

“The importance of Helfta monastery in medieval religious culture is well established, as is the role of Gertrud the Great. Barratt’s translation of Gertrud’s *Herald*, which makes this profoundly significant text accessible in a polished and reliable rendition, is now complete with the publication of Book 5, along with related material from Mechtild of Hackeborn. Book 5 deals with the terminal illnesses, deaths, and afterlives of nuns and others connected with Helfta, and it shows how posthumous purgation and the intercession of the living were viewed in a late medieval setting. As Barratt points out, this final book also gives rich depiction of the monastic community. This book is the capstone to a project of the utmost significance for the study of medieval religious culture.”

—Richard Kieckhefer  
Northwestern University

“With this book, Alexandra Barratt completes her translation of all five parts of *Herald of God’s Loving-Kindness* and therefore significantly contributes to Gertrudian studies. Her inclusion of parts six and seven of *The Book of Special Grace*, associated with Mecthild of Hackeborn, provides an invaluable tool for continuing scholarship on the thirteenth-century Helfta community.”

—Ella Johnson, author of *This Is My Body: Eucharistic Theology and Anthropology in the Writings of Gertrude the Great of Helfta*



CISTERCIAN FATHERS SERIES: NUMBER EIGHTY-SIX

GERTRUD THE GREAT OF HELFTA

THE HERALD OF GOD'S  
LOVING-KINDNESS

BOOK FIVE

and

MECHTILD OF HACKEBORN

THE BOOK OF SPECIAL GRACE

PARTS SIX AND SEVEN

Translated and Introduced by Alexandra Barratt



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## ABBREVIATIONS

CF	Cistercian Fathers series
LDP	Gertrude the Great of Helfta, <i>The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness</i>
SBOp	Sancti Bernardi Opera
SC	Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on the Song of Songs
SCh	Sources chrétiennes
<i>Special Grace</i>	Mechtild of Hackeborn, <i>Liber Specialis Gratiae</i>



## INTRODUCTION

Readers who have come as far as the fifth and final book of *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness* will no doubt already know the essential facts about Gertrud the Great (1256–1302), to whose name this text is attached. She was a German nun at the monastery of Helfta, founded in 1229 and situated in what is today Saxony-Anhalt, Germany.<sup>1</sup> Under Gertrud of Hackeborn, who had become abbess at the age of nineteen in 1251, three of Helfta's members wrote mystical treatises in the late thirteenth century: Mechtild of Hackeborn, author of *The Book of Special Grace*;<sup>2</sup> Gertrud (distinct from the abbess), source of *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness*, of which she wrote Book 2 herself, while a close confidante, now known as "Sister N.,"<sup>3</sup> compiled the other four books; and Mechtild

1. On Helfta and its history, see the documents reprinted in *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechtildianae* II, ed. L. Paquelin (Paris: Oudin, 1877), 714–28; Alexandra Barratt, trans. and annot., *Gertrud the Great of Helfta: The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness: Books One and Two*, CF 35 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 7–8; Alexandra Barratt and Debra L. Stoudt, "Gertrude the Great of Helfta," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1000–c. 1500*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 454–55; Josef Hochenauer, *Kloster Helfta: Raum schaffen für das Licht* (Bamberg: St Otto, 1999).

2. There is now an English translation of much of this lengthy treatise: *Mechtild of Hackeborn and the Nuns of Helfta: The Book of Special Grace*, Barbara Newman, intro. and trans. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2017). The translation is selective, and the material has been somewhat rearranged. Translations here from *The Book of Special Grace* are my own.

3. See Balázs J. Nemes, "Text Production and Authorship: Gertrude of Helfta's *Legatus divinae pietatis*," in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann, and Anne Simon, eds., *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 116–20; and Almuth Märker and Balázs J. Nemes, "*Hunc tertium conscripsi cum maximo labore*

of Magdebourg, a Beguine, who composed Book 7 of her vernacular treatise *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* at Helfta, where she found refuge late in life. The abbess and both Mechtilds figure prominently in Book 5.

Gertrud's earthly life was externally uneventful but internally intense. She was born on the feast of the Epiphany in 1256 and was offered to Helfta by her family at the age of four (child oblation was still practised in Benedictine houses, even though the Cistercians had abandoned the practice): we can only imagine how traumatic it must have been for the future saint to be wrenched from her parents at such a young age, however kind the abbess who received her. A few years before, in 1259, Helfta had moved from its site in Rodardsdorf to new and better buildings in Eisleben, and no doubt it was raising its profile and increasing its intake. In the monastery the young Gertrud received an excellent medieval education in the *trivium* (Latin grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and possibly in the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy): the abbess was a firm believer in the importance of such learning for the proper understanding of Scripture and, consequently, for the promotion of the religious life, as we learn from *Special Grace* VI.1. Originally indifferent to the vocation foisted upon her, in 1281 at the age of twenty-five Gertrud underwent a conversion and was thenceforward favored with numerous visions and mystical experiences, in which the divine heart of Jesus played a large part. Although frequently confused with the abbess of the same name, she never held conventual office (apart from acting as deputy chantress, as emerges in V.1.24).<sup>4</sup> Rather, she was renowned for her teaching, her composition

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*occultandi*: Schwester N von Helfta und ihre 'Sonderausgabe' des 'Legatus divinae pietatis' Gertruds von Helfta in der Leipziger Handschrift Ms 827," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 137 (2015): 248–96.

4. References to Book 5 of *The Herald* are to the present translation; references to Books 1 and 2 are to Alexandra Barratt, trans., *The Herald: Books One and Two*, CF35 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991); references to Book 3 to Alexandra Barratt, trans., *Gertrud the Great of Helfta: The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness: Book Three*, CF 63 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1999); and references to Book 4 to Alexandra Barratt, trans., *Gertrud the Great*

of prayers and spiritual florilegia,<sup>5</sup> and her role as spiritual advisor and intermediary with the divine, which is central to much of Book 5. After many years of sickness she died in her mid-forties in 1301 or 1302.<sup>6</sup>

### Structure of Book 5

Book 5 falls into two parts. The first twenty-two chapters present a series of exemplary accounts of the sickness, death, penitential sufferings, and eventual glorification of various people associated with the monastery of Helfta. Anyone who thinks this sounds like an unpromising subject is in for a surprise, for we probably learn more about Helfta as a community from this book alone than from the other four books of *The Herald* combined. The monastery emerges not as a homogeneous women's house, but as a diverse community made up of both men and women, religious and lay.

This section opens with ten chapters concerned with twelve women and girls. In pride of place is the lengthy appreciation of the abbess Gertrud, by far the longest of any of these essays. The abbess, who was a deft facilitator and efficient administrator rather than a visionary herself, has been overshadowed in the eyes of posterity by her nuns, but it is clear from both V.1 and *Special Grace* VI that she was a remarkable woman who set high standards of scholarship and piety, and whose leadership provided a sympathetic and sheltered environment in which the more mystically inclined could flourish. Second only in length to this eulogy of the abbess is that of

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*of Helfta: The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness: Book Four*, CF 85 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2018). References specifically to the Latin *Legatus* (LDP), the chapter and paragraph numbers of which are replicated in the translations, are to *Le Héraut*, ed. Pierre Doyère and others, SCh 25, 27, 225, and 331 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968–1986).

5. One possible example of her work in this genre has recently come to light in Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek MS 827, beginning “Ducam eam in solitudinem.”

6. Our meager information about Gertrud's life is derived from *The Herald* itself. See further Barratt, *The Herald: Books One and Two*, 9–12, and Barratt, *The Herald: Book Three*, 9–11.

THE HERALD OF GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS

*Book 5*



## PROLOGUE

**T**he Lord quite often reveals the rewards of the departed for the salvation of the living, so that they may choose examples, either of recompense for what has been done or of avoidance of what should be eschewed. We have therefore written down in one place material concerning certain souls whose merits and rewards the Lord condescended to reveal to Gertrud: first, concerning the most glorious and amiable reverend Lady G<ertrud>, most kindly abbess, whose deeds, though difficult to imitate, it is pious to admire, and to give devout thanks for her to God, who condescended to bestow upon her every good thing. Amen.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE GLORIOUS DEATH OF THE REVEREND LADY G<ERTRUD>, ABBESS, OF SWEETEST MEMORY<sup>1</sup>

1. Truly worthy and filled with the Holy Spirit, of reverend memory and to be embraced in the arms of unfeigned love, Lady G<ertrud>, whom we should revere as most kindly abbess and worthy of all praise and honor, governed the abbey for forty years and eleven days. She did so wisely, gently, and prudently, with wonderful discretion, to the praise of God and the profit of men and women: with the most fervent love and devotion with respect to God, in the greatest loving-kindness and solicitude with respect to her neighbor, foremost in humility and affliction with respect to herself. Displaying humility in her deeds, most conscientious in visiting the sick and, by helping with her own hands, obtaining for them what they needed, both for their rest and for their refreshment, and whatever else was necessary, from which her subordinates' vehement affections could not deter her. Not only in this but also in such other things as cleaning the cloister and setting things to rights, she was sometimes the first, or even quite often the only one to set to work until she persuaded, or rather

1. The abbess died in 1291.

attracted her subordinates by her example or her gentle words to help her.

2. Although in these and various other, or, rather, all virtues she blossomed like a rose all her life, so much so that she showed herself both to God and to men and women wonderfully lovable and full of grace, finally, after forty years and eleven days (as I said above), alas! alas! she fell sick with what is called a minor stroke.<sup>2</sup> This dart was sent from the hand of the Almighty to draw to himself this noble soul abounding in the fruits of so many virtues and to bring her out of the battlefield of physical misery, but all those who knew her could conceive how profoundly this pierced the innermost being of those subject to her. For we found it unthinkable that throughout the length and breadth of the whole world a person could be found who would be *prevented in* so ample *blessing* by God,\* both in gifts of nature and of grace, and also of fortune in things related to the divine.

\*see Ps 20:4

For although the number of people whom her maternal care had received and nurtured in religion had far exceeded one hundred, we have never heard from any of them that they could find someone for whom they could have greater affection and whom they would prefer to her in anything—so much so that, in addition, wonderful to relate! When children under the age of seven were sometimes received into the monastery, although they did not as yet have the natural intelligence to understand those things that are God's, nonetheless as soon as they were able to recognize, at first in a childish way, that she was their mother in a special sense, they rested on her gentle kindness with so much affection that

2. *apoplexia minor*, a technical medieval Latin medical term.

they thought it ridiculous that they had ever declared that they loved their father or mother or any other of their relatives more than they loved her. Since it would take far too long to recount these stories and others like them, and especially what outsiders felt about her when they saw her and heard her words, all redolent with wisdom, let us pour back all things, with praise and thanksgiving, into that abyss from whose outflowing all good proceeds.

3. Since, then, that sunbeam was moving through bodily sickness towards the sunset of death, her daughters feared lest perhaps it might happen that, having lost the splendor of such shining examples and the help of such a loving mother's leadership, they might at some time go astray in the path of the religious life, with all their heart's affection they fled to *the Father of mercies*,\* praying for her restoration to health with such prayers as they could offer. Because he is the highest good, from which every good receives its goodness, he did not *despise the supplication of the poor*,\* and also because it was not fitting to grant them an outcome contrary to the divine plan concerning their mother's health, he nonetheless granted the outcome that her daughters were consoled, rejoicing in the blessedness of their mother. And so through <Gertrud> he gave consoling replies to those constantly praying for her, as will become clear in what follows.

\*2 Cor 1:3

\*Ps 21:25

4. On one occasion, when <Gertrud> was praying for her and longed to know her state, the Lord replied, "With inestimable joy have I waited for this moment *to lead my chosen one into the wilderness*, so that I might there *speak to her heart*.\* I am *not defrauded of my desire*,\* for she herself is responding according to my most acceptable good pleasure, and she is obeying me in all things according to my sweetest delight." That

\*see Hos 2:14

\*see Ps 77:30

is, the “wilderness” is the sickness in which the Lord speaks to the heart, and not to the ear, of his beloved, because his speech cannot be understood in a human way, just as those things that are spoken to the heart are sensed rather than heard. Thence the Lord’s “words” to his chosen are trials and heaviness of heart, as when the sick person thinks that he is useless and wasting his time uselessly, and that others toiling for him are also wasting their time, for the enjoyment of good health will perhaps never come.

To this the chosen one responds according to God’s excellent pleasure, since, keeping patience in her heart, she desires that the Lord’s will should be completely accomplished in her. For such a response is not heard in heaven in a human way, but it resounds, as if through the sweetest divine instrument, that is, the heart of Jesus Christ, in the highest delight of the whole Trinity and of all the court of heaven. For no human heart on earth could offer its willingness to endure according to God’s will while experiencing heavy burdens, if that ability had not flowed into it from that most perfect heart of Jesus Christ. Thence it must always resound in heaven through that heart, the heart of Jesus Christ.

5. The Lord added, “My chosen one obeys me according to my sweetest delight when she does not despise the burdens of sickness as Queen Vashti despised the authority of King Ahasuerus when he ordered her to enter *with the crown set upon her head, to show her beauty to the princes.*\* So when I delight to show the loveliness of my chosen one in the presence of the Trinity, ever to be worshiped, and the whole court of heaven, then I weigh her down greatly with both sickness and exhaustion, and she serves me according to the sweetest delight of my heart when she then patiently accepts relief and physical necessities with discretion. And

\*see Esth 1:11

her occasional reluctance to do such things takes the place of a jewel in her crown. But it is right for her to accept comfort, recalling that *to them that love <me> all things work together unto good\** through my most kindly loving-kindness.”

\*Rom 8:28

6. Then another time while G<ertrud> was again praying for her, the Lord replied, “I sometimes take pleasure in my chosen one’s preparing gifts for me, and then I give her pearls and flowers of gold. That is, pearls are the senses, and flowers of gold the leisure with which she is preparing adornments most fitting and acceptable to me when, having some leisure and having somewhat recovered her strength, she attends to her duties as far as she can, concerned with how she should make determinations that can strengthen and sustain the religious life, so that after her death her decisions and precedents should be like most solid pillars to uphold the religious life to my eternal praise. But when she works at this, if she feels her health endangered, she immediately stops, and entrusts the task to me with the confidence that I will complete it. For this is the trust that moves my divine heart: when she feels better, she tries to do what she can with respect to her duties, and when she feels worse, she immediately stops again and trusts in me.”

7. Another time when Lady Gertrud, the abbess of sweet memory, was more especially weighed down because she could not do anything with her hands, and thence feared that she was spending her time uselessly, with her accustomed humility she sought reassurance from <Gertrud>, whose response she preferred to others. She entrusted to her the task of praying to the Lord on this. When she was devoutly doing this, she received this answer from the Lord: “A kindly king would never question his chosen one if she neglected to arrange her

jewels at the moment when she delighted to stretch out her hands in a caress. But it would be the more welcome because in all kinds of things she was always prepared to be subject to his will. Therefore the sweetness of my most kindly heart welcomes it so much the more if that chosen one patiently bears the difficulties of sickness. And as soon as she feels an improvement, she goes back to her wish to promote the religious life insofar as she can, without making her sickness worse.”

8. Again, while she wanted to resign her position as abbess because of her sickness, as she thought that she could not accomplish anything useful in office, and on this too asked <Gertrud> about the divine will, the Lord instructed her with these words: “I am sanctifying my chosen one by that sickness so that she may dwell with me, just as a church is sanctified by the bishop’s consecration. Again, just as a church is strengthened with bars to prevent the entrance of the unworthy, so I am barring her too, lest her outer senses might receive such varied things, in which there is sometimes no great utility, and nonetheless they disturb the heart, and also sometimes make it pay less attention to me. Thence speaking in the book of Wisdom and saying, *My delights are to be with the children of men*,\* I have rendered her so that because of the burdens of sickness it is right that I should dwell in her, according to those words, *The Lord is nigh unto those that are of troubled heart*.\*

\*Prov 8:31

\*Ps 33:19

9. “In addition I have so added adornment in good intentions and good will that, resting in her like a king on his most tranquil bed, I could for a while enjoy my delights in her according to my best pleasure on earth, before I conduct her to eternal delights in heaven. Indeed, I have left her external faculties quite healthy in part, so that I may make known my replies and my will through her to the daughters of the community subject

to her, just as I had once given the ark of the covenant to the children of Israel as an oracle, that they might honor me in her.\* May she, like the ark, contain manna,† that is, sweetness of consolation, in her heart and also in her words, according to her ability, for all those subject to her. Let her have *the stone tables of testimony*,\* that is, let her teach what should be done and what should be forgone according to her own good pleasure, insofar as she can discern it herself. Let her also contain *the rod of Aaron*,\* that is, the correction of the wicked, imposing penance by discernment with promptness of spirit, recalling that I could myself correct all things left uncorrected either by inspiration or by trial, but in what I do through her agency, I increase her reward. But if those whom she corrects are not corrected, this will not damage her, since she has displayed such loving care. For human beings can plant and water, but I alone can give *the increase*.”\*

\*see  
Num 7:89  
†see  
Exod 16:33-34

\*see  
Exod 31:18

\*Num 17:10

\*see 1 Cor 3:6

10. Similarly, when she feared to act negligently in omitting holy communion and prayers and other spiritual exercises, and thence feared to receive communion unworthily, since because of her sickness she could not prepare herself for holy communion with any exercises, she was privileged to be instructed and consoled by the Lord through <Gertrud> as follows: “When she omits communion, or something similar that she would willingly do but feels it would harm her, purely on my account, then my most generous loving-kindness wishes to give her its own share [of merit], in place of her own share that she loses, just as whatever good is done in the whole church is my own.”

11. Just as it is the mark of virtuous souls to fear guilt where there is none,<sup>3</sup> so she was weighed down at

3. Gregory the Great, Epp XI.64 (PL 77:1195B); see also IV.4.8.

\*see  
1 Cor 10:13

one time because she considered that those serving her were wasting their time, since good health would not result. God, who is faithful and *will not suffer anyone to be tempted above that he is able*,\* consoled her with these words through <Gertrud> on this matter too: “Let her be served with reverence and kindness, care and good humor for my love and honor, for I am God and, dwelling in her, have appointed her the head of the community; thence everyone is bound to support her, as the limbs support the head. And let her accept it to my honor, rejoicing that I am increasing the merits of my chosen through her, as through a more faithful friend, while I shall reward each and every benefit bestowed on her, not only by actions but also by affection or words, as if they had been bestowed on me.”

12. Similarly, on Saint Leafwine’s day<sup>4</sup> the whole community was collectively praying for her, that she should be healed through the merits of that saint. That same blessed martyr, invoked rather pressingly by <Gertrud>, seemed to give her this answer: “Since it is the king’s pleasure to caress his chosen one in private, what knight could possibly demand of the king that he send her out to comfort her household by her presence? So it is not appropriate for anyone to demand her return to health, as through patience and good will her sickness is one with God and is, as it were, a loving caress for the King of heaven.” From this it should be known that when those whose sickness is more precious to God call upon the saints’ assistance, they deserve to receive this: God’s grace, gently flowing into them, renders them

4. November 12: the Yorkshireman Saint Leafwine or Lebuin, d. ca.733, associate of Saint Boniface, who evangelized the Saxons and Frisians.

more patient, and thence from their sickness they bear fruit that is more abundant and more precious to God.

13. These witnesses are indeed most trustworthy: all those should confess it who, recognizing God's grace in that sickness, contemplated the quality of her life. For she lost the power of speech for twenty-two weeks, so much so that she could not indicate her requirements by any word or even gestures, except by these two words alone: "My spirit." When those present did not understand what she meant by this, and did not do what she wanted, that blessed mother struggled at length, repeating "My spirit," to no avail. Finally, *dumb as a gentle lamb*,\* and looking with dove-like gaze at those things that were being done against her wishes, she sometimes laughed most kindly and could never be thought to have fallen into impatience. From the root of love of God and neighbor, which had been deeply embedded in her inmost being all her life, this too was clear in her sickness: that she was never so unwell that she did not become livelier, as if there were nothing wrong with her, when she heard talk, or just a word, about God.

\*see Isa 53:7

14. It was also clear how very great was this devotion that she possessed from the tears that she shed so copiously when about to receive communion, and from other signs of eagerness that were evident in her when hearing Mass. She always wanted to be taken there, though one of her legs was as if already dead, and when she leaned on it, it was so unbearably painful that it seemed a miracle that she could endure the slightest touch on that leg on which she stood. But she gave no hint of pain, lest she should no longer be permitted to go to Mass. Concerning the canonical Hours she was astonishingly conscientious and devout, so much so that when she was drowsy from her sickness or sometimes had food in her mouth or a cup at her lips to drink from,

nonetheless at the time of the Hours she always forced herself to be miraculously alert. The last “My spirit” that we heard her say was requesting the recitation of Compline, after which she began her death agony.

15. She showed herself perfect in love of neighbor by her liberal kindness, for although, as I said earlier, she could say nothing except “My spirit,” with that phrase she did most completely all that was needed: receiving those coming through the door and lovingly extending the one hand that she could scarcely move, caressing those who were present and responding to all that she was asked, gently touching their chin or hands, so much so that the older people declared that they could never grow tired of her company, but took more delight in it than with anyone else who bestowed on them truly delightful conversation or an outstanding gift. As they left, she farewelled them with the same phrase, that is, “My spirit,” raising her damaged arm to bless them so kindly that it was indeed delightful to behold.

16. When she learned that one of her daughters was confined to bed and was said to be growing worse, even though she could not take a single step or speak a word except, as we have said so often, “My spirit,” nonetheless she did her best to show by her gestures such a strong desire to visit the sick woman that those present could not refuse to take her there. When she had arrived, she displayed so sincere an emotion of compassion by gesture and nods that she moved the hardest hearts to tears. And since no pen is sufficient to make plain each and every one of her virtues and the distinguishing marks of her loving-kindness, let us offer to the giver of all good things *the sacrifice of praise*\* for them all, from the depths of our being.

\*Ps 49:14

17. Since, as can be gleaned from what has already been said, she miraculously spoke this phrase, “My

spirit,” so easily, and repeated it so constantly, and uttered nothing else at all that was comprehensible, <Gertrud>, who loved her dearly, asked the Lord what it meant. On this she was instructed by the Lord with these words: “I, God dwelling in her, have drawn her spirit to me and united it with me so that in all creation she desired me alone; therefore in speaking, asking and requesting what she needs, she makes mention of my spirit, in which her spirit lives. And as often as she does this, I indicate to all the heavenly court that she is intent on me alone; from this she will have eternal glory in heaven.”

18. Very many similar testimonies could be recorded of the happy state of our most blessed mother, revealed to this daughter of hers by the Lord, but for the sake of brevity I will pass them over. For they all agree on this, and point at this: that what we have seen with our own eyes bears witness, while Holy Scripture demonstrates most openly, that God was indeed dwelling in her and with her, and that he directed all that happened to her by his sweetest spirit according to his pleasure.

19. About a month after her loss of speech, she was so unwell one morning that she was thought to be dying. When the community had been summoned and she was being urgently anointed, the Lord appeared in the form of a bridegroom in all his beauty, as Bernard says,<sup>5</sup> stretching out his arms as if to embrace her and looking at her tenderly and, wherever she turned, placing himself opposite the sick woman’s face. Through this Gertrud perceived that the Lord was swayed by such sweetness of love for his beloved that, as if longing to take her to himself in this act of preparation,<sup>6</sup> that is,

5. SC 32.3 (SBOp 1:227, line 27).

6. That is, the sacrament of anointing.

with hands outstretched to embrace her, in some way he was anticipating her death with strong desire, even though she lived for more than four months after this. And when she asked how our reverend mother and lady, the subject of this essay, could compare with the rewards of blessed virgins who were already canonized and had shed their blood for the faith, the Lord replied, “In the first year of her rule she united her will to mine, and with my assistance, in all that she did she was shown capable of equaling the rewards of those crowned most lavishly. But now I have added as many rewards to her glory as the number of additional years, accompanied by growth in virtue, that I have granted her.” From this anyone may consider with what dazzling glory God’s chosen one, our most kindly mother, is crowned!

20. And so that day arrived, for which God’s chosen one had longed with so many joyful desires and had secured with so many devout prayers, on which she began her death-agony; the Lord was seen to come quickly, all blithe,<sup>7</sup> accompanied on his right and on his left by his most blessed mother and the beloved disciple, John the Evangelist. After them followed a countless multitude of both men and women, from the whole court of heaven, and specially the army of purest white virgins,<sup>8</sup> which

7. *festivus*: compare *mitis atque festivus Christi Iesu tibi aspectus appareat, qui te inter assistentes sibi iugiter interesse decernat*, “May Christ Jesus appear to you with a mild and blithe countenance, and give you a place among those who are to be in his presence forever,” from the prayer *Commendo te* in the order for commendation of a soul.

8. Adapted from *candidatorum tibi Martyrum triumphator exercitus obviet; . . . iubilantium te Virginum chorus excipiat*, “the triumphant army of purest white martyrs will meet you . . . the choir of joyous virgins will receive you,” from the prayer *Commendo te*.

seemed to fill that house during that day on which she suffered her death agony. They seemed to mingle with the community, which also remained there throughout the whole day, bewailing their desolation with tears and sighs, commending to God the passing of so beloved a mother with devout prayers. Indeed, when the Lord Jesus had come to the bed of his beloved, he seemed to caress her with exceedingly sweet gestures capable of worthily assuaging the bitterness of death. And when the words *And bowing his head he gave up the ghost\** were read in the passion before the sick woman, as if from excess of love the Lord Jesus leaned over the dying woman, opened his own heart with both hands, and stretched it over her.

\*John 19:30

21. And when the whole community was at prayer, <Gertrud,> once again guided by sweet love, said to the Lord, “Ah, most kindly Jesu, for the sake of your unfailing loving-kindness, by which you gave us so lovable a mother, since you now intend to receive her, swayed by our tears and sighs, as far as it is possible, treat her like your mother by showing her some of that love that you showed your own most blessed mother when she was leaving the body.” At this, moved by loving compassion, the Lord seemed to say to his mother, “Tell me, lady mother, what I did for you on earth while you were leaving the body that you found delightful? For this woman is asking me to act as I did to my own mother!” Then the most merciful Virgin kindly replied, “My son, I took great pleasure in finding such a safe refuge in your arms.” The Lord replied, “You received this, my mother, because you so often honored my passion on earth with sorrowful sighs.” And the Lord added, “To deserve this reward, my chosen one will make up for it by suffering throughout this day, drawing her breath with difficulty as many times as you breathed forth sighs on earth while recalling my passion.”

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