

**English translation of “A Compendium of a Hundred Holy Meditations”
by Cristoforo da Verucchio
Translated
By Father Patrick Colbourne O.F.M.Cap.**

Translator’s note.

This translation is based on the introduction, text and footnotes which were published by P. Costanzo Cargnoni O.F.M. Cap. In I Frati Cappuccini: Documenti e testimonianze dell primo secolo, Edizioni Frate Indovino, Perugia, vol III/1, pp.1190 -1214. The only additions to the notes made by the translator are references to Francis of Assisi: The Early Documents, edited by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. and William J. Short O.F.M. Conv., New York City Press, New York, London, Manila, for an English version of quotations from the Writings or Biographies of St Francis.

Introduction by Castanzo Cargnoni O.F.M. Cap.

**A COMPEMDIUM OF A HUNDRED HOLY MEDITATIONS
BY VERICCHINO**

If we wish to speak about what was “popular” in Italian devotional literature, without doubt Verucchino’s work entitled Compendium Of A Hundred Holy Meditations merits more attention than does the “Exercises of a Soul.” The Meditations, for one thing, reflect and convey the warm and evocative tone and the matter that the preaching contained in a superior manner. Cristoforo da Verucchio planned to produce three volumes containing the three sections of his Exercises of a Soul. He told his readers this himself: “The first part will be about the most common and ordinary activities of the spiritual life. The second will deal with the grandeur of God and His marvellous actions. The third topic will deal with the Saviour’s life, the Madonna, the Passion of the Son and how His Mother shared in His suffering..

He was almost forced to write the first part. “As soon as the draft appeared (cf. above. doc. 16) the superiors requested a short summary of the Exercises of a Soul. Prompted by this and probably also because he was forced to stop preaching because of a recurring and persistent loss of voice, he completed this work within two months. A pocket edition that was very convenient, easy to use and suitable for all temperaments and abilities was produced. In a little more than forty years, from 1592, it was published no less than twenty times, not counting the reprints in the same year. One can still easily find one of these editions lying like a hidden flower in far-flung libraries from the north to the south of Italy which goes to show the notable success and wide influence of these editions.

*When in the past Verucchio was mentioned as being a spiritual writer it was only this small work, which went through many hands, that was mentioned. It was famous at the end of the Sixteenth and beginning of the Seventeenth Centuries, perhaps jus as famous as *The Practice of Mental Prayer* by Mattia Bellintani de Salò. Why was it so successful? This was probably due to the pithy brevity of the meditations which in a few well constructed points brought a vast amount of documentary material together which had been taken mainly “from the works of the most serious doctors and saintly fathers,” that was expressed in terms which – as the editors say- “were free from pretentiousness and affectation but that were beautiful to read and helpful for meditation: and could be read to promote practice and to facilitate*

action: To be read in the company of Angels; to be read to illumine the intellect, and to be meditated on to arouse the affections.”

Dedicated to the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Matia II della Rovere. this little book might be compared to a “book about love; about battle or about recreation: about recreation since it delights the spirit; about battle because it combats Lucifer; about chaste love because it advocates falling completely in love with God, who is all charity and love”. This is why that which the editors proposed and wished for in those days is still valid today namely, “that everyone put these things into practice, experiencing the mood, enjoying the fruits and being thus enriched in virtue, enlightenment, affection and gifts, grace, Gloria and every other sublime favour of the spirit”.

The pages which have been chosen here from the many very beautiful ones that have been left aside can in part explain their “popularity” since they bring together incontestable richness of affection that is vividly portrayed, often setting out a very vivid scene which is detailed, moving and backed up with patristic backing and traditional devotional themes.

4985 1. Behold, O my sweet Lord, how I who am miserable and of little or no worth, come in wonder and awe to contemplate your grandeur as you are all that exists and is good. though I cannot apprehend you with my senses because you do not have a body; my will cannot love you infinitely though you are infinitely lovable; my mind cannot comprehend you as you deserve to be comprehended since you are beyond my comprehension; my speech lacks words since you are beyond words; nor do I have the power to reach your exaltedness which is inaccessible; exceeding all that I could desire as you have no equal

Thus I stand in admiration and delight. O my Light! I stand in admiration because among what has been created and exists down here I cannot find anything that is completely like you. O Creator; or where there is any comparison between the finite, which is the creature, and what is infinite, such as you are. There is no comparison whatsoever. O how wonderful is the majesty of your magnificence!

2. To do the best that I can, I imagine seeing you seated on high, like a great Monarch, surrounded by majesty and glory covered with jewels and gold with *Regnum mundi* on your head, with stars around you, with angels adoring you and the entire universe in your hand. It seems to me that you are holding me in your omnipotent hand and enwrapping me with your traditional bright cloud. I am still enjoying a loving gaze and utter fervent words from my heart since. in a way, the infinite love in your breast is resting on me. In short, by means of your divine rays you have lifted, enlightened and enflamed all my inner being. Tell me, my only Good, when will I ever respond to you in adoration and love?

4986 3. I contemplate your most divine essence which is absolute, independent, the best, supreme, unique, which has existence alone, existing of itself and comes from nothing else but you who composed it as you wished. Because of this it exists of necessity and cannot fail to exist nor can we imagine it not existing. Everything else is conditional, to such an extent that it is not necessary that they exist. Who can doubt your existence when all other creatures show that it is so? Therefore, your existence is beyond doubt. However, this does not mean that your essence can be explained or defined completely without using metaphors that convey that there is nothing greater or better than your existence, *quo nihil est maius*.¹

¹ Cf. S. Anselmus Cantuar. Proslogon, c. 3=5, 15, [PL 158, 228=350, 235].

4. What is more, I consider the reason why your essence is so inexplicable springs from three reasons, namely that you are invisible, incomprehensible and beyond naming. You are invisible because you are a pure spirit and human eyes cannot see you on earth or even in heaven without the aid of the illumination of glory. Incomprehensible, because when the Angels behold your essence they do not comprehend or know it in its entirety, in its immensity. Because we cannot see you with neither our senses, nor our imagination or understand you completely, we cannot name you properly except by the use of terms taken from creatures which always convey something imperfect or unsuitable with regard to your divinity no matter how much scholastic theology tries to assign appropriate terms such as *Deus Spiritus, substantia, vita* and others.² Theology speaks about you using metaphorical expressions such as light, sun, sky, jewel, ocean, fountain, flower, treasure, wealth and likenesses. Finally mystical theology pleads with you and calls you other artificial names such as sweet, gentle, good, beautiful loveable, clement, just, merciful, gracious, blessed, virtuous, wise, patient, holy, great, delightful, glorious and a thousand other titles similar to these.

4987 5. By means of all of this, O superabundant love, I begin to see that you are a most perfect substance, filled with infinite perfections to the highest degree so that you do not need anything outside yourself and that you contain to an eminent degree within yourself the perfections of all created things which are reflected in you as in a very clear mirror. You exist as undivided act without being composite or having any mixture of parts, accidents or impurity. You are eternal; without cause, beginning or end. You are immense, without limit or any boundary. Your judgements and guidance are unchangeable O God because you are infinite, uncreated and immortal!

6. I meditate on your intellect that knows and penetrates everything with respect to time and place at the same time including what is possible but will never happen. Your memory is so good that it retains as present whatever is past or future and thus it never forgets anything. Nothing can resist your will. It is the cause of everything and it is not restricted by necessities. It is free and it never changes. Your judgement is always correct and it can never deviate. No one can investigate your secrets.

Ever more I admire your tremendous and abounding Majesty which alone can perform wonderful things before which the Angels bow most humbly, and the Demons in Hell tremble, and the splendour of which sanctified mankind on earth. Your other activities of presence, providence, predestination, election, justification and glorification and the like flow from this. This is how I appear to interpret the praises that rise continually from the spirits of the blessed and the praises offered by the stars of the morning.

4988 7. Finally all this makes me want to sing your praise forever, O outstanding essence, O divine substance O adorable Majesty, who alone can bring peace of heart, real happiness, true beatitude, wonderful patience, praiseworthy humility, commendable justice, most blessed virtue, blessed gentleness, fruitful sweetness, great sea of delight, ocean of grace and the source of all riches.

² Cf. *id. Monologium*, c. 12-13. 26. 28, [PL 158, 160s, 179, 181].

*Domine meus et Deus meus.*³ O my God and my Lord! *O Deus meus et omnia!* O God who are all I am and all I have! *O summum bonum et omne nostrum bonum, a quo omnia bona, et sine qua nullum bonum!*⁴ O highest good, and all that is good for us you alone is the source of all that is good! *Tibi laus, tibi Gloria per omnia saeculorum saecula.* To you always be praise, honour and glory world without end!

*Six points that have been taken from the great Gerson from his book Alphabetum divini Amoris*⁵ in order to consider the very noble conditions in a person for vital love of the loving God. Meditation six.

4989 1. I wish to love you, my dear Love. I wish to love you especially because you alone are God, and you are most worthy of love. I wish to state that the main reasons for loving you are not my own interests, which you already care for as you promote my wellbeing, because this is the way I would love a jewel, an article of clothing, a shield, a horse and other things like these because of how useful they are to me. I wish to love you mainly for yourself and for your infinite perfection, which deserve to be loved by everybody. I am resolved to love you, my good and beautiful life, even if I did not hope to receive anything from you or expected anything good or useful from you. In a secondary manner I ought to love you for the very many great gifts you continually give me without you every saying that this is enough, if you will allow me to speak in this way.

2. Thus I love you, and I want to love you, so as not for wish for or seek anything else except love. I want to try to love you more each hour though I cannot comprehend you completely or bridge the distance between the finite and the infinite. I now promise, O God, that I want to love you following your divine precept with all my heart, with my entire mind, with all my soul and all my strength. I shall love you; I do love you with all my heart, with all my affection, with all my mind, with all my intellect, with all my soul, with all the faculties of my soul, with all the faculties of my senses and the members of my body so that everything that I have is dedicated to you forever. As a Gloss or solemn interpreter said: *diligam te per virili et quo magis diligere possum.* I love you, and I love you as much as I can and as I could ever love you. O most chaste heavenly love, how could I ever love you that much?

4990 3. When shall I love you in the fifteen ways of perfect love that are symbolised by the fifteen steps that enable one to enter your temple, O mystical Solomon?⁶ In the first place I want to love you with an astute love with a joyful heart because I wish to love you to discover all aspects of lovableness or blessedness in you. Next I want to love you with strong love, in such a way that no amount of adversity can separate me from you or detach me from such sincere and pure charity. I want to be filled with effectual love so that I may be better prepared for whatever you wish and for wherever you wish to lead me, to hear your word and prompting as the only one that my heart loves. Then I wish to have fervent love that will distance me from base things by means of inner sweetness and transport me to higher things. What is more I wish to have aggressive love that will make me always repulse certain

³ Cf Jn 20, 28.

⁴ Cf. id. *Proslogon*, c. 23-25 (PL 158, 239-241).

⁵ Cf *Tractatus de elevatione mentis in Deum, cui titulus est alphabetum divini amoris. In Joannis Gersonii tertia pars operis*, Parisiis 1606, 1126-1156.

⁶ This matter was also raised in *The Exercises of a Soul* and appears in the quotations that follow. This shows that this *Compendium* took its material from the *Exercises* which were circulating more widely.

burning sighs, because I want to enjoy you. See, we have already taken five steps into your vivacious love as I sought for and wanted.

2. I shall now move on to the other steps, and thus I say O Christ, O most beloved Christ, whom I want to love with unsurpassed love to such an extent that I value your love more than all others put together. You said with your own lips: *Qui amat patrem vel matrem plus quam me, non est me dignus*. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, or of grace or of your glory. I want to have untiring love that will not prevent new growth, *cum modus diligendi te Deus sit diligere sine modo*: the real way to love you, is to love you without limit or measure. I want to have insatiable love so that I will say I thirst sufficiently for your love. Rather may I be in pain and torment because I do not love you fervently so as to dedicate all that I possess to you, all that I know, all that I desire, and all that I value. I wish to have love that penetrates to the depths of my very marrow. I have reached the tenth step.

4991 5. My most sweet and loveable Jesus, when shall I love you with love that melts, that ravishes me to the depths of my inner bring? When shall I love you with love that is inebriating so as to be like someone who has become drunk on the divine must of the Holy Spirit and cannot keep his balance or find rest in anything except you and your sacred wounds? When shall I love you with such trouble-free love that by means of the gentle desire for what is pleasing to you all bitterness will be changed into sweetness of spirit and will become happy because of you to the point of suffering injury and torment? When shall I possess unitive love so that it unites me to you and binds me to you indissolubly, proclaiming with St Paul: *Vivo ego, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*? Finally, when shall I ever love you with transforming love, so that just as iron becomes heated in fire, so I will become deified to a certain extent in you, by you and through you on earth and become completely yours and you completely mine? This is what a Saint meant when he wrote: *Scias, o anima, quod si Deum diligis, vi amoris in eius similitudinem transformaris*. O Christian soul, that when you love God. He transforms you into himself by the strength of that love.

4992 6. O what ardent desires, O what inflamed words, O what exciting expressions, O what tingling experiences, O what afire, O how excessive, O what sweetness, O what intoxication of melting, seraphic and productive love! How well did that saintly father speak: *O Mortales, amate amorem vos arternaliter amantem*; O mortals, love the love that loves you eternally. Love God who is in essence all love and supernatural love because he loves you with so much love!

O Donine, quando te diligam? Quando te amore constringam? Lord, when will I ever love you? When shall I hold you in my loving arms, O most delightful one? Can you not see that I desire nothing else nor seek anything else? Take all else from me and give me your love alone and I shall derive great benefit. Arise, O great God of love when ever will you grant what I desire? When shall I burn with your divine love as if it were a torch or a lamp or burning furnace? When ever shall your flame consume my innermost soul, as a fire burns wax as the sun does snow? Oh, Oh how I long to see you forever, to languish and die? When ever will you make me feel contented? When ever will you come?

O God, when, when, when?

Nine points for contemplating the loving mystery of the Birth of Christ the Redeemer, and very powerful Mediator

4993 1. O God, O blessed and holy God, by means of how many indications and signs you wished to demonstrate the birth of your Son even to heretics! Because of this I now recall some revelations that were made at the beginning of the world concerning some people who were struck dumb for just claiming to be the only prophet and sole Master. I remember the three suns that appeared in the Orient which were later reduced to one. I remember the shining arches and rings that appeared to circle our real sun because the real sun of justice was to be born into the world clothed in our nakedness and consisting of three substances, deity, soul and flesh. I remember Augustine who became a supporter of the Jews whom he had loathed formally, and who also did not want to misuse the name of Lord, or God, since following the oracle of Apollo they believed that the living God would come together with his Firstborn who would hold the greater power. Therefore they built an altar to him at Campidoglio with the beautiful title: *Haec est ara primogeniti Dei*. This is the altar of the firstborn and only Son of God. This was the origin of the name of the famous church *Ara Coeli*:⁷ The Altar of Heaven which still exists today.

I recall the view of many Sibyllines who lived throughout the universe, that nature had to give birth to God and that he would be the child of a Hebrew virgin and would rule over the entire world. Finally I recall the fountain that would miraculously bring forth oil instead of water running into the River Tiber for a whole day in the city of Rome. The church of Santa Maria Trastevere was built to commemorate this to represent the infinite mercy that was shown to us.

4994 2. I could dwell on this and a hundred other things that appeared at the beginning of the modern Ecclesiastical Annals,⁸ O joy of my heart. However to arouse my devotion and love of the divine immense goodness I will mention the memory of your strong ardour, O most holy virgin Mother, as the time for you to give birth drew near and how your desire increased to see and adore your Child's birth Thus you sighed languidly: "When will that happy day dawn, so that I will be able to admire, touch and kiss you, O my life?"

O how diligent you were in observing time! One hour seemed like a thousand years as all the while you gave yourself over to preparing swaddling clothes, items, sheets and a cradle and whatever you would need. In memory of what were your vivid concerns for eight days before Christmas the Church celebrates a special feast known as *Festum expectationis Beatae Virginis Mariae*, the Feast of the Expectation of the Madonna? At this time the Roman Church sings the O, O, O, antiphons that express all that you were wishing for. When shall I ever really wish that he will come and be reborn in my spirit, Christ the Saviour?

4995 I consider your zeal, your wishes and other similar desires, O most sweet Virgin, during the long journey that was perhaps more than forty miles, from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judaea that, according to St Jerome in his book *De locis hebraicis*,⁹ was not further than about six miles from Jerusalem, to fulfil the edict of Caesar Augustus and to have you listed on the Roman Census so that your child could also appear there as soon as he was born. Together with the Angels I accompany you on that journey when God knows whether you had a donkey for part of the trip. I am certain that you were well treated by your Spouse who kept close to you until the time that you gave birth even if he was taken away at times by

⁷ The present Church next to "Altare della patria" with steep steps is the historical centre of the ancient Observant Friars Minor.

⁸ That is the "Annali" of Cardinal Baronio. Cf. *Annalium Eccl. Caesaris Baroni ... Apparatus*, Lucae 1740, 445-448.

⁹ Cf. S. Hieronimus, *De vita et nominibus hebraicorum* (PL 23, 924s.)

the thousand things to be done. O how I seem to be able to hear you and see everything! Now I see you entering the village of Bethlehem as two poor people who are unknown and of no account. You are looking for somewhere to stay and all refuse you and perhaps insult you. O St Joseph you are so upset about your Spouse, who is so close to giving birth. You O Madonna, you are ashamed to wander among people in your condition as you are just a young virgin.

4996 4. In the end you withdrew outside the suburbs of the city, through the eastern gate and came to the countryside where there was a cave (according to what Jerome wrote in his *epistola ad Marcellam*)¹⁰ beneath the steep bank or rock on which sat the city of Bethlehem. The cave served as a public stable and thus had a crib and a manger, cut into the rock and was surrounded by I do not know how many troughs woven out of straw, which, according to Giovanni Crisostimo's *in Lucam*,¹¹ were subsequently covered with gold and taken to Rome.

O blessed and privileged cave, which was called the Crib in popular terms of speech and which was always esteemed, venerated as such and visited by the faithful and shown honour by a proud Church. At the instigations of Satan it was scoffed at by the Emperor Hadrian by means of vulgar and profane statues of Venus and Adonis, in an attempt to cancel the memory of its significance, as St Paulinus tells us in *epistola ad Severum*¹² I greet you and adore you from a distance. I only desire and wish that I could kiss your soil, and floor. I would also like to have lived my life close to you, your walls and your stones as did St Paul

4997 5. So most blessed Mary and Joseph when you had come this far and found a place with divine assistance as St Gregory of Nyssa says in *Sermone de Nativitate Christi*¹³ you found two beasts or domestic animals, call them what you like, one an ass and the other an ox, which were symbols of the two races, Jews and Gentiles. Now you come into where they are and drop down a handful of straw or wheat you and settle yourselves on the ground. You are feeling hungry, thirsty and cold and perhaps you do not have any food, light or a fire.

O if it had been my good fortune to have been there I would have run in great haste to provide all that you needed! Behold, O living God, how you allow everything to happen according to your hidden decrees which are always just. And (in my meditation it appears) that the three Churches of faithful, the triumphant, the militant and those who have died,¹⁴ confer together, and by means of what is in all the Scriptures come to the conclusion that on this night during which, O blessed spouses, when you are so disadvantaged and uncomfortable, the hour has come to bring forth in the dead of night the only begotten Son of God who is immortal light. O the depth of God's secrets!

4998 6. Now, my Lady, I meditate on the very act of your giving birth. Behold the heavens open and rays and light begin to come down on the grotto in Bethlehem and they bring marvellous light not only to the surroundings but shine much further, according to some, as far as Spain. They penetrate the heart of the Madonna which melts with unusual sweetness. O, most holy Virgin, I seem to see you with your arms extended praying on your knees in a

¹⁰ Id. *Ep. 46 ad Marcellam*, n. 10 (PL 22, 490).

¹¹ Cf. C. Baronio, *Annales Eccl.*, t. I. Lucae 1738, 2b; which refers to Giovanni Crisostomo, in *Lc.*, (reference not found).

¹² Another reference that is difficult to identify. It might come from the pages of the Annals of Borinio mentioned above.

¹³ Cf. S. Gregorius Nysserius, *Oratio in diem natalem Christi* (PG 46, 1142s)

¹⁴ That is those who are in Purgatory.

corner of the stable, and to see your spouse Joseph in meditation in the other corner. O to what heights of divine contemplation you were raised and how you remained like this absorbed in ardour beyond what is seraphic! In a mere creature there has never been greater and more exalted meditation than what you were wrapped in at that time as you attained the summit of ardent desire to see and adore your Son.

Now, what happiness, what glory! According to a sermon by St Athanasius¹⁵ *De sanctissima Deipara*, you felt your holy child come forth from your most pure womb in a gentle manner, without the slightest pain, without any languor indeed with indescribable joy.

7. The virgin bowed her face to the ground, O you who are ever virgin, and looked at the beautiful Infant who is Man and God at the same time and whom you longed to see. In being born from you he had penetrated your flesh and your body and was lying on the hay on the ground! *In suis meditationibus*¹⁶ St Bonaventure says, O what very great miracles these things are. He wonders how his face and body glow while his mouth whispers and sobs. O how beautiful he is even before being washed. According to St Bede in *De locis santus*¹⁷ all of a sudden a flow of clear water miraculously came out of the rock to provide for this. O what a wonder, how amazing, what tenderness, what grandeur! Where are the embellishments of gold, of jewels, the pageboys, the maids, the damsels, the lords, the champions and the trappings of worldly pomp? Could it be that no citizen of Bethlehem was aware of the light shining in the darkness and by a miracle did not come out to see what was going on?

4999 8. O Virgin Mother, how you wondered and rejoiced over the happy realisation that you had given birth without the slightest assistance or the need for an obstetrician who was not there as Cyprian says in *Nativitate Christi*.¹⁸ You were very happy as you saw and adored most devotedly what you had wished for, but never the less you could not help but share his suffering with him since in this very cold season he was naked and his pain pierced your motherly breast.

O fortunate Joseph you feel greatly consoled and you offer adoration. Why cannot I who am wicked also offer adoration? O how both of you were crying out of happiness and deep tenderness and thanked God the Father with humble emotion for opening the windows of heaven for you and his Son. Why do I not accompany you in doing this? What stops me from exalting and crying out? O dear Bethlehem, holy Crib, O most holy Mother, O most holy Child! O what nobility was conferred on you Bethlehem! O Crib how blessed are you? O Mother what were the workings of grace by the eternal Father that enabled you to enjoy the favour of becoming the Mother of God? O Child, what moved you to be born during such a cold season with such humility and poverty if not your extreme and superabundant love?

9. But now a group of Angels appears from heaven softly singing and only God knows how many thousand they are and how many choirs remained in heaven. O with what great reverence you circled the earth; O blessed Spirits, and adored God become Man, the Eternal Word become flesh. You venerated the blessed Mother and also St Joseph. Then you

¹⁵ Cf. S. Athanasius, *Sermo. Da descriptione Deiparae*, n. 8, (PG 28, 955)

¹⁶ Cf. Pseudo-bonaventurane *Meditationes vitae Christi*, cap. VII (*S. Bonaventuriae ... Operum tomus VI*. Romae 1596, 354b)

¹⁷ Cf. Venerabilis Beda, *De locis sanctis libellus*, c. 7 (PL 94, 1184)

¹⁸ Cf. *Opuscula vulgo adscripta Sancto Cypriano: De nativitate Christi*, in *Sancti Cypriani Opers*, Venetiis 1728, p. LXXs.

filled everywhere with song and the sweet sounds of heaven. Some of you appeared as beautiful light and went to the shepherds who were on watch and spoke to one but not to all. You appeared up high and told him the happy news of the birth of the Saviour of the world. You gave him clear indications of where to go and told him to come and adore him soon. Then you rose up in a countless multitude and the harmonious melody of your song rang out over hills and mountains: *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*.¹⁹

O twice blessed Angles why could they not hear you then? O at least why do I not know how to imitate you now?

Six points for contemplating the unspeakable joy of the Madonna in her giving of glorious birth. Meditation 21.

5000 1. O most sweet Virgin, who could describe the incredible joy that you experienced in your joyful and blessed giving birth? What was the source of your happiness if not for seven reasons? Firstly, because (as St Augustine observes in his work *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*)²⁰ you had already conceived your Child without any bloodshed, since when he came into the world he came to remedy the violence of others and he did not wish to be born of a mother who had experience force. Indeed, as a good Son he wanted to honour his Mother as much as he could and as he could be conceived by her without her losing the beautiful flower of virginity he wanted her to be a virgin up to the birth and to remain so following conception as one of the gifts that he deigned to confer on her in her wonderful conception.

2. In short, O Virgin most excellent, why should we rejoice over how you were following giving birth? If your Son is the eternal Word Himself, who is holy and incorrupt, why should he not be born to you remaining always inviolate and incorrupt? Thus in their books *De Symbolo*²¹ St Ambrose and St Cyprian, as they consider that by means of divine power two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time, conclude that it is possible that your sweet Son left your womb immaculate passing through the normal chambers involved in human generation and came out with the same shape and seize as other babies however in such a wonderful manner that he did not wish to open the cloister or the enclosure of your perpetual virginity. Because of this you remained an intact virgin even when you gave birth.

5001 3. In accord with the First Lateran Council²² that your divine Son had an eternal Father in heaven, he did not need to have another father on earth apart from you his most dignified Mother and he was the firstborn and only son of the Father, sharing his likeness. He wanted only to be your carnal Son, your first and only child and thus he wanted you to remain an intact and immaculate Virgin even after giving birth.

O what an honour, O what exceptional dignity was yours, such that you could truly be called *Regina virginum et Virgo virginum*, Virgin of virgins and Queen of virgins. How

¹⁹ Cf. Lk 2, 14

²⁰ Cf. S. Augustinus, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, c XI, n. 12 (PL 44, 420s)

²¹ Cf. S. Ambrosius *attr.), *Expanatio simboli ad initiandos* (PL 17, 1193); *Expositio in Symbolum apostolorum*, in *Sancti Cypriani Opera: Opuscula vulgo adscripta Sancto Cypriano*, Venetus 1728, p. CXC VII ss.

²² And the IV Lateran Council. Cf. *Constitutiones*, n. 1 (*Conc. Occum. Decreta*, editioe tertia, Bologna 1973, 230.

could you not rejoice greatly over that and over such a birth that made you the absolute and consubstantial Mother of Christ the Redeemer? You are the consubstantial mother since he really took his substance from you. You are his Mother absolutely as you received nothing from any other human person whether at his conception or when giving birth as is the case for other natural mothers. All such roles were taken up by the Holy Spirit.

5002 4. What shall I say, O sole Mother of Christ and ever virgin? Indeed, in accord with the First Council of Ephesus²³ I want to say more. The Council said that you may be truly called the Mother of God, not because you were the source of his divinity, but by communication of idioms, that is as much as in your womb you had the second divine Person who had assumed human flesh, and when you gave birth to him you brought forth the person who had two natures, human and divine, and what pertained to these two natures could be attributed to that person. That is why it can be said that you gave birth to God and that you bore God. In fact O most glorious one you are the Mother of God. Some theologians speculate about what would happen if the human Christ were to lay down his humanity. (This could not happen since one person shares both natures). If it did you would not be his mother since you had given birth to a human person who was also divine.

Why should I go on any longer, O Virgin Mother, since in the Summa²⁴ St Thomas wrote that because you are the Mother of God you have been given a certain infinite dignity because of your close association with what is divine in as much as one could not imagine any other mother being the mother of a better child than you had in being the Mother of God.

5003 5. Who does not know that great joy usually comes to us from four sources? They are the clear knowledge of having the possession of something very good, the recognition of the compatibility of those in love, the consideration of some great truth, wondering about some great event. Evidently if you, O most loving Virgin, retained the presence of God because of the grace of his likeness within you, which was fitting for the Mother of God, would it not be only the presence of the human eternal word whom you gave birth to, but also of the entire Holy Trinity whose divine essence (as far as I know) you contemplated in an excess of mind and beheld to an extent beyond all rejoicing?

Do you not bear a great likeness to the eternal Father as you are the unique Mother of his Son of whom he remains the Father? Do you not bear a very great likeness to the Holy Spirit as both cooperated in the conception and birth of the great Son, since he did not want to do anything without you, nor could you have conceived or given birth without him? What greater conformity could there be than what exists between you, O Mother of Christ, and Christ your Son? He is the incorrupt and incorruptible Word and you are the Virgin who is chaste and intact. He is totally humble, patient, meek and charitable. You are the most humble, patient, meek and loving Virgin Mother. He is filled with remembering, gifts, virtue and grace and you are most virtuous, gracious and bestow all kinds of favours. He is your Son because he assumed human nature. You are his daughter because of his immortal and eternal Deity. He is your spouse and you are his spouse. O Mother, O Son who are close in conduct, virtue, customs, ways of acting and in all perfection! You have everything, delight, joy, happiness, gentleness.

²³ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁴ Cf. S. Th., I, q. 25, art. VI, ad 4.

5004 6. What can I add now to your indescribable and undefinable joy in contemplating, admiring and wondering over these sublime truths? How can I gaze upon God become man, supreme Majesty brought low by such weakness, upon the Angels moving around and singing? How can I set aside the splendour that radiates from the face and the entire body of your most holy Child? Where can I transmit the inescapable sweetness that your heart experienced at that time? Enough, enough, O illustrious Lady, I do not now wish to repeat what I said in the meditation before or to say what I will say in what follows. I shall only conclude then by saying that I think that you eminently fulfil the words of the psalm: *Beatus qui scit iubilationem*.²⁵ Blessed is the people who know jubilation.

Eight points for considering the return of Christ from Egypt and his life with the Madonna and St Joseph as a child and a young man. Meditation 28

5005 1. O my soul let us go to Egypt to visit the most sweet Jesus. At this time after wicked Heron had died and been eaten by worms, and about eight years after the proclamation and departure from Judea, (according to the *Annali Ecclesiastici*)²⁶ the Angel told St Joseph in a dream that he should return to the Holy Land with his spouse and the child. What happy news this was!

This is a moment of grace given to you by the little Prince so that he may embrace you because he is so kind. Did you stay with him for a little while, pressing his hand, embracing him in your arms so that he may give you his heart. Do you not know this? We have the permission of the eternal Father to return and we are leaving tomorrow. Do you wish to come with us? I congratulate you, O my Lord, but take me to your sacred Mother so that I may see her and greet her, as well as her spouse Joseph, with reverence. I wish to offer myself and all that I have so that I undertake this return journey with you.

2. O my dear Goodness, as St Bonaventure said in his Meditations,²⁷ at your departure on the journey you were accompanied by a great number of barbarian people. I see them going ahead with St Joseph. The women come behind with holy Mary. Give me your hand, O beautiful Child, and the two of us will go in front of your beloved Mother. All say goodbye at the city gate and join ranks with the others with tenderness and tears. This was according to your heavenly practice. You were embarrassed to extend your hand to those who wished to give you alms and you thanked them. Let us get underway soon. Do you want to ride on a donkey or to go on foot? Do as you wish since I am ready to serve and to obey you.

5006 3. At every step I know that you will suffer greatly on this laborious and tiresome journey and I sympathise with you that at so tender an age you are suffering so much for me. These sufferings alone would have been enough, O humble human God, to save wicked mankind. What discomfort did your family also suffer day and night! What road did you take the desert road or the northern, ordinary road? How did you sleep? Of whom did you ask directions? Who got tired first?

Why can I not be of some service to all three of you together with the Angels? Arise. O praiseworthy God, because you have reached the Jordan in the Promised Land. But why are you afraid of the anger of Archhelaus who resembles his father Herod so closely so that

²⁵ Ps 88, 16, (*Vulg.*)

²⁶ Cf. C. Baronius, *Annales eccl.*, t. I, Parisii 1864, 25s.

²⁷ Cf. *Meditationes vitae Christi*, cap. 7.)S. Bonaventurae,..Operat. VI, Romae 1596, 360b)

to improve the situation you go to live in the city of Nazareth where you arrive on January 7 according to the Roman Martyrology.²⁸ O fortunate Nazareth, that gave the name of Nazarene to Christ and to Christians. Now your friends and relatives all come to visit you and to congratulate you on your return.

4. O blessed House of Loreto where (according to what St Bede wrote in the book *De locis sanctis*)²⁹ you lived, O Redeemer, for twenty two years, that is from the age of eight to the age of thirty. Although the Evangelists say nothing special about what you did in that time except about the debate with the doctors adding that *subditus parentibus suis, et proficiebat aetate et sapiential et gratia apud Deum et homines*,³⁰ that is that you were subject and obedient to your Mother and father and that you continually advanced showing signs of your wisdom and grace as you also advanced in age. In any case this provides much material for contemplation as long as you grant us your divine favour.

5007 5. Therefore I shall enter a short way into that holy house and wonder about the poverty in which they lived, how they did with what they had, how they slept in discomfort, how they were often hungry, how they observed the Law of Moses, how they attended the Synagogue and the Temple. O how amazed their neighbours were concerning their holiness and how they praised God!

Listen to St Joseph, who even though he had not generated Christ from his own flesh still (according to St Augustine in his book *De bono coniugali*)³¹ rightly calling himself the father of the Lord, as he fed the child and his mother and helped her to raise him. However he is called the presumed father because of the opinion of ignorant people who presumed he was the father in the flesh. They thought he was a conjugal father or that he had adopted the child. But tell me, as a favour of your infinite love, O Christ how wonderful it was when your parents heard themselves referred to as your mother or father? How their hearts must have melted when they were asked about Jesus their child? How reverently they would have treated you? While they worked on manual tasks you came to help one or the other even with the meanest work as Joseph was a carpenter, as St Justin the Martyr says in his book *De veritate religionis chrisyianae*.³² While they were working did they not always adore you?

6. Thus when St Bonaventure³³ was meditating on this he said that as Christ had shown signs of sanctity and virtue while he was a child, when he had become a man of twenty to twenty five years of age and people saw that he did not take up study, or speaking about Scripture or working any miracles they began to belittle him saying that he was an idiot, ungrateful and of little account, and someone to be laughed at. This was to teach us that the basic principle of Christian living is to be humble, to despise ourselves and to be despised by everyone. He wished to teach this emphatically by setting an example more than by uttering words and so this is how he spent the eighteen years between when he was ten until he was thirty years of age.. O what a beautiful thing to regard oneself as nothing, useless and

²⁸ Cf. *Martyrologium sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae, mediolani* 1578, 9.

²⁹ Cf. Ven. Beda, *De locis sanctis bellas*, c. 15 (PL 94, 1188 where there is not perfect correspondence with the above.

³⁰ Cf. Lk 3, 51-52.

³¹ The author quotes St Augustine, *De bono coniugali* (but the quote does not correspond) instead it is taken from *De consensus evangelistarum*, n. 2 (PL 34, 1071s) it is also in *Sermo* 51, n. 17 (PL 38, 342s)

³² Cf. S. Justinus, *Dialogus cum Tryphone iudeo*, n. 88 (PG 6, 687)

³³ Cf. *Meditationes vitae Christi*, cap. 15 (*Bouv. Operum t. VI, Romae* 1596, 362ab)

lacking everything, and even if I do some good attributing it all to God being amazed that he used me for this.

5008 7. If you can, imagine for a while seeing what a beautiful, outgoing and affable young man Our Lord must have been at the age of twenty. I do not know but it appears that he was only intent on becoming a carpenter. You can see that the Madonna was occupied with taking care of the home, preparing food and setting the table for her spouse and the child in a manner consistent with their poverty. Consider seeing them as they slept in three separate beds, for a short period of time, as they were awake more often to pray and contemplate. O you, most merciful Lord, deign to tell me something! What did you eat at table after all your work? What did you talk about? At certain times did you teach them some high divine secrets? O how much both of them hung on your words!

Who was the first one to rise from bed? At what time did you say prayers together? How often did you sob for the sins of the people? How did you speak with Angels in a friendly way? How did you react when the Jews called you *filius fabri*³⁴ / However, I am sure that as the Son of the heavenly Carpenter you can produce the wonderful works of the Spirit in me and once and for all shun what the flesh manufactures.

How could the life of other people be like the life that they lived? I do not know, O most holy Joseph (to meditate for a little while as the great Gerson did in his work on St Joseph)³⁵ how many years you enjoyed this life but the holy doctors conjectured that you were alive up to the time of Christ's baptism. However, perhaps you could tell me this I beg of you: what man's death could be as beautiful and gentle as your death? What care Jesus would have taken of you when you were close to death! On one hand there was the Saviour of the World and on the other the Madonna. You said" "Now I die contented with the knowledge that you will soon come to free me from Limbo." Because of all this death did not dare to approach the place where the source of life was. However, Christ called it and gave it permission to come and said to St Joseph: "Go my loved one with haste. Bring the good news to the souls in Limbo that I will soon be coming to bring them happiness."

5009 8. Then he commanded the Angels to carry your soul with honour and triumph once again into Abraham's bosom. O holy and blessed soul! I believe that you rose again at Easter, and covered in glory visited your spouse, alongside whom you are now seated in heaven, crowned with stars and a thousand garlands. May you never forget to pray to God for us! Where did we leave St Joseph's body just to follow his soul? Consider that Christ closed his eyes with his hands. Dressed as a widow would have customarily been dressed the Madonna wept for a while as his spouse and then buried him. Christ, her Son, immediately consoled her in a wonderful way.

Seven points for contemplating the most cruel piercing of Christ's side. Meditation 66.

5010 1. In the end, following the Lord's brutal death all his enemies and the crowd departed from Calvary, together with the soldiers who were left to guard him until he died. Perhaps they all went to lunch or to dinner. However, do not leave because the Madonna has not left. Indeed once the crowd had left she approached the cross and knelt down and sweetly touched and kissed it. After that it was the turn of those standing around to exhort her with

³⁴ CF Mk 13, 55.

³⁵ Cf. *Josephus sive vita b. Josepé*, in *Ioannis Gersoni ... Tertia pars operum, Parisiis 1606, 123.*

affectionate words interspersed with sobs, (O who has ever heard the like) to have lively faith in her divine Son. Thus all gathered around and humbly adored the cross and the Crucified just as the holy Mother had done. St John, Magdalene and the others looked on.

2. Then her Son's disciples who had been hiding approached the Madonna. They had remained hidden out of fear of the Jews and in tears they offered condolences to her and her companions. Then they accused themselves of their excessive timidity. They asked pardon of the Mother and of the Son because they had not opposed or offered brave resistance to the diabolical wishes of the Jews. They promised more faithful submission in future. Then spontaneously they offered themselves and all that they had to the Madonna. Then by means of a very serious exhortation she had them adore her Son and then all fear was banished. Then think how the Madonna chose two noble men Joseph and Nicodemus who were leaders and saintly and asked them to go to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus so it could be buried and when they had received his permission she ordered them to bring all that was necessary for this purpose. They willingly accepted this work and in obedience to her, after they made a gesture of reverence to the Son and to the Mother, and they departed.

5011 3. Along the way they now met armed rouses who were going to break the legs of those who had been crucified. So, holy Joseph begged them not to inflict any further injury on Christ as he was already dead. He asked them not to disturb the Mother any more as she wished to take him down from the cross. He was about to go to Pilate in the hope of obtaining permission for this. In the meantime, as the Madonna and others came up, other armed men appeared in the distance. O how this made her experience sorrow, fear and terror once again and so she turned to her Son as if he were still alive and, in fact, He was alive in a different life: "O my Son, why are they coming back? Are they still not satisfied with your wounds? O eternal Father, what can we do to defend ourselves if not to gather around the cross? Help us if you can!"

4. The executioners arrived quickly and broke the legs of the two thieves who were still alive and took them down from the cross and angrily threw them into a ditch that was close by. When they came to Christ you can see that the Madonna was afraid that they would do the same thing to her Son. She and her companions knelt down and humbly prayed. O Virgin Mother what did you do? Did you kneel at the feet of these cruel executioners?

5012 5. Listen to what she said to them: "O brothers, please, do not let me waste any more time. It is an important event that my Son has died as you can see. I am sure that you would never wish to harm anyone. If you have killed Him in obedience to your leaders be satisfied with this. I forgive you for inflicting this injury for love of Him, but for the love of God do not hurt his body any more nor make me suffer martyrdom as I am his Mother". O what a piteous prayer! Who would not be moved by such a sight!

6. With all of that a cursed servant ran with a lance and cast it into his right side and when it had penetrated his side and flesh it pierced two hearts, the heart of Christ and the heart of His Mother both of which were joined together. Indeed there were four hearts including the heart of St John and that of St Magdalene. O what a cruel blow which at one stroke killed one person and in a certain way killed three living persons! Now blood flowed over the lance and over the cross; and not only blood but also flowing water. Thus St Symeon Metaphrastes wrote in his *in die quintadecima augusti*,³⁶ that the Madonna was not only

³⁶ Cf. Sineon Metaphrasta, *Oratio de Sancta Maria*, n. 28-35 (PG115, 551-55).

bathed in the blood of her fallen Son; but that she gathered it in a vessel that she carried for just that purpose. She adored it and washed yourself in it or rather wash yourself in the sccond ampoule in which St Mary Magdalene gathered it and took it to Marsalis, according to a very authentic legend related by Laurentius Surius .³⁷

5013 7. Contemplate the wound in the side as a kind of love in which I ought to repose in loving. Look upon it as love from heaven from which come the Sacraments and which formed the Church. O fountain for washing the sins of the world! O precious rose, O gate to life, O nuptial bed, the water of which washes us and the blood of which sanctifies us! Gaze on your living flesh and your living blood for I want to hide in this wound forever, O my most merciful Jesus! I think that I can see rays coming from your heart and I pray that they will enlighten me.

Finally, I see you, O my Christ, with head bent to take care of me, with your feet together awaiting me, with your arms extended to embrace me, with your mouth open to kiss me, with your heart wounded to love me and with all your presence to help me, and bowing humbly I adore you, I praise you, I bless you, I magnify you and I glorify you.

³⁷ Cf. L. Surius, *Historiae sue vitae sanctorum*, vol VII, Augustae Tauringium 1877, 434. See also *Fiore det Bollandisti, ovvero vite det santi tratti dall'opere del Surio ,Rbadenetta, Giry*, vol. Vii, Napoli 1877, 569s.