cultural meanings were given to concepts such as femininity, masculinity, and sexuality? Third, what social practices were relevant and how were they developed? Fourth, what institutional contexts need to be taken into account? They constitute the arena in which subject positions, cultural meanings, and social practices

are played out. Finally, it is important to understand the structural aspect of power relations.

Allen makes a further distinction between *deep* and *surface* structures. She clarifies the difference between these two as follows: "One might say that viewing power from the perspective of deep structures involves examining the ways in which power relations actually structure our social situation, whereas from the surface perspective, power relations are viewed as structure."

The two perspectives of background and foreground will help in analyzing and illuminating the richness and the complexity of medieval power relations and power of holiness. Interestingly, they also seem to coincide with the goal of performance studies as described by Richard Schechner.

Performance

Richard Schechner, one of the leading figures in the field of performance studies, has described the goal of performance studies as follows:

We in performance studies need to pay closer attention to behaviors, to actions enacted, and of course to the complex social, political, ideological, and historical contexts not merely surrounding behavior, but profoundly interacting with it. Meaning radiates from these interactions, from what happens among performers and between performers and performance contexts.⁴⁹

In general, Schechner's description could be applied to the study of history as well. This quotation reveals what the new field of performance studies might bring to the study of history: the emphasis on interaction and the continually changing relations of actors can help a historian detect meanings and dynamics that are not easily observed in a static text.

The concept of performance helps answer the question of how Birgitta convinced people of her sanctity. Performance studies widen the perspective of the study of medieval living saints by taking the audiences into account. What is decisive for a performance is that it consists of the interaction between the performer and her audience. In conjunction with Kleinberg's ideas, this inspired me to think of living saints as performance artists. They performed their sanctity and messages in front of different audiences and in different spaces. An interesting analogy can be found among the early Christian ascetics, whom Patricia Cox Miller has called performance artists "enacting the spiritual body in the here-and-now." 51

Mary Suydam and Joanne Ziegler have also made the link between performance and the study of medieval mysticism. In 1999, they edited

a book called Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality, which includes articles about medieval people from the perspective of performance studies. In her insightful introduction to the theme, Suydam emphasizes that one part of performance is that the performer does something in the presence of and for an audience.⁵² Another crucial aspect is the dialogue between the performer and her audience. Very often, this dialogue involves the "intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's world." Suydam describes this dialogue: "Such dialogues in their attempts to make authoritative spaces and to claim sites of authority are performative and multidimensional." These dialogues often occurred with the performances of ecclesiastical orthodoxy.⁵³ In Birgitta's case, the ecclesiastical partner plays an important role but her audiences include many other groups of people as well. Birgitta acted on every level of society: she was acquainted with many members of the aristocracy but she was also in contact with servants and other nonaristocratic groups.

Suydam also points out that the gender and status of the performer and audience needs to be considered.⁵⁴ For Birgitta, her audiences included churchmen, aristocratic men and women as well as people of lower social status; all in all, they were quite diverse. One important audience for her performances was the heavenly, transcendental audience, whose implied presence had significance for the human audiences as well. The heavenly audience gave legitimation to Birgitta by impressing the earthly counterpart with her contacts with the divine realm and convincing them of her authenticity. As a woman, Birgitta was constrained by limitations and rules, which she sought to resolve.

Suydam addresses the relation of textual and acted performance in her article "Visionaries in the Public Eye. Beguine Literature as Performance." She concludes, "The process of producing and receiving the text interweaves textual, dramatic, ritual, and performative elements." She has observed that it is not possible to separate the oral performance and written composition. Consequently, performance "may refer to both the vision-enacted-in-the-here-and-now and to the performance (dictation) of a written work." In Birgitta's case, her revelations contain both enacted and written performance. What I mean by this is that, as texts, they contain situations that describe events that have taken place in reality, often under dramatic circumstances.

Since I am especially interested in the practical, historical situations behind the texts, performance studies offer a useful tool for analyzing practices. Speech, framing, and space are important components of performance. They belong to the contingent and strategic use of performances of a different kind. Religious performances can be viewed as a

method of establishing identity rather than merely expressing it. This runs parallel to the idea of the living saint who, from time to time, and from place to place, had to convince his or her audience.⁵⁷

In this study, the religious identity is not understood as fixed but it is continually constructed through performances. The investigation of religious performances reveals the strategies behind them and how they were interpreted. This can yield new understanding about power relations in Birgitta's world.

Finally, one significant aspect of the performances is their transformative element.⁵⁸ This aspect is often connected with the transformation that takes place in the audience. Even a brief glance at Birgitta's revelations shows that she aimed to achieve such a transformation in her public. But in Birgitta's case the performance might also make the visionary's own transformation visible. She could use it to help legitimize her unusual changing role in society.

In the following chapters, I will explore how Birgitta's performance of her sanctity became her means of convincing other people. The interaction between her as the performer and her audience will be the focus of my research. In the first, second, and third chapters of this study I will examine the beginning of Birgitta's career as a visionary, what factors and influences lay behind it, and what kind of roles they played in establishing her religious authority. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters I will concentrate on Birgitta's exercising of power in specific situations during her time in Sweden until she left on pilgrimage to Rome in 1349. How did she exercise power with different people? This book will offer a narrative of Birgitta's life and social interactions in Sweden as seen from the perspectives of power and authority.

Revelations and History

The textual history of Birgitta's works is complex. Some of her revelations were probably compiled as books before 1349, when she left for Rome. However, the main editorial work started at the time of her death when her confessors and collaborators, Prior Peter of Alvastra, Master Peter of Skänninge, and former bishop Alfonso Pecha began to prepare her writings and vita for her canonization.⁵⁹

Since Birgitta's closest confessors were the same men who also produced and edited the bulk of the Birgittine sources, it is appropriate to introduce them briefly. First, however, a few words about medieval women visionaries' confessors in general. If a woman claimed to have received divine messages, she was supposed to inform her priest about them through confession. The confessor then judged whether they

stemmed from a good or a bad spirit. Often, in order to be able to better assess the visions, the confessor or a scribe wrote the messages down. The confessor's role was multifaceted. For example, he could act as controller, scribe, translator, interpreter, supporter, promoter, defender, teacher, and disciple. The confessor not only learnt the secrets of the visionary's heart but also stimulated and inspired the visionary further with his questions. As a result, the confessor became the woman's most important collaborator. Most importantly, from the point of view of historical research, he gave her the "home of literacy," which resulted in the rich source material on and by female mystics. It could even be said that to convince one's confessor was the first step in a successful career as a visionary. ⁶⁰

Birgitta's most important confessors during her years in Sweden were Subprior (later Prior) Peter of Alvastra⁶¹ (1307–1390) and Master Mathias of Linköping (1300-1350). These two men became Birgitta's most valuable collaborators during her period in Sweden. During 1346-1349 Birgitta was looking for a suitable monastic rule especially for women but was not satisfied with any of the existing rules. The problem was solved when she received her first revelations concerning the new monastic rule for the Order of the Most Holy Savior (Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris). The two confessors played important parts in Birgitta's life and their roles will be investigated more thoroughly in chapters 3 and 4. Master Peter of Skänninge (ca. 1298–1378) became Birgitta's confessor probably around the time of her journey to Rome in the fall of 1349. Master Peter helped Birgitta to write down her revelations during her time in Rome, 1349-1373. He is known especially for arranging the music to Cantus sororum, liturgical chants that the sisters were supposed to sing in the future monastery. 62 According to Birgitta's revelations, his task was to act as Birgitta's scribe and translator whenever Prior Peter had to be in Sweden. 63 Master Peter's influence was at its greatest during Birgitta's Roman years, therefore he does not appear in this investigation except as the second author of Birgitta's Vita along with Prior Peter of Alvastra.

On the other hand, Alfonso Pecha (ca. 1327–1389), former bishop of Jaén, is mentioned many times. Birgitta became acquainted with Alfonso at the end of the 1360s in Rome. Thanks to his help and connections, Birgitta and her other supporters managed to advance papal approval for the *Rule*. Before her death, Birgitta also gave Alfonso the task of editing her revelations so that they could later be translated into many languages. Alfonso took the commission seriously and also worked eagerly toward Birgitta's canonization. With canonization in mind, he also rearranged the Birgittine revelations and documents dating to her time in Sweden. Therefore, when interpreting the sources it is important to be mindful of his influence.

The first book of the *Revelations*, *Rev*. I, contains 60 revelations of which 10 seem to be targeted at individual people or groups of people. The rest of the revelations in *Rev*. I feature Christ or Mary talking to Birgitta. The main theme of their messages is the general decline in people's attitude toward spiritual matters. The second book, *Rev*. II, likewise stems from the 1340s. It is especially targeted at the Swedish nobles and knights. There are also messages aimed especially at Swedish priests and spiritual leaders. In this book, Birgitta sets out the characteristics of the ideal knighthood that is pleasing to God. Crusades are sometimes needed for the salvation of the people. Priests are needed on the crusades, and therefore, in *Rev*. II, Birgitta describes in detail the roles of both knights and priests on crusades.

The third, fourth, sixth, and eighth books of revelations, as well as the so-called *Extravagantes*, contain material from both the 1340s and from Birgitta's time in Rome, 1349–1373.⁶⁶ Apart from *Rev.* VIII, the overarching themes are not as clear as they were in the first three books, instead, the revelations touch upon many different historical subjects relating to salvation. After Birgitta's death, her Spanish friend and confessor Alfonso Pecha edited together the revelations that were especially political in content, which came to form the eighth book of revelations. These revelation books are the most important sources for this investigation. Birgitta received the first version of the rule, *Regula Salvatoris*, *RS*, in Sweden; it also contains some interesting passages relevant to my study.

In addition to these books, there are two more, *Rev.* V and *Rev.* VII. The fifth book forms an exceptionally coherent unity among the revelations. It has been called the "Book of Questions," because it contains 16 interrogations by a learned monk to the heavenly judge. There are also the responses to these questions and, moreover, 13 revelations concerning the same subjects as the questions. Overall, this book discusses theological matters from the order of creation to the order of salvation. *Rev.* V has at times been seen as a testament of Birgitta's spiritual crisis at the end of the 1340s.⁶⁷ Due to its theological nature, *Rev.* V does not contain much autobiographical material that would be useful for my investigation.⁶⁸ Also, *Rev.* VII falls outside the scope of my study, because all the revelations in *Rev.* VII are from the 1370s.

Most of Birgitta's revelations are directed toward the public at large: no specific recipient is mentioned by name. Nevertheless, a surprising number of the revelations are aimed at specific individuals. The identities of these individuals are usually blurred in the final editions of the revelations, but judging by the content it is possible to detect that the original revelation was addressed to someone Birgitta knew.⁶⁹ There are usually two reasons for the personal revelations: either the person in question has

asked Birgitta for help⁷⁰ or—as more often seems to have been the case—Birgitta has offered the revelation without being solicited for it.

Some of the revelations bear features typical of letters, but usually the later editors have erased these traits as unnecessary.⁷¹ The revelations reflect Birgitta's thoughts and life in the first years of her widowhood and as a channel of God. Although in the form of revelations, they contain a surprising number of autobiographical details.

In addition to Birgitta's revelations, the canonization acts, especially the Vita and many testimonies, provide a great deal of biographical material. Moreover, some documents from the Diplomatarium suecanum (DS) contain information about Birgitta and her time. Unfortunately, there are many lacunae in the DS in the fourteenth century and the picture they give of fourteenth-century Sweden remains very sketchy.

Birgitta's revelations are written as divine messages for other people. Her role in them is that of a mediator, a channel of God.⁷³ The canonization acts were written from the viewpoint of Birgitta's canonization and, accordingly, they emphasize her saintly qualities. Consequently, in both sets of sources the idea was not to provide a chronological account of the historical Birgitta but a testimony of her holiness. For this reason many scholars have faced the difficulty of finding Birgitta's own voice in the sources. Even the dating of the revelations can be difficult.⁷⁴ In many cases it is impossible to know how much editing the revelations have undergone. But as Birgit Klockars has proposed, an astonishing number of the revelations can be assigned approximate dates.⁷⁵ Birger Bergh has observed that even Alfonso Pecha, to whom Birgitta gave the tasks of editing and publicizing her revelations, evidently did not make notable changes to her texts. This suggests that Alfonso, as well as Birgitta's other confessors, the two Peters, appreciated her revelations as divinely inspired and were not motivated to modify them considerably.⁷⁶ There are, nevertheless, many additions in the revelations, the purpose of which was to explain the context and consequences of the revelation. The additions are usually flavored with a hagiographic tendency. Some of them seem more reliable than others. As a general rule, those stemming from Prior Peter are usually regarded to be the most trustworthy.⁷⁷

The revelations suggest that Birgitta was convinced of her role as a channel of divine messages. She perceived that she had been given a divine mission, which she wanted to fulfill as well as she could. In this sense, her role resembles the mission of the Old Testament prophets. As many scholars have observed, the Hebrew prophets were a great source of inspiration and even role models for Birgitta. Rehrist and Mary are most often among the divine interlocutors but Birgitta also has conversations with angels, saints, and deceased people.

Birgitta's visions belong to the genre of revelations. They can be categorized, for example, as dream visions, poetic, political, contemplative, theological, corporal, intellectual, mystical, prophetic, aesthetic, or teaching visions. Birgitta's revelations cover most types of revelation. However, what is more important for my approach than typology is how the revelations were produced, used, and received. What happened when the visionary and her audiences met is also important.

While reading the revelations I have been particularly interested in what they reveal about the historical context of Birgitta and her thoughts. Robe herself was convinced that she acted under divine command, as a mediator of divine truths. Nevertheless, I will try to understand the revelations as a part of Birgitta's thinking and motivation. I will read and interpret the revelations as products representing the mind of Birgitta and of her human collaborators. Although the question of whether the revelations were or were not divinely inspired is largely irrelevant for my exploration, it is necessary to keep in mind that for Birgitta and many of her supporters they were considered to come from God. This is important in my intention to better understand the people and context of the medieval world.

The historical approach does not represent or include a certain explicit method that could be adapted and applied to whatever case of study. The method of my research could be described as "close reading" or "careful reading" and it contains many layers. The research questions direct the reader's gaze to find the relevant part of the sources. The questions arise from a dialogue with the themes that can be found in the sources on the one hand, and, on the other, from a dialogue with the approaches of different scholarly fields. Both dialogues are influenced by personal choices and questions that seem relevant to me and my own time.

In *Practicing New Historicism*, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt give a similar definition of interdisciplinary studies, and ask how it is possible to locate the appropriate archives, what the sources might be, and how to "identify, out of the vast array of textual traces in a culture, which are the significant ones, either for us or for them, the ones most worth pursuing. Again it proves impossible to provide a theoretical answer, an answer that would work reliably in advance of plunging ahead to see what resulted."⁸² As an answer they propose a method of "Luminous Detail." This means that they try to find the significant or "interpreting detail."⁸³

The boundary between the event and its representation is hard to maintain, which leads to the most challenging question for historians: What is real? One answer often proffered is that the research could be described as a history of possibilities. Although specialists in literary

history, Gallagher and Greenblatt acknowledge the significance of contexts. They have observed that, in their scholarship,

the relative positions of text and context often shift... We are fascinated by the ways in which certain texts come to possess some limited immunity from the policing functions of their society, how they lay claim to special status, and how they contrive to move from one time period to another without losing all meaning. Accordingly, we mine what are sometimes counter histories that make apparent the slippages, cracks, fault lines, and surprising absences in the monumental structures that dominated a more traditional historicism.⁸⁴

I have found these observations useful when reading the monumental corpus of Birgitta's revelations. As a historian I am interested in finding the "touch of the real." I am aware that it is difficult to find anything about "the real" or "the truth" in visionary texts of medieval women or in hagiographic texts concerning them. Some scholars even propose that these types of texts do not say anything about the reality of the women or the ideas of the women themselves. Many German literary historians, for example, Ursula Peters and Siegfried Ringler, have emphasized this. According to them, the literary conventions and religious leaders had control over women's texts and therefore it is difficult to uncover the women's own opinions. One consequence of this view would be that it is not possible to say anything about real life and the intentions the women had. But there are other kinds of views as well.

The aspects under Gallagher and Greenblatt's scrutiny are close to those observed by historian Gabrielle Spiegel in her writings about what she termed the "semiotic challenge of the linguistic turn." The linguistic turn has challenged the possibility of finding "the real" in history by declaring that the world and our knowledge of it is fundamentally linguistic in character. Consequently, many basic concepts in historical research, such as causality, change, authorial intent, stability of meaning, human agency, and social determination are called into question. Spiegel took seriously the challenge of the linguistic turn for historians, and as early as 1990 she wrote,

The ability of semiotics to sweep the theoretical field was testimony to the power of its challenge to traditional epistemologies, to the technical virtuosity of its practitioners, and to the underlying coherence of its theory, against which those advocating a return to history rather weakly invoke collective "common sense" or individual, subjective experience. But while there are good historical reasons for historians to insist on the autonomy of material reality, they are not necessarily reasons, which make

for good history, and the semiotic challenge cannot be met simply by an appeal to common or individual sense and experience.⁸⁹

Spiegel has sought answers to the semiotic challenge. 90 She maintains that the linguistic turn has offered some important insights that should be retained, but she also argues that a "historical turn" is now taking place among historians who have pondered the meaning of the world's linguistic character for research. Spiegel sees that the new approaches have emphasis on "the historically generated and always contingent nature of structures of culture," and this "returns historiography to its age-old concern with processes, agents, change, and transformation, while demanding the kind of empirically grounded research into the particularities of social and cultural conditions with which historians are by training and tradition most comfortable."91 Spiegel places emphasis on the moment of inscription of the source and speaks of the "social logic" of the text. 92 Spiegel's proposed contribution to the new literary theories and the study of history has been the so-called theory of the middle ground. 93 Spiegel concludes, "Only after the text has been returned to its social and political context can we begin to appreciate the ways in which both language and social reality shape discursive and material fields of activity and thus come to an understanding of a text's 'social logic' as situated language use."94

Concerning the historical situation of visionary experience, Barbara Newman gives valuable insights. 95 She has explored the influence of different contexts on how visions were produced. There were methods to encourage the visions; often the visions were preceded by spiritual disciplining. 96 The medieval mystical writings offered lay people an opportunity for literary innovation, as they did not have the rhetorical restrictions of the learned world. 97 This seems to be applicable to Birgitta's revelations as well. The general impression after reading the revelations is that the most frequently occurring pattern is that the visions were preceded by prayer. In practice, Birgitta sought answers to questions that engaged or occupied her mind and she often received answers while or after praying. Therefore, it was characteristic of Birgitta's utterances that visions often arose from a practical situation and offered a solution to a problem. For this reason, her visions also contain a considerable amount of information about the historical context. They seem to reveal "glimpses of reality." In many cases, the revelations reveal that the problem was related to a real person whom Birgitta knew. This knowledge is often enough for me to analyze the text for issues of gender and authority in Birgitta's attempts at exercising power.

It is more challenging to read Birgitta's *Vita* from a historical point of view. The *Vita*'s purpose was to bear witness and convince the reader of

Birgitta's sanctity. Its first version was left with Bishop Galhard of Spoleto in December 1373. Birgitta's confessors, the two Peters, Prior Peter of Alvastra and Master Peter of Skänninge, were the authors. The Vita was thus composed by two eyewitnesses and the intended readers were eyewitnesses as well. As Aviad Kleinberg has observed, a new saint needed authentication much more than a saintly person with a long and undisputed history. The data had to be credible and the "narrative ingredients in balance."98 This was the case with Birgitta as a contemporary saint. Writing up the life of a putative saint in the fourteenth century differed from older, pre-twelfth-century lives. Unlike the earlier saints, modern saints were required to exhibit, in addition to the conventional saintly features, unique elements as well. There are probably many reasons for this but part of the interest in the individual was due to the emphasis on Christ's childhood, family, and affective understanding of his passion. This made people more carefully evaluate those who tried to imitate Christ. The writer had to take into account that the audience knew quite a lot about the protagonist and the content of the Vita could not contradict their knowledge. 99 Bearing this in mind while reading Birgitta's Vita suggests that although hagiographically flavored, some parts of it describe historical situations in her life. It is precisely these glimpses that interest me most.

The right to canonize saints became a papal privilege in the thirteenth century. In order to secure canonization, a life (Lat. vita) and witnesses were needed. Pope Gregory IX (pope 1227-1241) initiated the use of articuli interrogatorii in the investigation. This meant that the witnesses could not say whatever they wanted about the future saint. Instead, they were asked whether certain statements about the life and miracles were valid or not. 100 This was done in Birgitta's case as well. The process began in Rome in March 1379 and the hearing of the witnesses lasted until March 1380. Material from Sweden was attached to the acts as well. The canonization acts sought to construct Birgitta as a saint. However, she is not a constructed saint in the sense that the image of her in the canonization acts is not real. She had to be recognizable and the witnesses credible. 101 When reading the canonization acts my aim is to reach beyond the constructed saint whenever possible. From the perspective of my research, the most important witnesses in the acts were Prior Peter of Alvastra, Alfonso Pecha, and Birgitta's daughter Katarina. 102

Research on medieval women has multiplied over the last 30 years. Nevertheless, monographs about Birgitta are rare, even though she is the most famous Scandinavian woman from the Middle Ages. The most important works in English are the absolutely vital English biography by Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*¹⁰³ and Claire Sahlin's *Birgitta*

of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy. Sahlin's work is an important contribution to Birgitta as a prophet and how her sainthood was perceived after her canonization in 1391. 104 The lack of monographs is possibly due to the fact that the modern editions of Birgitta's revelations had been under preparation since 1956, and by the 1990s the work was still not finished. Besides, most of the previous research on Birgitta was in Swedish, which had some implications for scholarly interest in English-speaking regions. 105

Although there are few monographs, Birgitta has been included in many articles about medieval women. In addition to Bridget Morris and Claire Sahlin, scholars such as Rosalynn Voaden, Nancy Caciola, Brian McGuire, Dyan Elliott, Ulla Williams, and Werner Williams-Krapp, as well as Barbara Newman have studied Birgitta and her revelations. 106 Birgitta was an inspiration to many laywomen, especially after her successful canonization in 1391. The Englishwoman Margery Kempe is perhaps one of the best-known "disciples" of Birgitta. The Swedish saint was not perceived as favorably everywhere. Jean Gerson, the Chancellor of the University of Paris, for example, sought to have her canonization reversed in 1415 at the Council of Constance. 107 Many of the studies mentioned above concentrate on Birgitta as a role model to other saintly women or on the attacks and defenses of her sainthood after her death 108

Often, in the studies mentioned above, Birgitta and her revelations are investigated thematically without paying attention whether she experienced them in Sweden or Italy. This, in my view, often weakens the argumentation considerably. I think that defining the context is important for both the interpretation and understanding of the revelations. For this reason, my goal has been to contextualize the revelations as much as possible. In this way, I also seek to avoid teleological deductions, for example, by using the revelations from the seventh book of revelations, *Rev.* VII, which was written during the last years of Birgitta's life in the 1370s, when interpreting events and revelations from the 1340s, three decades before. ¹⁰⁹ For the same reason, I avoid interpreting Birgitta and her time in the light of later events or individuals.

CHAPTER 1

FAMA SANCTITATIS IN THE 1340s

Birgitta's Life¹ and Sweden in the Fourteenth Century

In the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Sweden, both the state and church were relatively young phenomena and they were only gradually taking shape.² The church's activities were changing from a more missionary character to better reflecting an established institution. Sweden was invested with its first five episcopal sees, in Skara, Linköping, Uppsala, Strängnäs, and Västerås. In 1164, Uppsala was made the archbishopric, while the sixth Swedish bishopric was established in Turku³ in 1200. The clergy was educated in continental universities such as Paris and Köln; in the fourteenth century, Prague also became a popular educational center.⁴ Consequently, influences from abroad were vigorous.

Gradually, in the thirteenth century the institutions of the state and the church in Sweden grew more powerful and stable. At the same time, their mutual relationship developed. There were often power struggles but the state and the church also found allies in each other. The Cistercians, Franciscans, and Dominicans established their houses in Sweden during the thirteenth century, and the church not only grew into a powerful institution but also became one of the largest landholders. Concurrently, the nature of kingship was changing. In the thirteenth century, the king of Sweden was itinerant and often traveled through the country with his retinue. On their journeys, the king and his men had the right to demand hospitality from their subjects. On the one hand, this strengthened the court's relations with the aristocracy, but on the other hand, the demand of the hospitality was felt as a burden.

The centralization of power began in the thirteenth century and the state offices started to resemble those of central Europe. The royal administration consisted of few men. A duke (hertig)—earlier called "earl" (jarl)—acted as the king's representative in Svealand and was

usually closely related to the king. The councillor (*rådsman*) was the head of the council of state (*riksråd*). There were also a chancellor (*kansler*) and a steward (*drots*), who were responsible for the royal legislation. The army was led by a marshal (*marsk*).⁷

The largest social group was that of the free tax-paying yeoman farmers (bönder). They had considerable power: they had the right to vote in the election of the king and judges, could carry weapons, and swear oaths. As a class, the farmers could not be ignored by the monarchy or the nobility. In other European countries, the burghers were often the useful supporters of the nobility and monarchy, but in Sweden in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it was the farmers who played this role. It was characteristic of Swedish society that, as Bridget Morris puts it, it "was divided into those who paid taxes, mainly the free farming class, and those who did not, mainly the nobles, their tenants, and the crown's tenants."

This was the situation at the beginning of the fourteenth century when Birgitta and Ulf Gudmarsson, both members of the aristocratic class, married around 1316. Only a few years later, the power struggle among the rulers caused changes in Sweden. In 1319, King Birger Magnusson had his two brothers, Erik and Valdemar, killed. Instead of having the intended effect of ensuring his power, what followed was chaos and Birger had to flee into exile. In the same year, the Swedish nobles elected the six-yearold son of Erik Magnusson, the dead brother, as the king of Sweden. He was called Magnus Eriksson and during his minority, power lay mainly in the hands of the council, which consisted of members of the aristocracy and the church. Evidently Magnus's mother, Duchess Ingeborg (d. 1361), also took part in politics. She was probably not very independent in her regency, however. The sources suggest that members of both the clergy and the aristocracy often took advantage of her. Birgitta's father, Birger Petersson, as well as her uncle Knut Jonsson of Aspenäs (d. 1346) were lawmen. 10 Birger Petersson served two terms in the first half of the fourteenth century as a drots, steward of the council of state. Also Birgitta's brother, Israel Birgersson, held the office of drots in the 1340s. 11

Magnus Eriksson attained his majority in 1332 and was crowned four years later as the king of three regions—Sweden, Norway, and Skåne. He had inherited the kingship of Norway, whereas Skåne became part of his reign by a purchase: it originally belonged to Denmark but because of financial difficulties Denmark was forced to mortgage some of its territories, Skåne being one of them. Magnus Eriksson took over the rule of Skåne by paying its ruler, Johan of Holstein, 34,000 marks.

In general, the financial situation of Sweden was precarious. In 1336, Magnus found himself in deep economic troubles and in order to solve

them, he mortgaged parts of Sweden, including Kalmar castle and the provinces of Östergötland, Dalarna, Närke, and Värmland. Furthermore, he increased taxes and borrowed from the papacy, the Hanseats, and German magnates.¹²

The king ruled with the help of the council of state. Besides the secular administrators, it consisted of the archbishop as the highest-ranking member, other bishops and clergymen, and usually 12 members of the aristocracy. This meant that the church and the aristocracy were in charge of the political decision making together with the king.

The imbalance of the economic system continued during Magnus's reign in the 1340s. Therefore, it was crucial for him to cooperate with both the leading ecclesiastics and the old aristocratic families. The bishops of Sweden acted as the king's highest counselors and were great landowners. In addition, the king had to take into account that the aristocracy had the right to remove the king from power if they were not satisfied. There was no acute threat of this during Birgitta's time in Sweden in the 1340s but, nevertheless, the king was aware of the possibility. If he wanted to keep his crown, it was important for him to have allies in many places.

Magnus Eriksson's first years as king were promising. Under his reign, all the provincial laws were codified into a national law, *Magnus Erikssons landslag*, around 1347. He also wanted to develop closer contacts with Europe. His marriage to the Flemish princess, Blanche of Namur (1318–1363), was useful in that respect. Moreover, Magnus was interested in keeping contact with both the secular and clerical rulers of Europe. He sent his legates on a few occasions to Pope Clement VI (1342–1352), who, as the former chancellor to the French King Philip and cardinal as well as legate to Pope Benedict XII (1332–1342), also understood the importance of public relations between church and state. ¹⁴ Birgitta and her husband Ulf Gudmarsson knew the royal couple well and they had many common interests as will be seen later.

Birgitta's family belonged to the highest aristocracy of Sweden. Her father, Birger Petersson, was probably born in 1265. He was a knight, a lawman, a politician, and a councillor of state. Birgitta's mother, Ingeborg Bengtsdotter (b. after 1275), was Birger's second wife. She was related to the Folkung dynasty and her father, Bengt, was also a lawman, as were many other men in her family. Their first child, Peter, died in infancy. Birgitta was probably born around the New Year in 1303, but the exact date is not known. Therefore, her date of birth is often given by scholars as 1302/1303. Soon afterward another daughter, Katarina, was born. Birger and Ingeborg are said to have had seven children, but only these two girls and their younger brother Israel reached maturity. In her *Vita*,

Birgitta is described having been extraordinarily pious as a child. These stories bear a strong hagiographic flavor, and are thus intended to suggest that Birgitta was more interested in spiritual matters as a child than other children.¹⁷

Birgitta and Katarina were given in marriage when they were 13 and 12 years old, respectively, in 1316, a couple of years after their mother's death. Birgitta's husband Ulf Gudmarsson was about five years older than her. Ulf's father, Gudmar Magnusson, was a knight and councillor of state just as Birgitta's father was. Both fathers were often mentioned in state affairs in the fourteenth century. Birgitta's sister, Katarina, was married to Magnus Gudmarsson, Ulf's older brother. These marriages were probably seen as useful from political and financial perspectives.

Ulf followed his father's example and became a lawman and knight. He also belonged to the council of state. His work was not only concerned with legislative matters, but also required him to travel with the king and his court around the kingdom. ¹⁹ This lifestyle also provided Birgitta with important contacts, both as a noblewoman and a visionary.

Birgitta and Ulf had eight children. The oldest, possibly a son named Gudmar, was born around 1318 and the youngest, Cecilia, probably between the years 1334 and 1337. The other children, Märta, Karl, Ingeborg, Katarina, Birger, and Bengt were born between those years. Gudmar and Bengt died as children, and Ingeborg died quite young as well.²⁰

The beginning of the 1340s marked a new phase in the life of the aristocratic couple. Although Birgitta and Ulf were busy with their daily duties, they also arranged time for pilgrimage. In 1341, they made the long pilgrimage to Spain, to Santiago de Compostela. ²¹ During this journey, Ulf became ill but recovered and both returned home. Only few years later, in 1344, he died. ²² Birgitta's life changed considerably when she became widow. She could have entered a monastery, since she had close contacts with many of them. There was, for example, a Dominican convent for nuns in Skänninge in Östergötland where Birgitta and Ulf left their youngest daughter Cecilia when they went on pilgrimage to Spain. ²³ Birgitta had further connections to monasteries probably through her aunt Ramborg, who had donated her property to the Cistercian monastery in Riseberga in Närke. Birgitta's daughters Katarina and Ingeborg were educated there.

When Birgitta felt the divine call, however, she did not enter a community for women. She lived for long periods in the vicinity of a monastery of Cistercian monks in Alvastra. At the same time, she started to experience revelations. They were written in Latin by her collaborators. Birgitta was in her early 40s at this time. Birgitta was far from

reclusive—she maintained lively contact with all kinds of people around her. Her network of contacts can be clearly traced from her revelations.

In the present day, Birgitta is perhaps best known for her Birgittine monasteries, which are based on the *Rule*, whose first version she received around 1340s and which she elaborated during her Roman years. However, she did not have the chance to live according to the *Rule*; the first monastery was established in Vadstena, Sweden, by her daughter Katarina after Birgitta's death in 1373.

Building up the Status of a Living Saint

The saint was a familiar figure in the daily experience of early modern society, the expression of potent social creativity, and a product of a cultural setting that recognized in the saint elements that made him or her the embodiment of the current religious ideology.²⁴

This is how Gabriella Zarri describes the social status of saintly people and their characteristics in her study of female sanctity. The saintly individual had to convince those around her of her calling and behave as was socially expected of her. According to Zarri, the living saints appear to us as if through two lenses: (1) as hagiographic stereotypes, by which they were also inspired, and (2) as new models they themselves created. Zarri is speaking of the situation in medieval and early modern Italy, where society was particularly receptive to the contributions of women in the social and ecclesiastical arenas. Both prophecy and mysticism were held to be typically female.²⁵ Nevertheless, the situation in the fourteenth-century Sweden of Birgitta was different from Italy—a living saint was not an everyday acquaintance. There were many religious orders there but not the kind of religious mass movements of friars and lay penitents that existed in southern Europe.²⁶

Usually the calling vision is seen as the starting point of Birgitta's public career as a holy woman. However, a careful reading of the Birgittine sources reveals that she had already experienced a religious calling many years before her husband Ulf died. As a living saint, Birgitta played a visible social role; she was in close contact with the surrounding society and people in it. According to the sources concerning Birgitta, her friends and family accepted her claim to holiness, or at least her desire to lead a pious life, long before she became a widow. She seems to have had the *fama* (fame) of a saintly person already when she was married to Ulf Gudmarsson. Their marriage lasted from about 1316 to 1344. I will argue that she enjoyed widespread respect as a pious woman, and that by her actions she had already convinced many people in Sweden of her piety long before her widowhood and calling vision in 1344. Other aristocrats

around her and many clerics became her devotees and supporters and played an important role in the future, paving the way for Birgitta's status as a living saint.

It goes without saying that Birgitta was respected because of her noble social rank. Moreover, the sources show that Ulf Gudmarsson belonged to the inner circle of King Magnus Eriksson and often stayed at the court for long periods.²⁷ It is thus no wonder that around 1335, Birgitta was asked to assist the future queen, Blanche of Namur, by familiarizing her with the tasks and obligations of a Swedish queen. Prior Peter of Alvastra states in the canonization proceedings that Birgitta became "magistra domine Blanche," the teacher of Lady Blanche.²⁸ Birgitta was thus probably the mentor of the young bride, giving guidance and teaching her the customs of the Swedish court. Thus, both Birgitta and Ulf were close to the royal couple.²⁹ Birgitta was undoubtedly both respected and perhaps envied by the other members of the nobility because of her influence over the royal couple. She was something of a celebrity in her time.

The interaction between Birgitta and others reveals much about the power dynamics between different social groups as well. Hence, my questions in this chapter regarding the sources are as follows: What do these stories tell us about Birgitta's quest for religious authority? How did she start establishing her authority as a woman and especially as a married woman? I am also interested in what kinds of preconditions, external role models, and personal qualifications Birgitta had for acting as a living saint: How was it possible for her to gain the status of a living saint?

A Difficult Delivery-Mary as Birgitta's Midwife

During her first years as *magistra* to the queen, Birgitta gave birth to her youngest child. The story of the birth is one of the earliest events apart from the stories of her childhood that carries a spark of holy fame. The incident is significant because it has often been noted that Birgitta's religiosity deepened soon after the birth of this child, Cecilia.³⁰

During the pregnancy, Birgitta's eldest daughter Märta was getting married. The year is not known with certainty, but it was probably around 1337, because that year Ulf Gudmarsson pledged some of his goods, perhaps in order to finance the wedding of Märta. Birgitta had been against the marriage from the beginning, because she did not regard the bridegroom, the knight Sigvid Ribbing, as a suitable husband for her daughter. Birgitta thought of him as a greedy and impious man. While pregnant with her youngest child, Birgitta cried a lot on account of the upcoming wedding. Just before the wedding, she heard the unborn child suddenly crying in her womb: "Dear mother, do not kill me!" That

calmed Birgitta down; she had realized that her anger would harm the unborn child.³² When the time of the birth came, Birgitta felt like she was dying from the pain but then Mary came to her aid. The *Vita* written by her two confessors, both named Peter, relates the miraculous birth of Cecilia:

That night, the women who were present to watch over her were awake; and as they looked, a person dressed in white silk was seen to enter and stand before the bed and handle each one of Lady Birgitta's limbs as she lay there—to the fear of all the women who were present. When, however, that person had gone out, Lady Birgitta gave birth so easily that it was a thing of wonder and not to be doubted that the Blessed Virgin, who gave birth without pain, was that person who mitigated the labors, the pains, and the peril of her handmaid.³³

It is impossible to know whether the story goes back to Birgitta's own account of her experiences during the pregnancy and birth. The story has much hagiographic flavor to it, but it gives a glimpse of the reactions Birgitta might have had. She had felt that she heard her baby warning her and that during the difficult delivery Mary answered her prayers and helped her through it. Most important from the point of view of Birgitta's *fama* is that she was surrounded by other women, to whom she could relate her experiences. These women were her friends and eventual supporters, who preserved and passed on the stories about her life, for example, by standing as witnesses during her canonization process.³⁴ These events also showed that she and the women around her felt a particular closeness to Mary—and felt that Mary took an interest in them as well.

Prayers from Mary

Although Birgitta is best known for her Latin revelations, she also received prayers in Swedish that have been preserved. These prayers are one sign that Birgitta's piety was already increasing during her marriage. According to the *Vita*, Birgitta had asked for "suitable" prayers:

In truth, the bride of Christ was so very fervent in prayer and tears that when her husband was away, she passed almost whole nights in vigil and did not spare her body many genuflexions and cruel disciplining. In fact, some time passed during which she constantly kept asking God in her prayers that some suitable manner of praying might be poured into her. One day, in a wonderful manner, she was elevated in mind; and then there was poured into her a most beautiful prayer concerning the passion of Christ and concerning the life and the praise of the most Blessed Virgin Mary.³⁵

This passage from the Vita makes the same point as many witnesses did during the canonization proceedings: Birgitta's religious practices became more intense when her husband was away. 36 Even more interesting is the mention of the prayer, oracio pulcerrima, that was poured into Birgitta. At the end of the passage it is said that Birgitta read this prayer every day. As a reward for this fidelity, Mary appeared to Birgitta and said, "I merited that prayer for you; therefore when you read it, you will be visited with the consolation of my Son."37 Bridget Morris has studied these so-called Swedish meditations, which do not belong to the official Birgittine text corpus and whose authenticity cannot be definitively proven. It is very likely that they do originate with Birgitta because there are many verbal similarities between them and the revelations. 38 Morris notes, "We see her at a formative stage of her devotional life, expressing herself unselfconsciously in her native tongue in texts that were not, it appears, subject to reworking by her confessors...they are autobiographical commentaries on her immediate spiritual concerns, and provide evidence that her gift of the spirit was already manifesting itself during her married years."39 These prayers formed part of Birgitta's reputation as a pious person when she was still busy with her household duties. For example, the following passage has an interesting stress on motherhood:

My Lord Jesus Christ, may your feet be praised above those of learned masters, for they walked a harder road than they taught others to walk...Blessed be you, my Virgin Mary, Holy Mother of God, for none has loved the Creator as much as you, because you are the best Creature which God created. Honored be you, my Virgin Mary, Holy Mother of God, because of the annunciation of the angel to your father and mother. And from that most precious union that there ever was, your body was conceived, and like other children, was born from its mother's womb. 40

In the beginning of the prayer, Birgitta holds the "learned ones" in low esteem, since in her opinion they know nothing about the pain Christ felt. Then there is an emphasis on Mary, the one who was considered to have loved the Creator more than anyone else, who was the best of all those created, the Mother of God. At the end, Birgitta praises the birth and the body of Christ. He was born, like all earthly children, from a mother's womb. Thus, Birgitta gives value both to the humanity of Christ and to motherhood; she seems to emphasize the giving of birth, because this is something with which every mother can identify. The emphasis is very different from the underlining of the significance of virginity, which had been the most highly held virtue for females from the fourth century on.⁴¹

The extant prayers are written in old Swedish and, as can be deduced from the large number of surviving manuscripts, circulated in Sweden quite early on, perhaps as early as the 1340s.⁴² This supports my argument that Birgitta did not consider these prayers to be her own private property. Her relatives and friends certainly knew about the special grace she had experienced. It is easy to imagine that the prayers were especially popular among women, since many use language and images close to women's experiences.

Another prayer among the old Swedish meditations could also that be a model for a married woman to use is as follows:

It seems as if there is a boil in my heart; there are also through my heart two thorns and around the outside of it is drawn a membrane which constricts it and oppresses me very severely...My Lord God I pray to you because your head was crowned with thorns; rip out the thorn which is in my heart, which is bodily love for my husband or children, friends or relatives and replace it instead with divine love for the gain of my fellow Christian.⁴³

This Birgitta's prayer is a confession of a married woman. The mention of the bodily love for her husband suggests that the prayer stems from the time when Ulf was still alive. Here, Birgitta confesses the state of her heart. She describes thorns in her heart, which she interprets as "bodily love for my husband or children, friends or relatives." Instead, she asks of them to have divine love "for the gain of my fellow Christian." This prayer indicates that Birgitta is longing to live a more devout life but feels caught in the middle of her affection for her family and relatives. However, she thinks that it would be more pious to abandon her family and care for the sick and poor.

Through this prayer the possible audience would learn about Birgitta's inner thoughts. No doubt, she appeared as a devout mother. But as is usual with prayers that are meant to be public, this prayer can also be read as an exhortation to married ladies. Birgitta taught them that pride and caring too much for one's own relatives can make one care too little about those in real need. The prayer then becomes a means to influence other people's conduct.

Birgitta's devotion belongs to the tradition of affective piety, which appealed more to the emotions than the intellect. With women this form of piety was usually manifested through physiological phenomena. Tears, miraculous lactation, fasting and anorexia, and mystical pregnancy were visible marks of the individual's inner piety.⁴⁴

It is likely that Birgitta's inner life manifested in her way of dressing. There is one revelation that deals with everyday practices like the prayer

above, which could also stem from the time when Ulf Gudmarsson was still alive. *Rev.* IV 94 is a very simple prayer that teaches one how to pray when getting dressed, when eating, and when going to bed. The prayer begins with a surprisingly positive evaluation of beauty: "The Son of God Speaks to the bride and says: 'Exterior beauty symbolizes the interior beauty a person ought to have." According to Birgitta, outer beauty signifies the inner beauty that everybody should have. By saying so, Birgitta seems to approve of outer beauty and stresses that the person's inner condition should match it. Then she says that hiding one's hair under a scarf symbolizes the hiding of incontinency that makes a person unworthy of seeing God. The mention of the scarf or veil reveals that the prayer is intended for women. The revelation sounds like a prayer meant for women when they dress themselves:

When you cover your forehead with a veil, you should say: "Lord God, you have made all the creatures well and created man in your image 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."... You should show humility in all other clothes you wear and be virtuous and self-controlled in the use of your whole body.⁴⁵

Birgitta herself probably wore a scarf, which signified her married status, and through this revelation she told other women to observe the same practice. The outer appearance was important and it also included the right kind of behavior. It could be shown by eating moderately. "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 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."⁴⁶

Like in the prayer above, where Birgitta stressed the importance of motherhood, here she declares that virginity is worth nothing if the virgin wants to have pleasure: "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."⁴⁷

Not being a virgin but the mother of several children and feeling the call to holiness must have been a contradictory experience for Birgitta in a time when the official teaching of the church valued virginity as the highest religious state for women. In this revelation, Birgitta is assured that outward virginity as such, is worth nothing and inner piety is more decisive as to person's spiritual worth. These prayers might be held as the first revelatory experiences she had.

Reality Cracks the Harmony: A Fierce Revelation about a Lustful Woman

What challenges this harmonious picture of the gradually deepening fervor of Birgitta's religiosity is a fierce revelation, Ex. 75, about an aristocratic woman, whom the editor of the Extravagantes, Lennart Hollman, identifies as Birgitta herself. He and along with him Bridget Morris also think that the revelation must belong to the time when Birgitta's husband Ulf still lived. In other words, this revelation would stem from the same period as the prayers from Mary. However, I argue that this revelation cannot be about Birgitta, as it does not at all fit the image of her in the other texts. Hollman assumes that a scribe in Vadstena in the beginning of the fifteenth century tried to identify the Swedish lady in the revelation as somebody other than Birgitta and added the name of Ingeborg Eriksdotter between the lines. The reason for this would have been that the revelation gave too shocking a picture of Birgitta. Ingeborg Eriksdotter is well known from the sources; she belonged to Birgitta's friends and spent five years with her in Rome at the end of the 1360s.⁴⁹

The revelation begins with a shocking image: "She saw as it were a body covered in sperm and totally deformed." The revelation continues by accusing the lady in question of desiring men more than God's favor:

For your comfort and ease you deserve never to have rest, but always have wretchedness and misery. For the favor of men, which you desired more than my favor, you deserve to be so despised by all that even your children and dear friends would flee from you as to their eyes and noses you smell like rotting flesh and human excrement, and they would prefer to hear you were dead a hundred times than see you alive.⁵¹

Moreover, she is accused of causing her neighbor harm by "taking and retaining alienated property in your pride and greed." She is also accused of being merciless, for when "the unhappy man suffered and was tormented, you showed no mercy to him." 53

Usually Birgitta's revelations are strongly contextualized—they arise from concrete situations. This revelation also seems, in my opinion, to deal with some specific historical situation. Birgitta clearly wants to indicate that someone has acted wrong and, through the revelation, she urges the person in question to repent. At the end of the revelation, the Spirit speaks of the mercy of God and specific advice is given for a future life of penance:

Therefore, as you have sinned in all your members, you should also give satisfaction with all of them...Let your mouth abstain from many and

vain words. Shut your ears from bad words and eyes from unnecessary watching. Open your hands for giving alms to the poor and bend your knees to wash their feet...I command you eternally to hate all physical sexual contact, for if you wish to do my bidding, you shall henceforth become a mother to spiritual children, just as you have been a mother to fleshly children.⁵⁴

The picture of the protagonist in this revelation does not fit the pious image of Birgitta in other revelations, in the *Vita*, or in the canonization acts. The woman in this vision is far from the humble and devotional Birgitta who appears in the prayers from the beginning of the 1340s. Hollman's and Morris's explanation for this was that the revelation stems from the time when Birgitta was still married.⁵⁵ However, usually Birgitta's representation of herself in other revelations is much more positive. The detailed list of the woman's sins makes it unlikely that Birgitta is speaking in general terms; it seems as if it concerns someone Birgitta knew and whom she wanted to urge to repent. It is also reminiscent of many similar hortatory revelations, which were directed at specific people.⁵⁶ Regardless of whether the later addition of Ingeborg Eriksdotter's name is an accurate attribution, I think it likely that the anonymous revelation was about someone other than Birgitta.⁵⁷

If the lady in the revelation is Birgitta, the image presented of her is totally different from the one where she asked for a suitable prayer. It is then Birgitta, who has lived a vain life, who has been greedy for money and food, vain with regard to clothing and too eager to talk, full of envy and hatred. What would make it plausible that the person in question was Birgitta? The last sentence of the revelation contains a command to celibacy. This would be consistent with the idea of the celibate marriage between Birgitta and Ulf, which is mentioned in the Vita: "Between them, they maintained a mutual continence and decided to enter a monastery."58 Taking this as the focus, the whole vision seems to be a direct and an almost cruel revelation regarding its protagonist. It makes her out to be the most miserable creature on earth. At the same time it offers a means to change by starting to live in a celibate marriage. The meaning of the revelation culminates in that sentence. The vision was written down perhaps in order to convince or persuade someone of that point. Following Hollman's and Morris's interpretation, that person would have been Birgitta's husband, Ulf Gudmarsson. For Birgitta could not start a celibate marriage without her husband's consent.⁵⁹ Therefore, if this revelation was about Birgitta, it must have been directed at Ulf Gudmarsson and probably also at Birgitta's confessor.⁶⁰ The confessor's support was crucial in order to convince Ulf on the matter. In short, if this revelation

was written before Ulf died, as Hollman suggests, it could be a revelation, which was not meant for wide public circulation but was written down in order to persuade Ulf Gudmarsson to undertake the celibate marriage. The longer version would support such an interpretation. Later it was made somewhat more general and vague, which would suggest that editing rendered Birgitta's visions more benign.

However, after considering Birgitta as the potential protagonist of the revelation numbered Ex. 75, I still think that it is very difficult to see the central character in it as the same person that comes across in the early prayers. Above all, comparing this revelation with the early prayer, in which Birgitta complains of having too much pride and love for her family, the nuanced details in Ex. 75 about alienated property and merciless behavior toward somebody seem to me more like strong accusations against someone in Birgitta's vicinity, whom she wished to convert to a more pious life. Why would she have accused herself like this if she already wanted to change her way of life? The answer might be that Birgitta felt entitled to make these strong pronouncements because she herself had already made the choice toward a celibate marriage and more pious lifestyle. The ending would be comprehensible if the protagonist had recently been widowed. In that case the command to hate physical love thereafter would mean, "Do not remarry." This would make sense especially if the lady in question was relatively young and rich. Birgitta wanted to encourage her to choose the more devout way of life. Thus, it is quite evident that Ex. 75 does not describe Birgitta. It is, however, a vivid example of Birgitta's way to influence other people. She did not avoid using even shocking images in order to make the person in question repent and live a more pious life.

The deepening of Birgitta's religiosity during her marriage seems to have happened during her pregnancy and after the birth of her youngest daughter Cecilia in 1337, seven years before Ulf's death. Birgitta's increased interest in religious matters became visible to other people as well. Her close relationship to Mary was apparent at least to her close friends and the prayers of the Virgin began to circulate soon after Birgitta had received them. A mark of the change in her religious identity may be seen in an early revelation, which seems to suggest that she felt that she should not only act as an example to other people but also exhort them to repent.

A Suitable Husband for a Living Saint in the Making

Going on pilgrimages was typical for wealthy people in medieval Europe. Christianized Scandinavia also followed the trend. A good Christian should arrange his or her life so that at some point, he or she could

perform a longer pilgrimage.⁶¹ Birgitta and her husband, Ulf, went on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the beginning of the 1340s. On their way home, Ulf fell ill but managed to complete the journey.⁶²

According to the *Vita*, after the trip to Spain the noble couple agreed to live in a chaste marriage and enter a monastery. That was not an unusual decision in those days—it may be that the *Vita* is exploiting a hagiographic topos. The decision bore witness to Birgitta's saintly life. Katarina Ulfsdotter stated in Birgitta's canonization acts that Ulf died before he could fulfill his promise to enter a monastery. The reason she gave was that the building of the monastery in question was not yet finished. According to these statements the interpretation that Ulf and Birgitta entered a monastery before Ulf died seems hasty.

It is enlightening to examine other sources for what happened to Ulf after his return to Sweden. Did he indeed enter a monastery and live as a monk for the rest of his life? In a legal document from 1343, it is said that he gave up his profession as a lawman⁶⁵ and apparently after that he did not take much part in political affairs. The sources do not actually reveal much about Ulf's life after 1342. There has been speculation that he went to the monastery of Alvastra and lived there as a lay brother until his death. I find this unlikely because although he had given up the job as a district lawman he is still mentioned in a few documents as a witness. The last time he is mentioned is in a fairly important document in the archival material: he was one of the witnesses when King Magnus Eriksson and the Danish king Valdemar Atterdag made a contract concerning South Sweden on November 18, 1343.66 Perhaps the kings wanted to have the most venerable witnesses possible and that is why Ulf, a respected elder lawman, was asked to be one of them. After this entry, Ulf's name disappears from the documents. The last time Ulf appears in the Vita concerns his death, which is stated to have happened either in 1344, 1345, or 1346.⁶⁷ It is easy to guess that Ulf did not quite recover from the illness he had suffered from on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and died less than two years after their return.

The pilgrimage probably made the couple famous and appreciated in other people's eyes. It was in itself apparently a small miracle that they came back at all.⁶⁸ In his study of the sociology of medieval pilgrimage, Lutz Kaelber notes that especially for religious virtuosi, who were often mendicant brothers, pilgrimages themselves could be seen as "means to display signs of sainthood."⁶⁹ The same phenomenon could be seen at work with Birgitta as well. Pilgrimage was part of her way to become a "religious virtuoso." Birgitta's vision of Saint Denis was obviously written down and told to everyone—it was in the nature of prophecies that they should be made public. Hence, Birgitta's fame continued to increase.

The year of Ulf's death has been much debated.⁷⁰ In the best manuscripts of the Vita the confessors gave the year 1346, but this date seems to be quite late. I find Jan Liedgren's solution the most convincing. He stated that Ulf Gudmarsson appeared regularly in the sources from 1316 onward. His last appearance in the sources is the aforementioned treaty of November 1343. Furthermore, Liedgren found a letter of May 1, 1344, and another of August 22, in which Ulf should have appeared had he been alive. 71 Thus, he concludes that the death of Ulf Gudmarsson must have happened between November 1343 and May 1344.⁷² Therefore, the day that Diarium Vadstenense gives as his date of death, February 12, 1344, is most probably the accurate one. If the later date of 1346, as is also assumed, were correct, it is difficult to see how Birgitta had enough time to produce the vast number of revelations in such a short a space of time, since half of Birgitta's visions were written during her years in Sweden.⁷³ Because she left for Rome in 1349, she would have had only three or four years to produce hundreds of revelations.74

However, there is another vision that Birgitta apparently had just after Ulf's death. According to my interpretation, it offers further support that Ulf's death had already happened in 1344. More interestingly, it also paints a picture of a fairly pious person, which would be important for Birgitta's saintly fame. The core of the story is Ulf's eternal destiny but it reveals many interesting events from Ulf's life. This vision is presented in Chapter 56 of the *Extravagantes*. The vision may make references to Ulf's will, which has not been found but which he probably had drawn up as was customary for people of his rank. In the vision, Ulf complains that he had done wrong in five matters before his death. He says that after a short time in purgatory he is about to arrive in heaven and in order to do so he needs some help from Birgitta. Considering the contents of the story it could be among the first recorded visions Birgitta had after the death of her husband.

According to the revelation, Ulf, being in purgatory, listed the reasons why he was being punished. Birgitta asked—as if slightly surprised that Ulf had gone to purgatory and not to hell—what deeds had been counted in his favor. Ulf mentioned six meritorious things. First, he had made his confession every Friday. Second, he had been an honest lawman and willing to correct his mistakes. Third, he did not have sex with his wife as soon as he realized she was pregnant. Fourth, he had shown hospitality to the poor and did not have debts. Fifth, during the pilgrimage to Spain he did not drink anything between resting places—this also compensated for his long dinners, excessive drinking, eating, and talking at the table. The sixth merit was that he gave his position as a lawman to a person who he knew would be just. After this list, Ulf asked Birgitta

to shorten his time in the purgatory by having masses celebrated, taking care of the poor, having chalices made, and distributing their property to their children.⁷⁶

The vision revealing that Ulf was in purgatory and waiting to get out was very comforting for Birgitta. His getting into purgatory was already a relief. In order to reassure Birgitta, or the reader, the vision contained a list of Ulf's meritorious deeds so that it seemed credible that he would eventually get to heaven. It also gave Birgitta the authority to decide, within a certain framework, how to dispose of the earthly goods of her husband. Obviously, the framework was in accordance with both what Birgitta thought was right and what also could be presented as pious practices to be emulated by others.

When listing the good deeds of Ulf, the vision reveals some interesting features as to how Birgitta saw him. For example, he was honest in his job and wanted to do his best. He was also ready to change his judgment if necessary. He did not have sex with Birgitta as soon as he knew she was pregnant, as was right according to the doctrine of the church, for sex was allowed only in order to beget children. Because of the public office Ulf had held, he was very well known and his nature and even his table manners were familiar to many. In the revelation, he said that he used to enjoy meals for many hours, and drink and eat too much. But this was forgiven, as was his loquaciousness, because he did not drink whilst peregrinating. No doubt, this kind of lifestyle also represents an ideal Christian aristocrat in Sweden in the fourteenth century.

Yet two meritorious deeds are lacking in the vision in Ex. 56, which are found in the Vita: Birgitta and Ulf's decision to live in a chaste marriage and that Ulf spent his last years in a monastery. Had those two things actually happened they would most probably have been taken into account in the vision mentioned above. Especially the two years in the monastery would have been mentioned as means of easing one's suffering in the afterlife. Also, if Katarina's testimony about the monastery's buildings was accurate, then Ulf should have appeared in some documents between 1344 and 1346. Birgitta and Ulf's last years together were most likely characterized by the husband's poor health as well as the wife's increasing interest and activity in spiritual matters. The formulation of the Vita could be interpreted to read that Birgitta and Ulf would have gone to a monastery had he not died before fulfilling the plan. "Between them, they maintained a mutual continence and decided to enter a monastery. And after all their affairs and goods had been set in order to this end, her husband—still having the same purpose—died in the year of our Lord, 1344."⁷⁷ I think the careful formulation of "the purpose" implies that the couple did not have the actual possibility to enter a monastery. Therefore,

the celibacy and Ulf's entering a monastery are merely descriptions of what could have happened had he lived longer.

This revelation was important for Birgitta's *fama*. It reshaped the image of Ulf after his death and showed him to be a kindhearted and pious husband. If one considers that the revelation was also read or heard by people who had known Ulf personally, one can only admire how skillfully Birgitta's husband is transformed from a merry gastronome to a person who was just in his job and piously followed the commandments of the church. After his death he thus became a suitable husband for the potential saint.

Birgitta's interest in religious matters and contact with heavenly creatures started long before the death of Ulf Gudmarsson in 1344. A seemingly important turning point was the birth of her youngest child Cecilia. Birgitta did not hide her increasing piety and her *fama sanctitatis* (saintly fame) had already started to take shape in the 1330s. She struggled to live a deeply religious life but compared to the saintly women in history, she faced a difference: she was not a virgin but a married woman and a mother of eight children.

CHAPTER 2

LOST VIRGINITY AND THE POWER OF ROLE MODELS

The Sting of Virginity

I will converse with you, Theodora, about the flowers of paradise and the fruit of the Church's crop—that is, the holiness of the virginal life and the consummation of chastity in Christ's members...namely that the flower of virginity, preserved now for the sake of Christ, may in the future yield the special fruit of virgins in the paradise of God...for in the future when different rewards are given to different ranks, none shall equal the virgins.¹

Birgitta listened to this impressive text from the *Speculum virginum* (Mirror of virgins) while staying at Alvastra. Peter of Alvastra was the one who read it to her, and probably to her friends. During the fourteenth century, virginity was still a highly appreciated trait for a pious woman. But Birgitta was a married woman and a mother. She knew well the stories of many ancient virgins, such as Saint Agnes and Saint Cecilia. The requirement of virginity for a devout lifestyle troubled her, as can be seen in the early prayers, discussed in the previous chapter.

The Speculum virginum is one of the texts explicitly mentioned in the Birgittine sources. A thorough examination of Birgitta's literary sources can be found in Birgit Klockars's excellent work Birgitta och böckerna (Birgitta and the books). She concluded that much of Birgitta's literary knowledge had been acquired indirectly, by taking part in services, listening to sermons, or by means of conversation with learned friends of her confessors. She gives a thorough account of Birgitta's sources in general. In this chapter my scope is narrower, although I seek to go deeper. I trace what kinds of role models were available to Birgitta. My emphasis is, first, to investigate the meaning of virginity for Birgitta and second,

how she used examples of recent married saints in order to come to terms with the issues related to her gender and marital status.

The Speculum virginum consists of edifying discussions between the monk Peregrinus and a nun called Theodora. This book offers a theology about religious life for women. It was composed in Germany in the first half of the twelfth century. It became highly influential in the Latin west until the eve of the Reformation.³ Peter of Alvastra describes in Birgitta's canonization acts how she became rapt in the spirit as he was reading the Speculum virginum. After the rapture Birgitta revealed that she had heard the spirit saying, "Virginity merits the crown, widowhood draws nearer to God and marriage does not mean exclusion from heaven, but obedience introduces all the three groups to heavenly glory." For Birgitta as a widow and mother, the ideal state of virginity was impossible to gain. Peregrinus talks disapprovingly about married people and states the inevitable, "Semel enim amissa non poterit revocari," once virginity is lost, it cannot be restored. Apparently, this troubled Birgitta and she received comfort through this revelation. But actually, the Speculum virginum did not only stress the significance of virginity, it also made it less uncompromising; thus, Birgitta's vision was fully in accordance with it. In the sixth chapter of the Speculum virginum Peregrinus states, "Virginity of the flesh is of no use without integrity of the mind . . . For humility is the mother of charity, which is signified through the oil; charity is the glory or reward of holy humility."6

Peregrinus teaches Theodora in the sixth chapter that Christ had been shown to dwell as much in married women and in widows as in virgins. This view was in conflict with the mainstream traditional ecclesiastical teaching according to which virgins earn the hundredfold, widows the sixtyfold, and married women the thirtyfold reward in heaven.⁷ It seems that the author of the Speculum virginum took into account the realistic situation of monasteries that not all nuns, the intended audience of the text, were virgins. Many of them were widows or married women. Nevertheless, when Theodora in the seventh chapter asked Peregrinus why the rewards were different for virgins, widows, and married people, his answer is in accordance with the hierarchical thinking of the three states. Peregrinus said that varying effort demands varying reward. This did not satisfy Theodora who responded, "I weigh up the difference in merits and rewards of these three grades, but no virtue is to be conceded to them in deserving the fruit of reward unless the spirit dominates the flesh in everyone. For it seems to me that the flesh is the cause of victory among the good, just as it is of struggle."8 Although Peregrinus defends the traditional ranking of virgins above married people and widows, he

also says that spiritual reward is always earned by a life in the Spirit rather than by one's position in society.⁹

There are thus contradictory views in the *Speculum virginum* about the meaning of virginity and widowhood. Peregrinus's words were evidently granted greater authority than Theodora's, but it seems that here he had to admit that Theodora spoke prudently. This was important, since, as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne points out, medieval devotional texts for women were careful not to exclude the wedded and widowed from their audiences, for these groups of women were often economically the most powerful. Therefore, while virginity remains superior, chastity is also stressed and thus applicable to all including chastely married and widowed women.

The same issue is raised in another book that Birgitta obviously knew quite well. Birgitta already owned a copy of Liber de modo bene vivendi, perhaps after her visit to Spain in the beginning of the 1340s. 11 Liber de modo bene vivendi is attributed to Thomas of Froidmont (d. early thirteenth century), who was a pupil of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). The book contains advice to a nun. Anne McGovern-Mouron observes in it the same phenomenon as was apparent in the Speculum virginum: although the Liber de modo bene vivendi favors virginity, it also stresses that physical incorruption in itself is insufficient and sometimes even less valuable compared to the two other states of marriage and widowhood. Consequently, the book emphasized that a humble widow is better than a boastful virgin who becomes guilty of pride. There is also the suggestion that a virgin should serve widows as a daughter. According to this book, the best for women in both states is to concentrate on begetting spiritual children.¹² Thus, both books, with which Birgitta was well acquainted, maintained that physical virginity alone was worth nothing.¹³

The ranking of different states had changed in the course of Christianity. Echoing Mark 4, in which Jesus narrated the parable of the sower and crops, which multiplied 30, 60, or 100 times, in the beginning martyrdom was regarded as the highest state earning the hundredfold fruit and virginity and widowhood both were ranked as earning the sixtyfold fruit. Higher and her supporters could have referred to these texts in order to defend the status of married people and widows against the one-sided admiration of virgins. But this was not enough for Birgitta. The words she heard during her rapture relativized the significance of virginity, which would be worth nothing without obedience, whereas obedience would introduce "all the three groups to the heavenly glory." In this manner, Birgitta received, through the revelation, divine authorization for the idea that all stages of the female life cycle were equally valuable. 15

The description of this little episode of Peter reading the *Speculum virginum* and Birgitta's reaction to it shows that Birgitta was concerned with the widespread emphasis on virginity as defining the holy life in theological teaching. Birgitta's reaction also shows that at the beginning of her career she was already quite conscious about the requirements for sainthood. She wanted to live as a living saint, but the requirement of virginity disturbed her. I would not claim that Birgitta had canonization in mind, but I think she felt that she had a heavenly assignment to fulfill and that her rank as a widow and mother could diminish her credibility.

Birgitta's uneasiness is understandable since, as Constant Mews has emphasized, the *Speculum virginum* was instrumental in shaping the church's attitude toward women. By underlining obedience, Birgitta directed attention to the idea that a person's physical state was inferior to his or her spiritual state. Consequently, her being a mother of eight children should not be regarded as an obstacle for taking her spiritual message seriously. Birgitta was probably surrounded by other women, mostly widows, who shared her experience of the *Speculum virginum*. If

Caroline Walker Bynum has written about women's tendency to somatize religious experience. She maintained that for medieval female mystics, "the body is not so much a hindrance to the soul's ascent as the opportunity for it." But in the early phase of her religious career, Birgitta evidently felt that her body was a hindrance. The nonvirginal body she had was not the best possible one for a bride of Christ. She wrestled with this problem for a long time until she gradually found a way to compensate for her lost virginity.

Role Models for a Widow

The *Vita Birgittae* is full of hagiographic topoi about Birgitta's spiritual awakening in her childhood. There are also stories about her devotion to Mary and the suffering Christ, which draw a picture of a holy maiden. ¹⁹ Birgitta was painfully aware that motherhood separated her from virginal saints. Hence, the *Speculum virginum* was perhaps more depressing than inspiring for a married woman and mother like her. However, there were more encouraging books to be read.

Imitatio Christi and imitatio Mariae were probably the two most important ideals in Birgitta's life from her childhood on. These ideals could be found in the Book of Hours, which was important to her. According to her Vita, Birgitta even persuaded her husband to begin "learning to read the Hours of the most Blessed Virgin Mary." What was lacking in her life were living role models whom she could have met on the streets of her hometown. This was possible, for example, in the Low Countries, Belgium

or Italy, where pious beguines and penitents were a common sight, and where you could visit a famous anchoress to ask for advice. If somebody wanted to become an anchoress herself, she could learn the skills from an experienced old woman.²¹ But Sweden had been Christianized only a few hundred years earlier and the culture of expressing one's religiosity was not as versatile as in the societies with older Christian traditions.²²

Many of Birgitta's ideas and models for her religious practices stemmed from the Bible, devotional books, and sermons.²³ Knut Westman and Birgit Klockars have investigated whether Birgitta was influenced by writings of mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, or Meister Eckhart. Klockars concluded that Birgitta was not likely to have read their writings.²⁴ Their indirect influence is possible but difficult to prove, since the sources do not mention them explicitly. However, Birgit Klockars showed that in addition to the Speculum virginum and the Liber de modo bene vivendi, two popular works had influenced Birgitta directly. These were the Meditationes vitae Christi of an unknown Franciscan and Henry Suso's Book of the Eternal Wisdom. Many of the main topics and images used by Suso can be found in the Revelations. 25 The Meditationes offered useful examples for how to practice religious piety in the spirit of imitatio Christi as well as imitatio Mariae. These books presented general examples of practicing piety and Klockars has demonstrated their apparent impact on Birgitta.

Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231) and Marie D'Oignies (1177–1213) have often been mentioned as Birgitta's potential role models.²⁶ They were both married laywomen and recent saints, whom Birgitta undoubtedly knew about. Although Marie was not officially canonized, she was venerated as a saint.²⁷ The cult of Elizabeth and the early beguine movement were supported by the highest clerical supporter, Pope Gregory IX. Elizabeth's and Marie's vitae were the bestsellers of the thirteenth and fourteenth century.²⁸ Their impact on Birgitta has been mentioned in passing, but not analyzed in detail. In fact, Bridget Morris has stressed the opposite, namely that Birgitta was not attracted to poverty and mendicancy like beguine women. Morris maintained that Birgitta did not show "the delirium and other extreme expressions of mystical union of the beguines, but remains an elitist, reforming visionary whose interests lie outside the monastic enclosure."²⁹

In what follows, I seek to show that Elizabeth's and Marie's significance for Birgitta's religious thinking and practices was far more extensive than is usually thought. Elizabeth's influence was at its greatest in the first years of Birgitta's deepening piety in the end of the 1330s and beginning of the 1340s, whereas Marie's was particularly important in the first years of Birgitta's widowhood.

Elizabeth of Hungary as Birgitta's Aristocratic Role Model

The canonization acts of Birgitta give an interesting glimpse of the impact the *Legenda Aurea*, or the *Golden Legend*, had on her. In 1377, Birgitta's friend and devotee, then 50-year-old widow Kristina Bosdotter, revealed that she had lived in Birgitta and Ulf's house as a young girl. She said that every time Ulf was away Birgitta wore coarse clothes. More interestingly, she described that after having her breakfast and finishing the morning prayers, Birgitta's habit was to read to her servants from a Swedish book about the lives of the saints and their martyrdoms.³⁰ This book was probably the so-called *Old Swedish Legendary*, a popular compilation of saints' lives and church history, given in chronological order. Its main source was Jacobus de Voragine's (1230–1298) *Legenda Aurea* written about 1260.³¹ Birgit Klockars has shown the substantial impact the work had on Birgitta. There is no doubt that the compilation of the legends was one of Birgitta's main inspirational sources.³²

Saints like Katherine, Lucia, Agnes, and Marghareta from the early centuries of Christianity had their lives told in the legends. One of the female saints, and the only medieval woman saint, in the *Legenda Aurea* was Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231).³³ She was canonized soon after her death, in 1235, less than 70 years before Birgitta was born. Toni Schmid and Bridget Morris note that Birgitta and Elizabeth had several things in common, such as their royal connections, happy married life, and later the renunciation of their earthly life, including their children, after their husbands' deaths.³⁴ In my view, however, the influence of Elizabeth as a role model and inspiration for Birgitta could be emphasized even more. Birgitta herself introduced Elizabeth as a potential role model to the queen of Sweden, Blanche of Namur, in *Revelation* IV 4.³⁵ But I think that Elizabeth's life provided a useful model for Birgitta herself, including how to lead a devout life. This becomes obvious after a closer comparison of the lives of Elizabeth and Birgitta.

Elizabeth was the daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary and his wife Gertrude. At the age of 14, Elizabeth was married to Ludwig, the future landgrave of Thuringia. Anja Petrakopoulos and Dyan Elliott have observed that unlike the marriages of most medieval female saints Elizabeth and Ludwig's marriage seemed to have been genuinely happy, and Elizabeth is said to have grieved piteously when she learned of Ludwig's death in Crusade at the end of the 1220s. Elizabeth herself died at the age of 24 in 1231, only a few years after her husband, and was canonized 4 years later.³⁶

I will next present the most significant parts of the life of Elizabeth, which I think can be seen to have influenced the piety of Birgitta. The

version of Elizabeth's life in the *Old Swedish Legendary* known to Birgitta is not preserved, but it seems apparent that her knowledge about Elizabeth corresponds with the contents of Elizabeth's *Vita* in the *Legenda Aurea*. Therefore I use Jacobus de Voragine's version of Elizabeth's life as the basis of my comparison. ³⁸

The beginning of Elizabeth's story examines the explanations about the meaning of her name. One of the descriptions is especially interesting with respect to Birgitta. In the *Legenda Aurea* it says, "Elizabeth was called by a name meaning 'My God has known' because God knew her, in other words, God observed her with pleasure and approved her, i.e., infused her with the knowledge of himself." Infusion with the knowledge of God could have given Birgitta an idea of what to strive for in her practice of piety.

Jacobus de Voragine further explained the meaning of Elizabeth's name from many different angles. The most interesting explanation for a married Birgitta could have been the one explaining that Elizabeth meant "the seventh of God," "because of the seven states of life in which she lived. She was first in the state of virginity, secondly, in the state of marriage, thirdly, in widowhood, fourthly, in the active state, fifthly, in the contemplative state, sixthly, in the state of consecrated religious life, and seventhly, in the state of glory." Elizabeth had, like Birgitta, experienced virginity, motherhood, and widowhood. The four other states could have inspired Birgitta to strive for the sanctity that in her case also comprised both active and contemplative ideals.

Like Birgitta in her daughter Katarina's description,⁴¹ Elizabeth would have preferred not to marry, but she "entered the state of marriage in obedience to her father's order." Thus, according to Jacobus de Voragine, Elizabeth gained the thirtyfold fruit (Mark 4:8, 20). The *Life* stressed that marriage did not affect her piety at all. She acted just as she had earlier and prayed during the night as she used to do. Her husband seems to have been very understanding toward her piety.⁴²

When her husband was away Elizabeth could spend the whole night in prayer with her heavenly spouse. According to her hagiographer, Elizabeth cried a lot but this only made her more beautiful. Crying was also typical for Birgitta, according to Prior Peter.⁴³ Elizabeth was quite famous for her asceticism with regard to food, which indicates that she did not always practice it secretly.⁴⁴ Sometimes she even required that she and her handmaidens eat no food that might have been purchased with suspect funds.⁴⁵ In the same way, Peter of Alvastra, corroborated by Birgitta's *Vita*, states in his testimony that Birgitta "often abstained from delicacies in a hidden way so that it would not be noticed by her husband or by others."⁴⁶

According to Jacobus de Voragine, Elizabeth became known for her humility and goodness. She showed hospitality to pilgrims and poor people by giving them shelter. She had a large house built for the sick, whom she treated herself. Elizabeth was even accused of wasting her money on charity. Birgitta is also said to have taken care of the poor and the sick. Margareta of Broby's and Ingeborg Eriksdotter's testimonies in the canonization acts support this. Margareta had been widowed around the same time as Birgitta and had already known her in her youth. She related that Birgitta had had a house built for the poor and sick, and Ingeborg said that Birgitta herself had also visited and helped the needy.⁴⁷ Birgitta's daughter Katarina even related that some people accused Birgitta of having exposed her children to contagion because she took them with her to visit the sick.⁴⁸ This would then tend to strengthen the argument that Birgitta had, indeed, actively taken care of the sick. Also Prior Peter bore witness to Birgitta's concern for the sick. 49 Although it is probable that Katarina in her testimony used Elizabeth's life as a paradigm for her portrayal of Birgitta, I think it is reasonable to assume that Katarina did not invent the stories entirely, since there were many people alive who had known Birgitta and could prove them wrong. Consequently, I think it is safe to suppose that Elizabeth's example regarding the sick and poor was inspirational to Birgitta and made her strive to act like Elizabeth.

Elizabeth persuaded her husband to go to the Holy Land "to use his arms for the defense of the faith," as Jacobus de Voragine puts it. The landgrave died during the journey and Elizabeth became a widow. She then wanted to dedicate herself entirely to Christ and tried to arrange her life as a widow. She gave her money away and sent her children to various places to be cared for. After this, Elizabeth was banned from her country because she was "a prodigal, wasteful woman." Those accusations were made because not everybody appreciated her generosity to the poor. ⁵⁰

As was usual in the Middle Ages, Elizabeth organized the retrieval of the bones of her husband from the Holy Land.⁵¹ When receiving them she is said to have said, "Delightful as it would be for me to live with him still, even were we reduced to go begging through the whole world, yet I would not give one hair of my head to have him back against your will, nor to recall him to his mortal life."⁵² She explained that her way of life had changed because she loved only God: "The Lord has heard my voice graciously, because I regard all temporal things as dung, I care for my children no more than others around me, I make light of all contempt and disrespect, and it seems to me that I no longer love any but God alone."⁵³ This attitude was not approved of by everybody. Some people accused her of deserting and forgetting the memory of her husband and children too quickly.⁵⁴ This account resembles Birgitta's first days as a

widow when she felt the urge of divine calling and wanted to forget her former life as a wife. She had proclaimed, "When I buried my husband, I buried with him all carnal love. Although I loved him as my heart, I would not wish to pay a single denarius to get him back against the will of God."⁵⁵ In both cases the death of the husband meant a possibility for new choices; both Elizabeth and Birgitta wanted to be married to God alone ⁵⁶

Elizabeth proclaimed that she loved only God and no one else, not even her children. This was described in her *Life* as a merit. Abandoning the love of her children is emphasized in an early revelation of Birgitta's: "My bride, if you desire nothing but me, if you hold all things in contempt for my sake—both children and relatives as well as wealth and honors—I will give you a most precious and delightful reward. I will give you neither gold or silver as your wages but myself to be your bridegroom, I, who am the king of glory."

In Birgitta's writings and other Birgittine sources this feature is used to strengthen her new role as a bride, who is prepared even to renounce her own children for the sake of God. However, it does not turn to the "maternal martyr" paradigm, which could be applied to Elizabeth of Hungary. Barbara Newman has coined this concept to denote women "whose holiness is enhanced by their willingness to abandon her children or, in extreme cases, consent to their deaths as the Virgin did to Christ's. As a consequence of this renunciation, she is delivered from family ties and enabled to live for God alone." The willingness to give up all family ties was definitely seen as enhancing Birgitta's saintly fame, but she never forsook her children. She took care of them and worried about their welfare all her life. She acted as aristocratic mothers were supposed to do and tried to find suitable spouses or careers for all of her children. She was, however, very careful to stress that she loved Christ more than her children.

The shared features between Elizabeth and Birgitta have thus far been fairly circumstantial. However, there are two cases, which show Elizabeth as Birgitta's role model more explicitly. According to the *Life*, on her deathbed Elizabeth heard a little bird singing between her bed and the wall. The author tells us that the bird was the angel whose task was to guard Elizabeth and assure her eternal joy. This angel was needed because the devil was thought to threaten people up until their last breath. As Deborah Youngs underlines in her study, the importance of the last moments of a person were decisive in regard to his or her salvation. The church urged individuals "to prepare for death throughout their lives...It was held that in the last hour of life, a great struggle would take place between the angels and devils over rights to a person's soul." This also

seems to have been the case with Elizabeth, since it is said that before her death she had shouted three times "Go away!" as if shouting to the devil 62

In Birgitta's *Vita*, a similar story is told about the death of Birgitta's son Bengt. This happened in the monastery of Alvastra in the beginning of the 1340s. When Birgitta was by Bengt's deathbed she was visited by the devil who asked, "Why, woman, with all this water of tears, are you weakening your sight and laboring in vain?"⁶³ Immediately after this, Christ appeared to Birgitta saying, "This boy's infirmity has not been caused by constellations of stars—as the foolish say—nor by his sins. He has become infirm because of his physical condition and so that his crown will be greater...he shall be called the son of tears and prayers; and I shall put an end to his distress."⁶⁴ After five days the boy died and beautiful singing was heard between his bed and the wall. The Holy Spirit then explained to Birgitta, "Behold what tears can accomplish! Now the son of waters has passed over to his rest. Therefore the devil hates the tears of good people, which proceed from divine charity."⁶⁵

This story bears a strong hagiographic and Elizabethan flavor and therefore it is impossible to confirm with certainty whether it goes back to historical events. There are some features, however, which speak in favor of the story's historicity and I think that the writers of the *Vita* might have used Birgitta's own narrative of the story. Christ's explanation to the devil sounds like an answer to questions, which Birgitta perhaps had heard from other people or had herself asked concerning Bengt's illness. According to Christ, the reason for Bengt's illness was simply his weak "physical condition," not the position of the stars or the sins of his parents. Again it is emphasized that saintly women can achieve great virtues with profound crying. The influence of Elizabeth's death scene with the bird's song on the depiction of Bengt's death strengthens the idea that Elizabeth's *Life* had a deep impact on Birgitta's views and identity.

There is one more feature in Elizabeth's story that seems to have been especially important for Birgitta. Elizabeth's *Life* describes how the lifestyles of Mary and Martha were united in Elizabeth: "Elizabeth having reached the summit of perfection through Mary's contemplative prayer, did not give up Martha's laborious activity... Indeed, after taking the veil of religion, she practiced those works as assiduously as before." Thus, Elizabeth embraced both of the usually mutually exclusive lifestyles, the contemplative and the active.

Birgitta treated the lifestyles of Mary and Martha in a long revelation, in which the influence of Elizabethan piety is apparent. The revelation is written for both male and female followers of Birgitta. The climax of the revelation is that, in order to be able to conduct the most valued

virtuous life of Mary, one must first be able to fulfill the requirements of Martha. Only together do they form a model for an ideal Christian.⁶⁷ This became the maxim that Birgitta tried to follow in her own life.

Interestingly, while Elizabeth was a role model for women, her husband Ludwig can be seen as a role model for pious husbands. Ludwig was portrayed as a very tolerant husband. Birgitta could have introduced him as a role model to her husband Ulf Gudmarsson. It is also possible that Birgitta in part got the idea of going on a pilgrimage from Elizabeth's story.⁶⁸

As was mentioned earlier, after Ulf's death Birgitta was accused, as Elizabeth was, of forgetting the memory of her husband too quickly. To sum up, there seems to be an overwhelming number of similarities between the lives of these two women. Although many of the topoi in Elizabeth's life can be seen as quite typical to saintly women, however, there were not many other possible role models for Birgitta than Elizabeth. I would argue that she seems to be a paradigm after which Birgitta modeled her life. However, was Birgitta depicted in the sources in the likeness of Elizabeth in order to support her canonization cause or did she herself live like Elizabeth?

The virtues of Elizabeth are common saintly virtues and it is obvious that the writers of the *Life of Birgitta* regarded Elizabeth as their model saint. But it seems that some similarities in the lives of the two saints go back to the historical Birgitta. As a recent saint, her *Vita* had to be written so that people who had known her would recognize her in the narrative. Therefore, her biographers could not merely invent a story that resembled Elizabeth's story. The same can be applied to other people's testimonies, which resemble incidents from Elizabeth's life. It is not likely that all of them would have fabricated the stories. ⁶⁹ In my opinion, it is more conceivable that Elizabeth inspired Birgitta to public performances of her piety. It is also likely that Elizabeth's way of having revelations encouraged and inspired Birgitta to make use of revelations as an expression of her religious calling.

Moreover, I assume that it was significant for Birgitta that there had existed—not so long before—a saintly, indeed canonized, person who had been both a mother and a wife. Kristina Bosdotter's testimony, which was given at the beginning of the canonization proceedings, indicates that Birgitta already acted like Elizabeth during her marriage. Caroline Walker Bynum argues convincingly that from the late twelfth century onward, the imitation of Christ and martyrs, as well as saints, took a turn toward more literal emulation. Birgitta's use of role models in daily life fits well within these new paradigms. Birgitta not only venerated Elizabeth in affective meditation, but she also began to act like Elizabeth. It is also significant that she probably already imitated Elizabeth during

Ulf's lifetime. The writers of her life only strengthened this impression by applying some of the narrative patterns of Elizabeth's *Life* to Birgitta's *Life*. Barbara Newman has observed that Elizabeth was "forgiven her sexual experience because she endured it only in obedience to husband and parents, and her motherhood because she sacrificed her own children to look after God's." Perhaps this observation was apparent to Birgitta as well and increased her interest in Elizabeth's way of life.

In addition to the different relationship toward their children, there are two significant differences between the women, which indicate that in some respects Birgitta grew apart from Elizabeth's model. The first was their relationship with their confessors. Elizabeth and her Dominican confessor Konrad's bond was full of calculated cruelty on Konrad's part and humble submission on Elizabeth's. The idea was to underline Elizabeth's saintly obedience. Dyan Elliott described Konrad's function as follows: "If absolute obedience was the essential term conditioning Elizabeth's claim to sanctity, it was important that this obedience was pressed to the limit."73 Neither Svennung, Birgitta's confessor at least during her journey to Santiago de Compostela, nor Subprior Peter nor Master Mathias resembles the despotic Konrad. Obedience to their confessors was important for all medieval saintly women but Elizabeth's and Konrad's extremity in practicing it did not find resonance with Birgitta and her confessors. Although Birgitta naturally had to show obedience and submit herself to her confessors, the level of their interaction was based more on reciprocity.⁷⁴

The second difference is that Elizabeth was capable of acting with striking harshness. According to her *Life*, she let an elderly woman be whipped because she refused to confess her sins, after Elizabeth had urged her to. In another case Elizabeth ordered an unfair haircut for a young and beautiful woman.⁷⁵ Both stories were motivated by the pious urge to save the respective women's souls; Elizabeth knew better than them as to what was good for them. It is interesting that these coercive displays of power are lacking in Birgitta's early endeavor to construct a pious life. Obviously she found them lacking in appeal. She could be harsh in words but there are no descriptions of instances of violence, that in Elizabeth's *Life* were presented as virtuous.

The dilemma between the different states—virgin, wife, and widow—created mixed feelings in Birgitta throughout her life. This can be seen in her many revelations dealing with virginity and widowhood. Birgitta's conclusion during her life in Sweden was that virginity meant nothing without humility and obedience. The Life of Elizabeth of Hungary played a central, perhaps even decisive role in this respect. Finally, what made Elizabeth's story important was that it proved that it was possible to live

a pious, even saintly life despite not being a virgin and this view could be shared with other people. What is more, it provided Birgitta with a model how to perform that ideal in practice. The bodily shortcoming of not being a virgin could thus be compensated for.

Marie d'Oignies as Birgitta's Inspiration

In addition to Elizabeth of Hungary, Marie d'Oignies (ca. 1177–1213) represented an example of a married saint for Birgitta. Clarissa Atkinson says that Marie was, along with Elizabeth of Hungary, "among the first of a new phenomenon: the married women-saints of the later Middle Ages." Marie was Elizabeth's predecessor but most likely Birgitta learned of Marie only after first being acquainted with Elizabeth. It is probable that Master Mathias introduced Birgitta to Marie in more detail in the middle of the 1340s. He himself was impressed by Marie and used her story in some of his *exempla* in *Copia exemplorum*. Hence it is necessary to discuss how and why Marie's story could have impacted Birgitta's and her supporters' concept of how to practice a saintly life.

One of the most famous clerics of the thirteenth century, Jacques de Vitry (ca. 1160/1170–1240) wrote the life of Marie d'Oignies between the years 1213 and 1216 and during the thirteenth century it became widely known everywhere in Europe, also in Sweden. According to Brenda Bolton, the purpose of the *Life* was to be "an illustration of what a 'new' saint should be and to serve as an *exemplum* of northern piety in contrast to southern heresy. Scholars have only gradually acknowledged Marie's influence on the expression of laypeople during her lifetime and after Jacques made her a model saint. This is surprising, since, as Margot King notes, Marie attracted even Francis of Assisi's (1181/1182–1226) interest and he began a pilgrimage to Liège in the summer of 1217.

Birgitta lived in the middle of a time that Bernard McGinn calls the time of the "new mysticism." He sees that especially the mendicant orders of Franciscans and Dominicans and the independent group of beguines, often called *mulieres sanctae*, laid the ground for a mysticism that was decisively different from the scholarly and monastic spirituality of the earlier Christian centuries. McGinn defines the three main characteristics of the new mysticism as follows: "(1) new attitudes toward the relationship between world and cloister, (2) a new relationship between men and women in the mystical path; and, finally, (3) new forms of language and modes of representation of mystical consciousness."83

The emergence of female mystics, practitioners of the new mysticism, meant, as McGinn puts it, "new forms of cooperation between women and men, in terms of both a shared dedication to the pursuit of

the *vita apostolica* and a joint concern for attaining the 'loving knowledge of God.'"⁸⁴ The collaboration of women and men was in accordance with the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. The council had an impact on the life of every adult Christian, because more emphasis than before was placed on the direction of the laity through the confession and the reception of the Eucharist. Because both sacraments were led by clerics, their power consequently increased during the thirteenth century. ⁸⁵ *Vita apostolica* or the apostolic lifestyle of poverty and involvement in the world was another subject that the council wanted to promote.

Frequent confession and the apostolic way of life became important characteristics of the lives of female mystics. Jacques de Vitry was working on *The Life of Marie d'Oignies* at the same time as the Fourth Lateran was held. It is therefore no wonder that many themes of the council can be traced in Jacques's work. Marie's *Life* written by Jacques de Vitry became popular and set a new paradigm for lay piety, especially for female piety. ⁸⁶ Brenda Bolton, who has studied the first movement of holy women around Liège, sums up as follows: "These women are interesting because their lives bring us into contact with most of possible forms of religious life available to women at the time in this area."

The beguine movement, which consisted of groups of women who lived a religious life outside a monastery and without taking permanent vows, has been the object of intensive study. These women and their hagiographies do not reflect a picture of a solitary mystic. Their devotional lives were in many complex ways connected with the surrounding community. This creates the link between the beguine movement and Birgitta. Like beguines, she was by no means an introverted mystic but already lived a very social life at the beginning of her religious career, and though she established a monastic order, she herself remained a layperson. Mary Suydam describes the latest studies on the beguine movement and on beguine lives:

A detailed analysis of these *vitae* reveals a social context that challenges contemporary conceptualizations of beguine writings as literature and suggests that devotional performance is as much their function as literary communication. These hagiographies present compelling evidence that Flemish women's piety and its resulting written depiction were not acts of solitary contemplation, recorded later to edify future generations, but publicly enacted sacred performances shared and shaped by many audiences ⁹⁰

These kinds of interactive religious practices mediated religious messages to medieval audiences and showed ways to practice one's religion. This

makes Marie d'Oignies's *Life* important for the study of Birgitta. Marie had become extremely famous all over Europe. Swedish students of theology of Birgitta's time had also learned about her and the new trends in the spiritual forum. Nevertheless, whereas the number of beguines increased in Central Europe this was evidently not the case in Sweden. There is very little information about beguines in Sweden. In the 1270s, Petrus de Dacia's friend, the German beguine Christina of Stommeln, was asked to join a community of a few beguines in Visby, on the Baltic island of Gotland.⁹¹ Otherwise information about beguines in Sweden is scarce.⁹²

According to Jacques de Vitry, Marie represented a new kind of visionary woman: she was as apostolic as she was ecstatic. ⁹³ These women's religious practices, such as performing nature miracles and healing, prophesying and casting out demons, could have brought upon them accusations of heresy, had they not had eager and skillful male supporters. ⁹⁴ Common to them was also a close collaboration with their confessors. ⁹⁵

Jacques de Vitry relates that Marie came from a rich family. From childhood she had lived a pious life, which seemed to come to an end when her parents married her off at the age of 14, in 1191. From the beginning of her marriage she wanted to continue her pious life style as much but Jacques maintained that "she clearly did not have power over her own body, she secretly wore a very rough cord under her clothing which she bound with great force." Here Jacques implies that the marriage started as any other marriage. Its character was changed only when Marie's husband John was "visited by the Lord" and John promised to live a celibate life and give up everything to the poor for Christ. Jacques de Vitry praised John's decision:

The Lord entrusted a chaste woman a chaste man; he left her a faithful provider so that she might be comforted by the presence of a protector and thereby serve the Lord more freely. And John, who formerly had acted with a certain natural sweetness of spirit, did not oppose the holy plan of his wife (as is the custom of other men), but he suffered with her and bore with her labours goodnaturedly enough. 98

Jacques continued that Marie had later had a revelation, which had showed that in this way she had helped her husband save his soul. Here, it is interesting to note that Jacques consequently emphasized Marie's goodness: John helped Marie to fulfill the holy plan. Marie remains thus always the active central character. Jacques continues by describing how they abstained from "licit embraces" and worked at the leper colony

of Willambroux near Nivelles.⁹⁹ As for the traditional teaching about thirty-, sixty-, and hundredfold rewards of married women, widows, and virgins, Jacques's generosity might have been quite interesting to Birgitta. He observes about Marie: "Your handmaid condemned the kingdom of the world and all its adornments for your love. You indeed gave back her a hundred-fold." ¹⁰⁰

Around 1207–1208, Marie decided to live a more spiritual life and, with the permission of both her husband John and her confessor, she moved to Oignies near Namur, to live in a cell near the Augustinian community of Saint Nicholas. John's fate is not known after this move. In order not to encourage women to forsake their husbands it was important for Jacques to underline that Marie had her husband's consent for her withdrawal. The members of Marie's new community wanted to live in a balance of contemplation and pastoral care. They accepted lay sisters and brothers. After Marie, many other women moved there too. Marie died only few years later after severe fasting in 1213 when she was only 36 years old.¹⁰¹

Around 1210, Jacques de Vitry himself was already quite an influential cleric and his clerical career developed swiftly during the following years. 102 After their first meeting, he and Marie became close and he acted as her confessor. Jacques underlined that their relationship was not a usual relationship between master and spiritual child: he took guidance from her, not vice versa as would have been customary. As John Coakley has remarked, this role reversal worked: "For in picturing her as a sure discerner of the divine, he ascribes to Mary [Marie] powers that he, for all his official importance, professed himself to lack but which are now exercised on his behalf." 103 In other words, Jacques was convinced that Marie had access to divine knowledge as a gift from God, which made her knowledge different from his clerical knowledge. Therefore she had authority and was to be listened to.

Margot King and Miriam Marsolais suggest that as a man of his time, Jacques made it clear that each time they met he was Marie's "disciple." Marie was rapt in ecstasy. In this way the words she spoke were not her own but came from a divine source. Jacques also described Marie as having a guardian angel whom she was compelled to obey more than any human being: "A familiar angel was assigned to watch over her whom she had to obey as if he were her own abbot." The angel's authority thus exceeded even Jacques's authority over Marie. By granting the angel ultimate authority, Marie did not have to obey anyone else. This guaranteed her certain independence.

Jacques de Vitry wrote about Marie and the other women around her in a way that could have appealed to Birgitta as a widow:

Although their families abounded in great riches, yet they preferred to endure distress and poverty and were forgetful of their people and the home of their father rather than to abound in riches which had been wrongly acquired or to remain in danger among worldly pomps... Widows served the Lord in fasts and prayers, in vigils and in manual labour, in tears and entreaties. Just as they previously tried to please their husbands in the flesh, so now the more did they attempt to please their heavenly Bridegroom in the spirit. ¹⁰⁶

In addition to Marie, Jacques had met a number of other admirable women in Oignies, many of them widows coming from wealthy families. Bishop Fulk had even asked him to write about their lives as well but Jacques replied that he would not write about "those contemporary saints in whom God works in our days," because he was afraid that since they were "still alive they could not endure it." These quotations demonstrate that the idea of saintly fame and that of living a saintly life were already in use in the Middle Ages. These elements in Marie's and other religious laywomen's lives could have been important ingredients in the shaping of the concept of a saintly person in the minds of Birgitta and her supporters.

Jacques underlined in his writing that it was possible for people to achieve salvation within the world, without going to a monastery. He presented pious lay believers as religious models and messengers, and even agents of salvation. This emphasis has been called "a pastoral revolution" of the thirteenth century. The women of Liége shared the Augustinian canons' fervor for the curing of souls and the apostolic mission. The Coakley describes both Jacques and Marie as "zealous for souls." The focus of her revelations, according to Jacques, is on the salvation of individuals. This means that the revelations were legitimized as prophecies and they functioned for the benefit of others; thus, they were to be taken seriously.

Bengt Strömberg has shown that Birgitta must have learned of the life of Marie at least through Master Mathias. He cited Marie's *Vita* many times in his treatise *Copia exemplorum*, which was a collection of religious short stories.¹¹¹ Especially Marie's extraordinarily loud mourning and passionate weeping seemed to have impressed Mathias.¹¹² They were kinds of expressions of affective devotion that were seen as fitting for women, and laywomen in particular. Marie was especially famous among Dominicans and in addition to Mathias she was probably known by other Swedish clerics and mendicants as well.¹¹³ Birgitta might have therefore already heard about Marie earlier but Mathias's enthusiasm over Marie's exemplary religious practices evidently inspired Birgitta in the 1340s.¹¹⁴

This fits well with Carol Neel's observation that Marie became a role model and inspiration for single and widowed laywomen as well as for women who wanted to maintain celibacy in marriage.¹¹⁵

Birgitta's background was quite similar to Marie. Both came from rich families, married young, and felt attracted to the pious lifestyle at a young age. Like Elizabeth of Hungary, Marie was keen to care for the sick, which could have influenced Birgitta's interest in that area. Perhaps most importantly, Marie provided an example of how a married woman could practice the *vita apostolica*.

As in Elizabeth's case, Marie had a husband who was an encouraging example of how husbands could relate to their wives' wish to live a saintly life. The depiction of Birgitta's husband Ulf showed that he also was a good husband, although perhaps he did not abstain from "licit embraces" like Marie's John. 117 Ulf joined the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and promised to start a celibate marriage. After Ulf's death Birgitta, like Marie did not want to remarry. As for the confessors, unlike the cruel Konrad in Elizabeth's case, Jacques de Vitry was an amiable confessor. He was a more approachable role model for a confessor. It would be understandable if both Birgitta and her confessor found him more appealing than Konrad.

Marie's frequent visions of angels and saints, conversations with the devil or the souls of the deceased in her *Vita*, bear an even closer resemblance to Birgitta's revelations and could have supplied her with a model for her revelations. Jacques de Vitry wrote about Marie, "Scarcely would a day or night pass when she did not have a visitation from God or his angels or from those saints in heaven about whom she almost constantly spoke." Birgitta's revelations also often take the form of dialogues between the bride and heavenly creatures. Like Marie, Birgitta professed to have information about the status of the deceased in their afterlife. 119

The revelations are part of what Jacques de Vitry calls "the spirit of knowledge" in Marie. He wrote, "The Father of light whose unction teaches us about all things, illumined his daughter with the spirit of knowledge so that she knew when and in what manner something should be done or avoided and thus she seasoned every sacrifice with the salt of knowledge." Anneke Mulder-Bakker has noted Jacques de Vitry's emphasis on Marie's gift for perceiving things through the spirit of understanding. According to him, Marie felt salvation experientially. Mulder-Bakker aptly called this "lived knowledge," *experientia*. This knowledge of experience was needed because academic knowledge was not sufficient. John Coakley has noted that Marie's pastoral revelations were not in conflict with the authority of priests. Actually Jacques stressed that, on the contrary, her revelations supported the clerical authority.

Marie's chaste marriage, pilgrimages, asceticism, prayers, and especially her gift for seeing the state of dead people's souls seem to have been particularly appealing to Birgitta. According to Marie's *Vita*, she loved to hear sermons. She is also said to "have loved preachers," and she seemed to have been very supportive of priests.¹²³ She saw, for example, how "the Lord in the spirit who remained in the soul of the priest and filled him with a wondrous brightness."¹²⁴ Marie also claimed knowledge of hidden or forgotten sins; by reminding people of these sins, she helped them make the full confession required for their salvation.¹²⁵

Birgitta's knowledge was very similar to Marie. For example, it is described in Birgitta's *Vita* how she felt the taste of sulfur in her mouth if she herself said something that offended God, whereas she would smell sulfur if somebody else spoke offensive words about God. According to her *Vita*, people's secret thoughts and doubts were revealed to her by divine grace. Like Marie, Birgitta was passionately keen on hearing sermons. She encouraged both Hemming of Åbo and Master Mathias in their preaching as well as consoled them in moments of despair. In these cases Marie's example would have been both inspiring and empowering to Birgitta.

Jacques de Vitry shows through numerous examples how Marie performed her sanctity and how her performances were received by other people. He emphasized that Marie's way of life was to be admired but not imitated. Marie had even cut a piece of her foot in her zeal to emulate the suffering Christ. Jacques implied that it was not possible for any other human being to be as good as Marie had been. Jacques, Marie was the purest pearl among her beguine group of holy women. Birgitta and her friends could easily identify with the beguines of Liége. However, admiring Marie was not enough for Birgitta; she started to imitate her. One last example of direct imitation might have been that Birgitta was encouraged to live near the Alvastra monastery just as Marie had lived near the Augustinian canons of Saint Nicholas.

Shared Beliefs

Because of the general praise for virginity as being the highest of all states of woman, Birgitta felt at first that being a widow was not good enough for a saintly life or to proclaim divine messages convincingly. She felt strongly that virginity was preferred. Even Jerome (d. 420), whom Birgitta held in especially high regard and who was known as a friend of widows, had praised virgins in his writings. Birgitta learnt these views through the Bible, sermons, discussions, and devotional literature. In the same way she also learnt about Elizabeth of Hungary and Marie d'Oignies, whose models presented an alternative vision of sanctified life.

Elizabeth's popularity as a saint showed Birgitta that the loss of virginity and having children was not an insurmountable obstacle in her path to sanctity. As a role model Elizabeth was significant to Birgitta especially when Ulf was still alive. Marie's example sent more mixed messages. She had been married—but Jacques de Vitry had written about her as if she was equal to a virgin. Her significance to Birgitta can be seen especially in the very public way Birgitta performed her sanctity. Most importantly, however, these women's vitae showed that it was possible to strive for sanctity even if one was not a virgin. The role models' successful stories legitimated their ways of performing piety in practice and together they formed the most important ingredients of the idea of a living saint for Birgitta. By imitating them Birgitta could construct her saintly fame and gain authority.

Mary Suydam's notion about saintly beguines performing their sanctity in front of audiences who also took part in the shaping of that sanctity is important when examining how Birgitta's saintly way of life took shape. To have any success at all, it was crucial for Birgitta that other people recognized in her the same kind of potential as could be seen in Elizabeth or Marie. Therefore, it is of interest to dwell briefly on Birgitta's audiences, who also were her key supporters.

When Subprior Peter read out the *Speculum virginum* in Alvastra, Birgitta was probably not the only person listening to it. She most likely had many like-minded women with her. The first Swedish testimonies in Birgitta's canonization acts may provide names for some of them: Margareta, Ingeborg, Kristina, and Juliana. Like Birgitta, they learnt through shared reading, sermons, and discussions about the importance of chastity and about the new married saints, Elizabeth and Marie. Some of these women were married like Birgitta, and thus also their husbands and children might learn to know of the same things. These people belonged to the aristocracy.

The Birgittine sources also contain information about Birgitta's servants. They gained knowledge about the new saints, for example, when Birgitta herself read aloud to them.¹³³ These people formed a group that could be called reading community or textual community. They shared books, taught one another, and discussed together. As Felicity Riddy proposes that this discussing together was a source of strength for women.¹³⁴

It was not only the female community that empowered Birgitta, but also the priests and monks were an important part of Birgitta's audience. They transmitted the stories and by their theological training they were most able to recognize the acceptable forms of piety. Thus, the status and gender of Birgitta's audiences were quite varied. The shared beliefs of

these people were the foundation on which Birgitta's sanctity and exercise of power rested. 135 It was in dialogues with these people and inspired by new religious impulses from devotional texts that Birgitta's religious identity was shaped. It was not a fixed concept but a fluid one that was continually in transformation.

There are numerous similarities between Birgitta and Marie d'Oignies; I have shown above only the most striking ones. If Elizabeth of Hungary's example had encouraged Birgitta in her desire to live a saintly life, Marie's life taught her even more precisely how to perform it in practice. As Mary Suydam said about the beguine lives, they were not only "literary acts of solitary contemplation, recorded later to edify future generations, but publicly enacted sacred performances shared and shaped by many audiences." These two holy women gave inspiration and models to Birgitta for how to live a saintly life. What was especially significant was that they indirectly legitimized her authority as a religiously active woman in the world.

CHAPTER 3

THE BEGINNING—BIRGITTA AS A CHANNEL OF GOD

The Death of Ulf Gudmarsson and the Calling Vision

In scholarship on Birgitta, the death of Birgitta's husband, Ulf Gudmarsson, in 1344, has often been seen as the birth of the visionary Birgitta. To take one example, Bridget Morris writes, "In many ways Ulf's death came as a relief to Birgitta, as a release from earthly pressures and pleasures towards which she was always tempted, either by natural instinct or conjugal duty." I completely agree with Morris that Ulf's death seemed to be a relief to Birgitta and enabled her to live more freely. However, she did not completely leave "the earthly pressures" behind her. On the contrary, her activities among the politicians, for example, were only beginning. She was now free to follow her hagiographic role models and ready to carve out a model of her own. She had been having visions and revelations for years and struggled to live a saintly life as a married woman but now she was ready for the transformation from the wife of Ulf Gudmarsson to the bride of Christ.

The so-called calling vision few days after Ulf's death has been interpreted as a decisive turning point in Birgitta's life. It has been maintained that only after becoming a widow did she start to have heavenly revelations, whereas earlier she had had only a few such experiences. Sahlin concludes that before the calling vision, Birgitta had had revelations but affirms that they primarily concerned Birgitta personally.² However, as I have argued in the previous chapters, Birgitta had been already having revelatory experiences for many years before her husband died. The prayers from Mary and the comforting revelation during the pilgrimage are the most important examples of this. These revelations seemed to be well known to those around her. Thus, she started to gain fame as a visionary in her surroundings. The timing of the calling vision is

nevertheless important, since it represented a crucial change in Birgitta's social status and strengthened her religious vocation.

There are two versions of the calling vision in the Birgittine corpus. The longer one is in the *Life of Birgitta*, the process *Vita*, and the shorter one is recorded in *Ex*. 47. In the latter, it is said that a few days after her husband's death Birgitta was worrying about her changed status. Suddenly the inflaming spirit of God surrounded her. She was rapt in spirit, saw a bright light, and heard a voice saying to her, "I am your God, who wants to speak to you." According to the revelation, Birgitta was terrified because she feared the "illusion of the enemy." The voice speaking to her, however, was comforting:

Do not be afraid. For I am the creator of all and am not a deceiver. You should know that I do not speak to you for your sake alone, but for the sake of the salvation of all Christians. Therefore, hear what I say. For you shall be my bride and channel and you shall hear and see spiritual things and heavenly secrets, and my Spirit shall remain with you until your death.³

This was a significant moment in Birgitta's transformation from wife to bride and channel of divine voice. Through her, God and other heavenly powers wanted to declare spiritual matters and heavenly secrets.

The longer version of the calling vision in the *Vita* underlines how terrified Birgitta was to have such a revelation and that she feared it was "an illusion." This account is also more formal than the shorter one. According to the *Vita*, Birgitta was praying in her chapel and "was worried about the change in her status and its bearing on her service of God." She fell into ecstasy, and heard a voice saying to her, "Woman, hear me." Birgitta's reaction was fear, since she was afraid of a diabolic illusion.⁴ However, the third time this happened, she also received an explanation of what was happening to her and why:

"Woman, hear me; I am your God, who wish to speak with you." Terrified, therefore, and thinking it was an illusion, she heard again: "Fear not," he said; "for I am the Creator of all, and not a deceiver. For I do not speak to you for your sake alone, but for the sake of the salvation of others. Hear the things that I speak; and go to Master Matthias, your confessor, who has experience in discerning the two types of spirit. Say to him on my behalf what I now say to you: you shall be my bride and my channel, and you shall hear and see spiritual things, and my Spirit shall remain with you even to your death."⁵

When the two versions are compared to each other, the main differences between these two calling visions are that the longer one repeats the call three times, and at the end it has the exhortation to relate the visions to Master Mathias so that he could check the authenticity of the revelations. It is evident that the longer version puts greater weight on Birgitta's fear of deception, that which she calls "an illusion." The call was repeated three times before Birgitta was convinced that the speaker was the Lord. She was assured only when the voice said it was not speaking for Birgitta's sake but for the sake of the salvation of others. This was considered a typical sign of prophecy that it was given for the benefit for others (cf. 1 Cor. 14:1–5).

Birgit Klockars has pointed out that the longer calling vision is very similar to the biblical prophets' calling visions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. In all these instances the prophets are at first uncertain of their talents and need God's prompting before they are prepared to step in to the public arena.⁶ Hence, these features in Birgitta's calling vision bring her credibility and emphasize that she belonged to a long chain of prophets. This would fit in with a life written for the canonization process. In both versions, Birgitta is summoned to be a bride and a channel.⁷ The purpose of her calling is to bring salvation for as many as possible.

Lennart Hollman, the editor of the *Extravagantes*, considered the short version of *Ex.* 47 to be secondary to the longer version of Birgitta's *Vita*, which belongs to the canonization acts. Nine years after Hollman's edition, in 1965, Sara Ekwall suggested that the longer calling vision is probably a later extension of an earlier, shorter, calling vision. However, according to Ekwall, the earliest calling vision is not *Ex.* 47 but the one in the so-called *C 15 Vita*. This text was found in the manuscript called codex Upsaliensis C 15, which had belonged to the cloister of Vadstena. Hence, it was called the *C 15 Vita*. Ekwall claimed that the process *Vita* was secondary and that it was a later revision of the *C 15 Vita*, which, she suggested, was the earliest life of Birgitta written by Prior Peter and Master Peter. Ekwall's hypothesis about the primacy of the *C 15 Vita* to the process *Vita* has not found support in the subsequent scholarship. The main problem with her theory is that she had to invent many hypothetical suppositions in order to be convincing. 10

Nevertheless, there are still many unanswered questions concerning the dating of the two versions of Birgitta's calling vision. The longer version seems to have been reworked with the intention of convincing those who read the canonization acts of Birgitta's prophetic role. For that reason, it is composed like the callings of prophets in the Hebrew Scripture. Because of the elegant style of the version found in the process *Vita*, Sara Ekwall assumed that it was Birgitta's Spanish confessor, Alfonso Pecha (d. 1389), who had modified this longer version. According to Ekwall, the Swedish confessors could not have written some of the passages

because of their modesty. This is a peculiar claim against which speak Master Peter's faultless style in *Sermo Angelicus* as well as Prior Peter's bold testimonies in the *Acta et processus canonizazionis*. But I find it quite plausible that Alfonso Pecha read the two Peters' first versions of Birgitta's life and suggested some stylistic alterations. All of them lived in Rome at that time and were equally interested in producing the best possible vita of the recently deceased future saint. This would also explain Alfonso's influence on the process *Vita*, which Ekwall cites as proof of the process *Vita*'s secondarity. There is still room for speculation about the dating of the different vitae. Although Ekwall's suggestions are not entirely convincing, she raised many important questions concerning the textual history of Birgitta's vitae.

Unlike Ekwall, I find it probable that the simple and short version in Ex. 47 is closest to what can be termed the "primary calling vision." I suggest that the first written version of the calling experience—which I believe Birgitta had soon after Ulf's death—did not mention Master Mathias at all. 12 The main reasons for this are first, the secondary nature of the process Vita and, second, the following revelation in the Extravagantes (Ex. 48), which points to Subprior Peter as Birgitta's most important supporter and collaborator in the beginning of her career instead of Master Mathias as the process Vita's version implies.

Hjalmar Sundén's view of Birgitta's calling experience favors this hypothesis. He pays special attention to the end of Ex. 47, which he calls the self-legitimation of the divine voice. This passage runs as follows: "Therefore, believe firmly that I am he who was born from the pure virgin, who suffered and died for the salvation of all souls, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and who now with my spirit speaks with you." Sundén suggested that this kind of self-legitimation of the voice rendered the confessor's controlling role moot. This could also be the reason why there was no request for Birgitta to go to Master Mathias in order to check the authenticity of the revelations. This sounds plausible, when the contents of the Ex. 48 are associated with the historical context of the calling story.

Subprior Peter's Authorization

Birgitta often visited the monastery of Cistercian monks in Alvastra during the 1340s and knew Subprior Peter well. In *Ex.* 48, Christ exhorts her to tell Subprior Peter of Alvastra to listen to her words and write them down in Latin. Christ added that he sent his words through this woman out of his love for people and promised that Peter would have an eternal treasure for every single word he wrote down.¹⁴ The *Ex.* 48 is not merely

a revelation written in Birgitta's name but a composite of Peter's narration and Birgitta's words. Chronologically, it is contemporary with the calling vision.

In his testimony for the canonization acts given in 1380, Prior Peter described the same incident. He said that Birgitta came to him immediately after she had heard Christ's words and revealed to him what she had been told. At first, he had hesitated to take the job as Birgitta's translator. The same evening he had stood in the church of the Alvastra monastery and decided not to help Birgitta with recording and translating her revelations because, first, he felt he was not worthy enough for the task, and second, he was afraid that the revelations were the work of the devil. Immediately after making up his mind, he had felt as if something had hit him. He fell down and lay on the floor as if paralyzed. The other monks found him lying there and carried him to his cell. He was laid in his bed and was unable to move his body but his mind was clear. He began to think that perhaps the reason for his illness was his refusal to assist Lady Birgitta. He prayed to God to help him and said that if it were His will, he would take the job of writing down her revelations. Immediately after this prayer, he became well and hurried to tell Birgitta the news. 15

Ex. 48 also includes Birgitta's interpretation of Peter's experiences. She confirmed to Peter that the cause of his illness was indeed his refusal to write for her. Christ had told her that it was he who had hit Peter and who had also cured him. This suggests that Birgitta had heard about Peter's illness. At the end of his account, Peter affirmed that he immediately began to write down and translate the revelations given to Birgitta. The last sentence even gives the impression that there was already a set of revelations ready in Swedish for Peter to translate into Latin.

The story reveals that Subprior Peter, who supposedly knew Birgitta well, was not immediately convinced about her authority as a visionary. The feeling of unworthiness was given as the main reason for his reluctance, but he could have had another reason to hesitate since, as Rosalyn Voaden has pointed out, the fortune of the spiritual director depended on the success of the visionary.¹⁷ In other words, Peter's career was at stake. Naturally, the story has a hagiographic flavor but if it is read together with the shorter calling vision, the two stories yield a very plausible picture of events: Birgitta had had visionary experiences early on, which she had written down in Swedish, and after Ulf's death, she experienced the special call to make the revelations known.

The role of Master Mathias as an "expert of two spirits," meaning the capability to discern the good and evil spirits, which was mentioned in the *Vita*'s longer version of the calling vision, was in my opinion not current at the time *Ex.* 48 was written. Had Mathias already been active

with his public approbation of Birgitta's revelations, Peter would not have had reason to suspect them of being illusions. The whole story would not make any sense. Therefore, Peter's doubts probably actualized at the beginning of Birgitta's widowhood, before her close collaboration with Master Mathias. However, Mathias and Birgitta's relationship was to grow more intense at almost the same time as her relationship with Peter evolved.

There is one incident in the canonization acts that might be related to Peter's experience of a blow on the ear described above. Prior Peter said that he had suffered from severe headaches since his childhood. He asked Birgitta to pray for his cure. As she was praying, Christ appeared to her saying, "Go and say to brother Peter that he is liberated from his headache. Therefore he may courageously write books, which are my words that I revealed to you, because he will have assistants." Peter said that from that moment, he suffered from no headaches at all for the next 30 years. ¹⁹ It is possible that Peter meant exactly 30 years backward from the year 1380, when he gave his testimony. This would point to the time just before Birgitta left Sweden in 1349 and Master Peter of Skänninge was recruited as Birgitta's new assistant, due to Peter of Alvastra's duties as the Prior of his monastery.

However, Peter's mention that Birgitta was then living in Alvastra and the advice to courageously write Birgitta's revelations suggest that the healing of his headaches happened quite close to the beginning of his work as Birgitta's secretary. Elsewhere in his testimony Peter mentioned that at Birgitta's death he had been her confessor and scribe for 30 years. ²⁰ This speaks for the earlier date, meaning that the year when he started translating the revelations was 1343 or 1344. The experience of the blow and its healing would also have been very encouraging to Peter. It reassured him that the task was divinely authorized.

The remark about the "assistants" is also quite intriguing. To what persons does it refer? One possibility might be the other monks from Alvastra, who helped Peter with the writing and translations. Or was the other adiutor (assistant) Master Mathias? The answer might be found in another incident that Peter revealed in his testimony. He related a story about the Alvastran brother Nils who suffered from terrible hunger. Nils had, crying heavily, asked Birgitta to pray for him. Birgitta had prayed a special prayer for him. Nils was helped: while sleeping he saw a woman touch his lips and tongue saying, "Look, you are healed, stand up." In passing, Peter mentioned that this monk had earlier been Birgitta's scribe. The same monk Nils is mentioned by Peter in another story about a certain monk or brother who could not think about the Eucharist or Mary without filthy and blasphemous thoughts. Peter said that he had heard

this story from Birgitta and Nils. As in the previous story, Peter also revealed that he had been Nils's confessor at that time.²¹ This account suggests particular closeness between Birgitta and Nils, which could stem from their collaboration in writing the revelations.

Birgitta had started the writing of her visions in vernacular, as was customary among visionary women in the fourteenth century. ²² It would not have made much sense to write in Latin for a Swedish audience. In this phase, brother Nils might have been helping her with the writing. Nevertheless, after having revelations for some time—it is difficult to estimate for how long—Birgitta felt that the revelations should be written in Latin. One reason for writing in Latin would have been that she felt her messages had universal applicability, and wished to impart them to a wider audience. Therefore, writing in Swedish would no longer have been reasonable. In any case, it is clear that Birgitta felt she needed help from a clergyman. Besides the translation, it would guarantee the orthodoxy of the revelations and add to their authority.²³

Birgitta needed a capable person to undertake the translation, the best possible choice being a theologian who was proficient in both church doctrine and the Latin language. Birgitta found Peter to be the best man for this job. Thus, it was not the job of Master Mathias, although as Peter told in his testimony in the canonization acts, Mathias had already acted as Birgitta's confessor when Ulf was alive. I do not doubt his testimony, but Master Mathias, canon of the Linköping cathedral, was a busy man. To be a confessor to somebody was not as time consuming as it was to be a secretary. Mathias obviously visited Alvastra often but he had other engagements and wrote theological treatises himself.²⁴ He did not have time to engage in the full-time writing of Birgitta's revelations. The "assistants" who were promised to help Subprior Peter are thus more likely to be a reference to Nils and other monks from Alvastra.

Birgitta's case, therefore, differs from those of many other visionary women and their confessors. The confessors usually instructed visionary women to write their visions or religious experiences so that the confessors could then decide whether or not they stemmed from God. Birgitta, however, acted on her own initiative and arranged for her revelations to be translated. Her actions were probably driven by practical considerations: she needed help with Latin and the publishing of her revelations. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the church leaders the same act appeared as if Birgitta was submitting herself to the control of Church clerics. This was important because, as Kari Børresen has maintained, "doctrinal affirmation of redemptive equivalence forced the church to tolerate female mystics and prophets, on the condition that they submitted to clerical control of their activities and writings." Thus, the

definition of prophecy offered women a channel to act publicly. It may be that Birgitta also valued her revelations being scrutinized through a doctrinal lens, since she did not have the same kind of formal theological education as her confessors.

The Significance of the Calling Vision

Why was the calling vision necessary? One reason is given in the calling vision itself: as Birgitta was worried about her changed status as a widow, a new mission was given to her in the calling vision. Once she became a widow, in regard to heavenly matters her status rose from thirtyfold to sixtyfold fruit. The same had happened to her role model, Elizabeth of Hungary. Nina Sjöberg has noted that Birgitta must have been well aware of this promotion, although she did not mention it. Perhaps she did not want to underline it because in any case the hundredfold fruit was not accessible to her. By not mentioning the hierarchy she might have wanted to raise the status of wives and widows. ²⁶ The calling vision was important because she was also concerned about no longer being a virgin. A special divine call would help to compensate for that.

Still, as a woman and a layperson, Birgitta did not have authority in matters of religion. The only chance for her was to receive authority directly from God. As mentioned above, she identified herself strongly with the Hebrew prophets, and she was familiar with the biblical pattern of calling visions.²⁷ The explicit calling visions in the Hebrew Scripture as well as in the lives of many medieval mystics, such as Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), marked a notable change in that person's social status. For example, Hildegard felt that she was called to fulfill a new assignment. Hildegard called herself "a vessel," through which God could pronounce truths. The writer of her *Life*, Theoderic, compared her especially to the prophet Deborah.²⁸ The prophet's status was perhaps most significant for women stepping from the private to the public sphere. They found the legitimation for their public role in the Scriptures. The role itself was not sufficient; they had to convince other people of their calling.²⁹

Pierre Bourdieu's theories about symbolic power are helpful in ascertaining how Birgitta and other similar figures managed to convince other people. Bourdieu maintains that the use of language, manner, and substance of discourse depends on the social position of the speaker. It governs the access he or she can have to the language of the institution. Bourdieu called this "the access to the legitimate instruments of expression." Bourdieu's idea about access to legitimate instruments could be applied to medieval women mystics. Women as well as laymen in the Middle Ages could not claim the legitimate language of the religious institution, in

other words, the language of the church. This includes not only the access to the official language of theologians, Latin, but also the access to theological education. This was the privilege of male theologians and clergy. The female prophets gained access to the language of the church by having visions, which they presented as coming from God.

Of course, they also had to be convincing in front of their audiences when making this claim. According to Bourdieu, the power of words resides in the fact that they are not pronounced on behalf of the person who is the "carrier" of the words. The authorized spokesperson is only able to use words to act on other agents and, through their actions, on things themselves. The power act fails if the person does not have the authority to emit the words he or she utters. Bourdieu emphasizes, "The language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs."31 Although Bourdieu does not have the uninstitutional medieval women's speech in mind, his view seems to apply to medieval women visionaries. Because they did not have any publicly approved access to the legitimate instruments of expression, they had to create them individually and one by one theologians and other audiences tested them. This was relevant also in the cases in which the visionaries lean on the prophetic power, which can be described as having the authority through the grace of God, ex beneficio. 32 Before having this authority approved, the female visionary had to convince the other people of her authenticity.

Bourdieu's consideration of the efficacy of words presupposes that the person who speaks is both authorized to speak and is recognized as such by others. Therefore, Bourdieu maintains that the power of a performative utterance does not lie in the discourse itself but the authority comes to language from outside.³³ Birgitta would not have gained authority or any recognition as God's channel had she not underlined that she was only doing what she did because of God's exhortation, and only serving as His channel. In Bourdieuan terms, she was merely a carrier of the words she uttered. But this alone was not enough. As a woman, Birgitta did not have an authority but she had to build it piece by piece. The first stage in this process was to manifest her role as a channel and bride of God—a role that gave her access to the divine secrets. Otherwise, her words would not have had any public efficacy.

The most important person whom Birgitta had to convince and who was also able to provide her with authority was Subprior Peter. His recognition of her authority was no doubt fundamental for the whole enterprise to succeed. This was also a risk for Peter, because his reputation was at stake if Birgitta was found to be a false prophet. But on the basis of his own experiences he was convinced and ready to take the chance.

I assume that the monks from Alvastra supported Peter. Had they been against his collaboration with Birgitta it would not have been possible for Peter to work with Birgitta's revelations.

The next stage in establishing her authority was that Birgitta managed to convince people around her, other than theologians. This was easier after the theologians had already been convinced. In practice, those two audiences probably interacted with each other and thus helped Birgitta build her authority. It seems to me that the discourse and the authority cannot always be separated from each other, especially in the case of a visionary mystic. The power of the utterances was created in the interplay between the authority and the discourse itself. In other words, the message in Birgitta's revelations, her habitus, and the audience and their actions all together constructed her authority and led to the acceptance of her performances as divinely inspired and authentic.

To sum up, Subprior Peter was Birgitta's first assistant who translated the revelations to Latin. He is also called Birgitta's confessor in the sources. This was important because his help would guarantee the orthodoxy of the revelations. Brother Nils probably helped Birgitta with the first group of revelations and later assisted Peter.

It is noteworthy that Subprior Peter needed a dramatic experience before he decided to help Birgitta. His commission was legitimated by a supernatural experience. The fact that Peter needed that kind of additional confirmation suggests that the role as Birgitta's translator was otherwise very difficult to accept. He also had to convince his fellow monks on the issue. Peter interpreted his extraordinary blow on the ear as a sign from God. Evidently, his interpretation was not questioned. An illuminating difference can be traced here between men and women. Women's religious experiences were, unlike those of men, as Grace Jantzen has noted, subject to social control. A woman mystic's claim to direct access to the divine truths had to be tested in a patriarchal society. This had to do with the concept of knowledge. The infused knowledge of women was more susceptible and had to be carefully examined. Subprior Peter had the theological schooling; he was seen as being able to interpret his own experience *ex officio*.

It was not easy for Birgitta to be accepted as a female visionary in medieval Sweden. The situation would have been quite different, for example, in fifteenth-century Castile, where there seemed to be a social demand for visionary people. According to Ronald Surtz, the reason for this was that they corresponded to the needs of those who were not satisfied with the traditional access to the divine through the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Visionaries provided "a more direct way of contacting the supernatural. The visionary functioned as a locus of spiritual power, a channel of grace,

a direct pipeline to the eternal."³⁵ In the sources of fourteenth-century Sweden, it is hard to find a similar demand for visionaries. Revelations and visions were not totally unknown, though; there are some descriptions of them even in the sources about Birgitta. However, the other Swedish visionaries so far had been men, either monks or lay brothers who lived in a monastery. Thus, the circumstances in Sweden were quite different compared to those in Spain and other European countries in which female visionaries were a familiar sight. In addition, Birgitta had been a wife, had children, and did not fit in the saintly models of early Christianity. She was kind of a pioneer in the field of religion. Consequently, it was not easy for Birgitta to get approval for her revelations.

Very often the change in the status of a visionary is described as a struggle. The chosen person herself did not dare to follow the call but was represented as forced by God to do so. This is what is said to have happened, for example, to Hildegard of Bingen and to many prophets of the Hebrew Scripture. Nevertheless, in the case of Birgitta, there seems to have been a clear and simple calling, which she related to her confessor. It appears as if she had been prepared for this task during the years when her desire to live a more pious life had increased. She had already built some kind of *fama sanctitatis*. Thus, the purpose of her calling vision concentrated on making her transformation from a wife and widow to a bride publicly known and approved. As a channel of Christ, she should have authority, which in practice meant that people should listen to what she had to say.

The calling vision and the blow to Subprior Peter's ear were performances that confirmed the divinity of Birgitta's calling to the people near her and made her new career known. It is not possible to know what really happened, but since the sources were written with the aim of proving Birgitta's saintliness and while many who had personally known Birgitta were still alive, I believe that the core description of the events, after stripping away some of the hagiographic decor, is quite accurate. Convincing Subprior Peter and having him agree to translate the revelations was decisive for Birgitta's career. With his help Birgitta could gain credibility for her revelations and prepare herself to enter the international arena.

The Ring Performance

The calling vision was one part of Birgitta's transformation to a bride of Christ. Yet it was not the only performance that made her new status publicly known; shortly after the calling vision, an event took place that is commonly called the ring performance.

As a widow and mother of eight children, Birgitta was familiar with sexual matters. This was a problem for her because she felt that a central requirement for a living saint was sexual purity. The celibate marriage, which, according to the canonization acts, she and Ulf had decided to embark on, served as initial proof of Birgitta's yearning for sexual purity.

In the *Speculum virginum* it is emphasized that those who have lost their virginity, and thus purity, can never be worthy of the virgin's crown, not even if they live in celibacy.³⁷ As I argued in chapter 2 this obviously frustrated Birgitta, and she tried to convince her audience once again about her disregard for carnal matters.

One story in the canonization acts shows how Birgitta strived to rid herself of her past as a married woman and make room for her new role as Christ's bride. This story is found in Prior Peter's account of Ulf Gudmarsson's death in 1344. Peter was present when the approximately 45-year-old lawman died. Just before his death, Ulf took off a ring from his finger and asked Birgitta to keep it always and pray for his soul. Prior Peter said that only a few days after Ulf's death Birgitta took the ring from her finger. The removal of the ring became public knowledge and was possibly gossiped about. Peter said that some powerful people criticized her and accused her of not loving her husband properly. Birgitta answered the accusations by saying:

When I buried my husband, I buried with him all carnal love. Although I loved him as my heart, I would not wish to pay a single denarius to get him back against the will of God. When I had the ring on my hand, it was like a burden to me, because when I looked on it my soul recalled my former affections. Therefore, in order that my soul may immerse itself in the love of God alone, I wish to be free of the ring and my husband, and I commend myself to God.³⁹

By this act, Birgitta underlined her changed status as a widow and especially the transformation from a widow to a bride of Christ. As a widow, Birgitta wanted to dedicate herself wholeheartedly to Christ but was accused of not loving her husband. Birgitta might have felt the accusations to be unfair, since, as is stated in *Ex.* 56, she had already had a vision about Ulf's time in the purgatory and what those who outlived him needed to do to shorten his soul's time in the purgatory. Most probably, as a good wife, she had arranged the customary masses, chalices, and alms to the poor that Ulf had asked for.

The criticism that followed Birgitta's removal of Ulf's ring gave her an opportunity to explain why she took it off. With this performance, Birgitta wanted to put a definite end to her former life. Being a mother and a widow was a burden for her. She wanted to purge herself of those aspects and become a pure bride of Christ. Hence, by taking the ring from her finger she made her new status as a bride of Christ publicly known.

Birgitta showed with her calling vision and the ring performance that she was definitely not considering remarrying. She had a strong call to be the bride of Christ and the channel of divine truths. She also wanted to make this decision public. But she was known as Lady Birgitta, the rich widow of one of the most influential lawmen in Sweden and she had small children to take care of. Starting a career as a receiver of heavenly revelations was not an easy job for a woman in her position.

In the first book of the *Revelations*, there are many passages explaining Birgitta's heavenly betrothal and forsaking of secular symbols of marriage. For example, in *Rev.* I 2, Christ says to Birgitta,

I also have a certain rightful claim on you, since you surrendered your will to me when your husband died. After his death, you thought and prayed about how you might become poor for my sake, and you wanted to give up everything for my sake. So I have a rightful claim on you. In return for this great love of yours, it is only fitting that I should provide for you. Therefore I take you as my bride for my own pleasure, the kind that is appropriate for God to have with a chaste soul.⁴⁰

This revelation explains how Birgitta wanted to totally devote herself to God. Here the stress lies on the "chaste soul." This can be interpreted as meaning that Birgitta's past as a mother and wife was irrelevant as long as her soul was chaste.

In Birgitta's vision Christ describes the delights of her new life compared to marital life as follows: "Prefer my will to yours...then your heart will be with my heart, and it will be set aflame with my love in the same way as any dry thing is easily set aflame by fire. Your soul will be filled with me and I will be in you." Christ promises that temporal things will lose their meaning and carnal desire is like poison to the widowed Birgitta. Here again, the emphasis on the transformation from earthly wife to spiritual bride can be found.

Birgitta is assured time and again by her revelations that she should abandon her worldly affections and family bonds and give herself totally to God; then she may rest in her heavenly spouse's arms. These revelations in addition to the ring performance were probably not intended directly for Birgitta's benefit. Rather, their function was to reassure and convince people around Birgitta about the legitimacy of her new calling.⁴³

Birgitta's Search for Suitable Asceticism

In general, Birgitta, like Hildegard of Bingen, is known to have promoted moderation in ascetic practices, which, in fact, was in many respects the stance shared by most Western theologians.⁴⁴ In this regard the example of Marie d'Oignies's and other saintly women's excessive fasting seems to have had no influence on her. But at the beginning of her career the situation was quite different. Prior Peter related in detail Birgitta's ascetic practices in the first years of her widowhood. His main purpose was to praise Birgitta's obedience to her spiritual supervisors, but he also reveals interesting details about Birgitta's ascetic practices.

He says that in the second year after Birgitta had come to the monastery of Alvastra she became very ill due to not having bathed for a long time. The doctors pronounced that she could not be cured unless she took a bath. Birgitta was initially not receptive to the doctors' suggestion. She explained that after Ulf's death she had decided that it was suitable for her to abstain from bodily delights, such as bathing. Master Mathias, who was apparently visiting Alvastra, told her to obey the doctors' advice humbly so that she would regain her health. He reminded Birgitta that only thus she would be able to help others to salvation. Birgitta promised to obey him and the doctors.⁴⁵

Prior Peter relates further that two days after reluctantly obeying Master Mathias, Birgitta received a revelation concerning her asceticism. Christ told her that the Pharisees, who were considered spiritual people during Jesus's time, publicly exhibited their spirituality in three ways. They washed themselves frequently, prayed in public in order to be called holy, and taught many things that they themselves did not follow. Christ continued that washing oneself does not help the soul if the conscience is not cleansed. He also taught Birgitta that washing the body is not harmful if the soul is clean and if the washing is done without delight. Finally, Christ stressed how pleased he was that Birgitta had obeyed her master even against her own will, saying that obeying without one's own will was much more valuable than offering a great sacrifice.⁴⁶

Another similar case of Birgitta adjusting her asceticism for the sake of obedience is also related by Prior Peter. He and Master Mathias met Birgitta once in Alvastra. Birgitta could hardly speak because she drank nothing between meals. Mathias ordered her to drink immediately. She found it difficult to do so but obeyed just like in the previous case. Then she had heard in spirit a voice saying, "Why are you afraid of changing your life? Do you think that I need your good or do you think that you will get into heaven with the help of your merits? Therefore obey your master since he is an expert in discerning two conflicting spirits, namely

the spirit of truth and illusion." Birgitta is taught in the revelation that she could eat and drink ten times a day, if she was told to do so, and that would not be counted as a sin.⁴⁷ Prior Peter summed up that Birgitta was so fervent in her penitential practices that she was not aware of cold or any other inconveniences. Master Mathias and Peter had to restrict her excessive and bodily violent exercises.⁴⁸

Birgitta's unbathed appearance must have attracted attention in her environs. ⁴⁹ She made her changed way of life and self-mortification known to everybody by performing her new role as the bride of Christ. Marie d'Oignies's famous fasts might quite well have been her inspiration. ⁵⁰ Master Mathias's praise of Marie's fasts in one of his exempla could have made her even more appealing to Birgitta. ⁵¹ In addition, *Vitae patrum*'s and particularly Jerome's writings about nonbathing heroes and heroines might lie behind Birgitta's negative attitude toward washing herself. Especially apt in this respect is the letter Jerome wrote in 403 to Laeta, the daughter-in-law of his close friend Paula. Its main theme was to teach Laeta—and other Christian mothers—how to bring up their daughters. The letter is one of Jerome's most famous letters along with his letter to Eustochium (Letter XXII), in which he gave advice how to educate girls to become chaste women. Birgitta was probably acquainted with these letters. ⁵² In his letter to Laeta, Jerome describes the disadvantages of bathing:

For myself, however, I wholly disapprove of baths for a virgin of full age. Such a one should blush and feel overcome at the idea of seeing herself undressed. By vigils and fasts she mortifies her body and brings it into subjection. By a cold chastity she seeks to put out the flame of lust and to quench the hot desires of youth. And by a deliberate squalor she makes haste to spoil her natural good looks. Why, then, should she add fuel to a sleeping fire by taking baths?⁵³

For Jerome, a clean body was a mark of a dirty mind.⁵⁴ This letter of him might have inspired Birgitta to try to "spoil her natural good looks" or in any case to fulfill the transformation from wife and widow to the bride of Christ by harsh physical practices. Birgitta had adopted a certain image of the saintly life and tried to live accordingly.⁵⁵ As I have argued earlier, she felt that her past as a wife and mother was an obstacle in her path to the saintly life. She sought to follow what she felt was the most appropriate course. Severe asceticism was a widely appreciated way in the history of the Christianity to gain respect. Birgitta's role model, Marie d'Oignies, virtually starved herself to death and was widely admired for it.

But Birgitta's spiritual instructors found her mode of asceticism excessively harsh. They seemed to have been genuinely startled by Birgitta's

miserable appearance. This was often the response that educated clergymen had toward the extreme asceticism of the religious laity.⁵⁶ According to Peter, Birgitta reluctantly submitted herself to her confessors' advice and moderated her asceticism. And as often conveniently happened to her, she was soon to have a revelation that confirmed God's will on the matter. The heavenly instructor pointed out that deeds did not merit anything as such. The revelation made it easier for Birgitta to accept a new level of asceticism. No doubt the vision was passed on to her confessors and devotees as well. It legitimated the more moderate asceticism both in her own and her supporters' minds. The seriousness of the doctors' words might have alerted Birgitta to the realization that she might actually die before she had fulfilled her God-given mission; this thought would have helped her to give up the extreme ascetic practices. The same idea is evident in the words of *Rev.* III 34, which favors moderate bodily practices: "The body should not be killed but cleansed through abstinence so that the words of God can be spread abroad by means of it."57

As has become evident so far, the physical appearance of her body mattered to Birgitta. This aspect also became evident in her ascetic practices. The book *Framing Medieval Bodies* offers a broad and insightful collection of the different conceptions of the body in medieval sources. The emphasis of the book is in historically specific conceptualizations of the body. "Embodied persons, embodied relations, emerge... and these will suggest many other contexts for embodied understanding," as the editors Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin note in their introductory comments. ⁵⁸ I find the aspect important since the writers deal openly with the historical persons, not merely with the textual representations of them. Evidently, Birgitta also worked hard on the aspects of her body that she did not find suitable for a holy person.

What could Birgitta gain with her harsh asceticism, in addition to molding her body into a more suitable appearance for a living saint? Laurie Finke, who has investigated medieval women's visions and ascetic practices, has also asked what women gained from such spectacles of selfabuse. Her answer is simply that they gained power. The disciplines that mystics engaged in were designed to regulate and subjugate the body. Finke notes that they were "methods of consolidating spiritual power and authority, perhaps the only ones available to women." In the terminology of Michel Foucault, these could be called "the technologies of self." Finke also refers to Michel de Certeau, who developed Foucault's idea about technologies of the self and maintained that individuals who use these mechanisms may manipulate, evade, or shape them to their own ends, still outwardly to conform to them. ⁵⁹

Birgitta's self-torturing exercises can be seen as means of her empowerment and early efforts to establish her authority. Birgitta's wrecked outward appearance probably brought her publicity and respect. Finke also makes an interesting point about torture in medieval society. In the Middle Ages, torture was not only a form of punishment but also a technique, a ritual, or a semiotic system, which "must mark the victim." Thus, the marks on the victim's body were signs of the ruler's power. But the ruler's power granted power to the tortured as well. ⁶⁰ Finke continues,

In her excess, the mystic becomes at once both torturer and victim. Her body bears the marks, the "signs" of her own spiritual power. The mystic's progress as saint, then, is discursively organized by the disciplines authorized by religious tradition and performed on her body. However, she changes the meaning of the physical forces that oppress her. She assumes for herself power to define what they mean.⁶¹

The suffering of the mystic is thus the mark of who owns her. For Marie d'Oignies the purpose of cutting a piece off her foot reminded her of how Christ suffered and marked that she belonged to Christ.⁶² The imitatio Christi shown in public demonstrated that one belonged to Christ. Finke infers that it is the "power to construct cultural meanings that creates the mystical text's dialogism—the interanimation of its words, its signs, with other ambiguous words and signs."63 This approach, I believe, enhances the understanding of Birgitta and power. When Birgitta, after her transformation to the bride of Christ, was constructing her life anew, her ascetic practices, the "techniques of the self," brought her power and authority. She was now in a better position than before to tell other people how to live, even though her confessors ultimately calmed down her ascetic enthusiasm. As Amy Hollywood has pointed out, although the body was seen by many medieval thinkers as the site of sinfulness, it was also seen as the site of holiness. 64 This ambivalence was apparent in Birgitta's life as well.⁶⁵

Birgitta was not interpreting and shaping the practices alone, it happened through interaction with the people around her. She developed her practices in constant dialogue with her confessors, fellow widows, and religious texts. ⁶⁶ Instead of seeing her former asceticism as a failure, it became proof of her mental strength. The way Finke summarizes the relation of the mystic and her body applies to Birgitta as well: "The female mystic of the Middle Ages did not claim to speak in her own voice... Any visionary experience made public is always, *ipso facto*, a revisioning of that experience, an attempt to represent the unrepresentable." Finke

underlines that these women demanded their own right to interpret their experiences.

Birgitta, like many holy women in the Middle Ages, gained authority in many different ways. Reshaping her body was one of the methods. Birgitta's fervent practices can also be interpreted as due to the fresh convert's eagerness. Yet, the excessive practices above all signified a complete break from her former life as a wife and a mother, two roles that she had felt as a heavy burden and an obstacle in the saintly way of life.

Birgitta performed her new status publicly and thus adopted many of the typical visible signs of what Aviad Kleinberg has described as "the aspirant saint." These signs included increased piety, self-mortification, ecstatic states, and a change of dress.⁶⁸ Birgitta, perhaps reluctantly, adjusted her practices but she gained something important regarding her future, that is, her acknowledged readiness to self-denial. She had shown that she was ready to die for Christ. This brought her admiration and authority, strengthened her devotees' belief in her spiritual powers, and secured their willingness to support her.⁶⁹

Along with Birgitta's readiness to suffer, Prior Peter stressed in his testimony the role of Master Mathias as Birgitta's principal spiritual instructor. Birgitta's extreme self-mortification might have even been one of the first performances that got Mathias's attention. What is striking, however, is that Peter himself had been present in nearly all the cases described above. He had been able to follow Birgitta's life in Alvastra from up close. He also testified that not all the monks at Alvastra welcomed Birgitta's presence there. It thus appears that Peter was prepared to downplay his own influence, which, de facto, was considerable, by underlining Mathias's educated and prestigious involvement.

It is plausible that by embracing harsh asceticism Birgitta revealed how seriously she took her new lifestyle. She gained more authorization as a saintly person and was no longer required to continue the lifethreatening path of starvation. She was explicitly told not to exercise too harsh an asceticism. Thus, it seems plausible that after this there was more room for revelations. Birgitta's so-called mystical pregnancy was the next important step in Birgitta's effort to establish her authority.

A Christmas Miracle: Christ Is Born in Birgitta's Heart

As Birgit Klockars has observed, Birgitta's revelations often occurred during certain feasts of the church year. This was typical of Marie d'Oignies as well and of the age of the new mysticism of the later Middle Ages. Marie's example probably had considerable influence on Birgitta. Christmas was the time when Mary gave birth to Christ and therefore it was naturally the

time when Christians were encouraged to meditate on this miracle. This is what Birgitta was doing one Christmas Eve, when she felt as if she was carrying a baby inside her heart. This experience happened in the beginning of her visionary life, perhaps in 1344.⁷² Prior Peter describes the occasion as a great miracle. He and Master Mathias were both present at Alvastra, when Birgitta, while praying, was so struck by God's love that she felt as if there was a living baby in her heart. This child seemed to be turning around inside Birgitta so that both confessors could see it. They had also felt it with their hands through Birgitta's clothing. According to Peter, the movement was seen where Birgitta's heart was, which, according to popular medieval conceptions of anatomy, would indicate the upper part of her belly. He described it as caused by the divine love.⁷³

The same event and how Birgitta herself felt about it is described in the *Revelations*: the experience lasted for a long time, and she felt like bursting from joy. Because she was afraid it might be an illusion, she showed it to her confessors and other spiritual friends.⁷⁴ In this way the event became a shared experience, which had a great impact on her and her friends. When it comes to Birgitta's fame and success, it is crucial how this event was interpreted. I will next investigate the possible interpretations and their significance for Birgitta's authority.

Claire Sahlin has profoundly analyzed Birgitta's sources of inspiration for her mystical pregnancy and the medieval context for this idea.⁷⁵ Here I concentrate only on those sources that are important with regard to Birgitta's authority. The idea of mystical pregnancy can be found in the Speculum virginum in which the audience is encouraged to give birth spiritually to Christ in their heart.⁷⁶ Consequently, Mary was widely seen as an authorizing role model and, for example, many recluses identified with her.⁷⁷ One text that may have inspired Birgitta to this experience was the popular manual by an anonymous Franciscan friar called the Meditations on the Life of Christ and especially its description of the Nativity. The impact of the Meditations in the Middle Ages was, according to Barbara Newman, that it "diffused the techniques of affective prayer and visualization so widely that even illiterate lay folks might gain access to the realm of visionary experience and in consequence make exalted spiritual claims that, two centuries earlier, could scarcely have been heard outside the monastery or the recluse's cell."78 The book not only encouraged one to meditate on the event, but also to actively relive it. This is evidently what Birgitta was doing. Interestingly, Birgitta was a laywoman but she also shared living space with monastic people. She was not alone but with her friends and devotees, of whom many were priests and learned men, and therefore capable of interpreting her experience of mystical pregnancy on Christmas Eve.

Birgitta's mystical pregnancy finally gives Master Mathias a more central role. The sources suggest that Birgitta and Master Mathias were occasionally in contact with each other during the first years of Birgitta's widowhood. Prior Peter said that as a widow Birgitta lived in the houses near the Alvastra monastery. Around the same time, Master Mathias visited Alvastra regularly, partly because of its good library. Hence, the three of them seem to have met often in the monastery of Alvastra. Mathias and Birgitta had, probably, already known each other for some time, since Prior Peter said that Mathias had been both Birgitta's and Ulf's confessor.

This information is, however, somewhat misleading. Mathias had been probably studying in Paris for the ten years preceding Ulf Gudmarsson's death. He likely returned to Sweden around 1342–1343. 82 Prior Peter's assertion that Master Mathias was Birgitta's first confessor and already served as her and Ulf's confessor during her marriage is difficult to interpret. Because of his studies abroad, Mathias could have been Ulf's confessor for only about one year in the 1340s. In the story of Ulf Gudmarsson in purgatory (Ex. 56), it is mentioned that one of his merits was that he had obeyed his master's advice (obediui magistro meo) and did not have sex with Birgitta when she was pregnant. The magister is easy to interpret as Master Mathias, but since he was probably out of Sweden during the years when Birgitta and Ulf's children were born, I suggest that the magister in Ex. 56 was somebody else. 83 There were many masters close to the couple, for example, Brother Algot, the Prior of Skara, whom Birgitta, and presumably also Ulf, regarded warmly.⁸⁴ Consequently, Birgitta and Master Mathias would have been in close contact with each other only for a year's time before Ulf died. I will examine Mathias's role in Birgitta's life in more detail in the next chapter.

There seems to be little doubt about the historicity of the mystical pregnancy; the episode is related by both Birgitta and Prior Peter. Its meaning can be scrutinized from many angles. According to Kari Børresen it is evident that Birgitta identified herself with Mary: "Birgitta understands herself as revelatory instrument in the sense that she imitates Mary's role in the incarnation of Christ." This is certainly part of the significance of the experience and it is thus a good example of *imitatio Mariae*.

Some scholars have suggested that Birgitta's experience of the spiritual pregnancy was a sign of her longing for actual pregnancy; others have interpreted it simply as a hysterical desire. Ref. Claire Sahlin, who has thoroughly analyzed the general medieval context of the mystical pregnancy and the significance of this experience to Birgitta, gives a good summary of its meaning:

It represented her difficult decision to place her spiritual vocation above her attachments to her biological children and suggested that she was filled with divine wisdom. Her identification with the pregnant Virgin also indicated that Mary became her model for giving flesh to divinity. Perceiving herself to be like an expectant mother, Birgitta believed she was preparing herself to make Christ visible in the world once again. Birgitta felt authorized through the maternal role—one of only a few available roles for medieval women—to serve as an outspoken prophet and vehicle of divine revelation.⁸⁷

Sahlin's analysis is a good description of how Birgitta probably perceived the experience: she identified herself strongly with Mary and the maternal role became her authorization. The stress in this interpretation is more on how Birgitta saw it much later, since Sahlin supports her interpretation using revelations dating from Birgitta's time in Italy. 88 My perspective on the mystical pregnancy is different; I am interested in its performative nature and its meaning to Birgitta's audience in the beginning of her career. So I look at this event especially with regard to how it was perceived by Birgitta's friends at the time it occurred, how they interacted with each other, and finally, how Birgitta persuaded them to see her mystical pregnancy as an authentic experience of the divine source.

Prior Peter's description of the incident of the mystical pregnancy in the canonization acts illuminates his and Master Mathias's reactions to the experience. Peter recounted that her friends saw and felt the movement and admired it greatly. ⁸⁹ The reason why Birgitta had showed her body to her confessors was that she was afraid of an illusion or, in other words, she was afraid of being attacked by a demon. Peter's description does not give any hints that he considered Birgitta's experience demonic. It simply gives the impression, as was appropriate in a testimony for canonization, that he was amazed by the movement of Birgitta's heart and placed great value in it as it happened. ⁹⁰

But Peter gave his testimony long after the historical event and it is possible that the confessors were not immediately as convinced as Peter later implied. It would have been quite understandable that they found Birgitta's behavior more odd than holy. The assumption of the confessors' initial hesitation is supported by a revelation received by Birgitta the day after the first experience of the spiritual pregnancy, on Christmas day, during mass. In the revelation Mary explained to her the meaning of the movement in her heart by confirming to Birgitta that it was not an illusion. She described how as soon as the angel had announced the conception of Christ to her she had felt a wonderful living thing inside her. Mary told Birgitta that the experience signified the moment when Christ had arrived into her heart. From now on Birgitta would be Christ's new bride and consequently Mary and God's daughter-in-law. Her task would be to

proclaim their will to the world.⁹¹ The revelation features a breathtaking array of subjects about Birgitta's role and status. Birgitta may have needed this much encouragement since she had felt that Peter's and Mathias's first reactions to her belly's movements were indeed somehow skeptical. She may also have been genuinely afraid that her physical sensation could be interpreted as diabolic.

Illusion, meaning in this case usually demonic possession, was a fear taken seriously during the first half of the fourteenth century. Demons were believed to cause many kinds of bodily states or diseases. Birgitta's spiritual pregnancy was in this respect actually a risky event, especially because there was a commonly known female disease called "the suffocation of the womb," "the wandering womb," or "hysteria." According to Thomas of Cantimpré (d. after 1276), this disease was especially typical of widows. Symptomatic of this illness was that the womb rose and pressed against the heart. The reason for this was that the lack of sex led to the emergence of corrupted humors. Thus, Birgitta's symptoms resembled that disease and might quite easily have been interpreted as its signs rather than those of divine grace.

The wider context for this disease was philosophers' and theologians' growing concern about demonic activity and mystical sainthood from the thirteenth century on. As Barbara Newman shows, the decades between 1220 and 1260 "witnessed decisive changes both in models of sanctity, especially female sanctity, and in the understanding of possession." Two literary genres of the period show these developments particularly clearly: the lives of saintly women and the earliest collections of sermon exempla. As Newman points out, "hagiography and preaching were two sides of the same evangelical coin." Both genres that were well known to Birgitta and especially to her confessors.

Apart from demonic possession, another issue to which theologians devoted much of their time was the nonordination of women. This had effects on the general atmosphere regarding women, as well as what was held as allowed for them and what not. The most heated debates occurred approximately between 1240 and 1337, just mere decades before Birgitta's active religious life. As A. J. Minnis notes, there was full consensus that women could not be ordained. But since there was an evident need to find room for laypeople, especially women who had divine messages to mediate, theologians simultaneously developed doctrines about teaching *ex beneficio* and *ex officio*. During the period from the thirteenth century to the middle of the fourteenth century, many treatises were written about why women could not be ordained into priestly duties and why they were more prone than men to raptures—both divine and demonic. 97 Both of these approaches would not be favorable to a woman like Birgitta.

Jacques de Vitry's writings about holy women balanced the negative attitudes toward women. Especially Marie d'Oignies became widely known as a paradigmatic recent saint whose raptures had been found to stem from divine sources. Jacques de Vitry's life about her, *Vita Maria Oigniacensis*, was the first text set outside a monastery that utilized vocabulary earlier associated only "with the heights of monastic *contemplatio*." Bernard McGinn points out that when Jacques described Marie's prolonged fasting and trancelike states he often used expressions such as *separatus a corpore* (out of the body), *a sensibilibus abstracta* (out of senses), and *in excessu rapta* (rapt in ecstacy). 98

These raptures could have been easily interpreted as diabolical but theologians were also keen on developing more positive interpretations that were firmly based on the physiology of women. In her investigation of the pathologization of female spirituality, Dyan Elliott emphasizes that especially the thirteenth-century theologians, for example, Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), Bonaventure (d. 1274), Albert the Great (d. 1280), William of Auvergne (d. 1249), and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), often wrote about encounters with a higher spirit. They frequently used the terms familiar from Marie d'Oignies's Life, such as "rapture," "alienation," "ecstasy," or "departure of the mind," to connote the estrangement from the senses that occurs when a person has an encounter with a higher spirit.⁹⁹ There was a reasonable amount of philosophical, medical, and theological literature that explained why women's bodies were well suited to raptures. The basic reason was, as Amy Hollywood puts it, that they were held to be "more porous, permeable, and weak than men's." The cause was partly physiological: women's bodies were held to contain more humidity and that made them especially receptive to supernatural powers. The more humid and soft female bodies were believed to be more impressionable and thus more imaginative than men's drier bodies. 100

This was, unsurprisingly, often a negative issue for women. For example, Albert the Great linked female humidity and women's moral faults basing this assertion on the presumed fact that women's "mobile' complexion fosters mutability and a desire for novelty." But there could also be positive aspects: the imaginative capacity could make women more open to spiritual visions. An often-quoted example of how medieval thinkers reacted to female diseases such as the suffocation of the womb comes from a commentary to pseudo-Albert the Great's *De secretis mulierum*. It shows clearly the parallels between women's diseases and suspect spirituality:

Women who suffer this illness lie down as if they were dead. Old women who have recovered from it say that it was caused by an ecstasy during

which they were snatched out of their bodies and borne to heaven or to hell, but this is ridiculous. The illness happens from natural causes, however they think that they have been snatched out of their bodies because vapors rise to the brain.¹⁰³

The writer explained that when these vapors were thick, the women had an experience of being in hell and if the vapors were light, they felt as if they were in heaven. 104 It was also important in what part of body the experiences were felt. The upper part of the body, from the heart upward, was pure but the lower part of body was seen as impure. As Nancy Caciola concludes, "A series of associations was established between demons, bowels, and loins, on the one hand, and between the Holy Spirit, the heart, and the soul, on the other." 105 Hence, Birgitta's experience took place in the pure part of the body.

Although Birgitta did not have death-like trances, she was a recent widow and had symptoms that could be seen to match these female diseases instead of being spiritual gifts. But how well were the Swedish theologians informed of treatises and teachings about womb-related diseases? It is known that in the 1270s, the archdiocese of Uppsala supported its students in Paris and in 1291 they acquired a house of their own there. Around 1317, the dioceses of Linköping and Skara also established their own collegia in Paris. In 1329, no fewer than 34 Swedish students were listed as studying in Paris. Therefore, it is quite safe to assume that the lively discussions in Paris were quite well known to the Swedes. As Strömberg has shown, Master Mathias was familiar with the theological currents of his time. 107

Besides, Swedes knew from sermons and hagiography stories about demonic attacks. The following story about women and devils, which Birgitta was aware of, was recounted in the *Life of Elizabeth of Hungary*: A young woman named Benigna had asked her servant to give her something to drink. The servant had done so saying, "Take it and drink the devil!" After that Benigna's belly had swollen like a balloon and she had felt as if an animal was running inside her. Other people had thought she was possessed by the devil. After two years' suffering, she was cured when taken to Elizabeth's tomb.¹⁰⁸ In the light of such stories, therefore, it is possible that Birgitta's visionary and bodily experiences might have been pathologized. Her confessors had to take the possibility of devils lurking everywhere seriously.

What further confirms that demonic attacks were well known in Sweden is one revelation in the Birgittine sources, which deals with the disease known as the suffocation of the womb. According to *Rev.* VI 80, a demon tormented one woman so that her womb became swollen like

in pregnancy. The womb shrank again but the unclean spirit continued to plague the woman. Her mistress asked Birgitta for help. Birgitta prayed and received advice from Christ. He described three kinds of demons that were typical for "this country." One of them governs drinkers and heavy eaters, second type of demon possesses one's body and soul, and the third type is the most horrible, it forces one against one's nature to debauchery. Christ told Birgitta that the suffering woman had not confessed all her sins—having been too shy—and was possessed by a demon because of her infidelity and incontinence. Christ wanted this woman to be cured and therefore gave her advice through Birgitta. Christ also instructed that people around this woman should act on her behalf. As friends of God they should pray and cry for this woman and she should confess her hidden sin. After that she should receive Eucharist and then she would be cured. And so it came to pass. 110

The woman's bodily symptoms were seen as caused by a demon. Birgitta could have shared a similar destiny, had she not been able to convince her audience about the divine source of her mystical pregnancy. Why, then, was Birgitta's spiritual pregnancy interpreted as an authentic divine experience? This is probably due to the shared knowledge and mutual appreciation between Birgitta and her confessors. Birgitta's gradually deepening devotional life was well known to the latter.

Another account about a devil tormenting a woman is given in *Rev.* I 16. In this story as well the devil revealed that he was dwelling in the woman's belly and nature. After the revelation an explanation is given that Birgitta drew the devil away by saying, "Get you gone, devil, you have vexed this creature of God enough." And the woman was freed. Because Birgitta was familiar with stories about demonic possessions, it is understandable that she may have had a nagging uncertainty about where the experience of the mystical pregnancy came from. However, with her curing revelations about the possessed women, she showed she knew how to handle the demonic possessions and they would thus not be a threat to her.

The spiritual pregnancy seems to have taken Birgitta and her friends by surprise. Birgitta's interpretative vision the next day indicates that Subprior Peter and Master Mathias needed some further reassurance. However, as Mary Carruthers says in her book, *Craft of Thoughts*, "Like chance, grace also favors a prepared mind." In other words, creative thoughts are actually not created out of nothing. Carruthers writes about monastic practices of memory, thus the context is different from Birgitta's, but the notion that mystical experiences were viewed through a lens of shared religious expectations helps to put Birgitta's individual experience into a broader context. 114

Birgitta did not invent the idea of mystical pregnancy but had many sources of inspiration. Therefore, her prayer during Christmas Eve can be seen as preparation for an experience of God. What the experience was to be was naturally a surprise. This was central as well, since it was important that visions occur without warning. The unexpectedness brought credibility to the authenticity of the visions. But in order to find out what convinced Birgitta's confessors, I would stress the point Carruthers made that the training of the mind helps in receiving gifts of grace. In other words, I suggest that Marie d'Oignies provided, again, a role model that helped both Birgitta and her confessors to recognize the gift of mystical pregnancy. Many medieval visionary women experienced mystical pregnancies, but as Claire Sahlin showed, there is not enough evidence about Birgitta's knowledge about them. Sahlin suggested that Birgitta was possibly inspired by a story in Marie's life, in which Marie holds the baby Jesus tightly between her breasts: 116

Sometimes it seemed to her that she held him tightly between her breasts like a clinging baby for three or more days and she would hide him there lest he be seen by others and at other times she would kiss him as if he were an infant...When, at the Nativity, he appeared as a baby sucking at the breasts of the Virgin Mary or crying in his cradle, she was drawn to him in love just as if he had been her own baby.¹¹⁷

Jacques de Vitry even referred to Jerome, who had related that when visiting Bethlehem, Paula had had a vision of the baby Jesus lying in a crib. This shows how the veneration of Jesus at different ages was an old practice. Jacques de Vitry described further, how Christ manifested himself to Marie in different stages of life and states; for example, during Easter she saw him on the cross.¹¹⁸ Master Mathias used events from Marie d'Oignies's Life, as Strömberg has pointed out, in his exempla. The story in which Marie cuddled the baby Jesus was one of them. 119 Therefore, it is quite likely that Birgitta also knew this story. Since the image of Marie cuddling the infant Jesus is quite different from Birgitta's mystical pregnancy, Sahlin leaves the influence of Marie d'Oignies open and states that at least the liturgical season could have motivated Birgitta's experience. 120 But a careful reading of Marie d'Oignies's Life reveals another incident, which possibly inspired Birgitta's mystical pregnancy. Jacques wrote about Marie's frequent confessions and the purity of her heart. These were obvious to others because of Marie's faultless appearance. The next quotation of Marie's life sounds particularly familiar considering Birgitta's mystical pregnancy: "Never, or rarely, could we observe in her any unbecoming or inordinate gesture; although many times, out

of the immense joy of her heart scarcely able to restrain herself, she was compelled to show the joy of her heart, with modest excess in her smiling face and the outward movements of her body."¹²¹

This portrayal closely resembles that of Birgitta's mystical pregnancy, although the fetus-like movements in Birgitta's experience were lacking in Marie's. However, the expression "the jubilation of her heart was forced to show itself" might have triggered in Birgitta the more palpable experience of the heart's jubilation. 122

Moreover, it is interesting to note that, like Birgitta, Marie also usually shared her experiences with her confessor. Jacques said that after Marie's joyous experiences, when she had returned to herself, she reflected whether her actions had been too excessive. Whatever Marie's conclusion was, in every case she made a careful confession. This kind of obedience and subordination to the confessors' examination was also viewed as a positive mark of the visionary's state of mind. As has become clear, Birgitta followed the same practice. She is said to have hurried to show her heart's movements to her confessors. Jacques's description showed that Marie's experiences were visible to those around her. This supplied Birgitta and her friends with an example of how to relate to something like the mystical pregnancy. Most importantly, through confession the confessors were informed about the visionary women's experiences. Thus, the confession was not only a salvational medium, controlling people's behavior, but also it was an important way of transmitting spiritual revelations and experiences to the confessors, which was useful for women's search for authority.

Especially for Peter and Mathias, but also for other people near Birgitta, it was probably easier to accept her affectionate reenactment of Mary's pregnancy because they admired its Marie d'Oignies's version. As if this was not enough, Birgitta's explanatory revelation from Mary the next day came to ensure the right interpretation of the pregnancy. It was important for a performer to have her message accepted, thus it seems that Birgitta hastened—probably unconsciously—to give her audience the proper interpretative framework. 123

In Birgitta's case the role of confessors was to evaluate thoroughly the source of her experiences. The technical term of this was *discretio spirituum*, the testing of spirits.¹²⁴ It simply meant an examination of whether the visions stemmed from the divine source or from the devil. One might ask whether Birgitta needed other people's help interpreting her experience, since, as Amy Hollywood has suggested, many medieval visionary women were perfectly able to interpret their own visions. In her investigation into Christina the Astonishing (d. 1224), Hollywood mentions that women like Christina often "presumably understood themselves as overpowered by an experience beyond their control (this is the way

thirteenth- and fourteenth-century texts by women talk about such raptures), yet there is evidence that they struggled to maintain the authority to *interpret* that experience against the competing claims of male medical and ecclesial authorities."¹²⁵

Women often felt authorized merely by their experiences of the divine. ¹²⁶ This seems to be the case with Birgitta as well. Moreover, Marie d'Oignies example partly helped with the authorization. Nevertheless, Birgitta's vision the next day shows that she wanted to make sure that all other people correctly understood her encounter with the infant Christ. *She* definitely knew the right interpretation of her experience—mediated to her through a divine revelation—and took care that her confessors and friends were informed of it as well. Yet, like Christina the Astonishing, Birgitta needed clerical approval to sanction her interpretation. That is what she got. The visible movement in Birgitta's heart seems to have been key proof of Birgitta's authenticity for Peter and Mathias.

"Doing" the Body

As I have shown earlier, Birgitta struggled with her gender and especially with her nonvirgin status. Her mystical pregnancy could also be seen as reflecting her concern over her lack of virginity. Why was Birgitta then constantly preoccupied with this issue?

In order to understand Birgitta's way of thinking about matters concerning her gender I will take a brief look at Sarah Salih's research on the texts of the so-called Katharine Group women from the perspective of gender. Birgitta did not know these English texts but was well acquainted with stories about early virgin martyrs. The Katherine Group texts contained lives of the three famous early martyrs: Katherine, Margaret, and Juliana. The English translations of their lives were popular in England from the thirteenth century onward, in other words, during the same time as the lives of Marie d'Oignies and Elizabeth of Hungary gained popularity. Thus, the discourses about the meaning of virginity and married saints existed side by side.

Salih applies Judith Butler's concept of "performative gender" in her work, noting that a body is a negotiable sign, not a prediscursive thing. The Katherine Group characters did not identify themselves as feminine or women but as virgins. According to Salih, the Katherine Group virgins redefined their bodies and identities through the practice of virginity. "Becoming male" was a saying with which in the first four centuries AD, Christian teachers like Cyprian (d. 258) or Ambrose (d. 397), Bishop of Milan, praised religiously virtuous women. ¹²⁹ Becoming male usually meant that after rigorous asceticism some women ceased to be female. In practice, this meant that their characteristically female features

disappeared, for example, the cessation of menstruation.¹³⁰ This helped them to advance in the traditional hierarchy where males dominated over females and masculine over feminine.¹³¹ Salih persuasively proposes that if "virgin" is construed as a distinct gender identity, women could escape "becoming male," since being a virgin meant belonging to a completely separate gender. The virtues of virgins are in that case not categorized as masculine or feminine but as peculiar to virgins.¹³²

The praise of virginity bothered Birgitta but her real problem was that she was a mother and had been sexually active in the past. As an aspiring saint she needed to either downplay or restore her nonvirginal body. To restore her body was possible, since as Caroline Walker Bynum maintains, the body was not merely a hindrance but an opportunity for women. ¹³³ In the same vein Sarah Salih suggests, "Women's piety, then, need not mean redemption of the flesh: it could mean a redefinition of the body through chastity." Seeing gender as performative, Salih states that gender is a continual process rather than a fixed state. It is possible to "change" the gender due to the constructiveness of gender: "If gender identity requires repeated acts, it must be theoretically possible to stop repeating these acts, and to 'do' your gender differently. Gender identity is necessarily unstable." ¹³⁴

This helps to understand the significance of Birgitta's mystical pregnancy. Just as seeing virgins as a distinct gender helped avoid the paradox of becoming male, Birgitta's mystical pregnancy helped her to escape her past and restore her body. The mystical pregnancy can not only be interpreted as infusing the divine knowledge into her but, moreover, it can also be seen as the restoration of Birgitta's body and making it like that of Mary's, who was seen by medieval theologians as a perpetual virgin despite her motherhood. Mystical pregnancy could help Birgitta to see her body as similar to Mary's body. Given that Mary was held to be both a virgin and a mother, when Birgitta felt Jesus inside her, she became more like Mary, "whole" or "closed" like a virgin. With the help of the mystical pregnancy she redefined her gender. As the Katherine Group women performed their virginity, correspondingly after becoming widow and the chaste bride of Christ, Birgitta stopped repeating her married woman's acts and instead "did" her gender differently. With the imitation of Mary she redirected her audience's gaze from her physically active sexual past to the amazing presence of God inside her. 135 Therefore, it could be said that it was not gender that Birgitta performed, but holiness.

* * *

After her husband's death, Birgitta experienced a transformation from wife to bride. As a bride of Christ she was engaged in evangelical work in public. She worked hard to convince those around her of her new

mission. She wrestled with her past as a wife and mother. She felt the demand of virginity as a requirement to holiness, stemming from the theology of the time. As result she became sensitive to the issue and as if to compensate for her lack of virginity she experienced a mystical pregnancy one Christmas. This one type of *imitatio Mariae* helped her to construct her gender in a new way. She was no longer merely Ulf's widow and mother of eight but she had felt the baby Jesus within her and therefore she became more like Mary, sealed and holy. Her body became a more positive signifier of her holiness to her when she redirected her and her friends' gaze from her lack of virginity to her visible mystical pregnancy.

After the calling vision Birgitta actively sought clerical assistance. Subprior Peter became her scribe after some hesitation. Unlike theologically learned male mystics, Birgitta was dependant on her theologian friends and supporters when it came to her writings. After the first steps in her new career as a visionary, her renown grew.

CHAPTER 4

MASTER MATHIAS'S ROLE REASSESSED

Hear the things that I speak; and go to Master Matthias, your confessor, who has experience in discerning the two types of spirit. Say to him on my behalf what I now say to you: you shall be my bride and my channel, and you shall hear and see spiritual things, and my Spirit shall remain with you even to your death.¹

This passage from Birgitta's *Vita* has been central to the interpretations about Birgitta and Master Mathias's (b. ca. 1300–d. ca. 1350) relationship. According to this text, Birgitta's reason for going to Master Mathias, who was already her confessor, was that he had the ability to discern the authenticity of her revelations. Birger Bergh, for example, sees the text as containing the keys to better understanding Birgitta and her actions that followed.² Claire Sahlin stresses that Birgitta continuously submitted her daily practices and spiritual life to her confessors' direction and was dependent on their approval and their promulgation of her revelations. According to Sahlin, at the beginning of her career Birgitta "was terrified that the revelation was a diabolical illusion and received instructions to tell Master Mathias what it had revealed to her, since he was 'experienced in the discernment of the two spirits." These views, no doubt, reflect the impression the authors of the *Vita* wanted to give.

I argued, however, in chapter 3 that this longer version of Birgitta's calling vision is of a later date than Ex. 47, and contains more editorial work on its hagiographic aspect. I suggested that Ex. 47 is the most authentic description of Birgitta's so-called calling vision and it does not contain any reference to Mathias at all. I also suggested that Subprior Peter's role at the beginning of Birgitta's visions was more significant than has previously been assumed. In the following sections I seek to find out what lies behind the Vita's portrayal of Birgitta going to Master Mathias, and aim to establish how and when Mathias and Birgitta developed such

a close relationship. What was Mathias's role concerning Birgitta's revelations? One fundamental issue in this chapter is the question of how Birgitta managed to convince Mathias of the authenticity of her visions.

Mathias returned to Sweden before October 1342, almost at the same time as Birgitta and Ulf came home from their pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.⁴ Most of the information about Master Mathias comes from Prior Peter's testimony for the canonization acts; however, he does not reveal when Birgitta and Mathias first met.⁵ They seem to have usually met in the monastery of Alvastra.⁶ Mathias might have been keen on visiting Alvastra because it was one of the largest libraries in medieval Sweden. This would make sense because around 1344 he was writing the *Copia exemplorum*, a collection of edifying short stories, and a commentary on the Apocalypse.⁷

Prior Peter said that Master Mathias had already been Birgitta's confessor when Ulf was alive. Ido not see any reason to doubt this information. Although the Birgittine sources give only brief glimpses of Birgitta and Mathias's encounters, they suggest that these meetings might have been quite intense. Since Mathias was Birgitta's confessor, they met because of Birgitta's need for spiritual direction and confession. Moreover, Birgitta is said to have loved listening to sermons, and she often came to hear Mathias preach. Mathias was indisputably the most famous theologian in Sweden during the fourteenth century. He had studied abroad for a long time, probably in Paris, and was well acquainted with the latest theological debates at the universities.

Mathias was a learned man who seems to have been interested in all kinds of religious practices.¹³ He was aware of the fruitful and close relationships between visionary women and their confessors in the past, as can be seen from his references to Marie d'Oignies. Therefore, he regarded heavenly visions as possible and knew that visionary women usually needed pastoral support.¹⁴ Hence, it can be assumed that he was excited to meet an extraordinary, devout woman in Sweden. Birgitta had certain *fama sanctitatis* already before her widowhood and, as was seen in the previous chapter, Birgitta's mystical pregnancy made an especially great impression on Mathias.¹⁵

Before Mathias became Birgitta's confessor, at least during the pilgrimage to Spain, her confessor had been Svennung, a Cistercian monk and later abbot, from the monastery of Varnhem. Why would Birgitta want to change her confessor and why did she choose Master Mathias? Prior Peter's accounts offer one possible answer. He said that Birgitta, already when married, was keen on listening to the sermons of educated preachers. She did not spare her efforts in order to be able to do that. Mathias was one of the *virorum probatorum*, an "experienced man," who Birgitta thought was worth listening to and whom she would like to have as her confessor. Birgitta found confession vital for a Christian: "This soul comes closer and closer to God each day through a true confession... confession—the more often it is used and the more carefully it is made as to both lesser and greater sins—conveys the soul increasingly forward and is so pleasing to God that it leads the soul to God's very heart" 19

Mathias was famous in the 1340s as a writer of theological treatises. He also had the reputation as an expert in the discerning of spirits; he was known to be particularly experienced with temptations, which were usually not described more specifically. Bengt Strömberg has remarked that, in the beginning of her career, Birgitta needed a person who was able to discern spirits²⁰—discretio spirituum, as the practice was called in Latin. Hence, it is easy to assume—as is indeed often assumed—that Mathias's reputation as an expert in the discernment of spirits would have been the reason for Birgitta to seek his judgment on her visions. Here also Strömberg, one of the experts in research concerning Mathias, took the Vita's exhortation to Birgitta to approach Master Mathias literally. But if read carefully, the sources are confusing in this matter. How had Mathias earned such a reputation? Had he gained his experience with temptations during his studies in Paris, or did he acquire it only after his return to Sweden? Had he already made Birgitta's acquaintance when his temptations occurred?

The Birgittine sources contain a surprising amount of material to answer these questions. Especially Prior Peter's testimony clearly refers to the latter alternative: Mathias was struck by the temptation after he befriended Birgitta.²¹ According to Peter, Master Mathias was struck by a most serious temptation. Peter did not specify exactly what it was. Birgitta learnt about it and was told in the spirit that Mathias would be freed from the temptation and given the fervor of God's spirit. Mathias had felt instantly freed and the temptation was quieted.²² The reliability of Peter's account is increased by his mention that Master Mathias himself had related this episode to him. Peter's testimony is further supported by two other texts in the Revelations. First, in Rev. VI 75, Christ tells Mathias that if Mathias is unsure of who is speaking to him through Birgitta, it is Christ himself, who freed him from his temptations.²³ Second, in Rev. V, Master Mathias is praised because he himself fought against the temptations and did not trust in his senses; he is also promised the best knowledge of the Bible.²⁴

The sources do not reveal when exactly all this happened but they indicate that Mathias was already in contact with Birgitta by then. This would mean that Mathias's inner struggle with temptation could have

taken place some time after Ulf's death when Birgitta was starting her career as a visionary or perhaps even before that. In any case, Mathias's temptation most probably occurred around the same time as Birgitta's calling vision. The sources give an unambiguous picture of Mathias's temptation: it was Mathias who was in trouble and was helped through the divine message that Birgitta mediated. There seems to be a contradiction in the sources quoted above: Why would *she*, who had already received divine messages, need help in the discernment of spirits from Mathias as was said in the *Vita*?

To answer this question, it is useful to look at what is said about the discerning of spirits in Birgitta's visions from her Swedish time. In *Rev.* I 4, Christ accuses Birgitta of not trusting in his words:

"I am your Creator and Redeemer. Why were you afraid of my words? Why were you wondering whether they came from a good or an evil spirit? Tell me, did you find anything in my words that your conscience did not dictate to you to do? Or did I command you anything against reason?" To this the bride answered: "No, on the contrary, they are all true and I was badly mistaken."²⁵

This passage describes Birgitta as being afraid of "false illusions." In return, Christ showed how disappointed he was in her because it showed how little she trusted him. But immediately after this, Birgitta received information as to how to discern between good and evil spirits:

You can also recognize the unclean spirit from three things, the opposites of these. He tempts you to seek your own praise and to be proud of the things given you. He tempts you to betray your faith. He also tempts you to impurity in your whole body and in everything, and makes your heart burn for it. Sometimes he also deceives people under the guise of good. This is why I commanded you always to examine your conscience and disclose it to prudent spiritual advisors.²⁶

With these words, Birgitta showed how well informed she was about the discernment of spirits. She even took into account the widely shared spiritual recognition that sometimes evil spirits are disguised as good ones. The revelation thus showed that Birgitta is God's chosen one, can use her reason, and is prudent to let her confessors check her visions. However, in the rest of the revelation the spirit confirms that Birgitta should not worry since it is impossible to deceive her. Her revelations are true: "Therefore, do not doubt that God's good spirit is with you, seeing that you desire nothing other than God and are completely on fire with his love. I am the only one who can do that. It is impossible for the devil to draw near to

you."²⁷ Birgitta received further, in other revelations, teaching about the two spirits and is assured, "You do not have to be in doubt as to whether the spirit of your thoughts is good or bad. For your conscience tells you which things to ignore and which to choose."²⁸ In the case of Birgitta's mystical pregnancy, Mary had confirmed to Birgitta that the experience was not an illusion.²⁹ As these examples show, the early revelations deal explicitly with the discernment of the spirits and directly aim to assure Birgitta that her gift of receiving divine messages was authentic.

It seems on closer reading that Birgitta had little use for Mathias's advice. As was the case in her calling vision, Birgitta received confirmation about her revelation's authenticity in the same way as she received the revelation itself. Hjalmar Sundén fittingly called this the self-legitimation of the voice, which diminished the controlling and authenticating role of the confessors. According to these revelations, Birgitta at first doubted the authenticity of her visions but was soon assuaged and did not appear to be too terrified of demonic attacks. ³⁰ It appears that she felt that with the help of her divine knowledge she was perfectly able to interpret her own revelations. This resembles Jacques de Vitry's description of Marie d'Oignies, who also was represented as possessing the gift of discernment. ³¹ Marie's example of interpreting her visions might have motivated and encouraged Birgitta to trust her visions.

From the thirteenth century on, noncloistered women were encouraged to make frequent confessions by their confessors. In this way, confessors could keep an eye on the orthodoxy of the spiritual development of these women.³² It has become evident that Birgitta took advantage of the practice. Sometimes her frequent confessions have been seen as obsessive.³³ The obsession may also have been due to the fact that Birgitta received revelations constantly and wanted to share them with her confessors. It is therefore probable that as a dutiful confessant Birgitta told Master Mathias about the revelation of *Rev.* I 4 and its assurance that Birgitta's visions were from God. By telling Mathias about the revelation she was able to show how well informed she was about good and evil spirits, and that she was assured that she was not deceived. At the same time she engaged him as her confessor to work with her: probably more for reasons associated with collaboration than for the discernment of the spirits.

How did Birgitta acquire her knowledge about good and evil spirits? Rosalynn Voaden suggests that usually people got their information from scriptural stories, saints' lives, collections of exempla, stories of otherworldly journeys, cautionary tales, and spiritual manuals.³⁴ Priests and members of religious orders were probably the most important sources for mediating this information. These were evidently also Birgitta's sources of the knowledge of *discretio spirituum*.

In the light of Mathias's personal struggles, the exhortation of the *Vita* to go to Master Mathias and let him check the authenticity of the revelations appears to be a later invention by Birgitta's hagiographers. The authors of her *Vita* combined her concern about the authenticity of her visions and Master Mathias's well-known experience in the discernment of spirits. This was a common and acceptable way of writing hagiographic texts. This was a common and acceptable way of writing hagiographic texts. By doing so, the authors drew a picture of the perceptive, wise Mathias and the humble Birgitta. Thus, as regarded the canonization process, both were ascribed suitable roles, even though the historical Birgitta seems to have taken rather independent action with her visions.

The Vita's stress on Mathias's gift of discretio spirituum is more understandable when put into the context of the 1370s when it was written. Discernment of the spirits was much discussed around the time of Birgitta's death, especially if the aspirant saint was a woman. The concern over the doubtful origin of "divine" voices is especially noticeable in Alfonso Pecha's defensive prologue to Birgitta's revelations, the Epistola solitarii. He carefully defined Birgitta's visions according to the hierarchy that Augustine had presented—stressing that they were mostly intellectual—and continually underscored Birgitta's humility and obedience toward her confessors.³⁶ Alfonso's eager defense of Birgitta's visions had an effect on Prior Peter as well. This can be seen in his testimony in which he refers to Alfonso's Epistola solitarii and also in his own description of the mode of Birgitta's visionary experiences. Following Alfonso's Epistola solitarii, Peter seeks to emphasize in his testimony that Birgitta had intellectual visions. Still, his testimony shows that he was not as well informed about the Augustinian hierarchy of visions as Alfonso was. In Peter's description, the different types of visions are mixed together and their boundaries are blurred.³⁷ In fact, it is plausible that Mathias's fame as an expert in discerning the spirits was derived from his association with Birgitta, in other words, she authorized him and not vice versa. However, in the canonization proceedings the situation was presented as Mathias giving authorization to Birgitta's revelations.

If Birgitta did not need Mathias for his skill in the discernment of the spirits, why did she want to have him as her supporter? And why was Mathias ready to play this role that was later given particular prominence by the promoters of Birgitta's cult? One instance, in which Birgitta had made a positive impression on Mathias after she learned of his temptations, is related in *Rev.* VI 75. It describes what happened when Mathias was giving a sermon and Birgitta was present. During Mathias's sermon, a knight suddenly cried out, "If my soul does not arrive come to heaven, let her go like a wild animal and eat the earth and leaves. For it is a long time until doomsday, and no soul may see God's honor before this

doom!''³⁸ The theological core of this episode was the controversy over the *visio beatifica*. Master Mathias's sermon possibly provoked the knight's outburst. Bengt Strömberg suggested that Mathias had threatened the man with punishment in hell.³⁹ The layman responded that if his soul could not arrive in heaven right away after death, then it could not go to hell either, because just as a blessed soul could not see God before the final judgment, the condemned could not enter hell before then.

It may sound surprising that Master Mathias should have spoken in his sermon to this particular knight. A comment added later to this revelation makes it more understandable. According to it, the man in question was married but kept a mistress in his house. Mathias's intention in his sermon would have been to encourage the knight to repent, although he was apparently unsuccessful.⁴⁰

Strömberg investigated Master Mathias's attitude to different theological debates of his time. Strömberg showed convincingly that, judging from Mathias's writings, for example, *Homo conditus* and the commentary on the *Apocalypse*, he often dealt with questions that were connected to the *visio beatifica* and a movement usually called Latin Averroism.

Many Swedes had studied in Paris and apparently they were familiar with the discussion about *visio beatifica* and its links to Averroism. Even the venerated Master Mathias might have found it difficult to determine what to think. What was at stake in the discussion? I will briefly summarize the main points. Averroes's⁴¹ translation and commentary of Aristotle's texts had become famous in thirteenth-century Paris. Some of the interpretations of Averroes's comments clashed with the prevailing doctrines and sparked heated debates.⁴² Central ideas of Latin Averroism were, for example, that the transsubstantiation and the trinitarian nature of deity were logically impossible. The denial of the doctrine of divine prescience was also a central precept. Theologians accused Averroes of denying the creation *ex nihilo* and Bonaventure accused both Averroes and Aristotle of maintaining the impossibility of individual immortality.⁴³

Church leaders found the notion of one common intellect for all humankind especially alarming. Pope Alexander IV asked Albert the Great to write its denouncement and in 1256 he wrote *De unitate intellectu contra Averroem* and in 1270 Thomas Aquinas wrote *De unitate intellectus contra averroistas.* ⁴⁴ Averroism was one of the most influential theological and philosophical approaches in Paris from the twelfth century onward. Perhaps two of the best-known defenders of Averroism in the thirteenth century were Siger de Brabant (ca. 1240–1284) and Boethius de Dacia. Both claimed that a philosopher is a person who wants to perfect his intellectual virtues, eventually bringing himself to the highest level of perfection possible for human beings. ⁴⁵ Despite the condemnation of

Averroism in 1270, Averroes's views were respected and he greatly influenced the tone of the debate over Aristotle and religion in the thirteenth century and beyond. For example, in fourteenth-century Paris the works of Averroes were still studied. John of Jandun (d. 1328) was the leading figure in the continued promulgation of the Averroist philosophical program. ⁴⁶

Disagreement over the *visio beatifica* also raged in the church for many years, until in 1336 Pope Benedict XII issued the constitution "*Benedictus Deus*." In it, he declared that the blessed would see God immediately after their death and those souls who die while in the state of mortal sin would go straight to hell after their death.⁴⁷ This was vital for the church, since denying the salvation of an individual soul, would have meant that doctrines about hell and purgatory would have become obsolete. The church would have lost the power of the threat of hell and purgatory.

Of special interest is that one of the early leading Averroists, Boethius de Dacia, was probably of Swedish origin. It would not be surprising if already in the thirteenth century many Swedes were well acquainted with his views—whether or not they agreed with him.⁴⁸ It is evident that the debate over the *visio beatifica* was known in Sweden in the 1330s through many Swedes who stayed in Avignon in the papal curia. The best known of these theologians was Bishop Ödgisl of Västerås.⁴⁹

The story about the knight's outburst and Master Mathias's sermon shows that the doctrine of the visio beatifica was still a matter for public debate in the 1340s in Sweden. The debate must have been quite vigorous, since in the Revelations there is also another case in which the visio beatifica is central.⁵⁰ This is not surprising, since many Swedes studied at the University of Paris in the thirteenth and fourteenth century and were acquainted with Averroism. It is no wonder that Master Mathias took up the issue in his writing. He claimed in Homo conditus that one reason why souls are immortal is justice. For it would be a great injustice, if the evil ones who prosper in this life were not punished in the afterlife. Consequently, those who are good and suffer in this life should be rewarded in the afterlife.⁵¹ The consequences of some of the Averroist views and the denial of visio beatifica on earth would have presented problems for Birgitta. The existence of hell and purgatory and the belief that it was possible to receive divine messages were cornerstones of her role as a visionary.

The knight's theological views were apparently not uncommon in Sweden. But with regard to Birgitta and Mathias's relationship, the most interesting are the events after the knight's outburst. According to the *Revelations*, Birgitta's reaction to the knight's outburst and Mathias's response was acute. She was shaken and thought, "O Lord, king of glory,

I know that you are merciful and very patient. All of them who keep silent about the truth and conceal the justice are praised in the world. Those who have and show your true zeal are despised. Therefore, Lord, give this master firmness and fervor to speak."⁵² After these worried thoughts Birgitta was enraptured and heard a voice:

Say to your master: nobody else but your God, your Creator and your Savior says this: "Preach fearlessly! Preach firmly! Preach both at a suitable and unsuitable time. Preach that the blessed and purified souls will see the face of God! Preach fervently because you will get the same reward as the son who hears his father's voice. In case you are uncertain who I am, I am the one who freed you from your temptations." 53

Birger Bergh suggested that in this passage, Birgitta's encouraging words to Mathias might show that she was afraid that Mathias himself did not feel secure in his faith and was even tempted to surrender to his old temptation of Averroist intellectualism.⁵⁴ This interpretation is quite plausible. The question of visio beatifica was possibly connected to Mathias's severe temptation concerning his interest in philosophical examination of the faith. Birgitta even appeals to Christ's patience as if Mathias's distress in this case was not the first time such a thing had happened. Mathias must have been surprised and upset by the knight's words, especially if in the past he had been attracted to the Averroist views. The incident with the knight in the church was a public spectacle and put Mathias in a difficult situation: it is easy to imagine how it tested his authority and self-confidence. However, Birgitta's message to Mathias-whether public or not is not said—was very encouraging in the psychologically stressful situation and it must have been comforting to receive such a personal message directly from Christ. This doubtless strengthened the bond between Mathias and Birgitta.

The story recalls Marie d'Oignies's eagerness to encourage many priests in their preaching. According to Jacques de Vitry's testimony, Marie even helped him to become a better preacher. Jacques wrote emotionally about his "own unhappiness," which Marie helped him to get rid of. Since Mathias was well acquainted with Marie's *Life*, it is possible that he saw in his and Birgitta's relationship similarities to that of Marie and Jacques's, or, at least, to the similarly close relationships between other women visionaries and their male supporters. The example of Marie and Jacques could have paved the way for Mathias's positive and even enthusiastic attitude toward Birgitta and her revelations.

Prior Peter related another episode that also demonstrates Mathias's personal enthusiasm toward Birgitta. As Peter and Birgitta had gone to

hear Mathias preach, the Master had openly praised Birgitta's virtues in his sermon. This had distressed Birgitta and after the service she had asked Mathias never to mention her again in his sermons. Mathias had answered that exemplary men and women should be praised in order to build the faith of others. Here again Mathias sounded like Jacques de Vitry in his writings on Marie. ⁵⁷ According to Peter, Birgitta answered Mathias thus: "My ship is in the middle of streams, therefore I need prayers; we see the beginning but it is the end which should be praised." ⁵⁸ According to Bergh, Birgitta was embarrassed by Mathias's open praise of her. ⁵⁹ This is a possibility, but Birgitta's words about being in the middle of streams could also indicate her critics; she might have feared that Mathias's praise would irritate her potential opponents. ⁶⁰

To sum up, Mathias's interest in Birgitta can be explained by his enthusiasm to create the same type of relationship between himself and Birgitta as had existed between earlier saintly women and their confessors. Another factor could have been Birgitta's encouragement and support of him in his torments: Birgitta provided him with important confirmation when he was in doubt. During their meetings, Birgitta convinced Mathias about her authority as the recipient of divine messages, and Mathias was prepared to listen to her. Thus, Birgitta exercised authority over Mathias, and their relationship was more of a companionship of two people of equal power than a confessional arrangement in which the pastor directed his female disciple.

In fact, it is still not quite clear why Birgitta was so keen on Mathias. She had other theologians around her and was on good terms with many others, especially with Subprior Peter of Alvastra. Mathias was a source of considerable theological knowledge, which alone would have been attractive enough for the theologically and intellectually curious Birgitta. It should not be overlooked; however, the more respected the confessor was the more secure the position of the woman he approved would be. It might be that Birgitta saw greater potential for promoting her messages in Mathias than in Subprior Peter. At the same time, it is important to note that Subprior Peter was present in Birgitta's life in all the cases that Master Mathias is mentioned. Peter's and Mathias's roles did not exclude each other, but rather the two figures supported each other, for Peter helped Birgitta to write her revelations and Mathias inspired her with fresh theological insights. Birgitta did not lose anything by recruiting Mathias to help her.

There are further factors that explain Birgitta's interest in Mathias's support. Strömberg has shown that the themes in Birgitta's revelations and those in Mathias's works are quite similar. Strömberg also observed that Birgitta's revelations closely resembled sermons. According to him,

the revelations were often meant to be publicly delivered, which they also were: the canonization acts mention that Birgitta's revelations were preached in many churches at least around 1350.⁶² Also Eva Odelman has studied Birgitta's style and observed that she did not use rhetoric in the learned way as Master Mathias did. Birgitta's texts more closely resemble sermons, which were intended for uneducated people.⁶³

Strömberg's views have been ignored by later scholars who have followed the view of the Swedish editor of the *Revelations* I, Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, who argued that Birgitta's revelations were mostly kept secret during her time in Sweden. ⁶⁴ Undhagen's view is based on the following section in Birgitta's *Vita*: "The Virgin Mary instructed her to tell, on her own behalf, a certain hermit-priest Alphonsus, a friend and acquaintance of hers, to write down and copy the books of the revelations that had been divinely given to her and which indeed until then had been kept secret." ⁶⁵ This was confirmed and Alphonso's task was described more precisely: "At the death of this same lady, Christ confirmed this by instructing the same Lady Birgitta to tell her confessors to hand over to the said hermit all the secret revelations and all others that they had not yet handed over in order that this same hermit might have them written out and that he might publish them to the nations for the honor and glory of God." ⁶⁶

These lines have often been interpreted literally instead of considering their hagiographic intention and what is otherwise known about the publicity of Birgitta's revelations in Sweden while she still lived there.⁶⁷ The passage above is probably Alfonso Pecha's contribution to the "authorized" biography of Birgitta in the canonization documents.⁶⁸ His idea was to enhance the importance of the successful canonization process by claiming that its materials had not been circulated previously. It is likely that most of Birgitta's revelations from her time in Sweden were not known to people in Italy. This was understandable since they mostly concerned Swedish people. Nevertheless, it does not mean that they were not circulated in Sweden in the 1340s. The secrecy, to which Alfonso referred, would then mean that those revelations written in Sweden were "kept secret" in Italy. But this does not mean that those revelations would have been kept secret in Sweden at the time that Birgitta received them. On the contrary, it was in the exhortatory nature of the revelations that they should be made known to the people they concerned.

To maintain that the revelations were kept secret in Sweden is even less plausible since Master Mathias's Swedish version of Birgitta's so-called first revelation to the Swedish people was circulated in Sweden as a leaflet or circular letter probably even before the year 1346, as Jan Liedgren has already demonstrated in 1961.⁶⁹ This text, as many other revelations

from Birgitta's Swedish time, was meant to be proclaimed to as many people as possible. The early Swedish version of Birgitta's revelation did not contain her name. The reason for this might have been, as in the case mentioned above, when Birgitta asked Mathias never to refer to her by name in his sermons, that she was afraid that it would irritate people and weaken the reception of her messages. Besides, the contents were more important than the source.⁷⁰

Hence, the answer why Birgitta was interested in Master Mathias would be that she saw in him a capable and respected priest who could help her spread the messages she received through the divine revelations. As has already become evident, Mathias had great influence over Birgitta, but this relationship worked also in the other direction: Mathias evidently had high respect for Birgitta's thoughts and especially for her perceived capability to operate as a channel toward the divine.

Mathias respected Birgitta's authority when it came to theological matters as well. For example, he asked her what the meaning of the seven thunders in Apocalypse 10:3 was, and he also asked Birgitta whether the author of the Book of Revelation was the same as the Gospel of John. Birgitta dutifully delivered these questions through her prayers to her divine interlocutor and received answers. Among other things, she affirmed that the author of the Apocalypse was indeed the same John who wrote the Gospel. She also received from Christ very encouraging words to deliver to Mathias: he had been granted the same spirit that had helped to write the Sacred Scripture. Not only did Birgitta answer Mathias's questions, but she also flattered Mathias, making him out to be as important as the authors of the Bible. One can wholeheartedly agree with Bergh's assessment: "Understandably, Mathias must have been pleased."

During the first years of Birgitta's widowhood, her saintly way of life was taking shape in constant interaction with people around her. Master Mathias and Subprior Peter were her closest priestly supporters. One revelation in *Rev*. I is especially important concerning Mathias's and Peter's role as the publishers of Birgitta's revelations. Bridget Morris convincingly suggests that the intended audience of *Rev*. I 22 were Birgitta's confessors. This revelation contains an intimate conversation between Birgitta and Mary. First, Birgitta confesses her worries about her own sinfulness and then expresses her concerns about Christ's enemies. Mary's comforting words could be interpreted as encouraging confessors to preach firmly, especially to the "enemies of God": "Remember that good people are frequently found among evil. And adopted children sometimes turn away from what is good, like the prodigal son who went to a far-off land and lived an evil life. But sometimes preaching pricks their

conscience and they return to Father, as welcome then as they had been sinful before "74"

This revelation shows, first, how Birgitta encouraged the men around her in their task as preachers. Second, as Strömberg has shown, the revelation also contains material for sermons and was meant to be preached.⁷⁵ Birgitta's expressed aim was to save as many souls as possible. Since Mathias as the Canon of Linköping was in contact with a wide circle of people, both secular and clerical, he was an important link in Birgitta's network and would be able to spread Birgitta's messages effectively. And the Swedish version of Birgitta's first revelation suggests that Birgitta's revelations were indeed preached in Sweden in the 1340s.⁷⁶ I will return to the question of the publicity of Birgitta's revelations in the sixth chapter.

The themes in Birgitta's and Mathias's writings are quite similar. Both urged people to repent by threatening them with eternal damnation. As a counterbalance both mentioned God's mercy, *misericordia*, which was supposed to lead sinners to repent. For both of them, the mediatory role of Mary was important. On the basis of his analysis of the main themes in Mathias's *Copia exemplorum*, Strömberg concluded that Mathias and Birgitta had almost identical views on what ought to be preached to people for their salvation.⁷⁷ Evidently they found their soul mates in one another and their cooperation was therefore both mutually inspiring and productive.

CHAPTER 5

BIRGITTA ENCOUNTERS HER CRITICS

The authors of the canonization acts and the editors of Birgitta's revelations often used the topos of a "hostile witness," someone who experienced a conversion and became one of Birgitta's fervent devotees in the same way as Apostle Paul had in the New Testament. The testimony of a former enemy is one of the most convincing when it comes to persuading the reader. The stories about the critics and their conversions strengthened Birgitta's authority. They were proof that her visions were authentic and her message should be taken seriously. In the canonization acts they also showed Birgitta's proven and tested sanctity, and, thus, the strength of her character. The sources show this strategy usually worked well both in the 1340s and after Birgitta's death. I am especially interested in examining more closely how Birgitta reacted in those situations and how she exercised power. Therefore, I seek to find out, among the hagiographic emphases, what could be known about how Birgitta acted and reacted during the actual situations. I start with the resistance Birgitta met at Alvastra.

Resistance toward Birgitta

Prior Peter said that Birgitta lived in the monastery of Alvastra for a few years after Ulf's death, between the years 1344 and 1349.² According to Birgitta's *Vita*, she moved to the vicinity of the Cistercian monastery after Master Mathias had instructed her to do so.³ As mentioned earlier, Mathias, and also Birgitta, might have been inspired to do so by the example of Marie d'Oignies, who had moved near Augustinian canons. Birgitta probably had with her other pious women and servants.⁴ Not everybody in Alvastra approved of this. During the 1340s, a lay brother named Gerekinus criticized Birgitta's presence near the monastery of Alvastra. He was a highly respected man in the monastery, he was said

to have seen "the nine choirs of angels; and at the elevation of the Body of Christ, he frequently merited seeing Christ in the appearance of a child." In the process *Vita*, Gerekinus is described as wondering, why Birgitta was residing in a monastery for monks "introducing a new custom against our Rule?" However, soon he falls in ecstasy and hears an explanation: "Do not wonder. This woman is a friend of God; and she has come in order that at the foot of this mountain she may gather flowers from which all people, even overseas and beyond the world's ends, shall receive medicine."

According to Birgitta's hagiographers, Gerekinus ultimately became a devotee of Birgitta and had visions about her that convinced him further. He is said to have seen how Birgitta was elevated from the earth and a stream of water came from her mouth. 8 Claire Sahlin has analyzed Gerekinus's positive revelation about Birgitta and how it aptly supports the image the hagiographers wanted to project: "By stressing the significance of her vocation, the passage reiterates the message of Gerekinus' previous revelation: Birgitta's divine commission places her beyond established rules prohibiting women's residence on the edge of a male monastery of the Cistercian Order."

Nevertheless, the *Vita* seems to give too harmonized a picture of how things developed between Birgitta and Gerekinus. Apparently, Brother Gerekinus¹⁰ was not immediately in favor of Birgitta's presence at Alvastra, and a peculiar revelation appears to be Birgitta's straight answer to Gerekinus's doubts. In *Rev.* IV 121, the devil opens conversation with the Lord by saying,

"See, the monk flew away and only his shadow remains." The Lord asked for an explanation. The devil answered: "I shall do it although reluctantly. A true monk is his own guardian; his dress is obedience and observation of his occupation. Just as the clothes cover the body, so the virtues cover the soul. Therefore, the exterior dress does not have any value, unless the inner is not watched, because it is not the dress but the virtue, which makes the monk. This monk flew away when he thought so: 'I know my sin and from now on I shall correct my life and with the help of God's mercy I shall never sin anymore.' With this will he drew back from me and is now yours." Again, the Lord asked why the shadow remained and the devil explained that the monk had not remembered all his sins and had thus not made full penance.¹¹

This revelation shows that brother Gerekinus's criticism had reached Birgitta's ears. The story makes it evident that Gerekinus enjoyed a reputation at Alvastra of being an extraordinarily holy person. He had been there at least 40 years and was perhaps a man in his 60s or older.

Everybody knew him and especially his gift to see the infant Christ during the elevation of the *hostia*. With her revelation, Birgitta wanted to suggest that the brother was not as virtuous as his reputation as a holy man led one to suppose. It is also possible to see Gerekinus and Birgitta as rivals. Both had revelations and unusual charismatic gifts. In *Rev.* VI 86, Birgitta is said to have seen the face of Christ in the elevated *hostia* and even heard him saying, "A blessing on those of you who believe, but I will be a judge to those who do not believe." Because both Gerekinus and Birgitta had visions of Christ in the *hostia*, it might have seemed like Birgitta was trespassing on Gerekinus's territory with her revelations. Yet she also had to take the criticism that came from the devout and respected Gerekinus seriously.

Birgitta underlined in her revelation that the outer dress of Gerekinus meant nothing—regardless of how holy his fame was—if his inner life was not in order. She accused Gerekinus of having some old sins, which he had not remembered to confess—an accusation that anybody with a sensitive conscience would have found irksome. She painted a picture of Gerekinus's future after his death as if part of him, his shadow, would remain on the earth. This was a punishment for his incomplete confession and penance. Birgitta was often harsher in her revelations regarding doom and judgment¹³ but here it seems that Gerekinus's holy fame had to be taken into account. Given that Gerekinus died in 1345,¹⁴ the incidents must have happened right at the beginning of Birgitta's public career.

The importance of absolution for a person's every single sin was of great importance to Birgitta. Characteristic of this is the case related in *Rev.* IV 114. Birgitta was confessing her sins when a priest suddenly interrupted her confessor. The confessor went away and forgot to give Birgitta absolution. In the evening as Birgitta was going to bed the Holy Spirit gave her absolution and taught Birgitta that even minor sins become deadly if continued. This is in accordance with her claim about Gerekinus's hidden sins.

The *Vita* contains another revelation, which probably provides a response to Gerekinus's critical questions. According to the *Vita*, Birgitta was staying at Alvastra because Master Matthias had instructed her to do so. She had also been confirmed by a revelation in which the Spirit told her,

If it should please the mighty Lord to do a work that is singular, general works must not therefore be despised but must be loved all the more and with greater fervor. So I, the God of all, who am above all rules, permit you to reside at the present time near the monastery—not to abolish the Rule, nor to introduce a new custom, but rather to display my wonderful work in a holy place. For David, in a time of need, ate the hallowed loaves—an act that is nevertheless forbidden to some in a normal time. ¹⁶

This vision is presented in the *Vita* just before Gerekinus's doubting words: "Why does that lady settle here in a monastery of monks, introducing a new custom against our Rule?" I think it is obvious that Birgitta was inspired by Gerekinus's question.¹⁷ Through the vision she sought to explain why she was an exception. It is not possible to know what finally convinced Gerekinus, but evidently he was not convinced easily.

The case of Gerekinus bears an interesting resemblance to Marie d'Oignies's and other saints' presumed ability to perceive others' hidden sins as was mentioned above.¹⁸ Perhaps Marie's gift inspired Birgitta to use this kind of powerful knowledge. The ability to read hearts is certainly an old topos but it was also, at least in Birgitta's case, often put into practice.¹⁹

At first it seems surprising that this revelation with its unusual teaching about the monk's shadow remaining on the earth is among the preserved material. Birgitta's use of the shadow or image (lat. effigies) poses a puzzling dilemma. My first assumption was that Birgitta found this image among exempla or tales of folklore. Yet, the image might go back to the Bible. In Rev. IV 76, Birgitta mentioned Apostle Peter's shadow: "ad umbram Petri infirmi sunt sanati," meaning that even the apostle's shadow could heal the sick (Acts 5:15). The apostle's shadow may have been in Birgitta's mind but the idea might go back to the Vulgate's translation of the Wisdom of Solomon, Chapter 15, which says, "For neither has the evil intent of human art misled us, nor the fruitless toil of painters, a figure stained with varied colors, whose appearance arouses yearning in fools, so that they desire the lifeless form of a dead image." In Latin the wording bears even closer resemblance to Birgitta's revelation: "Non enim in errorem induxit nos hominum malae artis excogitatio, nec umbra picturae labor sine fructu, effigies sculpta per varios colores: cujus aspectus insensato dat concupiscentiam, et diligit mortuae imaginis effigiem sine anima" (Wisd. of Sol. 15:4-5). This passage might also have been Birgitta's inspiration for Gerekinus because of its idea of immortality and righteousness: "For even if we sin we are yours, knowing your power; but we will not sin, because we know that you acknowledge us as yours. For to know you is complete righteousness, and to know your power is the root of immortality" (Wisd. of Sol. 15:3-4).²⁰

Since Birgitta's revelations were products of various influences and sometimes mere impulses, ²¹ it is not possible to track the precise source for the shadow. Nevertheless, these possible allusions may help to understand the revelation better. Birgitta attacked Gerekinus with a powerful weapon, hidden sins. Accusing him of duplicity was perhaps the only possible accusation left for her given his pious fame. Anyone with a sensitive conscience ought to feel guilty at the accusation of having hidden sins,

especially if it was maintained that one had forgotten one had committed them. Had Gerekinus denied any forgotten or hidden sins, he would have been guilty of pride. It was thus in practice impossible to argue against such a claim. The shadow he left on the earth was an effective image as well. It split the person and without a doubt made the one concerned feel existentially uneasy. This case shows Birgitta's creativity in using figurative imagery. It is also evident that she had a well-developed psychological eye and sense of how to take into account the religious attitude of the person in question.

Gerekinus was not a singular case. Another Alvastran monk named Paulus doubted Birgitta's sanity and disapproved of her stay at Alvastra.²² When Birgitta was told about Paulus's words she admitted that she had not been sane earlier, but by loving God and wanting to please only God she had gained her sanity. Piously she blessed the monk and added, "Ask that brother to pray for me."²³ Here Birgitta shows admirable patience and, perhaps surprisingly, compared to her earlier reactions, she does not threaten the monk at all. She chooses to use submissive humility—although her request for the monk to pray for her might have a slight sense of irony: Paulus would need her prayers, not vice versa.

In the canonization acts, Prior Peter also told the story of brother Kethilmundus, who was the prior of Saint Olof's Dominican monastery in Skänninge. Kethilmundus had difficulties understanding why God had given Birgitta the gift of visions. According to Prior Peter, Kethilmundus became convinced of Birgitta's worth after receiving a dream from God. In the dream, he saw a fire coming out of Birgitta's mouth and inflaming many near her. He also heard a heavenly voice asking, who could prevent this fire of divine power. After his dream Kethilmundus became a fervent defender of Birgitta's revelations.²⁴

The story of Kethilmundus has a strong hagiographic flavor, and it is not to be taken literally. What I find most interesting in this story is that Kethilmundus could not believe that Birgitta was worthy of divine grace. His words imply that as a rich widow and mother, who did not have the pious past of a nun, Birgitta was not a plausible candidate for divine revelations. Unlike in most cases, there is no mention that Birgitta would have heard about Kethilmundus's negative thoughts or reacted against them.

As Claire Sahlin has noted, Birgitta's visions regarding Gerekinus and Kethilmundus affirmed her prophetic calling, in spite of her gender. Description of the prophetic calling, in spite of her gender. Moreover, I find it noteworthy that all these three men were ultimately convinced by a divine intervention. Their conviction was based on their own experiences, which they did not doubt. Having divine assurances seems to have been surprisingly popular in late medieval Sweden.

Brian Patrick McGuire, who has also analyzed the meaning of some of the aforementioned criticism, adds a story about a monk who was a gatekeeper at Alvastra. In the canonization acts it is said that Birgitta had a revelation that this monk would go to heaven. Christ had explained the vision: since great lords and learned masters did not want to come to him, Christ collected the poor and ignorant in the kingdom of heaven. After this and some other examples from Alvastra, McGuire interprets Birgitta's presence at Alvastra as follows:

Here Bridget's revelations convey to the monks at Alvastra the treasure that their house held, even in a simple monk. Bridget in these stories becomes almost a lightning rod for conducting and witnessing divine power in the buildings and inhabitants of Alvastra. She conveys that power to them in a way they can understand and tolerate, even if she starts out by abrogating the monastery's integrity because she insists on living there. It is as if Bridget's presence multiplied the number of visions that the monks had.²⁶

McGuire's analysis concerning Birgitta's initial difficulties in Alvastra is mostly convincing but in describing the life at Alvastra in Birgitta's days he may give too simple a picture. In the hagiographic text, Birgitta is naturally a heroic and holy person and the brothers and monks who in the beginning criticized her presence at Alvastra became, after a divine intervention, her ardent supporters. According to the acts, Birgitta overcomes their resistance easily. However, the real-life processes were probably more complicated and Birgitta had to defend her presence at Alvastra time and again. Two consecutive sentences in the acts might be separated by two years time in real life. Gerekinus's, Paulus's, and Kethilmundus's cases are good examples of this, for they clearly show that Birgitta's presence at Alvastra was still criticized after her first year there.

McGuire's idea that Birgitta's visionary gift inspired the Alvastran monks to have visions themselves could also have worked the other way around. Subprior Peter, Gerekinus, Kethilmundus, all seem to have had experiences, which they without hesitation interpreted as divine interventions. This kind of knowledge was not considered especially common, but quite possible for people to gain. It is also difficult to be sure what kind of visionary experience is referred to in each case. In the genre of hagiography, thoughts are easily rendered in a vision. However, these men seem to have had enough authority to interpret their encounters with the otherworldly by themselves. McGuire is quite right when he writes, "When Bridget challenged these monks and said she herself was in God's presence and heard his voice, the monks were bound to be skeptical." 27

Nevertheless, in what follows McGuire again gives too one-dimensional a picture of the life at the Cistercian monastery. McGuire writes, "But her way of life was too convincing to be ignored. She gained a place as part of the monks' everyday life. In Bridget's stay at Alvastra, we find a temporary union of spiritual and material life that benefited both Bridget and the Cistercians. She gained stability. They got a saint." The main problem in McGuire's reasoning concerning the mutual benefits of saint-making lies in tying together Birgitta's life at Alvastra with the making of a saint in the canonization acts. Not all Alvastran monks in the 1340s probably yet considered Birgitta a potential saint who would bring glory to their monastery. ²⁹

Much of the criticism Birgitta met with is quite understandable: a woman living near a male monastery was exceptional, and this seemed to be against the rules and conventions. The statutes allowed laypeople to live outside the *clausura* area but evidently some monks at the monastery of Alvastra felt that Birgitta trespassed the line many times. During her stay at Alvastra, Birgitta was supposed to stay out of the areas that were allowed only for the monks. But clearly Birgitta also entered a space meant only for men, since as Birgit Klockars has remarked, Birgitta listened to the prayers in the church and was in contact with several brothers. ³⁰ Birgitta seemed to go in and out of the church as she pleased.

Birgitta also met resistance outside Alvastra. Perhaps the most humiliating accusation against Birgitta came from an unnamed monk, who read the book Vitae patrum in front of the king of Sweden and his counselors when Birgitta was present. The monk pointed out that many of the holy fathers had been betrayed by too much fasting and unwise living and maintained that Birgitta had been betrayed in the same manner. Not long after the monk's hostile remarks, Birgitta received a revelation from an angry Christ, who said that those who loved him wisely cannot be deceived. Only those who exaggerated their abstinence and became proud instead of being humble were deceived. This revelation clearly meant to imply that the monk belonged to the latter group. Christ also asked how this monk thought that many saints had been deceived. In the revelation, Christ cleverly turned the monk's criticism against the monk himself: he had not followed the saints' or the desert fathers' example although he was carrying a book about them. The vision implied that Christ was going to bring forth the book of his justice against the monk.

The words of Christ suggest that this man was praised by his contemporaries for his wisdom. This wisdom, Birgitta's vision wanted to state, would not stand in front of Christ without true humility and a pure conscience. The revelation ends in a lamentation about how far the monk had fallen from those who had established his order.³¹ Evidently the monk was

a learned and highly esteemed man, and as was the case with Gerekinus, it was not easy to find flaws in his conduct as a monk. Pride was one of deadly sins and always a very useful tool against critics. Birgitta said that the monk's wisdom was worth nothing in heaven because of his pride. Again Birgitta's weapon was the threat of judgment.³²

Another very similar incident is described as a discussion between Master Mathias and a much-respected religious man whose name or religious affiliation is not mentioned. The man argued that it is not in accordance with the Holy Scripture that God speak to a noble woman and reject those who have chosen to live according to established religious statutes. Mathias was very disturbed by this. Birgitta saw his state of mind and the reason for it. As she prayed in order to help Mathias, in a revelation she soon heard Christ condemn this man, saying that he had the "dung of vain knowledge in his heart." Christ promised to discipline the man with his own hand. The man then suffered a stroke. At the end of the revelation it is said that the man repented later, but was still paralyzed and died. ³³ The vision suggested that this happened to people who criticized Birgitta.

Birgitta must have found the accusations against her gift especially hurtful, coming from highly learned men. In this case, even Mathias appears to have been initially filled with doubts, why else would he have been so upset? It was crucial for Birgitta to assure Mathias that the critic's learning was based on the vanity of superficial knowledge and his accusations against Birgitta were therefore without ground. The death of this man might have been added later and interpreted as the punishment of Christ. Two things are important in this case: first, the way Birgitta managed to placate Mathias with her revelation and second, the emphasis that learning does not guarantee God's favor. This legitimates Birgitta as a recipient of the gift of revelation, despite being an unlearned (lacking systematic theological education) woman.

There was one occasion on which Birgitta's visions during the 1340s were not approved for theological reasons. An addition to *Rev.* IV 23 recounts an incident of a Cistercian priest who had declared that nobody can see God's face before the Day of Judgment, that nobody can be doomed, and that God does not speak to any human being in this world. No doubt, the last allegation was targeted at Birgitta. The priest's ideas were also obviously Averroist. Birgitta heard about this elderly priest's claims and as usual, she produced a revelation about him. In it, the Holy Spirit told her to tell this brother that the devil was binding his tongue and mind. He should repent and return to the true faith or he would not rise alive from his bed.

The revelation is expanded with a story of how the brother took Birgitta's words seriously, repented, and died soon after that in peace. On his deathbed he had told other brothers that God had assured him of his salvation.³⁷ In this case Birgitta used tough words, accusing the aged brother of being under the devil's influence. As in the case of Gerekinus, Birgitta appealed to this brother's religious feelings. Since the man was old, he would have been aware that death could occur at any time, and the idea of eternal damnation horrifying. Birgitta's words—"you do not see as I see"—underlined her special gift of clairvoyance and had the intended effect

In all these cases the critics belonged to a religious order. At the beginning of her career in the 1340s however, Birgitta also met with resistance from the secular world. Two of the most famous stories to this effect are about the knights Nils Ingevaldsson and Knut Folkesson. Both belonged to King Magnus's immediate entourage and were concerned by Birgitta's growing influence on the king. The confrontation with Nils Ingevaldsson is said to have taken place at a banquet in Arboga. The knight wanted to ridicule Birgitta but did not dare to do it himself. He asked a friend to pretend to be drunk and say to Birgitta, "My dear Lady! You dream too much and you are awake too much. What you need is to drink more and sleep more! Why should God forsake the religious people and speak with the proud of the world? It is useless to believe your words." The reaction of those present was to punish the man but Birgitta stopped them and said that the man was only telling the truth: all her life she had sought her own glory.

According to the addition to Rev. IV 113, the effect of these humble words was that Nils Ingevaldsson repented and made peace with Birgitta. But as was the case with Gerekinus, in reality the events took longer time to develop as seems to be the case at first glance. There is a revelation, Rev. IV 113, which, according to Prior Peter, was addressed to Nils Ingevaldsson. The revelation, which has not been analyzed in the scholarship thus far, provides insight into how Birgitta responded to Nils's criticism. After experiencing Nils's hostility, Birgitta received a revelation from Christ about a worldly man. The revelation starts with an explanation of how Christ himself did not choose learned doctors to preach the Gospel but uneducated fishermen. This was because the doctors might use too much of their knowledge so that not all people could understand them. God can perform miracles so that the least can do the most.³⁹ This was an answer to Nils's question of why God would choose "the proud," meaning probably people of noble birth such as Birgitta, rather than members of religious orders as his messengers. Birgitta's Christ could not satisfactorily answer why she, an aristocrat, was chosen, but he quite skillfully let her understand that she belonged to "the least," simply as a woman and without theological learning, with whom God could perform miracles.

The rest of the revelation is put into the form of an exemplum. In the exemplum, Christ tells of a man who sought only worldly glory and acquired not only a big name for himself but also a heavy burden of sins. Consequently, he was now famous in hell, and what was worst, he drew with him many other people to hell. These people cursed his name, his ambition, and even his birth. Those who died after this man cursed him and wished that his now glorious social status would change to the most despised one. In the revelation the man was held responsible for the damnation of many souls. He had already led some people to hell and would lead more in the future. Birgitta obviously also took great care that Nils Ingevaldsson received this special message from Christ in order to make him repent and save his and many other people's souls.

It is easy to imagine that psychologically and spiritually the accusation of damnation was not easy to ignore. The exact response of Nils is not known but if Peter's account is reliable, he took Birgitta's words to heart. It seems, then, that by her revelations Birgitta won the support of an influential man.⁴¹ Fascinatingly, Birgitta succeeds in this exempla to justify that she as a noblewoman has been chosen by Christ: because she had the status to take others on a good path, as the man in the vision had done with the evil path. As a woman without education she gets the benefit of being both "the least" and one of the "great ones" with high earthly status.

Another similar episode occurred in Stockholm. Knight Knut Folkesson was jealous of Birgitta's increasing influence on the king. He wanted to mock Birgitta and poured dirty water over her from a window. Birgitta is said to have exclaimed, "May God save this man and hopefully he will not have to pay for this in his future life." This modest utterance was only the surface of Birgitta's reaction; Birger Bergh is probably not exaggerating when he says that deep down Birgitta was furious. To soon after this incident, she saw Christ who warned this man to be careful not to die in his own blood. Prior Peter said that Birgitta's brother Israel Birgersson had passed on Christ's warning to Knut Folkesson. The knight is said to have replied, "I do not believe in dreams, God is merciful and will not condemn anybody." Prior Peter noted that the man in question died soon after from a fatal nosebleed.

There is yet another, longer, revelation, which according to Prior Peter's testimony is about Knut Folkesson. Analysis of this might lead one closer to the historical Birgitta's time in 1340s. The message that Birgitta's brother Israel took to Knut probably also contained the longer revelation. Unlike the revelation about Nils Ingevaldsson, this one does not express concern that others are being led astray, but rather focuses on Knut's afterlife. With powerful images Birgitta describes how Knut is

the main enemy of God because he ridicules God and is interested only in satisfying his own lusts. It is as if he is lying on a narrow bridge and on his left side there is the deepest gulf; if he falls, he will never emerge. Knut can still choose: he can stand up and turn to the left, which means he continues to satisfy his carnal desires. He will then fall into hell. He can also jump onto the ship at his right side and, with hard work, be saved. He should make his decision quickly because the devil is waiting to push him down to hell and nobody would hear him cry. ⁴⁵ Birgitta painted clear images of two alternate futures that Knut was facing. But her warnings had no effect.

Knut's response to Israel, that God does not condemn anybody, sounds like the words of the Averroist knight who disagreed with Master Mathias about the *visio beatifica*. Was the dispute between Birgitta and Knut Folkesson partly grounded in theological argument? It is possible but there is not enough evidence to say conclusively. Anyhow, Birgitta predicted that Knut would soon die and so he did: he died around 1349.⁴⁷

Finally, there is a third case in which a knight, Karl Näskonungsson, mocked Birgitta. As before, the reason was that Birgitta's influence on the king had become disturbingly strong. According to Peter, the knight did not dare to do anything against Birgitta except "by words." Peter implied that Karl would have liked to behave violently against Birgitta. He got his chance once at court, when a big crowd surrounded the king. Pretending to stumble, Karl Näskonungsson threw himself against Birgitta's back and tried to make her fall down. According to Peter, the hands of other people present helped Birgitta to stay standing and unhurt. The king had seen the incident and wanted to punish the knight, but Birgitta petitioned the king to pardon him. The knight is said to have died soon after the incident. Before his death he openly reconciled with Birgitta.

The knight showed considerable hostility toward Birgitta. Peter's account implies that this was not uncommon. This becomes apparent when Peter relates that, earlier, the knight had mocked Birgitta "only" with words as if this were tolerable. The case of Karl Näskonungsson together with the stories about Nils Ingevaldsson and Knut Folkesson clearly indicate that as Birgitta's influence on king strengthened, courtiers' hostility toward her increased. Her influence was extensive because some of the knights did not dare to oppose Birgitta openly.

These stories are told in the sources in order to convince the readers about Birgitta's divine calling. Thus, they carry a strong hagiographic flavor. Nevertheless, I do not doubt that they go back to historical events, although the core of the events may be impossible to recover. The hagiographers' purpose was to prove Birgitta's authenticity but at the same time they provide glimpses of the historical situation.

The divine interventions and critics' punishments were suitable material for the hagiographers but it would not make sense to think that the resistance toward Birgitta was a fabrication. At the time the events took place, it was crucial for Birgitta and her supporters to placate and convince the critics. It is easy to imagine that the attacks initiated by Knut Folkesson, Nils Ingevaldsson, and Karl Näskungsson actually happened. Their criticisms do not come as a surprise. It must have been shocking for them to realize that the king listened to this woman while their own influence diminished. All the critics were male and quite notable people. Most likely people in the court and around Birgitta knew about the cases involving these men, especially since they happened in public places. This meant that Birgitta's fame and authority became stronger. Unmistakably, Birgitta was trespassing where women were not allowed—in the arena of public affairs.

The incidents that took place outside the monastery of Alvastra give a picture of Birgitta's life in the latter part of the 1340s. Although she stayed at Alvastra from time to time, she continued to take part in public life. When she had been a wife, the nobility had been her natural sphere for public interaction. Though she continued to take part in the social life, yet her main motivation was to inform people of God's will. If she had already possessed *fama sanctitatis* before Ulf died, her fame certainly grew after his death.

Misogynist Attitudes?

All the aforementioned critics were men. If there were any women who criticized Birgitta, evidently they were not seen as important enough to be mentioned in the sources. It is also possible that Birgitta found eager supporters more easily among women than men. Her gender would not have been seen as an obstacle to them, as it was to the brothers of Alvastra or to the knights. The canonization acts mention many noble women who knew Birgitta prior to the beginning of her public life. These women probably became her supporters and devotees early on; many of them followed her to Rome.⁴⁹

The criticism Birgitta received reflects attitudes that go back to an old misogynist tradition. Could it be said that Birgitta's revilers' attitudes stemmed from traditional misogynist teachings? In a recent article, Patrick McGuire argues that Birgitta got what she wanted with the help of her friends, especially the clerical ones. He also thinks that the influence of misogynist or "anti-feminist," as he puts it, literature that stretches back to Late Antiquity and earlier is easily exaggerated. McGuire wants scholars to go beyond the clichés. ⁵⁰ In a review of Rosalynn Voaden's

God's Words, Women's Voices, McGuire says, "For every nasty statement about women's 'nature' to be found in church writers, one can usually counter with an opposite and much more positive statement." He concludes that collections of "nasty statements" about women by medieval writers belonged to the 1970s: "In many medieval men, such as Bernard [of Clairvaux] and [Jean] Gerson, there is a doubleness in their affective lives, areas of inconsistency which for me simply make them human and believable "51

I understand McGuire's concern that referring to nasty statements about women might be quite one-sided and blind to nuance. But does his idea about the balance of negative and positive statements made by theologians reflect actual prevailing attitudes? It is possible to find positive accounts about women in the writings of the influential "archmisogynist" Jerome (d. 420). Nevertheless, those "good" women are usually exceptions; when Jerome speaks in a more general fashion the picture becomes undeniably misogynist. Even in his praise of these women he attacks their sex.⁵² Many medieval men praised women they knew, as Jacques de Vitry did, however, in his sermons he maintained the doctrine that only man is the image of God, and woman, because created through man, is the image of man. Therefore, man's intellectual powers are also stronger than woman's.⁵³ These seem to be the attitudes that are shared by, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) and Jean Gerson (d. 1429), both of whom denounced women's prophetic engagements.⁵⁴

Liz Herbert McAvoy holds the opposite view to McGuire. She states, "The voice of a woman was deemed to be dangerous and inappropriate for almost any setting beyond the private and domestic. The origins of this vilification, of course, lay embedded within mainstream Christian tradition which focused on the transgression of Eve and the resultant female 'ontology' that rendered women by nature corporeal, deeply carnal and the embodiment of original sin." McAvoy agrees with Rosalynn Voaden that "Pauline silence," which forbade women either to teach or preach publicly, together with the injunction that a woman should conduct herself "in silence with all subjection" (1 Tim. 2:11), was a dominant influence throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. 55

Thomas Aquinas supported the prohibition on female public speech although he proposed that occasionally women could teach privately "if they have the grace of wisdom or of knowledge." ⁵⁶ McAvoy maintains that attitudes, such as those expressed by Thomas Aquinas, are to be found everywhere in the literature of the period. According to her, those kinds of thoughts are particularly prevalent within the literature aimed at women. ⁵⁷ The misogynist tradition offered handy weapons for resistance to women's activities in public. It is important to remember that what is

viewed today as misogynist was usually perceived as natural during the Middle Ages. As Alcuin Blamires states, "The medieval notion of corporate female action...is filtered to us through the *structural* misogyny of the period... What we read as structural misogyny, most medieval writers articulated as the 'natural' condition of woman."⁵⁸

In the Middle Ages the misogynist remarks were part of the shared knowledge among the learned and also among the less learned. The nasty statements had an effect on how men were allowed to talk about women. for example, about Birgitta, and those statements were useful when criticizing women. The more positive remarks about women, which also existed, were not enough to balance the opinions, while the negative comments had a powerful effect on public opinion. I do not think that recognizing the misogynist tendencies of medieval writing is a throwback to the feminist scholarship of the 1970s; instead this means seriously taking the fact that misogynism was a powerful strategy in the medieval culture for perpetuating traditional women's roles. The existence of the misogynist tradition cannot be denied. 59 Still, the devotional texts are not univocally misogynist but, as McGuire also emphasized, contain several types of views about women. I think that the most fruitful approach is, as Anne Clark Barlett has suggested, to consider them "as sites of competing genres, registers, and traditions," which then "opens up a discursive space to examine feminine resistance to medieval misogyny, both in theory and practice."60

Especially the remarks of Kethilmundus and the unnamed monk who read passages from *Vitae patrum* bear witness to misogynist strategies. Birgitta must have been well aware of the prevailing perceptions of women. She was familiar with writings dating from early Christianity to her own day. The stories about the resistance Birgitta met are admittedly told in a hagiographic tone. Yet, because of the conflict situation they describe, they reveal more about the historical context than they necessarily intend.

Birgitta either condemned or threatened her critics using revelations, or acted patiently forgiving showing her virtuous humility. With Knut Folkesson she combined both methods. These cases show the historical Birgitta as utterly convinced of her calling. She firmly believed that she received divine truths through her revelations and had no problem using them openly against her critics. Her purpose was to make them repent and thus save their souls. She was concerned for the salvation of her critics as well. For example, in the case of Knut Folkesson she asked her brother Israel to deliver the divine message to Knut. Of course, expressing concern for an individual's salvation seemed a perfectly legitimate way for Birgitta to instruct him in what she considered appropriate forms of conduct.

Birgitta Defending Herself

The criticism required a response, and early on, elicited an explanation from Birgitta as to why she was the chosen one of God. Her attitude to her revelations is subtly exposed in Rev. II 16: she has revelations because it pleases Christ, not because he favors her over other people.⁶¹ All of Rev. II 16 is a defense for her revelations. In it, Christ affirms in almost arrogant tones that he can do what he wants. However, he is not insensitive to other pious people either; he tries to explain that if he seems to favor Birgitta, it does not mean that he is displeased with others. The vision begins, "Many people wonder why I speak with you and not with others who live a better life and have served me for a longer time."62 Christ answers with an example of a wealthy landowner who has many vineyards in different places. Every wine tastes different according to the soil in which the grapes are grown. The master sometimes wishes to taste the wine with a lighter flavor; he does not always want the best wine. He does so simply because it pleases him, but it does not mean that he throws the other wines away. He will store them carefully for a later use. This is what Christ has done with Birgitta. He explains to her,

I have many friends whose life is sweeter to me than honey, more delicious than any wine, brighter in my sight than the sun. However, it pleased me to choose you in my Spirit, not because you are better than they are or equal to them or better qualified, but because I wanted to—I who can make sages out of fools and saints out of sinners. I did not grant you so great a grace because I hold the others in disdain...Love everyone, even those who seem to hate and slander you, for they are only providing you with a greater opportunity to win your crown!⁶³

Christ's words seem to offer a direct answer to the criticism Birgitta had received. Christ manages in the revelation to balance between the better wine—meaning here the religious men—and the lighter wine, Birgitta. In this revelation, Birgitta is depicted as a less-valuable person compared to religious men but because Christ can do whatever he wants, he has chosen Birgitta. The last lines of the revelation underline that to turn down the task Christ has given her is out of the question: "Finally, there is fourth thing which I both order and command and recommend and permit. This is to obey, as you ought. I order this, inasmuch as I am your God. I command you not to act otherwise, inasmuch I am your Lord. I permit this to you, inasmuch as I am your bridegroom. I also recommend it, inasmuch as I am your friend." According to these words Birgitta had no choice but to obey, because her God, Lord, bridegroom, and friend told her so. It was God's decision to choose Birgitta and his decisions

cannot be questioned. This revelation dates from Birgitta's early years as a widow. There are several revelations in Birgitta's first books that deal with the question of why she was the chosen one.⁶⁵ They show that she continuously felt the need to defend her vocation.

Birgitta's vocation is dealt with at length in another revelation also that describes a long dialogue about Birgitta between the devil and the Lord. The devil asked the Lord, "But now, since you are just, ⁶⁶ let me ask you a question for you to answer me: tell me, why do you love her so much and why did you not choose someone holier, richer, and prettier for yourself?" The Lord answers, "Because that is what justice demanded." Then the Lord starts asking the devil questions "while she is listening." The role of the devil might be interpreted as the role of Birgitta's critics. The Lord gets the chance to defend her when asking the devil following questions: "Tell me, while she is listening, why it was just that you fell so far and what you were thinking when you fell!" The devil answered,

I saw three things in you: I saw your glory and honor...Second I saw that you were the most powerful of all...Third, I saw what was to be in the future and, since your glory and honor were without beginning and would be without end, I envied you and thought I would gladly be tortured forever with all manner of harsh punishments if only you could die. With such thoughts I fell. And in that way hell was created.⁶⁸

Although this passage purports to describe the devil's thoughts, it shows what people who share the devil's opinions are guilty of. Thoughts of pride and glory make people fall into hell. The Lord continues to explain why he loves Birgitta so much:

You asked me why I love this woman so much. Assuredly, it is because I change all your evil into good. Since you became proud and did not want to have me, your Creator, as an equal, therefore, humiliating myself in every way, I gather sinners to myself and make myself their equal by sharing my glory with them. Second, since you had so base a desire that you wanted to be more powerful than I, therefore I make sinners more powerful than you and sharers in my power. Third, because of your envy toward me, I am so full of love that I offered myself up for everyone. 69

Here the Lord explains that he shares his glory and power with the sinners, Birgitta included. She is a humble sinner whom God loves, unlike those who criticize her. The Lord then asks the devil to describe how the Lord loves her and even offers the devil salvation! The devil answers that by no means will he bend his knee before the Lord. At the end of the revelation, the Lord teaches the bride, Birgitta, about the devil's hardness.

The Lord could destroy him but he will wait for his time to come. He will then judge him and his followers.⁷⁰ Thus, the revelation explains why Birgitta is the chosen one. Between the lines it can be read that those who do not accept her vocation are the devil's followers and will be punished by him—once again, an audacious statement.

The hagiographically correct way for Birgitta to deal with her critics seems to have been to endure them patiently, at least on the surface. But her behavior toward her critics shows a pattern where she counters disapproval from others with a revelation. After some time of processing the criticism, she produced a revelation concerning her critic. The most effective strategy to defend herself was to make claims about the critic's hidden sins. Another option was to threaten the critic with eternal damnation and accuse him of leading other souls to hell as well. Naturally this worked well in the literary context of her *Vita* and *Revelations*, but I think that Birgitta's way of directing attention from herself to her opponents' spiritual state was effective in the actual confrontations as well. Birgitta's claim to receiving divine messages about her critics specifically evidently shattered their resistance and decreased their criticism.

The Commission of Theologians and Birgitta's Revelations

The Birgittine texts suggest that around 1346–1347, Birgitta's revelations were examined by the Swedish clergy. Birgit Klockars argued that the resistance Birgitta had met with forced her and her confessors to seek theological approval from other churchmen.⁷¹ In a similar vein, Carl-Gustaf Undhagen described in his general introduction to the *Rev.* I, in 1978, how Birgitta's revelations were presented to a group of Swedish bishops and theologians. In this meeting, which Undhagen assumes to have taken place some time in the spring 1346, Master Mathias introduced Birgitta's revelations with the words that later became the *Prologue* to the first book of revelations.⁷²

Undhagen suggested that since the number of revelations grew and some of them concerned people outside Sweden, for example, the pope's "Babylonian captivity" and the war between France and England, "obviously the need to have their divine origin established increased." Another reason to examine Birgitta's revelations, according to Undhagen, was that "Birgitta herself—like many others—still doubted the divine origin of the revelations." ⁷³

Undhagen based his view mainly on the prologue of the Rule, *Regula Salvatoris* (*RS*), whose first version was created by Birgitta in the 1340s. The author of the prologue was probably Alfonso Pecha, ⁷⁴ whom Birgitta had met in Rome at the end of the 1360s. Alfonso wrote the prologue

most probably in the 1370s, at the latest in 1377, when one version of the Regula Salvatoris was submitted to the canonization process.⁷⁵ With a hagiographically suitable tone he praised Birgitta's submission to the authorities of the church. Moreover, he described how Birgitta was afraid of a delusion and that the angel of darkness might be deceiving her. Because of this the archbishop ought to examine the revelations with three other bishops. Alfonso did not mention their names but the archbishop must have been Archbishop of Uppsala, Hemming Nilsson (archbishop 1342-1351). The three other bishops were presumably Hemming of Åbo, Thomas of Växjö, and Petrus Tyrgilsson of Linköping. Alfonso related that they gave their judgment publicly, while many "friends of God" were listening: the revelations were thoroughly approved as coming from the good spirit of truth and light. As his source, Alfonso had above all Prior Peter of Alvastra, who was certainly a very trustworthy if not entirely disinterested witness of events that had happened while Birgitta still lived in Sweden. But how trustworthy is Alfonso's account, when taken out of its historical context of the beginning of the canonization process and put into another historical context, 20 years earlier?

It is possible to examine Alfonso's description by comparing it with two revelations that contain the exhortation to take Birgitta's messages to different bishops in Sweden as well as advice to the bishops. These are *Rev.* I 52 and *Ex.* 51. The first starts with an elaborate conversation between Christ and Mary. Mary wishes that Christ's words be planted in the hearts of his friends and spread throughout the world. After praising Mary greatly, Christ promises that his words will take root "like the strongest pitch in the hearts of my friends. They will spread themselves like flagrant flowers and bear fruit like the sweetest and most delicious of date-palms." These words imply that the entire world should hear of them. Next, Christ turns to speak to Birgitta: "Tell your friend that he should take care to set forth these words in writing to his own father, whose heart is according to my heart, and he will convey them to the archbishop and later to another bishop. When these have been thoroughly informed, he should send them on to a third bishop."

Birgitta's friend's task was to take the message "in writing" to the Swedish bishops. This envoy was most likely Master Mathias. The idea was probably to circulate Birgitta's revelations first to Mathias's own spiritual father, which meant the bishop of Linköping, Peter Tyrgilsson. He should then present them to the archbishop and yet another bishop. After these men had been "informed"—Birgitta did not ask their approval—a third bishop should hear his message and act accordingly: "Wherefore, if you have any taste for my wounds in your soul, if my scourging and suffering mean anything to you, then show by your deeds how much you love me!"⁷⁹

The core of the message is that if the bishop did not approve the revelation, it meant that he did not care for Christ's suffering. The rest of the message was about how the bishop should make the words public and forward them to the pope, the head of the church. With the help of God's spirit, he would help to unite people in disagreement, provided they were believers. At the end of the revelation it is triumphantly stated, "The lord of the land, whom I have chosen as one of my members and made truly mine, will aid you manfully and supply you with the necessary provisions for your journey out of properly acquired means." So this revelation had a very practical, yet challenging goal: to create peace between two parties, meaning France and England, with the pope serving as mediator. According to the revelation the king, Magnus Eriksson, had already promised to take care of the expenses—if not, this revelation in any case urged him to do so. With this, Birgitta combined the defense of her own situation and the salvation of souls with ambitious political objectives.

Birgitta's idea was to circulate the revelation as a letter among different bishops in order to convince them about how important it was to send one of them abroad to persuade the pope to act as a negotiator of peace between the kings of France and England. The end of the revelation gives a strong impression that King Magnus Eriksson had already been persuaded to finance the journey of the envoys. This is a practical, straightforward message to Mathias, the archbishop, and three other bishops about a religiously worded political mission, which involved the pope as well. Birgitta was only a mediator of God's will. There is not a slightest sign of fear or submissiveness in this revelation unlike in Alfonso's description in the prologue of the *Regula Salvatoris*.

What exactly happened after this revelation is not quite clear. But evidently instead of being sent as a form letter from one bishop to another as was the idea in *Rev.* I 52, the revelations were discussed in a meeting of the leading theologians of Sweden sometime after 1346, probably around 1347. But was the gathering foremost about the authenticity of Birgitta's revelations, as has been maintained by modern scholars? The second revelation from the same time concerning the bishops' gathering sheds more light on the issue.

Ex. 51 begins with Christ's words. He declares why he was born and what his death meant. He came to make people believe and to open their hearts to heaven. Real This is another instance of what Sundén aptly called the divine voice's self-legitimation. The makes clear who is speaking and with what authority. Christ continues, "Now that the bishops have been gathered together, say to the archbishop..." The revelation sounds as if it was meant to be read aloud in front of an audience. Whether this was supposed to be done by Birgitta or by one of her confessors, is not known.

This suggests that Birgitta produced the revelation after she had learnt about the gathering of the theologians or possibly that she had received it during the meeting and somebody wrote it down.

What follows is a long appeal to Archbishop Peter Tyrgilsson as to how both the pope and many priests have drifted away from their original tasks. Christ asks the archbishop for three things: to consider how Christ has suffered and how people behave against him, to work with Christ as the friend of God, and to more enthusiastically fulfill what he, the archbishop, has begun. What Birgitta meant with the last part is not clear, perhaps she referred simply to the archbishop's support of the projects initiated on the basis of Birgitta's revelations.

The second part of the revelation was addressed to King Magnus. He should go and fight against the enemies. This meant starting a crusade against nonbelievers. According to the revelation, one of the bishops, whose name was not mentioned, would be in charge of the kingdom while the king was crusading. The third part of the revelation is aimed at Bishop Hemming of Åbo, who should prepare himself for a journey to the pope. Birgitta and Bishop Hemming of Åbo had become friends during the 1340s and Birgitta placed great trust in Hemming.⁸⁵ Unlike Rev. I 52, Birgitta seems to have used the situation recorded in Ex. 51 to simultaneously deliver messages to Hemming and other people of high ecclesiastical and social rank. She wanted Archbishop Peter Tyrgilsson to support both endeavors, Bishop Hemming's journey to meet Pope Clement V in order to exhort him to negotiate peace between France and England, and the king's crusade against the enemies, which in practice meant a crusade to the eastern parts of Finland, inhabited by both non-Christians and eastern Orthodox Christians. 86

The last part of the revelation contains an explanation for why a possessed person had not yet been freed from a demon. Birgitta's Christ offered a general explanation that there are three kinds of demon. One is like air, which comes easily and is easy to dispel. The second kind is like fire, it also comes easily and goes away easily, but it leaves the body weak. In the case of this particular man, he was possessed by a demon like smoke, penetrating everywhere in the body and therefore taking longer to go away. Christ promised that the demon would disappear, although it may take a long time.⁸⁷ In this revelation Christ refers to two other cases involving demons. The first apparently concerns a mother and her three-year-old son who was not properly baptized, and the second concerns a prostitute whom the devil tormented and who is freed after Birgitta addresses the demon.⁸⁸

This passage about demons does not seem to fit the rest of the contents of the revelation, about the king's crusade and the allegedly dire state of

the papal curia in Avignon. Which revelations were then presented to the bishops? As Undhagen notes it is difficult to determine exactly which revelations were given to the Swedish archbishop and other theologians, since there is no exact description of the revelations. They would have been at least the revelations concerning Hemming of Åbo's journey to the papal court in France and the king's crusade to Finland. ⁸⁹ Unfortunately no exact information can be found in the sources about the meeting of the bishops apart from Birgitta's revelations and Alfonso's later account in the beginning of the *Rule*. Nevertheless, the revelations were taken seriously by the bishops and the king. Hemming of Åbo started to prepare for the journey and the king arranged the crusade. ⁹⁰

In order to better understand the situation of the meeting of theologians and the surprising end of the *Ex.* 51 with the demons, it is worthwhile to take a look at Master Mathias's prologue to the first book of revelations, *Rev.* I. Most scholars find it probable that Mathias's prologue was already attached to the first book of *Rev.* I when it was compiled with the purpose of presenting them together to the Swedish theologians.⁹¹

Mathias' prologue is both an introduction and a defense of Birgitta to a larger audience. The prologue also contains the revelation that scholars have seen as Birgitta's first. In the first part of the prologue, Mathias seeks to convince the reader about the authenticity of the text: "May those who read these revelations harbour no suspicions about a false inspiration." In order to leave no doubt, Mathias depicts the virtues of Birgitta and stresses, along the lines of common hagiographic conventions, that she did not seek any publicity:

She would have preferred to remain hidden out of humility, had she not been commanded to reveal herself to certain people out of obedience to the Spirit, or, rather, to Christ, who appeared to her in spirit. By enduring insults and abuse, she wished to add to the glory of Christ. By her truthfulness, meekness, and justice she gave expression to Christ's way of life in her own life, allowing herself to be hurt by low and despicable persons who did so gratuitously and with impunity.⁹³

Mathias also points out the hostile reception of Birgitta's revelations. This means that the criticism was widely known, or at least anticipated that Mathias considered it important to reject it out of hand. He then lingers a while, wondering how miraculous it is that Birgitta had received the revelations: "Indeed, unless guided by the grace of the same Spirit, who could believe that Christ, who resides in heaven, would speak to a woman still living in this mortal condition?" Here it is hinted that, because Birgitta is a woman, these revelations are all the more amazing.

Mathias concludes that Christ, "while reigning in heaven, he reconciles human things to divine. In that apparition, by dying for us, he repaid the debt of justice. In this [i.e., Birgitta and her revelations], he promises to bestow the gift of mercy on us sinners, although there is no longer any debt to pay." Because people still sin, they need salvation and through Birgitta's revelations "the gift of mercy" is offered to people.

Mathias continues that Birgitta's revelations are so amazing that they are difficult to understand or accept just by hearing: "Even I myself, who have written this, can scarcely grasp it, although the words and the deeds convince me entirely of the truth of this inspiration, and I judge it to be most worthy of being fully accepted. By no means do I expect everyone who hears about it to believe it, if they have not heard the words themselves or known the deeds." By writing this Mathias puts all his authority at stake. Mathias artfully puts himself in the place of the skeptic, saying that disbelief is understandable if one is not aware of the underlying deeds and words. Therefore, at the end of the prologue, he presents Birgitta's deeds with the divine interactions.

But before presenting the deeds, the final proof of the authenticity of the revelations, he introduces Birgitta's revelation addressed to the people of Sweden. Its core message is that the noblemen and knights are too proud, striving for wealth and pleasure, thus earning God's displeasure. The revelation claims that God's judgment has been hanging over Sweden for a long time. It has been postponed with the help of the prayers of friends of God but the judgment is soon to come. The recipient of the revelation, Birgitta, had then "sighed and bewailed so harsh a sentence" and was given a consoling observation: "As long as a person lives, access to the kingdom of heaven is available. If people know how to change their lives, I know how to mitigate my sentence." 97

Mathias describes that his task was to make this revelation known to others. It seems that he had already done so earlier and now assumes this role also in the prologue. This corroborates Jan Liedgren's suggestion that the first Swedish version of the so-called "prologue revelation" distributed by Master Mathias circulated in Sweden one or two years earlier and Mathias attached it to the Latin prologue to *Rev.* I with a longer introduction than was found in the Swedish text. 98 This would mean that Mathias would have written the prologue around the same time as the bishops were supposedly examining Birgitta's revelations.

Mathias lists six deeds of Birgitta's to convince the reader of her authenticity. First, he argued that Birgitta could not have made them up herself even if she had wanted to, because she was an unlearned, simple, and humble widow, with a noble and honest character. Second, the revelations were written by a simple and pious monk, who considered

himself unworthy of writing them but was forced by Christ to do so. The third and fourth deeds concerned two men freed from a demonic possession with words that Birgitta had heard from Christ and which Peter of Alvastra had pronounced.⁹⁹ Fifth, a prostitute was converted with the help of Mary through Birgitta. Sixth, Birgitta's words had led many prominent Swedish men to conversion and a better life.¹⁰⁰

All the events in this list could not have happened in a short span of time. A few years must have passed from the beginning of Birgitta's career. Therefore, Mathias's presentation of Birgitta as God's messenger could have been addressed not only as a prologue to the first collection of Birgitta's revelations but also as a persuasive introduction to be presented to an important audience, such as the theologians whom Birgitta mentioned in Rev. I 52. Mathias's rich use of rhetoric in the prologue suggests that it was intended for an audience that could understand it. For example, he claimed, "This apparition [Birgitta's gift of visions] is even more amazing than the one by which he [Christ] showed himself in the flesh. His body presented itself outwardly to bodily eyes, but in this apparition God and man are presented to spiritual eyes."101 This kind of rhetoric was intended for professionals; to uneducated ears this kind of hyperbole could have sounded heretical. Hence, this text was written with a learned audience in mind, and it was most likely meant for the meeting of the theologians around 1347.

Now it is time to return to Birgitta's explanation at the end of Ex. 51 of why the possessed man was *not* cured. Birgitta must already have had a saintly reputation and especially the healings of the possessed must have attracted wide public attention. People might have been asking why she, then, had not been able to help this particular person. As a living saint, Birgitta's reputation and credibility was not stable but was put to test day after day. She had been severely criticized and one mistake would be enough to undo the other six meritorious deeds praised by Mathias in his prologue. Hence, the need to explain publicly why this possessed man did not make a swift recovery. In Ex. 51, apparently presented at the meeting of the theologians and most likely to a large group of other people, furnishes the necessary explanation. Consequently, in that context the conclusion of the Ex. 51 makes perfect sense.

Even in these texts it is not possible to find any signs of fear of delusion or doubt of the origin of Birgitta's revelations. There is an apparent contradiction between the contents of these revelations and the account of Birgitta's *Vita*. According to *Rev*. I 52 and *Ex*. 51 Birgitta and her supporters clearly felt convinced of their cause. The texts were more about practical matters. Birgitta had received divine messages concerning foreign countries and politics. She needed help from the king and bishops to

extend her mission abroad. From the king she wanted both royal support and supplies for Hemming's journey to France. The same applied to the clergy. Birgitta was wise enough to realize that the more appreciated the messengers were, the more seriously they would be taken. The bishops also actively took part in politics, working closely with the king and his council. For Birgitta then, in the first instance, the meeting of the theologians was about approving and arranging how her revelations were to be delivered to those whom they concerned. Moreover, Birgitta wanted the king to get on with his fight against the "enemies." Finally, it is important to note that the initiative to present the revelations to bishops came from Birgitta, as *Rev.* I 52 shows; it was not the idea of her confessors or some higher authority, although they eagerly collaborated to make it happen. ¹⁰²

Birgitta had already been receiving revelations for a couple of years when the meeting of the bishops was convened. She had managed to persuade Subprior Peter to act as her secretary, and Master Mathias as her confessor was constantly in contact with her and Peter. As a female visionary, Birgitta was expected to be obedient toward her supervisors. But according to her revelations, there was one exception to that condition, namely, whatever she is asked to do "does not go against the salvation of your soul or is otherwise irrational." 103 Hence, instead of blindly obeying her directors, she felt free to rely on her own judgment and, indeed, seems to have acted with considerable confidence. 104 This passage in her revelations underlines that her authority came from God, not from her confessors. However, the image of a fully independent and active Birgitta was not suitable from the later viewpoint of her canonization. Therefore her confessors and hagiographers sought to emphasize her humility and obedience. The most enthusiastic in this respect was Alfonso Pecha, who sought to establish a hagiographically appropriate image of Birgitta.

I return now to the *Vita*'s exhortation for Birgitta to go to Master Mathias who was an expert in the discerning of the spirits and seek to explain how that passage was created. As I have sought to demonstrate, Birgitta felt that she was quite capable of discerning the spirits herself with the divine teaching she received. So much so that she even helped Master Mathias with his temptations. Alfonso Pecha, in turn, was the conductor of Birgitta's canonization process after Birgitta's death in 1373. He had read most of the material available concerning and by Birgitta, and he had conversed with Prior Peter and Master Peter of Skänninge. He knew that she should be presented as a humble and obedient woman, always acting under the direction of wiser men. As a result, Alfonso made suggestions to the canonization material in order to make Birgitta a better fit for the traditional image of a female saint. This was also what the dying Birgitta had wished him to do.¹⁰⁵

Alfonso's influence can be clearly traced in Prior Peter of Alvastra's testimony as well, in which Peter describes the mode of Birgitta's visions and refers explicitly to two prologues of Birgitta's revelations, which, according to him, explain the authenticity of Birgitta profoundly. These two prologues were Master Mathias's prologue to *Rev.* I, written around 1346–1347, and Alfonso's prologue to *Rev.* VIII, *Epistola solitarii*, written in 1375–1376. 106

Alfonso's editorial work shows that he remembered and used the Birgittine source material masterfully. One example of this is the story in the prologue of Birgitta's Rule where Alfonso creates a hagiographic fiction about a fearful and humble Birgitta, so evidently in contrast with the bold Birgitta of the Revelations. Another example is the story about Birgitta's calling vision in which she is described as terrified of delusion and exhorted to go to Master Mathias. In it, Alfonso probably put together material from Birgitta's revelation Rev. I 52, which contained an exhortation to go to Master Mathias and ask him to present the revelations to the bishops and the question of discretio spirituum, which was also openly discussed in many of Birgitta's revelations. 107 Alfonso used his sources about Birgitta skillfully with the intention for securing Birgitta's canonization. At the same time he created an image of a meek Birgitta, which often had little to do with the historical Birgitta, who was ready to immerse herself in the politics of her time. The careful reading of the sources suggests that actually Birgitta felt herself capable to interpret her revelations and that she did not seek Master Mathias out for his abilities with regard to discretio spirituum, but for his collaboration in making the message of the revelations public.

Birgitta's *fama sanctitatis* in the last half of the 1340s in Sweden was strong. Her critics questioned her authority, but at the same time she had the means to argue that her critics were wrong. This in turn strengthened her authority; people took what she had to say seriously. This gave her an opportunity to influence the events of her time. Nevertheless, as was typical for a living saint, she had to convince her audiences on a day-to-day basis. This also she did by performing publicly as a messenger of God. Especially important for her fame were the exorcisms that she and her confessors performed as well as the publicity of her ascetic practices. Some of her revelations were apparently preached in different churches and she sent the others as letters to the people they concerned.

She had devoted confessors on her side, many laypeople sought her advice, and even most of the bishops blessed her public activity. In the next chapter I will investigate the other ways by which she gained authority and power, while still in Sweden and surrounded by the politics of her home country.

CHAPTER 6

HOLINESS IN ACTION

The previous chapter concentrated on Birgitta's encounters with theologians and her critics. This chapter explores, first, how average people in Sweden perceived Birgitta; second, how Birgitta won over the royal couple of Sweden, Magnus Eriksson and Blanche of Namur; and third, why she thought that a new monastic rule was needed. In order to ascertain how she exercised power in practice, I will focus especially on the question of what made her religiously and socially attractive to other people and how she sought to persuade people to change their way of life.

Helping the Dead, with an Impact on the Living

The public performance of Birgitta's visions played an important role in the formation of her saintly fame. Particularly powerful in this respect were exorcisms. The Birgittine sources relate many cases in which Birgitta helped her confessors to perform exorcisms. Once, she is said to have performed it herself even though exorcisms were generally considered the responsibility of priests. Therefore, it is no wonder that after she became a widow, some considered her a living saint and there was a demand for her heavenly powers in encounters with people. In addition to exorcisms, Birgitta used extraordinary powers to mediate between the dead and the living. This knowledge of hell and purgatory was considered a privilege of visionary women, to which priests did not have access. But the visionaries usually collaborated with priests, who were eager to record the visions and use them in their sermons. Priests encouraged individuals to consider the otherworld—even to look into it in order to be better aware of one's own mortality.

Concern over people's lack of interest in their mortality can be seen in one of Birgitta's revelations, in which Christ laments about obstinate people, who do not care for his suffering or their own mortality and after-life. He describes them as bumblebees, which fly wherever they want. They are gathering earthly honey, which is useless in eternity. Christ offers them salvation: "Hence, because of the prayers of my Mother, I will send my clear voice to these bumblebees... If they listen to it, they will be saved." Birgitta's task was to mediate this voice.

Especially while still living in Sweden, Birgitta had many revelations about the afterlives of different people.⁵ In Birgitta's *Vita* there is a story about a visitor from the otherworld. This woman's visits to Birgitta are probably among the first apparitions she received from purgatory. Birgitta was living in Alvastra when a lady whom she knew well appeared to her saying,

To you shall be given understanding of spiritual things...I give to you a threefold sign. The first is that I have been gravely purged for the stubbornness of my conscience. The second: that my husband, who is not my husband, now seeks something carnal—namely, carnal intercourse with another woman in opposition to God—and it will be, for him and his posterity, a cause of tribulation. The third is that you will cross the sea; and you will die in a glorious place, in Rome.⁶

In this passage a dead woman, Katarina Gudmarsdotter, a close friend of Birgitta's, came to tell her about her unhappy situation in the afterlife. Another concern of Katarina's was that she strongly disapproved her widower's plans to remarry. At the end of the visitation she praised Birgitta's extraordinary spirituality and declared that she would die in Rome. From a hagiographic point of view, the last part of Katarina's message was, no doubt, especially suitable for Birgitta's *Vita*. But the case of Katarina Gudmarsdotter contains personal, biographical elements, which make the core story interesting for a historical approach.

Katarina Gudmarsdotter was Birgitta's sister-in-law, Ulf's sister. Katarina had been married to the knight Gustaf Tunesson, councillor of state, who was active in the same circles as Ulf Gudmarsson. Katarina died apparently some time after the death of Ulf.⁸ She was close to Birgitta and they shared a strong interest in religious matters. This becomes evident in Birgitta's *Vita*'s long account of Katarina, who is described as "famous for her fasts and prayers." A year before Katarina died, she had had a terrifying vision of the devil. According to Birgitta's *Vita*, Katarina was comforted by Christ and promised that a year later she would see the same vision with Christ but without the devil, after which she would die. According to the *Vita*, this is indeed what happened. Katarina arrived in purgatory and from there appeared to Birgitta. Her second message concerned her own circumstances. She told Birgitta,

I want to inform you of my situation; for it thus pleases God that as we have loved each other while both living in the flesh, so we should now love each other in spirit. I—to speak using a similitude—have been put, as it were, in thick glass and can hear, but not yet reach, the things that I wish for. Thus, I can understand and desire and hope for those everlasting joys; but I have not yet attained the full until the glass, by God's will, becomes more thin and sheer.¹¹

As Barbara Newman has insightfully observed, "In some religious contexts, the extraordinary became ordinary, and apparitions the normal way to say farewell." Newman also noted that friends in a monastery could make a "mutual vision pact." According to it, the deceased would appear to the one still living and inform her about her state in the afterlife and, for example, of the need for prayers for her soul. 12 Birgitta and Katarina's relationship seems to have similar features; they supported one another even in the hereafter.

The account concerning Katarina Gudmarsdotter in purgatory also appears very similar to a story about a dying religious woman in the *Life of Marie d'Oignies*. Like Katarina, this woman had been tormented by the devil before she died. Mary and Christ defended her. Again like Katarina, this pious woman had found herself in purgatory. Jacques de Vitry described the case as follows:

The handmaid of Christ saw the soul which had not yet been entirely purged in the world made perfect in purgatory for those things which it still lacked...Not long afterwards the soul of the widow appeared to the handmaid of Christ, more transparent than glass, whiter than snow, and brighter than the sun. Having been offered hospitality, she ascended to heaven and was now rejoicing in the eternal banquet and giving thanks.¹³

Both Katarina and the devout woman in Marie's *Life* had to be purified before entering heaven. Marie's friend appears to have sinned without knowing, whereas Katarina revealed through Birgitta that it was her temper and greed that had caused her condition in purgatory. Both Birgitta and Marie engaged a circle of relatives and friends to pray for the dead. The most striking similarity between the stories is the image of the glass, although it is used in different ways. Katarina is behind a thick glass wall and waits for the wall to become thinner. Marie d'Oignies's friend, in turn, finally becomes as pure as transparent glass. Birgitta often mixed elements from different sources and created an image of her own. Therefore, despite the different use of the image of glass, I think it is possible that the story from Marie's *Life* was part of Birgitta's inspiration for experiencing a visitor from purgatory who stood behind thick glass.

Like many other saints, Marie d'Oignies was famous for her concern of the dead.¹⁵ There were also many other holy women who prayed for the dead in purgatory,¹⁶ and in sermons women were often exhorted to pray for the dead.¹⁷ There is also another notion that Marie shared with Birgitta: prayers for those who are already damned are in vain.¹⁸

Central to women's prayers for the dead is the expression of their own suffering.¹⁹ Jo Ann McNamara has pointed out that while there was, of course, plenty of involuntary suffering, "purgatorial alms sometimes acted as a creative way of converting involuntary suffering to voluntary suffering."²⁰ Barbara Newman has fittingly called these voluntarily suffering advocates of the dead "the apostles to the dead."²¹

Devout women were encouraged especially by their confessors to pray for those in purgatory. As Newman observes, such "prayer constituted a safe, invisible, contemplative mission that could put women's devotion and compassion to work without violating any gender taboos. At the same time, it could be construed as a work of active charity, an apostolate requiring the same zeal for souls that men could express by preaching or hearing confessions."²² It is also noteworthy that this kind of apostolate could be seen as *imitatio Mariae* since she was known to have compassion for souls in purgatory.²³ All the other aspects that Newman mentioned could be applied to Birgitta as well. Praying for the dead was apparently as valued in Sweden as it was in other parts of medieval Europe.

Suffering was emphasized so much that the women who sought to feel excessive pain could be seen as coredemptors along with Christ. This was based on the idea that Christ had paid for the original sin on the cross. New sin caused new debt and that had to be repaid. Money, masses, and suffering were payments for that debt.²⁴ Vicarious suffering on earth on behalf of another was one way to help balance the accounts.

In Katarina Gudmarsdotter's case, Birgitta's vicarious suffering for her relative was not mentioned. When Ulf Gudmarsson appeared to Birgitta after his death, prayers, masses, and chalices were required. ²⁵ As was usual in the stories about the dead souls appearing to the living, ²⁶ Katarina appeared to Birgitta a third time and expressed her satisfaction: "What I longed for, I now have. My former torments have been consigned to oblivion, and my love is now perfect. But as for you: be obedient! For you are going to come into the society of the great."

It is possible that Katarina Gudmarsdotter and her husband Gustaf Tunesson had traveled with Birgitta and Ulf to Santiago de Compostela in the beginning of the 1340s.²⁸ The wives shared a mutual interest in spiritual things; Katarina's fame for fasting and praying attests to that. Katarina's first appearance to Birgitta contained, in addition to the declaration of her unhappiness in purgatory, a practical message for Gustaf

Tunesson: he should not remarry. Birgitta apparently delivered that information to Gustaf. She felt loyalty toward Katarina and did not like the idea of her widower's possible new marriage. Perhaps she also thought that he could live a more pious life as widower. Since the couple was childless, Birgitta's message to Gustaf Tunesson was understandably a hard one for him to accept. It is no wonder that Gustaf did remarry later. Birgitta did not achieve the effect she had hoped for. Nevertheless, evidently Katarina's visit to Birgitta became public knowledge and she gained fame as a mediator between the living and the dead.

In Birgitta's Vita it is said that people often turned to Birgitta and asked her to pray to God on behalf of their dead relatives. Birgitta is said to have received the names of the departed and even information about whether they were in purgatory, heaven, or hell. Furthermore, Birgitta was informed what the living could do for their dead ones. 30 Those in hell could not be helped; and those who had managed to get into the heaven had no need.³¹ What is interesting in the Vita's narrative is that the "living questioners" received an answer from Birgitta in writing. In other words, after spending some time in prayer, the dead person's situation was revealed to Birgitta. After this she delivered to those who had asked her a detailed written description of the state of the dead person's soul and how she or he could be helped. Unlike Marie d'Oignies, or other famous beguines who made a career of suffering for the dead, Birgitta required action from the people who had asked her about their dead. She made them perform penitential activities and purchases, for example, masses and chalices. Presumably the clergy regarded these forms of financial support with satisfaction.

Since the *Vita*'s purpose was to promote Birgitta's sanctity through these passages as well, the historicity of these cases is not certain. Therefore, it is helpful to investigate some revelations from Birgitta's years in Sweden, which were probably about the same cases. These revelations come stylistically close to the letters, which Birgitta is known to have written. ³² John van Engen has observed that in the case of Hildegard of Bingen, what perhaps most influenced her public fame was her vivid correspondence. ³³ This might be true for Birgitta also.

One example of such a revelation is *Rev.* VI 10, a very long instruction to people—relatives or friends of the deceased—who would like to help to shorten the dead person's time in purgatory. Birgitta especially tried to help the soul out of purgatory. At the end of this revelation the dead man, who is said to have been a "merciful nobleman," appeared to Birgitta just like Katarina Gudmarsson did and said that he would be freed from his "exile" sooner if prayers and masses were celebrated for him.³⁴

In this revelation, Mary told Birgitta that the deceased had sinned in seven ways when alive. Mary described the sins one by one, explaining

after each particular sin what the living could do to shorten the punishment caused by this sin.

Those who wanted to help the dead soul in purgatory should accomplish a very concrete program of good deeds. If these instructions were followed, then three women of different states would have been supported in their lives, many poor would have been given food—in exchange for their prayers—and many masses would be celebrated for the dead man's soul. In most cases, what the penitent needed to do could be arranged with money. Only in few cases did the penitent need to humble him- or herself and act charitably toward the poor. When followed carefully, these instructions would have made those to whom the dead owed something, as well as the church, happy. The priests in particular would be well paid for the numerous masses.

One function of *Rev.* VI 10 was to help the dead soul out of purgatory, while the other was directed toward the living. Through Mary's words Birgitta was given a chance to teach people how to live. She vividly described which sins were the gravest. In practice, her list covered almost all deadly sins. She obliged not only the relatives of the dead into action, but also many other people, among others "the poor," who got a chance to eat and be clothed, but who at the same time were taught about purgatory and hell.

The relatives and friends of this particular dead man obviously did not follow Birgitta's instructions as carefully as she wished. There is a sequel to this revelation in which Mary and Christ converse about the same dead man suffering in purgatory. Christ said that the relatives of the man did not care for how long he would be punished; they were only interested in his property and worldly things. Mary affirmed how righteous Christ was, but reminded him also of his mercy. The dead man had after all read *The Book of Hours* daily in Mary's honor. Mary asked Christ not to punish the dead man for the sins of his survivors. Christ promises Mary that because of her prayer the soul was going to be transferred to a more tolerable place, where angels would comfort him. However, he would not be totally freed and he would still continue to need Mary's prayers.

It seems that Birgitta was very disappointed with how the dead man's relatives and friends behaved. It sounds like the relatives had ignored the instructions that Birgitta had delivered. This made Birgitta ask Christ, through Mary, that the living people's sins—which meant ignoring Birgitta's instructions—would not be counted against the dead man. The point of this rather paradoxical appeal was to demonstrate to the living that their conduct in particular was sinful and they should change their way of life. 35

With this revelation Birgitta both showed her concern for the dead man's soul and reminded his friends and relatives about what kind of destiny they would meet if they continued their worldly behavior. This text also demonstrated the power given to Mary. If Mary prayed for somebody that person would be saved. And—as has become obvious—as a close friend of Mary's, Birgitta also had access to this power. Through this case about one dead person, Birgitta sought to influence not only his relatives and friends but also a wide range of other people, for example, many poor people.

After reading the revelation, one does not wonder that Birgitta wanted to give her advice in writing: it would not have been easy for the recipient of the message to remember everything only by hearing. Another reason for the written format might have been that Birgitta meant the text to be preserved and to be read aloud to as many people as possible. Mary Suydam has noted that in the later Middle Ages there was a shift from visionary performances, utterances in front of an audience to written visions. By recording their visions, female holy women were able to introduce "an interpretative framework, with its citational authority, for their visions."36 This aspect helps to clarify what Birgitta did when putting her visions into writing. She not only delivered the content but also an interpretation, thus perceiving her written contribution as a vital part of the event. In her case, citational authority would mean the ways in which Birgitta used sacred texts as authorizing her vision and how she gave an interpretation of the revelation's content. Finally, when the text was in writing it would gain a citational authority of its own.³⁷ As a written revelation it could be copied and delivered to several readers. Even preachers could cite the whole revelation or parts of it in their sermons. In this way Birgitta could exercise considerable power in practice: direct power over the first recipients of her revelation and indirect power if her revelations were read to other audiences. Though in the latter case it is possible her name might not have been mentioned, but simply the content of the revelation.

Birgitta has sometimes been seen to collaborate more with men than women. ³⁸ It is certainly true that Subprior Peter and Master Mathias as her confessors played important roles during her life in Sweden until her departure for Rome in 1349, and women are seldom mentioned. Yet there were women around Birgitta throughout her life; on her pilgrimages and when she stayed in the vicinity of the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra, for example. This can also be seen in the canonization acts where Swedish women were among the witnesses. ³⁹ These women's statements were short but significant especially for historians. Many Italian women were interviewed about Birgitta more thoroughly. Obviously the Italian context was considered more significant for collecting the testimonies about Birgitta's sanctity after her death. ⁴⁰ But their short statements show

that Birgitta had many female followers who lived near her. It is true that many of Birgitta's revelations were addressed to priests or knights, but there are also many that were targeted at a general audience, regardless of gender or class. However, there is one revelation directed to women, which seems in part to redress the imbalance.

Swedish noble women were the object of one extended revelation, *Rev.* VI 52, describing a conversation between Birgitta and two dead women. In this vision dating probably from the 1340s, Birgitta does not act as an apostle to the dead as she did in earlier cases. In this case the dead appeared to Birgitta, first and foremost, in order to save the living.⁴¹

The beginning of the revelation served as a legitimation of Birgitta's authority, but it also made clear that Birgitta did not have to be wise or especially pious; what mattered most was that she wanted to follow Christ. This was a humble way to persuade the audience to receive Birgitta's message. 42 Mary joined in the conversation between Christ and Birgitta asking, "What do the proud women of your country say?" Birgitta answered modestly, "I am one of those and therefore I am embarrassed to speak in the presence of you."43 Yet Mary continued to press her for an answer. Birgitta went on to explain that true humility had been preached to her and her foremothers but still they had thought that they wanted to continue as their predecessors, who were rich and had many servants. Why not continue to live in corporeal joy and die greatly honored according to worldly standards, they had thought. Mary told Birgitta that this was the direct way to hell. Those women did not care about Christ's suffering. Mary explained that the proud women were responsible for other people's damnation as well: they taught others to be proud. Therefore, Mary wanted to be like a good mother who taught her children with fear. She painted the horrors of hell but reminded that everyone who asked for forgiveness with love would be given mercy.⁴⁴

This is the framework of Mary's teaching in the vision. She then let Birgitta see both into hell and into purgatory. The core of the revelation concerns three generations of women: a mother, a daughter, and a grand-daughter, all three unnamed. Only the daughter was alive, the other two had died. The grandmother was in hell, whereas the granddaughter was in purgatory.

The old woman related how she had taught her daughter to be proud and interested only in worldly matters. She described her body's horrible state in hell bit by bit. When she came to her womb, she said, "My shameful member was your way out of me and my blood's impurity was your dress, when you were born. And now my womb, in which you rested, is entirely gnawed by worms." She accused her living daughter of being like the tail of a cow, which gathers filth as it swings back and

forth. And now, every time the daughter acted like the mother had taught her to, the mother suffered even more in hell. He This vision explained the responsibility parents had and how they had to pay after death if they had not brought up their children properly. The horrors of hell were painted colorfully and at length before the audience of the revelation. The description of the woman's horrifying bodily state was Mary's way of teaching with fear. He This work was mary to the state of the revelation of the woman's horrifying bodily state was Mary's way of teaching with fear.

Next, the granddaughter appeared from purgatory accusing her mother, the woman who was still alive, of teaching her to appreciate carnal love, worldly honor, and bodily leisure and delights. Now she was paying for all her vainglory and bad choices, for which her mother also bore responsibility. She described that she had confessed her sins, but soon after that had continued to sin. She had hoped for the impossible that there would not be any punishment for her sins. She had also hoped that the time of her death would be far in the future. But that had changed when she had fallen ill. During her long sickness she had confessed her sins and reminded herself that her suffering was less than what Christ had suffered. Therefore, she had obtained tears⁴⁸ and cried over how great God's love toward her was and hers was so little. In her conscience she had then prayed to God and suddenly a scintilla of love had appeared in her heart. In light of this the passion of Christ had seemed bitterer to her than her own death. She had died and ended up in purgatory. She had avoided hell because of the tiny spark of love in her heart. After some time she would be purged completely. 49 Hence, the difference between the grandmother and granddaughter was the latter's scintilla of love that helped her to escape hell.

Throughout this, both women were addressing their speeches not only to the woman who still lived but also to Birgitta. One obvious target of the revelation was naturally the woman who was still alive. But the framing of the revelation hints that it was aimed at a wider group of people, "to the proud women of Sweden," that is, to the aristocratic women, whom Birgitta undoubtedly knew well. Her task was to deliver the messages to those women.

Birgitta's strategy in this revelation was to put herself at the same level as her implied readers. She was one of the proud women and although not particularly wise, she had been chosen to deliver the divine message. The use of fear for teaching was presented to the audience as Mary's teaching. Making people afraid of what would happen in the afterlife was therefore part of Birgitta's explicit strategy. She complained that people no longer cared about their mortality and afterlife. ⁵⁰ Teaching with fear was a powerful strategy, since the afterlife was a prominent part of human thought. One reason for this was obviously that the pains or delights

expected would be experienced for eternity.⁵¹ To activate this concern was a notable part of Birgitta's mission and strategy in order to make people change their way of behaving.

Birgitta did not only stress the horrors, but she also skillfully described the two women's ways of thinking, thus persuading the audience to identify with them. The emphasis on the similar upper-class upbringing of these women and their different afterlives underlined what caused the crucial difference between them: thinking about Christ's suffering had kindled the love in the younger woman. And this was enough for her to reach purgatory instead of hell.

This revelation clearly indicates the core of what, in Birgitta's view, was needed for a soul's salvation: up to the last moment of human life it was still possible to choose heaven. Contrition was needed, but the most important thing was to think of Christ's suffering. This would evoke love of Christ in the individual's heart and so mercy would be granted. Thus, Birgitta's view here was quite simple. She did not ask for penitential activity or voluntary suffering. In this context, she only asked that one think about the passion of Christ. A tiny bit of love was enough, and after the conversion it would make the person change his or her life for good. Without love all pious deeds were in vain, as was emphasized in the case of the grandmother.

The woman who was still alive was not mentioned although Birgitta saw her also in the beginning of the revelation. According to a short declaration after the revelation, the woman entered a monastery and lived in great perfection.⁵² One possibility could be that the colorful revelation of *Ex.* 75, which I discussed in chapter 1, was in fact directed at this third woman. The unnamed woman in that revelation was an aristocrat and a mother whom Birgitta urged to change her life and become a spiritual mother instead of being a fleshly mother. The style of the revelation is strikingly similar to the *Rev.* VI 52 and the list of the woman's sins would exactly suit the image of a "vainglorious scorpion," as the woman in *Rev.* VI 52 was characterized. It would also be plausible that the revelations were created or at least kept separate by the editors simply because of the length of *Rev.* VI 52.⁵³

This passage raises the question of where Birgitta got her ideas about purgatory, hell, and heaven. In addition to the Bible, for example, one obvious source of inspiration was Henry Suso's Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit (Little Book of Eternal Wisdom). Richard Kieckhefer has pointed out that raptures and visions were more important to female than to male saints. There were a few exceptions, however, the German Dominican Henry Suso (d. 1366) being one of them.⁵⁴ Birgit Klockars has shown the profound influence of Suso's Little Book of Eternal Wisdom, on Birgitta during

her Swedish time, approximately 1330. They have a remarkable number of topics in common. Both emphasized Christ's passion, why God's friends had to suffer, and death and the state of soul.⁵⁵ Also, their use of images and metaphors is quite similar.⁵⁶ Naturally Birgitta also found inspiration and images from sermons, discussions with theologians, and her own reading. But along with the knowledge of Marie d'Oignies's encounters with the dead, the apparitions of dead souls to Suso probably strongly shaped Birgitta's perceptions about what was possible for a holy person.⁵⁷

Perhaps because of Suso's influence, but also because of other schools of thought that did not emphasize the voluntary suffering of the living, Birgitta did not underline personal suffering as redemptive or necessary. In this respect her views differed from Marie d'Oignies and other great beguines.⁵⁸ Consequently, she never boasted about how many souls she had helped as some holy women had done.⁵⁹ In addition to these differences, Birgitta never doubted the necessity of hell as Hadewijch of Brabant (who lived in the thirteenth century, exact dates are not known) or Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), for example, might have done. 60 On the contrary, Birgitta fought along with Master Mathias against the kind of views that neutralized the physical sufferings in the world to come.⁶¹ Her emphasis was that Christ's suffering was enough and thinking about it was the most important step to take on the path toward salvation. 62 Nevertheless, I would call her an "apostle to the dead," using Newman's concept. Birgitta sought to help people shorten their own or their friends' time in purgatory. Therefore, it is meaningful to consider some psychological and social motivations for voluntary suffering that Newman has listed: "The need to give, to fill a valued niche within the family or community, to maintain contact with lost friends and kinfolk, to win fame as a tireless apostle and bountiful patron despite the limitations of gender and class—in a word, to earn respect from the living and gratitude from the dead."63 I think that all of these could be applied to Birgitta as well, not for her own suffering but her desire to influence people and awaken them to think about their mortality.

People who had lost a loved one might have been desperate because of their loss. Therefore, Birgitta's ability to mediate between the dead and the bereaved made her message especially appealing to those left behind. The fact that people believed in purgatory, hell, and heaven was significant for the proper reception of Birgitta's messages. As a dutiful daughter of the church, Birgitta condemned everyone who doubted the existence of hell. The belief in hell and in the pain of purgatory created a threat that was quite useful for controlling people's behavior.

One way that ordinary people acquired their knowledge of religious doctrines was from sermons. As Carolyn Muessig has observed,

"Sermons are a key source for understanding the way religious concepts were mediated between the clergy and the laity."64 There were also other ways, not easy to trace through scholarly methods, like informal talking, exchanging information, or gossiping. Birgitta's revelations were evidently material for sermons but her authority was established mostly through informal channels. She convinced people through personal contact. Also, as was the situation with dead saints, people sought the help of living saints in times of emergency or despair. McGuire has observed that in the High Middle Ages people were given a choice concerning their eternity: "In the flurry of activities that characterizes the High Middle Ages, people realized that they could have an impact on their surroundings. They could choose. Their own efforts could make a difference, in this world and in the next, for they saw that they were bound up in a community that worked, the communion of saints."65 This possibility of choice was relevant in Birgitta's time as well, although in her view many people were not interested enough in their ability to choose. Birgitta's revelations concerning dead souls showed people that they themselves could have an effect on their own afterlife. Birgitta did not hesitate to use her authority as an apostle to the dead to make people change their life and be saved.

One feature that could have appeared explicitly in these revelations is the *discretio spirituum*. As was shown in chapter 4, Birgitta was well acquainted with the discernment of the spirits. But in the case of the visitations of the dead, Birgitta is always said to have been certain of who was speaking. Not once did she suspect that the apparitions were illusions. This would speak for the general acceptance of her gift to act as the apostle to the dead. ⁶⁶ She was self-confident, frank, and expected people to listen to her. She often made people change their conduct. Only in the case of the dead man (*Rev.* VI 10) was she dissatisfied with the relatives' response. However, she did not give up, but continued to influence those whom she thought responsible.

Birgitta's revelations often resemble sermons. As was mentioned earlier, Birgitta was keen on listening to eminent preachers. She encouraged Master Mathias in his preaching. However, his sermons probably inspired and influenced the content and structure of Birgitta's revelations as well. Therefore, a look at Mathias's preaching might give new insight into Birgitta's revelations.

Bengt Strömberg investigated Master Mathias and the influences of the mendicant tradition on his *Copia exemplorum* collection. Strömberg observed that especially the work of the Dominican Stefan de Bourbon, *Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus*, from the middle of the twelfth century, seems to have inspired Mathias. Penitence, contrition, confession, and satisfaction are all central but preaching about hell is also considered important by the French Dominican. His advice is to make people afraid of hell and to describe the bodies of the damned to be as disgusting as possible. He calls this method "inductivum in timorem," persuading people with fear.⁶⁷

De Bourbon also thought that purgatory and its severe and long duration should also be openly presented in sermons. People should be told how to help people in purgatory. Crusade, invoking to saints, and meditation over purgatory for the sake of the dead are useful to the living since they will thus be drawn to penitence. Death and the fear of death were common themes that Stefan de Bourbon considered as focal points for sermons. While preaching about fear one was not to forget to preach about *misericordia*, God's mercy. Through this, it is shown that God cares for people and wants everyone to be saved. The incarnation, the childhood of Christ, his passion, and love of Mary should also be preached. They awaken compassion and sorrow and thus draw the sinful to penitence. This method he calls "attractoria pietatis," attracting by compassion. 69

These typical mendicant themes can be found in Mathias's *Copia exemplorum* but as the examples from Birgitta's *Revelations* show, these were exactly the central themes and methods with which Birgitta sought to influence people. She seemed to be well informed about both inductivum in timorem and attractoria pietatis. Whether she gained this knowledge by reading pastoral manuals or simply imitating preachers is not known.⁷⁰ What is known is that in her revelations she clearly used the language and rhetoric of priests.

Persuading the Royal Couple of Sweden

Birgitta had close relations with the royal couple of Sweden. This was not unusual for living saints; for example, in the Italian context prophetesses had important roles in politics as advisors of princes. They were also seen to protect the people with their prayers. But first, they had to be acknowledged as true prophets. My question in this chapter is how Birgitta managed to convince the royal couple of the authenticity of her three major projects in the 1340s and persuade them to collaborate with her. These projects were (1) the plan for a new monastery, (2) the journey of Bishop Hemming of Åbo and Prior Peter of Alvastra to France in order to mediate peace between France and England, and (3) the crusade to the Eastern parts of the Swedish Kingdom, that is, to the border of Novgorod. King Magnus Eriksson played an important part in all of these endeavors. His and Queen Blanche's actions make it evident that he

had a positive attitude toward Birgitta's suggestions.⁷² He supported the journey to France financially, started a crusade against Novgorod, and, with his wife, backed Birgitta's plans for the new monastery. Birgitta's projects overlapped each other temporally and they are mentioned in many different revelations, sometimes together. Birgitta also frequently mentioned the royal couple in her revelations. More revelations concerning the king than the queen have been preserved. This perhaps reflects the values of the editors, who saw revelations about the king as being of greater importance.⁷³

It is difficult to establish a chronologically plausible chain of events from the scattered mess of the revelations. Nevertheless, there are some key passages in the revelations that might help understand the means Birgitta used in order to convince the royal couple. In Rev. I-VII and Etravagantes there are some passages or entire revelations concerning the royal couple. The king and the queen are mentioned the most in Rev. VIII, also called Liber ad reges. Alfonso Pecha, whom Birgitta had authorized shortly before her death to edit the revelations,74 created it after Birgitta's death especially for royal rulers. Alfonso brought together some revelations from earlier revelation books and some not included in the other books.⁷⁵ He was not interested in the chronology of the text but wanted to create a thematically coherent book to declare the heavenly emperor's will to kings and queens. Naturally the canonization project of Birgitta was a factor: he wanted to emphasize Birgitta's value in the eyes of the clerical administrators.⁷⁶ Because of Alfonso's extensive editorial work, this book is, for a historian, the most challenging of the revelation books. However, some parts of Rev. VIII probably contain messages to King Magnus and Queen Blanche that echo Birgitta's relationship with the royal couple while she still lived in Sweden. But when comparing the earlier revelation books and Alfonso's Rev. VIII, the impression one gets is that Alfonso did not invent new revelations but sought to build his work on Birgitta's words. This is why it is possible to trace in it some of the historical interaction between Birgitta and the royal couple.

Birgitta and Ulf Gudmarsson's relationship with the royal couple seems to have been close. They had the opportunity to observe Magnus Eriksson (1316–1374) grow as the king of Sweden from his childhood on. In 1331, when 15, King Magnus reached his majority and Birgitta and Ulf were present at the festivities in his honor.⁷⁷ As lawman and knight, Ulf Gudmarsson already belonged to the king's council in the first half of the 1330s.⁷⁸ Ulf traveled with the court as evidently Birgitta did as well. The king's court was not yet permanently located in one place. Instead, it moved often around Sweden and Norway, of which also Magnus Eriksson was the king.⁷⁹

In 1335, the king married the Flemish princess Blanche of Namur (d. 1363). Prior Peter mentioned in his canonization testimony that Birgitta acted as the young queen's magistra. This is plausible since Birgitta knew the king and the court manners well. Birgitta probably helped Queen Blanche to adjust to a new role and taught her Swedish manners and language. Teaching Swedish to the queen was naturally important although German and French might also have been languages spoken at the court. As Bridget Morris has demonstrated, the king's marriage alliance meant the arrival of new political, economic, and cultural impulses in Sweden. Queen Blanche introduced new courtly traditions and literature, for example, German and French rhymed chronicles and courtly romances. Es She probably also brought some of the political concerns of central Europe with her.

Consequently, both Birgitta and Ulf were well acquainted with the royal couple. Birgit Klockars even suggested that Birgitta was the god-mother of the young prince Erik, who was born in 1339.⁸³ After Ulf's death in 1344, the relationship between Birgitta and the royal couple remained close. Birgitta introduced new ideas connected to political and religious matters to the king and the king seemed to have given his approval to virtually all of them. Judging from the sources, there was even some kind of religious revival in the royal court. Many aristocrats took Birgitta's exhortations to live a more pious life seriously.⁸⁴ Birgitta's revelations to many aristocrats support this idea.

In what follows, I will first examine Birgitta and the royal couple's, especially the king's, relationship in the revelations in *Rev.* I–VI and *Extravagantes*. I will then investigate what is said about the royal pair in *Rev.* VIII, which Alfonso Pecha edited after Birgitta's death.

Concerning Birgitta's attempt to resolve the war between France and England, *Rev.* I 52 is important. As was argued in chapter 5, this revelation from around 1346 was especially directed at Swedish theologians. Yet, it also contained a message to the king. The main issue in *Rev.* I 52 was the exhortations to a Swedish bishop to visit the pope and to make him seek an end to the war between France and England. 85 But the revelation also makes clear what King Magnus was supposed to do: "The lord of the land, whom I have chosen as one of my members and made truly mine, will aid you manfully and supply you with the necessary provisions for your journey out of properly acquired means." These few lines reveal interesting aspects of Birgitta and the king's relation. It sounds as if Birgitta had already spoken with the king about his part and was sure to have his support. Although the sources do not reveal anything about Queen Blanche's possible involvement in the solution to the war between France and England, it is quite possible that she would have encouraged

both Birgitta and her husband to try to end the war. It is quite possible that Birgitta and the royal couple had already talked about the journey and what kind of role the king would have in it.

In *Rev.* I 52, Christ makes known that the king is his faithful son whom he himself has chosen. This must have sounded persuasive to Magnus's ears because it shows that, as God's favorite, he had heavenly support for his kingship. That was a useful message for his possible critics. The revelation was also probably read or preached publicly, and this way it quickly became public knowledge.

In 1972 Sven Stolpe found in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, a manuscript that showed that King Magnus Eriksson not only provided the financial means for the journey but also wrote an introductory letter to both the king of England, Edward III, and the king of France, Philippe VI.⁸⁷ In it, Magnus spoke about the revelations of "a well-known pious widow," without mentioning Birgitta by name. Then Magnus related a revelation from Mary, who argued that the war could be ended with the help of a marriage contract.⁸⁸

The fact that the king allowed Hemming and Peter to travel in his name shows that he believed in Birgitta's messages. The king's recommendation certainly gave Hemming and Peter more authority. Behind Magnus's generosity toward Hemming and Peter might have also been his interest in forging political alliances with England. Queen Blanche's connections made this easier. Her relatives had close relations with the English court.⁸⁹

During this time, Sweden was a powerful state. The peace of Varberg with the Danish ruler, Valdemar Atterdag, in 1343, was advantageous especially to Magnus who became the king of Sweden, Norway, and Skåne. Expanding his actions outside of Scandinavia probably felt natural to him. Birgitta, in turn, was politically experienced after following the king's and his advisors' way of life from close proximity. Therefore, she did not send letters to the two fighting kings and the pope in her own name but instead sought more powerful diplomatic ways. The peace of Varberg with the peace of Va

According to Birgitta, in financing the journey to France, Magnus would be acting manfully, *viriliter*.⁹³ As a king, he should be an example to other people, especially for knights. *Ex.* 74 supports this assumption. Birgit Klockars dated this revelation among the earliest addressed to the king. The first part of the revelation is especially addressed to Swedish knights whom Christ accuses of three sins: pride, gluttony, and greed.⁹⁴ Because this part resembles the revelation incorporated into Master Mathias's prologue to *Rev.* I, it can stem from the same time as the prologue, around the year 1346.

The king had the responsibility to act correctly. Unfortunately, according to Birgitta, the king had been much too slack in his justice

and had caused many people to be destroyed. ⁹⁵ Here Birgitta's Christ uses frank speech: he does not ornament his judging words in any way. The language resembles the classic prophetic language, ⁹⁶ but Birgitta probably also knew the main characteristics of the rhetorics of her time quite well. Her words sound harsh but as a matter of fact, according to the rhetoric of friendship, this kind of language could be seen as a mark of closeness. Flattery belonged to enemies' way of talking and Birgitta often warned the king of flatterers. ⁹⁷ Master Mathias, Birgitta's close friend and collaborator, had mastered the rhetoric and had even written works on it. Through him, Birgitta had access to high-level learning about the use of rhetoric. Although she did not use the rules of rhetoric systematically in her writings, their influence can be traced in many places. ⁹⁸

According to Mathias, the best way to influence people was to arouse passions (pathos) in them. The presentation should stir feelings through images and these would help to convince the audience about the message and eventually steer people toward virtue. In his Copia exemplorum, Mathias emphasized the importance of images. He thought that the purpose of a text, whether it was poetry, a sermon, or something else, was to lead people to the right path in their life. Birgitta's revelations had exactly the same purpose. But when it comes to the planning of the composition beforehand, it is clear that it did not belong to the genre of revelations. Yet, this does not mean that Birgitta was unaware of the importance of effective presentation.

As Mats Malm has shown, Birgitta probably did not systematically learn the use of rhetorical devices but Mathias, who influenced and encouraged her at an early stage of her career, taught her how to persuade people. When this was combined with Birgitta's talent and skill for producing concrete images, the result was an unusually powerful text. ¹⁰⁰ Kerstin Norén aptly describes Birgitta's way of using revelations: "The revelations are aware only of their goal, verbally they work on an intuitive level." ¹⁰¹ In other words, the revelations not only lent expression to religious zeal but also they were influenced by the literary conventions of Birgitta's time. ¹⁰²

For the king of Sweden, Birgitta had precise advice, the purpose of which was to arouse passions in the king and make him act virtuously. To compensate for his regrettable behavior, the king was to build a monastery in honor of Mary in a place that Christ would show him. If the king was willing to do this, Christ promised to help him and his supporters. ¹⁰³ The purpose of the promise was probably to make the Swedish knights accept the idea of the monastery as well. After the positive part follows the threat: if the king did not do as Christ told him, his crown would be taken from him and he would get into trouble: his kingdom would be despised and its inhabitants would be unhappy. ¹⁰⁴

Quite similarly, in *Ex.* 73, which is not easy to connect to any clear historical event, Birgitta urged the king to keep his promise to God if he wanted to achieve success. He should also stay honest toward his people and be careful not to burden them with new payments or taxes. At the end of the revelation, the king was told that if he was in difficulty, he should listen to the advice of the pious ones. ¹⁰⁵ This revelation reflects the general atmosphere in Sweden during Magnus's reign. The king tried to figure out with his advisors how to raise more money for the crown. It is not mentioned what the promise to which Birgitta referred was, but it could be related to one or all three of the major projects that Birgitta initiated. Birgitta's advice was that it is better to endure difficult times than to sin against God and one's own soul. ¹⁰⁶ In this way she appealed to the king to keep his promise, which was important to Birgitta.

Birgitta's revelation to the king contains the promise of the love of Christ and the threat that the king might lose the crown. Her double-edged strategy seems to have been effective. The king accepted her authority. In their will made in May 1346, the royal couple ordered that they should be buried in Vadstena in the church belonging to the monastery that they and their heirs would establish "in the honor of God and the Virgin Mary." The executors of the will were, among others, Archbishop Hemming of Uppsala and bishops Peter Tyrgilsson of Linköping, Sigge of Skara, and Thomas of Växjö. These are almost exactly the same bishops who were present when Birgitta's revelations were presented to the theological committee. One of the knights present was Israel Birgersson, Birgitta's brother.

The will of the royal couple seems to be a direct response to Birgitta's exhortation in *Ex.* 74. In the will, considerable sums were promised for the future monastery on the condition that the royal couple would be buried in its church and masses celebrated according to what was dictated in the will. But why did they choose the royal estate at Vadstena?

My view is that Birgitta introduced the idea to the royal couple through Ex. 24 revelation. In this revelation, Birgitta describes herself as if she was in a large house with many people. She then heard Mary asking Christ, "My son, give this place to me." ¹⁰⁹ The devil interfered, demanding his right to the place arguing that the builders of that place were his friends and that it had already belonged to him for many years. He also supported his claim to ownership by maintaining that the palace was the place of hatred and punishment. The devil's friends, the owners of the place, had punished their subjects there without mercy. ¹¹⁰ The impression from the beginning of this revelation is that Birgitta got the idea of establishing a monastery at Vadstena, on the king's estate, quite suddenly, perhaps even while she was there at a big banquet. ¹¹¹ The devil's arguments seem to

describe the low moral condition of the estate. Indirectly they explain to the recipients of the revelation why the present use of the house should cease and a monastery should be established there.

In the vision, Mary argues against the devil and finally Christ says to her, "Beloved mother, you won this place justly. Therefore it belongs according to justice to you and I grant it to you." After this Christ declares that the future of Vadstena would benefit the whole country. In the monastery, there will be continual praise of God and prayers for the living and the dead. The revelation ends with Christ's words to Mary, "Your enemy has been for a long time master in this place, but from now on you will be the mistress and the queen here." Either personally or perhaps through a letter, Birgitta brought the contents of the revelation to Magnus Eriksson's and Blanche of Namur's attention and they decided to donate Vadstena for a future monastery.

It is striking that neither in the revelation nor in the royal couple's will there was a discussion about the kind of monastery it should be. The rule that would be adopted in the monastery was not decided, which suggests that, at this time, the idea was to adopt one of the existing rules. Apparently Birgitta had not yet received any revelations concerning a new rule.¹¹⁴

As can be judged from the will of the royal couple, Queen Blanche was also active in spiritual matters. I have already mentioned that Birgitta helped her to adjust to the life in the Swedish court and that *Rev.* IV 4 has usually been seen as addressed to the queen. The dating of this revelation, however, is not certain. It may stem from the time before Birgitta left for Rome or had just arrived there and tried to persuade the queen to go there for the Year of Jubilee, 1350. Therefore, Queen Blanche would have been the likely recipient of the revelation. In any case the revelation can be seen to reflect Birgitta and Queen Blanche's relationship around 1350.

The revelation describes how the good and the evil spirit fought for the noble lady's soul. They had a dialogue in which they tried to convince the lady why she should do as they say. The evil spirit says to the rich aristocrat lady¹¹⁷ that she is born to be rich, will be praised for it, and will give from her riches to those in need. The spirit also describes that if the lady would forsake her riches it would be difficult for her to get used to new customs and live without service. Therefore, she should continue to live as she had before. Then she would gain honor in front of both people and God.¹¹⁸ The evil spirit also warned the lady not to try to follow the example of the saints because they were much closer to God than ordinary people ever can be. Since human beings are weak and sinful, it would be childish to start something that is impossible to finish, such as the pious life of saints. To hope for heaven was enough for a human

being. As regards a pilgrimage the evil spirit maintains that it shows that a person has an unstable soul. Pilgrimage would mean giving up the riches and there would also be dangers. Bad men might try to violate the lady's body, which would mean that her family would be ashamed and the lady herself would turn hostile toward God and wish for death. Mercy and prayers are much better than sacrifice. ¹¹⁹ The evil spirit emphasized that the woman should not change her life and to hope and pray for salvation was enough.

The good spirit, in turn, instructs the aristocrat lady that riches and worldly fame are in vain; the most important thing is to account for in time to God. This spirit reminded her that God knows everything beforehand. It was safer to forsake riches than to risk heaven. A human being, when dying in pain, easily forgets the sins for which he or she should ask forgiveness. According to this spirit only two things were eternal: hell and heaven. 120 In consequence, the lady should not become too proud; a humble pilgrimage would be better for her soul and would also benefit her subjects. As for the dangers of the pilgrimage, the good spirit teaches that it is better to be imprisoned than to go to hell. The spirit recalls how Elizabeth of Hungary earned a wonderful heavenly crown and consolation of God because she gave up her riches and lived in poverty. One should not be afraid of the violation of the body either: one should remember Saint Lucia, who was taken to a brothel but God protected her.¹²¹ The spirit sighed as if the lady herself was speaking, "I am in need of good advice."122

The good spirit, thus, encourages the lady to change her life, to follow the example of the saints, and to prepare herself for the pilgrimage. The spirit also strongly emphasizes the consequences of a sudden death: one may not have the opportunity to confess all of one's sins. The earthly pain and trouble are nothing compared to eternal damnation. Concerning the dangers of the long journey, the spirit promised that God would protect those who loved him.

At the end of the revelation the good spirit reminds the lady of three things for which she should be grateful. First, she should remember the honor for which she is chosen. Second, she should remember the kind of love God has shown her in her marriage. Third, she should remember how mercifully she has been preserved in the time of death. Birgitta seems to imply that this lady of high social standing had a good marriage and a happy life without any great misfortunes.

The spirit then gathered together three warnings: the lady must remember to give account to God for everything she has done; her time will be very short and death comes suddenly; for God it is the same whether one is a mistress or a servant, everybody is treated similarly.¹²⁴

The last three things concerned practical things. The lady should confess, repent and do penance for all her sins, and love God from the bottom of her heart. Christ urged her to escape purgatory. The best way for her to do that was to temporarily forsake her earthly friends and go on a pilgrimage. It would be a short cut to heaven because of the indulgences that could be obtained.¹²⁵

The purpose of this revelation is to make the recipient prepare herself for a long pilgrimage. As is usually the case with Birgitta's revelations, this one is also closely connected to a real-life situation. The viewpoints of the evil spirit represent thoughts of those who were against pilgrimages and tried to persuade the lady to stay in her homeland. The evil spirit opposed ideas that were especially important for Birgitta. In addition to pilgrimage, the evil spirit also criticizes the idea of using the saints as role models.

The fact that Birgitta portrays Elizabeth of Hungary, a princess, as a suitable role model for the aristocrat lady strengthens the assumption that the lady in question was Queen Blanche. If this is so, Birgitta tried to persuade the queen to go on a long pilgrimage, most probably to travel to Rome for the year 1350. In that case, the date of this revelation would have been around 1348–1349. This would be the same time as King Magnus Eriksson was preparing the crusade against Novgorod. Mentioning a Hungarian princess in this context may also suggest that Birgitta wanted to remind the queen of what happened to the crusading husband of Elizabeth: Ludwig died and Elizabeth became a pious widow. King Magnus Eriksson was crusading at the same time and it was sensible to be prepared for his possible death. The occasion for the pilgrimage would have been therefore especially suitable for the queen, since the indulgences would have also benefited her husband.

Birgitta sought to influence the queen and show the superiority of her own devout advice to that of the queen's friends. By saying that the queen needed her advice Birgitta wanted to control whose advice the queen heeded. In this revelation Birgitta's method was to use the inductivum in timorem. She warned of the consequences of a sudden death and purgatory. She tried to persuade the recipient of the revelation by stressing that many other people would benefit from the pilgrimage as well. Birgitta was eager to make this socially prominent lady undertake a pilgrimage probably because she would thus be an example for other people. In this particular case, however, Birgitta's strategy failed: the queen never went to Rome.

Some revelations of the eighth book offer material to understand better the relationship of the royal couple and Birgitta. After Birgitta's death, Alfonso Pecha revised Birgitta's original revelations to fit into his plan of the book addressed to kings and queens. It is impossible to determine how

extensive his revisions were. However, there are 28 revelations, which in addition to being in his compilation can be found in the earlier books, *Rev.* II–VII. A comparison between them and Alfonso's version shows that he stayed relatively faithful to the earlier versions but at the same time also created new entities by combining parts from different revelations. He also identified some recipients as royal people, although they were not described as such in earlier versions. One should therefore be cautious when it comes to the historicity of the revelations. ¹²⁷ Concerning the revelations that appeared for the first time, it is naturally difficult to know how much Alfonso used the freedom that Birgitta had given him. Nevertheless, *Rev.* VIII contains some aspects that enhance the knowledge of the relationship between Birgitta and the royal couple prior to 1350.

Queen Blanche owned valuable relics and, as a Flemish princess, she had access to a wide range of courtly and religious literature. 128 Blanche apparently accepted Birgitta as a holy woman and a living saint. Birgitta, in turn, found Blanche to be genuinely interested in how to conduct a devout life as a queen. The relationship of Blanche and Birgitta seems to have been mutually respectful.¹²⁹ In Rev. VIII, there is a short revelation that sounds like a reaction to Rev. IV 4.130 According to Alfonso, it concerned the queen of Sweden and the contents seem to confirm this. In Rev. VIII 14, Christ says to Birgitta about the queen, "The aforementioned queen asked through you advice from me and after she had heard the advice that I gave her, she found it most burdensome." ¹³¹ Christ does not hide his disappointment and accuses the queen of loving her power more than him and that she would soon die a difficult death if she did not obey Christ's words. 132 But the threatening words could not change the queen's mind. Nevertheless, this revelation shows that the queen relied on Birgitta as a conduit of heavenly messages, although Birgitta was not always satisfied with the queen's actions.

The eighth book of the revelations contains many references about a king who is probably Magnus Eriksson. One revelation (*Rev.* VIII 5) describes a young king's sleeping problems. He has chronicles and annals read aloud to him. Birgitta suggests that he should have the acts of saints and stories about brave and devout heroes read out instead, for they would show how the king could direct his mind to God and respectfully grasp the power into his own hands away from the council. This fits in well with the time after Magnus Eriksson's minority, when the council of state was still in charge of administration. Birgitta encourages the young king to take the reins, but to do so respectfully. Birgitta's Christ promises to send two advisors to the king who will be like mothers for him. One would help the king in spiritual matters, the other in how to resolve difficult matters. If the king obeys these two, he will win both

God's and the people's favor. The revelation concludes in affirming that the king should not obey the two men so that the other advisors would be offended. Instead he should listen to many people's advice and choose the best solution after profound consideration.¹³⁵

Birgitta wanted to influence the king's ruling by making him take on advisors of whom she approved. Since she must have been aware that the old councilors might not be happy about this, she, with psychological insight, advised the king to be thoughtful in his actions. The two men whom Birgitta hoped to have appointed as the king's main advisors were probably a bishop and a respectful lawman. Birgitta showed in this revelation that the right to rule belonged now to the young king and advised him to be understanding with the men who had ruled during his childhood.

Birgitta's mild tone toward the king continued later. According to *Rev.* VIII 2, King Magnus Eriksson had asked Birgitta to find out how he could rule justly and wisely. Through Birgitta, Christ enumerated ten things that characterized a good king. Another set of ten instructions is listed in *Rev.* VIII 4. Historically the first list of *Rev.* VIII 2 is problematic because it clearly belongs to a collection of parts, which Alfonso had gathered from different revelations. ¹³⁶ According to Alfonso, the king had "humbly asked" Birgitta for advice. The style of the formulation is hagiographic, but it may give the right impression of the relations between Birgitta and the king. As mentioned above, the royal couple believed that Birgitta had a special gift and followed her advice in many cases. Therefore, this kind of petition for Birgitta to "see what God thinks about the king" seems quite likely to be genuine.

Birgitta urged the king to persistently investigate how the law was practiced in his country and punish dishonest lawmen. The specific advice in both lists was to get rid of bad advisors. These were greedy men who "sold justice for money."¹³⁷ The king should also thoroughly examine his own actions and judgments, be patient and just, and not act in haste but always seek the advice of more experienced and God-fearing people. Moreover, he should get rid of flatterers.¹³⁸

Birgitta saw the king's spiritual life as the grounds for just ruling. The king should read the *Hours of the Virgin Mary* daily and five times a day remember the five wounds of Christ, which he endured for the king's sake. The king should be careful not to fast too much; he should keep his body and mind in good condition. If the king felt that he the workload grew too much, he was to listen to what the leaders of the church advised him to do.¹³⁹

Birgitta emphasized that she was only a channel; the revelations showed to the king not her will but Christ's will. The king listened to Birgitta's revelations carefully. He sacked some of his advisors and replaced them with the men Birgitta had recommended. He secret behind Birgitta's success was that she did not demand the king listen only to her voice through the revelations but sought to find him experienced advisors whom she thought to be pious, wise, and experienced. The leaders of the church must have been pleased to realize that Birgitta considered that the bishops were the most important advisors of the king. They had publicly given their approval for Birgitta's messages. The close collaboration of Birgitta and the bishops could also be seen in the will of the royal couple, as the same men were its witnesses. Birgitta's net of support was wide, consisting of people from many classes. This must have helped convince the king about Birgitta's holiness.

The two lists of instruction for the king contain a striking amount of guidance about how he should behave in everyday situations. Birgitta wanted the king to behave patiently and with empathy toward other people. He was to listen to what they had to say and be careful with his own utterances. In this way he would be "feared by the young, respected by the old, praised by the wise and the righteous, and innerly desired by those who are burdened." Birgitta saw that in this way the young king would gain respect, which might otherwise have been challenging on account of his youth.

According to Birgitta, the king was the head of the country because of God's will. He had received the right to judge and rule from God. She emphasized that the king should earn the respect of his people by his actions. He would succeed if he followed Birgitta's advice. But it was not only actions, but also his outer appearance that was decisive in earning him respect. Therefore, Birgitta gave him advice even about dressing: his costume should be more handsome than other people's dresses. Yet, he should not become proud of his attire but wear it humbly, always remembering the responsibilities of his post. The detailed advice of Birgitta's Christ even contained a list of the days when the king was to wear his crown: the greatest feast days of the year and the days when the king called his council and dubbed knights. 142

Birgitta's advice to the king was practical and encouraging. Many people saw her as a channel of God, as a living saint. The king and the queen received, through Birgitta, special attention from the members of the heavenly court. Birgitta did not introduce any new, radical views but boosted royal power. The king and the queen could but gain by following her advice.

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the mild tone employed by Birgitta could not change. This indeed happened after Birgitta had learnt about Magnus Eriksson's crusade against Novgorod. The Swedish troops had been victorious in the beginning. The king had followed Birgitta's advice to challenge the religious leaders of the enemy to a dispute about whose religion was better. He Birgitta's advice was based on Deut. 20:10, in which it is said that the attacking troops should first offer peace and ask the city in question to surrender. Nevertheless, in the end the Swedish troops had lost and Birgitta accused Magnus of relying not on God's power but on military strength. In *Rev.* VIII 47 Birgitta condemned the king for listening to his devilish advisors instead of trusting in God alone. Through Birgitta, Mary offered the king forgiveness if he repented and changed his life. This long revelation contains Mary's account of the king's development from an ignorant and sinful man to a devout king. According to the revelation, Mary had freed the king from the devil's influence and taken him as her own son. The Holy Spirit had entered the king's heart and he had received the divine grace. He sing from the devil's heart and he had received the divine grace.

Mary also wanted to remind the king of the special grace that had appeared in Sweden in the person of Birgitta. Christ had talked often with Birgitta and through her he had wanted to make his will known to the king. With the help of Birgitta's revelations, the king had been shown how he would be able to rule wisely and love his people. He crusade and listen to worldly people's advice. This led to his failure and the consequences for the country were hard. Mary did not forsake the king for this but offered him forgiveness if he asked for it. She told him to listen to the advice of God's friends. He was a series of the saked for it.

The revelation contains frank criticism of the king's behavior, but part of the responsibility is laid on the devil's shoulders. It was the devil who made the king listen to the bad advisors. But the revelation also contains a description of Mary and the king's relationship. At the beginning of his career the king had acted in a worldly manner but after his conversion Mary had adopted him. What could have been more flattering? Mary talked to him like a mother who did not want to abandon him but to exhort him to repent. At the same time, her description of Birgitta, who had received a special grace, gave Birgitta the highest possible authority. Christ talked through her, so she should be listened to.

The picture *Rev.* VIII 47 gives of the relationship between the king and Birgitta is quite similar to what is described in other revelations. It is probable that Birgitta composed *Rev.* VIII 47 as a letter to the king from Rome at the beginning of the 1350s. The content of the letter suggests that it was written after the second part of the crusade to Novgorod. Although written from Rome, I think the revelation reflects well the kind of relationship there was between the visionary and the king at the end of the 1340s. The revelation shows that Birgitta saw her own

influence as having been decisive in the king's life and wanted him to listen to her in the future as well.¹⁴⁸

But Birgitta's status as a living saint in the eyes of the king or other people was not stable. She was constantly criticized, not least by the men whom she accused of being bad advisors. She had to reconvince the king time after time. It was important for her success that she involved many other people in her idea of what a just ruling by the king ought to be. In this way she got the support of people, mainly members of aristocracy. Birgitta thought that participation of the aristocracy guaranteed the best form of government. 149 One reason for her success in controlling and directing the king as his supreme advisor was, no doubt, this collaboration with other people. In doing so, she actually implied that she did not rely on the king's ability to act alone but the king does not seem to have been too concerned about this. He had to take into account the practical circumstances, in the middle of a crusade, for example, when acting according to Birgitta's advice did not seem to work, he had to change his strategy. Birgitta considered her own role more important than the king apparently did.

Birgitta reminded the king of the ruler's responsibilities and of the well-being of the people. She was fearless when speaking to the royal couple and did not spare her words. Of course, she always emphasized that she was only a channel for the divine will, but her constant emphasis on the importance of obeying the land laws and the legal ownership of properties probably made her appreciated in the eyes of the Swedish people. She did not demand the same rights for everyone but she energetically insisted that the rulers should not rule as despots. These teachings probably increased the sense of security among people. The rulers for their part understood the power of the people and they had to take Birgitta's words into consideration.

Why the New Rule?

The second item in the list of the king's duties in *Rev.* VIII 2 was, "I want that the king himself helps to provide for the building of the monastery, of which rule I myself have dictated." This formulation probably belongs to Alfonso Pecha. He united two things in it: the establishing of the monastery buildings and the new rule, which, according to Birgitta, Christ himself had dictated to her. The rule, *Regula Sanctissimi Salvatoris*, has often been connected to the will of the royal couple, which they signed in May 1346. It has been assumed that Magnus's and Blanche's idea was to support a future monastery, which would adopt the Birgittine Rule, but, as Birgitta Fritz and Birgit Klockars have shown, there is no

support for this assumption in the source material.¹⁵¹ On the contrary, it is possible that Birgitta first received the *Regula Sanctissimi Salvatoris* in 1348 or 1349, shortly before she left for Rome. Before that her idea was probably to follow one of the already existing rules. My questions in this chapter are, why did Birgitta create a new rule, and what does it reveal of her ideas concerning power and authority?

Birgitta received the new rule in a miraculous way. In the Birgittine sources it is said that one day she fell into ecstasy when riding on a horse near the king's estates at Vadstena. Christ appeared to her and dictated her a totally new monastic order. All the words and articles of the *Rule* came to her in a very short time. They were not presented to her as if written on paper and Birgitta could not clearly describe how they came. She said that, nevertheless, she could gather everything in her memory. She said that she could not describe the event without corporeal pictures. She explained that her heart was so full of glowing and joy that she felt it would burst like a bubble full of air. This state lasted until Birgitta had dictated the whole *Rule* to Subprior Petrus who wrote it down as fast as he could. When everything was written, Birgitta felt that her body and heart returned to their natural condition. ¹⁵² With this description Birgitta sought to show that the vision stemmed from the good spirit.

In the first chapter of the Rule, Christ declares its purpose: "I wish to found this Order in the honor of my beloved Mother, and first and foremost for women."153 There were also men in the monastery, but the primacy of women could be seen in the numbers of the women and men. There was to be a maximum of 60 nuns; 13 priests representing the apostles and Saint Paul; 4 deacons, representing the 4 church fathers, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, and Jerome; and 8 lay brothers. This made 85 people in total, equal to the 13 apostles, including Paul, plus the 72 disciples in Luke 10:17. The task of the men was to assist the nuns, visitors, and guests by preaching and administering the sacraments. In addition, there could be a number of servant brethren and sisters from outside the monastery. The monastery was like a double monastery because there were both women and men, but, according to Tore Nyberg, a better term would be the German "Gesamtkloster," which means the coexistence of two forms of monastic life according to the same Rule, in which the roles of the males and females are different.¹⁵⁴

The abbess represented Mary and was *caput et domina*, the head and mistress, of the whole monastery. The general confessor, representing Apostle Peter, was the head of the brothers. The abbess was elected by the whole monastery and she was to choose the general confessor. Both offices had to be confirmed by the bishop. In general, the brethren were to obey the general confessor and the sisters the abbess, but the abbess's

role was much more significant than the general confessor's. This can be seen in the *Rule*'s Chapter 14: "But the confessor, except when it concerns the judgments over the brethren and the observation of the Rule, shall do nothing without consultation with the abbess, for since she is the head of the monastery she should be consulted concerning its affairs and property." ¹⁵⁵ In Chapter 25, there are exact regulations for enclosure and the separation of the sexes. The bishop was the visitor, the king the defender, and the pope the supreme authority of the institution. ¹⁵⁶

A considerable number of Birgitta's revelations from her time in Sweden concern the life of different religious orders. Most often her tone is disapproving. She complains that the orders do not follow the rule properly. Birgitta explains why she did not approve one of the old rules in the introduction of the *Rule*. Christ told Birgitta why he found the old Orders unsuitable. He said that he wanted to found a new vineyard because the old ones have difficulties making wine. Many orders resembled deserted vineyards because their members did not follow their rules as they should. According to Birgitta, this became visible in their failure to follow humble and regular habits and obey the rules regarding abstinence and lack of possessions. There was also a lack of chastity and true humility. Therefore, a new rule was needed.¹⁵⁷ Christ said that the new vineyard would be established with the help of vine branches from the old vineyards. Birgitta was chosen to be the one who carried the branches from the old vineyards to the new one.¹⁵⁸

It seems that Birgitta was looking for a suitable rule for the future monastery in Vadstena but was always disappointed with the existing rules. So that day when Birgitta suddenly fell into ecstasy she received a rule that was tailored for her needs. ¹⁵⁹ The new rule based on older ones was a perfect solution for Birgitta; she could take the good parts of the old rules and add some new elements. Compared to earlier rules, there are also new, innovative elements in the Birgittine Rule. Above all, Mary assumed a central position, from the liturgy to the architecture. This emphasis was even more visible than with the Cistercians who also had the Virgin as their patroness. Further, the life of the nuns and brethren was different. The nuns were completely cloistered and contemplative, whereas the brethren acted as preachers, gave instruction, and produced and translated learned works into the vernacular. ¹⁶⁰

Prior Peter of Alvastra probably played a significant role when the rule was written down, since as a Cistercian he knew the Benedictine Rule well. He also knew the short Rule of Saint Augustine, the writings of monks and hermits in Egypt, and the life and Rule of Saint Benedict. Influences from the Dominican tradition are evident, as well as Franciscan tendencies ¹⁶¹

There were two critical points about the *Rule* of Birgitta. The first was that Birgitta wanted to establish a new order, which had been prohibited already at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, and renewed at the Council of Lyon in 1274. All new communities should be under an old Rule. Second, her monastery had the appearance of a double monastery, which had also been forbidden earlier. When reading the *Rule* carefully, it seems that Birgitta was aware of these possible obstacles and tried to take them into account when composing the *Rule*. There are many passages in the *Rule* that seem to persuade the reader to understand that, first, there is no preexisting rule made principally for women and, second, that the monastery is not a double monastery since the number of men is low and they are simply needed for priestly works because women could not perform them.

I presume that Birgitta could have heard about the prohibition against founding new orders from her confessors and therefore she deliberately incorporated material from the old rules into the *Rule*. She did this in order to better persuade the authorities to confirm the *Regula Salvatoris*. The pope was himself a friar and possibly Birgitta thought that because her *Rule* was a compilation of old, already approved rules, which—as she stated in the *Rule*—are themselves built on old rules, it would be easier to approve.

As for the second obstacle, the double monastery, Birgitta probably did not want to found such an institution to begin with. She wanted to establish a monastery foremost for women. Sacraments and confession—at least three times a year, more often if needed—played an important role in the lives of the nuns, for that reason the monastery needed confessors. Perhaps Birgitta had even heard of nunneries, which had difficulties in finding men to perform the priestly functions. In *Regula Salvatoris*, this problem was solved by the presence of 13 priestly brothers, whereas lay brothers were suitable for hard physical work that was not suitable or possible for women.

To sum up, Birgitta justified the new rule with the following means: she was the chosen one, through her God had promised to declare his will, and this authority was already officially approved by Swedish theologians. She had received a revelation concerning the place of Vadstena—according to it, there should be a monastery there in the future. The *Rule* itself came to her in a miraculous way, which witnessed to its divine character. Birgitta gave two reasons for the new *Rule*: it was in the honor of Mary and foremost for women as there was no rule written for women. The existing religious rules were not suitable for Birgitta's monastery since the members of the old rules were not practicing them properly. However, Birgitta was careful to point out that the older rules had been

good in the early days. Therefore, the new *Rule* would use and value the good parts, and many practices and experiences were to be taken from the old rules.

These are the reasons explicitly mentioned in the sources. But what more could be said? Birgitta was not the first woman to complain that no special rule for women existed. Heloise had complained about the same issue to Abelard in the twelfth century and she was neither the first nor the last to do so. 164 Birgitta had already, when married, made pilgrimages with other aristocrats. When her saintly reputation grew, she gathered similarly minded women around her. Those women were seldom mentioned by name in the hagiographic texts about Birgitta. Also the canonization acts do not contain many women from Sweden but nevertheless, they suggest that there was a group of devout women around Birgitta while in Sweden. 165 After becoming a widow, Birgitta did not enter a convent but remained in the world. This way she was able to exercise powers and mobility not available to cloistered women or even wives. She created female networks and wanted to provide the group with support and protection. 166 I suggest that the appearance of the Rule to Birgitta was due to this practical need. She had planned to enter some religious order for many years but after she had learnt more about different orders; she felt that they did not fulfill her demands. She was especially dissatisfied with the conduct of the male members of these orders. She realized that there were many women with the same desire and the solution was found through the new rule. She wanted to offer women an improved way to serve God.

Yet the future power relations in the monastery puzzled Birgitta. The role of the abbess in the rule is striking. The abbess and the general confessor would be in charge of the monastery but it is the abbess who exercises supreme power in the monastery; even the general confessor was to submit himself to her. Birgitta legitimized this surprising "anomaly" that a woman rule over men as the will of Christ. The abbess not only represents the honorable status of Mary but also becomes her substitute on earth.

Birgitta was well aware of the general status of women in society. In an angry revelation Birgitta describes how dumb and deceitful a woman is. At the end of the revelation she declares, "Therefore the woman should be submissive to the man." The power of the abbess does not contradict this rule because as Christ's will it forms an exception. But Birgitta was concerned with the abbess's position of leadership. She was especially concerned whether men would accept a woman as their leader. In Ex. 19, she ponders how the monastery functions with the people of both sexes together. Mary comforts her by saying that Christ already knew a

thousand persons whom Birgitta knew who wished to enter the order. Birgitta then sighed back, "Oh my lady, it is easy for the women to submit themselves under the order, but it will be difficult to find men who will subdue themselves under one woman's ruling. Especially because many of them are puffed up with worldly quibbling and the world fascinates them with honors, riches, and pleasures." ¹⁶⁸

Christ empowered the abbess of the future monastery because of his mother, Mary. The abbess represented her in the world. Birgitta was confident that she herself was empowered by the divine collocutors but she was doubtful whether the abbesses would be able to rule over the men in the monastery. This possibly reflects the obstacles she herself had experienced as a female visionary although she firmly believed that her messages were divine. She seems to have wondered how much more difficult would it be for an abbess who did not have the special grace of visions.

The rule could be seen as a result of Birgitta's confrontations and negotiations with reality. By granting the abbess highest authority and power over the men as well in her rule, Birgitta perhaps sought to prevent criticism over the abbess's leading role in the future monastery. ¹⁶⁹

The Publicity of the Revelations

After considering Birgitta's holiness in action, I return to the question about the publicity of her revelations in the 1340s Sweden. This is a central question concerning Birgitta's power and authority in practice. As mentioned earlier in chapter 5, it has been suggested that they were mostly kept secret until Alfonso Pecha started to edit them shortly before Birgitta's death. ¹⁷⁰ I find this view hard to share especially in light of the analyses I have set out in this and previous chapters. The situation seems to have been rather the opposite: evidently the influence of Birgitta's revelations on many people was widely known in Sweden.

Judging by their contents, many revelations that Birgitta received in Sweden were aimed at wide audiences. For example, the main theme of *Rev.* I was to exhort people to repent and better obey God's commands. With the revelations of *Rev.* II, the Swedish knights and priests were told how to serve God. Around half of the revelations in *Rev.* III originate from the 1340s and with their help Birgitta seeks to make the Swedish clergy more fervent in their spiritual work. These topics were linked to the larger salvational plan of God. Likewise, the Swedish clerics' journey to France to mediate the war between England and France as well as the crusade against Novgorod were part of the same plan. These were not private enterprises but involved the cooperation of many people, including spiritual leaders, knights, and the royal couple. Consequently, the

fulfillment of the divine plan required that many people know about the plan. This meant that Birgitta and her collaborators had to make the revelations' content known to those whom it concerned. It is also important to remember that the prophetic nature of the revelations required that they were meant to be brought to public knowledge.¹⁷¹

Apparently, over a hundred of the surviving revelations were aimed explicitly at certain individuals. After receiving the divine message, Birgitta sent a written revelation to the person in question.¹⁷² It is hard to know how much those revelations were discussed outside the families of the recipients. However, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of them were brought to public knowledge. The writers' description in Birgitta's *Vita* that many people asked for her help and Birgitta gave her advice in writing after a few days,¹⁷³ suggests that the received personal revelation might have been held as an honor and as such probably made public.

Concerning the revelations to wider audience, it is well established that Swedish preachers quoted Birgitta's revelations in their sermons after Birgitta's death. In 1374, when Birgitta's bones were brought from Rome to Vadstena, Sweden, Johannes the priest (d. 1391) held sermons in which he quoted Birgitta's revelations. This meant that even before Birgitta's canonization in 1391, her revelations were used in sermons. This goes well together with Ex. 23, which contains Birgitta's advice to the Birgittine friars. According to Ex. 23, the friars should, in their sermons, quote the Bible, Vitae patrum, saints' miracles, and "my and my beloved mother's words," meaning the Revelations. The passage shows that Birgitta intended her revelations to be preached in the future monastery. And this is indeed what happened. The

Unfortunately, this does not tell whether the revelations were used in sermons in the 1340s. What is evident is that in many revelations from Birgitta's time in Sweden, Birgitta actively tried to encourage the Swedish priests to make her revelations public in their sermons. Especially in the second book of *Revelations*, there are multiple exhortations to priests to preach Birgitta's revelations. This is quite logical, since the second book is aimed foremost at the Swedish nobility and priests, whose task was to preach the Christian faith.

To avoid criticism against herself, which, as was seen in chapter 5, did occur, Birgitta carefully stresses her own role as only a mediator of divine messages. Those messages contained God's will, and therefore they should be made public. For example, in *Rev.* II 14, Christ specifies who may preach his words and how it should be done. Christ is like a goldsmith and his words are gold. This revelation describes what a good servant, that is, a preacher, is like and that gold should not be entrusted

to bad servants. The revelation explains who would benefit from hearing the words: the damned, the sinners, and those who are firm. This, in practice, meant everybody. That is why Christ says, "My words should not be kept hidden from my friends, for having heard of my grace, they will get all the more stirred up in devotion to me." This quotation shows that Birgitta believed that the revelations would transform those who knew about them. Therefore, the wider an audience they had the better

At the same time, Birgitta was afraid of false revelations that might circulate under her name. At the end of Rev. II 14, Christ warns that "his enemy" will try to make his golden words to look like clay. Therefore, he commanded, "When any of my words are being transcribed, the transcriber should bring two trusty witnesses or one man of proven conscience to certify that he has examined the document. Only then may it be transmitted to whomever he wants, in order not to come uncertified into the hands of enemies who could add something false, which could lead to the words of truth being denigrated among simple folk."178 This warning sounds surprisingly precise, but if put together with the criticism Birgitta received, her mistrust of transcribers becomes understandable. The end of the revelation gives an interpretation to it: "The gold of these words contains, as it were, only three teachings. They teach you to fear rightly, to love piously, to desire heaven intelligently. Test the words and see for yourselves, and, if you find anything else there, contradict it!"179 The last part about testing the words refers to the discretio spirituum. Birgitta's Christ is confident that nobody can say anything against the revelation. This way the reader is persuaded not to question the authenticity of the revelation.

Another revelation, *Rev.* II 17, contains an exhortation to preach Birgitta's words. After a lengthy teaching on salvation history, Christ tells Birgitta, "Therefore, tell this man that, given that my mercy has already come, he should bring it out into the light so that people might learn to seek mercy and to beware of the judgment on themselves. Moreover, tell him that, although my words have been written down, still they must first be preached and put into practice." The man at whom the words are aimed remains unnamed. Here it is stressed that it is not enough to merely record the revelations, they must be made public by preaching. As if this was not enough, at the end of the revelation Christ said, "Although my loving words have been written down and should be conveyed to the world, still they cannot have any force until they have been completely brought out into the light." ¹⁸¹

All things considered, it appears as if Birgitta was more interested in seeking publicity for her revelations than keeping them secret. She tried to get her revelations preached publicly. This is in harmony with her greatest concern, which was the salvation of every individual. She was convinced that through her revelations God wanted to help people achieve eternal salvation. In order to make people to listen to her revelations she had to convince people that the authority and power she claimed to lean on, was authentic.

At the end of the year 1349, Birgitta and her friends headed toward Rome to celebrate the jubilee year of 1350. On their way, they stopped in Milan. Birgitta seemed to be also fully confident of her calling abroad. Inspired by the first bishop of Milan, Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), Birgitta received several revelations concerning particularly the archbishop of that time, Giovanni Visconti. Bishop Ambrose appeared to Birgitta complaining about the state of Milan and reassuring Birgitta of her authority:

By the light requested by the friends of God I mean a divine revelation made in the world in order that God's love might be renewed in human hearts and his justice not be forgotten or neglected. Therefore, because of his mercy and the prayers of his friends, it has pleased God to call you in the Holy Spirit in order that you may spiritually see, hear, and understand so that you may reveal to others that which you hear in the Spirit according to the will of God. ¹⁸³

Birgitta did not hesitate to declare to the archbishop of Milan or other people in Italy the will of God. In a new country and among new people, the first thing for her was to convince people of her authority.

CHAPTER 7

BIRGITTA AND POWER

The aim of this study has been to analyze how Birgitta established her authority and exercised power in the social context of her time. The emphasis has been on concrete situations that occurred during the early stages of Birgitta's career when she was still in Sweden and tried to influence other people's conduct and make them change their lives. I have treated an individual's ability to act and influence people as a central aspect of power. Power and authority are hard to distinguish. I suggested in the introduction that, in practice, authority means, "to be listened to." Therefore, concerning Birgitta of Sweden, it could be said that if she did not have authority she could not have had power either. Consequently, having authority is a prerequisite for having power. The effects of Birgitta's exercising of power—although hard to measure—can be seen in the actions of people: they changed their conduct according to her proclamations.

Behind Birgitta's exercising of power lay many factors, which have been mapped out in this book in order to better understand how she managed to become an influential visionary in Sweden, before she left for Rome in 1349, and never returned to her native country. The first challenge in Birgitta's early visionary career was to convince other people of the divine grace of visions that she had been given. She saw herself as a mediator between the will of God and ordinary people. Birgitta's transformation to a living saint had already begun during her marriage to Ulf Gudmarsson. She performed her visionary piety in more or less public situations so that those who saw it—family, friends, and servants, for example—could observe and recognize it. She probably also encouraged and inspired many other people to live more piously. In this way, Birgitta gradually convinced those around her of her divine gift.

The decisive moment that made Birgitta embrace religion with greater intensity than before was the birth of her youngest child Cecilia at the

end of the 1330s. She thought that Mary had helped her in the delivery, and this special favor of Mary's became public knowledge. The same happened with the prayers that Birgitta claimed she received from Mary. These prayers can, probably, also be dated to the time of her marriage. Through the prayers Birgitta made it known that she wished to live a more pious life and desired to work for the salvation of other people. The prayers also indicate that Birgitta considered family an obstacle in her path toward a more religious life. However, piety could also be practiced within family life. In this spirit, Birgitta and Ulf made pilgrimages both in the vicinity and to Spain. Ulf's death in 1344 freed Birgitta from the ties of marriage. She made her transformation from a wife to a bride of Christ public by removing the ring she had received from her dying husband and moving to the vicinity of the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra. A new phase in her life began. As a widow, she was able to dedicate more time to the practice of piety. With an urge to work for the salvation of other people, Birgitta now enthusiastically entered the religious field.

Ulf Gudmarsson had been influential and widely known in Sweden. Birgitta was worried about his fate after death and was relieved when Ulf visited her through a revelation. The revelation painted a rather pious picture of Ulf's life. Through the revelation, Ulf wished that Birgitta and their family have masses celebrated and sermons read for his soul in purgatory. In this way, Birgitta's revelation became public knowledge and showed that she was a good wife, and that Ulf had been a pious man. With this revelation, Birgitta influenced people's views regarding her dead husband. At the same time, with her revelation about Ulf, she showed part of the revelations' power: even the dead could speak through them.

Birgitta was seriously concerned with virginity, which from Late Antiquity onward was regarded as the requirement for the highest status women could achieve in the field of religion. Birgitta sought to compensate for her bodily shortcoming, the lack of virginity, with ascetic practices. She soon found a solution: to emphasize obedience instead of virginity. She found support for this idea in the lives of two recent saints: Elizabeth of Hungary and Marie d'Oignies. Elizabeth's model was most significant in the beginning of Birgitta's visionary life. Gradually, Birgitta distanced herself from Elizabeth, and Marie d'Oignies's ascetic mode of saintly life became increasingly important for her. Both these saints showed that it was possible to live a saintly life even if married, and Elizabeth's example as a recent saint proved that this was even possible for a mother. The stories about these two women were famous in Sweden in the 1340s and through them people learnt what constituted a saintly life. These shared beliefs were decisive for establishing Birgitta's

saintliness: people recognized the same saintly features they knew from the stories of Elizabeth and Marie in Birgitta and her revelations.

Both Elizabeth and Marie had close relations with their confessors. This probably inspired Birgitta to seek a learned confessor for herself. In her *Life*, Elizabeth's obedience to her confessor Konrad of Marburg was unconditional. Marie was more independent: her utmost authority was her guardian angel, whom she was compelled to obey more than her confessor. The latter kind of authority that supersedes other, earthly, authorities can be found in Birgitta's use of her revelations as well. Although she and her hagiographers stressed her obedience, Birgitta considered her revelations to be of greater authority than the authority of her confessors. In addition to the influence of Marie d'Oignies, the ascetics from Late Antiquity gave Birgitta further ideas of how to gain authority and power. Birgitta expressed her asceticism openly in public and made her new way of life manifest both in her conduct and in her outward appearance.

The vision that called Birgitta to a new life became a crucial moment in her conversion after her husband's death. There are several versions of this so-called calling vision in the sources. The long version of Birgitta's calling vision is, as I have argued above, largely a literary fiction. It contains elements from various incidents in Birgitta's life, and its purpose was to bear witness to Birgitta's authenticity as a visionary in the canonization process. The role of Master Mathias was emphasized in the longer version in order to prove Birgitta's obedience and humility. The shorter version of the calling vision is earlier and closer to Birgitta's own descriptions. It underlined the change in Birgitta's life: she transformed from a widow to a bride of Christ. It also convinced her to write her revelations more systematically than she had done earlier.

Birgitta needed help in the recording of her revelations. She probably had some monks or brothers from the monastery of Alvastra aid her before she persuaded Subprior Peter to become her assistant. In trying to recruit Peter to the task as a translator, she used her revelations in a way that could be called persistent persuasion or even manipulation. With the help of Peter, she started to record her revelations in Latin around 1344.

Birgitta reacted to her calling to be the bride of Christ with intensity and exhibited that fervor to other people as well. Through the mystical pregnancy, which she experienced one Christmastime, Birgitta showed to the people surrounding her that God had chosen her, just like he had chosen Mary. To legitimize the pregnancy, the possibility of a demonic illusion had to be eliminated. Therefore, the sources emphasize the confessors' role in determining whether the experience came from a good or bad spirit. However, more than that, the experience gave Birgitta

an opportunity to show her confessors that she had received the divine grace of experiencing the Christ child inside her. By feeling him inside her, Birgitta resembled Mary, who was a virgin. Hence, the mystical pregnancy could be interpreted as Birgitta's way of "fixing" her lack of virginity. This explanation can be supported by the fact that Birgitta hastened to interpret the experience herself through a revelation she received soon afterward. The experience itself and the interpretation convinced her close friends, particularly Master Mathias and Subprior Peter, of her authority as a living saint. Thus, *imitatio Mariae* was for Birgitta an important way to reconstruct her gender toward maternal virginity. This case demonstrates particularly clearly how Birgitta made creative use of the prevailing possibilities of the culture in which she lived in order to transform herself from a mother of eight to a virginal woman. At the same time, her holiness and therefore her authority increased.

Public performance was part of Birgitta's means of convincing other people about her sanctity. She argued that she did not need the interpretation of human beings because her revelations were a higher authority for her. Yet, she needed other people to agree that she had the gift of revelations *ex beneficio*. It was not enough that she herself was convinced of their divine origins; she had to persuade others to believe that as well. To borrow Pierre Bourdieu's concept, in this way Birgitta increased her "spiritual capital" and gained authority. Birgitta first convinced the people around her, and her learned confessors guaranteed with their collaboration and approval that Birgitta was an authentic visionary.

In his testimony, as well as in other writings, Prior Peter constantly downplayed his own role as Birgitta's close collaborator and underlined the role of the more educated Mathias, who had a reputation of being capable of discerning the spirits. Nevertheless, the link between this ability and Birgitta's calling vision was made later in order to promote her canonization. It is even possible to claim that Master Mathias gained his reputation as a specialist in discerning spirits through Birgitta. In practice, Birgitta wanted to recruit Mathias for two reasons: because of his learning and his ability to preach to wide audiences. Birgitta saw preaching as an effective way to spread the messages she received from the heavenly realm. She won Mathias over to her side because their relationship consisted of mutual assistance. Birgitta encouraged Mathias in his moments of despair, and Mathias helped Birgitta make her revelations publicly known. His role was significant when Birgitta's revelations, especially those concerning the war between England and France and the crusade against Novgorod, were presented to the theological committee in 1346-1347. With the help of Mathias, Birgitta created new networks, consisting of influential clerical and secular leaders.

As is often maintained, the manifestation of power demands noticeable resistance. Birgitta was no exception. She met resistance from both secular and clerical directions. Some monks and brothers in the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra did not approve of Birgitta's way of practicing piety. Birgitta answered her critics through revelations, which she claimed time after time proved her critics wrong. In these cases, Birgitta often used the power of knowledge: she claimed that she knew the hidden thoughts or sins of her critics. Birgitta often resorted to using threats as well. She declared that something terrible would happen, and the critic would be damned for ever if he did not repent.

In the case of Brother Gerekinus, Birgitta used a method that could be called psychological manipulation. Birgitta usually appealed to the feelings of guilt in the cases of her critics. When the knights criticized her, Birgitta threatened them with hell. The sources bear a strong hagiographic flavor when describing these cases; however, it is safe to say that in modern language, Birgitta's method of confronting her critics could be called psychological manipulation or even violence. Some of the criticism Birgitta received was simply due to her gender and the prevailing misogynistic views on women in general. She was seen to trespass beyond the women's sphere. Yet, I would argue that resistance was not the main way in which Birgitta's power was manifested. Her exercising of power was much more versatile, as the following example shows.

Birgitta had gained the status of living saint in Sweden and people sought her advice on many problems such as exorcisms. Many were particularly worried about their dead relatives' fate in the hereafter. Birgitta's contacts with this realm therefore made her especially appealing to these people. She used her knowledge of hell and purgatory to exhort the relatives of the deceased to change their way of life. She not only answered people's requests but also, without anyone's asking, actively told people about her visits to purgatory.

It added to Birgitta's *fama* that the royal couple of Sweden, Magnus Eriksson and Blanche of Namur, were sincerely attached to her. They followed her advice in most cases and tried to please God by doing as Birgitta instructed. Birgitta was fearless and frank in her way of speaking to the royal couple. She especially demanded that Magnus fulfill the responsibilities of the king. Obviously, the king also used Birgitta and her revelations to legitimate his actions. The crusade to Novgorod is a good example of that; the king listened to Birgitta carefully as long it suited him. Birgitta's frankness as regards the royal couple probably had an impact on how people saw her in general. Her affinity with the king and the queen increased her reputation and authority. However, she was also criticized because she commented on political as well as spiritual matters.

Some had lost their jobs because the king had listened to Birgitta's advice. Her status as a living saint was therefore constantly questioned.

Birgitta's idea to establish a monastery with a new rule shows how useful the visionary gift was to her. She probably received the idea of a new monastery in Vadstena before 1346 and before she had experienced any revelations about the new rule. Yet, Birgitta seems to have been deeply frustrated with all the existing rules, and her dissatisfaction produced a new rule, Regula Salvatoris, that was rooted in the tradition of older rules. Judging from the rule, it seems that Birgitta did not trust men's abilities to rule. Therefore, the abbess of the new monastery was in charge of the whole monastery. The new rule may also reflect a broader dissatisfaction among women with the old rules. Although the sources seldom mention women near Birgitta by name, she probably had many aristocratic and servant women of Sweden near her, who were interested in living a cloistered life. With her revelations about Vadstena and the new rule, Birgitta sought to provide those women and herself with the future they wished to have. These aristocratic women provided Birgitta with an influential network and helped her to both establish and maintain her position of power. The new monastery was established only after Birgitta's death and Vadstena Abbey was dedicated in 1384.

These are the main lines of how Birgitta exercised power in practice. As a by-product, my inquiry also offers a more nuanced picture of the beginning of Birgitta's life as a widow. I have argued earlier that the death of her husband Ulf must have happened in 1344. The committee of theologians gave their approval to Birgitta about two years later. Subprior Peter and Master Mathias had different roles than has previously been thought; Subprior Peter was from the beginning in charge of translating Birgitta's revelations and Master Mathias helped Birgitta publicize them. The initiative seems to have come from Birgitta herself, but evidently the recording and translating of the revelations became their joint project.

One of the major findings in this study is that Birgitta started to establish the authority of a living saint long before she became a widow. Through different performances, she made people recognize and believe in her spiritual abilities. She acted in many public fields, particularly in political, spiritual, and domestic ones. She played in different fields simultaneously, and the fields often overlapped. For example, when she used her revelations to promote an end to the war between England and France and the crusade against Novgorod, she had to persuade the clerics, the king, and even her relatives, like her brother Israel, to back her plans.

Birgitta was concerned with an individual's salvation in the next world and she sought to direct people's behavior in the right direction in order to help them gain salvation. If Birgitta's actions are reviewed in light of Michel Foucault's idea of pastoral power, Birgitta's power comes close to that of priests. Like those having pastoral power, as Foucault defined it, Birgitta also wanted people to change their lives for good. Birgitta did not have the priestly means of confession to gain knowledge of the conscience of people, but she used her revelations in a similar way: she revealed secret thoughts and claimed to have information about the deceased. As for Foucault's suggestion that part of pastoral power is the readiness to sacrifice oneself, this aspect may not be typical for Birgitta, but it is worth noting that she manifested through her asceticism that she would prefer even to die, but out of obedience to her confessors she would moderate her ascetic practices. Birgitta's revelations resemble sermons and she was instructed repeatedly through her revelations that they should be preached. Preaching was the privilege of priests ex officio; Birgitta could not take the role. Therefore, she actively worked to have the revelations preached as God's words and exhorted priests to make them public in their sermons.

Claudia Rapp outlined three types of episcopal authority in her book Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition; I suggest that Birgitta had used all three. First, she had the spiritual authority, which in her case coincided with the grace received ex beneficio. Although it could exist independently of its recognition by others, but in order to exercise power it had to be recognized. Second, with the help of the ascetic authority, Birgitta made her lifestyle known to others and built her fame. Third, the pragmatic authority based on action easily overlaps with the ascetic authority. Birgitta's success in her actions was crucial for gaining this kind of authority. For example, through exorcisms or messages from the dead, Birgitta benefited others, and when she was successful, her authority increased. The fourth type of authority that could be added to these forms of episcopal authority would be the authority of knowledge. Through her revelations, Birgitta had access to private knowledge and this became power, which she did not hesitate to use.

To sum up, Birgitta's power seems very similar to that of priests and ascetics. Common to all is that they demanded interaction with other people and audiences. Because Birgitta did not have power and authority ex officio, she had to persuade people to believe in her powers. She wanted to do that because she was convinced of her mission and sought to make people change their lives. While doing this, she moved from the domestic field to the fields of religion and politics. The interaction with other people and her activity in many fields meant that she also exposed herself to power dynamics. This meant that she sometimes met resistance. This resistance seems to have stimulated more than depressed her.

Birgitta had to establish authority first in order to exercise power. She did this with the help of her habitus and continual performances. Gradually she gained the status of a living saint, which gave her authority, which she then maintained by continuing the saintly performances. In most cases, Birgitta exercised power in fields that did not contain any conflict of interests. Her ways to influence people were most often inducement, flattery, and threats. In conflict situations, her usual strategy of confronting her opponents was frank speech, which often contained manipulation and threats. Although Birgitta did not have direct power like the king or the bishop had, she was able to exercise power indirectly. Her influence was evident to both the king and the bishops. They listened to her and often did as she told them. In addition, Birgitta was listened to by other people as well; servants, monks, and priests as well as her lady friends were eager to hear what she had to say. Many of them were also ready to change their lives.

Birgitta's holiness in action, her exercising of power, happened almost always in close cooperation with other people. Thus, in Amy Allen's terms her power was an example of the type of "power-with." However, as Allen has already noted, the three types of power—power-over, power-to, and power-with—often intertwine. This was actually what usually happened in Birgitta's exercising of power. Acting together with certain people made it possible for her to exercise power-over other people.

This investigation has concentrated on the time when Birgitta produced the majority of her preserved revelations—the years 1344–1349. During this time, she established her status as a living saint. When she left for Rome in 1349 the messages of her revelations had reached many people in Sweden and Birgitta had an unusual authority for a woman. The experiences of these years had made her a self-confident bride of Christ and she traveled to Rome full of hope: the pope would return his residence from Avignon to Rome and Birgitta would have the *Regula Salvatoris* approved.

How to Study Power and Saints

Note on the Sources and References: References to the revelations are given in form *Rev.* I 12; *Book* I, 71, meaning, for example, *Liber I* of the revelations, chapter 12, the corresponding page in the English translation. Passages from the *Revelaciones Extravagantes* are marked with *Ex.* The acts of Birgitta's canonization process are given as *Acta*. However, the following parts of *Acta*, Birgitta's life, the so-called process *Vita*, is referred to *PVita* and Prior Peter's testimony, *Deposicio copiosissima domini prioris de Aluastro*, is identified as *DCP*. The idea is to make it easier for the reader to follow which part of the acts is being referred. The page number that follows refers to Isak Collijn's edition, 1924–1931.

I have used existing translations from Latin into English, when possible. Rev. I–VII (Books I–VII) are translated by Denis Searby in The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume 1–3. Rev. V and Rev. VII. Translations of PVita are by Albert Kezel (Birgitta of Sweden, Life and Selected Revelations). Other translations are as indicated in the endnotes or, if there is no printed translation, the translations are mine. The translation of The Life of Marie d'Oignies by Jacques de Vitry is by Margot H. King and Supplement to the Life by Thomas de Cantimpré is by Hugh Feiss. Both can be found in Two Lives of Marie d'Oignies.

- 1. Heffernan (1988, 14).
- 2. Williams-Krapp (2002, 208-210).
- 3. Kleinberg (1989, 186).
- 4. In English, "Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century," see, Zarri (1996).
- 5. Zarri (1996, 221). Zarri has examined several Italian holy women in the sixteenth century who seemed to have made a career of being a saint (257).
- Kleinberg (1992, 6). Barcellona suggests the term "self-construction of sanctity" meaning a person who is aware of her or his would-be sanctity and seeks to act accordingly. This term closely resembles the concept of the living saint (1999, 36–37).
- 7. Sources regarding Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), the German abbess, contain many instances of the abbess in conflict with clerical or secular authorities (Salmesvuori 2000). I expected this to be the case with Birgitta of Sweden as well but soon realized that since she did not have

- any official position—as an abbess, for example—she did not find herself in a similar situation as Hildegard, whose disagreements with authorities often concerned administrative matters.
- 8. Mulder-Bakker (2005).
- 9. For the most recent use of the concept of the living saint, see Heinonen (2007) and Herzig (2008).
- 10. Riches and Salih (2002, 4). The classic texts among scholars for defining gender in historical analyses are the writings of Joan Wallach Scott (see, e.g., Scott 1988). Very few now deny the significance of gender or call it anachronistic. There are, however, a few who do. Dick Harrison interestingly discusses Hans-Werner Goetz's idea that gender should not be overemphasized (1998, 28–29). Useful collections, besides Gender and Holiness. Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe, ed. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih, that apply the gender perspective are, e.g., Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages, ed. Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl, and Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski.
- 11. On widows and power in the Middle Ages, see Haluska-Rausch (2005, 153–168). On men and "maleness" in the Middle Ages, see *Medieval Masculinities*. *Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees, and *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler.
- 12. See The Prime of Their Lives: Wise Old Women in Pre-industrial Society, ed. A. B. Mulder-Bakker and R. Nip.
- 13. Mulder-Bakker (2004b, x).
- 14. Mulder-Bakker (2004b, xx-xxii). Mulder-Bakker suggested that the menopause occurred earlier in the Middle Ages, when women were around 40. Both the earlier and more recent scholarship on menopause shows that 50 is the common age. It could occur between the age of 35 and 60 (Post 1971, 83–87; Youngs 2006, 172–173).
- 15. Blumenfeld-Kosinski (2004, 7).
- 16. Youngs (2006, 148-152).
- 17. Mann (1986, 2).
- 18. See, e.g., Women and Power in the Middle Ages, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, and by the same editors, Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages; Aers and Staley (1996); Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi; Gendering the Middle Ages, ed. Pauline Stafford and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker; The Experience of Power in Medieval France, 950–1350, ed. Robert F. Berkhofer, Alan Cooper, and Adam J. Kosto. Concerning authority, the works of Ronald Surtz and Alison Weber on women in Late Medieval Spain have been especially inspiring for me (Surtz 1990; 1995; Weber 1990).
- 19. Aers and Staley (1996, 7).
- 20. Bornstein (1996, 1-2).

- 21. Erler and Kowaleski (2003, 9).
- 22. Shifting the emphasis from "women" to "gender" brings a wider field of research to focus and is more inclusive than "women."
- 23. Some of the most important studies are, Medieval Women. Dedicated and Presented to Professor Rosalind M. T. Hill on the Occasion of Her Seventieth Birthday, ed. Derek Baker; Dronke (1984); Bynum (1987); Ennen (1989); Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages, ed. Judith M. Bennett et al.; Framing Medieval Bodies, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin; Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: Religious and Artistic Renaissance, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley; Newman (1995; 2003); Ferrante (1997); Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker; Women and Faith. Catholic Religious Life in Italy form Late Antiquity to the Present, ed. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri; Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide; New Trends in Feminine Spirituality. The Holy Women of Liège and Their Impact, ed. Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan Browne; Hollywood (2002); Voices in Dialogue. Reading Women in the Middle Ages, ed. Olson and Kerby-Fulton.
- 24. Lukes (1986, 4-5); Allen (1999, 121).
- 25. Garrard (1983, 105-121, 107); Engelstad (2006).
- 26. Mann (1986, 6). McGuire's definition of power and authority bears resemblance to this idea: power aims at influencing and changing a given condition and authority means right to exercise power (1991, 12).
- 27. "Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber 1968 I:53). Weber, despite being one of the most influential scholars in the field of sociology of religion, was operating under the assumption made in his *The Sociology of Religion* that women were receptive to religious but not political prophecy. As Diane Watt notes, this statement "does not bear scrutiny" (1997, 3). Regarding resistance in Foucault's writings, see Foucault (1982; 1988). Concerning power and resistance, see also J. M. Barbalet, who raises the interesting point that even quite different approaches "share an implicit assumption that the concept of 'resistance' is axiomatic and requires no further specification" (1985, 536–537).
- 28. Foucault (1983, 208-210).
- 29. Foucault (1983, 214). Foucault saw that this kind of power is applied today as well, with certain modifications: for example, instead of desiring salvation in the next world, people are ensuring it in this world. For the notion of practice in Michel Foucault's thinking, see Alhanen (2007).
- 30. Foucault (1988, 11-12); Deveaux (1994, 233).
- 31. Malina (1995, 170).
- 32. Weber already emphasized the importance of the power of the leader being recognized (1968 I:215–216).
- 33. Garrard (1983, 108-109).

- 34. Thompson (1991, 31).
- 35. Bourdieu (2001, 170; emphasis original).
- 36. Ibid., 170. Bourdieu also adopted and developed many of Max Weber's theories. See, Verter (2004).
- 37. Bourdieu (2001, 12–14); Verter (2004, 188). Bourdieu's concept of habitus goes beyond the conventional dictionary definition.
- 38. Verter (2003, 153).
- 39. Verter (2003, 156). On applying Bourdieu's concepts to the research of medieval themes, see also Graves (1989, 297–301).
- 40. Allen (1999, 123–129).
- 41. Rapp (2005, 16-22).
- 42. Jantzen (1995, 169).
- 43. McGinn (1998, 17).
- 44. Ibid., 21–22; Bériou (1998, 136–141); Lehmijoki-Gardner (1999); Kerby-Fulton (2005).
- 45. On the discerning of spirits, see Caciola (2003); Elliott (2004, 233, 300–302); Anderson (2011).
- 46. McGinn (2007, 17-18).
- 47. Newman (2005a, 7-9).
- 48. Allen (1999, 131-135).
- 49. Schechner (2000, 4).
- 50. For the history of performance studies, see Bell (1997, 73–79). The classic introduction to performance studies is Richard Schechner's *Performance Studies*. *An Introduction*. *Third Edition*, 2013.
- 51. Miller (1994, 137); Brakke (2003, 390). Mary Suydam and Beverly Kienzle have applied performance theory convincingly to the study of beguines and medieval sermons; Stavroula Constantinou has done the same to the lives of holy women in Late Antiquity (Suydam 1999b; 2004; 2007; Kienzle 2002; Constantinou 2005). In 2008, Elina Gertsman edited the fine volume *Visualizing Medieval Performance. Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, which contains 16 articles exploring various medieval cases from the performance perspective.
- 52. Suydam (1999a, 5).
- 53. Ibid., 11-12.
- 54. Ibid., 19.
- 55. Suydam (2004, 144).
- 56. Ibid., 152; emphasis original.
- 57. Suydam (1999a, 15-16).
- 58. Ibid., 16.
- 59. On the textual history of Birgitta's writings, see the introductions to the editions of her revelations: Undhagen (1978); Jönsson (1998); Aili (1992; 2002); Bergh (1967; 1971; 1991; 2001); Hollman (1956); Eklund (1972; 1975; 1991). In fact, after the 46 years it took for the preparation of the scholarly editions, some of the older editions' introductions could benefit from rewriting. The same is true of Collijn's edition of the canonization proceedings. Now that all the revelations and other

- materials exist in modern editions, it would be interesting to write a single, up-to-date, investigation of the relations of different texts and editorial layers. There are many unanswered questions concerning the different versions of Birgitta's lives, for example. On the nature of the sources, see also Klockars (1966); Morris (1982; 1993a; 1993b; 1996; 1999a, 3–11; 2006); Sahlin (2001, 19–33).
- 60. "Home of literacy" means that the often-illiterate visionary woman needed the learned theologian to record her visions (Elliott 1999, 168). For the roles of a confessor and a visionary woman, see especially *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpretators*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney; Elliott (2004); Coakley (2006).
- 61. The exact year when Peter of Alvastra became Prior of Alvastra is not known. This probably happened at the end of the 1340s. Therefore, I refer to him as Subprior Peter when alluding to the time before the end of the 1340s. Usually, when I designate him as Prior Peter, I am referring to him and his sayings in the canonization materials, which were produced after Birgitta's death.
- 62. For Master Peter and *Cantus sororum*, see Servatius (1990; 2003); Nilsson (1990); Vuori (2011).
- 63. Ex. 48.
- 64. Ex. 49.
- 65. Helge Nordahl's book in Norwegian, *Syv birgittinere* [Seven Birgittines], contains short biographies of Birgitta's four confessors: Master Mathias, Prior Peter of Alvastra, Master Peter of Skänninge, and Alfonso Pecha. In addition, there are biographies of Bishop Hemming of Åbo, Bishop Nils Hermansson of Linköping, and Birgitta's daughter Katarina. Nordahl's (2003) book is insightful and emphasizes the importance of Birgitta's friends during her life. It would have been even more valuable, had he made more use of the latest scholarship concerning Birgitta. For Alfonso Pecha, see Jönsson (1989) and Gilkær (1993).
- 66. Rev. III contains 34 revelations of which at least 14 stem from Sweden of the 1340s. Rev. IV contains 144 revelations, 18 of which can be dated to Birgitta's Swedish years, 33 are difficult to date, and the rest stem from the years 1349–1373. Rev. VI contains 122 revelations of which 43 seem to stem from the 1340s and 31 are difficult to date. Rev. VIII was edited by Alfonso Pecha and 47 of its 58 revelations are most probably from the time before Birgitta left Sweden. The Extravagantes contains 116 revelations and approximately 78 of these stem from Birgitta's time in Sweden.
- 67. Bergh (1971, 13-33); Nyberg (1990, 21-27).
- 68. Rev. V is the most important source concerning Birgitta's views on learned men.
- 69. For example, *Rev.* I 13, 17, 21, 23, 28, 32, 41, 52, and 60 are targeted at certain priests and noble men. Only in *Rev.* I 16, the protagonist is a woman. In the other revelation books, there are roughly over one hundred revelations aimed at specific individuals. For example, in *Rev.* III

- there are 13, in *Rev.* IV there are 8, and in *Rev.* VI there are 33 revelations, which seem to have been written with specific individuals in mind. In *Rev.* VIII, most of the revelations are directed at a king, usually Magnus Eriksson. *Ex.* has at least 26 revelations aimed at individual people. Many of the revelations are directed at Birgitta herself.
- 70. *Acta*, 84–85. According to her *Vita*, people asked Birgitta about some matter and after a few days she gave the answer in writing.
- 71. Jan Öberg has shown that in the chronological order at least *Rev.* VI 63, VIII 47, IV 78, IV 33, 79–80, VII 5, VIII 51, IV 139–140, VII 18–19, VII 28–29, IV 142–143 seem to have been originally letters (1969, 12).
- 72. Concerning the textual history of the canonization acts, see especially Collijn (1931, I–LV), and concerning the history of the canonization acts, see Nyberg (2004).
- 73. On Birgitta as a channel, see Piltz (1993, 78–79). Piltz observed that Henry of Ghent (d. 1293) used "the image *canalis* of the human agent" in a very similar way as Birgitta saw her role as a recipient of divine messages. Diane Watt fittingly uses the term "secretary of God" for women prophets (1997).
- 74. Schück (1901); Kraft (1929); Kezel (1990); Ellis (1993); Sahlin (2001, 25–26).
- 75. Klockars (1966, 44–56). Tryggve Lundén published a translation of Birgitta's revelations in 1956. He also dated most of the revelations and many of his recommendations still stand. In some cases, Birgit Klockars has suggested useful improvements for the dates and identifications of the persons whom the revelations concern (Lundén 1958; Klockars 1966, 54–56; 1976). In the recent translation of Birgitta's seven revelation books, the dating mostly follows Lundén's and Klockars's suggestions. The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden. Vols. 1–3: Books I–III; IV–V; VI–VII, trans. Denis Searby, introduction and notes by Bridget Morris.
- 76. Bergh (2002, 121).
- 77. Undhagen (1978, 28-29).
- 78. Schmid (1940); Klockars (1966, 29-44); Piltz (1993); Sahlin (2001).
- 79. Dinzelbacher (1981, 78-89; 1991); Newman (2005a, 6-14).
- 80. For the use of saints' lives in historical research, see Goodich (1982); Weinstein and Bell (1982); Delooz (1983); Dinzelbacher (1988); Heffernan (1988, 16–17); Kleinberg (1989; 1992); Lifshitz (1994); Vauchez (1997).
- 81. My approach is quite similar to, for example, that of Aviad Kleinberg, who describes his approach as follows: "While I found many theoretical 'systems' useful, and have used them in my work, I have not become a devotee of any of them" Kleinberg (1992, ix–x). For a similar approach, see also Voaden (1999).
- 82. Gallagher and Greenblatt (2001, 14–15). The "illuminating detail" closely resembles Carlo Ginzburg's use of the "clue" Ginzburg (1989 [in Italian 1986]).
- 83. Gallagher and Greenblatt (2001, 16-17).
- 84. Ibid.

- 85. I borrow the phrase "the touch of the real" from Gallagher and Greenblatt (2001).
- 86. Ringler (1988, 178–200); Heinonen (2007, 9–11). In addition to Siegfried Ringler, Ursula Peters has argued for the literary nature of the mystical texts whereas Peter Dinzelbacher has argued for the more historical approach of visionary texts (Dinzelbacher 1988; Peters 1988a; 1988b). Werner Williams-Krapp emphasizes the literary genre but also sees the significance of the historical context (2004). In English-speaking scholarship, concerning women in Late Antiquity, Elisabeth A. Clark has argued interestingly for the linguistic turn and the "vanishing of the lady," meaning that the sources do not reveal anything about the historical women (1998; 2004). Clark has evoked a vivid discussion concerning the relationship of the social reality and the textual sources. See, e.g., Matthews (2001) and Brakke (2003). This discussion is, in my view, applicable to medieval studies as well.
- 87. Spiegel (2005, 1-31).
- 88. Ibid., 2-3.
- 89. Spiegel (1990, 73).
- 90. Spiegel (2005) introduces many of them in *Practicing History. New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, which she has edited and written the introduction for. Concerning linguistic turn, see also Spiegel (2009) and Surkis (2012).
- 91. Spiegel (2005, 25).
- 92. Spiegel (1990, 84); Heinonen (2007, 11-12).
- 93. Heinonen (2007, 12).
- 94. Spiegel (1990, 85).
- 95. On the ambiguous historicity of the visionary texts, see Newman (2003, 26–30, 299–304). About the historicity of the sources concerning medieval women, see also Bynum (1987, 7–9; 1992, 11–26).
- 96. Newman (2005a, 2-3).
- 97. Williams-Krapp (2002, 207).
- 98. Kleinberg (1989, 183–187). Susanne Bürkle discusses one typical feature for the new lives: a certain intimacy. The close relationship between the writer and the protagonist can be read in the *Vita*. One purpose of the emphasis on familiarity and intimacy was to guarantee the authenticity of the life (1999, 201–202). In Birgitta's *Vita*, her confessors, especially Master Mathias and Alfonso Pecha, are present in the text as if to guarantee the *Vita*'s authenticity. The authors themselves, Prior Peter and Master Peter seem to be left in the background. The certain intimacy, which, for example, can be seen in the life of Marie d'Oignies between her and Jacques de Vitry is lacking in Birgitta's *Vita*. However, the life of Marie d'Oignies and the life of Elizabeth of Hungary apparently had an impact on the writers of Birgitta's *Vita*. Marie's *Vita* had an even greater impact, since it became a prototype of the new sort of lives in the fourteenth century. For the new lives, see especially Delooz (1983); Kleinberg (1989); Bürkle (1999, 193–233); Klaniczay (2004); Coakley (2006, 68–88).

- 99. Kleinberg (1989, 187-188).
- 100. Delooz (1983, 191–193); Kleinberg (1989, 189–191). Concerning canonization policy in the thirteenth century, see also Goodich (1981; 1982, 21–68).
- 101. Delooz made the distinction between real and constructed saints. Real saints were often recent saints and there was a lot of historical data available about them. Constructed saints were remodeled saints, so that sometimes nothing of the real was left or there was no historical information about them. Delooz also emphasized that all saints are in a way constructed, because saints are saints for other people and "they are remodeled in the collective representation which is made of them" (1983, 195).
- 102. It would be interesting to investigate the Vita, Revelations, and the canonization acts from the point of view of the emerging Birgittine monastic organization. What significance did they have concerning the new cloister and its sister cloisters? The Birgittine Rule received its first papal approval in 1370, three years before Birgitta's death. The preparations for the new community in Vadstena had begun around 1370 and it would certainly benefit from its founder's sanctity. A fruitful approach to the question could be, for instance, to compare the emerging Birgittine communities with the Dominican communities in Central or Southern Europe in the fourteenth century. In the German context, for example, the question of the function of women's mystical texts, especially Gnadenviten and Nonnenbücher, would be enlightening when investigating the role of Birgitta's Vita and other writings in the new Birgittine communities of sisters and brothers. Especially Ursula Peters's (1988a; 2000) and Susanne Bürkle's (1999) works would illuminate the German situation. The comparison with the Dominican female cloisters would be interesting because Birgitta also inspired women in the Dominican communities as well (Williams and Williams-Krapp 2004, 211-212).
- 103. Morris (1999a). This work should replace the completely outdated biography of Birgitta by Johannes Jørgensen (1954), which was used in scholarly works until the 1990s, for example, in Elliott (1993).
- 104. Interesting dissertations about Birgitta's theology are Fogelqvist (1993) and Stjerna (1994).
- 105. Important works on Birgitta in Swedish are, for example, Nina Sjöberg's dissertation (2003), in which she investigated Birgitta's view on marriage and sexuality and found it to be much more positive than had previously been thought. Carina Nynäs analyzed the images of Birgitta in twentieth-century Swedish biographies in her dissertation from 2006. Birger Bergh has been involved in the editing of Birgitta's revelations for a long time and his vast expertise is obvious in his insightful biography of Birgitta (2002). In addition to these monographs, there are several article collections about Birgitta and her monastery. See, e.g., Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden, Heliga Birgitta—budskapet och förebilden, Studies in St Birgitta and the Brigittine Order 1, Birgitta av

- Vadstena. Pilgrim och profet 1303–1373, and both in Italian and English Santa Brigida: Profeta dei tempi nuovi. For full bibliographic information, see the Bibliography.
- 106. McGuire (1990; 2001; 2005); Elliott (1993); Morris (1993a; 1993b; 1996; 1999b); Sahlin (1993a; 1993b; 1999; 2001); Voaden (1999); Caciola (2003); Newman (2003); Williams and Williams-Krapp (2004).
- 107. Sahlin (2001, 159–168). Sahlin offers an excellent account of the attacks against and defenses of Birgitta and her revelations.
- 108. Few older studies about Birgitta deserve to be mentioned. Birgit Klockars wrote numerous books and articles about Birgitta and her historical context (1960; 1966; 1971; 1973; 1976). She mastered the Birgittine and other contemporary sources admirably and her works are still valuable. Another scholar whose works are still relevant is Bengt Strömberg. His research on Master Mathias is the best available so far. Although in some points out of date, some even older studies about Birgitta are worth mentioning. The studies by Salomon Kraft, Knut Westman, Henrik Schück, Emilia Fogelklou, and Toni Schmid contain important insights especially with regard to the historical settings of Birgitta's life. See Schück (1901); Westman (1911); Kraft (1929); Schmid (1940); Fogelklou (1941); Strömberg (1943; 1944).
- 109. On the use of teleological terms in scholarship, see Freedman and Spiegel (1998, 693).

1 Fama Sanctitatis in the 1340s

- 1. I will touch upon certain themes more thoroughly in subsequent chapters. The most thorough studies about Birgitta's life are written in Swedish by Birgit Klockars (1966; 1971; 1973; 1976) and Birger Bergh (2002). In English the most important scholarly biography is by Bridget Morris (1999a). Claire Sahlin's investigation (2001) into Birgitta also constitutes a valuable English contribution to knowledge of Birgitta's life.
- 2. Regarding medieval Scandinavia in general, see Sawyer and Sawyer (1993). For the politics and administration of Sweden and Norway in the fourteenth century, see Blom (1992, I–II).
- 3. Turku is known also by its Swedish name, Åbo.
- 4. Nuorteva (1997, 36-65).
- 5. Nilsson (1998, 98-110); Morris (1999a, 26-28).
- 6. Klockars (1960, 94-96); Morris (1999a, 24); Pernler (1999, 92-93).
- 7. Morris (1999a, 24-25).
- 8. Ibid., 26.
- 9. The sources from this period are far from complete. Therefore, it is not quite clear how the administration was organized during Magnus's minority (Blom 1992, 40–43).
- 10. Lawmen could also be called judges. They were experts in matters of jurisdiction and were supposed to memorize the law. They were also in charge of the codification of provincial laws, which began in the end of

- the thirteenth century. Around 1347, during King Magnus Eriksson's reign, Sweden got its first *landslag* (state law) (Klockars 1976, 67–75).
- 11. Morris (1999a, 29).
- 12. Ibid., 29-30; Pernler (1999, 95-96).
- 13. For example, Bishop Hemming of Åbo often acted also as a landowner and judge. He was also for some years a member of the king's court in Finland. The bishops were higher ranked than the highest knights; this can be seen, for example, in their right to equip more horsemen than the knights (Klockars 1960, 94–104).
- 14. For the political situation of Sweden after 1349, see especially Blom (1992) and Sawyer and Sawyer (1993). For the political ideals in Vadstena Abbey from 1370, see Berglund (2003). On women in old Norse society, see Jochens (1995).
- 15. Klockars (1976, 24-26); Morris (1999a, 32).
- 16. Klockars (1976, 25).
- 17. PVita, 75–77. See also Prior Peter's testimony DCP, 508–509. Morris provides a thorough analysis of the stories of Birgitta's childhood (1999a, 35–40). I will leave the childhood stories out of my investigation, since they were probably written around 1370, and they bear a strong hagiographic flavor of exaggeration and interpretation. What they certainly show is that Birgitta was held as a devout child. But there is no proof that the stories about Birgitta's childhood would have been circulated while she was still living in Sweden.
- 18. Klockars (1976, 29); Morris (1999a, 30).
- 19. Klockars (1976, 67-75).
- 20. Ibid., 93-100.
- 21. On Scandinavian pilgrimages, see Krötzl (1994).
- 22. Klockars (1976, 85–89). The year of Ulf's death is debated, some scholars consider 1346 as the year of his death. I will return to this question in chapter 3.
- 23. Klockars (1976, 99); Morris (1999b, 160).
- 24. Zarri (1996, 219).
- 25. Ibid., 220.
- 26. On religious life in Sweden during the fourteenth century, see Nilsson (1998) and Pernler (1999).
- 27. DS 3134, 3140, 3156-3157; Klockars (1976, 72-73).
- 28. DCP, 528; Klockars (1976, 73).
- 29. Sundén's idea that Birgitta left Ulvåsa in 1335 in order to punish her husband Ulf for agreeing to the marriage of their daughter Märta and Sigvid Ribbing is not convincing, since Birgitta and Ulf remained at court together (1973, 35). Klockars also finds Sundén's idea improbable (1976, 73).
- 30. E.g., Sundén (1973, 35); Klockars (1976, 86).
- 31. Klockars (1976, 80–82). According to Klockars, Cecilia's birth took place between 1334 and 1341, probably around 1337.
- 32. Diarium Vadstenense, 111; the idea that the child in question was Cecilia stems from the Diarium Vadstenense, which recalls the birth and death of

Cecilia and notes that she was blessed with the best possible midwife, Mary, mother of Christ. The *Diarium* was written in 1399, which was also the year of Cecilia's death. Kezel (1990, 239 n. 26) assumes the child in question was Karl. I find in the note in the *Diarium Vadstenense* that the child was Cecilia more plausible (cf. Klockars 1976, 76; Morris 1999a, 48).

- 33. PVita, 79; LOB, 76.
- 34. Some women who might have been present are, for example, Margareta (Märta) Thuresdotter and Ingeborg Eriksdotter. Margareta Thuresdotter became widow in the same year as Birgitta; she is also a witness in the canonization process as is Ingeborg Eriksdotter and Ingeborg Magnusdotter. Already, all knew Birgitta well in Sweden and witnessed her pious way of life while her husband still lived (*Acta*, 63). Ingeborg Laurensdotter accompanied Birgitta in 1349 to Rome but died in Milan before reaching Rome. Her daughter Juliana Nilsdotter gave a lively testimony about Birgitta's daily practices during her Swedish years. She also mentions that King Magnus Eriksson had heard about Birgitta's fame as a holy woman and invited her many times to get some advice. According to Juliana, this made his relatives and men close to him jealous. All women mentioned above testified that Birgitta had been very active in taking care of sick people, even before the death of her husband (*Acta*, 65–66; *DS* 9466). About the death of Juliana's mother, see *DCP*, 514–515.
- 35. PVita, 78; LOB, 75.
- 36. E.g., Acta, 63, 64, 66.
- 37. PVita, 78; LOB, 75.
- 38. Morris (1996, 178).
- 39. Morris (1999a, 55; 1996). In the Latin corpus there are "The Four Prayers," *Quattuor Oraciones* (QO), which are more sophisticated and polished texts.
- 40. QO, 99-100. Translation from Swedish by Morris (1999a, 55-56).
- 41. See, e.g., Cooper (1996, 144-147).
- 42. Morris (1999a, 53-56).
- 43. Translation from old Swedish by Morris (1996, 183).
- 44. Bynum (1992, 194–198); Morris (1996, 168); McNamer (2010, 43–57, 167–173).
- 45. Rev. IV 94.
- 46. Ibid.
- 47. Ibid.
- 48. Ibid. Lundén places this revelation in the category of undatable revelations (1958, 18). In my opinion this revelation could go back to Birgitta's life as a wife because of its simple and practical advice. It could also stem from her first years as a widow, as suggested by the emphasis on moderation.
- 49. She appears as a witness in *Acta*, 64. According to the acts, in 1377 when she gave her testimony she was 50 years old and had been a widow for 30 years. She spoke in her statement about Birgitta's life before and after Ulf's death. She was about the same age as Birgitta's daughter Katarina.

- 50. Ex. 75; English trans. Morris (1999a, 45).
- 51. Ibid
- 52. "Taking and retaining alienated property" is a theme that seems to recur in the revelations. According to Birgitta, if one knew that some property had been obtained unjustly it was one's duty to see that it was given back to the former owner. See, e.g., Ex. 56.
- 53. Ex. 75; English trans. Morris (1999a, 45).
- 54. Ex. 75; English trans. Morris (1999a, 45-46).
- 55. Morris (1999a, 45-46).
- 56. See, e.g., Rev. IV 93, 113; VI 23-25.
- 57. Nevertheless, if the revelation was about Birgitta, I think that identifying the person as someone other than her probably saved the revelation from being expunged.
- 58. PVita, 80; LOB, 77.
- 59. Concerning celibacy in marriage, see Elliott (1993).
- 60. It is not clear who was serving as their confessor at this time.
- 61. Krötzl (1994, 99-102).
- 62. For details of the pilgrimage, see Salmesvuori (2014).
- 63. *PVita*, 80. For the concept and medieval representatives of chaste marriage, see especially Elliott (1993).
- 64. Acta, 305.
- 65. Klockars (1976, 91).
- 66. DS 3689; Klockars (1976, 91-92).
- 67. The editor of the *PVita*, Collijn, preferred the year 1344 for Ulf's death. For references, see note 71.
- 68. Regarding medieval travelers' final journey, see Labarge (1982, 195).
- 69. Kaelber (2006, 55-57).
- 70. Ekwall (1965; 1973; 1976); Liedgren (1974; 1996); Jönsson (1993).
- 71. DS 3778, 3822; Liedgren (1974, 51).
- 72. Liedgren and Ekwall engage in a lively debate about the year of Ulf Gudmarsson's death (Ekwall 1973; 1976; Liedgren 1974; 1996). Liedgren also commented on Arne Jönssön's notion that in the best manuscripts the confessors wrote 1346 as the year that Ulf died. According to Liedgren, Jönsson might be right but that does not mean that the year was historically the right one. He suggested that the two Peters gave the year 1346 perhaps because it was the first-known date in the history of Vadstena monastery (Liedgren 1996; Jönsson 1993). I would like to add that if the year 1346 was also the year in which Birgitta's revelations were examined by the committee of theologians, it could have affected the date written in the *PVita* in the 1370s. It was the mark of official approval of Birgitta's gift of receiving revelations. It would neatly fill the two-year gap between Birgitta's calling vision and the public examination.
- 73. See also Morris (1999a, 61).
- 74. This latter conclusion is based on the assumption that Birgitta only started to write her revelations after her husband died. It is, naturally, also possible that Birgitta had already been writing her revelations during the

- time Ulf was alive, or that there was a vast production machine behind her, but the sources do not provide anything to support this idea.
- 75. Klockars (1976, 101-102).
- 76. Ex. 56.
- 77. *PVita*, 80; *LOB*, 77. Alfonso Pecha stated in his testimony of 1379 that he had heard from Katarina, Birgitta and Ulf's daughter, that the couple's attitude to sexual matters had been very pure. He said that before Ulf's death they had lived in a celibate marriage for many years. His account seems to fit well with the *PVita*'s description according to which the couple lived in a celibate marriage and planned to enter a monastery (*Acta*, 376–377).

2 Lost Virginity and the Power of Role Models

- 1. Speculum virginum I:1-15, trans. Newman (2001, 271-272).
- 2. Klockars (1966, 218-219, 234-235).
- 3. Mews (2001, 15); Power (2001, 87–91). See especially Seyfarth (1990) and Listen Daughter. The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages, ed. Constant J. Mews.
- 4. *DCP*, 491. Nearly the same text, with minor variations, is found in *Ex.* 96. Birgit Klockars's suggestion that Peter had read from the seventh chapter in which virginity was stressed as the highest state of woman seems plausible (Klockars 1966, 218; Sahlin 2001, 89; Powell 2001, 112).
- 5. Speculum virginum, VII:242.
- 6. Speculum virginum, VI:176-177, 183-184, trans. Mews (2001, 26).
- 7. Mews (2001, 27). Jerome in particular promoted this view, e.g., *Comm. in Mathaeum 2* and letters 49.3, 123.8. Adv. Iovin. I, 3 (Jerome 1892). The idea appeared constantly in the writings of theologians from Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages. Unlike many other theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries, Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) considered only the martyrs to be worthy of the hundredfold fruit, chastity brought the sixtyfold, and marriage the thirtyfold. His view was not widely followed (Bernards 1982 [1955], 40–45).
- 8. Speculum virginum, VII:858-862, trans. Mews (2001, 27).
- 9. Mews (2001, 27).
- 10. Wogan-Browne (1994, 26).
- 11. This book is now in the library of the University of Uppsala. It was produced in Spain but it is not possible to determine exactly when. Thus, it is also possible that Birgitta acquired the book first during her stay in Rome (Klockars 1966, 27–28). Morris thinks that Birgitta probably received the book as a gift from her Spanish confessor, Alfonso Pecha, in the 1360s (Morris 1999b, 162). The book dates from the early four-teenth century, thus both suggestions are possible.
- 12. Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem, PL, 184, 1199–1306; McGovern-Mouron (2000, 88–89). Regarding the meaning of the book to Birgitta, see Klockars (1966, 25–26, 217).

- 13. Klockars (1966, 25–26). Perhaps this was emphasized slightly more in the *Liber de modo bene vivendi*.
- 14. Bernards (1982, 43–44). Birgitta was familiar with the ideas of the fifth century's most important theologians, such as Augustine and Jerome. She spoke especially warmly about Jerome (d. 420) whom she called "the friend of widows" (*Rev.* IV 21). But Jerome also considered virginity to be woman's highest state and strongly influenced the Christian teaching on women. As the creation of new martyrs ceased in the fifth century, it was Jerome in particular who started to reward virgins, as "bloodless" martyrs, with the hundredfold fruit (Bernards 1982, 45).
- 15. Nina Sjöberg also found that Birgitta moderated *Speculum*'s views regarding the hierarchical relationship of the three states. This can be seen especially in Birgitta's eagerness to stress the meaning of obedience instead of the meaning of virginity (2003, 73).
- 16. Mews (2001, 2).
- 17. See note 34 in chapter 1.
- 18. Bynum (1992, 194).
- 19. PVita, 75–77; see also Morris (1999a, 36–40). Scholars have sometimes taken these stories as historical facts, for example, Dyan Elliott, who writes, "She had an ardent desire to preserve her virginity by the time she was seven, but she was married against her will at thirteen" (1993, 210–211). I find that these childhood stories might reflect the adult Birgitta's—or even more her supporters'—ideas about a saintly childhood, but to argue that a seven-year-old wishes to preserve her virginity is not plausible.
- 20. PVita, 79; LOB, 76.
- 21. Mulder-Bakker (2005, 37).
- 22. Concerning women and the conversion of Scandinavia, see Sawyer (1990, 263–281) and Karras (1997, 100–114).
- 23. See Klockars (1966); Piltz (2000, 39–47). Regarding positive role models for medieval women in general, see Blamires (1997), especially the chapter "Profeminine Role-Models."
- 24. Westman (1911, 151-259); Klockars (1966, 227).
- 25. Klockars (1966, 226-228).
- E.g., Strömberg (1944, 160); Klockars (1966, 17); Morris (1999a, 42, 174); Sahlin (2001, 42n).
- 27. In 1227, after a successful career in the church, Jacques de Vitry came to Oignies and consecrated Marie's bones and placed her relics in a shrine. He also granted an indulgence to all who came to revere them (Bolton 1978, 271). At that time, this was considered equivalent to a local canonization (Mulder-Bakker 2006, 10).
- 28. Elliott (2004, 47-48).
- 29. Morris (1999b, 167).
- 30. Acta, 66.
- 31. Carlquist (1996, 61). On the influence of *Legenda Aurea* in the Middle Ages, see Kleinberg (2008, 239–277).

- 32. Klockars (1966, 165-176); see also Härdelin (2003, 34).
- 33. So called when named patrilinearly after her father, King Andrew II of Hungary, she is also known as Elizabeth of Thuringia, when named through her husband, the landgrave Ludwig of Thuringia.
- 34. Schmid (1940, 142); Morris (1999b, 163n).
- 35. Klockars (1966, 49). Aili (1986, 86–87) suspects that this might be only Alfonso Pecha's interpretation.
- 36. Petrakopoulos (1995, 264-265); Elliott (2004, 86-87).
- 37. Birgitta probably owned a copy of an early version of the so-called Fornsvenska legendariet, which was mainly composed on the basis of the Legenda Aurea and Chronicon Pontificum et Imperatorum by Martinus Oppaviensis (Klockars 1966, 166). For the composition and history of Fornsvenska legendariet, see Carlquist (1996), who also corrects some of Valter Jansson's (1934) conclusions. Since Latin versions of Legenda Aurea also existed in Sweden, Birgitta could also have known of Elizabeth's story directly translated from a Latin source. George Stephens (1847–1874) edited one version of the Old Swedish Legendary, which is based on manuscripts from thirteenth to sixteenth century. The life of Elizabeth is preserved in a manuscript written in 1502. It also contains revelations attributed to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. Although the revelations are, from the beginning, often assigned to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, they stem first from the beginning of the fourteenth century. The authorship of the revelations is most often attributed to her great-niece, Dominican nun Elizabeth of Töss (d. 1336), Switzerland (Barratt 1992; 1993; McNamer 1996, 14).
- 38. For early sources on Elizabeth of Hungary, see Petrakopoulos (1995, 286–287); Elliott (2004, 87n8).
- 39. I refer in the following to the English translation of the Legenda Aurea. Golden Legend II as GL II. GL II, 302.
- 40. Ibid.
- 41. Katarina revealed in her testimony that her mother had told her that she had not wanted to marry, she would rather have died. But her parents had forced her to marry. Her answer was apparently modeled on the Life of Elizabeth (Acta, 304-305). It is difficult to judge how much exaggeration Katarina, or even Birgitta, allowed to creep into this story. I would therefore be cautious about taking this as a reliable historical representation. Børresen (1991, 63) also finds that Birgitta's writings do not confirm her testimony. I find that where Katarina's testimony is concerned, another living saint was being set up, namely, Katarina herself. I would interpret the statements attributed to Birgitta within the context of her daughter's experiences in Rome in 1350. Katarina was newly married and Birgitta encouraged her to stay in Rome instead of traveling to her husband to Sweden. Eggard van Kyren, the husband, then died, and Katarina was free to stay with her mother. In Katarina's vita, despite her marriage, she is actually said to be a virgin. Whether this was true or not, this is the context where I would place Birgitta's stated childhood wish to not marry.

- 42. GL II, 304.
- 43. DCP, 475.
- 44. GL II, 304-305.
- 45. Bynum (1987, 88, 135–136); Elliott (2004, 94).
- 46. PVita, 78; see also DCP, 477, 486. Petrus of Alvastra said that he had heard this from Master Mathias.
- 47. Acta, 63-64.
- 48. Ibid., 315.
- 49. DCP, 477.
- 50. GL II, 304.
- 51. Brown (1981, 227).
- 52. GL II, 308.
- 53. Ibid., 309.
- 54. Ibid.
- 55. DCP, 479; trans. Sahlin (2001, 48).
- 56. Some other married saintly women had felt a similar desire, e.g., Marie d'Oignies (d. 1213) and Angela of Foligno (1248–1309).
- 57. As Atkinson states, Elizabeth "established a new model of sanctity for Christian women who were wives and mothers" (1991, 168).
- 58. Rev. I 2; Book I, 55; see also Ex. 95.
- 59. Newman (1995, 77).
- 60. Concerning Birgitta's seemingly ambivalent relation to her children, see Fogelklou (1919; 1941); Atkinson (1985; 1991); Nieuwland (1991; 1995). Ex. 63 shows that Birgitta continued to worry about her children even in Rome. In this revelation Mary consoles her and assures that she herself will be the adoptive mother of Birgitta's children. Thus, Birgitta could concentrate on her work without thinking too much about her children's well-being.
- 61. Youngs (2006, 195).
- 62. GL II, 312.
- 63. PVita, 92; LOB, 89.
- 64. PVita, 92; LOB, 89. Anders Piltz interprets this passage as if Birgitta herself was wondering whether the stars had caused the Bengt's illness (1986a, 147). Instead, I think that Birgitta had heard other people talk about the effect of the stars and used the revelation to show that according to her heavenly advisors, such notions were rubbish.
- 65. PVita, 92; LOB, 89.
- 66. GL II. 311.
- 67. Rev. IV 65. For the combination of the vita contemplativa and the vita activa in the lives of laypeople, see especially Constable (1995, 99–130); McGinn (1996, 197–219); Lehmijoki-Gardner (1999). An interesting parallel to Birgitta can be found in the teachings of Meister Eckhart (d. 1328). He reversed the paradigm about "Mary having chosen the best part" in his sermon 86. The Dominican praised Martha above Mary, challenging the conventional teaching about the active life and the contemplative life (McGinn 2006, 529). It is not known whether Birgitta knew about Eckhart's teachings.

- 68. See, e.g., PVita, 79.
- 69. For authors of sacred biographies, see Heffernan (1988, 14–17). On recently deceased future saints and writing of their vitae, see Kleinberg (1989; 1992, 52–55). For the development of hagiographic writing, see Goodich (1981; 1982; 2007).
- 70. Concerning changes in the conditions of sanctity, see Weinstein and Bell (1982); Atkinson (1985); Vauchez (1993; 1997); Mulder-Bakker (1995); Kleinberg (2008).
- 71. Bynum (1992, 145-146).
- 72. Newman (1995, 87).
- 73. Elliott (2004, 102).
- 74. Both John Coakley and Bernard McGinn have emphasized the generally positive relationships between later medieval saintly women and their confessors. See Coakley (2006) and McGinn (1998).
- 75. GL II, 311-312.
- 76. E.g., Rev. V int. 12:1-2; FBR, 128; Ex. 20, 21, 37.
- 77. Atkinson (1983, 140). For more details on Marie, see especially *Mary of Oignies: Mother of Salvation*. Ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker, which contains the two lives of Marie in English translation and Mulder-Bakker's introduction as well as Brenda Bolton's and Suzan Folkert's useful studies on Marie. John W. Coakley analyzes the relationship between Jacques de Vitry and Marie in his recent work on female saints and their male collaborators (2006, 68–88).
- 78. Marie d'Oignies in Copia exemplorum 35:4; 37:2; 151:6.
- 79. Marie's life was first translated into Swedish at the end of the fourteenth century. Thomas de Cantimpré wrote the *Supplement to the Life of Marie d'Oignies* in ca. 1230, some 15 years after Jacques had written the first *Life.* It is uncertain whether Master Mathias or the Swedish readers in Birgitta's time were familiar with this supplement. According to Suzan Folkerts the supplement did not enjoy as much success as Jacques de Vitry's version. On the Latin and vernacular versions of Marie's life, see Folkerts (2006, 221–241).
- 80. Bolton (1999, 137). Jacques de Vitry was commissioned by the papal legate to preach to the crusade against the Albigensians in France and in German-speaking Lothringia soon after Marie's death, in 1213. Iris Geyer (1991) has analyzed Marie's *Vita* as a demonstration of orthodoxy against heresy. For more about Marie and Jacques, see Ruh (1993, 85–87).
- 81. King (2003, 10).
- 82. McGinn (1996, 198).
- 83. McGinn (1998, 12).
- 84. Ibid., 17.
- 85. Bynum (1982, 250); Jantzen (1995, 172).
- 86. Neel (1989, 246); Mulder-Bakker (2006, 10-11).
- 87. Bolton (1978, 80-81).
- 88. See note 92.
- 89. Suydam (1999b, 169-170).

- 90. Ibid., 170.
- 91. Helborg, a beguine from the island of Gotland, wrote to Christina of Stommeln between 1280 and 1286 and asked her to join their community in Visby. The letter is translated to Swedish by Tryggve Lundén along with Petrus de Dacia's and Christina's correspondence (1965, 259).
- 92. See, Morris (1999b) on the surprising absence of beguines in Sweden.
- 93. McGinn (1998, 34-36).
- 94. Petroff (1986, 171-177); McGinn (1998, 36).
- 95. A parallel to this was the case of Petrus de Dacia and Christina of Stommeln. Petrus said that the reason he traveled to meet Christina was that from his childhood he had wanted to meet a real saint (Lundén 1965, 27–30). Another similar story can be found in the *Vita* of Elisabeth of Spalbeek. Abbot Philip of Clairvaux had heard about Elisabeth's extraordinary holy dance. In 1267 he traveled to a small village near Liège to see this dance with his own eyes. He stayed there almost half a year and wrote a report about Elisabeth's activities, which later comprised her *Vita* (Rodgers and Ziegler 1999, 299–301).
- 96. "Her parents were not of common stock but even though they abounded in riches and many temporal goods" (VMO I:11; LOM, 50). King and Marsolais correct Acta Sanctorum's (AASS) version of Marie's life against manuscripts and state that AASS has misleadingly stated that Marie was not noble by birth (King and Marsolais 2003, 151).
- 97. VMO I:13; LOM, 51.
- 98. VMO I:13-14; LOM, 52-53.
- 99. VMO I:13-14; LOM, 52-53.
- 100. VMO I:15; LOM, 54.
- 101. Petroff (1986, 175); Coakley (2006, 69).
- 102. Jacques was consecrated in 1216 as bishop of Acre; he resigned this post in 1226 and returned to Liège as an auxiliary bishop for three years. From Liège he went to Rome where he became cardinal and bishop of Tusculanum (modern Frascati) (Elliott 2004, 52–53).
- Coakley (2006, 69–70). For more about the roles of holy women and their confessors, see *Gendered Voices*. Medieval Saints and Their Interpretators, ed. Catherine M. Mooney; Mulder-Bakker (2006).
- 104. King and Marsolais (2003, 165).
- 105. VMO I:35; LOM, 71. As King and Marsolais hint in the notes of the English translation, the reference to the abbot's authority in the Benedictine rule meant an unquestionable authority (2003, 160).
- 106. VMO Prologus:3; LOM, 39-40.
- 107. VMO I:9; LOM, 45.
- 108. Mulder-Bakker (2006, 27).
- 109. Bolton (2006, 201).
- 110. Coakley (2006, 72).
- 111. It was perhaps a complement to Mathias's manual for preachers, *Homo conditus* (Piltz 1986a, 138).
- 112. Strömberg (1944, 160-161).

- 113. Ibid., 158-160.
- 114. Ibid., 160-162; Klockars (1976, 165); Sahlin (2001, 88).
- 115. Neel (1989, 247).
- 116. Jacques de Vitry never describes Marie as a virgin. I find Dyan Elliott quite convincing when she assumes that had Jacques thought Marie to be virgin, he would have mentioned it in his writing (1993, 239).
- 117. See chapter 1 about how Ulf abstained from sexual intercourse as soon he found out that Birgitta was pregnant.
- 118. VMO I:11; LOM, 46-47.
- 119. VMO II:52; LOM, 87–88. Cf. Rev. I 8, 50; II 2; VI 16, 28, 31; Ex. 56.
- 120. VMO II:64; LOM, 98.
- 121. Mulder-Bakker (2006, 27-28).
- 122. Coakley (2006, 77).
- 123. VMO II:68; LOM, 102.
- 124. VMO II:72; LOM, 104.
- 125. VMO II:76, 77; LOM, 108. This was especially in accordance with the teachings of the Lateran Council's decrees in 1215.
- 126. PVita, 84.
- 127. Ibid., 85.
- 128. For Birgitta's encouragement of Mathias, see *Rev.* VI 75. Mathias's doubts and temptations are described in *Rev. V*, int. 16:36–37. For Hemming, see *PVita*, 83.
- 129. VMO I:22; LOM, 59.
- 130. VMO I:12; LOM, 52.
- 131. *Rev.* IV 21 discusses how Jerome "loved widows." This might be a later revelation but I assume that in Sweden Birgitta was already quite familiar with Jerome's ideas.
- 132. Acta, 63–66. For the sharing of books among devout laywomen and women in orders in late medieval England, see Riddy (1996); Woods (1999).
- 133. Acta, 66.
- 134. Riddy (1996, 112–113). Riddy describes how the texts of Julian of Norwich (d. ca. 1416) and Margery Kempe (d. after 1438) were a result of "talking about the things of God" with other people. Creating their texts was a result not only of interaction with vernacular texts and images but also of the interaction with other people. Riddy draws attention to Julian's skill in finding meaning and power in the boundaries of the self and the external world. Julian accepts that according to the clerical definition an unlettered woman is weak and marginal. But that is not the whole picture, at the same time "she has an utter confidence in her own gender that presumably derives from her experience of women's collective lives, of being her mother's daughter, and from the sense of intellectual and emotional relationship with other women that is revealed in the passing on of books or in the shared talk that men habitually ridicule" (116). This kind of changing of the restrictions of women to a strength could be applied to Birgitta as well.

- 135. For shared beliefs and the exercise of symbolic power, see Bourdieu (2001, 125–126). Rosemary Drage Hale's use of the concept is similar to mine, see Hale (2001, 168–169). Related to the concept of shared beliefs is the idea of collective memory. It is perhaps more suitable when applied to larger groups of people than I do here; therefore, I will not elaborate my arguments in that direction but keep to the term "shared beliefs." For a useful introduction to the concept of collective memory, see Castelli (2004, 10–32).
- 136. Suydam (1999b, 170).

3 The Beginning—Birgitta as a Channel of God

- 1. Morris (1999a, 62).
- 2. Sahlin (2001, 45); Mulder-Bakker (2004b, xvi).
- 3. Ex. 47; trans. Sahlin (2001, 45).
- 4. PVita, 80-81; LOB, 77-78.
- 5. PVita, 80-81; LOB, 77-78.
- 6. Isa. 6; Jer. 1; Ezek 1-2; Dan. 10:9; Klockars (1966, 63).
- 7. About Birgitta as a channel, see Piltz (1993).
- 8. Hollman (1956, 90); also Westman (1911, 104).
- 9. Ekwall (1965, 43); Sundén (1973, 58-59).
- 10. Jönsson (1993, 38–41); Liedgren (1996, 152–154). Ekwall, for instance supposed that the C 15 Vita was not the version that was given in December 1373 to Bishop Galhard of Spoleto in Montefalco. Instead, Ekwall suggested that there existed a copy of Birgitta's life and miracles that she called Processvita X. This version then disappeared, according to Ekwall (1965, 40–59). Tore Nyberg has pointed out one further problem concerning Ekwall's hypothesis: how to explain that all the copies of the canonization acts, which were supposed to have been presented in Montefalco to the commissioners of bishop of Spoleto contain the so-called process vita and not the shorter version equivalent to C 15. According to Ekwall's hypothesis the shorter version was presented in Montefalco (Nyberg 2004, 71).
- 11. Ekwall (1965, 47).
- 12. In the recent scholarship on Birgitta, there are many opinions regarding the calling vision. Sahlin implies this also by calling *Ex.* 47 the original prophetic call by combining the *Vita*'s story with *Ex.* 47 (Sahlin 2001, 45). Morris and Bergh prefer the longer version alone (Morris 1999a, 64; Bergh 2002, 43–44).
- 13. Sundén (1973, 56-58).
- 14. Ex. 48. Almost exactly the same description can be found in Prior Peter's testimony, DCP, 510-511.
- 15. Ex. 48.
- 16. Ibid.
- 17. Voaden (1999, 60).
- 18. I will return to Mathias's role in the next chapter.

- 19. *DCP*, 535–536. Almost the same story is found in *Ex*. 108.
- 20. DCP, 512.
- 21. Ibid., 539.
- 22. McGinn (1998, 20-24); Newman (2003, 296-298).
- 23. Concerning visionaries and their scribes, see Gendered Voices. Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters, ed. Catherine M. Mooney; Coakley (2006).
- 24. Master Mathias was writing his *Copia exemplorum* around 1344 (Strömberg 1944, 163).
- 25. Børresen (1991, 21).
- 26. Sjöberg (2003, 76).
- E.g., 1 Sam., Isa. 6, Jer. 1, Ezek. 1–2, and Dan. 10:9; Klockars (1966, 63);
 Sahlin (2001, 76).
- 28. Vita Sanctae Hildegardis, 24.
- 29. On women's prophetic roles within Christian history, see *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker.
- 30. Bourdieu (2001 [first printing 1991], 109). Bourdieu wrote this text in 1975 as part of the debate dominated by more linguistically and sociohistorically oriented scholars such as Noam Chomsky and John L. Austin. The debate continues as shown by the writings of, for example, Gabrielle Spiegel (Spiegel 1990; 2005; 2009) and Surkis (2012).
- 31. Bourdieu (2001, 113).
- 32. McGinn (1996, 208-209).
- 33. Bourdieu (2001, 107-115).
- 34. Jantzen (1995, xii).
- 35. Surtz (1990, 2–3; 1995). A similar social need for lay saints was evident in the cities of Italy, the Low Countries, and Germany. See, e.g., Lehmijoki-Gardner (1999; 2005); Simons (2001); and Mulder-Bakker (2006).
- 36. Ex. 55 tells of lay brother Gerekinus, a visionary. Birgitta's confessor during the Santiago journey, later Abbot Svennung, is known to have had visions (DCP, 482, 503; Rev. VI 35).
- 37. Speculum virginum, II; Sjöberg (2003, 72).
- 38. DCP, 479.
- 39. Ibid.; trans. Sahlin (2001, 48-49).
- 40. Rev. I 2; Book I, 55.
- 41. Rev. I 1; Book I, 53-54.
- 42. Rev. I 1; Book I, 53-54.
- 43. One reason for the idea that these revelations were meant to convince other than Birgitta is that her view on sexuality in marriage was quite positive, as Nina Sjöberg (2003) has shown in her dissertation.
- 44. For Birgitta's views on asceticism, see, for example, RS 24. For a broad discussion of the role of asceticism in religious life, see the articles in Asceticism, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis.
- 45. DCP, 490.
- 46. Ibid. Ex. 60 contains the same vision. In this passage Master Mathias's ability to discern spirits is mentioned as a further reason for Birgitta to

trust him. It sounds, of course, more like a hagiographic addition meant especially for the assumed readers of the text to show that Birgitta was under direction of a man of good judgment. This formulation, "expert in discerning two conflicting spirits, namely the spirit of truth and illusion," seems to be attached to Master Mathias almost every time he is mentioned. I think it might go back to Alfonso Pecha and his emphasis on the discernment of the spirits, which in the 1370s was a major issue. Alfonso also greatly influenced Prior Peter and they both sought to make Master Mathias's character in the canonization acts as the guarantor of Birgitta's orthodoxy and authenticity during her time in Sweden. Still, I think that this passage reflects Birgitta's thoughts about ascetic practices. This might also be a response to some of her critics, who accused her of fasting too much.

- 47. DCP, 491. Also in Ex. 61.
- 48. DCP, 479-480.
- 49. For example, in the Rev. VI 92 she is criticized because of her asceticism.
- 50. VMO I:23-25; LOM, 59-61.
- 51. Magister Matthias: Copia Exemplorum, 37:2.
- 52. For Birgitta's knowledge of Jerome's works, see Klockars (1966, 172, 177–179, 213–214).
- 53. Jerome, Letter CVII 403 to Laeta, trans. Fremantle.
- 54. Jerome, Letter CVIII ca. 404 to Eustochium.
- 55. This was quite common among late medieval religious people. The influence of early Christian writings, such as Jerome's letters and the *Vitae patrum*, was strong. See, for example, Williams-Krapp (2004) and Heinonen (2007), about German mystics.
- 56. An almost contemporary parallel can be found in the Dominican friar Henry Suso's (d. 1366) disapproval of the Swiss Dominican nun Elsbeth Stagel's (d. ca. 1360) excessive asceticism. Suso sought to educate a female audience, mainly Dominican nuns, by exhorting them to read, among other things, the Vitae patrum. But this inspired some women to chastise their body in similar ascetic ways as the early ascetics. Suso saw such harsh ascetic practices as unsuitable for women because they were "the fragile sex." He hastened to direct them to adopt more moderate religious practices (Williams-Krapp 2004, 39-42). Heinonen develops Williams-Krapp ideas further and shows that Suso's idea of suitable asceticism for men and women was clearly gendered: men were fit for hard physical asceticism, whereas women were not (2007, 89-91). As Williams-Krapp and Heinonen show, this has to do with different understandings of what is suitable for women and men. But why is it not proper for women to imitate Christ's suffering as it is proper for men? Does this simply go back to the same reason as why women were not allowed to be ordained? Just as the priesthood was a male privilege, so was the physical imitation of Christ. Perhaps the heroic female ascetics would have threatened the male priesthood.

- 57. Rev. III 34. Rev. VI 121–122 also reflects the idea of a more moderate asceticism.
- 58. Kay and Rubin (1994, 1–7). The body and the gendered body in particular are in focus in many modern scholarly works about medieval people. See, e.g., Bynum (1987; 1992; 1995); Elliott (1993; 2004); *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and Alastair Minnis; *Handling Sin. Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis; Heinonen (2007).
- 59. Finke (1988, 446). Caroline Bynum has shown in her book, *The Resurrection of the Body*, that medieval authors perceived disciplined bodies, chastised by asceticism, as best suited for resurrected life (1995, 229–278).
- 60. Finke (1988, 447).
- 61. Ibid.
- 62. VMO I:22; LOM, 59.
- 63. Finke (1988, 447).
- 64. Hollywood (1995, 182).
- 65. For the paradoxes concerning the body in the late Middle Ages and what were considered as the proper masculine and feminine practices, see Heinonen (2007).
- 66. Marie was only 36 years old when she died after long fasting (VMO II:108; LOM, 137). For starving holy women and their influence, see especially Bell (1985); Bynum (1987); Lehmijoki-Gardner (1999).
- 67. Finke (1988, 448).
- 68. Kleinberg (1992, 149).
- 69. Heinonen makes the following observation about virginal ascetic women in the late medieval Germany: "If female virgins who could already be interpreted as honorary males furthermore practiced heroic and masculine acts of bodily torture, the privileged spiritual position of men was at stake" (2007, 91). This is, of course, not fully applicable to Birgitta who was no longer a virgin. But it is possible that her growing fame as a visionary and heroic ascetic made some men criticize her. Nevertheless, her confessors seemed not to fear for their own authority. The collaboration between them and Birgitta seemed to be mutually fruitful. They were probably genuinely concerned that Birgitta would die from her asceticism.
- 70. Klockars (1971, 165).
- 71. Jacques de Vitry said in the *Life of Marie* that during Christmastime Marie often had a vision of Jesus as a baby and, for example, at the feast of the purification, Marie saw Mary and Jesus in the temple. Jacques also said that Marie was often visited by saints whose feast days were approaching (*VMO* II:88–89; *LOM*, 118–119). The liturgical calendar had inspired living saints earlier as well, but in the age of new mysticism believers were more explicitly encouraged to follow the life of the holy family in accordance with the liturgical calendar. This was evident

- in, for example, the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. In this respect Marie d'Oignies's influence was notable also generally, not only to Birgitta (McGinn 1998, 38–39). Birgitta's contemporary, the Dominican nun Margaret Ebner (ca. 1291–1351), was also inspired in her mysticism by the liturgical cycle (Heinonen 2007, 108–109).
- 72. Lundén also assumes this took place in 1344 (1958, 17).
- 73. DCP, 500.
- 74. Rev. VI 88.
- 75. Sahlin (2001, 78–107). See also Sahlin (1993b) for the mystical pregnancy and Birgitta's devotion to the heart of Mary. Sahlin looks at the phenomenon of mystical pregnancy in a broader context and gives its many examples in the history of Christianity.
- 76. Bernards (1982, 189-191); Sahlin (2001, 89).
- 77. Mulder-Bakker (2004a, 198).
- 78. Newman (2005a, 6, 25). Newman gives an illuminating description of how thoroughly people were introduced to receive heavenly visions. The earliest examples of this kind of literature are the writings of the Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx in the twelfth century. *Meditationes vitae Christi* is a late thirteenth-century Franciscan work, which in the fourteenth century became a "blockbuster success," as Newman puts it, among monastic as well as laypeople.
- 79. DCP, 509. McGuire and Morris (following Edvard Ortved [1933]) assume that Birgitta was allowed to use the part of the church that was intended for the monastic laypeople (McGuire 1990, 302; Morris 1999a, 73). Concerning Birgitta's practices in Alvastra, see Acta, 65. Birgitta's daughter Katarina reveals in her testimony that her parents could not move to Alvastra since the buildings were not ready. The buildings might have been the same ones that Birgitta moved into after Ulf's death (Acta, 305). Klockars suggested that these buildings could have meant that Birgitta and Ulf were planning to establish a new monastery. I do not think this is probable; I think Katarina is referring to her parents' plan to live in a celibate marriage near Alvastra (Klockars 1976, 90).
- 80. Master Mathias wrote his *Copia exemplorum* and commentary on the Apocalypse probably 1344 onward (Strömberg 1944, 163; Klockars 1966, 17). On the whole, in the Middle Ages in Sweden the monastic libraries were the most significant. Unfortunately, we do not know exactly what books were in the library of Alvastra because during the Reformation the books were "recycled" as covers of account books. Nevertheless, three books survive from the monastery of Alvastra: two Bibles and one thirteenth-century volume containing three parts: sermons, a Jewish novel from the Late Antiquity, and theological texts (Regner 2005, 61).
- 81. DCP, 486. Strömberg discussed Prior Peter's testimony in which he said that Mathias had been Birgitta's first confessor some time after 1316, when Birgitta was first married. Although possible, I do not find this probable. Birgitta also had other confessors, for example, during the pilgrimage to

- Santiago de Compostela, Svennung, later abbot of Varnhem monastery, was her confessor (Strömberg 1944, 13–16). *Primus* confessor, perhaps, means only that Mathias was Birgitta's most important confessor and that is at least what Prior Peter wanted to stress in his testimony.
- 82. Strömberg (1944, 11-12); Carlsson (1948, 1-2).
- 83. Klockars (1976, 66) assumes that this *magister* was Master Mathias who, thus, as a young priest would have been Ulf's confessor as well. This is one possibility but I do not find it plausible.
- 84. *DCP*, 512–513; *PVita*, 83–84. Prior Peter said that Algot was master of theology and "familiarissimo ipsius domine Brigide" (knew this lady Birgitta very well).
- 85. Børresen (1991, 38).
- 86. Andræ (1926, 323-324); Rossing (1986, 167).
- 87. Sahlin (2001, 84).
- 88. E.g., Rev. III 8; Sermo Angelicus (SA); Sahlin (2001, 96-97).
- 89. DCP, 484, 500.
- 90. Prior Peter's description of the event was known to Alfonso Pecha, who praised this experience in his *Epistola solitarii* IV 14–16. This shows how highly they both regarded this experience. Alfonso's admiration of the mystical pregnancy has led some scholars to the incorrect conclusion that he himself witnessed the event. This was, of course, impossible since he and Birgitta did not meet until the end of the 1360s. For this misunderstanding, see, e.g., Voaden (1999, 92) and Caciola (2003, 210).
- 91. Rev. VI 88.
- 92. Elliott (1997, 159). For women's diseases and concepts of the womb in early Christianity, see especially Shaw (1998, 76n192). On interpreting medieval women's symptoms as hysteria, see Newman (1998, 733–770).
- 93. Newman (1998, 735).
- 94. Ibid., 735-736.
- 95. Ibid., 736.
- 96. Blamires (1995, 135–152); Minnis (1997, 110–113). Concerning women and revelations, see also Piltz (1993, 67–88).
- 97. It is perhaps appropriate to recollect that the second half of the fourteenth century marked a change in discussions. At that time the beginning of a new development could be seen, which exhibited more interest in witchcraft, demonic possession, and magic than earlier trends. Elliott (2004, 211) sums up as follows: "As the Middle Ages progressed, ecclesiastical authorities became increasingly sensitive to the dangers of physiologically induced pseudoraptures, and the fortunes of female spirituality would dwindle proportionately."
- 98. McGinn (1998, 37–38). For a useful analysis of this terminology, see Newman (2005a, 9–10).
- 99. Elliott (1997, 142).
- 100. Hollywood (2002, 244–245); Elliott (2004, 205). It was for the same reason, according to medieval thinkers, that women were not suitable to be ordained. In short, they were the image of God in soul but since God

- chose Christ to take the male rather than the female form, only men could naturally represent Christ. Women as priests would also present a sexual temptation for men. One further point was that women had weak minds in weak bodies, therefore they simply lacked the strength to speak at length and work in public (Blamires 1995, 138–143; Minnis 1997, 122–125).
- 101. Elliott (1997, 158).
- 102. Hollywood (2002, 245).
- 103. Commentator B, in Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's "De Secretis Mulierum" with Commentaries, ed. H. R. Lemay; cited in Elliott (1997, 160). Hollywood makes an important observation with this passage regarding women's own theological interpretations of their bodily experience. In this section, the male authority rejects the woman's interpretation as incorrect, offering an interpretation of his own (2002, 246).
- 104. Ibid.
- 105. Caciola (2003, 200).
- 106. Strömberg (1944, 10).
- 107. Strömberg (1943; 1944); see also Piltz (1986a; 1986b). For general features of the medieval church in Sweden, see Brilioth (1941) and Härdelin (1998).
- 108. GL II, 314.
- 109. The time and place of this revelation is uncertain. Birgitta had revelations about demons in Sweden (e.g., *Rev.* I 34) and there are other stories about Birgitta and exorcisms (e.g., *Rev.* VI 78). I therefore assume that this undated revelation, like the others, reflects the thoughts Birgitta already held about demons during her time in Sweden. For more on Birgitta and demons, see Bergh (2002, 149–160).
- 110. Rev. VI 80.
- 111. Rev. I 16: "Ideo ego sedeo nunc in ventre eius et in natura eius" ("Now I dwell in her belly and in her nature" [Book I, 78]).
- 112. Rev. I 16; Book I, 78-79.
- 113. Carruthers (1998, 1, 23-24).
- 114. Newman develops Carruthers's idea of the techniques of visualization and proposes aptly that when the medieval visionaries said, "I saw," they could mean, "I learned to see" (2005a, 22).
- 115. Ibid., 3.
- 116. Sahlin (2001, 88).
- 117. VMO II:88; LOM, 118-119.
- 118. VMO II:88; LOM, 118-119.
- 119. Strömberg (1944, 160). Marie d'Oignies in *Magister Matthias: Copia Exemplorum*, 35:4, 37:2, 151:6. Bernard McGinn shows that Marie is represented both as a preacher and a teacher (1998, 40).
- 120. Sahlin (2001, 88-89).
- 121. VMO I:20; LOM, 57.
- 122. On Marie d'Oignies's pioneering role in the history of mysticism, see especially McGinn (1998, 32–41). Concerning the experiences of *iubilus* of Franciscan beguine Douceline of Digne (1214–1255) and Dominican

- nun Margaret Ebner (ca. 1291–1351) and for jubilation as a mystical genre, see McGinn (1998, 39–40, 129, 138–139). For Ebner, see also Heinonen (2007, 37–41).
- 123. Birgitta was much more successful with her audiences than, for example, her later admirer, Margery of Kempe. Denis Renevey wrote concerning Margery Kempe's unsuccessful attempts in the fifteenth century to gain saintly appreciation that her audience failed to read her performing body. They did not perceive the divine messages that Margery herself saw as encoded within her raptures and proclamations (2000, 208).
- 124. About discretio spirituum, see especially Voaden (1999) and Caciola (2003).
- 125. Hollywood (2002, 247; emphasis original). An interesting parallel is Clare of Montefalco (d. 1308), who many times said that she had Jesus crucified inside her heart. Her own interpretation was also convincing to her fellow sisters. As Warr writes, women's bodily experiences were often linked to their heart in order to promote their sanctity (2007, 221–222).
- 126. See, e.g., Bynum (1987, 235).
- 127. Klockars (1966, 170).
- 128. The three heroic saints' lives were written in the first four Christian centuries and translated into English in the thirteenth century. Together with the *Ancrene Wisse*, *Holy Maidenhood*, and *Sawels Warde*, they were texts written especially for the use of anchoresses (Savage and Watson 1991, 7–8, 28–29).
- 129. For the concept of "becoming male," see, e.g., Cloke (1995, 57–60) and about the significance of virginity, see, e.g., Cooper (1996, 76–91).
- 130. Thus, the female body was also seen as becoming drier and more closely resembling men's bodies (Shaw 1998, 235–239).
- 131. Salih (1999, 99); Castelli (2004, 33).
- 132. The early Christian mother and martyr Perpetua (d. 203) is perhaps one of the most famous examples of the case of "becoming male." Although Perpetua's story contains the transformation to manhood in a dream vision, it does not represent a typical case of "becoming male" with the help of fierce asceticism. In Perpetua's last vision before her death, she becomes a gladiator who fights victoriously against the devil. The vision gives her power to heroically endure death in the arena and possibly empowered the readers of the story as well. Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis (The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity). Concerning authority and the interpretation of their own visions, Perpetua is an interesting parallel to Birgitta. For more on Perpetua, see Brown (1988, 74–75); Castelli (2004, 91); and Heffernan (2012).
- 133. Bynum (1992, 194).
- 134. Salih (1999, 98).
- 135. The idea of redirecting the gaze comes from Carruthers (1998, 111) (with reference to Leclercq [1946]), who mentions Leclercq's notion that *concupiscentia* was most commonly used to refer to sexual desire. It was taken seriously in monastic circumstances, and its intensity was not supposed to be diminished by monastic life, but redirected like a gaze.

4 Master Mathias's Role Reassessed

- 1. PVita, 81; LOB, 78.
- 2. Bergh (2002, 44).
- 3. Sahlin (2001, 117).
- 4. Strömberg (1944, 17).
- 5. Prior Peter mentions Mathias often in his testimony: *DCP*, 477, 479, 484–486, 488–491, 500, 508, 509, 530, 539. Mathias is also mentioned in the process *Vita*: *PVita*, 78, 81–83. Magnus Petri, later the general confessor of Vadstena, and Birgitta's daughter Katarina refer in their testimonies to Birgitta's time in Rome and how she miraculously knew the moment of Mathias's death: *Acta*, 267, 268, 324. In the *Revelations*, Mathias is mentioned only a few times: *Rev.* I 3, 52, 60 (if not Hemming of Åbo); V int. 16:3; VI 75, 89, 90, 110; *Ex.* 60, 61, 76; *RS* prol. 1.
- 6. There have been speculations that perhaps Birgitta knew Mathias since the year of her marriage, 1316. Or, they might have met in Paris when Birgitta traveled home from Santiago de Compostela. These suggestions are plausible but hard to prove (cf. Klockars 1971, 142).
- 7. Strömberg (1944, 163).
- 8. DCP, 477.
- 9. This was likely around the same time that Birgitta learnt through Mathias about Marie d'Oignies. See above, chapter 2. It is also possible that Birgitta already knew about Marie but Mathias could have increased her knowledge; Marie and Jacques de Vitry could have been an inspiration for both of them. About Mathias and Birgitta's encounters, see, e.g., *Rev.* VI 75, 89; *DCP*, 488, 530.
- 10. DCP, 488; Rev. VI 75; see also Bergh (2002, 50).
- 11. Mathias was the most prolific male theologian in Sweden at the time: Testa nucis was an early work about rhetoric and Poetria about poetics. His three major theological works are Alphabetum distinctionum, Exposicio super Apocalipsim, and Homo conditus. The first work is something between a concordance and an encyclopedia. It is meant to be a reference book for clerical use of the most important nouns, verbs, adverbs, and names mentioned in the Scriptures. It is preserved only in fragments. The second work is a commentary on the Apocalypse and the third is a manual for preachers. Perhaps as a kind of complement to the Homo conditus Mathias wrote Copia exemplorum, which was a collection of short stories for the use of preachers. These works and Birgitta's revelations have many similar themes (Strömberg 1944, 1–2, 163–178; Piltz 1986a, 138–139).
- 12. Strömberg (1943, 302).
- 13. Concerning Mathias generally, see Strömberg (1944), which still provides the best biography of him, and Piltz (1986a; 1986b).
- 14. Strömberg (1944, 160).
- 15. Coakley notes in his writings about visionary women and their mendicant confessors that friars had intense curiosity about things of apparently

divine origin and they could also make their own use of the supernatural knowledge to which only women had privileged access. This seemed to be the case with Mathias as well (1991, 459). See also Coakley (2006, 211–227).

- 16. DCP, 482. See also DCP, 503. Rev. VI 36 also refers to Svennung.
- 17. DCP, 477.
- 18. The decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 gave people a certain freedom to choose the best suitable confessor for them. For the development of confession in the Middle Ages, see Lochrie (1999).
- Rev. II 27:32–33; Book II, 244. Through this revelation, Birgitta is teaching about the meaning of confession, thoughts, and pure desire for God.
- 20. Strömberg (1943, 301).
- 21. Piltz suggests that Mathias experienced the temptation probably during his time abroad before 1343 and that the temptation in question must therefore have been the "second Averroism" (1986a, 149).
- 22. DCP, 530. The same story about Mathias's temptation can be found in the Vita Panisperna in Acta, 620, and in a shorter version in PVita, 83.
- 23. Rev. VI 75.
- 24. Rev. V int. 16 question 3. I agree with Bridget Morris's remark that this passage seems like a later editorial addition (1999a, 71). Of course, Mathias might have confronted temptations several times already, as Piltz (1986a) suggests, even before he came back to Sweden. Still, the sources, when read carefully, give the impression that Birgitta's role was decisive in helping him overcome the tribulations.
- 25. Rev. I 4:2; Book I, 58.
- 26. Rev. I 4:2-6; Book I, 58-59.
- 27. Rev. I 4:7, 9, 10; Book I, 58-59.
- 28. Rev. I 54:23; Book I, 151. For more about the different spirits, see Rev. IV 23, 110
- 29. See chapter 3, the "mystical pregnancy."
- 30. Sundén (1973, 56-58).
- 31. VMO II 42; LOM, 79: "The spirit of knowledge made her discerning."
- 32. Dillon (1996, 120). About confession in the Middle Ages, see *Handling Sin. Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis.
- 33. Dillon (1996, 121).
- 34. Voaden (1999, 61).
- 35. Concerning hagiography, Leclercq wrote about literary exaggeration in the Middle Ages that it was "only a means, but it is a legitimate means. Exaggerating is not, in such cases, lying; it is using hyperbole to make what one wants to say more unmistakable" (1982, 133). Concerning hagiographic genres, see also Heffernan (1988).
- 36. Epistola solitarii consists of eight long chapters in which Alfonso Pecha enthusiastically presents Birgitta's revelations in the light of the Bible and earlier theological writings. For a detailed analysis of Alfonso's Epistola solitarii, see Voaden (1999, 79–93) and Gilkær (1993).

- 37. DCP, 484: "Brigida...videbat et audiebat ymagines et similitudines corporales et in corde senciebat mirabiles illustraciones in intellectu suo" (Birgitta...saw and heard corporal images and similarities and sensed in her heart and intellect marvelous illustrations). The witness mixes corporal and intellectual visions together.
- 38. Rev. VI 75.
- 39. Strömberg (1943, 319).
- 40. In the declaration it is said that after the confrontation in the church, the knight killed his mistress. The knight himself died four days later. He was buried in a church of a monastery. Many nights, people had heard from the grave a voice shouting, "Oh! I am burning!" am burning!" This was told to the dead man's wife and the grave was opened with her permission. It was almost empty, only a part of the burial shroud and the man's shoes were left. The grave was refilled and after that, the voice was not heard again (Rev. VI 75, decl.). This confirmed what Master Mathias had taught about the visio beatifica. The story resembles an exemplum and although the historicity of it can be called into question, the teaching of it was clear: there was no doubt that souls entered hell immediately after death. This story also bears startling resemblance to an episode in Elizabeth of Hungary's Vita where she is said to have prayed for a young man (who looked as if he lived a dissolute life). When she prayed, the man felt a fire inside him. He cried out many times that he was burning, just like the knight in the grave is said to have done in Birgitta's story (GL II, 311). The existence of the story of the knight in the Birgittine sources confirms that visio beatifica was an important topic in the 1340s and the addition, which was added much later, shows that the issue was still relevant later. Schmid notes that in 1368 laypeople were prohibited from discussing matters of religion, either publicly or in secret. This implies that laypeople were, according to the magisterium, taking too great an interest in theological matters (1940, 54).
- 41. Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes (d. 1198), was a Muslim philosopher who in spite of being a philosopher and theologian, contributed, among other things, to psychology, astronomy, medicine, and physics.
- 42. Strömberg (1943, 303). Often the views of Averroes and the Latin Averroists did not correspond (Leaman 1988, 167).
- 43. Strömberg (1943, 304); Leaman (1988, 167).
- 44. Leaman (1988, 164-165).
- 45. Strömberg (1943, 303); Leaman (1988, 172-173).
- 46. Leaman (1988, 172).
- 47. Strömberg (1943, 302–303); Piltz (1986a, 147). Illuminating articles about visio beatifica can be found in Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages, ed. Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter. For a general view on visio beatifica, see especially the articles by Muessig (2007), McGinn (2007), Dronke (2007), Easting (2007), and Rozenski (2007). For the history of the beatific vision see Bynum (1995); McGinn (2007).

- 48. Strömberg (1943, 303).
- 49. Ibid., 318. Ödgisl became bishop of Västerås in 1329. He is probably one of the bishops in *Rev*. III 14–15. He died around 1352/3 (Schmid 1940, 54; Klockars 1966, 47). For his time in the papal curia in Avignon, see Brilioth (1915, 184–192). For the history of the beatific vision, see Russel (1997) and McGinn (2007).
- 50. Rev. IV 23.
- 51. Strömberg (1943, 305).
- 52. Rev. VI 75.
- 53. Ibid.
- 54. Bergh (2002, 49).
- 55. VMO II 68; 79; LOM, 102, 110.
- 56. Strömberg (1944, 160) also suggested this.
- 57. Jacques stressed that Marie and other holy women around her should be admired (VMO I 12; LOM, 52).
- 58. DCP, 488.
- 59. Bergh (2002, 50). Henrik Schück noted that this case shows how Mathias regarded Birgitta (1901, 8).
- 60. Regarding Birgitta's critics, see the section "Resistance toward Birgitta" in chapter 5.
- 61. Dillon (1996, 123).
- 62. Strömberg (1944, 174). Acta (460) in the testimony of priest Peter Johansson says, "ipse testis fuit presens in dicto regno Swecie et audiuit ab omnibus communiter tam clericis quam laycis, quod dicta domina Brigida fuit dotata supernaturali dono spiritus prophecie et habuit a Deo notabiles visiones diuinas... et specialiter audiuit dici, quod predicabatur coram populo in multis parrochialibus ecclesijs ante annum jubileum" (this witness was present in the said Kingdom of Sweden and heard from many people together, both from clerics and laymen, that this said lady Birgitta was given the supernatural gift of the spirit of prophecy and received significant divine visions from God... especially I heard to be said that they were proclaimed to people in many parish churches before year of jubilee [1350]). The same issue is related in priest Johan Petersson's testimony (Acta, 466).
- 63. Odelman (1993, 20). About Birgitta and rhetoric, see also Morris (2006, 25–31). For preaching in Sweden in the Middle Ages, in addition to Strömberg (1944), see Andersson (1993; 2001; 2003a; 2003b).
- 64. Undhagen (1978, 11).
- 65. PVita, 98; LOB, 95.
- 66. PVita, 98; LOB, 95..
- 67. Following the process *Vita*, Sahlin and Morris have suggested that generally, the revelations were not publicly known in Sweden and the addressees of Birgitta's revelations received the messages privately as letters (Sahlin 1999, 77–78; Morris 1999a, 5).
- 68. Undhagen (1978, 12).

- 69. Liedgren (1961, 101–116). See also Moberg's analysis of the language of the leaflet, which further confirms its authenticity as an early revelation, written in Swedish (1980, 193–211).
- 70. I will return to the question of the publicity of Birgitta's revelations in chapter 6.
- 71. Rev. VI 89.
- 72. Bergh (2002, 48). The mutual interests of a visionary and her confessor were evident in other medieval cases. This has already been noted in the relationship of Jacques de Vitry and Marie d'Oignies; for other similar cases, see especially Mulder-Bakker (2005) and Coakley (2006).
- 73. Morris (2006, 44); Rev. I 22.
- 74. Rev. I 22:6; Book I, 88.
- 75. Strömberg (1944, 174).
- 76. For example, *Rev.* I 55 contains a parable about judges, defenders, and laborers. The next revelation contains a warning of punishment for the same groups. These sound a lot like sermons, which are thought to have been preached to a wide audience. Many other revelations as well, for example, *Rev.* I 53, 55, 56; II 6, 14, contain phrases and passages that suggest they were meant to be used in sermons.
- 77. Strömberg (1944, 134-178).

5 Birgitta Encounters Her Critics

- 1. On the legitimization from the social identity perspective in the New Testament, see Hakola (2009). Also in Catherine of Siena's (d. 1380) case there were hostile witnesses, some of whom became devoted followers (Gill 1994, 110). For the criticisms Birgitta received in Sweden and Rome, see also Schmid (1940, 7–11) and Sahlin (2001, 136–153). Both also extend their analysis to the criticism Birgitta received posthumously.
- 2. *DCP*, 477, 478. It is unclear exactly how long Birgitta lived at Alvastra. Peter's descriptions are vague. Her stay was probably interrupted by her frequent travels around Sweden.
- 3. PVita, 82.
- 4. DCP, 539.
- 5. PVita, 82; LOB, 79.
- 6. PVita, 82; LOB, 79.
- 7. PVita, 82; LOB, 79.
- 8. Ex. 55 and PVita, 82 both describe the same incident.
- 9. Sahlin (2001, 143).
- 10. Gerekinus is called both brother and monk in the sources; it is therefore not clear whether he was a lay brother, as the translator of Birgitta's *Vita*, Kezel, and Sahlin suggest (Sahlin 2001, 139). Gerekinus's visionary gifts and especially theological knowledge of the rule would suggest that he was a monk. In the Birgittine sources Cistercian monks are often called "brother," *frater.* In Prior Peter's testimony, he at one point calls Gerekinus a monk (*DCP*, 545).

- 11. Rev. IV 121. In the declaracio of Rev. IV 121, the monk in question is identified as Gerekinus; I do not find any reason to doubt this identification.
- 12. Rev. VI 86.
- 13. For example, in Rev. VI 28, a nobleman is condemned to hell.
- 14. Collijn (1931, 658).
- 15. Rev. VI 114.
- 16. PVita, 82; LOB, 79.
- 17. Klockars assumes more cautiously that Birgitta had just had the same thought as Gerekinus (1966, 190).
- 18. VMO II 52; LOM, 88. See also Elliott (2004, 34); she notes that Marie and other beguine mystics were astonishingly aware of the unconfessed sins of others.
- 19. An example of its use can also be found in the twelfth-century *Life of Christina of Markyate*: "Hence you [God] gave her the power to know the secret thoughts of men and to see those that were far off and deliberately hidden as if they were present" (*LCM*, 87).
- 20. Also 1 John 1:8–10 might have influenced Birgitta: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." In spite of these biblical references, the idea of Gerekinus's flying soul might also have been inspired by Marie d'Oignies's *Life*, because there is one case of a gardener who had "flown to the Lord" in it (*VMO* II 53; *LOM*, 89). The same type of story is told about Francis of Assisi; Birgitta was acquainted with it probably through the *Old Swedish Legendary* (Klockars 1966, 175). The Franciscan influence on Master Mathias was remarkable (Piltz 1986b, 15–16).
- 21. Concerning the genre of revelations and Birgitta, see especially Piltz (1993, 67–84).
- 22. DCP, 488.
- 23. Ibid.
- 24. DCP, 503.
- 25. Sahlin (2001, 143).
- 26. McGuire (1990, 305-306).
- 27. Ibid., 310.
- 28. Ibid., 313.
- 29. The stories about the critics are mostly based on Prior Peter's testimony. They are well suited to the hagiographic style, but I presume that Peter wrote down the core of the stories as well as Birgitta's visions concerning these brothers in the 1340s and consulted these texts when composing his testimony in 1380.
- 30. Klockars (1966, 191).
- 31. Rev. VI 92.
- 32. The monk's response to Birgitta's revelation is not known.
- 33. Rev. VI 90.
- 34. Rev. IV 23, decl.

- 35. Schmid (1940, 9, 130-131).
- 36. Strömberg (1943, 308).
- 37. Rev. IV 23, decl.
- 38. Rev. IV 113. Prior Peter said in his testimony that this happened in Arboga, at a big banquet (DCP, 493).
- 39. Rev. IV 113.
- 40. Ibid.
- 41. Nils died in 1351, apparently after a pilgrimage to Rome (DCP, 493).
- 42. DCP, 492.
- 43. Bergh (2002, 37-38).
- 44. Rev. IV 122 addicio; DCP, 492-493.
- 45. Rev. IV 122.
- 46. Rev. VI 75.
- 47. Collijn (1931, 665).
- 48. *DCP*, 493. The information about the knight's death might be hagiographic exaggeration, since according to the sources Karl died before 1358, but how much before is not known (Collijn 1931, 666).
- 49. Acta, 63-67.
- 50. McGuire (2001, 103-104, 107).
- 51. Ibid.
- 52. See chapter 3, 55n. See also, Wulff (1914) and the classic essays of Ruether (1974) and McLaughlin (1974). More recent works include Bloch (1987; 1991) and Blamires (1997).
- 53. Muessig (1998, 146).
- 54. See, e.g., Voaden (1999).
- 55. Voaden (1999, 37-40); McAvoy (2004, 20-21).
- 56. Aquinas (1970, 134-135); McAvoy (2004, 21).
- 57. McAvoy (2004, 21).
- 58. Blamires (1997, 234; emphasis original).
- 59. As Richard Woods has noted, the medieval, or even older, views about gender relationships, marital bonds, or clerical misogyny, for example, still have persistent influence on the underlying current conflicts between the sexes (Woods 1994, 147).
- 60. Bartlett (1995, 144-146).
- 61. Rev. II 16:7; see also Sahlin (2001, 144).
- 62. Rev. II 16:1; Book II, 216.
- 63. Rev. II 16:6-9; Book II, 216.
- 64. Rev. II 16:16-17; Book II, 217.
- 65. E.g., Rev. I 2, 38, 44; II 18; IV 77; VI 52.
- 66. As usual, I follow Searby in this translation; only here I would choose the words "are just" for the Latin "iustus es" instead of Searby's "deal straightly."
- 67. Rev. I 34:17; Book I, 110.
- 68. Rev. I 34:18-20; Book I, 110-111.
- 69. Rev. I 34:21-23; Book I, 111.
- 70. Rev. I 34:28.

- 71. Klockars (1973, 19).
- 72. Undhagen (1978, 45-46).
- 73. Ibid., 47–48. Klockars's view about the criticism Birgitta received and Undhagen's introduction have been influential in the scholarship on Birgitta. For example, Sahlin follows Undhagen's interpretations and observes that to "gain hearing and to dispel opposition, she [Birgitta] required the approval and protection of the most powerful clerics of Sweden" (2001, 119).
- 74. Undhagen (1978, 47).
- 75. Ibid., 18.
- 76. RS 1.
- 77. Rev. I 52:7; Book I, 145.
- 78. Rev. I 52:8; Book I, 146.
- 79. Rev. I 52:9-10; Book I, 146.
- 80. Rev. I 52:16: Book I, 146.
- 81. Undhagen maintained that the meeting took place before King Magnus Eriksson and Queen Blanche had established their will of May 1, 1346, in which they donated estates to Vadstena for a future monastery. Undhagen's idea was that the royal couple would not have made their will unless Birgitta's revelations were officially approved. Undhagen thought that the Regula Salvatoris existed then at least as a draft (1978, 47). Birgitta Fritz has shown that the royal couple's will and Birgitta's ideas in the Rule are so far away from each other that Undhagen's reasoning is not plausible (1992, 115-129). See also Klockars (1960, 170; 1976, 114). It would be more plausible that Birgitta composed the Rule after the will of the king and the queen was drawn up. This means that the terminus ante quem for the meeting of the theologians was not dependant on the will. Instead, the determining date would be the time before Hemming of Åbo's journey to France. This happened during the fall of 1348, hence the meeting of the theologians happened probably closer to 1348 than 1346. See Stolpe (1972, 359-373) for the dating of the journey; for Hemming's journey, see (Klockars 1960, 151-166; Bergh 2002, 63-65).
- 82. Ex. 51.
- 83. Sundén (1973, 61).
- 84. Ex. 51.
- 85. On the relationship of Bishop Hemming of Åbo and Birgitta, see especially Klockars (1960; 1976).
- 86. On crusades, see Lind (1991; 2001).
- 87. Ex. 51.
- 88. Rev. VI 81 and I 16. Also described in Prior Peter's testimony (DCP, 540-542).
- 89. Undhagen (1978, 39–40, 50). For revelations about the journey to France, see foremost *Rev.* VI 63; IV 103–105, and for the crusade, see *Ex.* 26, *Rev.* VIII 39, 40, 43, 44, 46, 47.
- 90. See Klockars (1960, 151-166).

- 91. Klockars (1966, 35); Undhagen (1978, 39). Undhagen provides a useful summary of the discussions of former scholars.
- 92. Prol. Mathie 6; PMM, 48.
- 93. Prol. Mathie 16; PMM, 49.
- 94. Prol. Mathie 18; PMM, 49.
- 95. Prol. Mathie 22-23; PMM, 50.
- 96. Prol. Mathie 25; PMM, 50.
- 97. Prol. Mathie 32-40; PMM, 51-52.
- 98. Liedgren (1961,109). Concerning the Swedish text of the prologue, see also Moberg (1980, 193–211).
- 99. DCP, 539.
- 100. Prol. Mathie 41-46; PMM, 52.
- 101. Prol. Mathie 21; PMM, 50.
- 102. This was quite unusual in the history of visionary women. Usually it was somebody near the visionary woman—often her confessor—who arranged a wider investigation. Hildegard of Bingen's abbot Cuno took her texts to the Archbishop of Mainz and eventually to the synod held in Trier in 1147–1148 (*Vita Hildegardis*, 23–24; Salmesvuori 2000, 68).
- 103. Rev. I 20:9; Book I, 84. Again Birgitta resembles Marie d'Oignies, namely, "a familiar angel was assigned to watch over her whom she had to obey as if he were her own abbot" (VMO I 35; LOM, 71). Like Marie, Birgitta had a divine authority to whom she owed obedience above her confessor.
- 104. This was evident in many cases in which Birgitta interpreted her own revelations, examples of which include her calling vision and mystical pregnancy. In this respect, Julian of Norwich (ca. 1343–d. after 1416) resembled Birgitta. She also interpreted her own visions. One difference between these two women was that Birgitta did not speak as herself but always used her divine locutor but Julian spoke as herself (Staley 1996, 107–108; Watson and Jenkins 2006, 2–3).
- 105. Ex. 49.
- 106. DCP, 485.
- 107. Alfonso emphasized in his *Episola solitarii ad reges* the many passages in which Birgitta spoke about the *discretio spirituum*. He also said that Mary and Christ instructed Birgitta constantly in this matter. See *Epistola solitarii* especially cap. II and III.

6 Holiness in Action

- 1. E.g., Rev. I 13, 16, 32, 60; II 10; IV 115; VI 80, 81, 97; Ex. 51; Prol. Mathie 44; Acta, 537–539. Prior Peter described in Acta (537) how Birgitta commanded a demon to be silent and cured a possessed man. Usually the authors of Birgittine sources were careful not to have Birgitta perform too many priestly tasks; therefore, this case is an interesting lapse, which, I think, speaks for the historicity of the incident.
- 2. Suydam (2007, 94-95).
- 3. Easting (2007, 75-90).

- 4. Rev. I 44:8; Book I, 127.
- 5. E.g., Rev. I 13, 50, 85; III 4; VI 2, 28, 31; Ex. 56.
- 6. PVita, 87; LOB, 84.
- 7. The woman is identified in the *PVita* as Birgitta's sister-in-law. An interesting point in Katarina's case is that she said that her husband is no longer her husband. This implies that a marriage dissolves with the death of one of the parties. This would connect with Birgitta's struggles to erase her married past.
- 8. Katarina's exact time of death is not known. Gustaf Tunesson and Katarina Gudmarsdotter did not have children, and on May 1, 1344, Gustaf made a contract with Katarina's brother Magnus Gudmarsson about Katarina's inheritance in case he survived her (Liedgren 1974, 51; *DS* 3778). This might mean that Katarina had fallen ill and her death seemed possible.
- 9. PVita, 87; LOB, 84.
- 10. PVita, 87; LOB, 84.
- 11. PVita, 87; LOB, 84-85.
- 12. Newman (1995, 118).
- 13. VMO II 52; LOM, 88.
- 14. Klockars (1966, 234–235). Regarding Birgitta's use of images, see also Malm (1997, 74–75).
- 15. E.g., VMO I 27. Newman notes that this passage was widely disseminated through exemplum literature (1995, 280n56).
- 16. The most interesting of them was perhaps Christina Mirabilis (d. 1224), also known as Christina of Trond and Christina the Astonishing (Newman 1998, 733–770; Hollywood 2002, 241–247). Concerning purgatory, see especially Le Goff (1984); McGuire (1989); Geary (1994); Newman (1995). McGuire and Newman correct and enhance the interpretations of Le Goff.
- 17. Newman (1995, 112).
- 18. VMO I 27.
- 19. Bynum (1987, 125–127, 179–186, 235, 418n54); McNamara (1991, 213–221); Newman (1995,119–122); Elliott (2004, 74–84).
- 20. McNamara (1991, 216).
- 21. Newman (1995, 109).
- 22. Ibid., 111. Men had more options to help the dead, for example, celebrating masses—it was seen as the most effective way—and going to war although crusade indulgences remained controversial (112–113).
- 23. Ibid., 112.
- 24. Ibid., 119; Elliott (2004, 79). As Newman points out, the idea of coredemptive suffering justified physical pain, and what is more, transformed it into a blessing. This could even be seen as a kind of solution to the problem of theodicy (1995, 122).
- 25. Ex. 56, see above chapter 1.
- 26. There seemed to be a pattern where the deceased appeared several times to the living, the last time often being a kind of farewell because the soul was then moving on from purgatory (Newman 1995, 114, 117).

- 27. PVita, 88; LOB, 85.
- 28. Klockars (1976, 88). Katarina Ulfsdotter's testimony contains support to this idea; she said that a large crowd of friends traveled with her parents (*Acta*, 305).
- 29. DS 4518. The new wife was Mektild Lydersdotter.
- 30. PVita, 85.
- 31. Already Gregory the Great (d. 604) emphasized in *Dialogues* that prayers do not have effect if the dead are damned (McGuire 1989, 71).
- 32. Aili (1992, 19).
- 33. Van Engen (2000, 375-377).
- 34. Rev. VI 10.
- 35. *Rev.* VI 21. According to Birgitta, demons were allowed to torment people in purgatory. Angels would comfort people only after some time of purification. For Birgitta's concepts about demons and angels, see Klockars (1971, 21–31) and Bergh (2002, 149–159).
- 36. Suydam (2007, 94, 97).
- 37. Claire Waters suggests convincingly that all medieval interpretations of the Bible needed "citational authority." With this, she means the authority to both cite and be cited. For citational authority, see especially Waters (2004) and Suydam (2007, 97–99).
- 38. Bynum (1987, 27).
- 39. Acta, 63–67. The Swedish women were Margareta of Broby; Ingeborg Bosdotter; Ingeborg Eriksdotter; Ingeborg Magnusdotter, who also was Birgitta's niece; her younger sister Katarina's daughter, Juliana Nilsdotter; Kristina Bosdotter; and Helena Lydersdotter. Many of these ladies or their husbands donated goods to the Vadstena abbey in the 1370s (Collijn 1931, 661, 665, 667).
- 40. Ten persons testified about all 51 articles concerning Birgitta's holiness and 3 of these were women: Birgitta's daughter, Katarina; Francisca Papazzura, Birgitta's friend in Italy who also donated her palace in Rome to the monastery of Vadstena; and Golicia, wife of Latino Orsini. Many Roman noble women testified about single articles, mostly relating to miraculous healings. They were Ocilenda, widow of chancelor Nicolaus de Montenigro; Lucia, wife of Nicolaus de Tartaris; Angela, widow of Lellus Petri; Jacoba, widow of Cechus de Salvo; Cecha, wife of Johannes Sarracenus; Angela, widow of Matheucius Orsini; and Margareta, widow of Paulus Branche (Collijn 1931, xxxix—xl).
- 41. *Rev.* VI 52. The beginning of the revelation is almost the same as *Rev.* IV 77.
- 42. Rev. VI 52:10.
- 43. Rev. VI 52:1, 15.
- 44. Rev. VI 52:19-27.
- 45. Rev. VI 52:43.
- 46. Rev. VI 52:42.
- 47. This revelation especially, with its detailed and colorful descriptions of a woman's rotting body, is an example of what has been called "Birgitta's

- realism" among scholars. For example, she vividly described details of human bodies (Lindgren 1991; 1993; Piltz 1993; Malm 1997).
- 48. Birgitta often talked about the gift of tears. See, e.g., *Rev.* I 53; IV 13, 54, 55, 81, 108; V int. 4:2; VI 66, 75, 97, 98. On gift of tears, see McGinn (1998, 34, 36).
- 49. Rev. VI 52:112.
- 50. Rev. I 44.
- 51. Muessig (2007, 11).
- 52. Rev. VI 52.
- 53. At any rate, *Rev.* VI 52 seems to contain some editing, since the first part is nearly identical to *Rev.* IV 77. It would not be surprising if *Ex.* 75 had been cut.
- 54. Kieckhefer (1984, 172); Rozenski (2007, 109). Concerning Suso and the dating of his books, see also Heinonen (2007, 42–50).
- 55. Klockars (1966, 228–232). As Klockars noted, already in 1862 Hammerich had demonstrated Birgitta's dependence on Suso's book.
- 56. This despite Suso's struggle to follow his teacher Meister Eckhart's (d. ca. 1328) views about "the importance of spiritual, disembodied visions of a hidden Godhead" (Rozenski 2007, 111). See, e.g., Suso (1989, 205–304).
- 57. Although Suso has become famous for his description of excessive asceticism in his later *Vita*, he did not see voluntary suffering as suitable for pious women, since they are the fragile sex. To mortify one's flesh was, according to him, only the initial step on the road of *gelazenheit*, which meant "letting be" or "submitting one's will to God's will" (Williams-Krapp 2004, 44–47). For bodily suffering as a masculine virtue, see Heinonen (2007, especially 133–142). Birgit Klockars noted that most of Bigitta's revelations concerning purgatory or hell occurred in Sweden (1966, 232). This perhaps also argues for Suso's influence on Birgitta particularly in the 1340s.
- 58. In Birgitta's *Revelations*, the suffering of the friends of God was commonplace, but not coredemptive as among some thirteenth-century beguines. Also, penitential acts were useful, but Christ's passion was the most important. See, e.g., *Rev.* I 11, 20; VI 93.
- 59. E.g., Mechthild of Magdeburg (d. 1282 or 1294), Hadewijch of Brabant, Christina Mirabilis, and Margery Kempe (Newman 1995, 121–122).
- 60. Ibid., 118, 134.
- 61. See Master Mathias and the Averroist knight, in chapter 4.
- 62. This can also be seen in the powerful revelations about Christ's passion, recorded by Birgitta on numerous occasions. See *Rev.* I 10, 11, 27, 35; IV 70, and the most famous *Rev.* VII 15.
- 63. Newman (1995, 121).
- 64. Muessig (2007, 57). See also Hanska (1997, 11-12).
- 65. McGuire (1989, 84).
- 66. Apparently the editors of the revelations did not raise the question of *discretio spirituum* here. Perhaps they thought that it had been sufficiently dealt with earlier.

- 67. Strömberg (1944, 134–135).
- 68. Ibid.
- 69. Ibid., 136-137.
- 70. Strömberg suggested that the sermons were Birgitta's main source (1944, 176). But perhaps it would not be too far fetched to suppose that Birgitta had access to Mathias's or Alvastra's books and would have been able to enhance her knowledge by reading also.
- 71. Zarri (1996, 240-242).
- 72. See also Klockars (1976, 120).
- 73. There is surprisingly little literature on the royal couple. Mostly they are studied in separate articles. See, e.g., Blom (1985; 1992); Fritz (1985; 1992; 1997); Lind (1991; 2001); Morris (1993b). Birgitta and King Magnus's relationship in the 1350s and 1360s, when Birgitta lived in Rome, is studied by Hjalmar Sundén (1973), Olle Ferm (1993), and Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller (2003). Michael Nordberg published a nonfiction book about Magnus in 1995. He pays attention to Birgitta's heated writings about the king and seeks to clear Magnus's reputation. Nordberg's book is a good general introduction to the time of King Magnus although his interpretation of the meager sources does not always convince the reader. Therefore, more useful for scholars is Birgitta Fritz's (1997) review of Nordberg's book in which she assesses the author's use of the sources.
- 74. PVita, 98; LOB, 95; Ex. 49.
- 75. Concerning the textual history of *Rev.* VIII, see Aili (1986, 75–91; 2002, 17–46).
- 76. Aili (2002, 21).
- 77. Klockars (1976, 69).
- 78. Ibid., 73.
- 79. Klockars (1960, 94-95; 1976, 69-75).
- 80. DCP, 528; Ex. 59.
- 81. Klockars (1966, 14); Morris (1999a, 58).
- 82. Evidently Birgitta also came to know that kind of lighter literature. This can be seen in one of her revelations, which concerns the usefulness of nonreligious literature. In *Rev.* VI 27, she sees the worldly stories and entertainment as empty and hollow. She exhorts people to concentrate on more important matters such as the salvation of souls (Klockars 1966, 15–16; Morris 1999a, 57–58).
- 83. Klockars (1973, 15). Klockars did not give the reference for this observation, therefore it is hard to determine if it is plausible or not.
- 84. Klockars (1976, 120).
- 85. More about the journey of Bishop Hemming of Åbo and Prior Peter of Alvastra in Klockars (1960, 151–178). Klockars estimated that the journey took place some time between spring 1348 and winter 1349. This was confirmed in 1972, when Sven Stolpe discovered a document in Cambridge, which confirmed that the journey took place around October 1348 (1972, 364).

- 86. Rev. I 52; Book I, 145-146.
- 87. Cambridge manuscript 404 in Corpus Christi College, fol. 102v-103r (Stolpe 1972, 371–373). The edition of the manuscript was made by Birger Bergh (2002, 228).
- 88. Cambridge manuscript 404, fol. 102v. The manuscript contains some surprising parts, for example, in the beginning Magnus asks England's king for one of his daughters in marriage. The petition makes no sense, because Magnus was married to Blanche who was alive and well. A plausible explanation is that the proposal concerned one of Magnus's sons. This shows that the copyist of the document was not too careful in his work. See also Morris (1999a, 82).
- 89. Stolpe (1972); Morris (1999a, 82).
- 90. Sundberg (1997, 61, 63).
- 91. Stolpe (1972, 365).
- 92. The Swedish envoys and Birgitta's revelations seemed not to have had much effect on the rulers of France and England or on the pope. The war continued until 1453. Bishop Hemming's reaction was depression; he felt he had failed (*DCP*, 512). More about the end of the mission in Klockars (1960, 177–178); Morris (1999a, 82). It is quite interesting that to end the war between France and England, Pope Clement also suggested a marriage proposal between the heirs of the rulers. Birgitta's idea was quite in line with the pope's solution (Stolpe 1972, 365–366).
- 93. Rev. I 52:16.
- 94. Ex. 74:4.
- 95. Ex. 74:6-7.
- 96. For a thorough investigation about Birgitta as a prophet, see Sahlin (2001).
- 97. Fitzgerald (1996, vii); Konstan (1996, 13–14); Engberg–Pedersen (1996, 79). Birgitta mentions the danger of flattering advisors, for example, in *Rev.* VIII 4, 16.
- 98. How Birgitta obtained knowledge about rhetoric is dealt with in Bergh (1976, 5–25; 2002, 47–54); Odelman (1993, 15–21); Piltz (1993, 78–84); Malm (1997, 61–76).
- 99. Malm (1997, 71).
- 100. Ibid., 75. See also Morris (2006).
- 101. "Uppenbarelserna är bara medvetna om sitt ändamål, språkligt arbetar de på ett intuitivt plan" (my trans.; Norén 1993, 124; Malm 1997, 75).
- 102. The classical rhetoric had an influence on both secular and religious literature in the Middle Ages. It can be seen in the use of formulas of submission and protestations of incapacity. In this way the writers underline their humility (Petroff 1986, 24–25).
- 103. Ex. 74:7.
- 104. Ex. 74:8.
- 105. Ex. 73:4-5.
- 106. See the previous note.
- 107. DS 4069.

- 108. The list of names brings forth the idea that the theological committee's meeting coincides with the presentation of the will of the royal couple on May 1, 1346. But the sources are too scanty to confirm this.
- 109. Ex. 24:1.
- 110. Ex. 24:2-4.
- 111. This is also what Birgit Klockars ponders. She suggests that Birgitta traveled with the court around February 1345 and stayed in Vadstena for some time (1976, 110).
- 112. Ex. 24:11.
- 113. Ex. 24:14.
- 114. Klockars and later Fritz argue convincingly for this (Klockars 1976, 112–115); Fritz (1985, 13–14; 1992). About the *Rule* and the influence of already existing rules, see Fogelqvist (1991, 203–244).
- 115. Klockars (1966, 49, 170). In Aili's view it is not clear to whom the revelation is directed but he does not have any other suggestions (1986, 85).
- 116. Birgit Klockars suggests a later date, since she interpreted the passage "quam benigne in hac mortalite est seruata" in *Rev*. IV 4 to refer to the plague that came to Sweden around 1349. She concluded that *Rev*. IV 4, therefore, is a letter that Birgitta sent to the queen from Rome (1966, 49). I think that this is a possible interpretation, but first, as Klockars also noted elsewhere (1976, 128), it is possible that the plague appeared in Sweden before Birgitta left for Rome, she could have seen it already herself, and second, that the passage might refer to human beings' liability to die in general and the queen should be grateful that she is still alive. Even in the case that the revelation is of a later date, it shows the kind of relationship the two women had. For the plague in Sweden, see Myrdal (2003). In September 1349, King Magnus Eriksson exhorted the citizens of Sweden to repent and perform penance since the terrifying plague was approaching (*DS* 4515; Myrdal 2003, 86).
- 117. Alfonso Pecha used this revelation in *Rev*. VIII 13 and named the person as Queen Blanche.
- 118. Rev. IV 4:4-10.
- 119. Rev. IV 4:15-16, 24-25.
- 120. Rev. IV 4:4-6.
- 121. Rev. IV 4:21-22, 26, 30, 35-36.
- 122. Rev. IV 4:23.
- 123. Rev. IV 4:37.
- 124. Rev. IV 4:38-39.
- 125. Rev. IV 4:40-43.
- 126. Hungarian royal saints, especially Elizabeth of Hungary, was introduced as a model for royal sanctity in Central Europe in the fourteenth century (see Klaniczay 2002).
- 127. Aili (1986, 85-86).
- 128. DCP, 528; Ex. 59.
- 129. Birgitta presented Elizabeth of Hungary to Blanche as a role model. It is also probable that Blanche knew Marie d'Oignies's *Lise* as well: the

- beguine came from the same area as she. Therefore, Blanche was able to recognize the marks of a living saint in Birgitta. Birgitta directed Blanche to identify herself with Elizabeth of Hungary whereas she identified herself with both and gradually more with Marie d'Oignies.
- 130. Rev. VIII 14 follows Rev. VIII 13, which Alfonso put together exactly on the basis of Rev. IV 4. According to him, these two revelations are about the same incident.
- 131. Rev. VIII 14:1.
- 132. Rev. VIII 14:4.
- 133. Rev. VIII 5:1-2.
- 134. Birgit Klockars noted that the council of state had considerable power even after Magnus Eriksson attained his majority (1976).
- 135. Rev. VIII 5:4-6.
- 136. For example, sections 23–24 of *Rev.* VIII 1 are from *Rev.* II 7; *Rev.* VIII 13 is based on *Rev.* IV 4. See the table of the geminated revelations in Aili (2002, 46).
- 137. Rev. VIII 2:6-7. The last accusation rises from Amos 5:7-12.
- 138. Rev. VIII 4:4-5.
- 139. Rev. VIII 2:11-12, 14-15.
- 140. Klockars (1976, 120). An example of this kind of case is reported in *Rev.* VI 9. A priest, who was also a tax collector, had been sacked and he asked Birgitta what good that did anybody, now that he had lost his income. Birgitta answered that the king had dismissed him because Birgitta had advised him to do so. It had been done for the sake of the man's salvation. The priest had asked Birgitta to leave his soul in peace. It would answer for itself in the afterlife. Birgitta had answered that "if you are not going to repent, you will, as my name is Birgitta, not escape God's special judgment and die an unusual death." Not long after this, the addition recalls, the man died under the molten metal from which a bell was being made. The end of the story is written in a dramatic hagiographic mode but the beginning, the priest who accused Birgitta of costing him his job, might go back to a historical situation.
- 141. Rev. VIII 4:3, 16.
- 142. Rev. VIII 3:1-4.
- 143. Birgitta's view on kingship was traditional: the king received his power from God. She did not question the different social classes but thought that different people were needed in their rightful places. The rulers of the country, the king and his knights were supposed to act lawfully and always for the good of the citizens. They had greater rights than other people but they also had greater responsibility (Klockars 1971, 86–87). See also Gilkær (1993); Morris (1999a, 85).
- 144. Magnus Eriksson had according to the Russian chronicles done exactly as Birgitta had told him to do. Concerning the crusade and the Russian chronicles, see especially Lind (1991; 2001).
- 145. Rev. VIII 47:14, 24, 29, 37-38, 47.
- 146. Rev. VIII 47:34.

- 147. Rev. VIII 47:40-41, 46.
- 148. This also supports Birgit Klockars's argument that there was no rift between Birgitta and the royal couple until the end of 1350s (1976, 126–129).
- 149. Morris (1999a, 85).
- 150. Rev. VIII 2: "Secundum est, quod volo quod ipse rex adiuuet suo subsidio ad edificacionem monasterii tui, cuius regulam ego ipse dictaui." For the history of Vadstena, see Höjer (1905); Cnattingius (1963); Nyberg (1965); Andersson (2001).
- 151. For the early dating of Birgitta's rule, see, e.g., Kraft (1929, 190–191) and Sundén (1973, 68). Cf. Klockars (1976, 115–116) and Fritz (1985, 13–14; 1992). Bridget Morris suggests that it was possible but not certain that the rule already existed in 1346 (1999a, 86).
- 152. RS 29. The earliest version of the text does not exist anymore. Already in medieval documents there is a distinction between *regula in prima* persona and regula in tercia persona. In the first version Christ appears to be speaking in the first person and in the latter Christ is referred to in the third person. Scholars have distinguished seven early text versions of the Regula Salvatoris. The three most important ones are as follows:
 - 1. the so-called early version, "die Frühfassung," Birgitta's own text (Ω, Π) ;
 - 2. the authorised version, "die approbierte Fassung," the bull of 1378 (= Σ); and
 - 3. the adapted version, "die adaptierte Fassung," which was a mixture of Birgitta's own text and the bull of 1378 (termed Φ) (Eklund 1975, 21).
- 153. RS 1; Eklund (1975, 105); Morris (1999a, 162).
- 154. Nyberg (1968, 22-37); Morris (1999a, 162).
- 155. RS 14:167-170.
- 156. RS 26.
- 157. RS 28.
- 158. RS Introduction 3. It is not possible to distinguish the editorial work of Alfonso Pecha and other editors. Therefore, the issues especially in the introduction might reflect Alfonso's interpretation of Birgitta's precise idea.
- 159. RS 1.
- 160. Fogelqvist (1991, 207-217); Morris (1999a, 166).
- 161. Klockars (1966, 180-186); Fogelqvist (1991, 243).
- 162. Lawrence (1989, 168).
- 163. For example, Hildegard of Bingen had considerable difficulties in finding a new confessor for her nuns after the confessor Volmar's death in 1173. *Hildegard Bingensis*. *Epistolarium*, CCCM 91, 23–25.
- 164. Mews (2005, 157–159). There are many examples of women's interest in religious rules that take the female sex and gender into account. Maiju Lehmijoki–Gardner shows that the role of women in the production of religious rules has often been disregarded and women have been interested in creating rules for their communities more than the scholarly

- activity on the issue indicates. For recent studies on women and religious rules, see especially Lehmijoki-Gardner (2004, 79n1; 2005, 5).
- 165. See, for example, the testimonies of some Swedish women (*Acta*, 63–66).
- 166. On widowhood and female networks, see Carlson and Weisl (1999, 4-5).
- 167. *Rev.* IV 84. This revelation is undated. I presume that the attitude represents Birgitta's thinking from both her Swedish and Italian periods.
- 168. Ex. 19:1-3.
- 169. Birgitta's concern in Ex. 19 about the decisive role of the abbess was debated in the Vadstena Abbey and also in other Birgittine abbeys in the fifteenth century. Not only was the idea of a woman as leader of men problematic but practical difficulties also arose: the nuns were in strict *clausura*. Therefore, the contacts between Vadstena and its daughter abbeys was the brothers' responsibility (Gejrot 1990, 195–196).
- 170. See previously, chapter 4, 103-104.
- 171. 1 Cor. 14:1-5. See previously, chapter 3, 65, 69.
- 172. This number includes all the Revelations.
- 173. PVita, 84-85.
- 174. Andersson (2003a, 317). There has been extensive research on the Vadstena sermons since the 1990s. See, e.g., Borgehammar (1990; 2003); Fogelqvist (1990); Nordstrandh (1990); Andersson (1993; 2001; 2003a; 2003b); Härdelin (1998; 2003). The situation before the founding of Vadstena abbey is much less researched. The reason is evidently the lack of sources, for example, there is very little information about mendicant sermons (Andersson 1993, 185). Bengt Strömberg's work from 1944 and Jarl Gallén's research from 1946 and 1950 (reprinted 1998) are still valuable contributions to the research concerning the preaching of the revelations before Birgitta's death.
- 175. Ex. 23.
- 176. Andersson (2001, 124, 177-182).
- 177. Rev. II 14:74; Book II, 213.
- 178. Rev. II 14:75; Book II, 213.
- 179. Rev. II 14:77-78; Book II, 213.
- 180. Rev. II 17:47-48; Book II, 220.
- 181. Rev. II 17:53; Book II, 220.
- 182. Rev. III 6-7; Jönsson (1998, 33-34).
- 183. Rev. III 5:7-8; Book III, 269.

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