

The Bread the Devil Knead

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The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, St. Brigitta of Sweden (1303-73, canonized 1391) was one of the most charismatic and influential visionaries of the later Middle Ages. Altogether, she received some seven hundred revelations, dealing with subjects ranging from meditations on the human condition, domestic affairs in Sweden, and ecclesiastical matters in Rome, to revelations in praise of the Incarnation and devotion to the Virgin. Her Revelations, collected and ordered by her confessors, circulated widely throughout Europe and long after her death. Many eminent individuals, including Cardinal Juan Torquemada, Jean Gerson, and Martin Luther, read and commented on her writings, which influenced the spiritual lives of countless individuals. Birgitta was also the founder of a new monastic order which still exists today. She is the patron saint of Sweden and in 2000 was declared (with Catherine of Siena and Edith Stein) co-patroness of Europe. Birgitta's Revelations present her as a commanding and dauntless visionary who develops a contemplative mysticism that is always interwoven with social engagement and a commitment to the salvation of the world. The varied styles of her revelations are dominated by frequent juxtapositions of memorable images and allegories that illustrate her fierce and fertile imagination, her sharp powers of observation and understanding, and her passionate and receptive storytelling powers. This is the second of four volumes and it contains Book IV and Book V of the Revelations. Book IV includes some of Birgitta's most influential visions, with topics ranging from the Avignon papacy and purgatory, to the Hundred Years' War. Book V, the Liber Quaestionum (Book of Questions), takes the form of a learned dialogue between Christ and a monk standing on a ladder fixed between heaven and earth. The argument centers on the way in which God's providence is constantly misunderstood and rejected by self-centered human beings. The translation is based on the recently completed critical edition of the Latin text and promises to be the standard English translation of the Revelations for years to come.

1 The Mother speaks: "When you make dough, you have to knead and work it a lot. Fine wheaten bread is set before lords, but coarser bread is set before commoners, and an even worse kind of bread is given to dogs. 2 The kneading stands ..."