

THE LIFE OF MARY
AS SEEN BY THE MYSTICS

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From the Revelations of
ST. ELIZABETH OF SCHOENAU, ST. BRIDGET OF SWEDEN,
VEN. MOTHER MARY OF AGREDA
and VEN. ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICH

Compiled by
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TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina

Nihil Obstat: John A. Schulien, S.T.D.
 Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: ✠ Moses E. Kiley
 Archbishop of Milwaukee
 June 8, 1951

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No.: 90-71852

ISBN: 978-0-89555-436-9

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Cover design by Milo Persic.

TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina
www.TANBooks.com

2012

To Gertrude,
who helped
with prayer and counsel.

DECLARATION OF OBEDIENCE

In conformity with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII concerning the publication of private revelations, I herewith declare that:

1. While the sources from which this book has been compiled have frequently been published with the approval of learned theologians and with the permission of the ordinaries of many dioceses in several countries, I willingly submit all that is contained in this work to the judgment of the Holy See;

2. In applying the terms “saint” and “venerable” to persons who are neither canonized nor beatified, I wish in no way to anticipate the final decision of the Church; and

3. For all the private revelations and seemingly supernatural events herein narrated, insofar as they have not received the attestation of the Church, I claim no more than the assent of a merely human credence, according to the dictates of prudence and the principles of mystical theology.

THE COMPILER

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FOREWORD

MYSTICISM, especially of the visionary type, has always been a subject of discussion in the Church. Among its manifestations, some few have merited the approval of the prudent, others are looked upon as doubtful, while many have been rejected as false. In certain cases the Church has intervened with a condemnation. Only recently (February 3, 1951) an unofficial but authoritative warning has been uttered by a member of the Roman Curia, Monsignor Alfredo Ottaviani, against the flood of allegedly supernatural events in various parts of the world which tend to substitute a frenzied religiosity for obedience to the Church and reception of the Sacraments.

Even in the case of holy people and when the supernatural character of the phenomena seems sufficiently guaranteed, caution is necessary. The person receiving the favor may not distinguish with enough exactness the period of illumination from that which immediately follows, in which the soul remains in dispositions of the greatest fervor. St. Ignatius Loyola teaches that in this second period "it often happens that by its own thoughts, from

its own habits, and in consequence of its conceptions and judgments, whether by the suggestion of the good or evil spirit, the soul makes various resolves and plans which are not inspired immediately by God Our Lord." Although the Saint is speaking only of resolves and plans, strong reasons lead us to extend this prudent observation to the content of visions. The imagination working on the memory will inevitably supply details.

Difficulties of terminology, which are common to all technical literature, also play a role in spiritual writings. St. Robert Bellarmine's remark still holds good: "Writers on mystical theology are usually blamed by some and praised by others because what they say is not understood in the same way by all." The visionaries whose writings are used in this volume were women of no special competence in theology, but they were possessed of some gifts as writers and especially of lively imaginations. Trying to express in concrete terms their supernatural experiences, they had to borrow a vocabulary from books and persons or, if they were capable of it, forge one of their own. In either case they ran considerable risk of not reproducing faithfully the content of their visions.

Despite difficulties which are obvious to all who have had some experience in this thorny field, the Church has never been adverse to the prudent exploitation of the mystical writings of her saintly children. Catholic doctrine on revelation is clear enough to supply the required safeguards. The Church teaches as a revealed dogma that public revelation ceased with the death of the last Apostle, over eighteen hundred years ago. The Deposit of Faith is complete. No further revelation binding all will be forthcoming to the end of time. "Even if an angel from heaven were to preach a gospel other than that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema." (*Gal.* 1:18). God's revelation in and through His Son is final. The Church which possesses the fullness of this revelation can alone impose beliefs on the faithful at large, and the Church imposes only such as are contained in the Holy Scripture and in divine and apostolic Tradition.

The first law of new revelations is, therefore, that they cannot be really new. They must agree with Holy Scripture and Tradition, with morality and the decisions of the Church. Again, a private revelation will rightly be looked on with suspicion if the person receiving it is not approved by a good life, manifested by irreproachable conduct, by the practice of all the virtues of his state of life and especially by humility—and this before, during and after the favor. Even when satisfied that there is nothing offensive to reason, faith or morals in a revelation and that the character of the recipient is such as to lend probability to the report, and even if the Church should approve, we accept it with a merely human belief. St. Thomas Aquinas remarks that Catholic faith “rests upon the revelation made to the Apostles and Prophets who wrote the canonical Scriptures but not on a revelation, if any, made to others.” The Church, in approving of mystical phenomena, affirms that there is nothing against faith or morals in the content of the revelations, but does not guarantee their truth. The possibility of error in the facts is not excluded.

Because of this reserve the attitude of Catholics could, and has not failed to, manifest remarkable divergencies. “We have Moses and the Prophets,” many assert, “and we do not require fresh visions and private revelations.” Others, on the contrary, read such writings with avidity once competent ecclesiastical authority has sanctioned the publication. In this class are found numerous devout Christians of saintly life. To name but one—Matt Talbot, the Dublin workingman whose solid virtues have greatly edified the Church in our day, was much given to the perusal of this type of spiritual literature. In addition to these two responses to private revelations, there are others which it will not be necessary to specify here.

Some might think that St. Thérèse of the Infant Jesus, who has taught so many the way of holiness, would be out of sympathy with a point of view which stresses the marvelous in the life of Our Blessed Mother. Her little way of humility and love does require that we rejoice in the night

of faith and suffering and wait until death for the revelation of God's glory and that of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints. Still, the short life of the Little Flower was not devoid of the charismatic element. She was, for example, favored with a vision of the Blessed Virgin. Furthermore, Our Blessed Lady's life differed, in this respect, from that of even the greatest Saints.

We have scriptural testimony that Mary and Joseph had visions. Their many years at Nazareth with Jesus were, in a sense, a long vision of surpassing grandeur which included much intimate revelation. If we were to accept as true all the visions of all the Saints, we should still be obliged to judge that their favors, taken together, are not worthy to be compared with those of the Incomparable Virgin. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Doctor of the Church who was preeminent in Mariology, declared, "What wonder is there if God, who is wonderful in His saints, has shown Himself still more wonderful in His Mother?" It is true, of course, that Our Blessed Lady, unlike her divine Son, did not have in this life the beatific vision. She lived, as we her children live, by faith. Indeed, she is the model and mistress of faith and of the faithful. We must, however, admit that her faith was aided in many marvelous ways. And we can readily believe that our loving Mother in Heaven approves of devout writings long in use in the Church and rightly considered helpful in the spiritual struggle in which all are engaged.

While some persons may, doubtless, wish that the readers of this book will remember at every page the prudent warning sounded in the Introduction that the work is to be read as a religious novel and not as a fifth Gospel, nevertheless many Catholics and non-Catholics too will be very thankful for this pleasing compilation of vivid narratives of the Blessed Virgin's life "as seen by" four great mystics of the Church.

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THE LIFE OF MARY
AS SEEN BY THE MYSTICS

INTRODUCTION

“When both are united [the visions of Mary of Agreda and Anne Catherine Emmerich], we possess the most magnificent contemplations upon the mysteries of the Incarnation of God.”

DOM PROSPER GUÉRANGER, O.S.B.
ABBOT OF SOLESMES

1. Private Revelations

DUE to the special nature of its sources, *The Life of Mary as Seen by the Mystics* is not, does not purport to be, and therefore should not be considered a historical biography.

The study of history is based primarily on contemporaneous written documents. This work, however, has been compiled entirely from the visions and private revelations of St. Elizabeth of Schoenau (1127?–1164), St. Bridget of Sweden (1303–1373), Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus of Agreda (1602–1665) and Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774–1824), as recorded in their writings or in those of their secretaries.

It is therefore essential, in order properly to evaluate this book, that the reader have a clear understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church concerning the nature and reliability of private revelations. The following brief outline of the subject is derived from the masterful analysis of the Rev. Auguste Poulain, S.J., in his work entitled *The Graces of Interior Prayer, a Treatise on Mystical Theology* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1912), Part IV, "Revelations and Visions."

First and most important of all, we must always make a very sharp distinction between: 1) the divinely guaranteed, universal public Revelation which is contained in the Bible and the Apostolic Tradition of the Church, and 2) the numerous private or special revelations of saintly Christian men and women. The first came to an end with the preaching of the Apostles and is a matter of faith for all Catholics, whereas the second have occurred throughout the history of the Church and do not require belief, even when approved. "It matters little whether or not one believes in St. Bridget's revelations or those of other saints; these things have nothing to do with faith."¹ "Even when the Church approves them . . . *they are not to be used as deciding questions of history**. . . philosophy, or theology . . ."²

Next we must understand why it is possible that the writings or revelations of some saintly mystics have occasionally contained minor inaccuracies or details which do not agree with similar accounts of other equally holy mystics. This is especially observable when their visions represent historical scenes, such as the life and death of Jesus Christ and His Mother. For instance, St. Bridget and Mary of Agreda differ as to various details of the Nativity. Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich saw the Saviour crucified with three nails, whereas St. Bridget saw four nails. And

1. Poulain, *op. cit.*, p. 320. (An enlarged ed. was reprinted in 1978 by Celtic Cross Books, Westminster, Vt., now of Westmoreland, N.H.)

* All italics in this Introduction have been added by the compiler.

2. Poulain, pp. 320-21.

all three disagree concerning the number of years which the Blessed Virgin lived after the Crucifixion.

This does not mean that in each case only one mystic saw correctly and the others must have been mistaken. For, as Father Poulain very wisely explains—and *the importance of this statement for our work cannot be overstressed*: “When visions represent historic scenes . . . they often have an approximate and probable likeness only. . . . It is a mistake to attribute an absolute accuracy to them. . . . Many saints have, in fact, believed that the event took place exactly as they saw it. But God does not deceive us when He modifies certain details. If He tied Himself down to absolute accuracy in these matters, we should soon be seeking to satisfy in visions an idle desire for erudition in history or archaeology. He has a nobler aim, that of the soul’s sanctification, and to arouse in her a love of Jesus suffering. He is like a painter who, in order to excite our piety, is content to paint scenes in his own manner, but without departing too far from the truth. (This argument cannot be applied to the historical books of the Bible.) . . . God has another reason for modifying certain details. Sometimes He adds them to a historical scene in order to bring out the secret meaning of the mystery. The actual spectators saw nothing similar. . . . We see, therefore, that it is imprudent to seek to remake history by the help of the saints’ revelations.”³

And in his article on the same subject in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Father Poulain adds: “A vision need not guarantee its accuracy in every detail. *One should thus beware of concluding without examination that revelations are to be rejected. . . . Much less should one suspect that the saints have been always or very often deceived in their vision. On the contrary, such deception is rare, and as a rule in unimportant matters only. . . .*”⁴

In his treatise on mystical theology, Father Poulain also lists the following possible causes of errors in private rev-

3. Poulain, pp. 327-329.

4. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIII, p. 5.

elations: the human mind may mingle its own action with the divine action in a certain measure by injecting some of its own favorite or preconceived ideas; a true revelation may subsequently be altered when its recipient records it after an interval of time, or the secretary of the mystic may not write or edit it with perfect fidelity; and finally a printed text may be an incomplete version or an inaccurate translation of the original manuscript.⁵

We may therefore concede with the learned Father Herbert Thurston, S.J., that "it seems impossible to treat the visions of Anne Catherine [Emmerich]—or, indeed, any other similar visions—as sources which can contribute reliably to our knowledge of past history."⁶

What then is the value of the best private revelations?

The famous Dom Prosper Guéranger, O.S.B., abbot of Solesmes and pioneer of the modern liturgical revival, summed up the age-old wisdom of Holy Mother Church's reply to that question when he wrote: "*Private revelations . . . are a powerful means of strengthening and increasing Christian sentiments.*"⁷ For, according to his biographer, "in the thought of Dom Guéranger, private revelations, even though the human element may enter into their composition with the revealed element, are *one of the channels by which edification and the supernatural penetrate among the Christian faithful.*"⁸

The following statements on this subject by Dom Guéranger are significant and relevant:

"In all periods the Church . . . has had in her bosom souls to whom it pleases God to communicate extraordinary lights of which He allows some rays to fall onto the community of the faithful. . . .What counts for the Christian who wishes to know the things of God in the

5. Poulain, *op. cit.*, pp. 323-340.

6. *The Month*, Dec., 1921, p. 519.

7. *Le Monde*, Apr. 15, 1860, quoted in Emmerich, *Lowly Life*, Vol. I, p. 136.

8. *Un Moine Bénédictin*, Dom Guéranger (Paris, 1910), Vol. II, p. 181.

measure which is permitted to us here below, is to know that beyond the teaching generally imparted to all the children of the Church, there are also certain lights which God communicates to souls whom He has chosen, and that those lights pierce through the clouds, when He so determines, in such a way that they spread far and wide for the consolation of simple hearts and also to be a certain trial for those who are wise in their own opinion. . . . Those to whom the seer communicates what he has thus learned from a divine source, being reduced to a human and fallible intermediary, need give it only that assent which we give to probable matters, an assent which we call 'pious belief.' No doubt this is little if we consider the invincible certitude of Faith; yet it is much if we think of the shadows which surround us."

While granting the possibility of human imperfections in private revelations, Dom Guéranger insists on the spiritual value of the best examples in this masterful psychological analysis:

"But there always remains that superhuman tone, both gentle and strong at the same time, an echo of the divine words which resounded in the soul, that unction which penetrates into the reader's mind and soon obliges him to say: the source of this is not human. As we read, our heart slowly takes fire, our soul feels desires for virtue which it had not hitherto experienced, the mysteries of faith appear more luminous to us, bit by bit the world and its hopes vanish, and the longing for the good things of Heaven, which seemed to have been dozing within us, awakens with new fervor."⁹

That generations of devout Catholics, including many learned theologians and prelates and writers, have in fact derived great spiritual benefit and inspiration from a judicious reading of the private revelations which have been compiled here, will be definitively established in the following critical estimates of the works of the four mystics

9. *L'Univers*, Aug. 1, 1858.

that constitute our sources, as found in the most authoritative Catholic encyclopedias and treatises on the subject.

2. *St. Elizabeth of Schoenau*

This daughter of a humble German family in the Rhineland entered the great Benedictine monastery at Schoenau near Bonn at the age of twelve. She became a remarkably fervent and mortified nun, and from the age of twenty-three until her death in 1164 experienced frequent extraordinary mystical graces. Her writings were edited by her brother Egbert, a Benedictine abbot. Though honored locally and in her Order, St. Elizabeth of Schoenau was never formally beatified. Her revelations, like those of Sts. Hildegard, Gertrude and Mechtilde, exercised a profound influence on medieval spirituality.¹⁰

3. *St. Bridget of Sweden*

Bridget (*Birgitta*)—not to be confused with the Irish St. Bridget of Kildare (453–521)—was born about 1303, the daughter of a wealthy provincial governor. At the age of fourteen she married Ulf Gudmarsson, and they became the parents of eight children. In 1343 her devout husband entered the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra, where he died the following year. After spending several years at the court of King Magnus Eriksson, Bridget went to Rome in 1349. Except for a number of pilgrimages to Italian shrines and one to the Holy Land in 1372, she resided in Rome until her death on July 23, 1373. So great was her fame for sanctity that she was canonized by Pope Boniface IX on October 3, 1391.

Before leaving Sweden she began to dictate her revelations, at the urging of Jesus Christ and His Mother, to one of the several learned priests who were at various

10. Butler-Thurston, *The Lives of the Saints* (London, 1937), Vol. VI, pp. 233–235.

times her spiritual directors. These “Heavenly Revelations” comprise nine books, amounting to over 1,500 pages. They contain numerous lengthy discourses by Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin on such subjects as the Church, moral advice for clergy and laity, marriage and education, Purgatory, as well as accounts of apparitions of St. Ann, St. John the Baptist, St. Matthew, St. Francis of Assisi and other saints.

According to the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique*, “Benedict XIV has pronounced the decisive word concerning the orthodoxy of the Revelations of Bridget in the *De servorum Dei beatificatione*. . . Therefore there is no doubt: the Revelations of Bridget are included among those which have the approval of the Church; they are orthodox.” This formal approval, however, means only that they contain nothing contrary to faith and morals and that there is good evidence for their authenticity. For, in the words of Pope Benedict XIV, “even though . . . these revelations have been approved, we cannot and we ought not to give them the assent of divine faith, but only that of human faith, according to the dictates of prudence, wherever these dictates enable us to decide that they are probable and worthy of pious credence.”¹¹

The Revelations of St. Bridget of Sweden were among the most popular books in Europe during the late Middle Ages.¹² Their “value . . . resides in the spirituality of the Saint.” They contain “an entire mariology which is extremely rich. It is the Blessed Virgin most often who describes the scenes of the childhood and of the Passion of Christ.”¹³

4. Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus of Agreda

Born in Agreda, Old Castille, Spain, on April 2, 1602, in a middle-class family, Maria Coronel entered in Janu-

11. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique* (Paris), Vol. I, col. 1947.

12. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, p. 782.

13. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* . . . , Vol. I, cols. 1954–1955.

ary, 1619, with her mother and youngest sister, a Conceptionist Poor Clare convent which her devout parents had founded in their home town, while her father and two brothers became Franciscans. From 1627 until her death on May 24, 1665, except for a period of three years, Mother Mary of Jesus was re-elected Abbess no less than eleven times.

Mary of Agreda, as she is usually called, is a figure of special interest to Americans because in the 1630's, in one of the most thoroughly documented cases of bilocation in history, without ever leaving her convent in Spain she appeared innumerable times to the Indians of western Texas, Arizona and New Mexico, instructed them in the Catholic religion, and sent them southward to be baptized by the approaching Franciscan missionaries.¹⁴

Her famous biography of the Blessed Virgin, *The Mystical City of God*, became the subject of considerable controversy among theologians when it was first published in 1670. On November 9, 1681, at the request of King Charles II of Spain, Pope Innocent XI suspended in Spain a condemnation of the work by the Holy Office of the Inquisition of June 26 of the same year.¹⁵ That this suspension was generally interpreted by theologians and ordinaries as being of universal application is indicated by the publication between 1700 and 1750 of about twenty French, Italian, Latin, German and Polish translations in France, Italy, Germany and Belgium.¹⁶ Although, as Dom Guéranger and the Abbé H. Bremond have shown, a Jansenist and Gallican majority of professors at the Sorbonne University in Paris issued a condemnation of the book in 1696,¹⁷ the Spanish Inquisition and "the universities of Granada, Burgos, Cadiz, Madrid, Canarias, Sala-

14. Bibliography in Rev. S. J. Draugelis' *Madonna of Nazareth*, pp. 32-34.

15. *Lexikon fuer Kirche und Theologie*, Vol. I, col. 147.

16. List of editions in Draugelis, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43.

17. Dom Guéranger, "La Cité Mystique de Dieu," *L'Univers*, 1859; Abbé Henri Brémond, *Histoire du Sentiment Religieux en France* (Paris, 1932), Vol. IX, pp. 273-276.

manca, Alcalá, Toulouse, Louvain and seventeen of the greatest colleges in Europe have favored *The Mystical City of God* with their official approbation.”¹⁸

According to the authoritative modern Catholic *Lexikon fuer Kirche und Theologie*, “. . . it contains several errors in profane matters but nothing which contradicts the teaching of the Church. The point which was most displeasing to its opponents (particularly Gallicans, Jansenists, and followers of the Enlightenment) was the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. . . . However, the definition of this doctrine as a dogma [in 1854] proved that the Venerable Servant of God was right and again drew the attention of the Catholic world to her writings. *The Holy See has repeatedly permitted them to be read, but has not made a positive declaration concerning the character of the visions. . . . Many bishops and scholars have warmly recommended the work.* Despite all controversies, it has been widely distributed in many editions and translations . . . and *has filled countless souls, including priests also, with new love and reverence for the Mother of Our Lord.*”¹⁹

This remarkable book has indeed gained an ever-increasing favor during the past hundred years, even though the controversies of the eighteenth century resulted in halting the author’s Process of Beatification.²⁰

In 1850 the scholarly Jesuit editor of the journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* wrote: “. . . we must conclude that the book, *The Mystical City of God*, must with prudence be judged praiseworthy. . . . Between a blind belief and a no less blind scorn, the middle ground is a clear-seeing respect.”²¹ Thirty years later the same journal announced “with great

18. *Lexikon . . .*, Vol. I, col. 147; D. Francisco Silvela, *Cartas de Sor Maria de Agreda y Felipe IV* (Madrid, 1885), p. 237.

19. *Lexikon . . .*, *ibid.*

20. J. de Guibert, *Doctrina Ecclesiastica Christianae Perfectionis Studium Spectantia* (Rome, 1931), p. 484; *Acta Ordinis Minorum* (Rome), Vol. IX, 1890, pp. 42–43, and Vol. LX, 1941, p. 173. Cf. *Analecta Juris Pontificii* (Paris, 1886), Table générale des matières des Vols. 1–24.

21. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Ser. I, Vol. II, 1850, p. 205.

pleasure the new Italian version of the Life of the Blessed Virgin originally written in Spanish by Venerable Sister Mary of Jesus, to whom, as we may piously, though by merely human faith, believe, it was communicated by the Blessed Virgin herself. . . . Intrinsic reasons render it probable. . . . And extrinsic reasons likewise render it probable, i.e., the opinions of very learned theologians who have given the work their approval after a most detailed examination.”²²

According to Ludwig Clarus (Wilhelm Gustav Volk), the editor of the German version published in 1853, “*The Mystical City of God* has aided many persons to find the True Faith and to acquire virtue.”²³ This statement is especially noteworthy in view of the fact that Clarus himself joined the Catholic Church in 1855.²⁴

In 1858–1859, Dom Guéranger devoted a series of twenty-four articles to a thorough analysis and defense of Mary of Agreda’s book. While granting that it was not lacking in human flaws, he summed up his considered opinion thus: “The least that one can say in praise of this work is that it remains one of the most impressive monuments of the human spirit.” Calling it “a marvelous *Summa* . . . amazing, if not superhuman,” Dom Guéranger declared that “after a lengthy study of *The Mystical City* and of the voluminous writings that have been published for and against it,” in his judgment “the revelations of Mary of Agreda on the life of the Blessed Virgin have a right to the respect and the esteem of all those who are capable of undertaking to read them, that they deserve to occupy a distinguished place among writings of that kind, and that the judicious use that can be made of them can serve as a powerful stimulus to a revival of devotion in souls. . . .”²⁵

Father Frederick William Faber (1814-1862), the intimate friend of Cardinal Newman and founder of the Con-

22. *Ibid.*, Ser. II, Vol. VI, 1881, pp. 92–93.

23. Ubaldo de Pandolfi, *Life* . . . , p. 147.

24. *Lexikon* . . . , Vol. X, col. 671.

25. Dom Guéranger in *L’Univers*, Sept. 12, May 23, and Dec. 5, 1858.

gregation of the Oratory, whom Dom Guéranger considered a “saint,”²⁶ and whom *The Catholic Encyclopedia* describes as “a master in mystical theology,”²⁷ wrote that he found a “number of beautiful things”²⁸ in *The Mystical City of God*, from which he frequently quoted passages in his inspiring devotional works.

Typical of the many official recommendations to be found in the editions of that time is the following statement of Archbishop Descamps of Malines and Primate of Belgium (when Vicar-General of the Diocese of Tournai): “*We exhort the pious faithful and the clergy in particular who desire a deeper insight into the grandeur of the Most Holy Virgin to take advantage of this publication, which they cannot read without edification and profit.*”²⁹ A German edition published by the Redemptorist Fathers in 1885 was recommended by the Bishop of Ratisbon in these words: it “*will surely edify all readers and be the occasion of great spiritual blessings.*”³⁰

The famous French writer J. K. Huysmans disclosed in his autobiographical novel, *En Route*, that the writings of Mary of Agreda and Anne Catherine Emmerich influenced him in his return to the Sacraments. After complaining of the former’s verbosity and other faults, he added with profound perspicacity: “I know well that the Abbé [the hero’s spiritual director] would say that we need not concern ourselves with those singularities and those errors, but that *the Cité Mystique is to be read in relation to the inner life of the Blessed Virgin.*”³¹

On February 15, 1900, in Rome, a French-Canadian lady named Rose de Lima Dumas wrote a letter to His Holiness Pope Leo XIII in which she told him that for several years,

26. *Le Monde*, Jan. 25, 1864, quoted in John E. Bowden, *Life & Letters of Frederick William Faber, D.D.* (Baltimore, 1869), p. 452.

27. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. V, p. 741.

28. Faber, *Bethlehem* (Baltimore, 1862), p. 317.

29. Pandolfi, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

30. Blatter-Marison, *Mystical City of God* (South Chicago), Vol. I, p. xxii.

31. J. K. Huysmans, *En Route* (New York, 1918), p. 90.

after reading *The Mystical City of God*, she had adopted as a rule of life the moral instructions of the Blessed Virgin that are found at the end of each of its chapters, and that her feelings of gratitude and a desire “to spread the science of the saints had impelled her to publish” a one-volume compilation of those instructions in French “in order to offer it especially to devout persons living in the world.” While giving His Holiness a copy of the book, she begged for his blessing “for herself and for all those who will strive to put into practice the counsels of the Mother of God and who will do all they can to persuade others to do likewise.” On February 28, 1900, His Eminence M. Cardinal Rampolla wrote to her in reply that “the devout thoughts which you expressed to the Holy Father . . . were received with pleasure by His Holiness, who, wishing to confirm you in your virtuous projects, gladly gives you the Apostolic Blessing. . . .” Of special significance is the fact that the edition involved, entitled *Sublime Doctrine de la Mère de Dieu sur les Vertus Chrétiennes; Extrait de la Cité Mystique de Dieu . . .* was printed by the presses of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda in Rome.”³² Consequently, a few months later a Canadian diocesan journal stated: “The reserve which is ordinarily maintained on the subject of revelations really no longer has any reason to exist in relation to *The Mystical City*, since His Holiness Leo XIII has been so good as gladly to encourage the project of spreading among the faithful the science of the saints which is contained in that heavenly life of the Mother of God.”³³ And in 1915, the same lady published, also in Rome, a complete French edition of Mary of Agreda’s work bearing the statement of the Rev. Reginaldo Fei, O.P., Doctor in Sacred Theology, “that it contains nothing against faith and morals.”³⁴

Meanwhile, in 1903, the Rev. Van den Gheyn, S.J., one of the learned and cautious Bollandist experts in hagiog-

32. Marie d’Agréda, *Sublime Doctrine . . .*, (Rome, 1900), pp. i-iii.

33. *Revue Ecclesiastique de Valleyfield*, Vol. IX, 1901, p. 160.

34. Marie d’Agréda, *Cité Mystique de Dieu* (Rome, 1915), 3 vols.

raphy, wrote in his article on Mary of Agreda in the authoritative *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*: “[*The Mystical City of God*], says Goerres, ‘. . . contains a truly grandiose mystical contemplation.’ However, we must admit that there are in this work some very extraordinary assertions. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that the author’s only aim was to edify and that she had no intention of engaging in critical history. Mary of Agreda herself said: ‘Error on my part is possible, for I am only an ignorant woman. . . . Moreover I submit to my guides and to the correction of the Holy Catholic Church.’

“What credence does the work . . . deserve? . . . In the present case the saintly life of Mary of Agreda creates a prejudice in favor of the complete good faith of the author. There is no serious reason to doubt her sincerity, which is evidenced by an admirable obedience and a profound humility. But on the other hand, the limited spiritual culture of the writer, her ignorance of positive theology and of history, render possible and even probable some error in the description of revelations which may have been supernatural. . . .

“In brief, if we wish to judge the work of Mary of Agreda without the partisan spirit which has unfortunately vitiated a good number of appreciations that have been made of her writings, *it must be recognized that from the point of view of mystical theology and of edification, The Mystical City of God deserves the popularity which it has enjoyed.*”³⁵

At the same time, Father Poulain was writing in his *Graces of Interior Prayer*: “Whatever opinion we may form as to Mary of Agreda’s revelations, taken as a whole, we are obliged to admit that they contain some errors. Thus . . . she says that the earth’s radius is 1,251 miles. . . .* *Let us not, however, conclude from this that Mary of Agreda deceived herself also as to her purely intellectual visions of the Divinity. . . . Amort, who criticized her a great deal . . . adds:*

35. *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris, 1903), Vol. I, cols. 627–631.

* Actually it is about 3,960 miles.

'I unhesitatingly admit that she received wonderful lights from God . . . ' "36

In 1911–1912 a new critical Spanish edition of *The Mystical City of God* based on the author's original manuscripts was published with the approval of the Bishop of Tarazona, whose diocese includes Agreda.

In 1910 the Very Rev. Ubaldus de Pandolfi compiled an excellent life of Mary of Agreda in English, which was published by the Poor Clares of Evansville, Indiana. And in 1914 the Rev. George J. Blatter brought out his complete four-volume English translation of *The Mystical City of God*, with the Imprimatur of the Rt. Rev. H. J. Alerding, Bishop of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

It is also a significant fact, especially in view of the early Dominican opposition to this work for its Scotistic leanings, that the foremost modern Spanish Dominican "champion of the true traditional doctrine in mystical theology," the saintly Rev. Juan G. Arintero (1860–1928), who was "an authority in the discernment of spirits," did not hesitate to quote freely from *The Mystical City of God* in his masterpiece, *The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church*.³⁷

The Rev. S. J. Draugelis of New York City has written a series of sacred dramas on the life of the Blessed Virgin which are based entirely on the work of Mary of Agreda. "Madonna of Nazareth," the first of the series to be printed, was published in 1949 by the Marian Fathers in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. A favorable review of this work which appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Osservatore Romano* referred to the "noble task" undertaken by the author and to the "important influence" of Mary of Agreda "not only on the strictly religious but also in the political and moral fields of 17th century Spain."³⁸ On November 10, 1949,

36. Poulain, *op. cit.*, pp. 335–336.

37. Juan G. Arintero, O.P., *The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church* (St. Louis, 1949), pp. v, xii. Reprinted by TAN, 1978.

38. *Osservatore Romano*, Rome, July 24, 1949.

His Eminence P. Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi wrote to Father Draugelis: "I hope and pray that Almighty God will bless this undertaking and that He will grant you great success not only in increasing devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, but also in making Her better and more widely known in a world that has so much need of Her."³⁹

And last, but not least in importance, is the following impressive statement in the new Italian Catholic encyclopedia, *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, edited by the foremost ecclesiastical scholars in Italy and published in the Vatican City in 1949: "Considered objectively, although historical, geographical and chronological errors are not lacking in *The Mystical City of God*, from which it follows that the work does not contain only 'revelation,' its high ascetical and mystical value must be recognized."⁴⁰

5. Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich

Born on September 8, 1774, in a family of poor Westphalian peasants, Anne Catherine entered the Augustinian convent in Duermen in 1802. When the convent was closed in 1812, due to the Napoleonic Wars, she moved to a private home, in which she resided until her death on February 2, 1824.

From childhood she experienced many extraordinary mystical graces. Before becoming a nun she endured the pains of the crown of thorns, and in 1808 those of the other wounds of Christ. In 1812 the stigmata became visible.

When Clemens von Brentano (1778–1842), a prominent German romantic poet, visited her in 1818, soon after his return to the Catholic Church, she recognized him as the secretary who was destined to be the editor of her revelations. He remained with her throughout the last five years of her life, taking extensive notes of her visions

39. *Marian Helpers Bulletin* (Stockbridge, Mass.), Jan., 1950, p. 9.

40. *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (Vatican City, 1949), Vol. I, col. 571.

of the life of Christ, whose public ministry she witnessed day by day in 1821–1824.

“In editing his notes, Brentano did not exercise such fidelity that these visions may simply pass for verbal communications of Emmerich.” (Huempfer). As a result, the Emmerich-Brentano writings are not being considered as evidence in her Process for Beatification. They have nevertheless merited the recommendations of numerous learned prelates and theologians like Father Poulain, Dom Guéranger, and Cardinals Gibbons and Ehrle, and they have been a source of profound spiritual benefit to many persons, including such distinguished writers as J. K. Huysmans, Father Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., Léon Bloy, Jacques and Raissa Maritain, and Paul Claudel, as the following quotations will demonstrate:

J. J. Goerres: “I know of no revelations richer, more profound, more wonderful, or more thrilling in their nature than those of Sister Emmerich.”⁴¹

The Catholic Encyclopedia: “The rapid and silent spread of her works through Germany, France, Italy and elsewhere speaks well for their merit. Strangely enough they produced no controversy.”⁴²

Dom Prosper Guéranger, O.S.B.: “In the publication of this work (*The Life of Jesus Christ*) we must recognize a disposition of Divine Providence, who has deigned to console Catholic Germany in the midst of the most dreadful blasphemies that have been and still are uttered against the holy Gospels, by thus placing before our eyes the facts of the Gospel narratives. Indeed Catherine Emmerich has her mission! God does not lavish the extraordinary gifts which have been revealed in her. Not in vain has He placed her in the heart of Germany just before the outbreak of the most frightful infidelity. . . . I shall allow no favorable opportunity to pass without paying Anne Catherine Emmerich the tribute she deserves. Her revelations have

41. Emmerich, *Lowly Life*, Vol. I, p. 9.

42. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. V, p. 407.

found no reader who has perused them with greater diligence and appreciation than I, and I have ever been most eager to communicate my impressions concerning them to all my acquaintances.”⁴³

Most Rev. August Maria Toebbe, Bishop of Covington, Ky. (1882): “The writings of the venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich breathe so deeply a spirit of faith and so heartfelt a love for God that the devout perusal of them must afford the faithful a rich treasure of blessings and edification.”⁴⁴

Most Rev. Wm. H. Gross, C.Ss.R., Archbishop of Oregon (1888): “It is a masterpiece of its kind . . . We heartily approve its translation, and sincerely hope that a copy of it will soon be found in every Catholic family.”⁴⁵

Most Rev. William H. Elder, Archbishop of Cincinnati (1892): “The Life of Our Lord, according to the revelations of Catherine Emmerich, I have found extremely interesting and edifying. . . . If received according to the explanations given and if read in the spirit of piety, it is wonderfully adapted to increase in our heart the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by giving us vivid pictures of what He did and said during His mortal life.”⁴⁶

His Eminence J. Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore: “. . . from our own deep conviction of the great advantage to be derived from the pious perusal of the work . . . we do not hesitate in its approval to add our signature. . . .”⁴⁷

Father Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.: “One day in the Long Retreat (which ended on Christmas Day) they were reading in the refectory Sister Emmerich’s account of the Agony in the Garden and I suddenly began to cry and sob and could not stop. I put it down for this reason, that if I had been asked a minute beforehand I should

43. Emmerich, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–136, 230.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 219–220.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

have said that nothing of the sort was going to happen and even when it did I stood in a manner wondering at myself. . . ." 48

Léon Bloy and the Maritains: "At the very beginning [of the latter's conversion], Léon Bloy made us read Schmöger's three thick volumes on the life and visions of Anne Catherine Emmerich . . . one of the greatest mystics of the nineteenth century . . . the religious beauty of the visions and spiritual illuminations . . . is so great that there must have been at least one mystic involved—either Catherine or Brentano. No mere poet could have given a picture of such depth, coherence and theological value, of the inner life of a co-sufferer in Christ's Passion

"The *Revelations* of Anne Catherine Emmerich gave us a picture of Catholicism that was crowded and vivid, moving and yet familiar. They taught us countless things—we, who knew nothing of Catholic history, dogmas, theology, liturgy, mysticism." 49

Paul Claudel: "The books which proved very helpful during that period [of his conversion] were . . . Pascal . . . Bossuet . . . Dante . . . not to forget the marvelous private revelations of Catherine Emmerich." 50

J. K. Huysmans: ". . . the tonic, the stimulant in weakness, the strychnine for failure of faith, the goad which drives you in tears to the feet of Christ, the *Dolorous Passion* of Sister Emmerich. . . ." 51

Émile Baumann: "We find that Catherine Emmerich's originality is most valuable in her visions, thanks to the ability which she had of revealing their essential elements. Theologically hers are inferior to those of St. Teresa and of many others. . . .

48. *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London, 1937), p. 128 (see also pp. 339, 348, 372-373).

49. Raissa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together* (New York, 1942), p. 151; see also her *Adventures in Grace* (New York, 1945), p. 36.

50. Paul Claudel, "In the Grip of God," in *Through 100 Gates*, edited by Severin Lamping, O.F.M. (Milwaukee, 1939), p. 203.

51. Huysmans, *En Route* (New York, 1918), pp. 138-139.

“The three books of her revelations nevertheless constitute . . . one of the most beautiful supernatural poems that can be described as inspired.”⁵²

Rev. Paul de Jaeger, S.J.: “But as Brentano himself pointed out in the first edition of *The Dolorous Passion*, Anne never claimed historical accuracy for her visions. They are just powerfully realistic pictures, whose vividness and imaginative force have helped many a soul to appreciate the Passion with more intensity and love.”⁵³

Georges Goyau: “Henceforth, too, the veneration of the humanity of Christ was to play an increasingly important role in religious fervor. The visions of Catherine Emmerich deserve to be taken as a landmark in the development of this worship.

“All the detail which they add to the dramatic story of Christ is an enrichment, not indeed of the Deposit of Faith itself . . . but of Christian piety. They do not impose themselves on belief, still less on erudition; but the light they cast, the emotions they arouse, bear up the wings of meditation. . . .

“Clement Brentano, by making himself, at the bedside of the stigmatized woman, the assiduous chronicler of all that Catherine saw and said, thereby brought a fresh source of sustenance to the devout curiosity of believing souls. Before the eyes of that Germany in which certain schools were beginning to regard the story of Christ as a kind of myth, he developed scenes of pathos, scenes picturesque in their tragedy, in which the face of Christ became animated by a new life, more troubled, more poignant, one might almost say more in the raw, than the one which the sobriety of the Gospel narrative shows us.

“And thanks to Brentano, she who, through her stigmata, let herself become ‘in conformity with Christ,’ was

52. Émile Baumann, *L'Anneau d'Or des Grands Mystiques* (Paris, 1924), pp. 294, 297.

53. Paul de Jaeger, S.J., ed., *An Anthology of Mysticism* (London, 1935), p. 231.

to lead coming Christian generations, if not to know Christ better, at least to feel for Him better, in a compassion in which faith and love mingle and kneel together . . .”⁵⁴

His Eminence Franz Cardinal Ehrle, S.J. (in 1934): “One cannot deny the Divine touch in them.”⁵⁵

The new Italian Catholic encyclopedia: Her revelations “exercised a widespread influence on the piety of the Catholic faithful, particularly in the devotion to the Passion of Jesus, and not only in Germany.”⁵⁶

6. Summary

In concluding this study of our sources, we submit the following profoundly wise and enlightening comments of Dom Prosper Guéranger, O.S.B., and the Rev. Auguste Poulain, S.J., on the value of the revelations of both Mary of Agreda and Anne Catherine Emmerich, which, as will be explained in the next section, have the largest share in this compilation.

DOM GUÉRANGER:

“While we acknowledged Mary of Agreda’s superiority in point of ideality, we accorded to Sister Emmerich a pre-eminence with regard to the richness and exactness of facts. *Both bear upon them the marks of supernatural visions, and the contradictions between them that we notice here and there should not prejudice one against the communications as a whole.*”⁵⁷

“If I have drawn a parallel between Mary of Agreda and Catherine Emmerich, it was not done with the intention of undervaluing the German ecstasica. *I look upon both the one and the other as true prophetesses*; and if I think that Catherine Emmerich is to be accused of some errors in

54. Jeanne Danemarie (pseud. of Mme. Marthe Ponet), *The Mystery of the Stigmata* (London, 1934), pp. 234–235.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

56. *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (Vatican City, 1951), Vol. V, col. 314.

57. Emmerich, *Lowly Life*, Vol. I, p. 228.

regard to facts, I find no difficulty in making the same charge against Mary of Agreda. Private revelations like theirs are always mixed with imperfections. God permits this, in order that they may not be confounded with the inspired (canonical) Books. . . . I think the proper rule in judging such private revelations is that we be satisfied here and there to stumble upon certain innocent mistakes. . . . We may say that Catherine Emmerich supplies Mary of Agreda's deficiencies. The former received the aesthetic, the latter the doctrinal mission. *When both are united, we possess the most magnificent contemplations upon the mysteries of the Incarnation of God.*"⁵⁸

FATHER POULAIN:

"It may also be that the revelation can be regarded as Divine in its broad outlines, but doubtful in minor details. Concerning the revelations of Mary of Agreda and Anne Catherine Emmerich, for example, contradictory opinions have been expressed: some believe unhesitatingly everything they contain, and are annoyed when anyone does not share their confidence; others give the revelations no credence whatsoever (generally on a *priori* grounds); finally there are many who are sympathetic, but do not know what to reply when asked what degree of credibility is to be attributed to the writings of these two ecstasies. *The truth seems to be between the two extreme opinions.* . . . In particular instances these visionaries have been mistaken . . . *if there be question of the general statement of facts given in these works, we can admit with probability that many of them are true.* For these two visionaries led lives that were regarded as very holy. Competent authorities have judged their ecstasies divine. *It is therefore prudent to admit that they received a special assistance from God, preserving them not absolutely, but in the main, from error.*"⁵⁹

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

59. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIII, p. 5.

7. *This Compilation*

In accordance with the enlightened caution of those distinguished theologians and with the sound principles of mystical theology governing private revelations, the method of selection adopted in compiling this book has been to examine all available critical analyses of the writings which constitute its sources and to exclude any statements which might appear to be either unacceptable or implausible or unsuitable for a narrative designed only for popular edification.

The specific editions used are indicated in the Bibliography, which also includes references to standard works on the lives and writings of the four mystics.

It should be clearly understood that, except for a few scriptural quotations, every statement in *THE LIFE OF MARY AS SEEN BY THE MYSTICS* has been borrowed directly from one of its four sources. The compiler has merely combined, condensed and adapted into a unified style the materials which he found therein. Occasionally elements from the two or three principal sources have even been brought together in one sentence or phrase, as one or the other supplied a relevant detail.

With regard to the relative contribution of each of the sources, in general Venerable Mother Mary of Agreda and Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich have provided approximately two thirds of the total text. Of those two, the former contributed most of the material concerning the interior life of the Blessed Virgin, while the latter was usually responsible for exterior actions. St. Bridget of Sweden supplied valuable light on the major events, whereas St. Elizabeth of Schoenau's contribution was limited to the years in the Temple and (in part) to the Annunciation.

The compiler wishes to acknowledge his gratitude to the many priests, religious and lay persons who have prayed for the spiritual success of this work, and particularly to the Reverend Oblates of Mary Immaculate, editors of *The Annals of Our Lady of the Cape*, the official magazine of the

National Canadian Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary at Cap de la Madeleine, P.Q., in which it appeared as a series of articles in 1946–1949.

In conclusion he urges his readers to adopt the prudent and wise counsel of the learned Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye, S.J., who (referring only to the Emmerich-Brentano writings) advised: “*Let them read [this book] as a religious novel, but not as a fifth Gospel.*”⁶⁰

If any of them should be laboring under the dangerous illusion that visions and revelations are to be desired or that they constitute an essential rather than a secondary element in Christian contemplation and perfection, let them study attentively the several treatises on Catholic spirituality which are listed in the general section (I) of the Bibliography. From *THE LIFE OF MARY AS SEEN BY THE MYSTICS* we may learn to be true Christian mystics, not seekers of “phenomena” but cultivators of the interior life of contemplative union with God through the practice of the virtues and the humble love of Christ and His Cross.

The principal lesson for us in this life of Mary is that she is above all a model of the interior life, and that only insofar as we imitate her recollection and prayer and charity of heart will we be pleasing to God and capable of serving Him, for only thus will we be united to Him and do His Will. Thus too we will become like Mary, and so Christ will be born and grow in our souls. By our progressive self-purification through penitential loving sacrifices, by the grace of God we will be able to give Him to others.

THE LIFE OF MARY AS SEEN BY THE MYSTICS is hereby offered with filial love, as a bouquet of “Little Flowers,” to Mary Immaculate, Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of All Graces. May she deign to give it her blessing so that it may help its readers to live—as she did—in ever closer union with her divine Son, the Saviour of mankind.

THE COMPILER

Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 1950

60. *Analecta Bollandiana*, Vol. XLIII, 1925, p. 235.

OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST
is reported to have said to

ST. BRIDGET OF SWEDEN:

“Know that it is not for your own sake alone that I speak to you, but also for the salvation of all Christians . . . Know too that when it pleases Me, men shall come who will take up the words of ‘The Heavenly Revelations’ with joy and consolation.”

VEN. MOTHER MARY OF AGREDA:

“Many mysteries pertaining to My Mother . . . are still hidden, especially the interior secrets of her life, and these I wish now to make known. I desire to make known to mortals how much her intercession is worth. If men would now seek to please Me by reverencing, believing, and studying the wonders which are intimately connected with this Mother of Piety, and if they would all begin to solicit her intercession from their whole heart, the world would find some relief.”

SISTER ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICH:

“I give you these visions, not for yourself; they are given to you in order that they may be recorded. I give you these visions—and I have ever done so—to prove that I shall be with My Church till the end of days. But visions alone sanctify no one; you must practice charity, patience, and all the other virtues.”

CHAPTER ONE

ST. ANN AND ST. JOACHIM

BEFORE TIME BEGAN, the Holy Trinity decreed that one day, after the creation of the world and of man and after man's fall, God the Son was to be born of a Virgin Mother. In order that this Mother should be the purest human being who ever lived, Almighty God decreed that she was to be miraculously exempt from all stain of Original Sin.

And as a fitting preparation for the Incarnation of the God-Man among men, the Blessed Trinity also planned to train a chosen people to serve and to worship the Lord faithfully in the religion which He Himself revealed to them through their patriarchs and prophets. Thus He taught them to purify their hearts by leading a decent and holy daily life, and to pray for the coming of the Messiah or Saviour that He promised to send them as their King.

In the course of time, however, most of the Chosen People of Israel were unfaithful to God in many ways. And as they became more and more materialistic, they imagined that the Messiah would appear as a great ruler who would free them by political power from their oppressors, the

Romans. But some of the Israelites continued to love and to serve the Lord in humility and detachment from the world, for they knew that the Saviour would come to free men from the oppressor within their own hearts.

It was from these pure families that, by His grace, God developed and guided the ancestors of His future Mother. They were extremely simple and devout persons, very gentle and peace-loving and charitable. Out of love for God, they always lived a very mortified life. Often the married couples practiced continence over long periods of time, particularly during holy seasons, for their highest ideal was to raise saintly children who in turn would contribute toward bringing salvation to the world. They lived in small rural communities, and they did not engage in business. They worked on the land and tended flocks of sheep; they also had gardens and orchards. They were very conscientious in fulfilling their religious duties. Whenever they had to go to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices in the Temple, they prepared themselves by prayer and fasting and penance. When traveling, they always helped as best they could any sick persons or paupers whom they met. And because they led such an austere and detached life, these good people had to endure the scorn of many of the other Jews.

Thus Mary's grandparents inherited from their ancestors a love of humility, chastity, mortification and the simple life. Her mother, St. Ann, and her father, St. Joachim, were the very finest products of this long line of pure and holy servants of God.

St. Ann was born in Bethlehem of rich parents who owned many flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. But they regularly gave away to the poor a large part of their possessions and kept very little for themselves. After Ann's birth they moved to a beautiful country estate at Sephoris near Nazareth.

From her childhood Ann loved to pray and to think about God, but she also grew to be an industrious helper around the home. In fact, while very modest and retiring,

she became such a model daughter that other mothers used to tell their young girls to imitate her. And the more she learned about the awaited coming of the Saviour, the more ardently did she pray that God might hasten that happy event.

Just before her holy mother died, she told Ann that she was a chosen vessel and that she should pray for a worthy husband. Ann was now a comely, sturdy girl in her teens, with all the modest simplicity of a devout peasant maiden. Several young men were hoping to become her husband.

One day Ann happened to be praying fervently to God to give her a husband who would help her to live according to the Divine Law. And at the very same moment on another farm near Nazareth an unusually pious middle-aged bachelor named Joachim was also praying for God's help in choosing a wife. Although he knew and greatly admired Ann, he was so extremely humble that he did not dare think she would become his wife.

When the prayers of St. Ann and St. Joachim were presented by the angels before the throne of the Blessed Trinity, God decreed that this pure couple should unite in marriage and be the parents of the future mother of the Messias. The Archangel Gabriel was sent to announce this decision to them both.

He appeared in visible form to Ann while she was praying. He alone of the angels knew her destiny, but all he was allowed to tell her now was:

“The Lord give thee His blessing, servant of God! Continue to pray for the coming of the Redeemer and rejoice in the Lord. It is His Will that thou accept Joachim as thy husband.”

Leaving Ann greatly comforted, the Archangel went to Joachim and said to him while he slept:

“Blessed be thou by the Lord, Joachim! Persevere in the practice of justice and perfection. The Lord wants thee to take Ann as thy wife. Take care of her, esteem her, for she is dear to Him, and give thanks to God.”

The very next day, Joachim, who was small, lean, and broad-shouldered, went and asked Ann's father for the hand of his daughter. And soon the couple were solemnly wedded in a simple open-air ceremony. St. Ann was about twenty-four at the time, and St. Joachim was forty-two.

They made their home on the estate of Ann's father. Though they were quite wealthy, they lived very economically and charitably. Each year they divided all their rents and income and sheep into three parts. Then they gave one-third to the Temple for God's service, one-third to the poor, and they kept only what was left. And yet their flocks and herds continued to increase amazingly. Very often they gave food to poor travelers and lambs to their needy relatives.

In their home they frequently talked together about God and the coming of the Redeemer, for which they prayed long and fervently. Both Ann and Joachim had been serious even in their youth. Now as they matured, they made a distinguished and devout couple. Neither told the other about the message of the angel.

In His wisdom Almighty God proceeded to purify them still further by giving them a heavy cross to bear, a cross which only grew heavier as the years passed: they remained childless. Among the Israelites in those times, this was considered not only the greatest misfortune and disgrace socially, but also a clear indication that the Lord thought such a couple unworthy to contribute toward the coming of the Messiah. And so Ann and Joachim had to suffer increasing contempt and even insults from their neighbors and acquaintances. But they took these humiliations with patience and continued to pray that God might bless their marriage with children.

Seven years passed without an answer to their prayers. Then they decided to move to a smaller farm near Nazareth and to begin a new life, a much more mortified and holy life, in order thus to earn God's blessing. For in their profound humility they felt that their great affliction was entirely due to their own unworthiness before the Lord.

They also increased their charity and gifts to the poor. And they trained themselves in continence, for they always aspired to greater purity. They even took a solemn vow to dedicate their child, if God gave them one, to His service in the Temple.

Thus they lived through another thirteen long, trying years.

Then one day when Joachim was offering his sacrifices in the Temple, the priest rebuked and insulted him, saying: "Why do you come here, Joachim? Your offerings are not acceptable to the Lord!"

His face burning with shame, the poor man withdrew to a corner of the Temple and prayed:

"O Lord, my sins merit this disgrace. But as I accept it according to Thy will, do not cast me away. . . ."

Then with a sore heart he left the city and went to some of his flocks on the distant slopes of Mount Hermon. He was so troubled that he stayed there in prayer and penance for several months without communicating with Ann.

Through friends she heard about his being reproached by the priest, and this only added to her keen suffering. She often wept, lying flat on the ground in her room.

Once when she refused to allow a lightheaded servant to go out to a party, the girl exclaimed bitterly:

"God has inflicted a double punishment on you because you are so severe: you are sterile—and now your husband has abandoned you!"

With a sad heart Ann sent the girl back to her family.

That evening St. Ann was sitting under a great tree in her garden, reading prayers on a parchment roll and begging God to send Joachim home and to let them have at least one child—she was now forty-four. Then she prayed fervently for the coming of the Messiah, and her thoughts turned to the fortunate family, to the holy mother that God would choose. With a sigh she said to herself:

"Oh, who shall be worthy to be the servant of her servants?"

Just then the Archangel Gabriel suddenly appeared

before her in a resplendent human form and declared:

“Ann, servant of God. The Lord has heard thy petitions. If He delays their fulfillment, it is in order to prepare thee and to give thee much more than thou askest. The Most High has resolved to give thee and Joachim holy and wonderful fruit, for those who pray to Him in humble confidence are most agreeable to Him. Now He sends me to give thee joyful news: He chooses thee to be the mother of her who is to give birth to the Redeemer of mankind! Thou shalt bring forth a daughter and she shall be called Mary. She shall be blessed among women and filled with the Holy Ghost. I have announced to Joachim that he shall have a holy daughter, but he does not know that she is to be the Mother of the Messiah. Therefore guard this secret. And now go to the Temple to give thanks to the Lord, and thou shalt meet Joachim at the Golden Gate.”

Gabriel vanished, and St. Ann's humble heart was so overflowing with amazement, heavenly joy and gratitude that the Holy Spirit sustained her lest she faint. She immediately prostrated herself on the ground and for a long time poured out her thanks to God with tears of happiness.

That night she dreamed that an angel came and wrote the name of Mary in big luminous letters on the wall of her room, and after midnight she awoke and saw the large bright letters. Deeply moved, she kept gazing at them and thinking lovingly of this marvelous daughter Mary until the letters disappeared with the dawn. Then she arose, prepared herself for the trip to Jerusalem, and left with a servant. She was so deeply happy that she looked much younger.

Meanwhile Joachim had been visited by the Archangel Gabriel during the night while he slept among his flocks. Gabriel told him that Ann was going to give birth to a blessed daughter who was to be consecrated to God, and that he should go and give thanks in the Temple, where he would meet Ann at the Golden Gate. Joachim awoke filled with joyful consolation and hastened to Jerusalem.

This time the Holy Spirit moved the priests in the Temple to accept Joachim's offerings courteously, and several of his friends congratulated him. Then two priests led him into the Holy Place and left him there alone, after burning incense on the altar. While Joachim prayed on his knees with his arms extended, a bright angel appeared and told him that his childlessness was not a disgrace but an honor, for the child who was to be born of his wife would be the most perfect flower of the race of Abraham. Next the angel took him into the Holy of Holies, anointed his forehead, and gave him a certain mystic blessing which freed him from all sensuality. Then he led him back to the Holy Place and vanished, as Joachim sank to the floor in an ecstatic trance. Soon the priests found him thus and revived him with marks of respect. When he recovered consciousness, his face was radiant with spiritual joy and he seemed considerably younger. He told the priests that he wanted to meet his wife at the Golden Gate, and they showed him the way, which led through a long, beautifully decorated and well-lighted underground corridor.

St. Ann had just made her offering in another part of the Temple, and she told a priest that an angel had ordered her to find her husband at the Golden Gate. Accompanied by several devout women (among whom was Anna the Prophetess), St. Ann was taken to the same corridor.

Thus it happened that near the Golden Gate St. Joachim suddenly perceived his beloved wife coming toward him, her beautiful face shining with joy. They hastened toward each other and embraced with tender emotion.

Then each told the other what had happened, and together they gave fervent thanks to God for His marvelous answer to all their prayers. As they now renewed their vow to offer their child to His Temple, they seemed to be rapt in a holy ecstasy. A cloud of heavenly light enfolded them, while a great number of angels hovered above them. St. Ann and St. Joachim became luminous. Never had a human couple achieved such supernatural purity of soul. Then suddenly the heavens opened up, and

the Blessed Trinity looked down with joy and love on this saintly pair and gave them a special blessing.

Later St. Ann and St. Joachim left Jerusalem and returned to their home near Nazareth, where they gave a great feast for the poor and distributed alms abundantly.

Now they were both transfigured with fervor, happiness, and intense gratitude. And very often as they prayed together they wept tears of joy and love.

Thus did Almighty God prepare and purify Mary's good parents until the great day at last came when the glorious mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God took place.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN SAID TO ST. BRIDGET OF SWEDEN:

“It is a truth that I was conceived without Original Sin and not in sin. A golden hour was my conception. My Son joined my father and my mother in a marriage of such chastity that a purer union has never been seen. Sensuality was extinguished in them. Thus my flesh was formed through divine charity.”