

The
Revelations of
St. Birgitta of Sweden

VOLUME 3,
LIBER CAELESTIS,
BOOKS VI-VII



Translated by

Denis Searby

Introductions and Notes by

Bridget Morris

The Revelations of St. Birgitta
of Sweden
Volume 3



FIGURE 1. Birgitta receiving a revelation at Alvastra monastery, possibly depicting Book VI 86. Reprinted by permission of the Royal Library Manuscripts Division, National Library of Sweden, "Eriksberg MS", A70b.fol.5r.

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The present volume contains Books VI and VII only. Book VII is the last of the books in the central canon of the *Revelationes*, and consequently, after careful consideration, we have chosen to reflect the integrity of the original editorial arrangement and to assign Book VIII to volume 4, which will now contain all the extraneous materials that are attributed to St. Birgitta.

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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. | Latin |
| 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), 1884–1973

The Entire Birgittine Corpus

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

Contained in Volume 1 of the present translation:

Prologue of Magister Mathias of Linköping

Date: c. 1346

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

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

Contained in the present volume:

Book VI (122 chapters)

Mixture of revelations on various subjects

Date: Sweden and Rome years, 1344–71

Ed. Birger Bergh, 1991

Book VII (a brief preface, thirty-one chapters)

Revelations mainly on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem

Date: 1371–73

Ed. Birger Bergh, 1967

Contained in Volume 4 of the present translation:

Epistola Solitarii ad reges (Prologue to Book VIII)

Date c. 1377

Ed. Arne Jönsson, in Aili, Book VIII (below)

Book VIII (also known as the “*Liber caelestis Imperatoris ad reges*”;
sixty-one chapters)

Revelations concerning worldly leaders

Date: Sweden and Rome years, 1344–71

Ed. Hans Aili, 2002

Regula Salvatoris

The Birgittine Rule, the “Rule of St. Saviour” (prologue and preface, thirty-one
chapters)

Date: Sweden years, probably between 1346 and 1348

Ed. Sten Eklund, 1975

Sermo angelicus de Virginis excellentia

Matins readings for the nuns of the order (prologue, twenty-one chapters)

Date: Rome years, probably 1354
Ed. Sten Eklund, 1972

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

Revelationes extravagantes (prologue, 116 chapters)
Additional materials on a wide variety of subjects, including supplements to
the Rule
Date: Sweden and Rome years, 1344-71
Ed. Lennart Hollman, 1956

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Book VI

FIGURES 2-5. Part of a series of wall-paintings by Johannes Rosenrod, 1437, in Tensta church, Uppland. Reprinted by permission of Lennart Karlsson.



FIGURE 2. Birgitta writing down her revelations.

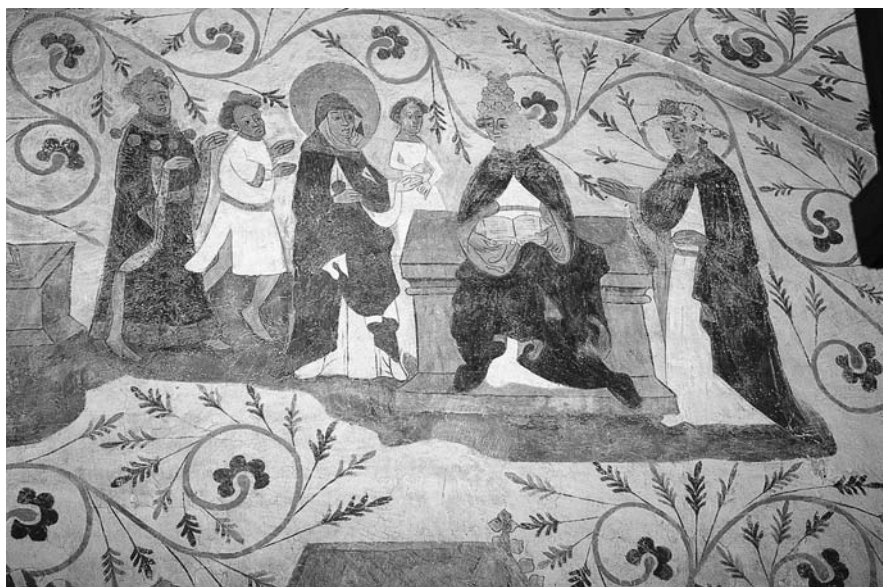


FIGURE 3. Birgitta with her children Karl, Birger, and Katherina at an audience with Pope Urban V.



FIGURE 4. Birgitta, the devil and an angel.



FIGURE 5. Birgitta's remains are taken from Rome to Vadstena.

Introduction

In breadth and scope, Book VI is similar to Book IV, and it contains some of Birgitta's most important visions as well as some of the most peripheral ones. The Book originally consisted of 109 chapters, to which a further group (VI 110–22) was added as part of the “supplementary material” that was not included by Alfonso in his canonization edition. Four revelations (VI 26, 41, 82, and 95) are repeated in Book VIII—the compilation of revelations exclusively on political subjects. Although many revelations in Book VI are hard to date, even approximately, they appear to be roughly divided into those received in the Sweden years and those received in the first years when Birgitta lived in Rome.¹

Revelations about Individuals in Birgitta's Family and Circle

The book contains several threads around certain themes, suggesting a sketchy editorial arrangement at an early stage. A dominant thread concerns Birgitta's life and spiritual experience and those of her family and acquaintances. These are blended with political, ecclesiastical, and apocalyptic messages that warn of impending doom and the judgment for sins, and the individual punishments to be meted out. To a greater extent than other books of the *Revelationes*, Book VI contains events based on Birgitta's everyday world, both in Sweden and Italy, that lend it a particularly intimate biographical character. There are comments on her calling (VI 13–14), and on how she might love God

more fervently (VI 42). Chapter 6 tells of her impatience, VI 17 of her susceptibility to temptation, VI 105 and III of the need for obedience, and VI 91 of her need to moderate her asceticism in fasting. Sometimes she refers to herself in the third person, for instance, as “a lady who was on the closest terms with the king” (VI 34). People of her acquaintance are referred to obliquely, such as “the man whom you know” (chapter 51). In some cases individuals can be identified in corroboration with the canonization testimonies. Only in rare instances is a person referred to directly by name (e.g., VI 95). A revelation may be introduced by a problem or question that Birgitta had been asked by someone in her circle, and while she is immersed in prayer or in a state of ecstasy, an answer is revealed to her. In VI 89, for example, her learned confessor Mathias of Linköping asks for spiritual enlightenment about the truth of the book of the Revelation (Apocalypse) of St. John. Mathias was the author of an influential commentary on this biblical book that was referred to by continental preachers such as Bernardino of Siena and Nicolaus Cusa.² In VI 110 Mathias makes a further enquiry concerning a point of detail, this time about the meaning of the seven thunders (Apocalypse 10:3). Birgitta elsewhere urges Mathias to be steadfast in his preaching in the face of temptation (VI 75), perhaps indicating, as has been suggested, that he was grappling with the contemporary debate over the doctrine of the beatific vision: in a bull of 1336, Pope Benedict XII stated that the saints enjoy the *visio beatifica* immediately after death and do not have to dwell in an interim place until the Last Judgment.³ These revelations about Mathias offer a glimpse into the types of theological discourse between Birgitta and the Swedish theologian during the 1340s when he was her spiritual guide and advocate (Book V being the best example of her level of learning in this respect), and it also suggests a relationship between confessor and confessant that was to the mutual benefit of each.

Another confessor, Master Petrus of Skänninge, who was the head of the Birgittine household in Rome, is half-glimpsed in his role as Birgitta’s spiritual and physical guide. Chapter 43 comments on her need to submit herself to her confessor in obedience, and chapter 46 refers to the practical concerns in governing the household in Rome, in particular their financial troubles. Her struggles with learning Latin, probably under the direction of Master Petrus, are also hinted at in VI 105.

Members of Birgitta’s family who are referred to include her brother, Israel Birgersson, who is advised in VI 95 to accept a post in government, and his death in Riga in 1351 on his way to a crusade is recorded. Chapter 20 concerns the conversion of one of her kinsmen, and VI 39–40 depict a lengthy judgment scene in which the devil and the Virgin are locked in dispute over the soul of a knight. This is one of Birgitta’s foremost judgment revelations. Chapter 118 concerns the death of one of her sons-in-law, a knight from Holstein named Eggard van Kyren, who was married to her daughter Katherina. Chapter 118 is followed by a general revelation on marriage, virginity, and widowhood that may have been intended as a commentary on Katherina’s situation. It is commonly hailed as one of Birgitta’s key visions, both in relation to the establishment of her monastic order for women, and also to the

idea that all human beings, whether they were virgins, chaste, or married, could deserve a crown in heaven provided that their will and intention were pure in the eyes of God. According to the colorful *Vita sanctae Katerinae*, written by the Vadstena general confessor Ulf Birgersson in the fifteenth century, Katherina's marriage remained unconsummated, and with her husband's muted approval and in the face of her brother's indignation, she left Sweden to join her mother in Rome. Ulf's *Vita* describes the transformation from a young, beautiful, worldly girl into a humble and obedient woman, who was later to become one of the main instigators of Birgitta's canonization and first abbess at Vadstena, where she died on 24 March, 1381; Katherina was later revered as a saint in Sweden and in 1489 her relics were translated.⁴ The presentation of Katherina in later sources shows how she achieved a twin ideal of womanhood, symbolizing on the one hand the worldly experience of the widow and on the other, the purity of the virgin. As such, she is the exemplary first abbess of Vadstena, demonstrating both practical experience and a chaste existence. In addition, there is an echo of the mother and daughter relationships that are seen in Birgitta's special devotion to the Virgin, as well as more generally, as they are reflected in popular representations of the Virgin and St. Anne in the fourteenth century (VI 104).

Chapters 23–25 and VI 97 concern another of Birgitta's sons-in-law, Sigvid Ribbing, who was married in a political match to her eldest daughter, Märta. The *Diarium Vadstenense* relates how at the time of the marriage, Birgitta was pregnant with her youngest daughter, Cecilia, when it happened “that a very great tyrant became betrothed to one of St. Birgitta's daughters against Birgitta's will, although it pleased her husband and the king and council. He had in fact previously caused the kingdom great harm. She therefore was overcome by constant weeping, and it happened once that as she was weeping bitterly the child in her womb cried out ‘Dear mother, do not kill me!’”⁵ Sigvid Ribbing was related to king Magnus Eriksson's stepfather, Knut Porse, who had established a political base in Halland, a border province between Sweden and Denmark, from where he mounted plundering incursions on neighboring lands. After Knut's death, Sigvid took over the lordship of the province. In VI 23–25 Birgitta brands him as “the robber” and accuses him of setting a bad example, killing innocent people in his anger, imposing high taxes on the poor, and offending in greed, immorality, and pride.⁶ It is worth noting at this point that, as with many revelations about known individuals, the identity of the “robber” is kept hidden, indeed, even with some distancing from the facts—the critical comments of chapters 23 and 24 are described in VI 25 as a “fair ballad.” In the medieval Swedish translation there is an additional comment stating that VI 25 took place three years after chapters 23 and 24. This revelation must have resonated among aristocratic and Birgittine factions in Sweden, where the historical circumstances were probably well known, as distinct from a Latin-reading, continental readership where the events would have had far less significance.

Knut Porse might also be “that man whom you know” of VI 32, a political vision that opens with an allegory about a venomous snake and its mate and

their offspring. The offspring is goaded by its mother into seeking a lordship among the powerful of the land (paragraph 15); and there is a warning about the snake's threat to the stability of the realm. Scholars have suggested that the offspring was Håkan, Knut Porse's son, the half-brother of king Magnus Eriksson, whose mother, Euphemia, played a major role during Magnus's minority rule in 1319–32, along with Knut Porse, who was her favorite and later husband. The story is told in the canonization documents of Birgitta's hostile encounter with Håkan at Bohus castle, on the Danish-Norwegian border. He provokes her by asking her to predict the weather that day and insinuates that Birgitta had ambitions for her own sons for the throne: "And will your sons become kings, and we shall be deprived of the right to the kingdom?" Her angry answer is that he would not live long if he did not improve his ways, and his mother would get no joy from him.⁷

A Woman in a Cistercian Setting

Birgitta's *Vita* adopts the standard typology of the saint-wife, presenting her as a conscientious and sober mistress of her home, who spent time in prayer, confession, fasting and devotional reading, while also performing alms-deeds and bringing up her children virtuously.⁸ Her fasting was strictly and unostentatiously observed, and she would sit with her husband at table apparently joining in the feasting and drinking from a silver chalice, but in reality drinking only water and eating bread.⁹ An unconventional picture is created of a wife advising her husband to study and read.¹⁰ On their way home from their pilgrimage to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela, Ulf fell ill, in Arras, and it was during this time that Birgitta received several visions telling her that she would see and hear great things. At Alvastra, Birgitta and Ulf had made plans to enter into a monastic life, though their exact intentions are left unclear.¹¹ Ulf died shortly afterward and was buried at the monastery.¹² Interestingly, Birgitta chose not to enter a Cistercian nunnery, such as the royal foundation of Vreta, the oldest and most distinguished nunnery in Sweden, and her decision to stay at Alvastra might have been at the encouragement of Mathias of Linköping and Master Petrus, then the sub-prior. Even at this early stage in her life as a mystic, Birgitta is more secure in a male domain surrounded by men of influence, although at Alvastra she also had to work to gain the acceptance of the hostile and suspicious community of monks.¹³ She cannot have lived within the monastic enclosure but it is clear that she had easy access to the church, even at night. One of the canonization witnesses, a woman named Juliana Nilsdotter, describes how Birgitta spent her days:

At night she got up several times to pray, and when the cock crowed, she got up for good and remained in the church, until the singing of prime. Then for the sake of being warmed from the icy cold, she

went to a heated room and there read part of the psalter . . . and then returned to the church until the main meal, praying and hearing the canonical hours. After she had eaten, she went back to prayer immediately for a while and then spent time on pious works for decorating altars and the priests' garments. She had chalices made and gave them to the churches and was never free from some task until at the hour of vespers she returned to the church until supper. Afterward she took care of business with her servants and then went to compline. Thereafter she refused to speak. Indeed she spoke with no one until the first hour of the next day.¹⁴

Although Birgitta adopted the gestures of conversion to a penitential life, by changing her habit, fasting, prayer, observance of the canonical hours, wakefulness, frequent confession, genuflection, and tears, her asceticism always remained constructive and controlled. She avoids the states of delirium and other extreme expressions of mystical union of, for example, the Dominican female mystics in Germany, or the beguines—whom she never mentions directly—but she remains an elitist, reforming visionary, whose interests lie outside the monastic enclosure.¹⁵ In VI 122, the last revelation of Book VI, a woman is told to moderate her gestures in public, which may indicate Birgitta's dislike of excessive displays of devotion: a sentiment that is later reflected in the regulations for her new order that emphasized plainness and simplicity.

The revelations in Book VI that very likely take place at Alvastra are VI 2, 5–8, 14, 88, and 113. Chapter 86, in which Birgitta sees the face of the lamb in the Eucharistic host, can be compared with a similar description by a monk at Alvastra in Book IV 121, and may be an example of the borrowing of an image from one context to another. Another Cistercian named Svennung is mentioned in VI 36, who accompanied Birgitta and her husband Ulf on their pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in 1341.

Revelations about Sorcery and Miraculous Events

Another thread that weaves through Book VI concerns local belief and superstitious practice, mostly in Sweden. In outlying regions of this sparsely populated country the church's prohibition of magical practices was probably met with popular indifference. Birgitta mentions instances of sorcerers, soothsaying, and demonic possession, all of which, in her eyes, was a violation of the first commandment. In VI 76, a man who believes that all of life is governed by fate and at the same time uses oaths and incantations to get a good fishing catch, is said to commit a twofold sin. His example is used by Birgitta to instruct the king that sorcery must be rooted out of all Christian society. In VI 78, a devil is able to speak and prophesy because it had lived in a house where elves or "tomtar" (Latin "penates") had previously lived. The tomte, a familiar figure from Scandinavian folklore, is a small creature who generally inhabits the land where a farm

is built and assures its well-being provided he is well-treated by the local people. However, it could appear in other shapes, as suggested by the “snakes for which you leave milk to drink” (VI 78.7). Olaus Magnus, the great Swedish historiographer and last Catholic bishop of Uppsala in the sixteenth century, comments that local people “worshipped serpents as sacred creatures, provided they were seen to harm no one, believing them to be the guardian gods of the house . . . Yet though those superstitious rites appear to have been utterly removed, remnants of them still persist through the instigation of demons in some lonely houses in remote parts, as for instance in the northern realms of Norway and Värmland” in central western Sweden.¹⁶ In VI 82, Birgitta points out that the prophecies of a sorceress to a knight were vindicated only by God’s grace, but she acknowledges that it is possible for the devil, too, to make prophecies. There is no mention of runes or lot-casting, a deep-rooted part of earlier Nordic tradition, and although Birgitta will have seen and known the many runic memorial stones scattered across Sweden, they had long lost their “magical” attributes since the conversion in the eleventh century.¹⁷ There are also scenes of demonic possession, such as the priest in VI 3 who is obsessed by a witch. According to the Swedish provincial laws a woman would be hanged, executed, or in some areas stoned for various types of witchcraft, but for superstitious practice the punishment was a fine. In the subsequent national law, a man would be punished on a gallows, whereas a woman would die at the stake or be stoned.¹⁸

The magic arts were counterbalanced by an acknowledgement of the efficacy of miracles. In practice, the boundaries must have been difficult to draw, for excessive levels of learning and prophetic powers—especially by women—were susceptible to allegations of a negative as well as a positive interpretation, and Birgitta occasionally found herself on the wrong side of this delicate line. She reveals her vulnerability in the reaction to her spiritual calling after a monk claimed that she was “deluded” (VI 92), and she expresses her anxiety that her messages might be discredited or not heard (VI 100–01).

Further accounts of demonic possession occur in the Birgittine miracles that took place after her death. As the case for canonization was being prepared, people came forward to testify to miraculous happenings: for instance, a man who repeatedly fell out of bed, a woman who could not control her profane language, a girl whose stomach suffered daily convulsions, a man who was robbed of his power of speech after he had lied during confession, and a man who had not confessed or taken communion for two years and fell into a river in Dalarna province in 1376.¹⁹

The inclusion of so many anecdotal chapters in Book VI may seem trivial and insignificant, but as with their inclusion in the canonization documents, they served the wider purpose of authenticating Birgitta’s role as a divine mouthpiece. Many of the middle and last sections of Book VI describe a narrative event, some texts even apparently lacking a “revealed” element. For example, “when the bride came in the midst of the coldest weather in Sweden to an island by boat, and everyone there was already asleep, she did not want to disturb anyone but remained on the boat until daybreak. While her servants

and household suffered a great deal due to the cold, she felt such a great warmth that those who saw and touched her were amazed. The Lord said to her when she was praying at dawn: "O how little trust people put in me! They pile layers of clothing on themselves like the hedgehogs with fruits and the peacock with feathers" (VI 84). These sort of circumstantial biographical texts are similar to the jettisoned materials that are included in the *Extravagantes*.

Revelations about the Virgin Mary

A sequence of revelations (VI 55–62) is based on the Virgin's life from her conception to her assumption. These straightforward and short chapters intimately involve Birgitta in a way that highlights her special relationship with the Virgin and are part of her own imitation of Mary: an example is VI 62.3, in which Mary mentions visiting the places where her son had suffered. These chapters, which are based on traditional medieval tellings of the life of Mary, can be compared with the more complex presentations of similar material during the pilgrimage to the Holy Land (see especially Book VII 15–16, 21–25), and with the stylized and abstract liturgical readings for the nuns of the Birgittine order, the *Sermo angelicus*.²⁰ In Book VI the events relating to the Incarnation are seen predominantly through Mary's eyes (VI 11–12, 49), and the scenes have a visual character, being embellished with small descriptive details that make Birgitta seem like an active participant and witness in the biblical scenes.

On occasion there is an unusual detail. She alludes in VI 60 to a medieval view on St. Jerome's alleged doubt, expressed in a sermon attributed to him, over the doctrine of the assumption of the Virgin.²¹ In VI 57 Mary expresses a view that she had wished to be buried with her son; this idea occurs, for instance, in the *Meditationes vite Christe*, chapter 80, that encouraged a deeply personal reflection of the Passion by the Franciscan Johannes of Caulibus. In this chapter her list of sorrows, and the number six that she enumerates, may be her own.²²

Birgitta's Christmas eve vision (VI 88), probably received at Alvastra during the 1340s, relates to Birgitta's prophetic authority and again demonstrates her close devotion to the Virgin. On Christmas eve she experiences "a great and wonderful feeling of exultation . . . in her heart" and the sensation of the living child within her, stirring her heart. Fearing this was an illusion she sought the reassurance of her confessors, both of whom later testified as to the miraculous nature of this happening.²³ Just as Mary gave flesh to divinity, so Birgitta was a receptacle for making Christ's message visible on earth. Thus, like Mary, she places herself in a maternal role through which she shows others the incarnate Christ through Mary's eyes. In so doing she encourages a rise in Marian piety that starts to become more prevalent after her time, while at the same time she obtains authorization for her own "spiritual motherhood" that enabled her to write and speak on behalf of God.²⁴

Revelations about the Remission of Sin

Local priests could not grant absolutions, privileges, licenses, and dispensations in respect of all types of sin. Many such cases were reserved to the authority of the pope and referred to the office of the penitentiary in Rome, which dealt with canon law and made judgments to ensure that the petitions and subsequent decisions taken were canonically correct.²⁵ Apart from the major penitentiary office in Rome there were several minor ones, situated in the basilicas, including a Scandinavian penitentiary that dealt with petitions in the Scandinavian languages.²⁶ Book VI 115 gives an example of the linguistic difficulties encountered by a Finnish pilgrim in Rome who knew no language other than his mother tongue; and Birgitta touches on other cases relating to the work of the penitentiaries. In VI 71 Master Petrus is authorized to give absolution to pilgrims in Rome “except in cases where the sentence of the church is clearly needed.” Chapter 72 is also about types of absolution and the responsibility of parish priests in respect of this, and Birgitta warns about the taint of corruption. The revelation indicates the types of practical problem that arise from dealing with “hidden sins.” Chapter 73 speaks disparagingly of a penitentiary priest in Rome, and points to the problems arising from the practice of absolution by a parish priest. Other cases that suggest violations of canon law are further indicated in VI 79, about a priest who administered the sacraments without having been ordained, and VI 86, about an excommunicate who ignored the terms of his ban. The central image of the important revelation in VI 39 is a book, filled with chapters and columns, that is used to list a knight’s many sins: this image may even be taken to refer to the typical large-sized penitentiary register that lies at the heart of the canonical judicial procedure in the church, and that categorizes, measures, and evaluates the sins of individual men and women.

Revelations about Reform

Birgitta’s name is of course widely associated with the prophetic tradition of the later middle ages. Like her near-contemporary Catherine of Siena, she spoke out in strident language against the failings of contemporary institutions and individuals at a time when the church was deeply divided. As André Vauchez has written, “Bridget, like Catherine, believed firmly in the apostolic see; both were convinced that the *reformatio in membris* could not be accomplished without the *reformatio in capite*. A slight difference of emphasis can nevertheless be discerned between them: the Swedish saint had a profound, almost visceral attachment to the Church of Rome, from which her country had received the faith and towards which she felt a debt of gratitude and love. Her Rome was that of the martyrs, which Christ had showed her in her vision of 1349: ‘Go to Rome, where the *piazze* are covered with gold and run red with the blood of the saints’ . . . Catherine of Siena’s inclinations, on the other hand, were perhaps less strictly Roman and more ‘papalist’ in character. It is true that she was every

bit as eager as Bridget to see the supreme pontiff return to the banks of the Tiber; but for her, the pontifical office counted more than the city."²⁷

For Birgitta the end of the Avignon papacy, with the return of Pope Urban V to Rome in 1367, was seen as the fulfillment of destiny and as a revolutionary shift that marked a new beginning for Christendom. Some of her prophecies are apocalyptic in tone, signaling the imminence of a new age dawning and with an emphasis on tribulation and judgment, a juxtaposition of good and evil, and a warning about the forces of the Antichrist that create division in the church. Her fierce and passionate character is perhaps nowhere better revealed than in her prophetic visions where she shows a close relationship with the past, and to Jewish and Christian history. In VI 67 three ages of the world are described, the third one being associated with the coming of Antichrist. Although Birgitta suggests an awareness of the contemporary movement for the *renovatio mundi* and a knowledge of the exponents of apocalyptic reform, such as Joachim of Fiore, she does not espouse their way of thought with any consistency or cause and it is difficult to establish unequivocal links with their ideas. Generally speaking, she is not greatly interested in historical and futuristic patterns in the way that Hildegard of Bingen and Joachim were, although VI 67, which outlines a division into periods of past and future and describes a ship in three parts, may faintly echo such images and arguments. In VI 26, she describes a king who should take a lead reforming the church, thus underlying her constant call for reformers who would take the clergy and church back to their pristine state.²⁸

Even though Birgitta's reformist message lacked coherence and frequently fell on deaf ears in the circles for which it was intended, this did not prevent its widespread circulation and an upsurge of interest in her writings across Europe in the fifteenth century in the wake of her canonization. From Italian and Dutch to Polish and Czech, there were vernacular compilations. Collections found their way to England before 1400 and were the object of study by theologians at Oxford and Cambridge universities, and individual revelations were the subject of retellings in different guises: Hoccleve wrote a verse paraphrase of Birgitta's account of Christ's judgment in his *De regimine principum*, for instance. In Germany, the *Onus mundi* was a compilation by the Leipzig theologian Johannes Tortsch in 1433 of prophetic passages, into which Tortsch inserts his own commentaries.²⁹ He had known Hildegard of Bingen, Joachim of Fiore, and other medieval prophets and was able to set Birgitta's prophecies in a wider context of the prophetic tradition. Indeed, for succeeding generations, it was mainly for her reformist prophecies that people sought out the *Revelationes*, as they had done with Hildegard's prophecies, and this accounts to a large degree for Birgitta's enormous popularity in the centuries after her death.

Revelations about Saints, Relics, and Shrines

Before she went to Italy, Birgitta's knowledge of the saints' lives was probably mostly largely derived from the *Legenda aurea* written by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine (see further volume 2, p. 7). Once in Italy, she had the opportunity

of visiting several shrines in person. Chapters 105–08 comprise a sequence on some Roman shrines. The traditional tour of the major basilicas included the great churches dedicated to the Virgin, such as Santa Maria Rotunda, Santa Maria Maggiore, as well as other basilicas dedicated to St. Peter such as St. Peter the Martyr, St. James (VI 102), and St. Paul's Outside the Walls (San Paolo fuori le mura) (VI 104). It can be assumed that individual revelations are attached to particular visits to shrines such as the relic of Christ's foreskin (VI 112), for instance, which had allegedly been placed in the basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome. Chapter 74 concerns the papal palaces and VI 96 describes the ominous burning of the bells of St. Peter's, presumably the result of a lightning strike, and foretelling the death of Pope Clement VI. Birgitta also traveled to other shrines in Italy, to visit the relics of St. Nicholas in Bari (VI 103), St. Andrew in Amalfi (VI 107), and St. Stephen (VI 108).³⁰ Some of these revelations raise wider questions about the importance of confession, the efficacy of indulgences (VI 102, chapter 97, routes to salvation), and the trade in church offices (VI 72), even though theological subjects are seldom explored in full, as is the case with a discussion about whether a venial sin can become a mortal one in VI 114.

Two Key Visions

Two visions in Book VI count among Birgitta's most famous visions in terms of their importance and influence, and in a sense they embody the full breadth and two extremes of her visionary writing. On the one hand there is a grim intensity and desire to bring about Christian reform, and on the other a balanced theological argument that was later realized in the monastic rule of the Birgittine order. Chapter 52 is a lengthy revelation about three generations of women. In this vision, with its concrete visualization of the afterlife, Birgitta may be expressing reflections on her own status "to behave as befits nobility, to live in physical comfort, and to die in a privileged and worldly rank"; equally, she passionately appeals to women of her class to act as befits their status. Within an autobiographical framework there are comments in the first person: she calls herself "an unworthy woman, a sinner ever since my youth" and compares herself to a "foolish ass." The introductory section (paragraphs 1–27) is broadly similar, though not identical, to paragraphs 1–25 of Book IV 77. It underlines Birgitta's visionary calling and gives her reassurance. Its inclusion as a preface to VI 52 reinforces the powerful message of the main vision, which shows how salvation can be earned by all who asked for mercy, even the most sinful. Then follows the powerful graphic description of three generations of women. Birgitta is told why she has unusually been allowed to see the punishments of these women in hell and purgatory, especially when one of them is still living, and she is being given a foresight of her fate: the answer is given that it is "for the consolation and edification of the good." The vile torments of the three women are portrayed with imagery of infernal torment ("my brain bubbles like lead and streams away like tar"), and there is some equivalence between sin and punishment, for instance, "my shins and thighs are like

thorny sticks because I set my will on carnal delight and my own lust." There are echoes from across the repertoire of medieval vision writing, such as the three paths described in the vision of the Irish knight Tundale (*Visio Thugdali*, see VI 39.109)—although without the sense of space and geography of the Irish visionary tradition—and the tightly concentric circles of her contemporary Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In this vision the doctrinal and dogmatic aspect of the afterlife is nebulous for Birgitta as it is for her contemporaries, but she probably surpasses them all in the vividness of her depictions of pain and torment, to such a degree indeed, that it is sometimes easy to forget that she is describing purgatory and not hell.³¹

The other well-known vision is that of Mary and Martha (VI 65), a lengthy and finely balanced account of the active and the contemplative life that corresponds to the mind working and meditating in the love of God. This symmetry of prayer and work also lies at the heart of the Birgittine order.³² Birgitta outlines the characteristics of both types of women and shows their mutual dependability, and the fact that each woman should share qualities of the other, but not in equal measure. Mary should be abstemious and removed from worldly pleasure and trouble, and she should not be greedy or extravagant or lazy. She should pray, work with her hands, and have an honest occupation in order to have spiritual goods to give to others. Her heart should be a house for guests, her humility and compassion should be clothes for the naked, her counsel, food for the hungry; her thoughts should be fire for the cold, and her good words medicine for the sick. Martha's qualities are to have faith, know God's precepts, speak no evil, perform works of mercy, and love God more than herself. Just as Martha came to Christ before Mary on behalf of their brother, Lazarus, Mary came afterward and he was raised on behalf of both sisters: "so it is in the spiritual life." The active must precede the contemplative life. Birgitta concludes that "God enters the house of Martha and Mary when the mind, full of good affectations and at peace away from the commotion of the world, reflects on God as ever present and not only meditates on but labors in his love day and night."³³

Imagery and Style

The images in Book VI, as with earlier books, reveal many cultural details of interest and demonstrate Birgitta's idiosyncratic style and her often literal interpretations of conventional images. There are several striking examples. While talking about different types of food, she describes roasted lamb simultaneously in a literal as well as a spiritual sense for Christ (VI 42). The rather unusual image of sheep in a town in VI 15 is probably intended to allude to the faithful in Rome, but at the same time there is an echo of the parable of the lost son: this revelation is a good example of the way in which Birgitta introduces an image which easily evaporates into another. In VI 16 a woman's bosom is pricked as though by the hide of a hedgehog whose quills pierce her flesh, and her feet walk on a razor's edge. In VI 17 a woman has thistle burs lodged in the

fringe of her garment. Among her other comments on women she mentions those who live by the flesh and are “worse than pack-animals” (VI 56). There are no lice and tangles or dirt in Christ’s hair (VI 1); Christ is a bee and Mary a beehive (VI 12); confession is like a washerwoman (VI 16); demons attack a man’s soul like crows (VI 21); an ass wears a golden saddle (VI 22); a mole gnaws at the roots of a tree (VI 30). Chapter 25 mentions a ballad about a robber. In VI 9 there is an image of a prostitute offering a nobleman her menstrual fluid to drink in a glass. Other images of note describe a priest holding the base of a halo on the base of his head (VI 35); workmen with a spade, shovel, and a container (VI 35); three vessels filled with human secretions (VI 36). One woman sits on a rope (VI 93) while another is like the tail of a cow that stains and splatters all around her (VI 52); the same image is also used in VI 97, of a Benedictine abbess, who will “wade with the fat cows into hell, and the ravens of hell will tear her to pieces,” and in purgatory the same woman appears covered with an iron net, her tongue on fire, and her hands and feet made of lead. There are descriptions of demons with “mouths wide open like wolves, glass-like eyes with burning flames . . . hands like a griffin, hanging ears like rabbits” (VI 35), and in the same chapter a purged soul is described as a star in an open glass. When the body follows its impulses it resembles cattle (VI 66); there is reference to the “dung of empty knowledge” (VI 90); and an Ethiopian in a veil and habit appears among nuns at a convent (VI 99). There are also some poetic images such as a “winnowing of words” for a schoolman (VI 60), and St. Jerome as a “tractable trumpet” perhaps reflects an iconographical depiction of the saint that Birgitta had seen (VI 60).

Some imagery relates to technical matters, which draw no doubt on Birgitta’s actual experience. She describes the sufferings of a soul in purgatory by means of three stages of metal processing, an image that has been taken to be a real description rather than an imagined metaphor, of a blast furnace or gold workshop (VI 21). She describes God as a glass-maker in VI 44, who makes vessels out of ashes; and she describes a rockslide, perhaps at a mine, in VI 47.³⁴

Additions and Explanations

Additional materials were appended to the established corpus of *Revelationes* in the course of the decades following Birgitta’s canonization. Many of them were gathered into a whole book that is now known as the *Extravagantes*, or else they were appended to individual revelations as *additiones* and *declarationes*. Many of these supplementary texts must have been part of Petrus of Alvastra’s deposition of materials at Vadstena abbey, perhaps rejected from the main corpus by Alfonso, or perhaps never even taken to Rome from Sweden to be considered by him.³⁵ The distinction between the two categories of *additiones* and *declarationes* is unclear, but generally speaking, the addition is an extra revelation that contains some further material, whereas the explanation contains a circumstantial detail. These supplementary texts, which tend toward the anecdotal and

informal, do not have a fixed tradition within the manuscript transmission—which in other respects is very fixed—and their inclusion varies from manuscript to manuscript.³⁶ Some of the same material recurs in the canonization testimonies of the key witnesses. In total across the corpus of the *Revelationes* there are about sixty additions and “explanations,” as many as twenty five of them in Book VI alone. For instance, VI 17 concerns Birgitta’s tendency to gluttony and her temptation by a devil. Some provide an identification of an individual mentioned in the revelation and tell of the individual’s fate after death and judgment. An explanation of particular note is in VI 36, where a monk is reported to have had a vision about Birgitta wearing seven crowns. This monk is said in the Explanation to have accompanied Birgitta on her pilgrimage to Santiago, which dates from before her widowhood—and thus before her calling to the life of the spirit. In his “spiritual vision” he sees an eclipse of the sun and is told that “the woman whom you see will receive a tiara of God’s sevenfold grace.” This very early foretelling of Birgitta’s future prophetic gift, by a monk at Alvastra, neatly encapsulates the unmistakable flavor of the stark visionary character of Book VI as a whole.

NOTES

1. It appears from circumstantial evidence that there were three overall periods when Birgitta’s visionary activity was at its most intense. The first is the early years of her widowhood in the second half of the 1340s, from which time as much as half of her total output can probably be assigned. The second is the first years after she arrived in Rome. At this time she was coming to terms with the demands of a new life abroad, away from her home and family, and beset by financial difficulties. The 1360s may have been a less productive period, but there was a renewal that was inspired by the pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1372–73, which constitutes the third period.

2. See Billing-Ottosson, *Magister Mathias Lincopensis*. Piltz, “Magister Mathias of Sweden in his Theological Context” p. 144, describes this work as “fresh, original and profound.” Mathias describes the deep-rooted theological truths that are realized in the three ages: past, present, and future. The seven seals of the biblical book are the seven afflictions, the suffering of the just, the well-being of the wicked, the struggles against heretics, false brethren and hypocrites, the prosperity of the wicked and the sins of the good. The seven trumpets represent the sevenfold corruption of the church. The punishment for everything will be undertaken by evil princes, who are symbolized by grasshoppers and scorpions. True Christians will reduce in number, and their influence will wane. The end will be at hand, and Antichrist will deceive the world with all kinds of stratagems. Yet Christ will watch over his church and ensure it will not perish. For further references, see volume 1, pp. 12–13, and Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 69–72.

3. Cf. Piltz, “Magister Mathias in his Theological Context,” p. 145. As Piltz points out, the fact that a local squire questions whether he would see the face of God as soon as he was cleansed from sin in purgatory, rather than at the Last Judgment (as he says, “it is a long wait indeed to the day of judgment,” VI 75.2), was an indication of the popular appeal of what had originally been a learned point of doctrine.

4. See Collijn, *Processus seu negocium canonizationis beate Katerine*; Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 109–13; and Fritz and Elfving, *Den stora kyrkofesten*.

5. Our translation. The account is given in the diary in the year of Cecilia’s death, 1399; see Gejrot, *Diarium Vadstenense*, p. 133. See further Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, pp. 76–84; Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 46–48.

6. The last mention of Sigvid in sources is in 1345, and in the 1350s Märta married a man named Knut Algotsson (brother of the king’s favorite, Bengt), with whom she went into exile in 1357 to Norway where she became lady-in-waiting to the queen.

7. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 514. On the possible connection with Håkan, see further Engström, “Ormungen och hans moder.” The influential Swedish psychologist of religion, Hjalmar Sundén, has applied his so-called role theory to this vision, analyzing its images as vehicles for Birgitta’s own mystical experience (Sundén, *Den heliga Birgitta. Ormungens moder som blev Kristi brud*).

8. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 77–79.

9. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 581.

10. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 64.

11. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 80. The date of Ulf's death is debated; some manuscripts give 1344 while others give 1346 (see further Kezel, in Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 240–41).
12. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 479.
13. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 82, 545; Book IV 121, and *Extravagantes* 55.
14. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 65. Translation, with some modifications, from McGuire, "Spiritual Life and Material Life," p. 302, who described this passage as "perhaps one of the few descriptions we have of how a person spent time in a fourteenth-century monastery."
15. On the beguines in Sweden see further Morris, "Birgittines and Beguines."
16. Foote, *Olaus Magnus*, I, p. 148; see also KL "tomte."
17. See Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*.
18. See KL "trolldom."
19. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 146, 130–31, 176–77, 147, 141. Further examples are given in Fröjmark, "Demons in the Miracula"; see also Myrdal and Bäärnhelm, *Kvinnor, barn och fester*.
20. Birgitta's references to the life of Mary are based in large measure on the vernacular version of Jacobus de Voragine's collection of saints' lives; see volume I, p. 10).
21. See Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 210.
22. On Birgitta's Mariology, see further Brodd and Hårdelin, *Maria i Sverige, Del 1*; Børreson, "Birgitta's Godlanguage."
23. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 81, 484, 500.
24. The expression is given by Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 107; see pp. 78–107 for a full and nuanced discussion of Birgitta's mystical pregnancy.
25. For more information on penitential practice in the Late Middle Ages, specifically as regards the interaction of Swedish citizens with the papal penitentiary, see Risberg and Salonen, *Auctoritate papae*.
26. See Gallén, "De skandinaviska penitentiarierna vid kurian under medeltiden."
27. Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, pp. 246–47.
28. On this subject, see further Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, pp. 421–22; further references are given by Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 76n152, 223; and Zochowska, *The Christian Kingdom as an Image of the Heavenly Kingdom*.
29. Further references to all these vernacular translations are given in Morris and O'Mara, eds. *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden*.
30. See also Book VII 4, on St. Thomas; on her visits to the shrines, see for example Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 15, 367, 579. See also Cesarini, "Från Milano till Siracusa"; Almazán, "Den heliga Birgitta och Spanien."
31. This point is made by Duffy in *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 339. This vision is analyzed by Salmesvuori, *Power and Authority*, pp. 191–95.
32. Salmesvuori, *Power and Authority*, pp. 66–67 looks at this question in relation to Birgitta's interest in St. Elizabeth of Hungary (Book IV 4).
33. As Giles Constable has noted in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* p. 120, these views are close to the early humanist view of the *vita activa*, which drew on Cicero's view of action as well as Petrarch's secularized version of wisdom as piety. Gilroy "English Adaptations of Revelations 6.65" surveys some of the differences between the embellished vernacular English tradition and the printed editions, noting that "the manuscript tradition not only emphasizes but also adds to Bridget's sharp criticism of the unseemly practices of members of the clergy, while the print editions accentuate her steadfast support for the Roman Church and its pope" (p. 16).
34. See further Götlind, *Technology and Religion*.
35. According to the prologue of the *Extravagantes*, after careful deliberation, they were added to the revelations to which they were assumed to refer. "Quarum reuelacionum alicque propter conuenienciam quam habent ad reuelaciones in libris originalibus contentas, tamquam declaraciones earundem et addiciones, diligenti prehabita discussione, ispsis originalibus libris hinc inde pio conamine sunt inserte." Hollman, *Den heliga Birgittas Reuelaciones Extravagantes*, p. 113.
36. The Swedish tradition by and large omits most of the supplementary materials.

Book VI

⚡ Chapter 1

On Christ's Physical Beauty

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Words of the Mother of God to the bride describing Christ's beauty and how often the Jews would go to see his face and be comforted whenever they experienced anxiety in their hearts.

1 The Mother of God spoke to the bride, saying: "I am the queen of heaven. My Son loves you with all his heart, so I advise you to love nothing but him. 2 He is so desirable that, if you have him, you can desire nothing else. He is so beautiful that the beauty of the heavenly elements or of light is a mere shadow in comparison. 3 When I was bringing him up, my son possessed such a gift of beauty that all those who looked on him used to be comforted from whatever sorrow they had in their hearts. 4 Many of the Jews used to say to each other: 'Let us go to be comforted by the sight of Mary's son.' Although they did not know he was the Son of God, still they derived great comfort from seeing his face. 5 His body, too, was so pure that no lice or maggots ever touched him, for these creatures showed reverence to their creator. Not even tangles or dirtiness were ever found in his hair."

⚡ Chapter 2

A Sick Man who Repented on his Deathbed Suffers in Purgatory

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ speaks to the bride about a man who had lived immorally but who, when he was dying, resolved to reform himself if he survived. He explains that the man will not be sentenced to eternal punishment but only to a fearful purgatory due to his good intention.

1 The Son spoke to the bride, saying: "The sick man for whom you are praying has been greatly negligent in my regard and lived his whole life in opposition to me. 2 However, you should let him know now that if he resolves to reform his life, should he escape death, I will still give him my grace. So encourage him in his desire to reform, for I feel pity for him in my great mercy because of his bitter punishment."

3 When the same man died before the singing of prime,¹ the Lord again appeared to the bride and said: "Consider how just I am in my judgment. 4 This man, who was weighed down by such a great sickness, came before my

1. "Before the singing of prime": the man may have been a monk or friar, or perhaps a lay brother or servant of Alvastra monastery.

court of judgment. Although he was judged worthy of pardon for the sake of his intention, still, in order for him to become completely cleansed, his soul must suffer so harshly in purgatory that no mortal could imagine it. 5 What, then, will they suffer who have their entire will bent on the world and are never afflicted by any distress?”

✠ Chapter 3

A Devil Tempts a Friar; In the Explanation a Witch Tempts a Priest

DATE: 1340S, LINKÖPING DIOCESE, SWEDEN

How the bride saw a devil flee in shame from a man praying devoutly whom the devil had long been troubling with strong temptations. A good angel explains the vision to her.

1 The bride saw a devil standing with his hands tied beside a man who was praying. When the devil had stood there an hour, he suddenly let go a loud and terrible cry and, with a great roar, went off in shame.

2 Concerning this, a good angel told the bride: “This devil had been troubling the man for some time. His hands were tied because he was unable to prevail over him as he intended. 3 Because the man bravely resisted the devil’s attacks, it was God’s decision not to let the devil do as he wished. 4 The devil still hopes to be able to prevail over him. However, he was easily beaten this time and will never more prevail over him. 5 God’s grace will grow in this man from day to day, so the demon is not shouting without cause, for he has lost the one whom he so often attacked and tried to conquer.”

EXPLANATION

6 This brother was for twelve years tempted concerning both the sacrament of the Body of Christ and the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which he could never pronounce without having sordid thoughts.¹ He was set free through the prayers of Lady Birgitta with the result that his greatest joy was to receive the Body of Christ and the name dearest to him in his heart and on his lips was that of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

7 Again, a witch cast a spell of carnal impurity on a certain priest,² and he asked Lady Birgitta to pray for him. When she was rapt in spirit, she heard: 8 “You wonder, daughter, why the devil exercises control over human beings. This is because of the inconstancy of the human will, as

1. “This brother . . . sordid thoughts”: this story is told in the *Vita*, where it is used to demonstrate the efficacy of Birgitta’s supplications for individuals (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 94, 627).

2. “A witch . . . on a certain priest”: According to Prior Petrus’s testimony, this was a priest named Johannes from the parish of Rinna in Linköping diocese, who had a fascination with a witch (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 513). The chapter appears to be about the sexual struggles of people in holy orders who were bound to a vow of celibacy, on which see further Constitutions 6 and 7 of the Second Lateran Council (Alberigo, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, p. 174).

you may see in the case of this priest spellbound by a woman. 9 Know that this woman has these three evil properties: infidelity, obduracy, and the desire for money and carnal pleasure. This is why the devil comes near to her and gives her to drink of the dregs of his bitterness. 10 Know, too, that this woman's tongue will be the end of her, her hand will be her death, and the devil himself will write her will and testament." 11 All this came to pass. On the third night, the witch became insanely furious and, grabbing a knife, stabbed herself in the groin, crying out for all to hear: 12 "Come and get me, devil!" At once, with horrible shouts, she ended her life. The above-mentioned priest was freed from his temptation and at once entered a religious order where he offered the pleasing fruits of his service to God until the end of his life.

✠ Chapter 4

A Wise Man must Preach Boldly, Suffer Patiently, and Deal Justly

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ tells the bride that every wise and virtuous man should boldly proclaim the words and grace of God contained in these books¹ to those who desire to hear as well as to those who do not, to both poor and rich, and thus he will win God himself as an eternal reward.

1 "He who has his master's golden wisdom must do three things. He must first distribute it to those who wish to have it and offer it, besides, to those who do not want it. Second, he has to be patient and forbearing. Third, he has to be reasonable and fair in distributing it. 2 The person with such virtues has my gold, that is, my wisdom. What metal is more precious than gold? Similarly, nothing written is worth more than my wisdom. 3 With this wisdom I filled the man for whom you pray. Like one of my knights, he should therefore preach boldly²—and not only to those desirous of hearing but he should also tell of my grace to those who do not wish to hear of it. 4 Second, he should be patient for the sake of my name, knowing that he has a master who heard every kind of insult. Third, I say, he should be fair in distributing it to poor as well as to rich. 5 He should spare none, fear none, for I am in him and he is in me.³ Who can harm him when I, the Almighty, am both within him and without? 6 I shall give him a precious reward for his labors—nothing bodily or earthly but my very self in whom there is every good thing, in whom there is every abundance."

1. "Every wise and virtuous man . . . in these books": Alfonso in his rubric seems to imply that Birgitta is talking about how all men should proclaim the message contained in her books of revelations, but in the revelation it is implied that she is referring to a particular man who is the subject of the vision and the wisdom that is conferred on him.

2. "Like one of my knights . . . preach boldly"; "preach" need not mean "preach sermons" but could have a more general sense of "proclaim." Although the suggestion is that the man was a knight, the meaning might equally be that he should preach as if he were one of Christ's knights.

3. "I am in him and he in me"; cf. John 15:5, and 1 John 3:24.

⚡ Chapter 5

Christ Describes a Place Where the Wicked Torment their Brethren

DATE: 1340S, ALVASTRA

Christ issues harsh warnings to presumptuous and proud religious hypocrites who deride the simplicity of the simple and innocent and thus harm them with their horns of detraction and evil works. He gently admonishes them to convert quickly to a life of virtue, for otherwise they will be harshly punished.

1 “I am the creator of all but created by none. For a long time I have averted my eyes¹ from this place due to the iniquity of its inhabitants. 2 While its first founders hastened to climb from virtue to virtue,² these men today go from evil to evil. Each tries to outdo the other, and they boast of their sin. 3 The prayers of my beloved Mother incline me now to have mercy, but there remain roots of a most wicked progeny, as you will see more clearly from a parable. Once there was a shepherd who said to his master: 4 ‘Master, there are a few gentle sheep in your flock, but there are also rams among them, butting the sheep and hurting them with their horns. Their heads are useless, their hides corrupt, their flesh rotten, their intestines evil-smelling.’ 5 His master answered him: ‘I will cut off the heads of the rams with a sharp sword so that they will not harm my gentle sheep. The hide will be stripped off, since it brings me no wool. Their rotten intestines and flesh will be flung to the wilds and given to birds that cannot distinguish between clean and unclean.’

6 I am that master. The simple faithful are like my sheep. Among them there are some horned rams that wound them. 7 Like rams that pounce on sheep and tear their woolly hides, pushing them with their horns and knocking them to the ground, so these men deride the simplicity of the innocent, hurting them and knocking them to the ground with their horns of detraction and evil deeds. 8 Therefore, their heads, that is, their will and purpose, held high on horns of arrogance and presumption, will be cut off at my severe sentencing, which is like a most sharp sword.³ 9 Their hide, that is, the hypocrisy they wear instead of religious simplicity, will be taken away from them. In return for their hypocrisy, the devils will strip their souls of every good thing, because they pretended to be one thing but were something else. 10 They served me in word⁴ and dissented from me in deed. Their lustful flesh, which in my sight is like the flesh of a prostitute, will be mercilessly burned to ashes. 11 Their intestines, that is, their thoughts and affections, which they keep for the world but not for me, cherishing my enemies, that is, sins and devils but not me, will be scourged by devils. There will not be a single base affection for which they will not be punished.

12 Therefore, while there is still time, let their head, that is, their contorted and proud wills, be lowered in humility. Let them put on the hide of

1. “Averted eyes”; cf. Isaiah 1:15.

2. “From virtue into virtue”; cf. Psalm 83(84): 8.

3. “The most sharp sword”; cf. Apocalypse 19:15.

4. “They served me in word”; cf. Isaiah 29:13.

simplicity. Let their flesh restrain itself from lust. Let their intestines, that is, their thoughts, be cured through penance. 13 Otherwise, I shall exact swift justice from them in accordance with their merits. I shall subject them to the power of devils in such a way that they will not be able to do anything but what pleases the devils, and the devils will push them thus from evil to evil.”

ADDITION

14 Christ spoke again: “Yet another parable will be given for those who ask about this house:⁵ ‘Why did God do so to this house?’ It shall be answered: ‘Because they did not want to hear the words of the one admonishing them.’ 15 I shall place guards on them. They will watch them from on high. They will force the land of their delights back into servitude. And bread shall be meted out to them, and they shall be numbered for their fewness.”⁶

✠ Chapter 6

Birgitta Has Shown Impatience

DATE: 1340S, ALVASTRA

Christ gently rebukes the bride for some impatience she displayed and instructs her not to give in to anger or make any answer to people who provoke her until she has settled down and sees that her words can come to good effect.

1 “I am your Creator and your bridegroom. You, my new bride,¹ have now sinned four times through anger. First, you became impatient in your heart about certain things said, although, for your sake, I put up with insults and stood before the judge and answered not a word.² 2 Second, you made a harsh reply and raised your voice loudly in reproval, although I kept my eyes on heaven when I was nailed to the cross and opened not my mouth.³ 3 Third, you showed contempt for me for whose sake you should patiently put up with everything. Fourth, you were of no benefit to your neighbor whom your patient example should encourage to improve when he has been in the wrong. 4 So I do not want you to get angry again. When you have been provoked to anger by someone, say nothing so long as your anger has not left your soul. Once you have settled down

5. “About this house”: According to an addition in one manuscript (“Codex Falkenberg”), written by the Vadstena brother Johannes Johannis (see further Undhagen, *Book I*, pp. 92–93), this revelation was received in the Cistercian abbey of Alvastra; however, Lundén, *Den heliga Birgitta*, 3, p. 9, speculates that this revelation, and chapter 8, may refer to the Benedictines in Farfa (cf. *Book III* 20–22).

6. “They shall be numbered for their fewness”; cf. Isaiah 10:19.

1. “My new bride”: an expression sometimes used in *Book I*, at the beginning of Birgitta’s visionary calling.

2. “Answered not a word”; cf. Matthew 27:12.

3. “Opened not my mouth”; cf. Isaiah 53:7.

and have carefully considered the reasons for your agitation, then speak with gentleness. 5 If you cannot do any good by speaking, and if you commit no sin by keeping quiet, then it is better to be silent in order to earn a greater reward.”

✠ Chapter 7

On a Deacon Who Must Work For the Conversion Of his Brethren

DATE: 1340S, ALVA STRA

Through his bride Christ orders a pious deacon to preach the word of God to his fellows and to other sinners with zeal and daring, instructing the weak, chastising the intemperate, and risking his life for the salvation of others' souls.

1 “I am your God and everyone’s God and Creator, yet I am neglected and despised. Say this to the one for whom you pray and whom you know to love me: ‘Since the office of deacon has been conferred upon you, you have received the authority to preach so that you may instruct the weak and chastise the intemperate. 2 I did this myself, as did my apostles and disciples. To win a single soul they went to many different places, through towns and villages. For the salvation of souls, they delivered their own souls to death. 3 Therefore, since it is your office to preach, it is neither suitable nor right for you to be silent, for my wicked enemies surround you and you tread in their midst. 4 Their accursed gluttony is as hateful to me as if they were eating meat on Good Friday. They are like a vessel open at both ends—if the whole sea were poured into it, it would never be filled. They are never able to get enough—their immoderate desire merely increases their appetite for sin. 5 They are distancing themselves from my angels, their guardians, and summoning demons who now stand closer to them than the good angels. They remain in my choir¹ not to please me but so as not to be rebuked by other men or to displease them. 6 They seem to be imitators of the ancient fathers but really are liars and frauds in my sight. They have broken the pledge that they gave me, and they defraud the souls through whose generosity they live, for they repay them neither with good example nor with prayers. 7 Therefore, before all the angels and saints I swear by the truth of myself who am the truth,² from whose mouth nothing but truth has ever proceeded, that, unless they reform, I will allow them for a short time to continue on the path of their pleasure. Afterward, however, I will lead them along a most thorny and barbed path. 8 To keep them from leaving it, I will place my servants to their right and left who will prevent them from leaving and compel them to continue on. Then, as a dead corpse falls to the ground, so too their souls will descend into hell,³ and they will be buried in the pain of a hell so deep that they will never ascend again.”

1. “Remain in my choir” suggests that the deacon and his brethren were canons. The statement in 7.6, “They seem to be imitators of the ancient fathers,” suggests that they prided themselves on serving in choir according to ancient precepts and not appointing vicars choral in their stead, as was common at the time.

2. “I am the truth”: John 14:6.

3. “Descend into hell”; cf. Psalm 54(55):15.

⚡ Chapter 8

Some Monks Lived in a Worldly Fashion and Did Not Heed Birgitta's Reproaches

DATE: 1340S, ALVASTRA

Christ grants boldness to the bride as she is hesitant to rebuke with confidence certain monks who were persisting in grave sins and whose guest she was. He tells her that her rebuke will not be imputed to her as a sin but to her credit, even if the monks take offense from it and become hard of heart.

1 “My bride, you have thought many times to yourself as follows: ‘Seeing that my God, though Lord of the universe and the almighty, patiently endured his betrayer, why cannot I, his creature, with even greater reason endure these men who live in the same residence with me?’¹ Am I afraid that they may become even worse because of my censure and rebukes?’ 2 I will reply to your thoughts, because they were pious in part yet lacking in fervor. 3 A good knight placed among wicked ones who sees an offense to his lord at least speaks up about the disgrace caused to his lord, if he cannot take actions to correct it. Then he suffers patiently any insults he receives. 4 So now you should speak with confidence to them about their transgressions, because their sins are altogether abhorrent to me by reason of their long duration. 5 Even if they become hardened against me in any way because of your words, it will not be counted as a sin of yours that you spoke up. Rather a greater reward will fall to you. 6 The apostles preached to many people but not everyone was converted, and yet their reward was no less for it. It will be the same for you, because, even if not everyone listens to you, still there will be some who are edified and healed by reason of your words. 7 So tell them that unless they mend their ways, I will come to them so swiftly and with such severity that everyone who hears it will cry out in anguish and everyone who experiences it will faint away. 8 In the sight of all the angels and saints I will condemn them as thieves to their unspeakable shame,² because they did not assume their religious habit for the merit of a virtuous life. 9 In my sight they are like thieves whose possessions are not theirs but belong to those who live virtuously. I will condemn them as deceivers and slice them from head to toe with my sword. 10 I will fill them with ever flowing, never failing fire, for I warned them like a loving father and they did not listen. I revealed to them the words of my mouth as I had never done before, and they rejected them. If I had sent my words to the gentiles, they may well have taken them to heart and repented. 11 Therefore, I will neither spare them nor hear the prayers of my beloved mother and saints for them.

1. “Who live in the same residence with me”: Presumably Alvastra; however, Lundén, *Den Heliga Birgitta*, 3, p. 9, speculates that this revelation, and chapter 5, may refer to the Benedictines in Farfa (cf. Book III 20–22).

2. “In the sight of all the angels . . . unspeakable shame”; cf. Mark 8:38.

Rather, as long as I remain in my glory, which is without end, they will remain in punishment. Nevertheless, while their souls are still in their bodies, my mercy remains available to them.”

✠ Chapter 9

On an Unrepentant Impious Priest; And on His Dreadful Death

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ here reveals to the bride how abhorrent it is in God’s sight for a priest to celebrate Mass in the state of mortal sin, how devils are present when he celebrates it, and how he will be punished in the future if he does not repent.

1 “The priest for whom you are praying is like a forceps that extracts the gold of my virtue. He is like a degenerate sheep that does not bother to listen to his mother’s call. 2 When he approaches my altar, devils stand at his side—the same ones that inhabit his soul, since his soul is dead in my sight. 3 When he puts on the amice,¹ the devils cover his soul so that he does not think or realize how fearful it is to approach my altar and how pure he should be to stand before me who am most pure. 4 As he dresses himself in the alb,² he is dressing himself in hardness of heart and impiety, for he thinks that his sin is not serious, that his future and eternal punishment will not be great. It never enters his mind what eternal joy is like. 5 As he puts on the stole,³ the devil puts a heavy yoke on his neck in such a way that the pleasure of sin delights him, and thus his soul is weighed down, because it does not let him lament or examine his sin. 6 As he puts on the maniple,⁴ all works done for God become heavy, burdensome and embarrassing to him, yet worldly things seem easy and light. 7 As he ties the cingulum⁵ around his waist, his will is tied to the devil in such a way that he deliberately intends to remain in sin. The band of charity between me and him is then loosened because he wills to do whatever the devil inspires in his mind, although he is restrained from doing so through my secret decision. 8 As he dresses himself in the chasuble,⁶ the devil dresses him in betrayal. When he says the *Confiteor*,⁷ the

1. “Amice”: a white rectangular linen cloth worn over the shoulders, fastened with ribbons around the chest. The priest first puts it over his head, then, after donning the alb, lowers it so that it forms a kind of collar around his neck.

2. “Alb”: a white linen vestment, reaching from the neck to the ankles, and held in at the waist by a girdle, the cingulum (see note for 9.7).

3. “Stole”: a long strip of fine colored cloth worn around the neck, its two ends hanging down parallel to each other over the alb.

4. “Maniple”: an embroidered band of fine fabric suspended equally on both sides of the left forearm.

5. “Cingulum”: the rope belt that fastens the alb at the waist.

6. “Chasuble”: a long ornate sleeveless garment worn over the alb and stole. The interpretations of the priest’s garments can be seen as a parody of the prayers traditionally said by the priest when putting them on. Compare the similar contrasting interpretations of priestly vestments in Book IV 58.18–22, and of monastic vestments in Book IV 127.11–14.

7. “*Confiteor*”: the first word, “I confess,” of the priest’s general confession of sins, at the opening of the Mass.

demons respond: 'You lie! We are witnesses: his confession is like that of Judas because his mouth says one thing and his heart another.' 9 As he approaches the altar, I avert my face from him.⁸ Regardless what Mass he is saying, whether the common of my Mother or of the saints,⁹ it pleases me as much as if a prostitute were to offer some nobleman her menstrual fluid in a glass to drink, or as if someone were to say to his enemy: 'Beware! I seek to injure you.' 10 Then, when he consecrates my body and says: 'This is my body,'¹⁰ the demons flee from him indeed, but his body remains a lifeless trunk, for his soul is dead in my sight. 11 When he receives my body in his mouth, his presumption brings the whole crowd of demons back to him, for he has no love for me.

12 However, I am so merciful that, if he were to say with a contrite heart and a purpose of amendment: 'Lord, for the sake of your passion and of the love that you have for us, forgive my sins,' I would welcome him, and the demons would not return to him. 13 But the filth of the world is in his mouth and worms are seething in his heart, so he has no liking for the sweetness of my words. Useless thoughts consume him in his heart and keep him from thinking at all of me. Therefore, he shall never approach my altar. 14 My altar is nothing other than the celestial table and the heavenly glory in which my angels and saints rejoice. 15 This is symbolized by the stone altar in a church where my crucified body is immolated on the cross each day in the same way in which the former sacrifices of the Law symbolized those now performed in the church. 16 What does the celestial table mean if not gladness and rejoicing? He shall never experience this gladness in eternal glory. He shall never stand before that altar of mine nor see my face. My children, however, shall see my face. 17 I am like a true pelican,¹¹ for I will give them my own blood. I will fill them to satisfaction both in the present and in the life to come. 18 As for him, however, the abominable eagle¹² will feed him, the kind that gives its young enough food only for a time but then withdraws their needful nourishment so that they bear the gauntness of hunger all the rest of their lives. 19 Likewise, the devil will feed him with delight for a time in order that afterward he will feel a hunger for joy, and the hunger will last in him forever. Still, while he lives, my mercy is open to him, if he converts."

8. "Avert my face from him"; cf. Psalm 87(88):15.

9. "Regardless what Mass he is saying . . . of the saints": On ordinary weekdays, when there was no obligatory feast to be celebrated, the priest would choose either a "common" mass for the saints or the Virgin Mary, or a "votive" mass for some specific intention.

10. "This is my body" (Matthew 26:26).

11. "Pelican": According to medieval bestiary tradition, the pelican's newly hatched offspring attack their father with their beaks, whereupon he strikes back and kills them. Their mother pierces herself and allows her blood to flow down so that her offspring may be resurrected. The pelican was thus a symbol for Christ, who sheds his blood on the cross to revive humankind. See further White, *The Book of Beasts*.

12. "Abominable eagle": In the bestiary tradition the eagle is endowed with mostly favorable characteristics. Birgitta's source for the notion that some eagles starve their young is unknown.

EXPLANATION

20 This priest was a bailiff. Through Lady Birgitta's influence, he was removed from office. He became completely furious and said to the lady: "You have now deprived me of my honor and my benefice. How much did you get out of it?" 21 She replied: "A cleric, who is God's portion,¹³ cannot hold such an office without danger to his soul. Therefore I am telling you, and it will without a doubt be as I heard it at God's judgment, as sure as my name is Birgitta, unless you take care and quickly reform your life, you will not escape your individual judgment by God and an unusual death." 22 Not long afterward, the same priest who had been removed by the bishop died a terrible and unheard-of death. Abell was being cast and the molten bronze overflowed all around and burned him up.

✠ Chapter 10

On a Swedish Aristocrat in Purgatory; The Living May Still Make Amends on His Behalf

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

God's Mother describes her own dignity to the bride and the benefits that everyone receives from her. She also talks about the way suffrages for the soul of a certain ruler for whom the bride was praying could free him from a terrible purgatory. An excellent lesson.

1 "I am the queen of heaven, the Mother of Mercy, the joy of the righteous and sinners' gateway to God. There is no punishment in the fires of purgatory that will not be easier and more bearable due to me than it would be otherwise. 2 None are so accursed that they lack my mercy during their lives, because, due to me, they are less tempted by demons than they would be otherwise. 3 None are so estranged from God—not even those who may be altogether accursed—that they would not be able, if they would but appeal to me, to return to God and receive mercy. 4 Because I am merciful, and because I have gained mercy from my Son, I want to show you how that deceased friend of yours for whom you are sorrowing can be saved from the seven torments¹ my Son told you about.

5 First, he can be saved from the fire that he suffers due to lust, if someone, in accordance with the three states of life in the church (i.e. married, widowed, and celibate) and on behalf of this man's soul, helps one woman on to marriage, another to the religious life, and a third to maintain herself as a widow.

13. "God's portion" renders "sors Dei"; cf. Sw. "enkannelica gudz thiänare" [God's special servant]. "God's portion" was the standard interpretation of the word cleric in the Middle Ages, since Latin *clericus* comes from a Greek word meaning "lot" or "portion"; cf. Deuteronomy 18:1–2, Acts 1:26; and the same interpretation in 15.19.

1. "Seven torments"; cf. IV 58.34, 62.9–10, 132.17. In the following, seven torments are not mentioned but rather seven sins that the nobleman has to atone for, mostly corresponding to the seven capital sins.

This is because he committed grave sins of lust even in his married life, violating his own marriage bed.

6 Second, because he sinned in three ways through gluttony, namely, by eating and drinking sumptuously and beyond measure, then by preparing meals of many courses due to pride and ostentation, and, finally, by sitting too long at table and missing divine services,² 7 someone should therefore, in reparation for his threefold gluttony and also in honor of the triune God, voluntarily support three paupers for an entire year. He should serve them food of the same kind and quality as he himself eats. 8 He should not begin his own meal until he sees the three of them eating, and this brief wait will blot out your friend's long delays when sitting at table. Moreover, he should provide sufficient clothing and beds for them, such as he sees is fit and necessary.

9 Third, in reparation for the pride that he had in abundance, someone should voluntarily bring together seven paupers on a day of his choosing once a week for an entire year. He should humbly wash their feet, thinking to himself as he does so: 10 'Lord Jesus Christ, you who were a prisoner of the Jews, have mercy on him!' Secondly: 'Lord Jesus Christ, you who were bound to a column,³ have mercy on him!' Thirdly: 'Lord Jesus Christ, you who were innocent but condemned by the guilty, have mercy on him!' 11 Fourthly: 'Lord Jesus Christ, you who were stripped of your own clothes and dressed in the clothes of derision, have mercy on him!' Fifthly: 'Lord Jesus Christ, you who were scourged so cruelly that your ribs were exposed and nothing was left in you uninjured, have mercy on him!' 12 Sixthly: 'Lord Jesus Christ, you who were struck and spat upon, have mercy on him!' Seventhly: 'Lord Jesus Christ, you who were stretched out on the cross, whose hands and feet were pierced by nails, whose head was bloody from the thorns,⁴ whose eyes were full of tears and whose mouth and ears were full of blood, have mercy on him!' 13 Once they have been washed, he should feed them as best he can and as he sees fit. He should then ask them humbly to pray for that man's soul.

14 Fourth, he sinned by way of sloth in three ways. First, he was slothful about going to church, secondly, about seeking indulgences and, thirdly, about visiting the shrines of the saints. 15 In reparation for the first fault, some volunteer should go to church once a month for a full year, having the mass for the faithful departed said for his soul. 16 For the second fault, he should go as often as he can and so desires—with the specific intention of offering it for the soul of this man—to those places where indulgences are granted and where he has

2. "Divine services" renders "opus Dei" [work of God]; cf. Sw. "gudz thiänist ok räutuusa ok dygdhelicu gerninga" [God's service and justice and virtuous deeds]. It is often difficult to know whether "opus Dei" refers to church services, or good works, or both.

3. "Bound to a column": the flogging of Christ is mentioned in John 19:1 but no column. However, the column was shown to Jerusalem pilgrims as early as in the fourth century and became a standard element in depictions of the event.

4. "Whose hands and feet . . . bloody from the thorns" renders Ghotan "cuius manus et pedes fuerunt claus perforati et caput fuit cruentatum spina"; the critical edition has "cuius manus, pedes et caput fuit cruentatum spina," which makes little sense; cf. Sw. (which modifies the whole passage) "oc hafðhe blodhoght hofodh och händir oc fötir oc munnin oc öron ful mz blodh oc öghonin ful mz taarom" [and had a bloody head and hands and feet and your mouth and ears full of blood and your eyes full of tears].

heard that those who grant them are especially devout. 17 For the third fault, he should send some faithful and upstanding Christian to take an offering to the chief shrines in the kingdom of Sweden where people tend to gather out of devotion and for the sake of gaining indulgences, such as the shrine of Saint Eric,⁵ Blessed Sigfrid,⁶ or similar ones. 18 He should also faithfully reward the bearer of the offering for his efforts.

19 Fifth, because he sinned through vanity and pleasure, someone should voluntarily gather all the poor people under his care or in his neighborhood once a month for a full year together under a single roof and have them participate in a Mass for the faithful departed said for this man's soul. 20 When the priest begins the mass, he should ask and encourage them to pray for his soul. Once the mass has been said, refreshments should be served to all the poor so that they may leave the gathering in a pleasant spirit. Thus the departed soul will have the pleasure of their prayers and the poor will have the pleasure of the refreshments.

21 Sixth, because he has to pay his debts down to the last farthing⁷ and remain in punishment until then, you should know that, both before and at his death, he had the intention of paying them off, though it was not as fervent as it should have been. Because of his intention, he is among the ranks of those to be saved.⁸ 22 From this fact people can reflect on the greatness of the mercy of my Son who gives so great a rest in return for so little payment. If he had not had that intention, he would have been condemned forever. 23 This is why his relatives who have inherited his possessions should have not only the intention of paying off any debts they know of but they should actually do so. They should humbly ask the people to whom they pay back his debts to forgive his soul if they have incurred any losses due to the long wait. Otherwise, if they do not pay off his debts, his relatives will bear the guilt of his sin. 24 After that, they should send some offering of their own choice to each monastery in the realm and have a public Mass said in the cloister church. Before Mass begins, prayers for his soul should be requested in atonement to God. 25 A Mass for the deceased should then be said in the church of each parish where he had property. A priest should chant it in the presence of the entire congregation. Before he begins chanting the Mass, he should tell them: 26 'This mass is being celebrated for the soul of this man. I ask you in the name of Christ to forgive him if he offended you in any way in word or deed or by any one of his decisions.' The priest may then approach the altar.

5. "Saint Eric": Erik Jedvardson, 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. Aspring arose where his head stopped rolling. His relics are preserved in Uppsala cathedral and his feast day is 18 May.

6. "Blessed Sigfrid": bishop of Husaby and Växjö, probably an Englishman by birth; 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.

7. "The last farthing"; cf. Matthew 5:26.

8. "In the ranks of those to be saved," i.e., he is in purgatory.

27 Seventh, because he was a judge but lent his authority to wicked representatives, he is now in the hands of demons.⁹ However, because he did not intend for them to behave wickedly but because he gave the matter less care and attention than he ought to have, he can be freed from his torments if he receives some help. 28 What kind of help? The kind of help that comes through the most holy body of my Son that is offered up each day on the altar. 29 The bread that is placed on the altar is bread up until the words ‘This is my body’ are pronounced, but then it is changed into the body of my Son, the same body that he received from me, the same that was crucified. 30 Then the Father receives glory and adoration in the Spirit from the limbs of my Son. The Son exults in the power and majesty of the Father. I, his mother, am honored by all the heavenly host because I gave birth to him. All the angels turn toward him and adore him. The souls of the righteous give thanks, for they have been redeemed through him. 31 O what a horrendous thing it is for miserable men to touch so worthy a Lord with unworthy hands! It is this body, then, which died for love, that can free him. 32 One Mass should therefore be said on each solemnity of my Son, that is, one on his nativity, one on his circumcision, one on his epiphany, one on Corpus Christi, one on Good Friday, one on Easter Day, another on Ascension Day and one on Pentecost. 33 Moreover, a Mass should be celebrated on each of the solemnities honoring me, and then nine Masses in honor of the nine orders of angels.¹⁰ 34 When the Masses of the angels are celebrated, nine poor people should be brought together and food and clothing should be given them so that the angels to whose guardianship this man was committed and whom he often offended may be appeased by this small offering and be able to present his soul before God. 35 Finally, a Mass should be said for all the deceased in general so that they may obtain rest and so that his soul may be granted a worthy rest together with them.”

EXPLANATION

36 This was a nobleman of merciful character. After his death he appeared to Lady Birgitta, saying: “Nothing raises me up from my sufferings as much as the prayers of the just and the sacrament of the altar. 37 I was myself a judge but entrusted my office to those less fond of justice. For this reason, I still remain in exile. But I would be freed sooner if those who should be and who were my own people showed more gentle concern for my salvation.” There is more on the same man in this book, chapter 21.

9. “In the hands of demons”: the expression does not indicate that he is in hell, since some of the souls who do penance in purgatory, in Birgitta’s view, are tormented by demons.

10. “Nine orders of angels”: the medieval view held that there was a hierarchy of nine angelic choirs ranged broadly into three spheres: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones; Dominions, Virtues, Powers; Principalities, Archangels, Angels. Cf. Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 1:16.

⚡ Chapter II

Everything Fell into Agitation At the Crucifixion

DATE: UNDATED

The Mother of God teaches the bride always to recall Christ's sorrowful passion, for it was as though all things were thrown into a state of agitation at the time of his passion—his divine and human natures, his mother, the angels and all the elements, all the souls of living and dead, and even the demons.

1 The Mother of God speaks to the bride, saying: "At my Son's death, everything was thrown into a state of agitation. 2 His divine nature, which surrendered the Son to death but was never separated from him, not even in death, seemed at the moment of his death to suffer from sympathy, though the divine nature itself can suffer neither pain nor sorrow, being impassible and immutable. 3 The Son himself suffered pain in every limb and in his heart, though he was immortal in his divine nature. Even his soul, though immortal, suffered when it departed¹ from the body. 4 The angels around him appeared agitated when they beheld God suffering in his human nature on earth. But how can angels be agitated, being immortal? 5 Surely, it is as when a good man sees his friend experience pain and suffering which will bring him great glory. So he rejoices over the glory to be won but is still saddened by his friend's pain. 6 In this way, the angels were somehow saddened by his pain, despite being impassible, but they also rejoiced in his future glory and the benefit to come from his passion. 7 All the elements were agitated: both the sun and moon lost their splendor,² the earth quaked, the rocks were rent and the tombs opened up³ at the time of my Son's death. 8 All the gentiles, wherever they were, became agitated, for their hearts were somehow pricked by sorrow, though they knew not where it came from. Even the hearts of his crucifiers were troubled at that hour, though not unto their glory. 9 Moreover, the unclean spirits themselves were agitated and gathered together in their agitation. The souls of those in the bosom of Abraham⁴ were so greatly agitated that they would have preferred to remain in hell forever than to behold their Lord suffer so much. 10 I, too, his virgin mother, standing by⁵ my Son—no one can imagine the sufferings I underwent. 11 So, my daughter, keep my Son's passion in mind. Flee this unstable world that is nothing but a dream or a flower quickly fading."

1. "When it departed" renders "quando exiuit" of some manuscripts; the critical edition has "quia exiuit" [because it departed].

2. "The sun and moon lost their splendor"; cf. Joel 2:31.

3. "The earth quaked . . . tombs opened up"; cf. Matthew 27:51–52.

4. "The bosom of Abraham"; cf. Luke 16:23.

5. "Mother, standing by"; cf. John 19:25.

⚡ Chapter 12

Mary is Like a Beehive

DATE: UNDATED

The Mother of God says that she is like a beehive, for the blessed bee of heaven, God's Son, filled her with the sweetest honey so plentifully when he descended to her womb that every trace of poison has been removed from us through the sweetness of that honey.

1 The Blessed Virgin spoke to the bride, saying: "Bride of my Son, when you greeted me, you compared me to a beehive. That I certainly was.¹ My body was merely like a piece of wood in my mother's womb before being joined to a soul.² 2 After my death my body became again like a piece of wood when it was separated from the soul, until God raised up my soul along with my body to his divinity.³ 3 This piece of wood was made into a beehive when that blessed bee, God's Son, came down from heaven and descended into my body. 4 There was prepared in me a most sweet and delicate honeycomb, altogether ready to receive the honey of the Holy Spirit's grace. 5 This honeycomb was filled up when God's Son came to me with power and love and virtue. He came with power, for he was my Lord and God. 6 He came with love, for he assumed flesh and took up the cross out of the love he had for souls. He came with virtue, for all Adam's sin was removed from me.⁴ God's most virtuous Son assumed most virtuous flesh. 7 As a bee has its sting, however, which it uses only reluctantly, so too my Son came with the severity of justice. But he makes use of it only when he is provoked by sins. 8 This bee was poorly rewarded. In return for his power, he was delivered into the hands of the wicked. In return for his love, he was given up to cruel hands. In return for his virtue, he was stripped and scourged mercilessly. 9 Blessed that bee who made a beehive for himself out of the wood of my body and filled it so plentifully with his honey that the trace of poison has been removed from everyone's mouth by the sweet honey given me!"

1. "That I certainly was" renders "Ego certe fui" of the critical edition. The manuscripts have "Ego certe fui apis" [Certainly I was a bee] which may be a confused anticipation of paragraph 3 where Christ is described as a bee (see also chapter 44); Ghotan amends to "Ego certe fui apiarium" [Certainly I was a beehive].

2. "Before being joined to a soul": The medieval view of conception held that every soul was directly created by God and poured into the embryo shortly after conception.

3. "After my death . . . his divinity": Mary died a normal death, as is sometimes represented in medieval art with her soul leaving her body and being received by Christ; but after the third day her body was reunited with her soul and she was assumed in glory into heaven.

4. "All Adam's sin was removed from me": A reference to the Immaculate Conception of Mary and her miraculous preservation from original sin. Although the sentence could be interpreted to mean that Mary was cleansed from original sin at the moment of the incarnation, not before, we know from other passages that such an opinion was not held by Birgitta.

⚔ Chapter 13

Three Resolutions

DATE: UNDATED

Christ instructs the bride to make full use of her time in accordance with God's will and not to do anything unless she believes it to be pleasing to God; furthermore, always to have the intention of serving God and to raise her mind constantly to heavenly things while wearing out her body in the present life in such a way that she can rise to future glory.

1 The Son says to the bride: "You should make three resolutions. The first: never to walk anywhere unless it is according to my will. The second: never to sit unless it is for my honor. The third: never to stand unless it is to be at your bridegroom's service. 2 You walk in accord with my will by making full use of your time in accord with my will, neither eating nor sleeping nor doing anything else unless you think it will please me. 3 You stand firmly by having the intention to stand at my service. You sit by raising your mind constantly to the heavenly things, considering what the glory of the saints and eternal life will be like. 4 To these three resolutions you should add three more. First your disposition should be that of a betrothed virgin who thinks to herself as follows: 5 'I shall gather all the fleeting possessions of my father to give to my groom by whom I must stand in good times and in bad.' You should do likewise, thinking of your body as your father. 6 You should demand all the work you can from your body for the sake of the poor and for other good deeds in order that you may rejoice with me, your groom. Because your body is a fleeting possession, be unsparing with it in the present life in order that it may rise again to a better life in the future. 7 Second, say to yourself as a good wife says to herself: 'As long as my husband loves me, why should I worry? If he is at peace with me, whom should I fear? Therefore, so that he does not grow angry with me, I will show him every honor and always be ready to carry out his will.' 8 Third, consider that your bridegroom is eternal and most wealthy and that you will have everlasting honor and eternal riches with him. Love not, then, what is perishable and you will obtain that which lasts forever."

⚔ Chapter 14

How Birgitta was Called to Follow Christ in Love

DATE: 1340S, ALVA STRA

Christ explains to the bride how he had his angel rear her like a child in the spiritual life and in the virtues, and he entrusts her once more to the angel. He tells her how he led her by holy stealth out of the world to a tranquil harbor. He instructs her to disclose every temptation to her spiritual fathers in order to reach perfection.

1 One of the angels was speaking to God and said: “May all your host praise you, my Lord, for all the love you give! You assigned this bride who stands here to my protection. See, I consign her to you again. 2 I lured her to you like a small child. First I gave her an apple, and when she had eaten it, I said: ‘Follow after me, my daughter, and I will give you the most delicious wine as well. There is not all that much flavor in an apple, but wine is both sweet and will raise your spirits.’ 3 Once she had tasted the wine, I said to her again: ‘Go on still farther and I will give you that which lasts forever and contains every good thing.’”

4 Then the Lord said to the bride: “What you heard my servant say is true. He lured you to me with an apple each time you thought to yourself that every thing you have comes from me and you gave thanks to me alone for them. 5 An apple offers only a bit of flavor and nourishment, and in the same way my love did not attract you much at the time—it only gave you the taste of an idea of God in your heart. 6 Then you went farther on by thinking this to yourself: ‘God’s glory is eternal but worldly happiness is extremely brief and extremely useless in the end. What good does it do me to love temporal things so much?’ 7 With such thoughts you bravely began to abstain from worldly pleasures and to do what good you could in my name. Then, as if you felt a craving for wine, you thirsted for me still more. 8 Finally, when you came to realize that I am the Lord Almighty from whom all good things come, you surrendered your own will by fulfilling mine. Then you became mine by right, and I consented to you and made you mine.”

9 Then the Lord said to the angel: “My servant, in me you are rich. Your honor is eternal, the fire of your love inextinguishable, your power unailing. 10 You have returned my bride to me, but I want you to continue to be her guardian until she comes of age. Guard her so that the devil does not put any unexpected obstacle in her way! 11 Supply her with the clothes of virtue, the finest of clothes! Feed her with my words, which are like fresh meat that improves the blood, heals bodily weakness and awakens a virtuous delight in the soul.

12 I treated her the way a man would treat his friend whom he takes captive with charity and virtue. The capturer says: ‘My friend, go inside my house and see what is going on there and what there is for you to do.’ 13 When he goes in, his capturer does not show him the horrible snakes or ferocious lions that live in the house in order not to frighten his friend. Rather, to sooth him, he makes the snakes look like the meekest sheep and the lions like beautiful sheep. He says to his friend: ‘Friend, know that I love you and have taken you captive for your own good. You should tell my friends whatever you see, for they watch over you. They will provide you with so much consolation that you will prefer captivity under me to your own freedom.’ My dear daughter, I have treated you like that. 14 It was as though I took you captive by recalling you to my love in the midst of your pleasure-seeking. I called you away from a world of perils to this tranquil harbor where those whom you think are virgins because of their continence are really lions because of their wickedness. Those whom you believe to be sheep due to their divine contemplation are like snakes in their gluttony and cupidity. 16 So, whatever you see and hear, tell none but my friends, and they will protect and instruct you. 17 The Spirit who brought you

to harbor will bring you to your fatherland.¹ He who led you to a good beginning will lead you to a better end.”

✠ Chapter 15

On the Greed and Ambition of Roman Priests, especially a priest of St. Peter's Church

DATE: 1350S, ROME

Christ tells the bride that prelates and scholars who become proud and rich through their knowledge but who live immorally may be compared to prostitutes and drinkers of wine. They should be more virtuous than others but instead cast themselves and others headlong into sin. However, like a father rejoicing in the son he has regained, the Lord will run with mercy to anyone who is converted.

1 “The prelate for whom you are praying has turned his eyes away from me and toward the world by his ostentatiousness. If he wanted to be mine, he would look at me each day and attentively read my book and not think so anxiously about the so-called law of the church.” 2 She replied: “But, my Lord, is not the law of the church your law?” The Lord answered: “It was my law so long as they studied it, so long as it was studied for my sake. 3 Now, however, it is not mine, because it is now read in the house of gamblers. They throw three pips on one die¹ for they make a lot of money out of the little justice they come up with in the law of the church. 4 It is not studied in my honor but in order to make money. And in the house of dice-players you will find prostitutes and drinkers of wine. 5 Such are they who now study my law, such are they who are now called scholars but who in fact are fools. What does a prostitute usually do? Well, she is impudent in her speech, loose in her morals, pretty of face, ostentatious in dress. 6 This is what those who read and study my law are like nowadays. There is indecency in their speech—they never open their mouths to preach for my sake or to praise me. 7 They are so loose in morals that even laymen blush at their immoral behavior. Not only do they drag themselves down but they even drag others down along with themselves by their example. 8 They desire nothing but to be seen by the world and to be praised for their honorable rank, to walk about in honorable dress and acquire wealth and honors. My words and precepts are bitter to them; my way of life and conduct abhorrent to them. 9 Their conduct and behavior have the stink of a prostitute to me. Just as a prostitute appears the most disgraceful and base of women, so too they are the most odious of people to me. 10 They talk and boast of their

1. “Your fatherland,” i.e., heaven.

1. “They throw three pips on one die” renders “qui tres punctos super unum taxillum iaciunt”; cf. Sw. “som thry öghon kasta a enne tärning” [who throw three eyes on one die]: Birgitta seems to mean a lucky throw, perhaps a “trey-ace” [a three and an ace].

legal knowledge but only to deceive others and do as they want. Moreover, in this house of mine where the law is studied, there are incontinent drinkers of wine. Their glory is to commit more transgressions than others and to provoke nature to excess.²

11 This is what the masters of law are like nowadays. They delight in excess, are little ashamed of their transgressions and little saddened by the sins of others. 12 Yet if they studied my law correctly, they would find that they are bound to be more continent and humble and more obliged to behave morally than others.

13 I am like a mighty lord who loves the sheep of many towns. A man, though he is mighty, still may not take the sheep from another town unless he has a just claim on them. 14 I, too, who am the creator of all things and the mightiest of all, do not take any sheep but those on whom I have a just claim and who know themselves to be mine³ by reason of divine love. 15 However, anyone who has wandered away from me and wishes to return and hearkens to my call can be saved. Does not a sheep that has strayed from its flock and mingled with another flock run back quickly to its mother when it hears her bleating? 16 Likewise, when the mother hears the call of her offspring, does she not make every attempt to run out to meet it—so much so that, if she is at liberty, is there any hardship or difficulty that can prevent her from running to it? 17 I, too, the creator of all, welcome anyone who hearkens to my call, and I run out as gladly to meet him as a father rejoices in his lost son who has returned, as glad as a dam to see her lamb return.”⁴

EXPLANATION

18 This was the dean of Saint Peter’s church,⁵ later a cardinal. The Son of God says about him: 19 “Many who are God’s portion and God’s almsmen hoard God’s gifts to others. The cleric is God’s portion,⁶ and whatever he has beyond what he needs for food, clothing⁷ and other necessities is not his but belongs to the poor. 20 Happy the man who gathers in summer what he needs to live through the winter. Look how avidly this man’s relatives are scattering what he gathered without a thought for his soul! 21 However, because he had the good intention of distributing his possessions, he has attained what he desired, although he would have been much happier if he had distributed them while he was still alive.”

2. “Provoke nature to excess” renders “naturam ad superflua irritare,” i.e., pushing themselves to excessive behavior.

3. “Know themselves to be mine . . . strayed from the fold”; cf. John 10:14–16.

4. “Adam to see her lamb return” renders “mater gaudens de redicione agni sui”; cf. Sw. “modhir glädhi-andis aff sins tappadha barns atirkomo” [a mother rejoicing over the return of her lost child].

5. “Saint Peter’s church”: possibly the church of S Pietro in Vincoli.

6. “God’s portion”; cf. the note to chapter 9.21.

7. “Food and clothing”: see the note to chapter 10.34.

⚡ Chapter 16

A Worldly Woman Undergoes Severe Punishment

DATE: UNDATED

Asaint tells the bride that even if a person were to die once each day for God's sake, it would not be enough to give thanks to God for his eternal glory. He also describes the terrible punishments endured by a deceased woman in her every limb because of the carnal pleasure in which she spent her life.

1 One of the saints spoke to the bride, saying: "If, for God's sake, I endured death for every hour I spent in the world and were to keep coming back to life, still with all that I would never be able to thank God fully for his love. 2 Indeed, his praise is ever on my lips and joy is ever in my soul, glory and honor are never withheld from my sight nor the sounds of exultation taken from my hearing."

3 Then the Lord said to the same saint: "Tell my bride here what those persons deserve who care more about the world than about God, who love the creature more than the Creator.¹ Tell her what kind of punishment that woman is now undergoing who spent her entire lifetime in the world in sinful pleasure." 4 The saint replied: "Her punishment is most severe. For the pride she had in her every limb, her head and hands, arms and legs burn horribly in a blazing fire. 5 Her bosom is being pricked as though by the hide of a hedgehog whose quills fasten to her flesh and mercilessly press into her. 6 The arms and other limbs with which she used to embrace men so tenderly are now stretched out like two snakes that coil themselves around her, mercilessly devouring and tearing her to pieces without rest. 7 Her belly is terribly twisted, as though a sharp pole were being driven into her private parts and thrust violently inward so as to penetrate ever more deeply. 8 Her thighs and knees are like ice, hard and stiff, with no warmth nor rest. The feet that used to carry her to her pleasures and lead others along with her now stand atop sharp razors slicing them incessantly."

EXPLANATION

9 This woman pursued her selfish will and completely abhorred going to confession. A tumor developed in her throat, and she died unconfessed. She was shown standing before God's judgment with the devils accusing her and shouting: 10 "Here is the woman who tried to hide herself from you, Lord! But we know her well enough!" The judge answered: "Confession is like an excellent washing-woman.² 11 Therefore, because she did not want to wash when she had the opportunity, she is now soiled with your impurities. Because she was unwilling to expose her shame to the few, it is only right that she should be shamed by everyone before the many."

1. "Who love the creature more than the Creator"; cf. Romans 1:25.

2. "Like an excellent washing-woman": see Book III 30.21 on the same image, there used as a metaphor for God.

⚡ Chapter 17

The Devil Wants to Tempt Birgitta; Mary Wants to Protect Her

DATE: UNDATED

The Mother of God teaches the bride how to react to and resist the promptings of the devil concerning worldly desires, worldly friendships and lust, and also how the soul, united to God through love, though she may be disturbed by various thoughts, will not be charged with sin but will earn a reward if she resists them.

1 Mary spoke to the bride, saying: “Daughter, if your enemy tries to lure you with the enjoyment of temporal goods, reply: ‘Enemy, you created nothing and you have therefore nothing to give. Even if you had something, it would soon perish and disappear.’ 2 If he lures you with the friendship of worldly people, tell him: ‘Friendship with the world ends in woe.’ If he lures you with bodily pleasure, reply: ‘I will have none of it, for, in the end, it is like a poison and results in sorrow.’

3 In that very moment, the devil appeared, and the Blessed Virgin said to him: “Tell me while she is listening, where are the things that you have created?” The devil answered: “I have not created anything. I was created good, and it is of my own doing that I became evil.” 4 The Blessed Virgin said again: “Has friendship with you ever led to a happy ending that brought joy with it?” The demon answered: “It has never happened and it never will.” 5 The Blessed Virgin spoke for the third time: “Answer me again—has the pleasure you offer ever led to anything good?” The demon: “It has never led to anything good and it never will, for it begins in evil and aims at evil.”

6 Then the devil said this to the Virgin: “Virgin, give up this woman to my power!” She asked: “Why don’t you take her into your power yourself?” 7 The demon said: “I am unable, for I am unable to separate and distinguish two types of blood mixed in a single glass. You know that the blood of God’s love is mixed with the blood of her heart’s love.” 8 Then the Blessed Virgin said: “Why don’t you leave her alone then?” The demon answered: “I will never do that, because, even if I cannot make her die through mortal sin, I can at least make sure that she suffers in return for venial sin. 9 If I am not able to do even that, then at least I will get my burs into the fringe of her dress. Pulling them out will cause her a lot of trouble. By this I mean I will inject various thoughts into her heart that will surely unsettle her.” 10 Then the Virgin said: “I will help her. Each time she pulls them out and throws them in your face, one of her sins will be forgiven, and she will receive a greater crown and a greater prize.”

ADDITION

11 One day the Lady was tempted to gluttony. Then, in a spiritual ecstasy, she saw an Ethiopian holding a bit of bread in his hand and a young man holding a gilded cup. The youth said to the Ethiopian: 12

“Why are you troubling her? She has been placed under my protection.” 13 The Ethiopian answered: “She is proud of her capacity for abstinence, though she has none. So I am offering her a bit of my bread so as to make her crave something meatier. Your Christ fasted for a time¹ without eating a thing, and the prophets ate bread and drank in moderation.² That is why they deserved a lofty reward. But what does she deserve who always feels full?” 14 The youth answered: “Christ taught fasting but not so as to weaken the body. He does not demand what is impossible for nature, but only requires moderation. He does not ask how much or what a person consumes but with what intention and how much love he or she consumes it. 15 The habits of good upbringing can be maintained in a spirit of thanksgiving so that the body does not fall into a serious illness.”

Then the devil disappeared, and the lady was freed from temptation.

✠ Chapter 18

Consolation Disdained is Like a Drink Thrown in the Giver's Face

DATE: 1350S, ROME

Christ tells the bride that religious or other spiritual persons who receive the consolations of the Holy Spirit without humbly thanking God for them, who show disrespect for grace or become proud of it and who, enjoying themselves in the world, grow weary of the spiritual life may be compared to the ungrateful pauper who was thirsty and then, after tasting a drink, threw it insultingly in the eyes of the one who gave it.

1 “Some people are like a poor man suffering from thirst. A family father hears his cry and gives him the best drink he has. When the other takes the drink and tastes it, he says: 2 ‘I don’t like this drink and I won’t thank you for it.’ And he throws the drink into the eyes of the one who gave it to him, repaying kindness with insult. After being insulted in this way, the family father, who has a gentle character, thinks to himself: 3 ‘Well, my guest has done me a great injury, but I do not want to revenge him for it until we both have gone to the judge and it is time for court.’ And then he wipes away the stain from his face and dries his brow.

4 This is how many in the religious orders treat me now. In the midst of their poverty and worldly opposition and disdain, they cry out to me and say: ‘Lord, we meet with disdain and hardship everywhere. Give us consolation!’ 5 Then, in my great mercy, I have compassion on them and give them my best wine, that is, the Holy Spirit. His sweetness replenishes their souls. His warmth makes them no longer worry about disdain and poverty. 6 Once they have

1. “Christ fasted for a time”; cf. Matthew 4:1.

2. “And the prophets . . . in moderation”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 19:3–8; Daniel 1:12–16.

tasted the wine of my Spirit and enjoyed it for a while, then they treat it with disrespect and give me no thanks. And they throw it back in my face by thinking about and longing to be attached to the world as well as by becoming conceited about the grace they have received.

7 This is also how that man whom you know treats me. When he was poor and destitute, I consoled him with my Spirit. When he was despised and felt unhappy in his soul, I refreshed him with my joy. 8 Although I do not speak with a bodily voice and my words are not openly heard, still my Spirit inspires and instructs my chosen ones in secret to do good and incites them to improve while strengthening them. 9 That man, however, tasted my Spirit and received my consoling grace, but thought nothing of what I had given him. He is now thinking about throwing my drink back in my face, but he has not yet done so. 10 Now look and reflect on my patience and mercy! Not only do I patiently endure him but I even repay his ingratitude with kindness. 11 He is now enjoying greater honor and goodwill from people than before, and his necessary expenses are being provided for more sufficiently than usual. Yet, in return for these things, he renders me less service than before. 12 He holds my grace as nothing and my love as of no importance. Instead he is like the man thinking about whether to throw his drink back into the giver's eyes, for the world—which he has given up—delights his mind more than I do. 13 The obligations he has assumed seem burdensome to him, and he regards the spiritual life as tedious. His changed odor will prove this to you well enough. 14 While he served me with all his heart and was eagerly devoted to me, a sweet fragrance could be sensed on his clothes—unsurprisingly, for angels full of virtue surround and protect God's friends each day. 15 Now, however, his odor has changed along with his change of intention. The odor that can be smelled now reflects his mind's intention and purpose. 16 What shall I do when my drink is thrown back in my face? I will indeed dry it off in gentleness and endure it patiently, until the time for my judgment and for the general assembly¹ arrives, when the ingratitude and presumption of the insolent will be apparent to all and the power of the long-suffering Lord demonstrated.”

EXPLANATION

17 This was a monk of the monastery of St. Paul² who repented and made a good end.

1. “General assembly” renders “generale placitum”; cf. Sw. “almännelikit thing”; Birgitta appears to describe universal judgment in terms of her knowledge of the Scandinavian court system, where a case was first brought to a local district meeting, for which there were specified dates (as suggested in paragraph 3), before being taken further to the provincial general assembly, then known as the “landsting.” See KL “ting.”

2. “Monastery of St. Paul,” i.e., the monastery belonging to the church of S. Paolo fuori le mura in Rome. See Book IV chapter 6.

‡ Chapter 19

On a Sinful Monk who Follows the Desires of the Flesh

DATE: 1350S, CHURCH OF S. LORENZO FUORI LE MURA, ROME

Christ complains about the people who take pleasure in temporal delights but despise future glory and the benefits won by his passion. Their prayer is compared to the sound of pipes or colliding stones. Such people will be condemned. Then, to their shame, they will see God's glory under heaven and above it, within and without, and everywhere.

1 "The man whom you know¹ chants: 'Deliver me, Lord, from the evil man!' To my ears his voice is like the sound of pipes and reeds. The sound of his lips is like a couple of colliding stones. 2 Who can make an answer to sounds that make no sense? It is as though his heart calls to me with three different cries. The first says: 3 'I want to follow my own will. I shall sleep and rise as I please. Pleasant words will be on my lips. Whatever is sweet and delicious will enter my mouth. 4 I will not bother to be frugal but will try to give nature fully what it craves. I want to have money in my pocket, soft clothes on my back. When I get them, I will be content and satisfied. That is what I call happiness.' 5 His second cry goes like this: 'Death is not so bad as they say and the judgment is not as severe as it is written. 6 Preachers threaten many harsh punishments as a warning, but less will be required because of God's mercy. Therefore, the best and most enjoyable thing for me will be to get what I want in the present. My soul can go where it may.' 7 The third cry says: 'God would not have created me if he had not meant to give me the kingdom of heaven. He would not have suffered if he had not meant to bring me home. 8 Why did he want to endure so harsh a punishment? Who compelled him and what good did he derive from it? What do I know of the kingdom of heaven? I understand nothing of it except by hearsay. 9 I do not see the good of it. I do not know whether or not to believe. Getting what I want—that, at least, I do know, and that is what I regard as the kingdom of heaven.'

10 This is what he thinks and what he desires. This is why the voice from his lips sounds like stones to my ears. To the first cry of his heart, I answer: 11 'Friend, your path does not lead to heaven, and the thought of my passion is not to your liking. For this reason, the underworld awaits you, because your life shows a love for lower things and your path leads downward.' 12 To his second cry, I answer: 'Son, a harsh death will come to you, and your sentence will be unendurable. It will be impossible for you to flee. You will have a bitter punishment, unless you reform yourself.' 13 To the third cry of your heart, I answer: 'Brother, all that I did, I did out of love of you, so that you may be like me and return to me. 14 But now my love has died in you; my works are burdensome to you; my words seem foolish to you, my way of life difficult. This is why bitter

1. "The man whom you know": the first part of this revelation (paragraphs 1–14) is essentially the same as Book V rev. 8, although there are some differences in phraseology.

suffering and the company of devils await you, unless you make a change for the better in your heart. 15 You turn not your face but your back to me, your loving Lord and Creator! You love my enemy in contempt of me. You trample my standard underfoot and audaciously raise up the enemy's standard.'

16 Look how they stand in my sight, these men who seem to be mine! Look how they have turned away from me! I see it and patiently endure it, but, because of their hardness of heart, they do not care what I have done for them or how I stood before them. 17 I stood before them in three ways. First, like a man whose eyes had been stabbed by the sharpest of daggers; second like a man whose heart had been pierced by a sword; third, like a man whose every limb was stiff with pressing pain. Thus did I stand before them. 18 The eyes symbolize my body that suffered a pain like a stab in the eyes, and yet I bore it out of love. The sword is my mother's sorrow. It hurt my heart more than my own sorrow.² 19 All my limbs and inner organs were convulsed in suffering. Thus did I stand before them. This is what I suffered for them, but they scorn it all. They are neglectful of it, as a son might neglect his mother. 20 Have I not been like a mother to them? When a mother bears a child in her womb, she hopes that it will come from her womb alive when it is time to give birth. Provided the child is baptized, she does not care about her own death. 21 This is how I have treated humankind. By my passion, I brought them forth from the darkness of hell to everlasting daylight. I bore them as though in my womb with great hardship when I fulfilled all the prophesies. 22 I nourished them with my milk, when I revealed words of goodness and gave them the precepts of life. However, they are like a wicked son neglectful of his mother's pain, and they scorn me rudely for my love. 23 They repay me with wailing for the suffering in my womb; they add infirmity on top of my wounds; they offer me stones in my hunger³ and mud to satisfy my thirst.

24 What is this sorrow that they cause me who can neither suffer or be upset, who remains forever God? Truly, the human race causes me sorrow when it separate itself from me through sin—not because any sorrow can befall me but, rather, it is like what happens when one person suffers at the fall of another. 25 They caused me sorrow when they did not realize the nature or seriousness of sin, at that time when they had neither prophets nor the law nor had heard the words of my mouth.⁴ 26 Now, however, they add a wailing to my sorrow, even though I am immutable, when, despite knowledge of my love and of my will, they go against my commandments and audaciously sin against the understanding of their own conscience. 27 Therefore, they descend lower into hell through knowledge of my will than if they had not been given my commandments. Again, they wounded me—though as God I cannot be wounded—when they added sin upon sin.⁵ 28 Now, however, it is as though they add a deadly illness on top of my wounds by not only multiplying their sins but even

2. "My mother's sorrow . . . hurt my heart more than my own sorrow"; cf. Book I, 35:6.

3. "Offer me stones in my hunger"; cf. Matthew 7:9.

4. "The words of my mouth"; cf. Deuteronomy 32:1.

5. "Sin upon sin"; cf. Ecclesiasticus 5:5.

boasting uncontritely about them. 29 They give me stones for my bread⁶ and mud for my thirst. What is the bread I desire if not the improvement of souls, contrition of heart, divine desires and a humility that is fervent with charity? 30 Instead, they offer me stones in their hardness of heart. They make to sate my thirst with the mud of impenitence and empty confidence. They scorn to return to me despite warnings and lashes. They disdain to look at me or ponder my love. 31 I am indeed right to complain, because, like a mother, I brought them forth to the light in the pain of my passion, but they prefer to be in darkness. 32 I nourished and fed them with my sweet milk, and they neglect me. Thus they audaciously add the mud of their wickedness to the sorrow of their ignorance. 33 They try to sate me by sinning, for which they should rather atone with tears of virtue. They hand me stones instead of giving me the sweet taste of a moral life. 34 Therefore, like a just judge who combines patience with justice, justice with mercy, mercy with wisdom, I shall rise up against them when it is time to judge their merits. 35 And they shall see my glory under heaven and above it, within and without, in every place, in every hill and valley. Even the damned shall see it and be covered with the shame they deserve.”

EXPLANATION

36 This monk of the monastery of Saint Lawrence was ruined and killed by his enemies and buried in the church of Saint Lawrence.⁷ Saint Lawrence appeared and said to the judge: 37 “What is this vagabond⁸ doing together with your elect? They shed their bodily blood for you,⁹ but this so-called monk loved his pleasure.” And his body was immediately seen to be cast out of the tomb. It was a frightening sight, and there was a terrible stench. 38 Then the judge said to his soul that was seen to be present: “Go off, wretch, to the uncircumcised¹⁰ and aborted creatures you followed, for you refused to hear your Father’s voice.”

✠ Chapter 20

One of Birgitta’s Kinsmen Must Improve his Lifestyle and Contemplate the Lord’s Passion; He is Converted and Dies

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The Mother of Mercy says that a person who has contrition and a purpose of amendment but is nonetheless cold in devotion to and

6. “They give me stones for my bread”; cf. Matthew 7:9.

7. “The church of Saint Lawrence”: the papal basilica of S. Lorenzo fuori le mura, one of seven pilgrim churches of Rome, built on the site of the martyrdom in 258 of St. Lawrence, one of the first seven deacons of Rome.

8. “Vagabond” renders “girouagus”; cf. the Rule of St. Benedict chapter 1, which describes the type of a bad monk who wanders the world seeking earthly pleasure.

9. “They shed their bodily blood for you”; cf. Apocalypse 16:6.

10. “The uncircumcised”; cf. Ezekiel 32:19.

love of God should beg God for a spark of divine fire through frequent meditation on Christ's passion. In this way the soul will be warmed with divine warmth and be fed at the breasts of the Virgin Mary, that is, with the virtues of obedience and fear of God.

1 The Virgin Mary said: "I am like a mother with two children who, however, cannot reach their mother's breasts, because they are too stiff with cold and dwell in a cold house. Yet their mother loves them so much that, if it were possible, she would gladly cut off her breasts to help her children. 2 I truly am the Mother of Mercy, for I have mercy on all unfortunate people pleading for mercy. I have, as it were, two children. The first child is the contrition of those who offend against my Son; the second is their purpose of amendment of their faults. 3 These two children are, however, too stiff with cold in the sense that they lack the warmth of charity and the desire for divine love. The house of their souls is cold with respect to the flame of divine consolation, so they cannot be fed from my breasts. 4 Because I am merciful, I have gone to my Son and said: 'My Son, praise and honor to you for all the love you have shown to me! I have two children—have mercy on them, for they cannot take hold of their mother's breasts due to coldness.' 5 My Son answered me: 'Mother dear, for your sake I will ignite a spark in their house that will grow into a great fire. Let this spark of fire refresh and nourish your children and give them the warmth they need so they can be fed from your breasts!'"

6 Then the Mother said to the bride: "The man for whom you pray had a special devotion to me. Although he brought countless miseries on himself, he always trusted in my aid and retained some warmth toward me, but he had no charity toward my Son and, for that reason, no fear of God. 7 This is why he would have been punished without end if he had been called from this world while still in the midst of his evil deeds. However, because I am full of mercy, I have not forgotten him. Because of me, he still has some hopes of improvement, provided he wants to help himself. 8 He now feels contrition for his offenses and has a purpose of amendment, but he is too cold in regard to charity and devotion. Therefore, in order to be able to become warm and be fed from my breasts, a spark must be ignited in the house of his soul, that is, the consideration of the passion of my Son should become his frequent meditation. 9 Let him consider how the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin—who is one God with the Father and the Holy Spirit—suffered and was arrested and beaten, 10 how he was spat upon and scourged right to the bone—the whips dug in and pulled out his flesh—how he remained in sorrow on the cross with all his muscles distended and wounded, how he cried out while on the cross and gave up his spirit.¹ 11 If he blows often on this spark, he will grow warm, and I will then give him my breasts, that is, the two virtues I offer of obedience and fear of God. 12 Although I never sinned, still I always had the fear of offending my God whether in words or motion. 13 By means of this fear I will nourish my child, namely, the contrition of my devotee for whom you pray, so that he may

1. "He was spat upon . . . gave up his spirit"; cf. John 19:30.

not only feel contrition for his wrongdoing but also fear punishment. Then he will even fear offending my Son, Jesus Christ. 14 I will also nourish his purpose at the breast of my obedience. I am indeed she who was never disobedient to God. 15 In him, then, who will be warm with the charity of my Son, I will ignite the obedience that will make him obey whatever is commanded him.”

EXPLANATION

16 This was Lady Birgitta’s kinsman who was very worldly. Given the divine warning, he became contrite and converted. He used to say: “As long as I was afraid of penance, it felt as though I was heavily weighed down with chains. 17 Since I have started going to frequent confession, I feel so relieved and spiritually prepared that I do not even think about honors or loss of property, and I enjoy nothing so much as to speak and hear about God.”

18 Having received God’s sacraments, he died in the peace of the Lord with the words “Sweet Jesus, have mercy on me!” on his lips. Revelation 66 of this book also concerns this same man.²

✠ Chapter 21

Punishment For a Man in Purgatory is Reduced

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The Virgin Mary prays for a man devoted to her who has passed away. Christ says that the charitable works of his heirs carried out on behalf of his soul are not of much benefit to him, because they were done more for worldly pride and honor than out of pious love for God. Because of the Virgin’s entreaties, however, his pains are alleviated.

1 Mary says: “Blessed be your name,¹ my Son! You are king of glory and the mighty Lord who combines justice with mercy. 2 Your body, so dear to me, begotten and nourished in my womb, was consecrated today in a mass for the soul of this man who has passed away. I entreat you, my dearest Son, that it may be of benefit to him. Have mercy on him!”

3 The Son answers: “My blessed Mother, may every creature bless you for your boundless mercy! I am like a man who has bought a small field, say about five square feet, at a high price. The finest gold is hidden in it.² 4 This man along with his five senses is that field. I bought and redeemed it with my most precious blood. The finest gold is in it, that is, a soul created by my divinity. His soul is now separated from his body and only his earthly dust remains. 5 His heirs are like a powerful man who goes to the judge and shouts

2. “Concerns the same man”: The identity of Birgitta’s relative remains unknown, here as in chapter 66.

1. “Blessed be your name”; cf. Psalm 112(113):2.

2. “A small field . . . finest gold is hidden in it”; cf. Matthew 13:44.

at the executioner:³ “Take out your sword and sunder the head from his body! Do not let him live any longer, do not spare his blood!” 6 This is what they do. When they perform good works on behalf of his soul, it is as though they go to court and shout to the executioner: ‘Sunder the head from his body!’ 7 This executioner is none other than the devil who sunders the soul assenting to him from God. They shout ‘Sunder!’ at him by scorning humility and carrying out their good deeds out of worldly pride and honor rather than divine charity. 8 By pride the head, that is, God, is removed from a man, and it is joined to him by humility. They shout out that he should no longer live, since they do not care about his death but only about obtaining his property. 9 They shout out that his blood should not be spared, since they do not care about his bitter suffering or how long he will be punished but only about fulfilling their own purposes. Their thoughts are directed at the world, but my passion means little to them.”

10 Then the Virgin answered: “I have seen your severe justice, my Son. However, I am not addressing your justice but your most kind mercy. For the sake of my entreaties, have mercy on this man, because he used to recite the office in my honor each and every day. 11 Do not impute to him the deeds of pride that his heirs carry out on his behalf. They are enjoying themselves, but he is weeping and being punished without consolation.”

12 The Son answered her: “Blessed are you, dear Mother! Your words are full of sweetness and are sweeter than honey.⁴ Your words come from a heart full of mercy and thus resound with mercy. 13 This man for whom you pray will receive three mercies for your sake. First he will be saved from the hands of the demons that attack him insatiably like crows. 14 Just as birds that hear some frightening sound let go of the prey they have in their claws and flee when frightened by the sound, so the demons will let go of his soul for your sake and never more touch or molest it. 15 Second he will be moved from hotter to cooler flames. Third the holy angels will comfort him. However, he is still not completely free, and he still needs help. 16 You see the fullness of justice in me and know that no one can enter beatitude unless he is completely purified as gold by fire.⁵ Therefore, for the sake of your entreaties, he will be set completely free when the time for mercy and justice comes.”

✠ Chapter 22

Advice For a Bishop Who Converts

DATE: UNDATED

Through the prayers of his mother, Christ takes into his mercy a certain bishop, naked with respect to good deeds but recently

3. “Executioner”: renders “licitor,” which in classical Latin is not an executioner but an officer whose functions were to attend upon a magistrate, bearing the fasces before him, and to execute sentence of judgment upon offenders.

4. “Your words are full of sweetness and are sweeter than honey”; cf. Psalm 17(18):10.

5. “No-one can enter beatitude . . . purified as gold by fire”; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:15; 1 Peter 1:7.

converted to contrition and a good and holy purpose of life. He clothes him in mercy and divine sweetness, teaching him how he must live humbly and without greed, and how he must with mercy and justice correct those under him who have done wrong.

1 The Son speaks: “The prelate for whom you are praying, my bride, has already come back to me in three ways. First, he has come back to me naked, as it were, and, second, as though holding a sword in his hand, and, third, as though asking forgiveness with outstretched hands. 2 For the sake of my Mother’s prayers, I, too, will come toward him.¹ I will run toward him like a mother runs toward the child she has lost and now has found. 3 Although my apostles offered prayers for his sake, they gained but little grace for him, because ever since he was raised to a rank of dignity in my church, he has turned against me and has not acted like a good prelate for the church.

4 I will now clothe him² so that he will no longer be naked. His nakedness symbolizes nothing other than his lack of good works. Good works should clothe his soul with virtues, but his soul is naked in my sight, though it appears clothed to him. 5 Because of the prayers of my mother and saints, I will now help him to be clothed and protected, now that he has come back naked to me. He came naked in that he had the following thoughts: 6 ‘I have nothing good in myself. I can do no good without God and am worthy of nothing good. If only I knew how to please God, I would willingly do what pleases him, even if I should die.’ 7 With such thoughts, he came naked to me, so I will go out to meet him and clothe him.

8 He also had a sword in his hand in that he had the following thoughts regarding the severity of my judgment: ‘God’s judgment is awful and inescapable, so I willingly consent to all that God wants from me. 9 I am ready to conform my will to his, because I have no good works. May his will and not mine be done!’ This thought and this intention took away from him the sword of my severity and brought to him my mercy.

10 His hands were outstretched in that he had the following thoughts: ‘I know that I have sinned beyond measure and deserve condemnation. But I put my trust in your goodness, my Lord God, and hope for your help. 11 You did not spurn Paul the persecutor³ nor Magdalene the sinner.⁴ Therefore, Lord, I turn to you—may you deal with me according to your great kindness and mercy.’ 12 In return for this thought and this desire, I stretch out the hand of my mercy to him. I will increase my sweet favor in him provided he manfully carries out the three things I now tell him. 13 First, he must get rid of all his arrogance and ostentation and put on humility. Second, he should get rid of all the greed in his heart, viewing all the temporal goods granted to him as would a good steward who has to render an account of them to his lord and master. 14 Third, he

1. “I will run toward him”; cf. Luke 15:20.

2. “I will now clothe him”; cf. Luke 15:22.

3. “Paul the persecutor”; cf. Acts 9:1–9.

4. “Magdalene the sinner”; cf. Luke 7:36–38.

should see to it that he overlooks neither his own sin nor those of his subordinates. He should rather correct them with justice and mercy, considering how I received publicans and prostitutes⁵ in my mercy but, in my justice, paid no regard to the arrogant. 15 Is it not written that, when someone came to me and said, ‘Master, I will follow you wherever you go,’ I replied, ‘No, for foxes have their dens’?⁶ 16 Why did I pay no regard to that man unless it was because I saw into his heart and his intention? He desired to gain glory as well as upkeep without working for it, and so he was justly rejected by me.

17 Let this man do likewise. If some wrongdoer comes and humbles himself before him, displaying a proper intention to mend his ways and asking for forgiveness, then he must treat him with mercy. 18 If, however, he finds anyone with the intention of remaining in sin and with no desire of repenting, then he should punish him prudently with a moderate whipping or by the imposition of fines. 19 He should take care, however, not to punish people out of greed but out of charity and justice. 20 He must use the money received in those cases in such a way that he can give a good account of it to God, taking a just and merciful amount from the wrongdoer and spending it wisely for godly purposes. 21 If the wrongdoer has been fined once and still refuses to come to his senses, then he should deprive him of his benefice. He should demote him to make him feel as ashamed as the ass that is thought to be something grand when it is wearing a golden saddle but, when the saddle is removed, is sent off like the dumb animal it was before. 22 This is how I, the creator of all things, act. First, I punish a person with temporary affliction—through sickness or other setbacks to his desires—and then, if he still does not come to his senses, then I take my mercy away from him and send him off to the punishment prepared for him in justice.”

✠ Chapter 23

The Virgin Mary Prays for a Nobleman Described as a Robber

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The Virgin Mary appears to the bride and prays for a certain great lord whom she compares to a robber. Christ tells her of his great sins, but grants him three graces thanks to her prayers. He gives him a spiritual master, an understanding of the severity of eternal punishment and the upright hope of mercy along with a prudent fear.

1 Mary says to her Son: “Blessed are you, my Son! I ask you to have mercy on the robber¹ for whom your bride weeps and prays.” 2 The Son answers: “Mother, why do you pray for him? He has committed three robberies. First,

5. “I received publicans and prostitutes”; cf. Matthew 9:10, 21:31.

6. “It is written . . . foxes have their dens”; cf. Matthew 8:19–20.

1. “Robber”: In this and the next two chapters, Birgitta appears to refer to Sigvid Ribbing, who was married to her eldest daughter, Märta. Sigvid Ribbing was related to King Magnus Eriksson’s stepfather, Knut Porse, who had earlier established a political power base in the southwestern province of Halland on the frontier between Denmark and Sweden. When he succeeded Porse, Ribbing became an independent and aggressive warlord, which may have earned him the nickname of “robber” that Birgitta uses here. See further Introduction, p. 7.

he has pillaged my angels and my chosen ones. 3 Second, he has pillaged the bodies of many people by separating their souls from their bodies before their time. Third, he has pillaged many innocent people of their goods. 4 First, then, he pillaged the angels of the company of many persons' souls who should be consorting with them. He did this by his vulgar speech, bad deeds and example, by offering them an occasion of and an excitement to sin, and then by tolerating the wickedness of wicked people whom he should have punished. 5 Next, in his indignant anger, he ordered many innocent people to be killed. And third, he unjustly usurped the property of innocent people for himself and imposed an unbearable exaction on people in misery.² To these three robberies, he adds three bad characteristics: 6 first, he has an excessive desire for the world; second, he leads an incontinent life because, though bound by matrimony, he does not hold to it for the sake of divine charity but in order to fulfill his desire; 7 third, he has pride and regards no one as his peer. See what kind of man this is for whom you pray! You behold all justice in me and see what is due to each one. 8 When the mother of James and John came to me³ and asked for them to sit on my right and my left, did I not answer her that he who worked harder and humbled himself the most would sit on my right and my left? 9 How is it due to anyone to sit with me and to be with me if he works not with me or for me but rather against me?"

10 His Mother answers: "Blessed be you, my Son, full of all justice and mercy! I see your terrible justice like fire, strong as a mountain, and none dare approach it. 11 But, on the other hand, I see your soothing mercy and to this, my Son, I speak and turn. While I do find some little justice in this robber, still he can in no way be saved without the intervention of your great mercy. 12 He is just like a boy who, though he has a mouth and eyes, hands and feet, still cannot speak with his mouth nor walk with his feet nor work with his hands. 13 Such is this robber. He was brought up from birth for the devil's works. His ears were stopped from hearing good things, his eyes were clouded and prevented from understanding the life to come. 14 His mouth was shut against your praise, and the hands he had to do good works for God were so completely weakened in him that every virtue and every goodness was deadened in him. 15 Still he is standing, as it were, with one foot in two tracks. This foot is the desire and the thought that he thinks and desires within himself: 15 'Would I could find someone who could tell me how I might mend my ways, how I should please God! Even if it meant my death, I would willingly do it.' 17 The first track was his frequent fear and consideration about how hard eternal punishment would be. The second track was his sorrow over the loss of the kingdom of heaven. 18 Therefore, my sweet Son, for the sake of your goodness and of the prayers of the one who bore you in her womb, have mercy on him!"

2. "And imposed an unbearable exaction on people in misery" renders "et miseris calumpniam intollabilem imposuit"; cf. Sw "ok laghde othollikin skat a fatika män ok vsla" [and imposed an unbearable tax on poor and miserable men].

3. "Mother of James and John came to me"; cf. Matthew 20:20.

19 The Son answered: “Blessed be you, sweet mother! Your words are full of wisdom and justice. Because all justice and mercy are found in me, I have already repaid the robber with three graces for the three goods he offered me. 20 Because of his purpose of amendment, I showed him my friend who in turn showed him the way to life. Second, in return for his anxious thoughts about eternal punishment, I gave him a greater understanding of the eternal pain than he had before, so that his heart might understand its bitterness. 21 Third, in return for his sorrow over the loss of the heavenly kingdom, I gave light to his hope so that he might more rightly hope now than before and fear more wisely and discreetly now than before.”

22 Then his Mother spoke again: “Blessed be you, my Son, by every creature in heaven and on earth, for having in your justice repaid the robber with these three graces! So now I ask that you deign to grant him your mercy as well, for you do nothing without mercy. 23 Grant him, then, the grace of your mercy for the sake of my prayers and another grace for the sake of your servant who begs me to pray for this robber! Grant him yet a third grace for the sake of the tears and prayers of my daughter, your bride!”

24 The Son answered her: “Blessed be you, dearest mother, lady of angels and queen of all spirits! Your words are as sweet to me as fine wine, delightful beyond all the words that can be thought and proven true in all their wisdom and justice! 25 And blessed be your mouth and your lips from which comes every mercy toward miserable sinners! You are called and really are the Mother of Mercy,⁴ because you consider everyone’s misery and incline me to mercy. 26 Ask, then, what you will! For your love and your petition can not be in vain.”

27 Then his Mother answered: “My Lord and my Son, this robber is in a very precarious position, standing as it were on one foot in two tracks. 28 In order that he may stand more firmly, grant him that which is to me the dearest thing, grant him your most holy body, which you received from me into your divine nature in all purity without any concupiscence. 29 This your body is the most effective help of the infirm. It makes the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk⁵ and hands work. It is the strongest healing plaster by means of which the infirm are quickly restored. 30 Give him this so that he may feel its help within him and take delight in it with fervent charity! Second, I ask that you may deign to show him what he must do and how he may please you. 31 Third, I ask for him to be given relief from the fever of his flesh for the sake of the prayers of those who are praying to you for him.”

32 The Son answered again: “Dearest mother, your words are as sweet as honey to my ears! However, because I am just, yet nothing can be denied you, I wish to deliberate like a wise lord concerning your petition. 3 This is not because there is any change in me or because you do not know and see everything in me, but because of the bride present here. I delay for her sake in order that she may understand my wisdom.”

4. Mother of Mercy”: a common appellation of Mary, e.g., in the *Salve Regina*.

5. “The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk”; cf. Matthew 11:5.

⚡ Chapter 24

The Same Man Must Atone For his Earlier Offenses

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ says that if the robber above would receive communion from the altar, he should first have contrition for his offenses and the intention to atone for them and sin no more but, rather, to persevere in virtue. He also explains to him other means by which he can reconcile himself with God as well as with the angels and saints and his fellow men. If he does not do these things, he will be severely punished.

1 Mary spoke: “Blessed be you, my Son, king of glory and Lord of angels! I am praying to you again on behalf of that robber.” The Son answered: “Blessed be you, dearest mother! 2 Just as your milk entered my human body and nourished all my limbs, so your words enter and delight my heart, for your every petition is made with discernment and your every desire is for mercy. Therefore I will show mercy to the robber for the sake of your love.” 3 The Mother answered: “Give him, then, my dear Son, that which is dearest to me, namely, your body and your grace, for this robber is hungry and empty of goodness. 4 Give him the grace to extinguish his wretched hunger, to strengthen his weakness and to incite his will, so slothful up to now in your love, to carry out good deeds!”

5 The Son answered: “As a child from whom food is withheld soon dies in body, so too this man, who from childhood has been nourished by the devil, cannot revive unless he is fed on my food. 6 If he wants to receive my body, if he aims at being refreshed with the sweetness of its fruit, let him come to me with these three virtues: true contrition for his offenses, the intention of redressing the wrongs he has committed, and the intention of no more committing wrongs but of persevering in the good. 7 Regarding the prayers of those who pray for him, I will tell you what must be done for the robber, if he desires salvation. 8 First, because he dared to stand against the king of glory, now for the sake of redressing his crimes he should defend the faith of my Holy Church and be ready to sacrifice his life for her protection. 9 As earlier he made every effort to gain the honorable status and comfortable life of a worldly lord, so now he should make every effort to spread the faith and suppress the enemies of the church’s faith. Just as earlier he led people astray while working in the service of the world, so may he now work to bring to me all those he can by his word and example. 10 I assure you that if he does no more than to put on his helmet for the sake of my honor and take his shield upon his arm with the intention of standing up for the holy faith, it shall be accounted to him as a deed, even if he should be called away at that moment. 11 Even if enemies approach, no one will be able to hurt him. Therefore, let him labor daringly, for when he has me, then he has a mighty lord. Let him labor manfully, for a precious reward will be given him, that of everlasting life.

12 In return for his offense to the angels and saints, and because he severed souls from their bodies, let him have a mass of all saints said every day for

a whole year, wherever he thinks best, giving the celebrant a stipend, in order to win back through this offering the saints and angels he has offended and regain favor in their sight. 13 They are won back by the oblation of my body, which is a regal offering, when it is presented and received in love and humility.

14 Again, because he robbed others of their possessions, inflicting injury on widows and orphans, he should return everything that he knows to be wrongful possessions, humbly asking the merciful pardon of the injured parties. 15 Moreover, because he cannot make compensation to all those whom he has injured, he should have an altar built at his own expense in whatever church he thinks most suitable, where a mass should be celebrated daily until the end of the world for all those he has wronged. 16 In order for this altar to endure in a firm and stable way, he should grant enough of an endowment to maintain a chaplain to celebrate mass there perpetually.

17 Then, since humility has been lacking to him for a long time, he should humble himself as much as he can and ask those he has offended to make peace and be reconciled insofar as it may most suitably be done. 18 Moreover, if he should ever hear praise or blame for the sins and errors he has committed, let him not defend himself presumptuously or take any boastful delight in them. Rather, he should humbly think to himself and say: 19 'Indeed, sin used to delight me a lot, but it did not profit me in any way. I went beyond the limits in my presumption. If I had wanted to, I could very well have prevented it. 20 So, brothers, ask the Lord to give me the spirit to repent of such things and atone like a man for the sins I have committed!'

21 Again, because of his multiple offenses of carnal excesses, he should discipline his body with a rational discipline. If he listens to these words and puts them into practice, he will have salvation and life everlasting. 22 If not, however, I will make him pay for his sins until the last farthing,¹ and his punishment will be more bitter than it otherwise would have been, because I have let him be warned."

✠ Chapter 25

A Threat To the Same Man

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Three years after the bride had the revelation above, Christ tells her that if the robber does not repent soon, he will be condemned with a horrible sentence on his descendants and property and that his soul will be punished like a miserable robber. Afterward all these things came to pass,¹ because he refused to repent.

1. "The last farthing"; cf. Matthew 5:26.

1. The words "three years after" and "afterward all these things came to pass" have, unusually, been moved from the revelation to the title; cf. the Sw. which seems to retain these words in their original positions.

The Son of God said to the bride: “Earlier² I sang you a fair ballad about a robber, which contained an even fairer remedy. Now, however, I am not singing a song for him but lamentation and grief. Unless he quickly converts to the right side, he will experience my terrible justice. 2 His days will be cut short, his seed will bear no fruit; others will seize the riches he has hoarded; and he himself will be judged like a miserable robber and like a disobedient son who has disdained the warnings of his father.”³

✠ Chapter 26

The King should Work to Rebuild the Church

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ tells the bride, who is praying for a certain king,¹ that, with the advice of upright and wise spiritual men, he should try to repair the walls of Jerusalem, that is, of the Catholic Church and faith, which have now nearly collapsed. The walls signify the Christian community and the vessels of the temple signify the clergy and religious.

1 The Son speaks: “Now that this man has become a member of my body after being a member of the devil, he should strive like those who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, who strove to repair the law that had been demolished, who gathered the utensils of God’s house that had been carried off and who restored them to their original place.² 2 I have three complaints. The first is that the walls of Jerusalem have been demolished. What are the walls of Jerusalem, that is, of my church, if not the bodies and souls of Christians? From these must my church be built. 3 These walls of the church have now collapsed, because everyone seeks to achieve his own will and not mine. They turn their eyes away from me and do not want to hear my cries. 4 My words have become unbearable for them, and my deeds mean nothing to them. They find my passion hateful to think upon, and my life seems to them intolerable and impossible to imitate.

5 My second complaint is that the instruments of my house have been carried away to Babylon.³ What are the various instruments and vessels of my church if not the disposition and the conduct of the clergy and religious? 6 Their good disposition and outward display have been carried away to worldly pride and to their own will and delight. 7 My wisdom and teaching is meaningless to them and my commandments burdensome. They break the promise they made

2. “Earlier”; cf. Sw. “Threm ärom äpte” [three years after].

3. “Who has disdained the warnings of his father”; cf. Deuteronomy 21:20. Sw. adds “Sua händö honom al thässe thing thy at han ville ey bätra sik” [So all these things came to pass because he would not improve his ways].

1. “A certain king”: The revelation, which refers to Magnus Eriksson, is duplicated in Book VIII 30.

2. “Who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem . . . to their original place”; cf. 2 Esdras (Nehemiah) 1–3; Jeremiah 52:14–17.

3. “Instruments . . . carried away to Babylon”; cf. 4 Kings (2 Kings) 25:14–15, Jeremiah 52:18–19.

to me, and they desecrate the law and statutes of my friends, their predecessors. Instead, they make up their own rules and regard these as their law.

8 My third complaint is that the law of the ten commandments has been abandoned. You can read in my gospel that a certain man asked me: ‘Master, what must I do to have eternal life?’⁴ Did I not respond to him: ‘Keep my commandments!’? These are now abandoned and neglected.

9 Therefore, this king, for whom you pray, should assemble spiritual advisers, wise in my wisdom, and those who have my Spirit. He should question them and, in accordance with their counsel, examine how the walls of my church may be rebuilt in Christians, how honor may be shown to God, how true faith may flourish again, and divine love be enkindled and my passion imprinted in human hearts. 10 He should also examine how to restore the vessels of my house to their original state, that is, how the clergy and religious, giving up their pride, may again take up humility, how the incontinent may come to love chastity, how the greedy and worldly ones may renounce their excessive desires for the world so that they can be a light for others. 11 He should also strive with fortitude and wisdom to ensure that my commandments may be loved with greater diligence. He is to assemble upright Christians so that he may with them rebuild what has fallen apart.

12 Truly, my church has gone so far away from me that, if it were not for the intervention of my mother’s prayers, there would be no hope of mercy. 13 Among all the lay states, however, the knights have apostasized more than any others. The danger and the punishment of their apostasy have already been shown to you previously.”

✠ Chapter 27

The Proud do not Heed God’s Commandments

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ forbids the bride to listen to news of the deeds of worldly people and the wars of princes. Instead he tells her to consider the works of God which are astounding and wonderful. He also rebukes those who only have their minds on wealth and privileges and enjoyments, saying that they will never enter the land flowing with milk and honey, that is, into heavenly glory, unless they convert and live righteously according to their state in life. The righteous, however, will enter and rejoice.

1 “Why does it delight you to hear of the deeds of the worldly and the wars of princes, when I am the Lord of all and no delight is thinkable without me? 2 If you would hear the deeds of noble lords and consider great works, you should consider and hear my deeds, which are beyond the grasp of the intellect, astounding

4. “What must I do to have eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16).

to the mind and wonderful to hear. 3 Though the devil may move worldly lords as he wishes, though they may prosper in accord with my hidden justice, nevertheless, I am their Lord and they shall receive my judgment. 4 They have issued a new law for themselves that goes against my law. They make every effort to obtain worldly privilege, to acquire wealth, to achieve their desires, to extend their family. 5 Therefore, I swear upon my divine and human natures that, if they die in such a state, they will never enter that land symbolically promised to the children of Israel that flowed with milk and honey,¹ no more than those who longed for the fleshpots² but died a sudden death. 6 Just as those died by the death of the body, so too these will die by the death of the soul.

7 Those, however, who fulfill my will shall enter the land flowing with milk and honey, that is, they shall enter the glory of heaven where there is no earth below nor sky above. 8 Rather, I myself, the Creator and Lord of all, am below and above, without and within, for I fill up everything. I satisfy my friends not with the sweetness of honey but, rather, I fill them with an inexpressible and wonderful delight, so they will desire nothing but me, they will want nothing but me in whom there is every goodness.

9 My enemies will never taste this goodness, unless they repent of their wickedness. If they would only reflect on what I have done for them, if they would only consider what I have given them, they would never deliberately provoke me to anger.³ 10 I gave them all that they could need or wish to have with moderation. I allowed them the moderate possession of privileges and wealth and the moderate fulfillment of their desires. 11 Let every man who has a respectable position think to himself as follows: 'Because I am in a respectable position, I will behave myself respectably according to my state in life. I will show reverence to my God; I will oppress no one; I will take care of my inferiors; I will love all men.' In such a way can such a one please me with his respectability. 12 Let every wealthy man think to himself: 'Because I have wealth, I will not take unjustly what belongs to another. I will harm no one. I will keep myself from mortal sin. I will come to the aid of the poor.' In such a way can such a one find favor with me in his wealth. 13 Let the man who is full of desires think to himself: 'My flesh is weak, and I do not hope to be able to restrain myself. Therefore, because I have a lawful wife, I will not covet others. I will keep preserve myself from all baseness and disorder.' Such a one can please me.

14 However, most people prefer their own law to my law. In their positions of respectability, they want to have no superiors. They can never get enough of wealth. In their desires, they want to go beyond moderation and praiseworthy principles. 15 Therefore, unless they repent and set out on a new path, they will not enter my land, where there is spiritual milk and honey, that is, sweet satisfaction. Those who receive it desire nothing more nor need anything other than what they have."

1. "That flowed with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:17; Baruch 1:20).

2. "Fleshpots"; cf. Exodus 16:3.

3. "They provoke me to anger"; cf. Psalm 77(78):58.

⚡ Chapter 28

A Soul is Described as a Stillborn Child and Condemned

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The soul of a dead man is condemned by Christ because of his grave sins and because he felt no sorrow over the sorrows and wounds of the passion of Christ. This soul is described as a stillborn child and condemned. There is a noteworthy comparison of this soul to those who followed Christ in his preaching with ill-will, and to his crucifiers and to the guards at his sepulcher.

1 A great host¹ was seen standing before God who spoke to it, saying: “The soul of this man does not belong to me! He felt no more compassion for the wounds in my side and heart than for the shattered shield of his enemy. 2 He cared as little for the wounds in my hands as for a torn piece of plain cloth. The wounds in my feet meant as little to him as it would if he saw a little apple being cut.”

3 Then God addressed the soul, saying: “You often asked while you were alive why I, God, suffered a bodily death. Now I ask you: Wretched soul, why did you suffer death?” The soul replied: “Because I did not love you.” 4 God answered the soul: “To me you were as a stillborn child is to its mother. She suffers no less pain for its sake than for the sake of the child that comes from her womb alive. 5 So too in my case. I redeemed you at as high a price and with as much bitter suffering as any of my saints, even though you cared so little about it. 6 As a stillborn child gets no sweet milk from its mother’s breasts or consolation from her words or warmth from her bosom, so too you will never experience the sweet and undescribable company of my chosen ones, because you were satisfied with your own sweet company. 7 You will never hear any words of mine to your own profit, because you were satisfied with the words of your own mouth and of the world, but the words of my mouth were bitter to you. You will never know my love and goodness, because you were as cold as ice to any goodness. 8 Go off, then, to the place where the stillborn are normally placed. There you shall live eternally in your death, because you did not want to live in my light and my life.”

9 Then God said to his host: “My friends, if all the stars and planets were turned into tongues, if all the saints beseeched me, I could not grant mercy to one who should be condemned according to due justice. 10 This soul is like three kinds of people. First, he resembles those who followed me in my preaching out of malice in order to find in my words and deeds some grounds for accusing me and handing me over. 11 They saw my good works² and the miracles that none but God can do. They heard my wisdom and witnessed my praiseworthy way of life, but for this they envied me and conceived fury in their

1. “A great host,” i.e., of angels and saints.

2. “They saw my works”: Psalm 94(95):9.

hearts against me. Yet why? 12 Simply because my works were good and their works were bad, and because I did not accept their sins but sharply accused them. Thus, this soul followed me with his body, not out of divine love but for the sake of human appearances. 13 He heard of my works and even saw them with his eyes, but then his anger was stirred up. He listened to my commandments and derided them. He knew my goodness but did not put his trust in it. He saw my friends progressing in virtues and he felt envious. Yet why? 14 Because my words and those of my friends were opposed to his own wickedness. My commandments and warnings were opposed to his desires. My charity and obedience were opposed to his will. But his conscience told him to honor me above all else. 15 From the movement of the stars he understood me to be the creator of the universe. From the fruit of the earth and from the due arrangement of other phenomena he knew me to be the creator, but, although he knew it, he still felt anger at my words, because I rebuked his evil actions.

16 Secondly, he resembles the men who put me to death. They said to each other: 'Let us unashamedly put him to death, for he will never rise again.' 17 I had indeed told my disciples that I would rise again on the third day,³ but my enemies, lovers of this world, did not believe that I would rise again in justice, because they viewed me as a mere human being but did not see the divine nature hidden in me. 18 This explains why they sinned with confidence and why, in terms of justice, they nearly prevailed. If they had known, they would never have put me to death.⁴ These were the thoughts of this soul. 19 He thought: 'If I carry out my will, as I wish, I shall unashamedly put him to death through my will and through actions that give pleasure. How will it harm me and why should I restrain myself? He will not rise again to condemn me—he does not judge according to the deeds of men. 20 If he is going to judge us so strictly, then he would not have bothered to redeem us, and if he regarded sin as so loathsome, he would not put up with sinners so patiently.'

21 Thirdly, he resembles those who guarded my grave.⁵ They armed themselves and surrounded my grave with guards in case I should rise again. They said: 'Let us stay on careful guard against his rising again, so we do not have to serve him.' That is what this soul did. 22 He armed himself in the hardness of sin; he was on his guard against the grave, that is, against the company of my chosen ones in whom I rest; he made sure not to let my words or their warnings get into him, thinking to himself: 23 'I will keep away from them⁶ so that I do not hear their words or am goaded by any divine thoughts into giving up the pleasures I have already undertaken, so that I do not hear anything unpleasant to my own will and desires.' 24 Accordingly, he withdrew himself with wicked intent from the people with whom he should have associated himself with charity."

3. "Told my disciples . . . third day"; cf. Matthew 16:21.

4. "If they had known . . . put me to death"; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:8.

5. "Those who guarded my grave"; cf. Matthew 27:66.

6. "I will keep away from them"; cf. Psalm 17(18):24.

EXPLANATION

25 This was a nobleman who cared little about God and who blasphemed God's holy ones while he was at table. He died without the sacraments, in a fit of sneezing. His soul was seen to stand at judgment, and the judge said: 26 "You spoke as you wished and acted as you were able to. So now it suits you to be quiet and listen. While this woman is listening, give me your answer, although I already know all things. 27 Did you never hear what I said: 'I desire not the death of the sinner but his conversion?'"⁷ Why did you not then turn back to me when you could?" 28 The soul replied: "I heard it but I did not care." Again the judge asked: "Did you not hear my words 'Go off, you evil-doers, into the fire,⁸ and come here, you blessed?'"⁹ Why did you not make haste toward that blessing?" 29 The soul said: "I heard it but I did not believe it." Again the judge asked: "Did you not hear that I am a just and eternal God and a fearsome judge? Why did you not fear the future judgment?" 30 The soul said: "I heard it, but I loved myself and shut my ears so that I would not hear of judgment, and I stopped up my heart, so I would not have any just thoughts." The judge said: "Now it is my just sentence that tribulation and shame open your understanding, for you refused to understand¹⁰ while you were able." 31 The soul was then cast out of the court wailing and crying out: "Alas, alas, what a reward! When will it ever end?" 32 A voice was then heard saying: "As the very beginning of all things has no end, so too there will be no end for you."

✠ Chapter 29

Birgitta Should Receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist More Frequently

DATE: UNDATED

The bride is instructed to receive frequently the body of Christ, which is symbolized by the manna that was rained down to the fathers in the desert and by the widow's flour that fed the prophet. It tells also of the great virtues and graces that accrue to the soul who devotedly receives communion.

1 "I am your God and Lord whose voice was heard by Moses from the bush¹ and by John at the Jordan.² I want you, from this day on, to receive my body frequently. 2 It is both medicine and food by which the soul is comforted, by which those infirm in spirit or weak in virtue may regain their strength. Is it not written that the prophet was sent to a widow who fed him with a little flour and that it did not fail until the day it rained upon the

7. "I desire not . . . but his conversion"; cf. Ezekiel 33:11.

8. "Go off . . . into the fire"; cf. Matthew 25:41.

9. "Come here, you blessed"; cf. Matthew 25:34.

10. "You refused to understand"; cf. Psalm 35(36):4.

1. "Heard by Moses from the bush"; cf. Exodus 3:2-4.17.

2. "By John at the Jordan"; cf. Matthew 3:13-17.

earth.³ 3 I am that prophet, figuratively speaking. My body is the flour. It is food for the soul. It is not spent nor does it fail but feeds the soul and remains always unspent.

4 Bodily food has three characteristics. First, when it is chewed, it melts, then it disappears, and third, it nourishes for a time. My food, however, is chewed but remains unchewed, and it does not disappear but remains the same, nor does it nourish only for a time but eternally. 5 This food was prefigured by the manna which the ancient fathers ate in the desert.⁴ It is the flesh that I promised in the gospel which gives everlasting nourishment.⁵ 6 Therefore, as a sick man grows in strength through bodily nourishment, so too everyone who receives my body with an upright intention grows in spiritual strength. 7 It is a powerful medicine that enters into the soul and satisfies it. It is hidden to bodily sense but is manifest to the spiritual intellect. 8 This food is tasteless for the wicked who only like the sweetness of temporal goods, whose eyes see nothing but the objects of their greed, whose intellect discerns nothing but its own will.”

✠ Chapter 30

The Will is Like the Roots of a Tree that are Gnawed at By a Mole; God is Like a Skillful Gardener; Application of This to a Mendicant Prior

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ instructs the bride to identify her will completely with God’s will in both good fortune and bad. The will is compared to the roots of a tree. When the roots are good, then the tree, which is the soul, bears good fruit. But if the roots are unstable, then the mole, that is, the devil, gnaws at them, and the soul is struck by the wind of adversity or dries up from the heat of the sun, that is, from the vain love of this world.

1 The Son spoke to the bride: “Although I know all things, tell me in your own words what the condition of your will is.” Straightaway her guardian angel answered for her, saying: 2 “Her will is as it may be read: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!”¹ The Lord answered: “This is what I look for and want. This is the service most pleasing to me.” 3 Therefore, my bride, you must be like a firmly rooted tree that need not fear the following three dangers. First, if the tree is firmly rooted, the mole does not bore through it. Second, it does not get overturned by the onrush of the winds. Third, it does not dry up from the heat of the sun.²

3. “A widow . . . rained upon the earth”; cf. 1 Kings (3 Kings) 17: 7–18:1.

4. “The manna . . . in the desert”; cf. Exodus 16.

5. “The flesh . . . everlasting nourishment”; cf. John 6:35.

1. “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

2. “If the tree is firmly rooted”; cf. Jeremiah 17:8.

4 That tree is your soul. Its principal root is a good will that agrees with the will of God. As many virtues spring from this root of the will as there are roots in a tree. 5 The principal root from which the others grow must be strong and thick and deeply rooted in the earth. 6 So too, your will must be strong in patience, thick in divine charity and deeply grounded in true humility. If your will is rooted like that, it need not fear the mole. 7 What does the mole burrowing beneath the earth symbolize if not the devil who burrows about unseen and upsets the soul? 8 If the root of the will is unstable in patience, he bites and splits it. He undoes it by biting on it, when, by inserting base thoughts and feelings into your heart, he pulls your will apart and makes you desire something against my will. 9 Then, once the principal root has been impaired, all the other roots are impaired as well, and the trunk dries up. This is to say, if your will and affections are corrupted, then the other virtues become stained and displeasing to me. Even more, if your bad will is not corrected through penance, you deserve to be subjected to the devil's control, even if your will does not achieve its effect.

10 If the root of the will is strong and thick, the mole can indeed gnaw at it but not split it. The root even grows stronger from the gnawing and acquires greater strength. 11 So it is with the devil: if your will always remains firm in failure as well as in success, the devil can indeed gnaw at it by inserting base thoughts, but, if your will puts up resistance and does not consent to them, then they will not be a punishment to you. Instead they will bring benefits to you through your patience that will bring you a greater reward and a higher level of virtue. 12 If you happen to fall due to impatience or because of something unforeseen, then get up quickly through penance and contrition, and I will pardon your sins and give you the patience and fortitude you need to endure the temptations of the devil.

13 In the second place, if the tree is firmly rooted, it need not fear the onrush of the winds. The same for you. If your will accords with mine, it need not worry about worldly misfortune which is like the wind. Think to yourself that if you should suffer misfortune, it may be to your benefit. 14 You need not worry about contempt or scorn, for I can raise up or cast down³ those whom I will. You need not grieve over bodily suffering, for I can heal or strike down, and I do nothing without a reason. 15 Whoever sets his will against mine suffers unrest in the present life, since he is unable to carry out what he aims at, and moreover will be punished in the life to come because of his bad intentions. If he entrusted his will to me, he would easily be able to endure whatever comes his way.

16 In the third place, a well-rooted tree need not fear excessive heat, that is, those people who have a perfect intention do not dry up in their love of God due to love of the world and are not pulled away from the love of God by any base impulse. 17 The souls of those who are unstable, however, are quickly turned away from their good resolution and love of God, either through a suggestion from the devil or worldly setbacks or the love in them that uselessly yearns for vain things.

3. "Can raise up or cast down"; cf. Deuteronomy 32:39.

18 For this reason, the man whom you now have in mind is not a good tree. His principal root has been broken—the ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ He has taken on the austerity of a celibate life, but the warmth of love has grown cold in him.⁴ 19 For the sake of my mother’s prayers I aided him, because he had three difficulties: scarcity of means, weakness of body, lack of knowledge. 20 It was my will that if he persevered patiently in these three difficulties, he would gain eternal plenty, eternal health and beauty, and the knowledge and vision of God. 21 In order for him to obtain them, I aided him by giving him spiritual fortitude and inspiring my will in him. But his will was opposed to mine. He seeks help lukewarmly. 22 He worries about his poverty, not for my sake but for the sake of his own advantage. He worries about suffering pain due to his ill health. He worries about others despising him for his lack of knowledge. 23 Therefore, according to my hidden knowledge, he has obtained the three things he wanted and which were troubling him. Now indeed he has greater means for his physical needs than before, and greater knowledge and a greater reputation. 24 This is why, when the diabolical mole touches him with temptation, his fall must be feared, because his principal intention has been broken. And so, if his love of the world grows hotter, he will wither as to virtue and incline to greed. 25 If any tribulation should afflict him, he will be full of worry, like a tree shaken by the wind, unstable on all sides, complaining about everything. 26 If honors blow upon him, he will be no less anxious—about how to please everyone, how to be considered good by everyone and how to resist attacks wisely. See how much instability arises from the instability of the impaired root!

27 Now, what will I do? I am like a skillful gardener whose garden has many unfruitful trees and few good ones. If he cuts down the good trees altogether, who will enter the garden? 28 If, however, all the unfruitful trees are uprooted, the garden will look extremely ugly from all the holes and the excavation of the ground. 29 This is how I work. If I brought all good people out of the carnal world to me, then who would enter the Holy Church? If I took away all evildoers at once, then extremely ugly holes would appear in the garden, and everyone would serve me out of fear of punishment rather than love. 30 So I work like a clever grafter who inserts a shoot into the dry trunk. When it has grown and taken firm root, he throws the part that was dry into the fire.⁵ 31 This is what I shall do. I shall plant a sweet bed of plants with scions of virtues. As they grow, I will cut away the dry parts and throw them into the fire. 32 I shall cleanse my garden so that nothing unfruitful remains to impede young and fruitful branches.

EXPLANATION

33 *About a prior who repented through the words of Lady Birgitta and afterward became devout.* This same prior saw Christ stretching out his hand toward him and saying: 34 “Here the nails entered the solid bone.” When this prior had died, Christ said: “That friar, your friend, is not dead but lives, for he lived up to the name of friar by his deeds.

4. “The warmth of love has grown cold in him”; cf. Matthew 24:12.

5. “He throws the part that was dry into the fire”; cf. Matthew 3:10.

But you may ask: who is a true friar? 35 I answer you: he is a true brother who, as the proverb says, carries all his belongings on his back,⁶ who desires nothing but God and who knows how to content himself with what he needs; who acknowledges me, God made flesh, as his own brother and loves me as a brother.”

36 *About the same friar.* When the same friar had difficulties believing the grace given to Lady Birgitta, he received an ecstatic vision of the lady with fire from heaven descending upon her. He woke up and was marveling at the vision and thought it an illusion. But then he fell asleep again and heard a voice saying clearly twice: 37 “No one can stop this fire from going forth. For I, power itself, will send this fire to east and west, north and south, to set many aflame.” 38 After this, the friar became a believer in and defender of the revelations.

39 *Again on the same chapter.* A certain friar suffered a disease for three years so that his feet were full of putrefied sores with the marrow flowing out of them. He suffered so patiently that he always had Jesus in his heart and on his lips, saying: 40 “Jesus, most worshipful God, have mercy on me!” When he was close to death, he cried out: “I desire, I desire, I desire. Oh my desire, come to me!” 41 When he was asked what he desired, he answered: “I saw God, and out of desire for him and the sight of him, I am so full of joy and happiness that I would be quite content even if I should live a hundred years with this disease.” 42 After that, the friar died joyfully in the arms of his brothers around midnight. On the following Sunday, the lady was in a spiritual rapture⁷ and heard: 43 “Daughter, because lords and masters do not want to come to me in humility, I gather poor and simple souls in the kingdom of heaven. Today this poor and simple man has found wisdom beyond Solomon, riches that do not age, and a crowning reward that ever grows and will never end. 44 Tell that brother who served this man in his infirmity for his own penance that, thanks to this service, he will be freed from temptations and receive spiritual fortitude and a joyful end and will waken in the rest of Lazarus.”⁸

✠ Chapter 31

On the Fate of Two Souls: One a Worldly Knight Who Chooses to be Condemned to Hell, and the Other a Dominican Prior who Is Like a Shining Star

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The bride saw a demon and a soul in the shape of a horrible animal before the judgment of God. The soul was condemned because she

6. “Proverb . . . carries all his belongings on his back”; cf. Walther, *Proverbia* 3, p. 608, no 20001b. Cf. also Book III 17.21.

7. “The following Sunday . . . spiritual rapture”; cf. Apocalypse 1:10.

8. “In the rest of Lazarus”; cf. Luke 16:22.

always persevered in evil and did not repent even at the end. She sees how Christ is loving and kind to the good but strict to the wicked, and how another soul rises up like a bright star.

The bride had a vision of what seemed to be two demons, alike in every limb, standing before the judgment seat of God. They had mouths wide open like wolves, glass-like eyes with burning flames inside, hanging ears like rabbits, swollen and protruding bellies, hands like those of a griffin, legs without joints, feet that looked mutilated and half cut-off. ² One of them said then to the judge: “Judge, sentence the soul of this knight who matches me to be united to me as my mate!”

The judge replied: “Tell me what rightful claim you have to his soul!”

³ The demon answered: “I ask you first, since you judge fairly: Is it not said, where an animal is found similar in type to another, that it belongs to the lion species or wolf species or some other such species? So now I ask to which species this soul belongs—is she like angels or demons?”

⁴ The judge said: “She does not match the angels but you and your mates, that is clear enough.”

Then, almost in mockery, the demon said: “When this soul was created from the fire of your unction,¹ heat of union, that is, of your love, she was like you. ⁵ Now, however, since she despised your sweet love, she is mine by a triple right: first, because she is like me in disposition; second, because we have the same tastes; third, because we both have a single will.”

⁶ The judge replied: “Although I know all things, yet for the sake of this my bride here present, tell me how this soul is like you in disposition.”

The demon said: ⁷ “Just as our limbs are alike, so too are our actions. We have open eyes but look at nothing that is good. Indeed, I do not want to look at anything that belongs to you and your love. ⁸ Likewise this soul, when she could, did not want to see anything belonging to you or to spiritual salvation but only paid attention to temporal delights. Again, we have ears but we do not listen to anything for our own improvement. ⁹ This soul did not want to hear anything that pertained to your honor—any news of you was equally bitter to us both. Thus the expressions of your goodness and sweetness never entered our ears to console or improve us. ¹⁰ We both have wide-open mouths. She kept her mouth open to all the sweet things of the world but closed to you and your honor. So too, I keep my mouth open to upset and offend you, and I would never shut it from harming you, if it were possible to upset you or affect your glory. ¹¹ Her hands are like a griffin’s, because she got whatever she could of temporal goods and would keep holding on to them if you permitted her to live longer. ¹² So too, I hold on to all those that come into my grasp so firmly that I would never relinquish them, unless they were taken from me against my will by your justice. Her belly is swollen, because the extent of her greed had no measure. ¹³ She was filled but never satisfied. Her greed was so great that, if she could have gained possession

1. “The fire of your unction” renders “de vnccionis”; cf. Sw. “aff thins kärleks hita” [from the heat of your love], reflecting a likely misreading, or an earlier emendation, of “vnccionis” [unction] from “vnicionis” [union].

of the whole world, she would gladly have toiled for it and would then have wanted to rule the heavens above. 14 I have a similar greed. If I alone could gain possession of all the souls in heaven and earth and purgatory, I would gladly seize them. And if only a single soul was left, I would out of my greed never let her go free from torment. 15 Her breast is icy cold just like my own, since she never had any love for you and your commandments were never to her liking. 16 So too, I feel no love for you. Rather, out of the envy I have toward you, I would willingly let myself be continuously killed in the bitterest of deaths and resuscitated again for the same punishment if only you were killed, if it were possible for you to be killed. 17 Our legs have no joints, because our will and purpose are one. From the moment I was created my will turned right away against you and I never willed as you will. Thus her will and purpose have always been contrary to your commandments. 18 Our feet are mutilated. Just as a man makes progress on foot for the benefit of his body, so too he progresses toward God by his good desires and actions. 19 As this soul never wanted to progress toward you with her desires and actions, so too neither do I. In this way we are alike in the disposition of our limbs. 20 Besides, we have similar tastes, since, though we know you to be the highest good, nevertheless we do not taste how sweet and good you are.² Therefore, since we are a match in every way, sentence us to be united!"

21 One of the angels in the sight of the Lord answered then, saying: "Lord God, as soon as this soul was joined to the body, I was always at her side and never left her as long as I could find some good in her. Now, however, I relinquish her like an empty sack with nothing good in it. 22 These three wicked things were hers: first, she regarded your words as a lie; second, she considered your judgment as falsity; third, she considered your mercy as nothing, so this mercy of yours seemed dead in her sight. 23 This person was married and had no more than one wife and did not have intercourse with any other woman. However, he maintained his fidelity in marriage not because of divine charity and fear but because he loved the body of his wife so tenderly that he was not attracted by sexual union with any other body. 24 He heard Mass and attended divine services not out of devotion but in order not to become an outcast or be pointed out by other Christians. 25 He went with others to church with this mind and intention: that you might grant him health of body and worldly wealth and honors and that you might keep him from the casualty which men call misfortune. 26 Lord, you recompensed the soul of this man in every way in the world and more than he deserved. You granted him good-looking children, physical health and wealth, preserved him from the misfortune he feared. 27 In your justice you granted him the profit of his greed, paying him back a hundred times over, so nothing remains unrewarded. Therefore, I let this soul go now empty of all good."

28 Then the demon answered: "So, judge, since this soul followed my will and you have repaid her a hundred times over for everything due from you, sentence us to be joined together! 29 Is it not written in your law that where the same matrimonial intention and consent are found, a legal union can take

2. "Taste and see how good you are"; cf. Psalm 33 (34):8.

place? 30 That is the case for us. Her intention is mine and mine is hers. Why should we be cheated out of mutual union?"

The judge replied: "Let the soul make her intentions known, what she thinks about being joined together with you."

31 The soul answered the judge: "I prefer being in the punishment of hell than coming to the joy of heaven so that you, God, will get no satisfaction from me. You are so hateful to me that I care less about my own torments than about depriving you of satisfaction."

32 The demon said to the judge: "That is the same intention I have. I would rather be tormented forever than enter your glory and give you any satisfaction because of it."

33 The judge said then to the soul: "Your own will is your judge and you will have to accept its sentence."

34 Then the judge turned to me³ who had seen all this and said: "Woe to this man who was worse than a robber!⁴ He had his own soul on sale; he thirsted for the impurity of the flesh; he cheated his neighbor. 35 This is why voices of men cry out for vengeance on him, the angels turn away their faces from him, the saints flee his company."

Then the demon drew close to the soul that matched him and said: 36 "O judge, look: here am I and I again! Here am I, wicked through my own wicked will, unredeemed and unredeemable. But this one here is another me: though he was redeemed, he made himself like me by obeying me more than you. So sentence his soul to me!"

37 The judge said to him: "If you would humble yourself, I would give you glory, and if this soul at the last moment of life had asked forgiveness of me with the purpose of amendment, she would not be in your clutches. 38 But because she persevered to the end in obedience to you, it is just for this soul to belong to you forever. However, whatever good she did in her lifetime will restrict you in your wickedness, so you will not be able to torment her as much as you like."

39 The demon: "So she is mine! Therefore, as they say, her flesh will be my flesh,⁵ though, of course, I have no flesh, and her blood will be my blood." The demon seemed to be very happy about this and began to clap his hands.

40 The judge said to him: "Why are you so happy and what kind of happiness is it that you feel in the loss of a soul? Tell me while this bride of mine stands here listening. Although I know all things, answer me for the sake of this bride who can only grasp spiritual matters figuratively."

41 The demon said: "As this soul burns, I burn even more fiercely. When I burn her with fire, I am burned even more. Yet, because you redeemed her with your blood and loved her to such an extent that you, God, gave yourself for her, and I still was able to deceive her, I am made glad."

3. "The judge turned to me": Birgitta, unusually, refers to herself in the first person at this point.

4. "Worse than a robber!": Sw. adds "ther iak thik för aff sagdhe" [about whom I spoke before], suggesting that the Swedish editors believed this to refer to the "robber" described in chapters 23–25.

5. "Her flesh will be my flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

42 The judge replied: "Great is your wickedness! But look around—I permit you to see it." And, see, a most beautiful star was rising up to the heights of heaven, and when the demon saw it, he fell silent.

43 The Lord asked him: "What is this one like?"

The demon answered: "She is more splendid than the sun, just as I am blacker than smoke. She is lovely in every way and full of divine favor, and I am full of all evil and bitterness."

44 The Lord said: "How does this suit your mind? What would you give to be given possession of this soul?"

The demon answered: "I would be happy to give all the souls in hell from Adam's time to now in exchange for her. 45 Moreover, I would be willing to suffer as harsh a punishment as having the points of countless blades set in a row—blade next to blade so close as not to leave the width of a pin between them—which I would voluntarily walk from the highest heaven down to the deepest hell just to have that star in my power."

46 The Lord answered: Your malice toward me and my chosen ones is enormous. But I am so loving that, if it were possible for me to die again, I would willingly endure such suffering for the sake of any soul whatsoever and for the sake of any impure spirit so that not a single impure spirit should remain.

47 You are so full of envy that you do not wish for even a single soul to come to me."

48 Then the Lord said to that good soul who seemed like a star: "Come, my chosen one, enter the joy for which you longed! Come to never-ending delight! Come to your God and Lord for whom you longed so often! 49 I will give you myself in whom all goodness and all sweetness are found. Come to me from the world that is like pain and sorrow, for there is nothing but misery in it."

Then the Lord turned to me who was watching all this in spirit and said: 50 "See daughter, this all took place instantaneously in my sight, but, because you can only grasp spiritual truths by way of likenesses, I have shown you these things in order that people might understand how strict I am to the wicked and how kind I am to the good."

EXPLANATION

51 A soul was brought before the judge. Four Ethiopians followed her in, saying: "Behold our prey! We chased her and took note of all her ways, and she has now fallen into our hands. What shall we do?"

The judge said to them: "What charges do you bring against her?"

52 The first Ethiopian answered: "You, God, have said: 'I am just and merciful and ready to pardon sins.' But this soul gave herself up to predestination, as though she had been created for eternal damnation."

53 The second Ethiopian said: "You, Lord, have said that a man should treat his neighbor justly and not cheat him. This man, however, cheated his neighbor, traded and got what he could with no intention of paying back."

54 The third said that a man should not love a creature above the creator.⁶ “But this soul loved everything but you.”

The fourth said that no one may enter heaven but one who desires and longs for God with his whole heart. 55 “This soul, however, desired nothing good nor found any pleasure in spiritual things. What he did for you he did only so that Christians might not see that he was not a Christian.”

56 The judge said to the soul: “What do you have to say of yourself?”

The soul answered: “My heart is hardened, and I wish evil, not good to you who are my Creator and Redeemer. But I am forced to tell the truth. I am blind and defective like a stillborn fetus and have spurned my mother’s warnings.⁷ 57 Therefore, my own conscience tells me my sentence: I will follow in punishment those whose ways and counsels I followed on earth.” Then the soul departed from God’s sight, weeping profusely.

58 The end of the revelation is about Brother Algot, the prior of Skara, who was blind for three years and struggled with gallstones but came to his rest in a blessed end.⁸ 59 When blessed Birgitta was praying for his cure, she heard in spirit this answer: “He is a shining star. A soul need not be blackened by her bodily condition. 60 He has now fought and finished his course. There is nothing left for him but to be rewarded. This will be a sign for him: from this moment his physical pains will be alleviated and his whole soul will be set aflame by my love.”

⚡ Chapter 32

The Swedish People are Warned About the Young Viper and its Mother

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ’s words to the bride about parents bringing up their children in worldly ways to gain privileges and worldly glory along with pride. They are memorably symbolized as snakes feeding their offspring and teaching them to sting and poison by goading them on.

1 “When a male snake mates with a female, there is venom in the seed sown in the mating, and a venomous snake¹ is conceived from their sexual union. 2 Once conceived, the snake cannot survive without my grace, because nothing exists or can exist without me, nor can it receive the breath of life unless by means

6. “Love a creature above the creator”; cf. Romans 1:25.

7. “Spurned my mother’s warnings”: possibly a reference to Mother Church; but some manuscripts, and Ghotan, have “my father’s warnings.”

8. “Brother Algot . . . in a blessed end”: according to Birgitta’s *Vita*, and Prior Petrus’s testimony, Algot was prior of the Dominican house at Skara in Östergötland, a master of theology, and a close friend of Birgitta’s; see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 83, 512–13. This revelation is further mentioned in chapter 35.

1. “A male snake and his mate . . . a venomous snake”: this famous vision is taken to represent Håkan Knutsson, the half-brother of King Magnus Eriksson, their mother, Euphemia, who played a major role during Magnus’s minority rule in 1319–32, and Håkan’s father, Euphemia’s favorite and later husband, the Dane, Knut Porse. Birgitta was hostile toward this aristocratic faction; see further pp. 7–8. This revelation is included in the Birgittine-Norwegian text, on which see further volume I, p. 23.

of my power. 3 When the snake is born, since its mother has no teats for the baby snake to suck, she coils herself over the baby and warms it up so much that it almost suffocates. 4 It feels much heat from above and much cold from the earth below, and, urged by necessity, it puts its mouth to the ground and starts to suck and feed. 5 Its mother teaches it to move by pricking the baby in the tail. When it puts its tail out again, she pricks it again so that it pulls back its tail. Similarly by her pricking, she teaches it to stretch its head forth and to twist its back. 6 Later its mother looks for some place where the sun's heat is warmer. There she brings her baby with her, going a little ahead of it so it learns to follow. When it follows and while it is sleeping in the warmth of the sun, the mother thinks so to herself: 7 'My son has venom for his wicked purposes. He must learn to bite. But since his fang is still tender and will soon break if I put something hard before him, he must first get used to biting and become strong.' 8 So, in her wise plans for her son, the mother looks for something soft to bring and then places it in front of her sleeping baby. 9 Then she whispers loudly into his ears and wakes him up so suddenly that, startled out of himself by the whispering in his ears, he starts to bite on the soft thing placed in front of him. 10 In this way he exercises his fang for a long time so it grows harder and gets used to biting, and he learns to bite stone and wood and any hard thing. When her baby has finally learned, the mother leaves him.

11 That man whom you know is like this. He is a snakelike baby born of a snakelike father and a snakelike mother. Both the male and female snakes joined together in the worst of venom—I mean pride, which condemns the soul to far worse harm than physical venom does to the body. 12 Whenever that male snake felt a great yearning and unquenchable longing to embrace, he burned with desire for the female. She thought him wise and handsome and strong and burned with an equal love for the male snake. 13 So they joined together in all pride and scorned to fear me. From their venomous begetting they begot a venomous snake. Since I am merciful and because justice demanded it, I gave to their seed a living soul, created by my divinity.

14 Since the mother certainly had no teats of divine love with which to feed her baby, she warms him under her, that is, she rears him in the love of the world. She educates him among more highly placed men with the consuming desire of seeing him counted among the powerful. 15 She incites him to his own ruin with such words: 'If you had that lordship and that governing position, you could be just like your father. And such and such a rank suits you, so you should struggle to acquire it.' 16 By means of such words, the baby snake is taught by its mother. Heated up for earthly things and out of a coldness to divine love, he starts wanting to eat the things of the earth and, by eating them, he burns for more.

17 Then, in order that he may learn to move his limbs and lift his head, he is pricked in the tail by his mother. This happens each time he is taught and encouraged by her to lure others by promises and 18 to attach others to himself through words and favors. It happens each time he is urged, in order to be called good, not to be sparing of his goods; in order to be called strong, not to be sparing of his life; in order to gain renown, not to take any rest.

19 The mother also teaches her baby how to creep by going ahead of him. She leads him to a warm place in the sun by her proud and dissolute life which

she incites him to imitate, saying to him both in private and in public: 20 ‘Your father and your ancestors lived like this, and this is the way it suits great men to behave. It would be a shame for you to want to be holier than they. It would be a disgrace for you to want to be more humble than they who won human favor by smooth talking and gained a great name for themselves by adapting their behavior.’ 21 Through such lessons the baby snake was lured on to follow his mother from one sin to the next until he came to the lust of the flesh as it were to the heat of the sun. When he began to rest there, and the heat of the flesh became sweet to him, then he was taught by his mother to bite and sting.

22 However, because his mother took into consideration his weakness in stinging as well as his lack of resources and strength, she recommended easier things to him at first, such as first acquiring temporal positions of a lesser reputation and climbing up to lesser ranks, all of which seems easy at first and pleasant to have. 23 Giving in to her venomous advice, he stung wretched people with no means of resistance by taking away their property. He stung others by injury. Still others he stung by hate and deprived them of life. 24 Finally, his fang strengthened by malice at lower levels, with his mother’s whisperings in his ears, he has begun to climb up to higher things, to envy the more powerful, to aim at treachery and to raise quarrels—so much so that he does not even fear to direct his sting against the strongest of all; that is, he will injure the Holy Church unless he is carefully anticipated and wisely prevented. 25 To defang him, there is only one remedy: have the snake’s tongue cut off. It is for the wise to discern how it may be cut off and what his tongue is.”

26 Then the Lord added: “A cloth is torn and does not feel it, and an apple² is peeled without hurting its owner. That is what my passion is like in the heart of this snake, for he never reflects upon it attentively in his heart. 27 He puts his trust in predestination, saying: ‘If God has foreseen that I will be condemned, why should I struggle any more? Or, if I am to be saved, then it will be easy for him to accept my repentance.’ Woe to him, if he does not quickly change his ways, for no one is rejected due to my foreknowledge. 28 You can be certain, too, that the female snake, his mother, will not obtain what she foolishly desires. Neither her sons nor her family will prosper. Rather she will die in bitter grief, and her memory will fall into oblivion.”

ADDITION

29 God’s Son speaks: “Beware in every way of looking to the offspring of that snake and his mate for help and stability to the realm, because they are now approaching the judgment of God and their days shall not be lengthened.” 30 At another point Christ appeared again, saying: “Be quite certain that this lady will not obtain what she desires. Her sons will not prosper, nor will they sow their seed, nor will there be any remembrance of them from generation to generation.”

2. “A cloth . . . an apple . . .”; cf. the same imagery in chapter 28.2.

⚡ Chapter 33

An Allegory About an Adulterous Bride who Kills her Bridegroom

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

God the Father tells the Son that the Son is like a bridegroom who so loves his bride that he was crucified for her sake; but she loved an adulterer and killed the bridegroom. The bride symbolizes souls; the bridal chamber, the Church; the bridal chamber's door, the will; and the adulterer symbolizes bodily pleasures. He also foretells a future bride to be betrothed to the bridegroom.

1 The Father speaks to the Son:¹ "You are like a bridegroom who betrothed a bride with a pretty face and an honest character and led her into his bridal chamber and loved her as himself. This is what you did, my Son. 2 You betrothed a new bride when you burned with such love for the souls of men that you were willing to be wounded and stretched out on the cross for their sakes. 3 As though into a bridal chamber, you led them into your Holy Church, which you consecrated with your blood. But now your bride has turned into an adulteress. The chamber-doors are closed, and instead of a bride, a wicked adulteress lies there, thinking to herself: 4 'While my husband is asleep and lying there naked, I will take out a sharp sword and kill him, because he does not please me.'

What does the bride denote if not the souls whom you redeemed with your blood? 5 Though they are many, yet thanks to the unity of faith and love, they can be called one. And these many souls have now turned into adulteresses, for they love the world more than you. 6 They seek the pleasure of another's company, not yours. The doors of the bridal chamber, that is, of the Church, are closed. What do the doors mean if not the good will and purpose through which God comes into the soul? 7 They are closed, as it were, by producing no good results. Yet the will of your enemy gets fulfilled, inasmuch as whatever is pleasant and whatever delightful for the body is loved, honored, and called holy and good. 8 But your will, which is that everyone should love you fervently, desire you prudently, surrender all rationally for your sake, is entirely closed and neglected. 9 There are even at times some who may openly go in through the doors of the chamber, not with the intention of doing your will and loving you with their whole heart but out of human fear. They do so in order not to appear wicked and so that it will not come out in public what kind of people they are in their inner life before God. 10 Thus, the gate to your bridal chamber has been closed and they find more pleasure in an adulterer than in you. They also think to kill you while you lie asleep naked. 11 You seem to them to be naked when they see your body, which you received from the most pure flesh of the Virgin but without losing your divinity, under the appearance of bread on the altar. 12 Discerning nothing of the power of your divinity in it, they take it to be a bit of bread. Although you are truly God and man, they cannot see you with their eyes, darkened as they are by the shadows of the world. 13 Again, you seem to them to be

1. "The Father speaks to the Son": unusually, God addresses His son in this revelation.

asleep when you allow them to go unpunished. Therefore, they enter your chamber with presumption, thinking to themselves: 14 ‘I shall enter and receive the body of Christ just like the others.’ Nevertheless, after communion, they do as they please. ‘What harm does it do me if I don’t receive and what good if I do?’

15 See, in order that you do not reign in their hearts, these wretches kill you from their hearts through such thoughts and intentions, although you are immortal and present everywhere by the power of your divinity. 16 Since, however, it is not fit for you, my Son, to be without a bride or to have a bride who is not most chaste, I will send my friends to bring you a new bride, charming in appearance, honest in character, desirable to touch, and they will lead her to your bridal chamber. 17 These my friends will be swift as the birds that fly, for my Spirit and I myself will guide them. They will be as strong as those at whose hands walls crumble. They will be as bold as those who fear not death but are ready to offer their lives. 18 These friends will bring you a new bride, that is, they will gain for you the souls of my chosen ones, with great honor and glory, with great devotion and charity, with brave efforts and steadfast perseverance. 19 I who now speak am He who proclaimed at the Jordan and on the mountain:² ‘This is my beloved Son!’ My words will soon be accomplished.”³

✠ Chapter 34

Two of Birgitta’s Friends are Given the Power of Exorcism; A Message for the Kings of France and England

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

By way of a comparison, God’s Mother explains to the bride how she requested the words of this heavenly book from her Son at the prayers of all the elect in the world. These words promise damnation to the proud and mercy to the humble. Also contained here are words in which certain persons are given the power to cast out devils and to obtain concord between warring parties, especially between the kings of France and England.

1 The Mother spoke: “My Son is like a king who had a state in which there were seventy rulers, and in the province of each of them there was but one person faithful to the king. 2 When these faithful people saw that nothing but death and damnation awaited the unfaithful, they wrote to a lady who was on the closest of terms with the king, asking her to intercede for the unfaithful and to suggest to the king that he write some words of warning to help them repent of their obstinacy. 3 To her suggestion concerning the salvation of those unfaithful people, the king replied: ‘Nothing is left for them but death, and they deserve it. However, because of your prayers I will send them two messages in writing. 4 In the first message are these three points: first, the condemnation they

2. “At the Jordan and on the mountain”; cf. Matthew 3:17; 17:5.

3. “My words will soon be accomplished”; cf. Apocalypse 22:6.

merit; second, poverty; third, the shame and dishonor they deserve for their deeds. The second message is that everyone who humbles himself will receive grace and be blessed with life.’ 5 When the letter containing these messages reached the unfaithful people, some of them said: ‘We are as strong as the king and so we shall defend ourselves.’ 6 Others said: ‘It is not for us to worry about life and death. What the outcome will be is not a great concern of ours.’ Still others said: ‘What we have heard is false. It is all made up. This letter did not come from the lips of the king.’ 7 When they heard these responses, the faithful wrote again to the aforesaid lady, the king’s intimate friend, saying: ‘These unfaithful people do not put any trust either in the king’s words or in ours. 8 Therefore, entreat the king as a sign of trustworthiness to send them some special sign by which they may come to believe that the letter came from the lips of the king.’ 9 When the king heard this, he said: ‘Two things belong especially to a king, namely, a crown and a shield. No one but the king may wear the crown, and a king’s shield brings peace to warring parties. Therefore, I will send them these two things so they may put faith in my words and repent of their evil.’

10 This king symbolizes, of course, my Son, who is king of glory¹ and God’s Son and my own. His state is the world and in it there are seventy languages, as it were seventy provinces. 11 In each language there is one friend to my Son—this means that there is no language in which one does not find my Son’s friends: they are symbolized by one friend due to their unity in faith and charity. 12 I myself am the lady on the closest of terms with the king. My friends, seeing the world in a state of distress, addressed their prayers to me, asking me to placate my Son on the world’s behalf. Moved by my prayers and those of the saints, he sent the world the words of his very lips² foreknown from all eternity. 13 As a sign of their trustworthiness—so they would not be thought to have originated elsewhere—I entreated him for the sign of a king’s crown and shield.³ The crown was the power over unclean spirits that was given to one person; the shield was the peacemaking work of another person, that is, the restoration of warring hearts to one heart and to mutual charity. 14 My Son’s words were but two messages, for in them all there are no other than these two messages: malediction for those who make themselves obdurate, and mercy for those who humble themselves.”

15 After this, the Son said to his Mother: “Blessed are you! You are like the mother who is sent to receive a wife for her son. Thus I send you to my friends who join their souls to me in spiritual matrimony befitting God. 16 Because of your great mercy and the charity with which you love souls so fervently, I grant you authority over that crown and shield so that you may give them not only to those two but to whomever you want. 17 You are full of mercy, and thus you

1. “The king of glory”; cf. Psalm 23 (24): 7–10.

2. “The words of his very lips”: probably the words revealed to Birgitta.

3. “The sign of a king’s crown and shield”: with these emblems Birgitta may be referring to Prior Petrus of Alvastra and Bishop Hemming of Turku (Åbo). In the 1340s these two men joined a mission to the kings of France and England with a message of peace (Book IV 103–05; see also volume 2, pp. 12–14); and they were part of the commission that gave its recognition to Birgitta’s revelations in Uppsala in 1346 (see volume 1, p. 41); cf. also Book I 52.

attract all the mercy in me toward sinners. Blessed be anyone who serves you, for he will not be abandoned either in death or life.”

18 Then the Mother spoke again to the bride: “It is written that John the Baptist went before the face of my Son.⁴ Not everyone saw him, because he was in the desert. So, too, with my mercy: I go before the terrible future judgment of my Son. 19 Therefore, say from me to him who has the crown that, whenever he feels the accustomed spirit and fervor of my Son within him, he should read these words: 20 ‘God the Father, who with the Son and the Holy Spirit is the creator of all things and the judge of all that has been done, who has sent his blessed Son with his very self into the womb of the Virgin Mary for our salvation, 21 he himself commands you,⁵ unclean spirit, unto the glory of his name and for the sake of the Virgin Mary’s prayers, to depart from this creature of God in his name who was born from the Virgin, Jesus Christ, one God, who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit.’ 22 Then say from me to him who has the shield: ‘You have often sent me as your messenger to God, and I have besought my Son on your behalf. Now I beseech you to go as my messenger to the highest head of the church, for even if Lucifer was settled there, the words of my Son would still be accomplished according to his will.’ 23 However, when he comes to France, he should say this to the leaders assembled before him: ‘God, who is with the Father and the Holy Spirit the creator of all things and the judge of all that has been done, who deigned to descend into the virginal womb and unite his divinity to humanity, though without removing himself from his divinity, 24 who had so deep a love for humankind that, when he saw the lance and the sharp nails and all the instruments of death in front of him, he preferred to die and endure every terrible instrument of death and let his sinews be cut open and his hands and feet pierced, than to give up his deep love for humankind; he himself, because of his passion, has joined you together in one heart, you who had been split into factions.’ 25 Then, according as my Spirit instructs him, he should set forth for them the pains of hell, the joy of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked.”

✠ Chapter 35

On the Different Fates of the Prior and Another Dominican Friar

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ shows the bride how the soul of a certain devout monk was cleansed in this life through his physical infirmities. The glory he won was revealed to her before his death in the shape of a star. The condemned soul of another monk is claimed by nine devils before the prince of devils. The reason why God tolerates evil religious is indicated.

1 The Son of God spoke to the bride: “You saw the soul of that deceased monk in the shape of a star, and rightly so, for he was like a bright and shining

4. “John the Baptist went before the face of my Son”; cf. Acts 13:24.

5. “He himself commands you” renders “Ipse precipit tibi” of one manuscript; others have “precipio tibi” [I command you], which leaves incomplete the sentence beginning “God the Father” (paragraph 20).

star¹ in his lifetime. He loved me before all creation and lived in observance of his chosen vocation. 2 His soul was revealed to you before his death in the state in which he was then when it was shown to you. This was when he had reached the final end of his life and his illness was showing signs of his death. 3 When he approached the boundary of death, he entered purgatory. That purgatory was his own body, where he was being cleansed through his pain and infirmities. 4 This is why he was shown to you like a star in an open glass. It was because he was on fire with my love, and this is why he is now in me and I in him. 5 Just as a star that enters a more abundant and more splendid fire can no longer be seen, so too he is now enclosed in me and I in him, and he shall be blessed with the indescribable glory that will never end. 6 While he was in his purgatory, this star was so on fire for me and I for him that he considered his intense physical pain to be trifling. His gladness began in suffering and grew up to everlasting joy. 7 When the devil saw it and wanted to claim some right over that soul on account of the love she felt for me, for her sake he would willingly have given up every other soul.

8 Another soul was also shown to you whom the devil possessed with nine rights. Since I have already revealed² her sentencing to you, I will now reveal her punishment. Everything happens instantaneously before God, but it cannot be physically explained or heard without material duration. 9 When that man's soul came to punishment, seven demons came out to meet her in the presence of their prince, saying: 'This soul is ours by right.' 10 The demon of pride was the first to speak: 'His soul is mine, because he counted no one his equal and wished to be above everyone else, just as I do.' The demon of greed was the second to speak: 'He could never get enough or be satisfied, just as I. Therefore, his soul is mine.' 11 The demon of disobedience was the third to speak: 'He was bound to obedience and discipline but was in every way disobedient to God and obedient to the flesh. Therefore, his soul is mine.' 12 The demon of gluttony was the fourth to speak: 'By eating and drinking at improper times, just as I prompted him, his soul went to excess and wanted nothing to do with abstinence. Therefore, his soul is mine.' 13 The demon of vainglory was the fifth to speak: 'He chanted for the sake of vainglory and empty reputation. When his voice was lowered and tired, I lifted it up higher and came gladly to his aid.' 14 The demon of ownership was the sixth to speak: 'He should have been poor in the world with nothing of his own, but, on the contrary, he was like an ant and gathered all he could and kept it without consulting his superior. Therefore, his soul is mine.' 15 The demon of contempt for religion was the seventh to speak: 'By the discipline of his order, he was obliged in all his acts to keep to set times, but, on the contrary, he had only disorder. 16 He drank and ate when he wanted, slept and woke up and spoke when he pleased. He did everything against the discipline of his order. Therefore, his soul is mine.'

1. "He was like a bright and shining star": This revelation is a continuation of chapter 31, on the Swedish Dominicans.

2. "Another soul . . . nine rights . . . already revealed": probably a reference to chapter 31.7–20, where a soul and a demon are compared on nine counts (eyes, ears, mouth, hands, belly, chest, legs, feet, and taste).

17 Then the prince of demons, as though giving examples, said: 'You, spirit of pride, since you possessed him inside and out, enter into him and (as though spiritual beings had limbs and were attached to bodies) squeeze him so tight and press him so terribly that his brain comes out together with his eyes and the marrow of his joints and all his limbs disintegrate.' 18 Next, to the spirit of greed, he said: 'You possessed him according to your will and desire, and he was never satisfied. 19 So enter into him with a heat worse than poisonous acid and hotter than molten lead and set him so horribly on fire that, like wine through the top of a glass vessel with many pipes³ fills and occupies them all as it enters, your poisonous molten lead, too, will enter his every member and burn there forever more.' 20 To the third, that is, to the spirit of disobedience, he said: 'You possessed him in every way contrary to his rule, and he obeyed you more than he did his God. 21 Therefore, enter into him like the sharpest sword and stick to him as fiercely as a sword might be planted in a heart without passing through the top or the bottom but remains there immovably and tortures him unbearably.' 22 To the fourth, that is, to the spirit of gluttony, he said: 'He gives his consent to you in every intemperance. Therefore, grind him with your teeth and rend his heart, so that each of the aforesaid spirits of pride, greed, disobedience and gluttony get a piece of his heart and, once they get it, can torture it, so that he is continually being crushed but never consumed.' 23 To the fifth, that is to the spirit of vainglory, he said: 'Enter into him and never let him have any rest! Instead of chanting, let only sounds of grief forever come from his lips! Let all the joy and delight he sought in the world turn for him into wailing and eternal misery!' 24 To the sixth, that is, to the spirit of ownership, he said: 'Enter into him and plague him with bitter grief and make him miss all the delights he desired! Instead of them, he will have indescribable confusion and unspeakable damnation and everlasting shame.' 25 To the seventh, that is, to the spirit of contempt for religion, he said: 'Since he kept all his times disorderedly, the only kind of time that will commence for him will never be terminated. In it he will suffer cold and heat without an end.'

26 At that very moment two spirits appeared before the prince of demons, saying: 'We also have a share in this soul.' The first said: 27 'He was a priest but did not live as a priest. Therefore, I have a share in him.' The second demon said: 'He had a base on his head where a halo of glory should have stood, and he does not have a halo. Therefore, his soul is mine.' 28 The prince answered: 'Instead of the honorable name of priest, let his name be changed. He shall be called Satan. Instead of a halo of glory, which he held in contempt, place there a curse of reproach and eternal rejection.'"

29 Then the Lord said to the bride: "Behold, my bride, what kind of rewards and how great a difference there is between them! Both these souls belonged to the same order, yet they are exceedingly unequal in their reward. 30 Do you know why I am showing you this? It is, of course, in order to strengthen good people and help the wicked to repent of their wicked ways by learning of their condemnation.

3. "A glass vessel with many pipes": Birgitta seems to be describing some kind of retort used for the distillation of spirits.

Truly I say to you, men of that order have turned far away from me, which you may understand by means of an example. 31 I am like the head of a household who has taken on workers to whom he assigns a spade to dig a ditch, a shovel to cast up the dirt from the ditch and a container to carry it away. 32 After a time the workmen came to despise their master's orders and brought the tools back to him, saying: 33 'The hoe is not sharp enough and the ground is too dry, and we aren't capable of working there. The shovel is way too small and can't hold the earth. The container is too heavy and it is too much of a burden for us to carry.'

34 This is how the religious who have taken vows treat me. To them as workmen, I entrusted a spade, that is, I gave them authority to preach my words and the power to dig up earthly hearts with fear of me. 35 But they have thrown away this hoe and taken up a new one, inasmuch as they use my words and my institution for their bodily comfort in order to please the people and grow in wealth. They say: 'Human hearts are too hard now and the words of the Lord are not sharp enough to stir up devotion.' 36 This is why they propose things that are agreeable to people; they hide my justice and neglect to rebuke sin. Thus they let their hearers confidently rest in their sins and become remiss about doing penance for their deeds. 37 Again, I entrusted them with a shovel with which they were to cast up the earth out of the ditch, that is, they were to love poverty and humility. But this is now too small for them, for they say: 38 'What are we to live on, if we are not to own anything? By whom will we be received, if we abase ourselves entirely?' Thus, deceived by a false confidence, they now surpass everyone else in pride to as great an extent as they ought to be more humble than the others. 39 I also gave them a container to carry off the earth, that is, in order that they might abstain from the pleasures of the body. But they have thrown this at my feet, saying: 40 'If we are going to live in as much exertion as the fathers lived, we will fail, and we will be altogether despised for such a life of abstinence, if we do not manage to live in such a strict manner.' So all the good things of their religious profession become burdensome to them, and they do as they please.

41 What shall I do when my tools are cast off and the work I assign is rejected? I will assuredly tell them: 'Live as you like and work on your work, and you will discover its profit! 42 Gain the respect of the world instead of eternal respect, and worldly wealth and friendship instead of eternal ones, and worldly pleasure instead of never-ending delight!' 43 I swear by the truth of myself that if I did not act for the sake of two good things for the sake of which I put up with them, not one of their convents would stand erect! The first good thing is my Mother's prayers that she offers incessantly together with their patron saint. 44 The second is my justice, because, although I am not bound to show them any mercy due to their bad will, still I am patient with them on account of the gifts of their benefactors, which are pleasing to me. For they are, as it were, instruments by which others can benefit. 45 From their preaching and their chanting other people are sometimes stirred to devotion and make good progress, while they cast their own selves into the deep, for they serve like slaves for gain but not that of eternity. 46 They are slaves, indeed, and few are found otherwise, so few that not one in a hundred can be found."

EXPLANATION

47 There appeared a soul wearing a scapular and extraordinarily deformed in every limb. Then Christ said: "A certain nation of people heard that the sons of Israel were winning victories everywhere and, fearing to be subjected to them, sent their legates with old shoes on their feet and stale bread in their satchels,⁴ falsely pretending to be from far-away parts. 48 When the truth was found out, however, they were led off into lasting servitude. So too many who are in religious orders pretend that they are not, and, serving the world beneath the habit of their order, they are excluded from the eternal inheritance.

49 One such man was the one whose soul belonged to the devil by nine rights. The first right is that he puts himself ahead of others in his pride, making a display of professing virtue but being full of vice. 50 The second right is that he desires everything he sees and is not content with having what he needs. The third is that he obeys only in the things that please him, but whatever he dislikes, he either does it against his will or seeks an opportunity to avoid it. 51 The fourth right is that he delights in intemperance and is a companion of those of whom it is said that 'their belly is their God.'⁵ The fifth is that he seeks to be praised by men, not God. Thus, he preaches sublime matters, sings sonorously, performs remarkable deeds. 52 The sixth right is that he enjoys having too many things and wearing a special habit, though his own habit should be poverty itself. The seventh is that he never keeps the appointed times but is guided by the motions of his body. 53 The eighth is that he approaches my altar with impudence and arrogance in order to bless and absolve others but himself deserves to be locked up under censure. 54 The ninth is that he unworthily bears the sign of glory on his head but is allied with my enemy. Therefore, unless he mends his ways, he will drink of my justice."

55 She replied: "My Lord, he celebrates masses and preaches, and his preaching appeals to many people. Doesn't this come from your Spirit?" God said: 56 "It does come from my Spirit, but when he does not preach with the charity or intention with which a true preacher ought to preach, then an evil spirit works in him, for he chews straw and sucks on the tail of the snake and seeks flowers that wither." 57 Then she said: "My Lord, I do not understand what is being said. Please, my Lord, explain what it means!" The Lord answered: 58 "He chews straw by not being attracted to the eternal bread, by not letting enter his heart the divine wisdom of the words: 'Come to me, humble ones, and I will refresh you.'⁶ 59 He sucks on the tail of the snake by having a dislike for the drink of divine understanding but a liking for the shrewdness of the devil that says: 'Eat and your eyes will be opened.'⁷ 60 He seeks flowers

4. "Old shoes on their feet and stale bread in their satchels"; cf. Joshua 9:5.

5. "Their belly is their God"; cf. Philippians 3:19.

6. "Come to me . . . and I will refresh you" (Matthew 11:28).

7. "Eat and your eyes will be opened"; cf. Genesis 3:1-7.

that wither by not caring about the fruit of eternal pleasure but continually having on his lips the words of the world and of the flesh.”

✠ Chapter 36

A Pentecost Vision About Three Vessels and A Man with Wine for Sale; A Swedish Cistercian is Promised a Reward

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ reveals to the bride how, because of three good qualities present in the clean and empty hearts of the apostles, the Holy Spirit was sent to them in three ways; also how the Holy Spirit does not enter into people full of greed, lust and pride. Also, Christ wants his wine, that is, his words in this book, to be first drunk by his friends who will then make them known to others.

1 “I who am speaking with you am he who on a day like today¹ sent my Holy Spirit to my apostles and disciples. He came to them in three ways: first, as a forceful wind; second, as fire; third, in the shape of tongues. 2 He came to them through closed doors, for they were alone, and they had three good qualities. First, they had every intention of remaining chaste and living continently in every way; second, they possessed outstanding humility; third, all their desire was for God, for they desired nothing but him. 3 They were like three clean but empty vessels—therefore the Holy Spirit came and filled them. He came like a forceful wind, for he filled their every joint and limb with divine delight and solace. 4 He came like fire, for he so set their hearts aflame with the fire of divine love that they loved none but God, feared none but God. 5 Third, he came in the shape of tongues, for, just as a tongue is inside the mouth without harming it but, rather, helping it to speak, so too the Holy Spirit was inside their souls, making them desire nothing but me and making them eloquent with divine wisdom. By his power, as if it were functioning as a tongue, they spoke the whole truth.

6 Thus, because these vessels were empty of desire, it was fitting that the Holy Spirit should come to them. Indeed, he cannot enter those people who are already filled and full. Who are ‘filled’ if not those who are full of all sin and filth? 7 Such people are like three foul vessels. The first is full of stinking human excrement with a stench so foul that no one can bear to smell it. The second is full of the most disgusting semen with so bitter a taste that no one can bear to sip it. 8 The third is full of diseased blood and pus so repulsive that no one can bear to see it. 9 Likewise the wicked are full of worldly ambition and greed that stinks to me and my saints worse than human excrement. What are all temporal things if not excrement? The wretches find pleasure in this foul excrement that will soon disappear. 10 The second vessel contains excessive lust and unchastity in every deed. This is as bitter to my taste as semen. I cannot endure such people; still less can I enter into them with my

1. “On a day like today”: i.e., Pentecost; cf. Acts 2:3–6.

grace. 11 How can I, true purity, enter into such impure beings? How can I, the fire of true love, inflame those whom the base fire of lust inflames? 12 The third is their pride and arrogance. This is like diseased blood and pus. 13 It corrupts people both within and without in their pursuit of the good, removes God's given grace and renders them repulsive to God and neighbor. Someone filled with that cannot be filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

14 I am like a man with wine for sale. When he wants to treat anyone to a drink, he gives it first to his friends and household members to sip. Then, with a herald's shout, he sends them out, exclaiming: 'We have drunk good wine. Anyone who wants it, step up!' 15 I have the best of wine, that is, something indescribably sweet. I treat some of the members of my household to a drink through the words heard to come from my mouth.² 16 Among those heralds who tasted the wine is the man who came to me today³ with, as it were, three receptacles to be filled. He came with the intention of keeping himself away from every vanity, and the intention to be entirely humble, and the desire for everything pleasing to me. 17 I have, therefore, filled his vessels today. First, by wisdom in spiritual matters, he will become more enlightened in his understanding and more apt for meditation than before. Second, I filled him with my charity which will make him more fervent than before in every good action. 18 Third, I gave him a more discerning fear, so that he will fear nothing but me and respect only the things pleasing to me. 19 Therefore, in order that he may also know how to proclaim the sweetness of my wine to others, he will hear my words that I have spoken and which have been written down. In this way, once he has heard my charity and justice, he will be as diligent in proclaiming as he is eager to taste the sweetness of the wine."

EXPLANATION

20 This brother followed Lady Birgitta to Santiago. He had a spiritual vision of the lady crowned as though with seven crowns, and he saw the sun completely darkened. 21 In his amazement, he heard a voice saying clearly: "The darkened sun signifies the ruler of your country who did shine like the sun."⁴ He will be most despised, a human scandal. 22 The woman whom you see will receive a tiara of God's sevenfold grace as signified by the seven crowns you saw. This will be a sign for you: you will be cured from this illness and return to your people and promoted to a higher rank." 23 When he returned, he was made an abbot, and advanced from virtue to virtue.

2. "The words heard to come from my mouth"; cf. Luke 4:22; here, the words of Christ to Birgitta are intended.

3. "Who came to me today": the monk (later abbot) Svennung from Varnhem in Skara diocese in Östergötland. He is the only named man known to have accompanied Birgitta and her husband on their pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in 1341, during the journey he fell ill and had a vision in which he saw Birgitta crowned with seven crowns; see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 503, which in essentials reiterates the Explanation that follows here.

4. "The ruler of your country, who did shine like the sun": an unflattering comment on King Magnus of Sweden that is strategically placed in the Explanation.

⚡ Chapter 37

On the Proper Ways of Serving the Virgin

DATE: UNDATED

The Virgin's words to the bride about how she, the Virgin, is hailed by four kinds of persons: by her true friends, out of love; by others, out of fear of punishment; by still others for the sake of money and honor; and, finally, by hypocrites, with the presumptuous expectation of pardon. The first two kinds will receive a spiritual reward; the third, a temporal reward; the fourth kind is abominable.

1 Mary speaks: "There are four kinds of persons who hail me. The first are those who surrender their whole will and conscience into my hands and do whatever they do for the sake of honoring me. Their salutation to me is like a sweet and delicious drink. 2 The second are those who fear punishment and, because of their fear, keep away from sin. If they persevere in praising me, I will give them a decrease of servile fear and an increase of true charity and the knowledge by which they may learn to love God in reason and wisdom. 3 The third are those who lift up my praise on high but with no other intention or disposition than to gain worldly honor and a fleeting advantage. 4 Like a ruler to whom some gift is sent back to the giver something of equal worth, I will give them what they want and reward them in their present life, since they seek only temporal benefits and desire nothing more precious. 5 The fourth are those who pretend to be good but still take delight in sin. They sin in secret, when they can, so as not to be seen by others. They think to themselves: 'The Virgin Mary is kind and, as soon as she is invoked, she will procure our pardon.' 6 Their cries are as pleasing to me as a vase that is silver-plated on the outside but inside is full of such stinking dung that no one can bear the smell. Such are they because of their degenerate inclination to sin."

⚡ Chapter 38

On the Effects of the Good and Bad Spirit

DATE: UNDATED

Christ tells the bride that there are two spirits, good and evil.¹ The signs of the good spirit are the mind's sweet tranquility and glory. Signs of the evil spirit are the mind's anxiety and unrest that come from greed or wrath, etc.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: "There is a good spirit in the human heart. What is the good spirit if not God? What is God if not the glory and the sweet tranquility of the saints? 2 God himself is in them and they in him. They have every good

1. "Two spirits, good and evil"; cf. Book I 54, and IV 110.

thing when they have God, without whom nothing is good. Therefore, those who have God's spirit have both God and the whole heavenly host and all goodness.

3 Likewise, those who have the evil spirit within them have all evil within them. What is the evil spirit if not the devil? What is the devil if not pain and every evil? Thus, those who have the devil have pain and every evil within them.

4 As a good person does not know from where or how the sweet tranquility of the Spirit enters his mind² and cannot fully appreciate it in the present life, though he gets a partial taste of it, 5 so too when a bad man is fraught with greed, when he pants with ambition, when he is stung with wrath or stained with lust and all the other vices, this is the pain inflicted by the devil and an indication of eternal unrest, though he cannot in the present appreciate it for what it is. 6 Unlucky those who cleave to this spirit!"

✠ Chapter 39

The Devil and the Virgin Dispute Over the Soul of a Knight; On his Fate in Purgatory

DATE: 1347 OR 1348, SWEDEN

The bride saw a demon bringing before the divine court of judgment seven books against the soul of a deceased knight,¹ while his good angel brought only one book on his behalf. The soul is not sentenced to eternal damnation, because the demon was unaware that the soul had repented in her innermost thought at the end. However, because of her sins, she is sentenced to endure nine punishments in purgatory until Judgment Day, because she had longed to live that long in the flesh. But Christ reveals three remedies by means of which she can be freed earlier, and three of the aforesaid punishments are immediately cancelled for her by the Lord through the prayers of the Virgin and of the saints. Yet a request of the good angel on her behalf is not immediately granted, but Christ defers it a while for deliberation.

1 Ademon appeared at the court of divine judgment with a certain deceased man's soul that was trembling the way a heart trembles. The demon said to the judge: 2 "Here's my prey! Your angel and I have been following this soul from start to finish—he did it to protect her, I to harm her. Both of us chased her like hunters. But in the end she fell into my hands. 3 My passion to gain possession of her is like a torrential stream rushing along which nothing can resist but the barrier of your justice. 4 However, your justice has not yet been applied against this soul, so I am not yet secure in her possession. 5 I long for her as intensely

2. "Does not know from where . . . enters his mind"; cf. John 3:8.

1. "The soul of a deceased knight," i.e., Ulf Abjörnsson (Sparre of the Tofta family) who died in 1347 or 1348. He was related to Birgitta through marriage. In an entry for the year 1407, that concerns this family's generosity toward Vadstena abbey, the *Diarium Vadstenense* makes a cross reference to this and the following revelation (see Gejrot, *Diarium Vadstenense*, p. 110).

as an animal consumed by starvation that hunger drives to eat its own limbs. Therefore, since you are the just judge, adjudge a just judgment upon her!”

6 The judge answered: “Why has she fallen into your hands and why were you closer to her than my angel?”

The demon answered: “Because her sins were greater in number than her good deeds.”

7 The judge answered: “Show me which!” The demon replied: “I have filled a book with her sins.” The judge: “What is the name of this book?”

8 The demon answered: “Its name is disobedience, and it is really seven books, each one containing three columns.² Each column contains more than a thousand words: none less than a thousand but some many more.”

9 The judge replied: “Tell me the names of these books; even though I know all things, yet say them in order that your purpose and my goodness might be known to others.”

10 The demon answered: “The name of the first book is pride. It has three columns. The first is the spiritual pride of his inmost thoughts, because he was proud in his belief of leading a more virtuous life than others. 11 He was also proud of being wiser than others in insight and understanding. The second column was that he was proud of the possessions given him and his servants and clothes and other things. 13 The third was that he was proud of his good looks and noble descent and his work. The words in these three columns are endless, as you know best.

13 The second book was his inordinate desire. This, too, had three columns. The first was spiritual desire, for he did not regard his sins as being as grave as was said, and, though unworthy, he wanted the heavenly kingdom which belongs to none but the perfectly pure. 14 The second column was that he desired more in this world than was necessary, and his will was focused only on the advancement of his own name and family in order to raise descendants of himself and make them great, not for the sake of your glory but for worldly glory. 15 The third column was that he longed for worldly honors and to be more highly placed than others. Also here, as you know best, there is no end to the words he used to win favor and goodwill or to acquire temporal gains for himself.

16 The third book is envy. It has three columns. The first was the secret envy he felt in his mind toward those who had more and prospered more than he did. 17 The second was that envy led him to take the property of those who had less than he and were in greater need. 18 The third was that envy led him to injure his fellow-man privately by advice and publicly both in word and deed, both on his own and through the agency of his people, and he also encouraged others to do the same.

19 The fourth book was greed, and it, too, has three columns. The first was greed in his mind inasmuch as he was unwilling to tell others things he knew that might comfort or improve them. He would think to himself: 20 ‘What good

2. “And it is really seven books, each one containing three columns” renders “septem libri et quilibet habet III columnas”; cf. Sw. “siv bökir ok huar bokin hawir thry bladth” [seven books and each book has three leaves].

does it do me if I give so-and-so this advice?’ 21 So the oppressed and needy person left him, neither edified nor instructed, although he might well have been instructed by him, if this man had only wanted to do so. 22 The second column was that he did not make peace between quarrelling parties when he was able to do so and did not bother to console the anxious when he could. 23 The third column was his greed with regard to his possessions, in that, if he had to give a dime for the sake of your glory, he became worried and dejected, but he would willingly give a hundred for the sake of worldly glory. 24 The words in these columns are also endless, as you know best, for you know all things and nothing can be hidden from you. Rather, your power compels me to speak, because you want to benefit others.

25 The fifth book is sloth, and it has three columns. First, he was very lazy about acting to carry out good deeds in your honor, that is, to fulfill your commandments. 26 He wasted his time in physical relaxation, because he cared more about his physical comfort and pleasure. 27 Second, he was very lazy in thought. When your good spirit inspired compunction or spiritual insight in his heart, he found it tedious and turned his mind away from spiritual meditation, but he found every worldly delight pleasant and alluring. 28 Third, he was very lazy of mouth, that is, in praying and speaking for the benefit of others and for your glory. However, he was keen on indecent language. 29 It is known to you alone how many words this column contains and how countless they are.

30 The sixth book was wrath. This, too, had three columns. The first was that he would grow angry at his fellow-man about matters that did not turn out to his advantage. 31 The second column was that he injured his fellow-man in anger, sometimes even taking away the other’s property. The third was that he caused anxiety in his fellow-man due to his anger.

32 The seventh book was his lust and it, too, had three columns. The first was that he spilled his seed in an undue and intemperate way. 33 Although he was married and kept away from the stain of other women, nevertheless he spilled his seed unduly as a result of embraces and unsuitable words and immodest behavior. 34 The second column was that he was extremely frivolous in his speech. He not only led his own wife on to more passionate sexual desire, his words also lured others many times to hearing and imagining indecent things. 35 The third column was that he fed his body too luxuriously, having sumptuous dishes prepared for the greater enjoyment of his body and for the sake of his reputation, in order to be called a great man. 36 Over a thousand words are in these columns—sitting longer at table than he ought, not keeping to schedule, speaking unsuitably, eating beyond natural requirements.

37 See, judge, my book has been read to the end. Declare this soul to be mine!”

38 Then, while the judge stayed silent, the Mother of Mercy, who had earlier seemed to be standing at a distance, drew near and said: “My Son, I wish to dispute the justice of this demon’s case.”

39 The Son answered her: “My dearest Mother, if justice is not refused a demon, how could it be denied you who are my Mother and the Lady of Angels?”

40 In me you can do and know all things, but you speak in order for my love to be made known to others.”

41 Then the Mother said to the devil: “I order you, devil, to answer the three questions I put to you. Although you do so unwillingly, still you must do so, for I am your sovereign Lady. Tell me, do you know all the thoughts of a human person?”

42 The devil replied: “Only those which I can assess from a person’s external action and disposition as well as those which, as it were, I put in his or her heart.”³

43 Even though I lost my high rank, enough of my exalted nature still remained in me to give me the intelligence to understand a person’s state of mind from his or her disposition, though I cannot recognize their good thoughts.”

44 Then the pious Virgin again asked the devil: “Tell me, devil, even if you do so unwillingly, what is it that can erase the writing in your book?”

45 The devil answered: “Only one thing can erase it, and that is divine charity. Whoever receives this in his heart, however much of a sinner he is, will get everything written about him in my book erased.”

45 The Virgin spoke a third time: “Tell me, devil, is there anyone who is so impure a sinner and has turned so far away from my Son that he cannot return to a state of forgiveness while he still lives in the world?”

47 The devil answered: “No one is such a sinner that he cannot return while he still lives, if he wants. 48 Whenever someone, however much of a sinner he is, commutes his evil intention into a good one and conceives divine charity, with the intention of remaining steadfastly in love, not all the demons in the world can retain him.”

49 Once she heard this, the Mother of Mercy said to the bystanders: “At the end of his life, this man turned to me and said: ‘You are the Mother of Mercy, and you show mercy to the miserable. 50 I am unworthy to beseech your Son, for my sins are many and grave, and I have greatly provoked his anger, loving my own pleasure and the world more than I did God my Creator. 51 Therefore I beseech you, have mercy on me, for you deny no one who begs for your mercy! I turn to you with the promise that, if I live, I will reform myself and redirect my will and purpose to your Son and love nothing but him. 52 Above all, I sigh and grieve because I did nothing good in honor of your Son, my Creator. So I beseech you, kindest Lady, have mercy on me, for you are my only refuge!’ 53 Such were the thoughts and words with which this soul came to me at the end of life. Shall I not give ear to him? Who does not deserve to be heard if he beseeches another with all his heart and a full purpose of amendment? Should not even more so I, the Mother of Mercy, give ear to one crying out to me?”

54 The devil replied: “I knew nothing of these intentions. But if it is as you say, so prove it by clear arguments!”

55 The Mother answered: “You deserve no answer from me. However, because what I have revealed is done for the benefit of others, I will answer you.

3. “Only those which I can assess . . . put in his or her heart”: This is the orthodox medieval understanding of the devil’s powers to tempt. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, only God knows the inward disposition of the soul (*Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 114, a. 2, ad 2), but the devil can induce a person to sin by presenting forms to the imagination or by inciting the sensitive appetite to some passion (*Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 80, a. 2).

Wretch, you said earlier that nothing but divine charity can erase the writing from your book.” 56 Now the Virgin turned to the judge and said: “Therefore, my Son, let the devil open his book and read it to see if all the writing is there or if anything has been erased.”

57 The judge said to the devil: “Where is your book?” The devil answered: “In my belly.” The judge said: “And what is your belly?” 58 The devil replied: “My memory. Just as all foul and unclean matter is stored in the belly, so in my belly there is stored all the evil and iniquity that rises like a foul stench before you. 59 When, through my pride, I removed myself from you and your light, I discovered for myself every evil and my memory was blinded to the good things of God. And all the iniquity of sins is inscribed in this memory of mine.”

60 Then the judge said to the devil: “I command you, devil, to look carefully and examine your book to see what is written and what erased regarding the sins of this soul, and then to declare it publically!”

61 The devil answered: “I am looking in my book and I see other things written there than what I expected. I see that those seven chapters are erased and nothing but garbage is left of them in my book.”

62 Then the judge said to the good angel who was standing there: “Where are this soul’s good deeds?” He answered: “Lord, all things are in your prescience and knowledge, both present, past and future. 63 We know and see all things in you⁴ and you in us, so it is not necessary for me to tell you, as you know it all. But because you wish to reveal your charity, you convey your will to whomever you please. 64 Thus, from the start when his soul was joined to his body, I was always with this man. I have written one book with his good deeds. If you wish to hear me read it out loud, it is in your power.”

65 The judge answered: “I cannot render judgment without first hearing and finding out both his good and bad points. Once these have been fairly weighed, as justice requires, he should be sentenced accordingly to death or life.” 66 The angel replied: “My book is the obedience with which he obeyed you. It has seven columns in it. The first is baptism. The second is his abstinence on days of fasting from unpermitted work, from sin and even from carnal pleasure and temptation. 67 The third column was the prayer and good resolutions he offered to you. The fourth column was his good work of almsgiving and other works of mercy. 68 The fifth column was his hope in you. The sixth column was his faith which he kept as a Christian. The seventh column was divine charity.” 69 After the good angel had spoken, the judge asked him: “Where is your book?” He answered: “In the vision of you and in your charity, my Lord.”

70 Then Mary retorted with a question to the devil: “How did you take care of your book and how is it that the writing in it has been erased?” 71 The devil answered with a shriek: “Because you cheated me!”

Then the judge turned to his dear mother: “You have won the sentence in this case with good reason and gained this soul with justice.” 72 The devil cried

4. “We know and see all things in you”: That the angels know all things in and through the divine Word was asserted by, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 58, a. 7).

out: "I lost! I am beaten! But tell me, judge, how long may I keep this soul in return for all this garbage?" 73 The judge answered: "I will explain that to you. The books have been opened and read.⁵ But tell me, devil, although I know all things, whether it is just for this soul to enter heaven or not. Come, I am now allowing you to see and know the truth of justice." 74 The devil answered: "The justice in you states that if anyone dies without mortal sin, then he or she will not enter the pains of hell and that whoever has divine charity has a right to heaven. 75 Accordingly, since this soul did not die in the state of mortal sin and did have divine charity, then she deserves to enter heaven after having first been purified." 76 The judge answered: "Therefore, because I opened your intellect now and allowed you to see the light of truth and justice, tell these listeners who are pleasing to me what the sentence of this soul should be." 77 The devil answered: "That she should be purified in such a way that not a single stain remains in her because, although she has justly been sentenced to be given to you, she is still impure and cannot come to you without first receiving purification. 78 Because you have put a question to me, judge, now I will ask you how she is to be purified and how long she should remain in my hands."

79 The judge answered: "You are ordered, devil, not to enter into her nor swallow her up inside you, but you are to purify her until she is made clean and immaculate. She will suffer punishment according to the category of her guilt. 80 She sinned in three ways through her sense of sight, three ways through her hearing, and three ways through her touch. Therefore she should be punished in her sight in three ways. First, she herself should behold her own sins and repulsiveness. 81 Second, she should behold you in your evil and terrible ugliness. Third, she should behold the wretchedness and terrible pains of the other souls. Let her hearing likewise be afflicted in three ways. 82 First, may she hear horrifying cries of woe, because she longed to hear about her own excellence and the pleasures of the world. Second, she should hear the horrifying shrieks and insults of the demons. 83 Third, she shall hear reproaches and unbearable woes, because she much preferred to hear about worldly love and favor than about God, and because she served the world with greater fervor than she served her God. 84 Let her sense of touch also be afflicted in three ways. First of all, she shall burn with the most burning fire inside and out so that not the least stain remains in her that is not purified by fire. Second, let her suffer extreme cold, because she used to burn with greed and was cold to my charity. 85 Third, she will fall into the hands of demons so that not the least little thought or word is left unpurified, until she becomes like the gold that is purified by fire⁶ and shaped according to the will of its owner."

86 The devil spoke again: "How long will this soul remain in her punishment?" The judge answered: "For as long as she desired to live in the world. And since she would gladly have liked to dwell in her body until the end of the

5. "The books have been opened and read"; cf. Daniel 7:10.

6. "Gold that is purified by fire"; cf. Wisdom 3:6.

world, her punishment must last until the end of the world. 87 It is indeed my justice that whoever possesses divine charity toward me and longs with every longing for me, desiring to be with me and separated from the world, such a one may enter heaven without any punishment, because the trial of the present life is his purification. 88 Again, someone who fears death due to its bitter pain and because of the coming punishment and wishes to live longer only in order to reform his or her life ought to receive a lighter punishment in purgatory. 89 But someone who harbors the wish to live until Judgment Day, though he does not sin mortally, will, because of his wish for perpetual life, have to suffer perpetual punishment up until Judgment Day.”

90 At that moment his most loving Mother said in reply: “Blessed are you, my Son, for your justice that is carried out with all mercy. 91 Although we see and know all things in you, yet tell us so that others may know what means may be applied in order to shorten such a long period of punishment and also how such fierce flames may be extinguished and how this soul may be freed from the demons’ hands.” 92 The Son answered: “Nothing can be denied you, for you are the Mother of Mercy and you seek and procure mercy and consolation for everyone. There are three things that can reduce the long period of punishment and extinguish the flames and free her from the hands of the demons. 93 The first is for someone to return those things which this man had unjustly taken and extorted from others or which he was bound in justice to repay to others. 94 It is just that a soul should undergo purgation until the things unjustly taken by her are restored down to the last farthing⁷ either through the prayers of the saints or through almsgiving and the good works of friends or through a purgation of equal worth. 95 The second is generous almsgiving: this will extinguish the fire. The third is the offering of my body on the altar on his behalf along with the prayers of my friends. These are the three things that will free him from those three punishments.”

96 The Mother of Mercy replied: “What are the good works now worth which he did for your sake?” The Son answered: “You are not asking because you do not know the answer, because you know and see all things in me, but you want to show others my charity by means of your question. 97 To be sure, not the least word or the least thought that he had in my honor will go without its reward. 98 Because all the things he did for my sake are now present before him, he will receive respite and consolation from them in his punishment and experience less burning heat than he otherwise would.”

99 The Mother then said to her Son: “Why is this soul immobile like someone who does not move hand or foot against enemies and yet is still living?” The judge answered: “The prophet wrote about me that I was like a lamb silent before its shearers.⁸ 100 I was indeed silent before my enemies, and therefore it is just that, because this soul did not care much about my death and gave it little regard, she is now justly like a child unable to cry out in the hands of its slayers.”

7. “The last farthing”; cf. Matthew 5:26.

8. “The prophet . . . before its shearers”; cf. Isaiah 53:7.

101 The Mother answered: "Blessed are you, my sweet Son, for you do nothing without justice! You said earlier, my Son, that your friends could help this soul and, besides, you know well that this soul has served me in three ways. 102 First, she was my servant through abstinence, that is, by fasting on the vigils of my feast days and observing abstinence for the sake of my name; second, because she recited my office; third, because she also sang my praise with her own lips. Therefore, my Son, since you hear your friends on earth who lift their cries to you, I too ask you to graciously hear me." 103 The Son replied: "The prayers of a person occupying a higher rank of love before some lord are granted all the sooner. And since you are dearest to me of all, ask what you will and it shall be given you."

104 The Mother answered: "This soul has three punishments related to sight, three related to hearing and another three related to the sense of touch. I ask you, my dear Son, to remove one of the punishments of sight so that he cannot see the terrible demons. He will suffer the other two, since justice demands it, and I cannot stand in its way according to the justice of your mercy. 105 Secondly, I ask you to remove one of the punishments of hearing, so that he does not have to hear of his shame and disgrace. Thirdly, I ask you also to remove one of the punishments related to the sense of touch, so he does not feel icy frigid cold, though he does deserve it inasmuch as he was cold in your charity." 106 The Son answered: "Blessed are you, dearest Mother! Nothing can be denied you. May your will be done! Let it be done as you asked." His Mother replied: "Blessed are you, my sweet Son, for all your charity and mercy!"

107 At that moment one of the saints appeared with a great host and said: "Praise to you, Lord God, creator and judge of all! This soul served me devoutly in life. He fasted in my honor and praised me and your friends around you with his salutations. 108 Therefore, on behalf of them and myself, I ask: have mercy on this soul and, for the sake of our prayers, grant her respite from one punishment so that the demons are not able to darken her inmost thought. 109 For, in their malice, they can so darken her thought that, unless they are restrained, she will never hope for an end to her misery or for the attainment of glory (unless it should please you to have a special regard for her in your grace)—and that would be her greatest suffering⁹ amid all her sufferings. 110 Therefore, kind Lord, for the sake of our prayers, grant her in whatever torment she may find herself to know for certain that her torment will end and that she will attain to everlasting glory."

111 The judge answered: "Since this soul many times turned her inmost thought away from spiritual meditation and understanding to bodily things and thus intentionally darkened her own mind and did not fear to act against me, it is truly just that the demons should now darken her inmost thought. However, dear friends, because you listened to my words and

9. She will never hope . . . her greatest suffering": The idea that ignorance of one's ultimate fate might be one of the worst torments in purgatory occurs also in medieval visionary accounts of the afterlife; cf. the *Visio Thugdali*, or Vision of Tundale, which Birgitta may have known.

carried them out in your actions, it is not right to deny you anything. Let it be done as you wish.” 113 Then all the saints responded: “Blessed are you, God, in all your justice, for your judgment is just and you let nothing go unpunished.”

114 Then the good angel who had been given to the soul as her guardian said to the judge: “I was with this soul from the beginning of the union of body and soul, and I accompanied her in your loving providence. 115 She did carry out my wishes at times. Therefore, I ask you, Lord, have mercy on her!” But the Lord replied: “We wish to deliberate on this matter.” Then the vision disappeared.

EXPLANATION

116 This was a kind knight, a lover of the poor, whose wife gave very generous alms on his behalf.¹⁰ She died in Rome in accordance with a prediction from the Holy Spirit.

✠ Chapter 40

The Same Soul Enters Heaven After Purgation

DATE: 1350 OR 1351, ITALY

In the fourth year after the bride had seen the above vision in which a soul was sentenced to purgatory until Judgment Day, she saw the same soul, as though half-clothed, brought by an angel before the divine court. The angel along with the whole heavenly army besought the Lord for her sake. This time Christ liberated her completely from punishment and sent her to her glory like a shining star thanks to the prayers of the angels and saints and the tears and suffrages of friends still alive.

1 In the fourth year after this, I saw a shining youth accompanying the aforesaid soul who was now clothed, though not fully. He said to the judge seated on the throne and attended by thousands upon thousands of beings,¹ all of whom were adoring him for his patience and charity: 2 “O Judge, this is the soul for whose sake I prayed, upon which you replied that you wanted to deliberate on the matter. Now all of us in attendance here again beseech your mercy upon her. 3 Though we know all things in your love, yet for the sake of this bride of yours who hears and sees all this in her spirit, we are speaking in

10. “Whose wife gave very generous alms on his behalf”: Ulf Åbjörnsson’s wife was Märta Sunesdotter (Båt family), who was buried at Vadstena in 1389. She is referred to in the canonization process as Margarete de Vourvourk (Fogelvik), Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 327. See also Book III 12.28 (volume 1, p. 282n7).

1. “Attended by thousands upon thousands of beings”; cf. Daniel 7:10.

human fashion, though we are not ourselves human.” 4 The Judge replied: “When a wagon is full of grains of wheat, if many persons, one after another, each removes a grain, both the number and the weight are reduced. So, too, in this case. Indeed, many tears and charitable works have come before me on behalf of this soul. Therefore, it is my decision that she should come into your care. 5 Take her away now to the rest which neither eye has seen nor ear heard² nor could this soul have imagined in the flesh, where there is neither heaven above nor earth below. Its height is unimaginable, its length unsayable, 6 its breadth wonderful and its depth³ unfathomable. There God is above all and beyond all and within all.⁴ He governs and encompasses all but cannot himself be encompassed.”

7 Then this soul was seen to rise up toward heaven, shining as bright as the brightest star. And the Judge spoke again: 8 “There shall soon come a time when I shall deliver my judgment and exercise justice against the descendants of the deceased man whose soul this is. They have ascended in their pride but will descend in retribution for their pride.”

✠ Chapter 41*

A King of Sweden is Inclined to Pursue his Crusade for Worldly Reasons; On the Mentality of a Good Crusader

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ reproaches a certain king and worldly men who attribute their victories over their enemies not to God but to their own skill and great army and physical strength. He says that they should go to war after the example of David who put his hope in God when he faced the giant, though having first made use of their human judgment. He wins easily who has God as his co-worker.

1 The Son speaks to the bride about a king of Sweden and says: “I told you that this king is a child. You can learn this from two things: first, from the way he governs; second, from his immense army. Did not David the shepherd conquer the giant?¹ 2 Yet how? Was it by means of his power and wisdom? Certainly not, but by means of divine might. If God had not brought the giant’s boldness to naught and stirred the spirits of the boy David, how could a boy have attacked a giant? 3 And how could a stone knock down so strong a man and hit such a trained warrior, unless God’s might was in it? Thus, he wins easily who has God as his co-worker. For someone who relies

2. “Neither eye has seen nor ear heard”; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9.

3. “Height . . . length . . . breadth . . . depth”; cf. Ephesians 3:18.

4. “God is above all . . . and within all”; cf. Romans 9:5; Ephesians 4:6.

* This revelation, about the crusading policy of Magnus Eriksson, is duplicated in Book VIII 44. On the crusade, see further volume 1, p. 170.

1. “Did not David the shepherd conquer the giant?”; cf. Ecclesiasticus 47:4; 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 17.

entirely on God, there is no great need of physical strength but of faith and love. 4 Worldly men think they will win by means of physical strength. They suppose success in battle to be due to human skill and, when they have proven to be victorious, they ascribe it more to the skill of man than to the might of God, although neither good nor bad men gain victory without God's permission and justice. 5 Indeed sometimes good men win out over bad or, on the other hand, bad men over good, and gain the victory because of God's hidden permission and justice. 6 Because, due to general neglect, few men wish to consider God's patience and justice, God's might is dishonored, and it is man who is praised and exalted as being the powerful author of his own victories.

7 It is not without reason that I called this king a child. For when a child sees two apples, one all gilded on the outside but inside all empty and rotten, and the other less pretty on the outside but inside lovely and fresh, he chooses the apple that is pretty on the outside but rotten on the inside, because he only knows how to consider things by their outward appearance. 8 That is how this king acts. It seemed pretty to him to advance with his great army, but he did not know or consider what misery it concealed inside. He did not expect the great hunger and sorrow that followed. He did not expect that they would go forth wearied by hunger and return more miserable still. 9 It seems base and foolish to him to advance with a small army, but it conceals a great advantage inside. Thus, if he does go forth in this way, I will fill his mind with divine wisdom; I will strengthen his body with divine strength. 10 Indeed, I can render the weak strong, the lowly sublime, the rejected honorable. Tell him, then, that he should not be ashamed but should put his hope in me and act with divine wisdom and human forethought as far as he is able. Thus, where human wisdom is lacking, love and a good intention will justify him.

ADDITION

11 The Son of God speaks: "Each man who desires to visit the lands of the infidels ought to have five dispositions. First, to unburden his conscience through true contrition and confession as though he were about to die. 12 Second, he should put off all frivolousness in habit and dress, not bothering about new fashions but keeping to the commendable ones established by his predecessors. 13 Third, not to want to have temporal possessions beyond what is necessary and does honor to God, and also, if he should be aware of any ill-gotten goods acquired by himself or his parents, to want to make retribution for them, however small or great they may be. 14 Fourth, to strive so that the infidels may attain the true faith, desiring neither their wealth nor their livestock, apart from physical necessity alone. The fifth is willingly wishing to die in honor of God and, thus, keeping oneself to commendable behavior beforehand so that one deserves to obtain a precious death."

⚡ Chapter 42

How Birgitta Can Learn to Love God More

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

God's Mother, praising her own concern in pleasing God, says that she does not praise herself because she seeks her own praise but because God is thereby praised and honored. She requests from her Son heavenly clothes for the bride and the sacred food of his body and a more fervent spirit. The Son grants her request, provided the bride first has humility and fear and gratitude.

1 God's Mother says: "From my youth I always thought about my Son's honor and was always concerned to please him. 2 While all praise is less praiseworthy coming from one's own lips, I am not saying this in the manner of those people who seek their own praise, but in honor of my Son, my Lord and God. 3 He wondrously planted his sun in the dust, in a dry container he enclosed a fire that does not consume but inflames, and brought forth the finest and sweetest fruit without moisture."

4 Then she turned to her Son and said: "Blessed be you, my Son! I am like the woman who begged mercy on behalf of the guilty and less powerful and was heard by her Lord. 5 Thus, because she is timid, I am praying to you on behalf of my daughter, that is, your bride whom you redeemed with your blood, enlightened with your love, stirred by your goodness and betrothed in your mercy. 6 I ask you, my Son, to give her three things. First, finer clothes, because she is the daughter and bride of the king of kings.¹ If a regal bride is lacking a regal dress, she is held in contempt. If she appears less becoming, she is criticized and reproached. 7 So give her not earthly but heavenly clothes, not those that shine with a metallic gleam on the outside but those that sparkle with charity and chastity on the inside. Clothe her in the habit of virtues, so she does not have to beg for external things but has an abundance within and can be a light for others with the habit she wears. 8 Second, give her finer food. Your bride has been accustomed to rougher kinds of food. Now let her grow accustomed to your food. This is the food that is touched but not seen, retained but not felt, nourishes but stays unknown to the senses, enters but is everywhere.² 9 This is your most worthy body, prefigured by the roasted lamb.³ Your human nature that you received from me accomplished it in a wondrous way; your divine nature along with your human nature demonstrates the accomplishment every day. 10 My Son, give this food to your bride, because without it, like

1. "The king of kings"; cf. Daniel 2:37; 1 Timothy 6:15; Apocalypse 17:14; 19:16.

2. "Touched but not seen . . . enters but is everywhere": According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, the substance of bread and wine is changed at Mass into the body and blood of the risen Christ without any change in their appearance. This is the basis of the paradoxes stated here.

3. "This is your most worthy body . . . roasted lamb"; cf. Exodus 12:1–13; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Apocalypse 5. The paschal lamb is of course a symbol of Christ who was offered up on the cross, and is represented in the form of bread and wine in the Mass; the fused image of the roasted meat that combines Birgitta's daily food with the divine image is a striking one.

a child without milk, she grows dry; without it she will fail altogether. But with it and through it, like a sick person given food, she is made new again for every good work. 11 Third, my Son, give her a more and more fervent spirit,⁴ the fire that once enkindled never dies, that renders attractive sights unalluring and makes one hope in the life to come. My Son, give her this spirit!”

12 The Son answered then, saying: “My dear Mother, your words are sweet, but, as you know, someone who seeks the sublime must first make an effort to do what is humble. Thus she needs three things. 13 First, she has to have humility. Through it, sublimity is achieved, and thus she understands that she has the good that she has because of grace and not her own merit. Second, she has to have a proper way of serving that repays the giver of graces. Third, fear, in order not to lose the grace granted. 14 Therefore, in order to obtain and possess the first three gifts you asked for, she must not neglect the subsequent three things mentioned. It does no good to obtain unless one knows how to possess what one obtains. Things once obtained and then lost are a more unbearable torment to the mind than if they had never been gathered and possessed.”

✠ Chapter 43

How Birgitta Struggles to Obey her Spiritual Father, and On the Spiritual Weapons of Combat

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The bride is troubled because she does not patiently and joyfully obey her spiritual father. Christ tells her that if she has made the resolution of perfect obedience, even if her will sometimes puts up a struggle, she still gains merit from her obedience and her past sins are purified. The Lord also proposes here spiritual weapons of combat, namely the virtues, by which the righteous fight and win, while the unrighteous cast them off and are beaten.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “Tell me why you are troubled. Though I know all things, I want to hear it by your telling me so that you may understand my answer.” 2 The bride answered him: “Two things trouble me and cause me to fear. First, that I am so impatient in obeying and not very cheerful about having to be patient. Second, because your friends are experiencing tribulation, and your enemies are prevailing over them.” 3 The Lord replied: “I am present in him to whom you have been given to obey.¹ As a result, at whatever hour or moment you consent to obey him and have the intention of

4. “Amore fervent spirit”; cf. Romans 12:11.

1. “To whom you have been given to obey”: Birgitta was under the material care and spiritual guidance of Master Petrus of Skänninge, who was the head of the household in Rome. He had a reputation for piety and practicality; see further volume I, pp. 13–16.

obeying, it will count toward your reward and the purgation of your sins. 4 As to your second worry about the adversity experienced by my friends, let me answer by way of an example. Where two parties are at battle with each other, and one of them casts off his arms but the other always goes fully armed, isn't the one who has cast off his arms more easily beaten than the one who arms himself each day? 5 Such is the case at hand. The enemies are daily casting off their arms. There are three kinds of arms particularly necessary in battle. The first is the kind that conveys or carries a man, such as a horse or the like. The second is the kind a man defends himself with, such as a sword. The third kind of arms is the armor that protects the body, such as a breastplate or the like. 6 However, the enemies have, first of all, lost the horse of obedience by which they should have made progress in virtue. Obedience is what sustains friendship with God and safeguards the faith pledged to the Lord. They have also cast off the sword of divine fear by which the body is restrained from lust and the devil is kept from approaching the soul. 7 They have also lost their breastplate by which they are protected from javelins. This is divine charity that cheers them in adversity, guards them in prosperity, calms them in temptation, soothes them in sufferings. Their helmet, divine wisdom, lies in the mud. 8 The armor for the neck, divine meditation, had already also fallen off. As the head moves by means of the neck, so by means of divine meditation the mind should be moved to everything concerning God. But divine meditation has already dropped away, so the head hangs low and is shaken by the wind. 9 Their breast-armor is very weak, for their feelings for God have grown so lukewarm that they are scarcely apparent and hardly perceptible. Their foot-armor—contrition along with a purpose of amendment—is neglected and forgotten. They rejoice in their sins and wish to persevere in them as long as they can. 10 Their gauntlets—charitable works—are loathsome and meaningless to them. They brazenly do what they want and feel no shame.

11 My friends, however, arm themselves daily. They ride the horse of obedience like good servants who have given up their own wishes because of the Lord's command. They fight against their vices with the fear of the Lord like good soldiers. They endure with charity all that happens to them, like good warriors, looking to the Lord for help. 12 They arm themselves with divine wisdom and patience against their detractors and accusers, like virtuous recluses who withdraw themselves from the world. 13 They are as agile and quick in divine matters as the very air that moves, as eager toward God as a bride for her bridegroom's embrace, as swift and strong in leaping over worldly attractions as a deer, as busy in action as an ant, as vigilant as a sentry. 14 Such are my friends, and thus do they arm themselves daily with the armor of virtue. Their enemies reject such armor and are therefore easily beaten. So spiritual combat, carried out in patience and divine charity, is much nobler than physical combat and much more loathsome to the devil. 15 The devil struggles not to remove physical goods but to vitiate the virtues and remove patience and steadfastness in virtue. Hence, you should not be troubled if adversity occurs to friends, because it results in their reward."

⚡ Chapter 44

Christ is like a Glass-Maker and a Bee; Christians are Undeserving of God's Love; Heathens should Instead be Favored

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ tells the bride that he is like a glass-maker who, though many glasses get broken, will not cease to fashion new ones, that is, souls, until the angelic chorus in heaven is filled up. And he is like a bee, because he will select new herbs, that is, he will convert the heathen, from whom he will extract nectar, that is, many souls to fill up the beehive of the kingdom of heaven.

1 "I am like a skillful glass-maker who makes many glasses out of mere ashes. Although many get broken, he does not cease to make new ones until the number of glasses is complete. 2 This is what I do: Out of base matter I make a noble creature¹—a human being—and, although many abandon me through their own wrong-doing, I do not cease to fashion new ones, until the angelic chorus and the empty places in heaven will be filled.²

3 Then again, I am like a bee³ that leaves its beehive and flies to the lovely herbage seen in the distance. There it seeks to find the loveliest flower redolent with the sweetest scent, but when it draws near to the herb it finds a dry flower with an altered and extinguished scent with all its sweetness thoroughly extracted. 4 Then it seeks another herb, and finds a somewhat bitter one whose flower is small with not much of a scent, yet it is a sweet scent, pleasing though faint. The bee alights on this herb and extracts nectar from it and carries it back to the beehive, doing this until the hive is as full as the bee wants. 5 I, the creator and Lord of all things, am that bee. I left my beehive when I took on a human form and showed myself in it. I sought out a lovely herb, that is, I took to myself the race of Christians. They were lovely in faith, sweet in charity, fruitful in good behavior. 6 Now, however, they have fallen away from their former state. They are lovely in name but ugly in behavior, fruitful as to the world and the flesh but sterile as to God and the soul, sweet unto themselves but most bitter to me. Therefore, they shall drop away and be extinguished. 7 However, like a bee, I will select for myself another herb that is somewhat bitter. I am referring to the pagans, whose morals are rather debased, but some of them have a small flower with a faintly sweet scent, that is, the will to convert freely and to serve me, if they could only learn how and had someone to help them. 8 Out of this herb I will extract so much nectar that the beehive will be filled up. I wish to come so close to it that the sweetness of the herb will never disappear nor will the bee lose the fruit of its labor. 9 This herb, so bitter and vile, will grow miraculously to the height of loveliness. But that which seems to be lovely will wither and fall into ugliness."

1. "Out of base matter I make a noble creature"; cf. Isaiah 64:8.

2. "Until the angelic chorus . . . will be filled": The idea that human beings were created in order to replace the fallen angels is found in St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, lib. 22, c. 1.

3. "I am like a bee"; cf. chapter 12.

‡ Chapter 45

On People's Blindness and Belief in Fate and Fortune

DATE: 1350, ITALY

Christ tells his mother that people who are blind in the eyes of their minds can in three ways recuperate their sight to be able to see God and love him above all things: by considering temporal justice and goodness, the beauty of creation and God's omnipotence and wisdom. Those who believe that bad or good events come about through fortune or the position of the stars are in error.

1 Mary says: "Blessed be you, my Son, my God and my Lord! Although I cannot be sad,¹ still I feel compassion for humankind for three reasons. 2 First, because they have eyes and are blind. They see their imprisonment and accept it, deride your justice but smile at their own cupidity, take but a moment to fall into everlasting punishment and lose the glory of eternal happiness. 3 Second, I feel compassion for humankind because, since they look on the world with delight and joy, they have no regard for your mercy but seek that which is worth little and throw away that which is worth the most. 4 Third, I feel compassion because, although you are God of all, they have forgotten and neglected to honor you, and your works are dead in their sight. Therefore, my blessed Son, have mercy on them!"

5 The Son answered: "All those in the world endowed with conscience have eyes to see that there is a justice in the world by which sinners are punished. If physical transgressions are punished by mortal men out of justice, how much greater is the justice by which an immortal soul is punished by the immortal God! 6 People can see and understand this if they want, but, because they turn their eyes toward the world and direct their desire toward their own delights, therefore, like an owl seeks the night, they pursue fleeting goods and feel a hatred for the good things that last. 7 Second, they can see and consider this, if they want: If planets and trees and herbal blossoms are beautiful, if all these things of the world are desirable, how much more beautiful and desirable is the Lord and Creator of them all! 8 If the fleeting glory of this time is so longed for and loved, how much more worth longing for is the glory of eternity! 9 They can see this, if they want—for they possess the intelligence to understand it: that something greater and nobler is more worth loving than something smaller and inferior. But they are like an animal with its head always down to the ground, though they were given the ability to lift their heads upward. And so they weave, as it were, a spider's web. 10 They forsake the beauty of angels and take to passing beauty. Just as grass blossoms for a brief time, so too they will wither like grass.² 11 Third, those who are willing can understand in their conscience and carefully observe from created things that there is one God and

1. "I cannot be sad": Having been bodily assumed into heaven Mary enjoys a perfect beatitude that nothing can diminish; cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., qq. 93–94.

2. "Grass blossoms . . . wither like grass"; cf. Isaiah 40:6–7.

Creator of all. 12 If no creator existed, everything would happen in a disordered way, for nothing disorderly occurs except that which human beings themselves put in disorder, even if it may seem so to humans to whom the course of planets and of times is unknown and to whom God's judgments remain hidden due to previous sins. 13 Thus, if there is one God and he is the best, for every good thing comes from him, why do people not honor him above all things and more than any other thing? Their own reason tells them to honor above all things him from whom all things come.

14 Instead man, as you said, has eyes yet sees nothing.³ In fact he himself has shut his eyes through the kind of blasphemy that assigns to the stars the causes of some being wicked and some good. 15 They impute to fate or fortune whatever harmful or difficult event that occurs to them, as if there were some divine cause or power in these things, although neither fate nor fortune exists.⁴ 16 Rather, both the arrangement of human affairs and the arrangement of all other things have been foreseen in God's unchanging state and are carried out in time as reason demands for each and every thing. 17 The reasons for a man being good or wicked do not lie in the stars, although many indications of rationality can indeed be discerned in the stars—in the excellence of their nature and in the orderly and measured ways of their seasons. People have eyes to see these, if they want.”

18 The Mother answered: “Everyone with a good conscience understands well that God is more lovable than anything else, and such a person also puts this into practice. However, not everyone sees this, even if they have healthy pupils, because eyelids cover the eyes of most people. 19 What does this eyelid signify if not the neglect of the life to come that covers the intelligence of many people?

20 Therefore, my dear Son, I pray to you to condescend to reveal your judgment on someone—not to his greater shame and misery but so that the punishment he deserves may be mitigated and your justice known and feared. 21 When a sack is full of something (or a glass is full of milk),⁵ how would anyone know what is inside the sack unless it is sturdily shaken out in the open? 22 So too, although your justice is great, unless you demonstrate it by means of a judgment out in the open, few people will feel any fear of it, since your miraculous works have faded due to the length of time and the great amount of sin.

23 Next, I ask you to condescend to reveal your mercy on someone dear to you for the sake of the spiritual life of others and the comfort of the distressed. Third, I pray that your name may come into honor so that those who love you may be known and the lukewarm may be enkindled.”

3. “Has eyes yet sees nothing”; cf. Mark 4:12; Isaiah 6:9–10.

4. “Neither fate nor fortune exists”: Birgitta's confessor, Mathias of Linköping, in his manual for preachers, criticizes the popular belief in destiny (*fatum*) as an instrument that governs all human behavior (see Piltz, *Magistri Mathiae canonici Lincopensis*, pp. 57–58); Birgitta appears to touch on the same belief in this vision. See further Piltz, “Magister Mathias of Sweden” p. 147; cf. also chapter 76:5.

5. “(or a glass is full of milk)”: this awkward aside further reinforces the idea of a filled vessel which is the central image in this passage; cf. Sw., which expands the image, “kar fult mz miölk älla honagh” [a vessel full of milk or honey].

24 The Son answered: “When many friends come in with a petition, it is right that they should be heard. How much more so if some lady most dear to a lord comes in with a petition! 25 Therefore, let it be done as you wish! My justice will be revealed with such evidence that the person experiencing it will feel it, his deeds will be made public and his limbs will tremble. 26 Second, I will give a particular person as much mercy as he can receive and as much as he needs. His body will be exalted and his soul glorified in order to reveal my mercy.”

27 Then the Mother says: “The house of this religious order⁶ has been turned away from the good and built upon ice, though its original foundation was of the purest gold. A great chasm lies beneath it. 28 When the sun heats it, the ice will melt and the building will fall into the abyss. Therefore, my blessed Son, have mercy on them! It is a horrendous drop and a dreadful precipice with everlasting shadows and prolonged pain.”

✠ Chapter 46

Birgitta is Reassured About her Straightened Circumstances

DATE: 1350S, ROME

The bride prays to the Virgin asking her to obtain for her perfect love for God. The Virgin answers that one must follow the six evangelical counsels contained here in order to obtain it. She explains the beautiful counsel “Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor” as well as “Do not be anxious about tomorrow.” She says that someone struggling in prayer and proper devotional reading can beg for the necessities of life.

1 The bride spoke to the Virgin, saying: “O how delightful is the Lord God! All those who find their greatest delight in him will have no sorrows without consolation. 2 Therefore, dear Mother of God, I ask you to pull out of my heart any love for temporal things so that your Son may be my dearest love until death.”

3 The Mother answered: “If you want to have my Son as your most dearly beloved, you must follow the counsels that he himself gave in the gospel which all lead to this one thing: love of him above everything else. 4 So let me remind you of six evangelical counsels.¹ The first is what he told the rich man: ‘Go and sell all that you have and give to the poor and come, follow me.’ The second is: ‘Do not be anxious about tomorrow.’ 5 The third is: ‘Behold how the sparrows are fed. How much more will the heavenly Father feed men.’ The fourth is: ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are

6. “The house of this religious order”: Lundén, *Den heliga Birgitta*, 3, p. 107, suggests that this revelation might be associated with Birgitta’s visit to the Benedictine house of Farfa in c. 1350; see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 491; see also *Extravagantes* 97.

1. “Six evangelical counsels”: The six counsels quoted are from Matthew 19:21, 6:24, 6:26, 22:21, 6:33, and 11:28.

God's.' The fifth is: 'Seek first the kingdom of heaven.' The sixth is: 'Come to me, all you who thirst, and I will refresh you.'

6 That man appears to sell what he has who does not seek more than moderate nourishment for his individual body and who distributes all the rest to the poor for the glory of God, not of the world, and with the intention of gaining God's friendship. This was apparent in the life of St. Gregory and many other kings and princes.² 7 They were greatly loved by God, and, though they were wealthy, they gave their wealth to others, like those who gave up everything for God and then had to beg from others. 8 The former, who only possessed wealth for the glory of God, would gladly have gone without it, if it had been God's will. The latter took upon themselves the poverty they desired for the glory of God. 9 So everyone who has justly acquired possessions or benefices is allowed to receive compensation for his or her own sustenance as well as that of his or her household for the glory of God. They should give whatever is left over to the needy friends of God.

10 Next, do not be anxious about tomorrow. Even if you have nothing but your bare body, put your hope in God and he, who even keeps the sparrows fed, will take care of you, whom he has redeemed with his own blood."

11 I answered her:³ "Dearest Lady, you are beautiful, rich, and virtuous—beautiful because you never sinned, rich because you are God's dearest friend, virtuous because you are most perfect in every good work. Hear me, my Lady, who am full of sins and poor in virtue. 12 Today we have our food and needs supplied, but tomorrow we will be needy and completely out of everything! How can we not get anxious when we have nothing? Though the soul receives consolation from God, still the ass that is our body⁴ craves its food." 13 The Virgin answered: "If you have anything you don't need and can do without it, then sell or pawn it and you can continue living without anxiety." I answered: "We have clothes that we use night and day, and a few utensils for our table. The priest has his books and we have a chalice and ornaments for Mass." 14 The Virgin answered: "The priest should not give up his books nor the rest of you the Mass, nor should Mass be celebrated with anything but proper ornaments. Your body mustn't go naked but clothed for the sake of modesty and to avoid getting cold. So you need all such things." 15 I answered: "Should I borrow money on my credit for a period of time?" The Mother replied: "If you are sure you can pay it back on time, then take a loan. Otherwise, don't. It is better for you to run out of bread for a day than to put your credit in doubt." 16 I said: "Should I start to work to earn a living?" The Mother answered: "What keeps you busy now and every day?" 17 I answered: "I am studying grammar, and I pray, and I write."⁵ 18 The Mother said: "It is not fitting to give this up for

2. "St. Gregory and many other kings and princes": refers to the fact that Gregory the Great came from a senatorial family and gave away his great wealth when in his youth he became a monk.

3. "I answered her": from this point, Birgitta breaks into a personal dialogue with the Virgin, addressing the subject of the straightened circumstances of her household in Rome.

4. "The ass that is our body": an echo of St. Francis, who called the body "brother ass."

5. "I am studying grammar, and I pray, and I write"; cf. Sw. "jak nimbir latina och jak läs ok iak scrifvir" [I am learning Latin and I read and I write]. See also chapter 105. On Birgitta's knowledge of Latin, see volume 1, p. 12.

manual labor.” I said: “What will we have to eat tomorrow?” The Mother answered: “Ask in the name of Jesus Christ, if there is anything you don’t have.”

✠ Chapter 47

Birgitta and God’s Friends must Proclaim God’s Word

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

God’s Mother says that when a person preaches the words of God and is criticized and put to shame because of it but bears it patiently, such a soul takes on a lovely color. A person may tire out his body for the glory of God, but his soul will possess divine delight and be adorned. The soul of a person who is disparaged and does not hate his disparager is freely adorned with precious garments for God.

God’s friends should be anxious to liberate the souls of sinners lying dangerously crushed beneath a mountain of sin.

1 The Mother says: “Do not worry when you are going to speak God’s word to people who do not wish to hear. Those who flush with color when they speak God’s word and endure it patiently will have their souls colored with a lovely red. The souls of those who tire out their bodies for the glory of God will find delight and be beautified because of it. 2 The souls of those who are disparaged but wish no evil upon the disparager are adorned in such lovely garments that the bridegroom, one God in three persons, longs to keep those souls for the eternal love of his divinity.

3 So God’s friends should be anxious to convert people who love pride and greed more than God, for they are trapped, as it were, beneath a mountain, and efforts must be made to drag them out alive. 4 Someone who sees his brothers trapped by a rockslide¹ sometimes has to strike hard to discharge the boulders, at other times has to break through gently so as not to crush the person trapped beneath even more, and at still other times has to strike through more forcibly to remove the boulders quickly from the person trapped beneath. He gives no thought to his own toils as long as the life of the trapped person can be rescued from danger. That is how God’s friends should work to save souls.

5 Just as there were few people with true faith when my Son ascended to heaven, so too there are few now who fulfill the commandment: ‘You shall love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself.’² 6 So God’s friends, who previously went to the pagans, go now to Christians, for, just as it was impossible for those who had heard of the faith but did not keep it to reach heaven, so too it is impossible now for those Christians to reach heaven who die without the love of God.”

1. “Rockslide” renders “sub casu montis” [beneath the fall of mountain]; cf. Sw. “vndir thungo bärgher” [beneath a heavy mountain]. It may be that Birgitta is thinking of a collapsed mineshaft.

2. “You shall love . . . as yourself”; cf. Luke 10:27.

⚡ Chapter 48

People's Different Ways of Responding to God's Word

DATE: UNDATED

Christ compares himself to a medical apothecary who brews sweet and healthful potions. He is prepared to give the potion of divine sweetness to all those who desire it in charity. Those who are healthy in spirit taste the potion and like it. Those who are spiritually weak, however, do not like to taste the Spirit of God.

1 Christ speaks to the bride: "I am like an honest medical apothecary to whom all those who love him turn because they know that his potion is sweet. Those who drink of his sweet potion, believing it to be healthy, visit the apothecary's shop continuously. However, those who feel stabs of pain from drinking the potion avoid him. 2 Such is the case of the spiritual potion which is the Holy Spirit.¹ God's Spirit is sweet to the taste, brings strength to the whole body and courses through the heart to instill cheerfulness in the face of trials. I, God, am that medical apothecary. I am prepared to give my potion to all those who desire it in charity. 3 That person is healthy and fit to receive my potion who does not have an intention of remaining in the state of sin but, once having tasted my potion, is delighted to drink it continuously. The person who has an intention of dying in the state of sin finds no delight in having the Spirit of God."

⚡ Chapter 49

On the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin

DATE: UNDATED

God's Mother makes known with certainty that she was conceived by her parents out of obedience to a divine commandment with no stain of original sin.

1 God's Mother says: "If anyone wishing to fast feels the desire to eat but has the intention of resisting that desire, but, however, is commanded to eat by a superior to whom obedience is owed, and does so out of obedience against his or her will, that act of eating deserves a greater reward than the act of fasting. 2 The union of my parents that resulted in my conception took place in similar fashion. Consequently, the truth is that I was conceived without original sin and not in a state of sin.¹ 3 Just as my Son and I never sinned, so too there was never a more virtuous matrimony than the one that brought me into the world."

1. "The spiritual potion which is the Holy Spirit"; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4.

1. "The union . . . not in a state of sin": Birgitta alludes to St. Augustine's opinion that lust transmits original sin to the child. This opinion, though common in the Middle Ages, was rejected by St. Thomas Aquinas (cf. *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 82, a. 4, ad 3).

⚡ Chapter 50

On a Good Pagan's Desire for God and Her Conversion

DATE: UNDATED

The Virgin's words to the bride about how nothing pleases God so much as being a person's greatest love. She gives the example of a pagan woman who obtained grace thanks to the great love she had for her Creator.

1 The Mother speaks to the bride, saying: "Nothing pleases God so much as when a person loves him above all things. I will give you the example of a pagan woman who knew nothing of the Catholic faith but thought to herself as follows: 2 'I know of what stuff I am made and what brought me into my mother's womb. I believe, too, that it is impossible for me to have a body with its joints and organs and senses, unless somebody gave it to me. 3 Therefore, there must be a Creator who created me as a proper human being and did not want to make me into some deformed creature like a worm or snake. 4 I think that, though I have a number of men, if they all called to me, I would rather run to my Creator's calling than in the direction of all their voices. 5 I also have a number of sons and daughters. However, if I saw them with food in their hands and knew my Creator was hungry, I would certainly take the food out of my children's hands and happily present it to my Creator. 6 I also have a number of possessions that I can dispose of as I will. But if I knew the will of my Creator, I would gladly give up my own will and dispose of my possessions in his honor.'

7 Now see, my daughter, what God has done for this pagan woman. He sent her one of his friends who instructed her in the holy faith, and God himself visited her heart, as you can tell from the woman's words. 8 When that man of God in his preaching told her that there is one God without beginning or end, the Creator of all things, she said: 'It is completely credible that he who created me and all other things should not have another creator over him. It is completely plausible for his life to be eternal, since he was able to give life to me.' 9 When the woman heard that the Creator had received a human nature from the Virgin, and that the Creator preached with the very words of his own lips, she said: 10 'One must believe in God in order to act virtuously in every way. But, friend of God, tell me what words came from the lips of the Creator? I want to give up my own will and obey him according to the words of his lips.' 11 Then that friend of God preached about the passion and the cross of God and about his resurrection. With tears in her eyes, the woman said: 'Blessed be God who has with such patience shown us on earth the love he has for us in heaven. 12 Therefore, if I loved him before because he created me, I am now more obliged to love him because he has revealed to me the true path and has redeemed me with his blood.¹ I must serve him with all the strength of my bodily limbs, because he redeemed me with all his bodily limbs. 13 I stand in his debt and should set aside every desire I once felt for

1. "Redeemed with his blood"; cf. Apocalypse 5:9.

possessions and children and parents and only desire my Creator in his glory and in the life that never ends.”

14 God’s Mother spoke again: “See, my daughter, how that woman received remuneration many times over for her love. Thus, too, each day reward is given to each person according as he or she loves God while living in the world.”

✠ Chapter 51

A Man is Advised how to Resist Worldly Pride and Success

DATE: UNDATED

Useful spiritual instruction about how a person should react to three enemies of the soul, namely, the devil tempting him to pride, greed, and so forth; friends and household members arguing that he should not be overly just and humble, and so forth; and rivals seeking to ridicule and harm him and cut his life short.

1 “That man whom you know has three enemies. The first is close to him wherever he is, whether asleep or awake, though he cannot see him. The second belongs to his household and is close to him when he is awake, though he does not hear him. The third does not belong to his household nor even knows him but still hates him. 2 The first enemy is the devil who tempts him with pride and greed and many other ideas. Against this enemy he should take hold of a whip and chastise him in the following way: ‘Devil, you have neither created nor given anything good. Why should I want your pride? You seek my destruction, but Christ calls me to life. It is only right that I should flee your will and follow the will and commandments of God.’ 4 Anyone sleeping or waking with such a disposition lifts thus a whip against the devil and makes him run away in confusion.

5 The second enemy symbolizes the friends and servants of his household who tell him: ‘You will come to harm if you are too just. From time to time you could think more of your own security and not be so very honest.’¹ 6 Besides, if you are too humble, you will be looked down upon. So lay hold of wealth and make us wealthy along with you. Aim at worldly honors and we will benefit with you.’ 7 This enemy makes himself heard every day, and so against him a thick wall must be built so he cannot be heard. This wall represents the good intention of preferring poverty on account of justice to wealth combined with injustice, ridicule on account of humility to honor on account of pride. 8 He should react to the counsels of this enemy with these words: ‘If I act contrary to God, I ask you to forewarn and admonish me, and then your words will make me rejoice rather than fill me with sorrow.’ 9 Let a wall like that stand between him and his enemies in order that their words will merely be like a gust of wind blowing over the wall but not touching his heart and moving it away from the love of God.²

1. “And not be so very honest” renders “et dissimulare multa,” literally “dissimulate many things.”

2. “Moving it away from the love of God”; cf. Romans 8:35.

10 The third enemy is the one whom he does not know. These enemies are the ones who seek to ridicule and harm him and cut his life short in order that they themselves may obtain worldly honor and success. 11 Against this enemy let him lay hold of a strong rope,³ that is, love for God and neighbor, by means of which he will gladly suffer what God wants him to suffer, wishing no harm to anyone. 12 In this way, the scandals his enemies plan for him will lead to his honor, the harm they plan will lead to his advantage, shortness of life will turn into longevity, and all this will so tie his enemy down that he will be unable to hurt him.”

✠ Chapter 52

The Punishments of Three Swedish Noblewomen, Representing Three Generations, are Described

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

The bride feels astonishment and, in the presence of Christ, considers herself unworthy of the grace given her in spiritual rapture of seeing and hearing what happens in heaven and purgatory and hell. This is given a beautiful explanation by Christ and his Mother at the beginning and end of the chapter. She is given the example of three women—one of whom she sees in hell and another in terrible torment in purgatory—who as mothers offered their daughters the ideas and examples of a strange and proud way of living, and their daughters imitated their examples and were sentenced to horrible condemnations.

1 “Praise to you my God,” says the bride, “for all that you have created, and glory to you for all your power! May you receive the service of all creatures in return for your charity! 2 I, an unworthy woman, a sinner ever since my youth, I thank you, my God, for you deny your grace to no sinner asking for it. No, you show mercy to everyone¹ and pardon them. 3 My most sweet God, it is astonishing how you treat me! When it pleases you, you enrapture my body with a spiritual rapture and then stimulate my soul to see and hear things of the spirit. 4 O my God, how sweet your words are² to my soul! My soul swallows them like the sweetest food, and they enter my heart with joy. When I hear your words, I feel both full and hungry. 5 I feel full, because nothing delights me like your words. But I feel hungry, because I get an even more fervent craving to hear them. Holy God, help me always to do your will!”

3. “Strong rope” renders “fortem funem”; cf. Sw. “lankt rep” [long rope]; the exact meaning of this image is unclear, though in the *Revelationes* in general, a rope is something that binds and holds together, both in a positive and a negative sense. The closest parallel to the present image is probably Book IV 88.9, where faith and hope are likened to two ropes.

1. “You show mercy to everyone”; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 11:23.

2. “How sweet your words are”; cf. Psalm 118 (119):103

6 Christ replied: "I am without beginning or end. All things that exist have been created through my power. All things are guided by my wisdom, governed by my justice and ordained by my divine love. Hence nothing is impossible for me. 7 Exceedingly hard is the heart that neither loves nor fears me, though I am the governor and judge of the universe. People prefer doing the devil's will, though the devil carries out my execution orders and hands people over to my judgment.³ Throughout the world the devil offers poison to drink in abundance, though souls cannot live on poison and sink down instead to the death of hell. 8 This is the poison of sin, which tastes sweet but is bitter for the soul, and this poison is sprinkled on many people each day by the hand of the devil. Who has ever heard of such a thing—that life is offered to everyone but instead they choose death? 9 Nevertheless, I, the God of everyone, am forbearing and feel compassion on the wretchedness of them all. I act like a king who sends wine to his servants, saying: 'Have many people drink of it, because it is healthy. It gives health to the sick, joy to the saddened, a brave heart to the sound and sober.' 10 However, wine is only sent out in suitable bottles. So I sent my words, which may be compared to wine, to my servants through you, who are my bottle,⁴ which I will fill up and pour out of as I please. 11 My Holy Spirit will teach you which way to go and what to say. So say what I tell you to say with joy and daring, because there will be none who will prevail against you."

12 Then I answered: "O King of all glory and inspirer of all wisdom and giver of all power, why do you appoint me to such a mission when I have wasted my body in sins? I am like a foolish ass,⁵ lacking in all virtue. I have in every way gone astray and have not made reparation for anything." 13 The Spirit answered: "Who is surprised if some lord takes coins or metal given to him and has it fashioned into crowns or rings or goblets for his use? So it is not to be wondered at when I take the hearts my friends offer me and make them carry out my will. 14 And, since one man has more of an intellect and another less, I make use of each person's conscience in the way it can contribute to my glory, for the heart of the righteous is my coinage. So stand firm and be ready to carry out my will."⁶

15 Then God's Mother spoke to me and said: "What do the proud women say in the kingdom where you live?" I answered her: "I am one of them, so I am ashamed to speak⁷ in your presence." The Mother said: "Though I know it better than you, still I want to hear you say it." 16 I answered: "When true humility is preached to us, we say that our parents made us heirs of great properties and fine ways. Why should we not follow their example? 17 Our mother sat among the leading ladies, nobly dressed with many servants, and brought

3. "Carries out . . . to my judgment" renders "meus lictor et proditor"; cf. Sw. "min stupogrefwe ok mǎn-niskiona förrådhare [my executioner and betrayer of humankind]. Book IV 72 has "qui lictor meus est et ipsorum hominum proditor" which was translated "my own executioner and the betrayer of humankind." Cf. also Book V int. 15. 45: "Dyabolus est quasi lictor et probator iustorum," translated as "The devil is like an executioner and a tester of the righteous." The sense above must be that the devil carries out Christ's execution orders and hands people over to his judgment.

4. "Who are my bottle"; cf. Acts 9:15.

5. "Like a foolish ass"; cf. Psalm 31 (32):9.

6. The opening section of this revelation, up to this point, is similar to Book IV 77.

7. "I am ashamed to speak"; cf. Ecclesiasticus 4:24.

us up in privilege. 18 Why should I not make my daughter heir of what I have learned—to behave as befits nobility, to live in physical comfort and to die in a privileged and worldly rank?”

19 God’s Mother answered: “Every woman who puts these words into practice walks the true path to hell. So that answer is a hard one indeed. 20 What good will it do to speak like that when the Creator of the universe suffered his body to remain on earth in all humility from his birth up to his death? The clothes of pride never covered him. 21 Such women surely do not consider how his face looked as he hung alive and then dead on the cross, bloodied and pale from pain. They do not care about the insults he heard or the lowly death he chose. 22 They do not recall the place where he gave up his spirit, for, where thieves and robbers received their punishments, that is where my Son was punished. And I, to him the dearest of creatures, who am full of humility, I was present there. 23 Therefore, these women who act in such an arrogant and pompous way and give others the excuse of imitating their example, they are like a sprinkler with flaming liquid that burns and stains everyone it besprinkles.⁸ Similarly, proud people give an example of pride and thus seriously burn souls through their bad example. 24 So I will now do what a good mother does who, in order to frighten her children and even her servants, shows them the rod. When her children see it, they are afraid to offend their mother and they thank her for warning instead of whipping them. 25 The servants, however, are afraid to be whipped if they do wrong. Thus, out of fear of their mother, the children act better than before and the servants act less badly. 26 Therefore, because I am the Mother of Mercy, I will show you the rewards of sin in order both that God’s friends may become more fervent out of love for God and that sinners may know their danger and at least flee sin out of fear. 27 Thus I show mercy to both good and bad: to the good, so that they may obtain a greater reward in heaven; to the bad as well, so they may incur less punishment. No one is so great a sinner that I am not ready to run to his aid or my Son to give him his grace, provided he asks for mercy with charity.”

28 There appeared then three women: mother, daughter, and granddaughter. Both the mother and granddaughter appeared to be dead but the daughter alive. The dead mother seemed to be creeping out of a dark and muddy lake. 29 Her heart had been torn away, her lips cut off; her chin was trembling, and her long white teeth were rattling together. Her nose was chewed off and her eyes dug out, dangling on their tendons against her cheeks. 30 Her forehead had sunk in, and a dark and gaping chasm was to be seen in its place. There was no skull in her head—her brain was like bubbling lead, streaming out like tar. 31 Her neck was revolving like wood being turned in a lathe⁹ with a sharp metal tool cutting against it without rest. 32 Her open chest was full of worms, long ones and short ones, twisting hither and thither, one on

8. “Sprinkler . . . besprinkles” renders “aspersorio . . . aspersit”; cf. Sw. “stänkelse . . . stänke”; the allusion seems to be to a holy-water sprinkler or aspergillum.

9. “In a lathe” renders “in torno seu in runcina” [in a lathe or in a plane], reflecting some uncertainty about the image; cf. Sw. “j swarwo stole” [in a lathe].

top of the other. Her arms were like the handles of a grindstone.¹⁰ 33 Her hands were long spikes tied into knots. The vertebrae of her spine were all loose, sliding up and down without stop. 34 A big long snake had worked its way through her lower to her upper intestines. With its head joined to its tail in a circle it wound itself continuously round about her entrails like a wheel. 35 Her legs, both thighs and shins, looked like a couple of thorny sticks covered with the sharpest barbs; her feet were like those of toads.

36 Then this dead mother addressed her living daughter in these words: “Hear me, my tormented and poisonous daughter! Alas, that I was ever your mother! I am the one who placed you in a nest of pride that kept you warm until you had grown and come of age. 37 You liked it so much that you wasted your youth in it. So let me tell you that each time you turn your eyes about with looks of pride, as I taught you, you throw boiling poison with an unbearable sting in my eyes. 38 Each time you speak proud words, as you learned from me, I have to swallow the most bitter of drinks. 39 Each time your ears are filled with the wind of pride, which the gales of arrogance stir up, that is, each time you hear compliments on your physical appearance and long for worldly privileges, as you learned from me, a burning wind blows terrible sounds into my ears. 40 Woe to me who am poor and miserable—I am poor, because I have and feel nothing good—I am miserable because I abound in every evil!

41 But you, daughter, you are like the tail of a cow that walks through muck and dung. As often as she moves her tail, she stains and splatters those who approach her. Daughter, you are like a cow because you have no godly wisdom but walk according to your bodily needs and impulses. 42 Each time you imitate the habitual acts of sin that I taught you, my pain is renewed and burns that much worse. So then, my daughter, why do you take pride in your noble birth? Is there any honor and privilege for you in having had the filth of my entrails as your cushion? 43 You came out of my shameful member, and the impurity of my blood clothed you at your birth. My belly where you lay once is now being all chewed out by worms.

44 But why should I be complaining about you, daughter, when I ought to complain more about myself? There are three things that heavily afflict my heart. The first is that, having been created by God for the joy of heaven, I abused my conscience and prepared myself for the sorrows of hell. 45 The second is that God created me as fair as an angel, but I made myself so ugly that I more resemble a devil than an angel of God. The third is that I made a very bad exchange in the time given me. I accepted a small, transitory good—the pleasure of sin—and am now experiencing unlimited evil—the pain of hell.”

47 Then she said to the bride: “You see me but only through bodily images. If you saw me in my real shape, you would die of fright, because my very members are demons. 48 It is true as Scripture says that the righteous are the members of God.¹¹ Likewise sinners are the devil’s members. I know and feel now

10. “The handles of a grindstone” renders “manubriis lapidis fabrilis”; cf. Sw. “slipostens k ppom” [the sticks of a grindstone], because they are just short and stubby and stick straight out on either side of the body.

11. “The members of God”; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:15; Romans 6:13.

that demons are affixed to my soul, because the intentions of my heart shaped me into such a state of ugliness. 49 But listen on! It appears to you as if my feet are like those of a toad. This is because I stood steadfast in sin, so now demons stand steadfast in me, gnawing at me but never getting their fill. 50 My shins and thighs are like thorny sticks because I set my will on carnal delight and my own lust. 51 Each vertebra of my spine sits loose and slides up and down against the others because sometimes the delight of my mind arose from worldly comfort, sometimes it subsided through excessive sadness or anger due to worldly setbacks. 52 As the spine moves according to the movement of the head, so I should have stayed or moved according to God's will, who is the head of all good people. But I did not, so I suffer justly what you see me suffer. 53 A snake has worked its way up through my lower to upper intestines and has stopped in a circle and winds around me like a wheel. This is because my lust and sensuality were inordinate: my will was set on owning everything and spending it in large amounts and unwisely. 54 So now the snake winds around my entrails, gnawing at me without rest and without mercy. My chest is open and is being chewed on by worms as a display of God's true justice. I loved rot more than I loved God. The affections of my heart were set on transient things. 55 And so, as longer worms are born from smaller ones, so my soul is full of demons in return for the rot that I loved. My arms look like handles. 56 This is because there were, one might say, two arms to my desire. I yearned for a long life to live long in sin. I also yearned and desired for God's judgment to be milder than Scripture stated. 57 Nonetheless, my conscience informed me well enough that my time was short and God's judgment unendurable. Still my desire to sin insinuated to me that my life would be long and that God's judgment would be endurable. 58 Such insinuations subverted my conscience, and so my will and my reason followed my lust and sensuality. This is why the devil now moves about in my soul against my will, and my conscience knows and understands that God's judgment is just. 59 My hands are like long spikes because God's commandments did not interest me. So my hands are now a burden to me and are of no use. 60 My neck is twisted like wood turned in a lathe against sharp metal because God's words were not sweet for my heart to swallow but all too bitter, because they reproved the lust and sensuality of my heart. 61 So now a sharp metal tool is held against my throat. My lips are cut off, because they were quick to speak proud and lascivious words but slow and lazy to speak the words of God. 62 My chin appears to be trembling and my teeth rattling because I had every intention of feeding my body in order to look beautiful, attractive, healthy, and fit for every bodily pleasure. 63 This is why my chin trembles without rest and my teeth rattle, because my teeth's work of consuming was useless in benefitting my soul. 64 My nose is cut off, because just as it is done unto their shame to those among you who offend in a similar way, so too my shame has been branded on me forever. 65 It is right that my eyes dangle on their sinews against my cheeks, because, as my eyes used to delight in the fairness of my cheeks in a show of pride, now they are dug out from all my weeping and dangle against my cheeks in shame. 66 It is right that my forehead is sunken and replaced by a gaping darkness, because a veil of pride

covered my forehead, and I wanted to be seen and to glory in my beauty, and so now my forehead is dark and ugly. 67 It is befitting that my brain bubbles like lead and streams away like tar, because, as lead is soft and can be bent as the user wants, my conscience, which is seated in my brain, was bent according to the wishes of my heart, though I knew my duties well enough. 68 The sufferings of God's Son were never a fixed object in my heart but streamed away like that which I knew well but for which I had no regard. 69 I thought no more of the blood that streamed from the limbs of God's Son than I thought of tar, and I avoided the words of God's love like tar so as not to be troubled or turned away from the pleasures of the body. 70 Sometimes I listened to God's words out of human motives, but they left my heart as easily as they went in. That is why my brain streams out now like hot tar hotly bubbling. 71 My ears are stopped with hard stones, because proud words entered them delightfully and spread themselves deliciously in my heart, for God's love was shut off from my heart. 72 Because I did whatever I did for the sake of pride and of the world, joyful words are now shut off from my ears.

73 But you may ask if I did anything meritorious. I answer you: I am like a money-changer who chips a coin and gives it back to the master. Likewise I used to fast and give alms and do other things only out of fear of hell and in order to escape physical difficulties. 74 But since the love of God was chipped off in my actions, such deeds were of no avail to me in obtaining heaven. Yet they were not without their reward. 75 Again you may ask if I am as ugly on the inside in my will as I am on the outside. I answer: 76 My will is like a man-killer, like a mother-killer who happily kills her own parent.¹² In the same way I wish the worst evil to God my Creator who was most kind and good to me."

77 Then the dead granddaughter of this dead grandmother addressed her living mother in these words: "Listen, scorpion, mother mine! Alas for me, whom you wickedly deceived! You put on a happy face for me but stabbed me gravely in the heart. 78 You gave me three pieces of advice from your own lips. I learned three things from your deeds. You showed me three paths as you made your way ahead.

Your first advice was to love carnally for the sake of gaining carnal friendship. 79 The second was to spend temporal goods wastefully for the sake of worldly honors. The third was to take it easy for the sake of physical comfort. These three pieces of advice cost me dearly. 80 Because I loved carnally, now I have gained spiritual shame and envy. Because I spent temporal goods wastefully, I was deprived of the grace of God's gifts in my lifetime and have obtained shame after my death. 81 Because I enjoyed bodily rest in my lifetime, my soul's inconsolable restlessness began at the moment of my death.

82 I learned three things from your deeds. I learned how to do some good deeds but without giving up the sin that delighted me, like someone who mixes honey with poison and offers it to the judge who in turn pours it out in anger over the one who offered him it. This is what I am now experiencing in great anguish and tribulation. 83 Second, I learned a marvelous way of dressing

12. "Like a mother-killer who happily kills her own parent"; cf. the note to chapter 9.17.

which was to cover my eyes with a lace veil, have sandals on my feet, gloves on my hands and leave my neck uncovered. 84 The lace shading my eyes stands for my physical beauty which so shaded my spiritual eyes that I never thought of the beauty of my soul. 85 The sandals protecting my feet underneath but not above stand for the holy faith of the church which I faithfully kept. 86 But no fruitful works followed on my faith, for, just as sandals point the feet forward, so my conscience firm in the faith pointed my soul forward, but, because good works did not follow, my soul remained almost naked. 87 The gloves on my hands stand for the empty hope I held. I thrust my works—symbolized by the hands—into the large and thick mercy of God—denoted by the gloves—but in such a way as not to feel or notice God’s justice when I touched it. Thus, I became reckless in sinning. 88 When death approached, the lace veil fell from my eyes on to the ground, that is, on to my body, and then my soul saw herself and realized that she was naked with few good works but many sins. 89 For my shame I could not dwell in the palace of the eternal king, because I was shamefully dressed. Then the demons dragged me to my harsh punishment where I am mocked with shame. 90 The third thing I learned from you, mother, was to dress the servant in the clothes of the master, to honor him as master set on the seat of the master, but to serve the master the miserable things left by the servant. 91 This master is God’s charity. The servant is the will to sin. Thus, the servant, that is, the pleasure and intention of sinning, was placed in my heart where divine charity should have ruled. 92 I dressed the servant up by making use of every created and temporal possession as I wished. But the left-overs and the garbage and the throw-aways I gave to God—not out of charity but out of fear. 93 My heart so enjoyed the success and pleasure of my will that the love of God was shut off from me—the good master was shut off and the wicked servant shut in. See, mother, these three things I learned from you!

94 You also showed me three paths as you made your way. The first was brilliant. When I entered it, I was blinded by its splendor. The second was narrow and slippery as ice. For each step ahead I took on it, I slipped one pace back. 95 The third path was extremely long. As I made my way ahead on it, there came after me a rushing torrent that carried me off beneath the mountain into a deep pit. 96 The first path denotes the progress of my pride. It was extremely bright because ostentation, which comes from pride, shone so much in my eyes that I did not think of how it ends, and so I became blind. 97 The second path denotes disobedience. The time for disobedience in this life is not long, since after death a person is forced to obey. 98 However, to me it was long, because each time I took one step ahead through the humility of confession, I slipped one pace back, because I wanted the confessed sin to be absolved but did not want to reject the sin. 99 So I did not step steadily in obedience but slipped back into sin, like someone slipping on the ice, because my will was cold and did not want to repent of the things that delighted me. 100 Thus, each time I took a step ahead by confessing my sins, I slipped one pace back, because I wanted to repeat the sinful pleasures I confessed. 101 The third path was hoping for an impossibility: I hoped to be able to commit sin but without receiving a lengthy punishment, to be able to live a long life and not hasten the hour of

death. 102 As I made my way ahead on this path, there came after me the rushing torrent of death which, from one year to the next, seized me and knocked me off my feet with the pain of illness. 103 Those feet mean that when illness came on, I could hardly take care of my body and even less attend to the health of my soul. 104 I thus fell into a deep pit when my heart, steep in pride and hardened in sin, burst, and my soul fell deep into the pitfall which is the punishment for sin. 105 And so this path was extremely long, because once the life of the flesh was finished, the long punishment soon began. Alas for me, then, mother mine, because all that I learned from you with pleasure, I now wash away with weeping.”

106 Then the dead daughter spoke to the bride who was watching all this and said: “Listen to me, you who are watching me! My head and face appear to you like a thundercloud flashing within and without, and my neck and breast seem to be caught in a harsh pressing device with long barbs. 107 My arms and feet resemble long snakes, and my stomach is being hit with hard hammers. My thighs and shins are like running water that has frozen in icicles hanging down from the roof-gutters. But there is still one more interior punishment worse for me than all of these. 108 It feels as a person would if all her breathing passages were stopped up and her breath were pressing through all her veins to the heart which began to burst due to the violent pressure of her trapped breath. This is how wretched I feel within me because of the proud air that was so dear to me. 109 Nevertheless, I am on the path to mercy, because I made a better confession during my grave illness, as well as I could, though still motivated by fear. When the time for my death drew near, the consideration of the sufferings of my God came into my mind, and I thought how much worse and more bitter his sufferings were than my own, which I deserved to suffer because of my offenses. 110 And from this consideration I gained the grace of tears, sighing that God’s love for me was so great and mine for him so small. Then I looked with the eyes of my conscience and said: 111 ‘Lord, I believe you are my God. Son of the Virgin, have mercy on me for the sake of your bitter passion! I would willingly reform my life now, if I only had the time.’ 112 And at that moment a spark of charity arose in my heart which made the passion of Christ seem more bitter to me than my own death. My heart burst then and there, and my soul came into the hands of the demons to be delivered to God’s judgment. 113 She fell into their hands because she was too unworthy for the fair angels to approach such an ugly soul. During the trial before God, when the demons clamored for my soul to be sentenced to hell, the judge replied: 114 ‘I see a spark of charity in her heart that should not be extinguished but live on in my presence. Therefore, I sentence her soul to purgatory until the time when, having been worthily purified, she deserves to obtain pardon.’

115 Again you may ask if I share in the good suffrages that are offered on my behalf. I will answer you by way of a simile. 116 If you saw two scales, in one of which there was lead pulling downward by nature and in the other some light material tending upward, then the more one put heavier pieces in the emptier scale, the quicker the other scale with the heavy and weighty lead would go up. My case is similar. 117 The deeper I fell in sin, the lower I

descended in the scale of punishment. 118 And so whatever is offered to the glory of God for my sake lifts me up out of punishment. This applies especially to the prayers and good deeds offered by upright people and the friends of God as well as to the benefices and charitable works that are offered out of justly acquired goods.¹³ 119 Such things bring me closer to God each day.”

120 Finally God’s Mother said to the bride: “You are wondering how it is that I, the queen of heaven, and you who are living on earth, and that soul in purgatory and that other one in hell can all speak together simultaneously. 121 I will explain it to you. It is true that I never leave heaven, since I will never be removed from the vision of God. Nor will the soul in hell ever be removed from her punishments. And the other soul will not be removed from purgatory until she has been purified, nor will you come to us before your removal from the life of the body. 122 Yet your soul along with your understanding is by the power of God’s Spirit lifted up in order to hear God’s words in heaven. You are also allowed to learn of some of the punishments in hell and purgatory as a warning to the wicked and for the consolation and edification of the good. 123 Know, however, that your body and soul remain united on earth, although the Holy Spirit in heaven grants you the understanding needed to understand his will.”

EXPLANATION

124 This was a description of three women, the third of whom entered a monastery and spent the remainder of her life in great perfection.

✠ Chapter 53

On the Need for Humility Among Those in Authority

DATE: UNDATED

Christ reproves prelates who take pride in their prelacy and says that they should display humility with respect to those under their authority. They should be virtuous in their conduct and habits and serve the interests of justice and fairness. By taking the measure of themselves so as not to become haughty, they should, by getting to know their own defects, learn to have compassion on the defects of their subordinates, following the example of Christ who chose to do and to suffer before he began to teach and who preferred to serve rather than be served. They should diligently correct their subordinates so as not to be condemned after the example of Eli the priest.

13. “Offered out of justly acquired goods”: Birgitta frequently insists that money given to the church or to charity must be honestly acquired.

1 The Son says to the bride: “It is a great thing—no, it is a monstrous thing that, while the king of glory humbled himself, any mere man, subject to account for his conduct, should become haughty with pride. 2 When a person is put in charge of others, he should not become proud because he is a prelate or superior.¹ Rather, he should be fearful, since all men are of the same nature and all authority comes from God. 3 If a good man is put in charge, it is God’s doing for the sake of the man’s own salvation and that of others. If he is a bad, God allows it to happen as a corrective trial for his subordinates and as greater grounds for his condemnation. 4 This is nothing surprising. It is right and just that members of the human race, having scorned to be subject to their Creator, should experience the rule of inferior people of the same nature as they. Therefore, whenever anyone wishes or is forced to be placed in authority over others, he should show himself to his subordinates to be the kind of person who is attractive in character and conduct and serves the interests of justice and fairness. 5 Given the natural equality of humankind, all those placed in authority over others should humble themselves and take their own measure so as not to become haughty but instead learn in themselves to have compassion on others. They should be fearful lest they be measured by the measure with which they measure out.² 6 I, God and man, conditioned myself in such a way that, although I had the knowledge of human weakness, I also got to know it by experience through suffering pain and death on the cross. Thus, in order to give an example to others, I began to do before I began to teach,³ and I chose to serve rather than to be served.⁴ 7 Thus, too, my mother, although she was the queen of apostles, valued humility before all else and became as one of the least little ones. This is why she ascended to the highest happiness. 8 Therefore, the prelate should observe and learn the weaknesses of his subordinates by means of his own defects. In this way, he will not give others any excuse or matter for sinning through his words or example or the abuse of his power. Indeed, nothing so provokes God as well as other people to anger as the licentiousness of prelates and superiors. 9 If, like Phinehas⁵ and Moses, the priest Eli⁶ had lived his office of priest to the fullest and loved his sons with a spiritual love, then his whole family would have been saved. 10 However, because he wished to please his sons in a worldly way, the memory he left behind for himself and his posterity was one of shame and hardship.”

1. “Prelate or superior” renders “*prelatus*”: Birgitta is speaking about those in authority, but not about any specific rank or office.

2. “Measured by the measure with which they measure out”; cf. Matthew 7:2.

3. “I began to do before I began to teach”; cf. Acts 1:1.

4. “I chose to serve rather than to be served”; cf. Matthew 20:28.

5. “Phinehas”; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 14:3.

6. “The priest Eli”; cf. 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 2:12–17.

⚡ Chapter 54

On a Sevenfold Road that Reawakens the True Faith

DATE: SWEDEN, 1340S

Christ says that the world before his coming was like a forlorn desert in which there was a muddy well, that is, love for the world, to which sinners' seven roads led the Gentiles¹ and the Jews like blind men. But when he assumed a human nature, he lit up the world and revealed the roads to heaven. Because these roads are now ruined, he is now sending the words of this book to the world. Those who accept them and put them into practice will be saved.

1 Mary speaks to her Son: "Blessed are you, my Son! You are the beginning without beginning in time and the power without which none are powerful. My Son, I ask you to complete in your power what you began in your wisdom!"
2 The Son answered: "You are like a sweet drink to a thirsty man, like a fountain irrigating an arid tract, for grace flows through you to all people. Therefore I will do as you ask."

3 The Son speaks again: "Before my incarnation, this world was like a forlorn desert in which there was a muddy and unclean well. Everyone who drank from it became even more thirsty, and sore eyes became more seriously ill.
4 Two men stood next to this well. The first shouted: 'Drink safely, for the doctor is coming who will take every sickness away!' The other said: 'Drink gladly! It is meaningless to long for uncertainties.' Seven roads led to this well, and so everyone desired it.

5 This world may well be compared to a forlorn desert where there are beasts and fruitless trees and unclean waters, for people were as eager as beasts to shed the blood of their neighbors. Their righteous works bore no fruit, and they were unclean through intemperance and lust. 6 In this forlorn desert, people sought a muddy well, that is, love of the world and its honor, which is deep in pride but muddy through care and concern for the flesh. One approached it on the seven roads of the seven deadly sins.² 7 The two men standing next to the well symbolize the Gentile and Jewish teachers. The learned men of the Jews took pride in the law which they possessed but did not follow. 8 Because their greed was great, they encouraged the people by their words and example to seek temporal wealth, saying: 'Live safely, for the Messiah is coming and will restore all things.'³ The learned men of the Gentiles would say: "Take advantage of created things, for the world was created for us to enjoy."

1. "Gentiles": generally, Birgitta seems to be speaking of Muslims when she uses the term "gentiles"; here, however the application seems wider, and refers to non-Jews.

2. "Seven deadly sins": the same as the seven capital sins, often called "deadly" in the Middle Ages because they deprived a person of grace and thus of spiritual life. They are states or tendencies of the soul rather than specific sinful acts: pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and listlessness.

3. "That will restore all things"; cf. Matthew 17:11.

9 Since humankind was in such a state of blindness that people neither thought about God nor considered the life to come, I, one God together with the Father and Holy Spirit, came into the world and assumed a human nature. I preached openly and said: “That which God promised and Moses wrote about has been fulfilled. Love the things of heaven, for the things of this world are passing, and I will give you the things of eternity.” I revealed a sevenfold road by which people might turn away from their empty way of living. 11 I revealed the way of poverty and obedience. I taught fasting and prayer. At times I fled human company and remained alone in prayer. I accepted insults. I chose hard work and sufferings. I endured punishment and a despicable death.

12 Through my very self I revealed the road on which my friends for a long time traveled, but the road is now ruined. The watchmen are sleeping; the travelers find their delight in empty novelties. I shall, therefore, arise and not be silent. 13 I will remove the sound of joy and plant my vineyard⁴ among others who will bear fruit in their own time. According to the common proverb,⁵ among enemies one encounters friends. Therefore, to my friends I will send words more delicious than dates, sweeter than honey,⁶ more precious than gold. 14 Those who accept and keep my words will receive that treasure which lasts happily forever and does not fail but increases in an everlasting life.”

✠ Chapter 55

Mary Speaks of her Immaculate Conception

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

God’s Mother says that one might well call the moment when she was conceived by her parents a “golden moment.” They did it more out of obedience to God than of their own volition, and love of God was more in operation there than sensual desire. But God willed that the manner of her conception would not be made immediately known to everyone until the truth became clear at the preordained time.

1 The Mother says: “When my father and mother came together in conjugal union, it was the result more of obedience than their own volition, and love of God was more in operation there than sensual desire. 2 The moment of my conception might well be called a golden and precious moment. Whereas other couples come together out of sensual desire, my parents did so out of obedience to and by the command of God.¹ The moment of my conception was

4. “My vineyard”: most likely a reference to the Birgittine Order, and specifically Birgitta’s intended plantation in Vadstena.

5. “Proverb”; cf. Koch and af Petersens, *Östnordiska och latinska ordspråk*, p. 110 (n. 1009).

6. “Words . . . sweeter than honey”; cf. Psalm 118 (119):103.

1. “Whereas other couples . . . command of God”; cf. chapter 49.2 with note.

indeed golden. 3 The beginnings of salvation² of all humankind began at that moment, and the shadows hastened toward the light. In his creative action God chose to work something singular and hidden from the age, as when he caused the dried tree to flower.³ 4 Know, however, that my conception was not made known to all, because, just as God willed that the natural law and the free choice of good and evil should precede the written law after which came the written law to constrain every disordered impulse, so too it pleased God that his friends should have pious doubts about my conception and each one had the opportunity to show his zeal until the preordained time came for the truth to be made clear.”⁴

✠ Chapter 56

Mary Speaks of her Birth and Childhood

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Virgin Mary describes how her birth was through the ordinary channel and was the beginning of true joy, because the rod had now appeared from which the flower desired of all nations would proceed. At her nativity the demons raged, the righteous rejoiced and the angels were filled with gladness. And she deplores those women who do not pay devout heed to such an important event.

1 The Mother says: “When my mother gave birth to me, I emerged through the ordinary channel, because a person should not be born in any other way, apart from the special manner of my Son’s birth.¹ As the creator of all nature, he willed to be born in a miraculous and unutterable way. 2 When I was born, it did not escape the notice of the devil who (so to speak) thought as follows: ‘A virgin indeed has been born. What shall we do? One can see something miraculous about her future. 3 If we cast all our malicious nets over her, she will break through them as easily as flax. If we search out her interior life, she is protected by a mighty defense, and no stain is found in her² on which any cusp of sin may be affixed. 4 It is therefore to be feared that her purity will be a torment to us, her grace will threaten whatever strength there is in us, and her steadfastness will trample us underfoot.’³ 5 But God’s friends, who had been

2. “The beginnings of salvation”: the same expression is found in liturgical texts for the Nativity of Mary (8 September), e.g., “salutis exordium” in a vesper collect (Peters, *Breviarium Lincopense*, p. 782).

3. “The dried tree to flower”; cf. Ezekiel 17:24.

4. “Pious doubts . . . truth to be made clear”: refers to some revered ecclesiastical authors who were known to have doubted the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary as it was taught and believed in Birgitta’s time, for example, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

1. “The special manner of my Son’s birth”: In the first revelation of a sequence about the Virgin (chapters 56–60), Birgitta raises the question of the miraculous birth of Christ with Mary’s virginity intact, a subject that is more fully developed in Book VII 21 and the *Sermo Angelicus*.

2. “No stain is found in her”: a reference to Mary as immaculate, that is, preserved from original sin.

3. “Trample us underfoot”; cf. Genesis 3:15, where, according to the Vulgate, God says to the serpent, “I will put enmities between thee and the woman . . . she shall crush thy head” (Douay-Rheims translation).

waiting for so long,⁴ exclaimed through divine inspiration: ‘Why should we grieve any more? We should instead rejoice, because a light has been born to us which will illuminate our darkness and fulfill our longing.’⁶ God’s angels rejoiced, although they always had the joy of the vision of God. They said: ‘A longed-for being has been born on earth, God’s own darling, through whom true peace will be restored in heaven and earth and our ruins will be rebuilt.’⁵

7 My daughter, I tell you that my birth was indeed the beginning of true joys, for the rod had come forth from which there would proceed the flower that kings and prophets had desired.⁶ 8 As soon as I was of an age to understand something about my creator, I felt an indescribable love for him and longed for him with all my heart. 9 I was preserved miraculously in grace in such a way that I did not consent to sin even at that tender age, for the love of God and my parents’ watchful care as well as a worthy upbringing, the company of virtuous people and a zeal to know God were always mine.

10 Now, however, I deplore those women who are begotten and beget with horror.⁷ They are born in impurity and delight in it. They pay no heed to my most pure birth but are worse than pack-animals, because they live without principle. 11 They live entirely according to the flesh. This is why their desire will pass away from them, the spirit of purity will depart from them, eternal joy will escape them, and they will be drenched with the spirit of impurity that they have followed.”

✠ Chapter 57

Mary’s Six Sufferings

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Virgin Mary spoke to the bride on the feast of the Purification, saying that she had no need of purification, since she was spotless and pure. However, in order to fulfill the prophecies, she chose to live in and according to the law and not to point to anything special in herself but to behave humbly. She also says that the sword about which Simeon spoke pierced her soul with six sorrows in life.

1 The Mother speaks to her Son’s bride and says: “My daughter, you should know that I was in no need of purification like other women,¹ because my Son,

4. “Had been waiting for so long”: that is, in Hades, where the saints of the Old Testament were believed to have waited for their liberation until the arrival of Christ.

5. “And our ruins will be rebuilt”: this may refer to the havoc wrought after the fall of the bad angels from heaven, thus leaving a gap in the heavenly host that needed to be restored to its previous state; cf. Sw. “oc var skardh opbyggias ok opfyllas” [and our ruins will be rebuilt and filled up].

6. “The rod . . . kings and prophets had desired”; cf. Isaiah 11:1; Luke 10:24. The Rod or Tree of Jesse, depicting the Virgin Mary as the final flower on a large tree of ancestors, is a common motif in medieval art.

7. “I deplore those women . . . with horror” renders “conqueror, quod ille femine, que generantur et generant cum horrore.”

1. “Purification like other women”; cf. Leviticus 12 according to which a woman was unclean for 40 days after childbirth for a boy child, and 80 days for a girl, at which point she made a sacrifice at the temple in atonement.

who was born of me, was also the one who purified me. I had not incurred the least little stain of sin when I, without any impurity, gave birth to my most pure Son. 2 In order to fulfill the law and the prophets, however, I wished to live according to the law. I did not live as those who hold worldly power live but passed my life in humility among people of humble condition. 3 I sought no special treatment but chose humility in all its aspects. On the day commemorated today,² an increase of my sorrow occurred. 4 Although by divine inspiration I already knew that my Son would suffer, when Simeon said that a sword would pierce my soul and that my Son would become a sign of contradiction,³ sorrow penetrated my heart still more deeply. 5 Though it was mitigated by the consolation of the Holy Spirit, it is a sorrow that never left my heart until the day I was assumed body and soul into heaven.⁴

6 I also want you to know that there were six ways in which my sorrow expressed itself⁵ from that day on. First it existed in my inner thoughts. 7 As often as I looked at my Son, as often as I wrapped him in linen-cloth, as often as I saw his hands and feet, my spirit was as though engulfed in fresh grief with the thought of how he would be crucified.⁶ Then there was the sorrow in my hearing. 8 As often as I heard of the insults, lies, and plots directed at my Son, my spirit was so overwhelmed by sorrow that it could scarcely maintain its balance, although by the power of God my sorrow remained virtuous and under control with no sign of either impatience or nervousity in me. 9 Third, there was the sorrow in my sight. When I saw my Son being bound and scourged and then hung on the wood of the cross, I fell almost lifeless to the ground, but, as soon as I revived, I stood there in sorrow and suffered with such patience that both my enemies and all others saw nothing in my bearing but grave dignity. 10 Fourth, there was the sorrow in my touch. When, with others' help, I took my Son down from the cross and wrapped him in a cloth and laid him in the tomb, the sorrow within me grew so great that my hands and feet scarcely had the strength to keep me standing. O how I longed to be buried then and there along with my Son!⁷ 11 Fifth, I suffered from such an intense yearning to come to my Son after he had ascended to heaven, that my sorrow was further increased by the long wait⁸ I had on earth after his ascension. 12 Sixth, I felt sorrow over the hardships suffered by the apostles and friends of God—their

2. "The day commemorated today:" the feast of Mary's purification or Candlemas, 2 February, which is the fortieth day after Christmas Day, the day of Jesus' birth.

3. "A sword would pierce my soul . . . sign of contradiction"; cf. Luke 2:34–35.

4. "Assumed body and soul into heaven": see further chapter 60, on the feast of the Assumption on 15 August.

5. "There were six ways in which my sorrow expressed itself": in the later Middle Ages various lists of the sorrows of the Virgin were employed as meditational themes. Birgitta's list here, and the number six, appears to be her own.

6. "Of how he would be crucified": In the art of Birgitta's time, Mary's meditations on the future sufferings of her son could be expressed by depicting the Virgin and child as surrounded by small angels holding the instruments of the passion.

7. "O how I longed . . . with my son"; cf. Stallings-Thaney, *Iohannes de Caulibus Meditationes vite Christi*, chapter LXXX lines 65–66.

8. "The long wait": according to Book VII 26.2, Mary lived for over fifteen years after the ascension of Jesus.

suffering was my suffering and I was always fearful and full of sorrow. I was fearful that they might give way to temptation in their sufferings. I was full of sorrow that the words of my Son met with contradiction everywhere. 13 Although God's grace always remained with me and my will was conformed to the will of God, still my sorrow was continuous, being yet mingled with consolation,⁹ until the time when I was assumed body and soul to be with my Son in heaven. 14 Therefore, my daughter, do not let this sorrow disappear from your soul,¹⁰ because very few persons would attain heaven unless there were hardships and pain."

✠ Chapter 58

Mary Describes Jesus' Childhood and Adolescence

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

God's Mother tells the bride that, among other sorrows, it was no small sorrow she felt when she fled for fear with her Son to Egypt and heard about her Son being pursued by Herod and the innocent children being killed. She gives a fine description of her Son's deeds during his childhood and adolescence up to the time of his preaching and his passion.

1 The Mother speaks to the bride, saying: "I told you about my sorrows. Not least among them was the sorrow I felt when I carried away my Son on our flight into Egypt¹ and when I heard how the innocent boys were killed and how Herod was pursuing my Son. 2 Although I was familiar with the scriptures about my Son,² still my heart was filled with sadness and sorrow because of the great love I bore for him.

Now you might ask what my Son did during all that time before he was to suffer. 3 I answer that, just as the gospel says, he was subject to his parents³ and behaved like other young children until he grew up. 4 Miraculous happenings were indeed not lacking during his youth—creatures that served their creator, idols that became mute and many that collapsed on his coming into Egypt,⁴ astrologers who foretold my Son to be a sign of things to come, 5 the mysterious appearance of angels, the absence of any unclean dirt on him or any

9 "Continuous . . . mingled with consolation"; cf. Book I 27.8–9.

10 "Do not let this sorrow disappear from your soul": meditation on the sorrow of Mary as a means of appropriating the Passion was spreading rapidly in Birgitta's time, and she herself both practiced and actively promoted it; in the fifteenth century, the "Compassion of Mary" would in many places be celebrated on a specific day of the liturgical year.

1. "Our flight into Egypt"; cf. Matthew 1:13.

2. "The scriptures about my Son": probably a reference to Jeremiah 31:15, quoted in Matthew 2:18 as a prophecy about the slaughter of the innocents.

3. "Subject to his parents"; cf. Luke 2:51.

4. "Creatures that served . . . into Egypt"; cf. the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (or Infancy Gospel of Matthew), chapters 20–23.

knots in his hair. None of this is necessary for you to know,⁵ since the proofs of his divine and human natures are set forth in the gospel for your own and others' edification.

6 When he grew older, he was continually in prayer, and obediently accompanied us on the established holy days to Jerusalem and elsewhere. The sight of him and the sound of his speech were so welcome and wonderful⁶ that many people suffering hardships would say: 'Let us go to Mary's Son for some consolation.'⁷ 7 As he grew in age and in the wisdom⁷ that he had in full from the start, he sometimes carried out honest work with his hands or shared with us alone words of consolation and words about his divine nature in such a way that we were filled with constant joy. 8 When we found ourselves in circumstances of poverty, fear or difficulties, he made no gold or silver for us but encouraged us to be patient. And we were marvelously protected from envious people. 9 Necessities came to us sometimes out of the compassion of pious souls, sometimes from our own labor, and thus we had only what we needed for our upkeep and nothing superfluous, since we sought nothing other than to serve God alone. 10 Besides this he had familiar conversations at home with visiting friends regarding the law and its meaning and symbols. He had open discussions with experts⁸ so that they were amazed and said: 'Joseph's boy⁹ is teaching the teachers—some great spirit is speaking through him.'

11 Once when he saw me feeling sad because I was thinking about his passion, he said to me: 'Do you not believe, Mother, that I am in the Father and the Father in me?'¹⁰ Were you defiled by my entrance or felt pain at my emergence?¹¹

12 Why do you feel sad? The Father's will is that I should suffer and die, and my will belongs to the Father. What I have from the Father cannot suffer, but the flesh, which I have received from you, will suffer in order that the flesh of others might be redeemed and their spirits saved.'

13 He was so obedient that if Joseph happened to say to him 'Do this or do that,' he would do it immediately, for he hid his divine power so well that it could not be perceived except by me and sometimes by Joseph. Many a time we saw a wondrous light shining around him and heard angelic voices singing above him. 14 We saw, too, that the unclean spirits who could not be cast out by the exorcists skilled in our law departed at the sight of my Son's appearance. 15 My daughter, let these things be continuously in your memory, and give sincere thanks to God who has willed to make his childhood known to others through you."

5. "None of this is necessary for you to know": although Birgitta is aware of apocryphal stories about Jesus, and indeed seems to put some trust in them, she emphasizes that the Gospels are sufficient.

6. "The sight of him . . . welcome and wonderful": that people who beheld the boy Jesus experienced great delight is an idea found also in Cistercian writers, e.g., Aelred of Rievaulx (see his *De Iesu puero duodenni*, I, 5).

7. "Grew in age and . . . wisdom"; cf. Luke 2:52.

8. "Open discussions with experts"; cf. Luke 2:46–47.

9. "Joseph's boy"; cf. John 6:42.

10. "I am in the Father and the Father in me"; cf. John 14:11.

11. "Felt pain at my emergence": Birgitta and her contemporaries believed that Mary had given birth without pain, since she was untainted by sin and thus exempt from the curse of Genesis 3:16. See further Book VII, chapter 21 with notes.

✠ Chapter 59

Mary's Visit to Elizabeth, her Pregnancy, and her Life with Joseph

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

The Virgin describes for the bride her own immediate sensations on the conception of her Son as well as those of Elizabeth and herself at their mutual embrace. She tells of their holy stay together and about how an angel both comforted her when she was feeling anxious and instructed Joseph in his wonderment. She also describes how Joseph and she lived together in a most holy manner as well as Joseph's many notable virtues.

1 The Mother speaks: "When the angel announced to me that God's Son was to be born of me and once I had consented, I immediately sensed something strange and wonderful within me. Full of wonder, I went up to my kinswoman Elizabeth¹ to aid her in her pregnancy and to talk with her about the angel's message to me. 2 She met me at the spring,² and when we embraced and exchanged kisses, the infant in her womb leapt for joy³ with a wonderful and noticeable movement. 3 I, too, was so much moved in my heart with a new and strange elation that my tongue declared words⁴ of God I had not thought out before, and my soul could scarcely contain itself for joy. 4 When Elizabeth felt wonder at the fervor of the spirit that spoke in me, and I, too, wondered at God's grace at work in her, then both of us praised God and remained together for some days.

5 After this, my mind began to be shaken by thoughts about how and with what kind of devotion I should behave with respect to the great grace at work in me, and also how I should react if I were asked how I had conceived or who the father was of the child to be born or if Joseph, urged on by some enemy, were to harbor hostile suspicions against me. 6 While I was engrossed in such thoughts, an angel, not unlike the one I had seen before, appeared to me and said: 'Our God, who is eternal, is with you and in you. 7 Have no fear, then, because he will tell you what to say. He will guide your steps and your position. He will fulfill his work⁵ in you with power and wisdom.'

8 When Joseph, to whom I had been entrusted, realized I was pregnant, he felt wonder and, considering himself unworthy to live with me, was anxious, not knowing what to do. An angel told him in his sleep:⁶ 9 'Do not walk away from the virgin entrusted to you, because it is most true what you have heard from her.⁷ She has indeed conceived through the Spirit of God and will give birth to a son who will be the savior of the world. Therefore, serve her faithfully

1. "I went up to my kinswoman Elizabeth"; cf. Luke 1:39-40.

2. "At the spring": The freshwater spring at Ein Kerem in Jerusalem has long been associated with the meeting of the two women.

3. "The infant in her womb leapt for joy"; cf. Luke 1:41.

4. "My tongue declared words": i.e., the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55.

5. "Have no fear . . . he will fulfill his work"; cf. 1 Chronicles 28:20.

6. "An angel told him in his sleep"; cf. Matthew 1:22-23.

7. "You have heard from her": see the note to Book VII 25:7.

and be the guardian and witness of her modesty!’ 10 From that day forth, Joseph served me as his lady and I, too, humbled myself for his smallest needs.

Afterward I was continually in prayer, wishing to see and be seen only rarely. I went out on very rare occasions, except for special holy days. 11 I was eagerly attentive to vigils and to the readings read by our priests. I had fixed times for physical work. I was prudent about fasting as much as my natural strength could bear in the service of God. 12 Whatever we had left over beyond our daily sustenance we gave to the poor and were satisfied with what we had.

Joseph served me in such a way that one never heard from his lips any word of roughness or complaint or anger. 13 He was most patient in his poverty, working intensely whenever necessary, gentle to those who reproached him, obedient to my every need, my ready defender against those who disparaged my virginity, a most faithful witness to God’s miracles. 14 He was as though dead to the world and the flesh, in such a way that he desired nothing but the things of heaven. He trusted so much in God’s promises that he was constantly saying: ‘Would that I might live⁸ to see God’s will accomplished!’ 15 He seldom went to the meetings and assemblies of the men, because all his desire was in obeying the will of God. Therefore his glory is now great.”

✠ Chapter 60

Mary Denies that St. Jerome Had Doubted her Assumption

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

God’s Mother tells the bride that Jerome had no doubts about the assumption of her body into heaven but, because God had not revealed the truth openly, he preferred to believe piously rather than to define things not yet shown. This is why he wrote in his letter that he did not know. The Virgin adds here some praise of Jerome.

1 The Mother speaks to the bride: “What did that schoolmaster¹ tell you, that winnow of words? That the letter of my Jerome² that speaks of my assumption should not be read in God’s Church? It seems to him that Jerome expressed doubts there about my assumption, since he says he does not know whether I was assumed with my body or not nor by whom I was carried away. 2 Well then, I, the Mother of God, make this answer to that schoolmaster: Jerome had no doubts about my assumption, but, because God had not openly revealed the truth of the matter, Jerome preferred to believe piously rather than to define things not yet shown by God. 3 Recall, my daughter, what I told you earlier: Jerome showed love for widows, followed the monastic life of perfection,

8. “Would that I might live”: Birgitta and her contemporaries believed that Joseph was an old man at this time; cf. Book VII 21.2.

1. “That schoolmaster”: Birgitta’s close acquaintance with learned men is worth noting. The identity of this particular scholar is unknown.

2. “The letter of my Jerome”: i.e., Pseudo-Jerome = Paschasius Radbertus, *De assumptione Sanctae Mariae Virginis*, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis, volume 56 C.

and was a champion and defender of the truth. He also gained for you the prayer with which you used to greet me.³ 4 I add now that Jerome was a docile trumpet through which the Holy Spirit spoke. He was a flame inflamed by the same fire that descended on me and the apostles on the day of Pentecost.⁴ Happy are those who hear this trumpet and follow it!”

✠ Chapter 61

Mary's Life after Christ's Ascension

DATE: 1350–70, ITALY

God's Mother tells the bride that she lived for a long time in the world after her Son's ascension, visiting with great sorrow those places where he had suffered and performed miracles. God permitted this so that many people would convert, the apostles be strengthened and her own reward be increased. She also gives the reason why her assumption was not then known to many.

1 The Mother speaks: “Recall, my daughter, that a number of years ago¹ I defended Jerome in the matter of my assumption. Now I will explain the truth of it to you. 2 After my Son's ascension, I lived for a long time in the world.² This was what God wanted so that, seeing my patience and character, more souls would be converted to God and his apostles and other chosen ones would be strengthened. 3 Along life was also the result of my own physical condition and led to an increase in my heavenly reward. While I was passing all this time after my Son's ascension, I visited the places where he had suffered and performed miracles. 4 His passion was so firmly fixed in my heart that, whether I was eating or working, it remained fresh in my memory. Moreover, my senses were so detached from worldly things that by turns I was being constantly set aflame with new desires or stirred again by sorrows. 5 However, I held my sorrows and joys in balance so they did not lead to any omission in my religious duties. My conduct in human company was such that I paid little attention to and took nothing of the food that people consider delicious beyond the small amount needed for my sustenance. 6 The fact that my assumption was not known to the multitude nor preached by many was due to the will of God, my Son, in order that belief in his ascension might be first firmly impressed on human hearts. 7 Given that people's hearts were so obdurate and slow to believe in his ascension, how much more so would they have been if my assumption had been preached when the faith was first spread?”

3. “Gained for you the prayer with which you used to greet me”; cf. Book IV 21.

4. “Fire that descended . . . day of Pentecost”; cf. Acts 2:1–4. The Virgin Mary is not mentioned in the Biblical account, but it is an ancient and universal Christian tradition that she was present.

1. “A number of years ago”; cf. chapter 60.

2. “After my Son's ascension, I lived for a long time in the world”: the time period is specified as fifteen years in Book VII, 26.2 (see further the note there).

‡ Chapter 62

Mary's Assumption into Heaven

DATE: EARLY 1350S, ITALY

The Queen of Heaven describes to the bride how an angel had told her the moment at which she would depart from this world and ascend with her body into heaven. The Virgin also tells of the manner of her departure and what thoughts her soul was meditating on at the moment of her passing as well as about some of the great things that occurred when she was bodily assumed into heaven.

1 The Mother speaks: “Some years had elapsed after my Son’s ascension when one day I was very much filled with the anxious desire of coming to him. And then I saw a shining angel like the one I had seen before, and he said to me: 2 ‘Your Son, our Lord and God, has sent me to announce to you that the time has come for you to come to him in body to receive the crown prepared for you.’ 3 I answered him: ‘Do you know the day and the hour at which I am to depart from this world?’ The angel replied: ‘Your friends will come and bury your body.’ At that the angel disappeared, and I prepared myself for departure, going around, as was my habit, to visit the places in which my Son had suffered. 4 One day my spirit was rapt in wonder at God’s love, and my soul was so filled with exultation in contemplating it that it could scarcely contain itself. In that very meditation my soul was released from the body. 5 You will not be able to grasp what magnificent things my soul then saw, what great honor the Father, Son and Holy Spirit then shed upon her, by how great a multitude of angels she was then raised—nor do I wish to tell you until your soul and body have been separated. Some of it, indeed, I have shown you in that daily prayer¹ which my Son inspired in you. 6 Those who were then with me in the house when I gave up my spirit understood from the remarkable flash of light what divine things were happening to me.

7 After this, the friends of my Son, sent by divine inspiration, buried my body in the Valley of Josaphat.² Angels as countless as the points of the sun were with them, but no evil spirits dared to approach. 8 My body lay buried in the earth for fifteen days³ and then was carried into heaven by a multitude of angels. The specific time held a great mystery, for the resurrection of bodies will occur at the seventh hour and the beatitude of souls and bodies will be accomplished at the eighth. 9 The first hour lasted from the origin of the world until the law was given through Moses. The second hour was from Moses until the incarnation of my Son. 10 The third began when my Son instituted baptism

1. “Daily prayer”: may refer to the four prayers (*Quattuor orationes*) that Birgitta was given to pray daily while she lived in Sweden; two of them are in praise and worship of Christ and the Virgin; see Eklund, *Sancta Birgitta. Opera minora, III*, Prologue, p. 65.

2. “Valley of Josaphat”; cf. Joel 3:2. This unidentified valley is in Christian tradition (since at least the fourth century) equated with the valley of Cedron in Jerusalem, where the tomb of the Virgin is located.

3. “My body lay buried in earth for fifteen days”: see the note to Book VII 26.2.

and mitigated the severity of the law. The fourth was when he preached the word and confirmed it by his example. The fifth was when my Son chose to suffer and die and when he rose from the dead and gave clear proof of his resurrection. 11 The sixth was when he ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit. The seventh will be when he comes to judge and all people will rise up with their bodies to be judged. The eighth will be when all the things that have been promised and prophesied are accomplished.⁴ 12 There will then be perfect beatitude. God will then be seen in his glory and the saints shall shine like the sun,⁵ and sorrow will be no more.”⁶

✠ Chapter 63

A Letter Addressed to Pope Clement VI

DATE: 1348, SWEDEN

Christ gives the bride the words herein contained and commands her to send them to Pope Clement, telling him to make peace between the kings of France and England, to come to Italy and to announce a jubilee year. Christ reproaches him for certain serious sins and acts of negligence and for his disorderly life in the past. He threatens him with justice if he does not reform himself.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “Write the following words on my part to Pope Clement:¹ I exalted you and let you ascend² through all the ranks of honor. Rise up and establish peace between the kings of France and England, who are like dangerous beasts, betrayers of souls. 2 Then come to Italy and preach the word there and proclaim a year of salvation³ and divine love! Look on the streets paved with the blood of my saints, and I shall give you an everlasting reward. 3 Think of times past when you had the audacity to provoke my anger,⁴ and I kept silent, when you did what you wanted and what you should not have done, and I was patient, as though I did not hear. 4 Indeed, my time approaches, and I shall require an account of you for the negligence and audacity of your time. In the same way as I let you ascend through the ranks, you will descend through other ranks that you will truly experience in soul and body, unless you obey my

4. “Think of times past”: On the “hours” of the world, see further Zochowska, *The Christian Kingdom as an Image of the Heavenly Kingdom*, pp. 120–27.

5. “Shine like the sun”; cf. Matthew 13:43.

6. “Sorrow will be no more”; cf. Apocalypse 21:4.

1. “Pope Clement,” i.e. Clement VI, pope in Avignon 1342–52. This revelation also occurs in Book IV 136 paragraphs 1–9 (see further Jönsson, *St. Bridget’s Revelations to the Popes*, p. 22). It was one of a group of texts taken by Bishop Hemming of Turku (Åbo) and Prior Petrus to France in order to persuade the pope to return to Rome. One manuscript, MS Falkenberg, says the message was given to the pope two years before the Jubilee, i.e., in 1348. See further volume 2 pp. 245–46.

2. “I exalted you and let you ascend”; cf. 3 Kings (1 Kings) 14:7; Genesis 50:23.

3. “A year of salvation”: the year of jubilee was a special year for universal pardon, indulgences, and pilgrimages that took place in Rome every fifty years.

4. “Provoked me to anger”; cf. Deuteronomy 32:21.

words. 5 Your grandiloquent tongue will be silent. The name by which you are called on earth will be held in oblivion and reproach before me and my saints. I shall also require an account of you as to how unworthily you rose through the ranks, though it was with my permission, which I, God, know better than your negligent conscience can recall. 6 I shall seek an account from you with regard to your lukewarmness⁵ in reestablishing peace between the kings and your preferential treatment⁶ of one of the two parties. Moreover, it shall not be forgotten how greed and ambition flourished and increased in the church during your time, or that you could have reformed and set many things right but that you, lover of the flesh, were unwilling. 7 Get up, therefore, before your fast approaching final hour arrives, and extinguish the negligence of your past by being zealous in your nearly final hour!

If you are in doubt about to which spirit these words belong, that kingdom and that person are well known in which amazement and wonders⁷ have been wrought. 8 The justice and mercy of which I speak are drawing near everywhere on earth. Your own conscience tells you that my exhortation is rational and my proposal charitable. 9 Had you not been saved by my patience, you should have descended lower than all your predecessors. Examine, then, the book of your conscience and see if I am telling the truth!”

✠ Chapter 64

A Reprimand to Worldly People

DATE: UNDATED

Christ issues serious warnings to certain persons who, forgetful of their past sins and God’s way, were living merrily without a care. He tells them, however, that if they repent, they will find mercy in him.

1 The Son speaks: “Pay no attention to these dancing good-for-nothings,¹ for I will soon come to them, not as a friend but as one who seeks revenge. 2 Pity them, for they chose not to seek eternal good during their time of peace. I tell you that the men of this generation arose from a bitter root² and have gathered the fruits of their vanity and greed. 3 That is why they shall now descend, and poverty, captivity, shame, humiliation, and grief shall arise for them instead. Nevertheless, those who humble themselves will find grace in my sight.”

5. “Why you were so lukewarm”; cf. Apocalypse 3:16.

6. “Your preferential treatment”: Birgitta criticizes Clement for his partisan views in favor of the French cause.

7. “Amazement and wonders”; cf. Jeremiah 5:13; an echo of the opening of Magister Mathias’s defense of Birgitta’s prophetic authority (which is sometimes named after this phrase *stupor et mirabilia*), see volume 1, p. 47. Mathias may have derived the phrase from this quotation or equally the phrase might have become a contemporary catchword that was associated with Birgitta.

1. “Dancing good-for-nothings” renders “ribaldos corizantes”; cf. Sw. “danzsanda riballana”; Birgitta may here be criticizing the excesses of the court and aristocracy.

2. “A bitter root”; cf. Deuteronomy 29:18; Hebrews 12:15.

⚡ Chapter 65

Martha and Mary Symbolize the Virtues of the Active and the Contemplative Life

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ gives the bride memorable instructions about pursuing the active and the contemplative life as symbolized by Martha and Mary. He explains how a person should begin and advance in the spiritual life and in virtues in order to reach the highest degree of perfect love of God and neighbor. He speaks first of the deeds belonging to Mary's life.

1 The Son speaks: "There are two ways of life¹ which may be represented by Martha and Mary.² Whoever wishes to imitate them must first make a clean confession of all his or her sins, adopting true confession for them and having the intention of not committing them again. 2 The first way of life that Mary chose, as attested by the Lord,³ leads to the contemplation of heavenly things. This is the best portion⁴ and a path that leads to eternal salvation. 3 For a person who wants to pursue Mary's way of living it is enough to have only physical necessities, such as unostentatious clothing, minimal and not superfluous food and drink, chastity without any base lusts, reasonable fasting according to the rule of the church. 4 A person who fasts should ensure that he does not incur illness due to unreasonable fasting with the result that he must cut down on his prayers or preaching due to his illness or omit other good works that might benefit others as well as himself. 5 He should make a careful examination to see if his fasting leads to lukewarmness in carrying out strict justice or negligence in acts of piety, because both physical and spiritual strength are needed in order to punish rebels and to subject infidels to the yoke of the faith. 6 Anyone who is ill and would rather fast for the glory of God than eat will receive an equally great reward due to his good intention as someone who fasts reasonably out of charity. Likewise, anyone who eats out of holy obedience, though preferring to fast rather than eat, will receive the same reward as the one who fasts.

7 In the second place, Mary should not take joy in worldly honors and success or feel sorrow over worldly setbacks. Rather she should rejoice when the impious become devout, when lovers of the world become lovers of God, when good people make progress in goodness and become more devout by struggling to serve God. 8 She should, moreover, feel sorrow when sinners fall into

1. "There are two ways of life"; cf. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in librum Iob*, 6.61. On the theme of Mary and Martha in ancient and medieval Christian tradition, see Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*.

2. "Martha and Mary"; cf. Luke 10:38–42.

3. "As attested by the Lord" renders "testante Domino," which is malplacé since it is the Lord who is speaking; cf. Sw. "varom herra vitnande" [our Lord attesting].

4. "The best portion"; cf. Luke 10:42.

a worse situation, when God is not loved by his creation, when God's commandments are despised.

9 In the third place, Mary should not be lazy, nor should Martha, but, having had her needful sleep, arise and give thanks to God with an attentive heart, because he has created all things in his goodness and, in his charity, recreated all things by assuming a human body, showing by his passion and death his love for humankind, greater than which none can have. 10 Mary should also give thanks to God for all those who have already been saved, for all those in purgatory and for all those in the world, and humbly ask him not to let them be tested beyond their strength. 11 Furthermore, Mary should be discreet in her prayer and orderly in her praise of God, for if she has the necessities of life, she should prolong her prayer without worrying. 12 However, if she feels fatigue in praying and temptations accumulate, then she should do some honest and useful work with her hands, either for her own benefit, if she is in need, or for the convenience of others. 13 If, however, she feels fatigue in both praying and working, then she should find some other virtuous way of occupying herself, or else listen to edifying words of serious import without any frivolity, until her body and soul feel fitter for the work of God. 14 But if Mary does not have the required sustenance for her body unless she works for it, then she should make her prayer briefer because of her necessary work, and then her work will be a perfection and extension of her prayer. 15 If Mary does not know how to or cannot carry out any work, then she should neither be ashamed nor feel it burdensome to beg. She should rather rejoice because she is imitating me, the Son of God, because I made myself poor so that man might become rich.⁵ 16 If Mary is subject to obedience, then she should live in obedience to her superior and her reward will be twice as great as if she were at liberty.

17 In the fourth place, Mary should not be greedy, nor should Martha, but rather very generous. As Martha distributes material goods on behalf of God, so Mary should distribute her spiritual goods. 18 If Mary holds God dear in her heart, she should beware of the words many people have on their lips: 19 'It is enough for me to help my own soul. What concern is it of mine what others do or, if I am good, what is it to me how others live?' 20 My daughter, if those who say and think such things saw their friend dishonored and in trouble, they would run the risk of death to save their friend from trouble. 21 That is how Mary should act. She should feel sorrow that her God is offended and at the spiritual injury to her brother and fellow human being. Of if someone falls into sin, Mary should try, as far as she is able, to save that person from sin, but always with discretion. 22 If Mary is persecuted because of this, she should look for a safer place, for I, God, have said: 'If they persecute you in one city, flee to the next!'⁶ This is what Paul did, because he was more needed for another time and so he was lowered over the city-wall in a basket.⁷

5. "I made myself poor so that man might become rich"; cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9.

6. "If they persecute you in one city, flee to the next"; cf. Matthew 10:23.

7. "In a basket"; cf. Acts 9:25; 2 Corinthians 11:33.

23 Therefore, in order for Mary to be generous and pious, five things are necessary. First, a house where guests can sleep. Second, clothes to clothe the naked. Third, food to feed the hungry. Fourth, fire to warm the cold. Fifth, medicine for the sick, that is, consoling words with God's charity. 24 Mary's house is her heart. Evil guests are all those thoughts disturbing her heart, such as anger, sadness, greed, pride, and the like that enter through her five senses. 25 When all these vices show up, they should lie down like those guests who sleep or who are at rest. 26 Like an innkeeper who receives both bad and good guests with patience, Mary should put up with everything in patient virtue for the sake of God and not consent in the least to the vices nor take any pleasure in them but, as far as she can, remove them from her heart with the cooperating grace of God. 27 If she cannot remove them, she should patiently put up with them like guests against her will in the certain knowledge that they will lead to the benefit of her greater reward and in no way to her condemnation.

28 Second, Mary should have clothes in which to dress her guests, that is, interior and exterior humility and compassion of heart for the problems of her neighbors. 29 If others despise her, Mary should have recourse to her own mind and consider how I, God, was scorned and despised but put up with it patiently, how I was sentenced but remained silent, how I was scourged and crowned with thorns⁸ but did not complain. 30 Mary should also be careful not to show any signs of anger or impatience to those who disparage her but bless those who persecute her⁹ in order that they, seeing it, may bless God whom Mary is imitating and so that God himself may replace their revilement with a blessing. 31 Mary should beware not to slander or blame those who annoy her, because slandering or listening to slander or impatiently reproaching others deserves to be condemned. 32 Accordingly, in order for Mary to possess perfectly the virtues of humility and patience, she should caution or admonish people who slander others by warning them of their danger and admonishing them to true humility by her charitable words and example. 33 Again, Mary's clothes should be compassion. If she sees her neighbor sin, she should have compassion on him and ask God to have mercy on him. 34 But if she sees him suffering any harm, whether material injury or scorn, she should feel sympathy for him and help him with her prayers, support and care, even pleading before worldly authorities, because true compassion does not seek its own but its neighbor's good. 35 If Mary is in such circumstances that she cannot obtain audience before princes and it does no good for her to leave her cell, then she should pray earnestly to God on behalf of the afflicted. 36 Then, because of the love of the one praying to him, God, who weighs hearts,¹⁰ will bring about a change of hearts for the peace of the afflicted person, and he will either be freed from his troubles or be given the divine patience needed to increase his reward. 37 These clothes of humility and patience must be in Mary's heart,

8. "I, God, was scorned . . . crowned with thorns"; cf. Matthew 27:28-31.

9. "Bless those who persecute her"; cf. Romans 12:14.

10. "Who weighs hearts"; cf. Proverbs 24:12.

because nothing so attracts God to a soul as humility and compassion on one's neighbors.

38 Third, Mary should have food and drink for the guests. Burdensome guests lodge in Mary's heart when, for example, her heart gets caught up with desires to see the pleasures of the earth and to have material possessions, or when her ears want to hear her own praise, 39 when the flesh seeks pleasure in the things of the flesh, when the spirit puts forward the excuse of weakness and the lightness of the offense, when a person wearies of doing good and forgets the life to come, when he thinks he has done a lot of good deeds and forgets any bad ones. 40 Mary needs a plan for such guests and must not ignore them and fall asleep. She should therefore arise with vibrant faith and reply in this way to these guests: 41 'I have no wish to have material possessions, but I only want to have the bare sustenance necessary for my body. 42 I do not want to waste a minute's time on anything but the glory of God, and I do not want to pay any attention to beauty or ugliness nor to physical advantages or disadvantages nor to my likes or dislikes unless it be pleasing to God or for the benefit of my soul, for I take no delight in living even a single hour unless it be for the glory of God.' 43 Such a resolution is the food for the guests who arrive, and such a reply extinguishes any disordered pleasures.

44 Fourth, Mary should have a fire to warm the guests and give them light. This fire is the warmth of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible for anyone to deny his or her own will or the natural affection for parents or the love of riches without the active impulse and warmth of the Holy Spirit. 45 No matter how perfect Mary is, she can neither begin nor continue in a holy life without the love and guidance of the Holy Spirit. For Mary to give light to the guests that arrive, she should first have the following thoughts: 46 'God created me with the purpose of honoring him above all else and thereby loving and respecting him. He was born of a virgin to teach the way to heaven for me to imitate and follow in humility. By his death he opened up heaven for me so that I may long and hasten to come to it.' 47 Mary should also consider and examine all her actions, thoughts and affections—in what ways she has offended God and how patiently God has treated humankind and in how many ways he calls people to come to me. 48 Such and similar thoughts are Mary's guests who are, as it were, in darkness until illuminated by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

49 This fire enters Mary's heart when she considers that serving God is a reasonable thing to do, when she prefers to suffer any pain than to consciously provoke the anger of God by whose goodness her soul was created and by whose blessed blood it was redeemed. 50 Her heart receives light from this good fire when her mind considers and understands the intention in which any guest—that is, any thought—comes and when her heart examines whether each thought tends to everlasting or fleeting joy, whether she leaves any thought unshaken, unpunished or without fear. 51 In order for this fire, accordingly, to be obtained and once obtained to be kept, it is necessary for Mary to bring dry wood to feed the fire, that is, she must keep a careful guard on her carnal impulses and take every care to devoutly increase the acts of piety and the prayers in which the

Holy Spirit delights. 52 However, it is most important to know and understand that when a flame has been lit in a covered vessel, it is quickly extinguished and the vessel cools down. 53 So, too, in Mary's case. If she wishes to live for nothing other than giving glory to God, she needs to have an open mouth for the flame of her charity to go forth. 54 Her mouth is open when she begets spiritual children for God by speaking with fervent charity. Mary must make sure that wherever she opens her mouth to preach, there the good should become more fervent and the wicked should be made better, justice should be able to grow and base customs should be abolished. 55 My apostle Paul sometimes wished to speak but was restrained by my Spirit.¹¹ He was silent at the right moment¹² and spoke at the fitting one. Sometimes he used more soothing speech, sometimes more stern. He aimed all his words and deeds to the glory of God and the strengthening of the faith. 56 If Mary is not capable of preaching but still has a desire and knowledge enough to preach, she should do what a fox does and wander about the hills, trying different places with its paws, and digging its den wherever it finds better and more suitable locations. 57 Mary should likewise test many hearts by her words, example and prayers. When she finds hearts suitable for receiving God's words, she should there settle down to advise and persuade as best she can. 58 Mary should also struggle to give a proper outlet to her flame, because the greater the flame, the more people will be illuminated and inflamed. 59 The flame has a proper outlet when Mary neither is afraid of abusive reproach nor seeks her own praise, when she neither fears setbacks nor takes pleasure in success. It is then more pleasing to God that Mary carries out her good deeds in public rather than in secret, so that those who see them may glorify God. 60 You should know that Mary should emit two flames, one in secret, one in public, that is, she should have a twofold humility. The first is an interior humility in her heart; the second is exterior. 61 The first means that Mary considers herself unworthy and useless for any good work and that she does not put herself ahead of any others in her mind, does not seek to be praised or seen, avoids all arrogance, desiring God above all else and following his words. 62 If Mary emits such a flame as signified by her actions, then her heart will be illuminated by charity and all adversities that occur will be overcome and easily endured. The second flame ought to be in public. 63 If there is true humility in her heart, it also ought to appear in the way she dresses and to be heard in what she says and to be carried out in what she does. 64 True humility is in the way she dresses when Mary chooses less expensive clothing that provides her with warmth and protection instead of the more expensive kind that will give her pride and ostentation. 65 Clothing that is of little value and which people call plain and lowly is beautiful to God, because it promotes humility. But clothing sold at a high price that is called beautiful is ugly to God, because it takes away the beauty of the angels, which is humility. 66 But if, for some good reason, Mary is forced to have somewhat better clothes than she would otherwise wish, she should not worry, because her reward will be greater because of it.

11. "Paul . . . was restrained by my Spirit"; cf. Acts 16:6.

12. "At the right moment"; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:2.

67 Mary should have humility in what she says, that is, she should speak humbly, avoiding frivolous talk, guarding against loquacity, not being oversubtle, not preferring her own opinion to those of her betters. 68 If Mary hears herself being praised for some good work, she should not be puffed up but her reaction should be this: 'Praise be to God the giver of all things! What am I but dust in the face of the wind?'¹³ What good is there in me who am like earth without water?'¹⁴ 69 If Mary is insulted, she should not be sad but should react like this: 'It is right, because I have sinned so often in the sight of God and not done penance. I deserve much worse abuse. So pray for me that I may endure short-lived reproaches and thus escape the everlasting kind.' 70 If Mary is provoked to anger by the base behavior of her fellow-men, she should be careful not to loosen her tongue with unwise remarks, because pride frequently accompanies anger. 71 When anger and pride come on, it is therefore advisable to keep one's mouth shut for the time it takes to ask God for help to be patient and then to deliberate on what or whether to reply in order to gain self-control, because anger will then be softened in one's heart, and a person is then able to reply wisely to the foolish. 72 You must realize, too, that the devil feels great envy toward Mary. If he cannot stop her by getting her to transgress God's commandments, then he incites her to lose her temper easily or to get carried away with worthless amusements or unguarded speech and joking. 73 This is why Mary must constantly ask God for help so that her every word and deed may be guided by him and directed to him.

74 Mary should also have humility in what she does so that she does nothing because of earthly praise, does not attempt to do anything unusual, is not ashamed of lowly work, avoids any desire for special favor, shows deference to everyone, considers herself unworthy in relation to others. 75 Mary should choose to sit among the poor rather than the rich, to obey rather than take the lead, to be silent rather than speak, to be alone rather than pass her time among influential people or with her relatives. 76 She should learn to hate her selfish will, ever to meditate on her death, not to be curious or a complainer or someone forgetful of divine justice and her own predilections.¹⁵ 77 Mary should also be frequent in going to confession, concerned about temptations, desirous of living for nothing other than an increase of God's glory and of the welfare of souls.

78 Consequently, if Mary's disposition is as described, and if she is then selected for Martha's role and she agrees in obedience and out of love for God to govern many souls, she will be given a twofold reward, as I can show you by way of a comparison. 79 There was a powerful lord who had a ship loaded with precious merchandise. He said to his servants: 'Go to such and such a port where my profit will be great and the reward generous. If the wind rises against you, struggle manfully without giving up and your compensation will be great.' 80 Then a wind got the best of the servants as they sailed, and storm-gales arose, and the ship was being heavily tossed. The ship's helmsman gave up, and they

13. "Dust in the face of the wind"; cf. Psalm 34(35):5.

14. "Earth without water"; cf. Psalm 142(143):6.

15. "Her own predilections" renders "affectio[n]um suarum."

all despaired of life and decided to aim for the port to which the wind was blowing them and not the one indicated by their master. 81 One of the servants, more faithful than the others, hearing this, seized the helm of the ship and, with all his might, steered it to the port the master wanted. 82 Accordingly, this man, who had so manfully steered the ship to port, deserves a greater remuneration than the others. The case is similar with the good superior who, out of love for God and for the salvation of souls, takes on the burden of governing without caring about honors, for he will receive a twofold reward. 83 First, he will share in the good things of all those whom he steered to port; second, his glory will receive everlasting increase. On the other hand, all those who are ambitious for honors and positions of leadership will share in all the punishments and sins of all those they undertook to govern. 84 Then they will receive everlasting shame. Superiors who are ambitious for honors are more like prostitutes than superiors, for they deceive souls with their bad example and words. They do not deserve to be called Mary or Martha, unless they reform themselves through penance.

85 Fifth, Mary should give medicine to her guests, that is, she should cheer them up with virtuous words by saying to them, no matter what occurs of happiness or sorrow, as follows: 'I want whatever God wants me to want; I am ready to obey his will, even if I should go to hell.' 86 Such an intention is the medicine against the afflictions of the heart, and this intention is a delight in the midst of trouble and a worthy temperament in the midst of prosperity. Mary, however, has many enemies, so she should be constant in confession. 87 If she should consciously remain in a state of sin with ample opportunity for confession but doing nothing about it nor paying it any attention, then she must rather be called an apostate than Mary."

88 Concerning the deeds and way of life of Martha. "Know, too, that, although Mary's portion is the better one,¹⁶ still that does not mean that Martha's portion is bad. Rather it is laudable and pleasing to God. I will tell you now how Martha should be disposed. 89 Just like Mary, she ought to have five things, and in the first place, the true faith of God's Church. In the second place, she should know the divine precepts and the counsels of the gospel truth,¹⁷ and she should carry them out in her heart and in her actions. 90 Third, she should hold her tongue away from every evil word against God or neighbor and her hand away from every illicit or dishonorable action. She ought to restrain her spirit from excessive desire and pleasure-seeking and learn to be satisfied with the things she has and not to desire anything superfluous. 91 Fourth, she should perform works of mercy in a prudent and humble manner in such a way that her confidence in these works does not offend God in any way. Fifth, she should love God above all things¹⁸ and more than herself. This is how Martha acted. 92 She dedicated

16. "Mary's portion is the better one"; cf. Luke 10:42.

17. "The counsels of the gospel truth": in Catholic doctrine there exist, in addition to God's commandments, certain counsels for those who seek perfection that were taught by Jesus in the gospel; see for example Matthew 19:16–21. These counsels are usually summarized as poverty, chastity, and obedience, and are the basis of all Christian monasticism. Cf. chapter 46 where six such counsels, all about poverty, are adduced.

18. "Love God above all things"; cf. Matthew 22:37.

herself joyfully to me, imitating my words and deeds, and then she dedicated all her possessions for the sake of my love. She disdained worldly goods and sought heavenly ones, and so she endured everything with patience and cared for others as much as for herself. 93 Thus she always kept my charity and my suffering in mind, and was cheerful in the midst of troubles, and had a mother's love for everyone. 94 Martha followed me daily, longing only to hear the words of life. She had compassion on the sorrowing, comforted the sick, spoke ill of no one but found excuses for the bad behavior of others and prayed for everyone. 95 Therefore, everyone who desires to live an active life of charity should imitate Martha by loving his or her neighbors so that they may reach heaven, without encouraging their vices, and by fleeing all self-praise, pride and duplicity. She should not harbor any anger or envy.

96 Recall that Martha prayed for her brother Lazarus and was the first to come to me,¹⁹ although her brother was not raised immediately. Mary was called afterward, and then their brother was raised for the sake of both sisters. 97 So it is in the spiritual life. Whoever really desires to be Mary must first be Martha and work materially to my glory, learning first to resist the desires of the flesh and encounter the temptations of the devil. 98 Afterward she can then with deliberation ascend to Mary's position. How can a person who is not tested and tempted and does not overcome the impulses of the flesh persevere firmly in heavenly ways? 99 Who is the dead brother of Martha and Mary if not imperfect action? Many times a virtuous action is done with an unconsidered intention and undecided spirit and turns out careless and lukewarm. 100 For a virtuous action to be acceptable to me, it must be raised by means of Martha and Mary, which happens when one's neighbor is loved for God's sake and unto God and when God alone is sought above all things.²⁰ 101 A person's every deed of virtue is then pleasing to God. Thus, I said in the gospel that Mary had chosen the better portion. Martha's portion is good when she feels sorrow over the sins of her fellow men. 102 Martha's portion becomes better when she works to help people to live and persevere wisely and uprightly and when she does this only for love of God. But Mary's portion is best, when she contemplates only heaven and the good of souls. 103 God enters the house of Martha and Mary when the mind, full of good affections and at peace away from the commotion of the world, reflects on God as ever present and not only meditates on but labors in his love day and night."

✠ Chapter 66

*An Allegory about a Lord, his Wife, and their House and Servants;
the Allegory Applies to a Deceased Man Suffering Punishment*

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

19. "Martha . . . was the first to come to me"; cf. John 11:20.

20. "One's neighbor is loved for God's sake . . . is sought above all things": this ideal goes back to St. Augustine, who in *De doctrina Christiana* (Book I) formulated the principle that only God is worthy of being loved for his own sake, while all else that is worthy of being loved shall be loved for the sake of him.

Christ reveals to the bride that the soul is God's wife whose house is her body. Her five servants symbolize her five senses and five attendants symbolize five virtues. The Lord explains in what way the soul should be virtuous and how she should be adorned. He also reveals the soul of a deceased man sentenced to purgatory for certain sins and, due to the intercession of a saint, tells her how this soul may be released from punishment by means of suffrages.

1 The Son speaks: "A certain lord married a woman for whom he built a home. He made arrangements for her to have servants and attendants as well as food-supplies. Then he went abroad.¹ 2 When the master at long last returned, he heard that his wife had a bad reputation, that the servants were disobedient and the attendants dishonest. In his anger, he handed his wife over to be judged, the servants to be tortured and the attendants to be whipped.

3 I, God, am that lord. By my divine power I created the human soul and took her as my wedded wife, wishing her to share in the indescribable pleasure of my divinity. 4 I wedded her through faith² and love and perseverance in the virtues. I built a home for this soul by giving her a mortal body in which she could be tested and exercise the virtues. 5 This home, that is, the body, has four properties: nobility, mortality, mutability, and corruptibility.³ 6 The body is noble because it was created by God, has a share in all the elements⁴ and will rise to eternal life on the last day. But it is ignoble with respect to the soul, because it is of earth while the soul is spiritual. 7 Therefore, because the body has nobility, it should be adorned with virtues so that it may be glorified on the day of judgment. The body is also mortal, because it is of earth. 8 Therefore, it has to be strong against sensual pleasures, because if it succumbs to them, it loses God. The body is mutable and must therefore be stabilized by the soul's faculty of reason. 9 When it follows its impulses, it resembles cattle. In the fourth place, the body is corruptible and must therefore always be pure, for the devil desires the impurity that flees from the angels' care.

10 The inhabitant of the house of the body is the soul. The soul is lodged in the body as in a house, and the soul gives life to the body. Without the presence of the soul, the body is foul and stinking and horrible to see. 11 The soul has five domestic servants for her convenience. The first servant is her sense of sight. He should be like a good scout that can distinguish between enemies and friends. 12 Enemies approach when the eyes want to see pretty faces, objects of physical pleasure, and harmful and indecent things. 13 Friends approach when it pleases her to see my passion and the works of my friends and things that are for the glory of God. The second servant is her hearing. He is like a good innkeeper who opens the door for friends but shuts

1. "Then he went abroad"; cf. Matthew 21:33.

2. "I wedded her through faith"; cf. Hosea 2:20.

3. "Mortality, mutability, and corruptibility"; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52-53.

4. "Has a share in all the elements"; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 91, a. 1.

it for enemies. 14 He opens the door for friends when it pleases her to hear the words of God and the sermons and deeds of God's friends. He shuts the door for enemies when slanders and gossip and frivolous talk are rejected. 15 The third servant is the sense of taste for eating and drinking. He is like a good doctor who prescribes the nourishment that is necessary, not that which is superfluous or for pleasure. 16 There are two rules to consider with regard to taste, namely that one should eat neither too much nor too little. If one eats too much food, one becomes sick. If one eats less than one ought, it leads to weariness in the service of God. 17 The fourth servant is the sense of touch. He is like a good laborer who does honest manual work to sustain the body, works prudently to tame illicit carnal desires and with a longing to obtain eternal salvation. 18 The fifth servant is the sense of smell as to pleasant aromas. He can be absent in many instances for the sake of eternal reward. This servant should therefore be like a good steward who considers whether he is beneficial for the soul, whether he is needed, whether the body can get on without him. 19 If a person thinks his or her body can go on and live without pleasant aromas under whatever circumstances, and if he or she abstains from them for the sake of the Lord, then he or she deserves a great reward from God, because it is highly pleasing to God when the spirit denies itself even in legitimate pleasures.

20 If the soul has such servants, she should also have five trained female attendants who take care of their lady and warn her of any dangers. 21 The first should be respectful and careful in seeing that the bridegroom is not offended through the transgression of his commandments and that her lady is not found to be neglectful in any respect. The second attendant should be devoted so that she seeks nothing but the glory of the bridegroom and the benefit of her lady. 22 The third should be disciplined and steadfast so that her lady neither gets carried away with enjoyment nor gives way to adversity. The fourth should be patient and prudent so that she is able to comfort her lady in the face of bad events. 23 The fifth should be modest and chaste so that nothing indecent or remiss is found in thought, word or deed.

24 If she has such a home as I have described, with trained servants and upright attendants, it is shameful for the soul, the lady of the house, not to be lovely and devout herself. I will accordingly reveal for you the soul's proper adornment and appearance. 25 She should use her reason to discern what is owed to the body and what is owed to God, inasmuch as she shares with the angels the faculties of reason and natural love.⁵ 26 She should therefore regard her body as a donkey,⁶ giving it the necessary nourishment in due measure, spurring it on to work, keeping it in check through fear and abstinence and watching its movements so that she does not condescend to the weakness of the flesh and thus sin against God. 27 Secondly, the soul should

5. "Shares with the angels . . . reason and natural love": see, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I^a, q. 96, a. 2 and q. 60, a. 1.

6. "Regard her body as a donkey": see the note to chapter 46.12.

be heaven-minded, since she possesses the image of heavenly God,⁷ and should never take delight or pleasure in carnal things and thus allow the image of the devil to take shape in her. 28 Thirdly, she should have a fervent love of God, because she is the sister of the angels and is immortal and everlasting. Fourthly, she should be lovely through all the virtues, because she will behold the everlasting loveliness of God. 29 If she gives her consent to the flesh, she will be everlastingly ugly. The lady, that is, the soul should also have food. Her food is the memory of God's favors, the consideration of his terrible judgment, and pleasure in his charity and commandments. 30 The soul should therefore take diligent care never to be steered by the body, because then everything is thrown into disorder. Her eyes then want to see attracting but harmful things, her ears to hear frivolous things. It pleases her then to taste sweet things and to labor in vain for worldly reasons. 31 Her reason is then seduced and dominated by impatience; devotion wanes, neglect increases; guilt is taken lightly but the life to come is disregarded. 32 Spiritual food starts to disgust her, and everything concerning God seems burdensome—for how can there be any room left for pleasure in the constant memory of God if one is full of sensuality? 33 How can a soul conform herself to the will of God if only carnal things please her? How can she distinguish between true and false if everything related to God is oppressive to her? 34 One can say of such a deformed soul that God's house has become the devil's tenement and is pledged to him.

35 Such is the soul of this deceased man whom you see. The devil possesses him with nine rights. First, because he freely consented to sin. Second, because he spurned the dignity and vow of his baptism. 36 Third, because he did not care about the grace of his confirmation received from the bishop. Fourth, because he did not bother about the time of penance granted him. Fifth, because he did not fear me, his God, in his actions, nor my judgments, but withdrew from me on purpose. 37 Sixth, because he scorned my patience, as though I would not or would be unwilling to render judgment. Seventh, because he cared less about my precepts and counsels than about human ones. 38 Eighth, because he did not give thanks to God from his heart for all his benefits, since his whole heart was bent on the world. Ninth, because my passion was completely dead in his heart.

39 This is why he is now suffering nine punishments. The first is because he suffers all that he suffers not out of charity but with bad will. The second is because he abandoned his Creator and loved creation.⁸ Therefore, every creature will detest him. 40 The third punishment is sorrow because he abandoned and lost all that he loved, and these are now opposed to him. The fourth is heat and thirst, because he longed more for fleeting things than eternal goods. 41 The fifth is the terror and power of the demons, since he did not choose to honor his benign God when he was able. 42 The seventh is despair of pardon,

7. "Image of . . . God"; cf. Genesis 1:26.

8. "He abandoned his Creator and loved creation"; cf. Romans 1:25.

since he does not know whether he will be saved or not.⁹ The ninth punishment is cold and weeping, since he did not long for God's love.

43 However, because this soul did have two good qualities—one was that he had faith in my passion and stood firmly, in so far as he was able, against my detractors, and the other was that he loved my Mother and saints and honored them with fasting—therefore, because of the prayers of my friends who pray for him, I will tell how he can be saved. 44 First, he will be saved due to my passion, because he kept the faith of my church; second, through the offering of my body, because this is the remedy for souls; third, for the sake of the prayers of my chosen ones in heaven; 45 fourth, because of the good deeds performed in the Holy Church; fifth, because of the prayers of good people living in the world; sixth, because of the alms given from justly acquired goods as well as the restitution of any known ill-gotten goods; 46 seventh, because of the deeds of the righteous who go on pilgrimages for the salvation of souls; eighth, because of the indulgences granted by the popes; ninth, because of the penance carried out on behalf of souls which they did not complete while still alive.

47 My daughter, this revelation was gained for you by your patron, Saint Erik,¹⁰ to whom this soul had devotion. There will indeed come a time when the wickedness of this land will cool down and zeal for souls will arise in many hearts.”

⚡ Chapter 67

On Three Ages of the World and the Coming of the Antichrist

DATE: 1360S, ROME

Christ tells the bride that this world is like a ship that has three parts: prow, middle, stern. Accordingly, this world will include the three ages described here and, at the end of the third age in which we live, the monstrous Antichrist¹ will be born from an accursed woman and man.

1 The Son says: “This world is like a ship. It is full of cares and tossed on the waves of temptations and never leaves a man safe until he reaches a quiet haven. 2 As a ship has three parts—prow, middle, and stern—so too the world has three ages which I will describe for you. The first age lasted from Adam until my incarnation. 3 This is symbolized by the prow and was high, admirable, and strong. It was high in the piety of the patriarchs, admirable in the knowledge of the prophets, strong in the observance of the law. 4 This part, however, began gradually to sink as the Jewish people scorned my commandments and involved itself in evil and impiety. Therefore, they were forced to give up their honor and inheritance. 5 The middle of this ship, that is, of the world,

9. “Does not know . . . saved or not”; cf. chapter 39.109 with note.

10. “Saint Erik”: the lawgiver king, Erik Jedvardsson, who engaged on a crusade to convert the Finns, and was killed by a Danish pretender to the Swedish throne in 1160. He was one of the most celebrated native saints of Sweden and was often used as a symbol of the aristocracy's uprisings against some of the monarchs in the thirteenth century. See also *Extravagantes* 27.

1. “The monstrous Antichrist”: On this vision, see p. 13.

began to make its appearance when I, Son of the living God, chose to become incarnate. 6 As the middle of a ship is lower and more humble than the rest, humility and honesty began to be preached upon my coming, and many people followed these virtues for a long time. 7 Now, however, because impiety and pride are growing in strength, and my passion is almost forgotten and ignored, the third part is starting to rise and it will endure until the day of judgment.

8 I have sent the words of my lips to the world through you in this age. All those who hear them and follow them will find happiness. 9 As John says in the gospel that is not his but mine: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen but still believe,’² so I say now: ‘Blessed indeed in eternal blessedness will they be who hear these words and follow them.’

10 At the end of this age the Antichrist will be born. God’s children are born through spiritual matrimony but the Antichrist will be born from an accursed woman pretending to have spiritual wisdom, and from an accursed man. The devil will fashion his work from their seed by my permission. 11 This Antichrist will not come at the time described by the friar whose books you have seen,³ but at a time known to me when iniquity will abound⁴ beyond measure and there will be an immense increase of impiety. 12 Know thus that, before the Antichrist comes, the door of faith will be opened to some peoples. Then, when Christians love heresies and the wicked trample the clergy and justice underfoot, it will be a clear sign that the Antichrist is coming.”

✠ Chapter 68

On an Excommunicated Monk

DATE: 1371–72?, ITALY

The bride is in doubt about whether a certain monk was trying to trick others by claiming to have seen heavenly visions. Christ replies that the monk has been tricked by the devil disguised as an angel of light.¹ Christ proves this by means of the ambition and self-praise contained in the monk’s books. Christ commands her to warn him to correct himself, otherwise he will soon die in an awful way. This is what unfortunately happened afterward.

1 The Son speaks to the bride: “I will tell you about that monk about whom you are having doubts. Know that it was impatience which made him leave his first monastery and that he entered a second one under false premises. 2 Because he had been excommunicated, he came to my city Jerusalem. This is why he deserved to be tricked and deceived, since he was ashamed to be a

2. “Blessed are those who have not seen but still believe”; cf. John 20:29.

3. “The friar whose books you have seen”: it is tempting to identify this friar with the monk mentioned in chapter 68, but the *Revelationes* usually distinguish quite clearly between friars (i.e., mendicants) and monks (i.e., members of the monastic orders).

4. “Iniquity will abound”; cf. Matthew 24:12.

1. “The devil disguised as an angel of light”; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:14.

humble monk and remain in the calling to which he was called. 3 Listen to the books he has authored and you will find ambition and self-praise in them. You have indeed read in them that Peter and Paul told him he deserved the high priesthood and that he would be made both pope and emperor, and also that, when he was in need, he found gold dinars at his head as well as an amount of unknown coinage, and, moreover, that the archangel Michael appeared to him as a merchant and also how he himself collected all the prophecies of his predecessors. 5 Be accordingly assured that all this comes from the devil who has tricked him. Tell him, therefore, that he will become neither pope nor caesar² but, rather, unless he returns quickly to his monastery and remains there as a humble monk, he will die within a very short time as an apostate, unworthy of the communion of the saints and the company of monks.”

✠ Chapter 69

A Certain Friar's Abstinence is Driven by Pride rather than Humility

DATE: UNDATED

Christ tells the bride that a certain friar was deceived by false virtue, having eaten nothing for forty days and performing other unwise acts of abstinence, confident of gaining heaven through such actions. We ought not to put our trust in our own good actions but consider them—however great they may be—as nothing, even if they are necessary. Rather, we should humbly hope only in the mercy of God.

1 The Son speaks: “I told you in my gospel that heaven can be obtained by means of two things. The first is when a person becomes as humble as a small child. The second is when a person does violence to his or her own self.¹ 2 That man is humble who considers all his progress and all his good deeds to be as nothing and does not put any trust in his own merits. 3 That man does violence to himself who goes against his disordered physical impulses and chastises himself in a wise manner so as not to offend God. Such a man does not believe he will obtain heaven through his own righteous deeds but through the mercy of God. 4 This friar, however, who did not eat anything for forty days and who performed other unwise acts of fasting, desired to gain heaven through his own abstinence as though it were his right. 5 His works of abstinence and justice came more from pride than from humility. Therefore, he will be justly sentenced along with those who fasted and paid tithes and despised other people.² 6 It would have been better for him to have imitated the humility of that sinner who did not even dare to lift his eyes up to heaven.³ 7 I, true God and man, lived

2. “He will become neither pope nor caesar”: the man in this vision may be the same as the second man in Book III 33.

1. “Heaven can be obtained . . . his or her own self”; cf. Matthew 18:3 and 8–9.

2. “Those who fasted and paid tithes and despised other people”; cf. Luke 18:11–12.

3. “That sinner . . . up to heaven”; cf. Luke 18:13.

among men and, though I could have survived without food, ate and drank what was put before me in order to give people an example of how to live and so that they might receive the necessities of life and give thanks to God.”

✠ Chapter 70

A Cardinal is Condemned to Eternal Torment for his Pride and Worldly Pleasures

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Christ reveals to the bride the terrifying condemnation of the soul of a deceased cardinal who lived a wicked and sensuous life. He also threatens with strict and terrible justice the prelates and clergy who unrightfully devour the ecclesiastical goods donated by the faithful, but he promises the donors complete recompense in eternal glory.

1 It seemed as though the person of a deceased cardinal was sitting on a tree trunk. Four chambers were being prepared for his soul to pass through by dark Ethiopians. 2 In the first chamber there were clothes of various kinds such as the soul cherished in life. In the second there were gold and silver vessels and various other kinds of utensils in which the soul delighted in life. 3 In the third chamber there were various foodstuffs and aromas with which the soul refreshed herself when she was united with her body. In the fourth chamber there were horses and animals with which the soul was conveyed when joined with her body.

4 Then, as the soul passed through the first chamber with the clothes, she was struck with an unendurable coldness and weighed down under a terrible burden. She cried out piteously and said: “Pity me, for I loved the beautiful more than the useful. I preferred to be exalted and praised, and this is why I deserve to be weighed down under the heels of demons.” 6 As she passed through the second chamber, she felt a torrent of pitch and flame spreading everywhere, and she cried out: 7 “Pity me forever, for I drank and drank again, I sought the glitter of the earth and now I deserve to be drenched by the torrent of the devil’s pleasure.” 8 When the soul passed through the third chamber, she sensed a horrid stench and flaming serpents, and she cried out in terror: 9 “O, o, I loved the handmaid and spurned the lady! I loved the easy life and so I deserve to taste the bitter one.” As she went through the fourth chamber, she heard a terrible sound like thunder, and she cried out wretchedly in her fright: “O my reward is deserved!”

10 After this a voice was heard to say: “What do people think on earth? That the Son of God was lying when he said that a person must render account of the least farthing¹ at the judgment? 11 No, I tell you, even more: a person will render an account of every moment and every coin and all the food and drink

1. “The least farthing”; cf. Matthew 5:26.

and all the various thoughts and words, unless they are washed away through contrition and penance. 12 Do the clergy and the cardinals and bishops think that I will not demand an account of my alms, which they do not eat with fear and devotion but devour with no profit? 13 Or do they think that the souls to whom those goods belonged in which they boast will not demand vengeance in my presence? Surely, my daughter, I will carefully judge and scrutinize why they collect the offerings made to me, and both men and angels will judge them. 14 My friends and I have given gifts to the church in order that the clergy might live a quiet life of service to me. Now, however, the clergy do not live as friends nor pray so as to be heard. Accordingly, from the table of my mercy and my passion, I shall provide for and have mercy on the souls of those persons whose goods they were.”

✠ Chapter 71

Master Petrus may Give Absolution to Pilgrims in Rome

DATE: 1350, ITALY

In the Jubilee Year Christ directs a confessor by means of the bride to give absolution freely to all those who make their confession to him except in cases where the sentence of the church is clearly needed.

1 The Son says: “Have that good confessor give absolution to all the sinners who come to him with contrition, so long as no one comes whom I say should not be given absolution. However, he should be cautious in cases clearly reserved for the sentence of the church.”

EXPLANATION¹

2 This priest is believed to be Master Petrus,² Saint Birgitta’s confessor. He writes about himself in the third person in his letter concerning the Roman Curia to Sir Nicolaus of blessed memory, then bishop of Linköping³ in Sweden, saying: 3 A certain foreign priest was requested by the papal vicar to attend to the pilgrims [. . .]

1. The Explanation occurs only in Gh, which is based upon a letter from Birgitta’s confessor Petrus to Bishop Nicolaus. Since the bishop is referred to as having died, this text must have been composed after 1391. However, there is another slightly abbreviated version of the letter in Codex Holmiensis A64 fols 9–10, which is likely to be the source of the Gh text; this version is translated here (after paragraphs 1–3 of Gh which are also translated), and the main differences from Gh are noted.

2. “Master Petrus,” Birgitta’s confessor for most of her life. He was the head of the Swedish household in Rome, and managed its financial affairs. He was the author of the liturgy for nuns, the *Cantus sororum*, and (with Prior Petrus) the *Vita* of St. Birgitta. He later helped in the founding of Vadstena abbey. Here is he alluded to as the appointed confessor to many of the Scandinavian pilgrims, as he spoke their language.

3. “Sir Nicolaus . . . bishop of Linköping”: Nicolaus Hermanni, c.1326–91, bishop from 1375; he was revered as a saint in the diocese and the official translation of his relics took place in 1515. See further Lundén, *Nikolaus Hermansson*. He is attributed with teaching Birgitta Latin (see volume I, p. 11).

2 Now, my Lord, for the glory of God and unto your solace, I will describe what occurred in the City when my lady Birgitta stayed for a time there. 3 A certain clergyman was also staying there at that time. He was from foreign parts, and the papal vicar had requested him to attend to the pilgrims sharing his language in the sacrament of confession. He also gave him authority of absolution in all the cases in which he was able. 4 Accordingly, there was a great stream of people with many serious cases whom he absolved. Among them there came a certain rich and influential man who said that he had sinned with four pairs of sisters, each pair of whom had thus come into this world from different parents and not all from the same father and mother, but each pair was from a separate father and mother. 5 Then he added that he had sinned with 200 women, and swore on top of this by God and all the saints⁴ that he had never acquired notoriety nor was ever accused before any judge, spiritual or civil. 6 Upon hearing this, the priest felt a great abhorrence toward him and kept as great a distance as he could from him. However, that sinner was aflame with divine fire and could not let himself despair. 7 Thus, he did not give up despite the clergyman's rejection but, turning to Lady Birgitta, he complained that the clergyman did not want to support him with the sacrament of absolution. Then Lady Birgitta questioned the priest about his reasons for doing so. He responded that both that man and many others were in such grave states of sin that no one but the pope had the authority to absolve them. You, my Lord, know well what familiar conversations blessed Birgitta had with God, our Lady and other denizens of heaven.⁵ 8 Accordingly, she prostrated herself in prayer, interceding for the clergyman and the aforementioned man. At that very moment she heard the voice of the heavenly Father saying: 9 'Tell the clergyman on my part that he should lovingly help forward all those who come to him of his own language and country, imposing on them a penance according to the grace conferred on him and his soundly considered judgment as well as the capacity of the penitent to bear it. 10 He should not be worrying about giving anyone absolution, unless I warn him about a sinner who comes to him by telling him beforehand: "Do not give him absolution." He should, however, be cautious in regard to cases of ecclesial censure, that is, public crimes, which should be subject to a public trial by church prelates.' The clergyman then did as he had been told."

✠ Chapter 72

On Simony and Absolution by Parish Priests

DATE: 1350-70, ITALY

Christ commands that it should be so arranged that no money is received for the absolution of sins and that parish priests should be

4. "By God and all the saints": omitted by Gh.

5. "Blessed Birgitta . . . denizens of heaven": omitted by Gh.

able to give absolution for all hidden sins in order that sinners, if referred without absolution to higher authorities, might not out of their fear of shame become obdurate in their mortal sins and die under a sentence of condemnation.

1 The Son speaks: “There are two stains in my church. The first is that few people receive absolution without money beforehand. The second is that parish priests do not dare to absolve sinners from all their hidden sins, 2 but, claiming that they cannot give absolution in some cases reserved to bishops, send those sinners along to the bishops. Then the bishops spend so much time in investigating them, that the hidden sins become obvious to everyone. 3 Therefore, those who have zeal for souls should go to such sinners with salvation so that no souls die in the state of mortal sin out of shame or obdurance.”

✠ Chapter 73

A Penitentiary in Rome is Criticized, but his Remissions are still Valid

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

In regard to a certain papal penitentiary in Rome, Christ says that, although he is sinful, nevertheless the absolution that he gives to penitents is valid in God’s sight. Christ also predicts his sudden death.

1 “This penitentiary¹ priest is a leper. Like the bird called a kite,² he is audacious in small ways, and overweening as a lion. So, like a butterfly with wide wings but a slender body,³ he will drop at the slightest breeze. 2 May you know, however, that the absolution he gives by the authority of the church to penitents confessing to him is as valid in God’s sight as the absolution given by upright priests. Tell him thus: 3 ‘You shall get what you desire but you will not possess it, for others will carry off what you have gathered.’” After this he obtained an archbishopric and died that very day.

✠ Chapter 74

Birgitta Sees an Area Around St. Peter’s Church that Belongs to the Pope

DATE: 1350S, ROME

The bride saw a vision of many residences in Rome surrounded by a wall from Castel Sant’Angelo to Saint Peter’s. Christ explains the vision, saying that the saintly pope who loves the church spiritually and fervently will live there with his cardinals and advisors.

1. “Penitentiary”: a priest of a papal tribunal who had responsibility for issues relating to mercy and the forgiveness of sins and the full powers to absolve people from sin.

2. “Kite” renders “miluus”; cf. Sw. “musauakir” which means buzzard. The latter seems more likely to be the bird Birgitta had in mind.

3. “Butterfly . . . but a slender body”: the same image appears in Book III 112, there used as a symbol of pride.

1 I saw as it were a flat area in Rome from the papal palace near Saint Peter's to the Castel Sant'Angelo¹ and from the castle to the Holy Spirit Hospital² up to the church of Saint Peter itself. A strong and solid wall surrounded the flat area and there were various residences around the wall. 2 Then I heard a voice saying: "That pope who loves his bride with the love with which I and my friends have loved her will possess this place together with his assistants in order that he may with greater freedom and peace gather his advisors together."

✠ Chapter 75

A Squire Doubts the Preaching of Master Mathias; He Must be Steadfast

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

By means of the bride, Christ directs a certain devout master of theology to preach fervently in season and out of season¹ that purified souls will see the face of God. He also says that those people who wish to live forever and sin forever will be eternally tormented in hell.

1 When Master Matthias of Sweden, who composed the prologue to the Revelations, was preaching once, a squire was enraged and cried out: "If my soul does not get into heaven, let it wander around like an animal eating earth and tree-bark. 2 It is a long wait indeed to the day of judgment. And before that judgment no soul will see the glory of God."

The bride was present, and when she heard this, she sighed and said: 3 "O Lord, King of glory, I know that you are very merciful and patient,² for all those who are silent about the truth and feign justice receive the world's praise, but those who have zeal for you and show it are scorned. Therefore, Lord, give this master the steadfastness and fervor he needs in speaking!"

4 Then the bride in ecstasy saw heaven opened and hell burning, and she heard a voice saying to her: "Behold heaven and the glory in which the souls are clothed! 5 Tell your teacher this:³ 'None other than your God, your creator and redeemer, tells you this. Preach fearlessly! Preach steadfastly! Preach in season and out of season!⁴ Preach that blessed and purified souls shall see the face of God!⁵ 6 Preach fervently, for your reward will be like that of a son hearing his father's voice! If you doubt who I am who tells you this, may you know that I am he who freed you from your temptations.'"

1. "Castel Sant'Angelo," in central Rome. Originally a mausoleum for Emperor Hadrian, it had in Birgitta's time been converted into a castle for the popes; Pope Nicholas III (1277–80) had connected it to St. Peter's basilica by means of a covered corridor.

2. "Holy Spirit Hospital": Ospedale di Santo Spirito, Rome, close to the Vatican. This was a hospital and orphanage established by Innocent III and run by the Order of the Holy Ghost.

1. "Preach fervently in season and out of season"; cf. 2 Timothy 4:2.

2. "You are very merciful and patient"; cf. Psalm 144 (145):8.

3. "Tell your teacher this . . . temptations"; cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 530, 620.

4. "Preach in season and out of season!"; cf. 2 Timothy 4:2.

5. Shall see the face of God": see note to Book VII 7.16.

7 After this, she saw hell. Terrified with fear, she heard a voice saying: “Do not be afraid of the spirits you see. Their hands, that is, their powers, are tied and have no more power without my permission than straw beneath your feet. 8 Do presumptuous men think that I will not exact vengeance from them—I who subject even the demons to my will?” The bride answered: “O Lord, do not be indignant if I speak. 9 Are you who are most merciful going to inflict everlasting punishment on someone who cannot sin everlastingly? Men do not believe that this accords with your dignity. You exalt mercy over justice, and humans do not inflict everlasting punishment on those who offend against them.” 10 The Spirit answered: “I am truth and justice themselves. I give to each one according to his works.⁶ I examine hearts and wills. As far as heaven is from earth, so far are my ways and my judgments from the decisions and minds belonging to the world.⁷ 11 Hence, is it so strange that a man who does not reform his wickedness while he lives and is able should be punished when he is no longer able? Why should those who wish to live forever and sin forever be allowed to dwell in my most pure eternity? 12 Therefore, he who reforms his sinful behavior while he is able may dwell with me forever, for I am eternally omnipotent and live eternally.”

EXPLANATION

13 This man was married but publicly kept a concubine in his house. He got up from the table with an anxious heart when this warning was made to him. In the sight of everyone, he killed his concubine. 14 He died on the fourth day after this without the sacraments and was buried in a church of the friars. Several of the friars heard a voice coming from his grave for several nights saying: “Alas, alas! I am burning, burning!” 15 When this was told to his wife, his tomb was opened in her presence. The body buried in it was not found, apart from a bit of clothing and shoes. After the tomb was covered up again, the voice was heard no more.

⚡ Chapter 76

On the Superstitious Owner of a Farm

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ chastises the bride by letting her things be burned. He says that people who do not chastise their servants in a virtuous manner bring God’s judgment on themselves. He also allows a terrible punishment to befall someone who held that everything happens by fortune and chance and because he tried to catch fish through magical incantations.

6. “I give to each one according to his works”; cf. Psalm 61 (62):12.

7. “As far as heaven is from earth . . . belonging to the world”; cf. Isaiah 55:9.

1 When the bride was staying in a certain village, it happened that her own and her servants' clothes and precious belongings were burnt up in a fire. Christ spoke to her when she was praying and said: "It is written that the chief cook burned down the temple of Jerusalem."¹ 2 Who is this chief if not those who look for physical delights more than the bitterness of my passion? You, too, look for and keep pretty faces and pretty clothes in your household staff, and you do not correct their behavior so that you do not seem strict to them. 3 This is why the damage that you see has now occurred: in order that you may understand that it is not enough, if you would be perfect, to chastise yourself. You must also encourage others and especially the members of your household to similar habits and a virtuous life. 4 Because you can chastise but neglect to do so for the sake of temporal advantage and your own popularity, this will be accounted to you as a matter of judgment and sin.

5 Know, moreover, that the inhabitant of this house labors under two sins. The first is infidelity, because he believes everything is steered by fate, that is, by chance and fortune.² The second is that he makes use of diabolical incantations and spells in order to catch plentiful fish from the lake. 6 Therefore, since he belongs to your household, you should warn him verbally to repent and reform himself. Otherwise you will see with your own eyes that the devil whom he serves will gain mastery over him."

7 He heard the warning of Christ's bride but rejected it. He was found suddenly dead in bed with his neck bent backward.

✠ Chapter 77

On a Monk Who Had Expressed Doubts Over the Crusades

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ reproaches a certain monk who was debating the salvation of pagans. He says that those who have struggled to live well in such a way that they could be called to the vineyard of heavenly glory, but were not able to become Christians, will receive their consolation from God after death, although they will not enter into glory.

1 The Son speaks to the bride, saying: "What did that loquacious monk tell you?" She answered: "That the pagans who are not called to the vineyard will not in any way receive the fruit of the vineyard."¹ 2 The Lord answered: "Tell him: 'There will come a time when there will be one sheepfold and one shepherd,'² one faith and one clear knowledge of God. Then many people who were called to the vineyard will be rejected. 3 However, those who had not been called but still struggled as far as they could in order to be called will receive mercy

1. "Chief cook burned down the temple of Jerusalem"; cf. Jeremiah 52:12-13.

2. "Fate . . . fortune"; cf. chapter 45:15.

1. "Called to the vineyard"; cf. Matthew 20:1-28.

2. "One sheepfold and one shepherd"; cf. John 10:16.

from God in their sufferings as well as the grace of a diminished punishment, although they will not enter into the vineyard itself.’ 4 Tell him again: ‘It is better for your salvation to pray an Our Father with simple piety than to debate with deceptive subtlety for the sake of an empty reputation in the world. 5 Consider, therefore, what you were when you entered your order, and know that you will soon be begging your bread elsewhere. However, if you correct your intention, God will mitigate his sentence.’”

✠ Chapter 78

Birgitta Stays at a Farm Where there are Evil Spirits and Teaches the Inhabitants how to be Free of the Spirits

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

A devil was expelled from a house by the words here contained and revealed to the bride. This was a devil who gave answers to its inhabitants in their idolatry and made prophecies about the future. When they were converted by the power and words of God, the devil withdrew in confusion with a clamor.

1 When the bride was staying one night in a house¹ where the devil had been openly speaking and making replies and predicting many things, this unclean spirit fell silent in her presence. 2 In her prayer she heard a voice saying to her, though she saw no one: “Many evil deeds have been done in this house by the former residents and also by those who are residing here now. 3 They show devotion to elves,² and only visit churches in order to seem respectable, and they never hear the word of God. That is why the devil is in control of this place. 4 Bring all the inhabitants of this house and their neighbors together, and have your confessor speak the following words to them: ‘God is one and triune. Through him all things were made³ and without him nothing can be made. 5 The devil is his creature and he cannot move the straw beneath your feet unless God permits it. 6 When you seek and love the creature and the world more than God⁴ and seek to become rich against God’s will, then the devil begins to possess your souls, making you prosper in temporal affairs when God’s justice permits it. 7 So believe in God and forget about the snakes for which you leave milk to drink. Do not leave first offerings for the elves of your beef or pork or bread or wine or anything else. And do not say that fate has done this or that, but that God has thus permitted it to happen. 8 Do not say that nothing but a wafer of bread is offered on the altar, but believe firmly that what is there is the true body of God crucified on the cross. And believe truly in

1. “In a house”: according to Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 540, this revelation took place in the vicinity of Lödöse, nor far from the site of present-day Gothenburg.

2. “Elves” renders “penates”; cf. Sw. “tomtar”; see Piltz “Magister Mathias of Sweden in his Theological Context,” p. 146, and Raudvere, “Jak är gudh ok ey stengudh.”

3. “All things were made”; cf. John 1:3.

4. “Creatures . . . God”: see chapter 16.2.

the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and extreme unction, and then the devil will flee from you.”

9 When they all cried out “we believe and promise to reform,” then a voice was heard from the oven from which the devil used to give his answers: “There will be no more room for me here anymore!,” and he withdrew in confusion, and after that the sound of his distress was heard.

✠ Chapter 79

On a Priest Who Had Administered the Sacraments Without Being Ordained; He Would be Saved on Account of His Repentance

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

A man died by the forces of justice because, though he was not ordained to the priesthood, he celebrated the sacraments. Christ says about him that his soul is not condemned, thanks to the punishment and the contrition he experienced. The masses and other sacraments that he carried out profited the faithful who received them because of the faith they had.

1 A man who had not been ordained to the priesthood celebrated masses. When he was brought before the judge, he was sentenced to the fire. Christ spoke to the bride as she prayed for the man and said: 2 “Look on my mercy! If this man had been left unpunished, he would never have obtained his glory. Now, however, he did obtain contrition, and therefore, because of the punishment he suffered and his contrition, he is drawing near to the state of grace and rest. 3 You may be asking now whether the people who heard his masses and received sacraments from an unordained man must be punished or whether they have committed any mortal sin. 4 I answer you that they are in no way to be condemned. Rather, the faith of his hearers saved them, because they believed that he had been ordained by the bishop and that I was in his hands on the altar. 5 Likewise the parents’ faith benefitted the children he baptized, because faith, thanks to its love for the works it believes are worthy of God, will not go unrewarded nor be robbed of its desire.”

✠ Chapter 80

On a Woman Possessed by a Devil

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ tells the bride about a certain woman who was terribly plagued by a brooding demon of lust. He says that she can be liberated through a clean confession and the reception of the eucharist and by the prayers of the servants of God.

1 A woman was plagued by a demon in such a way that her stomach swelled up as if she were about to give birth, and then it subsided gradually as if she had nothing in her womb. 2 Since she was plagued by the unclean spirit for

such a long time and was continually swelling up as if giving birth, her mistress consulted the bride of Christ about it. Christ said to her when she was praying: 3 “Among good spirits one is more rarefied and more highly placed than the other; so too among evil spirits one is lower than the other. In this kingdom there are in particular three kinds of demons. 4 One is fiery and flaming. This kind controls gluttons and drunkards. The second is diabolical and possesses the body and soul of a man. The third kind is more abominable than the others and spurs people on to unnatural lust. 5 Since this woman is under the control of a demon due to her lack of faithfulness and continence, and because she approached the sacrament of the altar without having confessed due to shame, therefore she must confess her long concealed sin and God’s friends must pray for her. 6 Then she should receive my body from the hands of a priest, for it pleases me to cure her through my friends’ prayers and the tears they shed for her.” Once this was done, the woman was cured.

✠ Chapter 81

A Three-year-old Boy is Possessed by a Devil

DATE: 1340S, BRÖMS, SKARA DIOCESE

Asolution is given here by Christ how to cure a boy of three years who was plagued by a devil. His mother, who had been deceived by an incubus, was liberated through the power of Christ and the words contained here.

1 A boy three years of age¹ could not quiet down, not even if he was splashed with cold water. The bride was surprised when she saw this. Christ said to her: 2 “See God’s justice and his permissive will! The mother of this boy has long been plagued by an incubus. Since the devil is a spirit, he can assume a body of air for himself. 3 He became visible in such a shape, egging on lust, and he carried out, as it were, his lustful malice and sin with this woman. 4 Though the boy was born from the seed of his father and mother, the devil has the most power over him, because he was not reborn with baptism but with the kind of baptism that women ignorant of the trinitarian formula use.² 5 Have the boy baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and he will be cured. Let his mother confess her sin and let her say when the devil comes to her: 6 ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, you who were born of the Virgin Mary for the salvation of men and were crucified and now reign in heaven and on earth, have mercy on me!’” When the woman did this, she was liberated.

1. “A boy three years of age”: Prior Petrus testifies about this story, and includes it in the *Vita*; see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 542, 630; it is also referred to in *Extravagantes* 51.

2. “The kind of baptism . . . use”: According to canon law, anyone can perform a valid baptism by means of water and the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Since child mortality was high in the Middle Ages, and baptism was considered necessary for salvation, it frequently happened that midwives baptized children immediately after birth. Apparently, they sometimes did so without the trinitarian formula, in which case the baptism was invalid.

⚡ Chapter 82*

The King Must Root out Fortune-Tellers

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ strongly reproaches those who believe in a pythonical spirit foretelling future events, since it is the devil who does this in his natural cunning by God's permission because of human faithlessness and cupidity.

1 A knight consulted a fortune-teller¹ about whether the men of the kingdom were about to revolt against the king or not. It turned out just as the fortune-teller predicted. 2 The knight related this to the king in the presence of the bride of Christ. When he departed from the king, the bride immediately heard Christ's voice in her spirit saying to her: 3 "You heard how the knight consulted the fortune-teller and how she predicted the future peace. Tell the king that this happened by my permission due to the bad faith of the people. 4 By his natural cunning the devil is able to discern many future events which he makes known to those consulting him in order to deceive those who believe in him and are unfaithful to me. 5 Accordingly, tell the king that such people should be rooted out from the fellowship of believers, because they are deceivers of souls. For the sake of temporal gain they submit and pledge themselves to the devil so that more people are deceived. 6 This is not surprising. Because people want to know more than God wants them to know and aspire to become wealthy against God's will, the devil tempts their minds which he sees are open to his suggestions, and he sends his assistants, that is, fortune-tellers and other enemies of the faith, who deceive them. 7 Although the small temporal good they desired is gained, they lose that which is eternal."

⚡ Chapter 83

Gentiles will Outflank Christians in Piety

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ predicts that the piety of the gentiles will grow far more than that of Christians in the future and that they will all sing 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.'

1 The Son speaks to the bride and says: "Know that there will yet be so much piety among the gentiles that Christians will be like their servants spiritually. 2 The scriptures will be fulfilled that speak of the people which does not understand, who will glorify me, and of the wastelands that shall be built up.¹ They shall all sing 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit and praise to all his saints.'"

* This revelation is duplicated in Book VIII 38.

1. "Consulted a fortune-teller"; cf. Deuteronomy 18:10-11.

1. "Scriptures . . . built up"; cf. Isaiah 55:5; 58:12; 61:4. Here, as usual in the *Revelationes*, "gentiles" seems to refer specifically to Muslims.

⚡ Chapter 84

Birgitta Spends a Cold Night Outdoors

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ reproaches those who wear heavy layers of clothes because of the cold as well as those who take pride in their fancy clothes like a peacock does in his feathers. He says that if they had complete trust in him, he would give them beauty and warmth in body and soul.

1 When the bride came in the midst of the coldest weather in Sweden to an island by boat, and everyone there was already asleep, she did not want to disturb anyone but remained on the boat until daybreak. 2 While her servants and household suffered a great deal due to the cold, she felt such a great warmth that those who saw and touched her were amazed. The Lord said to her when she was praying at dawn: 3 “O how little trust people put in me! They burden themselves with clothes like the hedgehog with fruits¹ and the peacock with feathers. And so they pride themselves on their fancy clothes, though they cannot find any warmth without me nor look beautiful but for my gifts 4 If they would place their hope in me, I would give them warmth of body and soul, and I would make them beautiful in the sight of my saints. 5 They are ugly now because they are not satisfied with necessities and love creatures more fervently than the Creator.”²

⚡ Chapter 85

Ill-gotten Goods should not be Retained

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ tells the bride that people who knowingly hold on to ill-gotten goods will not enter into their rest until these goods have been restored. An example is a soul who was in purgatory for a long time. Those who do so in ignorance will not be punished. He also gives an explanation concerning alms donated from ill-gotten acquisitions as to whether they benefit the donors or not.

1 A certain person who had been in purgatory for forty years appeared to the bride, saying: “Because of my sins and because of those ill-gotten temporal goods known to you, I was plagued for a long time in purgatory. 2 I had often heard when I was alive that those goods had been unjustly demanded by my relatives, but I did not care and did not restore them. 3 By divine inspiration, some of my relatives had a conscience and restored those goods to their owners after my death. I was then released from purgatory because of that and thanks to the prayers of the Holy Church.”

1. “Like the hedgehog with fruits”; cf. Sw. “swa som ighilkuttin mz äplom” [like the hedgehog with apples]. According to the medieval bestiary, the hedgehog likes to climb vines and shake down grapes; then it rolls around among the grapes so that they stick to its spines. It can then walk home with the fruits to its hungry children.

2. “Love creatures more fervently than the Creator”; cf. Romans 1:25.

4 Christ then said to the bride: “What do people who own property in bad faith think when they knowingly withhold their unjust acquisitions? Do they think they will enter into my rest? They will certainly not do so, no more than Lucifer. 5 Nor do the alms given from ill-gotten goods benefit them. Rather, they benefit the true owners and become a consolation for them whose goods they were. However, those people who do not realize that they are in possession of ill-gotten goods will not be punished. 6 Furthermore, those who fully intend to restore such goods and do so as far as they are able do not lose entrance into heaven, because God will supply whatever is lacking either in the present or a future age for the sake of their good intention.”

✠ Chapter 86

Birgitta Sees a Living Lamb in the Eucharistic Host

DATE: 1340S, PENTECOST, SWEDEN

How the bride saw fire descending from heaven on the altar and how she saw a lamb in the hands of the priest and the human face of Christ all aflame in the lamb and heard an explanation of the mystery.

1 A priest celebrated his first mass in some monastery on the day of Pentecost. At the elevation of the body of Christ, the bride saw fire descend from heaven upon the whole altar. In the hands of the priest she saw a living lamb and a human face all aflame in the lamb. 2 Then she heard a voice speaking to her: “My Holy Spirit descended upon my apostles at Pentecost and inflamed their hearts in the same way as you saw the fire descend on the altar. 3 Through the words the bread became a living lamb, that is, my body, and the face is in the lamb and the lamb is in the face, because the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father and the Holy Spirit is in both.”

4 Another time at the elevation of the eucharist, the bride saw in the hands of the priest a youth of amazing beauty who said: “I bless those of you who believe. For those who do not believe I will be their judge.”

✠ Chapter 87

Birgitta Experiences a Stench in the Presence of an Excommunicate

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

At the entry of an excommunicate into a house, the bride sensed a terrible stench. Christ explains it to her and says that just as that stench was dangerous to the body, so excommunication is dangerous for the excommunicate’s soul and for those who deal with him.

1 One day when the bride was seated with a bishop and other noblemen, she sensed an abominable stench like that of rotten fish-scales. 2 While the

noble lords were wondering why only she smelled the stench and no-one else, a man suddenly entered the house who had been excommunicated but who, because of his powerful position, was unconcerned about the bonds of excommunication. 3 When the conversation was over, Christ said to the bride: “Just as the rot of fish-scales is more harmful to the body than other stenches, so too excommunication is a spiritual disease more harmful to the soul than any other. 4 This is because it is not only harmful to the excommunicate but also to those who deal with him and are in sympathy with him. The bishop¹ should therefore strive to have such men punished so that others will not be tainted by their involvement with them.”

⚡ Chapter 88

Birgitta Feels a Physical Stirring of her Heart

DATE: 1340S, CHRISTMAS EVE, ALVA STRA

The bride was in doubt what the wonderful sensible movement she felt in heart meant whenever anything was about to be revealed to her by divine inspiration. God’s Mother explains the truth of the mystery to her, declaring to her that God and she want to indicate his will to the world through her.

1 On Christmas night such a great and wonderful feeling of exultation came to the bride of Christ in her heart that she could scarcely contain herself for joy. At that very moment she felt a wonderful sensible movement in her heart like that of a living child¹ turning and turning around. 2 When this movement lasted, she disclosed it to her spiritual father and certain spiritual friends in case it might be an illusion. By sight and touch they marveled at the truth of it. 3 At high mass on the same day, God’s Mother appeared to the bride and said: “Daughter, you are marveling at the movement you feel in your heart. Be assured that it is no illusion but shows a similarity to my own delight and to the mercy done to me. 4 Just as you do not know how this feeling of exultation came so suddenly to your heart, so too my Son’s coming to me was wonderful and swift. 5 As soon as I gave my consent to the angel who announced to me the conception of God’s Son, I immediately felt something wonderful and alive in me. When he was born from me, he came forth from my untouched virginal womb with an indescribable feeling of exultation and a wonderful swiftness. 6 Therefore, my daughter, do not fear that it is an illusion. Instead be thankful that this movement that you feel is a sign of the coming of my Son into your heart. As my Son has called you his new bride, so I call you now² my daughter-in-law who belongs to my Son. 7 When a father and mother grow old and

1. “Bishop” renders “episcopus” of some manuscripts; cf. Sw. “biscopin”; the other manuscripts, and Gh, have the less likely “rex” [king].

1. “Like that of a living child”: see p. 11.

2. “I call you now”; cf. Isaiah 62:2.

inactive, they give their daughter-in-law work to do and tell her what has to be done in the house. Similarly, now that God and I have grown old in human hearts and their charity is cold toward us, we want to indicate our intentions to our friends and to the world through you. 8 This movement in your heart will continue in you and grow according to the capacity of your heart.”

✠ Chapter 89

Master Mathias wishes to know whether the Book of the Apocalypse really was written by St. John

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Through John the evangelist God assures the bride that none other than this same John was the author of the Apocalypse by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and, moreover, that Master Mathias’s commentary on the Bible was divinely administered to him by the same Spirit.

1 At the time when Master Mathias,¹ the biblical commentator from the kingdom of Sweden, was writing his commentary on the Apocalypse, he asked the bride to find out when she was in ecstasy about the time of the Antichrist and whether the Apocalypse had been written by St. John, because many were of a contrary opinion. 2 So while she was praying about this, she fell into a spiritual ecstasy and saw a person anointed, as it were, with oil² yet shining with great splendor. Christ said to him: “Give witness as to who was the author of the Apocalypse.” 3 He answered: “I am John, to whom you entrusted your mother when you were on the cross. You, Lord, inspired its mysteries in me, and I wrote for the consolation of future generations so that your faithful might not be thrown into confusion by the calamities that were to come.” 4 The Lord said to the bride: “Listen, my daughter, I tell you that just as John wrote with the help of my Spirit about the future events he had seen, so Matthias, your confessor and father, understands things through the same Spirit and has written spiritual truths about the Holy Scripture. 5 Furthermore, tell this master of yours, whom I have made a master, that there are many Antichrists, but I will show him through you how and when that accursed Antichrist will come.”

✠ Chapter 90

A Monk Doubts Birgitta’s Divine Vision, While Mathias Defends It

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

1. “Master Mathias”: Birgitta’s confessor, who wrote among other things an *Expositio super Apocalypsim* (ed. Billing-Ottosson), a commentary on the biblical book of the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation).

2. “Anointed . . . with oil”: this may refer to the story that St. John the Evangelist was boiled in a cauldron of oil outside Rome but left unharmed (see Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, volume 1, p. 51); but cf. chapter 103 where the same thing is said of St. Nicholas for different reasons.

When a disbelieving monk doubts and questions the gracious gift¹ of seeing heavenly things given by God to the bride, Christ reproaches him through the bride for his loquacity and empty knowledge and punishes him with paralysis.

1 Master Mathias was speaking with a certain monk of great authority and familiarity about the grace of heavenly visions divinely given to the bride. The monk replied: 2 “It is not credible and is not in agreement with the scriptures that God should turn away from the chaste persons who have abandoned the world and reveal his secrets to aristocratic women.” 3 Master Mathias laid before him various arguments, but he did not agree. When the bride heard this and saw that the master was upset, she applied herself to prayer. In a spiritual ecstasy, she heard Christ say the following: 4 “Many people have such a dangerous sickness that even the cure makes them sick. This is why it should not be given to them, so that they do not become more seriously ill. 5 I am the medicine for the sick and the truth for those in error, but this loquacious monk does not want the medicine because the dung of empty knowledge is in his heart. 6 So I will strike him a blow with my hand, and it will be heard by everyone that I am not a loquacious but an effective God² who is to be feared.”

This monk was humiliated afterward with tribulations and died a paralytic.

⚡ Chapter 91

Birgitta is Instructed to Moderate her Asceticism

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

Christ commands the bride to fortify her body with moderate nourishment so that its weakness does not become an obstacle for the divine service or her soul

1 When the bride became too feeble in her head and body from fasting and vigils, and her mind due to her weakness less well took in the words she heard when Christ spoke to her, Christ went on to say: 2 “Go and give your body moderate but necessary nourishment, because it is my will that the body should have moderate nourishment so that its weakness does not become an obstacle for the soul in the spiritual life.”

⚡ Chapter 92

A Monk States in the Presence of the King that Birgitta is Deluded

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

1. “Gracious gift . . . given” renders “gracia . . . gratis data,” a technical term for a gift of grace such as those enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12, as distinct from “gratia gratum faciens,” the grace which renders humans acceptable to God.

2. “An effective God”; cf. Hebrews 4:12.

Christ reproaches and warns a certain monk who used the *Vitae patrum* to claim before the king that the bride was deluded. The Lord says that those fathers had been deceived who, being proud of their own righteousness, regarded themselves as superior to others and declined to obey humble persons.

1 In the presence of the bride, a monk brought in the book *Vitae patrum*¹ before the counselors and the king of Sweden. He read out a passage from it to the effect that many of the holy fathers had been deluded because of too much fasting and imprudence. 2 He then said that he was afraid that the bride might be similarly deluded. Afterward, when she was praying, she heard Christ saying to her: “What did that monk say? That many of the saints were deluded? This windbag spoke as he wished but not as he ought. 3 None of my friends who loved me in wisdom were deluded. Rather, the ones who were deluded were those who became proud of their abstinence and righteousness and thought themselves superior to others and did not want to be obedient to humble persons. 4 Because this monk brought against me the book of the holy fathers, whom he does not imitate, I will bring against him the book of my justice. He who praises himself for his wisdom will come before my wisdom, and then he will see in his conscience that true wisdom is not found in lofty words but in a clean conscience and in true humility. 5 Teachers from this order have for such a long time abandoned the paths of their father! He was a rebuilders of broken fences and a man who walked the path² of perfection.”

✠ Chapter 93

A Woman Sees a Vision of St. Peter and Peter the Martyr on her Deathbed

DATE: 1350–70, ROME

A notable vision regarding a certain lady whom the Virgin Mary and Peter were taking care of to keep her from falling. On their advice she changed her way of living and by a special divine grace contracted a disease through which she was purified and then moved on to heaven.

1 In a spiritual ecstasy the bride saw a woman sitting on a rope. A handsome man was holding up one of her feet and a virgin of wondrous beauty held the other. Holy Mary appeared then and said: 2 “This lady, with whom you are

1. “*Vitae patrum*”: an important collection of hagiographical stories relating to the lives of the ancient church fathers. It is full of anecdotal and aphoristic stories that were widely adapted by medieval preachers, and there was an emphasis on the ascetic life-style of the desert fathers. There was no version in Swedish until after Birgitta’s time (a translation was undertaken at Vadstena abbey at the end of the fourteenth century).

2. “Rebuilder of broken fences . . . walked the path”; cf. Isaiah 58:12 (where one branch of the Vulgate text has “repairer of fences, turning paths away from iniquity”). The monk was presumably a Cistercian, since Sweden had few other monastic orders; the reference here could then be to St. Bernard, but also to St. Benedict, since the Cistercians follow the Benedictine Rule.

acquainted and who was caught up in so many carnal and worldly concerns, was saved in a wonderful way. Although she often had the desire to sin, she did not have the opportunity of time or place. This was accomplished through the prayer of Peter, my Son's apostle,¹ whom this woman loved. 3 Sometimes she had the opportunity of time and place but lacked the desire. This was accomplished by the charity of me, the Mother of God. 4 Therefore, because her time is now approaching, St. Peter advises her to adopt a certain austerity in her dress, putting aside her soft clothing, for even he, the chief apostle, endured nakedness and prison and hunger,² though he was powerful in heaven and on earth. 5 Moreover I, the Mother of God, who spent not a single hour on earth without affliction³ in my heart, I advise her not to be ashamed to be humble and obey the friends of God."

6 The apostle St. Peter appeared immediately after this and said to the bride: "You who are the new bride of our Lord and our God, go and ask this woman whom I have loved and protected if she really wants to be my daughter." 7 When the woman was asked and answered affirmatively saying, "With all my heart I want it," St. Peter replied: "I will provide for her as I did for my daughter Petronilla⁴ and take her under my protection." 8 When the lady heard this, she immediately changed her way of living.

Not long afterward she fell sick for the rest of her lifetime until she was purified and then gave up her spirit with great devotion. 9 As this lady breathed her last, she beheld the apostle St. Peter in pontifical dress and St. Peter the Martyr in the habit of the Dominicans.⁵ 10 She had loved both of them dearly during her lifetime. She said aloud then: "What is it, my lords?" When those who stood around her asked if she had seen anything, she answered: 11 "Wonderful things. I see my lords Peter the apostle dressed like a pontiff and Peter the Martyr in his Dominican habit, both of whom I have always loved and in whose help I have always hoped." 12 She then exclaimed: "Blessed God, here I come!" And she fell asleep in the Lord.

✠ Chapter 94

On the Resurrection; and How Birgitta Should Deal with Temptations in Old Age

DATE: 1360S, EASTER DAY

God's Mother reveals to the bride where the souls were whom Christ freed from hell when he descended into hell until the day he

1. "Saint Peter, my Son's apostle": the Prince of the Apostles, founder of the Church of Rome and of its episcopal succession.

2. "Endured nakedness and prison and hunger"; cf. Acts 12:5, 2 Corinthians 11:27.

3. "Spent not . . . without affliction"; cf. chapter 61.

4. "Petronilla," traditionally identified as the daughter of St. Peter, or a spiritual convert to him; Peter is said to have cured her of palsy. She died a martyr after refusing marriage and after a hunger-strike.

5. "St. Peter the Martyr . . . Dominicans": Peter of Verona, Dominican friar and celebrated preacher, d. 1252.

ascended into heaven, and also where the bodies were of those who rose with him in Jerusalem when he brought their souls with him into heaven, and also about how after his resurrection the Lord appeared to his mother before anyone else. She also teaches the daughter how to resist temptations.

1 God's Mother speaks: "On this date my Son rose from the dead strong as a lion,¹ for he crushed the power of the devil and rescued the souls of his chosen ones who ascended with him into the joy of heaven. 2 But perhaps you ask where the souls of those whom he freed from hell stayed until he ascended into heaven. I answer that they were in a state of joy known only to my Son. 3 Wherever my Son was and is, there was and is joy and glory. As he said to the thief: 'This day you shall be with me in paradise.'² Many of the holy dead in Jerusalem also rose up³ whom we saw. 4 Their souls ascended with my Son but their bodies await along with others the judgment and resurrection. 5 After my Son's death, I, the Mother of God, was saddened with a sorrow beyond understanding, but, palpable to my touch, he appeared to me before appearing to anyone else, and he comforted me and reminded me that he would be seen ascending into heaven. 6 Although this is not in scripture because of my humility, it is nonetheless the truth of the matter that when my Son arose he appeared to me first before anyone else.

7 Now then, because my Son comforted me on this date, today I will lessen your temptations and teach you how to resist them. 8 You are amazed that temptations are accumulating for you in your old age such as you did not experience in youth or in your married life. 9 Let me tell you that this occurs so that you know yourself to be nothing and to be able to do nothing without my Son. Furthermore, if my Son did not watch over you, there would be no sin into which you would not fall. So let me give you three remedies now for your temptations. 10 When you are tempted by any unclean temptation, say: 'Jesus, Son of God, you know all our thoughts, help me so that I do not take pleasure in empty thoughts.' 11 When you take pleasure in speaking, say: 'Jesus, Son of God, you who were silent before the judge,⁴ hold my tongue until I consider how I should speak and what I should say.' 12 When you take pleasure in working or resting or eating, say: 'Jesus, Son of God, you who were bound and tied,⁵ govern my hands and all the limbs of my body so that all my deeds may be directed to a good end.' 13 Let this be a sign for you that from this day on your servant, that is, your body, will not prevail against its mistress, that is, your soul."

1. "Strong as a lion": this is a reminiscence of the *Visitatio sepulchri*, the liturgical enactment of the resurrection on Easter morning, which includes the phrase: "Today the strong lion rose from the dead, Christ, the son of God."

2. "This day you shall be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

3. "The holy dead in Jerusalem also rose up"; cf. Matthew 27:52.

4. "Who were silent before the judge"; cf. Matthew 26:63.

5. "Who were bound and tied"; cf. John 18:12.

ADDITION

14 The lady experienced temptations while she was at prayer. Mary said to her: “The devil is like a jealous spy. He seeks to accuse the good and put obstacles in their way. 15 Therefore, no matter what temptation you experience in your prayer, keep praying and try to pray, because your good desire and attempt will be as much to your credit as completed prayer. 16 If you cannot get rid of any unclean thoughts arising in your mind, the attempt will add to your reward, provided you do not consent to the temptations and they are against your will.”

✠ Chapter 95*

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)

A leading and upright nobleman, for a good intention, did not want to accept a great position in the government of the kingdom. God’s Mother reprimands him through the bride and tells him to accept it and always to have the words of truth on his lips and the sword of justice in his hand without partiality.

1 When a great nobleman of the kingdom of Sweden, whose name was Israel,¹ was repeatedly and insistently offered by the king a higher position of government in the kingdom, and he declined to accept it under any conditions because he intended to march against the pagans and die there in the service of God on behalf of the holy faith, the Mother of God spoke to the bride at prayer, saying: 2 “If those who both know and desire justice and want to carry it out refuse to take on a toilsome charge for God’s sake, how will the kingdom remain strong? 3 It is no kingdom but a den of thieves² and a cave of tyrants when the wicked rule and the just are trampled down. This is why a just and upright man should be led by love for God and honest zeal to be ready to take on an office of government in order to be of benefit to many people. 4 Those who go round desiring positions and a chance to govern in order to win worldly fame are not true leaders but the worst kind of tyrants. 5 Therefore, my friend Israel should accept an office of government in order to win God’s glory. He should have the words of truth on his lips and the sword of justice in his hand, not looking for human favors or favoring his kinsmen nor showing partiality.

* This revelation is duplicated in Book VIII 29.

1. “My friend Israel”: Israel Birgersson was Birgitta’s brother, who in 1348 took over the office of *drots* (steward) from Knut Jönsson of Aspenäs, Birgitta’s uncle. In this capacity he was in charge of royal legislation, one of the key offices of state in the *riksråd* (council of state) that helped introduce central royal power. He accompanied King Magnus on his Russian crusade in 1350 but died on the way, in Riga, at some point before 10 May 1351; see *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon*, volume 16, pp. 55–66.

2. “It is no kingdom but a den of thieves”; cf. Book VII 16:31–3.

6 I tell you that it will still be said of this man by others: ‘He bravely left his fatherland, sincerely honored the Mother of God, and served God faithfully.’ May you know that I will lead him to my country by another path, as with the wise men.”³

7 It all turned out this way later. After some years had gone, this nobleman marched against the infidels and came to the city of Riga⁴ in Germany where he fell ill. 8 Sensing the approach of death, he went with some others to the cathedral church and, on the finger of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom he held in the greatest reverence, he placed a precious ring and left it there, saying out loud: 9 “You are my lady and you have always been most kind to me. May you be my witness! I surrender myself and my soul to your merciful care.” Then, having received the sacraments, he died a most pious death.

10 When the bride was later praying for him, God’s Mother spoke to her about him, saying: “He gave me a ring of his love, wishing me to be his bride. 11 My daughter, I want you to know that while this man was alive, he loved me not with half a heart but with his whole heart. He honored my Son in his every deed and decision. 12 This is why, with God’s help, I led him to my Son on a path that was better and more necessary for him. I presented him to the heavenly host of saints and angels who loved him—had he died surrounded by family, human consolation might have stood in his way. 13 His good intention pleased God as much as if he had died fighting infidels in a pagan country on behalf of the holy Catholic faith.”

EXPLANATION⁵

This lord was the brother of Saint Birgitta.

✠ Chapter 96

The Burning of St. Peter’s Bells is a Sign of Clement VI’s Approaching Death

DATE: 1352, ROME

When the bells of St. Peter’s church in Rome burned up, Christ told the bride not to be surprised, because sometimes the elements show signs of coming events. Thus those bells show the approaching death of a pope who risks a heavy sentence unless he converts quickly to God.

1 Shortly before the death of a certain pope,¹ the bells of St. Peter’s church in Rome burned up in a strange accident. When the bride heard it she was amazed and began praying. Christ then appeared to her, saying: 2 “Indeed, my daughter, this is a great sign. It is written that all the elements showed, as it

3. “By another path, as with the wise men”; cf. Matthew 2:12.

4. “Riga”: the present capital of Latvia, then under the rule of the Teutonic Order.

5. This brief note appears only in Gh.

1. “A certain pope,” i.e., Clement VI, pope in Avignon 1342–52. See also Book IV 136, and chapter 63.

were, compassion with me at my death by holding back their light² and usual effects. 3 Thus, too, the elements and other creatures sometimes fight and pass judgment on God's behalf, displaying God's wrath and signs of coming events in their orbits. So too these church bells burned up as though they were crying out: 4 'The lord is dead, the lord pontiff has passed away! Blessed be this day but this lord is not blessed!' What a strange thing this is—for they should all have been crying out: 'Long live this lord! Happily may he live!' Instead they cry out and joyfully declare: 5 'May he sink down and never rise again!' No, it is not so strange, for he himself should have been crying out: 'Come, and you will find salvation³ for your souls!' Instead he cried out: 6 'Come and see me in my pomp and ostentation greater than that of Solomon!⁴ Come to my curia and empty your purses and you will find perdition for your souls!' This is what he has been crying out by his example and deeds. 7 So now the time of wrath approaches, and I will judge him as the scatterer of the flock of Peter. What a sentence awaits him! However, if he should still want to be converted to me, I will run out to meet him⁵ half-way like a loving father."

⚡ Chapter 97

On a Lord who has Avoided Going to Confession

DATE: 1340S, HALLAND

About how God wants sinners to be urged in season and out of season to go to confession, especially at the end of life. The example is given of a man who lived sixty years without confession and was almost forced to confess at the end but obtained the grace of contrition and was saved.

1 A certain lord, a great man by worldly standards, who had not been to confession for a long time, fell gravely ill. The bride felt compassion for him and was praying for him. Christ then appeared to her and said to her: 2 "Tell your confessor to visit this sick man and hear his confession." When he came, the sick man replied that he was not in need of confession and swore that he had often gone to confession. 3 On the following day, the confessor was again ordered by Christ to return. When he came, he received the same reply as before. 4 On the third day, the confessor came to the sick man and, in accordance with a revelation of Christ made to the bride, spoke to him as follows: "Christ, the Son of the living God and the Lord over the devil tells you: 5 'You have seven demons in you. One resides in your heart and binds it so that you feel no compunction for your sins. The second resides in your eyes so that you see nothing useful to your soul. The third resides in your

2. "All the elements . . . by holding back their light"; cf. Matthew 27:45.

3. "Come, and you will find salvation"; cf. Matthew 11:28–29.

4. "Greater than that of Solomon"; cf. Matthew 6:29.

5. "I will run out to meet him"; cf. Luke 15:20.

mouth so you do not speak words to the glory of God. 6 The fourth resides in your lower parts, and so you have loved every impurity. The fifth is in your hands and your feet, and so you were not ashamed to rob people and kill them. 7 The sixth is in your internal organs, and so you were given over to gluttony and drunkenness. The seventh is in your soul where God should reside, but where the devil, his enemy, now sits. Repent quickly, for God will still be kind to you.”

8 The sick man then replied with tears: “How can you convince me of gaining pardon when I have been entangled in so many public crimes?” 9 The confessor replied: “I swear to you in all certainty that even if you had done worse, you would still be saved by contrition.” Then, again with tears, he said: 10 “I had despaired of the salvation of my soul because I made a pledge to the devil who has spoken to me many times. 11 That is why I am now sixty years old but have never gone to confession or received the body of Christ, but pretended I had business to attend while others were going to communion. I confess to you, Father, that I never recall having such tears as I have now.” 12 Thus, on that day, he went to confession four times, and on the day after his confession he received communion. Then, on the sixth day, he died.

13 Christ spoke to the bride about him and said: “This man was a servant of that robber whose dangerous state I revealed to you earlier.¹ The devil, to whom he had made a pledge, ran away from him because of the grace of contrition he received. 14 He has now gone to purgatory. The sign of his liberation is the contrition that he received at the end. Perhaps you ask: Why did the man deserve the grace of contrition when he had been involved in so many crimes? 15 I answer you: My love did it. Up to the last instant I await a man’s conversion. It was also the merit of my Mother. 16 Although this man did not love her in his heart, nevertheless, because he felt habitual compassion on her sorrow as often as he thought of her or heard her mentioned, he has found a short-cut to salvation and will be saved.”

✠ Chapter 98

A Benedictine Abbess is Like a Fat Cow; Birgitta Later Sees her in Purgatory

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Through the bride, Christ rebukes and reprimands a certain abbess, comparing her to the devil’s fat cow, because she had her own possessions and proudly used soft and fancy clothing and dined sumptuously, giving her sisters an example of perdition.

1. “That robber . . . I revealed to you earlier,” i.e., Sigvid Ribbing; see note to chapter 23. According to Prior Petrus’s testimony, the subject of this revelation was called Tolmo, from Falkenberg in Halland; cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 542.

1 The Son of God speaks: “That abbess is one of the fat cows. She wades in mire and splatters by-standers with the dung from her tail.¹ Thus she splatters the sisters with her immoral example. 2 The ruffles in her dress bear witness that she is not the daughter of my blessed Benedict nor a humble bride, because she has forgotten all about her bridal vows. 3 Her rule tells her to wear a dress that is coarse and plain, but she chooses the softer, prettier and more pleasant kind. 4 The rule also orders her to eat the necessary nourishment frugally and fearfully and to own nothing of her own, but she has her own possessions and grows fat like one of the devil’s cows, guided by her own selfishness. 5 The rule also says that everything is in the hands of the abbess. Without bothering about the intention of my blessed Benedict, who put everything in the hands of the abbots in order for the abbot to be prudent and a paragon of virtue and an outstanding follower of the rule, 6 this woman has assumed the title and the voice of authority with a view to her own dissolute life. She does not care that she must render an account to me for all the souls of her sisters. 7 Know, therefore, that, unless she reforms her ways and those of her sisters, she will wade with the fat cows into hell, and the ravens of hell will tear her to pieces, because she was unwilling to fly with the humble and the temperate up to heaven.”

EXPLANATION

8 When she was dead, this abbess appeared to Lady Birgitta. She appeared rather white but as though she were covered by an iron net. Her tongue seemed to be on fire, her hands and feet made of lead, her eyes full of tears. She said: 9 “You wonder why I appear in such an ugly shape. It is God’s just reward. The reason I appear to be white is that I possessed physical virginity. But the iron net means that I did not maintain the observance of the rule or the good of patience. 10 Just as many loops are combined into a net, so too I am bound to suffer many things in return for the good works I omitted, because I did not carry out good works when I had the time. 11 The just reason my tongue appears to be on fire is that it was often loosed in vain and frivolous words against my vocation. 12 My hands and feet appear to be of lead, and I deserve this because my works, as symbolized by my hands, should have shone like gold but were soft and dissolute like lead. 13 My feet, on which I was appointed to walk to my sisters with good example and clean living, slipped into worldly fashions and became lazy with respect to spiritual aims. 14 My eyes appear to you like those of a person who weeps excessively, and I deserve it because I spared them from weeping when I could and should have washed away all the careless omissions of my life. 15 Yet I am in the state of mercy and await my good hope thanks to the actions carried out in the church of God and because of the prayers of the saints and the blood of Jesus Christ.”

1. “With the dung from her tail”: the same image is used in chapter 52 to denote a lack of godly wisdom.

⚡ Chapter 99

The Nuns of a Convent are Chided for their Acquisitiveness

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

An Ethiopian appears dressed in a nun's habit among nuns. Christ explains this and says that this is the demon of cupidity that induces nuns to collect wealth under the pretences of charity in order to give away generous alms. Christ issues a serious reprimand and condemnation of this.

1 A frightening Ethiopian appeared to be among the veiled nuns in a convent dressed with a black veil and a nun's habit. As she was wondering about this, Christ spoke to the bride and said: 2 "It is written in my gospel that one must beware of those who come dressed like sheep but who inwardly are ravening wolves.¹ 3 So I tell you now that this Ethiopian appearing among the nuns in a nun's habit represents the demon of cupidity who persuades them to gather possessions and castles and great riches 4 on which they might live more sumptuously and with which they might give more generous alms. This is in order that, beneath the guise of religion, they might leave behind the poverty so pleasing to me and start gradually living dissolute lives, until they reach the point of violating the rule and their earlier observance and thus lose their souls. 5 I assure you that if they are not on careful guard against this wolf of cupidity by being content with what they have and by not wanting to acquire more possessions and rich land, even the healthy sheep of this flock will be culpably infected by him and will later be mercilessly torn to pieces by wolves. 6 It pleases me more for them to live in and be content with a quiet and holy poverty as they promised than that they get involved in the earthly care of governing temporal affairs and boasting inanely of their distribution of the donations from other people's possessions."

⚡ Chapter 100

The Words Divinely Revealed to Birgitta will not Lose their Power

DATE: 1350-70, ROME

Christ encourages the bride and says that she should not be afraid that the words divinely revealed to her and contained in these books will lose their strength, though they should be ground and trampled and pressed out like oil in order that God's patience and glory might accordingly be magnified.

1 The bride was afraid that the words of these books divinely revealed to her would lose their strength and be discredited by jealous and malicious persons.

1. "Dressed like sheep . . . ravening wolves"; cf. Matthew 7:15.

Christ spoke to her about this while she was praying and said: 2 “I have two arms.¹ With one of them I embrace heaven and all that is in it, but with the other I embrace the earth and sea. 3 I stretch forth the one to my chosen ones in heaven and on earth to honor and comfort them. I stretch forth the other over people’s wickedness,² bearing with them mercifully and restraining them from doing all the evil they desire. 4 So do not be afraid that anyone will be able to rob my words of their strength. They will reach the place and the people intended by me. Know, however, that these words are like oil. 5 Accordingly, they must be ground and trampled and pressed out, sometimes by envious persons, sometimes by those desiring to know, sometimes by those seeking to criticize. This is in order to magnify my glory and my patience.”

✠ Chapter 101

God’s Friends Must Speak the Words he Speaks through Birgitta

DATE: UNDATED

Christ tells the bride to write down the things she hears in spiritual ecstasy and send them to people so that they may come to know their own ingratitude and God’s patience.

1 The Son speaks to the bride, saying: “I am like a lord whose children an enemy has so mesmerized and subjugated that they pride themselves on their captivity and do not want to raise their eyes and look at their father and their inheritance. 2 So write the words that you hear from me and send them to my children and my friends, and they themselves will sow them like seeds among the nations. Perhaps then they will come to know their own ingratitude and my patience. 3 I, God, will rise up and reveal my justice and my charity to all people.”

✠ Chapter 102

A Swedish Woman is Comforted on her Deathbed in Rome

DATE: 1350S, ROME

Christ exhorts a sick woman to be steadfast and patient, for her sickness is designed to benefit her soul. He explains that the indulgences of the Roman churches are worth more before God and are more beneficial for souls than people think.

1 A Swedish lady had been sick for a long time in Rome when, while the bride was listening, she remarked with a smile: “They say that there is absolution

1. “I have two arms”; cf. Deuteronomy 33:27.

2. “I stretch forth the other over people’s wickedness”; cf. Jeremiah 1:16.

from guilt and punishment¹ in this place. 2 But for God nothing is impossible.² I certainly am experiencing punishment!” On the morning after the bride heard in her spirit a voice saying to her: 3 “Daughter, this woman is pleasing to me both because she has lived piously herself and because she has raised her daughters to be mine. However, she has not felt as much contrition in her sufferings as she felt pleasure in her sins—or would have felt, had she not been restrained by my charity. 4 Therefore, since I am God and look after each person in health and sickness in the way I see that suits each of them, I ought not to be provoked or criticized by anyone but feared and venerated in all circumstances. 5 Tell her that the indulgences attached to the churches of the city of Rome are worth more before God than people say, for those who turn to these indulgences with a thoroughly blameless heart will not only receive the remission of their sins but also eternal glory. 6 Even if a person should let herself be killed a thousand times for God’s sake, she would not be worthy of the least share in the glory given the saints. 7 Although a human being is not able to live for thousands of years, still, because unlimited punishment is owed for unlimited sinning,³ which is impossible for anyone to repay fully and completely in this life, many of the punishments are consequently lessened and heavy and enduring penalties are commuted into a minimal sentence. 8 Those who pass away from the world after having received indulgences with perfect charity and true contrition are absolved not only from their sins but also from their punishments; for I, God, will not only give my saints and chosen ones what they ask for but will give twofold and a hundredfold out of charity. 9 So exhort this sick lady to be patient and steadfast, for I will treat her in the way most beneficial to her salvation.”

EXPLANATION

10 St. Birgitta saw the soul of this lady ascending like fire. A number of Ethiopians ran out to meet her, and at the sight of them the soul became terrified and seemed to tremble. 11 Immediately the fairest of virgins appeared to come to her aid. She said to the Ethiopians: “What do you have to do with this soul who belongs to the family of my Son’s new bride?” 12 The Ethiopians fled immediately and followed at a distance. When the soul came to be judged, the judge said: “Who will answer for this soul and be her advocate?” 13 St. James⁴ appeared and said: “Lord, I must answer for her. Twice she visited my monument⁵ at great effort. Lord, have mercy on her: she was willing but unable.” 14 The judge replied: “What is it that she was willing but

1. “Absolution from guilt and punishment” renders “absolucio a culpa et a pena,” a standard phrase in letters of indulgence.

2. “For God nothing is impossible”; cf. Luke 1:37.

3. “Unlimited sinning”: on this concept see chapter 75.9.

4. “St. James”: one of the twelve apostles, son of Zebedee and brother of John the Apostle. His remains are buried at Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

5. “She visited my monument”: presumably the lady had been on a pilgrimage to Santiago in Spain. Birgitta had also visited this shrine with her husband in the early 1340s, as testified in her *Vita*.

unable to do?” James replied: “She was willing to serve you with all her heart but she was unable, because she was held back by the sickness that prevented her.” The judge said then to the soul: 15 “Come, for your faith and your intention shall save you.” Immediately the soul left the presence of the judge exulting and shining like a star. All those who stood by said: 16 “Blessed are you, God, who are and were and will be!⁶ You do not rob those hoping in you of your mercy.”⁷

✠ Chapter 103

St. Nicholas Appears to Birgitta in Bari

DATE: 1360S, ITALY

About how St. Nicholas appeared to the bride at his tomb in Bari anointed in oil. He gives her an explanation of the oil flowing from his body and of his virtues while he lived and of the overflowing goodness of God to his elect.

1 When the bride visited the relics of St. Nicholas¹ at his tomb in Bari, she began to think about the liquid oil flowing from his body. 2 Then, rapt in spirit, she saw a person anointed in oil with a most delightful fragrance who said to her: “I am Bishop Nicholas appearing to you in the shape that reflects the disposition of my soul in my lifetime. 3 My whole body was as capable and movable in the service of God as a well-oiled device that moves according to its owner’s needs. 4 There was always exultant praise in my soul, godly preaching on my lips, and patience in my actions due to the virtues of chastity and humility that I especially loved. 5 Now, however, since there are many dry bones² in the world with no divine fluid in them, they produce sounds of vanity and creaking as they strike against each other. They are incapable of bearing the fruit of justice and are repugnant for God to look upon. 6 I assure you that just as a rose produces a fragrance and grapes sweetness, so God granted to my body the singular blessing of flowing oil, for he not only honors his elect in heaven but also makes them happy and exalts them on earth so that more people may be edified and share in the gift of grace.”

✠ Chapter 104

Birgitta Receives Some Relics of St. Anne

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

6. “Who are and were and will be”; cf. Apocalypse 1:4.

7. “You do not rob . . . of your mercy”; cf. I Kings (I Samuel) 20:15; Psalms 65(66):20; Daniel 3:35.

1. “St. Nicholas”: Bishop Nicholas of Myra, a popular fourth-century saint of the Greek and Latin churches, whose cult grew after the inhabitants of Bari claimed to have acquired some of his relics in 1087; his relics exuded oil. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 74, 309, 579. See also Book III 12, explanation.

2. “Dry bones”; cf. Ezekiel 37:1–11.

About how St. Anne appeared to the bride and taught her a special prayer in her own honor, to be used by married women for asking God to give them children.

1 In Rome, the sacristan of the monastery of St. Paul's¹ Outside the Walls gave the bride of Christ relics of St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, our Lady. 2 While the lady was thinking about how to store and honor them, St. Anne appeared to her, saying: "I am Anne, foremost among all the married women who lived before the Law. 3 I am also mother of all the married women among the faithful who are after the Law, for God chose to be born within my family. Therefore, my daughter, give honor to God in this way."²

4 'Blessed are you, Jesus, Son of God and Son of the Virgin, who chose a mother for yourself out of the marriage of Anne and Joachim! Through the prayers of Anne, have mercy on all married people that they may bear fruit for God. Guide all those preparing for marriage so that God may be honored through them!'

5 The relics of mine that you have will be a comfort to all those who love them until it should please God to bestow a higher honor on them in the final resurrection."

‡ Chapter 105

Birgitta is Encouraged to Visit the Shrines of Rome, But Not to Overlook her Latin Studies

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

God's Mother consoles the bride as she visits the Roman shrines and tells her that there are more indulgences there than people think. The saints have won them through their prayers and their own bloodshed.

1 The Mother speaks to the bride: "What is disturbing you, my daughter?" She answered: "My Lady, it is because I am not visiting the holy places in Rome." 2 The Mother said: "You are given permission to visit these places with humility and devout reverence, for there are more indulgences in this city of Rome than people can believe. God's saints succeeded in obtaining them from my Son though their own glorious bloodshed and their prayers. 3 However, my daughter, do not neglect your grammar lessons or the holy obedience to your spiritual father¹ because of this."

1. "The monastery of St. Paul's," i.e., the Benedictine house connected with San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome. Cf. also Book IV 6.

2. "In this way": this expression seems to refer to the "new law," i.e., the law of love laid down by Christ in the Gospel.

1. "Your spiritual father," i.e., Master Petrus; on her Latin studies see volume I, pp. 11–12.

⚡ Chapter 106

On a Man Who should Spurn Worldly Things and Entrust Himself to God

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Someone pretending to want to leave the world and serve God consults the bride as to which state in life he should serve God in. Christ tells her that this man has not yet crossed the Jordan, that is, he has not yet shown perfect contempt for the world and for his own will and, therefore, he shall not hear a response of God's hidden will.

1 A man was saying that he wanted to serve God and wished to know in which state in life he would be more pleasing to God. So he consulted the bride in his desire to get a response from God. Christ spoke to the bride about him and said: 2 "This man has not yet reached the Jordan or even less crossed it. It was written¹ of Elijah that when he crossed the Jordan he came to the desert where he heard God's secrets. 3 Now, what does the Jordan represent if not the world which flows along like water? Temporal affairs rise up with a man now and then they sink; they raise him up now with honor and success and then they lower him with adversity. A man is never without worry or trouble. 4 Hence, when someone desires the things of heaven, it is first necessary for him to remove all earthly affections from his mind, for a person develops a greater liking for God as earthly and corruptible things become more distasteful to him. 5 This man, however, has not yet come so far as to spurn all things. Rather, he still holds his will in his own hand. He is therefore not going to hear any heavenly secrets until he shows a more perfect contempt for the world and puts his will in God's hand."

⚡ Chapter 107

Birgitta should Travel to Amalfi to the Relics of St. Andrew

DATE: 1360S, AMALFI

Christ tells the bride that, like an eagle from on high watches over its young and hurries to them in their need and danger, so too he hurries to his friends in their bodily and spiritual needs. He also instructs the bride to visit the body of St. Andrew. The Lord praises St. Andrew here and promises mercy and grace to those visiting him.

1 The Son speaks to the bride, saying: "An eagle sees from on high anyone trying to harm its young and prevents it by flying to defend them. So too I provide you all with the means of health and salvation. So I say 'Wait!' and then I say 'Go!'
2 Thus it is now time for you to go to my apostle Andrew¹ in the city of Amalfi.

1. "It is written"; cf. 1 Kings (3 Kings) 17-19.

1. "My apostle Andrew": brother of Simon Peter, both fishermen by trade. In 1208 his main relics were transferred to Amalfi following the sack of Constantinople. His feast day is 30 November. Note that Birgitta is instructed to return to Naples in time for for Christmas (in paragraph 5).

His body was a temple of mine adorned with every virtue. 3 Accordingly, it has become there a treasury for the faithful and a help for sinners. Those who come to him in a faithful spirit will not only be exonerated of their sins but also abound in eternal consolation. 4 That is no wonder. He was not ashamed of my cross² but carried it cheerfully. Hence I am not ashamed to hear and receive those for whom he prays, for his wish is my desire. 5 However, once you have been with him, return right away to Naples for my birthday.”

6 The bride answered: “O Lord, our time is passing, and old age and infirmity are approaching, and there are fewer material means.” The Lord said to her: “I am the maker and the Lord and the restorer of nature. I am also the helper and defender and supplier in situations of need. 7 As a man with a horse that is dear to him does not spare even his favorite field but lets the horse pasture there, so too I, master of everything and in need of nothing, look into the minds of everyone and inspire in the hearts of those who love me the wish to do good to those who yearn for me. I even exhort those who do not love me to do good to my friends in order that they may become better persons through the prayers of virtuous people.”

✠ Chapter 108

St. Stephen Tells Birgitta About his Life and Martyrdom

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

When the bride was praying in Rome at the tomb of St. Stephen, he himself appeared to her and told her things about his life and virtues and passion. He foretells that she will yet travel to Jerusalem and offers to obtain this grace for her from God.

1 The bride was praying in Rome at the tomb of St. Stephen Outside the Walls,¹ saying: “Blessed are you, St. Stephen, you share equal merit with St. Lawrence!² 2 Just as he preached to the pagans, so you preached to the Jews. Just as Lawrence joyfully endured death by fire, so too you endured death by stoning. You are rightfully praised as the first among the martyrs.”

2. “He was not ashamed of my cross”: Andrew was said to have been martyred by crucifixion and the tradition arose that it was on an X-shaped cross, although this iconography did not become established until the later Middle Ages; see Calvert, “The Iconography of the St. Andrew Auckland Cross” p. 545, note 12.

1. “The tomb of St. Stephen Outside the Walls”: Stephen was tried for blasphemy (Acts 6:11) and during his trial he experienced a vision of the Father and the Son together (Acts 7:55); he was stoned to death (Acts 7:58); feast day 26 December. Cf. Book IV chapter 6. Stephen’s relics were discovered near Jerusalem in 415 but were later moved, first to Constantinople and then to Rome, where they are kept together with the relics of St. Lawrence in the church of San Lorenzo fuori le mura. This must be the tomb referred to here.

2. “You share equal merit with St. Lawrence”: St. Lawrence was one of the seven deacons of ancient Rome, martyred during the persecution of Valerian in 258; feast day 10 August. It was natural for Birgitta to link Lawrence with Stephen, since they were both deacons and martyrs, and were both interred beneath the main altar of San Lorenzo fuori le mura, the location of this revelation. Birgitta seems to have been particularly attached to St. Lawrence: her body was buried in the church of San Lorenzo in Panisperna, in the house of the Poor Clares, before it was repatriated to Sweden; see further Collijn, *Birgittinska gestalter*, pp. 65–92.

3 St. Stephen then appeared to her and answered: “God was dear to me from my youth, for I had parents who were concerned about the salvation of my soul. 4 When my Lord Jesus Christ became incarnate and began to preach, I listened to him with all my heart. After his ascension, I united myself with his apostles and served faithfully and humbly in the office appointed to me. 5 When the Jews blasphemed Jesus my God, I joyfully took the occasion to speak with them steadfastly and rebuke their hardness of heart, ready to die on behalf of the truth and in imitation of my Lord.

6 Three things contributed to my glory and the crown that I now enjoy. The first was my good intention. The second was the prayer of the apostles, my lords. The third was the passion and charity of my God. 7 This is why I now possess a threefold good. First, I behold the face and glory of God without cease. Second, I can do whatever I want and I want nothing but what God wants. Third, my joy will have no end. 8 And because you rejoice in my glory, my prayers will bring you to a greater knowledge of God, and God’s Spirit will continue with you, and you will yet come to the place of my passion in Jerusalem.”

✠ Chapter 109

A Message to an Ecclesiastic

DATE: UNDATED

God’s Mother reproves a certain ecclesiastic and says that he should not trust in any of his own virtues but should be on his guard against too much talking and laughing and a superficial character. It is more acceptable to God for a man to live justly in the world by his own labor than as a hermit or a monk without divine charity.

1 The Mother speaks: “If good food is mixed with something acrid, it gets ruined. Hence, no matter how many or what virtues someone has, if he takes pleasure in any sin, he is not pleasing to God. 2 So tell my friend that if he wants to please my Son and me, he should not trust in his own virtues in the least but restrain his tongue from too much talking and laughing and keep his character from becoming superficial. 3 He should carry flowers on his lips with which to attract the foolish to the best kind of fruit. If anything acrid is found among the flowers, they will be ruined and the good fruit will not be an object of desire.

4 Tell him, too, that just as a husband and wife sometimes love each other only for reasons of material livelihood, and just as a monk sometimes is in the monastery only because of his material advantage, so too that man whom he knows wants to be in a monastery in order to avoid problems, although he wants to be poor in such a way that nothing is lacking to him. 5 Therefore, let him give up his selfish will, because it is more acceptable to God to live justly in the world and to work with one’s hands than to remain in a hermitage or a religious order without divine charity.”

⚡ Chapter II0

On the Meaning of the Seven Thunders in the Apocalypse of St. John

DATE: 1340S, SWEDEN

In spiritual ecstasy the bride of Christ heard the meaning of the seven thunders and why John was commanded to designate but not explain them in writing, and also that for the many people living in that time thunders would enter the church in such a way as to make many people wish to die.

1 A master of theology¹ asked the lady the meaning of the seven thunders.² When she fell into a spiritual ecstasy, she heard from Christ: 2 “Do not believe, my daughter, that any temporal things may be thought to exist in my divine nature, or that thunder or winds or any senseless creatures have human voices. 3 However, by my inspiration John saw the future dangers of the church through physical symbols. If he had explained them in writing as coming at specific times, the hearers would have been terrified and would have died of fear as they waited. 4 Therefore it was commanded to him to designate the things he saw but not to explain them in writing. When something is designated, it becomes a sign of some future event and instills fear. 5 This is the case of the sounds of thunder, lightning and wind. They signified the threats of the tyrants who would disturb my church. John saw in his spirit that these threats were so violent that they were to be designated rather than explained. 6 Like one who writes or tells a short parable denoting great things in such a way as to occasion in his hearers a fear for the future, so too I revealed future events but did not expound them in order that people might fear and also because it was not the time to break the shell and take the nut out. 7 This is why I revealed future events in an obscure way, because a vessel must be prepared before the drink can be poured into it. Know, too, that so much thunder and lightning will enter the church during the lifetimes of many now living that many of them will wish for death, but death will flee from them.”³

⚡ Chapter III

On Obedience

DATE: UNDATED

That obedience is superior to chastity and leads to glory.

1 “What are you afraid of? Even if you eat ten times a day out of obedience, it would not be counted as a sin for you. Virginity certainly deserves its reward and widowhood draws near to God, but obedience leads everyone into glory.”

1. “Master of theology,” i.e., Mathias of Linköping, the author of a commentary on the Book of the Apocalypse. This revelation offers a small insight into their relationship, with Birgitta explaining a detail to him, rather than vice versa. Cf. also chapter 89.

2. “Seven thunders”; cf. Apocalypse 10:3.

3. “Will wish for death, but death will flee from them”; cf. Apocalypse 9:6.

⚡ Chapter 112

On the Relic of Christ's Foreskin

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Mary assures the bride that she carefully saved the foreskin of Christ and then gave it to John the evangelist to save along with the blood of Christ that was left in his wounds.

1 "When my Son was circumcised, I saved that skin of his and kept it with the greatest reverence wherever I went. How could I have buried in the ground something born from me without sin? 2 When the time for me to be called out of this world was at hand, I entrusted it to St. John, my guardian,¹ along with the blessed blood that was left in his wounds when we took him down from the cross. 3 After St. John and his successors were taken from the world, since wickedness and faithlessness were on the rise, the faithful of the time hid them in a perfectly clean spot underground. They remained there unknown for a long time until an angel of God revealed them to God's friends. 4 O Rome, Rome, if you only knew,² you would surely rejoice, and if you only knew how to weep, you would weep ceaselessly, for you have a treasure that is most dear to me and you do not treat it with reverence."

⚡ Chapter 113

On the Fate of Thirty-Three Friars

DATE: 1349, ALVASTRA

About how the bride saw the condition of the friars at Alvastra, and how things turned out exactly as revealed to the bride.

1 When the lady was praying and was rapt in spirit, she saw a house¹ with a very calm sky above it. While she was attentively considering it, she saw doves rising from the house and penetrating the sky. 2 There were some Ethiopians trying to stop them but they were unable. Underneath the house she saw a vast abyss in which there were three classes of friars. 3 "The first are innocent as doves.² This is why they easily rise up. I will tell you their names. The second are those who come to purgatory. 4 The third are those who already have one foot on the sea and one on the gangplank of the ship. Their judgment draws near. As proof that you may be sure of this, one after another of them will soon pass away. I will announce their names to you accordingly." 5 Something similar in fact happened. Death came and took thirty-three friars,³ just as predicted.

1. "St. John, my guardian"; cf. John 19:26. The holy foreskin was said to have been placed in the basilica of St. John Lateran during the Middle Ages; see further Palazzo, "The veneration of the sacred foreskin(s)": it is possible that Birgitta's vision was received in this church. The feast of the circumcision is celebrated on 1 January.

2. "O Rome, Rome, if you only knew"; cf. Matthew 23:37.

1. "House," i.e., the monastery of Alvastra.

2. "Innocent as doves"; cf. Matthew 10:16.

3. "Death came and took thirty-three friars": this may refer to the Black Death which struck Sweden in the spring of 1350.

⚡ Chapter 114

Birgitta's Confessor had Forgotten to Grant Absolution to Her

DATE: UNDATED

The Holy Spirit tells the bride, who had forgotten it, to go and get absolution for her sins, and also that a venial sin can become a mortal one through negligence.

1 Once when Lady Birgitta went to confession, her confessor was called away by another priest. He got up so quickly that he forgot to give her absolution. When the lady was about to go to bed and was on her knees, the Spirit said to her: 2 “Get up, my daughter, and humble yourself to receive absolution, for your confessor did not absolve you.” When she had received absolution, the Holy Spirit again said to her: 3 “Each person who disregards smaller matters falls in greater ones.¹ Even a venial sin nagging one’s conscience can become a mortal one, if it continues to be committed, and will be seriously punished due to the negligence shown.”

⚡ Chapter 115

Concerning a Finn who Cannot Make Confession in his Own Language in Rome

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

A good intention is sufficient for a penitent when he or she does not have access to a confessor. It helped the thief on the cross and opened up heaven for him. A wicked intention made hell. Lucifer became wicked through his wicked intention.

1 A man from the diocese of Åbo¹ who did not know Swedish came to Rome. Since nobody in Rome understood him and he could not find a confessor, he asked the lady for advice about what he should do. 2 She heard in spirit (Jesus Christ, God’s Son is speaking): “This man who has asked you for advice is grieving because he has no one to hear his confession. Tell him that his intention is sufficient for him. 3 Did it not help the thief on the cross?² Wasn’t his a good intention? What opens up heaven, if not the intention to will what is good and hate what is evil? 4 What makes hell, if not a disordered will and intention? Was not Lucifer created good?³ Or did I, goodness and virtue itself, create something evil? Of course not. 5 It was after Lucifer abused his power of will and moved it in a disordered way that he became disordered

1. “Who disregards smaller matters falls in greater ones”; cf. Luke 16:10.

1. “The diocese of Åbo”: this comprised the whole territory of Finland in the Middle Ages. Åbo is identical with the town named Turku in Finnish; the cathedral still exists.

2. “The thief on the cross”; cf. Luke 23:43.

3. “Lucifer created good”; cf. Isaiah 14:12.

himself. He became wicked by reason of his wicked intention. So this poor man should stand firm and not back away. 6 When he returns to his country, he should seek the salvation of his soul and listen to wise persons, subject his will and obey the advice of righteous individuals more than his own will. 7 If, however, he should die along the way, what I told the thief will apply to him: ‘You shall be with me in paradise.’”⁴

✠ Chapter 116

Christ May Prefer an Unlearned Man to Many a Learned Theologian

DATE: UNDATED

Simplicity that barely knows the Our Father pleases God more than the understanding of proud people, and keeps the commandments, all the counsels, vows and laws of the gospel by learned unwisdom and through love.

1 A simple man who did not even know the Our Father completely sought spiritual advice from Lady Birgitta. Christ told her: 2 “The simplicity of soul of this simple man is more pleasing to me than the understanding of proud people, for the pride in them removes God from their hearts, but the humility in this man brings God into his heart. 3 So tell him that he should go on with his customary job and that he will receive the same reward as those to whom I said: ‘Come all you who labor¹ and I will feed you with eternal bread.’ 4 If I said to him what I said to the Jewish man who deceitfully asked me for advice: ‘Keep the commandments,’ and ‘sell what you have,’² he will be unable to support it, because old age cannot learn new things and poverty has nothing to sell. 5 However, for a man aiming at eternal life the commandments are necessary, because without them a man cannot be saved, provided he has time and access to someone to guide him. 6 But this man’s learned unwisdom³ and good will are as pleasing to me as the two brass mites of the widow⁴ that I preferred to the riches of kings. He possesses all wisdom in his unwisdom. 7 He loves me in his heart, and where does that come from if not from my Spirit? It seems like unwisdom to the worldly wise not to love wealth and not to know how to use grand words. 8 This is why I spoke of ‘learned unwisdom,’ because from my Spirit he learned true wisdom, that is, he learned to love God. Don’t you think this man

4. “You shall be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

1. “Come all you who labor” (Matthew 11:28).

2. “Keep the commandments . . . sell what you have”; cf. Matthew 19:17, 21.

3. “Learned unwisdom” renders “docta insipientia”; compare the famous “docta ignorantia” in St. Augustine’s letter to the widow Proba, Ep. 130, 15, made even more famous by Nicholas of Cusa as the title of one of his books.

4. “Two brass mites of the widow”; cf. Luke 21:2.

is truly wise? Of course, he knows only one word, and that is “love.” 9 Through this love he keeps all the commandments of the law of Moses;⁵ through it he renders to God the things that are God’s;⁶ through it he lives all the evangelical counsels;⁷ through it he keeps all the vows and all the laws. 10 Through it he loves his neighbor, not coveting others’ goods⁸ but only what he needs for himself, not robbing or cheating his neighbor. 11 Through it he is continually mindful of his own death and of the judgment by which he must be judged by me.

Therefore, a person who wants to come to me should not worry about his ignorance of the law, provided he is ready to use his conscience which tells him to be willing to suffer the same treatment as he gives to others.⁹ 12 For what purpose do people study so much or learn so many facts or turn the pages of so many books? Is it in order to serve me? Is it not rather out of curiosity and distraction and ostentation and the desire to be called a learned teacher? 13 Yet each person is left with his conscience and is judged by his conscience. Therefore, my daughter, whoever says these three words ‘Jesus, pity me!’¹⁰ with a perfect faith and intention is more pleasing to me than someone who recites a thousand verses distractedly.”

✠ Chapter 117

On Mary’s Readiness to Help All

DATE: UNDATED

The glorious Virgin Mary offers help even when invoked by the vilest of sinners as is shown by the example of the soul of a certain sinner who shared in her dish of kindness.

1 Mary speaks: “There are no persons who are such great sinners or involved in such vile activities that I will not help them if they call upon me to aid them. Is there anything more disgusting than taking care of someone’s scabby head? 2 If people call upon me, I will help to clean them. Is there any tool more disgusting or filthy than what you use to throw the waste from the stable on to the cart? 3 If people call upon me, I will help them. Is there anything more disgusting than washing the wounds of lepers? Whichever persons call upon me, I will not refuse to touch and treat them and cure their wounds.”

5. “Through this love . . . law of Moses”; cf. Matthew 22:37–40.

6. “Renders to God the things that are God’s”; cf. Luke 20:25.

7. “Evangelical counsels”; cf. note on chapter 65,89.

8. “Loves his neighbor, not coveting others’ goods”; cf. Romans 13:9.

9. “Willing to suffer . . . gives to others”; cf. Matthew 7:12 (“the golden rule”).

10. “Jesus, pity me”; cf. Matthew 15:22; Mark 10:47.

4 The bride responded: “O most holy Lady, I know that you are most humble and powerful and kind. Help that soul for whom I have prayed so often!”

5 The Mother answered: “That soul did three things in life. He wanted to have the world, but the world did not want to have him. Second, he loved his own flesh incontinently, for he did not want to get married. 6 Third, he loved God less than he should have, though he was steadfast in faith.¹ This soul is now free of all this and constantly shares in the dish at the table of my kindness. There still remains some refuse, but she will soon be cleansed of it and set free.”

✠ Chapter 118

On the News of the Death of the Husband of Katherina, Birgitta's Daughter

DATE: C. 1352, ROME

The Son of God advises Katherina, St. Birgitta's daughter, to stay with her although she wants to return home, since her husband was soon about to die.

1 The Son of God speaks: “Advise the lady to stay with you for a time,¹ because it is more to her advantage to stay than to return. 2 I will treat her like a father treats his daughter when she is loved by two men and asked for in marriage, one of them being a poor man, the other rich, but both loved by the girl. 3 The prudent father sees the girl's affections and that she also loves the poor man. So he gives gifts and clothing to the poor man, but he marries off his daughter to the rich man. This is what I will do. 4 She loves me and she loves her husband. Therefore, since I am the richer and the Lord of all things, I will provide him with gifts more beneficial to his soul, for it pleases me to call him soon. 5 The sickness with which he is struggling is the sign of his leaving. It is fitting for him on his way to the Almighty to have his accounts in hand and it is good for him to be away from carnal acts. 6 I will lead her and bring her back home when she is ready for the work that I have foreknown from eternity and which it pleases me to show her.”

7 Some time elapsed after blessed Katherina promised to stay with her mother in Rome, but she felt upset and terrified by a way of life to which she was unaccustomed. She remembered the freedom of her former life and made anxious appeals to her mother to let her go back to Sweden. 8 Her mother was praying about this trial when Christ appeared to her and said: “Tell your virgin daughter that she is now a widow. I advise her to remain with you, for I myself will provide for her.”

1. “Steadfast in faith”; cf. Colossians 1:23.

1. “Advise the lady to stay with you for a time”: A personal revelation which concerns Katherina's doubts as to whether or not she should return to her husband in Sweden or stay in Rome. See further p. 7.



FIGURE 6. Högsby, Småland. Birgitta and her daughter Katharina who is dressed in the Birgittine habit, detail. Reprinted by permission of Lennart Karlsson.

⚡ Chapter 119

Virginity, Marriage, and Widowhood are All Praiseworthy States

DATE: ROME, 1352

The common matrimonial state is pleasing to God, widowhood finds favor with him, but virginity is the most perfect.

1 Christ speaks: “The common and praiseworthy state in life is acceptable to me. Moses, the leader of my people, was pleasing to me, yet he was married.”¹

1. “Moses . . . yet he was married”; cf. Ecclesiasticus 45:1.

2 Again, Peter was called to the apostolate while his wife still lived, and in this state of life he was pleasing to me.² One must rise from the lower to that which is more perfect, and a carnally minded people must by signs and deeds be taught to grasp spiritual matters. 3 Likewise, Judith found favor in my sight because of widowhood and the good that widowhood brings with it. She won liberation for her people because of her continence.³ 4 John, to whose care I entrusted my mother,⁴ was hardly displeasing to me because he was a virgin. On the contrary, he was most pleasing, because the most perfect life is to live not carnally in the flesh but a life like that of the angels.⁵ 5 This is why he deserved to become the guardian of chastity. To him I displayed special signs of affection.⁶ And this is what I tell you now. The widowhood of this lady⁷ is more pleasing to me than her married state, because a humble widow is more acceptable to me than a proud virgin. 6 Magdalene earned greater merit through her humility and tears⁸ than if she had followed her selfish will.”

✠ Chapter 120

Charity is Like a Tree of Virtues

DATE: 1350S, ITALY

Charity is compared to a tree from which all the virtues come, among which obedience holds the first place.

1 Christ, the Son of God, speaks: “As a tree has many branches, some of which are higher up and more exposed to heat and wind, it is similar in the case of the virtues. 2 Charity is like a tree from which all the virtues come.¹ Among them obedience holds the first place. Out of obedience, I, God himself, did not hesitate to ascend to my cross and death. 3 Obedience is, accordingly, as pleasing to me as the most delicious fruit. As peace is that which is most peaceable, so that person is dearest to me who yields to others out of humility and puts his or her own will under the authority of others. 4 This is why, for the sake of earning her greater reward and a higher degree of charity, it pleases me that this lady² should surrender her own will through obedience. Indeed, Abraham became more beloved by reason of his good intentions,³ and Ruth

2. “Peter . . . he was pleasing to me”; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:5.

3. “Judith . . . because of her continence”; cf. Judith 13.

4. “John, to whose care I entrusted my mother”; cf. John 19:26.

5. “A life like that of the angels”; cf. Matthew 22:30.

6. “Special signs of affection”; cf. e.g., John 13:23 (the “favorite disciple” in the Gospel of John is traditionally identified as St. John himself).

7. “The widowhood of this lady”: presumably Birgitta’s daughter Katherina is meant.

8. “Magdalene . . . humility and tears”; cf. Luke 7:38.

1. “Charity is a tree out of which all virtues come”: Birgitta is representing a common allegorical image used within monastic teaching to illustrate the virtues (and vices); see further, for instance, Bloomfield, *Review of Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art*; Roberts, *Review of The Treatise of Vices and Virtues*.

2. “This lady,” i.e., Katherina, Birgitta’s daughter.

3. “Abraham . . . good intentions”; cf. Genesis 22:10–13.

became more illustrious among God's people, because she did not obey her selfish will."⁴

5 Christ speaks again: "This woman will not die as the doctor says but will live out her appointed time. I will nurture her under the pinion of my right hand. 6 I will give her wisdom so that she may bring me choice flowers and live for my glory."

✠ Chapter 121

On the Virtue of Obedience

DATE: UNDATED

Christ shows how obedience is the virtue by which everything that is imperfect becomes perfect. Without it imprudent ideas come up in the mind, and a decrease in piety and, frequently, mental and physical distress follow.

1 Christ speaks: "Obedience is the virtue by which everything that is imperfect becomes perfect, and all defects are overcome. 2 I, God, the most perfect of all beings, perfection itself, was obedient to the Father unto the cross¹ in order to show by my example how pleasing the renunciation of one's own will is to God. 3 Many people, however, do not pay the virtue of obedience any attention. With an imprudent zeal they follow their own ideas and for a short time punish their flesh so imprudently that they become useless to themselves for a long time. 4 Hence they become less pleasing to God and more burdensome to others. When such people consider their faults and want to undo their former mistakes, they feel ashamed in their minds to leave off what they have begun, and, out of stubbornness, do not dare to apply the cure.

5 This man whom you see is one of them. He pays no attention to the advice of experienced directors nor to my own words when I said: 'I want not the death of the flesh but of sin.' He should therefore fear that he does not fall into a greater mental distress and a greater fault. 6 However, if he is obedient to wise persons and delivers his soul from his own ideas, his reward will be doubled and spiritual devotion will increase in him. 7 Otherwise, as it is written, so it will occur to him: 'Aman came and sowed weeds, and the thorns grew up and choked his seed.'²

4. "Ruth . . . did not obey her selfish will"; cf. Ruth 1:16.

1. "Obedient to the Father unto the cross"; cf. Philippians 2:8.

2. "Aman . . . choked his seed"; cf. Matthew 13:25-26.

‡ Chapter 122

A Woman is Encouraged to Moderate her Gestures in Public

DATE: UNDATED

Christ uses his own example to show that God's friends should be restrained in their movement and gestures, so that their efforts in praying do not result in their lesser reward.

1 The Son of God speaks: "When I placed myself in a human nature, I practiced restraint in my prayers, toils, and fasting, so that nobody who saw me might be scandalized and so that nobody who was absent might be offended, but that all those who wished might be able to imitate my words and actions and example. 2 This lady whom you now see has a strange way of gesturing and conducting herself. She is not without great temptations nor, however, without remorse of conscience. 3 It is therefore advisable to her to moderate her movements and gestures and do what she does in private rather than in public. Otherwise her exaggerated efforts and her prayer will be less deserving of reward."

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Book VII

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FIGURE 7. Amap 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. Reprinted by permission of Annette Landen and Lars Berggren.

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Introduction

In the early 1340s, in Arras, on her return from a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela with her husband, Birgitta received a message informing her that she would go to Jerusalem where she would receive a vision of the nativity.¹ The same message was repeated a few years later in the last vision of the *Liber Quaestionum*, which describes five places associated with aspects of the humanity of Christ; and in *Extravagantes* 66, Mary says to her: “I wish to show you how my son lived in his humanity, and how he suffered on the cross. And this is a sign to you, that you will come to the places where I dwelt on earth, and where you will see my son with your spiritual eyes.”²

Birgitta did not receive the actual instruction to prepare for her journey until 1371, by which time she was approaching the age of seventy, and years of self-discipline and rigorous fasting must have had their effect on her (VII 1, 6, 9). The pilgrimage, which commenced on 25 November, 1371, was to last around sixteen months. She was accompanied by three of her children: Karl, who died on the outward journey, Birger, who was made a knight of the Holy Sepulcher in the Holy Land, and Katherina. Her confessors—Alfonso, Prior Petrus, and Master Petrus—were also in the party, as well as two Spanish anchoresses named Elvira and Praxedis, probably acting as maidservants, and two Swedish chaplains, Gudmarus Frederici and Magnus Petri—the latter to become confessor general at Vadstena abbey.

Alfonso, who plays a key role in the transmission of Book VII and is probably responsible for its roughly chronological ordering, had only recently made Birgitta’s acquaintance, around 1367. Because of his influence in Rome, he towers above the other confessors, and he is largely instrumental as a major driving force behind the canonization.³ His duties toward Birgitta are described in terms of familial relation-

ships in the Addition to chapter 16. In Book VII he creates a more extensively integrated composition than is seen in any of the other books of *Revelationes*. The book is embellished by rubrics that give a relatively detailed narrative picture of the pilgrimage and embedded with many circumstantial and editorial comments such as “the vision then disappeared” (VII 1) or “she immediately got ready for a journey to visit him in Assisi” (VII 3). Alfonso casts Birgitta in a variety of roles—as an onlooker or participant in a scene, and as a letter-writer or political commentator—but always placing her person at the center.

The book’s framing structure enhances its sense of stylistic completeness. There are 31 revelations, about equally divided between the Virgin and Christ as the speaker. The book divides into three main sections that cover some previous events and the outward journey (VII 1–13), the Holy Land visions (VII 14–26), and the return journey (VII 27–31), with the last part mirroring the first to some degree. The two central visions are the crucifixion (VII 15) and the nativity (VII 21), with the crucifixion placed before the nativity, thus bringing to the fore the centrality of the passion story that is constantly underlined by Birgitta through her *Revelationes*.⁴ Several revelations take place at specifically named shrines in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. From Jerusalem, Birgitta also issues messages concerning the political situation in Cyprus (VII 16, 18, 19), and thereby a secular political message is woven into the devotional visions and underlines their contemporary impact collectively. Likewise, the crucifixion revelation is followed by an attack on kings and high-ranking individuals who ignore the divine message. Some revelations are embellishments of apocryphal biblical stories that confirm and repeat the truth of a biblical scene, such as the reaction of Joseph and the shepherds to Jesus’ birth (VII 22–23). There are also some prolonged meditative revelations, received over a period of time: chapter 13 takes place intermittently as she travels between Naples and the Holy Land, and some of the chapters following the Nativity revelation (VII 23–25) appear to be additional meditations on the central vision.

Shortly after Birgitta’s return to Rome in 1373, she reaches the end of her life, and her final revelations, including the premonition of her death, are incorporated at the end of Book VII.

The Canonization Documents as a Source

The Holy Land pilgrimage is referred to in the *Vita* that was composed by Birgitta’s two confessors, Prior Petrus of Alvastra and Master Petrus of Skänninge, immediately after her death. It is also referred to in the collection of the acts, protocols, and documents that were put before the commissions of Popes Gregory XI and Urban VI during the canonization process that was eventually brought to a conclusion in 1391.⁵ Fifty-one articles concerning Birgitta’s life and work were put by the procurator general, Ludovicus Alfonsi, and the depositions of twenty-six witnesses on each article were submitted. Many of those who participated in the pilgrimage gave detailed testimonies, including

Alfonso, Prior Petrus, Katherina, and Magnus Petri, as well as certain influential Roman and Neapolitan noblemen and rulers.⁶

The *Revelationes*, the *Vita*, and the witness testimonies were therefore all in train at about the same time. Each is presented in a slightly different way but they generally coincide and overlap, and frequently one gives additional circumstantial details not shared by the others: for example, Katherina testifies to storms encountered off the coast of Jaffa and Birgitta's reaction when their boat was nearly shipwrecked and her property thrown overboard.⁷

VII 4, which describes an event that took place some years before the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, illustrates the interlocking nature of these documents.⁸ It concerns a miracle that took place in Ortona when St. Thomas's relic rose up miraculously into Birgitta's hands.⁹ Its central theme concerns the way in which relics are revered—or, in this case, mistreated and disregarded.¹⁰ Three witnesses gave evidence on this miracle, among them Prior Petrus who puts it into context in the following way:

Again, this witness [Prior Petrus] spoke and said that he was present and saw that, when Lady Birgitta went with the others to Ortona in Naples where the body of the blessed apostle Thomas rests, it happened that they were unable to reach the city that evening on account of the shortness of the day and stayed the whole night beneath the open sky. There was much snow and intense cold, for it was winter, so that even the horses were nearly out of strength. The boys went around in the dark and about midnight came across a small shelter made of branches. Lady Birgitta and a few others happily stayed there without light or fire until the first hour of the following day. About dawn Christ appeared and spoke to her, citing the common proverb: "He who will not obey his mother, must obey his stepmother." I urged the hearts of those coming to meet you to tell you that you could not reach the city that night, but you did not want to trust them. Yet this did not happen without a reason, for it will turn out for your greater consolation. For tribulation befalls people for three reasons: either for the sake of greater humility, as in the case of King David, or for the sake of greater fear and caution, as in the case of Sara, Abraham's wife, who was captured by a king, or for people's greater consolation and God's honor, just as many of my friends suffer tribulation and are consoled. Now go into the city and you will receive consolation." The witness says that he heard this revelation from Lady Birgitta herself then and there. And then it happened that a bone from the reliquary containing the body of St. Thomas the Apostle miraculously came forth and presented itself to Lady Birgitta, as this same witness declares himself to have seen.¹¹

The miracle serves as a fitting prelude to Birgitta's visits to the Holy Land shrines and a fulfillment of her desire to touch something holy. The fact that St. Thomas chose her to accept his relic further had the effect of legitimizing her

role as a saint and mystic: St. Thomas, the doubter of the risen Christ, wanted to be given tangible evidence, just as St. Birgitta received a true relic in her own hands. In doing so she becomes part of a miraculous chain of evidence, which strengthens her case for sainthood. Significantly, too, the miracle is mentioned in the canonization bull of Boniface IX of 1391, making VII 4 the only revelation to be referred to in the bull, which otherwise plays down the importance of the *Revelationes* in documenting the case for sainthood.¹²

Naples

On their outward journey, the party stopped for five months (VII 4) at the court of Queen Johanna of Naples, whom Birgitta had met previously, around 1366, during an earlier visit to the pilgrim shrines of the kingdom of Naples. Johanna was about twenty-four years younger than Birgitta.¹³ She had been implicated in the murder of her first husband—her second cousin—Andrew of Hungary, in 1345. It was hoped that her second marriage, to another cousin, Louis of Taranto, would reduce tension concerning this murder, but Louis of Hungary led an expedition against Naples, and Johanna was forced to flee to Avignon, in her county of Provence, to seek protection from Pope Clement VI. When she was acquitted of charges relating to Andrew's murder, she sold her inheritance of Avignon to the papacy in 1348 for 80,000 gold florins. She returned to Naples where Hungary continued to cause problems. When her husband died in 1362, she married James III of Mallorca, but his efforts to recover his own kingdom kept him mostly away from Naples until his death in 1375. Johanna had the reputation of being a pleasure-loving and worldly woman whose name was involved in endless scandals. Although Naples had been a prosperous commercial center and its court had been a focus of culture and learning in the early fourteenth century, under her rule Neapolitan prosperity and culture started to disintegrate, and her court was notoriously full of corruption.

Birgitta is scathing in her comments on the state of the city of Naples where “many different, horrible and hidden sins” are committed (VII 28). She makes a personal attack on the queen in the composite chapter 11. The main body of this “revelation” (paragraphs 1–6) is relatively short, and it contains some general comments on the free will and the devil's work before the text is abruptly broken off with the words: “Hear what the queen did to me. I allowed her to rise to royal power, etc.” Alfonso in his rubric explicitly states that he is suppressing certain material: “They are secrets pertaining to the queen's status and person.”¹⁴ The next part (paragraphs 7–21) is a lengthy Addition, in which Birgitta is told to write to the queen. Because it is an Addition, it would not have been included in the canonization submissions, and judging by its content it is easy to see the reason why. What follows amounts to a “mirror of queens” of the sort that Birgitta had previously directed at the Swedish queen Blanche of Namur in the 1340s (e.g., Book IV 4, and several revelations in Book VIII) and was to issue to Eleanor of Aragon shortly afterward when she went to Cyprus (VII 16–18).

She offers fourteen pieces of advice on how Johanna should mend her ways, and at the end she tells the queen that if she ignores the advice she will be judged not as a queen but as an ungrateful apostate. Christ next advises Birgitta to temper the force of the message and send it with extreme tact and caution through Alfonso to the queen (paragraph 22). At paragraphs 23–31 there is a switch from the high moralizing tone to a graphic vision on “a certain queen” dressed in a shift covered in semen and mud and sitting naked on a trembling beam, and then on a golden throne, with two devils before her. Christ intercedes in paragraph 32 on the woman’s behalf, stating that she had nevertheless done some things to please him, and concludes that she still has the hope of salvation. At the end, there are two short revealed statements in paragraphs 33–37 concerning two men, one a papal administrator and the other a merchant.

Despite Birgitta’s strictures against Johanna, the apparent bond between the two women was not broken. Their friendship appears to have been further cemented on Birgitta’s return from the Holy Land, when she again visited Johanna’s court, at Aversa, bringing with her the gift of a gold cross.¹⁵ She had also run out of money and was obliged to accept charity from the queen. As a further token of their friendship, Johanna gave Birgitta a gift of a “Turkish woman” who, according to the *Diarium Vadstenense*, had been abducted from her homeland, brought by Christians to Naples and given to the queen there.¹⁶ This Turkish woman was later sent to Sweden to become a nun at Vadstena, with the adopted Swedish name Katarina Magnusdotter.

Another of the complicating factors in the handling of this sensitive material about Johanna arises from the queen’s alleged affair with Birgitta’s son Karl. Their meeting is recounted in a Swedish chronicle written at the motherhouse at Vadstena in the fifteenth century, known as *Margareta Clausdotters Krönika*.¹⁷ As well as greeting the queen in the customary way of kneeling down and kissing her feet, Karl also kissed her on the lips, thus winning her affection, so much so indeed that the queen then declared she would like to keep him in Naples as her husband—to Birgitta’s horror, especially since Karl’s wife was still living in Sweden. Birgitta turned to God for help, and within a matter of days, Karl was taken ill and died. Although this story, with its traveler’s tale motifs, found its way into the folklore of Vadstena, there is a complete silence about it in the canonization materials apart from a neutral reference to the fact that Johanna arranged for Karl’s burial.¹⁸

Probably the main reason for caution is that Johanna was a petitioner in the canonization: in October 1377 and September 1378 she submitted supportive applications to Pope Urban VI.¹⁹ After Birgitta’s death, but still while the canonization proceedings were in progress, Johanna came into conflict with the papacy. When in 1378, on the death of Gregory XI, a Neapolitan pope, Urban VI, was elected, he was met by opposition from the mostly French cardinals who elected a pro-French alternative, Clement VII, who reestablished the papal court at Avignon. Johanna saw the new pope’s presence in Rome as a threat to her own territories and was thus drawn into internal strife in Italy. She joined the factions of the Avignon papacy, lending her support to the anti-pope. Efforts were made to dissuade her by, amongst others, Caterina of Siena, who, like

Birgitta, had taken a close interest in the divisive papal politics of the time. Urban VI attempted to persuade Caterina to go to Naples with Katherina Ulfsdotter, to dissuade Johanna from her allegiance to the Clementist obedience. In the same vein as Birgitta had done, Caterina wrote a number of letters to Johanna, urging her to renounce her self-love and to respect the authority of the church, and if she could not accept the validity of Urban's election, at least to remain neutral in the question until she discovered the truth.²⁰ After fruitless efforts such as these, the pope accused Johanna of being a schismatic and excommunicated her in 1381. Shortly afterward she was driven into exile and the new king of Naples, Charles of Durazzo, had her taken prisoner and strangled in her bed.

The other important figure whom Birgitta met in Naples was the archbishop, Bernard of Rodez, who remains an indistinct—yet influential—figure in the canonization procedure. VII 12 is a response to his query as to his personal doubts, and at Johanna's court at Aversa, she revealed in public to “archbishop Bernard, three masters of theology, two doctors of canon and civil law, and some knights and citizens of the city” a message on the slackness and superstition of the Neapolitans (VII 27). The *Vita* uses the adverb “intrepide” to describe her boldness in speaking out thus.²¹ The message contained in VII 28 was put in writing to the archbishop. Several other sources, including the *Vita* and witness testimonies, suggest that Bernard initially questioned Birgitta's authority but was persuaded to preach her message of reform to the people of Naples and to promote her cause for the canonization.²²

By this point in her life, Birgitta had gained an authority and could command an audience which enabled her to issue her messages more forcefully than before, having them read from pulpits and in public places, and gathering high-ranking audiences to attend. In Naples she perhaps comes closer to public preaching than she had ever done before, although she always trod a fine line between preaching, from which lay people were banned, and admonitions to individuals, which was permitted for both men and women with wisdom and knowledge.²³

Bernard and Johanna represent some of the most vocal early proponents of the canonization and the role played by the Neapolitan advocates was a key to its successful conclusion.²⁴ Birgitta's reputation lived on in Naples long after her death, and her cult appears to have taken root there most rapidly. The first examinations of the miracles took place in Naples;²⁵ and according to a letter from her daughter Katherina to Archbishop Birger Gregorsson in Sweden on 15 January, 1378—five years after her death and thirteen before the canonization—her image was portrayed in churches in Naples, notably Our Lady of Carmel and San Eligio.²⁶

Cyprus

Another political sphere in turmoil was Cyprus, which was on the brink of war when Birgitta arrived there in April 1372. Cyprus had been under western rule since king Richard I of England had conquered it during the Third Crusade in

1191. It was a kingdom ruled by a French dynasty, the Lusignans, who imposed a western system of government and land ownership on the indigenous Greek population. It was one of the easternmost outposts of the Catholic Church, and strongly under the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church, as Birgitta makes plain in VII 19.32–36.²⁷ Until the end of the 1360s it was a stable, prosperous island, with a sound administration. King Peter I was murdered in 1369, shortly after he was engaged in a crusade against the Muslims. His young son Peter II was proclaimed king, but the boy's mother, Eleanor of Aragon, was passed over as regent in favor of Peter I's brother, Prince John of Antioch, whom Eleanor suspected of her husband's murder. She became the focus of opposition to the new regime and wrote to the pope and other western rulers, calling on them to allow her to make her case for justice before them, and she received letters from pope Gregory XI in 1371 admonishing the young prince to rule well and telling her to look after him. The pope also sent envoys to intervene in the deteriorating situation, and he ordered Peter II's coronation to take place immediately. On 6 January, 1372 he was duly crowned king of Cyprus, and on 10 October, 1372 he was crowned titular king of Jerusalem. The latter coronation was followed by a riot involving Genoese and Venetian merchants in Cyprus and led to the Genoese demanding compensation for deaths and heavy losses. Because of the weak internal position, with Eleanor and John both contending for power, the Genoese saw the opportunity of launching an invasion fleet against Cyprus. In October 1372 Eleanor was accused of appealing to the Genoese for help against John; and she again sought support from the pope, the king of Aragon, and Johanna of Naples. The pope intervened to head off the confrontation in October 1372 and in May 1373 he told Johanna and others not to help the Genoese expedition by donating provisions. The pope's efforts at intervention throughout 1373 failed and the invasion began. Famagusta and the capital, Nicosia, were taken, and the king, his mother and John were all imprisoned. The Genoese success was short-lived, however, and a peace treaty was signed on 21 October, 1374.²⁸

When Birgitta arrived in Cyprus she had with her a letter of recommendation from Johanna and the empress of Constantinople, Marie of Bourbon, a former sister-in-law of Peter I.²⁹ Eleanor welcomed Birgitta to her palace and took advice from her, asking when she should have her son crowned king, whether she should avenge her husband's murder, and whether she should enter into a new marriage or return to her native country. In the composite chapter 16, Christ describes the island in apocalyptic prophetic terms, as "Gomorrah," and says that the duke (John of Antioch), who knew of his brother's death, should do penance or he would experience a harsh death. The court is corrupt and its confessors, who appear to be like simple sheep, are really foxes and flatterers. Eleanor should not return to Aragon, or think of remarriage, but she should stay and nurture her son and appoint good counselors for him. On the subject of the crowning of a new king, the revelation speaks of the burdens and dangers of a rule by so young an heir. There is also personal advice for the queen: she is to cease wearing tight dresses and clothes which reveal her breasts, nor must she use perfumes, but she should follow instead the example of holy queens and saints.

While she was in Cyprus Birgitta was asked by Eleanor to pray for the new young king. Some time later, now in Jerusalem, she received advice for Peter II and John of Antioch, urging them to work together and always observe the love of God in their political dealings. She sent this guidance back to Cyprus, although according to Alfonso's editorial title of VII 18, Christ instructed her to write those things to them as if from herself and not from the part of Christ.

The following revelation, VII 19, was also received in Jerusalem and sent back to Cyprus in letter form. Its strictures are directed in crusading terms at those who espouse Greek Orthodoxy and are not followers of the pope in Rome. According to the title, the revelation was sent to Cyprus to be published there but John ignored it. Thus, on her return from Jerusalem, Birgitta herself let it be made public in the presence of Eleanor, Peter II, John of Antioch, and the royal council. In this vision she comes very close to adopting a role of public preacher.³⁰ Alfonso's words "narravit" and "publicavit" suggest that she delivered her own message, presumably in Latin; but Alfonso or another male companion may have spoken or interpreted on her behalf. The incident illustrates the growing confidence with which she spoke out publicly and uncompromisingly in her moral crusade, especially in secular political affairs, toward the end of her life.

It is clear that the king and John of Antioch paid Birgitta scant regard in Cyprus, and there were other voices of derision and incomprehension. A Dominican named Simon, who was confessor to John of Antioch, said she was demented, and another dismissively called her an ignorant little woman, "ignara muliercula."³¹ Among those who did not ridicule her was the English knight and courtier, William Williamson, who followed her from Cyprus to Jerusalem, as did the queen's confessor, the Franciscan, Martin of Aragon, who was the bearer of the message in VII 20 (see further below).

The Vision of the Passion

In the Holy Land, Birgitta made the tour of eight stations of the cross, starting with the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.³² Upon entering this church she appears to gain absolution for the deceased members of her family, and probably most immediately for Karl, who had died in Naples: "The souls of some of your kinsmen who were in purgatory have today been set free and have entered into my glory in heaven" (VII 14).

Birgitta's account of the crucifixion in Book VII (15–16) is the fourth of her major revelations on this subject (cf. Books I 10, I 27, and IV 70), each told from a different perspective and with variations of detail. The message conveyed here is for the conversion of sinners: "Unless they change their hearts and convert to me, they will be condemned along with those who divided my garments and cast lots for my vestment" (16.4). This perspective contrasts with Book I 10, which looks back on the Virgin's life up to the point of the crucifixion, and reminds Birgitta to bear the Passion in mind; Book IV 70, on the

other hand, which is more of a narrative account, adds a description of the physical beauty of Christ.³³ Further, in her Holy Land vision, unlike her other Passion visions, the narrative perspective is Birgitta's own: she gives an eyewitness account of the events as experienced through her own ears and eyes at the very shrine where they took place. Not only does she enter completely into compassion with Christ, but she also identifies wholly with the suffering of his mother, reproducing the common idea of the Virgin swooning at the foot of the cross "trembling as though half-dead," at the sight of her son's pain.³⁴ Birgitta's compassion for Mary's suffering extends into imitation, and Mary's pain becomes her pain when she personally feels that "a sharp sword of unbearable grief went through my heart."³⁵

It is impossible to tell how much contamination and borrowing has taken place between the four versions. They all contain commonplace motifs mixed with some more distinctive features, such as the suggestion that Christ is nailed to the cross when it is already erected, rather than more conventionally, when it is still on the ground.³⁶ Possibly the only unique detail is the insistence that Christ's stomach was so shrunken as to be a concavity, "as though he had no internal organs."³⁷ Each version of the crucifixion varies slightly, and certain details are picked out in one that are passed over in another: the left foot is placed over the right foot in Book I 10, whereas in VII 15 they are merely "fastened together."³⁸ Further, the cross appears to be tau-shaped in Book IV 70, and the flagellation in Books I 10 and IV 70 (but not described in VII 15) is brought to an end by a man who frees Christ from his bonds.³⁹

By Birgitta's time the story of the Passion was freely open to retelling. The vision embodies the intensity of the new devotionalism and affective piety which appealed directly to the emotion rather than the reason, and emphasized the pain and humiliation of the crucified Christ.⁴⁰ The motif of Christ Triumphant of older medieval tradition was now transformed into that of Christ Suffering, and the devout Christian was invited to become an active participant in the event itself, and to feel its bitter reality at first hand by entering into the drama and empathizing with the physical pain. From a doctrinal point of view, the increased insistence on the physical features of the Passion tended to compromise the significance of its place in the redemption of mankind, for the emphasis on corporeality drew attention away from the redemptive work of the Trinity, and the Passion risked overshadowing the Resurrection in salvation history. Birgitta, however, is less prone to one-sidedness in these regards than some of her contemporaries and successors.⁴¹

The Vision of the Nativity

Another important revelation is that of the Nativity (VII 21), an intimate and visual description that again adds innovative elements to the traditional ones in a seamless circuit of borrowing. In this vision, the innovative elements are

more numerous and striking. Birgitta draws details from monastic and apocryphal traditions of the later Middle Ages, such as the Franciscan tradition in which Joseph is described as an old man.⁴² Birgitta's depiction of the Virgin as kneeling down at the point of giving birth is the most significant new departure in the presentation of the scene. Birgitta is said not to have been able to see the part of the body from which the Virgin gave birth and her womb contracted immediately upon the birth; also the new-born infant and the umbilical cord did not need cleaning—traditionally a task carried out by the midwives who visited later. A further particularly original detail in Birgitta's vision seems to be that the outer swaddling clothes have ribbon bands on the edges, and the baby is put in the manger by Mary and Joseph jointly. Birgitta's own personal experience is probably also reflected as she adds details about the afterbirth and the tasks of the midwives, and the general tender maternal care that is so delicately described in this vision.

Birgitta is a participant witness who describes the unfolding scene in all its minute material detail. Some art historians have argued that the vision marked a shift in depictions of the Nativity in Christian iconography: starting in Italian art, the stable scene with the Virgin lying on her childbed is replaced by the outside stable scene, with Mary kneeling, with only a gown and no veil, and bathed in a splendid light.⁴³ Nicolaus Orsini's testimony in the canonization process around 1380 states that he had seen the new iconography represented in the church of San Antonio extra muros in Naples.⁴⁴ At about the same time, a fresco by Ugolino de Prete Ilario in the cathedral at Orvieto depicts the Virgin kneeling in an attitude of prayer. The Tuscan painter Niccolò di Tommaso was one of the first to make a direct allusion to Birgitta, in a painting dating c. 1380–1400, now in the Vatican's Pinacoteca: Birgitta is an onlooker in the right-hand foreground, and the words of welcome by the Virgin to the child are quoted in scrolls.⁴⁵ From around the same time, a mural depicts Birgitta as a spectator at the scene in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, as does a painter from the Sienese school in a work now in the Museo Civico in Pisa. A few decades later, Birgitta is depicted in the foreground of a fresco in Castiglione Olona, Lombardia, by the Florentine painter Masolino de Panicale.⁴⁶ By the early fifteenth century the new iconography had become established and was beginning to spread northward, manifesting itself above all in areas of Birgittine influence, as exemplified by Meister Franke's reredos in Hamburg and the reredos in Lye (Gotland) which was executed in Lübeck at the beginning of the fifteenth century.⁴⁷

The nativity vision is followed by four revelations (VII 22–25), which contain further reflections that may be intended to authenticate the account.⁴⁸ In the first the Virgin confirms the truth and novelty of the depictions, which might suggest an awareness by Birgitta that her account deviated from other depictions of the scene. She is reminded of a traditional picture of the birth which she had seen in Naples, but she implies that the true event was not exactly as depicted there: "Although I did show you in Naples something of what it was like when I brought forth my son, you can be sure that the way in which I gave birth was on my knees, praying alone in the stable, as you saw just

now.”⁴⁹ VII 23 describes the visit of the shepherds, who, having heard that the (male) *salvator* had been born and not a (female) *salvatrrix*, were allowed to see for themselves the child’s sex. The next chapter tells of the visit of the magi to the stable “to adore my son,” and the last recounts the birth from the Virgin’s perspective.

Franciscan Influences

Besides the Nativity and Passion, there are other revelations in Book VII that are suggestive of Birgitta’s special interest in Franciscan observance.⁵⁰ When she visits Assisi, St. Francis appears to her and speaks of the importance of obedience (VII 3).⁵¹

Another Franciscan subject is the poverty debate that had dogged the Franciscan order within only a few years of its founder’s death in 1226, leading to a schism between the Spirituals, who advocated a life of absolute poverty and claimed to be the true interpreters of their founder’s valedictory Testament, and the Conventuals, who lived according to mendicant requirements of the day. In 1323 Pope John XXII distanced himself from the Spirituals by issuing a bull that allowed for corporate ownership within the order, with the result that many Spirituals became schismatics under the name of “Fratricelli.”

One of the central unresolved arguments was whether Christ and the Apostles owned property. This debate is alluded to in VII 7–8, where a Franciscan friar named Peter of Trastevere asks Birgitta’s advice shortly before she leaves on her pilgrimage. The message contains words of spiritual comfort to the friar but it condemns those who denounce the pope as not being a true pope and who deny that unworthy priests handle the true body of Christ at the altar. It asserts the full authority of the papal office, whatever the private shortcomings of the incumbent might be, and the unfailing validity of sacraments performed by priests, regardless of their moral status, so long as they are not heretics. The highly sensitive poverty question is neatly resolved. If Birgitta had said that Christ owned no property, she could have been denounced as a heretic; if she had said that he did own property, she would have compromised her position as a critic of clerical greed and superfluity. Her reply—that Christ owned only the tunic given to him by his own mother—was a devout one that put the combatants to shame.

In VII 8, Mary adds that Birgitta is not permitted to know whether Pope John XXII is in hell or heaven, which is probably an indirect reference to his controversial opinions on the Beatific Vision.

The message in VII 20 to Martin of Aragon, secretary to Queen Eleanor of Cyprus, again alludes to the poverty debate and the Life of St. Francis. It tells of a confrontation between a friar of ill-intent who joins the Franciscan order and a Friar Adversary who is influenced by the devil. This confrontation might be a metaphorical reflection on the two opposing Franciscan factions. Overall, Birgitta takes a pragmatic view: she is not an extreme advocate of the

poverty argument, but, as with her other comparisons with original monastic founders, she urges an observance of the original ideals with good intent. After hearing this revelation Martin sold his books and other personal property and followed Birgitta on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Birgitta's Death

In VII 26, the Virgin instructs Birgitta to prepare to return to "Christian territory," for according to the *Vita*, "there were still messages to be sent to the world's princes."⁵² She appears eager to leave the shrines of the Holy Land and return to the secular intrigues in the Mediterranean area in which she had increasingly become involved. To the last, she wished to fulfill her role as a mediator of divine messages to secular potentates, and she continued to work tirelessly toward achieving her ambitions for the papacy.

VII 30 reinforces the admonishing tone of her last years, as well as the message for all mankind. It is a culminating message that depicts Christ in glory, together with the Virgin, reprimanding his people who have ceased listening to him:

Hear ye, all my enemies living in the world, for I am not speaking to my friends who obey my will. Hear ye, all priests, archbishops, bishops and all those of lower rank in the church! Hear ye, kings and princes and judges of the earth and all servants! Hear ye, women, princesses, and all ladies and maidservants! Everyone of any condition and rank, all those great and small who inhabit the earth, all of you, hear the words that I, your Creator, address to you now. My complaint is that you have gone away from me and placed your trust in the devil, my enemy.

Only five days before her death, she appealed to pope Gregory XI for the last time, and in this vision (VII 31), we learn that in the last few months of her life she had received no revelations. The date of her death was 23 July, 1373.⁵³ The words of Christ in VII 31 suggest that she was to be buried in nun's clothing ("you shall be clothed and consecrated as a nun before my altar. From now on you will not only be considered as my bride but also as a nun and a mother in Vadstena"). Katherina confirms that her body was taken to the monastery of San Lorenzo in Panisperna, where she had had many friends, among the sisters, from the Roman nobility.⁵⁴ In accordance with her wishes she was buried at the monastery on 27 July. Preparations were then begun to have her remains transported back to Sweden, and at the end of the year her relics were translated back to her native country. A travel permit dated 13 November, 1373 describes the items that accompanied the coffin; the fact that they included altar vessels, Mass vestments, and books suggests that permission had been granted for masses to be held during the long journey homeward.⁵⁵

The fulfillment of a Life-long Spiritual Journey

The prophetic message in Book V rev. 13 suggests that Birgitta would travel to the Holy Land in person to see five places associated with the Incarnation, which are indicated by reference to five items: a vessel, a lion, a lamb, a snake, and an eagle. The vessel may be taken to suggest the Virgin Mary and an embodiment of the places associated with her life. The four animals are Messianic titles that are traditionally associated with the earthly life of Christ, his birth, death, resurrection, and ascension.⁵⁶ Judging by Book VII, however, it would appear that Birgitta's prophecy was only partially fulfilled, and that she visited mainly the places of the Crucifixion and Nativity. While she visited the burial place of Mary and the church of the Holy Sepulcher, which contains the tomb of the Resurrection, no visit to the place that is traditionally associated with his Ascension is recorded.⁵⁷ The emphasis on the Nativity is a reminder of the dominating part that Mary played throughout Birgitta's visions, and the emphasis on the Crucifixion is a reminder of her incarnational theology and her hope for the salvation of humankind through the suffering of the Lord.

Book VII contains some important revelations that detail Birgitta's life's end, but also it summarizes her message that was intended to live on after her death. The book, then, is a fulfillment of a life-long spiritual journey and a realization of several prophecies she had received in earlier years. It is a culmination of some of her most personal visions, biographically; some of her most outspoken visions, politically; and some of her most expressive visions, spiritually.

NOTES

1. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 80–81, 95–96, 512, and 633. On Birgitta and Spain, see Almazán, “Den heliga Birgitta och Spanien.”

2. On Birgitta's pilgrimages, see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 14, 309, 579. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem was a tradition within Birgitta's family; see Klockars, *Birgittas svenska värld*, p. 15; and KL “pilgrim.” Her pilgrimage to the Holy Land is discussed by Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 118–42, and by Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*. Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld*, pp. 168–75, and Andersson, *Birgitta och det heliga landet*, attempt to reconstruct the chronology of the pilgrimage. See also Pernler, “I konflikt med de flesta,” Cesarini, *I den heliga Birgittas fotspår*, Cesarini, “Från Milano till Siracusa”; Jönsson, “Birgittas pilgrimsfärd till det heliga landet.”

3. On Alfonso, see further volume I, pp. 14–15.

4. This point is made by Kezel in Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 298n682; although strictly, the revelations as they stand are in a proper chronological sequence, since she arrived first in Jerusalem and not in Bethlehem.

5. All these documents are edited by I. Collijn, *Acta et processus*. St. Birgitta's is the most complete set of canonization materials in the later medieval period; see further Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, and Kleinberg, “Proving Sanctity.”

6. For example, Elizarius (251–53), Gerardus de Padua and Galhardus (68), Karoli Malseel (429–31), Latino Orsini (326), and John of Claro (234–35).

7. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 314; see also pp. 205 (Praxedis), 371–72 (Alfonso).

8. I would like to acknowledge my former student, Aileen Kozsdiy, who in the course of her PhD studies at the University of Leeds had begun to make an important study of some of these questions, and in particular the role of the revelations in the canonization process, before her untimely death in 2006 (editor).

9. The miracle is described in the *Vita*, Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 95, 634. Birgitta apparently visited Ortona twice, probably for the first time in c. 1358 and then again in c. 1365–66, when she was accompanied by Bishop Thomas of Växjö; see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 334.

10. Birgitta mentions relics on other occasions (VI 103, 104 concerning the relics of St. Nicholas in Bari, VI 112, concerning St. Anne, VI 112, calling Christ's foreskin a "treasure," *Extravagantes* 61, on St. Louis, and *Extravagantes* 106, on a relic of the true cross), but never quite as directly as she does here. See also Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist*, p. 11.

11. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 495 (and Bergh, *Bok VII*, p. 121–22, for a variant version of the Latin text). Katherina (p. 333) in her testimony adds a further detail saying the reliquary case contained no holes or cracks, and she tells how Birgitta received the relic with tears and sweet words. Magnus Petri (p. 272) also testifies on the miracle.

12. *Acta sanctorum*, p. 470.

13. On Johanna, see further Léonard, *Les Angevins de Naples*; and Capasso, *Inventario cronologico-sistemático dei Registri Angioni*, Durrieu *Les archives angevines de Naples*, and Camera *Elucubrazioni storico-diplomatiche*. Unfortunately there are gaps in Angevin registers for the years 1353–76 and 1379–80, which makes the sources scarce for the period that concerns Birgitta's pilgrimage.

14. Although in his testimony Alfonso refers to God's displeasure at the queen's behavior, he judiciously emphasizes, not just once, but twice, the secrecy of the revelations pertaining to the queen: "Item dixit etiam iste testis loquens, quod similiter fecit coram domina regina Neapolitana prefata domina Brigida, quoniam ipsa eidem domine regine dedit in secreto quandam reuelacionem diuinam sibi a Christo factam magne comminationis, terroris et ire Dei, quae quidem, vt dixit ipse testis, nimis secreta sunt." Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 373; see also pp. 325, 383. See further on this vision, Morris, "Birgitta of Sweden and Giovanna of Naples."

15. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 290.

16. Gejrot, *Diarium Vadstenense*, p. 142. She was sent by Johanna to Birgitta in Rome, but by the time she arrived there, Birgitta had already died.

17. See Annerstedt, "Chronicon de genere et nepotibus."

18. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 370–71. See also Colledge, "Epistola solitarii."

19. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 54–55.

20. See Bolton Holloway, "Saint Birgitta of Sweden, Saint Catherine of Siena," p. 36n21.

21. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 100.

22. See further Sahlin, "Gender and the paradoxes."

23. Even in private, it was doubtful that lay people were allowed to pronounce so much upon matters of doctrine as Birgitta did.

24. The Neapolitan influences on the canonization merit further investigation; see Höjer, *Studier i Vadstena klostrets och birgittinordens historia*; Valerio, "Brigida de Svezia a Napoli." It is worth noting that the first luxury copies of the *Corpus Revelationum* were made in Naples; see further Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*.

25. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 164–74, 331. The *Instrumentum Neapolim factum de miraculis in vita et post mortem* also records a number of miracles.

26. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 167, 169, 350–51.

27. See further on the history of Cyprus in this period, Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, volume 2, pp. 364–70; Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades*, pp. 197–211.

28. These events are described by a witness in the canonization proceedings, the Genoese knight, Charles of Malocello (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 429–31). Birgitta's pronouncements on Cyprus were also later used to explain the capture of Cyprus in 1376 by the Genoese.

29. See further Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*, p. 100.

30. Some have suggested that she indeed took on a role as a public preacher; e.g., Jørgensen, *St. Bridget of Sweden*, vol. II, p. 280; Costello, "Women's Mysticism and Reform," p. 114. See further Sahlin, "The Prophetess as Preacher."

31. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 430, 390.

32. The tour of eight stations had recently been organized by the Franciscans. See Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide*, p. 35: "In the C14 the Franciscans organized a devotional walk to follow the steps of Jesus in Jerusalem; a number of the present stations figured on this itinerary, but the starting-point was the Holy Sepulchre. This remained the standard route for nearly two centuries, and impressed itself firmly on the imagination of European pilgrims."

33. These perspectives are fully explored by Roger Ellis, "The Divine Message and its Human Agents," who notes (p. 214): "I.10 contrasts with VII.15: the latter is, so to say, a point of departure for other readers; the former is a point of arrival for the Saint herself."

34. See Graef, *Mary. A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, p. 309; Rubin, *Mother of God*, pp. 243–55, 346.

35. See Sahlin, "His Heart was my Heart," p. 220. The pierced heart, whether Birgitta's, Christ's or Mary's, is another common theme in the *Revelations*.

36. In the early sixteenth century a Danish preacher, Christiern Pedersen, notes that despite the uncertainty surrounding this question, St. Bonaventure was of the opinion that the cross had already been erected when Christ was fixed upon it; see Brandt and Fenger, *Christiern Pedersen*. I, 359, II.14–15.

37. See Pickering, *Art and Literature*, pp. 232, 280, who, however, cautions that the iconography might equally well have prompted the vision as much as vice versa.

38. See further volume I p. 68n11. Note According to Mereth Lindgren, "Birgitta och bilderna," p. 246, the right foot was placed over the left foot in 95 percent of all medieval crucifixes; thus the reverse positioning is distinctive in Birgitta's description in Book I. I am grateful to Jon Adams, Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, Copenhagen, for drawing my attention to this point.

39. Further comparisons are made by Ellis, "The Divine Message."

40. See further Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, pp. 88–121; Cousins "The Humanity and Passion of Christ"; Beckwith, *Christ's Body*.

41. One of the most outstanding depictions of this vision, that may have been influenced directly by Birgitta's vision, is that by the German artist Matthias Grünewald on the Isenheim altarpiece in the early sixteenth century; see Benesch, *The Art of the Renaissance*, pp. 27–34.

42. Tischendorff, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* 4, p. 124. This text does emphasize Joseph's age (90 when marrying Mary) but it only exists in Arabic and Coptic. The source for this idea in the West is more likely to be the more widely influential Gospel of James (Protoevangelium Jacobi); here, Joseph says "I am an old man" Book IX, 2. See also Nordenfalk, "St. Bridget of Sweden as Represented in Illuminated MSS," p. 372. Halborg, "A Possible Gestation," suggests that several details may have been stimulated by her veneration of relics connected with the Nativity, which were situated in churches in Rome.

43. See especially Cornell, "The Iconography of the Nativity," who first argued this case in 1924; and Andersson, *Birgitta och det heliga landet*, pp. 107–13; Lindgren, *Bilden av Birgitta*, p. 105; Svanberg "De äldsta bilderna." See also on the iconography *Marienlexikon*, I, p. 491.

44. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 233.

45. Svanberg, "De äldsta bilderna" draws attention to two further depictions by the same painter, one now in the Yale University collection and the other in Philadelphia Art Museum; see also Aili and Svanberg, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*, I, p. 89–101; Offner, *Studies in Florentine Painting*; and Skaug, "St. Bridget's Vision of the Nativity."

46. In this fresco she is depicted next to another woman, and together they appear to represent the two midwives who, according to legend, came to Bethlehem to witness the birth. One of them, who did not believe in Mary's post-partum virginity, points with her hand, while the other, who did believe, appears to represent Birgitta.

47. This piece is now in Historiska Museet, Stockholm.

48. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 386.

49. Although the question still remains of whether the iconographic shift was itself prompted by Birgitta's vision, or whether the new iconography was already in the process of development in the late fourteenth century, this suggestion might indeed suggest that Birgitta's vision was new. According to the testimony of Nicolaus Orsini, the new iconography, based on Birgitta's vision, is represented in the church of San Antonio extra muros in Naples ("in ecclesia sancti Antonij de Vienna de Neapoli extra muros"); Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 233.

50. Cousins, "The Humanity and Passion of Christ," p. 384. The *Meditationes Vitae Christi* by the Franciscan, pseudo-Bonaventure, for instance, retells episodes from the Gospels, in which the reader may imagine himself or herself to be involved, the purpose being to stir up devotion to Christ in his humanity and so to open up the route to salvation.

51. See Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna*, pp. 204–05; Roelvink, "Andlig släktskap," who discusses the Franciscan influences on St. Birgitta. Although it has sometimes been claimed that Birgitta was a Franciscan tertiary, there is no evidence that this was the case; however, she did have very close links with the Poor Clares at San Lorenzo in Rome, where her body was taken after her death; see Collijn *Birgittinska gestalter*, pp. 67–84.

52. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 96.

53. Unlike most saints she was not commemorated on the day of her death but on the day of her canonization, 7 October—perhaps due to national pride (she was the first formally canonized saint in Sweden). In Sweden the day of her "heavenly birthday," 23 July, was celebrated as well, and within the Birgittine Order also her translation day, 31 May. Outside Scandinavia her feast day was early moved to 8 October, and in 1969 it was moved to 23 July.

54. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 343. See further on her relations with this nunnery Collijn, *Birgittinska gestalter*, pp. 65–92.

55. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 80.

56. See further volume 2, p. 266.

57. I am grateful to Tore Nyberg for drawing my attention to this point. It should be noted, though, that the sanctuary of the Ascension at the top of the Mount of Olives was in Muslim possession at the time when Birgitta visited Jerusalem; and in addition, the heat of summer and the steep climb may have made it practically impossible for her to ascend to it.

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Book VII

HERE BEGINS THE PROLOGUE TO THE LAST BOOK

1 This book of heavenly revelations is the last.¹ Lady Birgitta received the revelations of this book in Rome and when she went on pilgrimage for the first time to Naples and to Sant'Angelo at Monte Gargano.² 2 After her return, while still in Rome, she also received some others included here. There in Rome, it was divinely told to her by Christ in a vision that she would go on a pilgrimage across the sea to the holy city of Jerusalem.³ 3 On the journey overseas, she had a great many revelations, in Naples as well as in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, just as had been divinely promised beforehand to her, as contained above in the Book of Questions in the last revelation given to her in the kingdom of Sweden.⁴ 4 After she had returned to Rome from Jerusalem, she received some further revelations included here as well. The lady then died⁵ in the City. 5 Before her death, Christ foretold for her in a vision the time and day on which she was to die. All this is given in greater detail here below.

✠ Chapter 1

The Virgin Tells Birgitta that She will go to Jerusalem and Bethlehem

DATE: 1350S (1358?), ROME

A revelation received by Lady Birgitta in Rome after the Jubilee Year.¹ The Virgin Mary announces to her in advance that Birgitta will go to Jerusalem and Bethlehem when it shall so please God. She promises that she will then show her how she gave birth to her blessed Son.

1 Once when Lady Birgitta, the bride of Christ, was in Rome and was devoting herself to prayer, she began to consider the virgin birth and the surpassing goodness of God who wanted to choose so pure a mother for himself. 2 Her heart became then so inflamed with love for the Virgin that she said

1. "This book . . . is the last": this phrase supports the claim that the first collection, produced for the canonization, originally comprised seven books. The prologue is almost certainly written by Alfonso, and it occurs in manuscripts belonging to the Prague group. See further volume 1, General Introduction, pp. 18–19.

2. "Sant'Angelo at Monte Gargano": a sanctuary on a mountain in the province of Apulia, where the archangel Michael is said to have appeared. The church built on the spot became a place of pilgrimage and of reverence to the angels, as is suggested in Book IV 131. Cf. also Book III 12, explanation; Book IV 114.

3. "It was divinely told . . . Jerusalem"; cf. chapter 9.

4. "The last revelation . . . Sweden"; cf. Book V rev. 13.

5. "The lady then died": Birgitta died on July 23, 1373; see chapter 31.

1. "Jubilee Year": a centennial celebration instituted by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300. Pope Clement VI changed the period to fifty years in a bull dated 27 January 1343 that was not published until 18 August 1349. See further volume 2, pp. 15–16. As to the date of this revelation, cf. the rubric to chapter 21.

within herself: “My Lady, Queen of Heaven, my heart is so full of joy because the most high God chose you beforehand² as his mother and deigned to confer such dignity on you, ³ that I would rather suffer eternal torment in hell than for you to lose even the least little bit of your surpassing glory and heavenly dignity.” ⁴ She was so inebriated with sweet love that it was as though she was standing above herself, removed from her senses and suspended in an ecstasy of mental contemplation.³ The Virgin then appeared to her and said: ⁵ “Listen carefully,⁴ my daughter! I am the Queen of Heaven, and since you cherish me with such immense love, I announce to you that you will go on pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem, when it so pleases my Son. ⁶ From there you will travel to Bethlehem where, in the place itself, I shall show you fully how I gave birth to my Son, Jesus Christ, for so it has pleased him.”

✠ Chapter 2

An Angel Carries a Sword of Sorrow Before the Virgin

DATE: 1350S, 2 FEBRUARY, CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE, ROME

Lady Birgitta received this revelation in Rome. It tells of the glorious sword of sorrow that pierced the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary and which the righteous Simeon had foretold to her in the temple.

1 On the feast of the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary,¹ when Lady Birgitta, the bride of Christ, was in Rome in the church called Santa Maria Maggiore,² she was caught up in a spiritual vision and saw how everything in heaven was being made ready as though for a great feast. 2 She saw then, as it were,³ a temple of wondrous beauty, and there was the venerable and righteous old man, Simeon,⁴ ready to receive the child Jesus in his arms with the

2. “Chose you beforehand” renders “preeligit,” emphasising the idea that it was previously ordained by God that Mary should be chosen.

3. “Ecstasy of mental contemplation”: this opening vision describes Birgitta’s mystical state, which begins in prayer, before her heart is inflamed and her mind is elevated in contemplation; this topos is used at the start of several books of *Revelationes* as a reminder of the divine inspiration behind her message.

4. “Listen carefully”: Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 245, n82, notes that the theme of attentiveness recurs throughout Book VII in warnings to individuals to be wary of having lapsed from the Christian way of life.

1. “Feast of the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” i.e., the feast of Candlemas, 2 February, which commemorates the presentation of Christ in the temple and the purification of the Virgin. This revelation takes up the celebratory aspect of the purification and the stirring of the heart while Simeon and the Virgin hold the infant Christ; a celebration that is overshadowed by ominous forebodings of the crucifixion to come. See further Larrington, “The Candlemas Vision.”

2. “Santa Maria Maggiore”: one of the major patriarchal basilicas, and the largest church in Rome dedicated to the Virgin. It was associated with the fourth-century “miracle of the snow,” and thought to contain a true relic of the manger. Cf. Book III 10 and IV 78, which also mention this church.

3. “As it were” renders “quasi,” a not uncommon qualifier in the *Revelationes* that underlines the conviction of Birgitta and her confessors that spiritual realities cannot be grasped directly by the human mind but only through corporeal representations.

utmost desire and joy. 3 She also saw the Blessed Virgin approaching most honorably and carrying her little son in order to present him in the temple according to the law of the Lord. Then she saw a countless multitude of angels and the various ranks of God's saints and holy virgins and ladies walking before the Blessed Virgin Mother of God and surrounding her with all gladness and devotion. 4 Ahead of her an angel was carrying a long sword, very broad and bloody, symbolizing the great sorrows that had befallen Mary on the death of her beloved son. These were prefigured by the sword that the righteous Simeon had foretold would pierce her soul. 5 Hence, while the heavenly court exulted, it was said to the bride: "Behold how much honor and glory are rendered on this feast to the Queen of heaven in return for the sword of sorrows which she endured at the passion of her beloved son." The vision then disappeared.

✠ Chapter 3

St. Francis Invites Birgitta to Eat and Drink with Him

DATE: 1350S, 4 OCTOBER, CHURCH IN TRAVESTERE, ROME

A vision that blessed Francis showed to Lady Birgitta. In it he invited her to his room to eat and drink, giving her the spiritual explanation that his room was obedience, his food was converting souls to God, while his drink was to see the converts loving God with all their strength and devoting themselves fervently to prayer and other virtuous actions.

1 On the feast of St. Francis¹ in his church in Trastevere in Rome,² the saint himself appeared to the bride of Christ and said: "Come to my room to eat and drink with me." When she heard that, she immediately got ready for a journey to visit him in Assisi.³ 2 When she had spent five days there, she decided to return to Rome and went into the church in order to commend herself and her loved ones to St. Francis. 3 Then he appeared to her and said: "Welcome! I invited you, of course, to come to my room to eat and drink with me. Understand, however, that this building is not the room I spoke to you about. Rather, my room is the true obedience that I always displayed so that I could never bear to be without a director. 4 I constantly had a priest with me whose every direction I humbly obeyed,⁴ and that was my room. You should do

4. "Simeon"; cf. Luke 2:25-35.

1. "The feast of St. Francis": 4 October.

2. "Church in Trastevere in Rome": most likely the church of S. Francesco a Ripa, in the district of Trastevere, where St. Francis is said to have once stayed during a visit to Rome; see Tesei, *Le Chiese di Roma*, p. 490, and Gunton, *Rome's Historic Churches*.

3. "To visit him in Assisi": the birthplace of St. Francis and the location of his major shrine, in the province of Perugia, Umbria.

likewise, because it pleases God. 5 The food⁵ which was my delightful refreshment was this: that I cheerfully drew my fellows away from the vanities of worldly life to serving God with all their hearts. I swallowed that joy like the sweetest of morsels. 6 My drink was the joy that I experienced when I saw people converted by me loving God and devoting themselves with all their strength to contemplation and prayer, instructing others in the virtuous life and imitating true poverty. 7 See, my daughter, this drink made my soul rejoice so much that all worldly things became distasteful to me. So, come into my room and eat this my food and drink this drink with me. Yes, drink it and you will be refreshed by God forever.”

✠ Chapter 4

The Relics of St. Thomas¹ the Apostle are Preserved at Ortona

DATE: 1365, ORTONA

Lady Birgitta had this revelation in the city of Ortona in the kingdom of Naples. Christ spoke to her and assured her that the relics of the apostle St. Thomas were in an altar there, and that he took sweet delight in these relics and those of other saints, regarding them as his precious treasure on earth and promising great recognition and reward to those who venerate them with due devotion.

1 It seemed to a person keeping a vigil of prayer as though her heart were on fire with divine love and filled with such spiritual joy that she was losing her strength. Then she heard a voice saying to her:

2 “I am the creator and redeemer of all beings. Know, then, that my treasure is such as the great joy that you are now feeling in your soul. It is written, indeed, ‘The Spirit blows where he will and you hear his voice but you know not whence it comes nor whither it goes.’² 3 I grant my friends this treasure variously in a variety of ways and gifts.³ But I wish to tell you of another treasure that is not yet in heaven but here with you on earth. 4 This treasure is the relics and bodies of my friends. Truly, my saints’ bodies, whether decaying or fresh, whether turned to dust and ashes or not, are most assuredly my trea-

4. “Had a priest . . . humbly obeyed”: see, e.g., *Scripta Leonis*, c. 106: “he always had one of his companions as his guardian whom he obeyed” (ed. and trans. Brooke, p. 275), and similarly the *Testament of St. Francis*.

5. “The food”; cf. John 4:34. Cf. also *Extravagantes* 90.

1. “The relics of St. Thomas . . . Ortona”: Thomas is mentioned in three episodes in the gospels: he offered to die for Jesus on his way to Bethany (John 11:16), he asked Jesus to clarify where he was going (John 15:5), and he doubted the resurrection unless allowed to touch the wounds of the Risen Lord (John 20: 25–28). He is believed to have been martyred and buried in Mylapore, near Madras, in India, and his remains translated to Edessa in Macedonia, Greece, in 394; they were later supposedly moved to Chios and then to Ortona.

2. “It is written . . . whither it goes”; cf. John 3:8.

3. “In a variety of ways and gifts”; cf. Hebrews 1:1.

sure. 5 Yet you may ask: When Scripture says, ‘Where your treasure is, there is your heart,’⁴ how then is my heart with this treasure of the relics of my saints? 6 I answer you: When people visit the shrines of my saints and show reverence to the relics of those who have been glorified by miracles and canonized by popes, it is my heart’s great delight to grant them eternal rewards after the measure of the will and faith and struggles of those pilgrims. That is how my heart is with my treasure. 7 Therefore, I want you to know that a most choice treasure of mine⁵ is here in this place, namely, the relics of my holy apostle Thomas. In no other place are so many of them to be found uncorrupted and undivided as in this altar.⁶ 8 When the city where the body of my apostle first reposed was laid to waste, this treasure was transferred to this city by some of my friends and placed within this altar with my permission. 9 The apostle’s body lies here now quite hidden, because, before it came here, the disposition of the princes of this land was as is written: 10 ‘They have mouths and will not speak, they have eyes and will not see. They have ears and will not hear. They have hands and will not touch. They have feet and will not walk.’⁷ 11 How could such people with such a disposition toward me, their God, give due honor to such a treasure? 12 Accordingly, anyone who loves me and my friends above all things, preferring to die rather than offend me in the least, having both the intention and the authority to honor me and to command others, such a one, whoever he is, will exalt and honor my treasure, the relics of this apostle of mine whom I chose and elected. 13 It should therefore be stated and proclaimed as most certain that just as the bodies of the apostles Peter and Paul are in Rome, so too the relics of my holy apostle Thomas are in Ortona.”

14 The bride⁸ answered and said: “Lord, did not the princes of this kingdom have churches built and did they not give generous alms?” 15 The Lord said to her: “They did build a lot and they did offer me great amounts of copper in order to appease me. But the alms of many of them were less pleasing and acceptable to me because their marriages were contracted contrary to the statutes⁹ of the holy fathers. 16 Although the marriages permitted by the popes were legal and binding, nevertheless, because their intention was corrupt and went against the statutes of the church, this must be examined and judged at my divine judgment.”

4. “Where your treasure is, there is your heart”; cf. Matthew 6:21, Luke 12:34.

5. “A most choice treasure of mine”: In the *Vita* (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 95), Thomas is described as the chief among the saints whose remains were preserved in the kingdom of Sicily.

6. “In no other place . . . as in this altar”: Birgitta was aware of the fact that relics of St. Thomas existed in more than one location.

7. “They have mouths . . . will not walk”; cf. Psalm 114 (115) 5-7.

8. “The bride”: Note the inconsistent editing: in paragraph 1 the recipient of the revelation is called “a person.” Both expressions are of course oblique references to Birgitta.

9. “Their marriages were contracted contrary to the statutes”: this sudden reference to the legal status of the princes of Ortona is unexplained.

ADDITION

17 When the lady had set out for Ortona, it happened that she and her companions had to stay a whole night in the cold under the open sky and in heavy rain. Then, about dawn, Christ said: 18 “Tribulation befalls people for three reasons: either for the sake of greater humility, as in the case of King David,¹⁰ or for the sake of greater fear and caution, as in the case of Sara, Abraham’s wife, who was carried off by a king,¹¹ or for people’s greater consolation and honor. 19 So it happened to you. I had urged the hearts of those coming to meet you, who told you¹² not to proceed further that day, but you did not want to trust them, and so you all have suffered as you have. Now go into the city and my servant Thomas will give you what you desire.”¹³

20 More on the same. Christ appeared in Ortona, saying: “I told you before¹⁴ that my holy apostle Thomas was my treasure, and that is most certainly true. 21 Thomas is indeed a light for the world,¹⁵ but men love the darkness more than the light.”¹⁶ Then St. Thomas appeared, saying: “I shall give you a treasure that you have long desired.” 22 And at that very moment, without anyone touching it, a piece of one of the bones of Blessed Thomas miraculously appeared from the reliquary of St. Thomas.¹⁷ The lady received it with joy and kept it reverently.¹⁸

✠ Chapter 5

About a King’s Daughter in a House

DATE: 1366, NAPLES

Lady Birgitta had this revelation in Naples after a request from Lord Elziarius, son of the countess of Ariano.¹ He was then a young gentleman and a scholar of good qualities. He had asked her to pray

10. “In the case of King David”; cf. 2 Kings (2 Samuel) chapter 12.

11. “Carried off by a king”; cf. Genesis 12:15.

12. “Who told you”: These words are not found in the manuscripts or the critical edition, but have been supplied from the parallel text in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 495. They seem necessary for the passage to make sense.

13. Asomewhat longer version of this Addition is found in Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 495 (and in the critical edition of Book VII, pp. 121–22).

14. “I told you before”; cf. paragraph 7.

15. “A light for the world”; cf. Matthew 5:14.

16. “Love the darkness more than the light”; cf. John 3:19.

17. “Blessed Thomas . . . St. Thomas”: in Birgitta’s time there was no clear distinction between the states of beatitude and sainthood.

18. “And kept it reverently”: This event was endorsed by a witness at the canonization proceedings of Birgitta; cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 495.

1. “Lord Elziarius, son of the countess of Ariano”: Lord Elziarius was related to St. Elzarius (Elzear) of Sabran, Provence (d. 1323); he later became a cardinal (as stated in the Addition) and a witness in the canonization process. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 251–53, 322–23, 520.

to God for him. While she was praying, the Virgin Mary appeared to her and gave her this vision to teach him how to live his life. She says very beautifully that reason ought to be the doorkeeper and guardian of the soul in order to cast out all temptations and resist them manfully so that they do not enter into a person's inner home.

1 Praise and glory be to almighty God from whom all good things come and especially for those favors He granted to you in your youth! His grace must be sought so that the love you have for him may grow in you each day until death.

2 There was once a great and mighty king who built a house in which he settled his daughter,² entrusting her to the guardianship of a certain man, saying: 3 "My daughter has mortal enemies and you must therefore guard her with all care. With diligent forethought and unremitting attention you must watch out for four things in particular. 4 The first is not to let anyone undermine the foundations of the house. The second is not to let anyone climb over the top of the fence. The third is to let nobody break through the walls of the house. The fourth is not to let any enemy get in through the doors."

5 My lord, this parable must be understood in a spiritual sense. I am writing it for you out of divine charity, as God, the searcher of every heart,³ is my witness. By the house I mean your body fashioned out of earth⁴ by the king of heaven. 6 By the king's daughter I mean your soul created by the power of the Most High and settled in your heart. By the guardian I mean human reason, which guards your soul according to the will of the eternal king. By the foundation I mean a good, steady and firm intention. All the good works by which the soul is ably defended must be built on that foundation. 7 Since you are so minded to live for nothing other than to follow God's will, giving him all the honor you can by word or deed, submitting to him with your body and goods and all your strength as long as you live so that you may be able to commend your soul preserved from all carnal filth to her creator: 8 O how vigilantly you must guard the foundation of your will with the guardian of reason, so that none can undermine it with their plots and injure your soul! 9 By those who endeavor to undermine the foundation I mean those that address you in words like this: "My lord, remain a layman and find yourself an attractive, high-born and wealthy wife, so that you may rejoice in having offspring and heirs; in this way you will not be troubled by any physical worries." 10 Others may speak as follows: "If you want to become a clergyman, then study the liberal arts in order to gain the title of 'master'⁵ and acquire as many ecclesial goods and proceeds

2. "A great and mighty king . . . his daughter": Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 283 n532, compares this allegory to the legend of St. Barbara and the *Gesta Romanorum*, chapter 1.

3. "The searcher of every heart"; cf. 1 Chronicles 28:9; Wisdom 1:6.

4. "Fashioned out of earth"; cf. Genesis 2:7.

5. "Liberal arts . . . master": The basic framework of a medieval education was the liberal arts, consisting of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). The grade of "master" (*magister*) entitled the holder to teach in the university faculties.

as you can get through request or donation. 11 Then you will gain worldly esteem for your learning and you will be praised by your worldly friends and many servants for your abundant wealth.” 12 If anyone tries to persuade you in such a way, then have your guardian, that is, your reason, answer right away and say that you would rather put up with any physical suffering than lose your chastity. 13 You should also answer that you want to acquire learning and arts for the glory of God and the defense of the Catholic faith, for the support of good people and the correction of those in error as well as for all those in need of your advice and instruction; moreover, that you want nothing beyond what is necessary for the upkeep of your body and of a sufficient household, nor any kind of excess in this life for the mere sake of vanity. 14 Tell them, too, that if divine providence should increase your rank, then you want to make wise use of it for the benefit of your neighbor and the glory of God. 15 In this way, surely, your guardian, that is, your reason, will be able to drive away those struggling to undermine the foundation of your good intention.

16 Your reason must also surely be on careful and diligent watch not to let anyone climb over the top of the fence. By the top of the fence I mean charity, which is above all other virtues. 17 You can be completely certain that the devil desires nothing more than to leap over this fence. This is why, as much as he can, he unceasingly tries to make worldly love and carnal affections overtake divine charity. 18 Thus, my lord, as often as worldly love attempts to take precedence over divine charity in your heart, immediately send your guardian reason out to meet it with the commandments of God and say that you would rather endure the death of soul and body than live in such a way as to provoke so merciful a God by word or deed. 19 Indeed, say that, in order to please God alone in every way and honor him in all things, you would not in any way be sparing of your own life or goods or possessions nor of the esteem of relatives or friends, 20 and that you would sooner freely submit to troubles of any kind than to cause any harm or scandal or trouble to your neighbor, high or low, and that you would rather love all your neighbors like a brother as the Lord commands. 21 And, my lord, if you act in this way, you will prove that you love God more than yourself and your neighbor as yourself.⁶ Then reason, your guardian, can rest securely in the knowledge that no rival of your soul can climb over the top of the fence.

22 By the walls I mean the four delights of the heavenly court, which the inner man should desire in earnest meditation. 23 The first delight is to desire fervently in one’s heart to see God himself in his eternal glory and those un-failing riches that are never taken away from one who has attained them. 24 The second is to wish continuously to hear those sweet-sounding voices of angels with which, without end or weariness, they ceaselessly praise and worship God. 25 The third is to long with all the burning desire of one’s heart to praise God eternally as the very angels do. The fourth is to desire to obtain the everlasting consolations of the angels and holy souls in heaven. 26 Think, then,

6. “You love God . . . as yourself”; cf. Matthew 22: 37–39.

how a man standing in his house has the walls around him whichever way he turns. In the same way, whoever longs night and day with the utmost desire for these four things—to see God in his glory, to hear the angels praising God, to praise God together with them, and to obtain their comfort—27 will truly be preserved unharmed within strong walls no matter where he turns or whatever he takes in hand. And so, living in this life among the very angels, he may truly be said to have fellowship with God.

28 O my lord, how much your enemy desires to break through such walls and take such interior delights away from your heart and inject and insert there others opposed to your desire, which can gravely injure your soul! 29 Therefore your guardian reason must keep careful watch on the two ways by which the enemy habitually comes. The first way is through the hearing, the second through sight. 30 He comes by way of hearing when he inserts in your heart the enjoyments of worldly songs and of various lovely sounding instruments, of useless stories and of people who sing your praises. 31 From this a man becomes puffed up with pride in so far as he separates himself from the humility of Christ. Let your guardian reason resist such enjoyment by saying: 32 “Just as the devil hates every kind of humility that the Holy Spirit inspires in human hearts, so by the operative aid of God I shall hate all the worldly ostentation and pride that the evil spirit pours into human hearts by his pestiferous incitements. It will be as hateful to me as the stench of rotting carcasses that instantly overcomes any nose that smells it.” 33 Sight is, as it were, the second habitual path on which the enemy approaches to break through the walls, bringing with him a variety of tools, such as metal objects of all shapes and kinds, precious stones, elegant clothing, stately palaces, castles, estates, lakes, forests, vineyards, and other such things of great monetary value. 34 All these things, if fervently desired, are sure to break down the walls, that is, the heavenly delights. Before the love and enjoyment of such things enter the heart, your guardian reason must therefore speedily run to their encounter and say: 35 “If I should have any of these kinds of possessions at my disposal, I shall deposit them in that chest where neither thieves nor moths⁷ are feared. With the aid of divine grace I will not offend my God by coveting the possessions of others, nor will I separate myself in any way from the company of Christ’s servants by any ambition concerning what belongs to others.”

36 By the doors of the house I mean all the needs of the body, all that a body cannot do without, such as eating, drinking, sleeping and waking, as well as occasionally feeling upset or cheerful. 37 Your guardian reason must attend to these doors, that is, to the needs of the body, with care, and with godly fear wisely and steadfastly defend them so that enemies do not get into the soul. 38 Just as when taking food and drink one must make sure not to let the enemy in through excesses that render the body sluggish for the service of God, so too one must make sure so that no enemy gains entry through

7. “Thieves nor moths”; cf. Matthew 6:20–21.

excessive abstinence, which renders the body feeble for any kind of activity. 39 The guardian, that is, reason, should also take care so that, for the sake of worldly honor or human favor, not too many courses are served at dinner, whether when you are alone with your family or when guests come. You should entertain everyone out of divine charity without many kinds of food or an excess of delicacies. 40 Then reason, your guardian, must watchfully and attentively consider that just as food and drink should be regulated, so too sleep should be reverently regulated in order for the body to be ready and able to work for the glory of God, and so that every waking hour may be usefully spent in the Divine Office and in honest work and not be affected by any sleepy dullness.

41 If any trouble or rancor should arise, your guardian reason, along with his companion, the fear of God, must quickly run to their encounter lest it happen that, by anger or impatience, you should fail in divine grace and seriously provoke God against you. 42 Moreover, whenever consolation or joy fills your heart, your guardian reason should more closely impress upon it the fear of God, which, aided by the grace of Jesus Christ, will regulate that consolation or joy as is best for you.

ADDITION

43 When Lady Birgitta was in Naples, the innermost secrets in the heart of the future cardinal Elziarius were revealed to her as well as certain wonderful events that would happen to him. When he heard them, he was stupefied and converted to a better life.⁸

✠ Chapter 6

Birgitta Is Told To Prepare To Go To Jerusalem

DATE: 25 MAY, 1371, ROME

In the year of Our Lord 1371, in the month of May, on the day of Blessed Urban, pope and martyr,¹ when Lady Birgitta had been residing in Rome for many years, after she had returned from her pilgrimages to shrines in the kingdom of Naples, and when she was in prayer on said day in said month, Christ appeared to her, saying that she should make preparations to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to visit the Holy Sepulcher.

8. "Converted to a better life": One manuscript adds the further point that Elziarius, as cardinal, was involved in the approval of the Birgittine Rule: "et ipse fuit commissarius pape in approbatione regule saluatoris."

1. "On the day of Blessed Urban, pope and martyr": bishop of Rome 222–30; feast day 25 May, as stated explicitly in one manuscript of the *Vita*; see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 636.

1 While Lady Birgitta was residing continuously in Rome, she was lifting up her mind one day in prayer when Christ appeared and spoke to her, saying: 2 “Prepare yourselves² to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to visit my sepulcher and the other holy sites there. You will depart from Rome when I tell you.”

✠ Chapter 7

Advice to a Franciscan Friar and Comments on the Pope

DATE: 1371, CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA ROTUNDA, ROME

In Rome, before Lady Birgitta went overseas, a devout Franciscan¹ consulted her about certain doubts of conscience. The Virgin Mary appeared to the lady at prayer, and gave her a full answer concerning those doubts. She said furthermore that regardless of how sinful the pope or priests may be, provided they are not heretics, the former has the keys of the Church and the true power of binding and loosing, and the latter consecrate and touch the blessed sacrament of the body of Christ on the altar, though they may be unworthy of heavenly glory.

1 Honor and thanksgiving to Almighty God and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, his most worthy mother. While I was praying, it seemed that the Mother of God spoke the following words to me, unworthy person:

2 “Tell that friar—my friend who sent me his petition through you—that it is the true faith and perfect truth that if someone should at the devil’s instigation commit all kinds of sins against God, but should later repent with true contrition and purpose of amendment and truly and humbly beg God’s mercy with ardent love, 3 there is no doubt that God, gentle and merciful, would at once be ready to receive that person into his grace with great joy and happiness, like a loving father who sees his only beloved son coming back to him² liberated finally from great scandal and an ignominious death.³ 4 Truly, more readily than any earthly father, God in his kindness forgives all the sins of his servants when they earnestly repent and ask for his mercy humbly and fear committing sin again and more than anything else long for God’s friendship with all their heart’s desire.

5 So tell that friar on my behalf that, thanks to his own good will and my intercession, through the goodness of God, he has now been pardoned for all the sins that he has committed in all the days of his life. 6 Tell him, too, that

2. “Prepare yourselves”: Birgitta and her companions, presumably.

1. “A devout Franciscan”: According to Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 382, this was a friar by the name Peter of Trastevere.

2. “Loving father . . . son coming back to him”; cf. Luke 15:11–32.

3. “An ignominious death”; cf. Luke 15:20.

thanks to my intercession the love he has for God will steadily grow until his death and by no means lessen.

7 Again, tell him that it pleases God my Son that he should remain preaching in Rome, giving good advice to those who seek it, hearing confessions and imposing salutary penances, unless his superior on occasion sends him out of the city on some legitimate and necessary errand. 8 May this friar also charitably admonish his brothers for their transgressions with kind words and salutary instruction as well as with fitting corrections whenever he is able to make a correction, in order that they may keep the Rule⁴ and humbly improve. 9 In addition, I inform him that his masses, reading, and prayers are acceptable and pleasing to God.

10 For that reason, tell him that just as he avoids any excess in food or drink or sleep, so too he must carefully avoid excessive abstinence so that he might not suffer any lack of strength in serving and working for God. 11 He should also wear only as much clothing as necessary according to the Rule of St. Francis,⁵ and nothing superfluous, so that pride and covetousness do not result; for the reward will be greater in proportion as the clothing has been cheaper and less valuable. 12 He should moreover obey his superior in everything he commands him, so long as it is not against God and the friar himself is able to carry it out.

13 Tell him, too, on my behalf, what he should reply to those who say the pope is not the true pope and who say that it is not the true body of my son Jesus Christ which is brought about on the altar by the actions of priests. He should reply to these heretics as follows: 14 'You have turned your back on God and therefore you do not see him. Turn your faces to him and then you shall be able to see him.' 15 For it is the true and catholic faith that a pope who is without heresy,⁶ no matter how much he may be stained by other sins, is never so bad due to those sins and his other bad deeds that there would not be always in him full authority and a perfect power of binding and loosing souls. 16 He has gained this authority through Blessed Peter⁷ and received it from God. There have certainly been many pontiffs before Pope John⁸ who are now in hell. However, the just and reasonable judgments that they rendered while on earth remain established and ratified before God.

4. "The Rule," i.e., the Rule of St. Francis.

5. "The Rule of St. Francis": St. Francis's original order was properly known as the Order of Friars Minor (Ordo Fratrum Minorum), and its official Rule, the *Regula Bullata*, was sanctioned by Pope Honorius III in 1223. Chapter 2 of the Rule makes some general statements about clothing.

6. "A pope who is without heresy": a distinction is made here between the sins committed by a pope as a private person and the full authority of his public office.

7. "Power of binding . . . Blessed Peter"; cf. Matthew 16:18–19, John 21:15–17.

8. "Pope John," i.e., Pope John XXII (1316–34). This pope expressed a controversial opinion on the Beatific Vision, suggesting that those who died in faith did not see God until the Last Judgment. He was attacked for this and other alleged faults by extreme Franciscans who wished to abrogate his pronouncement on the licitness of private property; see further Nold, *Pope John XXII and his Franciscan Cardinal*, and chapter 8.1 with note.

17 For a similar reason, I also say that all those priests who are not heretics are true ministers and do truly consecrate the body of Christ, my son, although they may otherwise be full of many other sins, and that they truly touch God with their hands on the altar and administer the other sacraments, although they may be unworthy of heavenly glory before God because of their own sins and evil deeds.”

✠ Chapter 8

A Continuation of the Preceding Revelation

DATE: 1371, CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA ROTUNDA, ROME

After the above-mentioned friar had received the preceding revelation from Lady Birgitta, he asked her to pray to God concerning whether Christ had property and concerning the authority of the supreme pontiff and priests celebrating Mass. The Virgin Mary appeared to her while she was praying and answered everything as follows.

1 “Tell that friar who is my friend¹ that you are not allowed to know whether the soul of Pope John XXII is in hell or in heaven. 2 Nor are you allowed to know anything about the sins he took with him when after death he came before the judgment seat of God. 3 But tell the friar that the decretals concerning the property of Christ which Pope John issued or ratified contain no error or heresy regarding the Catholic faith.² 4 Indeed I, who give birth to the true God himself, bear witness that my son Jesus Christ had one personal possession, and that he was its sole owner. This was the tunic that I made with my own hands. 5 The prophet testifies to this saying in the person of my Son: ‘For my garment they cast lots.’³ Notice that he did not say ‘our garment’ but ‘my garment.’ 6 Know, too, that when I used to dress him in that tunic for the benefit of his most holy body, my eyes used to fill with tears and my whole heart was twisted in pain and sorrow and afflicted with intense bitterness. 7 For I well knew the way in which that tunic would be removed from my son at the time of his passion when he, naked and innocent, would be crucified by the Jews. 8 This tunic was that garment for which his crucifiers cast lots, and while he lived no one else had it but only he.

9 Know, too, that all those who say that the pope is not the true pope, that his priests are not true priests nor licitly ordained, and that it is not the true body of my blessed son that is consecrated by the priests at the celebration of

1. “Tell that friar who is my friend”: This was one of the revelations that Alfonso took with him to Pope Gregory in Avignon after the pilgrimage to the Holy Land (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 382). It is quoted in c. 1379 in a letter in Italian by the Florentine abbot Giovanni dalle Celle, addressing the Fratricelli who were making the allegation of heresy against John XXII in the poverty debate, and using Birgitta’s revelation to refute their argument. See further Ekwall, *Vår äldsta Birgittavita*, pp. 134–35.

2. “The decretals . . . regarding the Catholic faith”: see Richter and Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici*, *Corpus iuris canonici* 2, cols 1229–30.

3. “Over my garments they cast lots”; cf. Matthew 27:35; John 19:24; Psalm 21 (22):18.

Mass, all those asserting such errors are inflated with the spirit of the infernal devil. 10 Truly those same heretics have committed such grave wickedness and horrendous sins against God that, because of their great misdeeds, they have been filled with diabolic iniquity and have for their heresy been damnably removed and expelled from the number of the whole flock of Christendom before the judgment of divine Majesty—just as Judas was excluded and removed from the sacred number of apostles for his terrible misdeeds, for he betrayed Christ my son. 11 You should know, however, that all those who are willing to mend their ways will gain mercy from God.”

✠ Chapter 9

Birgitta is Instructed to Go to Jerusalem

DATE: 1372, ROME

About how Christ speaks to Lady Birgitta while she is at prayer and tells her that she must now go to Jerusalem and promises her bodily strength and the necessary means.

1 The Son of God speaks to blessed Birgitta, his bride, saying: “Go now and depart from Rome for Jerusalem!¹ Why do you bring up the excuse of your age? I am the creator of nature. I can weaken or strengthen nature, just as I please. 2 I shall be with you. I shall direct your way. I shall lead you there and bring you back to Rome, and I shall procure for you what you need, more sufficiently than you ever had before.”

✠ Chapter 10

On the Celibacy of the Priesthood

DATE: 1372, NAPLES

The Virgin Mary speaks to Lady Birgitta and tells her that it is by no means God’s will that priests should have wives or be contaminated by carnal vice, and she forbids any pope to allow marriage for priests to occur or be established in the Church of God.

1 Rejoice eternally, blessed body of God, in perpetual honor, in perennial victory and in your everlasting omnipotence together with your Father and the Holy Spirit and also with your blessed, most worthy Mother and with all your glorious heavenly court. 2 Praise to you, eternal God, and thanksgiving without end because you deigned to become man and wished to consecrate for us in the world your venerable body out of material bread and lovingly gave it to us as food for the salvation of our souls!

1. “Depart from Rome for Jerusalem!”; cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 95–96, 633.

3 It happened to a person engaged in prayer that she heard a voice saying to her: “You, to whom it has been given to hear and see spiritually, listen now to what I want to reveal to you! 4 It concerns the archbishop² who told you that if he were pope, he would grant permission for all clerics and priests to contract carnal marriage,³ thinking and believing that this would be more acceptable to God than for clerics to live dissolute lives as they do at present. 5 This was because he believed that more serious sins of the flesh might be avoided by means of such marriages. Although in this matter he did not understand the will of God correctly, nevertheless that same archbishop was a friend of God.

6 But I shall now tell you God’s will in this matter, for I gave birth to God himself. You shall inform my bishop of this and tell him: Circumcision was given to Abraham⁴ long before the law of Moses was given, and in the time of Abraham men ruled in accord with their own understanding and the judgment of their will, yet many of them were friends of God at that time. 7 However, after the law of Moses was given, then it pleased God more that men should live under the law and in accordance with the law rather than according to their own human judgment and understanding. It was similar with the blessed body of my Son. 8 After he instituted on earth the new sacrament of the eucharist⁵ and ascended into heaven,⁶ then the old law continued to be observed and Christian priests lived in carnal matrimony. 9 Many of them were, however, friends of God, as they believed in simple purity that it was pleasing to God that Christian priests should have wives and live in matrimony, just as it had been pleasing to him in regard to Jewish priests in the ancient Jewish era. And so this was customary among Christian priests for many years. 10 However, this ancient observance and custom seemed very offensive and detestable to the whole heavenly court and to me, who gave birth to his body, namely that such should be the practice of priests who touched and handled with their hands this new and immaculate sacrament of the most holy body of my Son. 11 In the ancient law of the Old Testament the Jews possessed the shadow, that is, the figure of this sacrament,⁷ but Christians possess the truth itself, namely him who is true God and man, in that blessed consecrated bread. 12 After some ages during which the first Christian priests observed this custom, God himself, through the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, put into the heart of the pope then

2. “The archbishop”: Bergh *Bok VII*, p. 221, suggests that this is Archbishop Bernardus de Bosqueto (Bernard of Bosquet) who served as archbishop of Naples from 1365 to 1368. However, it might equally refer to his successor Bernard of Rodez whose identity is kept deliberately veiled, on account of the strong views expressed on clerical marriage; see further Sahlin, “Gender and the paradoxes” p. 97.

3. “To contract carnal marriage”: Carnal here has the sense of merely human as opposed to spiritual. Birgitta does not disdain marriage as such but upholds the ideal of clerical chastity and takes a strong stand against those who undermine it in word or deed. On priestly celibacy in Sweden in the Late Middle Ages, see further Risberg and Salonen, *Auctoritate papae*, pp. 35–36.

4. “Circumcision was given to Abraham”: cf. Genesis 16. 10–14; 17:24–27.

5. “Instituted . . . eucharist”: cf. Matthew 26:26–28.

6. “Ascended into heaven”: cf. Acts 1:9.

7. “The shadow, that is, the figure of this sacrament”: the notion that the Old Testament (as a shadow; cf. Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 8:5, 10:1) is brought to fulfillment in the New Testament is commonly used by Birgitta; cf. for example Book I 47.

ruling the church⁸ another law in this regard that was more acceptable and pleasing to himself. 13 He inspired the heart of that pope to make it a rule in the universal church that Christian priests, who have the holy and dignified office of consecrating this precious sacrament, should by no means live in the contaminating carnal enjoyment of matrimony. 14 Therefore, by God's prior decision and judgment, it was justly decided⁹ that those priests who do not live in the chastity and continence of the flesh are accused and excommunicated before God and deserve to lose their priestly office.¹⁰ 15 However, those who truly mended their ways with a sincere resolution of no longer sinning would obtain mercy from God.

16 Furthermore, know that if any pope grants priests permission to contract carnal matrimony, he will be spiritually condemned by God with as severe a sentence as that of a man who has committed so grave a crime that, according to legal justice, he should physically have his eyes torn out, his tongue and lips cut off together with his nose and ears, his hands and feet amputated, 17 all the blood of his body poured out and left to freeze cold, and then his whole bloodless body thrown to dogs and other wild beasts to be devoured. 18 Such would surely occur in a spiritual way to that pope who granted priests permission to contract matrimony against the prior decision and will of God. 19 God would completely deprive that same pope of spiritual vision and hearing as well as of spiritual words and deeds. All his spiritual wisdom would become altogether frozen. Then, after his death, his soul would be thrown into hell to be tormented forever, there to become the food of demons eternally and without end. 20 Even if Pope St. Gregory¹¹ himself had decreed this, he would never have obtained God's pardon from that sentence, unless he had humbly revoked it before death."

✠ Chapter II

A Revelation on Free Will; With an Addition Giving Advice to the Queen of Naples, and Other Revelations Relating to the People of Naples

DATE: 1372, NAPLES

This is the beginning of a revelation that Lady Birgitta had in Naples for the queen of that city, but certain things in the revelation are not included here, because they are secrets pertaining to the queen's status and person.

1 "I am God, the creator of all things. I gave free will to the angels and to men in order that those who wished to do my will would remain with me forever,

8. "Pope then ruling the church": This may refer to Leo IX (1049–54), who was the first pope to inveigh strongly against clerical incontinence; but it may be said without any specific pope in mind.

9. "It was justly decided": may refer to the prohibition of clerical concubinage and marriage by the First Lateran Council (1123), canon 7 (or 3); see Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, volume 1, p. 191.

10. "Excommunicated before God . . . priestly office": Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 287, notes the doctrinal precision of Birgitta's words that imply that priests can never be deprived of their sacramental priesthood but only the exercise of their office.

11. "Pope St. Gregory," i.e., Gregory the Great (560–604).

while those whose thoughts were opposed to me would be separated from me. 2 Some of the angels thus became demons, since they wished neither to love nor obey me. Then, when man was created, the devil saw my love for him and not only became my enemy but also stirred up a war against me, inciting Adam to transgress my commandments. 3 The devil then prevailed by my permission and according to my justice. From that time I and the devil contend and quarrel, for I want man to live according to my will, but the devil strives to have man follow his desires.¹ 4 For that reason, at the moment when I opened heaven with my heart's blood, the devil was deprived of the right that he seemed to have, and the souls who deserved it were saved and liberated.² 5 Then, too, the law was established that it should be up to man's free will to follow me, his God, in order to win an everlasting crown, but if he follows the desires of the devil, he will receive eternal punishment. 6 Thus do I and the devil contend, longing for souls as bridegrooms for their brides. I long for souls so that I might grant them eternal joy and honor, while the devil longs that he might grant them eternal horror and pain. Hear what the queen did to me. I allowed her to rise to royal power, etc."³

ADDITION

7 Christ speaks: "Write to her that she should make a pure confession of everything she has done since her youth, with a firm purpose of amendment according to the advice of her confessor. 8 Second, she should carefully consider the manner and quality of her conduct in her marriage and in her rule, because she shall render to me an account of everything. 9 Third, she should have the intention of repaying her debts and restoring deliberately ill-gotten gains, because her soul is in danger as long as they are kept, and it does no good to make large donations unless the debts are paid back in full. 10 Fourth, she should not invent new burdens for the populace but rather relieve their accustomed burdens, for God shall hear the sighs and cries of the wretched. 11 Fifth, she should have just counselors, not greedy ones, and entrust her decisions to people who love truth and do not fawn on factious parties or seek to get rich but who know how to be content with what is necessary. 12 Sixth, she should call to mind the wounds and passion of God at certain times every day, because this renews the love of God in one's heart. 13 Seventh, she should gather the poor at certain times, washing their feet and feeding them, and she should love all her subjects with sincere

1. "Follow his desires," referring either to man's own or the devil's desires; either way, they are against God's will.

2. "The souls who deserved it were saved and liberated" refers to the "harrowing of hell," during which Christ descended into hell in between his death and resurrection, and saved the righteous captives there. It is expressed in the Apostles' Creed; cf. 1 Peter 3:18–19.

3. "I allowed her to rise to royal power etc." renders "Ego permisi eam exaltari in regnum etc." which is found in some manuscripts and Gh. The critical edition has the active infinitive "exaltare," i.e., "I allowed her to raise to royal power etc." (with an unstated object). The inclusion of "etc." indicates that material was suppressed at this point, although some of the material probably reappears in the Addition attached to this revelation.

charity, bringing those in discordance to accord and consoling the unjustly wronged. 14 Eighth, she must distribute her gifts prudently and in proportion to her means, not oppressing some while enriching others but wisely relieving some and burdening none. 15 Ninth, she should not attend more to the money of offenders than to justice, but, having weighed the gravity of an offense, she should display greater compassion where she sees greater humility and leave no room for greed. 16 Tenth, while she is alive she must make every effort to ensure that her kingdom is maintained in peace after her death, because I predict to her that she will have no offspring from her own womb from this time forth. 17 Eleventh, she should be content with the coloring and beauty with which God has adorned her face, because artificial coloring is very displeasing to God.⁴ 18 Twelfth, she should adopt greater humility and contrition for her sins, because in my sight she is a ravisher of many souls, a wasteful dispenser of my good gifts, and a rod and scourge to my friends. 19 Thirteenth, she should have continual fear in her heart, since throughout her lifetime she has lived more like a wanton woman than a queen. 20 Fourteenth, she should distance herself from worldly customs and fawning women and spend the little time remaining to her in my honor, because until now she has thought of me as a human being who does not pay regard to her sins. 21 Let her now fear and live in such a way that she will not experience me as judge. Otherwise, if she does not listen to me, I will judge her not as a queen but as an apostate and an ingrate, and I shall scourge her from head to heel and she will be a disgrace to me and my angels and saints.”

22 Another revelation. Christ speaks: “Write these things in lighter and fewer words,⁵ as the Holy Spirit will inflame you, and send them with my bishop⁶ to the queen.”

23 Another about a certain queen. A lady appeared standing in a nightgown spattered with sperm and mud. A voice was heard: “This is a she-monkey that sniffs at stinking buttocks.⁷ She has venom in her heart and is harmful to herself. She is hastening into unexpected traps.” 24 Then she appeared to have a crown of twigs spattered with human excrement and street mud as she sat naked on a beam ready to fall. 25 Suddenly a most beautiful maiden appeared and said: “This shameless and reckless woman is thought by men to be mistress of the world, but in God’s sight she has been rejected, as you can see.” 26

4. “Artificial coloring is very displeasing to God”: Birgitta here shows her disapproval of female vanity. Rejection of makeup has a long history in the church; see, for example, St. Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, Book I, chapter 6 (paragraph 28).

5. “In lighter and fewer words”: this phrase echoes the so-called autograph “insurrection” revelation, calling for an uprising against the Swedish king (*Extravagantes* 49/ Book VIII 56). In both cases a powerful political message is deliberately toned down.

6. “My bishop”, i.e., Alfonso of Jaén.

7. “She-monkey . . . stinking buttocks”: The bestiary describes the monkey as nasty and ugly; it was associated with man’s baser nature, as being trapped in sensory pleasure and as a creature who imitates something it is not; see further Janson, *Apes and Ape-lore in the Middle Ages*; Tomkins, *The Monkey in Art*.

And the maiden added: "Woman, think of your beginnings and consider your end. Open the eyes of your heart and see, for your counselors are those who hate your soul."

27 Another about a certain queen. A woman appeared seated on a golden throne with two Ethiopians⁸ standing before her, one to the right, the other to the left. 28 The one on the right cried out and said: "O lion-like woman, I bring blood. Take and pour it out, for it is proper to a lioness to thirst after blood." 29 The one on the left said: "Woman, I bring you a vessel with fire in it. Take it, for you are of a fiery nature, and pour it on the water, so that the memory of you on earth⁹ may be as it is on the water." 30 After this a maiden appeared, wonderful to behold, at whose sight the Ethiopians fled. She said: "This woman is in a dangerous state. If she succeeds according to her will, she will bring affliction to many. 31 If, however, she is afflicted, it will be more useful for her with regard to eternal life. But she does not want to give up her self-will or to be afflicted according to God's will. If she is given over to her self-will, she will be of no consolation either to herself or to others."

32 Another revelation. The Son appeared, saying: "This woman has done some things pleasing to me. So, because of the prayers of my friends, I wish to show her how she may escape the reproach of men and the loss of her soul, if she obeys well. However, she will not escape the justice of the judge, because she refused to listen to the voice of the Father."

33 About Lord Gomez.¹⁰ The Mother of God speaks: "Advise him to do justice wherever he can. If he knows that he has wrongfully acquired possessions, he must not delay in making restitution. 34 He must also beware of loading uncustomary impositions on his subjects. He should be content with what he has, for it is sufficient for him, if he spends it moderately and wisely. 35 Except for his wife, he should avoid women like poison. He should not lead his army out against anyone or take part in the action personally, unless he is altogether sure that he has justice on his side and that the war is a just one. 36 He should strive to make frequent use of confession and more frequently receive the body of Christ, and also occupy himself with recalling Christ's suffering and wounds at regular times each day."

37 About Antonio de Carleto.¹¹ Christ speaks: "Tell the queen that she should let him remain in his position. If he rises to a greater one,

8. "Ethiopians"; cf. the note to Book III 11 (volume 1, p. 279 n9) and Book IV 7.

9. "The water . . . on earth"; cf. Apocalypse chapter 16–17.

10. "Lord Gomez": Gomez Garcias de Albornoz was a close friend of Birgitta's in Italy. He was administrator of the papal states, and rector of Spoleto; he died as a senator in Rome in 1377. On this revelation see also Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 381–82.

11. "Antonio de Carleto": a Neapolitan merchant who entered the service of Queen Johanna, and became a friend of Birgitta's. See Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 335, 390–91, 544, 652. He presents an example of Birgitta's influence among the mercantile class in Italy.

it will lead to the loss of his soul, and neither he nor his friends will rejoice at his rise.” So it all came to pass.

✠ Chapter 12

Advice to the Archbishop of Naples¹ for his Household and Diocese

DATE: 1372, NAPLES

This revelation was given by divine inspiration to Lady Birgitta in Naples at the request of Lord Bernard, archbishop of Naples, who asked her to pray to God concerning certain doubts of conscience that he had. While she was at prayer, Christ appeared to her and replied to all the doubts of the archbishop and also gave him instruction and norms regarding how he should conduct himself in governing both his household and his subjects in the diocese.

1 Christ speaks to his bride, saying: “Tell him that if he wants to be called a bishop in that justice of divine judgment, he must not imitate the behavior and customs of the majority of the present rulers of the church. 2 I assumed a human body from the Virgin in order to fulfill in word and deed the law ordained by the Godhead from eternity, opening heaven’s gate with the blood of my heart. I lit up the way to heaven by my words and deeds so that all might make use of my example in order to gain eternal life. 3 But truly, the words I spoke and the deeds I performed in the world are now all but completely forgotten and neglected. 4 No one has done so much to bring this about as the prelates of the churches, who are full of pride, greed and the rot of bodily pleasure. All these things are against my commandments and against the worthy statutes of the church which my friends instituted out of great devotion after my ascension, once my will was accomplished on earth. 5 Those evil prelates of the churches, filled with the evil disposition of the evil spirit, have provided extremely harmful examples to the souls of men. Therefore I must exact strict justice from them, rendering judgment upon them and obliterating them from the book of life in heaven² and placing them next to my enemy Lucifer in hell to be perpetually tormented on the thrones of hell. 6 You, however, should know that I will be prompt in showing my mercy to anyone who decides to reform himself before death by loving me with all his heart and abstaining from sins. Speak the following words to him, then, as if coming from you:

7 My lord, it sometimes happens that out of a black furnace comes a lovely flame, useful and very necessary for the fabrication of lovely works. 8 But it is not then necessary to praise the furnace for its blackness. Praise and honor and

1. “Archbishop of Naples”: Bernard of Rodez, see chapter 10 note; See also Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 265–66, 325, 373–74, 383, 518, 562–563; Sahlin, “Gender and Paradoxes.”

2. “The book of life in heaven”; cf. Apocalypse 20:12.

thanksgiving are due to him who is the master and craftsman of those works. 9 So it is with me, unworthy as I am, if you should find anything useful in my counsels; for you must constantly display unending thanks and willing service not to me but to God himself who made and makes all things and who has the perfect will of doing good.

10 My Lord, first I begin by speaking of those things that touch the salvation of many souls. I advise you, if you wish to enjoy God's friendship, not to promote anyone intentionally to sacred orders, either by your own hand or by means of some other bishop, 11 unless he has been diligently examined beforehand by good clerics and has been found so fit with regard to life and conduct that wise and truthful men can declare him worthy of receiving such an office. You should also make sure that all the other bishops—those under your jurisdiction and the suffragans of your archdiocese—do likewise. 12 No one would believe how great the wrath of God is against those bishops who do not bother to find out or carefully examine the character of those whom they promote to orders of such dignity in their bishoprics. 13 Whether they do this because of [negligence or of] the petitions of others³ or because of negligence and laziness or else because of fear, they will have to render a most strict account of it at God's judgment.

14 I also advise you to investigate how many and which priests with the care of souls in your diocese hold benefices. Summon them at least once a year to your presence so that you may discuss with them their own spiritual welfare and that of the souls under their care. 15 If not all of them can come together on a single day, then certain times and dates should be set during the year when they can meet individually with you, so that none of them will be able to find any excuse for not having consulted with you for a whole year. 16 You should also preach to them about what kind of life they who hold so worthy an office should lead. 17 You must also realize that priests who have concubines and still celebrate mass are as acceptable and pleasing to God as the inhabitants of Sodom⁴ whom God plunged into hell. 18 Although the mass in itself is always the same and of the same power and efficacy, nevertheless, the kiss of peace that such fornicating priests give at mass is as pleasing to God as the kiss of Judas⁵ by which he betrayed the savior of us all. 19 Therefore you should constantly try as much as you can, by words and deeds, by a combination of enticements, reproaches and threats, to make them strive to lead a chaste life, especially since they must handle such a holy sacrament and administer it to other faithful Christians with their hands.

20 In addition you should helpfully counsel everyone to reform themselves thoroughly—both the major clergy such as prelates and canons and the minor clergy who are subject to your rule and get their living from the churches. 21 Nor let anyone of them think that, just because they avoid sodomy, fornication

3. "Whether they do this because of [negligence or of] the petitions of others" renders "Quod siue hoc fecerint propter (negligenciam siue propter) aliorum supplicationeum"; on the textual problem here, see Bergh, *Bok VII*, p. 101.

4. "The inhabitants of Sodom"; cf. Genesis 19:1–29.

5. "The kiss of Judas"; cf. Matthew 26:48–49.

is somehow permitted them, nor that it is therefore tolerated for them to defile themselves with women.⁶ For any Christian who has an intellect but does not care about eternal life while he lives will without doubt suffer forever the severest pains of hell after death.

22 Concerning your household, my counsel to you is that it should not be very large due to pride but suitably proportionate to the needs of your administration and the requirements of your position. 23 Therefore you should have those clerics who are called your “companions” with you, wherever you are, primarily for the good reputation they bring, not for vainglory or ostentation; and they should rather be few in number than many. 24 However, you may have as many as you please of those clerics whom you support for no other purpose than for singing the divine office or for further studies or for teaching others or for writing; but it would benefit you to take as good and diligent care as you can about their discipline and the salvation of their souls. 25 You should see to it that each of your remaining servants has an occupation. If any are superfluous, then they should not be retained out of vainglory, lest your heart swell with pride over having a greater household than your peers. 26 You will do well always to keep in mind those members of your household who are truly necessary, carefully scrutinizing their behavior like a true family father,⁷ correcting their acts, their way of life and their customs, fostering them paternally with good instructions, and admonishing them to learn to flee sins and vices and to love God above all things. 27 It is certainly more acceptable to God and more beneficial for you never to have someone in your household who does not want to follow sound advice or humbly amend his faults.

28 Concerning your clothing, I counsel you never to have more than three sets in your possession at a time, and you should immediately offer to God all those that are superfluous. 29 Concerning your bedclothes and towels and tablecloths, have only as many as are necessary and useful to you, and give the rest to God. 30 Concerning silverware, keep only as much for yourself as you and the guests who eat at your own table require, 31 and cheerfully donate whatever remains to God, because the rest of your household and the guests sitting at other tables can very well eat and drink from vessels of tin, pottery, wood or glass without any embarrassment. 32 For the custom which is now common in the houses of lords and bishops, in which there is a superfluous abundance of gold and silver, is most abominable to God, who subjected himself to utter poverty for our sake, and very harmful to souls. 33 Again, beware of having too many courses or excessive delicacies.⁸ And you should not have too many large and expensive horses but ones moderate in size and price. 34 Large horses are required by those who expose themselves to the dangers of war, for the defense of justice and the protection of life, not for the sake of pride. 35 I tell you, each time prelates climb up on

6. “Defile themselves with women”; cf. Apocalypse 14:4.

7. “Family father” renders “paterfamilias”; cf. Matthew 20:1.

8. “Excessive delicacies”; cf. chapter 5,39.

their great big horses out of pride and vainglory, the devil climbs up on their necks.

36 Indeed, I know a person⁹ who has seen black demons, and whenever prelates and cardinals lifted their feet in pride in order to ride on the backs of their great horses, those demons then lifted their feet on to the necks of the prelates and mounted them and sat there in mockery, 37 and whenever those prelates spurred the horses with their heels in order to show off, the black demons lifted up their heads for joy and dug their heels into the riders' chests.

38 Again I advise you, as often as you need, to have your vicars promise under oath not to presume to do anything contrary to justice while representing your office. 39 If later they act otherwise, you should have them justly punished.

If you act in accordance with these words, you may be assured of having a clean conscience.

40 Let me also counsel you about the souls of your departed, about whom you asked me whether they were in purgatory or not and about giving alms for their sake and so forth. 41 I reply and tell you that you should have two masses celebrated for them every day during one year, that you should feed two paupers every day, and that you should see to it that one florin in coins is distributed to the poor every week.

42 Also tell your parish priests to admonish their parishioners and to punish them for manifest sins in the cases pertaining to them so that they might live better lives. If they do not accept their punishment, then let them be punished by you.

43 If you know that some people have manifestly offended against God and justice, and they are such great lords that you cannot administer justice to them, then tell them in light and attractive speech to correct themselves. 44 But if they refuse to obey, leave them to the judgment of God, who will pay regard to your good will. It is not right to cast a meek lamb into the ferocious jaws of a wolf, for it will only make the wolf more rapacious. 45 However, it is suitable to caution them lovingly about the danger to their souls, as a father does with his sometimes obstinate sons. 46 Nor should you hold back your reproaches out of fear for your own body, but only if some danger to souls might somehow come of it."

✠ Chapter 13

The Struggle for Karl Ulfsson's Soul

DATE: 27 FEBRUARY–II MAY, 1372, NAPLES

This revelation to Lady Birgitta began in Naples immediately after the death of the knight, Lord Karl, her son. The vision continued at intervals on the voyage to Jerusalem, until she arrived in Jerusalem, where it ended in the church of the Holy Sepulcher of the Lord. It

9. "I know a person"; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2; Birgitta may be referring to herself.

contains statements made at the divine court before Christ the Judge by the Virgin Mary and an angel on behalf of the said knight and statements made against this soul on behalf of the devil and the sentence of Christ the judge for his liberation.

1 The Virgin Mary speaks to Lady Birgitta, saying: "I will tell you what I did for the soul of your son Karl as it left his body. 2 I acted like a woman helping another woman as she gives birth,¹ helping the baby so that it does not die from the flow of blood and so that it is not suffocated in that narrow space through which it comes out, making sure that the baby's enemies, who are in the same house, cannot kill it. 3 That is how I acted. I stood near your son Karl shortly before he gave up his spirit² so that the memory of carnal love might not cause him to think or say anything against God and so that he would not omit anything pleasing to God or wish to do anything in any way contrary to the divine will and to the detriment of his own soul. 4 I also helped him in such a way in that narrow space, I mean in the departure of his soul from his body, so that he would not suffer such pain at death that it should cause him to waver or despair in any way, and so that he should not forget God at his death. 5 I also protected his soul from his mortal enemies, that is, the demons, in such a way that none of them could touch it. Rather, as soon as his soul left his body, I took it into my custody and protection. 6 At that the whole throng of demons, who in their malice had sought to swallow and eternally torment the soul, quickly fled and departed. 7 But how Karl's soul was judged after his death will indeed be shown to you when it pleases me."

A SECOND REVELATION ON THE SAME MATTER

8 After an interval of some days, the Virgin Mary appeared to Lady Birgitta as she was keeping watch in prayer and said: 9 "God's goodness now allows you to see and hear how judgment was passed on the aforesaid soul when it departed from his body. 10 That which occurred in a single instant before the incomprehensible majesty of God will be shown to you point by point,³ in corporal guise, so that your intellect will be able to take it in."

11 At that very moment, Lady Birgitta saw herself removed to a great and beautiful palace and the Lord Jesus Christ seated there like a crowned emperor with the tribunal in front of him⁴ and an infinite host of angels and saints in attendance. She saw his most worthy mother standing beside him and following the proceedings closely. 12 A soul, too, was seen to stand before the

1. "Another woman as she gives birth": Birgitta adopts an unusual and intimate image to describe her son's passage to the afterlife. On this revelation, see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 329, 386, 533.

2. "Gave up his spirit"; cf. Matthew 27:50.

3. "Point by point" renders "seriose per interualla."

4. "With the tribunal in front of him"; cf. John 19:13; Acts 25:6, 17.

judge in great fear and trembling, naked like a newborn babe, as though completely blind and unable to see but understanding in its conscience what was being said and done in the palace. 13 An angel stood to the right of the judge, next to the soul, and a devil to his left, but neither of them touched the soul or laid hands on it.

14 Then the devil cried out, saying: “Hear me, almighty Judge! I lodge a complaint before you that a woman, who is both my Lady and your mother, whom you love so much that you have given her power over heaven and earth and over all us demons of hell,⁵ has indeed done me an injustice in regard to this soul that now stands here. 15 After this soul left the body, by right I should have immediately received it and presented it in my company to your court of judgment. 16 Behold, o just judge: this woman, your mother, almost before this soul left the man’s mouth,⁶ laid hold of it with her hands and brought it to your court under her powerful protection.”

17 Then Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, replied: “Hear, devil, my reply. When you were created, you understood the justice which was in God from eternity without beginning. 18 You also had the free choice to do what pleased you most and, although you chose to hate God rather than to love him, you still understand what justice demands. 19 Therefore I say to you that it was my right rather than yours to bring this soul before God, the true Judge. 20 While his soul was in the body, this man had great love for me and often pondered in his heart how God had deigned to make me his mother and willed to raise me up above all created beings. 21 And so he began to love God so much that he said in his heart: ‘I rejoice so much that God so dearly cherishes the Virgin Mary, his mother, that there is no created thing or bodily delight in the world that I would accept in exchange for this joy. 22 Yes, indeed, I would prefer this joy to all earthly delights, and if it could happen that she could be the least bit removed from her place of honor next to God, I would willingly suffer in the depths of hell⁷ forever to prevent it. 23 Therefore, endless thanks and everlasting glory be to God for the blessed grace and immense glory which he has given to his most worthy Mother!’ 24 Accordingly, devil, look at the disposition of his will when he departed. What seems more right to you now: that his soul should come under my protection before the judgment seat of God or that it should come into your hands to be cruelly tortured?”

25 The devil answered: “Until sentence is passed, I do not have the right to have this soul, which loves you more than itself, come into my hands. 26 But

5. “Power . . . over all us demons of hell”: the idea that Mary could dominate over hell is a common motif, seen, for instance, in the *Legenda aurea*; for further references see Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 293.

6. “This soul left the man’s mouth”: The old idea that the soul exits the mouth at the last breath is illustrated in the thirteenth-century stave church of Torpo in Hallingdal, Norway, which shows a winged devil dragging the white soul by its wrists out of a king’s mouth in a scene depicting the martyrdom of St. Margaret of Antioch; see Blindheim, *The Stave Church Paintings*, plate 20.

7. “I would willingly suffer in the depths of hell”; cf. chapter 1.2–3. The contemplation of Mary leads to the complete love of God; see Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 293–94.

although you acted justly in granting it this grace before judgment, nevertheless after judgment its deeds will sentence it to punishment at my hands. 27 Now, o Queen, I ask you why, when this soul departed, you drove away all of us demons from the presence of its body and prevented any of us from causing any horror or striking the least fear⁸ into it?"

28 The Virgin Mary replied: "I did this in return for the ardent love he had toward my body and for the joy that he felt about my being the mother of God. 29 That is why I procured from my Son the grace that no evil spirit should approach his body, wherever it was, and indeed where it is now."

30 After this the devil says to the judge: "I know that you are justice and power itself. You give as just a sentence to a devil as to an angel. Therefore, award this soul to me! 31 In the wisdom I had when you created me, I wrote down all his sins. I also guarded all his sins with the malice I had when I fell from heaven. 32 For as soon as his soul reached the age of discretion,⁹ and clearly understood that what he did was sinful, then self-will swayed him to live in worldly pomp and carnal pleasure rather than to resist such things."

33 The angel replied: "As soon as his mother realized that his will inclined easily toward sin, she rushed to his aid with works of mercy and constant prayers, in order that God should have mercy on him and not let him drift away. 34 Because of these works of his mother, then, he at length obtained fear of God, so that whenever he fell in sin he would immediately hasten to make his confession."

35 The devil replied: "I shall now enumerate his sins." He wanted to start at once, but at that very moment began to cry and wail and frenetically search inside himself, in his head and in all the limbs he seemed to have. He seemed to tremble all over and cried out in great consternation: 36 "Woe and misery to me! I have lost the work that took me so long! Not only is the text erased and destroyed,¹⁰ but all the material in which everything was written has been consumed! 37 The material stands for the time in which he sinned, and I cannot remember it any more than the sins written in it."

38 The angel replied: "The tears and long work and many prayers of his mother accomplished this. For their sake, God had compassion on her sighs and gave her son the grace of obtaining contrition for every sin he committed, so that he made humble confession out of divine love, and therefore those sins have been erased and discarded from your memory."

39 The devil, asserting that he still had a sack full of writings in which this knight had proposed to rectify his sins but never did, replied that he would torture him until he had paid for it by punishment. After all, the knight had failed to rectify these sins while he was still alive.

8. "Prevented any of us . . . the least fear": In Birgitta's time it was a common belief that devils would show themselves to departing souls simply in order to terrorize them.

9. "Age of discretion": The age at which persons begin to be morally responsible, which was thought normally to be the age of seven.

10. "The text erased and destroyed"; cf. the miracle of St. Augustine in the *Fornsvenska legendariet*, p. 650; and Book VI 39.61.

40 The angel replied: “Open the sack and request judgment on the sins for which you are supposed to chastise him.”

41 At these words, the devil cried out as though out of his mind, saying: “I have been robbed of my rights! Not only has my sack been taken away, but even the sins that it was full of. 42 The sack was his laziness. I put all the charges into it for which I was to punish him, since he had omitted many good deeds out of laziness.”

43 The angel replied: “The tears of his mother robbed you and broke the sack and destroyed the writing. That is how much her tears pleased God.”

44 The devil replied: “I still have here some things to bring forward, namely, his venial sins.”

45 The angel replied: “He obtained his wish of going on pilgrimage from his fatherland, leaving property and friends behind and visiting the holy places with great efforts. And he did this in such a way that he made himself worthy to gain an indulgence from the Holy Church. 46 He also desired to appease God, his creator, by rectifying his sins. Hence, all those charges which you said you had written down have been pardoned.”

47 The devil replied: “I must still punish him for all those venial sins he committed; they have not at all been deleted by the indulgences. There are thousands of thousands, all written on my tongue.”

48 The angel replied: “Stick out your tongue and show us what is written there!”

49 The devil answered with a great wail and clamor like a madman and said: “Woe is me, I do not have even a single word to say! My tongue has been cut off at the root along with all its force.”

50 The angel answered: “His mother achieved this with her constant prayers and effort, for she loved his soul with all her heart. 51 For the sake of her charity it pleased God to pardon all the venial sins he committed from childhood to death, and therefore your tongue is said to have lost its force.”

52 The devil replied: “I still have one thing carefully guarded in my heart that no one is able to erase. This is that he acquired certain property unjustly without a thought of returning it.”

53 The angel replied: “His mother paid for such things with alms, prayers, and works of mercy, so that the rigor of justice has turned into the gentleness of mercy. 54 Besides, God granted him the perfect intention of remunerating as fully as he could, without sparing any of his goods, everyone from whom he had taken anything unjustly. 55 God accepted this intention in place of its effect,¹¹ since he was unable to live any longer. His heirs should therefore repay such things as far as they can.”

56 The devil replied: “Well, if I do not have the power of punishing him for his sins, I must still punish him for not practicing good works and virtues as

11. “In place of its effect”: Karl died on the pilgrimage, and therefore was unable to carry out his good intention.

far as he could when he had full use of his senses and a health of body. 57 Virtues and good works are those treasures which he should have brought to such a kingdom as the glorious kingdom of God. 58 Permit me, then, to make up for his lack of virtuous works with punishment.”

59 The angel replied: “It is written that to him who seeks it shall be given and for him who perseveres in knocking it shall be opened.¹² Listen, then, devil! 60 His mother perseveringly knocked on the door of mercy¹³ with loving prayers and works of piety for his sake, shedding many thousands of tears for over thirty years in hope that God might pour his Holy Spirit into his heart so that her son might of his own free will place his property and body and soul at God’s service. 61 And God did so. This knight became so ardent that he did not wish to live for any other purpose than to follow the will of God, and God, having been besought for so long, poured his blessed Spirit into his heart. 62 The Virgin Mother of God, too, gave him of her virtue to make up for whatever he lacks in the spiritual arms and dress which those knights should sport who are to appear before the most high Emperor in the kingdom of heaven. 63 The saints, too, whom this knight loved when living on earth, who have their place in the heavenly kingdom, took of their merits to give him consolation. And he himself collected a treasure, just like those pilgrims who daily convert their transient goods into eternal riches. 64 Because he did so, he will gain everlasting joy and honor, especially for that burning desire of his to go on pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem, 65 and also because he fervently desired voluntarily to risk his life in war¹⁴ in order to bring the Holy Land back under Christian rule, so that the glorious sepulcher of God¹⁵ would be held in due reverence, if he proved sufficient for such an undertaking. 66 Therefore you, devil, have no right to supply that which he did not personally achieve.”

67 The devil replied: “He still lacks a crown. If I might fabricate an imperfect crown for him, I would be more than happy to do so.”

68 The angel replied: “This is most certain: all who save themselves from hell by truly repenting their sins, freely conforming themselves to the divine will and loving God himself with all their heart, will receive God’s grace. 69 And it pleases God to give them a crown from the triumphal crown of his own blessed human body, if they have been purged as right justice demands. Therefore, o devil, it is no business of yours to fabricate anything as his crown.”

70 When the devil heard this, he cried out, roaring impatiently¹⁶ and saying: “Woe is me, for my whole memory has been taken away from me! I no

12. “To him who seeks . . . it shall be opened”; cf. Matthew 7:8.

13. “The door of mercy”; cf. Psalm 117 (118):19.

14. “Risk his life in war”: there is no specific evidence that Karl intended to fight in any crusading venture in the Holy Land, but the sentiment is in keeping with his status as a knight. In the Holy Land his brother Birger was made a knight of the Holy Sepulcher: see *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon*, 4, pp. 439–40.

15. “Sepulcher of God”: the tomb of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

16. “The devil . . . roaring impatiently”; cf. 1 Peter 5:8.

longer remember in what respects this knight followed my will, and, more strangely still, I have even forgotten what his name was when he lived!”

71 The angel replied: “Know that in heaven he is now called ‘Son of Tears.’”¹⁷

72 The devil then cried out loudly and replied: “O, curse that sow, that pig,¹⁸ his mother, who had such a big belly! For there was so much water in her that her whole belly was full of fluids for tears!¹⁹ May she be cursed by me and all my company!”

73 The angel replied: “Your curse is God’s honor and a blessing for all his friends.”

74 Then Christ the Judge spoke saying: “Withdraw, enemy devil!” To the knight he then said: “Come, you my chosen one!”²⁰ And immediately the devil fled.

75 Then the bride, seeing this, said: “O eternal power, incomprehensible God, my Lord Jesus Christ! You infuse all good thoughts and prayers and tears into hearts. You hide your gracious gifts, then confer glorious and eternal rewards for them. 76 To you be honor and service and thanksgiving from all your creatures! O my most sweet God, you are my dearest, truly dearer to me than my own body and soul!”

77 Then the angel spoke to the bride of Christ, saying: “You should know that God has shown you this vision not only for your own consolation but also so that the friends of God might understand how much he is willing to do for the sake of the prayers and tears and works of his friends, when they pray with charity for others and work for them with steadfastness and good will. 78 You should also know that this knight, your son, would not have had such a grace, if he had not from childhood had the will to love God and his friends, and willingly to rectify himself when he fell into sin.”

✠ Chapter 14

A Pardon to Pilgrims at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher

DATE: 11 MAY, 1372,¹ CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER, JERUSALEM

Lady Birgitta had this revelation in the holy city of Jerusalem the first time she was in the church of the Holy Sepulcher. In it Christ announces the indulgence and the grace which good pilgrims receive

17. “Son of Tears”: this phrase echoes Augustine’s *Confessions*, 3.12, and his mother, St. Monica, who worked tirelessly for her son’s conversion from paganism, with much shedding of tears. See further on this vision, Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, pp. 178–79.

18. “Curse that sow, that pig” renders “illa scrofa seu porca”: a vulgar insult that probably had several abusive undertones and connotations.

19. “Big belly . . . fluids for tears”: The implication is that Birgitta’s many tears for her son were instrumental in securing his liberation from the devil.

20. “Come, you my chosen one”; cf. Matthew 25:34.

1. According to Alfonso, Birgitta arrived in Jerusalem on the octave of Ascension day, i.e., 11 May 1372 (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 385).

in that church when they come there with the right intention and a holy resolution.

1 The Son spoke to the bride: “When you came together into my temple, which was dedicated through my blood,² you were cleansed from all your sins³ as though you had just been lifted from the baptismal font.⁴ 2 And because of your labors and devotion, the souls of some of your kinsmen⁵ who were in purgatory have today been set free and have entered into my glory in heaven. 3 All who come to this place with the perfect intention of rectifying themselves according to their better conscience and do not wish to fall back into their former sins, receive complete forgiveness of all their former sins and are granted an increase of the grace to improve.”

✠ Chapter 15

A Vision of the Crucifixion

DATE: 14 MAY 1372,¹ CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER, JERUSALEM

Lady Birgitta saw this vision in Jerusalem in the church of the Holy Sepulcher in the chapel of Mount Calvary on Friday after the Ascension of the Lord, where, in spiritual ecstasy, she saw in detail the whole passion of the Lord as contained in full below.

1 As I was weeping in sorrow at Mount Calvary, I saw my Lord, naked and scourged, led out to be crucified by the Jews under their close watch. 2 I saw, too, a hole cut into the hill² and the crucifiers standing around ready to do their cruel work. 3 The Lord turned to me and said: “Pay attention, for the base of my cross was set in this hole in the rock at the time of my passion.”

4 Then I saw how the Jews were setting his cross in the hole in the rock and securing it firmly there, hammering in wooden wedges all around to make the cross stand steadily without falling. 5 When the cross was solidly secured

2. “Which was dedicated through my blood”: that is, the blood that was spilt at the place of the crucifixion.

3. “Cleansed from all your sins”: the pardon refers to all of Birgitta’s company. Pilgrimage was, among other things, a means of making reparation for sins. Thus, pilgrimage shrines were always endowed with indulgences that had been granted by bishops, cardinals, and popes. The indulgence was, technically, a relaxation of a certain amount of the penance that a person had incurred by sinning, and was granted on specified conditions. Here, however, Christ grants Birgitta and her party a full, or plenary, indulgence as potent as the sacrament of baptism.

4. “Lifted from the baptismal font”: the sacrament of baptism cleanses of all sin, both original sin and all conscious sins committed before the moment of the baptism.

5. “The souls of some of your kinsmen”: the use of the plural might include all of Birgitta’s deceased relatives, although the strategic placing of the revelation here implies that it was her recently departed son Karl who was uppermost in her mind; cf. chapter 13, title.

1. Ekwall, *Vår äldsta Birgittavita*, p. 79n6 interprets one manuscript as indicating that Birgitta arrived in Jerusalem on 12 May, that she visited the shrine of the Holy Sepulcher on 13 May and received the crucifixion revelation on Friday 14 May. The day of the week is significant: it causes Birgitta to visit Calvary and to meditate on the events of Good Friday rather than on the themes of the season: Ascension and Pentecost. On this revelation, see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 23, 270, 328, 385, 619.

2. “A hole cut into the hill”: This hole in the rock of Calvary was shown to pilgrims then as it still is today.

there, they fitted wooden planks around the pole of the cross as a kind of ladder up to the place where his feet were to be crucified so that both he and his crucifiers could step up on the planks and stand on them in order to fasten him to the cross more easily. 6 They climbed those steps then, leading him up with the greatest scorn and derision. 7 He climbed happily up, like a gentle lamb led to slaughter.³ When he was on top of the planks, without being forced, he stretched his right arm out voluntarily, opened his hand and placed it on the cross. His savage torturers fixed it brutally to the cross, piercing it with a nail in the part where the bone was more solid. 8 Then, using a rope, they violently dragged his left arm and crucified it in the same way. 9 After his body had been stretched out beyond measure on the cross, they placed one of his shins on top of the other and so fastened his feet together to the cross with two nails.⁴ They stretched out his glorious limbs so violently on the cross that almost all his veins and sinews were rupturing. 10 Then they took the crown of thorns, which they had removed from his head while he was being fastened to the cross, and put it back, fitting it to his most holy head. 11 Its barbs entered his venerable head so forcibly that his eyes became filled with flowing blood, his ears were blocked and both his face and beard seemed covered and saturated with his rose-red blood.⁵ 12 The crucifiers and the soldiers then quickly removed all the planks attached to the cross. There remained the cross, alone and tall,⁶ and my Lord, crucified upon it.

13 Full of grief after I had witnessed their cruelty, I then saw his most sorrowful mother lying on the ground, trembling as though half-dead. 14 John and her sisters⁷ were comforting her. They were standing then to the right, not far from the cross. 15 A new pain of compassion for his most holy mother transfixed me so that a sharp sword of unbearable grief went through my heart. 16 At last, with her body nearly drained of life, his sorrowful mother got up and looked at her son. She stood there, held up by her sisters, completely dazed, as though dead but alive, transfixed by a sword of pain. 17 When her Son saw her and his other friends weeping, he entrusted her with a mournful voice to John.⁸ It could be clearly seen from his expression and voice that his heart was being pierced by a most sharp arrow of immense pain out of compassion for his mother.⁹

3. "Like a gentle lamb . . . slaughter"; cf. Jeremiah 11:19.

4. "Fastened his feet . . . with two nails": Sometimes in crucifixes both feet are fastened with only one nail. Birgitta rejects this representation. See further volume 1, p. 68n11.

5. "Rose-red blood" renders "roseo sanguine"; cf. Sw. "rosen blodheno" [rose-red blood]: an example of the fine detail attached to the crucified Christ's physical attributes.

6. "Alone and tall": the impression of spatial awareness and height in this phrase may echo some Italian paintings that Birgitta had seen and possibly been inspired by.

7. "Her sisters": In the gospels there are four women at the foot of the cross, the Virgin Mary, Salome—who in the Middle Ages was regarded as the Virgin's sister-in-law, not actually named Salome but daughter of Salome as well as wife of Zebedee and mother of the apostles James and John—and Mary, the daughter of Clopas (John 19:25), wife of Alphaeus and mother of James the younger and Josès/Joseph (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40), also often seen as the Virgin's sister-in-law. The fourth woman is Mary Magdalene, her sister in a spiritual sense.

8. "He entrusted her . . . to John"; cf. John 19:26–27.

9. "A most sharp arrow . . . compassion for his mother"; cf. Book 1, 35.6.



FIGURE 8. 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. Reprinted by permission of Annette Landen and Lars Berggren.

18 Then his beautiful, lovable eyes appeared half-dead. His mouth was open and bleeding, his face wan and sunken, all bruised and soaked with blood. His whole body was bruised and pale and extremely feeble from the continuous flow of running blood. 19 His skin, the virginal flesh of his sacred body, was so delicate and sensitive that a black and blue mark would appear on the surface from even a slight blow. 20 He made attempts at times to stretch himself out on the cross due to the extreme anguish of the sharp and intense pain he was experiencing. 21 Whenever the pain from his wounded limbs and veins reached his heart, it caused him severe and intense agony, thus prolonging his death and drawing it out with great torment and intensely bitter suffering.

22 Then, overcome by the extreme anguish of pain and near to death, he cried out in a loud and mournful voice to his Father, saying: "Father, why have you forsaken me?"¹⁰ 23 His lips had no color and his tongue was bleeding. His sunken stomach cleaved to his back, as though he had no internal organs. 24 Then he cried out again in great and severe pain: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." And then, lifting his head a little, he let it fall again and gave up his spirit.¹¹ 25 When his mother saw it, she shook with bitter grief and would have fallen to the ground if she was not being held up by the other women. 26 At that moment his hands pulled away from the nail-holes due to the great weight of his body, and so the body was being supported, as it were, by the nails by which his feet were fastened to the cross. 27 His fingers, hands and arms were now stretched out even farther than before, and his shoulder-blades and back scraped against the cross.

28 The Jews who were standing about then mocked his mother and shouted many things at her. Some said: "Mary, now your son is dead." Others mocked her with other scornful words. 29 While the crowd was standing around, one man rushed up in great fury and thrust a lance into his right side¹² so violently and powerfully that the lance was almost about to go through the other side of the body. 30 When it was pulled out of the body, there immediately came a sudden and abundant flow of blood from the wound. The iron blade of the lance and part of its shaft were red and covered with blood when they came out of the body. 31 When his mother saw it, she shook so violently and with such bitter sighs that it could clearly be seen in her face and expression that a sharp sword of pain¹³ was piercing her soul.

32 After this was done and the large crowd had withdrawn, some of his friends took the Lord down. His mother took him piously in her holy arms and sat down with him, all torn, wounded and bruised, placed on her lap. 33 She, John, and the other women washed him with their tears as they wept.¹⁴ 34 His

10. "Father, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

11. "Into your hands . . . gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:50).

12. "One man rushed up . . . right side"; cf. John 19:34.

13. "Sharp sword of pain"; cf. Luke 2:35. See also chapter 2.4.

14. "She, John . . . as they wept" renders "Quem lauabant cum lacrimis ipsa et Iohannes et alie mulieres plorantes," literally "Whom they washed with tears, she and John and other women, weeping." This sentence is omitted from Gh and certain manuscripts.

most sorrowful mother then dried his wounds and his whole body with her cloth. She closed his eyes and kissed them, and wrapped him in a clean linen shroud. 35 And so they carried him with great mourning and sorrow and laid him in the grave.

✠ Chapter 16

Worldly Princes Need to be Attentive; Several Pieces of Advice to the Rulers of Cyprus

DATE: 1372, JERUSALEM AND FAMAGUSTA

Christ complains to his bride about all the rulers and prelates of the earth because they do not keep in mind or remember his great pains and suffering nor wish to show consideration for the sacred places of the Holy Land, and he issues them a warning if they do not amend.

1 Later at that same time¹ Christ spoke to his bride, Lady Birgitta, saying: “The rulers of the earth pay no attention to the sufferings that you just saw or to others that I endured, nor do they show any consideration for the places where I was born and where I suffered. 2 They are indeed like a man who keeps a place designated for wild and untamed animals where he lets loose his hunting dogs and takes delight in watching the dogs and animals chase each other. 3 It is similar with the rulers of the earth and the prelates of the churches and all the worldly classes. They regard earthly pleasures more eagerly and willingly than my suffering and my wounds. 4 I will therefore as yet send my words to them through you. Unless they change their hearts and convert to me, they will be condemned along with those who divided my garments and cast lots for my vestment.”²

ADDITION

5 The following revelation was made to blessed Birgitta in Famagusta. The Son speaks: “This city is Gomorrah,³ burning with the fire of lust and excess and ambition. 6 Therefore, its structures shall fall, and it shall be left desolate and reduced. Its inhabitants will migrate, sighing in pain and distress, and fade away. Its shame will be spoken of in many lands, for I am enraged with them.”

1. “Later at that same time”: Paragraphs 1–4 may have been received at the shrine of the Holy Sepulcher on 14 May (cf. chapter 15) or else shortly afterward. The Additions seem to pertain partly to the time of Birgitta’s first stay on Cyprus in April 1372, partly to her subsequent stay there in October.

2. “Cast lots for my vestment”; cf. Psalm 21 (22):19; Matthew 27:35.

3. “Gomorrah”; cf. Genesis 18:20–19:29.

7 About the duke who had guilty knowledge of his brother's death.⁴ Christ speaks: "This man grows bold in his pride, boasting of his loose living and paying no attention to what he has done to his neighbor. 8 Therefore, unless he humbles himself, I shall deal with him according to the common proverb: 'No less wails he who weeps afterward than he who wept before.'⁵ He will die no less easy a death than his brother but a more bitter one, unless he reforms himself quickly."

9 About the duke's confessor.⁶ Christ speaks: "What did that friar tell you? Did he not excuse his loose living by saying that the duke is a good man and cannot live any better? 10 Such men are not confessors but deceivers who go about like simple sheep but are really foxes and flatterers. They are the kind of friends who see and suggest to people what to take up and what to reject⁷ for the sake of a small temporal gain. 11 If this friar had stayed in his monastery, he would have obtained a lesser punishment and a greater reward. Now, however, he will not escape the hand of Him who rebukes and afflicts.

12 Some people advised the lady to alter their manner of dress and to blacken their faces⁸ because of the Saracens. Christ speaks: "What are they advising you to do? Surely not to spoil your clothing and blacken your faces? 13 I am God who is commanding you. Am I like someone ignorant of the future or like some powerless man afraid of everything? Certainly not. 14 I am wisdom itself, power itself. I fore-know all things and can do all things. So keep your accustomed style of dress and appearance and abandon your will to me. 15 I, who saved Sarah from the hands of her captors,⁹ will save all of you at sea and on land, and I will provide for you as is fitting."

16 About the bishop.¹⁰ The Mother speaks: "My friend should love you as a mother, as a lady, as a daughter and as a sister. 17 He should love you first as a mother because of your age and of the advice he

4. "The duke who had guilty knowledge of his brother's death," i.e., Duke John of Antioch, who allegedly conspired in the death of his brother Peter I of Cyprus in 1369; cf. Introduction, pp. 195. There is little attempt to obscure his identity here.

5. "The common proverb . . . who cried before": an unidentified proverb, the basic meaning of which seems to be that grief is not diminished by being delayed, but rather the opposite. Birgitta uses it in order to suggest that remorse and penance in the present is better than punishment in the afterlife.

6. "The duke's confessor": Simon, a Dominican friar, allegedly "a great theologian and astronomer, knowing the planets and the stars but not himself" (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 390). The Genoese nobleman Charles Malocello testifies that Simon had said of Birgitta: "The woman's mind is affected, for never has it been heard from of old, ever since Christ appeared and spoke to Moses face to face, that he visibly appeared to any living person and said such things as Christ said to her. Do not believe those things in any way, for it is an act of foolishness to believe such things" (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 430). Several other witnesses in the canonization process testify that in the company of this deceitful friar, Birgitta smelt a stench of sulphur (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 274-75, 334-35, 390, 544).

7. "What to take up and what to reject" renders "assumpciones et deiecciones," which may echo the allusion to false prophecy in Lamentations 2:14.

8. "Blacken their faces": Birgitta and her companions are advised to adopt a disguise to enable them to pass unnoticed on their pilgrimage.

9. "Who saved Sarah from the hands of her captors"; cf. Genesis 12:1-20; 20:1-18.

10. "The bishop," i.e., Alfonso of Jaén. The following is an important outline of his role as confessor to Birgitta.

should seek from you; second, as his lady, because of the grace given you by God who reveals the secrets of his wisdom through you; 18 third, as his daughter, teaching and consoling you and supplying your needs; fourth, as his sister, correcting you when necessary, and exhorting and inciting you to greater perfection by words and examples. 19 Tell him, too, that he should be like a person carrying exquisite flowers. The flowers are my words¹¹ which are as sweet as honey to those tasting them, sharper and more penetrating than arrows, more efficacious than payment. 20 The one carrying them must protect the flowers from wind, rain, and heat, that is, from the wind of worldly talk, from the rain of carnal pleasures, from the heat of worldly regard. 21 Aman who prides himself on such things makes the flowers wither and proves himself less suitable to carry them.”

22 About the queen of Cyprus.¹² The Son speaks: “Advise the queen not to return to her native land,¹³ for it is not for the best. She should stay where she is placed, serving God with all her heart. 23 Second, tell her not to wed a second husband, for it is more acceptable to God that she should weep over her transgressions and by penance make up for time uselessly wasted. 24 Third, she should guide the people of the realm to mutual concord and love, laboring so that justice and good morals are maintained in praiseworthy fashion and so that the citizens are not oppressed with unaccustomed burdens.¹⁴ 25 Fourth, for God’s sake, she should forget the wrongs committed against her husband and not be fired up for revenge. I am judge and will render judgment for her. 26 Fifth, she should raise her son with divine love, appointing right-minded—not greedy—counselors for him, and virtuous, wise, and balanced household servants from whom he can learn to fear God, rule justly, sympathize with the unfortunate, avoid yes-men and flatterers like poison, and seek the advice of upright persons, even such as are poor, lowly, and despised. 27 Sixth, she should do away with the shameful fashion among women of wearing tight clothes and showing their breasts and using ointments and all kinds of aids to their vanity, for these things are altogether odious to God. 28 Seventh, she should have a confessor who has left the world and loves souls more than donations, who does not disguise sins or is ashamed to rebuke them. In matters relating to the salvation of her soul, she should be as obedient to him as to God. 29 Eighth, she should study and examine the lives of holy queens and women.¹⁵ She should exert herself to give greater glory to God. 30 Ninth, she should be reasonable in giving, avoiding debts and human praise, for it is more pleasing to God to give little or nothing than to contract debts and deceive one’s neighbor.”

11. “My words,” i.e., Christ’s words to Birgitta.

12. “The queen of Cyprus,” i.e., Eleanor, widow of the murdered Peter I and regent for her son, Peter II.

13. “Her native land,” i.e., Aragon, in Spain.

14. “With unaccustomed burdens”: A similar phrase is used concerning the government of Queen Johanna in chapter 11.10.

15. “She should study . . . holy queens and women,” i.e., the lives of the saints; cf. volume 2, p. 7.

31 On the coronation of the new king.¹⁶ The Son speaks: “It is a great burden to be king, but also a great honor and highly rewarding. It suits a king to be mature, experienced, prudent, just, hard-working, and a greater lover of the good of others than of his own will. 32 Thus, kingdoms of old were well ruled when such a man was elected king, one who was willing, knowledgeable enough, and able to rule justly. Now, kingdoms are no longer kingdoms, but places of immaturity, delusions, and robbery. 33 Just as a robber seeks after ways and opportunities of getting inside to make his gain without being noticed, so too kings nowadays seek new ways of promoting their family, pocketing money and cleverly taxing their subjects. 34 They are quite willing to carry out justice in order to obtain temporal goods, but they do not love justice in order to obtain an everlasting reward. 35 Wisely did the wise man say: ‘Woe to the kingdom whose king is a child¹⁷ living daintily and keeping dainty flatterers without bothering about the welfare of his citizens!’ 36 It is true that this boy will not bear the iniquity of his father,¹⁸ so, if he is willing to improve and live up to the dignity of the royal name, let him obey my earlier words about Cyprus. 37 He should not copy the habits of his predecessors, but rid himself of childish frivolity and lead a kingly life, with assistants who respect him and who do not love his gifts more than his soul and his good honor, who detest flattery and are not afraid to speak or follow the truth and give him warning advice. Otherwise, neither the boy will be happy with his people nor the people with the elected king.”

✠ Chapter 17

Birgitta Should Take Lodging in a Pilgrim Hostel Instead of a Monastery

DATE: 1372, JERUSALEM

When Lady Birgitta was in Jerusalem, she was in doubt as to whether she should lodge in the Franciscan monastery on Mount Sion¹ or in the pilgrims’ hostel in Jerusalem. Then the Virgin Mary appeared to her in prayer and told her to lodge in the hostel to set a good example for others.

1 The Mother of God speaks: “There are two kinds of people in that place Mount Sion. Some love God with their whole heart. Others want to have God, but the world delights them more than God. 2 Therefore, in order not to

16. “New king,” i.e., Peter II of Cyprus. He was crowned in Nicosia as king of Cyprus on 6 January 1372 and in Famagusta as king of Jerusalem on 10 October 1372. Birgitta is thus likely to have been present at the latter event.

17. “Woe to the kingdom whose king is a child”; cf. Ecclesiastes 10:16. In a typical example of the way in which Birgitta embellishes a biblical text, the biblical allusion ends after “child” and the remainder of the sentence is her own addition.

18. “The iniquity of his father”; cf. Ezekiel 18:20.

1. “Franciscan monastery on Mount Sion”: situated outside the southern walls of the old city of Jerusalem, on the traditional site of David’s tomb and the Last Supper.

scandalize good people or give any occasion to the lukewarm or set a precedent for future pilgrims, it is better to stay in the place reserved for pilgrims. My Son will provide for you in every way, as it pleases him.”

✠ Chapter 18

Counsel for the Queen of Cyprus's Son

DATE: JUNE–AUGUST 1372, JERUSALEM

In the kingdom of Cyprus, Lady Birgitta was asked by Lady Eleanor¹, the queen there, to pray to God for her son, the king, and for the kingdom. She then traveled to Jerusalem and was praying there one day when Christ appeared to her and gave her these counsels to send to the aforesaid king and to his father's brother, the ruler of Antioch.² Christ commanded her to write to them as though it came from her and not from him.

1 The bride writes to the king of Cyprus and to the ruler of Antioch: “The first counsel to each of you is to make a true and complete confession to your confessor of everything you have done against God's will, and then to receive the blessed body of our Lord Jesus Christ with fear and love of God. 2 The second counsel is that you should both be united in true love so that you may become one heart³ for God and his glory, ruling the kingdom for the glory of God and the benefit of your subjects. 3 The third counsel is that you should both be united in true charity with your subjects. Solely out of reverence for the passion and death of Jesus Christ, you should forgive and pardon all those who took part, by their advice, action or support, in the death of your father, King Peter, 4 receiving them wholeheartedly in your charity so that God may mercifully deign to receive and strengthen you in governing the kingdom for his glory. 5 The fourth counsel is that, since divine providence has appointed you to be governors of the realm, you should apply as much effort as possible to speaking with all the heads of churches or monasteries. You should charitably but effectively advise them, 6 so that all of them, along with their subordinates, may correct those aspects in which they have deviated in any way, spiritually or temporally, from the holy state of earlier holy fathers, their predecessors, in order that they may soon return to living purely in the pristine state of their predecessors. 7 In this way, having completely reformed and truly amended their way of living, both they and their subordinates may obtain God's friendship and become worthy of entreating God in his mercy graciously to renew in holiness of virtue the state of the universal church. 8 The fifth counsel is that you should love the souls of your subjects for the sake of the great love with which God has loved your souls. 9 Counsel all your military people who have in any way offended God to quickly and humbly correct themselves

1. “Lady Eleanor”; cf. chapter 16.22–37. On this revelation see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 266, 326.

2. “Ruler of Antioch,” i.e., Prince John of Antioch, brother of Eleanor's deceased husband, Peter I.

3. “You may become one heart”; cf. Acts 4:32.

and, furthermore, all who are under obedience to the Roman church and have reached the age of discretion to humbly make their confession and to make their reconciliation and peace with any of their fellows whom they have offended. Once they have amended their lives, they should receive the praiseworthy body of Christ. 10 Then they should live as Catholics afterward, living faithfully in matrimony or widowhood or in the laudable state of virginity and observing all the prescriptions of the Holy Church. 11 By their good examples, words, and deeds, they should with loving compassion⁴ get their family and household servants to do the same, along with their other subordinates and everyone else they can, giving everyone in these classes the encouragement of their good advice. 12 Be certain that all those who refuse to obey in such matters will suffer loss in body and soul. 13 My sixth counsel is for you to tell all the prelates that they must effectively and frequently admonish each of their priests, that is, the rectors of churches, to examine carefully whether they have any parishioners obstinately continuing in a wicked life of public sin to the offense of God and in contempt of his Holy Church. 14 If they find any such people living shamelessly in public sin, they should forewarn them regarding the peril of their souls and teach them the spiritual means and remedies by which they can and should humbly mend their ways. 15 If any of those living in public sin refuse to obey humbly, then the same rectors should not delay in informing their superiors and bishops so that the temerity of such obstinate sinners can be legally corrected by means of the prelates' ecclesiastical censure. 16 If the aforesaid bishops and prelates are unable to correct or punish them because of their defiant pride or worldly power, 17 then you, my lords, are advised to use your authority to cooperate with the reverend prelates in order that the aforesaid sinners, with your aid, may be brought to correction and, having amended their lives, obtain God's mercy."

✠ Chapter 19

The People of Cyprus Must Mend their Ways

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

A revelation given to Lady Birgitta in the holy city of Jerusalem concerning the kingdom of Cyprus and its reform. She transmitted it to the king of Cyprus and the ruler of Antioch¹ in order that they might make it public to the whole kingdom. Since the aforementioned ruler did not put entire trust in this revelation, the lady had it made public upon her return from Jerusalem in the city of Famagusta on the eighth of October in the presence of the king and queen of Cyprus and of the aforesaid ruler and of all the royal council.

4. "With loving compassion"; cf. Philippians 2:1.

1. "To the king and the ruler of Antioch": see note to chapter 18. On this revelation, see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 100, 266, 326, 372–73, 383, 430, 636; see also *Epistola solitarii I E* (ed. Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*).

1 To a certain person keeping watch in prayer it happened that, when she was caught up in the ecstasy of contemplation, she saw herself borne away in spirit to a palace of unfathomable size and indescribable beauty. 2 Jesus Christ appeared to her, seated on the imperial throne of majesty among his saints. Opening his blessed mouth,² he pronounced the following words written below.

3 “I am truly the highest love. All that I have done from eternity, I have done out of love. Likewise, all that I do now and will do in the future comes from my love. 4 This love is as incomprehensible and intense in me now as it was at the time of my passion when, by my death and in an excess of love I freed from hell³ all those chosen ones who were worthy of redemption and liberation. 5 If it were still possible, I would die as many times as there are souls in hell—for any one of them I would again endure the same kind of death as I then endured for all of them—my body would still be prepared to go through it all with a generous will and the most perfect love.⁴ 6 But now it is impossible for my body to die or to suffer any pain or affliction any more. 7 It is also impossible for any soul who is or will be condemned to hell after my death ever to be freed from it again 8 or to enjoy the heavenly joy which my saints and chosen ones enjoy in the glorious vision of my body. Rather, they will experience the pains of hell in an eternal death, because they refused to enjoy the blessing of my passion and death and did not want to obey my will while they lived in the world. 9 Besides, no one is judge over the offenses committed against me except I alone. Therefore, the love that I have always shown to humankind complains to my justice. Hence, it belongs to justice to render judgment in this matter according to my will.

10 I now make my accusations against the inhabitants of Cyprus as though they were a single person. 11 However, I am not accusing those friends of mine who live there and love me with all their heart and obey my will in all things. Rather, as though they were a single person, I speak in accusation of all those who scorn me and are always resisting my will and are thoroughly opposed to me. Accordingly, I now begin to speak to all of them as to one.

12 O, people of Cyprus, my adversary, hearken and attend carefully to what I say to you. I loved you as a father loves his only son whom he has desired to exalt to every honor. 13 I allotted you a country⁵ in which you could have in abundance all you needed for the upkeep of your body. 14 I sent you the warmth and light of the Holy Spirit to make you understand the true Christian faith to which you bound yourself in trust, submitting yourself to the sacred statutes of

2. “Opening his blessed mouth”; cf. Matthew 5:2.

3. “I freed from hell”: see note to 11.4.

4. “If it still were possible . . . most perfect love”: The source of this idea would appear to be a passage in Denis (or Dionysius) the Areopagite, Letter VIII to Demophilus, in which Jesus appears to a man named Carpus and says he is ready to suffer even again for the salvation of humans (Liubheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, p. 280).

5. “I allotted you a country”; cf. Daniel 2:21, Acts 14:16.

the Holy Church in humble obedience. 15 I have also placed you in a place fitting for a faithful servant, namely, in the midst of my enemies, in order that you might obtain a more precious reward in my kingdom in return for your earthly labors and your physical combat. 16 I have long carried you in my heart, in my divine charity, and guarded you as the apple of my eye⁶ in all your adversities and affliction. 17 As long as you kept my commandments and heeded the statutes of the Holy Church in faithful obedience, then an almost endless number of souls from the kingdom of Cyprus most certainly attained my heavenly kingdom to enjoy eternal glory with me forever.

18 However, you now act in self-will and do whatever delights your heart with no fear of me, your Judge, with no love for me, your Creator, who redeemed you through my most severe death. You have spat me out of your mouth⁷ like something tasteless and rotten. 19 You have shut the devil in with your soul in the chamber of your heart, but you have thrust me out like a thief and a robber. You are no more ashamed to sin in my presence than brute animals are ashamed of their mating. 20 Therefore, it is fitting justice and a just sentence that in heaven you should be thrust away from the whole company of my friends and placed in everlasting hell among my enemies.

21 Know this and do not doubt it: my Father, who is in me as I in him⁸ and the Holy Spirit in us both, is himself my witness that nothing but truth has ever left my mouth. 22 For that reason you should know for a truth that the soul of anyone so disposed as you are now, who refuses to amend, will go the way of Lucifer in his pride⁹ and of Judas, who sold me out of greed,¹⁰ and of Zimri,¹¹ whom Phinehas killed because of his lust. 23 Zimri committed sin with a woman against my commandment, and his soul was therefore condemned to hell after his death.

24 Hence, o people of Cyprus, I declare to you that, if you refuse to reform yourself and mend your ways, I will so destroy your race and progeny in this kingdom that I will spare neither poor nor rich. 25 I will destroy your race so that your memory will shortly disappear from human hearts, as if you had never been born in this world. 26 After that, it pleases me to plant new plants¹² in this kingdom of Cyprus that will fulfill my commandments and love me wholeheartedly.

27 However, you can be fully certain that I will joyfully run out to meet all those among you who wish to reform themselves and mend their ways and come back to me in humility. Like a gentle shepherd, I will lift them up on my shoulders and carry them back to my sheep.¹³ 28 By my shoulders, I mean that

6. "The apple of my eye"; cf. Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 16(17):8.

7. "Spat me out of your mouth"; cf. Apocalypse 3:16.

8. "Who is in me as I in him"; cf. John 14:10.

9. "Lucifer in his pride"; cf. Isaiah 14:12, Luke 10:18, Apocalypse 9:1.

10. "Judas . . . greed"; cf. Matthew 26:15.

11. "Zimri"; cf. Numbers 25:6–15; 1 Maccabees 2:26.

12. "Plant new plants": Birgitta frequently uses this image in her calls for political or monastic renewal.

13. "Lift them up . . . back to my sheep"; cf. Luke 15:4–6.

the person who amends will partake in the blessing of my passion and death which I endured in my body and shoulders. That person will secure eternal consolation with me in the kingdom of heaven.

29 You may also be absolutely certain that you, my enemies living in the kingdom of Cyprus, were not worthy to have such a vision, my divine revelation, sent to you. 30 However, some of my friends there, who serve me faithfully and love me wholeheartedly, inclined me through their efforts and tearful prayers to make known to you by means of this revelation the grave peril of your souls. 31 To some of my friends there, I showed divinely how many countless souls from the kingdom of Cyprus are being shut out from heavenly glory and doomed to eternal death in Gehenna.

32 I have spoken the above words to those Latin Christians subject to obedience to the Roman Church. At baptism they vowed to me to keep the true Roman Catholic faith but have completely departed from me through deeds opposed to me. 33 The Greeks understand that all Christians should hold only one Christian and Catholic faith and be under only one Church, namely, the Roman one, and that they should have as their spiritual pastor my only vicar general in the world, that is, the Roman pontiff.¹⁴ Yet, whether out of stubborn pride or avarice or temporal insolence or for whatever other worldly reason, they do not wish to submit in spirit to the Church of Rome or to my vicar and humbly subjugate themselves are unworthy to obtain from me pardon and mercy after death. 35 However, there are other Greeks who long to know the Roman Catholic faith but cannot, and yet, if they knew it and if they could, would devoutly and gladly receive it and humbly submit themselves¹⁵ to the Roman Church, and who keep themselves from sin and live piously according to their consciences in the state and faith in which they find themselves. Such as these deserve my mercy regarding their punishment after death when they are called to come to my court of judgment.

36 Let the Greeks also know that their empire, their kingdoms and domains will never stand secure or be in peace and quiet but will always be subject to their enemies from whom they will always sustain grave damages and long-lasting miseries until, with true humility and charity, they devoutly submit themselves to the Roman Church and faith, conforming themselves entirely to the sacred constitutions and rites of that same Church.”

37 Once these things had been seen and heard in spirit, as told above, the vision disappeared, and the aforesaid person remained in prayer, immersed in great fear and wonder.

14. “Latin Christians . . . the Roman pontiff”: Birgitta comments on the split between Western and Eastern (Greek Orthodox) Christianity that goes back to the Great Schism of 1054 and reflects differences in both practice and doctrine.

15. “Humbly submit themselves” Birgitta uses similar arguments concerning the conversion of the Greek Orthodox Christians in the Baltic, saying that they are misguided, but those with a humble and good intention will not be punished in equal measure as those who are proud and arrogant.

⚔ Chapter 20

A Franciscan Friar¹ Asks About the Order of the Friars Minor and the Vow of Poverty

DATE: JUNE–AUGUST 1372, JERUSALEM

In the kingdom of Cyprus, a certain Franciscan friar asked Lady Birgitta for advice about what he should do regarding certain doubts of conscience, especially in regard to the observance of the rule of his order. One day when the lady was praying for that friar in the holy city of Jerusalem, Christ appeared to her and addressed her, speaking much about the order of the Friars Minor and in the end threatening with eternal death all members of religious orders violating the vow of poverty by owning property.

1 Endless thanks and humble service to God in his eternal power and majesty, praise and honor to the one God in three persons! 2 It pleased his boundless goodness to speak in his most worthy human nature to a person in prayer. He said this:

3 “You to whom it has been given to hear and see spiritual things, listen now and store these words of mine carefully in your memory. 4 There was a man named Francis.² When he turned away from worldly pride, avarice, and immoral carnal pleasure to a spiritual life of penance and perfection, he then obtained true contrition for all his sins and a perfect purpose of amendment. He said: 5 “There is nothing in this world that I would not willingly give up for the love and honor of my Lord Jesus Christ. 6 There is nothing so hard in this life that I would not cheerfully endure it for the sake of his love, doing whatever I can for his honor according to my physical and spiritual capacity. 7 And I want to persuade and encourage all others that I can to love God with their whole heart.” 8 The rule that this Francis introduced was not dictated or composed by human intellect and sagacity but by me in accordance with my will. 9 Each word written in it was inspired in him by my Spirit, and later he presented and offered the rule³ to others. 10 So, too, all the other rules which my friends have introduced, keeping and observing them themselves, teaching and offering them to others to good effect: they were neither dictated nor composed by their own human intellects and wisdom but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 11 The

1. “Franciscan Friar,” i.e., Martin of Aragon. He was Queen Eleanor’s secretary and confessor. After hearing this revelation he sold his books and other personal property, and eventually became the guardian of the Franciscan house at Bethlehem. Chapter 20 is one of the few revelations that Birgitta is specifically said to have written in her own hand in Swedish (Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 383–84; see also pp. 269, 525).

2. “Francis,” i.e., St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226).

3. “He presented and offered the rule”: *The Mirror of Perfection*, chapter 1.8, a compilation of St. Francis’s writings, refers to the fears voiced about its strictness by his followers as he was composing the rule; a direct message from heaven told them there were to be no compromises in a divinely revealed rule.

friars of Francis, who are called ‘minor,’⁴ have kept and observed his rule well over the years, very spiritually and devoutly in full accord with my will.

12 However, the devil, that ancient enemy,⁵ was very envious and upset because he could not conquer those friars with his temptations and deceptions. 13 So the devil sought eagerly after one man in whom he could mingle his own malignant spirit with the man’s will. He found at last a member of the clergy who was thinking to himself as follows: 14 ‘I would like to find myself in a situation where I could have worldly honor and bodily pleasure and be able to accumulate so much money that nothing would be lacking to me for all my needs and pleasures. Thus, I will enter the Franciscan order and pretend to be very humble and obedient.’ 15 With this intention and desire, he entered the order and the devil immediately entered his heart.⁶ In this way he became a friar in the order. 16 The devil considered again in this way: ‘As Francis wants to win over many people from the world with his humble obedience in order to receive great rewards in heaven, 17 so this friar of mine, who will be called the Adversary since he will be an adversary of the Franciscan rule, will win over many in the Franciscan order from humility to pride, from wise poverty to avarice, from true obedience to self-will and physical pleasure-seeking.’ 18 When Friar Adversary entered the Franciscan Order, on the devil’s instigation he immediately began to think to himself: 19 ‘I will make a display of such humility and obedience that everyone will think me holy. When the others are fasting and maintaining silence, then I will do the contrary with select companions, eating and drinking and speaking so secretly that none of the others will know or realize it. 20 According to the rule, I cannot licitly handle money⁷ or own gold or silver, and so I will have a special friend to handle my money and gold for me so I can use the money as I wish. 21 I will study the liberal arts and science⁸ in order to gain from them honor and rank in the order, acquiring horses, silver vessels, beautiful clothing, and precious ornaments. 22 If anyone faults me for it, I will answer him that I am doing it for the honor of my order. 23 If I can work hard enough to be made a bishop, then I will be truly blessed and happy in the kind of life I could then be leading, because then I would be at my liberty and could have every bodily comfort.’

24 Hear now what the devil has done in the Order of Francis. It is really so that there are more friars in the world who in deed or desire keep the rule taught by Friar Adversary than those who observe the rule that I myself taught to brother Francis. 25 However, you can be sure that, although both the friars of Francis and those of Friar Adversary are mixed together while they live in the world, I will separate them after death,⁹ for I am their judge. I will judge that the friars of the rule of Francis should be with me together with Francis in

4. “The friars . . . who are called ‘minor’”: The Franciscan order is a mendicant order known as *Ordo Fratrum Minorum*, the Order of Friars Minor.

5. “Ancient enemy”; cf. Matthew 13:39; Apocalypse 12:9; 20:2.

6. “The devil immediately entered his heart”; cf. Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27.

7. “According to the rule . . . handle money”; cf. *Regula Fratrum Minorum*, chapter 4.

8. “Liberal arts and science”; cf. chapter 5.10.

9. “Separate them after death”; cf. Matthew 13. 24–30; 37–43; 47–50.

eternal joy, 26 but those others belonging to the rule of Friar Adversary will be sentenced to eternal punishments in the depths of hell, unless they are willing to correct and humbly amend themselves before death. 27 This is no cause for wonder, because those who should be giving worldly people examples of humility and sanctity offer them instead base and worthless examples through their pride and greed. 28 Thus, these friars and other religious, whose rule prohibits the owning of property but who nevertheless own property against their rule, may be absolutely certain that, though they try to appease me by offering me a part of their income, their gifts are abominable and loathsome to me and are unworthy of any good reward. 29 It is more pleasing and agreeable



FIGURE 9. Birgitta's vision of Christ's birth. Central panel of a triptych attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso, 1373–76. Reprinted by permission of The John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania.

to me if they diligently observe the blessed poverty that they have professed according to their rules than if they offer me all the gold and silver or all the other metals in the world.

30 You who hear my words, know that this vision would not have been granted to you to know were it not for a good servant of mine who prayed to me sincerely with all his heart for that friar minor. 31 Out of divine charity, he wanted to offer that friar counsel beneficial to his soul.”

After all this was seen and heard, the vision disappeared.

✠ Chapter 21

A Vision of the Nativity

DATE: AUGUST 1372, BETHLEHEM

A vision that Lady Birgitta had in Bethlehem where the Virgin Mary showed her exactly how she gave birth and brought forth her glorious son, just as she had promised to the same Lady Birgitta in Rome fifteen years before she went to Bethlehem, as appears in the first chapter of this last book.¹

1 When I was at the manger of the Lord in Bethlehem,² I saw a most beautiful virgin who was pregnant and clothed in a white mantel and a light gown through which I could clearly see her virginal body. 2 Her womb was very heavy and swollen, for she was now ready to give birth. There was a venerable old man³ with her, and they had brought along an ox and an ass. 3 When they had entered the cave, the old man tied the ox and ass⁴ to the manger and went outside. He brought back a lit candle for her and fixed it to the wall. Then he went outside again so as not to be present himself at the birth. 4 The Virgin took the shoes off her feet⁵ and put away the white mantle she had on. She removed the veil from her head and laid it next to her, keeping only her gown on, her beautiful hair spread out like gold over her shoulders. 5 Then she took out two linen cloths and two woolen ones, very clean and finely woven, which she had brought to wrap around the child who was to be born, and two other small linen cloths to cover and bind his head. She laid these next to her to use when the time came.

1. “Fifteen years before . . . the first chapter of this last book”: this would mean that the vision in chapter 1 was received in 1358—but there it is dated “after the Jubilee Year,” which, though vague, rather suggests a date in the early 1350s. On this vision see further pp. 197–98 and Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 96, 270, 328, 385, 516, 619, 633, 636.

2. “At the manger of the Lord in Bethlehem”: that is, in the cave beneath the apse of the Church of the Nativity, first built by Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, and consecrated on 31 May 339.

3. “Old man”: In Birgitta’s time, Joseph was thought to have been an old man when marrying Mary; cf. Book VI 59.14.

4. “Cave . . . ox and ass”: traditional features of the scene of Christ’s birth. Since at least the second century a cave in Bethlehem has been regarded as the birthplace of Christ. The ox and ass would have been known to Birgitta both from texts and works of art; they ultimately derive from Isaiah 1:3, “The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger.”

5. “Took the shoes off her feet”: as a sign of reverence in the presence of God; cf. Exodus 3:5; Joshua 5:16.

6 When all these things were ready, the Virgin knelt down with great reverence and began to pray. She kept her back to the manger but lifted up her head toward heaven, facing east.⁶ 7 She remained there with her hands raised and her eyes intent upon heaven as though held in ecstatic contemplation, inebriated with divine delight. 8 While she was thus praying, I saw the infant in her womb move, and at that very moment, in the flash of an eye, she gave birth to her son.⁷ Such indescribable light and splendor went out from him that the sun could not be compared to it. 9 The candle that the old man had placed there was giving no light at all, for that divine luster completely outshone the material luster of the candle. 10 The birth of the child was so instant and sudden that I was unable to see or discern how or even with what part of her body she gave birth.⁸ 11 And yet I immediately saw that glorious infant lying on the ground, naked and shining. His body was entirely clean of all filth and impurity. 12 I also saw the afterbirth lying near him, rolled up and shining. I also heard the angels singing a song of wondrous sweetness and great delight. 13 The Virgin's belly, which had been quite swollen before giving birth, contracted and her body then seemed wonderfully beautiful and delicate.

14 When the Virgin realized that she had given birth, she immediately bowed her head and joined her hands and, with great piety and reverence, adored the child, saying to him: "Welcome, my God, my Lord, and my Son!"⁹ 15 Then the infant boy, crying and trembling from the cold and the hard floor¹⁰ where he lay, turned himself a little and stretched out his limbs, seeking the comfort and protection of his mother. 16 His mother took him in her arms and clasped him to her breast, joyfully warming him with her cheek and her bosom with a mother's tenderness. 17 Then, sitting on the ground, she put him on her lap and with gentle fingers laid hold of his umbilical cord. It broke off at once with no loss of liquid or blood. 18 She then began to wrap him carefully, first with the linen cloths and then with the woolen ones, binding the arms and ankles of his little body with the ribbon that was sewn on the four sides of the outermost woolen cloth. 19 After that, she wrapped the baby's head with the two small linen cloths¹¹ that she had prepared for the purpose. 20 When she had finished, the old man came in and, falling down on his knees in adoration, wept for joy. 21 In giving birth, the Virgin experienced no change in color nor

6. "Lifted her head toward heaven, facing east": The east was traditionally seen as the direction of prayer and devotion. As with the crucifixion revelation (chapter 16), this sort of detail is typical of the close attention that Birgitta paid to the visual elements of the scene.

7. "She gave birth to her son"; cf. Matthew 1:25.

8. "I was unable to see . . . with what part of her body she gave birth": refers to the perpetual virginity of Mary; this and the contraction of the womb in paragraph 13 was connected to the absence of labor pains (the consequence of original sin, see Genesis 3:16).

9. "Welcome, my God, my Lord, and my Son"; cf. John 20:28.

10. "Crying and trembling from the cold and the hard floor"; cf. Psalm 118 (119): 25.

11. "Linen cloths"; cf. John 20:7.

any sickness. She suffered no loss of bodily strength¹² as is normal for other women at childbirth. The only difference was that her swollen belly subsided to its earlier state, in which it was before she had conceived her child. 22 Then with her baby in her arms, she got up. Then both of them, Mary and Joseph, placed him in the manger¹³ and, kneeling down, adored him with untold joy and happiness.

✠ Chapter 22

A Reaffirmation of the Nativity Vision

DATE: AUGUST 1372, BETHLEHEM

A revelation in Bethlehem at the manger of the Lord on the same subject as above.

1 Afterward the Virgin Mary appeared to me in the same place and said: “My daughter, it is a long time since I promised you in Rome¹ to show you here in Bethlehem how I gave birth. 2 Although I did show you in Naples² something of what it was like when I brought forth my son, you can be sure that the way in which I gave birth was on my knees, praying alone in the stable, as you saw just now. 3 I brought him forth with such joy and exultation of soul that I felt no pain or discomfort as he left my body. I wrapped him at once in the clean cloths that I had prepared long before. 4 When Joseph saw it, he marveled in great joy and happiness to find that I had given birth unassisted.³ 5 Because the great crowd of people in Bethlehem were busy with the census,⁴ they were too engrossed in it to have the news of God’s wonders made known among them. 6 Despite the attempts of people to assert that my Son was born in the ordinary way⁵ according to their human way of understanding, you can rest assured that it is undoubtedly more true that he was born as I have told you elsewhere and as you have now seen for yourself.”

12. “Nor any sickness . . . bodily strength”: Pain in childbirth is historically viewed as a punishment for the fall of man (cf. Genesis 3:16). According to the medieval view, since Mary, through her immaculate conception, was free of the consequences of the fall, she gave birth painlessly.

13. “Then both of them, Mary and Joseph, placed him in the manger”; cf. Luke 2:7, where Mary places Jesus in the manger on her own.

1. “I promised you in Rome”: see chapter 1.

2. “I did show you in Naples”: this seems to refer to an unrecorded vision that had already taken place.

3. “I had given birth unassisted”: in the apocryphal accounts, the midwives and Joseph arrive after the birth has taken place.

4. “Census”; cf. Luke 2:1.

5. “Born in the ordinary way”: Birgitta again underlines the miraculous nature of the birth (cf. chapter 21.10), but implies that some people—perhaps including preachers—on the contrary used to assert that Christ’s birth had been a perfectly normal one. The point of the latter assertion may have been to stress Christ’s true humanity.

✠ Chapter 23

The Virgin Shows the Christ Child to the Shepherds

DATE: 1372, BETHLEHEM

This revelation was made to the same lady at the manger of the Lord in Bethlehem concerning how the shepherds came to the manger to adore the newborn Christ.

1 In the same place, I also saw how, while the Virgin Mary and Joseph were adoring the babe in the manger, the shepherds and those tending their flocks came to see and adore the infant.¹ 2 When the shepherds saw him, they asked first whether it was a boy or a girl, because the angels had announced to them that the “savior” not the “saviorress”² of the world had been born. 3 So his Virgin Mother showed them the infant’s male genitals. At once, with great reverence and joy, they adored him. Then they returned, praising and glorifying God for all that they had heard and seen.³

✠ Chapter 24

The Virgin Tells Birgitta of the Visit of the Magi

DATE: 1372, BETHLEHEM

She had this revelation in the chapel in Bethlehem¹ where Christ was born. The Virgin Mary tells her how the three magi kings adored Christ her son.

1 The Mother of the Lord said to me: “My daughter, know that when the three magi kings² came to the stable to adore my son, I was aware of their coming well in advance. 2 When they came in and adored him, my son was elated and had an even happier face than usual. 3 I, too, rejoiced greatly. I felt an exultant joy in my heart as I attended to their words and actions, and I kept and pondered them all in my heart.”³

1. “See and adore the infant”; cf. Luke 2:15–18.

2. “‘Savior’ and not ‘saviorress’”: according to Luke 2:11–17 the shepherds were told that a (male) “Savior” had been born and they saw the “infant” in the manger. Birgitta’s insistence on the verifying of the child’s sex is a curious homely detail.

3. “Praising and glorifying God for all that they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20).

1. “Chapel in Bethlehem”: the cave of Christ’s birth, below the apse of the Church of the Nativity.

2. “The three magi kings”: Matthew 2:1–16 refers only to “magi,” but they were traditionally thought to be three kings, perhaps the result of an early mystical interpretation of Psalm 71(72):10–11 and Isaiah 60:6 (thus Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 308).

3. “Kept and pondered them all in my heart”; cf. Luke 2:19, 51; 11:28. On this revelation, see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, p. 386.

‡ Chapter 25

The Virgin in Heaven Reflects on her Marriage to Joseph and her Status as Jesus' Mother

DATE: 1372, BETHLEHEM

The Mother of God speaks to Lady Birgitta and tells her some things about her humility and that of her Son, saying that her Son and she are still as humble as they were on earth, though they are now in heaven.

1 The Mother speaks: “My Son’s humility is the same now in his divine power as it was when he lay in the manger. 2 Lying there between two animals, though he knew all things in his divine nature, still, in accordance with his human nature, he could not yet speak. 3 So too now, seated at the right hand of the Father, he listens with love to all who speak to him and answers through inspirations of the Holy Spirit—to some he speaks with words and thoughts, to others as it were face to face,¹ as he pleases.

4 Similarly, I, his Mother, am as humble now in my body, which has been exalted above all creatures, as I was when I was betrothed to Joseph. 5 You can, however, be quite sure that Joseph, before he betrothed me, understood through the Holy Spirit that I had vowed my virginity to God and that I was immaculate in thought, word, and deed. 6 He betrothed me with the intention of serving me, regarding me as his lady, not his wife. I, too, knew for certain through the Holy Spirit that my virginity would forever remain unharmed,² although, by God’s mysterious dispensation, I became betrothed to a man. 7 After I had given my consent to God’s messenger, Joseph saw my womb swell through the power of the Holy Spirit and felt a great fear. He harbored no improper suspicions³ against me, but, recalling the words of the prophets foretelling the virginal birth of the Son of God,⁴ he thought himself unworthy to serve such a mother, until the angel appeared in his sleep⁵ and told him not to be frightened but to take loving care of me. 8 Joseph and I never kept any wealth⁶ for ourselves apart from the necessities of life to the glory of God. The rest we gave up out of love for God. 9 The time for my Son’s birth drew near, as I well knew. In accordance with God’s foreknowledge, I came to Bethlehem, bringing along clean clothing and linens for my Son,

1. “Face to face” renders “ore ad os,” literally “mouth to mouth”; cf. Numbers 12:8.

2. “My virginity would forever remain unharmed”: refers to the ancient doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity—before, during, and after giving birth.

3. “Harbored no improper suspicions”: This is asserted by Birgitta contrary to the popular account in the Infancy Gospel (or Protoevangelium) of James, chapter 13, where Joseph at first thinks Mary has deceived him with another man.

4. “Prophets foretelling the virginal birth of the Son of God”; cf. Isaiah 7:14.

5. “Angel appeared in his sleep”; cf. Matthew 1:22–23.

6. “Joseph and I never kept any wealth”: Birgitta here draws attention to a monastic ideal and adherence to poverty.

which no one had ever used before. In them I first wrapped him who was born from me in all purity.

10 Although I was destined from eternity to take my place on the highest seat of honor above all creatures and every human being, nevertheless, in my humility I did not disdain to prepare and furnish the things necessary to Joseph and myself. 11 Likewise, my Son was subject to Joseph and to me.⁷ As I was humble on earth, known only to God and Joseph, so too I am humble now, seated on the highest throne, ready to present to God the reasonable petitions of everyone. 12 To some I respond by means of divine suggestions; to others I speak in a more secret way, as it pleases God.”

✠ Chapter 26

Birgitta Visits the Sepulcher of the Virgin

DATE: 8 SEPTEMBER, 1372, AT THE EMPTY GRAVE OF THE VIRGIN MARY, VALLEY OF JEHOSEPHAT

When Lady Birgitta wished to return to Rome from Jerusalem, on the birthday of the Virgin Mary¹ she went to visit her tomb and the other sanctuaries there close to Jerusalem. While she was praying at the tomb, the Virgin appeared to her, making a clear declaration about the time of her death and assumption and assuring her that the tomb was really hers.

1 When I was in the Valley of Jehosaphat,² praying at the tomb of the glorious Virgin, the Virgin herself appeared to me, shining with great splendor. She said:

2 “Hear me, my daughter! After my Son’s ascension into heaven, I lived on earth for fifteen years and then for as much more time as there is between the feast of his ascension and that of my death. 3 I lay dead in this tomb for fifteen days.³ Then I was assumed into heaven,⁴ with untold honor and joy. 4 The clothes I had on⁵ at my burial remained in this tomb, but I was then dressed in the same kind of clothes as my Son and my Lord Jesus Christ now wears.

7. “Was subject to Joseph and to me”; cf. Luke 2:51.

1. “Birthday of the Virgin Mary”: The feast of the nativity of the Virgin is 8 September.

2. “Valley of Jehosaphat”: a traditional burial place (cf. Joel 3:2) between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem, also known as the Kidron Valley. The Tomb of the Virgin containing Mary’s empty sepulcher is situated there.

3. “Fifteen days”: This closely reflects a passage in Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, chapter 115 (*The Golden Legend*, trans. Ryan, chapter 119, at volume II, p. 83), which in turn quotes the *Visions of Elizabeth of Schönau*. A difference is that according to *Legenda Aurea* the number of days between Mary’s death and resurrection was forty, not fifteen; but Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna*, pp. 167–68, observes that in the Swedish legendary (*Fornsvenska legendariet*, ed. Stephens) some manuscripts say fifteen days instead of forty. Birgitta may thus have been influenced by this local variation.

4. “Assumed into heaven”: The date of the Feast of the Assumption is 15 August; presumably Birgitta was prevented from visiting the Tomb of Mary on that date because she was in Bethlehem.

5. “The clothes I had on”: there are many alleged relics of Mary’s garments in churches around the world.

5 Know that there is no human body in heaven apart from the body of my glorious Son and my own body.⁶

6 Go back now⁷ to Christian territory. Always keep on improving your lives, and live with the greatest care and attention as long as you live, now that you have visited the holy places where my Son and I physically lived, died and were buried.”

✠ Chapter 27

A Message Urging the Citizens of Naples to Repent

DATE: 1373, NAPLES

When Lady Birgitta passed through the city of Naples on her return from Jerusalem, she prayed to God for all its inhabitants at the request of the queen and the archbishop¹ of that city. Christ spoke to her and charged those same inhabitants with a number of sins. He showed them the way for sinners to be reconciled with him, promising them mercy if they would be reconciled and mend their ways. He also threatened them with strict justice if they did not correct themselves but persevered in sin. Lady Birgitta made this revelation public² in the presence of Lord Bernard, the archbishop, three masters of theology and two doctors of canon and civil law, and some knights and citizens of the same city.

1 To a person³ keeping watch in prayer and lost in contemplation, Jesus Christ appeared while she was in a rapture of mental elevation. He said to her:

2 “Hear, you to whom it has been given to hear and see spiritual things, and listen carefully. Make sure that you proclaim to the people as coming from me what you now hear. Do not say it in order to win human honor and praise for yourself, 3 nor keep silent out of fear of human insults or scorn, because what you are about to hear is shown to you not on your account alone but also on account of the prayers of my friends. 4 Indeed, some of my chosen friends in the city of Naples have besought me for many years with all their heart in their prayers and labors to grant my enemies living in the city the grace to enable them to abandon their sins and abuses and be spiritually revived. 5 Their prayers have now inclined me to give you these words of mine. You should therefore listen carefully to what I say.

6. “Apart from the body of my son . . . my own body”: as against the opinion of some in the Middle Ages that other people, too—particularly Enoch and Elijah—had been taken bodily into heaven.

7. “Go back now”: in a sudden shift of subject, Birgitta and her party are instructed to return to Rome now that they have experienced the places associated with the Incarnation and Passion at first hand.

1. “Queen and archbishop,” i.e., Johanna and Archbishop Bernard; see chapter 12.

2. “Made this revelation public”: On this vision, see Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 100, 93, 265, 325, 373–74, 562–63; *Epistola 6B* (ed. Hans Aili, *Book VIII*); see further p. 196.

3. “To a person”: The strongly worded message of this vision is framed by statements that reinforce its divine origin; in this way Birgitta is distanced from its content.

6 I am the creator of all, Lord over both all the devils and all the angels, and no one can escape my judgment. The devil sinned against me in three ways: by pride, envy, and arrogance, that is, by love of his own will. 7 His pride was so great that he wished to be lord over me and for me to be subject to him. His envy toward me was so great that, if it were possible, he would gladly have killed me in order to be lord himself and take his place on my throne. 8 His self-will was so dear to him that he cared nothing at all for my will so long as he could carry out his own. This is why he fell from heaven:⁴ he fell from being an angel to becoming a devil in the depths of hell. 9 Later, when I saw his great malice and envy toward the human race, I revealed my will to them and gave them my commandments so that they might be able to carry them out and become pleasing to me but displeasing to the devil. 10 Because of the love I bore for the human race, I came into the world and took flesh of the Virgin. I myself taught them the way of salvation in word and deed. To show them perfect charity and love, I opened up heaven for them by means of my own blood.

11 But how do those people who are my enemies treat me now? They despise my precepts. They cast me out of their hearts like a horrible poison. They even spit me out of their mouths like something rotten. They abhor the very sight of me like that of a stinking leper. 12 Yet they embrace the devil and his works with all their affection and in their every deed. They introduce him into their hearts by doing his will with pleasure and delight and following his evil suggestions. 13 Therefore, by my just judgment, they will have their reward in hell together with the devil forever without end. In return for the pride they practice, they will have eternal shame and embarrassment to such an extent that angels and demons will say of them: 'They are filled to the brim with shame.' 14 In return for their insatiable greed, each devil of hell will fill them with his deadly venom to such an extent that there will be no room left in their souls that is not filled with diabolical venom. 15 In return for the lust with which they burn like brute animals, they will never be admitted to the sight of my face but will be separated from me and even deprived of their own unrestrained desire.

16 Know, too, that, just as every mortal sin is very grave, so too if a person delights in venial sin with the intention of persevering, it will become mortal. 17 Understand, accordingly, that two sins—which I will now name to you—are being practiced that bring with them other sins all of which seem to be venial, as it were, but, because the people delight in persevering in them, they therefore become mortal. People commit many other abhorrent sins in the city of Naples, but I do not wish to mention them to you by name.

18 The first of the two sins is that they paint the faces of rational human creatures in the various colors in which insensible images and idolatrous statues are painted. They do so in order to appear more beautiful to others than I made them. 19 The second sin is that the bodies of men and women are changed from their natural state by the indecent styles of dress people use. They do this

4. "He fell from heaven"; cf. chapter 19.22.

out of pride and in order to appear to have more beautiful and sensual bodies than the ones I, God, created for them, and also so that those who see them might be more easily excited and inflamed with carnal concupiscence. 20 You may therefore be fully certain that as often as they daub their faces with artificial makeup and coloring,⁵ they lose something of the infusion of the Holy Spirit, and the devil draws nearer to them. 21 As often as they adorn themselves in indecent and inappropriate dress and thus change the shape of their bodies, the adornment of their souls is diminished and the power of the devil is increased.

22 O my enemies, you who act in this way and brazenly commit other sins against my will, why have you forgotten my passion? Why do you not consider in your hearts how I stood naked, bound and cruelly scourged at a column?⁶ Or how I stood naked and cried out on the cross, full of wounds and dressed in blood? 23 When you paint and anoint your faces, why do you not look at my face and see how it was full of blood? You do not consider how my eyes were darkened and covered in blood and tears or how my eyelids turned livid. 24 Why do you not look at my mouth, my ears, and my beard or notice how they were discolored⁷ and dyed with blood? You do not consider how the rest of my body was terribly bruised or how I hung pale and dead on the cross for your sakes. 25 I became an abject and derided spectacle for everyone there in order that you might love me, your God, by recalling this and pondering on it, and so escape the snares of the evil in which you have become horribly entangled.

26 All this is forgotten and neglected in your eyes and in your hearts. This is why you act like harlots, loving carnal pleasure and delight but without offspring. 27 When they feel a living infant in their wombs, they immediately procure an abortion with herbs⁸ or other means so that they may not miss their carnal pleasure and continual, wretched delight but instead be constantly giving themselves over to disgusting lust and carnal intercourse. 28 That is how you behave.

I, God, your Creator and Redeemer, visit everyone with my grace, knocking on all your hearts,⁹ because I love everyone. 29 But when you feel any infusion of my Spirit knocking on your heart or feel any compunction or conceive any good intention while listening to my words, you immediately procure a spiritual abortion by excusing your sins and taking pleasure in them, even culpably desiring to persevere in them. 30 So you fulfill the will of the devil. You shut him up in your hearts but cast me out in scorn. Thus you are without me, and I am not with you. You are not in me but in the devil, because you obey his will and suggestions.

5. "Artificial make-up and coloring"; cf. 4 Kings (2 Kings) 9:30, Jeremiah 4:30; and see the note to chapter 11.17.

6. "Scourged at a column": see the note to Book VI 10.10.

7. "Discolored" renders "decolorata" of Gh and several manuscripts; cf. Sw. "stankt" [flecked]; the variant adopted (with some hesitation) in the critical edition is "dolorata" [filled with pain].

8. "Procure an abortion with herbs": on this practice in medieval times, see Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*, p. 133.

9. "Knocking on all your hearts"; cf. Song of Songs 5:2; Apocalypse 3:20.

31 I have already spoken of my judgment. Now I will also speak of my mercy. My mercy is this: that none of my enemies is so a great sinner that my mercy would be denied him or her, if it is asked for with a humble and perfect heart. 32 My enemies must, accordingly, do three things if they want to reconcile themselves to my grace and friendship. 33 The first is to repent and have whole-hearted contrition for having offended me, their Creator and Redeemer. The second is pure, frequent, and humble confession made before their confessor. 34 In this way they will make up for all their sins through penance and atonement according to the advice and discretion of their confessors. Then I will draw near to them and the devil will depart from them. 35 Once they have done this with devotion and perfect charity, the third thing they should do is to go to communion and receive my body with the intention of never falling back into their former sins but of persevering in virtue until the end.

36 If anyone reforms himself in this way, I will run to him as a father to his roving child¹⁰ and welcome him back into my grace with more joy than they can ask for or imagine. 37 Then will I be in him and he in me.¹¹ He will live and rejoice with me forever. But my justice will undoubtedly descend on him who perseveres in his sins and wickedness.

38 As a fisherman,¹² watching the fish playing in the water in glee and delight, casts his hook into the sea and then reels it in, catching them in turns, not all at once but a few at a time, throwing them then to their death until he has made off with all of them, thus I will deal with my enemies who persevere in sin. 39 I will make off with them a few at a time from the present worldly life in which they find temporary, sensual delight. 40 At the moment when they least suspect it,¹³ when they are living at the height of their pleasure, then I shall snatch them from their earthly life and throw them into eternal death where they will never more behold my face, because they preferred doing their own disordered and corrupt will to fulfilling my will and commandments.”

41 After this was seen and heard, the vision disappeared.

✠ Chapter 28

The People of Naples Maltreat their Servants and Sanction Witchcraft

DATE: 1373, NAPLES

A revelation from the Virgin Mary, received by Lady Birgitta in the city of Naples and addressed to Lord Bernard, the archbishop of Naples.

The revelation rebukes those who do not instruct their infidel servants

10. “Run to him as a father to his roving child”; cf. Luke 15:20.

11. “I will be in him and he in me”; cf. John 15:5; 6:57–58.

12. “Fisherman”; cf. Ecclesiastes 9:12 The image is used by Birgitta in the sense of the destruction of sinners, as opposed to the New Testament use, on the salvation of the elect (thus Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 312).

13. “The moment when they least suspect it”; cf. Matthew 24:36–44.

or slaves, newly converted to the faith, in Catholic faith and Christian law. The Virgin Mary also censures those masters who mistreat their servants and are unreasonably severe with them. She also threatens fortune-tellers, sorcerers, and soothsayers with great punishments as well as those who support them and put trust in them.

1 The bride of Christ writes to Lord Bernard,¹ archbishop of Naples, saying: “Reverend Father and Sir! When the person, whom you know well, was praying and was held in the rapture of contemplation, the Virgin Mary appeared and said:

2 ‘I am the Queen of heaven who am speaking to you. I am like the gardener of this world.’² 3 When a gardener sees a mighty wind rising that can harm the plants and trees of his garden, he quickly runs and ties them to sturdy supports, as well as he can. In various ways he helps them according to his ability so that the onrushing wind does not unhappily break or uproot them. I, the mother of mercy, do the same in the garden of this world. 4 When I see the dangerous winds of the devil’s temptations and malign suggestions blowing in human hearts, I run to my Lord and my God, my Son Jesus Christ, and help them with my prayers. I beg him 5 to pour into their hearts a holy infusion of the Holy Spirit to uphold and strengthen them safely so that they may remain spiritually protected and unharmed by the wind, and so that the devil may not prevail against them, breaking their souls and pulling them up by the roots in accord with his evil desire. 6 Those who accept my support and aid with a humble heart and effective action are immediately defended from the assault of the devil’s temptations. They remain firm in the state of grace and bear sweet fruit for God and for me in due season.³ 7 Those, however, who scorn my Son’s forewarnings and my spiritual support are swayed by the wind of temptation through their consent to the devil⁴ and in their actions. They are uprooted from the state of grace and led by the devil by means of illicit desires and deeds to the depths of eternal punishment and the shadows of hell.

8 Now you should know that there are many different, horrible, and hidden sins being committed in the city of Naples, which I am not going to recount for you. However, I will now tell you of two kinds of manifest sins that greatly displease my Son and myself and all the court of heaven.

9 The first is that many people in this city purchase pagans and infidels for their service,⁵ and that some of their masters do not even bother to baptize them or wish to convert them to the Christian faith. 10 Even if some of them do get baptized, their masters no more bother to have them instructed and

1. “Lord Bernard”: see chapters 12 and 27.

2. “Gardener of this world”: unusually, Mary refers to herself as a gardener, in the masculine form, a description that would more normally be expected of Jesus (cf. John 20:15) or God (1 Corinthians 3:9); see Tjader Harris, Kezel, and Nyberg, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 312.

3. “In due season”; cf. Psalm 31 (32):6; 144 (145):15.

4. “Through their consent to the devil” renders “per dyaboli consensum”: we thus follow the editor’s amendment of “per dyabolicum sensum” in most manuscripts and “dyaboli consensu” in the pi group and Gh.

5. “For their service”: slavery had formally been outlawed in Sweden in 1335 but it was slower to disappear in southern Europe.

formed in the Christian faith after their baptism, preparing them for the reception of the sacraments of the church, than they did before their baptism and conversion. 11 So it happens that these servants commit many sins after their conversion to the faith but do not know how to return to the sacraments of penance and communion and be restored to a state of salvation, divine reconciliation, and grace.

12 Again, some of them keep their women servants or slaves in such shameful abasement as if they were dogs, selling them and, what is even worse, frequently placing them in brothels for the sake of base and abominable profit. 13 Others keep them in their homes as whores for themselves or others, and this is extremely abominable and loathsome to God and to myself and all the court of heaven. 14 Other masters mistreat their servants with such insults and blows and deal so harshly with them that some of them become desperate and want to kill themselves.

15 Their sins and negligence are greatly displeasing to God and to all the court of heaven. God himself loves these slaves, because he created them. In order that all might be saved, he came into the world, taking flesh from me, and endured his passion and death on the cross.

16 Know, too, that those who purchase such pagans and infidels with the intention of making them Christians and with a desire of instructing and forming them in the Christian faith and virtues, intending to grant them their freedom during their lifetimes or at their masters' deaths so that these servants will not belong to their heirs, all such masters will be given a great reward for this and are acceptable before God. 17 But you may be fully certain that those who do the contrary will be severely punished by God.

18 The second kind of sin is that many men and women keep and consult wicked fortune-tellers and soothsayers as well as base sorcerers in various, improper ways. 19 Sometimes they ask them to pronounce spells and incantations in order that they may conceive and beget offspring. 20 Others request them to perform their incantations and charms in order that they may win the intimate love and heartfelt affection of certain men or women or even of their temporal masters. 21 Others look for foreknowledge of future events from the same evil spells. Many also ask them to cure them of their infirmities⁶ through their art of incantation and sorcery.

6. "To cure them of their infirmities": Bergh, *Bok VII*, p. 206, draws attention to an example of witchcraft in the Naples area concerning an elderly lady from Nola, named Picziolella, who was violated every night by an unclean spirit in human form. When all help failed she turned to witchcraft, and a priest named Raymond gave her a magic charm to wear in her hair. Birgitta persuaded the woman to throw the charm away, and she began to fast and pray and receive communion. The canonization interrogators received a written document containing the count of Nola's personal testimony as to the truth of this incident. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 234–35.

22 All these, both those who maintain such wicked soothsayers and sorcerers in their household and at their own expense and those who turn to such sorcerers for wicked counsels and diabolical remedies, as well as those same soothsayers and sorcerers who promise such services, all of them are wicked and detestable in God's sight. 23 So long as they continue in such a state and purpose, no inspiration or grace of the Holy Spirit will ever descend on them or enter their hearts. 24 However, those who repent and humbly mend their ways with the resolution to sin no more will obtain grace and mercy from my Son.⁷

After this was heard, the vision disappeared."⁷

✠ Chapter 29

A Bishop¹ Worries That He is too Often Absent From his Diocese

DATE: 1373, NAPLES

A certain bishop, the Holy Roman Church's ruler in the province of Ancona in Le Marche, consulted Lady Birgitta because he was bothered in conscience by the fact that he was absent and far removed from his diocese because of his duty in the marquisate where he resided. He could not, therefore, attend to the flock entrusted to him in his own diocese. He wondered whether it would please God more for him to remain in the marquisate or to return and govern the flock entrusted to him in his diocese. At his request the lady was praying for the bishop when Christ appeared to her and spoke the following words to her.

1 May God be blessed in eternity for all his good gifts! Amen. My Lord, most reverend Father,² accept my humble recommendation. You wrote to me with humility to request me, a woman unknown to you, to pray humbly to God on your behalf. 2 To this I reply and say to you truly that my conscience tells me that I, a sorry and unworthy sinner, am unfit for the task. 3 You wrote to me requesting spiritual advice for the good of your soul. For this reason, with regard for your faith and humility and with fatherly love, God has wished to compensate your desires and your trust, considering not my sins but the heartfelt affection of the one entreating him so humbly. 4 I am a sinful woman and unworthy of such things, but when I was praying to my Lord Jesus Christ for

7. "The vision disappeared": In a letter dated 18 July 1373, only a few days before Birgitta's death, Bernard tells Birgitta that her predictions have been fulfilled, and in a postscript, he requests of Master Petrus to ask Birgitta for further advice, and to have copies made of some of her revelations. See <http://www.ra.se/ra/diplomat.html> (*Svenskt Diplomatarium*), brevnummer (letter number) 10387.

1. "Bishop," i.e., John of Oleggio (thus Collijn, *Birgittinska gestalter*, p. 46 and Undhagen, *Book I*, pp. 77 and 252).

2. "Most reverend Father": The syntax of this revelation is more complex than in other revelations, and there are suggestions of a carefully worded exchange of letters behind the divine message that conveys some harsh criticism.

you the day before yesterday, he himself appeared to me in spirit and addressed me with a parable, saying:

5 “You to whom it is given to hear and see spiritually, pay attention now. You can be certain that all the bishops and abbots and even other ecclesial prelates and beneficiaries entrusted with the care of souls who, leaving their churches and my flocks entrusted to them, receive and hold other offices and governing assignments with the intention and aim of gaining more human honor from those offices and being exalted and raised up to a higher position in the world, 6 even if they as office-holders do not steal or loot or commit any other injustice there, nevertheless, because they pride themselves on and take delight in their titles and honors, leaving my flocks and their churches because of it, these men in my sight are like pigs dressed up in pontifical or priestly trappings. 7 Imagine what would happen if a great lord had invited his friends to a dinner,³ and then at dinner-time pigs dressed like that entered the palace in the sight of the lord and those seated at his table. 8 The lord tried to give them fine food from his table, but the pigs made a great clamor and noise, squealing their refusal with their piggish voices, declining to eat those fine dishes but eagerly longing to eat vile husks⁴ more to their piggish taste. 9 When the lord saw and understood this, he was disgusted at their vile filthiness and told his servants in great anger and indignation: 10 “Take them from the palace and throw them out so they may eat and have their sordid fill of the pig-food they deserve! They neither want nor are worthy to eat the dishes prepared for my friends.”

11 From this, my most reverend Father and Sir, I understood then in spirit that you should act in accordance with what you see in your conscience, whether or not the sheep of Christ entrusted to your episcopacy are being well governed spiritually in your absence. 12 However, if they are being so well governed in your absence in a way suitably conducive to the benefit and good of their souls and, moreover, if you see that you can do greater honor to God and benefit to souls by governing the province than in your diocese, 13 then I tell you that you can well and licitly remain in your office as provincial governor in accordance with the will of God, so long as you are not being seduced into staying by the desire of honor or the vain boasting in the office itself. 14 If your conscience tells you the contrary, then I advise you to leave your provincial duties and return to living in the church and diocese entrusted to you in order to govern your sheep, or rather Christ’s sheep specially entrusted to you, and to nourish them by your words, example, and deeds, not negligently or defectively like a worthless hireling, but in a diligent and virtuous manner like a true and good shepherd.⁵

3. “Lord . . . friends to a dinner”; cf. Matthew 22:1–10.

4. “To eat vile husks”; cf. Luke 15:16. Birgitta describes degenerate courtly manners using similar imagery in a letter to her son Birger; see volume 1, p. 169.

5. “Like a true and good shepherd”; cf. John 10:11–14.

15 My lord, forgive me, an ignorant woman and an unworthy sinner, for writing such things to you. I pray to our good and true shepherd, who condescended to die for his sheep, to grant you the grace of the Holy Spirit so that you may worthily govern your flock and always carry out his glorious and most holy will until death.

✠ Chapter 30

Christ in Majesty Bids all Ranks of People to Listen to his Message

DATE: 1373, NAPLES

The Judge complains to the bride about all sinners in every class and condition, describing the kind deeds he has done for them along with their ingratitude. He threatens them with the terrible sentence of his wrath, but admonishes them to convert to him, saying that he will welcome them with a father's mercy.

1 I saw a palace, great as the clear skies above. The army of the heavenly host was there, as countless as particles of the sun, with a brilliance like the rays of the sun. 2 On a wonderful throne in the palace there sat a human person, a Lord of incredible beauty and immense power, whose wonderful garments were of an indescribable splendor. 3 Before him who sat on the throne¹ stood a Virgin who outshone the sun.² All the heavenly host standing there paid reverent honor to her as the queen of heaven. He who sat on the throne opened his mouth and said:

4 "Hear ye,³ all my enemies living in the world, for I am not speaking to my friends who obey my will. Hear ye, all priests, archbishops, bishops, and all those of lower rank in the church! 5 Hear ye, kings and princes and judges of the earth⁴ and all servants! Hear ye, women, princesses and all ladies and maid-servants! Everyone of any condition and rank, all those great and small who inhabit the earth, all of you, hear the words that I, your Creator, address to you now. 6 My complaint⁵ is that you have gone away from me and placed your trust in the devil, my enemy. You have abandoned my commandments but obeyed the will of the devil and listened to his suggestions. 7 You have no regard for the fact that I, immutable and eternal God, your Creator, descended from heaven to the Virgin, receiving from her a body and living in your midst.⁶ Through my very self I opened for you the way to heaven and told you how to get there. 8 I

1. "Him who sat on the throne"; cf. Apocalypse 4:9; 5:13, 6:16, 21:5.

2. "Who outshone the sun"; cf. Apocalypse 12:1.

3. "Hear ye": this passage, calling on all groups to listen to the divinely revealed message for reform, is an appropriate climax to the Books of *Revelationes* collectively.

4. "Princes and judges of the earth"; cf. Wisdom 6:2.

5. "My complaint": see the note to chapter 19.9.

6. "Living in your midst"; cf. Baruch 3:38.

was stripped naked and scourged and crowned with thorns. I was stretched out so forcibly on the cross that almost all the sinews and joints of my body were breaking. I heard every kind of insult and endured the most contemptible death and the most bitter sorrow of heart for the sake of your salvation. 9 For none of this, o my enemies, do you show any regard. You have indeed been deceived. Thus you bear the yoke and burden⁷ of the devil with its false delight. You do not even know or realize it until the pain of the immense burden overtakes you. 10 Nor is this enough for you: so great is your pride that, if you could, you would gladly try to rise above me. So great is your carnal lust that you would rather lose me than let go of your disordered pleasure. 11 Moreover, your greed is as insatiable as a perforated sack, for there is nothing that can satisfy it.

12 Therefore, I swear by my divinity that if you die in the state in which you now find yourselves, you will never see my face.⁸ Instead, in return for your pride, you will be so deeply submerged in hell that all the devils will be on top of you, oppressing you without relief. 13 In return for your lust you will be filled with horrible, diabolic venom. In return for your greed you will be filled with pain and anguish and share in all the evil there is in hell.

14 O my enemies—abominable, thankless, degenerate! I seem to you like a worm, dead in the winter cold. So you do as you like, and you prosper. Therefore I will arise in the summer heat,⁹ and then you will fall silent¹⁰ and will not escape my hand.

15 Nevertheless, o my enemies, since I redeemed you with my blood and seek nothing but your souls, therefore, come back to me in humility and I will welcome you with joy as my children. 16 Shake off from yourselves the heavy yoke of the devil and be mindful of my charity, and you will see in your consciences that I am gentle and meek.”¹¹

✠ Chapter 31

A Prophecy of Birgitta's Death, with Some Concluding Messages

DATE: 19 AND 23 JULY 1373, ROME

In Rome Christ speaks to his bride, blessed Birgitta, and foretells for her the day and manner of her death, instructing her on what should be done with the books of revelations. He also says that, when he shall so please, there will be many in the world who will receive them with devotion and obtain his grace. The Lord also makes provisions for the burial of the body of his bride.

7. “The yoke and burden”; cf. Matthew 11:30.

8. “You will never see my face”; cf. Apocalypse 22:4; Acts 20:25, 38.

9. “I seem to you like a worm . . . winter cold”; cf. Psalm 21(22):7.

10. “You will fall silent”; cf. Psalm 75 (76): 9–10.

11. “I am gentle and meek”; cf. Matthew 29: 29–30.

1 Five days before the passing of Lady Birgitta,¹ often called the bride of Christ, it happened that our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her in front of the altar in her room.² With a joyful face, he said to her: 2 “I have treated you as a bridegroom normally does. He hides himself from his bride so that he may be more ardently desired by her. Thus I have not visited you with any consolations during this time, because it was the time of your trial. 3 Therefore, now that you have already been tried, go and make yourself ready, for it is now time to fulfill my promise: you shall be clothed and consecrated as a nun before my altar. From now on you will not only be considered as my bride but also as a nun and a mother in Vadstena.³ 4 However, know that you will leave your body here in Rome until it can come to the place prepared for it, because it pleases me to spare you from your labors and accept your intention in place of its effect.”

5 He turned then to Rome as though in complaint and said: “O my Rome, my Rome,⁴ the pope scorns you and pays no heed to my words but accepts doubts for certainties. Therefore he shall hear my reed⁵ no more, since he makes the time of my mercy subject to his own choosing.”

6 Then he said to the bride: “Tell the prior to deliver all my words in all the revelations to his brothers and to my bishop,⁶ to whom I will give the zeal of my Spirit and whom I will fill with my grace. 7 Know that, when it so pleases me, those people will come who will with joy and pleasure receive the words of these heavenly revelations that have been made to you up to now, and all the things told to you will be fulfilled. 8 Though my grace has been withheld from many people due to their ingratitude, others, however, will come who will take their place and obtain my grace.

9 Among the final words of the revelations made to you, there should be put that common and universal revelation⁷ that I granted you in Naples. For my sentence will be carried out on all those peoples who do not return to me in humility, as it was shown to you there.”

1. “Five days before the passing of Lady Birgitta”: assuming the classical method of calculating time, this means 19 July (she died on 23 July), 1373. Large parts of this vision are given verbatim in the *Vita* and canonization testimonies; cf. Collijn, *Acta et processus*, pp. 101, 506, 566.

2. “In her room”: the room in which she died is still to be seen in the house at Piazza Farnese, Rome, which is now the house of the main Birgittine convent of the reformed branch of the Birgittines that were founded by Elisabeth Hesselblad in 1911.

3. “As a nun and a mother in Vadstena”: this is the first explicit mention of Birgitta’s role as founder of the house in Sweden. Although she did not live to see the foundation of Vadstena, her daughter Katherina became the first abbess there. Cf. *Extravagantes* 67.6.

4. “O my Rome, my Rome”; cf. Matthew 23: 37–39. This section on the papacy in exile is discreetly omitted in the *Vita*.

5. “Reed” renders “fistulam”: a tube, or a musical instrument. One of several images used by Birgitta to describe herself as a mediator of divine communications: see for example Book III 30, Book IV 100.

6. “The prior . . . and to my bishop”: the “prior” may be Prior Petrus; the “bishop” may be Nicolaus Hermann, bishop of Linköping, who was revered as a local saint and whose relics were officially enshrined in 1515. Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna*, p. 51 notes that a witness in Nicolaus’s process for canonization links his name to this revelation; and in mentioning him here, Birgitta may be urging the case for the establishment of her order on Swedish soil. The other possibility is that “my bishop” refers (here as in chapter 11.22) to Alfonso of Jaén.

7. “That common and universal revelation”: a particular revelation, chapter 30, is singled out for its special message in this crowning message to Birgitta.

10 After this was said, as well as much else not recorded here,⁸ the bride of Christ made mention of some persons living with her and gave certain instructions, saying she had seen them before death in the presence of God.

11 After that, the Lord added: “On the morning of the fifth day, after you have received the sacraments, call the persons living with you whom I have just mentioned to you, and tell them one by one what they should do. 12 Thus amid their words and in their arms you will enter into your monastery, that is, into my joy, and your body will be placed in Vadstena.”

13 When the fifth day approached, Christ appeared to her again at dawn and consoled her. After Mass was said and she had received the sacraments with great reverence and devotion, in the arms of the aforesaid persons, she gave up her spirit.

8. “Much else not recorded here”; cf. John 20:30.

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Bibliography Volume 3

Note: Scandinavian characters (which occur at the end of the alphabet in the Scandinavian languages) are listed as follows: å=aa, ä=ae, ö =oe, ø=oe.

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General Index

The index includes names and subjects that are referred to in the Introductions and Notes, and provides a rudimentary list of the major themes and images that occur in Books VI–VII. Full indexes of place names, personal names, biblical citations, subjects, and images will be included in Volume 4.

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