

The
Revelations of
St. Birgitta of Sweden

VOLUME 4,
THE HEAVENLY EMPEROR'S
BOOK TO KINGS, THE RULE,
AND MINOR WORKS



Translated by

Denis Searby

Introductions and Notes by

Bridget Morris

The Revelations of St. Birgitta
of Sweden
Volume 4



FIGURE I. View of Vadstena from Lake Vättern. (Photo Lars Berggren)

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Sweden
Volume 4

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TRANSLATED BY DENIS SEARBY
WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES
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This, the concluding volume of the translation of St. Birgitta's works, contains the supplementary materials and minor works that were incorporated into the central corpus in time for her canonization in 1391, and remained a defined part of the manuscript tradition up to the first printed edition by Bartholomeus Ghotan in 1492. The ordering of the books in the translation follows Ghotan's arrangement. In order to make this translation a complete corpus of all extant texts by St. Birgitta, it also contains a small number of short texts that were never part of the central corpus and are not included in Ghotan's edition.

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Abbreviations

Add.	<i>additio</i> , addition, addendum
Birgittine-Norwegian	an early text of the Swedish vernacular tradition that displays elements of a pre-Latin version of the revelations
Decl.	<i>declaratio</i> , “explanation”
DS	Diplomatarium Suecanum, Svenskt diplomatarium, 1829–
Ex.	<i>Revelationes extravagantes</i>
Gh	first printed edition of the collected corpus of <i>Revelationes</i> , produced in Lübeck by Bartholomeus Ghotan
KL	<i>Kulturhistoriskt Lexikon för Nordisk Medeltid</i> (Encyclopedia of the Cultural History of the Scandinavian Middle Ages)
KVHAA	Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien (The Royal Academy of Letters, History, and Antiquities)
int.	<i>interrogatio</i> (Book V)
Lat.	<i>Latin</i>
OM	<i>Olaus Magnus. A Description of the Northern Peoples</i> , ed. P. G. Foote, 1996–98
PL	<i>Patrologia latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1841–64
QO	<i>Quattuor orationes</i>
rev.	revelation, <i>revelatio</i>
RS	<i>Regula Salvatoris</i>
SA	<i>Sermo angelicus</i>

- SFSS Samlingar utgivna av Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet
(Swedish Medieval Texts' Society Series)
- Sw. Swedish (medieval or modern)
- Söderwall *Ordbok öfver svenska medeltids-språket*, ed. K. F.
Söderwall et al. (Dictionary of Medieval Swedish),
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Book I (sixty chapters)

Mixture of early revelations

Date: Sweden years, 1344–49

Ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, 1977 (printed 1978)

Book II (thirty chapters)

Revelations on the knighthood

Date: Sweden years, 1344–49

Ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen† and Birger Bergh, 2001

Book III (thirty-four chapters)

Revelations on clerics

Date: Sweden and Rome years, mainly 1349–51

Ed. Ann-Mari Jönsson, 1998

Contained in Volume 2 of the present translation:

Book IV (144 chapters; includes the *Tractatus ad sacerdotes* chs. 131–35 and the *Tractatus ad pontifices* chs. 136–44)

Mixture of revelations on various subjects
Date: Sweden and (mainly) Rome years, 1344–71
Ed. Hans Aili, 1992

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

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Book VI (122 chapters)
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Ed. Birger Bergh, 1991

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

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Epistola Solitarii ad reges (Prologue to Book VIII)
Date c. 1377
Ed. Arne Jönsson, in Aili, *Book VIII* (below)
Ed. Hans Aili, 2002

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

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

Sermo angelicus de Virginis excellentia
Matins readings for the nuns of the order (prologue, twenty-one chapters)
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Ed. Sten Eklund, 1972

Quattuor orationes

Four major prayers (preceded by preface)

Undated

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Revelationes extravagantes (prologue, 116 chapters)

Additional materials on a wide variety of subjects, including supplements to
the Rule

Date: Sweden and Rome years, 1344-71

Ed. Lennart Hollman, 1956

The Revelations of St. Birgitta
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Volume 4

Book VIII

The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings

Introduction

The *Liber caelestis* (the term for the complete collection of Birgitta's books of revelations) finishes at the end of Book VII, but after Birgitta's death in 1373, a further book, known as the *Liber caelestis Imperatoris ad reges* [*The Heavenly Emperor's Book to Kings*], soon came to be added as an eighth book.¹ It was compiled by Alfonso of Jaén, probably in 1376–77, and is likely to have been included alongside books I–VII in the submissions to Pope Urban VI in 1379.² It is preceded by a lengthy treatise written by Alfonso, known as the *Epistola solitarii ad reges* [*The Hermit's Letter to Kings*]. This work probes the means of testing the nature of revelation and miracle and the ability to demonstrate how false and diabolical illusions could be distinguished from visions that were genuinely conferred by the Holy Spirit.³ This question—that had already been raised by Master Mathias in his Prologue to Book I—is also indicative of the theological obstacles that had to be overcome to attain Birgitta's public recognition by the church, and a possible explanation for the length and rigor of the treatise.

Book VIII contains fifty-eight revelations almost exclusively on the subject of the government of kings, and more specifically, on the rule of Swedish king Magnus Eriksson. It opens with an overarching statement from Christ as ruler, advising on various aspects of the king's life, from his personal behavior and marriage to his political affiliations and foreign policy. There follows a loosely organized body of revelations, and toward the end there is an appeal to both the emperor, requesting him to ratify the Birgittine Rule, and the pope, requesting him to absolve King Magnus from his excommunication following a financial loan from the papacy. Finally, in a tone of moral opprobrium, God expresses his anger over the sins of the people of Sweden. The Book serves as a guide to Christian rulers, who are to receive it as a "precious

and new royal crown" (*Epistola* paragraphs 9–10). It also contains propagandist elements in the sanctioning of the Birgittine Order and the declaring of Birgitta's sanctity.

A Thematic Anthology

About half of the contents of Book VIII repeat revelations that occur earlier in the *Liber caelestis*. The relevant chapters and their equivalents in the main corpus are: chapter 1 paragraphs 24–34 (equivalent to II 7 paragraphs 1–11); chapter 2 paragraphs 1–4 (II 12 paragraphs 1–5); chapter 7 (IV 48); chapter 8 (V rev. 4); chapter 13 (IV 4); chapter 15 (IV 17); chapter 22 (VII 18); chapter 23 (VII 19); chapter 24 (III 31); chapter 25 (IV 1); chapter 26 (IV 103); chapter 27 (IV 104); chapter 28 (IV 105); chapter 29 (VI 95); chapter 30 (VI 26); chapter 32 (II 7 paragraphs 17–37, 41–45); chapter 33 (II 9 paragraphs 1–2 [beginning], 17–33); chapter 34 (IV 74); chapter 35 (II 13 paragraphs 1, 11–39); chapter 36 (II 12 1[beginning], 31–59); chapter 37 (II 11); chapter 38 (VI 82); chapter 41 (IV 3); chapter 42 (II 6); chapter 44 (VI 41); chapter 50 (IV 45); chapter 58 (VII 30).

The placing of these duplicated materials is not fixed in the manuscript tradition of the central corpus.⁴ Rather than giving a revelation twice, many manuscripts of Book VIII simply provide a cross-reference to the location in the main corpus. There is sometimes contamination or overlap between the two text locations and an explanatory phrase is taken from Book VIII into the main corpus of books. For example, "I sent to the kings of France and England" in VIII 28.1 is given as "I sent to them" in IV 105.1, but one manuscript (Lund University Library, Codex 21, "Falkenberg") adopts the same reading as Book VIII.⁵

As can be seen in the above example, Alfonso makes a number of minor alterations in the duplicated revelations that he includes in Book VIII. A further example is VIII 50, giving "the German emperor" but "Your Majesty" in Book IV 45. And by elevating the high rank of the recipient (such as "nobilis" of Birgitta's brother in VI 95, but "princes" in VIII 29), he brings the political character of the collection to the fore.

Alfonso also makes many minor qualifying and stylistic additions in his version of Book VIII, such as "my womb" (VIII 27.1), "Noah's ark" (VIII 41.3), "Tell *him*" (VIII 7.4), and "my enemies" (VIII 58.15), and adding adverbs such as "in truth" (VIII 35.20). He sometimes changes sentence division, inverts a word order, or inserts a synonym, such as "conscience and intellect" (VIII 44.9) and "emperor and king" (VIII 50.9). Or he gives a fuller gloss, such as the expansion of IV 3.16 "to its legitimate owner" into "to the legitimate lord, that is, to that king, agreed by the preceding king as the hereditary king" (VIII 41.16). Many of these changes—such as the substitution of a synonym, or the active for the passive voice, or the accusative for the ablative case—are made for no apparent reason, but they shed light on Alfonso's editorial method as he sought to standardize the corpus as a whole.⁶

A few of the duplicated revelations are made up of extracts from several revelations, suggesting a tendency that recurs in the fifteenth century whereby

parts of individual revelations are adapted into other contexts.⁷ The most complex of these is ch. 1, which is a compilation from VII 30, III 26, II 13, II 18, II 17, and ch. 32, which is equivalent to Book II 7 17–37 and 41–45. Ch. 41, which is equivalent to IV 3, also consists of different parts dating from different periods of Birgitta's life.

Epistola Solitarii

Alfonso sets out to defend the divine inspiration and authenticity of the *Revelationes* against potential voices of opposition: "Because many not unjustly were questioning how and in what way lady Birgitta was able to have and had most frequently in her prayers such an abundance of revelations and divine visions, . . . the prologue was composed and produced."⁸

The *Epistola solitarii* was written either in 1378, in response to the outbreak of the Great Schism in the church and as a defense of pope Urban VI, or else between the summer of 1375 and October 1376, as evidence in support of the canonization.⁹ Petitions for the canonization came first from Vadstena and were taken up in the late 1370s among others by King Albrecht in Sweden, Queen Johanna of Naples, and Emperor Charles IV. These powerful voices in turn may have prompted the many critiques of the *Revelationes* after Birgitta's death. In 1415, Jean Gerson (one of her main critics) wrote *De probatione spirituum*, which is in part a commentary on the deliberations of the Council of Constance over Birgitta's canonization and the credence given to other female mystics. Gerson is concerned with the difficulties raised by identifying and proving the origin of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and he outlines three ways to test spirits: by learning from the scriptures, by spiritual experiences, and by virtue of hierarchical office.¹⁰

The opening question raised in the *Epistola solitarii* addresses the question of why God chose a woman to be the mediator of his divine message; the response is to present Birgitta as a weak and simple woman chosen in order to confound the strong and foolish of the world.¹¹ Alfonso lists many types of unlearned people, including women who had been given the gift of prophecy, and he urges those who are qualified to distinguish between demonic delusions to examine such cases very carefully. He compares Birgitta with a number of female prophets and biblical women, and he dwells in particular on a comparison with Moses, a "simple person" (*homo simplex*). He enumerates seven different ways in which authentic revelations may be distinguished from diabolical influences. They include the humility and obedience of the visionary, the sweetness of divine ecstasy, and the enlightenment of the intellect so that the soul understands what it sees and hears. Further, there must be an accord between what the visionary says and the Church's official teaching, as well as a propensity for the divine message to be widely broadcast. Lastly, the visionary must experience a pious death, and there must be evidence of posthumous miracles. Alfonso states that all these criteria are met in Birgitta's case, for which reason the heavenly origin of the revelations may be guaranteed.

The *Epistola solitarii* became a landmark in describing the criteria required for judging visionaries and their visions, and the *Revelationes* are consciously presented within the framework of discourse on the *discretio spirituum*.¹² Yet it was often omitted by later compilers of the *Revelationes*.¹³ As we have frequently noted in connection with earlier books, the result is that Birgitta herself becomes a disembodied mouthpiece of the divine message. By discussing the different presentations of Birgitta as a female mouthpiece of a divinely revealed message, Alfonso establishes her impeccable credentials as a visionary and measures her achievement against each of the criteria he defines. The *Epistola solitarii* was addressed to the European royalty and it emphasizes Birgitta's descent from the royal house of Sweden, calling her (erroneously) at one point the "princess of Närke" (*principissa Nericie*) to emphasize her high rank and royal connection.

It is not until the final chapter of the treatise that Alfonso outlines the function of the compilation of Book VIII, and this section alone serves as the Preface to the book itself.

A Propagandist "Mirror of Kings"

Birgitta's political revelations provide a valuable commentary on the struggles between the crown, nobility, and church in her time, and in gathering such texts into a single collection, Alfonso creates a unique historical and political document. By highlighting and reinforcing the distance that had arisen between Birgitta and the Swedish king—who had disappeared from the political scene by the 1370s when the book was compiled—Alfonso may be consciously aligning the Birgittine cause more closely with that of Magnus's successors for his own purposes in promoting Birgitta's case in Rome.

Although Birgitta was about fifteen years older than Magnus, the fate of both individuals was closely intertwined throughout the fourteenth century. Magnus's reign is difficult to evaluate because the existing written sources from the period are few and emanate mostly from within the Birgittine circle and present an ambivalent picture of him.¹⁴ Framing her language in moral imperatives, Birgitta voices the interests of Sweden's small and homogenous political class, which consisted of no more than a hundred members, about twenty or thirty of whom belonged to the exclusive circle around the king, and many of whom appear as shadowy figures in the *Revelationes*. She moves from a position of unequivocal support for him in the 1340s to one of contempt and condemnation—even, as can be seen in her autograph vision (Book VIII 56 and *Extravagantes* ch. 80), to the extent of calling for an uprising against him.

Magnus was elected as king of Sweden in 1319 at the age of three, and in the same year he also inherited Norway and its dependencies. His minority (1319–32) was presided over by a council drawn from the aristocracy and church, and led initially by the regent Mats Ketilmundsson and later by *drots* Knut Jönsson of Aspenäs, who was Birgitta's uncle by marriage; later, in 1348, Birgitta's brother Israel Birgersson took over as *officialis generalis* during the king's absence. Magnus's mother, Ingeborg, took an active part in the political

intrigues during the minority rule, with her Danish favorite, Knut Porse. Magnus was crowned king over Sweden, Norway and Skåne in Stockholm on 22 July 1336. He inherited serious financial difficulties caused essentially by an imbalance between the nation's income and its expenditure. Denmark—which was in even greater financial disarray until king Valdemar Atterdag began to restore its fortunes in the 1340s—was forced to mortgage some of its territories, and the people of Skåne and Blekinge in the southernmost part of present-day Sweden asked Magnus to take over the rule of the unpopular mortgage holder from Holstein, who had been governing them. Magnus paid 34,000 marks in silver and gained a wealthy region with approximately 350,000 inhabitants. To help raise the money to pay for the provinces, he taxed the nobility and church savagely. The fragile economic system was further unable to support the developing state and military institutions and the king continued to increase taxes, and to bring more of the nobility under the tax-paying umbrella. He taxed exports, mortgaged other parts of the kingdom, raised loans from the papacy, the Hanseats, and German magnates, and he centralized trade and imposed greater state controls on fiscal life. His relations with the Hanseats further exacerbated his problems as he struck repeated truces with them.

Magnus had undertaken his rule when conditions seemed favorable for the setting up of a united kingdom (VIII 1–5 describe the qualities of a good king), and the early decades of his reign were marked by a number of legal reforms and a cultural awakening. He was responsible for the codification of all the provincial laws into a single, national law, *Magnus Erikssons landslag*, in c. 1350, which became the embodiment of the constitutional basis of society (VIII 41 refers to this law code). He also developed closer contacts with Europe. In marrying Blanche of Namur in 1335, the daughter of a Flemish duke, he was forging a bond with one of the most politically developed and advanced states in Europe, and the new queen probably brought with her continental ideas about kingship and government. Birgitta was employed in the court as a “magistra” to the queen after her marriage (see *Extravagantes* ch. 59). VIII 10–16 deal with the qualities of a good queen, and advice on how a queen should behave.

However, without a strong power base, a fixed court, a healthy economy, a loyal aristocracy, and a supportive church, it was difficult for Magnus unconditionally to establish his authority. The old aristocratic families such as Birgitta's, whose members included lawmakers and leading ecclesiastics, had powerful positions in society, and the king was beholden to them; if he was not in a strong enough position, politically or economically, the aristocracy could legitimately overthrow him. (VIII 54 concerns the manners and clothing of the aristocracy, and there are chapters on the king's counselors, drawn from the aristocracy, such as ch. 2, ch. 4 on justice, and ch. 6 on the protection of commoners, paragraphs 18–20, 49.)

Magnus's political difficulties were exacerbated in the late 1340s, first with his abortive crusades to the regions east of the Baltic Sea and then by the ravages of the Great Plague, which hit Sweden much as it did continental Europe. Birgitta reminds the king of the need for a just cause and proper execution of the crusade (VIII 39–47).¹⁵ In the 1350s, by which time Birgitta was in Rome at a safe distance

and therefore more able to vent her criticism, the king's fortunes changed more markedly. He designated his two sons, Håkan and Erik, to inherit the thrones of Norway and Sweden respectively in 1343 and 1344; when the younger son, Håkan, reached his majority in 1355 he was declared king of Norway, leaving his elder brother without power or influence, and he was thus lured into conspiracy with the leading magnates against his father (VIII 41). In particular there was opposition among the magnates against the king's favored adviser, duke Bengt Algotsson (VIII 31), which led to open conflict in 1356, in which Erik, aided by his uncle Albrecht of Mecklenburg (the Elder), in an effort to broker peace, forced his father to relinquish parts of his Swedish kingdom, leaving the kingdom divided in 1357. Bengt Algotsson was banished from Norway and Sweden, and a council of state, consisting of members of the aristocracy, was established.¹⁶ Other parts of the kingdom were further weakened in this power struggle: Albrecht of Mecklenburg gained control of parts of the south, and thereby a political foothold in Sweden, and the Danish king, Valdemar Atterdag, who was anxious to regain the southern territories that formerly had been under the Danish crown, entered an alliance with Magnus and his son Håkan against Erik and Albrecht. Erik died shortly afterward, in 1359, and Magnus was again sole ruler of Sweden. During the following negotiations, Magnus found himself isolated when Albrecht and Valdemar agreed terms. Sweden lost the southern provinces in the ensuing conflict, and Valdemar then turned his attention to the rich Baltic island of Gotland (VIII 16–17 use the images of a fox and wolf, which may refer to these disputing rulers). VIII 52 contains outspoken criticism of the king's misdemeanors during his excommunication, including his debts, the heavy taxation of his people, disobedience, patronage of clerics to high positions, and his violation of state and ecclesial laws. Birgitta advises him to seek the pope's forgiveness and absolution from excommunication in person in Rome.

As Danish influence in Sweden grew, King Magnus's position looked increasingly vulnerable. His relations with the aristocracy grew ever more bitter, especially since the nobles had cherished the possession of the southern provinces. By an ill-fated alliance with Valdemar in 1359, Magnus had lost the southern region, and the aristocracy started to criticize him openly. When Magnus in 1361 refused to ratify a treaty with the Hanseatic towns against Valdemar, the aristocracy sided with his son Håkan, deposed Magnus in 1362, and made Håkan king. But shortly afterward father and son were reconciled and together they sought support from Valdemar, which was cemented by the marriage of Håkan with Valdemar's daughter Margarethe in 1363 (a marriage of which Birgitta disapproves in VIII 9). Håkan's cousin Albrecht "the Younger" was summoned to Sweden and elected king in Uppsala in 1364, at the same time as Magnus and Håkan were banished to Norway, although they retained the regions of western Sweden. Magnus died in a shipwreck in 1374. The unhappy events at the end of his reign heralded a new period of upheaval that led to Margarethe taking over the crown of a unified Scandinavia in 1397, the so-called Union of Kalmar, which was to last for over a hundred years.¹⁷

As her visionary authority grew, Birgitta became better equipped to speak out on behalf of the political class she represented. Her thinly veiled messages

initially offered positive advice, but later became more forthright. She is contemptuous of Magnus's government in the wake of his disastrous crusade to the Baltic, and she dislikes his financial squeeze on the church and aristocracy, his elevation of favorites, and his disregard of a ban of excommunication imposed by the church.

The so-called autograph revelation (of which ch. 56 is the opening part, and then the main political message is consigned to the *Extravagantes* ch. 80; see p. 325) is without doubt the most vehement and explicit criticism that Birgitta makes of the Swedish king. Although earlier Christ had said in a revelation (ch. 18) that "my friends should strive carefully to observe and maintain justice, to love the common people, to glorify God, and punish the rebellious and impious," only a few years afterward, in Rome, she issued an irrevocable program for a rebellion against the king. Showing a strong sense of *Realpolitik* combined with careful tactics, she presented her call to have Magnus Eriksson deposed in such a way that it came as a divine mandate, carefully couched within the legal prescriptions of the national law. Magnus was expressly accused of having broken the laws he himself had helped to create only a few years earlier in the national code, *Magnus Erikssons Landslag*. Birgitta addresses her message to four noblemen, calling on them to solicit help from the highest social ranks (where she herself had friends and relatives). But she also appeals to the wider group of the low nobility and the political group of commoners consisting of the farming class that made up the greater part of the population.¹⁸

Moral Reform in the Christian Community on Earth

Although Book VIII is informed by the real deeds of individuals, providing guidance on governance, yet Alfonso, in the genre of the "Mirror of Kings" [*Speculum regale*], seeks to draw out a general moral and spiritual meaning from the specific examples given. These have an application to the whole of Christendom. The revelations begin with a powerful metaphor or visual image, a sharp mnemonic detail that marks the beginning of a schematizing process that develops into moral, political, and religious exegesis. Doctrine, allegory, and scriptural exegesis are incorporated into the layers of interpretation, leaving a medley of unstructured phrases and snatches of familiar biblical and liturgical and commonplace devotional materials. Despite their rough edges and lack of elegance, Birgitta's own voice may clearly be heard in these revelations.

Birgitta is not writing as a theorizer or political commentator, but in a prophetic tradition; her concern is with the salvation of humankind. She began with the reform of those around her, in real persons and events, but it is the idea of the Christian community, as reflected in relation to political power and the heavenly community of saints, that is at the heart of Birgitta's worldview.¹⁹ In keeping with traditional Christian exegesis she always has in mind the traditional fourfold method of explaining the stark images and voices within her mind, and these divisions are to a greater or lesser extent present throughout the revelations.

Other contemporary treatises on kingship can be set alongside Book VIII, and they too present a larger worldview of the Christian kingdom on earth and its parallels with the heavenly kingdom. A tract entitled *Um styrilse konunga ok höfðinga* [*On the Government of Kings and Leaders*], dating from the 1340s, marks a departure from entrenched conservative views in Sweden, and looks forward to more European models of government.²⁰ Possibly written for Magnus Eriksson's two sons, Erik and Håkan, it is based on a work written c. 1280 by Giles of Rome for Philip the Fair of France. It highlights the ideological split between the king and aristocracy that was opening up in the mid-fourteenth century. It argues for absolutism rather than group government by an aristocracy, and shows how kingship by inheritance is preferable to kingship by election. It also describes how the prospective king should be educated, and what demands should be made on the court and the king's subjects. The overriding principle is that royal government should be not only to the credit of the king, but also to the benefit of the people.

Birgittine propaganda against Magnus was further fuelled by a pamphlet issued in c. 1370, known as the *Libellus de Magno Erico Rege*.²¹ It is a defense of aristocratic interests, and ascribes to Magnus the vices of *cupiditas*, *voluptas*, and *superbia*. It suggests a corrupt political influence on the king by his wife, Blanche, a view that is again hinted at, but never made explicit, in the *Revelationes* (for instance, the queen is described as a rotten apple, VIII 10).²²

One of Alfonso's primary ambitions in promoting the canonization was to persuade European leaders of Birgitta's commanding visionary voice and perhaps even to remind them of their shared political interests within the universal church at a time when powerful national interests were emerging. By applying particular details to individuals, he seeks out a universal message by referring collectively and implicitly to the ruling elites across the continent.²³

In chapter 50, an unequivocal appeal is made to the Emperor Charles IV.²⁴ He was one of the signatories to the application for Birgitta's canonization on 9 September 1377, and—according to the Prologue by Johannes Turrecremata in Ghotan's printed edition—the owner of one of the earliest copies of the *Revelationes*, as was the university he founded in Prague. Indeed, the *Revelationes* was allegedly the favorite reading of Charles IV.²⁵ Birgitta probably opposed the current view of the emperor as a partial secular European leader and instead espoused the traditional unity of pope and emperor, seeing the emperor's role as protector of the church.

Letters of supplication were sent to the pope from other leaders: Johanna of Naples was instrumental in the campaign in Rome, and although she is not mentioned in Book VIII, she is well represented in Book VII. The archbishop of Sweden, Birger Gregorsson, made a supplication in 1376, as did several members of the Swedish aristocracy; the Swedish king, Albrecht of Mecklenburg, who had not shown great enthusiasm toward the cause, probably saw the political and financial advantages that would accrue from the canonization, and added his name in support.²⁶

The ultimate purpose of the collection that made up Book VIII was therefore probably a mixed one: to write a tract on the subject of kingship that also

demonstrated that Birgitta's prophecies about Magnus Eriksson had been vindicated; to enlist the support of the current king of Sweden, Albrecht, now that there was a new emerging political order within a unified Scandinavia; to produce a thematic collection to reach a defined aristocratic European readership; to persuade the rulers of Europe to support the canonization and ratify the Rule; and, most importantly, to highlight Birgitta's view of the Christian community and the church's mission of reform in salvation history.

Imagery

Perhaps because of the political sensitivities of the subject matter and the need to convey many strong messages metaphorically, there are exceptionally many striking images in Book VIII, especially animal images to represent human beings and apocalyptic themes (e.g., a fox, a viper; ch. 17, 18). Christ's passion is like a thunderstorm (ch. 47); a mother thrusts away a stillborn fetus which she refuses to touch or breast-feed (ch. 56); a king sits in a glass orb (ch. 48); a dragon appears in the sky (ch. 31); marriage is like children playing with dolls (ch. 9); a queen is like a chewed-on apple core (ch. 10). Ch. 48 contains a particularly interesting range of images, with descriptions of God as a distiller producing brandy through several pipes through a complicated process until it has reached perfection. There are also images of instruments of torture, a blind puppy, marrow squeezed out of the brain, and a king who appears to be holding a whirligig. In ch. 56 there is an image of a human face in the eucharistic host and a flame burning around it.

Note on the Translation

In the translation, the duplicated revelations that have already been translated in the earlier books are not repeated, with the exception of those revelations where only a few paragraphs are duplicated (e.g., ch. 1 and 2). In the case of the duplicated chapters that are not included in full, a cross-reference and short summary heading is given, together with Alfonso's heading as given in Book VIII (where it sometimes has a slightly different wording from the heading of the parallel text). Any substantive points of difference between the two versions are indicated in the footnotes.

NOTES

1. Concerning the title, it is uncertain whether "caelestis" is intended to refer to the "emperor" of the title, or to "books." The former makes sense, and was probably Alfonso's intention, but the canonization materials suggest it was also interpreted as the latter; see further Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*, p. 62. In the Prague redaction that was compiled by Mattheus of Kraków, Book VIII is placed between Books III and IV; the New York and Palermo manuscripts that are among the earliest group of *de luxe* manuscripts that originated in Naples most likely included it as an integral part of the corpus instead of an additional text.

2. See further Undhagen, *Book I*, p. 22–23, 29–30, and for arguments regarding the dating, Aili, *Book VIII*, p. 21.

3. Alfonso mentions Book VIII in his canonization testimony with regard to the defenses of the divine inspiration of Birgitta's visions in the Prologue to Book I as well as the *Epistola solitarii*: "factus et compositus fuit

prologus hoc plene declarans per diuinam scripturam super primo libro celesti et clarius super viii eidem domine Brigide diuinitus reuelato, qui intitulatur liber celestis imperatoris ad reges"; Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 375.

4. The exact number of the *Extravagantes* cannot easily be determined. For example, there is a further duplicated chapter, *Extravagantes* 42, which is equivalent to Book VIII 51: but in this case it is most likely that the medieval editor had placed this chapter from the *Extravagantes* into Book VIII by mistake. In all the printed editions there are a further three chapters included in Book VIII that correspond to *Extravagantes* 27, 78, and 80. On the manuscript transmission of these revelations, see Aili, *Book VIII*, pp. 21–22, 46. We have made some minor amendments to Aili's table on p. 46 in accordance with the review by Stephan Borgehammar, in *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift*, 104, pp. 163–65.

5. As Aili, *Book VIII*, pp. 21–22 indicates, the early Italian manuscripts include the duplications in both locations, as does the beta₂ group of manuscripts; the defective MS "r" omits—with a cross-reference—the equivalent chapters only from Book VII (but not from the earlier books). The "Vadstena branch" of manuscripts is inconsistent, with some revelations included *in loco* and others omitted (IV 74 = VIII 34 is missing in both locations); MS K adopts Book VIII consistently, but a secondary hand has inserted the duplicated chapters at the end of the codex; the Prague group has an erratic pattern of retention or omission; and Ghotan adopts the principle of placing all of the duplications in Book VIII and giving cross-references in books of the main corpus.

6. On this editorial process see further Aili, *Book IV*, pp. 44–47; Aili, "St Birgitta and the Text" and Aili, "Alfonso's Editorial Work."

7. See for example the German or Italian vernacular compilations discussed in Morris and O'Mara, *The Translation of the Works*.

8. The *Epistola solitarii* was first edited by Jönsson in *Alfonso of Jaén*, pp. 115–68, and is reprinted by Aili in his edition of Book VIII.

9. In favor of the later dating, see Colledge, "'Epistola solitarii,'" pp. 44–45; of the earlier dating, see Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*, pp. 62, 106.

10. See further Caiger, "Doctrine and Discipline," and McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the Last Medieval Reformation*.

11. See further Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 173–76.

12. See further on the discernment of spirits Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*.

13. Roger Ellis, "Flores," p. 167, argues: "The 'propagandist' elements in the work—revelations, that is, sanctioning the creation of a new Order, or declaring the holiness of the Lady Bridget or certifying their own divine origins—served the turn of the compilers, in the main, only when the creation of the Order and the canonization of its foundress were still in question, or were being brought into question, and when the *Revelations* might be called in evidence on their behalf."

14. Magnus's career within the Birgittine tradition is assessed by Ferm, *Olaus Petri och Heliga Birgitta*, especially pp. 13–33. See also Authén Blom, *Norge i union* and Helle, *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, pp. 713–20.

15. On the crusade see further volume 1 p. 170 and volume 2 p. 14.

16. On Bengt Algotsson, see further Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, pp. 129–33.

17. See "Magnus Eriksson" in *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon*, 24 (1982–84).

18. The process by which Birgitta distanced herself from the king has been debated by several scholars. Andersson, *Källstudier till Sveriges historia*, challenges the Augustinian dualistic view drawn from the literary sources of a simplistic transition from a saint king to a tyrannical *rex iniquus*. Drar, *Konungens herravälde*, looks at the presentation of the princely ideal developed within canon law, and challenges the accuracy of the accusations levelled against the king in the revelation. Ferm, "Birgittas uppror mot Magnus Eriksson," discusses the motives for the uprising itself and the legitimacy of the revolt within the context of the legal framework in Sweden, arguing in favor of a pragmatic rather than theoretical approach on the part of Birgitta.

19. As Zochowska, "The Christian Kingdom," p. 8, has written, Birgitta was "deeply interested in the relationship between the religious and the political performance of Christian rulers, bishops, and nobles: specifically, the pragmatic exterior and spiritual interior of their activities. Therefore, even if we do not regard Birgitta as a political thinker, we must admit that she is a descendant of a certain political tradition. This tradition has specific Scandinavian marks, but it is also a part of general Christian political theology. *Revelationes celestes* is among the priceless sources that can aid an exploration of this tradition."

20. See Moberg, *Konungastyrelsen*.

21. It is also referred to as *Qualiter regnavit rex Magnus* [How King Magnus Reigned]. It was probably written by a cleric with Birgittine connections. See further Kraft, "Textstudier till Birgittas revelationer," pp. 1–27, Andersson, *Källstudier till Sveriges historia*, pp. 151–73, and Ferm, *Olaus Petri och heliga Birgitta*, pp. 17–18, who points out that the single manuscript owned by Vadstena was not allowed to be circulated, perhaps due to its political sensitivity and despite the fact that it represents a Birgittine faction and voice.

22. The antimonarchic view was reiterated in the chronicle texts of the early Reformation. Olaus Petri wrote *En Svensk krönika* in 1540, in which he insinuated that Birgitta had spread unfounded rumors about the king. See also the discussion of Johannes Magnus's *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sveonumque regibus* in 1554 by Johannesson, *The Renaissance of the Goths*.

23. Gilkaer, *The Political Ideas of St Birgitta*, has looked at the tract in respect of its Thomist ideas, and he has also examined some of the political ideas that emerged from the court of Castile under King Alfonso XI and Pedro I, from where Alfonso may have drawn some influence.

24. Charles IV was born under the name Wenceslaus in Prague in 1316. He was a great collector of religious relics, and a follower of the *devotio moderna* (whose representatives included Tauler and Christina Ebner), and he supported the reformist preacher Jan Milič. Birgitta may have met him in person in 1368, to appeal for help in the reform of the church and for reconciliation in Europe. She is told to wait in Rome until the pope and emperor are there at the same time (this message was witnessed by Magnus Petri; see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 267). See also Book IV 45; *Extravagantes* 8, 41; and Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 94. Birgitta is said to have received a relic of a splinter of the cross from Charles IV, which later came into the possession of the Birgittine house in Altomünster. See further Liebhart, "Birgitta of Sweden and Politics"; Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld*, pp. 88–96.

25. Undhagen, *Book I*, p. 32n145, and p. 64n2.

26. See further on the initial moves toward canonization, Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klostets och birgittinordens historia*, pp. 102–10; Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 143–59; Gejrot, "Att sätta ljuset i ljusstaken."



FIGURE 2. Frontispiece to the *Epistola solitarii* in the first printed edition at the press of Bartholomaeus Ghotan, Lübeck, 1492. (Photo Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm)

THE HERMIT'S LETTER TO KINGS

⚡ Chapter 1

*A Treatise Addressed to Kings in Defense of Birgitta that Outlines how to Distinguish Divine from Diabolical Visions*¹

DATE: 1376/1377, ROME

A rebuke to those who rashly and thoughtlessly accept or reject, without a preceding investigation, people claiming to receive divine visions and revelations.

1 Most illustrious kings—may you be true kings in Christ! My dear lords, accept my humble and suppliant greetings laid at the feet of your royal majesties.²

2 Kings do right to take pains in investigating and by investigating to learn the character of persons who write to them concerning extraordinary and private communications of the divine will. 3 Indeed, in these modern times so darkened by dense clouds,³ a woman of noble birth and shining spirit has appeared, Lady Birgitta of the kingdom of Sweden, the glory of womankind. 4 Like a bright star she sheds shining beams of holiness throughout this wide world. Now, by the command of the supreme Emperor of heaven, she sends you the present book which was supernaturally revealed to her. It is like a bright mirror⁴ to aid your royal adorning and the correcting of your conduct and the holy governance of your subjects. 5 Accordingly, my reverend lords, I wish to guard you against the hasty, rash and unreasonable opinions of unreasonable men that might lead you to the incredulity and hardness of heart of Pharaoh,⁵ uprooting like a storm-wind⁶ the seed of belief and faith from your hearts, without humble acceptance of and belief in this glorious book that was inscribed in the very heart of the aforesaid lady by the finger of the living God.⁷ 6 In order to put you on guard against such a deception, I have decided to give you a brief but complete description of that saintly lady's background and character as well as of the ways in which she received visions⁸ from God. 7 In what I write, I also intend to warn and

1. The Hermit's Letter: the title, "Epistola solitarii," which alludes to Alfonso's former existence as a solitary hermit, conveys the fact that he had been well prepared for his task in the discernment of spirits after he resigned his bishopric in 1368 and spent time as a desert hermit before he met Birgitta. Some manuscripts simply have the title "Epistola solitarii" while others add "ad reges," and others expand still further to explain that Alfonso was the former bishop of Jaén.

2. "Most illustrious kings... your royal majesty": petitions for Birgitta's canonization had been made to certain rulers, notably King Albrecht and the Swedish Council, Queen Johanna of Naples, and Emperor Charles IV. The *Epistola* was another such document of support; see Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*, pp. 107–09.

3. "Darkened by dense clouds"; cf. Job 10:21.

4. "It is like a bright mirror": a reference to the Mirror of Kings that is the theme of Book VIII.

5. "Incredulity and hardness of heart of Pharaoh"; cf. Exodus 5:1–12.36; Mark 16:14.

6. "Storm-wind" renders "ventus turbini"; cf. Ezechiel 1:4.

7. "By the finger of the living God"; cf. Exodus 31:18.

8. "Background and character": see ch. 3. "Ways in which she received visions": see ch. 4.

briefly teach⁹ both you and others how to distinguish divine visions from the miserable deceptions of Satan.

8 Therefore, my lords, to put it briefly, I say that there are many various kinds of visions. The subject matter is foreign and practically unknown to most people owing to their ignorance and lack of knowledge of Sacred Scripture as well as their inexperience of mental prayer and contemplation and of the spiritual life. 9 Because of the great dangers to which many people today, unfortunately, are exposed owing to their inexperience of this strange and arcane subject, I have often wished to write a brief treatise which would serve as a winnowing shovel¹⁰ in order to recognize and distinguish between the different kinds of visions. 10 At the beginning of the present book, the saintly lady, to whom it was supernaturally revealed in a vision, says that she saw “an incredibly large palace as big as a cloudless sky.”¹¹ 11 With this in mind, I have now decided to compose this treatise, this winnowing shovel, in the form of a letter, to winnow out good and divine visions and to separate them carefully from diabolic and evil visions, as we do grain from chaff.¹² 12 In this way the pure, clean grain can be laid up and venerated in the storehouse of spiritual and Catholic-minded persons, but the diabolical chaff of deceptions will be blown away by the wind of Holy Scripture and cast far off on the dunghheap to be trampled underfoot.

13 I begin then in the name of Christ, ever ready to submit all I say to the correction of holy mother Church and to better-informed opinion. 14 Anyone who wishes to investigate, discuss, distinguish, and judge the different kinds of visions or revelations rightly and reasonably 15 must, I say, possess both theoretical knowledge of Sacred Scripture regarding visions, as explained by the holy fathers and doctors clearly and discerningly, and practical experience of the spiritual life and the mental consolations and visions imparted by God spiritually or intellectually.

16 Because these days, unfortunately, there are few persons commonly found with experience in this theory and practice of making distinctions and forming correct opinions about such visions and spirits, 17 many people stumble about in these matters like blind men in a maze. They rashly turn around and condemn sincere and holy persons who follow God rather than make thorough distinctions and accept or reject on reasonable grounds that which should be accepted or rejected. 18 They offer no logical arguments for their unconsidered opinions and hasty pronouncements or, rather, for their detractions. They only say that Satan often disguises himself as an angel of light,¹³ 19 and then bring up examples of other spiritual persons who have in times past been deceived in their visions by the devil. 20 They do not,

9. “Warn and briefly teach”: see chs. 5–6.

10. “Winnowing shovel” renders “ventilabrum”; cf. Matthew 3:12.

11. “Large palace as big as a cloudless sky”; see Book VIII 1.

12. “Winnowing shovel [...] grain from chaff”; cf. Matthew 3:12, Luke 3:17.

13. “An angel of light”; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:14.

however, recall those people who received enlightenment from God through divine visions and inspirations and through them gave enlightenment and direction to the Church of God and to others. 21 They especially condemn sincere, spiritual laypersons and womankind as ignorant, incapable, unimportant and therefore unworthy of receiving divine or prophetic visions. 22 They forget that almighty God in the Old Testament as well as in the New chose the weak things of the world, of both the female and the male sex, to show forth his might and put the wise to shame.¹⁴ 23 Did he not make a prophet out of a shepherd?¹⁵ Did he not fill the young and unlettered¹⁶ with the spirit of prophecy? Did he not choose uneducated fishermen rather than the learned to be his apostles and filled them with the Holy Spirit? 24 Were not Mary (the sister of Aaron),¹⁷ Judith and Esther¹⁸ gifted with the spirit of prophecy? Was not King Josiah guided in his actions by Huldah the prophetess?¹⁹ 25 Do you not recall that Deborah²⁰ the prophetess ruled the people of Israel, and did not Hannah²¹ (Samuel's mother), Hagar²² and the wife of Manoah²³ (Samson's mother) as well as other women in the Old Testament have the spirit of prophecy? 26 In the New Testament, too, Anna, daughter of Phanuel,²⁴ prophesied, as did Elizabeth the wife of Zachary.²⁵ Furthermore: Blessed Lucy the Virgin, as one may read in her Acts,²⁶ and the Tiburtine Sybil, the Erythræan Sybil²⁷ and many others that you will find in great numbers in the books of Sacred Scripture and the lives of the saints.

27 Thus, there are dangers involved in accepting or rejecting out of hand spiritual visions and people claiming to receive divine visions. 28 A decision should not be made until one has made a careful investigation of the character of the persons involved as well as of the manner in which the visions are seen and of the content of the visions themselves. All this should be attentively

14. "Put the wise to shame"; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27. See also Ex. 23.4.

15. "A prophet out of a shepherd": an allusion to King David, whose psalms were regarded as prophetic.

16. "Young and unlettered" renders "iuuenes ydiotas" [young idiots], possibly an allusion to 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 19:20–21, or Joel 2:28.

17. "Sister of Aaron"; cf. Exodus 15:20–21.

18. "Judith and Esther": these two women are not strictly described as prophetesses in their biblical books. In Pope Boniface IX's canonization sermon Birgitta is presented as a latter-day Judith; see Ellis, "The Swedish Woman, the Widow," and Hedlund, "Vadstenapredikanter om Birgitta," especially pp. 314–16.

19. "Huldah the prophetess"; cf. 4 Kings (2 Kings) 22:14–20; 2 Chronicles 34:22–28.

20. "Deborah"; cf. Judges 4:4 sqq.

21. "Hannah"; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel): 1:2–28.

22. "Hagar"; cf. Genesis 16:7–16, 21:17–18.

23. "Wife of Manoah"; cf. Judges 13:3–10.

24. "Anna, daughter of Phanuel"; cf. Luke 2:36–38.

25. "Elizabeth, wife of Zachary"; cf. Luke 1:39–45.

26. "In her Acts" renders "in libris suis"; Lucy is said to have foretold the punishment of Paschasius and the speedy termination of the persecution, adding that Diocletian would reign no more, and Maximian would meet his end. See Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, vol. 1, pp. 27–29.

27. "Tiburtine Sybil... Erythræan Sybil": the Tiburtine Sybil was a Roman prophetess, and the Erythræan Sybil presided over the Appollonian oracle at Erythrae; in Christian tradition she is associated with prophesying the Redemption. On the Sibylline Oracles in the Middle Ages see McGinn, *Visions of the End*, pp. 43–50, 122–25; and Emerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*. According to Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 174 n23, the *Epistola solitarii* is the first known text connecting Birgitta with the sibyls; after the fourteenth century the association became commonplace.

studied in the light of Divine Scripture and the writings of the holy doctors in order to determine whether the visions are the products of delusion or come from the Spirit of truth. 29 We see that Pharaoh did not believe in Moses, because he was a sincere man who had seen God. For this reason, Pharaoh did not believe in the vision or message of Moses or rather of God. He stubbornly persisted in hardened disbelief and was therefore wretchedly cast into the Red Sea along with the people of Egypt.²⁸ 30 I have also seen many others in my days who regarded such people as common fools and considered their spiritual visions to be meaningless products of their own making or imagination. They thus became disobedient to God 31 and miserably brought on themselves and their subjects God's severe punishment, though they had received the warnings of those people and their visions. 32 As an example, consider the destruction of the kingdom of Cyprus²⁹ when its ruler did not believe in the visions of blessed Birgitta to whom this book was revealed (see Book VII chapter 19). 33 I have also seen and heard of others who trusted in delusional visions and fell into peril because of it. 34 For examples, see Book VI chapter 68, and John Cassian, *Conferences of the Fathers*, Conference 2, the chapter beginning "And to confirm this same definition,"³⁰ and many others. 35 It is therefore more prudent to subject such visions and such visionaries to serious discussion, and then, once having seriously discussed them and deliberated over them, to make the well-grounded decision to accept or reject them. 36 The apostle says: "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God."³¹ Then if they are examined and found to be from God, we should humbly and completely trust and obey them. 37 However, if they are from the devil, we should repudiate them as the worst of delusions and put no faith at all in them.

✠ Chapter 2

A Set of Questions to Examine the Character of the Visionary

DATE: 1376/1377, ROME

An explanation of the theoretical method of examining the character of the visionary, of the manner of seeing them and of the contents of visions and revelations.

1 The holy fathers and doctors of the Church say that the visionary should be examined on the following points.

2 Is the person a religious or a secular living in the world?

3 Does she follow a particular and constant spiritual discipline and live in obedience to a prudent, virtuous, level-headed, Catholic-minded and experienced spiritual father, or does she only follow her own will and judgment?

28. "Cast into the Red Sea along with the people of Egypt"; cf. Exodus 14.

29. "Destruction of the kingdom of Cyprus"; cf. Book VII 16.5–6.

30. "And to confirm this same definition"; the reference is to John Cassian, *Conferences*, 2.5 (ed. Pichery, t. 1, pp. 116–17).

31. "Test the spirits... from God"; 1 John 4:1.

4 Does she immediately submit her temptations and any such visions as she has to the examination and decision of her spiritual father or to other senior and prudent spiritual fathers with a humble fear of being deceived? Or does she hide them without submitting them to anyone's examination and decision?
 5 Are they a source of presumption and boastfulness in her? Does she have a high opinion of herself and hold others in low regard?

6 Furthermore, the visionary should be examined as to whether he or she performs true acts of virtue—obedience, humility, charity, attentive prayer—7 or, on the other hand, acts of self-esteem, boastfulness, pride, pretentiousness, conceit, thirst for praise, negligence in prayer and a longing for honors and distinction.

8 Does she have a reputation among the religious for being truly Catholic-minded, faithful and obedient to prelates and leaders of the Church, or is she suspect in her faith or obedience to those same prelates and leaders?

9 Again, has she persevered virtuously for a long time in the spiritual life, in penance, remaining humble despite receiving frequent visions, or is she a recent novice to the spiritual life?

10 Again, does this visionary naturally possess a sound understanding of the spiritual life? Does she display good judgment in her mind and spirit? Or is she light-headed, rash and easily affected by the imagination? 11 In his *Dialogues*,¹ Gregory says that “holy men distinguish between the visionary words or images of illusions and revelations as though by an inner sense, so that they know when they receive something from the good spirit or are being tricked by the deceiver.”

12 Has this person been elsewhere investigated concerning the matter and manner of her visions by educated and spiritual men and has she met with approval or not?

13 This is sufficient as to the investigation of the person. As to the manner in which a person sees and hears spiritually and experiences revelations or visions, the holy fathers and doctors of the Church demand a careful investigation.

14 Does the seer of visions or hearer of locutions experience them while awake or while asleep and dreaming?

15 Are they corporeal visions or imaginative and spiritual visions or might they be supernatural, intellectual visions?²

16 Does the visionary, when seeing such things in a state of mental rapture or ecstasy, experience any supernatural delight of God's love in her mind?

17 Does she see and hear someone announcing mysteries or indicating divine and spiritual doctrines? In what form does she see such speakers?

1. “In his *Dialogues*”: Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, 4.50.6 (ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, t. 3, pp. 174–76).

2. “Corporeal visions . . . intellectual visions”: the threefold division of the visionary experience as delineated by St. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) in book 12 of *De Genesi ad litteram* (ed. Zycha, pp. 379–435) and in *Contra Adimantum* 28 (ed. Zycha, at pp. 188 line 23–189 line 14). Cf. ch. 3.2 and ch. 4, where Alfonso emphasizes that most of Birgitta's revelations were intellectual, although toward the end of her life she sometimes saw Jesus and Mary with her bodily eyes. He also mentions that the majority of her revelations were auditory, not visual.

18 Does she experience or not any enlightenment or illumination of supernatural and intellectual light that discloses the divine truth of the contents of the visions?

19 One must also examine whether the character and content of the visions are in accordance with Divine Scripture or deviate from them.

20 Is the vision conducive to the virtuous guidance of human actions and the salvation of souls? Does it lead to errors in the Catholic faith? Does it introduce strange innovations or anything at variance with reason or in opposition to good habits of virtue and humility?

21 Are the visions always truthful? Or are they sometimes false and mendacious, that is, do they sometimes foretell things that are true, sometimes not?

22 Do they foretell for us honors or riches or fame in the future rather than humility in every respect? Do they induce us to extol ourselves, to be presumptuous, to trust in our own virtues or to be humble?

23 Again, do they teach us to show obedience to chaste, sincere and virtuous spiritual persons as well as to our superiors or do they do the contrary?

24 Finally, for the sake of brevity, I would only say that, for a thoroughgoing investigation of this matter both as to the character of the visionary, the nature and circumstances of the visions as well as of the nature of their content along with the ways of discerning whether the revealing spirits are good or evil, 25 see more fully in the Book of Heavenly Revelations of blessed Birgitta of Sweden, about whom we are speaking, Book I chapters 4 and 54, Book III chapter 10, Book IV chapters 23 and 110, Book VI chapters 52 and 58, and many other passages. 26 In these passages Lady Birgitta is fully informed by Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in the matter of recognizing spirits, visions and interior affections. 27 If the precaution of such a careful investigation is not taken, and the visionary and her visions and revelations are accepted or rejected hastily and without examination, dangerous errors can be the result. 28 It may happen that the abrupt and unreflected acceptance of a visionary and her visions will result in falsehood being taken for truth and the truth falling into dangerous disrepute. 29 Thus, good and true visions or divine locutions may come to be rejected, disbelieved and disobeyed, even if they truly do proceed from God's will. 30 Faith and obedience would then be given to false illusions to the detriment of the visionary and the person who hastily accepts or rejects them in an abrupt and unreflected manner, ample evidence of which can be found both in the Old and New Testaments. Today such errors often occur due to a lack of prudent and serious examination.

✠ Chapter 3

The Theory is Applied to Birgitta's Character

DATE: 1376/1377, ROME

A description of the character and virtues of Blessed Birgitta to whom the following book was revealed.

1 Now that we have seen the theory, let us apply it in practice to the character of the person to whom the present book was revealed. 2 This noble lady, Blessed Birgitta of saintly memory, saw and heard in spirit the visions of the present book and of the great Book of Heavenly *Revelationes* as well as many others and wrote them down at God's command, 3 as explained in *Revelationes* Book VI chapter 101. The first point of fact about her is that she descended from the kings of the Goths¹ and was born in the northerly kingdom of Sweden of noble and virtuous parents. 4 While still married, she convinced her husband to live in perfect continence, and for many years they abstained from physical intercourse.² 5 Both of them made a pilgrimage to St. James in Galicia with great effort and expense and devotion. 6 When they afterward returned to their native country of Sweden, her husband journeyed on to the Lord.³

7 The love of perfect chastity was then enkindled in her, and she surrendered her whole self to Christ. He gently took her as his bride and embraced her with his words, as is stated in *Revelationes* Book I chapter 2. 8 From that time she began to receive divine visions more clearly. She submitted them humbly and without delay to her spiritual father's examination.⁴ He was a holy man and a master in theology, having written a commentary to the entire Bible, as is stated in Book VI chapter 89. 9 The lady also humbly presented her visions to the examination and assessment of other prelates and spiritual men, as is stated in Book IV chapter 78 as well as more explicitly in the prologue to the Rule of the Savior that was divinely revealed to her. 10 These men, who were knowledgeable and experienced and cultivated the spiritual life, expressed their approval of the visions, inspirations and revelations given to her and concluded that they came from the Holy Spirit of truth and not from the deceiving spirit of falsehood. 11 As soon as they had done so, the lady, determined to imitate Christ the poor man in his poverty and to follow in his footsteps, kept nothing for herself of all she owned except simple food and plain clothes. 12 She generously distributed all the rest of her goods among her children and the poor people of Christ and cut her ties to the world. At Christ's command she followed Abraham's example and went forth from her own country and kin, as is clearly described in the legend of her life.⁵ 13 In this

1. "She is descended from the kings of the Goths": the term "Goths" (Götar) was used to denote the oldest inhabitants of Sweden. It was adopted by early historians, continental as well as Swedish, as a designation for Sweden and the Swedes. See KLNLM "Göticismen."

2. "For many years they abstained from sexual intercourse": according to the *Vita* (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 80), this was true only from the end of the couple's pilgrimage to Spain in 1342 until Ulf's death (cf. the following note).

3. "Her husband journeyed on to the Lord": Ulf died on 12 February 1344 (or 1346, according to some sources).

4. "Her spiritual father's examination," i.e., Mathias of Linköping. See also the *Vita* in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 81.

5. "Legend of her life," i.e., the *Vita*, written by Petrus of Alvastra and Petrus of Skänninge after Birgitta's death. It exists in three different versions, edited in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 73–101 ("Process-Vita"), and

way she came on pilgrimage to Rome and remained there living a life of penance and humbly visiting the shrines of the apostles and the relics of other saints, until Christ commanded her to do something else. 14 She was always accompanied by two experienced spiritual directors,⁶ both of them older and circumspect men, virtuous and chaste, who were with her until she died. 15 It was fitting that the chaste Spouse who had entrusted his own Virgin Mother to a virgin disciple⁷ should also entrust his new bride to the direction of virgin and virtuous fathers.

16 One was a religious monk, a Cistercian prior, chaste in body and very learned in scholarship. 17 As already stated, the lady herself wrote down the revelations in her own Gothic language at Christ's command. Accordingly, also at Christ's command, this prior translated all the books from her native language into Latin, including the present book divinely revealed to her. 18 This monk is mentioned toward the end of the prologue⁸ to the Heavenly Revelations.

19 The other spiritual father of this lady was a priest from Sweden, a chaste and venerable man who lived a holy life. He directed the lady's whole household and, commanded by Christ, taught her and her daughter grammar and chant.⁹ He directed them in the life of virtue and virtuously corrected them like a father.

20 She humbly obeyed these fathers in the practice of all the virtues during her whole life. She was as obedient as a true and humble monk who habitually obeys his superior. This is why she attained to such a degree of humility, obedience, and perfect self-denial 21 that, accompanied by her spiritual father, the aforesaid priest, as she visited indulgenced shrines and sanctuaries, she dared not lift her eyes from the ground without first asking and obtaining his special permission. 22 She went to confession two or three times a day. Together with her venerable daughter,¹⁰ who commendably lived with her and virtuously persevered in penance and chaste widowhood until death, she received the body of Christ with great devotion and humility every Sunday. 23 Both of them continuously practiced heavy corporal penances in private. They humbly offered these to God alone, performing them not in human sight for the sake of vain-glory but in simplicity of heart¹¹ and purity of spirit, submitting themselves humbly to their two spiritual fathers with constant spiritual obedience. 24 Blessed

pp. 614–40 (“Panisperna-Vita”) and in Kruse, “Vita metrica S. Birgittae” pp. 10–28, the lower half of each page (C 15-Vita). The relationship between these three versions is controversial with regard to which is the more original; see Wollin, “Birgittine Biography at Vadstena.” For an English translation, see Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 69–98. Much of the present chapter is based on the *Vita*, Mathias's Prologue to Book I and the *Revelationes*.

6. “Two experienced spiritual directors,” i.e., Prior Petrus of Alvastra and Master Petrus of Skänninge.

7. “To a virgin disciple”; cf. John 19:26–27.

8. “Toward the end of the prologue”: Master Mathias, *Prologue* to Book I, paragraph 42.

9. “Taught her and her daughter grammar and chant”: On Birgitta's knowledge of Latin see volume 1 pp. 11–12.

10. “Together with her venerable daughter”: by introducing Katherina, Alfonso suggests the parallel of the Virgin and St. Anne that was commonly represented in popular devotion in the fourteenth century.

11. “Simplicity of heart”: a common Biblical expression.

Birgitta disclosed the visions she received to these fathers without delay and humbly submitted everything to their judgment and decision.

25 She was not only outwardly humble in human relations but also inwardly with God. She considered herself to be such an unworthy sinner that, in her frequent conversations with Christ in prayer, she expressed her amazement at him and protested 26 that she was too unworthy to see and hear divine visions or to write down the holy words that he chose to speak to her. This can be seen clearly in *Revelationes* Book II chapter 15; Book VI chapter 52 (in the beginning and in the passage “Then I answered”); Book II chapter 18, and in many other passages.

27 I will not describe her patience and tranquility but, instead, will let the glorious virgin, St. Agnes, do so. She bore witness to it in *Revelationes* Book IV chapter 124. 28 Agnes says to the bride: “Come, daughter, and put a crown made from seven precious gems.” 29 As to the ardent charity she showed to Christ and his Virgin Mother, see *Revelationes* Book IV chapter 68; Book VI chapter 52; and Book VII¹² chapters 1 and 13 (toward the end), and many other passages.

30 She also showed her great love of neighbor with such motherly compassion that she was always praying to Christ for everyone in general as well as for specific persons, often shedding devout tears. See, for example, Book III chapter 23, as well as many other chapters in her *Revelationes*. 31 Once when the king of Sweden intended to burden his subjects throughout the kingdom with heavy taxation in order to pay off a certain amount of money that he owed to creditors, 32 blessed Birgitta said him: “My lord, please do not do this, but take my two sons and offer them as security until you can pay back your debts. Do not offend God or your subjects.” This is described more clearly in the legend of her life.¹³

33 This lady was so adorned and supplied with all the other virtues that Christ took her as his bride in an amazing way. He frequently granted her wonderful consolations and divine graces, saying to her: 34 “I have chosen you and taken you as my bride in order to show you my secrets, because it pleases me to do so.”¹⁴ 35 Again he said: “Therefore I take you as my bride for my own pleasure, the kind that is appropriate for God to have with a chaste soul.”¹⁵ See Book I chapter 2, and many similar passages in the books divinely revealed to the same lady.

36 She never grew proud of these divine graces but, as I myself can witness, daily humbled herself with tears.¹⁶ She felt that these graces put her in greater

12. “Book VII”: literally it says “the last book,” since Book VII ends the main corpus of the *Revelationes*.

13. “In the legend of her life”; cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 89. This may refer to the time when Magnus’s treaty with the Danish ruler Valdemar Atterdag concerning the mortgage of Skåne was renewed in the 1340s; it is not said whether the king accepted Birgitta’s offer.

14. “I have chosen you . . . it pleases me to do so”; cf. Book I 2.3.

15. “Therefore I take you . . . a chaste soul”; cf. Book I 2.4.

16. “With tears”; the mystical gift of tears, an essential criterion for evaluating sanctity, was thought to cleanse the heart and express both remorse for sin and a longing for heavenly joy. Birgitta does not overuse this motif, unlike several of her fellow mystics who are frequently described in this state. See also ch. 4.40.

debt to God, and she awaited with trepidation a stricter judgment because of them. 37 She would have preferred to hide and conceal this treasure of divine revelations for the sake of humility.¹⁷ However, Christ verbally commanded her several times and obliged her to write down and communicate his divine words boldly to the supreme pontiffs, to the emperor, to kings and princes, and to other nations. 38 He intended that, through the divine words of the Heavenly *Revelationes* as well as of the present book, sinners would convert to God and the virtuous and righteous would make greater progress. 39 This is quite clear in the last heavenly Book,¹⁸ chapter 27; in Book VI chapter 101, and many similar passages, including several chapters in the present heavenly book of the Emperor to kings.

40 Assuredly, who could imagine that demons should be permitted to mock so holy a life with their trickeries? Who would dare to accuse Christ of being so unkind as not to protect someone placing her hopes in him and glorifying not herself but him in the fullness of her love? 41 Would a good bridegroom expose his chaste and faithful bride to the deceptions of an adulterer?¹⁹

⚔ Chapter 4

The Different Ways in which Birgitta Received Visions and Revelations

DATE: 1376/1377, ROME

A description of the ways in which blessed Birgitta¹ received visions and revelations.

1 Above I addressed the character and virtues of blessed Birgitta, clarifying them for those who have little knowledge of her. However, many people are perplexed and in doubt about the very grace of seeing and hearing spiritual visions which was given to her, 2 and they desire assurance about the manner in which she saw and heard these things. They have therefore often requested me to explain it systematically² to them and to give clear testimony as to the plain facts of the matter and as to which spirit imparted all these revelations to her. 3 Accordingly, in honor of God and the Virgin as well as of the blessed Lady Birgitta, and in order to remove any doubts from the hearts of doubters, I will first explain the ways in which she saw and heard visions and revelations. 4 Then, using the winnow of divine Scripture, I will go on to prove that these things certainly derived from the Holy Spirit and not from the spirit of deception.

5 First of all, let me say that they can receive assurance about the manner in which she saw visions not only through what I say but also through what Blessed Birgitta tells us herself. In numerous chapters of these books, she states it humbly

17. "She would have preferred...for the sake of humility"; cf. Mathias, *Prologue* to Book I, paragraph 16.

18. "The last heavenly Book," i.e., Book VII.

19. "Assuredly...adulterer"; cf. Mathias, *Prologue* to Book I, paragraph 17.

1. "Blessed Birgitta": this is not a statement reflecting Birgitta's status as regards sainthood but rather a reflection of her distinction of veneration in Alfonso's eyes. The status of beatification had not been established formally in Birgitta's time.

2. "Systematically" renders "seriose": see also paragraph 32.

and clearly. See especially *Revelationes* Book IV chapter 77 and Book VI chapter 52. There she speaks to Christ in these words: 6 *O God most loving and sweetest of all! What you have done for me is wonderful for all those who hear of it. Whenever you please, you put my body to sleep—yet not with a bodily sleep but with a spiritual rest. Then you rouse my soul to life as though from sleep so that I hear and feel in a spiritual way.* 7 *O, Lord, how sweet are the words of your mouth! It truly seems to me, as often as I hear the words of your Spirit, that my soul within me swallows them with an indescribably sweet sensation like that from the sweetest food that seems to drop into my heart with great joy and indescribable consolation.* 8 *It seems wonderful to me that while I listen to your words, I am made both fully satisfied and yet still hungry. I feel satisfied because nothing else pleases me but your words. Yet I feel hungry because my appetite for them keeps increasing,* etc.³ 9 See also, among many other similar passages, the Prologue to the divinely revealed Rule of the Savior as well as its ending.⁴

10 As God is my witness, I, too, can confirm that I frequently saw her wholly absorbed and motionless in prayer, sometimes sitting, sometimes prostrate,⁵ separated from her bodily senses, rapt in spiritual ecstasy, neither seeing nor hearing anything that happened in her physical surroundings. 11 When she returned to herself, she used to describe to me, though I was unworthy, and to her two confessors, the visions she had then received and the secret, great and hidden things of God.⁶ 12 The manner in which she saw visions is also described clearly enough in a vision and private revelation sent by the lady to Lord Pope Gregory XI⁷ in which it is told how she entered a spiritual rapture while keeping vigil in prayer. 13 At that moment all her bodily strength seemed to fail, but her heart was inflamed and felt the exultation of burning love; her soul was consoled; her spirit was comforted with divine strength; and her whole conscience and intelligence were filled with spiritual understanding, as it is stated there.

14 Sometimes she had the physical sensation of a sensible and miraculous motion in her heart⁸ which imparted an indescribable joy to her spirit. It was as though a living baby were stirring inside her and its movement were outwardly visible. 15 Since she was in doubt as to whether this might be a deception of the devil, she showed it to her spiritual fathers. They saw it and touched it and were filled with amazement. 16 But Christ and the Virgin Mary dispelled her doubts by declaring that the movement in her heart was not a deception but a divine grace and an action of the Holy Spirit. See Book II chapter 18 and Book VI chapter 87.⁹

3. This passage is quoted from Book IV 77.3–6. Alfonso recognizes that Book VI 52.3–5 contains a shorter version of the same text. In fact, all of Book IV ch. 77 reappears in briefer form in Book VI 52.1–14. It is a revealing example of how Birgitta's original messages were developed stylistically by her male collaborators, a fact that Alfonso makes no attempt to hide.

4. "The Prologue . . . as well as its ending"; cf. *The Rule of the Savior*, 5–7 and 280–87.

5. "Sometimes sitting, sometimes prostrate" renders "aliquando sedendo, aliquando prostratum stare" (cf. the Middle English translation "sumtyme sittinge and symtyme to stonde"); presumably the problem is the Iberian use of "stare" to mean "to be," not "to stand."

6. "The secret, great and hidden things of God"; cf. Acts 2:1.

7. "A vision . . . to Lord Pope Gregory XI"; cf. Book IV 139.

8. "A miraculous motion in her heart"; on Birgitta's spiritual experience as physical experience, see Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 65–71.

9. "Book VI chapter 87": this is Book VI 88 in our translation.

17 You should also know that Lady Birgitta was praying in vigil and saw symbolic figures in her spiritual ecstasy 18 the meaning of which was not then explained to her. Instead she remained doubtful and uncertain about the significance of those visions, 19 as described in *Revelationes* Book IV chapter 2 and elsewhere, including the present book of the Heavenly Emperor to kings, chapter 31. 20 Sometimes these visions were explained to her afterward by Christ, as time went on; compare chapter 32 in the present book and the last chapter of Book IV.¹⁰ 21 Sometimes nothing was ever explained to her concerning the meaning of these visions, and she always remained uncertain about them, as is stated in various chapters of the Heavenly Book. 22 At other times in her vigils she did see symbolic figures in her visions which were immediately explained to her by Christ or by his Virgin Mother or by an angel or by some saint within those same visions. 23 The meaning of what she had seen was then divinely disclosed to her intellect. 24 See, for example, Book IV chapter 7, Book VI chapters 35 and 52 as well as chapter 48 below in the present book, along with many similar passages to be found in the *Revelationes* and in the book below.

25 You may ask how this blessed lady could see Christ and his Virgin Mother, the angels and saints as often as she did during the spiritual raptures of her prayer vigils. 26 After all, they are always immutably and essentially in heaven. Or how could she in the same instant see souls in torment or souls and demons speaking in purgatory and in hell or even persons still alive in the world? 27 She saw all this, moreover, in order and simultaneously as they spoke with each other. When she saw these things, was her soul in or outside her body? 28 The answer to this question will not be given by me but by Mary, the Queen of Heaven, the mirror of all wisdom and knowledge. She gives a very fine answer in, among other passages, Book VI chapter 52 (toward the end).¹¹ 29 It is stated there that it occurred by a miraculous elevation and enlightenment of the mind and intelligence of blessed Birgitta for the benefit of the whole body of the Church through the action and ministry of the Holy Spirit. 30 Sometimes when the likenesses of Christ or the saints were seen in an ecstasy, the blessed lady received at the same time great inspirations in her mind, such as solutions to problems, explanations of mysteries, virtuous advice and rules for a holy life. This took place through a certain supernatural influx of divine light. 31 Thus she received instantaneously the entire Book of questions¹² (Book V of the *Revelationes*) as well as the Rule of the Savior for her order of nuns that was revealed to her, as described in chapter 29 toward the end of the Rule. 32 With her bodily eyes, she saw the angel who was commanded by God to dictate to her a lengthy and most beautiful sermon systematically and in stages. He dictated it while she wrote it down at the same time. 33 Thus the excellent discourse of the angel concerning the excellence of the Virgin Mary was written over intervals of time. It is divided into readings for the whole week to be read each night at matins by the nuns in the Order of the Rule of the Savior.¹³

10. "The last chapter of Book IV": Book IV 130.

11. "Book VI chapter 52 (toward the end)": Book VI 52.120–23.

12. "She received instantaneously the entire Book of questions"; cf. Book V, Prologue, 11.

13. Cf. *The Angel's Discourse*, Prologue, 1–11.

34 Sometimes the blessed lady saw not only in spirit but even with her own bodily eyes the Lord Jesus Christ and his Virgin Mother, in particular toward the end of her life, as will be shown below.¹⁴ She declared this to her daughter and spiritual fathers.

35 However, most of the time, she saw no one but only heard the voice of the Son of God or the Virgin Mother or of some angel or saint speaking wonderful words to her in order to benefit humankind, to give moral guidance, to convert the nations and to reveal mysteries, as is clear from all the books mentioned above. The chapters in the greater part of them begin in this way: 36 “The Son speaks” or “The Mother speaks to the bride,” etc. Sometimes many future events were foretold in this way, and both prophetic statements about the future were made and other kinds of statements, not prophetic but verbally obscure, the meaning of which she did not understand, not knowing whether they should be taken literally or figuratively or spiritually or in some other way.

37 In fact she often took such statements literally, as St. Francis also did,¹⁵ when Christ or his Mother wished them to be taken in a spiritual sense. 38 For examples, see Heavenly Book IV chapters 15 and 75 and chapter 48 in the present Book of the Heavenly Emperor to Kings, and many other similar chapters in all these books. 39 Sometimes clear words were divinely spoken to her in such a way that their truth and significance were manifestly clear to her right then. There are many examples of this in the chapters of the Heavenly Book; see also the following book to kings, chapter 48 (near the beginning).

40 However, I would have you know that, though I am unworthy, I often heard from her own mouth that she always experienced, in all these kinds of visions, the greatest pleasure of God’s love and of ineffable divine consolation in her soul and mind—so much so that she could relate them to me in no other way but with sighs and tears.

✠ Chapter 5

An Examination of the Content of the Revelations using Authoritative Sources

DATE: 1376/1377, ROME

An examination of Sacred Scripture and a classification of the visions of this book and other revelations to Blessed Birgitta.

1 I have now given assurance to doubters concerning the character and virtues of the blessed lady Birgitta and also concerning the various ways in which she saw, heard, and experienced the visions and revelations of this book and other books, as is clear above. 2 What remains is to examine the contents of the visions and revelations themselves. 3 However, since I have dealt with this quite a lot above and will also do so below in chapter 6:112 f. and in chapter 8:9 f., and since it is also quite clear from the contents of this book and the other books, I will touch on it no further. 4 But what still remains for me to do

14. “As will be shown below”: ch. 5.11 and 5.14.

15. “As St. Francis also did”; cf. ch. 5.54.

is to examine and classify with support from statements in Scripture and the holy doctors the different kinds of visions and revelations of the aforesaid lady.

5 We should first note how Augustine and Jerome divide the three principal kinds of visions into corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual, as they write in Book 12 of *On the literal meaning of Genesis* and in the *Prologue to the Apocalypse*, respectively.¹ 6 A corporeal vision is, of course, when we see something with our bodily eyes. 7 We call it a spiritual or imaginary vision when, while awake or asleep, we behold images of things in our spirit in such a way that one thing signifies something else; for example, when Pharaoh, while asleep, saw the ears of corn,² or Moses, while awake, saw the burning bush.³ 8 An intellectual vision is when, through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, we grasp the true meaning of mysteries⁴ in the understanding of our mind, exactly as they really are; for example, the way John saw the things described in the *Apocalypse*. 9 He not only saw symbolic images in his spirit but also understood their meaning in his mind.

10 The first kind of visions, the corporeal, is not very relevant to our case, although blessed Birgitta did sometimes see the glorious Mother of God and her Son with her bodily eyes. For example, when Birgitta was a young girl, 11 she saw an altar with God's Mother seated above it who called out to her and put a crown on her.⁵ Again when she was close to death while giving birth, God's Mother came to her while all the attendant ladies were watching, and she touched her limbs and Birgitta was immediately free from danger;⁶ this is described in the legend of her life. 12 Once she saw fire descend from heaven upon the altar and the host in the celebrant's hands, and then she saw a lamb in the host, and then a human face in the lamb and the lamb in the face.⁷ Again she saw a living child in the host in the priest's hands, and when he made the sign of the cross over those present, he said: 13 "I bless those of you who believe. For those who do not believe I will be their judge."⁸ This is in Heavenly Book VI chapter 86. 14 Also when she was on her deathbed, she physically saw Christ consoling her, as mentioned earlier.⁹ 15 One has to believe that such a vision was shown to the bride by Christ himself through the action of the Holy Spirit for her own consolation and was not effected by the evil spirit of deception. 16 Besides, this is quite clear, given that the Lord Jesus Christ foretold to her the day of her passing five days before she died, telling her to receive the sacraments of the Church and giving her instructions concerning her affairs

1. Cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, book 12, chs. 6 sqq. Jerome wrote no prologue to the *Apocalypse*; Alfonso is perhaps referring to the prologue in the *Apocalypse* commentary by Anselm of Laon, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim* (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 162, cols. 1499–1500), where the three kinds of vision according to St. Augustine are discussed.

2. "Pharaoh...ears of corn"; cf. Genesis 41:5.

3. "Moses...burning bush"; cf. Exodus 3:2.

4. "Mysteries" renders "misteria," here and elsewhere, referring to the mysterious symbols and images perceived by Birgitta in her visionary states.

5. "She saw an altar...put a crown on her"; cf. Birgitta's *Vita* in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 76.

6. "Again when she was close to death...free from danger"; cf. Birgitta's *Vita* in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 79.

7. "She saw fire descend...the lamb in the face": Book VI 86.1.

8. "She saw a living child...I will be their judge": Book VI 86.4.

9. "As mentioned earlier": see ch. 4.34.

and arrangements concerning her monastery to be made according to his revelation.¹⁰ 17 The devil would not have told her to do so at the end of her life, if the vision had been diabolic. 18 A further proof that the vision came from God is that she did devoutly receive holy communion and extreme unction at end of her life in the presence of numerous persons. 19 After she had received the sacraments, she saw with her bodily eyes Christ himself consoling her and, humbly committing her spirit into his hands, she passed away. This is stated in the last chapter of the last Heavenly Book and at the end of the legend of her life.¹¹ 20 But I will not now deal with this category of corporeal visions, since the lady saw visions with her bodily eyes only a few times.

21 We will not speak of the spiritual or imaginary visions occurring during sleep, because Gregory regards such dreams with great suspicion in the fourth book of the *Dialogues*, chapter 48.¹² 22 Something similar is found in *Revelationes* IV chapter 38, although there it is also stated that sometimes dreams may be true and good and come from God. See in the same passage how you should react when such dreams occur. 23 Thus, once in her sleep while she was still a little girl, this blessed lady saw Christ as he was at the time of the crucifixion¹³ and, from then on, the passion of Christ always had a strong effect on her. But this visionary dream is not entirely relevant here, 24 because the lady received practically all her visions while awake in prayer and not sleeping, as is quite clear in many chapters of the Heavenly Book of *Revelationes*.

25 Now we come to the second kind of spiritual or imaginary vision that occurs in a waking state. This is indeed relevant to our case. In Book 12 of *On the literal meaning of Genesis* St. Augustine says as follows: 26 *When the attention of the mind is inwardly withdrawn and pulled away from the bodily senses, then there occurs what is usually called ecstasy. Then indeed whatever physical objects are present are not seen at all, even though the eyes are open, 27 nor are any sounds heard. Instead the mind's eye is wholly fixed on corporeal images present only to the spiritual vision or on incorporeal things without images but present to the intellectual vision.*¹⁴ 28 These words show plainly that when the lady was in a visionary state, asleep in joy with the sweet sleep of divine love, separated from her bodily senses, as she describes above, she was then in a state of ecstasy separated beyond herself. 29 The devil cannot impart the delight and intoxication of divine love to anyone's mind, as will be obvious below.¹⁵ He cannot impart what he does not have. 30 As she says above and in the books of *Revelationes*,¹⁶ God aroused her soul as though from sleep in order to see, hear and sense heavenly, divine and spiritual things, and that then she saw visions and heard the voice of someone speaking in her spirit. 31 Therefore, as the above quotation from

10. "The Lord Jesus Christ foretold... according to this revelation"; cf. Book VII 31.

11. "This is stated in... legend of her life": Book VII 31; Birgitta's *Vita* in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 101.

12. "The fourth book of the *Dialogues*, chapter 48"; this is book 4, chapter 50 in the modern edition by Adalbert de Vogüé: *Grégoire le grand. Dialogues*, t. 3, pp. 172–76.

13. "Once in her sleep... the time of the crucifixion"; cf. Birgitta's *Vita* in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 76.

14. "When the attention... intellectual vision"; St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 12.12 (ed. Zycha, p. 396 lines 5–12).

15. "As will be obvious below": 6.30–31.

16. "As she says above and in the books of *Revelationes*": 4.6 and cf. Book IV 77.4.

Augustine clearly proves, she was then rapt in spirit in a spiritual or imaginary vision, 32 inasmuch as she saw images or forms in her spirit and heard locutions in her visions.

33 As quoted above, she said that her whole conscience and intelligence were enlightened and filled with spiritual understanding in that ecstatic rapture.¹⁷ 34 While Christ was speaking, moreover, the Rule of the Savior as well as the entire Book of Questions and much else besides were instilled in her mind through a supernatural influx of intellectual light. 35 It is thereby clearly demonstrated to us that she was at those moments rapt in ecstasy, her mind and understanding being divinely enlightened and illuminated by means of a supernatural intellectual vision. 36 You should understand that the devil can in no way impart such an enlightenment or illumination to another person's mind, because a soul can never be deceived by a demon in an intellectual vision, as will be made more evident below¹⁸ through the quotations from Augustine and Thomas of Aquinas; all the doctors of the Church are in agreement about this. 37 Furthermore, when she was in the state of ecstatic rapture, she states that God's Son or the Virgin Mary or some angel or saint spoke to her the words that are contained in the Heavenly Book as well as practically throughout the following book. 38 We can thereby clearly gather from this that God in his mercy deigned to enlighten our consciences through the words of his teaching for the lady's beneficial guidance and for our own, 39 and wished, through this lady, to give us instructions about his mysterious will,¹⁹ about the future and about other holy teachings by means of a divine, internal locution in an intellectual vision.

40 St. Gregory gives us an excellent and complete explanation of such locutions in *Moralia* Book 28, chapter 2, as follows: 41 *Know moreover, he says, that a divine locution can be distinguished in two ways. Now the Lord either speaks by himself or his words to us are formed by means of an angelic creature.* 42 *When God speaks by himself, the sole power of internal inspiration is disclosed in us.*²⁰ *When he speaks by himself, the heart is taught his words without words and syllables,* 43 *for his might is made known through a kind of interior elevation. The mind when full is raised up but is weighed down when empty. It is as though there were a kind of weight that fills each soul that it lifts up.* 44 *It is an incorporeal light that fills the interior and outwardly surrounds it once filled. The communication takes place without noise. It both opens the sense of hearing and yet does so without a sound.* 45 A little later he adds: *To say that God's spirit speaks words to us means that, by a secret power, God intimates the things to be done and renders the ignorant human heart suddenly knowledgeable about mysteries without the noise or slowness of speech.* 46 Then he goes on to say: *God's locution to us is seen inwardly rather than heard. As he instills himself without the delay of speech, he enlightens the shadows of our*

17. "She said that...ecstatic rapture"; cf. 4.30–31.

18. "As will be made more evident below": 6.52–9.

19. "His mysterious will" renders "secretis misteriis suis."

20. "The sole power of internal inspiration is disclosed in us": "power" renders Latin "vis." The critical edition, however, has this word in the ablative ("vi"), which gives the passage a slightly different sense: "He [God] is disclosed in us by the sole power of internal inspiration."

ignorance by his sudden light.²¹ Thus Gregory. 47 By means of such an internal divine locution, this holy lady was taught and instructed by Christ her bridegroom about the matters contained in this book and in the Heavenly Book for the purposes of the spiritual instruction of rulers, kings, supreme pontiffs, prelates and all nations as well as the conversion of unbelievers. This is clear throughout the whole Heavenly Book and the present book.

48 In the chapter cited above, Gregory also says that *sometimes God speaks to us through angels by images assumed for a time out of the air and before our bodily eyes*, 49 *as happened to Abraham who was not only able to see three men but even to welcome them into his earthly abode*. 50 He goes on to say: *Unless angels assumed bodies for a time from the air when announcing inward messages to us, they would surely not appear to our outward sight*.²² Thus concludes Gregory. 51 This is also how God often spoke through an angel to his bride, especially when she was in Rome and he sent to her the angel to dictate the discourse on the excellence of the Virgin. 52 She saw the angel every day with her bodily eyes, and wrote down the discourse over intervals of time while he dictated it, as stated above.²³

53 You might ask why God's words are sometimes so obscure that they can be interpreted in different ways, being sometimes understood in one way by the prophet who hears them or by other people and in another way by God who utters them. 54 This is obvious in the case of St. Francis when Christ told him: "Go and rebuild my church,"²⁴ as well as in the case of many other persons who understood words in a material and literal sense that were intended in a spiritual sense. 55 My answer follows what Augustine says in Book 12 of *On Genesis* and what Thomas Aquinas²⁵ says in *Summa Theologiae* II-II "On prophecy" as well as other doctors: The prophet does not always correctly understand the things that are said and revealed in a vision. 56 Regarding this, see the response of the glorious Virgin Mary to the blessed lady in the book below, chapter 48, early on in the passage beginning with the words "You may ask"²⁶ and also *Revelationes* Book IV chapters 15 and 75, and many other passages.

57 Thus Lady Birgitta, too, sometimes understood the words of the visions in a physical or literal sense, while Christ or his Mother intended them spiritually or figuratively when they spoke, as can be seen in the passages just cited.²⁷

58 From what has been said and from the very contents of the books of divine revelations to this venerable lady, it is evident that God had granted her

21. "Know moreover... sudden light"; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, 28.2 (ed. Adriaen, vol. 143 B, pp. 1396–97, lines 19–30, 48–52 and 55–58).

22. "Sometimes God speaks... outward sight"; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, 28.7 (ed. Adriaen, vol. 143 B, p. 1399, lines 127–33).

23. "As stated above": 4.32–3.

24. "Go and rebuild my church": According to various Lives of St. Francis, a crucifix in the dilapidated church of San Damiano spoke these words (or similar ones) to him. He first took them to mean that he should repair that particular building, which he did, but later understood them to refer to his mission to the church at large. See, e.g., *The Legend of the Three Companions* (in Karrer, *The Little Flowers, Legends, and Lauds*, p. 8).

25. "What Augustine says... and... Thomas Aquinas"; cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 12.12 (ed. Zycha, pp. 395–96) and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 173, art. 4.

26. "You may ask": Book VIII 48.6.

27. "The passages just cited": 4.36–39.

the singular grace of a prophetic spirit. This divine grace was given through God's inward locutions to her and through spiritual and intellectual visions. 59 The cause of true and genuine prophecy and revelation together with knowledge and doctrine is the spiritual or imaginary vision of bodies or signs 60 with the added influx of the intellectual and supernatural light of divine truth. This is evident given the above cited experiences and sentiments in her visions and what Augustine says in Book XII of *On the literal meaning of Genesis*, 61 which speaks clearly about this matter, for corporeal images were depicted in her spirit and their meaning was nearly always divinely revealed to her mind.²⁸ 62 Furthermore, I make the following bold assertion in agreement with St. Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* II.II question 173, as well as with other doctors.²⁹ 63 The degree of prophecy divinely bestowed as a grace on this blessed lady is to be valued as the highest degree of all: it is the case when a prophet not only sees symbols of words or deeds but even sees in a waking state someone speaking or indicating something, 64 especially if the one speaking or indicating takes on the likeness of God. They say that the prophet in this case is closer to the revealing cause 65 than if the one speaking or indicating were to be shown in human likeness or in that of an angel; cf. Isaiah chapter 6, "I saw the Lord sitting,"³⁰ etc. 66 This is most especially so because, of all the writings of all the prophets, these writings were revealed to this lady by God in an intellectually clearer way than any other writings to any other prophets. 67 In his Prologue to the Psalter, Nicholas of Lyra,³¹ in agreement with other doctors, says that the clearer the meaning is to one's fellows, the higher the degree of prophecy.

✠ Chapter 6

Proof that her Visions were Authentic and not Deceptions of the Devil

DATE: 1376/1377, ROME

Proof from divine Scripture that the visions and revelations of this book and the other books of blessed Birgitta came from the Holy Spirit and not from diabolical deceptions, with seven signs or reasons proving this.

1 The classification of the visions contained in the present book and the other revelations of the blessed lady Birgitta should now be clear to the attentive reader from the foregoing discussion. 2 Let us now use the writings of the saints to determine whether the visions and revelations of these books were transmitted to her by the Holy Spirit of Truth or by the deceiving spirit of falsehood.

28. "Corporeal images...to her mind": Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 12.9 (ed. Zycha, pp. 391 line 25-392 line 1).

29. "In agreement with St. Thomas Aquinas...I saw the Lord sitting"; this refers not to question 173 in part II.II of the *Summa Theologiae* but to II.II, q. 174, a. 3, resp.

30. "I saw the Lord sitting": Isaiah 6:1.

31. "Nicholas of Lyra": The commentaries of Nicholas of Lyra were immensely influential from the fourteenth century and well into the seventeenth, but exist in no modern edition or translation. The prologues are treated in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-c. 1375*, pp. 197-276.

3 I declare that there are many ways by which we may clearly distinguish between a revelation or vision coming from the good spirit or from the evil one. They include both the character of the visionary and the inner sentiments of that person's soul, the classification and contents of the visions 4 as well as a careful analysis of what the vision moves and induces us to do. 5 As to her own knowledge and skill at making these distinctions, the blessed lady was frequently instructed and fully informed by means of divine visions and teachings so that she would not be tricked. 6 See *Revelationes* Book I chapter 54, Book II, chapter 19 and Book III, chapter 10. 7 About the seven clear differences between the visions of the good spirit and those of the evil spirit as pointed out to Lady Birgitta, the bride of Christ, by the Virgin Mary, see Book IV chapters 23 and 110, and Book VI chapters 68, 69 and 92, among others.

8 The divine grace graciously given by God to this blessed lady is indeed common knowledge. 9 It is inadmissible to let any suspicion of her being influenced by the false spirit cast its shadow on this gift, especially considering that her case was carefully studied at the time in the kingdom of Sweden by prelates, spiritual men and masters in theology. 10 They concluded that this grace was divine and was divinely given to her by the Holy Spirit, as I said above.¹ 11 Again, this grace received approval in Naples in the presence of Archbishop Bernard, three masters in theology, along with many other knights and experts and with me as a witness. 12 In fact a certain revelation, which the lady herself presented to them at the time, was, by the queen's own order, published in the cathedral church and made the subject of a solemn homily by one of the three theologians mentioned above.² He delivered it before the whole population of the city who had been assembled for that very purpose. 13 Nevertheless, for the sake of completeness and in order to silence disparaging critics and accusers while also satisfying those who are pious but doubtful, I will quote Sacred Scripture and the holy fathers in order to prove 14 that these revelations were imparted by God and given to this lady for the edification and benefit of the whole Church and the guidance of all the chosen and were not transmitted by the evil spirit of deception. 15 I will prove this by the following seven signs or reasons by means of which a vision of the good spirit may be distinguished from the deceptions of the devil.

16 The first sure sign that a vision is divine is when the visionary is a truly humble person, who lives in obedience and constant discipline under a wise spiritual father who is older, virtuous and experienced in the spiritual life. 17 Such a visionary is not presumptuous or given to self-praise or boasting, does not crave acclaim nor conceals the visions. 18 Rather she promptly discloses all

1. "Her case was carefully studied... as I said above": for the inquiry into Birgitta's sanctity that was conducted in Sweden, see 3.9–10 and Undhagen, *Sancta Birgitta. Revelationes. Book I*, pp. 47–48.

2. "Received approval in Naples... theologians mentioned above": for the examination conducted in Naples, see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 100, 265–66, 325, 373–74, 518 and 562–63. The revelation that was published is Book VII 27 and the three theologians were the Dominican friar Nicholas Misquini (who subsequently became a cardinal and member of the curia), the Franciscan friar Leonardo Rossi (Minister General of the Franciscan Order 1373–78) and the Austin friar Francis of Foligno. Which of them preached the homily is not known. For a discussion of this event, see Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, p. 120.

her visions or temptations with true humility and submits them humbly to the examination and decision of her own spiritual father or of other senior spiritual fathers. 19 She then accepts whatever they approve or repudiates whatever they define as deserving of censure. 20 Such a soul, I say, cannot be deceived. There is a passage in the *Conferences of the Fathers* by John Cassian that deals clearly with this. It is found in the second Conference, the chapter beginning with the words “And in order that this same definition,”³ which deals with a monk being tricked by the devil in the guise of an angel of light. 21 In the same conference, in the chapter beginning “Then Moses,” the same abbot Moses addresses the issue in these words: *A person, he says, who does not live according to his own ideas but by the example of his seniors can by no means be deceived. The wiles of the enemy will not be able to cheat the ignorance 22 of a person who does not shamefully conceal any of the thoughts arising in his heart but submits them to the mature examination of his seniors to be either rejected or approved. 23 As soon as the evil thought is exposed, it withers then and there. And even before the decision of discretion is pronounced, 24 the power of confession drags the foul serpent out of its dark underground cave into the light. Once it is handed over, it slinks away in shame. 25 Evil suggestions hold us in their sway only as long as they hide in the heart.*⁴ Thus Abbot Moses. Compare also the next chapter in the same book.

26 The fact is that this lady, blessed Birgitta, always lived in special obedience to and was guided by senior and virtuous spiritual fathers. She always displayed a true and deep humility 27 and submitted all her visions and temptations to the examination and decision of her spiritual advisors, as I said above. 28 The clear conclusion based on the authoritative discussion of the holy abbot Moses and that of other holy fathers is that all the revelations in her books proceeded from the Holy Spirit and not from the diabolical deceiver. 29 This first sign is clearly recognized by all truly spiritual persons and is the general advice among them all for avoiding the trap of the temptations, suggestions and deceptions of the devil.

30 The second sign that it is a divine vision and that the soul is not being deceived is when the soul feels herself to be delightfully filled and inebriated during the vision, inflamed as God's charity is instilled in her, inwardly savoring the delight of God's love. 31 I declare that the devil can by no means instill this inward charity and this delight of divine love into anyone's soul, because no one can give what he does not have. 32 Thus we conclude that the one who accomplishes such things in the soul is God. 33 This applies especially when the whole soul is strengthened and filled with the enlightenment of unwavering belief in and obedience and reverence to the Catholic faith and our holy mother Church; see *Revelationes* Book IV chapter 78 and similar passages. 34 This is also nicely demonstrated by Hugh of St. Victor in the *Soliloquy of the Pledge of the Soul* where the soul says the following to him at the end of the treatise: 35 *Please, says the soul, receive my last question: What is that accustomed delight which touches my*

3. “And in order that this same definition”; the reference is to John Cassian, *Conferences*, 2.5 (ed. Pichery, t. 1, pp. 116–17).

4. “A person... in the heart”: John Cassian, *Conferences*, 1.2.10 (ed. Pichery, pp. 120–21).

recollection and so forcefully and pleasantly affects me that I somehow begin to be separated from myself and carried away I know not whither? 36 Suddenly I am changed. I begin to feel happier than I can say. My mind is exhilarated and forgets past sorrows; my spirit rejoices, my understanding becomes clear; my heart is enlightened, my feelings are cheerful, etc. 37 Hugh gives this fine answer to the soul: Surely it is your beloved who visits you, meaning God.⁵ 38 St. Anthony says the same thing,⁶ teaching his disciples at length how to distinguish good visions from deceptions, as quoted in the *Life of St. Anthony* in the first book of the *Lives of the Fathers*: I will now explain to you other traps of the demons, etc. See more fully there. 39 Gregory also says in *Moralia*, Book 28, chapter 2, that when God speaks to the soul by himself, 40 the sole power of internal inspiration is disclosed in us, for his might is made known through the delight of an interior elevation,⁷ etc. 41 On this see more fully in *Revelationes* Book IV chapter 78 and in Book VII, chapter 4, as well as many other passages in the *Revelationes*. 42 This is the proof that everything revealed to blessed Birgitta and contained in these books was transmitted to her not by the deceiver who frightens but by the Holy Spirit who comforts and delights. 43 This is clear from the quotations above⁸ and the consoling sentiments she experienced during the visions and divine locutions as described in her own words.

44 The third sign by which a divine vision is recognized and distinguished from diabolical deception 45 is when a soul, either in a corporeal or imaginary and spiritual vision, experiences the influx of the supernatural light of intelligible truth, 46 which gives her insight into the true meaning of what she has seen and heard. Her intellect understands clearly and the true meaning of the vision is revealed to her. 47 This supernatural influx of intellectual light, whether a corporeal or imaginary vision precedes it or not, can never be transmitted into the soul by the devil but only by God. 48 Thomas of Aquinas says the following in *Summa Theologiae* II.II question 173 (under the heading "On prophecy"): 49 Demons reveal what they know to men not by the enlightenment of the intellect but by an imaginary vision or even by audible speech without enlightening his intellect. In this way this kind of prophecy falls short of and differs from true prophecy.⁹ 50 In Book 12 of *On the literal meaning of Genesis* Augustine says the following: The soul is misled and deceived in corporeal visions, etc. 51 Later he adds: In a spiritual or imaginative vision, that is, in the vision of bodily images seen in the spirit, the soul is also deceived when she considers the things thus seen to be bodies, etc. 52 Directly after this he says: On the contrary, the soul is not deceived in intellectual visions, etc. 53 Then he adds: If the soul in this state sees future events in such a way that they are clearly recognized to be future events, and the soul interprets the meaning of the images of these things, either with God's help on her own or through someone

5. Hugh of St. Victor, *Soliloquium de arrha animae* (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 176, col. 970).

6. "St. Anthony says the same thing": *Vitae patrum*, lib. I, "Vita beati Antonii abbatis," ch. 18 (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 73, cols. 142–43).

7. "When God speaks . . . interior elevation"; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, 28.2 (ed. Adriaen, vol. 143 B, p. 1396, lines 22–25). Cf. 5.42–43.

8. "The quotations above": 4.6–8.

9. "Demons reveal . . . true prophecy": Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II.II, q. 172, art. 5, ad 2.

explaining them, as it was explained in John's Apocalypse, 54 then this is a great revelation, even if the person to whom these things are shown does not, when he sees them, know whether his soul has left the body or is still in the body¹⁰ while his spirit is withdrawn from the senses.¹¹ Thus says Augustine.

55 Here the question may arise what the difference is between revelation to the human intellect through a fabrication or deception in someone's imagination and intellect and that which is transmitted divinely through an intellectual vision. 56 I base my answer on Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* II:II, question 173, article 2. The prophecy or revelation corresponding to the imagination and judgment of the human mind depends on the strength of the natural intellectual light. 57 However, the gift of divine prophecy confers something on the human mind that is beyond its natural capacity both 58 in regard to the judgment formed through the influx of intellectual light and in regard to the acceptance or representation of things which is formed through certain images. 59 A humanly fabricated or diabolical revelation can be likened to divine prophecy as to the latter but not as to the former.¹² Thus says Thomas Aquinas.

60 From this it is evident that when a supernatural, intellectual light is instilled in a soul, whether or not through an imaginative vision, it cannot come from the devil but only from God. 61 The following conclusion may clearly be drawn. When the blessed lady received that influx of intellectual and supernatural light in her visions, and Christ or his Mother or an angel or some saint was always there to explain 62 the images and figurative language to her and show her their true meaning, as is evident in her books, 63 it follows that all her revelations and visionary writings were communicated to her by God. He alone is capable of achieving such effects, and it is impossible for the deceiver to do so. 64 This is evident from the passages in Augustine and Thomas cited above. A deceptive vision differs from a divine one especially in this respect, and all the holy fathers and doctors agree about this.

65 The fourth sign by which a vision or revelation of the good spirit differs from diabolical deception is that the prophet or visionary always tells the truth, conveys Catholic mysteries and doctrines, and recommends upright and virtuous conduct. 66 These are all signs of divine origin, for the devil may sometimes tell the truth in his illusions in order to deceive, and at other times lies, but the Holy Spirit always tells the truth and never lies. 67 St. Thomas explains this clearly in the passage cited above where he says: The prophecy of demons can be distinguished from divine prophecy by certain signs, including outward ones. 68 Thus Chrysostomus in *On Matthew* says that some people, such as diviners, foretell things by the spirit of the devil, but this can be perceived because the devil sometimes utters what is false but the Holy Spirit never does. 69 Hence it is written in Deuteronomy chapter 18: "And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the

10. "Whether his soul has left the body or is still in the body"; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2.

11. "The soul... the senses": Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 12.25–26 (ed. Zycha, pp. 417 lines 22 and 25, 418 lines 14–17, and 419 lines 1–8).

12. "Judgment of the human mind... as to the former": Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II. II, q. 173, art. 2, resp.

Lord has not spoken?’¹³ 70 You will have this sign: ‘When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken,’¹⁴ etc. 71 Augustine, too, in Book 12 of *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, says the following about people whose minds are raised to an ecstatic state and who see bodily signs or images in an imaginative or spiritual vision: 72 *If the evil spirit has laid hold of them in this state, he turns them into demoniacs or false prophets.* 73 *But when the good spirit lays hold of them, he turns them into faithful who utter mysteries or, if the divine light grants them understanding, he turns them into true prophets so that they may see and describe that which it is suitable to reveal to them for a time.* Thus Augustine.¹⁵

74 Accordingly, this blessed lady always spoke the truth, provided one understands what she said in the right way, and never uttered anything false or deceitful or immoral or uncatholic in any of her books. 75 Rather, she always told the whole truth, affirmed the Catholic faith, condemned heresies and pointed out the way of virtue, as one can plainly see in this book and in the other books revealed to her. 76 The obvious conclusion is that all of it was communicated and revealed to her by the grace of God and not by the deceptions of the devil.

77 The fifth sign by which visions imparted by the good spirit may be distinguished from the evil spirit is the fruit and works that come out of those visions or revelations. 78 As it says in the gospel, a bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit, etc. By their fruits you shall know them.¹⁶ 79 In his great mercy, God granted true prophecy to humankind in order to guide human actions and steer their outcomes as well as to reveal mysteries by the divine light 80 in order to direct and instruct humankind in the knowledge of the faith and in all virtuous works so that his chosen ones might be saved. 81 Prophecy always varied according to the variety of times and situations, which Thomas explains in *Summa Theologiae* II.II under the heading *On prophecy*, article two, last chapter.¹⁷ 82 As it is said in *Proverbs* 29 (28:18): *When prophecy fails, the people will be scattered.*¹⁸

83 We see that the visions and words of these revelations illuminate the mind, enlighten the visionary’s understanding and perception, and lead to the correction and improvement of her life, 84 the conversion of men from vice to virtue and religion, from war and hatred to peace, from pride to humility and obedience, from evil to good. When we see this occur among many persons and continue for a long time, 85 then it is a most certain sign that the visions and revelations engendering and producing these fruits come from the Holy Spirit and not from the devil. 86 It is impossible for the devil to do this—no, quite the contrary comes out of his visions or, rather, his deceptions. 87 The latter tend to lead people away from the Catholic faith, from good morals, from sound doctrine, from obedience to prelates and Sacred Scripture as well as from submission to

13. “The prophecy of demons...the Lord has not spoken”: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II.II, q. 172, art. 5, ad 3. The quotations from John Chrysostom and Deuteronomy 18:22 are in the text of Thomas Aquinas.

14. “And if you say in your heart...has not spoken”; Deuteronomy 18:21–22.

15. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 12.19 (ed. Zycha, pp. 408 line 24–409 line 2).

16. “A bad tree...you shall know them”; cf. Matthew 7:18 and 7:16.

17. “*Summa Theologiae*...last chapter”: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II.II, q. 174, art. 6.

18. “When prophecy fails...scattered”: Proverbs 29:18.

our holy mother Church. 88 The visions and words of the revelations of this blessed lady have always led to results pleasing to God: virtue, moral purity, the conversion and improvement of her fellows, the revelation of mysteries, the confirmation of the faith, the condemnation of heretics, the rejection of vice, and the true prophecy of future things. 89 This is obvious from everything in this book and in her other books and represents the manifest experience of many persons in different parts of the world. 90 The necessary conclusion is, therefore, that these rivers have flowed from the pure and limpid well-spring of the Holy Spirit and not from the dark and foul pool of deception. 91 In the present dark and shadowy times of vice, this holy teaching has taught humankind to act in such a way 92 that they may escape God's terrible and strict justice as described in these books and take refuge in the bosom of God's kindness and mercy.

93 The sixth sign that this comes from God and not from the evil spirit is the praiseworthy and virtuous death of the visionary. 94 Observe that people may be deceived by visions or rather deceptions disguised as light for a long time, and the devil may show them many true things in order to trick them in the end with a lie. 95 In the works of the holy fathers we generally always find that the devil destroys those who have been thus deceived in the end by errors or by a bad death that comes suddenly or does not allow for the reception of the sacraments. 96 In this way God intends to make it clear to others that they should beware of such luring deceptions. 97 On the contrary, God is actively present in the death of his saints who were consoled and enlightened by divine visitations and visions during their lifetime. 98 While he always directs and protects them on earth and adorns their lives with virtues and miracles, 99 he glorifies them especially at death with singular graces as though to indicate his approval; this is obvious in the case of John the Evangelist¹⁹ and many others. 100 This was also how the good Lord Jesus himself treated this lady, his blessed bride. His wondrous and supernatural grace came in advance, for she ascended in an orderly progress from lowest to highest. 101 She was raised up by humility, gained life by dying to herself, became wise in her foolishness and conspicuous for her inward moral beauty. 102 Therefore he elevated her during her lifetime with admirable supernatural graces and adorned her angelically with divine visions and locutions for the benefit of the Church. 103 At the end of her life, he foretold her death beforehand to her and revealed himself to her bodily eyes on her death-bed to console her and show his approval, welcoming her soul as his beloved bride to the wedding feast of heaven with a sweet embrace, as described above. 104 About this see the last chapter of *Revelationes* Book VII as well as in the legend of her life.²⁰ 105 In this way God himself wanted to set his seal of approval on these books divinely revealed to the bride and to validate them and miraculously confirm their usefulness for the Church and for the faithful. 106 He had appeared to her so many times during her lifetime in prophetic, spiritual, and intellectual visions; now before she died, he foretold her death and showed her something more than a prophetic vision, appearing to her bodily.

19. "Glorifies them... John the Evangelist"; cf. Ryan, *The Golden Legend*.
20. Cf. Book VII 31 and Birgitta's *Vita* in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 101.

107 The seventh sign of the good spirit is the glorification of miracles after the visionary's death. Someone who has been deceived by the devil's visions up to death does not deserve to be glorified by divine miracles after death. 108 This worthy bride of Christ was certainly not deceived by the devil in her visions during her lifetime. 109 That is why Christ glorified her after her death with many wondrous miracles; for example, reviving a number of persons who had died, giving light to the blind, curing the deaf, and by countless other miraculous cures of sick people from various sicknesses. He glorified her during her lifetime but glorified her even more after her death.²¹ 110 All this is public and well known, and the news of it has spread by means of validated documents and been proven both in the kingdom of Sweden and in Rome and in the kingdom of Sicily and in many other parts of the world. 111 Her image is found in many churches²² where the faithful cherish her memory and venerate her. It demands no further proof and can no longer be hidden by any refusal to believe.

112 The fact that all the words and miracles contained²³ in these Heavenly books preach no other faith but the one preached by Christ should provide sufficient mental preparation to all those reading these divine revelations and lead them to accept belief in their truth more easily. 113 They bring us not a new Christ nor an anti-Christ. Rather, they admonish us to believe in and love more fervently and fear the same Christ who suffered for us on the cross. 114 They neither add anything to nor subtract anything from the truth that is in Christ. Rather they show us his mercy and justice for our advancement toward salvation more clearly than in the writings of other divine prophets.²⁴ 115 The heavenly words of these books teach us to fear God rightly, to love him piously and to desire heaven intelligently.

116 Therefore, test the words and see for yourselves, and, if you find anything else there, contradict it boldly! This is written in *Revelationes* Book II chapter 14 toward the end.²⁵ 117 Cease worrying about temptations by the false spirit and give up your proud and envious detractions that come from foolish opinion! Yield their place to God's glory and grace. The more incredible it seems to our ignorance and weak faith, the better it is for us to acknowledge it.²⁶ 118 Let us give thanks to the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation,²⁷ who in the many miseries of this ageing world proceeds with so much mercy to help the miserable, lest they fall into the pit of despair.

I will now recapitulate the foregoing.

21. Miracles attributed to St. Birgitta were collected after her death by different commissions in distinct stages. The major groups of miracles are found in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 25–27, 67–70, 108–43, 145–61, 175–84, and 608–10. A few additional miracles are to be found in Fröjmark, *Mirakler och helgonkult*, pp. 181–83, and in Borgehammar, “En legend till firandet av Birgittas kanonisationsdag,” pp. 131–33. For a full list, with cross-references where a miracle appears in more than one collection, see Myrdal and Bäärnhjelm, *Kvinnor, barn & fester*, pp. 135–41.

22. “Her image is found in many churches”: on this, see Lindgren, *Bilden av Birgitta*.

23. 6.112 “Contained” renders “seriose contenta.”

24. Paragraphs 12–14 are very similar in wording to Mathias's Prologue to Book I, paragraphs 27–28.

25. “Book II chapter 14 toward the end”: Book II 14.78.

26. This paragraph is very similar in wording to Mathias's Prologue to Book I, paragraph 18.

27. “The Father of mercies and the God of all consolation”; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3. This paragraph is the same as Mathias's Prologue to Book I, paragraph 29.

✚ Chapter 7

A Recapitulation of the Above

DATE: 1376/1377, ROME

1 Let us therefore briefly recapitulate the method of examining visionaries described above. The person being examined must first show true humility. 2 It is especially important that she should live in constant obedience to a spiritual father and submit everything to his discretion. When her mind is carried away in the state of ecstatic prayer, she should feel the singular delight of God's love. 3 When she has an imaginative vision or only a simple intellectual one, she should experience the supernatural influx of the intellectual light of divine truth which reveals the truth of the matter to her. 4 She must always communicate the truth in her visions, and their result should be the fruit of her own and others' edification and spiritual improvement. 5 I declare that such a person is not subject to the deceptions of the devil; her visions are neither delusionary nor deceptive but are rather wholly divine. They should be humbly received as coming from the hand of God; they should be believed in, obeyed, and followed in every way. 6 All this is obvious from the foregoing discussion and from the extensive treatment of the subject in the various writings of the holy fathers.

✚ Chapter 8

An Introduction to Book VIII which is a Compilation around a Single Theme Addressed to Kings and Rulers

DATE: 1376/1377, ROME

1 We turn now to the matter of the present book. Observe first its title: Book of the Heavenly Emperor to Kings. 2 It was divinely revealed in a spiritual and intellectual vision to the blessed lady Birgitta, a noblewoman from Närke in the kingdom of Sweden. She descended, as I said earlier, from the illustrious line and country of the kings of the Goths.¹ 3 It was indeed appropriate that Christ the Emperor chose as his bride and special envoy to kings and emperors and sent, as it were, as an apostle² with new letters and evangelical words 4 not a commoner or a peasant but a person of royal descent and birth.

5 The great volume of Heavenly Book of *Revelationes*, which contains seven books, includes many revelations concerning kings and emperors. 6 In addition to them, many others with similar material are in circulation. In order to bring together all the revelations on the subject in one and the same volume, 7 we excerpted the pertinent revelations from that spacious orchard of the Heavenly

1. "From the illustrious lines and country of the kings of the Goths": the Spaniard Alfonso selects the term "Gothica" rather than "Suetica," and was always keen to promote Birgitta's royal birth and origins; see further Undhagen, *Revelaciones. Book I*, p. 617.

2. "An apostle": Birgitta's *Vita* describes her not only as an apostle but also as an evangelist and a martyr; cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 86.

Book and transcribed them along with other revelations in circulation. Weaving them together like flowers to make a new royal crown, we compiled this book. 8 Blessed is he who reads and hears the words of this prophecy and keeps those things which are written in it; for the time is at hand.³

9 Therefore, o you emperors and kings, all you queens and other rulers, bend your heads to God. 10 Humble your proud, ambitious and greedy minds, and receive humbly this new, precious, heavenly and royal crown from the royal and beautiful hand of the bride of Christ. In his kindness and mercy he has designed it for you by means of her. 11 I speak of the holy teaching of the present book which deals with how kings should dress, when they should wear the crown, how devout and upright kings may live moral lives, 12 what kinds of queens their wives should be, what kind of men the kings should appoint and maintain as counselors, which ones they should remove from office and expel, 13 how they should select knights and noblemen, how they should treat their subjects and commoners, how they should rule their kingdoms and promote the nation and defend it zealously with tender compassion, 14 and how they should wage war and crusade against unbelievers in a wise, just and meritorious way. 15 Finally in the book a two-edged sword is shown to them coming out of the mouth⁴ of the one seated on the throne. This represents God's terrible sentence of justice on certain kings who were deprived of their kingdom and crown during their lifetimes because of their sins and were slain by the sword of divine justice in an evil and shameful death. 16 It also shows God's terrible sentence on other deceased kings whose souls the bride of Christ saw being judged and condemned by divine justice in an amazing and rigorous way. 17 The purpose of this was to reveal the sharpness and severity of this divine sword to the kings of today. 18 With its first sharp edge it punishes some by cutting off their honor with humiliation and their lives with death. But with its second and sharper edge it punishes others after death with terrible pain and the eternal damnation of their souls. 19 This is in order that every king and ruler may know that God shows no partiality⁵ and that they may thoroughly understand what a severe judgment awaits them from God both before and after death and how much they should fear God with trembling in their actions.

20 Now therefore, o kings, understand: receive instruction, you that judge the earth! Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice unto him with trembling! 21 Embrace discipline, I beg you, lest at any time the Lord be angry, and you perish from the just way, for his wrath is quickly kindled, but blessed are all who with a pure heart and righteous work place their hopes in him⁶ who is King of kings and Lord of lords⁷ forever and ever! Amen.

3. "The time is at hand"; cf. Apocalypse 1:3.

4. "A two-edged sword . . . out of the mouth"; cf. Apocalypse 1:16.

5. "God shows no partiality"; cf. Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25.

6. "Now therefore . . . place their hopes in him"; cf. Psalm 2(3):10-13.

7. "King of kings and Lord of lords"; 1 Timothy 6:15; Apocalypse 19:16.



FIGURE 3. Title page to Book VIII, in the so-called “Eriksberg-manuscript” (MS A 70b, fol. 96v. Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm).

Book VIII

THE HEAVENLY EMPEROR'S BOOK TO KINGS

⚡ Chapter 1

Ecclesial and Worldly Power in the Government of the World are Represented by St. Peter and St. Paul

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ the supreme Emperor addresses kings through the bride, showing himself to be the true creator of all beings, a king reigning in trinity and in unity. He says how he arranged for the world to be ruled by a double power, the ecclesial and the secular, here symbolized principally by the apostles Peter and Paul.

1 I saw an incredibly large palace as big as a cloudless sky where countless numbers of people were seated, clothed in white robes as bright as the rays of the sun. 2 I saw a wonderful throne in the palace on which there sat a man who was brighter than the sun, a lord of unimaginable beauty and immense power. The splendor of his light was unimaginable in its length and depth and breadth. 3 A Virgin was standing beside the throne. She was brilliantly shining and wore a costly crown upon her head. 4 All those present ministered to him who sat on the throne. They praised him with hymns and songs and reverently gave honor to the Virgin as the Queen of Heaven.

5 He who sat on the throne spoke to me in a fine voice: "I am the Creator of heaven and earth, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, true God. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God.¹ 6 Now you might ask: If there are three persons, why are there not three gods? My answer to you is that God is power itself, wisdom itself, goodness itself.² 7 All power beneath or above heaven comes from him, all the wisdom and all the kindness thinkable. God is triple and single: three in persons, one in nature. 8 The Father, from whom all things come, is power and wisdom. He is powerful above all things and has no other source eternally but himself. 9 Equal to the Father, the Son is also power and wisdom; he is powerful not of himself but as powerfully and ineffably born of the Father, the principle from the principle, never separated from the Father. 10 The Holy Spirit is also power and wisdom; he proceeds from the Father and the Son, eternal together with the Father and Son, equal in majesty and power. 11 Thus: One God and Three Persons, for one is the nature of the three, one

1. "I am the Creator... much to be praised": paragraphs 5-13 expound the traditional doctrine of God as found in, for example, the Athanasian creed and the widely used *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.

2. "God is power itself, wisdom itself, goodness itself": it was traditional to attribute power specifically to the Father, wisdom to the Son, and goodness to the Holy Spirit, although strictly speaking each of these attributes belongs to the Trinity as a whole (see Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, lib. I, dist. XXXIV, cap 4).

their operation and will, one their glory and power. God is as much one in essence, as the Three Persons are distinct, due to what is proper to each.³ 12 The Father is wholly in the Son and in the Spirit, and the Son in the Father and in the Spirit, and the Spirit in both, in a single divine nature. It is not as though any is before or after another. It is beyond utterance, for none is greater or less, but the whole is unutterable and equal. 13 Therefore, it has well been written that God is wonderful and much to be praised.⁴

The Deity sent his word to the Virgin Mary through his angel Gabriel. 14 Yet the same God was the one sending and the one being sent by himself. He was with the angel; he was in Gabriel and in the Virgin before Gabriel. 15 After the angel's words, the Word was made flesh in the Virgin. This Word is I who am speaking with you. The Father sent me to the Virgin's womb through himself and with the Holy Spirit. 16 It was not as if the angels did not then have the vision and presence of my divine nature, but I, the Son, who was with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the virginal womb, was the same in heaven with the Father and the Spirit in the vision of the angels, still governing and upholding the universe, although my human nature, which was assumed by me alone, rested in the womb of my Mother. 17 Thus, I, one God in my divine and human natures, do not scorn to speak with you in order to reveal my charity and to strengthen the holy Christian faith. 18 Although my human form seems to be here next to you and to speak with you, the truth is rather that your soul and your mind are with me and in me, for nothing in heaven and on earth is impossible or difficult to me.

19 I am like a powerful king who comes to a city with his army and completely occupies all the territory. Thus, my grace fills up your whole body and fortifies you. 20 Again, I am both within you and without you. Although I may speak with you, yet I remain the same in glory. What can be difficult for me who uphold the universe by my power, arrange it all through my wisdom and surpass it all in my might? 21 I am without beginning or end, one God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, who became human for the sake of humanity without diminishing my divinity. I suffered, I rose again, I ascended, and now I am truly speaking. 22 I am the true and supreme Emperor and Lord. There is no lord greater than I. There was none before me and there will be none after me, for all lordship comes from me and is through me. 23 I am the true Lord, and no one else can be called lord, but me alone, for every power and dominion comes from me, and no one can withstand my power.

24 I am also King of the crown.⁵ Do you know, my bride, why I said "King of the crown?" Because my divine nature was and will be and is without beginning

3. "God is as much one...due to what is proper to each" renders "qui ita est unum in essentia, quod eciam sunt distincti proprietate personarum." The phrase derives from Ps.-Augustine (Fulgentius of Ruspe), *De fide ad Petrum*, cap. I, 4.4, as quoted in Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, lib. I, dist. III, cap. 4.

4. "Wonderful and much to be praised" renders "mirabilis et multum laudabilis." It is a quotation from verse 8 of the Christmas hymn "Dies est laetitiae" [This is the joyful day], and refers to the newborn child Jesus.

5. "I am also the King of the crown": cf. Book II 7.1: "The Son spoke to the bride, saying: 'I am King of the crown. Do you know why I said "King of the crown?"'"

or end. 25 My divine nature is aptly likened to a crown, because a crown has neither starting point nor end. Just as a crown is reserved for the future king in a kingdom, so too my divine nature was reserved for my human nature to be its crown.

26 I had two excellent servants.⁶ One was a priest, the other a layman. The first was my apostle Peter who had a priestly office. The second was the apostle Paul who was, as it were, a layman. 27 Peter was bound in marriage, but when he saw that his marriage was not consistent with his priestly office, and considering that his upright intention might be endangered by a lack of continence, he separated himself from his wife with regard to sexual intercourse, which, however, would otherwise have been licit for him, and he devoted himself to me wholeheartedly. 28 Paul, however, did observe celibacy and kept himself unstained by the marriage bed. 29 See what great love I had for these two! I gave the keys of heaven to Peter so that whatever he bound or loosed on earth might be bound or loosed in heaven.⁷ I allowed Paul to become like Peter in glory and honor. 30 It should be clear that, as they were equals and partners together on earth, so now they are partners in everlasting glory in heaven and glorified together. However, although I mentioned these two expressly by name, by and through them I mean to denote other popes and kings and friends of mine as well.⁸ 31 In similar fashion, under the earlier Covenant,⁹ I used to speak to Israel as if I were addressing just one person, although I meant to designate the entire people of Israel by that one name. In the same way now, using these two men, I mean to denote the multitude of those whom I have filled with my glory and love. 32 With the passage of time, evils began to multiply and the flesh began to grow weaker and to be more than usually prone to evil. 33 Therefore, I set up norms for each of the two, that is, for the clergy and laity, represented here by Peter and Paul. In my mercy I decided to allow the clergy to own a moderate amount of Church property for their bodily needs in order that they might grow more fervent and constant in serving me. 34 I also allowed the laity to join honorably in marriage according to the rites of the Church.”¹⁰

✠ Chapter 2

On the King's Counselors

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

6. “I had two excellent servants”: cf. Book II 7.4: “I had two servants. One was a priest, the other a layman. The first was Peter who had a priestly office, while Paul was, as it were, a layman.”

7. “Bound or loosed in heaven”; cf. Matthew 16:19.

8. Cf. Book II 7.9–10: “As they were equals together on earth, so now they are united in everlasting glory in heaven and glorified together. However, although I mentioned these two expressly by name, by and through them I mean to denote other friends of mine as well.”

9. “Under the earlier Covenant”; cf. Deuteronomy 6:4.

10. Paragraphs 24–34 duplicate Book II 7 1–11. Cf. also ch. 32, which duplicates other parts of II 7. Part of the revelation also occurs in the Birgittine-Norwegian text further underlining the political nature of the collection; see volume I pp. 23 and 190.

Christ the supreme Emperor here lays out for kings what kind of counselors they should have, and he gives them ten useful moral recommendations.

1 "I am the true King. No one deserves to be called king except me, because all honor and power come from me. I am he who rendered judgment upon the first angel to fall through pride, greed and envy. 2 I am he who rendered judgment upon Adam and Cain as well as upon the whole world by sending it the Flood due to the sins of the human race. 3 I am the same one who allowed the people of Israel to come into captivity and miraculously led it out with miraculous signs. 4 All justice is to be found in me. Justice always was and is in me without beginning or end. It does not at any time grow less in me but remains in me true and unchangeable.¹ 5 Because this king of Sweden² asks you humbly about how he can govern with justice and prudence, I will point it out for him. There are ten things he should do.

6 The first is to get rid of any counselors with ambitious and greedy hearts, cheating and deceitful tongues, eyes all but blind as to spiritual matters. 7 He should instead choose men who do not sell justice for money, who have enough shame not to be lying yea-sayers, who love God more than bodily pleasures, who have compassion on the sufferings of their fellow human beings. 8 The second thing is that I want the king to help with his own contribution toward the building of your abbey whose rule I dictated myself.³ 9 The third thing is that he should send his vassals and his own people to those lands of the infidels⁴ where Catholic faith and charity can spread and grow. 10 His vassals were killed in Copenhagen,⁵ because he had his sights fixed on a part of another Christian kingdom.

The fourth thing is that the king himself should daily recite the office of the Blessed Virgin, my Mother. 11 When he has judicial decisions or other demanding work at hand, he may omit the office of the day. He should also hear two private masses⁶ or one sung mass every day. 12 Five times each day let him also call to mind my five wounds which I suffered for him on the Cross. The fifth thing is that he should fast on the vigils of the feast-days of the saints and of my Mother as established by the holy Church. 13 He should fast on fish on Fridays and on dairy products on Saturdays, if he wishes. 14 But he

1. Paragraphs 1-4 duplicate Book II 12.1-4.

2. "This king of Sweden": Magnus Eriksson (1316-74), king of Sweden 1319-64 (including Skåne 1332-60), and of Norway (1319-43).

3. "Your abbey whose rule I dictated myself" i.e., Vadstena abbey and the Rule of the Savior.

4. "His vassals . . . the lands of the infidels": a reference to the forthcoming crusade to Novgorod. See further volume 1 p. 170, and the sequence of revelations on the crusades, chs. 39-47.

5. "His vassals were killed in Copenhagen": this may refer to a battle in Copenhagen on 26 June 1342 when many Swedes were killed; see Andersson, *Källstudier till Sveriges historia*, p. 123. Alternatively, the vassals may have been killed in connection with Swedish attempts in 1343-44 to take Estonia from the Danes.

6. "Private masses": does not refer to masses celebrated in private but to masses deprived of the music and ceremonies proper to the celebration of a solemn mass.

should make sure that he is moderate and temperate in his fasting, so as not to get tired at council or become remiss in carrying out his judicial duties due to inappropriate fasting or imprudent vigils or extended times of prayer. 15 When he has a heavier workload, he should heed the advice and decision and exemption⁷ of the prelates of my Church.

16 The sixth thing is that he should give a tenth of the money owed to the royal treasury as alms to the poor. If, for some reason, he has a pious wish to give any more out of love for me, then his reward will be greater in heaven. 17 The seventh thing is that he should bring together thirteen paupers every Friday to wash their feet and give them food and money with his own hand. He can omit this if he happens to be on the road. 18 On Fridays when he is in residence without pressure of other business, he should fully occupy himself with hearing the complaints of the common citizens of the kingdom. 19 He should also then make an examination of the faithfulness and management of his representatives and vassals as well as of the royal judges and of the tax collectors and the exactors of the royal revenues. 20 The eighth thing is that the king himself should be prudent with regard to his own giving, so that his gifts to one person do not lead to stinginess with others. 21 And if he wants to give more to any one person than to others either because of meritorious behavior or greater accomplishments, even here he must act with maturity and circumspection, so that the king cannot be blamed for any unfairness which might give rise to grumbling. 22 There is nothing so reprehensible in powerful lords as either excessive prodigality or miserliness. Moreover, nothing so becomes and adorns a king as to command with modesty and to reward charitably those working in his service. 23 The king can even make gifts to foreigners who keep peace with his kingdom and who are suffering need. But he should do this in such a way that his own vassals and his own servants are neither neglected nor forgotten.

24 The ninth thing is that he should not transgress the law of God or introduce any new customs that go against time-honored statutes. 25 Nor should he govern imperiously or make decisions that simply occur to his mind. Rather he should act with justice in accordance with the law of God and of the realm, because it does not become a king to be issuing many decrees without accomplishing anything or to abandon justice and become a cruel ruler. 26 The tenth thing is that the king should prove himself in all his works to be worthy of the royal name by fleeing from greed and truly loving humility. 27 Because of the king's greater rank, he should be so much the more humble before God, from whom all power comes and who will exact as strict an account from the king at the judgment as from the general populace."⁸

7. "Advice and decision and exemption": when Magnus has a heavy workload the prelates of the church may give him permission to refrain from fasting and vigils altogether. A private mass took considerably less time to perform, hence the requirement of hearing two in place of a single sung mass.

8. "The first is . . . general populace": this early advice to the king is recalled in a much later, disillusioned revelation, in ch. 56.41–46. Andersson, *Källstudier till Sveriges historia*, pp. 118–24, provides further commentary on this revelation.

✚ Chapter 3

The King must Dress with Distinction

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ the supreme Emperor here commands kings to wear more distinguished and noble apparel than others as a sign of their preeminent rank. He also states on what days and solemnities they should wear the royal crown.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Because man refused to obey God, man must obey a man like himself. Again, because a king is appointed by God to judge and govern with justice, it is right for the king to be honored and respected by his subjects. 2 Therefore, in order that a king might stand out among others, he should have finer, more distinguished and more distinguishing apparel than other persons. The honor of a king lies in exercising justice and judgment, and so it is to the honor of a people to have a fine-looking and distinguished king. 3 This is why a king has permission to wear distinguished and distinguishing apparel and, when he wears them, he should not take pride in his privilege but be humble in consideration of the burden of his office.

4 The king should wear a crown on his head on the following days: Christmas, Epiphany, Easter Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, Ascension Thursday, 5 and on the feasts of the Assumption of my Virgin Mother, the Exaltation of the Cross, All Saints as well as on all the days on which he sits in judgment or on which he is to create knights. 6 Just as the whole heavenly host exults on the feast days of my human Incarnation and of the glorification of my saints, so too the righteous on earth should rejoice in the justice of the king as symbolized by his crown. The whole heavenly court exults in the reward of a just king.”

✚ Chapter 4

Ten Counsels for the King

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ the supreme Emperor here gives ten saving counsels to kings who should rule both themselves and their kingdoms.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride and says: “Earlier I told the king about the steps by which he can ascend to the heavenly level. If he follows them, he will ascend to heaven as easily as a person who leads a contemplative life. 2 Now I want to give the king ten counsels. The first is not to sit alone at his table but together with some of his subjects who may receive both physical and spiritual support by his presence, because, in this way, they move away from sins and dishonest doings. 3 The second counsel is to stay for a while in decent enjoyment after his meal, because through humble conversation and

get-togethers with his household, he will win favor and love. He will then have the opportunity to listen to many people's opinions and arguments, whether they are to be approved or disapproved. 4 The third counsel is to be merciful and just in all his actions and judicial decisions, so that he does not neglect to carry out justice either because of friendship or false compassion or because of his own private advantage or because of temporary gain or fear. 5 Again, he should not neglect or forget mercy out of anger or impatience, for it is unfitting for a king to be overcome by anger or for a judge to render hasty decisions or let himself be petitioned into straying from the path of justice. 6 The fourth counsel is for the king not to delegate matters of government or judicial decisions to men whom he knows to be partial and greedy or to those whom he knows will extort money fraudulently, for men like that stray easily away from justice. 7 Rather the king should seek out those who by nature are well ordered and who follow in the good steps of their forefathers and who prefer acting justly to making a profit. 8 The fifth counsel is that the king should make constant inquiry into how law and justice are being followed in his kingdom. Insofar as he is able, he should not let any who are delinquent go unpunished. 9 He should be careful not to extract too much money in fines from those who are delinquent or to cheat and exploit those who are innocent. Rather he should deal with the humble with more clemency and punish hardened transgressors with more severity, always making sure to observe justice and mercy in every case. 10 Where he sees greater humility, he should be more merciful than even-handed. 11 The sixth counsel is that the king should continuously examine his own judgments and actions. If he finds he has done wrong out of a light-headed and sudden impulse of the mind, he should not be ashamed to correct or take back anything he has done badly. 12 He is, to be sure, no wiser than David who also did wrong nor any holier than the prophet who put his trust in a lie and was killed by a lion.

13 The seventh counsel is that he should not be overly hasty in carrying out his actions but prudent and circumspect, keeping his goals in mind in his affairs. 14 He should rely on the advice of wise, experienced and God-fearing men. He should obey them and not avoid them, for only a degenerate and suspicious mind holds proven counselors suspect and rediscusses mature and soberly discussed advice with flatterers and yea-sayers. 15 The eighth counsel is that he should beware of levity in his words and moral conduct in every situation, even when among his family and household members, and he should avoid flatterers and yea-sayers like scorpions, for they only encourage him in sin and scandalize good people. 16 The goal is to become such a king as to be respected by the young, honored by the old, praised by the wise, loved by the just, and longed for in the hearts of the oppressed. 17 The ninth counsel is that the king should not hold communion with those who are excommunicated by the Church, nor give any encouragement to people who laugh at God and his commandments. He should instead form them by his charitable words and admonitions. If they do not come to their senses, he should show them his severity and remove their privileges. 18 The king's glory lies in loving the things of God above all else and to add to God's glory with all his strength. 19 The tenth counsel is that

he should love the common citizens of his kingdom, treat his soldiers with clemency and reward children for the good deeds of their parents.”

✚ Chapter 5

The King Should follow the Example of the Saints and be given the best Advisors

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ the Emperor advises kings to read the examples of the saints from time to time so as to stir up their hearts with love for God. He gives one king two excellent spiritual advisors so that he might obey them and so that other kings might be encouraged to similar behavior.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride: “It is written of a certain king who was unable to sleep that he had annals or chronicles brought to him.¹ 2 So too this king for whom you pray, because he is youthful, should have read to him the works and examples and deeds of steadfast men so as to stir up his mind with love for God and so that he may learn how to entertain himself decently while taking care of the kingdom. 3 Moreover, I will appoint two friends of mine who will be like two mothers to him. He will receive milk and bread from the first, and wine and medicine from the second. 4 The first will show him how and in what ways he sins, how he may make up for his errors, how he may be comforted in his trials, and how he can placate my anger. 5 From the second he will get wise instruction regarding doubtful issues and the solution to secret problems as well as prudent advice about governing and defending his kingdom. If he obeys them, he will be successful in the sight of God and of men. 6 He should not obey these two in such a way as to look down on other advisors, but he should hear the advice of several persons along with these two and choose the best path after deliberation.”

✚ Chapter 6

How a King must Treat his Subjects

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ the Emperor teaches kings to love their subjects by maintaining certain forms of government, and commands them to do away with unjust and immoral customs.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride: “Earlier I said that a king should love the common citizens of his kingdom. Well, he shows that he loves them¹

1. “It is written . . . annals or chronicles”; cf. Esther 6:1.

1. “He shows that he loves them” renders “ostendit se diligere eam” of certain manuscript variants, rather than “diligit eam” selected by the editor.

when he offers them the benefit of approved laws, 2 and when cruel tax-collectors and exactors do not lord it over the common people, when the people are not burdened by the imposition of additional new taxes, when they are not oppressed by burdensome and unaccustomed demands on their hospitality. 3 However the king may humbly request the assistance of the common people of the kingdom in fighting the infidels, if necessary, but he should take care that necessity does not settle into custom and law. 4 The king should also strive to remove customs contrary to the salvation of souls, especially that old and long-standing custom which entails that when ships are off the shore of his jurisdiction and sink in a storm, the owners of the ships and of the merchandise are deprived of their goods when these are conveyed to the shore. 5 What an impious cruelty it is to heap affliction on the afflicted!² The loss of a ship is enough of a sorrow for the afflicted without him also having his merchandise taken away. 6 The king should uproot this and other immoral and unjust customs from his kingdom, and then he will find greater grace and be a greater success in my sight.”

✚ Chapter 7*

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

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Christ the Emperor tells kings that, if they wish to honor him, they should keep his commandments and words; and they will increase his honor by loving the souls of their subjects whom he redeemed with his own blood.

✚ Chapter 8*

A Revelation Describing the Virgin Mary's Beauty

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ, the universal emperor, shows kings how to choose their queens for their piety and devotion, giving them the example of his own choice of his Mother, Queen of Heaven, preeminent in every virtue among all women.

2. “Heap affliction on the afflicted”: this echoes the wording in a papal regulation against the local appropriation of stranded vessels and goods from wreckages; the regulation was issued in 1266–67 and reissued for the Nordic countries in 1337. It illustrates Birgitta’s stance on legal matters: although she normally defends inherited laws and customs, she always gives precedence to the rulings of the Church. See Andersson, *Källstudier till Sveriges historia*, p. 124.

* This revelation duplicates Book IV 48.

* This revelation duplicates Book V rev. 4. At the end, where Mary is called “Mother and Virgin,” Alfonso adds “and empress of all queens” in accordance with the political emphasis of Book VIII.

✚ Chapter 9

About a Queen whose Marriage was Irregular

DATE: C. 1363, ITALY

Christ the Emperor speaks to the bride about a certain, recently married queen. He informs the king that trouble rather than security will be the result of the marriage, because she was born of a conjugal union condemned by the Church and was underage when she married.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride about a certain queen whom a king had taken in matrimony. She came from a conjugal union condemned by the Church and was under the legal age.¹ He says: 2 “Listen, my daughter, and recall that every Christian marriage requires legal age and legal consent, but these are absent in this case. That is why this marriage is like children playing with dolls, because this couple is only looking for worldly honors and not Christian law or the glory of God. 3 Therefore, this marriage will lead the kingdom into trouble rather than security. 4 Although this new queen, a daughter of parents condemned by the Church, will not be responsible for her father’s sin, the offspring of that man who provoked me to anger² will never bring security or benefit to the people. 5 Thus Isaac warned his son to take a wife from among his own people, so that he would not be contaminated by a people with whom God was angry.”

✚ Chapter 10

The Queen is like a Gnawed Apple Core Planted in a Foreign Land to Bear Fruit

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

God’s Mother warns a queen worldly in her ways that she should turn to God by producing for his sake the leaves, flowers and fruits of virtues by speaking and listening to what is good and by loving God and her neighbor.

1 God’s Mother speaks to the bride and says: “Tell the queen that I, the Mother of Mercy, received her like the gnawed core of an apple which was not beautiful to look at but bitter to taste and hard to swallow. 2 But I planted her in a distant land¹ so she could bear fruit. 3 Just as trees produce of themselves

1. “A certain queen . . . under the legal age”: historians take this as referring to the political match between Magnus Eriksson’s son Håkan, and Margareta, daughter of the Danish king Valdemar IV and Helvig of Schleswig. The marriage took place in 1363, when Margareta was only ten years old. The marriageable age for women was twelve, according to canon law.

2. “That man who provoked me to anger”: Margareta’s father, Valdemar IV, who in ch. 56.50 is called the devil’s sworn brother.

1. “I planted her in a distant land”: Blanche of Namur came to Sweden when she married Magnus Eriksson in 1335, the year before his coronation.

foliage, flowers and fruits, so she should bear the foliage of the virtues by willingly listening to the words of God which are beneficial to the soul and like the leaves of trees. 4 She should also speak for the glory of God and the benefit of her neighbor, for, in doing so, she bears beautiful flowers. Again, she should love God and neighbor, and thus bear excellent fruit. 5 At present, however, she prefers immoral speech and the words by which she can gain worldly reputation and favor. For that reason, she should turn to me and, in whatever she hears and says and in the charitable work she does, give my Son the fruit he likes the best, that is, her own soul, which he longs for with his all his heart.”

✠ Chapter II

Christ Comments on the Motives of the King and Queen in Abstaining from Sexual Relations

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ finds fault with a vow of conjugal continence, which a certain royal wedded couple vowed without consultation or mature deliberation. It may give rise to a greater evil and slanderous gossip.

1 After a king and queen had two children,¹ they made a vow of chastity and abstinence between themselves. The bride was requested to speak to God about this in prayer. Christ appeared and said to her: 2 “Scripture says² that man must not presume to put asunder what God has joined together. Who indeed would dare to change what reason approves and God’s law sanctifies? 3 For a just cause, the good of the body can at times be changed into the good of the spirit. This does not involve dissolving the marriage, but is a kind of transformation, when the couple, after mature deliberation and consultation, consent³ to pursuing a higher good for the love of God.

4 But this king and queen mutually consented to an apparent good but not a wise one, because one of the partners lightmindedly consented to a vow of abstinence out of new-found fervor and imprudent zeal, while the other partner did so impulsively out of a kind of complacency and in order to avoid pain. 5 Therefore it is safer and more admirable for them to go back to the first rule of conjugal relations. Otherwise, if they continue in their unwise choice, temptations might arise and they may repent their decision, and, thus, a worse evil as well as the possibility of slanderous gossip may come out of it. 6 In these matters the couple should act according to the advice of wise men, for it is not a sin to take back an imprudent decision that they had already started to carry out.”

1. “After a king and queen had two children”: Magnus Eriksson and Blanche of Namur had two sons, Erik and Hákan, born in 1339 and 1340 respectively.

2. “Scripture says”; cf. Matthew 19:6.

3. “When the couple . . . consent”; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

✚ Chapter 12

Advice for a Husband and for a Queen

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ here instructs kings about the discretion with which they should correct their wives, and he gives a fair admonition to a devout queen to be humble, compassionate with the suffering, full of charity, prudent and modest.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride and says: “When there is a spike¹ close to the heart, it should not be pulled out suddenly with a jerk but removed by excision gradually and gently. 2 Likewise a good wife should be loved, although she can sometimes become an obstacle for a man who aims at perfect holiness.² 3 This is why a man who is bound to a wife in matrimony, when he sees his danger, should sometimes use gentle words like a teacher, sometimes moderately severe words like a scholar, and sometimes excisions like a doctor. 4 In other words, he should prudently listen to his wife so as to comfort her; he should correct her with restraint and in private so as not to embarrass her; he should teach her straightforwardly and, occasionally, not listen to her in order that justice may not be abandoned.

5 Thus, a queen should possess humility of spirit, modesty in her work, prudence in her action, compassion for those who suffer. 6 David was softened by a woman’s prudence³ and did not sin. Esther came to the throne⁴ and remained there through humility, but Jezebel was rejected because of her pride and greed.⁵ 7 Mary my Mother was made the mother of all in heaven and on earth because of her compassion and charity.

8 And so, because the queen for whom you pray⁶ seeks my advice through you, answer her from me and tell her that she receives inspirations and suggestions from two different spirits, a good one and a bad one, and I will explain this to you another time.”⁷

✚ Chapter 13*

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

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ reveals to the bride the mental suggestions of the good and bad spirit who were contending with each other in the heart of the queen. The Lord makes clear which of them she should choose.

1. “Spike” renders “arista,” which means the point or a bristle of an ear of corn; the Swedish text gives a synonym “aghn älla thorn” [husk or thorn].

2. “A man who aims at perfect holiness” renders “homini tendenti ad perfeccionem.”

3. “David was softened by a woman’s prudence”; cf. 1 Kings 1 (Samuel) 25.

4. “Esther came to the throne”; cf. Esther 2.

5. “Jezebel was rejected because of her pride and greed”; cf. 1 Kings (3 Kings) 16–21 and 2 Kings (4 Kings) 9.

6. “The queen for whom you pray”: presumably refers to Blanche of Namur.

7. “I will explain this to you another time”; cf. ch. 13.

* This revelation duplicates Book IV 4 with one significant difference: “that lady known to you” spoken of in Book IV is here identified as “the queen,” presumably Blanche of Namur, wife of Magnus Eriksson.

✠ Chapter 14

The Queen Must Obey the Advice Given

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ tells the bride that the queen mentioned above finds the counsel of God burdensome. She should therefore tell her that if she does not obey promptly, her life will be short, the account she must render at her judgment will be burdensome and her death painful.

1 Christ spoke to the bride about the above-mentioned queen, saying: “The queen I spoke to you about previously sought my counsel through you, but once she heard what I had to say, it appeared very burdensome to her. 2 So tell her now that once there was a queen in the time of the prophet Elijah¹ who loved her leisure more than she loved me; she was hostile to the words of truth and thought she could stand on her own good sense. 3 The result was that the people came to scorn and despise her as much as they had earlier respected her and, moreover, she died a harsh death. 4 I am God and see clearly and know what will be. Accordingly, I tell this queen that her time will be short. The account she must render on the day of her judgment will be the real burden. Nor will her end be like her beginning, unless she obeys my words.”

✠ Chapter 15*

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

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

St. Agnes gives the bride a spiritual allegory of an ostentatious, material carriage in which a proud queen is seated. She says that this is the carriage of pride with wheels of vice, and a devil is its driver. She describes another spiritual carriage with wheels of virtue, and an angel is its driver.

✠ Chapter 16

The King's Favorite is Like a Wolf; and concerning a Queen who has Fallen Out of Favor

DATE: 1352, ITALY (ADDITION FROM 1359)

Christ forbids a certain king to appoint a clever flatterer as a counselor, because he is greedy and deceitful. He warns the king not to do otherwise.

1. “A queen in the time of the prophet Elijah”: refers to Jezebel; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 16–21, and 4 Kings (2 Kings) 9.

* This revelation duplicates Book IV 17. The “lady” of the vision is introduced in Book VIII as “a certain proud and ostentatious queen,” while in Book IV 17 she is a “viper,” possibly suggesting an identification with Helvig of Schleswig, wife of Valdemar IV of Denmark.

1 God's Son speaks to the bride about a certain clever flatterer whom the king wished to promote and appoint as a counselor, saying: 2 "That man known to you¹ whom the king now wants to appoint as an advisor is a wolf. What else is he going to do but seize, devour and deceive? 3 Accordingly, I say that if the king wants to gain my friendship, then he should beware of that man and keep away from his friendship and conversation. He should not give him the least little foot of the territory that he requests of him; he should not aid him with his men or his services. 4 The reason is that he wears the skin of a sheep but has an unquenchable thirst and poisonous deceit in his heart. 5 If the king hears his counsel and seeks his friendship and ruins himself with him by placing full trust in him, then he will be reprimanded by me and have to face the people's ridicule with these words on their lips: 6 'Behold a king more like a crowned ass than a prince!' Let him beware not to lose his kingdom with sorrow."

ADDITION

7 The Son speaks: "The lady who was dear to me earlier has now turned away and looks for conjugal fruit from her own fruit from the seed of the wolf and against my will and words.² 8 Know for sure that she will get no joy from his fruit nor will his seed take deep root nor shall the inhabitants rejoice in an heir,³ for the king had no right to the kingdom, because the younger supplanted the older."⁴

✠ Chapter 17

The King has Sought Help from Abroad to Gain Political Influence in this Kingdom; This Man is Like a Fox

DATE: C. 1358–59, ITALY

Christ forbids a certain king to accept the friendship of a great foreign lord and bring him into his kingdom. He compares him to a fox, because he is devious and proud and preys on simple folk.

1 Christ speaks to the bride and says: "The king seeks the aid and friendship of a fox.¹ But what does a fox habitually do if not play dead in order to capture simple

1. "That man known to you": presumably Bengt Algotsson (died 1360), who became a member of the royal council c. 1352 and was repeatedly criticized by Birgitta (cf. ch. 19 and 31).

2. "The Son speaks . . . supplanted the older": the Addition only exists in two Vadstena manuscripts and therefore cannot be part of Alfonso's original edition; see Aili, *Book VIII*, pp. 37–38. It clearly refers to Blanche of Namur and Valdemar IV of Denmark. The fact that the latter is called "wolf" is probably the reason that it was appended to the preceding revelation, which deals with a different "wolf." The seed of Valdemar is his daughter Margarethe and the fruit of Blanche is her son Håkan; cf. ch. 9.

3. "Nor shall the inhabitants rejoice in an heir": Olaf, the only son of Håkan and Margareta, succeeded as a young boy to the thrones of both Denmark and Norway but died in 1387 at the age of sixteen.

4. "The younger supplanted the older": Håkan, the younger son of Blanche and Magnus, had taken the crown of Norway, supplanting his older brother Erik. The event is also criticized in ch. 41 as well as in Book IV 3. The present text almost certainly dates from the first half of 1359, since the betrothal of Håkan and Margareta at the beginning of that year is referred to, but not Erik's death on 21 June.

1. "The king seeks the aid and friendship of a fox": the alliance between Magnus Eriksson and Valdemar IV of Denmark was sealed by the betrothal of their children Håkan and Margareta in 1359.

birds? 2 When he gets into the goose-pen, he is not content to eat just one but kills them all off. 3 So, if this man obtains a share in the territory, he will not rest until he acquires more, and then he will sow discord, because the native inhabitants will not get along with the foreigners. 4 This is the reason that one must flee from any dealings with him as one flees at the hiss of a poisonous snake. If he is allowed to go on, he will drive the land to ruin and pluck the simple geese of their feathers. 5 The royal counselors and the king should make sure that the money owed to him for the dower² is indeed paid to him. As the common proverb says, better safe than sorry.”³

ADDITION

6 The Son of God speaks: “From the seed of the fox and the viper they have already raised up a head which knows how to strip off the feathers but not how to heal. 7 This will lead neither to great joy nor a more just claim for them, because this offspring is displeasing to me and a sorrowful end will cast shadows over its happy beginnings.”⁴

✠ Chapter 18

A King should Have Excellent Counselors; with Images of a Forest or Desert Full of Wild Animals Within a Wall

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ gives a certain king two excellent counselors who have divine charity and zeal for justice. In this way he shows kings that they should appoint counselors such as these and not negligent or world-loving ones; and he explains why God allows his friends to suffer.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride who was praying for a certain king, and he says: “If this king wants to work for the conversion of souls, I will appoint two counselors for him to govern the realm. 2 The first one loves me more than himself and more than his own property; he is even ready to die for me. The second one has already put on the horns of the lamb¹ and is ready to obey me, to obey the spirit rather than the flesh. But you may ask why I allow my friends to suffer.

3 My answer to you comes by way of a comparison. It is as though there were some lord who had a forest or a wasteland surrounded by a wall. Within the

2. “Dower”: refers to the property given to the father of the future bride by the father of her future husband, i.e., the Germanic bride price.

3. “Better safe than sorry” renders “melius est esse ante cautum quam post pericula prudentem” [it is better to be cautious beforehand than prudent after danger]; cf. Sw., which rhymes and is more rhythmically balanced. “bättra är at vara fore var än äptir snar.” This proverb is similar to one in Book IV 4.2; see Walther, *Proverbia sententiaequae latinitatis*, no. 14604a and 38186.

4. The addition only exists in two Vadstena manuscripts and therefore cannot be part of Alfonso’s original edition; see Aili, *Book VIII*, pp. 37–38. The “fox” is most likely Valdemar IV and the “viper” his queen, Helvig of Schleswig. That they “raised up a head” by means of their “seed” perhaps means that they gained influence in Norway and Sweden by betrothing their daughter to Håkan. See also Book IV 55 where the same imagery is used and probably the same persons are referred to.

1. “The horns of the lamb”: cf. Apocalypse 5:6.

wall there are untamed animals; beyond the wall are sheep. The wall has many openings; next to each opening there are two gaps; next to each gap there are three hidden passages. 4 That lord cares for his sheep and tells his servants: 'My servants, you know that my sheep are simple and those beasts are voracious. 5 So stand and guard the passages and openings, so that the ferocious beasts do not leave the compound and harm the sheep. 6 Do not be lukewarm about your work or sluggish on guard. Use your voice like a horn and keep a staff constantly at hand to scare off the voracious beasts when they approach the sheep.'

7 The servants took their orders and gladly obeyed their master. 8 At length the master called the hunter to him and said: 'Go into my forest with the dogs and let the animals hear the sound of the horn and scare them off by the noise!' 9 The servants heard the sound of the horn and said: 'Listen, that is the sound of our master's hunter. Get up and hurry along! 10 Let us not now be timid or negligent! Let our hands now be more prompt in striking, our voice louder in shouting, our eyes more vigilant in watching! At the posts where we earlier placed others to defend the sheep, now let us place ourselves.'

11 I, God, am like this lord. The wasteland or forest is the world with its abundance of wild and untamed animals, that is, people without law, without love, without a sense of God, prepared to commit every wrong. 12 A wall of great presumption and stubbornness surrounds the world, inasmuch as people abuse God's patience and become hardened as they continue to do wrong. 13 Outside the wall are my friends; inflamed by my love, they follow in my footsteps and seek my pastures. 14 Within the wall are those whose greed has no measure, who prefer creation to the Creator, who love the body and not the soul, who aim at present and not future good. 15 The openings of this wall are deception, simony and malice, which spare neither father nor son but now exercise control over many people. It is now considered as the highest happiness to obtain temporal advantages and not to care about eternal glory. 16 The two gaps next to the openings are two abuses or evils in the world. The first is spiritual, the second material. The first is giving sinful example to others by word or act. The second and material abuse is twofold. 17 First it means pretending not to see sins that should be corrected, either because of gifts or favors and reputation or because of worldly fear. Second, it means not wanting to punish manifest sin either because of one's own advantage or because of some other worldly gain. 18 The three hidden passages are three passions of the wicked: for either they desire to do harm the lives of their fellow men, or to denigrate their reputation or to inflict damage on their property or their friends. 19 The hunter symbolizes the justice of God that will be manifested. His voice cries out thus: Be hard on the hard, gentle on the gentle.² The dogs that follow him represent the wicked whom God can use to good purpose even though they are wicked, not for their own sakes but for the sake of those who are to be purified. 20 They are indeed like insatiable dogs that are accustomed to hating the sheep, thrusting at them with horns of pride, stripping them of their skins and trampling them underfoot.

2. "Be hard on the hard, gentle on the gentle" renders "da duris dura et da mollibus mollia" [give hard to hard and soft to soft], which may echo the Latin proverb "Duris dura franguntur."

21 Accordingly, because the king rules over this wasteland and forest and has more wild, untamed beasts than sheep, I will appoint my friends to be guardians of the sheep. They must be prepared to be merciful to the humble but just to hardened wrongdoers and fair to all. 22 These friends should beware of the guardians standing by the passages who hold spears in their hands and keep them up to let beasts and enemies pass, and once they have gotten away, strike their spears on the ground with a great noise in order to appear to have acted bravely. 23 These are the guardians who do not seek souls but sheepskins, who pretend not to see sins or only give light reprimands in order not to offend, who fall asleep through their lazy attitude toward investigating cases of sin. 24 However, my friends should strive carefully to observe and maintain justice, to love the common people, to glorify God and punish the rebellious and impious.³ 25 It is not permitted for them to know whether the voice of my justice comes in their time or not. But they themselves should stand firm and cry out bravely. I, the God of truth, will give them the reward of truth.”

✠ Chapter 19

The King is Warned not to Promote One of His Favorite Counselors

DATE: C. 1352, ITALY

The Queen of Heaven explains why she sometimes says “we” when she speaks while Christ says “I” when he speaks. She severely warns a certain king what will happen if he does not rid himself of a wicked counselor. She admonishes the king to be vigilant and solicitous in God’s charity.

1 God’s Mother speaks to the bride and says: “You are wondering why I sometimes say ‘we’ when I speak to you, while my Son says ‘I’ when he speaks to you. 2 You should know that this is because when my Son speaks to you, he is speaking on his own divine behalf, for the Trinity is one God. 3 When I speak, I speak by the power of the same Trinity, and the word of the three Persons is one and the same word. Therefore I say ‘we;’

4 Tell the king for whom you are now praying that the Mother of Love admonishes and forewarns him about shameful modesty and his own loss. 5 For it would be shameful modesty if some lord appointed a servant in his stead. It would be a loss if someone were to exchange a chest full of gold for an empty one or for one of little value. 6 This king intends to promote the devil’s servant;¹ and he wants to obey him, which is spiritual modesty that is indeed shameful. 7 This is why I swear by the body that was born from my body, by my Son Jesus Christ, that if he does not get rid of that man, as wise men advise, and does not make him

3. “My friends . . . rebellious and impious”; see Ferm, “Birgittas uppror mot Magnus Eriksson,” who links this revelation to Birgitta’s revolutionary program and suggests that the revelation dates from the 1350s.

1. “The devil’s servant”: possibly Bengt Algotsson (see further pp. 56, 60, 64).

a commoner according to his common birth,² denying him control over even a royal farthing, 8 then I will whip him from head to toe until he says out of pain: 'Have mercy on me, Mary, for making you angry!' 9 Again I give him forewarning: he should not aim at achieving a little rest at the cost of incurring an enduring unrest. Instead he should make solicitous efforts to achieve divine charity in order to gain precious and everlasting gold. 10 Even if he does not want to obey, as my Son has said to him, let him yield,³ for we will surely come up with ways by which he can turn away from a course already begun without worldly censure or loss."

✚ Chapter 20

The King with Five Defective Servants and Five Effective Ones

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

God's Mother says to kings that they should not accept advice from men who are blind, deaf, dumb, and spiritually sick, but from those who are healthy in spirit and in the virtues.

1 God's Mother speaks to the bride and says: "Tell the king for whom you are praying that he has five servants. The first of them is blind, 2 but he has the stuff to make a beautiful work of art. Advice should not be asked of the blind man until his vision clears. 3 The second servant is deaf, because no love of God enters into his ears. Spiritual matters are not to be discussed with him, until his hearing improves. 4 The third servant is dumb, because there is no love of God in his soul. Everything he says, he says either out of fear of punishment or out of worldly gain or in order to please. 5 The fourth servant is paralyzed in his whole body, which makes him unfit for spiritual work. 6 The fifth servant is a spiritual leper, and one must flee from his presence, so that he does not infect others.

7 To replace these five servants whom we advise against, we will put five others at his disposal. They all have good spiritual sight and hearing and their souls are uninfected. If the king obeys them, he will retain my Son's friendship. 8 Again, tell him that he should stay obediently crowned. Otherwise my Son will summon him beneath the crown.¹ I will explain this word² to you in due time."

2. "Make him a commoner according to his common birth": Bengt Algotsson was of noble birth and in fact doubly related to St. Birgitta: his father was her cousin and his brother married her daughter Märta in 1355. The identification may be correct if it is supposed that there was something irregular about his birth.

3. "Even if he does not want to obey... let him yield" renders "Si vero obedire noluerit sicut Filius meus dixerat sibi, dimittat"; another strand of the manuscript tradition, also reflected in the Medieval Swedish translation, is "If he wants to obey... let him stop grieving."

1. "He should stay obediently crowned... beneath the crown" renders "obedienter stet in corona. Alioquin Filius meus vocabit eum sub coronam"; cf. Sw. "thz han stande mz lydhno j kronnone ällir skal min son skilia han fran kronnone ok rikit" [that he should stand in obedience in the crown or my son will separate him from the crown and the kingdom]. We take "summon beneath the crown" to mean "subjugate," but the meaning of the Latin is uncertain. The expression "sub corona(m)" with a verb of motion is also found in Book IV 3.22; IV 55.5; VIII 31.9; VIII 49.16, and Ex. 47.7. Odelman, "Rarae aves," pp. 45-46, suggests that Birgitta's Latin translators may have confused Sw. "under" [under] and "undan" [away from]. Although it seems unlikely that the same slip should occur so many times in precisely this connection, it is worth noting that the Medieval Swedish translation in most of these cases translates "sub" with "from," as here. See further Searby, "Birgittinsk bukett".

2. "I will explain this word"; this may refer to ch. 31.9 or Ex. 47.7.

✠ Chapter 21

The King Must Discipline a Man who has Derided Him

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

A certain nobleman spoke derisively about God in a king's presence, and Christ warns the same king to correct him, for the judge who corrects a sinner will receive a double reward, but the one who pretends not to see the sin will receive a double punishment.

1 The Son of God speaks to the bride: "Why are you upset that I put up so patiently with the man who spoke derisively about me? Do you not know how harsh it is to burn eternally?" 2 Where various pigments are planted,² if they are cut down before the proper season they will not be so good for coloring as they are when gathered at the proper season. 3 In the same way, my words, which will become manifest with justice and mercy, must grow to full maturity. Then they will suit the thing better to which they are applied and will suitably lend color to my virtue. 4 The king should beware that his soul does not take the place of the soul of the man who derided me. 5 Anyone who corrects a sinner for love of God so that God does not punish him, as Moses did, will receive a double reward, both because he appeases God's anger and because he reduces the sentence of the delinquent so that he does not receive an eternal punishment. 6 But anyone who neglects to correct the delinquent will receive a double punishment, because he has both increased the sinner's future punishment and because he has not exercised justice."

✠ Chapter 22*

Counsel for the Young Son of the Queen of Cyprus

DATE: 1372, JERUSALEM

The royal couple of Cyprus requested the bride to pray to God for the king and his realm. Christ appeared to the bride when she was in Jerusalem and gave a noteworthy lesson to transmit in writing to the king and his royal uncle.

✠ Chapter 23*

The People of Cyprus must Mend their Ways

DATE: JUNE–AUGUST 1372, JERUSALEM, AND 8 OCTOBER 1372, FAMAGUSTA

A second revelation given in Jerusalem. Through the bride Christ instructs the king of Cyprus and the ruler to make known to the whole

1. "Why are you so upset... burn eternally": the opening of this vision is similar to Book V rev. 12.

2. "Pigments are planted," i.e., plants that give dye coloring qualities.

* This chapter duplicates Book VII 18.

* This revelation duplicates Book VII 19.

kingdom right away without delay that they should reform themselves. Because they did not, they then suffered terrible destruction from the Genoese.

✚ Chapter 24*

On a Doctor, and Two Imprisoned Men

UNDATED

By means of an allegory Christ here explains that kings should be humble and ready to listen to the private advice of the friends of God, even if their words are not adorned with superficial eloquence, because the things worldly people think justified are often reprehensible in God's sight.

✚ Chapter 25*

St. John Exhorts the King to Lead a Better Life

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

John the Evangelist tells the bride that kings who favor unjust men oppress the just; they pass over transgressions that should be corrected; they allow them to carry off the property of their subjects and burden them with demands; they do not honor God in deed, but are like robbers and traitors in God's sight rather than kings. He explains how they can reform.

✚ Chapter 26*

St. Denis Prays for France

DATE: 1345, SWEDEN

The bride saw how Blessed Denis prayed to the Mother of God for the kingdom of France, and she hears him and humbly entreats her Son together with him.

✚ Chapter 27*

The Kings of England and France are Like Two Ferocious Beasts

DATE: 1345, SWEDEN

* This chapter duplicates Book III 31.
 * This chapter duplicates Book IV 1.
 * This chapter duplicates Book IV 103.
 * This chapter duplicates Book IV 104.

Together with Blessed Denis, the Mother of Mercy entreats her Son on behalf of the kingdoms of France and England and because of the war of the two kings, who are compared to two ferocious beasts.

✠ Chapter 28*

A Proposal for Peace between England and France

DATE: 1345, SWEDEN

Christ tells the bride how peace can come about between the kings of France and England. If the kings do not obey, they shall be punished severely.

✠ Chapter 29*

A Nobleman Named Israel Should not Reject a Position in Government; on his Death in Riga

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN (FIRST PART); 1351 ROME, (SECOND PART)

Through the bride the Queen of Heaven tells a nobleman devoted to her that good and just noblemen, when called by their kings to serve in the government of the country, should by all means accept the burden of governing for the glory of God and the benefit of the multitude.

✠ Chapter 30*

The King should Work to Rebuild the Church

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Here Christ says that kings should be crowned with the counsel of spiritual advisers and prudent and just men. She says that the walls of Jerusalem should be repaired in a spiritual sense, meaning the Church, and that all the classes of laity and clergy and religious should be reformed to their former and pristine state of obedience and fulfillment of the commandments of God and the Church.

✠ Chapter 31

The Sun and Moon Sink into an Abyss and a Dragon Rises up from a Snake-Infested Earth

DATE: FIRST PART, SWEDEN, C. 1349; SECOND PART, ITALY, C. 1360

* This chapter duplicates Book IV 105.

* This chapter duplicates Book VI 95.

* This revelation duplicates Book VI 26.

In a vision the bride saw the sun and the moon lose their usual brightness and fall into the abyss. This was a sign that a certain king and queen had changed their good habits for the worse, because of which the king lost his kingdom and died in captivity.

1 While I stood praying, I saw in spirit a stormy sky. The sun and moon shone with the brightest calm and their light stretched beyond the sky. 2 While I watched attentively, I saw that good and bad angels were fighting against the sun and moon but they were not prevailing, until a great and terrible dragon rose up in the sky, and the sun and moon gave their power and brightness to him. 3 Immediately the sun grew faint and dark, and the moon fled beneath the earth. 4 When I looked at the earth, I saw that it was full of reptiles and snakes which consumed the face of the earth and were killing men with their tails, until the sun fell into the abyss and the place of the moon was found no more.

5 Then eleven years passed and I heard the voice of Christ saying to me: "Remember, my bride, the stormy sky I showed you in the city of Stockholm. I shall now explain to you what it all meant. 6 The heavens which I showed to you as stormy represent the kingdom of Sweden. This kingdom should be quiet and just like heaven but is now agitated by the whirlwind of sin and suffering and is being crushed by taxation. 7 And that is no wonder, for the king and queen, who were shining like the sun and moon, have now become as dark as coal, because they have changed in their habits and intentions. They raised up a man from a viper's root¹ in order to strike down my friends and simple people. 8 Be assured then that this dragon will go down in greater shame than he rose up; and my friends, some of whom are angelic in their way of life while others are like bad angels in their immoral way of life, will be raised up and liberated from their sufferings. 9 But the sun will grow faint until he comes beneath the crown,² because he did not want to remain in power through justice. It will be said of him that as was his splendor, so are his shadows multiplied."³

≠ Chapter 32*

Peter and Paul are Compared with the Priesthood and the Laity. A New Ritual for Dubbing Knights is Outlined

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ here teaches kings a new and devout way of creating knights for a new army to do battle with infidels and defend the holy faith and the Church.

1. "A man from a viper's root": this is usually taken to mean Bengt Algotsson, but the identification is uncertain. Cf. the Addition to ch. 17, where Helvig of Schleswig is called a viper; if that identification holds here as well, the man who is described as a dragon is a relative of hers. See also the Addition to Book IV 55, which is worded similarly and seems to refer to the same circumstances as the present revelation.

2. "Until he comes beneath the crown" renders "donec venerit sub coronam"; cf. the note to ch. 20.8.

3. "So are his shadows multiplied"; cf. Isaiah 59:9-12.

* This chapter duplicates Book II 7:17-37, and 41-45; compare also ch. 1 above, which duplicates other paragraphs of Book II 7. It also occurs in the Birgittine-Norwegian text; see volume 1 p. 190.

✚ Chapter 33*

On Dissolute Knights

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ's words to the bride concerning the demons' attack on the soul of the knight who had apostasized from the true, virtuous and holy army, and was fighting for the world and for vice, and concerning his terrible sentence of condemnation.

✚ Chapter 34*

On the Knight's Armor

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

At the petitions of John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary, Christ the Emperor grants their devout knight to be armed spiritually. They, along with the apostles Peter and Paul, arm him splendidly with the precious spiritual weapons of the virtues listed here. Knights should take note of this teaching.

✚ Chapter 35*

A Dubbing Ritual for Knights Is Described

DATE: SEPTEMBER 1348?

Christ describes the good deeds he has done and does for knights. He complains about their ingratitude and teaches kings a new way, approved by him, of creating knights to defend the faith and extend the Church.

✚ Chapter 36*

Promise of Reward to Knights if They Convert to a Good Way of Life

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

* This chapter duplicates Book II 9. Paragraphs 1–2 (beginning), and paragraphs 17–33. It also occurs in the Birgittine-Norwegian text; see volume 1 p. 196.

* This chapter duplicates Book IV 74; the Explanation in Book IV 74.98, that identifies the subject of the vision with Birgitta's son Karl, is omitted in ch. 34.

* This chapter duplicates Book II 13 paragraph 1, and paragraphs 11–39. The chapter also occurs in the Birgittine-Norwegian text; see volume 1 p. 206. Again, in Book II 13 the Explanation makes explicit reference to Karl Ulfsson.

* This chapter duplicates Book II 12.1 beginning, and paragraphs 31–59. Parts of Book II 12 are also duplicated in chapter 2 above. The chapter also occurs in the Birgittine-Norwegian text; see volume 1 p. 202.

Christ, true Emperor and King, kindly and humbly, like a father and a brother and a master, instructs knights to turn back to him. He describes the punishments he suffered for their sakes and promises as a reward for returning to him five heavenly and glorious prizes.

✚ Chapter 37*

The Rewards of True Knightly Service are Described by Five Legions of Angels

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ shows here how good and just knights are gloriously welcomed into the glory of heaven. He gives the example of the soul of a good deceased knight whom the angels greet with rejoicing and the Trinity receives with wonderful joy.

✚ Chapter 38*

The King Must Root out Fortune-Tellers

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ commands kings to rid their kingdoms of soothsayers and sorcerers and fortune-tellers who deceive souls with their diabolical arts and give homage to the devil for the sake of temporal gains.

✚ Chapter 39

The Swedish King asks for Advice about his Crusade Against the Pagans

DATE: BEFORE 1348, SWEDEN

Christ here tells kings who wish to make an overseas expedition and wage war against pagans to do this with the right intention, that is, out of love of God and for the salvation of souls. They should first correct their own faults and reform their own kingdoms.

1 A king of Sweden asked the bride of Christ to consult God about whether it would please him if the king were to lead his army against the pagans, as he had made a vow to do. While the bride was praying about this, Christ appeared to her and said: 2 "If the king wishes to march out against the pagans, I will give him the following advice rather than any commandments, for there is greater merit in acting on advice than on command. Accordingly I advise him to do two things. 3 He should, first, have an upright heart and an apt body. An upright heart means that he has no other intention in marching out than to do it out of love for God and for the salvation of souls. An apt body means that he

* This chapter duplicates Book II 11.

* This chapter duplicates Book VI 82.

should be reasonable in regard to his fasting and his exertions. 4 Second, he should make sure that he has willing and upstanding vassals and knights. Consequently, he should first travel around his kingdom and make inquiries concerning how justice is being observed, what kind of rulings and regulations are being given and by whom. 5 Anyone who endeavors to bring others to heaven should first begin with himself. He should correct his own faults and then instruct his subjects through correcting them and giving them the incitement of virtuous example.”

✠ Chapter 40

Infidels must be Offered Peace before the Hand of Justice is Raised Against them

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ says that kings wishing to march against the infidels should first admonish them nobly and peaceably to convert, and, if they refuse, they should zealously take up arms against them.

1 Christ spoke to the bride and said: “It is said that no one should be forced against his will into the kingdom of heaven.¹ But I say that where weeds get in the way of fine flowers, is it not better to cut away the weeds so they do not get in the way of the flowers as they grow? 2 Therefore, those who march on the lands of the infidels, should first offer them peace, faith and freedom. If the infidels do not accept their advice and admonitions, then they should zealously take to arms. 3 I, God, Love itself, shall reward hundredfold all those who die for love of me. The infidels themselves will have less suffering than if they lived longer and died in peace, for, if they lived longer, they would sin more. 4 Divine love is so excellent a thing that not even the least thought will be without reward, so a good deed will be worth ever so much more.”

✠ Chapter 41*

On the Rights of Succession in the Country

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

A conversation between God and the bride which concerns the king and his hereditary rights in the kingdom, and also whether the king may give away anything belonging to the crown, and how he may reclaim and repossess territories that have been given up.

1. “No one should be forced...into the kingdom of heaven”: although there was a canon in the early church stating that individuals should not be made Christians by force, Birgitta may here be thinking of the forced conversion of whole nations, which was also prohibited in canon law and may have been under debate in Birgitta's time in the context of the eastern crusades.

* This revelation duplicates Book IV 3.

✚ Chapter 42*

About a King on a Battlefield, and His Soldiers Whose Helmets Are Back to Front

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

With examples Christ makes a heavy complaint about Christians and then turns to the infidels and pagans, commanding his servants and friends to go out to convert them with loving kindness and the gentle words contained here.

✚ Chapter 43

The Crusading King should have two Banners

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ instructs kings to have two flags when they march against the pagans, the banner of God's suffering and the banner of his justice, and to bring along priests and religious of various orders, learned, virtuous and devout.

1 God's Son speaks to the bride and says: "A king who wants to win souls should have two banners. The first banner should depict my suffering to symbolize mercy; the second should depict the sword of my justice. 2 When he reaches the pagans, first he should raise up the first banner of my mercy, offering them peace. If they refuse to accept it, he should then raise up the banner of justice. 3 He should trust in my goodness and not be afraid of the enemy numbers nor retreat out of cowardice nor listen to the voice of those saying: 'Let us turn back! How much more must we exert ourselves?' 4 If the king is afraid to carry through with perseverance, then he should not even try to begin the noble undertaking, since it is better not to take on arduous tasks at all than not to carry out with love what one has begun. 5 The king should also bring with him priests whose conduct has been tried and tested as well as religious of various orders who show true contempt for the world, because there are many pagans and Gentiles who prefer their own religions and to whom one must make wise reply. 6 The priests also should teach and instruct the people so that greed does not lead them to perdition or so that they do not die through discontent and unrestrained behavior."

✚ Chapter 44*

A King of Sweden is Inclined to Pursue his Crusade for Worldly Reasons

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

* This revelation duplicates Book II 6.

* This revelation duplicates Book VI 41, where there is also an Addition (VI 41.11-14), which is omitted in ch. 44.

Christ reproaches a certain king for marching against the infidels with unduly large forces without mature foresight for future developments. He reproaches those who attribute their victories in battle to themselves rather than to God.

✠ Chapter 45

The King should have a Fixed Number of Men on his Crusade; and be Careful to Keep his Promise

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

God's Mother advises the king on his march against the pagans to have a fixed number of men and not to be confident because of the promises made to him from heaven unless he himself keeps his own promises to God.

1 God's Mother speaks to the bride and says: "If the king marches against the pagans, he should have a fixed number of men. I know his departure and his return, and that many of those who march with him will be no less rebellious toward God than those who went out with Moses. 2 Moses did not lead the people into the promised land because of their ingratitude; and in a similar way those who are not yet born will be the ones to carry out God's will. 3 The king should not feel confident because I called him my son and wished him never to be separated from me. If he keeps his promises to me, I shall keep my promise to him. But if he scorns me, he should be afraid of being scorned."

✠ Chapter 46

The Crusading Bishop must build a New Church

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The Virgin Mary through the bride tells a certain bishop accompanying the king on his campaign against the infidels to erect a cathedral in any pagan territory as soon as it is acquired in order to provide the Christians with spiritual consolation.

1 The Queen of Heaven spoke to the bride and said: "Saint Sigfrid¹ the archbishop left England to do God's will in Sweden. 2 In the same way the bishop for whom you are praying, and who is marching out with the king against the infidels, should erect a cathedral in a good and suitable location, once he reaches pagan territory and once any of their lands are acquired by Christians. The Christians will thus be able to take their refuge to it as to a mother in all their

1. "Saint Sigfrid": bishop of Husaby and Växjö, and according to the oldest legend an Englishman who was formerly archbishop of York. He died c. 1045. He may justly be called a patron saint of Sweden, since his feast day (15 February) was celebrated as a public holiday in all Swedish dioceses. He is also mentioned Book VI 10.12. See KLNLM "Sigfrid."

needs and receive Catholic encouragement and spiritual comfort. 3 If the bishop is only able to appoint and support just one or two priests, he should be satisfied. My Son has the power to increase his gifts and make the diocese grow. 4 However, if he or other friends of mine should die before they can put these words into practice, then their good intention will be accounted to them as their deed and they will have their reward for that. 5 No one should count on having a long life; rather everyone should patiently be ready to accept God's will."

✠ Chapter 47

The Ungrateful King of Sweden did not Obey God on his Crusade, and Returned from the Crusade against Advice

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

God's Mother describes how she is a vessel which is filled and fills with grace, and she finds fault with a certain ungrateful king of Sweden who was unwilling to follow the advice of God and of spiritual men in his war and instead retreated from battle with the infidels on the advice of worldly men against God's will to his own shame and at a cost to the kingdom.

1 The Queen of heaven appeared to the bride and said: "You who see spiritual visions, listen and join me in a conversation with the Holy Spirit. I am the vessel which is filled and fills. 2 A vessel placed under a stream of water is filled with water, and though the water flows out, yet the vessel is always filled with the downpouring water. In the same way, when my soul was created and joined to the body, it was filled by the downpouring torrent of the Holy Spirit and was never empty afterward. 3 So whoever comes to me with humility and a clean heart will receive the help of the Holy Spirit. I can truly be called a filled vessel, 4 for when I was in the world in the downpour of the Spirit, the Son of God came into my body and received flesh and blood from me. He lived in me until I gave birth to him in a nativity befitting the Son of God. 5 He was born and came into my arms, and the angels rejoiced and proclaimed peace on earth. After this my Son was harshly punished unto death, his skin was torn by lashes, his bones were fastened with nails, and his heart burst together with all his dying limbs. 6 This punishment of death was so mighty that it lessened the power of the devil and opened the gates of heaven. I compare my Son's passion to a thunderstorm, the rumbling approach of which is heard long before and after the sound of the thunder-blast itself. 7 In a similar way, my Son's passion was announced through the mouths of the prophets long before it took place. After my Son died, there was a loud clamor and noise that was long heard and preached after his passion. Many people joyfully gave their lives because of it. 8 Now my Son is so forgotten and neglected that some have no regard at all for his death. Others say they do not know if it took place or not. Others know but do not care. There are, however, few who recall his death with love.

9 And so, in order that my Son's passion should be brought back to mind, God's words were given to you by divine inspiration and thus came into the world. 10 You were accordingly sent to this king of Sweden who was at the time caught in the trap of many sins. Once he got himself free of the devil, I adopted him as my son and wished to make of him an outstanding fighter for the glory of God. 11 The devil saw this and hated him, just as he once felt hatred for Moses who was set afloat in a basket which God steered to land. 12 Afterward, though his tongue had been burned,¹ he announced what God wanted. Out of fear he fled from Egypt but returned to Pharaoh out of divine Providence. The devil has dealt with the king in a similar way. 13 He stirred up a storm in the king's heart to make him retreat from battle on the pretext of poverty and hunger after he had raised a large army of men. This was why a number of persons were appointed to advise the king.

14 At the devil's prompting, the king reasoned in this way: 'The friends of God have no understanding of warfare, so I will look for men who are knowledgeable about it.' Then the devil sent him many of his own people, and he let himself be guided by their advice. This is why it was then revealed to the king whose advice he should follow. 15 The advice was also given to the king to bring along priests and religious whose character had been tried and tested. The providence of the Holy Spirit gave him this advice against the wiles of the devil. 16 For the devil knows well that the time is not far off when God will show how the battle is to be approached. The devil also knows that there are many pagans who regard themselves as great in their own religion; he is also aware that there are many who desire to know the holy Catholic faith. 17 This is why, when the moment of grace approaches, the devil wants those to be sent to the pagans who are fools and full of greed. God's friends, the priests and religious, should therefore be equipped with spiritual wisdom in order to respond to the pagans who come with their own religion. 18 Many other things were also told to you which shall not be immediately fulfilled. The words should instead be kept for the predetermined time. God also showed Moses several things that were not fulfilled all at once. 19 David was likewise revealed as a king long before he came to power. Accordingly, God's friends should wait prudently and not tire in carrying out their work.

20 We also said that the brothers of the orders of Dominic, Francis, and Bernard² should travel with the king to the pagans. These three orders should be the first ones to be invited to the pagan countries, because monasteries must be founded by men who have truly left the world and who have no other desire but to honor God and to attain his friendship. 21 It is true that some of these brothers have this question in mind: 'Where are the people to teach, where are the sites to build?' 22 In the same way the people of Israel said to Moses: 'Where is

1. "Though his tongue had been burned": this idea is not biblical but comes from the exegetical Rabbinic tradition that states that when reaching out for some gold Moses' hand was guided by an angel toward a live coal which he put in his mouth. Thereafter he is said to have had a speech impediment (cf. Exodus 4:10). Christian commentators have explained his disability as being due to his becoming overcome with emotion, being a poor orator, or forgetting his Egyptian; see Laes, "Silent History?" pp. 169–70. Birgitta may have come across this story in the vernacular paraphrases of biblical stories, even though the first known versions of these are written at a later date; see Klemming, *Svenska medeltidens bibel-arbeten*, vol. 1, p. 278–79, and Thorell, *Fem Moseböcker på fornsvenska*, p. 214.

2. "Dominic, Francis, and Bernard": the founders of the Dominican, Franciscan, and Cistercian Orders respectively.

the promised land? It would have been better to have stayed in Egypt by the flesh-pots than to run the risk of a miserable death by hunger in the desert.' 23 Yet the Israelites reached the promised land at the chosen time, despite the complaints of some of them. Thus the king should always have about him devout priests and men who freely follow him out of love for God. He should be as wary of greedy priests as of birds of prey.

24 Hear now what I, the Mother of Mercy, am about to say: This king, whom I earlier called my son, has become a son of disobedience. Two kingdoms were reserved for him while he was still a child. 25 When he reached the age of discretion, he governed unjustly and acted completely without discretion. However God always dealt patiently with him and even granted him spiritual graces whenever he directed the love of his heart toward God. 26 I remind him especially of three things that God has done for him. Now it often happens that an infant in the womb is so closely united with the mother that there is no way to separate them. In observing such a case, a prudent midwife would say to herself: 27 'If the infant remains much longer in the mother's womb, both of them will die.' So the midwife proceeds to separate the infant from the mother. 28 Similarly this king was united with his mother, the world. If he had remained much longer in it, he would surely have died in the punishment of hell. But I, the Queen of Heaven, came to the king and separated him from the love of the world. 29 I mean that the path on which I came to the king was the entry of the Holy Spirit into his heart. 30 Wherever the Spirit of God enters, the Father enters there with the Holy Spirit, and the Son with the Father and the Spirit, and the Mother with the Son. Everyone who has God in his heart also has me. 31 Just as it is impossible for the three Persons of the Trinity to be separated, so too, under the current legal order,³ it is impossible for me, God's Mother, to be separated from God. 32 I held within me the Son of God in both his divine and human natures. This is why God the Father holds me in his divinity, and the bond of our love is the Holy Spirit who is in the Father and the Son, who is also in me, and we can never be separated. 33 When I came thus to the king, God granted him contrition in his heart and spiritual tears in his eyes which no one can obtain except by divine grace. 34 Secondly I remind the king of the grace that was shown to his kingdom, which is that my Son, who sits on the high throne of heavenly majesty, often speaks to you who were born in his kingdom. I obtained this grace for the king in order that he might act for the glory of God and for the benefit of his soul.

35 Through you I also showed him how the kingdom was to be governed wisely, how he was to love the people of his kingdom, and how he was to govern his own life both physically and spiritually to the glory of God. 36 In the third place I remind him how he was chosen in order to bring the holy Catholic faith to pagan countries, if he so desires.

Now hear what this king does. 37 I, the Mother of Mercy, called this king my new son—new because he was a new arrival to holy obedience. 38 I prom-

3. "Under the current legal order" renders "stante lege currente." Birgitta couches a theological statement about God's appointed plan for salvation in legal language, thus underlining her family background as the daughter of a lawman.

ised him through you that I would be the protectress of his army and kingdom and that I would stand by him in enemy land. And that is what happened. 39 By divine providence there was peace in his country due to my prayers. I stood by him in the land of his enemies when I brought his greatest enemies together in the same spot and I was going to hand them over to him. 40 Shortly thereafter the devil's lackeys came to him full of evil in their heart and spirit. 41 They put more trust in the weapons of men than in the help of the Creator. Their desire for territorial gain was greater than their desire for the salvation of souls. 42 He who once moved Judas' tongue in selling his Creator stirred their tongues to speak. Their teeth were held up by the devil's fingers. Their cold lips were limed with the devil's venom. 43 This is why they disliked the taste of divine charity. They spat out the words of truth but kept falsehood in their mouths. 44 Following their malevolent advice, the king ran and snatched from my hands the assembled enemies who were resisting the holy faith. And I was left alone with my lap empty. 45 The king let the wolves go, and then placed the sheep in the hands of snakes that are ready to tear them to shreds and are now more full of venomous malice than before.

46 Such were the consequences of the deceitful suggestions of the devil. The king despised the advice of God's friends but followed the advice of sensuous men. He did not expect the powerful aid of God. He did not take my advice into consideration but went back with no profit gained. He became a burden to the people of his kingdom, disobedient to both God and men, and a violator of his knightly vows.

47 Nonetheless, as any mother can be easily won over by her son begging for pardon, so I too say to him now: My son, come back to me, and I will come back to you! Get up from your fall with the advice of the friends of God!

This is the last letter I will send him."⁴

≠ Chapter 48

The Trinity Appears in the Form of a Pulpit, a Golden Book, and Three Colored Rays; And on the Fate of Three Kings

DATE: 1350S, ROME

God's Mother explains to the bride why God's words are put forward in such an obscure way that they can be interpreted in different ways and are sometimes understood in one way by God and in another way by men. The whole Trinity shows itself here to the bride in a marvelous way through the symbols of a pulpit and of a golden book and of three rays of three colors. God explains the bride's vision concerning the distinctions and essence of the Trinity and of the book of life. At the divine tribunal of the judge the bride sees the remarkable trial of the souls of three kings, one of whom was alive, the second

4. "This is the last letter he will send him": an indication that the messages concerning the crusades might sometimes have been presented as letters.

sentenced to hell and the third to purgatory. Many noteworthy aspects concerning the laudable justice and mercy of God are included here.

1 God's Mother speaks to the bride and says: "My daughter, I told you earlier that the letter to be sent to my friend the king¹ would be the last one. This should be taken as referring to personal matters concerning myself and him. 2 If anyone sits and hears something useful being sung concerning a friend and brings it to him (whether it is a joyful melody or a text of salutary criticism), each of them would deserve a reward, both the messenger and the singer. 3 Thus God's justice, which judges impartially and administers justice with mercy, wants to sing out justice and mercy. May whoever so wishes hear it! It is not a letter of criticism but a song of justice and love. 4 When a letter was once sent to a person, it contained reprimands and admonitions: it was a rebuke of the ingratitude for kindnesses and an admonition to reform moral conduct. 5 Now, however, divine justice sings a beautiful song, and it concerns everyone. Whoever hears and receives it through faith and works will win the fruits of salvation and eternal life.

6 You may ask why God's words are expressed in such an obscure way that they can be interpreted in different ways and sometimes are understood in one way by God and in another way by men. 7 I answer: God is like a distiller who produces brandywine or brandy (which is made from wine).² 8 A distiller has several pipes—some of them going up, some of them going down—through which wine first rises, then descends by means of the fire's heat, until it has reached perfection. 9 This is what God does with his words. Sometimes he rises with justice, sometimes he descends with mercy. This is clear from the example of the king³ to whom a prophet said that he would die by justice, but afterward mercy added years to his life. 10 Sometimes God also descends by putting his words plainly and by using physical expressions. Then he rises again with the spiritual sense, as in the case of David to whom many things were said referring to Solomon but which obtained their fulfillment and meaning in the Son of God. 11 Again, sometimes God speaks about future events as though they were in the past or touches on both present and future at once, for all things are in God, present, past and future, as though all at the same instant.

12 It should not surprise you that God speaks in obscure ways. This happens for five reasons. First it is in order that God may show his mercy, because otherwise if anyone heard the just decision of God, he might despair of God's mercy. As it is, when a person changes his intention of sinning, then God changes the strictness of his sentence. 13 The second reason is to give a greater reward for their faith and expectation to those trusting in the justice and promises of God. 14 The third reason is that, if God's decision were known at a particular

1. "The letter to be sent to my friend the king": this refers to ch. 47. The present revelation is also said to be a letter (paragraphs 19–20). It is one of the longest of all of Birgitta's revelations.

2. "Brandywine or brandy (which is made from wine)": cf. Sw. "bränt vin älla bränt vatn huilkit som görs ok blandas aff vine" [burnt wine or burnt water which is made and mixed from wine], i.e., a liquor distilled from wine or distilled from grain or similar produce.

3. "The example of a king": cf. 2 Kings (4 Kings) 20:1–21, which tells of sick Hezekiah who is told by Isaiah that he will die, but praying to God, he obtains longer life.

time, some people would grow very anxious because of the reversals and falls known to them in advance, while others might give up their desires and fervor out of weariness. 15 This is why when I write words to anyone, no reference is made to their result—whether the person will welcome and believe the words and put them into effect or not—and it is not told to you either, because it is not lawful for you to know. 16 The fourth reason is to prevent anyone from making immoral use of God’s words, for God lays low the lofty and makes a friend out of an enemy. 17 The fifth reason is to allow anyone seeking discernment to find it and let the corrupt to become even more corrupt and the virtuous more manifest.”

18 The bride said: Then God’s Son spoke to me and said: “If anyone were to speak through a pipe with three openings and say to the listener: ‘You will never hear my voice from this opening again,’ he would not be proven wrong if later he spoke through the two remaining openings. 19 It is the same with our conversation now. Although my Virgin Mother said that the letter she sent to the king would be her last one, this must be understood to apply to her. 20 Now, however, I, God, who am in my Mother, and my Mother is in me, send my message to the king, both for the sake of those who are now alive and of those who are not yet born. Justice and mercy are in God from eternity. 21 Because God, even before the morning-star had risen, was full of wisdom⁴ and goodness and power, he wished for others who could share in his goodness.

22 And so he created the angels, some of whom, turning their minds to their own beauty, desired to be superior to God. This was why they fell and became wicked demons beneath God’s feet. 23 But God shows mercy even to them, for when the devil, by God’s justice and permission, carries out the evil he craves, he receives a kind of comfort from the success of his wickedness. 24 This does not mean that the devil’s punishment is thereby diminished. Think instead of how a sick man with a great enemy would be comforted by the other’s death, even though the pain of his disease is not diminished by the news. In this way, when God exercises justice against men, the devil feels a thrill of joy due to the envy with which he burns, and it is as though his thirst for evil is soothed and quenched.

25 Now when God saw the heavenly host diminished after the presumptuous crime of the demons, he created the human race to obey his commandments and to be fruitful up to the point when there would be as many of them who had ascended to heaven as angels who had fallen from heaven. 26 They were created perfect, but, when they had received the commandment of life, they did not apply themselves to God or his glory but yielded to the temptation of the devil and sinned, saying: 27 ‘Let us eat of the tree of life and we shall know everything like God.’ However, Adam and Eve did not wish God evil as the devil did nor desire to be superior to God but only wanted to become as wise as God. 28 This is why their fall was not like that of the devil. Because the devil was envious of God, there will be no end to his misery. However, because humankind wanted something other than what God wanted them to want,

4. “God... was full of wisdom”: the phrase bears an echo of the hymn “Ante luciferum genitus.”

therefore they deserved and received both justice and mercy. 29 Our progenitors learned indeed justice, when they got nakedness instead of the garment of glory, hunger instead of plenty, carnal lust instead of chastity, fear instead of safety, toil instead of ease. 30 But they also received the mercy of garments for their nakedness, food for their hunger, the safety of mutual love for the propagation of the race. 31 Of course, Adam was upright in his conduct and never had a wife other than Eve or any other woman but only her alone.

32 God even shows justice and mercy to animals. God created three outstanding beings: first, angels, who have spirit but not body; second, human beings, who have souls and bodies; third, animals, who have bodies but not souls like human beings. 33 Because an angel is a spirit, an angel can be continuously in contact with God and needs no human aid. However, because human beings have bodies, a man cannot be continuously in contact with God, not until his mortal side is separated from his spiritual. 34 Therefore, to help the human race survive, God created for them irrational animals as an aid to obey and serve their betters. 35 God shows great mercy to these irrational animals, inasmuch as they feel no shame about their bodies, experience no sorrow about death until its very arrival, and are content with plain food.

36 Then, too, when the flood came, God showed justice with mercy. He could, of course, have brought the people of Israel into the promised land in a short space of time, but justice held that the vessels intended to contain the best of beverages must first be tested and purified and then consecrated. 37 God also showed them mercy, because, through the prayers of one man, Moses, their sins were wiped away and they received the gift of divine grace. In the same way, too, after my Incarnation, justice is never exercised without mercy nor mercy without justice."

38 Then a voice sounded on high, saying: "O, Mother of Mercy, Mother of the eternal King, make a plea for mercy! The prayers and tears of your servant the king have surely reached you. 39 We know that it is just for his sins to be punished, but plead for mercy so that he may convert and do penance and give glory to God!" 40 The Spirit responded: "In God there is a fourfold justice. First, justice means that he who is uncreated and eternal should be honored above all things, for all things come from him, and in him they live and in him the universe subsists. 41 Second, justice means that he, who always was and is and who was born at a definite point in time, should be served by all and be loved with all purity. 42 Third, justice means that he, who in himself is not subject to suffering but became subject to suffering through his human nature, who took on a mortal natural and so gained immortality for man, should be desired above all things that can be desired and that ought to be desired. 43 Fourth, justice means that those who are unstable should seek true stability and that those who are in shadows should long for the light of the Holy Spirit by contritely seeking his help with true humility. 44 But, concerning that king, the servant of the Mother of God, for whom a plea for mercy is now being made, justice says that there is not sufficient time for him to make purification, in a worthy manner and according to the demands of justice, of those sins that he committed against the mercy of God; and his body could not endure the pain

he deserves for his sins. 45 However, the mercy of God's Mother has made a plea of mercy for her servant and won it. Accordingly, he will hear what he must do and how he can correct himself, that is, if he wants to repent and be converted."

46 Then suddenly I saw in the sky an astonishingly large and beautiful house. A pulpit was in the house, and a book was on the pulpit. I saw two beings in front of the pulpit, an angel and a devil, one of whom—the devil—was speaking. He said: 47 "My name is Woe. This angel and I are following something we both desire. We see that a powerful lord intends to build something great, and so we are both striving—the angel to bring it to perfection and I to bring about its destruction. 48 Yet what happens is that when I get my hands on that desirable thing, it burns so hot I cannot hold it. But when the angel gets his hands on it, it is so cold and slippery that it rolls right out of his hands." 49 As I gazed intently on the pulpit with all my mental concentration, my mind was unable to lay hold of it, nor could my soul grasp its beauty or my tongue express it. 50 The appearance of the pulpit was like a sunbeam of red and white and shining gold colors. The gold shone like the sun, the white gleamed like snow, and the red was like a red rose, and each of the colors could be seen in the others. 51 I looked at the gold color, and I beheld the white and the red in it. I looked at the white, I saw in it the remaining two colors, and it was just the same when I looked at the red color: each color could be seen in the others and yet each was distinct from the others and on its own. 52 None was before or after another; none was greater or less than another, but all were everywhere equal. 53 When I gazed up, I was unable to take in the length and width of the pulpit. Gazing down, I was unable to see and grasp its immense depth. All of it exceeded my view. 54 Then I saw on the pulpit a book glittering like the brightest gold but in the shape of a book. 55 The book lay open, and its writing was not written with ink. Rather each word in the book was alive and uttering itself, as though someone were saying "Do this or that" and the thing was done immediately on the utterance of the word. 56 No one was reading the text of the book, but whatever it contained could be seen in the pulpit and in the colors.

57 I saw a king in front of the pulpit who was still alive in the world. I saw another king on the pulpit's left side who was dead and in hell. I saw a third king on the pulpit's right side who was in purgatory. 58 The king who was alive appeared to be crowned and sitting in a sphere of glass. Above the sphere there hung a horrible, three-edged sword swinging closer and closer to the sphere every minute like a clock pendulum swinging toward its mark.⁵ 59 Standing to the right of the living king was an angel with a golden cup and bowl, standing to his left was a devil with a forceps and a hammer. 60 Both competed to get his hand closest to the glass sphere as soon as it was hit and broken by the sword. 61 Then I heard the devil's horrible voice asking: "How long will this last? Look, both of us are chasing a single prey but we do not know which of us will win."

5. "Mark" renders "signum" which can also mean a target; Birgitta seems to be describing some kind of pendulum torture here.

62 Then divine justice spoke and said to me: "What is shown to you is not physical but spiritual. Neither the angel nor the devil are physical beings, but they are shown because you are unable to understand spiritual things except by means of physical images. 63 Thus the living king appears to you in a glass sphere, because his life is like fragile glass that can break at any moment. The three-edged sword represents death, which does three things when it comes: 64 it weakens the body, alters consciousness, and deadens all living strength as, like a sword, it separates the soul from the flesh. The angel and devil seem to be competing about the glass sphere, and this means that each of them wants to gain the soul of the king which will be awarded to the one whose counsels he follows the most. 65 The angel has a curved vase, and this means that just as a child rests in the curved lap of his mother, so the angel strives to bring the soul to God as though in a vessel to rest in the lap of eternal consolation. 66 The devil has a pair of tongs and a hammer, and this means that a demon drags a soul to himself with the tongs of base pleasures and then crushes him with the hammer of consent to and perpetration of immoral deeds. 67 The glass sphere is sometimes very hot, sometimes slippery and cold, and this symbolizes the inconstancy of the king. When the king finds himself in a state of temptation, he expresses these thoughts to himself: 68 'Although I know I will offend God if I carry out what I have in mind, this time I will carry out what I have in mind, because I can no longer restrain myself from it.' In this way he sins deliberately against his God and comes into the hands of the devil because of this. 69 Then the king turns to confession and contrition and again escapes the hands of the devil and comes under the influence of the good angel. Thus, unless the king puts a stop to his inconstancy, he is in a dangerous position, because he is standing on weak ground."

70 After this, to the left of the pulpit, I saw the dead king who had been condemned to hell. He was clothed in royal garb and seemed to be sitting on a throne. He was dead and pale and very frightening. 71 In front of his face there was a kind of wheel with four strips at the end.⁶ The wheel spun around with the breath of the king, and every strip either went up or down as he wanted, because the king controlled the movement of the wheel. 72 Three of the strips had writing on them but nothing at all was written on the fourth. On the king's right I saw an angel in a most beautiful human shape. His hands were empty, and he was serving at the pulpit. 73 On the king's left a devil could be seen. He had a head like a dog and an immoderate belly. The navel of his belly was open, and poison was boiling out in every poisonous color. On each of his feet he had three great claws, strong and sharp.

74 A being shining like the sun and wonderfully bright to behold said to me then: "This king whom you see is miserable. His conscience will now be revealed to you as it was in his reign and in his intention at death. 75 What his conscience was like before his reign is not for you to know. Understand, however, that it is not his soul that you see but his conscience. 76 Because souls and

6. "A kind of wheel with four strips at the end": Birgitta may be describing a whirligig toy held in front of the king's face that he blows on and makes spin. It is a good image for the relative powerlessness of the king. For a visual representation of such a toy see Hieronymus Bosch, "The Christ Child with a Walking Frame," dating from the 1480s.

demons are not physical but spiritual beings, the temptations and punishments of the devil are shown to you here by means of physical images.” 77 Then the dead king began to speak not with his mouth but, as it were, with his brain. He said: 78 “My counselors, my intention is to keep hold of whatever belongs to the royal crown. I will also strive to increase my acquisitions and not decrease them. 79 Why ask how I acquired what I have? I am content if I can defend and increase my inheritance.” 80 Then the devil cried out: “Look! The hole is drilled! What shall I do with my hook?” Then justice answered from the book on the pulpit and said to the devil: “Put the hook in the hole and pull it toward you!” As soon as the word of justice was uttered, the hook was put in. 81 At that very moment the hammer of mercy appeared before the king, and he could have used it to knock away the hook, if only he had sought the truth of all things and changed his will with good effect.

82 Again the king spoke and said: “My counselors and my men, you have accepted me as your lord and I have accepted you as counselors. 83 Therefore I point a man out to you in the kingdom who is a betrayer of my honor and my life, who plots against the kingdom, who disturbs the peace and the common people of the kingdom. 84 If a man like that is put up with and tolerated, the republic will be ruined; there will be more disunity and an increase of domestic troubles in the kingdom. 85 So they put credence in these words of mine to them, both the educated and uneducated, the leaders and the commoners, so much so that the man whom I falsely accused of treason suffered great losses and shame and was sentenced to exile. 86 Yet my conscience knew well what the truth of the matter was in this business: I had said many things against that man out of my desire for the kingdom, out of fear of losing it, and in order to increase my reputation and more firmly secure the kingdom for myself and my posterity. 87 I thought to myself: Though I know the truth about how the kingdom was acquired and how that man suffered injury, 88 nevertheless, if I welcome him back into favor and reveal the truth, I will be roundly condemned and disgraced. So I am resolved in my soul to die rather than tell the truth and take back my unjust words and actions.”

89 Then the devil responded: “Judge, look how this king is sticking his tongue out at me!” Divine justice replied: “Put a noose on him!” 90 When the devil had done so, and the noose was put on him, a sharp sword was suddenly hanging in front of the king’s face. He could have used it to cut and slice the noose, if he wished.

91 The king spoke again and said: “My counselors! I have consulted with priests and learned men about the state of the kingdom. They tell me that if I made over the kingdom into the hands of others, I would be surrendering many persons to the loss of life and goods and violating justice and the law. 92 Accordingly, in order to keep the kingdom under my control and defend it from invaders, I must come up with new methods, because the old system of fiscal revenues is not enough for ruling and defending the kingdom. 93 So I have come up with devious, new impositions of taxes and fees on the citizens of the kingdom and even on innocent travelers and merchants passing by. 94 I am resolved to carry on with these contrivances until I die, although my conscience tells me that they go against God as well as all justice and common honesty.”

95 Then the devil cried out and said: "O judge, look at this king who has held out both his hands under my water basin.⁷ What shall I do?" Justice responded from the book: "Pour your poison over them." 96 Once the devil had poured his poison, a bowl of ointment came before the king which he could very well have used to counteract the poison. Then the demon cried out loudly and said: 97 "O! I see something amazing and unintelligible to me. My hook was put in the king's heart and at once a hammer was offered to him on his lap. 98 My noose was placed around his head and a sharp sword was given him. Even my poison was poured out on his hands and now a bowl of ointment is offered to him." 99 Justice responded from the book on the pulpit, saying: "All things have their time, and mercy and justice came to his encounter."

100 After this God's Mother again spoke to me, saying: "Come, daughter, see and hear what the good spirit suggests to the soul and what the evil suggests. Every person receives inspirations and encouragement, sometimes from the good spirit and sometimes from the evil, and there is no one whom God does not encourage so long as he lives."

101 Then the same dead king appeared, and the good spirit gave the following inspirations to his soul while he was still alive: "O friend, you are obliged to serve God with all your strength, for he has given you life, conscience, intelligence, health and honor. Moreover he tolerates your sinning." 102 The conscience of the king seemed to answer him and say: "It is true that I am obliged to serve God by whose power I was created and redeemed and by whose mercy I live and subsist." 103 Against this the evil spirit made the following suggestion to him: "Brother, let me give you good advice. Do what a person does when peeling apples. He throws away the apple skin and core but keeps the useful part of the fruit for himself. 104 You should do likewise. God is humble, merciful and patient, and he is in need of nothing. So, out of the things you have, give him whatever you can comfortably do without, but keep whatever is more useful and more desirable for yourself. 105 Do whatever gives you physical pleasure, because you can easily make up for that. Omit whatever you do not feel like doing, even though you are obliged to do it; instead, just give alms, and in that way a lot of people will be helped and consoled."

106 The king's conscience answered: "That is good advice. I will be able to give away some of what I have which is no loss to me but which God appreciates. The rest I will keep for my own purposes and for buying lots of friends."

107 Then the guardian angel of the king spoke again and said to the king by means of inspirations: "Friend, consider that you are mortal and shall soon die. 108 Consider, too, that this life is brief and that God is a just and patient judge who will examine everything you have thought and said and done from the first moment you entered the age of reason until the end. He will also judge all your affections and intentions and let nothing go unscrutinized. 109 You should therefore make sensible use of your time and abilities, control your body for the good of your soul, live in moderation and do not desire to carry out the lust of the flesh. Those who live for the flesh and their own self-will cannot enter into the divine fatherland."

7. "Under my water basin"; perhaps an oblique reference to Pilate washing his hands in Matthew 27:24.

110 The diabolical spirit immediately advised the king against this through interior suggestions, saying: “Brother, if you are going to give account to God for every hour and minute, when will you have any time for enjoyment? Listen to my advice. 111 God is merciful and easily placated. He would not have saved you, if he meant you to perish. Scripture tells us indeed that sins are forgiven if you are sorry for them. 112 Do what a clever man did who had to pay back twenty pounds of gold to his lender. Since he did not have the wherewithal, he asked a friend for advice. His friend said to take twenty pounds of copper and gild them over with one pound of gold, and then pay his lender back with the gilded copper. 113 He followed the advice and paid back the lender those twenty pounds of copper overlaid with gold and kept nineteen pounds of pure gold for himself. Do the same thing yourself. 114 Spend nineteen hours on your own pleasure and desire and enjoyment, and then one hour will be enough for your sorrow and contrition. Be bold and do what you like before and after confession. 115 In the same way as copper overlaid with gold has the appearance of solid gold, sinful actions, which the copper symbolizes, that are gilded by contrition will be wiped away, and all your actions will shine like gold.” 116 The conscience of the king replied: “This advice seems pleasant and reasonable, since, by doing so, I can spend all my time on my own enjoyment.”

The good angel spoke to the king again with his inspirations, saying: 117 “Friend, consider first how skillfully God drew you forth from the narrow womb⁸ of your mother. Second consider God’s patient allowance in allowing you to live. Third consider how much he suffered in order to redeem you from eternal death.” 118 Then the devil gave the king an inspiration against this, saying: “Brother, if God drew you forth from the narrow womb out into the wide world, consider as well that he will draw you out of the world through a harsh death. 119 Besides, if God allows you to live long, think of all the trouble and discomfort you experience against your will in this life. If God redeemed you through his own harsh death, who forced him? You certainly did not ask him.” 120 Then the king replied within his conscience as though he were speaking: “What you say is true. I am more sorry that I shall die than that I was born from my mother’s womb. 121 It is also harder for me to endure adversity in the world and hardship in my soul than anything else. If the option were given to me, I would rather live without a care in the world and remain comfortable there than to be removed from the world. 122 I would prefer never ending life in this world and worldly happiness to Christ redeeming me by his own blood. And I wouldn’t care to be in heaven, if I could have the world as I wish on earth.”

123 Then I heard a voice from the pulpit that said: “Now take away from the king the bowl of ointment, because he has sinned against God the Father. God is the Father who is eternally in the Son and the Holy Spirit, who gave the true and honest law through Moses, but this king set up a contrary and perverse law. 124 It is true that this king did some good, though not with a good intention,

8. “God drew you forth...from the narrow womb”: God is likened to a skilled midwife, an image that Birgitta uses elsewhere, most notably after the death of her son Karl (Book VII 13).

and so he had permission to have and hold his kingdom during his lifetime so that he would thus receive his reward in the world.” 125 Again a voice spoke from the pulpit, saying: “Take away the sharp sword in front of the king’s face. He sinned against God the Son who says in the Gospel that judgment without mercy will be given to him who does not have mercy. 126 Although injury had been unjustly done to a man, this king refused to have mercy or to correct his own error and change his wrongful will. However, because he did do some good things, he may have the reward of speaking wisely and of being considered wise by many people.” 127 A third time the voice of justice spoke, saying: “Take the hammer away from the king, for he has sinned against the Holy Spirit who forgives the sins of all those who repent. This king, however, intends to persevere in his sin until the very end. 128 However, because he did some good things, he may have what he hotly desires for his pleasure, that is, the woman he longs for as a wife, the delight of his eyes. Let him also end his life in a way that seems good and desirable by the standards of the world.”

129 The death of the king was soon approaching, and the devil exclaimed: “See, the bowl of ointment is gone! Now I will tighten my grip on his hands to keep him from doing any profitable works.” 130 As soon as the devil had said this, the king grew weak and his health worsened. Then the devil exclaimed: “See the sharp sword is gone! Now I will tighten my noose.” The king immediately lost his ability to speak. 131 At this moment of hardship, justice spoke to the good angel who had been given to the king as a guardian, saying: “Inspect the wheel, and find what strip points upward, and read its writing!” 132 And, indeed, the strip that pointed upward was the fourth one on which any and all writing seemed to have been erased, and there was nothing on it. Then justice replied: 133 “This soul loved that which was empty, so now she will enter the love of the one who will reward her.” And the soul of the king was immediately separated from his body.

134 As the soul was about to leave the body, the devil exclaimed: “Now I shall tear apart the heart of this king, for now I own his soul.” 135 Then I saw how the king was transformed from head to toe, and his appearance became horrible, like that of a skinned animal. His eyes were dug out, and all his flesh was rolled up like a ball. Then his voice was heard to say: 136 “O misery! I have become blind like a puppy born blind that seeks the hind parts of its mother. Because of my ingratitude I cannot see my mother’s nipples. 137 O misery! I see in my blindness that I will never see God. My conscience understands now why⁹ I have fallen and what I should have done and did not. 138 I am miserable, for I was born in the world through God’s providence and reborn through baptism, but I forgot and neglected God. Because I refused to drink the milk of divine sweetness, I am now more like a blind dog than an infant that sees and lives. 139 Though I was a king, I am now forced to tell the truth, even against my will. It was as though I was tied by three ropes and bound to serve God by my baptism, by my marriage, and by my royal rank. 140 By turning my affections to the vanities of the world, I showed I dismissed the importance of the first. By desiring

9. “Why” renders “unde” [whence].

another wife, I showed I did not take the second seriously. By growing proud of earthly power and not taking the power of heaven into consideration, I showed I scorned the third. 141 Therefore, though I am now blind, yet I see in my conscience that I must be tied to the devil's hatred because of my dismissal of baptism, that I must endure the devil's pleasure because of my unruly carnal appetites, that I must be tied to the devil's feet because of my pride."

142 The demon then replied: "O brother, it is now my time to speak, and I will bring about what I say. Come to me not with charity but with hatred. I was the most beautiful of the angels, but you were a mortal man. 143 Almighty God gave me free will, but I abused it. Instead of loving God, I chose to hate him in order to surpass him. That is why I fell like someone falling head down and feet up. 144 Along with all other men, you were created after my fall and obtained a special privilege over me. By the blood of God's Son you were redeemed, but I was not. 145 So then, because you despised God's love, put your head at my feet, and I will take your feet in my mouth. Thus let us be joined to one another like two swordsmen, the first with his sword in the other's heart, the second with his dagger in the other's intestines. 146 So pierce me with your anger, and I shall pierce you with my malice. Because I had the head, that is, the intelligence to honor God if I had wished, but you had the feet, that is, you had the strength to go to God and refused, my terrible head will therefore swallow your cold feet. 147 You will be endlessly devoured, yet not consumed; instead you will be restored to go through the same procedure again. 148 Let us be also joined by three ropes. Let the first be in the middle to join your navel with mine, so whenever I breathe, you will draw my poison into yourself, and whenever you breathe, I will draw your entrails into myself. 149 It is only right, for you loved yourself more than your Redeemer, just as I loved myself more than my Creator. Let your head and my feet then be joined by the second rope, and my head and your feet by the third rope."

150 Then I saw the same demon with three sharp claws on each foot. He said to the king: "Because you, brother, had eyes to see the way of life and a conscience to discern good and evil, my two claws will enter and perforate your eyes, 151 but the third claw will go through your brain. You will be so overpowered by them that you will be entirely under my feet, you who were created to be my master, and I your footstool. 152 You were given two ears for hearing of the way of life and a mouth to speak for the good of the soul. But because you disdainfully rejected hearing and speaking of the salvation of your soul, the two claws of my other foot will go into both your ears and the third will go into your mouth. 153 You will be so tormented by them that everything that you once thought sweet when you were offending God will seem most bitter to you now." 154 Once these words were spoken, the head and feet and navel of the king were joined in the described manner with the head and feet and navel of the devil. Tied together like that, they both descended into the abyss. Then I heard a voice saying: 155 "What did the king get out of all his wealth? Nothing but damnation. What did he get out of his privilege? Nothing but shame. What did he get out of his greedy desires for royal power? Nothing, really, but pain. 156 He was anointed with holy oil and consecrated with holy words and crowned

with the royal crown for the purpose of glorifying the words and works of God, defending and governing the people of God, and knowing that he was always subject to God and that God was his rewarder. 157 However, because he scorned to be at God's feet, he is now at the devil's feet. Because he refused to redeem his time through fruitful works when he was able, he will not have a fruitful time now."

158 Justice then spoke from the book on the pulpit and said to me: "All this that has been shown to you consecutively occurs in a single instant before God. However, because you are a bodily being, spiritual matters have to be displayed to your mind by means of bodily images. 159 For this reason, the king, the angel and the devil appeared to you to be speaking to one another, but this simply represented the inspirations and promptings of the good and bad spirits, aimed at the king's soul either by themselves or by their counselors and friends. 160 The exclamation of the devil saying 'the hole is drilled' and the king's statement that he wanted to keep everything belonging to the royal crown, no matter how it may have been acquired and without bothering about questions of justice, 161 should be interpreted as meaning that the conscience of the king had been drilled through by the iron of the devil, that is, by the sin of stubborn impenitence. This was when the king refused to investigate and determine what belonged by right to the kingdom and what did not, as well as when he did not bother to verify his own right to the kingdom.

162 A hook was placed on the soul of the king at the very moment when the temptation of the devil prevailed in his soul to such a degree that he was ready to persevere in his injustice until death. The hammer that was put in the king's lap after the hook signifies the time of contrition given him. 163 If the king had only thought to himself: 'I have sinned, but I no longer want to keep ill gotten goods knowingly. Therefore, I will rectify my life from now on.' Then the hook of justice would have been smashed by the hammer of contrition, and the king would have entered on the path and life of goodness. 164 When the devil exclaimed 'look, the king is sticking his tongue out at me' and a noose was placed on the king as he refused to bring back to favor the man whom he had defamed, this means that anyone who knowingly abuses and defames his fellow man in order to enhance his own reputation is steered by a diabolical spirit and must be ensnared in a noose like a thief. 165 The arrival of the sharp sword before the king after the noose signifies the time for change and correction of his perverse will and actions. 166 When a person corrects wrongdoing through a good resolution and improved conduct, such a resolution is like a sharp sword that cuts the devil's noose and obtains pardon of sins. 167 If this king had changed his resolution and shown favor to the injured and defamed man, then the devil's noose would have been cut through. However, because he was firmly resolved in his wicked purpose, it was divine justice that he should become more stubbornly impenitent.

168 Thirdly, you saw that poison was poured out on the king's hands when he was thinking of impositions of new taxes on the kingdom. This signifies that the king's actions were steered by the diabolical spirit and evil suggestions. 169 Poison makes a body restless and cold, and in the same way

the king became worried and restless through evil thoughts and suggestions that led him to seek out ways by which he could acquire the possessions and property of others and the gold of travelers. 170 The travelers fell asleep, thinking their gold was in their own pockets, but when they woke up they found it was in the power of the king. The bowl of ointment that came after the poison signifies the blood of Jesus Christ that gives life to all the sick. 171 If the king had steeped his actions in the consideration of Christ's blood, if he had asked God for help and said: 'O Lord God, who created and redeemed me, I know that I attained the kingdom and the crown by your permission, outfight the enemies who fight me and pay my debts, for the kingdom does not have enough means,' 172 then I would surely have made his cares and burdens light to bear. However, because he coveted the property of others and wished to appear to be just though he knew he was acting unjustly, consequently, the devil ruled his heart. 173 It was the devil who persuaded him to act against the laws of the Church, to start wars and defraud innocent people, until justice pronounced judgment and sentence over him from the pulpit of majesty.

174 The wheel that spun with the breath of the king signifies his conscience which was moved like a wheel now to gladness, now to sadness. The four linen strips on the wheel signify the four qualities of will that every person should have: it should be perfect, strong, upright and rational. 175 A perfect will is to love God and desire him above all things; and this should be on the first and uppermost linen strip. The second kind of will is to wish and to do good to one's neighbor as to oneself for the love of God. This will should be strong so as not to be broken by hate or greed. 176 The third kind of will is the resolution to abstain from carnal desires and to desire eternity. This will should be upright so that it does not act to please other men but to please God. This should be written on the third strip. The fourth kind of will is a desire for the world that is strictly rational and based on need alone. 177 When the wheel turned, what appeared on the strip that pointed upward was that the king had loved the pleasures of the world but spurned the love of God. On the second strip it was written that he loved worldly [honors and] men.¹⁰ 178 On the third strip was written the inordinate love that he had for worldly things and riches. On the fourth strip nothing was written; it was completely blank, but it should have had 'Love of God Above All' written on it. 179 The blankness of the fourth strip signifies his lack of love and fear of God. By fear God is attracted to a soul; by love God is attached to a good soul. 180 Even if a man had never loved God during his life but should say with his whole heart in his last moments: 'O, God, with all my heart, I regret having sinned against you. Give me your love and I will make emends in the future,' a man with such love would not go down to hell. 181 Because the king did not love the One he should have loved, he therefore now receives the reward for his love."

10. "[Honors and] men": the editor follows some manuscripts in reading only "homines"; other manuscripts and Ghotan have "honores et homines."

182 After this I saw the other king to the right side of justice. He was in purgatory and was like a newborn child, scarcely able to move and could only just lift his eyes. 183 To his left side I saw a devil standing whose head was like a bellows with a long nozzle; and he had arms that were like a pair of snakes and his knees were like an oil-press and his feet like a long hook. 184 To his right stood a most beautiful angel ready to help. Then I heard a voice saying: "This king now appears such as his soul was when it left his body." 185 Right away the devil exclaimed to the book on the pulpit, saying: "This is amazing. This angel and I were expecting the birth of this child—he with his purity, I with all my impurity. 186 When the child was born, not for the flesh but of the flesh, impurity was found in him. The angel recoiled from it and was unable to touch him. But I touch him, because he fell into my hands. 187 However I do not know where I am to lead him, because my clouded eyes do not see him because of a shining brightness that comes from his breast. The angel, however, sees him and knows where to lead him, but he is unable to touch him. So decide our conflict, you who are the just judge."

188 The word of the book on the pulpit answered and said: "You who are speaking, tell why the king's soul fell into your hands." 189 The devil replied: "You are justice itself, and you said that no one can enter heaven without first returning any unjustly acquired possessions.¹¹ 190 This soul was completely tainted with unjustly acquired possessions to such a degree that his very veins and marrow, flesh and blood fed and thrived on unjustly acquired food. 191 Again you said not to lay up treasures which rust and moth destroy but such as last forever. However, the place where heavenly treasure should have been stored was empty in this soul, and the place where worms and frogs were fed instead was full. 192 In the third place, you said that one must love one's fellow man for the sake of God. However, this soul loved the body more than God and did not care at all about his fellow man. 193 While he was in the flesh, he was pleased to take the possessions of his fellow man; he hurt his subjects' hearts by not paying any attention to others' losses, provided he himself had plenty. 194 He did whatever he liked and commanded whatever he wished and cared little about fairness. These are the principal causes; countless others are connected with them."

195 Then the word of the book of justice answered and said to the angel: "O guardian angel of the soul, you are in the light and see the light, what law or what virtue do you invoke¹² to help this soul?" 196 The angel replied: "This soul had holy faith, and believed and hoped that every sin could be blotted out by contrition and confession. He had fear of you, his God, though less than he should have."

11. "No one can enter heaven . . . acquired possessions": this idea is not biblical, but echoes similar thoughts in Church tradition, such as the words of St. Augustine as quoted by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* II.II, q. 62, a. 2, *sed contra*: "Augustinus dicit, *non dimittitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum*" (cf. St. Augustine, *Epistulae*, 153, c. 20 [ed. Goldbacher, p. 419, lines 7–8]). It was a well-known maxim in canon law in the Middle Ages and it is likely to be Birgitta's source here. (Paragraph 191): cf. Matthew 6:19–20.

12. "Do you invoke" renders "*habes tu*" [do you have]. The question is what principle of law the angel advocates or what virtue (in the king's character) the angel can point to in the soul's defense.

197 Once more the justice of the book spoke, saying: "O, my angel, you now have permission to touch the soul. And you, devil, now have permission to see the soul's light. Both of you, examine what this soul loved when alive and healthy in body." 198 Both the angel and the demon replied: "He loved people and wealth." Then the justice of the book said: "What did he love when he felt the pressure of a painful death?" 199 They both said: "He loved himself. He felt more pain concerning his own physical infirmity and inner affliction than concerning the sufferings of his Redeemer."

200 Justice spoke again to them: "Yet examine what he loved and was thinking about at the last moment of his life, while he was still conscious and of sound mind." 201 The angel alone replied: "This soul had the following thoughts: 'Alas, I was always so recklessly opposed to my Redeemer! If only I had time to thank my God for his kindness! 202 I am in greater pain over my sins against God than in pain of body. Even if I do not reach heaven, I still would serve my God.'" The justice of the book replied, saying: 203 "Because you, devil, cannot see the soul due to her shining brightness, nor can you, my angel, touch her due to her impurity, justice demands her purgation by you, devil. 204 But you, angel, comfort her until she can be brought into the brightness of glory. Soul, you now have permission to look on the angel and be comforted by him. You will be a partaker in the blood of Christ and in the prayers of God's Mother and his Church."

205 After they heard this, the devil said to the soul: "Because you have come into my hands full of ill-gotten goods and food, I shall now empty you with my press." 206 Then the demon placed the king's brain between his press-like knees and pressed it forcefully on all sides until all its inmost marrow¹³ was as thin as the leaf of a tree. 207 Next the devil said to the soul: "Because the seat of the virtues is empty, I shall fill it up." Then he placed the nozzle of his bellows-like head into the king's mouth and blew into it forcefully and filled him powerfully with such a terrible blast of air that all his veins and sinews were bursting painfully. 208 A third time the devil said to the soul of the king: "Because you were unkind and merciless to your subjects who should have been like children to you, my arms will squeeze and hurt you. Just as you used to jab your subjects sharply, so too my snake-like arms will tear you apart with terrible pain and loathing." 209 After the three punishments of the press, the bellows, and the snakes, the devil was about to start over again and make them worse, but I saw the angel of God stretch out his hands over the devil's hands so that he would not make them so painful as at first. 210 So it was that the angel of the Lord mitigated the pain of the punishment each and every time. After each punishment the soul raised her eyes to the angel, without saying anything but intimating with a nod that she felt encourage and would soon be saved.

211 Again a word was spoken to me from the pulpit, saying: "All this that has been shown to you in sequences occurs in a single instant before God. However, because you are a bodily being, spiritual matters are shown to your

13. "Inmost marrow": the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "marrow": "Originally: the inner substance or white matter of the brain. In later use: (more fully *oblong marrow*) the medulla oblongata." This must be the meaning here, since the devil explicitly takes the "cerebrum" of the king.

mind by means of bodily images. 212 Accordingly, although this king was greedy for the honors of the world and for getting what did not belong to him, still because he did have a fear of God and did give up some of his pleasures because of that fear, this fear brought him to the love of God. 213 You should therefore understand that many persons entangled in many crimes do reach a great state of contrition before death. Their contrition can be so perfect that not only is their sin forgiven them but even the punishment of purgatory, if they die in the same state of contrition. 214 However, this king did not reach the love of God until the final moment of life. Although his strength was already failing and he was losing consciousness, he was granted the grace of a divine inspiration to feel greater sorrow about dishonoring God than about his own pain and loss. 215 This sorrow betokened the light that made the devil with clouded eyes ignorant of where he should lead the soul of the king. 216 He did not say that his eyes were clouded in the sense of lacking spiritual perception, but because he was amazed at the shining brightness in that soul with all her impurity. 217 The angel, however, knew where to lead the soul but was unable to touch her until she was purged, for it is written:¹⁴ No one shall see the face of God, unless he first be cleansed."

218 Again a word was spoken to me from the pulpit, saying: "You saw the angel of God stretch out his hands over the devil's hands so that he would not make the punishments more painful. This means that the angel's power is greater than the devil's power, and he uses it to restrain the devil's wickedness. 219 Because a demon would show no moderation or control in punishing unless restrained by God's strength, God shows mercy even in hell. 220 It is true that there will be no redemption or pardon or consolation for the damned, but they are punished no more than they deserve according to the demands of justice. In this regard God's mercy is great, for the devil would otherwise show no restraint or moderation in inflicting harm. 221 The king appeared as a newborn baby, and the meaning of this is that anyone who is to be born from worldly vanity into heavenly life must be innocent and must grow to perfection in the virtues through the grace of God. 222 When the king raised his eyes to the angel, this meant that he was given comfort and the joyful hope of attaining eternal life by his guardian angel. 223 Spiritual truths can thus be understood by means of bodily images. Devils and angels do not have bodies or hold conversations, since they are spirits, but their wickedness or goodness is made plain to bodily eyes by means of such images."

224 Again a word was spoken to me from the pulpit, saying: "The pulpit that you saw signifies the Deity himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 225 The length, breadth, depth and height of the pulpit was unimaginable and beyond comprehension. This means that no beginning or end can be found in God, for God has and had no beginning and will have no end. 226 Each of the three colors appeared in the others, and each color was distinct from the others. This signifies that God the Father is eternally in the Son and the Holy Spirit in both, truly one in nature but distinct in personal properties. 227 One of the colors

14. "For it is written"; cf. Hebrews 12:14.

was blood red, and this symbolizes the Son who assumed a human nature in his person without it affecting his divine nature. 228 The white color symbolizes the Holy Spirit through whom sins are washed away. The gold color symbolizes the Father who is the beginning and perfection of all things, though this does not mean that there is any kind of perfection that exists more in the Father than in the Son or that the Father is prior to the Son. 229 To help you understand that the Father is not the same as the Son, but that the Father is one person, the Son one person, the Holy Spirit one person, all three being indeed one in nature, three distinct but united colors were shown to you, distinct according to the distinctions of the three persons, united according to the unity of the same nature. 230 Accordingly, in each color you saw the remaining colors and could not see one without the others nor anything prior or posterior, greater or less, in them. In the same way nothing is before or after, greater or less, divided or confused in the Trinity. There is but one will, one eternity, one power and one glory. 231 Although the Son is from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is from both, yet the Father was never without the Son and Holy Spirit nor the Son and Holy Spirit without the Father.”

232 Again a word was spoken to me from the pulpit, saying: “The book that appeared on the pulpit signifies that there is eternal justice and wisdom in the Deity without excess or lack.¹⁵ 233 This is the book of life, which is not written like writing that exists and once was not. No, the writing of this book exists always. 234 It is everlasting in the divine nature. It is also the understanding of all things present, past and future, without change or vicissitude. Nothing is invisible to it, for it sees all things. 235 The word uttered itself. This means that God is the eternal Word from which all words come and by which all things are given life and subsist. The Word itself spoke in a visible manner when the Word was made flesh and lived among men.

236 Now, the Mother of God obtained the favor of this divine vision. This is the mercy promised to the kingdom of Sweden that the people living there should hear the words that come from the mouth of God. 237 It is not God’s fault that few people accept and believe the heavenly words divinely granted to you. It is their fault, because they refused to give up their coldness of mind. 238 Even the words of the gospel were not fulfilled under the first kings of that time. But the time will come when they are fulfilled.”

✠ Chapter 49

On a King who lacks Compassion for his Subjects and Takes on Poor Counselors

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ explains to the bride why God afflicted the people of Israel in the desert and not in Egypt, and about the testing of Moses. He

15. “Without excess or lack” renders “cui nichil addi vel minui potest” [to which nothing can be added or diminished].

issues a reprimand and a warning to a certain king for not having compassion on his subjects and for governing through wicked counselors. The king should not be boldly confident because he had earlier been called a friend.

1 The Lord said to the bride: "There were three categories of people in the nation of Israel. Some loved God and Moses; others love themselves more than God; others loved neither God nor Moses but only earthly things. 2 When this people was in Egypt, they all were called children of God and children of Israel, but not all of them were like-minded in serving God. 3 Similarly, when God decided to lead the people out of Egypt, there were some who believed in God and in Moses, but others who provoked the anger of God and of Moses. In this way God showed both great mercy and justice to those who were stubborn and unrepentant.

4 But you may ask: Why did God lead the people out of Egypt rather than afflicting them there instead? After all he knew beforehand that it was not yet the time for mercy and that men had not yet finished carrying out their malicious intentions. 5 I answer: I, God, chose the people of Israel to instruct and test them in the desert like schoolboys. They needed a teacher who would lead them by word and deed. 6 The desert was more suitable than Egypt in order to instruct them more perfectly. Otherwise they might have met with too many disturbances from the Egyptians during their divine schooling or they might have become puffed up with pride over the divine signs of mercy which should be kept hidden from the dogs.¹ 7 Moses, who was like a schoolmaster for the people, had to be tested, because, though he was conspicuous to God's sight, he had to become known to his disciples so that they could imitate him. Being tested by the people's foolishness proved his character better, and the divine signs gave him greater authority and made him better known to everyone. 8 It is true, I say, that the people would have been led out even without Moses and even without Moses the people would have died. However, because of his virtuousness, the people had an easier death; because of his love, the people received a greater reward.² Nor is this any wonder, since Moses suffered out of compassion with the death of them all. 9 For these reasons the Lord postponed the fulfillment of his promise in order to test the people and to make God known through divine signs and through his mercy and patience, and so that the ingratitude of the people and their willfulness might serve as a warning for future generations. 10 In a similar way, many saints have entered the lands of infidels under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, yet without obtaining what they desired, though they still received a great reward for the sake of their good intentions. 11 For the sake of their patience and good intentions, God hastened the time of mercy and brought the new way of life which they were trying to establish into existence all the sooner. 12 God's decisions

1. "Hidden from the dogs"; cf. Matthew 7:6.

2. "Because of his love, the people received a greater reward" renders "propter caritatem Moysi sublimius est populus coronatus"; certain manuscripts have "propter caritatem populi sublimius est Moyses coronatus", which would give the reading (also in the Medieval Swedish text) "because of the people's love, Moses received a greater reward (crown)."

should therefore always be highly revered, feared and taken as warning so that the individual will is not opposed to God's will.

13 It is true that this king of whom I am speaking to you and whom you know was not of the same disposition as Moses. No, he did not care if all his people were to die, provided he alone could be saved and held in honor. Moreover he governed according to the counsel of the devil. 14 He refused to give up his stubbornness and his erratic behavior. He did not wish to follow the counsel of the people he should have, the ones from whom he could have received the milk of divine wisdom and of virtuous correction. 15 And this is no wonder, seeing that he came from the stock of a man who provokes God. Therefore, he can only be corrected by whipping.

Know, too, that there have been four ruling families in this kingdom. 16 Ambition and cruelty were seen in the first, but God tolerated them due to certain good works as well as due to the sins of the people. Intemperance and injustice were seen in the second, but God humbled them in his mercy and called them to submission.³ 17 The third came from an ambitious root and a hard trunk where there was greed and self-love. Therefore God gave it a temporal punishment so that its future would be gentle. 18 Pretended humility, a lack of justice, and wastefulness are found in the fourth. Therefore I will in charity treat him with mercy and justice. 19 If he does not listen, I will give him such a whipping from head to toe that everyone who hears about it will be amazed and start to tremble before the justice and equity of God. 20 He should not be boldly confident because I have called him a friend; rather he should recall how I concluded my words to him: if he keeps faith with me, then I will keep my promise."

✠ Chapter 50*

Four Virtuous Sisters Are Usurped by Four Worthless Ones

DATE: 1368, ROME

Christ's words revealed to the bride addressed to the German emperor, saying that he should reform four sisters in the Church, that is, the four virtues that have been driven from their places, and that he should depose and uproot the four contrary vices that, sadly, dominate the Church.

✠ Chapter 51*

A Message for the German Emperor to Spread the Message of Birgitta's Revelations and Work for Recognition of the Rule

DATE: 1367, ROME

3. "Called them to submission" renders "vocaui sub coronam" [called them under the crown]; see the note to ch. 20.8.

* This revelation duplicates Book IV 45, which omits the direct reference to the "German Emperor" (Charles IV).

* This chapter duplicates *Extravagantes* 42.

Christ the Emperor writes to the German emperor, informing him how he personally told the bride the many words that are written in the *Liber celestis*. He instructs him to look at and scrutinize these words and endeavor to have the supreme pontiff approve the rule which Christ himself had dictated to the bride.

✚ Chapter 52

The Excommunicated King Should Seek Absolution Directly from the Pope

DATE: 1360S, ITALY

Christ advises a certain king, who had disobeyed the advice of the Virgin Mary, to go to the pope and ask him for absolution of certain grave sins of his mentioned here, without hiding his sins or making excuses but humbling himself wholeheartedly, because supreme sins are to be effaced by the supreme pontiff.

1 God's Son speaks to the bride: "Because the king disobeyed the advice of my Mother, I, the Son of God, who am in the Mother, advise him to go on a journey to the supreme pontiff and humbly ask for absolution from his sins.¹ 2 Supreme sins must be corrected by the supreme pontiff who has supreme power. He holds supreme power who sits on my seat in the world and has the power of binding and loosing in my name.² 3 Accordingly, if the king accepts my advice, I will give him a precious treasure, defend him from his enemies, and pay back all his debts, either corporally or spiritually, if he cannot pay them back himself. I will count each footstep he takes in the labor of my love and measure it to him again in eternal life. 4 When the king reaches the supreme pontiff, he should wholeheartedly humble himself before him, not hiding his sins or making excuses but asking absolution of his disobedience to the ordinances of God's Holy Church, of the excommunication that binds him, of his public perjury, 5 of the unprecedented burdens on the common people of his kingdom, of the promotion of unworthy clerics to ecclesiastical benefices through his actions and of those acts which he has attempted against the laudable statutes of the kingdom and the bishops."

✚ Chapter 53

The King Must Visit the Pope with True Wisdom and Humility

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Through the bride Christ advises the aforesaid king to approach the pope without pomp or a large staff, wastefully lavishing his gifts in various countries to gain admiration; instead he should go in

1. "Absolution from his sins": the Swedish king was excommunicated in consequence of an unpaid debt to the papal treasury.

2. "Binding and loosing in my name"; cf. Matthew 16:19.

humility and wisdom with an upright and pious retinue, no larger than is necessary.

1 The Lord spoke to the bride, saying: “If the king sets out on a journey to the supreme pontiff, and if he regards his sins as great, then he should beware of flatterers who advise him to set out on the journey with splendid pomp in order to gain an admired name abroad or to lavish his gifts in order to gain a reputation or to bring along a large retinue as protection against enemies. 2 Instead he should set out in wisdom and humility with as large a retinue as is necessary but no more than sufficient, consisting of upright and pious servants, and without spending his means ostentatiously but for the service and glory of God. 3 He should take prudent caution with regard to those who seek him harm, for, although I can do all things, one must act at times according to human means and advice. 4 Although I did speak with Moses,¹ he also listened to and followed a pagan man’s advice, because it was good advice.”

✠ Chapter 54

The King Should Cast off Frivolity to Prepare for His Journey

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Through the bride Christ admonishes kings¹ to unload their sins. With the example of the angel standing girded who appeared to Tobias on his way, he tells them to gird themselves with self-mastery of speech and of good works before they depart from this world, and not to wear shortened clothes but decent ones and to be self-controlled in their bearing.

1 The Lord spoke to the bride about the king mentioned above, saying: “It is written that an angel of God standing girded appeared to Tobias² who was ready to set out on a journey. This is a figure of the righteous person. 2 Those who want to obtain pardon for sins must unload through contrition and confession and gird themselves with self-mastery of speech and of good deeds. This is what the king should do. 3 He should rectify his actions before departing from this world, resolved to cast off all his former frivolity so that he no longer finds any delight in them. It is disgraceful to promise a beautiful master to imitate his beauty and then to follow the example of ugliness. 4 The servants of David,³ with disgracefully shaven beards and cut-off clothes, could not enter the earthly Jerusalem until their clothes were mended and their beards regrown; they had to remain in a place of hardship and scorn. I, God, stronger and more beautiful than David, expect all the more beauty in my men! 5 I do not want

1. “I did speak with Moses”; cf. Exodus 18:13–27.

1. “Admonishes kings”: Alfonso’s title is an example of the way in which a specific detail is broadened out to have a general application. The specific here is the king of Sweden who is expected to go to Rome to do penance, while the general is a call to all rulers to prepare for their life in the world to come.

2. “It is written . . . Tobias”; Tobias 5:4–5.

3. “The servants of David”; cf. 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 10:5.

them to wear shortened clothes like fashionable dandies or to be ladylike in their bearing like the effeminate. On the contrary, I allow them purposeful and honest standards in order for them to be purposefully and honestly clothed in my honor and to be ready to render an account to me whenever it should please me to call them from this world.”

✚ Chapter 55

Birgitta Must Not Hesitate to Make Known God's Word

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Christ comforts the bride and tells her not to keep quiet about the words of God revealed to her, even if this leads to her disapproval, nor to speak of them in order to be admired, because those to whom divine counsels are given, provided they follow them, will obtain the promised mercy. However, if they disregard them, they will meet with justice.

1 God's Son said to the bride: “You who see spiritual things should not keep quiet about them for fear of criticism. You should not speak of them to make people admire you. And you should not worry that my words which have been divinely revealed to you might be disregarded or not be immediately fulfilled. 2 Justice shall judge the one who disregards me, and mercy shall reward the one who obeys me. The reward will be double, first in the sense that the punishment for sin will be obliterated from the book of justice, and second in the sense that the remuneration will increase according to the penance done by the sinner. 3 Thus all my words are sent for the purpose that those to whom my words are sent should hear and believe them and put them into practice, and in that way my promises will then be fulfilled. 4 Thus when the people of Israel did not wish to follow my commands, they left the straight and narrow path and went off on a shameful and difficult path and became hateful to everyone. Many of them are in hell, but more are in heaven. 5 This is also the present situation. I have afflicted the people of this kingdom, but they have not become humbler or more obedient because of the affliction. Instead they have become bolder in their opposition to me.”

6 Then I heard a voice saying: “O Son of God, by your death who freed the human race from hell, rise up and defend yourself, for many men and women have shut you out of their hearts. 7 Enter the kingdom with wisdom like Solomon; pull the tall doors from their posts with strength like Samson;¹ lay siege to the clergy and lay traps for the knights' feet on their path; frighten the women away with weapons and pull down bridges in the face of the common people! 8 Let none of your enemies get away until they beg for mercy with true humility, these people who have hardened their hearts against you!”

1. “Tall doors from their posts . . . Sampson”; cf. Judges 16:3.

‡ Chapter 56

An Angel and a Devil Dispute Over the Advice They Have Both Given to a Living King; and the King's Subjects Make Complaints Against Him from Hell and Purgatory

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN, 1360S, ROME

God the Father explains and shows to the bride a sequence of scenes from the terrible trial in the court of divine judgment against a certain ungrateful king who was still alive and who had disobeyed divine counsels. The bride sees a lamb and a human face on the altar of divine majesty in heaven and sees this at the same time in the hand of the priest as he celebrates mass in the world. Servants and subjects of kings, suffering affliction in the world, in hell and in purgatory, complain to God severely about their rulers and kings, and all the saints pray for justice to be done to them. A noteworthy admonition.

1 God the Father said to the bride: “Hear what I say and say what I tell you to say, without thinking of honor or reproach. Be impartial and equanimous toward both the one who praises and the one who reproaches. Do not let reproaches move you to anger or praise fill you with pride. 2 He alone is worthy of honor who exists and has existed eternally in himself and who created angels and men in his love for the sole purpose of having others share in his glory. 3 I am certainly now the same in power and will as I was when my Son assumed a human nature. 4 I am and was in him, and he in me, and the Holy Spirit in both of us. Although it was hidden to the world that he was the Son of God, still it was known to some. 5 Understand, too, that it was God’s justice, which, like God himself, has no beginning, that the light was shown to the angels before they saw God. They did not fall because of a lack of knowledge of God’s law and justice, but because they refused to observe and keep it. 6 They most certainly understood that all those who love God behold him and remain with him forever, but those who hate God will be eternally punished and will never see him in his glory. 7 Yet their covetousness and ambition chose rather the hatred of God and the place of punishment instead of loving him and rejoicing forever.

8 The human race¹ is subject to a similar kind of justice as the angels. They should love God first and behold him afterward. That is why my Son in his love wanted to be born under the law of justice in order to become visible in his human nature, since he could not be seen in his divine nature. 9 Free will was thus given to humans the same as it was to angels: in order that they might desire heavenly things and scorn earthly ones. 10 Therefore I, God, come to many people in many different ways, although, of course, my divine nature cannot be seen. I have revealed to many persons in many countries on earth how the sin of a particular country might be rectified and how mercy might be

1. “The human race”: some of the arguments in this part of the vision are reminiscent of those explored in Book V.

obtained before I rendered just judgment on that particular country. 11 But people pay no attention to these things or care about them. God's justice also demands that all who still walk the earth must first firmly place their hope in that which they do not see and their trust in the Church of God and the holy Gospel. 12 Then they should love above all things him who has given them all things and gave himself up to death on their behalf so that they all may rejoice with him eternally. 13 Therefore I, God himself, speak to those to whom it pleases me to speak in order to make known how sin can be rectified, punishment decreased and the crowning reward increased."

14 After this I saw that all the heavens seemed to be a single house in which a judge sat on a throne. The house was full of servants who praised the judge, each with his own voice. Beneath the heavens a kingdom could be seen. 15 Suddenly a voice could be heard by everyone, saying: "Come, you two, to the court of justice, both you, angel, the king's guardian, and you, devil, his director." 16 As soon as the word was uttered, an angel and a devil stood before the judge. The angel seemed disturbed, but the devil seemed happy. Then the judge said: 17 "Angel, I appointed you as the guardian of the king, when he entered an agreement with me and made confession of all the sins that he had committed from his youth on. You were meant to be closer to him than the devil. How is it that you are now at a distance from him?" 18 The angel answered: "O judge, I burn with the fire of your love which also warmed the king for a time. 19 However, the king felt a strong distaste and dislike for the recommendations of your friends. It bored him to do what you told him. So he followed the attraction of his own pleasure, distancing himself from me and approaching ever closer to the enemy." 20 The devil answered: "O judge I am coldness itself while you are divine heat and fire. Anyone coming closer to you burns more ardently to carry out good works. Likewise as the king drew closer to me, he became colder toward your love and more ardent for my works."

21 The judge answered: "The king was told to love God above all things and his neighbor as himself. Why are you stealing a man whom I redeemed with my own blood and making him injure his neighbor not only with respect to temporal possessions but even with respect to his life?" 22 The devil replied: "Judge, it is now my turn to speak and the angel's to keep quiet. When the king turned away from you and your advice and turned to me, I advised him, of course, to love himself more than his neighbor and not to care about the good of souls, but just to make sure he gained the admiration of the world, and not to help the needy or deprived, but just to make sure his own friends had plenty." 23 Then the judge said to the devil: "Everyone who wants to escape from you should be able to, and you cannot keep anyone back by violence. Therefore I will send some of my friends to the king who will warn him of his danger." 24 The devil answered: "Justice demands that anyone who wishes to obey me must be ruled by me. Therefore I will also send my advisers to the king, and we will see which advisers he listens to the most." 25 Then the judge said: "Go, for my justice awards to the executioner his due and to the plaintiff what his suit deserves."

26 Some years later² I saw the judge again with his heavenly host. He seemed unusually upset and angry. He said to the angel and to the devil: "Tell me which of you has won!" 27 The angel answered: "When I came to the king with divine inspirations and with the spiritual words of your friend, the messages of the devil whistled immediately in his ears, saying: 28 'Surely you are not going to be narrow-minded about temporal possessions and your honor or about souls and bodies when it is a question of the happiness and honor of the friends whom you love more than yourself?' 29 The king assented to these suggestions but reacted to the inspired recommendations of your friends, saying: 'I am self-sufficient and wise enough to take advice without you. You should be ashamed. Go away from me now!' So the king turned his back on you, and he turned toward his enemy. He sent your friends away dishonored and insulted, held in derision by the friends of the world." 30 Then the devil exclaimed: "O judge, look, now it is my right to rule the king and to advise him through my friends!" The judge answered: "Go and torment the king, as far as you have permission to do so, since he has provoked my indignation against himself."

31 Two years later, the judge again appeared with the angel and the devil standing in front of him. The devil said: "Judge, give us a ruling! I myself will now declare what is right and just. You are truly love itself. So you should not remain in a heart in which envy and anger are rooted. 32 You are wisdom itself. So it is not right for you to be in the heart of a man who seeks to injure the life and property and reputation of his fellow men. Again, you are truth itself, and so it is unfitting for you to stay with someone who has sworn himself to treachery. 33 Therefore, because this king spat you out, just as a man spits something disgusting out, let me trouble and oppress him. Let me frighten him out of his wits, because he looks on my advice as wisdom and treats your advice with derision. 34 I would really like to repay him for doing my will. However I can do nothing to him without your permission." 35 At these words the judge seemed to be wonderfully transformed and took on the appearance of the shining sun. In the sun these three words could be seen: Might, Truth, and Justice.

36 Might said: "I created all things though none had existed beforehand to deserve it. Therefore I deserve to be honored and not despised by my creatures. I deserve to be praised by my friends for the sake of my charity. 37 I should be honored and feared by my enemies, for I tolerate them in patience without their deserving it, when in fact they should rightfully be sentenced. Therefore, o devil, it belongs to me to pass judgment on all according to my justice and not according to your malice."

38 Then Truth said: "In my divine nature I assumed a human nature from a virgin. Through that human nature I spoke and preached to the nations. I also sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles and spoke through them and their tongues, just as I speak every day by means of spiritual inspiration to whomever I want. 39 May my friends therefore understand that I am he who is Truth, I am he who sent to a king the words that he rejected. So listen, devil, for now I wish to speak in order to make it known whether this king listened to my counsel or to

2. "Some years later": note that this vision takes places over several years (see also paragraph 31).

your suggestions. 40 I will say what counsel was given to the king, repeating now in a few words what I earlier explained at length.

41 The king was advised to beware of every sin forbidden by the Holy Church, and to observe moderation in fasting in order to be able to hear and reply to the complaints of his subjects and to be ready to exercise justice for rich and poor in response to their requests. If he exaggerated the practice of abstinence, the good of the people of the kingdom and the government of the nation might be neglected. Because of a disorderly exaggeration, he might become remiss in giving everyone a hearing. 42 The king was also told how he should serve God and pray, and on what days and at what hours he should devote himself to the needs of the people of his kingdom. 43 Again, the king was told when to wear the royal crown for the glory of God. He was told to discuss his decisions with truth-loving men who were friends of God, and never knowingly to go against the truth or against the law, and not to impose strange new tax burdens on the common people of his kingdom, unless it was for the defense of the kingdom or for wars against the heathens. 44 The king was also told to keep the size of his household and the number of servants in accordance with the revenues and income of his kingdom, and that he should divide whatever was left over among his knights and his friends. 45 The king was also told to admonish the insolent and foolish prudently with words of charity and to correct them manfully, to love the prudent and experienced with godly charity, to defend the inhabitants of the kingdom and to bestow his gifts with discretion. 46 He was not to reduce or surrender ownership of anything belonging to the crown; to deliver just rulings for the needy and for foreigners; to show a love of the clergy; to unite his knights with himself through charity, and to foster peace among the people of his kingdom.”³

47 After these words, the devil said to the judge: “I advised the king to commit certain sins in secret which he would not dare to do openly. 48 I recommended to him to pray many long prayers and hymns without attention and without any devotion in his heart. By senselessly prolonging his prayers and using up his time this way, he would not be able to hear any complaints or pursue justice for anyone who had suffered injury. 49 I recommended to him to pass over all the other capable men in the kingdom, to promote one man in particular and place him in charge of them all, to hate his very own son, to weigh down the people of the kingdom with taxes, to kill people, and despoil churches. 50 Again I recommended to the king to ignore the exercise of justice and let people inflict injuries on each other. I told him to give up ownership of lands belonging to his crown and to donate them to a certain great prince in another kingdom, my sworn brother.”⁴ 51 This was meant to give rise to treachery and wars, to disturb good and righteous people, to plunge the wicked more deeply down into hell, to cause worse afflictions to those being cleansed in purgatory, to bring about the rapes of women and the ruin of ships at sea, to cause the sacraments of the Church to be scorned, and, finally, to prolong lecherous and licentious behavior and to see to it that my will might be more freely carried

3. Cf. ch. 2.6–27.

4. “My sworn brother”; cf. ch 9.4.

out. 52 Accordingly, judge, from these actions of the king and by many other sins of his it can be proven and known whether the king followed my counsel or yours.”

53 After this Justice said in reply: “Because the king hated Might and despised Truth, you may now give the king more from your supply of evil, and, in accord with justice I will lessen in him some of the graces given him.” 54 The devil said: “Judge, I will add to and multiply my gifts for the king. First I will make him more neglectful so that he pays no attention in his heart to the works of God and does not think about the actions and examples of your friends.” 55 Justice replied: “And I will weaken in him the inspirations of my Holy Spirit and take from him recollections and consolations which he used to consider good.” 56 The devil said: “I will induce in him recklessness in considering and committing mortal and venial sins shamelessly and impudently.” Justice replied: “I will weaken his reasoning and discretion so that he fails to discern and examine the wages and condemnation of mortal and venial sins.” 57 The devil said: “I will induce fear in him so he does not dare to mention or exercise justice with regard to the enemies of God.” Justice replied: “I will weaken his prudence and practical wisdom to make him seem more like a fool and joker than a wise man in his speech and actions.” 58 Then the devil said: “I will cause him such anxiety and distress of heart that he will not have the success he desires.” Justice replied: “I will reduce the spiritual consolations he once had in his prayers and actions.”

59 The devil said in turn: “I will give him a shrewdness for coming up with clever stratagems to outwit and deceive those persons whom he seeks to ruin.” Justice answered: “I will weaken his understanding to such an extent that he does not consider his own honor and benefit.” 60 The devil said: “I will give him such mental elation that he will even rejoice over his own shame and loss and spiritual danger so long as he gains the temporal advantages he desires.” 61 Justice answered: “I will weaken in him the forethought and reflection that characterize wise men in their speech and actions.” Then the devil said: “I will give him a woman’s audacity and indecent fear and the kind of bearing that makes him look more like a good-for-nothing than a crowned king.” 62 Justice replied: “A man who separates himself from God deserves such a sentence. He ought to be despised by his friends and hated by the common people and overthrown by the enemies of God, because he has abused both the spiritual and corporal gifts of divine charity.” 63 Might spoke again: “What has been revealed here has not been revealed because of the king’s merits or faults. His soul has not yet been judged, but it will be judged when he is called at the final moment.”

64 After these words I saw that the three—Might, Truth, and Justice—took on the likeness of the judge who was speaking before. Then I heard a voice like that of a herald saying: 65 “Be silent, all you heavens and planets. Listen, all you devils who live in shadows. Hear, all you others who are in darkness. The supreme Emperor proposes to hear judgment on the rulers of the nations.” 66 Straightaway I saw things that were not bodily but spiritual, and my spiritual eyes were opened to hear and to see. I saw Abraham come with all the holy people among his descendants, and all the patriarchs and prophets

came. 67 I saw the four evangelists in the shape of four animals, just as they are depicted in mural paintings in the world, but they were seen to be alive and not lifeless. Then I saw the twelve apostles seated on twelve seats awaiting the coming power. 68 Adam and Eve came with the martyrs and confessors and all the other saints who descend from them. Christ was not yet visible in his human nature, nor the body of his blessed Mother, but everyone was waiting for them to come. 69 The earth with its waters seemed to be lifted up to the heavens, and all those on earth humbled themselves and bowed reverently to the power.

70 After this I saw an altar on the throne of majesty, and I saw a chalice with wine and water and bread in the form of a host on the altar. Then I saw a priest dressed in priestly vestments begin to say mass in a church in the world. 71 When he had performed all the preceding parts of the mass, he reached the words of the consecration of the bread. Then I beheld what seemed to be the sun, moon and stars with all the planets and all the heavens in their orbits and rotations resounding with melodious song in alternating voices. One could hear every song and melody. 72 Countless kinds of musicians could be seen, and it is impossible to grasp with one's senses and describe their most sweet sound. Those who were in the light looked at the priest and inclined themselves reverently and worshipfully to the power, but those who were in darkness trembled and feared. 73 When the divine words had been uttered by the priest over the bread, it seemed to me that the selfsame bread appeared in three likenesses on the throne of majesty while remaining in the hands of the priest. 74 The bread became a living lamb, and a human face could be seen on the lamb, and a flame appeared to burn within and around the lamb and the face. When I fixed my eyes intently to look at the face, I saw the lamb in it. 75 But when I looked at the lamb, I saw the face in it. A virgin with a crown sat beside the lamb, and all the angels ministered to them. There was such a multitude of them, they were like the rays of the sun. A wonderfully brilliant light shone from the lamb. 76 There were so many holy souls that my eyes could not take in the length and breadth and height and depth of their multitude. I saw, too, some vacancies which must be filled for the glory of God.

77 Then I heard from the earth the voice of endless thousands crying out: "Lord God and righteous Judge, give judgment on our kings and rulers! Look upon our bloodshed and sorrow and the tears of our wives and children! 78 Consider our hunger and shame, our wounds and captivity, the burning of our homes, the rape and shame of our young women and wives! 79 Look upon the wrongs inflicted on churches and all the priesthood, and see the false promises, the treachery, the extortions of rulers and kings! They extort with bitter violence and do not care how many thousands die, while they feed their pride."

80 Then a clamor as though of endless thousands arose from hell, saying: "Judge, we know that you are the creator of all things. Therefore render judgment on the masters whom we served on earth, because they have plunged us more deeply into hell. 81 We did wish you evil, but justice compels us to make our complaint and speak the truth. These masters of ours on earth loved us without charity. They cared no more for our souls than for dogs. 82 It was indifferent to our masters whether we loved you, God, the creator of the universe,

or not, though they wanted us to love and serve them. They do not deserve heaven, because they do not care about you. Unless your grace comes to help them, they deserve hell, because they betrayed us. 83 We are prepared to suffer even worse torment, if only their punishment may never end.”

84 Then those who were in purgatory, speaking through images, exclaimed: “O, judge, we were sentenced to purgatory because of the contrition and the good intention we had at the end of life. 85 This is why we are making our complaint about our rulers who are still alive on earth. They should have governed and exhorted us by their words and warnings and instructed us with salutary advice and their own example. 86 Instead they encouraged us and urged us on to wrongdoing and sin. Because of them our punishment is now heavier and lasts longer, and our shame and distress are greater.”

87 Then Abraham together with all the patriarchs said: “O, Lord, our wish of wishes was for your Son to be born from among our descendants. He is now scorned by the rulers of nations. 88 Accordingly we seek your judgment on them, because they neither pay heed to your mercy nor fear your judgment.” The prophets then said: 89 “We foretold the coming of your Son. We said that, in order to free his people, he had to be born of a virgin and suffer betrayal, to be captured and scourged, to be crowned with thorns and, in the end, to die on the cross so as to open up heaven and take away sin. 90 The things we claimed have been fulfilled, and so we seek your judgment on the rulers of the earth who scorn your Son who died for love of them.”

91 The evangelists then said: “We are witnesses that your Son fulfilled in himself everything that had been foretold of him.” The apostles said: 92 “We are judges. It is our right to judge according to the truth. Accordingly we sentence to damnation those who scorn the body of God and his commandments.” 93 But then the Virgin who sat beside the lamb said: “Dearest Lord, have mercy on them!” The judge said to her: “It is not right to deny you anything. Those who cease from their sin and perform a fitting penance will receive mercy and avert their sentence.”

94 After this I saw the face that could be seen in the lamb saying to the king: “I have been very gracious to you. I revealed to you my will concerning how you should conduct yourself in governing as well as how you should govern yourself uprightly and prudently. 95 Like a mother I coaxed you with sweet words of charity. Like a thoughtful father I threatened you with warnings. But you listened to the devil and thrust me away from you, like a mother thrusts away a stillborn fetus which she refuses to touch or breast-feed. 96 Hence all the good things promised to you will be taken away from you and given to someone else who will come after you.”

97 Then the Virgin who sat beside the lamb⁵ said to me: “I want to make known to you in what way the understanding of spiritual visions has been given to you. God’s holy ones have received the Holy Spirit in various ways. 98 Some of them, such as the prophets, foresaw when the things revealed to

5. “The Virgin who sat beside the lamb”: paragraphs 97–102 are part of the so-called “Autograph vision” (cf. *Extravagantes*, ch. 80). See p. 325.

them would happen. Others understood in their spirit how to respond to the questions of people who came to them for answers. 99 Others knew whether persons far away were alive or dead. Some foresaw how a given battle would end before the soldiers entered into it. 100 You, however, are only allowed to hear and see spiritual things and to write what you see and to tell it to those persons to whom you are commanded to speak. 101 Moreover, you are not allowed to know whether the people to whom you are commanded to write are alive or dead, or whether they will obey or not the counsels you have written down from the spiritual vision divinely given to you for their sake. 102 Even if this king⁶ scorns my words, another will surely come who will welcome them reverently and worshipfully and will take advantage of them for his salvation.”

✚ Chapter 57

Affliction Has Come to the Kingdom Because of Three Sins

DATE: UNDATED

God's Mother tells the bride that the affliction of God has come to the kingdom because of three sins. Accordingly God can be appeased by means of three good things: first by the people adopting true humility and decency in their dress; second by almsgiving; third by the processions and masses mentioned here.

1 God's Mother said to the bride: “Affliction has come to this kingdom because of the three sins of pride, intemperance and greed. Accordingly, God can be appeased by three things and the time of affliction can be shortened.

2 The first thing is for everyone to adopt true humility in their clothing. They should be moderate in their dress without having overly long garments like women or overly tight garments like dandies and without wasteful frills and cuts that are merely vain and useless; such clothes displease God. 3 They should carry their bodies in a respectable way without trying to be any more conspicuous than God has created them, neither smaller or thinner by means of belts or knots or similar artifices; all their clothing should serve a purpose and be for the honor of God. 4 Women should do away with ostentatious fashions which they have adopted out of pride and vanity. For the kind of women who despise the honest old fashions of their country, the devil has prescribed modern abuses and indecent ornaments for their heads and feet and other parts of their body for the purpose of arousing desire and of provoking God.

5 The second thing is to give alms with a cheerful mind. The third is for each parish priest to sing the entire Mass of the Holy Trinity once a month for a year. 6 All the people should attend it, after having confessed their sins and

6. “This king”: the king is referred to directly here, while previously there have been more generic references. The revelation as a whole has the sense of being a carefully worded preparation for the political message to follow. It is easy to see why it should have been studiously omitted from the main corpus as it is effectively an incitement to four Swedish noblemen to commit an act of treason against the king by deposing him.

expressed their contrition. On that day they should fast with intensive prayer and petition for the forgiveness of sins and the mitigation of God's anger. 7 Furthermore the bishops should lead or have their representatives lead solemn processions every month in their cathedral churches, celebrate the Mass of the Holy Trinity, and gather poor people and humbly wash their feet."

✠ Chapter 58*

Christ in Majesty Bids All Ranks of People to Listen to His Message

DATE: 1373, NAPLES

Christ, the heavenly emperor, sits on the judgment seat and strongly accuses the kings and rulers of the earth and their governments of ingratitude. He threatens them with the terrible sentence of his wrath, but admonishes them to convert so that he may welcome them with a father's mercy.

* This revelation duplicates Book VII 30, where it concludes the book with an uplifting call to action, as here.

The Rule of the Savior

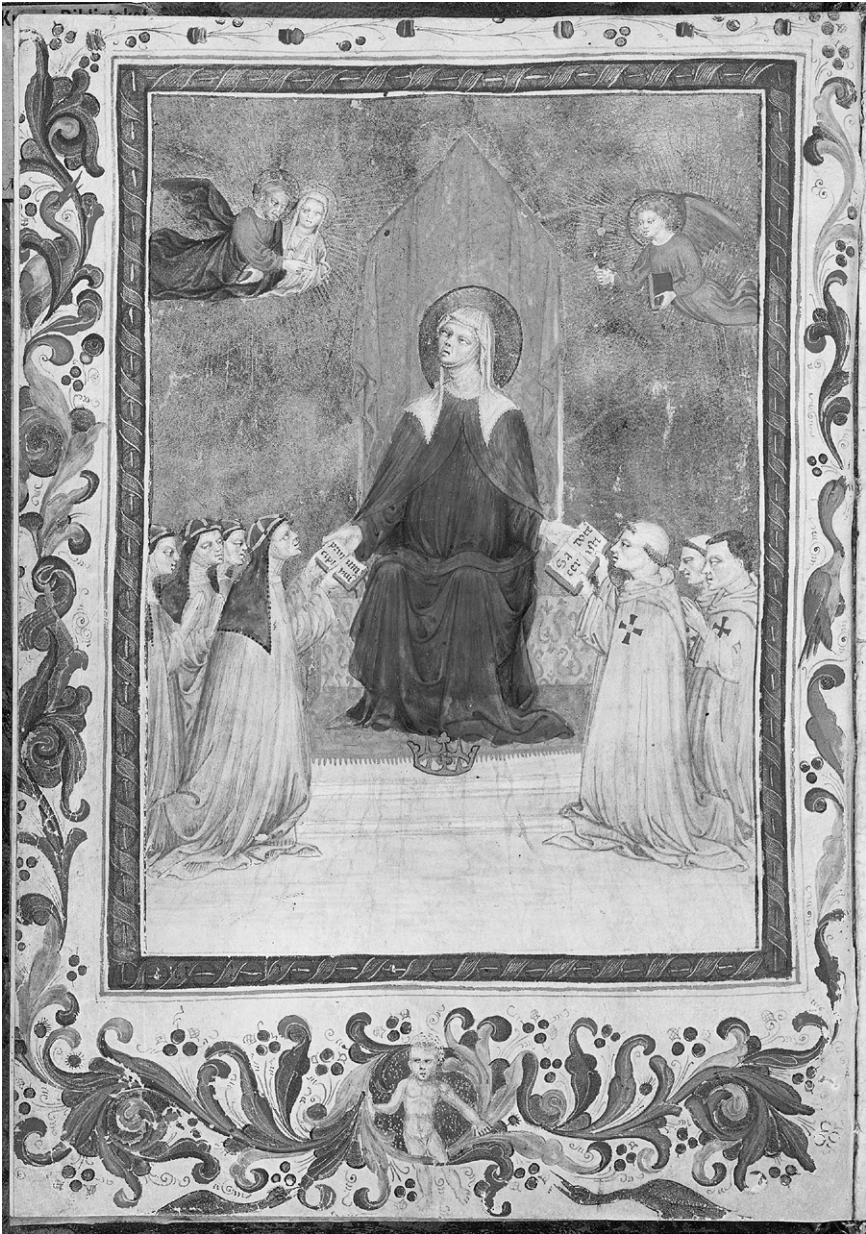


FIGURE 4. Birgitta handing over the Rule to the Birgittine nuns and brethren, in a manuscript written in Siena or Florence around 1400–25 (MS A75 fol. IV. Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm).

Introduction

There are several distinct versions of the Birgittine Rule. Early manuscripts distinguish between the version in which Christ revealed the rule to St. Birgitta in the first person (“regula in prima persona”), and the version in which Christ does not speak, but is referred to in the third person (“regula in tercia persona”). Modern scholars have coined the terms “early version” to denote the former, which is Birgitta’s own text; “authorized version” to denote the latter, which is the text included in the papal bull of 1378; and “adapted version” to denote a mixture of the Birgitta’s own text and the bull.¹

Birgitta says that she received the revelation of the rule in a very short time and that it was rapidly written down a few days later by a “friend of God”; that is, Prior Petrus of Alvastra. It is difficult to give a precise date to this event. While many scholars suggest that it preceded the donation by King Magnus and Queen Blanka of the royal estate in Vadstena for use as a monastery, dated 1 May 1346, all that can be said with certainty is that it occurred before Birgitta left Sweden for Rome.² The core of the rule comprises chapters 1 through 27. At some later date, the prologue (perhaps also the short first chapter of the rule itself) and chapters 28 through 30 were added. (This version is referred to as Π in Eklund’s edition.)

Additional prescriptions, known as the *Additiones seu constitutiones ad regulam Sancti Salvatoris* and written by Prior Petrus, came to be incorporated into later versions and translations of the rule. Petrus was charged with working out the practical implications of Birgitta’s plans. Some of these additions are found in the *Extravagantes*, chs. 1 through 46. Together, these additional materials are elucidations for the prescriptions of the rule, and some complement the rule where it lacked in detail. The process of constant revision suggested by all these

versions reflects the uncertainties about the status of the new order in the first few decades of its existence, as well as the need to satisfy expectations from different quarters within the church.³

The new order required papal authorization, which may have been one of the reasons for the mission to Avignon in the 1340s by a group of Birgittine supporters. It may also have been one of the reasons why Birgitta herself traveled to Rome in 1349, never to return home to Sweden. But it was not until Urban V returned from Avignon in 1367 that she began to make headway for her plans. She appears to have had at least one meeting with Urban, and influenced him through intermediaries such as the Emperor Charles (as suggested in *Extravagantes* ch. 8 and 42), and Nicolaus Orsini, Count of Nola, who spent three months at Montefiascone during the summer of 1370 in the company of Birgitta and Alfonso of Jaén.⁴ Ever since the Council of Lyon 1274 there had been a prohibition on the founding of new orders, and therefore the pope could not confirm an independent monastic rule. The Count of Nola was successful in persuading him to at least have the rule examined, and at last a bull dated 5 August 1370 was issued in which a heavily revised and abbreviated version of the Rule of the Savior was included in the form of constitutions added to the Rule of St. Augustine. (This version is referred to in Eklund's edition as Θ). The bull sanctioned two separate abbeys for nuns and brethren at Vadstena, in the partly dilapidated former royal palace. The abbess was to be an experienced nun taken from another order, well instructed in the Augustinian rule and the constitutions derived from Birgitta's text.

This was a significant deviation from Birgitta's original conception of the order, although she was unable to press for further changes before her death in 1373. The case was then taken over by her daughter Katherina, and a new bull was issued by Pope Urban VI on 3 December 1378. The rule contained in this bull, while still classed as constitutions subordinate to the Rule of St. Augustine, and not an independent rule, was very close to Birgitta's original text. This, then, is the "the approved version," or the "regula in tercia persona," and it is embedded in a letter from Cardinal Elziarius of Sabrano which recommends approval, which in turn is embedded in the bull of approval by Urban VI. (This version is referred to as Σ in Eklund's edition.) As time went on, the Π and Σ versions of the rule, being quite similar, were drawn together into further hybrid versions. In the present translation we have chosen to render the Π version because it is closest to Birgitta's original.

The Rule and the Revelations

Even if the rule is popularly presented as a single revelation received and hastily written down in the 1340s, it is more likely to be the product of a whole lifetime's ambition and careful consideration by Birgitta and her circle. In the early 1340s, she went with her husband Ulf Gudmarsson to the shrine of St. James of Compostela, and on their way back home Ulf fell gravely ill in Arras, in northern France. During the pilgrimage they may have visited the church of Fontevrault, where there was a double order, and certainly they would have

come into contact with the continental monastic life throughout the pilgrim route they followed. Early scholars speculated that they both vowed to enter into holy orders on their return to Sweden, perhaps as Franciscan tertiaries, and that they may have agreed to a vow of chastity.⁵ Whatever the facts behind this supposed ambition it was not realized, because Ulf died soon after their return to Sweden. In the early the days of her widowhood Birgitta received her calling to the spiritual life, causing her to state that when she buried Ulf's ring she buried her earthly love. She then settled near to the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra. Within just a few years, she had received and written down the version of the rule written in the first person.

The Birgittine Rule was new in both concept and formulation. Many of the *Revelationes* throughout the whole corpus can be seen as unconscious commentaries in the development of Birgitta's ideas for the new order. The whole of Book V, for example, can be taken as a manifestation of suggested forms of renewal and innovation within contemporary monasticism.⁶ Many individual revelations allude to the spiritual decline of the individual orders, from the Benedictines to the mendicants, and there is a constant call for reform and renewal. Many revelations illustrate her own semimonastic lifestyle in her widowhood, both at Alvastra and in Rome, as she practiced what she was to develop for her followers among the Birgittine nuns. The additional materials in the *Extravagantes* also show the extent to which she thought out the finer details of the new rule, her eye for domestic detail, and an awareness of the need to contain the potential excesses and deprivations of cloistered females. They also reflect a pragmatism in the daily routines (for example, the elderly and infirm were allowed to relax the fasting regulations in Ex. ch. 9, but equally, precautions were taken to ensure that there was no excess in fasting in Ex. ch. 24). They also frequently refer to Birgitta's hesitations and uncertainties as well as those of her close circle. The foundation is the natural outcome of a whole lifetime of vision and meditative reflection, and indeed it can be said that the distinctiveness of her order is that Birgitta's own character shines through so clearly and gives the foundation its firm visionary purpose. Despite this, she was one of very few monastic founders who did not herself become a member of her own order—even if she may have had this in mind—and yet her order is an embodiment of the spirit of the age. The 1340s was the decade in which the great plague ravaged the whole of Europe and changed the monastic landscape for good, bringing with it a break with the recorded memory of the past. It probably also brought an increased secularity, a flowering of affective religion, and an emphasis on the physicality of devotion. The architecture of the buildings, as described in the *Revelationes Extravagantes*, with the vast monastic church in the center, framed the interior devotional life within the abbey and there was always an open grave for the nuns to pass by as a *memento mori*.

Supporting Documents

The *Additiones* of Prior Petrus comprise explanatory interpretations of the rule, regulations taken from the *Revelationes Extravagantes*, and complementary

additions to the rule.⁷ They could be implemented as detailed guidance for specific circumstances that arose in any Birgittine house. In their original form they comprise fifty-four chapters, which are briefly summarized here.⁸ They start by expounding on the precepts of chastity and humility, which are the essence of the rule as a whole. There are prescriptions about genuflection, bowing in the church, and about the abbey's bells. There is guidance about the brethren's and sisters' worship that expounds on ch. 23 of the rule and *Extravagantes* ch. 4 and 18. Information about the election of the abbess, which is broadly in line with the rule of St. Benedict, builds on ch. 14 of the rule and *Extravagantes* ch. 22, especially with respect to a nomination if there is not unanimous agreement. The role of the abbess and confessor general develop ch. 19 of the rule and *Extravagantes* ch. 12, stating that the abbess and senior nuns are the major decision-makers, but often in conjunction with the confessor general and brethren. The conditions for resignations or dismissals are outlined in the case of old age, sickness, negligence, squandering of the abbey's goods, or lapses into lust or worldliness. All changes relating to discipline have to take place with the knowledge of the local bishop, the "pater" and "visitor" of the house. There are rules about economic administration and the sale or dispersal of the abbey's property in relation to ch. 20 of the rule. The abbess has to give an account to the confessor general each month, and the distribution of alms prescribed in the Rule is to take place on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, or more frequently if needed, by reliable *fratres ab extra*, according to *Extravagantes* ch. 33. There are stipulations about the procedures to be followed after the death of a brother or sister, and some prescriptions about the abbess's deputy, the prioress, are given and also for the confessor general and his office.

The rules about silence in ch. 6 of the rule are amplified, outlining the exceptions for the abbess and confessor general and other officials whose tasks made silence impossible to uphold. Two sisters and two brethren are appointed as *custodes* of the silence. There follows information about the sisters' work, matching *Extravagantes* 35, whereby they were advised to employ four kitchen women (*focaciae*) to help with heavy duties, with similar prescriptions for the men's enclosure. There is a section developing the rule ch. 24 and *Extravagantes* ch. 13 on the abbey's catering needs and daily meals. There are equivalent regulations about dress, bedding and food for the sick, and information about blood-letting and bathing in conjunction with *Extravagantes* ch. 15, and the special buildings for sisters with chronic illness, leprosy, or mental illness. In keeping with *Extravagantes* ch. 28, there should be no unnecessary adornment in the buildings, and there is a ban on keeping dogs, deer, or unusual quadrupeds or birds, which could give occasion for sin. In the dormitory the nuns are forbidden to have locks on their doors, but they may have a small locked casket for personal items. Guidelines for meditation in the abbey and the strictest form of monastic asceticism, scourging the body, are also given.

There is clarification of *Extravagantes* ch. 11 and the formulation in the bull of 3 December 1378 concerning the strict rule of enclosure, and the circumstances under which craftsmen and physicians could gain entry to the nunnery. The final section concerns the bishop's visitations every third year in

the presence of two chapter members, and the holding of a chapter at the abbey and punishments meted out, including a dark imprisonment for the most serious offenses. Finally, there is detail about the procedure for carrying out a burial.

Other supporting documents to the rule include the *Declarationes Dominorum*, questions posed by a number of leading church authorities to Alfonso and the answers he gives; and a number of papal bulls issued in the early years of the abbey's existence, the most important of which was the *Mare Magnum*, given by Pope John XXIII in 1413.⁹ There was also a customary that outlined more details on daily life, known as *Liber usuum fratrum monasterii Vadstenensis*, and an equivalent text written in Swedish for the nuns, known as the *Lucidarium*.¹⁰ The *Liber usuum*, containing a prologue and 56 chapters, was composed after a decision of the general chapter at Vadstena in 1429. It deals with questions on humility; how to avoid property ownership; silence and fasting; visitations of bishops; duties of the lay brethren, deacons, priests, and the confessor general; rituals for consecration, administration of the sacraments, and the burial of the dead; as well as customs regarding meals and reading at mealtimes. The *Lucidarium* was first written in Swedish and then translated into Latin at the instigation of one of the sisters at Vadstena. There are five known manuscripts, in Medieval Swedish, German, and Dutch, but only a small fragment in Latin that might have its provenance in the Finnish Birgittine house of Naantali (Nådendal).¹¹ The divergencies between these traditions help to provide a narrative of the evolution of the order across Europe in the fifteenth century. An example is the ongoing discussion at the general chapters about how much work the nuns were obliged to do in the kitchens, whether engaging in manual work themselves or supervising the servants who did the work. The fact that this section came to be excluded in the Swedish text but was included in the German tradition may suggest a change in practice in Sweden that was not adopted in Germany.¹² At a general chapter at Gnadenberg in 1487, the brethren's customary was approved for the entire Birgittine order, together with that of the sisters. However, it was not necessarily adopted; the English house in Syon, for example, declined to follow it.

The Rule and Other Monastic Orders

The Birgittine order falls between the contemplative ideal of the traditional monastic orders and the apostolic zeal of the mendicant orders.¹³ In wording and phrasing there are echoes of the Benedictine Rule, which was the basis of the Cistercian Order. There are Cistercian borrowings (for example, in the tradition that the bishop shall induct the nun at her profession, and in some of the indulgence privileges). There is influence in practical detail from Dominican tradition, which followed the rule of St. Augustine (for example, in the prescriptions on clothing and the use of animal furs). There are also Franciscan tendencies (for example, in the emphasis on the virtues of humility, chastity, and poverty). In a number of ways, too, the Birgittine Rule introduces innovative

elements that while not necessarily unparalleled in existing monasticism, are given a new emphasis. The Virgin Mary was the patroness of the Cistercians, for instance, whereas the Birgittines extended her role even further, placing the Virgin at the very heart of their entire monastic existence, from the liturgy (which was underpinned by the Marian *Sermo angelicus*) to the architecture (as it suggested by having a main altar dedicated to the Virgin at the east end of the church for the nuns).

A Double Order

Strictly, the Birgittine Rule was not a double order, for in reality there were two convents that were intended to operate side by side within the abbey walls.¹⁴ Nor were the male and female inmates on an equal standing, for each had their own prescriptions for the monastic life, and the men were outnumbered by the women, thus making it an establishment for nuns assisted by priest brethren. There were thirteen ordained brethren, eight lay brothers, and four ordained deacons—in all twenty-five men, under the leadership of a confessor general. They were referred to in contemporary documents as “fratres” [brethren, friars] and they provided spiritual support to the larger community of sixty nuns. The entire abbey was under the direction of the abbess, who presided over both houses, including a number of sisters “ab extra.”

Whereas the life of the nuns was cloistered and contemplative, the brethren fulfilled a pastoral role in preaching to the pilgrims and visitors to the monastic church, hearing confessions as well as giving instruction and disseminating learned works in the vernacular. They were allowed to leave the monastery only in their ministry, and for this reason their pastoral and homiletic role lacked the practical, outward-looking, and itinerant character of the mendicant preachers.

The unusual organization of the order made it unwieldy in its administration, and its development was hampered by constitutional weaknesses. A monastic community in which both sexes lived separately but within the same enclosure was cumbersome to manage and expensive to maintain. The segregation of men and women had to be strictly guaranteed in the design of the buildings, and this made local dioceses reluctant to support new establishments. Birgittine organization was not heavily centralized, unlike the independent Cistercians or the mendicants who were relieved of ties with diocesan jurisdiction and had a hierarchical structure at the head of which was a general chapter (and, in the case of the mendicants, a minister general). The Birgittines received visitations from the local bishop and the brethren’s services lay under episcopal authority and under the special protection of the king. Although attempts were made to establish a constitution, which might have given the order greater independence, there was insufficient support from the abbesses and local bishops, and the networks of newly founded Birgittine communities throughout Europe therefore did not have regular, formalized contact with each other. Clearly there was unease in Rome about the notion of a double monastery on one site,

in case it gave rise to scandalous gossip, and a decree was read out to the sisters and brethren on 25 October 1384 to the effect that the brethren were prohibited from entering the nunnery except in the two cases given in the rule—to administer the sacraments to a sick nun and to bury a deceased nun. The sisters risked excommunication and were reminded of eternal punishment if they feigned illness under the pretext of meeting one of the brethren. The brethren in turn were threatened with excommunication if they harassed the sisters during confession. Yet the relationship of the male community to the female one was poorly defined in the constitutions, and led to tensions in several monasteries. In Munkaliv, in Norway, on 1 January 1496, for instance, the *lagman* Erik Andersson wrote to Vadstena abbey saying: “The abbess who should rule most, she now rules least.”¹⁵

The Mother-House at Vadstena

King Magnus Eriksson is seen as the abbey’s founder.¹⁶ He and Queen Blanche had developed their own plans to create an abbey and royal burial place, perhaps a mausoleum with a chantry tradition along the lines of St. Denis in Paris or Westminster in London. In May 1346 they bequeathed the royal estate at Vadstena to be converted into an abbey. But their plans came to nothing when the king was driven into exile.

The innovative aspects of the new order are illustrated in the physical design and layout of the abbey church. The imposing church within the monastic complex on the shore overlooking the vast lake Vättern was built on the site of an earlier chapel and consecrated in 1430. It was a limestone church with three whitewashed aisles of equal height, brick arcading, and painted star-vaults. The latter may have been the only adorned parts of the church that was otherwise simply and sparsely decorated, in the style of the Cistercians. The most important side on the east belonged to the sisters, who had an elevated and concealed gallery facing an elevated Mary altar at the east end of the church to which the brethren had access via an ambulatory to celebrate mass. The chancel for the brethren, located in the west, had a high altar dedicated to St. Peter, with twelve altars dedicated to the apostles spreading out from it, six on either side, on the steps leading down to the central nave. The nave, which was for use by the laity, was separated from the chancel and ambulatory of the brethren by means of iron railings. The church had shrines for Birgitta’s relics and those of her beatified daughter Katherina (who was enshrined in 1489 and celebrated as a local saint in the diocese and all Birgittine convents), and also the relic of an arm of the Danish king St. Knut. Each of the altars all around the church (that is, the central part that was open to the laity) had an independent priest attached, and the number of altars may have risen to sixty by the end of the middle ages. Masses for the dead and other offices would have been celebrated at these private altars, all against a competing background of the singing in the brethren’s chancel or sisters’ gallery, and the voices of prayer and supplication from all other parts of the community and pilgrim visitors.

The abbey church had an unusual structure and must have seemed exceptional to observers at the time. Although it was built for the monastic community, it also had to cater for processions and crowds of laypeople, to whom the brethren were obliged to preach. The laity, who by Birgitta were regarded as equally important for the foundation as members of both convents, entered through doors in the east wall where they had their own main altar dedicated to St. Birgitta.

Roughly one hundred medieval graves survive within the church, some of them decorated with an elevated slab, which must have been contrary to Birgitta's original intention. Several of Birgitta's children and grandchildren are buried in the church. The most distinguished of the secular graves is that of Queen Philippa, daughter of Henry IV and sister of Henry V of England. An important benefactor to the abbey, Philippa illustrates the great interest the aristocracy had in being buried in the monastic church.¹⁷

After Birgitta's death Vadstena became a focus of growth when her relics were translated there in 1374, and a community began establishing itself well before the order was officially recognized. Katherina and Petrus of Skänninge became the first de facto abbess and confessor general respectively, although Katherina did not live to see the formal consecration of the abbey, which took place on 23–24 October 1384, three and a half years after her death on 24 March 1381. The events of the inauguration are recorded in the *Diarium Vadstenense*:

On Bishop St. Severinus's day, which that year fell on a Sunday, the sisters' convent was inaugurated, in keeping with St. Birgitta's constitutions, in Vadstena, in the presence of these honorable men, Archbishop Henrik of Uppsala, Bishop Tord of Strängnäs, and Bishop Nikolaus of Linköping. The sisters who were then inducted and consecrated were forty-six in number. On the following day, i.e. on Monday, the brethren were inducted into their enclosures, nine priests and seven lay brothers. On the following Wednesday, two priests who had been sent out by the convent for certain reasons, were inducted in the presence of the afore-mentioned clerics and men.¹⁸

As Vadstena grew in importance, funds began to accumulate.¹⁹ The first recorded gift was the donation for entry by novices in 1375. A significant number of privileges were also conferred on the abbey, which protected its property, granted exemptions from taxes, and helped to establish its economic independence. In 1378 permission to grant indulgences was given, leading to a vast increase in wealth. During the 1380s bequests and donations of land continued and no doubt Birgitta's canonization in 1391 helped seal the embryonic order, which was to become one of the foremost monastic institutions in Scandinavia by the end of the middle ages and one of the foremost landowners.

The large farm estate built up by the abbey became a powerful self-sustaining enterprise that required financial, practical, and organizational skills. Other buildings in the monastic enclosure included the cellar, cook house, bathing hut, brewery, drying house, cattle shed, dairy, smithy, stable, and brick kiln.

Storerooms and lodgings can also be identified. Paid laborers, farmhands, and itinerant agents were employed to run the farm estate, and the overall responsibility lay in the hands of the abbess, who oversaw the smallest detail in the running of the estate, its business dealings, and its relations with the outside world. She had a small office with overnight facilities near the “gate to the world” where she could deal with the administrative and financial work. Inevitably at times, the minor role accorded to the brethren in the abbey’s economic affairs (Birgitta had wanted them to dedicate themselves to preaching and intellectual work) led to discord in some houses, and to resentment about the exclusive decision-making powers given to the abbess. Frequently in Birgittine houses there were power struggles between the brethren and abbess over financial control. The brethren, many of whom had held high positions in society, felt superior to the sisters, who were widows or young women of lesser education. This inevitably led to disunity and conflict.

In time, Vadstena became an important center of pilgrimage and men and women flocked there in their thousands, leaving votive offerings of precious metal and wax, as well as other costly objects to add to the abbey’s wealth. Pilgrims came in connection with particular feasts, such as St. Peter ad Vincula (St. Peter in Chains, 1 August, when a plenary indulgence could be obtained) and Birgitta’s canonization day (7 October), for major feasts, and for designated years of jubilee or indulgence. Or they came simply to visit the miracle-working relics, as penitents to gain remission for a crime or sin committed, or to record and authenticate the experience of a miracle.

Culture at Vadstena

The mother-house at Vadstena became infused with Birgitta’s spirit after her death and was a catalyst for increased communications between Sweden and the continent. It had a substantial library to match other continental monastic libraries, and is estimated to have had about 1,500 books by the beginning of the sixteenth century. The scriptorium developed its own Swedish writing style, grammar, spelling system, handwriting habits, and bindery. The surviving collection mainly consists of smaller paper volumes (since the larger parchment volumes were broken up and used as covers of account books in the royal chancery after the Reformation). The collection, now mostly in Uppsala University Library (the Latin manuscripts) and the Royal Library in Stockholm (the Swedish manuscripts), provides an early map of Swedish intellectual history.²⁰ A large part consists of sermons, written in Latin but delivered in Swedish by the brethren to the sisters and pilgrims. Of the 12,000 sermons in the surviving manuscripts, about 5,000 are written by the brethren themselves, while the remainder are copies of foreign model sermons.²¹ The vernacular language that emerged in the translations produced at the abbey marks the beginnings of a continuous literary tradition in Sweden that can only be fragmentarily glimpsed before this time.²² It formed the basis of the sixteenth-century Bible translations, and the language of these translations in turn laid the foundations of the

modern Swedish language. The nuns were active in copying didactic literature in the vernacular, and were permitted to have prayer books and other devotional reading in their cells. Their level of literacy, in reading as well as writing, appears to have been very high.²³ The brethren's library was enriched by books sent or acquired from the centers of learning in Europe, such as Paris, Prague, and Rostock. In addition, a Swedish school of sculpture, based mainly on northern German styles, emerged at the abbey; the nuns also engaged in embroidery, some of which still survives today.²⁴ Vadstena's first printing press, introduced in 1495, was destroyed by fire in the same year, and the abbey had then to rely on printers in Lübeck, which became a focal point for the transmission of Birgittine texts in northern Europe.

The Order Outside Sweden

Outside Sweden the order was quick to become established. A number of early privileges were confirmed in 1413 by Pope John XXIII's bull, known as the *Mare Magnum*, which became the written constitution for the order and expressed a desire to coordinate all the Birgittine abbeys that were being founded abroad. The Birgittine following in Italy was particularly strong, and the first house was Santa Maria in Paradiso, outside Florence, founded in 1394, which became a center for the active organization of the order and the scholarly study of Birgitta's works. Another of the earliest foundations was Gdansk (Danzig) in 1396, through which the Swedish party had passed with the saint's relics in 1373, on their way back from Rome to Vadstena. It was here that the mystic Dorothea of Montau received a vision shortly before she died in 1394, in which St. Birgitta called her to join her in heaven; two years later a Birgittine foundation in this prosperous town was authorized by Pope Boniface IX, which took the name Fons Mariae (Marienbrunn).

As the Birgittine cult developed in Scandinavia, too, there were early foundations, though not all equally as successful. In Norway, the former Benedictine abbey of St. Michael outside Bergen, known as Munkeliv, became a Birgittine foundation through the efforts of a Swedish Benedictine who had been instrumental in the founding of Paradiso. Munkeliv never prospered financially and appears to have had difficulty in recruiting Norwegians to join the order: The first residents were Birgittine brethren from Denmark, and the high-born Norwegian women who wished to enter the order chose Vadstena in preference to Munkeliv. In Finland, the abbey of Vallis Gratiae (Nådendal) was founded in 1438 by the council of state but in the same year a group of brethren from Vadstena were sent to the Finnish province to establish an abbey, which eventually came to be situated in Reso parish near Turku (Åbo). It became the foremost cultural center in the country, where the brother Jöns Budde, Finland's first-named writer, produced an important body of mystical and devotional literature in translation.²⁵ He translated St. Mechthild of Hackeborn's Revelations into Swedish in 1469 while on a visit to Vadstena, and in it he gives a rare insight into the art of translation in medieval Scandinavia: after only a few chapters

Budde was overwhelmed by the task in hand and fell into a state of deep melancholy. In a dream he saw a young woman who held up before him a mirror in which he saw the whole book fully written. Upon awakening, he worked continuously for fourteen days and nights until he had completed the whole text.

In Denmark, Erik of Pomerania, ruler of the Union of the Scandinavian kingdom, sent a colony of pioneers to Maribo on the isle of Lolland in 1416, which became a rich establishment with a considerable reputation for preaching and the production of prayer books, as did its daughter-house at Mariager, in Jutland. King Erik opened up new spheres of influence by incorporating Birgittine activities into his political program, and using the foundations to consolidate and strengthen the political Union.

The Danish houses were part of an important group of fully integrated dynastic foundations that were endowed by kings who sought to extend their authority in the European sphere. Two other such foundations were Gnadenberg (near Nuremberg) in Bavaria, established in 1420 by Katerina, sister of King Erik of Pomerania, who was married to a Bavarian palatine duke; and the house founded by the rule of the joint Polish-Lithuanian kingdom and a convert from paganism, Wladyslaw Jagiello, who won an unexpected victory over the Teutonic Knights at Tannenberg (Grünwald) on 15 July 1410. On the battlefield he sent a promise to the Birgittines of Gdansk, who by now were well-established, saying that he would improve their economic standing, and two months afterward he sought permission to build an abbey on the battlefield site. When the site was lost to Poland in a subsequent treaty, the house was removed to Lublin.²⁶

Another of the important dynastic foundations was Syon in England, established by King Henry V and to a degree inspired by his sister Philippa, who had gone to Vadstena with several English followers. A few months before he dealt the French nobility a devastating defeat at Agincourt in 1415 Henry laid the foundation stone of the abbey of Syon at Twickenham, on the opposite bank of the Thames from his own palace. The Syon Birgittines were a richly endowed, centrally placed, and well-favored community, and intellectually at the very heart of late medieval and early Reformation England. The Birgittine friars assiduously promoted and retained orthodox texts to defend the old faith, but at the same time they were at the forefront of new changes, such as the introduction of printing.

Endowments from their dynastic patrons were often insufficient to maintain some of the complex monastic sites, which had to depend on political patronage and gifts from nearby towns for their continued prosperity. With the exception of Scandinavia, where towns were still small in size, there is a firm link in the history of the Birgittine order between monastic community and city, and the interaction with local economic life seems to have been a necessity for survival. This tendency can be seen especially in northern Europe, where houses were established in the urban and mercantile centers along the Baltic shores and in the Germanic regions with Hanseatic connections: Houses such as Tallinn (Reval) founded in 1407, and Lübeck in 1415, for instance, owed

their existence to the merchants of the city. The same pattern is seen in many other houses that were close to centers of trade and industry, such as the Dutch abbeys of Kampen, Gouda, Brielle, and Dendermonde in Flanders.

Post-Reformation Survival

Birgitta had neglected fully to address the potential consequences of the constitutional weakness of her foundation, and it remained difficult to govern centrally from Vadstena the very many houses that had sprung up across the continent. Despite this, the Birgittine heritage continued to spread beyond the Reformation, although in the nineteenth century the order nearly became extinct. Three branches of the order have continued their existence into the twenty-first century. There is the unreformed branch that traces its roots back to the original order and includes the Syon community that went from England to the Netherlands at the Reformation and thence to France and finally to Portugal, where it continued to recruit nuns from the recusant English families until the convent was able to return to England in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁷ In Germany, the house at Altomünster in Bavaria belongs to the unreformed branch, and in the Low Countries there was a house at Marienwater, near 's-Hertogenbosch, which from the eighteenth century continued as Maria Refuge at Uden in Brabant. Maria Hart in Weert, southern Netherlands, was founded from Uden at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The unreformed Birgittine order was reintroduced to Sweden in 1963 very near the site of the medieval abbey in Vadstena, which had been closed in 1595; it was upgraded to abbey status in 1992.

Another branch also formed in the seventeenth century in the Netherlands, when schismatic groups of priests moved away from the nuns and set up an order of their own, with papal approval, under the name *Novissimi Birgittani*. The nuns meanwhile established convents of their own and had numerous houses throughout the Netherlands and northern France. These strands, however, no longer survive.

The third branch was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Swede Maria Elisabeth Hesselblad (1870–1957), who joined the mass emigrations from Sweden to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. Having converted to Roman Catholicism in 1902, she traveled to Rome to the house where Birgitta had lived. The house had remained in Swedish hands since Francisca Papazzura had bequeathed it to Vadstena, and from 1692 to 1828 Birgittines from Altomünster lived there. It was later given to the parish of Santa Maria in Trastevere, and between 1855 and 1889 it was run by the Knights of the Holy Cross. When Elisabeth Hesselblad founded the reformed branch of the order in Rome in 1911, it was being used by Polish Carmelite nuns. She took up residence with this community and in 1906 the pope gave her permission to wear the Birgittine habit within the Carmelite community. She gradually developed the idea of reestablishing the Birgittine order in the house in Rome, although she met with scant interest among the cloistered

branches in Spain, the Low Countries, England, and Germany. Intent upon establishing a reformed branch of the order, she sought papal support to enable the resident Carmelites to be rehoused. The new branch received an official confirmation in 1920 and in 1942 it was given permission to take the name of the *Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris*. Unlike the old order it did not adopt a cloistered life, but supported itself mainly from running guest houses. The reformed Birgittine order was introduced in Sweden in 1923 in a house in Djursholm, on the outskirts of Stockholm, and the other houses have since been established as far afield as Lugano in Switzerland; Iver Heath, Uxbridge, in England; Mexico City; Havana in Cuba; Darien, Connecticut, in the United States; and several locations in India. It is today by far the largest branch of the order. Mention should also be made of the Monastery of Our Lady of Consolation, an independent monastery of Birgittine monks founded in 1976 in Amity, Oregon, by the former Benedictine Brother Benedict Kirby.²⁸

The original success of the Birgittine order, Birgitta's most lasting legacy, can be explained against the background of the general decline in monastic standards in the fifteenth century. It marked a fresh beginning and thus it attracted influential political and mercantile benefactors who were willing to lend it support. The total number of houses in the medieval period—both the fully developed double order for men and women, and the smaller scale single-sex communities—was never large, by the standards of mainstream monasticism, but for an innovative female foundation it was impressive, and all the more so for the influence and support it gained from among the noble and royal houses of Europe and also for its remarkable staying power well beyond the Reformation and to the present day.

Note on the Translation

As explained above, the translation follows the Π version of the text, as this is closest to Birgitta's original text. Because the editor of the Latin edition has also included the two other versions, his paragraph numbering covers all the versions with the result that the paragraphs are not all consecutive. For this reason we have omitted the paragraph numbers in the translation.

The monastic terminology in Latin is not always clearly defined, and therefore we have given the Latin equivalents of certain terms in the notes.²⁹ We translate "monasterium" as abbey, but as "convent" when it refers specifically to the nuns' areas of the abbey. Sometimes "conventus" is used in Latin, which we translate as "convent" or "community" (of nuns). "Divina officia" is given as "divine office" or "divine liturgy." The range of verbs used to prescribe the regulations ("determinat," "ponit," "disponit," "ordinat," "statuit," "precipit") are variously translated in accordance with the context and style.

NOTES

1. See Eklund, *Den heliga Birgitta. Opera minora. I. Regula Salvatoris*, pp. 21–29; and Ellis, "The Visionary and the Canon Lawyers." In his edition Eklund distinguishes seven text versions, each attributed with a Greek character.

2. Eklund, *Den heliga Birgitta. Opera minora. I. Regula Salvatoris*, p. 23.
3. The term "*Regula Salvatoris*" is today taken to refer to the original text with the subsequently sanctioned Constitutions. Even in Birgitta's time these *Constitutiones* were also referred to as the Additions (*Additiones*) of Prior Petrus.
4. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 94 (633), 477, 510, 515. The date and details of Birgitta's possible encounters with Urban are vague; see Eklund, *Regula Salvatoris*, p. 24.
5. See Roelvink, "Ändlig släktskap mellan Franciskus och Birgitta," who notes that although she was not a member of the Franciscan Third Order, there "existed a great spiritual affinity between the two saints."
6. See further volume 2, p. 267.
7. The *Additiones* survive in a number of different versions. The oldest and probably the most original redaction was edited by Tore Nyberg, *Dokument und Untersuchungen*, who has shown that the Additions had episcopal authority as early as 1384, pp. 42–110. A later version was sanctioned in 1420 by Bishop Knut of Linköping. For the Swedish version see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 5, pp. 17–53.
8. This summary is based on Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klostets och birgittinordens historia*, pp. 72–75; see also Vitalis, "*Addiciones Prioris Petri*."
9. Svenskt Diplomatarium: 1714 (SDHK 17999); <http://sok.riksarkivet.se/sdhk>.
10. See Risberg, *Liber usuum fratrum monasterii Vadstenensis*, pp. 9–10.
11. The *Lucidarium* exists in an edition by Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 5, pp. 59–106.
12. See Hedström, "One Customary to Rule them All" p. 364–65, in a helpful introduction to the continental traditions, which have not yet been edited and compared.
13. For a general and illustrated survey of the history of the Birgittine order see Sander-Olsen et al., *Birgitta Atlas*. See Fogelkvist, "The New Vineyard," on the extent of monastic influences on the Birgittine Rule.
14. The question of the double order is discussed by Tore Nyberg, *Birgittinische Klostergründungen*. See also Cavallin, "Manligt och kvinnligt i Birgittas klosteranke." See also Andersson, *Responsiones Vadstenensis*, p. 3, who uses the phrase "a twofold structure—a double leadership."
15. Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klostets och birgittinordens historia*, pp. 89–100 and 187–88, and 62 note 2.
16. For the history of the monastic complex at Vadstena see Fritz, "Kung Magnus Erikssons planer"; Fritz, "Det medeltida Vadstena"; Anderson, *Vadstena gård och kloster*; Andersson, Andersson, and Bennet, *Vadstena klosterkyrka. Östergötland*; Borgehammar, "St. Birgitta, Architect of Spiritual Reform."
17. See Flemberg, "Queen Philippa as a Benefactor of the Birgittines."
18. Gejrot, *Vadstenadiariet*, pp. 111–20. Our translation.
19. On the economic history see Norborg, *Storföretaget Vadstena* (the title refers to Vadstena as a "big business"). Norborg discusses the poverty ideal of the Rule in relation to its implementation in practice.
20. See Andersson-Schmitt, *Mittelalterliche Handschriften*.
21. See Andersson and Borgehammar, "The Preachings of the Birgittine Friars at Vadstena Abbey"; Roger Andersson, *De birgittinska ordensprästerna som traditionsförmedlare och folkfostrare*.
22. See Nils Dverstorp, "Skrivaren och skriften: om skrift- och handskriftsproduktion i Vadstena kloster."
23. See Hedström, "Medeltidens svenska bönböcker: kvinnligt skriftbruk i Vadstena kloster"; Lindell, "Christina Hansdotter Brask"; Carlquist, *Vadstenasystrarnas textvärld*.
24. See Estham, "Textilkonst i Vadstena kloster."
25. See Wollin, *Bilden av Budde*; Morris and O'Mara, *The Translation of the Works*, pp. 16–17.
26. See Cnattingius, "Birgittinerorden i Polen."
27. See de Hamel, *The Library of the Bridgettine Nuns*.
28. For a comprehensive overview of all the Birgittine houses, see Sander-Olsen et al, *Birgitta Atlas*.
29. Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns*, has been a useful guide.

The Rule of the Savior

HERE BEGINS THE RULE OF THE HOLY SAVIOR, DIVINELY DELIVERED FROM THE LIPS OF CHRIST TO HIS DEVOTED BRIDE, LADY BIRGITTA. IT IS TO BE AN ORDER OF NUNS IN HONOR OF THE GLORIOUS VIRGIN MARY. THE RULE WAS GIVEN TO LADY BIRGITTA IN A MIRACULOUS MANNER, AS RELATED BELOW, WHEN SHE WAS AT PRAYER AND BECAME ENRAPTURED IN A SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL VISION AT VADSTENA CASTLE IN THE DIOCESE OF LINKÖPING IN THE KINGDOM OF SWEDEN.

✠ Foreword, Chapter 1

Birgitta Receives her Revelations and Submits them to Clerical Scrutiny

Here we are told how Lady Birgitta was receiving divine revelations and had doubts about possibly being deceived. In her humility she submitted them for examination to an archbishop, three bishops, a master in theology as well as a pious abbot. After mature deliberation they all concluded that the revelations came from the good spirit of truth and not the deceiving angel of falsehood.

Within the dominion of the king of Norway,¹ the northernmost of all kingdoms, beyond which no territory suitable for human abode can be found, when Lady Birgitta was intent at prayer, it happened that her physical forces were as though emptied, but her soul began to see, hear, speak and feel spiritual things with full force and vigor. Often in a state of rapture, she heard much said to her spiritually in the Spirit or, rather, in a spiritual and intellectual vision. Afterward, with due reverence and fear of God, the lady made the content of her visions known to the archbishop of Uppsala along with three other bishops as well as a devout teacher who was considered to be a great theologian and a pious abbot who was devoted to God. She was afraid of being deceived by the deceiving angel of darkness in the form of an angel of light.² All of these men and many other friends of God³ were told these things, and after mature and spiritual deliberation with each other, they concluded that all of it had been divinely revealed to her by the spirit of truth and light through a special grace of the Holy Spirit.

Once in one of these revelations she saw a man and woman of great beauty, and then a voice spoke to her and said: “The two persons whom you see are Jesus Christ and his Mother Mary. They appear to you now as they appeared

1. “Within the dominion of the king of Norway”: although Magnus Eriksson (1316–74), was indeed for a time king of Norway (1319–43), as well as of Sweden 1319–64 (including Skåne 1332–60), this may be an imprecise reference to the northern region as a whole, written from the perspective of Alfonso writing in Rome.

2. “An angel of light”; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:14.

3. “Friends of God”: a phrase used frequently in the *Revelationes* to denote the faithful who take up the reforming battle against those without faith or with a lapsed faith, but here more in the sense of those belonging to Birgitta’s inner circle of followers; see further McGuire, “Friendship in Birigitta.”

when they lived in the world. It is impossible for you to know or see what their bodies are like in heaven.” After this was said, Jesus Christ who appeared to her, then opened his mouth and spoke, saying:

THE PROLOGUE TO THE RULE OF THE SAVIOR DIVINELY DELIVERED BY CHRIST THE LORD TO BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN IN THE KINGDOM OF SWEDEN.

✚ Prologue, Chapter 2

Christ will Plant a New Vineyard Because the Old Ones have been Laid Waste

Christ uses an image to explain to his bride Birgitta that, because other vineyards, that is, other religious orders, have in one way or another been laid waste, he would now plant a new vineyard, a new religious order, and that he would take special care of it so that it would produce sweet-tasting wine for him.

“I am like a mighty king who planted vineyards that produced excellent wine for a long time. Eventually his enemy sowed bad seed in it which grew and spread to such an extent that the vines¹ could produce wine only with great difficulty. The king’s servants said to him: ‘Lord, we inspected your vines and found very few of them producing wine-grapes, and the bad seed, which is only fit for the fire, has spread uncontrollably.’ The Lord answered them: ‘I will plant for myself a new vineyard to which the vines will be brought and there they will take root. I myself will fertilize it and it will be filled with excellent wine-grapes. I will watch over it myself. If anything harmful enters there, it will merely fertilize the vine and add to the sweetness of the wine. The harmful material will be quashed. It will dry up and quickly wither and do no harm. When the wine from this vineyard reaches my community, everyone will be glad, and glory and honor will be given to the Lord who planted the vineyard and fertilized it. The one who laid the roots will rejoice, nor will God forget the one who brought the vines there. Many vineyards that have long been dry will begin to be renewed through this vineyard and bear fruit after their renewal.’”

✚ Prologue Continued, Chapter 3

Birgitta will be the Vine, that is, the Foundress of the New Order

Christ explains the chapter above to the bride, telling her that she is to be the vine of his vineyard, that is, the foundress of a new and holy religious order from which fruitful vine-branches will come. He urges her to be virtuous, steadfast, and watchful, and to despise worldliness which is as harmful as poison.

1. “Vines” renders “palmitas.”

“I am the creator of all things, created by none. There is nothing in all my creation with more dignity than humankind. I appointed them to rule over earthly creatures.¹ I gave them intelligence so that they would make use of creation for their own necessity and benefit and so that they might praise me for the graces given them. But nothing in all creation so provokes my anger as the human race. All else stands ready to obey me.² I told you earlier that I was like a king who had planted fruitful vineyards that yielded good fruit for a long time. What were these vineyards? They were the religious orders and the institutions of the holy fathers. They gave refreshment to those who thirsted, warmth to those who were cold, humility to those swollen with pride, light to those who were blind. Now, however, my grievance is that the garden-walls have collapsed, the watchmen are sleeping and thieves are getting in. Moles are digging up the roots; the vines have become arid and dry; and the clusters of grapes have been knocked down by the wind and are being trampled underfoot. In order, therefore, that wine may not run out entirely, I will again plant a vineyard³ for myself, and you will bring to it the vines of my words. My friend⁴ will put them in place, and I myself will fertilize them with my grace. I will send watchmen to this vineyard who will not sleep at night. I will build a garden-wall of divine love. I will make the roots of good intentions steadfast in it, and the temptations of the devil will not dig them up. I will spread out the branches of its actions and make the clusters of its fame and devotion sweet to many persons. You who are to transfer the vines must be strong and steadfast in carrying them, ready and watchful in receiving them, faithful and prudent in guarding them, in order that the devil may not deceive you. He who is to put them in place must be attentive so as to put them in their proper place, diligent and careful in protecting them from cold and heat. Stand firm and love me with all your heart! Flee from all kinds of pride and embrace all humility. Guard your lips and your whole body in my honor. Carry out obediently everything exactly as I tell you. Examine your conscience at all times, the nature and extent of your transgressions. If you fall, get up right away and do it for me. Do not care about worldly honors or the friends of the world. As long as you have me, everything will delight you. As long as you love me completely, all else that is in the world will be like poison to you.”

✠ Chapter 1

Christ Wants to Create a Rule for Nuns

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

1. “I appointed them to rule over earthly creatures”: cf. Genesis 1:26–28; Psalm 7(8):7–8; Wisdom 9:2–3.
2. “All else stands ready to obey me”: note that Birgitta does not seem to be including the angels (the faithful or the fallen) in these statements.
3. “I will plant a vineyard”: cf. Psalm 79(80):15.
4. “My friend”: possibly Mathias of Linköping or Petrus of Skänninge.

Christ tells the bride that he will dictate this new Rule with his very mouth. He wants it to be a Rule for nuns in memory and honor of the glorious Virgin Mary, his Mother.

“I want to establish this Order first and foremost for women in honor of my beloved Mother. I will explain its constitution and statutes fully with my very mouth.”

✚ Chapter 2

Christ Forbids the Ownership of Private Possessions

To begin with, Christ bases this Rule on the three virtues of humility, chastity, and poverty. He forbids the nuns to have anything of their own. The abbess will provide for them in all their necessities.

“The beginning of this Order as well as of salvation is true humility, pure chastity and voluntary poverty. It is therefore not permitted to anyone to own anything, not even the least little thing, nor possess or handle money or anything of gold or silver, except perhaps when it is necessary when embroidering something in gold or silver and then only with the approval and permission of the abbess. The abbess is expected to provide for all necessities such as religious dress, bedding, and work-tools. They should not have anything unless permitted by the Rule.”

✚ Chapter 3

On Beds and Bedding

Christ prescribes here what kind of beds and bedding the nuns should have.

“Be it known that the approved bedding should be of straw.¹ On top, there may be two woolen blankets without linen sheets or top mattresses. Under the head one may have a cloth-covered pillow and a similarly cloth-covered neck-cushion.”²

✚ Chapter 4

On the Nuns' Habit

Christ prescribes here the nuns' habit, clothing, shoes, veils, and crown.

1. “Approved bedding” renders “lectisterna regularia,” denoting the mattresses or beds that were approved under the rule, rather than bedclothes.

2. “Woolen blankets” renders “thoralia de burello”; cf. Sw. “klädhe af wadmal” [cloth of wool]; “top mattresses” renders “culcedris”; “pillow” renders “cussinus”; and “neck-cushion” renders “cervical.”

“The clothing of the sisters will be two chemises of white wool, one for daily use, the other to be used when this is being washed; a tunic of gray wool; and a cowl whose sleeves extend no longer than to the end of the middle finger.¹ The sleeves will hang down in a fold around the hands. When they carry out manual work, these can be fastened loosely to their arms with a button² like other sleeves. There should also be a cloak, of gray wool like the tunic and the cowl. This cloak should not have any frills on the outside or be finely woven. It should be austere and plain for its purpose, completely functional with not a trace of vanity. It should be a simple cloak in summertime, while in wintertime it should be lined with the fleece of lamb or sheep but not with more elegant furs. In the winter they may also have a fur coat³ with the same kind of lining. The cloak should be a handbreadth from the ground and fastened by a wooden button at the chest. To cover their feet in summer they may have ankle-high shoes and knee-high stockings. In winter they may wear wool-lined boots up to their knees and stockings of the same height. Their headdress will be a wimple⁴ around their forehead and cheeks, partially covering the face. Its ends can be fastened with a pin at the back of the head. A black cloth veil should be placed on top of this with three pins to keep it in place, one at the forehead and one at each ear. A white cloth crown should be placed on top of the veil. On it there should be sewn five strips of red cloth like five drops. The first should be at the forehead, the second at the back of the head, the third and fourth near the ears, the fifth at the center of the head in the shape of a cross. A pin at the center will keep this crown in place and fit it to the head. Both widows and virgins should wear this crown as a sign of continence and chastity.”

✠ Chapter 5

On the Divine Office and the Office of the Virgin

Here Christ decides how the nuns are to begin the divine office in the choir before Mass every day by praying for forgiveness, and how they are to finish the office, and also that the office of the Virgin should be said each and every day, both ordinary weekdays and feast days.

“Every day in reverence to my Mother, the Virgin Mary, the sisters should solemnly chant her hours with three readings on both ordinary weekdays and feast days. Each day when the signal for vespers is given, the sisters should come together. First the right-hand choir should say a ‘Hail Mary’ and then, with a deep bow toward the other choir, say: ‘For the love of God and his kind Mother Mary, forgive us if we have offended you in word or deed, gesture or expression, for we willingly pardon any faults of yours against us.’ After the other choir bows similarly and asks forgiveness in the same words, they should proceed to vespers. At the end of the hours, they should chant the ‘Hail Mary’

1. “Wool” renders “burellum”; “tunic” renders “tunica”; “cowl” renders “cuculla”.
2. “Button” renders “nodus” that could mean a “knot”; “cloak” renders “mantellum.”
3. “Fur coat” renders “pellicium.”
4. “Wimple” renders “vitta,” the head-dress worn by nuns that covered the head and neck.

antiphon with the following collect prayer: (Prayer) ‘Almighty, ever-living God, you humbled yourself to be born of the most pure Virgin for our sakes, grant, we beseech you, that we may serve you with pure bodies and please you with humble minds.’ (Another prayer to the Virgin.) ‘We implore you, kindest Virgin Mary, Queen of the world and of angels, to seek relief for those experiencing the ordeal of the fires of purgatory, pardon for sinners and perseverance in virtue for the righteous. Defend us in our weakness from the dangers that surround us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.’ The sisters shall sing the votive Mass of my Mother every day, both ordinary weekdays and feast days,¹ and they shall sing the ‘Hail Holy Queen’² every Saturday after Mass.”

✚ Chapter 6

On Silence

Here Christ decides how and when the sisters are to maintain silence.

“In order to maintain silence, which is so important, no one is allowed to speak from early morning until after the votive Mass of my Mother has been sung. Permission is granted to speak in the designated areas about spiritual matters, the observance of the Rule and any truly necessary questions once the Mass is finished and between the hours of the divine office up until the blessing at table is said. Inappropriate and pointless talk is to be thoroughly avoided at all times and in all places. When grace after the midday meal has been said in the church, the sisters may speak amongst themselves until the start of vespers. Silence should then be scrupulously maintained until grace after supper is said in the church. Permission is granted to speak in the brief interval between grace and the collation. Silence is to be studiously maintained from the start of the collation¹ until the Mass of my glorious Mother has been sung on the following day. Be it known that all the sisters are bound to observe the appointed times of silence except those who have been assigned tasks which they cannot carry out without speaking. Everything must be done in a reasonable way so as not to give malicious persons an opportunity for fault-finding.”

✚ Chapter 7

On the Nuns’ Separation from the Affairs of the World

Here Christ forbids anyone, lay or religious, to enter the nuns’ cloister or speak with them except at certain times.

1. “The votive mass of my mother . . . and feast days”: the votive mass was offered for a “votum,” a special intention, and was therefore distinct from the masses celebrated according to the annual liturgical cycle. Votive masses were celebrated every day in cathedrals and monastic churches in the later middle ages, but the mass in honor of the Virgin Mary was normally reserved for Saturdays.

2. “Hail Holy Queen”: or the “Salve Regina,” one of four special anthems to the Virgin that have traditionally been part of the Liturgy of the Hours, and that vary depending on the season.

1. “Collation”: the daily formational talk, or the “collatio” in the Benedictine sense of reading. The term also occurs in the second sentence of the chapter, where it is translated as “to speak about spiritual matters.”

“Apart from an occasion or request arising out of necessity, no layperson, man or woman, and no other priests or members of other religious orders may enter the cloister of the nuns. Conversation with others is prohibited to the nuns except at certain times.”

✠ Chapter 8

On the Conditions under which the Nuns may Communicate with the Outside World

Here Christ determines on what days and in what way the nuns may speak to laypersons through the grate.

“The nuns may speak to laypersons only on Sundays and major feast days of the saints between the liturgical hours of none and vespers.¹ They may not go out but are to speak while sitting at the designated windows. Once a person has entered the Order, it will not be permissible for her to leave the cloister. If she wishes to be seen by relatives or close and virtuous friends, she may open the window. However, if she does not open the window, a more plentiful reward is promised to her in the life to come.”

✠ Chapter 9

On Fasting

Here Christ regulates the times and the ways in which the nuns are to fast.

“During Advent everyone should fast on Lenten fare until the day of my birth. From the Friday before Quinquagesima Sunday, they are to begin fasting on Lenten fare until Easter. From the Friday after my Ascension until Pentecost, they should fast on fish and dairy products. From the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until the feast of Saint Michael,¹ they should fast on fish and dairy products. From the feast of All Saints to Advent, they should fast on fish and dairy products. On the following days they should fast on bread and water: the four solemnities of my Mother Mary (Purification, Annunciation, Assumption and Birth); on the vigils of all the apostles, except when two apostles are combined in one solemnity, such as Peter and Paul, Philip and James, Simon and Jude, for then a fast of one day will suffice for both; the vigils of John before the Latin Gate,² John

1. “None and vespers”: the canonical hours mark the divisions of the day in terms of fixed prayer at regular intervals. None was the ninth hour, originally said around 3.00 p.m. but in the later middle ages around midday (hence the English word “noon”); it was followed by the evening prayer, or vespers, at sunset or thereabout.

1. “The exaltation of the Holy Cross until the feast of St. Michael”: 14 September and 28 September respectively.

2. “John before the Latin gate”: San Giovanni a Porta Latina, one of the Basilica churches near the Porta Latina in Rome. It was dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, who survived martyrdom after being immersed in a vat of boiling oil. Feast day 6 May.

the Baptist, Saint Michael the Archangel, All Saints, Good Friday and before the solemnity of my body.³ On all these days they should fast on bread and water. Be it known that the sick and the aged are excused from all fasts. Compassion is to be shown to those who are noticed to be truly weak when carrying out their tasks while fasting. In the rest of the year they may eat meat on four days every week: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. They should eat fish and dairy products at the evening meal on these days. They should abstain from meat both at the midday and at the evening meal on Wednesdays, though they are allowed to eat fish and dairy products then. They should fast on Lenten fare every Friday throughout the year. They should fast on fish and dairy products on Saturdays. Moreover, they should fast on all the other days of fasting as decided by the laws of the Church.”

✚ Chapter 10

On the Probation and Reception of Nuns

Here Christ prescribes the time and manner of probation and reception of nuns¹ into the Order.

“If a woman asks to be admitted to the Order, she should not be received until a full year has passed. She should first be told: ‘Come back to us after three months and we will examine your request in the meantime.’ When she returns at the appointed time, the abbess should inquire as to her intention in applying to the Order and whether she has any binding obligations in the world. Once her reasons and resolution have been explained, she should be told: ‘Daughter, sometimes a deceptive trap hides itself beneath the appearance of something good, and a failure to consider future consequences has been the ruin of many. Therefore, come back to us in a few months and make your intention of persevering in your good resolution clear to us.’ When she returns with the same humble attitude as before, the difficult demands of the Order should be described to her, scorning the world and forgetting her family. If she promises to observe all the requirements, then the whole community should give their consent to her around the end of the twelve months.² If she is someone whose character is not in doubt, then everyone can give their consent when she first makes her petition, but she should certainly not be allowed to enter and make her profession or receive the habit before the completion of a year. When consent is obtained for her admission, a petition should be sent to the bishop to come and consecrate her. When the bishop comes, he should go down to the entrance of the church where the candidate for admission to the Order should be waiting. The bishop should interrogate her outside, saying as follows: ‘Are you free and unencumbered by any ecclesial bonds, such as matrimony, vows or excommu-

3. “The solemnity of my body”: the feast of Corpus Christi, celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday.

1. “The manner of probation and reception of nuns”: On the consecration of nuns, see Hårdelin, *Kult, kultur och kontemplation*, pp. 336–49.

2. “Twelve months”: the normal period of the probation within monastic tradition.

nication?’ If she answers, ‘I am indeed free,’ the bishop should proceed: ‘Does any shame or any suffering of worldly hardships constrain you to seek the religious life? Or does any amount of unpaid debt force you to it?’ She answers: ‘Neither suffering nor shame motivates me in this but the ardent love of Christ, and I have paid all my debts to the best of my ability.’ Then the bishop continues: ‘Do you seek admission to this order in the name of Jesus Christ and in honor of his holy Mother the Virgin Mary?’ She says: ‘I do.’ Then the bishop leads her into the church, saying ‘Now she may worthily enter this order.’ As she enters the church, a red standard³ should be carried before her on which the image of my suffering body should be depicted on one side and an image of my Mother on the other. When the new bride looks on the sign of her new bridegroom suffering on the cross, may she learn patience and poverty. When she looks on the Virgin Mary, may she learn purity and humility. Once she has been led into the church, she should stand near the church doors, and the bishop, moving a little ways off from her to one side, consecrates the ring. Two torches should be lighted and carried lighted to her in front of the standard. They should be burning during the whole celebration of Mass. The bishop should say: (Prayer) ‘Almighty, ever-living God, you have betrothed a new bride to yourself in mercy and compassion. Bless this ring, and may your servant wear it on her hand as an outward sign like a new bride, so that she may deserve inwardly to wear your faith and charity. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.’”

✠ Chapter 11

On the Ceremony of Consecration

Here Christ sets forth the manner of consecration, blessing, and admission of nuns to the convent.

“After the blessing of the ring, the bishop should approach the servant of God and say: ‘You must promise God and me, his representative, that you will obey your superiors and keep this Rule to the best of your ability until the end of your life.’ When she has promised to do this, the bishop should continue: ‘Your intention in vowing to be faithful to God should be such that you love nothing so much as your God, and you ought to give your consent to him with all your desire.’ She will then answer: ‘I give my consent to my God with all my heart. I offer myself to him with my whole mind and the full simplicity of my heart.’ The bishop will then respond to her: ‘Representing almighty God and his only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, I give my consent to you.’ She should then say the following prayer: (Prayer) ‘May Almighty God, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who humbled himself to come to the Virgin, be firmly in your soul and may you be in Him. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.’ Then he should place the ring

3. “Red standard”: compare the description for the dubbing of knights in Book II 13. This passage also has similarities with the rituals associated with the consecration of a church.

on a finger of her right hand, saying: 'I consecrate you as a bride of God and as his own possession forever. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' After this the bishop should go up to the altar and intone the votive Mass of the Holy Trinity. The servant of God should in the meantime stand in the lower part near the sanctuary. When he begins the offertory, she should go to the altar and make the offering and then immediately return to her place. Once the offertory has been said, the vestments prepared for her as prescribed by the Rule should be brought from the convent to the altar and placed before the bishop. He will say the following blessing over them: (Prayer) 'Lord Jesus Christ, you do not will the death of sinners¹ but desire their repentance. Bless in your mercy, we beseech you, these vestments which your servant resolves to wear as a sign of humility and penance. Having left behind the vanity of this world, may she merit to put on you through true humility. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' Once the vestments have been consecrated, one of the priests should call the servant of God to the altar to stand before the bishop. She should walk up barefoot and take off her outer garments before the altar, standing there in her tunic to receive the consecrated habit. The bishop should clothe her in the tunic of the Order, while saying: (Prayer) 'May almighty God grant you true penitence in your conscience and perfect contrition in your heart. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' Then she should put the ankle-high shoes on her feet, while the bishop says: (Prayer) 'May our Lord Jesus Christ make the path straight for your feet² and grant you progress on the way of salvation, never more consenting to sin, and may he grant you time to make amends for your past sins and prudence to avoid future sins. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' When she puts on the cowl,³ the bishop should say: (Prayer) 'May the Lord Jesus Christ, hope of all Christians, grant you hope and confidence in your spirit. May you hope in God's mercy without forgetting his justice. May you fear his strictness while recalling his goodness and mercy. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' When she has been fitted with the cloak, he should say: (Prayer) 'May the Lord, almighty God, the principle of true faith, strengthen and confirm your soul in the true faith and grant that you believe what must be believed and persevere until the end of your life on the good path on which you have set out. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' Then the cloak should be fastened with the wooden button while the bishop says: (Prayer) 'May our Lord Jesus Christ, bound to the wood of the cross and sentenced to the harshest of deaths for the sake of the great love which he bore for us, bind and transfix your soul with the memory of his passion. May your love burn for God alone. May the fire of divine charity embrace you. May you rest in his blessed arms in which all the saints rest. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' She will then veil her head with the wimple. The bishop will fasten

1. "Will the death of sinners"; cf. Ezekiel 33:11.

2. "Make the path straight for your feet"; cf. Hebrews 12:13.

3. "When she puts on the cowl": the clothing is similar to that used of a bride in Book I 7; compare too the priest's clothing in Book IV 58, and the interpretation of Birgitta's own head-dress in Book IV 94.

it with a pin, saying: (Prayer) 'May our Lord Jesus Christ provide cool shade for your soul so that no harm may come to it.' When the veil has been placed on her, the bishop should say: (Prayer) 'May the Lord Jesus Christ enlighten your mind with spiritual light and wisdom. May the things of this world and everything harmful to your soul be dead to your eyes. May the way that leads to heaven shine before your soul so that you may be able to recognize him who has chosen you. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' After this the servant of God will return to the same place where she was standing before, and the bishop will finish the mass. When he reaches the point in the mass where the priest would turn and bless the bride and bridegroom at a wedding mass, the bishop should turn and another priest should call the servant of God to come to the altar. The bishop should then place the crown over the veil, saying: (Prayer) 'May our Lord Jesus Christ keep the sign I now place on your head firmly in place. May he direct your will in all the vows you have now made so that you may be firm and constant. May he crown you with the crown of happiness according to his merciful will, so that your soul may be inseparably united to him who is one God in three Persons. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' Then he puts the pin in the crown, saying: (Prayer) 'May Jesus Christ pierce your heart and soul with his affectionate love so that you need not fear the sting of temptations. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.' After this, the servant of God should return to her earlier place until the mass is ended. At the end of mass, a priest should call her to come to the altar, saying: 'Come forward, bride of Christ, to the altar of Christ.' She should then come forward and lie face down in a humble petition for pardon. Kneeling, the bishop and his priests should then recite the litany of all the saints praying for the servant of God. At the end of the litanies,⁴ the bishop should get up and approach the servant of God as she lies prostrate. He should then pray the absolution of sins over her. Once she has received absolution, she should get up to receive my body.⁵ After she has received, the door by which the servant of God is to enter⁶ should be opened and four sisters should exit quickly and bring into the abbey the bier filled with soil that is to be placed there before the beginning of mass. The bishop should proceed to the same door with the servant of God following and the priests singing the hymn 'Veni Creator Spiritus.'⁷ He should hand her over to the abbess waiting at the door with the whole convent. The bishop then says these words to the abbess: 'See, before God and all the saints and in the sight of the Holy Church, I entrust into your hands the soul of God's bride for safekeeping. If she falls away through any negli-

4. "The litanies": a prolonged prayer consisting of petitions, with repeated responses by the congregation, often repeating "Pray for us" after each.

5. "Receive my body": the newly consecrated nun took received communion after the end of the mass; only the priesthood would regularly receive the sacrament during the mass itself in the Middle Ages (but compare the procedure for the knight's initiation, Book II 13).

6. "The door by which the servant of God is to enter": the door was in the north wall of the church and was the only entrance to the convent. It was normally held locked, and could only be opened when a new nun entered, when the brethren were to administer communion to a sick nun, when a dead nun was taken out for burial, and when the bishop came to perform his visitation.

7. "Veni Creator Spiritus": one of the best-known Latin hymns, probably written by Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856).

gence of yours, her bridegroom Jesus Christ will demand an account of her from you. Keep and guard God's deposit, so that when an account is required, you will return her holier than you received her.' The abbess will answer him: 'Great is this treasure, dear father, and difficult the task, nor is my strength equal to it. But aided by your prayers and trusting in God's help, I will do as you command.' The servant of God should then be brought in without delay and the door shut, and she should immediately be led to the chapter-house.⁸ Then for eight days she is not to be restricted by any discipline but is to stand in the lowest place in the choir.⁹ At the end of the eight days, she has the same obligation to follow the Rule as all the others, and her place should be the last one in the choir and at table."

⚡ Chapter 12

On the Numbers of Nuns, Priests, Deacons, and Lay Brothers within the Community

Here Christ determines the number of nuns and priests and deacons as well as of the lay brothers¹ for the abbey. He also gives regulations for their living-quarters and the choir where both men and women sit or stand.

"The sisters should be sixty in number and no more than that. They should have priests who celebrate every day the mass of the season and the divine office as it is done in the cathedral of the place where each abbey is located.² The priests are prohibited from entering the nuns' convent but are to have a residence of their own to live in. They should have an entrance from their residence into the church. They will occupy the downstairs choir. The choir of the sisters will be upstairs under the ceiling but in such a way that they can see the sacraments and hear the office. There should be thirteen priests, the same number as the apostles, the thirteenth of whom endured the greatest labor.³ There should be four deacons who can be ordained priests, if they want; their number recalls the four great doctors of the Church: Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory and Jerome. There should be eight laymen to supply the needs of the priests and deacons by their labor. The total will then be sixty sisters, thirteen priests, four deacons and their eight servants, the same number of persons as the thirteen apostles and seventy-two disciples."

8. "Chapter-house": the room in the abbey where the brethren and sisters each held their daily meeting, for decision-making of common interests, in the "chapter."

9. "The lowest place in the choir": the nun's choir was situated in a gallery in the eastern part of the church; thus she would sit at the western end, nearest the exit.

1. "Lay brothers" renders "conversi"; cf. *Extravagantes* ch. 35.

2. "Where each abbey is located"; a suggestion here that Birgitta always intended for there to be several houses belonging to her new order.

3. "The thirteenth of whom endured the greatest labor," i.e. St. Paul; cf. I Corinthians 15:8-9.

✠ Chapter 13

On the Men's Clothing and their Consecration

Here Christ determines the number of priests, deacons, and lay brothers serving the abbey of nuns as well as the habit they should wear along with the manner of their blessing and consecration.

“All the priests and brothers may have two white woolen undershirts¹ and a gray woolen tunic as well as a gray woolen cowl with a hood sewn on it and a gray woolen cloak over the cowl. They may have a coat with a lining of fleece from lamb or sheep beneath the cloak when necessary. In veneration of my passion, the thirteen priests should have a red cloth cross sewn on the left side of their cloaks with a bit of white cloth in its middle as a symbol of the mystery of my body which they offer up every day. The four deacons should have a white circle on their cloaks as a symbol of the immense wisdom of the four doctors whom they represent. Four bits of red cloth in the shape of tongues should be sewn in the circle, for the Holy Spirit has kindled in them the flames of the sublimity of my divine nature, the mystery of my incarnation, the vanity and contempt of the world, the rewards of the righteous and the punishments of the wicked. The lay brothers should have a white cross on their cloaks as a symbol of innocence. There should be five bits of red on the cross in veneration of my five wounds.² The priests and other brothers should have ankle-high shoes and boots in the summer but shoes and boots lined with wool in the winter. Be it known that these brothers³ may never number more than twenty-five in the abbey. They should be received by the bishop and consecrated in the same way and in the same places and with the same blessings as the sisters, except that, instead of a ring, the bishop will take the hand of the brother, using the same blessing as when putting the ring on the sisters. In place of a veil, the bishop should place his hands on their head, using the same words as for the imposition of the veil on the sisters. The brothers should take the tonsure as in other monasteries. After mass the bishop will bring them to the residence of the brothers. They should never go out of it except to enter the church.”

✠ Chapter 14

On the Election of the Abbess and General Confessor

Here Christ gives regulations as to the manner of electing the abbess and how she together with the convent should elect one of the brother-priests as confessor. He is to be the general confessor of both the nuns and the brothers in the abbey.

1. “Undershirts” renders “subtunicalia”; “cowl” renders “cuculla”; “hood” renders “capucia”; “cloak” renders “mantellum”; and “coat” renders “pellicium.” Thus we have deliberately made some slight changes in translating the monks’ clothing as distinct from the nun’s clothing.

2. “In veneration of my five wounds”: the white cross with the five red dots is the most distinctive attribute of the Birgittines, although some Cistercians nuns in the later middle ages are known to have worn a “crown” similar to that of the Birgittine nuns.

3. “These brothers,” i.e. the total number of priests, deacons, and laymen at the abbey.

“The abbess should be elected by the convent with the consent of the bishop. In veneration of the Blessed Virgin, my Mother, to whom this order is dedicated, she should be the head and leader, for the Virgin, whom the abbess represents, was the head and queen of my apostles and disciples after my ascension into heaven. With the consent of the community of sisters and brothers, the abbess should elect one of the thirteen priests as the confessor of all, and the bishop should confirm and appoint him. Once the bishop has given him the full authority of binding and loosing, correcting and forming, all the priests and brothers should obey him in everything as the sisters do the abbess, doing nothing at all without his permission. Likewise, apart from decisions affecting the brothers and the keeping of the Rule, the confessor should do nothing at all without the advice of the abbess, because she is the head of the abbey and must be consulted in regard to arranging the affairs and goods of the abbey.”

✚ Chapter 15

On the Brother-Priests' Duties in Prayer and Preaching

Here Christ stipulates that the brother-priests of the abbey should only apply themselves to prayer and reading and preach the gospel on certain days to the nuns in their native language.

“The thirteen priests should only apply themselves to the divine office, to study and to prayer without involving themselves in other activities or tasks. They should explain the gospel of the day in their native language every Sunday with everyone in attendance. They should also preach publically on every solemnity preceded by a vigil of fasting on bread and water as well as on other feasts that have vigils.”

✚ Chapter 16

On Confession

Here Christ regulates the times of confession for the nuns and the brothers as well as the way for the general confessor to select other brother-priests to assist in hearing confessions.

“At least three times a year they should disclose themselves by making a confession of conscience to the general confessor of all the sisters, priests and brothers. Because the consciences of them all should be cleansed in confession several times a year, the general confessor is permitted to select as many of the twelve priests as he wishes to hear confession. They should be accessible every day to anyone wishing to go to confession.”

✚ Chapter 17

On Communion

Here Christ determines the days during the year on which the nuns and the brothers should receive communion.

“Everyone should receive communion on every feast day preceded by a vigil¹ on which they fast on bread and water, on Maundy Thursday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Thursday, Pentecost, and the day of my nativity. If God inspires a greater devotion in some nuns, and if they ask for it with a fervent desire, they may receive communion every Saturday according to the advice of their confessor.”

✠ Chapter 18

On the Chapter

Here Christ stipulates that the abbess should hold a chapter every Thursday. He also sets forth the penance for nuns owning any possessions against the Rule, for both the sick and the healthy as well as for the dying.

“A penitential chapter¹ should be held every Thursday at which anyone who has committed a fault is to be corrected. If a sister who is sick is caught or admits to possessing anything of her own, she should receive absolution from the confessor but submit to and fulfill the appropriate penance when she has recovered her health. If a sister is healthy and is caught having anything of her own and does not turn herself in but has been found guilty on the testimony of three witnesses, she is to sit on the stone floor and she is to receive the same allowance as the other sisters on the first day of the chapter, that is, on Thursday, but bread and water on Friday. She is not to enter the church for these two days, but remain in the cloisters² during the hours when God’s work³ is being celebrated. Without speaking to any of the sisters as they all leave the church, she should lie prostrate in their tracks. On Friday the convent should go out to vespers in the customary order with the abbess going last. When she comes to the nun lying there she should give her a hand and help her up and then lead her to the altar in the sisters’ choir with the convent following and praying for her. Once she has received absolution, she may return to her usual place. If a nun dies in possession of anything of her own and has not confessed it, her body should be washed and placed on the bier outside the church. In the presence and hearing of the convent, the abbess should say: ‘This woman committed a serious sin against God and against the Order by possessing property of her own through the deceit of the devil. Let us pray for her. May God forgive her this sin, for he is merciful.’ Once a Hail Mary has been said by them all, she will be absolved. Her body may then be placed in the middle of the sisters’ choir. At the end of

1. “Vigil” renders “vigilie vel profesta”; cf. Swedish “apna ällir forhålgd”; see also ch. 15.

1. “A penitential chapter” renders “capitulum,” the daily meeting of the community which dealt with disciplinary matters and secular and business affairs, and during which the nuns read sections of the rule and prayed for the souls of the dead.

2. “Cloisters” renders “ambitus.”

3. “God’s work” renders “Opus Dei,” i.e., the work of song and prayer that was at the heart of the monastic community. Based on the Old Testament psalmist who praised God seven times a day and rose at midnight to give thanks, the monastic community attended eight services or offices composed of psalms, the scriptures, and prayer.

Mass, the sisters should carry her body to the door of the church. Once it has been opened, the brothers should go in and carry the body off and bury it in the proper way.”

✚ Chapter 19

Prohibition on the Receipt of Gifts

Here Christ forbids the nuns to receive gifts and does not allow the abbess to grant permission to receive any. He also prohibits her from making herself more conspicuous than the others by wearing a richer habit in order that she may remain untainted by this sin.

“If any gifts are made by relatives or friends directly to anyone, they should by no means be accepted as a consequence of the vows and holy promises made. The abbess herself may not grant permission to have anything of one’s own, not even if the request is made by anyone’s high-ranking relatives. As a fire grows out of a spark, so too damnation develops out of having one’s own possessions. This destroys the praiseworthy unity of monasteries and ruins the equality common to all. In the free use of her authority, as it were, the abbess herself must be carefully on her guard against any attraction to this sin or making herself more conspicuous than the others in the habit she wears. Insofar as she is the leader of the others, she must be all that much more careful to keep all the requirements of the Rule.”

✚ Chapter 20

On Dowries, Offerings, Alms, and Donations

Here Christ gives regulations about completing the construction of the church and the abbey, specifying the number of nuns and priests needed to celebrate the divine offices before the convent can be established within the abbey. He gives prescriptions about the dowry and offering to be given to the abbey by newly admitted nuns and about how these means should be used; furthermore about making an annual account of the outlays for that year and about how any surpluses should be donated to the poor. He also gives prescriptions about the particular inquiry to be made into any donations to the abbey with regard to whether the means were justly acquired or not before the abbess and the convent may accept them from the donators.

“First to be constructed are the church and the abbey of the sisters as well as the residence for the priests in their corresponding locations, as stated above, and then the community is to be introduced into the abbey. If they are unable to finish it completely within a brief period of time, then every care must be taken not to institute the convent until the construction has been sufficiently completed to ensure that they can live there without any worries or difficulties.

The number of sisters first introduced into the convent should be no fewer than sufficient for the chanting of their office; likewise the number of priests should be enough to chant the daily office of the season. If so, they may then be situated in the abbey, and afterward as many other persons as needed to complete the prescribed number of sisters and brothers. Upon entering the Order, each of the founding members of the abbey should bring and place at the disposal of the abness enough income to cover the expenses of their bread and drink every year (in both fallow and fertile years). The abness will make use of the voluntary contributions of the citizens of the kingdom to supply other kinds of food as well as clothing and necessary housing for everyone. Once the number of the founding members of the abbey is filled up, and each person has an allowance of bread and drink for every year, neither estates nor other means of income should be given to the abbey by others entering the Order afterward. When a member of the abbey dies, another is admitted as a replacement according to the above mentioned order. The deceased person's clothing and daily allowance for food and drink should be donated to the poor until another person comes as a replacement. Every year before the feast of All Saints, the expenses for food and other necessities in the coming year should be calculated and budgeted. Any food supplies or money left over in the current year should be donated to the needy the day after All Saints, that is, the day in commemoration of All Souls. In this way the abbey will not be burdened by any debts of hospitality.¹ Be it known that if the food supplies for the coming year appear to be insufficient from time to time, whatever amount is necessary may be taken from the money and supplies of the current year, but no more, if the abness wishes to avoid endangering her soul, and the rest should then be given to the poor. Whenever new clothes are acquired, the old ones should be given to the poor. Let it be known to the abness that if she has more buildings built than real housing needs require or has ostentatious buildings built, then this will be accounted to her a sin as grave as the violent theft of my beloved poor people's own food and clothing. If anyone presents his son or daughter to the abbey, he should always offer some alms to the abbey but not in the form of estates or income from capital, provided that each person still has an allowance of bread and drink from the previous endowments. Some donation should be made, however, so that they do not appear empty-handed before God. The offering should not be compulsory nor predetermined by the convent. It should rather be done freely and graciously on the part of the giver. All that he can or wants to give should be received with gratitude. Persons who are quite poor should be admitted without any kind of offering. However, whatever offerings are made should not be used for the benefit of the abbey but donated to the poor and to needy churches, except when the abbey is constrained by undeniable need. No other donations to the convent offered by anyone should be accepted, apart from those persons who first founded the abbey and entered the Order and were not allowed to come empty-handed. However, if the convent is seriously burdened

1. "Burdened by any debts of hospitality": presumably means the abbey could build up a surplus for lean times to accommodate any unforeseen eventualities.

by dire necessity and is compelled to accept donations, attentive care must be taken and a particular inquiry made to determine whether the donations possibly derive from ill gotten goods. Once the abbess has deliberated over the matter, she should say to the donor: 'We are under orders to accept only donations that derive from trustworthy sources and justly acquired means. I ask you to make a careful examination of your donation and then return on such and such a day and offer it to your God in the presence of witnesses.' When he has returned with his testimony, his gift should be received and the convent should pray for him and he should be counted among their benefactors. If there is any doubt as to its acquisition, with some people of one opinion and others of another, it should not be accepted no matter what kind of necessity urges it. However, because of the goodwill he has shown to the convent, all of them should pray for him in return for his charitableness. If people have a strong desire to donate things to the convent when there is no need, a representative of the convent should explain to them: 'We gladly receive your gifts and count you among our friends, but because we have no need ourselves of these gifts, we advise and humbly ask you to donate them from us and in our name to the poor or to the churches we suggest to you.' If he promises to do so and does it, his prayer will be heard."

✚ Chapter 21

On Altars, Ornaments, and Liturgical Books

Here Christ prescribes and specifies the number of altars and ornaments and books to be used in celebrating the divine liturgy in the church and in the abbey.

"Be it also known that there will be thirteen altars and that one chalice will suffice for each altar. The high altar may have two chalices with two pairs of cruets and two pairs of candelabras, one cross and three thuribles, one of which is to be used on ordinary days, two on feast days, and also a pyx in which to keep my body. Moreover all care should be taken to ensure that no more items of silver or gold are kept in the possession of the abbey, because they must win for themselves the treasure not of gold or silver or jewels but of my grace by their constant endeavor,¹ devout prayer and divine praise. Permission is given to cover the relics of the saints with gold or silver or jewels in keeping with their dignity but without any superfluity. There should be as many liturgical books as necessary but no more than that. They may also have whatever books they want for the purposes of learning and studying. Furthermore, two sets of ornaments and two sets of vestments are enough for each altar for weekday and festive celebrations. No more than the above-mentioned items may be owned at the same time."

1. "Constant endeavor" renders "continuis studiis."

✠ Chapter 22

On the Minimum Age for Admission to the Order

Here Christ prescribes the minimum age of the nuns and brothers, at the time of both probation and consecration, before admission to the Order.

“No sister should be received into the Order or consecrated before her eighteenth year of age, not even if there is universal consent for her to enter the convent before that year. No priest or brother should be professed before his twenty-fifth year.”

✠ Chapter 23

On Pious Work

Here Christ decides that apart from the time spent in prayer, reading, and necessary care of bodily needs, the nuns and brothers should make good use of their time through pious and honest work.

“My mother divided all her time into three periods: the first in which she gave vocal praise to God; the second in which she served him with the work of her hands; and the third in which she had compassion on the weakness of the body and provided its needs in moderation. The sisters should also devote to manual work all the hours not reserved for divine liturgy or reading. In this way they will serve both with their lips and the rest of their bodies. Their work is not for the sake of any vain and worldly purposes or for profit but is intended to give honor to God and to benefit the churches and the poor, as was my Mother’s work. All the work they do should be done with the permission of the abbess. Did not I, God of the universe, work when I lived in the world? Did not my apostles work, though I could very well have provided enough for them? They served me, their God, with every limb of their bodies in order that their physical labor might make them more apt for their spiritual labor.”

✠ Chapter 24

On the Equal Distribution of Food

Here Christ decides that food is to be distributed in equal and reasonable measure to high and low.

“My saints did not mortify their bodies because they hated them but in order to train them for the service of God for which purpose their bodies had been created. They did not do so because they thought they deserved my kingdom without a need for my mercy. They knew that even if someone kills his body a hundred times over, he will still not deserve to share my kingdom on his own merits, if I should go to trial against him with my justice. Accordingly, this is what I find pleasing and acceptable: that a person should treat his or her body like a debilitated mule in order that it may be of service to me, not in order for it to live a life of luxury and dissolution. Let it be content with what its debilitated

nature needs and wants in reasonable measure. Thus, because people observe moderation only with difficulty, an equal measure should be assigned to everyone, high and low, poor and rich, whose virtue is known by him who became acquainted with infirmities through temptation, for moderation is learned by trial and perfected by patience and discretion.”

✚ Chapter 25

The Means of Communication Between the Male and Female Convents

Here Christ gives prescriptions about the grated windows, explaining that the nuns may be heard but not seen when they are at confession but both heard and seen when they receive communion. He also speaks about the turning-wheel¹ and its use. He forbids the confessor or any other man from ever entering the nuns' convent, unless to give the sacraments to the sick or when a nun has died and her body must be carried out for burial.

“The sisters should make their confession at the windows designated for the purpose where they can be heard but not in any way seen. However, they should receive communion at the windows where they can be both heard and seen. When they wish to speak with the confessor or another one of the priests or brothers about their physical or spiritual health, they should sit at the other windows where they can be heard but not seen. A turning-wheel should be built in the wall through which necessary items can be passed. No sister should presume to speak or hear anything or to receive or pass on anything there without the knowledge and permission of the abbess. Take care here and elsewhere not to let any sister be found alone listening or speaking to anyone without the presence of other sisters to hear all that is being said, except when confessions are being heard at the designated windows. It is also forbidden for any confessor or any of the priests or brothers ever to enter the convent, except to give sacraments to the sick. Even then the confessor should never enter alone but always accompanied by others. When any of the nuns has died, all the priests and brothers together with the confessor should enter with chants and prayers to carry the body away for burial.”

✚ Chapter 26

Regulations for Visitations by the Bishop and the King

Here Christ lays down the following regulations. The diocesan bishop is to be the father and visitor of the abbey of this order; the regent of the kingdom or province is to be its defender; the pope is to be the nuns' loving father and protector, without whose permission

1. “Turning-wheel” renders “rota.” It was formed out of a wooden barrel on a central pivot.

no abbey of this order should be established. He also says that some devout brothers of the Orders of Saint Benedict or Saint Bernard may add to this Rule certain chapters on the correction of transgressions and on the visitation to be made and about any other necessary matters they deem expedient to this Rule.

“The bishop of the diocese where the abbey is located should be the father and visitor of both the sisters and the brothers and the judge in all cases involving them. He should always be a careful and diligent inspector to ensure that the Rule is kept in every detail so as not to allow its salutary statutes to be neglected by any of the sisters or brothers. The regent of the kingdom or the land where the abbey is located should be responsible for them and be their defender in all their necessities. The pope, placed above both the regent of the land and the bishop, is to be their loving protector, should they request his aid in any pressing necessity. Anyone wishing to erect an abbey of this order should not presume to do so without the pope’s consent and permission. Once the pope has approved this Rule, devout brothers belonging to the Rules of Benedict or Bernard should be asked to include in it points dealing with the correction of transgressions in the abbey, the burial of the deceased, the manner of the bishop’s visitation and the cases in which he may enter the convent. Any other necessary details not explained here may be taken from the above-mentioned Rules in order to make this Rule more firm and secure.”

✠ Chapter 27

On the Open Grave in the Abbey

Here Christ lays down the regulation that there should always be an open grave in the abbey where a prayer is said every day and that a bier should be placed in front of the entrance to the church as a constant reminder of death.

“In a suitable place in the abbey there should be a hole in the ground like a grave left open every day. The sisters should go out to it after terce¹ on both feast days and ordinary days. The abbess should toss a bit of earth into it while they recite the psalm ‘De profundis’² with the following collect prayer: (Prayer) ‘Holy Father, Lord, you formed a body for your Son from the Virgin Mary. You kept it inviolate in the grave and brought it uncorrupted back to life. Keep our bodies clean and immaculate in your holy service, we beseech you, and guide our lives in time, so that when the great and terrible day of judgment comes, they may rise again with your saints. May our souls rejoice with you forever and deserve to join the company of your elect. Amen.’ A bier on which a bit of earth has been placed should

1. “Terce”: another of the canonical hours that mark the divisions of the day in terms of fixed prayer at regular intervals. Terce was the third hour of the day, originally said around 9.00 a.m. but often anticipated in the later middle ages.

2. “De profundis”: one of the penitential psalms, named after its opening words (Psalm 130(131):1).

also be left outside the entrance of the church to be always on display for those entering. In this way, when they see it, they may be reminded of death and say in their hearts that all things are dust and to dust they shall return.”

✚ Chapter 28

On the Importance of Observing the Rule

Christ speaks to his bride Birgitta and explains the chapter placed at the start of the Rule that speaks of overgrown vineyards. He says that the overgrown vineyards are the religious orders in which the rules are not observed. He promises his help and grace to those members of the orders who do try to observe the rules and try to reform the orders as far as they are able.

“By those overgrown vineyards about which I spoke earlier before you heard the contents of the Rule, I mean the religious orders in which the rules are not kept¹ in the way my friends dictated them under the inspiration of the Spirit of truth. Instead they have left the true path and degenerated into drunkenness and worldly pleasure. I have friends in these orders who recognize the abandonment of their brothers but are unable to correct it on their own. Day and night they cry out to me in the great distress of their hearts and pray with tears that those who refuse to be corrected should be rejected and those who are willing to correct themselves should be made fruitful in good works. I am the one who scrutinizes every heart and hears every word. If I should find any who attempt to correct the errors of their abbeys and to keep their own rule in all its particulars, such as by wearing the humble habit of religious, observing fitting abstinence, fleeing private possessions, preserving chastity, true humility and good morals, I will collaborate with them. I will surround them with my love as one surrounds a vineyard with a wall. I will give them the grace of happily contenting themselves with the bare necessities of life, rejecting all superfluity. That is how to kill the mole that chews on the roots, in other words, the promptings of the devil that seek to tear apart good desires by means of base lusts. The watchmen will be awakened, that is, the consciences of those who give no thought to the salvation of their souls will be stirred to examine themselves continuously. And then I will fortify them with the sweet taste of my Spirit. He will make them strong in my service, for I created them and redeemed them with my precious blood.”

✚ Chapter 29

On the Miraculous Way in which the Rule was Revealed to Birgitta

Here Lady Birgitta, the bride of Christ, describes the miraculous way in which the Rule of this Order was delivered to her instantaneously from Christ’s own blessed mouth.

1. “The religious orders in which the rules are not kept” renders “regulas illas, que iam non tenentur.”

“From his own blessed mouth, God, the creator of the universe, entrusted to me, unworthy person that I am, all the words of this Rule in such a miraculous way and in so short a span of time that I cannot explain it to anyone. No one could possibly grasp or understand, except by way of analogy, how so many words could be uttered in an instant. It is as though a great many precious things were kept in a jar and were poured out all at once in such a way that anyone seeing it would be able to distinguish one thing from another right away, and all the things lasted long enough in front of the person to be gathered in his or her lap. Similarly, when Jesus Christ appeared to me and opened his blessed lips and began to speak, all the articles of this Rule with all the words contained in it were suddenly before me for a short moment. It is not as though they were written down on paper. He alone knows how they could be heard so miraculously and understood through his marvelous power so that my senses could distinguish one thing from another. The vision lasted long enough for me to gather everything in the lap of my memory with the help of Christ’s grace. After this vision, my heart was so full of zeal and joy that there was no more room for anything else—any more would have been the end of me, my heart would have burst with joy. My heart swelled like a ball full of air for some days, while I related all the articles and words contained in the Rule to a monk, a friend of God, who wrote everything down as quickly as possible. When everything was written down, I felt my heart and body slowly return to their natural state. Praise and glory to almighty God! Amen.”

✠ Chapter 30

Birgitta must Seek Papal Approval for her Rule

Christ tells the bride to present the above rule to the pope for approval, and he tells the pope to approve it.

Many years later, while strength was returning to her wakeful body, bringing great comfort with it, the same person was caught up in a spiritual vision. A voice then spoke to her and said: “I am the Son of the living God. The Rule that you heard must be approved by my vicar or the pope as he is called in the world, because he has received from me the power of binding and loosing,¹ and he will render an account to me in the hearing of all my heavenly host. I am the same who, as it says in Scripture, gave Moses this reply when he asked my name: ‘I am who I am.’² I received a human body from the Virgin at the time I had appointed. I spoke with my bodily lips in the world and affirmed that I had not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. Similarly I tell you now that this Rule that you heard in the Spirit was not dictated by human reason, but it must still be approved by the pope like other rules that were composed by human reason through the inspiration of the Spirit. Once it has been approved, the pope should

1. “The power of binding and loosing”: cf. Matthew 16:19.

2. “I am who am”: cf. Exodus 3:12.

give his permission to those wishing to enter it to bring into this order any persons in other religious orders who have kept their own rule with divine love and who promise to remain in this order until death. However, they should admit no more applicants than they themselves choose, nor any other persons but only those they wish to incorporate into their community. The pope should also allow the construction of an abbey in the place in which the Rule was revealed in your hearing. That is where this order should first be established. He should also permit the sisters to chant my Mother's daily office which was composed by the same Spirit as the Rule." I heard this and replied: "O incorporeal Power, how great is your humility! Maker of all the virtues, Virtue itself, one omnipotent God in three persons! I believe everything the holy Church tells me to believe. I know with the utmost certainty that no one is so unworthy as to be denied your mercy, provided he asks you for mercy with true humility and the wholehearted intention of making up for his wrongs in the past. By your grace I have the intention of doing your will so long as I live, as you are my witness. You know that, if it could increase your joy and consolation, I would accept all kinds of bodily sickness, scandal, sorrow, poverty and tribulation as well as eternal punishment. I would sooner embrace these sufferings than the eternal happiness of body and soul rather than allow any consolation to be taken from you. O Lord my God, you created me and redeemed me with your blood. If you see any lack in me of the three virtues of faith, hope and charity, supply it, please, through your great grace. You are in the very inmost blood of my heart. You are within my soul. Though I am unworthy of the visitation and consolation of your Spirit, I entrust myself completely to the protection of your great power. Do whatever you please with me. Though you see the thoughts of everyone, my soul prompts my tongue to speak to you. My most worthy Lord Jesus Christ, I am a worthless person among your faithful servants. I am like a little ant among the strong camels that carry great loads for the convenience and glory of their master. How will the pope ever believe that you, God and Lord of the universe, deigned to treat a worthless ant in such a way? How will this Rule ever reach his sight?"

✠ Chapter 31

Birgitta is Reassured about Papal Approval and the Prosperity of the Order

Christ speaks to the bride and tells her that she has to make the efforts needed to obtain the pope's approval of the Rule. He promises his grace and help to all those who enter the Order as well as greater peace and concord in any country where an abbey of this order is founded.

Then the voice that was speaking before gave me this answer: "I am without beginning or end. I have arranged everything according to my will. I have made everything as I chose. If someone should ask why I did not create heaven and earth and everything in them¹ earlier, the answer must be that this was my will. Likewise, if someone asks why I did not give this Rule earlier or why I want it

1. "Create heaven and earth and everything in them"; cf. Genesis 1:1.

approved, the answer must be that this was how I wanted it to be. Does not Scripture say: "The Spirit blows where it will."² That is how it truly is. In different ways he blows where and when he will. Such graces attend him that the whole heart is filled with sudden joy, a joy that does not come to the heart from anything worldly or physiological but from the grace of the inspiring Spirit. Therefore, if the pope feels such a joy in his heart when he hears this Rule read out loud in his presence, then he will recognize the source of the Rule. How many of my friends, both priests and laymen, whose hearts I have enlightened with my charity, have an unwavering belief that it comes from me and recognize what I have deigned to do with you, I who created the universe, I who freed humankind from the power of hell. If, perhaps, some of the people at the papal court cannot accept it, then let three witnesses come to the pope. They were born in the same country as you, and are acquainted with you, and have full knowledge of what has occurred to you. You know all three: one is a bishop, one a monk and one a priest. The pope should also consider the following. If someone possesses a lot of gold and could give to others without diminishing his own supply, it would not be just not to give of his gold to those who seek nothing from it other than God's glory and the salvation of souls. By this gold I mean the authority the pope has received from me to approve this Rule. I have said "I am the good shepherd."³ I myself will protect all those who enter the Order from all their mortal enemies. In every kingdom, country and town in which an abbey of this order is built with the permission of my vicar, there will be an increase of peace and concord as soon as the abbey is completed that I designated to be first. You, to whom the Rule was given, make every effort to ensure that it reaches the pope. I am the very one who commanded my disciples to go into the city and lead the ass to me.⁴ Yet I was perfectly capable of making it immediately stand before me. Thus even now I could make this Rule come before the pope in an instant and have him approve it right away. Justice demands, however, that a greater reward should be given to the soul for the body's greater spiritual effort. Therefore, you should make every effort to cooperate. I will bring it to fulfillment when I choose."

2. "The Spirit blows where it will": cf. John 3:8.

3. "I am the good shepherd": cf. John 10:11.

4. "Commanded my disciples...ass to me": cf. Matthew 21:2.

The Angel's Discourse

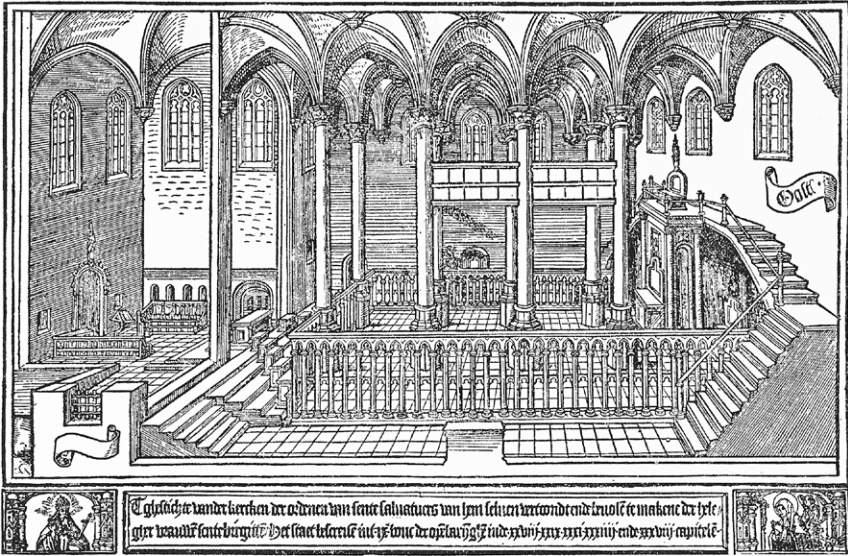


FIGURE 5. Hypothetical reconstruction of the interior of a Birgittine church, showing the nuns' gallery, from a Dutch woodcut dating from c. 1500. (Image courtesy of Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm).



FIGURE 6. Reconstructed model of the nuns' gallery. (Image © Lars Berggren).

Introduction

While the *Regula Salvatoris* laid down the practical rules for monastic observance in the Birgittine Order, the *Sermo angelicus de Virginis excellentia* (“The Angelic Discourse concerning the Excellence of the Virgin”) was the embodiment of the order’s contemplative spirituality.¹ A few years after Birgitta’s arrival in Rome, and while she lived overlooking the church of San Lorenzo in Damaso, twenty-one daily readings were divinely revealed to her on “the excellence of the Virgin.”² The resulting work, intended to be used by the nuns of the proposed monastic order, became the most resonant and eloquent expression of Birgitta’s Mariology. It has a more sophisticated diction compared with the *Revelationes*, and in both style and content it stands out among Birgitta’s collected writings.

According to the Prologue, written by Alfonso of Jaén, Birgitta could see the altar of the church from her house and she would sit daily “with pen, paper and tablet,” ready to receive the text of the readings dictated to her in Swedish by an angel. The angel left her with the parting instruction: “See, I have fashioned a dress for the Queen of heaven, the Mother of God. Sew the pieces together now, as well as you can” (Prologue paragraph 12). In other words, the readings had to be complemented by further material to make up the divine office, a task that was undertaken by her Swedish confessor, Master Petrus of Skänninge.³ Not only did he translate the twenty-one lessons of the *Sermo angelicus* from Swedish into partly metrical Latin, but he also set about composing or adapting the hymns, antiphons, and responses, as well as the accompanying music. The expanded work that contained the Birgittine Office became known as the *Cantus sororum* [The Song of the Sisters].⁴

Cantus Sororum

The brethren—who worshipped independently from the nuns, but whose worship in the monastic church must have alternated continually night and day with that of the nuns—followed an office that was based on local diocesan usage. The nuns, however, followed an adapted form of the *Officium parvum beate Mariae Virginis* (i.e., the seven daily offices of the lesser Marian additional office in common use), which was normally read or sung before the proper diocesan or monastic office.⁵ In the case of the Birgittine nuns, the shorter office was to be sung after the great office rather than before it. This arrangement is a unique feature of the Birgittine liturgy, in fulfillment of *Extravagantes* ch. 3:

Therefore, I want the brothers to chant their hours first at the proper times. Then the sisters should recite their office with somewhat greater pause. The seven times are not set for them by the course of the sun, but they should do their best and try to follow the fixed times as far as they are able. I have dictated this Rule and specify this matter so that even the heathen, who are to be converted, may understand the honor God wants to confer on his Mother. Since she is the head and mistress of this abbey, I want to show mercy to sinners through her. The passage in Scripture will also be fulfilled where it says: “I shall bless God at all times and in all my life.” This special privilege should not be refused, for a particular good does not harm the common good. The laudable custom of the fathers is not to be rejected, but it is pleasing to me that in other churches the hours of my Mother the Virgin should be recited first, then the hours of the day should be sung at the fixed times.

As distinct from the standard office according to the church calendar, the *Cantus sororum* was composed in such a way that each weekday had its own unchanging office throughout the year. It taught the nuns to place Mary at the center of their worship and to observe and reflect on different aspects of her life in their daily hours. It emphasized Mary’s role in the work of redemption, contrasting the part played by Eve with that of Mary, and explaining Mary’s role in relation to God, the angels, and the faithful of the Old Covenant. Petrus inserts into each weekday office a number of older Marian hymns, anthems, and antiphons that were already part of the standard repertoire of the church. They include the well-known hymn *Ave maris stella*, which is inserted into the Vespers for each day; the antiphon *Alma Redemptoris mater*, which concludes the Monday compline; and the *Salve Regina* antiphon, which ends Saturday’s compline. Petrus’s inspiration when he was composing is described in *Extravagantes* ch. 114. With his priestly training he was well-placed to embroider the theological content—although perhaps not unsurprisingly there were moments of self-doubt in the creation of such an ambitious breviary, as suggested in *Extravagantes* ch. 5, when he doubts his poetic ability and is told to leave the text of the hymn *Sponse iungendo filio* as it stands.

At Vadstena, a complete translation into Swedish of the nuns' offices was made in the early 1500s by the confessor general, Nikolaus Ragvaldsson (d. 1514), who was one of the foremost preachers at Vadstena, as well as the author of an account of the translation of the relics of Birgitta's daughter Katherina, which took place in 1489.⁶ His translation, known as *Jungfru Marie Örtagård* [The Herb Garden of the Virgin Mary], is provided with an extensive commentary, also omitting or paraphrasing certain sections that already existed in the vernacular. He gives a typological interpretation of the psalms, with a long exposition on the *Venite*, the introductory psalm of matins.⁷

In English another important independent vernacular version was known as the *Myroure of Oure Ladye*, which was composed around the middle of the fifteenth century and printed in London in 1530.⁸ Its anonymous author provided his translation with a long symbolical commentary, for instance arguing that the triad formed by the lessons and responses in the Sunday office corresponds to the three ages of the world. Both men were seen as significant liturgical commentators of their day.

Another work in which the *Sermo angelicus* formed a part was Alfonso's compilation of selected revelations dating from c. 1380, known as the *Celeste Viridarium* [The Heavenly Pleasure-Garden]. In his dedicatory letter to the nuns at Vadstena, the *Epistola Servi Christi*, he says he aimed to collect material specifically relating to the Virgin and her life on earth. The *Celeste Viridarium* contains extracts from the whole corpus of revelation books, and although it includes the *Sermo angelicus* in its entirety, it varies considerably from the text proper, including a dialogue between Birgitta and the angel.⁹ The fact that it occurs in only two manuscripts may suggest it was never popular, but it is an early example of the thematic collections of materials that started to be created after Birgitta's lifetime.

Birgittine Music and Singing

In her own devotions Birgitta sang parts of the office with her servants in Rome—probably around the same time as she received the vision of the *Sermo angelicus*—and a witness in the canonization process said she sang with a lowered voice and devout harmony (“voce submissa cum deuotissima armonia”).¹⁰ However, she probably was not musically schooled and her musical outlook was not especially innovative or original. She makes sporadic comments on music in her revelations, favoring the Gregorian chant while shunning the extremes of secular music and polyphony (*Extravagantes* 4); in Book VIII 56 she speaks of countless types of musical instruments in the context of worship. She forbids the use of organs and other musical instruments in her order (*Extravagantes* 10) and describes music when it is integrated into divine worship as resembling “refined gold” and “tested silver” (*Extravagantes* 18).¹¹

The monastic day in the abbey church was filled with the sound of devotion, of the nuns and brethren alike. Singing the fixed liturgy of the *Cantus sororum*, situated out of view on their wooden gallery high above the nave of the church

but with a view of the Mary altar to the east, the nuns' voice was like a celestial one, and it alternated with the brethren's worship in their separate choir in the western part of the church. They followed local diocesan usage with its constant variations according to the liturgical year. Altogether, at least twelve hours a day must have been spent in the service of God in worship, and what emerges is a "soundscape" in which the music and architecture and the voices of all those present in different parts of the church blend together. The nuns in their gallery choir sang in alternate groups, under a cantrix, and two other sisters who were appointed by rotation led the antiphons. According to the *Ludicarium* (ch. 2) when they came to the readings of the *Sermo angelicus*, the readings were intoned by a lectrix who stood up while her fellow sisters remained seated: "The sister who is due to read the lesson comes forward before the pulpit humbly, bowing to the altar and saying 'Praise be to God.' And the 'horista' shall give the benediction ordained for that day, and the choir answers 'Amen.' Afterward all sit except for the woman who is to read the lesson."¹²

The Angel's Discourse and the Virgin Mary

Thus the *Sermo angelicus* comprises the set of relatively lengthy readings (or lessons), to be used daily at the Matins office which took place in the middle of the night, at around 3.00 a.m. Each day had three prescribed readings that started after the gospel reading and were introduced by a formulaic blessing and concluded with a response and versicle that reflected their specific content.¹³

The contents are briefly as follows. For Sunday, the angel describes how God had always loved the Virgin Mary above all created things; for Monday the angel tells how after the fall of Lucifer the angels heard about the future coming of the Virgin and how she seemed to be present to God and the angels after the creation of the world. In the Tuesday readings Adam's repentance is described, and the foreknowledge of the Virgin's coming by the prophets of the Old Testament. The Wednesday readings describe her conception and birth and God's eternal love for her even while she was still in her mother's womb. The Thursday readings describe her beauty in soul and body, and the conception and birth of Jesus. The Friday readings describe her suffering and sorrow at the painful death of her Son, and the Saturday readings describe her unwavering true faith when others were in doubt of the resurrection, and how her example and teaching helped others; finally the assumption of her body and soul into heaven.

The *Sermo angelicus* reflects aspects of the rise in Marian devotion in the later middle ages. It exemplifies the shift from the representation of the Virgin as a distant, liturgical figure who was depicted mainly in terms of her relationship to Christ, into a personalized image of an individual who experienced human joys and sufferings and contributed to the work of salvation.¹⁴ As the *mater dulcissima* and the *regina misericordiae*, she is presented as the object of pious praise and an instrument of intercession between God and man. The *Sermo angelicus* reflects a blend of Marian popular devotion and learned doctrinal argument, and it contains some unusual elements, such as its interpreta-

tion of the Assumption, the traditional belief that the Virgin was assumed into heavenly glory in body and soul three days after her death: Saturday's third reading states that Mary was assumed into heaven "a few days" after her burial, in body as well as soul. Birgitta expounds this idea further in Book VI 62 and Book VII 26, where she asserts that the number of days Mary spent in the grave before the Assumption was fifteen (a point that was quoted and openly criticized in debates by theologians at the major church councils until well into the fifteenth century).¹⁵

Another old doctrine that is affirmed is the perpetual virginity of the Virgin—before, during, and after giving birth: "Those who doubt that God's omnipotence could accomplish this or think that his goodness would not do it if it could for the salvation of his creation—may they be ashamed and may they tremble!" as stated in the third lesson for Sunday (ch. 15.6; compare also Book IV 56 and Book VII 21). A further debate where Birgitta had an influence in the centuries after her death is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The intellectual argument in favor of the fact that Mary was free from the stain of original sin from the first moment of her conception depended on a line of thinking developed by St. Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century, but it was denied by St. Bernard. The great scholastic tradition of the Dominicans, represented by theologians such as St. Albert and St. Thomas Aquinas, conceded that Mary was sanctified in the womb, but denied that her conception was immaculate on the grounds that she, too, must have needed the redemption that is in Christ. Instead it argued that she was sanctified very soon after "animation"—that is, after the infusion of her soul into the embryo. However, thirteenth-century Franciscans writers such as Duns Scotus took the view that Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin from the very moment of her conception. Birgitta does not touch directly on this question in the *Sermo angelicus*, but she speaks of Mary's parents' exemplary marriage in general terms, suggesting that there will be no sin in the offspring if there is no concupiscence in the parents (the first lesson for Wednesday, ch. 10). Moreover, she mentions Mary's immunity from sin more explicitly elsewhere. In Book VI 49 Mary tells Birgitta how she was conceived "without original sin and not in a state of sin" because her parents had the most perfect marriage and their sexual union was against their own will and by God's will alone (compare also Book I 9, Book V rev. 13, and VI 55).

Mary is also depicted as an integral part and instrument of God's saving presence on earth. She is the intermediary in salvation history and the mother of mercy who intercedes on behalf of those who petition to God. Her reference to the Virgin as *salvatrix* in *Extravagantes* ch. 56 (the vision in which she sees her husband in purgatory) and as *redemptrix* (Book I 35) may illustrate further the active part the Virgin plays in the work of redemption and suggest that divine grace comes through Mary as well as Christ; in the latter vision, indeed, the Virgin declares that just as Adam and Eve sold the world for a fruit, she and her Son redeemed the world "as it were with one heart."

Chapter 19 of the *Sermo angelicus*, the first lesson for Saturday, outlines a view of Mary as Mother. She is the mother of wisdom and Birgitta draws attention to her active and intellectual qualities. In being the instrument of the incarnation,

the Virgin possesses a special wisdom superior to that of learned men. She rejoiced in the resurrection, which she witnesses—unrecorded in scripture—before Mary Magdalene and the apostles. Her name, *magistra apostolorum*, suggests that after the ascension she instructed the apostles in the things they did not know about Christ. She is also presented as one who comforts martyrs and teaches believers, and gives an example to virgins, consolation to widows, counsel to the married, and support for all who embrace the faith.

Without doubt Mary dominates Birgitta's spirituality, as is seen across the whole corpus of texts (in approximately a third of her revelations she is addressed by the Virgin), and in the monastic order, which is dedicated to the Virgin. It is seen too in the Birgittine liturgy, which repeatedly resonates with praise of the Virgin. It is seen in Birgitta's life, where Mary has a palpable role, perhaps best symbolized when she assures Birgitta of the authenticity of two Marian relics, a drop of her milk and a hair from her head.¹⁶ The Virgin is for Birgitta her comforter, friend, and mentor who explains the contents of her visions and reassures her in her prophetic calling. Most significantly, perhaps, is the way in which Birgitta presents her role as the channel of God's words as being analogous to the Virgin's role in giving birth to Christ: just as Mary is a vessel and channel, and the instrument of God's grace, so Birgitta places herself in a similar role as mediator of God's reforming message to mankind.¹⁷

NOTES

1. On the spirituality of the order, see Ellis, "Further Thoughts on the Spirituality."
2. On the date of the work, often given as 1354, and almost certainly between 1353 and 1366, see Eklund, *Sermo angelicus*, pp. 18–20.
3. On Petrus of Skänninge, see volume I pp. 13–14.
4. The whole cycle of liturgical offices was edited by Lundén, *Den heliga Birgitta och den helige Petrus*; see especially his summary in English, pp. cv–cxii. See also Collins, *The Bridgettine Breviary*, on the English translation, especially the introduction; and Servatius, *Cantus sororum*.
5. For interpretative studies, see Hårdelin, *Birgittinsk lovsång*; Piltz, "Nostram naturam sublimaverat"; and Woolfskeel, "Birgitta of Sweden," pp. 173–84. See also Hagberg, *Horae de Domina*, concerning a rare printed text from the short-lived Vadstena printing press, which contains the hours of Our Lady in the local diocesan usage.
6. See Geete, *Jungfru Marie Örtagård*; Hårdelin, "Heder och hugnad. Nicolaus Ragvaldis liturgiska hermeneutik."
7. There was also a Danish translation, made in the late fifteenth century, now preserved in MS A29 in Stockholm's Royal Library.
8. Blunt, *The Myroure of oure Ladye*; Hutchison, "The Nuns of Syon Abbey."
9. See Eklund, *Sermo angelicus*, p. 42.
10. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 248.
11. On the musical ideal outlined in *Extravagantes* ch. 4, see Milveden, "Per omnia humilis. Reflexioner kring en birgittinsk sångspegel."
12. Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser*, 5 p. 61; our translation. See also on Birgittine music, Servatius, "Magister Petrus som diktare" Servatius, "Heliga Birgitta som musikalisk visionär"; KLNLM "Koral, Gregoriansk." See also Bagnall Yardley, *Performing Piety*, especially pp. 203–27 on the music of Syon abbey.
13. The setting for the matins readings is outlined in the Prologue, written in medieval Swedish, to the vernacular translation of the work, *Jungfru Marie Örtagård* ed. Geete, pp. 3–15.
14. Birgitta's Mariology was first discussed by Vernet, "Brigitte de Suède," and Schmid, *Birgitta och hennes uppenbarelser*. See also Sahlin, "The Virgin Mary and Birgitta of Sweden's Prophetic Vocation" and other essays in the same collection edited by Brodd and Hårdelin, *Maria i Sverige under tusen år*.
15. For example, Fredriksson Adman, *Heymericus de Campo* p. 21; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 221–29.
16. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 628, 527–38, 634–35.
17. See further Sahlin, "The Virgin Mary," p. 239.

The Angel's Discourse

PROLOGUE TO THE ANGEL'S DISCOURSE ON THE EXCELLENCE OF THE VIRGIN

1 When Blessed Birgitta, the noblewoman from Närke¹ in the kingdom of Sweden, had been living in Rome for a number of years in the house of a cardinal, adjacent to the church of San Lorenzo in Damaso,² 2 she still did not know what readings the nuns should use in the abbey that Christ had ordered her to build in Sweden, the rule for which he himself had dictated in honor of the Blessed Virgin, his mother. 3 But then, when Blessed Birgitta was praying and wondering about this matter, Christ appeared to her and said: "I will send you my angel,³ and he will reveal to you the matins readings for the nuns in your abbey in honor of the Virgin, my mother. He will dictate them to you, and you must write down his exact words!" 4 Now Blessed Birgitta had a room with a window facing the high altar from which she could see the body of Christ every day. Every day in that room, as soon as she had read her hours and prayers, she made herself ready with a notebook and pen in hand, ready and waiting for the angel of the Lord. 5 When he came, he would place himself at her side with an upright, courteous stance, reverently facing the altar where the body of Christ lay concealed. 6 Standing in this way, he dictated clearly and in order, in Blessed Birgitta's own language, the following readings to be used at matins in the abbey, which describe the supreme and eternal⁴ excellence of the Blessed Virgin Mary. 7 She would devoutly write them down from the angel's lips every day and humbly show her spiritual father what she had written that day. 8 Sometimes it happened that the angel did not come to dictate. When her spiritual father asked if she had written anything on such a day, then she would humbly answer: 9 "Father, I wrote nothing today, because I waited a long time for the angel of the Lord to tell me what to write, but he did not come."

10 In this way the following discourse about the excellence of the Blessed Virgin Mary was dictated and written down from the lips of the angel himself. 11 He even divided it into readings to be used at matins during the week throughout the whole yearly cycle, as follows.

12 After the angel had finished dictating these words, he said to the bride as she was writing: "See, I have fashioned a dress for the Queen of heaven, the Mother of God. Sew the pieces together now, as well as you can."⁵ 13 O happy

1. "Närke": a province in central Sweden, where Birgitta's husband Ulf Gudmarsson was lawman.

2. "San Lorenzo in Damaso": The church of San Lorenzo in Damaso was the titular church of Cardinal Hugues Roger, the brother of the Avignon pope in exile, who also owned the house. See Collins, *The Bridgettine Breviary*, p. xvii; and Tesei, *Le Chiese de Roma*, p. 208.

3. "I will send you my angel"; cf. Exodus 23:20; Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:2; Apocalypse 22:16.

4. "Eternal": eternal in the sense that God had it in mind from eternity, *ab aeterno*.

5. "As well as you can": "you" is in the plural, presumably referring to Birgitta and her confessor Petrus of Skänninge.

nuns of the most holy Order of the Savior! By the very words of his mouth, he, the savior and maker of all humankind, has kindly and humbly provided you and the whole world with a Rule through the bride. 14 Now make ready ready your hands for the holy work of receiving, with the greatest reverence and devotion, this sacred discourse which the angel of the Lord has dictated to your mother, Blessed Birgitta, at God's command. 15 Open your ears to hear the new, sublime and never before heard praise of the most Blessed Virgin Mary. With humble minds, ponder her excellence from eternity as described here. Swallow it with the loving throat of meditation; consume its sweet delights with an appetite for contemplation. 16 Then lift up your hands and hearts with all your affection in the presence of God to render humble and devout acts of thanksgiving to him for the great kindness that he has so singularly shown to you. May her most Blessed Son, the king of angels, deign to grant this to you, he who lives and reigns with her⁶ forever. Amen."

HERE BEGIN THE READINGS TO BE READ NIGHTLY AT MATINS DURING THE WEEK THROUGHOUT THE YEARLY CYCLE IN THE CONVENTS OF NUNS OF THE ORDER OF THE RULE OF THE SAVIOR THAT CHRIST REVEALED TO BLESSED BIRGITTA OF THE KINGDOM OF SWEDEN.

HERE BEGINS THE ANGEL'S DISCOURSE CONCERNING THE EXCELLENCE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY. THE ANGEL DICTATED IT TO BLESSED BIRGITTA AT GOD'S COMMAND AND SHE RECORDED IT CAREFULLY IN WRITING AT THE SAME COMMAND. IT SHOULD BE READ AT MATINS⁷ ON SEPARATE DAYS OF THE WEEK THROUGHOUT THE YEARLY CYCLE, AS FOLLOWS.

✠ Chapter 1

Sunday: First Reading

DATE: 1350S, ROME

In these three readings the angel describes how God, from all eternity, loved the glorious and blessed Virgin, his mother, beyond all creatures and before any were created.

Invocation:¹ May the Virgin with whom the Holy Trinity is most pleased, shield us with her excellent prayers. Amen.

1 The Word mentioned in the Gospel of John² the Evangelist was from all eternity one God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. There are three Persons

6. "Reigns with her": this is an unusual statement, placed within a liturgical phrase, that draws attention to the queenship of Mary, which was well established by Birgitta's time, and places her as Queen who reigns alongside Christ the King. It is indicative of the centrality of the Virgin within Birgitta's thought and spirituality.

7. "Matins": the night office at the start of the monastic day, begun at around 3.00 a.m.

1. "Invocation" renders "absolutio"; a term that has many distinct meanings, but here, in a late usage according to Blaise's *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs du moyen-âge*, referring to a "supplication brève avant les leçons de matines"; thus in a liturgical sense it would have been clearly recognized by medieval clerics.

2. "The Word mentioned in the Gospel of John"; cf. John 1:1.

and one perfect divinity in them. 2 The three Persons were co-equal in every way. There was one will in the three, one wisdom, one power, one beauty, one strength, one charity, one joy. 3 It would certainly have been impossible for this Word to be God, if it were separable from the Father and the Holy Spirit. The word *ita* ("thus"), which seems to point out³ the truth and contains three letters, can serve as an example. 4 If any of the three letters were taken away from the other two, they would not have the same effect as before, since they would not make up the same word. One may reason in a similar way concerning the three Persons in the one divine nature. 5 If any one of them were separable from the others, or if any one were unequal or somehow lacked what the others had, then they would appear not to be divine, for the divine nature is indivisible in and of itself.

6 It is wrong to believe that the Word, the Son of God, became separated from the Father and the Holy Spirit by accepting a human nature. Just as any word that we may say, though conceived in the heart and uttered by the mouth, can in no way be touched or seen, unless it is inscribed or printed on something material, 7 in the same way it was impossible for the Word, the Son of God, to be touched or seen for the sake of the salvation of humankind without being joined to a human body. 8 As a word seen in a book can likewise be conceived in the mind and uttered by the mouth, so too there can be no doubt that the Son of God, visible in the human flesh he had assumed, was with the Father and the Holy Spirit. 9 The three Persons are, then, truly inseparable, unchangeable, eternally co-equal in every way, one God.

10 All things were foreknown to God from eternity. All the things that he later brought into being when he pleased to create them in his wisdom were present to his sight in their reverent beauty for his joy and honor. 11 God was not forced to create anything due to any kind of necessity or due to anything lacking to his joy or desire. It was, of course, impossible that he should find anything lacking to himself. 12 It was his own burning love that led him to the act of creation in order that more beings might rejoice forever with him in his indescribable joy.

13 Hence, all the uncreated things that would be created later were beautifully present to his sight from all eternity in the same form in which he then beautifully created them.

14 Among all these uncreated beings in God's sight, however, there was one that greatly excelled all the rest and which gave him the most joy. 15 The four elements, as yet uncreated, were in that being: fire, wind, water, and earth. To the divine sight they appeared in this way: the wind in it was so light that it never blew against the Holy Spirit; 16 the earth in it, as yet uncreated, was so good and fertile that nothing could grow there that was not useful for all one's needs; 17 the water was so calm that when the whirlwinds blew, no squall was ever stirred up in it; 18 the fire burned so high that its flames and heat reached the very dwelling-place of God.

3. "Point out" renders "sonare" [to sound or utter]; Birgitta is thinking of logical conclusions that are prefaced by "thus" ("ita").

19 O Mary, Virgin most pure and fruitful, you were that creature! You were uncreated but present from eternity to the sight of God. You received the matter of your blessed body from those pure and shining elements. 20 You stood uncreated in God's sight prior to your creation in such a form as you would later have. In his sight you excelled all the things to be created and gave him the greatest joy. 21 God the Father exulted in your fruitful works that you would later perform with his help. The Son exulted in your virtuous steadfastness and the Holy Spirit in your humble obedience. 22 The joy of the Father was the joy of the Son and the Spirit; the joy of the Son was the joy of the Father and the Spirit; the joy of the Spirit was the joy of the Father and the Son. 23 Hence, as their joy was one, so too they had one love for you.

✠ Chapter 2

Sunday: Second Reading

Invocation: Mother of Christ, assist us in our needs, you who brought joy to a world in tears! Amen.

1 Mary, most excellent of creatures, you were with God before he created you, as the ark was with Noah once the plan of its construction was made known to him¹ but before he completed it, as commanded. 2 The nature of the ark was made known to Noah at the time pleasing to God, but, before time existed, God knew the nature of his ark—your glorious body. 3 Noah exulted in his ark before it was made. God himself exulted in you, Blessed Virgin, before he created you. 4 Noah exulted that his ark would be so solidly built that no onslaught of any storm could break it. 5 God exulted that your body should be so firmly and virtuously made that none of the relentless wickedness that would exist in Hell could ever bend it to any sin. 6 Noah rejoiced that his ark was tarred inside and out in such a way that bilgewater could never seep through. 7 God rejoiced because he foreknew that your will would be so good with his goodness that you would deserve to be thoroughly anointed inside and out with the unction of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that no entry would ever be opened in your heart to the ambition for temporal things in the world to be created. 8 Worldly greed in humankind is as loathsome to God as bilgewater was to Noah in his ark. Noah rejoiced because his ark was so ample and spacious. 9 God rejoiced because your fervor² was to be so ample and merciful that you would love all creatures in a perfect way and shun none of them without reason. 10 Your blessed fervor would open up so wide that God who is immeasurable, whose greatness cannot be grasped, 11 would deign to lie and to move about in your blessed womb. Noah rejoiced, too, because his ark would be so bright. God rejoiced because your shining virginity was to be preserved until death in such a way that no corruption of sin would ever darken it. 12 Noah

1. "The plan of its construction was made known to him"; cf. Genesis 6:14–22.

2. "Fervor" renders "pietas."

rejoiced because he would have everything he needed physically on the ark. God rejoiced because he would take his entire body from your body alone, free from every defect. 13 Most pure Virgin, God took more joy in you than Noah in his ark. Noah knew beforehand that he would exit the ark with the same body with which he had entered it. 14 God knew beforehand that he, without a body, would enter the ark of your most fair body and would leave it with a body taken from your chaste flesh and pure blood. 15 Noah knew that when he exited the ark, he would leave it behind empty and that he would hardly return to it. 16 Before time existed, God knew that, after his human birth, you, o glorious Virgin and Mother, would not be empty like Noah's ark but would remain completely filled with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. 17 Although his body was to be separated from yours at birth, he knew beforehand that you would stay with him inseparably and forever.

✠ Chapter 3

Sunday: Third Reading

Invocation: May she who became God's home, gain for us his grace. Amen.

1 Because God promised Abraham that a son would be born to him,¹ the patriarch loved his son Isaac many years before his child was conceived. 2 But, sweet Virgin Mary, almighty God loved you with much greater love before anything was created, for he knew from all eternity that you would be born to him to his great joy. 3 Little did the patriarch know that the great love that he cherished for God was to be manifested through the son promised to him. 4 But God knew very well from the start that the great love that he cherished for the human race would be clearly revealed through you. 5 Abraham knew beforehand that his son must be conceived in shame and born of a woman through sexual intercourse. 6 Yet God knew beforehand, o most chaste Virgin, that he would be gloriously conceived in you without any man's cooperation, and that he would be gloriously born of you with your virginity remaining intact. 7 Abraham understood that the flesh of his son, once conceived, would be essentially separated from his own. 8 But God the Father knew that the blessed flesh which his sweet Son willed to take from you, Mother most fair, would never be separated from his majesty. 9 The Son in the Father and the Father in the Son are one God, inseparable in essence. 10 Abraham understood that the flesh born from his flesh must decay and return to dust, as his own flesh would do. 11 God, however, knew that your most pure flesh would no more be dissolved or decay than his most holy flesh begotten of your virginal flesh. 12 Abraham wished to build a house for his son before he was conceived so that he might live in it once he was born. 13 But for you, o Virgin beyond compare, it was decreed from eternity what house you were to dwell in—almighty God himself. 14 This house beyond description not only surrounded you on the outside, protecting you from every danger, but also remained inside you, strengthening and perfecting you in every virtue.

1. "God promised Abraham that a son would be born to him"; cf. Genesis 13:16; 15: 2-5; 17:1-8.

15 In order to nourish him after birth, Abraham provided three things for his son already before his conception: grain, wine and oil. 16 These three differed in appearance, essence and taste. 17 But, o beautiful Virgin, God provided himself for your unending nourishment from all eternity: three Persons differing not in the least in their divine essence. 18 O Mary, provider of the poor, this same God gave himself through you to the poor human race for their eternal nourishment. 19 One may see in the three things provided by the patriarch to his son the three Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 20 As lamp-oil cannot burn without a lighted wick, so the Father's fervent love did not shine clearly in the world until his Son took a human body (which may be understood as the lighted wick) from you, o chosen Bride of God. 21 As grain cannot be made into bread, until it has been prepared with several tools, 22 so too the Son of God, who is the food of the angels, did not appear in the form of bread for the nourishment of the human race, until his body had been put together from several limbs and parts in your blessed womb. 23 As wine cannot be carried unless a vessel has been prepared to carry it, in a similar way the grace of the Holy Spirit (which the wine denotes) could not offer eternal life to humankind 24 until the body of your beloved Son (which may be understood as the vessel) had been prepared by his suffering and death. 25 In this saving vessel the sweetness of every grace is given in rich measure for angels and men to drink.

✠ Chapter 4

Monday: First Reading

In these three lessons the angel describes how, after the fall of Lucifer, the angels learned of the Blessed Virgin's coming creation and rejoiced in it, and how, after the creation of the world, the Virgin seemed to be present to God and to the angels.

Invocation: May we be brought by the angels' Queen, to the company of heaven's citizens. Amen.

1 Given that God's knowledge of all things in himself was sufficient for his eternal exultation, his only motivation in creating was his fervent love and his desire to share his unutterable joy with others. 2 Therefore he created the countless multitude of angels, and gave them free will to act within their powers as it pleased them. He had not been compelled by any necessity but created them for unending happiness out of his own ardent love. 3 In the same way they were not meant to act against their will but freely in giving love in return for love and doing endless reverence to their Maker for his unending kindness. 4 At the very moment of their creation, some of them of their own free will began ungratefully to abuse the gracious gift of freedom and maliciously to envy their Creator whom they should have loved to the highest degree. 5 And in their malice, immediately, they deservedly fell from eternal happiness into unending misery. 6 But the other angels remained through their love in the glory prepared for them. They loved God ardently for the sake of his love, beholding in him all beauty, all power and all virtue.

7 From their contemplation of God the angels understood that he was without beginning and without end, that they had been created by him and that they had received whatever goodness they had from his goodness and power. 8 From their glorious vision of him they also realized that they had been made so wise through his wisdom that they could clearly see all the future within the limits of God's permission. Thus they gladly accepted and 9 foreknew that God, for his glory and the joy of the angelic host, had willed in his humility and love to fill again the places in heaven from which the disobedient angels had fallen in their wretched pride and envy. 10 As in a blessed mirror, they beheld in God, their Creator, a majestic throne so near to God that it seemed impossible for any other throne to be placed nearer. They knew, too, that the one for whom that throne was prepared from all eternity had not as yet been created. 11 In their contemplation of God's splendor, all of them were indeed so instantly inflamed with divine love that each experienced an unselfish love for the others. 12 Yet they loved God most of all and they loved that uncreated being that would be placed on the throne next to God more than themselves. They saw that God loved that uncreated being most highly and rejoiced in it exceedingly.

13 O Virgin Mary, the consolation of all, you were that uncreated being for whom, ever since their creation, the angels longed with such ardent love that, though they were indescribably happy in the delight and splendor they experienced in their vision and closeness to God, still they rejoiced all the more 14 because you would be even closer to God than they, and they knew that an even greater love and an even greater delight were reserved for you than they themselves enjoyed.

15 Upon that throne they saw a crown of such great beauty and worth that the majesty of none but God alone could excel it. 16 Hence, though they knew that the creation of the angels truly gave God great glory and joy, they understood that even greater glory and joy would be given to God by creating you for such an exalted crown. 17 Thus the angels experienced more joy because God wished to create you than because he had created them. 18 Virgin most holy, you gave joy to the angels from the moment of their creation and were the greatest delight to God who has no beginning. 19 And so indeed, God with the angels and the angels with God intimately rejoiced in you together before your creation, o Virgin most worthy of all creatures.

✠ Chapter 5

Monday: Second Reading

Invocation: May the Virgin chosen to be God's mother, lead us straight to the home of the Father. Amen.

1 When God willed to create the world with the other creatures in it, he said "Let there be!,"¹ and that which he willed to create was immediately and perfectly made. 2 Then when the world and all creatures except for human beings

1. "Let there be!"; cf. Genesis 1:1-31.

had been fully fashioned and stood in reverent beauty before God, there still remained a smaller world in all its charm uncreated in God's sight. 3 It was to give greater glory to God, greater happiness to the angels and greater benefit to any of the human race willing to enjoy its goodness than anything in this larger world. 4 O Virgin Mary, sweetest Lady, loving and beneficial to all! You may be fittingly understood to be this smaller world.

5 One reads in scripture that it pleased God to separate light from darkness² in the larger world. 6 But truly the separation of light from darkness that would take place in you after your creation was much more pleasing to him. This was when the ignorance of tender infancy, which may be compared to darkness, would leave you altogether, 7 and the knowledge of God and your understanding of his will and your will to live in accordance with it, which may be compared to light, would remain fully within you in ardent charity. 8 The tenderness of infancy is suitably compared to darkness, because God is not yet known nor does one yet understand the reason for doing anything. 9 O Virgin, immune from sin, you passed through this tender age of infancy with the greatest innocence! 10 As God created two lights along with the stars that were necessary for this world, one to rule the day, the other to rule the night,³ so too he provided you with two even brighter lights. 11 The first was your divine obedience that shone most brightly like the sun for those for whom God is truly perpetual day—for the angels in heaven and for good people in the world. 12 The second light was your most steadfast faith that was to guide many, wretchedly wandering in the darkness of despair and loss of faith, toward the knowledge of the truth, like the moon shining in the night—the night that would last from the time when the incarnate Creator would suffer for his creatures up to the moment of his resurrection. 13 The thoughts of your heart⁴ were like the stars, for, from the moment you received your first knowledge of God, you stayed so fervent in your love for God up until your death that your thoughts gleamed brighter before God and the angels than stars to the human eye. 14 As birds of different kinds soar in flight with sweet-sounding song, so the words of your lips would sweetly rise from your earthly body to the ears of him who sits on the throne of majesty⁵ to the great delight of all the angels. 15 Moreover, you were like the whole earth itself. Just as everything in the larger world that has an earthly body must be fed from the fruits of the earth, so too all of them would receive not only nourishment but life itself from your fruit. 16 Your works may be suitably compared to flowering and fruit-bearing trees. You were to carry them out with such love that they would delight God and the angels more than the beauty of all flowers together and more than the sweetness of all fruit. 17 Without the least doubt, one must believe that God foresaw more virtues in you before your creation than all the kinds of herbs, flowers, trees, fruits, stones, gems, and metals that can be found in all this wide world.

2. "It pleased God to separate light from darkness"; cf. Genesis 1:4.

3. "One to rule the day, the other to rule the night"; cf. Genesis 1:16.

4. "The thoughts of your heart"; cf. Psalm 32(33):11.

5. "The throne of majesty"; cf. Matthew 25:31; Apocalypse 5:7.

18 O smaller world, God doubtlessly took greater delight in you than in this larger world when you were yet to be created. 19 Although the world was created before you, it and all that is in it will perish. You, however, were to remain in your unfading beauty and never be separated from his loving charity, according to his eternal plan. 20 This larger world does not merit and never could merit to be made eternal, but you, blessed Mary, full of virtue, did most worthily merit with every perfection of virtue all that God deigned to work in it you with the help of his divine grace after your creation.

✠ Chapter 6

Monday: Third Reading

Invocation: May she ever be our ready protector, the Queen with virtues crowned and sceptered. Amen.

1 God brings about every virtue and is virtue itself. It is impossible for any creature, inasmuch as it is a mere creature, to radiate any virtue without God's support. 2 Once he had perfected the creation of the world and all its other creatures, he created the human race in his virtuous might, endowing them with free will in order that they might persevere in the good for a good reward and not fall into evil and be rewarded with evil. 3 The world thinks little of the work of those people who refuse to work until they are forced into it through corporal punishment,¹ but the work of those who perform it diligently deserves the highest reward, because they do not carry it out reluctantly but freely and with genuine love. 4 In a similar way, if God had not granted free will to the human race and to the angels, they would somehow appear as though forced into doing what they do, and their work would merit little remuneration. 5 It was pleasing to virtue, that is, to God, to grant them the liberty of doing as they please, and he gave them fully to understand what sort of reward divine obedience would deserve as well as what kinds of punishments stubborn disobedience would merit for its followers. 6 God revealed his great virtue by forming man from the earth in order to become, through charity and humility, a worthy inhabitant of the heavenly dwelling-place from which the angels who opposed God's will out of pride and envy had been sorrowfully rejected. 7 The virtues for which they could have received a lofty reward were hateful to them. 8 As a king is honored and magnified by reason of his royal crown, there can be no doubt that each and every virtue confers honor on the doer not only in the human world but also in the sight of God and the angels. It shines like a crown and excellently adorns him, and thus each and every virtue may fittingly be called a crown.

9 Assuredly, the number of such crowns by which God himself shines on high cannot be calculated. His virtues excel beyond compare all things that have been or are or will be in number and size and dignity, and he has never wrought

1. "They are forced into it through corporal punishment" renders "in cippo vel compede ad operandum detenti fuerint" [by being detained in the stocks or in fetters].

anything but virtue. 10 Three virtues especially adorn him most gloriously like three brilliant crowns. 11 The virtuous power by which he created the angels was his first crown. Some of the angels envied God's glory and sorrowfully deprived themselves of their crown. 12 The virtuous power by which he created the human race was his second crown. But they foolishly consented to the temptation of the enemy and all too soon lost their crown. 13 However, God's virtue and the glory of his virtue could not be diminished by the fall of the angels or of men. Ingloriously they fell from glory due to their own iniquity, for they refused to render glory to God for having created them for his and their own glory. 14 Yet God's superlative wisdom transformed their wickedness to the glory of his virtue.

15 The virtuous power by which he created you, o Virgin most beautiful, for his own eternal glory, glorifies him with his third crown. The angels recognized that the damage to the first two crowns would be repaired by means of the third crown. 16 Lady, hope of our salvation, you are rightly called the crown of God's honor. He performed the greatest act of virtue through you, and thus you have given him greater honor than any other creature. 17 It was indeed made known to the angels, before you had yet to be created, that you in your humility would conquer the devil who in his pride had scorned God and betrayed the human race in his malice. 18 Although the angels had seen the human race fall into great misery, yet they could feel no sorrow due to the joy of the divine vision, especially because it was clear to them what great things God would accomplish through your humility once you had been created.

✠ Chapter 7

Tuesday: First Reading

In these three lessons the angel describes the repentance of Adam as well as the comfort he took in the foreknowledge of the coming creation of the Virgin and in her great humility and dignity, and how Abraham the patriarch was comforted, together with Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets, by the coming birth of the Mother of God.

Invocation: May the loving Virgin protect us, should the evil foe assail us. Amen.

1 The sacred text affirms that Adam acted against God's commandment¹ while he was yet in the happiness of paradise, but it does not mention that he was disobedient to the divine will after he had fallen into misery. 2 It is surely clear that Adam loved God with all his heart, since, after his son committed fratricide, he avoided carnal intercourse with his wife. However, after receiving God's command, he obediently returned to marital relations with his wife. 3 He felt greater sorrow because he had offended his Creator than because he himself had to endure harsh punishment. 4 We recognize the justice of this. God's anger was

1. "Adam acted against God's commandment"; cf. Genesis 3:8–24.

directed at him for the sin of pride he had committed against God while he was in a state of happiness. 5 Similarly, when he was in a state of misery, he received great consolation because of the great sorrow and the true humility he experienced for having provoked the anger of his loving Creator. 6 Adam could not have received any greater consolation than the certainty that God, in his love and humility, would deign to be born of Adam's own offspring for the redemption of the same souls whom Adam, corrupted by the envy of the devil and his own pride, had excluded from everlasting life. 7 The learned think it impossible (and it is impossible) for God to assume a human body in the same manner as other infants who are conceived through carnal concupiscence, since nothing but the purest birth is fitting for God. Even more so did Adam think this was impossible, for he had himself been created without carnal lust. 8 Adam realized, therefore, that the Creator of the universe did not intend to create a body for himself in the same way as he had created bodies for Adam and Eve. 9 Adam believed that God willed to form his body from someone with a body like Eve's—from someone adorned with every perfection of virtue beyond all those ever conceived by man and woman—and to be born most purely of her virginity with his divine and human natures.

10 We recognize without a doubt the credibility of this. When Adam sensed that God's anger toward him had somehow been placated, he experienced true sorrow over the words Eve had heard in her conversation with the devil. 11 However, when he was in a state of sorrow and misery, he experienced tremendous joy and consolation over the words with which you, Mary, hope of all souls, would answer the angel.² 12 Adam grieved because the body of Eve, formed from his own body, had by deception dragged him to the everlasting death of Hell. 13 But he rejoiced because he had foreknowledge of that venerable body to be born from your body, o purest of virgins, which would bring him and his offspring powerfully back to the life of heaven. 14 It saddened Adam that Eve, his beloved wife, had disobeyed her Maker because of her great pride. 15 He rejoiced, however, because he foresaw how you, Mary, his beloved daughter, would obey God in utmost humility. 16 Adam grieved because Eve, in the pride of her mind, had said that she wanted to be coequal to God and experienced therefore a shameful fall in the sight of God and the angels. 17 But he exulted because the words with which you humbly proclaimed yourself to be God's handmaid shone brightly to your glory in the foreknowledge of God and the angels. 18 It saddened Adam that Eve's words provoked God's anger and led to his own and his posterity's condemnation. 19 However, he rejoiced because your words would attract God's love to you and to all those condemned through Eve's words and lead to their great consolation. 20 Eve's words sadly excluded her and her husband from glory and closed the gates of heaven to her and her descendants. Your blessed words, Mother of Wisdom, led you to great joy and opened the gates of heaven to all those wanting to enter. 21 As the angels rejoiced in heaven when they foresaw your birth, o Mother of God, before the creation of the world,³ so too Adam experienced great joy and exultation through his foreknowledge of your birth.

2. "The words . . . would answer the angel"; cf. Luke 1:38.

3. "Before the creation of the world"; cf. John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; I Peter 1:20.

✚ Chapter 8

Tuesday: Second Reading

Invocation: Help us Virgin most amiable, in our present dangers terrible! Amen.

1 Thrust out of paradise,¹ Adam experienced the justice and mercy of God. He feared God's justice and, throughout his whole life, intimately loved God for his mercy. 2 It surely went well for the world as long as his descendants did the same. When people stopped thinking of God's justice and mercy, many of them forgot their Maker.² 3 They put their trust in the things that pleased them, and spent their time reprehensibly in shameful carnal lust. 4 This was violently repugnant to God, and he destroyed all the inhabitants of the earth by means of the flood, except for those whom he saved on Noah's ark to restore the world according to his plan. 5 The human race increased in number again, but they fell away from the true worship of God through idolatry, spurred on by the evil spirit, and established a law for themselves contrary to the law of God. 6 Moved, however, by his merciful and fatherly kindness, God visited Abraham, a follower of the true faith, and made a pact with him and his descendants. 7 God granted Abraham's wish and gave him a son, Isaac.³ He promised that his own son Christ would be born of the line of Isaac. 8 It is therefore quite credible that it was divinely revealed to Abraham⁴ that a daughter of his race, an immaculate virgin, would give birth to the Son of God. 9 One can be certain that Abraham rejoiced more in this future daughter than in his son Isaac and loved her with greater affection. 10 It is also sure that Abraham did not acquire riches out of pride or greed nor wished for a son for his own physical security. 11 No, he was like a skillful gardener who serves his master faithfully. He takes an offshoot of the vine⁵ and plants it on his land, knowing that it will generate countless vines and a choice vineyard will thus come into being. 12 He fertilizes it with dung so that the plants will not wither but produce more fruit thanks to that nourishment. 13 That gardener would surely rejoice in the foreknowledge that a tree would grow tall and fair among his plants. 14 The tree's beauty would so delight his master that he would gladly walk about in the vineyard and taste the sweet fruit of the tree and quietly rest in its shade. 15 The gardener stands for Abraham, the offshoot for Isaac; the many vines growing there stand for all his many descendants; the dung denotes the worldly riches that God's beloved Abraham desired only for the sustenance of his people. The beautiful tree designates the Virgin Mary. 16 The master is almighty God who did not come to the vineyard of Abraham's descendants until a tall tree grew up there, that is, not until the glorious Virgin Mary, his beloved Mother, had come of age. 17 The beauty of the tree signifies her innocent way of life that was a delight for God to

1. "Thrust out of paradise"; cf. Genesis 3:23.

2. "Many of them forgot their Maker"; cf. Deuteronomy 32:18.

3. "And gave him a son, Isaac"; cf. Genesis 21:3.

4. "It was divinely revealed to Abraham"; cf. Genesis 15:1-21.

5. "He takes an offshoot of the vine"; cf. Jeremiah 2:21.

see. Its sweet fruit denotes her works that pleased God to the highest degree. Its shade is her virginal womb which the power of the Most High overshadowed.⁶ 18 Abraham knew, then, beforehand that the virgin who would give birth to God would be one of his descendants, and he took greater consolation in her alone than in all the sons and daughters of his race.

19 Abraham faithfully bequeathed to his son Isaac this faith and the holy hope that the Son of God would be born of his offspring. 20 This is shown by the fact that Abraham had the servant who was sent to fetch a wife for his son swear on his loins, that is, swear by him who would one day come from his loins.⁷ This was a sign that the Son of God would be one of his descendants. 21 Assuredly, Isaac bequeathed the same faith and hope to his son Jacob by the blessing⁸ that he gave to him. 22 Jacob blessed each one⁹ of his twelve sons individually and did not neglect to bequeath the same consolation to his son Juda. 23 It is certain that God so loved his Mother from the start that, before anything else was created, he took the greatest joy in her. In the same way, he granted the great consolation of the knowledge of her birth to his friends. 24 Thus, like the angels and the first man, so too the patriarchs received the great joy of knowing of the birth of the glorious Mother of God.

✠ Chapter 9

Tuesday: Third Reading

Invocation: May the Mother of true charity, undo the chains of our depravity. Amen.

1 God is the lover of true charity and charity itself.¹ He revealed his great charity by freeing the people of Israel from their Egyptian slavery through his might and bestowing on them a rich land in which they might dwell happily in freedom. 2 To be sure, the cunning enemy was highly envious of their descendants and tricked them countless times into sinning. 3 For their part, they put up little resistance to the devil's machinations and fell wretchedly into the worship of idols. They disregarded the law of Moses and foolishly forgot the pact that God had made with Abraham. 4 But God looked with mercy on those friends of his who did serve him in upright faith and true charity and who faithfully kept the law. He visited them in his kindness, 5 and raised up prophets in their midst so that they themselves might become more fervent in serving him and so that even God's enemies might, if they so wished, return to him in love and upright faith.

6. "The power of the Most High overshadowed"; cf. Luke 1:35.

7. "Abraham had the servant... from his loins"; cf. Genesis 24:1-9.

8. "His son Jacob by the blessing"; cf. Genesis 27:1-46.

9. "Jacob blessed each one"; cf. Genesis 49:1-33.

1. "God is the lover of true charity and charity itself"; cf. I John 4:8,16.

6 It was surely like a mountain stream that rolls down from a high peak into a deep valley, carrying along all the things caught in its flow so that they seem to sink beneath the movement of the water. 7 In the same way the Holy Spirit condescended to roll into the hearts of the prophets, carrying forth all the words of their lips that he wished to make known in order to correct the wrong ways of the world. 8 Among all the prophecies that streamed like honey into their hearts, there was one that flowed in more sweetly than the rest and then left their lips with even greater delight. 9 This was the prophecy that God, the Creator of the universe, would condescend to be born of an unsullied virgin and that he, by his own reparation and atonement, would unto eternal glory ransom those souls whom Satan had thrown into misery through Adam's sin. 10 From this great flowing stream, they also learned that God the Father so strongly desired in his kindness to set the human race free that he would not spare his only begotten Son.² 11 They learned that the Son willed to be so obedient to the Father that he would not refuse to take on a mortal body, and that the Holy Spirit most gladly willed to be sent together with the Son, though he was never separated from the Father. 12 But this, too, was quite clear to the prophets: the sun of justice, God the Son, would not come into the world until that star had arisen from Israel³ who would be able to approach the fire of the sun with her warmth. 13 This star prefigures the Virgin who was to give birth to God. By the warmth of her most fervent charity, she was to approach so close to God, and God to her, that he would accomplish his will perfectly in her. 14 From this uncreated sun that creates all things, the prophets derived their strength of speech and action, and God granted to them in their hardships the great consolation of knowing that this star, Mary, would be created. 15 The prophets felt a great sorrow when they saw the children of Israel desert the law of Moses through their carnal pride and petulance, which led to the withdrawal of God's love and drew his anger over them. 16 But they rejoiced in their foreknowledge that their Lord and lawgiver himself would be placated by your humble and pure life, o Mary, radiant star. They knew that he would receive back into his grace those who had provoked his anger and incurred his wrath in their wretchedness. 17 The prophets also sorrowed because the temple in which they used to sacrifice to God was brought to desolation. But they rejoiced because they foresaw the creation of the temple of your blessed body that would receive the consolation of having God himself within it. 18 They sorrowed, too, that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were destroyed, that God's enemies had entered and were assaulting it physically, while Satan assaulted it spiritually. 19 But they rejoiced in you, Mary, most worthy gate, for they knew that God, the strongest champion, would in you take up the weapons with which he would defeat the devil and all his enemies. 20 Thus, like the patriarchs, the prophets, too, most worthy Mother, found great consolation in you.

2. "He would not spare his only begotten Son"; cf. Genesis 22:12; Romans 8:32.

3. "That star had arisen from Israel"; cf. Numbers 24:17.

✠ Chapter 10

Wednesday: First Reading

In these three readings the angel describes the conception and birth of the Virgin and how God loved her even when she was in the womb of her mother.

Invocation: May Wisdom's Mother bring us light, to brighten the ignorance of our night. Amen.

1 For a long time before the law of Moses was given, people were ignorant about how to govern their actions and their own selves in life. Those who were aflame with burning love carefully tried to regulate their actions and customs in the way they thought was pleasing to God. 2 Others, however, who did not have the love of God and scorned to fear him, did whatever was pleasing to themselves. In merciful condescension to their ignorance, God's goodness established the law through his servant Moses to govern them in full accord with his divine will. 3 This law taught how to love God and neighbor and how to uphold marriage between man and woman in an honorable and divinely lawful way. Those whom God willed to call his people¹ would come from such marriages. 4 Indeed, God loved this form of marriage so much that he decided to take the most honorable mother of his human nature from such a marriage.

5 Consider an eagle that flies in the lofty skies, surveying all the forests below, and sees from afar a single tree with roots so strong that storm-winds cannot overturn it and a trunk so tall that none can climb it, 6 located where nothing can swoop down on it from above, and there, after careful inspection, it builds a nest for itself to rest in. 7 God may be compared to this eagle. All things present and future were clear and open to his view. Gazing on all lawful and honorable marriages from the creation of the first human couple to the end of time, he saw none so upright and full of divine love as that of Joachim and Anne. 8 It was therefore his will that the body of his fair mother should be engendered through this holy marriage, and there he deigned to take his rest in all good cheer.

9 Pious marriages may be aptly compared to beautiful trees. Their root is so close a union of two hearts that their sole rationale for marrying is to give honor and glory to God. 10 The intention of the spouses is also suitably likened to fruit-bearing branches. They are so God-fearing in all their actions that they love one another purely as God commands and only for the sake of procreating children. 11 The deceiver is unable to mar the greatness of such marriages with his power or cunning, so long as they find their joy in rendering God honor and glory, and so long as nothing troubles them but offending or dishonoring him. 12 They are located in a secure place whenever abundance of privileges or riches cannot lure their souls to worldly love or pride.

13 Because God foreknew that Joachim and Anne would be united in such a marriage, he preordained that their marriage should produce his home, that

1. "Those whom God willed to call his people"; cf. Hosea 2:23; Romans 9:25.

is, the body of his Mother. 14 Saint Anne, venerable mother, what a precious treasure you carried in your womb while Mary, God's mother, lay there! 15 Surely and without a doubt, God loved the matter from which Mary was to be formed when she was conceived and assembled in Anne's womb more than every other human body ever engendered or ever to be engendered in all the world. 16 The venerable Anne can truly be called the almighty God's treasure chest, for the treasure dearest to him of all lay hidden in her womb. How close God's heart always was to that treasure! 17 How lovingly and eagerly he directed the glance of his majesty to that treasure, he who later said in the gospel: "Where your treasure is, there is your heart!"² 18 And the angels certainly took great joy in this treasure when they learned that their Maker, whom they loved more than themselves, loved that treasure so. 19 It would therefore be most fitting and appropriate for everyone reverently to honor the day³ when the matter in Anne's womb was conceived and assembled, from which the blessed body of God's mother was formed that God and all his angels loved so greatly.

✠ Chapter 11

Wednesday: Second Reading

Invocation: May Mary, star of the sea, come to our aid most graciously. Amen.

1 When that blessed matter¹ duly received a completely formed body in the mother's uterus at the fitting moment, the King of all glory multiplied his treasure by infusing in it a living soul. 2 A bee flies about the blossoming fields and carefully inspects all the honey-producing plants, for it knows instinctively how to locate the loveliest flower. 3 If it does not happen to find one bursting from the bud as yet, it eagerly awaits its blossoming so that it may enjoy the pleasure of its sweetness. 4 Similarly, God in heaven, who beheld everything clearly in the glance of his majesty, watched Mary hidden in the concealment of her mother's womb, 5 knowing in his prescience that there would be no one like her in virtue in all the world. With a comforting joy, he awaited her blossoming so that his divine and superabundant goodness might be made manifest through the Virgin's sweet charity.

6 How clearly shone the rising dawn² in the womb of Anne when Mary's tiny body received a vivifying soul! How greatly angels and men longed to see her blossom! 7 To be sure, people who inhabit the regions where the sun lights up both night and day with its rays do not desire the dawn for the sake of its

2. "Where your treasure...heart": cf. Matthew 6:21. "Treasure chest" in paragraph 16" renders "gazophilacium" from Greek "gazophylakion." See also Book I 15.

3. "To honor the day": the feast of St. Anne's or Mary's Conception occurs in the East already in the sixth century and appears in the West by the eighth century. It was quite widely observed in Birgitta's time, but not universal or everywhere obligatory. The tense "would...be" shows that Birgitta reflects the contemporary situation and advocates a feast already widely observed.

1. "That blessed matter": this discussion implies the acceptance of the embryology of the time according to which the embryo first receives a soul upon "quickenning," i.e., when the mother first perceives its movement.

2. "The rising dawn"; cf. Song of Songs 6:10.

light (since the light of the sun is far brighter than the dawn), 8 but because they know that the sun will ascend even higher when the dawn appears. They know, too, that the crops they hope to store in their barns will then ripen more quickly and fully in the blessed warmth of the sun. 9 But the inhabitants of the lands covered by the darkness of night rejoice not only because they know that the sun must rise after the break of dawn, but they also rejoice exceedingly for they know that they will be able to see what must be done in the light of the rising dawn. 10 Similarly the angels, inhabiting the heavenly kingdom, did not desire the dawn of Mary's birth for the sake of its light, for the true sun, God himself, never disappeared from their sight. 11 No, they longed for her to rise and be born in the world, for they knew that God, who is the sun, willed to make the warmth of his great charity more manifest through this dawn. 12 And the angels would be able to gather the people that loved God, those who would bear fruit through good works and grow ripe by steadfast perseverance in virtue. 13 The men in this shadowy world who had foreknowledge of the dawn of God's Mother were full of joy, for they knew that she would give birth to their liberator. 14 But they also rejoiced because they would see the pure virtues of this glorious virgin and would thereby gain more complete knowledge of what to do or avoid. 15 This Virgin was the rod that Isaiah foretold would come forth out of the root of Jesse.³ He prophesied that a flower would rise up out of it on whom the Spirit of God would rest. 16 Ineffable rod! While it grew in the womb of Anne, its core remained gloriously in heaven. 17 This rod was so slender that it easily moved about in the mother's belly, but its core was so great and immense in length and width that no mind could grasp its size. 18 The rod could not bring forth a flower until the core had entered and conferred on it the power of germinating, and the core could not become manifest until the rod lent it its moisture. 19 This core was the person of the Son of God. Though the Father begot him before the morning star,⁴ yet he did not appear in the flower of his humanity until he had assumed the matter of the flower from the pure blood of the Virgin (denoted by the rod), when she gave her consent. 20 This blessed rod, Mary ever glorious, was separated from her mother's body at her birth. But the Son of God was no more separated from the Father when the Virgin gave birth to him corporally in time than when the Father begot him incorporally beyond time. 21 The Holy Spirit, too, was inseparably in the Father and the Son, for they are three Persons and one Divinity.

✠ Chapter 12

Wednesday: Third Reading

Invocation: May God's Mother's glorious birth, lead us to unending mirth. Amen.

3. "Out of the root of Jesse"; cf. Isaiah 11:1-2.

4. "Morning star" renders "Lucifer"; cf. Psalm 109(110):3, in which Lucifer [light-bearer] denotes the morning star, the harbinger of light, and is not a name for Satan. Cf. Book I 41.

1 The divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was one, nor was there ever any division of will among them. 2 As three flames may arise from a single fire, so three equal flames of love arose out of the goodness of the divine will for the perfection of a single work. 3 The flame of love arising from the Father burned brightly in the angels' sight when they learned of his gracious will to offer his beloved Son for the release of a captive slave. 4 The flame of love arising from the Son revealed itself when he willed to empty himself and take the form of a slave in accord with his Father's plan. 5 The flame of love arising from the Holy Spirit burned in equal measure when he showed himself ready to reveal the Father's and the Son's and his own will through manifest works. 6 Although the burning love of the divine will radiated throughout heaven and its brilliance gave the angels an unutterable joy, the redemption of the human race according to God's eternal ordinance could not come about before the birth of Mary. 7 The fire of love would burn so hotly in her that, as her aromatic fumes wafted ever upward, the fire that was in God would pour itself into that smoke and flow through it into this frigid world.

8 After her birth, this Virgin was like a new but still unlit lamp. This lamp had to be lit in a way similar to the love of God likened above to the three flames shining in heaven. In just such a way the chosen lamp that was Mary was to shine in this dark world with three other flames of love. 9 Mary's first bright flame began to shine when she made the firm promise to maintain her virginity immaculate until death in God's honor. 10 God the Father desired her pure virginity so much that he deigned to send to her his own beloved Son with the divinity of himself, the Son and the Holy Spirit. 11 Mary's second flame of love appeared in her constantly lowering herself in all ways in unthinkable humility. This was certainly so pleasing to the blessed Son of God that he deigned to assume his own venerable body from her humble body that was to be rightly exalted above everything in heaven and on earth. 12 Her third flame was her praiseworthy obedience in all things. This so attracted the Holy Spirit to her that he filled her with every gift of grace. 13 This blessed new lamp was not lit directly after her birth, for, like other small children, her body was too delicate and her intellect too tender for her to understand the will of God. 14 But although she still had not done anything to merit it, God took greater joy in her than in the good deeds of all the people in the entire world who had been born before her. 15 A skillful lute-player would love a not yet ready lute that he knew would produce sweet-sounding music. So too the author of the universe had the greatest love for the body and soul of Mary in her infancy, for he knew her words and deeds would please him more than any other melody.

16 It is most likely that, just as the Son of Mary was fully sensible when he was humanized¹ in her womb, so too Mary attained sensibility and understanding after her birth at a younger age than other children. 17 God and his angels rejoiced in heaven over her glorious birth. So too may people on earth

1. "Humanized" renders the unusual word "humanatus."

joyfully recall her birth and wholeheartedly praise and glorify the Creator of the universe because of her. 18 He chose her beforehand among all his creation and predestined her to be born among sinners, and she gave birth to their liberator in the holiest of ways.

✠ Chapter 13

Thursday: First Reading

In these three readings the angel describes the behavior of the Virgin once she had attained the understanding and knowledge of God, as well as the beauty of her soul and body, and how her will controlled all her senses, and then the conception of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin and his glorious birth in this world.

Invocation: Virgin of Virgins, full of grace, in the Lord's court please plead our case. Amen.

1 Mary's blessed body may be fittingly compared to a stainless vessel, her soul to a radiant lamp and her brain to a spring of water that gushes forth from the heights and then descends into a deep valley. 2 When the Virgin attained the age when she understood that the true God was in heaven, that he had created all the universe and especially the human race for his own everlasting glory, and that he would be the just judge of all creation, 3 then her understanding and intellect sprang up from her brain to the heights of heaven like a fountain of water and flowed downward into the deep valley of her humble body. 4 The Church sings of God's Son going forth from the Father and returning to the Father, although neither of them was ever separated from the other. 5 So too, the Virgin's understanding and intellect frequently ascended the heavenly heights and steadily grasped God through faith and then with gentle love returned to herself from his sweet embrace. 6 She held on to this love firmly with rational hope and divine reverence, and her soul was so aflame with love that she began to burn like a blazing fire with desire for God. 7 The Virgin's understanding and intellect subjected her soul to serving God to such an extent that her body obeyed him¹ from then on in all humility. 8 How quickly the Virgin's understanding and intellect apprehended God's charity! How prudent she was to store it up as a treasure for herself!

9 Imagine a lily that is transplanted with three roots to hold it firmly in the ground and then blossoms with three lovely flowers delightful to the beholder. 10 In the same way, divine charity was divinely inserted into the glorious ground of our Virgin. It was planted firmly with three strong roots of virtue that fortified her body. 11 It adorned the Virgin's soul with three ornaments like three shining flowers to the delight of God and his angels as they beheld her. 12 Her body's first strength lay in her wise self-restraint that regulated her eating and

1. "Obeyed him"; this might equally be "obeyed her" (Latin "obediuit ei").

drinking. No sluggishness due to excess ever kept her from serving God, and no feebleness due to immoderate frugality ever kept her from her duties. 13 Her second strength lay in keeping vigil in a temperate way. This kept her body in check in such a way that no listlessness due to lack of sleep ever overtook her when she was supposed to be keeping watch, and she never in the least cut short her appointed vigils for the sake of sleeping longer. 14 The Virgin's third strength lay in her strong physical constitution. It rendered her so steadfast that she was able to bear physical exertion and hardship as well as momentary well-being with equanimity, becoming neither upset by her hardships nor elated by her physical well-being.

15 Then there was the first ornament with which divine charity adorned the Virgin's soul. This consisted in her inwardly preferring the rewards God promised his friends to the beauty of anything else. Worldly riches seemed as despicable to her as reeking dung. 16 The second ornament decorating her soul was that she understood perfectly well that worldly honors could not compare to spiritual glory. She therefore considered any talk of worldly glory with as much revulsion as she would some poisonous gas that could quickly snuff out the lives of many with its fumes. 17 The third ornament embellishing her soul was that her heart delighted in everything that pleased God and bitterly abhorred everything opposed and hateful to him. 18 The Virgin's will led her soul to desire true delights so completely that it was not right for her to experience any spiritual dissatisfaction after this life.

19 With ornaments beyond those of any other creature, the Virgin appeared so well-equipped in soul that God willed to fulfill all his promises through her. 20 She was so strong in the virtue of charity that she never grew slack in any good work and the enemy never prevailed over her² in the least little respect. 21 There is no room for doubt that her body was as pleasing to all who beheld her as her soul was most beautiful in the sight of God and his angels. 22 As God and his angels rejoiced in the comeliness of her soul in heaven, her physical beauty was most charming, beneficial, and consoling to all who wished to see her on earth. 23 When pious persons saw how fervent she was in serving God, they themselves became more fervent for his glory. 14 The desire to sin in those prone to sin was soon extinguished by her virtuous words and bearing so long as they kept their eyes on her.

✠ Chapter 14

Thursday: Second Reading

Invocation: O Virgin whom the angel did greet, come and all our sins delete! Amen.

1 Tongue cannot tell how intelligently the glorious Virgin's mind and understanding apprehended God at the very moment when she first received

2. "The enemy never prevailed over her"; cf. Psalm 12(13):4.

knowledge of him. 2 The human mind is too feeble to understand the many ways in which the blessed will of the Virgin subjected itself to the service of God. It pleased and delighted her to do all that she knew was pleasing to God. 3 The Virgin understood that it was not due to her own merits that God had created her body and soul and endowed her with the freedom of will to embrace God's commandments humbly or, if it pleased her, to oppose them. 4 The humble Virgin decided to serve God lovingly her whole life long for the sake of all the benefits she had received, even if no more should be given her.

5 When her intellect was able to grasp that he is the Creator of all the souls he had created, she also grasped that he would deign to become their redeemer without wishing for any other recompense for his efforts than the souls themselves. 6 She understood, too, that every human being is endowed with free will either to please God with good works or to provoke his anger with evil actions. Accordingly, the Virgin's will began to steer her body vigilantly amidst the storms of this world like a skillful skipper his ship. 7 When a skipper fears his ship may be in danger from the battering of the waves, having in mind the Charybdis that often destroys ships, he ties the ropes and the armament of the ship tightly, 8 and his eyes gaze steadily toward the port he desires to rest in after his labors. He is especially eager to ensure that the goods on board the ship come into the use of their true owner whom he cherishes most of all. 9 Thus, surely, as soon as this most skillful Virgin knew of God's commandments, her will began immediately to steer her body in their direction with all vigilance. 10 In dealing with her close relations she was constantly on her guard against letting their successes or failures—which may be compared to the storms of this world—negatively affect her own service to God through their words or deeds. 11 She kept continually in mind everything prohibited by divine law and attentively avoided it so that the spiritual Charybdis¹ would not destroy her soul. 12 This commendable intention governed the Virgin and put a restraint on her senses. Her tongue was never stirred to idle talk. Her innocent eyes were never raised to look at anything unnecessarily. Her ears were only intent on hearing that which pertained to God's glory. 13 She never extended her hands or fingers but for the welfare of her neighbor and herself. She never let her feet take even one step without first considering what benefit would derive from it. 14 The desire of the Virgin's will was to endure joyfully all the troubles of this world in order that she might reach the safe port of the bosom of God the Father. Her continuous desire was for her soul to give honor and joy to God, whom she cherished most of all, in return for his creation.

15 Because the will of the Virgin never failed in any kind of goodness, God, from whom all good things come,² raised her up to the loftiest peak of virtue, making her sparkle brilliantly with the radiance of all the virtues. 16 Who can be surprised that God cherished this Virgin far more than anyone else? With

1. "Charybdis": renders "caribdes," the plural of "caribdis" for the whirlpool Charybdis from Greek mythology. The word was also used in classical Latin to denote any vortex or even "tortuous cavity" (thus the *Oxford English Dictionary*), and thus the idea of a maelstrom near cliffs may be what Birgitta had in mind here. This is a rare classical allusion in Birgitta's writings.

2. "From whom all good things come"; cf. James 1:17.

the sole exception of her alone, he foreknew no one born of man and woman whose will never yielded now and then to mortal or venial sin. 17 How close the ship of this Virgin's body came to the port for which she yearned, the dwelling-place of God the Father, when Gabriel approached her,³ saying "Hail, full of grace"! 18 How purely—without any man's cooperation—the Father entrusted his Son to the Virgin when she gave this answer to the angel: "Be it done unto me according to thy word!"⁴ 19 Then and there, in the Virgin's womb, divinity was joined to humanity. The Son of God the Father, himself true God, became man, the son of the Virgin.

✠ Chapter 15

Thursday: Third Reading

Invocation: Together with your child, bless us Virgin mild. Amen.

1 O most beautiful of unions and most worthy of acceptance!¹ The Virgin's body became the earthly dwelling-place of God the Son who dwells in the Trinity in heaven, although he is everywhere present through his power. The Virgin was full of the Holy Spirit in body and soul. 2 The Holy Spirit was in the Father and also in the humanized Son—God's Son who not only had his dwelling-place in the Virgin's womb on earth but also in the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven. 3 The Father with the Holy Spirit dwelled in the humanized Son in the world, although only the Son, true God, took on a human body for himself. His divine nature was hidden to human eyes but it appeared manifest and clear as always to the angels in his eternal dwelling-place.

4 May all those who hold the true faith rejoice in the ineffable union that took place in the Virgin! In that union the Son of God received a human body from the Virgin's flesh and blood, his divinity being joined to his humanity and his true humanity to his divinity. 5 In this most beautiful union, the divine nature was not in any way diminished in the Son and the Virgin's virginity remained intact. 6 Those who doubt that God's omnipotence could accomplish this or think that his goodness would not do it if it could for the salvation of his creation—may they be ashamed and may they tremble! 7 But if people believe that God did so in his power and goodness, why then is he not perfectly loved by those who do not doubt that he did it for them? 8 May your hearts take note and understand! An earthly lord would deserve the greatest love and affection, if, in the midst of his great privileges and plentiful wealth, he should hear that his friend were being insulted and badly treated and, in kindness, took the entire disgrace upon himself in order that his friend might be held in honor. 9 What if that same lord saw his friend afflicted by poverty and made himself destitute in order for his friend to live in plenty? 10 What if that lord saw his friend in misery being led away to slaughter, which could only

3. "When Gabriel approached her"; cf. Luke 1:28.

4. "Be it done unto me according to thy word!"; cf. Luke 1:38.

1. "Most worthy of acceptance" renders "omni acceptione dignissimam," presumably meaning being accepted in faith; cf. 1 Timothy 1:15. Cf. 21.19.

be escaped if someone would volunteer to die in his stead, and then delivered himself up to death in order that his condemned friend might live in happiness? 11 Because the greatest love is shown in these three ways, and so that no one could say that anyone in this world showed greater love for his friend than the Creator in heaven, 12 God lowered himself in his majesty and descended to the Virgin's womb. He did not enter into just one part of her body but infused himself inside her entire body, shaping a human body for himself most purely from the flesh and blood of the Virgin alone.

13 This chosen mother may be aptly likened to the burning but undamaged bush that Moses saw. He who dwelled in the bush long enough to make Moses believe and obey him told Moses his name when asked: 14 "I am who am," and "this is my name forever."² He is the same one who dwelled in the Virgin for as long as other infants are in their mothers' bellies before birth. 15 When God's Son was conceived he entered her entire body with his divinity. 16 Likewise when he was born, he was poured out with his humanity and divinity through the Virgin's body. Like the sweet scent from an intact rose, he was poured out through the Virgin's whole body, the virginal glory remaining intact in the mother. 17 God and the angels, then the first man and, after him, the patriarchs and prophets along with countless others of God's friends rejoiced because 18 that bush, Mary's body, was to burn so much with charity that God's Son would deign to enter her in his humility, to dwell in her and then depart from her in purity. 19 It is thus right for the people who are now alive to rejoice with all their hearts because God's Son, true and immortal God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, entered into this bush and took on a mortal body for himself. 20 They should fly with haste to the Virgin so that she may pray for eternal life to be granted to them who are mortal and who have merited eternal death because of their own wrongdoing. 21 God dwelled in the Virgin so that his body would not be somehow less than other infants as to age and bodily parts and in order to deliver a powerful defeat to the devil who had tricked everyone into subjection to his cruel rule. 22 May all people therefore make humble petition to her to let them dwell in her protection so as not to fall into the traps of the devil.³ 23 God went from the Virgin out into the world to open for all humankind the gate to the heavenly fatherland. 24 May they accordingly beseech her in earnest prayer to be there to help them when they leave this wicked world and to gain for them an entry into the eternal kingdom of her blessed Son.

✠ Chapter 16

Friday: First Reading

In these three readings the angel describes the glorious Virgin's painful suffering over the painful death of her blessed Son and the steadfast spirit she displayed in all her sorrows.

2. "I am who I am . . . this is my name forever"; cf. Exodus 3:14–15.

3. "Not to fall into the traps of the devil"; cf. I Timothy 3:7; 6:9; II Timothy 2:26.

Invocation: May the Virgin reunite us, to Christ her son who has redeemed us. Amen.

1 The glorious Virgin Mary is said¹ to have been frightened by the angel's salutation.² She certainly did not fear any physical danger to herself. Rather she was afraid that the enemy of the human race might cause some spiritual harm through his treachery. 2 Once she reached the age when her understanding and intellect were able to grasp the knowledge of God and his will, we see that she immediately began to foster a rational love for God as well as a rational fear. 3 This Virgin can be fittingly called a flowering rose. As a rose is wont to grow up among thorns, so too this venerable Virgin grew up in the world among hardships. 4 The more the rose grows and blossoms, the thicker and sharper the thorns become. Thus as she grew older, the choice rose Mary was pierced ever more sharply by the thick thorns of hardships.

5 Once she passed the age of childhood, the fear of the Lord was her first hardship. She was not only greatly troubled by fear in regard to how she might manage to avoid sin, but she felt no less concern in regard to performing good deeds in a prudent way. 6 Although she vigilantly directed her thoughts, words and deeds to the glory of God, she was still concerned over any possible failings. 7 May this be food for thought for those pitiful sinners who are constantly committing all the various kinds of iniquity deliberately and audaciously. May they consider how many torments and miseries they are amassing for themselves when they see that the glorious Virgin, who was free from every sin, performed all her actions (pleasing to God above all others) in a God-fearing way. 8 Even before she knew that she was to be his mother, she understood from the prophecies in the bible that God willed to become man and that he would suffer painful torment in his incarnate flesh. This was the second great hardship that she endured in her heart due to her ardent love for God.

9 Then she reached the age when the Son of God became her son. She felt him receiving from her in her womb that body with which he would fulfill the biblical prophecies. 10 Then that delicate rose seemed even more to blossom and grow in beauty, and the thorns pressing painfully upon her grew ever more thick and sharp. 11 A great, indescribable joy arose within her at the conception of God's Son, but manifold hardships afflicted her mind at the thought of his cruel sufferings in the future. 12 The Virgin exulted because her Son would with true humility lead his friends back to the glory of the heavenly kingdom, although the first man had in his pride gained for them eternal punishment. 13 In the paradise of Eden, man had sinned with his whole body in his evil desire. Therefore Mary also felt sorrow because she knew beforehand that her Son would in this world make atonement for human sin through the most painful death of his own body. 14 The Virgin rejoiced because she had conceived her Son without sin or sexual pleasure and had given birth to him without pain.³ 15 However, she was also sad-

1. "Is said" renders "legitur" [one reads that].

2. "Salutation" renders "affatu" [utterance, address]; cf. Luke 1:29.

3. "Gave birth to him without pain": pain at childbirth was the punishment after the fall of man (cf. Genesis 3:16) but by her immaculate conception, Mary was freed from the consequences of original sin, and thus (according to the medieval view) she gave birth painlessly.

dened because she knew beforehand that her dear Son was born to die a contemptible death and that she herself would witness his sufferings with the greatest anguish in her heart. 16 The Virgin rejoiced because she knew beforehand that he would rise from the dead and be eternally exalted in the highest glory for his suffering. 17 But she felt sorrow because she knew beforehand that insults and dire torments and savage torture would precede his final glory.

18 As a rose is seen to stand firm though surrounded by ever thicker and sharper thorns, so too, without a doubt, Mary the blessed rose stood firm in spirit. 19 No matter how much the thorns of hardship pricked her heart, they never altered her will in any way. She was always ready to do or endure whatever God wished. 20 She may very aptly be compared to a flowering rose and especially the rose of Jericho.⁴ That rose is said to have outshone all other flowers in beauty, and Mary excelled each living thing in the world in the beauty of virtues and purity, with the one exception of her own blessed Son. 21 Her virtuous perseverance filled God and his angels with delight in heaven. Those on earth who saw how patient she was in hardship and how prudent in consolation were likewise filled with great happiness.

✠ Chapter 17

Friday: Second Reading

Invocation: May He whose blood was the price of our salvation, protect us at his Virgin Mother's supplication. Amen.

1 Among all the things that the prophets predicted concerning the Son of God, they especially foretold the harsh death he willed to suffer in his innocent body in order to win eternal life in heaven for us all. 2 The prophets foretold¹ and wrote how God's Son would be bound and scourged for the liberation of the human race, how he would be led to the cross and how disgracefully he would be treated and then crucified. 3 We believe that they knew the reason that the immortal God willed to take on a mortal body and then endure hardships in that same body. 4 Christian faith can therefore not doubt that the Virgin our Lady, whom God had predestined before time began² to be his mother, knew this even more clearly. It is right to believe that the reason that God chose to be clothed in human flesh in her womb was not concealed from her. 5 There can be absolutely no doubt that she understood the meaning of the pronouncements of the prophets more perfectly than the prophets themselves by the inspiration of that same Spirit who had prompted them to speak.

6 When the Virgin first began to touch him with her hands after his birth, we can truly believe that she began at once to think of how he was going to fulfill the biblical prophecies. 7 When she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, her heart considered how his body was going to be wounded all over with sharp scourges to

4. "Rose of Jericho"; cf. Ecclesiasticus 24:14.

1. "The prophets foretold"; cf. Isaiah 53:2-3; Luke 18:31.

2. "Predestined before time began"; cf. Ecclesiasticus 24:9; 1 Corinthians 2:7.

make it appear like that of a leper. 8 When she bound her little Son's hands and feet with swaddling bands, she called to mind how harshly they would be pierced by iron nails on the cross. 9 When she contemplated her Son's face, more beautiful than that of any of the sons of men, she thought on how irreverently the lips of impious men would stain it with their spit. 10 The Mother often turned over in her mind the blows that would be struck against her Son's cheeks and the insults and reproaches that would fill his ears. 11 Now she considered how the stream of his own blood would block his sight, then again how sour wine mixed with gall would be poured into his mouth. Then she would bring to mind how his arms would be tied with ropes, 12 how his muscles and veins and all his joints would be pitilessly stretched out on the cross, how his vital organs would contract at the moment of death and how his entire body, inside and out, would undergo harsh and anguishing torment on the cross. 13 The Virgin knew that when he breathed his last on the cross, a sharp lance would pierce his side and penetrate his heart. 14 Hence, of all mothers she was the happiest, when she saw God's Son born of her body, knowing him to be truly God and truly man, mortal in his human nature, eternally immortal in his divine nature. Yet she was also the most sorrowful of mothers, because of her foreknowledge of his most painful sufferings.

15 A heavy sorrow always accompanied her great happiness. Imagine if one were to say to a woman giving birth: 16 "You have given birth to a son, alive and healthy in body, but the birth-pains you experienced will last until you die." That woman would rejoice on hearing that her child was alive and healthy, but she would be saddened by her own suffering and death. 17 The sadness of such a mother over the thought of her own body's pain and death would surely be no worse than the sorrow of the Virgin Mary as often as she called to mind the future death of her beloved Son. 18 The Virgin understood that the prophets had foretold that her dear Son would endure many harsh sufferings. Besides, the righteous Simeon told her to her face, and not far off in the past as the prophets had, that a sword would pierce her own soul.³ 19 Observe how the soul's capacity to perceive good and evil is stronger and more sensitive than that of the body. 20 In the same way, the soul of the Blessed Virgin, which that sword would pierce, was tormented by far worse pains before her Son's passion than any mother's body could sustain before giving birth to a child. 21 The sword of sorrow came ever nearer to the Virgin's heart as the time of her Son's passion approached. 22 Therefore, without a doubt, the most kind and innocent Son of God had filial compassion on his mother and eased her suffering with frequent consolation. Otherwise she could scarcely have gone on living until the death of her Son.

✠ Chapter 18

Friday: Third Reading

Invocation: May the passion of the Virgin's Son, place us in the Father's hands. Amen.

3. "A sword would pierce her own soul"; cf. Luke 2:35.

1 When the Son of the Virgin warned that “You shall seek me and you shall not find me,”¹ the tip of the sorrowful sword pricked her heart sharply. 2 When he was betrayed by his own disciple and, as was his will, captured by the rivals of truth and justice, that painful sword pierced the surface of the Virgin’s heart and forcefully passed through her soul, inflicting grievous pain on her whole body. 3 With every suffering and insult flung at her beloved Son, the sword was roughly twisted in her soul. 4 She saw her Son being cruelly boxed on the ears by impious hands and impiously scourged, sentenced to a shameful death by the Jewish leaders as all the people cried out, “Crucify the traitor!”² She saw him with hands bound being led to the place of his suffering. 5 Some men went before him as he wearily carried the cross on his shoulders, and they dragged him along with ropes behind them. Others went along beside him and urged him on with blows, treating that most innocent lamb³ like a ferocious beast. 6 As Isaiah foretold, he was as patient in all his sufferings as a dumb sheep led to slaughter, like a silent lamb before its shearers, opening not his mouth.⁴

7 Just as he was full of patience, so too with utmost patience his blessed Mother endured all her afflictions. 8 A lamb follows its mother wherever it is led by her, but the Virgin Mother followed her Son as he was led to the place of torture. 9 When she saw her Son being mocked with a crown of thorns, his face bloodied and his cheeks red with rough blows, she let out a deep sigh of sorrow and her own cheeks lost their color in her great sorrow. 10 As the blood flowed over his whole body during the scourging, the water of countless tears streamed out of her eyes.

11 When she saw her Son being cruelly stretched out on the cross, all her physical strength began to fail her. 12 When she heard the sound of hammering as his hands and feet were pierced by iron nails, the Virgin’s senses failed her and the intensity of her pain made her fall to the ground as though dead. 13 When the Jews gave him sour wine mixed with gall to drink, the Virgin felt her own tongue and palate dry up in the anxiety of her heart, and she could not even move her blessed lips to speak. 14 When she heard the mournful voice of her Son saying, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”⁵ and saw his whole body stiffen as he lowered his head and breathed his last, bitter pain seized her heart and every joint in her body remained motionless. 15 Surely, it was no small miracle God worked that the Virgin Mother did not give up her spirit though wounded inwardly by such intense pain. 16 She beheld her beloved Son naked and bleeding, alive and dead, pierced by a lance, and everyone mocking him as he hung there among thieves, and almost all those who knew him running away, many of them disgracefully losing the right way of faith.

17 In the same way as her Son endured the harshest of deaths more than anyone in the world, so his Mother bore the harshest suffering in her blessed soul. 18 Holy Scripture relates how the wife of Phinehas died all of a sudden

1. “You shall seek me and not find me”; cf. John 7:34.

2. “Crucify the traitor”; cf. Matthew 27:23.

3. “That most innocent lamb”; cf. Jeremiah 11:19.

4. “Sheep led to slaughter . . . mouth”; cf. Isaiah 53:7.

5. “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”; cf. Matthew 27:46.

from the intense sorrow she felt when she learned that the enemy had captured the ark of God. Yet this woman's sorrow cannot be compared to that of the Virgin Mary who saw her blessed Son's body (prefigured by the ark) nailed captive to the wood. 19 The Virgin loved her Son, true God and man, with a greater love than anyone born of man and woman could love another or love even his or her own self. 20 It seems astonishing that the wife of Phinehas died of sorrow,⁶ though afflicted by lesser sorrows, while Mary, wounded by greater grief, survived. Seeing this, who could imagine that anything but a special grace of the almighty God kept her alive in spite of her physical strength?

21 When he died, the Son of God opened the gates of heaven and mightily rescued his captive friends in hell. When she revived, the Virgin fully kept the true faith until her Son's resurrection and led many of those poor souls who had lost their way back to the right path of faith. 22 Her dead Son was taken down from the cross, wrapped in a burial shroud and laid in a grave like other corpses. Then everyone went away from him and few believed that he would rise again. 23 Then, too, the sting of sorrow left the Mother's heart and consoling joy softly began to reawaken within her. She knew that her Son's trials were completely at an end and that, with his divine and human natures, he would rise again to eternal glory on the third day and that, from then on, he would and could suffer no more.

✠ Chapter 19

Saturday: First Reading

In these three readings the angel describes how the blessed Virgin was unwavering in the true faith when others were in doubt about the resurrection of Christ, and how her example and teaching benefitted many persons, and how she was assumed body and soul into heaven.

Invocation: Strengthen us in holy faith, Mother of God, o glorious Maid. Amen.

1 The queen of the south is said to have traveled from afar to meet King Solomon. When she had seen all his wisdom, she was quite breathless with wonder.¹ When she recovered her strength, she praised his words and honored him with magnificent gifts. 2 We may suitably compare the Virgin Mary to this queen. When her discerning mind surveyed the order and progress of all the world from beginning to end, 3 and looked carefully at all that it contained, she found that she did not desire to have or hear anything but only the wisdom she heard from God. 4 Avidly she sought it, diligently she studied it, and wisely she found the wisdom that is Christ, the Son of God, incomparably wiser than

6. "The wife of Phinehas died of sorrow"; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 4:19–20.

1. "Breathless with wonder"; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 10:5; but Birgitta here takes it to mean that she no longer had the spirit of life.

Solomon. 5 She saw the wisdom with which he won souls back by his suffering on the cross and opened for them the gates of heaven, winning them from the treacherous enemy who had won for them a hellish death. The Virgin was then closer to death than the queen of the south was when she lost her breath. 6 When the suffering of Christ, God's Son and hers, was completed, she recovered her strength and honored God with the most pleasing of gifts. By her saving teaching she presented God with more souls than any other persons after Christ's death with all their deeds.

7 The proof that she praised God magnificently in her words is that, while many others doubted after the death of his human body that he was true God and eternally immortal in his divine nature, she alone steadfastly asserted it. 8 The third day, that of his resurrection, found his disciples hesitant, the women anxiously seeking his body in the tomb, and the apostles themselves greatly distressed in their hearts and locking themselves inside in their fear. 9 Although the bible does not mention her saying anything at this time, there can be no doubt that she bore witness that God's Son had risen in body for eternal glory and that death no longer had any power over him.

10 Although the bible also says that Mary Magdalene and the apostles were the first witnesses of the resurrection,² there can be no doubt that his worthy mother had certain knowledge of it before they did and that she had seen him alive and risen from the dead before they did. Therefore she humbly joined in their praise with overflowing joy in her heart. 11 When her blessed Son ascended to his kingdom of glory, the Virgin Mary was allowed to remain in this world in order to give strength to good people and to correct the wayward. 12 She became the instructor of the apostles, the comforter of martyrs, the teacher of confessors, the bright mirror of virgins, the consoler of widows, the counselor of the married and the perfect strengthener of everyone in the Catholic faith.

13 When the apostles came to themselves, she revealed everything they did not know fully about her Son and explained it to them in a sensible way. 14 She encouraged the martyrs to suffer trials and tribulations joyfully in the name of Christ, for he had freely exposed himself to far greater tribulations for their salvation and that of all souls. She affirmed that she herself had patiently endured constant tribulation in her heart for thirty years before the death of her Son. 15 She gave saving instruction to the confessors who learned perfectly well from her teaching and example how to organize the hours of day and night prudently to God's praise and glory, regulating their sleeping, eating, and physical labors in a reasonable and spiritual fashion. 16 From her chaste conduct, virgins learned to exercise a chaste mastery over themselves and preserve their virginal purity steadfastly until death, fleeing idle talk and vain behavior, considering all their actions diligently in advance, and rightly examining them on the just scales of the spiritual balance. 17 The glorious Virgin consoled widows by telling them that, although her motherly love would have preferred her beloved Son to be no more willing to die in his human nature than in his divine, 18 she completely conformed her maternal will with the divine will. She would

2. "Mary Magdalene . . . of the resurrection"; cf. Matthew 28:1-8.

rather have humbly endured any kind of hardship for the fulfillment of God's will than to dissent from the divine will in any way to suit her own pleasure. 19 By speaking to them in this way, she rendered their spirits patient in hardship and steadfast in bodily temptations. 20 She advised married couples to love one another body and soul with a real and unfeigned love³ and with the undivided intention to honor God in every way. She told them that she had sincerely placed all her trust in God and never in any way opposed the divine will out of her love for him.

✚ Chapter 20

Saturday: Second Reading

Invocation: May the Son of Mary ever Virgin, cleanse us of the stains of our perversion. Amen.

1 The holy gospel teaches that the measure with which we measure will be measured again to us.¹ It seems then impossible for human reason to comprehend 2 all the honors with which God's glorious parent deserved to be venerated by everyone in the palace of heaven. She did such good in her kindness to so many people who desired it while she lived in the world! 3 It is only right to suppose that all those whose wishes were accomplished through her would be present in ready attention for her added glory when it pleased her Son to call her from this world. 4 The Creator of the universe accomplished his will through her in the world, and therefore it was his will together with his angels to glorify her in heaven. 5 When the Virgin's soul was separated from her body, God raised it wondrously high above all the heavens,² giving her dominion over all the world and making her the everlasting Lady of the angels. 6 The angels became then so obedient to her that they would gladly suffer all the punishments of hell rather than disobey her orders in any way. 7 God gave her such power over the evil spirits that whenever they attack anyone devoutly imploring her aid, 8 they scatter right off in fear and flee far away at her merest nod. They would rather let their punishment and misery be multiplied than be subjected to the Virgin's power in such a way. 9 Because she was humblest among angels and men, she has been raised up highest over all creation, the most beautiful creature of all and the one most like to God himself.

10 To be sure, just as gold is worth more than other metals, so there are angels and souls who are worth more than other creatures. 11 Gold cannot be shaped into anything without the benefit of fire, but once fire is applied to it, it can take on various shapes. 12 Similarly, the Blessed Virgin's soul could not have become more beautiful than the angels and the other souls, unless her most excellent will—like an artful goldsmith—had prepared her in the hottest

3. "Unfeigned love"; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:6.

1. "The measure with which we measure . . . to us"; cf. Matthew 7:2.

2. "High above all the heavens"; cf. Ephesians 4:10.

fire of the Holy Spirit so effectively that her works appeared the most graceful of all to the Creator. 13 Gold may be shaped into beautiful objects, but the art of the goldsmith cannot be clearly discerned so long as the object he has shaped remains shut up in a dark room. When, however, it comes out into the sunshine, then the object's beauty gleams clearly. 14 Similarly, the glorious Virgin's worthy works that beautifully adorned her precious soul were not perfectly visible, so long as her soul was kept shut up in the hiding-place of her mortal body. But when her soul came out into the true sunshine, the Deity himself, 15 then all the heavenly court exalted her with the highest praises. Her will so adorned her soul that in beauty she excelled the beauty of the rest of creation, for she appeared as the one most like to God himself. 16 This glorious soul's glorified throne was placed from all eternity closest to the Trinity itself. 17 God the Father was in the Son and the Son in the Father and the Holy Spirit in both when the Son rested with both his human and divine natures in his Mother's womb after his incarnation. The unity of the Trinity remained undivided, and the Mother's virginity inviolate. 18 Thus, God ordained that the spiritual dwelling-place of the Blessed Virgin would be next to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in order that she might share in every good thing given by God.

19 No heart is large enough to take in all the mirth that God arranged for his heavenly company when his beloved Mother departed from this sorry world. This will be made clear to all those yearning with love for the heavenly fatherland when they finally contemplate God face-to-face. 20 The angels gave glory to God in their joy over the Virgin's soul, for their company will be filled up through Christ's bodily death, and their mirth was increased by his Mother's arrival. 21 Adam and Eve, together with the patriarchs and prophets and the whole cohort of souls released from the prison of hell, along with all those who have entered glory after the death of Christ, rejoiced at the Virgin's entrance into heaven. They praised and honored God who had favored her with the honor of giving birth to their Redeemer and Lord in such a holy and glorious manner. 22 When her beloved Son was carrying her glorious soul into heaven, the apostles and all God's friends who were present at her funeral³ venerated her in humble service, exalting her venerable body with all possible praise and honor. 23 With not a single doubt, we should believe that, as the Blessed Virgin's dead body was buried in the grave by God's friends, so too it was lifted up alive to everlasting life by her beloved Son, God himself.⁴

3. "When her beloved Son... her funeral": this refers to the well-know scene in the story of Mary's death, namely when the apostles were gathered about her bed while her soul left the body. This event precedes her burial, her placing in a grave, and her Assumption which all occurred subsequently (as referred to in the next sentence).

4. "So too it was lifted up... God himself": Mary's Assumption into heaven is more fully described by Birgitta in Book VI 62. The story of Mary's death and her assumption into heaven, first soul then body, is told in Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, chapter 115 (*The Golden Legend*, trans. Ryan, chapter 119, at volume II, pp. 80-82).

✚ Chapter 21

Saturday: Third Reading

Invocation: Queen of Angels, lead us securely, to the heavenly kingdom's glory. Amen.

1 The Truth itself, God's Son and the Virgin's, told us to return good for evil.¹ How much good, do we think, will not God himself render to the doers of good works? 2 In the gospel he promised a hundredfold reward² for each good work. Imagine, then, how he enriched his own revered Mother with the gifts of the highest rewards! She had never committed the least little sin, and the works pleasing to God that she performed cannot be numbered. 3 All these good works had their beginning in the volition of the Virgin's soul, and her body, too, was a most apt and always well-disposed instrument for carrying them out.

4 We believe that all human bodies will rise again on the last day through God's justice and receive the requisite retribution together with their souls according to their works. 5 After all, each person's works begin with the volition of the soul, and the body that is joined to the soul does the physical work in carrying them out. 6 Moreover, the sinless body of God's Son rose from the dead and was glorified together with his deity. Therefore, there should be no doubt about believing that 7 the likewise sinless body of his worthy Mother was, some days after its burial, assumed into heaven along with the Virgin's holy soul through God's power and might and glorified together with her soul with every honor in heaven. 8 The human intellect cannot conceive the beauty and glory of the crown that Christ merited to receive in return for his sufferings. In the same way no one can imagine the loveliness of the crown with which the Virgin Mary was honored in return for her holy obedience in body and soul. 9 All the virtues of the Virgin's soul glorified God, her Maker, and so her sacred body was then adorned with the rewards of all the virtues. 10 Thus, her bodily works glorified the worthy Virgin, Mother of God, for she had not failed to exercise any of the virtues while she lived in the world, knowing that she would be rewarded for them in body and soul in heaven. 11 To be sure, only the sacred soul of Christ and the soul of his Mother were worthy of the highest rewards for their virtues and merits, for there was no deficiency of any kind in their good works. 12 Only the body of Christ and the body of his Mother were worthy to receive their merited rewards together with their souls long before the bodies of others.³ Her body carried out all her excellent works together with her soul without ever consenting to any sin.

13 God revealed the might of his justice when he banished Adam from the paradise of Eden for having disobediently eaten the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. 14 But then God revealed his humble mercy in the world through

1. "Return good for evil"; cf. Psalm 34(35):12; 37 (38):20; Matthew 5:44; I Thessalonians 5:15.

2. "A hundredfold reward"; cf. Matthew 19:29.

3. "Before the bodies of others"; this refers to the fact that Mary's body was assumed into heaven. With Christ's, hers would have been the only human body in heaven at this point, and it is not until after the general resurrection at the end of time that they will be joined by more human bodies.

the Virgin Mary who may aptly be called the tree of life. 15 Recall how quickly justice banishes to misery those who disobey and taste the fruit of the tree of knowledge. 16 See, too, how kindly mercy invites to glory and attracts those who obey God and long to be refreshed by the tree of life.⁴ 17 Consider, my friends, how all the choirs of angels yearned for that tree's fruit, while the body of this pure Virgin, which may be compared to the tree of life, was growing up in the world. They took no less delight in her bodily birth than in the grace given them 18 of knowing themselves to be immortal in the joy of heaven. They knew, especially, that God's great charity would thereby shine brightly in the human race and that their own company would be increased in heaven. 19 The angel Gabriel hastened therefore quickly on his swift course to the Virgin and greeted her lovingly with words most deserving of a favorable response. 20 When the Virgin, the teacher of true humility and of all the virtues, made humble reply to the angel's message, he rejoiced, knowing that the desire of his will and of the other angels was going to be fulfilled.

21 Thus we truly know that the Virgin's blessed body was lifted up to heaven together with her soul.⁵ Here is saving advice to mortal men who have offended God. 22 Beset and wearied with troubles every day in this valley of misery, they have no doubt that their wretched lives will end with the perishing of their bodies. With true repentance for their sins, may they fly to her in haste! 23 If they desire to be nourished by the fruit that is Christ, let them try with all their strength to bend the tree branches toward themselves by lovingly greeting his Mother like the angel of the annunciation. Let them strengthen their intentions of avoiding sin and direct all their words and deeds to the glory of God as reason demands. 24 The Virgin will then incline herself easily toward them and lend them her aid in order that they may receive the fruit of the tree of life, the precious body of Christ. This is consecrated by human hands in order to become life and food for you sinners⁶ in the world as well as for the angels in heaven. 25 Christ ardently desires the souls he has redeemed with his blood for the completion of his heavenly company. Strive, therefore, dear friends, to fulfill his desire and receive him with all devotion and charity. 26 By the powerful intercession of our Virgin Mary, may Jesus Christ, her Son, grant you this, he who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

4. "Tree of life": cf. Genesis 2:9; Proverbs 3:18; Apocalypse: 22:2.

5. "The Virgin's blessed body was lifted... with her soul": cf. Book VI 12 and VII 26.

6. "This is consecrated by human hands in order to become life and food for you sinners": the consecrated bread in the priest's hands becomes the body of Christ.

The Four Prayers

halghast Eubanielit my ioufrow frith
 wone howist hetz hws vruast bar he
 dher lit alskelit radhelit my diastlomen
 loflit my angstromen thw ast renlich
 etz speghil Benaste ginstey hwalla a
 roma konunges fiste segh i svue
 mist und tha hay at erlost manbunt
 thit. predika the halghe last thit
 lofua all the halghe kirka thic lof
 ue hymel a jordh oc alt th son i thuy
 ar my gladhis oc lofs sang thv at h
 valloghete harre gith son fodes af
 thit scender af hogeste hypucromy i v
 tarsta tymanomy for virdena helso
 stuld iunelutte segh i thynora quidh
 oc fralste manbunt mydd svuom
 likama hwalla son hay thot af thit
 oc siorde svudghe man facta madh
 al wallot hrom gith i svua blodhe thv
 O halghe gudis moder hogste ioufrow
 gith monstet O maria vi ropom
 all thit in af allom alle thit madher
 sey vof vtant bone til thuy son for
 off alla O halghe minne gladhi O el
 arke are heel mare ful my mosth
 thasse bone vavo se bvgito af thuy
 halghe a anda bnde oc bewiste Oc
 a sidhey hwan dagh plaghade hoy thuy
 hwar dagh lafe my g mykls gudhelich

2
 rim

FIGURE 7. The opening lines of the Medieval Swedish text of the Four Prayers (MS A29. Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm).

Introduction

Quattuor orationes are four separate prayers composed by St. Birgitta in praise of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. Opinions are divided as to whether they were first included in Alfonso's first redaction of the canonization submissions of 1377 or 1378, or his second redaction prepared in 1380.¹ They appear in most Latin manuscripts right through to the first printed edition by Bartholomaeus Ghotan in 1492, which is the only version that assigns numbers to the prayers. Ghotan's numbering may have given rise to their present title that has been applied to them ever since. In the vernacular the four prayers also survive in four prayer book collections, but they are not part of the corpus of Birgitta's *Revelationes* in Medieval Swedish as they are in Latin.²

Little is known about the origins of these prayers. They may date back to Birgitta's early life before her widowhood, as is suggested by the *Vita*, which records how she was so very ardent and tearful in her divine prayer that when her husband was away she spent whole nights in vigil, not sparing her body in genuflection and rigorous discipline. She asked in her devotions for a suitable means of prayer to be given to her. One day when she was uplifted into a sort of elevation of mind, a most beautiful prayer was revealed to her on the suffering and wounds of Christ and on the life and praise of the Virgin. She remembered this prayer and read it every day from then on.³

As devotional pieces used on a daily basis by Birgitta throughout her visionary life, the prayers probably had a different history from the main body of the *Revelationes*, as is suggested by the surviving textual traditions in Latin and Swedish.⁴ An abiding question in scholarly discussion of the *Revelationes* concerns the likelihood of there having been early fragments and drafts in circulation during Birgitta's lifetime that represent an early stage of textual transmission, and

that may have been assimilated to a varying degree into the Latin and Swedish textual traditions respectively. The *Quattuor orationes* is one such case. A comparison between the authorized Latin and the Medieval Swedish versions of the prayers shows that the Swedish text has more concise phrasing, less subordination, and simpler syntax, as illustrated by the following paragraph (respectively from the authorized Latin version and the Medieval Swedish version):

Benedicta sis tu, domina mea Virgo Maria, que Christi corpus a tuo benedicto corpore creatum in tuo vtero sensisti semper crescere et moueri vsque ad tempus sue natiuitatis gloriose. Quem tu ante omnes tuis sanctis manibus attrectasti, pannis inuoluisti ac iuxta prophete vaticinium in presepio reclinasti et sacratissimo tuorum vberum lacte eum cum exultacionis gaudio maternaliter educasti (paragraph 13).

[Blessed are you, my Lady Virgin Mary, who felt the body of Christ, which was created from your blessed body, always growing and moving in your womb up to the time of his glorious birth. Whom you handled with your holy hands before anyone else, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and, as the prophet foretold, laid him in a manger; and you nurtured him maternally in joyful exultation with the most holy milk of your breasts.]

Æra vare thik myn jomfrw sancta maria gudhz modher thær kænde j thik gudhz likame vagste Oc rördhes til thæn tyme kom at han af thik föddis Oc var thu the förste pærsone thær gudhz likame hannadhe oc han j klædhe swepte Oc j jætzw lagdhe Oc mz thyne melk hans likame opfostradhe.

[Honor be to you my Virgin, Saint Mary Mother of God, who felt in yourself how God's body grew and stirred until the time came for him to be born of you. And you were the first person who handled God's body and swaddled him in a cloth and laid him in a manger. And you nourished his body with your milk.]

The Swedish version contains alliteration of the type that is familiar from Swedish vernacular oral tradition (e.g., paragraph 17, "titulum och tavla" [title and tablet], and paragraph 29, "bryne och bra" [eyebrows and eyelids]), and the style is at times pedantic (e.g., paragraph 76 "glory be to your nose"). There are a number of personal interjections by Birgitta herself (e.g., paragraph 25, she is a person "lacking in wisdom," who has "a sinful mouth," or paragraph 69, she describes herself as a "miserable sinner"). These interjections are absent from the Latin text. In paragraph 86 there is an addendum to the prayer, which sounds as though it might be Birgitta's own voice confessing to her sins and asking for forgiveness.

A Latin Fragment

In his edition of the *Quattuor orationes*, Sten Eklund drew attention to a previously unremarked Latin fragment in Riksarkivet, Oslo, consisting of just nine paragraphs.⁵ He examined the fragment against the authorized Latin text and equivalent passages in Medieval Swedish, and concluded that the fragment must predate the authorized Latin text. He also showed that the Medieval Swedish tradition is more similar to the Latin fragment than to the authorized Latin version. His argument is based on a number of observations concerning the differences between the overlapping paragraphs. The authorized Latin text is embellished with doublets, adjectives, and explanatory phrases (which is generally a sign of expansion from an early version to a later one), and the fragment and the Swedish text include a sentence (paragraph 45) that is omitted altogether from the authorized Latin text.

The ordering of the prayers in the fragment is similar to that of the Swedish text, but different from the authorized Latin text (the fragment spans two prayers, making it possible to speculate about the original ordering). In the authorized Latin tradition the ordering of the prayers is normally as follows: the Virgin Mary (*oratio prima* paragraphs 6–32); Christ's suffering and death (*oratio secunda* paragraphs 33–62); Christ's body (*oratio tertia* paragraphs 63–83); the Virgin Mary's body (*oratio quarta* paragraphs 84–103). The Latin fragment and Swedish text have the following ordering: Christ's suffering and death (paragraphs 2–24); Christ's body (paragraphs 25–45); the Virgin Mary (paragraphs 46–68); the Virgin Mary's body (paragraphs 69–87). Two Latin MSS of the authorized text, N^b and H^a, however, also reflect the Swedish ordering.

Eklund further notes that there is a grammatical change of a future indicative in the fragment to a subjunctive in the authorized text, which is unlikely to have happened had the authorized text had priority over the fragment. The syntax in the fragment and in the Swedish is also suggestive of a more colloquial style than that of the authorized version, and there is more use of *cursus* in the official Latin version. Eklund's conclusion is that the authorized Latin text must be based on the text of the fragment, being a later version with a more polished style. As for the relationship between the fragment and Swedish text, he was unable to say which had priority over the other.

Birgitta and Prayer

With their rigid and formulaic structure, the *Quattuor orationes* are different in tone from the more spontaneous outpourings of the revelations. They may indeed be viewed as aids to prayer, through which Birgitta contemplated an image of Christ or the Virgin and used the combination of image and text to direct her routine of daily prayer. As can often be seen throughout the *Revelationes* and supporting documents, prayer was the first stage toward Birgitta's meditative and ecstatic states. A witness in the canonization process, Katarina Bosdotter, shared a chamber with her for a year during her married life and tells how she

got up at night to pray, sometimes all night, and then went to chapel for the divine office, after which she would read devout writings to her servant folk.⁶ In the Swedish community in Rome she would also sometimes get up to pray all night and at meal times she would read her “own” prayers in order to prevent overindulgence in food and drink.⁷

The medieval prayer book has its origins in the Psalter (the 150 psalms of the Old Testament), of which set Psalms were recited at the fixed hours of monastic worship, forming the backbone of the so-called Divine Office. When lay people began to use prayer books in their private devotions, they initially combined passages from the Psalter with selected texts and prayers from the Office.⁸ However, these prayers were soon combined with others of a different kind, namely those stemming from the tradition of affective piety that had begun in the eleventh century. The latter were intended to be read in solitude and in such a way as to uplift the mind and stir the emotions to contrition and to increase the fear and love of God through self-examination.⁹ The way into private prayer, then, was through reading the scriptures, reciting the Office, contemplating liturgical texts in private, and reciting affective prayers; and the uniting of reading, meditation, and prayer involved a complete immersion in the words of scripture. It also involved the powerful effect of reminiscence, allowing echoes of what had been read or heard to come to the surface of the mind in free association. Thus prayerful devotional attitudes are for Birgitta the initial stage in the process toward higher states, which, by the working of divine grace, transmute into mystical experience. This process is explicitly referred to in Book VII 10 (“It happened to a person engaged in prayer that she heard a voice saying to her”) in which the revelation flows out of the prayer.

The dividing line between prayer, meditation, and revelation is of course a shifting one, but a simple subdivision into these categories is suggested by the extant Birgittine corpus.¹⁰ In the vast majority of the Birgittine revelations, Birgitta is the passive recipient of a divine communication. But sometimes a prayer is incorporated into a revelation, which testifies to her private devotion and a more active engagement with God. For example, in Book I 8, Mary teaches Birgitta a prayer of praise; in IV 21.1–4 a prayer is woven into a dialogue she has with the Virgin; IV 60. 4–5 includes a prayer; in Book IV 89. 4–7, two prayers for knights to say in battle are given; and IV 94 quotes some prayers that she is advised to say as she goes about her daily routines (paragraphs 2, 4, 5, 7, 9). In VI 94, paragraph 14, “The lady experienced temptations while she was at prayer” and Book VII 10.1–2 contain an opening doxology. Such occasional examples, spread evenly throughout the *Revelationes*, illustrate how deeply embedded prayer was in Birgitta’s devotional and spiritual life, and probably she used many more prayers that never found their way into written form.

These occasional prayers may or may not have been Birgitta’s own compositions.¹¹ Some of them (estimated to be about 25 in total) were later excerpted and added into private prayer book collections written or owned by the Vadstena nuns in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; in some of these collections they sit alongside the *Quattuor orationes*.¹² The prayer book collections are

an illustration of Birgitta's legacy in the development of lay spirituality at her monastic foundation at Vadstena. About fifteen prayer collections from Vadstena survive, some written for use by nuns, and some written by women who can be identified by name. The most important ones are those of Christina Hansadotter (MS Cod. Holm. A38); Ingegerd Ambjörnsdotter (MS Cod. Holm. A43); Christina Hansdotter (Brask) (MS Cod. Ups. C12); Birgitta Andersdotter (MS Cod. Holm. A80); Märita Thuresdotter (MS Cod. Holm. A37); and Dorothea Nilsdotter (MS Cod. Holm. A81). They are mostly a hybrid type of material with both prayers in Latin and individually composed prayers in Swedish, but some (in e.g., MS Cod. Holm. A37) are freely composed prayers.¹³

Birgittine Meditations

Besides the prayers, there are a number of longer devotional pieces or meditations that do not have any corresponding version in Latin (see further p 329). Apart from a few fragmentary lines that survive, the only copy of these pieces is in an eighteenth-century transcript by Sven Lagerbring.¹⁴ In one of these, Birgitta says she has more difficulty in seeing things close to her—that is, the activities of the Holy Spirit and the temptations of the devil—than things far away, like the earth and planets; using a range of antithetical images, she depicts the two paths available to guide away from excessive eating, sleeping, and drinking. The second meditation is about the state of her soul which has not improved since she last made her confession, and the third (a continuation of the second) starts with a quotation from St. Bernard, “multi multa sciunt et se ipsos nesciunt” [many know much and know not themselves] which she relates to her own experience, developing a simple theology on the faculties of understanding that are given to human beings and that distinguish them from animals.

Four further meditations are placed among an assortment of revelations at the end of Book IV in the Swedish tradition.¹⁵ On linguistic grounds they appear to date from before Birgitta's calling vision in the mid-1340s. One contains a reference to her friends and kinsmen and another refers to her husband and children: “Rip out the thorn which is in my heart, which is bodily love for my husband or children or friends or relatives.”

All these meditational texts are different in character from the revelations, and they are more like unselfconscious soliloquies and spiritual exercises in which Birgitta reflects aloud on some common devotional subjects of her day. As texts on the periphery of the Birgittine tradition, they provide a touchstone of theological discourse in the mid-fourteenth century and enrich our understanding of Birgitta's spirituality at an intimate level.

The Fifteen Oes

There is one other main group of prayers strongly associated with Birgitta, even if it remains strictly outside the Birgittine canon. A collection known as

the “Fifteen Oes” (*Quindecim orationes*) occurs in fifteenth-century books of hours and private devotional books across Europe. They are frequently attributed to Birgitta in the rubrics of their manuscripts, as “pious prayers of St. Birgitta,” and they were especially popular in England and northern Europe. They are loosely arranged around the Seven Words spoken by Christ on the cross, and they retell the passion story of the Gospels, each prayer starting with the exclamation “O.” They explore a range of imagery relating to the passion of Christ, in the tradition of affective piety and the concentration on human suffering, and much of the subject matter is familiar indeed from Birgitta’s own prayers and meditations.¹⁶ However, the genesis of this group of prayers remains a problematic question, and they are best described as apocryphal Birgittine writings.¹⁷ Regardless of this they have probably contributed more to Birgitta’s fame than any of her genuine writings, having been translated into virtually all European vernaculars and printed hundreds of times since the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Note on the Selected Text

The *Quattuor Orationes* illustrate some of the complexities in the process of the transmission of the Birgittine tradition from the original oral formulation, to the written Swedish text, to an early Latin draft (or perhaps vice versa, from the Latin draft to the received Swedish version), and then to the polished version intended for the canonization edition. Wishing to present the most pristine yet complete version available, we have elected to translate the Swedish text of the prayers in the manuscript version Stockholm Royal Library Cod. A 29, giving significant variant readings from the other Swedish manuscripts, and indicating the phrases for which there is no equivalent at all in the Latin text.¹⁸

NOTES

1. Eklund, *Quattuor orationes*, p. 15 opts for the first redaction, whereas Undhagen, *Book I*, pp. 14–26, argues in favor of the second.

2. The Swedish manuscripts are: (1) Stockholm Royal Library Cod. A 29, fol. 28v–38v, early 16th cent. (ed. Eklund, *Quattuor orationes*, pp. 93–107), a collection of Birgittine prayers previously thought (by Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, p. 162) to have been written by a Danish scribe at Vadstena abbey; a more recent study by Jexlev, “Anna Brahes Bønnebog” p. 327, suggests it was written in the Birgittine abbey of Maribo, and afterward taken to Vadstena. (2) Stockholm Royal Library Cod. A 27, fol. 2r–9r, 15th cent. (ed. Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, pp. 146–58). (3) Stockholm Royal Library Cod. A 36, fol. 43v–53r 15th cent. (ed. Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, pp. 132–46). This manuscript contains prayers written by several scribes in both Swedish and Latin. (4) Stockholm, Riksarkivet, Skokloster Cod. 8, fol. 62r–72v and 84r–87v, 16th cent. (ed. Geete, *Svenska Böner*, pp. 114–22, 218–23, 321–26).

3. “In oracione vero et lacrimis sponsa Christi feruentissima erat intantum, vt absente viro eciam fere totis vigilabat noctibus et non parcebat corpori suo a multis genuflexibus et crudelibus disciplinis; procedente vero aliquo tempore cum iam semper peteret a Deo in oracionibus suis, vt aliquis modus orandi conueniens infunderetur sibi, quodam die mirum in modum eleuata fuit in mente, et infusa est tunc sibi oracio pulcherrima de passione Christi et de vita et laude beatissime Marie virginis, quam ita memoriter tenuit, vt postea eam die quolibet legeret, vnde et beata Maria postea quadam vice apparens ei dixit: “Ego tibi promerui illam oracionem, ideo hanc legens vistaberis consolacionem filij mei.” Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 78. This text forms the prologue to the prayer in one of the manuscripts in Swedish (A 36); see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, p. 132.

4. Besides the authorized Latin version of the *Revelationes* that was prepared for the canonization in the late fourteenth century, there is a translation into the vernacular undertaken for use by nuns at the newly estab-

lished abbey of Vadstena. This translation back into Swedish is a literal and close translation of the Latin text, clothed in Latin syntax and style and deviating scarcely at all from the Latin text. See further volume 1, pp. 22–24.

5. MS Lat. fragm. [eske 24] 614 in Riksarkivet, Oslo. See also Eklund, “A Reassessment.”

6. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 66.

7. See the *Vita* of Katherina Ulfssdotter, written by the Vadstena brother Ulf Birgersson in 1415 (*Revelationes caelestes seraphicae matris sanctae Birgittae*, 1680, pp. 841–57). It is translated into Swedish by Lundén, *Den heliga Birgitta*. vol. 4, pp. 201–32. See also *Extravagantes*, ch. 8, on her formal prayer in Rome.

8. The development of the prayer book started with (1) books of hours, in which the connection with the breviary and the canonical hours is still apparent, because they contain a calendar (indicating for each day of the year which saint or festival to celebrate) and psalms and prayers for fixed hours of the day, as well as the litany and prayers directed to saints; (2) books of common prayer or prayer books proper, in which the selection of materials is dependent on the writer’s personal interests, and whose arrangement is sometimes random, sometimes in accordance with the hierarchy of the litany (i.e., first prayers to the Trinity, then to the Virgin Mary, then to groups of other saints, with local variations); and (3) hybrid forms of these two. See further Black, “The Divine Office.”

9. See Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm*, especially the prologue by R. W. Southern.

10. Prayer is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “a solemn and humble request to God, or an object of worship; a supplication, petition, or thanksgiving, usually expressed in words”; meditation, as “the continuous application of the mind to the contemplation of some religious truth, mystery, or object of reverence in order that the soul may increase in love of God and holiness of life”; and revelation, as “the disclosure or communication of knowledge to man by a divine or supernatural agency.”

11. See Undhagen, *Book I*, p. 154n5.

12. Geete, *Svenska böner från medeltiden*, pp. 67–68, 223–24, 393–96, 466–69, 471–72, 474, 478.

13. See Hedström, “Medeltidens svenska bönböcker,” and “Bön,” “Bönböcker” in KLNLM.

14. See Lagerbring, *Samling af åtskilliga handlingar*. For a translation, see p. 329.

15. They occur in the only manuscript in medieval Swedish containing Book IV (MS Cod. Holm. A5a) dating from c. 1425, ed. Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser 2*, pp. 261–69; and in another manuscript that is a direct copy of MS A5a.

16. See further Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 259–60, who writes of them “In sheer comprehensiveness and eloquence they present an unrivalled epitome of late medieval English religion at its most symbolically resonant. Despite their immense popularity these are learned prayers, with roots in patristic and early medieval theology, as well as the writings of Rolle and the affective tradition.”

17. See further Gejrot, “The Fifteen Oes.”

18. Eklund, *Quattuor oraciones*, pp. 93–107, includes a transcript of MS A 29 and we have chosen to use this for the translation. The reader wishing to consult a translation of the authorized Latin text is referred to the one by A. R. Kezel in Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 221–35. It is based on the printed edition by Durante of 1628, which deviates in some details from Eklund’s critical edition.

The Four Prayers

- 1 These prayers were taught and revealed to St. Birgitta by the Holy Spirit and ever afterward she had the habit of reading them daily with great piety.

Prayer on Christ's Passion and Death

- 2 My sweet God, glory be to you who are one God in three persons, the Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- 3 Glory be to you my Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, who were sent by the Father into the body of a virgin, yet nonetheless were in him in heaven and he in you in earth, with his divinity in your manhood.
- 4 Honor be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who grew and dwelled in the Virgin's womb until the time came for you to be born, and you deigned to be handled by her hands, wrapped in cloths, placed in a manger,¹ and nurtured by her milk.²
- 5 Praise be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who allowed yourself to be circumcised and called Jesus, and allowed kings to come to you,³ and afterward to be presented in the temple.⁴
- 6 Glory be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who were under the protection and obedience of your foster-father⁵ and your mother while your body grew, and who had them both under your protection and obedience.⁶
- 7 Honor be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who wished to be baptized by your servant, and yourself to perform miracles and preach, and rationally to reveal that you were true God, and you wished to fulfill the words of the prophets and redeem men's souls by your death.
- 8 Praise be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who fasted until hungry and wished to suffer temptations from your enemy, the devil, and yet with a single word, when you so wished, you drove him from you.
- 9 Honor be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who foretold your death, and in the Last Supper consecrated your precious body from bread and gave it to your apostles and disciples as a memorial; and afterward you humbly washed their feet.
- 10 Glory be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who in fear of death sweated blood⁷ in your prayer, and yet you did according to what you yourself wanted and you revealed the love you had for your handiwork.

1. "Placed in a manger"; cf. Luke 2:7.

2. "And nurtured by her milk": there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text.

3. "Allowed kings to come to you": there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text.

4. "To be presented in the temple": cf. Luke 2:22.

5. "Foster-father": refers to Joseph. Paragraphs 6–9 are considerably more embellished in the authorized Latin version.

6. "Protection and obedience... under your protection and obedience": there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text.

7. "Sweated blood"; cf. Luke 22:44.

- 11 Praise be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who were bought, sold and afterward captured, and with one word you cast your enemies to the ground⁸ and then committed yourself into their hands.
- 12 Honor be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who were led to Caiaphas's house, delivered to the judgment of Pilate, and sent to Herod, and by him and his court⁹ were mocked and reviled, and then led back to Pilate with scorn and hatred.
- 13 Glory be to you my Lord Jesus Christ for the sake of derision when you were led in purple clothes; and your head was crowned with thorns, and your face was spat upon by their mouths, your eyes were veiled, and your cheeks and neck were beaten.
- 14 Praise be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who were judged at the pillar, bound and whipped and, in accordance with Pilate's order, were shown bleeding so that the cruel harshness of the Jews might be assuaged.¹⁰
- 15 Honor be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who were led back to the Pilate's judgment and heard how lies were heaped upon you, and the people called for the robber to be set free and you, my Lord, crucified.
- 16 Glory be to you my Lord Jesus Christ, who were condemned to death bleeding, on whose blessed shoulders the cross was laid, and when you came to the place of execution you undressed yourself and were nailed naked to the cross.
- 17 Honor be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who let your hands and feet be stretched with ropes, pierced with iron nails, and fastened with hammers, and you heard yourself called deceiver and traitor, and the title and tablet were mockingly inscribed above your head.¹¹
- 18 Praise be to you my Lord Jesus Christ, for the sight of your bodily eyes was darkened by weakness, your face paled by the loss of blood, your tongue dried by the pains of your insides, your mouth moistened by a bitter drink, your beard and hair thickened by the blood from the wounds of your head, and all your body was so scourged that the skin was all lacerated by thorns. Thus you stood on the cross¹² and awaited death, my very dearest Lord.
- 19 Glory be to you my Lord Jesus Christ, who in such anguish saw your sinless mother,¹³ and commended her to the care of your disciple, and also because you responded to the sinner when you granted mercy to the robber.¹⁴

8. "Cast your enemies to the ground"; cf. John 18:5-6.

9. "And his court"; there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text.

10. This paragraph is omitted in MS A29 and supplemented here from MS A 36. There is no equivalent in the Latin text of the phrases "at the pillar" and "so that the cruel harshness... be assuaged."

11. "The title and tablet"; cf. John 19:19-22.

12. "You stood on the cross": the Scandinavian verb "sta" [to stand] is sometimes used interchangeably with "esse" [to be]. The same verb is used in the Latin version, "in cruce stetisti" [you stood on the cross], suggesting an influence on Swedish medieval Latin.

13. "Your disciple"; cf. John 19:26-27.

14. "To the robber"; cf. Luke 23:39-43.

- 20 Honor be to you my Lord Jesus Christ for every moment you suffered on the cross when the pain from every wound pressed on your heart and you commended your spirit into the hands of your Father.
- 21 Praise be to you my Lord Jesus Christ because your heart died from unbearable pain,¹⁵ and all your body became cold, and you hung dead upon the wood of the cross.¹⁶ And at the same moment you took all of your friends out of hell, and for all who had deserved it you opened up heaven.
- 22 Honor be to you my Lord Jesus Christ because your side opened so that the heart in your breast might be pierced. Nor did you want your dead body to be taken from the cross until leave was granted.
- 23 Glory be to you my Lord Jesus because your friends took your dead body from the cross and wrapped it all bloody in cloths and laid it in earth, where it was guarded by the knights and servants of Pilate.
- 24 Praise be to you my Lord Jesus Christ who rose alive on Easter Day and appeared to those you chose. And on Ascension Day you went to your kingdom as all who were near you witnessed. And on the Day of Pentecost you sent your Holy Spirit to your friends and made them burn in your love.¹⁷ And now you sit in the glory of your divinity with all your limbs alive that you took from the Virgin. And you shall come again on the Day of Judgment and judge all men according to their deeds.

Prayer to Christ's Body

- 25 My Lord Jesus Christ, although I know that your body is glorified in every moment with heavenly song, nevertheless I, a person lacking in wisdom, dare to speak his praise with my sinful mouth.¹⁸
- 26 My Lord Jesus, highest priest, who first consecrated your body out of bread, may highest honor be to the place where you sit¹⁹ beside your father in your divinity.
- 27 My Lord Jesus Christ, since all your deeds are done by the greatest love, may your head and hair be glorified with an imperial crown and may all that is created bow down under your power.
- 28 My Lord Jesus Christ, of royal birth,²⁰ may your brow be praised, for it never turned away from the truth.
- 29 My Lord Jesus Christ, may your eyebrows and eyelids and eyes be praised by all the company of heaven because they tenderly look upon all those who pray for mercy in love.

15. MS A36 here adds "your head fell onto your breast"; cf. John 19:30.

16. "Wood of the cross" renders "traeno" [the wood].

17. "And on the Day of Pentecost . . . in your love": there is no equivalent of this sentence in the Latin text.

18. "Lacking in wisdom . . . sinful mouth": note Birgitta's personal interjection here.

19. "The place where you sit" renders "likama saete" [physical seat].

20. "Of royal birth": there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text. Cf. A36 "af konunglike äro" [of royal honor], probably a misreading for "af konunglike ätt" [of royal family].

- 30 My Lord Jesus Christ, may your ears hear eternal honor, as they did not refuse to listen to anyone who spoke to you.
- 31 My Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to your nose which for the sake of our salvation was not disgusted by Lazarus's decaying body, nor by the foul smell which the traitor Judas emitted spiritually.
- 32 My Lord Jesus, blessed be your mouth for every word you uttered, because that was all for the necessity of the soul and body, and for the revelation of the holy faith.
- 33 My Lord Jesus Christ, who created all things, may your teeth be glorified for every time they opened and closed when you chewed food with them.
- 34 My Lord Jesus Christ, may your tongue have highest praise, for it never moved or rested except in accordance with what was foreseen in your divinity.
- 35 My Lord Jesus Christ, may eternal honor be to your throat and stomach, liver and lungs, and all other innards, for all the food and drink they swallowed and digested to strengthen your body and soul for everlasting refreshment.
- 36 My Lord Jesus Christ, blessed be your cheeks and chin on which you grew a beard as you increased in age, so that they might grow, just as you previously created Adam with a single word.²¹
- 37 My Lord Jesus Christ, who are called duke,²² honor be to your dear neck which bore a heavy burden²³ before you conquered hell and led the elected host to heaven.
- 38 My Lord Jesus Christ, may all creatures of the knighthood honor the glory of your heart, which, allured and importuned, did not spare the justice of your kingdom. That justice was your eternal wish to become man and make the law known. For those laws all the martyrs fought, and in allegiance to them, all who are to be made knights are bound with an oath.²⁴
- 39 My Lord Jesus Christ, honor be to your breast above all loyal servants who have not spared their own lives in order that their Lord might live. My Lord, you hastened into death, in order that those who serve you²⁵ might live.
- 40 My Lord Jesus Christ, praise be to your hands and arms above the strength of Samson and all other champions,²⁶ for these limbs overcame hell when they were fastened to the wood of the cross and snatched all your friends out of hell.

21. "Just as you previously created Adam with a single word": there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text. Note that paragraphs 35 and 36 are given in the reverse order in Latin.

22. "Duke" renders "hærtoghe," a term generally used of a secular ruler.

23. "Heavy burden," i.e., the cross.

24. The meaning of this paragraph, with its focus on knighthood and justice, is not altogether clear.

25. "Those who serve you" renders "swennen," a term in Medieval Swedish for men bearing arms and men in service to a secular lord, as distinct from the more generic "thiænara" [servants] at the start of the paragraph.

26. "And all other champions": there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text. Cf. Judges 16:25–30.

- 41 My Lord Jesus Christ, honor be to your shoulders²⁷ and back and ribs above all who cultivate the earth and do pious work, for these limbs worked from the hour of your birth until your death for the necessities of souls.
- 42 My Lord Jesus Christ, blessed be your loins and praised above all the purity of the angels in heaven and above all those who have observed chastity on earth.²⁸
- 43 My Lord Jesus Christ, may your legs and knees have honor above all those who learn to show reverence to their masters, for these limbs humbly knelt²⁹ before your disciples.
- 44 My Lord Jesus Christ, may your feet be praised above all who gained their masters' wisdom, for your feet trod a harder road than they taught to others.
- 45 My Lord Jesus Christ, joy, honor and glory be to all your holy body from your crown to beneath your soles, because you appear to men in the form of bread, and you appear before the company of heaven with all your limbs living.³⁰

Prayer to the Virgin Mary

- 46 Blessed be you my Virgin, St. Mary, Mother of God. For none loved your creator as much as you, for you are the best creature that God created.
- 47 Glory be to you, my Virgin, St. Mary, Mother of God. For an angel foretold your birth to your father and mother; and from the most precious marriage that ever was, your body was conceived and born of your mother's womb like other children.
- 48 Praise be to you, my Virgin, St. Mary, Mother of God. For after you were weaned you were presented in the temple by your parents and, with other virgins, you were given into the care of a devout bishop.³¹
- 49 Glory be to you, my Virgin, St. Mary, Mother of God. For when you reached the age when you knew God was your Creator, you at once loved him above all things. And all the time, day and night, you observed and utilized everything to his service, and gave your body sleep and food so that it could best prepare for divine work.
- 50 Honor be to you, my Virgin, St. Mary, who promised your virginity to God Himself and did not care who your betrothed was, since you had given your troth to another who was more powerful and better than all others.

27. "Shoulders" there is no equivalent of this noun in the Latin text.

28. Paragraphs 42–50, bridging two prayers, occur in the Oslo fragment in Latin; see p. 199.

29. "Knelt"; cf. John 13:4–16. The gospel does not mention his kneeling, although this motif is commonly represented in medieval art.

30. "My lord Jesus Christ . . . limbs living": there is no equivalent of this paragraph in the Latin text.

31. "Bishop" renders "biskop"; cf. Latin (in the Oslo fragment) "episcopi"—indicating the closer similarity between the fragment and the Swedish version but (in the authorized Latin text) "pontifex" [high priest]. Compare also paragraph 26 where Christ is referred to as "høgheste præster" [highest priest].

- 51 Blessed are you, my Lady, Virgin Mary! You were burning with the fire of divine love, lifting up all your heart with all your strength, and intently contemplating the most high God to whom you offered your virginity, when the angel was sent to you from God, greeted you and announced God's will for you. Your answer was to profess yourself humbly to be God's handmaid, and there and then the Holy Spirit miraculously filled you with every grace. God sent to you his Son coeternal and coequal with himself. He came to you and assumed a human body from your flesh and blood. At that blessed moment the Son of God became your son, alive in all his limbs yet without losing his divine majesty.³²
- 52 Glory be to you, my Virgin, St. Mary, who felt Christ's body grow and quicken in your womb until the time of his birth. And you were the first person who touched God's body and wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger and nourished his body with your milk.
- 53 Honor be to you, my Virgin, St. Mary, Mother of God, who saw kings come to the stable and bring royal gifts with honor for your son. And afterward you presented him in the temple yourself, and you cherished in your heart everything you heard him say and do in his childhood.
- 54 Praise be to you, my Virgin, St. Mary, who fled with your most precious child into Egypt, and then brought him back to Nazareth. And under your authority and that of his foster father his body grew.
- 55 Glory be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, who saw your son preach and perform miracles, call the disciples to him and elect apostles who would bear witness that he was God's Son, wanted to fulfill the words of the prophets and, according to them, suffer pain and death.
- 56 Honor be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, who knew your son was captured, and saw how he was bound and whipped, and crowned with thorns and called traitor and rejected by all. And you saw him fastened with nails to the cross, alive and naked.
- 57 Praise be to you my Virgin Mary, Mother of God, who heard him speak to you, and how he called to his Father in the anguish of death and commended his spirit into his hands.³³
- 58 Honor be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, who saw your son hanging dead on the cross, all bloody from his crown to his heels,³⁴ pierced through his hands and feet and breast, and all his body shredded by thorns.
- 59 Glory be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, who saw your son taken from the cross and wrapped in cloths and placed in a grave,³⁵ and guarded by the knights and servants of Pilate.

32. The translation of this paragraph is from the Latin text (Eklund, *Quattuor oraciones*, p. 67 paragraph 12) because the Swedish text in all manuscripts is corrupt.

33. "Commended . . . into his hands": cf. John 19.26; Luke 23.46.

34. "From his crown to his heels": cf. Deuteronomy 28:35; Job 2:7; Isaiah 1:6.

35. "Grave" renders "graff"; cf. Latin "sepulcro," suggesting a tomb or burial chamber, rather than interment in the ground. Cf. also paragraphs 65 and 67.

- 60 Honor be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, who in maternal love and weighed down by heartfelt sorrow departed from your son's grave and were led by his followers to the house of John the Evangelist;³⁶ and that was your comfort and solace that you were certain of his resurrection.
- 61 Praise be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, because at the very point when your son rose from death, he made it known to you himself, and afterward he appeared to those he chose and reasonably proved that it was the same body as had suffered death.
- 62 Honor be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, who saw your son on Ascension Day rise to his kingdom so that all who were nearby saw, and on the day of Pentecost sent his Holy Spirit, which you were also previously filled with, and made all those it touched burning in love.³⁷
- 63 Glory be to you my lady, St. Mary, because your son let you stay behind for some time and years³⁸ so that his friends should have joy and comfort from you and take advice, and so also that many countless Jews and heathens—because they saw your noble bearing and heard your wise words and understood your virtuous deeds—should fully believe that you were a mother with virginity and your son was God with manhood.
- 64 Praise be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, Mother of God, who in maternal love longed every hour to go to your Son.³⁹ Yet you willingly lived here so long as it pleased him, for which your glory was increased in his kingdom.
- 65 Honor be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, because the angel told you that you would part from the world, and your soul would be honored by God, and your body buried by the apostles.
- 66 Glory be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, because in death divinity itself embraced your soul, and God the Father protected it from all torments. God the Father, whose son you bore, placed all that is created under your authority. God's Son placed you, his mother, on a seat beside him. And the Holy Spirit brought you home,⁴⁰ his betrothed Virgin, with highest honor.
- 67 Praise be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, Mother of God, because your dead body was dressed and laid in earth by the apostles. And it remained there for a while until the time came for it to be united with your soul by God's power.

36. "John the Evangelist": a clarification in the Swedish text, but not in the Latin text. In the gospels John is not mentioned by name as the disciple to whom Christ entrusted his mother (John 19:26).

37. Paragraph 62 is considerably shorter than Latin, which has two paragraphs equivalent to the Swedish text. The idea that Mary saw Christ when he ascended into heaven is a part of later nonbiblical tradition.

38. "For some time and years": on the time Mary lived on earth, given elsewhere by Birgitta as fifteen years, see Book VII 26.

39. "In maternal love": Birgitta emphasizes the strength of her devotion to the Virgin here.

40. "Brought you home" renders "hemförde" [brought home], conjuring the image of bringing home a bride.

68 Honor be to you my Virgin, St. Mary, because your body then saw and felt that it lived after death. It saw that its son was God with manhood; it knew in itself that it was mother with virginity. It saw its son as judge of righteousness; it felt itself neither to have sinned mortally nor venially. It saw its son be the rewarder of good deeds; it knew itself to have done all the good that righteousness must honor and reward. It saw in righteousness that the one who loved God the most was deemed closest to God; it felt within itself that no one among angels and men loved God more dearly. Thus it deserved the highest throne, with God's leave, beside God.⁴¹

Prayer to the Virgin's Limbs

- 69 My Virgin Mary, you are praised by the Holy Trinity,⁴² for you are the best creature that was ever created. You give mercy to humble souls. And for a miserable sinner who asks for mercy you are the most gracious mediator.⁴³ All creatures praise God who created you and crowned you as their empress.
- 70 My Virgin Mary, praise be to your hair above the lily's beauty because it was fairer than the sun, for just as the strands of your hair cannot be counted so also are your virtues.
- 71 My Virgin Mary, your face and forehead shone above the moon's whiteness, so praise and glory be to them, for there was none in this dark world who did not look at you without feeling something good at the sight of you.
- 72 My Virgin Mary, your brows and eyelashes are like your hair in beauty, shining above the sunbeams.
- 73 My Virgin Mary, your eyes desired to own no transient thing that they saw in this transient world, therefore their every blink exceeds the beauty of the stars before the company of heaven.
- 74 My Virgin Mary, you never exposed your cheeks to vanity; therefore praise be to them above the beauty of the dawn which sometimes appears in the fairest colour of white and red.
- 75 My Virgin Mary, praise be to your ears above the might of the oceans and the movement of all the waters, for they were steadfast against all the heavy pressure of the impure world.
- 76 My Virgin Mary, glory be to your nostrils by the power of the Holy Spirit. For you never drew breath or breathed out without God

41. "Highest throne... beside God": again, the importance attached to the Virgin is indicated in positioning her beside, rather than beneath God. Paragraph 68 is equivalent to paragraphs 30–31 in Latin; paragraph 32 in Latin has no equivalent in Swedish.

42. "You are praised by the Holy Trinity": there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text.

43. "The most gracious mediator": there is no equivalent of this phrase in Latin. The reference to the Virgin Mary as "mediatrix" emphasizes her intercessory role in the work of salvation; cf. also Book I, Prologue, paragraph 5, and *Extravagantes* ch. 50.19.

- passing through your mouth,⁴⁴ even though you sometimes slept, yet your will was always the same; therefore they shall be glorified above all aromatic mixtures and herbs that transmit a sweet fragrance.
- 77 My Virgin Mary, may your tongue be glorified above all the trees that bear fruit for every word it spoke; for your speaking⁴⁵ was always of benefit to someone, and harmed no one, and your words⁴⁶ are sweeter to hear than it is even to taste the sweetest fruit.
- 78 My Virgin Mary, may your mouth be glorified above all the flowers in existence; praise be to your lips above the beauty of the roses for the answer you gave the angel when God himself made known his honorable will to you, to fulfill through you that which he had promised to the patriarchs and spoken through the prophets.⁴⁷ He reduced the power of hell and increased the heavenly host by the virtuous answer of your mouth.
- 79 My Virgin Mary, your neck, your back, your arms, and your shoulders be praised above the beauty of the lily which grew straight from the root, for they never bowed or were uprooted by vain things. Just as the lily is swayed by the blowing wind, so your limbs moved at the infusion of the Holy Spirit.
- 80 My Virgin Mary, your hands and fingers be praised and glorified above all precious stones which compare with your deeds, for they attracted God's Son to them according to his blessed will.
- 81 My Virgin Mary, praise be to your breast in purity above all the most shining gold and purest metal, for when you sorrowed and were troubled at the sound of the hammers beneath your son's cross, yet according to the will of God, you would rather suffer that anguish for the gain of souls than that he should not have suffered a bitter death, and the souls would not have been redeemed.
- 82 My Virgin Mary, may your gentle heart be glorified over all created flesh and praised for all its virtues,⁴⁸ because it was burning with love for God over all the things that ever lived, so that this flame of love rose up to the Father and into Him. And by the power⁴⁹ of the Holy Spirit the Son descended who was never parted from the Father, and in your virginal belly he took manhood with his godhead.
- 83 My Virgin Mary, praise be to your feet over all roots that do not lose their sap because they bear fruit. For they bore enclosed in your body your son and your virginity was inviolate, and they walked very virtuously so that wherever your footsteps went the king of heaven was pleased, and all the company of heaven was joyful.

44. "Through your mouth": cf. MS A36 "minne" [memory], MS Skok. 8: "att thinom huxilsom" [through your thoughts].

45. "Your speaking" renders "thz" [that].

46. "Your words" renders "the" [they].

47. "To the patriarchs . . . the prophets": there is no equivalent of this phrase in the Latin text.

48. "For all its virtues" renders "aff allom dygdom" [from all virtues].

49. "Power" renders "raadh"; another Swedish manuscript has "eldhe" [fire].

- 84 The place in which your son lay, my Virgin, St. Mary, Mother of God, be glorified and honored by the Father and the same Son and the Holy Spirit, with its incomprehensible power, and by all the company of heaven with its wisdom and all the Holy Church with its song and readings.⁵⁰
- 85 Praise, glory and thanks be to you, Lord God, who created her and made her into your Mother. So many have benefited from her, and both the good and the evil benefit, and those who fear you and ask for mercy in love.
- 86 My Lord Jesus Christ, I have spoken a little about your virtuous deeds and those of your Mother. Now, with your help, I will readily consider my offenses and my countless sins, and how I have spent my time uselessly, used my goods unreasonably, and loved my friends and kinsmen in a bodily fashion. And I will consider the way in which I have injured my soul with my bodily desires; how I have injured others spiritually, in bodily goods or honor; how I have offended against the God of virtue. I repent with all my heart and I want dearly to better myself with your help, and never again hereafter do the same again. Help me to do this, pure Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ, to whom be praise, honor and glory with your blessed Son Almighty God, for ever and ever, Amen.⁵¹
- 87 *Speciosa facta es.*⁵² You have become fair and sweet in your desire for virginity, blessed Mother of God, whom the daughters of Syon have seen fragrant among the rose petals and lilies of the valley and have preached to be the most holy and the queens have praised her.

50. "Readings" renders "laesninge," i.e., the formal liturgy.

51. There is no equivalent of this paragraph in the Latin text. The paragraph has the character of a private petition, more personal than the tenor of the four prayers in general.

52. "*Speciosa facta es*": This is a Swedish translation of an antiphon for the Assumption or Nativity of Mary: "*Speciosa facta es et suavis in deliciis virginitatis, sancta dei genetrix, quam videntes filiae Sion vernantem in floribus rosarum et liliis convallium beatissimam praedicaverunt et reginae laudaverunt eam.*" There is no equivalent of this paragraph in the Latin text, and it is not included in any other Swedish manuscript besides MS A29. It may be an opening to a new prayer rather than a conclusion to the existing one. There are similarities in imagery with the close of another prayer in Medieval Swedish; see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, p. 158.

Extravagant Revelations



FIGURE 8. Gislunge church Sjaelland, late medieval wall painting showing St. Birgitta. (Image © Danmarks Kirker)

Introduction

During a lull in the canonization proceedings, the Swedish delegates returned home to Sweden in 1380, among them Prior Petrus of Alvastra. He took with him a body of supplementary material that had been excluded from Alfonso's newly created edition that was in preparation for the papal canonization commission. This material included revelations that later came to be incorporated into Book IV chapters 131–135 and Book VI chapters 110–122. It also included a bundle of revelations that for various reasons had been excluded from the central corpus of the *Revelationes*. A brother at Vadstena, named Johannes Jordersson (d. 1391), prepared a compilation of Petrus's material which, although no longer extant, was copied, with a different ordering, into the manuscript known as Codex Falkenberg that was written in the early fifteenth century by a brother named Johan Johansson. This body of "extravagant, stray, isolated" material forms the basis of the book today known as the *Revelationes extravagantes*.

The collection in Codex Falkenberg comprises sixty-seven revelations, fifty-two of which were most probably part of Prior Petrus's original deposition (chapters 1–3, 5–6, 10, 17, 19, 24, 26, 27, 31–32, 34, 37, 39–40, 43, 50–52, 54, 56–59, 62–65, 69, 72–92, 106). Ch. 12, which is not included in Codex Falkenberg, was also part of Petrus's material, bringing its total to fifty-three revelations. The remaining fifteen revelations that make up the *Extravagantes* in Codex Falkenberg seem to have their source in the *Vita* that was compiled by Prior Petrus of Alvastra and Master Petrus of Skänninge soon after Birgitta's death, as well as depositions in the canonization process. This amorphous set of texts remained as an ill-defined collection within the manuscript groups until the first printed edition by Bartholomaeus Ghotan in 1492. The manuscripts of the "Swedish" tradition that emerged at Vadstena where all these residual texts had been gathered, contain varying numbers of revelations,

sometimes with marginal additions. The *Liber Magistri Petri* (MS Cod. Ups. C31), for example, might have been based on a copy owned by Birgitta's confessor himself; the above-mentioned redaction of Johannes Jordersson, otherwise known as Johannes the priest, who belonged to the oldest generation of brethren at Vadstena, is another important representative of the "Vadstena" tradition that contains much material not included in the manuscripts that were produced on the continent. Some individual chapters of the *Revelationes extravagantes* are only rarely met in the surviving manuscripts, and some are subject to considerable variation from one manuscript copy to another. For a detailed assessment of the contents of the *Revelationes extravagantes* the reader is referred to the scholarly edition by Lennart Hollman that includes 116 chapters, following the *editio princeps* by Bartholomaeus Ghotan.¹ This version is followed in the translation below.

Drafts of the Monastic Rule

The first part of the collection, chapters 1 through 46, comprises unofficial commentaries on the monastic rule. Some of these revelations are of a very early date, from the time around Birgitta's calling to a visionary life (e.g., ch. 27, on the future building of the monastery). There is an exploratory tone of questioning and self-justification in many of these short chapters, reflecting some of the early uncertainties and anxieties about the development of an ambitious new order. For example, the office and rule were to be kept at Alvastra Abbey until the new abbey was completed (ch. 113); the order might have difficulty in attracting men as well as women; older brethren might be reluctant to change their ways, for which reason they should retain local diocesan usage in their liturgy (ch. 18). There was a fear that men might find it difficult to subject themselves to a woman superior "since worldly knowledge makes many of them proud and conceited" (ch. 19). There are also explanations about why parts of the ritual for the consecration of the abbess are at odds with standard Benedictine practice (ch. 22). Chapter 29 contains a most detailed description of the layout of the monastic buildings.

Some of these texts (e.g., parts of ch. 4, 9, 13, 15, 22) also belong to the *Additiones* or *Constitutiones* of Prior Petrus, a collection of additional materials that comprise explanations of the rule, statutes, and complementary texts concerning the monastic life where the rule lacked sufficient detail.² These constitutions provoked controversy both in Vadstena and further afield, and they did not receive their definitive form until 1420 through Bishop Knut of Linköping. There is also a translation of this work into medieval Swedish, which consists of 54 chapters and includes a number of the *Extravagantes*.³

A Fragmentary Biography

The chapters in the second half of the book look like drafts of Birgitta's life written retrospectively. A lot of this material is also recounted or interwoven in

different ways in the *Vita* and the testimonies by those in Birgitta's circle who were first-hand witnesses in the canonization process, and there is much overlap between both sets of materials, even though linguistically they are rarely identical.⁴ There are also cross-references to chapters in the main corpus, suggesting that some of the *Extravagantes* may be early drafts of the same originals, or the first stage of an ongoing revision and reworking by Birgitta and her confessors. An example is the reference to a nutshell in ch. 62 (cf. Book IV 107, 109).

Some of these visionary experiences express Birgitta's early hopes, fears, and private thoughts as she moved from life as a married noblewoman to a life of asceticism and prayer. A few even appear to date from before her spiritual calling. There is mention of how she resided in the court of the Swedish queen, apparently as her mentor or teacher (ch. 59). There are references to her pilgrimage to Santiago with her husband Ulf Gudmarsson (ch. 59, 66, 92). Soon after this pilgrimage, Ulf fell ill and died. In ch. 56 Birgitta sees him in purgatory. With its echoes of testamentary settlements and letters of indulgence mixed with details of Ulf's failings, this revelation may be an intimate rewriting of a will that was framed legally, perhaps before they embarked on their pilgrimage. According to the formulae of medieval wills, the deceased had to acquit himself of all debts, spiritual and temporary (reflected in the specific mention of a widow, the king, his debts of conscience, and in judgments he had made which were insincere or unjust). To die in charity he had to be discharged from all his debts, to have shown mercy toward the poor, and to have undertaken pious deeds such as fasting and pilgrimage (all of which are included in Ulf's list of mitigating deeds). The vision also outlines details of the penances, prayers, supplications, and meritorious deeds that he asked to be performed on his behalf by those in charge of the disposal of his property. In this revelation Birgitta shows the same sternness of judgment as she shows toward herself in ch. 75, a revelation that deals in starkly grotesque images with her own conversion to the spiritual life. She demonstrates the moral imperatives that were to dominate her spiritual life as well as her dealings with other people. Ulf's death was a relief from her earthly pressures and temptations, and thus the revelations from the early 1340s about her changed lifestyle take on a clearer meaning. Mary, "daughter of Joachim," is now dearer than ever before to the "daughter of Birger" who has been instructed to shed her earthly ties (ch. 63). She discarded the ring that Ulf had given her on his deathbed, bidding her to pray for his soul, and she says: "When I buried my husband, I buried with him all bodily love, and although I loved him with all my heart, I should not wish to buy back his life, not with the least money. But as long as the ring was on my hand it was to me like a burden, since in seeing it I was reminded of my former love."⁵

Ulf was buried at the Cistercian abbey of Alvastra, and Birgitta appears to have left her family home at Ulvåsa and moved to live in the vicinity of the abbey.⁶ Alvastra abbey had been founded in 1143, set in a secluded site not far from the shore of lake Vättern, about twenty-five kilometers south of Vadstena. A male house of one of the strictest monastic orders seems an unlikely place for a high-ranking noblewoman to take up residence, and significantly, she chose not to enter one of the Cistercian nunneries, such as the nearby convent

of Vreta, the oldest and most distinguished nunnery in Sweden at the time. She may have moved to Alvastra at the recommendation of Mathias, who was a friend of Petrus, then sub-prior, and she is likely to have made an endowment to the monastery in exchange for permission to live there.⁷ Even at this early stage of her life as a visionary, she is more secure in a male domain. But her supporters had to ensure that she gained acceptance by the suspicious male community at the abbey. Decrees from the General Chapter had expressly forbidden the entry of laymen into enclosures, and women were not allowed to stay overnight without a special dispensation.⁸ Although Birgitta is unlikely to have lived within the enclosure itself she may have been allowed into the part of the church that was used by the monastic laypeople, as is testified by Juliana Nilsson, one of her companions at the time, who tells how Birgitta got up several times a night to pray and remained in the church until the singing of prime.⁹ Her presence was not universally welcomed, and a longstanding resident by the name of Gerekinus objected to her being there (ch. 55). However, in time she helped bring about a renewal of the spiritual life at Alvastra and some brethren, like Gerekinus, and one named Paulus who doubted her sanity, experienced a deepening of their personal faith, and the whole monastic community gained a fresh impetus in its devotional life.¹⁰

Many of the revelations in the 1340s must have been experienced at Alvastra, and many are quite homely in tone giving small insights into Swedish history in the decade leading up to the great plague. Yet surprisingly, there is scarcely a mention anywhere in her revelations of the devastation the plague was to cause throughout Sweden as in Europe in the very year—1349—when Birgitta left Sweden for Rome.

There are references to Birgitta's reverence for holy relics, including an ivory chest, a relic of the Virgin's hair obtained in Naples, and a relic of the true cross (ch. 59, 94, 106). Several revelations address her private struggles in withstanding temptation, gluttony, disobedience, and pride (ch. 52–54, 57–58, 60–63); and the personal guidance given to her applies by extension to the monastic rule in its emphasis on pragmatism and moderation, with a relaxation of rules about clothing, cold weather, or ill health. Ch. 99 is an example where the rules of fasting were overridden during a trip to Bari when everyone on the journey fell ill. The repetition and insistence of some themes, like obedience and overindulgence, perhaps suggests that she struggled in these matters to submit her own will to her spiritual father.

In many of these revelations, the Virgin (and more rarely St. Agnes, cast in this role), and Birgitta's confessors play the part of her alter ego, telling her what she ought to do even when she does not want to do it. The confessors are the focus of some revelations, especially Mathias of Linköping and Master Petrus of Skänninge in his capacity as the writer of the Birgittine liturgy in ch. 113–15; there are occasional snippets of information about these men—a long-lasting headache, a master raising his voice, and a master with a wound (ch. 109, 71, 76). Swedish bishops and saints are also mentioned, such as Brynolf of Skara (ch. 108) and Nicolaus of Linköping (ch. 79). There are references to Birgitta's reading of the Bible (ch. 91), and the *Speculum Virginum* with

her servants (ch. 96). Further, there are revelations about the king, the nobility, the crusades, and the political situation in Sweden, and these tend to be obscurely worded and opaque, most likely out of respect for the political sensitivities of the time (ch. 74–75, 77–78, 80, 84–86).

The remainder of the revelations in the book concern preparations for the journey to Rome (ch. 8) including the wrench Birgitta felt in giving up family and friends (ch. 54), her ongoing financial difficulties and dependency on others for support (ch. 65, 88, 103, 107, 110–11), and her encounters with members of the monastic orders in Rome (ch. 90, 97, 105). In Rome too there are domestic stories about malicious rumor and gossip, such as ch. 112 where her cook is accused of taunting her that her son Karl was dead.

Several of Birgitta's children are described in the *Extravagantes*, including an evocation of her anguish about leaving them behind when she travels to Rome in 1349 (ch. 95), the death of her daughter Ingeborg a few years later (ch. 98), and some of the trials of her eldest daughter Katherina while living in Rome. Being very attractive Birgitta thought her daughter might be in danger when they became homeless (ch. 107). This detail is also given in the biography of Katherina written by Ulf Birgersson (d. 1433), the confessor general at Vadstena abbey, which follows the typology of the saint's life where there is a transformation of a young, beautiful, and worldly girl to a humble, patient, and obedient woman.¹¹ Katherina was a virgin widow who had lived chastely with her husband, Eggard Lydersson van Kyren, and a few months after her marriage, aged about nineteen, traveled to Rome to visit her mother. She was homesick and unhappy, and continually beset by admirers. When she received the news of her husband's death in Sweden she was struggling to reconcile herself to her life as her mother's companion, although their relationship was not close, as is suggested in ch. 69: Birgitta is chastized for over-indulging her contemplative states at the expense of her worldly needs, and she is reminded of the great sacrifices her daughter has made by renouncing everything—husband, family, and friends. In a pointed reminder of the tension between the active and the contemplative life, Birgitta is instructed to interrupt her continual prayerful state and instead humbly to mend Katherina's ragged clothes.¹²

Form and Dissemination

The *Extravagantes* are an important source for understanding the process by which the revelations were received and disseminated. The two prologues provide information about the physical survival and the gathering of the materials into "scrolls and sextern quires," stating that the main body of materials was divided into chapters with headings, and divided into "eight rather large books."

For Birgitta revelation starts through prayer or reading (ch. 54, 60, 70, 96); indeed some revelations (ch. 52, 69) contain an entire prayer at their opening. There are articulations of private thoughts and supplications, or reactions to real events and circumstances and conversations that Birgitta had been involved

in personally. Some revelations in this book name Birgitta directly by name (e.g., ch. 102), as distinct from the way she is presented in the main corpus, where she is more commonly referred to in the third person indirectly as the “bride” or, more rarely, “a certain person.” Some chapters are presented in the form of letters that refer to specific individuals (e.g., ch. 51), suggesting that they were separately and independently circulated at an early date. In structure, too, many revelations reflect meandering patterns of speech and dialogue, often in a confused, stilted, and chaotic manner and frequently resulting in a text that is difficult to decipher; ch. 83 is one such example, with several images all joining with incoherent voices.

Ch. 71 may be considered as an example of the obscure nature of some of the *Extravagantes*.¹³ The title of this revelation suggests that John the Baptist is speaking of someone believed to be Master Petrus of Skänninge, although variations in different manuscripts leave room for uncertainty in this respect. Confirmation of his identity is found however in Master Petrus’s *Vita* when he was a candidate for beatification.¹⁴ John the Baptist is not named in the vision itself either, and there is simply a voice telling Birgitta not to be distressed by the fact that the protagonist (referred to variously as her spiritual friend, God’s soldier, God’s friend) had won a victory over his enemy. The central image is of a cleric who has been robbed of all his material possessions but is armed with the spears of righteousness and self-control. Although the visual picture is not immediately apparent, it is only in the explanation of what Birgitta has heard and seen that the sense becomes clearer: Petrus is struggling with his angry, irrational self, which wants to rise up against his wrongdoers. The triad of spears gives the vision a mnemonic structure and the standard Christian virtues of self-denial, self-control, and patience provide a moral framework. There are New Testament allusions, from the sermon on the Mount, the instruction to turn the other cheek in adversity, the good Samaritan, the calling of the disciples, and the injunction to offer one’s tunic when a man has taken one’s cloak (Matthew 5:40). A Franciscan element is introduced in the theme of holy nakedness, which has parallels in the life of St. Francis, presumably reflecting the idea that Petrus had divested himself of his material possessions and the mystical fire was sufficient to provide bodily warmth. The reference to “our company” might refer to Petrus’s group of friends and companions in the Birgittine circle. The revelation offers a good example of the raw material of the *Revelationes*, containing a personal story which is rich in metaphors and biblical allusions, but where the point is not immediately apparent.

Another dimension of the dissemination of the visions is explored in ch. 52, where Birgitta is sanctioned to talk and not be silent and she is encouraged to face opposition as the “burden of speaking” is imposed upon her. This accords with some of the other expressions of self-doubt and uncertainty that are frequently voiced in the *Extravagantes*, as they also are in the early revelations of Book I.

Ch. 49 is a key revelation that describes the process of writing down the revelations and sanctioning Alfonso to edit and ornament them, by means of an image of a woodcarver: the whole revelation can be taken as a direct mes-

sage to Alfonso to edit the whole corpus in an appropriate form for publication.¹⁵ This revelation demonstrates how Birgitta did not understand her revelations all at once, and was not immediately ready to write down what she felt, but she turned things over in her mind before writing them down. It is of interest that this revelation in particular was relegated to the extraneous material: ostensibly the reason is that Alfonso omitted it out of modesty and to avoid allegations of arrogance; but another reason may be because it admits to the editorial license given to the confessors, a fact that might have raised questions among the churchmen in the canonization committees.¹⁶ In a similar manner there are revelations that address Petrus's work on the rule and liturgical materials, and the extent of the license he was given (ch. 45–48).

As a collection, the *Extravagantes* comprise the haphazard remains and the jettisoned materials, which are often garbled and unclear, and it is not difficult to see why some of them at least should have been rejected from the canonization edition. There is a constant spirit of doubt and skepticism in the collection as a whole: Birgitta's questioning of the authenticity of the revelation itself, or the veracity of relics of the true wood of the cross or the Virgin's hair, her testing the loyalty and true faith of her companions and supporters, her contemplating the truth of scripture, her struggling with an ascetic lifestyle. Some chapters in the collection are obscure, while others are potentially controversial (e.g., ch. 4 about ecstatic women who are uncontrolled in their worship, which would have been the kind of behavior that Alfonso and Birgitta would have wanted to suppress), or they include personal details that may not show her up in a positive light, such as her overindulgence. There are also hints of a lack of respect by other people for her, such as the bishop of Orvieto who pays scant attention to her revelations (ch. 102). Some revelations are defensive in tone, such as ch. 113 where she reiterates the truth of what had been revealed to her in the *Angelic Discourse*: "Everything written about my infancy is true," perhaps indicating that things she had said had been open to question about their orthodoxy. In ch. 91 she wonders about the truth of every word of the Bible, and in ch. 90 about the reliability of Franciscan indulgences. The very fact that she raises these questions suggests that they must have been subject to questioning and debate in her time.

A final reason for the inclusion of certain revelations in this collection may simply be that they never passed through Alfonso's hands in Rome and therefore never were considered for inclusion in the main corpus.

Images

Ch. 83 states that the revelation was received on behalf of "this woman who is standing here and who cannot understand without the help of comparisons." The book contains many striking images: a bird that eats the fresh flesh of another bird's heart (ch. 50), the Roman curia as a chair with four legs, Christ as a crumb in the gullet, Christ hung on the cross like a dirty rag, the devil dressed in purple and gold and blowing on the fire under a pot (ch. 51). Birgitta's body

is like an untamed animal (ch. 52). Christ says of his new bride, before her conversion, that “when I turn south, she turns west” (ch. 62). There is a blending of the images of flames into the brain, flowers, fading fruits, pierced eyes, a glass of poison lined with honey, gems, and soft cushions (ch. 64). A bishop leaps over walls and ditches (ch. 79). The voices of those who have turned away from God are like croaking frogs (ch. 83). An artist makes a golden image out of clay, which is ruined by moisture and looks like the mouth of a dog with hanging ears and protruding eyes, and sunken cheeks and forehead (ch. 84). The devil separates a body and soul in the same way as meat is cut away from bones, and the Virgin has a pile of tools by her side to defend herself (ch. 89). A lady sits on top of a column with people admiring her, light rain of sweet-smelling red and white roses streaming out of her mouth (ch. 100). A man teases a dog with meat on a blade (ch. 102). And finally, a question: should a cold vase be filled with snow to make it colder still (ch. 110)?

Conclusion

If Books I–VIII largely contain the disembodied voice of St. Birgitta, often with a universally applicable message, the *Extravagantes* are the opposite. They are the raw expression of Birgitta’s thoughts as she struggles to articulate her visions in words. Perhaps to a greater extent than the books in the canonization edition, which are moderated by the editorial hand of the confessors, in the *Extravagantes* we meet a text in a less distilled form, and we see the human Birgitta as a passionate woman with a powerful, practical, and visionary mind.

Note on the Translation

Many revelations in this book are completely undatable (e.g., 86, 87) and in these cases they have been assigned to the 1340s, and based on the evidence of the Second Prologue belong to the earlier, rather than the later part of Birgitta’s life. Duplicate revelations are indicated by a cross-reference, but composites from other books are translated in full (e.g., ch. 57, which is made up from two separate texts).

Some revelations (e.g., ch. 10, 59, 106, 113, 114, 115) have different versions within the Latin manuscript groups; they are not translated twice but significant differences between the versions are noted.

NOTES

1. Hollman, *Den heliga Birgittas Reuelationes extrauagantes* (hereafter abbreviated as *Extravagantes*) pp. 28–45. The medieval Swedish text contains mainly the first part of the book, dealing with the monastic order, meaning that there is no medieval Swedish version for about half of the book; see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, pp. 48–120.

2. See further Hollman, *Extravagantes*, p. 65 and Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klostets och birgittinordens historia*, p. 72.

3. See Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 5, pp. 17–55.

4. On the relations between the revelations and the canonization materials, see further volume 3, pp. 190–92. Hollman, *Extravagantes*, pp. 90–91 discusses some of the revelations that relate to the depositions in the canonization process.

5. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 479.

6. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 499.

7. See France, *The Cistercians in Scandinavia*, p. 396.

8. Ortvéd, *Cisterciordenen*, p. 93

9. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 65.

10. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 488.

11. Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 19–99. On Katherina, see further Morris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 111–13.

12. See Book VI 120, where advice is also given to Katherina.

13. For further discussion see Morris, “Labyrinths of the Urtext,” pp. 27–28.

14. See Schück, “Två svenska biografier från medeltiden,” p. 306.

15. See further on the process of the recording of the visions, volume 1 p. 15.

16. Hollman, *Revelationes extravagantes*, p. 165: “Istam reuelacionem idem episcopus non inscripsit in libris reuelacionum propter arroganciam vitandam et causa humilitatis, sed post mortem eius reperta est in breuiario suo”; Westman, *Birgitta-studier*, p. 36 suggests that ch. 49 is the only text that acknowledges the editorial freedom of the Swedish confessors, and he differentiates between the sanctioning of editorial changes to the Rule and to the revelations in general.

Extravagant Revelations

‡ Prologue (Ghotan)

Prologue to the Heavenly Revelations Commonly called "Extra"

1 After Sir Alfonso, former bishop of Jaén and later a most worthy hermit, had, by the order of Christ, divided the heavenly revelations to St. Birgitta of Sweden into books, Sir Petrus, prior of Alvastra, who was the one who had recorded the revelations in writing, made a separate collection on scrolls and sextern quires¹ of the revelations omitted from the original collection.² 2 In the presence of the reverend Sir Nicolaus³ of blessed memory, at the time bishop of Linköping, and of several other civil and ecclesiastical leaders, he gave it to the first brothers of Vadstena Abbey, stating solemnly that these and several other revelations which he had kept in his own monastery in Alvastra had been divinely revealed to Blessed Birgitta, and that he had faithfully translated and recorded them in writing from her very lips.

3 Because of their relevance to the subject matter of the revelations in the original edition, some of these revelations, after careful examination and with loving effort, were inserted at various points as explanations and additions to the earlier published ones. 4 Although some people simply refer to them as "extra revelations," because they were not included in the original collection of heavenly revelations, still they are truly believed to come from the same fount of divine wisdom from which we have received all the others.

5 Because a large number of the so-called extra revelations are wholly or in part concerned with the Rule of the Holy Savior, these have been placed before the others in the present collection so as to be positioned closer to the Rule. 6 Thereafter follow the other revelations, which exhort people in various states in life to avoid abuses and vices, and offer them examples of virtues and good morals, continuing to the end of the book. 7 Prior Petrus and Blessed Katherina,⁴ the daughter of St. Birgitta, testified to the truth of these revelations (i.e., that they were divinely revealed) before her canonization, and anyone who takes a careful look at their testimony⁵ will, for the most part, find this to be obvious.

1. "On scrolls and sextern quires": an important detail for showing how the collection was built up in the early stages.

2. This is the prologue found in Ghotan, the first printed edition of the Revelations.

3. "Sir Nicolaus": Nicolaus Hermann, bishop of Linköping 1375–91; see further Lundén, *Nikolaus Hermansson*.

4. "Blessed Katherina": the role of Birgitta's daughter in the process of recording the revelations is well illustrated in this prologue.

5. "Anyone who takes a careful look at their testimony": a statement that demonstrates the interlacing of materials from one set of sources to another. Katherina's testimony may be found in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 303–52, and Prior Petrus's pp. 472–561.

⚡ Second Prologue

1 Here begin the heavenly revelations divinely revealed to the glorious Lady Birgitta of Sweden that are called “extra.” The reason for this title will be clear from what follows.⁶

2 To understand the reason, one must first of all know that, as clearly described in the third revelation below, when the venerable Lady Birgitta had set out for Rome, she had already become the “revealer”⁷ of many heavenly revelations, and she was commanded by the authority of Christ to deliver all the revelations made to her—faithfully recorded in writing over the course of many years by Prior Petrus, a worthy and God-fearing man, of blessed memory, from the Cistercian monastery at Alvastra in the diocese of Linköping—to the venerable father Sir Alfonso, a Spanish hermit and former bishop of Jaén, a most devout man and eloquent student of Sacred Scripture, in order that he might divide and edit the revelations into separate books and chapters. Thus they would be easier to explain in various languages and to be disseminated throughout the universal Catholic Church and contribute to the benefit of many souls, and this was put into effect. 3 By the order of Christ and with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Sir Alfonso edited the revelations delivered to his hands into eight rather large books,⁸ dividing them into chapters each provided with its own heading, in the state in which they have now been copied, transmitted and spread to many churches throughout the world.

4 Because Prior Petrus, the recorder of the revelations, left some of the visions revealed to Blessed Birgitta while in Sweden before her departure for Rome in his monastery at Alvastra and decided not to take them with him to Rome, so they never reached Sir Alfonso to be placed among the other revelations in the collection. 5 When Blessed Birgitta had already happily gone the way of all flesh, Prior Petrus returned to his monastery he had started from in Alvastra, and took the precious and treasured deposit of the whole revelations, so that they would not be put under a bushel and be lost. By divine inspiration he made the pious and worthy decision to deliver them to the hands of the first brothers in Vadstena Abbey. 6 Finally, then, he made clear his holy and pious resolution in the presence of the venerable Sir Nicolaus of holy memory, bishop of Linköping, with several other of the realm’s ecclesial prelates in attendance, and delivered the aforesaid revelations (which had been left over as mentioned above) to the first brothers in Vadstena with due respect, stating solemnly that he had kept many revelations up until then which he had in time promised to entrust to them in their entirety, which he had done after some delay and the occurrence of her death.

7 At length, after the passage of many years, the brothers who were living in Vadstena decided to edit into one book, for the purpose of enlarging the divine cult and for the salvation of souls, all the revelations given by Prior

6. This alternative prologue follows MS v (see the note to ch. 8.2), and is given here in full because of the considerable differences with Ghotan’s version, and the additional information it contains.

7. “Revealer” renders “Revelatrix”: a rare description of Birgitta as the conduit of divine revelations.

8. “Eight rather large books,” i.e., Books I–VII and Book VIII which contains the political revelations, including many new ones. On the number of books of revelations, see Undhagen, *Book I*, pp. 14–26.

Petrus, as has been explained, and others confirmed by other people in truth and sincere faith, and to divide them into chapters with headings in accordance with the style and form of the revelations in the eight books of Sir Alfonso and to bring them together like a bouquet of flowers⁹ in the present collection. 8 They decided to name them “Extravagant revelations” as being outside the scope and number of the eight books and not having a place in them. These revelations follow now in their own order and sequence.

✚ Chapter 1

Christ Calls for Humility Among the Nuns at Vadstena

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter II of the Rule of the Holy Savior.¹ Christ instructs the recorder² of the rule to explain the stages of true humility in order that the daughters of his Mother may learn, etc.

1 Christ speaks: “If someone has an ornamental box and says that it contains aromatic spices, who will believe him or how will it be of any use, unless he also explains what they are and gives examples of their different kinds and properties? 2 The same thing applies to the virtues. Someone declares: ‘Humility is a virtue.’ What does this convey to the person who hears it, unless one explains and gives examples of the roots and stages of humility, and also how to acquire and conserve it? 3 Therefore, because humility is a perfect virtue, which I exemplified in my own life, your confessor should explain in a few words the stages of humility—which he can find in my Benedict’s Rule³—in order that my Mother’s daughters may learn about the principle of the virtues on which to ground their own houses.”

✚ Chapter 2

The Sick Should be Allowed Extra Bed-clothes

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapters III and IV of the Rule of the Holy Savior. Prior Petrus was in doubt about whether or not to add anything about beds or clothing, and Christ tells him to add certain useful and necessary instructions.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Why does the brother not know what arrangements to make? Did I not myself reveal to him through you that my servant

9. “Like a bouquet of flowers”: cf. Book IV 126.135; Book VII 16.19.

1. “Rule of the Holy Savior” renders “regule Sancti Saluatoris.” Occasionally it is also referred to as the Rule of St. Savior.

2. “Recorder,” renders “scriptor,” i.e., Prior Petrus of Alvastra.

3. “My Benedict’s rule”; cf. Book III chs. 20–22. The personal pronoun conveys a tone of intimacy, and the mention of St. Benedict, the father of western monasticism, demonstrates the eclecticism of Birgitta’s foundation that also draws on the other main branch of western monasticism, Augustinianism.

Benedict regarded his body as a sack¹ as well as what the Benedictine habit should be like? ² Therefore, taking the feebleness of the sick into consideration, have him establish useful and necessary arrangements—but with nothing superfluous—and permission will be given. Those to whom I grant the grace of greater abstinence will feel less cold due to their inner warmth.”

✚ Chapter 3

The Monastic Community at Vadstena Should Celebrate the General Office as well as the Office of the Virgin

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter V in the Rule of the Holy Savior: about the liturgy of the hours, divine office, chant, etc. Christ compares human nature to a besieged city which a poor person—the most holy Virgin Mary—has liberated by means of her wisdom; and he describes the poor in spirit as well as the poor in means but not in spirit. He says that the brothers’ chant in their monastery should precede the sisters’ chant¹ and that the sisters should, within the time limits, perform their chant with greater pause.

1 “The Scripture, which you call the Bible but we call golden,² says³ that a mighty king laid siege to a city, and that a poor person liberated it by means of wisdom, though afterward no one remembered the name of the poor person. 2 This city is the human creature and the devil besieges it at its four corners. This means that he takes possession of a human being by means of a fourfold sin: disobedience to the divine precepts, transgression of the natural law, harmful desire, and hardness of heart. 3 My most holy Mother liberated this city by surrendering her entire will to my hands and by her readiness to endure any suffering for the salvation of souls. 4 This is true divine wisdom: to commit one’s will and power to God and even to rejoice in adversities for God’s sake. 5 Because of her intention, I, God and the Son of God from all eternity, became man in the Virgin whose heart was one with mine.⁴ I can honestly say that my Mother and I saved humanity with a single heart. I did it by suffering in my heart and body, she by the sorrow of her heart and by her love. 6 This Virgin was poor in that she had no desire for wealth, and not the least little sin stained her spirit. 7 There are those who are poor in means but full of desire and pride in spirit. They are not the poor whom I spoke of in my gospel.⁵ 8 There are others who are rich in wealth but destitute in spirit. These are the ones who keep in mind that they are ashes and dust and will die, who long to be with God, and who possess wealth

1. “Benedict regarded his body as a sack”: cf. Book III 20.5 and Book IV 127.7.

2. “The sisters’ chant,” i.e., *Cantus sororum*; while the brethren followed local diocesan usage.

3. “We call golden”: this description also occurs in ch. 18; see also Book I ch. 1; Book IV 107, 125.

4. “The scripture . . . says”; cf. Wisdom 9:13–15.

5. “Whose heart was one with mine”: cf. Book I ch. 35. On the identity of Mary’s heart with Christ’s heart and her participation in his passion, see Sahlin, “His Heart was my Heart.”

6. “The poor whom I spoke of in my gospel”; cf. Matthew 5:3.

only out of necessity and for the benefit of others. They are truly poor but rich in God, and my Mother was one of them. 9 The wisdom and poverty of this virginal Mother has all but been forgotten, for few invoke her wholeheartedly, even though they praise her with their lips, and few follow in the path of her love.

10 Many members of God's church sing God's praise seven times a day according to the custom of the early fathers. Therefore, I want the brothers to chant their hours first at the proper times. 11 Then the sisters should recite their office with somewhat greater pause. The seven times are not set for them by the course of the sun, but they should do their best and try to follow the fixed times as far as they are able. 12 I have dictated this Rule and specify this matter so that even the heathen, who are to be converted, may understand the honor God wants to confer on his Mother. 13 Since she is the head and mistress of this abbey, I want to show mercy to sinners through her. The passage in Scripture will also be fulfilled where it says: 'I shall bless God at all times⁶ and in all my life.' This special privilege should not be refused, for a particular good does not harm the common good. 14 The laudable custom of the fathers is not to be rejected, but it is pleasing to me that in other churches⁷ the hours of my Mother the Virgin should be recited first, then the hours of the day should be sung at the fixed times."

✠ Chapter 4

All Ostentation in the Nuns' Singing is to be Avoided

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ says that there should be no ostentation in the sisters' chant in the Order of the Holy Savior, but a chant of songful praise, etc.

1 The Son of God speaks: "Have you not read that when God worked the exceptional miracle in the Red Sea, Moses' sister¹ went out with the virgins and women singing a song of joy to God with tambourines and cymbals? 2 In the same way my Mother's daughters should go out of the Red Sea of worldly desire and complacency, with the tambourines of abstinence from carnal pleasure and the cymbals of songful praise in their hands. Their chant should not be spaced out or broken up or unrestrained, but straightforward, proper, monophonic, and in every way humble. 3 They should imitate the so-called chants of those who are called Carthusians.² Their way of chanting the psalms creates a gentle-minded atmosphere of humility and devotion, rather than one of ostentation.

6. "I shall bless God at all times"; cf. Psalm 33(34): 2 and 145(146):2 and *passim*.

7. "This special privilege . . . in other churches": this refers to the existence of a special liturgy for the nuns, as distinct from that of the brethren, which is referred to in paragraph 10–12.

1. "Moses' sister": cf. Exodus 15:20.

2. "Carthusians": Birgitta must have known the Carthusians from her pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in 1341, although this order was not established in Sweden until some 150 years later. Carthusian monks learnt their repertory by heart, for which a simplified form of liturgy was required. Their style of performance was sober, and it was a monk's duty to "lament rather than sing," in accordance with the *statuta antiqua* (1271) which forbade "breaking, gushing with the voice, and prolonged cadences"; see Berry, "Carthusian Monks" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*, cols 838–39. Cf. Milveden, "Per omnia humilis. Reflexioner kring en birgittinsk sångspegel."

4 The soul is not without blame when the melody delights the singer more than the subject that is sung, and it is altogether hateful to God when the voice is used to sing more for the audience's sake than for God's."

✚ Chapter 5

Petrus of Skänninge is Advised on the Hymns which he Composed for the Office of the Virgin

DATE: 1350S, ROME

This revelation makes clear how much Master Petrus pleases God when he celebrates Mass and when he composes the chant of the sisters of the Order of the Holy Savior.

1 One day when Lord Petrus of blessed memory,¹ the confessor of St. Birgitta, celebrated mass for her in the chapel, God the Father said to his Son's bride: "Although few persons in the world physically attend the mass, the whole heavenly host and all the souls in purgatory take delight in it.

2 Tell this priest, my lover, that he can leave the hymn 'Sponse iungendo filio' as he wrote it. If the Holy Church denotes all souls as the brides of my Son, then Mary's soul can be called his bride with all the more reason."

✚ Chapter 6

Christ Praises the Piety of Petrus of Skänninge

DATE: 1350S, ROME

The Virgin Mary tells how beloved Master Petrus, the confessor of St. Birgitta, was to God and to herself, and she praises the chant of the sisters of the Holy Savior.

1 God's Mother speaks to the bride of Christ: "Your master¹ was wounded by a man who spoke against God. Because he received the wound² out of love for God, we did not want to cure it but only bandaged it so that it might grow wider.

2 So tell him, this master of yours, who loves the Blessed Trinity with all his might, that I have advanced him so far in the love of the Blessed Trinity that he is one of those priests whom God loves most in the world. This is why he was given the gift of composing the chant that is the gold that will give comfort to many people."

1. "Lord Petrus of blessed memory," i.e., Petrus of Skänninge, the composer of the *Cantus sororum*, and close confidant of Birgitta's throughout her life. With his namesake, Petrus of Alvastra, he was the author of her *Vita*. After his death in 1378 miracles were associated with him, leading to a move to have him beatified.

1. "Your master," i.e., Petrus of Skänninge.

2. "The wound": this strange image possibly refers to the love of God that grows ever wider.

✠ Chapter 7*

Reassurance for the Composer of the Prayer of Praise

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Mother of God tells Blessed Birgitta how pleased God is with the chant of the sisters of the Order of the Holy Savior.

✠ Chapter 8

Birgitta is Instructed to go to Rome; about her Life in Rome; and about the Hymn "Ave Maris Stella"

DATE: 1350S, ROME

Christ instructed the bride to go to Rome. She remained there fifteen years amid great tribulations, but Christ and the Virgin Mary consoled her. About how the hymn "Ave maris stella" was included as a chant to be sung after the brothers' vespers in the Order of the Holy Savior.

1 Christ spoke with the bride when she was staying at Alvastra Abbey. He said: "Go to Rome and stay there until you see the pope and emperor and deliver the message that I will give you." 2 The bride of Christ came to Rome when she was forty-two years of age.¹ She remained there on God's instructions for fifteen years,² until the arrival of Pope Urban V and Emperor Charles of Bohemia. She was given revelations for them concerning the reform of the Church and the rule.³ 3 During those fifteen years while she lived in Rome before the coming of the pope and emperor, she received many revelations about the situation of the city. In them our Lord Jesus Christ condemned the sins and transgressions of the city's inhabitants and warned them of grave retribution.

4 The revelations addressed to the inhabitants of Rome fomented a savage hatred against St. Birgitta. Some of them threatened to burn her alive, others reviled her as a misguided and deceiving sorceress. 5 St. Birgitta patiently endured their threats and insults, but she feared that the members of her household and family and friends who were with her in Rome might be discouraged and scandalized by all the troubles and insults. 6 For a time she considered yielding to the fury of those who were maligning her, but she did not dare to move

* This revelation duplicates Book IV 32, where it is followed by an explanation (not included in chapter 7) concerning Petrus's vision of the faces of three women.

1. "Forty-two years of age": if correct, this might mean she went to Rome in 1345, four years earlier than is generally thought. According to Hollman, *Revelationes Extravagantes*, p. 90, this biographical chapter may be an amalgamation of depositions by Katherina Ulfsdotter and details from the *Vita*, and it appears only in one manuscript (MS v) that was edited by the Vadstena brother Ulpho Birgeri, who was confessor general in 1423–26. He was skilled in interpreting difficult passages in the Revelations, according to the *Diarium Vadstenense* (Gejrot, *Vadstenadiariet*, p. 204) and the author of Katherina's biography. See also Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 94, 97, 477, 510, 633, 638.

2. "Fifteen years," assuming she went to Rome in 1349 this would be two years before the German Emperor Charles IV came to Rome; cf. Book IV 45, and ch. 41 (duplicated in VIII 51).

3. "And the rule," i.e., the Birgittine Rule.

somewhere else without explicit instructions from Christ. During the twenty-eight years after her departure from her native land, she never visited any cities or regions or the shrines of any saints without a command from Christ. 7 St. Birgitta awaited an answer in her prayers concerning these matters, and, accordingly, Christ said: “You want to know whether it is my will for you to remain here in Rome, where many ill-willed people are plotting your death, or to yield in the face of their wicked hostility. 8 My answer to you is that if you have me, you need not fear anything. By the might of my arm I shall hold back their hostilities, and they will not be able to harm you. Although, with my permission, my enemies did crucify my human body, they will by no means be able to harm you or kill you.”

9 The glorious Virgin Mary also appeared to her at that time and said: “My Son has power over every human being and every demon and every other creature. In an unseen way he restrains their every attempt at evil. I myself will be the shield to protect you and yours from every attack by spiritual or physical enemies. 10 For that reason, I want you and your household to come together every evening to sing the hymn ‘Ave maris stella’. I will assist you in all your necessities.” 11 Accordingly, Lord Petrus Olavi, her confessor for twenty-nine years, and Lady Katherine of blessed memory, her daughter, established the daily custom of singing this hymn in the Order, claiming that Blessed Birgitta herself commanded this to be done on the instructions of the glorious Virgin. 12 The glorious Virgin herself promised to protect with a special grace this Order dedicated to her by her Son, and to favor it with the sweet blessings of the Holy Spirit.

✚ Chapter 9

The Community at Vadstena must Recite the Seven Psalms

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ explains how the sisters and the brothers should recite the seven psalms on Fridays.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Every Friday the sisters should take their walks in the cloister¹ reciting the seven psalms.² When they finish, they should enter the choir and recite the litanies on their knees. The brothers should do likewise when taking their walks in the cloister.”

✚ Chapter 10

Organ Playing is Prohibited

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

1. “Cloister” renders “ambitus.”

2. “The seven psalms,” i.e., the psalms of confession (penitential psalms), viz, Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143 (6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142 in the Vulgate numbering), which are expressive of one’s sorrow for sin.

Christ explains why organs are not at all to be allowed in the abbeys of the Order of the Holy Savior.

1 Christ, the Son of God, speaks: “The carnal descendants of Israel who served in the shadow of the law had many means to enkindle their devotion.¹ 2 They had trumpets, organs, and citharas which stirred them to praise God. They also had rituals and commandments which enlightened them about divine worship. 3 Furthermore, they had the law² and their scribes to keep them away from vice and to guide their actions.

4 Because the truth has now come, or rather I myself who am God, who was prefigured by the law in a hidden way,³ have come, it is just and humble to serve me wholeheartedly and truthfully. 5 Therefore, although organ music is good and pleasant to hear,⁴ nevertheless, there should be no organs in this abbey.⁵ Instead there should be a time-limit,⁶ solemnity in the chants, purity of mind, silent worship, preaching and steadfastness in the word of God, and true humility in all and above all.”⁷

✠ Chapter II

Under what Circumstances the Monastic Community May Speak with Outsiders or Leave the Abbey

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapters VI, VII and VIII in the Rule of the Holy Savior. Christ says that the abbess may speak briefly with workmen in the abbey and also explains when and why it is permitted for the abbess or the sisters or for the confessor or brothers to go outside the cloister.

1 The Son of God speaks: “The abbess may speak briefly with workmen in the abbey when repairs have to be made or anything new has to be constructed. Otherwise she may never speak with laymen in the abbey except through the grating. 2 Neither she nor any of the sisters may go outside, except when a new abbey is to be built. In such cases the abbess, the confessor, and the convent should send mature nuns.

1. “Christ, the Son of God, speaks . . . their devotion”: there are two versions of this chapter in the Latin manuscripts. The second version reads “Christ speaks: Because the descendants of Israel were carnal and served in the shadow of the law, they had many means to enkindle their devotion.”

2. “The law”: the second version reads “the law and judgments.”

3. “Because the truth . . . was prefigured by the law in a hidden way”: the second version reads “Because the truth has now come which had been presaged figuratively, or rather I myself, who am God, have come.”

4. “Is good and pleasant to hear”: the second version reads “is good and pleasant to hear and is not contrary to good morals.”

5. “In this abbey”: the second version reads “in my Mother’s abbey.”

6. “There should be a time-limit” renders “certa deduccio temporum,” which may mean that no excessive additional liturgical materials were to be added.

7. “Solemnity in the chants . . . humility in all and above all”: the second version reads “solemnity in chant, purity of mind, silent worship, steadfastness in the divine word, and above all true humility and obedience without delay.”

3 The confessor may go outside with someone to accompany him on matters concerning the establishment of the Rule or to consult with superiors to decide disciplinary actions. He may also absent himself in order to quell any scandal or disgrace involving the abbey, should any arise, or to refute heretics, if necessary. 4 Again, he may go outside, if he is called by the leaders of the Holy Church, or whenever any such business occurs which cannot be adequately dealt with through the agency of the administrators¹ of the abbey.”

⚭ Chapter 12

On Reading Aloud, Recreation, and Study at the Abbey

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Pious instruction concerning how the abbess with her sisters or the confessor with his brothers may make wise use of the time in between the liturgical hours on feast days.

1 On feast days, the abbess should go over the state and revenues of the building and any impending projects with her sisters. She should also go through some chapters of the rule with them, and where she leaves off she should resume on the next feast day, until it has been gone through completely, so that no one can claim ignorance of the rule. 2 She may also hold edifying conversation with them and give warnings about any irregularities she notices.

3 Similarly, the priests may read, converse and study as on other days, unless the confessor requires them in connection with the physical state of the buildings or for consultation or other matters that may turn up. Otherwise, if they like and with the permission of the confessor, they may walk about and relax.

4 As to the lay brothers, one of the priests should give them a simple commentary on the gospel of the day, instruct them about the Rule, teach them about the characters and lives of the saints and the example of the fathers, and also correct them regarding any negligences or irregularities, explaining their duties to them.¹

⚭ Chapter 13

On Rules for Fasting

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter IX in the Rule of the Holy Savior, on fasting, Christ says that humility and prudence please him more than fasting. Also, it is permitted to those who are fasting on bread and water to eat vegetables.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Although my Mother observed perfect abstinence, she exercised a prudent control of her body so that it would not break

1. “Administrators” renders “procuratores.”

1. This paragraph is an addition in one manuscript (MS k) only.

down due to excessive or violent practices of abstinence.¹ 2 Although the pharisees and many in the religious orders today do not make use of wine, they still do not draw near to me because they lack humility and prudence which are the foundations of self-restraint. 3 Therefore, when more intense penance is proposed or commanded, those who are sick should consider and consult not to do as much as they want but as much as is suitable and right. 4 It is good for the healthy to fast on bread and water, but it is not the highest good. The highest good is charity, without which there is no salvation. Anyone can be saved without fasting on bread and water, provided they have perfect faith and prudence and a good reason. 5 Therefore, since times have changed, and the regions are cold,² and hearts are lukewarm and the vessels weak, the vine-dresser may smooth over what is rough and irrigate what is dry with liquids.

6 This means that those who are fasting on bread and water are given permission to eat vegetables and to drink hot water. Bread is dry and hard to swallow without vegetables, and water is bitter and cold unless it is boiled with barley or prepared as gruel.”³

✠ Chapter 14

Dispensations may be Granted to Members of the Community who are Sick

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ distinguishes between three classes of sinners, for charity, humility and prudence are always to be observed in the new rule of the Holy Savior which he himself has established.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Every divine law is instituted either to check the boldness of lawbreakers or to prevent the outrages of abusers or to instruct people about what to do or what not to do. 2 With respect to each law, therefore, if someone sins out of weakness or unbearable poverty, he is pardoned. Someone who sins unintentionally and without premeditation receives a lighter sentence. However, someone who deliberately and repeatedly does wrong is not excused. 3 For example, when I lived among men, my disciples began plucking and eating heads of grains on a sabbath day, and they were criticized by the hypocrites among the Jews.¹ I knew their simplicity and weakness, and defended them with the example of David who ate the bread of the priests in dire need, although the law prohibited it to laymen. 4 I, God, have now prepared a new rule and sent it

1. “Excessive or violent practices of abstinence”: presumably, the stringent mortification of the flesh.

2. “The regions are cold” cf. Sw. “städhrene frosne” [the places frozen]; most likely a reference to the northerly climate and the need for a relaxation of monastic regulations to suit inclement conditions, or more metaphorically, a reference to the falling away of religious faith in the region.

3. “Gruel”: gruel was regularly permitted in fasting. This paragraph is an addition in a number of manuscripts (and Ghotan), and it helps to make the preceding paragraph more explicit. There is further variation in the medieval Swedish translation, where “vegetables and hot water... prepared as gruel” is translated as “fruit and berries and to drink boiled water, for bread is dry and hard without fruit and berries, and water is sharp and cold, without being brewed as a tisane, or soaked and strained in grain.”

1. “When I lived among men... among the Jews”; cf. Matthew 12:1–5.

to my friends. Charity, humility, and prudence are to be observed in it in every way. One should have compassion on the weak and even on the healthy, because a law that does not perfect charity, humility, and prudence deserves no praise. 5 Therefore, as I stated in the rule,² the healthy should fast at set times, but even they may be dispensed from it if a sudden change or sickness or workload demands compassion. 6 It is up to the abbess and the confessor and their sense of moderation to permit those who are in good health to break their fast or rest as often as is suitable. 7 A dispensation should be given to the frail, disabled, and those overcome by sudden sickness or fatigued by overworking.”

✠ Chapter 15

Baths Should be Taken Regularly

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Baths are not to be prohibited in the Order of the Holy Savior, not even for the healthy, at certain times and for good reasons.

1 The Son of God speaks: “The lawyers¹ and priests were criticizing my disciples for eating with unwashed hands.² I answered them that washing the body does no good if one’s heart is unclean. 2 Thus, a clean heart is pleasing to God, but washing and taking care of the body is not an obstacle, provided there is a good and sensible reason for it. Therefore, baths should not be prohibited even for healthy persons at certain times and for good reasons, because good health should be maintained so that people do not become weak.

3 Baths, then, may be taken by the sick as often as necessary. The healthy may bathe once a month or every two weeks, if it is good for their health.”³

✠ Chapter 16

The Period of the Novitiate may be Shortened for those about Whom there is no Doubt

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter X in the Rule of the Holy Savior which deals with the probation, admission, and consecration of persons.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Earlier¹ I spoke to you about having a probationary year. You should consider this for persons whose life and conduct are less known and proven. 2 Therefore, I give my permission that if any woman asks to be admitted to the religious life and is trustworthy and serious enough

2. “I stated in the rule”; cf. *Regula Salvatoris* ch. 9.

1. “Lawyers” renders “legis doctores” [doctors of the law].

2. “The lawyers and priests . . . unwashed hands”: cf. Matthew 15:1–3.

3. This paragraph is an addition in a few manuscripts and Ghotan.

1. “Earlier”: cf. *Regula Salvatoris* ch. 10.

that one need not worry about her inconstancy or lack of steadfastness, and if she recognizes the temptations of the flesh and the ploys of the devil, and her age has been proven,² then she can join the congregation after half a year, once the strictness of the rule and its statutes have been explained to her beforehand, so she understands the commitment involved.”

✠ Chapter 17

On Humility, Obedience, and Careful Observation of the Rule for the Nuns

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Excellent instruction about how virgins as well as others who want to profit from the Rule of the Holy Savior should prepare themselves and act to observe the Rule.

1 Those who want to become God's brides must struggle more fervently to fulfill God's will than to work for their own advantage or to fulfill their own will. 2 They should be like brides who are far away from their own property and are on their way to take up their lodgings in the ancestral estate of their bridegroom. Their property consists in their physical freedom and worldly dealings within their social circle. They should wholeheartedly and unconditionally leave all of this behind. 3 They should then put on their wedding gown, that is, humility, patience, and obedience, which adorn and beautify the soul in the sight of God. 4 They should rise and go forth to present themselves to the bridegroom and to his invited guests. How upright and proper in words and deeds they must be as they enter the sight of those spectators! The invited spectators are the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with all the heavenly host. The bridegroom who yearns for them is true God, the king of kings and lord of lords, whose power extends to every creature. 5 They have indeed risen by making their confession with wise contrition and a firm resolution to sin no more. They have gone forth by freely giving up all worldly things, caring for none of them and not even desiring to be free with respect to their own will. 6 They were consecrated with their bridegroom by promising to observe their rule and profession without violation. They walked a safe and straight path to the bridal chamber of the groom by preserving their profession as well as they could. 7 When they made their profession, the first day of the wedding feast began. It ends when the soul leaves the body. Therefore, they should spend the day living the three virtues of wise fear, devout joy and fervent charity.

✠ Chapter 18

The Monks may use the Rituals of the Diocese where the Abbey is Situated

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

2. "Her age has be proven": that is, if she is of the approved age, i.e., eighteen. (It was twenty-five for a brother.)

Concerning Chapter XII in the Rule of the Holy Savior which deals with the liturgy of the hours for the brothers as well as with the number of sisters and brothers.¹

1 Jesus Christ, the Son of God, speaks: “The golden Scripture² says that some people brought gold and silver and precious stones to adorn the tabernacle in the desert, others brought goat-skins and goat-hair for the tents, but that all the offerings were pleasing to God according to each giver’s will and intention.

2 Something similar applies to the prayers and readings of the faithful. Those who are detached from the love of the world offer God a heart that is pure as refined gold. Others who are inflamed by the spirit of divine wisdom speak and sing words of divine wisdom which are like tested silver. 3 Others scarcely know the ‘Our Father’ but offer to God in perfect faith, with heartfelt contrition and penitent deeds, the little they know and are able, and this is like the goat-hair. All of them are pleasing to me in their prayers, if their will and intention are good. 4 Accordingly, since it is difficult for priests of advanced age to give up their customary practices and accustom themselves to new ones, it is permissible for them to chant the office of the cathedral church in the diocese where the abbey is located. However, the sisters shall not change the office established for them in any way.”

⚡ Chapter 19

The Virgin Reassures Birgitta that Sufficient Numbers of People will Apply to join the Planned Order

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

When Blessed Birgitta was worried about the persons who would enter the Order of the Holy Savior, she heard the Blessed Virgin say that they were foreseen by God and that some of them would rebel against the words of Christ.

1 Once when the bride of Christ was at prayer, a thought occurred to her about the future state of the religious order and how so many persons of both sexes could be found. 2 The Mother of God appeared to her and said: “Daughter, you are worried about the persons who will enter this religious order in the future. Rest assured that my Son, who has himself dictated the rule, foreknows a thousand persons for every person who you know and hope will join the order.” 3 The bride answered: “My Lady, women can easily be found who will subject themselves to the order, but it will be very difficult to find men willing to subject themselves to the decisions of a woman, since worldly knowledge makes

1. “The number of sisters and brothers”: although the number of women and men at the intended abbey is referred to in chapter 12 of the Rule, there is in fact no further clarification in the present chapter.

2. “The golden Scripture”: see note to ch. 3.1.

many of them proud and conceited, and the world lures them with honor, wealth, and pleasure.” 4 The Mother of God said to her: “Men will certainly come and receive my Son’s words with delight and use them for the benefit of their own souls and the glory of God. 5 Others will come who will be just as opposed to my Son’s words and to the simple rule revealed to you as those unbelievers who contradicted the words of God and Moses in the desert and interpreted the divine words as they liked. 6 Rest assured, however, that the words of this rule will force their way forward and bear fruit until the end of time. Do not worry, my daughter, about the persons who will enter the order. 7 My Son himself knows whom he will call and appoint for this ministry according to his will, even though some of them will rebel against his words according to their human estimations. They will presumptuously look down on the simplicity of the words, just as the worldly wise sometimes presumptuously prefer their own opinions to the divine will, twisting the true meaning and introducing errors.”

✠ Chapter 20

On the Status of the Elected Abbess

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter XIV in the Rule of the Holy Savior which deals with the election of the abbess, etc. The Son of God describes the three classes of persons most pleasing to him. He does not want a sister born of illegitimate wedlock to be elected abbess.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Although a son is not responsible for his father’s sin, still there are three states that please me most: virginity, widowhood, and marriage. These three states are more preferable and honorable than all the others, both because they are particularly distinguished by purity and decency, and because my Mother lived in these three states in her own life. 2 She remained a most pure virgin in giving birth, and she was truly mother and virgin after giving birth. She was a widow after my ascension, deprived of my physical presence. 3 Accordingly, when an abbess is elected, a woman who belongs to one of these three states should be chosen. However, a sister who comes from a different origin,¹ however continent and exemplary she is in her conduct, should not be chosen as abbess.”

✠ Chapter 21

Humility is an Essential Virtue in the Order Dedicated to the Virgin

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

1. “From a different origin”: presumably, if she is of illegitimate birth.

Christ says that the abbess should be a chaste virgin, tried and tested, and exemplary in character. If a virgin of such character is lacking, then a humble, tried and tested widow may be appointed as abbess.

1 Jesus Christ speaks: "It is a beautiful union and a becoming alliance for a virgin to preside over virgins. Purity of mind and body must hold the primacy over all, for I, God, desired to become incarnate in it and through it. 2 My Mother was indeed both virgin and mother, but not mother in the sense that she had carnal knowledge of any man, but in the sense that, filled up with the Father's and my Spirit, she gave birth to me, true God and man. This is why this new order is to be dedicated to my Mother. 3 Therefore it is necessary and right that whoever has to preside over her virgins must be a virgin herself, chaste, tried and tested as to character, and exemplary in virtue. 4 If, however, such a virgin is not to be found in the congregation who can carry out the office of my Mother the Virgin, then it is not displeasing to me if a humble widow of tried and tested character should assume the humble burden of prelacy, for a humble widow is more pleasing to me than a proud virgin. 5 Accordingly, should it please God to exalt the humble and raise up the state of widowhood, if necessary, this does not detract from the praiseworthy tradition of virgins, for God condescends to exalt every humble condition. 6 Who or what was or is humbler than my Mother? What is it that perfect humility does not deserve? Because of humility, I, God and the Son of God, became the Virgin's true son. There is no way into heaven without humility."

✠ Chapter 22

On the Procedure for Consecrating the Abbess

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ explains why and how the abbess of the Order of the Holy Savior is to be consecrated.

1 Christ speaks: "A person who holds a ruling office in the world should receive some sign of office to indicate that everyone else should obey him and show him honor. 2 The same applies to the abbess, because she holds my Mother's office and exercises her functions on earth. Therefore, she should be consecrated by the bishop as a sign both of her greater responsibility and of an increase in spiritual grace so that the others may see and honor it, not because of her promotion but in honor of me and my Mother.

3 The consecration of the abbess should be done according to the Benedictine custom¹ for their abbesses, except that the crosier and ring should be consecrated beforehand."

1. "According to the Benedictine custom": a Benedictine abbess had to seek her consecration from the diocesan bishop within one year of her election, and the ceremony took place during the Mass, on any day of the week. No mention is made in the ritual book for bishops known as the *Pontificale Romanum* of the conferring of a staff, but this rite is prescribed in many monastic rituals. The abbess, like an abbot, normally bore a crosier as a symbol of her office and rank, and she also had a right to the wearing of the ring.

‡ Chapter 23

The Brethren must Preach in a Simple Unembellished Style

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter XV in the Rule of the Holy Savior about how the friars should devote themselves to the divine office, study, and prayer. Christ explains how and about what they should preach to the people.

1 Christ speaks: “Those who preach my truth should use few and simple words based on the study of Holy Scripture in order that people who travel in from a distance can understand them and are not made weary by long-winded, repetitious oratory. 2 They should not use tortuous language like flatterers do or multiply the distinctions and divisions of their arguments or use sophisticated leonine rhymes;¹ instead they should adapt everything to the capacity of the listeners. What the common people do not understand is usually said more in order to impress than to edify. 3 So, on Sundays, the preachers of this order should read out and explain the gospel of the day. They should discuss the Bible along with these words of mine² and of my beloved Mother and my saints; the lives of the Fathers; the miracles of the saints; the profession of faith; as well as countermeasures against temptations and vices, all of this according to the capacity of the listeners. 4 My dear Mother was altogether straightforward; Peter was unlearned;³ Francis a plain man from the countryside.⁴ Yet they did more good to souls than eloquent teachers, for they were full of love for souls.”

‡ Chapter 24

The Virgin and Devil Argue about the Land Rights of Vadstena Royal Palace

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter XX in the Rule of the Holy Savior. The vision shows how the Virgin Mary, in a debate with the devil, wins the legal argument for Vadstena as the site for the foundation of her abbey. Christ awards it to her and endows it with many graces.

1 A certain person had a vision of being in a large building where a great host had gathered. The Blessed Virgin then said to the king of heaven: “My Son, give me this place.” 2 The devil immediately appeared and said: “This place is mine. I have three rightful claims to ownership. The first is that I in-

1. “Leonine rhymes”: a type of Latin versification, much used in medieval Europe, and based on internal rhyme. The Swedish translation of this term in this passage is “rim.”

2. “Along with these words of mine,” i.e., Birgitta’s revelations. The frequent quotations from the revelations are a distinctive mark of Birgittine preaching.

3. “Peter was unlearned”; cf. Acts 4: 13; cf. Book V int. 13,38.

4. “A plain man from the countryside” renders “rusticus”; cf. Sw. “bonde” [farmer]. This is not strictly true, as Francis was the son of a wealthy merchant with some basic schooling.

spired the founders of the place with the intention of building it, and the masters of the building were my servants and friends. 3 My second claim is that this place is a place of torment and anger,¹ and my friends, cruel the way I like them, used to torment their subordinates here without mercy. Well, I am the lord of torment and the master of anger in this place, and therefore it is mine. 4 My third claim is that this place has been mine for many years now, and where my will is done, there is my throne.”²

5 Then the Blessed Virgin said to God: “My Son, I seek justice from you. If one man were to rob another of his property and money, and if he were to force the other to work for him in order to build him a house on the stolen property, using the money he had robbed from him, then who owns the new building?” 6 The Lord answered: “Dear Mother, the rightful owner of the building is the one who owned the money and expended his labor on it.” The Blessed Virgin said to the devil: “Accordingly, you have no right to this building.” 7 Then the Blessed Virgin put a second question to the Judge: “If cruelty and wrath were in someone’s heart, and then mercy and grace entered, which of them should flee?” 8 The Judge answered: “Cruelty and wrath should yield to mercy.” The Virgin said to the devil: “Accordingly, you should flee, because, if you are the lord of torment and the master of wrath, I am the mother of grace and the queen of mercy, for I have mercy on all who beseech me.” 9 The Virgin put a third question to the Judge: “My Son, if an executioner resided in a house, and his master came and also wished to reside in the same house, what should the executioner³ do?” 10 The Judge answered: “Justice requires the executioner to go away and the master to reside where he likes.” Then the Virgin said to the devil: “Since you are my Son’s executioner, and I am your Lady, justice requires you to flee and to let me reside wherever I want.”

11 Then the Judge said to the Virgin: “Dear Mother, you have won this place by lawful right. It is rightfully owed to you, and I award it to you.⁴ 12 As you heard, once the wretched wept and groaned here, and their blood and misery cried out to me from earth and sounded in my ears. But now the sound of those who praise you here will ascend to my ears. 13 Once this place was a place of torment that weighed heavy on the earth, but now there will be a gathering here of those who plead for mercy and pardon for the living and dead, and they will appease my anger over the state of the realm.” 14 After this, the Judge said in addition to the Virgin: “Your enemy was master of this place for a long time, but from now on you will be its mistress and queen.”

1. “The masters of the building . . . a place of torment and anger”: in the latter part of the thirteenth century, a spacious and elegant brick palace was built on land in Vadstena that belonged to the royal family. The reference to “your enemy” in paragraph 14 may refer to the increasing hostility that Birgitta developed towards the king, perhaps specifically over this property, or a suggestion that the palace had been put to bad use. This is an example of a revelation that has veiled meanings.

2. “There is my throne”; cf. Apocalypse 2:13, on the seat (throne) of Satan.

3. “Executioner”: as before, the devil is described as God’s “licitor.”

4. “I award it to you”; cf. chapter 25.5.

✠ Chapter 25

Vadstena, Earlier a Place of Injustice, would be Sanctified by the New Abbey

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ explains to St. Birgitta why the city of Jericho was destroyed, and he makes a comparison to the site of his abbey in Vadstena and to its inhabitants.

1 Jesus Christ speaks: “What did you read today in your book?”¹ She said: “I read, and it amazed me, that, at your command, the walls of the condemned city of Jericho collapsed² at the sounding of the trumpets as the holy ark passed around it.” 2 The Spirit answered: “Much evil was done in and from that city, and none of its inhabitants was pleasing to me. This is why it deserved neither forgiveness nor to be inhabited by my own people. 3 My people, worn and wearied in the desert, were to receive their promised possession but first had to be taught by words, deeds, and miracles. 4 Hence, a miraculous dispensation and a just retribution occurred in that city in order that my people, miraculously led forth from the sea, might see miracles on land. Once they had seen these miracles, God would be firmly anchored in their hearts, and they would learn to hope for greater things and be encouraged to aspire to greater things.

5 This site³ where my friends are now afflicted was the dwelling-place of demons. But my Mother was awarded this site with a threefold legal claim—by charity, prayers, and a change in its future functions.” 6 She said, “O, Lord, do not be angry if I speak.⁴ You said that there must be every kind of humility⁵ in your house. Should this building remain standing here?” 7 The Spirit answered: “In the wretched city of Jericho, there were some things that were useful to my people. They kept these after they had first been purged by fire. In this way my people came into possession of the achievements of Gentiles. 8 Accordingly, since this building was built with the sweat of the poor due to the pride of the rich, my poor ones will live in it and turn everything superfluous and proud to humble and profitable use. 9 One must take care, however, not to let an exception permitted by divine power for a special reason to be used as an example to the proud.”

✠ Chapter 26

Monastic Buildings had Started to be Built on the Royal Estate but were Later Demolished

DATE: 1350S, ROME

1. “In your book”: presumably the Bible.
2. “The walls of... Jericho collapsed”; cf. Joshua 6: 2–7.
3. “This site”; cf. ch. 24.11.
4. “Do not be angry if I speak”: Birgitta uses this formulation on occasion elsewhere, e.g., Book IV ch. 77 and 127.
5. “You said... every kind of humility”; cf. ch. 30.1.

Christ speaks to the bride about the disobedience of a king of Sweden who neither went to the pope to seek absolution for his sins nor marched against the pagans. He mentions the city of Jericho and the location of the abbey at Vadstena.

1 The Son of God speaks: “See, the king rejected my second recommendation¹ as he did my first.² This is why my enemies have entered the places belonging to my Mother and torn down and destroyed them, as you have heard.³ This is why the stones and timber cry out for revenge on the king. 2 It is true that God uses human wickedness to glorify himself, and in the very spot where the devil thinks he is prevailing, there he is cast down and put to shame. 3 As a matter of fact, if those tall buildings had remained standing, they would have been the occasion of pride in the future and an example of great vanity. It would have been negligent and wasteful if they had been deliberately demolished. 4 But now, using this occasion of wasteful destruction and human wickedness, I will show you how the humility that God loves may be built on top of vain, useless pride and pompously high walls. 5 Have the wings of the building brought down in humility, and lower the elevated height of the inner walls. This will bring glory to God and be a lesson to those who live there as well as a joy and a sign of humility to those who see it. But the manner of construction should be left to the responsibility and decisions of those who know how to construct buildings.”

6 The Son of God speaks again: “I spoke to you before⁴ about the city of Jericho and compared it to the site of this abbey. I spoke about how the buildings stood ready to use but had to be reduced to what was humble and necessary. I gave my friends permission to do this, if the king brought them together as I advised. 7 Therefore, those who are gathered now should work to get rid of anything superfluous, and content themselves only with what is humble and necessary and make that their badge of honor.”

≠ Chapter 27

King Magnus is Unworthy of Building the New Abbey

DATE: 1350S, ROME

The Son of God reveals to Blessed Birgitta that the king, because of his sins, was not worthy to build Vadstena abbey for the Lord.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Because this king does not seek my warmth but stays out in the cold, and because he does not renounce the scandal he has wrought, he will not build my house¹ like Solomon² nor end his life like David.³

1. “Second recommendation”; cf. ch. 43.

2. “First”; cf. ch. 51.25.

3. “As you have heard”; cf. ch. 43.5.

4. “I spoke to you before”; cf. ch. 25.

1. “He will not build my house”; cf. ch. 74.6.

2. “Solomon”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) ch. 6.

3. “David”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) ch. 2.

2 Nor will he be remembered like my beloved Olaf,⁴ nor crowned like my friend Eric.⁵ Instead he will get to know justice, because he refused mercy. I will plow the country with justice and tribulation until its inhabitants learn to ask for mercy.⁶ 3 However, the identity of the person who will build my abbey and the time of his coming will be made known to you, although it is not permitted for you to know whether or not it will be in this life.⁷

✠ Chapter 28

About the Monastic Church

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ explains to St. Birgitta the position, dimensions and layout of the abbey church at Vadstena as well as of the brothers' choir, the locutory between the brothers and sisters, the ceilings, altars, doorways, walkways, and columns, the sisters' choir, the windows, and the locutory for laymen.

1 The Son of God speaks: "The choir of the church should be in the west-side toward the lake; a high wall should run from the brick building in the north along the lake all the way up to the courtyard¹ of the clerics. 2 Between the wall and the choir a space of eighteen ells should be left where the locutory is to be built. A wall running from the choir and joining the wall along the lake should divide the space of the locutory lengthwise. 3 The brothers and sisters are to discuss necessary issues with each other in this locutory; to prevent them seeing each other, there should be no windows in the middle of the wall dividing them. There should also be two turning-wheels in the wall of the usual kind in other monasteries. 4 The choir should be twenty-two ells² long under a single vault from the inner wall to the high altar in such a way that the altar is under the same vault. 5 The clerics should stand between the high altar and the wall. The vault should be twenty ells wide. 6 The wall that is behind the stalls toward the sisters should have five openings at which the sisters may make their confessions and receive the body of the Lord.

4. "Olaf": Olaf Haraldsson, king of Norway 1015–28, who was martyred at the battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030. After years spent on viking travels he brought Christianity to Norway. Birgitta made a pilgrimage to his shrine at Niðaross (Trondheim) early in her life, and his cult saw a revival in her time.

5. "Eric": Erik Jedvardsson, king of the Svear, patron saint of Sweden and leader of the first crusade to Finland. According to his legend, he was attacked and killed in Uppsala in 1160 by the Danish king, Magnus Henriksson. His relics are preserved in Uppsala cathedral and his feast day is 18 May. He was one of the most celebrated native saints of Sweden, and often used as a symbol of the aristocracy's uprisings against some of the thirteenth-century monarchs. See also Book VI 10 and 66.

6. "Its inhabitants ask for mercy"; cf. ch. 77.

7. "Whether or not it will be in this life": it is left uncertain whether Birgitta will see the completed building in her lifetime; in the event, she did not.

1. "Courtyard" renders "curia."

2. "Ells": a unit of measurement approximating the length of a man's arm from his elbow to the tip of the middle finger.

7 The church should be five vaults in length and three in width. Each vault should be twenty ells in length and twenty in width. The three vaults immediately east of the high altar extending across the width of the church should be included in the choir. 8 Six steps should lead down from the high altar extending across the whole church. Each of the steps should have two altars on it so that there are six altars to the right of the high altar and six to the left. Each altar should be situated obliquely to the next. 9 The high altar should be five ells long and two and a half ells wide. Each of the other twelve altars should be two and a half ells long and one and a half ells wide. 10 The altars should be at a space of two ells from each other. Each step should be about a handbreadth in height all across.

11 The eastern wall should have two doorways under the two farthest vaults. There should be no doorway under the middle vault. Each doorway should be six ells wide, and their height should reach up to the floor beams under the feet of the sisters. 12 The altar of the Blessed Virgin should be between these two doors, four ells long and three wide, next to the eastern wall. The choir around the altar should be ten ells long and ten wide, and it should be closed off with iron grating. 13 There should be a corridor around the interior of the church, enclosed with iron grating, where the priests can walk without encountering the people. 14 Close to both doorways there should be stairs going up to the choir of the Blessed Virgin; there should be no other doorway into that choir. 15 There should be no doorway in the iron enclosure apart from the one in line with the high altar; this should always be kept locked except when someone is admitted into the order.³

16 In the middle of the southern wall, within the iron enclosure, there should be an altar to St. Michael where the priest would be facing south. 17 In the middle of the northern wall there should be an altar to St. John the Baptist where the priest would be facing north. 18 Altars should be built outside the iron enclosure where visiting secular priests can celebrate mass.

19 Columns should be eleven ells high from the floor of the church up to the ceiling beams. Over the beams, a floor should be built of boards, mortar, and bricks for the sisters to stand on. Sheets of copper should be fastened under the boards so there is no danger of fire. 20 The columns should go up through the floor of the sisters' choir so that they are about four ells above the sisters' floor before reaching the ceiling. 21 All the vaults above the choir and the whole church should be equal in height. The roof should be only as high as necessary. 22 There should be no fancy sculpture on doors, windows, or columns; they should be of plain and sturdy handiwork. The glass windows should not be colored but only white or gray. 23 The building where the sisters speak with laymen should be in the east between the large brick building and the church. There should be windows there so that the people can see each other. 24 The church should be of stone, cut from the mountains and found in the earth, and not of brick."

3. "When someone is admitted into the order": some manuscripts add "and whenever the bishop visits the abbey."

‡ Chapter 29

Birgitta Sees the Future Monastic Buildings at Vadstena

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

St. Birgitta's vision of the construction of Vadstena Abbey and the situation of its churchyard; in addition, the locutories between the sisters and the brothers, and between them and laymen; the residence of the brothers, the boundaries of the sisters, and the place for the delivery of medical supplies.

1 I saw¹ a long, wide half-wall² running from the large stone building down to the mound of turf that is south of the wide road. 2 Then I saw a church on the inside of the wall. I noted carefully its foundations, walls, windows, height and width. 3 Then I saw a large wall running from the wing of the same building up to the sanctuary, and it was said to me by the Spirit: "Another wall should be built to join this wall. The locutory of the brothers and sisters should be there. It should have two windows for the brothers and the sisters to communicate with each other and for the delivery of necessary items to the brothers." 4 Then I saw another wall extending from this wall to the small stone building, and it was said to me: "The residence of the clerics will be here." 5 From the southern wing of the small building a wall extended to the wall on the mound of turf. I heard in my spirit: "A small gate will be in this wall where necessary items like wood and such things can be delivered to the brothers. Here there will also be a building where the sick can be examined and treated." 6 From the wall that appeared on the turf mound another wall extended almost to the stone building in the east but without going right up to the building. A small space was left there, since another wall extended from the southern side of the church and joined the wall extending from the turf mound, and it united both walls. It was said to me: "A locutory for the brothers and laymen will be here." 7 Then I saw a wall going north from the west wing of the large stone building; it circled around the garden³ following the line of the old trees. It went around the garden and bent back to the eastern wing of the main building. 8 After this I saw a wall going up from the eastern wing and extending directly to the side of the church. Now I heard in my spirit: "There will be three rooms in this wall. One will be a place suitable for bishops and rulers to meet with the sisters. Another will be for necessary deliveries. The third will be for examining and treating the sick." 9 After this, on the other side of the lake, I saw a church, like this one with its buildings, surrounded by a long, thick and high wall on every side. Then I heard in my spirit: "The buildings and the church to be built after this church should be built in the same way as you see now."

1. "I saw": MS f has "Loquitur beata Birgitta dicens"; and Ghotan has "Vidi inquit beata Birgitta."

2. "Half-wall" renders "murum semissem," possibly short in height or else a thick wall.

3. "Garden" renders "pomerarium," possibly an orchard, or else open land.

✚ Chapter 30*

Instructions about a "House" (i.e., a New Monastery)

DATE: 1340S, EARLY WIDOWHOOD, ALVA STRA

Christ explains to St. Birgitta the layout of his house, by which he especially refers to Vadstena Abbey and the Order of the Holy Savior.

✚ Chapter 31

On the Symbolism of the Three Doors in the Monastic Church

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Here Christ says what kind of paintings there should be in the Abbey of the Holy Savior; he also says that the church should have three doors, and he gives a mystical interpretation of them.

1 The Son of God speaks: "There should be no paintings on the walls of the church,¹ except for my passion and in memory of my saints. People who go into churches often take more pleasure in the pictures on the walls than in the kindnesses of Christ. 2 Therefore, this church should have three doorways. The first should be called the door of forgiveness² through which all the laity should enter, because everyone who enters by this door with a contrite heart and a desire to improve will receive relief in temptations, the strength to do the right thing, devotion in prayer, forgiveness of sins, and prudence in action. 3 This door will be to the east, because divine love will rise for those who enter it and the light of faith will grow stronger in them. 4 The second door will be called the door of reconciliation³ and atonement. The brothers will enter through it into their choir, because sinners will come to God through their prayers and their faith, and the state of the kingdom will improve and God's wrath will be appeased. 5 This door will be to the west, because the power of the devil will in many ways be reduced and destroyed by means of their prayers, and his power to tempt will not be as great as he wants. 6 The third door will be called the door of grace and glory.⁴ The sisters will enter through it, because any sister who enters through it with a contrite heart and the sole intention of pleasing God will receive the grace to advance from virtue to virtue as well as consolation in the temptations of this life and glory in the future. 7 This door will be to the north,⁵ because just as all the coldness of evil is spread by the devil, so too

* This revelation duplicates Book I ch. 18.

1. "No paintings on the walls of the church": unlike the Swedish parish churches, which were filled with decorative frescos in their vaulted ceilings, figurative images were not permitted at Vadstena. The rigorous restrictions on ornamentation in Cistercian churches is a likely influence here.

2. "The door of forgiveness": of the two eastern doors in the monastic church the door of forgiveness is probably the one on the southern side. Outside it is a stone plaque with a quotation from Book IV 137 (= Ex ch. 44), which concerns an indulgence granted to those who visit the church.

3. "The door of reconciliation": this western door was the main entrance for the priestly brethren; today it has been walled up.

4. "The door of grace and glory": this was some way along the northern wall and is also walled up. It was the entrance to the nuns' gallery in the church.

5. "This door will be to the north": traditionally evil is believed to emanate from the cold north.

there will be an abundance of blessings for those entering this door, and the warmth of the Holy Spirit will be poured out on them, and the fire of divine love will grow in them.”

✠ Chapter 32

On the Financial Contributions Required toward the Completion of a New Abbey

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ asks the people of the realm for help in the completion of Vadstena Abbey.

1 Christ speaks: “I am he who commanded Abraham¹ to slay his own son, not because I did not know the excellence of his obedience in advance, but because I wanted his good will to be shown to future generations in order that they might imitate it. 2 In the same way now I want an abbey to be built² in honor of my Mother by the ruler of this country. In order to lessen the sins of the realm, I ask the common people for help in finishing the abbey. I do not ask for help as someone in need, since I am Lord of the universe, but to make their readiness of will known to others. 3 For this reason, everyone, whether man or woman, who decides to remain a virgin on reaching the age of discretion should contribute one pence of currency. Those in widowhood should do likewise. 4 A married man, however, should give two pence from himself and his wife for the construction of my Mother’s abbey. 5 Those who have sons and daughters who have reached the age of discretion, that is, sixteen years of age, should pay one pence for each child in order that the fruits of charity and obedience may grow in them. 6 Members of religious orders, however, who are bound to give me their own selves and all that is theirs, as well as priests who are my lot and portion, should be at liberty. 7 Household servants are also exempt, since they earn their bread by their sweat and are not legally independent.”

✠ Chapter 33

Four Laymen may be Designated for Worldly Matters

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The abess of the Order of the Holy Savior may admit four men of certified good reputation as lay brothers living outside the monastery.

1 Christ speaks: “The golden Scripture¹ says that when Moses was praying for the people, Aaron and his companion held up his hands so they would not be weighed down by the constant stretching. 2 But why was this² Could not

1. “Abraham”; cf. Genesis 22:2.

2. “I want an abbey to be built”; cf. ch. 74.6.

1. “Scripture”; cf. Exodus 17:12. On the golden scripture, see the note to ch. 3.1.

God who gave him the power of prayer also have strengthened him.² Of course, he could have. But it was a sign for those who cling only to God and turn their backs on all else that human nature is weak and needs to be held up. 3 Therefore, in order that God's friends can persevere after their divine contemplation without being corrupted by worldliness, they may have such exterior consolations that help them to ascend more vigorously to divine things. 4 Accordingly, four men of certified good behavior and age may be attached to the residence of the clerics for the purpose of distributing alms and clothing to the poor. They should be ready to receive requests from the sisters and the brothers with a sense of responsibility. They should be able to speak with temporal rulers about the business of the abbey and to serve and lighten the burden of the abbess. 5 For these purposes, however, these brothers should depend on the monastery and share in all the spiritual benefits effected at the monastery. 6 They should also live a continent life and wear a red cross on their clothing² close to the heart as a sign of divine love and friendship. Furthermore, they should promise to obey the abbess in temporal matters and the confessor in spiritual ones, 7 and to abide by the same charity and rules, by the same customs, obedience, and discipline as if they lived in the monastery. There should be no differences in customs or diet or correction. They should put the commands of the abbess and the confessor in first place. 8 If they do anything against the Rule or commit any disgraceful deeds that bring shame on the order or besmirch the fame of the abbey, they should be locked up in the abbey prison. If the confessor cannot correct them, he should ask the bishop for advice and help, safeguarding at all times what is established in the Rule. 9 The confessor should determine how they should fast, when they should have time for recreation and for silence, how they should sleep, and how and why they may leave the boundaries of the abbey or visit the rulers of the country. 10 Similarly, he should determine what habit they should wear, their liturgical hours, and when they should come to church to receive the body of Christ. There should be specific rooms where they can eat and sleep, and they should have their own burial place. 11 Of the four men who wear the cross, one or two may be priests, but they should still obey the abbess and confessor in everything. 12 If any workers or craftsmen want to submit themselves to the Rule, they should follow the same norms and statutes but without wearing the cross. One of the four should act as their director to guide and teach them according to the advice and decisions of the abbess and of the confessor in spiritual matters."³

✠ Chapter 34

Guidance on the Thirteen Altars in the Abbey Church

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

2. "Red cross on their clothing": the distinctive red mark on the Birgittine habit, for men and women equally, was a potent symbol of the equality of status between both communities.

3. Paragraphs 7–12 are additions in one manuscript and Ghotan.

Concerning Chapter XXI in the Rule of the Holy Savior. Christ designates thirteen altars to be consecrated to the thirteen apostles according to their thirteen outstanding virtues.

1 The Son of God speaks: "I told you earlier¹ that there should be thirteen altars on the thirteen steps in the choir,² their position being determined by the calling and enkindling of my Spirit in each of them. 2 The first and principal altar should be consecrated to Peter, the prince of the apostles, because he was first to be called and chosen, first in authoritative rank and first to die a death like my own. 3 The first altar to the right of the altar of Peter, prince of the apostles, should be that of Paul who, though he never saw me alive in the flesh, did see me in a spiritual vision. Moreover, because Paul became more perfectly enkindled with zeal for souls and made greater efforts in charity, he was awarded the title, life, and rank of apostle. 4 The second altar to the right should be that of James, the son of Zebedee, who, by virtue of his suffering and the ardor of his preaching, deserved to be the first apostle to enter into his glory before the others. 5 The third altar to the right should be that of John the evangelist who, by virtue of his pure love, achieved a special familiarity with me which allowed him to record the truth of the gospel in a more profound way than the others. 6 The fourth altar to the right should be that of Bartholomew who turned his back on wealth and became a lover of poverty, enduring suffering with patience. 7 The fifth altar should be that of Philip, who set aside the physical generation of children but caused many to be born again to eternal life. 8 The sixth altar to the right should be that of Thomas, who learned the perfection of faith from the wound in my side and persevered in perfect charity.

9 The first altar to the left of the altar of the prince of the apostles should be that of Andrew who followed me, his teacher, and was not ashamed of the ignominy of the cross. 10 The second altar on the left should be that of Matthew who gave up worldly money-making to become a teacher of souls. 11 The third altar should be that of James, the son of Alphaeus,³ who, being already related to me physically on earth, became like me in heaven. 12 The fourth altar should be that of Simon, his brother, who left behind his bodily parents and gained the merit of being filled with the wisdom from above. 13 The fifth altar should be that of Thaddeus,⁴ who bravely fought the devil through his purity of heart. 14 The sixth altar should be that of Mathias, who abhorred the greed of my traitor and gained the place of eternal glory through his humility.

15 Now, daughter, you may ask why I did not give a higher rank to John or the apostles related to my family than to Peter. My answer to you is this: Perfect charity toward God is that which a man has when he leaves nothing for himself

1. "I told you earlier"; cf. *Regula Salvatoris* ch. 21; ch. 28.8.

2. "In the choir" renders "in sanctuario."

3. "James, the son of Alphaeus": one of the twelve apostles, sometimes referred to as James the Less (Mark 15:40), to distinguish him from the apostle James, son of Zebedee.

4. "Thaddeus": another of the apostles, sometimes referred to as Jude, and distinguished from Judas Iscariot. On the altars, see Lindgren, "Altars and Apostles," and Nyberg "The Thirteen Apostles in the Spiritual World of St. Bridget."

but opens himself to every virtue and perfection. 16 Perfect charity toward one's neighbor, however, is when a man treats bad people well, even if he feels indignation toward them, and treats good people even better, especially those whom he finds to be better as to good deeds. 17 Because Peter was more fervent in charity and regarded nothing as his own except that which would remain with him eternally, and in order not to give preference to the physical over spiritual bonds, he was chosen for the pontificate. 18 The greater signs of love seen in John were the reward of his purity and his future perseverance. 19 In order to spread the sweetness of his goodness and inspire love, sometimes God chooses an occasion and persons to glorify himself in his creation for the purpose of exalting faith, whereas at other times, like a craftsman, he puts that which is blunt and cold into the fire in order to raise up the weak and cast down the proud, so that God may be everywhere glorified."

✠ Chapter 35

Four Women and Two Men may Help in the Kitchens

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter XXII in the Rule of the Holy Savior. Christ says that the sisters may have four female servants and the brothers two male servants for tasks within the cloister.

1 God's Son speaks: "When I lived with my apostles in the world, I sought only the benefit of souls, for it was neither fitting nor pleasing to serve both souls and the world. 2 Accordingly, material needs were looked after by faithful men and women who, however, were neither called nor were apostles. Rather they were assistants and helped to lighten the workload of the apostles who served and assisted me in a more direct way.

3 This is also so in the present case. Earlier I told you¹ the number of my Mother's girls who should assist her in a more intimate way than others. Some of them had an easier diet, others were old and infirm, others less accustomed to manual labor, and still others more occupied with divine contemplation. 4 Accordingly, if necessity and circumstances require it, the abbess may allow four kitchen maids to enter within the gates who are old enough and have a prudent character and a good reputation. They will tend to the fire, carry in wood and water, throw out the trash from the abbey, and help the less vigorous sisters in their work. 5 The kitchen maids may enter the church and other areas in the abbey to carry out their tasks. They should be housed near both the kitchen and the gate so they are always there to receive deliveries and bring supplies to the workrooms. 6 However, they should not be together with the convent in the choir, dormitory or refectory but should remain outside the choir, when they are idle, and they should not eat together with the convent but should live on alms from the sisters or provisions given to them by the abbess. 7 They

1. "Earlier I told you"; cf. *Regula Salvatoris* ch. 12.

should give obedience to the abbess and wear a hoodless scapular as a sign of identification. If there is work to be done in the kitchen by laymen, one or two of the kitchen maids should be there to watch so that nothing is done contrary to the Rule.

8 The brothers may also have two kitchen boys, if they find them useful and necessary. The kitchen boys should not have a cowl but a mantle over their shirt on which a small hood may be sewn, as other religious have. When they are working, they should wear their hoods like the lay brothers of St. Benedict.”²

⚡ Chapter 36

On the Use of Spices

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter XXIV in the Rule of the Holy Savior. Christ explains what spices the members of the Order may use.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Because they may spark indulgent desires, it is better for those in the abbey who are in good health not to be constantly using pepper and cumin or similar herbs but only those common in the area where they live. 2 But on feast-days with nine readings,¹ they may use them as a means of recreation² from all their work. 3 The weak and infirm are, of course, permitted to use such spices as often as needed.”

⚡ Chapter 37

Where the Sacrament should be Kept and How it should be taken to Sick Members of the Community

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Concerning Chapter XXV in the Rule of the Holy Savior. Christ says that he is the father of all those who have been created and re-created and of those keeping his commandments; that Mary is both his mother and daughter; that the sisters of the order of the Holy Savior are to be called his and Mary’s daughters. He gives them permission to reserve his body and to carry it to the sick whenever necessary, according to the decision of the clerical authorities. He highly extols virginal chastity.¹

2. Ghotan and one manuscript have “When they are working, they may take off the mantle and instead wear a hood in place of this, like the *conversi* of the order of St. Benedict or Bernard, and a black-leather belt.”

1. “With nine readings,” i.e., the lessons.

2. “As a means of recreation from their work” renders “propter laborem et recreationem.”

1. This chapter is an addition to ch. 25 of the *Regula Salvatoris*.

1 Jesus Christ, Son of God, speaks: "A man is called a father when he begets a son through the mutual coupling of the flesh. The son is his because he is begotten of his flesh. In the same way, I, God, am the father of all, because I pour the soul into the body² and regenerate it through my passion. Through the effects of divine inspiration, I make the deformed soul new again."³ 2 Just as I am the father of all those who have been created and recreated through baptism,⁴ so too I am the father of all those who imitate my human life and follow the path of my commandments. 3 Accordingly, Mary, the mother of my human life, may be called both my mother and my daughter. She is my mother because she gave birth to me in the flesh, my daughter because she imitated my will. The semblance of her body shines somehow again in my own body, but the likeness of every virtue radiates most perfectly in her heart and in her actions. 4 Because my mother wishes to choose daughters for her own, and I am their founder and director and have revealed their constitution through you, I want to be their father and to be called their father. To indicate this I grant them two special privileges. 5 The first privilege is that they may reserve the sacrament of my body on their altar⁵ in a suitable receptacle, for example of sapphire or crystal, so that they may all the more fervently desire me whom they contemplate in the sacramental species each day until they are filled with the reality of the truth. 6 The second privilege is the permission for the abbess or her delegate to carry the receptacle with my sacrament to any nun who is burdened by an illness preventing her from receiving the sacrament of my body for fear of regurgitation, lest she die in the night without the viaticum.⁶ I, the God of all, permit her to carry it in the company of the whole convent following and show her the Lord's body without touching it and say: "May your faith bring you to salvation and eternal life."

7 Lady Birgitta replied: "O Lord, you lavish your grace profusely, do not be angry if I speak.⁷ Truly you give yourself profusely to us with abundant generosity, nay more, you are lavish above and beyond our desire. 8 Who but one inebriated with your spirit could ever believe such sweet kindness? It is written that they died⁸ who touched and saw the holy ark that symbolized you in the law of Moses. 9 But now you promise and permit yourself to be touched—you who are truth itself and the promise of all these signs! O how pure must a person be who draws near to the most High!"

2. "I pour the soul into the body": the medieval view held that every soul was directly created by God and poured into the embryo shortly after conception.

3. "I make the deformed soul new again": refers to the teaching that God's image in man (Genesis 1:26) was destroyed through the fall of man.

4. "Recreated through baptism"; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

5. "On their altar": the nuns had a choir that consisted of a gallery in the eastern end of the church, where no one else had access. When the mass was celebrated just for the nuns by one of the priest brethren in the abbey it was at an altar in the Mary choir, a small gallery attached to the eastern wall of the church, visible from and possibly joined with the nuns' gallery, but separated from it by a railing or lattice. The nuns also had a prayer altar, possibly a wooden table, on their own side of the railing. By a special privilege of Christ, they were allowed to have the reserved sacrament on this altar table.

6. "Viaticum": the term for the consecrated host when it is taken to the dying.

7. "Do not be angry if I speak"; cf. Genesis 18:32; see the note to ch. 25,6.

8. "It is written that they died"; cf. Numbers 4:15, 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 6:19, 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 6:6-7.

10 God replied: “Why are you full of wonder, my daughter, that a receptacle comes near to a receptacle or that a virginal vessel should draw near to the vessel of the treasure that never fails? 11 When the ark of Moses entered, the walls of clay tumbled down⁹ and the idol was beheaded. Likewise the pride of the devil is defeated by virginal charity, hard hearts are softened and carnal impurity is overcome. 12 Why should he who deigned to be born of a virgin deem it strange to be touched by a virgin? Virginal charity can accomplish all things with God, if it is joined to true humility. 13 However, to avoid any suspicion of disrespect for the clergy or of forcing the decision of theologians, I submit this privilege to the regulation and decision of the clerical authorities. 14 Neither Moses nor the prophets were read without the approval and examination of the high priests.¹⁰ Similarly, my words should not be brought to light without the authority and approval of the high priests to whom I have given the power of binding and loosing. He who rejects them, scorns me.”

✠ Chapter 38

On the Graves within the Monastic Church and in the Graveyard

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ specifies what kind of floor there should be in the abbey both for the laymen and the religious, how it should be restored after burials, and who should be buried in the church.

1 The Son of God speaks: “I told you earlier how the sisters and brothers should be buried. 2 Now I want to add this: When the church is finished, the cloister and the walkway enclosed by iron grating should be paved with pure polished stone or bricks—pure goes with pure. 3 The cemetery should be situated within the main wall wherever it is best; this is where the sisters should be buried. 4 If they have to be buried in the cloister, make sure to avoid any unevenness or irregularity in the floor. After the burial it should be restored to the same beautiful condition as before. 5 Similarly the floor of the church should be of pure and smooth stone, so that people entering do not stumble over tombs¹ or uneven stones but may find the place pure and adorned for divine prayer. 6 If any spiritual or eminent men are to be buried in the church, make sure immediately to restore the floor where the bodies are buried to the same beautiful state as before.”

✠ Chapter 39

The Virgin Prays for the Abbey at Vadstena

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

9. “The walls of clay tumbled down”; cf. Joshua 6:20, 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 5:4.

10. “High priests” renders “pontificum,” possibly also referring to “popes.”

1. “Tombs”: the monuments and gravestones in the church today are described by Anderson, Andersson, and Bennett, *Vadstena klosterkyrka, Östergötland*.

Concerning Chapter XXVI in the Rule of the Holy Savior. The Virgin Mary introduces three kinds of the persons entering this order. The first are those who are on fire with love and contemplate the kindnesses of God. The second are those who do penance for their sins. The third are those who love the deeds of the flesh more than those of the spirit, the world more than God. She asks various blessings of God on this order and the consecrated persons in it, and explains why the temple of the Jews, which was an anticipation of this abbey, will never be rebuilt.

1 The Mother speaks: "Anyone who sits higher up will see the noonday light. Anyone on the right side will wake up early in the morning from sleep. Anyone on the left will freeze in the frost of the night. Anyone lowest down is dead in the shadow of the night. 2 So anyone entering into this house must be sure not to love death rather than life, coldness rather than warmth. May those entering my house beware of the enemy at the gates! May each of them have reason as their guide and God as their director!

3 I have spoken earlier¹ of this house to you. May it be like a fire that spreads first in the straw and on the floor, then sets the roof and the whole house aflame so quickly that those outside do not realize until it is all on fire. 4 May it receive the consolation of the Holy Spirit as Elijah did.² He ate the bread and drank the water, and then walked for forty days on the strength of that bread. May all those who enter this house be strengthened and advance on their daily march, and may spiritual strength and the fervor of faith and charity grow in them. 5 May God accompany those entering this house as he accompanied Jacob³ who set out alone from his father's house but returned with a great multitude. He begat Joseph who was called the salvation of the people and who did save his people. 6 May he protect this house and those entering, as he protected his apostle from being burned in boiling oil,⁴ and grant that those who love this house may not be burned by the oil of love for the world nor grow weak and yield in the face of worldly opposition. 7 May all those who enter this house bear fruit like the seed that bears a hundredfold⁵ and like the widow's jar⁶ of oil, so that they progress from virtue to virtue until they behold God in his beatitude. 8 May this house be fortified by a wall of spiritual protection so great and strong that the enemy who wants to break in will have to say that he has not time enough to tunnel through it nor the tools with which he can get at the foundations, let alone the wall itself. 9 May God look on this house as he looked on his people when he led them out of Egypt, showing them the way by day with a pillar of cloud and at night with a

1. "I have spoken earlier"; cf. ch.24.

2. "As Elijah did"; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 19:8.

3. "He accompanied Jacob"; cf. Genesis 28:1-22.

4. "His apostle . . . in boiling oil," i.e., St. John the Evangelist, who is said to have been boiled in a cauldron of oil outside Rome but left unharmed (see Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, volume I, p. 51).

5. "The seed that bears a hundredfold"; cf. Matthew 13:8.

6. "Widow's jar"; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 17:12-14.

pillar of fire.⁷ 10 May he bless those entering this house, as he blessed his apostles and me, his Mother, when he gave us the Holy Spirit and promised to remain with us until the end. 11 May there also be in this house a door through which everyone may enter, and may those entering it belong to my Son's sheep who hear the voice of the one who gave his life for them. May they be protected by the power of the Father, directed by the wisdom of the Son, inflamed by the love of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that, were a wolf to enter in sheep's clothing, it would result in their greater merit and bring the wolf down to the place prepared for it."

12 The Mother of God spoke again: "Know that the prophet was commanded⁸ to make the scenes of the destruction of the temple known to the ungrateful people. He saw them in a spiritual vision, not in the sense that they were physically in heaven but because spiritual things are understood through physical images. The disobedient people were meant to acknowledge their ingratitude, repent of their wickedness and prepare themselves to receive God's promise. 13 But they were deprived of God's promise and will remain deprived of it, because they persisted in their wickedness and refused to change their intention to the better. This is why the temple was not rebuilt nor will it ever be. 14 In my house, however, not only will material walls be raised, but also the souls of the righteous in it will be pleasing to my Son. They will spiritually fulfill in themselves the vision of the temple which God's prophet beheld in spirit."

⚡ Chapter 40

On Those Who Will Follow the Monastic Rule Dictated by Christ

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ describes three fruits, that is, three kinds of dispositions of the future members of the Order of the Holy Savior.

1 The Son of God speaks: "There will be three fruits in my order.¹ The first will come from the kind fear felt by a bride who is both willing and unwilling. She has tasted the will and pleasure of her bridegroom, but still wants his will to conform to her own. 2 This fruit will not taste the bridegroom's pleasure perfectly, because she has not completely emptied herself so to be filled with the sweet delights of the bridegroom. 3 The second fruit is the one who desires God and seeks to participate in his joy but is saddened by the hardships to be borne. 4 Such a one is like a soldier who forgets justice and the goal of attaining victory and instead seeks a large remuneration in the hour of prosperity but does not want to follow her lord in the hour of need. 5 The third fruit is that of the one who not only surrenders herself and all she has into the hands of God but makes over all she has and knows to God. She becomes like a beast of burden rather

7. "Pillar of cloud . . . pillar of fire"; cf. Exodus 13:21.

8. "The prophet was commanded"; cf. Ezechiel chs. 40-48.

1. "Order" renders "regula."

than human, seeks only the sweet delight of the lord, rejoices in hardships and is humble and fearful in success. 6 God will reward this fruit by rising up in mercy and granting the ascent to the promised joy in which the nations shall rejoice and the lukewarm regain their warmth and the ice-cold be set aflame.”

✠ Chapter 41

Birgitta is Instructed to Travel to Rome to Work for the Abbey's Foundation

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ tells St. Birgitta to travel to Rome and says that the Rule of the Holy Savior will make progress, etc.

1 The Son of God speaks: “The Rule has now been described, decorated with flowers and painted with colors. Go now to where you can meet the pope and the emperor. 2 This rule will indeed go forth like the beam of a lamp and force its way ahead until the third fruit¹ arises to thresh the corn and store the pure grain in my granary.”

✠ Chapter 42*

Birgitta Must Write to the German Emperor for Approval of the Rule

DATE: 1367, ROME

Christ tells St. Birgitta to write to the emperor regarding the approval of the Rule of the Holy Savior.

1 Christ speaks to the bride, saying: “Write the following words to the emperor¹ on my part: I am the light that gave light to everything² when darkness was covering it. 2 I am the light that was invisible as God but appeared as man. I am the light that made you its particular lamp in the world in order for a greater degree of justice to be found in you than in others so that you can lead everyone³ toward justice and piety. 3 I am the true light, and I placed you on the imperial throne, and I now declare to you: Because it pleases me to do so, I speak words of justice and mercy to a woman. 4 Welcome these words of my mouth which this woman has recorded in books. Examine them and strive to make my justice feared and my mercy rightly desired.

5 You who hold the imperial authority, be assured that I, the creator of the universe, have dictated a monastic rule in honor of my beloved Virgin Mother. I have given it to this woman who has written to you. 6 Read through it and,

1. “Third fruit”; cf. ch. 40.5.

* This revelation is duplicated in Book VIII ch. 51.

1. “The emperor,” i.e., Charles IV, who was born in Prague in 1316, and visited Rome for his coronation in 1355 and again in 1368. It appears that Birgitta met him in person, and appealed to him for help in the reform of the church and reconciliation in Europe, in addition to the support for her Revelations and the ratification of her Order, as described here. See also *Extravagantes* ch. 8 and 41; and Liebhart, “Birgitta of Sweden and Politics.”

2. “The light that gave light to everything”; cf. John 1:9.

3. “So that you can lead everyone”: the pronoun refers specifically to the emperor.

together with the supreme pontiff, see to it that this same rule, dictated by my very lips, is approved by him who is my vicar in the world and is accepted by the people. I am God and have approved it before my heavenly host.”

✠ Chapter 43

King Magnus is Instructed to Travel to Rome for the Remission of Sins and to Obtain Approval for the New Order

DATE: 1350S, ROME

Through St. Birgitta Christ shows a disobedient king how he may be reconciled with him.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Because he whom I called my son became disobedient and more like an irritable child than an obedient son, and because he did not follow the first way¹ by going to the pagans, I will now show him a second way² by which to become blessed, if he stays with it. 2 This is the way: he should go to the supreme pontiff, since supreme crimes must be rectified before the supreme lord and with the aid of his counsels. 3 If he goes, he should not blush to explain to him that he has plundered the commonwealth, betrayed souls, disregarded the Church, violated his own oath and public law, and recklessly surrendered and wasted the property rights and privileges of the royal crown. 4 He should plead for the absolution of his sins as well as for the approval of the Rule I revealed in his kingdom. Thus the bees may gather and the places already prepared and expected may be confirmed by his blessing. 5 He must not delay his journey, for otherwise, if he does delay, locusts and their larvae will take over the place prepared for the bees, defiling and wasting it with their excrement, and greater efforts will be required to clean and renovate it than were needed to build it from the start.”

✠ Chapter 44*

Pope Urban V is Urged to Ratify the Birgittine Rule

DATE: 1360S, ROME

Revelation of the indulgences of St. Peter in Chains and of the approval of the Rule of the Savior.

✠ Chapter 45

Prior Petrus of Alvastra is Instructed to Write down the Monastic Rule

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

1. “First way”: the king was advised to embark on a crusade to the eastern Baltic to convert the heathens there.

2. “Second way”: an alternative way forward for the king is suggested in Book VIII 52.

* This revelation duplicates Book IV ch. 137.

Through St. Birgitta Christ instructs Prior Petrus of Alvastra to put the Rule of the Holy Savior into writing.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Tell him to put the Rule dictated by my Spirit into writing. Take diligent care not to subtract anything or add anything from your own spirit but only what I have told you. 2 It will not displease me if the scribe adds anything from the rules of the fathers, where he sees it fits the subject and when he feels the accustomed guidance of my Spirit within him. 3 Like bees, Benedict and Francis and the other fathers built on earlier fathers for many aspects of their rules, and it pleased me, for they had my Spirit and their will was in accord with my will. Thus, whatever they laid down is pleasing to me.”

✠ Chapter 46

Birgitta is Instructed to Dictate the Monastic Rule to Petrus

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ instructs St. Birgitta to tell Lord Petrus, prior of Alvastra, about the Rule for the Order of the Holy Savior, and explains why he speaks to her and not to others.

1 “I want to reveal to you what kind of Rule there will be in my Mother’s abbey in order to make it known. Even hermits and the holy fathers received inspirations from my Spirit. 2 Therefore communicate whatever you hear in my Spirit to the scribe, and take care not to add a single word in any way from your own spirit to my words. 3 You may be wondering why I, the maker of all things, do not speak to some learned man or use language that anyone can understand and write down. 4 My answer: I had many prophets who were unable to express the words of my Spirit except through interpreters or scribal clerks, yet the words came to light and became known. When the gift of God is entrusted to more than one person, God is the more glorified. 5 This is the way it is with you. I do have friends through whom I can make my will known, but I want to reveal to you as my new instrument things both new and old in order that the proud may be humbled and the humble glorified.”

✠ Chapter 47

God Calls Birgitta to be his Bride and Mouthpiece

DATE: 1344 OR 1346, ALVASTRA

How and why St. Birgitta began to receive divine revelations.

1 Some days after her husband's death,¹ when blessed Birgitta was anxious about her situation, the Spirit of the Lord surrounded and inflamed her. Rapt in spirit, she saw a bright cloud, and out of the cloud she heard a voice saying to her: "I am your God, and I want to speak with you." 2 Afraid that it might be a trick of the enemy, she heard again: "Do not fear. I am the maker of the universe, not the seducer. Rest assured that I am not speaking only for your sake but for the sake of the salvation of all Christians. Listen to what I have to say. 3 You will be my bride and my conduit. You will hear and see spiritual and heavenly mysteries, and my Spirit will remain with you until death. 4 Keep your faith strong, for I am he who was born of the pure Virgin, who suffered and died for the salvation of all souls. I rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and I am now speaking with you in my Spirit."

✠ Chapter 48

After Initial Hesitation Prior Petrus Becomes Birgitta's Secretary

DATE: 1340S, ALVASTRA

A revelation about how Christ appointed Lord Petrus, then sub-prior of Alvastra, to write down these revelations, and how, when he refused, he punished him until he consented; Christ explained beforehand the purpose of these revelations.

1 While Lady Birgitta was at prayer, Christ appeared to her and said: "Tell Brother Petrus the sub-prior from me that I am like a lord whose children were held bound in hard wooden stocks.¹ He sent his representatives to set them free and to warn others about falling into the hands of enemies who they thought were friends. 2 I, God, have many children—Christians—who are caught in the oppressive traps of the devil. In my love I send them the words from my mouth spoken to a lady. 3 Hear them, brother Petrus, and write down all the words in Latin that she tells you to from me. For each letter I will give you neither gold nor silver but a treasure that never ages."

4 Lady Birgitta informed the prior (who was at the time sub-prior) right away about this revelation from Christ. However, he wished to think about it and stayed up late, struggling with his thoughts in the church. 5 In the end, when he had decided out of humility not to take on the task and not to write down the divine revelations, considering himself unworthy of it and also wondering if it might be one of the devil's tricks, he was knocked down with such force from a divine blow that he fell down then and there as though he were dead, losing the use of his senses and physical strength though he remained intellectually lucid in his mind. 6 When the monks found him lying on the ground, they carried him to his cell and placed him on the bed, and he lay there as though half-dead

1. "After her husband's death": this revelation, which took place very soon after Ulf Gudmarsson's death (in 1344 or 1346), is also recounted in the *Vita* (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 80 and 618); compare also Book I ch. 2.

1. "Hard wooden stocks"; cf. Book I 5.1.

for the greater part of the night. ⁷ It was by divine providence that the following thought finally occurred him: “Perhaps I am suffering this because I refused to obey the revelation and commandment of Christ that came to me through Lady Birgitta.” ⁸ And he said in his heart: “Lord God, if it is because of that, forgive me, for, look, I am ready and willing to obey and to write down all the words that she tells me to from you.” ⁹ At the very moment he agreed to it in his heart, he was cured immediately and without delay. He went quickly to Lady Birgitta and offered to write down all the revelations from Christ that she told him to.

¹⁰ The prior said that he heard from Lady Birgitta after this that Christ had told her the following in a revelation: “I struck him because he refused to obey, and then I cured him, for I am the physician who cured both Tobias² and the king of Israel. ¹¹ Tell him then: ‘Get about it, and consider and reconsider the task of recording my words, and start writing. I will give to you a master in my law to help you. ¹² You can be completely certain the work I want to accomplish through my words which you will record from the lips of this woman will be such as to humble the mighty and make the wise fall silent. ¹³ Do not think that these words spoken to you by this woman come from an evil spirit, for I will confirm what I tell you with deeds.’”



FIGURE 9. The Folkunga Palace, built in the thirteenth century, and donated to St. Birgitta to be converted to her abbey. The palace formed part of the nuns' convent, and housed its dormitory. Photo © Lars Berggren.

2. "Tobias"; cf. Tobit 11:10–15; 4 Kings (2 Kings) 20:5.

14 The prior said that he began right after this to write down and translate all the revelations and divine visions given to Lady Birgitta on her orders, though some of them were written by Lord Petrus the confessor, when the prior himself was not with her. 15 The prior said that he followed her afterward at the command of Christ and was her confessor and scribe of the revelations for thirty years until the death of the lady herself. 16 Before her death, Christ commanded that the revelations should be given to Lord Alfonso, a Spanish hermit, once bishop of Jaén. Thus did the books of the heavenly revelations come to be revealed and recorded.³

✠ Chapter 49

Christ Instructs Birgitta to let Alfonso Edit and Check all the Revelations

DATE: 1372, FAMAGUSTA, CYPRUS

In giving these revelations Christ compares himself to a carpenter; he sent them later to Lord Alfonso, bishop and later hermit, to clarify; he explains how the Holy Spirit sometimes separates his chosen ones from each other.¹

1 The Son of God spoke to the bride, saying: "I am like a carpenter who cuts wood from the forest and carries it home, then carves a beautiful image and adorns it with colors and contours. 2 His friends see that the image can be adorned with still more beautiful colors, and so they paint it with their own colors. 3 I, God, cut words from the forest of my divinity and placed them in your heart. My friends edited and arranged them in books, coloring and adorning them according to the grace given them. 4 Now in order to adapt them to several languages, give all these books containing revelations of my words to my bishop hermit. He will compile them and clarify obscure passages, capturing the Catholic sense of my Spirit. 5 My Spirit sometimes separates my chosen ones from each other in order that they examine my words, as it were, on a scale and ponder them in their heart, and so after much thought explain them more clearly and express them in a better way. 6 Your own heart is not always capable and enough on fire to express in writing the things you experience. Often instead you consider and reconsider them in your mind, and then you write and rewrite them, until you arrive at the true meaning of my words. In a similar way my Spirit used to ascend and descend on the evangelists and doctors of the Church. At certain times they would set down some things that had to be corrected, at other times things that had to be revised later, at still other

3. "Come to be revealed and recorded": there is material in this revelation that overlaps with Petrus's deposition in the canonization process; see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 510.

1. Title according to MSS n H o X F f: "Lady Birgitta received this revelation from God when she was in the city of Famagusta in the kingdom of Cyprus on her way to Jerusalem. In it Christ tells her to deliver all the books of the heavenly revelations to Alfonso the hermit, formerly a bishop, in order for him to compile, clarify and publish them."

times they were examined and reprimanded by others. 7 Yet others came later who pondered their words more thoroughly and explained them more clearly. And yet all my evangelists received the words of my Spirit through inspiration and declared them and wrote them down. 8 Tell the hermit² that he should carry out and fulfill the office of an evangelist.”³

✚ Chapter 50

Christ and the Virgin Discuss the Work of Salvation

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The Virgin Mary here extols Christ in five ways. Christ extols her in turn, beginning with the creation and downfall of the angels, going on to the redemption of humanity and the reason for his incarnation. He compares himself to the bird that only eats fresh heart.

1 Mary spoke: “Blessed are you, my dearest Son, who are without beginning or end, for these three perfections are in you: power, wisdom and virtue. 2 You displayed your power in the creation of the world, creating it out of nothing. You displayed your wisdom in the arrangement of the world, arranging all things in heaven, on earth, and in the sea with wisdom and intelligence. You displayed your virtue most especially when you were sent with the one who sent you to my womb. 3 Along with these three perfections you have two others, mercy and justice. You exercise all your power with mercy and justice, and your wisdom similarly, when you arranged all things with mercy, when you fought with and overcame the strong one¹ with wisdom. 4 You displayed your virtue in mercy and justice, when you decided to be born of me and to redeem him who fell on his own but could not get back up without you.”

5 The Son answered: “Blessed are you, Mother of the king of glory and Lady of the angels. Your words are sweet and true. You said rightly that I do all things in mercy and justice. 6 This was patently clear in the case of the angels at the original creation of the world. At the moment of their creation they saw in their conscience who I am, though they had not yet tasted me. 7 Accordingly, some of them, making good use of their freedom, resolved in conscience to stand firm out of love for my will. Others, however, became proud and turned their will against me and against reason. 8 It was therefore just that those who became proud were overthrown, but those who were righteous tasted my goodness and were strengthened, all the more.

2. “The hermit” i.e., Alfonso of Jaén, Birgitta’s confessor in the later years of her life; see further volume 1 p. 15. This revelation is a key description of his role as editor and publisher of the corpus as a whole (see too Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 98). Respect is shown for orthodoxy and faithfulness to the spirit of the revealed word. The text of this revelation occurs on the frontispiece to Book VII of Ghotan’s printed edition, Lübeck 1492. Compare also Book VII 31.6.

3. “The office of an evangelist”; cf. 2 Timothy 4:5.

1. “The strong one,” i.e., the devil; cf. Matthew 12:29.

9 Then to show my mercy and to fill the places of the fallen, in my love I created humankind out of the earth. They, too, fell through their own freedom and lost their original goodness and were driven away from pleasure, but, in mercy, were not abandoned completely. 10 Justice decided that they who had turned away from their original condition by their own free determination should return of free will and do so through one who was sinless and most pure. 11 Yet none could be found righteous enough to redeem himself, let alone bring about the salvation of others. There was no one who was immune to the sin of the first disobedience. 12 But God in his mercy placed in human seed a divinely created soul so that humankind could hope and wait for the coming of the most pure and good man who would be able to set the downfallen free and not let the devil forever rejoice in their fall.

13 Therefore, when the acceptable and eternally foreseen time arrived, it pleased God the Father to send me, his Son, with himself and the Holy Spirit, into your blessed womb, to take flesh and blood from you, for two reasons. 14 The first reason was so that the human race would serve none other than God, their creator and redeemer. The second was to manifest the love I had for them and the decision of justice which was that I, who was sinless, should die out of love in order to set captives free in justice. And so, my dear Mother, you were right to say that I do all things in justice and mercy.

15 Blessed are you, for you were so attractive that God was pleased to come to you and never leave you. You were as clean as the cleanest of homes, with the sweet smell of every virtue and every adornment of beauty. 16 You gleamed like a clear gleaming star without ever burning out. In your love for me you gleamed above all others, and you never burned out. 17 You were rightly called full of love and mercy, for love for all blossomed in you and all encountered mercy through you, because you concealed within yourself the fountain of mercy, and from its abundance you would show mercy even to your worst enemy, to the devil, if he humbly asked for it. Thus whatever you wish and ask for shall be given to you.”

18 The Mother answered: “My Son, my prayer is known to you from eternity. In order for this bride of yours to have the understanding of spiritual things, I ask that your words, which you were kind enough to reveal, may take root in the hearts of your friends and be perfectly fulfilled.”

19 The Son answered: “May the whole host of heaven bless you. You are like the dawn rising with the brightness of every virtue. You are like the star that goes before the sun, for your gentleness precedes my justice. You are the wise mediatrix² who makes peace between those who are at variance, between humankind and God. 20 For this reason, your prayer will be heard, and, as you wish, my words will be fulfilled. Truly you see and know all things in me, and so explain to your daughter, my bride, how these words should go forth into the world and how they should be made public with mercy and justice.

2. “Mediatrice”: this reference to the Virgin Mary emphasizes her intercessionary role in the work of salvation; cf. also Book I, Prologue, paragraph 5, and *Quattuor orationes*, paragraph 69.

21 I am like the bird that does not want to eat anything but the fresh flesh of a bird's heart nor to drink anything but its pure blood, and whose sight is so keen that it can assess whether the heart of a bird in its flight is fresh or corrupt, and thus only chooses birds with a fresh heart.³ 22 I am a bird like that. I desire nothing but a fresh heart, that is, a soul fresh with good deeds and divine affections, and I want to drink the blood of its love. This is my food: a burning love for God and a soul cleansed of sin.

23 Because I am loving and just and desire none but those who burn with love, my words must enter the world with justice and mercy. 24 With justice, so that people do not serve me because they fear my words or because they are drawn to service by some kind of physical satisfaction, but because of the divine love that arises from the interior consideration of my works and the remembrance of their sins. Someone who frequently thinks about these two finds love and finds me worthy of every good thing. 25 My words must enter with mercy so that people consider that I am ready to be merciful in order that they may understand the God whom they have neglected and who makes sinners better."

✠ Chapter 51

Instructions to the Swedish Archbishop to Promote Various Messages

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Here Christ tells a certain archbishop¹ why he wanted to reveal these words. He expresses his grief over all the categories of men. He fought through the trials of his suffering, but declares he is now neglected and rejected. He orders the archbishop to work on behalf of these revelations, as well as the king of Sweden to lead an expedition against the heathen, and the bishop of Åbo² to bring the matter before the pope. He points out that there are three kinds of demons that beset men.

1 "I am he who was sent with him who sent me to the womb³ of the Virgin and took on flesh and was born. But for what purpose? Surely in order that I might manifest the faith in words and deeds. Then I died in order to open up heaven. Buried, I rose again, and I will return as judge.

2 Now that the bishops have had their meeting,⁴ tell the archbishop this: 'You wonder why I speak these words of mine. Lift up your eyes and see! Listen with your ears and hear! Open your mouth and ask! 3 <Lift up your eyes

3. "Birds with a fresh heart": perhaps an eagle which is known to be keen-sighted, and who attacks its prey using sharp talons. The image of the eaten heart is also alluded to in Book IV 2.

1. "A certain archbishop": Hemming Nicholai of Uppsala, who was appointed by Pope Clement VI in 1342, and held a leading position in the council of the realm.

2. "The bishop of Åbo": Hemming of Turku (Åbo) was the bishop who led the mission to the pope in Avignon with revelations concerning the Hundred Years War and other matters (see also ch. 85 and 104).

3. "I am he who sent me to the womb"; cf. ch. 50.2.

4. "The bishops have had their meeting": on this meeting and those taking part, see volume 1 p. 41. See also Book I 52, Book IV 103-105, Book VI 63.

and see⁵ how neglected I am by everyone. See how cast off I am by everyone. See how no one wants to share his pleasure with me. 4 Prick up your ears and hear how greedy human hearts are from sun-up to sun-down, cruelly shedding their neighbor's blood because of greed. Hear how they all prettify their bodies out of pride. Hear how human pleasure is as irrational as that of animals. 5 Open your mouth and ask where the defenders of the faith are, where those who fight the enemies of God may be found, where those who lay down their lives for their Lord may be. Inquire into this diligently and you will find very few friends of mine. Ponder this, and you will know that I do not speak without cause.

6 Ask again and hear about the state of the Roman curia which should be my chair. 7 A chair has four legs to hold it up and a something in the middle for the sitter to rest on. In the same way, the chair I left behind for the supreme pontiff should also have four legs—humility, obedience, justice and mercy—and something in the middle—divine wisdom and charity. 8 But this has been changed, and a new chair is being used that has pride for humility, self-will for obedience, love of money for justice, anger and envy for mercy. In the middle it has the reputation of being a wise teacher by the measure of the world. See how changed and upside-down my chair is!

9 Look again and examine the head's remaining members and the whole clergy. You will find that I, the God and creator of all, am as heavy to them as a stone! I taste like poison to them; I am but a crumb in their gullet. 10 See how I rejected am! Behold how my love is repaid! I created and redeemed them with such justice and equity that, speaking metaphorically, if a balance were before me, I would place my very own heart on the scales in order to measure the weight correctly. 11 I was born and circumcised. I suffered hardship and distress. I was the object of insults. I was captured and scourged, tied with ropes and crushed as in an oil-press—my muscles were stretched beyond measure, my veins burst, my joints were pulled apart. 12 The top of my head was pierced by sharp thorns. The blood streamed down and got clotted, and defiled my whole face and beard. My mouth and tongue were covered in blood. My gums were swollen with sores.

13 When I was stretched out on the cross, my neck had nothing to lean against but my shoulders. My arms were stretched out by ropes to reach the holes of the crossbeam. My feet were pulled down and pierced with two nails⁶ and had nothing to support them but the nails. 14 My insides were all dry and contracted. My heart, being tender and quick, was full of pain, which would travel from my sinews to my heart and back again, and so the pain was increased and death prolonged. 15 I stood thus in anguish, and when I opened my eyes, I saw my mother standing there in tears. Her heart was full of grief, her body was numb and pale. Her grief and sorrow tormented me more than my own. 16 I also saw my friends in the greatest distress, some of them almost doubting, others keeping the faith but terribly unsettled. 17 As I was holding up in this

5. "<Lift up your eyes and see>": this phrase is lacking in all the Latin manuscripts but is supplemented from the Medieval Swedish text (Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 2, p. 242).

6. "With two nails": see the note to Book I 10.23.

great pain and persevering in sorrow, my heart at last burst from the violence of the suffering, and my soul departed. At its departure my head raised itself a little, and all my limbs trembled. My eyes opened half-way, my feet carried the entire weight of my body, and I hung there like a dirty rag. 18 See what I suffered, your Creator, and nobody cares. I lay my grievance before you to consider what I have done and what is repaid to me.

19 I ask you now to work with me. Everyone who wants to do some work must have three things. First, the material with which it is made. Second, the tools with which it is done. Third, divine foresight, so that it may be done intelligently. 20 I myself am the material. I am wisdom itself from which and through which all wisdom comes, I who have sent my words to the world. My friends are the tools. 21 Test my words, then, and see whether they are fresh and not rotten, whether they taste and feel of sound and upright faith. See if they are suitable and worthy of my gold. Consider whether they lead from the love of the world to the love of God, away from the path down to hell and up toward the heavenly heights. 22 If you find it so, then work with my friends as with good tools and do it for my glory. Work intelligently like an intelligent man, I say, and struggle manfully like a manly man. Work habitually like a friend of the Lord.

23 Finally, as your Lord, I order you to finish what you started. You have followed my way, you thrust your plow into a little patch of land and began to plow. 24 Now I order you: Turn and uproot the roots and thorns more habitually. Build churches there with the means of your church. I entrust this patch of the land to your hands, this I ask of you. So work fervently and habitually.'

25 I order the king to move against the enemies as quickly as possibly. If he thinks what he is doing for me is a lot, well, I have done greater things for him, since I did not even spare my own life for him. I shall give him three companions, two who have insight into spiritual things, and a third who knows the law of the church. 26 I commit⁷ his kingdom to the bishop who will bring along as associate a layman who does not take bribes in exercising justice, nor shows false respects when rendering judgment, nor trades gold for copper or mud for heaven.

27 I order the bishop of Åbo to bring the matter before the supreme pontiff. I order the pope not to take anything away but permit him to add whatever may be for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

28 They wonder why the spirit does not leave the possessed person.⁸ This is so they may ponder my great justice. I do no greater injury to the devil than to an angel in heaven. Justice demands that something goes as it has come. This spirit came from far off and will take a long while to leave. 29 There are three kinds of demons. The first is like the air that easily rolls in and darkens the human mind, leading a person to speak and act shamelessly. This easily comes and easily goes. This spirit was in that boy, as earlier revealed to you.⁹ 30 The second kind is like fire. It vexes body and flesh with impatience and makes

7. "I commit" renders "committo"; cf. MS v and Ghotan "commitet" [let him commit].

8. "The possessed person"; cf. Book III ch. 31.

9. "That boy, as earlier revealed to you"; cf. Book VI 81; Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 542, 630.

human life bitter, so that people would rather die than live, and impatience pushes them to everything the impure spirit suggests. It comes as easily as it goes, though the physical sickness remains. This was the case of that woman.¹⁰ 31 The third kind is like smoke. Where smoke gets in, it dirties and permeates everything. Similarly this kind of demon completely permeated that man's soul and body. Therefore, just as smoke gradually wafts far away through an open chimney, so too this spirit, which began to leave the man at the word, will leave him in stages until the man is wholly cleansed. 32 When as many tears have been shed and fasts undertaken as suitable and needed for the purpose, then the demon will go out entirely, and the man will feel himself cleansed. Just as this spirit drew near gradually and from far away, so justice demands that it will depart in similar fashion."

⚡ Chapter 52

Birgitta Asks the Virgin's Help in Self-Discipline

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

St. Birgitta accuses herself before the Blessed Virgin of having an untamed body and an unstable will. The comforting reply of the Virgin.

1 "Blessed are you, Queen of heaven! You despise no sinner who calls upon you wholeheartedly. Hear me, though I am unworthy to open my mouth and pray to you. 2 Without your support, I know that I cannot control myself, because my body is like an untamed animal that, without a bit in its mouth to restrain it, runs off to all its favorite places of pleasure. My will is like a bird's, constantly following flights of fancy and flying off with them. 3 This is why I ask you to rein in my body, as soon as it feels like running anywhere displeasing to your Son, and to lead it to where it can fulfill his will. May you also rope in that bird of a will of mine so that it flies no farther than is pleasing to your dearest Son."

4 The Virgin replied: "The prayer of a devout heart, outpoured in honor of God, deserves to be heard and accomplished. Since you ask for your body to be reined in so it can be led to the will of God, it is also best to give it a load to convey in honor of the leader. 5 Since your will makes you prefer silence to speaking with worldly people, and you think it more pleasant to suffer poverty in your home than to see all the wealth in the homes of princes, and because you do not mind their antagonism, provided you win the friendship of God, I will therefore impose on you the burden of speaking words to whomever God pleases."

⚡ Chapter 53

Concerning Birgitta's Sumptuous Bed

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

10. "That woman": possibly the prostitute mentioned in Book I 16; see further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 540, 629.

Referring to his suffering, Christ expresses disapproval of sumptuousness in homes and physical comfort.

1 Once it happened, while her husband was still alive,¹ that Blessed Birgitta had a carpenter make a bed more imposing and sumptuous than usual in her manor house in Ulvåsa.² She then felt as though she had been hit in the head by a hand so hard that she could scarcely move because of the pain. 2 When she was carried to another part of the house, she seemed to hear a voice from the wall telling her: "I did not stand but hung on the cross, and my head had nothing to rest on, but you are demanding this kind of sumptuous comfort for yourself." 3 After hearing this, Lady Birgitta melted into tears and was suddenly cured. After that she preferred to sleep on straw and bearskin than on the bed whenever she could.

✠ Chapter 54

Birgitta's Heart is like a Pot of Delicious Food

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

A spiritual vision of a pot with delicious food and a small fire underneath, and someone dressed in golden clothes busying himself about the pot, and the meaning of this.

1 Once when Lady Birgitta was at prayer, she saw before her in a spiritual vision a small fire with a small pot above it, and delicious food in the pot. 2 She also saw a man splendidly dressed in purple and gold. He went around the pot on bended knees, now blowing on the fire, now stirring the wood, and busying himself in this way about the pot. 3 Finally he said this to her as she was watching: "You who are watching this, did you ever see anyone as humble as I am? As you can see, I am dressed in golden clothes but still show so much concern for this pot. 4 I go around it on bended knees. I lay my head on the ground to blow on the fire. Now and then I bring pieces of wood and pile them up or move them apart, sparing no efforts. This is the proof of my great humility.

5 But I must show you what all this means. The pot signifies your heart. The food in it is the sweet words given to you by God from above. The small fire is the fervor of the love you have from God. 6 I am the devil, and I envy the consoling grace you have. That is the reason behind my humble concern. I blow on the fire not to make it burn more but to stir up the ashes of earthly affections so they get into the pot of your heart and make the appetizing food of the Holy Spirit's words inspired in you lose its taste. 7 I move the wood and

1. "Her husband was still alive": a rare revelation dating from the time when Birgitta's husband was still alive, cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 480, 629; also Book V rev. 11.

2. "Ulvåsa": Birgitta and Ulf's home in Östergötland (today a ruin), presumably only one of their many inherited properties throughout the land. See Book II chs. 24–27 for an allegorical description of a medieval household of the type Birgitta might have run at Ulvåsa.

sticks around to turn the pot of your heart toward the earth, that is, toward earthly acquaintances or relations so that God will thus be less loved by you.”

✠ Chapter 55

Brother Gerekinus at Alvastra had Apparitions Concerning Birgitta

DATE: 1340S, ALVASTRA

A description of Blessed Birgitta's outstanding and meritorious holiness which Brother Gerekinus¹ of Alvastra Abbey, a man of great holiness, saw and foretold.

1 A monk of holy life from Alvastra Abbey, with tears in his eyes and under an oath to Prior Petrus, described how his heart was full of consternation when Lady Birgitta came there to live in the same monastery.² With zeal for the rule and for holiness, he said in his heart: “Why does this lady reside here against our rule in a monastery of monks, ushering in a new way of doing things?” 2 Then he was caught up in mental ecstasy when at prayer and heard a voice telling him: “This woman is a friend of God, and this is why she has come to the monastery: in order to collect flowers beneath this mountain to provide medicine for all the people, even those beyond the seas and the boundaries of the world.” 3 This brother's name was Gerekinus. He led such a holy life that he never left the monastery for forty years but spent his days and nights in prayer. He received the special grace from God of almost always beholding the nine choirs of angels in his prayer. At the elevation of the body of Christ he saw the image of Christ as a boy.

4 On one occasion in Alvastra Abbey, Brother Gerekinus beheld Lady Birgitta raised up in the air with a river streaming out of her mouth. Then as he was praying he heard in his spirit a voice saying: “This is the woman who will come from the ends of the earth to give countless people wisdom to drink. 5 This will be a sign for you: she will announce to you from God's mouth when your life will end, and you will rejoice in her words and at her coming. Your desire not to see the evils God will bring on this house will soon be fulfilled.”

6 It is also said of this brother that the abbot ordered him once to help the brothers in the grinding-house. Not being used to the miller's art, he addressed an image of the Virgin Mary painted on the wall in the ordinary devotional style with these words: “Dearest Lady, the father abbot has ordered me to work with the millers. You know that I don't know anything about it, but I will do as you wish.” 7 The image replied: “Do what you have been doing up to now and I will serve for you in the grinding-house.” And this is what happened. Without those

1. “Gerekinus”: a devout resident at the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra, who was prone to seeing heavenly apparitions when he spent his nights in prayer. See further Book IV ch. 117, 121; Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 82, 545, 619–20.

2. “Came to live in the same monastery”: it is generally assumed she cannot have lived within the enclosure of the male convent, but rather in its vicinity; however, she appears to have had access to the monastic church.

who worked there knowing anything more than that Brother Gerekinus himself had joined them, he remained steadfast in prayer in the church.

8 One can read about this same brother in Book IV chapter 121: “The devil appeared and said, etc.”

✚ Chapter 56

Birgitta sees her Husband in Purgatory

DATE: 1344/1346, SWEDEN

The husband of blessed Birgitta, Sir Ulf Gudmarsson of blessed memory, appeared to her after his death, and described the causes of his punishments in purgatory and explained the means to aid his speedy release.¹

1 A dead man appeared saying: “I have experienced the justice of the judge. The severity of the sentence is being lessened step by step and the moment of mercy approaches. While I was alive, there were five transgressions of which I did not fully repent in my final moments. 2 My first great transgression has to do with that idiot boy² whom you know, by applauding his foolish actions and taking delight in his idiocies. 3 The second is that I did not give that widow full payment for the property bought from her before my death, and this was due to my own negligence. So that you know I speak the truth, tomorrow she will come to you and ask for it. So give it to her, for she is only asking for the due amount. 4 The third is that I made a lightheaded promise to a man that I would be there for him in all his difficulties, and this made him more audacious and he rose up against the king and against the law. 5 The fourth is that I exerted myself in tournaments and similar worldly pursuits more to show off than for any real benefit. 6 Fifthly, I was too obstinate and unrelenting with regard to the exile of a certain nobleman. Although he did deserve his sentence, I treated him less mercifully than I should have.”

7 The lady answered: “O happy soul, what first contributed to your salvation³ or what is it that can now contribute to your salvation?” 8 He answered: “Six things contributed to it. First of all, the confession I made every Friday when I had the opportunity with the firm purpose of amendment and doing my penance. 9 The second is that when I acted as judge, I made my decisions uninfluenced by a desire for money or favors but, rather, reviewed all my decisions carefully and was ready to correct errors and retract anything done wrongly. 10 The third is that I

1. Ulf's death date is generally given as 1344, the date recorded on his tombstone at Alvastra. An alternative date of 1346 has also been suggested, on the basis of some manuscripts that give Birgitta's year of calling to the spiritual life as 1346, which allegedly happened within a few days of Ulf's death. The later date of 1346 is also supported by statements recording the number of years of her active calling, which is given in the *Vita* as the twenty-eighth year before her death (i.e., twenty-seven years before her death in 1373).

2. “That idiot boy”: speculation about the boy's identity ranges from a court jester to a boy with a mental disability who lived at Ulvåsa.

3. “What first contributed to your salvation”: that is, that Ulf was not eternally damned but was in purgatory.

obeyed my director⁴ who advised me to observe abstinence as soon as I realized there was a living child.⁵ 11 The fourth is that I was as careful as I could be to avoid tactlessness, overbearingness, or haughtiness toward the poor in myself or members of my household when providing hospitality for them, and I was scrupulous about not contracting any debts unless I knew that I would have the means to repay them. 12 The fifth is the mortification I took on myself on the pilgrimage to St. James,⁶ for I had decided not to drink between stops on the way. This mortification erased all the times I had taken too long at dinner as well as my talkativeness and my excesses in eating and drinking. And now I am certain of my salvation, though I am uncertain of the hour. 13 The sixth is that I entrusted my right to judge to men I believed to be just, so that they in return should pay my debts. Because I was anxious not to be in debt, I returned his provinces to the king while I was still alive so that my soul would not be subject to God's condemnation.

14 Now then, since I have been permitted to ask for help, and because I hope to be released sooner, for a full year I ask you to have votive masses said of Holy Mary our savior, the angels and all saints as well as masses for the deceased, and, above all, votive masses of the passion of Christ, our Savior. 15 Be especially mindful of the poor and generously distribute pottery,⁷ horses, and other things of the kind that were objects of sinful pleasure to me. 16 If you can, do not neglect to offer some chalices for the divine sacrifice, because they are especially effective for the speedy salvation of souls. 17 Give the immovable property to our children, because my conscience does not reproach me for having wrongfully acquired or kept or wanted to keep any of them."

✠ Chapter 57

Birgitta's Temptations to Gluttony

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Once the bride of Christ was tempted by a spirit of gluttony and an angel gave her a sure way to avoid this kind of temptation.

1 Once in Alvastra Abbey Blessed Birgitta felt such a strong temptation to gluttony that she could hardly think of anything else because of hunger. Finally while she was at prayer, she had a spiritual vision of two men, an Ethiopian who seemed to hold a morsel of bread in his hand, and a beautiful youth who held a gilt vase. 2 The youth said to the Ethiopian: "Why are you bothering this woman who is entrusted to my custody?" The Ethiopian answered: "Because she boasts of the abstinence that she does not observe. She never stops filling her belly

4. "I obeyed my director," i.e., Mathias of Linköping, who was Ulf's confessor, as well as Birgitta's, during the 1340s.

5. "There was a living child": that is, as soon as Birgitta became pregnant.

6. "The pilgrimage to St. James": Birgitta and Ulf travelled to Santiago de Compostela in around 1341 (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 482, 309). It was the first of three great pilgrimages she was to make in her life. In later iconography she is often represented as a pilgrim.

7. "Pottery" renders "vasa," presumably referring to household objects of value.

until it is full of delicious filth. So I am offering her my morsel to make fatter foods seem sweet to her.” 3 The youth answered: “You know well enough that she does not have an immaterial nature like ours but an earthly sack which, because it is made of unstable and unsettled earth, needs to be refreshed constantly.” 4 The Ethiopian said: “Your Christ fasted at times and ate not a thing, and the prophets ate bread and drank water in moderation. That is why they deserved higher things. But how will this one deserve it when she is always feeling full?” 5 The angel answered: “Surely Christ is not yours as well as ours?” He said: “Not in the least, for I will never humble myself before him but instead do the opposite, since I will not reenter his glory.” 6 The youth answered: “Christ taught humankind to fast not in order to weaken the body beyond moderation but to humble it so that it would not be insolent to the soul. Our Christ does not look for things impossible to nature but for moderation. And he does not look at how much a person eats or what but with what kind of intention and with how much love.” 7 The Ethiopian said to him: “It is right for this woman to experience in old age what she did not experience in her youth.” In reply the youth said: “The kind of fasting that is praiseworthy is abstinence from sin. Rich clothing and delicate food do not keep people from getting to heaven, if they have the love of God, since the customs of a good upbringing should at times be practiced with gratitude, so that the body does not grow too weak.”¹

8 At the same time the Virgin Mary appeared to Lady Birgitta wearing a crown. She said to the Ethiopian: “Silence, you spiteful barterer!² This woman has been allotted to me.” The Ethiopian said: “If there is nothing else I can do, then at least I will thrust a thorn into the fringe of her dress.” The Virgin replied: “I will help her, and as often as you thrust it there, it will be thrust back at your face, and her reward will be doubled.”

≠ Chapter 58

Three Aspects of Birgitta's Fasting

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The Virgin Mary says that all fasting and other meritorious acts must be done with obedience and discretion. She speaks of three important aspects of fasting.

1 Mary speaks: “You should do everything you do with obedience and discretion. My Son is more pleased when you eat than when you fast contrary to obedience. There are three aspects you must safeguard when you fast. 2 First, do your fasting without the vanity of those who want to show off with the intention of being as good as others when it comes to fasting and industriousness. 3 That is irrational. One's fasting must be adjusted to one's physical forces and

1. Paragraphs 1–7 are duplicated in Book VI 17 Addition, paragraphs 11–15; and paragraph 8 is abbreviated from Book VI 8–10. See further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 93, 626.

2. “Barterer” renders “negociator,” a term that also occurs in ch. 95.

the need to tame illicit tendencies and be no more demanding than nature can bear. 4 Second, do your fasting without the foolishness of those who want to fast as much in sickness as in health contrary to the strength of one's constitution. Such people have no confidence in my Son's mercy—as if he would not accept their sickness in place of their works and will! 5 Therefore, my daughter, fast in an intelligent way. Whenever you are sick, treat your body a little more gently. Show it the same compassion as you would to an irrational animal, so that it does not break down from exertion. 6 Third, do your fasting without the senselessness of those who fast more than others in order to obtain a greater reward and greater glory than others. They act like people who set their own wages for their work. 7 Accordingly, fast only to please my Son, and as far as your nature can bear. Moderate yourself according to your physical strength, always trusting in the mercy of my Son. 8 Do not consider yourself worthy of anything, and do not think that any of your exertions are sufficient for the pardon of your sins, or even less so for your eternal reward, not unless my Son has mercy on you."

✠ Chapter 59

An Episode concerning the Relics of St. Louis of France

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

The relics of the saints must be held in reverence.

1 When Blessed Birgitta was the teacher of Queen Blanka,¹ then queen of Sweden, she received from her a lovely ivory case containing the relics of several saints, including St. Louis,² king of France, which the queen had herself brought from France. 2 By accident the case was put away in an unsuitable place by the servants and forgotten. Then Blessed Birgitta had a spiritual vision of a splendid ray of light coming from the case. 3 While she was wondering over this, she heard a voice saying to her: "See, the treasure of God is honored in heaven but despised on earth. Let us move somewhere else!" After hearing this, the lady had the case put in a place of honor on the altar.

✠ Chapter 60

Birgitta Grants her Body the Necessary Refreshment, in Obedience to her Spiritual Father

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

1. "Blanka": Blanche of Namur, wife of King Magnus Eriksson, queen of Sweden, d. 1363; see further volume 2, p. 20n13. The suggestion here that Birgitta was her teacher ("magistra") may imply that Birgitta had a position at the royal court, perhaps during the 1330s after Blanche's wedding to Magnus in 1335, and Birgitta may have been employed to give her instruction in Swedish customs.

2. "St. Louis": Louis IX (1214–70), the only canonized king of France, often regarded as the model of the Christian king. He died during his second crusade, in Tunis. His entrails were sealed in an urn in the basilica of Monreale, Palermo, and his corpse was eventually taken to the French royal necropolis at Saint-Denis in Paris. Cf. further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 528, 632.

Here Christ explains that he is not displeased if God's elect make reasonable use of baths or other physical cures.

1 When Blessed Birgitta was praying, Christ appeared to her and said: "May you understand that the men who seemed to be spiritual under the Old Law were called the pharisees, and they did three things. 2 They washed themselves constantly in order to seem clean. They fasted and prayed in the open in order to be called holy. They taught and established a lot of precepts which they themselves hardly fulfilled. Little good it did them in God's sight, for their intention was tainted and their soul impure. 3 While the washing of the body does no good to an impure soul without the cleansing of the conscience, it is not an obstacle to a pure soul, so long as it is motivated by compassion and done without too much pleasure. 4 This is why I was more pleased that you obeyed your master¹ against your will, than if you had followed your will against his instructions. 5 Many of my elect made no use of bodily cures or other relaxations, and they were pleasing to me. Others, however, according to the circumstances of time and place and various infirmities, did make use of cures for themselves, and they, too, were pleasing to me, because they did it all in order to serve me. 6 Thus, selfless obedience pleases me more than great sacrifices."

✚ Chapter 61

Birgitta Follows Magister Mathias's Advice to Drink Between Meals

DATE: 1340S, ALVASTRA

A pious custom can be changed for the sake of obedience.

1 Blessed Birgitta was accustomed not to drink between times.¹ It happened one day that she experienced so much thirst that she could hardly speak. 2 When Master Mathias, her spiritual father, saw it, he told her to take something to drink. Although it seemed hard to her to change all her earlier custom, nevertheless she obeyed. 3 Then she heard in the spirit: "What makes you afraid to change your behavior? Do I happen to have need of any good of yours, and will you get into heaven on your own merits? So be obedient to your master. He has experience of the conflict of the two spirits of truth and deception.² 4 Even if you ate and drank ten times for the sake of obedience,³ it would not be imputed to you as a sin."

1. "You obeyed your master"; presumably Mathias. A witness states that after Ulf's death Birgitta resolved not to bathe as an expression of her grief, and when she fell ill her doctors ordered a hot bath and her confessor told her to abandon her resolution for the sake of her health (cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 490).

1. "Between times": the same expression is used in ch. 56 regarding the fact that Ulf did not pause between stops to take a drink during his and Birgitta's pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James. According to a witness the present revelation occurred at Alvastra (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 491), and therefore the expression must refer to intervals during her daily routine rather than intervals in a journey.

2. "The two spirits of truth and deception": as a learned cleric, Mathias had the gift of the discernment of spirits, an important factor not least as a means of authenticating Birgitta's divine visions; cf. Book I 4, 54.

3. "For the sake of obedience": on obedience and the breaking of her fast see also Book IV 106 and Book VI 111.

‡ Chapter 62

A Devil Tempts Birgitta toward Pride

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

How St. Birgitta separated herself from the devil and turned herself wholeheartedly to God, and how much the devil hates God.

1 Angels appeared, and among them an evil one who said: “Your soul has a different disposition now than before. Your nurse is now separating herself from you. I am talking about pride, and pride is me. Why do you not speak to me and show me the same favor as before?” 2 She answered in her soul: “Because you do not love God. Even if you fed my mind with every delight and dressed my body in gold, I would not love you, because you reject my God. 3 I would rather go with God to punishment than with you to every pleasure. Because you hate God, everything that belongs to you is hateful to me. However if you would turn your mind to God, I would surely love you and do your will.” 4 The devil answered: “Truly, if I could take on a mortal body, I would suffer every kind of bodily punishment and all the punishments of hell besides rather than turn my love to God.”

5 Two good angels answered: “Since our Lord is your God and Creator, why do you not want to submit to him?” He answered: “Because I made up my mind and set my will to be so, and I refuse to change. That is how much I hate him.”

6 One of the two angels said: “Lord, although you have all things in mind, still, because it so pleases you, I will remind you of something you said. 7 Earlier you said about your new bride: ‘When I turn south, she turns west.’ Now you can say, wherever you turn, your bride turns with you as far as she is able.” The Lord answered: “It is fitting for the bride to be obedient and to humble herself before her God.”

8 That said, an angel of wondrous beauty appeared, and the two angels seen earlier said to him: “O friend, why do you offer to our God an empty nutshell?” etc. Book IV 107.

‡ Chapter 63

The Virgin Promises to Care for Birgitta and tells her to Obey St. Agnes’s Instructions and her Spiritual Leader’s Advice

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

St. Birgitta’s words to the Virgin Mary about her love for her and the Virgin’s affectionate reply.

1 “Blessed be you, Mary, Mother of God, and blessed be God, your Son Jesus Christ, for all the joy he gave to me because you are his mother. He knows that Mary, daughter of Joachim,¹ is dearer to me than the children of Ulf and

1. “Daughter of Birger . . . daughter of Joachim”: the use of patronymics was common throughout medieval Scandinavia in Birgitta’s time; cf. Book V rev. 5.

Birgitta. 2 I would rather that Birgitta, daughter of Birger, had never been born, than that Mary, daughter of Joachim, had not earlier been born. I would easily choose for Birgitta to be in hell rather than for Mary, daughter of Joachim, not to be the Mother of God in heaven.”

3 The Blessed Virgin replied: “Daughter, you can be sure that Mary, daughter of Joachim, will be more useful to you than you, Birgitta, daughter of Birger, are to yourself. Mary, daughter of Joachim, who is the Mother of God, wants to be like a mother to the children of Ulf and Birgitta. 4 Therefore be firm, obey the advice Agnes gives you in spiritual visions, and obey your master.² Both of them are instructing you in the one spirit. By obeying either one of them, you obey both.

5 But tell him to do as he has been told, though it will lead to physical suffering, because the sufferings that stand in the way of good works are only the snares of the devil. 6 He should jump over the snares and go forward like a man, for the path on which a man begins to tread in great suffering for the glory of God will lead him to greater recompense than the path with less suffering. The Lord will take every step into account for his reward.”

≠ Chapter 64

On the Temptations that Concern Birgitta and her Circle

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

St. Birgitta testifies here to the twofold kindness of the Virgin Mary. Also concerning five temptations that are typical obstacles in the spiritual life.

1 “Blessed are you who are both Virgin and Mother! Mary is your name. You gave birth to Jesus Christ. There is a comparison I once heard to the effect that many noble and wise men gave witness that a certain person was kind and merciful. A crowd of poor people, standing at a distance, shouted and said that their witness was true. 2 O my dearest Lady, it seems to me that all the noble and wise saints bear you witness that you are most kind and merciful. I, one of the crowd of poor people with nothing good of my own, shout and say that their witness is most true. 3 I entreat you humbly, kindest Lady, to have mercy on me. I feel like I am in a dangerous position. It seems as if I am standing on the borderline between two houses—one a very bright house, the other very dark. While I turn my eyes to the dark house, everything I have seen in the bright house seems to me like a dream in the night.”

4 The Blessed Virgin replied: “Although I know everything, tell me what you saw spiritually in the dark house.” 5 I answered: “It seemed to me as though there was a single entrance into the dark house and a narrow exit. Outside the exit there was a clear brightness, in which everything was beautiful. 6 There were many paths leading from the entrance to the exit, and on each of them stood five mortal

2. “Your master”: presumably Magister Mathias.

enemies of all those passing through. 7 The first enemy was speaking with coaxing words, but he aimed a burning flame into the brain of those who lent him their ears. 8 The second held flowers and other quickly fading fruits of the earth in his hand. But anyone who looked at them with the desire of possessing them was pierced through the eyes as though by a sharp spear. 9 The third enemy held a glass full of poison but lined with a little honey outside on top, and he poured the poison down the throat of everyone who tasted the glass. 10 The fourth had a number of precious nuggets of gold and silver and precious gems, the work of human hands. Anyone who stretched out his hand to take them was wounded by a poisonous snake. 11 The fifth spread soft cushions by the feet of those passing through, but as soon as anyone wanted to rest on them, he took away the pillow, and the person who thought to rest fell down deep on to the hardest stones.”

✠ Chapter 65

How Birgitta's Servants should Arrange their Daily Life in Rome

DATE: 1350S, ROME

Here Christ reveals to the bride a regulated way of life for her and her household.

1 Christ speaks: “I advise you¹ to sleep four hours before and four hours after midnight. Those who cannot do so should have the intention, and that will do them good. Those who can reduce these eight hours’ sleep in a reasonable way without lessening their strength or senses will gain a greater reward. 2 Then you should allow four hours for prayers or other devotions and useful work so that not an hour may be unprofitably spent. 3 You may sit at table for two hours, but if you can do it in less, God will reward you for it. You should not prolong it without a good reason. 4 Then you should allow six hours for carrying out any necessary tasks which you have permission or orders to do. 5 You should allow two hours for vespers and compline and devotional prayers. 6 After that you should allow two hours of mealtime for eating and drinking and suitable relaxation for your physical recreation.

7 After you get out of bed you should maintain silence for four hours, not speaking without permission and only when truly necessary and giving only brief replies, if anything is asked of you. 8 After that you may enjoy moderate and suitable conversation² for your physical rest and recreation. After grace is said, you should keep silence until you say the prayers you have been instructed and required to do. 9 You should plan the six hours in accord with the instructions of your master,³ studying or doing useful work. You are then free to carry

1. “I advise you”: the revelation is addressed in the plural (“consulo vos”), presumably not just to Birgitta but her entire household.

2. “Suitable conversation” renders “honestam consolacionem,” the same expression as is rendered as “relaxation” in paragraph 6, though here it is more specific to the keeping of silence.

3. “Your master”: presumably Master Petrus of Skänninge, who was charged with the daily running of the household in Rome.

on suitable and pious conversation with whomever you want. 10 At vespers and compline you should maintain silence. In the brief time from then until supper, you may speak with one another, and when supper is over, you may have consoling conversation until bedtime.

11 In the gospel I said⁴ that he who gives a cup of cold water in my name shall not lose his reward. Hence I will reward accordingly any fasting, however slight, undertaken in my honor and faithfully completed. 12 You know the fasts to be kept when you are on pilgrimage.⁵ If you were in a monastery, you would perhaps have greater leisure and abundance. Therefore take only what is necessary for the body with prudent frugality. 13 Have only one kind of soup, whether it be vegetables or some other base, but give the rest up in honor of God. You may have two sorts of meat or fish on the table, but forgo anything more than that in my honor. 14 Eat the bread set before you, and if you need more than that, ask your master for it in my name. The same rule goes for drinking. 15 You should also understand that a sick person cannot observe the same rule as a healthy and fit person. For that reason the sick may ask for what they need and receive what is available. 16 Because you have decided not to own anything, you should not without permission give away anything or accept anything given.

17 I caution you that the devil is always prepared with his snares and his plots for you at all hours. Accordingly I advise you to note any words you may have uttered incautiously during the times of silence and to make a good confession of them and do proper penance for them. 18 If any useless or thoughtless speech has occurred, then the penance and reparation should be greater. 19 But if anyone interrupts someone else out of sudden passion or in anger, you should immediately find a suitable place to say a Hail Mary and humbly ask God's forgiveness. 20 Every Friday you should come to the chapter⁶ with the intention of not hiding or repeating any of your transgressions but of humbly improving your behavior as enjoined on you."

≠ Chapter 66

While Returning from Santiago de Compostela¹ with her Husband, Birgitta is Told that she will Visit the Holy Land

DATE: C. 1342, SPAIN

St. Birgitta is promised that she will see what Christ was like.

1 Mary speaks: "I am the Queen of heaven and the Mother of mercy. I want to show you what my Son was like in his human nature and what he was like when he

4. "In the gospel I said"; cf. Matthew 10:42.

5. "When you are on pilgrimage" renders "in itinere"; alternatively, simply when she was traveling in general.

6. "The chapter": the regular chapter meeting in the monastery, where participants would confess their faults.

1. "Santiago de Compostela": very little is known of Birgitta's pilgrimage to Spain, except that on the return journey Ulf Gudmarsson fell ill, in Arras in Flanders. See also ch. 56, 92, and Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 80–81, 512, 619.

suffered on the cross. This will be a sign for you: you will come to the places where I spent my bodily life, and there you will see my Son with your spiritual eyes.”

✠ Chapter 67

Birgitta is Comforted by the Virgin Shortly Before her Death

DATE: 1373, ROME

The consoling words of the Virgin Mary to blessed Birgitta in her final sickness.

1 The Virgin Mary appeared to Blessed Birgitta a short while before her death, and said to her: “If a woman gives birth when she is sick,¹ all the children to whom she gives birth will be sick. But you will give birth to strong and healthy children who are devoted to God, and you will therefore be much healthier than you ever were before. You will not die but come to the place promised and prepared for you. 2 St. Francis was sick for a long time, and yet he bore fruit and did the will of God. Afterward he was cured and he did and does much more than when he was sick. 3 But you may wonder why your sickness lingers so long and consumes your strength and physical constitution. My answer is that my Son and I love you. 4 Do you not recall that my Son told you in Jerusalem² that your sins were forgiven when you entered the Holy Church of his sepulcher, just as when you were baptized? However, I did not say that you would not have to suffer anything while you lived in the world. 5 It is God’s will that human love should correspond to God’s love and that negligences in the past should be washed away by patiently enduring sickness.

6 Remember that I have said to you many times that my Son’s and my words can be understood spiritually and bodily. As I told you in the city of Stralsund, if you should be called from the world before the divine words contained in these heavenly books and given to you divinely attain their fulfillment, then you will be counted as a nun in Vadstena³ because of your good intention and will share in all God’s promises to you.”

✠ Chapter 68

On the Same Occasion, the Virgin Explains what it is to Live and Die Spiritually

DATE: 1373, ROME

The Blessed Virgin explains here what it means to die or live spiritually.

1. “If a woman gives birth when she is sick”: Birgitta sometimes uses birth imagery at the point of death, most notably in Book VII 13.

2. “My Son told you in Jerusalem”; cf. Book VII 16.

3. “You will be counted as a nun at Vadstena”; cf. Book VII 31.3.

1 The Virgin Mary appeared to Blessed Birgitta on the sixth day before her death, saying: “Do the doctors tell you that you will not die? Truly, my daughter, they are not considering what it means to die. 2 That person dies who is separated from God through being a hardened sinner who has not vomited up the filth of sins by means of confession. Again, that person is dead who does not believe in God or love his Creator. 3 But that person lives and does not die who always fears God and washes away his sins in frequent confession and desires to come to his God in the end. 4 The God of nature¹ speaks with you, but he also plans and maintains your life against nature, because there is neither health nor life in medicaments. Nor is it necessary for you to rely on medicine now, for a small amount of time requires only a small amount of food.”

✚ Chapter 69

The Virgin Praises Katherina Ulfsdotter for Living Voluntarily in Rome with her Mother

DATE: 1360S, ROME

The prayer of St. Birgitta to Holy Mary. The Virgin’s reply with praise for Blessed Katherina, the daughter of the bride.

1 The bride of Christ was praying to the Virgin, saying: “O my dearest Lady, I beseech you for the love of your beloved Son, help me to love him with all my heart. I feel myself too weak to love him as ardently as I ought. 2 So I beseech you humbly, Mother of mercy, to tie my heart with his love and make every effort to pull it to your Son, separating it from all carnal desire, pulling it all the more strongly the heavier it gets.”

3 The Blessed Virgin answered: “Blessed is he who inspires such a prayer in you! But although you are enjoying speaking with me, go and sew your daughter’s dress. She prefers an old and repaired dress to a new one and would rather wear coarse woolen cloth than garments of silk or other precious material. 4 She is blessed who has thus freely given up worldly things. With his kind consent she has given up her husband whose body she loved as her own and whose soul she loved more than both their bodies. She has given up her brothers and sisters, her relatives and friends in a physical sense in order to help them spiritually. 5 She has not been concerned about worldly possessions. All her sins have been forgiven her because she has given up her family.¹ May she remain steadfast from this moment on, and in place of earthly possessions she will gain the kingdom of heaven and Jesus Christ for her husband, and all who love her will go toward God because of her.”

1. “The God of nature” renders “Deus naturarum” [the God of natures].

1. “Because she has given up her family”: Katherina had gone to Rome soon after her unconsummated marriage to Eggard Lydersson van Kyren, and she was to remain her mother’s companion for several years. Later she became the first abbess at Vadstena.

✠ Chapter 70

Birgitta Gives Alms to Some Poor People

DATE: C. 1349, LÖDÖSE, SWEDEN

Christ here promises himself to be the provider to his bride and her people for the sake of charity.

1 It happened that when Blessed Birgitta was near Lödöse¹ in the kingdom of Sweden, a poor relative of hers asked her to have mercy on him, because he was trying to arrange a wedding for his engaged daughter but was unable due to poverty. 2 Lady Birgitta, hearing from the steward of her household how much she had in ready money, said: “Give a third part of what you have to this poor man so that his daughter, being helped, may pray for us.” 3 When they entered the city, they found a group of poor people gathered outside the door of Lady Birgitta’s lodgings and she directed that alms were to be given them. 4 The steward protested that what he had was in no way sufficient to pay for the lodgings, unless he received a supply of money from someone else. He added: “And how can you dole out money so generously? That’s just grand, giving paupers money and then having to borrow from others.” 5 Lady Birgitta said to him: “Let us give while we have, for our merciful God gives generously to us when we are in need. I have been set apart for these poor people, for they have no other assistance. In my own needs, however, I abandon myself to the will of God.”

6 When they heard Mass in the church, Blessed Birgitta heard Christ saying to her in her prayer: “Our daughter resembles her who is in such a hurry to get to her bridegroom that she forgets mother and father and all she has, until she finds him whom she seeks. 7 What will the groom do then? He will, of course, send his servants, and make sure that everything belonging to the bride reaches her. Because of your charity, my daughter, we will provide for you and yours. It was charity that brought me into the womb of the Virgin in a manner indescribable, and it is a person’s charity that brings God into his soul.”

✠ Chapter 71

When Master Petrus of Skänninge was Overcome by Robbers he Showed Exemplary Courage

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

St. John the Baptist¹ speaks to Blessed Birgitta about a man, probably Master Petrus Olavi, her confessor [who has been mentioned above].

1 “O daughter, you need not worry about the victory of your spiritual friend. God’s soldier and friend won a fine victory over God’s enemy. The enemy was

1. “Lödöse”: an important centre of trade in the middle ages, a precursor to modern day Gothenburg. See also Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 499.

1. “John the Baptist”: an unusual interlocutor in the *Revelationes*, in an obscure vision that seems to have been prompted by a robbery.

running incautiously behind him with the intention of wounding him by leading him into anger against the thieves who had robbed him. ² He, however, rushed right up against the enemy's spear and shattered it. He impaled him on his own spear in this way: when they had taken away everything from him, without any agitation or anger, he said: 'Friends, if you want anything to drink, there is still some wine in the wineskin.' ³ He impaled the enemy with a second spear in this way: as they were taking his cloak, he offered them his shirt without any impatience. ⁴ He impaled him with a third spear in this way: when they had withdrawn, and he was left behind naked, he thanked God for his troubles, full of joy, and prayed for the offenders with charity. He went on his way again, not at all ashamed of his nakedness, and all our company rejoiced together with him in his victory."

✚ Chapter 72

Before her Husband's Death Birgitta is Promised Future Spiritual Gifts

DATE: 1340? 1342?, SWEDEN

St. Botvid gained the merit of this grace for Blessed Birgitta.

¹ Four years before her husband's death,¹ St. Botvid² of Sweden appeared to Birgitta in a spiritual ecstasy and said: "Together with other saints I gained for you the merit of the divine grace of hearing, seeing and perceiving spiritual things, and the spirit of God will set your soul aflame."

✚ Chapter 73

Advice for King Magnus Eriksson

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Kingdoms are sometimes lost due to bad rulers. Concerning how the king should conduct himself following God's will.

¹ The Son of God speaks: "In the same way as a kingdom may sometimes be saved thanks to one man's charity, so too kingdoms may be lost due to new burdens and contrivances. I will give you the example of one kingdom. ² The king trusted in money wrested from the people and from travelers by fraud and a pretense of justice more than in God. For this reason he lost his life and forfeited the kingdom in affliction. His low contrivances were established as custom and law. ³ However, if a man trusts in God, and help is mercifully asked

1. "Four years before her husband's death": the "apparition" of St. Botvid takes place before the death of Birgitta's husband, foretelling her future spiritual life in widowhood.

2. "St. Botvid": a missionary who converted while trading in England and returned to his native Södermanland where he was killed in c. 1120 by an axe while on a boat. See further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 81, 486, 619.

from the people, God has the might to save speedily and will quickly restore peace for his charity's sake. 4 Thus the king, if he wishes to prosper, should keep his promise to God and be truthful with the people, and be careful not to introduce any new contrivances or complicated regulations. 5 In times of difficulty he should listen to the advice of those who fear God and not of the greedy, for it is better to suffer worldly setbacks than to sin knowingly against God and his own soul."¹

‡ Chapter 74

A Warning to the Swedish Knights; the King Should Support the Monastic Foundation

DATE: 1349?, SWEDEN

God issues a grave warning to a certain king's company of knights; God's sentence can be mitigated in three ways.

1 Jesus Christ speaks: "Earlier I told you that I would come to punish the knights of this kingdom with sword and spear and anger. But they answer: 'God is merciful. Nothing bad will happen. Let us do what we want, for our time is brief.' 2 Now hear what I say. I will rise up and will spare neither young nor old, rich or poor, just or unjust. I will go forth with my harrow and will overturn stumps and trees. Where there were a thousand, scarcely a hundred will remain, and the houses will be empty.¹ 3 A root of bitterness² will spring up and the mighty will be cast down. Birds of prey will have success with their claws and will eat what is not their own.

4 However my sentence can be mitigated and alleviated by three things, inasmuch as three sins abound in this kingdom: pride, gluttony, and greed. 5 Hence if decency and humility in dress is observed, if there is moderation in drinking, and restraint in greedy desires, my anger will be mitigated. 6 Because the ruler of the land has been remiss in administering justice and has plundered his people, he shall build an abbey³ in honor of my Mother in the location I indicate to him.⁴ 7 If he does so, I will help him and will increase my charity in him and for all his collaborators. However, I shall call him to submission,⁵ and his affliction will be increased in proportion to his former glory, and his kingdom will be held in contempt and its citizens will not be happy."

1. "And his own soul": see further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 89, 498, 624.

1. "The houses will be empty": the vision might be about the plague visiting Sweden.

2. "A root of bitterness"; cf. Hebrews 12:15.

3. "Build an abbey"; cf. ch. 32.2.

4. "To him" renders "quem sibi," but cf. some manuscripts and Ghotan "quo tibi" [to you].

5. "I shall call him to submission" renders "vocabo eum sub coronam"; a phrase that is difficult to interpret and used several times elsewhere (see further note to VIII 20.8). It is discussed by Odelman "Rarae aeves" as an example of Swedish Latinity and the contribution made by Birgitta to the development of Latin literature in Sweden.

✚ Chapter 75

A Worldly Noblewoman is Threatened with Punishment and Told to Lead a Better Life

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ accuses a certain lady of serious transgressions and shows her the sentence appropriate for them, but that he will commute the sentence to one of mercy because of penance and reparation.

1 She saw what looked like a completely deformed body covered with sperm. While she was wondering about it and trembling, the Spirit said to her:¹
 2 “I created you from the seed of your parents and gave you fair limbs and a body, and implanted a soul in the body, created by nothing other than my divine power alone. 3 When you had come to the church for baptism, I gave you my consent and made you my daughter, you who had been the daughter of the devil because of Adam’s sin. Then I brought you up. My angels watched over you, for you would not otherwise have been able to survive. Then I led you to my Spirit for the sole purpose of getting to know me and loving nothing as you loved me.

5 But from your earliest youth, in return for my love, you have always provoked my anger. You stirred up so much lust in your every limb that you appear as deformed in my sight as this deformed body. 6 Your eyes were curious and eager to look at sensuous sights. Your ears were quick to hear your own praise and low talk. Your mouth was ready for defamation and idle banter. Your belly was always full of delicious food, and you never refused it whatever it wanted. You dressed immoderately to win praise for the clothes but not for me. 7 My friends stood outside wretched, hungry, and naked. They cried out, but you did not hear them. They longed to enter, but you were indignant. You insulted and mocked their wretchedness, and your soul felt no compassion for them. 8 Whatever you did for the honor of your body seemed easy to you; whatever you did for me seemed heavy and excessive. You lay down and you sat when you felt like doing it, and you never thought about my judgment. You sought whatever was beautiful in the world but cared less for me, the creator of the world, than for anything else.

9 Therefore, if I were to give you a fair trial, you deserve to be abhorred by everyone and publicly covered with shame and reproach in return for the pride of your mouth and body. 10 In return for your lust you deserve to have all the joints of all your limbs dissolved, your flesh putrefied, your skin full of swelling sores, your eyes falling out, your mouth distorted, your hands and feet cut off, and all your limbs ceaselessly mutilated. 11 In return for your contempt of the poor and of my friends and your greed, you deserve to have such hunger pervade your body that you would eat your own limbs and your own excrement, as if it were a morsel

1. “The Spirit said to her”: Birgitta is likely to be the subject of this powerful vision, received perhaps around the time of her conversion to a spiritual life, and expressing her distaste for her former physical comforts.

of meat, and drink your own urine, and yet your hunger would never be quenched. 12 In return for your comfort and sloth you deserve to have no comfort at all but only wretchedness and misery on all sides. 13 In return for the human favor you sought more than me, you deserve to be abased to such an extent that even your children and dearest friends would flee from you, as though you stank like rotting flesh and human excrement in their sight and in their nostrils, to such an extent that they would rather see you dead a hundred times over than to see you alive. 14 In return for the injuries inflicted on your neighbors when you acquired and held on to the property of others only to become more proud, you deserve to have a sword pierce your limbs and bones, limb by limb, and a sharp saw ceaselessly to lacerate your flesh without cease. A wretched man was afflicted and you had no compassion on him. 15 In return for your envy and anger, of which you had plenty, you deserve to be swallowed whole in the mouths of demons and for their teeth to grind you like flour, and you would long to die and could not die but would be ever mangled and ever revived in order to undergo the same torture.

16 Nevertheless, because I am merciful and carry out no justice without mercy nor mercy without justice, I am ready to have mercy on all those who ask for it, although not in such a way that I set justice aside. Rather I commute a just sentence to a lighter one, since I do no more injustice to the demons than to the angels in heaven. 17 Thus, because you sinned in all your limbs, so too you must make reparation in all your limbs. With a little effort you will win the greatest delight.

18 May you keep your mouth from talking too much and from all idle speech. May you close your ears to defamation and your eyes to vain sights. May you open your hands to give alms to the poor. May you bend your knees to wash their feet. May you abstain in your body from dainty food and feed it so as to be able to persevere in my service but not in order to live in luxury. 19 Let not a single thread of pride be detected in your clothing. It should only be useful and necessary and not ostentatious. 20 I command you to hate forever all carnal intercourse. If you want to live according to my will, you will be a mother of spiritual children, just as you have been mother of bodily ones up to now.”

✠ Chapter 76

Birgitta's Magister is Told to Continue to Raise his Voice

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

A revelation follows.

1 Christ speaks: “Tell your teacher¹ not to cease crying out and raising his voice, for I am coming soon, and those who take their refuge in true humility will be happy.”

1. “Your teacher”: one of Birgitta's confessors, perhaps Mathias.

✚ Chapter 77

Sweden will Undergo Punishment

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

A serious warning to the king of Sweden.

1 The Son of God speaks: "I shall harrow this land¹ with judgment and affliction until its inhabitants learn to plead for God's mercy."

✚ Chapter 78

On Six Kings

DATE: UNDATED

About five kings of three kingdoms who are compared to animals, and about a sixth king of exalted position who will be overthrown. Christ's warning to cities and kingdoms.

1 The Son of God speaks: "Earlier I showed you five kings and their kingdoms. The first was a crowned ass,¹ because he fell away from good principles and stained his honor. The second was a ravenous wolf who learned² that his unforeseen fall would enrich his enemy. 2 The third was a lofty eagle who looked down on the others. The fourth was a ram brandishing his horns, trampling and advancing by the justice of God. The fifth was a slaughtered lamb but not one without stain, whose blood was the occasion of affliction and ruin to many.

3 Now I will show you a sixth king who will trouble land and sea and sadden the simple folk, dishonor the land of my saints and shed innocent blood. The boldness of his hands has set the time for my vindication. 4 Therefore, if he does not soon take heed, my judgment will come to him, and he will relinquish his kingdom in affliction. Thus it will be as it is written:³ 'They sow wind and will reap affliction and sorrow.' 5 Not only will I punish this kingdom but also the opulent and great cities. I will raise up a starving creature that will devour the objects of their desires. 6 The evil belly will not give up, and discord will abound. The stupid will rule and the wise will not raise up their heads. Honor and truth will be laid low until the coming of the one who will placate my anger and will spare not even his own soul for the love of justice."

✚ Chapter 79

Advice for two Men who Might Become Bishops

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

1. "I shall harrow this land"; cf. ch. 74.

1. Crowned ass cf. Book VIII 16 and 24.

2. "Who learned" renders "cognovit"; cf. Ghotan "non cognovit."

3. "As it is written"; cf. Hosea 8:7.

Christ speaks about two men who were both said to have the makings of a bishop, but in different ways. He gives here excellent instruction to bishops about keeping themselves in grace and avoiding temptations.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Recall that I sent you to the teacher who I said had the makings of a bishop. I told him that he could become a cup of salvation by means of four things. 2 However he was not made a bishop, for human judgment and divine judgment are differently inclined, and because he wanted to have God in such a way as not to have to suffer contempt from the world. 3 Now I tell you of another who I say has the makings of a bishop,¹ and he is the one whom I love. I will strengthen his body and save it from the snares of the devil. The deceptions of the devil will not obscure his conscience. My Mother will present his soul to me. I ask three things of him. 4 First, that he should proceed with caution and walk the path no farther than he ought. Second, he should leap over walls and ditches by offering me that which is most dear to me—souls. 5 Third, he should not set his left foot in front of his right nor lift one foot until the other is set on solid ground.

6 What does it mean to proceed on his way with caution? It means that he should exercise caution in temptations, without excessive abstinence that weakens his health by his exertions and without indulging the body so as to make it rebel against his soul. 7 The second point was that he should leap over walls and ditches. The walls are the obstacles and setbacks impeding my friend and making him weary in the winning of souls. The obstacles are fear of the powerful, favors of flatterers, threats from malicious men, worldly loss and shame, friendship with unspiritual men, rest and ease for one’s own sake. 8 My friend must leap over these by means of trust in God, firmness in faith and the attraction of and desire for heaven. 9 The ditches are the temptation of carnal delight, the assault of impure spirits, faintheartedness, wanton pleasure, immoderate sadness, hardness, and coldness of mind. 10 My bishop must climb over these by finding consolation in holy scripture, by the example and lives of the saints, the consideration of his own faults and of the mercies shown to him, by contrition and frequent confession, the thought of the divine judgment and the fear of his certain death. 11 If the bishop climbs over these walls and ditches, then he will be able to win for me the treasure of souls, so precious to me, and I, God, will be with him in his heart and on his lips, and I will keep his body safe so that the arrows of malicious men do not reach his heart. However, he

1. “A bishop”: Nicolaus Hermanni (c. 1326–91), who became bishop of Linköping in 1375, was a friend of Birgitta’s and Katherina’s, and later one of the chief promoters of the Birgittine cause. He was revered as a saint in the diocese of Linköping and the official elevation of his relics took place in 1515. He was the author of a number of rhymed offices to St. Anne and the missionary “apostle of the north,” St. Ansgar, whose cult was revived in the later middle ages. His Office to Birgitta was composed sometime before her canonization, and the opening lines of the antiphon for the first vespers are among the most celebrated lines in medieval Swedish poetry: *Rosa rorans bonitatem / stella vitae puritatem / in vallem miseriae* [Rose, distilling dew of goodness / Star, trickling down brightness / Birgitta, vessel of grace]. This revelation is quoted in his *Vita*. See Schück, “Två svenska biografier från medeltiden,” and Lundén, *Nikolaus Hermansson*.

will not escape the attacks of the devil, but I, God, will throw them away from him. 12 The two feet symbolize two desires to please: to please God in order to obtain eternal life and to please others in order to help them attain to God. 13 The bishop should stretch out his left foot to please men by admonishing them and conversing with them and by showing compassion to those who go astray. He should do so in such a way as not to offend God and his commandments. 14 He should also stretch out his right foot by exercising mercy without forgetting justice, for it is more glorious in God's sight to render account of moderate mercy than of overstrict fairness. 15 But the bishop should not lift one foot unless the other is on solid ground. This means that he should not practice charity and zeal for sinners without first learning and diligently examining the truth. David was very holy but even he erred in carrying out justice, but once he learned the truth of the matter, he corrected himself in accordance with the divine admonition."

✠ Chapter 80

A Political Revelation in which Four Noblemen are Encouraged to Rise against the King

DATE: 1361, ROME

The Blessed Virgin gives here some recommendations to the leading men of a kingdom in order that the king of that kingdom may rectify his transgressions.¹

1 The Virgin Mary, Mother of God, spoke to the bride of Christ: "I am the one to whom the angel said: 'Hail, full of grace.' I lend my grace to all those who need and want it. 2 I lend my assistance to the government of the kingdom in which you were born against the enemies of God, both physical and spiritual. I admonish the kingdom's citizens to work together to obtain a king who wants to lead its inhabitants toward pious deeds and upright conduct. 3 I announce to them that divine justice intends to remove the king and his whole family from the government of this kingdom. Another native of the kingdom has been chosen to be king, and he will rule in accord with the recommendations of the friends of God and for the benefit of the kingdom.

4 You four should follow my instructions, keeping them secret and hidden from the friends of God and from his enemies, in order to attract more people to your side, revive good morals and restore the property transferred from the crown back to the kingdom. 5 May one or more than one of you go to the king and say to him: 'We have something to say to you touching the salvation of your soul, and we ask you to keep it under the seal of confession.' 6 You may also add other things as seem fitting to the following effect: 'You have the worst of

1. This is one of the so-called autograph visions, written in Birgitta's own hand: see General Introduction, volume I, pp. 1–2, 17; Högman, *Heliga Birgittas originaltexter*. For the translation of the autograph from Swedish, see p. 325.

reputations in the whole kingdom. It is said that you carry on sexual intercourse and perversion with other men against nature. This appears likely, since you love some men more than God or your own soul or your own wife. 7 There is also doubt about whether you have the true faith, seeing that the church has placed you under interdiction and forbidden you to attend mass, but you still enter churches and attend masses. Moreover, you have plundered the property of the crown and the kingdom. 8 You are a traitor to your household servants and the subjects who have served you and your son faithfully. You surrendered them and the whole of Skåne deliberately into the hands of their worst enemy, and they will never be safe and secure from his ill will and deceits as long as he is alive. 9 If, however, you decide to rectify these sins and repossess the transferred territory, we will serve you. Otherwise you should hand the kingdom over to your son under sworn oath to repossess the transferred territory, love the common people, be faithful to his knights, and rule and govern justly and piously according to the laws of the country.'

10 But the four of you should understand that God has appointed for himself another king in the future, one who can come before the people with less damage and danger. The Lord is indeed mighty enough to cut short the life of both a younger and an older man or to expel him from the kingdom and arrange everything according to his will. 11 If the king refuses to obey, then you should secretly consult others among the leading men and knights of the kingdom. When you find any who are likeminded and faithful to your cause, you should say to them in public what you said before to the king in private, adding that you do not wish to serve a heretic or a traitor or his son, if his son decides to follow the example of his criminal father. 12 After this you should elect for yourselves a leader who is capable of fighting the battles of the kingdom on behalf of the kingdom. If the one who is elected is my friend, he will be a perfect choice. Otherwise, he will soon be removed. 13 You should contribute money and deliberations. I will impart bravery and boldness of heart so that if he deliberately refuses, he will be reluctantly compelled to obey. But if the king wishes to leave the kingdom, take care that none of you follow in his footsteps."

✠ Chapter 81

Birgitta Smells an Unpleasant Odor in the Presence of Evil People

DATE: UNDATED

Description of a certain special grace given to Blessed Birgitta.

1 By the grace of the Holy Spirit the bride of Christ had the special gift of smelling a stench and sensing a bitter taste in her mouth whenever people with an impure and proud spirit approached her. She felt it right away and it was almost unbearable. 2 Once a sinful man sat down next to her and asked: "The spirit you are said to have, does it come from yourself or someone else or from the devil?" 3 But hardly able to bear his stench she said: "You have a stinking inhabitant and the words of your mouth give off a terrible stench. Do penance or

otherwise God's vengeance will come to you." 4 He left her very angry, but when he went to sleep, he heard an endless number of demonic voices: "Let us bring him to the pigsty, because he rejects helpful warnings." Coming to himself, he reformed his criminal life with the grace of God, and then a good odor replaced his former stench.¹

✚ Chapter 82

A Call for People to Observe God's Justice and Mercy as Revealed in History

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ mercifully exhorts people to consider his works and encourages sinners to do penance with the threat of terrible punishment and eternal sorrow.

1 Christ speaks: "I am the God of everyone. Moses heard my voice in the bush, John in the river Jordan, Peter on the mountain.¹ My people, I cry out mercifully to you, I who cried out tearfully for your sakes on the cross. 2 Prick up your ears and listen to me. Open your eyes and look at me. Look at me, for I, who am addressing you, am most powerful and strong, most wise and virtuous, most just and kind, and, besides all this, altogether most beautiful.

3 Look and search for my power in the old law,² and you will discover it in the wonderful and awesome creation of all creatures. You will also discover my strength in the case of rebellious kings and rulers, 4 and my wisdom in creation as well as in the dignity of the human likeness and in the prophets' wisdom. Search for my incomparable virtue, and you will discover it in the giving of the law and the liberation of my people. 5 Look for my justice in the cases of the first angel and the first man, of the flood and of the destruction of cities and towns.³ Look for my kindness in supporting and enduring my enemies and in admonishing the people through the prophets. 6 Finally, look for and ponder my beauty in the beauty and arrangement of the elements or the glory of Moses.⁴ Consider then how right you are to choose me and how you should love me.

7 Behold, I am the same who spoke in the new law,⁵ at once most powerful and most poor—most powerful in the adoration of the kings following the message of the star,⁶ most poor when I was wrapped in swaddling clothes⁷ and lay in a manger. 8 Behold me at once most wise and most foolish—most wise when my adversaries could not answer me,⁸ most foolish when I was accused of lying and sentenced as a prisoner. 9 Behold me at once most virtuous and most abject—

1. "His former stench": see further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 96, 544, 637.

1. "Moses hear my voice... Peter on the mountain"; cf. Exodus 3; Matthew 3:17; 17:5.

2. "The old law," i.e., the Old Testament.

3. "The destruction of cities and towns"; cf. Genesis 11:1–9; Genesis 19: 1–38; Joshua 6:1–6.

4. "The glory of Moses"; cf. Exodus 34:29–35; 2 Corinthians 3:7.

5. "The new law": here used for Jesus's teaching in the New Testament.

6. "The message of the star"; cf. Matthew 2:2, 9.

7. "Wrapped in swaddling clothes"; cf. Luke 2:7.

8. "My adversaries could not answer me"; cf. Matthew 22:46.

most virtuous when I healed the sick and cast out demons, most abject when all my limbs were scourged. 10 Behold me at once most just and yet thought to be most unjust—most just for I established truth and justice, yet thought to be most unjust because of my shameful death sentence. 11 Behold me at once most kind and yet treated most unkindly—most kind in forgiving and condemning sins, yet treated most unkindly when I was placed on the cross in the company of thieves.⁹ 12 Behold me at once most beautiful and most ugly—most beautiful on the mountain,¹⁰ most ugly on the cross, where I had no comeliness nor sightliness.¹¹

13 Behold me and consider that I, who suffered for your sake, am now speaking to you. Behold me not with the eyes of the flesh but of the heart. Behold what I have given you, what I ask of you, what you will give back to me. I gave you a soul without stain; give it back without stain. 14 I suffered for your sake so that you would follow me. I taught you to live as I want rather than to follow your own will. Hear what I cried out to you when I was in the flesh: ‘Do penance.’ Hear what I cried out on the cross: ‘I thirst for you.’¹² 15 Listen even more closely now when I say that unless you do penance,¹³ sorrow will come to you, a sorrow to make your flesh wither up, your soul melt away with fear, your very marrow dry up, your strength grow weak, your beauty vanish, your life so tedious that you will try to flee and not be able to. Therefore flee to the den of my humility! Otherwise the sorrow I threaten you with will come. That is why I threaten you with it—to make you flee it! 16 If you would believe, believe! Otherwise the facts will make you believe my words. Ask the wise. I will not pass my promise by, although in my patience, I patiently await the fruits of patience.”

✠ Chapter 83

On the Selfishness and Worldliness of Laymen, Priests, and People in Holy Orders

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Three things showed that Christ was true God and man at his death. Also concerning the three friends Christ had in the world who have now turned away from him.

1 Mary spoke saying: “In three ways one could understand and know that my Son was true God and true man at his death. The first was that the earth shook and the rocks were split.¹ The second was when he said: ‘The Scripture is fulfilled.’² The third was when he said to the thief: ‘This day you shall be with me in paradise.’³ None of the saints could promise that.”

9. “In the company of thieves”; cf. Matthew 27:38.

10. “Most beautiful on the mountain”; cf. Matthew 17:1–2.

11. “No comeliness nor sightliness”; cf. Isaiah 53:2.

12. “I thirst for you”; cf. John 19:28. Jesus expresses not just his physical thirst, but his thirst for the salvation of the world.

13. “Do penance”; cf. Matthew 4:17.

1. “The earth shook and the rocks were split”; cf. Matthew 27:51.

2. “The Scripture is fulfilled”; cf. John 19:28.

3. “This day you shall be with me in paradise”; cf. Luke 23:43.

2 Then the Son said to his army gathered around him: "My friends, my words are eternal, and you know and see all things in me. However, for the sake of this woman who is standing here and who cannot understand without the help of comparisons, I express my grievance before you. 3 I had three friends in the world. The first loved me because he had the experience of his senses. He thought to himself: 'God gives me fruit of the earth and its trees and the fish from the sea. Again he gives me a body and soul and, along with this, health and all my necessities.' This is why he loved me in faith and deeds of charity, in almsgiving, and fasting. This friend represents all good laymen. 4 The second loved me because he had experience of his senses, and he saw. He experienced that the earth gave its fruit and the heavens rain. He saw in Scripture how he should live, how I and my saints lived and taught, and he thought to himself: 'People seem to be blind and dead. Hence, because God has given me knowledge, I will instruct them.' This friend represents all good scholars and clerics who praised and glorified me in their deeds, leading good lives, because they experienced and loved me, and they encouraged others by their example and teaching. 5 The third loved me, because he experienced and saw and considered with perfect understanding. Like the first friend, he experienced the benefits brought by earth and the heavens that enlightened him. Like the second friend, he saw in the scriptures what he should avoid and what he should do. Then he considered within himself how much love I had showed him. 6 Because of his three considerations, he mortified himself in three ways out of love. He considered my nakedness and poverty, and therefore he abandoned the world and sought solitude. He considered my patient suffering, and therefore he decided to live a life of abstinence. He considered my obedience unto the death on the cross, and therefore he gave up his will into the hands of others. This friend represents the good people in cloisters.⁴

7 The cries of these three friends of mine rang daily in my ears, and their voice was as sweet to me as a good and delicious drink is to the thirsty. Now, however, these my friends have turned away from me, and their voice become as abominable to me as the croaking of frogs. 8 The first friend who represents the common people says: 'I will till the earth because it gives me fruit. I will live off my labors, as I please, because everything I have is the result of my own work. Everything I have comes from my own industriousness. If I didn't work, I wouldn't have anything.' 9 They do not thank me for giving them life and health. They do not recall that I arrange the seasons for them in a convenient way and send them fair weather from heaven. They do not even consider why I created them nor that they must render an account to me of their works. So they congratulate themselves and live as they please. On top of that, they rob me of my rights by not paying tithes to me. 10 The second friend says: 'What I have comes from my own industriousness. It is mine by right, and therefore I shall do as I will. I will acquire human wisdom, because the wisdom of God is foolishness, his commands are burdensome, and his example

4. "The good people in cloisters," i.e., monks and nuns.

difficult to imitate. After all, I am called to a life of honor and privilege. This is what I will strive for: to win human honor. Happiness is worldly greatness.’¹¹ The third friend says: ‘I will enter the monastery in order to achieve greater honor than others. Wherever I am, I will sit in front.’ As to poverty he says: ‘I want nothing to be lacking to me.’ As to abstinence he says: ‘I want to follow my own will.’ As to obedience he says: ‘I will obey men for my own good, and I don’t care to obey God. It is enough for me to win human favor.’¹² This is what their damnable clamor sounds like to my ears, and that is how they appear in my sight.”

✠ Chapter 84

An Artist makes a Golden Image to Replace one that is Ruined by Moisture

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ will choose pagans to replace wicked Christians, just as an artist makes himself another image to replace one that has been ruined.

1 “I am like an artist who fashions a lovely image out of clay to cover it with beautiful gold. As time goes by, however, the artist examines it and sees that it has become moist and the moisture has ruined it. 2 A mouth has been twisted out of shape and looks like the mouth of a dog with hanging ears and protruding eyes, with sunken cheeks and forehead. Then the master says: ‘You do not deserve to be clothed in my gold.’ He throws it away and breaks it, and then he fashions another that is worthy of his gold. 3 I am that artist who has made man out of the earth to decorate him with the gold of my divinity. But the love of his pleasure and greed have so ruined him that he is unworthy of my gold. 4 The mouth that was created for my praise utters only whatever pleases the man himself or harms his neighbor. His ears listen to nothing but earthly things. His eyes see nothing but pleasure. The forehead of humility is sunken but pride is raised up. 5 Therefore I will choose paupers, that is, the despised pagans,¹ and I will say to them: ‘Come in and rest in my loving arms.’ 6 All you who should be mine but refuse, go ahead and live as you please while your time lasts. When my time comes, that is, at the judgment, I will say to you: ‘Look, you will be tormented to the same extent as you loved your pleasure more than your God.’

7 But this man² came to me like a puppy, putting his head and neck in the collar and leash,³ admitting his guilt. This is why his sin was pardoned.”

1. “Despised pagans”: advice about the crusade, and God’s preference for converted pagans above lapsed Christians.

2. “This man”: this might refer to the Swedish king. Through several revelations, Birgitta reflects a shifting attitude towards Magnus’s foreign policy, and here there is a suggestion that he was repentant and acted in accordance with what she saw as God’s purpose for the crusades; on other occasions she is more critical of his actions.

3. “Collar and leash” renders “laqueum.”

✚ Chapter 85

*Advice and Guidance to a Certain Bishop*¹

DATE: C. 1345, SWEDEN

There should be three qualities in the human body and three in the human soul, just as there are three in the heavenly host. Concerning how a certain bishop, a friend of Christ and the Virgin Mary, should take care of his body, and about how he should transmit these words of Christ to bad Christians.

1 Mary spoke: "Three qualities belong to the army of the king of angels: first it is abundant and never decreases; second, it is stable and is never overcome; third, it shines and never darkens. In the same way there should be three qualities in the body and three in the soul. 2 First, the soul should be abundant and not decrease. This refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit given to the soul which, although abundant in virtue in itself, can be decreased because of sin. 3 Second, the soul should be stable in good works and not overcome by wrong will. Third, it should shine with beauty and progress in good works and not be darkened by the colors of base affections or desires. 4 There should be three things in the body: first nourishment; second, effort; third, restraint in matters of sensual pleasure and consent. The first implies sufficient sleep, moderated vigils, and temperance in nourishment so the body has neither too much nor too little but can persevere in serving God. 5 The second implies continual effort but with prudence. The third means being cheerful in serving God and restraining base sensuality in order that the soul may receive enlightenment.

6 Because my friend has tied his hands by means of vows² to prevent his body from opposing against his soul, I, Queen of heaven and the creature most dear and most close to my Son, release him from his vow, since this is the will of my Son. 7 I am the one about whom he began to preach. Like the star that precedes the sun,³ I precede him with my prayers before my Son, and I follow after to guide him. Therefore I permit him to treat his body as mercifully as fitting to his constitution. He may eat meat on meat days and fish on fish days.⁴ 8 I give him three gifts besides: first, the right way of carrying out good deeds; second, plentiful wisdom and insight; third, greater strength and feeling in expressing divine words. 9 Moreover, I will change the fear he has of eating too much into something good to make the food he eats provide him with physical and spiritual strength and contribute to his spiritual progress."

10 Then the Son appeared and said: "The apostolic office⁵ has been assigned to him, and for this reason I permit him to have the food of the apostles. The

1. "A certain bishop": Bishop Hemming of Turku (Åbo); see also chs. 51 and 104.

2. "My friend has tied his hands by means of vows": that is, the promise of a strict fast (cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 521).

3. "Like the star that precedes the sun": the morning star Venus that rises in the east and presages the sun's rising.

4. "Meat days... fish days," i.e., otherwise normal fast days, when no meat was eaten, or fish and vegetables but not meat, eggs, or dairy products. Fridays, Lent, and certain other days were regarded as fast days in the middle ages.

5. "The apostolic office": that is, the office of bishop. Cf. *Regula Salvatoris* ch.9.

apostles ate what was given to them. Let him behave like an apostle in the nourishment of his body. I send him out not to Gentiles like my other friends but to bad Christians. 11 It is more difficult to bring the bride who has scorned to live with her husband back to living with him than a woman who has not tasted the pleasure of a man. In the same way it is more difficult to convert bad Christians to God than those who have not yet tasted the words and sweet delight of God. 12 Because he is my friend and I love him intimately, I have given him a more demanding charge⁶ as I would to a friend. However, all his efforts will seem easy to him thanks to my grace. Let him see to it that he is prepared to carry out my business when Easter comes around. 13 He will place a nut in the rich soil, and it will grow in many ways⁷ and bear rich fruit. The nut represents my words, the soil is the holy Church, which becomes fruitful when it is plowed by the wise. Let him go forth with confidence. I will be with him in his heart and on his lips.”⁸

✠ Chapter 86

On Laughter and Sorrow

DATE: UNDATED

The dangers of worldly happiness and security.

1 “There is little happiness in the laughter which one knows for certain will be followed by weeping. Such is the laughter of worldly people. People know that after it comes punishment in every limb and their happiness will be changed into the grief of a broken heart. 2 There is much danger in not bothering to be reconciled with the judge before the sword separates the head from the body. This is the danger that awaits a person who does not think about being reconciled with the judge who is the God of justice until the sword of death separates the soul from the body.”

✠ Chapter 87

Filling an Empty Bag or Jar is like Filling a Person with the Holy Spirit

DATE: UNDATED

Those who refuse to give up their sins do not deserve the grace of the Holy Spirit.

1 “You are accustomed to filling an open bag or a clean jar when someone comes with it. But if he brings a bag and is too lazy to open it or if his jar is not washed but is filthy dirty, and he has no intention of cleaning it, who would give him any valuables when he does not deserve it? 2 This is also the case in the

6. “A more demanding charge”: probably the task of going to the pope, to hand over some of Birgitta’s early revelations and messages about effecting peace between England and France.

7. “In many ways” renders “in multis,” possibly also meaning “in many persons.”

8. “In his heart and on his lips”; cf. Romans 10:8.

spiritual life. When a person does not intend to give up sin, then it is not right to give him the cup of the Holy Spirit. When his heart has not the intention of correcting its faults, then the food of the Holy Spirit should not be placed in it, regardless of whether he is king or emperor or priest or poor or rich.”

✚ Chapter 88

The Circumstances under which Birgitta may Make Loans

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

To lend money to the needy is meritorious, but only without usury.

1 “If anyone asks you to lend him money in God’s name, and you know he will not spend it in opposition to the will of God, ask him when he will pay it back and then lend him as much as you can and as much as he needs, after first having estimated and kept what you and your household needs for your daily outlays. 2 Even if he pays it back by the settled date, you will still receive a reward from the Lord for every penny lent. If he does not pay it back by the settled date, you can demand back what is yours according to the laws of the country, but you will still receive a reward from the Lord for your efforts and your lending. In this way you can gain more spiritual profits with your money than if you kept it safely hidden in a chest. 3 However, take care not to receive a single penny in usury, if you wish to receive compensation from God for your services.”

✚ Chapter 89

The Virgin has Tools with which to Defend Herself and her Friends

DATE: UNDATED

A vision concerning how the Mother of Christ helps everyone who wishes to be reconciled with God and reduces the punishment of the condemned. Also concerning the devil’s hatred for humankind.

1 Blessed Birgitta, the bride of Christ, had the impression that the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, was standing next to her and that various tools were lying at her right hand with which she could defend herself from every danger, and weapons were on her left to be used on those who sentenced themselves to punishment through their own bad intentions.

2 The Blessed Virgin said to the bride: “You see the various tools, each one suitable to its task. In the same way I will come with my tools to aid all those who venerate and love my Son and bravely resist the temptations of the devil. 3 They sit, as it were, within the town-walls and wage daily warfare against the treachery of evil spirits, to whom I come in defense with my arms. 4 While the enemies attempt to undermine the wall and destroy it, I support its structure. If they attempt to scale with ladders, I push them back with pitchforks. If they attempt to bore holes in the sides of the walls, I repair them with a trowel and

fill in the holes. 5 With defensive arms I help all those who wish to be reconciled with my Son and never more to sin intentionally against him. Although I only mention three tools, I have innumerable weapons to defend my friends.

6 I will mention three of the tools that appear on your left. The first is my sword, though the executioner's sword is sharper.¹ The second is the snare. The third is the wood that will burn those who sentence themselves at the very point of death to eternal punishment by their intention to keep on sinning until the end of life. 7 When someone resolves to go on offending God until the end and not to stop before he is no longer able to sin, then divine justice demands that he must be sentenced to eternal torment. 8 Those who are condemned to death on earth are put to death in different ways according to the nature of their crimes. In a similar way, there are different kinds of torments for the condemned in Gehenna. When a person intends to sin throughout life, it is appropriate that the devil should be given power over his body and soul. 9 As meat is cut away from bones, it is the right of the devil to separate a man's body and soul as painfully as if his flesh and bones were being cut with flint for as long as the wretched body can endure the pain.

10 However, you can be certain that, although someone may be handed over body and soul to the devil by God due to the enormity of his crimes, yet the grace of repentance will never be taken from him, as long as he lives and has the use of his senses. 11 But for those who do not repent, my sword will reduce some of their physical pain prior to death, so as not to give the devil the same full control over the body still alive in the world as he has over the soul in hell. 12 As when someone uses a saw to cut off the head of his enemy to make the punishment more painful, so too the devil uses his sword to cut the soul as it lives in eternal death. 13 The snare represents the sorrow experienced by the condemned soul after death, which will be all the greater in hell the longer his life was on earth. This is why the devil wants people with the intention of sinning all life long to live a very long life in order that their sorrow will be correspondingly great after death. 14 However, my grace breaks through the snare you see by shortening the miserable life of the flesh in opposition to the devil's will, and thus the punishment to which they are justly sentenced will not be as horrible as the enemy would like. 15 The devil also enkindles a fire in the hearts of his friends who live for pleasure. Although their conscience tells them it goes against God, still they long for it, because they do not care about offending God. 16 For this reason the devil has the right to increase the heat of their hell-fires for each time he filled them with perverse pleasure in the world."

✠ Chapter 90

Contemporary Franciscans are Criticized, and the Authenticity of the Indulgences at the Nearby Church is Upheld

DATE: 1360S, ASSISI, ITALY

1. "The executioner's sword is sharper" renders "gladius lictoris acucior est"; readings of certain other manuscripts would suggest "which is sharper than the executioner's sword."

Christ praises St. Francis but finds fault with his friars. He goes on to say that he gave the indulgences associated with Assisi to him.

1 When Blessed Birgitta was in the church of the friars in Assisi, she heard and saw Christ saying: “My friend Francis descended from the mountain of delights into the cave, where his bread was divine charity, his drink continuous tears and his bed the meditation on my works and commandments. 2 Now, however, his friars ascend the mountain of worldly cares and delights and pay no attention to the humility and solace of their father and my friend. But tell me what is in your heart that troubles you, although I know all things.” 3 She said: “I am troubled because some people say that this saint made up these indulgences by himself and some claim that there are no indulgences.” 4 Christ answered: “Anyone who makes something up is like a reed that sways according to the favor of admirers. But my friend was like burning brimstone¹ because he had me who am divine fire within him. 5 Fire and straw do not mix, nor can falsehood dwell with truth or the fire of divine charity. My friend, however, possessed and spoke the truth. When he saw human lukewarmness with respect to God and human greed for the world, he suffered great sorrow. Therefore he asked me for a sign of love to enkindle love in the people and lessen their greed. 6 I, who am love, gave him a sign, for he asked for it with love, and the sign was that all those who come here empty would be filled with my blessings and freed from their sins.” 7 The lady answered: “My Lord, may a successor revoke that which you, the infuser of power and grace, have granted?” 8 Christ answered: “What I said to Peter² and his successors is settled: ‘Whatever you bind, remains bound.’ However, because of human wickedness many gifts are taken away, but because of faith and merit, the grace granted will be increased.”

⚡ Chapter 91

The Potencies of Precious Gems are used to Describe the Potency of the Words Written in the Bible

DATE: UNDATED

All the words of the Bible emanated from God and each is like a gem with its own special potency.

1 God the Father spoke to the bride of the Son and said: “Listen, for you are wondering about those words that are written in the Bible. You may be certain that each word written in it emanated from me and has its own potency and efficacy. 2 The precious gems in the world have each their own natural potencies. For example, a magnet has the potency to attract iron to itself; other stones grind grain and turn them in flour; others are used to produce cement with the potency to join stone to stone; others like whetstones sharpen iron. Thus each kind has its own potency. 3 In the same way each word that has emanated from me

1. “Brimstone” renders “lapis ignitus.”

2. “What I said to Peter”; cf. Matthew 16:19.

has its own potencies, and all of them shine with eternal beauty in heaven in sight of all my heavenly host like precious gems of charming colors against the brightest gold. Everyone in heaven knows the special potency of each of them.”

✠ Chapter 92

St. Denis Appears to Birgitta and Comforts Her in Her Husband's Illness

DATE: C. 1342, ARRAS, NORTHERN FRANCE

How St. Denis consoled the bride of Christ when her husband fell sick on the pilgrimage.

1 When he was returning from the pilgrimage to Santiago, the husband of St. Birgitta fell sick in Arras.¹ As the sickness got worse, the bride of Christ, very anxious in mind, earned the grace of being consoled by St. Denis.² 2 He appeared to her in prayer and said, “I am Denis who came from Rome to these parts of France to announce the word of God there while I lived. Because you love me with a special devotion, I announce to you that God wants to be made known to the world through you, and you have been given to my custody and protection. Therefore I will always come to your aid. I give you this sign: your husband will not die from this sickness now.” 3 Blessed Denis also visited and consoled her in revelations on many other occasions.³

✠ Chapter 93

Birgitta Overcomes a Temptation of Pride

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

St. Birgitta answers the devil who was tempting her with regard to her noble birth and love of God.

1 “Devil, you fell because of your pride. Why then should I seek pride when the flesh of a queen is no better than that of a maidservant? It is but vile dust. Why then should I not humble myself, since I could not think a single good thought on my own without the help of God?” 2 Then Christ appeared to her and said: “Humility is like a ladder on which one climbs from earth up to the heart of God.”¹

✠ Chapter 94

Birgitta Receives some Relics of the Virgin's Hair, and is Assured of their Authenticity

DATE: 1360S, NAPLES

1. “Arras”: cf. ch. 66.

2. “St. Denis”: Denis (Dionysius), third century bishop of Paris and martyr; see also Book IV 103.

3. “On many other occasions”: cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 79, 482, 618.

1. “The heart of God”; see further on this vision Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 488.

How St. Birgitta obtained hairs of the Blessed Virgin Mary

1 When St. Birgitta was living for a time in the city of Naples, a nun, Sister Clara of the Holy Cross convent, sent her the following message: "I have relics of the hairs of the Mother of God, which Queen Sancia¹ gave to me and now I want to give them to you, for it was revealed to me divinely that I should entrust them to you. 2 The sign that I am speaking the truth will be that I am soon to die and come to my Lord whom my soul loves above all else." After this message, she survived for a few more days, but then received the sacraments of the church and gave up her spirit. 3 When Blessed Birgitta was doubting whether those hairs really belonged to the Virgin Mary or not, then the Mother of God appeared to her in prayer and said: "As true and believed as it is that I was born of Anna and Joachim, it is equally true that these hairs grew on my head."

✠ Chapter 95

Birgitta Expresses Concern about Leaving her Children when she Leaves for Rome

DATE: 1340S, ALVASTRA, SWEDEN

A vision of a pot placed over a fire and a boy blowing on it; concerning inordinate love for her children.

1 Once in the monastery of Alvastra it happened that Blessed Birgitta was preoccupied by her love for her children when she was about to return to Rome.¹ She felt sorry about leaving them to get on without her motherly affection and was particularly anxious that they might in some way become bolder in sinning against God after she withdrew, since they were young, rich, and powerful. 2 Then she had a vision of a pot placed over a fire and of a boy blowing on the coals to heat it up. Blessed Birgitta said to him: "Why are you blowing so hard so to get the pot to heat up?" The boy answered: "So that the love of your children may start to heat up and burn in you." 3 Blessed Birgitta answered: "Who are you?" He said to her: "I am the barterer." Then she understood that her love for her children was inordinate in her heart, and she immediately corrected herself in order that she might not prefer anything to the love of Christ.

✠ Chapter 96

While Reading the Speculum Virginum Birgitta Hears a Voice Praising Virginity, Marriage, and Widowhood

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

That obedience is preferable to virginity.

1. "Queen Sancia": daughter of King James II of Mallorca, and queen of Naples; she died in 1345 shortly after fulfilling her life's wish to become a nun. See further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 527 and 634.

1. "About to return to Rome": see further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 478, 499.

1 One day when Blessed Birgitta was going to have someone read to her from a book entitled *Speculum virginum*,¹ she went into a spiritual trance. When she returned to herself, she said: “I heard in spirit a voice saying to me that virginity deserves a crown, widowhood draws near to God, marriage is not excluded from heaven, but obedience brings everyone into glory.”

✠ Chapter 97

An Event that Occurs during Birgitta’s Visit to the Benedictine Abbey of Farfa

DATE: 1350S, FARFA, ITALY

Christ calls a cottage a chamber of salvation and tells St. Birgitta to stay there.

1 Christ tells his bride to go from Rome to Castelnuovo of the Abbey of Farfa,¹ saying: “Go, a chamber has been prepared for you there.” 2 When she came there together with Lord Peter, her confessor, and her household, she obtained permission from the friars of that monastery only with greatest difficulty to live in a lowly cottage, since they maintained that it was not their custom to live together with women. 3 Then Christ appeared to her and said: “This is a chamber of salvation where you can gain merit and acquire higher learning. Whereas before you lived in lofty and fair homes, now you can experience what my saints suffered when they lived in caves.” 4 She carried out and obeyed the instructions of Christ.

✠ Chapter 98

Concerning the Death of Birgitta’s Daughter Ingeborg, at Riseberga Abbey

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

St. Birgitta’s steadfastness in connection with her daughter’s death.
Concerning who is a true mother and who is a stepmother as well as how daughters should be brought up.

1 When the bride of Christ received the news of the death of her daughter, Lady Ingeborg,¹ a nun in the convent of Risberga, she rejoiced² and said:

1. “*Speculum virginum*” (The Mirror of Virgins): a rare mention of a book within Birgitta’s repertoire of reading. It contains a dialogue between a fictitious monk and a virgin nun, teaching the imitation of Mary. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 491. See also volume 1 p. 10.

1. “Castelnuovo of the Abbey of Farfa”: Farfa, situated about sixty kilometers from Rome, was one of most famous Benedictine abbeys in Europe. The Orsini family (whom Birgitta had befriended) was closely connected with the abbey. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, at the will of Farfa’s abbots, a new fortified castle “Castrum novum” was built in a dominant position over the Farfa and Riana valleys, ensuring the abbey’s safety. See also ch. 105; Book VI 46; Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 491.

1. “Ingeborg”: Birgitta’s second eldest daughter, who entered the Cistercian convent of Riseberga in Närke province in 1341, probably at the minimum age of twelve, but died some years later and after she had taken her vows. See further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 494.

2. “She rejoiced”: Birgitta laments the death of her daughter not because of her personal loss, but because she had failed to discipline her and curb her vanity.

“O my lover, Lord Jesus Christ, blessed be you, for you called her before the world ensnared her.”² Then she went into her oratory and shed so many tears and sighed so loud that she could be heard by those present. They said: “Ah, she is mourning her daughter.”

³ Then Christ appeared to her and said: “Woman, why do you weep?”³ Although I know everything, still I want you to tell me.”⁴ She answered: “O Lord, I do not mourn that my daughter has died. Rather I rejoice, because if she had lived longer, she would have had to render a greater account to you. No, I am mourning because I did not teach her as you commanded, because I set her an example of pride, and I was too lax in correcting her faults.”⁵ Christ answered her: “A mother who mourns because her daughter offends God and teaches her to follow her better conscience is a mother of true love and a mother of tears. Her daughter is God’s daughter thanks to her.”⁶ When a mother rejoices in her daughter’s worldly conduct and does not care about her moral habits but only about her worldly rank and position, she is not a mother but a stepmother. ⁷ Thanks to your love and good intentions, your daughter will have a short passage to her glorious reward.”⁴

✚ Chapter 99

During a Pilgrimage in Italy Birgitta is Instructed to Moderate her Fasting

DATE: 1360S, ITALY

Christ relaxes his bride’s vow to fast during Advent.

¹ When Blessed Birgitta was on her way from Rome to the tomb of St. Andrew¹ the Apostle in the kingdom of Sicily, she could travel no farther than to Bari due to various illnesses. ² It was the season of the Lord’s advent during which she was accustomed to fasting, but several persons in her company were ill and there was no fish to be found during the journey. She asked God to have mercy on them so that they would not offend him or scandalize others by eating nor risk the collapse of those who were ill by fasting. ³ Christ appeared and said: “The fish are very cold and the season is not very warm, the road is rough and rocky, and you are all sick. Therefore, eat what you can find, for I am above all vows. That which is done for the honor of God and the moderate sustenance of the body will not be counted as a sin.”²

✚ Chapter 100

A Swedish Woman in Montefiascone has a Revelation Concerning Birgitta

DATE: 1350S, MONTEFIASCONI, ITALY

³. “Woman, why do you weep?”; cf. John 20:15.

⁴. “A short passage to her glorious reward”: probably a reference to the time Ingeborg would spend in purgatory.

¹. “St. Andrew”: brother of Simon Peter, both fishermen by trade (thus perhaps significant that fish is the focus of this vision). In 1208 his main relics were transferred to Amalfi following the sack of Constantinople. His feast day is 30 November. See also Book VI 107.

². “Will not be counted as a sin”: see further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 495.

An image of the crucified foretold to a lady her death and she saw Blessed Birgitta standing on a column.

1 When a certain lady of the kingdom of Sweden was in the vicinity of Santiago in Galicia, she saw a crucifix painted on the wall of a church. Looking at it with compassionate love and devotion, she heard a voice saying to her: "Where you see this image again and hear it speaking, there you will remain and die." 2 She returned to her native country, and later set out again on pilgrimage to Rome. When she reached the city of Montefiascone, she saw an image similar to the one she had seen in Spain in the house of a certain lady. 3 The image then said to her: "Here you will enter and remain. I will incline the mind of the lady of this house to offer you lodgings here." Thus she persevered there as a recluse and led an exemplary and admirable life in tears, fasting and prayers.

4 Once she had a vision of a certain lady of medium height standing atop a column with large crowds standing around looking at her with admiration. It seemed as though a light rain streamed out of her mouth along with white and red roses which delighted the onlookers by their sweet odor. 5 During a vigil on the following night she saw similar things and heard a voice saying: "The woman whom you see is your lady Birgitta who is staying at Rome and will convey wine from distant parts mixed with roses and will give drink to thirsting pilgrims."¹

✠ Chapter 101

A Revelation about one of Birgitta's Female Companions who Died in Milan

DATE: 1349, MILAN, ITALY

The pilgrimage, death, and salvation of a certain lady whom the devil purged while she lived.

1 A certain lady of Sweden who followed Blessed Birgitta to Rome and, worried about the impulsiveness of her husband, asked Blessed Birgitta to pray to God for him. 2 Christ appeared to her while she was praying and said: "Continue on the way and do not be swayed from your journey and holy resolution. I will cut this woman's journey short and so prepare her body that, when the sack has been emptied, her soul will be sweetly filled, and the husband will get his wish." 3 When they came to Milan, this woman was taken sick and passed away in peace. When she had been buried, Lady Birgitta fell into a spiritual trance while she was praying and heard the devil complaining that her soul had not been awarded to him. 4 Christ then said to him: "Go away. You purged her by afflicting the sack of her body, and I will now own and honor the soul that lay within."¹

1. "Thirsting pilgrims": see further on this vision Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 503, 632.

1. "The soul that lay within": see further on this vision Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 514, 631.

✚ Chapter 102

On the Death of the Bishop of Orvieto

DATE: 1350S, ROME, ITALY

How a certain bishop, enamoured of the world and deceived by the devil, died fruitlessly.

1 When a certain bishop of Orvieto,¹ then vicar for Pope Clement² in the mother city, received some revelations divinely revealed to Blessed Birgitta but did not pay much attention to them, Christ appeared to Blessed Birgitta while she was praying, and spoke these words: 2 “Hear me, Birgitta, for it is my will to reveal something of the future of men! Know that this bishop will never have that which he desires in time with all the strength and feeling of his heart. Instead he will have to surrender all that he has gathered and will die away from home. 3 The same thing will happen to him as happens to a dog tricked by a man. First the man wraps greasy meat around an iron blade so the dog tries to devour it but chokes to death on it. The devil made clear to this bishop that worldly pleasures were agreeable to his heart and that all his possessions were suitable to his rank. 4 Thus he has resolved to give up none of his delights, until death forces him fruitlessly to relinquish everything. Wait and see that all this will turn out as I say.” 5 After a few days the bishop went to Avignon where he ended his life and relinquished his treasures against his will.

✚ Chapter 103

Birgitta has Economic Difficulties while in Rome

DATE: 1350S, FEAST OF ALL SAINTS, ROME

Christ consoles the bride who is worried about the payment of her debts, and foretells the arrival of envoys with the money.

1 When Blessed Birgitta was living in Rome, she had to take loans from various persons because she had not received any money from her native country for three years and therefore had no money. She was in great anxiety because of her creditors who were daily insisting that she pay them back. Before the feast of All Saints it happened that Christ said to her: 2 “Take the borrowed money without any fear. Assure your creditors and promise to pay them back everything the first Sunday after the octave of the Epiphany of the Lord, when the sweat-cloth is displayed,¹ because everything will be paid back to them by then.” 3 And that is what she did. On the evening of that Sunday an envoy came

1. “Bishop of Orvieto”: probably Poncius de Péret, 1348–61. See further on this vision Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 515, 631.

2. “Pope Clement”: pope in Avignon (1342–52); see further Book I 23, 41, 52; Book IV 136, Book VI 63, 96.

1. “The sweat-cloth is displayed”: the cloth imprinted with the image of Christ’s face when St. Veronica of Jerusalem offered her veil to him to wipe his face on the Via Dolorosa; it was taken to Rome in the eighth century and became one of the best-known relics in St. Peter’s Basilica.

from her native country bringing the money, and her creditors received their payment that very day.²

✠ Chapter 104

Concerning Bishop Hemming and Birgitta

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ revealed to St. Birgitta a certain bishop's critical thoughts about how she was eating, but he was a friend of the Virgin Mary.

1 Once the bride of Christ was eating dinner with Bishop Hemming¹ of Åbo (Turku). While she was at the table, she ate the delicious foods placed before her for the glory of God.² Because of this, the bishop was saying in his heart: "Why does this lady who has the gift of the Spirit not abstain from delicious foods?" 2 She knew nothing of his thoughts, but when she was at evening prayer, she heard a voice saying to her in the Spirit: "I am he who filled the shepherd with the spirit of prophecy—was that because of his fasting? I am he who made prophets out of the married³—what merit did they have? I commanded the prophet to take an adulteress as wife—did he disobey? 3 I am he who spoke with Job as kindly in his enjoyments as when he sat in the dung. Hence, because I am full of marvels, I do as I please without the preceding merits of anyone." 4 She made this revelation known to the bishop right away. When the bishop heard it, he recognized his own behavior and confessed that he had judgmental thoughts at the dinner table. He felt humiliated about it and begged her pardon, and asked her to pray for him.

5 Three days later the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Lady Birgitta at prayer and said: "Tell the bishop that because he is accustomed to begin all his sermons with my praise, and because his criticism of you at the dinner table came from charity and not envy, therefore he has earned grace through his charity. 6 Tell him that I want to be a mother to him and will present his soul to God. Now I reveal to him that he is the seventh of the animals earlier shown to you, and that he will bring the words of God before kings and pontiffs."

7 The revelation of seven animals is in Book 4 chapter 125.⁴

✠ Chapter 105

Criticism of an Abbot at the Benedictine Abbey of Farfa

DATE: 1350S, FARFA, ITALY

2. "That very day": see further on this vision Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 516, 633.

1. "Bishop Hemming": see ch. 51, 85. See further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 91, 625, and 521.

2. "She ate . . . for the glory of God"; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31.

3. "Who made prophets out of the married" renders "qui feci coniugatos" [who made the married]; but Hollman in his edition refers to Genesis 2:21–24, which is the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, thus perhaps alluding more generally to the institution of marriage.

4. "Book IV chapter 125": paragraph 37.

The words of Christ that St. Birgitta reported to the abbot of Farfa¹ in order for him to correct himself.

1 Christ speaks: “You, Lord Abbot, should be a mirror of the religious life, but you are a meretricious leader. This is evident from the children who have given you a bad reputation. 2 You should be an example to the poor and distribute alms to the needy, but you behave like a great lord concerning alms. This is evident from the fact that you prefer to live in castles rather than in cloisters. 3 You should be the teacher and mother of your brothers, but instead you are a stepfather and a stepmother. You enjoy pleasures and pomp, but they murmur all day long in their hardships. 4 If you do not correct yourself, I will remove you from your castles, and you will not enjoy company of even the least brothers or return to your fatherland, as you expect, nor will you enter my fatherland.” That was also what happened afterward.

✚ Chapter 106

Birgitta Receives a Relic of the Cross and is Assured of its Authenticity

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

How the bride of Christ acquired a particle of the true cross of Christ. It had been disdained but will appear and cause terror.

1 A certain young man in the diocese of Linköping in Sweden had inherited from his father a gold cross in which were enclosed true relics of the wood of the holy cross. 2 Due to poverty he was forced to sell the gold cross but he gave the wood of the cross to a pious woman, and she was afraid to keep it and so donated it to Blessed Birgitta. 3 When she was in a state of doubt as to whether it was the true wood of the cross or not, Christ said to her: “That young man made an unadvisable trade. He gave up the most precious pearl and traded it for mud. 4 He gave up the sign by which he could have conquered his enemies and traded it for lowly gold. He gave up the desire of the angels and traded it for something desirable to his own eyes. 5 Accordingly, the time is coming when the wood that is now disdained will appear and cause terror. Few men consider how I hung in pain on that wood when my heart burst and my sinews were pulled away from their joints.” 6 Therefore Blessed Birgitta had the wood of the holy cross put in a valuable case in order to prevent unworthy persons from carrying it about.¹

✚ Chapter 107

Birgitta Fears that she has to Move from a House by the Church of S. Lorenzo in Damaso in Rome

DATE: C. 1354, ROME, ITALY

1. “Farfa”: cf. ch 97; on this chapter, see further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 525.

1. “Carrying it about”: see further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 528, 635.

Christ allowed his bride to worry for a month about not finding lodgings in Rome for her household and later comforted her.

1 When Blessed Birgitta had been living in Rome for four years in a cardinal's house next to the church of San Lorenzo in Damaso,¹ the cardinal vicar told her that she and her household would have to leave within a month and find another home. 2 She was very sad when she heard this, because she had her beautiful daughter with her, a young noblewoman of attractive appearance. This is why she was worried about not finding similar lodgings in order to protect her honor and that of her daughter. 3 Tearfully she prayed to God for a suitable solution. But he wanted to test his handmaid and said to her: "Go around the city this month, you and your confessor, and try to find another house suitable for your use." 4 She obeyed and went with her master and spiritual father throughout the city for a whole month in painful anxiety because they were unable to find a suitable house. Her daughter, Lady Katherina, was frequently in tears, seeing her mother's anxiety and concerned about safeguarding her own purity. 5 Two days before the end of the month, when she was having her things packed in order to leave the house and move to the public lodgings for pilgrims, upset and sad, she started praying and tearfully implored the help of heaven.

6 Then Christ appeared to her and said: "You are worried because you are unable to find a suitable house. Know that I permitted this for your own good and for your greater reward in order that you might have some experience of the poverty and hardships that poor pilgrims go through when they leave their native country to come on a pilgrimage, and also in order that you may learn to have compassion on them. 7 However, rest assured that you will not be turned out of this house. Envoys have been sent to you by the owner of the house with the consoling message that you may remain here, as you have done up to now, in peace and quiet along with all your household. You will be safe and secure here, you and your household and all your people, and no one will bother you any more." 8 Lady Birgitta went happily out to report this revelation to Lord Petrus, her spiritual father. Right there and then a messenger knocked on the door of the house bringing a consoling letter from the owner of the house in which he told her not to leave the house but to settle down and live there safe and secure in all peace and quiet.²

✠ Chapter 108

A Vision of Bishop Brynolf Algotsson¹ of Skara

DATE: 2 FEBRUARY 1349, SKARA, SWEDEN

1. "San Lorenzo in Damaso": St. Lawrence in Damasus, where today the Palazzo della Cancelleria is situated, was owned by the cardinal of San Damaso, brother of Pope Clement VI.

2. "Settle down . . . in all peace and quiet": some time afterwards, Birgitta was offered a house by the Roman noblewoman, Francisca Papazzura, who had befriended her and was a witness in the canonization proceedings. The house, which she donated to Vadstena abbey in 1383, was situated on Campo di Fiore, and subsequently became the home of the Birgittine order in Rome, as it still is today. See further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 436–47, 528; and Collijn *Birgittinska gestalter*, pp. 13–17.

1. "Bishop Brynolf Algotsson": c. 1240–1317, bishop of Skara; see further volume 1, pp. 170–71; Collijn, *Acta et processus*, 531, 628.

Concerning how pleasing Blessed Brynolf, the bishop of Skara, was to God and the Virgin Mary.

1 On the feast of the Presentation,² Blessed Birgitta happened to be in the cathedral of Skara, when she sensed a sweet and uncommon aroma. As she was wondering about it, she fell into a spiritual trance. She saw the Blessed Virgin Mary together with a man of admirable beauty who was clothed in pontifical garb. 2 Then the Virgin Mary said to her: “May you know, my daughter, that this bishop gave honor to me while he lived and proved the honor in his deeds. His life was so pleasing to God that it gives off the aroma you smell. 3 Although his soul is in God’s presence, however, his body lies here on earth and no honors are given to it. This pearl, so beloved to me, has thus been placed among pigs.”

4 One can read about the same bishop in the final revelation of the second book.

✚ Chapter 109

Prior Petrus is Cured of a Long-standing Headache

DATE: 1340S, ALVASTRA, SWEDEN

The recorder of these revelations was cured of a lifelong headache

1 Prior Petrus tells that he had been suffering constantly from violent headaches ever since he was a boy, when he asked Blessed Birgitta who was then living in Alvastra Abbey to pray for him about this. 2 Christ appeared to her when she was praying and said: “Go and tell Brother Petrus that he is set free from his headache. May he be accordingly bold in writing out the books of my words as revealed to you, for he will have people to help him.” 3 After that he had no headaches for thirty years.¹

✚ Chapter 110

Queen Johanna of Naples gives Birgitta some Money during her Return Visit from Jerusalem

DATE: 1373, NAPLES, ITALY

The needy should gratefully accept what they are offered.

1 When Blessed Birgitta was returning to Rome from the holy city of Jerusalem, a queen¹ felt compassion on her and sent her a certain amount of money for her support in the city of Naples. 2 When she was in doubt about accepting the gift, Christ appeared to her and said: “Should friendship be repaid with

2. “Feast of the Presentation,” i.e., Candlemas, 2 February, also known as the Feast of the Purification, as in Book II 30, concerning the same bishop.

1. “For thirty years”: see further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 535.

1. “A queen”: Johanna of Naples; see further volume 3, pp. 192–94, and revelations throughout Book VII. See further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 636.

hostility? Should good be repaid with evil? Should a cold vase be filled with snow to make it colder still? 3 Although the queen sent you a gift in the coldness of her heart, you must accept it with reverent love and pray for her that she will attain to divine warmth. 4 It is written:² The abundance of some shall supply the want of the poor, and no good works shall be forgotten by God.”

✠ Chapter III

On a Pilgrimage Birgitta is Beset by Financial Difficulties and Advised to Turn to the Archbishop for Help

DATE: 1360S, NAPLES

The property of priests belongs to Christ and he wants it to be used to support the poor.

1 Blessed Birgitta once suffered a lack of means on her pilgrimage because she had spent her money for the glory of God. She was in need because she had been generous to others for the love of the Lord Jesus, and he appeared to her at prayer and said: 2 “Although the world is mine and I could give all things to all people, nevertheless, that which is offered in charity is more welcome to me, and I prefer to ask for those things that belong to me. Because you have spent your means cheerfully for my glory, you will receive what you need from my means. 3 Send this message to the archbishop of this city:¹ ‘Just as all the churches are mine, so too all charitable donations are also mine. Therefore, use that which is mine to make a gift to me in my friends. Although it is pleasing to me to build up the walls of churches, it is equally pleasing to me to help my needy friends who have spent their own means out of love for me. 4 Recall that I sent Elijah² to the poor widow after I had him fed by ravens. It is not because there was no one richer than this widow at the time or because I could not take care of him without her help—I had sustained his life for forty days without food. No, I did this to test the widow’s love. I, the God who searches hearts and tests minds, knew her love well and would have it shown to others. 5 Therefore, you who are the widow’s father and lord, do good to widows using my goods. Although I can do all things without you and you can do nothing without me, yet I want to see your charity toward them in the meantime.”

✠ Chapter II2

Birgitta’s Cook Repents in Purgatory for Telling her in Jest that her son Karl had been Hanged in Sweden

DATE: 1350S, ROME, ITALY

2. “It is written”; cf. 2 Corinthians 8:14; and Hebrews 6:10.

1. “Archbishop of this city”: possibly archbishop Bernard Rodez of Naples; cf. Book VII 12, 27 and 28. See further Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 636.

2. “Elijah”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 17.

It is wrong to unsettle the friends of God.

1 When St. Birgitta was living at Rome, her cook said to her meanspiritedly: “Lady, your son, Sir Karl¹ has been hanged.” She answered him, saying: “God forbid! Who told you this?” He said: “Pilgrims told me it.” 2 Toward the end of the same year, the cook passed away after he had repented and gone to confession. Blessed Birgitta was concerned for the salvation of his soul and set herself to praying. Seven years elapsed, and then she fell into a spiritual vision and saw a beam placed over the chasm of hell and the soul of the cook was sitting in the middle of it. 3 Then the Virgin Mary appeared and said to her: “The fear of this soul sitting here is incredible. This is because when he lived in the body he unsettled the friends of God. However, be assured that he is of the number of those who will be saved.”

✠ Chapter 113

On the Liturgical Hours Composed by Birgitta and Master Petrus

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The chant of the sisters of the Order of the Holy Savior and the office dictated by Master Petrus, the confessor of St. Birgitta, and the morning lesson and the Rule all come from the Holy Spirit.

1 Mary said to St. Birgitta: “Send my friend my office.¹ Tell him that the same one who dictated the rule dictated this, and the same Spirit who inspired you to write the lessons also inspired him to dictate the chant so wonderfully. 2 Such a wind entered his ears and filled his head and breast that his heart became hot with the love of God. His tongue uttered the words and the chant as the wind guided him. It is not necessary to shorten it. 3 However, tell him to show it to my beloved and true friend, Bishop Hemming.² If he wants, he can add to it or even it out. Everything written there about my infancy is true,³ and the Church cannot contradict it. 4 Although it may not be masterly Latin, nevertheless the words of my dear friend’s mouth please me more than those of some worldly master. 5 The office and the Rule should be kept safe in Alvastra Abbey until my abbey has been finished.”

✠ Chapter 114

The Master’s Ears will be filled with a Rush of Wind to Help his Composition

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Holy Spirit enlightens the human intellect in two ways. The lessons and the chant of the sisters of the Order of the Holy Savior come from the Holy Spirit.

1. “Sir Karl”: cf. also Book IV 73, and Book IV 124.14, which seem to allude to the same event.

1. “My office,” i.e., the liturgical hours.

2. “Bishop Hemming”: see ch. 104.

3. “Everything written about my infancy is true”; cf. for example Book VII ch. 22.

1 The Virgin Mary spoke to the bride of Christ: “It is just as easy for God to speak as to create. He made poisonous snakes,¹ and they know how to proceed as they need. 2 He gladly bends down to humankind to enlighten their conscience so that they may understand his words, as he pleases. And this he does in two ways. 3 The first is like when it seemed to you that someone showed you what to say. The second is like when it seemed to your master that his ears and mouth were filled with wind and his heart swelled like a bellows with ardent love for God. 4 It was in this way that he was able to write those words which he did not know before, and how to compose the responses, antiphons and hymns and arrange the chant. 5 That is why none of them should be shortened or lengthened. However, if anything seems obscure, permission is given to clarify it.”

✠ Chapter 115

An Angel Describes Petrus's Role as Birgitta's Secretary

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Concerning the same Master Petrus.

1 An angel spoke to St. Birgitta and said: “Tell your master that both he and I are a single limb¹ of God—he without, I within. 2 May he write down the words I tell you and subtract or add things, as it pleases him, for we are both guided by the one Spirit.”

✠ Chapter 116

Birgitta Talks to God about her Love

DATE: UNDATED

How sweet and beloved God was to St. Birgitta and conversely.

1 Blessed Birgitta said to God: “O my most sweet God, when you condescend to visit my heart, I cannot keep my arms still but hug myself in divine love for the sake of the sweet pleasure I feel in my heart. 2 It seems to me that you are so impressed on my soul that you are its true heart and marrow and inner parts. You are dearer to me than my own soul and body. 3 How happy I would be, if I did what was pleasing to you. My dearest Lord, grant me your help and the ability to give you glory in every way.”

4 God answers: “Daughter, as wax is impressed with a seal, so your soul is imprinted by the Holy Spirit, and when you are dead, many will say: ‘Now we know that the Holy Spirit was with her.’ 5 My warmth will be added to your warmth, and all who draw near will be warmed, enlightened and strengthened there.”

1. “Poisonous snakes” renders “vermes,” an odd analogy; cf. Book V int. 5 question 1.

1. “He and I are a single limb”: this is about the possibility that there are different ways of expressing the same thing.

Additional Texts

Introduction

Outside the main corpus of the *Revelationes* a small number of supplementary texts survive that are attributed to St. Birgitta, and these are translated below to complete the corpus of her known works.¹

Three Letters in Latin

In the collections of the *Svenskt Diplomatarium* (*Diplomatarium Suecanum*) there are three extant letters in Latin written by Birgitta. She wrote the first in 1367 jointly with her daughter, Katherina Ulfsdotter, and addressed it to Lady Lapa Acciajuoli, the sister of the grand seneschal of Sicily, Niccolo Acciajuoli (a lover of the arts and friend and protector of Boccaccio and Petrarch). Lapa was married to Manente di Buondelmonte from Florence. Her son was named Esau. Several family members are mentioned in the letter, which is an indication of Birgitta's close relations with this high-ranking Italian family.

The other two letters date from 1371 and are addressed to the Spanish Lord Gómez García de Albornoz, who at the time was governor of the duchy of Spoleto. One is signed and sealed by Birgitta herself.

For the printed edition, and for further references, see *Svenskt Diplomatarium*, IX:1 (1970), no. 7622, pp. 308–09; volume X:1 (1970), nos. 105 and 106, pp. 99–103.

Letter 1

DATE: 14 DECEMBER, 1367?, ROME

My dear Lady and dearest daughter,

May you attain the salvation you hope for in the Lord!

Rest assured that we are in good health and doing well as to our outer persons, dear to you, and we pray that the Lord most high may give you to understand that our inner persons are more important.

We wish you to know that we have received good and encouraging news from our home country and are pleased to inform you, dear Lady, that we will stay here for the present in order to take care of some business in the name of the Lord. May we accomplish something profitable to the salvation of our souls! Though we are unworthy, may our actions render honor and blessing, eternal praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus Christ!

It is our wholehearted desire to see you here, lovely lady and dearest daughter. If you, dear lady, decide to take the trouble to come here, please inform us and your own people as soon as possible by letter, knowing that we are mindful of your care and kindness and will always be at your service so long as we live.

We beg of you in every way, dear lady, to send our humble respects to Niccolò Severino (Soderino) and thank him in our name for all the care and kindness he lavishes upon us, which we experience each day, though we deserve it not.

Sir Peter² is recovering day by day and humbly entrusts himself to your pious prayers.

Sir Mimace greets you with affection and also greets especially my daughter, Lady Margaret, declaring himself to be ready at your service.

Give our greetings to Sir Francis, Lady Margaret, and Esau, beloved to us in the Lord. Greetings from all of us to your daughters and to all your family. Please give our cordial greetings to Lady Constance, the wife of Niccolò Severino, and to his whole family.

Lady Ingeborg, Lady Francesca, the noblewoman Margaret Barchina, and all our household humbly entrust themselves to your care.

May God in the highest always guide you and keep you in his grace.

Written in Rome on the day after the feast of Saint Lucy, Virgin.

Birgitta and Katherina of Norway.

Letter 2

DATE: 7 NOVEMBER, 1371, ROME

Praise, honor and glory be to God for all his kindnesses!

My dearest Sir,

From your message as conveyed to me by my lord and son, Bishop Alfonso, I have learned of your good intention. It seems clear to me that it is a special grace and gift of the Holy Spirit. May God grant you perseverance in this intention until the end for his glory and for your own joy and salvation! I pray that it may not offend your goodwill if I write some words to comfort and console you in confronting the enemies of the human race.

My dear sir, I have heard that you are a great man with jurisdiction and authority over your subjects, a nobleman by birth with worldly privileges and wealth. You also enjoy the human consolation of a wife and children as well as that of other friends and relatives. In addition, God has favored you with his Holy Spirit. Given all this, sir, you need to be mindful and vigilant in preserving this grace in order not to allow any of these precious gifts, which are spiritual and divine, to fade away due to earthly and temporal advantages.

God, therefore, now counsels you—you who must govern others and carry out justice—to take great care not to make any unjust legal decisions. If you have any wrongly acquired goods, you are commanded to make full restitution without delay. In any case you must make sure not to acquire anything in an unjust or wrongful manner. Avoid it as carefully as you would a toxic and deadly poison. Moreover, since you have the office of governing the ecclesial and papal territories according to the measure of justice and in an upright manner, you must see to it that the populations under your control are not burdened or overwhelmed with unaccustomed taxes and impositions. Rather, they should in every respect enjoy their traditional rights such as were observed in times of upright and just rulers.

Furthermore, if you want to preserve the precious and special favor of the Holy Spirit who comes to you unseen, you must take great care to avoid God's wrath by never becoming a leader or commander or participant in any war or conflict, neither for the sake of the Church or the pope or because of entreaties or enmity or money or personal connections, unless you know for certain that justice obliges you to aid in conquering or defending others or in coming to the support of the unjustly oppressed.

Because God has given you sufficient material means to support yourself and your family in a moderate and suitable way, you must guard your heart against every greedy desire as though guarding it against the very breath and poison of the devil. Do not save or store up these material means in order to become wealthy enough to enrich and advance your children or relatives.

Again, because God has placed you in the state of wedlock and matrimony, then live so and persevere in it with pious decency and fear of God, being careful to guard yourself against doing anything that might incur the wrath of the Holy Spirit. Avoid the company of women other than your wife so that you do not risk acting contrary to God's commandments. If you behave otherwise, you will find yourself on the road to damnation. May the Virgin Mary, God's Mother, protect you from it and keep you free!

It is advisable that you remain for a time in the papal office that you currently hold as governor of the duchy, until it is known what policy the Lord Pope will follow and where he will set up his see in a stable manner. My firm hope in the living God is that your present desire of leaving the world and serving God will prosper and be brought to a happy conclusion.

I will now speak to you with motherly love and humility and, by your own permission, from now on I will call you my son. My son, I advise you to confess your sins frequently. Whenever you wish to go to communion, receive the body of Christ freely and devoutly. As an infant is fed with the food of his mother's milk and grows, so too your soul will be strengthened through the

reception of the food of the body of Christ and grow stronger in its capacity for divine love.

I advise you to reserve some time every day for thinking and devoutly meditating on the sacred wounds and passion of Christ. Consider, my son, how our good Jesus was arrested, tied up and scourged, mocked and wounded, crowned with thorns, sentenced to death, crucified and nailed, given bitter vinegar and gall to drink, derided, cruelly put to death, and pierced with a spear for your redemption. He who is King of glory and Lord of lords! After this devout meditation, ask him humbly and tearfully to increase the fire of his love in your heart and bring to perfection your good desires according to the divine pleasure of his will. Amen.

May He who is forever blessed enlighten, steer and guide you!

For your assurance, I have written my name in this letter with my own hand and have had it sealed with my customary seal.

Written in Rome, 7 November.

Letter 3

DATE: 7–25 NOVEMBER 1371, ROME

Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people of good will.

My dear sir and beloved son,

I have received your letter which was of great consolation to me and filled my heart with joy. Its contents indicate to me that the Holy Spirit has visited your heart and, therefore, wholehearted praise and thanksgiving should be given to him.

You and your spiritual friends should pray that God may increase and intensify in your soul his holy grace which he has begun to pour into your heart.

It is advisable for you to keep the fear of God always firmly planted in your heart and always to keep in mind the thought that your efforts in this office are being offered up to God, preferring to do this work for Christ the High Priest in heaven than for the pope or anyone else in this world. Better to desire the friendship of God than all the offices and worldly rewards the pope may offer you in return for your efforts. Reflect regularly on what I wrote to you in my previous letter, keep it constantly in mind and make a genuine attempt to put it into effect.

I, who am unworthy, advise you to remain unwavering in the office entrusted to you, if the pope comes to Italy. In this office you can offer the Lord Pope trustworthy aid in the service of God. In this way no one else will be appointed to it who may turn out to be a ravenous wolf and offensive to God or someone else who is not as faithful and devoted to his duties.

But if the pope does not come to Italy, I advise you to remain in your office for an entire year in hopes of receiving sure and saving counsel by God's grace concerning what action you should take in regard to your state in life.

Regarding the request in your letter that I send you some devotional prayer, I must answer that I am no good at such things and that, at the moment, I have no time for it, because I am about to undertake my journey to Naples. If, however, God

willing, I stay for a time in Naples, I will compose another prayer for you by his grace. Still I advise you to recite no prayer more willingly than Our Father, for it was kindly and divinely offered to us from the precious lips of Jesus Christ himself.

While other prayers may also be useful for stirring up devotion in the heart, I am now sending you a brief prayer for you to recite with humble reverence and deep devotion, especially at the moment of the consecration of the body of Christ on the altar. Here it is:

My Lord and my God, my Creator and Redeemer, unworthy sinner that I am, I beseech you by your great and wonderful work of mercy in converting bread into your true body and wine mixed with water into your blood unto our eternal and saving nourishment: Convert my will wholly unto your will so that I may always in thought, word and deed fulfil your good pleasure throughout my life. Amen.

My dear son, in your letter you asked me to receive you as my spiritual son totally and entirely. This is my answer: just as I am accompanied by my two sons and my daughter, so too I receive you as my son, and you will constantly accompany me as a son enclosed within my heart. You will be a sharer in my unworthy prayer and pilgrimage. I intend to return as soon as I can from this pilgrimage and overseas journey of mine, and when I return I will notify you immediately of my arrival.

My sons, my confessor, and my daughter humbly send their greetings to you. Pray for us, my son, and seek comfort by meditating on the passion of Christ and on the grief of his sorrowful Mother.

Two Autographs in Birgitta's Own Hand

The precious manuscript leaves on paper written in Birgitta's own hand provide a unique insight into her writing ability and method in the recording of her visions. They date from the 1360s, some ten years after her arrival in Rome. Autograph A contains a message to the pope to reform himself and his Church, and Autograph B contains an exhortation to four Swedish noblemen to rise up against King Magnus Eriksson. The equivalent texts in Latin of these two autographs respectively are Book IV 49 (Autograph A), and Book VIII 56 paragraphs 97 through 102 and *Extravagantes* 80 (Autograph B). On these texts and their transmission, see further, volume 1, p. 17 and p. 2 for an image of Autograph B.

Paragraphs have been numbered so as to correspond as far as possible to the numbering of the Latin edition and our English translation. In Autograph A, paragraphs 8, 11, and 12 of the Latin text have no correspondence in the autograph (except for a phrase in paragraph 8 that in the autograph appears in paragraph 13). Equally, several passages in the autograph have no correspondence in the Latin: in particular the summary interpretation of the whole vision included in paragraph 10, the phrases that conclude each part of the interpretation, a paragraph directed to the pope, and the interpretation of the roof that drips fire. Both the additions and the omissions of the Latin version can be understood as revisions undertaken by the translator after consultation with Birgitta herself.³

Nevertheless, it is curious that the Latin translation includes the interpretations of the sayings directed to the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, and the secular clergy, but omits those directed to monastics and laymen. The autograph seems to have had all of these, although the interpretation of the saying directed to laymen was on a separate sheet that has now been lost.

The opening paragraphs of Autograph B comprise the last part of Book VIII ch. 56, a lengthy revelation that contains a dispute between an angel and a devil about a living king and the complaints his subjects have against him. A highly political message then follows that is effectively an incitement to four noblemen to rise against the king and depose him.

By comparing these valuable original fragments with the surviving Latin texts it is possible to gain an insight into Birgitta's own rhetorical style; her use of metaphor and simile, repetition, parallel phrases, and antithesis; and her syntax that echoes the patterns of the medieval Swedish legal tradition, echoing her strong family ties in the law and her familiarity with the cadences of Swedish vernacular legal prose.⁴

Autograph A (Corresponding to Book IV, ch. 49)

1 It appeared to a certain person, who was awake and not sleeping, as if she were in a palace, and on the wall right in front of her a sun appeared, very large. In front of the sun there were two pulpits, as it were, one on the right wall of the palace and the other on the left, and there was a kind of space between the sun and the pulpits. Two rays went out from the sun, one to the right pulpit and the other to the left.

2 A voice was heard from the left pulpit, even though no one could be seen there, but the voice was heard pleading and saying thus to the sun: "Hail, eternal king, you are creator and redeemer and just judge! Nothing is hidden from you, but all things are known to you which are beyond this person who is now able to hear these words and answers by your permission. O Lord (said the voice), your vicar, who sits in your place, has brought the seat back to its old place Rome, where the bodies of the first popes Peter and Paul⁵ lie, together with many chosen friends of God." 3 A voice answered from the right pulpit, saying: "That the seat comes to Rome pleases God; the downfall and destruction of his Holy Church greatly displeases him. 4 For its doors sag down to the earth rather more than they should. The hinge-pins of the doors are completely extended and not properly bent. 5 The floor is all dug up into deep pits that have no bottom. 6 From the ceiling drip drops of brimstone with a burning fire with a terrible stench. 7 The walls are as ugly to look at as if they were mixed with putrefying blood."

9 After this had been said the voice from the left cried out, saying to the one that had spoken: "Explain the words that you just spoke, what the spiritual meaning is of what you said physically." 10 Then the voice on the right answered and said: "The Holy Church is the society of Christians. The pope is represented by the doors, the cardinals by the hinge-pins, the floor represents all

other secular clergy, the roof represents monastics who should follow their Rule, and the walls represent all the Christian lay people. If the pope wishes to renew and beautify this church he should start with himself, and carefully search and inquire if there are any incomes or fees and taxes or duties under the papacy that have been unreasonably levied, and give those back to their rightful owners. 13 Then he should look to his own household and his belongings of gold and silver, animals and clothes; he should take of that only what he needs, and all that is surplus—that which is kept for no other purpose than for pride—he should pass on to the truly needy. 14 Thereafter he should organize his entourage with moderation, according to necessity. He may have soldiers when he sees a need for them, not in order to protect his life, 15 for it is in God's hands to decide when he wishes to call him to judgment; but he may have them so that he can put a check on those who do injustice.

The pope should lift his love's desire from all the things that are transient and take pleasure in that place where all needs are fulfilled with never-ending joy. There, in heaven, God has arranged a place for all his vicars who follow his will when they represent him here on earth. The door of Holy Church is lifted from the earth when the pope reasonably disdains all perishable things, practices a moderate abstinence and loves all his subjects with godly love.

16 By the hinge-pins of the doors the cardinals are meant, whose support the door should have but who have been outstretched as far as possible toward pride and greed and their own bodily delight. 17 This is why the pope should take a hammer and tongs and bend the hinges to his will. 18 Let him bend them first with the tongs, that is, with soothing words and godly counsel and fatherly love, so that they put off simony, all their sinful habits and all excess. If anyone refuses to obey, the pope should strike him with the hammer, that is, show him his displeasure and reduce his income. Thus should he bend them to his will, so that they may be called and truly be the hinges of Holy Church.

19 By the floor of Holy Church is meant the bishops and the secular clergy, whose greed is so deep that it is bottomless. And from their pride and luxurious way of living an effervescence arises. It is hateful for God's friends to witness this stench. 20 If the pope wants to improve matters, he may order all bishops to follow his precept as regards property and other matters as you heard himself being ordered to do. Thereafter, he should order each bishop to watch over the ways of his own clergy. 21 Anyone who refuses to mend his ways and live continently should be stripped of the income he has from the Church. God would rather not have a mass said somewhere than let whorish hands handle his blessed body. Thereafter he should prohibit simony and suppress it as much as he can. Thus should the pope, by means of these things that have now been said, renew the floor of Holy Church.

By the roof is meant those who have renounced the world and have bound themselves to a rule and to obedience. Just as a roof protects from water and weather, so monastic people should protect against God's displeasure by their humbleness and continence, prayers, and godly singing. These people now incite God to wrath by their damned example. They have forsaken humility and

fallen into pride itself. They have forsaken the upbringing and way of life of their good parents. Thus has the devil set their hearts on fire, which is likened to the fire of brimstone that drips down, not from pride alone but from many other sins and ungodly habits, which are likened to tar and pitch; and their example has brought many to damnation. The pope must renew this roof and make it better.”

Autograph B (Corresponding to Book VIII 56.97–102 and Extravagantes 80)

97 “First I want to tell you, how spiritual understanding has been given to you to see and hear. Certain people had the Holy Spirit, 98 so that they knew when things would happen, as when the prophet said to the king: ‘That day the messenger will come.’⁶ And many knew what answer they would get before they spoke. 99 Some even knew, without being told by other men, which people were alive or dead, and before the battle began they knew how it would end. 100 You have not obtained permission to know more than what you see and hear spiritually and to speak in accordance with that; 101 nor may you know whether those who are far away from you are living or dead, even if you are commanded to write to them; nor even if they want to obey or do what they hear. 102 If you had known that the king did not wish to obey, then you would not have been so well-disposed toward him after what you heard said. Even though it may happen that the king disdains and rejects it, yet another king shall take it for his honor and use it well.

It shall appear to you as if four of my friends, who are still living, stood before me.⁷ One of them is the one whom the king obeyed when the man was worldly but hated as soon as the man became God-fearing. These four are named in accordance with their worldly power———.⁸

1⁹ Then it seemed to me as if the Virgin spoke to them and her words began:

“I am the one to whom the angel said ‘Ave, gratia plena!’ Therefore my grace shall be offered to all those that need it and wish to receive it. 2 I offer you my help for the defense of your kingdom against God’s enemies, spiritual and physical. I beseech you to work so that the kingdom gets the king who can help it toward godly deeds and courtly customs. 3 I declare to you that the justice of God’s judgment shall separate the king and his offspring from this kingdom. Another man born in the kingdom, for the moment unnamed and elected by God to be king, shall govern the kingdom in accordance with the advice of God’s friends¹⁰ and the needs of the kingdom.

4 Do as I advise you, so that fewer people will be harmed and so that you may attract more people to your side. Keep this plan secret which I am now speaking about, you four, both from God’s friends and his enemies! You should conceal it, in case you do not find the person who, like you, wants the kingdom to be strengthened in God’s honor, good custom to be begun and renewed, and so that what the crown has lost may be restored beneath it.¹¹

5 Begin thus: one of you, or more, should go to King Magnus and speak thus: ‘We have something to say to you which concerns your soul, and we be-

seeh you to keep it secret like confession,' 6 and with more suitable words, if you wish. And this is the sense: You have the worst reputation in the kingdom and beyond that a Christian man can have, namely that you have had sexual relations with men. And that appears likely, because you love men more than God or your own soul or your own wife.

7 Secondly, we do not know whether you have the right faith or not. For you were forbidden by the Church to hear mass, but you did not care about that and went to church as before and heard masses. Thirdly, you are a robber of the crown's lands and property. 8 Fourthly, you have been a traitor to your servants and subjects. The Scanians¹² served you and your son, wishing to serve you and your son and lawfully keep the territory under the crown and do harm to the crown's enemies. You delivered them into the hands of their worst enemy, so that as long as he is alive they will never be sure of their property or life. 9 If you wish to make amends for your sin and take the territory back, then we will willingly serve you. If you will not do this yourself, then give us your son, while you yourself travel away or even pass the crown over to him with a sworn oath that he will win back our territory and obey his council of state and his servants, and admonish the commoners to obey justice.

10 But supposing that another man is to become God's king, he may comply with this without the least danger. For God has power over the young man as well as the old man to shorten his life or drive him out of the country, now as well as then; but He shall ordain everything according to His pronounced judgment, to prolong it or shorten it.

11 It may be that they will not obey; then seek friends secretly. Since you have some from the nobility who support you, say openly to them what you said to the king in secret, and say that you do not wish to serve any heretic or traitor, nor his son if he wishes to follow his father's deeds. 12 Take a leader, who will wage war on the crown's behalf! If it is the person my son has chosen, he will be sanctioned. If not, he will be lawfully exiled. 13 If you give advice and money, I will add courage and a manly heart, to enable the man who is reluctant. If the king wants to travel out of the country none of you is to follow him."

Six Meditations in Swedish

Four devotional pieces in the vernacular, here termed *Meditations*, are included in one manuscript of the medieval Swedish tradition (MS Cod. Holm A 5a; see further volume 1 p. 35 n64) where they are placed at the end of Book IV as chapters 142 through 145. They do not appear in any known Latin manuscript. These texts, which may date from the years of Birgitta's marriage (one mentions her husband and children), contain spontaneous petitions and intimate reflections. They dwell on the humanity of Christ and the doctrine of atonement, generally adopting a literal rather than a theological interpretation of the Bible. See further on these meditations volume 1 p. 7. For the edition, see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 2, pp. 261–69.

There are two further *Meditations* for which there is no Latin equivalent. These may date from Birgitta's early widowhood (as suggested by one that describes her as "the bride of Christ"). Again, they are deeply personal texts that develop a simple theology and raise themes that recur commonly throughout the *Revelationes*. Today they survive only in fragmentary form—consisting of eleven lines—in MS Codex Bergmanianus in Lund University Library. Before they were lost they were edited, in 1758, by Sven Lagerbring; and later they were reprinted by Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppebarelsor* 4, pp. 127–31.

Meditation 1

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

My Lord Jesus Christ, I fully believe that no one who asks your help in overcoming sin is so sinful that her prayer is not heard. Yet I know nothing that erases sins or strengthens good deeds so quickly as the grace to love you above soul and body, goods and honor, friends and family, and all the world. If I were only granted the grace to love you as I should, then I would have proper contrition for my sins. You are the same God as you were when on the cross you answered the robber and heard his prayer. My Lord Jesus Christ, hear my prayer, even though it may be that I have done nothing by my deeds to deserve it, yet hear me because you are true God and worthy. Make my heart burn with the fire of your love, so that everything unpleasing to you becomes like ashes in the blowing wind.

My Lady Virgin Mary, Mother of God, pray for me that I may receive this grace for the sake of what you felt at that moment when God became man, and for what you, God's Virgin Mother, felt when the angel foretold it to you.

Pray for me all you angels who were created incorporeal, for the sake of the joy you knew when you first saw God; and because you were among those who stood firm and not among those who fell away from him.

Pray for me, patriarchs and prophets and all you children of Adam who lived in darkness before God's passion, for the sake of what you felt at the moment when God's blessed body suffered death. The eyes of his blessed body lost their light and became lifeless in his blessed head. You lost the darkness and obtained light from his divinity. His mouth was filled with two kinds of bitterness. One was that which came from all his innards at the approach of death; the other was the bitterness when he tasted the vinegar and gall. Your spiritual mouths were filled with two kinds of sweetness: first, the sweetness of knowing in your souls that you were destined for salvation and the eternal kingdom and separated from all torment; the other, the sweetness you received from the sight of God when you were filled with eternal joy.

Pray for me, a sinner, that by your prayer God may forgive my sins, and make my heart fit for his service and burning love.

Pray for me apostles and evangelists and all you who sat inside the house on the day of Pentecost when you received the Holy Spirit, for the sake of what you felt when you received the courage to speak and to serve him and would not spare your bodies from any pain and trouble. Help me, that by your prayer

the same Spirit may condescend to visit my heart and be enkindled in it and never cease or be quenched. May I receive words and deeds to do and speak according to his blessed will!

Pray for me, all you martyrs and confessors and all you souls released from purgatory, for the sake of the joy you knew when you first saw Jesus Christ's body in his divinity. Your places were assigned near God each according to the way you loved God while you lived. You received light from his beauty. He received you as a father does his dearest son who has been released from his deadliest enemy. You heard all the company of heaven proclaim your honor. Help me with your prayer that I may love him in such a way that my thoughts, words, and deeds may all be in accordance with his blessed will.

Meditation 2

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

Our understanding cannot grasp spiritual things except by likenesses which are in the world. A sort of powder¹³ burns so greatly when set alight that if it is enclosed in something it gives off such a great noise from the powder's power and movement that all those who hear it are beside themselves with astonishment. What I mean is God the Father in his divinity. The powder signifies God's Son, who was born of the Father without their being separated at all. The fire signifies the Holy Spirit. The virtue of Jesus Christ's highest love was revealed for all the company of heaven at the point when the little piece of flesh, God's blessed heart, died from torments on the cross and the body hung there dead. At that movement, which was in God's blessed breast, all the company of heaven shouted with all its power and great rejoicing and new praise and sweet song: "Praise and honor be to God." Then Lucifer, prince of hell, received such a great blow that he faded in all his strength and might and all the devils' tribe roared and thundered and shuddered with fear and wonder. The heavenly bodies were upset; the earth moved with all its weight and everything that grows on it. O Lord of Bethlehem, you perfected your lordly life when you led the great host from darkness and grief into eternal joy. O most honorable knight, God's blessed body, you were yourself made from Adam's kin in your mother's womb. O how valiantly you perfected your knightly justice as befitted their order!¹⁴ You strengthened the Church when you spoke and ordained the new law; you protected widows when you promised confession; you helped fatherless children when you opened heaven with your heart's blood; and your heart is constantly ready to do justice and destroy injustice.

The son of God and the Virgin's son is dearest to my soul and body above all that is created. May all in heaven give honor and thanks for its joy which shall be without end. And everything that is in purgatory shall praise you for your merciful deeds; your praise shall even be in hell, without their will, because of the justice of your judgments. All the heavens and planets shall honor you with the fairest sound and their movements and song. And the world with all that is in it, dead and alive, may walk eternally in praise of God's blessed body because you wished to be made man, and your handiwork was bought so dearly and your love which was eternally in you was revealed to all.

My dear lord God, I am one of those whom you bought with your death. What shall now be my help? I have myself deserved hell in so many ways; I have acted against your commandment; I feel in myself the lack of good deeds and the desire to sin. I will never gain heaven if I do not gain forgiveness of sins by divine love. My Lord God, just as it was impossible to come to heaven before you died, on account of Adam's sin, so it is impossible for me to be separated from hell which I have myself deserved, except with your help. My Creator and Savior, save me and have mercy on me for the sake of your great virtue and mercy.

Meditation 3

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

My Lord Jesus Christ, true God, you are my creator and redeemer and my judge. I confess I have broken your commandment in many ways; but your virtuous patience has helped me. With your grace I should dearly like to better myself.

My Lord I bewail to you the inclination of my heart. It seems as if there is a canker in my heart. Two thorns through my heart. A crust covers it on the outside that constricts it and oppresses me severely. My dear Lord God, this is impossible for me to do myself without your help. Therefore I ask you for the sake of all the humility which you revealed in the world: tear out this crust that stands for pride, and weave about it the humility that has been without beginning in the virtue of your divinity. My Lord God, I pray to you whose head was crowned with thorns; pull out the thorn that is in my heart, the bodily love for my husband¹⁵ or children, friends and relatives, and replace it instead with divine love for the benefit of my fellow Christian. I ask you my dear Lord, whose blessed hands and feet were torn assunder by the nails; pull out of my heart the thorn of worldly desire and place there instead a longing and desire for your service and your eternal kingdom.

My dear Lord God, I ask you this for all that your dear heart suffered when you died from harsh pains on the cross and all your body became cold, and after death your breast was pierced by the spear. Pierce the canker in my heart.

Meditation 4

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

Rejoice, my Lord Jesus Christ in eternal honor and power, over the victory you won in the world. O what joy was added to all your company when for the first time your blessed body came to heaven. Well might they all say with one voice "God's body, welcome from the battle. No one was or is born or created as your equal."

Honor be to you for daring over all warriors who have braved their lives for the sake of justice. You dared to go into battle naked with endurance.

Praise be to you over all choirs of angels, for you dared to suffer that which they could scarcely see and even less do themselves. With humility you conquered your mortal enemies who felt envy toward you. With patience

you conquered the devils' kind and their company at the extreme point of death. With your heart's blood you dared to open heaven and conquer hell. May your blessed body be honored by your blessed father who sent you without a body into the world, you who have won the highest seat beside him above all other bodies and angels, the same seat which you held eternally without a body.

Praise be to you, God's body, for the Virgin who bore you, for all that you accomplished in her. For the word became flesh and blood in her womb of her flesh and blood and the conceiving and nurturing power of the Holy Spirit; with her virginity whole and intact and without any pain, she gave birth to you with all joy. You were first to visit her after your death with the greatest comfort. And after her death you assigned her a seat next to yourself and made her mistress over all that is created and crowned her as the highest empress.

Honor and praise be to your body from all your knighthood in heaven and earth. With your help you have won a victory over the flesh, demons, and the world. They have all the right to speak to you and bear witness and say: "Go forth before us, God's blessed body, in greatest joy and highest honor and in the highest power beside your father. You are the strongest warrior and most manly knight. You did the greatest deeds and suffered the harshest pains in the world. O Virgin's son, your body was so fragile and tender above all bodies. Just as the pupil of the eye and the heel are different so your pain was greater and harsher than any other's, however short or long it was, whether on land or water or in fire. May your honor be proclaimed by all the company of heaven: 'Cry to the height where none can comprehend the vastness of the power of God.' That cry shall also go down to the bottomless depths of hell. Your praise shall be proclaimed and increased in the world where both your friends and enemies are. For you were the first into battle beneath your own banner which may be compared to your love. Then the banner was lifted up and made visible from the moment in which you said 'Consummatum est'¹⁶ until you commended yourself into your father's hands, and when the pains from all your wounds reached your heart. You heard your enemies cry to you with the loudest shouts and insults and scornful words. You saw¹⁷ your dearest mother as one half-dead from sorrow and suffering, and all your friends weeping with greatest distress. That you did not come down from the cross at that moment and ease your victorious heart was comfort to your friends and distress to your enemies, for you could easily have done so if you had wished. Then love was shown in that you preferred your heart to be broken than that souls should lose heaven."

Meditation 5

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

St Birgitta, the bride of Christ, says: My soul has trouble seeing the things that are close to me. I can more easily see those that are far away from me, like the sky and the planets, the earth with its minerals, stones, and plants; so also the things that walk, crawl and fly that are born on earth, and that which moves in water. All of this I consider to be at a distance from me, for my soul cannot take

any of those things with it. I consider those things to be close to me that I get either through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or through the temptation of the devil. For no person who is able to understand that this life will end in death will be without these two. Therefore, without doubt, under these conditions no one can govern herself alone, but will be led by the will of either the good or the evil spirit. Just as day and night do not remain during all hours, so it is with the human being. Sleeping and waking, she goes forth either on the road to heaven or on the road to hell. If her will is such that she loves God above all things and her fellow Christian as herself, flees everything that God has forbidden and does what she is commanded to do to the best of her ability, then that person is walking on the road that leads to everything good. If her will wishes to obey her flesh contrary to God's commandment and if, in order to have worldly honor and riches, she is prepared to harm her fellow Christian's life and possessions and cause him shame or sorrow, then she walks on the road that leads to everything evil. To a person who walks on the road that leads to eternal life, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is closer and the devil is farther away – but out of spite he will not let such a soul be without temptation. When that road is taken that leads to suffering in eternal death, then the devil is closest with his goadings – but God's goodness never stops touching that person from time to time with his visitation. Some things are to be mentioned here that are natural to a human, and through which good spirits test her and bad spirits tempt her. Those are the things that, firstly, are natural for the body and, secondly, belong to the world, like sleeping and waking, clothing and food, and being sometimes saddened by sorrows, or else sometimes comforted by joys. The good spirit advises us to be reasonable, to sleep so moderately that when anything is to be done in God's honor we shall not be weighed down by sleeplessness, and so that the time for God's service is not shortened or abandoned because of too long a sleep. For this reason the body should be frequently roused from pleasant sleep. The evil spirit protests. He advises to "Sleep until the body is tired of bed and the day well advanced.¹⁸ If you have to finally fast, then you should prolong your sleep, so you can get up at midday. Then do some work until the ninth hour, so that your appetite for food will be all the more. Then eat so properly that when evening comes you will not be hungry. Fill yourself up so much with drink that you have no longing for an evening meal. Stay awake into the night with merrymaking and drink until sleep overcomes you and then go to bed so drunk that you sleep long into the day. Do not get up until you don't feel like sleeping anymore. So may you make your fasting easy for yourself." He also advises some to fast and observe vigils so immoderately that their consciences are dulled, until they fail in word or deed or thought in the service of God.

Meditation 6

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

My dear Lord and Father, my sins, which I was reminded of before we parted, are known to you both in their planning and their quick execution. How little I have managed to improve my ways! But although I have added some sin every

hour, still my will is to improve and with the powerful help of God never to transgress again. I want to tell you how I think about the condition of my blessed soul, before God deigns to separate it from the body and call it to his judgment. I know that when I came new from baptism, then my soul was beautiful and rich. Now it seems that her beauty is broken and she is very poor on account of my sin. I am unable to grasp the shape of the soul with my mind. Therefore, I want to imagine the soul as though she were a person like me with limbs, and with God's help and according to my mind's image, I wish to make some of her difficulties known to you.

Saint Bernard says "multi multa sciunt et se ipsos nesciunt".¹⁹ I may say that is true for I am one of those who have been in this state. It is not by my own merit that I know anything. It is due to my lack of virtue that I have devoted myself to introspection. With God's help I now want to say something about the appearance of the limb of the soul, as if she were formed in accordance with the shape of the body. It is beyond all doubt that God in his goodness would never have wanted to give a lower form and higher understanding and more distress and sorrow and dos and don'ts to human beings than to other animals, if it were not for the fact that their souls are to live eternally. I will first mention something in the common sense that is superior to the animal soul. I regard it as my soul's head. It is the ability to distinguish between these five things: to see and hear, smell and taste and touch, which are all in the understanding of the head, for the support of the body in this short life. Then there are another five things in the faculty of discernment that I call the head, and they are for the eternal comfort of the soul. The first is to see the things that faith states shall remain eternally and distinguish them from those that will only exist for a short duration. It is the same with the hearing: which burden in the world shall be honored for God's sake, and which honor in the world shall be thought a burden for his sake. The third is to smell what foulness and disgust accompany inappropriate carnal desire.²⁰

Four Birgittine-Norwegian Texts

The so-called Birgittine-Norwegian text of the *Revelationes* (MS E 8902, Riksarkivet, Stockholm) is distinct from the Medieval Swedish text tradition (see further volume 1 p. 22). It dates from sometime between 1379 and 1425 and is a compilation of twenty-five texts in a complex hybrid mixture of Swedish and Norwegian. It contains four texts that do not pass through the Latin tradition at all. For the edition of these passages see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 4, p. 458 line 18–p. 461 line 26; p. 465 line 25–p. 467 line 2; p. 487 line 1–p. 488 line 2; p. 498 lines 18–29.

Birgittine-Norwegian Text 1

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

Therefore the rulers should be addressed with these words: "I God, creator and redeemer of all, have done three things with you. First, I have frightened you by

my rod. Second, I have fed you. Third, I have protected and preserved you from all harm and misfortunes.

First, I have frightened you as a father does his son. He beats him to stop him stealing or doing any other evil deeds. So I too have beaten you with my wrath to stop you from falling too greatly into the hands of the devil. I have also fed you, supplying your bodily needs, and conferred honor on you and made your name great. I have also protected you from misfortunes inflicted by your enemies.

In exchange for these three things I demand three things of you. Just as I have frightened you, so too you shall frighten others by godly words and good deeds, and by the sword for those who transgress against justice. Second, you shall feed those who spread my word and serve God. Third, you shall protect the commoners just as I have protected you, and help and show consideration for those in need.

There are three estates in the Holy Church. One is the clerics. The second is the knighthood. The third is the commoners. These three turn against me and have forgotten my love. For this reason I now want to open a gate where I wish to enter: that is the mind of the Karelians and heathens. On them do I wish to bestow my love and grace and become sweet in their mouth, where I have long tasted sour and rancid.

Inasmuch as my Birgitta²¹ wrote to you to gather together spiritual and wise men and those who love God, take counsel with them as to what you might do in this affair. Even though I know everything, yet shall man engage not only his conscience but also his body for my honor so strenuously that the devil cannot say that I reveal everything and man does not act according to his conscience.

Truly I lament to you and all my friends that to Christians I taste like rotten meat in their mouths; they spit me out and consider my commandments that redeemed them to be empty words. For this reason I want to be tasted by the heathen and become sweet to him. To Christians who count me as nothing I want to come as a strong, harsh, and awesome champion. I want to come to them so awesome that they dare not raise a finger against me, so strong that they will become more powerless than a midge, and so harsh that they shall know misery in the world and eternal misery in hell. In my holy scripture it is written: 'so when I saw Jerusalem, then I wept and said: if you knew the things that will befall you, then well might also you weep.'²² I often wanted to take you under my protection and love, as the hen does her chick.²³ But you did not want that. Well may I say to you: Jerusalem, that is, all Christian men, you do not think about what I have done for your sake, and what love I have for you, and how poorly you repay me. If you considered this, you would indeed weep. I went for your sake with bloody feet to the cross. I bore you in my arms when they were wrenched out of their sockets with ropes. I bore you in my hands when they were penetrated with sharp nails, and the sound of the hammer was heard both in heaven and on earth; because even while I suffered in my manhood on the cross, I was in the godhead ruling both in heaven and on earth. I protected you with my head when that sharp thorn pierced it. I shielded you with my own side when I was pierced with the sharp spear. Why do you think I wished to suffer this, if not in order that you should love me all the more? I walked with bloody feet to the cross so that the devil would never more gain entry into your soul. I bore you as a

mother in my arms so that my divine love should never be separated from you. I protected you with my hands so that the devil's deeds would not harm you and so you would do good deeds and live a godly life. I protected you with my head so that your worldly desire and sinful greed should not be reckoned as sin. And so that the devil would not bring shame on you I shielded you with my side so that your sins would not come before the sight of my father and my saints.

I, your God and Creator, did this for you. But you have repaid me badly. You remained in your pride while I stood both blue and bloody and naked for your sake. I subjected all my limbs to the harshest pains, but you did not want to suffer one word for me, and you spared none of your limbs from sinning. Because I desired nothing but you, I wanted rather to let my heart be pierced to pieces than to lose you. But you desire the least created thing with more ardor than me the creator. All is sweet to you except me, all is delightful to contemplate except my commandment and love, who created you and give you all good things. I give you health and life. I give you spiritual and physical comfort. I give you heaven to enlighten you and the earth and all that is in her for enjoyment and pleasure. You act as if this is nothing. For this reason the days shall come when you will repent of what you have done. For the greatness of the grace I have now bestowed on you your misery will be so much harder."

Birgittine-Norwegian Text 2

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

Mary the Mother spoke to her Son Jesus Christ and said "Praise and honor be to you, Creator and Lord of all things. You loved and honored me above all creatures. You mixed your divinity with your manhood in my womb. You humbled yourself to become mine and took flesh and blood without sin from me. By your virtue all my soul burned to become yours. You are my dear Son and my Father. You are my God, Creator and Lord. You deigned to make me queen in heaven and lady over all spirits. Therefore I ask your mercy and all the saints with me. For even though we see everything and know everything in you, yet for the sake of that person who is listening and cannot grasp and understand spiritual things without likenesses, we speak to you, not with a physical mouth because we are not physical, but our speaking to you is nothing other than the manifestation of our will in her soul and conscience. Therefore my beloved Son and Lord, we ask your mercy because we see that by your justice people go one after another to hell. We, too, need your mercy. We speak to her and pray first of all for the angels, that their choir might be completed²⁴ to your honor and glory. We also pray for the world, that you send to it your mercy and your light, for it is blind and deaf to your honor."

Then God the Father answered: "Blessed be you my Son's bride, and my dear mother. You were pleasing to my divinity above all others and by your sweetness you attracted my blessed Son to you. Blessed be you, my Son's bride because all creation cannot be likened to you. Blessed are you, dearest bride and the mother of my Son. You loved me more than everything else and so you deserved to have not any son but the very Son of God. And he

deserved to have not any mother but you who loved me most. Since you obeyed my commandment on earth, which I sent you, I now want to answer your prayer. Because of your prayer I want to send the world my grace. To him who receives it, I will give myself as a reward. To him who despises it, will be never-ending woe.”

Birgittine-Norwegian Text 3

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

“She is not mine, because she is like three men. The first is the one who says to another: ‘I want to give you an appropriate sum of money so that I may kill your son before your eyes.’ This is what she does to me. She seems to do little to honor me and she gives away my possessions to harm others all the more effectively and inflict misery on Christian men who are my sons, in order to promote her own child in the world. I swear this on my truth, for I am the truth and nothing was or is uttered from my mouth but the truth. But she will die in the condition in which she now is; she will never see my face.

She is also like that man, who says this: ‘I want to give you a small amount of money so that I may burn all your possessions.’ This is what she does to me. She serves me with little work, and no mind or love, because she wants to fulfill her will and inflict sorrow on others to satisfy her will. Truly her life is abhorrent to me and most wretched because of this. She is not only against me with her evil desire, but she draws others with her behavior and encourages evil.

Third, she is like a whore who lies between the master of the house and her whoremonger. Because she fears the master of the house she dares not refuse him; yet her love is all for her whoremonger. She too is like that. Although she seems to serve me in some things, her desire and will are all toward the world which she loves much more. Because she wishes to serve two masters she is not dear to me. Woe to her if she does not better herself! If she does not believe then she will experience.”²⁵

Birgittine-Norwegian Text 4

DATE: EARLY 1340S, SWEDEN

I who speak to you am Jesus Christ, true God and man, creator of heaven and earth, one God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, not three gods, but one, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. I am the same who spoke to Moses and all the prophets. I gave the law to the people of Israel. I am the same who lay in the Virgin’s womb with my humanity, while at the same time I was in the godhead governing both in heaven and on earth. These words, which I speak to you now, should be addressed to this king in this kingdom.

A Letter to Birger Ulfsson in Swedish

Birgitta’s son, Birger Ulfsson, was born some time in the 1330s. He was lawman and councilor, first in Tiohäräd, Småland, and then in Närke. He traveled

several times to Rome to visit his mother and went with her to the Holy Land, where he was made a knight of the Holy Sepulcher in 1372. He accompanied his mother's body back to Sweden in 1373, and later assisted in the building work at Vadstena abbey. He died in 1391, only weeks before Birgitta's canonization was pronounced. The image of Birger as an honorable knight—as reflected in Birgitta's letter—is reinforced in the Swedish chronicle written at Vadstena in the fifteenth century known as *Margareta Clausdotters krönika*, in which he is juxtaposed with Karl at the meeting with the pope and portrayed as the epitome of the restrained, modest man about whom the pope comments "You are truly your mother's son."²⁶ For the edition, see Klemming, *Heliga Birgittas Uppenbarelser* 5, pp. 140–41.

DATE: 1372, ROME

Praise and honor and glory be to Lord Jesus Christ especially for the bitter pains he suffered on the gallows of the cross for our sake. Dearest son, if you ask for proper love from your God, Creator and Savior, then bear his suffering always in your heart and prepare yourself often to partake of his holy body in accordance with the advice of your confessor. Further, wherever you are, ask for the house of the poor and help them according to your means. God will reward you well. Again, pay those who have worked for your sake well, and chastise those under your authority reasonably and gently and have none who is ill-disposed toward God in your service. Next, when you get up in the morning submit your soul and life to God and bid him protect your thoughts, works and deeds, make the sign of the cross on your face and upon your heart and say "Jesus Christ the Nazarene, king of the Jews, have mercy on me." When you hear mass then think of our Lord Almighty's hard pains and your own sins. Again when you sit at table, have godly and courteous conversation, and beware of Sweden's sinful ways. Many seldom leave the table before they have become like grunting pigs in a common house. Do not use the name of the devil. When you are about to speak or answer, make the sign of the cross on your heart and say "Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ." So you will receive prudent words with which to speak and answer. Fear God in all your doings when you sit in judgment. Consider carefully your words before you utter them. Judge thus your fellow Christian as you will answer before God's harsh judgment. If anyone does you an injustice, take refuge in Sweden's law and do not take revenge in your anger; even if it happens that justice is not done to you by your company, bow to reconciliation and hand the matter to our Lord Jesus Christ. Do not doubt that he will help you better for righteousness than you ever thought possible. Herewith I commend you with life and soul to the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and all the saints in heaven.

NOTES

1. The collaborative translations are by Stephan Borgehammar, Bridget Morris, and Denis Searby.
2. "Sir Petrus" renders "Dominus Petrus," presumably Prior Peter, who is not otherwise thus named.
3. Thus Högman, *Heliga Birgittas originaltexter*, pp. 30–37.
4. See Gunneng and Westlund, "Två egenhändiga texter."
5. Paul was never pope. This mistake was rectified by the Latin translator.

6. Cf. 4 Kings (2 Kings) 6:32.
7. "It shall appear to you . . . their worldly power": this unnumbered paragraph has no equivalent in Latin and it bridges the two sections of this vision.
8. The names of the four men have been deliberately erased in the manuscript to hide their identity.
9. The numbering now follows Book IV 80 at the opening paragraph.
10. "God's friends": this term is used throughout the *Revelationes* to denote groups of people who take up the reforming battle against those without faith or with a lapsed faith.
11. See the note to Book VIII 20 on this phrase.
12. "Scanians": Scania (Skåne) was the disputed territory of the southern province of Sweden that Magnus mortgaged to Denmark. See further, on Magnus's political role, volume 2, pp. 11–14, and Introduction to Book VIII (pp. 6–11).
13. "Powder" renders "pulver" [powder]; the Swedish word for gunpowder (*krut*) was first attested in the sixteenth century.
14. Presumably, the order of knights.
15. Cf. Book V rev. 11, where Birgitta also speaks of her physical love for her husband.
16. "Consummatum est": John 19:30.
17. The text has "thu saat" [you sat], here emended to "thu sagh" [you saw].
18. "Tired of bed" is followed by a further verb "framt tåra", recorded in Söderwall's medieval Swedish dictionary as a hapax legomenon. Our translation, "the day well advanced", is a guess based on the context.
19. "Many know many things but know not themselves". St. Bernard, *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis*, PL 184 col 485.
20. The text breaks off here, leaving the remainder missing.
21. This is the only time in the entire corpus of the *Revelationes*, including these additional texts, that Birgitta is mentioned by name; in the other rare instances where she is referred to it is generally as "a person" or as "the bride".
22. "So when . . . you weep": cf. Luke 19:41–44.
23. "As the hen does her chick": cf. Matthew 23:37.
24. This refers to the ancient conviction that human beings were created in order to fill the gap created in the heavenly host by the fall of Lucifer and the angels.
25. The text finishes here, leaving the sentence incomplete.
26. Annerstedt, "Chronicon de genere et nepotibus." See also Volume 1, p. 169.

Bibliography—Volume 4

Note: Scandinavian characters (which occur at the end of the alphabet in the Scandinavian languages) are listed as follows: â=aa, ä=ae, ö, ø=oe.

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- Corpus Reuelacionum Sancte Birgitte: <http://riksarkivet.se/crb>
- Peter Lombard: <http://www.franciscan-archive.org/lombardus/>
- Svenskt Diplomatarium: <http://riksarkivet.se/diplomatariet>
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English translation in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/>

Incipit tabula Li-
brorū celestium Revela-
tionū Sancte Birgitte
de regno Swecie.



Abbas be-
nedictus
comēda-
tur. iij. li.
cap. xx. z
xxj.
Abbas
nimis se-
cularis dā
natur. iij.

li. ca. xxij. b. itē. ex. cv. (li. ca. xxij. c. d
Abbas ad quid tenet z quid fugiat. iij
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Abba ordis scilalua. q̄liter se habeat
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Abba ordis scilal. gerit vices marie in
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Abhoianē xpm̄ qdam hoies. j. li. ca. lūj.
Abiectū reputat xpm̄ aliqui hoies. j. li.
cap. xlvj. d. Item extra. l. a. b.
Abiectū plus vide in vocabulis. expul-
sus. oblitus et neglectus
Abiecta qualit̄ fuit p̄mo vera militia.
ij. li. cap. viij. a. b. c. et. ix. a. b.
Abiss⁹ isatiabil̄ hñs duo recepracla dī i
fern⁹. ij. li. xv. a. z. xx. a. itē. iij. li. cxxij. a

Abata iuste qbz p̄sūt erogata. iij. li. ca.
vij. z. xij. b. (li. ca. xxxix. o. z. lxxv
Abata iuste plongāt purgatoriū. vj.
Abata iuste qlē req̄r̄t penā. ex. lxxv. c.
Abata req̄re plus in vocablo Acq̄sita
Abortino silant̄ qd̄a aie damnate. vj. li.
ca. xix. g. z. xxvij. a. z. xxxj. k. (xxvij. f
Abortiuū pcurare sp̄ualit̄ qd̄ ē. vj. li.
Abraam erat deo carissimus. ij. li. x. b.
Abrae posuit deus fed⁹ suū. iij. li. xxx. c.
Item sermo. angel. viij. a. (cvj. b.
Abraā hūit p̄fectā voluntatē. iij. li. ca.
Abraā p̄t̄ obiaz dilect⁹ ēat dō vj. li. cxx
Abraā p̄q̄t̄ s̄ p̄ncipes t̄re viij. li. lvj. m
Abraā dilexit filiū suū ysaac anteq̄ p̄ci-
peret. sic tē maria anteq̄ crearet. f̄mōe
ang. iij. p. totū. geli. viij. a
Abraā erat ver⁹ fidei emulator. f̄mo an
Abraā p̄ciuit mariā nasciturā vñ mari-
me gaudēbat. f̄mo ange. viij. b. c.
Abraā fuit ficus bon⁹ ortulan⁹ plātans
ramulculū vitis. z. f̄mo ang. viij. b. c.
Abrae p̄genies dicit̄ vinea electa. f̄mo
ange. viij. b. c. extra. xxij
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Abscōdit cur deus dyabolo suam nati-
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li. ca. xxij. f. itē. vj. li. lxxij. (vj. li. crūj
Absolutōez pctōz negligere piclosū ē
Absoluere a peccatis potest etiā mal⁹
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Abstinētia dicit̄ non⁹ cib⁹. j. li. xxxij. a
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nō placz deo. j. li. ca. xxxij. a. Itē. vj. li.
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FIGURE 10. First page of the register of key-words in the first printed edition at the press of Bartholomaeus Ghotan, Lübeck, 1492. (Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.)

Place Names, Volumes 1–4

This index includes names of countries, provinces, cities, and places, as well as locations of Birgittine abbeys, and churches in Rome. Biblical places are not listed, but some lakes, rivers, and valleys are included as appropriate. Scandinavian characters (which occur at the end of the alphabet in the Scandinavian languages) are listed as follows: å=aa, ä=ae, ö=oe, ø=oe. References are to volume and page number.

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This selective index of imagery attempts to list Birgitta's more memorable expressions and metaphors. It can be used in conjunction with the short title headings given at the opening of each volume and at the head of each revelation, which also often point out the central visual image on which a revelation rests. The index is grouped alphabetically under a number of broad classifications. These are: Animals, including fabulous beasts; Boats and ships; Body; Books and art; Clothing; Colors; Flowers and plants; Food and drink; Home and domestic Life; Instruments and technical images; Language; Miscellaneous; Music; Mythology and folklore; Natural world; Unnamed people; Places and buildings; Precious metal and gems; Theology; Warfare; Weather; Work-scenes and professions. References are to book and chapter number.

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Abbreviations: ES (*Epistola solitarii, The Hermit's Letter to Kings*); RS (*Regula Salvatoris, The Rule of the Savior*); QO (*Quattour orationes, Four Prayers*); Ex (*Revelationes Extravagantes, Extravagant Revelations*); rev. (revelation), int. (interrogacio/question); SA (*Sermo angelicus, The Angel's Discourse*). "Ch." refers to the whole chapter in a biblical book, rather than a range of verses.

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Illustrations, Volumes 1–4

Volume 1

Jacket illustration

Detail from a wall painting attributed to Pietro di Miniato, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, c. 1390, showing St. Birgitta witnessing the Nativity. (Photo Jan Svanberg)

Title page

Frontispiece to Book VIII in the Neapolitan MS from c. 1380. MS 498, fol. 343v, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Figure 2 p. 2

One of two surviving fragments written in Birgitta's own hand. MS A 65, Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

Figure 3 p. 20

The main Latin manuscript groups.

Figures 4a and 4b p. 40

Opening initials of Master Mathias's Prologue and Book I. MS IV.G.2 fol. 2r, and 3r, Biblioteca central, Palermo.

Figure 5 p. 166

Frontispiece to Book II in the first printed edition at the press of Bartholomaeus Ghotan, Lübeck, 1492. (Photo Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm)

Figure 5 p. 252

St. Birgitta the pilgrim. Detail from a wall painting in Börje church, Uppland, late fifteenth century. (Photo ATA, The National Heritage Board, Stockholm)

Volume 2

Jacket

A detail of St. Birgitta, early fifteenth century. Bolton Hours MS Add. 2, fol. 108v, York Minster Library.

Title page

The earliest wooden sculpture of St. Birgitta, from Skederid church, Uppland, in the parish of her birth, c. 1375–1400. Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm.

Figure 2 p. 2

Frontispiece to Book IV (depicting chapter 7) in the first printed edition at the press of Bartholomaeus Ghotan, Lübeck, 1492. (Photo Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm)

Figure 3 p. 238

Frontispiece to “Die Bürde der Welt,” a selection of revelations in German, printed in Nuremberg in 1481. (Photo Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm)

Figure 4 p. 260

Frontispiece to Book V in the second printed edition at the press of Anton Koberger, Nuremberg, 1500. (Photo Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm)

Volume 3

Jacket illustration

Birgitta with her pilgrim’s attributes in a German colored woodcut, c. 1481–85. (Photo Lars Berggren)

Figure 1 title page

Birgitta receiving a revelation at Alvastra monastery, possibly depicting Book VI 86. MS A 70b fol. 5r (“Eriksberg” manuscript), Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm

Figures 2–5, pp. 2–4

Part of a series of wall paintings by Johannes Rosenrod, 1437, in Tensta church, Uppland, depicting Birgitta writing down her revelations; Birgitta with her children Karl, Birger, and Katherina at an audience with Pope Urban V; Birgitta, the devil, and an angel; and Birgitta’s remains being taken from Rome to Vadstena. (Photo Lennart Karlsson)

Figure 6 p. 180

Birgitta and her daughter Katherina who is dressed in the Birgittine habit, detail. Högsby church, Småland. (Photo Lennart Karlsson)

Figure 7 p. 187

A map of the Holy Land. From an advertising prospectus dated 1556, a year before the publication of the Swedish Reformer, Olaus Magnus’s edition of the *Revelationes* in Rome. (Photo Lars Berggren)

Figure 8 p. 236

Birgitta speaks to Christ on the cross. From an advertising prospectus dated 1556, a year before the publication of the Swedish Reformer, Olaus Magnus’s edition of the *Revelationes* in Rome. (Photo Lars Berggren)

Figure 9 p. 249

Birgitta's vision of Christ's birth. Central panel of a triptych attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso, 1373–76. The John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania.

Volume 4

Jacket illustration

Birgitta receiving the rule and handing it to the Birgittine nuns. Initial in *the Regula Salvatoris* in a manuscript written in Naples c.1380. MS IV.G.2, fol. 186r. Biblioteca centrale della Regione siciliana, Palermo.

Figure 1 title page

View of Vadstena from Lake Vättern. (Photo Lars Berggren)

Figure 2 p. 14

Frontispiece to the *Epistola solitarii* in the first printed edition at the press of Bartholomaeus Ghotan, Lübeck, 1492. (Photo Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm)

Figure 3 p. 42

Title page to Book VIII, in the so-called “Eriksberg-manuscript,” MS A 70b, fol. 96v, Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

Figure 4 p. 107

Birgitta handing over the rule to the Birgittine nuns and brethren, in a manuscript written in Siena or Florence around 1400–25, MS A75 fol. IV, Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

Figure 5 p. 151

Hypothetical reconstruction of the interior of a Birgittine church, showing the nuns' gallery, from a Dutch woodcut dating from c. 1500. (Photo Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm)

Figure 6 p. 151

Reconstructed model of the nuns' gallery. (Photo Lars Berggren)

Figure 7 p. 195

The opening lines of the Medieval Swedish text of the Four Prayers. MS A29, Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

Figure 8 p. 217

Gislinge church Sjaelland, late medieval wall painting showing St. Birgitta. (Photo Danmarks Kirker)

Figure 9 p. 266

The Folkunga Palace, built in the thirteenth century, and donated to St. Birgitta to be converted to her abbey. The palace formed part of the nuns' convent, and housed its dormitory. (Photo Lars Berggren)

Figure 10 p. 351

First page of the register of key-words in the first printed edition at the press of Bartholomaeus Ghotan, Lübeck, 1492. (Photo Kungliga Biblioteket, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.)