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THE CHRISTIAN KINGDOM AS AN IMAGE OF THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM  
ACCORDING TO ST. BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN

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## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

“Habent tamen corpora omnia ad invisibilia bona similitudinem aliquam.”  
– Richard of St. Victor, *Benjamin major II*, 12<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.1. Thesis and Aim of this Study

In his recent book on Scandinavian crusading history, Dick Harrison wrote of St. Birgitta: “According to the future saint, kingdoms, duchies and counties were insignificant in God’s eyes, only Christendom itself was significant.”<sup>2</sup> Birgitta’s ideas of politics and patriotism undoubtedly were much different from ours, but were political structures altogether insignificant for her? And what did she actually say about the relation of these structures to Christendom as a whole? This study is an attempt to discuss these questions as Birgitta describes them in her *Revelationes celestes*.

The thesis of this study is that the idea of Christian community is an important subject of St. Birgitta’s *Revelationes celestes*, especially in relation to structures of political power on the one hand and to the heavenly community of saints on the other. Birgitta was an advisor to King Magnus Eriksson for many years, until she left Sweden. Later, she became active supporter of the pope’s return to Rome and gave her prophetic advice to a number of Christian rulers.

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<sup>1</sup> PL 196, 90. *Benjamin major*, also known as *De Arca mystica*, has not yet been critically edited.

<sup>2</sup> “In det blivande helgonets ögon var riken, hertigdömen och grevskap oväsentliga i Guds ögon; det enda väsentliga var kristenheten som sådan.” Dick Harrison, *Gud vill det! Nordiska korsfarare under medeltiden* (Stockholm: Ordfront förlag, 2005), 475.

Despite this great activity, she is not considered a political thinker, nor is she granted a prominent place in the history of medieval political theory. This is because of the very specific character of Birgitta's revelations, which indeed are difficult to classify as political thought. In my opinion, Birgitta never attempted to be a theorist; on the contrary, she acted as a prophetess, addressing the Christian rulers in the name of God. The thesis of this study is that her task was to start a great work of reform in the church, beginning with the personal conversion of the individuals responsible for the wellbeing of the community and gradually involving all Christians. She intended this reform to prepare society for the second coming of Christ.

Another element of my thesis is that, despite this highly practical task, Birgitta had a general conceptual view of Christian society as well as its origin, history, and final destination. She also was deeply interested in the relationship between the religious and the political performance of Christian rulers, bishops, and nobles: specifically, the pragmatic exterior and spiritual interior of their activities. Therefore, even if we do not regard Birgitta as a political thinker, we must admit that she is a descendant of a certain political tradition. This tradition has specific Scandinavian marks, but it is also a part of general Christian political theology. *Revelationes celestes* is among the priceless sources that can aid an exploration of this tradition.

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the study of St. Birgitta's texts (*Revelationes* and other parts of the *Corpus Birgittianum*) concerning the Christian kingdom and its relation to the kingdom of heaven. I have set out to achieve a better understanding of the texts at hand, carefully following the thought of the authors, identifying notions and concepts characteristic to the text, and identifying the structure of the authors' thought. I am of the opinion that knowledge of the surrounding historical and ideological context contributes to a better understanding of a



source text. If a theological work is concerned, then, theological analysis is the proper tool for examining this context. Therefore, I have made theological study a part of my research procedure.

## 1.2. Sources and Previous Research

This study does not aspire to be a complete presentation of the subject concerned. Rather, it is a synthesis of what has been already done by the scholars who have previously worked with the Birgittine texts. The originality of this dissertation lies mainly in its research method, described in a separate section of this introduction. I will begin by sketching a short “genealogy” of this dissertation, starting from the medieval interpretations of St. Birgitta’s work, as they introduce the philosophical environment of *Revelationes* and therefore play an important role in its contextualization (see section 1.2.2). Next, I will present the modern research concerning the text in three subsections, as *Revelationes celestes* is discussed mostly within the fields of philology and the history of literature (literature studies), history, or theology. This division can by no means be regarded as complete and absolute, since these disciplines are largely interconnected and often overlap (see section 1.2.3).

### 1.2.1. The Text of *Revelationes* and Its Contributors

The main source of my research is the text of *Corpus Birgittianum*, which includes *Revelationes celestes* by St. Birgitta of Sweden, and the *Opera minora*,<sup>3</sup> another work Birgitta authored with the help of her advisors and confessors.<sup>4</sup> In this study, the text in its present Latin

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<sup>3</sup> *Opera minora* include: *Sermo angelicus*, lections about the life of Virgin Mary, intended to be a part of the liturgy of hours in Vadstena monastery, *Regula Salvatoris*, the rule of Birgittine order in its original form, *Quattuor Orationes*, the four prayers of St. Birgitta, and *Revelationes Extravagantes*, a series of revelations excluded from the eight books of *Revelationes celestes*.

<sup>4</sup> About the authorship of *Revelationes* and my attitude towards this question, see section 1.3.2.

form is in focus.<sup>5</sup> I have worked with the modern critical edition of St. Birgitta's writings, published by The Swedish Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities with Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet between 1956 and 2002. A number of philologists authored the critical edition; among them are Hans Aili, Birger Bergh, Sten Eklund, Arne Jönsson, Lennart Hollman, and Carl-Gustaf Undhagen. I also have consulted the electronic edition of *Revelationes* based on the above critical text. Sarah Risberg edited the electronic version, published by Riksarkivet in Stockholm.

The textual history of *Revelationes celestes* is quite complex, as the original reports of visions—written or dictated by Birgitta—were translated from Old Swedish into Latin, then edited and re-edited by Birgitta or her confessors. Therefore, the final Latin version of the text includes remarks and contributions of at least four persons other than Birgitta Birgersdotter: Magister Mathias of Linköping, Petrus of Alvastra, Petrus of Skänninge, and Alfonso de Jaén.<sup>6</sup>

From this group, two men left written apologies for Birgitta's visions: Magister Mathias, who advised Birgitta in Sweden, and Alfonso de Jaén, who guided her in Rome. Their accounts are particularly important for reconstructing the context of *Revelationes*, but they can also be read as an interpretation of the text made by its contributors.

Magister Mathias, a canon of Linköping diocese chapter, was a leading theologian of fourteenth-century Scandinavia.<sup>7</sup> Together with St. Birgitta, he is the most influential

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<sup>5</sup> The eight books of revelations are the central part of *Corpus Birgittianum*. *Opera minora* have similar visionary character. Therefore, I often use the word "*Revelationes*" as synonymous with "the work of St. Birgitta".

<sup>6</sup> For the further clarification of the subject and a short bibliography of the textual history of *Revelationes* see the next section, "Research method".

<sup>7</sup> The below passage concerning Magister Mathias is based on: Anders Piltz, "Magister Mathias of Sweden in his theological context: A preliminary survey," in *The Editing of Theological and Philosophical Texts from the Middle Ages*, ed. Monika Asztalos (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1986), 137-160; Anders Piltz, "Nostram

representative of medieval Swedish literature and theology. Educated in Paris as *magister in sacra pagina*, he served as a confessor and spiritual adviser to St. Birgitta for a number of years before she left Sweden in 1348. He probably died in 1350. Not all of his works survive. Those preserved to the present day include a commentary on the book of Apocalypse; *Homo conditus*, a theological compendium for preachers; *Copia exemplorum*, an anthology of exempla useful in preaching; and *Aphabetum distinctionum*, a Bible concordance or, rather, encyclopedia. This work has survived only in fragments, as the manuscript was largely destroyed in the sixteenth century. Mathias is also author of *Testa nucis* and *Poetria*, two important treatises on poetic art and the art of translation, based on Aristotle's *Poetics*. His works were known and studied in Europe: Bernardino of Siena owned a copy of Mathias's commentary on the apocalypse, and we also know that Nicolas of Cusa valued his work.

The influence of Magister Mathias's books on *Revelationes* is evident, although we still lack a detailed study of the mutual influence the works may have exercised upon one another.

Mathias's opposition to the unorthodox doubting of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist can be interpreted as a polemic with Averroist theories. This subject is touched upon in *Revelationes* as well. Birgitta did not mention Averroes, but she strongly supported the belief in the Eucharistic presence of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Another important theological question of Birgitta's time was

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naturam sublimaverat: den liturgiska och teologiska bakgrunden till det birgittinska mariaofficiet," in *Maria i Sverige under tusen år: föredrag vid symposiet i Vadstena 6-10 oktober 1994*, ed. Sven-Erik Brodd and Alf Härdelin (Skellefteå: Artos, 1996), 255-287; Anders Piltz, *Prolegomena till en textkritisk edition av magister Mathias' Homo conditus* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1974); Bengt Strömberg, "Magister Mathias' ställning till tidens heretiska strömningar," *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* 19 (1943): 301-322; Hjalmar Sundén, "Den heliga Birgitta och hennes biktfar, magister Mathias," *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 73 (1973): 15-39.

<sup>8</sup> "Et tunc ipsa in oracione audiuit vocem dicentem sibi, . . . 'Propterea confessor tuus congregatis omnibus inhabitantibus in domo ista et vicinis dicat eis ista verba, . . . "Nec dicatis, quod in altari nichil aliud immolatur nisi una tortella panis, sed firmiter credite, quod ibi est vere corpus Dei crucifixum in cruce"' (VI, 78. 2 and 4 and 8). In the revelation, this sentence belongs to Christ's statement. Through Birgitta, he gives advice to her confessor about the

the status of the human soul after death. In 1336, in his bulla *Benedictus Deus*, Pope Benedict XII stated that the saints enjoy *visio beatifica* immediately after death and do not dwell in an interim place until the Last Judgment. Mathias supported this thesis, as did St. Birgitta (VI, 75. 1–12). They were also both involved in polemic with the superstitious belief in destiny, or fortune, as they called it.<sup>9</sup> Mathias explained that only God in his providence governs time and human lives; impersonal, omnipotent destiny does not exist. Both Mathias and Birgitta also upheld the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin,<sup>10</sup> which was a subject of polemic between Franciscan and Dominican theologians at the time. The two Swedes supported the Franciscan party, even though one would be unlikely to find any direct quotations from Duns Scotus in Mathias's works. St. Bonaventure more greatly influenced him. However, in other subjects Mathias followed both the secular and Dominican masters: he was probably an adherent to Henry of Ghent and, in other aspects, to Hervaeus Natalis, his contemporary master from Paris, who belonged to the order of St. Dominic.

It is thus likely that Mathias influenced Birgitta. It is also possible that the influence was mutual. According to *Revelationes*, in at least one instance Magister Mathias asked Birgitta for her advice (or, rather, for God's advice through her mediation) while commenting on the book of Apocalypse (VI, 89. 1–5), but it is possible that he consulted her more often.<sup>11</sup>

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way of preaching to certain people who lacked faith. The confessor could be perhaps identified with Magister Mathias, as the subjects of the sermon belong to his field of interest.

<sup>9</sup> "Nec dicatis, quod fortuna facit ista vel illa, sed quia Deus sic permisit" (VI, 78. 7).

<sup>10</sup> Mary speaks about the beginning of her life: "Facto autem corpore meo Deus a diuinitate sua animam creatam immisit corpori, et mox anima cum corpore sanctificata est, quam angeli custodiebant et seruabant die ac nocte" (I, 9. 4).

<sup>11</sup> See revelation 75 in Book VI describing Birgitta's vision given her in response to her prayer for Mathias. In this revelation Mathias' reaction to Birgitta's advice is not mentioned.

The first book of Birgitta's revelations is introduced by Magister Mathias's prologue. In this short text, known by its first words, "Stuport et mirabilia," he depicts Birgitta as a prophetess of the Last Days and compares her to the Old Testament prophets. According to Mathias, Birgitta is the voice of God's mercy, preceding his great judgment. He rebukes the Swedish nobility, the possible addressees of this prologue, for neglecting the chance for conversion God had given them through the person of Birgitta. In this short text, Mathias employed his authority as a theologian and master of spiritual life in order to support the visionary calling of Birgitta.

In the initial stage of her visionary mission, after the death of her husband, Ulf,<sup>12</sup> Birgitta lived in the Cistercian cloister in Alvastra.<sup>13</sup> Both Birgitta and Ulf were spiritually bound to the Alvastra congregation and he was probably a Cistercian lay brother as well. At this time, Magister Mathias was still guiding Birgitta, but the prior of the Cistercian community, Petrus Olavi, also began to assist her. He accompanied Bishop Hemming of Åbo, who travelled to the kings of England and France, presenting them with the revelations of St. Birgitta and calling both parties to end the Hundred Years' War. Prior Petrus had already become Birgitta's close adviser, but his influence grew stronger when she left Sweden for Rome, where Prior Petrus was the leading Swedish priest in Birgitta's circle. Along with Magister Petrus Olavi of Skänninge, he translated her revelations into Latin. According to Lennart Hollman, the author of the critical edition of *Revelationes extravagantes*, Prior Petrus also was responsible for editing this book of revelations.

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<sup>12</sup> Isak Collijn, ed., *Acta et processus canonisationis beate Birgitte* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Bogtryckeri, 1924-1931), 479 (further referred as A&P).

<sup>13</sup> Birgitta stayed in the monastery as a guest, not a member of the community, since Alvastra was a male congregation.

In this volume, he collected the texts excluded from the previous version (the already-existing seven books of *Revelationes*).<sup>14</sup>

Prior Petrus became an advocate for Birgitta's canonization. He and Magister Petrus of Skänninge wrote the official *vita* of Birgitta that was used in the process.<sup>15</sup> Because he knew her Swedish surroundings very well, his testimony was an important source of information about Birgitta's childhood and family. To some extent, the Cistercian influence on Birgitta's spirituality and, consequently, on the text of her revelations,<sup>16</sup> can be ascribed to Prior Petrus. This influence is also visible in the *Rule of the Birgittine Order*,<sup>17</sup> accompanied by *Addiciones Prioris Petri*, the statutes of the Order.<sup>18</sup>

Another important person in Birgitta's circle was Magister Petrus Olavi of Skänninge, a priest in the Linköping diocese.<sup>19</sup> Birgitta would have been unable to communicate her messages if not through the mediation of the Swedish priests. They gave her necessary help, providing not only knowledge but also the translation skills she needed. Magister Petrus already had become

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<sup>14</sup> Lennart Hollman, "Texthistoria," in *Den heliga Birgittas Reuelaciones Extrauagantes* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956), 28-29.

<sup>15</sup> A&P, 73-102.

<sup>16</sup> James France, "Bridget Gathers Cistercian Flowers," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Salzburg Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1993), 1:29-48; James France, "From Bernard to Bridget Cistercian contribution to a unique Scandinavian monastic body," in *Bernardus Magister: Papers Presented at the Nonacentenary Celebration of the Birth of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Sponsored by the Institute of Cistercian Studies, Western Michigan University, 10-13 May 1990*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 479-495.

<sup>17</sup> Tore Nyberg, "Bemerkungen zum Benediktinischen und Zisterziensischen Einfluss auf die Satzungen des Birgittenordens," *Révue bénédictine* 83, no. 3-4 (1973): 351-382.

<sup>18</sup> Henrik Vitalis, "Addiciones prioris Petri - on Birgittine rules and regulations," in *A Catalogue and Its Users. A Symposium on the Uppsala C Collection of Medieval Manuscripts*, ed. Monica Hedlund (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1995), 47-56; Sara Risberg, ed. *Liber usuum fratrum monasterii Vadstenensis: The customary of the Vadstena Brothers* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003), 10.

<sup>19</sup> For details about the life of Magister Petrus see: Helge Nordahl, *Magister Petrus Olavi af Skänninge: Den heliga Birgittas andliga vägledare* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2007).

her adviser in Sweden. He followed her to Italy and acted as the head of her household, translating her revelations until her death. Educated in canon law and theology, he was endowed with a practical mind and organizational skills. In Skänninge, he had been a warden of The Holy Ghost House hospital.<sup>20</sup> Apart from these very practical talents, he was apparently a gifted poet and composer, since he authored the hymns and prayers that, together with *Sermo angelicus*, formed the *Cantus sororum*, the liturgical office of the Birgittine nuns in Vadstena.<sup>21</sup>

The fifth participant of the process of shaping *Revelationes celestes* was Bishop Alfonso Fernández Pecha of Jaén,<sup>22</sup> Birgitta's friend and confessor during her last years in Rome. His noble background and good orientation in public matters, along with his deep piety and enthusiasm for demanding forms of spiritual life (as he himself withdrew from his bishopric to enter an eremitic monastery), made him an ideal companion and adviser to Birgitta. He also became an active supporter of her canonization process and took part in establishing the Vadstena cloister.<sup>23</sup> Shortly before her death, Birgitta asked him to copy the whole body of her revelations, which had been largely kept secret until that time, except for those that circulated as private letters or messages addressed to certain persons.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Nordahl, op.cit., 15-18.

<sup>21</sup> Saint Birgitta and Petrus Olavi of Skänninge, *Officium parvum beate Marie Virginis: Vår Frus tidegård*, ed. Tryggve Lundén (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1976).

<sup>22</sup> For the detailed biography of Alfonso and information about his background see: Hans Torben Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha: Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges—A Mirror of Princes* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993), 27-76.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Colledge, "Epistola solitarii ad reges: Alphonse of Pecha as Organizer of Brigittine and Urbanist Propaganda," *Medieval Studies* 18 (1956): 19-49; Michael Seidlmayer, "Ein Gehilfe der hl. Birgitta von Schweden: Alfons von Jaén," *Historisches Jahrbuch des Görres-Gesellschaft* 50 (1930): 1-18.

<sup>24</sup> Bridget Morris, "General Introduction," in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume I: Liber Caelestis, Books I-III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14-15.

Alfonso's role in creating the final text of *Revelationes* is still a matter of discussion among scholars. It is generally agreed that he added a heading to each revelation and checked the text for any unorthodox fragments or expressions. He also compiled various revelations into three thematic anthologies: *Liber ad reges*, discussing political matters; *Tractatus de summis pontificibus*, concerning the ecclesiastical hierarchy; and *Celeste viridarium*, a collection of revelations particularly useful for the spiritual progress of the members of the Birgittine Order.

Alfonso undoubtedly made an important contribution to the current organization of the text, with its division into the seven books we recognize today; however, specialists continue to debate the details of his work. During her lifetime, Birgitta wrote or dictated some six hundred revelations. They were collected and organized by Magister Mathias in Sweden and by two other Swedish priests in Rome. In 1377 and in 1379 the revelations were presented before two subsequent papal commissions as part of Birgitta's canonization process. We know that Alfonso edited the text before that, but the time, nature, and scope of his edition is open to discussion. According to Henrik Schück and Knut Westman, Prior Petrus and Magister Petrus arranged the text into seven books, and Alfonso then modified these according to his own criteria.<sup>25</sup> Salomon Kraft is of the opinion that Alfonso—not the two Swedes—was responsible for the basic division into seven books and that the contents of the collection presented to the papal commission in 1377 differed from the version presented in 1379.<sup>26</sup> Based on her study of Birgitta's vita and its textual variants, Sara Ekwall states that the work of organizing the text was not finished until Birgitta's

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<sup>25</sup> Henrik Schück, *Några anmärkingar om Birgittas revelationer* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1901), 18-20; Knut B. Westman, *Birgitta-studier* (Uppsala: Uppsala Akademiska boktryckeri, 1911), 1:23.

<sup>26</sup> Salomon Kraft, "Textstudier till Birgittas revelationer," *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* (1929): 59-66.



canonization in 1391.<sup>27</sup> One critic of this theory is Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, who noticed that, in 1378, Alfonso refers to the seven books, *Liber ad reges*, and the *Rule*, citing specific chapter numbers. Moreover, Undhagen supports the traditional opinion held in Vadstena that it was Alfonso, not Prior Petrus or Magister Petrus, who divided the revelations into books and chapters.<sup>28</sup> Arne Jönsson agrees with the early dating of the seven books, suggesting that they may have been prepared as early as 1374 or 1375, before the first papal commission was appointed.<sup>29</sup> Tore Nyberg is of the opinion that the structure of the books was probably well developed at an early stage in their formation, but he states that it was Alfonso who created the final seven books.<sup>30</sup> In the critical edition of *Liber ad reges*, Hans Aili takes for granted that it was Alfonso who compiled the seven books,<sup>31</sup> but he does not discuss his role as a contributor to the text. It is, however, generally acknowledged that Alfonso authored *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, the introduction to *Liber ad reges*, and that he compiled the book itself. He was therefore interested in the political and social ideas in Birgitta's work, which makes him, at least potentially, an important contributor to the thematic aspect of this study.

Again, the scope of his influence on the political ideas expressed in *Revelationes* is uncertain. Hans Torben Gilkær, who recently studied Alfonso's contribution to the political ideas

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<sup>27</sup> Sara Ekwall, *Vår äldsta Birgittavita och dennas viktigaste varianter* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1965), 111.

<sup>28</sup> Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "General Introduction," in *Revelaciones. Book I*, by Saint Birgitta (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978), 14-16.

<sup>29</sup> Arne Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén, His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1989), 94-96.

<sup>30</sup> Tore Nyberg, introduction to *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 39.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Aili, introduction to *Revelaciones VIII: Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, by Saint Birgitta (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2002), 18.

of *Liber ad reges*, does not hesitate to call the book “Alfonso’s Mirror of Princes”<sup>32</sup> and says that the *Liber ad reges* was “compiled by Alfonso in the 1370s on the basis of some of Birgitta’s political revelations.”<sup>33</sup> He describes the book as a separate work, quite independent from the rest of *Revelationes* and from the person of Birgitta Birgersdotter. According to him, the political ideas expressed in *Liber ad reges* are different from those of Birgitta’s autographs, since the general views of *Liber ad reges* are mostly influenced by the Augustinian worldview, while the Old Swedish autographs of Birgitta appear to reflect Thomistic thought and theory of the state.<sup>34</sup>

Michel Seidlmayer, one of the first scholars to study Alfonso’s relationship with Birgitta, pointed out that the omissions Alfonso made while editing the text of *Revelationes* for the papal commissions might have been his important contribution to the text.<sup>35</sup> We know that he excluded some revelations from his editions but that these were presented to the public again as *Revelationes extravagantes*.

According to other scholars, including Arne Jönsson, who critically edited the works of Alfonso, his role was that of a transmitter, not a modulator.<sup>36</sup> He concludes that Alfonso’s alterations do not change the meaning of the text. Bridget Morris also states that Alfonso’s input was mainly stylistic in character, while materially “he does not appear to contribute much, apart from ordering the revelations into eight books and writing headings for all of them.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Gilkær, op. cit., 241.

<sup>33</sup> Gilkær, loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Gilkær, op. cit., 242.

<sup>35</sup> Seidlmayer, op. cit., 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> Arne Jönsson, introduction to *St. Bridget's Revelations to the Popes: An edition of the so-called Tractatus de summis pontificibus* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997), 67.

<sup>37</sup> Morris, op. cit., 34.

The question of Alfonso's influence on the present form of *Revelationes celestes* is one of the most interesting and controversial aspects of the text's history. Unfortunately, at the present stage of research no final conclusions can be drawn about this issue. The same is true regarding the contributions of Magister Mathias, Prior Petrus, and Magister Petrus. However, the main source of my study is the Latin version of *Revelationes* as known since the canonization of Birgitta, printed in 1492 and critically edited. I shall therefore concentrate on the text in its present form and analyze this version. I will not analyze the political ideas of St. Birgitta as opposed to those of Alfonso;<sup>38</sup> rather, I simply will refer to the ongoing discussion.

### 1.2.2. Medieval Commentaries on *Revelationes* and Various Responses to the Book

Even at the time of her canonization process, the editing and shaping of St. Birgitta's work was a subject of interest and study. Many passages in the saint's *vita* as well as in the witnesses' testimonies describe the way Birgitta received her visions and auditions.<sup>39</sup> Several passages also reveal information concerning the role of her advisers in editing the final text. These fragments in *Acta et processus* describe the role of Birgitta's assistants as rather passive, but it is evident that the saint expected them to clarify and present her reports to the public in an understandable and orthodox shape.<sup>40</sup>

The book of *Revelationes* was also examined during the process. Two committees were appointed for this task: one by Gregory XI and another by Urban VI. They both expressed a

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<sup>38</sup> For the further clarification of the consequences of this problem for the research method of the present study, see below, section 1.3.2.

<sup>39</sup> A&P, 82-87 (*vita*); 251-253 (cardinal Eliazar's testimony); 264-269 (Magnus Petri's testimony); 508-533 (Prior Petrus' testimony); 321-326 (Katarina's testimony), etc.

<sup>40</sup> Prior Petrus' testimony about his role in editing the revelations: A&P, 522-533; Alfonso de Jaén: A&P, 381, 384.

favorable opinion about the orthodoxy of the text, also found in the canonization bulls of St. Birgitta: *Ab origine mundi*, from 1391 and *Excellentum principum*, a confirmation bull from 1419.<sup>41</sup> However, the main reason for Birgitta's canonization was not an appreciation for her prophetic gift, but her exceptional virtues and saintly way of living. She was venerated as a holy widow. The revelations served as one piece of evidence promoting her sanctity.

Nevertheless, the book itself soon became a subject of debate and subsequent doctrinal investigation.<sup>42</sup> The orthodoxy of Birgitta's revelations and their divine origin was questioned at least two times during the Councils of the Church: in Constance and in Basel. In both cases, the reason for opening the investigation was at least partly political. In Basel, the Birgittine order claimed to have a right to administer special *ad instar* indulgences, which were reserved only for certain churches (Sanctus Petri in Vinculi in Rome and the shrine in Portiuncula). Indulgences of this kind could be also administered in other churches if a special authorization was obtained in Rome, but Boniface IX revoked all indulgences of this kind in 1402. The Birgittines, however, claimed that they were exempt from this revocation and used a certain fragment of Birgitta's revelations (IV, 137. 5) as proof to support their case. It was thus necessary for the Council to examine *Revelationes* and pass a final verdict about their divine inspiration.

The case of *Revelationes* was also part of an ongoing controversy concerning the status of private revelations in general and revelations received by women in particular.<sup>43</sup> The verdict

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<sup>41</sup> *Acta Sanctorum Octobriis*, vol. IV (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1965-70), 468-472, 476.

<sup>42</sup> Carl Silfverstolpe, "Om kyrkans angrepp mot *Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae*," *Kungl. Vitterhets, Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar* 32, no. 4 (1985).

<sup>43</sup> For the description of the Johannes Gersons' participation in the controversy see: Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (February 2002), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/107.1/ah0102000026.html> (accessed August 13,

promulgated in Basel in 1436 was a compromise between the claims of the Birgittines and their supporters, who defended the divine authority of *Revelationes*, and the requests of their opponents (such as Johannes Gerson), who suggested that the revelations were heretical. The judge stated that the book contained certain “perplexities and ineptitudes” requiring Catholic modification, but the word “heresy” was not used.<sup>44</sup> Fortunately for the Birgittines, the verdict was revised during the same Council and completely changed by Sixtus IV fifty years later, in 1484.

Among the Constance and Basel investigation documents we find a number of texts of great importance for the history of Birgittine research. Johannes Gerson, who opposed the possibility that women could receive divinely inspired revelations, discussed Birgitta’s work in his *De probatione spirituum*. Gerson’s short work was edited in his *Oeuvres complètes* in 1974.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Heymericus de Campo, a member of one of the commissions in Basel, authored *Dyalogus super Reuelationibus beate Birgitte*, in support of the divine origin of Birgitta’s visions. His book is preserved in several manuscripts and was critically edited by Anna Frederiksson Adman in 2003.<sup>46</sup> Johannes de Torquemada also supported this case. His apologetic prologue was included in the first printed editions and translations of Birgitta’s book and thus became an “official defence” of the text.<sup>47</sup>

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2009). See also: Knut B. Westman, “Exkurs C: Striden om Birgittas Uppenbarelser vid Baselkonciliet,” in *Birgitta-studier* (Uppsala: Akademiska boktryckeriet, 1911), 1:280-281.

<sup>44</sup> Anna Frederiksson Adman, introduction to *Dyalogus super Reuelacionibus beate Birgitte*, by Heymericus de Campo, (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003), 30.

<sup>45</sup> Johannes Gerson, “De probatione spirituum,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9 (Paris, 1974), 177-185.

<sup>46</sup> Heymericus de Campo, *Dyalogus super Reuelacionibus beate Birgitte*, ed. Anna Frederiksson Adman (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Johannes de Torquemada’s *Declarationes*, the defence of *Revelationes celestes* includes chapters I-VI. Chapters I-V have been used as a prologue to *Revelationes*. See: “Epistola domini Joannis cardinalis de Turre Cremata ad omnes cristifideles” in: *Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae* (Lubeck: Bartholomæus Ghotan, 1492). It has been also

The inquiry made during the canonization process and during the two councils can be described as the first systematic examination of *Revelationes celestes*, thus giving it an important place in the history of Birgittine research. In this initial period of research, the question of the *Revelationes'* orthodoxy and divine inspiration was in focus. Another typical feature of these investigations was an examination of the strong link between the reception of *Revelationes* and the political performance of the Birgittine order. The newly established order searched for its place within the structure of the church, entering occasionally into conflicts with the local authorities. The cornerstone of the Birgittine order, the book of *Revelationes* served as evidence in these conflicts. It appears, however, that Birgitta's treatment of various political and social problems did not provoke much disagreement. Among the one hundred twenty-three passages ("articles") taken from *Revelationes* and marked as potential heresy at the council in Basel, only approximately fifteen deal with these questions and only four are taken from *Liber ad reges*.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, *Revelationes* became a popular, even famous, book. It was printed for the first time in 1492.<sup>49</sup> Until 1680, nine Latin editions were printed, as well as a number of translations into vernacular languages.<sup>50</sup> Fragments of Birgitta's revelations were also included in

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included in the Polish edition of *Revelationes: Saint Birgitta, Skarby niebieskich tajemnic, to jest księgi objawienia niebieskiego świętej matki Brygitty z rodzaju królewskiego, xiężney neryckiey ze Szwecyey, fundatorki reguły s.Salwatora, z łacińskich na polskie przełożone przez zakonnika braci mniejszych oyców. . .*, trans. Bernard Krupski (Zamość: Typis Academicis, 1698). Chapter VI was edited as: Johannes de Torquemada, "Defensiones quorundam articulorum rubrorum Revelationum S. Birgitte factae. . .", ed. J. D. Mansi in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. 30 (Venice, 1792), cols. 699-814.

<sup>48</sup> These are articles cxxvi-cxxxix according to Heymericus de Campo dialogue (Heymericus de Campo, op. cit. 217-218).

<sup>49</sup> *Editio princeps*, printed in Lúbeck, is referred to as the Ghotan edition, after the printer Bartholomeus Ghotan.

<sup>50</sup> Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara, eds., *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

various prophetic and eschatological anthologies, circulating in Europe both in Latin<sup>51</sup> and in vernacular<sup>52</sup> versions. Birgitta became widely known as a prophetess of the imminent Judgment. Readers apparently regarded this subject matter as being the most interesting and important for them.

The book of *Revelationes* was still interpreted and used in political and social controversies, as the text itself touched many current problems, such as the Hundred Years' War and the Avignon Captivity. It also was interpreted as a prophecy concerning some other events not described by Birgitta, such as the victory of the Polish-Lithuanian army over the Teutonic Order in Tannenberg in 1410,<sup>53</sup> and even the discovery of the New World.<sup>54</sup>

The controversies surrounding St. Birgitta's work and its authority continued during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One reason for this was her political activity and prophecies. She

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<sup>51</sup> E. g. Johannes Tortsch, *Onus mundi id est propheta de male futuro ipsi mundo superventuro* (Leipzig, 1424); Johannes Lichtenberger, *Prognosticacio in latino* (Heidelberg, 1488); *Libellus de quibusdam futuris ex Sancte Brigitte revelationum libris, additis etiam nonnullorum aliorum dictis collectus* (Kraków, 1522); Jacobus Willart OP, *Ramus olivae annuntians mirum secretum divinae misericordiae in hoc mundi vespere faciendae ad totius Ecclesiae sublevamen, collectus potissimum ex Revelationibus Seraphicae Matris Birgittae* (Douai, 1667).

<sup>52</sup> E. g. Johannes Tortsch, *Dis buchlein wirt genant die burde der welt vn[d] die weissagung vn[d] offenbarung von den zukunfftigen betrubnissen . . .* (Nuremberg, 1481); idem, *Die purde der welt* (Augsburg, 1482); idem, *Das büchlin der hymlichen Offenbarung* (Augsburg, 1502); see also: Ulrich Montag, "The Reception of St. Birgitta in Germany," in *The Translations of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into the European Vernaculars*, ed. Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 106-116.

<sup>53</sup> Sven Ekdahl, "Heliga Birgitta, slaget vid Tannenberg och grundandet av klostret Triumphus Mariae i Lublin," in *Skandinavien och Polen: Möten, relationer och ömsesidig påverkan*, ed. Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Lund: Lund University, 2007), 1-24; idem, "St Birgitta of Sweden, the Battle of Tannenberg (Grunwald) and the Foundation of the Monastery Triumphus Mariae in Lublin," in *Między Śląskiem a Wiedniem: Księga Jubileuszowa z okazji 60. urodzin prof. dr. hab. Krzysztofa A. Kuczyńskiego*, ed. Aleksander Kozłowski and Małgorzata Znyk, (Płock: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej w Płocku, 2008), 287-301.

<sup>54</sup> Bernardino de Sahagun, a Spanish Franciscan, who authored a catechism for his brethren working with the Indians in Mexico referred in his book to the revelations of St. Birgitta. He stated that the discovery of the New World is a realisation of "God's secret judgments", announced by St. Birgitta. See: Adriano Prosperi, "New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and Propaganda at the Time of the Discovery and Conquest of the Americas," in *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, ed. Marjorie Reeves (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 293.

sided with certain political parties (for example, with the English against the French in the Hundred Years' War and with the Swedes against the Novgorodians). Other groups used her authority to support their cases (such as the faction of King Erik against his father, Magnus Eriksson).<sup>55</sup> It was understandable that these groups presented Birgitta's book as an important and trustworthy prophecy, while their opponents accused it of heresy and doubted Birgitta's mystical gift. One of the most common accusations against her was based on widespread doubt about the ability and right of women to spread the words of God. Birgitta's opponents tried to paint her as being a proud and rebellious woman who disobeyed the Pauline command: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence" (1Ti 2:12). Claire Sahlin has studied this subject, focusing on the negative reactions against Birgitta's announcements.<sup>56</sup>

### 1.2.3. Contemporary Research

Contemporary literature concerning the life and work of St. Birgitta is too rich and complex to be adequately summarized in this short introduction. The list of works sketched below reflects the sources of this particular study only, not a complete bibliography of Birgittine studies in general, so it focuses on the important secondary sources concerning the political and social ideas in *Revelationes celestes*. The literature is divided into three main categories: text criticism with textual history, general history, and theology. However, this division is not complete, as many of the works discussed can be ascribed to more than one category.

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<sup>55</sup> See "Libellus de Magno Eriki Rege," in *Scriptores Rerum Suecicarum*, vol. III ed. Claes Annerstedt (Uppsala: Zeipel & Palmblad, 1871-1876), 12-16. This subject is discussed below, sections 2.3.5. and 3.1.

<sup>56</sup> Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 136-168.



A comprehensive *Bibliography of St. Birgitta and the Birgittine Order* is available online, edited by Stephan Borgehammar and Ulla Sander Olsen. It contains both contemporary (post-1888)<sup>57</sup> and historical (pre-1888) documents.<sup>58</sup> Another source of knowledge for Birgittine studies is the small *Bibliographia Birgittina*,<sup>59</sup> edited in 1973 by B.I. Kilström and C.-G. Frithz. The journal *Birgittiana* provides information about recent literature concerning St. Birgitta and her order.

Henrik Schück,<sup>60</sup> Knut Bernhard Westman,<sup>61</sup> and Salomon Kraft<sup>62</sup> initiated modern text-studies of *Revelationes* in the beginning of the twentieth century. The Old-Swedish original texts, the so-called autographs of St. Birgitta, have been edited critically by Bertil Högman in 1951<sup>63</sup> and reprinted in 2009. His work on these short fragments opened the new possibility of studying the process by which *Revelationes* were created. We are now able to discuss the role of Birgitta herself and that of her confessors in creating the Latin text, as the fragments are preserved in Old Swedish. The most important studies on this topic include the aforementioned works of Kraft, Westman, Jönsson, Aili, and Gilkær. Currently, most studies focus on Alfonso's work, as his contribution to the text is easier to identify than the influence of the three Swedes. To date, the most important result of the textual research has been the critical edition of *Revelationes*. Each

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<sup>57</sup> Stephan Borgehammar and Ulla Sander Olsen, *Birgitta Bibliography (ca 1890 - ca 2001)*, in the LIBRIS - National Library Systems, [http://libris.kb.se/form\\_extended.jsp?f=birb](http://libris.kb.se/form_extended.jsp?f=birb) (accessed August 15, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Stephan Borgehammar and Ulla Sander Olsen, *On-Line Bibliography of St Birgitta and the Birgittine Order*, [http://www.sanctabirgitta.com/underniva/lardigmer/artikel\\_visar.asp?ID=512](http://www.sanctabirgitta.com/underniva/lardigmer/artikel_visar.asp?ID=512) (accessed August 15, 2009).

<sup>59</sup> Bengt Ingmar Kilström and Carl-Gösta Frithz, *Bibliographia Birgittina* (Strängnäs: Societas Sanctae Birgittae, 1973).

<sup>60</sup> Henrik Schück, *Några anmärkningar om Birgittas revelationer* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1901).

<sup>61</sup> Knut B. Westman, *Birgitta-studier* (Uppsala: Akademiska boktryckeriet, 1911).

<sup>62</sup> Salomon Kraft, *Textstudier till Birgittas revelationer* (Uppsala: Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift, 1929).

<sup>63</sup> Saint Birgitta, *Heliga Birgittas originaltexter*, ed. Bertil Högman (Uppsala: Svenska fornskriftsällskapet, 1951).

book is accompanied by an introduction explaining the textual history and philological aspects of that edition.

Translations of Birgitta's revelations into European medieval vernacular languages also reveal important information pertaining to the medieval reception of the text. The volume edited by Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara gathers a number of studies in this field, devoted to the translations of *Revelationes* into Old Swedish, Danish, German, Netherlandish (Dutch), Middle English, and Italian.<sup>64</sup> Another important medieval translation of *Revelationes* is the Polish text, dating back to the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>65</sup>

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The use of historical literature in this study is structured as follows: First, I will discuss works concerning particular aspects of Birgitta's political and social thought. Second, I will discuss the history of medieval Scandinavia, mentioning St. Birgitta's role in politics and society. Third, I will use general historical sources that touch upon problems important to Birgitta without referring to her work. Finally, I will briefly describe several scholarly biographies of Birgitta as well as the history textbooks that have popularized the knowledge of Birgitta's role in Swedish history.

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<sup>64</sup> Bridget Morris, and Veronica O'Mara, eds., *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> According to Jan Długosz (Johannes Dlugossius), the Polish translation has been prepared for Queen Jadwiga. He wrote: "Ad orationem et lectionem librorum divinatorum, videlicet Veteris et Novi Testamenti, Omeliarum quattuor Doctorum, Vitas Patrum, Sermonum et Passionum de Sanctis, Meditationum et Orationum Beati Bernardi, Sancti Ambrosii, Revelationum Sanctae Brigittae et plurimorum aliorum de Latino in Polonicum translatorum animum et cogitationem intenderat" (Jan Długosz, *Historiae polonicae libri XII*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Przeździecki [Kraków, 1873], 532). This translation survived only in fragments. It has been published in: Wiesław Wydra and Wojciech Ryszard Rzepka, eds., *Chrestomatia staropolska* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1984), 156-158. The facsimile edition: Jan Łoś, *Dwa teksty staropolskie* (Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności, 1911), 423-436.

It would be impossible to mention here all the sources I consulted. Therefore, my description of their structure will be based on examples taken from two sections of this study: section 1.2, "The Structures of the Christian Kingdom," and section 3.1, "King and Queen."

I will begin by discussing the books and articles by Birgittine scholars that deal specifically with the problems treated in my text. For example, my discussion of the idea of Birgitta's knightly order is based on the articles by Hans Cnatingius and Tore Nyberg,<sup>66</sup> who both studied this particular subject. The two authors present a different opinion on the problem of the existence of a Birgittine knightly order. Their dispute became a point of departure for my analysis of the subject. In the section that discusses Birgitta's so-called "programme of revolt" against Magnus Eriksson, I refer to articles by Gottfrid Carlsson, Ole Ferm, and John Lind.<sup>67</sup> In my opinion, these three works are the most important voices in the discussion of Birgitta's alleged participation in a group of political dissidents who planned to dethrone King Magnus.

Second, I refer to more general historical works in order to address the problems noticed in *Revelationes* within their broader historical context. For example, while working on the section that discusses Birgitta and Magnus Eriksson, I consulted Michael Nordberg's *I kung Magnus tid*,

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<sup>66</sup> Hans Cnatingius, "The Order of the Knights of St. Bridget," *Annales Academiæ Regiæ Scientiarum Upsaliensis* 11 (1967): 5-35; Tore Nyberg, "Die Nova Militia Birgittas von Schweden und ihr Nachfolgeorden," *Birgittiana* 10 (2000): 89-105.

<sup>67</sup> Gottfrid Carlsson, "Heliga Birgitta Upprorsprogram," in *Archivistica et Mediævistica Ernesto Nygren Oblata*, ed. Ingvar Andersson (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1956), 86-102; Ole Ferm, "Heliga Birgittas program for uppror mot Magnus Eriksson. En studie i politisk argumentationskonst," in *Heliga Birgitta – budskapet och förebilden. Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vastena 3-7 oktober 1991*, ed. Alf Hålderlin and Monica Lingren (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1993), 126-143; John Lind, "Magnus Eriksson som birgittinsk konge i lyset af russiske kilder," in *Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden: Akter fra et symposium, afholdt i Mariager den 8.-11. marts 1990*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1991), 103-128.

which was particularly useful as a study of Swedish politics in Birgitta's time.<sup>68</sup> Dick Harrison's history of Scandinavian crusading movement was another important authority I consulted on this topic.<sup>69</sup> His work reflects the current state of knowledge about the Novgorodian crusade of King Magnus. It was also very interesting to compare Harrison's opinions about Birgitta's role in this crusade with other studies of the subject.

Finally, in this study I establish the historical context of *Revelationes* using literature that does not refer to Birgitta but nevertheless concerns problems she addressed. For example, I compare information about the structure of society as described in *Revelationes* with the medieval structure of "the three orders of society" as presented by Georges Duby and Giles Constable.<sup>70</sup> When presenting Birgitta's idea of knightly order, I consult the book by Jean Flori on the history of knighthood in order to discuss the development of the rites of dubbing and benediction of the arms.<sup>71</sup> The problem of Birgitta's relationship to King Magnus is presented against the background of medieval literature concerning the tyrannical government and the government of "rex inutilis." I use both primary sources, such as *Policraticus* by John Salisbury,<sup>72</sup> and secondary literature. In the case of "rex inutilis," the most important was Edward Peters's work *The Shadow King: Rex Inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature 751–1327*,<sup>73</sup> which focuses on the English experience but

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<sup>68</sup> Michael Nordberg, *I kung Magnus tid: Norden under Magnus Eriksson 1317-1374* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> Dick Harrison, *Gud vill det! Nordiska korsfarare under medeltiden* (Stockholm: Ordfront förlag, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha; The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ; The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> Jean Flori, *L'Essor de la Chevalerie. XIe – XIIIe siècles* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1986).

<sup>72</sup> John of Salisbury *Policraticus*, trans. John Dickinson (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963).

<sup>73</sup> Edward Peters, *The Shadow King: Rex Inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature 751-1327* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

also describes the phenomenon of “weak kingship” in general. These three types of references are probably the most common in the body of text.

Additionally, I consult a number of Birgitta’s scholarly biographies, from among which the books by Birgit Klockars and Bridget Morris are the most frequently quoted.<sup>74</sup> I also benefited from other works of this genre, which, although not directly quoted, enabled me to build a more complete picture of Birgitta's life.<sup>75</sup> Carina Nynas’s *Jag Ser Klart: Synen Pa Den Heliga Birgitta I Svenska 1900-Talsbiografier*<sup>76</sup> was also very helpful for its description of the way Birgitta is received and pictured in her contemporary Swedish biographies.

Studies of St. Birgitta’s mystical and prophetic experience belong to a separate category of historical literature. Peter Dinzelbacher’s influential work, *Christliche Mystik im Abendland*,<sup>77</sup> presents St. Birgitta within the context of Northern Europe’s late medieval mystics and Christian mystics in general. Dinzelbacher also studied Birgitta’s role as a political mystic, comparing her to Hildegard of Bingen and Catharine of Siena.<sup>78</sup> Andre Vauchez is another important author: he shaped scholarly discussion about Birgitta’s place among the late medieval saints.<sup>79</sup> Vauchez also commented on Birgitta’s role as a prophetess, a participant in the late medieval “l’invasion

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<sup>74</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1971); Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999).

<sup>75</sup> E.g. Emilia Fogelklou, *Birgitta* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1919).

<sup>76</sup> Carina Nynas, *Jag Ser Klart? Synen Pa Den Heliga Birgitta I Svenska 1900-Talsbiografier* (Åbo: Åbo Akademies Förlag, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, *Christliche Mystik im Abendland: ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Mittelalters* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, “Das politische Wirken der Mystikerinnen in Kirche und Staat Hildegard, Birgitta, Katharina,” in *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1988), 265-302.

<sup>79</sup> André Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge: d'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1981).

mystique,” which often aimed at reforming the church or at least changing its shape and routines.<sup>80</sup> The works by Dinzelbacher and Vauchez were this study’s most important points of reference when dealing with the question of Birgitta’s place among the other political visionaries of her time.

Birgitta’s strong, vivid personality influenced Swedish history and culture; therefore, each general textbook of Scandinavian history mentions Birgitta and her *Revelationes*. One of the most popular books of this genre is *A History of Sweden* by Ingvar Andersson, which has been translated into many European languages, including Russian, French, and Polish.<sup>81</sup> I consulted this and several other general introductions to the history of Sweden<sup>82</sup> in order to investigate the contemporary reception of *Revelationes* and their weight for Swedish politics in the fourteenth century. These books usually stand behind the common opinions about St. Birgitta that circulate among the educated public.

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Many historical works on *Revelationes* discuss Birgitta’s religious ideas in the theological context of her times, but the number of studies by professional theologians, when compared to the historical or interdisciplinary literature, is considerably smaller. Authors whose main field of

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<sup>80</sup> André Vauchez, “Les pouvoirs informels dans l’Église aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge: visionnaires, prophètes et mystiques,” *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes* 96, no. 1 (1984): 281-293; idem, *Le prophétisme médiéval d’Hildegarde de Bingen à Savonarole* (Budapest: Collegium Budapest. Institute for Advanced Study, 1999).

<sup>81</sup> Ingvar Andersson, *A History of Sweden* (New York: Praeger, 1956); idem, *Histoire de la Suède: des origines à nos jours*, trans. Marcel Bouvier (Roanne: Éditions Horvath, 1973); idem, *Dzieje Szwecji*, trans. Stanisław Piekarczyk (Warszawa: PWN, 1967).

<sup>82</sup> Adam Kersten, *Historia Szwecji* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1973); Franklin D. Scott, *Sweden, the Nation's History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).

expertise in history or philology nevertheless made substantial contributions to theological analysis of Birgitta's texts.

Tore Nyberg discusses several aspects of Birgitta's theological thought in his *Birgittinsk festgåva: Studier om Heliga Birgitta och Birgittaorden*, but also in a number of other studies. My study is in many aspects based on his research, especially in the field of Birgitta's political ideas and their religious implementation.<sup>83</sup> Alf Härdelin analyzed various aspects of Birgitta's spirituality. From among his books, the most recent—discussing not only Birgitta's text but also medieval Scandinavian spirituality in general—became an important source of inspiration for this dissertation.<sup>84</sup> Works by Anders Piltz concern mostly the spirituality of the Birgittine order, but he also authored an important analysis of Birgitta's texts, such as *Sermo angelicus*.<sup>85</sup> He also analyzed Birgitta's identity as a prophetess, presenting her texts within their historical and theological setting.<sup>86</sup> The content and method of Piltz's studies is an important point of reference for my work, as he extensively discusses the theological background of Birgitta's thought.

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<sup>83</sup> Tore Nyberg, *Birgittinsk festgåva. Studier om Heliga Birgitta och Birgittaorden* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1991); idem, "Die Nova Militia Birgittas von Schweden und ihr Nachfolgeorden," *Birgittiana* 10 (2000): 89-105; idem, introduction to *Life and Selected Revelations*, by Birgitta of Sweden (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 13-51; idem, "St. Bridget's Charism and Prophecy for Our Time," in *Santa Brigida, profeta dei tempi nuovi: Atti dell'incontro internazionale di studio Roma, 3-7 ottobre 1991* (Rome: Casa Generalizia Suore Santa Brigida, 1993), 404-416.

<sup>84</sup> Alf Härdelin, *Världen som yta och fönster. Spiritualitet i medeltidens Sverige* (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia, 2005).

<sup>85</sup> Anders Piltz, "Nostram naturam sublimaverat. Den liturgiska och teologiska bakgrunden till birgittinska mariaofficiet," in *Maria i Sverige under tusen år: Föredrag vid symposiet i Vadstena 6-10 oktober 1994*, ed. Sven-Erik Brodd and Alf Härdelin, (Skellefteå: Artos, 1996), 255-287.

<sup>86</sup> Anders Piltz, "Inspiration, vision, profetia. Birgitta och teorierna om uppenbarelsen," in *Heliga Birgitta, budskapet och förebilden: föredrag vid Jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991*, eds. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1993), 67-88.

Anna Jane Rossing, in *Studier i den heliga Birgittas Spiritualitet*, provides perspective on various aspects of Birgitta's spirituality, as seen from the perspective of the mystic's biography.<sup>87</sup> One recent book discussing Birgitta's revelations from a theological perspective is *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta* by Ingvar Fogelvist, who contributes to the study of a very important aspect of Birgitta's thought, namely, the reform of church and society. In my opinion this work, published in 2000, is still awaiting its full reception by Birgittine scholars. From among the books edited in the last years, Claire L. Sahlin's *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* must be mentioned here, as it provides a detailed analysis of Birgitta's vocation as a prophetess, one of the important themes of my study. Sahlin presents *Revelationes* mainly as part of female visionary literature of the late Middle Ages, but she also considers the theological context of the book.<sup>88</sup>

The political and social aspects of Birgitta's thought belong to two fields of study: history and theology. *I kund Magnus tid*, Michael Nordberg's book discussing the political situation in Sweden in the fourteenth century, supplies the general historical background for my work. Hans Torben Gilkær's book, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha: Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges—A Mirror of Princes*, is an important point of reference for my study as well. He also analyzed Spanish sources on Alfonso Pecha, who Gilkær believes was not only an editor, but a coauthor of Birgitta's *Liber ad reges*. The book thus focuses on the theological ideas of Alfonso. A study by Bernd-Urlich Hergemöller<sup>89</sup> titled *Magnus versus Birgitta: Der Kampf den heiligen Birgitta von Schweden gegen König Magnus Eriksson*, is one of the most detailed

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<sup>87</sup> Anna Jane Rossing, *Studier i den heliga Birgittas Spiritualitet* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1986).

<sup>88</sup> Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001).

<sup>89</sup> Bernd-Urlich Hergemöller, *Magnus versus Birgitta. Der Kampf den heiligen Birgitta von Schweden gegen König Magnus Eriksson* (Hamburg: HHL-Verlag, 2003).



analyses of Birgitta's relation to King Magnus. Hergemöller is of the opinion that the prophetess fought against the king and incited a campaign of accusations aimed at his dethronement. The other books discussing important social and political ideas of *Revelationes* have been already mentioned above.

### 1.3. Research Method

To describe my research method I shall refer to a definition found in the proceedings of a conference dealing with methodology in medieval studies:

The concept "method" seems to have different meanings, depending on the discipline or tradition of inquiry in question. One meaning is the purely technical aspect of our work, be it the study of manuscripts or the excavation of material remains. Secondly, to the historian, the notion of method has traditionally meant the selection of proper sources and the way one has gone about reading them. Thirdly, it is also at times used to denote the theoretical approach or framework of interpretation we work with, the philosophy behind the questions we ask of our materials. To an extent all of these components—the preparatory work, interpretation and intellectual foundation or contextualization of our interpretation—are all part of what the scholar of the past does, although, depending on the discipline and school of thought, just one or two of them end up being emphasized.<sup>90</sup>

In this introduction I will emphasize the second ("the way one has gone about reading the sources") and third ("philosophy behind the questions we ask of our materials") as aspects of my research method.

#### 1.3.1. Interpretation of a Source according to the Theological and the Historical Method

One possible element of a source's historical interpretation is identifying the purpose that governed the author's work. This aim will be essential for my study. To achieve it, the key subjects

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<sup>90</sup> Marko Lamberg, Jesse Keskiäho, Elina Räsänen and Olga Timofeeva, "Methods and the Medievalist," in *Methods and the Medievalist: Current Approaches in Medieval Studies* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 3-4.

discussed in this source must be identified. St. Birgitta's *Revelationes* deals with two main subjects. First, the text is an expression of a certain religious faith and culture characteristic of fourteenth-century Western Europe in general and of its Scandinavian setting in particular. Second, the book often deals with politics, the life of the church as an institution, and with public affairs. To grasp the idea of the Christian Kingdom described in *Revelationes*, we must consider both. Therefore, in order to approach the text in its twofold character, I decided to use an interdisciplinary research method, employing elements of both the theological and the historical approach. I consider the theological approach useful for understanding the religious content of Birgitta's text, whereas the historical approach is necessary to understand the broader context of *Revelationes* as well as the political and social matters discussed in the text itself.

I shall now briefly explain the specific features of each of these methods as I understand them in this study and then clarify the way I have combined them in order to establish a consistent research perspective.

Every branch of knowledge, including every type of science, has its own specific axioms or presuppositions, which are a necessary point of departure for further study.<sup>91</sup> In Christian theology, this axiom is the Revelation of God<sup>92</sup> presented in the Holy Scripture and, in the case of

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<sup>91</sup>Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I.1-2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1-5.

<sup>92</sup>"Theology may be defined as a study in which, along with other axioms, at least one sentence is assumed which belongs to given Creed and which is not sustained by persons other than the believers of a given religion. It may of course happen that such sentences are recognized as true by the believers of several different religions – nevertheless only believers of some religion do accept them, not other persons." Józef M. Bocheński, *The Logic of Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 14; „Theologie setzt Glauben voraus. Sie lebt von dem Paradox einer Verbindung von Glaube und Wissenschaft. . . . In ihr kommt die besondere Art des christlichen Anspruchs auf Wahrheit, das eigentliche Wesen des Christentums im Ganzen der Religionsgeschichte zum Vorschein." Joseph Ratzinger, *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie. Versuche zu ihrer Ortsbestimmung im Disput der Gegenwart* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1993), 48.

Roman Catholic and Orthodox theology, in Tradition.<sup>93</sup> Interpretations of the Revelation might vary, but accepting the existence of the Revelation is a necessary first move for Christian theology.

It is an important feature of Christian religion that its dogmas result from certain historical events, namely the life of Jesus Christ and the preceding chain of Old Testament events. Therefore, the Christian faith is to some extent built on history. This feature of Christianity influences its interpretation and theology, because Christians of each generation aim to understand the historical events that frame their faith in the new light of their contemporary mentality and realities. Therefore, taking a theological approach to the subject means analyzing the source in view of Christian revelation in order to explain it to the current Christian community, taking into consideration its contemporary context.<sup>94</sup> In this study, I will use some of the elements of this method, but I will not employ it fully, as I do not address “Christian community” and do not seek ways to implement the studied materials into Christian life. The details of my use of the theological method will be explained below.

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<sup>93</sup> The role of Tradition is explained and understood differently in various Christian denominations, but each of them considers the teachings of Church as an important *locus theologicus*, a source of theological knowledge.

<sup>94</sup> Józef Majewski, “Wprowadzenie do teologii dogmatycznej,” in *Dogmatyka*, vol. 1, ed. Grzegorz Strzelczyk and Józef Majewski (Warszawa: Biblioteka “Więzi”, 2005), 127. See also: “Christian theology or any other theology for that matter, arises out of, and remains importantly linked to a particular community of faith. . . . Theology must be critical reflection on the community's faith and practice . . . Most decisively, critical reflection on the faith of the Christian community involves the deployment of a comprehensive theological vision, an interpretation of the central Christian message in interaction with the culture, experience, and need of a particular time and place.” Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), XIV-XVI. “The presupposition of theology is that there is a special encounter with reality or a special way in which reality imposes itself on us—which is ordinarily called ‘religious.’ And it is the presupposition of this paper that ‘having a religious encounter with reality’ means ‘being ultimately concerned about reality.’ The ultimate concern or the religious encounter with reality can be considered in two ways. It can be looked at as an event beside other events, to be observed and described in theoretical detachment; or it can be understood as an event in which he who considers it is ‘existentially’ involved. In the first case the philosopher of religion is at work, in the second the theologian speaks.” Paul Tillich, “The Problem of Theological Method: II,” *The Journal of Religion* 27, no. 1 (January 1947): 17. See also: Karl Barth, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 24-25.

Certain problems raised by Christians about their faith have been regarded as particularly important throughout the ages, gradually building the set of questions distinctive for theology as a branch of knowledge. This set is certainly not invariable, as it is possible to identify questions and themes characteristic for different historical epochs and for the various social surroundings of theology (academia, church, or wider society).<sup>95</sup> By focusing on the main questions asked in a source, we can determine the role of the source in various theological discussions and controversies the author's design or aim (is it an apologetic, dogmatic, or spiritual text?), and the subjects of interest within a Christian community (as well as within society) during the time period in which it was written. Recognizing the questions distinctive to the theology of a certain time and place is therefore a significant stage in the theological interpretation of a source. Such analysis will be an important part of this study. The technical features of the theological method include the same elements that are found in other disciplines within the humanities, the first being a systematic source text criticism.

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History, as a branch of knowledge about the human past, uses its own set of methods. A feature specific to historical research is its concentration on the sequence of events, change, and continuity, as well as causality.<sup>96</sup> Most historical studies are explicitly focused on change over time. Some of them, however, "treat a moment in time. . . . Even such studies, nonetheless, assume change by exposing the distinctiveness of the practices being described and the ways they came

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<sup>95</sup> Migliore, *op. cit.*, 16.

<sup>96</sup> Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 119.

into being.”<sup>97</sup> This study belongs to the second category, as I am focused on the *Revelationes* text in a fourteenth-century setting.

Historical research is based on a detailed analysis of sources. This is done on “external” and “internal” levels. The external analysis concerns the form of a source, such as language and handwriting (if a manuscript is discussed), time and place location (including the social surroundings of the author and the addressees), and a source’s authenticity. The internal analysis includes questions about the author’s identity and role (who is responsible for creating the contents of the document?), the originality of the document, and, finally, the competence and trustworthiness of the observer (who may or may be not identical with the author of the document).<sup>98</sup> This level of text analysis includes questions about the intended meaning of a source as well.<sup>99</sup> In this study, searching for the meaning designed and intended by the author will be an important element of text analysis.

History can be researched using various methods, depending on the subject and the aim of the research, as well on the aspect of human life or historical period discussed. For example, economic history is often linked with quantitative methods,<sup>100</sup> while examining the accounts of people taking part in a historical event (oral history) is particularly useful for twentieth-century research,<sup>101</sup> since we often are able to interview the observers. Medieval authors cannot be interviewed, but in a way all medieval texts are accounts of eyewitnesses, too, even if they do not

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<sup>97</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *op. cit.*, 120.

<sup>98</sup> Howel and Prevenier, *op. cit.*, 60-68.

<sup>99</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *op. cit.*, 60.

<sup>100</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London/New York: Arnold Publishing/Oxford University Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>101</sup> Jordanova, *op. cit.*, 52-53.

deal with important “historical” facts, as they bear a testimony of mentalities, ideas, and forms of expression. St. Birgitta’s *Revelationes* often touches on political or social matters, but this highly subjective text is aimed at creating a perfect model of society rather than at describing the social reality itself. It is therefore impossible to read Birgitta’s text as a chronicle of events, but we can still use it as an account of a person (or persons) taking part in social and political activities, a person who analyzed the facts and drew conclusions about their meaning.<sup>102</sup>

According to one traditional division of the discipline, history can be described as political, social, or economic.<sup>103</sup> This division is also rather important for “the way I have gone about reading the sources” in this study. The subject, the Christian kingdom and the kingdom of heaven, implies my interest in the social and political spheres of human life as described by St. Birgitta. Consequently, my research method involves choosing from among the revelations the texts that deal with these subjects. For that reason, I would like to explain the way I understand the notions of “politics,” “political thought,” and “society” in this dissertation.

Unlike modern thought, medieval reflection upon political life did not necessarily begin with the definition of the state and its functions.<sup>104</sup> St. Augustine, whose *De civitate Dei* was one of the most important sources of medieval political thought, never gave any definition of politics or built any theory of state.<sup>105</sup> I suppose, however, that many researchers working with the history of medieval political thought would agree with this summary definition of their field offered by

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<sup>102</sup> The same is true if we bear in mind the question of complicated authorship of Birgitta’s work.

<sup>103</sup> Jordanova, *op. cit.*, 35.

<sup>104</sup> Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought* (London: Routledge, 2005), X-XI.

<sup>105</sup> Todd Breyfogle, “Toward a Contemporary Augustinian Understanding of Politics,” in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2005), 218.

Joseph Canning: “Ideas concerning the nature, organization, government and ends of society.”<sup>106</sup>

As we can see, the notion of “the state” is absent, while “society” is the central term. The nature, organization, government, and ends of society are of interest here. Based on this definition of political thought, we can also suggest a definition of politics as a certain aspect of social life—the organization, government, and ends of society, rooted in certain convictions about its nature. To a modern political scholar, the lack of a precise distinction between the “political” and the “social” in this definition may seem methodologically intolerable. However, considering the specific character of medieval politics and political thought, establishing this distinction too firmly could be opposed to the nature of subject. Therefore, in this study much attention is given to issues classified today as social, not political.

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History and theology are sometimes combined in research, and a number of possible methodological relationships exist between the two.<sup>107</sup> For example, the history of theology examines the development of theology (as a discipline) in its subject matter, but its method usually remains historical, without accepting any assumptions about Christian revelation. Historical theology, as opposed to systematic theology, examines the development of Christian doctrine and dogmas throughout the two thousand years of church history.<sup>108</sup> It includes the theological method, as the research in this field is often done from the perspective of a certain Christian denomination with an apologetic task. It is also possible to examine the change in

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<sup>106</sup> Canning, op. cit., X-XI.

<sup>107</sup> I would like to avoid the impression that history and theology used as antonyms in this work. An antonym of “historical” is “systematic”, if the research methods are discussed.

<sup>108</sup> The classic work in this field is *An Essay On the Development of Christian Doctrine* by John Henry Newman (London, 1845). In this work, Newman introduced the term “development of doctrine.”

Christian doctrine without assuming any theological implications. This branch of knowledge is called “the history of the Christian religion.” None of these methodological possibilities is fully represented in this study, although my method falls between a historical approach to the history of the Christian religion and systematic theology. I use some elements of the theological method (clarified below), whereas the general framework of my work remains historical.

As mentioned above, the text of *Revelationes* is theological in character. It is therefore necessary to know the categories used and questions asked by Christian theology in order to understand it. In my study, I employ these categories to explain the text without imposing too many modern categories and notions on Birgitta’s work. The theological approach to *Revelationes* represented in this work is therefore characterized by the following features: first, I assume that for St. Birgitta the truth of Christian revelation was undeniable. My assumption about the truth of Revelation is therefore relative: I accept it as certain for the author(s) of the text concerned, whereas the personal worldview of the researcher is not involved and does not influence the analysis. If theology is *fides quaerens intellectum* (“faith seeking understanding”), then I seek for “understanding” of Birgitta’s<sup>109</sup> faith. Second, I employ the categories of Christian theology, concentrating on the questions of importance within the scope of this branch of knowledge. I do not, however, discuss the significance of *Revelationes* for modern Christians and I do not argue for or against its orthodoxy as seen from the point of view of contemporary Christianity. Nevertheless, within the analysis of the source itself I cannot avoid treating the question of Birgitta’s orthodoxy, but only in relationship to the *corpus* of Christian dogma as accepted in the fourteenth century.

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<sup>109</sup> Id est: the narrator of Latin *Revelationes*, see below, section 1.3.2.



### 1.3.2. Consequences of the Complex Authorship of *Revelationes*

One more axiom concerning St. Birgitta lies beyond my interpretation of *Revelationes*. In the case of this work, the question of authorship is quite complicated, as the extant Latin text is the result of cooperation between Birgitta and her priestly advisers (Magister Mathias of Linköping, Prior Petrus of Alvastra, Master Petrus of Skänninge, and Alfonso de Jaén). The original Swedish text, transcribed by Birgitta or one of her advisers, was translated into Latin and proofread by the priests.<sup>110</sup> Birgitta herself studied Latin,<sup>111</sup> so it is possible that she took part in the process of translating, but her assistants did most of this work. Then the corpus of the revelations was arranged into the seven books of *Revelationes celestes*. The eighth book, *Liber ad reges*, is an anthology of revelations written down in different years, connected by the central idea of kingship and power. Alfonso de Jaén authored this anthology and influenced on its final shape and contents considerably.<sup>112</sup>

According to one of the revelations, the contribution of Birgitta's spiritual advisers was planned by Christ as a part of the process of transmitting the visionary message. In this revelation,

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<sup>110</sup> For the description of the procedure of dictating or writing down the revelations see: A&P, 84 (Birgitta's vita); 381, 384 (Alfonso's testimony); 522, 523 (Peter's of Alvastra testimony). See also: Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999), 3-4.

<sup>111</sup> See also : "Respondit mater: 'Quid agis modo et cotidie?' Et ego respondi: 'Addisco gramaticam et oro et scribo'" (VI, 46. 16); "Alter vero pater spiritualis istius domine erat quidam presbiter de Suecia, virgo eciam venerabilis et sanctissime vite, qui totam domum predictae domine regebat et eam cum filia sua gramaticam et cantum ex precepto Christi docuit" (Alfonso de Jaén, *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, III, 19).

<sup>112</sup> For the summary of the discussion on Alfonso's editorial work see: Hans Aili, introduction to *Reuelaciones VIII: Liber celestis imperatoris as reges*, by Saint Birgitta (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 2002), 17-22. Basic works of the subject include: Michael Seidlmayer, "Ein Gehilfe der hl. Birgitta von Schweden: Alfons von Jaén," *Historisches Jahrbuch des Görres-Gesellschaft* 50 (1930): 1-18; Eric Colledge, "Epistola solitarii ad reges: Alphonse of Pecha as Organizer of Brigittine and Urbanist Propaganda," *Medieval Studies* 18 (1956): 19-49; Arne Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén, His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1989); Hans Torben Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha: Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges—A Mirror of Princes* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993).

Christ describes himself as a carpenter who carves a beautiful image out of wood and whose friends decorate the image with additional colors. This allegory speaks of Birgitta, who bears the image of the word of God in her heart, and her confessors, who clarify and translate the revelations (Extrav., 49. 1–3). Based on this text we can thus deduce that the author(s) viewed the participation of persons other than St. Birgitta as an integral part of her work, placed logically within the structure of the text as such.

Analysis of the textual history of Birgitta's work belongs to the field of the history of literature.<sup>113</sup> It is certainly possible to examine the influence each of Birgitta's confessors exercised upon the text, as well as to comment on the role of Birgitta Birgersdotter in forming St. Birgitta's *Revelationes* ("finding Birgitta's voice in the *Revelations*," as Claire Sahlin has said).<sup>114</sup> In this study I will not, however, enter into these questions very deeply, as they lie beyond the scope of my research. I will instead concentrate on the Latin text of *Revelationes* in its final form. Therefore, each time I write about "Birgitta" this should be understood as "the narrator of the present form of the Latin *Revelationes celestes* and other works included in *Corpus Birgittianum*." I do not seek to explore the psychological features or social performance of the historical figure of Birgitta Birgersdotter.

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<sup>113</sup> Basic bibliography of *Revelationes* textual criticism include (in chronological order): Henrik Schück, *Några anmärkingar om Birgittas revelationer* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1901); Knut B. Westman, *Birgitta-studier*, vol. 1 (Uppsala: Uppsala Akademiska boktryckeri, 1911); Salomon Kraft, *Textstudier till Birgittas revelationer* (Uppsala: Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift, 1929); Roger Ellis, "The divine message and its human agents: St. Birgitta and her editors," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine order*, vol. 2, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1993); Bridget Morris, "Labyrinths of the Urtext," in *Heliga Birgitta, budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991*, ed. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1993); Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara, eds. *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). The process of creating and editing the *Corpus Birgittianum* has been summarized by: Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999), 3-11 and Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 25-33.

<sup>114</sup> Sahlin, op. cit., 25.

To some extent I share this approach with historical readers of Birgitta's revelations, who were able to read and interpret her work in print since 1492.<sup>115</sup> In the late Middle Ages, St. Birgitta spoke to her readers only through the Latin *Revelationes*, and it was not until the nineteenth century that critical analysis of her authorship began and the Old Swedish fragments of *Revelationes*, so important for modern research, were discovered.<sup>116</sup> I would like to stress this similarity, since one basic feature of my method is an attempt to present St. Birgitta's work within the context of her contemporary thought. I will explain this feature below.

### 1.3.3. Contextualization

The most important element of the "philosophy behind the questions I ask of the sources" is that I attempt to use the philosophical and theological categories known in the fourteenth century to examine the text of *Revelationes*. My aim is to expose the internal structure of contents and key points of the text as designed by the author(s), which will lead to placing the text within the context of fourteenth-century thought. This approach can be compared to a restoration of an ancient picture or a sculpture using techniques and materials as similar as possible to these originally employed. In the case of historical research, however, we can only speak of emphasizing the medieval mentality as an element of study procedure.

Alf Härdelin briefly explained the need for studies concentrated on the "inner substance" of medieval Christianity in the introduction to his book *Kult, Kultur och Kontemplation: Studier I medeltida svenskt kyrkoliv*:

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<sup>115</sup> In 1492 appeared *editio princeps*. See: *Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae* (Lubeck: Bartholomæus Ghotan, 1492).

<sup>116</sup> Saint Birgitta, *Heliga Birgittas originaltexter*, ed. Bertil Högman (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1951).

Många har också studerat gudstjänstlivets former och ordningar, men inte mycken uppmärksamhet har däremot skänkts åt frågorna om deras innebörd och teologiska fundament. Om det andliga livet såsom det lärdes och praktiserades under medeltiden och om den tro som bar upp det är det således ännu bara möjligt att få en fragmentarisk kunskap. Några få personer har visserligen lyfts fram: Birgitta förstås och ytterligare en handfull gestalter, men man kan inte påstå att vi ännu känner ens dem och deras tankar och insatser särskilt väl.<sup>117</sup>

I will therefore concentrate on the “theological fundamentals” of the text and gather information about spirituality<sup>118</sup> “as it has been taught and practised in the Middle Ages.” From this point of view I approach the relationship between theological thought and politics.

Another reason why I find this approach appropriate is the specific character of Birgitta’s text. *Revelationes*, as an anthology of accounts of mystical visions and auditions, are particularly prone to misinterpretation if examined outside of their “natural” context. Ernst Kantorowicz explained this problem in the introduction to his famous book *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*:

Mysticism, when transposed from the warm twilight of myth and fiction to the cold searchlight of fact and reason, has usually little left to recommend itself. Its language, unless resounding within its own magic or mythic circle, will often appear poor and even slightly foolish, and its most baffling metaphors and highflown images, when deprived of their iridescent wings, may easily resemble the pathetic and pitiful sight of Baudelaire’s Albatross. Political mysticism in particular is exposed to the danger of losing its spell or

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<sup>117</sup> Alf Härdelin, *Kult, kultur och kontemplation: Studier i medeltida svenskt kyrkoliv* (Skellefteå: Artos Bokförlag, 1998), 7.

<sup>118</sup> I follow the definition of “spirituality” given by Alf Härdelin: “Spiritualitet, med klang av *spiritus*, ansågs bättre än `fromhed’ och `fromhedsliv’ kunna leda tankarna till det av den Helige Ande präglade livet i den kyrkliga gemenskapen. Det skulle inte avse mer eller mindre ogripbara subjektiva egenskaper hos enskilda. Ännu mindre skulle det beteckna svåranalyserade känslotillstånd och emotionella upplevelser, i motsats till en intellektuellt medveten och genomreflekterad teologi, eller trosövertygelse. När det först kom att brukas i den här nya meningen var det inte avsett att uttrycka något slag av antiintellektualism. Det skulle referera till något som var *mer* än den teologiska trosövertygelsen, till en helhet av tro *och* liv, av form *och* innehåll, av teoretisk insikt *och* praktisk förverkligande; det var under alla omständigheter tänkt att beteckna något av genomtänkt teologi och bestämda kyrkliga ordningar präglad och med sidor som är åtkomliga för beskrivning och analys.” Idem, *Världen som yta och fönster. Spiritualitet i medeltidens Sverige* (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia, 2005), 29.

becoming quite meaningless when taken out of its native surroundings, its time and its space.<sup>119</sup>

Therefore, in his book Kantorowicz intends to “sketch . . . the general historical background of *The King’s Two Bodies* and to place this concept, if possible, in its proper setting of medieval thought and political theory.”<sup>120</sup> Otherwise, the mystical text may be rendered senseless, if, for example, examined according to criteria appropriate for interpreting chronicles—or it may become subject to manipulation by ascribing to the author certain theses not represented in the text. A mystical text, with its complicated symbolism, may be easily misused in this way. In this study, I take inspiration from Kantorowicz’s method of contextualization in order to avoid manipulating the text in the aforementioned manner.

To explain the nature of the cultural and historical context of *Revelationes*, it is useful to employ the notion of religious culture. It is not enough to say that European medieval culture was religious (or, penetrated with Christianity in all its aspects). I am of the opinion that the religious culture is a sphere of life of its own, comparable, for example, to technical culture. A person characterized by a high level of religious culture shows certain abilities to understand, internalize, and employ religious concepts. In other words, religious culture is a way of thinking and a lifestyle inspired and motivated by religion. We can generally say that in the Middle Ages, when most social structures were, as mentioned, penetrated by Christianity, the level of religious culture among the individuals who lived within these structures was quite high. Europeans who described themselves as Christians, Muslims, or Jews were generally accustomed to thinking according to

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<sup>119</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>120</sup> Kantorowicz, op. cit., 6.

religious or even theological criteria. The works of St. Birgitta, with all their political and religious material combined together in a unique way, are also the products of a certain religious culture, meant to be read within such a culture. Therefore, the author of *Revelationes* takes for granted that the reader of this text knows and accepts the key rules of Christian thinking as understood in the fourteenth century, such as the existence of orthodox and heterodox faith (and the impossibility of combining them into a coherent and valid synthesis), the necessary relationship between one's faith and life, and the eternal consequences of one's earthly choices. It is also a presumption of the text of *Revelationes* that a person who represents religious authority has the right to comment on public matters. These rules and facts are not explained in the text. The problems discussed in *Revelationes*, such as the status of Birgitta as a prophetess of the Last Days, have been built upon these presumptions.

St. Birgitta can be regarded as an active representative of the Christian religious culture, and one who attempted to impose the high standards of this culture on the prominent members of the Christian society. In my opinion, the mission of St. Birgitta in *Revelationes* was to explain the deeper meaning of Christian kingship, queenship, or papal authority to the persons holding these offices. St. Birgitta did not intend to revolutionize the understanding of Christian society and its structures already held by these officials. Instead, she wished to strengthen their Christian identity. This communication between the author of *Revelationes* and the officials was possible within the context of medieval Christian religious culture.

Many elements of the Christian religious culture were valid not only in the fourteenth century but also continued to exist throughout Christian history. Therefore, I found it useful and relevant to refer to the works of authors other than St. Birgitta in order to compare their thought

with *Revelationes* or to show the text of *Revelationes* in light of this literature. Most of these works are certainly by medieval authors, but I also refer to ancient texts that are useful in analyzing the context of *Revelationes*.

The historical events in Sweden,<sup>121</sup> Rome,<sup>122</sup> Cyprus,<sup>123</sup> Naples,<sup>124</sup> and other parts of Europe in the time of St. Birgitta are also an obvious and natural context of her work. I refer to them and clarify the relationship between *Revelationes* and their political and historical context. These events are not, however, at the center of this study. They are discussed and analyzed by many authors in numerous historical works.<sup>125</sup> In this study, I use such scholarship as a point of reference and source of knowledge about Birgitta's *Sitz im Leben*, but I do not express any original opinions about Birgitta Birgersdotter's social performance.

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I have now presented the characteristic features of my research method, understood as an interpretation and contextualization of a source text. My main source is *Revelationes celestes* and all the other works included in the *Corpus Birgittianum*. My interpretation of this source is twofold: theological and historical. I have chosen this methodology since the subject matter of this study, the idea of the Christian kingdom as presented in Birgitta's *Revelationes*, has a twofold— theological and political—character. Elements of the theological method include (1) accepting the fact that St. Birgitta considered the truth of Christian revelation as the basis for her theological

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<sup>121</sup> For a brief historical background information about the political situation in Sweden at the time of Birgitta see section 3.1.1.

<sup>122</sup> See section 3.3.3.

<sup>123</sup> See section 3.1.4, the passage discussing Birgitta's advice for Queen Leonor de Gandia of Aragon.

<sup>124</sup> See section 3.1.4. the passage discussing Birgitta's advice for Queen Joanna I of Naples.

<sup>125</sup> See section 1.2.3.

authorship and social activity, and (2) analyzing the theological questions posed by Birgitta.

Elements of the theological method are presented within the historical framework as I perform a critical analysis of the text, seeking to establish a connection between *Revelationes* and its historical and ideological context. As a historical work, this study concentrates on the events and ideologies represented in a certain historical epoch (in this case: fourteenth-century Europe, especially in Sweden), placing them within a historical context. I do not, however, undertake to study the change of structures and ideologies through the ages. Another important feature of my research method is the attempt I made to place the *Revelationes* within the context of medieval thought and medieval Christian religious culture in general. In my opinion, stressing this context is particularly important if a mystical and symbolic text is being analyzed. Such a text is especially prone to misinterpretation when no consideration of its original setting is offered.

#### **1.4. The Symbolic Imagery of *Revelationes celestes***

The language of symbols that is used in *Revelationes* plays a key role in understanding the substance of the text, as many of the revelations have a symbolic character. The structure of this dissertation is also inspired by the medieval method of interpreting a symbolic text, which Birgitta (as the narrator of *Revelationes*) and Alfonso also used to interpret Birgitta's visions. I will therefore briefly explain the main features of this symbolic language and the method of treating symbols in Birgitta's text according to Alfonso Pecha (see sections 1.4.2 and 1.4.3) and according to the text of *Revelationes* itself (see section 1.4.4). This analysis will be based on a short presentation of the medieval understanding of cognitive processes and of the mystical vision as a variation of this process (see section 1.4.1).



#### 1.4.1. Cognitive Process and Prophetic Visions in Late Medieval Scholastics

During the early Middle Ages, theories of cognition were based mostly on Neoplatonic sources and St. Augustine. The philosophy and theology of the fourteenth century explained cognitive processes with theories inspired by Aristotle's works, mainly *De anima*, as well as by the works of Arabian masters (Avicenna), who introduced the works of the Philosopher to the Latin world.<sup>126</sup> In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas provided Christian philosophy with an interpretation of this material that corresponded to the Christian religion and worldview.<sup>127</sup>

In both *Epistola Solitaria* by Alfonso and *Revelationes* by Birgitta, we find terminology and ideas rooted in the language and thought of Christian Scholasticism. Therefore, a short presentation of the theory of perception and cognitive process as described by Aquinas will contribute to a better understanding of the subject.

Aquinas distinguishes two levels of cognition: sensory (which, to some extent, can be identified with "perception" in terms of modern psychology) and intellectual ("cognitive process" in modern terms).<sup>128</sup> Under normal conditions, the physical human sense organs receive information about the world. There are five external senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste) and four internal (common sense, imagination, estimative or cogitative sense, and memory),<sup>129</sup> whose organs are located in the brain. Objects create a kind of impression in the

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<sup>126</sup> Simon Kemp, *Cognitive Psychology in the Middle Ages* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>127</sup> Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11-12.

<sup>128</sup> In Middle Ages both levels were often described as "cognitive process," see Simon Kemp, *Medieval Psychology* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 53. We shall also use the term in its broad meaning of "perception plus cognitive process."

<sup>129</sup> Five according to Avicenna, who distinguishes between "imagination" (imagination) and "fantasy" (phantasia). See: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 4 (cited below as *S.Th.*). All references to *Summa*

external organs. These impressions are processed in the common sense, which combines various impressions (for example, shape, color, and sound) into a single image of the object perceived. These immaterial images, called *phantasmas* or sensible species, are stored and processed in the imagination. Intellectual cognition does not involve the activity of any corporeal organ, as it takes place in the immaterial human soul: more precisely, in the active and passive intellect. The active intellect is responsible for abstracting general ideas out of our sensory impressions. These representations of things at the intellectual level are called intelligible species. The passive intellect is the part of the intellect that is then brought to a state of actually cognizing. In other words, sensory cognition tells us about the qualities and appearance of objects, while intellect allows us to recognize the object we are viewing.<sup>130</sup> We can thus conclude that according to Aquinas all the information about the world and in fact all knowledge comes to the human mind via the physical sense organs. Cognition takes place through species: representations of the things cognized.<sup>131</sup>

However, in specific circumstances, a variation of the normal cognitive process may occur. A prophetic vision is one of these situations. According to Aquinas, there are at least three ways in which “human knowledge is assisted by the revelation of grace.” First, human intellect may be directly “illuminated” by God, through *lumen intellectuale* or intelligible species. In this case, knowledge appears directly in the intellect of the prophet. All stages of sensory cognition are

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*Theologiae* according to: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vols. 4-12 of *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita* (Roma: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888-1906). The English translation: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Burns, Oates & Washburne, 1920). The electronic edition: Thomas Aquinas, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Enrique Alarcón (Pamplona: Fundación Tomás de Aquino, Universitatis Studiorum Navarrensis, 2009), <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html> (accessed September 10, 2009).

<sup>130</sup> Pasnau, op. cit., 12-13. See: Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, 78-79.

<sup>131</sup> Pasnau, op. cit., 14.

omitted here and knowledge appears within the immaterial soul of the prophet. Second, God may form sensible species directly in the imagination of a prophet, without being derived from physical objects through the prophet's external senses. In this case, the first stages of sensory cognition are omitted, but the *phantasmas* are processed through the bodily organs (internal sense) to the intellect.<sup>132</sup> Third, God may form material objects miraculously in the external world. They then are perceived by the prophet or by other people through a normal cognitive process. The vision of the Holy Spirit as a dove, seen by those who witnessed the baptism of Jesus, belonged to this third type.<sup>133</sup>

It is apparent, then, that the three kinds of prophetic cognition described by Aquinas correspond to the three different stages of the cognitive process. They all involve God's miraculous creation of images or species processed by various powers of human body and soul. In question twelve of the first part of *Summa theologiae*, briefly discussed above, Aquinas does not state whether the three kinds of visions are to be understood as three levels of the same experience or as three different phenomena.

Comparable classification of the three kinds of visions is found in Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*. It will be explained in the following part of this section. This work likely inspired many medieval authors, including Aquinas. In the later Middle Ages, knowledge about the three kinds or levels of prophetic vision—*visio corporalis*, *spiritualis (imaginativa)*, and *intellectualis*—became a part of the art of discernment of spirits.

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<sup>132</sup> Jozef Matula, "Thomas Aquinas and the Influence of Imaginatio/Phantasia on Human Being," *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis, Facultas Philosophica, Philosophica V* (2002): 174-175.

<sup>133</sup> This passage is based on: Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* I, q. 12, a. 13.

#### 1.4.2. The Nature of Birgitta's Visionary Experience according to Alfonso

In *Epistola solitarii*, his introduction to *Liber ad reges*, Alfonso de Jaén used the criteria for discernment of spirits to analyze Birgitta's revelations. He also refers to the three levels of prophetic vision described above in the following way:

Sciendum est ergo de primo, quod Augustinus in libro XII Super Genesim ad Litteram et Ieronimus in prologo Apocalipsis<sup>134</sup> tria principalia genera visionum describunt, scilicet corporale, spirituale et intellectuale. Visio enim corporalis est, quando videlicet corporalibus oculis aliquid videmus. Spiritualis seu ymaginaria visio dicitur, cum videlicet dormientes vel vigilantes in spiritu ymagines rerum cernimus, quibus aliquid aliud significatur, sicut vidit Pharaon spicas et Moyses rubum ardere, ille dormiens et iste vigilans. Intellectualis autem visio est, quando videlicet Spiritu Sancto reuelante intellectu mentis veritatem misteriorum, sicut est, capimus, quo modo vidit Iohannes illa, que in libro Apocalipsis referuntur. Non enim figuras tantum in spiritu vidit, sed et eorum significata mente intellexit. (*Epistola solitarii* V, 5–9)

According to Alfonso, Birgitta experienced all three kinds of visions. From among them, *visio corporalis* was the least frequent event in her spiritual life. However, Alfonso describes six of Birgitta's visions that can be listed in this category: her vision of the Virgin Mary, who placed a golden crown on young Birgitta's head (*Epistola solitarii* V, 10–11); the vision of Christ as a lamb, a child, and a human face appearing in the host held by the priest celebrating Eucharist (*Epistola solitarii* V, 11–13); the vision of the angel who dictated her *Sermo angelicus* (*Epistola solitarii* IV, 32–33); Birgitta's miraculous experience of "spiritual pregnancy," a movement in her body comparable to that of an unborn child moving around in the womb<sup>135</sup> (*Epistola solitarii* IV, 14–16); and the vision of Christ consoling Birgitta on her deathbed (*Epistola solitarii* V, 14–19). According to Alfonso, all of these visions belong to one category, but if we analyze the fragments of

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<sup>134</sup> Jerome did not author a prologue to the book of Apocalypse. Alfonso probably refers to some pseudo-Jerome work accompanying the edition of Apocalypse.

<sup>135</sup> See section 5.1.1.

*Revelationes* describing those visions and use the aforementioned criteria given by Alfonso himself, based on Aquinas and the church fathers, we can see that a distinction should be made within this category. According to *Revelationes*, the vision or miraculous sensation of the unborn baby has been confirmed by Birgitta's confessors, who were also able to see the phenomenon (VI, 88. 2), while the vision of Christ at her deathbed could have been only experienced by Birgitta, not by other persons present (VII, 31. 1 and 11–13). If we exclude the possibility of Birgitta's confessors experiencing mystical visions (which is not suggested in the text), we can imply that Alfonso's simple formula, "Visio enim corporalis est quando videlicet corporalibus oculis aliquid videmus," allows for the following interpretation: an image perceived by Birgitta in *visio corporalis* has been formed, according to Alfonso, in two different ways: first as an object in the external world (what is the essence of *visio corporalis* in Aquinas), and second as *species in medio*, an image of an object perceived by the senses of a prophet but not by other persons present.

Alfonso observes that, in most of Birgitta's visions, various images (*species, figures, ymagines*) are found, but he does not subsequently conclude that these visions belong to the second category, *visio spiritualis* or *imaginativa (ymaginaría)*. When discussing *visio spiritualis*, he stresses that Birgitta saw all her visions while awake, not in her dreams, as all oneiric visions are hardly considered trustworthy by the Fathers. Here Alfonso refers to Gregory the Great, who is of the opinion that dreams may sometimes come as a revelation but can be also inspired by evil spirits. Most dreams, however, occur as natural phenomena, without any special meaning. It is thus difficult to recognize a truly prophetic dream (*Epistola solitarii V, 21*).<sup>136</sup> But Birgitta saw her

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<sup>136</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV, 50 (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1980), 172-176. (Alfonso refers to chapter XLVIII in book IV of *Dialogues*, but this reference is not valid in the critical text. Alfonso's reference follows the earlier editions, it is in accordance with *Patrologia Latina* as well.)

visions while awake, so the images (*species*) seen by her are not a product of her dreaming imagination.

Alfonso describes Birgitta's spiritual visions twice in *Epistola solitarii*. In chapter IV, he refers to the various types of Birgitta's visionary experiences, without explicitly systemizing them, while in chapter V he describes the three kinds of visions as she experienced them. In both passages Alfonso uses similar expressions to describe the images seen by Birgitta: "species seu formas" (IV, 17) and "ymagines seu species" (V, 32). In both cases he chooses to use the scholastic technical term "species," which makes the philosophical context of his text much clearer. In chapter IV, Alfonso emphasizes that Birgitta was not always sure about the meaning of her visions. In some instances, she never discovered what a vision meant. Other visions were later explained by Christ in another vision or audition. In many cases, however, the meaning of a revelation would become clear to Birgitta's intelligence immediately ("manifestabantur ei tunc diuinitus in intelligencia sua significaciones illorum visorum," *Epistola solitarii* IV, 23).

This passage (IV, 17–24) is followed by a corresponding description of Birgitta's auditions, often mysterious to her as well. In Alfonso's account there is no substantial difference between the nature of visual and audible representations Birgitta perceived. The authors of her *vita*, Magister Petrus and Prior Petrus,<sup>137</sup> express the same opinion. Anna Jane Rossing, who was inspired by the classic tripartite division when classifying Birgitta's visions, found it necessary to organize the auditions as a separate class of revelations, but this concept is beyond the medieval interpretation of the subject.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> A&P, 81, 484.

<sup>138</sup> Anna Jane Rossing, *Studier i den heliga Birgittas Spiritualitet* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1986), 34-38.

It is worth noting here that, according to Alfonso, Birgitta interpreted her own symbolic visions and was often uncertain about their proper interpretation. Alfonso proposes the following ways of interpreting the visions: “textualiter an figuraliter vel an spiritualiter vel per quem modum” (*Epistola solitarii* IV, 36).

In chapter V Alfonso briefly described Birgitta’s condition while experiencing *visio spiritualis*: her joy, the sweetness of divine love filling her heart, her ecstasy (“alienation from corporal senses”) while she saw her visions (“videbat in spiritu illas ymagines seu species et audiebat locuciones illorum visorum” [*Epistola solitarii* V, 32]). He then immediately goes on to describe Birgitta’s intellectual visions.

Both passages (*Epistola solitarii* IV, 17–24 and V, 21–32) suggest that, according to Alfonso, *visio spiritualis* was a mediocre level of Birgitta’s visionary experience, leading finally to *visio intellectualis*. It appears that in chapter 4 Alfonso classifies Birgitta’s visions according to the various levels of her understanding, giving priority to those that were accompanied by the “supernatural light of reason” (“lumen intellectuale supernaturale” [*Epistola solitarii* V, 34]).

In fact, Alfonso aims to present most of Birgitta’s visions as intellectual, despite the fact that they include images and symbols. He states that the revelations in the book of *Revelationes* and in *Liber ad reges* are a product of Birgitta’s intellectual vision (*Epistola solitarii* V, 47). He compares them to the apocalyptic vision of St. John, which also represents *visio intellectualis*. According to Alfonso, the essence of *visio intellectualis* is that the visionary sees not only the images, but he or she knows their meaning as well (“Non enim figuras tantum in spiritu vidit, sed et eorum significata mente intellexit.” [*Epistola solitarii* V, 9]). Alfonso held the opinion in order to prove Birgitta’s reliability, as it was generally agreed upon that the human mind in state of *visio*

*intellectualis* cannot be deceived by the devil. This belief was held by Augustine<sup>139</sup> and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>140</sup> According to the latter, the influence of the devil does not reach to the intellectual sphere of the human soul. The devil might be able to produce imaginary illusions, as his intellectual and spiritual nature is higher and subtler than the corporeal human nature. He cannot, however, influence human intellect, as he is somehow impaired in his nature because of his isolation from God, the source of all knowledge.<sup>141</sup>

Alfonso used the authority of Augustine to defend Birgitta from potential attacks, but at the same time he slightly modified the Augustinian concept of *visio intellectualis*. According to Augustine, the book of Apocalypse originated in John's *visio spiritualis*, not *intellectualis*, as he had seen some "images of corporeal things."<sup>142</sup> It thus appears that Augustine regarded spiritual and intellectual visions rather as two different phenomena, not as degrees of the same experience.<sup>143</sup>

In this aspect, Alfonso followed Aquinas quite precisely: question 173 in *Secunda secundae*,<sup>144</sup> in which Thomas states that the intellectual light is a condition of prophecy (a person who experienced a vision but did not understand its meaning may not be named a prophet), but

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<sup>139</sup> Augustine, "De Genesi ad litteram," XII, 14, 29, in *La Genèse au sens littéral en douze livres (VIII-XII): De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, ed. and trans. P. Agaësse and A. Solignac (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1972), 374-376.

<sup>140</sup> *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, q. 16, a. 11-12., trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 939-960; Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, II, d. 8, a. 5: in Thomas Aquinas, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Enrique Alarcón (Pamplona: Fundación Tomás de Aquino, Universitatis Studiorum Navarrensis, 2009), <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/snp2005.html> (accessed September 10, 2009); *S.Th.* I, q. 111, a. 3-4.

<sup>141</sup> Matula, op. cit., 171-173.

<sup>142</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, 26, 54, op. cit., 422-423.

<sup>143</sup> See also: "Quando autem penitus avertitur atque abripitur animi intentio a sensibus corporis, tunc magis ecstasis dici solet. Tunc omnino quaecumque sint praesentia corpora, etiam patentibus oculis non videntur, nec ullae voces prorsus audiuntur: totus animi contuitus aut in corporum imaginibus est per spiritalem, aut in rebus incorporeis nulla corporis imagine figuratis per intellectualem visionem" (Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, 12, 25, op. cit., 365-368).

<sup>144</sup> *Epistola solitarii V*, 62.



the intelligible species seen in intellectual vision may come from various sources. They can be imprinted directly by God in the prophet's intellect, but they can also result from species produced or revealed to the prophet's imagination.<sup>145</sup> Consequently, we can suppose that Aquinas understood the three kinds of visions as three levels of visionary experience—not excluding, but incorporating each other (at least potentially, if the intellectual vision is related to the spiritual, which is a source of intelligible species). Alfonso followed here the authority of Aquinas more than that of Augustine, who does not mention any species involved in *visio intellectualis*. In Alfonso's opinion, *visio intellectualis* may include perceiving images (species), but it would also include their understanding. This highest type of vision is, according to Alfonso, a kind of supernatural, infallible interpretation added to the spiritual vision. We must, however, clearly state that Aquinas speaks about intelligible species, while Alfonso understands "species" generally, including also visual representations.

Alfonso was right in his prognosis of the possible conflict that Birgitta's visions could generate: their imaginative character became one of the points of controversy surrounding her book. John Gerson, after he failed to uplift Birgitta's reputation as a prophetess, authored a number of works generally discrediting revelations that depended on images, knowing that these revelations were the cornerstone of female mysticism.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.*, IIa IIae, q. 173, a. 2, ad 2.

<sup>146</sup> Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," *The American Historical Review* (February 2002), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/107.1/ah0102000026.html> (accessed August 13, 2009), 14. See also: Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 69-70.

Prior Petrus of Alvastra and Magister Petrus—who both had considerable influence on the text of *Revelationes*, as they translated her Birgitta’s accounts into Latin—shared Alfonso’s view on the possible classification of Birgitta’s visions in many aspects. Both in Birgitta’s *vita* (written by the two Swedes) and in Prior Petrus’s testimony at the canonization process, they mention *visio corporalis*, *spiritualis*, and *intellectualis*. However, no special attempt to enumerate most of Birgitta’s visions among the intellectual ones is found there. Like Alfonso, the authors of the *vita* are of the opinion that Birgitta experienced all three kinds of visions and that they are to be understood as three levels of the same experience:

Igitur anno Domini millesimo iij.xl.v (1345) facte sunt prime diuine reuelaciones domine Brigide non in sompno, sed vigilando in oracione corpore manente viuo in vigore, sed rapta a sensibus corporalibus in extasi et in visione spirituali seu ymaginaria, accedente visione seu supernaturali diuina illustracione intellectuali, nam vidit et audiuit spiritualia et ea spiritu senciebat. Vidit quippe dicto modo et audiuit ymagines et similitudines corporales; in corde vero senciebat quasi quoddam viuudum, . . . vehemens erat mocio in corde, quod eciam ab extra videri poterat motus et sentiri.<sup>147</sup>

In his testimony, Prior Petrus said that Birgitta heard and saw certain things “in visione spirituali et aliquando in visione supernaturali intellectuali,” but he stressed the fact that she was awake, not dreaming, while experiencing the vision.<sup>148</sup>

Magister Mathias of Linköping has not provided an analysis of Birgitta’s visionary experience comparable to Alfonso’s. We know, however, that he followed the traditional Augustinian description of *visio intellectualis*. According to Anders Piltz, in *Alphabetum distincionum*, a biblical concordance authored by Mathias, he states that John the apostle experienced a *visio spiritualis* that resulted in his creating the book of Revelation. In this vision “in

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<sup>147</sup> A&P, 81.

<sup>148</sup> A&P, 484.

rerum visibilium imaginibus rerum inuisibilium veritatem comprehendit.”<sup>149</sup> As we said above, according to Alfonso, the vision of John should be described as *intellectualis*. We can thus conclude that Mathias had a different opinion on this subject and possibly about the nature of *visio intellectualis* as well.

Contemporary literature also has addressed the question of organizing Birgitta’s visions by the three categories of *visio corporalis*, *spiritualis*, and *intellectualis*. According to Anna Jane Rossing, who studied the spirituality of St. Birgitta in general, the text of *Revelationes* suggests that most of Birgitta’s visions belong to the “imaginative” type. She does, however, mention the fact that Alfonso insisted on presenting Birgitta’s visions as intellectual.<sup>150</sup> Claire Sahlin also states that most “descriptions of Birgitta’s visionary experiences conform directly to Augustine’s category of spiritual vision”<sup>151</sup> and that she “rarely, if ever, experienced a . . . purely intellectual vision.”<sup>152</sup> This dominance of imaginative experiences in descriptions of Birgitta’s spirituality might be, according to Sahlin, a result of her being female, since medieval theologians associated the intellectual visions with the male and spiritual visions with female intellect. Birgitta thus represents a “standard pattern of behaviour expected of authentic, female visionaries.”<sup>153</sup> Sahlin

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<sup>149</sup> *Alphabetum distincionum* has not been edited critically. I rely here on Anders Piltz, who studied fragments of the only surviving manuscript. Anders Piltz, "Inspiration, vision, profetia. Birgitta och teorierna om uppenbarelsen," in *Heliga Birgitta, budskapet och förebilden: föredrag vid Jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991*, eds. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1993), 76.

<sup>150</sup> Anna Jane Rossing, *Studier i den heliga Birgittas Spiritualitet* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1986), 34-38.

<sup>151</sup> Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 60.

<sup>152</sup> Sahlin, *op. cit.*, 69.

<sup>153</sup> Sahlin, *loc. cit.*

also notes that “intellectual understanding was continually wedded to her spiritual visions,”<sup>154</sup> but she nevertheless states that descriptions of Birgitta’s visions correspond to the Augustinian definition of spiritual visions. In her opinion, Birgitta presented her visions as conforming to the expectations of medieval society. The same may be not entirely true of Alfonso’s presentation of Birgitta’s visions. If medieval female visionaries were expected to present their audience with *visio spiritualis*, then Alfonso did not conform to these expectations.

#### 1.4.3. Birgitta’s Symbolic Imagery and Its Possible Interpretation according to *Epistola solitaria*

This analysis provides a basis for discussing Alfonso’s account of the various kinds of images and symbols in Birgitta’s revelations. According to him, the images and symbols Birgitta perceived in *visio corporalis* were miraculously formed by God in her senses (observed only by her) or formed in the outside world (in which case other people observed as well). Alfonso does not mention the need to interpret such visions. They probably required no interpretation, as they became clear to Birgitta by means of her own understanding or by the divine interpretation following the vision.

On the other hand, spiritual or imaginative revelations (both visions and auditions), which were based on an apparition of sensible species in Birgitta’s imagination, were sometimes incomprehensible to her. Regarding the visual representations, Alfonso does not refer to any interpretations made by Birgitta, but he states that Birgitta considered the following types of interpretation for the auditory revelation she received: “Et aliquando tali modo predicebantur ei multa futura et prophetica de futuris et alia non prophetica per verba obscura, quorum significata ipsa nesciebat, an intelligerentur textualiter an figuraliter vel an spiritualiter vel per quem

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<sup>154</sup> Sahlin, loc. cit.

modum” (Epistola solitarii IV, 36). A similar account is given in chapter 5: “Domina Brigida aliquando intelligebat verba visionum corporaliter seu litteraliter, et tamen Christus vel mater eius loquentes intelligebant illa spiritualiter aut figuraliter” (Epistola solitarii IV, 36).

Thus, according to Alfonso, Birgitta heard some words in *visio spiritualis* and tried to interpret them herself. He mentions three categories familiar to her: the words could be interpreted *corporaliter* (*litteraliter*, *textualiter*), *figuraliter*, or *spiritualiter*. At the same time, other spiritual auditions had a rather clear meaning and were aimed “ad utilitatem proximorum, direccionem morum, conuersionem gencium et reuelacionem misteriorum” (*Epistola solitarii IV*, 35). Therefore, the words of Christ—which were quite understandable to Birgitta—often bore a moral connotation. We shall return to this classification later, as Alfonso’s account strongly influenced the structure of the present study.

An intellectual vision may involve a kind of species (intelligible species), but it also may be based on the pure “light of understanding.” Visual symbols are involved in neither case, since intelligible species are concepts on the higher level of abstraction. However, it is still reasonable to ask about the role images played in Birgitta’s intellectual visions. According to Alfonso, some of Birgitta’s intellectual visions involved the miraculous cognition of very complex contents in a very short amount of time. The *Rule of the Most Holy Saviour* and the *Book of Questions (Revelationes V)* were revealed to her this way:

Quando autem ipsa dixit, ut supra habetur, quod tota consciencia et intelligencia eius in illo raptu extasis replebatur et illuminabatur quodam intellectu spirituali et quod in momento erant Christo loquente infusa in intellectu eius multa, ut scilicet tota Regula Saluatoris et Liber Questionum et multa alia per quendam influxum luminis intellectualis supernaturalis, ecce quod per hoc clare ostenditur nobis, quod ipsa tunc stabat rapta in illo extasi, et tunc illuminabatur et illustrabatur mens et intelligencia eius diuinitus per supernaturalem, intellectualem visionem. (Epistola solitarii V, 34)

Another short account of the same subject is found in chapter 4:

Aliquando quippe visa in extasi aliqua specie Christi vel sanctorum infundebantur in momento intellectui eiusdem beate domine aliqua magnalia, scilicet soluciones questionum, reuelaciones misteriorum et direcciones actuum virtuosorum et regula sancte vite per quendam influxum supernaturalis luminis diuini. Et tali modo habuit quasi in momento totum Librum Questionum, qui est quintus liber in numero inter libros celestis voluminis, et Regulam eciam Saluatoris religionis monialium ei reuelatam. (Epistola solitarii IV, 30–31)

In the first fragment, no images are mentioned. In the second one, Alfonso speaks about a representation of Christ or a saint seen by Birgitta. He does, however, refer to the images and metaphors present in the text of book 5 and the *Rule*; furthermore, these works contain a number of symbolic images, metaphors, and parables.<sup>155</sup> It is therefore likely that Alfonso thought them an integral part of what Christ said to Birgitta, not an independent vision.

To summarize, according to Alfonso there are at least two kinds of images in Birgitta's visions: representations of persons or objects both visual and audible (*phantasmas*), and representations in the form of narration heard by Birgitta, a kind of "mystical literature." These representations might have been clear to Birgitta from the beginning, or they might have required an interpretation. Alfonso mentions four possible ways of interpreting the vision: it could have

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<sup>155</sup> For example, in Book V a parable is told by Christ the Judge about a man, who owns two fields, one fertile and the other infertile. Christ compares himself to this man: "Homo erat possidens duos agros, quorum alter incultus manens, alter certis temporibus fructificabat. Cui dixit amicus suus: 'Miror', inquit, 'cum sis sapiens et diues, cur agros tuos diligentius non excolis aut cur non tradis aliis excolendos.' Respondit ille: 'Alter agrorum, quantamcumque diligentiam exhibuero, nichil producit nisi herbas pessimas, quas bestie nociue occupant et deturpant locum; cui si adhibuero pinguedinem, tantum lasciuendo insolescit, quod, eciam si modicum frumenti produxerit, plures ascendunt zizanie, quas dedignor colligere, quia frumentum non desidero nisi purum. Ergo consulcius est agrum talem dimittere incultum, quia tunc bestie non occupant locum nec bestie occultant se in herbis, et si aliquae herbe amare pullulant, utile est pro ouibus, quia gustatis illis discunt suauiam non fastidire. Alter vero ager secundum temperiem temporum dispositus est. Cuius quedam pars est petrosa et indiget pinguedine, alia humida indigens calore, alia sicca indigens humore. Ideo secundum qualitatem agri opus meum volo temperare.' Ego itaque Deus similis sum homini isti" (V, int. 13. 44-50).

been understood *textualiter* (*corporaliter*, *litteraliter*), *figuraliter*, *spiritualiter*, or it could bear a moral meaning (“ad utilitatem proximorum, direccionem morum”).

#### 1.4.4. Birgitta’s Symbolic Imagery and Its Possible Interpretation according to *Revelationes celestes*

No comparable classification of Birgitta’s visions appears in the text of *Revelationes celestes*. Either Birgitta was uninterested in building such theories concerning her own experience, or her theories simply are not expressed in the text of *Revelationes*. The narrator of *Revelationes*, however, reflects upon the symbolic nature of her mystical experience. These reflections appear to center around three main questions: Why do the spiritual beings (God, saints, and angels) present themselves to Birgitta as visual images? Why are the visions so difficult to understand? And, how ought they to be interpreted?<sup>156</sup> Discussing these questions, we rely on three of Birgitta’s revelations: IV, 15; V, rev. 10 and VIII, 48. These three address the subject most thoroughly, but a number of other revelations will be consulted as well.

In *Revelationes*, the first question is related to a general problem of God’s invisibility. Several times Birgitta asks God, “Why are you invisible and impossible to perceive with the senses?” This problem is touched upon in book 5, when the proud cleric standing on the ladder<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> The following passage does not aim at presenting a complete analysis of Birgitta’s reflection upon the nature of her own visions. It is rather focused on the symbolic imagery of the visions and kinds of interpretation suggested in *Revelationes*.

<sup>157</sup> The character called sometimes “Monk-on-the-ladder,” but in fact the man is described in Book V as “religiosus”, not “monachus.” The word “religiosus” may suggest a mendicant friar or another member of clergy. For the discussion about his identity see: Bridget Morris, “The monk-on-the-ladder in Book 5 of St Birgitta’s Revelaciones,” *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 82 (1982): 95-107; Bridget Morris, introduction to Book V of *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume II. Liber Caelestis, Books IV-V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

asks a series of questions about the invisibility of God, angels, and demons.<sup>158</sup> The answer given by Christ is based on the central thesis that weak human flesh would be incapable of seeing and perceiving heavenly realities: “Si itaque gloria mea, sicut est, videretur, corpus ipsum hominis corruptibile infirmaretur et deficeret sicut sensus illorum, qui in monte gloriam meam viderunt; corpus quoque pre leticia anime a labore deficeret et ad exercicia corporalia non sufficeret” (V, int. 8. 15). According to this reasoning, the human body, because it is made of material substance, lacks the capacity to receive the intensity of a spiritual experience. However, the purely spiritual human soul is capable of such cognition: “Si enim corpus alicuius hominis videret deitatem, liquesceret sicut cera ante ignem anima que tanta exultacione gauderet, quod corpus quasi cinis annihilaretur,” says Christ below in the *Book of Questions* (V, int. 11. 15). Another reason why we cannot see God, according to the *Book of Questions*, is because of God’s intention to encourage man’s love and faith towards Him. God wants people to seek for and desire him, so he hides from their eyes (V, int. 8. 16). This is why God is invisible in his nature and why he became incarnate, coming to the world as a man, similar to us and knowable through the senses.

However, the same explanation is given for the fact that in her visions Birgitta sees God and spiritual creatures in the form of corporeal similitudes (*similitudines corporales*). Birgitta knows that the vision is not in fact an insight into the real nature of God and angels, since they are not corporeal, but she sees them “as if they had bodies” (II, 18. 4). Otherwise, her body “would break like a vessel, broken and decayed due to the soul’s joy at the sight” (II, 18. 2).

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<sup>158</sup> “Item cur non facis videri ab hominibus in hac vita gloriam tuam, ut feruentius desideretur ab eis? . . . Item, cum sancti et angeli tui nobiliores et sancciores sint super omnes creaturas, cur non videntur ab hominibus in hac vita? . . . Item, cum inferni pene sunt incomparabiliter horribiles, cur non facis videri eas ab hominibus in hac vita, ut fugiantur? . . . Item, cum demones incomparabiliter sint deformes et horribiles, cur non apparent visibiles hominibus, quia tunc nullus eos sequeretur nec consentiret eis?” (V, int. 8. 2-5); “O iudex, quero a te: Cum Deus sis et homo, cur non ostendisti deitatem tuam sicut et humanitatem, et tunc omnes credidissent tibi?” (V, int. 11. 1).



The term *similitudines corporales* or *corporalium*,<sup>159</sup> which Birgitta used often, belongs to the technical language of Scholastic theology. Aquinas uses this expression to describe the symbolic style of Holy Scripture. He states that “conueniens est sacrae Scripturae diuina et spiritualia sub similitudine corporalium tradere.”<sup>160</sup> His reason is similar to Birgitta’s: God adapts his way of speaking to the human mode of cognition. But Birgitta emphasizes the body’s weakness and incapability of receiving the intensity of heavenly truth, whereas Aquinas speaks about the natural way of gaining knowledge through the senses, which is proper for human nature.<sup>161</sup>

The second question, “Why are some of the visions difficult to understand?” is closely linked to the first one. Book 6 poses it directly: “Cur Deus, cui omnes hore et momenta nota sunt, non plane et ad certas horas predixit singula? Aut cur alia dixit, alia notauit?” asks Christ, anticipating Birgitta’s question (IV, 15. 23). Put another way, why is the truth of the revelations, their real meaning, often hidden from Birgitta’s eyes and mind? That the visions are symbolic does not provide an adequate answer, since some of the non-visual revelations are incomprehensible for Birgitta as well (“quare uerba Dei ita obscure dicuntur, quod diuersimode interpretari

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<sup>159</sup> “Ergo, quia anima nobilissime et ignite nature est, tribuens corpori uiuificationem et calorem, et quia spiritualis est, ideo a corporalibus nisi per **corporales similitudines** uideri nullatenus potest” (V, int. 15. 24). “Tu,’ inquit, ‘que uides me, non uides me nisi per **similitudines corporales**. Si enim uideres me in ea forma, in qua sum, morereris ex timore, quia omnia membra mea sunt demones. Ideo uera est Scriptura, que dicit, quod, sicut iusti sunt membra Dei, ita peccatores sunt membra dyaboli” (VI, 52. 47-48). “Ego quippe ostendi in monte Moysi uestes, quibus sacerdotes legis uterentur. Non quod in celesti Dei habitacione aliquid materiale sit, **sed quia spiritualia nisi per corporales similitudines non capiuntur**. Ideo spirituale per corporale ostendi, ut sciatur, quanta reuerencia et mundicia opus est hiis, qui habent ipsam ueritatem, scilicet corpus meum, si tantam mundiciam et reuerenciam habebant hii, qui portabant umbram et figuram” (IV, 58. 16-17). Emphasis mine.

<sup>160</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q.1, a. 9.

<sup>161</sup> “Est autem naturale homini ut per sensibilia ad intelligibilia ueniat, quia omnis nostra cognitio a sensu initium habet. Unde conuenienter in sacra Scriptura traduntur nobis spiritualia sub metaphoris corporalium” (Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.*, loc. cit.).

possunt?” VIII, 48. 6). The symbols are thus a method of hiding the truth, but not the reason for hiding it.

Birgitta gives a number of reasons why God speaks to her and to other prophets using symbols or unclear expressions (“*verba Dei obscure dicitur*” [VIII, 48. 6]). First, this is done for her own sake. Christ wants to strengthen her faith and teach her about the way God expresses his will. Therefore, he sometimes intends for Birgitta to be uncertain about the outcomes of her prophetic announcements: “*Eciam quandoque dico aliqua obscure, ut et timeas et gaudeas; timeas, ne alio modo eueniant propter pacienciam meam diuinam, qui noui mutaciones cordium, gaudeas eciam, quia voluntas mea semper adimpletur*” (V, rev 10. 4).

Second, God wants to achieve similar results with those whom the prophecies address. Christ compares the words of prophecy to wine circulating in a distiller’s machinery. Like wine, ascending and descending in a system of pipes and tubes, the words of God ascend by love and descend by justice to become perfectly “distilled”: fulfilled and accepted by the friends of God, rejected by his enemies, all according to God’s will and providence. The mysterious character of the prophecy is thus a tool of modulating its effect on people. A prophet may rebuke a king in the name of God and warn him about imminent death, but afterward bless him and wish him long life, if the king is converted (VIII, 48. 6–11). The unclear form of the prophecy is also helpful to keep people trusting in God’s mercy. An entirely clear and outspoken warning against eternal punishment could lead some to despair instead of conversion (VIII, 48. 12). Presenting such warnings in symbolic form respects the freedom of the addressee. Every mysterious prophecy thus has a moral purpose regardless of its contents, since its very form is meaningful.

Finally, the mysterious words of prophecy contribute to God's judgment. The friends of God and his enemies may understand the same words differently because of the different disposition of their souls. Then the faith of God's friends may earn merit and their magnanimity may become manifest thanks to their trust in God's word, while the sinners may prove unfaithful: "qui occasionem discernendi querit, inueniat et, qui sordescunt, sordescant adhuc boni quoque fiant manifestiores" (VIII, 48. 17). Therefore, people reveal their real nature and judge themselves when confronted with the puzzling prophecy.<sup>162</sup> It appears that while speaking about the reasons for the prophecy's obscurity, Birgitta reveals a great deal about the purposes of her prophecy in general. They can be grouped in two categories: moral (that is, aimed at correcting people's conduct) and eschatological, since the judgment of God, both individual and the Last Judgment, belongs to the field of eschatology.

The third question discussed ("How ought the visions to be interpreted?") leads to a more general dimension of Birgitta's reflection upon her experience. In all three above-quoted revelations (IV, 15; V, rev. 10 and VIII, 48) Birgitta puts the problem of interpreting prophecy (including her own visions) into a framework of "corporeal and spiritual" understanding. She refers to the times of Old Testament, when God spoke to Israel *corporaliter* in order to teach carnal men about heavenly things (V, rev. 10, 5). Many of the promises given then, such as those concerning the coming of the Son of David, were fulfilled corporally (the promise given to David was fulfilled through Solomon) although their real meaning was spiritual, and so they found their true completion in Christ (VIII, 48. 10). "Corporeal" in this context refers to all material reality, the

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<sup>162</sup> See: "Nec eiam sine causa erat, quod obscure tradidi aliqua, quia sic erat iusticia, ut occultaretur consilium meum aliquantulum a malis et ut unusquisque bonorum feruenter expectaret gratiam meam et pro expectatione optineret premium, ne, si certo tempore consilium meum insinuatam fuisset, omnes ab expectatione et caritate propter longiturnitatem temporis desisterent" (II, 28. 7).

surface of things, but also to everyday life and a mundane way of thinking, while the “spiritual” sphere of life refers to viewing things in their inner and eternal dimension.

Prophecies of the Old Testament had therefore a double meaning: corporeal and spiritual.

According to Birgitta, the same rule of interpreting prophecies is valid also today. Christ says to her in a vision:

Propterea, filia, verba Dei multipliciter intelligi possunt, nec tamen ob hoc aliqua in Deo mutabilitas est consideranda, sed sapientia eius admiranda et formidanda. Nam sicut in prophetis multa dixi corporaliter, que et corporaliter perficiebantur, multa etiam dixi corporaliter, que spiritualiter perficiebantur vel intelligebantur, sic et nunc facio, et quando hec contingunt, causam eorum indicabo tibi. (IV, 15. 33–34)

It is remarkable that Birgitta applies the same rules that govern the interpretation of biblical history and prophecies to her own experience. We shall discuss this question further in chapter 2 when addressing sacred and secular history as presented in *Revelationes*. Here, however, it is essential to note that the “corporeal and spiritual” paradigm governs Birgitta’s own interpretation of her revelations.<sup>163</sup> This is also valid as one of the rules governing her spirituality in general. In this aspect, Birgitta follows the general pattern of medieval theology, which spoke about the literal and spiritual meaning of the Bible but also of the events currently taking place. Alf Härdelin wrote about this kind of hermeneutic while discussing the rules governing the medieval worldview:

Det handlar alltså för medeltidens teologer i grunden, och först och främst, inte om texttolking utan om en tolking av hela den yttre, objektiva verkligheten själv, och det handlar om historiesyn. På båda dessa områden är det fråga om vad vi kan kalla för en

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<sup>163</sup> See also: “Quandoque etiam descendit Deus per simplicem verborum prolationem et corporalem expressionem. Sed ascendit iterum per spiritualem intelligenciam, sicut in Daudid, cui multa dicta sunt sub nomine Salomonis, sed completa sunt sicut et intellecta in Filio Dei. Quandoque etiam loquitur Deus de futuris quasi de preteritis et presenciam simul tangit et futura, quia omnia sunt in Deo: et presenciam et preterita et futura quasi unus punctus” (VIII, 48. 10-11).

serie övergångar från synliga ytor till osynliga, inre mysterier, eller om gränsöverskridanden från en fas i frälsningshistorien till en annan.<sup>164</sup>

These “transitions” (övergångar) from the visible surface to the invisible mysteries, from the corporeal to the spiritual, are perhaps one of the most important features of Birgitta’s thought. We shall formulate this general thesis now, since it influenced the structure and contents of the present study. The remainder of this work will discuss and develop this point in detail.

We can thus observe that Birgitta interprets and explains her visions in several dimensions using various arguments. The symbolical form of visions, which is a problem itself for Birgitta, calls for a special interpretation, which must be done on both a corporeal and a spiritual level. The visions, addressed to certain people, have a precise aim that is also related to their symbolic form. This aim is often moral or reformatory, but the true effect of many revelations will only be clear at the end of the addressee’s life. Therefore, we can speak about at least four modes of interpreting Birgitta’s visions as expressed in *Revelationes*: corporeal and spiritual, moral and eschatological. Their cross-links are quite complex and they are never explicitly proposed as a fourfold scheme.

#### 1.4.5. The Four Ways of Understanding the Word of God

This fourfold scheme provides an inspiring possibility for employing both Birgitta’s and Alfonso’s accounts to organize the study of *Revelationes celestes*. As mentioned previously, the research method of this study involves using categories and notions familiar to the author(s) and readers of *Revelationes* in order to bring out the possible “original” meaning of the text, the

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<sup>164</sup> Alf Härdelin, *Världen som yta och fönster. Spiritualitet i medeltidens Sverige* (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia, 2005), 276.

meaning intended by its author(s), and to place the text in the theological context of the fourteenth century.

In medieval exegesis, interpreting the Bible according to its fourfold sense (*sensus quadruplex Scripturae*) was a highly valued and popular method. In fact, the method does not deal with the text itself, but with the events and facts described, so it was also employed to interpret non-biblical facts of importance for the history of salvation or its mysteries.<sup>165</sup> The method is based on the distinction between the literal or historical sense and the spiritual sense. The historical sense (*sensus historicus*) denotes facts and events directly reported in the text. Explaining this sense requires knowledge of historical and theological context of the interpreted text. The spiritual sense (*sensus spiritualis*) denotes all the non-literal or more-than-literal<sup>166</sup> contents that were intended by the author of the text, designed by God, or even created by the interpreter. Spiritual exegesis includes three dimensions: allegorical (*sensus allegoricus*), which denotes a transition from the promises of the Old Testament to their fulfillment in Christ, or from a heavenly prototype to its earthly realization (for example, of the City of God). The third sense (*sensus tropologicus* or *moralis*) denotes the personal or existential dimension of the Scripture, discovered by each member of the Christian community individually or by the community of the faithful. The last sense is *sensus anagogicus*. It represents the eschatological dimension of human existence, the transition from life to death and judgment, and from death to resurrection.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Alf Härdelin, op. cit., 289.

<sup>166</sup> The term "more-than-literal sense" has been popularized among the Catholic theologians by R. E. Brown and the New Jerome biblical commentary. See: Raymond Edward Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland Edmund Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 1152-1162.

<sup>167</sup> The most important work concerning the fourfold interpretation of Scripture and the main source of inspiration for the structure of this study is: Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale, les quatre sens de l'écriture* (Paris:

St. Birgitta does not mention this method of spiritual exegesis in *Revelationes*, but she does refer to each of the four senses while interpreting her own revelations. Alfonso de Jaén explicitly states his familiarity with the four senses when he wonders whether Birgitta's revelations should be interpreted *textualiter, figuraliter, spiritualiter*, or "ad utilitatem proximorum, direccionem morum" (*Epistola solitarii* IV, 35). In his opinion, the visions themselves provoke an interpretation on different levels, depending on their symbolic nature. Therefore, I have decided to use the medieval exegetical method as a source of inspiration for the structure of this study. I was encouraged and inspired by the recent book by Alf Härdelin: *Världen som yta och fönster: Spiritualitet i medeltidens Sverige*, which also employs the fourfold scheme in its structure. The first volume refers to the literal and allegorical dimensions in medieval Scandinavian spirituality. The second volume is not yet published.

### 1.5. The Structure of this Study as Inspired by the "Four Senses"

The structure of this study results from my method, as I have decided to stress the importance of categories familiar to the author(s) of *Revelationes* in order to place the text in the theological context of the fourteenth century. The division of the text into four chapters (following this introductory chapter) was inspired by the medieval method of interpreting the text according to its four senses: literal, moral, allegorical (or symbolic), and anagogical. **Therefore, the second chapter ("Politics and History in the Eyes of a Mystic") corresponds to the literal meaning of a text** and concerns Birgitta's actual attitude toward politics and history, as well as her vision of a Christian society in general, and the structure of this society in particular. **The third chapter, "The Mirror of a Christian society," corresponds to the moral meaning of a text** and describes the

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Aubier, 1959-1964). The English edition is: Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* (Grand Rapids and Edinburgh: William B. Eerdmans and T&T Clark, 1998-2009).

moral duties of persons belonging to each status within Christian society. According to *Revelationes*, a man's public performance was as important for his spiritual condition as his behavior in the private sphere of life. **The fourth chapter corresponds to the allegorical meaning of text.** Its title, "On Earth as It is in Heaven" is taken from the Pater Noster, a prayer that expresses the Christian longing for harmony between temporal heavenly realities. This harmony was thought attainable through the imitation Christ and his saints. St. Birgitta considered herself a follower and imitator of Christ, as she believed the category of *imitatio* to be one of the important rules governing the Christian life. This conviction resulted in her idea of the Christian kingdom, which should imitate its eternal prototype. **The last chapter presents the "anagogical sense" of Birgitta's text:** that is, the eschatological tension accompanying her prophetic message and her remarks about the last days of the world coming to a Christian society.

Therefore, in each of the four chapters I will approach the main subject of this dissertation from a different angle, accenting different aspects of life in a Christian society, but the reality and ideas described remain the same throughout the whole dissertation. Also, the protagonists of this study—kings, queens, knights, and monks—are constantly present. It is thus inevitable that some questions, such as the idea of knighthood, recur several times in my analysis: these will be treated from different perspectives according to the requirements of the dissertation's general structure.

Apart from this main division into five chapters (the introduction and four chapters), there is at least one more structural scheme applicable to this study. The reader will easily notice that in chapters two and three new subjects and themes are introduced and developed, while in chapters four and five they are continued and summarized. This construction resembles the medieval



*exitus-reditus* scheme,<sup>168</sup> which was meant to pursue all the themes harmoniously and bring them to a logical ending.

## 1.6. References and Quotations

When quoting *Revelationes celestes*, I used the critical edition published by The Swedish Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities together with Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet between 1956 and 2002. I also consulted the electronic edition of *Revelationes* based on the above critical text. The electronic version has been edited by Sara Risberg (Riksarkivet, Stockholm).

I quote my main source, *Revelationes celestes*, in its Latin original for two reasons. First, I have been working with the original text and my intention is to analyze the content of this version. Every translation is to some extent an interpretation of the source text, and the scope of this study is not broad enough to include a systematic comparison of various English translations. Second, the critical English translation edited by Oxford University Press, which could possibly serve as a reference for bilingual quotations in this study, is still not complete. To date, books 1–5 of *Revelationes* have been published,<sup>169</sup> but *Liber ad reges*, which has a great value for this study, is

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<sup>168</sup> "Platonismus Ideen, bei ihm in noch ungeklärter Stellung unter der Idee des Guten, wurden gegen Ende des Mittelplatonismus (um Christi Geburt) zu urbildl. Gedanken des weltkonstituierenden Gottes, die Teilhabe an ihnen gewinnt im Neuplatonismus (ab 3. Jh. n. Chr.) dynamische Aspekte in der Weltbegründungstrias μονή, πρόοδος, ἐπιστροφή-Verharren, Hervorgang, Rückgang (lat. unum, exitus, reditus). Christl. verstanden: die ursprgl. Erschaffung der Welt ist von vornherein angelegt auf die abschließende vollendende Rückbindung an den Schöpfer; dieses Rückgerichtetsein gehört zum Wesen des Kreatürlichen." *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977-1999), s.vv. "Platon, Platonismus: Part A, Einleitung" (by Helmut Meinhardt).

<sup>169</sup> *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume I: Liber Caelestis, Books I-III*, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Searby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume II: Liber Caelestis, Books IV-V*, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Searby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

forthcoming. Therefore, I use the English critical edition if appropriate, but I generally refer to the Latin text.

I used a different method when referring to other ancient or medieval works. Generally, I quote the English translation if available and if the idea expressed in the original can be clearly seen in the translation. In all other cases, the Latin original source remains the point of reference. I quote medieval authors according to the critical editions of their works, and according to *Patrologia Latina* if such editions are unavailable. Unless otherwise indicated, most biblical quotations follow the Douay-Rhemis translation of the Bible. It is based on the Latin Vulgate, which is used and quoted in *Revelationes*. The internal references, linking one section of this work to another, will enable the reader to follow certain themes throughout the text.

I decided to indicate emphasis with bold print, not with italics, as the general formatting norm requires, in order to avoid confusion, since I use italics to mark titles of books and non-English terms.

**CHAPTER TWO:  
POLITICS AND HISTORY IN THE EYES OF A MYSTIC**

The following chapter concerns the literal or historical dimension of the *Revelationes* text, in which Birgitta addresses historical, social, and political matters. This chapter is more general in character than the next three chapters, but all of the major subjects discussed in this thesis will be introduced now. Therefore, the following chapter can be described as the broad and solid basis upon which the whole construction of this thesis will be built.

This chapter is divided into three sections. We shall first discuss Birgitta's attitude toward history and time in general, since these subjects will frame our further reflections on the Christian society. We will demonstrate that in *Revelationes* many aspects of Christian social life and current political events are interpreted according to criteria derived from the history of salvation (2.1). The next section (2.2) concerns the religious aspect of social organization.

In *Revelationes*, people are depicted as belonging to various groups or categories, depending on their relation to God. Among these groups, "the friends of God" have a special importance. We shall investigate whether these spiritual criteria find any continuation in the actual divisions of the Christian society discussed in the last section (2.3). Focusing on the basic distinctions between clerical and lay status, two special orders will be addressed: the Order of the Most Holy Savior, established by Birgitta to reform the religious (clerical) part of society; and Nova Militia, a knightly order she could have intended to establish with the intent of reforming the life of lay knighthood. We shall finish the last section with a description of the principles of royal power.

## 2.1. St. Birgitta's Reflections on History and Time

We begin our reflection on the Christian kingdom and the kingdom of heaven as presented in *Revelationes celestes* by exploring the view Birgitta (the narrator of *Revelationes*) takes toward history and time, as in my opinion these two elements make up the crucial part of the book's analysis of political life.<sup>170</sup> *Revelationes* does not ask explicitly formulated questions like, "Who is a king?" or, "What should be the proper organization of the state?" These problems are among the subjects treated in *Revelationes*, but they are usually presented as a part of prophetic advice for a particular person, not a theoretical deliberation. The reflection itself is, however, undoubtedly present.

St. Birgitta begins treating the problems of history and time with an explanation of the origins of kingship or political life, referring to earlier historical events. In her opinion, the nature of phenomena or events is often communicated by the circumstances of their origin. We shall discuss this method of analyzing the past in section 2.1.2, "*In Principio*." She also assumes that some of the rules and patterns of human behavior do not change too much, regardless of changing times and social conditions. In her eyes, that makes history an endless source of examples and stories with universal moral significance. This subject will be discussed in section 2.1.3, "*Historia Magistra Vitae*." Moreover, according to Birgitta, some historical events also bear a prophetic meaning and are designed by God to be understood as symbols. This will be discussed in the next part, 2.1.4, "History Understood Allegorically." In Birgitta's theological reflection, applying similar rules to interpret various events from both secular history and the history of salvation becomes possible thanks to the reference to the concept eternity as a specific mode of

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<sup>170</sup> This short section has an introductory character. It contains working hypotheses to be developed in the further course of section 2.1.

God's existence. In her view, all historical events are eternally present before God because he transcends time. This problem will be discussed briefly in section 2.1.5, "The Point of View of Eternity." All of the above-mentioned modes of referring to historical events are present in Birgitta's prophetic interpretation of history as taking place within eight successive epochs, which are discussed in section 2.1.6, "The Epochs of World History." I shall finish this section with a short summary, drawing general conclusions about Birgitta's concept of history and time in section 2.1.7, "St. Birgitta's Concept of History."

In my opinion, when Birgitta took part in politics and formulated her view on the Christian kingdom in a certain way, it was because she was convinced that she knew general rules governing the realm of human affairs and that those rules frequently could be derived from history. I shall now briefly present the theological reason for this conviction as deduced from *Revelationes*.

#### 2.1.1. The History of Salvation as a Hermeneutical Instrument

A question of some importance for our further study of St. Birgitta's political theology is the problem of the meaning of history, since the interpretation of historical and political events made in *Revelationes* assumes the existence of such a meaning, which will be demonstrated below. If we ask whether historical events have meaning, the Christian answer, as given in ancient times and in the Middle Ages, must be a positive one.<sup>171</sup> This is the common assumption in medieval historiography.<sup>172</sup> First, the foundation of the Christian religion entailed a historical

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<sup>171</sup> The opinion that a general Christian view of history does exist and is valid not only in the Middle Ages but generally on the ground of Christian religion, is shared by a range of authors, to mention only Karl Löwith, Christopher Dawkins (whose works are the source of many theological opinions quoted in this section), David Bebbington, Karl Barth, Nikolai Berdyaev, Jean Daniélou. On this subject see: C. T. McIntire, ed., *God, History and Historians: An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>172</sup> "Die Geschichte sollte Lehrmeisterin ('vitae magistra') sein, den Guten zur Ermunterung, den Bösen zur Warnung. Darüber hinaus wurde die Erkenntnis unveränderl., ewiger Wahrheit erstrebt, insofern es um die von der

event—namely, the life and death of Jesus Christ—and it assumes a rational sequence of events accessible to the generations of followers who made sense of their lives thanks to those historical facts. These events are the building blocks of the history of salvation, which can be defined as “the story of God’s dealings with his people and the fulfillment of his eternal purpose in and through them.”<sup>173</sup> Christ’s life and resurrection constituted a central event in this history of salvation, which extends backward to the time of Noah, Abraham, and Moses, and ultimately to God’s first promise of salvation given to Adam after he had sinned. According to Christian theology, the history of salvation will continue until the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment.<sup>174</sup>

One might say that the promise of salvation described in the Bible tends to spread itself and embrace new groups of people. At first, it was given to individual men, like Adam or Noah (Gen 9:8–9); then to Abraham and his offspring, who became a nation populating many lands (Gen 18:17–19). The prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus in the most striking way: the promise was extended to all men who love God (Luk 10:27) and follow Jesus (Mat 19:21)—and also for the Gentiles. Scripture teaches that the miraculous event of Christ’s incarnation broke down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:14). According to Christopher Dawson, this barrier also can be interpreted as a barrier between the history of Israel, which until the coming of Christ was the sacred history, and the history of the Gentiles, which was “secular history.” From the coming of Christ, however, they form one society, and the “story of God’s dealings with men” is present in

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göttlichen Vorsehung bewirkten Ereignisse u. deren heilsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung ging.” *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 5, cols. 49-51 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977-1999), s.v. “Historiographie, I. Allgemein” (by K. Schnith).

<sup>173</sup> Christopher Dawson, “The Christian View of History,” in *God, History and Historians. An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 33.

<sup>174</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 181, 187.

the history of empires and kingdoms.<sup>175</sup> The Christian theological interpretation of history can thus search for the meaning typical of the history of salvation also in the current events or in the events of “general” history not described in the Bible. Potentially all events can be meaningful, if they are a part of the great narrative about salvation.

On the ground of Christian theology, the history of salvation is therefore a way of speaking about God and his relation to human kind. The Bible contains many passages that describe God introducing himself through the mouth of the prophets, referring to certain events and characters from the history of salvation: for example, “I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exo 20:2) and, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Exo 3:6). In these passages, which were well-known and studied in the Middle Ages because they preceded the presentation of the Ten Commandments, God’s reference to historical events shows that they are one possible way of knowing his nature.

In *Revelationes* we find God using the same type of introductory expressions in reference to historical events, such as “Ego sum qui iudicaui primum angelum,” “Ego sum qui iudicaui Adam et Cain et totum mundum,” and “Ego idem sum qui populum Israeliticum permisi in captiuitatem venire et eum in signis mirabilibus de captiuitate mirabiliter eduxi”(VIII, 2. 1–3). They resemble the above-quoted biblical passages both in form and in meaning. Birgitta thus apparently shared the conviction expressed in the Bible that God can be known through the history of salvation. This conviction implies belief that there is meaning in the history of salvation.

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<sup>175</sup> Dawson, op. cit., 216-217.

She also describes the times of the old covenant as a shadow. Christ who cast this shadow gives a true shape to reality. After he incarnated and became visible, the time of shadow was gone.<sup>176</sup> Did Birgitta, then, perceive secular history as something different from the history of salvation? And, if so, did she believe that there was a meaning to secular history? Birgit Klockars, who has studied Birgitta's attitude toward history, suggests that the mystic does not distinguish between the two types of history but mixes legends with historical sources, thus following the dominant pattern of medieval historiography.<sup>177</sup> This seems to be a true statement, as Birgitta often refers to salvation history in order to explain facts of political importance (for example, the wedding of King Magnus and Queen Blanka; see below), whereas she seldom refers to the events of secular history and apparently finds them uninteresting compared to biblical history. However, if we assume that Birgitta shared the Christian theological concept of history presented above, Klockars's answer does not satisfy: her view would render Birgitta's concepts of sacred and secular history exclusive, not interlocking (as in case of the Christian theological concept).

According to Birgitta herself, secular history—which does not reveal any deeper meaning—is indeed senseless and not worth studying:

Cur delectat te audire opera mundanorum et bella procerum et cur tali inani auditu occuparis, cum ego sum omnium Dominus et nulla delectatio est sine me reputanda? Si

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<sup>176</sup> "Itaque antiquo populo data erat quedam via carnalis, scilicet circumcisio, in signum obediencie et purgacionis future, que in personis fidelibus et legem seruantibus, antequam veniret veritas promissa, scilicet ego Dei filius, operabatur effectum quendam future gracie et promissionis. Veniente vero veritate, quia lex non erat nisi quasi umbra, diffinitum est in eternitate, ut antiqua via retrocederet, carens effectu suo. Ergo, ut veritas appareret et umbra retrocederet viaque facilior ad celum ostenderetur, ideo ego Deus et homo sine peccato natus baptizari volui propter humilitatem et aliorum exemplum et ut celum credentibus aperirem. . . . Sic igitur veniente veritate, idest quando veni in mundo ego, qui veritas sum, tunc statim disparuit umbra, confracta est testa legis et apparuit nucleus, cessit circumcisio et confirmatus est in me ipso baptismus." (V, inter. 10. 32-34 & 37)

<sup>177</sup> In fact Klockars does not state definitely that St. Birgitta mixes legend with history, but she quotes the possible sources, which could have form Birgitta's historical perspective and her opinion about those sources is as mentioned above. See: Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1971), 73-77.



vero tu velles audire facta dominorum, si considerare opera magnalia, deberes utique considerare et audire facta mea, que intellectu incomprehensibilia sunt, cogitatione stupenda et auditu ad miranda. (VI, 27. 1–2)

In my opinion, this text suggests that Birgitta shares the Christian theological view of history inspired by the Bible, which has been enumerated above. In this paradigm, events are understood as meaningful if they reveal the inner, spiritual plan of God. Understood this way, history that does not tell anything about God is indeed senseless. But is there any history that does not tell anything about God? In this paradigm, every event may be potentially incorporated into the great system of the universal history of man and God, if only the observer can see this internal spiritual plan. It is rather a question of perception than of an arbitrary and objectively perceivable distinction between secular and sacred history. Sacred history is written by prophets, preachers, mystics, and theologians—people who can see the spiritual essence of things.<sup>178</sup> Secular history (or history without God) is in fact not history at all but merely a series of stories, since in this paradigm there is no place for any other method of studying and systematizing historical events.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, in this fragment the “deeds of worldly people” are presented as unworthy of Birgitta’s interest because they are not “facta Dei,” the signs of salvation, not because they are concern “secular affairs.” Birgitta, however, does make a distinction between secular history and the history of

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<sup>178</sup> Löwith, op. cit., 5.

<sup>179</sup> About the omnipotent power of the Christian paradigm see: “The intellectual background of universal history is not provided by the rhetoric of the ancient schools, but by the framework of Creation, Fall and Redemption, which Christianity gave to the western world. This cosmic plan gave birth to a new view of history, which was the most important intellectual contribution that Christianity made to the stock of ancient learning. The ancient pagan world never had, any more than we now have, a clear and unambiguous picture of human history from its beginning to its end; but by the end of the fourth century Christian scholars had created a new view of a compact universe existing within clearly defined chronological limits and sharply distinguished from the eternal world of spiritual essences.” R. W. Southern, “Presidential Address: Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 2. Hugh of St. Victor and the Idea of Historical Development,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, no. 21 (1971): 159-160.

salvation, since she notes that there are events that cannot be included in the great narrative of salvation history.

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The existence and character of the border separating secular history from the history of salvation is a significant issue in the analysis of St. Birgitta's authorship because, in my opinion, she considered the history of salvation a hermeneutical instrument that could be used to explain the meaning of present events. By "hermeneutical instrument," I mean a specific method of interpreting the studied material (historical events, in this case) using a paradigm that was developed for analyzing a different kind of material. By applying it in a new context, it becomes the instrument of a new and original method of interpretation. In this case, it means that St. Birgitta interprets all historical events as if they are a part of the history of salvation, using the same or similar methods to describe events of both political and religious nature. In other words, she uses the history of salvation as a hermeneutical tool to interpret all historical events.

In the following part of this section, we shall analyze St. Birgitta's use of this instrument. We shall now give an outline of the general rules governing Birgitta's interpretation of the history of salvation, and then see how these rules are applied in *Revelationes* to analyze certain political events. As we shall see, the rules of the kingdom of heaven do not (or should not) differ too much from those governing the Christian kingdom.

### 2.1.2. *In Principio*

In the Bible, Jesus sometimes referred to the origin of facts to explain their nature. When asked about the possible causes for divorce, he answered:

Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but **from the beginning it was not so**. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. (Mat 19:4–9, [emphasis mine])

Jesus puts the authority of the creation first, even before the authority of Moses. He thus focuses on the starting point of human history. He stresses the difference between God’s original plan for human nature and the weak realization of this plan. All the commandments were given to Moses and the chosen nation of Israel in order to revive a fallen human nature, to restore the original state of things. They were suitable for sinners. Jesus recalls the starting point of the story, when people were not yet sinners and they were acting according to their real nature. The true nature of man and woman was to live together and love each other as if they were one flesh. Now Jesus calls his followers to restore this original nature. In other words, he wants them to act as if they never sinned. How could that be possible? According to this passage, Jesus himself brings the answer: by changing the traditional Jewish hierarchy of authorities and thereby putting his own authority higher than Moses’, Jesus focuses on the salvation he himself will accomplish. He is able to restore the original happiness of people.

In my opinion, this passage exemplifies the hermeneutical rule that may be called “origin explains nature.” This rule is often used throughout Scripture.<sup>180</sup> It states that the true nature and purpose of things can be understood by referring to their original state or the beginning of their

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<sup>180</sup> See e.g. the beginning of the Gospel according to St. John, explaining the nature of the Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made” (Joh 1:1-3).

existence. The biblical languages facilitate this practice: in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the term “beginning” is identical with “principle” or “general rule” (Greek *arche*, Hebrew *rosh*, Latin *principium*). In the Vulgate translation, Jesus also calls himself “the principle,” “the beginning” (Joh 8:25).<sup>181</sup>

It is worth noting that this method—explaining the present state of events by referring to their past—is not entirely analogous to a mythological explanation of the origin of things. According to Mircea Eliade, mythology also creates a narrative about beginnings to explain the nature of things, but those beginnings are not placed at any historical starting point. Events described in a mythological story occurred a “long, long time ago,” before time or in some timeless world of the ancestors. It is not even necessary to ask whether “that really happened.” The mythological story occurred in a different world, a different reality, before profane time began.<sup>182</sup> On the contrary, biblical and Christian stories of the beginnings always claim to be authentic; they claim to be placed at some certain historical moment. Events in the history of salvation, including the initial events, occurred in linear time.<sup>183</sup>

In *Revelationes*, we also find an attempt to search for the sense of facts by exploring their original establishment or point of creation, comparable to the biblical method. In one revelation, Birgitta explained human nature by referring to the creation of man:

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<sup>181</sup> This is the meaning of this verse chosen by Vulgate and known in medieval Latin West: “dicebant ergo ei tu quis es dixit eis Iesus principium quia et loquor vobis.” In Douay-Rheims version: “They said therefore to him: Who art thou? Jesus said to them: The beginning, who also speak unto you.” There are however other interpretations of this verse possible, as the original Greek text is rather unclear. See: Chrys C. Caragounis, “What Did Jesus Mean by τὴν ἀρχὴν in John 8:25?” *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 2 (2007): 129-147.

<sup>182</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1987), 68-72.

<sup>183</sup> In Christianity “time is no longer the circular Time of the Eternal Return; it has become linear and irreversible Time” (Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* [New York: Harper and Row, 1963], 65).

Item, cur angelo dedi spiritum sine carne, respondeo: In principio et ante tempora et secula creavi spiritus, ut in libero arbitrio stantes secundum voluntatem meam gauderent de bonitate et gloria mea. Quorum quidam superbientes de bono fecerunt sibi malum, voluntatem liberam mouentes inordinate. Et quia nichil malum erat in natura et creacione nisi inordinacio voluntatis proprie, ideo ceciderunt. Alii vero spirituum elegerunt sub me Deo suo in humilitate stare; ideo et perpetuam stabilitatem meruerunt. Quia dignum et iustum est, ut ego Deus, qui spiritus increatus sum et omnium creator et Dominus, habeam etiam spiritus subtiliores et agiliores aliis creaturis michi obsequentes. **Verum quia non decuit me habere diminucionem in exercitu meo, ideo creavi aliam creaturam, scilicet hominem, loco eorum, qui ceciderunt, que libero arbitrio et bona voluntate promereretur eandem dignitatem, quam angeli deseruerunt.** Itaque, si homo haberet animam et non carnem, non posset promereri tam sublime bonum sed nec laborare. Propterea ad optinendum eternum honorem coniunctum est corpus anime. Ideo et augentur ei tribulaciones, ut homo experiatur liberum arbitrium et infirmitates suas, ut non superbiat. Item, ut desideret gloriam, ad quam creatus est, et exsoluat inobedienciam, quam voluntarie incurrerat, ideo ex diuina iusticia additus est ei flebilis ingressus et egressus et vita laboriosa. (V, int. 9. 13–20 [emphasis mine])

According to this revelation, men were created in order to replace the fallen angels who did not fulfill the vocation given them by God. Because of their sin, they initiated a gap in the hierarchy of creatures. This gap had to be filled by another creature comparable to the angels, so God created people, whose nature is also spiritual and who are also given a free will, as the angels were.

Birgitta sees a connection between the corporeality and free will of human beings and the fact that they replaced the fallen angels. However, Birgitta does not find this reasoning in the Bible, since the Bible does not use the term “free will” and does not describe angels as “spirits without body.” The language and concepts presented in this fragment are of philosophical origin and were widely known in the Middle Ages. Not a part of medieval “common sense,” however, was Birgitta’s opinion that human free will and the human body are related in such a way as to enable people to change their minds because their nature is also corporeal, not only spiritual. People are unlike angels in this respect.<sup>184</sup> This opinion is rather an effect of Birgitta’s education or a proof of

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<sup>184</sup> “Verum quia non decuit me habere diminucionem in exercitu meo, ideo creavi aliam creaturam, scilicet hominem, loco eorum, qui ceciderunt, que libero arbitrio et bona voluntate promereretur eandem dignitatem, quam

her confessor's influence. It is in full accord with Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic theologians who claim that the human's body gives him an opportunity to change his will, since the form of bodily creatures is characterized by a material receptive mode. On the contrary, angels are fully spiritual, so they are constant in their decisions, as their form is a pure intellect without the material receptive mode that enables humans to change.<sup>185</sup>

The aim of a human is thus connected with his nature and with the circumstances of his creation. This aim was to obtain the dignity the fallen angels lost. According to this text, men are subject to suffering and infirmity in order to exercise their free will, the feature of their nature that they share in common with the angels, whose fall was in fact the cause for creating people. Therefore, suffering is a kind of test for the free will,<sup>186</sup> enabling men to show their ability to stand firmly by God's commands and be obedient. In this particular revelation, St. Birgitta does not refer to original sin as a cause of human suffering. Here the experience of one's own infirmity is presented an inseparable element of human nature.<sup>187</sup>

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angeli deseruerunt. Itaque, si homo haberet animam et non carnem, non posset promereri tam sublime bonum" (V, int. 9. 17-18).

<sup>185</sup> See the following passage from Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*: "Further, wherever the properties of matter exist, there is matter. Now the properties of matter are to receive and to stand; whence Boethius says that 'a simple form cannot be a subject': and the above properties are found in the angel. Therefore an angel is composed of matter and form. . . . This reason is given in the book on the Fount of Life, and it would be cogent, supposing that the receptive mode of the intellect and of matter were the same. But this is clearly false. For matter receives the form, that thereby it may be constituted in some species, either of air, or of fire, or of something else. But the intellect does not receive the form in the same way; otherwise the opinion of Empedocles (*De Anima* I, 5, text 26) would be true, to the effect that we know earth by earth, and fire by fire. But the intelligible form is in the intellect according to the very nature of a form; for as such is it so known by the intellect. Hence such a way of receiving is not that of matter, but of an immaterial substance." (S. Th. I, q. 50, a. 2)

<sup>186</sup> On the category of trial (probacio) in Birgitta's theology: see below, section 2.2.

<sup>187</sup> In a number of other texts Birgitta explains the present decay and suffering of humans by recalling the original sin: "Item, cur corpus patitur penam in morte, iustum est, quod per illa, per que peccat homo, per similia puniatur, et quia peccat delectacione inordinata, dignum est, ut plectatur amaritudine et pena ordinate" (V, int. 5. 16).

Therefore, the philosophical *instrumentarium* used by Birgitta is medieval, but the hermeneutical rule applied here (“origin explains nature”) is biblical. She explains human nature by referring to creation: people are corporeal and spiritual beings possessing a free will given to them by God. The reason for this condition is that they were created in order to replace the fallen angels, who were also given free will by God, but they used this gift against their Creator. The purpose of men (related to their nature) is to repair this disharmony caused by the fallen angels. Birgitta’s line of reasoning is very similar to that represented in the above-quoted biblical passage in which Jesus refers to the origin of men and women in order to explain their true vocation (living together).

The idea that people were created in order to replace the fallen angels was not unknown in the Middle Ages. I was able to find at least four texts containing similar statements. One of them comes from Origen’s patristic literature. In his homily on the book of Ezekiel, he writes that people are invited by God to win the hope that the demon lost, that they may become the light of the world instead of Lucifer, the light-bearer. He was once among the stars, but now he must be replaced by people, the offspring of Abraham, multiplied by God like the stars of heaven. According to Origen, people who stand firm through faith will ascend to heaven to replace the unfaithful Lucifer and his angels.<sup>188</sup> So for the question, “Why may people replace the fallen angels?” Origen answers that people are faithful, in contrast to the traitor Lucifer. He built his argument on the metaphor of light—lost by the demons and promised to the seed of Abraham—and on the human ability to be faithful.

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<sup>188</sup> Origen, *Homélie sur Ézéchiél*, XIII, 2 (Paris: Editions du CERF, 1989), 412-414. Unfortunately, the book is not yet translated into English. The first English translation is now being prepared by Thomas P. Scheck. It will be published by Paulist Press in 2010.

Another text discussing the same idea is the anonymous<sup>189</sup> *Peri Didaxeon sive Elementorum philosophiae libri IV*, an early medieval work. The author began by introducing some elements of Platonic ontology merged with Christian religious statements. After discussing the nature of God as Creator and the soul of the world, he presents the three orders of spiritual creatures. The third and lowest of them is the *ordo* of evil demons, who hate people:

Tertius ordo est in hac humecta parte aeris, quod ita definitur: Animal humectum, rationale, immortale, patibile, cuius est officium humanitati invidere, ex invidia insidiari, quia unde descendit per superbiam, ascendit humanitas per humilitatem.<sup>190</sup>

The reason for their hatred is that people now hold the position in the heavenly hierarchy lost by the demons because of their pride. The author of *Elementa philosophiae* points to humility as the unique virtue enabling people to restore the harmony among God's creatures.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux held a similar view. In his *Sermon on the Advent I*, he claims that the reason for angels' persistence is their pride, not their unfaithfulness (as Origen states) or an inability to change their decisions resulting from the specifics of their spiritual form (as we read in *Revelationes*). He writes:

The angels, we know, sinned through malice, not through ignorance and frailty; wherefore, as they were unwilling to repent, they must of necessity perish, for the love of the Father and the honour of the King demand judgment. For this cause He created men from the beginning, that they might fill those lost places, and repair the ruins of the heavenly Jerusalem. For He knew "the pride of Moab, that he is exceedingly proud," and that his pride would never seek the remedy of repentance, nor, consequently, of pardon. After man's fall, however, He created no other creature in his place, thus intimating that man should yet be redeemed, and that he who had been supplanted by another's malice might

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<sup>189</sup> The work, also known as *Philosophia mundi*, has been ascribed to William of Hirschau, the Venerable Bede (edited in PL 90, 1127-78) and to Honorius of Autun (PL 172, 39-102). Here we cite the Pseudo-Bede edition.

<sup>190</sup> PL 90, 1131.



still by another's charity be redeemed.<sup>191</sup>

Unlike Birgitta, Bernard stresses the importance of redemption in Christ and the need for humility, necessary to overcome the devil's pride. Nevertheless, he points out that the angels did not want to repent. In Birgitta's text, the emphasis is placed on the free will and the chance for obtaining eternal happiness by serving God voluntarily.

Bernard's sermon is the closest parallel to Birgitta's statement, since it mentions the persistence of the demons and their unwillingness to repent. There is, however, one more medieval work that mentions a man taking the place of Lucifer. In *Speculum perfectionis*, a fourteenth century *vita* of St. Francis (written c. 1318), we read that Francis himself is expected to occupy the throne in heaven emptied by Lucifer. Brother Pacificus, describing his vision of heaven and St. Francis taking the sit of Lucifer, concludes his relation:

Et statim dictum fuit animae fratris Pacifici: "In hoc potes cognoscere veram fuisse visionem quam vidisti, quoniam sicut Lucifer, propter superbiam suam de illa sede fuit ejectus, sic Franciscus propter humilitatem suam merebitur exaltari et sedere in ea."<sup>192</sup>

The emphasis again is on the humility of Francis, contrasted with the pride of Lucifer. Another way in which *Speculum* differs from Birgitta's vision is that it speaks about one certain person replacing a certain fallen angel, not about humankind in general.

It is thus difficult to determine whether St. Birgitta was inspired by any of these texts, since none of them is directly analogous to her line of reasoning, but they still provide rather relevant information about the theological context of her work. It is also noteworthy that none of the

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<sup>191</sup> Bernard de Clairvaux, *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas: including the famous treatise on the incarnation called "Missus est"* (London: R&T Washbourne, 1909), 7-8.

<sup>192</sup> Anonimo della Porziuncola, *Speculum perfectionis status fratris minoris*, IV, 60, ed. Daniele Solvi (Firenze: SISMELE - Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2006), 55-56.

discussed texts mention the circumstances of the creation of men in order to explain the present human condition. Rather, the other texts reviewed in this section have moral aims—St. Bernard presents a moral encouragement for practicing the virtue of humility, while the author of *Speculum perfectionis* praises the humility of St. Francis by comparing him to proud Lucifer.

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The beginning of a phenomenon is not necessarily identical with the moment of creation. Birgitta uses the same hermeneutical rule in order to explain the origins of social and political structures. For example, her analysis of the roots of the Christian kingdom involves a reference to the beginning of kingship. She writes:

Filius Dei loquitur: “Quia homo contempsit obedire Deo, ideo necesse est, ut obediat homini simili sibi. Et quia rex a Deo constituitur ad iudicandum et regendum iuste, ideo dignum est, ut honoretur et timeatur a subditis. Ergo, ut rex discernatur ab aliis, necesse est ut habitum discretum et honestum et honorabilem habeat pre aliis. Quia sicut honor regis est iusticia et iudicium, sic honor plebis est pulchritudo regis et honestas eius. Propterea permittitur regi habitus honorabilis et honestus, quem cum portauerit non superbiat ex permissione sed humiliet se considerando onus officii sui.” (VIII, 3. 1–3)

The above revelation is included in the *Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad reges*. As the book is an anthology of Birgitta’s revelations, many of the texts found there have their direct analogies in other parts of *Revelationes Celestes*, but this particular revelation occurs only once in the whole *Corpus Birgittianum*. However, book 4 contains another fragment in which St. Birgitta uses a similar argumentation:

Filius loquitur ad sponsam: “**Tu debes te quadrupliciter humiliare. Primo coram potentibus mundi, quia ex quo homo contempsit obedire Deo dignum est, ut obediat homini, et quia sine rectoribus homo stare non potest, ideo deferendum est potestati.** Secundo coram spiritualibus pauperibus, id est coram peccatoribus, orando pro eis et regraciando Deo, quia forte non fuisti nec es talis. Tercio coram spiritualibus diuitibus, id est coram amicis Dei, cogitando te indignam seruire eis et conuersari cum eis. Quarto

coram pauperibus mundi iuuando et vestiendo eos et lauando pedes eorum.” (IV, 91. 1–4 [emphasis mine])

In both texts, the line of argumentation follows the same pattern: men must be obedient to kings because they did not want to be obedient to God. Domination of men over each other is therefore a result of and punishment for original sin. However, later Birgitta states that the king is “established by God” and that rulers are necessary for people. Those two phrases appear to contradict each other, but we shall investigate whether this truly is the case.

The roots of the concept of kingship can be found in the biblical book of Samuel (1Sa 8). The establishment of the Israel’s monarchy, as presented there, also bears a dichotomy: the chosen nation asked God to give them a king, similar to other kings ruling over nations. God judged this desire to be unjust and even idolatrous, for the existence of a human king indicated that the Israelites did not accept the Lord as their king any longer. The difference between Israel and other nations, which were ruled by kings, was the unique relationship the chosen nation had with its God. However, God agreed to establish a king over Israel, but his acceptance of Israel’s request was at the same time a punishment for their idolatry. God punished the Jews with a king who would oppress and enslave them (1Sa 8). As explained in the second book of Samuel, the king of Israel obtained a very special dignity despite all this. He was chosen and blessed by God. His power was delegated from God and he symbolized God’s role in the life of Israel (2Sa 7:12–16). In this way, the power of the king became a punishment for sin, but also a remedy for it, as loyalty to the king was made synonymous with loyalty to God.

St. Paul further develops this idea when in the epistle to the Romans he warns against any disobedience to the secular power, as this power is also established by God (Rom 13). Not only the

kings of Israel, but all kings and rulers are legitimized by God, are his ministers, and are “revengers to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom 13:4). I think that Birgitta’s notion of political power expressed in the two aforementioned revelations could be placed within this biblical context.

According to Hans Torben Gilkær, a more direct inspiration for St. Birgitta’s concept would be Augustine’s idea of the origins and nature of government.<sup>193</sup> Birgitta shares with Augustine his basic schema of nature and sin as two fundamental conditions of man, defining all the aspects of his existence.<sup>194</sup> In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine distinguishes between the two kinds of rule: one based on benevolent care (*benevolentia consulere*), which characterized society before the fall, and another, based on the lust for power (*libido dominandi*), typical for the societies of *civitas terrena*—especially for the Roman Empire, but also for other states. According to him, men were created equal and were given power to rule only “over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every creeping thing which creepeth on the earth” (Gen 1:26), not over one another.<sup>195</sup> The domination of men over their neighbors results from the *libido dominandi*, which

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<sup>193</sup> Hans Torben Gilkær, “New Perspectives on Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges (book VIII of the Revelations),” in *Saint Bridget, Prophetess of New Ages/Santa Brigida profeta dei tempi nuovi: Atti dell'incontro internazionale di studio, Roma, 3-7 ottobre, 1991*, ed. Tekla Famiglietti (Rome: Casa Generalizia Suore Santa Brigida, 1993), 848.

<sup>194</sup> About nature and sin as two fundamental conditions of human existence see: Frederick Van Fleteren, “Principles of Augustine’s Hermeneutics: An Overview,” in *Augustine: Biblical Exegete*, ed. Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

<sup>195</sup> “This is prescribed by the order of nature: it is thus that God has created man. For *let them*, He says, *have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every creeping thing which creepeth on the earth*. He did not intend that His rational creature, who was made in His image, should have dominion over anything but the irrational creation,—not man over man, but man over the beasts. And hence the righteous men in primitive times were made shepherds of cattle rather than kings of men, God intending thus to teach us what the relative position of the creatures is, and what the desert of sin; for it is with justice, we believe, that the condition of slavery is the result of sin” (Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 15). This and all following quotations from *De Civitate Dei* according to: Augustine, “City of God,” trans. Marcus Dods, in vol. 2 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of*

is a clear consequence of sinful pride, characteristic not only for men as sinners but also for the fallen angels, who preferred their own power to the government of God. It leads to creating an unnatural, perverse structure of social power, which aims at power in itself. Augustine apparently classifies the government of kings as inseparable from the slavery of his subjects. A just and natural social relationship involves some kind of order of command and obedience, but without any violence or domination. As a model society still able to keep this social structure, Augustine mentions family and household (including the servants, who were an integral part of the household). A family is ruled by its father, who is responsible for keeping justice and love among the members of a household and whose burden is also to punish those who interrupt domestic peace (*De civitate Dei*, XIX, 16). However, his main responsibility is to lead the members of his family toward their heavenly home. The family members, in turn, should be obedient to the orders of the one who stands higher and should cultivate a faithful love of him, even if he is a cruel master (*De civitate Dei* XIX, 15).

According to many interpreters, among them Miikka Roukanen, who studied the theology of social life in *De civitate Dei*,<sup>196</sup> Augustine sees an analogy between family and social life and applies the same rules that govern a household to the desirable social structures described in *Civitas Dei*.<sup>197</sup> His definition of domestic peace, *pax domus*, is fully analogous to that of *pax civitatis*: the peace of a household is “an ordered agreement among those who live together about

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*the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.html> (accessed February 5, 2010).

<sup>196</sup> Miikka Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De Civitate Dei* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

<sup>197</sup> Roukanen, op. cit. 96-108.

giving and obeying orders” (*De civitate Dei* XIX, 13, 6–8; 14, 46–47; 16, 29–31).<sup>198</sup> The peace of society is “the ordered agreement among the citizens about giving and obeying orders” (*De civitate Dei* XIX, 13, 8–9; 16, 29–32). It is indisputable that Augustine creates certain links between the two kinds of human society when he writes:

Since, then, the house ought to be the beginning or element of the city, and every beginning bears reference to some end of its own kind, and every element to the integrity of the whole of which it is an element, it follows plainly enough that domestic peace has a relation to civic peace—in other words, that the well-ordered concord of domestic obedience and domestic rule has a relation to the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and civic rule. And therefore it follows, further, that the father of the family ought to frame his domestic rule in accordance with the law of the city, so that the household may be in harmony with the civic order. (*De civitate Dei* XIX, 16)

Roukanen claims (and I share his opinion) that in the Middle Ages, this interpretation was widely accepted. Some modern scholars—Roukanen himself among them—question it, arguing that St. Augustine had no specified theory of divinely organized social or political life and that, according to *De civitate Dei*, this sphere of human activity is only a result of sin and the subsequent lust for domination.<sup>199</sup> St. Birgitta, however, follows the interpretation of her times when she accepts both parts of Augustine’s analogy: she claims that the government of men over one another is a result of sin and a punishment for disobedience, but that it is the just and merciful God who punishes men. A king is therefore a tool in God’s hand, designed to execute divine justice by ruling his people and judging them rightly, so all his subjects owe him respect and fear—similar to members of the household in *De civitate Dei*, who Augustine says should respect their father.

It is noteworthy that the narrator of *Revelationes* chooses an Augustinian interpretation of the origins of royal power, although Birgitta’s scholarly friends and teachers (if not Birgitta herself)

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<sup>198</sup> Roukanen, op. cit., 103.

<sup>199</sup> Roukanen, op. cit., 106.

must have known of another theory developed by Thomas Aquinas and based on Aristotle. According to Aquinas, the political society of men is a natural form of living and would have existed even if the first people had not sinned.<sup>200</sup> In the fourteenth century, both of these conceptions were circulating among scholars. The traditional, Augustinian version was taken up by the Franciscan theologians Bonaventure and Alexander of Hales, who both argued that political power is a human institution: it is sanctioned by divine providence, but it results from original sin and as such is unnatural. The opposite statement was formulated on the grounds of Christian theology by Albert the Great and developed by Aquinas.<sup>201</sup> Therefore, choosing the Augustinian version could be a sign of Franciscan influence on the author of the above revelations. Unfortunately, because of the complex authorship issues surrounding Birgitta's work, in this case we must refrain from anything more than suggestions.

Some scholars solve this dilemma by concentrating on Birgitta's confessors as possible *spiritus moventes* of revelations. Hans Torben Gilkær, who focused on the contribution of Alfonso Pecha, holds this position in his study of the above revelations.<sup>202</sup> He also claims that there is a clearly visible Augustinian influence on the text of *Revelationes* regarding the question of the origin of royal power. When discussing the possible sources of this influence, he is only interested in the materials used by Alfonso. It appears therefore that Gilkær takes for granted that Alfonso is

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<sup>200</sup> "Nec unus homo est per se sibi sufficiens ad vivendum separatus a civitate" (Thomas Aquinas, Com. in Polit. 1, 1, X. 7); "Homo indiget ab aliis hominibus adiuvari ad consequendum proprium finem" (idem, ScG. III, q. 117, a. 3.). See: Gilkær, op. cit., 848.

<sup>201</sup> R. A. Markus, "Two Conceptions of Political Authority: Augustine, De Civitate Dei XIX, 14-15, and some thirteenth-century interpretations," *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965): 82-100.

<sup>202</sup> Hans Torben Gilkær, "New Perspectives on Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges (book VIII of the Revelations)," in *Saint Bridget, Prophetess of New Ages/Santa Brigida profeta dei tempi nuovi: Atti dell'incontro internazionale di studio, Roma, 3-7 ottobre, 1991*, ed. Tekla Famiglietti (Rome: Casa Generalizia Suore Santa Brigida, 1993), 848; see: idem, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha: Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges—A Mirror of Princes*. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993), 109-110.

the author of the discussed texts, since he does not put forward any arguments to support this thesis. However, Alfonso took the role of compiler and editor of *Liber ad reges*. We certainly can presume some influence of Alfonso, who was St. Birgitta's close friend and cooperated with her on the contents of the book. In my opinion, however, there is no textual evidence to support the thesis that he played a decisive role in creating the revelations discussed above.

We can thus conclude that Birgitta referred to the origin of a phenomenon in order to explain its nature in at least two instances. Both of the aforementioned cases are of some importance for an analysis of her political theology. First, in Birgitta's opinion, people were created as both spiritual and corporeal beings able to use their free will in order to replace the fallen angels in the hierarchy of God's creatures, since angels were also rational and spiritual; but those angels now referred to as fallen used their free will to turn against God. Because of their solely spiritual nature, which excludes the material receptive mode, these angels were unable to change their minds. People, on the contrary, may change their minds many times, since their form includes the material receptive mode. They can therefore "exercise" their free will and gain eternal salvation, which the angels forfeited in their act of rebellion. The latter fact explains the present human condition. To describe it, Birgitta refers to the creation of men and angels. Her reasoning shows knowledge of the categories and concepts used by Scholastic theology. Second, Birgitta discusses the origin of royal power in reference to original sin. In her opinion, men must be obedient to kings, since they did not want to be obedient to God. In this case, the origin of the present human condition is not creation, but original sin. Birgitta's opinion on the origin of royal (and all secular) power apparently is inspired by certain biblical motives and characters (such as the kings of Israel) and by the theology of St. Augustine expressed in *De civitate Dei*.



### 2.1.3. *Historia Magistra Vitae*

In our discussion of possible analogies to the fragment of *Revelationes* stating that people were created in order to replace the sinful angels, we have mentioned that other medieval authors refer to this fact in order to present a moral teaching, while St. Birgitta's goal is to explain the human condition (namely, that people are both corporeal and spiritual). The difference between these two aims is quite remarkable. In the first case, the purpose of the text is to encourage the reader to change his or her behavior; in the second case, the text, like the above-quoted fragments from *Revelationes*, is aimed at explaining the existing state of affairs.

Nonetheless, in *Revelationes* we also find revelations referring to the beginning of a phenomenon (and especially to the origins of social and political structures, which are the subject of this study) in order to give an example of an honest or an incorrect behavior that could be followed or omitted by her contemporary readers. History—in this case, primarily the history of salvation—is supposed to be a “teacher of life.” By accepting this idea, Birgitta shows her adherence to the view of history represented by the aphorism of Cicero quoted in the title of this part of the present section: “*Historia magistra vitae.*”<sup>203</sup>

In book 2 we find a revelation (II, 7) that analyzes the origin of two important social institutions: monasticism and knighthood. Birgitta starts by introducing two biblical characters: Peter, who stands for clerics, and Paul, who represents laymen. Peter, being married, observed that his status did not correlate with priesthood and thus refrained from cohabitating with his wife. Paul led a life of chastity. As a reward for their faithfulness, God granted Peter the keys to

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<sup>203</sup> “*Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia nisi oratoris immortalitati commendatur?*” Cicero, *De oratore libri tres*, II, 36, ed. Augustus S. Wilkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 245.

the kingdom of heaven, for everything he bound on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever he loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Mat 18:18). Paul is equal to him in glory and dignity. As mentioned above, Birgitta recalls these two men with a specific aim: they represent clerics and laymen. She writes:

Sed licet istos duos expresse nominauerim, tamen cum eis et in eis alios amicos meos intelligo. Sicut enim olim in lege ad solum Israel quasi ad unum hominem loquebar, cum tamen totum Israeliticum populum in illo nomine notabam, sic nunc in istis duobus plures intelligo, quos gloria mea et caritate repleui. (II, 7. 9)

In my opinion, Birgitta here sets a general rule, applicable to the following part of the revelation that describes the next period of church history. She argues that in the next centuries “evil began to increase, and the body became weak,” so God allowed people to lead a less-restrictive way of life, considering their weakness. Priests were approved to use the properties of the church, and the laics were allowed to marry. However, this caused even worse conduct by Christians. Having experienced all the misery of the sinful world, one man among the clerics decided to live a life of chastity, labor, and prayer. He decided that this was the only way to struggle against his own weakness. This man established the first cloister and monastic life commenced. Birgitta does not mention the name of this person; she only describes his aims and principles.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> “Inter clericos erat quidam bonus homo, qui cogitabat apud se: ‘Caro trahit me ad prauam voluptatem, mundus ad nociuum visum, dyabolus ponit michi multipliciter peccati insidias. Ideo, ne supplanter a carne et a voluptate, ponam modum in omnibus actibus meis, moderabo me in refeccione et quiete, seruabo tempus debitum in labore et oratione, refrenabo carnem ieiuniis. Secundo, ne mundus trahat me ab amore Dei, omnia, que mundi sunt, quia caduca sunt, relinquere volo. Paupertate Christum sequi tucius est. Tercio, ne dyabolus decipiat me, qui semper falsa ostendit pro vero, subiciam me regimini et obediencie alterius, omnem voluntatem propriam abiciam et paratum me exhibebo ad omnia, quecumque michi ab alio fuerint imperata.’ Hic est, qui primum instituit monasterium et laudabiliter in eo perseuerans et aliis vitam suam imitandam dereliquit.” (II, 7. 12-16)

Analogically, secular life was reformed by a man who decided to make a public vow of obedience to his sovereign and to God. The purpose of this vow was to support him in his mission of defending the church:

Ideo in presenti promitto obedienciam Deo et tibi, qui caput es, cum iuramento meo firmiter astringens mesanctam Ecclesiam contra inimicos eius defensurum, amicos Dei confortaturum, viduis, orphanis et fidelibus Dei benefacturum, contra Dei Ecclesiam et fidem eius numquam aliquid contrarium acturum. (II, 7. 30)

His name is not mentioned in the text, and in verse four Christ states that Birgitta “does not know him by name.” Based on the text, which avoids any details about this first knight, we can accept that the narrator aims to build a general model of behavior that all knights should follow. Birgitta concludes the scene with the following phrase: “Talis fuit amicus meus Georgius et plures alii. Tales et deberent esse milites, qui nomen deberent habere propter dignitatem, habitum propter operacionem et defensionem fidei sancte” (II, 7. 36). Using the word “talis” suggests further that Birgitta does not describe St. George in this revelation; instead, she only mentions him as an example of a man who followed the described model of behavior. Hans Cnatingius believes, however, that the described person indeed is St. George, but he does not put forward any arguments to support this thesis.<sup>205</sup> The same is true of the translation of book 2 by Bridget Morris and Denis Searby. The editors explain in the footnote that “my friend” mentioned in verse four is St. George, even though the same verse says Birgitta does not know the name of this “friend,”

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<sup>205</sup> Hans Cnatingius, "The Order of the Knights of St. Bridget," *Annales Academiæ Regiæ Scientiarum Upsaliensis* 11 (1967): 30.

which could not be true of St. George, who was well known to her and referred to in the same revelation (II, 7. 36).<sup>206</sup>

This problem is quite noteworthy. Birgitta here presents an exact analogy between monastic life and knighthood. Both stories are general and historical at the same time. Birgitta's narration seems to lead toward some particular figures, presented as founders of monastic and chivalrous life. She starts by presenting Peter and Paul, founders of the clerical and secular ways of living. Then she introduces a certain "quidam bonus homo" who established the first monastery, and then another "quidam bonus homo," who first made chivalry vows. But in the end she does not point out any particular person except for St. George, who, in my opinion, is rather excluded from the circle of potential knighthood-founders since he is described as "one of the genre." This general character of narration prevents us from classifying the discussed revelation to the category of texts, which explain the nature of a thing by referring to its beginning. Indeed, Birgitta describes here the beginning of two social institutions: knighthood and monasticism. She emphasizes the moral and intellectual principles of the two founders, not their biographies. Therefore, it is difficult to consider those stories as fully historical, although Birgitta builds at least an impression of historicity by introducing Peter and Paul, who are both historical characters, at least from the Christian point of view (which Birgitta represents).

If the figures of two "good men," the first knight and the first monk, are not fully historical, is it not justifiable to include the whole story among the mythological narratives of beginnings, mentioned above? Despite the slightly inconclusive character of the text, this seems rather

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<sup>206</sup> See also: "Ista autem galea est voluntas placendi soli Deo. Sicut enim galea defendit caput a iaculis et ictibus, sic voluntas bona et sola ad Deum defendit animam, ne temptationes dyabolice preualeant contra eam, Deumque in animam introducit. Hanc habuit ille bonus Georgius et Mauricius et plures alii . . ." (IV, 74. 32-34).

unlikely. First, in the revelation we do not find any expressions or phrases suggesting that Birgitta wanted to question the genuineness of her protagonists. On the contrary, she refers to the apostles as authentic figures. If St. Birgitta wanted to tell the story of beginnings of the monasticism referring to historical figures, she could have mentioned to St. Anthony or St. Paul the Eremite, two famous saints considered among medieval Christians as founders of monasticism and eremitism.

A possible solution to this problem is suggested in the following expression: “Sed licet istos duos expresse nominauerim, tamen cum eis et in eis alios amicos meos intelligo” (II, 7. 9). We read about St. Peter and St. Paul in the same revelation. The same may be true about the anonymous “two good men”: they are not named, but they are specific individuals who stand for all monks and knights. By not mentioning their names, Birgitta stressed only the moral and general character of their deeds, not their particular stories. Despite this fact, there is no reason to assume that they never existed. By putting their example into the context of St. Peter and St. Paul’s biographies, Birgitta makes those characters genuine, although general. This leads us to conclude that the discussed revelation cannot be classified as one of the texts “de principiis.” Nevertheless, the text deals somehow with history, although in a different way. The whole stress is put on the moral value of the examples presented.

In the above revelation, Birgitta tells the story of the two apostles and two other men with all the details in order to make the example more persuasive. Quite frequently, however, she uses historical examples in a less-meticulous manner, such as in her revelation addressed to the young Swedish queen, Blanka of Narmur. The text itself does not mention the name of the addressee, but we can suppose it is Queen Blanka, since the revelation is placed amidst other advice for her.

Moreover, in the last part of this revelation (VIII, 12. 8), Christ declares that he will give advice to Blanka, as indeed occurs in the next chapter (VIII, 13). The revelation, which includes historical examples, reads as follows:

Ubi arista est iuxta cor, non est subito et precipitanter auellenda, sed paulatim et leniter resecanda. Sic mulier bona est et diligenda, sed tamen homini tendenti ad perfeccionem quandoque impedimentum est. Et ideo homo qui ligatus est ad uxorem per matrimonium, ubi videt periculum suum, quandoque lenibus verbis utatur more monitoris, quandoque moderate seuerioribus more doctoris, quandoque more medici resecacionibus. Quia mulier prudenter audienda est, ut consoletur, modeste et secrete arguenda, ne contempnatur, honeste erudienda et quandoque non audienda, ne iusticia dimittatur. **Propterea ad reginam pertinet humilitas animi, modestia operum, prudentia agendorum, compassio miserorum. Nam prudentia mulieris mitigatus est Daud, ne faceret peccatum,<sup>207</sup> humilitate peruenit Hester ad regnum et perseueravit, sed superbia et cupiditate deiecta est lezabel.<sup>208</sup> Et Maria mater mea propter compassionem et caritatem facta est mater omnium in celis et in terris.** (VIII, 12. 1–7 [emphasis mine])

In this short message the author gives a few positive examples of the queens who were good advisors to their husbands and one negative example of a sinner, Queen Jezebel, in order to support her general thesis as presented in the first part of the revelation: that good counsel given by a woman should be taken into consideration amongst men. The aim of building this thesis is to inspire the behavior of Queen Blanka, who is expected to follow the examples of good queens and to avoid the fate of Jezebel (“Propterea ad reginam pertinent . . .” VIII, 12. 5).

She returns once more the story of Jezebel in order to warn the queen against being too concerned for her own wellbeing:

Regina illa, de qua prius dixeram tibi, consilium quesivit a me per te, et audito consilio, quod dedi ei, videtur sibi grauissimum. Et ideo modo dic ei, quod erat quedam regina tempore Helye prophete, que dilexit quietem suam plus quam me et persequebatur verba veritatis et credebat stare per prudentiam suam. Ideo contigit, quod non solum contempta

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<sup>207</sup> 1Sa 25 (Abigail was not a queen at the time of events, but she became one as a consequence of the described events).

<sup>208</sup> 1Ki 21; 2Ki 9.

et despecta fuit ab omnibus, sicut prius honorata, sed etiam in morte sua tribulata fuit. Et propterea ego Deus, qui clarius video et scio futura, dico nunc isti regine, quod tempus suum breue est. Computus, quem redditura est in die iudicii, grauis est. Et finis suus non sicut principium erit, nisi obedierit verbis meis. (VIII, 14. 1–4)

In this instance, the wicked queen in question is not named as “Jezebel,” but she is described as “a queen living in the times of Elijah the prophet,” and Jezebel is the only biblical character contemporary with Elijah who could serve as such a negative example. The story of Jezebel is described in the first and second book of Kings (1Ki 21; 2Ki 9). She was the pagan wife of King Ahab, whom she inspired to abandon the cult of Yahweh and to serve pagan gods. The queen, hated by the Israelites, was murdered and her body thrown out a window. She was never buried. This miserable fate is interpreted in the Bible as a God’s punishment.

In the first revelation (VIII, 12), Birgitta refers to the story of Jezebel as something well known to her listener. Not mentioning the name of the queen “who lived in the time of Elijah the prophet” thus may be a rhetorical figure aimed at attracting the attention of a reader. The example of Jezebel does not exactly suit the situation of a young Christian queen, who might well feel shocked at the comparison between her and this cruel pagan woman who hated God of Israel, killed his prophets, and forbade all forms of his worship. Blanka certainly was a different kind of sinner. But according to Birgitta, the essence of their sin was the same: the Swedish queen also “loved her own peace and idleness more than God and she persecuted the words of truth and she relied only on her own prudence.” Birgitta shows Blanka “a queen’s mirror,” but the image that could be seen in this mirror is not a very attractive one. She does that in order to warn the queen against following in the steps of Jezebel, as the punishment for the same sin would be similar. This text is thus a representation of historical exemplification: Birgitta refers to a historical figure in order to influence the behavior of a currently living person.

In the three revelations analyzed above, the aim of referring to historical figures is the same. Birgitta does not perceive historical events as being an efficient cause of the present state of things, but she refers to them as examples.

This way of referring to historical figures belongs to the method of medieval historiography. We shall illustrate this method with two examples taken from medieval chronicles, which will help to place the text of *Revelationes* in its historical and literary context. I have chosen these two chronicles, as they undoubtedly belong to the genre of Latin medieval historiography and their authors do not refrain from passing moral judgments based on Biblical categories. The two examples concern comparing a Christian female ruler to Jezebel, the archetypal bloodthirsty pagan queen. Both chronicles describe the events that took place in the first half of the eleventh century. In his chronicle titled *De diversitate temporum libri duo*, Alpertus of Metz accused Adela, the wife of count Baldric, of encouraging him to arrange the murder of his opponent, count Wichman. The chronicler noted that Baldric intended to make peace with Wichman, but Adela persuaded him to break the treaty and kill their enemy. Alpertus wrote about her:

Persuadet facile cupido, et more hominum qui honoribus expleri nesciunt, suscipit negotium, non solum ad suae familiaris rei damnum, sed etiam ad perpetuam ruinam suae salutis. Et quamvis graves causae irarum inter eos antecessissent, tamen haec fomes et initium utriusque extitit exitii; et sicut Hiezabel Achab, ita et ista hunc ad flagitia semper concitavit, dans ei consilia quibus ad perniciem suam uteretur, donec abhominabilis et odiosus omnibus fieret.<sup>209</sup>

The role of Adela is therefore comparable to that of Jezebel, because they both incited their husbands to sin and, consequently, to hazard their good name and eternal salvation.

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<sup>209</sup> Alpertus of Metz, *De diversitate temporum libri duo*, II.5, ed. A. Hulshof (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1916).



It is remarkable that Thietmar,<sup>210</sup> while relating the same events, compares Adela to Herodias, another bloody queen known from the Bible, who encouraged her husband to kill his opponent.<sup>211</sup>

The second example comes from the anonymous *Chronicon sancti Andreae Castri Cameracensi*. The chronicle notes that Walter, the castellan of Cambrai, was in conflict with Bishop Gerard, who considered him to be excommunicated. When Walter's four enemies murdered him, the bishop refused to bury him among the Christians. Then Walter's wife, Ermintrude, tried to pressure the bishop by ordering that "almost the whole region of Cambrai [be] consumed by fire and completely devastated."<sup>212</sup> The bishop finally relented, but the chronicler judged Ermintrude to be a new Jezebel:

Sub iisdem fere diebus Cameraci Walterus castellanus reprobis actibus circumquaque famosus ad ostium monasterii sanctae Mariae dum oraret ut aiunt - nos id parum compertum habemus - a quattuor viris ad hoc ipsum conventionem facta paratis interficitur. De cuius morte civitati et omni patriae sive episcopali curiae requies aliqua sed non diu provenit. **Uxor quippe eius Ermentrudis cum unico filio parvulo relicta, Hiezabel maleficae non impar**, ab insania viri sui non cessavit, sed nequitias eius superexcellens tyrannum quemdam Ioannem advocatum Attrebatensem maritum duxit, ut eius fulta praesidio castellaturam recipere posset.<sup>213</sup> (emphasis mine)

The aim of comparing Ermintrude to Jezebel is the same as in the latter case. It stresses the cruel personality of the duchess and the sinister role played by her in the described events.

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<sup>210</sup> According to Thietmar the described events took place in 1016. Alpertus does not mention a precise date.

<sup>211</sup> Thietmarus Merseburgensis, *Chronicon*, VII, 47, ed. R. Holtzmann, MGH SS rer. Germ. N. S. 9, (Berlin: Weidman, 1935), 456.

<sup>212</sup> According to *Annales Elonenses* quoted in T. M. Riches, "Bishop Gerard I of Cambrai-Arras, the Three Orders, and the Problem of Human Weakness," in *The Bishop Reformed: Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in The Central Middle Ages*, ed. John S. Ott and Anna Trumbore Jones (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 134.

<sup>213</sup> *Chronikon s. Andreae Castri Cameracesii*, II, 8, ed. L. C. Bethmann, MGH SS 7, (Hannover: Hahn, 1846), 532.

Against this background, Birgitta's remarks about Jezebel appear more subdued. She does not compare Blanka to Jezebel directly, but rather warns her from becoming similar to the wicked queen. Another difference is that Birgitta described Jezebel as a queen "living in the times of Elijah the prophet," while the two chronicles do not mention the prophet. It is thus possible that Birgitta stressed the role of Elijah in order to build a double metaphor involving Blanka, who is warned against becoming a new Jezebel, and Birgitta herself, who suggests that she plays the role of Elijah, the prophet who rebuked Jezebel. This element is not present in the chronicles, since they are not aimed at correcting the behavior of Adela or Ermintrude, but rather at inspiring the reader and passing judgment on the moral condition of the two women. The work of Birgitta is not a historical one, even though history is one of its important themes. Hence this difference between *Revelationes* and the two chronicles. The three texts are similar, however, in their sharp critique of irresponsible female rulers and their destructive influence on their husbands. They all use a historical example (in the medieval Christian sense) in order to express this critique.

Book 8 of *Revelationes* also contains another revelation concerning the queen that seems to represent a somewhat different approach to moral exemplification. In this instance, Birgitta does not refer to generally known historical figures, but to the relatives of the addressee, who might have some influence over her behavior.

In her comment concerning the royal wedding, Birgitta disapproves of the marriage between the king and the "daughter of parents condemned by the Church."<sup>214</sup> Nonetheless, she does not suggest that the girl will be punished for the sins of her parents; on the contrary, she

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<sup>214</sup> Most probably Magnus Eriksson and Queen Blanka. For the explanation of the historical circumstances of the marriage between Magnus Eriksson and Blanka of Namur, see section 3.1.4.

clearly disagrees with this possibility. However, she expects that being the offspring of an excommunicated family will somehow influence the queen and her future children:

Filius Dei loquitur sponse de quadam regina, quam rex acceperat in coniugem de semine dampnato ab Ecclesia et infra etatem legitimam, dicens: "Attende, filia, et scias, quod in omni coniugio Christiano tenetur esse etas et consensus legitimus, sed in istis nichil horum est. Et ideo istud matrimonium simile est puppis et ludo puerili ex eo, quod gloria temporalis ab istis queritur et non lex Christiana et honor Dei. Et ideo ex isto coniugio orietur tribulacio et non salus regno. Et licet ista nouella regina, filia parentum dampnatorum ab Ecclesia, non portabit iniquitatem patris, numquam tamen de semine istius, prouocantis me ad iram, veniet populo salus et fructus. Et ideo Ysaac monuit filium suum recipere uxorem de generatione sua, ne ipse contaminaretur a populo, cui iratus erat Deus." (VIII, 9. 1–5)

Two examples of moral exemplification can be found in this text. In the first instance, Birgitta uses an example taken from the history of salvation: Isaac married a girl from his own tribe, since, according to Birgitta, God had not approved a marriage to someone from "the people that God is angry with." This particular expression is not found in the book of Genesis, but Birgitta's interpretation accords with the scriptural text, which reads that Abraham insistently avoided a marriage between Isaac and one of the Canaanite women. He sent his servant to his "own country and kindred" to find a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:1–7). The line of argumentation presented in Birgitta's text is quite clear: it is not recommended to marry someone from outside the chosen nation, whether the nation of Abraham or the "nation" of the church, as it may provoke God's anger. According to Birgitta, what was true for the patriarch must be also true for the Christian monarch. So far, the text is a classic example of the "historia magistra vitae" type of argumentation.

In the following part, however, Birgitta employs a slightly different kind of moral exemplification. This time the moral example concerns the relationship between the queen's origin and her present situation. Its existence is not obvious at first glance, but a closer look

reveals Birgitta's expectation that the queen will follow the example of her excommunicated family. Birgitta states that the queen "does not carry the sins" of her family, but nonetheless the royal marriage will not bring any good fruits for the kingdom. This statement seems to lack consequence, but Birgitta explains her point of view for this question in another revelation (V, int. 14). In this vision, a monk is questioning Christ the Judge about several theological and moral questions. Among them: "Why does the child bear the sins of his father, if he didn't sin himself?" (V, int. 14. 19–23). In this context, the question is more general, concerning not only the royals but people in general. Raising this problem is already a provocation intended by the monk, since in the Scripture we find two contradictory statements: that God is "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation" (Exo 20:5; Num 14:18, Deu 5:9), and later in the book of Ezekiel that "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and the father shall not bear the iniquity of the son" (Eze 18:20). The answer given by Christ is based on accepting the starting point set by the monk: indeed, children bear the consequences of their parents' sin, but this sin has to be understood as the original sin of the first parents. We are all impure because of that, and "nothing pure can proceed from the impure." The cure for the original sin is baptism introduced by Christ. A baptized infant is liberated from the sin of his fathers. In this sense, unbaptized people really bear the sin of their ancestors and the baptized "shall not bear the iniquity of their fathers, but die in their own sins," as states Christ in the revelation, quoting the book of Ezekiel (18:20). It happens, however, that the baptized child imitates the sins of its parents. If both father and son are being punished for the same sin, we can say, in a metaphorical sense, that the sin of the father is punished in his son. Birgitta perceives this kind of relation between the sinners as being so strong and common that the iniquity of the fathers is visited by God unto the fourth generation (V, int. 14. 22–23). Therefore, it is not causality

but the power of example that sets the rule of this relation. The person providing the example is different this time, however: it is not a historical figure, but a member of one's family.

In the second type of moral exemplification, we speak about direct influence, not about imitating a historical figure, but in the case of royal marriage the personal example gains a historical value. If this young girl is already determined to follow in the footsteps of her family, and there is no chance for any "populus salus et fructus" to be born from this marriage, then the prospects for the Swedish monarchy are poor. The discussed revelations demonstrate that the matters of historical inspiration and exemplification were of great importance to St. Birgitta.

In the current section, we have analyzed Birgitta's revelations employing moral examples based on historical figures. All these figures are known from the Bible, so can be regarded as historical only if a general thesis about the historical value of the Bible is accepted (which thesis was accepted by the authors of *Revelationes* and their medieval readers). The Bible documents the history of salvation. Two of the discussed revelations concern the origin of the social institutions that existed in Birgitta's time: monasticism and knighthood. They refer to these origins in order to set a model of behavior for currently living monks and knights, who should treat their prototypes as moral examples. The other two texts concern the positive and negative models of queenship presented to Queen Blanka. The author(s) of the revelations refer to both noble and wicked royal characters in Scripture to inspire the conduct of the young queen. Using biblical examples of this kind was a common practice in medieval historiography. The texts from *Revelationes* have been compared to the two fragments of medieval chronicles, which confronted wicked aristocrats (the wives of rulers), with Queen Jezebel exemplifying the paradigmatic royal

sinner. We have also mentioned the history of one's own family as a possible source of moral exemplification of a slightly different kind.

#### 2.1.4. History Understood Allegorically

It has been stated above that St. Birgitta refers to the exemplary meaning of historical events. Now we shall see that she also explains history allegorically: that is, she ascribes to historical facts an additional, broader meaning, not intended by the participants and witnesses of these events, but intended by God, seen as the real "author" of history. We shall analyze this type of revelation further in chapter 4, while investigating allegorical meanings in Birgitta's authorship. Below, only a few introductory remarks will be made in order to explain the basic rules governing this kind of historical reflection as taken up in *Revelationes*.

I have noticed that Birgitta generally interprets the facts of Old Testament in this way. She presents them as designed and planned by God, who Himself invests them with additional meaning. In the revelation analyzed above (VIII, 9. 1–5), Birgitta did not claim that Isaac married Rebecca in order to provide King Magnus and Queen Blanka with moral teaching. But in many other cases she reads the Old Testament differently, as a symbol and prophecy of future things. She writes:

Eciam quandoque dico aliqua obscure, ut et timeas et gaudeas; timeas, ne alio modo eueniant propter pacienciam meam diuinam, qui noui mutaciones cordium, gaudeas eciam, quia voluntas mea semper adimpletur, sicut eciam in veteri lege multa dixi, que magis spiritualiter quam corporaliter intelligi debebant, sicut de templo et Daud et Ierusalem, ut homines carnales spiritualia addiscerent desiderare. (V, rev. 10. 4–5)

As we stated above, according to the Christian interpretation, history is also a kind of revelation, the language of a God who speaks through facts. Therefore, we can assume that St. Birgitta means

here not only the texts in the Bible that speak about David or Jerusalem, which might be interpreted symbolically, but the events themselves. At the same time, she admits that the words of God can be understood in several ways and that they are “obscure.” In this revelation (V, rev. 10) she explains several causes of this obscurity. First, God wants his friends to “learn to desire heavenly things” and thereby to develop their faith in things that they cannot see. Second, he wants to protect the faithful from becoming impatient. If he expressed all his promises literally, people would get impatient and tired of waiting; the fulfillment of many promises is postponed on account of human ingratitude. Some warnings and announcements of coming punishment never would be realized if the sinners would repent. Third, the mysterious words of God are also better protected from insolent questioning. Finally, some prophecies have already been fulfilled but people cannot detect them, as they were given “corporeally” and their realization is “spiritual.” Such was the case with King David, who was promised an eternal kingdom that was not fully achieved until his offspring, Jesus, fulfilled it (V, rev. 10. 5; VIII, 48. 10).

The example of King David is particularly significant, as St. Birgitta repeatedly interprets his story in a symbolic manner<sup>215</sup> and invokes him as an illustration of the postponed realization of God’s promises.<sup>216</sup> Characteristically, she seldom compares any Christian king to King David, at least not in a positive sense.<sup>217</sup> However, a few times she mentions David in order compare him

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<sup>215</sup> “Sed ascendit iterum per spiritualem intelligenciam, sicut in Daud, cui multa dicta sunt sub nomine Salomonis, sed completa sunt sicut et intellecta in Filio Dei. Quandoque eciam loquitur Deus de futuris quasi de preteritis et presencia simul tangit et futura, quia omnia sunt in Deo: et presencia et preterita et futura quasi unus punctus” (VIII, 48. 10-11).

<sup>216</sup> “Multa eciam alia dicta sunt tibi, que non statim perficientur. Sed verba custodiri debent ad tempus prefinitum. Nam plura ostendit Deus Moysi, que non completa sunt una hora. Sic et Daud longo tempore ostensus fuit rex, antequam peruenit ad potestatem. Et ideo amici Dei expectent sapienter et non attendentur in operando” (VIII, 47. 18-19).

<sup>217</sup> See section 3.1.1.

with King Magnus of Sweden. First, she states that Magnus is not “wiser than David,” so he should not hesitate to change or correct his decisions if they are inaccurate.<sup>218</sup> Another time, Birgitta uses the example of David to explain to the king that relying on his own power is pointless because it is God who gives victory to warriors, even if they are weak in themselves, like David—a shepherd who killed a giant.<sup>219</sup> Finally, she warns Magnus that his lifestyle will not achieve a pious end to his days such as King David, St. Olav, or St. Eric had.<sup>220</sup>

Birgitta also frequently invokes David to compare him with Christ:

Item ait mater ad Christum Filium eius: “Benedictus sis tu, Iesu Christe optime gygas, qui celerrimus fuisti ad currendum viam<sup>221</sup> et fortissimus ad tenendum pugnam.<sup>222</sup> Scribitur quippe, quod Daudid fuit gygas magnus et fortis, sed nullo modo similis tibi. Daudid denique a longe currendo iactavit lapidem contra hostem. Tu vero appropinquabas pedibus inimico et confregisti dorsum eius. Daudid quoque hoste prostrato abstulit ei gladium amputando caput eius. Tu vero ab hoste stante abstulisti gladium, vincens hostem viuum paciencia tua et confringens robur robusti humilitate tua. Propterea tu pugil pugilum es, cui nullus fuit nec erit similis. De robusto enim patre surrexit fortissimus filius, qui patrem et fratres liberauit. Ergo, o, piissime gygas, rogo te, ut isti episcopo scienciam pugnandi donare digneris et fortitudinem currendi in stadio pugilum, ut sedeat cum veris gygantibus, qui vitam dederunt pro vita et pro sanguine tuo obtulerunt sanguinem suum.” (IV, 126. 27–32)

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<sup>218</sup> “Sextum est, quod continue rex discuciat iudicia et opera sua. Et si ex facili et subito mentis impulsu errasse se viderit, non erubescat corrigere vel retractare que male acta sunt. Non enim ipse sapiencior est Daudid, qui eciam errauit, nec sancior propheta, qui credens mendacio occisus est a leone” (VIII, 4. 11-12).

<sup>219</sup> “Numquid non pastor Daudid vicit gygantem? Sed quomodo? Numquid potencia et sapiencia? Non utique, sed virtute diuina. Nisi enim Deus infatuasset audaciam gygantem et animasset mentem pueri Daudid, quomodo puer aggressus fuisset gygantem? Et quomodo lapis prostrauisset tam fortem et attigisset tam doctum, nisi in lapide fuisset virtus Dei? Ideo faciliter vincit, qui Deum habet cooperatorem, nec ei, qui Deo perfecte innititur, opus est multa corporis fortitudine, sed fide et caritate” (VI, 41. 1 = VIII, 44. 1).

<sup>220</sup> “Quia rex iste non querit calorem meum sed permanet in frigore et scandalum manuum suarum non dimittit, ideo non edificabit michi domum ut Salomon nec habebit exitum vite ut Daudid. Sed nec memoria eius erit ut dilecti mei Olau, nec coronabitur ut amicus meus Ericus, sed senciet iusticiam, quia noluit misericordiam, et arabo terram in iudicio et tribulacione, donec inhabitantes discant petere misericordiam. Verumptamen persona, que edificabit monasterium meum, qualis erit et quando veniet, erit tibi notum, sed utrum in hac vita, non est tibi licitum scire” (Extrav. 27. 1-3).

<sup>221</sup> Psa 18:6.

<sup>222</sup> 1Ma 3:3.



At first glance, it seems that this type of revelation is identical to the moral exemplification treated above. They are indeed similar, as Mary compares Christ to David, enumerating several analogies between David's fight with the giant and Jesus' fight with evil. However, she says that there is one significant difference between the two—Christ is something more than David. Whatever David did, Christ also did in a spiritual and thus more perfect way. David was Christ's shadow, giving an impression of the shape of the real King, but David was still imperfect and insufficient. This method of interpreting the events and characters from the history of Israel was initiated by the Gospels. Jesus said about Himself:

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here (Mat 12:41–42, cf. Luk 11:31–32).

Medieval Christian scriptural exegesis often included an examination of the likeness between Christ and the prophets, and in what way he is "something greater." Birgitta here uses a literary genre of medieval biblical exegesis to stress the real meaning of Old Testament history. The rule that could be called "a greater than Solomon is here" applies not only to David and Solomon but also to many other events and institutions of the Old Testament. For example, the garments worn by the Israel's priests symbolized the seven virtues of the soul necessary to its salvation:

Ego quippe ostendi in monte Moysi vestes,<sup>223</sup> quibus sacerdotes legis uterentur. Non quod in celesti Dei habitacione aliquid materiale sit, sed quia spiritualia nisi per corporales similitudines non capiuntur. Ideo spirituale per corporale ostendi, ut sciatur, quanta reuerencia et mundicia opus est hiis, qui habent ipsam veritatem, scilicet corpus meum, si tantam mundiciam et reuerenciam habebant hii, qui portabant umbram et figuram. Sed ad quid Moysi ostendi tantam vestium materialium pulchritudinem, nisi ut per eas addisceretur et significaretur ornatus et pulchritudo anime? Sicut enim vestes sacerdotis

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<sup>223</sup> Exo 28; 39.

sunt septem, sic anime accedentis ad corpus Dei septem debent esse virtutes, sine quibus non est salus. (IV, 58. 16–18)

Although Birgitta refers only to the vestments of the Old Testament priests and their spiritual meaning, we can suppose that in fact the analogy is more complex, and by the “seven vestments of the priest,” Birgitta actually means the liturgical robes of the Christian priest, which were seven in number, and, according to medieval theologians, such as Rabanus Maurus, their symbolic meaning was derived from the Old Testament vestments.<sup>224</sup> Here the line of historical signification would therefore lead from Aaron and his liturgy (a corporeal sign), to the New Testament liturgy, which enjoys the “truth itself, that is: the Body of Christ” (IV, 58. 17) and the fully spiritual fruits of this chain of signs are virtues of the soul (IV, 58. 18).

This pattern of argumentation, here applied to liturgy, may be in my opinion applied to Birgitta’s general view of history: Old Testament events are signs, which find their fulfillment in Christ, who is present and working in the church; and the same grace that was given in the time of the Old Testament is available also for contemporary Christians, but in a more perfect way.

#### 2.1.5. The Point of View of Eternity

We briefly discussed above the reasons why, according to St. Birgitta, history is to be understood symbolically and explored the inner mechanism of her symbolic interpretation. But

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<sup>224</sup> See: “In habitu sacerdotali nihil esse quod vacet a ratione, apud veteres quoque constitit, sicut beatus Hieronymus scribens ad Fabiolam testis est. Apud nos ergo quanto sacerdotium Christi veteri sacerdotio dignius est, tanto in habitu sacerdotali causas habere probatur digniores.” Rupertus of Deutz, *De divinis officiis*, I, 18, (PL 170, 22). In subsequent chapters 19-25 Rupert mentions the following seven vestments: amice, alb, stole, chasuble, tunica, sandals, angulum. Some of them have a meaning clearly derived from the book of Exodus: “Casula magni sacerdotis nostri, Christi vestimentum, significat illud vestimentum veri Aaron, cujus in oram descendit unguentum, quod est in capite, primum descendens in barbam ipsius Aaron. Quod est illud vestimentum? Sancta Ecclesia catholica. Nam barba Aaron, quod interpretatur mons fortitudinis, barba, inquam, Aaron, id est Christi apostoli sunt, atque apostolici viri, fortes et perfecti” – Rupert of Deutz, *op. cit.*, I, 22, (PL 170, 23).

how is it possible that, according to Birgitta, the past events and the present events have the same meaning? What makes the meaning “circulate” between apparently distant events? In the fragment of book 8 (VIII, 48. 7–11) we find the general theological rule which may bring an answer to this question: “Quandoque eiam loquitur Deus de futuris quasi de preteritis et presencia simul tangit et futura, quia omnia sunt in Deo: et presencia et preterita et futura quasi unus punctus” (VIII, 48. 11).

In this revelation, Christ explains why his words, transmitted through the prophets (including Birgitta), are sometimes obscure and prone to misinterpretation. According to this text, the rules of speaking about time (and, therefore, of interpreting past, present, and future events) are established by God, who transcends time. Time appears to him not as a line of events but “as one point,” so he can see at a glance all events, which we perceive as coming and passing in a chronological order. Speaking “about future things as if they were present or future” is therefore possible only from the point of view of God.

This bears an easily discernable resemblance to St. Augustine’s reflection on time and eternity, found in book 11 of his *Confessiones*:

Nor dost thou precede any given period of time by another period of time. Else thou wouldst not precede all periods of time. In the eminence of thy ever-present eternity, thou precedest all times past, and extendest beyond all future times, for they are still to come—and when they have come, they will be past. But “Thou art always the Selfsame and thy years shall have no end” (Psa 102:27). Thy years neither go nor come; but ours both go and come in order that all separate moments may come to pass. All thy years stand together as one, since they are abiding. Nor do thy years past exclude the years to come because thy years do not pass away. All these years of ours shall be with thee, when all of them shall have ceased to be. Thy years are but a day, and thy day is not recurrent, but always today. Thy “today” yields not to tomorrow and does not follow yesterday. Thy “today” is eternity.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* XI, 13, 16, transl. Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 182.

It is a common intuition of medieval theology<sup>226</sup> that God's mode of existence in eternity can be described as an "endless now" or "today" rather than a continuous line of time without end. The classical medieval definition of eternity as "interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio" was formulated by Boethius in his *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.<sup>227</sup> Here I would like to emphasize one element of this definition: "tota simul" means that God's existence in eternity is "without succession" or "completely simultaneous." Boethius clearly distinguished between eternity (*aeternitas*) and everlastingness (*sempiternitas*) as two different modes of existence:<sup>228</sup> the first is characteristic only for God, the second is achievable by the human soul after death and in the soul and body *compositum* after the resurrection. Everlastingness has a beginning in time, whereas eternity has no beginning or end. A definition similar to that of Boethius was accepted by St. Anselm<sup>229</sup> and St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>230</sup> Anselm states besides that all of time is somehow contained in eternity, since eternity is "eternally present."<sup>231</sup>

One phrase in particular provides additional insight into the problem: "omnia sunt in Deo: et presencia et preterita et futura quasi unus punctus" (VIII, 48. 11). This suggests that eternity may be somehow compared to a point (*punctus*). These authors may also inspire the geometric

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<sup>226</sup> Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the nature of time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 111.

<sup>227</sup> Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, prose 6, 4, ed. Ludwig Bieler (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), 102.

<sup>228</sup> Garrett J. DeWeese, op. cit., 134.

<sup>229</sup> "Hence, if [the Supreme Being] is said always to exist, then since for it to exist is the same as for it to live, nothing better is understood [by 'always existing'] than eternally existing, or eternally living—i.e., having an unending life which at once is completely whole. For its eternity is seen to be an unending life existing as completely whole at once." Anselm, "Monologion," chapt. 24 in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), 41.

<sup>230</sup> Aquinas, *S. Th.*, I, q.10, a.1.

<sup>231</sup> Garrett J. DeWeese, op. cit., 150.

metaphor used here. Boethius compares Fate to a circle or a sphere of which the center is Providence. According to him, the relationship between ever-changing time and eternity is similar,<sup>232</sup> since eternity is always present but does not belong to time. Boethius only mentioned time and eternity, as his discussion was focused on Fate and Providence, but his complex thought was continued and developed by Aquinas, who explains in his *Summa contra Gentiles*:

Let us consider a determined point on the circumference of a circle. Although it is indivisible, it does not co-exist simultaneously with any other point as to position, since it is the order of position that produces the continuity of the circumference. On the other hand, the center of the circle, which is no part of the circumference, is directly opposed to any given determinate point on the circumference. Hence, whatever is found in any part of time coexists with what is eternal as being present to it, although with respect to some other time it be past or future. Something can be present to what is eternal only by being present to the whole of it, since the eternal does not have the duration of succession. The divine intellect, therefore, sees in the whole of its eternity, as being present to it, whatever takes place through the whole course of time. And yet what takes place in a certain part of time was not always existent. It remains, therefore, that God has a knowledge of those things that according to the march of time do not yet exist.<sup>233</sup>

As we can see, Aquinas uses the same metaphor, but he focuses on the relationship between time and eternity, not between Fate and Providence. The complete argument was presented above in its complete form, since it appears to be a very relevant context for the expression used in *Revelationes*. Birgitta also compares God's relationship to time to the relationship between a point and a circle. She states that the reason why God may speak about future and past events as if they

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<sup>232</sup> "Consider the example of a number of spheres in orbit around the same central point: the innermost moves toward the simplicity of the center and becomes a kind of hinge about which the outer spheres circle; whereas the outermost, whirling in a wider orbit, tends to increase its orbit in space the farther it moves from the indivisible midpoint of the center. If, however, it is connected to the center, it is confined by the simplicity of the center and no longer tends to stray into space. . . . Therefore, the changing course of Fate is to the simple stability of Providence as reasoning is to intellect, as that which is generated is to that which is, as time is to eternity, as a circle is to its center." Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, IV, prose 6, ed. Douglas C. Langston (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 72.

<sup>233</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On the truth of the Catholic faith. Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 66, 7, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Hannover House, 1955), vol.1, 219.

were present is that from his point of view they are, in fact, all present. Here the analogy must end, since we cannot state for certain whether Birgitta means that the events are “quasi unus punctus” in God or that God is “quasi unus punctus” compared to the events. The text of *Revelationes* is not entirely clear here, whereas Aquinas and Boethius are both quite precise regarding the relationship between the elements of the metaphor. It is therefore only possible to state that, according to Birgitta, all events are for God “quasi unus punctus,” and that this statement assumes the timeless character of God’s eternity. It is reflected in God’s mode of speaking about distant events.

It is by no means evident that any of the authors of *Revelationes* used *Summa contra Gentiles* as a source, but it is highly probable that the source of inspiration for Birgitta’s work was close to this line of reasoning. Apart from Boethius and Aquinas, such geometric metaphors were used by Cusanus<sup>234</sup> and other medieval authors,<sup>235</sup> but in the cited works of Boethius and Aquinas we observe the type of correlation between God’s eternity and time which is of interest in Birgitta’s case.

To conclude, we can say that according to the discussed fragment of *Revelationes*, history may be subject to the interpretation offered by a prophet who is given grace to see things as if

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<sup>234</sup> The whole book of Cusanus: *De Theologicis Complementis* is based on geometric comparisons. He states that the truth about God may be adequately presented using mathematical figures, since “No one fails to know that truth is more assuredly attained in mathematics than in the other liberal arts; and, thus, we see that those who taste of geometric learning cling to it with a marvelous love, as if a certain nourishment for the intellectual life were very purely and very simply contained therein.” Nicolas of Cusa, “De Theologicis Complementis (Complementary Theological Considerations),” 2, in *Metaphysical Speculations: Six Latin Texts*, trans. by Jasper Hopkins, (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1998), 747.

<sup>235</sup> Edith Dudley Sylla, “God and the Continuum in the later Middle Ages: The Relations of Philosophy to Theology, Logic, and Mathematics,” in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter? Qu'est-ce que la philosophie au Moyen Age? What is Philosophy in the Middle Ages?: Akten des X. Internationalen Kongresses für mittelalterliche Philosophie der Société Internationale pour l'Etude de la Philosophie Médiévale...*, eds. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer, *Miscellanea Medievalia*, 26 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998): 791-797.

“from God’s point of view,”<sup>236</sup> since God sees all events simultaneously, as he is eternal (which, for medieval authors, means that he is timeless).<sup>237</sup> In my opinion, in *Revelationes* this method of interpreting historical events may result in comparing present events to past ones, such as confronting Magnus Eriksson with the model of king David (VI, 41. 1 = VIII, 44. 1) or by foreseeing future events: Birgitta foretold what God’s punishment would be for Blanka if she continued to follow the example of Jezebel (VIII, 14. 4).

### 2.1.6. The Epochs of World History

Thus far, we have said that in *Revelationes* we find a specific form of historical thinking or the interpretation of history which, according to the discussed text, may be performed only by prophets, mystics, or other persons given the grace to understand time and history according to “God’s criteria,” which are based on understanding past, present, and future as if they were simultaneously present. We have also said that, according to this historical thinking, it is possible to interpret the events of external history in light of a central, spiritual purpose. In Jewish and Christian historiography, this interpretation took the form of a theory of successive world ages or empires, which are perceived as separate entities, each bearing its own sense in the particular moment of history.<sup>238</sup> Birgitta also uses this classical theological genre, which dates back to the

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<sup>236</sup> Joachim di Fiore also explained his mandate to interpret the secret meaning of the Church history referring to a special grace given him by God. It was not however the grace of prophetism, but of “understanding the Scriptures.” Bernard McGinn, *Apocalyptic spirituality: treatises and letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, the spiritual Franciscans, Savonarola* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), xvi.

<sup>237</sup> For an interesting analysis of the “timeless eternity” in Boethius see: Nelson Pike, “The Predicate ‘Timeless,’” in *The Consolation of Philosophy: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, by Boethius, ed. Douglas C. Langston, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 151-158.

<sup>238</sup> Dawson, op. cit., 33; see also: “The theory of the world ages, which became incorporated in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition and was ultimately taken over by Christian apocalyptic, was not however Jewish in origin. It was widely diffused throughout the ancient world in Hellenistic times and probably goes back in origin to the tradition of Babylonian cosmology and astral theology. The theory of world empires, on the other hand, is distinctively biblical in

book of Daniel, the Revelation of St. John, the Christian apocalyptic, and St. Augustine. Birgitta's thought is quite original in this aspect, however, as will be demonstrated below.

In *Revelationes celestes* we find two revelations dealing with the question of successive world ages or empires, both of them in book 6. The first one is a part of a sequence of seven revelations describing the life and death of the Virgin Mary (VI, 55–62). The discussed passage is found the last revelation, concerning Mary's last days, death, funeral, and assumption. The structure of the text seems to end with the description of these events, when an unexpected addition follows:

Quindecim vero diebus corpus meum iacuit sepultum in terra. Deinde cum multitudine angelorum fuit assumptum in celum. Et hoc tempus non sine maximo misterio est, quia in septima hora erit resurreccio corporum et in octava complebitur beatitudo animarum et corporum. Prima quippe hora fuit ab origine mundi usque ad tempus illud, quo[d] per Moysen dabatur lex; secunda a Moyse usque ad incarnationem filii mei; tertia, quando filius meus baptismum instituit et austeritatem legis mitigavit; quarta, quando ipse predicabat verbo et exemplo confirmabat; quinta, quando filius meus pati voluit et mori et quando surrexit a morte et resurreccionem suam certis argumentis approbat; sexta, quando ascendit in celum et misit Spiritum Sanctum; septima, quando veniet ad iudicium et omnes cum corporibus suis surgent ad iudicium; octava, quando complebuntur omnia, que promissa et prophetata sunt; et tunc erit beatitudo perfecta, tunc videbitur Deus in gloria sua et sancti fulgebunt sicut sol, et non erit amplius dolor. (VI, 62. 8–12)

The connection between the main part of the revelation and its last paragraph, describing the eight "hours" of history, is not obvious. It is certainly the subject—the resurrection of the dead—that creates a link between the two parts, but it is still difficult to say why the historical summary starts with the phrase, "Et hoc tempus non sine maximo misterio est."

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spirit and belongs to the central message of Hebrew prophecy. For the Divine Judgment which it was the mission of the prophets to declare was not confined to the chosen people. The rulers of the Gentiles were also the instrument of divine judgment" (Dawson, *op.cit.*, 33-34).



As we have said, this summary is a final part of the sequence of revelations dealing with the life and assumption of the Virgin Mary. In order to understand this construction, we must consider one feature of Birgitta's theology: according to *Revelationes*, the life of Mary is the culmination point of human history. It is described as such in *Sermo angelicus*, where the narration about the life of Mary starts from the creation of the world and continues through the ages until her death and assumption. All the events of the history of salvation are described in relation to Mary. This may be the reason why the narration about the life and death of Mary in book 6 concludes with a general theory of world history, explained by Birgitta. If Mary's life is a culmination of world history, she is given the special privilege of clarifying this history for Birgitta.

The schema of seven or eight epochs of the world's history is a classical *topos* of Christian historiography. It is generally assumed<sup>239</sup> that the roots of this Christian *topos* can be found in the three sections of the Bible. The first of them is the description of God's creating the world in six days, followed by the seventh day of God's rest (Gen 1:1–2:3). The scheme of seven days became an inspiration for many Christian authors (for example, St. Augustine, St. Vincent of Beauvais, and others mentioned below) who searched for a framework that would enable them to understand the deeper structure of world history. The other section is found in the second epistle of St. Peter: "But of this one thing be not ignorant, my beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2Pe 3:8). This fragment enabled the Christian authors to search for a direct relationship between the "seven days" and the "seven ages" of world history. The third one, found in Psalm 89:4 ("a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past") played a similar role.

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<sup>239</sup> Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 83.

The theory of seven epochs was given its most widespread form by St. Augustine. He describes the scheme in several of his works. In most descriptions, the scheme involves seven ages or epochs, corresponding to the seven days of creation. In *De catechizandis rudibus*, he gives the most consistent description of the six epochs (this time not mentioning the seventh one):

Five ages of the world, accordingly, having been now completed (there has entered the sixth). Of these ages the first is from the beginning of the human race, that is, from Adam, who was the first man that was made, down to Noah, who constructed the ark at the time of the flood. Then the second extends from that period on to Abraham. . . . For the third age extends from Abraham on to David the king; the fourth from David on to that captivity whereby the people of God passed over into Babylonia; and the fifth from that transmigration down to the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. With His coming the sixth age has entered on its process; so that now the spiritual grace, which in previous times was known to a few patriarchs and prophets, may be made manifest to all nations.<sup>240</sup>

A similar description is offered in *De Trinitate* and *De Genesi contra Manicheos*.<sup>241</sup> In all three works, the periodization of history and the span of each epoch is the same. In *De catechizandis rudibus* and in *De Trinitate*, Augustine finishes his discourse with the description of the sixth epoch, which started with the coming of Christ and which is still in course now, whereas in *De Genesi contra Manicheos* he continues to describe the seventh “day” of the world history, which will commence with the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment. In this text, the discussion of the ages of world history terminates with Augustine’s statement that “the seventh day has no

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<sup>240</sup> Augustine, “On the Catechising of the Uninstructed,” 22, 39, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103.iv.iii.xxiii.html> (accessed October 20, 2009).

<sup>241</sup> Augustine, “On the Holy Trinity,” IV, 4, 7 in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103.iv.i.vi.v.html> (accessed October 20, 2009); idem, “On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees,” I, 35-41 in *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees; Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis; The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, ed. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002), 62-67.

evening,”<sup>242</sup> so we can understand that this “day” is the final stage of world history and lasts forever.

Augustine presents a slightly different opinion in the last book of *De civitate Dei*. There he suggests that after the seventh “day,” the great “Sabbath of God,” the history of the world will enter a new, eighth stage, “Dies Domini,” the eternal Sunday:

But there is not now space to treat of these ages; suffice it to say that the seventh shall be our Sabbath, which shall be brought to a close, not by an evening, but by the Lord’s day, as an eighth and eternal day, consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, and prefiguring the eternal repose not only of the spirit, but also of the body. There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end?<sup>243</sup>

In this text, Augustine still claims that the seventh day will not be brought to a close “by an evening,” but now he states that this epoch will be also terminated “not by an evening but by the Lord’s day.” This scheme is in accordance with the Christian view, but not with the Jewish view, of the sacral organization of time. Both the Jewish and the Christian weeks end with the seventh day, the Sabbath. The next day after the Sabbath is the beginning of a new week. As is commonly known, this day is not a holiday according to the Jewish religion. It does not have any particular sacral meaning. Christians, on the other hand, celebrate the next day after the Sabbath, when, according to the Gospels, Christ had risen from the dead (Mat 28:1; Mar 16:1–2; Luk 24:1, Joh 20:1–2). The fathers of the church called it sometimes “the eighth day” in order to stress its unique character.<sup>244</sup> In this fragment from *De civitate Dei*, Augustine also describes “the eighth

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<sup>242</sup> Augustine, “On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees” I, 41, op. cit., 65.

<sup>243</sup> Augustine, “City of God,” XXII, 30, trans. Marcus Dods, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XXII.30.html> (accessed February 5, 2010).

<sup>244</sup> St. Basil of Cesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 27, 66, ed. Benoît Pruche (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 2002), 484-485; *Epistula Barnabae* 15, 8-9, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Pierre Prigent (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1971), 186-189.

day” as the real finale of world history. Therefore, he divided history into eight, not seven, epochs. This observation will be quite important for finding the theological context of Birgitta’s division of world history, since she mentions eight epochs as well.

The scheme of seven or eight successive ages of the world was taken up by medieval scholars,<sup>245</sup> who adopted it as a frame of many historical works, for example in Vincent de Beauvais’s *Speculum Naturale*, which was one of the sources for the *Old Swedish Paraphrase of Pentateuch*.<sup>246</sup> According to Birgit Klockars, Birgitta might have been familiar with this book. Another Swedish source which mentions the ages of the world history is *Fornsvenska Legendariet*, which also could have influenced Birgitta.<sup>247</sup> Vincent de Beauvais mentions both the seven-fold and the eight-fold scheme of the periodization of history. The *Old Swedish Paraphrase of Pentateuch* mentions the eight-fold division.<sup>248</sup>

There also existed another scheme of seven epochs, which referred to the seven seals of the book to be opened by the Lamb in the end of days, mentioned in Apocalypse (Rev 5–8). Those seals were interpreted as the seven epochs of church history, starting with the life and passion of Christ. Venerable Bede employs this motif in his *Explanatio Apocalypsis*<sup>249</sup> as does Anselm of Havelberg in his *Dialogi*.<sup>250</sup> They both discuss the history of the church using the “seven seals” theme as their framework. Magister Mathias of Linköping in his commentary on the book of Apocalypse interpreted the seven seals as seven great events in the history of the church.

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<sup>245</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1971), 68.

<sup>246</sup> Klockars, op. cit., 67.

<sup>247</sup> Klockars, op. cit., 67-71.

<sup>248</sup> Klockars, op. cit., 69-70.

<sup>249</sup> Venerable Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypseos* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001).

<sup>250</sup> Anselm from Havelberg, *Dialogi*, I, 4-12, (PL 188, 1149-1160).

Nevertheless, he did not interpret them as seven subsequent epochs, but as “God’s judgments” (“iudicia Dei”)<sup>251</sup>: all taking place at present and simultaneously.<sup>252</sup>

Compared to this material, Birgitta’s idea expressed in the discussed revelation (VI, 62. 8–12) is quite original. The first scheme discussed (the seven days of creation) does not divide the sixth age, the time of the church, into minor parts. The sixth age starts from Christ and finishes with the Last Judgment. The second scheme (seven seals) does not interpret history before Christ, whereas in Birgitta’s text we find the whole history of salvation divided into eight, not seven, periods, involving the time before and after the incarnation.

Augustine divided all history before Christ into five parts, followed by two additional parts after his coming. Birgitta does the opposite: she speaks of two ages before Christ (from the beginning to Moses and from Moses to Christ) and five ages after his birth. Three of those ages took place during the life of Christ, so the present epoch is the sixth one, which takes the division back to Augustine’s concept. Birgitta, like Augustine, also placed the Final Judgment in the seventh age, although she did not call it “Sabbath.” According to her revelation, the final fulfillment of time will take place in the eighth epoch, analogical to the division proposed by Augustine in the last book of *De civitate Dei*.

In addition, the term “hour” (“hora”), which Birgitta uses to signify “age” or “epoch,” is rather original. Most of the aforementioned authors follow terminology inspired by the book of

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<sup>251</sup> “Septem sigilla septem iudicia Dei sunt, vt inferius patebit, scilicet aduersitas iustorum, prosperitas malorum, astucia hereticorum, simulacio ypocritorum, impunitas malorum hominorum, casus et ruina iustorum et generalis tepor deuocionis fidelium.” Mathias of Linköping, *Exposicio super Apocalypsim*, V, 13 (Uppsala: Universitetstryckeriet, 2003), 154.

<sup>252</sup> Mathias of Linköping, op. cit., V-VIII, 152-246.

Genesis (Gen 1:1–2:3) and the second epistle of St. Peter (2Pe 3:8), and they speak of “days,”<sup>253</sup> or “ages,”<sup>254</sup> not “hours” in the context of the stages of the world history. Still, the word “hour” has a rich theological meaning and the author(s) of *Revelationes* likely were aware of that while choosing this particular term. In the Latin Bible, “hora” often has a specific connotation. In the book of Daniel, “hour” means the unique, important time of some event.<sup>255</sup> In the gospels, Jesus speaks about his “hour,” meaning the time at which He will begin His mission,<sup>256</sup> and later in reference to the hour of his passion and death.<sup>257</sup> According to the Gospel of John, God the Father decided when the final “hour of Jesus” must come, and no one could harm Jesus before that time, despite many attempts.<sup>258</sup> Jesus also foretold the coming of other “hours”: that of the persecution of his disciples,<sup>259</sup> the resurrection of the dead,<sup>260</sup> and the worship of the true God.<sup>261</sup> Especially in the Gospel of St. John, “hour” means a special time when someone’s destiny is fulfilled.<sup>262</sup> In the first epistle of St. John, we also find a remark about the “last hour”: that of persecution and the

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<sup>253</sup> In case of The Old Swedish Paraphrase of Pentateuch. See Klockars, op. cit., 69.

<sup>254</sup> In case of Vincent de Beauvais and Augustine (see above).

<sup>255</sup> “But if any man shall not fall down and adore, he shall the same hour be cast into a furnace of burning fire” (Dan 3:6). “In the same hour there appeared fingers, as it were of the hand of a man, writing over against the candlestick upon the surface of the wall of the king's palace” (Dan 5:5).

<sup>256</sup> “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come” (Joh 2:4).

<sup>257</sup> “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour” (Joh 12:27).

<sup>258</sup> “They were seeking therefore to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come” (Joh 7:30).

<sup>259</sup> “. . . absque synagogis facient vos sed venit hora ut omnis qui interficit vos arbitretur obsequium se praestare Deo” (Joh 16:2) (In King James Version: “time”).

<sup>260</sup> “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (Joh 5:25).

<sup>261</sup> “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (Joh 4:23).

<sup>262</sup> “A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world” (Joh 16:21).

coming of Antichrist. According to John, this hour has already come. He wrote: “it is the last hour; and as you have heard that Antichrist cometh.”<sup>263</sup>

Birgitta’s description of eight “hours” is analogical with these biblical passages in another aspect—she does not describe the duration of epochs using words like “from” or “until,” but rather only points out the main event that describes the nature of a given age. This similarity between Birgitta’s prophetic language and the language of the Bible is probably not accidental. Birgit Klockars notes that some expressions and features of language in *Revelationes* are inspired by the language of the prophetic books of the Bible.<sup>264</sup> Claire Sahlin makes the same observation, concluding that this language helps to present Birgitta as a trustworthy prophet, a figure modeled on the biblical characters.<sup>265</sup>

The other revelation that mentions the epochs of world history is also original, but it is possible to find more analogies between this work and earlier literature. This text is also found in the sixth book of *Revelationes*. It is also part of a larger unit: it is not linked thematically with the preceding revelation, but rather is connected with the successive one, which, according to Marjorie Reeves, who revised the critical edition of book 6, refers to the work of Mathias of Janow concerning Antichrist.<sup>266</sup> This revelation describes the world as a ship with three parts: the bow, the middle part, and the stern. The text runs as follows:

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<sup>263</sup> “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that Antichrist cometh, even now there are become many Antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last hour” (1Jo 2:18).

<sup>264</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna: En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 83.

<sup>265</sup> Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 76-77.

<sup>266</sup> Marjorie Reeves, “Book reviews: Ancient and medieval (reviews: ‘Sancta Birgitta: Revelaciones,’ Book VI edited by Birger Bergh, Book IV edited by Hans Aili),” *Catholic Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (April 1993): 322.

Filius loquitur: “Mundus iste est quasi nauis. Qui sollicitudinibus plenus est et procellis temptationum agitur nec aliquando dimittit hominem securum, antequam homo peruenerit ad portum quietis. Sicut autem nauis habet tres partes, scilicet proram, medium et puppim, sic tres etates tibi describo esse in mundo. Prima erat ab Adam usque ad incarnationem meam. Hec signatur in prora, que alta erat et mirabilis et fortis: alta in patriarcharum pietate, mirabilis in prophetarum sciencia, fortis in legis obseruacione. Sed hec pars tunc paulatim descendere cepit, quando populus Iudaicus contemptis mandatis meis miscuit se sceleribus et impietatibus. Propterea abiectus est ab honore et possessione. Media uero pars nauis, idest mundi, tunc apparere cepit, quando ego ipse, filius Dei uiui, incarnari uolui. Quia sicut media pars nauis depressior et humilior est parte reliqua, sic in aduentu meo humilitas predicari cepit et omnis honestas, et multi longo tempore ea sunt secuti. Nunc autem, quia impietas et superbia inualescit et passio mea quasi oblita et neglecta est, ideo tertia pars incipit ascendere, que durabit usque ad iudicium. Et in hac etate misi per te uerba oris mei mundo, que quicumque audierint et secuti fuerint, felices erunt. Sicut enim Iohannes dicit in euangelio non suo sed meo: ‘Beati’, inquit, ‘qui non uiderunt et crediderunt’, sic dico nunc: ‘Beati utique erunt eterna beatitudine, qui hec uerba audierint et sequentur.’ In fine uero etatis huius nascetur Antichristus. Sicut enim de coniugio spirituali nascuntur filii Dei, sic Antichristus nascetur de maledicta femina simulante se sapere spiritualia et de maledicto homine. De quorum seminibus permissione mea dyabolus formabit opus suum. Sed tempus istius Antichristi non erit, sicut frater ille, cuius libros uidisti, descripsit, sed in tempore michi cognito, quando iniquitas ultra modum habundauerit et impietas excreuerit in immensum. Ideo scito, quod, priusquam Antichristus uenerit, gentibus aliquibus aperietur porta fidei. Deinde christianis diligentibus hereses et iniquis conculcantibus clerum et iusticiam signum est euident, quod cito ueniet Antichristus.” (VI, 67. 1–12)

According to this text, the three parts of the ship stand for the three epochs of world history: the first epoch began with Adam and lasted until the incarnation of Christ. The second age started with Christ and is still in process, but recently has begun to “descend” because of the pride and iniquities of Christians, so the final age, which will last until the Judgment, will begin to “ascend.” In this epoch the antichrist will come, and before that Christians will fall into heresies, showing contempt for the clergy.

A threefold division of world history is also used by many ancient and medieval historiographers. Its origin may be found in the writings of St. Paul, who distinguished between the time before the Law, time under the Law and time under grace (Rom 5). Augustine also used this



division, parallel to the previously mentioned seven-period schema, when he divided the history of the fight between the City of God and the earthly city into three epochs: their origin, their course, and their destined end.<sup>267</sup> Some scholars, among them Johannes van Oort, express the opinion that this division could be inspired by the Manichean doctrine of three epochs or three moments, since Augustine gives this scheme a quite similar meaning to the Manichean scheme of three epochs.<sup>268</sup>

It is also possible that an analogy to the discussed scheme of three epochs may be found in the works of Joachim di Fiore, who, like Birgitta, divided world history into three ages: that of the Father, that of the Son, and that of the Holy Spirit, which overlapped with each other. Birgitta, however, does not ascribe the three epochs to the three persons of the Trinity, but it is quite remarkable that she also describes the epochs as overlapping with each other—the last, third age has already begun, but the second one still endures—which corresponds to Joachim’s theory.<sup>269</sup> As far as I know, this feature of historical division is not found in Augustine or the Bible, and a search for the possible source of this solution may eventually lead to the works of Joachim di Fiore. Claire Sahlin quotes the work of Kevin Scott Echart, who analyzed the discussed revelation (VI, 67) in search of possible traces of Joachim’s influence on Birgitta, but he finally concluded that Birgitta’s vision of the three ages of history “reveals no very profound or detailed knowledge of Joachim’s

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<sup>267</sup> “And now, in fulfillment of the promise I made in the first book, I shall go on to say, as God shall aid me, what I think needs to be said regarding the origin, history, and deserved ends of the two cities, which, as already remarked, are in this world commingled and implicated with one another” (Augustine, “City of God,” X, 32, trans. Marcus Dods, in the Christian Classics Ethereal, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.X.32.html> [accessed February 5, 2010]).

<sup>268</sup> Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A study into Augustine's City of God and the sources of his doctrine of the two cities* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 93-94, 224-226.

<sup>269</sup> Bernard McGinn, *Apocalyptic spirituality: treatises and letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, the spiritual Franciscans, Savonarola* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), 102.

ideas.”<sup>270</sup> I agree with this opinion. It is likely that we cannot speak about any direct influence of Joachim on Birgitta, since the analogies between *Revelationes* and Joachim’s works are not very close in this aspect.

In my opinion, Magister Mathias is the possible true source of the threefold division of history noted in the discussed revelation. In his prologue to the first book of *Revelationes*, he presents the history of salvation as a series of subsequent prophetic revelations (see section 5.1.1). Mathias groups these revelations into three sets: the revelations of the Old Testament, compared to “a great and strong wind before the Lord overthrowing the mountains, and breaking the rocks in pieces” (1Ki 19:11); the time of the incarnation of Christ and the spread of the gospel, compared to “the fire” (1Ki 19:12); and, finally, the present time, when “a whistling of a gentle air” (1Ki 19:20), the special revelation of God’s mercy, is manifested. We read:

Mirabile siquidem erat, quod zelator legis, Moyses, igneam legem in ulcionem peccatorum de medio ignis zeli Dei audiret. Sed stupendius est, quod hodie humiles et mansueti spiritu vocem Iesu Christi, Dei et hominis, audiunt, ut olim Helias in sibilo aure tenuis audiuit. Qui enim durissimum, ignarum et rudem populum zelo iusticie sue legi sue primum subdidit per timorem, nunc in lenitate misericordie populum utraque lege, scilicet veteri et noua, eruditum subdere disponit per amorem. Precesserat enim spiritus grandis terroris Dei, subuertens montes superborum et conterens petras induratorum cordium, et commocio penitencie, conturbantis mentes ad salutem, et ignis diuine dileccionis, in euangelio Christi coruscantis per euidetissima magne caritatis eius ad suos indicia, qui semetipsum pro eis tradidit in mortem, ne ipsi in eternum morerentur, et suorum ad ipsum, semetipsos pro gloria eius tradencium, ut sic quodammodo loquar. In hoc igne Deus non secundum sue diuinitatis excellenciam sed secundum nostre seruilitatis humilem condicionem apparuit, in qua mundum redemit. Et sequitur iam sibilus lenitatis diuine misericordie, omnes propter preces et merita matris misericordie, virginis Marie, ab estu peccati ad auram placidissime misericordie conuocans. (Prologue, 1–3)

Mathias presents here the three phases of salvation history: the current phase when “the humble and meek in spirit hear the voice of Jesus Christ” and the two preceding phases: one of “the great

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<sup>270</sup> Claire L. Sahlín, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 76.

wind,” the Old Testament, and one of “the fire” of the Gospel. The third phase is especially devoted to the Mother of God, the Mother of Mercy (Prologue, 3). Birgitta is presented as the prophet of this new, unique age.

Even without entering into detailed analysis, we can see some similarities between Joachim’s theory of the three ages and the above-discussed construction. Both authors claim that the history of salvation currently is divided into three stages and that it now enters its third and final stage.<sup>271</sup> They both agree that the last stage will be the “spiritual” one<sup>272</sup> and that in this age people will be given a chance to know God better than before.<sup>273</sup>

There are, however, considerable differences between the two thinkers. Mathias does not ascribe each of the three phases in salvation history to one person of the Holy Trinity, as Joachim does.<sup>274</sup> Instead, he is inspired by the fragment of the first book of Kings that describes God’s revelation to Elijah (1Ki 19). Moreover, he connects the third phase with the Mother of Mercy. In his opinion, the third phase is the time of mercy.

It is therefore likely that the threefold division of history found in *Revelationes* is inspired by the original thought of Magister Mathias de Linköping. There are some similarities between Mathias and Joachim, but it is difficult to say whether they can be regarded as an inspiration or an influence. The subject has been touched upon by a number of scholars, which discussion is briefly

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<sup>271</sup> McGinn, op. cit., xvii.

<sup>272</sup> “In quibus omnibus non suam sed Dei gloriam querens, latere quidem ob humilitatis custodiam maluisset, nisi quantum ad proximorum salutem se per imperium spiritus, vel potius Christi, in spiritu sibi apparentis, certis se personis manifestare iussa fuit” (Prologue, 16); See also: Marjorie Reeves, *The influence of prophecy in the later Middle Ages: a study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 129-130.

<sup>273</sup> “Nichil veritati, que in Christo est, subtrahunt aut addunt, sed misericordie, que tanto in eis habundancior ostenditur, quanto iam peccatorum miseria super id, quod umquam fuerat, cognoscitur maior” (Prologue, 28); See also: Reeves, op. cit., 138.

<sup>274</sup> McGinn, op. cit., 102-103.

summarized by Bridget Morris in her biography of Birgitta.<sup>275</sup> Johannes Jørgensen,<sup>276</sup> Hjalmar Sunden,<sup>277</sup> and Carl-Gustaf Undhagen,<sup>278</sup> the author of the critical edition of book 1 of *Revelationes*, opt for the possibility of Joachim's influence on Birgitta. However, Marjorie Reeves, whose field of expertise is Joachimism, claims that it is difficult to find proof of such an influence in *Revelationes*.<sup>279</sup> Ingvar Fogelqvist agrees with this statement.<sup>280</sup> Håkon Ulfgaard, in his important article about the theological and exegetical context of Magister Mathias's commentary on the Apocalypse, claims that a Joachimist influence on Mathias's concept of history is unlikely.<sup>281</sup> He does not, however, analyze the *Prologue*, but rather the text of Mathias's commentary on the Apocalypse. Therefore, I think that the question of Mathias's eschatological concepts, their inspiration, and their possible influence upon Birgitta still requires a deep study and has not yet been analyzed in detail.

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<sup>275</sup> Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999), 75.

<sup>276</sup> Johannes Jørgensen, *Saint Bridget of Sweden* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1954), vol. II, 23.

<sup>277</sup> Hjalmar Sundén, *Den heliga Birgitta, ormungens moder som blev Kristi brud* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1973), 11.

<sup>278</sup> Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, "Special Introduction," in *Revelaciones. Book I, by Saint Birgitta* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978), 45n52.

<sup>279</sup> Marjorie Reeves, *The influence of prophecy in the later Middle Ages: a study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 338.

<sup>280</sup> Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), 32.

<sup>281</sup> "Kort kan sägas at det i *Exposicio* inte märks några spår av den slags indelning av världs- och kyrkohistorien som finns hos Joachim di Fiore, och som kunde inspirera andliga och världsliga reformrörelser. Några millenariska spekulationer och drömmar om ett tillkommande tredje rike under ett andlig och förnyat ledarskap hittar man inte hos honom". Håkon Ulfgard, "Från Paris till Linköping – Akademiska bibelstudier och kyrklig bibelutläggning i medeltidens Europa belysta utifrån Magister Mathias Apokalyps-kommentar," in *Diocesis Lincopensis II: Medeltida internationella influenser - några uttryck för en framväxande östgötsk delaktighet*, ed. Kjell O. Lejon (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2005), 153.

### 2.1.7. St. Birgitta's Concept of History

After we have studied the different methods of approach history in St. Birgitta's authorship, we shall move toward some general remarks on her notion of history.

St. Birgitta is interested in historical events and figures if they could be counted among "facta Dei" (VI, 27. 2), which, in the light of a Christian concept of history (detailed above), can be understood as "signs of salvation," events of some importance in the history of salvation. Other events and "secular affairs," such as political facts, were of interest to her if they could be interpreted in connection with the great narrative of the salvation history. Therefore, Birgitta distinguishes between secular and sacred history, since she perceives some historical narratives as unworthy of her interest, as they are of no importance from the point of view of salvation history.

I understand that Birgitta does not put the question of history at the center of her doctrine. She rather uses historical arguments to support her opinions on current political and social matters and to express some theological views, as the teaching of the history of salvation is an essential part of the Christian faith. In my opinion, her method of treating historical (and many political) subjects can be described as an interpretation which uses salvation history as its instrument. Birgitta refers to the rules governing the history of salvation, which can be derived from the Bible, and applies them to the interpretation of current events. These rules, discussed above, are: (1) referring to the origin of a phenomenon in order to explain its true meaning; (2) using historical figures and events as sources of moral exemplification; and (3) interpreting the past events as bearing a hidden, allegorical meaning, discernible only by the special grace of God. In this mode of interpretation, history is understood as a prophecy, a message from God. Birgitta's authority as an interpreter of the hidden meaning of history comes from her prophetic gift. We

have stated that a prophet can interpret history in his or her own, specific way, because he or she is able to see events “from the point of view of eternity”<sup>282</sup>: that is, according to the rules established by God, who transcends time and space and who can, consequently, see past, present, and future “as if they were one point” (VIII, 48. 11).

In two of her revelations, Birgitta presents two different versions of the periodization of salvation history. In one of them, she divides the history of salvation into eight great epochs or stages, while in another text the history is divided into three epochs. We have stated that these two schemes of periodization likely were inspired by St. Augustine, *Fornsvenska Legendariet*, the *Old Swedish Paraphrase of Pentateuch*, and by Magister Mathias, but that they also were rooted in the Bible. Birgitta’s idea of the periodization of history is in some points original, since her eight-fold division of history is composed of different stages than those found in Augustine’s writings. Moreover, she uses the term “hour” to describe an “epoch,” which is apparently not as common a term as “day” or “age.” The threefold division described by Birgitta is also quite original, since it is difficult to pinpoint any direct source of inspiration in this case, but the influence of Magister Mathias seems likely.

In spite of having this developed concept of history and its periodization, Birgitta hardly ever uses the word “historia.” In fact, she uses it only once, and in a very specific context—as the title of a book she quotes: “Recordare quod scribitur de Moyse, quod filia regis inuenit eum super aquas et dilexit eum pro filio suo. Scribitur quoque in scolasticis historiis, quod idem Moyses vicit terram per aues, que consumpserunt serpentes venenosos” (IV, 55. 1).

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<sup>282</sup> When Baruch Spinoza spoke about understood things “sub specie aeternitatis”, he apparently meant something quite different from Birgitta. For that reason, I do not refer to Spinoza, even though the phrase “from the point of view of eternity” was introduced by him. See: Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Volume 4: The Rationalists, Descartes to Leibnitz* (New York: Continuum Books, 2003), 247.

The story about the birds that saved the Israelites from serpents is indeed found in Petrus Comestor's *Historia scholastica*.<sup>283</sup> Birgitta might have known of that book through the *Old Swedish Paraphrase of Pentateuch*.<sup>284</sup> But the absence of the word "history" itself does not indicate a lack of interest in the idea, especially that Birgitta's meaning of the Latin word "historia" is not identical with the modern English term "history," but has much more in common with the term "narrative" or "story." Perhaps Birgitta's concept of history is also more narrative than the modern one. Based on the narrative, not theoretical character of *Revelationes*, we can say that Birgitta rather tells stories than builds a theory of history.

## 2.2. The Four Cities

After outlining a historical explanation of the phenomenon of Christian society and kingdom, in the following section we will investigate this society and its organization more closely. We stress the religious aspect of the subject, as well as the motivations of members from each societal group, and relationships between the groups.

To describe Christian society as presented by St. Birgitta, it is very useful to recall her original concept of four cities or four places, which represent the four possible versions of human condition at the stage of world history she describes (see section 1.2.6). We find two parallel revelations on this subject, one of them in book 1 (I, 50), the other in book 3 (III, 28). The first one is a dialogue between Christ and His mother, who asks for God's mercy on those suffering in purgatory and living in the world. Mary speaks about the inhabitants of four places ("quattuour

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<sup>283</sup> Petrus Comestor, *Historia scholastica*, historia libri Exodi, VI (PL 198, 1144). Until now, this part of *Historia scholastica* has not been critically edited.

<sup>284</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna: En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 245.

loca"): heaven ("celum"), hell ("infernus"), the place of those being purged ("purgandorum") (I, 50. 15–19) and the world ("mundus") (I, 50. 22). Heaven- and hell-dwellers do not need mercy, as the former already have everything they need and they enjoy the love of God, and the latter are excluded from any love and mercy, because they are full of wickedness (I, 50. 15–16). Those who suffer in purgatory are given some relief and many of them enter heaven thanks to the prayers of Mary (I, 50. 20–21). People living in the fourth place need the grace of Christ in three aspects:

Quartus locus est **mundus** et habitatores eius indigent tribus: primo contricione pro peccatis, secundo satisfaccione, tercio fortitudine ad faciendum bona. Respondit filius: Omnis, quicumque inuocauerit nomen tuum et spem habet in te cum proposito emendandi commissa, ista tria dabuntur ei, insuper **et regnum celeste**. (I, 50. 22–23 [emphasis mine])

Based on the distinction between the "world" and "the kingdom of heaven" presented here, we could presume that according to this text the kingdom ("regnum celeste") is still not present in the world, as it is a separate place from the temporal world ("mundus"). However, Christ mentions here the three gifts useful for those still fighting against sin, as well as the fourth gift: the heavenly kingdom. Therefore, it is possible that the Kingdom is also a kind of reward accessible already in this life. Moreover, in the same text "heaven" as a place of eternal life is named "celum" (I, 50. 15), not "regnum celeste." It is thus not entirely clear if, according to this text, the kingdom of heaven may be accessible already in this life or not, so it would be reasonable to say that Birgitta suggests here that the kingdom is related mostly to the first place, "celum."

The other revelation comes from a later period of Birgitta's life, the 1350s, while the first one is dated around the 1340s. The second text (III, 28) was written in Rome.<sup>285</sup> Compared to the previous revelation, it may represent a more theologically developed concept of the four "places."

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<sup>285</sup> *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume I: Liber Caelestis, Books I-III*, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Searby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 314.



In this revelation the four places are called cities (“civitates”) and Birgitta’s sequence of introducing them differs from the previous text, as she starts with the world (“mundus”), which is given the name of “civitas probationis” (city of trial [III, 28. 3]). The other three cities are: “civitas purgationis” (III, 28. 5), “civitas doloris” (III, 28. 7) and “civitas gloriae” (III, 28. 11). God rules in all of them, even in hell, where he performs his justice and mercy (III, 28. 7).

The representation of the world as four or five places was present in medieval theology and sermons. Preachers associated the four places with the four rivers of Paradise or the four animals and the wheels from Ezekiel’s vision (Eze 10). The structure of the four places varied. In older Scriptural commentaries, such as St. Jerome’s commentary on the book of Ezekiel<sup>286</sup> and that of Rabanus Maurus,<sup>287</sup> who repeats after Jerome, the four places were: earth, hell, heaven and “locum supercoelestium.” St. Bernard of Clairvaux distinguished between five kingdoms instead of places: earth, named here “regio dissimilitudinis,” an Augustinian expression,<sup>288</sup> the closed paradise (“paradisus claustralis”), purgatory (“regio expiationis”), hell (“regio gehennalis”) and heaven (“paradisus supercoelestis”).<sup>289</sup> This version seems to be close to St. Birgitta’s concept, as Bernard speaks about “kingdoms,” not abstract “places.” However, Bernard mentions also the fifth place (paradisus claustralis), which is absent from Birgitta’s vision.

In this text, Birgitta presents a clear principle of distinction between the cities. This principle is love. She writes:

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<sup>286</sup> Jerome, *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem libri XIV*, I, 1, 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1964), 10.

<sup>287</sup> Rabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in Ezechielem*, I, 1 (PL 110, 505).

<sup>288</sup> “The land of unlikeness” – Augustine, *Confessions* VII, 10, 16, trans. Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 147.

<sup>289</sup> Bernard de Clairvaux, *Sermons divers 23-69*, sermo 42 (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 2007), 272-295.

Nam quatuor sunt ciuitates, in quibus quatuor inueniuntur caritates, si tamen omnes caritates nuncupari debent, quia non est proprie dicenda caritas, nisi ubi Deus et anima in vera virtutum unitate confederantur. **Prima igitur ciuitas est ciuitas probacionis**, que est **mundus**, in quo ponitur homo, ut probetur, si diligit Deum an non, ut experiatur infirmitatem suam, ut acquirat sibi virtutes, quibus redeat ad gloriam, ut purgatus in terra gloriosius in celis coronetur. In hac ciuitate inuenitur dileccio inordinata, cum diligitur caro plus quam anima, cum desideratur temporale feruencius quam spirituale, cum honoratur viciu et despicitur virtus, cum plus dulcessit peregrinacio quam patria, cum plus timetur et honoratur moriturus homunculus quam in eternum regnaturus Deus. **Secunda ciuitas est ciuitas purgacionis**, in qua abluuntur sordes anime . . . . In hac ciuitate inuenitur dileccio imperfecta, quia diligitur Deus ex spe soluende captiuitatis sed non ex feruore affectionis propter tedium et amaritudinem satisfaciende culpe. **Tercia ciuitas est ciuitas doloris**, ubi est infernus. In hac inuenitur dileccio omnis malicie et immundicie, omnis inuidie et obduracionis. In hac quoque ciuitate regnat eciam Deus per ordinatam suam iusticiam, per mensuram suppliciorum debitam, per malicie refrenanciam, per libratam pro meritis omnium equitatem. Nam sicut alii dampnandorum peccant plus, alii minus, ita et pene et retribucionis condigne constituti sunt termini . . . . **Quarta ciuitas est ciuitas glorie**. In hac est dileccio perfecta et caritas ordinata, qua nichil desideratur nisi Deus et propter Deum. (III, 28. 2–11 [emphasis mine])

In my opinion, by replacing the general word “place” with “city,” St. Birgitta stressed the social aspect of all described states of life, as a “city” is a form of community, unlike a “place.” According to the text, the four cities are communities of people bound together by love. The four kinds of love are very different from each other (and the love of the damned ones should not be called love in the proper sense). In fact, in a very wide sense, all of those cities are part of God’s kingdom, as he rules in all of them. In a narrow sense, described in the previous revelation, only the City of Glory belongs to the kingdom. It is important to notice this tension between the two aspects of the kingdom of God (or of heaven) present in St. Birgitta’s writings, as it finds its manifestation in her view of the temporal, Christian kingdom, which already reflects the kingdom of heaven by being a Christian political entity, but at the same time still belongs to the temporal and sinful world. This tension is expressed in Birgitta’s own phrase, “city of trial.”

The category of trial (“probacio”) is quite an important part of Birgitta’s theology. She often explains the cause of suffering and other difficulties people encounter as a trial or test given them by God to improve their sanctity. The good angels guard people, while the bad ones are given them as a test (I, 9. 8). The wicked people serve the same function for the good (I, 22. 7–8). Even dangerous or troublesome creatures serve as a test for good people (V, int. 12. 10–12). Some historical events, like the journey of Israel through the desert, have similar meaning. The chosen nation was tested and instructed in the desert: they were students in Moses’ school. But as the nation became more and more stubborn and wicked, the situation became also a trial for Moses. Finally, the nation was saved thanks to his instruction, and Moses obtained a greater eternal merit thanks to his love for the nation.<sup>290</sup> In revelation 8, 49, the story of Moses is given as an example for the king of Sweden, so we can assume that governing a kingdom is also a kind of trial. In fact, every situation in which a good man is confronted with evil is a trial. Finally, all of human existence in its present condition is described by St. Birgitta in these terms: after the original sin, people placed themselves in this situation, as they refused to accept God’s conditions. Now the trial is a kind of punishment for that sin, but also a chance to win eternal life again (V, int. 6. 12–18).

We shall now concentrate on the reality described as “the city of trial”: the human community on earth and the Christian kingdom. To describe it, we shall also employ the Augustinian terms “civitas Dei” and “civitas terrena,” although St. Birgitta herself did not use them in this particular form. However, we will discuss whether her idea of Christian society in general involved the notion of two fighting, but temporally intermingling, communities, one of which belongs to God and the other one to the devil. As we have already seen, there are some

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<sup>290</sup> “Vere dico, quod eciam sine Moyse eductus fuisset populus, et sine Moyse moriturus erat populus, sed propter bonitatem Moysi leuius mortuus est populus, et propter caritatem populi sublimius est Moyses coronatus “ (VIII, 49. 8).

inspirations from St. Augustine's thought to be found in St. Birgitta's writings, although in this case it is better to speak of a common catholic tradition, established by Augustine and continued by St. Birgitta in her own, specific way. However, it might be interesting to compare her original idea on the subject with the well-known notions of St. Augustine. Moreover, in Birgitta's work we do not find a fixed, theological term to describe a phenomenon of two warring societies, despite an obvious presence of the phenomenon itself. Therefore, we find it useful to employ the Augustinian expressions.

### 2.2.1. The Friends of God (*amici Dei*) as a Distinctive Group

Unlike St. Augustine, St. Birgitta did not create a cohesive metaphor for society, but she concentrated on two groups of people, which are in opposition to each other. Below we discuss the two groups: "amici Dei" (the friends of God) and "inimici Dei" or "amici mundi." The term "amici Dei" is used by St. Birgitta very often<sup>291</sup> and has a quite general meaning.

The expression "amici Dei" comes from the Bible. According to the book of Chronicles, God gave the land of Israel to Abraham, "his friend" (2Ch 20:7). Moses spoke to God "face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend" (Exo 33:11). Jesus said to His disciples:

You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you. I will not now call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends: because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you." (Joh 15:14–15)

We can thus see that the Scriptural denotation of the term is also quite general (since it does not describe any special social group) and used to characterize man's personal attitude toward God.

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<sup>291</sup> ca. 500 times in the whole *Corpus Birgittianum*.

In Christian tradition expressed in medieval liturgy, it was usually the apostles and martyrs who bore the name of “God’s friends.” Many antiphons sung on the feast days of those two groups of saints include this phrase, while it was seldom applied on other occasions.<sup>292</sup> A more general usage of this term is also known. For example, in a sermon given at the funeral of Philip, the prince of Taranto (d. 1332), the deceased was called “a friend of God.” The prince of Taranto was a layperson.<sup>293</sup> It appears that the idea of a friend of Christ, who is an ordinary man and not an apostle, became more popular during the Middle Ages and is particularly characteristic for the mystics and other Christian writers of the fourteenth century, since it was used also by Julian of Norwich,<sup>294</sup> Henry Suso,<sup>295</sup> and Johannes Tauler.<sup>296</sup> All of those authors gave it a meaning similar to

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<sup>292</sup> St. Gregory the Great in his *Antiphonary* included the following antiphons for the Eve of feast of St. John and St. Paul: “Vidi conjunctos viros habentes splendoras vestes et angelus Domini locutus est ad me dicens: Isti sunt viri sancti facti amici Dei,” “Astiterunt justii ante Dominum, et ab invicem non separati sunt; gloriam Domini viderunt, et amici Dei appellati sunt.” The second antiphon is included also in the Office of Martyrs. Thomas Apostle is called “a friend of God” as well: “Vidi angelum Dei volantem per medium coelum, voce magna clamantem, et dicentem: Isti sunt. Isti sunt triumphatores et amici Dei, qui contemnentes jussa principum meruerunt praemia aeterna. Modo coronantur et accipiunt palmam.” St. Andrew is called a friend of God, because he is both Apostle and Martyr: “Doctor bonus et amicus Dei Andreas ducitur ad crucem, aspiciens a longe vidit crucem: Salve, crux, suscipe discipulum ejus, qui pependit in te, magister meus Christus,” “Dilexit Andream Dominus in odorem suavitatis. Dum penderet in cruce, dignum sibi computavit martyrem, quem vocavit apostolum, dum esset in mari, et ideo amicus Dei appellatus est.” (PL 78, columns 821, 788, 820, 814).

<sup>293</sup> “Et fuit amicus dei . . . Quem amorem ostendit in multis dum uiueret, omni die audiendo missam et dicendo officium diuinum, et in festis audiendo cantari in capella sua, et sepe confitendo” (indedited sermon of Giovanni da Napoli OP quoted in David L. D’Avray, *Death and the Prince: Memorial Preaching before 1350* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 150).

<sup>294</sup> About the passion of Christ: “And thus tho that were his frendes suffered paine for love, and generally alle: that is to say, they that knew him not sufferede for failinge of all maner comfort, save the mighty prive keping of God. I mene of two maner of people that knew him not, as it may be understond by two persons. That one was Pilate, that other person was Saint Dionisy of France, which was that time a paynim.” (Julian of Norwich, “Revelations of Divine Love,” Rev. 8, 18. 18-22, in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: ‘A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman’ and ‘A Revelation of Love,’* eds. Nicolas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins [Turnhout: Brepols, 2006], 185-186). Julian also calls Jesus the “highest sovereign Friend”: “The most wisdom is a creature to do after the will and the councelles of his highest sovereyn frende. This blessedde frend is Jesu, and it is his wille and counceyle that we holde us with him, and fasten us homely to him evermore, in what state so ever we been” (idem, revelation 16, 76. 20-21, op. cit., 363).

<sup>295</sup> “Another thing, Lord, I have at my heart: may I venture to tell it Thee? May I indeed venture to dispute with Thee like holy Jeremias? Gentle Lord, people say as follows: that how sweet soever Thy love may be, Thou dost

that found in *Revelationes*, so it is now rather difficult to trace the possible influences between those authors. Julian of Norwich probably knew Birgitta's work.<sup>297</sup> St. Birgitta could have known Henry Suso,<sup>298</sup> but it also seems appropriate to ascribe the similarities to the general atmosphere of that time and analogous reading of the Scriptures. It would be interesting to trace the usage of the discussed expression among fourteenth century writers, as it appears to be emblematic for a particular stream of theology of that time.

In St. Birgitta's works, the term "friend of God" denotes in fact "somebody who is in a close, personal, friendly relationship with God." If seen according to the pattern of Christian salvation history (creation–sin–salvation), a friend of God is someone who accepts and enjoys the gift of salvation, following the will of God.<sup>299</sup> If seen in moral categories, a friend of God is

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yet allow it to prove very harsh to Thy friends in the many severe trials which Thou sendest them, such as worldly scorn and much adversity, both inwardly and outwardly. Scarcely is any one, say they, admitted to Thy friendship, but he has forthwith to gather up his courage for suffering. Lord, by Thy goodness! what sweetness can they have in all this? Or how canst Thou permit it in Thy friends? Or art Thou pleased not to know anything about it? Eternal Wisdom.—Even as My Father loves Me, so do I love My friends. I do to My friends now as I have done from the beginning of the world." Henry Suso, *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, I, 10 (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1910), 64.

<sup>296</sup> "Then there are other, who are devoted to religious life, and enjoy great esteem and reputation. They are pretty sure that they have left darkness far behind; and yet they are fundamentally Pharisees, filled with self-love and self-will. All their striving is centered upon themselves. Outwardly one can barely tell them apart from God's friends, for they often spend more time on pious exercises than God's friends." Johannes Tauler, *Sermons*, 10 (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 51.

<sup>297</sup> Nicolas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, introduction to *The writings of Julian of Norwich: 'A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman' and 'A Revelation of Love,'* by Julian of Norwich (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 3.

<sup>298</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna: En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 228.

<sup>299</sup> "Amici sunt, cum me imitantur; inimici sunt, cum me et mandata mea contempnendo persequuntur" (III, 19. 15). "Omnis, qui aliquod opus facere vult, debet habere tria. Primo materiam, de qua fiat opus. Secundo instrumenta, cum quibus fiet. Tercio diuinam premeditationem, ut sapienter fiat. Materia ego ipse sum, sapientia ipsa, de qua et per quam omnis sapientia est, qui verba mea misi ad mundum"(Extrav. 51. 19-20).

someone who repents and is converted.<sup>300</sup> Moreover, in several revelations, Birgitta describes the social relations in which the friends of God participate, which is the most interesting approach for us at the moment.

As we shall see, being a friend of God is one of the possible attitudes a person may have toward him. Birgitta classified people as belonging to certain groups, characterized by this attitude. They are not always two antagonistic groups. In the second book of revelations we find a narrative about Christ, who peregrinates in the world, knocking on the doors of five houses (II, 3). The five houses signify the five statuses of human condition in this world (“*quinque status hominum in mundo*” [II, 3. 23]): unfaithful Christians (“*infideles Christiani*” [II, 3. 23]), obdurate Jews (“*Iudei indurate*” [II, 3. 40]), pagans (“*pagani*” [II, 3. 43]), those Jews and pagans who would rather become Christians if they knew Christ (“*illi Iudei et pagani, qui libenter essent Christiani*” [II, 3. 47]) and, finally, the friends and sons of Christ (“*amici mei et filii mei*” [II, 3. 55]). As we see, the groups form a certain construction, stretching from the enemies of Christ to his real followers. Being a friend of God, therefore, is described here as the highest level of a hierarchical structure or effect of a spiritual process. The criterion of building this hierarchy is spiritual, as most opponents to God are “unfaithful Christians,” people who nominally should be his friends. In this case, the “*civitas Dei*,” which may be understood here as a group of God’s friends, is opposed to four different kinds of people, who are not equally hostile to Christ.

A somehow different classification of this type is found in book 4 (IV, 2). In this text, St. Birgitta distinguishes between three main groups of people: pagans (gentiles), symbolized by the monster fish (IV, 2. 2); those who are baptized but do not follow the words of the holy gospel,

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<sup>300</sup> “*Vere, filia, lupus rapax ego eram, sed de lupo fecit me Deus agnum . . . propter magnam suam caritatem, qui de indignis facit vasa sua et de peccatoribus amicos suos*” (IV, 6. 1-2).

symbolized by a fierce animal (IV, 2. 3); and the friends of God, who themselves are placed in three groups—those who use the goods of this world in moderate way, those who abandon their own will and live in obedience to a rule, and those who are ready to die for God (IV, 2. 33). Christ asks His friends to conquer the animal and the fish for Him, but only the last group is ready for that (IV, 2. 13). The other two are not, however, condemned for their refusal. Bridget Morris, who analyzed this revelation, is of the opinion that the two other groups are not expected to fight with the pagans or bad Christians. It is not their duty.<sup>301</sup> Again, the criterion of Birgitta's discernment is spiritual: the rite of baptism itself, if not followed by Christian living, is not enough to be counted among the friends of God. In the same text, Birgitta mentions here the possible vocations of the friends of God: they can be laics, monks, or knights (IV, 2. 33). We shall return to this subject in the next section (2.3).

In book 1 (I, 41) Birgitta describes the judgment of members of the five groups: the pope and his clergymen ("Ecclesie rector et eius clerici" [I, 41. 6]); the wicked laymen ("mali layci" [I, 41. 6]); the Jews (except for those who are secretly Christians [I, 41. 7]); the pagans (except for all those who would gladly walk in the way of the commandments, if only they knew how and were instructed [I, 41. 8]); and the friends of God (I, 41. 6). The first four are accused of breaking a promise made to God and of being ungrateful for his grace. They are all sentenced to various kinds of punishment, according to their sin (I, 41. 9–26). The representative of the friends of God is rewarded, but it is still not a final reward. Instead, he is armed with God's weapons to fight the evil and to stand firm until the end of time (I, 41. 27–33). The other men are warned, but the way to God's kingdom is not yet closed for them. Christ says: "Illi autem numquam intrabunt in regnum

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<sup>301</sup> Bridget Morris, "Swedish Foreign Policy of the 1340s in the Balance: An Interpretation of Book IV Chapter 2 of St. Bridget's *Revelations*," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1993), 1:180-191.



meum, quamdiu ego sum rex, nisi se emendauerint. Nullis enim dabitur celum nisi humiliantibus se et penitentibus” (I, 41. 57).

It is remarkable that according to this revelation, being a friend of God is not a permanent situation, but rather a changeable qualification of a soul. People who are now outside the group of God’s friends have a chance to join them, if they “improve themselves” (I, 41. 57), while “God’s man” is armed to “stand firm” (I, 41. 55). It is thus possible for him to lapse or to be conquered by the powers of evil. In another revelation, Birgitta evokes the apostle Judas, who betrayed Jesus (III, 19. 14), and David, who committed a murder after he had been hailed as “a man after the heart of God” (III, 19. 16 [cf. 1Sa 13: 14]) as examples of men, who were called to be friends of God, but who decided to abandon this vocation, for many are called, but few are chosen (III, 19. 24 [cf. Mat 22: 14]).

In the three above-mentioned revelations, the friends of God do not make up any particular social group. They are confronted with several social strata: pagans, Jews, clergy, and laymen. Some other categories of people opposed to the friends of God have not the social, but rather the moral character “unfaithful Christians” or “wicked laymen.” Therefore, Birgitta states here that the friends of God are present among various social groups.

Based on these revelations, we could conclude that the community of God’s friends is invisible and does not build any specific structures. This conclusion, however, appears to deeply contradict what we have said in the introductory part of this section about the “civitas” or organized community of salvation present in the works of St. Birgitta. But if we take a closer look at the classes of people confronted with the friends of God, we shall see a certain pattern: there are no friends of God among the Jews nor among the pagans (although there are some “good”

Jews and pagans, who are close to Christ, but they are not counted among “the friends of God”). Therefore, a better conclusion would be that, according to the discussed texts, being a member of the visible church does not guarantee salvation, but the community of the faithful is present only among the Christians.

At this point, we have not named the community of the friends of God the “church.” However, it is necessary to observe the equivalence between Birgitta’s distinctions and the traditional Catholic doctrine of salvation, which is possible only inside the church (“extra Ecclesiam nulla salus”), formulated for the first time by St. Cyprian of Carthage in the context of a debate about the validity of baptism administered by heretics.<sup>302</sup> Discussion around the thesis formulated by Cyprian (“extra Ecclesiam nulla salus”) has focused on the question of belonging to the church or being outside it. For example, Augustine states that many people belonged to the body of Christ, the holy church, even before the incarnation of Christ. “Since the righteous Abel until the end of time” there were born people who lived their life in an honest way, and they are all parts of the Holy Church.<sup>303</sup> Therefore, the church did not start from the death and resurrection of Christ,

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<sup>302</sup> “If, then, not even the baptism of blood and of public confession will profit the heretic for salvation—for there is no salvation outside the Church—how much more must this be so if in some lair, in some den of thieves, a man is bathed in polluted and spurious water and so far from putting off his old sins, he loads himself with yet more fresh and graver ones.” *The Letters of Cyprian of Carthage*, 73, 21. 2, trans. Graeme W. Clarke (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 66.

<sup>303</sup> “All of us together are the members of Christ and his body: not only those of us who are in this place, but throughout the whole world: and not only those of us who are alive at this time, but what shall I say? From Abel the just right up to the end of the world, as long as people beget and are begotten, any or the just who make the passage through this life - all that now - that is, not in this place but in this life—all that are going to be born after us, all constitute the one body of Christ; while they are each individually members of Christ. So if all constitute the body and are each individually members, there is of course a head, of which this is the body. And he himself, it says, is the head of the body, the Church, the firstborn, himself holding the first place (Col 1:18). And because it also says of him that he is always the head of every principality and power (Col 2:10), this Church which is now on its pilgrimage is joined to that heavenly Church where we have the angels as fellow citizens, with whom we would be quite shameless in claiming equality after the resurrection of our bodies, unless Truth had promised us this, saying, They shall be equal to

but rather existed from the beginning of mankind and society.<sup>304</sup> On the other hand, there are people living in the current epoch of world history (after the incarnation of Christ) who belong to the church “bodily” but, because of their sins, actually (that is, spiritually) do not belong to it, so they will not be redeemed in the end. There are also some who “seem to be outside” the church, but they actually know Christ and love Him, so they are real members of the church, although in secret. Augustine wrote:

There are some also who as yet live wickedly, or even lie in heresies or the superstitions of the Gentiles, and yet even then "the Lord knoweth them that are His." For, in that unspeakable foreknowledge of God, many who seem to be without are in reality within, and many who seem to be within yet really are without. Of all those, therefore, who, if I may so say, are inwardly and secretly within, is that "enclosed garden" composed "the fountain sealed, a well of living water, the orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits." The divinely imparted gifts of these are partly peculiar to themselves, as in this world the charity that never faileth, and in the world to come eternal life; partly they are common with evil and perverse men, as all the other things in which consist the holy mysteries.<sup>305</sup>

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the angels of God (Luk 20:36); and there is achieved one Church, the city of the great king (Mat 5:35)." Augustine, *Sermons 341-400 (on various themes)*, 341, 11, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1995).

<sup>304</sup> The idea of everlasting Church, existing from the beginning of the world, is not invented by St. Augustine, on the contrary, it is present as early as in 2<sup>nd</sup> century, in the works of St. Justin the Marthyr. He wrote: "We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others." Justin the Martyr, "The First Apology," XLVI, in *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.ii.xlvi.html> (accessed March 20, 2009).

Around the year 325 Eusebius of Cesarea wrote: "But that very religion of Abraham has reappeared at the present time, practiced in deeds, more efficacious than words, by Christians alone throughout the world. What then should prevent the confession that we who are of Christ practice one and the same mode of life and have one and the same religion **as those divinely favored men (θεοφιλέσιν = as those friends of God)** of old? Whence it is evident that the perfect religion committed to us by the teaching of Christ is not new and strange, but, if the truth must be spoken, it is the first and the true religion." Eusebius Pamphilus, "The Church History," I, 4, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff, in Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.vi.iv.html> (accessed March 20, 2009).

<sup>305</sup> Augustine, "On Baptism Against Donatists," V, 27, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf104.v.iv.vii.xxvii.html> (accessed October 20, 2009).

According to this fragment, until the Day of Judgment the invisible church, *Civitas Dei*, is intermingled with the society of sinners. Only God in his *praescientia* (foreknowledge) knows who will actually belong to the church of saints. It does not mean that Augustine neglected the necessity of the visible, catholic church to salvation. If one breaks unity with the visible church, it is a certain sign of losing the spiritual unity as well.<sup>306</sup>

The doctrine, based on the principles formulated by Cyprian and Augustine, was finally dogmatized in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council and became a part of the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>307</sup> It is thus likely that Birgitta refers to this idea of belonging to the church or being excluded from it.

Based on the discussed texts and on the doctrine “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*,” we can conclude that by choosing the expression “*amici Dei*” to describe the members of the community of salvation, Birgitta stresses the spiritual and personal aspect of this community. It is easier to understand now why she does not include all the Christians among “*amici Dei*,” or even condemn “*inimici Dei*” among the monks, cardinals, or at the Holy See. But there are also other reasons why the kingdom of the friends of God is not identical with the church (at this stage of history). In explaining these reasons, the visible and structural aspect of the Christian community plays an important role. Church hierarchy is not the only hierarchy in which people participate. There are

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<sup>306</sup> For example, the grace of baptism cannot be used outside the Church, for the Spirit is only active in the Church: “Wherefore, as the apostle said of the law, “The law is good, if a man use it lawfully,” (1Ti 1:8) so we may fairly say of baptism, Baptism is good, if a man use it lawfully. And as they who used the law unlawfully could not in that case cause that it should not be in itself good, or make it null and void, so any one who uses baptism unlawfully, either because he lives in heresy, or because he lives the worst of lives, yet cannot cause that the baptism should be otherwise than good, or altogether null and void” (Augustine, *op.cit.*, V, 8, 466).

<sup>307</sup> The first canon of this Council declared: “There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation.” H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 238.

also other criteria by which to classify them, based on various personal and social relations. We shall discuss these criteria below, in section 2.3.

### 2.2.2. The Society of God's Friends

Above we have said that, according to *Revelationes*, the friends of God are a certain group of people related to the Christian church but not identical with it. In this part of the present section, we shall tell more about the relation between the friends of God and their social setting and ask if this group is structured in some way: in other words, whether Birgitta describes "a society of God's friends" or only a loosely connected "group," impossible to locate in authentic social settings of the Christian kingdom.

At this point, it would be useful to describe the relations between the church and the state, two parts of Christian society which first come to the mind of a modern scholar approaching the subject of "the Christian kingdom." However, based on a study of *Revelationes celestes*, this task appears to be complicated, if not impossible, since establishing the borders between the two is quite problematic. In fact, the notion of "state" is not present as such in the text of *Revelationes*. It is generally absent from medieval political thought.<sup>308</sup> According to Rees Davies, applying our modern concept of the state to fourteenth-century political theology also is quite difficult, as the structure of power in that time was very different from the present one. The moral and "ideological" justification of politics also was different.<sup>309</sup> Therefore, I think that using the notion of "state" while speaking about Middle Ages, despite being necessary in many cases, in this particular context could lead to simplifications or provoke the researcher to ask inappropriate

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<sup>308</sup> Rees Davies, "The Medieval State: The Tyranny of a Concept?" *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16, no. 2 (July 2003): 280-300

<sup>309</sup> Davies, *op. cit.*, 289-292.

questions. The term used by Birgitta herself is rather “regnum,” translated as “kingdom,” “kingship,” or “reign.” However, the “regnum” cannot be contrasted with the “church” (“ecclesia”). In fact, it is not possible to find in *Revelationes* any other noun to be contrasted with “church” in the way it is done by contemporary political science, describing the relations between church and state in terms of separate social entities.

Knowing this, we must search in *Revelationes* for the “society of the friends of God” without lightly using modern analogies or focusing only on the spiritual level of reflection and without considering the social and political dependencies of Christians.

The thesis of this section is that the “society of God’s friends” is recognizable in *Revelationes*. Below, we will try to identify the scope of this notion following Birgitta’s own metaphors for describing the group of the friends of God. St. Birgitta uses various symbols to describe the relation between the group of the friends of God and the other groups of people, but, as we shall see, the expression “friends of God” itself is not used in each of the revelations concerned. Some symbols are explained as relating to the church, some relate to the world (mundus) and different groups of its inhabitants, and some describe a new religious order to be established by St. Birgitta in Vadstena. But each of these communities includes faithful Christians and is presented in opposition to another community that is antagonistic toward God.

It is remarkable that more than one meaning is ascribed to many of the symbols used in Birgitta’s text. In several revelations, Birgitta describes the church as a fortress (“castrum” [IV, 65. 4; I, 5. 1]), but in another vision (III, 13) a fortress denotes deity (“deitas”), not the church. The treasures kept in this fortress are “words and deeds of Christ” (III, 13. 4). In *Revelationes*, a new vineyard (“vinea”) is a frequently used symbol of the new order to be founded by St. Birgitta.

Christ compares the new vineyard to his other vineyards (other orders), which used to be fruitful but now are destroyed by the devil's weed (Reg. 2. 15–17) and their guardians are asleep, so the vineyards do not bear much fruit (Reg. 3. 28). It is therefore necessary to establish a new one (Reg. 2. 18 and 29). In another revelation, a vineyard signifies the church in general, not only the religious order. Birgitta writes:

Filius loquitur ad sponsam dicens: "Quid dixit tibi ille frater loquax?" Respondit illa: "Quod gentiles, qui non vocati fuerunt ad vineam, nullo modo habebunt fructum de vinea." Respondit Dominus: "Dic illi: Veniet tempus, quo fiet unum ovile et unus pastor, una fides et una clara cognicio Dei, et tunc multi, qui vocati fuerunt ad vineam, reprobabuntur. Qui vero non vocati fuerunt et tamen iuxta possibilitatem suam laborauerunt, ut vocarentur, percipient quidem a Deo in suppliciis aliquam misericordiam et gratiam releuaminis, quamuis ipsam vineam non intrabunt." (VI, 77. 1–3)

Here the vineyard is not in fact called "the church" explicitly, but the meaning of the image is more understandable when we consider that the symbolic elements used in this revelation (vineyard, people called to work in the vineyard, the value of their work) are similar to those used in the biblical parable of the vineyard (Mat 20). Therefore, the parable was probably a direct inspiration for Birgitta. It is remarkable that St. Birgitta sees the possibility of God's mercy and grace ("misericordia et gracia") for the pagans, because some of them are outside the church (vineyard) when it is not their own fault: they were not called to the vineyard. In fact, here the term "vineyard" denotes the church in its temporal, imperfect condition as a community of those who work and "bear the burden and the scorching heat of the day" (Mat 20:12). According to this revelation, belonging to the church comes by the grace of God. Birgitta does not neglect the necessity of belonging to the church, but she stresses the need of cooperation with divine grace. Until the end of time, there are still some people inside the vineyard who will be finally damned, and some are outside, who finally receive grace and mercy.

However, the parable of the vineyard, which appears as a source of inspiration for this text, does not say anything about people who were not called to the vineyard at all. Jesus mentioned only people called at different times, working longer or shorter. The final conclusion of St. Birgitta's text is also a bit different from that of the parable. "So shall the last be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen," reads Matthew 20:16. St. Birgitta concentrates on those who were not even called, but who can in some way get merit from the fruits of the vineyard. I would suggest that this is analogous to St. Augustine's previously mentioned concept of the city of God intermingled with the city of the devil until the Last Day, not clearly visible at the moment and including those who seem to be outside.

Another similar image of the community of God's friends is that of a palace ("palatium"), used by St. Birgitta quite often and usually signifying the heavenly court and the community of saints. Many revelations include a prologue describing the great, luminous palace with Christ sitting there in majesty surrounded by angels, saints, and the Virgin Mary.<sup>310</sup> The scene is static and resembles an icon of Christ Pantocrator. However, in at least one revelation, the palace represents the church in her current earthly condition, not in celestial glory. In the first book of revelations (I, 55), we find the story of a landlord who built a city ("civitas") with a palace inside it and then went abroad (I, 55. 4). Inhabitants of the city betrayed him and did not want to obey the rules set by their master (I, 55. 8–11). We shall analyze this revelation again below while describing the structure of Christian society. Now we shall only concentrate on the symbol of a palace inside the city. The city signifies here the world ("mundus") and the palace stands for the church inside it (I, 55. 12). This very interesting relationship between the world and the church

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<sup>310</sup>This narrative scheme is present in the following revelations: IV, 8; VII, 13; VII, 19; VII, 30; VIII, 1; VIII, 23; VIII, 58.



must not pass unnoticed. The palace is part of the city, meaning that the church is part of the world. The two are not described as competing, hostile entities. On the contrary, the church has a significant function within the world, and the world is the natural place of the church's existence, since the palace is normally placed within the city. The whole city is the property of the lord, but the palace is his special dwelling, which reflects his ruling function. Therefore, according to this revelation, both the church and the whole world belong to God, without excluding any social structures (here presented as "laboratores, defensores, iudices").

The most recent Catholic theological analogy to this image is the constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*. The function of the church is expressed therein as that of "a leaven and a kind of soul for human society ("tamquam fermentum et veluti anima societatis humanae") as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family."<sup>311</sup> This idea may be regarded as a new and original contribution of the Second Vatican Council, but in fact the fathers of the council were quoting the *Epistle to Diognetus*, one of the oldest Christian sources, dating from approximately 120 AD, which reads: "What the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world."<sup>312</sup> The idea is therefore very ancient. In Birgitta's work we find an interesting parallel to this teaching.

In *Revelationes*, a similar set of connotations is associated with the image of a beehive. The allegory of bees and beehive used to describe human society was generally known in the Middle Ages. Among many influential works that employ this allegory, the most renowned were *Bonum*

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<sup>311</sup> The II Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes*, 40, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (accessed Nov 1, 2009).

<sup>312</sup> "Epistle to Diognetus," VI, in *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iii.ii.vi.html> (accessed March 20, 2009).

*universale de apibus* by Thomas of Cantimpré,<sup>313</sup> whose structure is based on the comparison between a monastic community and a “society” of bees. Moreover, the comparison extends to human society as such. Thomas also mentioned bees in his other work, *De natura rerum*, in which he comments on the nature of bees in general.<sup>314</sup>

The tradition of this allegory reaches back to Aristotle, Virgil, and Plutarch. Aristotle’s *On the Sagacity of Bees* became an important point of reference for medieval authors, including Thomas of Cantimpré, but all three were widely known.<sup>315</sup> Other influential medieval authors using this allegory were Vincent de Beauvais and John of Salisbury. In his *Speculum naturale*, Vincent de Beauvais showed much interest in the nature and behavior of bees. According to Birgit Klockars, his works could have been a source for St. Birgitta. However, Klockars does not comment on the particular allegory of a beehive.<sup>316</sup> *Policraticus* by John of Salisbury is another medieval work comparing a community of bees to a society of people. John of Salisbury quotes Virgil, commenting that “nowhere is the civil life presented to you more accurately and more elegantly”<sup>317</sup> than in this allegory. In John’s work, unlike in Birgitta’s, the image of the “society of bees” lacks any spiritual dimension. It is only valid for “civil life.”

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<sup>313</sup> Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus* (Toulouse: Thorin, 1895).

<sup>314</sup> Guy Guldentops, "The sagacity of the bees: an Aristotelian topos in thirteenth-century philosophy," in *Aristotle's Animals in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, eds. Carlos Steel, Guy Guldentops and Pieter Beullens (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 278-279.

<sup>315</sup> Guldentops, op. cit., 277, 282.

<sup>316</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1971), 56.

<sup>317</sup> John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: of the frivolities of courtiers and the footprints of philosophers*, VI, 21, ed. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 127-129.

In *Revelationes*, we find the following application of this allegory. In book 4 (IV, 44), Christ is compared to a bee that flies out of the beehive to seek sweet, flowering herbs (VI, 44. 3). The bee noticed a beautiful and sweet flower, but before it reached the flower, it was already dry and its pleasant scent gone (VI, 44. 3). The bee searched for another flower: small, thorny, and not so appealing, but some sweet honey was found in it (VI, 44. 4). The bee continued to gather the honey until the beehive became full (VI, 44. 4). This parable speaks about Christ, who descended from heaven by his incarnation (like the bee flying out of the beehive). First, Christ chose Christians, who were sweet and fruitful at one time, but nowadays are degenerated and sinful (VI, 44. 5-6). Therefore, he calls the pagans, who seem to be cruel and barbaric, but they have a will to convert (VI, 44. 7). They are going to be a source of “sweetness” until the beehive is filled (VI, 44. 8). Birgitta returns to this image once again, in book 2, where she writes: “Primo, quod apiaria illa suauiissima, que in celo ab eterno edificata sunt, de quibus apes ille inutiles exierunt, vacua sunt” (II, 20. 2). Therefore, the beehive denotes heaven not only as God’s residence but also as a place where God lives with His chosen friends.

It also appears that these two aspects are characteristic for the kingdom of heaven in general, not only for heaven. According to this text, the borders of the heavenly dwellings are, again, not fully identical with the borders of the visible church, as most of Christians are not fruitful anymore. The borders of the church change their location: the thorny flower becomes more and more sweet and aromatic as the bee continues to take honey from it, and finally it grows to become the most beautiful flower (VI, 44. 9). We can say that the pagans become more and more the church, while many of the church’s previous members are now placed outside of it. I think, however, that it is not possible to declare with full confidence whether Birgitta means here the borders of the invisible church only or those of a visible institution as well.

In another revelation, Christ is again compared to a bee, but this time his beehive is the Virgin Mary, who was filled with His spiritual sweetness (VI, 12. 1 and 4). Therefore, the image of a beehive may signify both the community of salvation and an individual soul possessing certain spiritual qualities (in this example, the Virgin Mary). This feature also points to a close connection between the institutional and the spiritual dimensions of the society of salvation, already sketched above.

The relationship between the church and the world is the subject of Birgitta's well-known revelation describing a landlord who owns a wild forest surrounded by a wall (VIII, 18). Outside the wall lives a flock of sheep, and inside it live wild and ferocious animals, more numerous than the sheep (VIII, 18. 3). In the wall, there are some openings so that the beasts can come out and harm the sheep; thus the landlord ordered his servants to guard the sheep with watchdogs (VIII, 18. 4–8). The space within the wall stands for the "community of God's friends" ("Extra vero hunc murum sunt amici mei" [VIII, 18. 13]), while the space outside it signifies the world (VIII, 18. 11).

Compared to the previously cited revelation about the palace in a city (I, 55), this vision of the church and the world is quite different. Here the friends of God live in an open space, while His enemies are closed up behind a wall. In the previous revelation, the palace, "God's structure," was built within the world; here the structures of evil are built into the world, but they are controlled by the servants of God, who are outside of those structures. With this image the text suggests that the world should belong to God and his friends, not to sinners.

We can now conclude that the society of the friends of God has some characteristic features that make it a unique community among other human assemblies. First, the criterion of belonging to the community of God's friends is based mainly on the spiritual qualities of its

members. Second, the community is closely connected to the church, and in the final stage of history it will be identical with the church of the saints. However, for the moment, there still are those who nominally belong to the church but because of their sins are spiritually outside it. On the other hand, there are also some who are not in the church corporeally, as they are not baptized, but finally they will obtain the grace of God. The community of God's friends dwells in the world and is part of it, as the whole world is God's creation, good by nature. The world has been spoiled by people's sins, so now it serves the function of an ordeal or trial for those who desire to save their souls. Therefore, the society of God's friends is both a social and a spiritual reality, both "visible" and "invisible," simultaneously present and forthcoming.

The church herself is also described by St. Birgitta in at least three aspects: first, as an international and universal institution—visible, but fulfilling an invisible, eternal aim (mentioned for example in revelation I, 41, where Birgitta describes the judgment of the pope: "rector Ecclesiae et eius clerici"). Second, she depicts it as an institutional part of Christian society (see, for example, in revelation I, 55). Finally, she calls it an invisible community of salvation, the true "city of God" gathering angels, those men who already enjoy eternal life, and saintly men living on earth (as in *civitas gloriae* and in the image of "heavenly palace"). From this third church all sinners are excluded. However, sinners still belong to the other two. In my opinion, it is pointless to ask which of these three types is the "real" church, or which one is more important for St. Birgitta, since it would be impossible to find the answers to these questions in *Revelationes*. It is only one church described in these three aspects. At the moment of history described by Birgitta, these are only intellectual categories, not separate entities, as the church of saints is inseparable from the church of sinners and they both share the same institutions, which are often formed by the same people.

## 2.3. Structures of the Christian Kingdom

In this section, we shall discuss various divisions of Christian society as presented in *Revelationes*. After describing these divisions (see section 2.3.1), we shall attempt to build a synthetic image of the subject based on the text of *Revelationes*, and, in the four subsequent paragraphs (2.3.2–2.3.5), we shall discuss the nature and role of each of the important social groups described by Birgitta.

### 2.3.1. Various Divisions of Society

In Birgitta's work, we find several fragments to be interpreted as various schemes of the structure of society, but the twofold distinction between clerics and laymen seems to be the basis of all other divisions. In medieval canon law, it was the most essential distinction among the members of the church. In *Decretum Gratiani* we read:

Duo sunt genera Christianorum. Est autem genus unum, quod mancipatum diuino offitio, et deditum contemplationi et orationi, ab omni strepitu temporalium cessare conuenit, ut sunt clerici, et Deo deuoti, uidelicet conuersi. . . . Aliud uero est genus Christianorum, ut sunt laici. "Laos" enim est populus. His licet temporalia possidere, sed non nisi ad usum.<sup>318</sup>

This canon, dating from the eleventh century, both describes medieval Christian society and establishes norms for it. The criterion of distinction that the canon mentions is spiritual (the clerics are those who "contemplate and pray") but its consequences are not purely spiritual: they are also very practical, since clerics and laymen were then subject to different jurisdictions, the ecclesiastical and the secular.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> See: "Decretum Gratiani" pars II, causa XII, q. 1, c. 7, in *Corpus Iuris Canonici: Editio Lipsiensis Secunda*, eds. Emill Albert Freiberg and Aemilius Ludwig Richter (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879-1881), col. 678.

<sup>319</sup> Giles Constable, *Three studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha; The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ; The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 295.

It apparently is important for Birgitta that the line distinguishing between the two groups remained untouched, since in book 4, 33 she criticizes Roman clerics who lived the life of laymen, possessing property and having concubines and children (IV, 33. 7–10 and 17). For her, this is “contrary to the custom of the Church” (“contra Ecclesie consuetudinem” [IV, 33. 7]). In Rome, she had also seen laymen sidestepping the customs and laws of the Church, such as not receiving the sacraments and neglecting the obligation of fasting on certain days. According to her, both clerics and laymen were guilty of these transgressions: “Certe clerici una cum laycis hec exercent quandoque; qui Saracenis sunt similes, qui in die ieiunant et in nocte saciantur carnibus” (IV, 33. 39). We can thus suggest that for Birgitta the distinction between clerics and laymen was a significant criterion for judging the deeds of a person in the light of Christian customs and law.

However, she also mentions this distinction in a less down-to-earth context. In the *Rule of the Birgittine Order*, Christ says, “Quam vere multi amici mei, tam clerici quam layci, quorum corda caritate mea illuminaui, credunt indubitanter ex me venisse” (Reg. 310).<sup>320</sup>

We have already discussed some of the revelations that touch upon the subject of social structure. In revelation 55 of book 1, the lord who built the city with a palace inside designated three groups of people to take care of his property: judges (*iudices*), defenders (*defensores*), and workers (*laboratores*). At first, when they still remembered their lord, they all did their best to comfort him and performed all their duties carefully:

Tunc dixerunt iudices: “Dominus noster ad remotas partes profectus est. Iudicemus rectum iudicium et faciamus iusticiam, ut redeunte domino nostro non arguamur sed reportemus honorem et benedictionem.” Tunc dixerunt defensores: “Dominus noster confidit in nos et reliquit nobis custodiam domus sue. Abstineamus ergo a superfluitate cibi et potus, ne ad pugnam simus inepti! Abstineamus et ab immoderato sompno, ne incauti decipiamur! Simus et bene armati et continue vigilantes, ne venientibus hostibus imparati inueniamur!

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<sup>320</sup> We shall return to this basic distinction of Christian society in the next section (2.3.3).

In nobis enim honor domini nostri maxime pendet et salus populi eius.” Tunc et laboratores dixerunt: “Magna est gloria domini nostri et remuneratio eius gloriosa. Laboremus ergo fortiter et demus ei non solum decimam partem laboris nostri sed et, quidquid ultra victum nostrum superfuerit, offeramus ei! Tanto enim gloriosior erit merces, quo maiorem caritatem nostram viderit.” (I, 55. 4–7)

As we can see from the example of *laboratores*, they were even doing more than was expected.

However, when the absence of their lord was prolonged, they began to lose their previous enthusiasm. Finally, they all decided to follow their own will and interests, abandoning the service:

Tunc dixerunt iudices ad se ipsos: “Longa est mora domini nostri et nescimus, utrum reuertetur an non. Iudicemus ergo secundum voluntatem nostram et, quod nobis placuerit, faciamus!” Deinde dixerunt defensores: “Fatui sumus, quia laboramus et nescimus propter quam mercedem. Confederemus nos potius inimicis nostris, dormiamus et bibamus cum eis! Non enim est curandum nobis, cuius fuerint inimici.” Postea dixerunt laboratores: “Quare seruamus aurum nostrum alteri? Et, quis reportet illud post nos, ignoramus. Melius est ergo, ut utamur eo nos ipsi disponendo ad voluntatem nostram. Demus enim iudicibus decimam partem, et placatis eis facere possumus, quod volumus.” (I, 55. 8–11)

As stated earlier, this revelation is the metaphor of the world created and organized by God. At the present stage of history, he is not directly accessible to the human senses or mind, so he seems to be absent. The revelation describes three statuses within society, characterized by their function in a common *civitas*. It is important to notice that the structure of society is presented as natural—that is, established by the Lord himself—and that every duty performed by the inhabitants of the city is a service unto him. Problems arise when people forget about their Lord and concentrate of themselves. They immediately lose control over their actions and forget their sense: “Confederemus nos potius inimicis nostris, dormiamus et bibamus cum eis!” (I, 55. 9).

The revelation can be interpreted as an allusion to or a comment on the parables of Jesus. One of them (Luk 12:36–48) speaks about the servants waiting for their lord, who comes back from a wedding (“And you yourselves like to men who wait for their lord, when he shall return



from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately” [Luk 12:36]). There is also the parable of the wise and foolish virgins who waited with their lamps for the coming of the bridegroom. When he returned, he invited only the virgins with the burning lamps to the feast (Mat 25: 1–13). Another parable found in the Gospel of Matthew speaks about the lord who traveled away and left his money to three servants. Two of them traded with the money and returned to their lord more than they had been given at first, while the third servant buried the talent of silver in the ground and returned it to his master when he came back (Mat 25:14–30). The situation described is quite similar in the three parables and in the revelation (the lord leaving and asking his servants to watch over his property and to wait for him), but the emphasis is put differently in Birgitta’s text. She does not concentrate on the moment of the lord’s arrival (although the revelation ends with a warning of punishment), but rather focuses on the time of his absence and the servants’ conduct in that interim.

We find another revelation describing a social structure in book 2. The structure of the text is quite similar to the previous one, as Christ describes three men who stand for the three statuses in the world (“per quos intelligo triplicem statum in mundo” [II, 20. 6]):

Primo elegi clericum, qui clamaret voluntatem meam voce et ostenderet opere. Secundo defensorem elegi, qui amicos meos defenderet vita sua et paratus esset pro me ad omnem laborem. Tercio elegi laboratorem, qui laboraret manibus suis, ut pasceret corpora labore suo. (II, 20. 7–9)

*Clericus, defensor, and laborator* were elected by Christ, but now they are all unfaithful and have become caricatures of themselves, having abandoned their duties: the cleric is leprous and mute (II, 20. 10), the defender is a coward (II, 20. 13), and the worker resembles a donkey, looking only downward onto the ground, uninterested in the world above him (II, 20. 16). In the same

revelation, their conduct is compared with that of some other servants of God, who keep their faith:

Ego habeo unum clericum et unum defensorem et unum rusticum. Primus est delectabilis sicut sponsa, quam sponsus honestissimus cum diuina caritate toto desiderio desiderat. Huius vox erit sicut vox, que ex clamore et collocutione resultat in siluis. Secundus erit paratus dare vitam suam pro me, non timebit mundi obprobrium. Hunc ego armabo armis Spiritus sancti. Tercius habebit tam firmam fidem, quod dicet sic: "Tam firmiter credo, quod quasi videam, que credo. Spero etiam omnia, que promisit Deus." Voluntatem habebit faciendi bona et proficiendi in bono et omittendi mala. (II, 20. 22–26)

Those three also stand for many others belonging to the same three statuses of society.

The threefold division of society used here (*iudices, defensores, laboratores*) was popular in the Middle Ages, specially in the later period, but the attention given by scholars to this particular division (to mention only George Duby's famous book, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*<sup>321</sup>) has tended to obscure the fact that there were many equivalent divisions in use. Giles Constable noted that in fact the discussed division is one step in a quite complicated evolution of this subject. According to him, the earlier distinction was that of clerics, monks, and laymen. Over the years, the clerical and monastic orders became unified, but meanwhile the lay order was divided into "fighters" and "workers."<sup>322</sup>

It is also noteworthy that in the revelation previously discussed (I, 55) the worker is called both *laborator* and *rusticus* (peasant). In this context, the meaning of the two expressions is the same. Nevertheless, in another aforementioned revelation describing the first monastic vows and the oath of a knight, two analogical rites representing two ways of life inspired by St. Peter and St.

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<sup>321</sup> Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>322</sup> Giles Constable, *Three studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha; The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ; The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 252-253.

Paul (II, 7 and VIII, 33), we find *rusticus* placed in a somewhat different place within social hierarchy. Here St. Birgitta describes various occupations of the laymen:

Status laycorum bene erat ad tempus dispositus. Quidam eorum excolebant terram et labori agrorum viriliter instabant. Alii velificabant nauibus et mercimonia aliis regionibus deferebant, ut unius regionis fertilitas alterius subleuaret inopiam. Quidam instabant operi manuum et diuersarum arcium. Inter istos erant quidam defensores Ecclesie mee, qui nunc dicuntur curiales. (II, 7. 17–19)

The structure of society described here is different from that in revelation 2, 20. There is no mention of judges (*iudices*) and the two previously separate orders of defenders and workers form one group of laymen. However, inside this large group there are some distinctions, namely: “those who cultivate the land,” “those who sail and trade in distant countries,” “those who practice a craft” and finally, “the defenders of the church . . . who are called ‘the courtiers’ these days” (II, 7. 17-19). The probable reason why the social structure described in this revelation is different from the previously described is because the subject of the text is different from the previous two revelations (I, 55 and II, 20). Here Birgitta is more focused upon the dichotomy between the lay and clerical stations, and she makes only a small remark about various ways of life among the laymen. In the previous two revelations, the distinction between clerics and laymen was not her main point of reference, so she chose to present a tripartite division of society.

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Why are there so many equivalent descriptions of social hierarchy in *Revelationes*? The first possible answer is that the subject is not of fundamental importance for Birgitta, as none of the revelations analyzed above really aim at describing such a hierarchy. From her point of view, many other differences between people were more important than the strictly social ones, such as being a friend of God or his enemy. The distinguishing criterion was spiritual in nature. The other

possible explanation is that the relationships within society described by St. Birgitta were far too complex to be captured by a simple scheme of three or more statuses or orders, so she uses various divisions according to her needs. Social institutions as we understand them now were in fact not a central category within the medieval mentality.<sup>323</sup> The social distinctions were based rather on mutual relations of duty and benevolence, which found their most renowned shape in the feudal system,<sup>324</sup> but not all social relations that were present in medieval society need be described as feudal. According to Constable, the central category within the medieval mentality concerning social distinctions was that of *ordo* and, used, as a synonym, *status*.<sup>325</sup> St. Birgitta used the word “status” more often usually described the visible, social difference between people as a difference of “status.” For example, the two groups of clerics and laymen are described as “utriusque status” or “the both statuses” (II, 7. 11). We also mentioned the revelation describing five “statuses” of people (“sunt quinque status hominum in mundo” [II, 3. 23]): unfaithful Christians, obdurate Jews, pagans, “Jews and pagans who would rather become Christians,” and the friends of God (II, 3.23–59).

The term *ordo* is also used as a synonym to *status* in *Revelationes*. For example, Birgitta wrote about herself (here in the third person):

Occurrit, inquit, cogitacio dicens: “Si bona es, sufficit tibi bonitas tua. Quid ad te iudicare et prouocare alios docereque meliores, quod **nec tui ordinis est nec status?**” Ex qua cogitacione ita obduratur animus, quod et suiipsius obliuiscitur totusque refrigescit a Dei caritate.” (IV, 21. 7 [emphasis mine])

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<sup>323</sup> Tore Nyberg, conversation with the autor, Odense, November 2008.

<sup>324</sup> Duby, op. cit., 70-71.

<sup>325</sup> Constable, op. cit., 254.

In the Rule of her Order (*Regula Sanctissimi Salvatoris*) and in the comments to the Rule found in *Extravagates*, she mostly used the word “ordo” to describe the rule or way of life pursued in the order: “observancia ordinis” (Reg. 75, 174 ) or the establishment itself (Reg. 167), but in some cases it was also synonymous with *status*: “Si vero aliqua enormia seu abhominabilia talia per eos committuntur, quibus **denigratur ordo aut status monasterii diffamatur**, carceribus monasterii recludantur” (Extrav. 33. 8 [emphasis mine]).

However, in other cases, a distinction between *status* and *ordo* must be made. In one revelation, Birgitta describes all human beings as belonging to some “conditio” or “gradus,” but only some of them were members of orders (“ordines”), namely, those who were religious people:

Audite omnes clerici, archiepiscopi et episcopi et omnes inferioris gradus Ecclesie! Audite omnes religiosi, cuiuscumque ordinis estis! Audite reges et principes et iudices terre et omnes seruiantes! Audite mulieres, principisse ac omnes domine et ancille, et omnes, cuiuscumque condicionis et gradus estis, magni et parui, qui habitatis orbem. . . . (VII, 30. 4–5)

According to Giles Constable, in medieval culture there were two types of social belonging. One was natural, visible, and connected with more or less conscious decisions (*status*); the other was characterized by internal discipline of some sort, as well as external distinctions and obligations (*ordo*).<sup>326</sup> If we apply this distinction to St. Birgitta’s text above, we reach the following conclusion: Birgitta directed her reformative and prophetic efforts to three main groups of people or three *ordines*: members of her new monastic order, knights, and kings. Those were groups of special interest within the two *status*—clerical and lay.

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<sup>326</sup> Constable, op. cit, 255.

Based on this short textual examination, we can now sketch the structure of society as St. Birgitta saw it. The social function and role of each of the two *status* and three *ordines* that she mentions will be discussed further in the course of this chapter. We will also return to these divisions while discussing the moral duties of members of various social orders (chapter three).

The main borderline is drawn between clerics and laymen (see section 2.3.2 below). The clerics can be further divided into diocesan clerics and those belonging to religious orders. The latter group is a subject of special interest to Birgitta's (see section 3.3.2). There is also another group within the larger category of clergy that is of special importance for Birgitta: the Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris, the new vineyard, whose goal was to start a revival of monastic life (see section 2.3.3). Laymen had many different occupations, but the special category among them was that of knighthood, the defenders of the church, who bore a special responsibility for the wellbeing of the Christian community.<sup>327</sup> Below, we will also discuss Birgitta's plans concerning the establishment of a special group of chosen knights, parallel to her monastic order (see section 2.3.3). The structure is not complete without mentioning the king. In all the revelations discussed above (see section 2.3.1), it is the lord, the king, or Christ who acts as narrator and introduces the social hierarchy to the reader. The king is in fact the heart of this hierarchy and gives meaning to all the actions done by people. In his absence, the structure collapses and turns into its own caricature, as shown in revelation 2, 20 and 1, 55. In a symbolic sense, God is this ruler. But in some revelations, such as those discussed below, Birgitta speaks similarly of the king in a Christian kingdom. However, in any version of social hierarchy proposed by Birgitta, we do not find the king described as a one of the elements (see section 2.3.5).

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<sup>327</sup> Tore Nyberg, "Birgitta och lekmännen," in *Birgittinsk festgåva. Studier om Heliga Birgitta och Birgittinorden* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1991), 32.

### 2.3.2. Clerics and Laymen

What is the difference between clerics and laymen according to *Revelationes*? What is their role in social life? The answer seems to be quite simple, as it is possible to grasp intuitively the difference between the two types of medieval Christians in Western Europe as known from other historical sources. The distinctive features seem to be (1) clerical celibacy versus lay marriage; (2) the sacrament of the holy orders that clerics received; and (3) the lack of private property or, in some cases, the vow of poverty monks and clerics made versus the free use of material goods by laymen. The two statuses were presented in this way in the above-quoted canon, “Duo sunt genera Christianorum.”<sup>328</sup> If we take a closer look at Birgitta’s text, we shall notice that all these features are present there, but none of them can be regarded as a sole distinctive mark.

As stated above, according to revelation 2, 7, St. Paul is the prototype of lay status, while St. Peter represents the clergy. The symbolic meanings St. Birgitta ascribes to the two apostles may seem a bit unusual, since we know from Scripture that Paul was unmarried, whereas Peter was a married man.<sup>329</sup> However, according to Birgitta, after he was called by Jesus and became an apostle, Peter decided that he should not live with his wife anymore, as it is not proper for a cleric to live the life of a married man (II, 7. 5). This statement accords with the Roman Catholic doctrine of clerical celibacy and the historical formulation of this doctrine. In the early days of the church, celibacy was not considered a condition *sine qua non* of priesthood, although it was always expected and highly approved of as a way of life for clerics. Later on, the Western Church decided

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<sup>328</sup> For the analysis of the canon and the list of literature see: Giles Constable, *Three studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha; The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ; The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 295.

<sup>329</sup> In the Gospel of Mark we read that Jesus healed Peter’s mother in law, so he must have been married: Mark 1: 29-31.

that it is not proper for a cleric to be married.<sup>330</sup> According to the discussed revelation, Birgitta knows that there is a theoretical possibility of being a cleric and a married man at the same time, as in the case of Peter at the beginning, but she does not approve this as a rule of life.

Another difference between clerics and laymen lies in the sacrament of holy orders (ordination), which is the means of entering the clerical state. Catholic theology in its medieval form held that this sacrament was established by Christ at the Last Supper when he told the apostles: “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of me” (Luk 22:19).<sup>331</sup> With the same words he established the Eucharist.<sup>332</sup> The apostles were also present during the event of Pentecost, which gave them a special bond with each of the sacraments they were to celebrate later (Act 2:1-40). The Gospels and the book of Acts state that Paul was not present then, since he became converted after the death and resurrection of Christ (Luk 22:14; Mat 26:20; Mar 14:17; Act 22:3-21). He later called himself an apostle (1Co 15:9), but, according to the discussed revelation of Birgitta, he never became a priest.

The sacrament of holy orders was (and is) a condition for entering clerical status in the strict sense, but according to Birgitta, not only those who receive this sacrament belong to the the clergy, since in the same revelation we read that the founder of the first monastery was a member of the clergy (II, 7. 12–16). However, Catholic monks and nuns do not receive the sacrament of the

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<sup>330</sup> Herbert Thurston, “Celibacy of the Clergy,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03481a.htm> (accessed Dec 1, 2009).

<sup>331</sup> Confirmed at the Council of Trent in 1562: “Si quis dixerit, illis verbis: 'Hoc facite in meam commemorationem', Christum non instituisse Apostolos sacerdotes, aut non ordinasse, ut ipsi alique sacerdotes offerrent corpus et sanguinem suum: anathema sit.” Henricus Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum, quod primum edidit Henricus Denzinger, et quod funditus retractavit auxit notulis ornavit Adolfus Schönmetzer* (Barcinone: Herder, 1976), no. 1752.

<sup>332</sup> See: Encyclical *Transiturus de hoc mundo* by Urban VI (1264): “In institutione quidem huius sacramenti dixit ipse Apostolis: 'Hoc facite in meam commemorationem', ut praecipuum et insigne memoriale sui amoris eximii, quo nos dilexit, esset nobis hoc praecelsum et venerabile sacramentum” (Denzinger, op. cit., 846).



holy orders. It is possible for monks to become priests, and in the Middle Ages there were congregations of priests who lived together in a cloister (regular canons), but the sacrament of ordination was never a condition of being a monk. Nevertheless, in this revelation Birgitta presents monks as clerics, not laymen. Therefore, the sacrament of holy orders is not the only distinctive mark between the clerics and laypeople.

Another difference between the social performance of clerics and laymen might be found in their attitude toward material goods. Birgitta was very concerned about priests' proper relationship toward the possessions of the church. In II, 7 she states that God allowed the clerics to use "bona Ecclesie ad utilitatem corporis moderate habere" (II, 7. 11). In other revelations she also stresses that this use should be "moderate."<sup>333</sup> Monks, who made up a special group within the clerical status, were expected to follow Christ's poverty (II, 7. 14) so that they would conform to even more difficult requirements. At the same time, laymen were allowed to use material goods in a more free way: they were able to own ships and sail to different parts of the world, to own and cultivate land, and to work as craftsmen (II, 7. 17–19). Birgitta is of the opinion that rich men could enter the heavenly kingdom if they used their wealth responsibly (III, 11. 4–6). Still, she also encourages laymen to use the material goods "moderately" and to possess "no more than necessary." She contrasts a saintly, "spiritual" married couple who possessed things only if they were necessary ("solummodo ad necessitatem, nichil ad superfluitatem" [I, 26. 24]) with a sinful couple who marry with a view toward acquiring greater riches and who raise children "ad diuicias

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<sup>333</sup> E.g. "Apparuit sanctus Laurentius, dicens: 'Ego cum essem in mundo, habui tria: continenciam ad me ipsum, misericordiam ad proximum, caritatem ad Deum. Ideo feruenter predicauit verbum Dei, sapienter distribui bona Ecclesie et gaudenter tolerabam verbera, ignem et mortem. Hic vero episcopus tolerat et dissimulat incontinciam cleri, expendit largiter bona Ecclesie in diuites, caritatem habet ad se et ad suos. Ideo notum ei facio, quod nubes leuissima iam ascenderat in celum, quam faces tenebrose obumbrant, ne videatur a pluribus'" (I, 23. 17–18). See section 3.3.2.

et honores”(I, 26. 18). She also states that the friends of God (regardless of social status) are wise because they use the transitory things “ad necessitate” (II, 19: 47).

Thus we can see that Birgitta is fully aware of the complicated character of the actual borders between clerics and laymen within the Christian society in which she lived. She recognizes various divisions between the social positions of members of the two states of life, but the rules of morality she promotes are often the same for both clerics and laity (see sections 3.2 and 3.3). Generally, laypeople led a family life since they were allowed to marry (II, 7. 11) and a different public life since they were “defenders of the Church” (II, 7. 19). It was thus their duty to bear and raise children and to take the primary responsibility for the affairs of the kingdom. Clerics, on the contrary, are expected to live a life of chastity (II, 7. 5; IV, 33. 7–10 and 17) and to administer the properties of the Church (II, 7. 11), but (at least partial) poverty should be also their ideal of life (II, 7. 14).

It is noteworthy that the dignity of all the statuses of life is equal before God: Christ told Birgitta that both the married and the virgins, if they live according to their own rule of life, have the same merit and their lives have the same value for him:

. . . equalisque meriti esse possunt coniugata non lasciuiens et iuxta regulam suam in timore Domini viuens et virgo pudica et humilis, quia licet magnum est in igne probacionis esse et non ardere, tamen eque magnum est extra ignem esse religionis et in igne velle libencius esse et maiori ardore feruere ad Deum extra ignem quam qui est in igne. (IV, 71. 14–15)

This vision discusses the plans Birgitta had concerning the future of her daughter, Cecilia. She was not sure whether it would be better for the girl to be professed as a nun in the cloister where she was educated or to leave the monastery and get married. Christ told Birgitta that any of these

solutions would please him, as virginity is very dear to him, but if someone is not specially inclined to this state of life, it is better to have a family and live a fruitful life.

### 2.3.3. The New Vineyard

Up to this point, we have not directly touched upon the subject of spiritual reform proposed in *Revelationes*, but we discussed several aspects of Birgitta's theology and political thinking. Based on the above discussion, we can now suggest that two rules apply to Birgitta's logic of spiritual and pastoral reform.

First, the reform starts from *caput* and then continues *in membris*.<sup>334</sup> Birgitta greatly stresses the responsibility of the "head," that is, the church leaders: priests, bishops, and the pope; secular leaders—nobles, aristocrats, and kings—share this responsibility as well.<sup>335</sup> This way of thinking was typical in fourteenth-century theology, as expressed in the famous phrase "reformatio tam in capite quam in membris," which first appeared in 1312 in the book by Guillaume Durand, *De modo celebrandi concilii et corruptelis in Ecclesia reformatis*, written at the demand of Clement V.<sup>336</sup> But in *Revelationes*, Birgitta also builds a model of moral and religious behavior for all strata of society ("membra"), both laymen and clerics. According to Ingvar Fogelqvist, another important feature of Birgitta's concept of reform is that one must start the revival from within one's own soul.<sup>337</sup> Then, with the help of other people who have entered this process already, God begins his work of renewal of the whole world: first by choosing the small

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<sup>334</sup> Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), 24, 245.

<sup>335</sup> Fogelqvist, op. cit., 151.

<sup>336</sup> Jürgen Miethke, *De potestate papae: die päpstliche Amtskompetenz im Widerstreit der politischen Theorie von Thomas von Aquin bis Wilhelm von Ockham* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 324.

<sup>337</sup> Fogelqvist, op. cit., 83.

group of his friends who are ready to take up more responsibility and to spread the reform further. Therefore, we put forward the thesis that according to Birgitta both the pastoral and the spiritual reform starts in two ways: from the “head,” understood as the head of a Christian community (a pope, king, or bishop), and from “the mind and heart” of an individual Christian.

Second, Birgitta’s plan of spiritual and institutional reform can be described as a return of representatives of all those strata to the original disposition of their *ordo*. We have already seen an example of this way of thinking in revelation 2, 7. As stated earlier, for Birgitta it was often the primal, original state of affairs that should serve as a model for the present situation (see section 2.1.2). Therefore, the reform of the church that she planned was actually a restoration rather than a revolution.

These two features of Birgitta’s reformative plans are clearly visible in her descriptions of the Order of the Most Holy Savior (*Ordo Sactissimi Salvatoris*). The members of this new *ordo* are to inspire the reform (or renovation) of all religious orders, but first of all they are to reform their own souls. Below we shall give only a brief description of the Order and its function in the church as designed by Birgitta herself, abstracting from the actual history of the foundation, which flourished in Scandinavia and in other parts of Europe until the Protestant Reformation and beyond (in Catholic parts of the world). The shape taken by the Order during its history is a fascinating research topic, unfortunately beyond the scope of present the study.<sup>338</sup>

Now we shall discuss the first of the two aspects of Christian reform as represented in the idea of the new vineyard. While she visited the castle in Vadstena, which later became the first cloister of the Birgittine order, St. Birgitta experienced a vision of Christ, who revealed to her the

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<sup>338</sup> For an outline of the history of the Birgittine Order and the bibliography of the subject see: Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999), 160-177.

rule of a new monastic order (Reg. 1. 1). In many aspects it was similar to existing rules like the Benedictine, Cistercian, or Dominican orders, but it had some unique qualities. The order was established to honor the Virgin Mary and was “primarily and principally an order for women,”<sup>339</sup> unlike many other medieval women’s congregations, which were established as female branches of existing male orders. According to the Rule of the Most Holy Savior, the abbess was the “head and lady” (“caput et domina”) of the monastery, because in some way she held the place of the Virgin Mary (“Virgo, cuius abbatissa gerit vicem in terris”), who was the “head and queen” of the apostles after the ascension of Christ.<sup>340</sup> She was the person responsible for the organization of everyday life in the community (Reg. 2. 52). The “general confessor” was in charge of spiritual matters (Reg. 14. 169). He was chosen by the abbess with the consent of the other members of the congregation (Reg. 14. 168). The community was to consist of sixty sisters, thirteen priests, four deacons, and eight lay brothers. These proportions were a symbol and image of the young church, which had thirteen apostles and seventy-two disciples (Reg. 12. 150-153) and, as we have said, the Virgin Mary was represented by the abbess (Reg. 14. 167).

In the Benedictine rule, the abbot represented Christ or even held his place (“Christi enim agere vices,”)<sup>341</sup> while the whole community represented the disciples of Christ, who followed his

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<sup>339</sup> “Hanc igitur religionem ad honorem amantissime Matris mee per mulieres primum et principaliter statuere volo.” Text of Reg. 44 - caput I according to  $\Phi$ -text, see: Sten Eklund, introduction to *Opera minora 1: Regula Saluatoris*, by Saint Birgitta (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1975), 27.

<sup>340</sup> “Que ob reuerenciam beatissime Virginis, Matris mee, cui hic ordo dedicatus est, caput et domina esse debet, quia **ipsa Virgo, cuius abbatissa gerit vicem in terris**, ascendente me in celos caput et regina extitit apostolorum et discipulorum meorum” (Reg. 14. 167).

<sup>341</sup> Note the same expression used in the Birgittine rule to describe the function of the abbess: “Abbas, qui praeesse dignus est monasterio, semper meminere debet, quod dicitur, et nomen maioris factis implere. **Christi enim agere uices in monasterio** creditur, quando ipsius uocatur pronomine, dicente apostolo: *Acceptistis spiritum adoptionis filiorum, in quo clamamus: abba, pater.*” *Benedicti Regula* II, 1-3. ed. Rudolf Hanslik (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1970), 19-20.

footsteps.<sup>342</sup> The ideal of “apostolic life,” or “vita apostolica,” modeled after the apostolic lifestyle as described in the Gospel of Matthew (Mat 10) and the book of Acts (2:41–45), was a common aim of many ecclesiastical reformers of the Middle Ages, including Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Francis.<sup>343</sup> What seems unusual about the symbolic structure of the Birgittine community compared to the rules of other monastic congregations is the absence of any person who would represent Christ. That is because the Birgittine community represented the primitive church in a very specific moment of its history: after the ascension of Christ, waiting for Pentecost (Reg. 14. 167). We can therefore understand that the members of the new order were to live in constant eschatological tension, waiting for the second coming of Christ and for a new Pentecost.

I think that the dominant role of the sisters and the abbess should not be interpreted as an attempt to change the social relations within the church or society. The order was established with the main purpose of honoring the Virgin Mary (Reg. 1. 44). The sisters were totally devoted to this aim, as their duty was to praise Mary and imitate her by their own lives, living humbly and devotedly to Christ.<sup>344</sup> Deacons and priests, on the other hand, led a more active life, preaching and celebrating the sacraments.<sup>345</sup> Therefore, the female members of the order were in some way closer to its main purpose: this was their point of dominance. Their social performance, however,

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<sup>342</sup> “Quid dulcius nobis ab hac uoce Domini inuitantis nos, fratres carissimi? Ecce pietate sua demonstrat nobis Dominus uiam uitae. Succinctis ergo fide vel obseruantia bonorum actuum lumbis nostris, per ducatum euangelii pergamus itinera eius, ut mereamur eum, qui nos uocauit in regnum suum, uidere” (*Benedicti Regula*, Prologus, 19-21, op. cit., 4).

<sup>343</sup> Michael Robson, *St. Francis of Assisi: The Legend and the Life* (London: Continuum Books, 2002), 103-104.

<sup>344</sup> “Propterea Maria, mater humanitatis mee, vocari potest et mater et filia, mater generatione carnis, filia imitatione voluntatis mee. Nam similitudo corporis eius relucebat quodammodo in carne mea, et similitudo virtutum omnium resplenduit perfectius in corde et operatione eius. Ergo quia mater mea eligere sibi vult filias, quarum institutor et rector ego sum, quibus et nouam per te ostenderam institutionem, ideo pater earum esse et vocari volo” (Extrav. 37. 3-4).

<sup>345</sup> Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999), 166.

and their relations with the outside world were not at all changed compared to other female monastic communities of that time. They were to be obedient to the abbess (Reg. 14. 169) and were not to leave the enclosure (Reg. 8. 85).

In the *Rule*, Birgitta gives detailed instructions about the structure of the cloister church, since she requires that many elements of the interior design express symbolic meaning. For example, each of the thirteen altars in the church was dedicated to one of the apostles. The central and most important one was the altar of St. Peter, and on its right side was the altar of St. Paul. Other altars were located around the central one (Extrav. 34, 1–19). The position of the altars corresponded to the sequence of the church holidays of the apostles.<sup>346</sup> This symbolic meaning of the altars corresponded to the symbolic function of the thirteen priests, who also represented the thirteen apostles (Reg. 12. 150–153).

Another example of “symbolic theology” expressed in the structure of the Birgittine church is the location of entrances. Each of the entrances to the church had its own symbolic meaning. The door used by laymen was called the “entrance of forgiveness” (“porta remissionis”). By using this name, Birgitta foretold and anticipated the grace given to those who entered the church through that door:

Ideo hec ecclesia habeat tres portas. Prima debet vocari porta remissionis, per quam omnes seculares ingrediantur, quia omnis, qui contrito corde et voluntate emendandi ingreditur hanc portam, habebit alleuiacionem in temptacionibus, fortitudinem ad operandum bona, deuocionem in oracione, remissionem peccatorum et cautelam in agendis. (Extrav. 31. 2)

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<sup>346</sup> Tore Nyberg, “The Thirteen Apostles in the Spiritual World of St. Bridget,” in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1993), 1:192–208.

The same was true of the other two entrances: the “entrance of reconciliation and conversion” (“porta reconciliacionis et propiciacionis”) used by the friars, (Extrav. 31. 4–5) and the “entrance of grace and glory” (“porta gracie et glorie”) used by the sisters (Extrav. 31. 6–7). Their names tell of the grace specific to each of the three groups of people entering the church.

Each door is also symbolically linked to one of the directions of the world. The “porta remissionis” is described as opening to the east because divine love was “rising” (“orietur”) in those who entered the church (Extrav. 31. 3). The “porta reconciliacionis et propiciacionis” opened to the west (“ad occidentem”) because the power of devil was killed (“occidetur”) by the prayers of the brethren (Extrav. 31. 5). The third door opened to the north because the ice-cold anger of the devil was healed by the warmth of divine grace in the hearts of the sisters (Extrav. 31. 7).

Therefore, we may understand that the structure of the Birgittine order as well as the architecture of the monastery St. Birgitta designed reflected the church and built a certain model for all its members to imitate.<sup>347</sup> There were priests celebrating sacraments and thus sharing divine grace with the people, sisters and brothers continuously praising God and his mother, and, finally, there was a place for laymen, who could participate in the liturgy celebrated by the order and who attended the sermons. Moreover, Christ promised a special grace to the new order: all the cities and countries where monasteries of this order would be established were to receive a special blessing, since they would be governed by concord and peace (Reg. 31. 315). The new order thus was expected to influence the whole Christian community, inspiring them to take up the work of spiritual renovation.

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<sup>347</sup> For the detailed discussion of this subject see: Stephan Borgehammar, “St. Birgitta: An Architect of Spiritual Reform,” *Birgittiana* 5 (1988): 23-49.



The influence of the Birgittine rules started with building certain social and physical structures: we can understand that the hierarchy of the order as well as the physical surroundings of the cloister and the church represented the saintly church of apostles in order to encourage the members of the order as well as visiting laymen to imitate this example of sanctity. But first of all, the new order was expected to contribute to the reform of *status clericorum*. In the Rule, Birgitta compares the existing monastic congregations to the old and unfruitful vineyards (see also section 2.2.2). Her new establishment is compared to the vineyard planed “anew,” which will save the vine from dying out:

Nunc autem conqueror, quia maceria vinearum dissipata est, custodes dormiunt et ingrediuntur fures, radices suffodiuntur a talpis, palmites siccitate aridi sunt et racemi a vento prostrati conculcantur. Propterea, ne omnino vinum deficiat, plantabo michi de nouo vineam, in quam tu portabis palmites verborum meorum, amicus meus ponet eos, ego vero ipse Deus apponam pinguedinem graciae mee. (Reg. 3. 28–29)

The old vines also were to be renovated using the branches from the new vineyard:

Gaudebit etiam ille, qui radices posuit, nec eius Deus obliuiscetur, qui palmites apportauit. Ex hac autem vinea multe vinee longo tempore arentes renouari incipient et facere fructum iuxta diem innouacionis suae. (Reg. 2. 21)

The role of Birgitta was to bring the “branches of the words of Christ” (Reg. 3. 29) to the new vineyard. There they would be planted and eventually would begin to bear fruit. The work of planting the vineyard is therefore presented as a gradual growth, a process in which various persons took part: Birgitta, Christ himself, “his friend” the pope, and “the guards” (Reg. 3. 29–30).

In another revelation (V, rev. 12. 11–14), Birgitta mentions that the words of God she transmits are like a seed in need of a good and fertile soil in which to grow; so the visionary had to leave Sweden, which was like a heavy stone lying on a seed and preventing its growth, and go to

Rome, where the words of Christ would be understood and bear fruit. There the seed was to become a great tree: “Ubi sic profunde et stabiliter infigit radices, quod non solum facit fructum pulcherrimum, ymmo eciam trunco fortiter crescente annichilat omne impediens ascensum et extendit se super id, quod est ponderosum” (V, rev. 12. 14).

The image of a seed as a metaphor representing the words of God is present in the Gospels.<sup>348</sup> It signifies the vivid potential of these words, which are “living and effectual” (Heb 4:12), able to bring results not expected before and reach the “unto the ends of the whole world” (Rom 10:18) starting from a single spot in Jerusalem (Mar 16:15). In Birgitta’s metaphors of a seed and a new vineyard giving life to the all the vines, we can observe the same meaning. The renewing word of God begins with its growth from a single person and a single monastery, but gradually it expands and gains more impact.

The second aspect of the reform planned by Birgitta is that the whole work was based more on a restoration of the original state of things than on creating a brand new value. In *Revelationes Extravagantes*, we read that the new monastic community (here called “the house of Mary”) was to become the spiritual Temple of God that the prophets saw in their visions (Extrav. 39. 14). In this way, the Temple of Jerusalem, destroyed because of the sins of the chosen nation and never rebuilt physically (Extrav. 39. 12–13), was to be reconstructed.<sup>349</sup>

In the same book, we find other comments to the Rule and revelations concerning the new monastic community. Two of them concern the castle in Vadstena. In one of her revelations (IV, 137. 3), Birgitta requested that this particular castle become the monastery of her community.

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<sup>348</sup> Mat 13:3-30; Luk 8:10-15; Mar 4:3-20.

<sup>349</sup> See also sections 3.3.3 and 5.1.2.

Magnus Eriksson had donated the castle to the Birgittines in 1346.<sup>350</sup> However, Birgitta expressed the opinion that the castle was ruled by devil at that time, because its inhabitants have always been Satan's "servants and friends" (Extrav. 24. 2). In this revelation, Mary asks her son to grant the castle to her. But the devil claims his rights to this place as his "capital," because "his will has been always fulfilled there" (Extrav. 24. 4). The Virgin then puts forward a legal case as an example of a similar conflict: "Fili mi, quero a te iusticiam. Si forte aliquis spoliasset alium bonis suis et pecunia et faceret eum adhuc super dampnum suum edificare domum sibi proprio labore et pecunia, qua eum spoliauerat, cuius esset locus edificatus?" Christ agrees with her, so the conflict ends with the Virgin's victory: "Respondit Dominus: 'Mater,' inquit, 'dilecta, ille possidet de iure domum, qui possiderat pecuniam et laborem expenderat.' Et beata virgo ad dyabolum ait: 'Ideo nichil tu iusticie habes in domo hac.'" (Extrav. 24. 5–6) Christ admits that if one man steals the money and workforce of another and uses these resources to build a house from himself, the house belongs to the person who funded it, not to the one who built it. Therefore, Mary asks for the return of her and her son's property, illicitly used by the devil; so we can understand that even despite the fact that the cloister in Vadstena castle is a new establishment, it is also a restoration of the original state of things, "original justice."

The same subject is continued in the next revelation. The castle is compared to the town of Jericho, taken from the pagans, "cleansed by the fire" and given to the people of God (Extrav. 25. 7). Vadstena was not to be "cleaned" in such a spectacular way, but the humility and poverty of the nuns and monks was to replace the pride and luxury of its previous inhabitants (Extrav. 25. 8). Therefore, the place was to become spiritually pure, free from sin.

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<sup>350</sup> Iwar Andersson, *Vadstena gård och kloster*, vol. 1 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1972), 5.

#### 2.3.4. *Vera Militia*

The new monastic establishment was not the only reformatory effort taken up by the saint, despite its universal character. Birgitta addresses many of her revelations to noblemen, members of the royal court, and the royals in order to pursue another part of the reform—the element concerning the kingdom in its political and social aspect. Many of those revelations are found in *Liber ad reges* and in book 2 of *Revelationes*. In this section we will focus on the material found in book 2, 7–13, which concern the knightly ethical code and rules of life. Above we have put forward the following thesis: Birgitta focused her reformatory efforts on religious persons and nobility, who were expected to start the work of renewal and to influence the whole of Christian society. Monks and nuns were to begin reforming the clergy, while the nobility were responsible for the condition of the status of laymen. Based on this thesis, we might now expect that St. Birgitta could have intended to establish a community aimed at reforming the lay status and particularly the nobility parallel to the Order of the Most Holy Savior, as the Order was not directly aimed at reforming the lay part of society.

Some remarks found in *Revelationes* suggest that St. Birgitta wanted to establish a society of Christian knights, or at least to bind some of them more closely with the church by a special oath. We shall discuss these fragments below. However, there is no direct evidence of Birgitta's establishing this group or of its existence during the first years after her death. Therefore, many scholars, among them Hans Cnattingius<sup>351</sup> and Birgit Klockars,<sup>352</sup> refuse to recognize even a plan

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<sup>351</sup> Hans Cnattingius, "The Order of the Knights of St. Bridget," *Annales Academiae Regiae Scientiarum Upsaliensis* 11 (1967): 5-35.

<sup>352</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1971), 83.

for a knightly organization in St. Birgitta's works. Nevertheless, Tore Nyberg<sup>353</sup> holds the opinion that Birgitta's texts are too ambiguous in this aspect to allow for a flat denial of such plans.

In 1859, Don Vincenzo Abbate de Castello founded in Naples the Military Order of St. Birgitta of Sweden. It was founded as a pious association of laymen who wish to realize the knightly ideal in their own lives. Don Vincenzo claimed, however, that his establishment was a restoration of the already-existing Military Order of St. Birgitta. The historical material used by the present order to certify its past record has been carefully examined by Hans Cnattingius,<sup>354</sup> who concludes that the Military Order of St. Birgitta is a historical falsification produced in the seventeenth century by a single Spanish author, Ioseph Micheli y Marquez,<sup>355</sup> in his book concerning the general history of military orders.<sup>356</sup> However, in his article Cnattingius does not focus on the text of *Revelationes*, but on later documents, so his results are not fully relevant for our study, which is aimed at presenting the ideas found in *Revelationes*. In a more recent study, Tore Nyberg claims that the idea of knightly order is present in St. Birgitta's authorship, albeit in undeveloped form.<sup>357</sup> There are some traces of it in later centuries, such as with the coincidental appearance of Micheli y Marquez's book in Spain at the same time when a new branch of the Birgittine Order was established there.<sup>358</sup> It is beyond doubt that the question of the existence of the Military Order of St. Birgitta requires more scholarly consideration. Birgitta's intentions on this subject remain unclear, although the spiritual reform of the nobility is among the most important

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<sup>353</sup> Tore Nyberg, "Die Nova Militia Birgittas von Schweden und ihr Nachfolgeorden," *Birgittiana* 10 (2000): 89-105.

<sup>354</sup> Cnattingius, op. cit.

<sup>355</sup> "There can be no doubt that the order was an invention of Micheli's" (Cnattingius, op. cit., 33).

<sup>356</sup> Ioseph Micheli y Marquez, *Tesoro militar de Cavalleria* (Madrid, 1642).

<sup>357</sup> Nyberg, op. cit., 104-105.

<sup>358</sup> Nyberg, op. cit., 101-103.

topics covered by her writings. Therefore, below we shall concentrate on the text of *Revelationes* to find out more about Birgitta's<sup>359</sup> intentions and ideas on this subject.

In book 2, 7–13, we find a series of revelations concerning knighthood and the responsibilities of knights. Most of them are also included in *Liber ad reges*<sup>360</sup> (book 8 of *Revelationes*). We have already twice discussed the first revelation concerned (II, 7). It is the story of the origin of lay and clerical order, beginning with St. Peter and St. Paul. In the following part of the revelation (which we have not yet discussed), we find a description of two oaths: monastic vows and an oath of knighthood. It is remarkable that Birgitta builds a direct analogy between these two states of life by describing two parallel oaths. The analogy continues in the final part of the revelation, as Christ rebukes both the clerics and the knights for abandoning the commandments and duties of their “ordines.”<sup>361</sup>

In this revelation, Birgitta does not portray the ceremony of monastic profession in detail, but she gives a short summary about the purpose of three monastic vows:

Inter clericos erat quidam bonus homo, qui cogitabat apud se: “Caro trahit me ad prauam voluptatem, mundus ad nociuum visum, dyabolus ponit michi multipliciter peccati insidias.

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<sup>359</sup> Understood as the narrator of *Revelationes*, as in the entire text of this study.

<sup>360</sup> VIII, 32-37, except for VIII, 34, taken from IV, 74. Revelations II, 8 and II, 10 are not found in *Liber ad reges*.

<sup>361</sup> “Audi nunc, quid inimici mei faciunt contra ea, que amici mei prius fecerunt! Denique amici mei ingrediebantur monasteria ex discreto timore et diuina caritate. Sed hii, qui nunc sunt in monasteriis, vadunt in mundum pro superbia et cupiditate habentes propriam voluntatem, facientes corporis sui delectamenta. Istorum, qui in tali voluntate moriuntur, iusticia est, quod non senciant nec optineant celeste gaudium sed penam in inferno sine fine. Scito eciam, quod claustrales, qui coguntur contra velle proprium ex diuina caritate fieri prelati, non sunt in eorum numero computandi. Milites quoque, qui mea portabant arma, fuerunt parati dare vitam pro iusticia et effundere sanguinem propter fidem sanctam, indigentes promouendo ad iusticiam, malosque deprimere et humiliare. Sed nunc audi, quomodo auersi sunt! Placet quippe eis nunc magis mori in bello pro superbia et cupiditate et inuidia iuxta dyabolicas suggestiones quam secundum mandata mea viuere ad optinendum gaudium sempiternum. Ergo omnes, qui in tali voluntate moriuntur, dabitur eis stipendium ex iudicio iusticie, scilicet animabus eorum in eterna dyaboli coniunctione. Hii vero, qui michi seruiunt, tenentur habere stipendium cum celesti exercitu sine fine” (II, 7. 37-44).

Ideo, ne supplanter a carne et a voluptate, ponam modum in omnibus actibus meis, moderabo me in refeccione et quiete, seruabo tempus debitum in labore et oracione, refrenabo carnem ieiuniis. Secundo, ne mundus trahat me ab amore Dei, omnia, que mundi sunt, quia caduca sunt, relinquere volo. Paupertate Christum sequi tucius est. Tercio, ne dyabolus decipiat me, qui semper falsa ostendit pro vero, subiciam me regimini et obediencie alterius, omnem voluntatem propriam abiciam et paratum me exhibebo ad omnia, quecumque michi ab alio fuerint imperata.” (II, 7. 12–15)

Farther down, she describes a knight who had a very similar idea in response to his own problems and weaknesses. He did not intend to take monastic vows, but he also wanted to take a certain oath:

Inter istos erant quidam defensores Ecclesie mee, qui nunc dicuntur curiales. Qui assumpserunt sibi arma ad ulcionem Ecclesie sancte, ad expugnationem inimicorum eius. In istis curialibus apparuit quidam bonus homo et amicus meus, qui cogitabat apud se: “Non excolo terram ut agriculor, non desudo in fluctibus maris ut mercator, non insisto labori manuum ut operator egregius. Quid ergo faciam aut quibus operibus placabo Deum meum? Sed nec virilis sum in labore Ecclesie. Corpus meum debile est et molle ad pacienda vulnera, manus remissa ad ferendum inimicos, mens fastidiosa ad cogitandum celestia. Quid ergo faciendum est modo? Certe scio, quid faciam. Surgam et obligabo me cum iuramento stabili sub temporali principe, quod defensurus sim viribus meis et sanguine meo fidem sancte Ecclesie.” (II, 7. 19–24)

Afterward, the knight and his lord both went to the church and the knight took the following oath by the altar:

Ideo in presenti promitto obedienciam Deo et tibi, qui caput es, cum iuramento meo firmiter astringens me sanctam Ecclesiam contra inimicos eius defensurum, amicos Dei confortaturum, viduis, orphanis et fidelibus Dei benefacturum, contra Dei Ecclesiam et fidem eius numquam aliquid contrarium acturum. Insuper obligo me correccioni tue, si errare me contingat, ad hoc, ut obligatus ad obedienciam tanto magis cauere possim peccata et voluntatem propriam et tanto feruencius et facilius insistere voluntati Dei et tue sciamque tanto michi esse dampnabilius ceteris et contemptibilius, si violata obediencia mandatis tuis contraire presumpsero. (II, 7. 30–31)

Therefore, he promised to defend the Holy Church, to be a friend of God’s friends and a benefactor of orphans, widows, and all the faithful. He promised to do nothing against the faith

and the church. Finally, he swore obedience to his secular leader. Having done that, he received his weapons from his *princeps* (which could be translated here as “king,” “count,” or “leader”) and Holy Communion from the assisting priest.

Having compared the two oaths (the monk’s and the knight’s), we can observe that monastic life is presented here as a special and more perfect way of life for the clergy. At a certain point, one cleric took the vows and “founded the first monastery” (II, 7. 16). At first, it seems that the direct analog of this monk is a knight (or a nobleman) who has taken his oath. But the discussed knight is not in fact the founder of knighthood, as he is already “one of the defenders of the Church,” an existing group within the status of laymen. He is not the first-ever defender of the church, but rather he established a certain group of knights who are devoted to God and to his church in a special way, by an oath taken in the church. Therefore, their position within a Christian society is not directly analogous, if we take into account the dichotomy between clerics and laymen presented in this revelation. A monk belongs to a special group (*ordo*) within the status of the clergy (a two-level structure), while the knight belongs to a special group within the group of “defensores Ecclesiae,” which is a part of the status of laymen (a three-level structure).

The knight received a special kind of vestment from his *princeps*. This vestment, or *habitus*, is different from the clothes of other laymen,<sup>362</sup> and Birgitta states that it is a reminder to him that he has now abandoned his own will and must be obedient to his superior (II, 7. 32). This remark about “a habit” can also suggest that the knight was in fact a member of an *ordo* within the *status* of nobility, since “habitus” in Birgitta’s works is not a synonym for “clothing,” but rather a special

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<sup>362</sup> “Facta autem ista professione ad altare meum princeps sapienter considerans disposuit sibi habitum ab aliis secularibus distinctum, in signum abdicacionis voluntatis proprie et ut sciret se superiorem habere et debere ei obtemperare” (II, 7. 32).



vestment indicating the spiritual duties of the person wearing it. There are also different uses of this word in *Revelationes* (denoting manners or habits),<sup>363</sup> but if the expression is used to describe a kind of vestment, it is nearly always in the context of monastic or clerical clothing.<sup>364</sup> Here St. Birgitta could mean a special vestment of knights in general, distinguishing them from other laymen, or a more specific kind of vestment, characteristic only for knights who have taken the oath described above.

In book 2, the next five revelations following after II, 7 contain more detailed guidelines for Christian knights and some characteristics of knighthood. The possible key phrase for Birgitta's concept of knighthood is the idea of "vera militia." The knight described above, one of the "defenders of the Church" was "the first one to courageously establish the true knighthood" ("qui viriliter miliciam veram primo incepit" [II, 11. 2]). Birgitta also describes a wicked knight, who was the first to abandon this ideal ("de professione milicie institute ab amico meo primo recessit" [II, 8. 4]). He was faithful only to his own desires and lust of his body (II, 8.20). Birgitta then describes the final judgment of this knight, who was condemned as a traitor, since he "abandoned the professed service to God and joined our service" ("de milicia Dei professa se separavit et adhesit milicie nostre"), as the demons say (II, 9. 24).

In all of these revelations, Birgitta stresses the necessity of keeping faith with God, and she warns the Christian nobles against breaking their oath and, consequently, leaving the "militia Dei." It is noteworthy that Birgitta addresses her warnings to all knights, as they are all "defenders of

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<sup>363</sup> About a saintly married couple: "humilitatem cupiunt seruare interius in consciencia et exterius in habitu" (I, 26. 25).

<sup>364</sup> Eg. "Vestimentis ergo sanctificatis unus clericorum vocabit famulam Dei ad altare ante episcopum. Que nudis pedibus incedens et exterioribus vestimentis ante altare se exuens in una tunica remaneat consecratum habitum susceptura" (Reg. 11. 120); "Et ex habitu discernatur episcopalis auctoritas" (III, 1. 14).

the Church,”<sup>365</sup> but at the same time in revelation 2, 7, she apparently points to a special and more perfect group within the general category of knighthood.

The word “militia” itself has a very general meaning and may be translated as “fighting,”<sup>366</sup> an “army,” or “the noble class.” However, there also existed a specific theological concept of “militia,” a group of soldiers or knights devoted to spiritual tasks in a special way. Crusaders were called “militia Dei” or “militia Christi” by the authors of crusading chronicles,<sup>367</sup> despite the fact that earlier this expression was used in a quite different way: to describe the monastic status (opposed to “militia secularis,” the laymen).<sup>368</sup> In his famous book, *De laude novae militiae*, Bernard of Clairvaux linked the expression “nova militia” to the Templar Order. He confronted the poor condition of secular knighthood with the splendid mission and disposition of the Templars, an elite group among the knights.<sup>369</sup> With his powerful depiction of the downfall and regeneration of knighthood, he set a model for many future authors who would write about the Christian *militia*. We can thus assume that Birgitta uses this influential paradigm to depict the ideal Christian warrior contrasted with a traitor who abandoned his mission of *defensor Ecclesiae* and now serves only his own desires.

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<sup>365</sup>“Ergo, o milites, reuertimini ad me, patrem vestrum, qui cum caritate educaui vos! Considerate me, fratrem vestrum, pro vobis et vobiscum factum similem! Reuertimini ad me, pium dominum! Inhonestas quippe magna est alii domino dare fidem, alii obsequium. Vos enim michi dedistis fidem, quod defenderetis Ecclesiam meam, quod miseris subueniretis. Et ecce inimico meo datis obsequium, deponitis eciam vexillum meum et vexillum inimici mei erigitis!” (II, 12. 36-39).

<sup>366</sup> “Militia est vita hominis super terram” (Job 7:1).

<sup>367</sup> See for example: Robert the Monk, “Historia Iherosolimitana,” IV, 1, in: *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Historiens occidentaux*, vol. III (Farnborough: Gregg Press, 1967), 776.

<sup>368</sup> Jean Flori, *L'Essor de la Chevalerie. XIe – XIIe siècles* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1986), 191-192.

<sup>369</sup> Bernard de Clairvaux, “De laude novae militiae,” 3-6, in *Éloge de la nouvelle chevalerie: Vie de saint Malachie; Epitaphe, hymne, lettres* (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1990), 56-67.

In chapter 13 of book 2, we find a more detailed description of the ceremony of knightly vows. This time it is not a description of a past event or of an already existing rite, as in II, 7, but a guide for creating a new ceremony:

Dic ergo illi, qui miliciam suam ad me conuertere vellet, quod sub hac forma michi denuo placere posset. Quicumque enim miles fieri vellet, deberet cum equo suo et apparatu ad cimiterium procedere et ibi eum relinquere, quia equus non est creatus ad superbiam hominum sed ad vite utilitatem et defensionem et inimicorum Dei expugnacionem. (II, 13. 22–23)

Then follows a detailed description of the ceremony, which is to be performed by those who want to become members of the *vera militia*. The ceremony runs as follows. First, the knight is to dismount from his horse (this gesture is a symbol of humility [II, 13. 23]). Next, he enters the churchyard (cemetery) and puts on his cloak there. This gesture is interpreted in the text as a sign of his military profession, obedience, and service as a defender of the cross (II, 13. 24). Putting on a cloak, according to Birgitta, parallels the diaconal rite of putting on a stole (with the band placed over his forehead [II, 13. 24]). As he approaches the church, “a banner of secular power” is carried in front of him to remind him of his duty to obey all commands that do not oppose God (II, 13. 25). After he enters the cemetery, a banner with the image of Christ’s passion precedes him (II, 13. 26). Inside the church, only this second banner is still accompanying the knight, as secular power is subordinated to the divine one, and the spiritual things are more worth achieving than temporal goods (II, 13. 26). Then the Holy Mass begins and continues until the *Agnus Dei* is sung. Prior to this part of the Mass, the king (or some other lord, “*prelatus, scilicet rex vel alius*”) takes the oath of the knight (II, 13. 28). The knight swears to God and to the king to defend the faith of the Church and obey its prelates (*prelatis eius*) in everything that relates to God’s honor. He shall not

spare his life for the faith, fight God's enemies and defend His friends, help orphans and widows (II, 13. 29).

Compared to the knightly oath quoted in II, 7. 28–31, this one contains several matching elements, namely, the profession of defending the faith and the vow to protect widows, orphans, and all friends of God. However, in the first oath we do not find a pledge of obedience to the prelates of the church, found in the second one, only the general promise of “doing nothing that is contradictory to faith” (II, 7. 30). In the first formula, the knight swears obedience to the king or secular prince (*princeps*). However, according to both texts, no prelate of the church personally takes the oath of a knight; it is the king or another lord who celebrates the ceremony in both cases (II, 7. 24; II, 13. 28).

The interpretation of the ritual described in revelation II, 13 is quite challenging, as we do not have any proofs of this ceremony actually having been performed. The only information about a possible connection of the text to real life is given by the rubrics to *Revelationes*, which read that the knight, who was an addressee of Birgitta's vision, was most probably “creditor fuisse,” her son, Charles (Karolus) (II, 13. 40). We do not know, however, if he actually performed the rite.

Bridget Morris and Hans Cnatingius both suggest that the ceremony described above is Birgitta's proposal of a dubbing ritual that should take place in the context of a mass instead of being a purely secular ceremony.<sup>370</sup> According to Philippe Contamine, not all knights performed their dubbing ceremony in church. He also claims that the purely secular dubbing ceremonies were always more popular than the church ones,<sup>371</sup> so according to Morris and Cnatingius, the

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<sup>370</sup> Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999), 77-78; Hans Cnatingius, "The Order of the Knights of St. Bridget," *Annales Academiae Regiae Scientiarum Upsaliensis* 11 (1967): 30-31.

<sup>371</sup> Philip Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 277.

proposed ceremony would have been an attempt on Birgitta's part to "baptize" the secular rite of dubbing.

However, in the first part of the revelation St. Birgitta clearly stated that the ritual is to be performed by an actual knight, not by a candidate for knighthood. ("Dic ergo ilii, qui **miliciam suam** ad me conuertere vellet, quod sub hac forma michi **denuo** placere posset"; "say then to the man who wishes to **make his knighthood mine** that he can please me **again** in this way" II, 13.22 [emphasis mine]). Moreover, in the final part of the revelation Birgitta suggested that the ceremony's purpose is a renewal of vows already taken:

Quod si forte fuerit in campo et ibi pro honore meo et fide mea defendenda sumpserit miliciam, nichilominus ei prodest, si intencio fuerit recta. Ego denique in omni loco sum per potenciam meam, et omnes michi intencione recta et voluntate bona placere possunt. Ego autem sum caritas, et nullus ad me venire potest nisi qui habet caritatem. Ideo nullis precipio hoc facere, quia tunc seruirent michi ex timore. Sed quicumque vellent sic assumere miliciam, michi placere possent. Dignum quippe esset, ut, sicut per superbiam a vera professione milicie excessum est, sic per humilitatem ad vere milicie cultum se reuertere velle ostenderent. (II, 13. 36–39)

On the other hand, the description of the ceremony starts with the phrase, "Quicumque enim miles fieri vellet" ("Whoever wants to become a knight" [II, 13. 23]) and the king is expected to begin the formula of the oath by asking the knight: "Vis tu fieri miles?" ("Do you want to become a knight?" [II, 13. 28]). These two fragments may indicate that the ceremony could indeed be a rite of dubbing. Another clue to support this thesis is suggested by the gesture of the king, who, at the end of ceremony, is to place his hand on the knight's neck (II, 13. 32). A similar gesture, "a blow on the neck or cheek," of the new knight is considered as being typical for an accolade<sup>372</sup> or

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<sup>372</sup> Accolade, from Italian "accolata", derived from Latin "collum", the neck.

dubbing.<sup>373</sup> In *Revelationes*, however, we read about “placing a hand” (“manum imponat collo eius”), not “striking a blow” or “hitting.” It is thus also likely that this gesture is linked rather to the religious symbol of the neck as a sign of obedience. The stole, the part of the liturgical vestment placed around priest’s neck, symbolized obedience.<sup>374</sup> The gesture of the king has the same meaning, since it is followed by following words: “Ecce obediencie subiectus es et potestati. Vide ergo, ut, sicut ligasti te professione, sic impleas et opere!” (II, 13. 32).

Therefore, we can state that the text is again quite enigmatic, and that at least two interpretations of it are possible. The first potential interpretation: that the ceremony described above may be a replacement for some other dubbing ceremony of the same value, performed in the field (as suggested by Karl-Erik Löfqvist and Brigdet Morris).<sup>375</sup> In this case, it would be nothing more than one of the proposals for young people who are about to enter the knightly state of life. The second potential interpretation: that the ceremony is not a dubbing, but a renewal of an oath already taken, aimed at developing the spiritual life of a knight, performable both in church and on the battlefield (as the essential part of it is the good spiritual disposition of a man, not his external conditions). This interpretation is supported by Tore Nyberg in his article about *Nova militia*<sup>376</sup> and, to some extent, by Hans Cnattingius, who states that the ceremony described in II, 13 is a dubbing rite, but it is to be performed by “apostate knights who wish to turn back to Christ.”<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Marc Bloch, *Feudal society*, vol. II (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 312.

<sup>374</sup> “As touching that which agreeth unto the Head, even Christ, the Stole, as lying over the Amice on the Priest’s neck, doth signify that obedience and servitude which the Lord of ali things underwent in order to the salvation of His own son.” Guillaume Durand, *The Sacred Vestments: An English Rendering of the Third Book of the 'Rationale Divinorum Officiorum' of Durandus, Bishop of Mende* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1899), 45.

<sup>375</sup> Karl-Erik Löfqvist, *Om riddarväsen och frälse I nordisk medeltid* (Lund, 1935), 107-109; Morris, op.cit., 78.

<sup>376</sup> Nyberg, op. cit., 91-94.

<sup>377</sup> Cnattingius, op. cit., 30.

According to him, the ceremony is a kind of “re-dubbing,” but he rejects the opinion that this “re-dubbing” ceremony may be an initiation to a new knightly order.<sup>378</sup>

To give a credible answer to this question, some comparative material is needed. First we shall take a closer look at the liturgical formulas of dubbing (from the twelfth century onward) or benediction of the arms (which continues to the present day). This division is based on the structure of the subject established by Jean Flori, who states that the rite of dubbing evolved in the twelfth century from the rite of benediction of the arms.<sup>379</sup>

The emphasis St. Birgitta places on the importance of a knightly oath is quite noticeable. During the ceremony described in II, 13, a knight takes an oath of obedience to the king and to the “prelates of the Church” (II, 13. 29). An oath of obedience to the king or another leader was a part of the feudal system. We can expect this pledge in a secular rite of investiture of a vassal.<sup>380</sup> However, the formula of the oath was not a part of a church ceremony of blessing of a new knight or of the so called “ecclesiastical dubbing.”<sup>381</sup> It is not included in the ceremony of “*Benedictio novis militis*” found in *Pontificale* of Guillaume Durand from 1285, which was later incorporated into *Pontificale Romanum*. This ceremony is based on various benedictions (of the knight and his weapons) and gestures of acceptance, such as *osculum pacis* given by the celebrant priest, but does not include any formula for a pledge.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Cnatingius, loc. cit.

<sup>379</sup> Jean Flori, *L'Essor de la Chevalerie. XIe – XIIIe siècles* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1986), 43-115.

<sup>380</sup> François Louis Ganshof, *Feudalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 75-78.

<sup>381</sup> “On se ne connaît aucun rituel comportant une prestation de serments” (Flori, op. cit., 288).

<sup>382</sup> Michel Andrieu, ed., *Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand*, vol. 3 of *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen Age* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1965), 447-450.

Still, the lack of a formula does not necessarily imply the lack of an oath itself. John of Salisbury argues in *Policraticus* that knights were considered as bound by an oath of obedience to the church although they have not taken it *explicite*, in a verbal form. According to him, there was no custom of taking this kind of oath, although the gesture of placing the sword on the altar during the church ceremony of blessing was in fact identical with a “material” oath.<sup>383</sup>

Other differences that distinguish an ecclesiastical dubbing ceremony from Birgitta’s knightly rite are (1) the status of the celebrant person and (2) the lack of a formula for the benediction in the latter. Benediction is an essential part of the ecclesiastical dubbing, which includes a blessing of a sword and other weapons, of the knight himself and of the banner.<sup>384</sup> However, in the ceremony described by Birgitta, the simpler gesture of handing the weapons over by the king to the knight is chosen. If the ceremony indeed is a dubbing rite, this lack of a benediction would be a considerable difference and, from the point of view of liturgical history, even a regress when compared to other rites of “*benedictio novi militis*,” which developed from

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<sup>383</sup> “Though some of them do not regard themselves as bound to the Church by a solemn oath, because today by general custom no such oath is actually taken, yet there is none who is not in fact under an obligation to the Church by virtue of a tacit oath if not of an express one. And perchance the solemnity of the oath has been given up for precisely the reason that the requirements of their office and the sincerity of their faith are a sufficient inducement and guarantee of the same result. Whence the solemn custom has now taken root, that on the day on which a man is girt with the belt of a soldier he goes solemnly to the church, and placing his sword on the altar like a sacrificial offering, and making as it were a public profession, he dedicates himself to the service of the altar and vows to God the never-failing obedience of his sword, that is to say, of his performance of the duties of his office. Nor is it needful that this profession should be made expressly and in so many words, since the lawful profession of a soldier seems implicit in his act. Who would demand of an illiterate man whose duty is to know arms rather than letters, that he should make a profession in writing? Bishops and abbots are visibly bound to fidelity and obedience by a written or spoken profession; and they are truly bound, for it is not lawful to break faith with God. But it is surely an act of even greater, or at least of equal solemnity, which soldiers perform when they offer up not a parchment but their sword, and as it were redeem from the altar the first-fruits of their office; whereby they enter into the perpetual service of the Church; for as they must lawfully do all that in them lies for the Church, so it is not lawful for them to do aught against the Church.” John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VI, 10, trans. John Dickinson (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 203-204.

<sup>384</sup> Andrieu, loc.cit.



the rites of the benediction of arms.<sup>385</sup> There is a general consensus among scholars that ceremonies of this kind developed from purely secular rites of initiation of the young warrior into a Christian and, finally, an ecclesiastical ceremony.<sup>386</sup> Liturgical books from the twelfth century onward, such as the aforementioned *Pontificale* of Guillaume Durand and *Pontificale Romanum*, already present a liturgical rite of blessing for a new knight performed by the priest. Therefore, we can expect that if Birgitta wanted to establish a ceremony of ecclesiastical dubbing, she would probably leave the celebration to the priest and would include the blessing of the knight as well as his weapons. The lack of the benediction of arms could also mean that they were already blessed and that the knight performing the ceremony had been dubbed by that point.

In chapters ten and eleven of *Regula Salvatoris*, Birgitta described in detail a ceremony of monastic profession in the future Vadstena cloister. Its structure bears some similarities to the vows of a knight described above. Analyzing these parallels may help us to find more about the meaning of the knighthood ceremony. First, both ceremonies start outside the church: the knight leaves his horse and puts on the cloak in the churchyard (II, 13. 23). Comparatively, the new nun stands by the doors of the church and here answers some questions asked by the bishop concerning her motivation for entering the monastery and possible obstacles, such as a previous marriage or excommunication (Reg. 10. 104). Afterward, both the knight and the nun enter the church, preceded by a double banner: during monastic vows, it is a red banner with a depiction of the passion of Christ on one side and the Virgin Mary on the other side (Reg. 10. 107). In front of the knight, a banner of “secular power” is being carried, and while he enters the church, this banner is put aside and another one, “vexillum Dei,” goes before the knight to the altar (II, 13. 24–

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<sup>385</sup> Contamine, op.cit., 277; Flori, op.cit., 11.

<sup>386</sup> Flori, op. cit, 10.

25).<sup>387</sup> During the Mass, both the knight and the nun take an oath. A nun promises to be obedient to her superiors (prelates) and to the rule (Reg. 11. 112). A knight promises to be obedient to his superiors (prelates) and to defend the faith of the holy church (II, 13. 29). Both ceremonies include a ritual of obtaining new garments, which symbolize the duties and privileges of the new statuses of life: knightly and monastic. In the case of the knight, it is a cloak (II, 13. 33), but a habit in the case of the nun (Reg. 11. 118–139). Furthermore, the new nun receives a ring, similar to a wedding ring (Reg. 11. 117). The bishop, using a special benediction formula, blesses the ring before that (Reg. 10. 109). All parts of her monastic habit are similarly blessed before the nun puts them on. Conversely, the knightly ceremony does not include the benediction of the cloak and weapons the knight has obtained from the king. It is also probable that the cloak, which he puts on before entering the church, is the same one that he receives afterward from the king, since in the ceremony's description there is no mention of a different cloak. Both ceremonies finish with their main actors' receiving Holy Communion (II, 13. 34; Reg. 11. 141).

The similar composition of both ceremonies suggests that they have comparable meanings. The stages of the ceremony are very much alike in both cases: the beginning outside the church, the ceremonial entry of the main actor accompanied by a banner, the taking of an oath, the handing of vestments and attributes (the ring and the weapons), and the administration of Holy Communion as a final part of the ceremony. Alf Härdelin points out that at least one element, the double banner accompanying the knight and the new nun is unique to these two Brigittine ceremonies and we do not find it in other descriptions of medieval initiation rites. According to

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<sup>387</sup> We encounter a remark about a double banner in one more revelation, concerning a crusade planned by Magnus Eriksson: "Rex, qui luca animarum querit et ad paganos egredi voluerit, habeat duo vexilla. In primo vexillo depicta sit passio mea, que notat misericordiam, in secundo gladius iusticie mee. Veniens igitur rex ad paganos erigat primo primum vexillum misericordie, offerendo pacem eis. Qui si recipere noluerint, erigat postea vexillum iusticie" (VIII, 43. 1-2).

Härdelin's article describing Birgitta's concept of a nun, this may also point to a special correspondence between the Brigittine monastic vows and the knightly ceremony.<sup>388</sup>

There are also considerable differences between the two ceremonies. A complex ritual performed by the bishop accompanies the monastic vows. The ritual itself has much in common with the liturgy of the sacrament of marriage and has a very high, quasi-sacramental range (emphasized by the dignity of the celebrating prelate and the very ceremonial prayer formulas). The knighthood ceremony is much simpler. We can assume that it did not demand any changes in the ordinary celebration of the mass, except for the break prior to *Agnus Dei*, when the knight takes his oath. Moreover, it is clear that the monastic vows change not only the internal disposition, but also the social role of the woman taking them, whereas the knightly ceremony has apparently only a spiritual meaning and effect, since the text does not mention any particular social consequences of this rite.

In order to discover whether Birgitta intended to establish a new chivalric order, it will be useful to compare the ceremony described in *Revelationes* with the rites of religious vows taken by the members of military orders. Knights who were members of these orders normally took the three regular monastic vows (poverty, chastity, and obedience) and some additional vows. In the case of the Templar order, the supplementary vows extended the vow of obedience, but they were also connected with a specific military mission of the order: the Templar knights promised to "keep the customs of the order," to "help to conquer the Holy Land," "never to leave the order"

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<sup>388</sup> Alf Härdelin, "Guds brud och egendom. Om 'nunnebildnen' i Birgittinreglens nunnevigningsrit," in *Heliga Birgitta - budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991*, eds. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1993), 206-207.

and “never to deprive a Christian of his property.”<sup>389</sup> Hospitallers took the three regular vows and a pledge of service to the sick and poor.<sup>390</sup> The knights of the Order of St. James, who did not take the regular vows as they were allowed to have families, took the vow of obedience to their master according to the rule.<sup>391</sup> St. Birgitta, on the contrary, does not prescribe any particular vows of this kind in her ceremony. The rite described in revelation 2, 13 includes only a general promise of defending the faith and church and a vow of obedience to the king and church prelates, but does not mention a master of the order.

However, because her father, Birger Gudmarsson, was a secular member of the Hospitaller Order, Birgitta certainly was aware that even outside the group of those who professed military orders there were knights who had a special relationship to the defense of the Holy Church, although they did not take the three religious vows. Birger Gudmarsson is buried in the cloister of this order in Eskiltuna.<sup>392</sup> This kind of burial was a privilege of a secular member, or *confrater*. As a *confrater*, he took a vow to defend and protect the order of the Hospital and assumed financial responsibility for the order. If a Hospitaller *confrater* decided later to enter a religious order as a full member, it had to be the Order of the Hospital.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> “Reception into the Order,” 675-676, in *The Rule of the Templars: The French Text of the Rule of the Order of the Knights Templar*, trans. Judith Upton-Ward (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 169-174; see also “Penances,” op. cit., 81.

<sup>390</sup> Edwin J. King, ed., *The Rule, Statutes and Customs of the Hospitallers 1099-1310*, chapter “The Customs (Usances)” (New York: AMS Press, 1981), 193.

<sup>391</sup> Enrique Gallego Blanco, trans., *The Rule of the Spanish Military Order of St. James, 1170-1493: Latin and Spanish Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 153.

<sup>392</sup> Nyberg, op. cit., 96.

<sup>393</sup> King, op.cit., 194-195.

Another society of which Birgitta may have been aware is the aforementioned Order of St. James. Knights of this order protected pilgrim routes to Santiago de Compostela, and Birgitta would have been able to hear about or meet them during her pilgrimage to Spain in 1341–1342.<sup>394</sup>

In analyzing Birgitta's own text, we shall not find a definite answer to the question of whether she established a special society of knights or not. A detailed analysis of the actions taken in Birgitta's name in Sweden would be necessary to establish this positively or negatively. However, having analyzed the revelations that describe the rite of a specific knightly oath, we might propose two possible interpretations of this mysterious ceremonial: first, that it might be a dubbing ceremony; second, that it might be a rite of renewal of a knightly oath already taken and a pledge of special service for the Church.

We shall choose the second interpretation for the following reasons. First, the internal structure and contents of the text must be considered. St. Birgitta mentions several times that the main actor in this rite was already a knight. Second, this rite is significantly different from other ecclesiastical dubbing ceremonies. Third, it is comparable with (or even analogous to) the ceremony of monastic vows in the Order of the Most Holy Savior. Fourth, the considerable differences between the rites of acceptance into military orders and Birgitta's knightly rite do not allow us to regard these ceremonies as entirely parallel. Therefore, it is likely that Birgitta wanted to establish a special group of knights bound by an oath of fidelity to the church and to the king. However, the character of this society is uncertain. It may have been intended not as a regular military order with professed members, but rather as a lay fraternity.

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<sup>394</sup> Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999), 59-60.

### 2.3.5. Principles of Royal Power

In the sections above, we discussed the origin of royal power, which is a result of original sin but also a remedy for it (see section 2.1.2). Now we shall sketch a general picture of the principles of royal power in relation to God (in the first part of this paragraph) and to the people of the kingdom (in the second part), as presented in *Revelationes*. We shall set forth the king's relationship to God by analyzing Birgitta's revelations based on the two metaphors: the metaphor of light and the metaphor of a palace. In my opinion, these two images are particularly important for the subject, since they describe various aspects of the relationship between God and a Christian.

First, we shall discuss two revelations using the metaphor of light addressed to the Emperor Charles IV and to King Magnus Eriksson. The first of the discussed revelations was probably related to the meeting between the Pope Urban V and the Emperor Charles IV that occurred in Rome in 1368.<sup>395</sup> This event was highly significant for Birgitta, since in one of her revelations Christ commanded her to go to Rome and, in the name of God, urge the pope and the emperor to reform the Christian world and end the Avignon Captivity (Extrav. 8). After fifteen years spent in Rome, she actually witnessed their meeting.

The discussed revelation was mostly aimed at gaining the emperor's support for the planned establishment of the new monastic order, Ordo Santissimi Salvatoris. Unfortunately, we do not know how Charles IV reacted to this message. However, we can suppose his positive response, as he supported Birgitta's canonization process that began soon after her death.<sup>396</sup> The

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<sup>395</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1971), 92.

<sup>396</sup> Klockars, op. cit., 91-94.

second revelation, addressed to Magnus Eriksson, is dated before 1349, when Birgitta was still actively involved in the Swedish court.

We will begin our analysis from the later text, addressed to Charles IV. The entire revelation reads as follows:

Loquebatur Christus ad sponsam dicens: "Scribe ex parte mea imperatori verba hec: Ego sum lux illa, que illuminaui omnia, quando tenebre operiebant omnia. Ego sum etiam lux illa, que, inuisibilis per deitatem, visibilis vero apparui per humanitatem. Ego sum etiam lux, que te quasi speciale lumen constitui in mundo, ut in te inueniretur maior iusticia pre aliis, et ut tu dirigeres omnes ad iusticiam et pietatem. Ideo significo tibi ego, vera lux, qui te ascendere feci ad sedem imperialem: Quia sic placet michi, loquor cum una femina verba iusticie et misericordie mee. Suscipe igitur illa verba librorum, que ipsa mulier scripsit de ore meo, et perscrutare illa et labora, ut iusticia mea timeatur et misericordia mea discrete desideretur. Scias etiam tu, qui imperium tenes, quod ego, omnium conditor, dictaui unam regulam monialium ad honorem amantissime virginis matris mee et dedi illam isti mulieri, que scribit tibi. Perlege igitur eam et conare cum summo pontifice, ut dicta regula, ore meo proprio dictata, per eum, qui in mundo vicarius meus est, etiam apud homines approbetur, quam ego Deus coram exercitu meo celesti approbaui." (Extrav. 42. 1–6)

The idea of describing God as light and a source of light has strong roots in the Christian tradition. It seems that for St. Birgitta the main inspiration here was the Gospel of St. John. One can say that the first phrase of Birgitta's revelation is extracted from St. John's theology: "Ego sum lux illa, que illuminaui omnia, quando tenebre operiebant omnia," writes St. Birgitta (Extrav. 42. 1). And in the prologue of St. John's Gospel, the Savior is portrayed as both Word and "the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (Joh 1:9). The Light existed "in the beginning" and it continuously "shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (Joh 1:5).

The next part of this phrase has a less scriptural and more philosophical character, as Birgitta here mentions "invisible light": "Ego sum etiam lux illa, que, inuisibilis per deitatem, visibilis vero apparui per humanitatem" (Extrav. 42. 2). This expression, clearly of Neoplatonic

origin, recalls the conception of celestial hierarchy, which embraces all of heaven and earth.

According to Plotinus, God emanated from himself the whole world of beings. God (the One) is compared to the sun. His first emanation was *Nous*: entirely spiritual, invisible light. Visible light is considered here as being of a similar nature to the invisible one, but of a lower status. All beings therefore emanate from the higher level of the hierarchy: *Nous* from the One, and all the lower creatures, including the human soul, from *Nous*.<sup>397</sup> In the Christian interpretation, done mostly by Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, Invisible Light can be identified with God.<sup>398</sup> By his incarnation, he descended to the lower level of the hierarchy and became visible as a man. By using this terminology St. Birgitta shows her awareness of the Neoplatonic tradition, although its use does not imply her direct knowledge of Plotinus or Areopagite. She may have read or heard, for example, Gregory the Great's *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, which also mention "invisible light" ("lumen invisibile").<sup>399</sup> According to Birgit Klockars, there is nothing to indicate that Birgitta read the works of Dionysius herself, although she does use some concepts derived from these works, which became well-known in the medieval Latin-speaking West, such as "nine choirs of angels" and the idea of progressing through the stages of knowledge.<sup>400</sup> In my opinion, it would be

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<sup>397</sup> "The Intellectual-Principle stands as the image of The One, firstly because there is a certain necessity that the first should have its offspring, carrying onward much of its quality, in other words that there be something in its likeness as the sun's rays tell of the sun . . . the thought of the Divine Mind must be a substantial existence: such then is that [Soul] which circles about the Divine Mind, its light, its image inseparably attached to it: on the upper level united with it, filled from it, enjoying it, participant in its nature, intellectual with it, but on the lower level in contact with the realm beneath itself." Plotinus, *The Six Enneads* V. 1. 7. (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), 375-377.

<sup>398</sup> "Light comes from the Good, and light is an image of this archetypal Good. Thus the Good is also praised by the name *Light*. Just as an archetype is revealed in its image. The goodness of the transcendent God reaches from the highest and most perfect forms of being to the very lowest." Pseudo-Dionysius Aeropagite, "The Divine Names," 4, 4, in *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 74.

<sup>399</sup> In a bit different sense however: Gregory means mystical light illuminating the soul. Gregory the Great, *Homélie sur Ezéchiél II*, II, 5, 17-18 (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1990), 260-264.

<sup>400</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna: En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 223-226, 233.



appropriate to add the concept of light as a source of justice and wisdom transferred from God through the stages of human hierarchy. This idea will be explained below.

What does it mean to be a “special light” established by God? “Ego sum etiam lux, que te quasi speciale lumen constitui in mundo,” says Christ to the emperor (Extrav. 42. 2). This characteristic of the emperor follows immediately after Christ introduces himself. The structure of Christ’s speech indicates, therefore, that the emperor obtains his identity only in relation to Christ, who created him. The emperor is an “emanation” of Christ: he is a light, but only a light proceeding from the unique source of all light—from God himself.

People who have been given a special mission from God are also described in *Revelationes* as lights proceeding from Him. Birgitta refers to the Virgin Mary and other saints in this way. Mary praises her son with these words:

Benedictum sit nomen tuum, fili mi, sine fine cum deitate tua, que est sine principio et sine fine! . . . Virtus tua est quasi lumen solis, quod lucet in celis et terram sua luce replet. Sic virtus tua supera et infera saciat et omnia replet. Ideo sis tu benedictus, fili mi, qui es Deus meus et Dominus meus! (I, 50. 1 and 6)

And he immediately answers, praising her virtues:

Tu es quasi aurora procedens cum serenitate. Tu radiasti super omnes celos; lux tua et serenitas tua excessit omnes angelos. Tu attraxisti ad te serenitate tua solem verum, id est deitatem meam, in tantum, quod sol deitatis mee veniens in te fixit se in te, ex cuius calore calefacta es super omnes caritate mea, ex cuius splendore illuminata es plus omnibus sapientia mea. (I, 50. 7–8)

Mary’s splendor is here described as a reflection of God’s glory. Birgitta compares God’s glory and other attributes to fire and light, and the Virgin Mary resembles her Son in these qualities, just as he resembled her in his human nature. Mary is not described as a separate deity, but as a human who was enlightened and changed by the power of God.

The same is true of other saints. In a revelation that Birgitta experienced by the tomb of St. Thomas the apostle, Christ says: “Dixi tibi prius, quod sanctus Thomas apostolus meus erat thesaurus meus. Hoc utique verum est. Nam ipse Thomas est vere lux mundi, sed homines magis diligunt tenebras quam lucem” (VII, 4. 20). The apostle is also described as a light. It is possible to connect this verse with the words Christ addressed to His followers: “you are the light of the world” (Mat 5:14). The next part of this phrase also appears to be an allusion to the Gospel of John: “the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light: for their works were evil.” (Joh 3:19). In the Gospel of John, this sentence refers to the Savior. Therefore, the apostle Thomas as described in *Revelationes* reflects and continues the mission of Christ, being a light proceeding from him.

Birgitta presents the function of the emperor as being analogical to that of Mary and Thomas. He is also described as a light proceeding from God, but he is supposed to imitate and continue the mission of Christ in his own way. God has established him as emperor “to be more righteous than the others and to direct everyone toward justice and piety” (Extrav. 47. 2). It appears, therefore, that his mission is particularly associated with justice.

This message from St. Birgitta was probably no surprise to Charles IV. Many political theorists—among them John of Paris, Thomas Aquinas, and Aegidius Romanus—describe the role of a ruler as being an “animated justice” or “animated law,” or a personification of law and justice.<sup>401</sup> The predecessors of Charles IV (such as Frederick II) used the prophetic title “Sol

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<sup>401</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 132-135.

lustitiae,” meaning “Sun of Justice,”<sup>402</sup> a term originally applied to the Messiah in the book of

Malachi:

For behold the day shall come kindled as a furnace: and all the proud, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall set them on fire, saith the Lord of hosts, it shall not leave them root, nor branch. But unto you that fear my name, the Sun of justice shall arise, and health in his wings: and you shall go forth, and shall leap like calves of the herd. (Mal 4:1–2)

Charles IV himself, in his *Golden Bull*, reminds the electors about the necessity of spiritual illumination during the election of emperor:

After, moreover, the oft-mentioned electors or their envoys shall have entered the city of Frankfort, they shall straightway on the following day at dawn, in the church of St. Bartholomew the apostle, in the presence of all of them cause a mass to be sung to the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit himself may illumine their hearts and infuse the light of his virtue into their senses; so that they, armed with his protection, may be able to elect a just, good and useful man as king of the Romans and future emperor, and as a safeguard for the people of Christ.<sup>403</sup>

According to the bull, illumination is necessary to choose a “just, good and useful”<sup>404</sup> man as future emperor. We can also suppose that the light of the Holy Spirit should accompany the future emperor during his reign.

According to Birgitta, the second important function of the emperor, after being a reflection of God’s glory and righteousness, is to lead his people toward justice and piety (Extrav. 42. 2). In other words, they are to share his lightness like the sun does. We shall continue the analysis of this topic below when discussing the second revelation. Now the remark about the

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<sup>402</sup> Kantorowicz, op. cit., 102.

<sup>403</sup> Charles IV, “Golden Bull” 2, 1, in *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, trans. and ed. by Ernest F. Henderson (London: George Bell and Son, 1903), 229.

<sup>404</sup> Henderson, loc. cit.

virtue of “pietas,” which ought to characterize the emperor, leads us to the third important aspect of the solar symbolism in this revelation.

According to the Roman tradition continued to some extent by Christian ascetics, “piety” or devotion is a kind of love that requires a sense of duty: somebody who possesses this virtue loves and respects his parents, teachers, or home country.<sup>405</sup> Analogically, the emperor ought to love and respect God, and the people of the empire should respect their emperor. The virtue of piety can be only understood within some hierarchy, or in a society in which members keep strong ties between each other. “Piety” is denotation of the symbol of light proceeding from the upper level of the hierarchy and descending to lower levels. Those who stand on the lower level ought to have devotion toward the more perfect ones. The descending movement of the emanations has its parallel in the ascending steps of devotion.

I put forward, therefore, that that the central idea of this revelation is the performance of emperor and Birgitta herself within ecclesiastical hierarchy. She stands on a low level of this hierarchy, being a woman (Extrav. 42. 3) and deprived of any ecclesiastical or political office. God speaks to her only “because he wants to” (“Quia sic placet michi,” as Christ says [Extrav. 42. 3]). Nevertheless, she perceives herself as one receiving a message from God, and so she must spread the message among the Christians: the fact that she addressed the emperor with her revelation suggests such interpretation. That is why she needs assistance from the emperor: he is the light and he is expected to share his illumination with all his subjects. According to *Heavenly Hierarchy*, a member of the hierarchy can only communicate with those standing directly above or below

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<sup>405</sup> Cicero defined “pietas” as “the feeling which renders kind offices and loving service to one’s kin and country.” Ambrose slightly modified this definition for the needs of Christian audience: he put the service to God first. James D. Garrison, *Pietas from Vergil to Dryden* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 10, 33-34.

him, not with the whole range of the hierarchy.<sup>406</sup> If we assume that this Dionysian trend had some influence on Birgitta's thought, we can suggest that the emperor was able to pass Birgitta's message to the pope, another ruler of the Christian world, as they both have a very high status in the Christian chain of command. We can also suppose that the emperor, as the "special light" placed at the top of hierarchy, should be able to communicate with God directly. Despite this, their communication takes place through Birgitta's mediation (Extrav. 42. 3), but this mediation cannot be understood as breaking the hierarchy. If that were the case, she would not require the emperor's acceptance of her ideas. Her position is therefore exceptional, as she is outside the ordinary chain of ecclesiastical command and communication (her voice comes directly from God, who, in her own opinion, dictated to her the words: "Scribe ex parte mea imperatori verba hec" [Extrav. 42. 2]), but she still she acts within the rules of church and political hierarchy, since she perceives the emperor's acceptance of her ideas as essential.

God's expectations from the emperor are explained in the second part of the revelation (Extrav. 42. 5–6). The emperor ought to accept and support the new monastic rule dictated by Christ. The rule must be approved by the pope, Christ's vicar, and by the people, as it is already approved in heaven by God and the heavenly host: "per eum, qui in mundo vicarius meus est, eciam apud homines approbetur, quam ego Deus coram exercitu meo celesti approbauit" (Extrav. 42. 6). This reason for the pope's approval of the rule is quite noteworthy: The church on earth should confirm the event (approving the rule) which already took place in heaven. In fact, the general character of the emperor's mission can be also described in these terms. As a light from God, he must act "on earth, as it is in heaven" (Mat 6:10).

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<sup>406</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius Aeropagite, "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy," 1, 1-3, in *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987), 195-198.

The second revelation (VIII, 31) concerns the king of Sweden. Its character and tone are much different from the previous one. It is not a request to the king, but rather a prophetic vision that concerns him without addressing him directly. This text has a more symbolic character than the first one, but its apocalyptic symbolism is explained within the text itself. Sun and moon represent the king and queen of Sweden. They are both depicted as being denigrated, because their “manners and will changed” (VIII, 31. 7). They gave up their power to some vicious advisor, who is compared to the dragon (VIII, 31. 7–8). Christ announced that this man is to be soon overthrown and so is the royal couple (VIII, 31. 8–9).

I posit that the solar symbols used in this revelation are based on a different biblical source: here the Revelation of St. John is concerned, rather than his Gospel. The scene is built on images and symbols taken from the description of the final struggle between the woman and the Dragon (Rev 12)—thematically similar to sun and moon imagery,<sup>407</sup> the fight in heaven between good and evil angels,<sup>408</sup> the dragon,<sup>409</sup> and serpents attacking people on earth.<sup>410</sup>

In this text Birgitta emphasizes the consequences of royal sin. When sun and moon do not shine over the earth, the whole kingdom with all its inhabitants falls into chaos (VIII, 31. 6). To other eyewitnesses of Swedish politics of that time, the connection between the king’s fault and his country’s collapse may not seem so obvious, but St. Birgitta catches the reason that is most important to her at a glance. She ignores the more detailed causes of the crisis such as economic and political problems. The responsibility that fell upon the royal couple is therefore direct and

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<sup>407</sup> VIII, 31. 1-4 & 7; see: Rev 12:1.

<sup>408</sup> VIII, 31. 2 & 8; see: Rev 12:7-8.

<sup>409</sup> VIII, 31. 2 & 7-8; see: Rev 12:3-4.

<sup>410</sup> VIII, 31. 4; see: Rev 12:17-18.

very heavy. We can interpret the reason for this responsibility in the following way: when they lost contact with God, the source of light, they were no longer able to pass down the light to their people. As a consequence, they had to be deprived of their lordship, as they were unable to perform God's justice.

The most remarkable element of this revelation, compared with the previous one, is its dramatic, apocalyptic tone. Birgitta apparently sees the politics of Sweden in categories of universal struggle between Good and Evil (see section 5.2.). For this reason, she ascribes great responsibility to the Christian king, comparing him to the sun. In this aspect, a book written by her friend and confessor Magister Mathias of Linköping may have inspired her.

In chapter twelve of the biblical book of Revelation, relating the struggle between a woman and a dragon, there is no mention of the fall of sun and moon. They only appear in connection with the woman "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet" (Rev 12:1). In chapter six, however, we find the following description: "the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood" (Rev 6:12). Magister Mathias in his commentary on the book of Revelation interpreted the sun as the prelates of the church, whose mission is to enlighten Christians with the light of divine wisdom. However, he says that they have since abandoned their duty. They grew ignorant and negligent of divine things, so they became "black as a sackcloth." According to Mathias, the moon here represents laymen who are taught by clergy as the light of the sun is reflected by the moon.<sup>411</sup> A very similar interpretation is found in his commentary on chapter eight. In Apocalypse we read that on the sound of the fourth trumpet, the "third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars" (Rev 8:12).

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<sup>411</sup> Mathias of Linköping, *Expositio super Apocalypsim*, VI, 140-145 (Uppsala: Universitetsstryckeriet, 2003), 198.

Magister Mathias interpreted the sun as the major prelates of the church, the moon as the clergymen of “middle dignity,” and the stars as ordinary priests. They should all be trained in three kinds of science: theology, the law of the church, and its practical interpretations or “institutions.” Canons and institutions without theology are like a body without head, but unfortunately clergymen in Mathias’ times were ignorant of theology. This ignorance is represented by the smiting of the third part of sun, moon and stars.<sup>412</sup>

In Birgitta’s solar symbolism, we find similar principles of interpretation: sun and moon denote upper-level members of the hierarchy who are given some special ability and grace that they were supposed to share with those who stand on lower levels. Both Mathias and Birgitta (in VIII, 31. 7) judge those people as negligent and sinful. There are, however, significant differences between the two authors. Birgitta uses solar symbolism to describe political, not ecclesiastical, hierarchy. Her vision concerns the kingdom of Sweden, not the entire world. Moreover, she goes further than Mathias in her visionary announcements, as she speaks in the name of God and foretells some future events, while he gives a diagnosis of the present situation from a preacher’s point of view, focusing on the given text from the book of Apocalypse, not on the political events themselves.<sup>413</sup>

The other important metaphor describing the principles of royal power is that of a palace. Book 8 of *Revelationes* starts with a solemn proclamation of God’s power. Birgitta describes her vision of the heavenly palace, where figures in white robes surround the throne of almighty Lord (VIII, 1. 1). By his throne stands a Virgin wearing a beautiful crown (VIII, 1. 3). All those who stand

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<sup>412</sup> Mathias of Linköping, op. cit., VIII, 96-109, 244-245.

<sup>413</sup> See also: Anders Piltz, “Uppenbarelsererna och uppenbarelsen. Birgittas förhållande til Bibeln,” in *Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1991), 463-464.



around the throne praise and glorify the Lord, honoring the Virgin as the queen of heaven (VIII, 1. 4). In this introduction, we can already see this report's most characteristic feature: that God is not alone, and that he in some way shares his unique power and glory with the creatures (Mary and the saints). This feature is explained in the following source of the revelation as grounded in the inner nature of God, who is one but in three persons:

Deus est ipsa potencia, ipsa sapiencia, ipsa bonitas, a quo est omnis potestas infra celum et supra, omnis sapiencia et omnis pietas, que posset cogitari. Itaque Deus trinus est et unus: trinus in personis, unus in natura. Nam potencia et sapiencia est Pater, a quo sunt omnia, et qui est ante omnia potens, non aliunde sed a seipso et eternaliter. Potencia et sapiencia eciam Filius equalis Patri, non a seipso potens sed a Patre potenter et ineffabiliter genitus, principium de principio et a Patre numquam separatum. Potencia et sapiencia eciam Spiritus Sanctus, a Patre et Filio procedens, eternus cum Patre et Filio et equalis in maiestate et potestate. (VIII, 1. 6–10)

According to this text, all three persons of the Trinity are powerful and operate as one, although each of them takes part in this unique power in a special way: the Father is the source of all power, the Son is not powerful by himself but is born of the Father, so His power comes from the Father; and the Holy Spirit is equal to them in power and majesty. Therefore, we can understand that the power of God has a “communicative” nature: we may say that this power is here depicted as “circulating” among the Holy Persons of the Trinity. This concise Trinitarian description is followed in Birgitta's vision by a depiction of the incarnation of Christ. God the Son, who governs and sustains everything (VIII, 1. 20), became the son of Mary thanks to the Holy Spirit (VIII, 1. 15), and acts miraculously in the soul of Birgitta, being both human and divine (VIII, 1. 17). We can thus understand that “the Powerful One” became human, but the incarnation itself was a sign of his power, since he can now communicate with Birgitta and reign over her soul in a unique way (VIII, 1. 21).

The above vision of the heavenly palace serves as the solemn opening to *Liber ad reges*. Therefore, it would be reasonable to interpret this description of God's power as communicating to the reader that God is the most important point of reference for a Christian king. This vision, which, unlike many other revelations found in *Liber ad reges*, is not repeated in any other book of *Revelationes*, continues with another solemn declaration of Christ's lordship starting from verse 24:

Ego etiam sum rex corone. Numquid, sponsa mea, scis tu, quare dixerim 'rex corone'? Certe deitas mea sine principio erat et sine fine erit et est. Hec igitur deitas merito corone assimilatur, quia corona sine principio et sine fine est. Sicut autem in regno corona seruatur regi futuro, sic deitas mea seruabatur humanitati mee, qua ipsa coronaretur (VIII, 1. 24–25).

By comparing his deity to a crown, Christ introduces the idea of continuity belonging to his lordship: his deity is eternal and it "served" his human nature, like a crown "serves" a new king. In a way, his divine kingship is "continued" in his human nature, which was "crowned" by the divine nature (VIII, 1. 25). This passage is immediately followed by the fragment about the two "good servants of Christ," the apostles Peter and Paul who stand for clerics and laymen, which we already know from chapter 7, book 2 (VIII, 1. 27–34). This time, however, the function of this short text is very different. By placing it in a new context, the editor calls up the image of divine kingship which is, to some extent, "continued" by the two apostles:

Ecce, qualem caritatem cum istis duobus feci! Nam Petro dedi claues regni celorum, ut quecumque ligaret et solueret in terra ligata et soluta essent in celis. Paulo vero dedi, ut similis Petro fieret in gloria et honore. (VIII, 1.29)

In revelation 2, 7 however, the two apostles stand for "many friends of Christ" ("Sed licet istos duos expresse nominauerim, tamen cum eis et in eis alios amicos meos intelligo" [II, 7. 9]) and the context allows for interpreting Peter and Paul as symbols of all clerics and all laymen. In *Liber ad*

*reges*, however, a considerable change in this text is made: “Sed licet istos duos expresse nominavi, tamen in eis et cum eis alios pontifices et reges et amicos meos intelligo” (VIII, 1. 30). The power of God is thus shared with people, but not with all of them or with some unidentified “friends of God,” but with people who hold a particular place in a Christian society: with popes and kings, whom Peter and Paul represent. The position of a Christian ruler set forth in this revelation thus can be described as that of a special “servant” of God. The power of a Christian ruler, both secular and ecclesiastical, is made legitimate by taking part in the “communicative” nature of God’s lordship.

On the other hand, in the same revelation and in the next one, we read that Christ is the only Lord and the only one who may be rightfully called “the King”: “Ego sum verus rex et nullus est dignus vocari rex nisi ego” (VIII, 2. 1).<sup>414</sup> In the same verse, however, Christ declares that all power comes from him: “a me est omnis honor et potestas” (VIII, 2. 1), so it is shared with certain people. Still, the first statement taken out of its context could convey a rejection of royal power. However, if we compare it to similar remarks found in the New Testament, we can deduce a different meaning. In the New Testament we find a number of passages ascribing a feature or an attribute exclusively to God, such as Jesus’s statement, “None is good but one, that is God,” (Mar 10:18). He also forbade his disciples to call themselves “masters” or “fathers”:

But be not you called Rabbi. For one is your master; and all you are brethren. And call none your father upon earth; for one is your father, who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your master, Christ. (Mat 23:8–10)

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<sup>414</sup> “Ideo ego verus sum dominus, nec aliquis vere dominus dicendus est nisi ego solus, quia a me est omnis potestas et dominatio, et potencie mee nullus resistere poterit” (VIII, 1. 23).

In St. Paul's epistle to Timothy, Jesus is called the only mediator between God and man (1Ti 2:5). Finally, in the book of Apocalypse a choir of holy men sings the glory of God, who is the only Holy one ("solus sanctus"): "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and magnify thy name? For thou only art holy" (Rev 15:4). However, in other passages of the same books of Scripture, such titles are ascribed to people. In Apocalypse, those who sing are also called "sancti" (Rev 15:1). St. Paul calls himself "the teacher of the gentiles" (1Ti 2:7) and "teacher of the Gospel" (2Ti 1:11). He also feels himself the spiritual father of the Christians at Corinth: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1Co 4:15), though he must have known Jesus' words prohibiting his disciples from using these titles. Many Catholic authors, such as St. Jerome, explain the significance of this seeming contradiction by stressing the deeper meaning of each of the titles and distinguishing this deeper meaning from common sense. All of these titles (teacher, saint, etc.) are attributed only to God in a proper sense, as he is the source of all good things. However, people are apparently welcomed and invited to imitate his characteristics and participate in them.<sup>415</sup>

In the same manner, St. Birgitta speaks about kingship and rule: "Ego sum verus rex et nullus est dignus vocari rex nisi ego" (VIII, 2. 1). Still, she does not hesitate to call Magnus Eriksson "the king of Sweden" in the same revelation (VIII, 2. 5). Therefore, if we assume that Catholic

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<sup>415</sup> "Nec magister, nec pater vocandus est alius, nisi Deus Pater et Dominus noster Jesus Christus. Pater, quia ex ipso sunt omnia. Magister, quia per ipsum omnia: vel quoniam per dispensationem carnis ejus, omnes reconciliati sumus Deo. Quaeritur quare adversum hoc praeceptum, doctorem gentium Apostolus se esse dixerit; aut quomodo vulgato sermone, maxime in Palaestina et Aegypti monasteriis se invicem Patres vocent? Quod sic solvitur: Aliud esse natura patrem vel magistrum, aliud indulgentia. Nos si hominem patrem vocamus, honorem aetati deferimus, non auctorem nostrae ostendimus vitae. Magister quoque dicitur ex consortio veri magistri. Et ne infinita replicem, quomodo unus per naturam Deus et unus Filius, non praejudicat caeteris ne per adoptionem dii [A]. dei] vocentur, et filii: ita et unus et pater et magister, non praejudicat aliis, ut abusive appellentur patres et magistri." Jerome, *Commentariorum in Matheum libri IV*, IV, 114-128, ed. D. Hurst and M. Adriaen (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), 213.

theology has inspired this practice of combining the two seemingly contradictory statements about the title of “king,” we can also suppose that in the phrase “aliquis vere dominus dicendus est nisi ego solus” addressed to the Christian king and “dominus” (since *Liber ad reges* is addressed to Christian kings), a certain theological message may be emerging: that the Christian king takes his power and majesty from God and in some way represents God to people.

To conclude, we may say that Birgitta describes Christian royal power as “transmitted” hierarchically, with a king or an emperor placed on the top of this hierarchy. However, he is by no means independent, since his prerogatives come directly from God in a manner of light or grace (Extrav. 42). In *Revelationes*, the “transmission” of power is described analogically as conveying grace among the friends of God (saints). Grace is also compared to light, which comes from God (I, 50. 7–8; VII, 4. 20). This analogy suggests that, according to Birgitta, power and honor are also a kind of grace given to Christian rulers.

A king is described in *Revelationes* as a “servant of God.” He is expected to share the “light” of kingship with his subjects, governing them justly and with mercy (see below). According to the above-analyzed revelation (VIII. 31), Birgitta expects that the Christian ruler will also conform to the advice given by her, and presents herself as a mediator between Christ and the ruler. If a king fails to “share the illumination” of God and becomes sinful, God will eventually overthrow him, as he has become “denigrated” and does not participate in hierarchy of legitimate, divinely-inspired government anymore. From the point of view of this principle of royal power, a sinful king who rebels against God becomes a usurper.

This “diffusive” and hierarchical nature of royal power to some extent results from the nature of God, the source of kingship, who is not a monad but a Trinity, a community of three

persons. In the solemn opening of *Liber ad reges* (VIII, 1) we read that God is surrounded by his “court,” Mary and the saints, who also in their own way participate in executing Christ’s kingship (Mary is “honored as queen of heaven” [VIII, 1. 4]). Christ himself, as the second person of the Holy Trinity, “non a seipso potens sed a Patre potenter et ineffabiliter genitus,” (VIII, 1. 9) performs with power given to him by his Father.

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In the last part of this section, we shall focus on the principles governing the relationship between a Christian ruler and his subjects. Generally, Birgitta placed the king in relation to the community of the kingdom using the following expressions: the king relates to the people (“Quid vero regnum nisi populus ei subiectus?” [VIII, 41. 10]), to the community (“communitas regni” [VIII, 41. 28]), and to the “kingdom” or the “crown” (“corona”). The latter expression is the most abstract. It describes the whole land and goods of the kingdom, which belong to its inhabitants, not to the king. He is not allowed to alienate any part of it or to conquer lands that do not belong to “corona.” If some previous king alienated any lands, he is obliged to take them back (VIII, 41. 9). “Corona” also means royal power (“postestas regalis” [IV, 3. 10]): Birgitta warns King Magnus that if he rejects God’s commands and advice God can “vocare eum sub coronam,” that is, deprive him of his royal power.<sup>416</sup>

What then is the purpose of royal government according to *Revelationes*? In *Liber ad reges* we find the following answer: “rex a Deo constituitur ad iudicandum et regendum iuste” (VIII, 3. 1). In this short sentence, Birgitta summarizes the relationship between a king and God as well as between a king and his subjects: a king is “established by God” in order to “rule judge and rule

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<sup>416</sup> IV, 55. 5; VIII, 20. 8; VIII, 31, 9; VIII, 49, 16; Extrav. 74. 7.

justly.” Ingvar Fogelqvist analyzed these two aspects of a ruler’s attitude toward the community. According to him, Birgitta distinguished between the two types of justice: distributive justice and legal justice or just judgment (or “commutative justice,” using the terms of Aquinas, whose text is a source for this particular distinction).<sup>417</sup> The first type of justice (distributive justice) concerns the order of the community in relation to each single person, while the second (legal or commutative justice) concerns the mutual dealings between two persons. According to Fogelqvist, Birgitta means “legal justice” when she speaks about “just judgment,” while “distributive justice” is denoted by “just rule.”<sup>418</sup> Because of his elevated position, a king is thus placed in the center of both the legal system and the administration of the country.<sup>419</sup>

Birgitta distinguished between four kinds of laws altogether: the three “man-made” laws and the spiritual or divine law:

Tres leges sunt. Una est Ecclesie, secunda est imperatoris, tertia est communitatis. Iste omnes leges scribuntur in pellibus animalium mortuorum. Sed est alia lex spiritualis, que non scribitur in pellibus sed in libro vite, que numquam perditur nec vetustate corrumpitur, numquam habetur tedio nec cum difficultate possidetur. Omnis itaque lex bona ordinari debet ad salutem anime et ad precepta Dei perficienda et ad desideria mala fugienda et ad bona opera, que desiderari discrete debent, querenda. (IV, 111. 1–3)

According to this fragment, the Christian ruler is obliged to keep the law of the kingdom (“lex communitatis”), the law of the church (“lex Ecclesie”), and, most of all, the spiritual law. “Lex imperatoris”—which, according to Sven-Erik Pernler and Birgit Klockars, is to be understood as Roman law—may be considered as superior to country regulations in this system, since in the

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<sup>417</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* II-II q. 61, a. 1.

<sup>418</sup> Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), 174.

<sup>419</sup> See also: Fogelqvist, *op. cit.*, 173-183.

Nordic countries it was known that in some cases the Roman emperor could act as the highest authority.<sup>420</sup>

Birgitta presents divine law as superior over all three “man-made” legal systems and the link between “lex Dei” and the country regulations is very close. Among her advice for Magnus Eriksson we find the following fragment:

Nonum est, quod legem Dei non transgrediatur nec nouas inducat consuetudines contra statuta laudabilia, nec potestatiue disponat et iudicet que occurrunt menti eius. Sed iuste secundum legem Dei et regni agat omnia, quia non decet regem multa precipere et nichil agere iusticiamque relinquere et crudeliter imperare. (VIII, 2. 24–25)

The king is thus not allowed to create new regulations according to his desires or to force his cruel commands contrary to God’s will. He must conform both to the “statutes” and the “customs” of the country, but respecting these laws is in fact his way of showing respect for the divine law, since the king is given the following advice:

Si iste rex velit me honorare, minuat primo dedecus meum et augeat honorem meum. Dedecus quippe meum est, quod precepta mea, que precepi, et verba, que personaliter locutus fui, contempnuntur et quasi a pluribus pro nichilo reputantur. (VIII, 7. 1)

Moreover, a Christian ruler is described not as a “lord” (“dominus”) of the crown but as its “governor” (“rector”), “conservator and defender” (“conseruator et defensor corone”) (VIII, 41.11, 14). The “lord,” the only true sovereign, would be in this case God, who speaks to Birgitta, giving her advice.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Sven-Erik Pernler, “‘Tres leges sunt.’ Om lagmansdottern och lagarna: St. Birgitta and the law,” in *Heliga Birgitta – budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vastena 3-7 oktober 1991* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993), 54; Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1971), 88.

<sup>421</sup> See also Pernler, *op. cit.*, 57.



The king is, however, allowed to change the “customs” of the country if they are opposing the divine law. As an example of such a case, Birgitta mentions the old custom of people plundering wrecked ships. She states that the merchants already have been afflicted by the catastrophe at sea, so it is cruel and unjust to steal their property (VIII, 6. 4–6). Therefore, a king’s relationship with his subjects is in fact shaped by his relationship with God. Birgitta states that the people must honor him, for is established by God (VIII, 3. 1), but that he must humiliate himself before God because he has received his power from above (VIII, 2. 27).

The king is also a guardian of faith in his country. Among other duties of Christian ruler, Birgitta mentions organizing a crusade against heathens (cf. VIII, 39 and 42) and expelling all the witches and fortune-tellers who were threatening the purity of Christian faith in the country (VIII, 38. 5).

Based on the above observations we can thus notice that, from Birgitta’s perspective, law is the main field of communication between a king and God as well as between inhabitants of the kingdom and the king. The king is described as “governor” of the kingdom in the sense that he may not create or change the laws according to his own will or desires, but he must protect the divine law, which is a spiritual value, not fully identical with any of the legal systems “written on the skins of animals” (IV, 111. 1). In my opinion, this way of understanding the position of the king is grounded in the origin and justification of royal power, which is described as representation and delegation of God’s power, not an independent competence (discussed above, in the first part of this paragraph).

I submit that the king’s attitude toward the law as described here could have been shaped by the Old Testament model. In his analysis of Birgitta’s attitude towards Old Testament, Sten

Hidal states that she knew the history of Israel in the times of the kings well and was interested in its *sensus litteralis*. David, Saul, and many other Old Testament figures are presented as potential examples for those kings who want to be counted among Christ's friends. In one revelation, we find a description of Mary and Birgitta's "search" for the friends of God:

Inquiramus eciam in regibus et in ducibus, quis stat in laudabili suo statu. Ille quippe est rex, qui in moribus suis est sicut Iob, in humilitate sicut Dauid, in zelo regis ut Phinees, ut Moyses in mansuetudine et longanimitate. Ille quoque est dux, qui regis exercitum regit et informat ad prelia, qui fiduciam habet in Deo et timorem ut Iosue, qui utilitatem domini sui plus querit quam propriam ut Iob, qui zelum legis et commodum proximorum diligit ut Iudas Machabeus. (IV, 76. 9–10)

According to the Old Testament, the kings of Israel were also subject to the Mosaic Law and to God. The deeds of many kings described in the books of Kings and Chronicles are summarized with the short statement, "he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord"<sup>422</sup> or "he did evil in the eyes of the Lord."<sup>423</sup> This phrase refers each time to specific legal action taken up by the ruler discussed. If a king did his best to eliminate paganism and idolatry from the public life of Israel and did not hesitate to fulfill the commandments of God, he was judged to be a righteous monarch. In the Old Testament the kings were by no means autocrats or "sources of law."<sup>424</sup>

In *Revelationes*, Moses is also presented as a model of the ideal judge and ruler when Birgitta ensures Magnus Eriksson that his reward ("corona") will be doubled if he follows the deeds of Moses:

Quia qui corripit peccatorem propter Deum, ne puniatur a Deo, sicut fecit Moyses, duplicabitur ei corona eius, et quia placat iram Dei et quia minuit iudicium delinquentis, ne in eternum puniatur. (VIII, 21. 5)

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<sup>422</sup> E.g. 1Ki 15:11; 2Ki 22:2; 2Ch 34:2.

<sup>423</sup> E.g. 1Ki 14:22; 1Ki 15:26; 2Ki 13:11; 2Ki 14:24.

<sup>424</sup> D. J. Wiseman, "Law and Order in Old Testament Times," *Vox Evangelica* 8 (1973): 6.

The king is thus obliged to execute his authority also in moral matters and punish those who transgress moral law, as Moses did.

Another source of inspiration for Birgitta may have been the Swedish legal tradition, expressed in the law itself as well as in synthetical works such as *Konungastyrelsen*, the work belonging to the genre of *King's Mirror*, written for Magnus Eriksson or his sons.<sup>425</sup> According to the aforementioned article by Sven-Erik Pernler, Birgitta Birgersdotter was a person of high legal competence and culture. Members of her family held public offices and were present at the royal court, so she probably had occasion to gain a solid grasp of legal knowledge during her upbringing and marriage.<sup>426</sup>

In revelation 18, *Liber ad reges*, we read that the king must obey and love God because God “allowed him to be crowned” (VIII, 7. 4). This love is expressed through the works of mercy performed by the king, but primarily by keeping the commandments and leading a saintly life according to the royal way of living (VIII, 6. 1–4). We shall thus begin the discussion of the moral dimension of Christian community life described in *Revelationes* by focusing on the “via iusticie” (VIII, 4. 5), the morality of the rulers.

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<sup>425</sup> See below, introduction to chapter 3.

<sup>426</sup> Pernler, op. cit., 51-53.

**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**A MIRROR OF CHRISTIAN SOCIETY**

We now leave the realm of history and principles to focus on more practical issues, namely, the moral questions concerning Christian leaders and citizens described in *Revelationes*. As we established above, Birgitta considers the law superior to the king. He was to rule according to various kinds of law and not create new regulations that contradicted the old ones (see section 2.3.5). However, it would be false to state that in St. Birgitta's view, law, not man, governed the country. The domination of the institution over the human conscience is a tendency in modern political thought.<sup>427</sup> In the Middle Ages, by contrast, a king would judge and make decisions in keeping with the law, but also according to his own conscience.<sup>428</sup> The well-being of the state and its citizens depended on the judgment of that man. If his conscience was badly shaped, the consequences could be very serious. Therefore, the personal qualities of the medieval king were of great importance for the country.

According to this concept of kingship, the morality of a king as a person and as a ruler could not be in contradiction with each other. Again, in modern political thought, this harmony is hardly a given. According to Hannah Arendt, the conflict between the values recognized in private and in public life started perhaps as early as Machiavelli, who did not recognize the concept of the good as valid in the public sphere of human life, although he accepted its validity in private and religious

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<sup>427</sup> Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: den revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1978), 255-283.

<sup>428</sup> J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350 - c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 488. See also: Max Radin, "The Conscience of the Court," *Law Quarterly Review* 48, no. 4 (1932): 506-520.

life.<sup>429</sup> In the writings of Rousseau, Karl Löwith finds a separate morality and values appropriate for a man (*homme*) and for a citizen (*citoyen*), which are by no means in harmony with each other. According to Löwith, this conflict is also present in other works of political thinkers who criticized bourgeois society.<sup>430</sup>

Perhaps this is the reason why modern rulers do not need King's Mirrors anymore. In the Middle Ages the situation was, as we said, different. The ruler was given advice and instruction both as a person, responsible before God in his conscience, and as a politician, responsible before his fellow men. On these grounds the literary genre of The King's Mirror developed.

Book 8 of *Revelationes celestes*, called *Liber ad reges*, can be described as a work belonging to this literary genre.<sup>431</sup> Hans Torben Gilkær has discovered, moreover, that the book's editor, Alfonso Pecha de Jaén, modeled its structure on the Spanish Mirror *Las Siete Partidas* written for King Alfonso X el Sabio ca. 1265.<sup>432</sup> In Scandinavia we also find other examples of this genre, some of them possibly known to St. Birgitta. Among the books that could have served as a model for *Liber ad reges*<sup>433</sup> was the Swedish *Konungastyrelsen*, composed for Magnus Eriksson or his young sons. *Konungastyrelsen* is a compilation based on Thomas Aquinas's and Aegidius Romanus's *De*

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<sup>429</sup> Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 137.

<sup>430</sup> Löwith, op. cit. 256.

<sup>431</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna: En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 137.

<sup>432</sup> Hans Torben Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha: Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges—A Mirror of Princes* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993), 79.

<sup>433</sup> Birgit Klockars, loc. cit.

*regimine principum*.<sup>434</sup> Another important Scandinavian Mirror is *Konungs Skuggsjá*, also known as *Speculum Regale*, a Norwegian book from the eighteenth century.<sup>435</sup>

In my opinion, a significant difference between these works and Birgitta's revelations is the person of the addressee. Most of the Mirrors are addressed to an unspecified king, a king in general (even if they were presented to a particular king), whereas Birgitta's advice and warnings always concern specific people: King Magnus Eriksson, Queen Blanka, Queen Joanna of Naples, and others. Thanks to Alfonso's editorial work, the texts acquired a more general meaning because he added generalizing rubrics to each revelation; but we must remember that Birgitta, the narrator of *Revelationes*, is not really a political theorist, even though her advice for the kings is based on some general knowledge and judgment.

Despite its title, *Liber ad reges* does not deal with the kings exclusively. The author was also interested in the public performance and morality of the king's advisers, the nobility, and people within each status of Christian society. Each of these groups is discussed in a separate section of *Liber ad reges*. Therefore, our analysis must also concern all groups of people who take part in the life of a Christian kingdom.

This chapter, based mostly on the material found in *Liber ad reges*, book 3 of *Revelationes*, and *Tractatus de summis pontificibus*, is structured in the following way. First, we discuss the

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<sup>434</sup> Herman Schüek, "Chronicles, 2. Sweden," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Philip Pulsiano (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 81. The edition of *Konungastyrelsen: En nyttigh Bok om Konnunga styrilse och höfdinga: Johannes Bureus utgåva 1634*, ed. Lennart Moberg (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1964). For the list of literature concerning *Konungastyrelsen* see: Lennart Moberg, *Konungastyrelsen: En filologisk undersökning* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1984).

<sup>435</sup> Ludvig Holm-Olsen, ed., *Konungs Skuggsjá* (Oslo: Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1983). For the list of literature concerning *Konungs Skuggsjá* see: Sverre Bagge, *The Political Thought of The King's Mirror* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987).

moral duties of a Christian king and queen (3.1). Second, we deal with the moral advice given by Birgitta to the laymen and laywomen. In the structure of *Liber ad reges* we can observe a separate section discussing the moral duties of knights and nobility (revelations 32–38). Therefore, we shall also pay special attention to this social group. We shall further focus on the social virtues and sins of all lay members of a Christian community, understood as “*communitas regni*” (3.2). Third, we discuss the defining moral issues for clerical members of a Christian society, as dealt with by St. Birgitta (3.3).

### 3.1. King and Queen

In modern literature it is a widespread conviction that St. Birgitta was simply an enemy to King Magnus Eriksson<sup>436</sup> and that she was even guilty of his dethronement, since it is said that she inspired a conspiracy against him (see section 3.1.3 below). However, an analysis of the whole corpus of *Revelationes* reveals a much more complicated relationship between Birgitta and the king. She was certainly critical, but, especially in the first period of their cooperation, she also gave peaceful advice to the king and tried to build a positive model of kingship for Magnus Eriksson to imitate (section 3.1.2). He was to play an essential role in her plan of spiritual reforming the Swedish kingdom. Below, we shall deal with this positive model first (sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2) and afterward concentrate on Birgitta’s critical statements concerning the king (section 3.1.3).

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<sup>436</sup>See the examples from the works by Bengt Hergemöller and Herman Schück: “The procedure of the so called ‘hermeneutic explanation,’ the emphatic reconstruction of the royal *vita* including all of its restraints and problems, should contribute to liberate Magnus from unjustified attributions. Almost all of these attributions lead us back to one single person: his relative Birgitta Birgersdotter. Using biblical and literary stereotypes she is designing the portrait of a tyrant” (Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Magnus versus Birgitta. Der Kampf den heiligen Birgitta von Schweden gegen König Magnus Eriksson* [Hamburg: HHL-Verlag, 2003], 206-207); “The other historical-political works of the 14th century do not take the form of the chronicle. This applies to . . . several of Birgitta’s revelations, which can be considered political treatises, directed against a tyrannical royal power” (Schück, *op. cit.*, 81).

Birgitta was in contact with other European rulers, since her reformatory plans concerned countries other than Sweden, such as Cyprus, England, and France. Based on the revelations addressed to all these kings and queens, it is therefore possible to draw the more general portraits of good and wicked Christian rulers as St. Birgitta saw them, despite the fact that, as we mentioned above, she was not a political theorist.

### 3.1.1. *Via Regia*

In order to understand a king's duties and moral obligations, we must first ask about the purpose of royal government. St. Birgitta gives a precise answer to this question: "rex a Deo constituitur ad iudicandum et regendum iuste" (VIII, 3. 1). Therefore, all the responsibilities of a king are related to justice and concentrate on two duties: judging and governing. As we said above (2.3.5), God is the most important point of reference for a king also in this aspect. A Christian ruler is supposed to perform God's justice, because there is no other real justice: only the one coming from God, without beginning or end (VIII, 2. 4). The advice about the "royal way of life" given to the king of Sweden (VIII, 2) starts with this solemn proclamation of God's justice.

It appears that the virtue of justice results from this perspective on the purpose of royal government. Birgitta constantly urges the king to be a righteous person. He ought to ask whether his verdicts are rightly performed, and whether law and justice are being observed in his kingdom (VIII, 4. 8). He must also control the people who perform justice in his name and who therefore take part in his royal power. They must be chosen from among those who are "well formed by nature and who follow the good examples of their ancestors, and who love the works of justice more than riches" (VIII, 4. 7).



Royal justice must be followed by mercy (“in omnibus iudiciis et operibus suis sit misericors et iustus” VIII, 4.4). This condition can be also understood as imitating God’s justice, since according to the Bible God is “misericors and iustus” (cf. Ps 114:5). The king must not be too severe in his verdicts, but not overly meek, either. His mercy should be accessible to everyone, not only to his friends and for relatives (VIII, 4. 4). The king’s lifestyle and everyday schedule should include performing regular works of mercy, such as almsgiving every Saturday and giving every tenth denarius from the royal treasury as a support for the poor (VIII, 2. 10–17).

Another royal virtue closely related to justice is humility. A man who enjoys the privilege of representing God’s justice should realize the truth about himself as a human, who, by nature, is equal to his fellow men. The only reason why a king is exalted above the others is divine grace (VIII, 2. 26–27). Humility is also necessary to perform justice, as the king must not be afraid of admitting his fallibility and correcting his inappropriate decisions (VIII, 4. 11).

The virtue of prudence must come along with the previous three. In response to Magnus’s request, Birgitta plans a detailed schedule for the king’s devotional practices (VIII, 2). He should read the Hours of Virgin Mary every day and hear three masses: two private and one sung. He should also meditate on the passion of Christ and remember to fast on certain days, specified by Birgitta in her schedule for the king. According to this plan, Saturday was a day dedicated to the king’s pious practices as well as to performing justice. On this day the king ought to wash the feet of thirteen poor men and give them enough money to support themselves. The rest of this day the king should spend on examining petitions filed by his subjects and passing judgments. On this day he must be fasting (VIII, 2. 10–18).

Justice, mercy, humility, and prudence is a classic list of royal virtues, traceable in many books of the King's Mirror genre, starting from *Via regia* by Smaragdus of St. Mihiel, composed for Charlemagne<sup>437</sup> and *De institutione regia* by Jonas of Orleans.<sup>438</sup> These virtues are usually followed by wisdom (*sapientia*), but Birgitta seldom reminded Magnus Eriksson of royal wisdom. She rather condemned him for his lack of this virtue: discussion on wisdom is present in her critique of the king's wicked advisers, as, according to Birgitta, the wisdom of a king lies in his ability to choose wise advisers and to follow their suggestions.<sup>439</sup>

According to Birgitta, royal virtues must be grounded in love: she reminds Magnus that he ought to love his people ("populum et communitatem regni sui diligere," VIII, 4. 19). Loving the people is in fact a condition *sine qua non* of loving God: "si igitur ipse velit me diligere, habeat de cetero majorem caritatem ad animas" (VIII, 7. 2). When Birgitta spoke about love, she did not mean a sentiment but rather a specific attitude of the king toward the community, shown in certain ways:

Dixi prius, quod rex diligeret populum et communitatem regni sui. Tunc autem diligit eam, si eam permittit uti legibus approbatis, si super communitatem et populum crudeles non dominantur exactores et collectores, si nouis adinuencionibus et impositacionibus tributorum non oneratur populus, si hospitalitate onerosa et insolita non aggrauatur. Poterit tamen rex ad impugnacionem infidelium humiliter petere auxilium a populo et communitate regni, si necessitatur, sed caueat, quod necessitas non veniat in consuetudinem et legem. Studeat eciam rex amouere consuetudines contrarias saluti animarum. (VIII, 6. 1–4)

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<sup>437</sup> Smaragdus of St. Mihiel, *Via Regia*, XV-XVI, PL 102, 956. (Critical edition is planned by *Sources Chrétiennes*).

<sup>438</sup> Jonas of Orleans, *Le Métier de roi: De institutione regia*, III, ed. Alain Dubreucq (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1995), 184-197.

<sup>439</sup> "Ego enim Mater misericordie vocaui istum regem filium meum nouum. Et ideo nouum, quia nouiter venerat ad obedienciam sanctam. . . . Et grauauit communitatem et populum regni sui factus inobediens Deo et hominibus" (VIII, 47. 37 & 46).

According to this fragment, proper royal government as Birgitta sees it ought to be motivated by love manifested in respecting the laws, showing reasonable hospitality and generosity, and even imposing appropriate fiscal policies.

This point of view expressed by Birgitta may have been inspired by Augustinian philosophy, since according to St. Augustine love is a principle of social life in Christian community.<sup>440</sup> This principle is opposed to *libido dominandi* governing *civitas terrena* (see section 2.1.2), which isolates people from each other, as the mundane ruler aims solely at his own benefit and creates only one-way ties in society: those binding the subjects with his own interest. The Christian ruler, on the contrary, desires good for the community, not only for individuals in his kingdom. Therefore, he must respect the natural (but not sinful) ties binding his subjects to each other. By love he is also bound to God, who is a source of both power and *caritas*.<sup>441</sup> In this aspect we again see in St. Birgitta's thought the influence of St. Augustine, who built a program for renewed, Christian society, a *Civitas Dei* on earth.

Virtues and love are the basics of the royal "rule of life" described in *Revelationes*. The expression "via regia" is not present in the text itself, but we find there both the metaphor of a road or way as a description of the royal mode of spiritual life (see below) and a precise description of this way of life, discussed briefly above. In fact, Birgitta writes about "via iusticie," "the way of justice" as a specific royal way of living:

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<sup>440</sup> See Hannah Arendt's interpretations of Augustine principle of love: "Truth fellowship rests on the fact of common faith. Therefore, by observation we can define the society of believers by two distinguishing marks. First, since a society of believers is established by what in principle is not mundane, it is a community with others grounded not in a pre-existing reality in the world, but in a specific possibility. Second, because this possibility is the most radical of all possibilities available to human existence, the community of faith that is realized in loving each other calls for and demands a total response from each person" (Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 98-99).

<sup>441</sup> Arendt, loc. cit.

Tercium consilium est, quod in omnibus iudiciis et operibus suis sit misericors et iustus, ut nec propter amicitiam vel falsam compassionem nec propter priuatum bonum suum aut propter temporalem utilitatem seu timorem dimittat exercere iusticiam. Nec propter iram seu impacienciam negligat aut obliuiscatur misericordiam, quia indecens est regi vinci ab ira et iudicem iudicare subito aut precibus **a via iusticie** deuiare. (VIII, 4. 4–5 [emphasis mine])

According to this fragment, “the way of justice” can be described as a moral condition of a person who is not only righteous and unbiased, but also patient and merciful. In one of the revelations already quoted above, Christ proposed to Magnus Eriksson a special “ascending way” of spiritual progress:

Dixi regi prius quosdam gradus, per quos ascendere potest ad celestia. Quos si tenuerit et seruauerit, tanta facilitate ascendet ad celum sicut ille, qui vitam tenet contemplatiuam. (VIII, 4. 1)

In this revelation, the royal life is presented as one of the Christian ways of gaining salvation, comparable to the monastic way of living. Therefore, advice for the king must be seen parallel to monastic rules and “mirrors of the soul,” being another kind of religious guidance for people leading a specific way of Christian life. In this revelation, the metaphor of grades or steps (being virtues necessary for a king) and a comparison with the contemplative way of life may allude to *Steps of Humility and Pride* by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, since this book is based on a similar metaphor of steps, which stand for levels of one’s spiritual progress. Like Bernard, Birgitta also stressed the necessity of humility for virtuous Christian living, but the royal way is *via iusticie*, not “the way of humility,” as in the case of monastic life that *Steps of Humility and Pride* describes.<sup>442</sup>

We do not know whether Birgitta was familiar with this particular work of St. Bernard, but Birgit

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<sup>442</sup> “I am going to speak of the steps of humility which the blessed Benedict set before us to climb (although he does not ask us to count them). But first I shall show if I can where we shall arrive at if we reach the top, so that when you have heard what the reward is, the labor of the climb will seem less.” Bernard de Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” I, 1, in *Selected Works*, trans. Gillian R. Evans (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978), 102.

Klockars has found several references in *Revelationes* to his other works, which is not surprising, knowing that Birgitta was inspired by Cistercian spirituality in Alvastra.<sup>443</sup>

In the same environment she read other religious books giving advice on a certain *status* of Christian life: *Liber de modo bene vivendi*, ascribed to St. Bernard, *Speculum virginum*, a book of advice for nuns, and *Regula pastoralis*, a mirror of bishops by Gregory the Great.<sup>444</sup> All these books could have made her familiar with the idea of spirituality and the moral duties typical for each status of Christian life (in this case, the monarchs), or with the Mirror as a literary genre.

The image of a good king, *rex iustus*, shaped by St. Birgitta, was not based on medieval moral literature only. Another source of her concept of the good king was probably the Old Testament with the models of David, Solomon, and other saintly kings of Israel, since these models were known and popular in the Christian literature and iconography of that time.<sup>445</sup> Other important sources for building Birgitta's "royal way" may have been the lives and legends of saintly kings. However, Birgitta rarely mentions the names of St. Erik or other Scandinavian holy kings. We actually find one revelation showing St. Eric, the royal patron of Sweden,<sup>446</sup> and St. Olof, the patron of Norway,<sup>447</sup> as a model for Magnus Eriksson. In this case, however, the sanctity of the two is rather a pretext for reprimand than a positive model, since Birgitta writes that King Magnus

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<sup>443</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna: En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 217-220.

<sup>444</sup> Klockars, op. cit., 216-218.

<sup>445</sup> See: Aryeh Grabois, "Un mythe fondamental de l'histoire de France au Moyen-Age; le 'roi David' précurseur du roi 'très chrétien'," *Revue historique* 581 (January 1992): 11-31; Simone Maser, "L'image de David dans la littérature médiévale française," *Le Moyen Age: Revue d'histoire et de philologie* 99, no. 3-4 (1993): 423-448; Daniel H. Weiss, "Biblical History and Medieval Historiography: Rationalizing Strategies in Crusader Art," *MLN: Modern Language Notes* 108, no. 4 (1993): 710-737.

<sup>446</sup> Saint Eric is mentioned three times in *Revelationes*: VI, 10. 17; VI, 66. 47 and Extrav. 27. 2.

<sup>447</sup> Mentioned only once in *Revelationes*: Extrav. 27. 2.

is not able to achieve such a high level of spiritual progress and he is not worthy to build the Vadstena cloister:

Filius Dei loquitur: "Quia rex iste non querit calorem meum sed permanet in frigore et scandalum manuum suarum non dimittit, ideo non edificabit michi domum ut Salomon nec habebit exitum vite ut Daud. Sed nec memoria eius erit ut dilecti mei Olai, nec coronabitur ut amicus meus Ericus, sed senciet iusticiam, quia noluit misericordiam, et arabo terram in iudicio et tribulacione, donec inhabitantes discant petere misericordiam. Verumptamen persona, que edificabit monasterium meum, qualis erit et quando veniet, erit tibi notum, sed utrum in hac vita, non est tibi licitum scire." (Extrav. 27. 1–3)

We can thus observe that Birgitta does not put much stress on the figures of Scandinavian saintly kings as positive models for Magnus Eriksson. In the above-mentioned fragment and in her other advice for the kings, she prefers to analyze virtues and vices (conceptually presented) rather than derive the features of a perfect king from the narratives of saints.

### 3.1.2. The New Son of the Virgin Mary

According to *Revelationes*, Birgitta's relationship to Magnus Eriksson had at least two phases, as two types of messages can be distinguished in her correspondence to the king: those sketching a positive model of kingship, and those which are more critical. Some texts confirm that the king was well-disposed toward Birgitta and her message, as he himself asked her for advice ("Et quia rex iste Swecie querit a te humiliter, quomodo in regimine viuat iuste et prudenter, ideo ego indicabo ei," VIII, 2. 5). We also find some remarks concerning the king's conversion and his special relationship to the Virgin Mary:

Itaque, ut passio Filii mei reduceretur ad memoriam, ideo verba Dei tibi diuinitus data venerunt in mundum. Propterea et tu missa es ad regem istum Swecie, qui irretitus multis peccatorum laqueis, postquam separatus fuit a dyabolo, suscepi eum michi in filium, desiderans eum facere pugnatorem egregium ad honorem Dei. . . . Ego enim Mater misericordie vocaui istum regem filium meum nouum. Et ideo nouum, quia nouiter venerat ad obedienciam sanctam. Cui promisi per te, quod vellem esse domina et defensatrix

exercitus sui et regni sui et quod starem ante eum in terra inimicorum eius. (VIII, 47. 9–10 & 37–38)

The same text says that the king was given the grace of contrition and he was crying over his previous sins (VIII, 47. 33). The mission of the king in Birgitta's plan of spiritual reform appears clearer now: it is likely that Birgitta regarded Magnus Eriksson as chosen by God and the Virgin Mary, and thought he was on his way to becoming a saintly king, a defender of the faith, and a protector of the friends of God. In the work of rebuilding the church, or rather the Christian community in Sweden (as imagined by Birgitta), Magnus Eriksson could have played a role analogical to that of King Cyrus, who allowed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity,<sup>448</sup> or even greater than that:

Christus loquebatur sponse oranti pro quodam rege Swecie dicens: "Is, qui de dyaboli membro factus est membrum meum, laboret sicut illi, qui reedificabant muros Ierusalem, qui pro legis destructe reparacione laborabant, qui utensilia domus Dei abducta congregabant et in locum pristinum restituebant. . . . Ideo rex iste, pro quo tu oras, debet congregare viros spirituales sapientes sapientia mea et eos, qui Spiritum meum habent, interroget et inquirat diligenter secundum consilium eorum, quomodo murus ecclesie mee reedificetur in Christianis et honor Deo exhibeatur, fides recta catholica refloreat, caritas diuina ferueat et passio mea in corde hominum imprimatur. Inquirat eciam rex, quomodo vasa domus mee restituantur in pristinum statum, scilicet ut clerici et religiosi relicta superbia reassumant humilitatem, incontinentes diligant castitatem, cupidi et mundiales abstineant a nimio mundi appetitu, ut lucere possint aliis. Laboret eciam rex fortiter et sapienter, ut mandata mea attentius diligentur. Et congreget iustos Christianos, ut cum eis diruta spiritualiter reedificet." (VIII, 30. 1 & 9–11 )

Therefore, the king was to be responsible not only for the reform of state and political life in Sweden but for the condition of clergy and lay Christians as well. He was to be in charge of the whole reform and it is likely that Birgitta saw herself as a prophet by his side, similar to Old

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<sup>448</sup> 2Ch 36:23; Ezr 1:2; Ezr 1:7-8; 4:3; 5:14.

Testament prophets accompanying the kings of Israel.<sup>449</sup> According to this text, the main tools used by the king in the work of renewal are “viri spirituali sapientes sapientia Dei” (VIII, 30. 9), so he is fact not expected to possess any special personal charisma but only to trust those who are close to God.

Birgitta did not entrust this special mission to the king of Sweden exclusively. When she addressed Peter II, the young king of Cyprus who ruled together with his uncle, John of Antioch,<sup>450</sup> her hopes regarding their rule were comparable. They should start the renewal from within themselves by confessing and receiving the Holy Communion (VII, 18. 1 = VIII, 22. 1). They both must be united and love each other in order to be able to rule the country together (VII, 18. 2 = VIII, 22. 2). They should also love the souls of their subjects, as they are themselves beloved by God (VII, 18. 3-4 = VIII, 22. 3-4). In describing the work of reform, which would be the result of this love, Birgitta stressed the position of clergy and the importance of their discipline and devotion to God (VII, 18. 5-7 = VIII, 22. 5-7). Finally, those inhabitants of Cyprus who belonged to the Roman Church shall confess, receive the Body of Christ, and be converted from their sins (VII, 18. 8-12 = VIII, 22. 8-12).

### 3.1.3. Tyrant or “Shadow King”?

We must also consider the fact that the relationship between King Magnus and the prophetess changed with time, and finally both King Magnus and Birgitta became disappointed with each other. This may be one of the reasons why the kingdom of Sweden is presented as an “unfruitful land” in the same text in which Christ urges Birgitta to leave for Rome. The most critical

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<sup>449</sup> See chapter 5.1.

<sup>450</sup> For a short explanation of the political situation in Cyprus in Birgitta’s times, see section 3.1.4.



revelations, the so-called “rebellion program” (Extrav. 80) and the critiques of the crusade to Novgorod, are dated to 1350 and 1360, when Birgitta lived in Rome and had no personal contact with the king anymore.<sup>451</sup>

The change of the mutual relationship between Birgitta and the king is presented in the above-quoted revelation concerning the supposed conversion of the king (VIII, 47), which continues in the following way:

Et ita factum est. Nam pax erat in terra sua ex diuina prouidencia propter preces meas. Et ante ipsum fui in terra inimicorum eius, quando maiores inimicos eius congregaui in unum locum terre, quos ei traditura eram. Paruo igitur tempore elapso accesserunt ad regem istum instrumenta dyaboli plena corde malo et maligno spiritu. Qui confidebant in manibus hominum plus quam in auxilio creatoris; quorum cupiditas maior fuit ad possessiones terrenas quam ad adiuuandum animas; quorum linguas ille excitauit ad loquendum, qui mouit linguam lude ad vendendum creatorem suum; quorum dentes eleuabantur digitis dyaboli; quorum frigida labia perlinita fuerunt veneno dyaboli. Propterea diuina caritas non sapuit eis, sed expuentes verba veritatis falsitatem in ore habuerunt. Quorum malignis consiliis obediens rex cucurrit et distraxit de manibus meis congregatos inimicos meos resistentes fidei sancte. (VIII, 47. 38–44)

Here we see that Birgitta thinks the king has finally abandoned “via iusticie” and that he fails to live up to the prophetess’s and—in her eyes, to God’s—expectations.

What was the basis of this critique? It is often said that Birgitta accused Magnus Eriksson of pursuing tyrannical government,<sup>452</sup> but she actually never called Magnus a tyrant, despite using this word in other contexts.<sup>453</sup> On the other hand, she warned him against becoming a “crowned

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<sup>451</sup> Denis Searby, introduction to Book IV of *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume II: Liber Caelestis, Books IV-V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>452</sup> Ole Ferm, “Heliga Birgittas program for uppror mot Magnus Eriksson. En studie i politisk argumentationskonst,” in *Heliga Birgitta – budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vastena 3-7 oktober 1991* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993), 132; Ingvar Andersson, “Tyrannbegreppet under medeltid och renässans,” *Lychnos* (1943): 115-116.

<sup>453</sup> “Sed quia homo, libero arbitrio datus, voluntarie mandatis meis contemptis consentit dyabolo, ideo iustum est, ut homo tyrannidem eius experiatur” (I, 1. 6). “Si . . . illi, qui iusticiam sciunt et eam desiderant et facere

ass" (*asinus coronatus*),<sup>454</sup> and this expression points rather to the weakness and stupidity of the king than to any tyrannical inclinations. It is also generally believed that Birgitta is responsible for calling King Magnus "Smek" ("The Caresser"), which became his nickname for ages.<sup>455</sup> It appears, however, that these two accusations (of tyranny and effeminate behavior) are not entirely in line with each other and that they may be even contradictory, if analyzed in view of various theoretical models of kingship. What is the essence of Birgitta's critique, then? Does she think Magnus Eriksson a tyrant or rather a weak, worthless king, *rex inutilis*? In both cases she would refer to a certain tradition of political thought. The basic idea of tyranny as understood in late Medieval Europe came from the church fathers and from Aristotle's *Politics*,<sup>456</sup> while the expression *rex inutilis* was used for the first time by Carolingian historiographers to justify the deposition of Childeric III, the last Merovingian king. Edward Peters described the history of the idea of "worthless kingship," which was later developed by lawyers and political thinkers, among them Gregory VII.<sup>457</sup>

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possunt, recusant pro Deo suscipere onus et laborem, quomodo stabit regnum in vigore suo? Vere illud non est regnum sed latrocinium et spelunca tyrannorum, ubi iniqui dominantur et iusti conculcantur. Et ideo homo iustus et bonus trahi debet caritate Dei et zelo bono offerre se ad regimen, ut proficiat multis. Qui autem dignitates et regimina ambiunt propter honorem mundi, non sunt principes veri sed tyranni pessimi" (VI, 95. 2-4).

<sup>454</sup> "Si vero rex audierit consilia eius et vult amicitiam eius et dissoluerit se cum eo, confidendo plenarie de eo, reprobabitur a me et erit prouerbium et ridiculum multorum dicencium: 'Ecce rex similior est asino coronato quam principi!' Et eciam timendum est ei, ne cum dolore amittat regnum" (VIII, 16. 5-6).

<sup>455</sup> Popular historiography expresses opinions similar to this one: "Magnus became the scapegoat. St. Bridget accused him of homosexuality, which resulted in the nickname Magnus Smek" (Bengt Liljegren and Adam Williams, *Rulers of Sweden* [Lund: Historiska Media, 2004], 48).

<sup>456</sup> J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350 - c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 493-495.

<sup>457</sup> Edward Peters, *The Shadow King: Rex Inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature 751-1327* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 30-80.

As Jean Dunbabin has pointed out, for any king “the shudder ‘tyrant!’ produced in an audience was too handy an ally for the offence to be clearly defined,”<sup>458</sup> so the essence of tyranny was debated in many aspects during the Middle Ages. However, while discussing the medieval theories of tyranny and resistance to this form of government, Dunbabin stresses that a tyrant “rules in his own interest, not that of his subjects,”<sup>459</sup> which is a very important feature of this form of rule, and it is introduced and preserved by force, not by lawful methods.<sup>460</sup> In our study of Birgitta’s accusation against King Magnus we shall also stress these two aspects of tyrannical government.<sup>461</sup>

To understand the nature of Birgitta’s critique of Magnus Eriksson, we must first analyze the particular accusations brought up by her. We shall read the text of *Revelationes* in the light of two other contemporary texts that polemically address King Magnus’s politics and somehow relate to St. Birgitta and *Revelationes*. They are *Libellus de Magno Erics Rege* and *Commentarii historici super nonnullis revelationibus S. Birgittae de rege Magno Erics et succesoribus eius*. Both texts are found in MS C 230, which belongs to the so called “C collection,” a collection of Vadstena manuscripts currently located in Stockholm University’s library. They were both edited in the third volume of *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum* and *Commentarii historici* has been also edited according to modern criteria by Eva Odelman.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Burns, op. cit., 493.

<sup>459</sup> Burns, op.cit., 494.

<sup>460</sup> Burns, loc. cit.

<sup>461</sup> For a detailed study of the subject with reference to Swedish political conditions see: Ingvar Andersson, “Tyranbegreppet under medeltid och renässans,” *Lychnos* (1943): 111-129

<sup>462</sup> “Libellus de Magno Erics Rege,” in *Scriptores Rerum Suecicarum*, vol. 3, ed. Claes Annerstedt (Uppsala: Zeipel & Palmblad, 1871-1876), 12-16; “Commentarii historici super nonnullis revelationibus S. Birgittae de rege Magno Erics et succesoribus eius,” in *Scriptores Rerum Suecicarum*, vol. 3, ed. Claes Annerstedt, (Uppsala: Zeipel &

One important accusation found in *Revelationes* was that King Magnus chose wicked people as royal advisers and supported those who cared nothing for common good but sought only private prosperity:

Christus loquitur sponse dicens: “Rex querit auxilium et amicitiam vulpis. Sed que est consuetudo vulpis nisi simulare se mortuam, ut rapiat simplices aues? Si intrauerit cubile anserum, non contentatur comedere unum, nisi et interficiat omnes. Sic iste, si obtinuerit partem terre, non quiescet, donec habeat maiora, et tunc seminabit discordiam, quia indigene cum extraneis non concordabunt. Et ideo fugiatur conuersacio eius sicut sibilus serpentis venenosi, quia si profecerit, rediget terram in ruinam et anseres simplices deplumabit. Consiliarii vero regni et rex laborent, ut pecunia, que ratione dotis debetur sibi, soluatur ei, quia secundum commune prouerbium melius est esse ante cautum quam post pericula prudentem.” (VIII, 17. 1–5)<sup>463</sup>

An interpretation of the king’s role in such a situation can be twofold: surrounded by selfish and greedy people, he does not in fact rule but rather is an instrument in his counselors’ hands. The second possibility is that the king became a tyrant and now uses a narrow group of his confidants to terrorize the rest of community. Both cases would signal the collapse of true monarchy, or in Aristotelian terms, *basileia*, and the establishment of a corrupted political system: oligarchy or tyranny (*monarchia*).<sup>464</sup>

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Palmlblad, 1871-1876), 16-20; Eva Odelman, “Commentarii historici: en birgittinsk propagandatext,” in *Dicit scriptura: studier i C-samlingen tillägnade Monica Hedlund* (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia, 2006), 73-90.

<sup>463</sup> See also VIII, 16. 1-6; VIII, 17, 1-7; VIII, 19, 6-7.

<sup>464</sup> “It remains to discuss monarchy, both the causes from which it perishes and the means by which it is naturally preserved. And the things that happen with kingships and tyrannies are much the same as those we have described as happening with constitutions. For kingship accords with aristocracy, and tyranny is composed of ultimate oligarchy and democracy. Just for this reason tyranny is also extremely harmful to its subjects, inasmuch as it is composed of two evils and has the deviations and mistakes issuing from both constitutions” (Aristotle, *Politics*, V, 10, trans. David Keyt [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999], 23).

In medieval political literature many kings were said to have “wicked advisers” who bring the country to collapse.<sup>465</sup> Some scholars, among them Joel T. Rosenthal, who examined English baronial revolts, claim that the accusation of “wicked advice” was only a legal fiction used by the barons to eliminate people from adversarial aristocratic or noble circles that had some influence on the king. Barons were not interested in changing the political system itself, as long as they took part in governance and were able to obtain some wealth and properties for themselves and for their vassals. If some adversarial group of aristocrats or perhaps a court bureaucracy took the privileges for themselves, barons would try to regain the king’s favor and accuse their opponents of advising the monarch badly. Still, nobody wanted to attack the king himself, as long as it was possible to gain his favor and use him for one’s own purposes. In other words, barons were not interested in the moral credentials of the political system (as according to classical political thought, the system they wanted was oligarchy, one of the corrupted forms of governance). On this interpretation, accusations of “wicked advice” can tell us about some conflicts between different fractions at the royal court, but does not in fact describe any reality, being only a legal fiction, a tool to fight political opponents.<sup>466</sup>

It appears that some commentators of Birgitta’s work follow this interpretation. Gottrid Carlsson and Hans Torben Gilkær (who focus on Birgitta’s Old Swedish autograph of Extrav. 80) both claim that Birgitta represented interests of Swedish aristocracy opposing the king. This is a

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<sup>465</sup> Henry IV was told to eschew "the low born persons by whose advice he had been governing." See: Alexander James Carlyle, *A History of Medieval Political Theory in the West*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1962), 155. For a similar example in France, see: Ferdinand Lot and Robert Fawtier, *Histoire des Institutions Françaises au Moyen-Age*, vol. 2 (Paris: P.U.F., 1958), 47.

<sup>466</sup> Joel T. Rosenthal, “The King’s ‘Wicked Advisers’ and Medieval Baronial Rebellions,” *Political Science Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (December 1967): 595-618.

supposed reason of her critique of the monarch.<sup>467</sup> To corroborate this thesis, Carlsson refers to the so-called *Libellus de Magno Eriki rege*,<sup>468</sup> a political pamphlet written between 1366 and 1371 in order to explain the reasons for Magnus Eriksson's second dethronement,<sup>469</sup> which occurred in 1364.<sup>470</sup> Andersson and Carlsson state that this booklet expresses the opinions of some aristocratic group gathered around St. Birgitta and inspired by her, while Birgitta's revelations are interpreted as an expression of this group's opinions and interests.<sup>471</sup> There are indeed many similarities between *Revelationes* and *Libellus*. Both works use a number of similar arguments: "wicked advisers" as a reason for the king's calamities,<sup>472</sup> which began when he came of age;<sup>473</sup> his neglect of wise and God-loving counselors;<sup>474</sup> and his avoiding of sexual relations with the queen

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<sup>467</sup> Gottfrid Carlsson, "Heliga Birgitta Upprorsprogram," *Archivistica et Mediævistica Ernesto Nygren Oblata* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1956), 96-97; Hans Torben Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha: Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges—A Mirror of Princes* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993), 216.

<sup>468</sup> "Libellus de Magno Eriki Rege," in *Scriptores Rerum Suecicarum*, vol. 3, ed. Claes Annerstedt, (Uppsala: Zeipel & Palmblad, 1871-1876), 12-16.

<sup>469</sup> For the first time king Magnus was deposed by his son Eric in 1356. They reconciled in 1359 on the condition that Eric controls most of the territory of Sweden. After Eric's death which occurred a few months later, Magnus reclaimed full power and ruled until 1364, when Albrecht of Mechlemburg was elected by noblemen, who refused to serve King Magnus.

<sup>470</sup> According to the text of *Libellus*, it was created during King Magnus' imprisonment, since it states that the king was captured by Albrecht of Melchemburg "qui adhuc captus sicut male maruit detinetur" (*Libellus*, op. cit., 15).

<sup>471</sup> Ingvar Andersson, *Källstudier till Sveriges historia 1230-1436: Inhemsk berättande källor jämte Libellus Magnipolensis* (Lund: Skånska centraltryckeriet, 1928), 151-173; Carlsson, op. cit., 96.

<sup>472</sup> "Rex quippe recepit uxorem de Francia, juvenem pulchram et generosam, qua ducta elapso rex cepit antiquiores et nobiliores regni susceptores et tedio habere nec obediuit eis, sed recepit consiliarios iuvenes pauperes et degeneres exaltando eos, quorum processu tantus incepit superbie et cupiditatis esse excessus, quod regna duo que cepit ditissima infra decem sic depauperata sunt, quod multi propter impositiones grauissimas relictis domibus vacuis cum vxoribus et filiis in terra aliena panem mendicabant" (*Libellus*, op.cit., 13); see: VIII, 16. 1-6; VIII, 17. 1-5; VIII, 20, 1-7.

<sup>473</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 13; see: "Cui existenti puero custodiebantur duo regna. Qui, cum ad annos discrecionis venisset, regebat iniuste et omnia agebat sine discrecione" (VIII, 47. 24-25).

<sup>474</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 13; see: "Rex iste, pro quo tu supplicas, coram Deo predator est, proditor animarum prodigusque effusor diuiciarum. Itaque sicut nullus proditor est peior illo qui diligentem se prodit, sic iste multos spiritualiter prodidit carnaliter diligendo iniustos, iniuste exaltando impios, iustos deprimendo et excessus corrigendos dissimulando" (VIII, 25. 6-7).

and having some unnatural, sinful relationship with one knight, who enjoyed the favor of the king.<sup>475</sup> Moreover, both *Libellus* and *Revelationes* condemn Magnus Eriksson for losing Scania.<sup>476</sup>

There are, however, considerable differences between the two texts. First of all, Birgitta's argumentation has a strictly religious character: she is concerned about Magnus's sin and calls for his repentance, as we have said above. She uses some facts known from political life as arguments, but always interprets these facts in the light of God's will and the king's mission as a Christian ruler. When dealing with politics, for example—such as in Extrav. 80, the so-called “rebellion revelation” (see below)—she does not create new arguments but quotes what is already being said at the court and among the aristocracy.

The argumentation of *Libellus* has a different character. *Libellus* is political treatise that occasionally uses religious arguments, but only in order to support the political thesis: “Magnus Eriksson was a bad king, so it is better for everyone that he was deposed.” In *Libellus*, the reasons for Magnus's deposition are explained in the following way:

Eodem tempore conuenerunt omnes episcopi et barones et alii nobiles et sapientes et attendentes regem obstinatum in conceptibus suis proditoremque regni et suorum violatorem juramentorum et promissionum suarum favctoremque Regis Dacie et consciuum doli sui sed depopulatorem communitatis sue propter exacciones grauissimas, ipsoque propter premissa legitime deposito, elegerunt sibi in regem Albertum.<sup>477</sup>

We see that the stress is put on the king's betrayal of Swedish *raison d'état*. He broke promises given to the Swedish people and conspired with the king of Denmark against his own people.

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<sup>475</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 14; see: VIII, 11. 1-6 (the vow of celibacy between the king and the queen); Extrav. 80. 6 (accusation of homosexuality brought up by the Swedish knights).

<sup>476</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 14-15; see: Extrav. 80. 8.

<sup>477</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 15.

There are also other heavy accusations used by *Libellus*, but not mentioned by Birgitta. The evil influence of the queen is stressed in *Libellus*, while in Birgitta's work we do not notice any particular connection between Blanka's actions and the political crisis in Sweden. In a political pamphlet, Blanka is accused of conspiring with the king of Denmark against her own son, Erik, and, as a consequence, of poisoning him.<sup>478</sup> It was she who isolated Magnus from his proper advisors from the beginning, so that he turned to "iuuenes pauperes et degeneres."<sup>479</sup> She was also promoting Bengt Algotsson, Magnus's alleged lover.<sup>480</sup> In my opinion, it is highly probable that if Birgitta had been the author of these ideas expressed in *Libellus*, she would have mentioned them in her own work, as she knew the queen very well, having been Blanka's educator and tutor (Extrav. 59. 1).

*Libellus* suggests that Magnus Eriksson was elected, among other reasons, because he had no relatives who could compete with him for the Swedish throne. Because of this fact he would be more dependent on his magnate advisors. Further, we read that the country was successful in wars and wealthy when the king was young and controlled by his responsible advisers. Moreover, the anonymous author deprives Magnus of his great success of buying Scania from Denmark in 1332, which in fact occurred during Magnus's independent reign, while *Libellus* states that it happened when Magnus was still underage and ascribes this success to "people of the kingdom."<sup>481</sup> According to the booklet, the political crisis began when the king came of age and married Blanka.<sup>482</sup> Reading the *Libellus*, it is thus difficult to avoid the impression that according to

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<sup>478</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit, 14.

<sup>479</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit, 13.

<sup>480</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit, 14.

<sup>481</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 13.

<sup>482</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 12-13.



the author the king should be more or less controlled by the noblemen, who as a group are presented as a truly positive political power, responsible for the country's well-being.

Birgitta does not in fact suggest that the king should be under control of the noblemen, although she stresses their important role in political life (see section 3.2.1). The qualities of "good advisers" are however depicted a bit differently in both texts. According to *Libellus*, the good advisers were "old and noble" ("antiquiores et nobiliores regni susceptores"), while the unworthy people exalted by King Magnus were young, "poor and degenerated" ("iuuenes pauperes et degeneres"), so they lusted for riches and power.<sup>483</sup> We can notice that these criteria stress the social and moral performance of the king's advisers, while in *Revelationes* the good advisers must not only be righteous but also should "love God more than material things" and "be compassionate with their neighbors," which are religious, not social, criteria.<sup>484</sup>

On the other hand, there is also an important accusation mentioned by Birgitta which is not present in *Libellus*. King Magnus and Queen Blanka decided that their older son, Prince Erik, should rule Sweden, which was an elective kingdom, and Håkan, the younger son, Norway. Birgitta sees this decision as "opposing justice, opposing God, opposing the public good and the benefit of the community." According to her, the senior prince should inherit Norway and the junior should

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<sup>483</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 13.

<sup>484</sup> "Primum est, quod remoueat a se illos consiliarios, quorum corda sunt ambiciosa et cupida, quorum lingua duplex et dolosa, quorum oculi sunt ad spiritualia lippientes. Eligat vero illos, qui non vendunt iusticiam pro pecunia, qui erubescunt mendacium et assentaciones, qui diligunt Deum plus quam carnalia et qui proximorum miseriis compaciuntur" (VIII, 2. 6-7).

be elected in Sweden (IV, 3. 25–29 = VIII, 41. 25–29).<sup>485</sup> *Libellus* also mentions this decision of the royal couple, but does not judge it negatively.<sup>486</sup>

As we can see now, the argument of “wicked advice” can support the general charge of tyrannical government, since in *Libellus* it is used to paint Magnus as a tyrant who oppressed his subjects with the help of a little group of advisors, described as “co-tyrants,” as they seek only private profit, analogically to the selfish king.<sup>487</sup> But the same argument can support an opposite thesis as well, if we notice that a badly advised king can be an instrument in his counselors’ hands. We shall now examine whether this is the case in *Revelationes*.

At least once, Birgitta accused Swedish magnates of having tyrannical inclinations:

Cum quidam magnus nobilis regni Suecie, qui dominus Israel vocabatur, multis precibus ad dignitatem maiorem regiminis regni vocaretur multociens a rege et ille habens desiderium eundi contra paganos et ibi in seruicio Dei pro fide sancta moriendi nullo modo ad suscipiendam dictam dignitatem inclinaretur, tunc orante sponsa loquebatur ei mater Dei dicens: “Si”, inquit, “illi, qui iusticiam sciunt et eam desiderant et facere possunt, recusant pro Deo suscipere onus et laborem, quomodo stabit regnum in vigore suo? Vere illud non est regnum sed latrocinium et spelunca tyrannorum, ubi iniqui dominantur et iusti conculcantur. Et ideo homo iustus et bonus trahi debet caritate Dei et zelo bono offerre se ad regimen, ut proficiat multis. Qui autem dignitates et regimina ambiunt propter honorem mundi, non sunt principes veri sed tyranni pessimi.” (VI, 95. 1–4)

But, again, Birgitta never says the same about Magnus. She does not accuse him of ruling for his own benefit only; neither does she rebuke him for imposing his government by force. As we said above, in medieval political thought these two features were regarded as characteristic of a tyrant. On the contrary, she often advises him to be firmer in his decisions and to take responsibility for

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<sup>485</sup> This subject will be further discussed in section 4.3.2.

<sup>486</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 13.

<sup>487</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 14.

them, such as when she encourages him to punish sinners (VIII, 31. 3–6) or to expel witches from the kingdom (VIII, 38. 5).

Birgitta warns Magnus against being a “crowned ass,” “*asinus coronatus*” (VIII, 16. 5–6).

She also tells him an allegorical story about a doctor who came to a dark and gloomy kingdom governed by a weak king, similar to an ass, who had a hare-like heart:

Medicus venit in regionem longinquam et ignotam, in qua rex non regebat, sed regebatur, quia cor habebat leporinum. Et ideo sedens in throno quasi coronatus asinus apparebat. Populus vero suus vacabat commessacionibus et honestatis equitatisque oblitus omnes de futuris bonis consulentes odiebat. (III, 31. 1–2 = VIII, 24. 1–2)

There is also another revelation mentioning a “crowned ass” or a king who has abandoned the right principles of governing and began to glorify “*macula*,” a misdeed.<sup>488</sup> Generally, the symbolic figure of an ass used in medieval religious texts can be interpreted in two ways. An ass is a widely known figure of stupidity and stubbornness. It is described as such in many medieval encyclopedias, including *De proprietatibus rerum*,<sup>489</sup> a book with which Birgitta may have been familiar.<sup>490</sup> A more specific allegorical meaning of this animal, which Birgitta also employs, is based on the difference between an ass, which always keeps its head down and looks to the ground, and a horse, which looks forward. In this context, the ass is a symbol of a person concentrated

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<sup>488</sup> “Ostendi tibi prius quinque reges et eorum regna. Primus coronatus asinus, quia degenerans a principiis bonis maculam posuit in gloriam suam. Secundus lupus insaciabilis, qui cognouit improuisum casum suum, ut ditaret inimicum. Tercius aquila sublimis ceteros contempnens. Quartus aries ventilans et conterens et proficiens ex iusticia Dei. Quintus agnus occisus sed non sine macula, cuius sanguis multis fuit occasio tribulacionis et ruine” (Extrav. 78. 1–2). It is not entirely clear that “*asinus coronatus*” is Magnus Eriksson, as there is also another, sixth king mentioned, who is a main character of this text. This king “*conturbabit terram et mare et simplices contristabit, qui terram sanctorum meorum exhonorabit, sanguinem innocentem effundet*” (Extrav. 78. 3).

<sup>489</sup> “Animal quippe est simplex et tardum et ideo de facili subiectum humanis viribus” (Batholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, 18 [Cologne: Johannes Koelhoff, 1483], 746).

<sup>490</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna: En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 133–135.

exclusively on earthly things, who does not care about the future life (which is also a sign of stupidity). Birgitta wrote about priests, who ought to be as wise as serpents, but instead they are stupid and thoughtless: “stant quasi asinus, qui caput inclinat ad terram: sic ipsi stolidi et insipientes semper terrena meditantur et presencia, numquam futura” (IV, 133. 14).<sup>491</sup>

Birgitta uses the same comparison to describe King Magnus, so she apparently thinks him guilty of the same sin—he does not look forward to the future. But she also thinks that he does not look behind to see his responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of his predecessors or the Swedish Crown: she states that the king is obliged to regain territories of the Crown alienated by previous monarchs, even if they were forced to alienate these territories (IV, 3. 7–14 = VIII, 41. 4–17). By saying this, Birgitta expressed her regret for the loss of Scania in 1360 after only twenty-eight years of Swedish rule, and she wanted Magnus Eriksson to regain this territory for Sweden. But the king failed to recapture Scania from Denmark and this was, according to Birgitta, one of the reasons of his losing the rights to the Swedish Crown (Extrav. 80. 8–9). She also stated that the king left some of his “serfs and subjects” in Scania, betraying them and letting them fall into Danish hands (Extrav. 80. 8).

“Wicked advice” is related to other Magnus’s sins. Birgitta expressed the opinion that his financial and personal decisions were also unjust. Birgitta also calls this behavior a betrayal:

Rex iste, pro quo tu supplicas, coram Deo predator est, proditor animarum prodigusque effusor diuiciarum. Itaque sicut nullus proditor est peior illo qui diligentem se prodit, sic iste multos spiritualiter prodidit carnaliter diligendo iniustos, iniuste exaltando impios, iustos deprimendo et excessus corrigendos dissimulando. Secundo nullus predo peior est

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<sup>491</sup> See also: “Tercius est velut asinus, qui caput inclinat ad terram et stat quatuor pedibus iunctis simul. Vere sicut asinus est populus, qui nulla desiderat nisi terrena, qui negligit celestia et querit caduca. Ipse quasi quatuor pedes habet, quia modicam habet fidem et vacuam spem, tercio nulla opera bona, quarto voluntatem completam ad peccatum. Inde os gule et cupiditati semper apertum stat. Ecce, amici mei, quomodo per tales potest abyssus illa insaciabilis minui, quomodo fauus poterit impleri?” (II, 20. 16-18) – this revelation concerns Christian people.

illo qui prodit eum, qui in sinu eius caput suum reclinat. Sic populus regni quasi in sinu suo erat, quem iste rex miserabiliter depredatus est aliorum bona auferri permittendo, aliis intolerabilia imponendo, aliorum iniurias dissimulando et iusticiam semper negligenter et remisse exercendo. Tercio nullus fur peior est illo qui creditis sibi omnibus et acceptis clauibus furatur domino inuito. Sic iste rex accepit claues potestatis et honoris, quibus iniuste et prodigaliter usus est, non ad honorem Dei. (VIII, 25. 6–10)

According to this fragment, the essence of being “proditor” is therefore using royal authority “non ad honorem Dei.” The king had obligations resulting from his special relationship to God (see section 2.3.5) and from his promises to the people (both being an effect of his coronation). In Birgitta’s eyes, he was not fulfilling them.

The above-quoted revelation also suggests a very personal dimension of the king’s treason, as Birgitta uses language of love here: the people of the kingdom are trusting, like a friend or a lover, laying their head on the king’s lap—and he is unfaithful to those who love and trust him (VIII, 25. 7). According to this revelation, treason is in fact identical with unfaithfulness or failed trust. In a similar way, Birgitta describes the relationship between Christ and sinful priests. In a sacramental way they “married” Christ and ought to love him solely, but now they are two-faced “proditores.”<sup>492</sup> A tie between a king and his people has a similar character, as the same expression is used. The analogy lies in the personal character of both relationships and in the mediating function between God and people, which function is performed by both king and priest.

This concept of treason as a very personal issue related to love throws some light on the famous question of Magnus Eriksson’s homosexuality. Several scholars, among them Bernd-Urlik Hergemöller in his important book *Magnus versus Birgitta: Der Kampf den heiligen Birgitta von*

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<sup>492</sup> “Arma itaque ista, id est vestes, quibus induuntur, non sunt ad defensionem Domini sed ad visionem solam, sicut solent proditores aliud facere et aliud ostendere. . . . Ego coniunxi eos michi cum corpore meo, et ipsi dissoluunt vinculum nostrum. Ideo sicut proditores non sicut sacerdotes iudicabuntur, si se non emendauerint” (IV, 133. 19 & 26).

*Schweden gegen König Magnus Eriksson*,<sup>493</sup> claim that it was St. Birgitta who first accused Magnus Eriksson of homosexuality and thus “denigrated the memory” of the king, who otherwise would be remembered as a responsible and effective ruler placed in a difficult historical situation.<sup>494</sup>

The main argument to support this thesis comes from the so called “rebellion program” (“upprorsprogram”), or revelation 80 in the book of *Extravagantes*. This text is also preserved in Birgitta’s own Old-Swedish autograph, but as far as I understand it, there are no considerable differences between the contents of the two versions in this aspect. The only noticeable difference is that the Swedish version describes the gossip concerning the king as “the most disgraceful reputation a Christian man could have,”<sup>495</sup> while the Latin text says simply that the king is a subject of “pessima fama,” “the worst gossip.” The fragment in focus reads as follows:

Vos habetis pessimam famam in toto regno, dicentem vos habere et exercere naturalem commixtionem et turpitudinem cum masculis contra naturalem dispositionem. Quod verisimile videtur ex eo, quod plus diligitis quosdam viros quam Deum vel animam propriam aut propriam uxorem. (Extrav. 80. 6)

The problem of Magnus’s homosexuality is here presented as part of advice given by the Virgin Mary to some of the noblemen, who intended to resist the king’s irresponsible government. They were supposed to warn the king and tell him that people “in the whole kingdom” repeat the gossip. Three other important accusations follow. The knights were to let the king know that if he does not amend his ways, they will feel free to vow obedience to his son (Håkan) instead of him

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<sup>493</sup> Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Magnus versus Birgitta. Der Kampf den heiligen Birgitta von Schweden gegen König Magnus Eriksson* (Hamburg: HHL-Verlag, 2003).

<sup>494</sup> Hergemöller, op. cit., 90-94, 206-207.

<sup>495</sup> Hans Torben Gilkær, *The Political Ideas of St. Birgitta and her Spanish Confessor, Alfonso Pecha: Liber Celestis Imperatoris ad Reges—A Mirror of Princes* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993), 208.

(Extrav 80. 9) or, if the son proves to be similar to his sinful father, to a king from outside the dynasty (Extrav. 80. 11).

According to this text, it was not Birgitta, Mary herself, or even the noblemen who formulated the accusation: it is described as a “gossip” (“fama”). Still, the very existence of this gossip was already dangerous for the authority and reputation of the king, even if it was false. Moreover, it seemed to be true, as Magnus favored one of his courtiers who, in the eyes of knights who came to rebuke the king, did not deserve this special treatment (Extrav. 80. 6). As far as we know, this special favorite of the king was Bengt Algotsson, who was indeed detested by a group of Swedish magnates related to Prince Eric. The family of Birgitta Birgersdotter belonged to this group.<sup>496</sup>

I suggest that the essence of the accusation presented in Extrav. 80 is not in fact Magnus’s supposed homosexuality, but his inordinate love in general. We read that the king’s fault lies in being unfaithful to God, his own soul, and his wife (Extrav. 80. 4). As we said before (3.1.1), in Birgitta’s view love is the basic criterion of social and religious life and must “circulate” in a proper, hierarchical way in order to preserve the harmony within the Christian society. The king apparently had broken this vivid cycle by loving “some man” more than God, the queen, and himself. Precise knowledge of the character of this love is not therefore crucial for understanding the problem: the important point is that according to Birgitta these “men” should not take part in ruling the country, so the king should not love them.

Moreover, in my opinion the Latin text of *Revelationes* does not prove that Birgitta in her own name accused the king of being a homosexual person, since the accusation recalled in both

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<sup>496</sup> Gilkær, op. cit., 198-199; Hergemöller, op. cit., 60-61.

the Swedish autograph and the Latin text is based on “fama” circulating among the Swedish people (Extrav. 80. 6), and in *Revelationes* there is no further evidence of Birgitta’s authorship of this accusation, since this subject appears only once in her writings, in the book of *Revelationes Extravagantes* (Extrav. 80), but Alfonso did not include the text in question in *Liber ad reges*.<sup>497</sup> The revelation is dated to the beginning of 1361.<sup>498</sup> At that time, Birgitta had been living in Rome for many years, so she could not verify this gossip herself. Perhaps there were no signs of such problems when she was still present at the Swedish court, since she does not mention it in other revelations. We can thus suggest that this issue, despite being the most famed *casus belli* between Birgitta and Magnus, was not the most important one. Compared to the question of selfish and greedy people who surrounded the king or with the problem of his disobedience to God and to the Virgin Mary, the problem of homosexuality plays a marginal role in Birgitta’s discourse.

In the same revelation (Extrav. 80), Birgitta mentions another sin of King Magnus, namely his “heresy”:

Secundo dubitari potest, an habetis fidem rectam, quia interdicti ab ecclesia audire missam intrastis nichilominus ecclesias et audistis missas. (...) Et cum inueneritis aliquos ad idem vobiscum beniuolos et fideles, dicatis eis in publico, quod prius dixistis regi in secreto, addendo, quod **nulli heretico seruire volueritis vel proditori**. (Extrav. 80. 7 and 11 [emphasis mine])

By that she means the king’s disobedience to the church and his neglect of the pope’s decision, punishing the king with excommunication for not paying back the loan he had acquired in the

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<sup>497</sup> Gilkær, op. cit., 221.

<sup>498</sup> Gilkær, op. cit., 207.



Papal Curia in 1351.<sup>499</sup> The king was, however, neglecting the verdict of the pope, since he attended the Holy Mass (Extrav. 80. 7), which was forbidden for him in such a case.<sup>500</sup>

As far as we know, the king did not adhere to any opinion contradicting the doctrine of the church,<sup>501</sup> so the accusation of heresy seems to be inadequate and perhaps emotionally charged. However, Birgitta could have regarded his stubborn disobedience to the pope as negligence of the Apostolic See primacy, which was a part of Christian doctrine in the fourteenth century.<sup>502</sup> Birgitta urges the king to repent of his sins and to ask the pope for absolution (VIII, 52. 1–5). In her eyes, disregarding the excommunication—the most important canonical sanction<sup>503</sup>—could have been dangerous and destructive not only to the king’s own soul but for the whole Christian kingdom, led by a sinful king who is unable to live in peace with the Holy See, the spiritual center of the Christian community (see below section 3.3.3). According to Birgitta’s revelation, such a serious disturbance of Christian life in the country could be a justification for a king’s dethronement (Extrav. 80. 11). She was not isolated in this opinion. Theoretically, in the case of a monarch’s excommunication, the pope could absolve his subjects of all oaths of allegiance, as in the case of

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<sup>499</sup> Gilkær, op. cit., 198.

<sup>500</sup> According to *Decretum Gratiani* the punishment of excommunication had two forms: anathema, which excluded the culprit from the community of faithful, and excommunication “a communione corporis et sanguinis Christi”, which resulted only in exclusion from the Eucharist. “Decretum Gratiani,” pars II, causa XI, q. 3, c. 24, in: *Corpus Iuris Canonici: Editio Lipsiensis Secunda*, vol. 1, ed. Emill Albert Friedberg and Aemilius Ludwig Richter (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879-1881), col. 651.

<sup>501</sup> “Heresy came to mean a baptized person’s wilful and persistent dissent from orthodox doctrines of faith” (Gerald O’Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* [New York: Paulist Press, 2000], 103.

<sup>502</sup> Doctrinal confirmations announced close to Birgitta’s time are: The Creed of Emperor Michael Paleolog from 1274 (Henricus Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum, quod primum edidit Henricus Denzinger, et quod funditus retractavit auxit notulis ornavit Adolfus Schönmetzer* [Barcinone: Herder, 1976], no. 466) and the bull *Unam sanctam* pronounced by Boniface VIII in 1302 (Denzinger, op. cit. 468).

<sup>503</sup> Wilfried Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington, *The History of Medieval Canon Law in the Classical Period, 1140-1234: From Gratian to the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 46.

Henry IV, who was excommunicated by Gregory VIII.<sup>504</sup> Yngve Brilioth and Lennart Sjöstedt suppose that the excommunication of Magnus Eriksson might have been somehow inspired by the rebellion party at the Swedish court.<sup>505</sup>

All of the above-described symptoms (Magnus's acceptance of wicked advisers, his stupidity, treason, homosexuality, and "heresy") point to the root of the problem discussed, which Birgitta presents as Magnus's disturbed relationship with God. As suggested above, in *Revelationes* the most important quality of a good ruler is his ability to maintain a relationship of love with God and with the community of the kingdom (see section 2.3.5). A ruler too weak or too strong would be equally devastating for the Christian community because a king, who represents God's power on earth, is responsible for the hierarchical "circulation" of power and love in his kingdom (see section 2.3.5). Therefore, his sinful breaking-off of these ties can be destructive for the structure of the whole kingdom. At first glance, heresy and betrayal could be considered as characteristic of a tyrant, but have observed that here weight is placed on the king's negligence and passive behavior, not on his abuse of power. We can therefore conclude that Birgitta considered Magnus to be rather *rex inutilis*, a "Magnus Smek"; but some of the characteristics of his government, and especially of his advisers' government, suggest tyrannical inclinations as well.

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<sup>504</sup> "Hac itaque fiducia fretus, pro Ecclesiae tuae honore et defensione, ex parte omnipotentis Dei Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti, per tuam potestatem et auctoritatem, Henrico Regi, filio Henrici Imperatoris, qui contra tuam Ecclesiam inaudita superbia surrexit, totius Regni Teutonicorum et Italiae gubernacula contradico, et omnes Christianos a vinculo juramenti, quod sibi fecere vel facient, absolvo; et, ut nullus ei sicut Regi serviat, interdico" (Paul of Bernried, *Vita Gregorii VII*, VII, PL 148,74).

<sup>505</sup> Lennart Sjöstedt, *Krisen inom det svensk-skånska väldet 1356-1359* (Lund: Geerupska Universitetsbokhandelns Förlag, 1954), 11; Yngre Brilioth, *Den påfliga beskattningen af Sverige intill den stora schismen* (Uppsala: K. W. Appelbergs Boktryckeri, 1915), 234.

The existence of the above-mentioned revelation called the “rebellion program” (Extrav. 80), created in 1361, and the fact that the Swedish magnates started a rebellion against Magnus Eriksson in 1363 using similar arguments lead at least three authors (Gottfrid Carlsson, Ole Ferm, and Bernd-Urlik Hergemöller) to the conviction that Birgitta opted for the dethronement of Magnus Eriksson<sup>506</sup> and that she even led a secret society aimed at rebellion, as Carlsson puts it.<sup>507</sup> Ingvar Andersson and Gottfrid Carlsson claim, moreover, that *Libellus de Magno Erici rege* is a proof of direct application of Birgitta’s rebellion plans into Swedish political reality.<sup>508</sup>

However, according to Tore Nyberg, the question of rebellion is still open and needs more consideration, as no direct call to dethronement or a plan of such an action is found in the text of *Revelationes* itself.<sup>509</sup> Many times Birgitta warns the king not to break the commandments and not to become a “traitor of souls,” as she put it (IV, 1. 6–10 = VIII, 25. 6–10; Extrav. 43, 3), but, according to Extrav. 80, the punishment was to be executed by divine justice (Extrav. 80. 3), which may but may also not use the group of people as its executors. Ole Ferm states simply that Birgitta and her four colleagues positioned themselves as executors of divine judgment,<sup>510</sup> but the text does not prove that. Birgitta warns Magnus Eriksson of an unexpected death as well, if he did not

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<sup>506</sup> ”Allra tydligast framgår det dock av den egenhändig skrift från 1360-talets början, där hon i revelationsform uppdrager riktlinjerna för ingenting mindre än konung Magnus Erikssons eller rent av hela Folkungahusets detronisering i Sverige” (Gottfrid Carlsson, ”Heliga Birgitta Upprorsprogram,” *Archivistica et Mediävistica Ernesto Nygren Oblata* [Stockholm: Norstedts, 1956] 86. See also: Ferm, op. cit. 125; Hergemöller, op. cit, 110.

<sup>507</sup> Carlsson, op. cit., 95-99.

<sup>508</sup> Ingvar Andersson, *Källstudier till Sveriges historia 1230-1436: Inhemska berättande källor jämte Libellus Magnipolensis* (Lund: Skånska centraltryckeriet, 1928), 151-173; Carlsson, op. cit., 96.

<sup>509</sup> ”Den så kallade upprorsuppenbarelsen är ett argument för att hon kan ha uppmuntrat till regimförändringen, men stormannakretsen i Sverige kan också ha missförstått hennes egentliga budskap i fråga om Magnus Erikssons kungastyre” (Tore Nyberg, ”Birgitta politikern,” in *Birgitta av Vadstena: pilgrim och profet 1303-1373*, eds. Per Beskow and Annette Landen [Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2003], 93).

<sup>510</sup> Ferm, op. cit., 134.

“love God more than anything else.”<sup>511</sup> That would be a different way of fulfilling the divine judgment.

We must also consider the significant differences between the reasons for a possible rebellion mentioned in *Libellus* and in *Revelationes*. *Libellus* belongs to a different literary genre than *Revelationes*. It is a political pamphlet, composed in the 1360s by someone representing the political interests of the Swedish aristocracy opposing the king. It is apparently aimed at justifying the dethronement already performed, since King Magnus is described as currently being held captive by the new king.<sup>512</sup> The argumentation of *Libellus* is strictly political, referring sometimes to religious motivations of persons described, but focused in the Swedish *raison d'état*, not the “will of God” or the warnings of the Virgin Mary, as it is in *Revelationes*. Revelation Extrav. 80 was composed before the dethronement of the king and was apparently designed to be a religiously motivated warning. It refers to political arguments, but the overall aim is religious. There are also, as we have demonstrated above, some differences in the arguments used by the two texts.

Therefore, I think that based only on a comparison between the text of *Revelationes* and *Libellus de Magno Erici rege* it is not possible to state whether Birgitta represented the interests of the Swedish aristocracy or whether the aristocrats were expressing her ideas. There certainly was a mutual exchange of ideas between Birgitta and her aristocratic environment, since there are significant similarities between the two texts. Nevertheless, the view on politics and kingship, and especially on the rule of Magnus Eriksson, expressed in *Revelationes* is still quite different from the

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<sup>511</sup> “Dic ei insuper tu, que hec audis: Ego Deus permisi eum coronari. Ideo ad ipsum pertinet plus sequi voluntatem meam et me super omnia honorare et diligere. Quod si non fecerit, breuiabuntur dies eius” (IV, 48. 4-5 = VIII, 7. 4-5).

<sup>512</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit., 15.

one held by the anonymous author(s) of *Libellus*, who undoubtedly promoted the viewpoint of the Swedish magnates, as we have demonstrated above.

Perhaps it would be reasonable to search for an expression of ideas held by a “Birgittine party” (if there existed such a group) in the other historical text found in MS C 203 alongside *Libellus*, since this text, *Commentarii historici*, refers directly to *Revelationes*, whereas *Libellus* does not in fact mention St. Birgitta or her revelations. The author of *Commentarii historici*, who might have been a Vadstena priest or a Linköping diocese preacher,<sup>513</sup> explains that King Magnus has been dethroned for three reasons. First of all, the king has been unfaithful to God and has not converted in spite of Christ’s many admonitions and warnings.<sup>514</sup> Second, he was disobedient to Christ and to his Mother. Among the signs of the disobedience the preacher mentions elevating Bengt Algotsson to a high rank. Mary called him “servus diaboli” in one of the revelations quoted here (VIII, 19. 6).<sup>515</sup> Third, he was a sinner. The list of his sins is identical with Extrav. 80.<sup>516</sup> The author refers therefore to the religious reasons for King Magnus’s fall in the first place and presents his sinfulness as a proof or a sign of the fact that Magnus was spiritually incapable of ruling the country. We may thus suggest that this text could be more in line with the reasoning of *Revelationes* than with that of *Libellus de Magno Erici rege*.

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<sup>513</sup> Eva Odelman, “Commentarii historici: en birgittinsk propagandatext,” in *Dicit scriptura: studier i C-samlingen tillägnade Monica Hedlund* (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia, 2006), 74-75.

<sup>514</sup> *Commentarii historici*, 3, in Odelman, op. cit., 82.

<sup>515</sup> *Commentarii historici*, 4-5, in Odelman, op. cit., 83.

<sup>516</sup> *Commentarii historici*, 6, in Odelman, op. cit., 83.

### 3.1.4. The Queen

Birgitta advised several monarchs other than Magnus Eriksson, but in each case her instructions are similar. Therefore, it is not difficult to form a general image of moral obligations of a king as described in *Revelationes*. Birgitta's advice for queens is a different situation. Apart from Blanka de Namur, Magnus Eriksson's queen, Birgitta addressed at least two other female rulers: Joanna of Naples and Eleanor de Gandia of Aragon of Cyprus. They were all very different personalities and Birgitta's relationship to each of them was different, so her advice is also more complex. Thus we shall ask if it is possible to find some common characteristics between all the described queens. We shall now discuss Birgitta's advice for each of them and then try to come to some general conclusions about the moral obligations of a queen as presented in *Revelationes*.

Birgitta knew Blanka from the very beginning of the young princess' marriage to King Magnus. In 1335, when they got married, both Magnus and Blanka were very young,<sup>517</sup> perhaps too young and immature in Birgitta's view, so she judged this marriage "childish play."<sup>518</sup> She did not expect any good from this marriage, as Blanka came, according to Birgitta, from a family "condemned by the church" ("de semine dampnato ab Ecclesia").<sup>519</sup> Her father, Jean I of Namur, was indeed excommunicated by the Bishop of Cambrai, with whom he was engaged in a territorial

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<sup>517</sup> The king was born in 1316, the queen in 1320. They were, respectively, 19 and 15 when they got married in 1335. See: Wilhelmina Stålberg and Per Gustaf Berg, eds., *Anteckningar om svenska qvinnor* (Stockholm: P.G. Berg, 1864-1866), 38; Michael Nordberg, *I kung Magnus tid: Norden under Magnus Eriksson 1317-1374* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1995), 69-72.

<sup>518</sup> "Attende, filia, et scias, quod in omni coniugio Christiano tenetur esse etas et consensus legitimus, sed in istis nichil horum est. Et ideo istud matrimonium simile est puppis et ludo puerili ex eo, quod gloria temporalis ab istis queritur et non lex Christiana et honor Dei" (VIII, 9. 2).

<sup>519</sup> "Filius Dei loquitur sponse de quadam regina, quam rex acceperat in coniugem de semine dampnato ab Ecclesia et infra etatem legitimam . . . Et licet ista nouella regina, filia parentum dampnatorum ab Ecclesia, non portabit iniquitatem patris, numquam tamen de semine istius, prouocantis me ad iram, veniet populo salus et fructus" (VIII, 9. 1 & 4). See also section 2.1.3.

conflict.<sup>520</sup> In her biography of Birgitta, Bridget Morris mentions that during her pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela Birgitta visited Arras, the home city of Blanka's mother, Marie of Atrois.<sup>521</sup> There she could obtain more information about the family of the queen and perhaps shape her critical opinion of them. However, she later served as the queen's *magistra*—teacher and tutor—so she probably became quite close to Blanka.<sup>522</sup> There are several revelations concerning the queen and in all of them we can observe that Birgitta's advice comes in a very private tone. In these passages, her voice seems to be not that of a prophetess, but rather the voice of a mature woman who takes maternal care of a young one. Her tone is often critical, but she is also very patient with the young queen. Birgitta transcribes the following words as a message from the Virgin Mary:

Dic regine, quod ego Mater misericordie recepi eam tamquam nucleum in pomo corrosum, qui non erat pulcher ad videndum sed amarus ad gustandum et insipidus ad gluciendum. Verumptamen plantaui eam in terram longinquam, ut portaret fructum bonum. Ergo sicut arbores proferunt de se folia, flores et fructus, sic ipsa debet portare folia virtutum, scilicet audiendo libenter verba Dei, que utilia sunt anime et similia foliis arborum. Loquatur eciam illa que honoris sunt Dei et utilitatis proximorum, quia tunc portat pulchros flores. Diligat quoque Deum et proximum, et tunc habet optimum fructum. Sed ipsa nunc loquitur libenter scurrilia et ea, quibus acquirere potest mundi honorem et fauorem. Et ideo conuertat se ad me, scilicet portando Filio meo auditu et locucione et opere caritatis fructum illum, qui ei dulcius sapit, hoc est animam suam, quam ipse precordialiter desiderat possidere. (VIII, 10. 1–5)

Apparently, despite her own initial distrust of Blanka, Birgitta hopes for some good fruits from the wild apple tree of Namur. She asks the queen to hear the words of God, to speak about things that are pleasing for God and useful for people and to love God and neighbor. According to Birgitta,

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<sup>520</sup> Count of Namur was given the participate of Cambrai by the emperor, but he apparently did not succeed to establish a peaceful relationship with the bishop (Charles Piot, "Jean I-er," in *Biographie nationale*, vol. 10, by Académie royale de Belgique [Brussels: Établissements Émile Bruylant, 1889], 304-307).

<sup>521</sup> Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 57-59.

<sup>522</sup> A&P, 528, 632; Extrav 59. 1.

love would make Blanka's life fruitful. Still, she knew that the young queen cared more about worldly honor and liked to chat about silly things.

Another revelation also points in this direction: Birgitta thought that Blanka was childish and immature. In Extrav. 59 we read that the queen possessed a beautiful ivory reliquary containing many relics of saints, among them St. Louis, brought from France (Extrav. 59, 1). However, she did not care about this treasure very much, as her servants put it in some "inappropriate place" and forgot about it (Extrav. 59. 2). Birgitta suddenly saw a light coming from this dusty corner and heard a voice saying, "This treasure is honored in heaven, but neglected on earth, so we shall move to some other place." She took the box and brought it to the church (Extrav. 59. 3). This episode could be read as an example of Birgitta's educational principles and Blanka's reaction to them.

Still, Birgitta expects the queen to be more responsible, as she had an important role to play by the side of her husband. She instructs Magnus to pay attention to his queen's discreet advice, very useful for a married man (VIII, 12. 4). On this point Birgitta follows medieval political thought, shaped in the Carolingian times.<sup>523</sup> A queen was crowned together with her husband, and, according to the theology expressed in many coronation rites, she was a co-ruler. Together with the glory, she also bore a part of the royal responsibility.<sup>524</sup> Therefore, Birgitta requires from Blanka some typical queenly virtues and informs Magnus about them:

Propterea ad reginam pertinet humilitas animi, modestia operum, prudentia agendorum,

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<sup>523</sup> Janet Nelson, "Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship," in *Queens and Quennship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference held at King's College, London April 1995*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 302.

<sup>524</sup> Nelson, *op. cit.*, 305



compassio miserorum. Nam prudentia mulieris mitigatus est Daud, ne faceret peccatum, humilitate peruenit Hester ad regnum et perseueravit, sed superbia et cupiditate deiecta est lezabel. Et Maria mater mea propter compassionem et caritatem facta est mater omnium in celis et in terris. (VIII, 12. 5–7)

We can thus understand that Birgitta's critique of Blanka's childish behavior was also related to the political and religious function of the queen. According to Birgitta, to be a queen meant "to rule," and everyone must start by ruling over one's own instincts, disadvantages, and sins. She prays to the Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven:

Benedicta sis tu, regina celi, que nullum peccatorem despicias te ex toto corde inuocantem. Exaudi me, licet indigna sim os meum aperire ad rogandum te. Scio enim, quod nisi suffulta adiutorio tuo non possum memetipsam regere, quia corpus meum est quasi animal indomitum, cuius ori nisi frenum imponitur, currit ad omnia loca, in quibus habere consueuerat sua delectabilia. Voluntas mea est quasi volucris, continue sequi volens cogitationes volatiles et volare cum eis volantibus. Ideo rogo te, ut frenum imponas corpori meo, quam cito alicubi currere voluerit, ubi filio tuo displicuerit, et duc illud, ubi voluntatem filii tui perficere potuerit. Imponas eiam retinaculum illi volucris, que est voluntas mea, ne longius euolet, quam tuo carissimo filio complacet. (Extrav. 52. 1–3)

We can suppose that she wants her pupil to follow the same path that she herself was trying to walk, as she urges Blanka to be more humble, modest, prudent, and compassionate (VIII, 12. 5).

Birgitta wants to follow the footsteps of Mary and the saints, so she has chosen similar models to be imitated by the queen.

We can guess that Birgitta had a very good understanding of possible obstacles in this saintly way of life. She gives a proof of this in a mystical narration about the struggle between a good and evil spirit in the queen's heart (IV, 4 = VIII, 13). In this text, Birgitta writes that God spoke to Blanka through her, expressing the queen's own thoughts and interpreting them as inspirations from two spirits. Comprehension of this text could probably help Blanka to confront her own thoughts and accept them. We don't know anything about the queen's reaction to the message,

but the psychological truth of the arguments of both spirits is striking. The good spirit tries to encourage Blanka to love God and to seek eternal life. It says that all the riches and honors are in fact too tiring and are not worth any efforts to seek them, as they are all transitory (VIII, 13. 4). They are all a burden to the soul. One moment of earthly joy could be a sin leading to long-lasting suffering in purgatory or even in hell (VIII, 13. 5). The evil spirit also has quite convincing arguments. It says that the queen is born to possess and use riches and it is her obligation to be familiar with wealth, as she should distribute money among those who need it (VIII, 13. 8). It would also be dangerous to live in poverty, as “*persona pauper vadit sine consolacione,*” and the queen who renounces her wealth would have to serve those who now serve her (VIII, 13. 8–9). Therefore, it would be better for the queen and for her salvation to keep the rules of her status and way of life:

Ideo stabilis esto in homine accepto, tene statum tuum regaliter, dispone domum tuam laudabiliter, ne, si mutaueris statum tuum, arguaris inconstancie, sed potius mane in inceptis et eris apud Deum et homines gloriosa.<sup>525</sup> (IV, 4. 10 = VIII, 13. 10)

The conversation continues in the same tone, leading the queen to a more detailed reflection about some plans of peregrination to Rome, apparently advised by Birgitta (VIII, 13. 22 and 42). The good spirit tries to awaken Blanka’s enthusiasm for spiritual life and to stir up her courage,

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<sup>525</sup> Alfonso changed the original rubric from IV, 4, while incorporating the text into *Liber ad reges*. In Book IV, the spiritual struggle takes part in a mind of “a certain lady”: “*de mirabili et utili bello in mente cuiusdam domine orto ab inspiracionibus boni spiritus et a temptacionibus maligni spiritus*” – reads the rubric in Book IV. The text of the revelation is not changed in Book VIII and its details allow identifying the addressee as a queen, for example vers VIII, 13. 29 reads that the lady wears a crown and is dressed in purple. In the rubric accompanying the text in *Liber ad reges*, the lady is clearly identified as the queen, and the whole vision is joined with the preceding revelation, VIII, 12 by a following verse: “*Ergo quia regina ista, pro qua tu oras, per te querit a me consilium, responde ei ex parte mea et dic ei, quod ipsa habet aliquas infusiones et suggestiones a duobus spiritibus, scilicet a bono et malo spiritu, quas ego indicabo tibi alia vice*” (VIII, 12. 8). For the discussion of Alfonso’s contribution to editing this particular text see: Arne Jönsson, introduction to *St. Bridget’s Revelations to the Popes: An Edition of the so-called Tractatus de summis pontificibus* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997), 37.

referring to good examples of saints: Princess Elisabeth of Hungary and St. Lucy (VIII, 13. 30 and 35). The evil one is not a simplistic “voice of temptation.” It is rather a voice of realism and constancy, claiming, “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” It thus appears that Birgitta must have realized the complicated moral position in which a ruler could be placed. Still, she has high expectations concerning Blanka.

She does not expect the queen or king to lead the quasi-monastic life that she herself had chosen, however. When the royal couple came to the idea of vowing celibacy, Birgitta strongly opposes this plan. She says that they both lack a proper motivation to live in celibacy, as the king wants to separate himself from the queen “ex feruore nouicio et ex zelo indiscreto et leuitate animi,” while the queen is moved by some sudden impulse, wanting only to please her husband and to avoid pain (VIII, 11. 4).

Generally, the portrait of Queen Blanka sketched in St. Birgitta’s revelations shows an intelligent but immature and impulsive woman who has a very responsible and demanding role to play. We see that she was probably trying to live up to Birgitta’s expectations (as revelation 8, 13 shows) but finally she failed, as she is later an object of Birgitta’s critique together with the king. In her vision, Birgitta saw them both as sun and moon, turning dark and falling from the sky, as they are no more able to illuminate their kingdom with God’s light (VIII, 31. 7).<sup>526</sup>

In *Revelationes* we do not find any of the heavy accusations thrown on Blanka in *Libellus de Magno Erici Rege*. In this booklet, the queen is blamed for poisoning her son and his wife and also for conspiracy with the King of Denmark.<sup>527</sup> I think, therefore, that it would be difficult to make

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<sup>526</sup> See also section 2.3.5.

<sup>527</sup> *Libellus*, op. cit, 15.

Birgitta responsible for creating Blanka's bad reputation which was transmitted by later historiography. Such attempts are nevertheless made, though, such as this one by Steinar Imsen, who writes:

Eric died in 1359 after having joined his father's adversaries, and the influential noblewoman Birgitta Birgersdotter (St. Birgitta) accused the queen of having poisoned her son. In many ways Blanche was made a political scapegoat by the noble opposition in Sweden, and it was Blanche the murderess and the evil spirit of the royal family who survived in Swedish tradition and historiography.<sup>528</sup>

It is also noteworthy that the author of *Commentarii historici*, who is undoubtedly under the influence of *Revelationes*, since he comments on them, expresses no resentment toward Queen Blanka. On the contrary, he even creates a specific interpretation of revelation 8, 9, which could be understood as relating to Blanka's young age and ungodly origin: in *Commentarii historici* we read that this text concerns Beatrix, wife of prince Håkan, not queen Blanka.<sup>529</sup>

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The other two queens described in Birgitta's work represent different models of queenship. During her travels to Cyprus in 1372,<sup>530</sup> Birgitta found herself in the middle of a political crisis. In 1369 the king, Peter I de Lusignan, came back from his crusading expedition to find his kingdom governed by his wife's favorites. He began his revenge on them, but he was so cruel and punished so many persons that he lost the support of his barons as a consequence. Eventually he was murdered in his own bed by a group of nobles. His son and successor, Peter II, was a boy of thirteen at this time and a period of regency began. The queen, Eleanor, and the two paternal

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<sup>528</sup> Steinar Imsen, "Late Medieval Scandinavian Queenship," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a conference held at King's College, London, April 1995* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 54.

<sup>529</sup> *Commentarii historici* 12-13, in: Odelman, op. cit., 84-85.

<sup>530</sup> Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 127.

uncles of the young prince acted as co-regents. Shortly afterward, a conflict between Genoese and Venetian fractions in Cyprus broke out and the rule of young Peter was endangered.<sup>531</sup>

We know only one revelation, or rather its part (VII, 16. 22–30) addressed from Birgitta to Eleanor<sup>532</sup> de Gandia of Aragon, queen of Cyprus, wife of Peter I and mother of Peter II. Birgitta gave her some brief suggestions concerning both political and religious matters. The queen should not go back to her fatherland (“quia non expedit” or “there is no need for that,” VII, 16. 22), but she should rather stay firmly where God had placed her and try to find herself in the complicated situation in Cyprus (VII, 16. 22). Birgitta advised her not to marry again (indeed, this could lead to even greater political crisis, as there were already several parties fighting for power in Cyprus), but to concentrate on her son’s upbringing (VII, 16. 26). This should involve finding wise and pious advisers for Peter and avoiding flatterers. The young king should be raised as a righteous, pious, and compassionate person (VII, 16. 26). Birgitta reminds Eleanor to love her son with “divine love” (VII, 16. 26); we can suppose that this could be contrasted with meek maternal love, tending to spoil the child. But at the moment it is Eleanor herself, not the young king, who is responsible for establishing peace and concord among the citizens of Cyprus (VII, 16. 24). The queen must also see to her own religious formation. She should find a wise and God-loving confessor, not too scrupulous, but not one who will neglect her sins (VII, 16. 28). For the queen it is also appropriate to imitate the lives of saintly queens and other holy women (VII, 16. 29). Birgitta also mentions the style of the queen’s costumes: in her opinion, Eleanor was wearing dresses with too-low necklines

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<sup>531</sup> Philip Newman, *A Short History of Cyprus* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1953), 144-146; Morris, op. cit., 126-127.

<sup>532</sup> In the literature, there are several versions of queen’s name used. She is called Eleanor, Leonor, Leonor. In *Revelationes*: “Elionor”.

as well as using too much perfume and other “vanitates” (VII, 16. 27). Finally, the donations of Eleanor are discussed. Birgitta warns her against inconvenient financial relations:

Nono, quod sit rationabilis in donis suis, fugiendo debita et laudes hominum, quia accepit est Deo vel modicum vel nichil tribuere quam debita contrahere et proximum suum defraudare. (VII, 16. 30)

Based on this short text we can observe that Birgitta apparently expects Eleanor to keep up with many of the rules that applied to Christian kings (see section 3.1.1). Compared to Blanka, Eleanor’s role and authority is presented differently: Blanka was queen consort, not a self-standing ruler, so her duty was to advise her husband and stand by him. Eleanor is, at least temporarily, responsible for the peace in Cyprus, so Birgitta’s instructions are more demanding and include questions like establishing peace and donations policy. However, in the first place, Birgitta advises the queen to raise and educate her son wisely. Eleanor is not a monarch but only a regent, and Birgitta wants her to remain in this somewhat overshadowed position. Apart from the queen there were two other co-regents, the two uncles of young Peter, but in this revelation Birgitta does not mention them. However, she did write a message to John, prince of Antioch (VII, 18 = VIII, 22 and VII, 19).<sup>533</sup> Alfonso in his rubrics states that it was Eleanor who asked Birgitta to write a letter with advice for her co-regents (VII, 18. rubrics).

Eleanor de Gandia was blamed for her husband’s death, as her unfaithfulness led to political crisis.<sup>534</sup> Birgitta does not mention this accusation; instead she warned the queen against seeking revenge for her husband’s death, as judgment and justice are in the hands of God. Again, Birgitta did not support the “bad reputation” of the queen. In her mind, Eleanor still represented

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<sup>533</sup> The two revelations were mentioned above in discussed above: VII, 18 = VIII, 22 and VII, 19.

<sup>534</sup> Newman, op. cit., 144.

the interests of Peter I, since she is advised not to seek revenge for the “iniquity done to her husband” (VII, 16. 29), so Birgitta likely thinks that Eleanor wants revenge. That would place Eleanor in a position of a devoted (even too-devoted, in Birgitta’s eyes) wife and consort.

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The third queen addressed by Birgitta was Joanna I of Naples. Joanna inherited the Neapolitan throne, being a granddaughter of Robert I the Wise, who did not have a male heir. In his will he left his possessions in Provence and southern Italy to Joanna and Andrew of Anjou, Duke of Calabria (chosen by the grandfather as her husband), as well as the funds to be spent on re-conquering Sicily. Unfortunately, she did not manage to be successful as a ruler and was involved in many scandals, including the accusation of inspiring her first husband’s murder. Later historians judged her as a “pleasure-loving and worldly woman”<sup>535</sup> who was too much influenced by her advisers, such Niccolò Acciaiuoli, to lead independent politics.<sup>536</sup>

Birgitta agrees with the common opinion about Joanna. The queen met with Birgitta’s sharp critique. We know of one revelation addressed to Joanna concerning political matters (VII, 11). The text is not homogenous, but a compilation of several short messages that were sent to Joanna in different circumstances. It has a quite short “body” (VII, 11. 1–6) which describes the great war between God and the devil who fight for men’s souls, and an extensive “addicio,” an appendix to the revelation in the form of seven visions (VII, 11. 7–37). In Birgitta’s work, “addiciones” and “declaraciones” concern similar subjects as the revelation’s main text, but they

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<sup>535</sup> Morris, op. cit, 123.

<sup>536</sup> Michael Jones, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History VI: c. 1300 – 1415* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 496.

are not fully integrated with it. Usually they bring more details about the identity of the message recipients or explain the outcomes of the revelation.<sup>537</sup>

In this case, the “addicio” starts with an urging call to the queen to confess, meditate on her sins, and convert (VII, 11. 7). Then the political and moral counsel follows. It appears to be very similar to the advice that Birgitta gave to the kings: she reminds Joanna about the necessity of justice and mercy, about choosing wise advisers who are free from greed, and about the dangers of impulsive and unjust giving (VII, 11. 8–15). The queen should love her subjects with a true love, “discordantes inducendo ad concordiam et iniuste offensos consolando” (VII, 11. 13). Among the devotional practices recommended to the queen we must mention washing the feet of the poor, since we find the same gesture among the devotions recommended for a king (VIII, 2. 17). The next piece of advice concerns Joanna very personally, as Birgitta foresaw that she would die without an heir and therefore she must ensure that the kingdom would not suffer domestic war after her death (VII, 11. 16). Joanna is also urged to end her luxurious and greedy lifestyle, her use of makeup (VII, 11. 17), and her life of “a woman of easy virtue rather than a queen” (“pocius duxerat vitam mulieris lasciue quam regine,” VII, 11. 19). Birgitta warns her against the tremendous verdict of God: if she does not repent, she will be judged “not as a queen, but as an apostate and an ungrateful person” (VII, 11. 21).

The next two visions go even further than that. Birgitta sees Joanna in a dirty shirt and compares her to a monkey that smells its own feces:

Videbatur domina stare in camisia respersa spermate et luto et audita est vox: “Hec est symia odorans fetencia posteriora, que habet venenum in corde et stat sibi ipsi nociua et

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<sup>537</sup> For example: “Cum domina Birgitta staret in Neapoli, reuelata sunt ei secretissima cordis Elziarii, postea cardinalis, et quedam ad ipsum mirabilia futura. Quibus auditis ille stupefactus conuersus est ad meliora” (VII, 5. 43); “Hic miles creditur fuisse dominus Karolus, filius sancte Birgitte” (II, 13. 40).



festinat in decipulas precipitacionis.” Item videbatur habere coronam de viminibus respersis stercore humano et luto platearum et sedere nuda in trabe casura. Statimque videbatur virgo pulcherrima, que dixit: “Hec est mulier procax et audax, que reputatur ab hominibus domina mundi sed coram Deo abiecta est, sicut cernis.” Et addidit virgo: “O mulier, cogita ingressum tuum et attende finem et aperi oculos cordis tui et vide, quia consiliarii tui sunt hii, qui odiunt animam tuam” (VII, 11. 23–26).

Joanna is here confronted with the Virgin Mary, who appears as a “beautiful virgin” (VII, 11. 25) and urges Joanna to “open the eyes of her heart” (VII, 11. 26). Like many of Birgitta’s other visions, here the disgusting appearance of a person is a symbol of his or her ugly and dirty soul, whereas beauty is a sign of sanctity.<sup>538</sup> The message of this text is clear: the queen’s advisers hate her soul (VII, 11. 26), so we can understand that they are at least partially guilty for her disgusting appearance. However, the miserable condition of Joanna’s soul is partly their fault, since she is named an “audacious” and “impudent” woman (VII, 11. 26).

In the next vision Joanna is shown as a demonic, blood-lusting queen, resembling the Babylonian adulteress (VII, 11. 27). She is sitting on a golden throne, accompanied by two black men, “Ethiopes” (who in Birgitta’s symbolic language are representative of the devil).<sup>539</sup> One of them hands her a chalice of blood, saying, “O mulier leonina, ego porto sanguinem. Suscipe et

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<sup>538</sup> This results from the general conviction expressed in *Revelationes* that God, being invisible and incomprehensible for human soul, manifests himself to Birgitta through visible and audible “images”, see section 1.4.3. and 1.4.4. Moreover, beauty has a moral value, since it consoles the soul: “Filius meus, qualis est in celo, videre non poteris sed, qualis erat secundum corpus in mundo, cognosce. Ipse enim tam pulcher facie erat, quod nullus videbat eum facie, qui non consolabatur in aspectu eius, etiam si precordialiter dolorem haberet. Iusti vero spirituali consolacione consolabantur, sed et mali a tristitia seculi tanto tempore, quo eum videbant, releuabantur. Unde et dolentes dicere consueuerunt: Eamus et filium Marie videamus, ut saltem tanto tempore releuemur” (IV, 70. 24-25).

<sup>539</sup> “Visio mirabilis et notanda de quadam anima iudicanda et de Dyaboli accusationibus et virginis gloriose aduocacionibus et de expositione ipsius visionis, in qua celum per palacium, Christus per solem, virgo per mulierem, Dyabolus per Ethiopem, angelus per militem designantur” (IV, 7. rubrics); “Deinde videbatur quidam Ethiops, terribilis in aspectu et gestibus, quasi plenus inuidia et accensus ira magna, qui loquendo clamauit: O, iuste iudex, iudica michi animam et audi opera eius! . . . Permite quoque michi punire corpus cum anima, donec abinuicem separentur” (IV, 7. 4).

effunde, quia proprium est leene sitire sanguinem” (VII, 11. 28). The other gives her a vessel of fire, saying, “O mulier, ego porto tibi in vase ignem. Suscipe, quia ignee nature es et effunde in aquas, ut et memoria tua ita sit in aquis sicut in terris” (VII, 11. 29). A beautiful virgin interrupts this scene, when (having frightened both “Ethiopes”) she warns Joanna not to risk her eternal life (VII, 11. 30–31).

To a modern reader, the language and imagery of these visions may appear quite brutal. One can even wonder why Joanna listened to this cruel critique and why Birgitta dared to address her generous Neapolitan hostess in such a way.<sup>540</sup> However, in Birgitta’s own eyes the revelations addressed to Joanna are probably a gift from God, a reward for the good deeds of the queen and an answer to God’s friends’ prayers, since in her next vision, Christ said:

Hec mulier aliqua placita fecerat michi. Ideo propter preces amicorum meorum indicare ei volo, quomodo fugiat obprobrium hominum et dispendium anime sue, si obedierit bene quidem; sin autem, non effugiat iusticiam iudicis, quia noluit audire vocem Patris. (VII, 11. 32)

The reasons for Joanna’s patience are less obvious. It is possible that she felt honored as a monarch to be addressed by a someone presenting herself as a prophetess, since such a situation had clear biblical parallels, such as Samuel and Nathan addressing Saul and David (1Sa 9–25; 2Sa 7–12). She also could have taken Birgitta’s visions with a grain of salt. Regardless of the reasons, we know that Queen Joanna was not antagonistic toward Birgitta because she strongly supported her canonization: she wrote letters to the pope to support Birgitta’s case and organized the questioning of the Neapolitan witnesses who took part in the canonization process.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 124.

<sup>541</sup> A&P, 54-55, 64-66.

It is noteworthy that Birgitta never questions Joanna's or Eleanor's right or ability to rule the kingdom. It appears that the gender of a ruler was not a matter of importance for her, as long as a queen's behavior did not collide with the dignity of a monarch. We can guess that she criticized the regents' vanity because (among other moral reasons) she felt it was in collision with the high dignity they held. Concerning political questions her expectations vary, regarding the function held by a queen. From Joanna she expects fulfilling all the conditions of Christian kingship, as she was in fact a self-standing ruler. Eleanor was supposed to take a large part of the responsibility for the country, but only until her son comes of age. Blanka, who was a queen consort, had another role to play in the kingdom. In Birgitta's opinion, her authority was dependant on her husband's power and she could exercise it mostly as a positive influence on him. In *Revelationes*, it is therefore difficult to speak about "queenly virtues" in general, as Birgitta was very flexible in her advice for the queens, who are all presented as strong individuals.

Nevertheless, Alfonso de Jaén attempted to construct a general image of Christian queenship when he edited *Liber ad reges*. In the plan of this book he created a section concerning queens (VIII, 8–15). It contains only visions addressed to Blanka, the queen consort, excluding all revelations concerning Joanna or Eleanor, more independent rulers. In addition, in the beginning and in the end of this section we find two allegorical revelations (VIII, 8 and 15) which may have been presented to Blanka, but nothing in their contents proves that. One of these visions (VIII, 8) describes the beauty and virtues of the Virgin Mary and the other (VIII, 15) presents symbolic figures of *domina Superbia* and *domina Humilitas* providing an example of humility to a queen. This construction suggests that for Alfonso the model of a queen consort is the "proper" kind of queenship and that it should be somehow based on the example of Mary. We can also suppose that Alfonso probably regarded the virtue of humility as particularly important for a queen, since

he stressed that point by adding a revelation that did not mention any particular female ruler, but included “queen-like” allegorical figures.

Revelation 8, 8 was originally placed in book 5, revelation 4. The meaning of the text is different in both books, however. The original rubrics in book 5 reads as follows:

Reuelacio quarta in libro questionum, in qua Christus pulcherrime laudat omnia membra virginis Marie matris sue, moralizans dicta membra spiritualiter, comparando ea virtutibus, et pronunciat eandem virginem dignissimam esse reginali corona. (V, rev. 4. rubrics)

This is a simple description of this vision’s contents. In book 8, Alfonso provides the following rubrics:

Omnium imperator Christus ad ostendendum regibus, quod regine debent eligi deuote et virtuose, ostendit hoc exemplo suo; qui eligit inter omnes feminas virtuosiore[m] omni virtute in Matrem et reginam celorum. (VIII, 8. rubrics)

In the text, however, we do not find any suggestion that it contains “advice for the kings that they should choose a devout and virtuous queen.” The text itself becomes here an instrument in the hands of the editor, who aims at creating general advice for Christian kings about the virtues desirable in a royal consort. Alfonso also slightly changes the text in order to adjust it to its new function:

Nec initium habet corona mea nec finem, significans potestatem meam, que non habuit principium nec habebit finem. Verum ego aliam coronam habui custoditam in me, que quidem corona sum ego ipse Deus. Hec autem corona preparata fuit **illi regine, que super omnes maiorem** caritatem haberet ad me, et hanc coronam, dulcissima Mater mea, vicisti et traxisti ad te cum iusticia et caritate. (VIII, 8. 1–3 [emphasis mine])

In book 5, revelation 4, the only queen mentioned is Virgin Mary, since the underlined fragment reads: “Hec autem corona preparata fuit ei, qui maximam caritatem haberet ad me” (V, rev. 4. 3).

The change was probably also aimed at adjusting the text to a new addressee: all Christian kings (*Epistola solitarii* I, 1).

### 3.2. The Laity

In this section we shall discuss the duties and moral obligations of lay Christians who take part in the life of the Christian kingdom. Therefore, we will accent these elements of Birgitta's teaching about the morality of laymen, which are important for their social and public performance. From this perspective we will speak about the two groups of laypeople: knights, who are described in *Revelationes* as a group held to strict legal responsibilities and having great influence on the social life (see section 3.2.1); and "communitas regni," the community of the realm, the group of "common people" who take part in public life by, among other responsibilities, paying taxes and leading their businesses. According to Birgitta, their public activities involve certain moral obligations resulting from Christian worldview (see section 3.2.2). However, we will not discuss the individual ethics as presented in *Revelationes* and we will not touch on the subject of marriage and family life; while these are very important dimensions of Christian life in *ordo laicorum*, they are not included in the matter of this study.<sup>542</sup>

#### 3.2.1. Knights

The moral obligations of knights result to some extent from the oath they take. Birgitta states that knights who take the special knightly oath described above (see section 2.3.4) should be "brought to God by love" ("divina delectacio," II, 9. 4), but Birgitta refers to all Christians while

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<sup>542</sup> On this subject see: Nina Sjöberg, *Hustru och man i Birgittas uppenbarelser* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003); Emilia Gutowska, "Mistyka małżeńska św. Brygidy Szwedzkiej" [Marital Mystics of St. Birgitta of Sweden], *Fronda* 40 (2006): 138-157.

speaking about this oath, broken by a certain knight who first abandoned “vera militia”: “Fregit etiam promissionem michi factam. Que est promissio vera, quam homo tenetur vouere Deo? Utique opus caritatis, ut, quidquid fecerit homo, hoc ex caritate Dei faciat” (II, 9. 13). Therefore, love should be the major motive of all human actions and should be somehow confirmed by an oath or a vow to God. Various vows were indeed a part of Christian life in the Middle Ages: the sacrament of marriage, monastic profession, and the sacrament of holy orders included a vow or an oath. However, according to Birgitta, the oaths taken in various states of Christian life express different degrees of love for God. She describes these grades using a grammatical comparison:<sup>543</sup> people who are married or stay in other “laudabile dispositio” are on a positive grade of love (III, 27. 11). Those who give away their property or teach the Christian faith are on a comparative grade (III, 27. 12), while those who give their lives away for Christ are on superlative grade of love. To the third group belong monks and knights (III, 27. 13). All other laymen belong to the first group, so we notice that Birgitta perceives knighthood as, potentially, the most spiritually mature group within the lay status, chosen by God to love Him more than anyone else. In the same revelation Birgitta suggests that knighthood should be esteemed even higher than monastic life:

Sed queramus in istis gradibus supradictis. Ubi inuenitur nunc caritas Dei feruencior? Queramus in militibus et doctoribus. Queramus in religiosis et mundi contemptoribus, qui tenerentur esse in comparatiuo et superlatiuo gradu, et certe nimis pauci inueniuntur, nam non est vita austerior quam vita militaris, si in sua vera institucione staret. Si enim

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<sup>543</sup> Birgitta took grammar classes in Rome. See : “Respondit mater: ‘Quid agis modo et cotidie?’ Et ego respondi: ‘Addisco gramaticam et oro et scribo’” (VI, 46. 16); “Mater loquitur sponse: ‘Cur sic turbaris, filia?’ Respondit illa: ‘Quia, domina, non visito loca ista sancta, que sunt in Roma.’ Et mater: ‘Permittitur,’ inquit, ‘tibi visitare loca ista cum humilitate et deuota reuerencia . . . Verumptamen, filia, non dimittas propter hoc scholas tuas in gramatica nec patris spiritualis tui tuam sanctam obedienciam’” (VI, 105. 1-3); “Christus loquebatur sponse dicens: ‘Tu in gramatica tua composuisti hodie prouerbium, quod melius esset preuenire quam preueniri. Sic ego preueni te dulcedine gracie mee, ne dyabolus dominaretur anime tue’” (VIII, 34. 1). Alfonso de Jaen states in his *Epistola solitarii ad reges* that Birgitta learned music as well: “Alter vero pater spiritualis istius domine erat quidam presbiter de Suecia . . . qui totam domum predictae domine regebat et eam cum filia sua gramaticam et cantum ex precepto Christi docuit” (*Epistola solitarii ad reges*, III, 19).

monacho precipitur habere cucullam, militi precipitur grauius, scilicet lorica. Si vero est graue monacho pugnare contra voluptatem carnis, militi est grauius inter armatos hostes procedere. Si vero ordinatur monacho durus lectus, grauius est militi in armis quiescere. Et si monachus turbatur et affligitur abstinencia, durius est militi affligi continuo timore vite. (III, 27. 13–15)

This comparison may be inspired by literary works such as *De laude novae militiae* by Bernard of Clairvaux. In this work he also compares monks and knights, concluding that the latter group has more opportunity to show heroic virtues than monks, who fight evil spiritually but do not confront the enemies of Christ in the same way that knights do.<sup>544</sup>

Unfortunately, in Birgitta's eyes most of the defenders of faith have abandoned their mission and have become "knights of the devil." She even calls their relapse "an apostasy" and judges it as worse than sins of other laymen ("Sed inter omnes status laycorum milites plus aliis apostatauerunt" VI, 26. 13 = VIII, 30. 13), probably because their love was expected to be greater than that of other laymen. Invar Fogelqvist also notes that Birgitta puts such a great responsibility on knights and clergy because they have spiritual and secular power in the world and are thus being responsible for the wellbeing of other social groups.<sup>545</sup> Birgitta describes them as steersmen who steer the ship irresponsibly, thus leading innumerable souls of their "passengers" to perdition:

Per istos vero gubernatores intelligo omnes potestatem habentes corporaliter et spiritualiter in mundo. Plerique enim eorum in tantum diligunt voluntatem propriam, quod de animarum utilitate suorum subditorum non attendunt, seuissimis mundi procellis, videlicet superbie, cupiditatis et immundicie, se voluntarie inuoluendo. (III, 5. 4)

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<sup>544</sup> Bernard de Clairvaux, "De laude novae militiae," 1, in *Éloge de la nouvelle chevalerie: Vie de saint Malachie; Epitaphe, hymne, lettres* (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1990), 50.

<sup>545</sup> Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), 31.

The first important aspect of morality of knighthood noticed in *Revelationes* is thus their (potentially) highest moral position among the laymen, or perhaps even among all Christians, and their responsibility before God for the spiritual condition of other social groups.

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Above we have said that Birgitta probably intended to establish a knightly fraternity aimed at inspiring the spiritual reform of the whole Christian knighthood (see section 2.3.4). However, as long as basic moral choice is concerned, we see no considerable differences between the requirements she imposed on members of this “military order” and on other Christian knights not belonging to this special group. The choice that appears before a knight is between “militia Dei” and “militia diaboli,” since, according to Birgitta all “milites” fight in one of these two armies, even if they are not conscious of that. Knights of the devil think that they struggle to win temporal wealth or honor, but in fact they only serve their *cupiditas* and *superbia* (II, 10. 19–21).

In the above-mentioned revelation (II, 8) describing the first knight who abandoned the army of Christ and joined the army of the devil, Birgitta carefully analyzes the motives and intentions of that man’s actions. Before taking his oath, he knew that as a knight of Christ he would be bound to believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (II, 8. 6), to be humble and not follow his own will (II, 8. 7) and not to care about “worldly honor” (II, 8. 8). All of that sounded unconvincing or perhaps too abstract for him, so he has chosen to follow a voice in his heart promising him better merits in another army:

Si, sicut dixi, volueris esse meus, tunc debes procedere cum omni superbia in campum et in plateas, ut, sicut ille Dominus precepit suis habere humilitatem in omnibus, sic nullum sit genus ostentacionis et superbie, quod te fugiat. Et sicut ille intrauit cum obediencia et omni se subdidit obediencie, sic nullum tu patere te esse superiorem! Nulli curues per humilitatem ceruicem tuam. Gladium assume in manibus ad hoc, ut effundas sanguinem proximi tui et fratris tui propter acquisitionem possessionis eius! Clipeum pone in brachio



ad hoc, ut libenter des vitam tuam pro acquisitione honoris! Pro fide, quam ille habet, tu dilige templum corporis tui, ut a nulla voluptate, que te delectat, abstineas! (II, 8. 16–20)

However, this man did not take any “diabolical” oath, he only rejected taking a special knightly oath in the church (which was his first intention: see II, 8. 5) and was dubbed by the prince in an ordinary way (II, 8. 21). He joined the army of the devil without taking any oath of fidelity to him: the deed was decided when he left the church and confirmed when he was dubbed. Birgitta does not say that dubbing was a “demonic act,” but neither does she praise it. In this description, both ceremonies are presented as less important than the intention behind the man’s actions.

A similar statement is found in book 4, where Birgitta writes:

Omnis accio tua sit racionabilis et intencio tua recta, ut omne quod agis ea intencione facias, ut honor Dei perficiatur et utilitas anime delectacioni corporis preferatur. Nam multi seruiunt Deo opere, sed intencio corrupta obfuscat omne bonum. . . . Sic multi seruiunt michi oracionibus et ieiuniis ex timore quodam, quia considerant penam horribilem et misericordiam meam magnam. Querunt me operibus exterioribus aliquibus, sed voluntate faciunt contra mandata Filii mei. . . . Quorum retribucio brevis erit, quia de frigido corde eorum processit opus. (IV, 114. 3–4 and 7 and 11)

In my opinion, both fragments suggest that Birgitta viewed the internal disposition of a person and his or her intentions as much more important for assessing the moral value of the act than the performance of the act itself. Birgitta often accuses Swedish knights of acting with evil intentions and with negligence about the proper meaning of their duties. This was the case of a Swedish crusading expedition to Novgorod in 1348–1350, which she inspired and praised. Before the expedition began, Birgitta clearly expresses her opinion about the proper intentions of the crusaders:<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> About the proper intentions of crusading see also: Kurt Villads Jensen, “Imitatio Christi i den grad. Korstogene som en spirituel rejse,” in *Undervejs mod Gud. Rummet og rejsen i middelalderlig religiøsitet*, ed. Mette Birkedal Bruun and Britt Istof (København: Museum Tusulanum Forlag, 2004), 46-65.

Si rex exire voluerit ad paganos, consulo – non precipio, quia maius meritum est facere secundum consilium quam ex precepto. Ideo consulo ei duo. Primo, quod habeat cor bonum et corpus aptum. Cor scilicet bonum, ut nulla sit intencio alia exeundi nisi propter caritatem Dei et salutem animarum. Corpus vero aptum, ut scilicet racionabilis sit in ieiunio et labore. Secundo laboret, quod vasallos et milites habeat voluntarios et correctos. . . . Quia qui alios conatur mittere in celum necesse est, ut incipiat a seipso, corrigendo errores proprios et post hec subditos ammonendo et corripiendo et virtuosus exemplis incitando. (VIII, 39. 2–5)

According to this text, the king should be motivated by love for God and a desire to save the souls of people. Birgitta warned him against doing anything contrary to these motives. She puts much effort into transforming Magnus's escapade into a religious mission: she advises him to offer "faith and peace and freedom" to the heretics<sup>547</sup> (VIII, 40. 2) and proposes to organize a theological debate with their priests (VIII, 43. 5). Sermons preached by Dominicans, Franciscans, and Bernardines ("quia illi tres ordines ad paganismum primo sunt vocandi") were also a necessary part of the mission (VIII, 47. 20.). If that did not work out, the king was entitled to use force, but the goal of this expedition was "salvation of souls," not killing the "pagans" (VIII, 39. 3). Like many crusading preachers, Birgitta promises salvation for those who die in the battle (VIII, 40. 3). However, it was not death during the crusade that entitled the knights to enter heaven, but, again, their intention. Only those who "die because of love" ("qui pro caritate mortui fuerint") will receive the reward (VIII, 40. 3). According to this point of view, in the same battle some of the Swedish knights may have died and been redeemed, while others were punished.

Unfortunately, the expedition turned out to be a failure; Magnus Eriksson and his people were forced to withdraw because of pestilence and did not achieve any remarkable results in

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<sup>547</sup> Further discussion on Birgitta's attitude towards the members of Byzantine Orthodox Church, who were the object that crusade, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study. We can only suggest that she was in a full agreement with theology and practice of her time, both from the Roman and from Byzantine side.

converting the heretics.<sup>548</sup> Birgitta states that king's failure was caused by his lack of humility and distrust in God: he went to conquer pagans with a huge army, while it would have been more secure for him to lead a small group of God-loving knights, because in that case God would give them victory (VIII, 44. 8–10; VIII, 47. 9–13). He could have been a new David, who killed a giant thanks to God's power and wisdom although only a boy himself (VIII, 44. 1–3). Instead, he was like Moses, leading a stubborn and wicked people through the desert: because of the ingratitude of the people Moses was forbidden to enter the Holy Land and the king was forbidden to fulfill the will of God (VIII, 45. 2). She further states that King Magnus was acting like a child who prefers an apple that looks nice but is rotten inside to the one that looks ugly, but tastes good. He decided to set out with many splendid warriors, but he did not consider that their internal disposition would bring catastrophe upon them all (VIII, 44. 7–8). In Birgitta's opinion, this way of thinking was not specific to the king only. It was a typical sin of knights who are afraid to trust God and as a consequence prefer to fight each other, moved by pride and greed, than to fight evil (II, 7. 42).

Birgitta's criticism of Magnus Eriksson's intentions as a crusader is rather sharp, but we must also notice that according to the Russian sources Magnus tried to conform to the visionary's advice. John Lind analyzed these sources, mainly *Novgorod Fourth Chronicle* and *Novgorod Karamzin Chronicle*.<sup>549</sup> They both note that when the Swedish army arrived in Novgorod in 1348, the king sent "his monks" to Novgorodians inviting them to a theological debate. The debate would decide whose faith was better: if the orthodox Russians agreed to accept the Roman faith

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<sup>548</sup> Michael Nordberg, *I kung Magnus tid: Norden under Magnus Eriksson 1317-1374* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1995), 103-104.

<sup>549</sup> John Lind, "Magnus Eriksson som birgittinsk konge i lyset af russiske kilder," in *Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden: Akter fra et symposium, afholdt i Mariager den 8.-11. marts 1990*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1991), 103-128.

the army would not attack them, and if the orthodox theologians won the king would convert to their faith. The citizens did not however accept this invitation. They replied that the king should ought to go to Constantinople if he desired to discuss their faith, since they had accepted Christianity from the Greeks. At the same time they expressed a will to discuss other subjects with the Swedish mediators, but the Swedes were not interested in further negotiations, so the military phase of the expedition began.<sup>550</sup> John Lind suggests, however, that Magnus Eriksson was not entirely sure about the religious character of his expedition, since he entered the territory of Novgorod through the “key points on the important waterways to Novgorod, long coveted by the Swedes,” where the resistance would be fierce—and that would suggest that the campaign had an aggressive character.<sup>551</sup>

Michael Nordberg judges Birgitta’s contribution to these events as unrealistic and inconsequential,<sup>552</sup> but if we consider Birgitta’s ethical concept of intention, it may become more understandable. In all of the above-described revelations, Birgitta stresses the importance of intention in moral assessment and claims that the same act can be assessed as good or evil depending on the intention. Based on that, we can suggest that in ethical questions Birgitta is a firm intentionalist. According to medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas, a human act—one that is performed by a man as a man and has moral value—is to be free (as human will is free) and

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<sup>550</sup> See the fragments of *Novgorodian Karamzin Chronicle* translated by John Lind in: Lind, op. cit., 121-122.

<sup>551</sup> Lind, op.cit., 103.

<sup>552</sup> ”Det är inte utan att en klenrogen nutida läsare i detta sammanhang kommer att tänka på riddaren från La Mancha och hans fasta förtröstan på det vandrande ridderskapets absoluta överlägsenhet över också den fruktansvärdaste motståndare. Graden av kontakt med realiteter torde vara densamma både i hans och fru Birgittas fall” (Nordberg, op. cit., 104).

rational (as we are able to understand, what we do and why).<sup>553</sup> Therefore, it is possible to assent to human acts according to two main criteria: knowledge (of what we are doing) and intention to do it.<sup>554</sup> If someone is ignorant about the act, that act has in fact no moral value, so it cannot be regarded as good or evil. If the act was done involuntarily, its moral value cannot be assessed, either. In the discussed fragment, Birgitta follows the tradition represented by Peter Abelard<sup>555</sup> in expressing her belief that the intention only is important for moral assessment of an act. Even the performance of it is not decisive. Intentionalism claims that before we actually perform an act, we complete a mental act of willing it and consenting to it. Therefore, someone who wants to sin but does not have an opportunity for it is not any better than someone who wants to sin and does it. On the other hand, I would suggest that in the discussed texts Birgitta does not pay much attention to the question of knowledge or ignorance about the real meaning and consequences of an act, since she assumes that the king knew about it. She wrote that Magnus intentionally hired “people skilled to fight” who were not friends of God, since he thought that “*amici Dei non habent scienciam pugnandi*” (VIII, 47. 14).

We can conclude that Birgitta’s idea of kingship and knightly virtue is based on two principles governing the social life in general, but clearly visible in the case of this social group. The first one is love for God and for people, which should be the internal motive of all public actions. The second is Birgitta’s general view of social affairs as a part of the Great War between good and evil, the army of God and the army of Devil. This principle will be discussed in detail in the last

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<sup>553</sup> *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, q. II, a. 5., trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 60-70.

<sup>554</sup> *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, loc.cit.

<sup>555</sup> Peter Abelard, *Scito te ipsum*, lib. 1, ca 3., ed. Rainer M. Ilgner (Brepols: Turnhout, 2001), 20.

chapter of this study (section 5.2). We also noted that Birgitta presents an intentionalist view on morality, also in the social aspect.

### 3.2.2. *Communitas Regni*

According to Tore Nyberg, Birgitta's position in the church was quite exceptional compared to other medieval authors: she started her public activities as a laywoman (lay meaning both "non-religious" and "not academically educated"), but thanks to her unique, personal relationship with God she became an authority in religious matters. She learned Latin and her revelations were transmitted in that language. In fact, Birgitta entered a world of educated and therefore somehow consecrated people, but did not lose her special sensitivity to the situation of laymen.<sup>556</sup> I think, therefore, that Birgitta's social position makes her opinion about the role of laymen in social life particularly interesting.

Based on an analysis of *Revelationes*, I suggest that according to this text lay people generally take part in the social life of the kingdom as "communitas regni," the community of the realm. Birgitta uses the word "communitas" in two different senses: it describes the community of all inhabitants of the kingdom, but in a narrow sense this expression is reserved for those laymen who are not knights. We shall discuss each of these two meanings briefly.

By choosing the term "communitas regni," Birgitta suggests that she represents a certain viewpoint on the nature of social organization. "Communitas" in the Middle Ages means usually "basic concrete social reality which is established with the growth of politics"<sup>557</sup> or a group of

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<sup>556</sup> Tore Nyberg, "Birgitta och lekmännen," in *Birgittinsk festgåva: Studier om Heliga Birgitta och Birgittinorden* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1991), 25-26.

<sup>557</sup> J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350 - c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 522.

people organized by common law and community of interest.<sup>558</sup> The term is rooted in Roman and canon law<sup>559</sup> and Birgitta apparently was conscious of the term's legal connotation, since she divided the laws into three types: "Tres leges sunt. Una est Ecclesie, secunda est imperatoris, tertia est communitatis" (IV, 111. 1). The other source of the "communitas" concept is the theological idea of "communio" or Greek "koinonia": a harmonious relation between men or between men and God.<sup>560</sup> This Christian theological concept assumes that "communio" between people is modeled after internal relations of love within the Holy Trinity (Joh 17:21). The church as a community of the faithful is also expected to be "communio."<sup>561</sup>

In Birgitta's eyes, people living in the kingdom are not isolated individuals, but members of some social reality—it could be the great community of the realm or some smaller groups, like city communities (see below). Therefore, in most cases the king is not related to each of his subjects individually but to one of these basic communities: organized, united entities having some laws and demands. We can understand that this relation is twofold, but Birgitta puts much more stress on the king's obligations concerning the community than on the community's public duties. It is clear to her that the king must love the community and take care for its good (VIII, 4. 19). He is not allowed to put too heavy a burden on the people or to have a preference for some group of his subjects, excluding or oppressing the others (IV, 25. 5–7). She judged some of Magnus Eriksson's decisions as being contrary to the good of the community, even if those decisions did not oppress it directly—this was the case with the succession to the Swedish and Norwegian throne after

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<sup>558</sup> Burns, loc. cit.

<sup>559</sup> Burns, op. cit., 521-522.

<sup>560</sup> Burns, op. cit., 524.

<sup>561</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "The Holy Spirit as Communio: Concerning the Relationship of Pneumatology and Spirituality in Augustine," *Communio* 25 (Summer 1998): 326-327.

Magnus. He appointed his younger son, Håkan, as a king of Norway where monarchy was hereditary, while the older Eric ruled in Sweden, an elective kingdom. In Birgitta's opinion, this was a mistake. The older son should inherit Norway. She says:

In electoribus eorum tria erant inconuenientia et quartum superexcellit: inordinatus amor, prudentia simulata, adulacio stultorum et **diffidencia de Deo et communitate**. Ideo electio eorum fuit contra iusticiam, contra Deum, **contra bonum rei publice et utilitatem communitatis**. Propterea ad prouidendum paci et consulendum **utilitati communitatis** necesse est, quod senior filius recipiat regnum hereditarium, iunior vero ad electionem veniat. Alioquin, nisi retractentur priora facta, regnum pacietur dispendium, **communitas affligetur**, discordia orietur, dies filiorum erunt in amaritudine, regnaque eorum iam non erunt regna sed sicut scriptum est: "Potentes transmigrabunt a sedibus suis, et qui ambulabant in terris eleuabuntur." (IV, 3. 25–29 [emphasis mine])

Birgitta actually thought the precedence of the senior prince necessary for saving peace in both kingdoms (IV, 3. 26), and in her opinion peace was a main concern of community and the very essential condition of its wellbeing. In her revelation concerning the Hundred Years' War, she said that the Virgin Mary listens to the voice of "communitas," which cries for peace (VI, 104. 17).

In the second sense mentioned above, "communitas" means a certain social group, identical to "laboratores," one of the groups distinguished in a tripartite scheme of society ("iudices, milites, laboratores"), discussed above (2.3.1). Birgitta described "laboratores" as "communitas tota" (I, 55. 17) or "communitas" (I, 56. 12), so we can assume that in this sense "communitas" has a meaning close to "common people": laymen who are not knights, "milites," since judges, "iudices," are identified with "clerics" (I, 56. 7).

We can learn about the duties of the community's members in a negative way from Birgitta's warnings and lament over their sins. In public life, they should keep the rules of Christian life and fulfill their financial duties both to the king and to the church, but they should not try to corrupt representatives of power with any gifts:



Laboratores vero, qui sunt communitas tota, respuunt mandata mea et retinent dona mea et decimas meas. Offerunt dona iudicibus suis et eis reuerenciam exhibent, ut eos beniuolos et placabiles inueniant. (I, 60. 19)

According to Birgitta, the main spiritual difficulty of the lay community was their shortsighted and mundane view of the world. Apparently, they were not too interested in eternal life, as long as their current life was enjoyable:

Tercio laboratores, idest communitas, sunt sicut tauri indomiti, quia habent tria. Effodiunt enim terram pedibus, secundo implet se ad sacietatem, tercio complent voluptatem suam iuxta desiderium suum. Sic communitas nunc totis affectionibus inhiat temporalibus. Implet se immoderata gula et vanitate mundi. Complet absque ratione carnis sue delectacionem. (I, 56. 12–13)

We can thus notice that Birgitta generally does not demand any special, heroic virtues from the ordinary people: to be proper citizens of the Christian kingdom they had to keep the commandments (I, 55. 19) and receive the sacraments, which could also take the form of a public duty. In Naples, Birgitta desired a reform of society starting from mass confessions and receiving Holy Communion by all Roman Catholics in this kingdom, which would undoubtedly be a public event (VII, 27. 34–35).

Birgitta noticed that citizens of Naples kept pagan servants and slaves but did not care about their spiritual condition and even neglected their human dignity: the slaves were not baptized or religiously uninstructed, and some women were sold to brothels or kept as “mistresses” by their lords. Birgitta orders that slaves should be freed or at least promised freedom and both free and non-free servants should be catechized (VII, 28. 9–17). Based on this revelation we can observe that Birgitta requires members of “communitas” to bear a certain responsibility for the spiritual life of the people put under their care.

It is noteworthy that Birgitta perceived the people (*populus*) or community of the realm as an object of individual salvation history, a separate entity having its own destiny and own way of Christian life, since many times she addresses not individual persons but “populus,” such as in Rome (VII, 31. 5), France (IV, 103. 2), and Cyprus (“O, popule Cypri michi adversarie!” VII, 19. 12 = VIII, 23. 12). According to these revelations, within the universal Christian society there is apparently place for the individual fortune of each nation. We can thus assume that the community of the realm is co-responsible for the salvation of the kingdom as a whole. This point of view is probably shaped after the Old Testament theology of the chosen nation, which later was applied to all Christians, who, according to ancient Christian theology, replaced the Jewish nation in this role.<sup>562</sup>

### 3.3. Clergy

#### 3.3.1. The Way of the Good Shepherd

By way of analogy to the royal way of living (*via regia*), Birgitta presents the way of the Good Shepherd to be followed by the bishops. A detailed description of this ideal is found in book 3, which may be described as a *Speculum episcoporum*, a mirror of bishops.<sup>563</sup> This way of Christian living was briefly characterized in the first chapter of the book. In this text, Christ

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<sup>562</sup> “We have been led to God through this crucified Christ, and we are the true spiritual Israel, and the descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham, who, though uncircumcised, was approved and blessed by God because of his faith and was called the father of many nations” – Justin the Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 11, 5, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 21; “Therefore as we have shown above that the coming cessation of the old law and of the carnal circumcision was declared, so, too, the observance of the new law and the spiritual circumcision has shone out into the voluntary obediences of peace. For ‘a people,’ he says, ‘whom I knew not hath served me; in obedience of the ear it hath obeyed me’” – Tertullian, “An Answer to the Jews,” 3, 154, in *Anti-Nicens Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.iv.ix.iii.html> (accessed October 20, 2009).

<sup>563</sup> Bridget Morris, introduction to Book III of *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume I: Liber Caelestis, Books I-III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 253.

encourages a bishop to join him on a “narrow path taken by few” (III, 1. 2), to lay aside the heavy burden of “worldly desires” and to accept the light burden of humility (III, 1. 2–3). Then the bishop should be girded for the journey, and his belt stands for “justice and divine love”:

Quid significat, quod angelus erat precinctus, nisi quod omnis episcopus precinctus debet esse cingulo iusticie et diuine caritatis, paratus ire per illam viam, per quam ille iuit, qui ait: “Ego sum pastor bonus, qui pono animam meam pro ouibus meis.” (III, 1. 4)

The bishop therefore should follow Christ, the Good Shepherd, who “giveth his life for his sheep” (Joh 10:11.) In his case, “giving his life” means speaking the truth in his words and performing the justice in his actions (III, 1. 4). He should also take some provisions for the journey: his bread stands for “loving God more than anything else” (III, 1. 9) and his water for “considering the passion of Christ” (III, 1. 10).

These brief pieces of advice, followed by a detailed explanation of the everyday spiritual routines of a good bishop, already reveals the main features of a bishop’s specific spirituality as seen by Birgitta: it will be centered around justice (expressed in judging and teaching), love, and humility, contrary to worldly desires.

Birgitta’s view on the role of bishops in a Christian community is quite complex, but it can be generally placed within the scheme of teaching and judging as two main fields of bishopric authority. According to her, the authority and dignity of a bishop is expressed in the following ways:

Quid vero significat infula episcopalis nisi potestatem et dignitatem episcopalem, ordinare scilicet clerum, conficere crisma, corrigere errantes, excitare exemplo suo negligentes? (III, 3. 2)

We can thus understand that she stresses the importance of judging (“*corrigerere errantes*”) and sacramental service reserved for the shepherd of diocese (“*ordinare clerum, condicere crisma*”), while she understood teaching mostly as an example of Christian living, but also “speaking the truth in words,” as mentioned above.

In the revelation addressed to the regent of Cyprus (VII, 18), Birgitta also gives detailed advice to the bishops about the way of executing their office of judging. The regent should thus instruct all bishops that they are obliged to admonish their diocesan clergy to rebuke those parishioners who live in public sin—that is, sin which could be harmful to the public life of Christian society (VII, 18. 13). Priests must instruct such persons about spiritual dangers threatening their souls and possible ways of conversion (VII, 18. 14). If a sinner is not willing to convert, the priest is expected to inform the bishop about the problem. A bishop’s duty is to punish the sinner with an ecclesiastical sentence, according to canon law (VII, 18. 15). If, however, the sinner neglects the authority of the bishop and the punishment, the king is supposed to step in. Birgitta addresses the prince of Antiochia in the following way:

*Si vero predicti episcopi et prelati propter eorum pertinaciam et superbiam aut propter eorum temporalem potenciam illos corrigerere nequierint et punire, tunc vobis, domini mei, consulitur, quod vestra potenti manu sitis cooperatores dominorum prelatorum, ut auxilio vestro dicti peccatores inducti corrigantur et emendati misericordiam Dei consequantur.*  
(VII, 18. 16–17)

This procedure assumes the existence of a specific “chain of power.” It appears that Birgitta sees the authority of a bishop as a central part of this chain. A bishop delegates his authority of teaching to diocesan priests, “his clerics” (“*clericis suis*,” VII, 18. 13), who are directly responsible for correcting and rebuking the laymen. If this authority is neglected, the monarch is entitled to act as a higher instance and punish the sinner. The authority of a bishop and the authority of a

king are thus presented as complementary. They both take part in executing the moral judgment in the Christian society.

Birgitta never actually took part in the medieval discussion on the supremacy of royal or ecclesiastical authority over the Christian community. Here she presents royal power as a higher instance, but in other situations she expects the king to obey the pope, such as when she urges Magnus Eriksson to ask for the absolution from his sins of destroying the well-being of the Swedish state (VIII, 52. 1–5).

According to Birgitta, the bishop's ability to judge properly could be harmed by his leading a luxurious lifestyle, which not only may hinder his own spiritual progress but also may scandalize people (III, 11. 11.). Moreover, a bishop's judgment should not be influenced by his personal sympathies, prejudices, or fears (III, 1. 5). Birgitta is very firm in her demands concerning the independence of this judgment and also regarding a bishop's independence from secular power. She points to St. Thomas Becket as an example of a brave and responsible bishop who did not hesitate to oppose the king, fight sin, and defend justice, even though this firm resistance led to his death (III, 13. 11–12).

According to revelation 3, 1, bishops realize their duty of teaching in two ways: by preaching (III, 1. 4) and by their example of good deeds (III, 1. 2). In my opinion, Birgitta is particularly concerned about this second type of teaching. The authority of a bishop is in fact Christian authority *per se*, as Christ himself established it, and it should express Christ's humble way of ruling. In this sense, holding authority is not a privilege, but a service, requiring even more responsibility than other ways of Christian life. This point of view is expressed in revelation 53, in book 4. Birgitta says in the name of Christ:

Si quis preficitur aliis, non ideo superbire debet, quia prelatus est, sed magis timere, quia omnes eiusdem nature sunt et omnis potestas est a Deo. Quippe si bonus est, qui preficitur, a Deo est ad propriam et aliorum salutem; si vero malus est, permissione Dei est ad subditorum correccionem et maius iudicium suum. . . . Ergo, cum aliquis vel desiderat vel cogitur preesse, talem se exhibeat subditis, ut et desiderabilis sit moribus et eciam vita utilisque in iusticia et equitate. . . . Et attendat, ne verbis vel exemplis vel abusione potestatis sue materiam et occasionem aliis peccandi tribuat, quia nichil ita prouocat iram Dei et homines ad peccandum sicut lasciua prelatorum. (VI, 53. 2–4 and 8)<sup>564</sup>

Therefore, a pompous lifestyle can scandalize the people because it is in contradiction with a Christian way of ruling.

Bishops, however, decided to surround themselves with luxury not only because of their moral weakness but also to prove their dignity and authority, following the example of Christian monarchs. Birgitta does not condemn kings for wearing rich robes and she apparently understood the need of rich vestment in a bishop's case as well when she said: "Et ex habitu discernatur episcopalis auctoritas ad correccionem et informacionem aliorum" (III, 1. 14). She nevertheless advises bishops to pray in the following way while putting off his vestments: "Ideo rogo te, piissime Deus, ut tribuas michi in animo stabilitatem, ne superbiam de cineris et terre precio nec inaniter glorier de colore puluereo" (III, 1. 14).

As in the case of other members of Christian community, the virtues of the bishop must be grounded in love for God and for his church (III, 1. 9). Love for the church is a special charisma of bishops, as they are symbolically married to their local church, thus being an image of Christ, the church's bridegroom (III, 6. 8). When Birgitta visited the tomb of St. Bishop Brynolf in Skara, she found it forsaken by the people and neglected. She heard the Virgin Mary saying that Brynolf, her

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<sup>564</sup> In *editio princeps* (1492), the text is also reproduced in the beginning of Book III, a large passage of which concerns the bishops (III, 1-16). The text is followed by a depiction of bishops and cardinals listening to Birgitta's message.

precious pearl, had been placed among the pigs (Extrav. 108. 3), but in heaven his soul is honored, because he was like sapphire in a ring on account of his love for the church, his bride: “eciam quasi saphirus in anulo per fame et vite claritatem, per quam ostendit se esse Ecclesie sue sponsum, Domini sui amicum, fidei sancte conseruatorem et mundi contemptorem” (II, 30. 12). In another revelation she heard St. Ambrose saying that every bishop should prove to be a real bridegroom of his church, but some prefer to sin with a housemaid, that is the world, than to spend their time with their charming and prudent wife (III, 6. 8).

Humility is often mentioned in *Revelationes* among the moral virtues necessary for a bishop. We can notice a connection between humility and the office of teaching, which bishops perform by giving an example of Christian life. Their humility is presented as a necessary “public virtue,” since “nothing so provokes God to anger or the people to sin as the impudence of prelates (*lasciua prelatorum*)” (VI, 53. 8).

Birgitta claims that apart from humility a bishop should be also characterized by true wisdom, which is necessary to in order for him to teach (Extrav. 85. 8). Unfortunately, foolishness was one of the main vices of bishops that she condemns. Birgitta compares a foolish prelate to a monkey, “curious about the vanity of the world, too deformed for any action deserving praise” (III, 11. 9). He is deformed by his own greed, despite bearing a seal of God on his soul (III, 11. 14). The sin of foolishness (*fatuitas*) is, according to Scholastic theology, different from stupidity (*stultitia*), which “implies apathy in the heart and dullness in the senses, while foolishness (*fatuitas*) denotes entire privation of the spiritual sense.”<sup>565</sup> Stupidity is therefore a weakness, resulting from original sin, while foolishness is an even deeper wound of the heart and senses.

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<sup>565</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* II-II, q. 46, a. 1.

Another feature contrasted in *Revelationes* with true wisdom is “mundana sapientia,” mundane wisdom. In revelation 3, 4 we find a parable about a bishop who was wise but did not love God as much as he should, and one of his diocesan priests, who tried to admonish the sinner. The bishop derided the priest and neglected his advice, but when they both died and appeared before the tribunal of Christ, the bishop was judged as stupid, because he had been wise only with mundane wisdom, and the canonic was regarded as wise and prudent. The false wisdom which only cares about worldly matters and forgets about the spiritual values will be thus, according to Birgitta—humiliated and unmasked as stupidity (III, 10. 18–19).

### 3.3.2. Priests

According to *Revelationes*, in the structure of Christian society priests also play a decisive role. They are the dearest friends of Jesus and they were given a very special assignment: they can transform God’s enemies into “angels” (IV, 132. 1–2). Birgitta states that they hold the keys to heaven and hell. It depends on them which key will be used often, and which one is forgotten and lost (IV, 132. 5), so in fact they can enable people to gain citizenship in *Civitas Gloriam* or prevent them from that. Therefore, in the public life of the Christian kingdom on earth they have an important role as well.

Based on this, we can expect that the role of a priest in the public life of *Civitas Probationis*, as Birgitta sees it, would be restricted to the formation of a truly Christian, God-loving society. However, she is conscious that members of the clergy did not hesitate to take part in very prosaic political games. St. Birgitta judges all activities of this kind as sin and accuses the priests of being moved by “luxuria,” “cupiditas,” (IV, 132. 13) and most of all by “amor mundi” (IV, 132. 4), which led them to promote their own friends and relatives, regardless of the benefit of the church.



Birgitta's revelations concerning the moral condition and vocation of priests, church hierarchs, and Roman pontiffs are grouped into the so-called *Tractatus de summis pontificibus*, a collection composed by Alfonso de Jaen. In the modern critical edition, *Tractatus* is included in book 4 as revelations 132–144.<sup>566</sup>

It is remarkable that Birgitta very often refers to the sacrament of the Eucharist while speaking about the role of priests. One is even tempted to say that Birgitta explains the proper role of priests in society by their relation to the Eucharist. Birgitta describes the mission of priests as the service of the body of Christ, meaning that they are allowed to touch the Eucharist, which is the real body of Christ (IV, 132. 1–2), to celebrate the sacrament and transform the bread and wine into the Lord's flesh and blood, to receive the sacrament themselves, and finally, to administer and distribute it among the faithful Christians. Through the Eucharist they experience the closest relation any human ever has with God. Birgitta states moreover that even the angels cannot experience anything comparable to the Eucharist (IV, 132. 3–4). The priests are symbolically and sacramentally married to Christ, who bound himself with a special relation of love to them (IV, 135. 1). On the altar, Christ is like a bride who impatiently awaits her beloved husband, trustful and defenseless (I, 47. 30), or like a groom, waiting for his beautiful wife (IV, 133. 21).

Traditionally, the image of the body of Christ has two meanings derived from the Bible: one is the Eucharist<sup>567</sup> and the other one is the church.<sup>568</sup> Reading *Revelationes* we also notice that

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<sup>566</sup> See also the separate publication of the same critical edition: *St. Bridget's Revelations to the Popes: An Edition of the so-called Tractatus de summis pontificibus*, ed. Arne Jönsson (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997).

<sup>567</sup> Mat 26:26-29; Mar 14:22-25; Luk 22: 19-20; 1Co 11:23-25; 1Co 10:16.

<sup>568</sup> Rom 12:4-5; 1Co 6:12-20; 1Co 12:12-31; Col 1:18-24; Eph 5:30.

priests are expected to be in the same relation to the Eucharistic Christ and to his church. They can transform the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ, and they can also transform the enemies of God into “angels” (IV, 132. 1–2); they distribute the Holy Communion, but they should also spread the love of God among the Christians through their preaching and example of a good life (which is not done, however, as Birgitta states in IV, 132. 7). Finally, Christ entrusts to them his Eucharistic body, but he is also trustful when it comes to deciding in all the matters concerning the wellbeing of his body on earth. In this body they are indeed necessary and fragile members, like fingers on the hand (IV, 135. 6).

Birgitta mentions that Christians are members of the body of Christ (I, 59. 16) unless they choose to separate themselves and become parts of the body of the devil (V, 6. 25). According to her, a sinner resembles the devil in a similar way to how each human being bears the image of God, since in the Bible we read that people are created “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26–27); but medieval Scholastic theology taught that they had lost this likeness because of original sin, although the image of God was not destroyed by it.<sup>569</sup> Birgitta apparently holds the opinion that the image of God is indeed present in men, since she states that “anima sit celestis, quia ymaginem habet celestis Dei” (VI, 66. 27) and the souls of saints can be beautiful like angels (V, 5. 7). I suggest, moreover, that Birgitta’s shocking visions of deformed or monstrous humans should be interpreted in this theological context: because of their sins they are away from the body of Christ, so they are now made “in the image and after the likeness” of the devil, as we read in book 5 (V, int. 6. 25).

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<sup>569</sup> Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 94.

However, in Birgitta's view most clerics did not fulfill their tasks. In fact, all that we have said above about the mission of priests, Birgitta places in a negative context: she rebukes the clerics and urges them to repent. She calls them traitors, thieves, prostitutes, and "unclean hoopoes"<sup>570</sup>:

Ecce, amici mei, quales sacerdotes sunt! Ecce, angeli mei, quibus seruitis! Si iacerem ante vos, sicut in altari iaceo ante eos, nullus vestrum auderet me contingere, sed terreremini. Ipsi autem quasi fures et proditores produnt me; ipsi quasi meretrices contingunt me; ipsi quoque immundiores pice non erubescunt appropinquare michi, qui Deus sum et Dominus glorie. (IV, 132. 15–16)

For her, the celebration of the Eucharist by a sinful priest likely was particularly scandalous, as she was assured that the special, material presence of Christ was in the Host and Wine (IV, 61. 12–15). Nevertheless, she never questions the validity of sacraments celebrated by a sinful priest. Sin prevented the priest himself from being redeemed, but it did not affect Christian society in this fatal way. Birgitta deals with this question in Rome, when asked for her opinion by a certain Franciscan friar, identified by Henrik Roelvink as Peter of Trastevere,<sup>571</sup> who apparently doubted the validity of such sacraments. Birgitta answers:

Simili eiam racione dico, quod veri presbiteri sunt et vere conficiunt corpus Christi filii mei omnes illi sacerdotes, qui non sunt heretici, quamuis alias sint pleni multis aliis peccatis, et vere tractant Deum manibus suis in altari et alia sacramenta ministrant, quamuis propter sua peccata et mala opera sint indigni celesti gloria apud Deum. (VII, 7. 17)

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<sup>570</sup> In fact, Latin "Picus" is not a hoopoe (Lat. upupa) but a woodpecker. However, in medieval sources a symbolical meaning of uncleanness is often ascribed to hoopoe, which is said to nest in unclean places, even in graves, or to build nest of human excrements. See: Lev 11:19; *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 12, 7, 66, trans. Stephen A. Barney, Jennifer A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 268.

<sup>571</sup> Henrik Roelvink, "Andlig släktskap mellan Franciscus och Birgitta," in *Heliga Birgitta - budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, 1993), 110-111.

The question raised by the Franciscan was not new. The concept that sacraments celebrated by a sinful priest were worthless was condemned in the fourth and fifth centuries as a heresy of the Donatists, who also claimed that the consecration of the bishop done by his sinful fellows was invalid.<sup>572</sup> In spite of Augustine's powerful polemics against Donatism,<sup>573</sup> the concept kept returning during the following centuries, as both the desire for sanctity and the existence of sinful priests were constant factors in the Christian world.

The problem of Donatism returned in the thirteenth century within the Franciscan spiritual movement. Some of the friars were in conflict with the pope and the principles of the Franciscan order.<sup>574</sup> The problem arose around the question of poverty,<sup>575</sup> but later some of the brothers declared the pope and those priests who live in sin as acting invalidly.<sup>576</sup> Although condemned many times by the popes,<sup>577</sup> the Fraticelli were still active in Italy when Birgitta lived there.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 67.

<sup>573</sup> Augustine's writings against Donatism include: Augustine, *Psalmus contra partem Donati, Contra epistulam Parmeniani, De baptismo*, ed. M. Petschenig (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1908); idem, *Contra litteras Petilian, Epistula ad catholicos de secta Donatistarum, Contra Cresconium grammaticum et Donatistam*, ed. M. Petschenig (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1909); idem, *De unico baptismo, Breviculus collationis cum Donatistis, Contra partem Donati post gesta, Sermo ad Caesariensis ecclesiae plebem, Gesta cum Emerito Donatistarum episcopo, Contra Gaudentium Donatistarum episcopum*, ed. M. Petschenig (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1910).

<sup>574</sup> For the history of the conflict see: David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

<sup>575</sup> Concerning the poverty, Birgitta also opposed radical Franciscans, who insisted that Christ did not possess absolutely anything. In one of Birgitta's revelations, Virgin Mary says that her son possessed actually one thing: a tunic made by his mother (VII, 8. 4).

<sup>576</sup> Burr, op. cit., 200.

<sup>577</sup> Examples: Boniface VIII issued the bull *Saepe sacram Ecclesiam* in 1296 (see Burr, op.cit, 95); John XII issued *Sancta romana* in 1317 (Burr, op. cit., 281) and *Gloriosam Ecclesiam* in 1318 (Burr, op. cit., 199-200).

<sup>578</sup> Roelvink, op. cit., 110-113.

However, in spite of her strong affinity for St. Francis and his order, in this question she was a firm supporter of the Roman point of view, as we can see in the above-quoted revelation.

This short reflection on the morality of priests tells us much about Birgitta's concept of sin and its meaning for social life. She presents priestly sin as a destructive force, but not completely out of God's control. According to her, personal sin results in the spiritual death of the person who has committed it, but its influence on society as a whole is limited. A sinner sets a scandalous example for others: he can make them follow him and become "infected by sin." Nevertheless, sin cannot cross the borders of sacramental order, founded by Christ, because sacramental "distribution of grace" is above the personal qualities of an individual person. Receiving the sacraments is a different question, because a good personal disposition is necessary to cooperate with divine grace and make it fruitful.

### 3.3.3. The Pope and the Importance of Rome

Birgitta left Sweden in 1349 in order to take part in the holy year of Jubilee in 1350. The Jubilee year, announced by Clement VI,<sup>579</sup> was related mainly to the indulgences promised to everyone who would visit Rome and pray in Roman basilicas during the this year.<sup>580</sup> It was the second great Jubilee, after the famous one held in the year 1300 when Boniface VIII announced and hosted the first event of this kind.<sup>581</sup> Since 1300, the idea of indulgences had gained increasing popularity<sup>582</sup> and the second Jubilee was announced under the influence of an enthusiastic

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<sup>579</sup> Announced by the bull *Unigenitus*, see: Diana Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 77-78.

<sup>580</sup> Webb, op. cit., 65-66, 77.

<sup>581</sup> Gary Dickson, "The Crowd at the Feet of Pope Boniface VIII: Pilgrimage, Crusade and the First Roman Jubilee (1300)," *Journal of Medieval History* 25 (1999): 279-280.

<sup>582</sup> Dickson, op. cit., 306-307.

public's demanding that the pope shorten the time span between the Jubilees, originally planned for 100 years.<sup>583</sup> Birgitta wanted to participate in this important religious event, but she was also prepared to stay in Rome as long as her prophetic mission demanded it (V, rev. 12. 11–14; Extrav. 8. 1; 41. 1). We can say that from 1349 her activity gained momentum, since she began to take part in the politics and spiritual life of the Roman Church and, as Bridget Morris noted, for Birgitta "Rome was the very essence and embodiment of Christendom."<sup>584</sup> She thought that her plans of reform could be properly realized only from Rome, despite the fact that since the beginning of the fourteenth century both the pope and the Roman curia resided in Avignon, so the center of the "visible church" should be placed there at Birgitta's time. Choosing Rome as her "base" indicates therefore that Birgitta was more concerned about moral reform than strictly political matters.

Below we shall briefly discuss Birgitta's view about the symbolic meaning of Rome for the Christian church. It is noteworthy that the moral advice or even the reprimands which she addresses to the popes result from this symbolic and, to some extent, metaphorical meaning of Rome as St. Peter's See. For that reason we shall discuss the imagery related to Rome in this section.

During her long stay in Rome, Birgitta addressed six Roman Pontiffs: Clement VI (1342–1352), Innocent VI (1352–1362), Urban V (1362–1370), and Gregory XI (1371–1378), who managed to accomplish the resettlement of the Curia back to Rome, thus finishing the Avignon Captivity in 1377.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Webb, op. cit., 78.

<sup>584</sup> Bridget Morris, introduction to Book V of *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume II: Liber Caelestis, Books IV-V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>585</sup> Morris, op. cit., 15.

None of his predecessors met with Birgitta's approval regarding the moral demands of their office. It appears, however, that the conclusion formulated about the different consequences of sin for one's private and public performances applied also to the Roman Pontiff, in Birgitta's view. In the revelation addressed to Peter of Trastevere (VII, 7) she states that no sin can destroy the pope's authority or his power to govern the church, since the authority of a pope does not come from himself but rests exclusively on the authority of St. Peter and, ultimately, on God's authority:

Nam vera et catholica fides est, quod papa, qui est sine heresi, quantumcumque aliis peccatis sit commaculatus, numquam tamen est ita malus ex illis peccatis et ex aliis suis malis operibus, quin semper sit in eo plena auctoritas et perfecta potestas ligandi et soluendi animas. Quam auctoritatem ipse per beatum Petrum habuit et assumpsit a Deo. Quia multi summi pontifices fuerunt ante Iohannem papam, qui sunt in inferno; nichilominus tamen ipsorum iusta et rationabilia iudicia, que in mundo fecerunt, stabilia et approbata sunt apud Deum. (VII, 7. 15–16)

Therefore, the sin which can cause the pope's damnation in hell or make him, as a person, "worse than Lucifer," "worse than Pilate, Judas and Jews" (I, 41. 10 and 17), does not influence his authority or his position in the Christian community: he is still a legitimate pope, unless he is a heretic (VII, 7. 15).

In Birgitta's revelations to the popes this tension between the narrator's desire to remain faithful to the Roman Pontiff as a successor of St. Peter and her sharp critique of the pope's sinfulness is clearly noticeable. Based on revelation 1, 41, in which she says that the pope, probably Clement VI,<sup>586</sup> is "worse than Lucifer," we can suggest that her critique of the pope's conduct was so sharp not in spite of the reverence Birgitta had for the papal office, but because of

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<sup>586</sup> The revelation is dated for 1340s. Clement VI ruled from 1242 to 1352, so he was probably the addressee of this text. See: *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume I: Liber Caelestis, Books I-III* ed. Bridget Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120.

it: she confronts the wicked pope with the model of primacy set by Peter and Jesus himself and she expects that the pope will perform certain tasks related to his office:

Nunc ergo conqueror super te, caput Ecclesie mee, qui sedes in sede mea, quam Petro et successoribus eius tradidi ad sedendum in ea triplici dignitate et auctoritate: primo, ut potestatem haberent ligandi animas et soluendi a peccato, secundo, ut aperirent celum penitentibus, tercio, ut clauderent celum maledictis et contempnentibus. (I, 41. 9)

Further, she states that the pope does not fulfill this task, but her rather “kills souls through his bad example” and even kills Christ “by cutting Christ off from himself through his bad works” (I, 41. 12). This enormous “scale of sin” is only possible because the pope was entrusted with care of the souls and placed in the See of Peter, “the shepherd and servant of Christ’s sheep” (I, 41. 10). Birgitta calls Peter “the first pope, prince of the Apostles” (IV, 49. 2), so we can understand that she interpreted the relationship between the authority of Peter and that of the popes as being close and rather straightforward.

Based on the revelations included in *Tractatus de summis pontificibus*, we notice that Birgitta’s messages for the popes had three main tasks. First, she asked the Vicar of Christ to return to the See of St. Peter, to Rome (IV, 138; 139; 140; 141; 142). Second, she demanded that he finish the wars (IV, 136; 140. 13–15) and bring an end to the scandalous sins of the church’s hierarchy (IV, 142). Third, she asked for confirmation of the Rule of the Most Holy Savior (IV, 137). All three tasks were closely related to each other since, as we will briefly explain below, according to Birgitta Rome is the spiritual center of Christianity, so the reform must start there. One of the most important works of this reform would be the founding of the New Vineyard.

It appears that Birgitta saw Rome as a living metaphor of Christian society, since in the history of Rome all possible conditions of Christian community can be observed as with a spotlight:



in one of the revelations found in book 3, she discusses the different moral conditions of Christians and various historical epochs of the church. She writes that in the past Rome was the city of martyrs, confessors, and saints (III, 27. 4–7) Their testimony of love and faith were decisive for establishing the special character of Rome. Rome is the capital of Christianity because the blood of martyrs is spread there, and the church is still profiting from both their testimony and their example (III, 27. 22–23). The relics are another aspect of martyrdom presented as in *Revelationes* as important for the life of church. St. Birgitta venerated the relics herself, since we know from *Revelationes* that she visited the shrines of St. Thomas in Otrona (VII, 7), St. Agnes, St. Nicolas in Bari (VI, 103) or St. Anne in Rome, in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls (VI, 104). In all these places she experienced revelations which stressed the necessity of cult of the relics. In my opinion, this results from her view on the relationship between the human soul and body. She writes that a friend of God who lives according to his commandments lives also in harmony with himself so that his soul and body are united, meaning that his soul governs his body (VI, 66. 4–6). His soul has some influence on his body and even after his death this connection does not disappear entirely, since the body of a deceased saint is a source of grace for the living—one can tell that God is acting through the relics of saints to give his grace to the living Christians (VII, 4. 6).

Nevertheless, Birgitta saw the tombs of saints and their churches abandoned and destroyed, their rectors being “far from God” (III, 27. 1). She describes the Rome of her time as a place governed by pride, greed, and cupidity (III, 27. 27–28). Her lamentation for the city of Rome is apparently modeled after the Old Testament lamentations for Jerusalem, since the scheme of her visions concerning Rome is similar to the biblical prophecies in which a prophet cries over the city of God, so beautiful in the past days, and but in his day abandoned on account of the

sinfulness of the priests and leaders of the people, or over the destroyed temple. We find the same motives in Birgitta's texts:

O Roma, Roma, muri tui sunt disrupti. Ideo porte tue sunt sine custodia. Vasa tua venduntur. Ideo altaria tua desolata sunt. Vium sacrificium et incensum matutinum comburitur in atrio. Ideo non egreditur de sancta sanctorum sanctus odor suauius. (III, 27. 19–20)

The Old Testament idea of the Temple was based on the conviction that the presence of God (*Shekinah*) dwelt there. A similar statement would be true about Rome in St. Birgitta's theology. According to her, the presence of God is concentrated in the two main points discussed above: in the saints, who were witnesses of God and who now make him present through their relics; and in the Pope, who is a symbolic and sacramental "incarnation" of St. Peter.

Birgitta wanted the regrettable situation of Rome to change, the prestige of the "most excellent and holy city" to be rebuilt, since in her vision Rome must become the center of the renewed church. The voice of Birgitta must come from Rome, because the spiritual reform of the church must start in the heart of the church. The words of revelations are like seeds, planted in Rome, where the soil is more fertile than in the sinful kingdom of Sweden. When the seed blossoms, she declares, it shall bring the fruit for the whole Christianity (V, rev. 12. 11–14).

**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
**“ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN”**

In our study of St. Birgitta’s idea of a Christian community organized in the form of a kingdom, we have already mentioned its strong relationship to the kingdom of heaven. In chapter 2, we observed that Birgitta expected the Christian kingdom to be governed according to the same rules which are valid in the court of Christ. Like a hierarchical organization of society or the spiritual fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, she derived these rules from history, from Holy Scripture, and from the teaching of the medieval church (see section 2.1). We further noted that she also built models of a proper Christian conduct and morality regarding the public affairs (see chapter 3). Based on these observations, we can now formulate an additional, general thesis: that St. Birgitta expected the Christian kingdom to be a reflection or an image of the eternal kingdom of heaven. In this chapter we shall attempt to show that it is possible to interpret her idea of Christian public life as a kind of commentary on the words of the Lord’s Prayer: “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven” (Mat 6:10). I have chosen these words as the title of this chapter since the Our Father, called also the Lord’s Prayer, is one of the most popular Christian prayers and would have been easily recognized by all medieval Christians who fulfilled the basic requirements of religious education, which included learning the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Creed by heart.<sup>587</sup> In *Revelationes* the Lord’s Prayer is often mentioned.<sup>588</sup> The

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<sup>587</sup> Norman Tanner and Sethina Watson, “Least of the laity: the minimum requirements for a medieval Christian,” *Journal of Medieval History* 32, no. 4 (2006): 399-403.

<sup>588</sup> “Our Father” mentioned as a prayer advised for clerics: IV, 80. 11 and 26 and 31; as an intercessory prayer for the dead: IV, 13. 12-13; as a prayer known even by simple Christians: Extrav. 18. 3; II, 25. 31; VI, 77. 4; as Birgitta’s prayer: IV, 118.1.

narrator judges a man who “does not know even the entire Our Father” as being very *simplex*, or a “simple man” (VI, 116.1).

In the whole *Corpus* of Birgitta’s work we do not find any explicit statement about the Christian kingdom being an image of the kingdom of heaven. Nevertheless, in my opinion the idea itself is present there. It can be deduced as a result of the following chain of reasoning. First, we noted that according to *Revelationes* the same rules that govern the eternal kingdom ought also to be valid on earth. Second, as is evident from Birgitta’s statements, the heavenly court is organized as a kind of society. Third, we noticed that according to the text of *Revelationes*, this society is closely bound to the society of God’s friends (this thought will be further developed below, in section 4.1). Therefore, we can presume that the society of God’s friends should be modeled according to its eternal prototype. Moreover, we will demonstrate below that according to *Revelationes* it is a Christian’s duty and privilege is to follow Christ and to imitate his footsteps in various aspects (section 4.2), and, among other things, to imitate his kingship (section 4.3). We also observed a close relationship between the private and public spheres of Christian life as described in Birgitta’s work (chapter 3, introduction). We can thus expect that the duty of following in Christ’s footsteps will be also to some extent present in Birgitta’s political and social advice. Consequently, we claim that the close relationship between the earthly and the heavenly kingdom of God’s friends presented in *Revelationes* can be described as imitating or being modeled on a prototype. In this chapter we shall analyze more closely the elements of this reasoning which have not yet been discussed, that is, the relationship between the Christian community on earth and the heavenly kingdom understood as “*civitas gloriae*” and “*civitas*

purgationis”<sup>589</sup> (section 4.1), and the theme of the imitation of Christ (section 4.2), with a special notice on imitating his reign (section 4.3) in various aspects, including the Christian leadership (section 4.3.1), a hereditary principle (section 4.3.2), the church as the body of Christ (section 4.3.3) and Virgin Mary as a queen of Christian community as presented in *Revelationes* (section 4.3.4).

#### **4.1. Community with the Heavenly Kingdom**

We have already discussed the hierarchical structure of the congregation of God’s friends and its socially organized nature, described by Birgitta using various symbols, like a palace, a fortress, a vineyard, or a beehive (section 2.2.2). We also noticed that becoming a member of this society is described in *Revelationes* as an effect of the spiritual process of building a friendly relationship with God. We further noted that this process takes place within a certain structure, which is to some extent identical to the social structure (as everyone is supposed to fulfill the requirements of his or her “state of life”), and to some extent identical to the visible church structures (ibid.). The hierarchy of creatures is governed and animated by God, who is to some extent represented by the Christian king, the center of “the chain of power” on earth. The obligations of a Christian king are a result of this unique position in God’s plan (sections 2.3.6 and 3.1.3). The structure of Christian society is thus presented in *Revelationes* as a result of a complex relationship between God and people on earth.

We shall now take a closer look at the relationship between the Christian society on earth and the community of the friends of God in heaven (“civitas gloriae”) and in purgatory (“civitas

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<sup>589</sup> Two of the four cities: “civitas probationis”, “civitas purgationis”, “civitas doloris” and “civitas gloriae” discussed in section 2.2.

purgationis”). Birgitta often describes the inhabitants of heaven as “celestial hosts” or members of a court of Christ (“exercitus celestis”<sup>590</sup>). At this court he sits on his throne, surrounded by saints and angels, in the presence of his mother. The vision of the heavenly court makes up the scenery for several of Birgitta’s visions in which Christ or one of the saints addresses her.<sup>591</sup> This symbolic image strongly suggests a hierarchical character of celestial hosts, but I would say that it can be also interpreted as speaking about the possibility of communication between the friends of God in Heaven and on those on earth, since in her visions Birgitta is able to hear saints and to speak with them.

In *Revelationes* we also find descriptions of other aspects of this communication between heaven and earth. When describing the “four cities” of human existence (heaven, purgatory, the world, and hell), Birgitta points to love as a distinctive mark between them (III, 28. 2). In heaven the love for God is perfect, because to a person dwelling in “civitas gloriae” nothing is more sweet than God (III, 28. 14). Birgitta says that this love begins in the present, but is fulfilled in heaven (“Hec in presenti inchoatur, sed in celo consumatur,” III, 28. 14). This suggests that the eternal life starts already on earth, as in the same revelation Birgitta says that the essence of this life is in loving God (VIII, 28. 13–14), which can begin during one’s earthly life.

In another revelation Birgitta compares God to a goldsmith selling his gold (the words of God) to people who have a good conscience:

Quis habet conscienciam nisi qui disponit temporalia ista et caduca in eterna, qui **animum habet in celo et corpus in terra**, qui cotidie ruminat, quomodo exeat de terra et respondeat Deo de factis suis? Huic committatur aurum meum. (II, 14.21 [emphasis mine]).

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<sup>590</sup> E.g. I, 5. 4; III, 4. 17; IV, 137. 5.

<sup>591</sup> This narrative scheme is present in the following revelations (among others): VII, 13. 11-78; VII, 19. 1; VII, 30. 1-3; VIII, 1. 1-5 ; VIII, 23. 1-2, VIII, 58. 1-3.

According to this short fragment, having one's "spirit in Heaven and body on earth" can be thus identified with a person's proper attitude toward temporal goods and by his or her desire to meet God in eternity. According to the same revelation, love for God transforms all the qualities of human soul and body, including the senses, in order to prepare a person for the plenitude of eternal life (II, 14. 24–39). In the following part of this revelation, Birgitta enumerates the qualities of the person ready to receive the gold of divine words. Among such there is an ability to share one's goods with the poor, as well as to share God's word to edify other people (II, 14. 28–30). This situates the idea of sanctity within the context of social life, as these virtues can only be shown and proven in a community.

We can understand that according to *Revelationes* this "double presence" of saints (on earth and in heaven simultaneously) continues after their death, when their relics become a source of grace for the living (see section 3.3.3). Birgitta encourages the veneration of saints' graves and relics because she says that they enjoy eternal honor and reward in heaven (Extrav. 108. 2) and she wants to see the same attitude shown to the saints who are here on earth in the community of Christians (VII, 4. 6). We have already mentioned Birgitta's intervention in the case of Queen Blanka's reliquary, which the queen had neglected (Extrav. 59). *Revelationes* reports that Birgitta heard the voices of saints saying that they are mistreated by the queen: "this treasure is honored in heaven, but neglected on earth, so we shall move to some other place" (Extrav. 59. 3). A similar vision is described in the same book: the text reads that Birgitta experienced a vision while she was visiting the grave of St. Bishop Brynolf of Skara and noticed that it was abandoned. We read that she suddenly smelled a beautiful scent and heard the Virgin Mary saying to her:

Scias, filia, quod iste episcopus honoravit me in vita sua et honorem opere confirmavit.

Cuius vita quam acceptabilis fuit Deo, demonstrat odor, quem sensisti. Nunc autem licet anima eiusdem est in conspectu Dei, tamen corpus eius iacet hic in terra sine honore. Et sic ista margarita michi dilecta locata est inter porcos. (Extrav. 108. 2–3)

In another revelation concerning the same subject, we read that the Virgin Mary asked her Son to glorify the body of Bishop Brynolf, because he honored Jesus “in his own small way”:

Hic sanctus, cum temporaliter vixit, fuit in fide sancta sicut mons stabilis, quem non fregit aduersitas, nulla retraxit delectacio. Fuit et flexibilis ad voluntatem tuam sicut aer mobilis, quocumque eum impetus spiritus tui traxit. Fuit insuper in caritate tua ardens quasi ignis, calefaciens frigidus et consumens iniquos. Nunc autem anima eius tecum est in gloria; vas autem instrumenti eius depressum est et in humiliiori loco iacet quam decet. Ideo, fili mi, da corpori eius alciorem eleuacionem, honora illud, quod te pro modulo suo honorauit, eleua illud, quod te labore suo, quo potuit, eleuauit. (II, 30. 2–6)

Veneration of relics is thus described as a reward for the saint, but it exemplifies also a spiritual law saying that the love of God shall be the main rule of life for people both in Heaven and on earth.<sup>592</sup>

According to *Revelationes*, not only does love for God continue in heaven, but so does love between humans. Two friends of Jesus, Peter and Paul, were equal and united (“coniuncti”) on earth, so they are now united in heaven:

Ecce qualem caritatem cum istis duobus feci! Primo, idest Petro, dedi clauces celi, ut, quecumque ligaret et solueret in terra, ligata et soluta essent in celo. Secundo, idest Paulo, dedi, ut similis Petro fieret in gloria et honore. Sicut enim in terra pares fuerunt et coniuncti, sic nunc in celo in gloria perpetua coniuncti sunt et glorificati. (II, 7. 7–8)

According to the Bible, Peter and Paul had never met before the resurrection and ascension of Christ, but afterward they became two main leaders the young church. Paul did not know Jesus

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<sup>592</sup> “Nam lex spiritualis est Deum intelligere et diligere et eo frui; et in hac lege est honor et spirituales diuicie, scilicet creata omnia commutare in creatorem, voluntatem propriam pro Deo relinquere, virtutes diligere et pro celo dare mundum” (IV, 111. 5-6).



during Jesus' earthly life (1Co 15:3–8), while Peter was his closest follower (Joh 21:17). Still, their relationship with him was the reason for the later unanimity between the two (2Pe 3:14–16). According to the discussed revelation, their relationship reaches beyond death, because on earth it was anticipating the unity and glory of Heaven and was kind of "model" of this unity.

In the gospel of Mathew we read that Jesus gave Peter the keys of heaven, so that whatever he bound or loosed on earth shall be bound or loosed in Heaven (Mat 16:19). The Catholic bishops regard themselves as continuators of this mission, successors of St. Peter and the apostles. The doctrine of the church held in the Middle Ages states that within apostolic succession the same is true of priests, understood as bishops' delegates.<sup>593</sup> In this doctrine we can also find a belief in a specific communication between Peter and the later bishops, which in this case would be a symbolical communication. In the previous chapter, we demonstrated that Birgitta's view of the papacy's role agrees with this doctrine (see section 3.3.3).

In *Revelationes* we read that Birgitta asked many times for the intercessory prayer of the saints and sometimes she reports that she witnessed saints or Mary praying for people or answering her prayers. Intercessory prayer could also have a specifically social aspect, as Birgitta describes the saints as praying not only for individuals but also for kingdoms or nations. In book 4 of *Revelationes* we read that Mary prayed to her Son for the kingdom of France, saying:

Rogo te cum Dyonisio et aliis sanctis tuis, quorum corpora in hac terra istius regni Francie sunt, anime vero in celo: Miserere isto regno! (IV, 104. 4)

St. Denis himself cries to the Virgin Mary: "Miserere igitur regno Francie tuo et meo" (IV, 103. 2).

This specific intercession of saints is also mentioned in context of Christians' prayers for the souls

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<sup>593</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 6, trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1907), 182.

being purified in purgatory. Birgitta express a belief that the souls in purgatory still belong to the Kingdom of Christ (they are “crowned”), but they must be purged before entering “requiem,” eternal peace (III, 28. 5; I, 50. 21). She also states that people praying to God with the intercession of saints can help them in their suffering. In book 4 we read that one of Birgitta’s deceased friends appeared to her and asked for prayer. Mary instructed Birgitta that the best way to help this soul was to pray to the Swedish saints who are now venerated by the local people (VI, 10. 17–18).

Moreover, in *Revelationes* the saints are sometimes depicted as commenting on certain people’s behavior or even rebuking them. Frequently the authors of these prayers and comments are in some way related to the addressees: for example, St. Anna, the mother of the Virgin Mary, speaks to married women (VI, 104. 1–5); St. Ambrose, the bishop, addresses bishops (III, 6. 1–18); and St. Peter, whom Birgitta calls the “first pope” (IV, 49. 2), foretells the return of the pope to Rome (IV, 5. 1–13). In other cases it is only someone’s personal devotion to a particular saint that helps him or her and creates a special bond with this saint, as was the case of one woman who was strongly tempted to sin but prayed to St. Peter, whom she loved, and he promised to take care of her as if she were his own daughter, Petronilla (VI, 93. 7). St. Birgitta conveyed the message she said she received from St. Peter to this woman, who indeed succeeded in changing her life, as we read further (VI, 93. 8).

In my opinion, it can be regarded as a distinctive feature of Birgitta’s theology that she describes a special relationship that others in her environment enjoyed with saints. This sets her apart from many other medieval mystics (especially from the earlier period) who devoted much attention to their own spiritual progress. By contrast, *Revelationes* provides an account of Birgitta’s active participation in her neighbors’ troubles and affairs. According to Bridget Morris,

this “active spirituality” typical of Birgitta, but also of Saint Catherine of Siena, is a hallmark of the late medieval period.<sup>594</sup>

We can conclude therefore that the desired goal of the aforementioned forms of communication with the saints, including intercessory prayer, is to shape the human life according to an ideal the saints have established to make life more “heavenly.” In *Revelationes* we read that unanimity with the saints is thus acquired by communicating with them in many complex ways: through the cult of relics, the priests (who are successors of the apostles), intercessory prayer to “local saints,” and personal devotion to saints.

#### **4.2. *Imitatio Christi***

The theological category of *imitatio Christi* or *imitatio Dei* is strongly rooted in the Christian tradition. According to the New Testament, the second person of the Holy Trinity or the Word of God is himself the eternal image of the Father (Col 1:15), the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature (Heb 1:3). His unity with the Father is expressed in the work of creation, which has been done by him and for him (Col 1:16; Joh 1:3; Heb 1:2; 1Co 8:6), and now he “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). Therefore, the conclusion of Christian teaching has been that the Word of God (Christ) is the Lord and King of all things created.<sup>595</sup>

In the book of Genesis we read, moreover, that men are created in the image of God and after his likeness (Gen 1:26f; 5:3; 9:6). Based on these biblical statements, Christian theology thus concluded that people have a special relationship to the Word of God, a relationship different

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<sup>594</sup> Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1999), 175.

<sup>595</sup> Per Beskow, *Rex Gloriam: The Kingship of Christ in the Early Church* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), 299.

from all the other creatures, though these also were created “by him and for him” (Col 1:15–16). This unique likeness was lost or dimmed by the first people, who turned away from God and obeyed Satan. Still, in the Christian interpretations the need for “imitating” God and regaining the lost image has been a demand and opportunity of the Old Covenant, as God said to Israel: “you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy” (Lev 11:44 cf. Lev 19:2; 20:7; 1Pe 1:16). God’s salvation, promised already in paradise, involves the grace of becoming similar to God through imitating him.<sup>596</sup>

In the early Christian and medieval interpretation of the New Testament, however, this grace and demand acquired a new dimension. The idea of imitating Christ became a part of reflection on his incarnation. The Word of God became flesh, and thus it was possible for him to approach humans in a new way never available to the nation of the Old Covenant. In Christ, the incarnate Word, people have access to his Father and our Father (Eph 3:12). Christ reconciled all things to himself (Col 1:20) and explained the Father to us (Joh 1:18). People now need to imitate God “as beloved children” (Eph 5:1), but this involves imitating the way Christ has reconciled the world to God, and this happened “through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). This is only possible in love, because Christ loved men and gave himself up for them (*ibid.*).<sup>597</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> Richard A. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 349.

<sup>597</sup> Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha; The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ; The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 156–157.

Consequently, according to this point of view, the more closely people know Jesus, the better they are able to imitate him. Apart from his love and passion, they can also try to follow his obedience to the Father, his magnanimity, and many of his other attributes.<sup>598</sup>

St. Paul in his letters puts forward his own example as an imitator of Christ, crucified with him and dead to the world (Gal 2:19) so that his fellow Christians could in turn imitate him (2Th 3:7). His proposal was treated as a paradigm in the medieval church, understood as an encouragement to follow the footsteps of saints.<sup>599</sup>

Following Christ is an idea very close to imitating him. To many ancient and medieval authors, these two concepts were almost indistinguishable, and even in many modern vernacular languages (unlike English) it is difficult to express the difference between the two. However, in medieval Latin theology, the distinction can be made. As we said, *imitatio* bears connections with the eternal likeness between the Father and the Son, and the creation of man connects him to the image and likeness of God. *Imitatio* is the restoration of this image.<sup>600</sup> In the gospel of Matthew we read Christ's words that "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mat 16:24). He said: "Follow me" ("sequere me") to his Apostles at the moment of selecting each of them, promising a complete change of their lives (Mat 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; Joh 1:43), but he also spoke about the suffering that would result from following him (Mat 16:24). In the gospel of Luke we read that following Christ is a spiritual process which he himself regarded as the crowning of one's development: "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Luk

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<sup>598</sup> Constable, loc. cit.

<sup>599</sup> Constable, op. cit., 145.

<sup>600</sup> Constable, op. cit., 154-155.

18:22)—he said these words to a young man who declared that he had kept the commandments and desired to “possess everlasting life” (Luk 18:18). It appears that the medieval authors related the idea of following Christ to his being Good Shepherd: in the Rule of Benedict we read that the abbot should follow the example of the Good Shepherd<sup>601</sup> who leaves ninety-nine sheep in the mountains to search for the lost one (Mat 18:12). The idea of following Christ has therefore an important meaning for the medieval ascetics, concentrating on the personal relationship to Jesus based on his human characteristics (like humility and patience) rather than his eternal attributes (like reign and authority).<sup>602</sup>

The idea of *imitatio Christi* is also present in the moral and ascetic teaching of *Revelationes*.

Magister Mathias interprets Birgitta’s life as imitating Christ in his prologue to book 1:

. . . adhuc in coniugio viuens, maritum suum ad continencie perfeccionem adduxit, ut multis annis simul sine exaccione et reddicione debiti coniugalis viuerent. Iamque adhuc ligata matrimonio sobrietatem vidualem in victu et vestitu preferebat. Deuocioque cordis eius et oracionum instancia magnam in ea future religionis et gracie perfeccionem premonstrabat. Cumque iam a lege viri soluta esset, bona sua heredibus et pauperibus distribuens et a mundi retinaculis se expediens et Christum pauperem pauper sequens, nichil sibi nisi simplicissimum victum et vestitum contemptibilem retinebat. Propter quod et eam, que omnem mundi consolacionem reiecerat, Christus mirandis consolacionibus et graciis visitabat. In quibus omnibus non suam sed Dei gloriam querens, latere quidem ob humilitatis custodiam maluisset, nisi quantum ad proximorum salutem se per imperium spiritus, vel pocius Christi, in spiritu sibi apparentis, certis se personis manifestare iussa fuit. Optabatque obprobriis et contumeliis suis Christi cumulare gloriam. Veritate, mansuetudine et iusticia formam vite Christi in se exprimens, eciam a minimis et vilibus personis gratis et impune ledi sufferebat. (Prologue, 14–16)

According to this passage, in Mathias eyes Birgitta’s married life was a preparatory stage for her, before she was “set free from all the earthly bonds” (cf. Rom 7:2) and “being poor, followed poor

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<sup>601</sup> Benedict of Nursia, *Benedicti Regula* XXVII, 8., ed. Rudolf Hanslik (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1960), 83.

<sup>602</sup> Constable, *op.cit.*, 157.

Christ” in accordance with Franciscan spirituality (Prologue, 15). Henrik Roelvink notes that the Franciscan influence came to Birgitta also through Magister Mathias, who was not a Franciscan himself but was familiar with Franciscan spirituality.<sup>603</sup> As in the aforementioned fragment from the gospel of Luke, following Christ is here presented as the crowning of one’s spiritual development, but also as a new beginning. Mathias goes on to say that afterwards Birgitta, fortified by the grace of God, began to imitate Christ more closely than before. This stage is described by Mathias as “pressing the form of Christ’s life in her own life” (“formam vitae Christi in se exprimens,” Prologue, 16), which suggests pressing out an image on a coin or a seal. Then we read that Birgitta was imitating Christ’s way of life and his passion through her patience, truthfulness, and justice (Prologue, 16). Mathias also stresses Birgitta’s humility. Below, we will compare these accounts with other fragments of *Revelationes* that discuss the virtues of a person who attempts to imitate Christ, narrated by Birgitta.

According to Birgitta, Christ’s call to imitate his deeds is a consequence of his incarnation and a final element of his work of salvation. She writes:

Ego quidem assumpsi corpus humanum de virgine, ut legem illam verbis et operibus adimplerem, que in deitate ordinata erat ab eterno, aperiendo portam celi sanguine cordis mei viamque per verba et opera ita illuminando, quod omnes uterentur meo exemplo ad promerendum vitam eternam. (VII, 12. 2)

Following the example of Christ is therefore a sign of fidelity and love for him, so it must be a result of a personal relationship with Jesus.

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<sup>603</sup> Henrik Roelvink, “Andlig släktskap mellan Franciscus och Birgitta,” in *Heliga Birgitta - budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, 1993), 116-118.

According to many medieval authors, including Birgitta, *imitatio Christi* is a way of life followed by the saints.<sup>604</sup> In book 4 Birgitta describes Mary and Martha, who stand for people leading contemplative (Mary) and active (Martha) lives (VI, 65. 1–2 and 95). Mary and Martha were often interpreted as symbols of monastic and lay life,<sup>605</sup> but in Birgitta’s view, these are not necessarily two different statuses of social life (monastic and un-monastic) but rather two different temperaments or *modi* of experiencing one’s relationship to Christ (VI, 65. 91–95). A person following the way of Mary should be patient and humble, even in the face of persecution or the hostility of people. Then his enemies would be given the chance to see an image of Christ in them, and the enemies would finally bless God (VI, 65. 30). Humility is here presented as a preparation for martyrdom, even if this is never to be achieved literally.

In the same revelation we read that Martha is also following Christ, but her domain is to manage temporal matters, not spiritual ones. She is also supposed to “love God more than anyone else and more than herself” (“diligere Deum super omnia et plus quam se ipsum,” VI, 65. 91), but her mark is rather neighborly love, not pure contemplation. Her humility is shown in the works of love and, like Mary, she is confident in the face of aggression (VI, 65. 92–93). Birgitta does not, however, suggest Martha’s willingness for martyrdom. Despite the fact that both sisters represent the same principle—the imitation of Christ—Birgitta uses the word “imitatio” or “imitare” only for Mary, while Martha is “following” Christ (“sequere”<sup>606</sup>). This difference in wording may suggest that Birgitta saw a slight difference in the meaning of the two words, giving a priority to *imitatio* as

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<sup>604</sup> Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha; The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ; The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 175–176.

<sup>605</sup> Constable, op. cit., 3–141.

<sup>606</sup> “Imitare”: VI, 65. 15 and 30 and 46 and 61. “Sequere”: VI, 65. 46 and 92 and 94 and 95.



a higher stage of spiritual life,<sup>607</sup> since she esteemed the contemplative life of Mary as more the more “advanced” of the two (VI, 65. 97).

Among the marks of the idea of the imitation of Christ is the suffering undertaken in his name. Birgitta describes herself as “the bride of Christ” and expresses her conviction that a bride must resemble her groom in this aspect, since she reports a vision in which she hears Christ saying to her:

Dilige me toto corde, quia ego dilexi te et ego spontanee tradidi me inimicis meis, et remanserunt amici mei et mater mea in amarissimo dolore et fletu. . . . Propterea nimis ingrata es, si me pro tanta caritate non dilexeris. Si enim caput meum punctum est et inclinatum in cruce pro te, caput tuum debet inclinari ad humilitatem. Et quia oculi mei erant sanguinolenti et pleni lacrimis, ideo oculi tui debent abstinere a delectabili visu. Et quia aures mee implebantur sanguine et audiebant verba detraccionis mee, idcirco aures tue auertantur a scurrilibus et ineptis locucionibus. Quia etiam os meum potatum est amarissima potacione et prohibitum a bona, ideo os tuum obstruatur a malis et aperiatur ad bona. Et quia manus mee extense sunt cum clavis, propterea opera tua, que figurantur in manibus, extendantur ad pauperes et ad precepta mea. Pedes tui, idest affectus tui, quibus ad me ire debes, crucifigantur a voluptatibus, ut, sicut in omnibus membris passus sum ego, sic omnia membra tua parata sint ad obsequium meum. Quia maius seruicium exigo a te quam ab aliis, quia maiorem gratiam feci tibi. (I, 11. 1 & 3–5)

Imitating the passion of Christ is here presented as a universal ascetic program, involving not only benevolent suffering in the name of Lord but also connecting all the virtues with certain details of the passion of Christ. Birgitta’s meditation on the passion is generally known as being strongly concentrated on his humanity. In her revelations, she emphasizes all the brutal details of Christ’s suffering in order to make them imaginable for herself and her readers, and to move their hearts and minds. This meditation should lead the reader to make Christ’s passion fruitful by imitating it

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<sup>607</sup> However, once “imitare” and “sequere” are used in the same phrase, while the narrator speaks about Maria: “Natus quoque est de virgine, ut viam ad celum doceret, quam imitando ego sequerer cum humilitate. Deinde morte sua aperuit celum, ut illuc desiderando et veniendo festinarem” (VI, 65. 46).

in his or her own behavior.<sup>608</sup> According to Santha Bhattacharji and Henrik Roelving, Birgitta was meditating on the passion of Christ with the help of *Meditationes vitae Christi*, a very popular fourteenth-century book describing the life and death of Christ as an inspiration to personal prayer.<sup>609</sup>

According to Birgitta, however, not only mystics and contemplatives are invited to imitate the passion of Christ. In the previously quoted revelation analyzing Queen Blanka's inner spiritual struggle (VIII, 13), Birgitta states that the imitation of Christ and the saints is Blanka's desire and need:

Ipsum enim Deum imitati sunt Mater eius et omnes sancti, qui omnem penam sustinere omniaque amittere magis voluerunt, ymmo etiam seipsos contempserunt, ne perderent celestia et eterna. Et ideo tucius est dimittere honorem et diuicias tempestiue quam tenere eas usque ad finem, ne forte crescente dolore in extremis decrescat tunc memoria delictorum, et tunc illi capient omnes diuicias, quas congregauit, qui de salute anime mee nichil currant. (VIII, 13. 13–14)

This passage describes the saints as people who preferred to lose everything they had in order not to lose eternal life (VIII, 13. 13.). The queen knows that they have chosen the right solution, as earthly things can be dangerous for one's soul if valued too highly (VIII, 13. 14.). Still, she is not courageous enough to follow their footsteps, as these saints seem too perfect and too distant to be followed (VIII, 13. 15–16).

Nevertheless, Birgitta may have used the examples of saints as complementary to the example of Christ because she may have found them more achievable than his perfect humanity,

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<sup>608</sup> Santha Bhattacharji, "Medieval Contemplation and Mystical Experience," in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 56-57.

<sup>609</sup> Bhattacharji, loc. cit.; Henrik Roelvink, "Andlig släktskap mellan Franciscus och Birgitta," in *Heliga Birgitta - budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, 1993), 114.

fortified by the divine nature: according to her, the models of the saints and Mary may be imitated because they themselves were imitating Christ (VI, 65. 15). In another revelation we read that in her vision Birgitta heard Saint Stephen describing the circumstances of his own martyrdom:

Iudeis igitur blasphemantibus Deum meum Iesum ego gaudens accepisse occasionem loquendi cum eis constanter increpabam duriciam eorum, paratus mori pro veritate et imitari Dominum meum. (VI, 108. 5)

In this fragment Birgitta says that Stephen was in fact looking for an occasion for martyrdom. In the Gospel of Mark we read that, unlike Stephen, Mary did nothing to take part in her son's suffering: she was simply "looking on afar off" (Mar 15:40), but it is her example that Birgitta regards as the most relevant preparation for her own death (I, 35. 7). Birgitta writes that Mary followed Christ to Golgotha like a silent lamb following his mother (Sermo 18. 5–8). But according to *Revelationes*, Mary not only followed the passion of Christ: she was completely unified with him in his pain, not only as a mother but as the most loving and obedient creature (Extrav. 3. 3). Birgitta states that "Mary's heart was like Christ's heart" (I, 35. 7). She even metaphorically says that through her compassion and obedience to his will, she was "saving the world together" with her son (Extrav. 3. 3–5). As Claire Sahlin notes, Birgitta presents Mary as a model for imitation in three aspects: "imitation of Mary's sufferings, imitation of the intimate union between her and her son, and finally the imitation of her role as mediator of compassion for Christ's suffering."<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> Claire L. Sahlin, "'His Heart was My Heart': Birgitta of Sweden's Devotion to the Heart of Mary," in *Heliga Birgitta - budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991*, ed. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien, 1993), 220.

However, Helga Koch points out that in *Revelationes* the role of Mary is always presented with respect to her relationship with God: “Birgitta never sees Mary in her own rights,”<sup>611</sup> despite the fact that she is described as the most perfect creature (Oracio I, 7), as the Wisdom of God, and as pre-existing from the beginning of the world.<sup>612</sup> Birgitta says that Mary is now “summum membrum” in the body of Christ (IV, 74. 6) and often addresses her as a mother of mercy, always willing to pray for and help sinners, but she still sees the ideal of *imitatio Marie*<sup>613</sup> in relation to God’s grace given to Mary, which resulted in her humility, obedience, and love to him (I, 42. 1–2). From Mary one can learn to imitate her only desire: “to please her son” (II, 23. 11).

Birgitta states that saints become similar to Christ during their lifetime. She writes that the apostle James, the son of Alpheus, looked very much like Jesus, but that he became more similar to him in heaven (Extrav. 34. 11). In the Middle Ages, James the son of Alpheus was identified with James, the brother of Jesus, described in the New Testament,<sup>614</sup> so Birgitta here could mean that they were similar, like brothers. She also mentions the spiritual similarity to Jesus which James achieved during his life and martyrdom, since in the revelation of St. Stephen referenced above Birgitta associates martyrdom with imitating Christ. This would also harmonize with the statement

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<sup>611</sup> Helga Koch, “Lignelses-, symbol- og billedsprog hos Birgitta: visdommens efterfølgelse som *imitatio Christi et Mariae*,” in *Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Odense Univesitetsforlag, 1991), 471.

<sup>612</sup> Koch, *op. cit.*, 480-481.

<sup>613</sup> About the ideal of *imitatio Marie* see also: Alf Härdelin, “St Aelred of Rievaulx on the Imitation of Mary,” in *Munkarnas och mystikernas medeltid: Tjugofyra kapitel om teologi, spiritualitet och kultur* (Skellefteå: Afton, 1996), 190-200.

<sup>614</sup> Mat 13:55; Mar 6:3; Gal 1:19. The conviction that James the son of Alpheus is identical with James, the brother of Jesus was popularized by Jerome. See: Jerome, “The Perpetual Virginité of Blessed Mary: Against Helvidius,” 14-16, in *A Select Library of The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*, vol. VI, ed. Philip Schaff, in Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vi.v.html> (accessed February 5, 2010).

of St. Paul that Christ, being the most perfect human, ultimately restored the likeness of God in mankind when he, being God, became “the likeness of man” (Phi 2:7).

Birgitta also expressed the idea that thanks to Christ the image of God in a human soul is not only restored, but it can become even more perfect than in the moment of creation: she compares God to a sculptor who first created a figure in clay and planned to make a golden statue according to that model afterward (Extrav. 84. 1). The clay figure represents people, created “of the dust of the ground” in order to be deified, filled with the gold of deity (Extrav. 84. 3). Unfortunately, the beautiful clay image was destroyed by moisture, that is, sin. Now it does not resemble the original and must be replaced by a new one, here representing the pagans, which can be cast in gold<sup>615</sup> (Extrav. 84. 2 and 5).

Moreover, according to revelation 8 in book 5 the enemies of Christ are losing their chance to resemble him. Birgitta reports the words of her vision in which she heard Christ saying to a sinner:

Frater, omnia opera mea ex caritate feci, ut tu esses michi similis et auersus redires ad me. Nunc autem opera mea sunt mortua in te, verba mea onerosa et via mea neglecta. Ideo restat tibi supplicium et societas demonum, quia vertis ad me dorsum, calcas sub pedibus tuis signa humilitatis mee et non attendis, qualis in cruce steti ante te et pro te. (V, rev. 8. 11–12)

We can also notice that in the same book Birgitta says that bearing similarity to the devil and being a member of his “body” are consequences of sin (V, int. 6. 25). Therefore, we can understand that according to her people unavoidably bear a likeness to spiritual beings, even being corporeal

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<sup>615</sup> The metaphor seems to be not entirely coherent: if the old clay figure represents “homo”, the man in general, one could expect that the new one would stand for some un-human group of created beings.

themselves: no neutrality is possible. Depending on their way of living and the subject of their love, they resemble Christ and the saints or the devil.

### 4.3. *Imitatio* of the Reign of Christ

St. Birgitta's expressive visions of Christ's nativity and passion greatly influenced late medieval iconography, so her reflection upon Christ's humanity is present in the theological culture of that period.<sup>616</sup> A well-known painting inspired by Birgitta's visions is the crucifixion by Matthias Grünewald in the Isenheim Altarpiece: an expressive or even brutal representation of Christ dying in terrible pain and sorrow.<sup>617</sup> In early medieval times, the crucified Christ was often presented as *Christus Triumphans*, a crucified *rex gloriae*, wearing a crown and without signs of suffering.<sup>618</sup> These two iconographical motifs express two types of theological reflection upon the humanity and kingship of Christ: Grünewald's painting shows the ultimate *kenosis* of the Son of God, stressing his unity with vulnerable human nature, while the crucified *rex gloriae* already anticipates the resurrection of Christ and shows both his suffering and his eternal glory as the triumphant king. We shall now examine the text of *Revelationes* to find out whether Birgitta's idea of the kingship of Christ shows familiarity with these medieval theological categories and, if so, to what extent.

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<sup>616</sup> Henrik Cornell, "The Iconography of the Nativity of Christ," *Uppsala universitets årsskrift* 1 (1924): 1-101; James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Kortrijk: Van Ghemmert Publishing Company, 1979), 204-212.

<sup>617</sup> About the theological sources of the Isenheim altarpiece see: Otto Benesch, *The Art of the Renaissance in Northern Europe: Its Relation to the Contemporary Spiritual and Intellectual Movements* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 28-31; John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics: Theological Perceptions and Visual Images in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27-49.

<sup>618</sup> Barbara Catherine Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography and the Art of the Monastic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Per Beskow, *Rex Gloriae: The Kingship of Christ in the Early Church* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1962), 100.

This section is devoted to analyzing the relationship between Birgitta's theological idea of imitating Christ, presented above, and the idea of Christ as a king. In my opinion, these two ideas have a certain influence of the idea of Christian kingdom as presented in *Revelationes*. Below I explain the three important aspects of the subject as it appears in Birgitta's work: Christ as the leader of the church and the model for Christian leaders (section 4.3.1); the idea of "Christ's heredity," which has some influence on Birgitta's opinion that the hereditary principle is one of the principles governing social life (4.3.2); the church as the body of Christ (4.3.3), and the Virgin Mary as a representation of Church in its relation to Christ (4.3.4).

#### 4.3.1. "*Dux Qui Reget Populum Meum Israhel*"<sup>619</sup>

In one of her prayers, Birgitta calls Christ "the leader" ("dux"), as he led the souls of saints out of hell:

Domine mi Iesu Christe, qui digne ab omnibus appellaris dux, quia crucis onustam sarcinam tuis sanctis humeris et collo portasti, antequam inferni portas potenter confringeres animasque electorum ad celos reduceres, idcirco tuo benedicto collo et humeris, qui talia sustinuerunt, sit honor et gloria eternaliter sine fine. Amen. (Oratio III, 76)

His mission of leading and liberating is presented here as a consequence of his passion. In this passage, Birgitta's awareness of the divine nature of Christ (addressed "Domine," or "Lord") is fully incorporated into a meditation upon his humanity. In my opinion, this fragment is characteristic, as Birgitta tends in many other revelations (which will be discussed below) to connect the divine attributes of Christ so closely to his human features that even her apprehension of his essentially divine attribute, his kingship, results from contemplation upon Christ's earthly life and passion.

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<sup>619</sup> Mat 2:6. The word "reget", "will reign", which points to equality between Christ's leadership and his reign, is not present in the English translations of this verse.

We notice that in the Christian society presented in *Revelationes*, knights are the group particularly related to Christ as a leader. In book 2, Birgitta describes Christ persuading the knights to convert. In this revelation, Christ presents himself as the father and creator of the knights; as their brother, who became similar to them; and finally as a lord to whom they have all sworn fidelity:

Ego moneo eos tripliciter. Primo sicut pater filios, ut reuertantur ad me, quia ego pater et creator eorum sum. Reuertantur, et dabo eis patrimonium, quod paterno iure debetur eis! Reuertantur, quia, licet contemptus sum, attamen cum gaudio suscipiam eos et occurram eis cum caritate! Secundo rogo eos sicut frater, ut recordentur vulnerum et operum meorum. Reuertantur, et suscipiam eos quasi frater! Tercio rogo ut dominus, ut reuertantur ad dominum suum, cui dederunt fidem, cui et obsequium tenentur et iuramento se obligauerunt. (II, 12. 32–35)

In all the three aspects, Christ presents himself as the leader of knighthood: he is the knights' father who wants to introduce them into his property, which is their patrimony. It is remarkable that the grace described as "patrimony" is something proper for people, "due to them by right" (II, 12. 33). We shall return to this aspect of Christ's leadership when discussing the hereditary laws of Christendom (4.3.2).

Jesus speaks here also about his humanity, as he says he became the brother of men and suffered the punishment for their sins in their stead (II, 12. 40–42). He was "first in war, first in suffering" (II, 12. 46), giving them an example and encouragement to defend the Holy Church and suffer for her. Again we see this unique aspect of the knightly way of living: they are presented in *Revelationes* as potential martyrs who may imitate the passion of their leader (see section 3.2.1). Birgitta goes on to say that Christian knights had broken the promise given to their Lord and now keep faith with the devil. They had thrown away the banner of Christ and now hoist the banner of the enemy (II, 12. 37–39), which must be judged as the worst treason and an insult to their Lord:



“you have insulted me in a way you yourselves would never tolerate,” says Christ in his rebuke (II, 12. 57). In Birgitta’s vision, Christ’s accusation against the knights is based on their own code of behavior, which highly values the virtue of fidelity and disrespects traitors:

Cur rescinditis promissionem vestram? Cur iuramentum contempnitis? Numquid ego minor et indignior sum amico vestro temporali, cui si datis fidem soluitis? Michi autem, datori vite et honoris, conseruatori sanitatis, non redditis promissum. (II, 12. 47–48)

According to this passage, Birgitta does not only put forward Christ as a leader to follow and imitate, but she compares him to a worldly lord, fully adapting her argumentation to the needs and mentality of the listener. This can lead to a certain conclusion about Birgitta’s idea of imitating Christ within the social structures: imitating Christ is possible because he himself “imitates” the paradigms of human behavior. Moreover, I would propose placing Birgitta’s comparison between Christ and a worldly lord within the theological context of the incarnation idea: according to the epistle to Hebrews, Christ, being God, became similar to humans “in everything, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). The idea of Christ’s conforming to a human mentality and set of needs is therefore present in Christian theology inspired by this verse, among others.<sup>620</sup> Birgitta here suggests that in

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<sup>620</sup> “Multi pontifices ignorant eos qui in tribulationibus constituti sunt, neque quae sit tribulatio in quolibet sciunt. Impossibile quippe est scire afflictiones afflictorum ei qui experimentum afflictionis non habuit, et sensibilter omnia non sustinuit. Pontifex enim noster competenter omnia sustinuit, quae fuerunt humanae miseriae illata post peccatum primi hominis, et tunc in interiora velaminis ad thronum paternae majestatis ascendit. Tentatum autem per omnia pro similitudine absque peccato” (Rabanus Maurus, *Ennarationes in epistolas beati Pauli*, 27, 4, PL 112,737); “Dandus enim erat diabolo locus tentandi, ut fieret Christo occasio superandi. Permisit enim se a maligno spiritu tentari, ut nobis exemplum pugnandi ostenderet. Quod apostolus Paulus in Epistola sua ad Hebraeos, cum de Domino loqueretur, dicit: «Non enim habemus pontificem, qui non possit infirmitatibus nostris compati, tentatum autem per omnia pro similitudine absque peccato” (Haymo of Halberstadt, *Homiliae de tempore*, 28, PL 118, 191); “Tentatum autem. Quasi dicat: Non habemus talem qui non possit compati, sed potius, tentatum a diabolo, et hominibus, quia irrisus et crucifixus fuit, et ideo potest compati. Tentatum dico per omnia genera tentationum: et hoc pro similitudine carnis peccati, id est quia similis adhuc erat hominibus secundum, vel pro similis, id est ut exemplum daret aliis similia sustinendi, ens tamen absque peccato. Et ideo potest liberare. Ex eo enim quod tentatus est, scit compati; ex eo vero quod sine peccato est, potens est liberare. Impossibile est enim scire afflictorum afflictionem homini qui afflictionis experimentum non habuit, et sensibilter omnia non sustinuit. Christus vero scit non solum per hoc quod Deus

becoming a man Christ also became the human leader of the Christian army. She now claims that through her revelations Christ “translates” his message into the social language that is understandable to medieval Christian kingdom.

In this revelation, Birgitta says that Christ warns the knights against further misdeeds as they risk meeting their Lord’s justice instead of his mercy, which he offers them now (II, 12. 31). The narration of the revelation is thus organized around the two ideas: justice and mercy. They are described as the two modes of the Lord’s action towards his “vassals.” In another revelation (VIII, 43) the two banners of Christ symbolize these two ideas: the banner of mercy and the banner of justice (VIII, 43. 1). From the text we can deduce that the banners had a quite literal meaning for Birgitta; they were not only metaphors of spiritual ideas, since Birgitta expected Magnus Eriksson’s army to carry the two banners during the expedition to Novgorod (see section 3.2.1). The banner of mercy had to depict Christ’s passion, and the other the sword of justice (VIII, 43.1). They were to be used during the two possible phases of the expedition. First, the Christian army was to offer peace to the “pagans,” presenting the banner of mercy. The priests accompanying the army—members of various orders, chosen from among clerics “qui veraciter contempnunt mundum” (VIII, 43. 5)—were to discuss religious matters with the “pagans” (VIII, 43.5). If the pagans rejected the offer of mercy and true faith, the banner of justice was to be raised and the war had to begin (VIII, 43. 2). It is important to notice that Birgitta here presents the first phase as something more than an entry ceremony before the fight: she describes the two phases as equally important. This attitude toward heretics becomes more understandable if we consider her previous statements (II, 12) about the importance of mercy and justice as the Christ’s possible methods for dealing with his

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secundum quod omnia novit, sed per hoc quod homo et similia sustinuit” (Peter Lombard, *Collectanea in Epistolas Pauli: In Epistola ad Hebraeos*, IV, PL 192, 435).

army. We may suggest that Birgitta wanted Christian soldiers to act in the same way as their leader: first offer peace and mercy and then, if the mercy is rejected, proceed with “the banner of justice.”

“The banner of mercy” that depicted the passion of Christ is mentioned several times in Birgitta’s work. In each case the function of this symbol represents Christ, who wants his example to be followed. Birgitta says that this banner should precede the new nun to the church during the ceremony of her vows:

*Et cum ingreditur ecclesiam, feratur ante illam vexillum rubeum, in quo ymago corporis mei passi depicta sit ex parte una et ymago Matris mee ex parte altera, ut aspiciens noua sponsa signum noui sponsi in cruce passi discat pacienciam et paupertatem et aspiciens Virginem Matrem discat castitatem et humilitatem. (Reg. 10. 107)*

Here, the banner reminds “the new bride of Christ” that she should resemble her groom. The other side of the banner depicts an image of the mother of God, as the example of Mary is described as complimentary to that of Christ.

We have already described the Birgittine ceremony of knightly vows, which also includes the use of the standard or banner (see section 2.3.4). Also in this context, a second banner representing the secular power accompanies the banner of the passion, while the banner of Christ represents the knight’s obedience to prelates and his vow to defend the church:

*Ingresso autem eo cimiterium clerici occurrant ei cum vexillo ecclesie, in quo depicta sit passio Christi et vulnera eius in signum, quod Ecclesiam Dei defendere debet et eius prelati eciam obtemperare. (II, 13. 26)*

We can thus conclude that in St. Birgitta’s work the banner of the passion is an important sign demonstrating Christ as a leader and a king. In spite of this, Birgitta, unlike other medieval

theologians,<sup>621</sup> never explicitly calls the cross “vexillum Christi,” “the banner of Christ.” In the revelations discussed above, however, she does describe the banner with the scene of passion depicted on it. She also suggests a relationship between Christ’s banner and his passion in the following passage:

Ego quoque, Deus et creator, blasphemor. Dicunt enim: “Nescimus, si est Deus. Et si est, non curamus.” Vexillum meum prosternitur et conculcatur, dicentes: “Quare passus est? Quid prodest nobis? Si velit dare nobis voluntatem nostram, sufficit nobis, et habeat ipse regnum suum et celum!” (I, 5. 17)

In my opinion, however, the absence of the concept of the cross as a banner of Christ in *Revelationes* is quite remarkable, since this concept was present in medieval liturgy and well-known religious texts, like *Donation of Constantin* or the hymn *Vexilla Regis*.<sup>622</sup> We can also notice that in *Revelationes* the king who leads the Christian army is never directly compared to Christ, nor is Christ put forward as an example for him to imitate. Instead, we read that the king should follow the example of David (VIII, 44. 1–3), Moses (VIII, 49. 13), Joshua, Joab, and Jude Maccabeus (IV, 76. 9–10). They are all biblical types of Christ, so the sequence of imitation finally leads from the Old

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<sup>621</sup> See : “De qua mundus exurgens, ab omni me leprae squalore mundatum agnoscite: levatoque me de venerabili fonte, induto vestibus candidis, septiformis gratiae sancti Spiritus consignationem adhibuit beati chrismatis unctione, et vexillum sanctae crucis in mea fronte linivit, dicens: Signet te Deus sigillo fidei suae, in nomine Patris; et Filii, et Spiritus sancti, in consignatione fidei” (*Donatio Constantini*, PL 8, 574); “Sed vir sanctus magis elegit Deo coelesti servire, quam sub imperatore militare terreno; qui specialiter electus est, ut vexillum sanctae crucis occiduas orbis portaret in partes, et militiae sacramenta evangelicis mutaret edictis” (Alcuin, *De Vita Sancti Martini*, II, PL 101, 659); “Bene ergo congressuri christiani cum saracenis ponentes spem victoriae non in multitudine vel potencia armorum vel industria. sed in ipsa cruce per quam nobiliter triumphavit. crucem accipiant et erigant contra saracenos exemplo Constantini Imperatoris. qui dimicaturus contra infideles signum istud in vexillo et in armis militum suorum fecit poni propter spem victoriae” (Humbertus Romanus, *Liber de Predicatione Sanctae Crucis*, IV, ed. Kurt Villads Jensen, <http://www.jggj.dk/saracenos.htm#cap4> [accessed November 20. 2009]). The idea of cross as a battle standard was also constantly present in medieval liturgy. See e.g. the liturgical hymn “Vexilla Regis” by Venantius Fortunatus (“Vexilla regis prodeunt, fulget crucis mysterium”) sung e.g. on the feast of Invention of the Holy Cross and during the week after the Palm Sunday. See: *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc*, I, 9, ed. David Knowles (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1951), 66; Peter of Cluny, *Apologetica*, 75, PL 189, 1047; Rupert of Deutz, *De divinis officiis*, V, 1, PL 170, 122).

<sup>622</sup> See previous footnote.

Testament figures, through Jesus, to the Christian king. However, I would suggest that by avoiding a direct comparison between a Christian leader and Christ, Birgitta expresses her conviction that only Christ is the true leader of his people and his army, while her literal understanding of “the banner of Christ” suggests an attempt to place the idea of Christ as a leader within certain social settings, like a Christian army, a knightly fraternity, or a monastic community.

#### 4.3.2. *Hereditas Christi*

In the Bible, The Son of God, Christ, is presented as the son of David, the offspring of his dynasty (see below). Therefore, the medieval theologians believed that his right to the throne of Israel has a double foundation: he is “Rex terrenus hereditariæ successionis et cælestis a Patre,” as Albert the Great wrote.<sup>623</sup> During the Middle Ages, many opponents to the pontifical theocracy offered the reminder that Christ refused to execute temporal power over his people. Their disputants, however, noticed that this refusal did not contest the hereditary foundation of Christ’s power.<sup>624</sup> Birgitta herself did not take active part in this dispute, but she expressed some opinions about the kingdom of God as hereditary for Christians, which indirectly touches on this subject and plays an important role in her discussion on the Christian kingdom as related to Christ.

We shall now present briefly the biblical foundations of the hereditary principle. In the Old Testament, the birthright of the firstborn son was regarded as a basic principle of inheritance law. The oldest son was entitled to receive a double portion of his father’s estate, compared to the

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<sup>623</sup> Albert the Great, *In Johannem XVI*, 15, quoted in Jean Leclercq, *L'idée de la royauté du Christ au moyen-âge* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1959), 33.

<sup>624</sup> Jean Leclercq, *L'idée de la royauté du Christ au moyen-âge* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1959), 33.

other brothers.<sup>625</sup> The book of Deuteronomy strictly forbids making changes to this rule or favoring any other children (Deu 21:15–17). The rule of primogeniture had not only a legal but also a religious function, as in the times of patriarchs when the special blessing passed from the father to his firstborn son.<sup>626</sup> In several important cases this rule was broken, however. Jacob received the blessing from his father, Isaac, despite the fact that he was the younger son (Gen 25: 19–34; 27:1–40). Joseph was always favored by his father, and he finally received the blessing and the rights of the firstborn, as his oldest brother, Ruben, committed a serious offense against his father and the family (Gen 48:22). The younger son of Joseph, Ephraim, was also preferred to the older Manasseh (Gen 48:12–20). These irregularities have a deep theological meaning, as they stress God’s free choice of the channel through which the stream of his blessing is transmitted. They also prove that inheritance of grace has a spiritual rather than corporeal character.<sup>627</sup>

According to the biblical idea of the chosen nation, the essence of this blessing was a promise given to Abraham: “I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee” (Gen 17:6). Israel was therefore understood as the chosen nation, the royal property of God, but also a source and a beginning of blessing for other nations. The firstborn sons had a special place in this covenant between God and Israel as witnesses of it, and they had a special right to inherit the land that God gave to the nation. They also belonged to God exclusively according to the law (Exo 13:13).

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<sup>625</sup> Eryl W. Davies, “The Inheritance of the First-born in Israel and the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 175-176.

<sup>626</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 415-416.

<sup>627</sup> Davies, *op. cit.*, 176-179.

In the New Testament Christ is described as the firstborn and only begotten son of God (Joh 1:14; 1Jo 4:9), so, according to the Old Testament rules, everything that belongs to his Father is Christ's patrimony. In the gospel of Luke we read that being the King of heaven and earth and the heir of the kingdom, he wants to share his inheritance with his disciples (Luk 22:29–30). They are described as the adopted sons of God, and therefore heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ (Rom 8: 14–17). According to the book of Acts, the disciples of Christ who come from among the Jews have the same rights as those who come from paganism (Act 16:13). According to New Testament theology the promise of the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ, but the accent was moved from the promise of possessing the Holy Land to the spiritual Kingdom and heredity. Both Christ himself in the gospel of Luke (Luk 22:25-28) and St. Paul in his letters (Rom 8:17) explain that in order to obtain a share with Christ, one must take part in his sufferings, trying to imitate him. In the book of Revelation this imitation takes the form of a spiritual fight for the salvation and the inheritance with Christ is a reward for the one who shall overcome (Rev 21:7).

The narrator of *Revelationes* proves to be an attentive reader of the Bible,<sup>628</sup> so we can suppose that she was conscious of these connotations. For Birgitta and her medieval readers these could have been even more understandable than for her modern readers, as the hereditary principle was one of the foundations of the European medieval legal system. In Scandinavia, it shaped family relations and was an important principle of forming the noble class.<sup>629</sup>

In *Revelationes* we find numerous evidence for the importance of the hereditary principle for Birgitta's religious and social thought. She was of the opinion that the inheritance of the

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<sup>628</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och böckerna: En undersökning av den heliga Birgittas källor* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 57-98.

<sup>629</sup> Birgit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800 – 1500* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 180-185.

patriarchs of the Old Testament was the promise of salvation expected from the king of Israel, the Son of God, since in *Sermo Angelicus* we read:

Hanc denique fidem et sanctam spem, scilicet future natiuitatis filii Dei de progenie eiusdem Abrahe, pro hereditate cum magna fide reliquit idem Abraham filio suo Ysaac, quod ex eo bene probatur, quod suum seruum, quem pro uxore filii mittebat, iurare fecit super lumbos suos, idest per eum, qui de suis lumbis in futurum egrederetur, per hoc innuens, quod Dei filius ex eius nasceretur propagine. Ysaac quoque per benedictionem, quam dedit filio suo Iacob, eandem hereditatem, idest supradictam fidem et spem, sibi reliquisse dinoscitur. Benedicens autem Iacob singillatim suos duodecim filios, eadem hereditate suum filium Iudam consolari non omisit. (Sermo VIII, 19–22)

Here Birgitta stresses the spiritual character of the covenant between God and people, even in Old Testament times. She never named the Holy Land “the heredity of Abraham” or even “the heredity of Christ,” even though she considered this place to be sacred and specially blessed.<sup>630</sup> We can thus suggest that, analogically to her presentation of the Christian king—who in fact led the Christian army but is never described as *imitator Christi*—Birgitta never spoke about the heredity of the Holy Land in order to stress the true, spiritual character of God’s inheritance.

In book 4 she discusses the question of obtaining the spiritual “property,” that is, the grace of God animating the souls of faithful. Birgitta compares this inner process to the process of obtaining property according to the civil law. She says that in this law there are several ways to obtain property, and inheritance is one of them. Birgitta states that a similar law governs spiritual matters:

Itaque iste diuicie obtinentur quadrupliciter. Primo per caritatem. . . . Secundo obtinetur honor spiritualis propter hereditatem. Ego quippe per humanitatis mee assumptionem et passionem homini emi celum et aperui hereditario iure. Sicut enim homo hereditatem diuinam quodammodo vendidit Dyabolo recipiendo pomum modicum in permutacionem pro delectacione eterna, cibum vetitum pro ligno vite, falsitatem pro veritate, sic ego obediendo Patri discerpsi litteram inobediencie per amaritudinem cordis mei, satisfeci pro

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<sup>630</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1971), 168-175.



dulcedine pomi, per mortem meam promerui homini lignum vite, per fidem humanitatis mee reduxi hominem et institui omnem veritatem. Ergo quicumque credit verbis veritatis mee et imitatur me, hic per hereditatem obtinebit diuicias spirituales et gratiam meam. (IV, 111. 7 and 9–12)

People are presented here as lawful participants in Christ's heredity since he became one of them, elevating the human race to the heavenly honors. As a matter of fact, Birgitta states that people were entitled to the legacy of heaven from the moment of their creation, but they were disinherited—or, rather, abandoned their inheritance—as a consequence of original sin.<sup>631</sup> Here she says that their primal legacy is returned to them but also shared with the Son of God himself. According to Birgitta, the way to obtain this spiritual wealth is to imitate Christ and believe his words. If people are to imitate the way he won salvation, they must be faithful and obedient to the Father and accept the suffering he potentially will send, as Christ won their salvation through his suffering.<sup>632</sup>

According to Birgitta, the primary means of obtaining the inheritance with Christ is through baptism. She writes in a revelation dealing with the spiritual arms of the knight of Christ that “baptizati . . . filii Dei efficiuntur et coheredes Dei” (IV, 74. 79) and below: “in baptism . . . datur . . . celum in hereditatem” (IV, 74. 96 = VIII, 34. 96). Therefore, according to this text the knight of Christ is heir to a property: we can add that this metaphor again conforms to the mentality of knights, who were proud of their father's riches and whose position in society was dependent upon their parents' wealth. The knight of Christ will be able to enjoy his inheritance fully after he

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<sup>631</sup> “Contra hec duo Deus virtuosus non destitit alia duo remedia opponere. Nam contra desperationem dedit spem, nominans nomen Abrahe et promittens ei se de semine eius nasciturum, qui ad amissam hereditatem reduceret eum et eius fidei sequaces” (II, 17. 35).

<sup>632</sup> “Ego emi eis hereditatem eternam passione mea” (II, 13. 16 = VIII, 35. 6).

meets his father in heaven, after he had proven his fidelity: “Tibi debetur hereditas patris, quia ei obedisti,” Birgitta says in her vision of eternal reward for a knight (II, 11. 9).

The royal character of Christ’s inheritance that is visible in New Testament writings is also noticeable in Birgitta’s work. Commenting on Matthew 8:12, which reads, “But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness,” she says:

Scriptum est, quod filii regni eicientur et filii non regni accipient hereditatem. Sic etiam scribitur, quod quedam regina de ultimis finibus venit videre diuicias Salomonis et audire sapienciam eius. Que cum vidit, vix pre admiracione habuit spiritum. Qui autem erant in regno eius, non attendebant sapienciam eius nec admirabantur diuicias eius. (II, 4. 2–3)

Further in this revelation Christ explains that Solomon was his type (“ego sum Salomon in figura,” II, 4.) and that today the “children of the kingdom” are unfaithful Christians. Christ promised to grant them his richness, which is eternal life and glory, if they follow his example and believe his words (II, 4. 5); but they neglect them, so they will finally lose the inheritance:

Quid ergo faciam eis? Utique, quia filii nolunt habere hereditatem, extranei, idest pagani, recipient. (II, 4. 6–7)

It is particularly interesting that Birgitta preserves two elements of the metaphor used in the gospel of Matthew (Christ is the new Solomon and “filii non regni” are interpreted as pagans in Matthew and in Birgitta’s text), but she changes the third one: Matthew spoke about the Jewish people as the royal nation,<sup>633</sup> while Birgitta speaks about Christians, the new people of God (II, 4. 5). A superficial interpretation of this passage could lead to the conclusion that Birgitta expected a new revelation that would end the age of Christianity and start a new religion to replace Christianity in the same way that the latter replaced Judaism in God’s plan. It appears, however,

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<sup>633</sup> As opposed with the centurion who is the addressee of Jesus’ speech (Mat 8:5).

that Birgitta's third metaphor is not governed by the rules of prophecy, but by those of imitation. In *Revelationes* many of the Old Testament characters and events are interpreted as prophecies of the new covenant, but some of them are interpreted according to the rule already mentioned in chapter 2, which we named "a greater than Solomon is here."<sup>634</sup> In short, this term describes a method of interpreting the Bible by searching the New Testament for a greater, spiritual, and full sense of characters and events introduced in the Old Testament (see section 2.1.4). Here this rule is applied to King Solomon and the pagan queen. In a number of other revelations Birgitta foretells the "time of the pagans," a time when they will believe in Christ, to mention only the above-quoted example of the two clay figures, symbols of "all the people" and pagans (Extrav. 84.). The conversion of pagans is also a traditional, biblical theme, present in the Old and New Testaments alike.<sup>635</sup>

The new problem here is the "disinheritance" of Christians expected by Birgitta (II, 4. 7). To interpret this passage in accordance with its internal logic, we may suggest that Birgitta speaks here about the unfaithful Christians, not about the Christians in general, since in her other revelations we do not find prophecies about the end of Christianity. Here she also says that the "faithful souls" will be saved (II, 4. 7). The sinners will indeed be disinherited after they die, as they did not resemble Christ (II, 4. 9). In their behavior, they imitate "children of the kingdom"<sup>636</sup> who neglect their position and opportunities, but they also imitate the unfaithful Jews who lost their inheritance (Mat 8:12), and the surroundings of king Solomon, who paid no attention to his

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<sup>634</sup> Mat 12:41-42; Luk 11:31-32

<sup>635</sup> Isa 2:2-5; Phi 2:12-18. See also: James P. Ware, *The Mission of the Church in Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>636</sup> A direct Scriptural analogy could be the offspring of Salomon: Jeroboam, the apostate King of Judah and his son Nadab (1Ki 14:16; 15:25-26).

wisdom (II, 4.3). I posit, therefore, that we can count this text among Birgitta's uses of historical exemplification (see section 2.1.3).

A study of those two exegetical rules, imitation and prophecy, might be particularly useful for interpreting Birgitta's texts since she often uses them simultaneously as two elements of a single metaphor, such as in the passage analyzed above in which Christ is presented as a new Solomon according to the rules of prophecy, but unfaithful Christians are described as a disinherited nation according to the rules of imitation. The two rules are parallel to each other, but their relation to the Old and New Testaments is different: they have "opposite vectors of time." Prophetic exegesis starts from the Old Testament event to reveal its proper meaning in the light of the New Testament, the "fullness of the time," while imitation explains current events in the light of New Testament. Another important difference between the two rules is the character of the relationship between the facts interpreted according to each of them: according to the first rule, the connection between a prophetic forecast and its fulfillment is "necessary" and intended by God, who inspired the Holy Scripture and leads the history of salvation. But the relationship of imitation is by no means "unavoidable," since it is not included in the internal structure of facts, so it can be changed by the present actors of history: a sinful Christian can be converted (VI, 8. 11) and imitate Christ instead.

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Birgitta's deep conviction of the spiritual character of the inheritance of Christ expressed in the above texts has consequences for her view on the properties of Church and clergy. In her opinion, the priests should not be proud of their personal, inherited wealth, nor should they struggle to obtain riches for the church. She says that Christ could have chosen kings and rulers as

his apostles if he wished so, and then the church would have been enriched by their earthly inheritance, but he decided to come as a poor man into the world in order to show that earthly possessions are transitory and it is better to search for the true riches of heaven.<sup>637</sup> The priests are expected to resemble the Levites, who, according to the book of Numbers, had no inheritance among the chosen nation, as God was their only inheritance; they lived on the offerings given to the Lord by the people (Num 18:23–24). Birgitta here presents herself as a strong supporter of the view that the church should be poor and entirely dependent upon God’s will, following Christ’s poverty.

With this statement Birgitta contributes to the discussion on ecclesiastical poverty that arose during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Voluntary poverty is indeed one of the central ideas of Christian spirituality, constantly present in doctrine and spiritual life, but the need of poverty and esteem of the idea are at certain times rising, interacting usually with the need for church reform.<sup>638</sup> The idea itself is rooted in the New Testament, since it is said in the gospel of Matthew that Christ had nowhere to lay his head (Mat 8:20), and that he advised one of his disciples to sell his possessions and give his money to the poor in order to obtain a treasure in heaven (Mat 19:21). Nevertheless, approaches to poverty—what sort of poor life was proper, and

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<sup>637</sup> “Inquiramus insuper in clero, quorum est diligere continenciam, paupertatem et deuocionem; et certe hii eciam a via recesserunt. Quid autem sunt clerici nisi pars et elemosinarii Dei, ut viuentes de oblacione Dei tanto essent humiliores et ad Deum feruenciores, quanta a curis mundi plus debent esse segregati? Ideo et a tribulacione et paupertate primum surrexit Ecclesia, ut Deus esset hereditas eorum, et non in mundo nec in carne sed in Deo gloriarentur. Sed numquid, filia, non potuisset Deus elegisse reges et duces in apostolos, et tunc per eos hereditate terrena ditata fuisset Ecclesia? Potuisset quidem, sed diues Deus venit in mundum pauper, ut terrena ostenderet transitoria esse, et ut homo exemplo Domini sui addisceret nec erubesceret paupertatem sed ad veras diuicias et celestes festinaret. Ideo cum paupere piscatore inchoauit pulcherrimam dispositionem Ecclesie et posuit eum in locum suum, ut de sorte Domini non de hereditate viueret in hoc mundo” (IV, 76. 14-18).

<sup>638</sup> Michael D. Bailey, “Religions Poverty, Mendicancy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages,” *Church History* 72, no. 3 (September 2003): 457-483.

for whom—could and did vary considerably. Throughout the late Middle Ages, interpretations of this idea ranged from full acceptance of ecclesiastical property (as Christ reigns over both spiritual and temporal goods, which are subordinated to spiritual ones, and the church executes the authority of Christ),<sup>639</sup> to the radical negation of all forms of property as long as religious persons and institutions were concerned (most clearly visible in the case of the spiritual Franciscans).<sup>640</sup> We already mentioned Birgitta’s balanced statement on the question of Christ’s poverty (see section 3.3.2). In this revelation (IV, 76) she appears as an arduous defender of the poverty of clerics, entirely in line with the mendicant reform movements of her age. The mendicant orders, however, opposed the luxurious lifestyle of prelates by establishing their own communities, whose clerical members lived a poor life, not by contesting the right of clerics to possess property. According to canon law and the common custom, diocesan clerics were not obliged to vow poverty.<sup>641</sup> In Birgitta’s opinion, however, voluntary poverty has a moral value itself and can be regarded as a virtue on its own; therefore it can be practiced by all disciples of Christ to a certain extent (Extrav. 3. 7–8). This point of view situates her in line with Franciscan thinkers and in opposition to Dominicans, who generally regarded poverty and mendicancy as means to a certain end, namely more effective preaching and contemplation.<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>639</sup> Durand of Saint-Pourcain, *De origine jurisdictionum* q. 3, ad.3, quoted in Jean Leclercq, *L'idée de la royauté du Christ au moyen-âge* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1959), 188.

<sup>640</sup> David Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty: The Origins of the Usus Pauper Controversy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans. From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Malcolm Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty: The Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order, 1210-1323* (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute, 1998).

<sup>641</sup> J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350 - c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 619.

<sup>642</sup> Michael D Bailey, “Religions Poverty, Mendicancy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages,” *Church History* 72, no. 3 (September 2003): 470.

Birgitta called priests “pars et elemosinarii Dei” (IV, 76. 14), meaning that alms for God are their inheritance because they are supposed to live on the alms of people, namely the offerings given voluntary to the church (“oblaciones Dei,” IV, 76. 14). This concept may have Franciscan sources, as St. Francis in his rule also calls the alms given to the friars “their inheritance.”<sup>643</sup> However, the justification Birgitta offers for this idea is a bit different from Franciscan reasoning. The Franciscan rule relies in this aspect on the New Testament, mentioning the inheritance promised to the poor of Christ (Jam 3:5), whereas Birgitta compares the Christian priests to the Levites.

Birgitta’s opinion about the moral value of poverty, associated with the concept of the spiritual inheritance of Christ, results also in her view on managing the temporal goods inherited by noblemen. In the same revelation (IV, 76) she writes about the wealthy lay people:

Inquiramus in militibus et dominis aliis, quis eorum cogitat taliter: “Bona, que habeo, hereditate acquisiui et de hiis sustentamentum meum moderatum iuxta statum meum Deo et hominibus conuenienter requiro. Cetera vero Deo et pauperibus communicabo. Si vero bona ista hereditaria scirem acquisita male, aut restituerem aut dimitterem consilio electorum spiritualium seruorum Dei.” O, filia, talis cogitacio rara est in terra! (IV, 76. 7–8)

This reservation toward using and enjoying the temporal inheritance can be also explained by a need to imitate Christ’s poverty. Birgitta did not require laypeople to give away all their properties, but many times she expressed the opinion that it is better not to consume anything more than a “reasonable means of support” (“sustentamentum moderatum”), appropriate to

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<sup>643</sup> “Et eleemosyna est hereditas et iustitia, quae debetur pauperibus, quam nobis acquisiuit Dominus noster Jesus Christus. Et fratres, qui eam acquirendo laborant, magnam mercedem habebunt et faciunt lucrari et acquirere tribuentes; quia omnia, quae relinquent homines in mundo peribunt, sed de caritate et de eleemosynis, quas fecerunt, habebunt praemium a Domino” (David Ethelbert Flood, *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder*, IX, 8-9, [Werl: Dietrich Coelde Verlag, 1967], 61).

one's noble or common descent and social position (IV, 76. 7). As we can see here, this opinion is valid also for inherited goods. It seems therefore that Birgitta opposed the superfluous consumption of goods, not to ownership of inherited property.<sup>644</sup>

Birgitta, being a member of the noble class herself, appears to be conscious of the truth expressed in the gospel of Matthew: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mat 19:24). In one of her visions, Birgitta talks to the Virgin Mary about the mindset of wealthy women and rebukes the wealthy for their consumer mentality. The psychological truth of this passage is remarkable:

Deinde loquebatur ad me mater Dei dicens: "Quid dicunt mulieres superbe in regno tuo?" Cui ego respondi: "Ego sum una de illis et ideo confundor loqui in conspectu tuo." Et mater ait: "Licet melius te hoc sciam, tamen te loquente audire volo." Et ego respondi: "'Quando', inquit, predicabatur nobis vera humilitas, diximus, quod genitores nostri hereditabant nobis latas possessiones et mores pulchros. Cur ergo illos imitari non debeamus? Mater quoque nostra sedebat cum primis vestita nobiliter habensque seruitores plurimos et enutriens nos cum honore. Cur talia non debeam hereditare filie mee, que didici, scilicet gerere se nobiliter et viuere cum corporali gaudio, mori quoque cum grandi honore mundi?" Respondit Dei mater: "Omnis mulier, que hec verba sequitur opere, per veram viam vadit ad infernum et ideo dura est talis responsio." (VI, 52. 15–19)

Mary's verdict may seem very harsh, as the way of thinking presented here must have been so common that it was probably not regarded as sinful (it is natural for a daughter to inherit both the lifestyle and noble manners of her wealthy mother). Still, according to the text, this mentality is truly dangerous for one's soul (VI, 52. 19). Wealthy women have inherited and pass on to their daughters not only money, land, and certain customs, but also arrogance and pride. Mary judges this behavior by referring to her son's life: she says that proud women do not imitate Christ and do

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<sup>644</sup> In a way, this problem is parallel to the question of Franciscan *usus pauper*: the friars declared that they do not possess anything, they only use things. See: David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 43-66.



not even care about his passion (VI, 52. 20). Moreover, they are themselves like an aspergillum filled with burning acid: they spread their pride on their children and relatives, who imitate it and become as sinful as their mothers (VI, 52. 23). Later in the same text Birgitta describes a vision of a mother, daughter, and granddaughter who are all influenced by the sin of pride because of their noble descent (VI, 52. 26–124). She says that the mother is already dead and suffers tortures in hell. The mother warns her living daughter not to imitate this lifestyle, which will lead her to a very miserable condition (VI, 52. 36–46). She compares the young woman to a dirty cow, spreading mud on everyone around her:

Sed tu, filia, similis es caude vacce, que vadens in lutosi locis, quociens mouet caudam, tociens maculat et aspergit appropinquantes. Sic tu, filia, similis es vacce, quia non habes diuinam sapienciam et vadis secundum opera et motus corporis tui. Ideo, quociens imitaris opera consuetudinis mee, scilicet peccata, que te docui, tociens innouatur pena mea et eo grauius exardescit. Preterea, o filia mea, cur superbis de generatione tua? (VI, 52. 41–42)

The granddaughter of the damned woman is also dead. She suffers in purgatory, as she learned from the mother and grandmother many things useful in this world, but she did not learn how to love (VI, 52. 77–81). Her fate is different, though: in the last moment of her life she remembered the passion of Christ and considered it worse and more painful than her own death. This single “sparkle of love” saved her from eternal damnation (VI, 52. 112).

We can conclude that according to *Revelationes* that Christ’s royal inheritance is not the only kind that has a spiritual character. People can also inherit pride and stupidity, particularly if they are of noble descent. This sinful inheritance is presented as a hindrance to the glorious legacy of Christ the king.

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Birgitta mentions the hereditary principle in a strictly political context as well. Many European monarchies were hereditary during her time. However, this was not the case with Scandinavian monarchies (with the exception of Norway; at the time of Magnus Eriksson, rule passed to his family through matrilineal descent). A personal union bound Sweden and Norway then. Magnus Eriksson decided that he would pass the Norwegian throne to his younger son, Håkan, while the senior prince, Erik, was to be elected as a king of Sweden. According to Grete Blom, the motives behind this decision are not entirely clear. It is possible that the Swedish aristocracy refused to elect for the Swedish throne anyone else except Erik, the older prince. The initiative could have also been on the Norwegian side: there was opposition to the personal union between the two countries, and the Norwegian skeptics could refuse to accept anyone else except the younger son, Håkan.<sup>645</sup> In both cases, the rules of primogeniture would be still an important motivator, since the rule of the firstborn would be regarded as more prestigious for the country.

As previously mentioned (in section 3.2.2), Birgitta was very critical of this decision.

According to her, Erik, the firstborn of King Magnus, should inherit the Norwegian throne. She wrote about the election:

In electoribus eorum tria erant inconueniencia et quartum superexcellit: inordinatus amor, prudentia simulata, adulacio stultorum et diffidencia de Deo et communitate. Ideo electio eorum fuit contra iusticiam, contra Deum, contra bonum rei publice et utilitatem communitatis. Propterea ad prouidendum paci et consulendum utilitati communitatis necesse est, quod senior filius recipiat regnum hereditarium, iunior vero ad eleccionem veniat. Alioquin, nisi retractentur priora facta, regnum pacietur dispendium, communitas affligetur, discordia orietur, dies filiorum erunt in amaritudine, regnaque eorum iam non erunt regna sed sicut scriptum est: "Potentes transmigrabunt a sedibus suis, et qui ambulabant in terris eleuabuntur."<sup>646</sup> (IV, 3. 25–29 = VIII, 41. 25–29)

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<sup>645</sup> Grete Blom, *Norge i union på 1300-tallet: Kongedømme, politikk, administrasjon og forvaltning 1319-1380* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1992), 136-137.

<sup>646</sup> See Luk 1:52: "deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles". I did not succeed in indentifying the variant quoted here by Birgitta.

Even though she expresses her firm critique, Birgitta does not say much about the motives for her judgment. She only says that king's action is "opposing justice, opposing God, opposing the public good and benefit of the community" (VIII, 41. 26). Based on this text we can deduce that the problem was with the hereditary principle and its functioning, not with the personal qualities of both princes. According to Birgitta, the firstborn son always should inherit the throne in a hereditary kingdom, but an heir of the current monarch also should take the elective throne. It is of consequence whether his rights pass through matrilineal or patrilineal descent (VIII, 41. 32).

Birgitta's opinion is difficult to explain on the grounds of political practice and the traditions of that time, as many of Norway's neighbor states, including Sweden, were elective monarchies and the rules of inheritance and primogeniture were not considered key policy there.<sup>647</sup> Nevertheless, Birgitta was not a politician. Her statement would be more understandable on the grounds of political theology. Birgitta could have considered hereditary monarchy as a form of government based on biblical examples and she would expect the same rule of government to be kept in the Christian kingdom, wherever possible. The firstborn son, who inherits the throne of his father, is not only following the example of Old Testament kings and patriarchs, but he is also imitating Christ the king, the Son of God.<sup>648</sup> On this basis it becomes easier to see why Birgitta thinks that peace can be achieved through the proper inheritance of the throne. She comes to that conclusion while commenting on the Swedish and Norwegian situation, but she also suggests that a legitimate heir would bring peace to France and England, fighting in the Hundred Years' War. She

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<sup>647</sup> They were however taken into consideration, see: Blom, loc. cit.

<sup>648</sup> See above, introduction to the current section (4.3.2).

says that a marriage between English and French royals would be the best way of solving the question of the inheritance of the throne in those countries.<sup>649</sup>

#### 4.3.3. The Body of Christ

In one of her revelations, Birgitta says that those who believe firmly in the teaching of the church can obtain the royal inheritance of Christ.<sup>650</sup> With this statement Birgitta introduces the ecclesiastical dimension of the kingdom of Christ. As we already said in chapters 2 and 3, according to *Revelationes* the visible church on earth can be to some extent identified with the kingdom of Christ, and this identity may be fully realized in the eschatological church of the saints (2.2.1). Below we discuss the revelations that say Christ is not visible at this stage of the history of salvation, although he is present as the head of the church, his mystical body.

Describing the church as the body of Christ and Christians as its members has its roots in Pauline letters. According to St. Paul, Christians are “baptized into one body” and now all are individual members of Christ: therefore, they should be responsible for one another and love each other, as they are all necessary to the well-being of the body (1Co 6:15–20). Christ’s love for the church is similar to a husband’s love for his wife; they are united so closely that they become one body (Eph 5:25–32). The image of the body of Christ is therefore closely related to the metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ. The theological meaning of these two images is also similar. They both accent the personal relationship or even physical intimacy between Christ and his

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<sup>649</sup> “Ego sum pax vera, et ubi pax est, ibi pro certo ego sum. Si igitur isti duo reges Francie et Anglie habere voluerint pacem, ego dabo eis perpetuam pacem. Sed pax vera haberi non poterit, nisi veritas et iusticia diligentur. Ideo, quia alter regum habet iusticiam, placet michi, quod per matrimonium fiat pax et sic regnum ad legitimum heredem poterit peruenire” (IV, 105. 1-2 = VIII, 28. 1-2).

<sup>650</sup> “Ergo, filia, quere honorem spiritualemente obtinere per caritatem scilicet nichil diligendo sicut me, quere per hereditatem scilicet credendo firmiter illa, que precipit Ecclesia, quere per opera humilitatis omnia scilicet faciendo pro honore meo” (IV, 111. 17).

followers (1Co 6:15–20). Based on the Pauline letters, medieval theologians also taught about the hierarchical nature of the church as symbolized by the body of Christ: different groups of the faithful receive “different gifts according to grace that is given to them” (Rom 12:5): some of them are prophets, some are teachers, and others serve as leaders. In this aspect they can also be compared to the parts of the body of Christ: it would be dangerous for the body if all its members wanted to perform the same duties. “If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?” writes St. Paul, warning his disciples not to neglect the diversity of church (1Co 12:15).<sup>651</sup>

Birgitta employs this imagery in her revelation describing the farmer (Christ), who owns sheep and hires shepherds to tend them. His first shepherd (the priests “in the old days of church”) was a faithful and watchful man, but unfortunately for some reason he gave up his work (I, 59. 3–5). The one who was hired to take his place turned out to be a lazy and negligent worker. After he married, he did not care about the sheep anymore and they were attacked by wild beasts (I, 59. 5). After the attack, the farmer called his wife and they both went looking for surviving sheep:

Ergo uxor mea, idest Christiani boni, iuuate me! Nam sicut uxor et vir una caro et unum membrum esse tenentur, sic Christianus membrum meum est et ego suum, quia ego in eo et ipse in me. Ideo, o uxor, idest boni Christiani, currite mecum ad oues, que adhuc habent spiritum, et erigamus eas et refoueamus! Compatimini michi, quia multum care emi oues! Recipe mecum et ego tecum, tu in dorsum et ego in caput! Gaudenter duco eas inter manus meas. Ego portauit eas omnes semel in dorso meo, quando erat totum sauciatum et stipiti affixum. O amici mei, sic tenere diligo oues istas, quod, si possibile esset adhuc mori propter quamlibet ouem speciali morte, qualem in cruce semel pro omnibus passus sum, magis redimerem quam eis carerem. (I, 59. 32–35)

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<sup>651</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 199–200.

Here the good Christians, friends of God, are compared to the wife of Christ, who is “one body” with her husband and “wants nothing but what he wants, who possess everything in common with her husband and accepts him as her master, obeying him in everything as her master” (I, 59. 2). It is noteworthy that priests, members of the church hierarchy, apparently have a lower position in this family, as they are compared to shepherds (who are servants and, at least at the described moment, not really useful ones). According to this text, the family of Christ is his “extended body,” as the relationship between him and his followers has the same character as a man’s relation to his own body (I, 59. 32).<sup>652</sup> Those who are more intimate with Christ (“Christiani boni”) have a higher position in his family (they are compared to the wife) and are trusted with the serious task of rescuing lost souls.

In the beginning of this chapter we discussed the similarity between Christ and his followers (section 4.2). Birgitta expressed her conviction that the “good Christians” who resemble Christ are members of his body, while sinners are similar to the devil and also form “a mystical body of the devil,” fully analogical to the body of Christ:

Omnis, qui voluntatem perfectam habet nocendi proximo suo, hic similis est dyabolo eiusque membrum est et instrumentum. Cui, scilicet dyabolo, facerem iniuriam, si eius seruum sine iusticia ab eo auferrem. Ergo, sicut ego instrumento meo utor ad quecumque michi placita, sic iusticia est, ut dyabolus in eo, qui vult esse membrum eius magis quam meum, operetur et faciat, quod suum est, aut ad purgacionem aliorum aut ad perficiendam maliciam suam, me sic permittente et peccato exigente. (V, inter. 6. 25–27)

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<sup>652</sup> According to the Greek and Roman tradition the family, where the private life took place, was regarded as fully dependant on necessity: the needs of human biology. Only a few individuals were given a chance to take part in the public life, life of the free people, on the forum of *polis*. Christianity changed those relations, shaping the community of faithful as a Body or Family of Christ, extending therefore the private sphere of life, changing the public and “making the public more private.” See: Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 117.

It is remarkable that according to this text, the lines of division between the body of Christ and the body of the devil are entirely spiritual in character. The hierarchical and visible organization of the church is not under consideration in this metaphor. Birgitta's approach is quite different from the theological context of her time. In 1302, Pope Boniface VIII in his famous bull *Unam sanctam* summarized and dogmatized the church's doctrine about the body of Christ in the following way:

We are obliged by the faith to believe and hold—and we do firmly believe and sincerely confess—that there is one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and that outside this Church there is neither salvation nor remission of sins. . . . Of this one and only Church there is one body and one head—not two heads, like a monster—namely Christ, and Christ's vicar is Peter, and Peter's successor, for the Lord said to Peter himself, "Feed My sheep". . . . Furthermore we declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff.<sup>653</sup>

This bull was issued in the context of a political struggle between the pope and King Philip the Fair of France, who demanded that his power be regarded as equal to that of the pope. In answer, Boniface VIII formulated the doctrine of papal supremacy over the whole Christian community. After this bull came many theological statements aimed at supporting the papal doctrine as well as fighting it. Two parties arose: one of them supporting the pope, the other one siding with the king of France, other kings, and the emperor.<sup>654</sup>

According to *Unam sanctam*, the body of Christ has a visible and tangible character: it is to be identified with the structures of church. Birgitta did not take part in the discussion which arose concerning the bull; she did not ask about the supremacy of the pope or the emperor. Instead she uses a different emphasis and speaks about the church as a spiritual being. However, she expresses her opinion about the pope's supremacy: according to the Birgittine Rule, the pope is

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<sup>653</sup> Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 115-116.

<sup>654</sup> Jean Leclercq, *L'idée de la royauté du Christ au moyen-âge* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1959), 171-191.

superior to the local bishops as well as to the kings and princes (Reg. 24. 240). When it comes to the power of the emperor, she does not state that the emperor is superior or inferior to the pope and I would suggest that she does not see the power of emperor as directly comparable to that of the pope. However, she does not describe these problems using the imagery of the body of Christ or his resemblance, which in her writings is reserved entirely for spiritual membership and belonging, as shown earlier in this section and in section 4.2.

Birgitta does not use the expression “the head of Church” to describe the pope. She neither calls the king or the emperor “the head of Christian state” or community. As mentioned before (section 4.3.2), she avoids making direct comparisons between Christ and human rulers. In fact, in her writings we do not find any single individual who would fully represent and could be identified with Christ on earth. This may be a sign of Birgitta’s Christ-centered reflection on the nature of power in a Christian community. This reserve also could be interpreted as a reaction to theological and political conflicts that resulted in the aforementioned controversy between “regalists” and “theocrats.”

This fourteenth-century controversy had its roots in the historical change of theological opinions on the relationship between Christ and the Christian ruler. In the empire of Charlemagne and his successors, the king was often compared to Christ and even identified with him, as he was “Christ by grace,” anointed with the holy oil to perform a duty of ruling in the name of Christ. In this period of “Christ-centered kingship,” which according to Ernst Kantorowicz took place from



900 A.D. to 1100, kingship was considered as a sacramental grace and duty, fully integrated with the doctrine of the Church.<sup>655</sup>

Since the struggle between the papacy and secular princes arose during the Gregorian reform, theology has tended to reduce this traditional set of meanings, finally reserving the right to represent Christ solely for the pope. But even this right was questioned by the opponents of papal misdeeds who, like Petrarch, held the opinion that the kingdom of Christ—being spiritual and not political in nature—differs fundamentally from temporal kingdoms, while the sinful lives of political rulers as well as popes makes them incomparable to Christ.<sup>656</sup>

Birgitta appears to agree with these reserved opinions. She is also skeptical about the popes' method of executing secular power, accusing them of being ambitious and greedy (see section 3.3.3). She does not, however, question the need for such a power; for example, she expected Clement VI to mediate for France and England during the Hundred Years' War (IV, 136). She says that the role of the pope results from his descent from St. Peter, who was given the power to "bind and loose" souls in earth and in heaven, as stated in the previous chapter, rather than from the pope's being an image of Christ. Still, Birgitta is interested mostly in the spiritual dimension of papal authority, so we cannot really perceive her as a one of the disputants in the controversy over papal versus royal supremacy.

There is also another aspect of Christ's kingship related to his body, but this time understood literally, not as a metaphor for the church. In *Quattuor Oraciones* she meditates upon

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<sup>655</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 42-86.

<sup>656</sup> Jean Leclercq, *L'idée de la royauté du Christ au moyen-âge* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1959), 172.

Christ's body and says that he should be venerated as a king, because he suffered passion and was crowned with thorns:

Domine mi Iesu Christe, tu vere es caput omnium hominum et angelorum et dignus rex regum et dominus dominantium, qui omnia opera facis ex vera et ineffabili caritate. Et quia caput tuum benedictum corona spinea coronari humiliter permisisti, idcirco caput et capilli tui benedicti sint et honorentur gloriose dyademate imperiali celumque et terra et mare et omnia, que creata sunt, in eternum tue subiaceant et obediant potestati. Amen. (Oratio III, 66)

According to this prayer, Christ is the king, because his acts were motivated by true and unspeakable love. With this statement Birgitta creates a strong link between Christ's kingship and his deeds as a man.

#### 4.3.4. The Kingdom of Mary

Above we have said that according to Birgitta there is no single individual who would actually represent Christ in his relationship to the church, despite the fact that all Christians are invited to imitate their Lord. One person, however, is described in *Revelationes* as a representation of the church in its relation to Christ. This person is the Virgin Mary.

It probably would be true to say that according to Birgitta, metaphorically, "Mary is the church." This short statement communicates the essence of the problem, but it is not *per se* understandable. Birgitta writes about Mary who represents the church, expresses its fate, and foretells its future glory.<sup>657</sup> She never describes the church as a queen, but she often calls Mary "the queen." In Birgitta's work we find the doctrine of identification between Mary and the church in its fully developed medieval form, so an introduction to the historical context is necessary to present her point of view.

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<sup>657</sup> Tore Nyberg, "Birgitta och Maria," in *Birgittinsk festgåva: Studier om Heliga Birgitta och Birgittinorden* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1991), 16-17.

The sources of the question are found in two biblical books: in the book of Revelation Jerusalem is described as the bride of Lamb (Rev 21: 2; 9–10), while in the epistle to the Galatians Paul calls Jerusalem “the mother of us all” (Gal 4:26). Another important passage from the book of Apocalypse is the vision of the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet (Rev 12:1). In the Middle Ages this mysterious person was commonly interpreted as a representation of the church.<sup>658</sup> This idea has its roots in the prophetic tradition of comparing the chosen nation to a virgin or to the mother of the faithful and identifying Jerusalem, the city of God, with Israel in general. It was also expressed in the allegorical exegesis of the Song of Solomon, interpreting the Song as a story of God’s love for Israel.<sup>659</sup>

Already in the first centuries the church was described as the mother of the faithful,<sup>660</sup> but also as the mother of Christ, giving birth to him in the hearts of people just as the apocalyptic woman “gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (Rev 12:5).<sup>661</sup> The symbolism of the church as the bride of Christ, based on the book of Revelation and the above-quoted letter to the Ephesians (Eph 5:22–32), developed simultaneously. At the same time, the Virgin Mary had been ascribed the same set of meanings. She was named the “New

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<sup>658</sup> Alois Müller, *Ecclesia-Maria: Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche* (Freiburg: Paulusverlag, 1951), 192-194, 226-230.

<sup>659</sup> E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 50-51.

<sup>660</sup> In the “Shepherd” of Hermas, church is represented by the Old Lady, who says: “Give ear unto me, O Sons: I have brought you up in much simplicity, and guilelessness, and chastity, on account of the mercy of the Lord” (Hermas, “Shepherd,” vision 3, 9, 1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.ii.ii.iii.html> [accessed March 20, 2009]).

<sup>661</sup> Hippolytus, “Treatise on Christ and Antichrist,” 61: “By the woman then clothed with the sun, he meant most manifestly the Church, endued with the Father’s word, whose brightness is above the sun . . . . And she brought forth, he says, a man-child, who is to rule all the nations;” by which is meant that the Church, always bringing forth Christ, the perfect man-child of God, who is declared to be God and man, becomes the instructor of all the nations” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iii.iv.ii.i.html> [accessed March 20, 2009]).

Eve,” first by Irenaeus of Lyon<sup>662</sup> and later by Tertullian.<sup>663</sup> This comparison stressed the unique position of Mary in the history of salvation, placing her next to her son, who redeemed the sinful world thanks to his obedience. The two authors claim that Mary along with Christ cured the souls injured by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Mary was also called “the mother of the faithful,” as in the gospel of John we read that Christ told her to become the adoptive mother of the apostle John (Joh 19:27), and ancient theologians claim that through him she became mother to all the followers of Christ.<sup>664</sup> As a result, during the first three centuries Mary was perceived as being fully analogous to the church: she was the mother of Christ, the mother of the faithful, and the Virgin who obeyed the Word of God.<sup>665</sup>

This analogy was later developed by the fathers, who decided that it would be appropriate to use *communicatio idiomatum* between Mary and the church.<sup>666</sup> Since the fourth century it was possible to say that every faithful soul is Mary, giving birth to Christ and sharing his love with

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<sup>662</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, “Against Heresies,” 5, 21, 1: “For indeed the enemy would not have been fairly vanquished, unless it had been a man [born] of a woman who conquered him. For it was by means of a woman that he got the advantage over man at first, setting himself up as man’s opponent. And therefore does the Lord profess Himself to be the Son of man, comprising in Himself that original man out of whom the woman was fashioned (ex quo ea quæ secundum mulierem est plasmatio facta est), in order that, as our species went down to death through a vanquished man, so we may ascend to life again through a victorious one; and as through a man death received the palm [of victory] against us, so again by a man we may receive the palm against death” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.vii.xxii.html> [accessed March 20, 2009]).

<sup>663</sup> Tertullian, *De Carne Christi liber: Treatise on the Incarnation*, XVII, 9-41, ed. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1956), 58-60.

<sup>664</sup> See e.g.: “Eris filius tonitruui, si fueris filius ecclesiae. Dicat et tibi de patibulo crucis Christus: Ecce mater tua. Dicat et Ecclesiae: Ecce filius tuus; tunc enim incipis esse filius Ecclesiae, cum in cruce victorem videris Christum” (Ambrose of Milan, *Traité sur l’Évangile de S. Luc*, VII, 5, ed. Gabriel Tissot [Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1958], 10).

<sup>665</sup> Alois Müller, *Ecclesia-Maria: Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche* (Freiburg: Paulusverlag, 1951), 206-214.

<sup>666</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Homilliae diversae*, 4, PG 77, 992.

people.<sup>667</sup> The Christian exegesis of the Song of Solomon followed this theology, identifying the bride with both the church and Virgin Mary.<sup>668</sup> Mary not only became the analogy of the church, but also the model of church.

During the Middle Ages another reflection developed and became integrated with the image of the church. The theologians reasoned as follows: if Christ is the king of the whole created universe and of human souls, then his bride, the church, is the queen. The figure of Ecclesia was often depicted in Christian art, sometimes compared to the figure of the blind Synagogue. From the twelfth century on, when the idea of the coronation of Mary became widely accepted, the figure of Queen Ecclesia is indistinguishable from Mary the Queen.<sup>669</sup>

According to Tore Nyberg, this medieval form of Marian theology, identifying church with Mary the Queen, emerges in *Revelationes*.<sup>670</sup> In one of the revelations, Birgitta says that Mary is the “throat” of the body whose head is Christ. This body is to be understood as the church (IV, 74. 6). Helga Koch notes, moreover, that Birgitta often uses expressions which in medieval symbolic language denote both Mary and the church, such as “virgo purissima,” “mater fecundissima,” or, more generally, “virgin” and “mother.”<sup>671</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *Traité sur l'Évangile de S. Luc*, X, 24-25, ed. Gabriel Tissot (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1958), 165.

<sup>668</sup> E. Ann Matter, op. cit., 86-122, 151-171.

<sup>669</sup> Harvey Stahl, “Heaven in View: the Place of the Elect in an Illuminated Book of Hours,” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 209-220.

<sup>670</sup> Tore Nyberg, “Birgitta och Maria,” in *Birgittinsk festgåva: Studier om Heliga Birgitta och Birgittinorden* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1991), 16-17

<sup>671</sup> Helga Koch, “Lignelses-, symbol- og billedsprog hos Birgitta: visdommens efterfølgelse som imitatio Christi et Mariae,” in *Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Odense Univesitetsforlag, 1991), 482.

We have also mentioned that the new monastic order planned by Birgitta was devoted to the mother of God, represented by the abbess (Reg. 14. 167). Standing in the center of the canonical hours of the Birgittines,<sup>672</sup> Mary is presented in the *Rule* as an authoritative and royal figure (Reg. 5. 67–72).

However, mentioned earlier (section 4.2), her authority as a queen is seen as not entirely independent:

Ego sum regina celi. Tu sollicita es, quomodo laudare me debes. Scias pro certo, quod omnis laus filii mei laus mea est. Et qui inhonorat eum, inhonorat me, quia ego sic feruenter dilexi eum et ipse me, quod quasi unum cor ambo fuimus. Et ipse me, que eram vas terrenum, sic honorifice honorauit, ut supra omnes angelos me exaltaret. (I, 8. 1)

According to this fragment, the queenship of Mary has a non-autonomous character: it is fully dependent upon Christ's kingship. Birgitta says that Mary is to be venerated because her son honored her as his mother and perfect follower, his "vessel." There is therefore no need to give praise to Mary in any other way than praising her son. Birgitta says that praise of Mary and prayer to her should be incorporated into prayers to Christ in a following way:

Benedictus sis tu, Deus, qui corpus et animam Marie virginis, matris tue, in celum assumpsisti et super omnes angelos iuxta deitatem tuam honorifice collocasti. Miserere mei propter preces eius! (I, 8. 3)

In *Sermo Angelicus* Birgitta says that Mary has been elevated above all the angels and humans, because she loved God in a most devout and perfect way (*Sermo* 12. 11). In the same book Birgitta

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<sup>672</sup> Anders Piltz, "Nostram naturam sublimaverat: Den liturgiska och teologiska bakgrunden till birgittinska mariaofficiet," in *Maria i Sverige under tusen år: Föredrag vid symposiet i Vadstena 6-10 oktober 1994*, eds. Sven-Erik Brodd and Alf Härdelin (Skellefteå: Artos, 1996).

suggests that the mother of God serves as an example of love and virtue to all Christians,<sup>673</sup> as she served to the apostles after her son's resurrection and ascension:

Erat enim magistra apostolorum, confortatrix martirum, doctrix confessorum, clarissimum speculum virginum, consolatrix viduarum, in coniugio viuencium saluberrima monitrix atque omnium in fide catholica perfectissima roboratrix. (Sermo 19. 12)

Mary is here presented as a person who continued the mission of Christ, standing in the center of the church. In the *Rule* Birgitta says that after Mary died, she was raised from the dead and joined her son in his kingdom, becoming queen of the world and queen of the angels (Reg. 5. 71). But her assumption did not in fact change the role she had to play within the church or her relationship to the community of Christ's disciples. As a queen she still teaches the apostles, comforts the widows, and strengthens the faith (Sermo 19. 12). From this fragment of *Sermo Angelicus* we can thus deduce that according to Birgitta, Mary has a unique and close connection to each group of the faithful. Being a follower and a believer herself, she represents all the followers of Christ in his heavenly court.

In one revelation, Birgitta uses the categories of ruling and obeying to describe her spiritual life. She confesses to the Virgin Mary that she is unable to "reign over herself" ("memetipsam regere" Extrav. 52. 2), as her body behaves like a wild animal, impossible to control, her will is like a bird, concentrated on transitory thoughts. Birgitta asks Mary:

Ideo rogo te, ut frenum imponas corpori meo, quam cito alicubi currere voluerit, ubi filio tuo displicuerit, et duc illud, ubi voluntatem filii tui perficere potuerit. Imponas etiam retinaculum illi volucris, que est voluntas mea, ne longius euolet, quam tuo carissimo filio complacet. (Extrav. 52. 3)

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<sup>673</sup> See the antiphon from *Sermo Angelicus*: "Corona virtutum regina decorata sit nobis in tutamen iugiter parata. Amen" (Sermo VI, *absolutio*).

It is remarkable that she does not ask for the ability to control her own body and will. Instead she asks Christ to reign over them. She addresses her prayer to the Virgin Mary, who is presented in this verse as perfectly obedient to her son, who ruled over her soul and body. If we interpret this passage in context of the *imitatio Christi* idea, it becomes more visible that Birgitta here indirectly expresses the will to imitate Christ (as she complains about her inability to “reign over herself”) and she believes it is possible only through Mary.

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We have said that Birgitta’s model of moral and religious behavior presented to the kings is based on the example of the saints rather than on Christ’s kingship directly. Still, in one case Mary is called “the empress of all queens” in the context of her unique virtues, the cause of her merit and crowning (VIII, 8. 22). The virtues of Mary here are represented and expressed by various features of her beautiful, perfect body, whereas the body of Mary resembles the body of Christ, who was the most beautiful of all men: in two other revelations Birgitta reports that Mary said that her son was so beautiful that people came to look at him to cheer themselves up, “consolabantur.”<sup>674</sup> According to the revelation in book 5, the body of Mary, crowned with the crown of God’s grace, becomes here a model to imitate by all Christians.

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<sup>674</sup> “Unde cum ego enutirem filium meum, tanta pulchritudine preeditus erat, ut, quicumque eum inspiceret, consolabatur a dolore cordis, quem habebat. Ideo et multi Iudei dicebant ad inuicem: ‘Eamus ad videndum filium Marie, ut consolari possimus.’ Et licet ignorarent eum esse filium Dei, tamen consolacionem recipiebant magnam ex aspectu eius. Sic etiam corpus eius mundum erat, quod numquam super illud aliquis pediculus vel alius vermis venit, quia vermis reuerenciam factori suo exhibebat. Nec etiam aliqua perplexitas nec immundicia in eius capillis inueniebatur nec nutriebatur” (VI, 1. 3.5); “Filium meum, qualis est in celo, videre non poteris sed, qualis erat secundum corpus in mundo, cognosce. Ipse enim tam pulcher facie erat, quod nullus videbat eum facie, qui non consolabatur in aspectu eius, etiam si precordialiter dolerem haberet. Iusti vero spirituali consolacione consolabantur, sed et mali a tristitia seculi tanto tempore, quo eum videbant, releuabantur. Unde et dolentes dicere consueuerunt: ‘Eamus et filium Marie videamus, ut saltem tanto tempore releuemur’” (IV, 70. 24-25); “Cuius visus et locucio sic mirabilis et acceptabilis erat, ut multi tribulati dicerent: ‘Eamus ad filium Marie, a quo possimus consolari’” (VI, 58. 6).



This revelation, originally located in book 5, revelation 4, was incorporated to *Liber ad reges* (VIII, 20), possibly with the intention of presenting Mary as a model of queenship for Christian queens. The phrase “imperatrix omnium reginarum” (VIII, 8. 22) is not however found in book 5.<sup>675</sup> The text therefore was reinterpreted already in the fourteenth century, apparently by Alfonso Pecha, the editor of *Liber ad reges*. It may be understood as Alfonso’s attempt to create a model of queenship based on the example of Mary.

To conclude, we can say that the authority of Mary as presented in *Revelationes* has a similar character to the authority of the church, since they are both derived from the kingship of Christ. This authority is characterized by concentration on Christ and his love; it has a strictly spiritual character; and it leads to obtaining perfect, heroic virtues. This unusual kingship requires ministry and even suffering for the benefit of those who are governed. In this sense, Christ’s, or rather Mary’s, kingship is a spiritual ideal to be followed by all Christians.

Based on the above discussion we can also say that Mary holds a very high position in Birgitta’s theology, since she takes part in Christ’s kingship. The complex relationship between Mary and Christ presented in *Revelationes* has provoked various interpretations. Claire Sahlin stresses the active role of the Virgin Mary in the history of salvation, expressed by, among other things, the symbol of Mary’s heart united with the heart of Christ, which is undoubtedly a characteristic mark of Birgitta’s theology. The line of reasoning that stresses Mary’s active participation in salvation is continued by Yvonne Bruce, who claims boldly that Birgitta “elevates

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<sup>675</sup> “Ideo, mater carissima, corona illa, que custodiebatur in me, que quidem corona sum ego Deus, qui debebam incarnari, nulli debuit imponi nisi tibi, quia es vere mater et virgo” (V, rev. 4. 22). “Ideo, Mater carissima, corona illa reginalis preciosa, que custodiebatur in me, que quidem corona sum ego Deus, qui debebam incarnari, nulli femine debuit imponi nisi soli tibi, quia es vera Mater et virgo et imperatrix omnium reginarum” (VIII, 8. 22).

Mary to triune status.”<sup>676</sup> This statement appears to me as not entirely grounded in the text of *Revelationes*, since in my opinion Birgitta presents Mary as “the most perfect creature”(Oracio I, 7) and “the most important part in the body of Christ” (IV, 74. 6), not as a divine or semi-divine being. This second point of view (that *Revelationes* presents Mary as a perfect creature, not as creator) is represented also by Helga Koch<sup>677</sup> and Birgit Klockars.<sup>678</sup> An interesting view on the subject in agreement with these two authors is presented by Barbara Newman, who analyzed Birgitta’s revelations in context of medieval art presenting the Virgin Mary’s complex relation to the Holy Trinity.<sup>679</sup>

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In the introduction to this chapter, we raised the question of the vision of Christ’s kingship as presented by Birgitta: did she adhere to the “Romanesque” vision of Christ as a crucified but triumphant king, or did she see the kingship of Christ as subject to his passion and humiliation on the cross? Based on the above discussion, we must state that each aspect of Christ’s kingship touched upon by Birgitta refers in a certain way to his human nature and to his passion: as a leader of the Christian army, Christ offers his mercy, symbolized in Birgitta’s text by “the banner of

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<sup>676</sup> “The Revelations are radical because Birgitta puts herself at the very center of her supposedly Christo-centric work, partaking of divine authority for her own personal and female, as well as social and (proto)feminist goals. She manages this . . . in her identification with Mary, whom she elevates to triune status . . . Birgitta aligns herself with a divine Mary, with Christ the messenger, and even with the voice of God” (Yvonne Bruce, "I am the Creator: Birgitta of Sweden Feminine Divine," *Comitatus. A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 32 [2001]: 20).

<sup>677</sup> Helga Koch, “Lignelses-, symbol- og billedsprog hos Birgitta: visdommens efterfølgelse som imitatio Christi et Mariae,” in *Birgitta, hendes værk og hendes klostre i Norden*, ed. Tore Nyberg (Odense: Odense Univesitetsforlag, 1991), 471.

<sup>678</sup> Birgit Klockars, *Birgitta och hennes värld* (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell , 1971), 42-43.

<sup>679</sup> Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2003), 282.

mercy” depicting his passion.

In the next section we said that Birgitta presents the kingdom of heaven as the “heredity of Christ,” which he “opened thanks to his incarnation and passion” (IV, 111. 7). The link between Christ’s kingship and his passion is also visible in relation to the body of Christ: Birgitta venerates his head and hair crowned with the crown of thorns because he is the king whose deeds were motivated by love. However, it appears that Birgitta’s metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is not closely related to his passion.

In many other revelations discussed above, Birgitta speaks about the kingship of Christ and its imitation without a special association with his passion. I would suggest, however, that the ideal of the imitation of Christ’s kingship in its various aspects is always related to Christ’s human nature. It appears that Birgitta encourages the imitation of Christ because he was both man and God, so his example is both possible to follow and salutary. I would be thus plausible to say that both ways of relating Christ’s passion with his kingship—“Romanesque” and “Gothic”—are in some way close to Birgitta’s thought.

**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**THE LAST DAYS AND THE CHRISTIAN KINGDOM**

In this chapter we shall continue our discussion of the themes started in chapter 2 (Birgitta's attitude toward the history of the Christian kingdom) and in chapter 4 (the moral dimension of the public life in the Christian kingdom). As we said in chapter 2, the vision of history found in *Revelationes* appears to be linear, starting with the creation of the world and proceeding to its ultimate, eschatological end (section 2.1.1). In this chapter we shall deal with Birgitta's prophecies about this final stage of salvation history. The subject is of interest to us as long as it concerns the Christian society as a whole or individual persons acting in the public sphere. Our discussion therefore assumes that there is a social dimension in Birgitta's eschatological prophecies, and this assumption results from the prior analysis of the *Revelationes* text.

In the first section, we shall present Birgitta as the prophetess of the apocalypse. It appears that Magister Mathias of Linköping attempted to present her as such, and that he found a considerable basis for this attempt in Birgitta's revelations (see section 5.1). In the second part of this chapter, we shall focus on the idea of war between good and evil as presented in *Revelationes*, claiming that this theological category greatly influenced Birgitta's idea of the Christian society (section 5.2). It would be impossible to discuss the moral dimension of social life presented in *Revelationes* without mentioning the scenes of God's judgment, so numerous in Birgitta's revelations. We discuss the subject of judgment, understood both as individual judgment—which, according to medieval Christian theology, awaits every soul after death—and the Final Judgment, the great closing of world history (section 5.3). It is remarkable that Birgitta only seldom writes about the eternal kingdom of Christ that will commence after the Final

Judgment, but she does mention it, so a presentation of her eschatology would be probably incomplete without discussing this last stage of world history, as it appears to be always implicitly present in her reflections (see section 5.4).

### 5.1. St. Birgitta as the Prophet of the Last Days

According to the plan of the first editors of *Revelationes* who organized the contents of the book, the reader begins his or her contact with Birgitta's visions through the prologue of Magister Mathias. In this text, Mathias quotes only one of Birgitta's revelations. It foretells a terrible war as God's punishment for the sins of the Swedish nobles. This description is concluded as follows: "Hoc autem iudicium diu ante regno Suecie superduxissem, nisi preces amicorum meorum, qui inter eos sunt, obsisterent, qui me ad misericordiam inclinant. Et ideo veniet tempus, quando eosdem amicos meos ad me colligam, ne videant mala, que illi regno superducam"(Prologue, 38). Choosing his particular text shows that Mathias apparently attempted to present Birgitta as a prophetess foretelling the apocalypse threatening the Swedish kingdom and even the whole world. As we shall see, the text of the prologue, analyzed below, suggests the same. As a theologian, Magister Mathias was apparently interested in eschatology, since he commented on the book of Revelation; and from one of Birgitta's revelations we know that he asked her for clarifications regarding the coming of Antichrist.<sup>680</sup> We can thus suggest that he might have influenced the creation and transmission of Birgitta's visions concerning eschatology. Therefore, in this section we shall analyze Birgitta's text in context of his works and his possible influence on Birgitta as the narrator of *Revelationes* suggested by the text of her visions.

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<sup>680</sup> See: Anders Piltz, "Magister Mathias of Sweden in his Theological Context: A Preliminary Survey," in *The Editing of Theological and Philosophical Texts from the Middle Ages*, ed. Monika Asztalos (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1986), 135-137.

### 5.1.1. Announcing the Apocalypse

It is noticeable that most remarks about the apocalypse and the second coming of Christ found in *Revelationes* are to some extent related to Birgitta's identity as a prophetess. According to Anders Piltz, the category of prophecy is particularly suitable for describing her task, as Birgitta's view of her own deeds and duties depended mainly on biblical categories filtered through medieval theology, such as the works of Peter Lombard, Aquinas, or Henry of Ghent, which reached her via Magister Mathias.<sup>681</sup>

Even though many of Birgitta's remarks about eschatology are prophetic in nature, Magister Mathias did not consider foretelling the future as the essence of her prophetic duty. He explained his opinion on the nature of this duty in his introduction to the book of *Revelationes celestes*. In my opinion, his account is particularly important, as he was not only judging and explaining the phenomenon of Birgitta's prophecy, but he also had a considerable influence on the prophetess herself.

In the prologue Mathias claims that he witnessed an exceptional work of God's grace, similar to a new stage in the history of salvation. He starts by comparing the incredible events of his day to the revelation given to Moses in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai (Ex 3:2; 19:18). Then he compares the time of Moses and the Old Testament Law to the vision of God experienced by Elijah: "God . . . like the great wind rending the mountains and crushing the rocks of hardened hearts," while the time of Christ's incarnation and earthly life was like a fire of divine love.<sup>682</sup> Now

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<sup>681</sup> Anders Piltz, "Inspiration, vision, profetia: Birgitta och teorierna om uppenbarelsen," in *Heliga Birgitta - budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991*, ed. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1993).

<sup>682</sup> "And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in

follows the time of gentle breeze of divine mercy and grace, when the “humble and meek in spirit should hear the voice of Jesus Christ” (Prologue, 1–3). He says that Birgitta is one of these “humble and meek.” She is an instrument of God’s grace, so people who know her “words and deeds” and do not follow them are indeed “inexcusable and worthy of being punished by divine justice” (Prologue, 4).

Already in this short fragment we see a number of remarks about the prophetic character of Birgitta’s message. Mathias describes the history of salvation in terms of subsequent prophetic revelations: first to Moses, then to Elijah, and finally to Jesus, who was the greatest prophet of all time. Mathias says further that he is witnessing the rise of the new prophet, who speaks the words of God in the third, final stage of the history of salvation: in “the time of mercy.” He even builds a twofold parallel between the apparition of God in Christ and in Birgitta’s saying:

Per illam [apparitio] ambulans in terra in humanis diuina monstrabat, per hanc regnans in celo humana diuinis reconciliat. In illa debitum iusticie moriendo pro nobis soluit, in hac indebite nobis peccatoribus misericordie munus largiri promittit. (Prologue, 22–23)

In my opinion, using this rhetorical comparison does not mean that Mathias wishes to compare Birgitta with Jesus or to suggest that the importance of their prophetic messages can be placed on the same level. From the point of view of the medieval Catholic Church, that would be an openly heterodox statement. According to Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, with his prologue Mathias aimed at promoting Birgitta’s revelations within the church and strengthening her credibility,<sup>683</sup> not at

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the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?” (3Ki 19:11-13).

<sup>683</sup> Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, “Special Introduction,” in *Revelaciones. Book I*, by Saint Birgitta (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1977), 46-50.

leading her out of the Christian church. Therefore, I suggest that he rather stresses the unique character of “the time of mercy” understood as the time of Birgitta and her contemporaries. Mathias does not say anything about the duration of this era. Perhaps he is not interested in dates, but rather in the quality and the characteristics of time. It is a possible interpretation of his words that the time of grace started immediately after the ascension of Jesus and finds its culmination in Birgitta’s times, which are followed by “God’s judgment” (Prologue, 1–3).

Mathias says that Birgitta is especially predisposed to be a prophetess in the last stage of history, as she is “humble and meek in spirit.” It is remarkable that Mathias describes Birgitta and those like her who hear the voice of Jesus as “humiles et mansueti spiritu” (Prologue, 1), because by using this expression he refers to a number of biblical prophecies announcing the eschatological kingdom of God, who is the Lord of the “humble and meek” (Jdt 9:16) and who shall elevate them, so that they will “inherit the land, and shall delight in abundance of peace” (Psa 36:11; cf. Mat 5:5). The last epoch of the world initiates the eternal kingdom of God and Birgitta is one of those who already enjoy the eternal peace thanks to their humility. This virtue of Birgitta is stressed by Mathias several times in his prologue, and when he describes the “insults and abuses” she suffered (Prologue, 16).

According to Mathias, the humble personality of Birgitta and her low position as an “unlearned woman” and a widow also corroborate the truth of her prophecy and its eschatological character (Prologue, 41). He does not explain the reason for his conviction, but we can interpret it as a reference to the biblical tradition of prophecy. In the Old Testament the gift of prophecy was given to chosen men and women who were to transmit important messages from God to his people. According to the book of Joel, however, in the last days the gift of prophecy will be given



to many, if not to everyone. He says that this will be one of the eschatological signs, followed by the “wonders in heaven and earth”:

And it shall come to pass after this, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy: your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Moreover upon my servants and handmaids in those days I will pour forth my spirit. And I will shew wonders in heaven; and in earth, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood: before the great and dreadful day of the Lord doth come. And it shall come to pass, that every one that shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved: for in mount Sion, and in Jerusalem shall be salvation, as the Lord hath said, and in the residue whom the Lord shall call. (Joe 2:28–32)

In the book of Acts we read that Peter referred to this prophecy (Act 2:16–18) in order to explain the Pentecostal event: the apostles announced that they were given the Holy Spirit and began speaking in many languages. He identified the apostles with the “servants and handmaids” from the prophecy. We can thus suppose that by stressing the humble condition of Birgitta, Mathias compares her to the apostles, who were fishers and unlearned men themselves and whose special task was based on the personal call of God rather than on their position in Israel. It is also noteworthy that according to Acts, Peter considered the prophetic spirit given to “servants and handmaids” as one of the signs of the end of days, “the day of the Lord,” which fulfilled the prophecy of Joel (Act 2:20–22). A similar statement is found in the gospel of Luke, where we read that Mary prophesied about the elevation of the “humble and poor” and humiliation of the “mighty and rich” (Luk 1: 52–53), which was interpreted in the text as the sign of the plenitude of time, a realization of the Old Testament promises (Luk 1:55).

It is thus possible that in Mathias’s text we can see an attempt to stress the continuity between Birgitta and the church of Christ and the apostles, as he wants to present her as being united with the church and her prophetic announcement as taking place within the community of

the church. Still, he introduces Birgitta not as one of many prophets but as the unique prophetess of the last days who will prepare the kingdom of Sweden for the Last Judgment.

In the prologue, Mathias quotes a fragment of Birgitta's revelation to give an outline of the history of salvation. In this fragment Birgitta starts referring to the sin of Lucifer, who began to hate God and sinned by pride, by greed, and by lust. The devil fell from heaven, infecting the human race with his sins (Prologue, 33). Therefore, Christ came to this world to fight the devil: he annihilated the devil's pride by his humility, destroyed the devil's greed by his poverty, and finally exterminated the demonic lust through the blood of his heart and opened heaven to mankind (Prologue, 34). Nevertheless, she says that people of the kingdom of Sweden, especially the knights, sin "just like the devil sinned before them": they are proud, greedy, and full of concupiscence (Prologue, 35). Birgitta announces the judgment of God approaching the sinners. It will come already in this life, as they will be conquered and killed in battles, the enemy will carry away their riches and they will become poor and needy (Prologue, 36). This verdict already would have been executed had not the prayers of the friends of God among the Swedish nation held back God's hand. Now, says Birgitta in the name of God, "the time will come when I shall gather those same friends to myself lest they behold the evils I will bring upon the kingdom" (Prologue, 38). Only a few friends of God will be left among the sinners. Potentially, the fulfillment of this threat is avoidable: "as long as a person lives, access to the kingdom of heaven is available" if he or she repents and wants to be converted (Prologue, 40). In this passage we see a characteristic feature of Biblical prophetic warnings: the sins of the people are offending the merciful God, so the just punishment is about to come upon them. Still, God wants to give another chance to the sinners and he sends them a prophet who calls them to repent and ask forgiveness. This scheme

of a prophetic announcement can be found in the biblical books of the prophets<sup>684</sup> and in a number of other passages, including the New Testament, because both Jesus and his followers are presented in the New Testament as continuators of the prophetic tradition.<sup>685</sup>

Why did Mathias choose this particular passage from Birgitta's writings to introduce her revelations? It appears that he considered the eschatological interpretation of history to be one of the most important (if not the most important) subjects of her visions. The revelation he quotes proves that the narrator of *Revelationes* also expressed a tendency to present her message within this prophetic paradigm. Below we shall claim that this is indeed one of the important subjects of *Revelationes*, having certain influence on the idea of Christian kingdom presented in this book.

To explain the role of Birgitta as an eschatological prophetess, we need therefore to analyze the relation between history and prophecy in her writings. As we have just said, presenting the outline of the history of salvation in order to call the listeners to repent was a normal element of biblical prophecy. In the Bible, prophets are often presented as people who interpret past events and shape them into a history, an ordered and comprehensible chain of events. This function was based on the nature of prophecy. A prophet was understood as someone who transmitted God's speech, and, strictly speaking, according to Biblical theology the language of God can take the form of words or deeds. The pair "words and deeds" is often inseparable in the Bible and in most cases the two terms are synonyms.<sup>686</sup> Sometimes the Biblical

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<sup>684</sup> Jutta Krispenz, "Prophetische Redeformen, 2. Unheilsankündigungen," In *Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet (WiBiLex)*, <http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/wibilex/das-bibellexikon/details/quelle/WIBI/zeichen/p/referenz/31384///cache/f35eb66766/#h3> (accessed February 1, 2010).

<sup>685</sup> Mat 11:7-25; Mat 12:39-43; Act 13:16-42. See: Niels Christian Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 59-67.

<sup>686</sup> Psalm 144:13: "regnum tuum regnum omnium saeculorum et dominatio tua in omni generatione et progenie fidelis Dominus in omnibus verbis suis et sanctus in omnibus operibus suis." This verse is built on a parallel

prophets act in a special, symbolic way in order to imitate the way God acts or intends to act (such as when Jeremiah is told to wear bonds and a yoke in order to show the Israelites their future fate as servants of the Babylonian king in Jeremiah 27:1–11).<sup>687</sup> Prophets therefore had a special insight not only into God’s words, but also into his acts; and, as stated in chapter 2, according to the Bible God acts through history. Within this paradigm, those who speak God’s language thus have a certain power over history. It is a power of interpretation and understanding, as no one except the prophet has his special tools of interpretation, coming directly from God.

However, as R. W. Southern notes, the power of the Christian prophet is not only about interpretation of events. According to Aquinas’s definition, widely accepted in the Middle Ages, prophets “know things that are far removed from man’s knowledge. Wherefore they may be said to take their name from *phanos*, apparition, because things appear to them from afar. Wherefore, as Isidore states,<sup>688</sup> in the Old Testament they were called Seers, because they saw what others saw not, and surveyed things hidden in mystery.”<sup>689</sup> Aquinas therefore sees prophecy as a specific mode of knowledge based on a direct revelation from God, not on information from human senses. As a result the prophet brings news of otherwise inaccessible events in history, like the creation of the world or the flood.<sup>690</sup>

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between certain words: “Regnum tuum” vs. “regnum omnium saeculorum”; “dominatio tua in omni generatione” vs. “progenie”; “fidelis Dominus in omnibus **verbis** suis” vs. “et sanctus in omnibus **operibus** suis”.

<sup>687</sup> David L Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 20.

<sup>688</sup> *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, VII, 8, 1, trans. Stephen A. Barney, Jennifer A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 166.

<sup>689</sup> S.Th., Ila Ilae, q. 171, a. 1.

<sup>690</sup> R. W. Southern "Presidential Address: Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 3. History as Prophecy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 22 (1972): 160.

Aquinas states, moreover, that this knowledge is not restricted to the time when the events occur: they can be past or present as well as future. According to him, "since prophecy is about things remote from our knowledge, it must be observed that the more remote things are from our knowledge the more pertinent they are to prophecy," and since future events are remote from the knowledge of all men, being in themselves indeterminate and unknowable, "revelation of future events belongs most properly to prophecy."<sup>691</sup>

As said in section 2.1.7, I think that Birgitta indirectly expressed her conviction that the sense of history is to be found in God's plan of salvation revealing itself through the historical events, not in the events themselves. Birgitta presents herself as a person who has a unique access to this hidden meaning of history, as she often speaks about the history of salvation in the above-described manner, summarizing its course in order to explain the events of the current epoch and to stress their importance. In that sense her announcements are fully prophetic, as she claims she finds her information through direct revelations from Christ, Mary, or one of the saints. This hermeneutic of history finds its culmination in *Sermo angelicus*, which is a detailed description of the role of the Virgin Mary in the history of salvation, but it also reveals "the real meaning" of this history as seen from the Marian perspective.<sup>692</sup>

This perspective is particularly useful for explaining the *Revelationes* accounts concerning the prophetic character of Birgitta's visions. As mentioned above, Birgitta valued the ideal of the imitation of Christ very highly, and the most perfect way of imitating him was to imitate his

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<sup>691</sup> S.Th., IIa IIae, q. 171, a. 3.

<sup>692</sup> Anders Piltz, "Nostram naturam sublimaverat: Den liturgiska och teologiska bakgrunden till birgittinska mariaofficiet," in *Maria i Sverige under tusen år: Föredrag vid symposiet i Vadstena 6-10 oktober 1994*, eds. Sven-Erik Brodd and Alf Härdelin, (Skellefteå: Artos, 1996).

mother, who was herself the greatest follower of the Lord. Knowing that, it is interesting to see the passages from *Sermo angelicus* in which Birgitta describes Mary as prophetess. She writes:

Deinde ex prophetarum scripturis Deum incarnari velle intelligens et quod tam diuersis penis in carne assumpta deberet cruciari, tribulacionem protinus non modicam propter feruentem caritatem, quam ad Deum habebat, in corde suo sustinuit, quamquam nondum sibi innotesceret, quod ipsa eius mater fieri debebat. (Sermo 16. 8)

Birgitta describes here the perfect cognition of God's will that Mary possessed. Even before the annunciation she knew that God willed to become incarnate, and below Birgitta states that Mary knew he would have to suffer the passion (Sermo 17. 18). Thanks to God's grace, Mary had a complete understanding of the prophecies of the Old Testament. She is thus presented as a prophetess, even greater than all the previous prophets. This concept is not original with Birgitta, as it has Biblical foundations. It is visible in the Magnificat, the prophetic hymn sung by Mary according to the gospel of Luke, announcing the nativity of the Son of God who will bring the promised salvation to Israel "as he spoke to the fathers" (Luk 1:46–55). As *Sermo angelicus* was a part of the Marian rule of life established by Birgitta, we can suggest that she had seen some connection between Mary the prophetess and herself as founder of the order. This connection is also proven by a miraculous occurrence that Birgitta relates. She reports that on Christmas night she unexpectedly became exceptionally joyful and she felt a sudden movement in her heart, comparable to an unborn child moving itself around in the womb (VI, 88. 1). We read that this movement was strong enough to be seen by Birgitta's spiritual father and some of her friends, whom she called for advice, as she was afraid of diabolic illusion (VI, 88. 2). But on the next day Birgitta heard the voice of the Virgin Mary, who explained the event as a special sign of grace for Birgitta. She notes that the Mother of God told her that she felt the same miraculous movement which Mary herself experienced just after the annunciation and the conception of Jesus. With this

special experience, Mary wanted to communicate Birgitta's prophetic task and corroborate her mission. According to this revelation, Mary said:

Ideo, filia, non timeas illusionem sed gratulare, quia motus iste, quem tu sentis, signum aduentus filii mei est in cor tuum. Ideo, sicut filius meus imposuit tibi nomen noue sponse sue, sic ego voco te nunc nurum filii mei. Nam sicut pater et mater senescentes et quiescentes imponunt nurui onus et dicunt ei ea, que sunt facienda in domo, sic Deus et ego in cordibus hominum senes et frigidi a caritate eorum indicare volumus amicis nostris et mundo per te voluntatem nostram. (VI, 88. 6–7)

In other words, Birgitta is to continue Mary's task and to express the will of God and his mother.

As Claire Sahlin notes, Birgitta presents herself as a prophetess of Mary and like Mary. In Mary she finds the perfect example of a Christian prophetess,<sup>693</sup> announcing the final stage of God's salvation plan.<sup>694</sup> In this passage, the apocalyptic character of Birgitta's prophecy is indicated by the remark about love growing cold in people's hearts ("Deus et ego in cordibus hominum senes et frigidi a caritate eorum," VI, 88. 7). According to the gospel of Matthew, this will be one of the signs of the consummation of the world.<sup>695</sup>

Claire Sahlin also notes that Birgitta's role was interpreted as analogous to Mary's by an anonymous Franciscan friar who authored a treatise aimed at defending Birgitta's revelations and their authority against those who rejected their authenticity on the grounds of Birgitta's sex. The work, composed between 1391 and 1409, is preserved in only one copy. The anonymous author

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<sup>693</sup> Concerning the social dimension of female prophecy see: Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 1-12. The author reminds that the possibility of possessing a prophetic gift by women was sometimes questioned in Christian history, but on the ground of theology it was difficult to neglect such a possibility without questioning the full human nature in women. The biblical examples were also remembered. As a result, many female mystics who claimed prophetic abilities were derided, but at the same time respected, especially if an apocalyptic prophecy was concerned, as they fulfilled all the requirements of being Christ's humble and poor prophet. As a rule, women were placed outside the official structures of ecclesiastical power. That gave them a possibility of rebuking the officials, as the Old Testaments prophets did to the kings of Israel.

<sup>694</sup> Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 16.

<sup>695</sup> ". . . et quoniam abundabit iniquitas refrigescet caritas multorum" (Mat 24:12).

states that the revelations must have been mediated through a woman because they come from Mary.<sup>696</sup> In the treatise, Birgitta is presented as both the propheticess of Mary and the eschatological prophet:

For Birgitta is called, so to speak, the arrow of the Virgin. As the apostles and their successors were sharp arrows of Christ, since through their ministry Christ made many people subject to himself, so the blessed Virgin Mary in these last days aimed this arrow of salvation against the world for putting to fight the power of the devil, who is the “ancient serpent” whose head Mary crushed. (Rev 12:9; 20.2; Gen 3:15)<sup>697</sup>

This interpretation of Birgitta’s role appears quite similar to Magister Mathias’s, since both authors mention the connection between Birgitta’s revelation and “the last days.”

In *Revelationes*, both the Virgin Mary and Birgitta are presented as imitators of Jesus (see section 4.2), therefore it is important to stress that according to the Gospels Jesus was an eschatological prophet as well. We read that he used to call himself “the Son of Man,”<sup>698</sup> referring to the vision of Daniel, who reports he saw “one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven” who was given “power, and glory, and kingdom: and all peoples, tribes and tongues shall serve him: his power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away: and his kingdom that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13–14). In the gospel of Matthew, Christ spoke about his second coming and the Final Judgment preceded by terrifying signs on heaven and earth, calling his listeners to repent (Mat 24). Joseph Ratzinger states, moreover, that the main theme of Jesus’

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<sup>696</sup> Claire L. Sahlin, “The Virgin Mary and Birgitta of Sweden’s Prophetic Vocation,” in *Maria i Sverige under tusen år: Föredrag vid symposiet i Vadstena 6-10 oktober 1994*, eds. Sven-Erik Brodd and Alf Härdelin (Skellefteå: Artos, 1996), 1:228-230.

<sup>697</sup> Quoted in Sahlin, *op. cit.*, 231.

<sup>698</sup> See e.g.: Mat 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 23, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; Luk. 5:24; 6:5, 22; 7:12, 34; 9:22; Joh 1:51; 3:13-14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62.



teaching was the kingdom of heaven, announced and preached by the prophets to come in the end of time.<sup>699</sup>

This apocalyptic character of Jesus' preaching as shown in the Gospels gives a strong spiritual tension to the Christian religion. Christians generally believe that the final epoch of world history started with Jesus and that nothing more decisive than his incarnation, death, and resurrection will happen until his second coming and judgment.<sup>700</sup> Birgitta shares this opinion, as we can see from her periodization of world history: according to her, the seventh epoch of the world began with Pentecost and will continue until the Great Judgment (VI, 62. 11). It is easily observable that the intensity of this eschatological tension expressed in Christian literature varied throughout the centuries. As we know from the apostolic letters, in the early church many expected the second coming of Christ within a couple of years after his ascension (1Th 4:15–17), but the Apostles refrained from defining any particular date and only stressed the nearness of Parousia (2Th 2:2). During the Middle Ages the eschatological anxiety increased several times, usually in relation to particular dates (such as the millennium) or violent historical events.<sup>701</sup> I would say that from the point of view of Christian theology this modulation of interest in apocalyptic matters is fully understandable. If Christians believe that the last days already began with the first coming of Christ, they can expect his second coming at any time. As we said above, for Christian eschatology the quality of time is much more important than its duration.

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<sup>699</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatologie: Tod und ewiges Leben* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1978), 33-35.

<sup>700</sup> Ratzinger, *op. cit.*, 53-54.

<sup>701</sup> Umberto Eco, "Waiting for the Millennium," in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050*, eds. Richard Allen Landes, Andrew Colin Gow and David C. Van Meter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Guy Lobrichon, "Stalking the Signs: Apocalyptic Commentaries," in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050*, eds. Richard Allen Landes, Andrew Colin Gow and David C. Van Meter, 67-79.

According to Laura Smoller, in the fourteenth century the anxiety became much stronger than it had been one hundred years earlier. This was partly due to political and social reasons, as many wars were troubling Europe at that time and a series of natural catastrophes caused massive depopulation. The Great Famine of 1315–1317 touched most of Europe, but it was the Black Death that gave the final argument for people looking for signs of the apocalypse.<sup>702</sup>

### 5.1.2. The Signs of Christ's Second Coming

The signs preceding Christ's second coming are described in all three Synoptic Gospels—Matthew (Mat 24), Luke (Luk 21) and Mark (Mar 13)—and further explained in the book of Revelation (Rev 15–16). The three descriptions in the Gospels differ a bit in the details, but they all predict a similar series of signs of the consummation of the world. They start with the destruction of the temple, about which Jesus said, "Amen I say to you there shall not be left here a stone upon a stone that shall not be destroyed" (Mat 24:2, cf. Mar 13:2; Luk 21:6). His disciples knew that he was speaking about the end of days, not about a possible war or a natural catastrophe, as they immediately asked him: "Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the consummation of the world?" (Mat 24:3). The destruction of the temple had happened already in the past, when the chosen nation was taken into captivity by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar (2Ki 24–25; 2Ch 36). Again, this was foretold by Jeremiah, who wore bonds and a yoke as a prophetic sign (Jer 27:1–11). In the Bible we read that when the time of God's anger had passed, the temple was reconstructed by Ezra and Nehemiah after Cyrus, king of the Persians, allowed the Israelites to return to the Holy Land (Ezr 1:1–4). The book of Lamentations

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<sup>702</sup> Laura A. Smoller, "Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 156-163.

interprets the destruction of the temple and captivity as the ultimate catastrophe brought to the chosen nation by the burning anger of God that their sins had caused (Lam 5:7). Some medieval Jewish theologians, such as Maimonides, accepted a similar interpretation of these events.<sup>703</sup> Christians believed that Jesus' prophecy was realized already in the year 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>704</sup> Birgitta knew that the Jewish temple had been destroyed and never rebuilt,<sup>705</sup> and she regarded this as a sign of God's anger toward the Jews:

Item mater Dei: "Scito eciam, quod prophete preceptum fuit ostendere populo ingrato descripciones templi destructi, quas vidit in spirituali visione, non quia in celo erant corporaliter, sed quia per corporalia intelliguntur spiritualia, ut populus inobediens cognosceret ingratitude suam et respiciens a malis suis prepararet se ad percipiendam promissionem Dei. Qui ideo priuatus est et priuabitur promissis Dei, quia persistens in malicia sua noluit mutare voluntatem suam ad bona. Ideo eciam templum non reedificatum est nec erit in perpetuum. Sed in domo mea non solum erigentur parietes materiales, sed et anime iustorum placebunt in ea filio meo et complebunt in se spiritualiter descripciones templi, quod in spiritu vidit propheta Dei." (Extrav 39. 12–14)

According to this revelation, the Temple is therefore reconstructed in a new way: first, it is to be rebuilt in Vadstena, in the form of the monastery of the New Vineyard; and second, it is spiritually rebuilt in the hearts of righteous people. But it is noteworthy that according to the text "reconstruction" does not mean restoring the previous state of affairs: this time, it is aimed at renewal and transformation. The new, spiritual temple is much different from the Jerusalem

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<sup>703</sup> Warren Zev Harvey, "The Jewish Approaches to Evil in History," in *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 197-198.

<sup>704</sup> It is possible that the Gospel of John has been written after 70 A.D. as a response to destruction of the temple. See: Andreas Köstenberger, "The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel," in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. John Lierman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 78-88.

<sup>705</sup> Contrary to what is sometimes said about medieval Christians, who are supposed to believe that the Dome on the Rock is the Temple of Salomon itself. This view was expressed e.g. in: *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Dome of the Rock," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168491/Dome-of-the-Rock> (accessed March 10, 2009).

temple, perhaps in connection with Christ's words from the gospel of John: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Joh 2:19).

In the medieval church, Rome also could have been regarded as a temple of God, and in Birgitta's times the desolation of this temple became clearly visible: the pope abandoned the Holy See and went into the Avignon Captivity. I think that Birgitta considered this situation an apocalyptic sign, even if she hoped for his return, although her prophecy was not primarily aimed at changing the physical location of the papal court and curia from Avignon to Rome again: rather, she wanted the pope to convert and abandon his arrogant lifestyle. The return to Rome was meant as a return to the duties of the "good shepherd."<sup>706</sup>

Similarities between Birgitta's lament over Rome, destroyed by wars and earthquakes,<sup>707</sup> and the prophetic cries for Jerusalem are noticeable. Let us compare the short fragment of Birgitta's revelation with a couple of passages from Biblical prophecies, which were important sources of Christian eschatology. Birgitta writes:

Iterum vidi quasi multos ortos in terra, rosas vero et lilia conspexi inter ortos. In quodam vero loco spaciose terre vidi agrum centum vestigiorum in longitudine et totidem in latitudine. In quolibet autem vestigio erant septem grana tritici seminata et quodlibet granum dabat fructum centuplum. Post hec audiui vocem dicentem: "O Roma, Roma, muri tui sunt dirupti. Ideo porte tue sunt sine custodia. Vasa tua venduntur. Ideo altaria tua desolata sunt. Viuum sacrificium et incensum matutinum comburitur in atrio. Ideo non egreditur de sancta sanctorum sanctus odor suavissimus." (III, 27. 18–20)

In the tone and form of this short prophetic statement, we can see a parallel to biblical apocalyptic literature, as Birgitta introduces her vision using the phrases "vidi" and "audiui vocem dicentem,"

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<sup>706</sup> Ingvar Fogelqvist, *Apostasy and Reform in the Revelations of St. Birgitta* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), 169.

<sup>707</sup> A particularly strong one destroyed Rome in 1349.

which is a common practice in biblical prophecies.<sup>708</sup> She further compares the world to a garden, and Rome to a field of God.<sup>709</sup> This field used to give fruit a hundredfold, but now the walls of Rome have crumbled (“muri tui sunt dirupti”) like the walls of the vineyard in Isaiah’s prophecy: “et nunc ostendam vobis quid ego faciam vineae meae auferam sepem eius et erit in direptionem diruam maceriam eius et erit in conculcationem” (Isa 5:5). The gates of Rome are unguarded, resembling the empty gates of destroyed Jerusalem described in the book of Lamentations (Lam 1:4). The vessels from the temples of Rome are being sold, as they were in the time of Nebuchadnezzar (2Ch 36:18). The altars have been abandoned (“desolata sunt”) and the living sacrifice burned in the portico. The sweet fragrance does not come from the Holy of Holies anymore. An echo of Isaiah’s lament can be heard in this passage, sung every year in the Advent liturgy of the church in the hymn *Rorate caeli desuper*:

Ne irascaris Domine, ne ultra memineris iniquitatis: ecce civitas Sancti facta est deserta, Sion deserta facta est: Ierusalem desolata est: domus sanctificationis tuae et gloriae tuae, ubi laudaverunt te patres nostri.<sup>710</sup>

Birgitta must have known this hymn as it was sung during the liturgy in her times,<sup>711</sup> so she also would have known that the antiphon is meant to express the longing and desire of the church

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<sup>708</sup> Introductory phrase: “et vidi” or “vidi” before a description of a vision occurs 45 times in the book of Revelation, 38 times in 4 book of Esdras, 15 times in Daniel’s prophecy and 21 times in Ezechiel’s.

<sup>709</sup> See chapter 32 in the book of Jeremiah, describing the prophet purchasing a field during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. God told him to do so such a strange and seemingly senseless thing in order to encourage the Israelites and foretell the future, eternal peace in the Holy Land: “quia haec dicit Dominus sicut adduxi super populum istum omne malum hoc grande sic adducam super eos omne bonum quod ego loquor ad eos. et possidebuntur agri in terra ista de qua vos dicitis quod deserta sit eo quod non remanserit homo et iumentum et data sit in manu Chaldeorum” (Jer 32: 42-42).

<sup>710</sup> Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year: Advent* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1870), 155. See: “. . . civitas sancti tui facta est deserta Sion deserta facta est Hierusalem desolata domus sanctificationis nostrae et gloriae nostrae ubi laudaverunt te patres nostri facta est in exustionem ignis et omnia desiderabilia nostra versa sunt in ruinas” (Is 64:10-11).

waiting for the second coming of Christ: “Rorate caeli desuper, et nubes pluant iustum.” In this context it becomes more understandable that her own prophetic lament over the desolation of the temple includes eschatological contents.

According to the Gospels, further signs of the end are natural catastrophes: plague, famine, and earthquakes (Mat 24:7; Luk 21:11; Mar 13:8). Birgitta witnessed a number of terrifying events of this kind: between the years of 1315 and 1317 the great famine killed thousands of people in Northern Europe.<sup>712</sup> Around 1347 the plague followed, coming from the east and thus fulfilling another apocalyptic prediction about the consummation of the world beginning in the east: “For as lightning cometh out of the east, and appeareth even into the west: so shall the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mat 24:27).<sup>713</sup> In the fourteenth century the Black Death was sometimes considered to be an apocalyptic sign, one of the “seven last plagues” prophesied in the book of Revelation (Rev 15–16).<sup>714</sup>

Birgitta rarely takes up the subject of the plagues (VIII, 57), and compared to many of her contemporaries she does not stress the apocalyptic nature of this event. She considers the disease to be a punishment for the sins of the people and reports a revelation of Mary telling her about the possible means of penitence for those sins (VIII, 57. 1–7). She says that people should abandon the sins of pride, incontinence and cupidity, give alms and pray (VIII, 57. 2–5). The priests and bishops should celebrate the Mass of the Holy Trinity and the bishops shall perform the ritual foot-

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<sup>711</sup> Albert Ryle Kezel, notes to *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 265.

<sup>712</sup> Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 233.

<sup>713</sup> Laura A. Smoller, "Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," in *Last Things. Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 156-161.

<sup>714</sup> Smoller, op.cit. 159.

washing of the poor people (VIII, 57. 6–7). It is also remarkable that according to Birgitta the disease troubled the kingdom, not individual men (VIII, 57. 1) and thus was a social phenomenon. While explaining the general reasons for plagues and famine, she does not mention the Final Judgment, but only speaks about the punishment for sins. In book 5, she writes that men suffer from disease on earth in order to be saved from eternal punishment, much worse than the plague. Such unhappy events may also cause reflection and even lead a sinner to conversion:

Item, cur pestilencie et fames veniunt, respondeo: Scriptum est in lege, quod, qui furtum fecerit, reddat plus quam abstulerit. Ergo, quia homines ingrati dona mea recipiunt et abutuntur eis nec honor michi debitus ab eis michi impenditur, ideo plus exigo tribulacionis a corpore in presenti, ut parcatur anime in futuro. Quandoque eciam parcendo corpori punio hominem in hiis et per ea, que diligit, ut, qui noluit agnoscere me letus, cognoscat et intelligat vel tribulatus. (V, inter. 6. 19–21)

Even if Birgitta was not sure whether the current plague was one of the last seven plagues, she knew that the seven plagues were actually dangerous. She apparently saw some special relation between the seven plagues and sinful priests, as she warns them in her revelation:

Ecce, amici mei, quales sacerdotes sunt! Ecce, angeli mei, quibus seruitis! Si iacerem ante vos, sicut in altari iaceo ante eos, nullus vestrum auderet me contingere, sed terreremini. Ipsi autem quasi fures et proditores produnt me; ipsi quasi meretrices contingunt me; ipsi quoque immundiores pice non erubescunt appropinquare michi, qui Deus sum et Dominus glorie. Propterea, sicut dictum est Israeli, septem plage venient super vos. Vere ille septem plage venient super sacerdotes! (IV, 132. 15–17)

Similar warnings are found in other revelations as well.<sup>715</sup> But the seven plagues also could have a slightly different meaning. Birgitta mentions one of her noble friends who was saved by the

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<sup>715</sup> See also: “Itaque misericordia mea parcat in omnibus et omnes suffert, sed iusticia clamat vindictam, quia clamo cotidie et quam multi michi respondent, satis tu vides. Verumptamen adhuc mittam verba oris mei, et qui audierint complebunt dies suos in leticia illa, que nec dici nec cogitari potest pre dulcedine. Qui vero non audierint, **venient eis sicut scriptum est septem plage in anima et septem in corpore**, quas considerando et legendo ea, que gesta fuerunt, inuenient, ne experiendo contremiscant.”(IV, 58. 32-34 [emphasis mine])

prayers of Mary from the seven plagues of purgatory (VI 10. 4). Based on this and the previous passage, it is difficult to state whether Birgitta meant the same thing by the term “the seven plagues” in each case and whether she expected the historical event of “seven apocalyptic plagues.” In the revelations addressed to the priests, she could be speaking about God’s punishment in general or perhaps about the punishments of hell. Seen in the light of Magister Mathias’s commentary on the book of Revelation, the latter is even more probable. Mathias interpreted the seven seals and seven trumpets (Rev 6; 8) as tribulations and sins of the present or future church, preparing the Final Judgment. The seven plagues, however, were to be interpreted as the eternal punishments of hell, awaiting sinners after the Final Judgment.<sup>716</sup> Birgitta likely understood the seven plagues analogically.<sup>717</sup>

According to the gospel of Mark, the coming of Antichrist is one of the signs bearing the most tragic effects for the church (Mar 13:11). But again, contrary to the atmosphere of her time when

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“Attamen ego, Dominus omnium, ingredior ad sacerdotem istum sed non includor et commaculor. Ingredivor ut sponsus, egredior ut iudex iudicaturus, contemptus a sumente. Propterea, sicut dixi, **veniam sacerdotibus cum septem plagis**. Priuabuntur enim omnibus, que dilexerunt, eiicientur a conspectu Dei et iudicabuntur in ira eius, tradentur demonibus, patientur absque requie, contempnentur ab omnibus, egebunt bonis omnibus malisque omnibus habundabunt. Similiter eciam aliis septem corporalibus malis sicut Israel flagellabuntur” (IV, 62. 8-10 [emphasis mine])

<sup>716</sup> Mathias Lincopensis, *Expositio super Apocalypsim*, XV, 13-14 (Uppsala: Universitetstryckeriet, 2003), 456-457. Unfortunately, we do not know any more details of Mathias’ interpretation of Rev 15 and 16, as the last part of his commentary is lost. It is also possible that he had never completed the book. The text is discontinued after the commentary on the following verse: “et exierunt septem angeli habentes septem plagas de templo” (Rev 15:6).

<sup>717</sup> The seven plagues interpreted as eternal punishments appear also in *Visio Pauli*, an ancient apocryphal *visio* well known in the Latin West and translated in a number of vernacular languages, including Old Norse. In *Visio Pauli* we read: “Et iterum vidit fornacem ignis ardentem per septem flammis in diversis coloribus, et puniebantur in eo peccatores. Et septem plage erant in circuitu eius: prima nix, secunda glacies, tertia ignis, quarta sanguis, quinta serpens, sexta fulgur, septima fetor. Et in illa anime peccatorum puniuntur, qui non egerunt penitentiam post peccata commissa in hoc mundo” (Herman Brandes, *Visio S. Pauli: Ein Beitrag zur Visionslitteratur mit einem deutschen und zwei lateinischen Texten* [Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1885], 75-80). *Visio Pauli* was an influential book, but we do not know if St. Birgitta knew it. I suppose some influence, even indirect, is however possible.



many were speculating about Antichrist and the Angelic Pope,<sup>718</sup> in Birgitta's work the subject of the antichrist is by no means central. She mentions the antichrist twice: both remarks are found in book six. At least one of them was provoked by Magister Mathias, who commented on the book of Revelation and searched for Birgitta's advice, or rather for a prophetic message on this subject.

She gives him the following answer:

Ecce filia, dico tibi, quod, sicut Iohannes scripsit de Spiritu meo futura, que vidit, sic Mathias, confessor et pater tuus, de eodem Spiritu intelligit et scripsit spiritualem veritatem Sacre Scripture. Insuper dic eidem magistro tuo, quem ego feci magistrum, quod multi sunt Antichristi. Sed quomodo et quando veniet ille maledictus Antichristus, ostendam sibi per te. (VI, 89. 4–5)

The other remark is found in the same book, but it is difficult to say whether or not it is the expected revelation detailing Antichrist's coming, as it does not include any detailed remarks about the time of Antichrist's appearance. However, Birgitta touched on the subject while describing the three epochs of world history:

In fine vero etatis huius nascetur Antichristus. Sicut enim de coniugio spirituali nascuntur filii Dei, sic Antichristus nascetur de maledicta femina simulante se sapere spiritualia et de maledicto homine. De quorum seminibus permissione mea dyabolus formabit opus suum. Sed tempus istius Antichristi non erit, sicut frater ille, cuius libros vidisti, descripsit, sed in tempore michi cognito, quando iniquitas ultra modum habundauerit et impietas excreuerit in immensum. Ideo scito, quod, priusquam Antichristus venerit, gentibus aliquibus aperietur porta fidei. Deinde christianis diligentibus hereses et iniquis conculcantibus clerum et iusticiam signum est euidens, quod cito veniet Antichristus." (VI, 67. 10–12)

Moreover, both of these passages point to Birgitta's self-identification as a prophetess of the last days, as she expected (and was expected by Mathias, who asked for her clarifications) to transmit God's words concerning the consummation of the world. On the other hand, she clearly states

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<sup>718</sup> Bernard McGinn, "Angel Pope and Papal Antichrist," *Church History* 47 (1978): 155-173.

that the third, ultimate epoch of the world began not long ago (VI, 67. 7) and that the antichrist will appear at the end of this epoch, so she probably did not expect it within a short time. In accordance with the biblical apocalyptic paradigm, she abstains from mentioning any date for these events. She also criticizes one author “whose books she had seen,” who tried to make such attempts (VI, 58, 11).

Like many other medieval authors, Birgitta is particularly interested in the birth of Antichrist and his origin. According to her, the enemy of Christ will be the child of a “damned woman” who claims to possess spiritual knowledge and a “damned man” (VI, 67. 10). Birgitta apparently thinks that sin enables the devil to conquer one’s soul and body, and in some cases that a child of a possessed parent can be somehow infected by this sin.<sup>719</sup> The antichrist was usually expected to parody the nativity of Christ and many authors, including Hildegard of Bingen, foretold that he would pretend to be born of a virgin mother.<sup>720</sup> Birgitta, however, does not

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<sup>719</sup> See also Birgitta’s intervention in case of a baby who could not stop crying unless sprinkled with holy water. Birgitta said that the baby is afflicted by demon because of his mother, who was visited by incubus. The baby was improperly baptised as well (VI, 81. 1-6).

<sup>720</sup> “Cum enim tempus illud aduenerit, quo iste nequissimus deceptor horribiliter apparebit, mater illa quae istum fallacem in mundum eiciet, a pueritia sua in puellari aetate diabolicis artibus plena uitii in deserto abjectionis inter nefandissimos homines enutrita est, ibi parentibus suis eam nescientibus, nec illis cum quibus moratur eam scientibus: quoniam diabolus eam illuc ire persuadet, et ibi eam secundum uoluntatem suam decipiendo componit, quasi angelus sanctus sit. Et ideo illa ab hominibus se separat, ut tanto facilius celari possit. Vnde etiam aliquibus, sed tamen paucis uiris nequissimo latrocinio fornicationis occulte commiscetur et in tanto studio turpitudinis cum illis se polluit, uelut angelus sanctus feruorem prauitatis illius eam perficere iubeat. Et sic in feruentissimo ardore fornicationis illius filium perditionis concipit, nesciens de quo semine uirorum illorum eum conceperit. Sed Lucifer, serpens uidelicet antiquus, turpitudine ista delectatus, coagulationem hanc iusto meo iudicio artibus suis afflat et eam omnibus uiribus suis totam in uentre matris illius possidet, sic illo perditore de uentre matris suae pleno diabolico spiritu egrediente. Deinde illa consuetam fornicationem deuitat: et aperte stulto et insipienti populo dicit quia uirum non habeat nec patrem infantis sui sciat. Fornicationem autem quam perpetravit, sanctam dicit, unde et populus illam sanctam putat et nominat.” (Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* 3, 11, 25, eds. Andelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris [Turnhout: Brepols, 1978], 589-590).

compare the origins of Antichrist and Jesus. Instead she compares children of God-loving parents, whose marriage is a spiritual union, with Antichrist, the offspring of sinners.<sup>721</sup>

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It is typical for Birgitta's prophetic language to use apocalyptic symbols in order to describe current events but without clear reference to the end of days. The atmosphere she builds is, however, full of eschatological tension and awaiting. Birgitta uses this method in her revelation addressed to King Magnus and Queen Blanka in order to show them the true meaning and consequences of their sinful ruling:

Dum stare orando, vidi in spiritu celum quasi turbulentum et solem et lunam fulgentes in serenitate clarissima, quorum lux etiam ultra celum se extendebat. Cumque attente aspicerem, vidi, quod angeli boni et mali pugnabant contra solem et lunam sed non prevaluerunt, donec draco magnus et terribilis ascendit in celo. Cui sol et luna dederunt potestatem et claritatem suam. Et tunc statim sol factus est pallidus et niger et luna fugiit subter terram. Cumque aspicerem ad terram, vidi eam plenam reptilibus et serpentibus, qui comedebant superficiem terre et occidebant homines caudis suis, donec sol cecidit in abyssum et locus lune non est inuentus amplius. (VIII, 31. 1–4)

Later in the same text she explains that the sun and moon represent here the king and queen of Sweden. Both of them ought to illuminate their kingdom with justice and peace, being a source of grace for their people. Unfortunately, they have betrayed this vocation and given up their power to a vicious adviser, who is compared to the dragon. Christ announced that this man would soon be overthrown and so will the royal couple (see section 2.3.5).

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<sup>721</sup> "Propterea conuertam me ad coniugium spirituale, quale decet habere Deum cum corpore casto et anima casta. Ibi enim alia septem bona inueniuntur, contraria prioribus predictis malis. Nam ibi non desideratur forma aliqua seu pulchritudo corporis nec delectabilium visio sed solummodo visio et amor Dei; secundo nichil possidere nisi unde viuant, solummodo ad necessitatem, nichil ad superfluitatem; tercio vitant verba ociosa et scurrilia; quarto non curant videre amicos vel parentes, sed ego sum amor et desiderium eorum. Quinto humilitatem cupiunt seruare interius in consciencia et exterius in habitu. Sexto habent voluntatem numquam velle luxuriari. Septimo generant Deo suo filios et filias per bonam conuersacionem et bonum exemplum et per spiritualium verborum predicationem" (I, 26. 23-25).

In her vision, Birgitta combines the apocalyptic signs described in the Synoptic Gospels—the darkening of sun and moon and falling stars (Mat 24:29; Mar 13:24)—with similar signs from the book of Revelation (Rev 6) and the vision of ultimate struggle between the woman and the dragon (Rev 21).<sup>722</sup> The vision of reptiles and serpents killing people is probably inspired by the book of Numbers: we read there that God sent venomous serpents to punish the Israelites in the desert (Num 21). However, in Birgitta’s revelation the sequence of events is different than in the Bible: she does not follow the narrative scheme of opening the seven seals, which is a base for presenting the apocalyptic signs in revelation 6, nor does she describe the fight between a woman and a dragon such as the one detailed in revelation 21. Rather, she is creating an original work using biblical imagery. Anders Piltz calls this method used by Birgitta “a patch-work of biblical idioms.”<sup>723</sup> In this case, the idea of employing the apocalyptic signs to describe current problems can be also inspired by Magister Mathias’s commentary on the book of Revelation.

Mathias interprets the darkening sun as prelates of the church, whose mission was to enlighten Christians with the light of divine wisdom but who had since abandoned their duty. They became ignorant of and negligent toward divine things, making them “black as sackcloth.” According to Mathias, the moon here represents laymen who are taught by the clergy, as the moon reflects the sunlight. A very similar interpretation is found in his commentary on the eighth chapter of the book of Revelation. At the sound of the fourth trumpet, “the third part of the sun

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<sup>722</sup> In the 12th chapter of the book of Revelation, relating the struggle between the woman and the dragon, there is no mention of the fall of sun and moon. They only appear in connection with the woman “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet” (Rev 12:1). In chapter six however, we find the following description: “the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood.” These are the results of opening the sixth seal by the Lamb (Rev 6:12).

<sup>723</sup> Anders Piltz, “Inspiration, vision, profetia: Birgitta och teorierna om uppenbarelsen,” in *Heliga Birgitta - budskapet och förebilden: Föredrag vid jubileumssymposiet i Vadstena 3-7 oktober 1991*, eds. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1993), 85.

was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars” turned dark (Rev 8:12). Magister Mathias interpreted the sun as the major prelates of the church, the moon as clergymen of “middle dignity,” and the stars as ordinary priests. They should all be trained in three kinds of science: theology, the law of the Church, and its practical interpretations (“institutions”). Canons and institutions without theology are like a body without a head, but unfortunately today’s clergymen are ignorant in theology. This ignorance is represented by the smiting of the third part of the sun, moon, and stars.<sup>724</sup>

In Birgitta’s solar symbolism we find similar principles of interpretation: the sun and moon denote members of the higher level of hierarchy who are given special abilities and grace and who are supposed to share it with those standing on lower levels. Both Mathias and Birgitta judge those people as negligent and sinful. There are, however, significant differences between the two authors. Birgitta uses solar symbols to describe political, not ecclesiastical, hierarchy. Her vision concerns the kingdom of Sweden, not the entire world. Moreover, she goes further than Mathias in her visionary announcements, as she speaks in the name of God and foretells some near events, while he gives a diagnosis of the present situation from the point of view of a preacher without trying to predict the future. We can thus conclude that both Mathias and Birgitta were generally convinced that they lived in the last epoch of the world when the apocalyptic signs would start to appear, but they were quite reserved about setting these signs within a timeframe.

This reserve points to the theological (rather than strictly historical) nature of Birgitta’s prophecy. As we have said, Christians are generally convinced that they live in the last days, but the duration of these days is impossible to predict. They are, however, obliged to await the second

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<sup>724</sup> Mathias Lincopensis, *Exposicio super Apocalypsim*, XV, 13-14, ed. Ann-Marie Billing-Ottosson (Uppsala: Universitetstryckeriet, 2003), 198-200.

coming of Christ every day. This watchfulness is a necessary feature of a good Christian, but also of a Christian community. Augustine developed this concept further, saying that it is important to remember that all problems and joys here on earth are in fact temporary or even provisional, as people can be called to the Last Judgment anytime. Strictly speaking, one cannot and should not really love temporal things, because they are to be desired in order to use them, not to enjoy them disinterestedly (Augustine defines this kind of love for things as “*appetitus*,” or desire). Moreover, medieval theology, inspired by St. Augustine, distinguished between desiring something in order to enjoy it for its own sake (*propter se ipsum*) and using things as a means for obtaining something else (*propter uti*). A free man uses things but does not become bound by them. Otherwise he loses his freedom and becomes enslaved by cupidity.<sup>725</sup> Human desires should be thus directed towards the eternal life, when we will enjoy God and love him solely. In order to keep on the right path, we must be aware of the danger of enslavement by temporal things and know that our happiness is “not yet perfect”: “not yet whole, not yet pure, not yet full freedom, because not yet eternity.”<sup>726</sup>

We can therefore suggest that Birgitta chose the apocalyptic symbols to warn the king, spoke about the seven plagues to focus the attention of the priests, and compared Rome to the temple desolated before the Parousia in order to encourage the Christian society to watch and await the coming of Christ, their King.

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<sup>725</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 32-35.

<sup>726</sup> “Ex parte libertas, ex parte servitus: nondum tota, nondum pura, nondum plena libertas, quia nondum aeternitas” (Augustine, *Tractates on John’s Gospel* XLI, 10, quote in Arendt, op. cit., 35).

### 5.1.3. Making History Present

The statements of Birgitta discussed above express a quite specific relation to time and history, which is a result of their prophetic character. In the Bible, God's words heard and spoken by a prophet are always addressed to the community, not to the prophet privately.<sup>727</sup> Birgitta also transmits "God's message" to kings, popes, and nobles, thus placing Sweden and other Christian communities within God's plan of salvation (see section 2.1). It appears that one of the important methods in this message is using the prophetic signs discussed above.

In my opinion, there are two types of prophetic signs employed by Birgitta. First, she sometimes acts in a prophetic way or experiences unusual situations of prophetic meaning. As an example, we can mention the miraculous movement "under her heart," resembling Mary's experience (VI, 88. 1–8). Secondly, she reports signs performed by God directly, not via Birgitta as the prophetess. These are all the apocalyptic signs described in the Gospels and the book of Revelation which she interprets. I understand that there are two differences between these two types of signs: the main difference lies in their relation to their denotation. The apocalyptic signs are symptoms: there is a causative relationship between the sign and the coming of Christ. In other words, I would say that Birgitta presents these signs not only as symbols of Christ's coming but a part of this event as well, contrary to the prophetic signs, which are mainly symbols, not symptoms. They resemble their denotation but do not necessarily cause it; or, they are not identical with the denotation (Birgitta does not describe herself as identical with the pregnant Virgin Mary, but as similar to her).

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<sup>727</sup> Klaus Baltzer, "Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet," *The Harvard Theological Review* 61, no. 4 (1968): 578-581.

I would describe the other difference as “transformation of signs”: some of the prophetic signs, together with the prophetic announcements accompanying them, become the signs of the apocalypse. This process can be observed in biblical prophecies. When Jeremiah wore his bonds and yoke, he had in mind a catastrophe closely approaching Israel: the Babylonian conquest. His prophecy was later considered fulfilled, since the temple was destroyed and the land of Israel desolated. But after the time of captivity had passed, the Israelites did not forget about Jeremiah’s prophecy. Its fulfillment did not cause it to cease. On the contrary, the sign was now interpreted as a prophecy of another, greater and ultimate catastrophe approaching the temple of God and his faithful. The sign acquired an apocalyptic meaning. When Jesus talked about the desolation of the temple, he referred to the earlier prophecy and its realization, but he also established his own sign and prophecy (“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” Joh 2:19; “there shall not be left here a stone upon a stone that shall not be destroyed” Mar 13:2). He foretold that the catastrophe would happen again. His prophecy was then considered as fulfilled in the year 70 AD, but again, not forgotten. His disciples understood his words and signs as an announcement of the ultimate, apocalyptic catastrophe and desolation (see sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2). The general rule derived from this example would be that that the fulfillment of prophecy does not necessarily finish its lifespan: some prophecies are being transformed into the early prognosis of apocalyptic symptoms. The ability to perform this transformation appears to be the privilege of a prophet.

I think that a similar mechanism is noticeable in *Revelationes*. Thanks to this power of interpreting history and establishing new signs, Birgitta is able to make the past and future fates of the community present again in current events. That is why Mathias asked Birgitta about the coming of Antichrist: he knew from the Scriptures that “there are many Antichrists” (1Jo 2:18), but



he expected the prophetess to interpret past and present signs in order to explain the current situation of the church within the whole timeframe of salvation history.

## 5.2. The Great War between Good and Evil

In one of the revelations addressed to the queen of Naples (VII, 11) Birgitta summarizes the course of the history of salvation as a story of the Great War, starting at the beginning of creation and continuing until the end of days. According to her, *casus belli* was Satan's rebellion against God, but the real struggle began when Adam and his offspring became involved, as Satan induced them to break God's commandments (VII, 11. 2). Initially God allowed Satan to prevail, as people had voluntarily chosen evil (VII, 11. 3), but the forces of good and evil were not equal at any stage of that fight. The story of this war can be interpreted as the story of rebellion or unjust uprising, as Birgitta says that God controls the powers of evil, which can only prevail thanks to "permission of God":

Et tunc dyabolus preualuit permissione mea ex iusticia mea et ab illo tempore ego et dyabolus discordamus et certamus, quia ego volo, ut homo viuat ad voluntatem meam, dyabolus vero nititur, ut homo sequatur desideria sua. (VII, 11. 3)

She further states that the final battle of this war took place on the cross: Christ opened heaven to mankind and the devil lost his previous rights to them (VII, 11. 4). As a result of this battle, a new law was established: those who choose to follow Christ will gain the eternal crown. Those who choose to stay in the devil's power, on the other hand, will suffer eternal damnation. The war is not yet finished, as people still have free will and still are vulnerable because they must bear some effects of original sin (VII, 11. 5–6).

According to the logic of this war understood as a part of the Christian history of salvation, every spiritual struggle taking place after the death and resurrection of Christ must be placed in the ultimate stage of the universal war, since Christians do not expect any other decisive event after the coming of Christ and before the Last Judgment (see section 2.1.6). The book of Revelation foretells that in the last days of the world the forces of evil will try to prevail one more time, fighting with the followers of Christ, but they will not overcome Christians (Rev 12: 9–7). The book of Revelation, moreover, can be discussed in the context of “war messianism” which developed both in Judaism and in early Christianity. Many motifs of this book could be interpreted as an encouragement to a spiritual fight that will end with the final victory of Messiah.<sup>728</sup> Consequently, we can expect that if a Christian author perceives human life as a struggle between good and evil, it would be justifiable to interpret this as a sign of his or her eschatological anxiety and longing for the end of days.

As mentioned earlier (see section 4.3.1), Birgitta presents Jesus as a warrior or a knight who is a perfect example for the Christian knights as he was “first in battle, first in passion” (II, 12. 46): he has gone through the fight himself, so he is reliable as a war leader. In the same revelation, Birgitta writes about the virtues of knights:

Ergo redite et state viriliter! Ego enim, qui moneo vos, sum ille, cui angeli seruiunt, qui patres vestros obedientes liberaui, inobedientes iudicaui et superbos humiliaui. Ego fui primus in bello, primus in passione. Sequimini ergo me, ne sicut cera ab igne dissoluamini! Cur rescinditis promissionem vestram? Cur iuramentum contempnitis? (II, 12. 45–47)

According to this text, the knightly “rule of life” (described in section 3.2.1) is therefore based on a personal relation to the leader, who is himself the greatest warrior. But Birgitta applies the

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<sup>728</sup> Richard Bauckham, “The Apocalypse as a Christian War Scroll,” in *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 211-213.

metaphor of war to all Christians, not only to knight. In book 1, she reports a vision of Christ saying that he sends all Christians “like soldiers to the war,” because the war is necessary for them as a chance to practice virtue and to gain merit (I, 6. 3).

To be able to fight, they need to wear spiritual armor, that is, virtues and sacraments. Birgitta presents this armor several times. Her descriptions of various weapons and parts of armor are very detailed and we can guess that they are addressed to people who knew warfare and enjoyed it. Each part is ascribed a spiritual meaning: a virtue or a sacrament. However, the relationship between the spiritual element and the weapon is not permanent. In some revelations a cuirass (“lorica,” a corselet of thongs) is a symbol of divine love (IV, 74. 16; VI, 43. 7), while in another it stands for abstinence (IV, 89. 16). A sword can be a symbol of confession (IV, 89. 8), but it can also mean “confidencia in Deo ad preliandum pro iusticia” (IV, 74. 69) or faith (I, 6. 4).

Comparing virtues to parts of spiritual armor has its origin in St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

Therefore take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:13–17)

As we can see, there is no direct analogy between Birgitta’s symbolic interpretation of the pieces of armor and St. Paul’s version, since she ascribes a different meaning to each of the parts of the armor. The armor St. Paul describes is also quite different from that described in *Revelationes*: the Apostle does not mention “armatura manum,” “armatura pedum,” or “the horse and saddle,” all of which appear in Birgitta’s vision (IV, 74. 36 and 46 and 77), since the medieval militaries were

different from the ancient. A similar idea is noticeable, however. This passage from Ephesians was often commented upon by the church fathers and in the Middle Ages supplied the basis for a widespread theology of spiritual war.<sup>729</sup> In the time of the church fathers, martyrs were regarded as “God’s soldiers.”<sup>730</sup> It appears, moreover, that Birgitta’s metaphor is quite similar to those used by the preachers who addressed crusaders.<sup>731</sup>

The above texts were mostly addressed to knights, but in another revelation Birgitta says that the liturgical vestments worn by priests also represents the spiritual armor (IV, 33. 17). But she adds that many priests are so sinful that they resemble knights who betrayed their lord and try to make their weapons blunt so as not to hurt the enemy (IV, 133.18–19).

If the metaphor says that the friends of God wear virtues and sacraments as their armor, we can expect his enemies to be armed with vices or some other features giving them strength to fight God. Birgitta’s concept is quite different, however. There is no such thing as “armor of evil” in *Revelationes*. Instead Birgitta says that the enemies of God are supplied with the same spiritual armor as his friends: love, justice, prudence, and the others, but they do not care about their

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<sup>729</sup> Bauckham, op. cit., 236-237.

<sup>730</sup> See e.g.: “Grant now, O blessed, that even to Christians the prison is unpleasant; yet we were called to the warfare of the living God in our very response to the sacramental words. Well, no soldier comes out to the campaign laden with luxuries, nor does he go to action from his comfortable chamber, but from the light and narrow tent, where every kind of hardness, roughness and unpleasantness must be put up with. Even in peace soldiers inure themselves to war by toils and inconveniences—marching in arms, running over the plain, working at the ditch, making the *testudo*, engaging in many arduous labours. The sweat of the brow is on everything, that bodies and minds may not shrink at having to pass from shade to sunshine, from sunshine to icy cold, from the robe of peace to the coat of mail, from silence to clamour, from quiet to tumult. In like manner, O blessed ones, count whatever is hard in this lot of yours as a discipline of your powers of mind and body. You are about to pass through a noble struggle, in which the living God acts the part of superintendent, in which the Holy Ghost is your trainer, in which the prize is an eternal crown of angelic essence, citizenship in the heavens, glory everlasting” (Tertullian, “Ad Martyras,” III, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. Allan Menzies, in Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.vi.v.iii.html> [accessed February 2, 2010]).

<sup>731</sup> Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology, Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45.

equipment, so they must be finally defeated (VI, 43. 14). Despite the fact that they belong to the army of the devil, being his faithful servants and “members of his body” (V, int. 6. 25), they do not get any support from their leader. In fact, they are being cheated: their leader fights against them, desiring to kill them and damn their souls. Birgitta explains this mechanism using the somewhat grotesque parable of an army that was deceived by their enemy who promised to give them gold if they would unfasten their helmets and wear them “as he wishes” (II, 6. 3). When they agreed to do this and took off their helmets, he fastened them back to front. “The result was that the front part with the apertures to see through was at the back of their heads while the helmets’ back part covered their eyes so that they were unable to see. Shouting like this, he led them after him like blind men” (II, 6. 4). The king’s friends tried to call them back, but they did not listen (II, 6. 6–7). The king, seeing chaos in his army, turned to his friends who remained with him and asked them to offer peace and forgiveness to the enemies standing on the left-hand side. Surprisingly, they accepted the offer and were welcomed to the army (II, 6. 8–10). The text does not say why they decided to do it. One reason could have been the lack of any leader among the enemies: only one king is mentioned, and the sinister voice tricking the knights does not belong to the enemy ruler; it only described as “the devil’s voice” (II, 6. 12). It is thus possible that because of the chaos and panic caused by the blinded soldiers, the evil army decided to accept the offer of the only true leader.

It is remarkable that in Birgitta’s vision the army of God is full of dignity and glory (II, 13. 7), but the army of the devil does not have to be comparably terrifying. As we can see in this passage, sometimes they are portrayed as a party of fools. In another revelation Birgitta compares bad Christians to cowardly knights who try to stay away from the battle until it finishes: if their army

loses, they can run away easily, but if they win, they will move toward the front and enjoy the honors of victory.<sup>732</sup>

Nevertheless, even when Birgitta derides the sinners, she is concerned about the danger of sin. Therefore she suggests that Christians need to fight sin as an army, not individually: in Birgitta's vision, her son is given spiritual armor and weapons by Mary and the saints, as he nearly was killed in a battle fighting alone and without this armor (IV, 74. 9–10). This vision of two armies (II, 6) also suggests that the community of God's friends on earth should be well organized and disciplined like an army, standing on the right side of their king, ready to defend themselves against the enemy's attack (II, 6. 1).

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Apart from the purely spiritual dimension, the war between good and evil described in *Revelationes* has a social aspect as well. If, as we said in section 2.2.2, Birgitta perceives the two hostile societies—the city of God, and the city of the devil as visible and even to some extent identifiable with earthly societies—this is to be expected. It is noteworthy that the above-quoted revelation (VII, 11) describing the spiritual war as the essence of salvation history was addressed to the queen of Naples. The description of the war is immediately followed by a more personal message concerning her government, which, according to the rubrics, was kept secret and not

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<sup>732</sup> "Iste est mirabiliter armatus, sicut ille, qui esset positus in corporali bello, cuius galee foramina essent in occipite, cuius clipeus ponendus in brachio penderet in humeris, cuius gladio abiecto vagine remanerent vacue, cuius dyplois, que corpus et pectus defendere deberet, iaceret subtus eum in sella, cuius selle ligature in equo solute essent. Sic iste armatus est spiritualiter coram Deo, et ideo discernere nescit inter amicum et inimicum nec scit facere dampnum hosti. Spiritus vero qui pugnat cum eo est sicut ille, qui taliter cogitat: 'Ego volo esse cum ultimis in pugna, quod possim videre rubeta, si primi perdiderint bellum. Si vero vicerint, veniam ita velociter, quod computabor cum primis.' Ideo qui emisit bellum fecit secundum sapienciam carnalem et non ex caritate Dei" (IV, 27. 2-6).

included in the book of Birgitta's *Revelationes* (VII, 11. rubrics). The description of the war ends in the following way:

Ego enim desidero animas, ut tribuam eis eternum gaudium et honorem, dyabolus vero ut tribuat eternum horrorem et dolorem. Audi, quid regina fecerat michi. Ego permisi eam exaltare in regnum etc. (VII, 11. 6)

Personal advice follows. The context suggests that the universal war explains the situation not only in Joanna's kingdom but also in her own soul, as many of Birgitta's short messages to Joanna concern her personal spiritual condition: she is warned against evil advisers who hate her soul and try to deceive her (VII, 11. 23–26), as said in section 3.1.4.

While explaining the failure of King Magnus's crusade to Novgorod, Birgitta refers to the war in the king's soul as well: she says that Mary chose Magnus to become her adopted son because she wanted him to take part in her own struggle for the people to remember Jesus' passion and the salvation he won. Magnus was "separated from the devil" and from worldly love, and Mary decided to give him the honor of fighting the pagans "ad honorem Dei" (VIII, 47. 9–10). That is why the devil began to hate Magnus and tried to disturb his fight (VIII, 47. 11). Magnus is further compared to baby Moses, who was thrown into the water in a basket because of Pharaoh's evil plan to exterminate the chosen nation. God did not abandon Moses, however—he was saved by Pharaoh's daughter and found himself in the headquarters of his enemy, where he was brought up by Egyptians. At some point Moses was scared and ran away from Egypt, but then he returned to save his nation and defeat Pharaoh. God had not abandoned Magnus, either, but had entrusted him with the mission of leading Christians to fight pagans (VIII, 47. 11–13). Magnus was tempted by the devil, who sent him thoughts which seemed to be very rational: "God's friends do not know much about warfare. I shall consult people who know how to fight," thinks

the king in Birgitta's vision (VIII, 47. 14). Gradually, he began to organize the crusade with the help of professional but greedy people and neglected the help of God's friends, despite the fact that he knew how close they were to God and Mary. According to Birgitta the king became a victim of the devil's plan to scare and then eliminate him. The devil knew that many pagans would willingly become converted if they were to hear a good and pious preacher, so he sent all the stupid and selfish people to Magnus Eriksson, who unfortunately accepted them into his army (VIII, 47. 15–17).

Birgitta also says that during the war Mary tried to support the king's soldiers: she was "domina et defensatrix exercitus sui et regni sui et quod stare ante eum in terra inimicorum eius" (VIII, 47. 38), but failure was almost inevitable. The king allowed the "enemies of Mary," "resistentes fidei sancte," to run away (VIII, 47. 44). I think that in this vision Birgitta expresses her belief that the real fight with the pagans began long before the army left Sweden: it took place in the king's heart and conscience. The devil was already victorious when he scared the king and destroyed his good intention, for then the rest of the army could only follow their defeated leader. The physical, visible war with the pagans is therefore presented as an expression of spiritual warfare taking place in the king's heart. Moreover, King Magnus's fight is shown as part of the universal war fought by Christ and Mary, who did their best to make him their ally. Taking part in this war as a crusader was a privilege for Magnus, the sign of special a vocation and reward. It is remarkable that Birgitta claims that God and Mary take a very active part not only in the spiritual "wars" with sin, but also in real, non-metaphorical wars with the pagans or rather heretics, who are here presented as "enemies of Mary" (VIII, 47. 44).



One could ask here why pagans are here presented as “enemies of Mary” and not as “enemies of Christ.” Considering what we have already said in chapter 4 about the identification of Mary with the church in medieval theology and in Birgitta’s works (section 4.3.4), we can suggest that in this case a similar reasoning is present: Birgitta identifies Mary with the church, so enemies of the church are also hostile toward Mary.

Nevertheless, Birgitta says that war is not the only possible method of facing pagans. As mentioned, according to her the Swedish expedition did not have to lead to a battle; it could have turned into a missionary effort as well (see section 3.2.1). In fact, she also states that in the history of salvation pagans have a great and very positive role to play, as they can take the place of the unfaithful Christians, and the idea of replacing one group from among the hosts of God with the other appears to me as strongly rooted in Birgitta’s theology. In the revelation quoted by Mathias in his *Prologue*, Birgitta warns Swedish knights and nobles that they would be replaced by “the poor, the weak, the infants and the wretched” if they still refused to convert (*Prologue*, 39). This idea is probably inspired by the evangelical parable of the wedding feast. This parable says that all the friends and relatives of the groom refused to come to the feast, so the servants of the host went out to “highways and hedges” and invited everyone who was around, “as many as they found” (Luk 14:16–24; Mat 22:2–10).

Moreover, in another revelation (already mentioned in section 2.1.2), Birgitta says that people were created in order to replace the fallen angels:

Verum quia non decuit me habere diminucionem in exercitu meo, ideo creauī aliam creaturam, scilicet hominem, loco eorum, qui ceciderunt, que libero arbitrio et bona voluntate promereretur eandem dignitatem, quam angeli deseruerunt. (V, inter. 9. 17)

The creation of man was not, however, a simple repetition of the creation of angels, since people have a different nature from angels (see section 2.1.2). Birgitta further states that the hosts of God shrunk again as a result of the original sin and the outbreak of the war against God started by demons and accompanied by sinful people (II, 17. 20–21). Many returned to God’s army thanks to Christ, who brought them peace; these people can be identified generally with Christians (II, 6. 11). Unfortunately, some of them were fooled by the devil and they left God’s hosts again, so Christ turns now to pagans in order to fulfill the number of faithful (II, 6. 22–30; VI, 44. 8).

As we already said, Birgitta is of the opinion that the crusade should not be aimed at killing or conquering the pagans. Instead pagans should be converted, as she thought that Christ the King awaited them in his army (II. 6. 22–30). This is likely is the reason why Birgitta calls the Swedish expedition “*tempus gracie*,” a “time of grace” for pagans (VIII, 47. 17). It is also remarkable that, according to the gospel of Mark, preaching the good news to all nations must take place before Christ’s second coming. In other words, he will not return before all peoples hear his voice (Mar 13:10), so Birgitta could have thought that every missionary effort brings Parousia nearer.

Knowing that pagans are sometimes called in *Revelationes* “the enemies of Mary” and sometimes are seen as his potential friends, we may ask: who is therefore the real enemy of God according to Birgitta? Who is to be conquered? In revelation 8, 47, pagans are presented as evil because they “resist holy faith,” but it appears that in the text Mary speaks about them without much anger, whereas she is almost furious with king’s bad advisers when she says:

Et ante ipsum fui in terra inimicorum eius, quando maiores inimicos eius congregavi in unum locum terre, quos ei traditura eram. Paruo igitur tempore elapso accesserunt ad regem istum instrumenta dyaboli plena corde malo et maligno spiritu. Qui confidebant in manibus hominum plus quam in auxilio creatoris; quorum cupiditas maior fuit ad possessiones terrenas quam ad adiuvandum animas; quorum linguas ille excitavit ad loquendum, qui movit linguam lude ad vendendum creatorem suum; quorum dentes

eleuabantur digitis dyaboli; quorum frigida labia perlinita fuerunt veneno dyaboli.  
Propterea diuina caritas non sapuit eis, sed exspuentes verba veritatis falsitatem in ore  
habuerunt. (VIII, 47. 39–43)

According to this fragment, it seems that bad Christians are more hostile toward God than pagans, as they are named “instrumenta dyaboli” (VIII, 47. 40); so in fact they are presented as belonging to the enemy’s army even though they bring Christ’s banners with them.

Again, Birgitta’s opinion on the intention behind the act appears as the basic criterion of moral assessment. We have already said that, according to her, human deeds can be considered good or evil if they are voluntary and conscious. Otherwise, they cannot be really praised or condemned (see section 3.2.1). While advising the king about his crusade, Birgitta stresses the importance of preaching, as among the pagans there are people who would convert if they knew Christ (VIII, 47. 16). We can therefore suppose that according to Birgitta some pagans are not entirely conscious of their fault against truth and against Christ, and so their fault is not as heavy as the sin of unfaithfulness among Christians. Pagans are certainly “resisting the holy faith” (VIII, 47. 44) and their actions are dangerous to Christ’s friends. Still, they are shown as “temporary enemies” who must be fought, but not particularly feared or hated. The war against pagans or heretics apparently is shown in *Revelationes* as rational and righteous as long as it reflects the spiritual war against the powers of evil.

However, according to another revelation, sinners may sometimes be used to support God’s friends. In book 8 we find a revelation describing the world as a wild forest surrounded by a wall. The lord’s sheep live outside and wild beasts, inside the reservation (VIII, 18. 3). In the wall there are openings, so it is necessary to protect the sheep from the wild animals lurking outside.

Guards governed by the lord's hunter with his dogs keep watch. In this revelation, the hunter stands for divine justice, while his ferocious watchdogs stand for vicious men:

. . . viri iniquitatis, quibus Deus, quamuis sunt mali, utitur ad bonum, non sibi ipsis sed purgandis. Hii utique sunt quasi canes insaciabiles, qui consuescunt odire oues, impingere eas superbia, diripere eas vellere et pedibus conculcare. (VIII, 18. 19–20)

The hunter is shouting and blowing his horn to keep the guards watchful. The guards (who stand for clerics) are supposed to kill or scare away the beasts if they slip out of their reservation to the area of the sheep, but they sometimes forget their duty if not guarded themselves (VIII, 18. 8–10).

According to Birgitta, however, his voice is not clearly audible, so God's friends must do their best to keep justice themselves, but one day the voice of justice will sound again. The friends of God cannot know that day, so they must be watchful and await it:

Sed isti amici mei laborent sollicite, ut iusticia obseruetur et teneatur, communitas diligatur, honor Dei augeatur et rebelles et impii puniantur. Utrum autem vox iusticie mee veniet in diebus istorum an non, licitum non est eis scire. Sed ipsi stent firmiter et viriliter clament. Ego enim Deus veritas dabo eis mercedem veritatis. (VIII, 18. 24–25)

We can thus suggest that Birgitta was awaiting a special eschatological revelation of God's justice. It could be the Last Judgment, but there is no detailed information about it given here. Despite this ambiguity, the remark about the day when "the voice of justice will come" (VIII, 18. 25) can in my opinion point to an eschatological tension in Birgitta's view of the fate of Christian society, since she notices that "it is not for them to know if the voice of justice will come during their days" ("Utrum autem vox iusticie mee veniet in diebus istorum an non, licitum non est eis scire. Sed ipsi stent firmiter et viriliter clament" [VIII, 18. 25]), which may allude to the verse from the book of Acts:

They therefore who were come together, asked him, saying: Lord, wilt thou at this time

restore again the kingdom to Israel? But he said to them: It is not for you to know the times or moments, which the Father hath put in his own power. (Act 1:6–7)

In other passages of *Revelationes*, however, the war is explicitly presented as God's judgment. In the revelation quoted in Magister Mathias' prologue, Birgitta warns the Swedish nobility not only against being disinherited by "the poor, the weak, the infants and the wretched," but also against a physical punishment:

Abhominabili concupiscencia sic defluunt, ut, si eis possibile esset, magis me occiderent quam voluptatibus suis carere vellent, aut iudicium meum horribile, quod eis pro peccatis suis imminet, sustinerent. Et ideo corpora illa, de quibus superbiunt, occidentur gladio, lancea et securi. Membra illa speciosa, de quibus gloriantur, bestie et volucres lacerabunt. Bona, que contra voluntatem meam congregant, alieni diripient et ipsi egebunt. (Prologue, 35–36)

Here Birgitta states that sinners will be killed because they hate God to such an extent that they would rather kill him than give up their concupiscence. They will be thus conquered, because they fight against God. In this case it is certain that, according to Birgitta, a war will become an instrument of God's judgment and therefore a part of the universal war, probably related somehow to the last judgment. From the point of view of an individual, this prophesied war already has an eschatological nature, because for every sinner this punishment could be the final one: for him or her it may end with an eternal sentence in hell. Nevertheless, this war is not described as a punishment for individual people only, but for the sins of the kingdom of Sweden (Prologue, 38).

### 5.3. The Individual Judgment and the Final Judgment

Having analyzed the other periods of salvation history as seen from the perspective of the Christian kingdom (and society in general), we can now take a closer look at the final stage of this cosmic and historical drama.

As we have stated, according to *Revelationes* nations or kingdoms are subjects of moral assessment and actors in the history of salvation (see 3.2.2). The main, but not exclusive, responsibility for the condition of Christian society organized as a kingdom rests on the king, the nobility, and the clergy. In Birgitta's revelations, if a Christian society is a subject, they are usually objects of the prophetess' critic or warning (see chapter 3).

In late medieval theology it was generally agreed upon that eschatology concerns members of the Christian society in two dimensions. First, they all die and are judged immediately after they die. This individual judgment does not deal only with the private life of a person but also with his or her contribution to the life of the community. For some period of time, death excludes individuals from taking part in the course of history, but they will return into it after their resurrection. Before that, many are being purged. Unlike the saints and the damned, those in purgatory are not experiencing their final state yet, as they will finally join the saints in heaven, but their ultimate condition is already decided.<sup>733</sup> Second, all people will take part in the Final Judgment at the end of days. This judgment will not repeat the first trial or change its verdict. Instead, the meaning of the Final Judgment lies in restoring absolute justice: the world will return to its Creator and all sin will be destroyed. In this drama the main actor is the church, which finally

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<sup>733</sup> Coloman Viola, "Jugements de Dieu et jugement dernier: Saint. Augustin et la scolastique naissante (fin XIe-milieu XIIIe siècles)," in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, eds. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst and Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 253-268.

becomes the perfect city of God, the Jerusalem above (Gal 4:26). In both of these levels of judgment, the Christian society is involved: first as an environment of the individual history of salvation, and also as an environment of the life of the church.<sup>734</sup>

The similarly twofold character of eschatological events also can be seen in *Revelationes*. We have already examined the ambiguity of the seven plagues or war as a punishment for sins: Birgitta speaks of them as a prophet, stressing the nearness of the *Eschaton* and the necessity of vigilance, but it is also possible that she expects these events to be a punishment for certain sins, followed by long ages of subsequent history. For their participants, however, they would have a truly eschatological character. In my opinion, Birgitta's interpretation of current events in the light of *Parousia* is focused on the actuality of eschatology: "ecce filius meus venit," says Mary in one of the revelations (II, 24. 6). Birgitta was convinced that he is coming now, bringing the ultimate justice and confronting humans with the truth about themselves, but this "now" can be understood both as "the ultimate judgment of the entire world" and as "the ultimate judgment of a person."

This specific character of Birgitta's eschatological message is clearly visible in the visions of judgment she describes. In book 8 we find a description of the judgment of kings (VIII, 48). One of them, Magnus Eriksson, was still living, while two of his deceased predecessors were already in purgatory or hell (VIII, 48. 57). Birgitta presents the example of the two sinners to the king, as she hopes to inspire his repentance (VIII, 48. 69). "He lives still, so we understand this is not his final judgment, but something intermediate, meant as a warning to him, and to us, the spectators of

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<sup>734</sup> Viola, op. cit., 268-298.

this miniature drama,” says Penny Gill, who analyzes this revelation in detail.<sup>735</sup> What is therefore the nature of this “intermediate” judgment in Birgitta’s intention? Gill interprets the scene as a metaphor of the king’s situation presented to him by Birgitta in order to provoke his reaction.<sup>736</sup> In my opinion, this interpretation is true, but it would be useful to take into account the similarity between this scene and many other scenes of the individual judgment of deceased persons found in *Revelationes*. If we compare this revelation to the description of the judgment of the knight in II, 9. 18–33, we see that both scenes involve similar participants: the defendant soul, the Judge, his court, the guardian angel, and the “guardian” demon accompanying the defendant. The angel and the demon both try to convince the judge that they have a right to the soul. The only difference in the structure of these two types of revelation is the lack of a sentence in the case of the living soul. Instead of being sentenced, the defendant is warned and reproached (VIII, 48. 57–69).

Having in mind Birgitta’s special, prophetic attitude toward time (described in section 5.1.3), we can suggest that the judgment of the living king is something more than a metaphor only: in fact it is his individual judgment, but presented to him as “potential.” It is shown to him, in mystical way, what would happen to his soul if he died now, without repentance. This kind of “hypothetical” vision of eternity is found in other mystical writings, such as in the *Autobiography* of St. Teresa of Avila, who had seen a place in hell prepared for her. The vision was very realistic; nevertheless, she knew that she was not doomed to hell, as she was saved by Christ and had the will to do penance for her sins.<sup>737</sup>

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<sup>735</sup> Penny Gill, “The Judgement of the King,” in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1993), 1:128.

<sup>736</sup> Gill, loc. cit.

<sup>737</sup> *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 233-235.



In Birgitta's work we find a number of visions describing the judgment over a soul. Based on the above comparison between the scene of "potential" judgment of Magnus Eriksson and the other description of a king's judgment, I would propose organizing all of them into the following two types: descriptions of Birgitta's vision of a "real" or "actual" judgment that had already taken place, and prophetic visions of future judgment that Birgitta expects will take place in the future, if the person concerned does not change his or her life. I have observed that most of Birgitta's visions of judgment present an individual judgment, not the final one. These are, however, within the scope of this study, since many of them concern the social performance of the defendant. I think that the most important here are the visions of the judgment of kings, since Birgitta places great responsibility for societal life on the monarchs.

In revelation 48 in book 8, already mentioned above, Birgitta says that the king who dwells in purgatory committed heavy sins against his subjects:

Nam habitans in carne consolabatur de ablacione bonorum proximi sui, vulnerabat corda subditorum suorum non attendens dampna aliorum, dummodo ipse habundaret. Fecit quoque quidquid placuit sibi et quidquid voluit iussit et modicum curavit de equitate. (VIII, 48, 93–94)

She says here that he did not care for the rights of his subjects and hurt them both physically (in stealing their property) and spiritually (in failing to care for their salvation). These must be considered as very serious accusations against the king, and Birgitta says that he would surely deserve hell if it were not for his repentance shown in the very last moment of his life. He is forgiven and he may join the eternal society of saints, after he is purged: "erisque particeps sanguinis Christi et oracionum Matris eius et Ecclesie Dei," says divine Justice (VIII, 48. 204).

Birgitta further says that the other king did not show any repentance or love, so he found himself in hell after he died (VIII, 48. 173 and 180–181). But she admits that his way toward this terrible fate started unknowingly: he wanted to serve God, just not entirely. He wanted to reserve a part of his wealth, power, and abilities only for himself. Inspired by the devil, he says:

“Istud,” inquit, “est utile consilium. Potero quidem aliqua dare de meis, de quibus nullum habeo dampnum, que tamen Deus reputat maxima. Cetera vero seruabo in usus proprios et ad acquirendum amiciciam multorum.” (VIII, 48. 106)

He realizes afterward that his idea was sinful and dangerous, but he had wanted to postpone conversion till his last hour. When he was dying, however, he did not think about God anymore: he would rather live on earth forever and enjoy himself than die and live with God (VIII, 48. 122). In his last moment the verdict is announced and the king is symbolically dethroned by the Holy Trinity:

Aufer nunc a rege vas unccionis, quia peccauit in Deum patrem. Deus enim pater, qui eternaliter est in Filio et Spiritu Sancto, dedit legem veram et rectam per Moysen, sed iste rex constituit legem contrariam et peruersam. Verum quia iste rex aliqua bona fecit, licet non bona intencione, ideo permittitur ei possidere regnum ad dies suos, ut sic in mundo remuneretur. . . . Aufer ferrum acutissimum ab oculis regis, quia peccauit contra Filium Dei. Ipse enim dicit in Euangelio, quod iudicium sine misericordia fiet ei qui non facit misericordiam. Iste vero rex noluit iniuste afflicto facere misericordiam nec corrigere errorem suum, sed nec mutare peruersam voluntatem suam. . . . Auferatur a rege malleus, quia peccauit in Spiritum Sanctum. Spiritus enim Sanctus omnibus penitentibus remittit peccata. Iste vero rex usque ad finem perseuerare proponit in peccato suo. (VIII, 48. 124–127)

In this scene the king is therefore judged regarding his quality as a ruler. According to Birgitta, his function in the Christian kingdom proves to be decisive for his spiritual life and, consequently, for his eternal fate. He is doomed to hell because he was himself an unjust and unmerciful judge, which he never regretted. She says that the king agrees with this sentence, even if he does not approve of the conditions defined by God. He is crying over himself (“Ve michi!”), but he still

shows no regret (VIII, 48. 137–141). His understanding of himself after his death is, however, presented as being much different from what he thought about his own condition when he was still alive. He always knew that he did not serve God properly, but now he sees himself as a miserable and confused creature. Birgitta suggests here that death has opened his eyes and now he can see himself very clearly.<sup>738</sup>

Another vision of the judgment of a king is found in the same book (VIII, 56). This time the situation has an even more social character, as the scene shows heaven and a certain kingdom “under the sky”:

Post hec autem vidi, quasi quod omnes celi essent una domus, in qua sedebat in throno iudex, et domus plena erat seruatoribus et laudantibus iudicem unusquisque voce sua. Subtus vero celum videbatur unum regnum. (VIII, 56. 14)

Birgitta says that the judged king was still living, so we are presented with a series of his “hypothetical” trials,<sup>739</sup> or rather discussions, between Christ the Judge, an angel, and a devil. These discussions take place throughout various stages of the king’s life. Birgitta says that he is gradually falling into heavy sins and losing his spiritual orientation. He was given many good inspirations and spiritual gifts, but he preferred to pay attention to the devil’s inspirations (VIII, 56.

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<sup>738</sup> In my opinion the psychological depth of this analysis of sin and temptation is really appealing, but Penny Gill sees Birgitta as a cruel person, incapable of compassion: “It is tempting, for me, to imagine Bridget, with her shrill judgemental voice, always ‘forgetting mercy.’ God, or the source of Bridget’s visions, keeps trying to instruct her in this fundamental spiritual understanding. The issue of judgement-mercy comes up in the vast majority of her more than 700 revelations; it is as if she couldn’t quite ‘get it,’ and her vision-source kept repeating the lesson, in ever new images, trying to grow Bridget herself into a more deeply compassionate person” (Gill, op. cit., 130). There are however revelations which suggest that these “pedagogical efforts” of God were successful. For example, Birgitta reports a vision of Christ as a judge who must bring a case against his own brother, who is guilty. The judge suffers and regrets that he must sentence the one he loves, but otherwise he would prove unjust (II, 12. 15-30). This text could show Birgitta’s idea of relations between passion and mercy in a quite different light.

<sup>739</sup> “Hec, que ostensa sunt, non sunt propter merita regis, cuius anima nondum iudicata est sed in extremo puncto vocacionis sue iudicanda erit” (VIII, 56, 63).

27–28). The result described by the visionary is terrible—not only for himself, but also for his kingdom, as his sin was the reason for his bad government, which resulted in wars and chaos. The king inspired many people to become cruel and iniquitous as he promoted the wicked, especially elevating one man who did not deserve it and hating his good advisers, including his own son (VIII, 56. 47–52). It is thus possible to identify this king with Magnus Eriksson, since we know that Birgitta accused him of the same fault (see section 3.1.3). The royal sin is here described as infecting his realm like a disease, reaching further and further, bringing destruction upon the public life of the kingdom. After having heard the accounts of the guardian angel and the devil, the divine Judge declares that the king deserves severe judgment, because he has separated himself from God and abused the spiritual and corporal gifts he received from the merciful Creator (VIII, 56. 62).

That statement brings this part of the vision to a close. Birgitta now describes a new scene: the Final Judgment of kings and princes, expressed in the same prophetic (“hypothetical”) manner (VIII, 56, 64–96). I think that vision can be regarded as a summary and culmination of Birgitta’s theological thought concerning the Christian kingdom and its ultimate fate.

The vision starts with the call of the court usher<sup>740</sup> (“*vocem quasi preconis*”), who calls the whole world to pay attention to the verdict announced by Christ the Emperor (VIII, 56. 64). The sentence is passed upon kings and princes living on earth. Birgitta reports that while hearing the voice she saw the whole celestial court entering the place of judgment. First Abraham and the patriarchs entered, then the prophets and the four Evangelists in the form of the four animals

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<sup>740</sup> “*Preco*” could be also translated as “herald”, see: “*Quod intelligens dominus ait preconis famulo suo: ‘Vade,’ inquit, ‘et clama alta voce militibus meis sic: Ego dominus liberabo castrum meum’*” (IV, 65. 5).

("sicut in parietibus depinguntur in mundo"). She noticed the twelve apostles sitting on their thrones.<sup>741</sup> Then Adam and Eve came in with all the saints, their descendants (VIII, 56. 66–68).

She goes on to say that everyone awaited Christ and his mother, who were not yet present (VIII, 56. 68). Then Birgitta states that she suddenly saw a different scene: a holy mass celebrated on earth. All the celestial hosts—sun, moon, stars, and planets—praised God with beautiful music when the priest consecrated the host and the wine. In the host, Birgitta saw the lamb, the face of a man, and the flame (VIII, 56. 74–75). From this moment on, her vision is narrated from two points of view: the cosmic drama of the judgment intermingles with the liturgy. I think it likely that the structure of this description is aimed at showing the universal importance of the actions taken up by the church on earth in the name of Christ, whose presence in the liturgy is depicted as having a value comparable to his physical appearance on the Day of Judgment.

It is remarkable that Birgitta includes in this description different groups of "citizens" of the society of God's friends: people living on earth, saints, and angels. This idea, not surprising if seen in context of her general concept of this society as discussed in chapter 2, can also have specific theological connotations: according to the epistle to the Hebrews, Abraham and the patriarchs had not yet received "what was promised to them," because God did not want them "to be perfected without us" (Heb 11:39–40). In early Christian and medieval theology, this verse was interpreted as speaking about the glory of heaven: the saints enjoy *visio beatifica*, but until the whole body of Christ becomes united in heaven, their joy will not be perfect.<sup>742</sup> We also said that

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<sup>741</sup> This fragment points to eschatological character of the scene, cf. "vos qui secuti estis me in regeneratione cum sederit Filius hominis in sede maiestatis suae sedebitis et vos super sedes duodecim iudicantes duodecim tribus Israel" (Mat 19:28).

<sup>742</sup> See for example: "Non enim est illis perfecta laetitia, donec pro erroribus nostris dolent et lugent nostra peccata. Hoc fortasse mihi dicenti non credas; quis enim ego sum, qui confirmare sententiam tanti dogmatis audeam?"

according to Birgitta the church is as close to Christ as his body or his family, so the friends of God are members of his body (section 4.3.3). Therefore, in Birgitta's revelation he is shown a judge accompanied by his friends—the perfect church of the saints, who take part in passing this sentence. We can also suggest that according to this text the final assessment of the deeds of an individual person depends very much on his or her attitude towards the friends of Christ, who will judge the deeds of their neighbors.

In Birgitta's vision, the kings are judged by seven groups of people: the community of the realm still dwelling on earth, members of this community who died and were damned in hell, those who suffer in purgatory, the patriarchs, the prophets, the four Evangelists, and the apostles. They all request a severe verdict for earthly rulers, but each group brings different accusations against them. "Voices from the earth" accuse their rulers of cruelty and injustice. Wicked rule has led to wars, murders, and rapes, but the kings did not care about it, even if thousands of their subjects were killed, as long as they could satisfy their own pride (VIII, 56. 77–79). "Voices from hell" bring up different accusation. We have already said that in the moment of death the soul of a king acquired a new ability to see spiritual matters and the truth about his life much more clearly. The same appears to be true of these souls in hell: they capture the sense of their rulers' guilt more precisely. They blame their lords for driving them to despair and deadly sin. They accuse the kings with the following words:

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Sed adhibeo horum testem, de quo non potes dubitare: 'Magister' enim 'gentium est in fide et veritate' Apostolus Paulus. Ipse igitur ad Hebraeos scribens, cum enumerasset omnes sanctos patres, qui per fidem iustificati sunt, addit post omnia etiam hoc: 'Sed isti' inquit 'omnes testimonium habentes per fidem nondum adsecuti sunt repromissionem, Deo pro nobis melius aliquid providente, uti ne sine nobis perfectionem consequerentur' . . . . Expectat et Isaac et Iacob et omnes prophetae expectant nos, ut nobiscum perfectam beatitudinem capiant. Propter hoc ergo etiam mysterium illud in ultimam diem dilate iudicii custoditur" (Origen, *Homélies sur le Lévitique*, VII, 2, 111-124, ed. Marcel Borret [Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1981], 316).

Ipsi quippe domini nostri terreni absque caritate dilexerunt nos, quia non plus curabant de animabus nostris quam de canibus. Quibus dominis nostris indifferens fuit, utrum dileximus te Deum, creatorem omnium, an non, cupientes diligi et serui a nobis. Propterea indigni sunt celo, quia non curant de te, et digni sunt inferno, nisi eis succurrat gracia tua, quia nos prodiderunt. (VIII, 56. 81–82)

“Loving without mercy” (VIII, 56. 81) appears as the essence of royal sin against the community. As Tore Nyberg notes, in Birgitta’s theology, mercy and justice are the two most important modes of God’s actions in the world,<sup>743</sup> so the king who executed God’s power on earth is here judged according to these two criteria. Earth-dwellers mentioned the injustice of their lords, and now the damned ones speak about their lack of mercy.

Birgitta pays much attention to the question of the relationship between divine justice and mercy. She analyzed this subject in many of her revelations, always stressing the complementary character of these two attributes of God. She was strongly convinced that understanding and recognizing God’s judgment is closely related to recognizing his mercy.<sup>744</sup> She writes that people who neglect Christ’s justice and still count on his mercy will be disappointed, or they will rather disappoint themselves, like the deceased king who wanted to postpone his conversion but then forgot about it and his heart became obdurate (VIII, 48. 162). She observes that God’s actions are never merciful without justice, nor are they just but unmerciful. When Birgitta wonders about this matter, Christ reveals to her that he is merciful even to the sinners in hell. He is hurt if one of his beloved brothers must be sentenced to eternal suffering, but he cannot save anyone against their will (II, 12. 15–19).

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<sup>743</sup> Tore Nyberg, "St. Bridget's Charism and Prophecy for Our Time," in *Santa Brigida, profeta dei tempi nuovi: Atti dell'incontro internazionale di studio Roma, 3-7 ottobre 1991* (Rome: Casa Generalizia Suore Santa Brigida, 1993), 406-409.

<sup>744</sup> Nyberg, *op. cit.*, 406.

Moreover, it appears that justice and mercy are presented in *Revelationes* as the two attributes of Christ. For Birgitta, a personal relationship with him is the ultimate criterion of judgment, so his justice and mercy do not have an abstract character and are not discussed in isolation from the person of Christ and from each other. According to Birgitta, it is always merciful Christ and righteous Christ who passes judgment—not abstract justice or love.

This subject is touched upon in the next part of the discussed revelation (VIII, 56). The next four groups of prosecutors in the cosmic trial—the patriarchs, the prophets, the Evangelists, and the apostles—bring up one common accusation. They all claim that rulers hold Christ in contempt and neglect his salvation (VIII, 56. 87–92). It is remarkable that this question is taken up by the citizens of the “*civitas gloriae*.” They are here presented as fully focused on Christ, because according to Birgitta the essence of eternal life and *visio beatifica* is to enjoy God (*frui*) and contemplate him (see section 5.4 below).

It appears that according to this revelation justice and mercy ought to be the framework of royal government, but they must also govern the life of the Christian community in general. The same moral conditions are applicable to private and public life, but the moral responsibility of those acting in public is greater; therefore their justice and mercy decide the eternal fate of the whole community and must be judged by this community.

Even though Birgitta perceives justice and mercy as inseparable, she knows that God may reveal himself as righteous or as merciful depending on man’s decisions and the historical moment. She writes that the time she lives in is the time of mercy, but it will be followed by the time of divine justice, a time of judgment and punishment for those who do not listen to the voice of mercy (Prologue, 3–5). In my opinion this dialectical movement of justice and mercy is a



characteristic feature of Birgitta's prophetic proclamation. In the revelation quoted in the *Prologue* she expresses her conviction that her duty as a prophet is to warn people of the approaching time of justice and call them to accept God's mercy. As we have suggested above, according to several revelations, this "time of justice" can be to some extent identified with the Final Judgment.

#### **5.4. "Civitas Gloriam": The Ultimate Aim of the Christian Society**

To me it appears that "celestia" ("the heavenly things") is the expression most often used in *Revelationes* to describe heaven. "Celestia" had a notable influence on the Christian social life as shown in *Revelationes*. Birgitta rebuked her royal patrons for turning their attention down to earth instead of raising their heads up to heaven (Extrav. 78. 1–3). The same criticism also is valid for the priests (IV, 133. 14) and for Christian people in general (II, 20. 16). We could interpret these texts as speaking about a target which should be always in Christians' mind to help them build a true "civitas Dei" on earth. "The heavenly things" are here to some extent identifiable with future things, since Birgitta compares the bad priests to asses looking under their feet and not caring about "celestia," and she explains this metaphor as dealing with the future:

. . . stant quasi asinus, qui caput inclinat ad terram: sic ipsi stolidi et insipientes semper terrena meditantur et presenciam, numquam futura. (IV, 133. 14)

It is noticeable that these warnings always concern a community or a public person, such as a king, but not the private life of individuals. We can thus suggest that the idea of "celestia" includes the social character of heaven.

But what does *Revelationes* really mean by "heavenly things"? This general expression is often contrasted with "terrena," "earthly things" or "earthly matters," and describes the eternal life. It is quite characteristic that Birgitta chose such a general word as her most frequent

description of the problem which, according to her, stands at the center of the Christian social life. In Birgitta's work we do not find suggestive visions of heavenly joys comparable to her visions of sufferings in hell. Penny Gill explains this state of things by Birgitta's inability to imagine good.<sup>745</sup> It we look at the following text, this opinion appears fully convincing:

Ei vero qui in carcere natus fuit dixit mater: "O, fili, si volueris egredi a tenebris, habebis cibum delicaciorem, lectum molliorem et tuciorum locum." Quod puer audiens egressus est, quia si mater promisisset sublimiora, scilicet vel currentes equos vel domos eburneas aut latam familiam, non credidisset, quia nichil nouerat nisi tenebras et lac maternum; sic et Deus quandoque parua promittit, in quibus alciora intelligit, ut homo per temporalia addiscat celestia cogitare. (IV, 15. 5–7)

However, in my opinion, Birgitta's emphasis is a bit different. I understand that she says here that heaven is indeed difficult to imagine for earth dwellers, but not because it is boring or impossible to visualize in this vale of tears. The reason is different: heaven is much more beautiful and exciting than people expect. It would be also useful to remember that in a different revelation Birgitta says that corporeal senses cannot perceive celestial, spiritual realities as they are, so God presents "celestia" as "corporalia" (see section 1.4.4).

It is necessary to notice the similarity between this allegory of the child born in prison who does not know "the real world" and Plato's allegory of the cave. In both parables, the world perceived by the prisoner is not in fact the real one, but only a shadow or a small fraction of spiritual reality.<sup>746</sup> Plato spoke about a philosopher who leaves the cave, sees the real world, and then returns to his fellow prisoners to tell them about it. It is thus possible that Birgitta comments here on her identity as a prophetess, who, being "a prisoner" herself, looks out of the window and

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<sup>745</sup> Penny Gill, "The Judgement of the King," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1993), 1:133.

<sup>746</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, IV, 514a-517a, trans. Reginald E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 227-228.

notices some of “the real houses, horses, and people” (IV, 16. 6) and who is now trying to tell her companions about these things. She describes them generally as “celestia” to make complicated things simple.

In the introduction, we said that according to Birgitta God lets people know “celestia” through “temporalia,” as the visible world resembles the invisible one. She says that God gives temporal goods to people in order to teach them to love spiritual goods. We noted that Birgitta apparently thought this the general rule of God’s actions throughout the history of salvation (section 1.4).

Among the temporal goods mentioned by Birgitta there is the fatherland (“patria”). According to revelation 15 in book 4, the Promised Land served as a model and example for Jews who learned to love it on account of the miracles they had seen, their own efforts to conquer the land, and the words of the prophets, who taught them how to understand corporeal things spiritually (IV, 15. 18–22). It is possible that in Birgitta’s theology the Christian kingdom plays an analogical role. The sense of its existence lies in its resembling and foretelling the glory of the “heavenly fatherland” (“patria celestis”). This supposition is based on the following:

Birgitta uses the word “patria” quite often, but in most cases she speaks about Sweden, her native country, or about someone else’s home country. In several contexts, however, she means the heavenly kingdom.<sup>747</sup> Her descriptions of heaven as the fatherland have two important connotations. First, they bear the connection with “hereditas Christi,” discussed in chapter 4. Christians are entitled to inherit the property of their Father, their “patria,” but it won’t be fully realized until the end of days. Second, “patria” is in Birgitta’s work contrasted with “peregrinatio,”

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<sup>747</sup> See: IV, 18. 21; IV, 65. 10; IV, 75. 37; VIII, 48. 107-109.

pilgrimage, meaning both pilgrimage as a symbol of man's life on earth and a journey made in search of spiritual experience.

Birgitta attempts to present the Christian life on earth from the point of view of "patria," not the pilgrimage. According to her, loving pilgrimage more than one's home country is a sign of disordered love and the friends of God should try to overcome it in order to find the right way to their home country (III, 28. 4). She admits that the path is narrow and sometimes almost invisible under the thickets and thorn bushes that have grown up since Christ, the divine Pilgrim, prepared this road, as not many people love their fatherland and try to find the way home (I, 15. 23). Most of them prefer the broad and open way that leads to hell. The friends of Christ, who travel to their heavenly homeland like migrating birds, moving from bush to bush, should now try to make this road accessible again. The time has come to call back those who have forgotten that they are not at home in this world (II, 15. 28–35). Still, the temporary desires and loves, including the love of one's earthly fatherland, should make up parts along the way leading to the heavenly kingdom, not only obstacles, since the visible things are here to teach the friends of God about the invisible ones (see section 1.4.4).

The small prisoner in Birgitta's allegory (IV, 15) has a brother who was also born in miserable conditions: in a small, poor hut. His mother encouraged him to seek happiness outside their prison, so the boy went out and noticed a strange scene:

Vidi, inquit, mirabilem ludum in stadio: alii prosternebantur et conculcabantur, alii denudabantur et mortificabantur, attamen omnes tacebant, omnes ludebant, nullusque contra prosternentes se leuauit caput seu manum. (IV, 15. 10–11)

His mother explains that what he saw is a suburb of the city of glory, "suburbium civitatis gloriae," a place where prospective citizens of this city must fight a battle in order to demonstrate their

courage and vigilance. Those who had proven to be the most arduous are let inside the city, where they enjoy “gaudium interminabile et indicibile honorque sine fine” (IV, 15. 9).

We discussed the expression “civitas gloriae” used by Birgitta to describe heaven (section 2.2.2). Using this expression, Birgitta accents the eternal and transcendental aspect of the community of faith. She says, however, that in this life even the most zealous friends of God cannot get further than to “the suburbs” of this city. Revelation 4, 15 suggests that it is accessible only in the future life, since those who are being prepared in its suburbs reach their glorious crown inside the city (IV, 15. 12–13).

Above, we briefly mentioned the Augustinian distinction between enjoying (“frui”) something it for its own sake (“propter se ipsum”) and using things as a means for obtaining something else (“propter uti”). In *De civitate Dei* we read that citizens of the city of God do not desire anything, as their desires find their end in God. They enjoy the One whom they loved already on earth.<sup>748</sup>

In *Revelationes* the concept of enjoyment (“frui”) as a description of eternal life is also present. Birgitta says that “spiritual taste,” a quality of the God-loving soul, begins already in this life but reaches its fullness in heaven “sine fine in celis in fruicione et dulcedine Dei” (II, 14. 34). She also says that the sanctuary mentioned in the prophecy of Isaiah (“sanctum sanctorum”) signifies “desiderium diuine fruicionis et visionis” (III, 27. 29). This enjoyment is synonymous with eternity both in St. Augustine and in St. Birgitta’s work. In the heavenly kingdom, the joy of the members of the Christian society will be full because it will be without end (IV, 15. 9). It is also

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<sup>748</sup> Augustine, “City of God,” XXII, 30, trans. Marcus Dods, in vol. 2 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, in the Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XXII.30.html> (accessed February 5, 2010).

important to notice that Birgitta describes eternity as a royal crown, because the crown is round (without an end)<sup>749</sup>, so we can suppose that to some extent she could interpret the crown worn by Magnus Eriksson as a symbol of eternity as well. It appears therefore that Birgitta imagined eternal happiness as a social experience even when she described her very personal longing for eternity or Christ's tender promises given to her, she portrayed heaven as the society, the eternal "us," in accordance with the pattern established by the Scripture and by Augustine, who ends his *De civitate Dei* in the following way:

There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end?<sup>750</sup>

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In this chapter, we have summarized the threads of thought started in the previous parts of this dissertation, focusing on the eschatological perspective present in *Revelationes*. We have said that Birgitta presents herself and is presented by Magister Mathias as a prophetess who should prepare Sweden for the "time of God's justice," an apocalyptic punishment, which, according to her, is to be expected if the Swedish knights and king neglect "the time of mercy" given them by God as a chance to repent. We briefly discussed the relationship between the ideas of justice and mercy as presented in *Revelationes*. We also noticed that Birgitta presents heaven in a more abstract manner than hell, which is explained in *Revelationes* by her inability to imagine "celestia," so different from earthly things. This chapter closes with the observation that Birgitta depicts

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<sup>749</sup> "Ego eciam sum rex corone. Numquid, sponsa mea, scis tu, quare dixerim 'rex corone'? Certe deitas mea sine principio erat et sine fine erit et est. Hec igitur deitas merito corone assimilatur, quia corona sine principio et sine fine est. Sicut autem in regno corona seruatur regi futuro, sic deitas mea seruabatur humanitati mee, qua ipsa coronaretur" (VIII, 1. 24-25).

<sup>750</sup> Augustine, op. cit., 511.

heaven as a social phenomenon, which is a simple observation, but it can be better understood in the context of Birgitta's idea of the Christian society presented earlier in this dissertation.

### **Summary**

In my study I aimed at presenting the broad view of St. Birgitta's political and theological thought, focusing on the specific relationship between the Christian political community, organized in the form of a kingdom, and the eternal kingdom of heaven. I called this relation "an image," as according to Birgitta the nature and functions of a Christian kingdom should reflect the properties of the heavenly kingdom.

Explaining the origins of kingship and political life, Birgitta refers to earlier historical events. She also assumed that some of the rules and patterns of human behavior do not change too much, regardless of changing times and social conditions. In her eyes that makes history an endless source of examples and stories with universal moral significance. Moreover, some historical events also bear a prophetic meaning and are designed by God to be understood spiritually. Generally,

Birgitta took part in public life because she was convinced that she knew the general rules governing the realm of human affairs and that those rules could frequently be derived from the history of salvation and from the general history of mankind.

St. Birgitta had a developed concept of history, both secular and ecclesiastical. In her view, they both bore a spiritual meaning, so it was possible to interpret these two types of history according to similar criteria. Her ideas were in some points original, but generally she did not put the question of history in the center of her doctrine. She rather used historical arguments to support her opinions on current political and social matters and to express some theological views, as the teaching of the history of salvation is an essential part of Christian faith.

Morality was not a private matter in the Middle Ages. For example, the ruler needed advice and instruction both as a person and as a politician, responsible before God in his conscience, but also before his fellow men. On this ground, the literary genre of The King's Mirror came into being. Book 8 of *Revelationes*, called *Liber ad reges*, arranged by Alfonso Pecha de Jaén as Birgitta's message for kings, follows the rules of this genre. Most of the Mirrors, however, address an unspecified king, whereas Birgitta's advice and warnings always concern specific people. Thanks to Alfonso's editorial work they acquired a more general meaning, but we must remember that St. Birgitta was not a political theorist herself, even though her advice for the king was based on general knowledge and judgment. Despite its title, *Liber ad reges* did not deal with kings exclusively. Birgitta was also interested in the public performance and the morality of the king's advisers, in nobility, and in all the statuses within Christian society. Members of each of these groups were supposed to fulfill the moral duties resulting from their place in the hierarchy of the church, which is in fact part of the great heavenly hierarchy.



As *Civitas Dei* on earth is so closely bound up with *Civitas gloriae* in heaven, Birgitta expected that the same rules that govern the eternal kingdom will be also valid on earth. Therefore, we can assume that the society of God's friends should be modeled according to its eternal prototype. Moreover, every Christian's duty and privilege is to follow Christ and imitate his path in various aspects—to imitate his kingship, among other things. There is no reason to believe that this applies only to the private sphere of life. Consequently, the close relationship between the earthly and the heavenly kingdoms of God's friends can be described as imitating the prototype.

When St. Birgitta spoke about the apocalypse and the second coming of Christ, she did it because she considered herself (and was considered by others) to be a prophet. Placed outside the structures of power, she was able to transmit the words of God addressed to rulers and popes straightforwardly and honestly. As part of her prophetic duty, Birgitta also imitated Christ, who was unwanted and persecuted by his fellow citizens. As a prophet, Birgitta had a strong awareness of the approaching apocalypse. It was her duty to prepare Sweden and the Christian world for these final events.

God gives temporal joy to people in order to teach them to love spiritual merits. That was the general rule of God's actions throughout the history of salvation. For example, the Promised Land served as a model for the Jews who learned how to love it and thus became capable of developing a desire for possessing their spiritual, eternal homeland. In St. Birgitta's theology, the Christian kingdom plays an analogical role. The meaning of its existence lies in its resembling and foretelling the glory of the heavenly fatherland, the *patria celestis*.

## RESUMÉ

I min afhandling har jeg forsøgt at give et bredt indtryk af den hellige Birgittas politiske og teologiske tanker og særligt at fokusere på, hvordan hun opfatter forbindelsen mellem det kristne politiske samfund – det kristne kongedømme – og himlens evige kongedømme. Denne forbindelse har jeg kaldt *imago*, "et image", fordi et kristent kongedømme i sin natur og i sine funktioner ifølge Birgitta nøje skulle reflektere eller gengive det himmelske kongedømme.

Når Birgitta skal forklare, hvordan kongedømme og politisk liv opstår, viser hun tilbage til tidligere historiske begivenheder. Hun regner også med, at nogle af reglerne for menneskelig opførsel og de mønstre, vi lever efter, ikke ændrer sig særligt meget, selvom tiderne ændrer sig og de sociale omstændigheder ændrer sig. Som Birgitta ser det, bliver historie på den måde en endeløs kilde af eksempler og fortællinger med universel eller almindelig moralsk betydning. Nogle af disse begivenheder har også har en profetisk mening og er bestemt af Gud til at skulle forstås spirituelt eller åndeligt. Birgitta tog del i det offentlige liv, fordi hun var overbevist om, at hun kendte de generelle regler, som styrer den menneskelige sfære, og at disse regler som regel kunne udledes af frelseshistorien og på menneskehedens almindelige historie.

Birgitta havde en veludviklet opfattelse af historie, både den verdslige og den kirkelige. Ifølge hende har de begge en spirituel mening, så det er muligt at tolke de to former for historie efter de samme kriterier. På mange måder er hendes idéer om historie originale, men alligevel er spørgsmålet om, hvad historie er, ikke det centrale for hendes doktrin. Hun bruger snarere de historiske argumenter til at understøtte sin egen opfattelse af den daglige politik og af sociale spørgsmål og til at udtrykke nogle af sine teologiske synspunkter, således at læren om frelseshistorien bliver en integreret eller essentiel del af den kristne tro.

Moral var ingen privatsag i middelalderen. En hersker havde brug for rådgivning og for at få instruktion både som enkeltperson og som politiker, og han var ansvarlig overfor Gud og i sin samvittighed, men også ansvarlig overfor sine medmennesker. Det er baggrunden for den litterære genre med kongespejl. Den syvende bog af "Åbenbaringerne" er kaldt "Bogen til konger", og den var blevet arrangeret eller organiseret af Alfonso Pecha de Jaén, som Birgittas meddelelse til konger, og den fulgte denne genres regler ganske nøje. De fleste kongespejle er henvendt til en ikke specifik konge, men Birgittas råd og advarsler er altid rettet til ganske bestemte personer. Pga. Alfonsos bearbejdelse af arbejdet bagefter fik Birgittas regler en mere generel betydning, men vi skal huske, at Birgitta ikke var en politisk teoretiker, selvom hendes råd til konger var bygget på generel viden og omdømme. Selvom værket hedder "Bogen til konger", så drejer den sig ikke udelukkende om konger. Birgitta var også interesseret i, hvordan det offentlige liv fungerede og i kongens rådgiveres moral, i adelen og i alle dele af det kristne samfund. Medlemmer af hver enkelt gruppe skal opfylde deres moralske pligter, som er afhængige af, hvilken plads de har i kirkens hierarki, som igen er en del af det store himmelske hierarki.

Fordi Guds stad her på jorden er så tæt forbundet med ærens stad i himlen, så regnede Birgitta også med, at de samme regler, som styrer det himmelske kongedømme, også skal gælde her på jorden. Derfor kan vi regne med, at Guds venners selskab skal efterligne den evige prototype. Desuden er det enhver kristens pligt og privilegium at følge Kristus og følge i hans fodspor og efterligne ham i alle mulige måder, dvs. også at efterligne hans kongedømme eller herredømme. Den tætte forbindelse mellem Guds venners jordiske og himmelske kongedømme kan beskrives som et forsøg på at efterligne en prototype.

Når den hellige Birgitta talte om Apokalypsen og om Kristi anden komme, så gjorde hun det, fordi hun anså sig selv for en profet, og hun blev anset for en profet. Hun stod udenfor magten og derfor var hun i stand til at overlevere Guds ord til herskere og paver direkte og ærligt. I sit profetiske hverv efterlignede Birgitta også Kristus, som blev forkastet og forfulgt af sin samtid. Som profet havde Birgitta en meget stærk fornemmelse af, at Apokalypsen nærmede sig. Det var hendes pligt at forberede Sverige og hele den kristne verden på disse sidste tiders begivenheder.

Gud giver mennesket timelige glæder, således at han kan lære dem at elske de åndelige glæder. Sådan har Guds handlinger almindeligvis virket igennem frelseshistorien. Det forjættede land f.eks. blev en model for jøderne, som lærte at elske det og derfor også blev i stand til at udvikle et ønske om at komme i besiddelse af deres åndelige evige hjemland. I Birgittas teologi spiller det kristne kongedømme en lignende rolle. Meningen med det kristne kongedømme er, at det ligner og fortæller om det kommende himmelske fædrelands ære, om *patria celestis*.

## STRESZCZENIE

Celem niniejszej pracy jest prezentacja polityczno-teologicznej myśli świętej Brygidy, a szczególnie specyficznej relacji między chrześcijańską społecznością polityczną zorganizowaną w formie królestwa a królestwem niebieskim. Relację tę nazwałam obrazem, ponieważ zgodnie z opinią świętej Brygidy, natura i działanie chrześcijańskiego królestwa powinny być odbiciem właściwości królestwa niebieskiego.

Aby wyjaśnić pochodzenie chrześcijańskiego królestwa i życia politycznego w ogóle, Brygida odwołuje się do wydarzeń historycznych. Zakłada także, że pewne zasady czy też wzory ludzkiego zachowania są niezmiennie, niezależne od warunków społecznych. Czyni to w jej oczach historię niewyczerpanym źródłem przykładów i opowieści o uniwersalnym znaczeniu moralnym. Ponadto niektóre wydarzenia historyczne niosą w sobie także znaczenie profetyczne i zgodnie z Bożym zamysłem mają być rozumiane w sposób duchowy. Celem udziału Brygidy w życiu publicznym było przekazywanie władcom szczegółowych wskazówek opartych na ogólnych zasadach czerpanych z historii zbawienia i z historii ludzkości w ogóle.

W pismach świętej Brygidy znajdujemy rozwiniętą koncepcję historii świeckiej i historii zbawienia. Jej zdaniem, oba te rodzaje historii niosą w sobie znaczenie duchowe, możliwe do odczytania i interpretacji według podobnych kryteriów. W pewnych punktach jej koncepcja jest oryginalna, ale zasadniczo reprezentuje główny nurt chrześcijańskiej historiografii tamtego czasu. Zresztą kwestia historii i jej interpretacji, choć ważna, nie jest jednak centralnym problemem *Objawień*. Brygida posługuje się po prostu argumentami historycznymi aby poprzeć swoje stanowisko w kwestii bieżących wydarzeń politycznych i spraw społecznych, a także aby wyrazić

pewne kwestie o charakterze teologicznym, jako że historia zbawienia jest integralną częścią wiary chrześcijańskiej.

W średniowieczu moralność nie była sprawą wyłącznie prywatną. Władca na przykład mógł otrzymywać wskazówki zarówno jako osoba prywatna, jak i jako polityk, odpowiedzialny w swoim sumieniu przed Bogiem, ale także przed bliźnimi. Jako odpowiedź na potrzebę takich wskazań moralnych powstawały dzieła zaliczane do gatunku literackiego zwanego „zwierciadłem króla”. Księga VIII *Objawień*, czyli *Liber ad reges*, została skompilowana przez Alfonso Pecha de Jaén jako przekaz Brygidy dla królów zgodnie z regułami tego gatunku, choć większość „zwierciadeł” adresowana była do króla w ogólności, nie tylko do pojedynczego władcy, miały więc charakter teoretyczny, podczas gdy objawienia Brygidy zawsze dotyczą konkretnych osób. Dzięki pracy edytorskiej Alfonsa nabrały znaczenia bardziej ogólnego, ale trzeba pamiętać, że sama Brygida nie była teoretykiem myśli politycznej, nawet jeśli jej konkretne wskazówki oparte były na pewnej ogólnej wiedzy i osądzie. *Liber ad reges* nie dotyczy jednak wyłącznie królów. Brygida interesowała się także publicznym zachowaniem i moralnością doradców króla, szlachty i pozostałych stanów społeczeństwa chrześcijańskiego. Osoby należące do każdej z tych grup powinny wykonywać obowiązki moralne wynikające z zajmowanego przez siebie miejsca w hierarchii kościelnej, która jest także częścią hierarchii niebieskiej.

*Civitas Dei* na ziemi jest ściśle związana z *Civitas gloriae* w niebie, dlatego Brygida oczekuje, że te same reguły, które rządzą wiecznym Królestwem będą obowiązywać także na ziemi. Możemy wobec tego zakładać, że społeczność przyjaciół Bożych na ziemi będzie odwzorowaniem jej odwiecznego prototypu: skoro obowiązkiem i przywilejem każdego chrześcijanina z osobna jest naśladowanie Chrystusa, m. in. naśladowanie Jego królowania, a nie ma powodu by twierdzić, że

reguła ta dotyczy tylko prywatnej sfery życia, to bliską relację między ziemskim i niebieskim Królestwem Bożych przyjaciół także można nazwać odwzorowywaniem pierwowzoru.

Kiedy święta Brygida mówi o Apokalipsie i powtórny przyjsciu Chrystusa, czyni to jako prorok. Stojąc poza ziemskimi strukturami władzy, mogła bezinteresownie i dosłownie przekazywać słowa Boga skierowane do władców i papieży. W tej prorockiej misji Brygida także naśladowała Chrystusa, odrzuconego i prześladowanego przez rodaków. Jak prorok, Brygida ma silną świadomość zbliżającej się Apokalipsy. Jej zadaniem było przygotować Szwecję i cały świat chrześcijański na wydarzenia dni ostatecznych.

Bóg daje ludziom doczesne radości, aby nauczyć ich pragnienia dóbr wiecznych. Taką zasadą kierował się Pan w ciągu całych dziejów zbawienia. Ziemia Obiecana była dla Żydów pewną zapowiedzią: kochając swoją ojczyznę doczesną, uczyli się jednocześnie pragnąć ojczyzny wiecznej. W teologii świętej Brygidy królestwo chrześcijańskie odgrywa analogiczną rolę. Sens jego istnienia polega na naśladowaniu i zapowiadaniu przyszłej chwały ojczyzny niebieskiej (*patria celestis*).

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- I Saint Birgitta. *Revelaciones. Book I, with Magister Mathias' Prologue*. Edited by Carl-Gustaf Undhagen. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1977.
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