**JOSEPH - THE JUST MAN AND THE PROTECTOR** (from the Writings of Maria Valtorta)

Joseph is a saint of the highest order, yet of the four gospels, only Matthew and Luke mention him briefly. These extracts, from the writings of Maria Valtorta, offer significant insights into his life as the spouse of Mary, and as the foster-father of Jesus. Joseph is a wonderful example in the practice of faith, charity, humility, and obedience. He is indeed the model of models for all husbands, and for all fathers. The following passages are taken from three of the five volumes of Maria Valtorta’s The Poem of the Man-God, and from her 1943and 1944 Notebooks. [According to the decree of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, AAS 58, 1186, approved by Pope Paul VI on October 14th 1966, it ispermitted to publish, without a Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur, works relating toprivate revelations, prophecies and miracles etc., provided that they containnothing which contravenes faith and morals. This compilation, therefore, has credibility only as human testimony andis not intended to represent the opinion of the Church. The compiler wishes to affirm submission tothe final and official judgement of the Church regarding the visions anddictations contained in these extracts.]   
MARY’S VOW(Vol. 1, p. 61) (Mary is about 15 years old, and is with otheryoung virgins in the Temple of Jerusalem. She is summoned by the High Priest, who tells Her he knows of Her graceand goodness, and that now She is a young woman, She must have a husband. Mary weeps, and confides in the High Priestthat She had given Her life to God as a little girl, even before the time ofHer memory. She tells of a voice thatseemed to be calling Her:)« …With My lips which still tasted of My mother’s milk, but with My heart full ofcelestial honey, I then said: "Here I am. I am coming. I am Yours. No onewill have My body, but You, My Lord, neither will My soul have any other love…" And while saying so, it seemed to Me that I was saying over again thingsalready said and that I was fulfilling a rite already fulfilled, and the chosenSpouse was not a stranger to Me, because I already knew His ardour and My sighthad been formed at His light and My capacity for loving had been fulfilled inHis embrace… When? I do not know. Beyond life, I would say, because I feel Ialways had Him, and that He always had Me, and that I exist because He wantedMe for the joy of His Spirit and Mine… Now I obey you, O Priest. But pleasetell Me how I am to behave… I have neither father nor mother. Please be Myguide. »« God will give You Your husband and he will be a holy man,because You have entrusted Yourself to God. You will tell him Your vow. »« And will he agree? »« I hope so. Pray, my child, that he may understand Your heart.Go now. May God always accompany You. » TO BE THE HUSBAND OF THE VIRGIN(Vol. 1, p. 61-6) (Thescene is a rich hall with beautiful furnishings. There are priests (one of whom is Zacharias,the husband of Mary’s cousin Elizabeth), and there are many men of differentages, dressed in their best clothes. Joseph is in a corner of the hall…) He is talking to a hale andhearty elderly man. Joseph is about thirty years old. He is a handsome man withshort and rather curly hair, dark brown like his beard and his moustache, whichcover a well shaped chin and rise towards his rosy-brown cheeks, which are notolive-coloured as is normal in most people with a brown complexion. His eyes aredark, kindly and deep, very serious and perhaps somewhat sad. But when hesmiles, as he does now, they become gay and young looking. He is dressed inlight brown, very simple but very tidy. A group of young Levites comes in andthey take up position between the door and a long narrow table, which isagainst the same wall as the door, which is left wide open. A single curtainhanging down to about twenty centimetres from the floor is drawn to cover theempty space.The curiosity of the group increases. It grows more so when a handpulls the curtain to one side to admit a Levite, who is carrying in his arms abundle of dry branches on which one in blossom is gently laid: it looks like alight foam of white petals, with a vague pinkish hue that spreads softer andsofter from the centre to the top of the light petals. The Levite lays thebundle of branches on the table very gently to avoid detracting from themiracle of the branch full of flowers among so many dry ones.Whispering spreads in the hall. They all stretch their necks andsharpen their eyes to see. Zacharias, who is near the table with the otherpriests, also endeavours to see. But he can see nothing.Joseph, in his comer, gives a quick glance to the bundle of branchesand when the man he was speaking to says something to him, he shakes his headin denial as if to say: Impossible and smiles.A trumpet is heard beyond the curtain. They all become quiet andturn in an orderly way towards the door, which is now completely clear as thecurtain has been pulled to one side. The High Priest enters surrounded byelders. They all make a deep bow. The Pontiff goes to the table and begins tospeak, standing up.« Men of the race of David, gathered here at my request, pleaselisten. The Lord has spoken, glory be to Him! From His Glory a ray hasdescended and, like the sun in springtime, it has given life to a dry branchwhich has blossomed miraculously, whereas no other branch on earth is in bloomto-day, the last day of the Feast of Dedication, and the snow that fell on themountains in Judah has not yet melted and everything is white between Zion andBethany. God has spoken and has made Himself the father and the guardian of theVirgin of David Who has Him alone as Her protection. A holy girl, the glory ofthe Temple, She deserved the word of God to learn the name of a husbandagreeable to the Eternal One. And he must be very just to be chosen by the Lordas the protector of the Virgin so dear to Him! For this reason our sorrow inlosing Her is alleviated and all worries about Her destiny as a wife cease. Andto the man appointed by God we entrust with full confidence the Virgin blessedby God and by ourselves. The name of the husband is Joseph of Jacob ofBethlehem, of the tribe of David, a carpenter in Nazareth in Galilee. Joseph:come forward. It is an order of the High Priest… »There is a lot of whispering. Heads move round, eyes castinquisitive glances, hands make signs: there are expressions of disappointmentand relief. Someone, particularly amongst the older people, must be happy thatit was not his fate.Joseph, blushing and embarrassed moves forward. He is now near thetable, in front of the Pontiff, whom he has greeted reverently.« Everyone must come here to see the name engraved on thebranch. And everyone must take his own branch to make sure that there is nodeception. »The men obey. They look at the branch gently held by the High Priestand then each takes his own: some break it, some keep it. They all look atJoseph. Some look and are silent, others look and congratulate him. The elderlyman to whom Joseph was speaking before, exclaims: « I told you, Joseph!Who feels less certain, is the one who wins the game! » They have all nowpassed before the Pontiff.The High Priest gives Joseph his branch in bloom, he lays his handon his shoulder and says to him: « The spouse the Lord has presented youwith, is not rich, as you know. But all virtues are in Her. Be more and moreworthy of Her. There is no flower in Israel as beautiful and pure as She is. Please,all go out now. You, Joseph, stay here. And you, Zacharias, since you are Herrelative, please bring in the bride. »They all go out, except the High Priest and Joseph. The curtain isdrawn once again over the door.Joseph is standing in a very humble attitude, near the Priest. Thereis silence, then the Priest says to Joseph: « Mary wishes to inform you ofa vow She made. Please help Her shyness. Be good to Her, Who is so good. »« I will put my strength and my manly authority at Her serviceand no sacrifice on Her behalf will be heavy for me. Be sure of that. »Mary enters with Zacharias and Anna of Phanuel.« Come, Mary » says the Pontiff. « Here is the spousethat God has destined to You. He is Joseph of Nazareth. You will therefore goback to Your own town. I will leave You now. May God give You His blessing. Maythe Lord protect You and bless You, may He show His face to You and have mercyon You. May He turn His face to You and give You peace. »Zacharias goes out escorting the Pontiff. Anna congratulates Josephand then she goes out, too.The betrothed are now facing each other. Mary, full of blushes, isstanding with Her head bowed. Joseph, who is also red in the face, looks at Herand tries to find the first words to be said. He eventually finds them and abright smile lights up his eyes. He says: « I welcome you, Mary. I saw Youwhen You were a little baby, only a few days old… I was a friend of Yourfather's and I have a nephew, the son of my brother Alphaeus, who was a greatfriend of Your mother. He was her little friend, because he is only eighteenyears old, and when You were not yet born, he was only a little boy and hecheered up Your sad mother who loved him so much. You do not know us becauseYou were only a little girl when You came here. But everyone in Nazareth lovesYou and they all think and speak of Joachim's little Mary, Whose birth was amiracle of the Lord, Who made the barren old lady blossom wonderfully… And Iremember the evening You were born… We all remember it because of the prodigyof a heavy rain that saved the country and of a violent storm during which thethunderbolts did not damage even a stem of heather and it ended with such alarge and beautiful rainbow that the like has never been seen again. And then…who does not remember Joachim's happiness? He dandled You showing You to hisneighbours… As if You were a flower that had descended from Heaven, he admiredYou and wanted everyone to admire You, a happy old father who died talkingabout his Mary, Who was so beautiful and good and Whose words were so full ofwisdom and grace… He was quite right in admiring You and in saying that thereis no other woman lovelier than You are! And Your mother? She filled Your houseand the neighbourhood with her songs and she sang like a skylark in springtimewhen she was carrying You, and afterwards when she held You in her arms. I madea cradle for You. A tiny little cradle, with roses carved all over it, becauseYour mother wanted it like that. Perhaps it is still in the house… I am old, Mary.When You were born I was beginning to work. I was already working… I wouldnever have believed that I was going to have You as a spouse! Perhaps Yourparents would have died a happier death if they had known, because they were myfriends. I buried Your father, mourning over his death with a sincere heart,because he was a good teacher to me. »Mary raises Her face, little by little, taking heart, as She hearsJoseph speak to Her thus, and when he mentions the cradle She smiles gently andwhen Joseph speaks of Her father, She holds out Her hand to him and says:« Thank you, Joseph. » A very timid and gentle « thankyou. »Joseph holds Her little jasmine hand in his short and strong handsof a carpenter and he caresses it with an affection that expresses more andmore confidence. Perhaps he is waiting for more words. But Mary is silent onceagain. He then goes on: « As You know, Your house is still intact, withthe exception of the part that was demolished by order of the consul, to builda road for the wagons of the Romans. But the fields, what is left of them - Youknow that because of Your father's illness much of the property had to bedisposed of - have been rather neglected. For over three years the trees andthe vines have never been pruned and the land is untilled and hard. But thetrees that saw You when You were a little girl are still there, and if Youagree, I will at once take care of them. »« Thank you, Joseph. But you have your work… »« I will work in Your orchard in the morning and in the evening.The days are getting longer and longer. By springtime I want everything to bein order for Your happiness. Look: this is a branch of the almond tree near thehouse. I wanted to pick it - the hedge is so ruined that one can enteranywhere, but I will remake it solid and strong - I wanted to pick it, becauseI thought that if I should be the chosen one, You would have been pleased tohave a flower from Your garden. But I was not expecting to be the chosen one asI am a Nazirite and I have obeyed because it is an order of the Priest, notbecause I wish to get married. Here is the branch, Mary. With it I offer You myheart, that, like it, has bloomed up till now only for the Lord and is nowblooming for You, my spouse »Mary takes the branch. She is moved and looks at Joseph with a facethat has become more and more confident and bright. She feels certain of him.When he says to Her « I am a Nazirite », Her face becomes bright andShe takes courage: « Also I am all of the Lord, Joseph. I do not knowwhether the High Priest told you… »« He only told me that You are good and pure, that You wish toinform me of a vow, and that I must be good to you. Speak, Mary. Your Josephwants You to be happy in all Your desires. I do not love You with my body. Ilove You with my soul, holy girl given to me by God! Please see in me a fatherand a brother, in addition to a husband. And open Your heart to me as to afather and rely on me as on a brother… »« Since My childhood I have consecrated Myself to the Lord. Iknow this is not the custom in Israel. But I heard a voice requesting Myvirginity as a sacrifice of love for the coming of the Messiah. Israel has beenwaiting for Him for such a long time!… It is not too much to forgo the joy ofbeing a mother for that! »Joseph gazes at Her as if he wanted to read Her heart, then he takesHer tiny hands which are still holding the branch in blossom and he says:« I will join my sacrifice to Yours and we shall love the Eternal Father so much with our chastity that He willsend His Saviour to the world earlier, and will allow us to see His Lightshining in the world. Come, Mary. Let us go before His House and take an oaththat we shall love each other as the angels do. Then I will go to Nazareth toprepare everything for You, in Your house, if You wish to go there, orelsewhere if You wish so. »« In My house… There was a grotto down at the bottom… Is itstill there? »« It is, but it is no longer Yours… But I will build anotherone for You where it will be cool and quiet during the hottest hours of theday. I will make it as much as possible identical to the older one. And tellme: whom do You want with You? »« Nobody. I am not afraid. Alphaeus' mother, who has alwayscome to see Me, will keep Me company during the day. At night I prefer to bealone. No harm can befall Me. »« And now I am there, too. When shall I come and getYou? »« Whenever you wish, Joseph. »« Then I will come as soon as the house is ready. I will nottouch anything. I want You to find it as Your mother left it. But I want it tobe bright and clean, to receive You without any sadness. Come, Mary. Let us goand tell the Most High that we bless Him. » THE ENGAGEMENT OF MARY AND JOSEPH(Vol. 1, p. 68-72) (Maryis dressed as a bride, assisted by Elizabeth, her cousin, and by Anna ofPhanuel, Her teacher. Anna asked Marywhat Joseph said about Her vow. Marysays:)« Hemade no objection. On the contrary, when I told him the reasons, he said: “Iwill join my sacrifice to Yours”. »« He is a holy young man » says Anna of Phanuel.The « holy young man » is coming in just now in thecompany of Zacharias.He is really magnificent. All dressed in gold yellow he seems aneastern sovereign. A splendid belt supports his bag and his dagger, the formerof morocco embroidered in gold, the latter with a morocco sheath and golddecorations. On his head he is wearing a turban, that is the usual piece ofcloth worn like a hood, as is still customary amongst certain people in Africa,such as the bedouins, and it is held by a precious ring, a thin wire of gold,to which there are tied some small bunches of myrtle. He has on a new mantle,with fringes, and he wears it with great dignity. He is sparkling with joy. Hehas in his hands small bunches of myrtle in bloom.« Peace to you, my spouse! » he greets Her. « Peaceto everyone. » When he has received a reply to his greetings, he says:« I saw Your joy the day I gave You a branch from Your garden. I thought Ishould bring You some myrtle which I picked near the grotto You love so much. Iwanted to bring You some of the roses that are already beginning to bloom nearYour house. But roses do not last long. After a journey of several days I wouldhave arrived here with only the thorns. And I want to offer You, my dear, onlyroses and spread Your way with soft scented flowers, so that Your feet may reston them without touching anything dirty or harsh. »« Oh! Thank you, you are so good! But what did you do to keepit so fresh? »« I tied a vase to the saddle and I put in it the branches ofthe flowers in bud. During the journey they have burst into flower. Here theyare, Mary. May Your forehead be garlanded with purity, the symbol of a bride,which, however, is much inferior to the purity of Your heart. »Elizabeth and the teachers adorn Mary with a little garland offlowers which they form attaching to the precious ring the little white bunchesof myrtle and they insert small white roses which they take from a vase placedon a small chest.Mary is on the point of taking Her large white mantle to put it onHer shoulders, but Joseph precedes Her and helps Her to fasten it at the top ofHer shoulders with two silver buckles. The teachers then arrange the folds withloving care.Everything is ready. While they are awaiting I do not know what,Joseph takes Mary to one side and says to Her: « I have pondered a lot onYour vow these last days. I told You that I will share it with You. But themore I think of it, the more I realise that a temporary Naziritism is notsufficient, even if renewed several times. Ihave understood You, Mary. I do not yet deserve the word of Light, but amurmur of it comes to me. And it causes me to read Your secret, at least in itsmain lines. I am a poor ignorant man, Mary. A poor workman. I know nothing ofletters and I have no treasures. But I place at Your feet my treasure: my absolute chastity, for ever, to beworthy of being beside You, Virgin of God, “my sister spouse, enclosed garden,sealed fountain”, as our Ancestor says, who perhaps wrote the Song of Songsseeing You… I shall be the guardian of this garden of spices in which are themost precious fruits and from which a spring of living water gushes out in agentle surge: Your kindness, o spouse, has conquered my soul with Yourinnocence, O most beautiful one. You are more beautiful than dawn, You are asun that shines because Your heart shines, You are full of love for Your Godand for the world, to which You wish to give a Saviour with Your sacrifice of awoman. Come, my beloved spouse » and he takes Her gently by the hand andleads Her towards the door. All the others follow them and outside the joyfulcompanions, all dressed in white and wearing veils, join them.They go through yards and porches, among the crowds that watch them,up to a point that is not the Temple, but seems to be a hall used forceremonies, because there are lamps and rolls of parchment as in synagogues.They go as far as a tall lectern, almost a desk, and they wait. The othersstand orderly behind them. Other priests and curious people gather at the end.The High Priest enters solemnly.There is whispering amongst the curious crowd: « Is he going tomarry them? »« Yes, because She is of royal and sacerdotal rank. A flower ofDavid and Aaron, the bride is a virgin of the Temple. The groom is of the tribeof David. »The Pontiff joins the right hand of the bride with the right hand ofthe groom and he blesses them solemnly: « May the God of Abraham, Isaacand Jacob be with you. May He join you and fulfill His blessing in you givingyou His peace and numerous descendants with a long life and a happy death inthe bosom of Abraham. » He then withdraws as solemn as when he entered.The promise has been exchanged. Mary is Joseph's spouse.#They all go out and they orderly move to a hall where they stipulatethe wedding contract in which it is stated that Mary, the daughter heiress ofJoachim of David and of Anne of Aaron gives Joseph, as Her dowry, Her house andthe estate attached to it, Her personal property and what She has inheritedfrom Her father.It is now all over.The betrothed go out into the yard and they move toward the exitnear the dwellings of the women assigned to the Temple. A comfortable heavywagon is waiting for them. A tent is laid over it as a shelter and Mary's heavytrunks are already loaded on it.After farewell words, kisses and tears, blessings and advice, Marygets into the wagon with Elizabeth, while Joseph and Zacharias sit in thefront. They have taken off their best mantles and are all wearing dark ones.The wagon departs at the heavy trot of a big dark horse. The Templewalls and then the city walls are receding and here is the country, new, fresh,blooming in the early springtime sunshine, with the corn a few inches off theground, its little leaves, which look like emeralds, waving at a gentle breeze,which carries the scent of peach and apple flowers, of clover flowers and ofwild mint.Mary is weeping silently, under Her veil, and now and again Sheremoves the tent and looks at the far away Temple and the city She has left…(Jesus says:) « …You have seen how Joseph, not by human culture, but bysupernatural education can read in the sealed book of the Immaculate Virgin andhow he borders upon prophetic truths by his “seeing” a superhuman mystery whereothers could only see a great virtue. Since he is imbued with this wisdom,which is a breath of the power of God and a definite emanation of the Almighty,he sails with a secure spirit the sea of this mystery of grace which is Mary.He penetrates with Her spiritual contacts, in which, rather than the lips, thetwo spirits speak to each other in the sacred silence of their souls, where Godonly can hear voices and those who are well liked by God, because they are Hisfaithful servants and are full of Him.The wisdom of the Just man, which increases by his union andCloseness to Mary, Full of Grace, prepares him to penetrate the deepest secretsof God and enables him to protect and defend them from the snares of man anddemon. And in the meantime it invigorates him. It makes the just man a saint,and the saint the guardian of the Spouse and of the Son of God.Without removing the seal of God, he, a chaste man, now elevatinghis chastity to angelical heroism, can read the word of fire written by God onthe virginal diamond, and he reads what his wisdom does not repeat, but isgreater than what Moses read on the stone tablets. And to prevent profane eyesfrom prying into the mystery, he places himself, seal upon the seal, as anarchangel of fire on the threshold of Paradise, within which the Eternal Fathertakes His delight, “walking in the cool of the evening” and talking to Her Whois His love, Garden of lilies in bloom, Air scented with perfumes, freshmorning Breeze, lovely Star, Delight of God. The new Eve is there, in front ofhim, not bone from his bones, nor flesh from his flesh, but companion of hislife, living Ark of God, Whom he receives in guardianship and Whom he mustreturn to God as pure as he received Her.“Spouse to God” was written in the immaculate pages of that mysticalbook… And when in the hour of trial suspicion hissed its torture, he suffered as a man and as a servant of God, as no mansuffered, because of the suspected sacrilege. But this was to be the futuretrial. Now, in this time of grace, he seesand he puts himself at the most true service of God. Then the storm of thetrial will come, as for all saints, to be tested and made coadjutors of God.What do you read in Leviticus? “Tell Aaron, your brother, that hemust not enter the sanctuary beyond the Veil in front of the Throne of mercythat is over the Ark, whenever he chooses. He may die; for I appear in a cloudon the Throne of mercy, unless he has done these things first: he will offer ayoung bull for a sacrifice for sin and a ram for holocaust, he is to wear alinen tunic and cover his nakedness with a linen girdle”.And Joseph really enters the sanctuary of God, when and as far asGod wants, beyond the veil that conceals the Ark on which the Spirit of Godhovers and he offers himself and will offer the Lamb, a holocaust for the sinof the world and in expiation of such sin. And he does that dressed in linen,and mortifying his virile limbs to abolish their faculty of sensation, whichonce, at the beginning of times, did triumph, impairing the rights of God onman and which will now be crushed in the Son, in the Mother and in the putativefather, to lead men back to Grace and restore the right of God on man. He doesthat with his perpetual chastity.Was Joseph not on Golgotha? Do you think he is not amongst theco-redeemers? I tell you solemnly that he was the first and therefore he isgreat in the eyes of God. Great for his sacrifice, his patience, hisperseverance, his faith. Which faith is greater than this one that believedwithout seeing the miracles of the Messiah?Praise be to My putative father, an example to you of what you lackmost: purity, faithfulness and perfect love. Praise be to the magnificentreader of the sealed Book, imbued with Wisdom to be able to understand the mysteriesof Grace and chosen to protect the Salvation of the world from the snares ofall enemies. »# InIsrael, also at the time of Our Lady, a marriage comprised two phases: theengagement and the wedding. The rite of the engagement, by which the marriagewas essentially established, implied that the young couple should be blessed bya priest while holding each other's right hand; a legal contract was made inregard to property and rights. During this first phase they did not livetogether. The wedding was the solemn accomplishment of the contract and thecouple began to live together. JOSEPH ASSERTS HIMSELF(Vol. 1, p. 74-7) (Itis early morning as Mary and Joseph, together with Elizabeth and Zacharias,arrive in Nazareth in a wagon. Mary hadnot returned to Nazareth since She had left for Jerusalem as a littlegirl. Under a rustic arch of flowers andbranches, children and women greet Joseph, who is well known to them, andwelcome his Bride. The men are somewhatmore grave and solemn in their welcome. Mary, white and blonde as an angel, smiles lovingly at everybody…) « There is Your house, Mary » says Joseph, pointing withhis whip to a little house which is just under the edge of an undulation of thehill. Behind the house there is a lovely large kitchen garden all in bloom, atthe end of which there is a small olive-grove. Behind the olive-grove there isthe usual boundary hedge of hawthorn and cactus. The fields that once belongedto Joachim, are farther beyond…« As You can see, very little is left for You » saysZacharias. « Your father's illness was a long and expensive one. Also theexpenses to repair the damage done by the Romans were heavy. See? The road tookaway the three main rooms and the house was cut down in size in order toenlarge it, without excessive expenses, a part of the mountain was adapted,where the grotto is. Joachim kept his supplies there and Anne her looms. Youwill do as You think best. »« Oh! It does not matter if only little is left. It will besufficient for Me. I will work… »« No, Mary. » It is Joseph who is speaking. « I willwork. You will do nothing but weave and sew things for the house. I am youngand strong and I am Your husband. Please do not humiliate me with Yourwork. »« I shall do as you wish. »« Yes, in this case I dowant it. In everything else Your wishes are the law. But not in regard tothis. » (They arrive atthe house, and Mary meets Joseph’s brother Alphaeus, his wife Mary, and theirchildren – two of whom are destined to become apostles of Jesus…) Joseph takes Mary by Her handand they go in. On the threshold he says to Her: « And now, on thisthreshold, I want a promise from You. That whatever may happen to You, whateverYou may need, there is no other friend whom to apply to but Joseph and that,for no reason whatsoever, may You worry all by Yourself. Remember that I ameverything for You and it will be a joy for me to make Your life happy and,since happiness is not always in our power, I will at least make it peacefuland safe. »« I do promise, Joseph. »The door and windows are opened. The last searching rays of the sunenter.Mary has now taken off Her mantle and veil, because, with theexception of the myrtle flowers, She has still Her bridal dress on. She thengoes into the kitchen garden in bloom. She looks and smiles. Still held by thehand by Joseph, She goes round the garden. She looks as if She were takingpossession of a lost place.And Joseph shows Her his work: « See? I dug a hole here togather the rain water, because these vines are always thirsty. I cut off theoldest branches of this olive tree to strengthen it and I transplanted theseapple trees because two of them had withered. Over there I planted some figtrees. When they grow up they will shelter the house both from the excessiveheat of the sun and from inquisitive people. The pergola is the old one. I onlychanged the rotten poles and I did some trimming. It will give You a lot ofgrapes, I hope. And here, look » and he leads Her proudly towards the sideof the hill at the back of the house, which limits the northern side of thegarden « there I dug a grotto and I have reinforced it and when theselittle plants take roots, it will be almost identical to the one You had. Thereis no spring… but I hope to convey a little stream there. I will work in thelong summer evenings, when I come to see You… »« What do you mean? » asks Alphaeus. « Are you notgetting married this summer? »« No. Mary wants to weave Her woollen clothes, the only thingsmissing from Her trousseau. And I agree with Her. Mary is so young that it doesnot matter if we wait for a year or more. In the meantime She will get used tothe house… »« Well! You have always been somewhat different from otherpeople and you still are. I do not know who would not be in a hurry to getmarried to a beautiful flower like Mary, and you are delaying things bymonths!… »« A joy awaited for a long time is a joy to be taken delight inmore intensely » replies Joseph with a gentle smile.His brother shrugs his shoulders and asks: « Well, then, whenare you thinking of getting married? »« When Mary is sixteen. After the feast of the Tabernacles. Thewinter evenings will be sweet for the newly weds!… » and he smiles againlooking at Mary. A smile of a gentle secret understanding. A smile of abrotherly chastity giving comfort. He then resumes his tour of the garden.« This is the big room under the mountain. If You agree, I will use it asa workshop when I come here. It is joined to the house, but not in the house. SoI will not annoy You with noises and disorder. However, if You wishotherwise… »« No, Joseph. That is perfectly all right. »They go back into the house and light the lamps.« Mary is tired » says Joseph. « Let us leave Her inpeace with Her cousins. »They all say goodbye and go out. Joseph stays for a few moments andspeaks to Zacharias in a low voice.« Your cousin is leaving Elizabeth with You for a little while.Are You happy? I am. Because she will help You… to become a perfect housewife.With her You will be able to arrange Your things and Your furniture, and I willcome every evening to help You. With Elizabeth You can purchase the wool andwhatever You may need. And I will see to the expenses. Remember, You havepromised to come to me for everything.Goodbye, Mary. Sleep the first night as the landlady of this house and may theangel of God make Your sleep peaceful. May the Lord be always with You. »« Goodbye, Joseph. May you also be under the wings of God'sangel. Thank you, Joseph. For everything. As far as I can, I will requite yourlove with Mine. » ELIZABETH’S PREGNANCY, AND MARY’S SECRET(Vol. 1, p. 91-4) (Itis evening in the little house in Nazareth. Mary has just eaten the meal of a little girl. There is a knock on the door…) Mary gets up and opens it.Joseph comes in. They greet each other. Then Joseph sits on a stool in front ofMary, on the opposite side of the table.Joseph is a handsome man in the prime of life. He must bethirty-five years old at most. His face is framed by his dark brown hair and abeard of the same colour and his eyes are very sweet and very dark, almostblack. His forehead is large and smooth, his nose thin and slightly aquiline,his cheeks are roundish of a brown hue, but not olive-coloured, on the contrarythey are rosy near the cheek-bones. He is not very tall, but he is strong andwell built.Before sitting down he has taken off his mantle and it is the firstI have seen of its kind, because it is a full circle. It is held close at theneck by a kind of hook and it has a hood. The colour is light brown and itseems to be made of a cloth of coarse wool proof against water. It looks likethe mantle of a mountaineer suitable to shelter from inclement weather.Also before sitting down he offers Mary two eggs and a bunch ofgrapes, somewhat withered, but well preserved. And he smiles saying: « Thegrapes were brought to me from Cana. I was given the eggs by a Centurion forsome repair work I did to his cart. A wheel was broken and their carpenter is ill.They are new laid. He took them from the hen house. Drink them. They will doYou good. »« Tomorrow, Joseph. I have just finished My meal. »« But You can take the grapes. They are good, as sweet ashoney. I carried them very carefully, so that they would not get spoiled. Eatthem. There are plenty more. I'll bring them to-morrow in a little basket. Icouldn't this evening, because I came straight from the Centurion'shouse. »« Well, then, you have not had any supper yet. »« No, I haven't, but it does not matter. »Mary gets up at once and goes into the kitchen and She comes backwith some milk, some olives and cheese. « I have nothing else » Shesays. « Take an egg. »But Joseph does not want it. The eggs are for Mary. He eats withrelish his bread and the cheese and he drinks the lukewarm milk. He thenaccepts an apple. And his supper is over.Mary takes Her embroidery after cleaning the table and Joseph helpsHer and he remains in the kitchen even when She comes back here. I can hear himputting things away. He pokes the fire because it is a cool evening. When hecomes in, Mary thanks him.They speak to each other. Joseph tells Her how he spent the day. Hetalks of his little nephews and he takes an interest in Mary's work and in Herflowers. He promises to bring Her some beautiful flowers which the Centurionhas promised him. « They are flowers we haven't got here. They werebrought from Rome. And he promised me some little plants. Now, when the moon isin the right quarter I will plant them for You. They have lovely colours and abeautiful scent. I saw them last year, because they bloom in summer. They willscent the whole house for You. Then I will prune the trees when the moon isright. It is time. »Mary smiles and thanks him. Then there is silence. Joseph looks atMary's fair head bowed over Her embroidery. A look of angelical love.Certainly, if an angel were to love a woman with the love of a husband, hewould look at her thus.Then Mary, as if She were taking a sudden decision, lays theembroidery on Her lap and says: « I also have something to tell you. Inever have anything to say, because you know how retired I live. But today Ihave some news. I heard that our relative Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife, is aboutto have a child… »Joseph opens his eyes wide and exclaims: « At her age? »« At her age » replies Mary smiling. « The Lord cando everything, and now He is giving this joy to our relative. »« How do you know? Is the news certain? »« A messenger came. One who would not tell lies. I would liketo go to Elizabeth's, to help her and tell her that I am rejoicing with her. Ifyou will allow Me… »« Mary, You are my lady and I Your servant. Whatever You do iswell done. When would You like to go? »« As soon as possible. But I shall be away for somemonths. »« And I will count the days waiting for You. Go and don'tworry. I will look after the house and Your little garden. You will find theflowers as beautiful as if You had taken care of them. Only… wait. BeforePassover I must go to Jerusalem to buy certain things for my work. If You canwait for a few days, I will come with You as far as Jerusalem. I can't go anyfarther, because I must hurry back. But we can go there together. I will behappier if I know that You are not on the road by Yourself. When You want tocome back, You can let me know and I will come and meet You. »« You are so good, Joseph. May the Lord reward you with Hisblessings and keep sorrow away from you. I always pray Him for that. »The chaste couple smile at each other angelically. There is silenceagain for a little while.Then Joseph gets up. He puts his mantle on and he covers his headwith the hood. He says goodbye to Mary Who has also got up, and he goes out.Mary looks at him going out and She sighs rather sadly. She thenlifts Her eyes to Heavens. She is certainly praying. She closes the doorcarefully. She folds the embroidery. She goes into the kitchen, puts out orcovers up the fire. She makes sure that everything is in order. She then takesthe oil lamp and goes out closing the door. With Her hand She shields thefeeble flame that flickers in the cool evening breeze… She enters Her room andprays once again.The vision ends.(Mary says:)« Mydear daughter, when I came back to the reality of earthly life after the ecstasythat had filled Me with inexpressible joy, My first thought was for Joseph: athought as sharp as a rose thorn, that pierced My heart enraptured among theroses of Divine Love, Who had become My Spouse only a few moments before.By this time I loved My holy and provident guardian. Since the timewhen by the will of God, manifested to Me by the word of the Priest, I hadbecome married to Joseph, I had the possibility of knowing and appreciating theholiness of that Just man. When I became united to him, My dismay at being anorphan disappeared and I no longer regretted the lost retreat of the Temple. Hewas as sweet as My deceased father. With him I felt as safe as with the Priest.All perplexity had disappeared, nay it had been forgotten, so far it was fromMy virginal heart. I had in fact understood that there was no reason whatsoeverfor hesitation or fear with regard to Joseph. My virginity entrusted to Josephwas safer than a child in his mother's arms.But now, how could I tell him that I was a Mother? I endeavoured tofind suitable words to give him the news. A difficult task, as I did not wantto boast of God's gift and on the other hand there was no way of justifying Mymaternity without saying: “The Lord has loved Me amongst all women and has madeMe, His servant, His Bride”. Neither did I wish to deceive him by concealing Mycondition from him.And while I was praying, the Spirit of Whom I was full, said to Me:“Be silent. Entrust Me with the task of justifying You with Your spouse”. When?How? I did not ask. I had always relied upon God, and I had always allowedMyself to be led by Him exactly as a flower is led away by running water. TheEternal Father had never abandoned Me without His help. His hand had alwayssupported, protected and guided Me so far. It would do so also now.O My daughter, how beautiful and comforting is faith in our EternalGood God! He holds us in His arms as in a cradle, like a boat He steers us intothe bright harbour of Goodness, He warms our hearts, comforts and nourishes us,He bestows rest and happiness, light and guidance on us. Reliance in God iseverything, and God grants everything to those who trust in Him: He givesHimself.That evening I elevated to perfection My reliance as a creature. NowI was able to do so, because God was in Me. Before I had the confidence of apoor creature, such as I was: a mere nothing, even if I was so much loved as tobe the Faultless One. But now I had a divine confidence, because God was Mine:My Spouse, My Son! Oh! What a joy! To be One with God. Not for My own glory,but to love Him with a total union and say to Him: “You, only You are in Me:please assist Me with Your Divine perfection in everything I do”.If He had not said to Me: “Be silent!”, I would probably have daredsay to Joseph, with My face bowed to the ground: “The Spirit has penetrated Meand now the Embryo of God is in Me”, and he would have believed Me, because heheld Me in high esteem and because like those who never lie, he could notbelieve that others lied. Yes, to avoid hurting his feelings in future, I wouldhave overcome My reluctance to praise Myself. But I obeyed the divine command.And for months after that moment, I felt the first wound pierce My heart.It was the first pain in My destiny of Co-Redeemer. I offered andsuffered it in atonement and to give you a guidance for similar circumstancesin life, when it is necessary to suffer in silence for an event that casts abad light on you in relation to those who love you.Entrust God with the protection of your reputation and affections.If you deserve God's protection with a holy life, you can proceed safely. Evenif the whole world is against you, He will defend you with regard to those wholove you and will cause the truth to be known... » TRUST IN GOD(Vol. 1, p. 108) (Mary is stayingwith Elizabeth, and it is nearing the time for John the Baptist to beborn. Elizabeth asks Mary whether Shehas told Her secret to Joseph, and offers to tell Joseph herself. Mary says:) « No. Ihave entrusted God with the task of informing him of his happy destiny ofputative father of the Son of God, and He will do so. The Spirit said to Methat evening: “Be silent. Entrust Me with the task of justifying You”. And Hewill do so. God never lies. It is a great trial, but with the help of theEternal Father, it will be overcome. » THE FIRST PASSION OF JOSEPH AND MARY(Vol. 1, p. 121-5) (John the Baptist has been born,and is taken by Elizabeth, Zacharias and Mary to the Temple at Jerusalem to becircumcised. Afterwards, they wait forJoseph to take Mary home to Nazareth…)Thetime passes quickly, but there is no sign of Joseph. Mary controls Her grieflulling the baby, but it is obvious that She is worried. Although it is so warmthat everybody is perspiring, She has not taken off Her mantle, concerned asShe is to conceal Her condition.At long last, Joseph is announced by a loud knocking at the door.Mary's face shines, cheerful again.Joseph greets Her, because She is the first to go and meet him andgreet him reverently. « The Lord's blessing on you, Mary! »« And on you, Joseph. And praised be the Lord that you havecome! Here, Zacharias and Elizabeth were about to leave, to be at home beforenight. »« Your messenger arrived in Nazareth, when I was at Cana,working there. I was told the other evening. And I left at once. But although Ihave travelled without stopping, I am late, because the donkey lost one of hisshoes. Please forgive me. »« I am to be forgiven by you, because I have been away fromNazareth for such a long time! But see, they were so happy to have Me withthem, that I decided to please them up till now. »« You have done well, Woman. Where is the baby? »They enter the room where Elizabeth is giving suck to little John,before departing. Joseph congratulates the parents on the sturdiness of thechild, who screams and kicks, as if they were thrashing him, because he hasbeen taken away from his mother's breast to be shown to Joseph. They all laughat his protests. Also Zebedee's relatives, who have come in with fresh fruit,milk and bread for everybody, and a large tray of fish, laugh and join in theconversation.Mary speaks very little. She is sitting quiet and silent in Herlittle comer, with Her hands on Her lap under Her mantle. Also when She drinksa cup of milk, and eats a bunch of golden grapes with a little bread, Shespeaks very little, and hardly moves. Her looks at Joseph are a mixture of painand enquiry.He also looks at Her. And after some time, bending over Her shoulder,he asks Her: « Are You tired or are You not well? You look pale andsad. »« I am sorry I have to part from little John. I am very fond ofhim. I held him on My heart only a few minutes after he was born… »Joseph does not ask any more questions.It is time for Zacharias to depart. The wagon stops at the door andthey all go towards it. The two cousins embrace each other fondly. Mary kissesthe baby many times before putting him in the lap of his mother, who is alreadysitting in the wagon. She then says goodbye to Zacharias, and asks him to blessHer. When kneeling before the priest, Her mantle slips off Her shoulders, andHer figure appears in the bright light of the summer afternoon. I do not knowwhether Joseph notices Her figure at this moment, because he is intent onsaying goodbye to Elizabeth. The wagon leaves.Joseph goes back into the house with Mary, Who sits down again inthe dim comer. « If You do not mind travelling by night, I would suggestwe leave at sunset. It is very warm during the day. The night instead is cooland quiet. I am saying that for You, because I don't want You to get sunstroke.It makes no difference to me to be in a scorching sun. But You… »« As you wish, Joseph. I also think it is better to travel bynight. »« The house has been all tidied up. And the little orchard. Theflowers are beautiful, as You will see. You are arriving just in time to seethem all in bloom. The apple-tree, the fig-tree, the vines are laden with fruitas was never seen before, and I had to put a support for the pomegranate,because its branches were so heavily laden with fruit already fully grown, athing which has never been seen before at this time of the year. Theolive-tree… You will have plenty oil. It blossomed in a miraculous way, and notone flower was lost. All the flowers are now little olives. When they aremature, the tree will seem full of dark pearls. There isn't another orchard asbeautiful in the whole of Nazareth. Also Your relatives are surprised. Alphaeussays it is a miracle. »« Your hands have worked it! »« Oh! no! Poor me! What can I have done? I took care of thetrees and I gave some water to the flowers… Do You know? I built a fountain forYou down at the end, near the grotto, and I put a large basin there. So Youwill not have to go out to get water. I brought the water down from the springwhich is above Matthew's olivegrove. It is pure and plentiful. I brought alittle stream down to You. I dug a small duct in the ground, I covered itproperly, and now the water comes down, singing like a harp. I was not happythat You should go to the village fountain, and then carry back home the jarsfull of water. »« Thank you, Joseph. You are so good! »Joseph and Mary are now silent, as if they were tired. And Joseph isalso dozing. Mary is praying.It is now evening. The host insists that they should eat somethingbefore leaving. Joseph, in fact, eats some bread and fish, while Mary takesonly some milk and fruit.They then depart. They get on their donkeys. Joseph has fastened Mary'slittle trunk to his saddle, as he had done when coming to Jerusalem. And beforeShe gets on Her donkey, he makes sure that Her saddle is properly fastened. Isee that Joseph looks at Mary when she mounts Her saddle. But he does not sayanything. Their journey starts when the first stars begin to twinkle in thesky.They hurry to the town gates to reach them before they close. Whenthey come out of Jerusalem, and they take the main road towards Galilee, theclear sky is already crowded with stars. There is solemn quietness in thecountry. One can hear only a few nightingales singing, and the beating of thehooves of the two donkeys on the hard road, baked by the sun.(Mary says:)« Itis the eve of Maundy Thursday. Some people may think that this vision is out ofplace. But your grief of lover of My Jesus Crucified is in your heart and willremain there even if a sweet vision is shown to you. It is like the tepidityemanating from a flame, which is still fire but is no longer fire. The flame isfire, not its tepidity which comes from it. No beatific or peaceful vision willbe able to remove that grief from your heart. And regard it as somethingprecious, more precious than your own life. Because it is the greatest giftthat God can grant a believer in His Son. Further, my vision is not discordant,in all its peace, with the commemorations of this week.Also My Joseph suffered his passion. It began in Jerusalem when henoticed My condition. And it lasted several days, exactly as it had happened toJesus and to Me. Neither was it less painful for his soul. And only because ofthe holiness of My just spouse, it was contained in such a dignified and secretform, that it has been hardly noticed throughout centuries.Oh! Our first Passion! Who can feel its intimate and silentintensity? Who can describe My pain when I realised that Heaven had not yetheard My prayer by revealing the mystery to Joseph?I understood that he was not aware of it when I saw that he wasrespectful to Me as usual. If he had known that I bore in Me the Word of God,he would have adored that Word enclosed in My womb, with the acts of venerationwhich are due to God and which he would not have failed to accomplish, as Iwould not have refused to receive, not for My own sake, but for Him Who waswithin Me and that I bore, as the Ark of the Alliance carried the stone codeand the vases of manna.Who can measure My struggle against the dismay that endeavoured tooverwhelm Me in order to convince Me that I had hoped in vain in the Lord? Oh!I think it was the furious rage of Satan! I perceived doubt rising behind Myback, and stretching its icy claws to imprison My soul and prevent it frompraying. Doubt is so dangerous and lethal to the spirit. It is lethal becauseit is the first agent of the deadly disease called “despair”, against which wemust react with all our strength, so that our souls may not perish, and we maynot lose God.Who can truly tell Joseph's pain, his thoughts, the perturbation ofhis feelings? Like a little boat caught in a great storm, he was in a vortex ofconflicting ideas, in a turmoil of reflections, of which one was more piercingand painful than the other. He was, to all appearances, a man betrayed by hiswife. He saw his good reputation and the esteem of his world collapse aroundhim; because of Her he saw scornful fingers pointed at himself and felt pitiedby the village people. Above all, he perceived that his love and esteem for Mehad fallen, struck to death, before the evidence of a deed.In this respect, his holiness shines brighter than Mine. And I givethis witness with the affection of a spouse, because I want you to love MyJoseph, this wise, prudent, patient and good man, who is not separated from themystery of Redemption, on the contrary, he is closely connected to it, becausehe suffered for it, consuming himself in sorrow for it, saving your Saviour atthe cost of his own sacrifice because of his holiness.Had he not been so holy, he would have acted in a human way,denouncing Me as an adulteress so that I should be stoned, and the Son of Mysin should perish with Me. If he had been less holy, God would not have grantedhim His light as guidance in his trial. But Joseph was holy. His pure spiritlived in God. His charity was ardent and strong. And out of charity he savedyour Saviour for you, both when he refrained from accusing Me to the elders,and when he saved Jesus in Egypt, leaving everything with prompt obedience.The three days of Joseph's passion were short in number, but deep inintensity. And they were tremendous also for Me, those days of My firstpassion. Because I was aware of his suffering, which I could not alleviate, infact I had to obey God's command Who had said to Me: “Be silent!”And when, after we arrived in Nazareth, I saw him go away with alaconic goodbye, and bent as if he had aged in a short time, and I noticed thathe no longer came to see Me in the evening as he used to do, then I tell you,My children, that My heart wept very bitterly. Closed in My house, all alone,in the house where everything reminded Me of the Annunciation and theIncarnation, and where everything reminded Me of Joseph, married to Me wit hspotless virginity, I had to fight despair and Satan's insinuation, and hope,hope, hope. And pray, pray, pray. And forgive, forgive, forgive Joseph'ssuspicion, his disturbance and just despair.My children: it is necessary to hope, to pray, to forgive to obtainGod's intervention in our favour. You must live your passions, because youdeserved them with your sins. I can teach you how to overcome them and turnthem into joy. Hope beyond measure. Pray with confidence. Forgive to beforgiven. God's forgiveness will be the peace you desire, My children… » FAITH, CHARITY AND HUMILITY(Vol. 1, p. 126-9) (Threedays later, Mary is spinning in the shade of an apple-tree overloaded withfruit. There are shadows under Her eyes,which are swollen as if from crying…)Marystarts at a loud resolute knocking at the door. She lays the distaff andspindle down and rises to go and open. Although Her dress is loose and wide itdoes not conceal the rotundity of Her pelvis.Joseph is standing in front of Her. Mary turns pale, also in Herlips. Her face is so bloodless that it looks like a host. Mary looks at Josephwith sad enquiring eyes. Joseph looks at Her with imploring ones. They are bothsilent, looking at each other. Then Mary says: « At this time, Joseph? Isthere anything you need? What do you want to tell Me? Come in. »Joseph enters and closes the door. He is still silent.« Speak, Joseph. What is it you want from Me? »« I want You to forgive me. » Joseph bends down as if hewanted to kneel down. But Mary, Who is always so reserved in touching him,seizes him resolutely by his shoulders and stops him.Mary's face blushes and blanches in rapid succession, one moment itis all red and immediately afterwards it is as white as snow, as it was before.« You want Me to forgive you? I have nothing to forgive you, Joseph. I canbut thank you once again for everything you have done here while I was away andfor your love for Me. »Joseph looks at Her, and I can see two large tears welling up in thecavity of his deep eyes, they remain there as if they were on the rim of avase, and they then roll down on to his cheeks and his beard. « Forgiveme, Mary. I mistrusted You. Now I know. I am not worthy of having such atreasure. I lacked in charity, I accused You in my heart, I accused Youunfairly, because I did not ask You to tell me the truth. I sinned againstGod's law, because I did not love You as I loved myself… »« Oh! no! You have not sinned! »« Yes, I have, Mary. If I had been accused of such a crime, Iwould have defended myself. But You… I was not giving You the possibility ofdefending Yourself, because I was about to take a decision without questioningYou. I have been unfair to You, because I offended You with my suspicion. Alsoa single suspicion is an offence, Mary. Who suspects does not know. And I didnot know You as I should have done. But for the torment I suffered… three daysof torture, forgive me, Mary. »« I have nothing for which to forgive you. On the contrary, Iask you to forgive Me for the pain I caused you. »« Oh! Yes, it was a great pain! What a torture! Look! I wastold this morning that my temples are white haired and my face wrinkled. Thesepast days have been more than ten years of my life! But why, Mary, have Youbeen so humble as to conceal Your glory from me, Your spouse, and thus allow meto suspect You? »Joseph is not on his knees, but he is bent so low that he is as goodas kneeling down, and Mary lays Her tiny hand on his head and smiles. She seemsto be absolving him. And She whispers: « If I had not been humble in themost perfect manner, I would not have deserved to conceive the Expected One, Who is coming to pay for the sin of pride that ruined man. And then I obeyed… Godhad requested such obedience. It cost Me so much… because of you, because ofthe pain that you were to suffer. But I could but obey. I am the Handmaid ofthe Lord, -and servants do not discuss the orders they receive. They fulfillthem, Joseph, even if they cause bitter tears. » Mary weeps quietly whilespeaking. So quietly that Joseph, bent down as he is, does not notice it untila tear falls on the floor.He then lifts his head and - it is the first time I see him do thishe presses Mary's little hands in his dark strong ones and he kisses the tipsof the rosy slender fingers that protrude like fresh buds of a peach-tree fromthe circle formed by his own hands.« Now we shall have to arrange for… » Joseph does not sayanything else, but he looks at Mary's body and She becomes purple and sitssuddenly, to avoid Her figure being exposed to eyes watching Her. « Weshall have to make haste. I will come here… We will complete the wedding… Nextweek. Is that all right? »« Whatever you do is all right, Joseph. You are the head of thefamily, I am your servant. »« No. I am Your servant. I am the happy servant of my Lord Whois growing in Your womb. You are blessed amongst all the women of Israel. Thisevening I will warn my relatives. And after… when I am here, we will work toprepare everything to receive… Oh! How can I receive God in my house? God… inmy arms? I will die of joy!… I will never dare touch Him! I will never be able…! »« You will be able, as I will, by the grace of God. »« But You are… I am a poor man, the poorest of God'schildren!… »« Jesus is coming to us, poor people, to make us rich in God,He is coming to us two, because we are the poorest and we admit it. Rejoice,Joseph. The House of David has the King long waited for and our home willbecome more splendid than Solomon's palace, because Heaven will be here and weshall share with God the secret of peace that men will be acquainted withlater. He will grow among us, our arms will be the cradle for the Redeemer andour work will procure bread for Him… Oh! Joseph! We will hear the voice of Godcalling us "father and Mother!" Oh!… » Mary cries with joy. Suchhappy tears!And Joseph, who is now kneeling at Her feet, is weeping with hishead almost hidden in Mary's wide dress, which falls in folds on to the plainpavement of the room.The vision ends here.(Mary says:)« Noone must interpret My pallor erroneously. It was not caused by human fear. Froma human point of view I should have expected to be stoned to death. But I wasnot afraid because of that. I was suffering because of Joseph's pain. Neitherwas I upset by the thought that he might accuse Me. I was only sorry and afraidthat he might be lacking in charity if he should insist in his accusation. Thatis why all My blood rushed to My heart when I saw him. It was the moment wheneven a just man might have offended Justice by offending charity. And I wouldhave been extremely upset if a just man were to commit an error since he nevererred.Had I not been humble to the very extreme limit, as I told Joseph, Iwould not have deserved to bear within Me Him Who was lowering Himself: God, tothe humiliation of being a man in order to make reparation for the pride of thehuman race.I have shown you that scene which is not described by any of theGospels, because I want to draw the excessively misguided attention of men tothe conditions which are essential to please God and receive His continuouscalls to your hearts.Faith: Joseph believed the heavenly messenger's words unquestioningly. Hewanted but to believe, because he was sincerely convinced that God is good andthat since he had hoped in the Lord, the Lord would not have reserved for himthe torture of being betrayed, disappointed and sneered at by his neighbours.He asked for nothing, but to believe in Me, because, being honest, it waspainful for him to think that other people were not honest. He lived accordingto the Law and the Law says: “Love your neighbour as you love yourself”. Welove ourselves so much that we think we are perfect even when we are not. Canwe therefore not love our neighbour simply because we think he is faulty?Unrestricted Charity. A charity that knows how to forgive, that wants to forgive, andforgive in advance excusing wholeheartedly the imperfections of our neighbours.It is necessary to forgive immediately, accepting every extenuatingcircumstance.Humility, as unrestricted as charity. You must admit that you can be faultyeven in simple thoughts, and you must not be so proud as to refuse to say: “Imade a mistake”, because such pride would be more harmful than the previousfault. Everybody makes mistakes, with the exception of God. Who can say:"I am never wrong" ? And there is a more difficult humility: the onethat knows how to keep silent about God's wonderful things in us, when it isnot necessary to proclaim them for His glory, so that we might not discourageour neighbour who has not received such special gifts from God. If He wants,oh! if He only wants, God reveals Himself in His servant! Elizabeth “saw” Mefor what I was, My spouse knew Me for what I was, when it was time for him toknow.Leave to the Lord the care of proclaiming you His servants. He isanxious to do so, because every creature that rises to a particular mission, isa new glory which is added to His infinite glory, and is a witness of what manis, as God wanted him to be: a lesser perfection that reflects its Author.Remain in shadow and silence, you who are beloved by Grace, so that you mayhear the only words of “life”, that you may deserve to have on you and in youthe Sun that shines eternally.Oh! Most Blessed Light, God, joy of Your servants, do shine on thoseservants of Yours that they may exult in their humility, praising You, onlyYou, because You disperse the proud but raise the humble, who love You, to thesplendour of Your Kingdom. » THE CENSUS EDICT(Vol. 1, p. 131-3) (Itis late in the afternoon, in the little room in the little house inNazareth. Mary is no longer the younggirl, but is fully “the woman”, beautiful and pregnant with Her child…)Josephcomes in. He seems to be coming from the village, because he comes in throughthe main door, not from the workshop. Mary lifts Her head and smiles at him.Also Joseph smiles. But his smile seems to be a forced one, as if he wereworried. Mary looks at him inquisitively. She then gets up to take the mantlethat Joseph is taking off and She folds it and lays it on a chest.Joseph sits at the table. He rests one elbow on it and lays his headon one hand, while with the other hand, absentmindedly, he combs and ruffleshis beard with alternate strokes.« Is there anything worrying you? » asks Mary. « CanI help you? »« You always comfort me, Mary. But this time, I have a big problem… that concerns You. »« Me, Joseph. And what is it? »« They have posted an edict on the synagogue door. It ordersthe census of all Palestinians. And everybody must go and register in his placeof origin. We must go to Bethlehem… »« Oh! » exclaims Mary, interrupting him and putting onehand on Her bosom.« It's a shock, isn't it? And a sad one. I know »« No, Joseph. That's not it. I am thinking… I am thinking ofthe Holy Scriptures: Rachel, Benjamin's mother and Jacob's wife of whom theStar will be born: the Saviour. Rachel buried in Bethlehem, of which it issaid: “But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, out ofyou will be born the Ruler”. The Ruler who was promised to the House of David.He will be born there… »« Do You… do You think it is already the time?… Oh! What shallwe do? » Joseph is completely dismayed. He looks at Mary with two pitifuleyes.She realises this and smiles. But She smiles more at Herself than at him. A smile that seemsto say: « He is a man, a just man, but a man. And he sees as a man. Hethinks as a man. Have pity on him, o soul of Mine, and guide him so that he maysee as a spirit. » But Her kindness induces Her to reassure him. She isnot untruthful. She simply diverts his anxiety. « I do not know, Joseph.My time is very close. But could the Lord not delay it to relieve you from thisworry? He can do everything. Don't fear. »« But the journey!… Think of the crowds. Will we find goodlodgings? Will we be in time to come back? And if… if You are to become aMother there, what will we do? We have no home there… We do not know anybodyany longer. »« Don't be afraid. Everything will be all right. God finds ashelter for the animal about to give birth. Do you think He will not find onefor His Messiah? We trust in Him, don't we? We always trust in Him. The harderthe trial, the more we trust. Like two children we put our hands in Hisfatherly ones. He is our guide. We rely entirely on Him. Consider how He hasled us with love so far. A father, even the best of fathers, could not do itwith greater care. We are His children and His servants. We fulfill His will.No harm can befall us. Also this edict is His will. What is Caesar after all?An instrument in the hands of God. Since the time when the Father decided toforgive man, He pre-arranged the events so that His Christ may be born inBethlehem. Bethlehem, the smallest town in Judah did not yet exist and itsglory was already destined. And there… a powerful man has risen, very far fromhere, and he conquered us, and now he wants to know all his subjects, now,while the world is in peace… so that the glory of Bethlehem may be accomplishedand the word of God may not be belied, - as it would be if the Messiah were to beborn elsewhere. Oh! What is our small trouble if we consider the beauty of thismoment of peace? Just think, Joseph: a period of time when there is no hatredin the world! Can there be a happier hour for the rising of the “Star”, thelight of which is divine and its influence is redemption? Oh! Do not be afraid,Joseph. If the roads are not safe, if the crowds will make the journey adifficult one, the angels will defend and protect us. Not us: but their King.If we find no accommodation, their wings will be our tents. No mishap willbefall us. It cannot: God is with us. »Joseph looks at Her and listens to Her, happy. The wrinkles on hisforehead smooth away. He gets up, no longer tired or worried. He smiles.« You are blessed, Sun of my soul! You are blessed, because You seeeverything through the Grace, of which You are full! Don't let us waste time,then. Because we must leave as soon as possible, and come back as soon aspossible, because everything is ready here for the… for the… »« For our Son, Joseph.He must be such in the eyes of the world,remember that. The Father has covered His coming with the veil of mystery andwe must not lift that veil. Jesus will do it, when the time comes… »The beauty of Mary's face, look, expression and voice, when She saysthis « Jesus » cannot be described. It is already an ecstasy. And thevision ends on it.(Mary says:)« Iwill not add much more, because My words are already a lesson.But I wish to draw the attention of wives to one point. Too manymarriages break up through the fault of women, who do not possess that love,which is everything: kindness, pity and solace to their husbands. The physicalsuffering that lies heavy on women does not lie heavily on men. But all themoral worries do: necessities of work, decisions to be taken, responsibilitiesbefore the established authorities and one's own family… oh! how many thingsweigh on man! And how much comfort he also needs! And yet, a woman'sselfishness is such that she adds the weight of useless and sometimes unfaircomplaints to the burden of her tired, disheartened, worried husband. And allthis because she is selfish. She does not love. Love is not the satisfaction ofone's senses and utility. To love is to satisfy him whom we love, beyond sensesand utility, giving him the help he needs so that he may always be able to keephis wings open in the skies of hope and peace.There is another point to which I wish to draw you attention. I havealready spoken of it. But I wish to insist: trust in God. Trust summarises thetheological virtues. Who trusts has faith. Who trusts hopes. Who trusts loves.When we love, we hope, we believe in a person, we trust. Otherwise we do not.God deserves our trust. If we trust poor men who may fail, why should we nottrust God Who can never fail?Trust is also humility. The proud man says: “I will do it by myself.I do not trust him because he is an incapable man, a liar, an overbearingfellow…” The humble man says: “I trust him. Why should I not? Why should Ithink that I am better than he is?” And more rightly he says of God: “Whyshould I mistrust Him Who is so good? Why should I think that I can do it bymyself?” God gives Himself to the humble, but withdraws from the proud.Trust is also obedience. And God loves the obedient man. Obedienceimplies that we acknowledge ourselves as His children and we acknowledge God asour Father. And a father can but love when he is a real father. God is our real Father and a perfect Father.The third point I want you to consider. It is always based on trust.No event can happen unless God allows it. Are you powerful? You became so,because God permitted it. Are you a subject? You are such, because Godpermitted it. Endeavour, therefore, powerful one, not to turn your-power toyour own detriment. It would always be "your detriment", even if atthe beginning, it may appear detrimental to others. Because if God allows, Hedoes not over-allow, and if you go beyond the mark, He will strike you andcrush you. Endeavour, therefore, o subject, to make of your condition a magnetthat will draw the protection of Heaven upon You. And never curse anyone. Leavethat to God's care. It is for Him, the Lord of all, to bless and curse Hiscreatures.Go in peace. » TO BETHLEHEM, AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS(Vol. 1, p. 134-42) (The main road toBethlehem is crowded, with people and loaded donkeys. It is very cold…)Maryis on a little grey donkey. She is all enveloped in a heavy mantle. In front ofthe saddle there is the fitting already seen in Her journey to Hebron, and onit there is the little trunk with the basic essential things.Joseph is walking on the side holding the reins. « Are youtired? » he asks Her now and again.Mary looks at him smiling and replies: « No, I am not. »The third time She adds: « You must be tired walking. »« Oh! Me! It's nothing for me. I was only thinking that if Ihad found another donkey You would have been more comfortable, and we couldhave travelled faster. But I just could not find another one. Everybody needs amount nowadays. But take heart. We shall soon be in Bethlehem. Ephrathah isbeyond that mountain. »They are both silent. The Virgin, when She does not speak, seems toconcentrate on internal prayer. She smiles mildly at one of Her thoughts and ifShe looks at the crowd, She does not seem to see it for what it is: a man, awoman, an old man, a shepherd, a rich or a poor man, but only for what Shesees.« Are you cold? » asks Joseph when the wind startsblowing.« No, thank you. »But Joseph is not too happy. He touches Her feet, which are shod insandals and are hanging down along the side of the donkey and can hardly beseen coming out from under Her long dress, and he must feel them cold, becausehe shakes his head and takes a blanket which he has across his shoulders andenvelops Mary's legs in it and he spreads it also on Her lap, so that Her handsmay be kept warm, being covered by the blanket and Her mantle.They meet a shepherd, who cuts across the road with his herd, movingfrom the grazing ground on the right-hand side of the road to the one of theleft-hand side. Joseph bends down to say something to him. The shepherd nods inassent. Joseph takes the donkey and drags it behind the herd into the grazingground. The shepherd pulls a coarse bowl out of his knapsack, he milks a bigsheep with swollen udders and hands the bowl to Joseph who offers it to Mary.« May God bless you both » exclaims Mary. « You foryour love, and you for your kindness. I will pray for you. »« Are you coming from far? »« From Nazareth » replies Joseph.« And where are you going? »« To Bethlehem. »« A long journey for a woman in Her state. Is She yourwife? »« Yes, She is. »« Have you got a place where to go? »« No, we haven't. »« That's bad! Bethlehem is overcrowded with people who havecome from all over to register there, or are on their way to registerelsewhere. I don't know whether you will find lodgings. Are you familiar withthe place? »« Not very. »« Well… I will explain it to you… for Her… (and he points toMary). Find the hotel, but it will be full. But I will tell you just the same,to guide you. It's in the square, in the largest one. This main road will takeyou to it. You can't miss it. There is a fountain in front of it, it is a longand low building with a very big door. It will be full. But if you do not findroom in the hotel, or in any of the houses, go round to the back of the hotel,towards the country. There are some stables in the mountain, which are usedsometimes by merchants to keep their animals there, on their way to Jerusalem,when they don't find room in the hotel. They are stables, you know, in themountain: they are damp and cold and there are no doors. But they are always ashelter, because your wife She can't be left on the road. Perhaps you will findroom there and some hay to sleep on and for the donkey. And may God guideyou. »« And may God give you joy » answers Mary. Joseph insteadreplies: « Peace be with you. »They take to the road again. A wider valley can be seen from thecrest they have climbed over. In the valley, up and down the soft slopessurrounding it, there are many houses. It is Bethlehem.« Here we are in David's land, Mary. Now You will be able torest. You look so tired »« No. I was thinking I think… » Mary gets hold of Joseph'shand and says to him with a blissful smile: « I really think that the timehas come. »« O Lord of mercy! What shall we do? »« Don't be afraid, Joseph. Be steady. See how calm I am? »« But You must be suffering a lot. »« Oh! No. I am full of joy. Such a joy, so great, so beautiful,so uncontainable, that My heart is thumping and thumping and it is whisperingto Me: “He is coming! He is coming!” It says so at each beat. It is My Childknocking at My heart and saying: “Mother, I am here and I am coming to give Youthe kiss of God”. Oh! What a joy, My dear Joseph! »But Joseph is not joyful. He is thinking of the urgent need to finda shelter and he quickens his pace. He goes from door to door asking for aroom. Nothing. They are all full. They reach the hotel. Even the rustic porchessurrounding the large inner yard are full of campers.Joseph leaves Mary on the donkey inside the yard and he goes outlooking in other houses. He comes back thoroughly disheartened. He has notfound anything. The fast winter twilight is beginning to spread its shadows.Joseph implores the hotel-keeper. He implores also some of the travellers. Hepoints out that they are all healthy men, that there is a woman about to givebirth to a child. He begs them to have mercy. Nothing.There is a rich Pharisee who looks at them with obvious contempt andwhen Mary goes near him, he steps aside as if he had been approached by aleper. Joseph looks at him and his face blushes with disdain. Mary lays Herhand on his wrist to calm him and says: « Don't insist. Let us go. Godwill provide. »They go out and they follow the wall of the hotel. They turn into alittle street which runs between the hotel and some poor houses. They then turnbehind the hotel. They look for the stables. At last, here are some grottos, akind of cellars, I would say, rather than stables, because they are so low anddamp. The best have already been taken. Joseph is utterly disheartened.« Ehi! Galilean! » an old man shouts. « Down there,at the end, under those ruins, there is a den. Perhaps there is nobody in ityet. »They hurry to the « den ». It is really a den. Among theruins of an old building there is a hole, beyond which there is a grotto, anexcavation in the mountain, rather than a grotto. It seems to consist of thefoundations of the old building, with the roof formed by rubble supported bycoarse tree trunks.There is hardly any light, and to see better Joseph pulls out tinderand flint and he lights a little lamp that he takes out of the knapsack he iscarrying across his shoulders. He goes in and is greeted by a bellow.« Come in, Mary. It is empty. There is only an ox. » Joseph smiles.« It's better than nothing!… »Mary dismounts from Her donkey and goes in.Joseph has hung the little lamp on a nail of one of the supportingtrunks. They see the vault covered with cobwebs, the soil stamped ramshackleearth, with holes, rubbish, excrement - the soil is strewn with straw. In therear, an ox turns its head round and looks with his large quiet eyes while somehay is hanging from its lips. There is a rough seat and two big stones in acomer near a loop-hole. The blackness in that comer is a clear sign that a fireis generally lit there.Mary, goes near the ox. She is cold. She puts Her hands on its neckto feel its warmth. The ox bellows but does not stir. It seems to understand.Also when Joseph pushes it aside to take a large quantity of hay from themanger and make a bed for Mary, the ox remains calm and quiet. The manger is adouble one: that is, there is one out of which the ox eats, and above it thereis a kind of a shelf, with some spare hay, which Joseph pulls down. The oxmakes room also for the little donkey that, tired and hungry as it is, startseating at once.Joseph discovers also a battered bucket, turned upside down. He goesout, because he saw a little stream outside, and he comes back with some waterfor the little donkey. He then takes possession of a bunch of twigs in a comerand he tries to sweep the floor with it. He next spreads the hay and makes abed with it near the ox, in the most sheltered and dry comer. But he realizesthat the poor hay is damp, and he sighs. He then lights a fire, and with thepatience of Job, he dries the hay, a handful at the time, holding it near thefire.Mary is sitting on the stool, She is tired, She watches and smiles.The hay is now ready. Mary sits down more comfortably on the soft hay, with Herback leaning against one of the tree trunks. Joseph completes… the furnishingshanging his mantle as a curtain on the hole that serves as a door. It is amakeshift protection. He then offers some bread and cheese to the Virgin, andhe gives Her some water out of a flask.« Sleep now » he says. « I will, sit up and watchthat the fire does not go out. There is some wood fortunately, let us hope thatit will bum and last. Thus I will be able to save the oil of the lamp. »Mary lies down obediently. Joseph covers Her with Her own mantle andwith the blanket that She had round Her feet earlier.« But you… you will be cold. »« No, Mary. I'll be near the fire. Try and rest now. Thingswill be better tomorrow. »Mary closes Her eyes without insisting. Joseph creeps into hislittle comer, sits on the stool, with some dry shoot near him. They are veryfew. I do not think they will last long.They are placed as follows: Mary is on the right hand side, with Herback to the… door, half hidden by the tree trunk and the ox which has lain downon the litter. Joseph is on the left side, towards the door, and since he isfacing the fire, his back is turned towards Mary. But he turns round now andagain to look at Her, and he sees She is lying quietly, as if She weresleeping. He breaks the little sticks as noiselessly as possible and throwsthem one at a time on to the little fire, so that it may not go out and maygive some light and yet make the wood last longer. There is only the dim lightof the fire: at times bright at times very faint. The lamp in fact has been putout and in the half light only the whiteness of the ox and of Joseph's handsand face can be seen. All the rest is a confused mass in the dull dim light. (Some time later…)Thelittle fire is dozing together with its guardian. Mary lifts Her head slowlyfrom Her bed and looks round. She sees that Joseph's head is bowed over hischest, as if he were meditating, and She thinks that his good intention toremain awake has been overcome by tiredness. She smiles lovingly and makingless noise than a butterfly alighting on a rose, She sits up and then goes onHer knees. She prays with a blissful smile on Her face. She prays with Her armsstretched out, almost in the shape of a cross, with the palms of Her handsfacing up and forward, and She never seems to tire in that position. She thenprostrates Herself with Her face on the hay, in an even more ardent prayer. Along prayer.Joseph rouses. He notices that the fire is almost out and the stablealmost -dark. He throws a handful of very slender heath on to the fire and theflames are revived, he then adds some thicker twigs and finally some sticks,because the cold is really biting: the cold of a serene winter night that comesinto the ruins from everywhere. Poor Joseph must be frozen sitting as he isnear the door, if we can call a door the hole where Joseph's mantle serves as acurtain. He warms his hands near the fire, then takes his sandals off and warmshis feet. When the fire is gaily blazing and its light is steady, he turnsround. But he does not see anything, not even Mary's white veil that formed aclear line on the dark hay. He gets up and slowly moves towards Her pallet.« Are You not sleeping, Mary? » he asks.He asks Her three times until She turns round and replies: « Iam praying. »« Is there anything you need? »« No, Joseph. »« Try and sleep a little. At least try and rest. »« I will try. But I don't get tired praying. »« God be with You, Mary. »« And with you, Joseph. »Mary resumes Her position. Joseph to avoid falling asleep, goes onhis knees near the fire and prays. He prays with his hands pressed against hisface. He removes them now and again to feed the fire and then he resumes hisardent prayer. Apart from the noise of the crackling sticks and the noise madenow and again by the donkey stamping its hooves on the ground, no other soundis heard. (And Maria Valtortadescribes, in a most beautiful and detailed manner, how the Baby Jesus isborn…) Joseph, who almost enraptured, was praying so ardently as to beisolated from what was around him, now rouses and he sees a strange lightfilter through the fingers of his hands pressed against his face. He removeshis hands, lifts his head and turns round. The ox, standing as it is, hidesMary. But She calls him: « Joseph, come. »Joseph rushes. And when he sees, he stops, struck by reverence, andhe is about to fall on his knees where he is. But Mary insists: « Come,Joseph » and She leans on the hay with Her left hand and, holding theChild close to Her heart with Her right one, She gets up and moves towardsJoseph, who is walking embarrassed, because of a conflict in him between hisdesire to go and his fear of being irreverent.They meet at the foot of the straw bed and they look at each other,weeping blissfully.« Come, let us offer Jesus to the Father » says Mary. Andwhile Joseph kneels down, She stands up between two trunks supporting thevault, She lifts up Her Creature in Her arms and says: « Here I am. On Hisbehalf, O God, I speak these words to You: here I am to do Your will. And I,Mary, and My spouse, Joseph, with Him. Here are Your servants, O Lord. May Yourwill always be done by us, in every hour, in every event, for Your glory andYour love. »Then Mary bends down and says: « Here, Joseph, take Him »,and offers him the Child.« What! I?… Me?… Oh, no! I am not worthy! » Joseph isutterly dumbfounded at the idea of having to touch God.But Mary insists smiling: « You are well worthy. No one is moreworthy than you are, and that is why the Most High chose you. Take Him, Joseph,and hold Him while I look for the linens. »Joseph, blushing almost purple, stretches his arms out and takes theBaby, Who is screaming because of the cold and when he has Him in his arms, heno longer persists in the intention of holding Him far from himself, out ofrespect, but he presses Him to his heart and bursts into tears exclaiming:« Oh! Lord! My God! » And he bends down to kiss His tiny feet andfeels them cold. He then sits on the ground, and holds Him close to his chestand with his brown tunic and his hands he tries to cover Him, and warm Him,defending Him from the bitterly cold wind of the night. He would like to gonear the fire, but there is a cold draft there, coming in from the door. It isbetter to stay where he is. No, it is better to go between the two animalswhich serve as a protection against the air and give out warmth. Thus, he goesbetween the ox and the donkey, with his back to the door, bending over theNew-Born to form with his body a shelter, the two sides of which are a greyhead with long ears, and a huge white muzzle with a steaming nose and two gentlesoft eyes.Mary has opened the trunk and has pulled out the linens andswaddling clothes. She has been near the fire warming them. She now movestowards Joseph and envelops the Baby with lukewarm linen and then with Her veilto protect His little head. « Where shall we put Him now? » She asks.Joseph looks round, thinking… « Wait » he says. « Letus move the animals and their hay over here, we will then pull down that hay upthere and arrange it in here. The wood on the side will protect Him from the air,the hay will serve as a pillow and the ox will warm Him a little with itsbreath. The ox is better than the donkey. It is more patient and quiet. »And he bustles about, while Mary is lulling the Baby, holding Him close to Herheart, and laying Her cheek on His tiny head to warm it.Joseph makes up the fire, without economy this time, to have a goodblaze, and he warms the hay and as it dries up, he keeps it near his chest, sothat it will not get cold. Then, when he has gathered enough to make a littlemattress for the Child, he goes to the manger and sorts it out as if it were acradle. « It is ready » he says. « Now we would need a blanket,because the hay stings, and also to cover Him. »« Take My mantle » says Mary.« You will be cold. »« Oh! It does not matter! The blanket is too coarse. The mantleis soft and warm. I am not cold at all. Don't let Him suffer any longer! »Joseph takes the wide mantle of soft dark blue wool, he double foldsit and lays it on the hay, leaving a strip hanging out of the manger. The firstbed for the Saviour is ready.And the Mother, with Her sweet,graceful gait, moves to the manger, lays Him in it, and covers Him with thestrip of Her mantle. She arranges it also around His bare head, almostcompletely covered by the hay, from which it is protected only by Mary's thinveil. Only His little face, the size of a man's fist, is left uncovered. Maryand Joseph, bending over the manger, are blissfully happy watching Him sleepHis first sleep… THE SHEPHERDS(Vol. 1, p. 150-4) (An angel appears to some shepherds, tellingthem that the Saviour has been born. They are uncertain where to find the Child and His Mother, and one ofthe shepherds remembers talking with a man, and a woman on a donkey, the nightbefore…)« Comewith me, I know where He is. I saw the woman and I felt sorry for Her. I toldthem where to go, for Her sake, because I thought they might not find lodgings,and I gave the man some milk for Her. She is so young and beautiful, and Shemust be as good and kind as the angel who spoke to us. Come. Let us go and getsome milk, cheese, lambs and tanned hides. They must be very poor… and I wonderhow cold He must be Whose name I dare not mention! And imagine! I spoke to theMother as I would have spoken to a poor wife!… » (The shepherds collect somefood for the Holy Family, go to the stable, and listen outside. One of them makes a noise…) Joseph turns round and comes to the door. « Who are you? »« Shepherds. We brought you some food and some wool. We havecome to worship the Saviour. »« Come in. »They go in, and the stable becomes brighter because of the light ofthe torches. The older men push the young ones in front of them.Mary turns round and smiles. « Come » She says.« Come! », and She invites them with Her hand and Her smile, and Shetakes the boy who saw the angel and She draws him to Herself, against themanger. And the boy looks, and is happy.The others, invited also by Joseph, move forward with their giftsand they place them at Mary's feet with few deep-felt words. They then look atthe Baby Who is weeping a little and they smile moved and happy.And one of them, somewhat bolder than the rest, says: « Mother,take this wool. It's soft and clean. I prepared it for my child who is about tobe born. But I offer it to You. Lay your Son in this wool. It will be soft andwarm. » And he offers the sheep hide, a beautiful hide, well covered withwhite soft wool.Mary lifts Jesus, and puts it round Him. And She shows Him to theshepherds, who, kneeling on the hay on the ground, look at Him ecstatically!They become bolder, and one suggests: « He should be given amouthful of milk, better still, some water and honey. But we have no honey. Wegive it to little babies. I have seven children, and I know… »« There is some milk here. Take it, Woman. »« But it is cold. It should be warm. Where is Elias? He has thesheep. »Elias must be the shepherd who gave the milk. But he is not there.He remained outside and is looking from the hole, but he cannot be seen in thedark night.« Who led you here? »« An angel told us to come, and Elias showed us the way. Butwhere is he now? »The sheep declares his presence with a bleat.« Come in. You are wanted. »He enters with his sheep, embarrassed because they all look at him.« It's you! » says Joseph, who recognizes him, and Marysmiles at him saying: « You are good. »They milk the sheep and with the hem of a piece of linen dipped intothe warm creamy milk, Mary moistens the lips of the Baby Who sucks the sweet cream.They all smile, and even more so, when Jesus falls asleep in the warmth of thewool, with the little bit of linen still between His lips.« But You can't stay here. It's cold and damp. And… there istoo strong a smell of animals. It's not good… it's not good for theSaviour. »« I know » replies Mary with a deep sigh. « But thereis no room for us in Bethlehem. »« Take heart, Woman. We will look for a house for You. »« I will tell my mistress » says Elias. « She isgood. She will receive You, even if she had to give You her own room. As soonas it is daylight, I will tell her. Her house is full of people. But she willfind room for You. »« For My Child, at least. Joseph and I can lie also on thefloor. But for the Little One… »« Don't worry, Woman. I will see to it. And we will tell manypeople what we were told. You will lack nothing. For the time being, take whatour poverty can give You. We are shepherds… »« We are poor, too. And we cannot reward you » saysJoseph.« Oh! We don't want it. Even if You could afford it, we wouldnot want it. The Lord has already rewarded us. He promised peace to everybody. The angels said: “Peace tomen of good will”. But He has alreadygiven it to us, because the angel said that this Child is the Saviour, Whois Christ, the Lord. We are poor and ignorant, but we know that the Prophetssay that the Saviour will be the Prince of Peace. And he told us to come andadore Him. That is why He gave us His peace. Glory be to God in the Most HighHeaven and glory to His Christ here, and You are blessed, Woman, Who gave birthto Him: You are holy, because You deserved to bear Him! Give us orders as ourQueen, because we will be happy to serve You. What can we do for You? »« You can love My Son, and always cherish the same thoughts asyou have now. » (One of the shepherds knowsZacharias, and promises to send a message to him and Elizabeth about Jesus’Birth. They each introduce themselves byname, and promise to return, and bring others to worship the Baby Jesus. Then one more question from the youngestshepherd:) « Will You let us kiss His dress? » asks Levi, with anangelic smile.And Mary lifts Jesus slowly, and sitting on the hay, envelops thetiny little feet in a linen, and offers them to be kissed. And the shepherds bowdown to the ground and kiss the tiny feet, veiled by the linen. Those with abeard clean it first; almost everyone is crying, and when they have to go, theywalk out backwards, leaving their hearts there…The vision ends thus, with Mary sitting on the straw with the Childon Her lap and Joseph who, leaning with his elbow on the manger, looks andadores. (Notebooks1943, p. 512, 515-6) (Jesusdescribes Mary’s ecstasy, and Joseph’s love:)“…Paleand meek, (Mary) was going to meet Love, no longer only an embrace of spiritualfire, but the warmth of real flesh that was a woman's, but that was God, andwhen Joseph would interrupt that ecstasy, respectfully penetrating it as ifstepping across God's threshold, to give his Wife the comfort of food and rest,they were not drawn-out words, but just a single gaze, one word - 'Joseph!' - ahandclasp, and the wave of ecstasy poured into Joseph as if from a cup filledto the brim.“Words disturb the atmospherewhere God lives. Nor, for the just, are words needed for them to be convincedof the presence of God and of the wonderful effects of that presence in a heart… “Joseph was filled with this emanation to thepoint of being made thereby almost like the Woman Full of Grace. Blessed tearsfell from the Just One over the joy flooding him, the mystical joy of thecontemplator bending over a miracle of divine manifestation. Adoration andsilence were the characteristics of Holy Joseph. Venerating respect for theBlessed One whose natural protector he was. And love.“The first chaste love of aspouse, love as that of men ought to have been, according to the Creator'sthought: love without the sting of sense and the mire of malice. A love at oncenatural and angelic, for in the souls of Adam and his children, according to thethought creating them, there was to be the angelic purity of the spirit mingledwith human tenderness, and like a flower opening sinlessly from the stembearing it, so, without the worm of lust, love was to arise in spouses and givechildren to chaste marriage beds.“To be chaste does not mean toprohibit union. It means to fulfill it while thinking of God, who makes tworeasoning animals into two lesser creators, and as God created the male and thefemale without introducing malicious thought into them and did not place intheir pupils a fleshly light to reveal the flesh to the innocent, so spousesought to make marriage a holy creation gladdened by cradles, but not sullied bylust.“The spouse who is honest andloving in a holy way seeks to become like the other spouse, for those who lovetend to take on the likeness of the beloved creature, so that marriage, whenwell understood, is a mutual elevation, for there is no one who is completelywicked, and it is enough for each to improve one point by taking as an examplethe other's good side in order to climb up the stairway of sanctity, competingwith one another Like a plant putting forth a branch higher than the precedingone and rising and rising towards the sky, such is conjugal and individualholiness. Today it's one virtue. Tomorrow from this virtue another, higher onesprouts forth, and from the human virtues of mutual forbearance one rises tothe peaks of supernatural heroism.“Joseph, the holy and chaste spouse of the Holy and Chaste Woman,like a child alongside his teacher, learned day by day the science of beinglike God, and since in his heart as a just man nothing was an obstacle toGrace, day by day he took on the likeness of his beloved Teacher, thusresembling God, whose most perfect copy Mary was.“In the holy night, what roused Joseph, praying so forcefully thathe reached the point of being surrounded by a mystical barrier isolating hissoul from the exterior, was the light.“In the grotto, first barely illuminated by a little fire of drytwigs which was already fading out from a lack of fuel, there had spread apeaceful light which was gradually increasing like the radiance of the moon,which, first covered by veils of clouds, then gets free of them and descendsclearly to make the Earth silver.“In the luminosity was Mary, still kneeling-for I was born while Shewas praying-but lowered back on her heels. It was Mary that, with tears andsmiles, kissed my Flesh as an infant.“Not many words then, either - the usual ‘Joseph!’ - and the presentationto him of the Fruit of her holy womb.“The Family was the firstreality redeemed by God. Reconstructed as the Eternal had conceived it. Two wholove one another in a holy way and in a holy way join to bend over a newbornbabe, and in the kiss they exchange over that cradle there is no savor of lust,but mutual gratitude and the mutual promise to love one another with reciprocallove which aids and comforts.“When the first shepherds came in, they found the two Holy Onesstill united that way by love and adoration, and that tenderness devoid ofcarnality which, unfortunately, is not seen except in the eyes of a father wasso visible on Joseph's face that he, a mature man, seemed to be the father ofthe Virgin and of the Child…” TO STAY IN BETHLEHEM?(Vol. 1, p. 155-9) (Jesus,Mary and Joseph are now staying in the hospitable house of the shepherd Elias’mistress. There is a knock at the door…)Josephopens the door, and he utters a cry of joy when he sees Zacharias. He takes himinto a little room, as small as a corridor. « Mary is suckling the Child.She will not be long. Sit down, you must be tired. » And he makes room forhis guest on his couch, and sits beside him.I hear Joseph asking after little John and Zacharias replies:« He is growing as strong as a little colt. But he is teething now and heis suffering a little. That is why we did not want to bring him. It is verycold, and that is why Elizabeth did not come either. She could not leave himwithout milk. She was very upset, but the season is so rigorous! »« It is rigorous indeed » replies Joseph.« The man you sent me told me that you were homeless when Hewas born. You must have suffered a lot. »« Yes, quite a lot. But our fears were greater than ourdiscomfort. We were afraid the Child's health might be injured. And we had tostay there for the first days. We lacked nothing, for ourselves, because theshepherds gave the good news to the people of Bethlehem, and many of thembrought us gifts. But we had no house, not even a decent room, a bed… and Jesuscried so much, particularly at night, because the wind was blowing in from alldirections. I used to light a little fire. Only a little one, because the smokemade Jesus cough… and it was still cold in any case. Two animals do not giveout much heat, especially when the cold air comes in from all directions! Wehad no warm water to wash Him, nor dry clothes to change Him. Yes, He sufferedquite a lot! And Mary suffered seeing Him suffer. I suffered… so you canimagine His Mother's anguish! She fed Him with milk and tears, milk and love…Now here it is much better. I had made for Him such a comfortable cradle andMary had fitted it with a soft little mattress. But it is in Nazareth! Ah! IfHe were born there, it would have been different! »« But Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. It wasprophesied. »Mary comes in, She heard their voices. She is all dressed in whitewool. She has taken off the dark dress She was wearing during the journey andin the grotto, and She is all white, as I have seen Her dressed before. She isnot wearing anything on Her head, and She is holding Jesus in Her arms: He issleeping, sated with milk, in His pure white swaddling clothes.Zacharias stands up reverently and bows down in veneration. He thengoes nearer, and looks at Jesus with the greatest respect. He bends down, notso much to see Him better, as to pay Him homage. Mary offers the Child to him,and Zacharias takes Him with such adoration that he seems to be holding up amonstrance. It is in fact the Host that he takes in his hands, the Host alreadyoffered and that will be sacrificed after being given to men as a nourishmentof love and redemption. Zacharias hands Jesus back to Mary.They all sit down, and Zacharias explains once again to Mary thereason why Elizabeth has not come and how upset she was. « During the pastmonths she has prepared some linens for Your blessed Son. I have brought themto You. They are downstairs in the wagon. »He rises and goes out, then comes back with a large parcel and asmaller one. Joseph relieves him of the heavier one and Zacharias startspulling his gifts from both of them: a soft handwoven woollen blanket, somelinens and little dresses. Then from the other one, some honey, some snow-whiteflour, butter, apples for Mary and cakes baked by Elizabeth and many morelittle things which are a token of the motherly love of the grateful cousin forthe young Mother.« Please tell Elizabeth that I am very grateful to her, as I amgrateful to you, too. I would have been so happy to see her, but I understandthe situation. And I would also have loved to see little John… »« But You will see him in spring. We will come and seeYou. »« Nazareth is too far away » remarks Joseph.« Nazareth? But you must stay here. The Messiah must grow up inBethlehem. It is David's town. The Most High, through Caesar's will, broughtHim to the town in David's land, the holy land of Judaea. Why take Him toNazareth? You know in what opinion the Jews hold the Nazarenes. This Child isto be in future years the Saviour of His people. The capital town must notscorn its King because He comes from a despised land. You know as well as I dohow captious the Sanhedrin is and how disdainful its three main castes are… Andthen, here, near me, I will be able to help you somehow, and put everything Ihave, not so much in the way of material things, but of moral gifts, at theservice of this New-Born Baby. And when He is old enough to understand, I willbe very happy to be His teacher, as I will be for my own son, so that later,when He is grown up, He will bless me. We must consider that He is destined forgreat things and, consequently, He must be in a position to present Himself tothe world with all the necessary means to win His game. He will certainlypossess Wisdom. But also the simple fact that He was educated by a priest, willmake Him more agreeable to the difficult Pharisees and Scribes and will renderHis mission easier. »Mary looks at Joseph, and Joseph looks at Mary. Above the rosyinnocent head of the Child, sleeping unaware of it all, there is a silentexchange of questions. And they are questions full of sadness. Mary is thinkingof Her little house, Joseph is concerned about his work. Here, where only a fewdays ago they were completely unknown, they must start from scratch. Here theyhave none of the dear things they left at home, and which they had preparedwith so much love for the Child.­­ And Mary says so: « How canwe do that? We have left everything there. Joseph had worked so hard for MyJesus, without sparing labour or money. He worked at night, so that during theday he could work for other people and thus earn enough to buy the best wood,the softest wool, the finest linen, and prepare everything for Jesus. He builtbeehives, and he even worked as a mason to make certain modifications in thehouse, so that the cradle could be placed in My room and remain there untilJesus had grown up and the cradle could then be replaced by a bed, becauseJesus will stay with Me until He is an adolescent »« Joseph can go and get what you left there »« And where will we put it? You know, Zacharias, that we arepoor. We have only our work and our home. And they both enable us to livewithout starving. But here… perhaps we will find some work. But we will alwayshave the problem of a house. This good woman cannot give us hospitality forever. And I cannot sacrifice Joseph more than he has already sacrificed himselffor My sake! »« Oh! Me! It's nothing for me! I am concerned with Mary'sgrief. Her grief in not living in Her own house… »Two big tears well from Mary's eyes.« I think that house must be as dear to Her as Paradise,because of the mystery which was accomplished in it. I speak little, but Iunderstand a lot. If it wasn't for that, I would not be upset. I will worktwice as much, that's all. I am young and strong enough to work twice as muchas I used to and see to everything. And if Mary does not suffer too much… andif you say that we must do so… well, here I am. I will do whatever you think isbest. Provided that it will help Jesus. »« It will certainly help. Think it over, and you will see thereasons. »« It is also said that the Messiah will be calledNazarene… » objects Mary.« True. But at least, until He is grown up, let Him grow up inJudaea. The Prophet says: "And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, will be thegreatest, because out of you will come the Saviour". He does not speak ofNazareth. Perhaps that title was given to Him for some reason unknown to us.But this is His land. »« You say so, you, priest, and we… we listen toyou with sad hearts, and we believe you. But how painful it is!… When shall Isee that house where I became a Mother? » Mary is weeping, silently… (Marycomments to Maria Valtorta about the difference between Joseph and Zacharias,and about the soul of a priest…)Hewas a man, that is, he had no other help for his spirit, except his holiness. Ihad all the gifts of God, in My condition of Immaculate. I did not know I wassuch. But the gifts were active in My soul, and gave Me spiritual strength. Buthe was not immaculate. Humanity was in him with all its heavy weight and he hadto rise towards perfection with all that burden, at the cost of continuousefforts of all his faculties to reach perfection and be agreeable to God.Oh! My holy spouse! Holy in everything, also in the most humblethings in life. Holy for his angelical chastity. Holy for his human honesty.Holy for his patience, his activity, for his constant serenity, for hismodesty, for everything. His holiness shines also in this event. A priest saysto him: “You ought to settle here” and he replies, fully aware of the greaterhardships he would have to face: “It is nothing for Me. I am concerned withMary's grief. If it was not for that, I would not be upset. Provided that itwill help Jesus”. Jesus, Mary: his angelical loves. My holy spouse lovednothing else on earth. And he sacrificed himself to that love.They elected him protector of Christian families, of workers andmany other categories. But he should be appointed protector not only of dyingpeople, of married couples, of workmen, but also of those consecrated to God.Who, of all the people in the world consecrated to the service of God, hasconsecrated himself as he did, to the service of his God, accepting everything,foregoing everything, bearing everything, fulfilling everything with quickness,with a cheerful mind, a constant humour? There is no one like him…Zacharias is a priest. Joseph is not. But you must note how he, whois not a priest, has a more heavenly soul than the priest. Zacharias thinks ina human way, and in a human way he expounds the Scriptures because he allowshimself to be led by his good human sense, and it is not the first time he doesso. And he was punished for it. But he relapses, although less gravely. Withregard to John's birth he said: “How can that happen, if I am old, and my wifeis barren?” Now he says: “To smooth His way, Christ is to be brought up here.”And with that subtle root of pride that persists also in the best people, hethinks that he can be useful toJesus. Not useful in the sense that Joseph wanted to be, by serving Him, but byteaching Him… God forgave him, because of his good intention. But did the"Master" need teachers?… » THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS(Vol. 1, p. 160-3) (Accompanied byJoseph, Mary, a very young mother, leaves from the house, carrying the childJesus in Her arms. Mary is pale, blonde,agile, and kind in Her behaviour…)Sheis dressed in white, with a pale blue mantle and a white veil on Her head. Sheis carrying Her Child so carefully.Joseph is waiting for Her at the foot of the steps with a littlegrey donkey. Joseph is dressed entirely in light brown: both his tunic and hismantle being the same colour. He looks at Mary and smiles at Her. When Maryarrives near the little donkey, Joseph places the animal's bridle on his leftarm, he takes for a moment the Child, Who is sleeping peacefully, and thusallows Mary to sit more comfortably on the donkey's saddle. He then hands Jesusback to Her and they set out. Joseph is walking beside Mary,holding the bridle all the time and ensuring that the donkey goes straight onwithout stumbling. Mary is holding Jesus in Her lap, and lest He might feelcold, She spreads the edge of Her mantle over Him. Joseph and Mary speak verylittle but they often smile at each other.The road, which is not a model road, winds along a country madebarren by the season of the year. Only a few other travellers meet them on theroad or overtake them.Then I see some houses and the walls around a town. They go inthrough a gate and start walking on the pavement which is all broken up, andvery irregular. Progress is now much more difficult, both because the trafficcauses the donkey to stop every moment and because the holes where stones aremissing make the poor animal jerk continuously and thus Mary and the Child arealso disturbed.The road is not flat. It is uphill, although but slightly. It is anarrow road running between high houses with small narrow low doors and only afew windows on the road. High above, the sky can be seen peeping with many thinblue strips between the houses, nay between the terraces. Down in the streetthere are many people and much shouting. They meet other people on foot orriding donkeys or leading loaded donkeys and a crowd following a cumbersomecamel caravan. At a certain moment, a patrol of Roman legionaries passes bywith a great noise of hooves and arms and they disappear beyond an arch builtacross a narrow stony road.Joseph turns left along a wider and more pleasant road. I can seethe embattled town walls, with which I am already familiar, at the end of thestreet.Mary dismounts from the little donkey near a gate where there is akind of stall for other donkeys. I say « stall » because it is a kindof shed, or better still, a kind of shed, spread with straw; there are alsosome poles with rings to which the animals are tied.Joseph gives some coins to a little man who has gone up to him andwith them he buys some hay and he draws a pail of water from a rustic well inthe comer. He then feeds the donkey. He joins Mary and they both enter theenclosure of the Temple.At first, they turn their steps towards an arcade where themerchants are, to whom Jesus later will give a good lashing: the vendors oflambs and doves and the money-changers. Joseph buys two little white pigeons.He does not change any money: he obviously has what is required. (They enter the Temple, andthe Baby Jesus is offered to the priest, who carries out the rite ofPresentation. Among some onlookers is atearful old man, Simeon, who takes the Child and kisses Him…) I hear the words of the holy old man and I see the astonished gazeof Joseph, the deeply moved look of Mary as well as the glances of the littlecrowd, partly surprised and moved, partly laughing at the words of the old man.Amongst the latter there are some bearded and conceited members of theSanhedrin, who shake their heads giving Simeon an ironic pitying look. Theymust think he is a dotard.Mary’s smile fades into paleness when Simeon mentions sorrow.Although She knows, that word piercesHer soul. She goes closer to Joseph, to be comforted, She presses Her Child toHer breast passionately and like a thirsty soul, She takes in the words of Annaof Phanuel, who being a woman, has mercy on Her suffering and promises Her thatthe Eternal Father will soothe the hour of sorrow with a supernatural strength.« Woman, He Who gave a Saviour to His people, will not lack the power tosend His angel to console Your tears. The great women of Israel never lackedthe help of the Lord and You are far greater than Judith and Jael. Our God willgive You a heart of the most pure gold to withstand the storm of sorrow, sothat You will be the greatest woman in Creation: the Mother. And You, Child,remember me in the hour of Your mission. » (Notebooks1943, p. 541-2) (Mary says:)“Whenspeaking of the Presentation in the Temple, Luke says that 'the father and themother remained in amazement over the things which were being said about theChild'.“The two spouses felt this wonder in different ways. I, to whom theSpouse Spirit had revealed the whole future, felt supernatural wonder, adoringthe Will of the Lord, who was robing Himself in flesh because He wanted toredeem man and was revealing Himself to the spiritually alive. I felt wonderonce more at the fact that God had chosen me, his humble handmaid, to be theMother of the Incarnate Will. Joseph felt wonder in a human manner, too, for he did not know anything except whatthe Scriptures had told him and the angel had revealed. I kept silence.“The secrets of the Most Highwere as if deposited in a closed ark in the Holy of Holies, and only I, thesupreme Priestess, knew them, and the Glory of the Lord concealed them from theeyes of men with his unbearable splendor They were abysses of splendor, andonly the virginal eye kissed by the Spirit of God could look fixedly at them. Thatis why both Joseph and I felt wonder. Indifferent ways, but equally in awe.“The other passage in Luke should also be interpreted in this way:'But they did not understand what he had said to them' (2:50).“I understood. I knew even before, and if the Father permitted myanguish as a mother, He did not concealfrom me the sublime meaning of the words of my Son. But I remained silentso as not to mortify Joseph, to whom the fullness of grace was not granted.“I was the Mother of God, butthat did not exempt me from being a respectful wife towards the good man whowas my loving companion and vigilant brother Our family did not experiencedefects, for any reason or under any aspect. We loved one another in holyfashion, concerned about one thing alone: our Son.“Oh, Jesus, as only He could do, restored to my Joseph every comfortin the hour of death, in remembrance of all that He had received from that JustMan. Jesus is the model for children, as Joseph is for husbands. I havereceived much pain from the world and on account of the world. But my holy Son and my just husband made noother tears come to my eyes except those of their pain…” ADORATION OF THE MAGI(Vol. 1, p. 171-4,178) (TheHoly Family is now staying in a house in Bethlehem. It is night-time, and the heavens are lit upby a star of unusual size and brightness, which moves across the sky and stopsover the house. A cavalcade with threeMagi, many servants and animals arrives. The vision ends as the Magi venerate the house, and retire for thenight. Next afternoon the Magi,sumptuously dressed and accompanied by servants carrying gifts, walk towardsthe house…) The Magi climb the steps and go in. They enter a room that extendsfrom the road to the back of the house. The little kitchen garden at the backcan be seen through a window which is open to the sun. There are doors in theother two walls, and the owners, that is a man, a woman and some boys andyounger children cast sidelong glances through them.Mary is sitting with the Child in Her lap and Joseph is standingnear Her. But She also gets up and bows when She sees the Magi entering. She isall dressed in white. She is so beautiful in Her plain white dress which coversHer from Her neck down to Her feet, from Her shoulders to Her slender wrists.She is so beautiful with Her head crowned with Her blond plaits, Her face morerosy for the emotion, with Her eyes smiling so sweetly while Her mouth gives agreeting: « May God be with you », that the three Magi stop for amoment, completely astonished. They then proceed and prostrate themselves atHer feet. (The oldest of the Magiexplains how each of them, from places very distant from each other, saw thestar, and recognised it as heralding the arrival of the Messiah. They were each guided by the star, met oneanother beyond the Dead Sea, and continued to follow the star as far asJerusalem, where they met King Herod, whose chief priests and scribes advisedthat the Child was to be born in Bethlehem. In presenting their gifts, the man told a frightened Mary what he knewof the prophesied Passion of Jesus. Thenwith due ceremony the three Magi knelt and kissed the feet of Jesus, the littleChild about nine months old and just attempting to walk, and leave the house…) The three Men go down the steps. The caravan is already therewaiting for them. The horses' studs shine in the setting sun. People havegathered in the little square watching the unusual sight.Jesus laughs clapping His hands. His Mother has lifted Him up on thewide parapet of the landing and is holding Him against Her breast with an arm sothat He may not fall. Joseph has gone down with the Magi and is holding thestirrup to each of them while they mount their horses and the camel.Servants and masters are now all on horseback. The starting commandis given. The three Men bow down as low as the necks of their mounts in a finalgesture of homage. Joseph bows down. Also Mary bows and then She guides Jesus'hand again in a gesture of goodbye and blessing. (Jesus gives us a lesson onthe behaviour of Joseph, “who knows how to keep ‘his’ place”:)He ispresent as the guardian of Purity and Holiness. But not as the usurper of theirrights. It is Mary with Jesus who receives the homage and the words. Josephrejoices because of Her and does not grieve because he is a secondary figure.Joseph is a just man: he is the Just Man.And he is always just. Also at the present moment. The fumes of the feast donot go to his head. He remains humble and just.He is happy for the gifts. Not for himself, but because he thinksthat with them he will be able to make his Spouse's and the sweet Child's livesmore comfortable. There is no greed in Joseph. He is a workman and willcontinue to work. But he is anxious that “They”, his two loves, should becomfortable. Neither he nor the Magi know that those gifts serve for a flightand a life in exile, when riches vanish like clouds scattered by winds, as wellas for their return to their country, where they have lost everything,customers and household furnishings, and where only the walls of their househave been saved, which were protected by God, because there He was united tothe Virgin and became Flesh.Joseph is humble, in fact, although he is the guardian of God and ofthe Mother of God and Spouse of the Most High, he holds the stirrups of thesevassals of God. He is a poor carpenter, because sustained human pressures havedeprived David's heirs of their royal wealth. But he is always the offspring ofa king, and has the manners of a king. Also of him it must he said: “He washumble, because he was really great”. JOSEPH - THE JUST MAN AND THE PROTECTOR(Vol. 1, p. 179-87)It isnight. Joseph is sleeping in his little bed in his very small room: thepeaceful sleep of a man after a hard day's honest and diligent work.­ I can see him in the dark room, becausea thin ray of moonlight filters in through the window shutters left ajar,either because Joseph is too warm in the little room or because he wants to bewoken by the early rays of light at daybreak and get up at once. He is lying onone side and is smiling at some vision he sees in his dream.But his smile turns into an expression of anxiety. He is now sighingdeeply as if he had a nightmare and he awakes with a start. He sits up on hisbed, rubs his eyes and looks around. He looks at the little window where thefeeble light comes in. It is the dead of night but he grasps his robe which islying at the bottom of the bed, and still sitting on the bed he pulls it onover the white shortsleeved tunic which he is wearing next to his skin. Hepulls the blanket away, puts his feet on the floor and looks for his sandals.He puts them on and ties them. He stands up and goes towards the door facinghis bed, not the one at the side of his bed leading into the big room where theMagi were received.He knocks very gently, a very soft knocking with the tips of hisfingers. He must have heard a voice asking him to enter because he opens thedoor carefully and sets it ajar without making any noise. Before going to thedoor he has lit a small one-flamed oil lamp, and lights his way with it. Hegoes in. The room is a little larger than his own, and there is a low bed init, near a cradle, with a night lamp in a corner, the flickering flame of whichseems a little star with a soft golden light that allows one to see withoutdisturbing any sleeper.But Mary is not sleeping. She is kneeling near the cradle in Herlight dress and is praying, watching Jesus Who is sleeping Peacefully. Jesus isthe same age as I saw Him in the vision of the Magi: a Child about one yearold, beautiful, rosy and fair haired. He is sleeping with His curly head sunkin the pillow and a clenched fist under His chin.« Are You not sleeping? » Joseph asks Her in a lowsurprised voice. « Why not? Is Jesus not well? »« Oh, no! He is all right. I am praying. Later I will sleep.Why have you come, Joseph? » Mary speaks, kneeling on the same spot.Joseph speaks in a very low voice lest he should awaken the Child,but it is an excited voice. « We must go away from here at once. It must be at once. Prepare the cofferand a sack with everything You can put in them. I'll prepare the rest, I'lltake as much as I can… We will flee at dawn. I would go even sooner but I mustspeak to the landlady… »« But why this flight? »« I will tell You later. It's because of Jesus. An angel saidto me: "Take the Child and His Mother and escape into Egypt." Don'twaste any time. I'm going to prepare what I can. »There is no need to tell Mary not to waste time. As soon as Sheheard Joseph mention an angel, Jesus and flight, She understood that HerCreature was in danger and She jumped to Her feet, Her face whiter than wax,holding one hand against Her heart, completely distressed. And She began tomove about, quick and agile, laying the clothes in the coffer and in a largesack which She placed on Her bed still untouched. Although She is disheartened,She does not lose Her head: She acts quickly but orderly. Now and again, whenpassing near the cradle, She looks at the Child Who is sleeping calmly.« Do you need help? » Joseph asks now and again, peepinginto the room through the door ajar.« No, thank you » replies Mary every time.Only when Her sack is full, and it is obviously very heavy, Shecalls Joseph to help Her to close it and take it off the bed. But Joseph doesnot want any help, he prefers to do it himself, and he takes the long sack intohis little room.« Shall I take also the woollen blankets? » asks Mary.« Take as much as You can. We will lose the rest. Do take asmuch as You can. Things will be useful because… because we will have to stayaway for a long time, Mary!… » Joseph is very sad in saying so. And onecan easily imagine how Mary feels. She folds Her blankets and Joseph's, sighingdeeply. Joseph ties the blankets with a rope and while doing so, he says:« We will leave the quilts and the mats. Even if I take three donkeys Icannot overload them. We will have a long and uncomfortable journey, partly inthe mountains and in the desert. Cover Jesus well. The nights will be cold bothup in the mountains and in the desert. I have taken the gifts of the Magibecause they will be very useful down there. I am going to spend all the moneyI have to buy two donkeys. We cannot send them back, so I will have to buythem. I'll go now, without awaiting dawn. I know where to find them. You finishpreparing everything. » And he goes out.Mary gathers a few more things, then, after looking at Jesus, Shegoes out and comes back with some little dresses which appear to be still damp:perhaps they were washed the day before. She folds them, wraps them up in acloth, and adds them to the other things. There is nothing else. She looksround and in a corner She sees one of Jesus' toys: a little sheep carved inwood. She picks it up sobbing, and kisses it. On the wood there are traces ofJesus' little teeth and the ears of the little sheep are all nibbled. Marycaresses the thing without any value, a plain piece of light wood, which,however, is of great value to Her, because it tells Her of Joseph's love forJesus and speaks to Her of Her Child. She adds it to the other things placed onthe closed coffer.Now there is really nothing else. Except Jesus in the little cradle.Mary thinks She ought also to prepare the Child. She goes to the cradle andshakes it a little to wake up the Baby. But He whimpers a little, turns roundand continues to sleep. Mary pats His curls gently. Jesus opens His littlemouth yawning. Mary bends down and kisses His cheek. Jesus wakes up completely.He opens His eyes, sees His Mother and smiles and stretches His little handstowards Her breast.« Yes, love of Your Mummy. Yes, Your milk. Before the usualtime… But You are always ready to suck Your Mummy's breast, My little holyLamb! »Jesus laughs and plays, kicking His little feet out of the blankets,moving His arms happily in a typical childish style, so beautiful to see. Hepushes His feet against His Mummy's stomach, He arches His back leaning Hisfair head on Her breast, and then throws Himself back and laughs, holding withHis hands the laces that tie Mary's dress to Her neck, endeavouring to open it.He looks most beautiful in His little linen shirt, plump and as rosy as- aflower.Mary bends down and in that position, looking through the cradle, asif for protection, She smiles and cries at the same time, while the Childprattles, uttering words which are not the words of all little children; amongthem the word « Mummy » is repeated very clearly. He looks at Her,surprised to see Her crying. He stretches one little hand towards the shinytraces of tears and it gets wet while patting Her face. And, very gracefully,He leans once again on His Mother's breast, He clings to it and pats it withHis hand.Mary kisses His hair, takes Him up in Her arms, sits down anddresses Him. His little woollen dress has now been put on Him and His sandalshave been tied on His feet. She nurses Him and Jesus avidly sucks His Mother'sgood milk, and when He feels that only a little is coming from Her rightbreast, He looks for the left one, laughing while doing so and looking up atHis Mother. Then He falls asleep again on Her breast, His rosy round littlecheek resting against Her white round breast.Mary rises very slowly and lays Him on the quilt on Her bed. Shecovers Rim with Her mantle, She goes back to the cradle and folds its littleblankets. She wonders whether She ought to take also the little mattress. It'sso small. It can be taken. She puts it, together with the pillow, near theother things already on the coffer. And She cries over the empty cradle, poorMother, persecuted in Her Little Creature.Joseph comes back. « Are you ready? Is Jesus ready? Have Youtaken His blankets and His little bed? We can't take His cradle, but He musthave at least His little mattress: poor Baby, Whose death they areseeking! »­­ « Joseph » shoutsMary, while She grasps his arm.« Yes, Mary, His death.Herod wants Him dead… because he is afraid of Him, that filthy beast, becauseof his human kingdom he is afraid of this innocent Child. I do not know what hewill do when he realises that He has escaped. But we will be far away by thattime. I don't think he will revenge himself by seeking Him as far as Galilee.It would be very difficult for him to find out that we are Galileans, least ofall that we are from Nazareth and who we are precisely. Unless Satan helps himto thank him for being his faithful servant. But… if that should happen… Godwill help us just the same. Don’t cry, Mary. To see You crying is a greaterpain for me than having to go into exile. »« Forgive Me, Joseph. I am not crying for Myself, or for thefew things I am losing. I am crying for you… You already have had to sacrificeyourself so much! And now once again you will have no customers, no home. Howmuch I am costing you, Joseph! ».« How much? No, Mary. You do not cost me. You comfort me.Always. Don't worry about the future. We have the gifts of the Magi. They willserve for the first days. Later I will find some work. A good clever workmanwill always make his way. You have seen what happened here. I haven't got enoughtime for all the work I have. »« I know. But who will relieve your homesickness for yournative land? »« And what about You? Who will relieve Your longing for Yourhome which is so dear to You? »« Jesus. Having Him, I have what I had there. »« And I, having Jesus, have my native land, in which I had hopeup to some months ago. I have my God. You can see that I lose nothing of whatis dear to me above all things. The only important thing is to save Jesus, andthen we have everything. Even if weshould never see this sky again, or this country or the even dearer country ofGalilee, we shall always have everything, because we shall have Him. Come,Mary, it is dawning. It is time to say goodbye to our hostess and load ourthings. Everything will be all right. »Mary gets up obediently. She puts on Her mantle while Joseph makesup a last parcel and goes out with it.Mary lifts the Child gently, envelops Him in a shawl and clasps Himto Her heart. She looks at the walls that have given Her hospitality for somemonths and She touches them caressingly with one hand. Happy house, thatdeserved to be loved and blessed by Mary!She goes out. She goes through Joseph's little room, into the bigroom. The landlady, in tears, kisses Her goodbye and, lifting the edge of theshawl, she kisses the forehead of the Child Who is sleeping calmly. They godown the outside steps.The first light of dawn enables them to see faintly. In the dimlight, three little donkeys can be seen. The strongest is loaded with the goodsand chattels. The other two are saddled. Joseph is busy fastening the cofferand bundles on the pack-saddle of the first one. I can see his carpenter'stools tied in a bundle on top of the sack. After more tears and goodbyes, Marymounts the little donkey, while the landlady is holding Jesus in her arms, andkissing Him once again. She then hands Him back to Mary. Also Joseph mountsafter tying his donkey to the one loaded with the goods, in order to be free tohold the reins of Mary's donkey.The flight begins while Bethlehem, still dreaming of thephantasmagoric scene of the Magi, is sleeping peacefully, unaware of what isimpending over it. (Jesussays…)Thelast vision clarifies a detail quoted twice in the Gospel by Matthew, asentence which is repeated twice: “Get up, take the Child and His Mother with you, and escape intoEgypt”; “Get up, take the Child and HisMother with you and go back to the land of Israel”. And you saw that Marywas by Herself in Her room with the Child.Mary's virginity after Her delivery and Joseph's chastity have beenstrongly denied by those who being putrid mud themselves, are not prepared toadmit that one like them can be as pure and clear as light. They are wretchedpeople whose souls are so corrupted and their minds so prostituted to theflesh, that they are incapable of thinking that one like them can respect awoman seeing in her not her flesh but her soul, neither can they elevatethemselves to live in a supernatural atmosphere, craving not for what is flesh,but only for what is God.Well, I wish to tell those deniers of the most beautiful things,those worms incapable of becoming butterflies, those reptiles covered with theslaver of their own lewdness, incapable of understanding the beauty of a lily,I wish to tell them that Mary was andremained a virgin, and that onlyHer soul was married to Joseph, exactly as Her spirit was united only to the Spirit of God by Whose deedShe conceived Her Only Son: I, Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of theFather and of Mary.This is not a tradition embellished afterwards, out of lovingrespect for the Blessed Virgin Who was My Mother. It is the truth and has beenknown since early times.Matthew was not born after centuries. He was a contemporary of Mary.Matthew was not a poor ignorant man brought up in a forest and likely tobelieve any idle story. He was a clerk in the taxation office, as you would saynowadays, he was an excise man, as we said then. He could see, hear,understand, and tell the truth from the false. Matthew did not hear thingsreported by third parties. He heard them directly from Mary's lips to Whom heapplied for information, prompted by his love for his Master and for the truth.I do not believe that those repudiators of Mary's inviolability willdare think that She may have lied. My own relatives could have given Her thelie, had there been other children: James, Judas, Simon and Joseph weredisciples together with Matthew. Therefore Matthew could have easily comparedtheir versions, had there been more than one account.But Matthew does not say: “Get up and take your wife”. He says:“Take His Mother”. Before he says: “A virgin betrothed to Joseph”; “Joseph Herspouse”. Neither those repudiators of Purity should tell Me that it was a wayof speaking particular to the Jews, as if to say “wife” was a disgrace. No,deniers of Purity. At the very beginning of the Bible we read: “And he willjoin himself to his wife”. She iscalled “companion” up to the moment of the sensual consummation of themarriage, and afterwards she is called “wife” in various circumstances and indifferent chapters. And these are the expressions referred to the wives of thesons of Adam. And so Sarah is called the “wife” of Abraham: “Sarah your wife”. And: “Take your wife and your two daughters” is said ofLot. And in the book of Ruth it is written: “The Moabitess, the wife ofMahalon”. And in the first book of the Kings it is said: “Elkanah had two wives”. And further on: “Elkanah thenhad intercourse with his wifeHannah”. And again: “Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife”. And again in the Book of the Kings it is said: “Bathsheba,the wife of Uriah the Hittite, becamethe wife of David and bore him ason”. And what do you read in the blue book of Tobias, what the Church sings toyou at your wedding, to advise you to be holy in your marriage? You read: “Nowwhen Tobias arrived with his wife andhis son… “; and again: “Tobias succeeded in escaping with his son and with his wife”.And in the Gospels, that is in times contemporary with Christ, whentherefore they wrote in a modem style of language, as compared to the ancientkind, and therefore no error of transcription could be suspected, it said andjust by Matthew in Chapter 22: “… and the first, after marrying his wife died and left his wife to his brother”. And Mark atChapter 10: “The man who divorces his wife…”And Luke called Elizabeth the wife ofZacharias for four times running, and in the eighth Chapter of his Gospel hesays: “Johanna, the wife of Chuza”.As you can see, this name was not a word banished by those whowalked in the ways of the Lord, it was not an impure word not worthy of beinguttered and least of all written when there was a mention of God and of Hiswonderful work. And the angel, saying: “The Child and His Mother”, proves to youthat Mary was His real Mother. But She was nota wife of Joseph. She remained for ever: “Thevirgin betrothed to Joseph”.And this is the last teaching of the vision. And it is a halo whichshines on the heads of Mary and Joseph. The Inviolate Virgin. The just andchaste man. The two lilies amongst whom I grew up, receiving only the perfumeof purity. » LIVING IN EGYPT(Vol. 1, p. 189-94) (Ayear or more has gone by. Jesus, Maryand Joseph are living in Egypt, in a poor house with two rooms. Jesus is playing, while Mary is weaving. A man comes along the road. He is not very tall, but he is well built,and forty years old at the most. It isJoseph, and he is smiling…)Hishair and beard are thick and black, his skin is rather tanned, his eyes aredark. An honest pleasant face, inspiring confidence.When he sees Jesus and Mary, he quickens his step. On his leftshoulder he has a kind of saw and a kind of plane, and he is holding in hishand other tools of his trade, not exactly like the ones we use now, but almostsimilar. He is probably coming back after working in somebody's house. He iswearing a tunic the colour of which is between hazel and dark brown; it is notvery long - it reaches a good bit up from his ankles - and its sleeves areshort. I think he is wearing a leather belt at his waist. It is the propertunic of a workman. On his feet he has sandals tied at his ankles.Mary smiles and the Child utters cries of joy and He stretches outthe hand which is free. When the three meet, Joseph bends down and offers theChild a fruit which I think is an apple, by its colour and shape. He thenstretches his arms and the Child leaves His Mother, and cuddles in the arms ofJoseph, bending His little head into the cavity of Joseph's neck; he kissesHim, and is kissed by Him. A scene full of loving grace.I was forgetting to say that Mary had promptly taken Joseph's worktools, to leave him free to embrace the Child.Then Joseph, who had crouched down to the ground to be at the sameheight as Jesus, stands up, takes his tools with his left hand and holds littleJesus tight to his strong chest with his right arm. And he moves towards thehouse, while Mary goes to the fountain to fill Her amphora.After entering the enclosure of the house, Joseph puts the Childdown, takes Mary's loom into the house, and then he milks the goat. Jesuswatches all these activities carefully and in particular the closing up thelittle goat in a little closet in one side of the house.It is now getting dark. I can see the red of the sunset becomingviolet on the sands which seem to be trembling because of the heat. The pyramidlooks darker.Joseph goes into the house, into a room which must be his workshop,the kitchen, the dining room all in one. The other room is obviously thebedroom. But I do not go in there. The fire is lit in a low fireplace. There isa carpenter's bench, a small table, some stools, some shelves with two oillamps and some kitchenware on them. In a corner, there is Mary's loom. And agreat deal of order and cleanliness. A very poor dwelling, but very clean.And this is a remark I wish to make: in all the visions concerningthe human life of Jesus I have noticed that both He and Mary, as well as Josephand John, are always tidy and cleanboth in their garments and their bodies. They wear modest' and simple garments,but they are so clean that they look like gentlemen in them.Mary comes back with the amphora and the door is closed on therapidly growing dusk. The room is illuminated by a lamp which Joseph has litand placed on his bench, where he now starts working on some little boards,while Mary is preparing supper. Also the fire illuminates the room. Jesus, withHis little hands leaning on the bench and His little head turned upwards, iswatching what Joseph is doing.They then sit down at the table after saying their prayers.Obviously they do not bless themselves with the sign of the cross, but theypray. It is Joseph who says the prayers, and Mary answers. I do not understandanything at all. It must be a psalm. But it is said in a language which isentirely unknown to me.They then sit down at the table. The lamp is now on the table. Maryis holding Jesus in Her lap, and makes Him drink some of the goat's milk, intowhich She dips some small slices of bread which She has cut off a little roundloaf. The crust of the loaf, as well as the inside, is very dark, it looks likerye bread or bread made with barley. It certainly contains a lot of bran,judging by its colour. In the meantime, Joseph eats some bread and cheese, asmall slice of cheese and a lot of bread. Then Mary sits Jesus on a littlestool near Her, and brings some cooked vegetables to the table - they appear tobe boiled and dressed as we use them nowadays - and She also eats some of themafter Joseph has helped himself. Jesus is nibbling happily at His apple, and Hesmiles displaying His little white teeth. Their supper ends with some olives ordates. I cannot tell exactly which because they appear to be too light to beolives and too hard to be dates. There is no wine. The supper of poor people.But there is so much peace in this room that not even the sight ofthe most solemn royal palace could give me as much. And how much harmony!(Jesus says:)« Thethings you see teach you and others the lesson. It is a lesson of humility,resignation and good harmony. A lesson given as an example to all Christianfamilies, and particularly to the Christian families in this especiallysorrowful age.You have seen a poor house. And what is more saddening, a poor housein a foreign country.Many people, only because they are fairly good Catholics who prayand receive Me in the Holy Eucharist, and they pray and receive Me for “their”needs, not for the needs of their souls and for the Glory of God - because onlyseldom those who pray are not selfish - many people would pretend to have aprosperous, happy, easy material life, well-protected even from the least pain.Joseph and Mary had Me, True God, as their Son, yet they did noteven have the meagre satisfaction of being poor in their own country, wherethey were known, where at least there was their “own” little house and theproblem of a dwelling did not add a harassing thought to their many problems,in the country where, as they were known, it was easier for them to find workand provide for the needs of their lives. They are two refugees just becausethey had Me. A different climate, a different country, so sad in comparisonwith the sweet countryside of Galilee, a different language, different habits, livingamongst people who did not know them, and who generally distrusted refugees andpeople they did not know.They are deprived of those comfortable and dear pieces of furnitureof “their” little house, of so many humble and necessary things they had there,and which did not seem to be so necessary, whereas here, in the void thatsurrounds them, seem even beautiful like the luxurious things that make thehouses of rich people so charming. And they felt nostalgia both for theircountry and for their home, they worried about the poor things they had leftbehind, about the little kitchen garden where probably no one would take careof their vines and their figs, and the other useful plants. And they had toprovide every day for food, clothes, fire, and for Me, a Child, Whom they couldnot feed with the same food they took themselves. And they were sad at heart:because of their homesickness, because of the uncertainty of the future, andthe lack of trust of people who are reluctant, particularly at first, to acceptthe offer of work of two unknown people.And yet, as you have seen yourself, that house is pervaded with serenity, smiles, harmony, and by mutualconsent they endeavour to make it more beautiful, even in its scanty littlekitchen garden, that it may be more like the more comfortable one they had toleave behind. They have only one thought: that the land may be less hostile andless unpleasant for Me, since I come from God. It is the love of believers andrelatives which reveals itself in many ways: from the little goat theypurchased with many hours of extra work, to the little toys carved in scraps ofwood, to the fruit purchased only for Me, while they denied themselves a morselof food.O beloved father of mine on the earth, how loved you have been byGod, by God the Father in the Most High Heavens, by God the Son, Who became theSaviour on the earth!In that house there is no quick temper, no sulkiness, no grim faces,neither is there any reproach against each other, and least of all against theGod Who has not loaded them with material wealth. Joseph does not reproach Maryas being the cause of his discomfort, neither does Mary reproach Joseph becausehe is incapable of procuring greater worldly goods. They love each other in a holy way, that is all. And therefore theydo not worry about their own comfort, but only about the comfort of theirconsort. True love is not selfish. And true love is always chaste, even if itis not perfect in chastity as the love of the two virgin spouses. Chastityunited to charity yields a suite of other virtues and therefore two people wholove each other chastely become perfect.The love of Mary and Joseph was perfect. Therefore it was anincentive to every other virtue and in particular to charity towards God,blessed every hour, notwithstanding His holy will is painful for the flesh andthe heart, blessed because, above the flesh and above the heart, the spirit wasmore lively and stronger in the two saints, and they exalted the Lord withgratitude because they had been chosen as guardians of His Eternal Son.In that house they prayed. You pray too little in your homes, nowadays. The sun rises andsets, you start your work, and you sit at the table without a thought for theLord, Who has granted you to see a new day, and then to live and see a newnight, Who has blessed your work and has made it the means for you to purchasethe food, the fire, the clothes, the house which are so necessary for yourhuman lives. Whatever comes from Good God is “good”. Even if it is poor andmeagre, love gives it flavour and body, the love that allows you to see in theEternal Creator, the Father Who loves you.In that house there isfrugality and it would be there even if there wasplenty money. They eat to live. They do not eat to satisfy their gluttony, withthe insatiability of gluttons and the whims of epicures who fill themselves tothe extent of being sick and squander for-tunes on expensive food, withoutgiving one thought to those who are without or with little food, without consideringthat if they were moderate, many people could be relieved of the pangs ofhunger.In that house they lovework, and they would love it even if there wasplenty money, because the working man obeys the command of God and freeshimself from vice, which like tenacious ivy clenches and suffocates idlepeople, who are like immovable rocks. Food is good, rest is serene, hearts arehappy, when you have worked well and you enjoy the resting time between one joband the next one. Neither in the houses nor in the minds of those who lovework, can many-sided vice rise. And, in its absence, love, esteem, reciprocalrespect prosper and tender children grow in a pure atmosphere and they thusbecome the origin of future holy families.Humility reigns in thathouse. What a lesson of humility for the proud.Mary, from a human point of view, had a thousand reasons to be proud and to beadored by Her spouse. Many women are proud only because they are a littlebetter educated, or of nobler birth, or of a wealthier family than theirhusbands. Mary is the Spouse and the Mother of God, and yet She serves - anddoes not expect to be served - Her consort, and She is full of love for him.Joseph is the head of the family, judged by God so worthy of being the head ofa family, as to be entrusted by God with the guardianship of the Word Incarnateand the Spouse of the Eternal Spirit. And yet he is anxious to relieve Mary ofHer work, and he takes care of the most humble jobs in the house so that Marymay not get tired, not only, but whenever he can he does his best to please Herand make Her house more comfortable and Her little garden more beautiful.In that house order isrespected: supernatural, moral, material. God isthe Supreme Head and He is worshipped and loved: supernatural order. Joseph is the head of the family and he isloved, respected and obeyed: moral order.The house is a gift of God as well as the clothes and the furnishings. TheProvidence of God is shown in everything, of God Who supplied wool to sheep,feathers to birds, grass to meadows, hay to animals, grains and branches tobirds, Who weaves the dress of the lily of the valley. The house, the dresses,the furnishings are accepted with gratitude, blessing the divine hand thatsupplies them, looking after them with respect as gifts of the Lord, withoutany bad humour because they are poor, without ill use, without abusing DivineProvidence: material order.You did not understand the words they exchanged in the dialect ofNazareth, neither did you understand the words of the prayer. But the thingsyou saw are a great lesson. Meditateon them, you all who now suffer so much because you failed in so many thingstowards God, also in those things in which the holy Spouses never failed, theSpouses who were my Mother and father. A FATHER TO JESUS(Vol. 1, p. 194-8) (MariaValtorta, whom Jesus calls His “little John”, describes a vision, and conveysan explanation…)I seemy little Jesus appear as sweet as a ray of sun on a rainy day; He is a littlechild about five years old, completely blond and most beautiful in His simpleblue dress which reaches down to half His well-shaped calves. He is playingwith some earth in the little kitchen garden. He makes little heaps with it andon top He plants little branches as if He were making a miniature forest, withlittle stones He builds little roads and then He would like to build a littlelake at the foot of His tiny hills. He therefore takes the bottom part of anold pot and inters it up to its brim and then fills it with water with apitcher which He dips into a vessel, which is certainly used either for washingpurposes or to water the little garden. But the only result is that He wets Hisdress, particularly its sleeves. The water runs out of the chipped pot which isprobably also cracked and… the lake dries up.Joseph appears at the door and for some time he stands very quietlywatching the work of the Child and smiles. It is a sight, indeed, that makesone smile happily. Then, to prevent Jesus from getting more wet, he calls Him.Jesus turns round smiling, and when He sees Joseph, He runs towards him withHis little arms stretched out. Joseph with the edge of his short working tunicdries the little hands which are soiled and wet, and kisses them. And thenthere is a sweet conversation between the two.Jesus explains His work and His game and the difficulties He met init. He wanted to make a lake like the lake of Gennesaret. (I therefore supposethat they have either spoken to Him about it or they had taken Him to see it.)He wanted to make a little one for His own delight. This was Tiberias, therewas Magdala, over there Capernaum. This was the road that took to Nazarethgoing through Cana. He wanted to launch some little boats in the lake; theseleaves are boats, and He wanted to go over to the other shore. But the waterruns away…Joseph watches and takes an interest as it were a very seriousmatter. He then proposes to make a small lake, the following day, but not withan old cracked pot, but with a small wooden basin, well coated with pitch andstucco, in which Jesus would be able to launch small real wooden boats whichJoseph would teach Him how to make. Just then, he was bringing Him some smallworking tools, suitable for Him, that He might learn to use them, without anyfatigue.« So I will be able to help you! » Jesus says, smiling.« So You will help me, and You will become a clever carpenter.Come and see them. »And they go into the workshop. Joseph shows Him a small hammer, atiny saw, some very small screwdrivers, a plane suitable for a doll, which areall lying on the bench of a budding carpenter: a bench suitable for littleJesus' size.« See, to saw, You must put this piece of wood like that. Youthen take the saw like that, and making sure that You do not catch Yourfingers, You start sawing. Try… »And the lesson begins. And Jesus, blushing with the effort andpressing His lips together, saws the piece of wood carefully and then planesit, and although it is not perfectly straight, He thinks it is nice. Josephpraises Him and with patience and love teaches Him how to work.Mary comes back. She had certainly gone out, and She looks in at thedoor. Joseph and Jesus do not see Her because She is behind them. Mother smilesseeing how zealously Jesus is working with the plane and how loving Joseph isin teaching Him.But Jesus must have perceived Her smile. He turns round, sees HisMother and runs towards Her, showing Her the little piece of wood not yetfinished. Mary admires it, and She bends down to kiss Jesus. She tidies up Hisruffled curls, wipes the perspiration on His hot face, and listens with lovingattention to Jesus, Who promises to make Her a little stool so that She will bemore comfortable when working. Joseph standing near the tiny bench, with onehand resting on his side, looks and smiles.I have thus been present at the first work lesson of my Jesus. Andall the peace of this holy Family is within me.(Jesus says:)« Ihave consoled you, My dear soul, with a vision of My childhood, which was happyin its poverty, because it was surrounded by the love of two saints, thegreatest the world ever had.They say that Joseph was My foster-father. Oh! If, being a man, hecould not feed Me with milk, as My Mother Mary did, he worked very hard indeed,to give Me bread and comfort and he had the loving kindness of a real mother.From him I learned - and never had a pupil a kinder teacher - I learnedeverything that makes a man of a child, and a man who is to earn his own bread.If My intelligence, that of the Son of God was perfect, you mustconsider and believe that I did not want to deviate from the attributes andattainments of My own age group ostentatiously. Therefore, by lowering Mydivine intellectual perfection to that of a human intellectual perfection Isubmitted Myself to having a man as My teacher, and to the need of a teacher.If I learned quickly and willingly, that does not deprive Me of the merit ofsubmitting Myself to man, neither does it deprive the just man of the merit ofbeing the person who nourished My young mind with the ideas which are necessaryto life.Not even now that I am in Heaven can I forget the happy hours Ispent beside Joseph, who, as if he were playing with Me, guided Me to the pointof being capable of working. And when I look at My putative father, I see onceagain the little kitchen garden and the smoky workshop, and I still appear tosee Mother peep in with Her beautiful smile which turned the place intoParadise and made us so happy.How much families should learn from the perfection of this couplewho loved each other as nobody else ever loved!Joseph was the head of the family, and as such, his authority wasundisputed and indisputable: before it the Spouse and Mother of God bentreverently and the Son of God submitted Himself willingly. Whatever Josephdecided to do, was well done: there were no discussions, no punctiliousness, nooppositions. His word was our little law. And yet, how much humility there wasin him! There never was any abuse of power, or any decision against reason onlybecause he was the head of the family. His Spouse was his sweet adviser. And ifin Her deep humility She considered Herself the servant of Her consort, he drewfrom Her wisdom of Full of Grace, light to guide him in all events.And I grew like a flower protected by vigorous trees, between thosetwo loves that interlaced above Me, to protect Me, and love Me.No. As long as I was able to ignore the world because of My age, Idid not regret being absent from Paradise. God the Father and the Holy Spiritwere not absent, because Mary was full of Them. And the angels dwelt there,because nothing drove them away from that house. And one of them, I might say,had become flesh and was Joseph, an angelical soul freed from the burden of theflesh, intent only on serving God and His cause and loving Him as the seraphimlove Him. Joseph's look! It was as placid and pure as the brightness of a starunaware of worldly concupiscence. It was our peace, and our strength.Many think that I did not suffer as a human being when the holyglance of the guardian of our home was extinguished by death. If I was God, andas such I was aware of the happy destiny of Joseph, and consequently I was notsorry for his death, because after a short time in Limbo, I was going to openHeaven to him, as a Man I cried bitterly in the house now empty and deprived ofhis presence. I cried over My dead friend, and should I not have cried over Myholy friend, on whose chest I had slept when I was a little boy, and from whomI had received so much love in so many years?Finally I would like to draw the attention of parents to how Josephmade a clever workman of Me, without any help of pedagogical learning. As soonas I was old enough to handle tools, he did not let Me lead a life of idleness,but he started Me to work and he made use of My love for Mary as the means tospur Me to work. I was to make useful things for Mother. That is how heinculcated the respect which every son should have for his mother and theteaching for the future carpenter was based on that respectful and lovingincentive.Where are now the families in which the little ones are taught tolove work as a means of pleasing their parents? Children, nowadays, are thetyrants of the house. They grow hard, indifferent, ill-mannered towards theirparents. They consider their parents as their servants, their slaves. They donot love their parents and they are scarcely loved by them. The reason is that,while you allow your children to become objectionable overbearing fellows, youbecome detached from them with shameful indifference.They are everybody's children, except yours, o parents of thetwentieth century. They are the children of the nurse, of the governess, of thecollege, if you are rich people. They belong to their companions, they are thechildren of the streets, of the schools, if you are poor. But they are notyours. You, mothers, give birth to them and that is all. And you, fathers, doexactly the same. But a son is not only flesh. He has a mind, a heart, a soul.Believe Me, no one is more entitled and more obliged than a father and a motherto form that mind, that heart, that soul.A family is necessary: it exists and must exist. There is no theoryor progress capable of destroying this truth without causing ruin. A shatteredfamily can but yield men and women who in future will be more perverted, andwill cause greater and greater ruin. And I tell you most solemnly that it wouldbe better if there were no more marriages and no more children on the earth,rather than have families less united than the tribes of monkeys, familieswhich are not schools of virtue, of work, of love, of religion, but a babel inwhich everyone lives on his own like disengaged gears, which end up bybreaking.Broken families. You break up the most holy way of social living andyou see and suffer the consequences. You may continue thus, if you so wish. Butdo not complain if this world is becoming a deeper and deeper hell, a dwellingplace of monsters who devour families and nations. You want it. Let it beso. » A SCHOOL IN THE HOME(Vol. 1, p. 202-4) (The Holy Familyis home again in Nazareth. Jesus, Who isnow about five years old, is playing with His cousins, two of four sons ofJoseph’s brother Alphaeus and his wife Mary. (These two boys are to become two of Jesus’ apostles – to be known asJames of Alphaeus and Judas Thaddeus.) Alphaeus reminds Joseph that it is time Jesus went to school. Jesus’ Mother is quick to reply:)« Iwill never send Jesus to school » says Mary resolutely. It is most unusualto hear Her talk thus and above all to hear Her talk before Joseph.« Why? The Child must learn to be ready in good time to passHis exam when He comes of age… »« The Child will be ready. But He will not go to school. Thatis quite definite. »« You will be the only woman in Israel to do that. »« I will be the only one. But that is what I am going to do.Isn't that right, Joseph? »« Yes, that's correct. There is no need for Jesus to go toschool. Mary was brought up in the Temple, and She knows the Law as well as anydoctor. She will be His Teacher. That's what I want, too. »« You are spoiling the Boy. »« You cannot say that. He is the best boy in Nazareth. Have youever heard Him cry, or be naughty, or be disobedient, or lack respect? »« No. That's true. But He will do all that if You continue tospoil Him. »« You do not necessarily spoil your children just because youkeep them at home. To keep them at home implies loving them with good commonsense and wholeheartedly. And that is how we love our Jesus, and since Mary isbetter educated than a teacher, She will be Jesus' Teacher. »« And when Your Jesus is a Man, He will be like a silly littlewoman frightened even of flies. »« He will not. Mary is a strong woman, and She will give Him amanly education. I am not a coward, and I can give Him man-like examples. Jesusis a creature without any physical or moral faults. He will grow, therefore,upright and strong, both in His body and in His spirit. You can be sure ofthat, Alphaeus. He will not be a disgrace to the family. In any case, that iswhat I have decided, and that is all. »« Perhaps Mary has decided, and you… »« And if it were so? Is it not fair that two, who love eachother, should have the same thoughts and the same wishes, so that each mayaccept the wishes of the other as if they were his own? If Mary should wishsilly things, I would say to Her: "No". But She is asking forsomething which is full of wisdom, and I agree, and I make it my own. We loveeach other, we do as we did the first day, and we shall go on doing so as longas we live. Is that right, Mary? »« Yes, Joseph. And let us hope it will never happen, but whenone should die without the other, we will still go on loving each other. »Joseph pats Mary on the head as if She were a young daughter and Shelooks at him with Her serene loving eyes.Her sister-in-law interferes: « You are quite right. I wish Icould teach! Our children at school learn evil and good. At home they onlylearn what is good. But I do not know whether… if Mary… »« What is it you want, My dear sister-in-law? Speak freely. Youknow that I love you and I am happy when I can do something that pleasesyou. »« I was thinking… James and Judas are only a little older thanJesus. They are already going to school… for what they have learned!… Jesusinstead already knows the Law so well… I would like… eh, I mean, if I asked Youto take them as well, when You teach Jesus? I think they would behave betterand be better educated. After all, they are cousins, and it is only fair thatthey should love one another like brothers. Oh! I would be so happy! »« If Joseph wants, and your husband agrees, I am quite willing.It is the same to speak to one as to speak to three. And it is a joy to gothrough the whole Bible. Let them come. »The three children, who have come in very quietly, are listening andare awaiting the final decision.« They will drive You to despair, Mary » says Alphaeus.« No! They are always good with Me. You will be good if I teachyou, will you not? »The two boys move near Mary, one on Her left side, the other on Herright, they place their arms around Her shoulders, they lean their little headson Her shoulders, and they promise all the good in the world.« Let them try, Alphaeus, and let Me try. I am sure you willnot be dissatisfied with the test. They can come every day from the sixth houruntil evening. It will be enough, believe Me. I know how to teach withouttiring them. You must hold their attention and let them relax at the same time.You must understand them, love them, and be loved by them, if you wish to getgood results. And you will love Me, will you not? »Two big kisses are the answer.« See? »« I see. I can only say: “Thank You”. And what will Jesus say,when He sees His Mummy busy with others? What do you say, Jesus? »« I say: “Happy those who listen to Her and build theirdwelling near Hers”. As for Wisdom, happy are those who are My Mother'sfriends, and I am happy that those whom I love are Her friends. »« But who puts such words on the lips of the Child »Alphaeus asks, astonished.« Nobody, brother. Nobody in this world ». A COMING OF AGE(Vol. 1, p. 207-10) (Jesusis now twelve years old, already tall, at home with His Mother and Joseph, Hiscousins, and His aunt Mary of Alphaeus…)« Hereis our Son » says Mary lifting Her right hand which is holding Jesus' leftone. She seems to be introducing Him to everybody and confirming the paternityof the Just man who is smiling. And She adds: « Bless Him, Joseph, beforeleaving for Jerusalem. There was no ritual blessing for His first step in life,because it was not necessary for Him to go to school. But now that He is goingto the Temple to be proclaimed of age, please bless Him. And bless Me with Him.Your blessing… » (Mary sobs softly) « will fortify Him and give Mestrength, to detach Myself a little more from Him… »« Mary, Jesus will always be Yours. The formality will notaffect our mutual relationship. Neither will I contend with You for this Son,so dear to us. No one deserves, as You do, to guide Him in life, o my HolySpouse. »Mary bends down and takes Joseph's hand and kisses it. She is therespectful, loving spouse of Her consort!Joseph receives the sign of respect and love with dignity, he thenlifts the hand which She has kissed and lays it on the head of his Spouse andsays to Her: « Yes. I bless You, o Blessed One, and I bless Jesus withYou. Come to me, my only joys, my honour and essence of my life. » Josephis solemn. With his arms stretched out and the palms of his hands turned downabove the two heads which are bent down, both equally blond and holy, hepronounces his blessing: « May the Lord look upon You and bless You. MayHe have mercy on You and give You peace. May the Lord give You Hisblessing.. » And then he says: « And now let us go. The hour isfavourable for the journey. »Mary takes a wide dark brown mantle and She drapes it on the body ofHer Son. How She caresses Him in doing so! (They arrive atthe Temple in Jerusalem, on a feast day…)Peoplegoing in and coming out of the enclosure gates, crossing yards, halls andporches, disappearing in this or that building on the various floors, whichform the bulk of the Temple.Also the group of Jesus' family go in singing psalms in low voices.All the men are in front, the women come behind. Other people have joined them,perhaps from Nazareth, perhaps their friends in Jerusalem. I do not know.Joseph, after worshipping the Most High with all the others at thepoint, obviously, where men were allowed to do so, (the women stopped on alower landing), parts from the rest and with his Son goes back through someyards, he then moves to one side and enters a vast room which looks like asynagogue. I do not know why. Were there synagogues also in the Temple? Hespeaks to a Levite and the latter disappears behind a striped curtain, thencomes back with some elder priests, I think they are priests, they arecertainly masters in the knowledge of the Law, and they are therefore appointedto examine the believers.Joseph introduces Jesus. First of all, they both bow down deeply tothe ten doctors, who have sat down with dignity on low wooden stools.« Here » he says, « this in my Son. Three months and twelve daysago He reached the age which the Law prescribes to become of age. And I wantHim to comply with the prescriptions of Israel. I would ask you to note thatHis constitution proves that He is no longer in His childhood or minority. AndI ask you to examine Him kindly and fairly, to judge that what I here, Hisfather, have stated, is the truth. I have prepared Him for this hour and forthis dignity of son of the Law. He knows the precepts, the traditions, thedecisions, the customs of the fringes and the phylacteries, He knows how to saythe daily prayers and blessings. Therefore, since He knows the Law in Itselfand in its three branches of Halascia, Midrasc and Aggada, He can behave as aman. Therefore I wish to be free from the responsibilities of His actions andof His sins. From now on, He must be subject to the precepts and He must payHimself the penalty for His failures towards them. Examine Him. »« We Will. Come forward, Child. What is Your name? »« Jesus of Joseph, from Nazareth. »« A Nazarene… can You therefore read? »« Yes, rabbi, I can read the words which are written and thosewhich are construed in the words themselves. »« What do you mean? »« I mean that I understand also the meaning of the allegory orof the symbol which is hidden under the appearance, as a pearl does not appearbut it is inside an ugly closed shell. »« A clever answer and a very wise one. We seldom hear that onthe lips of adults; in a child, and a Nazarene in addition!… »The attention of the ten has been awakened. Their eyes do not lose foran instant the beautiful blond Child, Who is looking at them sure of Himself,without boldness, but also without fear.« You honour Your master, who, certainly, was deeplyread. »« The Wisdom of God was gathered in his just heart. »« But listen to that! You are a happy man, father of such aSon! »Joseph, who is at the end of the room, smiles and bows down.They give Jesus three different rolls saying: « Read the oneclosed with the golden ribbon. »Jesus opens the roll and reads. It is the Decalogue. But after thefirst few words, one of the judges takes the roll from Him saying: « Go onby heart. » Jesus continues so sure of Himself, that He seems to bereading. Every time He mentions the Lord, He bows down deeply.« Who taught You that? Why do You do that? »« Because that Name is holy and it is to be pronounced with asign of internal and external respect. Subjects bow down to their king, who isking only for a short time and he is dust. To the King of kings, the Most HighLord of Israel, Who is present even if He is only visible to the spirit, shallnot every creature bow down since every creature depends on Him with eternalsubjection? »« Very clever! Man: we advise you to have your Son educatedeither by Hillel or Gamaliel. He is a Nazarene… but His answers give us hopethat He will become a new great doctor. »« My Son is of age. He will decide according to His own will.If His decision is an honest one, I will not oppose it. »… THE DEATH OF JOSEPH(Vol. 1, p. 223-31)(Jesus is working at a carpentry bench, in the workshop of the housein Nazareth…)He isby Himself. He works diligently, but peacefully. No abrupt or impatientmovement. He is precise and constant in His work. Nothing annoys Him: neither aknot in the wood which will not be planed, nor a screwdriver (I think it is ascrewdriver) which falls twice from the bench, nor the smoke floating in theroom which must irritate His eyes.Now and again He raises His head and looks towards the southernwall, where there is a closed door, and He listens. At a certain moment Heopens a door which is on the eastern side and opens on to the road, and Helooks out. I can see a small portion of the dusty little road. He seems to bewaiting for someone. He then goes back to His work. He is not sad, but veryserious. He closes the door again and goes back to work.While He is busy making something, which I think is part of a wheel,His Mother comes in. She comes in by the southern door. She rushes towardsJesus. She is dressed in dark blue and is bareheaded. Her simple tunic is heldtight at Her waist by a cord of the same colour. She is worried when She callsHer Son, and leans with both Her hands on His arm in an attitude of prayer andsorrow. Jesus caresses Her, passing His arm over Her shoulder and comforts Her.He leaves His work, takes His apron off and goes out with Her.I suppose you would like to know the exact words they said. Very fewwere spoken by Mary: « Oh! Jesus! Come, come. He is very ill! » Theyare uttered with trembling lips and tears shining in Her reddened and tiredeyes. Jesus says only: « Mother! » but that word means everything.They go into the adjoining room, full of bright sunshine coming froma door open onto the little kitchen garden, which is also full of light andgreen, and where doves are fluttering around near the clothes hanging out todry and blowing in the wind. The room is poor but tidy. There is a low bed,covered with small mattresses, (I say mattresses because they are thick andsoft things, but the bed is not like ours). On it leaning on many cushions,there is Joseph. He is dying. It is obvious from the livid paleness of hisface, his lifeless eyes, his panting chest, and the total relaxation of all hisbody.Mary goes to his left-hand side, takes his wrinkled hand now lividnear its nails, rubs it, caresses it, kisses it, She dries with a small pieceof cloth the perspiration that forms shiny lines at his temples; She wipes aglassy tear in the comer of his eye; She moistens his lips with a piece of linendipped into a liquid which I think is white wine.Jesus goes to his right-hand side. He lifts quickly and carefullythe body which has sunk, He straightens him onto the cushions which He thenadjusts together with Mary. He caresses the forehead of the dying man andendeavours to encourage him.Mary is weeping softly, without any noise, but She is weeping. Herlarge tears run down Her pale cheeks, right down to Her dark blue dress, andthey look like bright sapphires.Joseph recovers somewhat, and stares at Jesus, he takes His hand asif he wanted to say something and also to receive strength, for the last trial,from the divine contact. Jesus bends over that hand and kisses it. Josephsmiles. He then turns round and with his eyes he looks for Mary and smiles alsoat Her. Mary kneels down near the bed endeavouring to smile. But She does notsucceed and She bends Her head. Joseph lays his hand on Her head with a chastecaress that looks like a blessing.Only the fluttering and cooing of the doves, the rustling of theleaves, the warbling of the water can be heard outside, and the breathing ofthe dying man in the room.Jesus goes round the bed, takes a stool and makes Mary sit on it,once again calling Her simply: « Mother ». He then goes back to Hisplace and takes Joseph's hand into His own once again. The scene is so realthat I can't help crying because of Mary's pain.Then Jesus bending over the dying man, whispers a psalm. I know itis a psalm, but just now I cannot tell which one.It begins thus: « “Look after me, o Lord, because I hoped inYou…In favour of his friends who live on his earth he has accomplishedall my wishes in a wonderful way…I will bless the Lord Who is my advisor…The Lord is always before me. He is on my right-hand side that I maynot fall.Therefore my heart exults and my tongue rejoices and also my bodywill rest in hope.Because You will not abandon my soul in the dwelling place of thedead, neither will You allow Your friend to see corruption.You will reveal the path of light to me and will fill me with joyshowing me Your face”. »Joseph cheers up a little and with a more lively look he smiles atJesus and presses His fingers.Jesus replies to the smile with a smile of His own and to thepressure on His fingers with a caress. And still bending over His putativefather, He goes on softly: « “How I love your Tabernacles, o Lord.My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord.Also the sparrow has found a home and the little dove a nest for itsyoung. I am longing for your Altars, Lord.Happy those who live in Your house… happy the man who finds hisstrength in You. He inspired into his heart the ascents from the valley oftears to the chosen place.O Lord hear my prayer…O God, turn Your eyes and look at the face of Your Anointed…” »Joseph sobbing, looks at Jesus and makes an effort to speak as if tobless Him. But he cannot. He obviously understands, but has an impediment inhis speech. But he is happy and looks at his Jesus with liveliness and trust.« “Oh! Lord” », goes on Jesus. « “You have favouredYour own country, You brought back the captives of Jacob…Show us, o Lord, Your mercy and bring us back Your Saviour.I want to listen to what the Lord is saying to me. He will certainlyspeak of peace to His people for His friends and for those who convert theirhearts to Him.Yes, His saving help is near… and the glory will live in ourcountry. Love and loyalty have now met, righteousness and peace have nowembraced. Loyalty reaches up from the earth and righteousness leans down fromHeaven.Yes, the Lord Himself bestows happiness and our soil gives itsharvest. Righteousness will always precede Him and will leave its footprints onthe path”.You have seen that hour, father and you have worked for it. You havecooperated in the formation of this hour and the Lord will reward you for it. Iam telling you » adds Jesus, wiping a tear of joy which slowly runs downJoseph's cheek.He then resumes: « “O Lord, remember David and all hiskindness.How he swore to the Lord: Iwill not enter my house, nor climb into the bed ofmy rest, nor allow my eyes to sleep, nor give rest to my eyelids, nor peace tomy temples until I have found a place forthe Lord, a home for the God of Jacob…Rise, o Lord and come to Yourresting place, You and Your Ark of holiness (Mary understands, and Shebursts into tears).May Your priests vest in virtue and Your devote shout for joy.For the sake of Your servant David, do not deprive us of the face ofYour Anointed.The Lord swore to David and will remain true to His word: 'I willput on your throne the fruit of your womb'.The Lord has chosen His home…I will make a horn sprout for David, I will trim a lamp for MyAnointed”.Thank you, My father on My-behalf and on behalf of My Mother. Youhave been a Just father to Me and the Eternal Father chose you as the guardianof His Christ and of His Ark. You have been the lamp trimmed for Him and forthe Fruit of the holy womb you have had a loving heart. Go in peace, father.Your Widow will not be helpless. God has arranged that She must not be alone.Go peacefully to your rest. I tell You. »Mary is crying with Her face bent down on the blankets (they looklike mantles) which are stretched on Joseph's body, which is now getting cold.Jesus hastens to comfort him because he is breathing with great difficulty andhis eyes are growing dim once again.« “Happy the man who fears the Lord and joyfully keeps Hiscommandments…His righteousness will last for ever.For the upright He shines like a lamp in the dark, He is merciful,tender-hearted, virtuous…The just man will be remembered for ever. His justice is eternal andhis power will rise and become a glory…”You, father, will have that glory. I will soon come to take you,with the Patriarchs who have preceded you, to the glory which is waiting foryou. May your spirit rejoice in My word.“Who lives in the shelter of the Most High, lives under theprotection of the God of Heaven”You live there, o father.“He rescued me from the snares of fowlers and from rough words.He will cover you with His wings and under His feathers you willfind shelter.His truth will protect you like a shield and you need not fear theterrors of night…No evil will come near you because He ordered His angels to guardyou wherever you go.They will support you on their hands so that you may not hurt yourfoot against stones.You will tread on lions and adders, you will trample on savage lionsand dragons.Because you have hoped in the Lord, He says to you, o father, thatHe will free you and protect you.Because you have lifted your voice to Him, He will hear you, He willbe with you in your last affliction, He will glorify you after this life,showing you even now His Salvation”. And in future life, He will let you enter,because of the Saviour Who is now comforting you and Who very soon, oh! Irepeat it, He will come very soon and hold you in His divine embrace and takeyou, at the head of all the Patriarchs, where the dwelling place has beenprepared for the Just man of God who was My blessed father.Go before Me and tell the Patriarchs that the Saviour is in theworld and the Kingdom of Heaven will soon be opened to them. Go, father. May Myblessing accompany you. »Jesus has raised His voice to reach the heart of Joseph, who issinking into the mists of death. His end is impending. He is panting verypainfully. Mary caresses him, Jesus sits on the edge of the little bed,embraces him and draws to Himself the dying man, who collapses, and passes awaypeacefully.The scene is full of a solemn peace. Jesus lays the Patriarch downagain and embraces Mary, Who at the last moment, broken-hearted, had gone nearJesus.(Jesus says:)« Iexhort all wives who are tortured by pain, to imitate Mary in Her widowhood: tobe united to Jesus.Those who think that Mary's heart did not suffer any afflictions aremistaken. My Mother did suffer. Letthat be known. She suffered in a holy way,because everything in Her was holy, but She suffered bitterly.Those who think that Mary did not love Joseph deeply, only becausehe was the spouse of Her soul and not of Her flesh, are also mistaken. Mary didlove Joseph deeply, and She devoted thirty years of faithful life to him.Joseph was Her father, Her spouse, Her brother, Her friend, Her protector.Now She felt as lonely as the shoot of a vine when the tree to whichit is tied is cut down. It was as if Her house had been struck by thunder. Itwas splitting. Before it was a unit in which the members supported one another.Now the main wall was missing and that was the first blow to the Family and asign of the impending parting of Her beloved Jesus.The will of the Eternal Father Who had asked Her to be a spouse anda Mother, was now imposing upon Her widowhood and separation from Her Creature.But Mary utters, shedding tears, one of Her most sublime remarks: “Yes. Yes,Lord, let it be done to Me according to Your word”.And to have enough strength for that hour, She drew close to Me.Mary was always united to God in the gravest hours of Her life: in the Temple,when She was asked to marry, at Nazareth when She was called to Maternity,again at Nazareth when shedding the tears of a widow, at Nazareth in thedreadful separation of Her Son, on Calvary in the torture of seeing Me dying.Learn, you who are crying. Learn, you who are dying. Learn, you whoare living to die. Endeavour to deserve the words I said to Joseph. They willbe your peace in the struggle of death. Learn, you who are dying, to deserve tohave Jesus near you, comforting you. And if you have not deserved it, dare justthe same, and call Me near you. I will come. With My hands full of graces andconsolation, My Heart full of forgiveness and love, My lips full of words ofabsolution and encouragement.Death loses its bitterness if it takes place between My arms.Believe Me. I cannot abolish death, but I can make it sweet for those who dietrusting in Me.Christ, on His Cross, saidon behalf of you all: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit”. He saidthat in His agony, thinking of youragonies, your terrors, your errors, your fears, your desire for forgiveness. Hesaid it with His Heart pierced by extreme torture, before being pierced by thelance, a torture that was more spiritual than physical, so that the agonies ofthose who die thinking of Him might be relieved by the Lord and their spiritsmight pass from death to eternal Life, from sorrow to joy, for ever.This, My little John, is your lesson for today. Be good and do notbe afraid. My peace will always flow into you, through My words and throughcontemplation. Come. Just think that you are Joseph who has Jesus' chest as acushion, and Mary as a nurse. Rest between us, like a child in hiscradle. » (Mary comments on the family life of Jesus…)« Theinfancy, childhood, adolescence and youth of my Son are only briefly mentionedin the vast picture of His life as described in the Gospels. There He is theMaster. Here He is the Man. He is the God Who humiliates Himself for the sakeof man. And He works miracles also in the humility of a common life. He worksthem in Me, because I feel that My soul reaches perfection by the contact withMy Son Who is growing in My womb. He works them in the house of Zacharias bysanctifying the Baptist, by helping the labour of Elizabeth and by givingspeech and faith back to Zacharias. He works them in Joseph opening his spiritto the light of such a sublime truth which he could not understand by himself,although he was just. And after Me, Joseph is the most blessed by this showerof divine gifts.Consider how much progress he makes, I mean spiritual progress, fromthe moment he comes into My house to the moment of the flight into Egypt. Atthe beginning he was but a just man of his times. Then by successive steps, hebecomes the just man of Christian times. He acquires faith in Christ and herelies so securely on that faith that from the sentence he pronounced at thebeginning of the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem: “What shall we do?”, asentence which reveals the whole man with his human fears and his humanworries, he passes on to hope. In the grotto, before the birth, he says: “Itwill be better tomorrow”. Jesus Who is approaching already fortifies him withthis hope which is one of the most magnificent gifts of God. And from thishope, when he is sanctified by the contact with Jesus, he progresses on todaring. He always wanted to be guided by Me because of the venerable respect hefelt for Me. Now he manages himself both spiritual and material matters, and ashead of the Family, he decides when there is a decision to be taken. Not only,but in the painful hour of our flight, after that months of union with theDivine Son had filled him with holiness, it is he who comforts My afflictionand says to Me: “Even if we should have nothing else, we shall always haveeverything, because we shall have Him”…It is enough if you say with Joseph: “If Jesus is left with me, Ihave everything” and we will come with heavenly gifts to comfort your spirits.I do not promise you human gifts or human comfort. I promise you thesame consolations as Joseph had: supernatural ones. Because, everybody shouldknow, the gifts of the Wise Men, in the dire necessities of poor refugees,vanished as fast as lightning when we purchased a home and the bare essentialhousehold implements necessary for life, and the food which is also essentialfor life and could be procured only out of that source of income, until suchtime as we found work.Jewish communities have always helped one another. But the communitygathered in Egypt was formed almost exclusively of persecuted refugees, whotherefore were almost as poor as we, who had come to join them. And a littleshare of that wealth, which we were anxious to keep for our Jesus when adult,and we had spared out of the expenses for settling in Egypt, was most usefulfor our return and just sufficient toreorganise our house and the workshop in Nazareth upon our return. Becausetimes change, but human greed is always the same and it takes advantage ofother people's necessities to suck its part in the most exorbitant way.No. The fact that we had Jesus with us did not procure us anymaterial wealth. Many amongst you expect that, when they are hardly united toJesus. They forget what He said: “Set your hearts on things of the spirit”. Allthe rest is unnecessary. God provides also food. For men as well as for birds.Because He knows that you need food while your flesh is the tabernacle of yoursoul. But first of all ask for His grace. First of all ask for things for yourspirit. The rest will be given to you in addition.All Joseph had from his union with Jesus, from a human point ofview, were worries, fatigue, persecutions, starvation. He had nothing else. Butas he aimed only at Jesus, all this was turned into spiritual peace andsupernatural joy. I would like to take you to the point where My Spouse waswhen he said: “Even if we should have nothing else, we shall always haveeverything, because we have Jesus”. » A REMINISCENCE OF MARY(Vol. 2, p. 359-62) (The time is nowduring the second year of Jesus’ Public Life. The scene is the grotto of Bethlehem. Traveling near Bethlehem with Jesus, His apostles and some of His womendisciples, Mary begins to describe the events of Her journey with Joseph on thenight of Jesus’ Birth. She says:) « Come. Let us go to theGrotto. It is useless to enter the town. The best friends of My Child are nolonger there. Friendly Nature is quite sufficient to make a fire, with itsstones, its stream, its wood. Nature perceived the coming of its Lord… There…come without hesitating… We go round here… There, over there are the ruins ofDavid's Tower. Oh! it is dearer to Me than a royal palace! Blessed ruins!Blessed stream! Blessed tree because, as if by miracle, you allowed the wind topull down so many of your branches so that we might find firewood and light afire! » Mary descends quickly towardsthe Grotto, She crosses the little stream on a board acting as a bridge, Sheruns in the open space before the ruins and falls on Her knees at the entranceof the Grotto, She bends and kisses the ground. All the others follow Her. Theyare touched… The boy, who has not left Her one moment, seems to be listening toa wonderful story and his little dark eyes drink in Mary's words and gestureswithout missing a single one.Mary stands up and goes in saying: « Everything is exactly asthen!… But then it was night… Joseph lit a lamp when I entered. Only then,dismounting from the little donkey I became aware of how tired and cold I was…An ox greeted us, I went near it, to feel its warmth and lean against the hay…Joseph laid the hay out here, where I am, to make a bed for Me, and he driedthe hay for Me and for You, Son, at the fire he had lit in that comer… becausehe was as good as a father in his love of an angelical spouse… And holding eachother's hand, like brother and sister lost in the darkness of night, we ate ourbread and cheese, then he went over there to kindle the fire and he took offhis mantle to close the entrance… In actual fact he put a veil before the gloryof God descending from Heaven. You, My Jesus… and I lay on the hay, in thewarmth of the two animals, enveloped in My mantle and covered with a woollenblanket… My dear spouse!… In that hour of anxiety when I was all alone beforethe mystery of My first maternity, an hour full of uncertainty for every woman,and in My case, in My only maternity, it was also full of the mystery of whatit would be to see the Son of God emerge from mortal flesh, he, Joseph, waslike a mother, an angel to Me… he was My comfort then and always afterwards…Then silence and sleep enveloped the Just man… so that he might not see whatfor Me was God's daily kiss…And with regard to Me, after the interval of human necessities,there came immeasurable waves of ecstasy from a heavenly sea and they raised Mehigher and higher on their bright crests carrying Me up with them into an oceanof light, of joy, of peace, of love, until I was lost in the sea of God, ofGod's bosom… A voice from the earth whispered: “Are You sleeping, Mary?”. Oh!it was so far away!… An echo, a remembrance of the earth!… And so faint it wasthat My soul did not stir, and I do not know how I replied, while I rose, Irose even higher into the depth of fire, of infinite beatitude, offoreknowledge of God… up to Him… Oh! were You born of Me that night, or was Iborn of the Trine brightness? Did I give You or did You absorb Me to generateMe? I do not know… And then the descent, from choir to choir, from star tostar, from cloud to cloud, a sweet, slow, blissful, placid descent, like a flowercarried high in the sky by an eagle and then dropped, descending slowly, on thewings of the air, made more beautiful by a drop of rain, by a tiny piece ofrainbow stolen in the sky… alights on its native soil… My diadem: You! You onMy heart…Sitting here, after adoring You on My knees, I loved You. At last Icould love You without the barrier of the flesh, and I moved from here to takeYou to the love of him, who, like Me, was worthy of being one of the first tolove You. And here, between these two rustic columns, I offered You to theFather. And here You rested for the first time on Joseph's heart… Then Iswaddled You and together we laid You here… And I lulled You while Joseph wasdrying hay at the fire and when it was warm he placed it on Your chest and thenwe both adored You, bending over You, as I am doing now, to inhale Your breath,contemplating the humiliation to which love can lead and shedding tears whichare certainly shed also in Heaven for the unexhausted joy of seeing God. » (Mary goes back tothe time of Caesar’s edict, discovering that they should go to Bethlehem forthe census…) « That evening, when Joseph brought the news, You and I, Son,leapt for joy. It was the call… because You were to be born here, and nowhereelse, as the Prophets had foretold, and that sudden decree was as if mercifulHeaven wanted Joseph to erase even the memory of his suspicion. It was what Iwas waiting for, for You, for him, for the Judaic world and for the futureworld, for ever and ever. We decided. And we acted accordingly. Wait! Can thebride delay her nuptial dream? Why wait? »« Well… anything might have happened… » says Mary ofAlphaeus once again.« I was not afraid of anything. I rested in God. »« But did You know that everything would happen thus? »« Nobody told Me. And I never thought of it, so much so that toencourage Joseph, I let him and you doubt that there was still time for thebirth. But I knew, I really knew that the Light of the World was to be bornduring the feast of the Dedication. »« And you, mother, why did you not go with Mary? And why didfather not think of it? After all you were both going to come here! Did we notall come? » asks Judas Thaddeus sternly.« Your father had decided to come after the Dedication and hetold his brother. But Joseph would not wait. »« But at least you… » insists Thaddeus.« Do not reproach her, Judas. By mutual consent we decided itwas just to lay a veil on the mystery of this birth. »« Did Joseph know that it was to take place with those signs?If You did not know, how could he have known? »« We knew nothing, except that He was to be born. »« So? »« So divine Wisdom guided us, as it was rightthat it should. Jesus' birth and His presence in the world were to appeardevoid of uncommon features, which might rouse Satan… » THE JOSEPH PRAYER(Vol. 5, p. 154-5) (Itis nearing the time of Jesus’ Passion, and Jesus is saying goodbye to Hisfriend, Joseph of Aramithea…)« Goodbye,Joseph. Be just. Just like him who was My guardian for so many years and whowas capable of every renovation to serve the Lord his God. If he were here,among us, oh! how he would teach you to serve the Lord perfectly, to be just,just, just. But it is right that he should already be in Abraham's bosom!… In ordernot to see the injustice of Israel. Holy servant of God!… A new Abraham, with abroken heart, but with perfect will, he would not have advised Me to becowardly, but he would have spoken the words that he used to utter whenanything painful weighed heavily on us: “Let us raise our spirits. We shallmeet the yes of God and we shall forget that it is men who grieve us. And letus do whatever is burdensome, as if the Most High presented it to us. In thisway we shall sanctify also the least things, and God will love us”. Oh! Hewould have said so also to comfort Me to suffer the deepest sorrows… He would have comforted us… » MORE REMINISCENCES(Vol. 5, p. 294-6) (Maryis travelling with Jesus and His apostles, near the banks of the Jordan River. Mary of Alphaeus, who is also with Her,reminisces about Her childhood…)« WhenYou were a little girl, I always remember You with these flowers in Your littlehands. You called them the flowers of Your coming. In fact when You were bornYour garden was full of them, and that evening when the whole of Nazareth cameto see Joachim's daughter, the clusters of these little stars looked likediamonds because of the water from the sky and of the last ray of the sun thatlit them up while setting, and since Your name was “Star”, everybody saidlooking at those tiny shining stars: “The flowers have adorned themselves togive a hearty welcome to Joachim's flower, and the stars have left the sky tocome to the Star”, and they all smiled, happy with the omen and with Yourfather's joy. And Joseph, my husband's brother, said: “Stars and drops. She isreally Mary!”. Who could have told him then that You were to become his star?When he came back from Jerusalem, after being chosen as Your spouse? The wholeof Nazareth wanted to celebrate the event with him, because great was thehonour that had come to him from Heaven and because of his nuptials with You,the daughter of Joachim and Anne, and everybody wanted to feast with him. Hekindly but firmly refused all celebrations, amazing everybody. Because whichman, destined to such an honourable wedding and by such a decree of the MostHigh, would not celebrate the happiness of his soul, flesh and blood? But heused to say: “A severe preparation is required for a great appointment”. Andwith sparing use of words and food, because he had always practised all othercontinence, he spent that time working and praying, because I believe thatevery hammer-stroke, every chisel-mark became a prayer, if it is possible topray working. His face was enraptured. I used to go to tidy up the house, tobleach sheets and all other things left by Your mother and which had yellowedwith age, and I used to watch him working in the kitchen garden and in thehouse, making them as beautiful as if they had never been neglected, and I usedto speak to him, too… but he was engrossed in thought. He used to smile. Not atme or at anybody else, but at a thought of his, that was not the thought ofevery man about to get married. That is a smile of mischievous sensualpleasure… He… seemed to smile at the invisible angels of God, and to speak tothem and to consult with them… Oh! I am sure they told him how to treat You!Because later - and this amazed everybody in Nazareth and almost irritated myAlphaeus - he put off the wedding as long as possible, and we never understoodwhy he suddenly made up his mind before the fixed time. And also when we heardYou were a mother, how surprised was Nazareth at his contained joy!… Also myJames is somewhat like that. And he is becoming so more and more. Now that Iwatch him carefully - I don't know why, but since we came from Ephraim he seemsto have changed completely - I see him thus… just like Joseph. Look at him evennow, Mary, now that he turns round again to look at us. Does he not have thepensive attitude so habitual to Your spouse Joseph? He smiles, but I do notknow whether his smile is a sad or vague one. He looks, but he seems to belooking far away, beyond us, as Joseph did so often. Do You remember how Alphaeusused to tease him? He used to say: “Brother, are you still looking at thepyramids?”. He would shake his head without speaking, patient and engrossed inthought. He was never talkative. But when You came back from Hebron! He did noteven come to the fountain by himself any longer, as he used to do and aseverybody does. He was either with You or at his work. And with the exceptionof the Sabbaths, when he went to the synagogue, or when he went somewhere onbusiness, no one can say that they saw Joseph loitering about during thosemonths. Then you went away… How distressing it was to have no news of you afterthe slaughter! Alphaeus went as far as Bethlehem… “They went away” they said.But how could we believe them, if they had a mortal hatred of you in town,where the innocent blood was still red and the ruins were still smoking andthey blamed you for the blood that had been shed? He went to Hebron and then tothe Temple, because it was Zacharias' turn. Elizabeth gave him nothing but hertears, Zacharias only words of comfort. They were both worried about John andfearing fresh cruelties, they had hidden him and trembled for him. They had nonews of you and Zacharias said to Alphaeus: “If they are dead, their blood ison me, because I convinced them to remain in Bethlehem”. My Mary! My Jesus sobeautiful at the Passover after His birth! And to have no news of You for sucha long time! But why never any news?… »« Because it was better to be silent. Where we were, there weremany Maries and Josephs, and it was wise to be considered as a normal marriedcouple » Mary replies quietly, then with a sigh She says: « And evenin their sadness they were happy days. Evil was still so far away! If as humanbeings we lacked so many things, our spirits were sated with the joy of havingYou, My Son! »« You have Your Son even now, Mary. Joseph is no longer withYou, that is true! But Jesus is here and with His full love of an adult »remarks Mary of Alphaeus.Mary raises Her head to look at Jesus. Although Her lips smilefaintly, Her eyes reveal Her torture. But She does not utter another word… A PORTRAIT OF JOSEPH(Notebooks 1944, p. 52) (In a vision ofHeaven, Maria Valtorta sees St. Joseph:)…Heis not so tall, more or less like Mary. Sturdily built. With grizzly hair,curly and short, and a squarely‑cut beard. A long, thin, aquiline nose. Twowrinkles cut across his cheeks, starting from the corners of his nose andmoving down until fading at the sides if his mouth in his beard. Dark, verygood eyes. In them I rediscover the lovingly good look of my father. The wholeface is good, thoughtful without being sad, dignified, but very, very good. Heis wearing a dark blue‑purple tunic like the petals of certain periwinkles, andhis cloak is the color of camel's skin. Jesus points him out to me, saying,“Here is the patron of all the just.” “MY HOLY AND BLESSED JOSEPH !”(Notebooks 1944, p. 58-60) (We re-visit thefirst passage of this compilation. Marycomments on the bewilderment She felt when the High Priest wanted to arrangeHer marriage, and on Her illumination from the Holy Spirit, that this was thewill of God…)“Inexchange for my obedience, I asked only that God grant his servant the kind ofhusband who would not represent a perturbing violence for my virginity, sacredto the Lord, or a scornful mockery, but a respectful, holy companion in whoseheart the fear and 43 Luke 1:26‑38.44 Matthew 26:39‑44; Mark 14:35‑36; Luke 22:41‑42.love of God would be alight to comprehend the soul of his Wife. I asked for nothing else.Attractiveness, youth, social position, and wealth were so negligible for methat they did not warrant even a fleeting thought. I asked for the 'sanctity' of my future husband. And did notconcern myself about anything else.“The first condition ‑excessively overlooked in your present marriages ‑ is to turn to God to ask fora mate in keeping with your character and your position and, above all, acompanion who is 'just' in his sight. You don't ask God for anything in thisdecisive hour of a woman's life and do not look at either your spirit or thatof your mate. It is enough for you that he should be handsome, rich, andinfluential in the world. Everything else has no weight when it is time tochoose. But, unfortunately, it takes onfull weight after marriage, and many marriages are a disappointment limited tobeing such only if the wife is a woman with Christian sentiments. If even theseare lacking in her, the marriage becomes a disaster whose expiatory victims arethe innocent and often ends in double adultery. You place your souls at riskand frequently lead them to death because you consider only human ends inmarriage and do not turn to the Father in Heaven in that solemn hour.“When I saw Joseph, all my natural anxiety fell like a clouddissolving into a rainbow. It was enough for me to look into his eyes to readin them that he was an honest, faithful, pure, just man. His age, more thantwice my own, had left him with the clear gaze of a child, for Evil had risen uparound him as he lived in the world, but had been unable to penetrate into hisheart, filled with the love of God.“With what trust I placed my hand in his, sensing that I had foundin him a loving father, a faithful spouse, and a chaste companion who would belike olive and fig trees shading a small house and defending it from winds andthe heat, providing the refreshment and comfort of sweetness and nourishment!“My sweet spouse who did not disappoint me! Who, since he reallyloved me, believed in me, even going against appearances;45 who concealed his tears from me soas not to disturb45 Matthew 1:18‑19. me; who had only smiles and help for me; whoguided me as his first putative daughter, holding my hand to make me feel hewas close by with his love, avoiding obstacles for me, and anticipating myneeds‑patient, silent, and chaste, chaste as only an angel can be.“Oh, yes! Blessed be the Lord for this! I, whom the Eternal haddestined to be the Queen of his angels, had two angels as my subjects, beginningon earth: my Guardian Angel, whose invisible presence I felt stirring at myside continually, with flashes of light and heavenly perfume, and my angelicconsort, whose flesh, not darkened by the desire of blood, lived close to mine ‑like that of two lilies blossoming in the same flowerbed scenting each otherand blooming for the Lord, each an example for the other in rising ever higher,towards God, in perfuming more intensely out of charity for God and one'scompanion, but never joining their flowering mouths in a kiss which would sullywith pollen the angelic silk of their robes of purity.“My holy and blessed Joseph! My heart does not cease to thank itsLord for having given him to me as a consort, for as a holy Father He providedfor his Servant and created this living defense for my virginity, drawn out ofthe Temple, and the world's breath thus broke against Joseph, so that the dinand stench of human baseness did not penetrate where the eternal Virgincontinued to praise the Lord as if she were assigned to the service of thealtar, beyond the Holy of Holies, where the glory of the Eternal God wasshining.” o o 0 o o [Compiled by David D. Murray for theMaria Valtorta Readers’ Group AUSTRALIA RIP],