

From Revelations

[God to Birgitta:] “I gave humans sense and understanding in order that they might meditate on and imitate the ways of life and shun the ways of death... With regard to eternal salvation, abundant wisdom does not benefit the soul, unless she also shines with goodness of life. It is in fact more useful to have less knowledge but a better way of life. Accordingly, reason is measured out to all persons in such a way that they can gain heaven, if they lead godly lives. Yet the reasoning faculty differs in many people according to their natural and spiritual dispositions.

“Whoever, then, has the grace of greater understanding should beware of the danger of a harsher judgment if he or she is negligent. Whoever lacks understanding and intellectual brilliance should take advantage of the little he has and do what he can--for he has been saved from many occasions of sin. In youth even Peter the Apostle was forgetful, and John unlearned. Yet they grasped true wisdom in old age, for they sought the source of wisdom. Solomon was quick to learn when young, and Aristotle had a subtle mind. However, they did not grasp the origin of wisdom, for they neither glorified the giver of wisdom, as they should have, nor put into practice what they knew and taught, nor studied in order to improve themselves but to improve others...

“No one is good in himself, except for me alone, God, and anyone who is good is good through me alone. Therefore, if you who are nothing seek praise for yourself and not for me from whom comes every perfect gift, then your praise is false and you do me, your Creator, an injustice. As all the good things that you have come from me, so all praise should be given to me. And just as I, your God, bestow on you all worldly goods - strength, health, knowledge, and discernment for considering what is to your advantage, and time and life - so too I alone should be glorified in everything, that is, if you make good and rational use of the things given you. However, if you make bad use of them, then the fault is yours and the ingratitude is yours...

“Just as one person succeeds through virtue and God-sent zeal in perfecting the virtues, another can likewise fall into vanities through bad will and nature's bad disposition as well as an immoral upbringing. One's nature is often damaged when one sins and struggles against nature. Therefore, it is not without cause that some people have a greater reasoning faculty but to no use, as in the case of those who have knowledge but not a corresponding way of life. Other people have less knowledge but make better use of it. In some people, moreover, there is harmony between their knowledge and way of living, while still others display neither reasoning nor a decent way of life. This variation derives at times from my ordinary divine permission (either for people's benefit or humiliation and edification), but at times it is the result of ingratitude and temptation or of a natural defect or of secret sin. Sometimes, too, it occurs in order to avoid the occasion of a greater sin or because of limited natural capacity.

“Friend, all my works are from the start in my foreknowledge, and everything that has been made was created for the comfort and solace of humankind. However, since people in general prefer their own will to my will, the good things gratuitously given them are therefore justly taken away from them, so that they may know that everything concerning God is rational and just. And because many people are ungrateful for my grace and grow less devout the more gifts are given to them, the gifts are therefore soon taken away from them so as to reveal my divine purpose more quickly and so that people may not abuse my grace and receive a harsher sentence.

“Friend, just as my works are many, so they are also wonderful and unfathomable. Yet none of them, many though they are, is without a purpose. Truly, humankind is like a child brought up in a dark prison. If he were told of the existence of light and stars, he would not believe it, because he has never seen it. Likewise, after the human race had abandoned the true light, it did not delight in anything but darkness, as the saying goes: ‘a person who grows accustomed to evil learns to like it.’ Therefore, while human intellect may be darkened, yet there is no shadow or change in me. I arranged and continue to arrange all things in so orderly, wise, and honest a fashion that nothing has been made without cause or use - not the highest mountain nor the desert or the lakes, nor even beasts or poisonous reptiles...

“Just as I provide for humanity, so I provide for the needs of other creatures. I am like a man who reserves some places for strolling, others for the storage of utensils and tools, others for keeping both tame and wild animals, others for fortifications and secret councils, others adapted for the proper use of land, still others for the correction of humankind. Thus I, God, have arranged all things in a rational way, some for human use and enjoyment, others for the various haunts of wild beasts and birds, some to discipline and curb human greed, others for the meeting of the elements, some for the admiration of my works, others for the punishment of sinners and the meeting of higher and lower beings, and still others for a cause known and reserved to me alone.

“The riches of the world only belong to you insofar as you need them for food and clothing. The world was made for this: that man, having sustenance for his body, might through work and humility return to me, his God, whom he scorned in his disobedience and neglected in his pride. However, if you claim that the temporal goods belong to you, I assure you that you are in effect forcibly usurping for yourself all that you possess beyond your needs. All temporal goods ought to belong to the community and be equally accessible to the needy out of charity.

“You usurp for your own superfluous possession things that should be given to others out of compassion. However, many people do own much more than others but in a rational way, and they distribute it in discreet fashion. Therefore, in order not to be accused more severely at the judgment because you received more than others, it is advisable for you not to put yourself ahead of others by acting haughtily and hoarding possessions. As pleasant as it is in the world to have more temporal goods than others and to have them in abundance, it will likewise be terrible and painful beyond measure at the judgment not to have administered in reasonable fashion even licitly held goods...

“A person is given the limbs of the body in order that the soul might see in them a certain likeness of the virtues and so that they might be the soul's instruments for duty and virtue. I gave food and other carnal necessities for the moderate sustenance of the body and so that people might exercise the virtues of the soul with greater strength without growing weak from excessive consumption. I gave them the seed of intercourse so that it might germinate at the right place and in the right way and bear fruit for a just and rational cause...

“I gave people bodily rest and quiet in order to strengthen the weakness of the flesh and to endow the soul with fortitude and virtue. But because the flesh sometimes grows thoughtlessly insolent, one must cheerfully endure tribulations and all other such corrective measures.”