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"There is a Threeness About You": Trinitarian Images of God, Self, and Community Among Medieval Women Visionaries

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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DEDICATION

For Harry

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ABSTRACT

Despite the ineffability of the Holy Trinity, not to mention its logical impossibility—that the three persons of the Godhead are also one—many medieval thinkers tried hard to capture its essence and importance. Among the richest and most original medieval images of the Trinity were those produced by women visionaries. This is a comparative study of seven of these women—Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Hackeborn, Gertrude of Helfta, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch of Brabant, Julian of Norwich, and Christine de Pizan—and their visionary experiences, related through both word and image, of the Holy Trinity. While they were careful to claim doctrinal orthodoxy, these women produced visionary images of the Trinity that were unique, colorful, and diverse: the Holy Trinity might be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but it might also include a mother or a sister. It might

consist of three kinds of apples on one tree, three properties of stone, three bodily functions, three regal ladies, or a three-fold rainbow.

Visionary women readily acknowledged the difficulty of representing the divine in a way that was neither reductionistic nor presumptuous. Juggling a diverse set of images, they skillfully expressed the inexhaustible mystery of God and the complexity of the doctrine of the Trinity. They gave insight as well into the ways that humans, created in the image of God, reflect the relationality, equality, and multiplicity of roles that inhere in God's threeness. In their devotion to the Holy Trinity in its providential and salvific roles (the "economic Trinity"), these women provide a powerful counterpoint to medieval academic preoccupation with the structure of God's inner life (the "immanent Trinity"). In depicting the triune God as independent and exalted yet passionately involved in identity and community formation, these women produced a holistic theology of the Trinity. Thus they have an important place in the historical development of the doctrine of God, for both its theological and social implications. They may provide useful models as well in ongoing interpretations of Trinitarian doctrine.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Holy Trinity is the very foundation of Christian faith. It is therefore not surprising that interest in, devotion to, and controversy about the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have been perennial among Christians since its formalization as doctrine at the ecumenical church council of Nicaea in 325. Although attention to the doctrine itself has ebbed and flowed over time—intensifying especially during the patristic and later medieval periods—such engagement continues to this day and has, in fact, reignited in the last fifty years. Among Protestants, the doctrine was largely sidelined after the Reformation as antiquated and (for practical purposes) useless. But twentieth-century continental theologians of the Neo-orthodox movement, especially Karl Barth (1886-1968), placed it back at the center of theological discourse and gave it renewed attention. Among Roman Catholics, Karl Rahner (1904-84) was the most prominent of the post-conciliar theologians (that is, after the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65) whose goal was to revive the importance of the Trinity both for the daily life of believers and for theology.

Debate about the Trinity in the last twenty years, in particular, has often been along gender lines. One recent case shows the ongoing liveliness of the issue: At a 2006 meeting of Christian theologians, a group of Southern Baptist seminary professors argued that Jesus the Son is eternally subordinate to God the Father, and that it follows that women are eternally subordinate to men. Their feminist opponents pointed out that these professors were simply reviving the fourth-century heresy of Arianism.[1] Elsewhere, initiatives to rename the Trinity—for instance, with the more gender-inclusive Mother, Lover, and

[1] "In Gender Debate, Jesus is 'Subordinate,'" *Christian Century*, 2/20/2007, 12-13.

Friend;[2] or with the gender-neutral Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—have met with similarly heated response. As historian Janet Martin Soskice has put it: "A frequent criticism from the feminist quarter is that the doctrine of the Trinity is used to reinforce hierarchy and underwrite the maleness of God. … Tritheism may have been despatched early on, but more subtle forms of subordinationism, monarchianism [a form of subordinationism, granting divinity only to God the Father], and deism, all in their way idolatrous, have enjoyed good careers."[3] Thus, she says, "fear of covert monarchianism is a sound theological instinct."[4]

Paradoxically, the original intent of the doctrine of the Trinity[5] was to subvert hierarchical readings, not reinforce them.[6] As it appears during the first four-hundred years of Christian history (in scripture, the liturgy of the Church, and the Fathers), the essential features of the doctrine include the coequality and coeternality of the three "persons" of the Holy Trinity, in which there is no internal hierarchy or subordination as all three members are equally divine and each of its "missions" equally important; both unity and plurality within the Godhead; attention to both the immanent (internal) and economic (external) aspects of the Trinity, without giving priority to one or the other; ultimate concern given to human salvation; and value given both to clarity of expression and to the preservation of divine mystery.

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[2] The online article "Paganism at the Re-Imagining Conference in Minneapolis" is typical of the backlash following an attempt to rename the Trinity at a 1993 conference (http://www.brfwitness.org/Articles/1994v29n3.htm, accessed 5/16/11). See also Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 116; and Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 311-12.
[3] Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 110.
[4] Ibid., 113.
[5] See chap. 2 for full discussion of the historical trajectory of the doctrine.
[6] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 110.

Despite attempts over time to understand, define, explain, and picture the Holy Trinity—as surveyed in Chapter 2 (on the history of the doctrine) and in Chapter 3 (on visual images of the Trinity)—the doctrine remained, and remains still, the most difficult as well as the most important article of faith. In its ineffability, it exposes the limitations of human efforts to grasp and articulate experiences of the divine. And it defies logic: that God is simultaneously three and one makes for dogma that is "riddled with mathematical nonsense."[7] As such, the doctrine of the Trinity has been contested since the early days of Christianity and is a perpetual source of theological maneuvering and controversy.

This dissertation focuses especially on Trinitarian theology as it was developed and refined in Western Europe from the late-eleventh through the early-fifteenth centuries. During this period the doctrine was as subject to variety (and distortion), both in method and in content, as it had been in earlier periods and would continue to be in later centuries. As academic medieval theologians sought to crystallize their beliefs in order both to unify the Church and to combat heresy, Church doctrine lost much of the flexibility and pastoral application it had once had. Especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the relative overemphasis on the immanent Trinity and the reliance on metaphysics led to an official theology that had "little practical significance for Christian life."[8]

Visionary women theologians, who are the main subject of this study, drew from and interpreted doctrinal tradition in their own unique ways, adding richness of imagery and immediacy of experience to the existing plurality of approaches to the doctrine. Medieval visionary literature, in contrast to much academic theology of the same time, was characterized by a flexibility of Trinitarian ideas, a balance of the economic (earthly) and

[7] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 60.
[8] Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus*, 35.

immanent (transcendent) life of the Godhead, and generous expression of the practical significance of the doctrine within Christian life and community. Thus medieval women visionaries masterfully articulated the "depth structure" (that is, the original profile and intent) of the doctrine of the Trinity, and deserve to be brought into fuller conversation with other modes of medieval theological discourse. Whether they intended to or not, women visionaries with their unique revelations took the medieval theological imagination to a new level, especially as regards the ever-elusive Trinity. They should be given credit for doing so.

Chapters 4-7 will each center on one medieval woman visionary, her context (religious, social, political, cultural, and rhetorical), her writings, and her Trinitarian theology. Chapter 4 will feature Hildegard of Bingen (German Benedictine abbess, ca. 1098-1179) in twelfth-century context. Chapter 5 will feature Mechthild of Hackeborn (German nun, 1241-99), Gertrude of Helfta (German nun, 1256-ca. 1302), Mechthild of Magdeburg (German beguine, ca. 1207-1290), and Hadewijch of Brabant (a Flemish beguine, mid-thirteenth century) in thirteenth-century context. Chapter 6 will feature Julian of Norwich (English anchoress, ca. 1342-1423) in fourteenth-century context. And Chapter 7 will feature Christine de Pizan (French laywoman, ca. 1364-1430) in fifteenth-century context. This chapter will conclude with an overview of the situation of women—particularly visionary women—in Europe at the close of the Middle Ages.

Although other individuals will be brought into the discussion, I have chosen to focus on these seven women because they span the time when Church doctrine was under lively debate within Christendom; and because they all articulate a rich, complex, and creative Trinitarian theology, providing a good lens through which to examine and appreciate the

unique contributions medieval visionary women made to Christian theological tradition. By moving in chronological order, this study will highlight some of the changes over time in medieval spirituality and theology, especially as regards the Trinity. Chapter 8 will provide a summary of and conclusion to the dissertation as a whole, with an eye toward both future lines of research and application to modern-day Trinitarian debate.

This is both a historical and a theological project. As intellectual history, the dissertation examines ideas and modes of thinking about the triune God within Christian tradition as it developed during its first fifteen centuries. As church history, it takes an interest in institutional, social, cultural, and political dynamics. As gender history, it looks into how gendered experience has influenced spiritual and theological expression. And because I look at ancient and medieval symbols and pictures of the Trinity, I have dealt with art history to some degree as well, and consider the influence of art and iconography on visionary literature. The chapters that follow this one will address the complexity of Trinitarian ideas, debates, and images in the Middle Ages among thinkers both inside and outside of the academy, the implications of those ideas for individuals and their communities, and the role of women's visions of the Trinity in constructing alternate spiritual, ecclesial, and social possibilities. As a theological project, this dissertation poses questions (like "How is the Holy Trinity most appropriately understood and presented?") that both emerge from historical discourse and are perennially relevant to the construction of theology. All religious belief is socially, historically, and even politically conditioned; and everyone who creates and interprets doctrine has an agenda. Part of both the historical and theological task of this project is to uncover some of those agendas and to consider how they shaped, and might continue to shape, Trinitarian theology into the twenty-first century.

No book-length project has been done on the intersection of visionary tradition, gender, and the doctrine of the Trinity. This project will therefore fill gaps both in historical theology, which has tended to neglect women, visionaries, imaginative theology, and vernacular writings;[9] and in the study of women in religion, which has tended to neglect theology in favor of "spirituality" and religious practice.[10] Medieval women's visionary literature, in fact, has it all: intellectual depth, theological comprehensiveness, spiritual insight, and pastoral application. Trinitarian theology, understood holistically, is at the same time philosophical, dogmatic, and practical, having "far-reaching consequences for Christian life."[11] It is, as the late Catholic theologian Catherine LaCugna argued, the proper source of reflection on theological ethics, spirituality, ecclesiology, the liturgical and communitarian life of the Church, sacramental theology, anthropology, providence, and grace.[12] Medieval visionary women covered all this ground, and more, in their reflections on the Trinity; and these are the issues that continue to matter.

The recent revival of interest in Trinitarian theology points to the currency of this project, which contributes to the ongoing debate about the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity, its religious and social implications, and the diverse historical precedents that provide grounding for the discussion. Few Christian doctrines have been as subject to the vicissitudes of the times as this one, or have spawned more varying and contradictory interpretations. But not all discussion about the Trinity, old or new, has been contentious; and much of it (contentious or not) has been fruitful in renewing this central doctrine after

[9] One recent example is Russell Friedman's book *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham* (2010), which makes no mention of theology produced outside the academy.
[10] In doing so, the division of gender roles promoted by some medieval preachers like Jean Gerson are repeated and continued.
[11] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 1.
[12] Ibid., 1-2.

periods of neglect. What such discussions always reveal is that religious doctrine has real power, whether to comfort or to offend, to upset or to justify existing orders. In other words, theology matters. It describes the divine being and one's relationship to it, the ultimate order of things and one's place in it, and frameworks within which people might interpret both their spiritual and social positions. The Holy Trinity, understood to be tripersonal within itself and also active on behalf of humanity in the economy of salvation, is relational by definition. One's understanding of the Trinity thus has particular power to define the believer's understanding of self, relationships among people and with God, and the order of community. As Karl Barth said, lecturing on Christian dogmatics in the 1920s: "If only I could get the doctrine of the Trinity right, everything else would fall into place."

The overarching questions I address in this project are these: Why was the doctrine of the Trinity so important to medieval theological writers (of all types), and why so controversial? What is at stake, both personally and communally, in theologies of the Trinity? And what might be gained from presenting new visions and images of the Trinity? What, more specifically, did the Trinity (as they imagined it) *do* for visionary women who devoted so much thought and energy to it, who dared to experiment with and, in many cases, rename the Trinity? This line of research includes corollary considerations about who "owned" the Trinitarian tradition in the Middle Ages, that is, whose definitions of the Trinity were official and authoritative, and what their Trinity was like. In Chapter Two generally, and in each of the following chapters more specifically, I have traced the Trinitarian theological trajectory from Augustine to Anselm, Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, the Victorines, Joachim of Fiore, Albertus Magnus, Bonaventure, and Aquinas, among others, and put these figures alongside the women visionaries for comparison.

In my research method and presentation, I have drawn inspiration from some recent analyses of medieval religion—especially those of Sarah Beckwith and Barbara Newman. Beckwith, in her book *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, is interested in the body of Christ not so much as an article of faith but rather as a symbol with social functions and imaginative effects—as she puts it, "a medium for the production of identity."[13] In contrast to Beckwith, I am interested in the Holy Trinity as an article of faith—and in the creative ways medieval visionaries imagined it as such—because the production of theology (that is, the production of ideas about ultimate meaning) is interesting to me in and of itself. But, like Beckwith, I am also interested in the Trinity as an organizing metaphor for understandings of the self, especially as the self relates to God and society.

A doctrine like that of the Holy Trinity, with its logical ambiguity and movable parts, invites manipulation and varying interpretations. As Beckwith says, "It is the very imprecision of symbols, the way they do not so much express meaning as encourage the creative attribution of multiple meanings to themselves that lead them to become the subject of political and social contestation."[14] In other words, symbols (and, for my purposes, doctrines) *work*. They have "practical necessity"[15] because they "emerge out of the urgencies of [a] particular time and place."[16] John Arnold concurs that, in the Middle Ages, "images were *active* things. They could work to promote and sustain particular ideologies. … Medieval images could be intended to impress, to inspire, to provide models for good

[13] Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.
[14] Ibid., 3.
[15] Ibid., 6.
[16] Ibid., 10.

conduct, to be meditated upon, to be laughed at, to signal identity and status, to narrate, to scare."[17] The creation of theology and its symbols thus has consequences that are not merely personal, but also social and political. Otherwise, why would anyone care? Why would people fight over doctrine as heatedly as they do? The stakes are evidently high.

One aspect of Beckwith's book that I find very helpful for my own analysis is the idea of spiritual role-play. Beckwith says that, for medieval Christians, "Christ's body was the focus of a complex symbolics of identification and role-playing."[18] Likewise, the medieval women in this study undertook role-playing with the Trinity—sometimes as a whole, and sometimes in relation to its individual members. By worshipping, playing with, passionately embracing, identifying with, despairing over, sparring with, and questioning the triune God, these women worked out their relationship to it and considered the ways in which they themselves were living images of it. This was not just a personal quest. The reception, interpretation, and recording of Trinitarian visions was rather an effort to work out the relationship of women, and humans more generally, to God, and thus to the Church and to Western European Christendom—a social, political, and spiritual hierarchy that was defined, organized, and controlled by men and purportedly represented God on earth.

Barbara Newman (for instance, in *Sister of Wisdom* and *God and the Goddesses*) is interested in precisely what medieval visionary women were doing theologically, and why. In *God and the Goddesses*, for instance, Newman examines the functions of both "God-language" and "goddess-language" in the high and late Middle Ages. Medieval women writers, she says, including Hildegard, Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Julian, and Christine de Pizan, "found goddess figures [like Sapientia, Ecclesia, and Natura] spiritually

[17] John H. Arnold, *What is Medieval History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 47.
[18] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, 4.

and psychologically empowering."[19] While none of these women had as their goal the overthrow of patriarchy or the subversion of orthodoxy, Newman argues that by envisioning female divinity, as in Christine's trio of heavenly ladies, or by claiming feminine aspects of the divine, like Julian's mother-God, these writers helped to elevate women's public image as well as their own sense of self-worth.[20] Newman looks at some medieval uses and depictions of the Trinity, especially in her consideration of the various roles played by Mary as fourth "member" of the Godhead.[21] In the present study, I take this analysis further by showing how medieval religious women mapped their own visions—particularly visions of a feminine, communal, social, or egalitarian divine—onto the doctrine of the Trinity, and to what ends.

Approaches to Mystical and Visionary Experience

Definitions of mysticism are many, but all involve a direct and immediate consciousness of, or abiding relationship with, the divine. As Angela of Foligno, a thirteenth-century Franciscan tertiary, described her spiritual experience: "I am in harmony with the God-Man nearly always … there is no mediator between God and myself."[22] Mystical experience is usually understood to impart new knowledge or insight that is transformative to the recipient, even while that insight often "defies conventional modes of expression, and hence the mystics' strong use of metaphors and figures of speech."[23] Bernard McGinn has stressed the moral ramifications of such experience, saying that "mysticism (as

[19] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 312.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, chap. 6.
[22] Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, ed. Cristina Mazzoni and trans. John Cirignano (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell and Brewer, 1999), 70.
[23] Anne Hunt, *The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2010), xiv.

the mystics insisted) is more than a matter of unusual sensations, but essentially comprises new ways of knowing and loving based on states of awareness in which God becomes present in our inner acts, not as an object to be grasped, but as the direct and transforming center of life."[24] Mystical literature often expresses a sense of union with God, as well as a confession of ultimate mystery behind whatever words and (in visionary literature) images are manifest to express God's person and presence.

McGinn, in his ongoing series of volumes on the history of mysticism, has described the stages of medieval theology as monastic, scholastic, and vernacular (including mystical and visionary theology)[25]—the year 1200 being a major turning point for the latter in Western Christianity, especially as represented by mendicants, beguines, and tertiaries.[26] The three stages of theology that he has identified, which might sometimes overlap, have become touchpoints for historians of medieval theology and spirituality. Joan Nuth, for example, suggests that the ongoing "rift between theology and mysticism" has its roots in the distinction between scholastic and monastic theology in the Middle Ages.[27] Barbara Newman, in *God and the Goddesses*, recognizes six categories of medieval theology, which may also overlap, incorporating McGinn's terminology and adding some of her own: scholastic, monastic, pastoral, mystical, vernacular, and imaginative.

It is primarily into this last category that Newman fits the women in this study, defining the imaginative theologian as one who, "like the poet, works with images," and who pursues "serious religious and theological thought through the techniques of imaginative

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[24] Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Random House, 2006), xiv.
[25] Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 19.
[26] Ibid., ix.
[27] Joan M. Nuth, "Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anselm of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 613.

literature, especially vision, dialogue, and personification."[28] Mystical theology, as both Newman and McGinn have defined it, may or may not include visual manifestations; and so the two terms ("mystical" and "visionary") should not be used interchangeably. The visionary, whatever more general category he or she might belong to, is one who claims to "see" or "behold" divine revelation through visual perception that may be physical, mental, or spiritual. The visions are then described and recorded at least in part through picturesque, often vivid, language. "Visions" may also include auditory or other sensory input.

Following Newman, I prefer the terms *visionary* and *imaginative* to *mystical* when describing the theology of the women under study here, as the former terms capture more precisely the imagistic aspects of these women's spiritual experience. Moreover, the words *mystic*, *mystical*, and *mysticism*, although they still appear frequently in scholarly literature, have been defined and used so variously and become so fraught with misunderstanding that an increasing number of historians and theologians prefer to avoid them. *Mysticism* often brings to mind, for instance, radical individualism, irrationality, or dissent against organized religion. But because medieval visionary writers were usually deeply orthodox and understood mystical experience in the context of the Church, its liturgy, and its sacraments, they could be seen as authenticating church dogma through immediate experience, rather than as undermining it.[29] The word *mysticism*, like the word *spirituality*, was coined well after the Middle Ages, and thus no one in medieval Europe, including the women in this study, referred to herself or himself as a "mystic." Those we call mystics today would have referred to themselves—if they gave themselves any formal label at all—as contemplatives.

[28] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 292.
[29] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, 12.

Typical of scholarly literature on mysticism, until fairly recently, is an assumption that a mystical experience is merely private and has no wider social or cultural relevance. Robert Wilson, for instance, in his description of different types of religious mediators, says that "the term 'mystic'… does not usually refer to a social role but to a particular type of relationship between an individual and the divine world. … Mystics are frequently unwilling or unable to verbalize their experiences and often have no clearly defined religious role within their societies."[30] This description completely misses the mark in regard to the women in this study, all of whom were both willing and able to verbalize their experiences of God and to share them with, even foist them upon, others. While women visionaries sometimes expressed "a painful sense of isolation and awareness of an unusual and demanding vocation,"[31] isolation was not their goal. Such a misconception has inhibited the reading of visionary texts as social or political, and has therefore led to a neglect of the layers of possible meaning in them.

Some recent treatments of medieval visionaries, however, have challenged this notion, recognizing that the visionaries' lives and writings were not ahistorical or asocial at all, but were thoroughly embedded in their time and place, affecting and affected by their social, political, and religious contexts. As Stuart Clark argues in his book *Vanities of the Eye* (2007), for instance, and F. Thomas Luongo shows in *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena* (2006), religious texts are always socially constructed and, because they deal with issues of ultimate order, may be political as well. David Aers sets medieval mystical and visionary writing within its larger ecclesiastical context, showing that, in the Middle Ages, it

[30] Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 27.
[31] Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 142.

was assumed that "people become faithful followers of Christ not as abstract individuals but as members of a specific community where faith, ethics, Christology, and ecclesiology are bound together. … There is no assumption of a necessary dichotomy between the individual (inner, spiritual) and the collective (outward, public)."[32] Aers goes on to say that "even fideistic and affective piety is not as apolitical and transcendent as some scholars imagine."[33] The women in this study were all aware of their social and political situations. They were educated in or near communities where they knew other learned people, and they were therefore also aware of the intellectual and philosophical questions of their day.[34] They had access to a great variety of theological ideas and images and, with them, textual, hermeneutical, and pedagogical precedents.[35]

In view of this, much recent scholarship has been devoted to the rhetorical context of medieval visions and the (previously unrecognized) rhetorical sophistication of those who claimed and recorded visionary experience. Several scholars, for instance, have disputed the notion that mystical and visionary experience was unsought, uncultivated, and unmediated—and thus experienced as "a bolt from the blue,"[36] as Newman puts it. While bolts from the blue were not unheard of,[37] mystical and visionary experiences in the pre-modern world were in fact acknowledged to be dependent on the sacraments, Church tradition and culture, religious art and iconography, and regular spiritual routines, and thus were neither

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[32] David Aers, *Faith, Ethics, and Church: Writing in England, 1360-1409* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 6.
[33] Ibid., 23.
[34] Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, 142.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80 (2005): 4.
[37] Newman argues that medieval clerics in fact preferred visions that were experienced this way because they presumably involved divine agency alone. Visions as they were actually received were usually at odds with this preference, causing anxiety, suspicion, and (sometimes) hostility among clerics toward those claiming visionary experience. Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?" 3-6.

unexpected nor passively received.[38] Classical definitions of mysticism, says Newman, stress not only "the union of the soul with God" but also the "whole system of ascetic and contemplative disciplines that aim to facilitate that union."[39]

Much medieval devotional life was, further, centered around the mastery of meditational techniques intended to induce visions. The records (including hagiographies) that sprang from these visions were crafted and embellished to fit the purposes of the writer.[40] Mary Carruthers has argued that "representation" was not the major objective of medieval visionary rhetoric but rather persuasion, education, and devotion.[41] While the supernatural element of mystical or visionary experience need not be doubted, when put down on paper the experience was likely to be edited and shaped by its authors for theological, aesthetic, didactic, or social reasons.[42]

Women, Vision, and Authority

Feminist theory has been another valuable resource in the rehabilitation and interpretation of religious women's visionary writings. In their own time as well as more recently, visionary women have been regarded as loose cannons or dangerous entrepreneurs, dismissed as theological lightweights, or seen as merely eccentric; and their work has been less likely than that of male medieval theologians to find a publisher. Thus their influence

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[38] Van Nieuwenhove, "Trinity, Faith and Mysticism," 66. See also Kerrie Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment: The Soteriology of Julian of Norwich* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), 19-20.
[39] Barbara Newman, introduction to Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 17.
[40] Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?" 3-4.
[41] Mary Carruthers, "Moving Images in the Mind's Eye," in Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché, eds., *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 287.
[42] Erin Ronsse, "Rhetoric of Martyrs: Listening to Saints Perpetua and Felicitas," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006): 283-84.

has been, until fairly recently, limited; and the substance of their work has been overlooked.[43] The manuscripts written or dictated by medieval women have in many cases been rediscovered only since the early twentieth century; and for the most part they have been given serious scholarly treatment only since the 1970s. Feminist theologians and scholars, among others, have gone a long way since then in bringing these works into the theological and literary canon and giving visionary women their due respect as participants in religious and cultural discourse.[44]

Medieval visionary and monastic women were keenly aware of their outsider status in the theological arena, making frequent reference to their lack of the three basic requirements for authority in their time and place: a formal education, maleness, and official ecclesiastical status. ("Ah, Lord," Mechthild of Magdeburg sighed at one point, "if I were a learned religious man."[45]) Women's exclusion from higher education and ordained priesthood led to their need for the charismatic authorization that visions provided. As Newman says of the medieval period:

> It has often been suggested that, in an age when the Apostle's command that "no woman is to teach or have authority over men" (1 Tim. 2:12) was rigorously enforced, only through vision could a religious or intellectual woman gain a hearing. This is not to say that such visions were necessarily rooted in the desire for authority; but the visionary could not help knowing

[43] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 315.
[44] See the work of, for example, Amy Hollywood, Rosalynn Voaden, Caroline Walker Bynum, Elizabeth Petroff, Kerrie Hide, Janet Martin Soskice, Grace Jantzen, and Ulrike Wiethaus, in addition to Sarah Beckwith and Barbara Newman.
[45] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 2.26.

that while men might perhaps heed a divinely inspired woman, they would have little patience with a mere presumptuous female.[46]

Within the context of visionary experience, medieval women used a variety of strategies to bolster their authority. Claims to humility, ignorance, and unworthiness were, paradoxically, one such strategy. Although the women under study here read and wrote extensively, were learned to some degree, and were known for their sanctity, they often referred to themselves in the lowliest terms. Hildegard of Bingen referred to herself repeatedly as *paupercula* (a "poor little woman"). Julian of Norwich claimed to be a "simple, unlettered creature."[47] Mechthild of Magdeburg—engaging the trope most colorfully—described herself as a foul puddle, a lame dog, an ash cake, a filthy ooze, a wretched girl, an unhappy sack of misery, and a sinful, lazy creature.[48]

But embedded in these claims to unworthiness were appeals to a higher authority. Insisting on the paucity of her learning, Mechthild says at the end of one chapter: "Now my German fails me; I do not know Latin. If there is something of merit here, it is not my doing."[49] These women knew (and proclaimed) 1 Corinthians 1:27: "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things … to nullify the things that are."[50] Given the women visionaries' (supposed) incapacity, it could only be God

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[46] Barbara Newman,"Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validations," *Church History* 54 (1985): 170.
[47] Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 177.
[48] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Flowing Light*, 2.4, 2.7, 2.20, 2.25, 2.26.
[49] Ibid., 2.3.
[50] All English translations of scriptural quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Latin scriptural references are from the Vulgate (*Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

who spoke through them. As God replied reassuringly to Mechthild: "[my marvelous Godhead] flows continuously into your soul from my divine mouth. … So have no doubts about yourself!"[51] The visionary literature that medieval women produced—with its graphic detail, commanding tone, rich and complex language, and (especially in Hildegard and Mechthild) precise numbers and lists—lent to those who claimed the visions an air of legitimacy, as though they truly took dictation from, and were commissioned by, God.

Medieval women writers also benefitted from being part of a religious culture that embraced, or at least tolerated, sensory and miraculous manifestations of the divine.[52] According to Nicholas Watson,

> in the beguinages and convents of northern Europe, visionary experience seems to have been not only common but expected. The fourteenth-century German nun Christine Ebner was surprised that there was even one sister in her convent who had never had a vision. Although individuals could be diffident about their experiences … the visions of many women were eagerly discussed and were often written down. Indeed visionary experience was a crucial spur to, and justification for, the literary activity in which a fairly large number of [European] religious women engaged.[53]

Although scripture provided authorization for the subordination of women, scriptural precedent also served as a valuable support for visionary claims. While medieval theology

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[51] Ibid., 2.26.

[52] Jo Ann McNamara and others have argued that such embrace and tolerance decreased from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, as the culture of "discernment" and inquisition took hold. Jo Ann McNamara, "The Rhetoric of Orthodoxy: Clerical Authority and Female Innovation in the Struggle with Heresy," in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 9-27.

[53] Nicholas Watson, "The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 643-44. In England, which was more conservative, says Watson (649), visions were a "minor feature of … female spirituality" (666). Julian of Norwich was an exception.

discouraged the anthropomorphizing of God through images, both men and women in the Middle Ages who claimed to have visions could, and did, model themselves after prophetic visionaries in the Bible (like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah). These authoritative figures were "exceptions to the general rule of the invisibility of God" and were permitted to give pictorial representations of the divine.[54]

Medieval visionaries could also point to the beatitudes of Jesus, which seemed to link visionary experience with personal sanctity: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Those who did not grasp the truth of the relayed vision, it could thus be reasonably assumed, had only themselves to blame, as their spiritual vision must be clogged by sin and hypocrisy.[55] Finally, women visionaries could bolster their authority with Acts 2:17, which anticipates that Christians both young and old, women and men, would have visions and would prophesy.

Most medieval visionary women, in addition to their adherence to scripture, took pains to endorse Catholic doctrine. In the case of the Trinity this must, according to the Nicene formula, include belief in both the unity and distinction of the three persons of the Godhead, their coeternality, and their coequality. But sometimes the orthodox formula might appear only as a footnote to a more exciting vision. At one point, for instance, Mechthild of Magdeburg describes an enrapturing, and rather erotic, encounter with "the heavenly flood … of the flowing Trinity"; but she is sure to finish with the credally-correct remark that she also "sees one complete God in three Persons and knows the three Persons in one God

[54] André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 116.
[55] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Flowing Light*, 1.Prologue.

undivided."[56] In any case, the intention to uphold orthodoxy was always there. Citation of dogma, like the citation of scripture, was not necessarily a cynical move on the women's part. Church doctrine provided an important framework for their own thought; they drew inspiration as well as authorization from established theological tradition—scriptural, patristic, and medieval—even while they made it their own. But they understood the theological environment in which they lived and worked. As Frank Tobin has pointed out, the reception and reiteration of tradition was crucial in shaping the forms of mystical communication that were judged effective and accepted.[57] McGinn says, further:

> There was no institutionally approved way by which a woman could gain the authority to teach in an official way, but, given Christian belief that the Holy Spirit is the true source of all divine truth, women could not be totally excluded from all forms of teaching. About 1290 the Paris master Henry of Ghent, disputing the question "Whether a woman can be a doctor of theology?" distinguished between teaching *ex officio* and teaching *ex beneficio* (i.e., from a gift of grace). Women were excluded from the former, but "speaking about teaching from divine favor and the fervor of charity, it is well allowed for a woman to teach just like anyone else, if she possesses sound doctrine."[58]

Henry added that women should teach only "to other women and girls, not to men, both because their address might incite the men to lust (as they say), and also would be shameful

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[56] Ibid., 1.2.
[57] Frank Tobin, "Mechthild of Magdeburg and Meister Eckhart: Points of Coincidence," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 52.
[58] McGinn, *Flowering*, 21.

and dishonorable to the men."[59] Once their sanctity, wisdom, and soundness were sufficiently established, however, medieval women visionaries could gain the endorsement of powerful men, who might also collaborate with them in recording, promoting, and disseminating their ideas. The support of these men was often key to visionary women's ability to gain an appreciative hearing.

Care must be taken when reading women visionaries to avoid the anachronistic application of feminism—looking to medieval women writers as proto-feminists, or judging them not feminist enough. Caution must also be exercised when considering whether there exists, or ever existed, an essential "women's spirituality." On the one hand, as Caroline Walker Bynum has said, "no modern theorist would explain women's religious options or opinions as biologically determined."[60] On the other, "[there were] institutional and educational constraints not rooted in biology that were constant throughout the later Middle Ages."[61] As a result, there are some observable differences between women's and men's religious writings from this period.

Circumstances limited women to theological forms (mystical, visionary, imaginative, poetic, and vernacular) other than the scholastic. Thus, although much of women's visionary literature is lofty, esoteric, and complicated, it is usually more experiential than philosophical. Women's records of their visions tend toward natural, familial, and bodily analogies for the divine; and they show greater attraction to social models of the Trinity in which the Godhead is primarily, and often intensely, relational. In rhythm, structure, and content, medieval women's writings drew mostly from monastic sources: scripture, the

[59] McGinn, *Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 1.
[60] Bynum, preface to Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 3.
[61] Ibid.

liturgy, and the Fathers. Like those sources, women's writings were more concerned with the *why* of salvation than the *how*—the love and redemption enacted by, and overflowing from, the Godhead rather than the technical aspects of divine operations.

While the theme of *imago dei* (the human reflection of the image of God) was a common feature of mystical and visionary theology in the late antique and medieval periods, women gave special attention to it—perhaps because their capacity for likeness with God was contested. As the twelfth-century jurist Gratian wrote in his *Decretum*: "The image of God is in man and it is one. Women were drawn from man, who has God's jurisdiction as if he were God's vicar, because he has the image of one God. Therefore woman is not made in God's image. Woman's authority is nil; … neither can she teach, nor be a witness, nor give a guarantee, nor sit in judgment."[62] Despite this official view, contingent upon an emphasis on God's unity, medieval women visionaries perceived themselves as being made in the image of God in its triune wholeness. As the *imago* or *imitatio trinitatis*—and thus the embodiment of "integrated diversity," as Hadewijch put it—they were fit for a variety of divinely-appointed religious and social roles. God affirms this in a vision to Mechthild of Magdeburg, saying to her:

> There is a threeness about you.
>
> You can indeed be God's image:
>
> You are a virile vassal in battle.
>
> You are a finely attired maiden in your Lord's presence in the palace.

[62] Gratian, *Decretum* 33.8.19, cited in "*De Impedimento Sexus*: Women's Bodies and Medieval Impediments to Female Ordination," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge, U.K.: York Medieval Press, 1997), 116.

You are an eager bride in your bed of love with God.[63]

As the triune God's own image—eternally multiple—medieval women visionaries could imagine numberless ways in which they, too, reflected the nature of God, because the Trinity conferred like qualities upon them. Reception and construction of diverse Trinitarian images and ideas thus affected these women writers' sense of spiritual and social place, and their Trinitarian visions emboldened them to speak and to work for God in a great variety of ways.

Approaches to the Holy Trinity

For both patristic and medieval theologians, the Trinity was of utmost importance and intense interest because it was understood to be the highest mystery, the foundation of creation, and the source of all truth, justice, and happiness. This was true for theologians working both inside and outside the academy, including the visionary women in this study. The Holy Trinity was, as art historian Jeffrey Hamburger has said, "the ultimate vision to which the mystic aspire[d]."[64] Despite patristic and medieval cautions against depiction of the Trinity (held to be a divine secret beyond human imagination), not to mention its logical impossibility, many medieval thinkers tried hard to capture its essence and importance, both in words and in images. The ambiguity and mystery of the doctrine of the Trinity in fact opened it up to creative engagement.

Recent debates around the Trinity have tended to focus on several key issues, none of them new: the use of psychological and social analogies for the Trinity; the meaning of the terms "person" and "relation" in Trinitarian theology; the question of whether there is some

[63] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Flowing Light*, 2.19.
[64] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland circa 1300* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 118.

kind of order in the life of the Trinity, and how to describe this order without falling into a sort of hierarchy; whether the traditional names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be enriched by using other names in addition; and the contribution of Trinitarian doctrine to an understanding of the Church, human nature in the image of God, and the goal of human community. These issues, to one degree or another, were also of keen interest to theological thinkers in the first fifteen centuries of Christianity. Such shared interests across time, and their continued urgency, are what make a patristic and medieval *ressourcement* (as Finbarr Clancy and Rik Van Nieuwenhove have termed it)[65] and "postcritical retrieval" of Trinitarian theology (as Anselm Min has undertaken with Aquinas)[66] a worthwhile task for the present theological conversation.

Much of the current theological wave has attempted a return to devotional, pastoral, and mystical modes, with emphasis on the "social Trinity"—the interrelationship (or *perichoresis*, the Greek term) among the three persons of the Trinity—and on the triune God as an inherently social being who serves as a model for Christian identity and community. This is a lively issue (discussed more fully in Chapter 8), the concern among those who oppose the social model being that it compromises the unity of God and inaccurately applies human analogies to the three "persons." Corollary concerns, as already noted, have had to do with names for the Trinity that—when they depart from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—retain the orthodox attributes or missions of the three persons and thus the depth structure of the doctrine.

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[65] Finbarr Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology: The Need for a Patristic *Ressourcement*," in *Trinity and Salvation: Theological, Spiritual and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. Declan Marmion and Gesa Thiessen, 11-64 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009); and Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "Trinity, Faith and Mysticism: The Need for a Medieval *Ressourcement*," 65-80, in Marmion and Thiessen.

[66] Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 2.

Since at least the nineteenth century, theologians have made a heuristic distinction between the "economic" Trinity (from the Greek *oikonomia*, used to describe the activity of the three persons of the Godhead in the creation, redemption, and sustenance of the created universe; also referred to as God *ad extra*) and the "immanent" Trinity (the inner life of the Godhead, also referred to as the essential Trinity or God *in se*). These are terms I have already used, and will continue to use, throughout the dissertation. Systematic theologian Daniel Migliore defines the economic Trinity as "the differentiated agency of Father, Son, and Spirit in the 'economy' [literally: household] of salvation" and the immanent Trinity as "the eternal distinction of persons within the being of God."[67] Put another way, the immanent Trinity expresses what God *is*, while the economic Trinity expresses what God *does*; the economic Trinity is the outward expression of the immanent Trinity. Precise definition of the immanent and economic Trinity and the (philosophical) relationship between them is an ongoing element of the literature. Karl Rahner's book *The Trinity* (1967) has been especially influential in this endeavor. His contention that the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity, and vice versa, has been widely adopted among theologians and continues to be a point of reference.

Catherine LaCugna, one of the next generation of "Rahnerians," examined in her book *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (1991) the reasons for Christians' long neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity as a living and usable article of faith. After the Council of Nicaea, she argues, the focus of patristic and then medieval theologians moved from a devotional interest in the economic Trinity (God "for us") to an academic preoccupation with the structure of God's inner life. This shift in focus led, in LaCugna's words, to both the

[67] Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 61.

theological and political defeat of a living, relational, egalitarian, and loving God in favor of one who is "unitarian, patriarchal, monarchical, and hierarchical."[68] This was a tragic theological mistake, she says, not only because the economic Trinity is "more consistent with the Bible, creeds, and the liturgy," but because humans (made in the image of God) were then able to justify "every kind of hierarchy, exclusion, and pattern of domination, whether religious, sexual, political, clerical, [or] racial, as 'natural' and divinely intended."[69] This is the model that has, LaCugna argues, been dominant in the West ever since.[70]

LaCugna's book continues to be controversial and has been challenged even by other feminist scholars. Janet Soskice, for instance, has argued: "I am not so sure that scholastic Trinitarian theologies were remote from the economy of salvation. … Aquinas suggests [that] 'relation' is the key to the Trinity, and [that] the to-be of God is to-be-related."[71] Soskice admits, however, that Christian metaphysics has been "forgetful" of "the fully relational account of the Trinitarian life of God."[72] While academic Trinitarian theology dominated the field in the Middle Ages, religious writers of all genres (monastic, pastoral, mystical, visionary, imaginative, and vernacular, as well as scholastic) formulated Trinitarian theologies. It is in the non-scholastic genres that one is more likely to find a "fully relational account" of the Trinity. It was in pursuit of such an account that the women visionaries excelled.

Just as the Trinity has always been a central theme in academic systematic theology, so it has been in mystical and visionary theologies as well. The mystical strain in Trinitarian

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[68] LaCugna, *God For Us*, 17.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 118-19.
[72] Ibid.

theology, in fact, begins with scripture and continues into the patristic and late antique periods, especially in the figures of Gregory of Nazianzus and Pseudo-Dionysius. Although mystical approaches to the Trinity were especially characteristic of Eastern Orthodoxy in these earlier periods, and are still a distinctive part of that tradition,[73] mystical and visionary Trinitarians can be found in both East and West during the medieval period—among figures like William of St. Thierry, Bernard of Clairvaux, the Victorines, and (in the East) Gregory Palamas. The Western figures will be of particular interest in comparison to the women in this study.

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-88), one of the first modern theologians to take patristic and medieval mystical theology seriously and to incorporate it into his own theology, contrasted mystical and visionary theology with scholastic doctrine: "Faith is not a matter of the assent of the intellect to what is held as true [as in Aquinas[74]], but more a question of grasping the beauty of the form of divine revelation."[75] In their apprehension of revelation, mystical and visionary theologians "propose a Trinity alive to sensory experience."[76] Georges Tavard thus explains visionary Trinitarian theology this way: "Vision is … participation. We become what we see. If we can see the Three, then we are being incorporated into their mutual relationships. … Only in mystical experience can the full import of Christian doctrine be perceived."[77] While in academic terms the Trinity may finally be impossible to explain, such impossibility is not a problem for the visionary, who

[73] Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Leighton Buzzard, U.K.: Faith Press, 1973), 81-83, describes Trinitarian mysticism as the peak of contemplation in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.
[74] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II, q. 4, art. 2, trans. Laurence Shapcote, Great Books of the Western World 18, ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1996), 403-4. The *Summa Theologica* will be abbreviated hereafter as *ST*.
[75] Quoted in Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving Western Tradition* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2005), 28.
[76] Watson, "Trinitarian Hermeneutic," 38.
[77] Georges H. Tavard, *The Vision of the Trinity* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 51.

takes on the impossible through divine participation. While the formal doctrine of the Trinity provides a framework for spiritual visions, the visions move beyond it to a fully realized whole.

The growth of vernacular, visionary, and imaginative theologies (to use McGinn's and Newman's terminology) in twelfth- through fifteenth-century Europe, including those of lay, religious, and quasi-religious women, contributed to the diversity of theological expressions in that period. Among the women in this study—Hildegard, Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Mechthild of Hackeborn, Gertrude, Julian, and Christine—the Holy Trinity might be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but it might just as well include a mother or a sister. It might also be three kinds of apples, three properties of stone, three bodily functions, three kitchen workers, three regal ladies, or a three-fold rainbow, all images that "appeared to" these women as visible analogues for the invisible Trinity. Not constrained by academic expectations, visionary women were freer to engage in theological experimentation, in the process producing images of the Godhead that were fluid and diverse, and tending to destabilize traditional hierarchies even while upholding orthodoxy.

Primarily devotional, mystical, imaginative, social, and personal in orientation, medieval visionary women may be seen as a missing link in Trinitarian theology between biblical and patristic models and modern ones. While LaCugna overstates her case when she blames medieval scholastic theologians for the sterile and truncated doctrine of the Holy Trinity that (she says) has persisted to the present day, her point about the need for a more holistic doctrine of the Trinity is well taken. As a variety of recent theologians has pointed out, the power of Trinitarian theology is undermined when one aspect of triunity is favored over others. Most often—from the Middle Ages, to the Enlightenment, to the present—unity

and simplicity have taken precedence over multiplicity, complexity, and diversity within the divine being, leading to fractures in Trinitarian theology that have personal and social as well as theological consequences.

A fresh awareness of the contributions of medieval women visionaries can help complete the picture of medieval Trinitarian theology in addition to enriching and informing current debates. For, despite their own protestations to the contrary, their exclusion from formal theological education and office, and a "firm, deep-rooted, and universal belief in female inferiority"[78] in the Middle Ages, the women in this study, like all theologians, inquired deeply into the essential theological questions: Who is God? What is God like? What does God have to do with me?[79] All had much of substance to say about Christian belief, and did so with remarkable confidence, sophistication, and authority. Despite its richness and deep insight, medieval women visionaries' contribution to Trinitarian theology has yet to be fully examined, understood, or appreciated. That is the purpose of the present work.

As theologian Anne Hunt has said, women's theological visions provide a "rich seam of data for the understanding of Christian faith."[80] And yet "theology, in its task of faith seeking understanding, has paid little systematic attention to the insights offered by the mystics. … Yet surely, if theology is to be true to itself, it must attend to the actual witness of the mystics and the intense consciousness of the mysteries that they manifest."[81] Put another way by Jesuit theologian Michael J. Buckley, visionary theologians are important because

[78] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 309.
[79] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 56.
[80] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, viii.
[81] Ibid.

they witness to and have something concrete to say about "the reality of God."[82] Bernard McGinn's observation about vernacular theology, furthermore, applies as well to visionary theology: "The vernacular theological tradition was a true theology, like the scholastic and monastic, insofar as it was a serious attempt to foster greater love of God and neighbor through a deeper understanding of the faith."[83] It was just theology expressed in a different way.

Taking creative liberties with the doctrine of the Trinity has always been a risky venture. Visionary women readily acknowledged the difficulty of representing the divine in a positive way that was neither reductionistic nor presumptuous, while also taking care (with more or less success) not to violate the tenets of orthodoxy. Juggling a diverse set of images, they skillfully expressed the inexhaustible mystery of God and the complexity of the doctrine of the Trinity. They gave insight as well into the ways that humans, created in the image of God, reflect the relationality, equality, and multiplicity of roles that inhere in God's threeness. Thus they provide a fuller picture of medieval Trinitarian theology; broaden the idea of theology itself; and provide useful models for ongoing formulations of the Trinity.

[82] Quoted ibid.
[83] McGinn, *Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 9.

Chapter 2: Historical Background to the Doctrine of the Trinity

In order to appreciate medieval women visionaries' debt to scripture and tradition, as well as their creativity and innovation, it is helpful to look briefly at how the doctrine of the Trinity developed over time. The medieval inheritance of the doctrine of the Trinity was the result of a mix of inputs: Celtic, Greco-Roman, Jewish, scriptural, liturgical, and patristic. Medieval religious women would have been exposed, at least indirectly, to the convergence of theology, imagery, and spirituality in these sources. Their own theology was, in many ways, more resonant with scriptural, liturgical, and patristic themes, methods, and images than with those of the schoolmen who were their contemporaries—although the impact of the latter can also be felt in mystical and visionary literature. This chapter seeks to distill those influences.

The historical literature on the Holy Trinity is vast, and the controversies have been many and philosophically complex. In this chapter, I will give a general and selective overview of the development of Trinitarian doctrine, from the Bible to the late Middle Ages in Europe, with attention to the Trinitarian ideas that are germane to the project at hand. In the next chapter, I will give a general description of visual images and symbols of the Holy Trinity as they have appeared over time. In each successive chapter, I will provide more detailed information about both the doctrinal and visual representations of the Trinity for the period in question, establishing context for the women featured.

Biblical Basis of the Trinity

The word "Trinity" is not in the Bible. While the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is drawn from scripture, it appears there as a diffuse idea that is not named or comprehensively defined. The contours and character of the Trinity, however, evolve—at least from a medieval Christian exegetical perspective—from the intimations of the Hebrew scriptures to the more explicit statements in the Gospels and the New Testament epistles into something close to an article of faith. Scriptural witness to the Trinity, and to the three persons therein, is thus shifting and diverse.

Divine Unity and Plurality in the Hebrew Scriptures

Judaic monotheism, as reflected in the Hebrew scriptures, promotes the absolute unity of God; and Jews in the New Testament (for example, in Mark 2:7 and John 10:33) are portrayed as opposing the divinity of Christ and thus any notion of plurality within God. Even so, Christians found plenty of Old Testament material as analogue to, or foreshadowing of, the New to support the idea of a triune God. There is evidence of plurality in God, for instance, in the Genesis account of creation (1:26-27): "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness'; . . . So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." God's self-referential *us* appears again in Genesis 3:22 ("Then the Lord God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil'") and Genesis 11:7 ("And the Lord [at the tower of Babel] said, … 'Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there'"). In the call narrative of Isaiah (6:8), God says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Images of a heavenly court, council, or host appear in the Hebrew scriptures as well, as in the

prelude to Job (1:6) and the prophecy of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19), giving further evidence of divine plurality, even while Yahweh emerges in Hebrew scripture as the one supreme God who judges the other gods, as in Psalm 82.

Sets of three and multiples of three in the Hebrew scriptures gave to patristic and medieval interpreters a specifically triadic sense of the divine, as in the six-winged seraphs in Isaiah 6:3 who cry out "holy, holy, holy" in the presence of the enthroned God—a scene echoed in the Apocalypse of John in the New Testament (Revelation 4:8). Ecclesiastes 4:12, though more general, asserts the superiority of threeness: "And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken."[84] The Hebrew narrative most often cited by medieval exegetes as evidence for a threefold God (and famously depicted in Andrei Rublev's fifteenth-century icon) is the story of the heavenly visitors to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18:1-15: "The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him." The three visitors are not named—it is not clear whether they are divine beings, divine manifestations, or angels—but Abraham bows down to them, seeks their favor, addresses them collectively as "my lord," and receives their promise that he and Sarah will have a son and be the forebears of a great nation.

Individual portraits of the three persons of the Trinity were also discerned by medieval theologians within the pages of Hebrew scripture. Old Testament representations of God as Father, King, Ancient One (or Ancient of Days), Messiah, Word, Wisdom, and Spirit were particularly significant for medieval exegetes; and in some places a Lord-Word-

[84] Hildegard seems to allude to this passage in *Scivias* II.2.7: "O human, understand the One God in Three Persons. In the foolishness of your mind you think that God is so powerless that He cannot truly live in three Persons, but only exist weakly in one. What does this mean? God is, in three Persons, the true God, the First and the Last."

Spirit triad was found, as in Psalm 33:6. Medieval Christians also perceived a two-fold personality in God (divine and human, father and son) expressed by the prophets: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us … and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). These factors together set the stage for Christian Trinitarian thought,[85] as well as for conventional medieval images of the Trinity. Psalm 110 (109 in the Vulgate), in which a lord—interpreted later by Jews and Christians alike as the messiah—is seated at the right hand of "the Lord God" (God the Father), is made more explicitly Trinitarian when cited in the New Testament, as in Acts 2:32-36. Medieval illuminators thus frequently illustrated the initial D, for "Dixit," at the beginning of this psalm with a picture of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit (usually depicted as a dove) hovering between the Father and the Son.

Barbara Newman, in *God and the Goddesses*, argues that female figures in scripture and Church tradition (like Wisdom, Nature, Fortune, and Poverty), whom she refers to as goddesses, also give a sense of plurality or community to God—one in which the divine feminine is represented. Wisdom, which is grammatically feminine in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (*hokmah*, *sophia*, and *sapientia*, respectively), is personified as an authoritative female figure in the Old Testament—as in Sirach (1:1-10, 42-43), Wisdom (7:22-23), and Proverbs (chaps. 1 and 8-9)—who is coexistent and co-creator with God. Spirit (grammatically feminine in the Hebrew *ruach*, neuter in the Greek *pneuma*, and masculine in the Latin *spiritus*), an inspiring breath or wind in the Hebrew scriptures (as in Isaiah 61:1, Joel 2:28-32, and Micah 3:8), is usually translated as "he" or "it" in English. The Holy Spirit was sometimes feminized in later generations (as in the writings of fourth-century Neoplatonist

[85] Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 34.

theologian Marius Victorinus) or understood to be a gender-blind source of inspiration and authority, based on a passage from the prophet Joel and quoted in Acts 2:17: "I [God] will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."

That the God of the Hebrew scriptures has a variety of attributes, including maternal ones (see, for example, Hosea 11:1-4 and Isaiah 46:3-4), no doubt emboldened medieval visionary women to think of God, or persons of the Godhead, as feminine or gender-neutral as well as masculine. Janet Martin Soskice, in *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*, has remarked on the appropriateness of this sort of gender inclusivity in Trinitarian theology: "Including the feminine range of imagery allows us to keep in place in the doctrine of the Trinity the Genesis teaching that human beings were made in the image of God, 'male and female,'" reflecting the idea that perfect humanity and perfect divinity must be both.[86]

Evidence for the Trinity in the New Testament

New Testament references to the Trinity, while more explicit than those found (by medieval interpreters) in the Hebrew scriptures, are nonetheless liturgical, devotional, and confessional rather than formal or dogmatic.[87] Jesus made ambiguous claims about his own identity, but the New Testament writers express the early Christians' confidence in the divinity of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit. The close relationship between Father and Son is foundational in the New Testament. Thus the first step toward a fully-formed Trinitarian theology might be seen in the many "binitarian" texts, those that refer to two of

[86] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 115.
[87] Anne Hunt, *The Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of the Christian Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005), 10.

the three persons of the Trinity, usually Father and Son (as in John 10:30: "The Father and I [Jesus] are one"). The unity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the latter understood to be "the agency of God's power and presence with individuals and communities,"[88] is expressed in the Gospel of John (chap. 14), in Acts 2, and in the Pauline epistles (Romans 8, Galatians 4). There are few passages of scripture in which all three persons of the Trinity appear together, and fewer in which their relationship is explained.

Individual portraits of the three persons of the Trinity appear throughout the New Testament; and the Trinity as a whole is implied in several key scenes in the life of Jesus. In many medieval visual images the whole Trinity, in a variety of guises, appears as a corollary to or participant in these key scenes, including the Annunciation (Luke 1:35), the Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17, Luke 3:21-22), and the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33). What appears to be an early baptismal creed is found at the end of the Gospel of Matthew (28:16-20), written in the last third of the first century CE, in which Jesus, just before his ascension into heaven, tells his followers: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Thus, as Hunt and others have shown, "there are definite traces of a triadic pattern in the Synoptics [Matthew, Mark, and Luke] and Acts, but there is no Trinitarian doctrine as such, and there is no sense of 'a problem' with the Three."[89]

The Gospel of John, one of the latest New Testament books written (near the end of the first century CE), contains the most-developed Trinitarian thought in scripture as well as an apparent awareness of a problem: the need to define somewhat more precisely the

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[88] Thomas R. W. Longstaff, "Trinity, the," in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985), 1098-99.
[89] Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus*, 8.

functions and relationships among the three persons of the Trinity, their coeternality, and both the immanent and economic aspects of the Trinity as a whole. (That John did not go far enough is evidenced by the definitional problems that remained, which the creeds were meant to resolve.) John articulates, or tries to articulate, both the relations among the three persons of the Trinity and the relationship between the Trinity and the community of believers, expressed in Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit in John 4:15-17 and 16:5-15. John puts relatively more emphasis on the metaphysical components of God's inner life (the "unthinkably close proximity" of the persons of the Trinity to each other, as Rahner said[90]) than do Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But as in the Synoptics, John puts yet greater emphasis on the relationship between the persons of the Trinity and creation than on the Trinity *in se*.

The apostle Paul, like the evangelist John and the other New Testament epistle writers, explicitly promotes the divinity of Christ (Colossians 2:8-9), and his letters contain "triadic formulas."[91] But the Pauline material, too, falls short of a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity.[92] The focus remains on soteriology (the mechanics of salvation) in the Trinitarian "economy" rather than on the internal "immanent" life of the Triune God. In Paul's narrative, expressed for example in the letters to the Romans (5:1-11) and to the Galatians (4:4-6), and in the deutero-Pauline epistle to the Ephesians (5:18-20), God the Father is creator and lover, though sometimes a wrathful one; Jesus the Son, through his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, provides forgiveness for sin and access to divine grace; and the Holy Spirit sustains, unifies, and sanctifies the body of believers through a variety of "gifts." In 2 Corinthians 13:11-14 there appears the earliest (ca. 56 CE) of the four

[90]Karl Rahner, "Trinity, Divine," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise* Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 1756.
[91] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 52.
[92] Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus*, 9.

explicit Trinitarian formulas in the Bible: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." (The other three are 1 Peter 1:2, Matthew 28:16-20, and 1 John 5:7-8, the so-called c*omma Johanneum*, which appears in the Vulgate but has since been deemed apocryphal.) Here again are trinitarian configurations in thinking about God and essentially economic understandings of the Three-in-One, but no formal teaching.

Paul and the other New Testament writers, despite their promotion (however inchoate) of Trinitarian thought, also took pains to reject polytheism and, at least in part for the benefit of their Jewish audience, to reiterate the oneness of God (as in Romans 3:29-30 and Galatians 3:20). These passages would later be used by Catholic clerics as ammunition against the heresy of tritheism; but they would also complicate the formal debates about God's threeness. Likewise, passages of scripture that seem to express a hierarchy within the Trinity would muddy the fourth-century disputes with Arius and his followers and give ballast to those who wished to impose subordination on human relationships as well: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

On the whole, even given its internal diversity, the scriptural account of God rests on several assumptions; and these assumptions would carry over into much patristic and medieval theology. The first assumption is simply that God (and, included therein, all three persons of the Trinity) exists. Although God is understood in scripture to be higher than human thoughts and words, it is also understood that there is a real referent behind the metaphors, the visions, and the felt presence of the divine. It is further understood that God is living: that God speaks and hears; is personal, purposeful, and providential; and addresses

people directly. God is thus more often described in scripture in a narrative way than in a discursive one, and is active in a variety of events and circumstances, showing personality and engaging in relationships. At the same time, paradoxically, God is hidden and inscrutable. There is thus an abiding tension between the transcendence and closeness of God, between righteousness and love, and between the self-sufficient unity of the Trinity and simultaneous "missions" of its three persons. Salvation history as it is described in scripture involves all three members of the Godhead, who are described in images that are functional and relational, both *ad extra* and *ad intra*, but never in ways that are merely speculative or propositional.

Medieval visionary writers shared all of these assumptions. Like the Trinitarian language of both the biblical writers and the Church Fathers, and unlike the more formulaic language of academia, medieval visionaries' words were sometimes "hesitant and groping" as they "tr[ied] to speak of the unity and distinction of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, . . . obeying an instinct which they fe[lt] no need to question, refus[ing] to give a 'rational' explanation."[93] The women in the present study drew on the imagery and authority of scripture as well as its methodology, especially in its prophetic and experiential aspects, its comfort with internal diversity, its inclusion of feminine imagery, and its emphasis on the economy of salvation. Medieval visionaries drew as well from that other source of theological structure and wisdom in which they were steeped daily, and which reflected a Trinitarian faith: the liturgy.

[93] Rahner, "Trinity, Divine," 1756.

The Trinity in the Liturgy

Walter Kasper, in *The God of Jesus Christ*, makes the point that "the liturgical life and doxological vocation of the Church's members is a key locus for the emergence of Trinitarian doctrine."[94] The liturgy and the worshiping community, predating the ecumenical councils of the fourth century at which the formal creedal statements were produced, offered a lived experience of the Trinity rather than (though not opposed to) intellectual concepts. The long-standing Christian principle, dating to at least the fifth century, of *lex orandi, lex credenda* ("the law of prayer is the law of belief" or, more loosely, "what we pray is what we believe") points to the early Christian belief that the liturgy of the church, comprised of word, symbol, gesture, and action, should provide the framework for doctrine.

In the case of the Trinity, the liturgy ensured Father-Son-Spirit terminology, implying that the three are on the same plane, equally divine and eternal. The divine office of both East and West was, and is, "dotted with" the Trinitarian doxology ("Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit").[95] This liturgical threeness appeared early in Church tradition. The prayer uttered by Polycarp before his martyrdom (in the mid-second century) praises all three members of the Godhead;[96] and a eucharistic prayer from Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* (ca. 216) is Trinitarian in both structure and content, giving thanks to God the Father, recounting the story of Jesus, and asking for the sending of the Holy Spirit.[97]

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[94] Quoted in Finbarr Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology: The Need for a Patristic *Ressourcement*," in *Trinity and Salvation: Theological, Spiritual and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. Declan Marmion and Gesa Thiessen (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 22.
[95] Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity: Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 156.
[96] "The Martyrdom of Polycarp," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1951-57), 1.42. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* will be abbreviated hereafter as *ANF*, followed by volume and page numbers.
[97] *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, chaps. 2-4, 21, trans. Burton Scott Easton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 33-36, 45-47.

The "Phos Hilaron," a vespers hymn since at least the third century, includes the line "We sing to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[98]

The earliest baptismal creeds were threefold as well. The *Didache*, an early liturgical handbook produced in the late-first to early-second century instructs the priest to "pour out water three times upon the head in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit" (chap. 7).[99] Irenaeus of Lyons (d. ca. 200) described the liturgical act of anointing in Trinitarian terms as well: "It is the Father who anoints, and it is the Son who is anointed by the Spirit. The Spirit is the unction."[100] The Trinitarian structure of early sacramental rites followed naturally from an emphasis on the economy of salvation. Actions of grace and redemption on earth (that is, through the Church and its ritual) channeled the grace and redemption enacted by the three members of the Godhead. Trinitarian belief, from earliest times, thus had a pastoral application.

In the early church, although there was no special office or day assigned for the Holy Trinity, the hourly, daily, and weekly services were strongly Trinitarian in content and form. Some clerics in the fourth and fifth centuries wanting to counteract the Arian heresy prepared canticles, responses, a preface, and hymns to the Trinity to be recited on Sundays. In the Sacramentary of Pope Gregory I (r. 590-604) there are prayers and a preface referring to the Trinity;[101] and Gregory VII (r. 1073-85) called the Sunday after Pentecost a *Dominica vacans*, with no special office, but with the option of Trinitarian devotion.[102] Trinity Sunday

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[98] Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 38.
[99] "Concerning Baptism," in "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," *ANF* 7.379.
[100] Irenaeus of Lyons, "Against Heresies," *ANF* 1.446.
[101] Pope Gregory I, "Liber Sacramentorum," in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1882), 78:116.103. The *Patrologia Latina* will be abbreviated hereafter as *PL*, followed by the volume, column, and section numbers.
[102] "Trinity Sunday," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=1170, accessed 6/27/11.

was formally added to the church calendar by Pope John XXII in 1334 as the first Sunday after Pentecost in the Western church.[103] Trinity Sunday is thus the finale to all the preceding events of the church year—that is, events of divine revelation and salvation. Readings for Trinity Sunday, like Psalm 111, reflected the economic sense of the Trinity found in scripture. Trinity Sunday continues to be the only major Church observance devoted to a doctrine rather than to an event or person.

Medieval women visionaries, all of whom were intimately familiar with the Catholic liturgy, reiterated in their own Trinitarian theologies the "depth grammar" of orthodoxy, the lived experience and praise of the Godhead, the emphasis on salvation, the aesthetic beauty and balance of the Three-in-One, and the pastoral usefulness of the Trinitarian content of the liturgy. They thought of the Trinity, like the liturgy, as something that was enacted both in heaven and on earth. Medieval women visionaries would draw deeply as well from the Fathers writing in the first five centuries CE, who were steeped in the same essential liturgy, and who meditated upon and struggled with similar themes.

Ante-Nicene Trinitarian Theology

Because the New Testament had presented "an almost inextricable confusion of ideas" about the Trinity,[104] and because the liturgy was doxological rather than discursive, precise definition of, and terminology for, the Trinity were left to the Church Fathers and the ecumenical councils, and further refinement of the doctrine to medieval theologians. Christians during the first three hundred years after Christ (the ante-Nicene period) were

[103] Ibid.
[104] K. E. Kirk, "The Evolution of the Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation*, ed. Alfred E. J. Rawlinson (New York: Longmans, Green, 1928), 199.

deeply Trinitarian in both teaching and liturgy, but mystagogical and devotional rather than doctrinal in their approach, synthesizing the mysteries of Christian faith in often imaginative ways rather than systematic ones.[105] There was no formal consensus among the early Church Fathers on the Trinity, as discussion of it was conducted mostly independently and rather sporadically.

Although increasingly polemical as the Christian population grew and perceived errors in Christology began to arise, Trinitarian theology in this period was concerned primarily (as it was in scripture and liturgy) with a spiritual understanding of salvation and the community of believers as opposed to a "politico-dogmatic" program,[106] which it would largely become in the fourth century when concepts of orthodoxy and heresy would lead to "entanglement with issues of power, politics, and gender."[107] Creative terms, images, and concepts about the Trinity emerged in this period as the scriptural canon, the discipline of exegesis, and Christian theological language were still being developed, allowing for a broader range of images than would be the case from the fourth century on.[108]

Given that Trinitarian theology arose first from Christology and, later, pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit), post-New Testament Trinitarian thought gave much attention to the defining events of Jesus' life and the "Trinitarian" passages of scripture: Annunciation, baptism, transfiguration, Jesus' promise of the Paraclete (Holy Spirit), the prologue to the Gospel of John, Christological hymns (like Philippians 2:6-11), Pentecost, and Old Testament foreshadowing of Christ and the Trinity. The emphasis in this period

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[105] Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 12; and Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus*, 4.
[106] B. Studer, "Trinity," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, 2 vols., ed. Angelo Di Berardino and trans. Adrian Walford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2:851.
[107] Sarah Coakley, "Introduction: Disputed Questions in Patristic Trinitarianism," *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 125-38.
[108] Philip A. Rolnick, "Trinity," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 5 vols., ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999-2008), 5:541.

remained on the economy—the functionality or salvific role—of the Trinity; but the early Church Fathers also began to show interest in a more precise understanding of the Trinity *in se*, especially in regard to the divine origin and eternal existence of the Son and the Spirit. The influence of Jewish apocalyptic and prophetic literature, as well as classical (especially Platonist, Stoic, and Pythagorean) sources, are apparent in this period. The latter were especially influential from the mid-second century on, with the development of the idea of an eternal Logos, or Word, of God (understood to be Christ), metaphysical nuances in theology, and technical terminology to describe the Trinity and its paradoxical triunity.

Trinitarian expressions taken from scripture and the liturgy appear in theological treatises as early as the late first century, as in Clement of Rome (ca. 96): "Do we not have one God and one Christ? Is there not one Spirit of grace poured out upon us?"[109] The Trinity as theological formula was expressed explicitly from the beginning of the second century. It was first given a name by the Greek theologian Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (ca. 180), who used the term "triad" (in Greek, *trias*) to describe the Godhead: "The three days which were before the luminaries are types of the Triad of God, His Word, and His Wisdom."[110] In the West, the theologian Tertullian (ca. 155-220) is usually credited with coining the term "Trinity" (in Latin, *trinitas*) and for using the words "person" (*persona*) and "substance" (*substantia*), which the New Testament did not use in Trinitarian context. With this terminology, Tertullian was able to explain that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were "three persons, one substance [*tres personae, una substantia*]"[111]—a technical phrase that would become important in later formulations. It was not until the fourth century, however,

[109] Clement of Rome, "First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," *ANF* 1.17.
[110] Theophilus of Antioch, "Theophilus to Autolycus," *ANF* 2.101.
[111] Tertullian, "On Idolatry," *ANF* 3.62.

that Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers (ca. 300-368), would write the first full treatise on the subject (*De Trinitate*) in the Latin West.

Catherine LaCugna, among others who have looked to the ante-Nicene period for a "pure" and "holistic" Trinitarian theology,[112] has argued that the early Church Fathers were more appropriately imaginative and open-ended in their understanding of the Trinity than were later scholastic theologians with their philosophical accretions and (she argues) drive toward doctrinal stasis.[113] Although LaCugna does not discuss the medieval visionary writers at any length, they were in many ways the true inheritors of ante-Nicene thought. Scriptural narratives, natural images, human analogies, a concern for practical application, a balance of divine economy and unity (or "monarchy"), and reliance on mystical perception all have central place both in patristic Trinitarian theology and medieval visionary literature.

In his mining of the Hebrew scriptures for Trinitarian signs, Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) is typical of patristic method. He saw in the Old Testament an apocalyptic, mystical foreshadowing of the Trinity, here in the story of Daniel: "The three children [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego], along with Daniel, . . . observed the third, sixth, and ninth hours (as it were) for a sacrament of the Trinity, which was to be manifested in the last times. For the first hour in its progress to the third declares the completed number of the Trinity."[114] The anonymous *Treatise Against Novatian* (ca. 255) also finds Trinitarian foreshadowing in the Old Testament, this time in the hopeful and redemptive story of Noah: "The very same

[112] Others include Boris Bobrinskoy, Sarah Coakley, Lewis Ayres, and Neil Ormerod.
[113] LaCugna, *God For Us*, 6.
[114] Cyprian, "Treatises of Cyprian," *ANF* 5.456.

Trinity who operated figuratively through the dove in Noah's days, now operated spiritually in the church through the disciples."[115]

The use of natural and physical images for the Trinity begins with the early Greek theologians. Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165), in his *First Apology*, reiterates the Stoic idea that nothing can be real unless it is in some sense bodily.[116] He thus understands the Trinity in its incarnational sense, especially as communicated through the sacraments. In a fusion of physical and metaphysical language that will resonate later in visionary theology, Justin compares the Word of the Father to the light from the sun. While the sun and its light are distinct, they are also "indivisible and inseparable."[117] Athenagoras (ca. 133-90), using the Neoplatonic language of outflow and return (in Latin, *exitus* and *reditus*), explains that "the Son is the Intelligence, Reason, and Wisdom of the Father. And the Spirit is an emanation, as light from fire."[118] Ante-Nicene writers linked the flaming, flowing Holy Spirit especially to the biblical prophets, who functioned as the voice or communication of God, as Athenagoras explains: "The Holy Spirit himself also, which operated in the prophets, we assert to be an effluence of God, flowing from him, and returning back again like a beam of the sun."[119]

Fiery, watery, and arboreal images for the Trinity were common among early Christian writers. Tertullian, although he employed technical language to describe the Trinity (in addition to the aforementioned "person" and "substance," he spoke of

[115] Anonymous, "A Treatise Against the Heretic Novatian," *ANF* 5.658.
[116] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 89.
[117] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew," *ANF* 1.264.
[118] Athenagoras, "A Plea for the Christians," *ANF* 2.141.
[119] E. Calvin Beisner, *God in Three Persons* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1984), 53.

divine economy, emanation, form, aspect, condition, degree, and number), also used these natural images:

> For God sent forth the Word, as the Paraclete also declares. This is just as the root puts forth the tree, the fountain the river, and the sun the ray. For these are emanations of the substances from which they proceed. I should not hesitate, indeed, to call the tree the son or offspring of the root; or the river, that of the fountain; or the ray, that of the sun. . . . Now, the Spirit indeed is third from God and the Son, just as the fruit of the tree is third from the root, or as the stream out of the river is third from the fountain, or as the apex of the ray is third from the sun. Nothing, however, is alien from that original source from which it derives its own properties. In like manner, the Trinity, flowing down from the Father through intertwined and connected steps, does not at all disturb the "Monarchy," while it at the same time guards the state of the "Economy."[120]

Tertullian's immediate concern (along with Irenaeus, Hippolytus of Rome, Novatian, and the author of *Contra Noetum*) was to refute the second-century heresy of Gnosticism with emphasis on the humanity of Christ, his incarnation and crucifixion. But the passage above, with its combination of imaginative, dynamic images, precise theological diagramming, and concern for orthodoxy, also nicely packages Tertullian's legacy not only for the next generation of theologians (like Cyprian, who adapted Tertullian's images[121]) but also for medieval monastic and vernacular theologians, including the women visionaries, whose Trinity very often flamed, flowed, and flowered.

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[120] Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," *ANF* 3.602.
[121] Cyprian, "Treatises of Cyprian," *ANF* 5.423.

Medieval visionaries' fondness for bodily images and respect for bodily reality was also a part of patristic legacy, expressed in Justin's (aforementioned) incarnational belief that all reality must be bodily, and Athanasius' statement in the fourth century that "He [Christ] manifests himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father."[122] Irenaeus (d. ca. 200), providing more specific bodily images, imagined Christ and the Holy Spirit as the two hands of God.[123] Marius Victorinus (ca. 300-370) used the mechanisms of sound for his Trinitarian analogy: "one and the same sound can involve a speaker, the word spoken, and the breath or voice that carries sound to us."[124] This particular analogy will appear again, with variations, in Hildegard's *Scivias*.

The Alexandrian exegete Origen (d. ca. 254) was one of the first Eastern Fathers to reflect systematically on the doctrine of the Trinity,[125] using technical language to combat the emerging Christological heresies and to explain the unity (*homoousios*: consubstantiality, or "sameness of substance") of the three persons (*hypostases*) of the Trinity.[126] But Origen also ruminated on the human being as the image of the Trinity: "God the Father bestows existence upon all. Participation in Christ, in respect of His being the Word of reason, renders them rational beings. … To begin with, they [humans] derive their existence from God the Father. Secondly, they derive their rational nature from the Word. Thirdly, they derive their holiness from the Holy Spirit."[127] Somewhat more intimately, Origen says: "The Christian imitates

[122] Athanasius, *Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi* 54, quoted in Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 223.
[123] Irenaeus of Lyons, "Against Heresies," *ANF* 1.487.
[124] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 199.
[125] Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 24.
[126] Origen, "Commentary on the Gospel of John," Book II, *ANF* 10.332.
[127] Origen, "On First Principles," *ANF* 4.255.

him [Christ], acquires his mind, and … gains the same knowledge as he has."[128] Thus the righteous, together with Christ, "all become one sun."[129]

The notion of the Trinitarian image and likeness in the human person, an especially strong theme in the Eastern fathers, will be a theme as well among both medieval male theologians (like William of St. Thierry, who sometimes wrote in a mystical vein) and female visionaries.[130] The inclusion of women in the image of God, officially abjured in the Middle Ages, was startlingly asserted by the Greek theologian Methodius (d. 311). According to a later (post-Nicene) writer, Methodius essentially equated the first woman with the Holy Spirit, saying:

> The following are types of the holy and consubstantial Trinity: the innocent and unbegotten Adam is a type and resemblance of God the Father Almighty, who is uncaused and is the cause of all. Adam's begotten son [Abel or Seth] pictures the image of the begotten Son and Word of God. And Eve, who proceeded forth from Adam, signifies the person and procession of the Holy Spirit.[131]

It follows logically, if individual humans are made in the image of God, that the body of believers as a whole, the Church, would also reflect the Trinity. This idea is indeed found in the writings of the Fathers and is reiterated in medieval visionary literature. Origen, in his *Commentary on Psalm 23*, says "the Church is filled with the Holy Trinity."[132] Like Irenaeus, Origen "believed in the three persons of the Trinity being active in the life of the

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[128] Origen, "Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew," Book XII, *ANF* 10.460. Quoted in Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 216.
[129] Origen, "Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew," Book X, *ANF* 10.415.
[130] Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 6.
[131] Methodius, "Two Fragments, Uncertain" II, *ANF* 6.402.
[132] Origen, *Commentary on Psalm 23*; quoted in Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 24.

Church, the sacramental economy, and the life of prayer, both personal and liturgical."[133] And as Tertullian said, "the very church itself is—properly and principally—the Spirit Himself, in whom is the Trinity of the One Divinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[134]

According to Orthodox theologians Boris Bobrinskoy and Nikolai Feodorov, the early Church Fathers thought of the Trinity—with its dynamically interconnected members—as a "social program" eternally imprinted upon the Church.[135] Although the best minds of the day, including Origen and Tertullian, slipped occasionally into subordinationism, the main thrust of their Trinitarian theology was the absolute equality and shared essence of the three persons of the Trinity, each indispensable to the others. This idea, with its implications for community life, would be creatively expanded upon by, for example, Mechthild of Hackeborn in the thirteenth century.

Some of the most interesting pre-Nicene Trinitarian thought comes from the early Syriac tradition which (following Semitic grammar) cast the Holy Spirit as feminine, but in which "feminization was drawn across all three Persons of the Trinity."[136] The second-century Syriac Christian work *Odes of Solomon*, for example, speaks of both a maternal Spirit and a maternal (albeit bovine) Father:

A cup of milk was offered to me

And I drank it with the sweetness of the Lord's kindness.

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[133] Ibid.
[134] Tertullian, "On Modesty," *ANF* 4.99.
[135] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 5-6: "This life in communion, this participation in the Trinity, this difference and reciprocity in unity are neither a dream nor a human conquest, but a gift to us God wishes to make. In this sense one may say, as Nikolai Feodorov did, that 'our social program is the Trinity': our beginning and end which are not merely those of Christian individuals preoccupied with their lonely little salvation, but those of the great human family whose vocation is to discover its Trinitarian identity through the Church." See also Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 61-62.
[136] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 114; and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37 (1993): 114.

The Son is the cup,

And He who was milked is the Father,

and she who milked Him is the Holy Spirit.[137]

It is impossible to know whether this Syriac literature was in the libraries to which medieval visionary writers had access; but it is known that the theology of the Cappadocian Father Basil of Caesarea was "linked to the Syrian theological tradition" on certain issues.[138] Basil's thought, given its influence in both the East and the West, would surely have reached these women, at least indirectly. In any case, the similarities among Syriac and medieval visionary writings are striking. Both the early Syriac theologians and medieval visionaries, in written works that might be said to be characterized by "rhetorical excess,"[139] used bodily and gendered metaphors for the Trinity in which "roles are reversed, fused, inverted: no one is simply who they seem to be. More accurately, everyone is *more than* they seem to be."[140] Although familial and gender-bending images were suppressed in the fourth century, they reappeared among mystical and visionary writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Julian of Norwich) and in a great variety of art during the same period.[141]

In sum, patristic thought on the Trinity was creative and contemplative as well as intellectual: "a mosaic of images and insights [was] often employed in the service of capturing facets of the mystery" of the Godhead that, even while increasingly expressed in

[137] Quoted in Harvey, "Feminine Imagery," 114.
[138] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 233. Ephrem the Syriac was especially important to Basil.
[139] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 114-15.
[140] Ibid. See also Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 248.
[141] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 248-49.

philosophical terms, had "day-to-day relevance for ecclesial life."[142] This relevance was due not only to the relatability of natural, material, bodily, and communal images of the Trinity, but also to the unwavering focus on salvation history (the divine "economy") understood to be ongoing in the Church, as summarized by Tertullian:

> We … believe that there is only one God, but under the following dispensation or 'economy' [Gr. *oikonomia*], as it is called. We believe that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made. Him we believe to have been sent by the Father into the virgin, and to have been born of her—being both man and God, the Son of man and the Son of God. … And the Son also sent from heaven from the Father, according to His own promise, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[143]

It was understood by patristic theologians that the Church and its members, as *imago* and *imitatio trinitatis*, should always seek to clarify and strengthen that reflected image by growing closer to, and thus more like, God. The process of union with God was seen somewhat differently in Eastern and Western contexts. In the Greek-speaking world, "deification (*theosis*) was primarily a matter of sharing in divine qualities, and occasionally this idea became so prominent that the writers in question ran the risk of blurring the line between God and human beings."[144] A greater divide between creator and creature was generally maintained in the Latin West, although the idea of deification (*deificatio*) did exist,

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[142] Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 61-62.
[143] Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," *ANF* 3.598.
[144] Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 9.

based on Romans 8:29, in which godliness, sanctification, and participation in Christ are indicated. In the West, more emphasis was placed on guilt and redemption than on ecstatic union; nonetheless, "what many (perhaps most) within the early church [both East and West] meant by the … word *theosis*, or deification, was believers' sharing in the warm fellowship that has existed from all eternity between the persons of the Trinity."[145] This idea of union is parsed—and experienced—in various ways by medieval visionaries, sometimes in a state of ecstasy that might be considered more Eastern than Western.

In the ante-Nicene period and in the centuries that followed, however, any "warm fellowship" that had existed (especially between East and West) was fractured by theological differences, as "the inherent tension of claiming monotheism and Trinity … spawned creative exploration of personhood, interrelatedness, and an ongoing [conflicted] investigation of how unity and diversity can be thought together."[146] In the end, the ante-Nicene theologians "despite their untiring efforts, had failed to find a formula in which the unity and the distinction of the divine persons were counterbalanced, still less to explain the unique divinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[147] As a result, "at the start of the fourth century, [there were] two opposed tendencies in Trinitarian theology, the 'pluralistic' [represented by Origen and his followers, and radicalized by Arius, who gave priority to the Father] and the 'unitarian.' Later a clash between these two tendencies was inevitable."[148]

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[145] Ibid., 10.
[146] Rolnick, "Trinity," 540.
[147] B. Studer, "Trinity," 2:852.
[148] Ibid.

Fourth- and Fifth-Century Ferment in Trinitarian Theology

If Trinitarian debate came to the fore among second- and third-century churchmen—writing against Jews, polytheists, and heretics alike—it "boiled over in the Arian controversy."[149] In the long run, thanks in large part to the Cappadocian Fathers and to Augustine, Trinitarian doctrine "became stabilized in the course of the fourth century."[150] But the process was long and difficult and, as before, many questions remained unresolved and further questions were created for the next generations to puzzle out.

Factors fueling the development of Trinitarian theology in the fourth century included the new authority of the canonical scriptures, which put limits on theological creativity; the rise of "cultivated reason" in Christian theology, that is, a "dependence on language and concepts drawn from philosophy," especially Plato; and the growing separation in the newly Christianized empire between East and West, and between theologically educated and uneducated people, which created both doctrinal and socio-political factions.[151] Religious experience and worship continued to be important bases for Christian faith, as was the firming up of liturgical and sacramental formulas, but "liturgical symbols" and the occasional treatise were no longer sufficient to explain the Trinity to a broad audience, especially given the growing prevalence of heterodox belief.[152] Major Christological (and, therefore, Trinitarian) heresies at this time included Sabellianism (and its variants: modalism and monarchianism), which dispenses with the immanent Trinity by focusing on the functions of the three persons and holding that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are only modes or aspects of

[149] Bernard J. Cooke, *The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 72.
[150] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 121.
[151] Cooke, *Distancing of God*, 71-72.
[152] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 85; and Cooke, *Distancing of God*, 72.

the one divine person; subordinationism, in which God the Father is considered eternal and immutable, but Son and Spirit are understood to be created beings in direct contact with humanity, and thus of lower rank, creating a Father-Son-Spirit hierarchy within the Trinity; gnosticism (dualism); and tritheism, in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are understood to be three individual and separate deities.[153]

Subordinationism was the most pressing issue at hand in the early fourth century. This idea was drawn from scripture (especially 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Matthew 24:36) but was also influenced by Neoplatonism, with its hierarchical relationships and idea of emanations. This position was most famously promoted by Arius, but many of the early Fathers had subordinationist tendencies as well. Tertullian, who was inconsistent about the coequality of the members of the Godhead, said: "For the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole, as He Himself acknowledges: 'My Father is greater than I.'"[154] Origen, too, had said that "the Father is the origin and source of the Son or Holy Spirit."[155] This despite the fact that pre-creedal statements that were Trinitarian in form (with a threefold formula and a catalogue of events in salvation history carried out by the three Persons) were produced from the second to the fourth century in order to quash incipient heresy, especially subordinationism.[156]

Arius, an Alexandrian presbyter (ca. 250-336), pushed ante-Nicene subordinationism much further, explicitly giving priority to the Father. Arianism had lasting social as well as theological effects, as Germanic Arians and Latin Catholics created segregated communities

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[153] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 61.
[154] Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," *ANF* 3.604.
[155] Origen, "On First Principles," *ANF* 4.255.
[156] Some of the authors of these creeds, who included Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Novatian, Origen, and Eusebius (this last in 325), were ironically those who themselves bordered on subordinationism.

within Christianity in the Western Roman Empire; and the idea itself was reincarnated many times in the centuries that followed. The Greek bishop Athanasius (ca. 293-373) would represent Catholic orthodoxy against Arius at the ecumenical church council at Nicaea called by Emperor Constantine in 325.[157] With the goal of officially defining the relationship of the Son to the Father, and led by Athanasius, the council established the divinity of Christ and the consubstantial Trinity as orthodoxy and condemned Arius' teaching that Christ was the first creation of God. The creed adopted by the council described Christ as "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father."[158] *Homoousios* here referred only to the Trinity *in se*, but at the Council of Chalcedon (451) its meaning was expanded to Christology and anthropology: Christ is *homooousios* both with the Godhead and with humanity, linking humans intimately and ontologically with the Trinity.[159]

The Council of Constantinople was called in 381 by Emperor Theodosius I who, like Constantine, had the goal of political as well as theological unity within the Empire. This council built upon the decisions of Nicaea, reaffirming that the Son was begotten of the Father and decreeing that the Holy Spirit was fully divine and proceeded both from the Father and from the Son, and that the three were eternally equal. God is thus "one in essence, distinguished in three persons" (*mia ousia, tres hypostases*) who are each "very God of very God." After this council the Nicene Creed took a longer, more final form; and Pope Damasus (in the *Tome of Damasus*, written in 382) summed up Trinitarian errors in a

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[157] Athanasius defends the full divinity of the Son and the Spirit in, respectively, *Contra Arianos* 2.24 and *Letters to Serapion* 1.2, 1.24-25, and 3.6; cited in Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 24-25.
[158] William C. Placher, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Vol. 1: From Its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 53.
[159] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 222.

collection of twenty-four anathemas.[160] Later meetings of Catholic clerics, including the Eleventh Council of Toledo (675), the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the Second Council of Lyons (1274), and the Council of Florence (1439-45), would revisit the issue of Trinitarian dogma, albeit under different circumstances; but the goal in every case was to guard against the various Trinitarian heresies and tighten orthodox definitions.

The major ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries did not, therefore, end the controversy; and the creeds produced by them created their own problems. The Nicene Creed in its later (381) form raised the *filioque* problem (the issue of whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, or just the Father—a sticking point between East and West to this day) and narrowed theological possibilities with precise terminology that "made it difficult for many to accept."[161] Later, the so-called Athanasian Creed (not written by Athanasius himself, but rather in fifth-century Gaul), which "came to control theological and doctrinal discussion"[162] and which "shaped the heart of Western Trinitarian faith in the medieval period,"[163] also raised questions of terminology for the later scholastic age. Still, the Athanasian Creed remains one of the most succinct statements of the essentials of the Christian faith and—significantly for medieval visionary writers, including Hildegard, who wrote a long commentary on it—dwells on the economic Trinity and the history of salvation enacted thereby.[164]

There has been much scholarly speculation about why the doctrine of the Trinity has generated so much debate, hair-splitting, and conflict over the centuries. As the first

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[160] John A. Hardon, "Catholic Doctrine on the Holy Trinity," http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Trinity/Trinity_001.htm, accessed 6/18/11.
[161] Beisner, *God in Three Persons*, 84.
[162] Cooke, *Distancing of God*, 73.
[163] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 150.
[164] Beisner, *God in Three Persons*, 12.

principle of Christian theology, every other category of Christian belief flows from Trinitarian dogma and depends on its philosophical and spiritual soundness. On a more existential level, eternal salvation was felt to be at stake, as the mission of the Trinity was to "maintain and restore the created world to a state of well-being and communion with God" that would culminate in heavenly bliss. As Athanasius said: "He [Christ], indeed, assumed humanity that we might become like God."[165] Salvation was only achievable, according to the newly-minted orthodox theology of the fourth century, by a Trinity fully divine in all its parts and a Christ both fully human and fully divine.

Orthodox theologian Bobrinskoy has further pointed out that "the theological undertaking is always conditioned by the human problems—political, cultural, philosophic, religious—in which theology moves, and in which are as many question marks, existential, not theoretical, about the faith and the Gospel … leading to a necessary ambiguity, and unavoidable tension."[166] The political as well as religious stature of the fourth-century combatants was at stake, and it depended not only on their rhetorical prowess, but on the actual content of their theology: a fully divine Christ trumped a merely human Christ; and those who "supported" the fully divine Christ saw themselves as having greater authority, both spiritual and secular, than those who did not.[167]

The Cappadocian Synthesis

Debate over how the creed (especially the phrase "one substance") ought to be interpreted continued to rage for decades, and most post-Nicene discussion of the Trinity

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[165] Athanasius, *Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi* 54; quoted in Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 223.
[166] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 197.
[167] Beisner, *God in Three Persons*, 105-06, 142.

consisted of attempts to understand and explain the concept. Greater clarity was achieved largely through the efforts of the Cappadocian Fathers—Basil of Caesarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus—who continued to develop philosophical terminology and exactitude of expression with the goal of refuting heresy, even while continuing to draw on scripture and the liturgy and striving to retain a sense of the mystery and ineffability of the Trinity.[168] Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329-79) insisted on the transcendence and simplicity of God but, in keeping with Nicene orthodoxy, sought to refute two errors in Trinitarian theology—denial of the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and denial of the real distinction of the three.[169] For Basil, Trinitarian terminology (especially *ousia* and *hypostasis*) was not "an exercise in speculative and abstract theology, but . . . [related to] the most authentic spiritual experience, of the vision of faith and of knowledge about [the Trinity]."[170] Basil acknowledged, however, that such knowledge was provisional, and that while the Trinity was divinely revealed truth, the human vocabulary for it was symbolic and not exhaustive.[171]

Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330-90), more abstract and "Platonizing" than Basil and more interested in the Trinity *in se*, may be considered, in Bobrinskoy's words, "the first mystic and minstrel of the Holy Trinity."[172] Gregory indeed uses the visionary language of "I behold" and "there appeared to me":

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[168] Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 25-27.
[169] Stephen M. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 56-57. See Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto* 1.3, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 8:3.
[170] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 234-35.
[171] Ibid., 236.
[172] Ibid., 154.

> As soon as I begin to contemplate the Unity [of God], the Trinity bathes me in its splendor. As soon as I begin to think of the Trinity, I am seized by the Unity. When one of the Three appears to me, I think that it is the whole, so fully my eye is filled, so fully the abundance escapes me. For in my mind, which is too limited to comprehend a single One, there is no room for any more. When I join the Three in a single thought, I behold a single flame, and I am able neither to divide nor to analyze the unified Light.[173]

Gregory envisions the "ineffable radiance" of the Trinity pouring down on the creation as "the source of all that is here below."[174] A similar metaphor for the Trinity ("luminous rays with triple light") appears in early Byzantine hymnology as well.[175] Hildegard would create a similar but more anthropomorphic image for the Trinity in the twelfth century, with her radiant sapphire man inside concentric circles of light.

As Hildegard and Joachim of Fiore would also do later, Gregory of Nazianzus set forth the idea of an intentional, gradual revelation of the Trinity—in the Old Testament first, then in the New Testament, and then in the Church. According to Gregory:

> The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New manifested the Son, and suggested the deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself. For it was not safe, when the Godhead of the

[173] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 40; quoted in Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 2.
[174] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata de seipso* I; quoted in Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 154.
[175] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 155-56.

> Father was not yet acknowledged, plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when that of the Son was not yet received to burden us further … with the Holy Spirit.[176]

This progression was not smooth, constant, or linear: "By gradual additions [the revelation of the Trinity] advances … from glory to glory, [so that] the Light of the Trinity might shine upon the more illuminated"[177]—as Gregory, and Hildegard and Joachim too, considered themselves to be.

Like Basil, Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-85) acknowledged the limitations of human language to describe the Trinity, as "even the threefold naming, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, does not describe the divine essence, something that could never be done."[178] In his treatise *That There are Not Three Gods*, using the analogue of human community, Gregory compared the divinity shared by the three persons of the Trinity to the common "humanness," or human nature, shared by individual human beings.[179] All three of the Cappadocians, following Basil in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, liked to describe the Trinity in terms of a *koinonia* (communion or fellowship) of the three persons, defined by their mutual relationships with each other.[180] In doing so, they "specif[ied] and deepen[ed] the theology of the *hypostases*, that is, of the most personal and nontransferable specifics of each of the Three."[181] The Cappadocians thus produced what some have understood to be an early version of social Trinitarianism.

It has been argued that beginning with Athanasius and the Cappadocians, Christian theology (expressed in art and liturgy as well as in doctrine) began to take more interest in

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[176] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 31 (*Theologica* V) 26; quoted in Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 8.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 114.
[179] Placher, *Readings*, 53, notes the irony of the title of Gregory's treatise, given that social Trinitarianism has been criticized for verging on tritheism.
[180] Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 25.
[181] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 261.

the immanent Trinity than in the economic Trinity,[182] de-emphasizing the historical Jesus, soteriology, and the idea of the human imitation of Christ in favor of "the ontological status of the Logos within the Trinity."[183] This is not entirely true. Medieval monastic, mystical, and visionary writers continued to focus on the personal involvement of the Trinity in the economy of salvation, as did many scholastic theologians, although to a lesser extent and using more technical language. Within academic circles, however, the "social Trinity" lost ground to a new model: the psychological analogy of the Trinity invented by Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine and the Trinity

Augustine (354-430), the most important figure in the formulation of medieval Trinitarian theology, struggled deeply to find apt metaphors for the Trinity, its saving work, and its human image, clarifying and complicating concepts of the Trinity at the same time. In writing his great work *De Trinitate*, Augustine had three main objectives: to demonstrate that the divinity and coequality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are rooted in scripture; to convince pagan philosophers of the need for faith in a divine mediator so that redemption could occur; and to show his readers that salvation and spiritual growth are connected with the knowledge of themselves as images of the triune God, from whom they came and to whom they return.[184] The Nicene Trinitarian paradoxes that Augustine reiterates, and attempts to hold in balance, are God's immediacy to, but distinction from, creation; God's

[182] Ibid., 3.
[183] Cooke, *Distancing of God*, 73-74.
[184] Mary T. Clark, "De Trinitate," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 91.

self-disclosure and mystery; and God's economic and immanent aspects.[185] Augustine is best known for his psychological analogy (as it was later called) in which he described the Trinity as comparable to three parts of the human mind: memory (*memoria*), intellect (*intelligentia*), and will (*voluntas*) or, alternately, love (*amor*). These, Augustine explained, were three distinct yet inseparable aspects of personhood, together constituting one unified human being, just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constitute one unified God.

Augustine came up with at least twenty variations of the psychological analogy, both in *De Trinitate* and in his sermons, imagining trinities within trinities: the eternal Trinity that made us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit); the "miserable trinity" that unmakes us (impotence, ignorance, concupiscence); the "beneficial trinity" that remakes us (faith, hope, love); the "reasonable trinity" (memory, understanding, will); and corollary sets of three: articles, commandments, and sacraments; pardon, grace, and glory; pure heart, good conscience, and firm faith.[186] Augustine toyed with other analogies as well, including images drawn from scripture,[187] but he favored mental parallels: the mind, its love, and its knowledge of its love (*mens, amor, notitia eius*); and lover, beloved, and love (*amans, quod amatur, amor*). This latter he ultimately discarded, but it was picked back up by Richard of St. Victor among other medieval theologians, including some visionaries like Hadewijch. Augustine did not entirely dispense with social or communal notions of the Trinity, however; he concurred with the

[185] Matthew Drever, "The Self Before God? Rethinking Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 233-42. Augustine opens *De Trinitate* (bks. 1-4) with discussion of the divine economy.
[186] See Christine de Pizan (*Vision*, 132) who, citing Augustine, affirms that the end and goal of every human being can be summed up as "this Blessed Trinity, one God alone, reigning forever and ever."
[187] Book I of Augustine, *The Trinity (De Trinitate)*, trans. Edmund Hill and ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991), 65-96.

earlier Fathers that, because humans are made in the image of God, it follows that the Church is "the extension of the trinitarian family to human beings."[188]

Like the Cappadocians, Augustine admitted the limitations of language in describing God, including that of the psychological analogy: "We see, rather than believe, the trinity which is in ourselves; whereas we believe rather than see that God is Trinity."[189] And yet, he believed that the natural and human worlds were the best, indeed the only, possible source of comparison: "So then, as we direct our gaze at the creator by *understanding the things that are made* (Romans 1:20), we should understand him as a triad, whose traces [*vestigia*] appear in creation in a way that is fitting. In that supreme triad is the source of all things, and the most perfect beauty, and wholly blissful delight."[190] Terms for the Trinity must be found, he said, "not so that we may talk, but lest we remain dumb."[191] Such terms, he said, are found (however imperfectly) both through the body with its senses and through the mind—although Augustine privileged mind over body.[192]

The psychological analogy put forward by Augustine and developed further by Thomas Aquinas "remains the classical explanation [for the Trinity] to the present day," at least in Catholic theology.[193] While much of Augustine's theology, as well as his vision theory,[194] was adapted by medieval thinkers, visionary writers would not privilege the mind

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[188] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 10.
[189] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5.10.
[190] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6.10.12.
[191] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15.14.
[192] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 13.4.6-8; also 9.1.1-8. See Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 133.
[193] Rahner, "Trinity, Divine," 1764.
[194] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 187: "Augustine differentiated corporeal vision (the outward appearance of a form), spiritual vision (seeing an interior image), and intellectual vision (direct perception of unchanging truth). In the case of divinely given visions, God could supply special external and internal images for the first two kinds; with regard to the last, he could even grant immediate and infallible cognition of divine truth." Medieval vision theory was built on these ideas.

over the body as he did, but would immerse themselves in bodily images of the Trinity.[195] Thus they remained truer to patristic and Nicene theology while Augustine set medieval scholastic theology on a different trajectory, as the psychological theory had the practical outcome of "obscur[ing] the connection between the immanent and the economic Trinity, to the detriment of a vitally practical theology of the Trinity."[196]

In sum, patristic writers, both Eastern and Western, were generally content with devotional, exegetical, and mystical reflections on the Trinity until the threat of Arianism forced the clerics at the Council of Nicaea to set down the doctrine as it has basically remained ever since: God is three coequal persons (*hypostases*) but one substance (*ousia*). Effort to define the Trinity even more precisely was a particularly medieval undertaking. Augustine set the tone and terms for much of that medieval discussion. Even while he described the doctrine of the Trinity as perilous and difficult, it was yet an "excellent undying light" that no human mind was strong enough to comprehend—but so important that he and many others proceeded to try. While "the patristic tradition [both East and West] that preceded Western scholasticism was labile, internally complex, and deeply aware of divine mystery,"[197] medieval scholars produced theology with the particular aim of understanding the inner workings of the Godhead (God *in se*) with logical explanations of how the three could also be one. Thus, as Bobrinskoy and LaCugna have both argued, "from the fourth

[195] Including feminine images, which Augustine did not use. Augustine believed that "the woman is only partially and derivatively made in God's image" (Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 390, n. 15; citing *De Trinitate* 12.7). Scholastic theologians continued to exclude female language and imagery for God (Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 249).
[196] Karl Rahner, "Trinity in Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise* Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 1768.
[197] Coakley, "Introduction," 2.

century onward, the paths of the trinitarian economy (revelation, salvation) and of Trinitarian theology properly speaking will diverge."[198]

Trinitarian Developments in the Early Medieval Period (500-1050)

After the major Trinitarian questions were settled in the fourth and fifth centuries, interest in the Trinity waned, not to heat up again until the high Middle Ages (the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries) and "reach[ing] its climax with the institution of the Feast of the Holy Trinity in 1334."[199] There were some developments in the early Middle Ages, however. Boethius (d. ca. 524) helped clarify technical Trinitarian terminology, like *persona*, that was carried into scholasticism. Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth to early sixth century) "set to work to show that scriptural statements about the equality and distinctions of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be reconciled if one does not make philosophical mistakes."[200] He did so with Neoplatonic resources, and his ideas were influential for centuries to come, especially those in *Celestial Hierarchy*, his most widely read work in the Middle Ages.[201] Many mystics of the later Middle Ages, for instance, like Pseudo-Dionysius, classified ideas and objects in groups of three or multiples of three. These triads, in the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, operated within a larger cosmic structure in which the human ascended to the divine. Pseudo-Dionysius, in fact, defined hierarchy in specifically Trinitarian terms as "a sacred order, a state of understanding, and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine. … As a Trinitarian manifestation, every hierarchy in the

[198] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 314.
[199] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 149.
[200] Mary T. Clark, introduction to Marius Victorinus, *Theological Treatises on the Trinity* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 7.
[201] McGinn, *Flowering*, 83.

created universe must be both one and three, exercising the purifying, enlightening, and perfecting activities that lead back to God—initiating action, mediating action, and being acted upon."[202] This Trinitarian vision of *exitus* and *reditus*, originating with the Fathers but eloquently restated by Pseudo-Dionysius, was picked up strongly in the twelfth century by the Victorines and by Hildegard, and in the thirteenth century by Mechthild of Magdeburg, among other writers both philosophical and mystical.

Anglo-Saxon theologians, teachers, and artists used language and images more evocative than academic, as St. Columbanus, an Irish monk and missionary (ca. 540-615), did in his sermon entitled *Concerning the Faith*: "Who then is God? He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. Seek no further concerning God; for those who wish to know the great deep must first review the natural world. For knowledge of the Trinity is properly likened to the depth of the sea."[203] The Anglo-Saxon period, as Francis Wormald and others have shown, was rich in Trinitarian thought and images, especially of the devotional and homiletical sort.[204] While there was evident concern about doctrinal issues in Anglo-Saxon sources—like the unity of the Godhead, the equality of its members, and the role of the Incarnation—there was greater interest in "the intimate relationship between meditation on the Trinity, the beatific vision, and the monastic life," as well as the imprint of the triune God on creation and on the individual believer.[205]

Some official developments in the West enforcing creedal orthodoxy also took place during the early Middle Ages, mostly having to do with the contested *filioque* clause stating

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[202] Ibid.
[203] Columbanus, "Concerning the Faith" 4, in *Sermons of Columbanus*, ed. G. S. M. Walker, CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts, www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T201053/index.html, accessed 6/23/11.
[204] Francis Wormald, *Collected Writings I: Studies in Medieval Art from the Sixth to the Twelfth Centuries*, ed. J. J. G. Alexander, T. J. Brown and J. Gibbs (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 105-10.
[205] Barbara C. Raw, *Trinity and Incarnation in Anglo-Saxon Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1, 15-16.

that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son as well as the Father. At the Third Council of Toledo in 589, it was ordered for the first time that the Nicene Creed be chanted as part of the mass; and the creed in the Visigothic liturgy now included the *filioque*. The Eleventh Council of Toledo (675), which also affirmed the *filioque*, produced the most extensive declaration to date of the Church's teaching on the Trinity. This declaration was drawn from earlier doctrinal decisions to address still-prevalent errors and became a touch-point in theological debates with Islam.

Charlemagne, in an overt attack on the Greeks, who repudiated the *filioque*,[206] advocated in *Libri Carolini* (787) for the use of the clause in the Carolingian liturgy, and it was added in 809, only to be revoked by the pope in 812 for the sake of ecumenical unity.[207] Nonetheless, the *filioque* resurfaced in the mid-ninth century in an ongoing struggle between Rome and Constantinople for preeminence, and it was officially reinstated in the creed by Pope Benedict VIII (r. 1012-24). The West's embrace of the *filioque* clause brought about such great East-West enmity that the two halves of Christendom finally broke in the Great Schism of 1054. Nonetheless, the *filioque* doctrine was reaffirmed at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, and at the Council of Florence in 1438-39. It was only at Lyons, however, that "this doctrine assumed dogmatic status among the Latins."[208]

As the *filioque* controversy was roiling, positive contributions were also being made to Trinitarian thought. John Damascene ("of Damascus") in the eighth century originated the

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[206] They believed it jeopardized the full equality of the Spirit. Declan Marmion and Gesa Thiessen, "The Revival of Trinitarian Theology," in *Trinity and Salvation: Theological, Spiritual and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. Marmion and Thiessen, 8, n. 10.
[207] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 279; and Georges H. Tavard, *The Vision of the Trinity* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 93.
[208] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 281.

term *perichoresis*, which in Greek signifies the mutual indwelling or interpenetration of the three persons of the Trinity. This term was adopted by the Latin West, where it was translated as *circumincessio* ("running around") or *circuminsessio* ("indwelling" or "coexistence")[209] and was also eventually affirmed at the Council of Florence. The ancient notion of *perichoresis*, although coined by John Damascene, has resonances with the Cappadocians and reappears in medieval visionary literature, especially strongly in Julian of Norwich's image of mutual enclosure within the Trinity. The term *perichoresis* has also been retrieved and popularized in recent treatments of the Trinity. Social Trinitarians—those who put emphasis on the relationality of the Three—have particularly embraced the term. Presbyterian theologian Daniel Migliore, for instance, characterizes Trinitarian *perichoresis* as "a *koinonia* of persons in love" and an "exquisite divine dance."[210]

Trinitarian Theology in the High and Late Middle Ages (1050-1500)

After a relatively fallow period in the development of Trinitarian theology, "the eleventh and twelfth centuries saw a remarkable flourishing of Trinitarian devotion and Trinitarian iconography" as well as of Trinitarian scholarship. The twelfth-century renaissance in Trinitarian thought and thirteenth-century developments in scholastic, mystical, and vernacular theologies were followed by an "explosion of [Trinitarian] images for private devotion that occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries."[211] That the Trinity was "the point of departure of every theological enterprise" was not in dispute in the

[209] Brant Pelphrey, *Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1982), 108-09.
[210] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 70.
[211] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, xiii, 23-25.

Middle Ages,[212] whether among visionary or academic types. Scholastic theologians in fact devoted more pages to the Trinity than to any other topic; but thorny intellectual problems remained.

The major questions in medieval scholarly debate about the Trinity revolved around old issues: 1) How can the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be distinct and yet identical, one God? 2) Is there one consciousness or three in the Godhead (a precursor to the "social Trinity" question)? 3) How can divine production, especially the begetting (not creating) of the Son and Holy Spirit, be made intelligible? and 4) How should Augustine's psychological model be applied?[213] The latter was a special preoccupation of the Neoplatonists and, from the thirteenth century on, the Franciscans, but Augustine's model was affirmed by most Latin theologians.[214] (Mystical and visionary writers of the same period addressed the first question, although in less academic language and in more pictorial and affective ways, with more interest in the *why* and less in the *how*; and they tended more toward social models than psychological ones.)

Academic theologians drew on all the metaphysical and philosophical resources available to them; different writers dealt with the same problems but went at it from various angles.[215] In answer to the first question above, there were two main approaches: the "relation account" and the "emanation account" of personal distinction in the Trinity. In the relation account (held by Aquinas and, to some degree, Bonaventure), the distinction between the persons of the Trinity is constituted by their opposed relations to each other:

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[212] Peter Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics: Developments of Latin Trinitarian Theology between c. 1075 and c. 1160," in *Trinitarian Theology in the Medieval West*, ed. Pekka Kärkkäinen (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Seura, 2007), 12.
[213] Russell L. Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), abstract.
[214] Pekka Kärkkäinen, *Trinitarian Theology in the Medieval West* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Seura, 2007), 9.
[215] Ibid.

"That the Father has a Son and that the Son has a Father, these are the differences that make the Father and the Son personally distinct from each other."[216] In the emanation account (held by the Franciscans, Bonaventure, John Pecham, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus) these relations must be grounded in some logically prior distinction between the way that each person "emanates" or is originated: "On the emanation account, the Father is the divine essence in a fundamentally different way than the Son is, and the Holy Spirit is the very same divine essence in a third totally different way, these three different ways being how each one originates or has being."[217] The psychological analogy was especially important to this school.

In the age of scholasticism, monastic piety and reliance on scripture, liturgy, and the Fathers were not necessarily abandoned: "The philosophical nature of the discussion … should not obscure the fact that the intense interest with which later-medieval theologians approached the issue [of the Trinity] is an indication primarily of the immense *religious* importance it had for them."[218] Anselm of Bec (ca. 1033-1109), a Benedictine monk who became Archbishop of Canterbury, developed a way of theological thinking that merged the monastic reception of revelation with explanations from reason. This he expressed in his famous dictum "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*), in which *intellectum* is understanding beyond reason (connected with *sapientia*/wisdom), as opposed to *ratio* (reason connected with *scientia*/knowledge).

The doctrine of the Trinity continued to be a puzzle for even the finest philosophical minds, including that of Anselm. He was, like theologians before him, humbled by the task

[216] Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, 9.
[217] Ibid., 17.
[218] Ibid., 1.

of making philosophical sense of the Trinity, and had to acknowledge that "because of its deep and incomprehensible nature, [it] does not admit of explanation."[219] Anselm in fact criticized "dialecticians" who forged ahead in difficult theological matters—like the question of how God could be both a number of persons and yet a single God—without a firm foundation of faith: "Since they are unable to understand intellectually things the Christian faith professes, and with foolish pride think that there cannot in any way be things that they cannot understand, with unspeakable rashness [the dialecticians] dare to argue against such things rather than with humble wisdom admit their possibility."[220]

This passage is a part of Anselm's argument against Roscelin, whom Anselm accused of tritheism and who spurred Anselm to greater philosophical precision, using a variation of Augustine's psychological analogy. (In Anselm's terms: the Godhead is conscious of itself, recognizes itself, and loves itself).[221] But Anselm also went beyond Augustine in his clarification of Trinitarian terminology, "certainly narrowing the focus of theology on the 'inner' Trinity"[222] while shifting focus away from the economic Trinity and its mission of salvation. Questions Anselm grappled with that would continue into the high Middle Ages included how to deal with gaps and inconsistencies in the Fathers and creeds, and to update them for the current age; how, and to what extent, to use logic and dialectic; and how to deal with Greek differences. In regard to the latter, Anselm addressed the *filioque* controversy

[219] Anselm of Bec, *Monologion* 64; quoted in Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 10.
[220] Anselm of Bec, *On Faith in the Trinity and on the Incarnation of the Word, against the Blasphemies of Roscelin* I; quoted in Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 19.
[221] Anselm of Bec, *Monologion* 67, in *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. S. N. Deane (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1966), 132. See also Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.8.11 and 12.15.
[222] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 24.

afresh, "proving" the Holy Spirit's procession from the Son with passages of scripture and analogies from nature.[223]

From Anselm on, the high medieval period was marked by further efforts to formalize and clarify Trinitarian doctrine.[224] But more mystical approaches to the Trinity were revived as well, beginning especially with Cistercian abbot William of St. Thierry (ca. 1080-1148), a contemporary and friend of Bernard of Clairvaux whose Trinitarian mysticism and theology is found primarily in his *Mirror of Faith* (*Speculum fidei*) and its companion volume, *The Enigma of Faith* (*Aenigma fidei*). While Augustine's watchword was *credo ut intelligam* ("I believe so that I may understand") and Anselm's was, similarly, *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding"), William held the credo of the mystic: *credo ut experiar* ("I believe so that I may experience").[225] This was a credo the medieval visionaries, including William's contemporary Hildegard, would have affirmed. Like Hildegard and many of the later visionary theologians, William was both spiritual and didactic, both mystical and speculative. He was not, however, a visionary or imaginative theologian—that is, he did not describe what he "saw" in his mystical communion with God, nor did he draw verbal or visual pictures of his ideas. Although he speaks of seeing and vision, he does so in the spiritual sense (as in Augustine's top category of vision[226]).

At the center of William's Trinitarian theology was the soul's "entry into trinitarian communion" made possible by the "imprint of the Trinity on the soul," which William understood to be the Augustinian memory, reason, and will; as well as faith, hope, and

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[223] Ibid., 23.
[224] Ibid., 21-22.
[225] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 18. See also Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 213.
[226] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 187.

love.[227] The human soul, according to William, though blighted by sin, was restored by this trinity of virtues, gaining greater knowledge of both God and self in the process.[228] William sometimes expressed this union with the triune God in intimate terms: "Such is the astounding generosity of the Creator to the creature; the great grace, the unknowable goodness, the devout confidence of the creature for the Creator, the tender approach, the tenderness of a good conscience, that man somehow finds himself in their midst, in the embrace and kiss of the Father and Son, that is, in the Holy Spirit."[229] For William—as for Hildegard, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch, and Julian—the ascent to and union with God was the work of the whole Trinity. Like all the women visionaries under discussion here, and like Augustine, William also liked to use various triads as analogies for the Trinity and the human person's progress to union with God.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) likewise took a mystical and doxological approach to the Trinity: "This mystery is a great one and is to be venerated, not investigated. How is plurality in unity? Is it by this unity, or is [this unity] itself in plurality? To investigate into this is careless, to believe it is piety, and to know it means to live, that is, to live eternally."[230] Bernard and William both "insisted that the mystery of the Trinity [given its ineffability] does not yield to the faculty of human reason, but is rather to be approached by way of loving contemplation."[231] Bernard's fame was so great by the time that Hildegard began to write that she corresponded with him, seeking approval and support for her visions, which he

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[227] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 9-11; see William of St. Thierry, *The Mirror of Faith*, trans. Thomas X. Davis (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 3-7.
[228] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 16.
[229] William of St. Thierry, *Mirror of Faith*, 80.
[230] Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione* 5.18, in *Five Books on Consideration: Advice to a Pope*, trans. John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 163.
[231] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 5-6.

gave.[232] Her mystical approach to the great theological mysteries, along with her concern for orthodoxy and obedience to the Church, were in keeping with his own. New directions in academic theology would present challenges, however.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) was the nemesis of both William of St. Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux. At the root of the conflict among these three was "the perennial question of the relationship of faith and reason, and the proper application of Anselm's notion of theology as faith seeking understanding … in the exploration of the mysteries of faith … especially pertinent in Trinitarian theology."[233] Abelard relied on metaphysics and logic in theology; and with Gilbert of Poitiers and others he would continue the academic analysis of the Trinity *in se* begun by Anselm, dedicating the second half of his scholarly life predominantly to the doctrine of the Trinity.[234] While Abelard never abjured scripture or the Fathers, he rejected mere fideism, holding that every article of faith should meet standards of philosophical coherence and intelligibility. Furthermore, Abelard felt that "mastering the doctrine of the Trinity in an intellectually challenging manner served in particular as an excellent advertisement for a teacher."[235] Given the difficulty of the doctrine, it is not surprising that one's Trinitarian theology should be used as an intellectual status symbol. Theology in the Middle Ages could be, and was, used as a tool for personal promotion and showmanship.

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[232] Hildegard of Bingen, Letter 1, in *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Mark Atherton (New York: Penguin, 2001), 3-5.
[233] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 5.
[234] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 25-26.
[235] Ibid., 28.

Likewise, theological disputes could and did revolve around personal politics. Although Abelard was mostly Augustinian,[236] he introduced some innovations to existing Trinitarian theology and was twice put on trial for heresy. His error (alleged by Bernard and his followers) was "the gradual distinction of power within the Trinitarian persons" and "assertion that the procession of the Holy Spirit is not predicated as being 'of the substance of the Father'" (in other words, he verged on subordinationism and was "weak" on the *filioque*).[237] Abelard was also suspected of falling into modalism when he described the Father as Power begetting, the Son as Wisdom begotten (and the only incarnate member of the Trinity), and the Holy Spirit as love having proceeded from the Father and the Son. Bernard and others reproached Abelard more generally for being too reliant on logic in explaining divine revelation, specifically the inner life of the Trinity.

Abelard was consequently forced at the Synod of Soissons in 1121 to throw onto a fire the book (*Theologia*) containing his Trinitarian theology. He was tried again at the Council of Sens in 1141. But neither trial ultimately came to anything: "both [trials] were pushed forward by Bernard of Clairvaux and both terminated by papal decisions."[238] Those conducting the trials could not, finally, prove Abelard heretical on theological grounds, but said he should be condemned anyway "because he had [failed] to ask for a papal *imprimatur* before publishing and distributing [his book]."[239] So here, as with the trial of Gilbert of Poitiers at Reims in 1148 (also initiated by Bernard), Trinitarian theology was as much about politics, bureaucracy, and authority—not to mention competitive sport—as it was about theology, its methods, and its ecclesial and pastoral applications. The unfortunate

[236] Ibid.
[237] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 33-34.
[238] Ibid., 37.
[239] Ibid., 28.

implication of these academic conflicts is the power of Trinitarian theology to tear the church apart and cause social upheaval.[240]

In the meantime, the theological issues that Anselm had contended with were still on the table, namely, logic and terminology pertaining to the Trinity, the relationship of unity and plurality within the Godhead, the usefulness and reliability of the Fathers, and the *filioque*. Systematic theology was needed to order and resolve these questions. With Abelard and Peter Lombard (ca. 1100-1160), theology became professionalized, meeting the need for synthesis, comprehensiveness, and philosophical plausibility. Lombard, whose *Sentences* (of which the first book is "On the Mystery of the Trinity") was the primary theological textbook for generations to follow, demurred somewhat at the difficult task of explaining the doctrine of the Trinity: "We are not entitled to research into the divine majesty, to set juridical limits against the divine power, [or] to limit the infinite by circumscribing its mode of being."[241] While Lombard and other scholastic theologians upheld the Trinity as an article of faith, they still felt the need to explicate it, either for people who did not accept it as revealed truth or for those who wanted a rationally credible faith. Lombard's expressed desire as a theologian and teacher was thus to "enabl[e] his followers to draw upon the tradition of Trinitarian thought presented in a thoroughly systematized form."[242]

The Victorines (primarily Hugh, Richard, and Thomas), scholarly monks of the Augustinian Abbey of St. Victor in Paris, were among the theologians most influential for the women visionary writers, as they took both a contemplative and intellectual approach to

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[240] Constant J. Mews, "The Council of Sens (1141): Abelard, Bernard, and the Fear of Social Upheaval," *Speculum* 77 (2002): 342-82.
[241] Peter Lombard, *Sentences* Id.33.2.1, in *The Sentences, Book I: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), 84.
[242] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 57.

knowledge about God. Influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius, they understood this knowledge to be grasped at four levels of *ratio*: 1) that which is from reason (*ex ratione*)—necessary knowledge such as "God exists"; 2) that which is according to reason (*secundum rationem*)—probable knowledge; 3) that which is above reason (*supra rationem*)—"admirable" knowledge; and finally 4) that which is against reason (*contra rationem*)—things that shouldn't be believed.[243] Comprehension of a doctrine like that of the Trinity might be grasped at all of the first three levels, with the third being the highest and most desirable.

Hugh of St. Victor (ca. 1096–1141) wrote his magnum opus, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* (*De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*), around 1133. In it, Hugh "depicted the Christian experience as a process of restoration within human history situated in the Incarnation, effected by means of the sacraments, and ultimately completed in the union beyond history of the individual with God"[244]—a description just as apt for Hildegard's *Scivias*, written about ten years later. *De Sacramentis*, like the *Scivias*, is a dogmatic synthesis that covers the theological waterfront, with emphasis on the centrality of the Incarnation, the human as image of the triune God (*vestigia trinitatis*), and salvation as the joint effort of God and humanity.[245] Hugh reworks Augustine's psychological model of the Trinity, as well as his triad of power-wisdom-love, adding "cosmological insight" and an emphasis on soteriology.[246] In Hugh's schema, the Trinity is manifest as power (*potentia*), wisdom (*sapientia*), and love (*benignitas*) in both the Godhead itself and the human soul,

[243] McGinn, *Flowering*, 332, n. 120.
[244] Michael T. Girolimon, "Hugh of St. Victor's *De sacramentis Christianae fidei*: The Sacraments of Salvation," *Journal of Religious History* 18 (1994): 127-38.
[245] Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith (De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei)* I.2.13 and I.3, ed. and trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1951), 34, 41-61.
[246] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 45.

linking the two eternally together. Hugh tended "to leave the more technical questions of the day unresolved" but his "lively description of the loving relationship of the persons [of the Trinity] including their joint operation concerning redemption"[247] was influential for future generations of theologians, both academic and visionary.

Whereas Hugh was most interested in the economic Trinity, Richard of St. Victor (d. ca. 1173), in his *De Trinitate* written around 1162, turned his focus to the immanent Trinity, with an expressed desire to clarify the inner life of the Godhead through both speculative reasoning and contemplation.[248] Richard retrieved Augustine's idea of interpersonal love as an analogy for the Trinity, which Augustine had set aside in favor of the psychological analogy; but Richard took a more mystical approach. Drawing from "exemplaristic metaphysics" and the "metaphysics of participation," Richard saw human love as a reflection of Trinitarian love, consisting of the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love Shared (*dilector*, *dilectus*, *condilectus*)[249]—an idea that influenced visionary writers as well as Bonaventure.[250] Explaining the same essential idea in more academic terms, Richard described the Trinity as a "triad of symmetrical and consubstantial interpersonal relations between coequals, where there is no hierarchy."[251]

In terms of imagistic depiction of the Trinity, the women visionary writers were more like Hugh than Richard, whose presentation of the Trinity in both words and pictures was more architectonic than affective. Hugh, like Hildegard in particular, was concerned to represent the Trinity in a way that was at the same time concrete, intensely personal, and

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[247] Ibid., 48.
[248] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 48-49.
[249] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 24.
[250] Ibid., 26.
[251] Ibid., 24-26.

cosmic (that is, removed from ordinary reality). Thomas of St. Victor (ca. 1200-46), a generation later, was the last major Victorine mystical theologian, connecting the twelfth-century contemplative tradition and the "new mysticism" of the thirteenth century, which was both apophatic and affective. In this he has resonances with the thirteenth-century visionary women under study here, whose goal (expressed both "positively" and "negatively") was union with the whole Trinity.[252]

From the 1140s on, the papacy's interest in detecting heresy and defining orthodoxy, along with a growing apocalyptic emphasis in Christian theology, helped give rise to the growing popularity of Trinitarian theology. Ideas about the Trinity both served as a useful litmus test of orthodoxy and provided a suitably broad, all-encompassing template for speculation on last things.[253] This was the context for Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), who fell afoul of papal censure but created an influential apocalyptic Trinitarian theology designed to show Christian history's unfolding order in three stages or "ages": the age of the Father from Creation through the Old Testament period, the age of the Son from the Incarnation to 1260, and the age of the Holy Spirit from 1260 to the end of the world, which was believed to be near.[254] Joachim was posthumously condemned for tritheism at the Fourth Lateran Council,[255] but his diagram of the Trinity (depicted with both geometrical and botanical images) continued to be influential, not only in theological circles but also in literary ones.[256]

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[252] McGinn, *Flowering*, 78.
[253] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 25.
[254] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 29.
[255] This council, in 1215, also reaffirmed the *filioque* and condemned Albigensian dualism, affirming both the spiritual and corporeal nature of the Trinity.
[256] Dante (d. 1321) placed Joachim in Paradise, in which Dante's climactic vision involved three circles of three colors, similar to Joachim's depiction of the Trinity. See *Paradiso* 14.1.28 and 33.115-20, ed. and trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 120-27, 290-97.

In sum, Catholic theology in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, despite efforts at precision of grammar and logic, "had to be done within an undeniable plurality of meanings and approaches … by the ongoing search for a reliable hermeneutics of tradition."[257] Many academic issues, however, were left to the next generation of university scholars. The Trinitarian theology written down especially in the thirteenth-century *summae* would reflect the full impact of both Dionysian and Aristotelian writings,[258] at that point more widely available, adding layers of philosophical complexity and controversy to the ongoing debate.

Bonaventure (ca. 1221-74), a Franciscan mystic and scholar drawing on both Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, described the Trinity as the highest perfection and an object of faith that could not be proved by reason alone.[259] He equated the triune God with goodness that was "naturally and necessarily self-diffusive,"[260] and thus eternally fecund, communicative, productive, and expressive. While Bonaventure adapted Augustinian theology, especially the idea of divine emanations, he preferred Richard of St. Victor's "love analogy" of the Trinity (*dilector*, *dilectus*, *condilectus*) to Augustine's psychological model. Bonaventure took further than any of his predecessors the idea of creation as an aspect of the triune God's self-expressiveness: "the cosmos emanates, in and through the Word, from the Trinitarian exemplar and itself reflects the Trinitarian order at various levels and degrees. … Thus the world as a whole is a vast symbol of the Trinity."[261] These likenesses in creation, according to Bonaventure, could take radically different forms, thus reflecting the internal

[257] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 58.
[258] Ibid., 59.
[259] Bonaventure, *Commentary on the First Book of Sentences*, q. 5, art. 2. Quoted in Van Nieuwenhove, "Trinity, Faith and Mysticism," 67-68.
[260] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 58.
[261] Ibid.

diversity of the Trinity: an idea that visionary women (most explicitly Hadewijch) would also affirm.

Albert the Great, though a Dominican, shared Bonaventure's "speculative Dionysianism."[262] His student Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74), however, strongly influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, "refashioned the richly experiential and intuitive approach to the mystery of the Trinity that was the Augustinian inheritance" and was more "concerned for systematic intelligibility of the sacred mysteries in a way that was never part of Augustine's intention."[263] Aquinas, who did not like the interpersonal love analogy for the Trinity,[264] developed a more exacting metaphysical psychological analogy. He also made original contributions to Trinitarian theology, especially "his adoption of the Aristotelian category of 'relation' to explain the persons"[265] of the Trinity, showing that each of the three was needed for the others to be what they are.[266] Thus he brought "gains in intellectual clarity about the divine perfections."[267] Scholastic preoccupation with technical precision had its costs, however, in that philosophical language had the tendency to mute scriptural revelation. It also tended, intentionally or not, to mute the pastoral concerns that were explicit both in earlier theology and among contemporary visionary writers, like Hadewijch and the women of Helfta.

But even Aquinas admitted his intellectual limitations, citing Augustine: "When we speak of the Trinity," Aquinas said, "we must proceed with care and with befitting modesty. As Augustine says, 'Nowhere is error more harmful, the quest more toilsome, the finding

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[262] McGinn, *Flowering*, 79.
[263] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 20.
[264] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 149.
[265] Tavard, *Vision of the Trinity*, 81.
[266] Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 40, a. 1 (through q. 43), in Shapcote, 17:213-37.
[267] O'Collins, Tripersonal *God*, 149.

more fruitful.'"[268] While many modern scholars have blamed Aquinas and other academic theologians of this period for producing "the indigestible fruits of scholasticism"[269] that would be carried into textbooks and catechisms for centuries to come, others argue that "even Aquinas, at whose door many of the problems with an abstract and intellectualist approach to theology have been put, evinces a remarkable integration of theology and spirituality,"[270] with an eye always on humans and their salvation. Anselm Min has argued that Aquinas' theology was indeed focused primarily on the Trinity as a vehicle of grace and providence, which the three Persons both share and enact: "As infinite goodness, God creates, adopts, and redeems creatures so as to admit them into the mutual love of the Father and the Son, in the Holy Spirit."[271] Aquinas's theology thus, Min argues, has both pastoral and devotional applications.[272]

Some scholars, like Etienne Gilson, have identified a shift in Trinitarian theology in the fourteenth century—especially given the destabilizing effects of the Black Death, the papal schism, and other fourteenth-century calamities—to "pessimistic fideism"; while others, like Russell Friedman, see more positive developments.[273] Friedman says that there was in the fourteenth century "an increasing worry that the previous century's Trinitarian theology had failed in its duty to divine simplicity" with its tedious efforts to rationalize the three persons of the Trinity and reconcile the "relations" and "emanations" schools of

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[268] Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 31, art. 2, in Shapcote, 17:172-78; citing Augustine's *De Trinitate* 1.3.
[269] Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 150.
[270] Marmion and Thiessen, "Revival of Trinitarian Theology," 1. See Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 32, a.1, in Shapcote, 17:175-78.
[271] Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 77. See also Min, "Retrieving Aquinas's Natural Theology as a Trinitarian Theology of Creation: Natural Theology Today," in *Issues in Medieval Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Dales*, ed. Nancy van Deusen (Ottawa: The Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2001), 169-76.
[272] Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 76-77.
[273] Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought*, chaps. 3-4.

thought. John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265-1308), for example, working from a firm belief in the intelligibility of the triune God, spilled much ink on those subjects. In contrast, William of Ockham (ca. 1288-1348), in an effort to move past previous categories and preserve God's simplicity, eschewed detailed explanations of the Trinitarian processions.

Friedman does, however, acknowledge a strain of doctrinal agnosticism or fideism in the fourteenth century, which said in effect that "the divine persons just *are* distinct from each other, and no mechanism need be given to explain their distinction."[274] In contrast to Ockham and other theologians of the fourteenth century who wished to set aside or cut away (as with Ockham's razor) theological ambiguity, the visionary theologians of the same period (like Julian of Norwich), with their effluence of images for the Trinity, might be said to have looked for new and ever *more* ambiguous ways of presenting Trinitarian faith, including bodily, natural, and feminine images.

Medieval theologies of the Trinity, even among schoolmen, were therefore not univocal or only interested in the immanent or essential Trinity (God *in se*). Those theologians working in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, like Anselm, Abelard, William of St. Thierry, and the Victorines, combined mystical, affective, and devotional treatments of the Trinity with logical ones. The relationship between rational and affective theology remained open throughout the Middle Ages, and at no point were reason and debate alone accepted as a means to pursue orthodox truth, especially about God. As McGinn says, all medieval theology "involved both the *intellectus fidei* [theological study] and the *experientia amoris* [love for God], though in different configurations."[275] It is not accurate to characterize all scholastic theologians as preoccupied with the unity of the Godhead at the

[274] Ibid., 143.
[275] McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 9.

expense of its triunity, or with God's impassibility at the expense of God's relationship with humanity. But given the importance of logically coherent dogma against heretics, schismatics, and nonbelievers, university theologians did tend to be concerned mainly with logical proofs of Catholic truth-claims.

Scholastic theology did not show much interest in the physical, embodied individual or community as *imago* or *imitatio trinitatis*, and it thus tended to lose sight of "how the image of the triune God in us is a programme to be lived."[276] Rather it remained, as Rahner put it, remote from the actual events of salvation history experienced on the ground.[277] And it certainly is true (as feminist theologians have pointed out) that, with rare exceptions among male theologians—Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Meister Eckhart—the three persons of the Trinity were always described or depicted as male, reinforcing the idea that women may only be considered images of God in a derivative way, if at all.

As medieval theologians sought to crystallize their beliefs in order both to unify the Church and to combat heresy, Church doctrine lost much of the flexibility it may once have had—at least in academic circles. Especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the relative overemphasis on the immanent Trinity and the reliance on metaphysics led to an official theology that had "little practical significance for Christian life."[278] Medieval women's visionary literature, in contrast, was characterized by a flexibility of Trinitarian ideas, a balance of the economic (earthly) and immanent (transcendent) Trinity, and generous expression of the practical significance of the doctrine within Christian life and community. These characteristics will be featured in chapters 4-7.

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[276] Hill, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 150.
[277] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 37.
[278] Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus*, 35.

Chapter 3: The Holy Trinity in Medieval Art and Iconography

Like any kind of religious art or iconography, images of the Trinity "always interact with the faith context of each epoch and reflect the theological, personal, historical and social concerns of that context."[279] Religious art can thus be "a way of learning the ropes of [any given] community" and its preoccupations.[280] Medieval visionaries, as products of their time and place, expressed revelations and insights that were "grounded in a prior familiarity with doctrinal formulations as well as iconographic and theological expressions of the mystery [of the Trinity] … evident to varying degrees."[281] In other words, although many of their images were *sui generis*, they derived much of their thought from traditional sources.[282] So did other medieval artists and iconographers.

Prior to the fifteenth century, the two most important images in Christian art were the crucifixion and the Madonna and child. The Trinity, when it was depicted, tended to have a doctrinal rather than devotional character, with emphasis on the unity and equality of the Three, as in the simple equilateral triangle.[283] A good figural example of this emphasis is from the twelfth-century *Hortus deliciarum*, an illuminated manuscript produced at the Hohenburg Abbey, Alsace, by the abbess Herrad of Landsberg. In this image, three identical men sit side by side on a bench holding a scroll that reads *Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*: "Let us make humans to our image and likeness," from Genesis

[279] Marmion and Thiessen, "Revival of Trinitarian Theology," 4.
[280] John Drury, *Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and Their Meanings* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 36.
[281] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, xii.
[282] Tobin, "Mechthild of Magdeburg and Meister Eckhart," 52.
[283] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 247.

1:26.[284] Medieval depictions of the Trinity were less varied than those of Jesus or Mary because, of the three persons of the Godhead, only the earthly Jesus had physical form; and so "they [depictions of the Trinity] were expressions of human inadequacy in the face of a mystery."[285] As art historian John Drury has said, "Christianity has always believed that exchange is at the centre of life. God as Trinity is its doctrinal heart. But the image of the Madonna and child has always, for obvious and deeply human reasons, been more popular. It has therefore been more painted."[286]

At the beginning of his *De mystica theologia*, Pseudo-Dionysius includes a hymn to the Trinity, "higher than any being, any divinity, any goodness!" If the absolute transcendence of the Trinity puts into question all human language, according to Dionysius, this is *a fortiori* true of attempts to picture the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[287] Nevertheless, it seemed worthwhile to try. The classical and medieval assumption about visual images, according to Mary Carruthers, was that "while one certainly can retain matters from listening alone, … it is always made easier and more secure when supported by a visual image [*pictura*],"[288] whether verbal or material. Religious pictures were meant to have practical application, and the use of *picturae* was "a conscious rhetorical decision, in keeping with well-established conventions of oratory [and iconography]."[289] Carruthers and McGinn have both argued that an image received in *visio* (which can be translated "visualization" as well as "vision"), when put down on paper, was not merely illustration; it was argument, or necessary expression, or manifestation of theological insight.

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[284] Ibid.
[285] Raw, *Trinity and Incarnation*, 143.
[286] Drury, *Painting the Word*, 36.
[287] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 186.
[288] Carruthers, "Moving Images in the Mind's Eye," 288.
[289] Ibid., 289.

Whether or not it has been a difficult and relatively unpopular subject, a great many pictures of the Trinity have been produced over the last two thousand years. At the Index of Christian Art at Princeton University, the main repository of Christian images through the fifteenth century, there are 1,240 images of the Trinity on record in a variety of compositions and media. Many people, therefore, have felt compelled to capture (or try to capture) this mystery in symbols and pictures—just as there have been many who have tried to capture it in words—despite the impossibility.[290] As a means of exegesis, religious images interpret and construct theology that will both "form" and "inform" the viewer; they may have both a spiritual and didactic function.[291] As art historian Barbara Raw has said, medieval pictures of the Trinity thus do more than explain and comment on the doctrine: "they reveal something beyond themselves and invite a response from those who view them."[292]

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the Trinity was depicted in Christian art and iconography over time, how those depictions changed, and what they might reveal. This will set the stage for the discussion that follows on how the images (whether verbal or visual) of medieval women visionaries compare to the depictions they were likely to have seen or read in their own contexts—on a church wall or in the pages of a psalter, for instance—and what their own images might reveal.

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[290] According to McGinn, there was an "impossible, but still apparently necessary, desire to picture the unknowable Trinity" (in "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 186).
[291] Jacki Price-Linnartz, *Seeing the Triune God: Trinitarian Theology in Visual Art* (Duke Divinity School, Th.M. thesis, 2009), 2.
[292] Raw, *Trinity and Incarnation*, 169.

Depictions of the Trinity in the Early Church (through the Fourth Century)

Although the names of the three persons of the Trinity, their attributes, and their functions appear frequently in the New Testament and in the liturgical formulae of the early Church, "symbols representing the idea of the Holy Trinity were not so common in the early days of Christianity as one might expect."[293] There was, in fact, very little public Christian art at all before Constantine because of the illegality of Christianity in the Roman Empire. The Christian iconography that does appear during this time was "incomplete and accidental, taking initial steps in various directions, retaining a few of the results, and quickly abandoning others."[294] Like ante-Nicene theology, art of the same period tended to rely on biblical images and to emphasize the divinity of the Father, moving outward from there.[295]

Early Christian iconography was resistant to anthropomorphisms for the Father, who was believed to be beyond human vision and knowability. There is, furthermore, no conclusive evidence that the Holy Spirit—of lesser theological interest in the ante-Nicene period—was depicted until the fourth century.[296] Because Jesus had physical form, Christological art, like that of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, was relatively more common than Trinitarian images *per se* (or than images of the Father and Spirit alone) in the first four hundred years of Christianity. There has been debate in art historical circles about the existence and intent of Trinitarian images before the legalization of Christianity in 313 and the formulations of the fourth- and fifth-century ecumenical councils—after which Trinitarian images, shaped by the formulations themselves, would be on public display.

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[293] F. R. Webber, *Church Symbolism: An Explanation of the More Important Symbols of the Old and New Testament, the Primitive, the Mediaeval and the Modern Church*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1971), 39.
[294] Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 112.
[295] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 262.
[296] John Brainerd MacHarg, *Visual Representations of the Trinity: An Historical Survey* (Cooperstown, NY: Arthur H. Crist Publishing Company, 1917), 22.

While a few triangles appear in the Roman catacombs,[297] for example, it is uncertain whether those triangles were meant to represent the Trinity or if they were just incidental.[298]

Later depictions of three biblical figures (the three visitors to Abraham, a type known as the *philoxenia*; the three companions of Daniel in the fiery furnace; or the three magi, for instance) may or may not have been intended as Trinitarian analogues (Figure 3.1). Some art historians have argued that a carving on a fourth-century Roman sarcophagus, of three similar bearded men in bas-relief, is the earliest figural depiction of the Trinity[299] (Figure 3.2). Funeral art as a genre—which would include most Trinitarian images prior to the fifth century—is in any case meant to be conservative and familiar, not aimed at giving people an "existential shock, at pushing them toward new awareness of self or toward a breakthrough in the investigation of the mystery of life."[300] This is, in fact, an apt description of most images of the Trinity in medieval art and iconography, which were formulaic and predictable; and it is a point of divergence from the medieval visionaries, whose images do push boundaries, even to the point of "existential shock."

Caution in depicting the Godhead visually, whether symbolically or figurally, was given a theological foundation by Augustine: "The Trinity is invisible in such a way that it cannot be seen [even] by the mind."[301] Yet he couldn't help trying to figure it out both philosophically and visually, as in his *Epistula* 120, in which he speculated that the Trinity is not "like three living masses, even though immense and beautiful, bounded by their proper

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[297] There is an equilateral triangle found in the third-century catacomb of St. Priscilla in Rome, for example (Webber, *Church Symbolism*, 40). But MacHarg argues that the triangle "is found rarely" in the ante-Nicene period, "and its significance is questioned" (MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 27).
[298] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 28: there is "no certain evidence" of images of the whole Trinity before the fourth century.
[299] Tavard, *Vision of the Trinity*, 31; and MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 102.
[300] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 102.
[301] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 186.

limits, … whether with one in the middle, … or in the manner of a triangle with each [side] touching the other."[302] Manicheans, whose dualist theology Augustine rejected, used the equilateral triangle to explain the Trinity; so Augustine abandoned the triangle as a Trinitarian symbol.[303] He settled instead on the image of three interlocking gold rings: three separate entities of one substance.[304]

Trinitarian Images between the Fourth and Twelfth Centuries

From the fifth century on, as theological minds continued to hammer out an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, the impossibility of capturing both the oneness and threeness of God in one image was an ongoing problem. Trinitarian images remained relatively rare until the ninth century and are not frequently attested until the twelfth. Neat geometric shapes representing the Trinity that began to appear in the early Middle Ages did not become an important part of church architecture and ornamentation until the Gothic period.[305] These included the triangle, a circle interwoven with a triangle, three circles, and the repurposed Celtic knot and triple spiral, or triskelion, which had pagan roots. Perhaps the most famous symbol of the Trinity—St. Patrick's shamrock—is traced to the fifth century but peaked in popularity, usually in trefoil shape, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[306] In the Western church, these post-Nicene symbols had polemical as well as decorative purposes,

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[302] Ibid.
[303] "Trinity," in *The Bible and the Saints*, ed. Gaston Duchet-Suchaux and Michel Pastoreau (New York: Flammarion, 1994), 334.
[304] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 9.5.7.
[305] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 158: triangles and circles were an essential part of Gothic representations of the Trinity (twelfth to sixteenth centuries).
[306] When Patrick, according to legend, preached a sermon on the doctrine of the Trinity to the puzzled King Laoghaire of Ireland or, alternately, to his daughters, he supposedly used a three-leaf clover as an illustration.

showing forth the equality of the three persons and the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son (as in the creed's *filioque* clause).[307]

Despite the iconoclast controversies in the late antique and early medieval periods, from at least the fourth century there have been attempts to depict the Trinity in figural ways as well as geometric ones[308]—although these were also few until the ninth century. Such images would by necessity have to lean more toward one aspect of the Trinity or the other, favoring either the unity or distinction of the three persons.[309] Certain iconographic tropes existed for individual members of the Trinity prior to those for the Trinity as a whole. God the Father, for instance, was suggested by a hand reaching down from heaven (often surrounded by a tri-radiated nimbus or rays of light, sometimes with the first three fingers extended), radiant clouds, a throne, or the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH.[310] From the ninth century on, when figural images of God became more widely acceptable, artists drew inspiration from Old Testament personages like the "Ancient of Days" in Daniel 7:9, picturing God the Father as aged and white-bearded but not infirm. He might be a half-figure issuing from the clouds, a full-length figure sitting or standing, or a head with nimbus looking down from heaven; and he might be wearing the apparel of a king or pope.[311]

Portraiture of Christ continued to be most common in this period and included not only the Good Shepherd but also Jesus as a lamb, lion, pelican, vine, fish, or Orpheus; and represented by monograms like the Alpha-Omega and Chi-Rho.[312] (Images of the

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[307] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 6.
[308] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 186.
[309] Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 115-16.
[310] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 16.
[311] W. and G. Audsley, *Handbook of Christian Symbolism* (London: Day and Son, Ltd., 1865), 29-31.
[312] Audsley, *Handbook*, 31-44; and MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 20.

crucifixion are hardly found until the seventh century.[313]) Much less varied were depictions of the Holy Spirit, who appeared almost exclusively as a white dove through the eleventh century, sometimes with a tri-radiated nimbus, a triangular nimbus, or three groups of three rays representing the Trinity.[314] There were rare instances of the Holy Spirit depicted as a lamp, eagle (as on the roof of St. Alban's Abbey),[315] cloud, book, torch, or tongues of flame.[316] The Holy Spirit appears in human form beginning in the tenth century, but such a depiction was not common until the eleventh. The earliest certain occurrence of an image of the Trinity in which all three members have human form is from the tenth century, in a manuscript of Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 988).[317]

Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Visual Images of the Trinity

The Second Council of Nicaea (787) "spoke in favor of representations of the Deity"; but not until the twelfth century were the persons of the Trinity frequently shown in human form.[318] From that point on, there was a variety of types of Trinitarian portraiture—usually some variant of three human figures, or two human figures and a dove[319]—and both geometric and figural depictions of the Trinity were "of very frequent occurrence in all branches of Christian art."[320] Illuminated manuscripts (service books, psalters, Bibles, and private books of devotion, especially Books of Hours from the thirteenth to the sixteenth

[313] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 19. The earliest known image of the crucifixion is from the fifth century, in Santa Sabina, Rome.
[314] Audsley, *Handbook*, 50-57.
[315] Ibid., 44-50.
[316] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 22.
[317] Ibid., 80.
[318] Ibid., 17.
[319] Audsley, *Handbook*, 51.
[320] Ibid., 50.

centuries) are the most important source of medieval pictures of the Trinity.[321] Such illuminations might be part of an ornamental border or initial letter, or might be stand-alone pictures.[322] In the latter, the Trinity might be depicted directly, as the main subject of the picture, or indirectly, as a participant in a larger scene like the Annunciation or the baptism of Christ. Medieval depictions of the Trinity appear in many other media as well: drawings, engravings, carvings, tapestries, window glass, enamel, ivory, and stone. No matter what the medium, artists continued to face the challenges that their predecessors had in depicting a Godhead that was both one and three, divine and human, immanent (God *ad intra*) and economic (God *ad extra*).

Concurrent with the flowering of Trinitarian images and iconography in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was a flourishing of Trinitarian devotion and, as discussed in Chapter 2, renewed interest in Trinitarian theology.[323] Many visual images reflected both the emotional depth and the theological complexity of those movements. The *Gnadenstuhl* iconographic form (also known as the Throne of Mercy, Mercy Seat, or Seat of Grace), which shows God the Father, the dove of the Holy Spirit, and the crucified Christ, was especially popular in the high and late Middle Ages (Figure 3.3).[324] Of the 1,240 images of the Trinity at the Index of Christian Art, about half are of this type, which is first attested in the eleventh century. *Gnadenstuhl* images show both the immanent relationship among the three members of the Trinity and the economy of salvation set in motion by Jesus' crucifixion. Even while being

[321] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 10.
[322] Ibid., 11.
[323] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, xiii.
[324] Ibid.

rather formulaic, they have the potential still to show forth "the dynamic and emotional power of the Trinity's relationality."[325]

Another frequent medieval configuration of the Trinity portrays two male figures and a dove in a horizontal line (Figure 3.4) rather than a vertical line, as in the *Gnadenstuhl*—thus, arguably, better representing the equality of the three "persons," but also sacrificing the sense of Trinity *ad extra* represented in the crucified Christ. This type of image is often referred to as the "co-enthronement" Trinity and is very frequently found within the letter D, for "Dixit," at the beginning of Psalm 110 (109 in the Vulgate), the interchange between two "lords" being interpreted by medieval exegetes as a conversation between God the Father and God the Son (Figure 3.5). A third common type of medieval Trinitarian portraiture shows three identical or nearly identical figures in heaven, often referred to as the "Trinity in glory" (Figure 3.6). This type even better preserves the equality of the three—the Holy Spirit is promoted from dove to man—and also expresses their immanent, coeternal relationship, but again at the expense of the economic sense portrayed by the *Gnadenstuhl*.

All images of the Trinity have their limits, and any figural representation of the Trinity must "circumscribe the persons of the Trinity to specific, bounded, visible bodies, which is a theological stumbling block."[326] It is interesting to see how medieval visionary theologians try to get around this conundrum. Hildegard of Bingen, in her visual depictions of the Trinity, and the other visionary women's verbal "paintings" of the Trinity mostly succeed in avoiding the problem of bodily circumscription, as they relied less on human figures to show forth the mystery and plenitude of the Godhead, using instead a variety of shifting images both human and non-human. Of course, the *Gnadenstuhl*, co-enthronement,

[325] Price-Linnartz, *Seeing the Triune God*, 3.
[326] Ibid.

and "Trinity in glory" images, as their placement in churches and prayer-books indicates, were intended as a focus of contemplation or prayer, not as doctrine. Still, as efforts to represent the doctrine in a public way, they had to be as orthodox as possible.

Geometrical figures like the *scutum fidei* (Shield of Faith, also called the Shield of the Trinity: Figure 3.7) and the Borromean Rings (Figure 3.8), employed in scholastic theological texts, would have served the reverse function—to clarify and reinforce orthodoxy, not necessarily to inspire a devotional response. The *scutum fidei*, a sort of divine heraldic coat of arms, dates from the twelfth century and is most frequently found in thirteenth-century English and French manuscripts.[327] The image of the Borromean Rings dates from the thirteenth century. These images are typical of medieval efforts to diagram the logic of the Trinity, but without any of the warmth or energy of the portraiture. The advantage of the geometric images is, again, that they convey doctrinal purity—the equality and coeternality of the three persons, the double procession of the Holy Spirit, and the unity of the whole—without the limitations of human bodies or the messiness of personal relationships.

Trinitarian Images of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries

The outpouring of private devotion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries "prompted another flourishing of trinitarian iconography, also witnessing to the interconnection between mysticism and the visual arts."[328] While the conventions described above continued, two types of images especially characteristic of the later medieval period

[327] Leroy H. Appleton and Stephen Bridges, *Symbolism in Liturgical Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 102-3.
[328] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, xiii. Tavard, *Vision of the Trinity*, 39: images of the Trinity are "not in essence intellectual" although they have "a noetic aspect."

combined the *Gnadenstuhl* Trinity with the *Pietà* (also known as the "Suffering Trinity" or "Compassion of the Father" by modern scholars: Figure 3.9), or combined the Trinity with the Madonna (Figure 3.10).[329] Until the twelfth century, Jesus was usually alive in depictions of the Trinity; but in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, he was just as often dead, as in both the *Gnadenstuhl* and *Pietà* types. The latter was found as early as the eleventh century, in Saxony, but was not common until the fourteenth[330] and was most popular in the following two centuries in Germany and the Netherlands.[331] Its emphasis on the crucified Christ was consonant with the piety of the time: Books of Hours encouraged a focus on Christ's "salvific wounds"; and the *devotio moderna*, which began in the fourteenth century and flourished in the fifteenth, likewise placed emphasis on Christ's sacrifice for individuals, "which elicits an emotional response and subsequent pious activities."[332]

Books of Hours encouraged Marian devotion as well, expressed in a variety of ways. While very popular, devotional images that combined Mary with the Trinity were not always officially approved. There was opposition among clerics, for example, to the "shrine Madonna" in which Mary contains the whole Trinity (Figure 3.11). Jean Gerson complained that this image falsely suggested that "the whole Trinity took human flesh in the Virgin Mary,"[333] the image's dominant female figure and her physicality presumably compromising the transcendence of the Godhead.[334] Other "quaternities" combined portraits of Mary with

[329] Kärkkäinen, *Trinitarian Theology*, 9; Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 266.
[330] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 80.
[331] Price-Linnarz, *Seeing the Triune God*, 35. In a variation of this type known as the "Paternitas," the Son is pictured as a young child sitting on the Father's lap.
[332] Price-Linnartz, *Seeing the Triune God*, 25.
[333] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 283.
[334] Ibid., 247.

the Trinity in various scenes—the Annunciation, the Coronation, and the Dormition of the Virgin being especially popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[335]

These images portrayed both Mary and the Trinity in familial terms and in a multiplicity of roles. Newman sees this type as a reemergence of the Syriac tradition, which had been repressed:

> Several ancient authors, especially but not exclusively Syriac speakers, had envisaged a Trinity of Father, Mother, and Son, placing the feminine Spirit in the maternal role as a celestial counterpart of Mary. By the fourth century, however, all such traditions had dwindled to insignificance, relegated to the status of obscure heresies or, at best, esoteric countertraditions.[336]

Reasons for this suppression included "Greek disdain for the feminine, the ascendancy of a limited number of creedal formulas, [and] a desire to avoid 'mythological' language that might awaken gnostic or pagan echoes."[337] In Latin Christendom, Newman says, Augustine "sealed the doom of the familial metaphor for nearly a thousand years in the *De Trinitate*," rejecting the Adam-Abel-Eve analogue as too carnal.[338]

The types of Trinity images described above—geometric symbols, the *Gnadenstuhl*, co-enthronement (and other variations on two male figures and a dove), Trinity in glory, *Pietà*, *paternitas*, and Marian—made up the great majority of depictions of the Trinity in the Middle Ages. There can be found, however, more unusual images. One is the tricephalic or trifacial sort, found from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, but especially from the

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[335] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 17.
[336] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 248.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid.

fifteenth to the sixteenth (Figure 3.12).[339] In a fresco at the Church of St. James in Urschalling (Bavaria), not only is the Trinity tricephalic, but the Holy Spirit appears to be a woman (Figure 3.13). In rare instances, the Trinity was portrayed as three linked animals, as in the three hares with shared ears in the cathedrals at Wissembourg, France; Devon, England; and Paderborn, Germany (Figure 3.14).

In W. and G. Audsley's nineteenth-century *Handbook of Christian Symbolism*, a religious symbol is defined as "an exterior formula [i.e., any "sensible or tangible design" employed to convey an idea], the representation of some dogma or religious belief; it is, like the dogma itself, an article of faith."[340] Art historian M. Didron, also in the mid-nineteenth century, described symbols of the Church as "a hieroglyphic record of the changes which the Church has undergone during successive ages, whether produced by external influences, or by heresies generated within herself."[341] These definitions are workable but limited. Modern scholars have expressed greater appreciation for the complexities in depicting the Trinity: "One can suspect that the Trinity cannot be grasped pictorially in its essence, but only represented in its manifestations [missions or attributes]."[342] There is "an element of imaginative engagement," says David Brown, that makes it difficult, or even inappropriate, to apply verbal standards of doctrinal accuracy or orthodoxy to visual images of divine revelation, including that of the Trinity.[343] "Precise theological statements," he says, have

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[339] David Brown, "The Trinity in Art," in *The Trinity: A Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 334.
[340] Audsley, *Handbook*, 41-42.
[341] M. Didron, *Christian Iconography; or, The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. J. Millington, 2 vols., (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1851, repr. 1965), 1:vi.
[342] Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 115.
[343] Brown, "Trinity in Art," 329.

never been the point of religious art and iconography, but rather the production of "visual metaphors that invite further exploration and involvement."[344]

In picturing the Trinity, concurs McGinn, "theological iconographers were not really trying to depict what is by essence unimaginable and unportrayable."[345] They had a more personal aim: As themselves images of the Trinity (*imago Trinitatis*), "they were trying to give fitting praise to the mystery that was the foundation of their faith."[346] Robin Jensen, in *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity*, argues that, given the impossibility of capturing the Trinity in one image, "more is better."[347] In this, Augustine once again provides a theological foundation, as his writings "were used to justify not only the perception of an analogy of the Trinity within the human soul, but the detection of such analogies everywhere."[348]

Because the Trinity is multivalent in its very nature, only multivalent words and images—and the attendant avoidance of literalism and reductionism—will lead to a deeper understanding of such a great mystery. The medieval visionaries under examination in the next four chapters lived by this truth. Both visually and theologically, they provide a great variety and breadth of imagery, found everywhere, to express the importance, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the Holy Trinity.

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[344] Ibid., 330.
[345] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 202.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Robin M. Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), xii.
[348] Brown, "Trinity in Art," 337.

Chapter 4: Hildegard of Bingen's Cosmic Trinity in Twelfth-Century Context

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), a German Benedictine nun, was the most prolific of medieval women writers. She was also an influential public figure in the twelfth-century Rhineland and in the Holy Roman Empire of Frederick Barbarossa. Hildegard's writings fill nine volumes of the CCCM (*Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*) and an entire volume of the *Patrologia Latina* (197), among other editions in print. These writings include letters, songs, biblical commentary, hagiography, a morality play, and herbal medicine, in addition to her trilogy of major visionary works.[349] She shows therein deep knowledge of scripture, the Church Fathers, natural science, classical and religious Latin literature, and the general contours of Neoplatonic philosophy.[350] She herself wrote in Latin, as opposed to the vernacular languages used by the later visionaries in this study, but she reached a broad audience nonetheless. Much of her output was composed for her own community, but much was also directed toward people across the social and political spectrum outside of the convent.

Hildegard had received visions from early childhood.[351] Later in her life, on the advice of her confessor, she began to record them in both words and pictures.[352] Her first

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[349] Maud Burnett McInerney, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), xviii-xix.
[350] Barbara Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 17.
[351] Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179: A Visionary Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.
[352] There has been some scholarly debate about Hildegard's involvement in the composition of the pictures accompanying the texts of the *Scivias* and the *Liber divinorum operum*. Madeline Caviness argues for Hildegard's direct involvement in the production of the pictures—through dictation of the content if not the compositions themselves—and most scholars seem to fall in line with this view. Madeleine Caviness, "Artist: 'To See, Hear, and Know All at Once,'" in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 110-13. The original Rupertsberg *Scivias* (produced ca. 1165) was lost in World War II; but a complete copy of the illuminated manuscript had been made by the nuns at Abtei St. Hildegard, Eibingen, in 1927-33. The *Scivias* images corresponding to this chapter are from that facsimile, reproduced in *The Miniatures from the Book* Scivias*—Know the Ways—of St.*

major volume of theological visions, the *Scivias* (*Know the Ways of the Lord*), was produced in the 1140s, followed within the next thirty years by *Liber vitae meritorum* (*Book of the Rewards of Life* or *Book of Life's Merits*, begun in 1158) and *Liber divinorum operum* (*Book of Divine Works*, begun perhaps around 1163 and completed in 1173).[353] In the "threeness" of the trilogy itself and in the structure and content of each volume, especially the first and third, the Holy Trinity is foundational. Twenty of the twenty-six *Scivias* visions and their illuminations make reference to the Trinity—some at length—as do five of the ten visions described in the *Liber divinorum operum*.[354] These two volumes, along with Hildegard's commentary on the Athanasian Creed and two of her letters addressing questions about the doctrine of the Trinity, will be the main focus of this chapter. Using natural images and communal analogues, Hildegard presents a Trinitarian theology in which the Godhead, the cosmos, the Church, and the individual human being are eternally intertwined.

Following Augustine, and along with her near contemporaries Anselm of Bec, William of St. Thierry, the early Victorines (particularly Hugh and Richard), Peter Abelard, and Joachim of Fiore, among others, Hildegard took on the challenging task of making the invisible and ineffable Trinity understandable and theologically useful. The twelfth century was, after all, the "golden age of Trinitarian reflection in the West";[355] and as Constant Mews

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Hildegard of Bingen, from the Illuminated Rupertsberg Codex, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1977). Images from the *Liber divinorum operum* are facsimiles from the Lucca edition (Biblioteca Statale, MS 1942), made in the early thirteenth century and reproduced in *Liber divinorum operum*, ed. Albert Derolez and Peter Dronke, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 92 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1996). Although this latter manuscript was made after Hildegard's death, Caviness ("Artist," 112) and McGinn ("Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 188) agree that the illuminations, in their basic design, were dictated or suggested by Hildegard herself.

[353] Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 4-9.

[354] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 188, says that "at least four of the twenty-six *Scivias* visions and their illustrations refer to the Trinity, as do two of the ten showings of the *Liber divinorum operum*." But I found many more Trinitarian images and allusions in both works.

[355] Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: Sapientia Press, 2003), xxviii.

has said, "the search for rational analogies to describe Christian doctrine [including that of the Trinity] is a characteristic feature of twelfth-century theology."[356] Most twelfth-century theologians, that is, men who were formally trained, assumed an audience familiar with philosophical argument. Hildegard's images and descriptions of the Trinity, produced through visionary experience, were unique in comparison—her images were thought strange and obscure even by her contemporaries.[357] Although her discourse on the Trinity is characterized by theological complexity, verbal precision, and references to Catholic dogma, her writings are not academic in content or form. Her originality lay in her ability to find metaphors from the heavens, the natural world, and human experience alike to interpret Christian teaching and, often, to apply them to practical and pastoral concerns, making her theology of the Trinity a living force.

As Caroline Walker Bynum and Barbara Newman have both argued, Hildegard was more a prophet, adviser, and teacher than a mystic.[358] The female figures in vision I.1 of *Scivias*, a child whose head is alight with divine fire and a "seer" covered in eyes, represent the virtues of the Fear of the Lord and Poverty of Spirit; but they could also represent Hildegard as child and adult. Within her visionary, often apocalyptic, works Hildegard interpreted scripture at great length; and she showed a special fondness for the Old Testament prophets including Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Daniel, and Joel. Some of her own correspondents compared her, as one who broadcast the word of God to the community, to

[356] Constant Mews, "Religious Thinker: 'A Frail Human Being' on Fiery Life," in Newman, *Voice of the Living Light*, 58.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Caroline Walker Bynum, preface to Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 2; and Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 17.

female Hebrew prophets like Miriam, Deborah, and Judith.[359] Like these figures, Hildegard was reluctant to take on a prophetic role. But also like her biblical forebears, Hildegard finally embraced her calling, issuing strong pronouncements that were metaphysical, experiential, and imaginative, as well as analytical. Although her writings were full of esoteric cosmic imagery, her goals were primarily didactic, moral, and doctrinal.

While she was thoroughly orthodox in her Trinitarian theology, Hildegard put her own visionary spin on orthodoxy, reinterpreting and supporting church doctrine at the same time.[360] As discussed in Chapter 1, a medieval woman who took up a prophetic, preaching, and theological role faced multiple obstacles and, therefore, needed strategies for legitimacy. One sees in Hildegard frequent use of the weakness trope ("*ego paupercula*") typical of women visionaries, and emphasis on the divine origin and authority of her revelations.[361] As for other women visionaries, the benefits that Hildegard's visions conferred upon her were a direct experience of God (the highest authority in both religious and secular realms), a source of unmediated truth, and a form of public validation. For these women, "in cases of conflict, divine authority could override that of a powerful male, such as an abbot, and thus vindicate the visionary."[362] Hildegard did experience conflict in her life, but her visions allowed her to describe her spiritual experience as the "infusion of a new kind of knowledge" that others ignored at their peril.[363]

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[359] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 33.
[360] Bynum, preface to *Scivias*, 2.
[361] *Scivias* III.I. prologue.
[362] Ibid.
[363] Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation," 166; see also Barbara Newman, S*ister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 26-30.

Central to Hildegard's theology was her integration of visionary experience with monastic tradition and exegetical practice.[364] Her three major works share a similar format: each section opens with a description and illustration of the divine revelation that she perceived both visually and aurally, followed by an exegesis of its meaning, and often accompanied as well by an exposition of a relevant passage of scripture.[365] Unlike the visionary records produced by many other mystics and contemplatives, Hildegard's revelations were not ecstatic, nuptial, or erotic; nor was their main purpose to reveal or describe her spiritual life.[366] And although she demanded discipline and rigor from both herself and others, she did not engage, as some others did, in "self-punishing asceticism."[367] Her visions have thus been said to lack a "spirituality of *imitatio Christi*"[368]—the suffering and crucifixion of Christ, while included in her narratives of salvation history, were not among her major themes.

Instead, Hildegard's work is replete with ideas about the human being and the Church as *imitatio trinitatis*. This likeness was for her mostly positive in content—that is, it implied a fruitful union with the Trinity, variously imagined, and was not apophatic, quietist, or self-negating but rather constituted a call to action. Her visions of God overflowed with fully realized, if always shifting, images: "Heaven was opened," she says in the opening Declaration to the *Scivias* upon hearing the voice of "the Living Light, who illuminates the darkness." By writing down her visions, Hildegard "worked with him [God] in great zeal so that [his] hidden miracles might be revealed," not just to herself but to whomever might read

[364] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 187.
[365] Ibid., 188.
[366] Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation," 166-67.
[367] Bynum, preface to *Scivias*, 3.
[368] Ibid.

or listen.[369] God encouraged Hildegard to "burst forth into a fountain of abundance and overflow with mystical knowledge."[370] Incarnational in her theology, with an overarching vision of the divine economy of salvation from creation to eschaton always before her and grounding every vision, Hildegard worked from the assumption that "the visible and temporal is a manifestation of the invisible and eternal."[371] In her envisioning of the Holy Trinity, Hildegard attempted to make the greatest of all the invisible and eternal Christian mysteries visible and temporal; and with great skill and erudition she drew personal, social, and ecclesial implications from it as well.

Hildegard's Twelfth-Century Context

Paris was the most renowned intellectual center in medieval Europe; but the Rhineland was also a "flourishing center of learning" during Hildegard's time.[372] Twelfth-century Germany was also, with the rest of Western Europe, the stage of the Gregorian Reforms and the crusading movement. At the end of her Declaration (the prologue to the *Scivias*), written around the year 1141, Hildegard puts herself into specific political and ecclesial context: "These visions took place and these words were written in the days of Henry, Archbishop of Mainz [who endorsed her writings]; and of Conrad, King of the Romans; and of Cuno, Abbot of Disibodenberg, under Pope Eugenius," a Cistercian monk and student of Bernard of Clairvaux who approved her gifts at the Synod of Trier after she requested official validation of her visionary experience.[373] Hildegard was born not far from

[369] *Scivias*, "Declaration."
[370] *Scivias*, prologue to I.1.67.
[371] *Scivias*, I.3.1.
[372] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 23.
[373] Ibid., 28.

the cathedral city of Mainz, in the village of Bermersheim; she began her monastic career at Disibodenberg, where she became abbess (or, more accurately, *magistra*), and later founded a new convent at Rupertsberg, near Bingen.[374] As a product of the Benedictine tradition, she did not approve of the new methods of scholasticism; and while sharing academic theologians' interest in orthodoxy and precision, Hildegard had little else in common with them. But she reflected the Twelfth-Century Renaissance anyway, by virtue of her encyclopedic knowledge of a variety of topics, her presentation of new knowledge, her confidence, and her intellectual complexity and difficulty.

Gregorian Reform is the most evident contemporary issue in Hildegard's writings. She was especially agitated by clerical marriage and concubinage, simony, pluralism, and the subservience of church prelates to the state.[375] Those ordained to preach, she said, had become lukewarm, sluggish, and timid in "serving God's justice."[376] She held these clerics up to the example of Christ, who was humble and did not pursue "eager embraces or beauty of flesh or earthly riches or gold ornaments or earthly honors."[377] She complained on behalf of Ecclesia, who says: "I conceive and bear many who oppress me, their mother, by heretical, schismatic and useless battles, by robberies and murders, by adultery and fornication, and by many such errors."[378] Hildegard called Frederick Barbarossa a tyrant and chastised him for his role in the papal schism;[379] and she predicted the decline of the authority of the Holy

[374] Flanagan, Hildegard of Bingen, 2-7.
[375] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 20.
[376] *Scivias* I.1.prologue.
[377] *Scivias* I.2.33.
[378] *Scivias* II.3.prologue.
[379] Hildegard of Bingen, Letters 312-316, in *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 112-16.

Roman Empire.[380] In support of reform, she made four preaching tours all over Germany and corresponded with popes, emperors, and prelates. Her whole corpus of visionary writings was shot through with social, political, and ecclesiastical concerns, full of "preaching" as well as teaching. Every cosmic image she presented also had earthly implications, whether for clerical ethics, monastic life, or marriage. Hildegard also promoted the crusading spirit of the times; her preaching tours included one in Cologne against the Cathar heresy.[381]

It is difficult to know what Hildegard read, and thus who influenced her theologically. She rarely cited sources other than scripture, and she could not do so if she wished to keep up her "unlearned" persona, although she surely read as widely as her circumstances allowed. Hildegard would have been familiar with Bible commentaries, the Benedictine Rule, the liturgy, the Church Fathers (including Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory), and the ideas of her own contemporary Bernard of Clairvaux, with whom she corresponded.[382] She seems also to have been familiar with Jewish, Greek, Neoplatonic, and apocalyptic literature;[383] and she may have read Anselm of Bec, Rupert of Deutz, and Hugh of St. Victor.

Anselm (ca. 1033-1109), as Constant Mews has shown, was discussed at length in the annals of Disibodenberg, Hildegard's first monastic home:

> Thus Hildegard was raised at an abbey familiar with one of the most fertile thinkers of Benedictine tradition. At first sight, one cannot imagine a greater contrast than that between St. Anselm's emphasis on reason and Hildegard's

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[380] *Liber divinorum operum* III.10.25, in *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works with Letters and Songs,* ed. Matthew Fox (Santa Fe, N.M.: Bear and Co., 1987), 249-50. Hereafter abbreviated as *Liber*.
[381] Hildegard of Bingen, Letters 15r and 16r, in *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 54-67.
[382] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 44.
[383] Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 90-93.

> insistence on her lack of education and her dependence on divine inspiration. Yet both share a desire to present Christian teaching on the basis of self-evident truths.[384]

Anselm's language was more academic than Hildegard's and more focused on the Godhead *in se* as he tried to work out the terminology of the Trinity (essence, substance, person, relation) and formalize the doctrine. His theology was thus arguably more polemical than spiritual, "giving short shrift to mystery and soteriology."[385] Still, both Anselm and Hildegard put faith before reason and sought *intellectus*, that is, understanding connected with wisdom (*sapientia*) and beyond purely intellectual reason (*ratio*). Both also claimed humility and modesty, given the inscrutability of God. At one point Anselm gave up trying to define the Trinity, calling it *tres nescio quid* ("three I-do-not-know-whats").[386] Like several of the ante-Nicene theologians (Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Tertullian), Anselm sometimes used images from nature as analogues for the Trinity—spring, stream, lake;[387] and sun, brightness, heat.[388] Hildegard did this, too. Like Bernard of Clairvaux, however, Hildegard took even further than Anselm the idea that the Trinity was beyond rational ideas.

Hildegard was also comparable in many ways with Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1079-1129), a fellow German Benedictine, who echoed Augustine when he said: "No revelation, knowledge, prophecy, or teaching comes about unless the understanding, which is proper to

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[384] Mews, "Religious Thinker," 55-56.
[385] Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 14, 22-24.
[386] Anselm, *Monologion* 79, in *Anselm: Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), 72.
[387] Anselm, "Letter on the Incarnation of the Word" 13, in Williams, 232-34.
[388] Anselm, "On the Procession of the Holy Spirit" 8:200, 7-12; cited in Gemeinhardt, "Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics," 14-15.

the mind, is brought to bear on the images perceived through vision."[389] Despite Rupert's tendency toward biblical literalism, both Rupert and Hildegard, along with Hildegard's protégé Elisabeth of Schönau, "regarded their visions both as a medium of divine inspiration and as a source of vindication against real or potential opponents."[390] A visionary mystic himself, Rupert like Hildegard was concerned with salvation and morality more than with purely speculative ventures, and he was interested in liturgical applications as well.[391]

Fruitful comparisons have also been made between Hildegard and Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141), who was probably from Saxony and whose book *De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei* (*On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*) was written only ten years before Hildegard's *Scivias*. Hugh died the year Hildegard began to write. His *De Sacramentis* (written ca. 1134), like the *Scivias*, covered salvation history from creation to final judgment; and it had practical, didactic, and pastoral concerns in mind.[392] Hugh's style was not like Hildegard's, however. While he might be described as meditative, he "used the method of scholastic argument rather than inspired visions, and he claimed only human authority," rather than claiming to speak for God.[393] Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) was more visionary than Hugh but, unlike Hildegard, focused almost exclusively in his *De Trinitate* on the inner life of the Trinity rather than its economy,[394] and described the Trinity in more abstract terms. Common to all the Victorines was a fondness for the Augustinian triad of divine "appropriations," reflected also in creation, of power (*potentia*), wisdom (*sapientia*), and

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[389] Rupert of Deutz, *Commentariorum in Apocalypsim* 1.1, quoted in Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation," 172.
[390] Ibid., 175.
[391] Wanda Zemler-Cizewski, "A Theological Feast: The Commentary by Rupert of Deutz on Trinity Sunday," *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 55 (1988): 41-52.
[392] Boyd Taylor Coolman and Dale M. Coulter, eds., *Trinity and Creation: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Richard and Adam of St Victor* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 27.
[393] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 23.
[394] Coolman and Coulter, *Trinity and Creation*, 26-27.

goodness (*bonitas*)[395]—language that Hildegard also uses. But while Hildegard shared the Victorines' focus on doctrine and ethics rather than on mystical union, her natural images and "attention to bodily phenomena" set her apart from male theologians of the twelfth century—even mystical and visionary ones.[396]

The Cistercians (founded 1098, the year of Hildegard's birth) and Carthusians were more affective than either Hildegard or the Victorines in their tone and themes.[397] In contrast to Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), for instance, a Cistercian whom Hildegard admired, Hildegard's concern "is more ecclesiological; her vision of the divine economy more historical; her piety is tougher and less individualistic."[398] Says Newman: "In the rare texts where she portrays herself as a partner in dialogue with God, she is not the enamored bride [*sponsa*] longing for divine union, as in St. Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*."[399] Like Bernard, however, Hildegard took a mystical and doxological approach to the Trinity that often correlated to visual or visionary experience. For Hildegard, Bernard, and the Victorines alike, visualization was understood as a spiritual exercise, useful for "making thoughts about God" that could be reproduced and shared with others.[400]

The next-generation Cistercian Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), like Hildegard, had an interest in tracing salvation history onto the threeness of the Trinity with both words and images, but Joachim did so more explicitly: "For Joachim, history has a Trinitarian structure because God is Trinity; the inner-trinitarian relations are expressed in history, with three

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[395] Ibid., 28-29.
[396] Bynum, preface to *Scivias*, 3.
[397] Ibid., 5.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 17.
[400] Carruthers, "Moving Images in the Mind's Eye," 292.

successive stages corresponding to the three divine persons."[401] Although Joachim was condemned for tritheism at the Fourth Lateran Council, his diagramming of the Trinity remained very influential. He did not use human forms, as Hildegard sometimes did, but rather geometric or botanical images to depict the Trinity and the historical stages represented therein (Figure 4.1).

Hildegard anticipated Joachim's interest in the Last Days; but, while Hildegard's writings resound with apocalyptic warnings, "she did not envisage an imminent Second Coming or look forward to a golden age of the Spirit."[402] Rather, she shared the perception of the Old Testament prophets that divine judgment was more immediate and "inevitably follows on human sin, and especially on the sins of rulers."[403] Despite their differences, it is possible that Hildegard influenced Joachim, as "the Cistercian prior Gebeno of Eberbach kept her prophetic reputation alive by publishing an extremely popular anthology of her apocalyptic prophecies, which he entitled *Speculum futurorum temporum* or *Pentachronon* (1220); this collection proved much more appealing to later medieval tastes than Hildegard's original writings."[404] The similarity of some of their depictions of the Trinity, like that of three circles vertically aligned (compare Figure 4.1, right, and Figure 4.22a), might also point to Hildegard's influence on Joachim.

In the final assessment, however, Hildegard was unlike any of her peers, especially her academic peers. Unlike the organic and human images that Hildegard produced in response to her visions, "scholastic theological discourse, whether framed in terms of abstraction about form or essence, as in the writings of Peter Abelard or Gilbert of Poitiers,

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[401] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 29.
[402] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 21.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid., 47.

developed within sophisticated conceptual categories shaped by a very different philosophical tradition."[405] Even the thought of Bernard of Clairvaux, Mews points out, "is structured around the theme of the visitation of the Word in the soul, without relation to the natural world."[406] Using a variety of images, Hildegard's three visionary works "present Christian doctrine in a way Hildegard considers to be accessible to her readers, answering questions they might raise through the use of images and analogies drawn from experience, rather than through abstractions."[407]

Hildegard's Trinitarian Texts and Images

In addition to her Trinitarian visions in the *Scivias* and *Liber divinorum operum*, Hildegard wrote letters in response to churchmen like Eberhard, Bishop of Bamberg (Appendix A), who asked for her interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity; and she wrote a commentary on the Athanasian Creed (Appendix B) in which she explains to her nuns, at great length, her understanding of the doctrine. Whereas the *Scivias* and *Liber* are at the same time visionary and doctrinal, and both include pictures, much of the content of Hildegard's letters and commentary might be described as mystical but not visionary. All the works under consideration here, however, are saturated with Trinitarian theology. Salvation, which Hildegard saw as a joint effort between God and humans, was her foremost concern. This salvation was made possible by God's very threeness, which in its comprehensiveness and mobility is able to sweep the entirety of space and time. An image from the *Liber* captures this nicely, as Hildegard addresses the Trinity: "You have three wings. The first

[405] Mews, "Religious Thinker," 56.
[406] Ibid.
[407] Ibid., 68.

unfolds and flies through the highest sky. The second dips down, touching the earth. The third whirls its way over, under, and through all things" (IX.4).

Madeline Caviness has argued that, in her visual pictures, Hildegard did not portray the Trinity in any of the standard twelfth-century ways: geometric shapes (like circles and triangles), the schematic shield of the Trinity (*scutum fidei*), three identical figures, or a pair of men with a dove, as Christina of Markyate had described in a vision twenty-five years earlier. "Whereas clarity and orderliness are period features" of the twelfth century, says Caviness, and while Hildegard envisions harmony and balance among soul, body, and cosmos, her images are quite eccentric, with irregular frames, figures that don't quite fit, jagged edges, figures that are sometimes sideways or upside-down, and unusual composites of abstract and figural modes. All of this leads to a "kinetic effect" and an unpredictability that backs up Hildegard's claim to divine revelation, because visions so strange couldn't be merely human invention.[408]

Barbara Newman agrees with Caviness that both Hildegard's theological ideas and her pictures were *sui generis*: "Even in the context of twelfth-century symbolics, Hildegard had no peer in her kaleidoscopic array of metaphors, her figures within figures, [and] her synesthetic language. In the midst of a routine bit of biblical exegesis, she would suddenly convey some new insight with an arresting turn of phrase, or use a familiar typological image in a wholly new sense."[409] The pictures cited in this chapter will highlight these features.[410]

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[408] Caviness, "Artist," 110-13.
[409] Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 24.
[410] Hadewijch, who is discussed in the next chapter, may have been influenced by Hildegard, who appears on Hadewijch's "List of the Perfect," a catalogue of eighty-six saints and contemporaries whom Hadewijch admired. Some of Hadewijch's descriptions of the Trinity resemble the verbal and visual pictures found in Hildegard's three major works from the twelfth century, especially in their concentric circles and kinetic, whirling movements.

Hildegard's Trinitarian Visions in the *Scivias*

Hildegard's first major work, *Scivias* (short for *Scito vias Domini* or *Know the Ways of the Lord*), is a comprehensive doctrinal tome addressed to a largely clerical and monastic audience.[411] As in her other major visionary works—*The Book of Life's Merits* and *The Book of Divine Works*—Hildegard combines doctrinal, ethical, and cosmological discourse, "explaining how humankind and creation are related to God and to each other."[412] In Hildegard's opening explanation of the means by which she received her revelations—that is, through visual and aural communication of the "Living Light"—Newman says, "readers might be reminded of Augustine's theory of illumination, which was probably familiar to Hildegard, or of the variant form of Neoplatonic light-mysticism that reached medieval Europe through Pseudo-Dionysius."[413]

The *Scivias* is structured in three parts according to the work of the three persons of the Trinity. Book I, consisting of six visions, is entitled "The Creator and Creation"; Book II (seven visions) is entitled "The Redeemer and Redemption"; and Book III (thirteen visions) is entitled "The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building." Each book is divided into chapters (one chapter per vision), which are in turn divided into a variable number of sections. The structure of each chapter is the same: Hildegard gives a poetic and "obscure" account of what she saw in a vision, represented also by a visual image; she then repeats and develops each point, revealing its deep significance, whether theological, social, or ecclesiological.

[411] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 22.
[412] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 35.
[413] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 19.

Both the verbal and the visual images of the Trinity within the *Scivias*, like all of Hildegard's images—and like the doctrine of the Trinity itself—are abstract and complex, yet concrete and precise. These images include a three-sided pillar; three peaks of a single mountain; the three parts of one breath (air, moisture, and warmth); three parts of one eye; and concentric circles of light, fire, and sapphire—which each in turn have three virtues. For Hildegard, the whole universe was full of spiritual significance for those who had eyes to see, and it was full of divine threeness. Her steadfast focus on the incarnational and sacramental relationship between God and the world, in addition to "the well-established tradition of the Rhineland abbeys in the eleventh century of interest in the natural world," help to account for Hildegard's attachment to images from nature to explain the Trinity.[414]

After a brief prologue ("Declaration") in which Hildegard describes the manner in which she receives her visions and the divine authority with which she speaks, Book I of the *Scivias* begins at the beginning of salvation history: with the majesty of God, the creation, and the fall of humankind. The Trinity is present in the entire sweep of salvation history, beginning with the Fall, which brings agitation to the universe; but it is a *felix culpa*, because redemption in Christ brings even greater radiance and harmony than before. Like many medieval mystics, Hildegard was fond of threes and multiples of three (as in her vision of the nine choirs of angels in three sets of three, reminiscent of Pseudo-Dionysius, I.6), and these usually have specific Trinitarian corollaries in the *Scivias*, although sometimes oblique and always creative.[415]

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[414] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 35.
[415] Hildegard reflected on other numbers as well (four, five, seven, ten), expressing the "intricate numerological correlations so dear to Hildegard's age"; Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 16.

The ur-narrative of salvation is summed up, for instance, by Hildegard's description of the human condition symbolized by a garden, a sheep, and a pearl representing, roughly, creation, redemption, and sanctification (I.2.32): the sheep and the pearl fall into the mud that mucks up the garden, but they are restored "with even greater glory." Here the sheep represents both Christ slaughtered and the parabolic lost sheep restored. In Hildegard's depiction of the universe (Figure 4.2a), the macrocosm within which the human microcosm resides,[416] three stars or "little torches" (Figure 4.2b) hover over the universe "arranged in such a way that by their fire they hold up the globe lest it fall; that is [the Trinity] shows how by its arrangement" the heavenly things are illuminated, so that humans can avoid "harmful error" (I.3.4). Hildegard then describes "a diversity of people" correlating to three kinds of cheese—strong, weak, and bitter (I.4.13)—who will need divine help, perhaps symbolized by the three-fold "kite" hovering above them, to achieve salvation (Figure 4.3).

Hildegard clarifies this salvation in Vision Four with a more straightforward explanation of the work of the Trinity:

> The Blessed and Ineffable Trinity showed itself to the world when the Father sent into the world his Only-Begotten, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin, so that humans, born so diversely and bound by so many sins, should be brought back by Him to the way of truth; and thus those who, when released from their ties to the heavy body, carry good and holy works with them might gain the joys of the celestial inheritance (I.4.8).

In Hildegard's vision, the three persons of the Trinity are the only means of reunion with God; and it is only in the human experience of the "economy" of salvation that God may be

[416] This is a major theme in the *Liber divinorum operum*.

perceived: “In these Three Persons recognize your God, Who created you in the power of His Divinity and redeemed you from damnation” (II.8.8). But the triune God may also be perceived in the human being. Hildegard modifies Augustine’s psychological analogy by describing three “paths” within each human being to knowledge of the Trinity. These are “the soul, the body and the senses; and all human life is led in these. How? The soul vivifies the body and conveys the breath of life to the senses; the body draws the soul to itself and opens the senses; and the senses touch the soul and draw the body” (I.4.18). While Hildegard’s model is notable for its inclusion of the physical body, she emphasizes that the soul (containing intellect and will) rules over the body and the senses.

In another image of human and natural threeness (thus *imago trinitatis*), Hildegard uses the example of a tree: the human body is the tree itself; the intellect is the viridity (greenness or liveliness) of the branches and leaves; and the soul is the sap (I.4.26). Here Hildegard may be foreshadowing a vision that appears later in the *Scivias* (III.6), in which three twigs of one branch represent the Trinity (I.4.31). She will expand upon this image more explicitly again in her explanation of the Athanasian Creed (ca. 1160-70) and its Trinitarian themes. Hildegard makes further bodily analogies in Book I of the *Scivias*: the Trinity is like a human with its heart and blood, which can’t exist apart from one another; and she describes the “salvific mission” of Christ as an *exitus* and *reditus*, flowing from the Godhead and back again, like the circulation of the human heart (I.4.31).

Book I culminates in the vision of the nine choirs of angels, analogues for human nature: angels and archangels signify body and soul, the cherubim and seraphim are the love and knowledge of God, and the five middle orders (virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, and thrones) represent the five senses. As Barbara Newman has said, Hildegard

takes the notion from Pseudo-Dionysius that "the celestial hierarchy above mirrors the ecclesiastical hierarchy below."[417] This vision also indicates a debt to Augustine, with its diverse aspects of human nature; but it goes beyond his psychological analogy of the Trinity and includes a multitude of human characteristics.[418] The concentric circles of this vision (Figure 4.4) anticipate the Trinitarian vision in II.2 (Figure 4.6) and represent the fullness of the human being as *imago trinitatis* shining through in the glory of the heavenly host.

In Book II of the *Scivias*, Hildegard moves on to the theme of redemption, and thus the practical outworking of the Trinity; but the book is dominated by the massive female figure of Ecclesia—the venue of Trinitarian redemption. The book opens with an image (Figure 4.5) in which there is a gold and blue ball—both at the top and, partially, at the bottom of the picture—that again foreshadows the more explicitly drawn Trinitarian picture in the next vision (II.2, Figure 4.6). The concentric circles of the Trinity "offer" the white flower of obedience to the human, while the great Old Testament luminaries Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are represented by "three great stars . . . symbolizing the Holy Trinity, embracing one another both by their works of faith and by their relationship in the flesh, and by their signs driving back the darkness in the world" (II.1.9). Thus Hildegard envisions the Trinity as present in creation and in the time of the Patriarchs, before the birth of Christ.

In Book II, Vision II, Hildegard provides one of her most extended explanations of the Trinity, envisioned as an androgynous sapphire figure standing within glowing concentric circles (Figure 4.6), which Hildegard explicates: "That bright light [outer circle: Father] bathed the whole of the glowing fire [inner circle: Holy Spirit], and the glowing fire bathed

[417] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 30.
[418] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 187. McGinn argues that both Hildegard and Joachim were primarily spiritual visionaries (Augustine's middle category), although their visions, and their explications of them, often stretched or blurred Augustine's categories.

the bright light; and the bright light and the glowing fire poured over the whole human image [Christ], so that the three were one light in one power of potential" (II.2.2). Christ, she says, gives access to the other two. Here Hildegard engages in, for her, rare speculation about the immanent Trinity: the inner life of God, apart from creation. And yet she understands the three to have relational qualities, showing forth both God's "maternal love" (II.2.4) and "paternal love" (II.2.6), the blending of genders echoed in the androgyny of the central figure.

In the next chapter, Hildegard shifts to a different array of images, reinforcing the Augustinian idea that no one analogy or metaphor is sufficient to capture the ineffable Trinity. She compares the Trinity to the qualities of stone, flame, and word as figuring the three Persons in one God: "In the stone is cool dampness and solidity to the touch and sparkling fire" (II.2.5). Further, "a flame is made up of brilliant light and red power and fiery heat. It has brilliant light that it may shine, and red power that it may endure, and fiery heat that it may burn" (II.2.6). Likewise there is threeness in a human word, which has "sound, force, and breath" (II.2.7).

Ecclesia (Mother Church) is introduced in II.3, and the chapters that follow contain Hildegard's meditation on the infusion of the Trinity in the community of believers, to which Hildegard devoted her life and directed her teaching. Again, the blue and gold ball of the Trinity appears in the picture, now adjacent to Ecclesia (Figure 4.7, lower right panel). Like the human being, the Church is a Trinitarian image, reflecting the threeness of God: it sounds like a trumpet in three ways, and has three dazzling windows that illumine it. Regeneration of sinners takes place "by the Church their mother in the faith of the Trinity" (II.3.12), and is undertaken with "maternal kindness" (II.3.4). This regeneration occurs

chiefly in the sacraments, which Hildegard presents in turn, always within Trinitarian context.

In baptism, the whole Trinity must be invoked in order for it to be valid (II.3.37). There must also be three people present at the font (II.3.32): a priest and two godparents. These three help ensure the salvation of the one being baptized through their sacramental role (represented by the priest) and through their sponsorship and teaching (the godparents). The three people also represent the Holy Trinity: the priest as God the Father, the godmother as God the Son (in another bit of gender-bending), and the godfather as the Holy Spirit. The Trinity in Hildegard's vision strips off the black skin of sinners, throwing it away, and clothing them "in a pure white garment" in baptism; then "heaven opens and that Blessed Trinity appears to the baptized" (II.3.14). Hildegard, furthermore, makes clear the spiritual equality of those who are baptized: "For in whatever hour and of whatever sex or age a person may be, male or female, infant or decrepit, when he comes to baptism with loving devotion I [God] will receive him with my merciful help" (II.3.31).

In the next vision, Hildegard presents the role of the Trinity in confirmation, a rite understood to confer gifts of the Holy Spirit on the baptized that will be used for the defense and edification of the community of believers. These gifts, taken from Isaiah 11:2-3, are wisdom [*sapientia*], understanding [*intellectus*], counsel or right judgment [*consilium*], fortitude or courage [*fortitudo*], knowledge [*scientia*], piety or reverence [*pietas*], and fear of the Lord, or wonder and awe [*spiritus timoris Domini*]. As Hildegard sees it, an immense white tower with three windows at the top stands behind Mother Church and the community of the baptized (Figure 4.8). The windows "shine [with] so much brilliance that even the roof of the tower, which is constructed like a cone, shows very clearly in its light; for the

ineffable Trinity is manifested in the outpouring of the gifts of the power of the Holy Spirit" (II.4.3). Not only does the Trinity shine through the Church, it resounds like a trumpet with the three-fold means of salvation: "Fear the Father, love the Son, burn in the Holy Spirit!" (II.4.12). As in this revelation, Hildegard employs all the senses in her theological evocations, as she considered the senses an essential means of grasping the divine.

Following the visions of baptism and confirmation, Hildegard discusses the three orders of the Church (II.5.26). Here the Trinity's role is more diffuse; and although Hildegard describes this vision with much Trinitarian language, the symbolism in the picture is unclear (Figure 4.9). She sees Ecclesia with "three splendors" or auras: white around her head, red around her chest, and red mixed with blue and purple around her lower torso. The Trinity extends golden rays toward the people around her chest, showing, she says, that "the ineffable Trinity unceasingly works the miracles of its profound wisdom among the faithful who seek virtue and flee the seductions of the Devil" (II.5.7). These faithful include the clergy, those who have taken religious vows ("monks and virgins"), and laypeople. Together the three orders make the church blossom with *viriditas*, or greenness: "these three splendors around that image shine afar, which is to say that these three institutions surround and consolidate the blessed Church in a wondrous way in honor of the heavenly Trinity, causing her to burst forth with buds and spread out with blessed verdure" (II.5.26). But, she continues, "as in three Persons there is one God, so in these three orders there is one Church, founded by Him who has planted all good things" (II.5.27).

In her conception of Church hierarchy, Hildegard was essentially conservative: "Each order must avoid diversity, singularity, and novelty" in its way of life, she said, keeping traditional hierarchy, order, and discipline. For all her self-assertion and elevation of the

feminine, Hildegard "did not call for radical change of social or ecclesiastical structures."[419] The verticality of many of her pictures, some with explicit hierarchies, reflects this. Hildegard's traditionalism extended to the social and political orders as well; she encouraged her readers to submit to secular government (III.6.9) and—showing her aristocratic roots—believed some people to be naturally better, and thus more fit to rule, than others (III.6.16). She did not challenge authority *per se*; it was the abuse of power that infuriated her.[420] Those who held church office or who were in a teaching role, she believed (with the budding scholastic movement in view), should not "leave the well-trodden path and the well-plowed ground of the early Fathers" (II.5.27). But even given her support for traditional authority, she admits: "often I find the greater people in the lower ranks and the lesser in the higher, since pride falls and humility ascends" (II.5.35).

Hildegard concludes her discourse on the rites and orders of Ecclesia with a long discussion of the eucharist, here more in homiletical mode than mystical (II.6), but once again undergirding the whole discussion with the sacramental role of the Trinity (II.6.44). Hildegard explains that three things must be offered in the Eucharist which are an analogue to the three persons of the Godhead: bread (Son), wine (Father), and water (Holy Spirit). "If any of these three is lacking," she says, "the Trinity is not truly worshipped." She extends the analogue to the human person, in which there is also no division. A person is comprised of thought, will, and deed (II.6.44); and endowed with body, soul, and "powers" (II.6.50). The culminating image of this book (Figure 4.10), accompanying a discourse on the Devil, pictures three groups of people who struggle with the Devil in three degrees of difficulty and

[419] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 20.
[420] Ibid.

six ways of temptation, even while they continue to worship the Trinity who alone will help them ascend to heaven (II.7.15).[421]

Book III is the longest and the most difficult of the three books of the *Scivias*. Titled "The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building," the meanings of both the visions and the pictures are more obscure than in the previous two books. Here Hildegard's attraction to Old Testament models is also most apparent, especially in the grand building described in precise detail and the beautiful garments that the allegorized figures wear.[422] Three pillars (two of them three-sided) hold up the edifice of salvation, inhabited by the virtues; and the whole structure, with Hildegard's commentary on it, constitutes "a theology of the moral life."[423] The opening picture shows the enthroned God atop a glowing circular ball, indicating the Trinity as a dynamic foundation and source of divine life (Figure 4.11). It "circled about, … and shone with a terrifying radiance the color of stone, steel and fire, which extended everywhere, from the heights of heaven to the depth of the abyss, so that I could see no end to it" (III.1.prologue). The "great circle" represents the power, action, and eternity of the Trinity: "This is to say that God's power and his work encircle and include every creature. How? All creatures arose in the will of the Father, who is one God with the Son and the Holy Spirit, and all feel him in his power. How? They all feel him in their creation" (III.1.9). The diagram of the building as a whole (Figure 4.12) is encircled by yet another three bands of color, alluding to the three-fold work of the Trinity (III.2.27).

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[421] Here are strong echoes of Origen, who described this spiritual ascent as leading to the vision of God; of Irenaeus, who said, "The Father plans and gives commands, the Son performs and creates, while the Spirit nourishes and increases, and, by degrees, man ascends toward the Perfect One" ("Against Heresies" 4.38.3; *ANF* 1.521-22); and of Basil of Caesarea, who perceived two movements of Trinitarian grace—ascending and descending—in which "man is able to see the divine light, being himself in the light, and becoming light." Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 238.

[422] Bynum, preface to *Scivias*, 2. It is possible that Hildegard had also read Ignatius of Antioch, who likened the Trinity to the construction of a building ("Epistle to the Ephesians" 9, *ANF* 1.53).

[423] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 23.

The first of the three pillars holding up the building of salvation is the Pillar of the Word of God (Figure 4.13). This pillar has three sides and contains the historical community of believers, from the Patriarchs on. Facing east are the Old Testament fathers and prophets sitting in branches and representing the old law of the Hebrew scriptures. Facing north are the apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and "many other saints" representing the grace of the New Testament. And facing south is a bowed edge that is narrower at the top and bottom, representing the wisdom of the Doctors who "burn with the Holy Spirit" in their exposition of scripture; the thick, sharp middle of this edge represents the Church Fathers. Law, grace, and exposition are the three divisions of the Word of God (III.4.5), as Hildegard lays them out. A bright light at the top of the pillar represents "the Heavenly Father, in his highest and deepest mysteries" and "his Son, who shined in his Father with glorious light; and the dove is the Holy Spirit" (III.4.14-15). The three together inspire the writing of the scriptures.

The Trinity as depicted in III.5, "The Zeal of God" (Figure 4.14), is fierce as well as dynamic, empowering, and enlightening. This figure with three wings appears in smaller form in III.2 (the diagram of the building of salvation, Figure 4.12) and is alluded to in II.3.20: "He displayed three wings, which symbolize the Holy Trinity." Here the figure is used to strike down sinners. Like the sapphire man, it is an androgynous image, but more male than female: "And you see its head, a bare human head; which is to say that the Jealousy of the Lord is not … covered by hair like a man's or by a veil like a woman's; … but it is more manly than womanly; for the mighty power of God resembles manly virility more than it does soft womanly weakness" (III.5.13). Such manly power was needed in this age of reform and crusade to vanquish "evil people," like pagans, heretics, Jews, and false

prophets (I.3.19, II.3.12)—including the Cathars, who had begun to infiltrate the Rhineland at the beginning of the twelfth century.[424] God's judgment is just, however, as "the Holy Trinity judges all people rightly according to their intentions" (III.5.14). A person who embraces the works of the Trinity can be assured that he or she will be "productive and perfect and prosperous" (III.5.32).

The Triple Wall (III.6: Figure 4.15a) is one of the most difficult of Hildegard's pictures to decipher. Like the Pillar of the Word of God it seems to represent three dispensations (Old Testament, New Testament, Church). In any case, its Trinitarian context is clear (III.6.9-27); all the Virtues who inhabit the Wall show forth the glory and the gifts of the Trinity. There are two sets of three female virtues (from left to right: Beatitude, Truth, Peace; and Piety, Abstinence, Liberality) in whom, as in the persons of the Trinity, "you see certain resemblances, for the virtues are of one mind though diverse in the gifts of God. … He has given them different powers" (III.6.27). The figure who stands in the middle of the second set of three (Figure 4.15b) "had a yellow circlet like a crown on her head, with this inscription carved on the right side: 'Always burn!' And I saw that a dove was flying at the right side of this figure and breathing out this writing from its beak" (III.6.prologue). The threeness, the burning, and the dove in this image all evoke the Trinity.

Another female figure in a black tunic (Figure 4.15c) looks toward the pillar of the Trinity, "for she directs her intention toward that Trinity in everything, with sharpest vision and mental powers, as all who worship God must contemplate Him in their deeds, diligently and ceaselessly, as the eternal Trinity inviolably in Three Persons. … [F]or it is in her strength derived from the holy and ineffable Trinity that she brings back souls to their true

[424] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 20.

country" (III.6.26). She is Discretion, the "mother of virtues," and holds in her right hand a small branch with three flowering twigs: "from the top of this wood [branch] three twigs have wonderfully sprouted forth into flower, that the faithful may believe above all that the Holy Trinity perpetually flowers in wonder and gloriously reigns in the Unity of the Divinity" (III.6.34).

After the image of the sapphire figure in concentric circles (II.2), Hildegard's most explicit image of the Trinity is III.7: The Pillar of the Trinity (Figure 4.16). Hildegard beholds this manifestation of the Trinity as "a wondrous, secret, and supremely strong pillar, purple-black in color, … so placed in the corner that it protruded both inside and outside the building [of salvation]." The three metallic edges of the pillar, facing southwest, northwest, and west, signify the "holy and ineffable Trinity of the supreme Unity," hidden in the time of the Law but made manifest by Christ. These sharp edges cut off the errors of those who do not properly believe or worship—the pieces of straw on the southwest (right) are heretics; the little severed wings on the northwest (left) represent the Jews; and the decaying branches to the west (center) signify the pagans.

In the prologue to this section, Hildegard says that God "showed me all these things" and said to her: "To you I explain these mystical and miraculous unknown gifts [of the Trinity] in all their fullness, and grant you to speak of them and show them; for, O human, they appear to you clearly in the true light." Despite that, in the next section, Hildegard warns that the Trinity, holy and ineffable, must be "believed humbly" and not be "rashly scrutinized," and although she attacks the Trinitarian errors of contemporaries who

"presumed to know what is not to be known" about the Trinity (III.7.11),[425] she proceeds to explain what the vision means. Just as the Trinity is a paradox—revealed yet incomprehensible—the features of the Pillar of the Trinity are paradoxical as well. Despite its severity, it is "the perfect pillar of all good, reaching from the heights to the depths and governing the whole terrestrial globe" (III.7). It manifests the triune God to the believers who enter salvation by it (III.7.1), and to them it is "miraculously even and without roughnesses, for … it is mild and benign in grace, and smooth in its sweet justice to all those who hasten to it, so that no rough place of injustice is in it, but justly and beautifully it confers salvation." But for those who do not believe or worship rightly, according to Hildegard—pagans, heretics, and Jews—God's judgment represented by the pillar's sharp edges "pierces their hearts" and "slays them" (III.7.3).

Hildegard usually envisioned the Trinity in living, dynamic ways; so the Pillar of the Trinity represents something of a departure, or an alternate metaphor. Like the compound piers commonly found in Romanesque churches (Figure 4.17), with multiple parts joined to appear as one, Hildegard's Pillar of the Trinity is strong and solid but impenetrable. It is vast, seamless, and sturdy: "Thus the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit testify that they are in no way disunited in power, even though they are distinguished in Persons, because they work together in the unity of the simple and immutable substance" (III.7.9). Although Hildegard does not draw this analogy, the pillar may also be understood to represent the living community of believers, which has its life in the Church. As Bernard McGinn says: "Hildegard's Trinitarian images are primarily didactic presentations of the mystery of the

[425] This may be a reference to Gilbert of Poitiers, about whose views Hildegard had been queried by Odo of Soissons in 1148. It could also be a more general criticism of scholastic speculation about the inner workings of the Trinity.

divine triunity. They are also fundamentally anthropomorphic. Even the one case that can be described as having a more geometric character expresses a visualizable object in the world of experience, a church pillar."[426]

That Hildegard generally preferred living, moving, anthropomorphic metaphors for the Trinity is apparent in the images and commentary in the sections following her vision of the Pillar. In her commentary on 1 John 5:6-8 (the c*omma Johanneum*), she describes the Holy Trinity as giving life and "giving testimony" to Christ through the Spirit, the water, and the blood (III.7.8). In III.7.10 she presents brief Trinitarian similes based on work (*operatio*), breath, and the eye:

> Power, will, and fire are the three peaks of a single height of work. How? The will is in the power, and the fire is in the will, and they are inseparable, like expelled human breath. How? The indivisible emission of human breath is the whirling air currents, the moisture and the warmth. So too is the complete human eye. How? The circuit of our eyesight has two transparent parts, but they form one housing for all that is within them.

A third pillar, the Pillar of the Savior's Humanity, appears in the next book (III.8: Figure 4.18a), but its Trinitarian analogues are subtle, represented primarily by the female figure at the top (Figure 4.18b) who wears a triangular crown with three prongs and three gems and, on her chest, "a shining mirror, in which appeared with wondrous brightness the image of the incarnate Son of God." This figure somewhat resembles both the "Mercy Seat" and "Paternitas" images of the Trinity common in Hildegard's place and time, but the dove of the Holy Spirit is lower in the picture, the crucifix floats off to the side, and the central figure is

[426] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 188.

female (personified Humility). In her commentary on this Pillar, Hildegard argues that the Trinity and the Incarnation must be thought of as a unit. The Pillar of the Trinity and the Pillar of the Savior's Humanity are adjacent to one another in the building of salvation, and "his [Christ's] humanity is manifested in the ardent faith of its stones, which are the faithful people who work hard by the goodness of the Supernal Father when the Trinity has been revealed to them. … That is to say that the incarnate Son of God, who is true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is now inherent in his members; that is, the faithful people" (III.8.9-11) whose "noblest impulses" are sealed by the crowned figure (III.8.18).

Vision III.9, "The Tower of the Church," is again rather obscure but reflects a Trinitarian pattern. Here Wisdom, who "was in the Most High Father before all creatures, giving counsel in the formation of all the creatures made in heaven and earth" (III.9.25), stands on top of the house of seven pillars described in Proverbs 9:1 (Figure 4.19a).[427] On the pavement below is a female triad: Justice, Fortitude, and Sanctity. These Virtues "do the divine work" of justice and salvation with "united and cooperative action"; they are "the three instruments by which the Church strives toward eternity in her children: nourishment from their teachers, and the fight of the faithful against the Devil, and the rejection of consent to vice" (III.9.26).

The Virtue of Sanctity, pictured in the lower left corner of the image accompanying Vision Nine (Figure 4.19b), is envisioned by Hildegard as tripartite, with "Sanctity" written on the forehead of the face in the middle, "The root of goodness" on the left-hand face, and "Self-sacrifice" on the right-hand face. (The words do not appear in the picture but are described in the explication of the vision, III.9.3). Sanctity is unique among the virtues in

[427] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 40-41.

that she has three heads. All of the heads appear to be female in the picture, but Hildegard says that "their brilliance dazzled my eyes, so that I could not quite see whether their faces were masculine or feminine" (III.9.3). The three heads converse with one another about their origins and their roles in the divine mission, "for they are strongly united in inner vision and in love, and none of them can last without the help of the others. And so they direct their words and admonitions to people, to help them go forward" (III.9.29).

This three-headed figure is similar to tricephalic images of the Trinity that appeared elsewhere in medieval Europe, although usually with identical male heads. In one interesting example, though (Figure 4.20, from a fourteenth-century German chronicle), the left and middle heads are bearded and male, but the head on the right is female. It seems possible that the artist was influenced by Hildegard, as I could find no other precedent for this image. One twelfth-century fresco of the Trinity does, however, include a female figure (apparently representing the Holy Spirit) in the middle of three (Figure 3.13).

Hildegard's writings and pictures contain a great deal of cross-referencing; a phrase or image that appears in one place will often appear in another, presented from a different angle or with another layer of interpretation. In Vision III.10, for example, there is again the "great circle" of the Trinity, recognizable from earlier pictures, that "extended from the Shining One who sat on the throne." Another wheel hangs in the air around a female figure below, perhaps meant as a reiteration of the circle of the Trinity (Figure 4.21). This figure, Contempt of the World, holds a small blossoming branch—another allusion to the Trinity that Hildegard has made before (I.4 and III.6). The wheel, which revolves ceaselessly, has written on its perimeter John 12:26: "If anyone serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servant be." The female figure, encompassed and infused by the

Holy Trinity and bearing its fruits, represents not only one of the divine Virtues but "anyone" who has received redemption and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (III.10.9).

The three central figures in Vision III.10, yet another set of female Virtues who "resembled each other" (III.10.9), "showed themselves unalterably unanimous in their devotion in the power of the Trinity" (III.10.21), which their number signifies. They are revealed "to people in the center of this number, … showing them that they should be constant in good works" (III.10.23). But "there is a divergence between them [the three figures]," Hildegard continues, "for [like the three Persons of the Trinity with their appropriate missions], though they are of one mind and join to do their work, each one separately shows her powers over the people subject to her in heavenly fervor and clarity" (III.10.22). This vision, as a whole, is interesting for its later resonances: a ceaselessly spinning wheel representing the Trinity will appear in Hadewijch (thirteenth-century Flanders); and three regal, divine ladies who are alike yet distinct—and who give guidance to those who behold them—will appear in Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* (early fifteenth-century Paris).

As the *Scivias* comes to a close, Hildegard makes her own last judgments presented in dual visions: a frightful "End of Times" (III.11) and a glorious "New Heaven and New Earth" (III.12). In the picture accompanying the latter (Figure 4.22a) Hildegard is, in comparison to her other visual images of the Trinity, uncharacteristically "rather traditional, where the Father is presented anthropomorphically as an old man, and the Son and the Spirit appear under the symbols of lamb and dove."[428] (Compare Figure 4.22b with the depiction of the Trinity over the main entrance to the abbey church of Saint-Denis in Paris, Figure

[428] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 188.

4.23.) Why does Hildegard use conventional iconography here? Perhaps this image represents her traditionalist self, envisioning a return to hierarchical order in the Last Days, in which the three spheres "symboliz[e] God, the righteous, and creation, related to three spheres of life now brought together into harmony."[429] Harmony, in Hildegard's worldview, often correlates with hierarchy (as also in Vision I.6). In this final vision, the harmony is literal as well as allegorical, as the *Scivias* culminates in heavenly music.

In her *Symphonia*—a cycle of more than seventy liturgical songs, probably finished by 1158[430]—Hildegard reiterates and expands upon the heavenly music that she presents in this last vision of the *Scivias*, including an Antiphon for the Trinity (*Symphonia* 26: "Laus Trinitas") not included in the *Scivias*. In this antiphon, she describes the Godhead as music, but without any suggestion of hierarchy:

> To the Trinity be praise!
>
> God is music, God is life
>
> that nurtures every creature in its kind.
>
> Our God is the song of the angel throng
>
> and the splendor of secret ways
>
> hid from all humankind.
>
> But God our life is the life of all.[431]

The Trinity as harmony is another patristic theme that Hildegard adapts, as in Hippolytus (third century) on the "economy" of harmony: "For the Father indeed is one, but there are two Persons, because there is also the Son. And then there is the third, the Holy Spirit. The

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[429] Mews, "Religious Thinker," 62.
[430] Barbara Newman, *Symphonia: A Critical Edition of the "Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum"* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 9.
[431] Ibid., 143.

Father decrees, the Word executes, and the Son is manifested, through whom the Father is believed on. The Economy of harmony is led back to one God. For God is one."[432] Hildegard's closing vision in the *Scivias* of cosmic-divine-human harmony and the ultimate unity of all things—finally more circular than vertical in Hildegard's thought—sets the stage for the Trinitarian theology she presents in the *Liber divinorum operum*.

Trinitarian Vision in the *Liber divinorum operum*

In this work, written around 1170-73 and consisting of ten visions, Hildegard continues the theme of triune divinity as glowing or fiery life (*ignea vita*), but explores more fully than in the *Scivias* the relationship between God and creation, the place of humanity in the universe, and the interconnections between body and soul.[433] Although this work is shorter than the *Scivias*, and the Trinity not a major theme, Hildegard depicts the Trinity here in some interesting ways both verbally and visually, especially in the first half of the book, in which she shows in great detail the interconnections between the human person, the Trinitarian God, and the created universe.

In the opening vision of the *Liber* (Figure 4.24), there is a glowing, red human form in the center of the accompanying image, holding a radiant lamb; and emerging from the red figure's head is "a second countenance like that of an elderly man" (I.1). Hildegard explains that "this life [the radiant figure], who is always in motion and constantly in action, is manifest in a threefold power." The elderly man corresponds to God the Father, who is Eternity. The lamb corresponds to Christ, who is the Word. The red figure, who is rather androgynous-looking, corresponds to the Holy Spirit, who is the breath connecting Eternity

[432] Hippolytus, "Against the Heresy of One Noetus," *ANF* 5.228.
[433] Mews, "Religious Thinker," 64-65.

and Word. This figure treads on "a monster of dreadful appearance" (I.13) representing injustice and a serpent representing Satan. Hildegard goes on to say that "God has likewise marked humanity [with a three-fold nature]; in human being there are body, soul, and reason," which correspond to the earth, water, and fire in the cosmos (I.2) as well as to the three persons of the Trinity. Like the elements of the universe, the human being lives in constant tension, vacillating between virtue and vice. That tension threatens to upset cosmic harmony (II.18) until redemption and sanctification through the Trinity are complete.

In Vision Two, Hildegard expands on the idea of the human being as microcosm of the cosmic macrocosm, which is itself a microcosm of the Trinity. The universe as pictured here is a sapphire sphere with concentric circles, like the Trinity as pictured in the *Scivias*, and described as Love "constantly circling" (II.2). The sphere, replacing the lamb from the previous schema, is really a giant womb-like wheel in the belly of the red figure (Figure 4.25): "In its foreknowledge and in its workings the Godhead is like a wheel, a whole … because the Godhead has no beginning nor end … and just as a wheel encloses within itself what lies hidden within it, so also does the Holy Godhead enclose everything within itself" (II.2). The Trinity's presence in this vision is thus portrayed by Hildegard as intimate and encompassing everything, rather than being above and beyond creation.

Because everything in the universe is interconnected and interdependent (as described in Vision 4 and shown in Figure 4.26) and connected to God as well, the created world and the body itself are positive aids in the understanding and attainment of salvation. It is notable that the "construction of the world" in *Liber* I.2 matches in its spherical shape and colored layers both the vision of the (Trinitarian) choir of angels in *Scivias* I.6 and the (Trinitarian) cosmos and "articulation of the body" in *Liber* I.4. All are enclosed in, and image forth, the

triune Godhead. The relationship between humans and God is so close, in fact, that Hildegard can even describe the human form as enclosing the Godhead, rather than the other way around (IV.14).

In Vision 4 of the *Liber*, Hildegard develops further the idea of the human being as tripartite, having two sets of three powers: understanding (*comprehensio*), insight (*intelligentia*), and action (*motio*); and breathing (*expiratio*), knowledge (*scientia*), and sensation (*sensus*). These powers derive from the fact that "God has inscribed the entire divine deed on the human form" (IV.105). As a result, "in matters pertaining to what is good, perfect, and holy, we understand, feel, and know the things that are God's. We revere the true God in the Trinity and do not look in false hope to another god, just as the powers of the soul are linked to one another by working together in unity." The soul, working in concert with the body as a unified *opus dei*, awakens in the whole human person love, obedience, and humility (IV.103, IV.59). Hildegard makes clear, furthermore, that man and woman are both made in the image of God, are co-creators with God, and are complementary to one another (IV.100).

Finally, Hildegard presents another set of three female figures with Trinitarian features like those in *Scivias* III.6, 9, and 10 (Figure 4.27). One is Love, "the splendor of the living God" in which all being is reflected; another is Wisdom ("the First and the Last"); and the third is Peace. It could hardly be coincidental that Hildegard describes these and other female figures with the same language of divinity that she uses for the Godhead and its three (male) persons, as in *Liber* III.10.38, and gives them the same number. In the process, she elevates not only the virtues that the female figures represent, but femaleness more generally.

Hildegard's Trinitarian Theology in Letters and Exposition

Hildegard gained a reputation as a divinely inspired authority on Trinitarian questions, as at least two letters sent to her indicate. Around 1148 (while she was writing the *Scivias*), Odo of Soissons, a theologian and master at the University of Paris, asked Hildegard for an opinion on the controversial Trinitarian theology of Gilbert of Poitiers (ca. 1075-1154), condemned at a trial in Reims in 1148. Gilbert had sought to make a technical distinction between God and the "form of God," that is, the nature or being of God which, Gilbert thought, was not one but three,[434] thus apparently compromising the unity of the Trinity. The charges against Gilbert were eventually dropped. But through letter writing, Hildegard was able to have her theological say and participate in the scholastic controversies of her day.[435]

Odo writes: "They say that you [Hildegard] are taken up in the heavenly places and see many things which you bring out in your writing." He then comes to the point: "The fact is that many scholars argue that God is not identical with both paternity and divinity. Please expound to us what you see in the heavens about this problem and send it to us."[436] Hildegard responded that, according to the Living Light from whom she received her answer, "God is a whole and nothing other than a whole, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away. … And whoever denies that God is both paternity and

[434] Mark Atherton, prefatory note to Hildegard's letter (40r) to Odo of Soissons, in *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Mark Atherton (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 21.
[435] Odo's letter and Hildegard's response are Letters 40 and 40r of her correspondence in Atherton, 181-82 and 21-22 (respectively).
[436] Ibid., 182.

divinity denies God, for he implies that there is a kind of emptiness in God, which is not the case."[437]

In a second letter, from about 1163, Eberhard, Bishop of Bamberg, wrote to Hildegard about the proper understanding of the triad *eternitas-equalitas-conexio* in relation to the three Persons of the Trinity, asking her to explain the phrase "Eternity abides in the Father, equality abides in the Son, the union of eternity and equality abides in the Holy Spirit."[438] Her response is an original interpretation of this Augustinian formula commonly found in twelfth-century theology,[439] in which she reprises, from the *Scivias* and the *Liber*, the images of the blossoming tree, the lustrous fire, the living eye, the moist stone, and the circling wheel. She adds some new analogies for the Godhead here as well, like the sun with its rays (producing a brightness, a flashing forth, and a warmth that are yet one sun), the blacksmith who forges separate pieces of metal together into one piece, and the person holding together a bundle that is multiple-yet-one. Hildegard also revisits the sound-word-breath analogy used in *Scivias* II.2.7, stressing the unity of both substance and mission in the three persons of the Trinity:

> Rationality also has three powers, namely sound, word, breath. The Son is in the Father, like a word is in a sound, the Holy Spirit is in each, as breath is in sound and word. And these three persons, as said above, are one God. Eternity is in the Father, because there was nothing before him, and eternity has no beginning as the works of God have beginning. In the Son, moreover,

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[437] Ibid., 22.
[438] Eberhard's letter and Hildegard's response are Letters 31 and 31r of her correspondence in *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, 3 vols, ed. and trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994-2004), I:94-99.
[439] Lieven Van Acker, *Hildegardis Bingensis epistolarium*, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 91 and 91a (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1991), 91:83-88.

> is equality, since the Son has never been cut off from the Father, nor is the Father without the Son. But in the Holy Spirit is union, because the Son has always abided in the Father, and the Father with the Son; since the Holy Spirit is the fiery life in them, and they are one.[440]

The human being as *imago trinitatis*, Hildegard explains, is infused with the radiance of the tripartite sun and co-creates with God in the capacities of ruling, using, and commanding the physical world.

In her Explanation of the Athanasian Creed ("Explanatio symboli Sancti Athanasii"),[441] one of her lesser-known works written probably between 1160 and 1170, Hildegard picks up on these same themes. But she explains to her nuns at much greater length here than elsewhere her theology of the Trinity. On the one hand, her goal seems straightforwardly (though still creatively) doctrinal, as she hews closely to tenets of the Athanasian Creed—like the double procession of the Holy Spirit and the unity without confusion of the three persons—in her explanation of it. She takes special care to emphasize sections 25-27 of the Creed, which read as follows:

> 25. And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another.
>
> 26. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal.
>
> 27. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

Hildegard uses the now-familiar analogies of breath, fire, and branches to make her point, their physical properties and three-in-oneness useful for refuting the dualists and

[440] This is my own translation. See Appendix A for full text.
[441] *PL* 197:1065B-82A.

modalists to whom she makes oblique reference. The last sentence of Hildegard's exposition reinforces the eternal consequences of correct Trinitarian belief: "Therefore, one must believe in truth and confidently, because there is one Divinity in three persons, and three persons in one Divinity, [and] they are one life of eternity; and he who does not believe this will be rooted out from the day of salvation" (Appendix B: 7).[442]

On the other hand, Hildegard appears to have an agenda beyond addressing purely theological questions. Thomas Izbicki suggests that, because the exhortation was directed to her nuns, not to prelates or theologians, and because it reads like a sermon, Hildegard may have been addressing conflict within the community and trying to encourage unity through Trinitarian imagery.[443] She begins the exposition with a reference to ongoing hostility between the monks at Disibodenberg and her new foundation (the "mystical colony of my daughters") at Rupertsberg. She urges the nuns not to become embroiled in the conflict or to sow discord and instability, but to have charity among themselves and thus "shine in the brightest and glowing light by the grace of God" (Appendix B: 2). They should model themselves on the faithful people of the early church who, even in the midst of the Arian conflict, would likewise "shine like the sun in its strength" (Appendix B: 6).

At this point, Hildegard begins her Trinitarian exposition proper, which indeed has strong implications for community life. If the nuns are to shine, glow, and be strong, they must model themselves on the divine tripartite Sun (sun-ray-brightness), tripartite Fire (burning-flashing-moving), and tripartite Tree (root-fruit-viridity), which are yet one. With the Trinity as their guide and model, they must (as *imago trinitatis*) demonstrate humility,

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[442] Appendix B contains my own translation of Hildegard's exposition on the Creed.
[443] Thomas M. Izbicki, introduction to *An Explanation of the Athanasian Creed: Latin Text with Facing English Translation*, ed. and trans. Thomas M. Izbicki (Toronto: Peregrina, 2001), 9.

rationality, wisdom, charity, discipline, right faith—and, above all, unity. Although the community is comprised of a multiplicity of persons, names, and gifts, they, like the Trinity, will thus form an intimate, unbreakable bond with a unified mission: salvation. In this all-important task, one person cannot exist or function without the others.

Hildegard and the visionary women who came after her were most original—compared to their male peers—in their use of images and analogies drawn from experience, including women's experience, rather than *primarily* through abstractions or formulas. Hildegard does not make an issue of her femininity; and neither does God, who addresses her as *homo* rather than as *mulier* while relaying to her the divine plan of salvation for all humankind. Nonetheless, her writing is "colored subtly but pervasively by her feminine self-awareness"[444] and with images of embodiment. Hildegard emphasizes the fertility, vitality, and *viriditas* of the divine nature (*Scivias* II.1.2-3), for instance; and the concentric circles of the universe and of the Trinity itself have a womb-like character.[445] Salvation for Hildegard involves both soul and body, associated in the Middle Ages especially with women, just as it involves all three persons of the Trinity. The body as a garment, a favorite physical image of Hildegard's, is crucial both to divine and human identity, as Christ took on flesh for the redemption of humankind—both male and female. Hildegard thus reiterates the ante-Nicene emphasis on the importance of the body[446] and expands on the Creed's assertion of bodily

[444] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 45.
[445] Mews, "Religious Thinker," 57.
[446] Justin Martyr, for instance, in his First Apology, restates the Stoic idea that nothing can be real unless it is in some sense bodily. He thus understands the Trinity in its incarnational sense, especially vis à vis the sacraments; *ANF* 1.164.

resurrection. She envisions bodies rising on the last day both gendered and intact (*Scivias* III.12.3).

Further, Hildegard envisions and describes many powerful female figures, especially in the *Scivias* and the *Liber*, herself not least of all. These also include the massive maternal figure of Ecclesia and the Virtues, all of whom receive more extended treatment than any male figure in Hildegard's writings. The Knowledge of God, for instance, is radiant and fearsome as she

> oversees all people and all things in heaven and earth. And she is so bright and glorious that you cannot look at her face or her garments for the splendor with which she shines. For she is terrible with the terror of the avenging lightning, and gentle with the goodness of the bright sun; and both her terror and her gentleness are incomprehensible to humans. … But she is with everyone and in everyone, and so beautiful is her secret that no person can know the sweetness with which she sustains people (*Scivias* III.4.15).

Like the other virtues in the *Scivias*, Knowledge of God has both awesome command over, and tender intimacy with, creation. Humility, despite her name, "bears down and conquers all opposition" (III.9.4); and Sanctity carries a "naked sword" along with a cross (III.9.3). Wisdom, through whom "all things were created and ruled by God," is so brilliant that she can't be looked at directly, and "no one can oppose her by craft or might" (III.9.25). Fortitude is armed like a knight, strong in faith "to repel by righteous and holy labor all traps set for humans by their enemies." Like the Trinity in *Liber* I.13, she is treading a "horrible dragon" under her feet and sticking a spear in its mouth (III.9.28).

These female figures often represent, contain, or show forth the Trinity in Hildegard's exegesis of her visions; and as such, they accentuate the feminine aspects of the divine as salvific. As Newman puts it, the Virtues "appear in feminine form in keeping with a long tradition of virtue-vice allegory that goes back to Prudentius, but also because in Hildegard's symbolic theology the feminine represents the sphere of synergy in which divinity and humanity work together for salvation."[447]

Ecclesia, the Church, is likewise awe-inspiring: enormous, brilliant, beautiful, and powerful. She too is infused by, and flashes forth, the Trinity. Yet Hildegard sees the Church as an evolving institution: "[The Tower of the Church] is not yet finished, but is being diligently constructed, with great skill and speed, by a great many workers. This is to say that the Church has not yet come to the direction and status she will have; but, with great diligence and industry, she incessantly hastens toward her full beauty through swiftly passing time and by means of her children" (*Scivias* III.9.11). This vision of the Church has serious implications both for theology and for anthropology; for as the Church evolves over time, it grows in the knowledge and strength of the Trinity through gradual revelation (III.11.42). If doctrine is to be revealed in stages for the sake of the Church, then room is made for new visions and ideas of the sort Hildegard reveals: "I Who Am [God] speak through her of new secrets and mystical truths, heretofore hidden in books" (III.11.18).

As the Church evolves in its understanding of God—provided it is responsive to these new revelations—its members grow continually into the image of the Trinity: "But let the one who has ears sharp to hear inner meanings ardently love my [the Godhead's] reflection and pant after my words, and inscribe them in his soul and conscience" (*Scivias* III.13.16).

[447] Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, 37.

Only at the end of time, which Hildegard describes in the closing scenes of the *Scivias*, will the Church be complete in its knowledge of the Trinity, and will each Christian soul be entirely conformed to the Trinity's image. In other words, the Trinity *is* the final consummation. It is the end and goal of life. But the Trinity is also a lived reality in the here and now: it is a model and a likeness to which both women and men aspire. The idea of humans as the image of God comes from scripture and was a common theme in medieval theology—especially mystical theology—and Hildegard made it explicitly Trinitarian: "But a human being is also the workman of God; he must be the shadow of the mysteries of God and must reveal in every way the Blessed Trinity; he whom God made to his image and likeness." Like the Trinity, the human has "triple energy" (opening to the *Liber*) evidenced in the various triads (like soul, body, senses) that Hildegard sets forth in all her works. As *imago trinitatis*, the human is the center of the universe, "a mirror created even more perfect than the angels, for he reflects the entire cosmos, which is sealed in him: 'man is the mirror of all the miracles of God.'"[448]

Because the Trinity is both divine and human in the person of Christ, so is the human being both spiritual and physical. This leads Hildegard (like Augustine) to a positive view of the body and the senses as long as they are trained on God and lead to a greater good. The figure of Justice, for instance, "seems to be as broad as five people standing side by side; for she takes in all five human senses and uses them to abide in the law of God, and she contains and keeps all the commandments God instituted for those who love her" (*Scivias* III.9.27). In her exposition on the creed, Hildegard says that "the human is made in the image and likeness of God, so that he may work with the five senses of his body, through which also he

[448] Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 97; quoting Hildegard's *Causae et curae* 65.

is not divided, but through them he is wise and knowing and understanding how to carry out his works" (Appendix B: 11).

Hildegard's conviction that all humans were created in the image of God is reflected in her insistence on gender equality at baptism and the resurrection, as well as in her mix of male and female images. Yet she invoked feminine imagery without "displacing or rejecting masculine imagery," so that "no one particular trinitarian image or analogy dominates."[449] Hildegard used a great many images for the Trinity, not all of them (like pillar and stone) figural or human. The non-figural images of the Trinity in Hildegard's visions are alternately triangular, circular, solid, unmoveable, whirling, hard, or radiant. Still, Hildegard favored living images. While she warned against arrogance in speculating about the inner life of God ("man must not look into what he is not meant to know," *Scivias* III.10.5), she also believed, according to Romans 1:19-20, that "the invisible things of God are revealed through the created things of the world."[450] In keeping with her views on the ever-evolving nature of Church and doctrine, "Hildegard shifts attention away from an unchanging truth beyond creation to a light that is alive"[451] and to "indescribable beauty" (*Scivias* III.7.9) that breathes fresh life into hardened dogma.[452]

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[449] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 45.

[450] Mews, "Religious Thinker," 59. Hildegard's contemporaries believed this, too, but still tended not to use images from nature as analogues for God. Abelard, for instance, employs this passage to justify the use of pre-Christian philosophical texts; he does not use natural images.

[451] The term Hildegard uses, *lux vivens* (living light), is not used previously in Latin literature to describe divine inspiration; Mews, "Religious Thinker," 55.

[452] In her theme of divine beauty, Hildegard is like the patristic theologian Cyril of Alexandria, who says: "In the one divine nature, the three distinct hypostases are joined in one supreme beauty. … to this beauty we too have been conformed, by receiving a filial imprint though the Son in the Spirit." Cyril of Alexandria, "Third Letter to Nestorius," in *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters*, ed. and trans. Lionel R. Wickham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 17.

Hildegard, like the other women in this study, reveled in the variety of ways one might describe the triune God. In her letter to Odo, Hildegard writes of the "fullness" or "plenitude" of God, which points to the need for a plenitude of divine names and images:

> But God is fullness and whatever is in God is God. God cannot be shaken or passed through a sieve by human thinking, for there isn't anything in God that is not God. And since creation has a beginning, human reasoning has to find God through names and concepts, for human reasoning itself is by its nature full of names and concepts.[453]

In balancing a wide range of images herself, Hildegard also kept in tension the knowability and unknowability of God, the farness and the nearness, the invisible divine life and the visible workings on humanity's behalf. Interested neither in argument for its own sake nor in the secret inner life of the Trinity (God *in se*), Hildegard stayed focused on "God's appearance, both in cosmology and in history."[454] The incarnation rather than the crucifixion was, for Hildegard, the crucial point of contact between Trinity and creation, the divine indwelling making possible a Christian life well grounded and well lived. Among the persons of the Godhead and the persons of Christian community, love was the point: "the mercy of God bends down to humans and has compassion on their miseries, and so is always available to those who seek it" (*Scivias* III.10.26). Hildegard describes this love as both maternal and paternal, and associated with the Trinity as a whole: *Caritas* (Charity) is blue and radiant, just like the Trinity (*Scivias* III.8.19).[455]

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[453] Letter 40r in *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings*, 22.
[454] McGinn, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," 188.
[455] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 43.

While Hildegard upheld traditional hierarchies—ecclesial, social, and political—her images of the Trinity (*Scivias* III.12 excepted) were less hierarchical than much of the iconography of her time. Furthermore, Hildegard believed that "divine justice" in the Trinity could trump human hierarchies. Perhaps this is where we might see a "social program" in her Trinitarian theology. The central figure in *Scivias* III.10, who is Constancy, speaks not only for women but for all people who seek to be conformed to the image of the Trinity (who is solid, unified, and stable); and who seek to be the building blocks of a just community:

> I am the strong pillar, who cannot be moved by light changefulness, a blast of wind cannot shake me like the leaf of a tree, for I abide in the true rock, which is the true Son of God. Who can prevail to move me? And who can harm me? Neither strong nor weak, prince nor noble, rich nor poor will ever be able to keep me from persevering in the true God, who will not be moved forever. And I will not be moved, for I was founded on the strongest foundation [that is, the Trinity] (*Scivias* III.10.10).

Chapter 5: Flowing and Melting Trinity: Hadewijch of Brabant and the Women of Helfta in Thirteenth-Century Context

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Trinity was a "hot topic," both within the context of scholarly debate and in religious devotion and iconography. The growth of mystical, visionary, and vernacular theologies during this period contributed to a diversity of Trinitarian expressions. Of the women who are the focus of this chapter— Mechthild of Hackeborn, Gertrude of Helfta, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Hadewijch of Brabant—the first two were nuns at the Thuringian convent of Helfta, and will be treated more briefly. The latter two were beguines in Germany and Flanders, respectively, with Mechthild of Magdeburg joining the convent of Helfta late in her life. Like Hildegard, these women sometimes imagined the Triune God simply and conventionally, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but just as often they didn't. All four produced an array of visions of a Trinity who was usually in motion—a divine model both for the active Christian life and for cooperative relationships within the Christian community.

By working outside of the academy and around clerical oversight, these women were able to avoid the constricting demands of theological cliques and pressure groups, philosophically technical vocabulary, and controversial jargon, instead dwelling in a scriptural and liturgical environment that was supportive of visionary teaching and authority. The Mechthilds and Gertrude of Helfta, as well as Hadewijch, also drew upon Benedictine and Cistercian emphases and precedents, especially those of Bernard of Clairvaux, who

himself used a wide range of metaphors for God.[456] But most of the visions these women produced, like those of Hildegard, seem to have been original. Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that women who entered convents at a young age—as Hildegard, Mechthild of Hackeborn, and Gertrude of Helfta did—were "less likely to be influenced by the contemporary stereotype of women as morally and intellectually inferior" and "were more likely to see themselves as functioning with a full range of male and female, governing and comforting roles, paralleling the full range of the operations of God." Thus these women saw both God and themselves "as characterized by a very wide range of modes of operation."[457] Such confidence inspired them to produce works of great theological depth and imagination.

All four of the women in this chapter produced visionary literature that was both Christocentric and Trinitarian: Mechthild of Hackeborn and Gertrude of Helfta in Latin, Mechthild of Magdeburg in Middle Low German, and Hadewijch in Middle Dutch. Their writings are suffused with images of and references to Jesus (especially, in contrast to Hildegard, the crucified Christ and the Sacred Heart) and meditations on the Trinity, often focused around sets of three or multiples of three. In both of these emphases—the passion of Christ and the attributes and missions of the Trinity—Hadewijch and the women of Helfta were in keeping with thirteenth-century preoccupations more generally. In terms of visual Trinitarian images, the closest comparison might be made to the Rothschild Canticles, a

[456] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 176.
[457] Ibid., 184-85.

mystical manual produced for a female religious in Flanders or Germany at the beginning of the fourteenth century.[458]

The Rothschild Canticles treat the Holy Trinity at length both in words and in pictures. The images (see Figure 5.1 for two examples) are relatively inventive and dynamic compared to the spare, geometric diagrams reflecting scholastic formulations and appearing in Gothic architecture. But they nonetheless reflect ongoing Trinitarian conventions (especially the type with two male figures and a dove) to a much greater degree than those produced by the women visionaries. The Rothschild images, being fairly formulaic, are less earthy, organic, and anthropocentric than the Trinitarian images the women expressed.[459] (The women discussed in this chapter "painted" verbal pictures, but they did not produce any visual images.)

Historically, interpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity have placed emphasis on some aspects of God instead of or at the expense of others. As representatives of the thirteenth-century transition in medieval aesthetics and spirituality from wooden and abstract images to more dynamic, fluid, and varied understandings of God, the women under study in this chapter produced theologies that contained elements both old and new. They embraced the traditional attributes of God as eternal, inscrutable, and omnipotent, as king and judge, even while they were moving toward the emphases of the fourteenth-century mystics (like Jordan of Saxony, Henry Suso, Meister Eckhart, Henry of Nördlingen and the Circle of Friends): God's love, knowability, vulnerability, and nearness.[460] Among the thirteenth-

[458] Hamburger, *Rothschild Canticles*, 118.
[459] It is possible, however, that both Hildegard's and Hadewijch's depictions of the Trinity were an influence on the illuminations of the Trinity in the Rothschild Canticles, with their pulsing three-part and circular movements and watery borders.
[460] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 177, 189.

century visionary women's favorite images of the Trinity and the soul's relationship to it were those involving reciprocal movement, often represented as flowing and melting, which expressed their felt intimacy with the triune God.

Mechthild of Hackeborn

The women of Helfta readily acknowledged the difficulty of representing the divine in a positive way that was neither reductionistic nor presumptuous. "Sometimes," Mechthild of Hackeborn said, "so spiritual was the revelation, that it seemed as if in no way it could be explained in words" (*Liber specialis gratiae* 2.12). Yet this very difficulty, far from discouraging women visionaries from imagining the triune God, inspired them to produce endlessly changing imagery that might approximate it.[461]

Mechthild, like the others, was always careful to uphold orthodoxy by maintaining the coeternality of the three persons of the Godhead, balancing divine transcendence and immanence, mystery and knowability, invisibility and visibility and affirming the basic Nicene formula. In a vision of the highest heaven, for instance, Mechthild saw "the throne and seat of the most high and undivided Trinity," on which Jesus sat. She fell down and worshiped him as "the most high Trinity, one God, … in whom there is equal glory [and] coeternal majesty to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, who subjects the whole world to his laws" (1.6). Yet, as this section will demonstrate, she usually favored less hieratic images.

This Mechthild (ca. 1241-1299) was the sister of Gertrude of Hackeborn, the second abbess of Helfta. She was well known for her musical talents and, in addition to her role as

[461] Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, "Divine Communication: Mechtild of Hackeborn's Imagery of the Trinitarian God," *Magistra* 14 (2008): 41.

chantress, was employed as headmistress of the convent school, keeper of the library, and illuminator of manuscripts.[462] Later in her life, she wrote or dictated her visions in Latin with the help of at least two other sisters, among them probably Gertrude of Helfta. Mechthild's book, consisting of seven volumes, was titled *Liber specialis gratiae* ("Book of Special Grace"), and is an account of her life, her visionary experiences, and her interpretation of those experiences.

Perhaps due to her role as teacher of the younger nuns at Helfta, Mechthild favored familiar, natural, and communal images of the soul's relationship to God, of the Church, of the heart of God, and of divinity itself. In the *Book of Special Grace*, she depicts herself as a rabbit in Christ's lap (2.35), for instance, and as a fish swimming in a sea of divine grace (2.9, 2.24). She envisions Jesus as gardener in a vineyard (the Church) digging in the earth with a spade—the earth representing both hard and soft hearts, which he asks Mechthild to water (2.2). A "fair house" with comfortable silk pillows, representing the heart of God, is a favorite place for Mechthild to rest, pray, and receive divine help: in one such situation, Christ appears to her as a seamstress, sewing the garments of a troubled sister for whom Mechthild had interceded (2.7). References to music and singing are frequent in Mechthild's writings as well, for instance, in a vision in which Christ is both harp and harpist (1.1, 3.5, 4.7). Many of Mechthild's metaphors are taken from the everyday life of the convent; this is the context of her homely encounters with the divine.[463]

In its Trinitarian focus, Mechthild's book contains a great many images in sets of three or multiples of three. A partial list includes a threefold glory in the shape of a rainbow

[462] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 209-10; Pedersen, "Divine Communication," 34-36.
[463] Pedersen, "Divine Communication," 42.

(1.5);[464] three chalices offered by the Holy Spirit containing the wine of love, the wine of divine consolation and sweetness, and the nectar of heavenly things (1.13); a three-fold garment (forgiveness of sins, sanctification of souls, divine enlightenment) in which Jesus clothes all Christians (3.1); three fruits issuing from God's heart: praise, thanksgiving, delight (2.4); a three-colored wedding garment of purple (humility), white (pure heart), and gold (divine love) (3.12); and the heart as a triangular crystal glass adorned with gold and gems, through which Mechthild praises the Trinity (4.15).

In one of her most original extended metaphors for the Trinity—which appears in book 2, chapter 23, of *The Book of Special Grace*—Mechthild describes a kitchen (*coquina Domini*) in which the Holy Trinity works: the heart of Jesus is the kitchen itself; the Holy Spirit is the cook; the Father (though his role is less clear) provides nourishment for the community and water for the dishes, which Mechthild offers to wash. The "Lord" says to Mechthild in her vision:

> My kitchen is my divine heart which—in the manner of a kitchen, which is a common home and accessible to all, both servants and free—is always open to all and ready for anyone's enjoyment. The cook of this kitchen is the Holy Spirit, whose inestimable sweetness infuses and fills [my heart] without interruption with a most abundant generosity, and by filling it, makes it overflow. My dishes are the hearts of all the saints and my elect, which are continuously infused with wonderful sweetness from the superabundance of

[464] A rainbow is "the traditional symbol of the connection between heaven and earth and sign of new life and hope." Kerrie Hide, "Illuminations of the Trinity: Illuminating Theology," March 2007, Issue 9, Australian EJournal of Theology, 18, accessed 4/15/11: http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_9/hide.htm.

my divine heart. … [When you wash them] take in this cleansing flow for yourself by desire and zeal of imitation.[465]

The divine "kitchen," like any household kitchen and like the Trinity itself, is a center of friendship and communion in which everyone is welcome and served, reflecting the ideal set forth in Galatians 3:28, which describes the household (*oikonomia*) of God as a place in which there is no distinction of persons, whether Greek or Jew, slave or free, male or female; but rather all are one in Christ. In Else Wiberg Pedersen's analysis of this passage, the kitchen (standing in for the Trinity, the Sacred Heart, and the eucharist all at once) is a place of sociability, inclusivity, communication, kinship, friendship, and equality.[466] It reflects as well the attention given to food, its preparation, and its service in the Benedictine Rule (35: 1-2); except that there is no hierarchy in Mechthild's kitchen.[467]

The women of Helfta, Pedersen argues, understand the doctrine of the Trinity as a "social program" lived out in the convent.[468] Certainly there is evidence that the Helfta community was a place of mutual support, spiritual reassurance, and practical assistance; and that the nuns functioned in multiple ways to that end.[469] It was a place that Mechthild imagined, in a vision of the eucharist, as a community of equals: "At the mass," Jesus says to Mechthild, "you ought to be with me, as if at a banquet, where all meet together and none is excepted, but where all bring with them their own provisions, that is, their prayers" (3.5).

We might then consider the convent of Helfta as a whole—given the visions of both the community and the Holy Trinity in the writings produced there—as the *imago* or *imitatio*

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[465] This is my own translation. See Appendix C.
[466] Pedersen, "Divine Communication," 50-51.
[467] Ibid., 52.
[468] Ibid., 54.
[469] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 184-86.

trinitatis: a system of interdependent women that reflects the interrelationship of the three persons of the Trinity, who are distinct but equal, and who assume a variety of roles or services. Just as the persons of the Trinity are presented variously in their visions as mother, father, spouse, friend, deacon, servant, traveling companion, cook, teacher, and king, among others, the women of Helfta describe themselves and each other in a multiplicity of roles that are pastoral, musical, liturgical, intellectual, advisory, intercessory, serving, comforting, preaching, and governing.

Descriptions of roles in the writings from Helfta—both the women's roles and God's roles—are made without reference to gender, and indeed sometimes use gender-crossing language: Mechthild of Hackeborn explains the love of God as that of a "mother who receives her dearly beloved child with fatherly embraces" and the economic Trinity as a family.[470] God reassures Mechthild that "I am [your] father in creation, [your] mother in redemption; I am [your] brother in sharing the kingdom; I am [your] sister in tender community."[471] This is the triune God that Mechthild and her community imitate as its living images: "I have walked in this world by three ways," God says to Mechthild (4.10), "and if any one desire to imitate Me, he must follow me perfectly in these three ways. … Everyone who desires to follow me [must] embrace poverty, be praiseworthy in his behavior, [and] must gladly suffer for my love both pains and tribulations." Mechthild envisions herself and her community as imprinted by the threefold operation of the Holy Spirit, who sets Christian disciples on fire, melts them, and molds them into his image, so that they will no longer be timid and weak, but will be strong and holy. Says Mechthild: "so did the Holy Spirit melt the apostles in the fire of his love and make them flow into God and conform them to his

[470] *Liber specialis gratiae* 4.7.264; quoted in Pedersen, "Divine Communication," 45.
[471] *Liber specialis gratiae* 4.50.304; quoted in Pedersen, "Divine Communication," 44.

image, … of them that saying of the psalmist seemed fulfilled: I have said, you are gods" (1.13)

The women of Helfta, then, imagined their roles as multiple, not only within the human community, but also in their relationship to God. Mechthild of Hackeborn envisions herself, for instance, as Christ's lover, sister, and spouse (2.1). She imagines the Trinity working totally in her so that she "sees though the eyes of the Trinity, hears through the ears of the Trinity, and sings God's praises thought the mouth of the Trinity."[472] This very likeness is what allows her, as woman and as visionary, to say anything at all about the ineffable divine. Entry into the holy mysteries, says Mechthild, is possible because we are created in God's image (3.5).

Gertrude of Helfta

Gertrude of Helfta (ca. 1256-1301), Mechthild of Hackeborn's younger contemporary, shared many interests and themes with both Mechthild of Hackeborn and Mechthild of Magdeburg; so it seems that there was theological cross-pollination among them at the convent. Gertrude was, in fact, a student of both Mechthilds (Mechthild of Hackeborn was fifteen years older than Gertrude, Mechthild of Magdeburg nearly fifty years older).[473] Gertrude's book, *The Herald of Divine Love*, was begun in 1289 and written in Latin. It is, like the rest of the Helfta corpus, replete with creative Trinitarian imagery.

In the second book of the *Herald*, Gertrude's spiritual autobiography, the Godhead in its Trinitarian fullness is imprinted on the soul of Gertrude like a seal upon wax (using the

[472] *Liber specialis gratiae* 1.26 and 1.29; paraphrased by Pedersen, "Divine Communication," 47.
[473] Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Womens Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 209.

themes of heat, melting, and imprinting that appear in the writings of the Mechthilds as well). In this scene, Mary comes to Gertrude when she is sick and makes a promise to her: "You have never received from my Son more noble gifts than those which will now be given to you, and for which your sufferings have prepared you" (II.7). As Gertrude receives communion later in the day, Mary's promise is fulfilled, as Gertrude relates: "I beheld my soul, under the similitude of wax softened by the fire, impressed like a seal upon the bosom of the Lord; and immediately I beheld it surrounding and partly drawn into this treasure-house, where the ever-peaceful Trinity abides corporally in the plenitude of the Divinity, and resplendent with its glorious impression." She then addresses the Trinity as three kinds of powerful heat: "O ardent fire … O consuming fire … O burning furnace." "In Thee," she says addressing the entire Trinity, "do we receive this grace of being reformed to the image and likeness in which we were created" (II.7). This scene nicely captures not only Gertrude's focus on the Trinity and herself as the very image of the Trinity, but also her trademark themes of the Sacred Heart and of eucharistic devotion—the context of her Trinitarian vision.

The Sacred Heart is for Gertrude, of course, the instrument of union between humankind and God—but it is, in much of her imagery (as in the example above), the source of union with the entire Trinity, and not just with Christ. She understands the Sacred Heart, in another image that echoes Mechthild of Hackeborn, as the harp of the Trinity, for it draws individuals (really, the whole of creation) to God: "With the sweetly melodious harp of your divine heart, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, I sing to you, Lord God, adorable Father, songs of praise and thanksgiving on behalf of all creatures in heaven, on

earth and under the earth; all which are, were, and shall be."[474] The Trinity is at the center of Gertrude's life, and not as a vague or abstract concept but, as Maximilian Marnau has said, as a living, loving, and beloved reality.[475] The three persons of the Trinity are often expressed by Gertrude, as by Hildegard, Mechthild of Hackeborn, and Mechthild of Magdeburg, as three persons with three characteristics (power, wisdom, and goodness: the favorite Victorine triad borrowed from Augustine), but also unmistakably as one divine being with one love, and with one divine heart; as she is also one being with multiple aspects.

The idea of *imago trinitatis* is developed further by Gertrude in Book 3 of the *Herald*, where she imagines herself as a frail little plant. When placed near the warmth and flowing water of Christ's heart, she grows and flourishes, becoming a vibrant green tree whose branches are divided in three, in the form of a fleur-de-lys (traditionally an image of the Trinity,[476] and which appears in Christine de Pizan's Trinitarian vision as well). This tree has three fruits—omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness:

> the Son of God took this tree and presented it with gratitude to the glory of the ever adorable Trinity. When he had presented it, the whole blessed Trinity with great graciousness bowed down toward the offering. God the Father in his divine omnipotence set in the upper branches all the fruit that this soul would have been able to produce, were she to correspond aright to divine omnipotence. In the same way she saw the Son of God and the Holy Spirit

[474] Quoted in Maximilian Marnau, introduction to *Gertrude of Helfta: The Herald of Divine Love*, trans. Margaret Winkworth (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 30.
[475] Ibid.
[476] MacHarg, *Visual Representations*, 119: "In February 1376, Charles V reduced the number to be used in heraldry to three, in honor of the Trinity."

> setting in the other two sections of the branches the fruits of wisdom and goodness (3.18).

Gertrude seeks forgiveness from each of the three persons of the Trinity for offending power, wisdom, and goodness (3.24), and she receives in turn three three-fold blessings (nine total) and the remission of her three-fold sins. Movement Godward, like the movement of Gertrude's three-branched tree toward the heart of God, is only possible because God's image is already within her soul (indeed, it is imprinted on every soul) and humanity is thus wedded to divinity.[477]

Gertrude's other major work, the *Spiritual Exercises*, contains numerous prayers to the Trinity as well as to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit separately. Like Mechthild of Magdeburg, in particular, Gertrude meditated on the Trinity in both its immanent and its economic sense—in terms of what it is and how it works. The work of the Trinity, for Gertrude as for both Mechthilds and Hadewijch, is often expressed as an overflowing. The power, love, and goodness that characterize the internal life of the Trinity overflow into the Godhead's relationship with humanity:

> From you [Trinity] spring God's own powerfulness, insight from your mutual oneness, overflowing sweetness, love-kindling goodness, all-embracing holiness, [and] all-pervasive goodness. … And you, O love, God yourself, loving bond of the Holy Trinity, you lie down to take your rest and pleasure among earth's children. … in you the Holy Trinity makes covenants of loving, through you the Spirit's better gifts are working.[478]

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[477] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 194.
[478] Gertrude the Great, *Spiritual Exercises* 3; quoted in *The Heart of Love: Prayers of German Women Mystics*, ed. Brian Pickett (Middlegreen, U.K.: St. Paul Publications, 1991), 32-33.

Thus the whole Trinity makes reparation for sins, as the whole Trinity acts together in all its external works.

Yet another similarity between Gertrude and both Mechthilds in their Trinitarian devotion is the use of familial images in addition to images from nature. Gertrude imagines herself, for instance, in language similar to that of the others, as daughter of the Father, sister of the Son, and betrothed of the Spirit. All of these visionary women, however, understand that no language can really capture that highest of mysteries, the Holy Trinity, either in its secret inner life or in its divine work among humanity. Gertrude acknowledges that the Trinity is a mystery too sublime for her to express in any clear way; she will never fully comprehend it *as it is* until she dies and goes to heaven, when (as she puts it) the Father will call her to glory, the Son will receive her with joy, and the Spirit will unite them all.[479] Despite the impossibility of the task, with the inspiration of her visionary revelations Gertrude gave some of her best creative efforts to describing what the Trinity is like and what it does.

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Mechthild of Magdeburg, a thirteenth-century German beguine and visionary, is probably best known for her erotic imagery of the soul's relationship with God. In 1982, about one hundred years after Mechthild's writings were rediscovered in a German library, Caroline Walker Bynum lamented, however, that Mechthild scholarship had rarely gone beyond the erotic content of her work and her strangeness generally to serious examination of

[479] Quoted in Marnau, introduction to *Gertrude of Helfta: The Herald of Divine Love*, trans. Margaret Winkworth (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 32.

her ideas about God.[480] Fortunately, much scholarship has emerged since then on the theological content of Mechthild's work.

Mechthild's life spanned most of the thirteenth century. She was born in Saxony around 1208, probably to a family of lower nobility, and died sometime between 1282 and 1294. She reportedly began to receive visions ("greetings" or "visitations") from God at age twelve; and at the age of twenty-two she left home in pursuit of religious life—a fulfillment of her desire for humility and undivided devotion to God. She became a beguine at Magdeburg, leading a life of prayer and penance. On the advice of her Dominican confessor, Henry of Halle, she began in 1250 to write down her visions. The book that Mechthild produced was written in her own dialect, Middle Low German; and she called it *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit—The Flowing Light of the Godhead*. She wrote the first six sections between 1250 and 1270 while living in Madgeburg. According to the slight autobiographical information that can be gleaned from *The Flowing Light* and from later Dominican prefaces to it, Mechthild was a beguine for forty years, living in a house with other beguines, where she seems to have been in a position of authority (6.7). At the end of her life, Mechthild retired to the convent at Helfta where, from 1272 to 1280, she wrote the final section of her book.

Like the Cistercians, the order to which the convent at Helfta informally belonged, beguines appeared in Europe in the twelfth century. They were located mostly in the Low Countries, northern Germany, and northern France. Unlike Cistercian sisters, beguines were only loosely affiliated with one another, did not take formal vows, and were not a papally-approved order. Nor were they cloistered, though they often lived in communal houses. The

[480] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 183.

beguine life involved voluntary poverty, chastity, devotion, charitable work, and earning money through work or begging. Like the Franciscan and Dominican orders formed in the early thirteenth century, beguines believed that apostolic example—that is, living according to the ideals of Jesus and the early church—was at least as important as formal learning and teaching.[481] Like the mendicant friars, they lived in the world while remaining spiritually detached from it.

Mechthild of Magdeburg, like her German predecessor Hildegard, was interested in both practical morality and lofty theology—and she came under fire, as many beguines did, both for her condemnation of corrupt clergy, whom she likened to stinking billy goats (6.3), and for the eccentricity and erotic content of her theology. By the time she retired to Helfta she was tired, ill, and nearly blind.[482] Beguines and other parareligious groups of the thirteenth century lacked the protection and nurture of a formal religious community. They were often irritating to church authorities, who perceived them as potential heretics. Many beguines were suppressed, and some were burned along with their writings. Under such pressure, the movement largely died out in the fifteenth century.

Mechthild's *Flowing Light of the Godhead* is an eclectic collection of visions, parables, dialogues, reflections, and advice, often clothed in courtly imagery. Mechthild was apparently well educated in both the liberal arts and basic church teachings, as she had a refined writing style and showed a familiarity with scripture, liturgy, and both patristic and contemporary theology. She also made use of the narrative resources of her time, including

[481] Frank Tobin, *Mechtild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995), 2.
[482] Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe*, trans. Sheila Hughes (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 40.

lyric poetry, allegory, and folk wisdom.[483] Still, it is difficult to characterize *The Flowing Light*. It might best be described as a compendium of visions in a mix of prose and verse that, like other thirteenth-century visionary writings, are experiential, confessional, pictorial, symbolic, and sometimes ecstatic.

Mysticism, as Bernard McGinn has defined it, is the search for a deep and immediate experience of the presence of God.[484] The poetic forms that Mechthild of Magedeburg employed are especially appropriate for mystical writings, as poetry allows for compression and contradiction. Mechthild embraced the ambiguity and mystery of the divine presence, and she apparently did not feel compelled to organize or rationalize her visions—her many lists and numbers notwithstanding.[485] She was more descriptive and affective than analytical. Her intense exploration of emotions, especially relating to the "courting" between God and her soul, reflects the courtly love tradition that was current in the thirteenth century. Mechthild's key images, like Hildegard's and Gertrude's, are sensory, kinetic, and elemental—light, fire, and water are among her favorites. These images are often interwoven with Trinitarian and eucharistic language, making abstract notions of God and the spiritual life immediate and concrete.

Perhaps most remarkable about *The Flowing Light* is its status as the first German mystical work to be written and circulated in the vernacular.[486] Mechthild's intent, as stated

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[483] Elizabeth A. Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), 37.
[484] McGinn, *Flowering*, ix.
[485] A mystical view of numbers, often Trinitarian in regard to threes and multiples of three, began during the ante-Nicene period. Methodius (ca. 290), for instance, blended numerology and apocalypticism: "The thousand two hundred and sixty days [Rev. 12:6] … is the accurate and complete understanding concerning the Father, the Son, and the Spirit" (in "Banquet of the Ten Virgins," *ANF* 6.339).
[486] Margot Schmidt, "The Importance of Christ in the Correspondence between Jordan of Saxony and Diana d'Andalo, and in the Writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg," in *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers*, ed. Kent Emery and Joseph Peter Wawrykow (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 107; and Andersen, *Voices*, 20.

in her opening lines, was the instruction and edification of all Christians having pure faith; and she aimed particularly at the local community and its spiritual leadership.[487] Her purpose was best served by using the local dialect which was, besides, the only language she knew well. Innocent III's ongoing program of pastoral renewal encouraged, in addition to better preaching and more precisely defined sacramental theology, a devotionalism that was not exclusive to the cloistered religious.[488] Mechthild's life and writing were consonant with this movement.

Even so, Mechthild seems to have crossed some authoritative individuals. She made reference in *The Flowing Light* to her enemies and their persecution of her: "I was warned," she says, "against writing this book. People said: If one did not watch out, it could be burned" (2.26).[489] She never specifies the reasons for the animosity directed at her, but her frankly sensual and emotional language about God was no doubt scandalous to many, as was her criticism of the clergy. Further, Mechthild claimed to have a new and authoritative revelation, and this was no doubt startling. There is also the possibility of subordinationism in her Trinitarian theology, as she describes a near-collapse of God's transcendence and immanence in her language of union between Jesus and the soul. Mechthild took pains, however, to defend her orthodoxy; and it seems plain that she did not mean to create controversy. She saw herself as the scribe of the Holy Trinity and wrote the book "all because of your [God's] honor" (2.26). Despite or perhaps because of her suffering—through which she identified with Christ—Mechthild was confident in the truth of her visions

[487] *FL* 1.Prologue: "This book I hereby send as a messenger to all religious people, both the bad and the good; for if the pillars [leaders] fall, the building cannot remain standing."
[488] McGinn, *Flowering*, 9.
[489] See also *FL* 3.1, 3.5, 3.16, and 3.20.

and in the sinfulness of her detractors. And whether she intended to or not, her unique revelations helped take the medieval theological imagination in a new direction.

As part of the first wave of vernacular, imaginative devotional writers in Europe, Mechthild has been seen as a link between Hildegard, who wrote in Latin, and Meister Eckhart, the fourteenth-century German Dominican mystic who wrote in both Latin and German. Mechthild combines Hildegard's sort of highly visual and original interpretations of Church doctrine and Eckhart's mystical way of knowing God and use of the vernacular. As Emilie Zum Brunn has observed, Mechthild also connects the "feudal, sacral medieval period" and its hierarchical structures to later courtly and individualistic expressions in which feeling, will, freedom, piety, and experience were more important than traditional lines of authority.[490] Mechthild's fusion of Church doctrine with individual experience was played out most revealingly in her theology of the Trinity.

Mechthild's Theology of the Trinity

The sections of Mechthild's book have no apparent order; finding a cogent theology in her writing is, therefore, a challenging task. That said, Mechthild, like Hildegard, had something to say about every major aspect of Christian teaching: God, creation, sin, human nature, salvation, the church, eschatology, and the relationship of the soul to God. It is also notable that Mechthild herself thought of *The Flowing Light* as a unified whole, as she refers to it repeatedly as her "buch" (6.1).

The doctrine of the Trinity was central to Mechthild's theology, and she had much to say about both its form and its function. *The Flowing Light* contains many explicit, if

[490] Zum Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics*, 43.

diverse, images of the Trinity. Occasionally Mechthild provides a simple and static metaphor—for instance, the three-part eye (pupil, iris, white; 4.3). Bodily images are among her favorites (God as heart, body, and breath; 4.5), as are images from nature (rain, sun, and dew; 5.6). Frequently, she lists divine attributes or functions in sets of three: noble Eagle, sweet Lamb, and flaming Glow (2.2); wisdom, suffering, and consolation (2.6); shining, flowing, and sighing (3.3). Most frequent in Mechthild's Trinitarian imagery are objects in motion, for example, a tree with three kinds of apples, bending over the soul to provide shade and nourishment (2.25). She offers a liturgical or literary image (2.25-26)—perhaps in defense of her own book—of white parchment (Jesus), inscribed with words (Father), which are then spoken (Holy Spirit). One of her more striking images of the Trinity is this eucharistic analogy:

> When I recall that the heavenly Father is the blessed chalice-bearer there and Jesus the chalice, the Holy Spirit the unadulterated wine, and how the whole Trinity is the full chalice and love the mistress in charge of the wine cellar, then, God knows, I would be happy indeed if love would invite me into the house. (2.24)

Mechthild often used images of human relationship, as when she describes her soul as the daughter of the Father, the sister of the Son, the friend of the Holy Spirit, and the bride of the Trinity as a whole (2.22). She, like the nuns of Helfta and like Hadewijch, imagined herself in a multiplicity of roles, which might shift. In another passage, she describes herself as the bride of the Father, the mother of the Son, the "beloved" of the Holy Spirit, and "the bride of the Holy Trinity" (1.22).

Most dynamic, and most characteristic of Mechthild's thought, are images of flowing, soaring, and sinking. As Mechthild imagines it, the Trinity is in ceaseless motion, both in relation to itself and in relation to human souls. Even before the world was made, love and communication flowed among the three members of the Trinity: "you, Lord, were enclosed within yourself alone and your indescribable bliss was shared by no one" (3.9). Here Mechthild reflects an essential part of Trinitarian orthodoxy—the self-sufficiency of the immanent Trinity. She also envisions the coeternality of the three persons: "Ah," she says, "now listen how the Holy Trinity praises itself with its wisdom that has no beginning, with its goodness that has no end, with its everlasting truth, and with its whole eternity" (5.26).

In keeping (however unconsciously) with the Neoplatonic theological tradition found in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and Albert the Great,[491] Mechthild imagined the flow of the divine inner life (that is, the immanent Trinity) overflowing its borders into human souls. The Trinity then receives those who, in prayer and devotion, rise and soar into God's heavenly presence and sink into its embrace. Mechthild devotes many passages to this overflowing love of God, which she usually describes with images of water (as in a three-fold stream), but sometimes also with fire, blood, wine, or flowering: "This is a greeting that has many streams. It pours forth from the flowing God into the poor, parched soul unceasingly with new knowledge, in new contemplation, and in a special enjoyment of the new presence. O sweet God, inwardly on fire, outwardly blossoming …" (1.2). The Trinity, according to Mechthild, is an ever-flowing source of revelation for those whose minds and souls are open to it.

[491] Tobin, "Mechthild of Magdeburg and Meister Eckhart," 54.

Mechthild's writing is replete with images of union between the soul and God. In this passage she describes a moment of divine union with the entire Trinity, referring to herself in the third person:

> With great longing he [God] reveals to her his divine heart. It resembles red gold burning in a great fire of coals. He places her into his glowing heart. When the exalted Sovereign and the little waif thus embrace and are united as water and wine, she turns to nothing and is transported out of herself. … She would like to speak but cannot, so utterly has she been enmeshed in sublime union with the awe-inspiring Trinity. (1.4-5)

Usually Mechthild maintains a traditional power differential between herself and God, as in the Sovereign and the waif, above, or as the submissive bride to her Bridegroom. She acknowledges that human nature is too "mixed" to achieve perfect divinity. At other times, however, she and God seem to have a relationship of equals. God is just as lovesick for her as she is for him; they are physicians for one another; and they are playmates (3.2-3). The union that Mechthild imagines is often playful and erotic, especially in relation to the person of Jesus, but sometimes in relation to the Trinity as a whole, as in the extract above and in this passage: "Our Lord said to her [Mechthild]: 'Grant me this: that I might cool the heat of my Godhead, the longing of my humanity, and the pleasure of my Holy Spirit in you'" (4.12). However she imagined it, union with the Trinity always represented the absolutely God-centered life (6.1).

But Mechthild was painfully aware that union of the soul with God is not perfect or lasting in this life. In this awareness, she is reminiscent of Augustine (especially in his vision at Ostia), Gregory, Bernard, and Albert—all of whom lamented their limited and fleeting

access to God. For Mechthild, the separation or sinking of the soul, and the sometime withdrawal of God, were inevitable. Then the soul is like a new bride whose husband has "slipped away as she slept" (2.25). The ebbing of God's love and attention, according to Mechthild, always follows the flow; but the flow eventually resumes. Thus the spiritual life is cyclical, like the rising and setting of the sun:

> All the while that love grows in the soul, it ascends to God longingly and, richly flowing, opens up to receive the wonder that is approaching. It dissolves through the soul into the senses. … And yet the soul is never so utterly flooded with divine love that she is not often tempted by earthly things. … Just so, when the soul has been permeated by the radiant heat of long love and has thus become faint in the embrace of the Holy Trinity, she begins to sink and to cool, as does the sun when it descends from its highest point and sinks down into the night. (5.4)

The ebbing and flowing of divine love are a never-ending cycle because God is free to come and go whenever he pleases. Theologically speaking, Mechthild thus maintains both divine imminence and divine transcendence—the sense that God both dwells within the human soul but may also choose to be impossibly remote from it. Caroline Walker Bynum has observed that Mechthild's metaphysical balance reflects much of thirteenth-century spirituality, in which "religious writings had moved toward emphasizing the humanness of Christ, without yet losing, as it sometimes did in the fourteenth century, a concomitant awareness of God's authority and power."[492] Mechthild believed that faithful obedience,

[492] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 185. Nor did Mechthild imagine a Trinity that was radically separate from, and unmoved by, humanity, as Calvin did in the sixteenth century.

worship, and prayer reunited the abandoned soul with God, refurbishing communion between the two and reanimating the divine flow.

Here again, Mechthild expresses a perfectly Augustinian understanding of personal sin and the need for divine grace. For her, salvation is threefold: the soul is bound to God the Father, the body to Jesus, and the senses to the Holy Spirit. Salvation depends on the joining of humanity with divinity, not only for the sake of unity (however imperfect) between the two, but for the soul's expiation. The cycle of salvation, with its necessary purifying aspect, made Mechthild's relationship with God about equal parts pain and pleasure. But that cycle was always for the good of her soul, as God says to her: "Allow me to refresh in you the furnace of my Deity, the desire of my Humanity and the joy of my Holy Spirit" (4.2). Mechthild, though often anguished, was finally optimistic in her longing for God, for she believed that love was God's purpose.

Mechthild's visions, in addition to being intensely personal, had a public dimension. She was concerned not only for her own salvation, but for the salvation of the world. She therefore had an interest in salvation history and imagined the ways that the Trinity effected salvation—beginning with creation, continuing with the virgin birth, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, and consummated in the Last Judgment. In a surprisingly physical and Trinitarian theology of the Incarnation, Mechthild imagines the birth of the entire Godhead, addressing a personified divine love: "Lady Love, you struggled many a year before you forced the exalted Trinity to pour itself utterly into the humble virginal womb of Mary" (1.2).

Mechthild's most comprehensive passage of theology, in Book 3.9, covers the entire sweep of salvation history, focusing especially on the role of the Trinity in the "economy" of salvation. Here she uses language of the economic or functional Trinity instead of language

of the immanent Trinity, which is her usual element. Describing the persons of the Trinity as a committee of sorts, working together to bring about the salvation of the world, Mechthild once again emphasizes the coeternal, equal, and communal natures of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As they plan together the redemption after the Fall, the Holy Spirit says to God the Father: "O Almighty God, we shall form a splendid procession and shall go forth unchanged in great glory down from these heights" (3.9). The entire Trinity then bends down to create humankind, body and soul. Then Jesus says to God the Father, "I foresee great tragedy. … Father, you well know I shall yet die for love." As always, Mechthild's Trinity is in motion, condescending to humanity even while dwelling within human souls.

Influences on Mechthild's Theology and Spirituality

The essential question in any theological inquiry is: How is God known and mediated? In pursuing this question, Christians have generally relied on four sources of authority: scripture, church tradition, reason, and experience. In many ways, Mechthild was theologically unique. She drew on all four sources, but she gave primacy to experience—specifically, the experience of direct contact with God. A. M. Haas has observed that, in Mechthild's spirituality, "what is decisive is always, and almost exclusively, the *I* which is responsible for the ensemble of these revelations."[493]

But scripture was surely important to Mechthild, too, as she often quoted it, alluded to it, and borrowed from its imagery.[494] She considered scripture an essential part of the spiritual life. Addressing a theoretical group of religious, she says, "Let us build the Holy Trinity a delightful palace in our souls with the Holy Scripture as the lumber and with noble

[493] Quoted in Zum Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics*, 46. See *FL* 3.15, 6.43.
[494] Especially the Psalms, Song of Songs, Gospels, and Revelation (*FL* 3.3, 3.20)

virtues as the stones" (6.1). She did not, however, filter all her visions through scripture; hers is a "book of experience" that holds the literal Biblical text rather loosely. She was fond of taking biblical images in a new direction, for instance, in her vision of the mutual physicians: Mechthild imagined Christ as a physician, as in the Gospels; but she also imagined the human soul as a physician to Christ, making the relationship between Christ and the soul one of mutual help (7.58, 3.2). Mechthild's Dominican editor had urged her readers to understand her book on both historical (literal) and mystical levels, as was common in the Middle Ages.[495] Mechthild herself, like the other women visionaries, seemed to favor the mystical approach to scripture, as she took much liberty with its meaning.

Mechthild derived much of her thought from traditional sources besides scritpure,[496] but this influence is diffuse in her writing and hard to document. Bynum has said that "insofar as we can tell from influences traceable in the surviving literature, the nuns [at Helfta, including Mechthild of Magdeburg] appear to have read the great spiritual writers of the past, especially Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard, and Hugh of St. Victor."[497] Lucy Menzies sees the influence of Richard of St. Victor and Joachim of Fiore in Mechthild's book.[498] And Emilie Zum Brunn has claimed that, although Mechthild was not a philosopher in the scholastic sense, "it was, in fact, the Cistercian, Victorine, and doubtlessly the Albertinian tradition which taught Mechthild the great Neoplatonic and patristic theme of the return to our original nature in God."[499]

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[495] Tobin, *Mechthild of Magdeburg*, 337 n.4.
[496] Tobin, "Mechthild of Magdeburg and Meister Eckhart," 52.
[497] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 176.
[498] Lucy Menzies, *The Revelations of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (London: Longmans, Green, 1953), 28.
[499] Zum Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics*, 52.

On the latter theme, Zum Brunn says: "the Platonic master paradigm of *exitus* and *reditus*, the flowing out of all things from the First Principle and their eventual return to it, had been incorporated into Christian mysticism as early as the time of Origen."[500] This idea was to recur again and again in Christian theology, in Pseudo-Dionysius, the Cistercians, the Victorines, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, and in the thirteenth-century mystics. Mechthild expressed the idea of *exitus* and *reditus* most succinctly as she reflected on the end of her life: "The rippling tide of love which all her life had flowed secretly from God into her soul, drew it mightily back into its Source" (7.45).

In contrast to the objective, systematic teaching of the scholastic theologians, Mechthild's soteriology was existential.[501] She used "traditional visionary language inherited from Augustine"[502] to express God's all-encompassing love and the importance of personal experience of the divine and of salvation. German scholars Kurt Ruh and Alois Haas have argued that *The Flowing Light* must be understood as a confession in the tradition of Augustine.[503] Like the *Confessions*, "Mechthild's *confessio* expresses both praise for the goodness of God and a sense of her own poverty and sinfulness. Also like Augustine's work, Mechthild's confession of the greatness of God's love for her is not a private message but tells the story of one person in order to provide a message for all."[504]

Mechthild reflects on her experience, especially that of personal sin and the felt need for personal salvation, and gives it theological shape. Again like Augustine, Mechthild attempts to express "the inexpressibility of the divine within finite human language" with her

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[500] McGinn, *Flowering*, 231.
[501] Zum Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics*, 45-46.
[502] Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 66.
[503] Cited ibid., 57.
[504] Ibid., 57; McGinn, *Flowering*, 227.

use of multivalent symbols and her struggle to express the ineffable.[505] Augustine usually narrates with a more unified sense of self than Mechthild does, however; her "I" has a variety of aspects. Both Mechthild and Augustine are dialogic in their writing style, but God speaks to Augustine only in the words of scripture, and never in poetry.[506] Like Mechthild's "I," her God takes on multiple personae not strictly drawn from the Bible.

In some ways, Mechthild's theology recalls Gregory the Great more than it does Augustine. While Mechthild's soul relies on God's grace and goodwill, she imagines an important role for humans to play in their own salvation. She waits, but not passively so, drawing her soul closer to God through prayer, obedience, and good works (4.4). Like Gregory, Mechthild portrays the spiritual life as cyclical (flowing, rising, sinking), not as linear. And she advocates, as she herself lived, a "mixed" life of both action and contemplation, even while she saw contemplation as the better part (1.35).

Among high medieval theologians, Mechthild might be compared most fruitfully to Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173). Richard described the Trinity, in *The Twelve Patriarchs*, as above and beyond reason and, as such, an object of faith that could be apprehended only through contemplation at its highest levels.[507] The Trinity was at the pinnacle of contemplation for Mechthild, too, in one instance leaving her (nearly) speechless: "Above on the throne one sees the mirror of the Godhead, the likeness of Humanity, the light of the Holy Spirit, and one understands how these three are one God and how they fit together into one. I am able to say no more about this" (3.1). For both Mechthild and Richard, the Trinity was mystical, personal, and overflowing with spiritual wisdom.

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[505] Hollywood, *Soul as Virgin Wife*, 62.
[506] McGinn, *Flowering*, 227.
[507] Richard of St. Victor, The *Twelve Patriarchs*, in *Richard of St. Victor*, ed. and trans. Grover Zinn (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1979), 145.

In Mechthild's visions, God is shown to her directly in Trinitarian form. Mechthild seems to have accepted the doctrine of the Trinity as divine revelation, without the need for rationalization. Here she differs from Richard. Although Richard claimed to disapprove of philosophy, he was quite technical in his spirituality. Both mystical and intellectual, both monastic and scholastic, Richard was a systematic mystic. He devoted many pages, in Book Three of *The Trinity*, to an argument for the logical necessity of the Trinity. Mechthild, like Richard (and like Joachim of Fiore as well), imposed order on her mystical visions of the Trinity through the use of numbers and lists,[508] giving her visions a sense of technicality that is also found in Richard's writing. But Richard's numbers and symbols have one-to-one correspondence with the things they represent, whereas Mechthild's language, symbolism, and numbering are multivalent.

In this multivalence, Mechthild's writing bears some resemblance to that of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)—for whom also the mystery of faith transcended human knowledge and could be gained only through mystic contemplation.[509] It is plausible to imagine that Mechthild had read Bernard, especially during her years at the Cistercian convent in Helfta. Bernard, like Mechthild, is not as methodical as Richard of St. Victor. His writing is fluid, goes off on tangents, and incorporates words and signs (like "bride") that are multivalent. Bernard and Mechthild were both drawn to the biblical love literature: "She [Mechthild] must have known Bernard's homily on the Song of Songs, which provides many of her symbols. … Mystic love is described in terms of courtly love."[510] Within the context of divine love and courting, Mechthild shares Bernard's fear of abandonment and his

[508] Mechthild was fond of threes and nines generally, although not to the exclusion of other numbers.
[509] Betty Radice, introduction to *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, ed. and trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 36.
[510] Menzies, *Revelations*, 28.

persistent seeking and longing for the beloved. Mechthild expresses a greater intimacy with her God, however; Bernard's God is more remote.

Finally, the Dominicans were no doubt influential for Mechthild. Thirteenth-century Dominicans were often given responsibility for the pastoral care and supervision of beguine communities in Germany and the Low Countries. A Dominican community was established in Magdeburg in 1224, about six years before Mechthild arrived, and Dominican friars were appointed spiritual directors of the beguine community there. Mechthild was a great admirer of Dominic and his order. Her brother was made a Dominican subprior through her influence,[511] and her spiritual adviser and editor was the Dominican Henry of Halle, a student of Albert the Great. She was, therefore, no doubt influenced by Dominican theology and spirituality. Margot Schmidt has noted that "Mechthild's association with the history of the Dominican Order was assured by Dietrich of Apolda, who included portions of *The Flowing Light* in his *Vita S. Dominici*, completed in 1298 soon after Mechthild's death. Dietrich said that her writings bore testimony 'ex verissima revelatione.'"[512]

Mechthild believed that contemplation could lead to knowledge of God—of a sort. Although the revelation of God that Mechthild received was direct and experiential rather than conceptual or propositional, she was confident that she perceived the true word of God through her senses, both physical and spiritual: "I neither wish nor am able to write anything, unless I see it with the eyes of my soul and hear it with the ears of my eternal spirit, feeling in all the parts of my body the strength of the Holy Spirit" (4.14, 5.12). But Mechthild apparently cared about truth in its propositional form as well. She frequently spoke of the

[511] Schmidt, "Importance of Christ," 107.
[512] Schmidt, "Importance of Christ," 107.

evils of heresy and the importance of orthodoxy.[513] The value she placed on right knowledge of God is especially reflected in her admiration for the Dominicans and their preaching against heresy. As God says to her: "I sent St. Dominic as a messenger to unbelievers and as a teacher to the ignorant and as a comfort to the despondent" (5.34).

Albert the Great (1206-80), as the teacher of Mechthild's Dominican adviser, and as a mystic as well as an intellectual,[514] was a likely (even if second-hand) theological source for Mechthild vis à vis the use of reason. Albert had a nuanced view of the knowability of God. He believed in the possibility of theophany—an immediate, mystical, or symbolic experience of God—even though articulation of that experience was difficult because all language and imagery about God could only be approximate.[515] Mechthild understood this. Her many and diverse representations of God demonstrate her sense of God's ultimate mysteriousness. Albert, like Mechthild, used language of flowing and ascending in reference to God's relationship with the human soul.[516] He also had an exalted view of the Trinity, which he imagined (drawing from Pseudo-Dionysius) as dwelling in its own heaven, inaccessible to other heavenly beings.[517] Likewise Mechthild understood the transcendence of the Trinity and the special limitations placed on human access to it. Speaking of herself, she says: "It [whatever she wants] is granted her and she is enlightened. What she is not enlightened about is the first cause of the Three Persons. Then he draws her further to a secret place. Then she soars further to a blissful place of which I neither will nor can speak. It is too difficult" (1.2).

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[513] See, for instance, *Flowing Light* 1.2, 2.24, 3.1, and 5.6.
[514] Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300-1500)* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 13.
[515] Ibid., 22-27.
[516] Ibid., 14-17.
[517] Edward P. Mahoney, "Albert the Great on Christ and Hierarchy," in Emery and Wawrykow, *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans*, 371.

Despite her emphasis on experience and her super-rational sense of the divine—especially in its Trinitarian form—Mechthild was not opposed to learning, as long as it was fruitful learning that led to good works and greater intimacy with God through a sharing of divine wisdom. Mechthild's awareness of God has positive content, and her experience of God involves both love and knowledge. She employs images of light in describing the Trinity as the source of both love and wisdom, of which she is a reflection: "God lets his fiery spirit shine forth unceasingly from his Holy Trinity into this loving soul, just like a bright sunbeam shining forth from the hot sun lights up a new golden shield" (5.1). Like Albert, Mechthild believed that one should not only love, but try to understand what it is that one loves. Though Mechthild was acquainted with the dark night of the soul and with her own limitations, she mistrusted the mysticism of unknowing:[518] "Love without knowledge seems darkness to the wise soul. Knowledge without fruition seems to her infernal pains" (1.21). Mechthild was, finally, secure in her knowledge of God, which required no justification, and in God's love for her, which she felt undeniably in her soul. As the keeper of God's secrets she had the confidence, indeed the mandate, to impart divine wisdom to others.

As a beguine who wrote in the vernacular and had no clear or systematic doctrine that one could identify in any particular way, Mechthild risked trouble but managed to stay beyond the reach of church micromanagement. Given the controversy around her, Frances Beer suggests that Mechthild's move to Helfta may have saved both herself and her book.[519] It is clear that she had an influence on that community, as the overlapping themes attest. It is

[518] Zum Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics*, 44. See also *FL* 1.35.
[519] Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 1992), 11.

unlikely that Hadewijch of Brabant (alternately known as Hadewijch of Antwerp) knew or read the nuns of Helfta but, as she was absorbed in a similar spiritual and theological environment, her imagery is strikingly similar as well.

Hadewijch of Brabant

Hadewijch, a thirteenth-century Flemish beguine who recorded visions and also wrote letters and poems in Middle Dutch, produced a complex theology of the Trinity that could be described as less symbolic than that of Hildegard and the nuns of Helfta, and even more experiential.[520] She occasionally envisioned the sort of concrete sets of three that the others did—images from nature, for example, as in a tree with three sets of three branches and three colors (Vision 1); or heavenly images, like three thrones (Vision 5) and the seraph with three sets of wings representing the "three hidden states" of the Godhead (Vision 13). But she tended to write about the Trinity more in terms of characteristics or appropriations (as they were called in scholastic theology) than in images. These were no less shifting and varied, however, than the images found in the earlier visionary writers. In Hadewijch's Letter 1, for instance, God has the trifold characteristics of Truth, Goodness, and Totality: "It is for these three names that the *Sanctus* is sung three times in heaven (Isa. 6:3), for they comprehend in their one essence all the virtues, whatever may be their particular works from their three distinct attributes." Elsewhere (Letter 28) she describes God as the "manifoldness" of Three Persons: Presence (Son), Effusion (Holy Spirit), and Totality (Father); and yet again as power, knowableness, and glory; and as one who gives, reveals, and "enables us to taste."

[520] Representing a general trend in thirteenth-century mystical narratives, according to Barbara Kline, "The Discourse of Heaven in Mechtild of Hackeborn's *Booke of Gostlye Grace*," in *Imagining Heaven in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Jan Swango Emerson and Hugh Feiss (New York: Garland, 2000), 88.

In Hadewiijch's "exemplaristic view of the relation of the human subject to the three persons of the Trinity,"[521] she responds to the Trinity in kind with threefold characteristics: For the Son, she is to do just works of perfection; for the Holy Spirit, she is to show forth the pure will of God in works and love; and for the Father, her life is to have the fruition [good works] of one full-grown in love (Letter 30). In her own explanation of Augustine's psychological model of the Trinity (intellect, memory, will), she says in Letter 22: "He gave us his Nature in the soul, with three powers whereby to love his Three Persons: with enlightened reason, the Father; with the memory, the wise Son of God; and with the high flaming will, the Holy Spirit. This was the gift that his Nature gave ours to love him with." She expresses the Trinitarian basis for the spiritual life—and what sounds like the hope of deification[522]—in Letter 17, explaining that different persons of the Trinity require different virtues: "Render service (and, indeed, chivalrously) to each of the Three Persons. … This seems indeed to be the most perfect life one can attain on earth. … When by fruition man is united to Love, he becomes God, mighty and just. And then will, work, and might have an equal part in his justice, as the Three Persons are in one God."

Hadewijch wrote in a time and place (the early- to mid-thirteenth century, around Antwerp) in which the mendicants, their philosophical resources, and their theologians, including Bonaventure and Aquinas, were not yet widely known. Hadewijch's writings reflect, rather, her deep familiarity with scripture, liturgy, patristic theologians (especially Origen, Augustine, and Gregory), and earlier monastic writers, especially the Cistercians, the

[521] McGinn, *Flowering*, 212.
[522] She expresses a similar idea in Vision 7, in which she imagines complete union with Christ during the eucharist: "I could no longer recognize or perceive him outside me, and I could no longer distinguish him within me. Then it was to me as if we were one without difference." Elsewhere she says, more modestly, that her goal is to be "somewhat what God is" (Letter 7).

Victorines, and William of St. Thierry.[523] The Cistercian influence is evident in her stress on the role of experience and erotic love-language, the Victorine influence in her precision and rationality, Pseudo-Dionysian themes, attraction to both apophatic and affective mysticism (though she finally favors the latter), and the idea of union with the Trinity.[524] The influence of William of St. Thierry is apparent in the mystical formula that they both express: knowledge equals love equals understanding of God *in se* (*intellectus*), which can't be attained by reason alone. From the store of images available to her, and on the basis of her own personal reflection (expressed in letters and poems), and through her visionary experience (described in her fourteen Visions) Hadewijch produced insights about the Trinity that were not only original but influential, most apparently in the writings of fourteenth-century Flemish mystical theologian Jan Ruusbroec and his followers, including the Brethren of the Common Life.

While the images and attributes that Hadewijch discerned in the Trinity were multiple and diverse, among the most interesting were images of forceful fluidity—the abyss, the whirlpool, the ocean, the thunderstorm—images not unique in themselves among mystical theologians, but given new content and meaning in Hadewijch's treatment of the Trinity and of the soul's relationship to it. For Hadewijch, the abyss and the whirlpool (*afgront* and *wiel* in Middle Dutch, which she tended to use in similar ways or interchangeably) represent both God, the soul, and their mutual participation in one another, as in Letter 18: "The soul is a bottomless abyss in which God suffices to himself; and his own self-sufficiency ever finds fruition to the full in this soul, as the soul, for its part, ever does in him"; and in Stanzaic Poem 7: "My soul melts away / In the madness of Love; / The abyss into which she [Love]

[523] McGinn, *Flowering*, 200-22; and Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 12.
[524] McGinn, *Flowering*, 1-2, 78.

hurls me / Is deeper than the sea." Words related to the abyss, like "engulfment," "flood," "storm," and "unfathomable depths," also appear frequently in Hadewijch's writings in relation to the divine, the soul, and the centered yet super-kinetic spiritual life that Hadewijch both lived and taught.

In both biblical and theological tradition, *abyss* has nearly always had negative connotations as primeval, chaotic, and dangerous (as, for example, in Genesis 1:2, Job 26:7, Psalms 14 and 138, and Revelation 21:1)—and was often used as a synonym for hell, as it was for Hildegard. Ocean and sea images among early Western mystics in the Neoplatonic tradition (like Evagrius, Cassian, and Eriugena) were more ambivalent, the abyss connoting vastness and divine infinity while retaining more ominous possibilities. But, according to McGinn, "many of the Christian fathers, particularly Latin figures like Augustine and Gregory the Great, continued to use the sea primarily in a negative fashion as imaging the turmoil of this life"[525] or the hopelessness of the life to come for those condemned to hell. For mystical theologians in the apophatic tradition, which dominated the genre of mystical writing until the late twelfth century, the abyss was a place of nothingness.

Images of vast watery depths, and of flowing and overflowing, were fairly common among visionary theologians from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, especially women.[526] One common image among women visionaries (including Beatrice of Nazareth, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Mechthild of Hackeborn, and Catherine of Siena) was the great, tranquil sea of divine love in which the soul might swim. But the abyss, as opposed to the

[525] Bernard McGinn, "Ocean and Desert as Symbols of Mystical Absorption in the Christian Tradition," *Journal of Religion* 74 (1994): 158.
[526] McGinn, "Ocean and Desert," 177; and Ulrike Wiethaus, "Sexuality, Gender, and the Body in Late Medieval Women's Spirituality: Cases from German and the Netherlands," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 (1991): 49.

sea, was portrayed in a negative way among both earlier and later medieval contemplatives, male and female, as a place in which the soul could be lost or swallowed up.[527] In one of Beatrice's visions, for example, the abyss, while containing Love, completely disables the soul:

> Love's beauty has consumed it [the soul].
>
> Love's strength has eaten it up.
>
> Love's sweetness has immersed it.
>
> Love's greatness has absorbed it.
>
> So conquered is it by love that it can scarcely sustain itself
>
> And loses its power over its members and senses.[528]

Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch's near contemporary in Saxony (and sounding very much like Augustine), laments the spiritual abyss as a simile of sin and loss: "Lord, my guilt through which I have lost you stands before my eyes like an immense mountain and has created an extensive darkness between you and me, and an eternal distance of you, alas, from me!"[529] For mystical writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries who carried on the apophatic tradition, the abyss—as a place of nothingness—was the endpoint of spiritual union with God, a point that for Meister Eckhart, the main exemplar of the genre, went beyond even the Trinity to the absolute and simple Unity of God.

Here is where Hadewijch stands apart, as she sets forth a specifically Trinitarian and more positive interpretation of the abyss and the whirlpool—one in which she is never,

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[527] Zum Brunn and Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics*, 46.
[528] Beatrice of Nazareth, "The Seven Manners of Holy Love," in *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth 1200-1268*, trans. Roger de Ganck (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 311.
[529] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Flowing Light*, 4.5.

finally, lost to herself or to God; nor is her spiritual agency compromised.[530] Rather than imagining the abyss only as the absence of God or the locus of the annihilation of the soul, Hadewijch imagined the abyss or whirlpool in multivalent ways—as an image of the triune God with its moveable parts, as the virtuous soul rotating among states of action and contemplation, and as the ceaseless interchange between the soul and the triune divine. While all four genres of Hadewijch's writing (letters, visions, poems in stanzas, and poems in couplets) contain commentary on the Trinity, her visions are especially colorful and rich with Trinitarian life—ceaseless in its movement and complex in its diversity, even while rest might be found (but only temporarily) in the still point of Unity. Put together, there emerges in Hadewijch's writings a theology of the Trinity that is original, practical, and balanced—though not tidy and systematic, and certainly not easy.

Hadewijch does not shy away, for instance, from violent images of God or Love and the soul's relationship to it; she embraces ambivalence and extremity in her efforts to grasp the lived reality of life in the Trinity, whom she understood to be relational, multiple, and complex by definition, while at the same time self-sufficient, one, and simple. In Poem 16, she uses images both overwhelming and wet to describe the attributes of the Trinity as a unity of contradictions: "By the dew the conflagration [violence of Love] is appeased, / And balm is poured out, a unitive strong wind. / The bliss and the madness of Love / Then cast them into the abysmal Flood, / Unfathomable, ever living, / Which with life receives, in the Unity of the Trinity, / God and man in one single love: / Such is the Trinity above all thought."

[530] In this, she is like Hilary of Poitiers (the fourth-century "Athanasius of the West"), who bridges the two halves of the church in his *De Trinitate*, cautious against "reason's curiosity" but also against "the silence of ignorance." He wants to "penetrate into the mystery, plunge into the darkness" of the Trinity (Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 229).

God is thus a gaping abyss for Hadewijch; but that cannot be all of God, nor the endpoint of Christian contemplation. The abyss as a symbol of the triune God is also for her, as it was finally for Mechthild of Magdeburg, a source of spiritual nourishment and creativity.[531] Notwithstanding that Hadewijch is buffeted by the violent force of Love, and often suffers miserably as a result, the abyss and the whirlpool grant important self-knowledge and knowledge of the divine through her "self-abandonment to a descent, an abyss of humility," in which the self is "capable of experiencing all extremes of existence without being torn apart by them."[532] Hadewijch masterfully keeps spiritual opposites in tension, destabilizing traditional dichotomies and hierarchies like soul and body, intellect and senses, heaven and hell.[533] She is careful to emphasize both the pain and the productivity of the spiritual life as it is experienced in the abyss and the whirlpool—that is, in the triune God.

In the twelfth-century contemplative tradition from which Hadewijch drew, vast bodies of water (oceans and seas) often stood in for God or the heavens. Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, spoke of the angelic order as being "rapt while still conscious through excessive wonder of the sweetest and most intense contemplation into so vast a sea [*pelagus*] of divine brightness."[534] In his *De Trinitate*, Richard of St. Victor speaks of the "flowing wave [*unda*] of divinity and overflowing of love," which is poured out by all three persons of the Trinity.[535] "This dynamic picture of the Trinity as a flood of waters," McGinn says, "appears to have had echoes among the vernacular mystics of the late Middle Ages. Where the ocean symbol was picked up, among a host of other water images in thirteenth-

[531] Perhaps echoing Romans 11:33: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!"
[532] Elizabeth Petroff, *Body and Soul*, 199; quoted in Julie B. Miller, "Eroticized Violence in Medieval Women's Mystical Literature: A Call for a Feminist Critique," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 15 (1999): 43.
[533] Mary A. Suydam, "The Touch of Satisfaction: Visions and the Religious Experience According to Hadewijch of Antwerp," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12 (1996): 6.
[534] Quoted in McGinn, "Ocean and Desert," 174.
[535] Ibid.

century mystics, was primarily among some of the Beguines."[536] Richard of St. Victor's particularly Trinitarian interpretation of a vast and overflowing body of water is one that Hadewijch richly develops.

In Vision 1, Hadewijch sees under a seat shaped like a wheel or circling disk (*scine*) three pillars,[537] within which is a whirlpool: "The pillar like fire is the name of the Holy Spirit. The pillar like the topaz is the name of the Father. The pillar like the amethyst is the name of the Son. The profound whirlpool, which is so frightfully dark, is divine fruition in its hidden storms." The whirlpool here, which seems to represent the inner life of the Trinity (the shared substance among the three persons) is both frightening and beautiful. Visions 11 and 12 extend the whirlpool image as an abyss "wide and exceedingly dark" that contains all of creation, including a city with "a great crowd in festive apparel, and each one rich in her own works." Yet, paradoxically, the abyss "was of such unheard-of depth and so dark that no horror can be compared to it." Three birds hover over this abyss—two eagles representing Hadewijch and Augustine, the third a phoenix representing "the Unity in which the Trinity dwells," which swallows the two eagles. The presence beneath of "One whose Countenance none could perceive without belonging to the terrible flames of this disk and being thrown into the deep abyss which lay underneath," is nonetheless redemptive and healing: "That Countenance drew all the dead to it living; and everything that was withered blossomed because of it; and all the poor who saw it received great riches; and all the sick became strong; and all who were in multiplicity and division became one in that Countenance."

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[536] Ibid.
[537] It is possible that Hadewijch borrowed this image from Hildegard, whose "building of salvation" in *Scivias* III is held up by three pillars, one of which is the three-sided Pillar of the Trinity.

Here are the themes that run throughout Hadewijch's writings, in which the Trinity is all about paradox and reversal: oneness and threeness, stillness and ceaseless motion, condemnation and salvation, misery and happiness, reason and feeling, unity and diversity. The Christian soul, modeled after the Trinity in Hadewijch's own version of Platonic exemplarism, contains similar paradoxical tension, as does the Christian life, which is often as difficult, demanding, and busy (at least for Hadewijch) as is the inner and outworking life of the Trinity.

Unlike many contemplative theologians, beginning with Augustine, who made disclaimers about their ability and worthiness to describe the inner life of God, Hadewijch's strong sense of unity with, and likeness to, the whole Trinity gave her the confidence to speak of it, indeed, to wear it. Following the intense vision described above (Vision 12), Hadewijch receives a sort of merit badge: "She [Hadewijch] wore on her breast an ornament with the divine seal, by which she had knowledge of the undivided divine Unity. This was a symbol that she had understood the hidden work of God himself out of the abyss." Those who achieve union with God, Hadewijch says, are uniquely able to understand and embrace the mystery of God's inner life that is hidden from, or misunderstood by, those whose vision is clogged by sin, fear, or laziness. As she says in Vision 12: "They who contemplate the Countenance … are enabled to fathom the deep abysses that for those unacquainted with them are so terrifying to know."

In her vision of the inner life of God (the immanent Trinity), Hadewijch seems to have been influenced by Richard of St. Victor's conceptualization of the interrelationship of persons in the Trinity as Lover, Beloved, and the Love they share. But Hadewijch is bolder, expressing the idea in her own less abstract way, using the language of abyss, submergence,

and flowing—as well as language of the body—to evoke both the unity of the Godhead within multiplicity and the unity of the soul with God despite difference (here in Letter 9, probably to a younger beguine):

> May God make known to you, dear child, who he is, and how he deals with his servants, and especially with his handmaids—and may he submerge you in him! Where the abyss of his wisdom is, he will teach you what he is, and with what wondrous sweetness the loved one and the Beloved dwell one in the other, and how they penetrate each other in such a way that neither of the two distinguishes himself from the other. But they abide in one another in fruition, mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, and soul in soul, while one sweet divine Nature flows through them both, and they are both one thing through each other, but at the same time remain two different selves—yes, and remain so forever.

For Hadewijch, neither the spiritual life nor the task of theology was static or merely speculative. Life in God, as she envisioned it, has both movement—a continual *exitus* and *reditus* between the soul and the triune God—and positive content. It makes real, daily demands of the Christian, as God says to her in Vision 3: "In my unity, you have received me and I have received you. Go forth, and live what I am; and return bringing me full divinity, and have fruition of me as who I am." By "full divinity," Hadewijch means the three persons of the Trinity and all their works, which the Christian soul imitates and offers back to God. The word "fruition" (*ghebruken*) appears very frequently in Hadewijch's writing, almost as often as "love" (*minne*). *Ghebruken* may, according to Mary Suydam, be better translated

"enjoyment" or "satisfaction"[538] and seems to refer both to knowledge of God and to productive virtue in *imitatio Trinitatis*, formed in the whirlpool and the abyss for those brave enough to enter into it.

As one of the first theologians of substance to write in Middle Dutch, Hadewijch was a natural source of ideas and images for Jan Ruusbroec (1293-1381), a Flemish theologian writing a century later in the same language who acknowledged his admiration for Hadewijch and who disseminated her writings. Ruusbroec's intellectual debt to Hadewijch, especially in his first two works (*The Kingdom of Lovers* and *The Spiritual Marriage*), has been acknowledged by some scholars but overlooked by others (Louis Dupré, Rik Van Nieuwenhove, and James Wiseman among them). Bernard McGinn, Columba Hart, and more recent feminist scholars have drawn parallels between the two Flemish writers' use of the *minne* language of courtly love as a spiritual metaphor, but have given only passing attention to the powerful fluid and abysmal images of the Trinity that Ruusbroec apparently borrowed from Hadewijch.

Like Hadewijch, Ruusbroec understood the Trinity as active love, given and returned in an unceasing circular movement, both among the three divine persons and between God (the "Eternal Archetype") and creation, made in God's image: "The abyss of God calls to the abyss; that is, of all those who are united with the spirit of God in fruitive love. This inward call is an inundation of the essential brightness, … enfolding us in an abysmal love, … the wild darkness of the Godhead."[539] For Ruusbroec as for Hadewijch, the relationship between the Trinity and the soul is one of endless ebb and flow that sometimes becomes violent (in

[538] Suydam, "Touch of Satisfaction," 14.
[539] *John Ruusbroec: The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, trans. James A. Wiseman (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 132.

Ruusbroec's words: a "storm of love" in which "two spirits contend").[540] Ruusbroec uses other fluid images for God as well: "a flowing ebbing sea," "a fathomless whirlpool," and "the wild waves of the sea."[541] He describes the Trinity as a spring with three streams and as water boiling over[542]—probably borrowing here from Meister Eckhart, who also seems to have borrowed some themes from Hadewijch (although this is less well attested).

Key to Ruusbroec's Trinitarian theology, as for Hadewijch's (but not Eckhart's), is the idea that union with the triune God is both negative and positive, both rational and affective, both simple and complex, and both restful and productive (fruitive). Ruusbroec called the combination of good works plus contemplation, the relationship of the Trinity with the Christian community, and the relationship of Christians to one another the "common life" (*dat ghemeyne leven*)—an idea adapted from Gregory in its general contours, but more specifically from Hadewijch, who uses the same phrase in her Letter 12. Among all these relationships—within the triune God, between God and souls, and among people in the Church—is a balance of unity and multiplicity, of "integrated diversity," as Hadewijch puts it (Letter 28), which Ruusbroec strongly picks up on but expresses in more academic language.[543]

Jan Ruusbroec has been called "Western Christianity's most articulate interpreter of the Trinitarian mystical tradition"[544] and "one of the most radical Trinitarian thinkers of the

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[540] *John Ruusbroec: The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, trans. James A. Wiseman (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 115.
[541] McGinn, "Ocean and Desert," 177.
[542] Ruusbroec, *Spiritual Marriage*, II.81.
[543] They both seem to be paraphrasing Augustine, who says: "For the human soul, to be is not to be strong, or prudent, or just, or temperate; it can be a soul and have none of these virtues. But for God, to be is to be strong, or just, or wise, and anything else you may mention of that simple multiplicity or multiplex simplicity whereby his substance is signified." (*DT* 6.4.6)
[544] Dupré, *The Common Life*, 29.

West."[545] But I would argue that Hadewijch deserves these titles. With boldness and originality (especially compared to the Trinitarian conventions of the time[546]), Hadewijch captures the multidimensionality and difficulty of the spiritual life as lived in and through the Holy Trinity. She gives penetrating insight not only into the redemptive outworkings of God, that is, salvation history (to which most theologians and contemplatives limited themselves) but also into the inner life of God and the implications of that inner divine life for embodied souls. Thus she gave new, dynamic life to an archaic but essential doctrine, opening its diverse meanings to the next generations of mystical theologians.

[545] Van Nieuwenhove, "Trinity, Faith and Mysticism," 70.
[546] Most figural depictions of the Holy Trinity during Hadewijch's time were of two male figures and a dove. The "Throne of Grace" or "Mercy Seat" (*Gnadenstuhl*) variant of this motif was especially prevalent in northern Europe.

Chapter 6: Julian of Norwich's Passionate Trinity in Fourteenth-Century Context

Julian of Norwich (1342-ca. 1416), an English anchoress, made various and innovative uses of intimate, mostly familial, imagery when writing of the Trinity as it was shown to her in a series of visions. Her book of "shewynges," titled by later redactors *Revelations of Divine Love* or *Showings*, was recorded in Middle English and includes a short text (ST) and a second longer text (LT), which Julian wrote some years later, expanding upon the short text. Despite proscriptions against vernacular theology in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, most famously set forth in the Constitutions of Arundel (1408), Julian was able to create in her vernacular English "a new genre in her *Shewings*, a combination of visionary narrative and extensive theological meditation."[547]

Julian is probably best known for her use of maternal images when speaking of the Trinity and its relationship to humanity. She was not the first to use maternal imagery to describe God, but her application of that imagery to the Trinity as a whole was unique among medieval religious writers. Salvation was the goal of the Holy Trinity, as she understood it, and love the reason. Salvation and love were both embodied and enacted by the triune Godhead in its diverse roles, the maternal role chief among them.

The Fourteenth-Century Context

Born during the reign of Edward III (r. 1327-77), Julian lived at a time of great literary achievement in England, with writers like Chaucer, Langland, and the author of *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* representing the reassertion of Middle English. But it

[547] McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguines Mystics*, 10.

was also a tumultuous era. The Hundred Years' War between England and France began in 1337, five years before Julian's birth, lasting until 1453. The Black Death struck Norwich at least three times during Julian's lifetime (in 1349, 1351, and 1369) and wiped out half of the city's population.[548] Julian does not mention the plague in her writings, but there is evidence of her familiarity with "foul black death" (ST 1) in her gruesome and detailed descriptions of the crucifixion, which echo a preoccupation with death in the larger culture. Related to both war and plague was the Peasant Uprising of 1381, which spread throughout East Anglia.[549] The end of the fourteenth century and beginning of the fifteenth was, furthermore, a time of intense theological strife and papal schism. From 1378 to 1417, coterminous with Julian's adult life, there were two or three popes vying for power. Although Julian made no explicit reference to this crisis in her book, it is likely that she knew about it because the Bishop of Norwich at the time (Henry Despenser) was an active supporter of Pope Urban IV in Rome.

Despite the turmoil around her, Julian was remarkably optimistic and tranquil, without the prophetic or critical edge of Hildegard and Mechthild of Magdeburg. She did represent, however, one popular reaction to fractious church politics and other disasters: a burgeoning lay spirituality, including the use of Books of Hours generated in great numbers from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.[550] The *devotio moderna*, a lay movement begun in the fourteenth century that encouraged personal piety and devotion, like the Books of Hours placed emphasis on Christ's sacrifice for individuals with the goal of eliciting "an emotional response and subsequent pious activities."[551] Julian, a devout Catholic, carried on the affective spirituality of the twelfth-century Cistercians and thirteenth-century visionaries.

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[548] Hide, *Gifted Origins*, 11.
[549] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 99.
[550] Price-Linnartz, "Seeing the Triune God," 25.
[551] Price-Linnartz, "Seeing the Triune God," 23.

She also shared in the contemporary personal devotion that centered around "a recollection of the Passion" (ST 1) and Christ's salvific wounds[552]—even while she abjured the incipient Protestantism of her contemporary John Wycliffe (ca. 1328-1384) and his followers, the Lollards, who were active in her region. (The Constitutions of Arundel were aimed primarily at this group.)

Meanwhile in the academic world, "scholastic theology had become increasingly complex and inaccessible to many."[553] With due respect to scholastic theologians' personal sanctity, pastoral and ecclesiastical intentions, and usefulness in clarifying doctrine and combating heresy, their philosophical debates were marked by "increasing technical refinement" that "began to become counterproductive,"[554] that is, of questionable use to Christian spirituality and practice.[555] Aquinas, for example, had described the Trinity this way:

> The many persons are the many subsisting relations really distinct from each other. But a real distinction between the divine relations can come only from relative opposition. … We must consequently admit that spiration belongs to the person of the Father and to the person of the Son, inasmuch as it has no relative opposition either to paternity or to filiation; and consequently that procession belongs to the other person who is called the person of the Holy Ghost. … Therefore only three persons exist in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.[556]

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[552] Ibid., 25.
[553] Ibid., 24.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 113.
[556] Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 30, a. 2, in Shapcote, 17:168-69.

In the ongoing effort in scholastic Trinitarian theology to chart a course between modalism (the belief that there is just one divine person with three "modes" or aspects) and tritheism (the belief that there are three divine substances or Gods), John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265-1308) had this to say:

> When it is claimed further that the relation in the divine is substantial, my reply is this: Although the Philosopher distinguishes first substance from second substance in the *Categories* nevertheless in the case at hand the essence functions in both ways in so far as it is related to anything. To the extent that it is common it has the aspect of secondary substance. Not however in the sense that it is a universal, that is, divisible or able to be multiplied, for it is common by a community that is real. … It has the characteristic of primary substance, however, to the extent that it is just this being or singular, for the divine essence is singular of itself.[557]

Julian showed no affinity for this sort of discourse. Neither did Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380-1471), a contemporary of Julian and a member of the Brethren of the Common Life (part of the *devotio moderna* movement), who expressed his exasperation with scholastic method:

> What good is it for you to be able to discuss the Trinity with great profundity, if you lack humility, and thereby offend the Trinity? Verily, high sounding words do not make one holy and just. But a life of virtue does make one acceptable to God. It is better to feel repentance, than to be able to define it. Were you to memorize the entire Bible and all the sayings of the philosophers,

[557] John Duns Scotus, Quod. 3, n. 17; quoted in Richard Cross, "Duns Scotus on Divine Substance and the Trinity," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2003): 188.

what good would this be for you without the love of God and without grace?

Vanity of vanities. All is vanity, except loving God and serving only God.[558]

In the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, key issues in scholastic Trinitarian theology continued to be the unity, equality, and distinction of the three persons and the procession of the Holy Spirit.[559] But there was also a fideistic strain emerging, which included William of Ockham (ca. 1287-1347) and, while remaining academic, posed questions about the certainty and usefulness of technical, philosophical language to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. The great English mystical writers of the same period—Richard Rolle (1290-1349), Walter Hilton (ca. 1340-1396), and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* (second half of the fourteenth century)—expressed an apophatic spirituality that acknowledged the same sort of fideistic agnosticism about the Trinity.

Julian's immediate context of Norwich, East Anglia—an important cultural center during the fourteenth century, and second only to London in population among English cities—included many churches, beguinages, and religious houses. These numbered at least twenty and included Augustinian Canons, Franciscans, Dominicans, Benedictines, and Carmelites, all of whose traditions have been identified by various scholars as contributing influences to Julian's theology. Dominating the fourteenth-century skyline of the city was Norwich Cathedral (full name: Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity), which was being rebuilt in Gothic style during Julian's lifetime. Several of the local religious institutions had good libraries, and they would have provided townspeople with religious visual culture as well as theological books.

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[558] Price-Linnartz, "Seeing the Triune God," 25.
[559] Ibid., 18.

Portraits of the crucified Christ and of the Trinity were readily available in East Anglia and the surrounding areas, and in a variety of media. Both themes figured importantly, and inseparably, in Julian's theology; and her innovation is striking in contrast to the conventionality of the images to which she would have been exposed. Julian expressed her confidence in visual forms as theological vehicles when she said: "I believed firmly in all Christ's pains, as Holy Church shows and teaches, and as paintings of the Crucifixion represent, which are made by God's grace, according to Holy Church's teaching, to resemble Christ's Passion, so far as human understanding can attain" (ST 1). She would depart creatively from those images and their meanings in describing her own visions, even while affirming her adherence to orthodoxy.

The *Showings*

Julian was the first major female English visionary[560] and the first known woman writer in English.[561] She has been read since at least the mid-fifteenth century, the date of the earliest extant manuscript, but until the 1980s her writings were "treated as devotional literature, with minimal attention given to her theology; or her teaching has been assessed through isolated statements rather than as a whole; or her theology, which is of the first order, has been diminished in importance by being compared piecemeal to that of other theologians and mystics."[562] These others include the Cistercians (especially William of St. Thierry), the

[560] Watson, "Composition," 651.
[561] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 222.
[562] Ritamary Bradley, review of *Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich* by Brant Pelphrey, *Speculum* 59 (1984): 682-83.

Victorines, and the Franciscans, who were especially devoted to Christ's passion.[563] In the last thirty years, however, more attention has been given to Julian's theology as a whole, and without the assumption that she derived it directly from other sources.[564]

Julian claimed to be uneducated (a "simple, unlettered creature," LT 2); and she made the sort of disclaimers commonplace among women writers, saying: "God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not and never was my intention; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak and frail." But she goes on to express her confidence in her visions, and in her higher authority: "I know very well that what I am saying I have received by the revelation of him who is the sovereign teacher" (ST 6). She continues by stating her overall aim: "It is truly love which moves me to tell it [God's revelation] to you, for I want God to be known and my fellow Christians to prosper, as I hope to prosper myself, by hating sin more and loving God more" (ST 6). Julian does not cite any sources besides scripture, tradition ("the true doctrine of Holy Church," ST 6), and her own visionary experience. There is no hard evidence of what or how much she read. But the sophistication in both content and style of Julian's writing indicates that she knew and read more than she would admit. It is clear, at least, that she knew the Vulgate very well and was immersed in the theology of the spiritual classics.[565]

The Trinitarian theologies of both Augustine and Anselm, which were widely known and absorbed in the later Middle Ages, are reflected in Julian's writings even if she did not

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[563] Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, introduction to *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), I:43-59.
[564] See especially Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011); Brant Pelphrey, *Christ Our Mother: Julian of Norwich* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989); Nicholas Watson, "Trinitarian Hermeneutic" in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire, 61-90 (New York: Garland, 1998) and Ritamary Bradley, Review of *Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich*, by Brant Pelphrey, *Speculum* 59 (1984): 682-84.
[565] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 103.

read them herself. These two foundational thinkers focused on the love of God manifest in the Trinity—a focus that Julian shared, but without the metaphysical or technical expression of it.[566] Anselm, drawing from Augustine (especially *De Trinitate* 15), seems to place greater importance on the Trinity *ad intra* than the Trinity *ad extra*, a position from which Julian distanced herself even while it remained of great interest to scholastic theologians. Of the love shared within the Godhead, Anselm says, for instance:

> But, while I am here considering with interest the individual properties and the common attributes of Father and Son, I find none in them more pleasing to contemplate than the feeling of mutual love. … That love is, then, the supreme Spirit. Hence if no creature, that is, if nothing other than the supreme Spirit, the Father and the Son, ever existed; nevertheless, Father and Son would love themselves and one another.[567]

Julian's visions were the main source of her theological reflection and, more specifically, of her confidence in God's abiding love for humanity (as opposed to divine love as abstract and self-involved). She received her visions at age thirty, during a grave illness, while gazing at a crucifix held before her by the priest who had come to give her last rites (ST 3). She received sixteen distinct "showings" over two days in May 1373 (fifteen on the first day, and the sixteenth concluding vision the following night, LT 15-16). She describes herself as being awake during the visions, and the process of receiving them as "lovely and calm" (LT 15). Her explications of the visions are so full of God's love that they were titled *Revelations of Divine Love* by later editors. The short text, written first, contains twenty-five

[566] Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 114-15.
[567] Anselm, *Monologion* 49 and 53, in *Basic Writings: Proslogium, Monologium, Gaunilon's On Behalf of the Fool; Cur Deus Homo*, ed. S. N. Deane (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), 113-15.

chapters of varying length; the long text, with eighty-six chapters, is four times longer than the short. The long text contains elaboration of two of Julian's major themes: the Trinity and the Motherhood of God. It also contains Julian's well-known story of the Lord and Servant. This parable of human sin and salvation serves as a focal point for the Trinity as manifestation and conduit of God's love.

Dates for both the short and long texts have been disputed. While most scholars believe that the short text was written down shortly after the visions were received (ca. 1373-74), and the long text about twenty years later (ca. 1393), Nicholas Watson has argued for later dates for both: the short text during the 1380s, and the long text "very late in Julian's life," around 1410-1415.[568] Everyone agrees, however, that a substantial interval of time passed between the two, as Julian herself says. During this time she was able to reflect more deeply and theologically on the visions and to present them as a coherent whole—a process she describes in LT 51 and in the closing chapters of the long text. The Trinity provides the thematic structure, which Watson calls Julian's "Trinitarian hermeneutic,"[569] for the whole work: Julian describes her writing project in three phases corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity and their attributes (as defined by Augustine, and reiterated by Julian): 1) the beginning of teaching/memory/Father/power; 2) inward instruction/reason/Son/wisdom; and 3) the whole revelation/will/Holy Spirit/love.

Julian thus came to view her collection of showings "as a single and theologically integrated revelation sent by God, not only to her but to all Christians (and, implicitly, to the

[568] Watson, "Composition," 666, 678-80.
[569] Nicholas Watson, "Trinitarian Hermeneutic," in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), 62-63.

entire world)."[570] Her visions, as Julian understood them, were communal: "And you to whom this book will come, give our savior Christ Jesus great and hearty thanks that he made these showings and revelations for you and to you out of his endless love, mercy and goodness, for a safe guide and conduct for you and us to everlasting bliss, which may Jesus grant us" (LT 86). Although it has been argued that Julian had different intended audiences for the two texts—the short text aimed at "an audience of contemplatives" rather than to the "carefully universalized audience of LT"[571]—Julian herself seems to contradict this. She says that the short text was intended "for all those who desire to be Christ's lovers" (ST 1) and that "everything that I say about myself I mean to apply to all my fellow Christians … for it is common and general, just as we are all one" (ST 6).

Numerous suggestions have also been made as to the theological precedents for, and context of, Julian's thought. Brant Pelphrey, for instance, finds much similarity between Julian and the Eastern Orthodox tradition, including the idea of human divination, the glorification of Christ, a focus on the three persons of the Trinity and their interrelationships (both amongst themselves and with humanity), and an emphasis on the community over the individual. He admits, however, that "these same elements are present in medieval mysticism as a whole."[572] Others have found in Julian an Origenist intellectual mysticism (in the Neoplatonic tradition) and an Orthodox panentheism, the belief that "God is present in everything, but at the same time, is beyond everything."[573] These generalizations call for qualification. Julian cannot really be described as Neoplatonic: while on the one hand she says that "no soul has rest until it has despised as nothing all which is created" (ST 4), she

[570] Watson, "Composition," 637.
[571] Ibid., 673.
[572] Pelphrey, *Love Was His Meaning*, 69.
[573] Bobrinskoy, *Mystery of the Trinity*, 315.

sees creation as "great and lovely and bountiful and good … and the goodness which everything has is God" (ST 5). She claims, further, that "God is in our sensuality" (LT 55). Julian might rightly be seen as fitting into the panentheist stream, as she observes that God "is present in all things" (ST 8); but she also recognizes the eternal distinction between the divine and human and the ruinous effects of sin.

It may be more accurate to say that Julian joins together the two spiritual streams—Eastern and Western—especially given the strong Augustinian themes in her writings. Augustinian friars, Soskice has pointed out, "lived near her in Norwich, and contemporary sermons and spiritual writings were suffused with Augustinian teachings. Elements of *De Trinitate* were well known through Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, which her advisors certainly would have known."[574] Julian indeed brings together the two halves of Augustine's *De Trinitate*—Trinity and *imago dei*—and picks up (as do Abelard and the women of Helfta, among many others) Augustine's characterization of the Trinity as power, wisdom, and goodness. Soskice argues that Julian does not depart from the "largely Augustinian orthodoxy of her day," with similarities of substance, style, and spiritual intent in her writing, but rather "presses it to a new fruitfulness" in her "theology configured by kinship."[575]

The perceived Victorine influence (particularly that of Richard of St. Victor) on Julian comes primarily from "the teaching that it is love that binds together the Trinity, as well as being the 'property' particularly associated with the Holy Spirit"[576]—an idea that may also be traced ultimately to Augustine.[577] Julian sounds much like Richard when, in her explication of the parable of the Lord and Servant, she says: "the lord is God the Father, the

[574] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 128-29.
[575] Ibid., 126.
[576] Watson, "Composition," 672. See Richard of St. Victor, especially his *De Trinitate* (*PL* 196: 887-992).
[577] Augustine, *DT* 15.17.27-28.

servant is the Son, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is the equal love which is in them both" (LT 51). Watson argues, furthermore, that Julian understood (as evident in the long text) the orthodox tenet that "love is more than a 'property' belonging to one of the persons [of the Trinity] and instead resembles the unity in which all three persons coinhere."[578] While modest about her own knowledge and about the provisional nature of knowledge itself, Julian shares Richard of St. Victor's "optimistic and intimate expectation of knowledge," including that of the Trinity.[579]

In contrast to many of her mystical peers, who were influenced largely by the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysius, Julian's spirituality was not generally apophatic: "in Julian there is no cloud, no darkness of unknowing, no [separate] active and contemplative lives, no hierarchical distinctions among Christians, no despising of the flesh, and no effort to soar above it."[580] Julian stands in contrast, for example, to her contemporary, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, in regard to meditation on the passion of Christ. As Jantzen says, the *Cloud* author

> teaches that within the practice of contemplative prayer, all other things must be put aside under the 'cloud of forgetting'; this includes all theological doctrines, all meditation on the saints and on the joys of heaven, and so on. He explicitly includes in the things which must be forgotten during this prayer all thoughts of Christ and his passion. Consideration of these things will only

[578] Watson, "Composition," 672.
[579] Pelphrey, *Love Was His Meaning*, 63.
[580] Bradley, review of *Love Was His Meaning*, 683.

> lead to meditation on one's own sinful wretchedness, and from there to the conditions of one's life, and soon all concentration will be gone.[581]

Julian indeed moves from contemplation of the cross to contemplation of "sinful wretchedness," but this only leads her focus further to assurance of her ultimate safety in the love of God—the still point of all existence.

It is not known whether Julian knew or read her contemporary English mystics, nor if she read continental visionary literature which, from the 1390s on, was more available in England than it had been before.[582] This literature included writings by Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, Mechthild of Hackeborn, Elizabeth of Hungary, and Marie d'Oignies (along with mystical writings by continental men, including Henry Suso and Jan Ruusbroec).[583] In regard to the authority and influence of continental women visionaries in their own countries, JoAnne McNamara made the (influential but debatable) argument that the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries were the heyday of women's mysticism, but that in the later Middle Ages there was a "great silent void" of women's religious voices.[584] Watson argues that, in England at least, the reverse was true; and that by the end of Julian's life "there are signs that the long-standing English institutional suspicion of visions and female visionary writers had begun to soften."[585] This, along with her orthodox Catholicism, perhaps explains the positive reception that Julian seems to have received, even if not widely

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[581] Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 110. See *Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1981), 131-34.
[582] Watson, "Composition," 653.
[583] Ibid., 653-54.
[584] McNamara, "Rhetoric of Orthodoxy," 10.
[585] Watson, "Composition," 653-54.

known or read beyond Norwich in her own day,[586] and the popularity of continental women's visionary literature in late medieval England.

Finally, there are frequent scholarly comparisons made between Julian and the *Ancrene Wisse* (also known as the *Ancrene Riwle*), the Middle English rule for anchoresses, not only in terms of the routines of Julian's daily life but also in the content of her devotion. According to the *Ancrene Wisse,* religious women should

> keep him [Christ] in your nest, that is, your heart. Think how much pain he suffered in his flesh outwardly, how sweet hearted he was, how soft within. … Whoever cannot have or hold this gemstone in the nest of her heart should at least have its likeness, that is the crucifix, in the nest of her anchorhouse; let her look on it often and kiss the places of the wounds in sweet memory of the true wounds which he patiently suffered on the true cross.[587]

The *Ancrene Wisse* also prescribed for anchoresses a prayer to the Trinity to be said daily with the Pater Noster, which says in part: "Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, even as You Three are one God, even as You are one Power, one Wisdom, and one Love, and yet in Holy Scripture power is especially attributed to Thee, Beloved Father, wisdom to Thee, Blessed Son, love to Thee, O Holy Spirit; give me, O one Almighty God, threefold in three Persons, these same three things."[588] Augustinian in its attribution of power, wisdom, and love to the three members of the Godhead, this prayer also shows an understanding of the doctrinal notion of appropriations—that while power, wisdom, and love belong to the Trinity as a whole, each of those attributes is appropriated especially to one member of the Godhead.

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[586] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 225.
[587] *Ancrene Wisse* III: Inner Feelings, in *Anchoritic Spirituality:* Ancrene Wisse *and Associated Works*, trans. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 99.
[588] *Ancrene Wisse* I; quoted in Pelphrey, *Love Was His Meaning*, 102.

Julian will make similar assertions, emphasizing the all-for-one nature of the Trinity even while recognizing the missions of the three: "For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity … [and] where Jesus appears, the blessed Trinity is to be understood" (LT 4).

While Julian has been compared to other medieval theologians and visionaries, Watson maintains that while "it is clearly possible that she was empowered by her sense of belonging to some sort of visionary tradition," she "resolutely (and significantly) refused to conform to literary type—[her writings] blossoming instead into what can be characterized as a dialogic, imagistically spare, and theologically dense visionary argument which, taken as whole, is without structural precedent or parallel."[589] Like the other women in this study, her writings are finally her own. As Marion Glasscoe put it: "The hall-mark of her witness lies in the interpenetration of theology and experience; she will not allow one to falsify the other. … She formulates her understanding in medieval theological terms, but in such a way as to reveal that psychological dynamic which is the starting point of theology."[590]

Julian's Trinitarian Theology

Of all the medieval women visionaries, Julian arguably has the best-developed Trinitarian theology, which she lays out especially in chapters 52-63 of the long text, adjacent to the Lord and Servant parable. Trinitarian spirituality suffuses and structures her whole work, however, and the Trinity is envisioned by Julian in various and creative ways. The first thing one notices about Julian is her fondness for sets of three, which she shares with other visionary women and with the mystical tradition generally. Many sets of three are found in scripture, the liturgy, and the creeds as well, giving a Trinitarian shape to Christian

[589] Watson, "Composition," 649-50.
[590] Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (Harlow, U.K.: Longman Group, 1993), 219.

tradition more generally. These "threes" inspired Julian's imagination, giving structure to her own deep investigations into how the three persons of the Godhead function for human benefit and salvation.

In the opening chapters of the short text, Julian sets the stage for the Trinitarian hermeneutic to follow as she presents three graces, three wounds, three days and nights of sickness, three degrees of bliss, three ways to respond to the devil, three sayings, visions of Mary at three different stages of her life, three "nothings," three heavens, and a teaching received in three parts: "in her bodily vision, in words formed in her understanding, and in spiritual vision" (ST 7). In chapter 4 of the short text, in which Julian describes the three properties of the hazelnut-small universe (that God made it, loves it, and preserves it), she makes parallel observations about the roles played by the members of the Trinity as creator, lover, and protector.

Julian's Trinity is always active on humans' behalf as love pours out of God's own internal being—which Julian believed to be beyond human understanding. Indeed, Julian disparages a doctrine of God that is purely speculative or essentialist, as she says in chapter 15 of the short text: "It is God's will that we should know in general that all will be well, but it is not God's will that we should know it now except as it applies to us for the present." And in chapter 24 (ST), she objects to academic speculation even while affirming orthodox formulations:

> Though the persons of the blessed Trinity be all alike in their attributes, it was their love which was most shown to me, and that it is closest to us all. And it is about this knowledge that we are most blind, for many men and women believe that God is almighty and may do everything, and that he is all wisdom

> and can do everything, but that he is all love and wishes to do everything, that is where they fail.

One has to wonder whom Julian has in mind here as she chides those (perhaps scholastic theologians) fixated on the omnipotence and omniscience of God at the expense of God's omnibenevolence, thus destabilizing the Augustinian balance of divine might, wisdom, and love. This triad appears repeatedly in the *Showings*, and Julian interprets it with sophistication. Not only is the entire Godhead almighty, all wise, and all good (ST 4), so are its individual members—Julian knows that, according to the doctrine of the Church, each member of the Trinity contains the essence of the whole. Thus she can say, upon later reflection, that "Mother Jesus" is likewise almighty, all wisdom and all love (LT 61). She sometimes, however, reshuffles the traditional divine attributes or adds new ones. As God says to Julian: "I am he, the power and goodness of fatherhood; I am he, the wisdom and the lovingness of motherhood; I am he, the light and the grace which is all blessed love; I am he, the Trinity" (LT 59).

Julian seems to have been aware of formal theological distinctions regarding the Trinity, including the practical bifurcation of the Trinity *ad extra* and *ad intra*, which she describes (in ST 14) as two ways to approach the nature of the triune God:

> He [God] gave me understanding of two portions. One portion is our savior and our salvation. This blessed portion is open and clear and fair and bright and plentiful. … We are bidden to this by God, and drawn and counseled and taught, inwardly by the Holy Spirit and outwardly, through the grace of the same Spirit, by Holy Church. Our Lord wants us to be occupied in this, rejoicing in him, for he rejoices in us. … The other portion is closed to us and

> hidden, that is to say all which is additional to our salvation. For this is our Lord's privy counsel, and it is fitting to God's royal dominion to keep his privy counsel in peace, and it is fitting to his subjects out of obedience and respect not to wish to know his counsel.

Julian thus understood the dual nature of the Trinity—that is, both its economic and immanent dimensions (in modern parlance)—but didn't feel able or entitled to pursue knowledge of the latter. It should be left alone, she says. Envisioning, naming, adoring, and emulating the economic Trinity (because "we ought to wish to be like him") is where she channels almost all of her energy, reflection, and creativity. For "just as the blessed Trinity created everything from nothing, just so the same blessed Trinity will make well all things that are not well" (ST 15) by means of its earthly missions. She devotes the rest of her book to explaining what this means and how the Trinity works for human salvation.

While the short text of the *Showings* touches upon the Trinitarian structure and content of the revelations that Julian received, the long text delves deeply into her long-considered Trinitarian theology. Julian announces this in the opening of the long text:

> This is a revelation of love which Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in sixteen showings, of which the first is about his precious crowning of thorns; and in this was contained and specified the blessed Trinity, with the Incarnation and the union between God and man's soul, with many fair revelations and teachings of endless wisdom and love, in which all the revelations which follow are founded and connected. (LT 1)

The first, ninth, and sixteenth revelations of the long text, Julian says, are specifically about the Trinity; these being the first, middle, and last of the revelations, they give the whole work

a triangular shape. The ninth revelation (LT 21-23), she says, is about "the delight which the blessed Trinity has in the cruel Passion of Christ, once his sorrowful death was accomplished, and that he wishes that joy and delight to be our solace and happiness, as it is his, until we come to glory in heaven." At this point—the midpoint and hinge of the long text—Julian's emphasis on suffering turns to emphasis on "joy, bliss, and endless delight." After explicating this idea (that is, the transformation of suffering into joy) at length in the rest of the long text, Julian says that the sixteenth and last revelation "is that the blessed Trinity our Creator dwells eternally in our soul in Christ Jesus our Saviour, honorably ruling and commanding all things, powerfully and wisely saving and preserving us out of love; and that we shall not be overcome by our enemy" (LT 1).

Trinity as Mother

In her brief deliberations on the nature and function of the Trinity in the short text, Julian envisions there the persons of the Trinity as they are traditionally gendered (as male) and does not specifically speak of God as Mother. She characterizes God, however, as gentle, forgiving, and nurturing—never vengeful or harshly judgmental. In Julian's visions, God repeatedly reassures his children (or, alternately, his "lovers," ST 24) that they are absolved from sin by divine love. God treats humanity in a "courteous," "familiar," and "lovely" manner: "He is that love which wraps and enfolds us, embraces us and guides us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us" (ST 4). God's people can thus be "peaceful and restful" just as God is (ST 25). These attributes, while traditionally associated with the feminine and the maternal, are applied more generally by Julian in the short text and not assigned explicitly either to divine Father or divine Mother.

The characterization of the divine Mother in the long text generally occurs within the framework of the Trinity. Julian's Trinitarian configurations tend to shift, however—in the opening of chapter 52 (LT), for instance, she says that God "is our Father," that God "is our Mother," and also that God "is our true spouse, and that our soul is his beloved wife." In the same paragraph, Julian says that Christ is our brother, although elsewhere he is our lover or mother. Like many sensitive interpreters of scripture, spirituality, and theology, Julian sees multiple meanings and relational complexity within the Holy Trinity—giving voice to its inherent flexibility and retrieving the scriptural and patristic focus on function over form. A similar sort of gender conflation can be found, in fact, in Isaiah 46:3-4, in which God says "I am he" who carried Israel in the womb, gave birth to it, and nurtured it.

In both the short and long texts of the *Showings*, Julian focuses on the abundantly compassionate, gracious, and self-sacrificing aspects of a God who heals and revives his children. (I use the pronoun "his" because Julian does. Even when she characterizes God or Christ as female she never uses a feminine pronoun.) So it is not surprising, given the cultural association of such qualities with feminine virtue, when in her long text Julian focuses those qualities in the image of a divine Mother. This theology of Mother is made explicit in chapters 52-63 of the long text, in which Julian interprets her fourteenth revelation. Within the unity of the Trinity, Julian assigns different roles to different persons, but again these roles are not static. In chapter 54, for instance, Mother-God is linked to the Holy Spirit as "all wisdom," while the "almighty truth of the Trinity is our Father." Christ, whom she refers to here as "our Lord" (although elsewhere the Holy Spirit is Lord), is the "high goodness of the Trinity." By the end of chapter 57 of the long text, however, "Mother" is linked most closely with Christ.

Christ as Mother is also metonymically linked to Mary: "our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ, for she who is mother of our saviour is mother of all who are saved in our saviour." Yet, "our saviour is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come" (LT 57). At the beginning of chapter 58, Christ, traditionally the Son, appears as Mother along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Here, Mother is once again described as "all wisdom," but the Holy Spirit, with whom both Mother and wisdom were equated before, is now a separate entity. Interestingly, while "she sometimes uses the traditional 'Son,' Julian never uses the masculine 'Word' but always the feminine 'Wisdom' to designate the second person of the Trinity."[591] In scripture, wisdom is often linked to the Spirit but is clearly Christological in Proverbs 9 and 1 Corinthians 1:30—so there is biblical precedent for identifying Wisdom with both the second and third members of the Trinity.

Julian stretches her maternal imagery even further when she speaks of "our mother Holy Church, who is Christ Jesus" (LT 61), to whom "I submit myself … as a simple child should" (LT 46). Julian transitions seamlessly from Mother Church (the body of Christ) to Mother Christ: "He [Christ] wants us to commit ourselves fervently to the faith of Holy Church, and find there our beloved Mother in consolation and true understanding, with all the company of the blessed. … And therefore it is a certain thing, and good and gracious to will, meekly and fervently, to be fastened and united to our mother Holy Church, who is Christ Jesus" (LT 61).

One can quickly become confounded by Julian's theological maneuvers and ever-shifting attributes and names for the triune divine. Like Hildegard of Bingen and Mechthild

[591] Joan M. Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 46.

of Magdeburg, Julian described her visions with great care, and yet systematization was not her purpose. She invokes multivocal imagery without apparent fear of being logically inconsistent. As Pelphrey says: "We may think of the *Revelations* not so much as a treatise but more as a meditation, or perhaps a kind of painting" characterized by "relational thought" as opposed to sequential thought.[592] While Julian was not systematic in her presentation of the Trinity, she was thematically consistent, as "the mystery of Trinitarian love thoroughly permeates her writings in a remarkable and profound way."[593] Her language is "effusive" but "never careless," and in this she is similar both to Athanasius and Augustine, among others, who were "capable of great precision, while at the same time throwing out a profusion of models, or Trinitarian stories—as though they are saying, 'Imagine it is like this, or this, or this …'."[594] Julian finally favors the mother-child image (alongside the lord-servant image), because whether "Mother" is Christ, Mary, Church, or the Trinity as a whole, she/he is "nearest, readiest, and surest" (LT 60); and thus Mother is the role in which God can do everything needful.

As mentioned above, Julian was not the first to describe God as Mother. There is scriptural basis for the image. In addition to the aforementioned Isaiah 46: 3-4, Isaiah 66:9 describes God as having a womb; and other biblical passages compare God to a mother eagle (Deuteronomy 32:11), a mother bear (Hosea 13:8), and a mother hen (Matthew 23:37), among other maternal images. Earlier Christian writers like Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, Augustine, Anselm, and the early Cistercians—as well as Julian's near

[592] Pelphrey, *Love Was His Meaning*, 83.
[593] Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus*, 31.
[594] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 116.

contemporary, the German friar Henry Suso—also attributed maternal or feminine qualities to God, although mostly in passing.[595]

The idea that there was both a male and female principle in God was part of Gnostic teaching and was thus rejected by the early church and during the early medieval period. The Zohar, a medieval Jewish mystical text, carries over some maternal images of God from earlier traditions. But there is no hard evidence that Julian was familiar with either Gnostic or Jewish writings.[596] The Motherhood of God figures strongly in the Christian mystical tradition, says Bynum,[597] but only Julian applies "Mother" to the whole Trinity.[598] In LT 58, for instance, the "three ways of contemplating motherhood" correspond with attributes of the Trinity that Julian had established earlier in the *Showings*: creation, incarnation, and "work" (sanctification).

Anselm, in the eleventh century, had drawn a connection between the passion of Christ and the motherhood of God—a line of thought that some other medieval writers would pick up on. In his "Prayer to St. Paul," he writes:

> And you, Jesus, are you not also a mother?
>
> Are you not the mother who, like a hen,
>
> gathers her chickens under her wings?
>
> Truly, Lord, you are a mother;
>
> for both they who are in labour
>
> and they who are brought forth

[595] Jean Leclercq, preface to Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 9; Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 115; Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 225.
[596] Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 116-17.
[597] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 110-69.
[598] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 115-16; LT 59.295-97 and 26.223.

> are accepted by you.
>
> You have died more than they, that they may labour to bear.
>
> It is by your death that they have been born.[599]

Medieval monastic writing for or by women contains a few references to God as a mother who (as in Anselm) achieves atonement on the cross. The *Ancrene Wisse* portrays Jesus as the mother who reconciles her children to their angry father.[600] Marguerite d'Oignt (a Carthusian prioress, ca. 1240-1310) writes on the theme as well:

> Are you [Christ] not my mother and more than my mother? … Ah, my sweet and lovely Lord, with what love you labored for me and bore me through your whole life. … For when the hour of your delivery came you were placed on the hard bed of the cross … and your nerves and all your veins were broken. And truly it is no surprise that your veins burst when in one day you gave birth to the whole world.[601]

Julian likewise equates Christ's work on the cross to giving birth: "But our true Mother Jesus, he alone bears us for joy and for endless life, blessed may he be. So he carries us within him in love and travail, until the full time when he wanted to suffer the sharpest thorns and cruel pains that ever were or will be," after which humanity is born into new life (LT 60). But Julian goes further, developing the link between birth and atonement in Trinitarian

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[599] Anselm, "Prayer to St. Paul," in *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, ed. Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin, 1973), 153-56.
[600] Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 118.
[601] Quoted in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 153.

context.[602] Within Christ's "sweet open side" is shown the whole Godhead and its properties of nature, love, wisdom, and knowledge.

Julian took from earlier medieval literature the conflation of the wounds of Jesus with a mother's breasts: Aelred, for example, had spoken of the wound in Jesus' side as the source from which the soul draws nurture.[603] Medieval medical theory also held that "the milk obtained from a mother's breast was in fact processed blood; therefore the ideas of milk and blood can easily be interchanged."[604] This interchange extended to the eucharist in Julian's theology, as she explains: "The mother can give her child to suck her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life; and with all the sweet sacrament he sustains us most mercifully and graciously" (LT 60).

While Julian shared with other female visionaries an embodied theology, she did not (as Hildegard did not) favor spousal or erotic imagery.[605] Rather, in describing the dynamic, relational, and creative nature of the triune God as revealed in her visions, Julian usually depicts the "familiar" God as literally familial, alternately assuming different roles, attributes, or tasks,[606] as we have seen. The persons of the Trinitarian "family" nevertheless interact as a divine totality—"all one love"—for the purpose of reforming and restoring humanity and, in Julian's words, uniting us to our essential being (the divine "substance" that also inheres in the Trinity). Each member of the "family," both divine and human, has or acquires divine

[602] Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 117.
[603] Ibid., 122.
[604] Ibid.
[605] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 120.
[606] Leclercq, preface to *Showings*, 8-11.

attributes. As it logically follows, Julian assigns both genders (equally endowed with said attributes) to God without hierarchical difference.[607]

Newman speculates that Julian was aware of "the affective devotion to Mother Jesus" that had been popularized in England by Anselm and Aelred, among others; but she "lifted the conception of Christ/Sapientia as Mother from the status of casual metaphor to the core of her theological program."[608] When Christ becomes Mother, Sandra McEntire argues further, "women are incorporated into the redemptive plan as persons and, as such, valued."[609] At the same time, Julian's images for God, like those in scripture, included both motherhood and fatherhood and "are complementary, not opposed or mutually exclusive."[610] Julian envisioned a balance between male and female images and did not set one against the other:[611] God as "father" and "lord" are no less tender and protective than God as "mother."[612] Julian, as already noted, comfortably assigns to Christ the status of "Mother, brother, and saviour" all at the same time (LT 58). The soul that is saved and cared for in Julian's theology is, moreover, genderless—neither "he" nor "she" but "it."[613] Like her choice of diction in reference to God, according to Jennifer Heimmel,

> Julian employs a notably equalizing choice of diction in her references to humanity. Rather than a total reliance on the typical expression of general 'mankind' to represent all humanity, Julian repeatedly specifies both sexes in her book. Julian constantly reminds the reader that she is speaking to both

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[607] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 227.
[608] Ibid., 225-26.
[609] Sandra J. McEntire, "The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*," in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), 25.
[610] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 118.
[611] Leclercq, preface to *Showings*, 10-11.
[612] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 226.
[613] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 169.

> 'men and women' or 'man and woman.' She further reinforces this idea by her persistent use of the term 'evyn cristen' [fellow Christian] to describe in the most equating and non-sexist fashion all those who shall be saved.[614]

Probably influenced, as were earlier mystics and visionaries, by the Song of Songs and courtly literature,[615] Julian did (once) use nuptial imagery in her theology. But she did so in Trinitarian context, describing a vision in which the union of the Godhead overflows into the relationship between God and humans: "And in the joining and the union [of the persons of the Trinity] he is our very true spouse and we his beloved wife and his fair maiden, with which wife he was never displeased; for he says: I love you and you love me, and our love will never divide in two" (LT 58). Julian then returns to her more customary parental imagery to explain the union further: "And our substance is in our Father, God almighty, and our substance is in our Mother, God all wisdom, and our substance is in our Lord God, the Holy Spirit, all goodness, for our substance is whole in each person of the Trinity, who is one God" (LT 58).

Enclosure in the Trinity

Closely related to the image of divine Mother is that of enclosure, an image that Julian returns to again and again (usually using the words "closyd" and "beclosyd"). As seen above, Julian envisions the human soul enclosed within Mary (LT 57) and united with the Church (LT 61). She also sees enclosure among the members of the Trinity, of the soul in

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[614] Jennifer P. Heimmel, *"God is Our Mother": Julian of Norwich and the Medieval Image of Christian Feminine Divinity* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1982), 73.
[615] Leclercq, preface to *Showings*, 10.

God, and of God in the soul—what Newman describes as "a sort of reciprocal pregnancy"[616] among various parties, human and divine, evoking both union and distinction. This passage from LT 54 relates the interweaving of the soul and the Trinity that Julian envisioned; it also suggests, but qualifies, the possibility of human divinization:

> And I saw no difference between God and our substance, but, as it were, all God; and still my understanding accepted that our substance is in God, that is to say that God is God, and our substance is a creature in God. For the almighty truth of the Trinity is our Father, for he made us and keeps us in him. And the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, in whom we are enclosed. And the high goodness of the Trinity is our Lord, and in him we are enclosed and he in us. We are enclosed in the Father, and we are enclosed in the Son, and we are enclosed in the Holy Spirit. And the Father is enclosed in us, the Son is enclosed in us, and the Holy Spirit is enclosed in us, almighty, all wisdom and all goodness, one God, one Lord.

Julian connects the idea of enclosure with the missions of the three persons of the Trinity when she says (LT 31):

> And so our good Lord answered to all the questions and doubts which I could raise, saying most comfortingly "I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well; and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well." When he says "I may," I understand this to apply to the Father; and when he says "I can," I understand it for the Son; and when he says "I will," I understand it for

[616] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 227.

> the Holy Spirit; and when he says "I shall," I understand it for the unity of the blessed Trinity, three persons and one truth; and when he says "You will see yourself," I understand it for the union of all men who will be saved in the blessed Trinity. And in these five words [may, can, will, shall, you will see] God wishes us to be enclosed in rest and in peace.

The key point in Julian's envisioning of enclosure is the mutuality of the persons involved: God in three persons, God in the soul, the soul in the body, and soul and body alike "clad and enclosed in the goodness of God."[617] This divine goodness we seek "until we truly know our God, who has enclosed us all in himself" (LT 6). The enclosure is the knowing, the very image of the unity of the Godhead and the unity of the triune God with humanity.

Julian must have been familiar with the Celtic knot (Figure 6.1), a ubiquitous symbol of the Trinity in medieval England, and an ideal image of divine enclosure. She in fact alludes to such an image in LT 53:

> He wants us to know that this beloved [human] soul was preciously knitted to him in its making, by a knot so subtle and so mighty that it is united in God. In this uniting it is made endlessly holy. Furthermore, he wants us to know that all the souls which will be saved in heaven without end are knit in this knot, and united [onyd] in this union [onyng], and made holy in this holiness.

In the knot there is no beginning or end ("this endless love"), and there are no loose ends, "so we shall never be lost" or misled into danger (LT 53). Thus there is safety in enclosure, and being knitted into the divine knot the human soul will be "treasured and hidden by God, known and loved from without beginning." Julian emphasizes the eternality and wholeness

[617] Ibid., 233.

of salvation as it is imaged forth by the knot, for the Trinity is that "out of whom we have all come, in whom we are all enclosed, into whom we shall all go, finding in him our full heaven in everlasting joy by the prescient purpose of all the blessed Trinity" (LT 53).

Finally, there is no top or bottom to the knot that would indicate hierarchy. It can be turned in any direction and be the same. Indeed, Julian makes no mention of church hierarchy in her book,[618] and (unlike Hildegard) shows no interest in it. Rather she is keen to show that there is no spiritual hierarchy in the Trinity (as its originators intended), in the Church, or in life.[619] She thus shows an understanding of the patristic notion of divine *perichoresis* in which "the Father [is] in the Son, and the Holy Spirit [is] in the Father and the Son"; all three abide together "in rest and peace" with no subordination among them (LT 51).

Because of the divine substance that all humans share with the triune God, an egalitarian social ethic is made possible (in theory, if not in reality) by Julian's vision of the coequal and coeternal Trinity:

> He [God] is the ground, his is the substance, he is very essence or nature, and he is the true Father and the true Mother of natures. And all natures which he has made to flow out of him to work his will, they will be restored and brought back into him by the salvation of man through the operation of grace. For all natures which he has put separately in different creatures are all in man, wholly, in fullness and power, in beauty and in goodness, in kingliness and in nobility, in every manner of stateliness, preciousness and honour. (LT 62)

[618] Hide, *Gifted Origins*, 12.
[619] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 120.

Julian takes care to keep her theology (and her anthropology with it) in balance, so that divinity and humanity are equally important, as embodied in the person of Christ in whose life and death "all the Trinity worked" (LT 23); and all three persons of the Trinity are equally important as well. In their plurality of active roles, Julian explains, the three persons of the Godhead are akin to the three heavens that she describes both in chapter 12 of the short text and in chapter 22 of the long text: "None is greater, none is less, none is higher, none is lower, but all are equal in their joy." For in the first heaven, "the Father is pleased"; in the second heaven, "the Son is honored"; and in the third heaven, "the Holy Spirit takes delight" (ST 12). Because humans are created as *imago trinitatis*, it stands to reason that—at least in God's eyes—none is greater, none is less, none is higher, and none is lower.

The possibility of gender egalitarianism in Julian's thought stems not only from her inclusion of "Mother" in the divine triad, and the importance of Mary and Mother Church, but also in the natural and "substantial" inclusion of women in the *imago trinitatis*. The Marian Trinity (discussed in Chapter 2) was a common image in the fourteenth century and one with which Julian would probably have been familiar. Newman describes the addition of Mary to the Trinity (really a "quaternity") in many late-medieval images as "a long-repressed motif from antiquity. … Only the vernacular writers of the late Middle Ages at times revisited the tempting, but forcefully resisted, familial metaphor, reincorporating the maternal into an explicit model of the Trinity."[620] These vernacular writers in England included not only Julian but her contemporary William Langland (ca. 1330-87). The following passage from Langland's *Piers Plowman* echoes the assertion of the fourth-century

[620] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 248.

Greek theologian Methodius that Jesus and Eve, as the primordial mother, are parallel figures in the Trinitarian scheme of salvation. In Langland's words:

> That God is three distinct persons and one almighty God, I prove by humankind, if all men are from Adam. Eve was from Adam and drawn out of him, and Abel was from them both, and all three were of one nature. … Now let us turn to the Godhead. The Son existed in God, the Father of heaven, in a likeness, just as Eve was drawn out of the man when God willed. And as Abel sprang from Adam and his wife Eve, a scion of them both, and spoke, so the Holy Spirit is from both the Father and the Son, and always was, and will be without end.[621]

As Newman adds, the "scholastic consensus that excluded female language and imagery" for the Trinity, and which tended to neglect or diminish the Holy Spirit as a fully divine "person," had the effect of truncating the Trinity as a whole. This had real-life ramifications: "To reclaim the personality of the Spirit meant, in at least some cases,[622] to reclaim the fluidity of leadership, including the participation of women, thought to have characterized the primitive Church."[623]

While Julian does not advocate for women's leadership in the Church, in her comprehensive and all-inclusive Trinity there is no truncation, whether of male or female, divine or human. There is no Father-Son dyad at the expense of the Holy Spirit. In the spirit

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[621] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, C-text, 18.215-39; quoted in Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 249. Langland also produced original metaphors for the Trinity, notably in the fifth vision of *Piers Plowman*, including fist/fingers/palm and wax/wick/flame.

[622] Newman cites the example of the Guglielmites, a thirteenth-century Italian sect and "charismatic movement," which "not only reinstated the Holy Spirit as a female personage, but announced her incarnation and imminent Second Coming in a particular saint, Guglielma of Milan, who would return to found a new church under the leadership of a woman pope." Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 249.

[623] Ibid.

of Augustine (although he did not use feminine language for God), Julian's Trinitarian theology represents a Godhead in which "each [is] in each, and all are in each, and each in all, and all in all, and all are One."[624] Watson observes that Julian saw as an important part of her theological task to "relay the everything of God in her visions."[625] This task extended to the "everything" of humanity, revealed to Julian in a vision of the "completeness of his [God's] love" (ST 17): "What can make me love my fellow Christians more than to see in God that he loves all who will be saved, all of them as it were one soul? … just as the persons of the blessed Trinity [are one]."

The comprehensiveness of Julian's doctrine of the Trinity can be summed up by the triad that she presents in LT 84, comprised of "Charity unmade," which is the life of love in the Trinity (its inner, immanent being in which there is "undying love," LT 18); "Charity made," or the love of God for humanity in the incarnation and cross of Christ; and "Charity given," which is the human response to God and one's "even-Christians" (fellow Christians) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (LT 84).[626] In the context of both the Trinity and the divine Mother, Julian explains that, in the three ways of motherhood [creation, incarnation, work], "by the same grace, everything is penetrated, in length and in breadth, in height and in depth without end; and it is all one love" (LT 59). In Julian's theological vision, not only does God display various yet harmonious personae; so might one's devotional life (as Julian's) be broadened in light of a multi-faceted image of God, appealing to and focusing various aspect of one's life. The comprehensiveness of the Trinity itself, in other words,

[624] Augustine, quoted in Heinrich Schipperges, *Hildegard of Bingen: Healing and the Nature of the Cosmos*, trans. John A. Broadwin (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), 9.
[625] Watson, "Trinitarian Hermeneutic," 123.
[626] Bradley, review of *Love Was His Meaning*, 683.

leads to a more comprehensive theology and spirituality, as well as to a more comprehensive self-image.

The Human Being as **Imago Trinitatis**

One of the key theological outcomes of Julian's visions of the Trinity is her corresponding understanding of herself and all her "even-Christians" as being made not just in the image of God the Father, or in the likeness of Christ, but in the image of the Trinity as a whole. In Augustinian theology, the human being is progressively transformed into the image of God through the missions of the Trinity,[627] an idea developed extensively in medieval mystical and visionary theology produced by both men and women. The idea of *imago trinitatis* also appears in the devotional literature of the late Middle Ages, as in a prayer to the Trinity in the DuBois Hours (English, ca. 1330): "O Trinity, light of lights, you illuminate the heart of humanity. Reform your likeness into your image."[628] Walter Hilton described the whole nature of the soul as a mirror of the Trinity (in its power, wisdom, and love),[629] and Julian expands on this idea at length:

> Truth sees God, and wisdom contemplates God, and of these two comes the third, and that is a marvelous delight in God, which is love. Where truth and wisdom are, truly here is love, truly coming from them both, and all are of God's making. For God is endless supreme truth, endless supreme wisdom, endless supreme love uncreated; and a man's soul is a creature in God which

[627] Hunt, *Trinity: Insights*, 114.
[628] Hide, "Illuminations of the Trinity," 21.
[629] Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics*, 156.

> has the same properties created. And always it does what it was created for; it sees God and it contemplates God and it loves God. (LT 44)

Humanity is united to God through the divine substance of the soul, Julian says, but there is also some agency and work involved on the part of the human person in attaining to that unity. Likeness to God is achieved in ever greater perfection by doing "what it was created for": contemplative prayer, trust in God, and love of God and neighbor.

Julian describes human souls united with and of like kind to the Trinity more explicitly when she says: "And so my understanding was led by God to see in him and to know, to understand and to recognize that our soul is a created trinity, like the uncreated blessed Trinity, known and loved from without beginning, and in the creation united to the Creator" (LT 55). That humans are made in the image of the Trinity is the very ground of salvation in mystical and devotional thought; and Julian puts this idea in narrative perspective:

> We know in our faith and our belief, by the teaching and preaching of Holy Church, that the blessed Trinity made mankind in their image and their likeness. In the same way we know that when man fell so deeply and so wretchedly through sin, there was no other help for restoring him, except through him who created man. And he who created man for love, by the same love wanted to restore man to the same blessedness and to even more. And just as we were made like the Trinity in our first making, our Creator wished us to be like Jesus Christ our savior in heaven forever, through the power of our making again.

Humans may thus claim confidence in their relationship with, and likeness to, God. In Julian's visionary world, and by the authority of the visions themselves, one may call God friend, mother, brother, or savior. One may think of oneself as God's spouse, lover, child, or servant. All of these roles reflect the multiplicity of the triune God.

Kerrie Hide has argued, in regard to the effect of the visual apparatus of late medieval Books of Hours, that "beholding or gazing at illuminations of the Trinity can activate the memory of the human original likeness to the Trinity, and realize the depth of trinitarian love and the limitless extent [to which] the Trinity will go to restore the image."[630] If one were to look, for instance, at the depiction of the Trinity in the Carmelite Missal (English, ca. 1393; Figure 6.2), in which triangles within triangles can be mentally drawn among the figures—the three persons of the Godhead, Mary, angels, and people—one might be visually inspired by the sense of the interlocking relationships between human and divine. Looking at the DuBois Book of Hours' "None of the Trinity" (English, ca. 1330; Figure 6.3), one would get a visual sense of the economic Trinity, who is in this image surrounded on all sides by laypeople, thus confirming Julian's foundational theological belief in the participation of humanity in the Trinity.

Although Julian's theological creativity surpassed that of the conventional painted images of the Trinity she would have seen around her, whether in religious books or on church walls, it is possible that she was influenced by them. Pictures of the Marian Trinity (as in Figures 3.10 and 3.11), for instance, had didactic as well as devotional purposes and may have inspired greater conformity to divine ideals and roles. "As art historians have demonstrated," Newman says,

[630] Hide, "Illuminations of the Trinity," 8.

> the Virgin and the saints were not represented in late medieval paintings simply for their own sake, but as models of exemplary *pietas* to inspire imitation, as well as empathy and devotion. Their actions and attitudes taught the viewer how to feel, how to behave, what to dread, and what to desire. In the case of the Marian Trinity, the Virgin's multiple and labile roles within the celestial family [mother, daughter, wife, coredemptrix] expressed a whole panoply of relationships to the divine and offered each in turn as a paradigm for imitation.[631]

The same could be said of visions and images of the Trinity. Certainly, Julian understood the Trinitarian Mother as embodying a variety and flexibility of roles, depending on the needs of the person within her care: "and always as the child grows in age and stature, she [the mother] acts differently, but she does not change her love" (LT 60). In both her long and short texts, Julian depicts the Trinity as a whole in a variety of roles and attributes, as we have seen, but with the unwavering goal of love and salvation, creating, as Newman puts it, "a total intimacy that could not be symbolized save by the compression and fusion of all earthly ties."[632]

If multiplicity, flexibility, and intimacy are the nature of the Trinity, then the nature of the *imago trinitatis* must be like it. Because God is three-fold and so relational by definition, not an isolated monad, and because God *in se* spills over into the economy of salvation (as envisioned by so many of the female visionaries in intimate and dynamic ways), the soul made in the image of the Trinity likewise spills over into relationships with other people, and in a variety of roles. Love, as always, is the reason: "Christ himself is this love

[631] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 253.
[632] Ibid., 254.

and does to us as he teaches us to do; for he wishes us to be like him, in a unity of undying love for ourselves and for our fellow Christians" (LT 18). For the sake of love, Julian wishes to be active, as she envisions the Trinity to be, and not merely contemplative. She says: "I never wanted any bodily vision or any kind of revelation from God, but only the compassion which I thought a loving soul could have for our Lord Jesus, who for love was willing to become a mortal man. I desired to suffer with him, living in my mortal body, as God would give me grace" (ST 3). Her love for God would then naturally translate into love for her fellow Christians.

Just as the triune God is both human and divine, indivisible, so does God embrace the human person, body and soul, as *imago trinitatis*. As Julian says: "The … Trinity is our mother in nature and in our essential creation, in whom we are grounded and rooted, and he is our mother in mercy in taking on our sensuality. And so our Mother, in whom our parts are kept unparted, works in us in various ways … and by the power of his Passion, his death and his Resurrection he unites us to our substance" (LT 58). Julian thus sees the body and its senses ("our sensuality") not as an impediment to union with God, but as a vehicle for it. She apprehends the "three properties of God" with touching, sight, and feeling (LT 83) and describes herself as receiving her visions in a kind of three-fold wholeness (ST 7)—body, mind, and spirit. In this three-foldness she, and all humans, are linked by nature to the Trinity.

Salvation in the Trinity

Julian's Parable of the Lord and Servant (LT 51) is the centerpiece of her fourteenth revelation (explicated in LT 41-63) and of the long text as a whole. The story of the

compassionate lord (representing God) and the well-intentioned servant (alternately Adam, Jesus, and humanity) who falls into a pit summarizes Julian's soteriology, in which the Trinity plays an essential role. It is a parable of *felix culpa*, or "happy fall," as the errant servant is lifted out of the pit (sin) and is not only restored but honored by the lord and "rewarded forever, above what he would have been if he had not fallen" (LT 51). Julian gives an explicitly Trinitarian interpretation of the parable which, according to Watson, frames the hermeneutic for the whole book. She describes her understanding of what was shown to her in three phases, which, like the persons of the Trinity are "unified, … that I cannot and may not separate them": 1) the beginning of teaching (at the moment the visions were received), 2) inward instruction ("which I have understood from it since"), and 3) "the whole revelation from the beginning to the end" (LT 51). The exalted servant is, in the end, a crown who is "the Father's joy, the Son's honor, the Holy Spirit's delight" (LT 51). In the remaining chapters of the long text, Julian adds in the figure of the divine Mother as she interprets the parable.

Throughout both the long and short texts of the *Showings*, Julian is careful to link the Trinity with the key salvific events of incarnation and atonement. Just as Jesus was enclosed in the virgin's womb at the incarnation, so "he, dwelling in us, has enclosed [the divine gifts] in him until the time that we are fully grown, our soul together with our body and our body together with our soul" (LT 55). As the incarnate Christ embodies the Trinity as a whole, and as human creation is an incarnation of sorts, "our soul is a created trinity, like the uncreated blessed Trinity, known and loved from without beginning, and in the creation united to the Creator" (LT 55). United to the creator in both body and soul, the human person is eternally saved.

Likewise, the whole Trinity was present on the cross, where redemption was completed: "Let us pay heed to this bliss over our salvation," says Julian, "which is in the blessed Trinity … [for] all the Trinity worked in Christ's Passion" (LT 23). Of the two predominant schools of soteriology in the Middle Ages, the most influential was that promoting the substitutionary theory of atonement (set forth in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*). This theory "accentuates that justice requires that a member of the Trinity, Jesus the God-human, become human and be crucified in order to make amends to God the Father and thus restore the image of the Trinity [in humans] defaced by sin."[633] The second school, promoted most famously by Abelard but also expressed by Julian, holds that "God in Christ was always going to become human as an expression of Trinitarian love" and was thus not driven by a need to avenge divine honor.[634] The incarnation and crucifixion of Christ were for Julian the triune God's means of union ("oneing") with all of creation.

In contrast, Julian's contemporary Walter Hilton represented the substitutionary model. In his *Scale of Perfection* (2.2) he describes the unfallen soul in Augustinian terms (reflecting the Trinitarian memory, reason and will) but sees the soul as hopelessly deformed by sin and saved only because "God's Son became man, and through his precious death that he suffered made amends to the Father in heaven."[635] Although Julian's work has the same "trinitarian flavour"[636] as Hilton's, her mood is entirely hopeful in "the human journey from God to God within the context of an all-pervading theology of Trinitarian love."[637] She summarizes the history of human existence as follows: "all our life consists of three: In the

[633] Hide, "Illuminations of the Trinity," 4.
[634] Ibid.
[635] Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. John P. H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 194-95.
[636] Hide, "Illuminations of the Trinity," 6.
[637] Hide, *Gifted Origins*, xi.

first we have our being, and in the second we have our increasing, and in the third we have our fulfillment … and all are one."[638]

Such immersion from creation to consummation in the love of the Trinity leads to the "oneing" that is salvation (LT 14). Julian links human existence with the Father along with the attributes of might, nature, and will; she links human increasing (by which she means "reforming" and "restoring") with Christ the Mother and the attributes of mercy, wisdom, and works; and she links human fulfillment with the Holy Spirit and the attributes of grace, love or goodness, and "confirmation" (LT 58). She elaborates on this in LT 59: "Our Father wills, our Mother [Christ] works, our good Lord the Holy Spirit confirms. And therefore it is our part to love our God in whom we have being, reverently thanking and praising him for our creation, mightily praying to our Mother for mercy and pity, and to our Lord the Holy Spirit for help and grace. For in these three is all our life."

Julian understood the passion of Christ (as Gertrude interpreted the Sacred Heart) to be the locus of the earthly love of the Trinity as a whole: "Where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity is understood" (LT 4, 23). In her meditation on the Trinity and its multiple aspects, "what Julian focuses on … is not simply one person's experience in relation to God; rather the focus is the mystery of humanity in mystical union ["oneing"] with God"[639] and the conforming of humans to God's image. Instead of focusing on the eternal damnation of sinners, which was the pretext for the substitutionary model of atonement, Julian sought universality, evident in her "rhetoric of inclusion."[640] Academic theology, from Irenaeus to

[638] Ibid., xiii.
[639] Ibid.
[640] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 234.

Aquinas, tended to approach the issue of salvation from "within a juridical framework,"[641] but Julian showed little interest in such an approach. The classical (that is, academic) expression of soteriology had also "tended to spiritualize salvation and place it on a supernatural plane where it loses contact with the existential lives of people."[642] Julian never lost touch with the human and practical dimensions of the salvation achieved by the Trinity on the soul's behalf.

While Julian claimed absolute orthodoxy, some aspects of her theology are in tension with the teachings of the Church: the motherhood of God, atonement motivated by divine love rather than divine anger, and the apparent universality of salvation (even while she gives due attention to sin and the devil, and recognizes their power). Despite this, Julian trusts that "the reality of God is structured as it is revealed to her."[643] She is confident (as Karl Rahner would also argue six centuries later) that God is what God does, and not something else. While Julian certainly had the intellectual capacity to speculate on the internal, "immanent" life of the Trinity, she chose not to; for it was the "economic" outworking of the Trinity's love, mediated especially by the divine Mother (LT 63), that really mattered to her.

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[641] Hide, *Gifted Origins*, xiv.
[642] Ibid.
[643] Lee Ann Pingel, "With My Body I Thee Worship: Embodiment Theology and Trinitarian Anthropology in the Works of Four Medieval Women Mystics" (M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 2004), 106.

Chapter 7: Christine de Pizan's Regal Trinity in Early Fifteenth-Century Context

Christine de Pizan (ca. 1364-1430) is often identified as one of the first Renaissance humanist writers in France and, as such, secular or literary—rather than theological—in her aims. She was surely literary, but she was not secular. While she displays the rationalism, classicism, and aestheticism of a Renaissance humanist, she also carries over into the fifteenth century aspects of medieval visionary culture. She encounters ("sees") the divine, and she dwells very deeply in the realms of theology, Christian morality, church history, and spirituality. She was apparently very familiar with scripture and the church fathers, as well as with medieval theologians like Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas, and she was not afraid to take them on. Christine made some interesting theological moves of her own, especially in her presentation of the three divine ladies—Reason, Righteousness, and Justice—who appear in both *Le Livre de la cité des dames* (*The Book of the City of Ladies*) and *Le Livre des trois vertus* (*The Book of Three Virtues*), both written in Middle French around 1405.

This chapter is concerned primarily with the identities and functions (personal, social, political, and spiritual) of these three divine ladies and the ways they reflect Christine's theology. I will argue that the characterization of Christine's three ladies as a female Trinity—while not perfect—best fits Christine's written and iconographic depictions of them. The Trinity is a theme that recurs frequently, and in diverse ways, in Christine's writings: In addition to the works listed above and in the illuminations made for them under Christine's supervision, her reflections on the Trinity can be found in *Epistre Othéa a Hector* (*Othea's Letter to Hector*, ca. 1400) and *Lavision Christine* (*Christine's Vision*, ca. 1405).

Taken together, Christine's works evoke a Holy Trinity that is personal, active, and encouraging, but also rational, just, philosophical, and yet poetically ambiguous.

Christine's Context and Writings

We know more about Christine de Pizan than any of the other women in this study, almost entirely on the basis of the autobiographical details she included in her writings.[644] She was born in Venice around 1364 but moved as a young child to Paris with her family when her father, Thomas of Pizan, began work as court physician and astrologer for the French king, Charles V. Around 1379, when Christine was fifteen, she married Etienne de Castel, a young nobleman who was a secretary and notary at the royal court. They had three children. Her comfortable life took an abrupt downturn, however, beginning in 1380, when Charles V died and, with him, royal patronage of Christine's family. Thomas de Pizan died in the mid- to late-1380s, and Etienne de Castel in 1389, leaving Christine a poor widow at the age of twenty-five with three children, her mother, and a niece to support.

Christine indicates in *The Book of the City of Ladies* II.36 that her father had encouraged her education over her mother's objections: "Not all men (and especially the wisest)," Righteousness says to Christine, "share the opinion that it is bad for women to be educated. … Your father, who was a great scientist and philosopher, did not believe that women were worth less by knowing science; rather, as you know, he took great pleasure from seeing your inclination to learning." With access to both her father's books and the court library, Christine read widely in French and probably also in Latin as she was growing

[644] The biographical summary here is taken from Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee, introduction to *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); Rosalind Brown-Grant, introduction to *The Book of the City of Ladies* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999); and Earl Jeffrey Richards, introduction to *The Book of the City of Ladies* (New York: Persea Books, 1982).

up (although she wrote exclusively in French).[645] Her learning was fortuitous, as she was "forced by circumstances to 'become a man'" and earn a living, as she said in her book *Le Livre de la mutacion de Fortune* (*The Book of the Mutation of Fortune*, ca. 1403).[646] For ten years or so after the deaths of her father and husband, she likely worked as a copyist at one or more of the many manuscript workshops in Paris.[647] But at some point, around 1399, she decided to support herself and her family by writing, rather than take the traditional course of widows: remarrying or entering a convent. Thus she became the first professional woman writer in Europe,[648] producing a large and varied corpus of literature and securing the support of many wealthy patrons.

Christine started her literary career by writing love poetry commissioned by her patrons. But soon she broadened her output to include poems of widowhood, moral and devotional texts (expressing a "deeply held Christian faith"),[649] love debates and complaints, a biography of Charles V, conduct manuals, and treatises on military art and political ethics. The latter were a response to the turmoil in France at Christine's time, due not only to the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) but also to civil strife among the French and Burgundian nobility. Christine used her authorial voice to urge peace and stability. She also, perhaps most famously, urged better treatment of women, becoming involved (through a series of letters) in the early fifteenth-century debate among Paris intellectuals about the thirteenth-century allegory *Roman de la Rose*, which Christine criticized as a vulgar and unfair screed

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[645] Brown-Grant, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xxiv; and Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee, introduction to *Selected Writings*, xv.
[646] Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee, introduction to *Selected Writings*, xii.
[647] Ibid., xxv.
[648] Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee, introduction to *Selected Writings*, xi.
[649] Ibid., xii. Christine wrote at least four such texts: *Prieres à Notre Dame* (1402-03), *Sept Psaumes allegorisés* (1409), *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine* (1418), and *Heures de contemplation de la Passion de Notre Seigneur* (ca. 1422).

against women.[650] While Christine believed in social hierarchy and did not promote its dismantling,[651] she was yet "the first writer to address the tradition of misogyny prevalent in both the society and the literature of her time from a female perspective."[652] In the texts under consideration in this chapter, Christine combined spiritual, theological, and civic concerns with advocacy for the dignity of women.

Othea's Letter, the earliest (ca. 1400) of the four pertinent texts, is a series of a hundred short narratives, each with three parts: text, gloss (explication of the text), and allegory (Christian interpretation). In this work, a courtesy book for young knights,[653] Christine invents "a goddess of wisdom, Othea, who uses lessons drawn from mythological stories to give advice … about the chivalric and spiritual life."[654] Christine followed *Othea's Letter* with fifteen more major works that combined to various degrees allegory, autobiography, political and social commentary,[655] and advocacy for the moral and intellectual equality of the sexes. *Christine's Vision* and the *Book of the City of Ladies* are both described by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski as "allegorical dream-visions,"[656] the former a semi-autobiographical meditation in dialogue with personified Wisdom. *The Book of the City of Ladies*, today Christine's most-read work, recounts the stories of good women

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[650] Ibid., xiii.
[651] In *The Book of Three Virtues*, for instance, Christine encourages women of all social classes to "accept their lot with patience and … submit to male control." Brown-Grant, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xviii-xix.
[652] Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee, introduction to *Selected Writings*, xv.
[653] Othea's letter is arguably meant for a wider audience, however, as "Christine interprets her stories in the Letter of Othea … for their general relevance to the human soul, irrespective of the sex of the person portrayed in them." Brown-Grant, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xxvi.
[654] Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee, introduction to *Selected Writings*, xii.
[655] Ibid., xiii.
[656] Ibid., xvii. Conversation with allegorical figures was a popular convention among medieval authors. Marina Warner, foreword to *The Book of the City of Ladies*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), xiii.

throughout history and their accomplishments: the "stones" used to build the city. Its sequel, *The Book of Three Virtues*, is a handbook for women's conduct in society.[657]

According to Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Christine was "involved in the production and illustration of her own manuscripts: she would gather together a number of texts and have them bound to present to a wealthy patron, and she would give detailed instructions to artists concerning the content of the illuminations she wanted in her works."[658] Her writing and book-production career was put on hold, however, in 1418, when Christine fled from Paris amidst political chaos. She probably went to the Dominican abbey of Poissy, outside Paris, where her daughter was a nun, and where she remained until her death around 1430. (Both of her sons predeceased her.) Before her death, however, she wrote one more work: *Le Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* (*The Tale of Joan of Arc*, ca. 1429), in praise of the virtuous girl hero.

Female Trinity in *The Book of the City of Ladies*

In the opening chapter of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine describes herself sitting in her study and reading Matheolus's *Lamentations*, "a thirteenth-century tirade against marriage in which the author vilifies women for making men's lives a misery" and for being generally "depraved and malicious creatures."[659] As she reads, Christine grows depressed at her misfortune for being a woman. She laments, in regard to the male God: "I thought myself very unfortunate that he had given me a female form" (I.1). She feels shaken in her authority and self-confidence, acknowledging that she "preferred to give more weight to what others said than to trust my own judgment and experience" (I.1). But an immediate

[657] Ibid., xiii.
[658] Ibid., xiv.
[659] Brown-Grant, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xvii.

reversal in mood comes about in the next moment, as "all of a sudden, I saw a beam of light, like the rays of the sun, shine down into my lap. … I looked up to see where the light had come from and all at once saw before me three ladies, crowned and of majestic appearance" (I.2).

Who does Christine understand the ladies to be? The answer to this question is hard to pin down, because the roles and functions of Christine's three ladies are always shifting. The idea of deity itself was apparently fluid for Christine, and language about deity was open to interpretation. In the preface to *Christine's Vision*, she says that "what is put in poetic language can have several meanings" and "can be understood in different ways."[660] It is therefore possible—even likely—that she was deliberately ambiguous about the identity of her allegorical figures. For Christine, deity could be either male or female: While she addressed and talked about the traditional God (a singular "he"), her writings are replete with feminine representatives of the divine.

In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, the three regal ladies function as saviors for the despondent Christine—and by proxy, for all women, because Christine holds the keys to the City of Ladies. In the first seven chapters of the book, in which Christine describes her introduction to Reason, Righteousness, and Justice, she describes them as being "born of God" and as "daughters of God." She thus leaves no doubt about their heavenly origins, in contrast to the human origins of the illustrious historical women invited into the City of Ladies. Reason, Righteousness, and Justice have all the traditional marks of divinity. They are beautiful, good, serious, regal, judicious, radiant, infallible, omnipotent, omniscient, containing "all wisdom and truth," and worthy of human reverence. And yet, what *kind* of

[660] Christine Reno, "The Preface to the *Avision-Christine* in ex-Phillipps 128," in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 209.

divinity are they? At different points in Christine's narrative, her three ladies seem to be emanations of God, helpers of God, attributes of God, messenger angels,[661] guardian angels,[662] mediators between humans and God,[663] prophets,[664] Virtues,[665] and deity itself.

This last is what I wish to examine, especially as the three ladies appear and function like a Holy Trinity. They are described in the *City of Ladies* and pictured in the iconography for that book as three noble ladies who are "all so alike that you could hardly tell them apart," yet they have "diverse offices" or functions, represented by the three different objects they hold in their hands—a mirror, a measuring stick, and a measuring vessel (I.3: see Figure 7.1).[666] They have "harmonious voices" (I.1 of the *Book of Three Virtues*). They are daughters of God and yet the same as God. Justice says: "I am in God and God is in me. … Between we three ladies you see here we are as one same thing [*comme une mesmes chose*], neither could we function one without the other. What the first lady decides, the second one puts into effect and then I, the third one, bring all to completion" (*City of Ladies* I.6). The three ladies meet together in a council that is parallel to the traditional council of the Trinity, as both make decisions of universal scope. The City of Ladies, recalling Augustine's City of

[661] Righteousness says in I.5 of the *City of Ladies*: "Like a shining ray of light sent down by God, I bring with me the message of his goodness." Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, ed. and trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999), 13.
[662] Reason says in I.3: "My task is to bring back men and women when they drift away from the straight and narrow" (Brown-Grant, 10); Righteousness says in I.5: "I am the shield and defender of those who serve God and I help to prevent the wicked from abusing their power." Brown-Grant, 13.
[663] Righteousness in I.5: "Through me, God reveals his secrets to those he loves, and it is I who am their advocate in heaven." Brown-Grant, 13.
[664] Reason in I.4: "In the manner of the true sibyl, I prophesy to you that this city which you are going to build with our help will never fall or be taken." Brown-Grant, 12.
[665] Justice in I.6: "Of all the Virtues, I am the most important since they all culminate in me." Brown-Grant, 15. And Christine opens *The Book of Three Virtues* with a précis of her life "after I built the City of Ladies with the aid and instruction of the three lady Virtues: Reason, Righteousness, and Justice." Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 156-57.
[666] Price-Linnartz, "Seeing the Triune God," 16: Likewise, in the "Trinity in Glory" or "co-enthronement" type of medieval images of the Trinity, "all three persons are shown as three nigh-identical, glorified men. In this motif, each person is the same size, with a consistent visage either like other images of the Father or of the Son; they are also often in a horizontal row and wear the same or similar clothing. Each person may still give clues as to its identity—such as possessing certain objects or making certain hand gestures."

God, was built according to the triune council's "grand scheme" (I.1 of the *Book of Three Virtues*).

In Part I of this tripartite work, Reason takes the lead in helping Christine build the literary edifice, giving her examples of women, "mostly pagans, who were famous for their soldierly courage, artistry, or inventiveness."[667] In Part II, Righteousness takes over, supplying Christine with stories of "pagan, Hebrew, and Christian ladies who were renowned for their prophetic gifts, exemplary chastity, or devotion to their loved ones and fellow countrymen."[668] In Part III, "Justice recounts the lives of female saints who were crowned with glory for their steadfastness in the face of martyrdom or for their unfailing devotion to God."[669] The whole pantheon of women in the *City of Ladies* includes teachers, artists, saints, warriors, and political leaders, as well as wives, daughters, and mothers. All showed forth virtues that, in Christine's view, any woman could and should imitate.[670]

In her building of the City under the direction of divinized female figures, Christine (probably unconsciously) echoes Hildegard, on whose Triple Wall (*Scivias* III.6), part of the Building of Salvation, the Virtues show forth the glory and the gifts of the Trinity. In Hildegard's vision, they are two sets of three female virtues who portray Trinitarian characteristics, as do Christine's three ladies: "And in these figures you see certain resemblances, for the virtues are of one mind though diverse in the gifts of God. … He has given them different powers." (*Scivias* III.6.27). Alongside Hildegard's "Tower of the Church" (*Scivias* III.9) is another female triad: Justice, Fortitude, and Sanctity. These Virtues "do the divine work" of justice and salvation with "united and cooperative action;"

[667] Brown-Grant, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xviii.
[668] Ibid.
[669] Ibid.
[670] Ibid., xxxiii.

they are "the three instruments by which the Church strives toward eternity in her children: nourishment from their teachers, and the fight of the faithful against the Devil, and the rejection of consent to vice" (*Scivias* III.9.26). The roles of Hildegard's divine women, in other words, are very similar to those of Christine's three ladies.

While Reason, Righteousness, and Justice in Christine's account function as a divine unit or council, they also represent the diverse functions of the Trinity—sometimes individually (as their three objects suggest), and sometimes collectively. Like God the Father, they create institutions both earthly and heavenly, keep watch over them, and provide for them; they "order all things well" and bring the whole world into balance. Like Christ, they are transcendent yet incarnate: "We, celestial creatures though we may be, have been sent down to earth in order to restore order and justice to those institutions which we ourselves have set up at God's command" (I.3). Like the post-resurrection Jesus, they "managed to enter a room whose doors and windows were all closed" (I.2). And like the Holy Spirit, the three divine ladies bring comfort and help to their subjects and function as heavenly advocates.

Confusing the issue, however, is the fact that the three ladies are also sometimes not-God. In some places in Christine's writings, they are divine yet subordinate, following God's orders and acting at his behest. Righteousness implies this separateness when she says to Christine: "With the help of God and us three, you will build the city" (*City of Ladies*, I.5). In the next section, however, Justice describes herself as the same as God or, at least, begotten of God ("I am part of God and God is part of me: in effect, we amount to the same thing. … my being arises directly from his own"). But a little later in the narrative, the ladies' self-definition shifts back to subordinationism: "All three of us are his daughters, for

it was he who created us." Here, the three daughters of God are made, not begotten, and thus presumably not amounting to the same thing as God.[671]

The three ladies figure also in *The Book of Three Virtues*, a book of advice addressed to all classes of women, from queens to prostitutes, pontificating on how they should dress, speak, and behave.[672] In this rendering, Reason, Righteousness, and Justice appear to Christine again, although with less fanfare, to encourage her to take up her pen and finish the work she began in the *City of Ladies*. The trio are described here as "three radiant creatures" with harmonious voices (I.1), but they are not described in as much detail as they were in the previous book, and they have more practical concerns in mind. In the illuminations for the extant manuscripts of the *Book of Three Virtues*—some of which were produced during Christine's lifetime, and some later—the three ladies are not identical, and they do not look especially regal. They seem to be three ordinary (albeit upper-class) women, presumably meant to appeal to the wide range of women who might identify with them or look to them as moral exemplars. The three ladies in this book hope to bring "all sorts of women" into the City of Ladies (I.1), because it is a place in which, "according to God's word, the humble shall be exalted" (I.2).

Unlike the traditional Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there was no prescribed way in the fifteenth century to characterize the appearance, character, and function of a feminine trio like Christine's—and so she might pass them off as something else. They might simply be understood as literary tropes or allegorical figures. The ambiguity of her female figures no doubt helped Christine escape the suspicious eye of theological censors, even while she employed them for theological purposes of her own. Although it seems

[671] In Augustinian theology, "begotten" implies equality; and "created" or "made" implies subordination.
[672] Brown-Grant, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xviii-xix.

obvious that Christine was testing the boundaries of Trinitarian theology in her writing, she was clever enough to leave her three ladies open to interpretation. This openness has led to some interesting scholarly theories on whom she might have intended them to be.

Scholars' Interpretations of Christine's Three Ladies

Scholars have interpreted and characterized Christine's three regal ladies in various ways. Many, in discussion of Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies* and *Book of Three Virtues*, refrain from categorizing her personifications of Reason, Righteousness, and Justice. These commentators prefer simply to call them the "three allegorical ladies" or "three divine ladies." That may be a wise course, and is surely the easier one, given the three ladies' ambiguity and multivalence. There are a few scholars, however, who have made more daring attempts to define the three ladies precisely and, in the process, figure out what Christine was up to philosophically and theologically. This section of the chapter will describe and assess a few of those attempts.

A first category of scholarly interpretation of the three ladies depends on ancient or literary sources. Margaret Brabant and Michael Brint, for instance, consider Christine's three ladies as parallel to the Greek virtues of sophia, sophrôsunê, and dikê, "transfigured into a thoroughly Christian allegory."[673] Two scholars see resonances with Dante: Benjamin Semple thinks of Christine's three ladies as spiritual guides, like a tripartite Virgil;[674] and Earl Jeffrey Richards sees parallels between Christine's ladies and the "three blessed ladies"

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[673] Margaret Brabant and Michael Brint, "Identity and Difference in Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*," in *Politics, Gender and Genre: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Margaret Brabant (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), 211.
[674] Benjamin M. Semple, "The Critique of Knowledge as Power: The Limits of Philosophy and Theology in Christine de Pizan," in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. Marilyn Desmond (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 113-15.

in the *Inferno* (2.124), whose intercessions brought Virgil to Dante as his guide.[675] The problem with comparisons to Dante, while intriguing, is that Virgil lacks threeness and the three blessed ladies lack oneness—they appear separately to Dante, in three separate scenes.

Some scholars bypass altogether the theological dimension of Christine's three ladies. Joël Blanchard, for instance, theorizes that Reason, Righteousness (or Rectitude), and Justice represent the three aesthetic functions of Christine's book: Reason is the truth and unity of the whole; Rectitude represents the balanced proportions among the sections; and Justice shows forth the harmonious relationships among the characters.[676] Glenda McLeod argues that the three ladies, and the three stages of city-building that they direct, represent Christine herself—"her own better instincts"[677] and her "identity formation" or personal development in three areas: reasoning, virtue, and sense of justice.[678] McLeod points out that in fifteenth-century poetry, the city was often a metaphor for the self.[679] While all of the above are interesting ideas that add layers of possible meaning to Christine's ladies, these scholars' neglect of the obvious theological content of Christine's encounter with the three ladies renders their theories incomplete.

Better approaches to Christine's three ladies take fully into account the Christian doctrines, church traditions, and biblical literature in which Christine was steeped. Bonnie Birk, for instance, makes a theologically sensitive and detailed argument for the three ladies as a tripartite Biblical Wisdom. She shows that, combined, they have all the qualities

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[675] V. A. Kolve, "The Annunciation to Christine: Authorial Empowerment in *The Book of the City of Ladies*," in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 177.
[676] Joël Blanchard , "Compilation and Legitimation in the Fifteenth Century: *Le livre de la cité des dames*," in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 238.
[677] Glenda McLeod, "Poetics and Antimisogynist Polemics in Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*," in Richards, *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, 38.
[678] Ibid., 40-43.
[679] Ibid., "Poetics and Antimisogynist Polemics," 44.

attributed to the female personification of Wisdom as described in the Wisdom of Solomon—lover of justice, one who makes all things right, who fashions all that exists, and who renews all things.[680] Barbara Newman describes Christine's three ladies as goddesses, by which she does not necessarily mean "pagan." Rather, she uses the term loosely to mean "divine women" or "figures of female sacrality."[681] Goddesses, as Newman understands them, might therefore be female mediators or emanations of the divine, sacred symbols, or Platonic universals. She thus justifies her description of Christine's regal ladies in the *City of Ladies* as "three crowned goddesses."[682] Newman cites this line from the opening chapters of the book as evidence that Christine herself understood the three ladies as goddesses:

> Kissing the ground they stood on, I adored them as if they were goddesses of glory [*deesses de gloire*], praising them with these words: "Oh noble and worthy ladies, light of the heavens and of the earth, fountains of paradise bringing joy to the blessed, how is it that you have deigned to come down from your lofty seats and shining thrones to visit me, a simple and ignorant scholar, in my dark and gloomy retreat?" (I.6)

This is the only instance in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, however, in which Christine uses the word *deesses* to describe her three ladies.

V. A. Kolve, in his examination of Christine's iconography, notes the inadequacy of a merely literary approach to Christine: "Literary criticism has concerned itself only with differentiating the three women," he says, rather than seeing them as a unit, as Christine clearly intended. He continues: "Christine doesn't merely present three ladies, she invites us

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[680] Bonnie A. Birk, *Christine de Pizan and Biblical Wisdom: A Feminist-Theological Point of View* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2005), 148.
[681] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 49.
[682] Ibid., 20.

to think of them as three-in-one and one-in-three—creating a female Trinity as the empowering fiction of her work, a Trinity that like its divine antecedent intervenes in human history in order to change it."[683] While Newman acknowledges the biblical and theological tradition that Christine was drawing from, her goddess theory suffers from the problem that Kolve describes, in that her goddesses function only as separate units. Calling Christine's three ladies "goddesses" does not adequately account for their oneness of source and substance. Birk's theory, while compelling in many ways, has the opposite problem: it accounts for the divine oneness of the three ladies but does not adequately account for their threeness.

In both *The Book of the City of Ladies* and in Christine's ballads (written during her early career as a court poet), Christine speaks adoringly of figures like Athena and the Sybils. With the Renaissance underway in Europe, Christine was operating in a context in which the full history of the Roman world was being brought to bear. But these female figures were not Christian personages for Christine, nor were they really deities. Pagan figures at best foreshadowed Christian events and Christian virtues in Christine's mind because, she said, "the ancients did not yet have the light of true faith" (*Othea*, 32). In the *City of Ladies* (I.33-34), Christine informs the reader that the divinity ascribed to legendary mythological figures from the classical world is customary but "fabulous."[684] Likewise, in *Othea's Letter*, Christine explains that Minerva was called a goddess because of her great knowledge, not because she was really of divine origin (*Othea*, 34).

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[683] Kolve, "Annunciation to Christine," 181.
[684] Eleni Stecopoulos and Karl D. Uitti, "Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*," in Richards, *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, 48.

Christine makes a point of showing that the wisdom and power of the ancient "goddesses" was fallible: "Even the Amazons' power," Justice explains in the *City of Ladies*, "began to crumble in due course, as is the way with all earthly rulers. … By contrast, the city which you are going to build [the City of Ladies] will be much more powerful than these" (I.4). Christine's three divine ladies, unlike the pre-Christian "goddesses," will be "infallible" in their guidance. A gathering of *Christian* women will be the culmination of the City of Ladies, where the Virgin Mary is queen. In sum, although Christine drew from a multitude of sources to find female exemplars and divine beings to people her books, Christian doctrine, scripture, and tradition were of paramount importance to her, with other sources like ancient myth playing a secondary role.

Christine's Trinitarian Theology

Evidence in Christine's writings and book illuminations points to the preeminence of the Trinity in her theology, giving ballast to Kolve's (and my own) argument that Christine's three regal ladies are best understood as a female Trinity. Trinitarian conventions, symbols, and ideas suffuse Christine's work. Her fondness for threeness extends both to the content and organization of her works, many of which she divided into three sections. Significantly, as shown above in regard to the *City of Ladies*, Christine put a Trinitarian spin on pre-Christian figures and ideas. In *Othea's Letter*, Christine presents two sets of three legendary women: Minerva, Athena, and Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons (sections 13-15); and Diana, Ceres, and Isis (23-25). In the threefold format consisting of text, gloss, and allegory, Christine draws parallels between the first three goddesses and the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and love). The second three she makes parallel to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The function of the "goddesses" here is to prefigure Christian virtues and personages. They are not presented as objects of worship in themselves.

In her *Vision*, Christine addresses Lady Wisdom, who becomes progressively Lady Philosophy (consoling Christine in her troubles, as she did for Boethius) and then Lady Theology. So here Christine creates another female Trinity—Wisdom, Philosophy, and Theology—with one being and three different aspects. Christine addresses her/them as "God, who is properly you, and you, who are properly God" (110). Christine also refers to Lady Philosophy as "the excellent goddess" (110). But Philosophy here is an orthodox Christian figure, as she promises Christine that "on the foundation of Holy Writ, the most sure, I will lead you back" to truth and happiness (111). Lady Philosophy also defers to the church fathers. In Christine's imagined dialogue with her, she cites no fewer than nine prominent theologians from late antiquity and the Middle Ages: Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Cassiodorus, Bede, Bernard, John Chrysostom, and Hugh of St. Victor. Christine's mental and imaginative universe is thoroughly Christian.

Some of Christine's most explicit theology appears at the end of the third section of the *Vision*, where her dialogue with Wisdom/Philosophy/Theology culminates in a speech on the Holy Trinity. Here Christine cites Augustine's *De Trinitate* and discusses both Augustine's argument with Arius about the undivided Trinity and Bernard's warning against over-speculation about such a great mystery. Most interestingly, Christine quotes extensively from Augustine on the several possible trinities that he devises in *De Trinitate*: the eternal Trinity that made us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit); the "miserable trinity" that unmakes us (impotence, ignorance, concupiscence); the "beneficial trinity" that remakes us (faith, hope, love); the "reasonable trinity" (memory, understanding, will); and corollary sets

of three: articles, commandments, sacraments; pardon, grace, glory; and pure heart, good conscience, firm faith. Still quoting Augustine, Christine affirms that the end and goal of every human being can be summed up as "this Blessed Trinity, one God alone, reigning forever and ever" (132).

Augustine validated for Christine a Trinity that is one but contains within itself many possible meanings. This creative potential within the doctrine of the Trinity takes root and flowers in Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies*. Like her *Vision* and *Book of Three Virtues*, the *City of Ladies* is arranged in three parts—as is the city itself—and is replete with Trinitarian symbolism. Kolve gives strong evidence of Christine's familiarity with, and use of, Trinitarian conventions in the *City of Ladies*, not only in the three regal ladies' self-descriptions (discussed above) but also in the illuminations Christine supervised for the book. While medieval artists often depicted God the Father as an old man or a king, the Son as an infant or a crucified man, and the Holy Spirit as a dove, the Trinity was sometimes drawn (especially in the fifteenth century) as three separate but identical men (Figure 3.6), in some depictions holding three different objects—just as Christine's three ladies are distinct yet identical, and each holds an object that will help her carry out human salvation. (Justice's golden measuring vessel is described in I.6 as "engraved with the *fleur de lys* of the Holy Trinity" because it "never gives out wrong measure.") Fifteenth-century religious plays, likewise, often represented the Trinity as three separate yet similar figures, each having his own role and speaking part, as do Christine's three ladies.[685]

Kolve notes that the Trinity pictured as three distinct yet identical *personae* was especially connected in medieval iconography with the Annunciation—another prominent

[685] Kolve, "The Annunciation to Christine," 181.

theme in the opening pages of the *City of Ladies*.[686] Like Mary, Christine is "terrified" when first confronted by the heavenly beings (I.2). Justice announces to her that "you alone of all women" have been granted the honor of building the City of Ladies (I.4). Should her similarity to the Blessed Virgin elude the reader, Christine makes the connection clear by using language from the Annunciation passage in Luke 1 as she says to the three ladies:

> Though I am still daunted by the prospect of this extraordinary task, I know that nothing is impossible for God. … I therefore thank both God and you with all my heart for having entrusted me with such a noble task, one which I accept with great pleasure. Behold your handmaiden, ready to do your bidding. I will obey your every command, so be it unto me according to your word. (I.7)

Compare this passage to Luke 1:37-38 in which the angel, after telling Mary that she will give birth to the Son of God, says to her: "'For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'"

The implication of the passage in Christine's book is that Christine's building of the City of Ladies is a salvific act, reminiscent of Mary's role as coredemptrix in giving birth to Jesus. Christine will act as a coredemptrix for women, and she will do so under the watchful care of the whole Trinity. As Kolve puts it: "The Three Ladies come to bring peace, reconciliation, a new understanding. And like the earlier Trinity, they need an earthly woman to help them perform that monumental task."[687] In Christine's narration, Mary herself, after being ushered in as queen of the City of Ladies (III.1), invokes both female and male Trinities whose divine wills coincide in the completion of the city:

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[686] Ibid., 184.
[687] Ibid., 185.

> Justice, my son's dearly beloved, I will gladly come to live amongst these women, who are my sisters and friends, and I will take my place by their side. This is because Reason, Rectitude [Righteousness], you Justice and even Nature, have all persuaded me to do so. Women serve, honor and praise me without end, thus I am now and ever shall be the head of the female sex. God himself always wished this to be so and it was predestined and ordained by the Holy Trinity.

Says Newman: "This moment of convergent divinity is the veiled climax of Christine's theological project."[688]

Christine's joyful triumph at the end of *The Book of the City of Ladies* stands in contrast to her sad demeanor at the beginning. By envisioning female divinity, Christine elevated women—herself included—and helped rehabilitate women's public image. To envision female divinity in Trinitarian form was even more powerful, for Christine (with other medieval theologians) understood the Trinity as the highest mystery, the peak of contemplation, and the source of all truth, righteousness, justice, and happiness. By showing that women as well as men could participate in and reflect the triune God, Christine argued as well for a more vital and just role for women in society.

Christine's three regal ladies can't really be reduced to a single category, and she probably intended it that way. But if a category must be chosen, "female Trinity" makes the most sense. What better template could there be for a Christian woman who wishes to participate in the highest possible being, and to bring all women with her? Using the conventional language of the Trinity, as well as that of the Annunciation and of medieval

[688] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 24.

visions ("I saw"), Christine bolstered her authority as a writer and as a theologian. Her extensive citation of scripture, the Fathers, and medieval theological luminaries; her ability to skate around heterodoxy with ambiguity; and her genuine traditionalism served the same purpose.

In many ways, Christine reaped the benefits of Renaissance culture—literary, artistic, and philosophical—that was making its way from Italy to France during her lifetime.[689] She herself was an examplar of the civic humanism, optimism, sophistication, rationalism, classicism, confidence, and independence that were its hallmarks. But, as a woman, her participation in the new movement was not assured. The medieval genre of literature known as the "querelle des femmes" ("quarrel about women"), in which the merits of womanhood were debated, was still dominated by misogynist clerics in late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century France.[690] As female literary production and patronage increased in the fifteenth century, however, dissenting voices arose, including Christine's own objection to the preponderance of such literature for "maligning and mistreating women for no good reason."[691] Christine "sought to prove misogynists such as Jean de Meun [one of the authors of the *Roman de la Rose*] wrong by arguing that what unites men and women as human beings—their rationality and possession of a soul—is more important than what divides them as sexes."[692] Both men and women, she argued, are equally prone to sin.

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[689] Earl Jeffrey Richards, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xxvii: Renaissance humanism spread from Italy to France as a "large number of French translations of Latin and Italian works [were] circulating in French courtly circles at this time."
[690] Marina Warner, foreword to *Book of the City of Ladies*, ed. Richards, xiii.
[691] Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee, introduction to *Selected Writings*, xiii.
[692] Brown-Grant, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xxvi.

In religious circles, however, a severe movement of Church reform and spiritual discernment, aimed especially at women claiming visions, was also underway in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries. This movement, which Dyan Elliott has called a "'top-down' initiative to contain female spirituality,"[693] was spearheaded largely by Jean Gerson (1363-1429), chancellor of the University of Paris. Using 1 John 4:1 ("Test the spirits to see whether they are of God") as his proof-text, Gerson sought to give the discernment of spirits a rational, scientific patina with the orderly method he set forth in his tract "On the Testing of Spirits" (1415).[694] In this document, Gerson warned that visions should automatically be considered doubtful if they are claimed by the mentally ill, people "under the sway of strong passions," recent converts, and "especially adolescents and women, whose ardor is excessive, greedy, changeable, unbridled, and therefore suspect."[695] A visionary should be immediately disqualified, he said, by any sign of heresy, spiritual pride, disobedience, "singularity," or excessive (perceived) intimacy with her confessor.[696] Gerson's guidelines required an assessor of mystical phenomena to have both practical pastoral experience and theological training—a set of requirements that would, by necessity, exclude women.[697]

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[693] Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 28.
[694] His six-fold method (expressed succinctly in a Latin mnemonic ditty: *Tu, quis, quid, quare, / Cui, qualiter, unde, require*) required discernment specialists to ask the questions: "*Who* is it to whom the revelation is made? *What* does the revelation itself mean and to what does it refer? *Why* is it said to have taken place? *To whom* was it manifested for advice? *What kind of life* does the visionary lead? *Whence* does the revelation originate?" Jean Gerson, "On the Testing of Spirits," trans. Paschal Boland, *The Concept of "Discretio Spirituum" in John Gerson's "De Probatione Spirituum" and "De Distinctione Verarum Visionum A Falsis,"* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), 30.
[695] Ibid., 30.
[696] Ibid., 30-31.
[697] Ibid., 26; and Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 19.

Crises (whether local or national) have often, historically, correlated with an uptick in claims to mystical and visionary experience.[698] Such crises also contributed, however, to a backlash against mystical and visionary experience, especially when action on the basis of that experience seemed to make things worse. (Gerson blamed Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden for contributing to the Great Schism with their vision-inspired interventions. His presentation of "On the Testing of Spirits" to the Council of Constance in 1415 was motivated, in part, to his objection to the canonization of Birgitta.) The crisis of authority in the "troubled religious world of the early fifteenth century" [699] was due in large part to various heretical groups, but also to the lingering effects of the papal schism and the Hundred Years' War. Spiritual discernment "as envisaged by Gerson and his cohort seemed to promise an enhancement of clerical control," as it provided a mechanism for distinguishing counterfeit from genuine spirituality.[700]

Indeed, Gerson's weapons of scholastic rhetoric, inquisition, and more rigorous pastoral "care"—especially for women—were taken up with a vengeance by others, like the anonymous writer of "On the Good and the Evil Spirit"[701] and by Johannes Nider, a German reformer and theologian who collected, organized, and disseminated stories of witchcraft throughout Europe.[702] As Gerson's discernment literature began to take on a life of its own,

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[698] Elliott, "Seeing Double," 26. See also W. V. Harris, "Roman Opinions about the Truthfulness of Dreams," *Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003): 18-34.
[699] Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 10.
[700] Elliott, "Seeing Double," 27.
[701] Ibid., 36-37. This tract fleshed out objections to Joan of Arc's sanctity using Gerson's earlier work. To Gerson (a proud Frenchman), however, Joan was a patriot-saint; to the tract writer she was a heretic-witch.
[702] Bailey, *Battling Demons*, 4. Nider believed the threat of witchcraft more dangerous than heresy (not to mention more titillating) and thus a better goad to religious reform among Christians at all levels (Bailey, 7). Nider, with his treatise *Formicarius*, would consequently "partake in the creation of the pious terror that would grip Europe for the next three centuries and lead tens of thousands to the stake" (Bailey, 117). See also Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 315-19.

it often led to clerical brutality and scapegoating, of which many late-medieval mystics and visionaries (in France, most notably Joan of Arc, Marguerite Porete, and Na Prous Boneta) were casualties.[703]

Christine de Pizan was able to escape this brutality, not least of all because she had Jean Gerson on her side. Gerson had been Christine's ally in disparaging the vulgarity of the *Roman de la Rose* and in championing Joan of Arc. He apparently agreed that the *Roman de la Rose* "presented an un-Christian view of relations between the sexes, one based on mutual mistrust and antagonism rather than on love and charity."[704] In his admiration for Christine, Gerson even referred to her as *femina ista virilis* ("that manly woman").[705] Women in general, however, were still assumed to be more vulnerable than men to "spiritual transgression," as they were "associated with the qualities of softness, changeability, and malleability; [and] men with strength, force, and virtue."[706]

Although this was an old assumption, held over from classical antiquity and early Christianity, from the twelfth century on "a significant number of those laying claim to positions of leadership based upon oracular and visionary prerogatives were women;"[707] and visions "were the cornerstone of female mysticism," beginning especially with Hildegard of Bingen.[708] The "laicization of religious life"[709] initiated by the Gregorian Reform in the late-eleventh and early-twelfth century had helped set mystical, vernacular, and other lay expressions of piety in motion. But definitions of legitimate sanctity became increasingly narrow for women during the late Middle Ages. Bodily symptoms often believed in the

[703] Elliott, "Seeing Double," 27. See also Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, 276-98.
[704] Brown-Grant, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xxvi.
[705] Richards, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xxxvii.
[706] Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 130.
[707] Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 14.
[708] Elliott, "Seeing Double," 32, 34.
[709] Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 10.

previous three centuries to be signs of holiness were now cast under suspicion, and women were just as likely to be perceived as *imago diaboli* as *imago dei*.[710]

Thus for most women who asserted their spiritual authority, the late medieval environment was more hostile than it had been in earlier centuries. Jo Ann McNamara has argued that, even in the twelfth- to fourteenth-century heyday of women's mysticism, medieval women's writing was heavily edited and vetted by male authority figures and by "judicious self-censorship."[711] And even in the best of times, women's accounts of visionary experience were met with "mingled admiration and hostility."[712] But then, in the fourteenth century, there was plague, famine, social upheaval, and economic woes in addition to papal schism and efforts at Church reform; and what followed in the next century, McNamara argues, was a "great silent void" of women's religious voices.[713] Intense piety and intercession among religious women had, it was felt, led to "an alarming independence" and were feared to encroach on clerical prerogatives.[714] John Coakley has also observed a downward trajectory from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, particularly in regard to the relationships between holy women and their male colleagues.[715] While he argues in *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power* that there were separate but (generally) equal spheres of male priest and female prophet during the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, he sees a new anxiety in later literature, in which the male collaborator must anticipate doubts and suspicions about the holy women's claims, and must address the question of their genuineness.[716]

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[710] Ibid., 175.
[711] McNamara, "Rhetoric of Orthodoxy," 9, 13.
[712] Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 2.
[713] McNamara, "Rhetoric of Orthodoxy," 10.
[714] Ibid., 22, 26-27.
[715] John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3.
[716] Ibid., 16-24.

In her argument that "discernment" literature contributed significantly to this deterioration of authority, respectability, and freedom among visionary women, Elliott observes that Jean Gerson took a pan-historical approach to his misogyny:

> [He] trips lightly from Virgil's denunciation of woman's mutability, to apostolic warnings against young and curious women, to a denunciation of Eve, who, according to his reckoning, lied twice in her first utterance. All female verbiage should be scrutinized much more carefully than male, since both human and divine law unite in attempting to restrain women.[717]

Christine, in her similarly pan-historical review of illustrious women in the *City of Ladies*, effectively reverses Gerson's narrative. Indeed, her arguments on behalf of women "repeatedly invoke historical tradition and Christianity. … Christine saw in Christianity a means of overcoming oppression."[718] With the three divine ladies of Reason, Righteousness, and Justice—the female Trinity—alongside her and showing her the way, Christine was, finally, an optimist.

[717] Elliott, "Seeing Double," 30.
[718] Richards, introduction to *City of Ladies*, xxviii-xxvix.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Visionary women of medieval Europe, in producing some of the most innovative, intimate, and colorful Trinitarian theology of the period, proclaimed a divine reality that was in turns cosmic, homey, communal, erotic, regal, playful, and (sometimes) feminine. With such visionary images as the centerpiece, this study has sought to address the interweaving of three themes: Trinitarian theology, gender (specifically its role in the making of theology), and medieval visionary literature. All three of these areas of inquiry have suffered periods of neglect over time, but in the last few decades interest in, and study of, the Trinity, women's theological voices, and visionary literature alike have been revived. In this project, I put them all together. The intersection of these three themes yields a theology that is rich, immediate, experiential, and compelling in its apprehension of divine reality.

Across time, place, and confession, there has been in the doctrine of the Trinity a shifting of emphases, with priority given at times to God's unity and at other times to God's threeness, or with priority given to one person of the Trinity at the expense of the other two. Historical theology is marked by cycles in which God draws closer and then further away, the human aspect of the Trinity is emphasized or muted, and preference is given to God's indwelling love or, alternately, God's remote majesty. This shifting of priorities has sometimes led to an unbalanced Christian theology, and an unbalanced anthropology as well. When, for instance, emphasis on the unity and sovereignty of God (characteristic of Western academic theology since the fourth century) takes precedence over the long term, that model takes on the status of orthodoxy and becomes a closed system. In his essay "Religion as a Cultural System" (1966), Clifford Geertz defined religion as a system of symbols "which acts

to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."[719]

While this observation generally holds true in regard to the lasting effects of medieval Catholic dogma, it is important to remember that there was a great deal of variety even within medieval scholasticism, as the historical overview in Chapter 2 shows. Interpretation of, and explanations for, the doctrine of the Trinity were continually probed and contested by scholastic theologians, and novel approaches to the three-in-one never ceased. Add to that the greatly diverse Trinitarian theologies produced by monastic, mystical, visionary, imaginary, and vernacular theologians, and a picture of medieval theology emerges that is much more varied and lively than has sometimes been supposed.

A sense of plurality within God begins in scripture, where the idea of the Trinity is shifting and diffuse. Although Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to be found there, they appear not as formal articles of faith but as persons to be worshipped, emulated, and believed upon for salvation. Approaches to the Trinity in scripture are, in other words, liturgical, devotional, and confessional, rather than systematic. The Trinity is not seen by the biblical writers (the evangelist John and the apostle Paul to some degree excepted) as a problem to be solved, as it would be in later centuries, but as a mystery to be praised. The triune God of scripture is living, real, and communicative, but also inscrutable, far away, and majestic. The scriptural mode of expression (which resonates in medieval visionary literature) is prophetic, authoritative, experiential, and often vividly imagistic, pressing upon its hearers and readers the moral imperatives of the devout religious life. Some scriptural images of the divine have

[719] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," reprinted in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-125, at 90.

had real staying power—the "Ancient of Days" (the white-bearded old man in Daniel 7:9) being probably the most recognizable image of God, and ubiquitous in images of the Trinity. It is notable that God is rarely depicted as an old man by the medieval women visionaries. They, in contrast, drew attention to other, relatively neglected, depictions of the divine in scripture, particularly feminine and maternal images (like the figure of Wisdom, and images of God in labor and giving birth).

The liturgy of the Church, like scripture, assumes the Trinity to be eternally imprinted on the Christian community, its ritual and sacraments, and the religious lives of the individuals therein. The Trinity is therefore the "doxological vocation" of the church.[720] Visionary women, steeped in the liturgy, understood this. Their relationship with the Trinity (role-played in a great variety of ways in their visions) was primarily one of love, praise, and action, often expressed in threefold structures and sets of images. The liturgy shaped this expression, because liturgy is about lived experience and enactment of belief—belief that is prior to doctrine, both chronologically and existentially.

In the ante-Nicene period, ideas about the Trinity were not yet hardened into doctrine; while increasingly polemical and dogmatic, they were still open-ended and imaginative. Trinitarian theology at this time drew from scriptural images and narratives; from dynamic, natural images (especially of fire, water, and plants); and from human analogies (both bodily and communal). Sometimes feminine imagery for the Trinity could be found in early Christian literature as well. In second-century Syriac theological poetry, an openness to gender ambiguity created a spiritual milieu in which "everyone is more than they seem to

[720] Clancy, "Trinity and Ecclesiology," 22.

be,"[721] and thus new possibilities for religious and social roles. As in scripture and liturgy, Trinitarian theology from this period had practical application, a sacramental cast, a balance of the economic and immanent aspects of the Trinity (with preference for the economic), a fondness for precise theological diagramming, and a fusion of physical and metaphysical language. All of these characteristics were carried on by the medieval women visionaries.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, once many of the formal questions about Christology and the Trinity were settled—establishing the coeternality and coequality of the three persons of the Trinity and, in the West, the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son—theological creativity was curtailed. Developments and innovations did continue, but vocabulary for the Trinity was now more crystallized than it had been before. Attention in academic theological circles turned more toward speculation about the immanent Trinity, even though the creeds developed at this time focused on the economy of salvation and the missions of the three Persons; and the Council of Chalcedon (451) broadened the definition of *homoousios* to include not only the unity of Christ with the Father and Holy Spirit, but also the unity of Christ with humanity—an emphasis visionary women would retain.

Visionary women were also heirs to the Cappadocians' blend of intellectual and mystical theology, their sense of abundance in the Trinity, and their attraction to the idea of the Trinity as a *koinonia* (fellowship) of divine love. The Cappadocians' contemporary Augustine was foundational for medieval theology, providing the scaffolding for later Trinitarian thought. The most enduring aspect of his Trinitarian theology was his psychological analogy for it (memory, intellect, will). It is less well known that Augustine actually produced a multiplicity of analogies for the Trinity, even a multiplicity of variations

[721] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 114-15.

on the psychological analogy. Given the ultimate impossibility of defining the Trinity, he sometimes seemed to stand on the brink of despair; but at other times he took a more playful tone. Always, he kept working at it. The Augustinian gifts of diversity, balance, modesty, and persistence (as well as the tendency to despair) in conceptualizing the Trinity were fully inherited by later visionary women, although they would do so in more concrete and imagistic ways.

Some aspects of Augustine's Trinitarian thought were shared by all kinds of medieval theologians—scholastic, monastic, and visionary—like the triad of divine attributes (power, wisdom, goodness), which appear over and over again in Christian theology; and the Trinitarian analogue of Love, Beloved, and Love Shared, which Augustine set aside but which was developed by later theologians, male and female alike. Although he labored to be philosophically precise and to understand the inner workings of the "immanant" Trinity, Augustine did not settle for mere speculation about the Godhead, but was mainly concerned with its redemptive work. His thoughts about the human being as *imago trinitatis* (which entailed personal spiritual growth and extended to the Church as a whole) and the creation as *vestigia* of the Trinity were likewise carried on by theologians of various types, the visionary women among them. In contrast to these latter, however, Augustine privileged the mind over the body, and mental ideas over spiritual visions and sensory images. He also used exclusively male language for the Trinity. Even in their admiration for and frequent citation of Augustine, the medieval women visionaries often subverted his categories, putting their own spin on his basic ideas.

A plurality of approaches to the Trinity continued into the Middle Ages, especially with the rise of both scholastic and vernacular theology in the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries. People working within each of these theological modes constantly reworked tradition, although the former with a more technical vocabulary and according to scholastic training in argumentation and dialectic. The mystical strain of Trinitarian theology, which was continued from the Neoplatonism of the early Church Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius, was expressed by writers like William of St. Thierry, who spoke of union with God through embraces and kisses; Bernard of Clairvaux, who eschewed philosophical speculation for an intimate, fideistic relationship with God; the Victorines, whose contemplative-intellectual approach and themes like the divine *koinonia* were reminiscent of the Cappadocians; and Joachim of Fiore, with his mystical-apocalyptic view of the Trinity. Among these medieval mystical or mystical-intellectual men there is considerable theological cross-over with the women visionaries, particularly evident in their shared understanding of the Trinity as a being of mutual love and participation, and in their embrace of Trinitarian ineffability. In Hildegard, there is the combination of both personal and cosmic imagery; and in Mechthild of Magdeburg, nuptial and ecstatic expressions that have resonance with their male mystical peers.

While medieval visionary women had, in terms of method and vocabulary, little in common with the great thirteenth-century scholastic theologians, they shared these theologians' desire for comprehensiveness. Like the writers of the mammoth *summae* produced at this time, although usually in fewer pages, women visionaries covered every category of salvation history and religious life. They shared some themes with scholastic theologians as well: the Franciscan Bonaventure, for instance, described the Trinity as "self-diffusive" and endlessly productive; he continued the love analogy that originated with Augustine and was developed by Richard of St. Victor; and he understood the created world

in all its diversity as the *imago trinitatis*. Albert the Great and his student Thomas Aquinas stressed both rationality and love in one's approach to God. While women visionaries did not reject the use of reason (and some, like Hadewijch, embraced it) they valued reason and love in different amounts and configurations than did the schoolmen, putting relatively greater stress on love. When it came to the Trinity, scholastic theologians' ambition was generally to resolve it, while visionary women were more content to live with it, behold it, and describe it without rationalizing it. Even fourteenth-century theologians, like Duns Scotus, who backed away from theological certainty, still traded in highly technical language and logic.

Adjectives used in this dissertation to describe medieval women's visionary theology include: experiential, immediate, personal, natural, living, familial, loving, bodily, sensory, social, communal, egalitarian, relational, devotional, holistic, kinetic, diverse, participatory, and fluid. The women themselves often described their visions of the Trinity as beautiful, inspiring, and reassuring. These are all positive words; but one should also remember that visionary writers' experience of the Trinity might also be confusing, scary, and even violent. Because they were working outside the schools, visionary theologians were in some ways freer to do theology as they liked, but, especially in the later Middle Ages, doing so could be risky. Most of the women under study here expressed at one time or another discomfort, fear, feelings of persecution, and resistance to their visionary and prophetic vocations. For the modern reader (as likely for many a medieval reader), visionary literature can be opaque, difficult, and strange. In short, neither the visionary women's lives, nor their spiritual experiences, nor the writings they produced were easy—even while they made great effort to present their ideas in accessible ways.

Hildegard, in her letter to Bishop Odo, advocated for a plenitude of names and images for God. And she invented a great variety of images of the Trinity: some circular, some triangular, and some vertical and hierarchical; some male, some female, and some androgynous; and many images both bodily and natural. Her powerful female figures, including virtuous female triads, expressed the feminine divine in action—especially appropriate for the edification of her nuns, which was always Hildegard's top concern. Hildegard was herself the very image of internal diversity: mystical, devotional, and pastorally sensitive while at the same time tough, didactic, and prophetic. In the plurality of community, both male and female, Hildegard also urged unity, as her explication of the Athanasian Creed so eloquently expresses. In this unity-in-plurality, as in everything, the Trinity was her guide and exemplar.

Mechthild of Hackeborn, like Gerturde of Helfta and Julian of Norwich, favored communal, sacramental, and familial images, as in her vision of the Trinity at work in the convent kitchen, where everyone was welcome and equal. These three women used gender-crossing language as well to express the plenitude of roles among the three persons of the Trinity, between themselves and the Trinity (either as a whole or as individual members), and among the nuns in the busy hive of the convent. Always, the Trinity was in motion. As such, it was a divine model for the active Christian life and for cooperative relationships within the Christian community.

The women of Helfta, while traditionally cloistered in a Cistercian convent, were less hieratic than Hildegard in their visions of God and themselves. Mechthild of Magdeburg, who joined the convent of Helfta very late in life, was somewhat less communally minded; rather she was focused on the individual soul's intimacy with God. Still, her Trinity was

relational, elemental, multisensory, and often familial. She, like the others, favored eucharistic and sacramental language over philosophical abstractions. She usually imagined the Trinity, and herself in relationship to it, flowing, melting, soaring, and sinking. Hadewijch, in similar terms, captured with her images of the whirlpool and the abyss the paradoxes, reversals, tensions, and balancing acts involved in relation to the triune God, in the religious life, and in Christian community. For all of these thirteenth-century women, life with the Trinity was passionate and sometimes unpredictable.

Julian of Norwich made the most of kinship metaphors in her Trinitarian theology, portraying the members of the Godhead as father, mother, lord, brother, and spouse. In her overflowing multiplicity of images, Julian like the others expressed the irrepressible nature of divinity as well as its gender ambiguity (or, one could say, gender complexity). Just as Hildegard was addressed by God as "homo" rather than as "mulier," Julian was addressed as a genderless child, and she in turn addressed her readers as a community of "even Christians." For all of these visionary women, love both divine and human was at the center of Trinitarian theology, and Julian made this most explicit. In her intimate and poignant images of knitting and enclosure, Julian assured herself and her readers that, because of the triune God's courtesy and compassion, "all shall be well."

Christine de Pizan, the only laywoman among the seven women under study here, was more stylized and literary than the other six, but she was at the same time theologically sophisticated. In her dream-visions at the openings of the *Book of the City of Ladies* and the *Book of Three Virtues*, in which the three divine ladies (Reason, Righteousness, and Justice) appeared to her, she used visionary language just as evocative as that of the others. Christine's feminine Trinity is rational and philosophical, but also personal, affective,

encouraging, and active on her (and all women's) behalf. They are also ambiguous. In the midst of her theological musing about the Trinity—which went here and there—Christine invoked no less an authority figure than Augustine, whose Trinity likewise resisted easy capture.

The women visionaries in this study exploited the doctrine of the Trinity to the fullest, tapping deeply into its creative potential. They did this by dressing the basic structure of the doctrine with what they experienced in their visions and by playing inventively with the Trinitarian tradition they had inherited. They always kept an eye on the practical and communal ramifications of the Trinity, and ultimately on the Trinity's guarantee of salvation. They sought clarity and reassurance, but they also sought to preserve the mystery of the divine. In all of this, visionary women were never passive, but were their own theological agents. Given their denial of official authority, they boldly claimed charismatic authority. They sought male endorsement when it served their cause, but they did not hesitate to criticize male leadership when it was called for. With great energy, they employed a variety of strategies in order to get a hearing. In the essentially misogynist world in which they lived, and in which their being in the image of God was in doubt, the seven women under study here constructed images of the Trinity in which lay alternate spiritual, ecclesial, and social possibilities. Like visual images of the Trinity, visionary expressions of the Godhead revealed something beyond themselves and invited a response. They were never static, but always reached for new knowledge and new paradigms.

The explication of their visions was never simply personal for these women. They always worked within a particular religious, social, and political context—even if they gave few clues about their personal lives and situations. They seemed to assume that God was

talking to them for a reason, and that they had a calling to apostolic life (*vita apostolica*), although that life might take different forms for different women. And, of course, all of them wrote; and writing is a public act. The visionary theology that they produced was not only spiritually instructive and inspiring for others, however; it could also be personally empowering. The qualities with which their envisioned Trinity was endowed might have the same effect—spiritually, socially, and psychologically—as the goddesses and Marian quaternities in medieval literature and art that Newman describes.[722]

While, as it has already been pointed out, visionary women did not seek to overturn hierarchy or subvert orthodoxy, their images of God as feminine, communal, social, egalitarian, and plural provided incipient ideas for change. In contrast to Gratian's unitary view of God and consequential gender hierarchy (effectively nullifying women's authority), women visionaries in their emphasis on the above characteristics dwelt in a more holistic image of God, which could only lead to a more fully realized image of themselves. In emphasizing the plurality over the singularity of God, visionary women created a place for themselves, their ideas, and their work; for they also envisioned a society and a Church in which people and their "missions" must (being in the image of the Trinity) take a variety of forms. As Tavard said of Trinitarian mysticism, "We become what we see."[723] Thus spiritual visions and the Trinitarian theology extracted from them opened up possibilities for the women who claimed them.

The movement from the thirteenth-century on toward vernacular theology had a similar effect. Of the seven women under study here, four of them (Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch, Julian, and Christine) wrote in their own languages rather than in

[722] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 312.
[723] Tavard, *Vision of the Trinity*, 51.

Latin. Like all vernacular theologians, McGinn says, visionary women were "able to become involved in a form of unprecedented theological conversation—a real mutual interchange between male and female theological voices carried on in the vernacular."[724] This put men and women "on the same footing" and "facilitated reexaminations of the gender roles that long tradition, both cultural and ecclesiastical, had made to seem inviolable to many."[725] McGinn says further that "medieval mystical texts challenge or subvert stereotypes about men and women,"[726] marking a "democratizing trend."[727] Theology was now, as it would continue to be, often produced by people who were neither elite, nor cloistered, nor formally educated.

The rise of the vernacular, which corresponded with a rise in literacy and book ownership in late-medieval Europe, also allowed for a broader audience. Vernacular literature (including sermons, treatises and booklets, hagiography, letters, poetry, and plays in addition to visionary and mystical accounts) was "practical and synthetic," appealing to a broad spectrum of people.[728] That is, again, not to say that visionary and vernacular theology was easy, but that it was intended to be grappled with by a wider audience. McGinn says of the fourteenth-century mystic Meister Eckhart that he "preached the possibility of a radical new awareness of God, in rich and often difficult terms, not to the clerical elite of the schools, but to women and men of every walk of life."[729] The same could be said of the medieval women visionaries. In their Trinitarian visions, especially, they brought a great richness and liveliness to the hardest of doctrines.

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[724] McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguines*, 4.
[725] Ibid., 7.
[726] Ibid., 8.
[727] Ibid., 10
[728] Ibid.
[729] Ibid., 9.

Because the Holy Trinity "occupies the highest place in the hierarchy of truths"[730] within Christian theology, medieval women visionaries—by saturating their works with Trinitarian language and imagery, and by claiming direct communication with the triune God—showed forth divine inspiration and authority. The task of envisioning the Trinity was felt to be imperative upon them, for the doctrine revealed necessary truths about God, themselves, and the community of Christian believers. For them the doctrine of the Trinity was (to reiterate LaCugna) the proper source of reflection on theological ethics, spirituality, ecclesiology, the liturgical and communitarian life of the Church, sacramental theology, anthropology, providence, and grace—that is, everything. Thus the Trinity, and how one conceived of it, really mattered. For theology today, it still matters.

Issues in Trinitarian Theology and the Contribution of Visionary Women

The Trinity has in recent years "made a dramatic comeback as the central and pivotal doctrine" in Christian thought;[731] and the present conversation is endlessly enriched by the variety of precedents (scriptural, patristic, medieval, and modern) retrieved and interpreted anew. While Augustine's psychological analogy of the Trinity—which emphasizes the unity of God, like the unity of the human mind, over the multiplicity of persons—was the reigning model for many centuries, recent assessments of that paradigm have led to its decline in favor of more social models.

To sum up several points that have been made throughout the dissertation, critiques of the Western Trinitarian tradition for which Augustine was foundational have included charges that theologians of the Latin West were not as faithful to scripture, liturgy, and the

[730] Peter C. Phan, foreword to Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus*, i.
[731] Phan, foreword to Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus*, i.

Fathers as those in the Greek East;[732] that the Western theological tradition is too philosophical and abstract,[733] and has thus lost its spiritual and pastoral usefulness; that the psychological analogy anticipated Descartes and has led to an individualism that is at odds with Christian community;[734] that the West's overemphasis on divine unity has led to modalism and monarchianism;[735] and that such Western conceptions of the Trinity promote hierarchical and patriarchal Church structures, which suppress (or institutionalize, or domesticate) both the human Jesus and the Holy Spirit.[736] German theologian Jürgen Moltmann has argued—and Gratian might have argued in the twelfth century, although to opposite ends—that images of God "always have the effect of legitimating human conditions."[737] If that is true, then (Moltmann says) the church should instead find its model in "the egalitarian mutuality of the persons of the Trinity."[738] The ancient Greek notion of divine *perichoresis*, "social" Trinitarians argue, still has currency as it connotes a divine (and, consequently, human) communion free from domination and subjection.[739]

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[732] Louis Dupré, *The Common Life: The Origins of Trinitarian Mysticism and its Development by Jan Ruusbroec* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 12. In regard to the Trinitarian theologies of patristic writers like Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, Dupré says: "How far [their] meditation remains from the kind of higher mathematics we all too readily associate with the [Western] Trinitarian dogma!"

[733] See Rahner, *Trinity*; and LaCugna, *God for Us*.

[734] See especially Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003); and Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988).

[735] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 110.

[736] This has been a particular complaint of feminist theologians, notably Mary Daly, Sallie McFague, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Elaine Pagels, Elsa Tamez, Patricia Wilson-Kastner, and Carter Heyward.

[737] Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, xiii.

[738] Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2005), 30. Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, xi: The "social Trinity" has been popularized especially since 1980.

[739] As such, liberation theologian Leonardo Boff (in *Trinity and Society*) argues that the Trinity becomes a "social program" for a communitarian church that defies "an authoritarian religious system in which the people are made dependent and kept in tutelage." Cited in Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, xiii.

In the recent backlash against the "social Trinity" (and tandem efforts to rename or reconfigure the Trinity to fit modern sensibilities), it has been pointed out that this model, with its emphasis on the three persons and their relationships both among themselves and with humans verges on modalism or tritheism;[740] that replacement of the psychological analogy with the social analogy inaccurately appeals to the Cappadocians and other Eastern theologians; and that "the Western tradition knows that God is pure spirit and as such imagination is a poor guide that quickly leads the mind to error."[741] Neil Ormerod argues that, in the Western tradition (by which he means principally Augustine and Aquinas), "relation" does not equal "interpersonal relationship," and the terms "relation" and "person" in regard to the Trinity cannot therefore be transferred to ideas about community or ecclesiology.[742] One might reasonably contend that the women under study here, held up to this standard of doctrinal orthodoxy, verged on modalism or even subordinationism in their "social" visions of the Trinity: that is, some of their characterizations of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, in particular, may have brought God too close to the created order and compromised divine dignity, unity, and independence.

It must be acknowledged, further, that social Trinitarian models carry the danger of projection of human realities, desires, and agendas onto the ineffable divine. But the same can be said of Augustinian and scholastic models and the kinds of unitarian, hieratic, and closed structures they might support. Although not perfect, what the social model does best is "to bring the triune symbol into the public sphere."[743] Marmion and Thiessen concur that, "following Karl Rahner's statement that the Trinity is a mystery of salvation (otherwise it

[740] O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 158; Ormerod, *Trinity*, 30.
[741] Ormerod, *Trinity*, 19.
[742] Ibid.
[743] Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, xiii.

would never have been revealed), and [that] salvation incorporates all aspects of life—personal, social, cosmic—then the Trinitarian symbol must have more than intra-ecclesial significance."[744]

Social analogies preserve orthodoxy just as well, or even better, than models that give priority to the unity of the Godhead over its plurality, or give priority to God the Father,[745] because they put greater emphasis on the coeternality and coequality of all three persons of the Trinity and fully embrace both its human and divine dimensions. Social analogies better convey the "missions" or "appropriations" of the three persons and thus the economic sense of the Trinity as a whole. These were the aspects of the Trinity most important to the New Testament writers and to the Fathers, as well as to the medieval women visionaries in this study.

Augustine lamented in the fourth century that there will inevitably be a "conflict between words" when humans try to define and articulate truths that are "worthy of God."[746] Visual images of the divine are similarly risky, because they seek to express "our ultimate concern"[747] but, like words, are limited in their ability to capture anything that is really true about God. How best, then, to express the depth structure of the Trinity without compromising any of its essential and salutary features? As in artistic renderings of the Trinity, choices must be made. Because it is impossible to represent simultaneously both the unity and the threeness of the Godhead, and both its immanent and economic aspects, the writer or artist must favor one or the other even while trying to maintain a balance.

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[744] Marmion and Thiessen, *Trinity and Salvation*, 2.
[745] Louis Dupré, *The Common Life*, 10-11: "We in the Latin world begin with a theory of the one God and add the 'distinctions' later. But by that time they no longer relate to the primary object of spiritual theology, man's approach to God."
[746] Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 1.6.13-14, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10-11.
[747] Paul Tillich, quoted in Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, xiii.

Alternately, the artist (or visionary) must produce a multiplicity of images in order to approximate, by sheer volume and complexity, a better approximation of who God is.

Of course, it would be anachronistic to claim the women visionaries as social Trinitarians (a term used only since the 1980s), just as it would be to call them feminists or liberationists. But as art historian John Drury has said, "Christianity has always believed that exchange is at the centre of life. God as Trinity is its doctrinal heart."[748] It is the great divine-human exchange that the visionary women expressed so well, with a Trinity always in motion and always inviting participation. In their use of familial and communal images—as in Julian's Trinitarian family and Mechthild of Hackeborn's divine kitchen—they show forth the reciprocity within the Godhead itself, between God and the Christian community, and among members of that community. In their use of both male and female images for the triune divine, and the multiplicity of roles therein, the women visionaries promote unity in diversity—not only within the Trinity but among themselves, in their own contexts. Their many circular images for the Trinity (Hildegard's sapphire sphere, Hadewijch's whirlpool, Julian's knot) reinforce the stipulation in the Athanasian Creed that "none [in the Trinity] is before or after another; none is greater or less."[749] With this doctrine and her visionary interpretation of it, Hildegard could urge harmony in her fractious community, and Hadewijch could advocate for "integrated diversity" within the "common life."[750] Julian could refer to the endless Trinitarian love for both herself and her "evyn cristens" without reference to gender or social roles.[751]

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[748] Drury, *Painting the Word*, 36.
[749] Athanasian Creed, Article 25.
[750] Hadewijch, Letter 28.
[751] Julian of Norwich, LT 84.

Although the women visionaries favored social images for the Trinity, they were not confined to them. Most of them (Hildegard, Gertrude, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch, Julian, and Christine) experimented with Augustinian models, including the psychological analogy. Most of them also included non-social images as well, including Hildegard's three-sided pillar, natural images like Gertrude's three-branched plant and Hildegard's sun-rays-brightness, and more abstract images like Mechthild of Hackeborn's vision of praise, thanksgiving, and delight issuing from God's heart. While mostly concerned with the "economic" outworking of the three persons of the Trinity, a few of these women (especially Hadewijch and Mechthild of Magdeburg) ventured into speculation about the inner life of the Trinity. And while primarily affective, as already mentioned, they acknowledged and even showed respect for philosophy and rationality (Hadewijch and Christine both followed the instructions of Lady Reason). The women visionaries thus managed, in their various and creative ways, to maintain theological comprehensiveness, balance, and orthodoxy.

But balance is not the same thing as stasis. These women's theological visions, like the Trinity itself, were kinetic, living, and difficult—working in surprising, unpredictable, and sometimes troubling ways. Their Trinity was perceived and attained to through all the senses, at multiple levels of vision, through both affirmation and negation. "God is plenitude," Hildegard observed, and thus can and should be perceived in a plenitude of ways.[752] Outside the academy—where debate about the Trinity tended all too often to look like an "algebraic party-game"[753]—visionary women's Trinitarian theology had real consequences for Christian life. In its various missions and roles, the Trinity gave them a model for an array of human roles and characteristics: justice and love, distance and

[752] Hildegard of Bingen, Letter 40r to Bishop Odo, in *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings*, 22.
[753] Laurence Cantwell, *The Theology of the Trinity* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1969), 9.

intimacy, service and contemplation. As in their visions of the Trinity, the spiritual and communal life of believers in its image could be, in turns, jagged, peaceful, whirling, blissful, confusing, ambiguous, or dark. Far from making the Trinity simpler, as one might expect from "unlearned" medieval women, they made it more complex, and certainly more interesting. In the current theological scene, Louis Dupré observes, "it is not surprising that … the 'psychological' approach to the Trinity is on the wane [and] 'social' models of the Trinity continue to resonate in an age that regards all theology as contextual and practical."[754] Perhaps this explains the recent interest in medieval women's visionary literature: it has a strong contextual (that is, socio-historical) and practical element to it that resonates with modern theological values.

While the writings and activities of religious women in the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries could not be said to have constituted a "women's movement," as some have contended[755]—at least not in the modern sense—the women under study here opened up new possibilities for themselves and the Christians who came after them. By returning to the ambiguity of scripture and the early Fathers, and by drawing upon the new insights given to them through visionary experience, they destabilized medieval hierarchies and configurations of the Trinity. Their claim to visions conferred upon them the confidence, independence, and authority to reimagine the Godhead. At the same time, they bolstered confidence in themselves and in their communities as *imago trinitatis*. Unlike male theologians, women visionaries sometimes "felt … that their validation as prophets required a blurring, or fusion, or full ironic reversal of stereotyped sex roles—a state of affairs they

[754] Louis Dupré, *The Common Life*, 12.
[755] Petroff (*Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, 171), McNamara ("Rhetoric of Orthodoxy," 9), and Caciola (*Discerning Spirits*, 17) all make reference to a "women's movement" in the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries.

found sanctioned by the visions themselves."[756] As God says to Hildegard, "I Who Am speak through her [Hildegard] of new secrets and mystical truths, heretofore hidden in books, like one who mixes clay and then shapes it into any form he wishes."[757] Theological creativity was thus not only allowed; it was mandated.

Although the reception of these women's work in their own time is hard to know, given the paucity of evidence, the women themselves allude to their feelings of fear and despair (sometimes to the point of illness) upon publicly revealing their visions. Mechthild of Magdeburg worried that her book would be burned. Generally speaking, women's religious activities and assertions from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries drew both suspicion and admiration from clerics and laypeople alike;[758] and Church authorities reserved the highest praise for religious women who remained devoted to a humble contemplative life and did not venture proudly into intellectual formulations.[759] The spotty publishing record of their works suggests that medieval women's visionary literature—even while being preserved and anthologized by admirers—suffered long periods of neglect, redaction, and suppression, even into the modern period.[760]

Although medieval visionary women's claims to having a new and living truth, and their boldness in sharing it, have sometimes been problematic, the visionary literature they left behind sets a helpful and hopeful theological precedent for current debates. As Marion

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[756] Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validations," 174.
[757] Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* III.11.18.
[758] Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 2.
[759] Tanya Stabler Miller, "What's in a Name? Clerical Representations of Parisian Beguines (1200-1328)," *Journal of Medieval History* 33 (2007): 81-82.
[760] McNamara, in "Rhetoric of Orthodoxy," argued that it was in the late-fourteenth century that women's visionary claims began to come under close scrutiny, culminating in the fifteenth-century discernment literature produced by Jean Gerson and others. Caciola (*Discerning Spirits*, 130) agrees that visionary women were seen in an increasingly negative light in the later Middle Ages, but also argues that visionary women had always been divisive. At the same time that lay piety was being encouraged, the church was trying to centralize, purify, and unify itself, stamping out heresy, to which "silly" and "fragile" women were thought to be especially prone.

Glasscoe says, "There are times … when its [mysticism's] self-authenticating witness to spiritual reality and visionary consciousness may be viewed with unease by innately conservative authority [figures] in the institutionalized religious establishment who fear the disintegration that may follow when religion breaks free of accepted frameworks and definitions."[761] But, she goes on to say, "it is through such tensions that living truth is renewed."[762]

In their shifting emphases and characterizations of the Trinity all the women in this study captured well the variety of ways in which the Trinity has been understood and grappled with over time. They avoided reductionism through their wide range of images and their imaginative experimentation with traditional configurations and names for the Trinity, thus reflecting the "fruitful tension" among the three in one.[763] By revealing new insights received through visionary experience and, at the same time, upholding basic orthodoxy—that the Three are somehow One—these women engaged the mystery of the Trinity and preserved its depth structure as well or better than any of their peers. They are thus a resource for continuing efforts to do the same.

[761] Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics*, viii.
[762] Ibid.
[763] Maximilian Marnau, introduction to *Gertrude of Helfta: The Herald of Divine Love*, 31.

Future Research

Much work has been done in the last thirty years to uncover the reception and afterlife of the works visionary women wrote.[764] The manuscript histories and numbers give clues as to when, where, by whom, and by how many they were read. They give clues as well to the women's (or their patrons') publication strategies. In future research, I will look more closely at this aspect of the history of medieval visionary literature, with the goal of assessing what these women accomplished in both the short and long terms. I will also undertake more substantial discussion of scholastic and other kinds of theology (monastic, mystical, vernacular, and imaginative) and examine how these different types of theology interacted in the Middle Ages—whether toward convergence or conflict. I also plan to look at the various genres of vernacular theology and at additional visionary women (like Margery Kempe, Birgitta of Sweden, and Catherine of Siena) to see what they have to add to the mix of voices presented here. This is the historical aspect of the work to be done.

There is also more theological work to be done. I have done some *ressourcement* in this project—that is, retrieval of medieval precedents for current use. But there is much more to be done, both to analyze the current scene in Trinitarian theology, to marshal medieval sources, and to bring medieval visionaries into dialogue with other theologians across time and place, the better to bring notice to, integrate, and apply these women's considerable creativity, depth, and wisdom to ongoing conversations about the Trinity.

[764] Including work by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Barbara Newman, Maud Burnett McInerney, Else Wiberg Pedersen, Caroline Walker Bynum, Sara Poor, Bernard McGinn, Rosalynn Voaden, Valerie Lagorio, and Anne Clark Bartlett.

Appendices

Appendix A:

Correspondence between Hildegard of Bingen and Eberhard, Bishop of Bamberg

Letter from Eberhard, Bishop of Bamberg, to Hildegard

Eberhard, bishop of the church of Bamberg by the grace of God, although unworthy, to Hildegard, venerable sister and abbess of St. Rupert, [wishing her] the service of faithful devotion and the reward of everlasting blessedness.

Through the favor of heavenly grace, the report of your sanctity sweetly resounds everywhere in the ears of the people, so that we are able truly to say: "Because we are the good fragrance of Christ [offered] to God" (2 Corinthians 2:15). But also since "the Lord looks out from heaven upon the children of men, in order that he might see if any understand," or perhaps might seek the one who dwells in you (Psalm 13), having smelled the perfume of this, your good reputation, we run with all [our] heart to the Lord who is venerated and consulted by you. For what you have offered to many you will not deny to me alone. For when we were passing through your [locale] from the imperial court, because you were filled with the Holy Spirit, we committed to your charity to be explained [the phrase]: "Eternity abides in the Father, equality abides in the Son, the union of eternity and equality abides in the Holy Spirit": which even now, according to what God revealed to you, we desire to see explained. May the Lord be with you, so that we also may be helped by your prayers.

Response to Eberhard from Hildegard

"He who is" (Exodus 3), and from whom nothing is hidden, says: O, shepherd, may you not wither up in the sweet flow of balsamic fragrance, which is viridity, which is offered to dull minds, who do not have the breasts of maternal compassion from which they might suck. Those who don't have these are lacking. Therefore, offer to your [people] the lamp of the king, lest they be dispersed by severity, and rise up, living in light. Now, O Father, I, a poor little woman, have looked to the true light, and according to what I saw and heard there in a true vision, that which you asked to be explained for you I thus transmit in this manner, expounded not by my words, but by [the words of] the true light, in which nothing is ever defective:

Eternity abides in the Father, that is, nothing can be cut away from or added to the eternity of the Father; because eternity abides in the likeness of a wheel, which neither begins nor has an end. Thus eternity is in the Father before every creature because eternity has been always and forever. And what is eternity? It is God. But eternity is not eternity except in perfect life. Therefore God is now in eternity. Now, life does not proceed from mortality. But life is in life. For the tree does not flourish except from viridity, neither is the stone without moisture, nor is any creature without its own power. For living eternity itself is not without floridity, whereby the word of the Father has brought forth every creature in its own function, and thus the Father in his most powerful strength is not idle. Hence God is called Father, since from him all things are born. And therefore also eternity abides in the Father, because he was Father before the beginning, and was eternal before the beginning of the shining works, all of which appeared in the foreknowledge of eternity.

But that which abides in the Father is not as a cause in man is, which is sometimes in doubt, sometimes past, sometimes future, sometimes new, sometimes old; but that which is in the Father is always stable. The Father is brightness, and that brightness has luster, and that luster has fire, and they are one. Whoever does not hold this in faith does not see God, because he wishes to divide from him what is, when God is not to be divided. Indeed, the works that God created do not have the whole quality of their names, since man divided it. Clarity is paternity, from which all things are born, and which encloses all things, because they are from its power. For the same power also made man and sent the breath of life into him. But man also has in himself the effective capability in the same power. How? Flesh is from flesh, and good is from that which is good, sent out in good repute, and it is increased by the good example in another man. These are in man both physically and spiritually, because the one proceeds from the other. Man highly loves his useful works, because from his knowledge they become enacted. Thus God also wills, so that his power may also manifest itself in all his species, because they are his work.

And light gives eyes, and that light is the Son, who gave eyes when he said: Let it be. Then all things appeared physically in the living eye. And fire, which is God, penetrates these two words, because it is impossible for the brightness to lack splendor. And if this fire is lacking, the brightness is not bright, nor does the splendor shine. For in fire he hid flame and light; otherwise, it would not be fire. In the Son abides equality. How? All creatures were before time in the Father, with him arranging them in himself, which afterward the Son brought about in deed. How? Like a man who has in himself knowledge of great works, which afterwards he brings forth by his words, so it comes forth in good repute. The Father commands, but the Son brings into effect. For the Father ordains all things in himself, and

the Son brings to completion all things in his works. And light is from light before time in eternity, which was in the beginning, and this is the Son, who shines from the Father, and through whom all creatures were made.

And the Son also put on the garment of man, whom he had formed from mud, which had not appeared physically before. Thus God looked at all his works before him as light. And when he said *Let it be*, each one put on a garment according to its class. Then God inclined himself to his work, and thus, in part, this equality abides in the Son of God even toward man, because he himself put on humanity, just as the works of God also put on their bodies. For God foreknew all of his works, which he brought about: whence in humility toward humanity, he inclined himself to man; because divinity is so perfect it would not spare anything in man which fights against good, unless he might have clothed himself with humanity, since *all things were made by him, and without him nothing was made*. For all things visible and touchable and even tastable were made by him, and he foresaw all these things for some need of man, some, that is to say, for the embracing of charity, some for fear, some for instruction, some as a precaution for some cause.

And without him nothing was made; this nothing is pride. For it is an attitude which has regard for itself, and which trusts in nothing. For it wishes what God does not wish; and it always counts this, that which it has itself established; and it is dark, because it despised the light of truth, and it began what it was not able to perfect: thus it is nothing, because it was neither made nor created by God. It began in the first angel, when he looked upon his own brilliance and took on an attitude, and did not see from what he might have that same brilliance; but he said to himself: I wish to be the Lord, and not another. Thus his glory vanished from him, and he lost it, and he became the prince of hell (Isaiah 14). Then God

gave his glory to his other son, who was made in such robust strength that all creatures submit to him: and who also is constituted in such great power that, through it all, he does not lose his glory. For in that curse, by which the devil denied God, the foolishness in man desired to be like God in honor, that is, as God is. But nevertheless he did not lose that love, which he knew God to be. Hence the essence of the devil is entirely dark, because he did not wish the brightness of God to exist. Adam wished the brightness of God to exist, but desired to be in his presence, whence he is perfected in his essence, since something of the light [remains in him], but nevertheless he is full of many miseries.

The union of eternity and equality abides in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is fiery, and not an extinguishable fire, which sometimes manifests through flame, and now and then is extinguished. For the Holy Spirit itself permeates and connects eternity and equality, as if they were one, just as a person binds together a bundle; because, if the bundle were not bound together, if would not be a bundle, but would be scattered, and just as a blacksmith joins two quantities of bronze into one with fire. Whence it is like a versatile sword that is brandished everywhere. The Holy Spirit shows forth eternity and enkindles equality, so that they are one. The Holy Spirit is fire and life in this eternity and equality, because God is living. For the sun is bright and its light blazes, and the fire burns in it; it illuminates the whole world, and it appears as a complete whole. But whatever cause in which there is no power is dead, just as a limb cut off from a tree becomes withered, because it does not have viridity. For the Holy Spirit is solidifying and life-giving; and without the Holy Spirit, eternity would not be eternity. Equality also would not be equality without the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is in both, and is one in divinity, one God.

Rationality also has three powers, namely sound, word, breath. The Son is in the Father, like a word is in a sound, the Holy Spirit is in each, as breath is in sound and word. And these three persons, as said above, are one God. Eternity is in the Father, because there was nothing before him, and eternity has no beginning as the works of God have beginning. In the Son, moreover, is equality, since the Son has never been cut off from the Father, nor is the Father without the Son. But in the Holy Spirit is union, because the Son has always abided in the Father, and the Father with the Son; since the Holy Spirit is the fiery life in them, and they are one. And it is written: *the Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world* (Wisdom 1). That is, all created things which are visible and invisible do not lack spiritual life, and those things man does not know. For from greenness are flowers; from flowers are fruit. The clouds also have their course. Also, the moon and stars blaze with fire. Branches bring forth flowers though viridity, water has fineness both by cleansing wind and by rivulets being brought forth. Even the earth has humidity with perspiration. For all created things have that which is seen and that which is unseen. That which is seen is weak; and that which is not seen is strong and vital. Since he does not see it, this the intellect of man seeks, so that he may know it.

These are the forces of the works of the Holy Spirit. And this is what contains all things. Why is this? Man *contains all things*. How? By ruling, by using, by commanding. God gave him this according to himself. *He has knowledge of the voice*. This is rationality which sounds with a voice. The voice is body; rationality, soul; the warmth of the air, fire; and they are one. Thus when rationality is heard by speaking, by creating with the voice, all its works are brought to perfection, and by it he is able to create, because as it commands, so will it be. Thus all the works of God are not in vain.

Appendix B:

Hildegard of Bingen's Explanation of the Athanasian Creed, to the Congregation of her Sisters

O daughters, you who have followed in the footsteps of Christ in love of chastity, and who have chosen me, a poor little woman, as mother to you, in the humility of subjection for the purpose of heavenly exaltation I say to you, not by me but by divine showing through a motherly heart: I found this place, that is to say, the place of rest of the relics of blessed Rupert confessor, to whose protection you fled, in clear miracles by the will of God, for the offering of praise, and with the permission of my superiors have come to it, and I, with divine help, have freely drawn him to me and everyone following me.

Afterwards, however, by the admonition of God, I proceeded to the mountain of blessed Disibodenberg, from which I had departed by permission: and I completed this petition in the presence of all living in that very place, that is, so that our place and the estates of alms of our place might not be bound by them, but set free, seeking nonetheless an opportunity of usefulness for the salvation of our souls, and concern for regular discipline. And according to that which I perceived in a true vision, I said to the Father, that is to say, to the abbot of that place: "The clear light says: May you be the Father of the intention and salvation of souls and of the mystical colony of my daughters. Their alms pertain neither to you nor to your brothers, but may your place be their refuge. But if you should wish to persevere in your hostile words, gnashing your teeth against us, you will be like the Amalechites and Antiochus, of whom it is written that he robbed the temple of the Lord (1 Maccabees 1).

"But if anyone among you should say in his own unworthiness: We wish to encroach upon their estates: then I, who am, say that you would be the worst robber. But if you should try to remove forcibly from them the shepherd of spiritual medicine, then again I say that you would be similar to the sons of Belial, and in this you do not consider the justice of God; whence also you will destroy the justice of God." And when I, a poor little figure, was seeking in these words the aforementioned liberty of the place and the estates of my daughters from the aforementioned abbot and from his brothers, they all conferred it [liberty] on me with written permission. But all, both older and younger, seeing, hearing, and understanding these things, had great benevolence toward these things, so that they have been confirmed at the command of God in writing. Whence the faithful are to learn, affirm, perfect, and defend these things, so that they may receive that blessing, which God gave to Jacob and Israel.

But how great a lamentation will these daughters of mine have after the death of their mother, since the words of their same mother will not arise anymore, and thus in sighing and in sorrow, through many times, with tears, alas and alack, [they will say]: "We would gladly suck the breasts of our mother, if we had her present with us now." Therefore, O Daughters of God, I admonish that you have charity among you just as I, your mother, have admonished you from my childhood, so that you may be the dearest light along with the angels because of your benevolence, and very strong in your power, just as your Father Benedict taught you. The Holy Spirit urges gifts upon you, because after my death, you will no longer hear my voice.

But let my voice among you never be taken into oblivion, which [voice] frequently sounded in charity among you. My daughters now glow in their hearts because of sadness,

which they have about their mother, panting and sighing after heavenly things. Afterwards, they will shine in the brightest and glowing light by the grace of God, and they will become the strongest warriors in his house. Whence if anyone in this throng of my daughters should want to make discord and a breaking up of this dwelling and spiritual discipline, may the gift of the Holy Spirit avert this from his heart. But if, scorning God, he nevertheless should do it, may the hand of the Lord kill him in the presence of all the people, because he is worthy to be confounded.

Wherefore, O daughters, live in this place which you have chosen for fighting for God, with all devotion and stability, so that you will gain heavenly rewards in it. Whence also charity says in [the book of] Wisdom: I was ordained from ancient time and I was present at the formation of the first man, when he was formed by God, because God wisely created heaven and earth and the rest of the creatures for man's sake so that he might both be sustained and fed by them [creatures]. Whence also wisdom is rightly able to be called an artisan since she has surrounded heaven and earth, and has weighed them with equal weight. Now the flesh of man, along with the soul, is entirely spread with veins and marrow, so that the flesh is always stirred up by the soul; and also because man recognizes creatures through the soul, he holds those very things in pleasantness and joy. For indeed thus man is lovable in flesh and soul as if from mercy and charity, just as wisdom and charity are one.

Through these two virtues, namely wisdom and charity, angels and men will obey God in humility, since humility frequently bows itself in honor of God, and thus it [humility] gathers all virtues to itself. In these virtues, therefore, God created man, lest he perish entirely, just as all the angels also did not perish, because many endured with God, but others fell with the ancient serpent. For God created man in wisdom, and gave him life in charity,

but he ruled him in obedience and humility, since he might understand how he ought to live: but the first Angel did not wish to know these things, which thing could not be, since the one life is from itself, from which all living things are; wherefore he fell from life, and withered, just as it sometimes also happens in created things, namely in trees, in grass, and in every creature, when some things wither by falling from them [created things], since they no longer taste the sap.

An angel, of course, is given life by God; but man is the complete work of God, since God always works in him, which man is able to understand in himself, because as long as he lives in this life, he does not stop to think and to work in any way, in whichever part [of the world] he may be; but when he is finished in this life, in another life he lives forever. For when a man works for the good, he is made like to the good angels; when, however, he does not realize the great honor, how God made him, and when he flees from right obedience and does not work in humility, but wishes to be from himself, having been made similar to the worst angels, he falls from life like Satan and dries up.

But you, O human, you wish to hold God guilty in these things. Wherefore it is answered to you: Did you create yourself? No. Therefore is it more suitable that you serve yourself rather than him who created you? And what reward will you be able to prepare for yourself when you did not make yourself? None but the punishment of fire. Thus those angels and humans and the rest of the creatures of God are divided into two parts, just as was also done to you when God marked man by circumcision. Since the first deceiver falsely tricked the first human, who was thus made disobedient to God, he consented to his words and by disobedience he did as he had advised him. But the same disobedience was cut by

circumcision in keeping with the precept of God, when Abraham willingly obeyed God, thus doing just as he [God] commanded him (Genesis 17).

Then the same deceiver with craftiness growled within himself, putting this evil thing in certain men, that it would not be possible that they acknowledge as God him whom they could neither see, nor hear, nor touch. And thus he raved in the people, who had been marked by obedience, and he called to mind that he had deceived the first human when he said: *You will be just like a god, knowing good and evil* (Genesis 3): and he put the wickedest arrogance in them, saying that in no way except in some kind of fornication would they be able to know God, because man also was a form, and if God had created man, why would he hide himself, so that man might be able neither to see, nor to hear, nor to understand him.

But the whole ancient law, and the people, truly sealed, were not able to crush this ancient deceiver and these erring men, neither will they yet be able, but God will crush them before the last day and will conquer them before all people. In such a way the old law with all these [people], namely, with those who were observing circumcision, also with those who were in the aforementioned error, ran up until the birth of Christ, when the true Sun of justice himself appeared in truth. And the same Sun gave great brightness through his teaching, having been seen and heard in his humanity, since the prophets anticipated him, just as certain planets are above the sun, which God had foreseen when he established the firmament with all its adornments; indeed, to the sun, with the moon and stars, God added water, and with the storm he put clouds, which lightning pierces, and which are torn now and then by the sound of thunder, so that they are moved.

For just as God established this creation for the service of people, so also by it he foreordained his son, whom the prophets foretold, and whose humanity with the service of prophecy they mentioned, just as the planets support the sun by serving it. For with this prophecy he said: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive* (Isaiah 7), he touched his humanity, because the purity of the Virgin conceived from the heat of the Holy Spirit, and not from the heat of the flesh, just as the sun pierces something with its rays in such a way that the whole thing is warm from its heat, and is not consumed, because the sun of justice proceeded from the intact virgin, and illuminated the whole world, just as also the sun illumines the whole world by the firmament, which nevertheless remains whole, so the virgin bore a son, whose name was Emmanuel, because he proceeded from her in purity, as the sun flashes through the firmament, with neither having been divided; and thus God is with us, since in that same incarnation, which arose in the Virgin's womb from the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, blessed divinity was fully intact, just as the sun in the firmament, and the power of divinity, transcends the heavens, the abyss, and all creatures; and yet the Son of God by his blessed humanity was then with us.

But also, by the offering of his body and by his teaching he is with us now and will be [with us], until we see him plainly. The waters are present also for the same sun of justice, with the moon and stars, just as he sent his disciples into all the world to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16). For the things which the prophets predicted about him, he fulfilled in himself, just as also on the seventh day of the creation of the world, God rested from all his work (Genesis 2). And as God then subjected every creature to the service of humanity, so also now the Son of God, after his Ascension, entrusted the works of his incarnation to the disciples, when, by his command, they preached the Gospel to every creature. For they

revealed to humans right faith about the Son of God, because while remaining with him, they had seen and recognized his miracles, just as the sun shines in the firmament.

Thus, with innumerable throngs of people accepting this faith, the Church was established, as the moon with the stars was established in the firmament. But just as also the firmament was illuminated with the sun, moon, and stars, the same peoples ordained among themselves, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, various teachers and prelates who might support the whole church. Then thunder and lightning arose by means of unfaithful people and cruel tyrants, who like wolves attacked the faithful of the Lord, who in the ardor of faith, shine like the sun in its strength, and shed their blood so that there was not even anyone who might bury them.

Thunder also arose, which in the first downfall of Satan, when he was plunged into hell, resounded through the enemies of God, who by their sins did not cease sinning, and lightning appeared among many Christians who were dividing faith in faithlessness, and the lightning burned up many Catholics: just as was done by Arius, whom Athanasius entirely crushed, having been strengthened by John the Evangelist, who sucked from the breast of Jesus, so that he flew on high when by mystical inspiration he brought his Gospel forth from divinity. In the same way, Athanasius afterward wrote about the unity of Divinity, fortifying the Church, that is to say, that everyone who wishes to be saved is to hold faith whole and inviolate, believing perfectly in God, lest he be plunged into hell and become hellish.

But the true faith is that one God is to be gloriously honored in the Trinity of persons, and the same Trinity is to be honored in one God without any confusion regarding unity being divided, because one God is indivisibly in one substance of divinity. For the Father is not one thing in substance, nor the Son something else, nor the Holy Spirit something else,

nor are they divided from one another in the substance of divinity; but in Father and Son and Holy Spirit, one divinity of one substance is in the glory of majesty. However, one person is the Father, who is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit; another is the Son, who is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit; another is the Holy Spirit, who is neither the Father nor the Son; and there is one inseparable divinity of these persons, equal and steadfast honor, coeternal and invincible power.

For as the Father is in divinity, and not in a person, so is the Son in divinity, and not in a person; so also is the Holy Spirit in divinity, and not in a person; since there is one Father, one Son, one Holy Spirit in the distinction of persons. Is not, however, the Father one thing, the Son another, and the Holy Spirit another in the substance of divinity, and how are these persons to be understood? God certainly is rational in his word, and he lives. And God created the world, namely, humanity with all its glory, because God always held in eternity that it ought to be. God alone did this, without whom no one is. And who might make the non-existing [human] to be made? Nobody at all. God made everything by his word, as John, who reclined on the chest of Christ, affirms (John 1).

But God is fire, and in this fire, flame lies hidden, and this flame is mobile in life. But in this fire there is no division except distinction of persons. However, material and visible fire is of a golden color, and the flame flashes in its fire which, in a strong wind, blazes. Indeed, this fire would not flash unless it were flaming, and would not move except by the wind; whence also there are three words in this fire. For the flame is from the fire, and fire flashes from the flame, and it does not move unless by a strong wind. The fire also burns with the flame, and this whole heat pervades and fills equally the fire and the flame, and if there were no heat in the fire it would not be fire, nor would it have the roaring of flame. But

the soul also is fire, and its fire pervades the whole body, in which it is, namely the veins with the blood, the bone with the marrow, and the flesh with its hue, and it is inextinguishable. And the fire of the soul has heat in the reasoning by which the word sounds forth. Because if the soul were not fiery, it would not ignite a cold mass, nor would it build the body with blood-bearing veins.

Because, however, the soul is windy [mobile] in reasoning, it rightly divides its warmth throughout all places of the body, lest it burn the body. But when the soul has torn itself away from the body, the body fails: just as logs do not burn when they lack the heat of fire. For the human, following after God, is rational, and the rationality of man resounds with the fire in the wind. For rationality is a great force, fiery and not divided: and if it were not fiery, it would not be windy [mobile]: and if it were not windy, it would not sound forth. Thus God created everything, and if not for him alone, no one ever made anything living, although the human may form certain things with his art, which however he does not cause to live, since man has a beginning. And he who created everything is not created, because there was no beginning before him, but he himself is without beginning, and all things are in him, because *by him all things were made* (John 1). But through those things that man flees because of fear, lest they may hurt him, he has trust in the Lord, crying out [to him], that God may help him and keep him in the repose of peace. But through these things which exist for the sake of man, and which exist in him, and with which he works, and which are present to him from among these things, calmly and conveniently, he learns to have love for God.

For if man knew nothing except what was easy and gentle for him, he would not know what the same was, and what it should be called: whence he has highest knowledge of the weight of the harshness of harmful things, and he recognizes what is good and evil, and

knows how to name them, like Adam. For if he knew only one thing, the work of God would not have been completed in him: and the thing that he saw he would not recognize, and the thing which he heard, he should not be able to know what, and of what type, it was; therefore he would be empty and extinguished, just as this thing which, having been burned by the fire, is converted into coal. Therefore, as was said before, the Father is uncreated, the Son is also uncreated, so too the Holy Spirit is uncreated; since these three persons are one God, and all creatures were made by the same God; *but without him nothing was made* (John 1). Certainly at the beginning, which was made in the beginning of creation, he wished to have the likeness of him who is without beginning, which in no way ought to have been done, because nothing existed, since in God is life and truth, but in the fallen angel and in man is vanity, which puffed up pride, which passed like the wind. And because he was made through God and in God, life is in him, and God crushed his head, he who first seized the aforementioned evils, and he threw into hell him who is without life.

The father is also immense, who is unable to be contained by any measure nor to be bounded by number as those things are able to be, which were made in the beginning. For God had all things in his presence, but nevertheless he did not create them suddenly, whence also there is a certain interval in creatures, just as in man, who is fashioned as an infant, a child, a youth, an old man, and a very old man, which certainly can be understood. But also it is to be understood, in regard to the Son and the Holy Spirit, that they can be contained neither by immeasurable capacity nor by immense number. The Father is also eternal, that is to say, in that eternity which never began, and in the likeness of a circling wheel, in which neither a beginning nor an end is observed. *For God is spirit* (John 4). Every spirit, indeed, is incomprehensible and invisible.

For indeed eternity is without all this change, because it is said: It was and is, it remains eternal, nor in it is anyone likened to God. For eternity is unique, and all his creatures were made through it. And the son, coeternal with the Father in divinity, put on from the creature [creation] the garment which is man; divinity declared this garment thus, just like its ray was affixed to the sun. But the sun sends forth its light on the earth, nor yet is it increased or diminished on account of this; nor is the Son of God coming into the world enlarged, nor is he diminished in divinity, because he put on his garment just as God clothed Adam from fragile creation lest he seem naked. Man indeed is by no means able to see eternity unless in humanity, because divinity lay hidden in humanity, in such a way that the Son was known by the garment of humanity, as also, even dressed in armor, man would be known, although he is not seen hidden in it.

But the Holy Spirit, coeternal with the Father and Son, is also eternal, who was present in the beginning with all creation, and made it mobile by its inspiration. And there are not three eternities in God, but there is one eternity in him, and not three parts as Arius made in it [eternity], as the limbs of man are lopped off by cutting, but eternity is one divinity which the reason of man, on account of his [God's] strongest works, is not able to name with one name. But also because the human, having a beginning, is turned into ash, therefore also he is unable to describe those things that are before the beginning and after death; but in his soul, holding one faith, he speaks about the substance of God, which is spiritual. For the soul is the windpipe from God, whence he both seizes many invisible things and senses the unity of divinity in right faith; because there are not three uncreated gods, nor three immeasurable gods, but there is one God, that is to say, uncreated and immeasurable, neither in three modes, nor divided into three parts.

The Father is also omnipotent who, by his Word, which is his omnipotent Son, created all things, which the omnipotent Holy Spirit, who is life, infuses as also the heat of fire and flame burns; thus, nevertheless, there are not three almighties, but God, one omnipotent God in three persons. And as it would be inconvenient that man, who with a rational soul is one man, might be divided into three, since then he would not be a whole life but a dead body, how might the unique life in which is no mortality of beginning and change be able to be divided? But also God is the Father, who is powerful; God is the Son, who is the power of the Father; God is the Holy Spirit, who is the life through which all life proceeds. But there are not three gods, but there is a single God without any division, whose most mighty power is called by individual names. Thus also the Lord is Father by ruling, the Lord is Son by doing, the Lord is Holy Spirit by bringing to life; and these are the whole divinity of three names, just as God signified all his works in one power of divinity. Nor are they lords ruling individually, but with full integrity there is one divinity in three powers of three persons, namely by ruling over, working, and also giving life to all creatures, and moving them to each one's duties: and thus there is one Lord.

And this Lord made two works [things], namely angel and human, with all creation. But the angel is spirit; however, the human is made in the image and likeness of God, so that he may work with the five senses of his body, through which also he is not divided, but through them he is wise and knowing and understanding how to carry out his works. These three powers God fixed in man, namely for this [purpose], that the soul of man is rational, because it moves the body to work, and in it the five senses of the body of man are fully completed. For man, through sight, recognizes creatures; but through hearing, reason tells him what this may be that he hears; through smell, moreover, he discerns what is to be used,

conveniently or inconveniently, for himself; and also through taste he recognizes on which things and what kind of things he may feed; and through touch he brings about good and bad things, and he rules all his deeds with the aforementioned five senses. These five senses in the human, joined together in one in such a way that one can by no means lack another, exist in one man, who nevertheless is divided neither into two nor three men; but he is aware and understanding, recognizing creation. And likewise he recognizes God, whom he cannot see unless through faith, through creatures, and through his great works, which also he hardly understands with his five senses.

Therefore man understands and recognizes all things in creation by his five senses, because he loves through sight, he understands through taste, he discerns through hearing, he chooses what is good for him through smell, and through touch he brings about that which pleases him; and in this he exemplifies God, who created all creatures. Thus also man, because he is wise, knows what may be pleasant or harmful to him; and because he is knowing, he constrains by ordering the creation, which is subordinate by serving him, and draws to himself what he wishes and drives from himself what he does not want; and because he is understanding, he knows what is appropriate for each creature in respect to its duties. For with these three powers and their appendages, man is rational in his soul, which is by no means divided, in such a way also that if by persuasion of the devil some limb of a man is cut off, the rational soul is in no way divided because of this. Truly, the body is the dwelling-place of the soul, which works with it according to its sensibility, just as a mill is moved around by the waters.

Therefore, all baptized people confess there to be three persons in unity; but that the three persons are one true and stable divinity. And since there are not three souls in one

rational soul, which has three powers, but there is one soul; how might there be that separable division in the unity of divinity, when all things were created from God? By no means, therefore, is it to be said that there are three gods or three lords, but he is called one God, who created all things, and one Lord, whom all creatures call Lord, and whose own sheep they are; and therefore it is to be forbidden, lest any individuality may be held [to exist] in the oneness of divinity, because God is one. And the Father was made from no one, since no one appeared before him, by whom he could have been begotten or created, but he is eternal, without beginning. Now, the Son is from the Father alone without any separation, original, not made, nor created with body parts, but begotten, as light is in the sun without any separation. He assumed flesh from the Virgin Mary; but nevertheless the brightness of divinity did not recede from him, because he was with the Father eternally in divinity, although he put on, in time, his garment, namely flesh from the Virgin mother.

But the Holy Spirit is the life which moves all breathing in creatures: and this one was made life by no breathing, nor also created by anyone, nor begotten by anyone else; but he exists coeternal and coequal in divinity to the Father and the Son. For he was present at the first creation of the world, because *the Spirit of God was borne over the waters* (Genesis 1), illuminating the circle of the whole world, when the Word of God said: *Let it be*. And the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son in the truth of prophecy, made the prophets to prophesy, who nevertheless many times hid the depth of prophecy, although they wrote the text, since they sometimes spoke through signs in shadow and in night vision.

Coming upon the apostles also in fiery tongues, he filled all of them, and made them other men than they had been before, so that they saw those tongues, and felt the touch of that same Holy Spirit, who had appeared thus to no human before the nativity of Christ, nor

will appear afterwards, since Christ is the only-begotten of God. That he appeared to them in fiery tongues, however, was done for this reason, because the virgin Mary conceived the Son of God in his fiery heat, and so now he proceeds from the Father and the Son. And since the apostles saw him in fire, he spoke openly with wisdom and understanding. But also because the Son of God was conceived in the virgin Mary from the Holy Spirit (Luke 1), the Holy Spirit remained, and remains, in him, and is always with him; nor are they ever separated from one another, and therefore it is the whole and pure faith that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, as said above. For this that the Son said: *Who proceeds from the Father* (John 15), he said in honor of the Father, mindful that his incarnation was in time, since time is not present to paternal divinity.

So there is one Father, and not three fathers, but one Father, since, if he were not the Father, he would not have begotten the Son, and if the Son had not been begotten, the world would not have been created. Also, there is one Son, not three sons, but one, through whom all things were made, consubstantial with the Father. And there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits, but one, vivifying and moving all things. For each root has viridity in itself, from which fruit proceeds; but this is perceived unequally, and they are nevertheless in one [root]. Why therefore would the creator of all things not be in a Trinity of persons? For the person of the Father is understood as the root; and the person of the Son is understood as the fruit; but the person of the Holy Spirit is understood as the viridity; and they are not separated from one another, but God is one.

And in this unity of the Trinity, nothing is first by preceding, nothing is last by following behind, nothing greater in magnificence, nothing less in power; but all the persons of this Trinity, without any emptiness, join themselves into one, and they are in eternity and

in equality, coeternal and coequal to one another, in such a way that there is nothing in those persons of which it could be said with regard to divinity: *It is and it was not*, great and small, since God, lacking beginning and end, receives neither gain nor loss, because he is immutable. For the work of God, not formed before in creation, now appears formed, and it passes through time, expanding into something larger, and contracting into something smaller.

Therefore three persons in the unity, and one God, is to be worshipped in three persons, since he created all things, and he is the life through which all living things proceed, which any of the faithful should thus undoubtingly accept. It is necessary for the faithful person that he not separate himself from the catholic faith; but believe the incarnation of the Son of God to be true, and he should consider himself, how he is created and how, the body working with the rational soul, he is one. For God had foreseen before time the form of man, in which he would assume flesh; and whoever doubts this denies himself: nor does he believe that he is one person in two natures of soul and body through three modes; because if one of these three, namely soul, body and rationality, of which man is constituted, were missing, he would not be a man. For a rational man is in the soul, which accomplishes some things in the body with the sound of words, since creatures are present to man like the branches of a tree, because man was not created without the rest of the creatures, just as a tree is not created without branches.

In truth, therefore, the right faith is that Christ, the Son of God, born before time, is God; and also, he is true man through the garment of flesh, and so God [the Son] is from the substance of the Father, since he is coeternal with him without time and is coequal, begotten before the ages, because *all things were made through him* (John 1); but through humanity,

which has [exists in] time, he is man from the substance of the mother: For indeed, he is fully God in the wholeness of eternity and fully man with a rational soul and pure flesh, and without any virile mixing of human nature; and he is coequal with the Father in the eternity of divinity, however, lesser than him in humanity, which has time.

And he, being God and man, was not divided in two; but is one Christ, not however by the changing of divinity into flesh, but through the assumption of flesh, which divinity joined to itself, and which he so infused with his brightness as a ray of the sun shines in the sun: nor on account of this are the substance of divinity and the substance of the flesh confused with one another by any confusion; but there is one Christ, the true Son of God, in the true unity of the person. For thus there is no change in the rational soul by human flesh, because that rational spirit, which infuses the whole human body, and which moves all the actions of the working human, is from God; and so the soul and the flesh are one man. So also, without any doubt, the Son of God, born before the ages, was clothed in flesh assumed fully from the virgin, as was said above.

Being God and man, Christ is one, indeed called Christ through the anointing of God's grace. He was wounded in his holy humanity by the piercing of nails and lance (John 19) on account of the one wound of the first human, which he had inflicted on all his race, so that he might cleanse it by the purple of his blood, and might suffuse it with the anointing of the oil of grace, and might bind it by penance, when a person was grieving that he had sinned. Now having been wounded, he descended spiritually into the pit of the infernal abyss, and there he attracted very many to himself, that is, he removed from the same hell the first human, and all who had ever touched God in the ways of human honor and placed them in the place of delights and joys, which they had lost in the first parent. But that he rose on

the third day from the death of the sleeping body, in this he signified the three persons of the deity, and ascending with the same body, he went to heaven; and there he sits reigning at the right hand of the Father, which is the salvation of the people who believe, giving life to those whom he redeemed with his blood.

And all these people were foreknown before the time of all beginnings, since the Word of the Father, by whom *all things were made* (John 1), put on flesh, so that he might redeem men, whom he had formed. Now, the same Son of God will come at the end of the world as the just judge to judge the living and the dead, the living, that is to say, who are doing the work of faith and are found in the same good work; but the dead, who did the works of death by faithlessness, when at the sound of the calling of the blaring trumpet, man will lie below the same Son of God for judgment like a footstool, since by seeing him then, he knows who is worthy. For at the coming of this judge, by the aforesaid call, the dead will rise with their bodies; just as also every creature came forth by the sound of the word of God; all will respond to their judge about their own deeds, which they did in their mortal body, nor will anyone be able to excuse himself, because everyone will then see his own works openly, by recognition, which previously he only knew he had done, because he is to them just as in a garment, whence they too will follow him everywhere. And those who did just and right works will go into greater clarity of life than that with which the sun lights this world, with their souls lit with grace, whence also the angels praise God, because they did such great deeds that they are surrounded by them gloriously, like a human with a precious garment with which he is clothed.

Also, an innumerable multitude of those people who, before their end, or even at their end, did penance perfectly, and in their sins confessed God, the Son of man will raise to

himself in his blood, and he will give to each one according to his works a reward in life. But the bad ones, having no excuse for their unjust deeds, and not knowing what they could say, and those who worshipped images through the arts of the devil, and who performed bad deeds unendingly with the devilish crowd, will be clothed with the confusion of their works, and will descend with the devil into the pit of hell, which he occupied, since he wanted to be like God. Therefore, one must believe in truth and confidently, because there is one Divinity in three persons, and three persons in one Divinity, [and] they are one life of eternity; and he who does not believe this will be rooted out from the day of salvation.

Appendix C:

Mechthild of Hackeborn on the Lord's Kitchen, from the *Book of Special Grace*

2.23: Of the Lord's Kitchen

One time, when she had received a certain very magnificent gift from the divine beneficence of the Lord, acknowledging her own worthlessness, she said with humble submissiveness: "O most munificent King, in no way does this gift of your great excellence befit me, who consider myself unworthy even to be sent to your kitchen to wash your dishes." The Lord kindly answered her: "What is my kitchen, and what are my dishes, which you might wish to wash?" Not knowing how to respond to this, she was overcome and fell silent. Then the Lord, who is sometimes accustomed to pose a question, not so that it may be resolved, but so that he may resolve it, delighted her with this reply and, at the same time, with a vision. For he said: "My kitchen is my divine heart which—in the manner of a kitchen, which is a common home [room in the house] and accessible to all, both servants and free—is always open to all and ready for anyone's enjoyment. The cook of this kitchen is the Holy Spirit, whose inestimable sweetness infuses and fills it [God's heart] without interruption with a most abundant generosity, and by filling it, makes it overflow. My dishes [platters] are the hearts of all the saints and my elect, which are continuously infused with wonderful sweetness from the superabundance of my divine heart.

And behold, she saw the blessed Virgin standing next to God, with the whole multitude of angels and saints. These angels presented their hearts to the Lord their King in the manner of golden plates, as if from their chests, to be washed. The torrent of divine pleasure issuing from the outpouring of the divine heart seemed to rinse each one with most

copious superabundance. This stream, flowing back again from the hearts of the saints, returned to the Lord's heart with wonderful gratitude. Then the Lord said to her: "Draw near now first to the most pure heart of my virgin mother, wherein you are zealous to be washed by giving thanks and by extolling in her that most worthy faithfulness by which she was joined to me most firmly, or rather inseparably, in all her works, above all creatures. And take in this cleansing flow for yourself by desire and zeal of imitation. Do likewise from the hearts of the individual saints, always praising their virtues devoutly, and imitating them humbly according to your ability; thus you will be able happily to gain their fellowship in glory."

Appendix D:

Figures

Figure 3.1: Abraham entertaining three angels, mosaic in the nave of the S. Maria Maggiore Church, Rome, ca. 432-40. Photo: ARTstor.

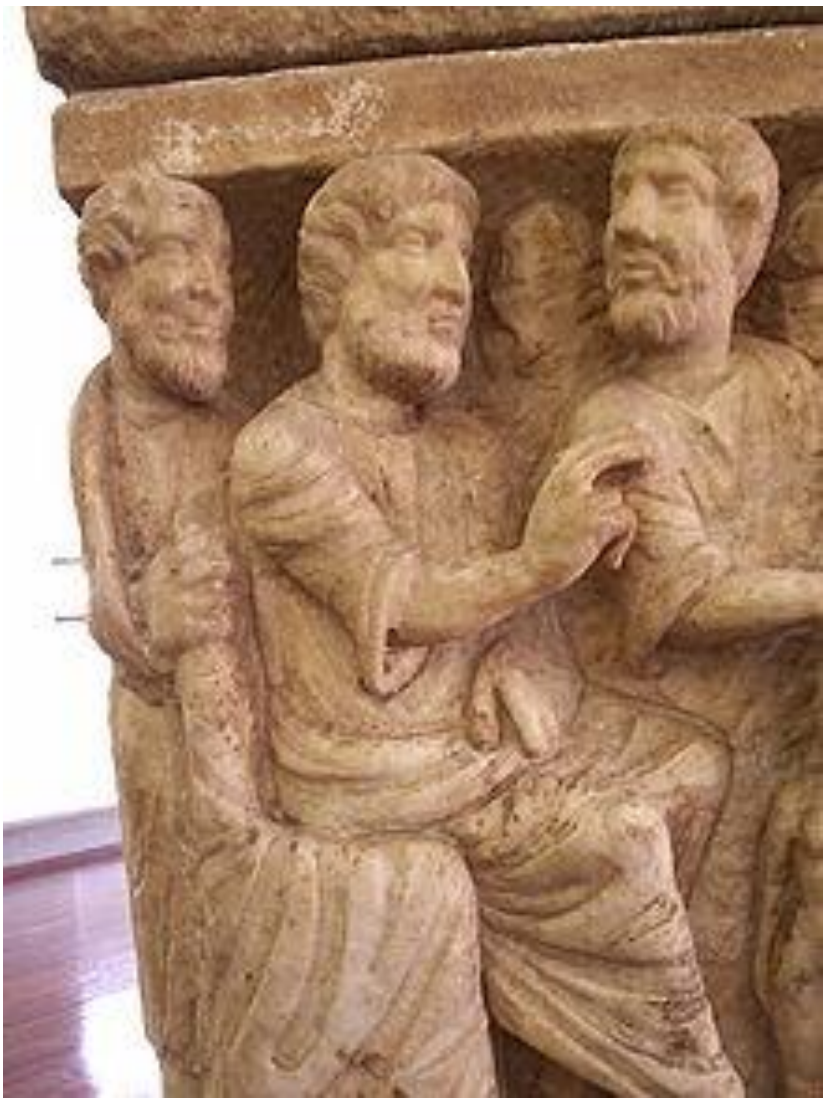


Figure 3.2: Detail, the creation of Adam and Eve, on the "Dogmatic" Sarcophagus of S. Paolo, Rome, ca. 350. Vatican Museums. Photo: Index of Christian Art, Princeton University.

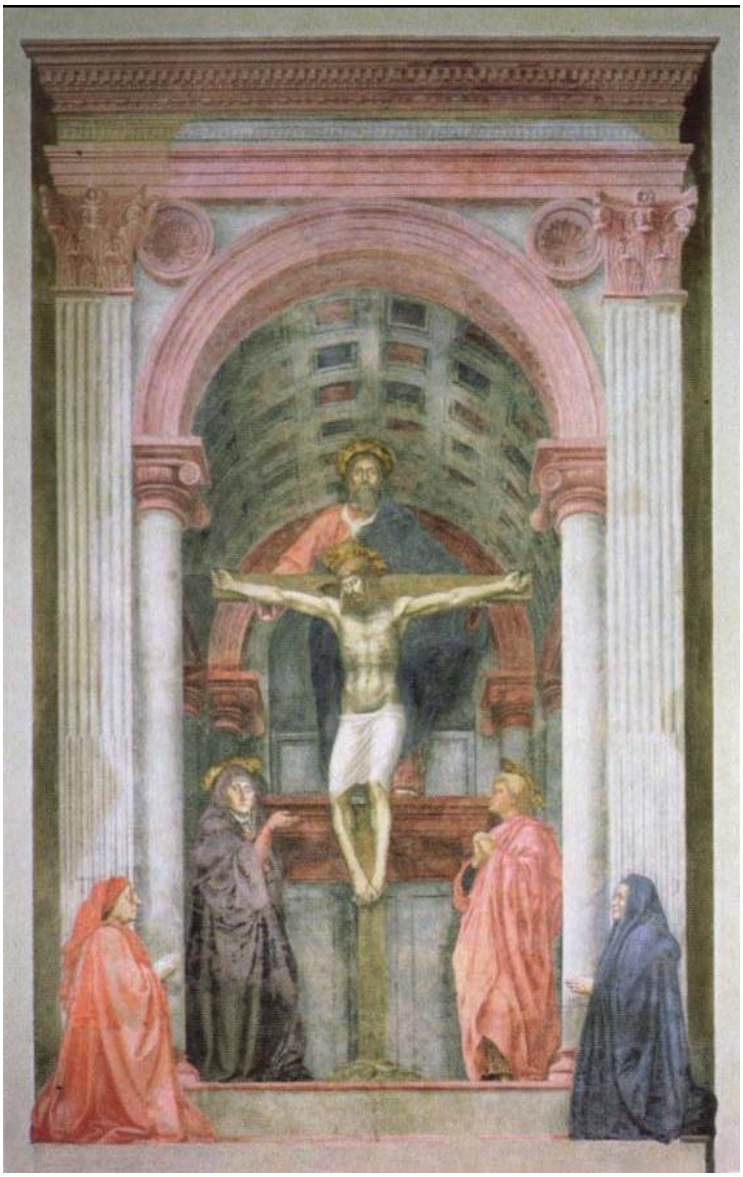


Figure 3.3: "The Holy Trinity," Masaccio, fresco in the Church of S. Maria Novella, Florence, Italy, 1427. Photo: ARTstor.

Figure 3.4: Illumination in the Lothian Bible, England, ca. 1215-20. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library. Photo: ARTstor.

Figure 3.5: Illumination in English Psalter, 1260. Oxford, Bodleian Library. Photo: ARTstor.

Figure 3.6: Fresco in the side chapel of the Church of St. Augustine, Bergamo, Italy, late fourteenth century. Photo: ARTstor.

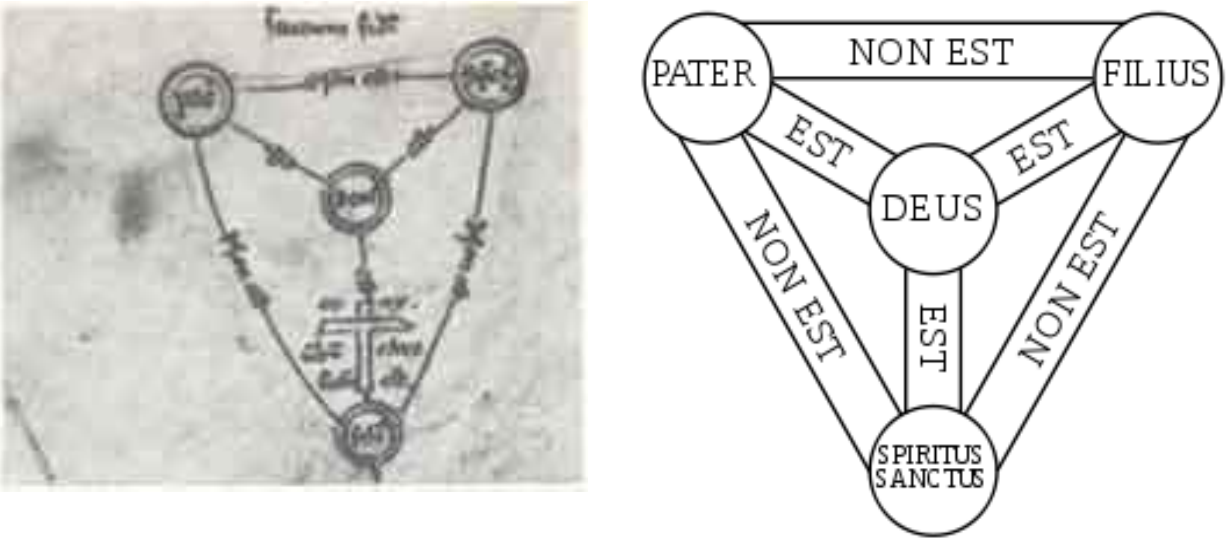


Figure 3.7: *Scutum fidei*, in Matthew Paris's manuscript *Chronica maiora*, ca. 1240–53, London, British Library (left); and a modern rendering.

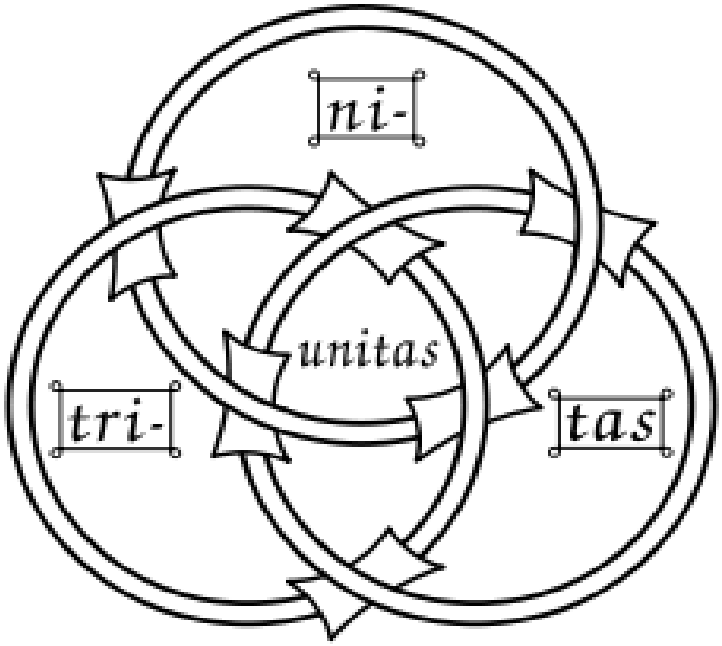


Figure 3.8: Borromean Rings, from a thirteenth-century manuscript in Chartres Municipal Library; as reproduced in M. Didron, *Christian Iconography; or, The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851.

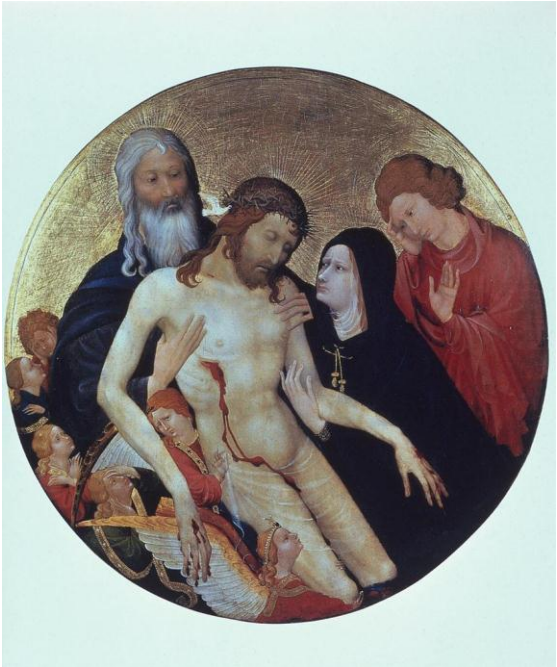


Figure 3.9: “La Grande Pietà ronde,” Jean Malouel, ca. 1400-15. Louvre Museum, Paris. Photo: ARTstor.

Figure 3.10: Mary with the Trinity (God the Father and dove above her head, Jesus as fetus in her belly), illumination in a German Lectionary (Regensburg, Bavaria), ca. 1270-76. Oxford, Keble College. Photo: Index of Christian Art, Princeton University.

Figure 3.11: "Shrine of the Virgin" with Trinity inside (crucified Christ missing), ca. 1300, German (Rhine Valley). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo: ARTstor.

Figure 3.12: Illumination in a missal, Venice, Italy, ca. 1370. Illuminated Manuscript Collection, Princeton University Library. Photo: ARTstor.

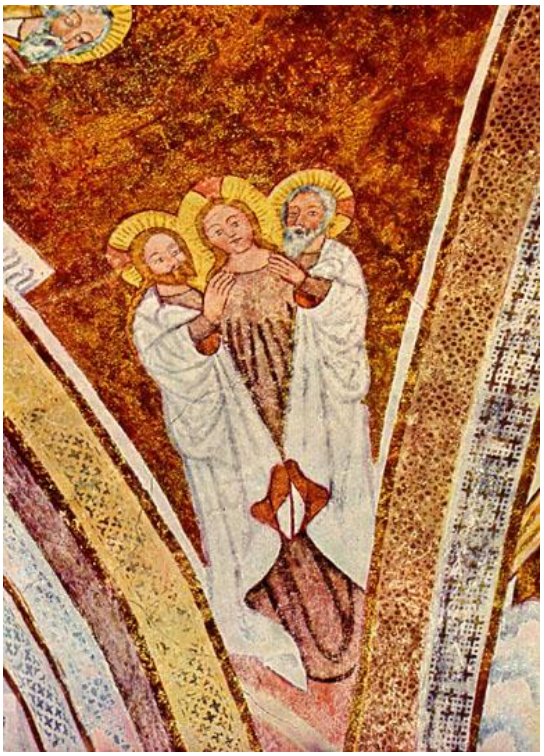


Figure 3.13: The Urschalling Trinity, Church of St. James, Urschalling, Bavaria, ca. 1378-95. Reproduced in Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 199.

Figure 3.14: Roof boss, Wissembourg, France, ca. 1300. Photo: Index of Christian Art, Princeton University.

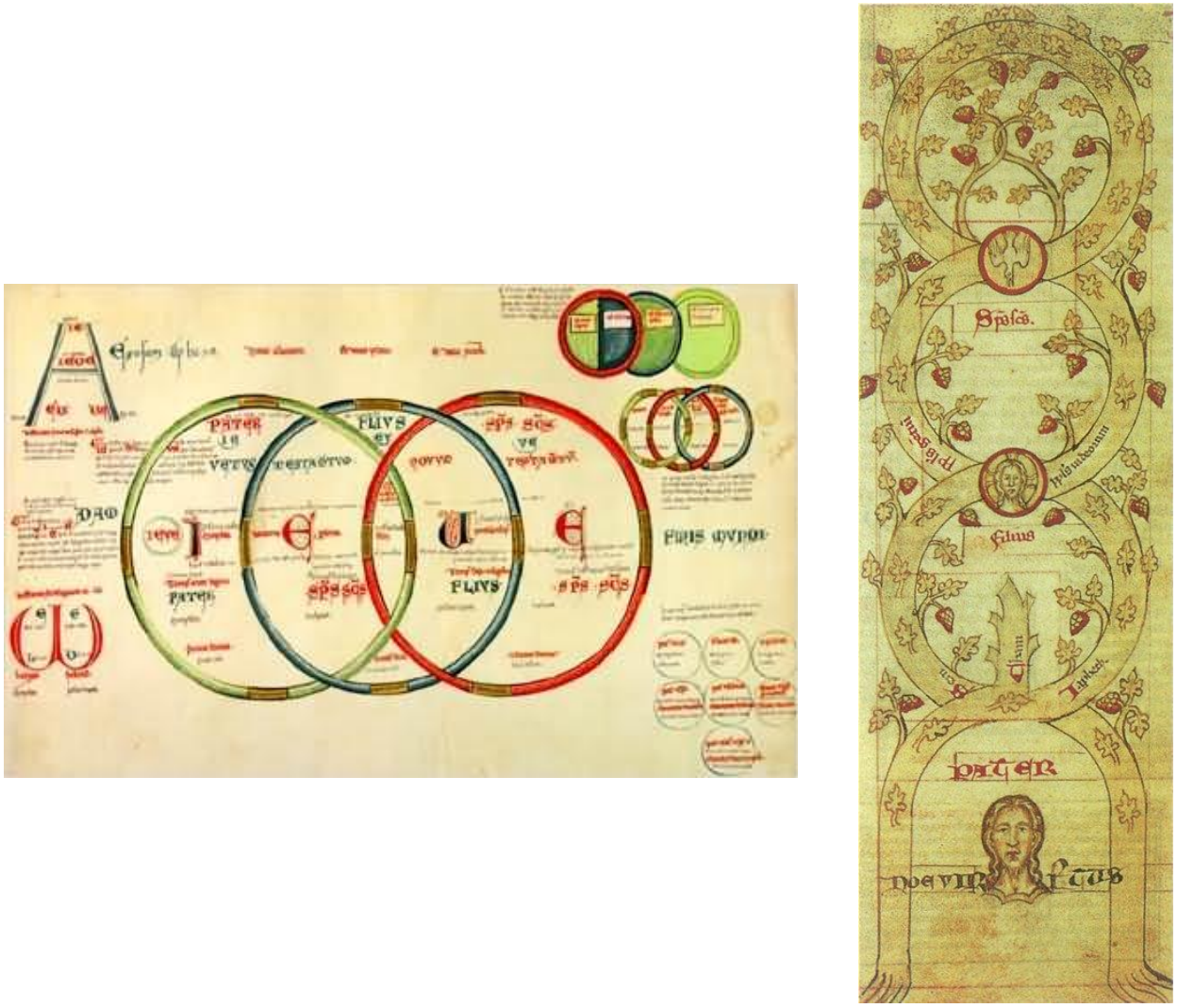


Figure 4.1: Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), *Liber figurarum*, Oxford, Corpus Christi College (MS 255a).

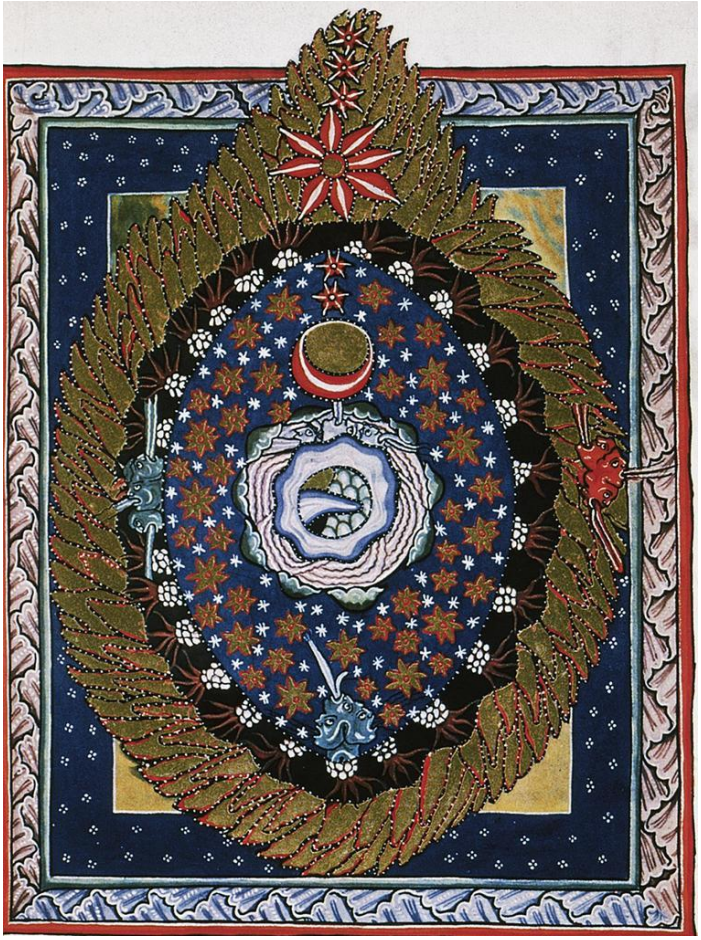


Figure 4.2a: *Scivias* I.3, "The Universe." All images from the *Scivias* that appear here are from the facsimile of the Rupertsberg Codex produced by the nuns at Eibingen, 1927-33, and reproduced in *The Miniatures from the Book* Scivias*—Know the Ways—of St. Hildegard of Bingen, from the Illuminated Rupertsberg Codex*, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1977).

Figure 4.2b: Detail of *Scivias* I.3, "The Universe." Three stars of the Trinity line up above the "sun of justice."

Figure 4.3: *Scivias* I.4, “Body and Soul”

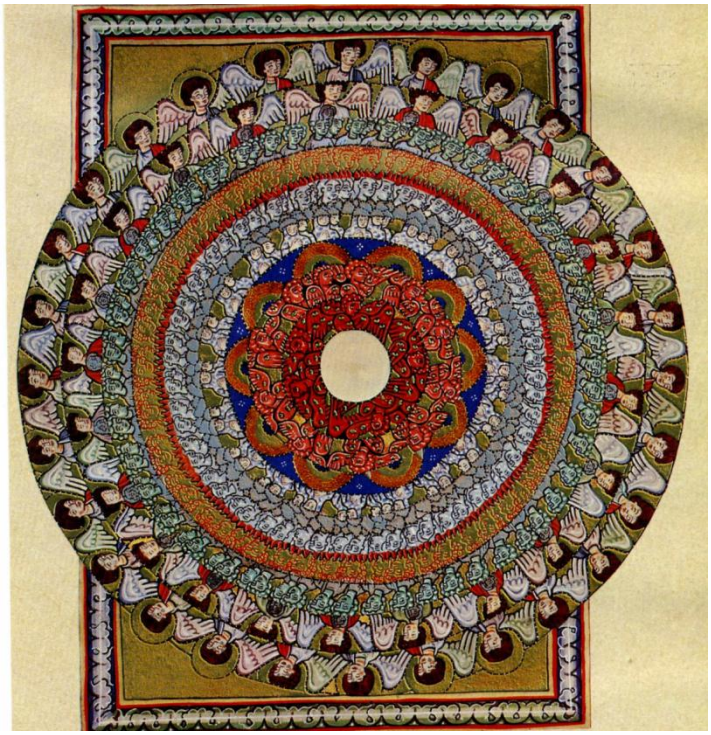


Figure 4.4: *Scivias* I.6, “The Choirs of Angels”

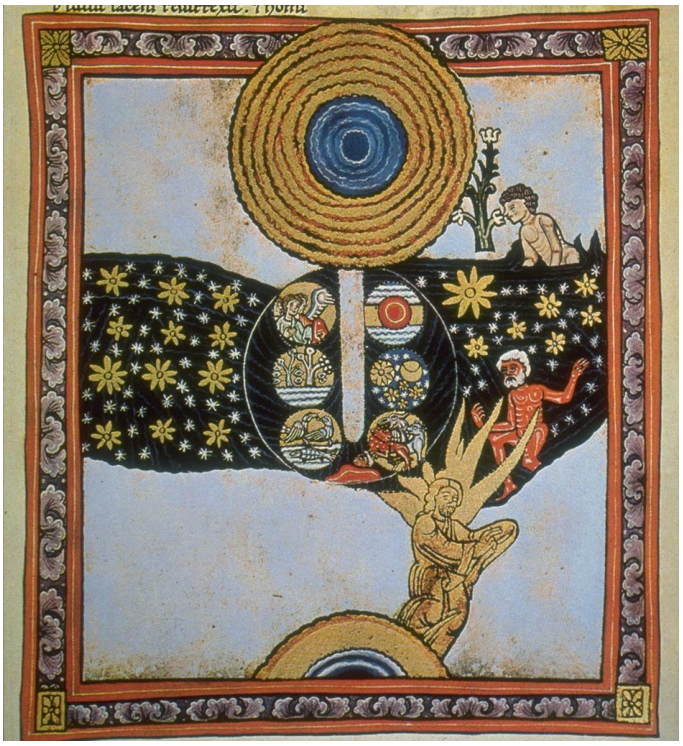


Figure 4.5: *Scivias* II.1, “The Redeemer”

Figure 4.6: *Scivias* II.2, "The Trinity in the Unity"

Figure 4.7: *Scivias* II.3, "Mother Church"

Figure 4.8: *Scivias* II.4, “Confirmation”

Figure 4.9: *Scivias* II.5, “The Mystical Body”

Figure 4.10: Detail of *Scivias* II.7, “The Tempter”

Figure 4.11: *Scivias* III.1, “The One Sitting Upon the Throne”

Figure 4.12: *Scivia*s III.2, “The Building of Salvation”

Figure 4.13: *Scivias* III.4, “Pillar of the Word of God”

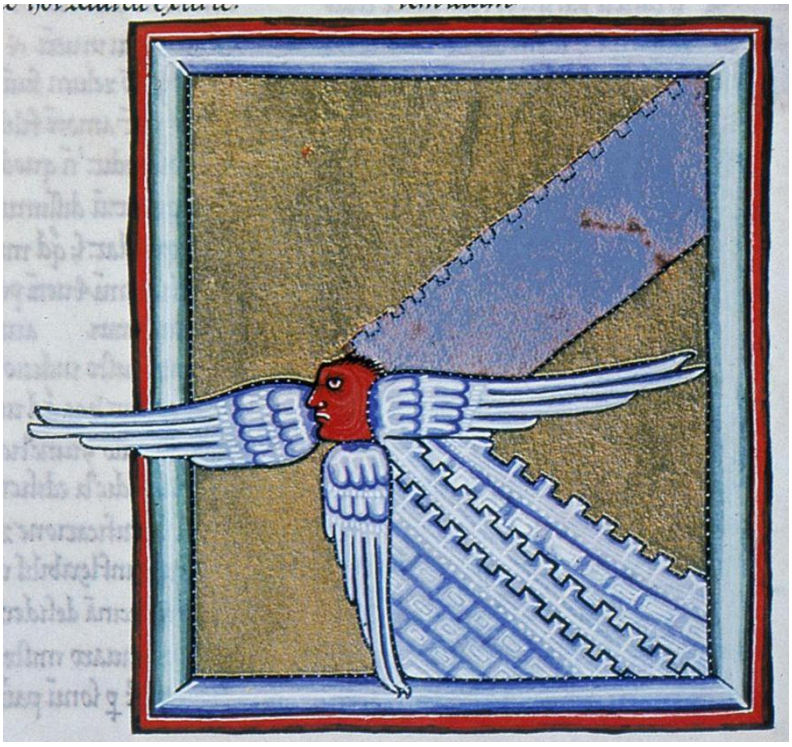


Figure 4.14: *Scivias* III.5, “The Zeal of God”

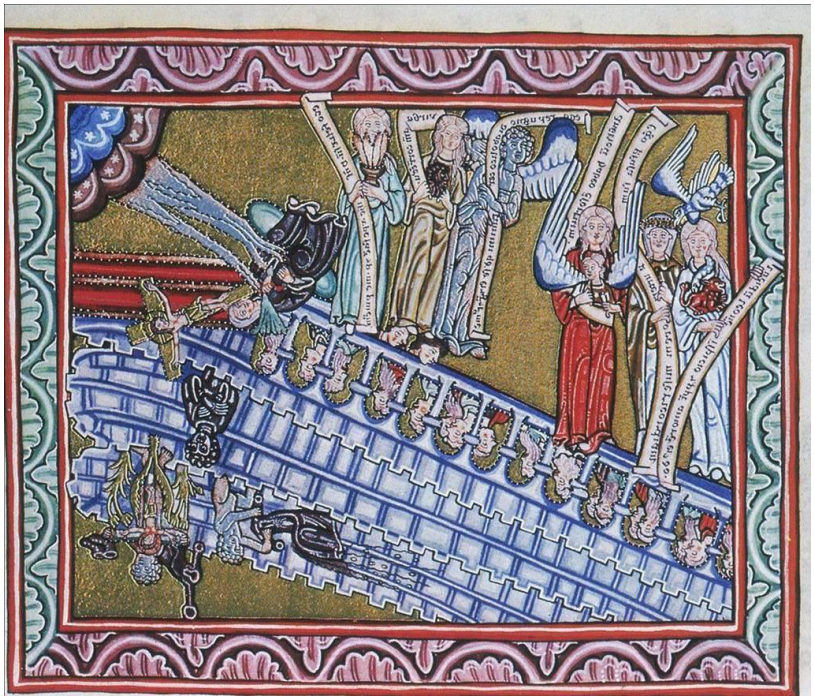


Figure 4.15a: *Scivias* III.6, “The Triple Wall”

Figure 4.15b: Detail of *Scivias* III.6, “The Triple Wall”

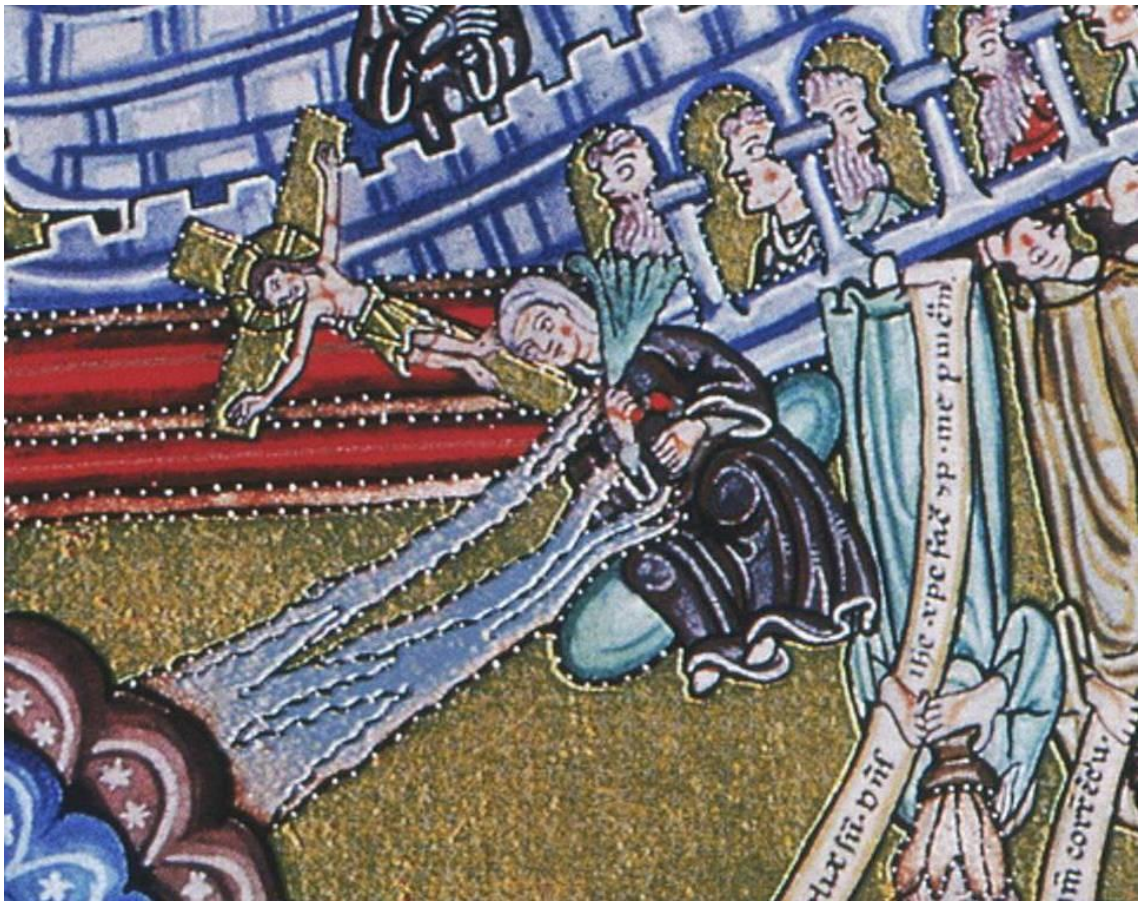


Figure 4.15c: Detail of *Scivias* III.6, “The Triple Wall”

Figure 4.16: *Scivias* III.7, “Pillar of the Trinity”

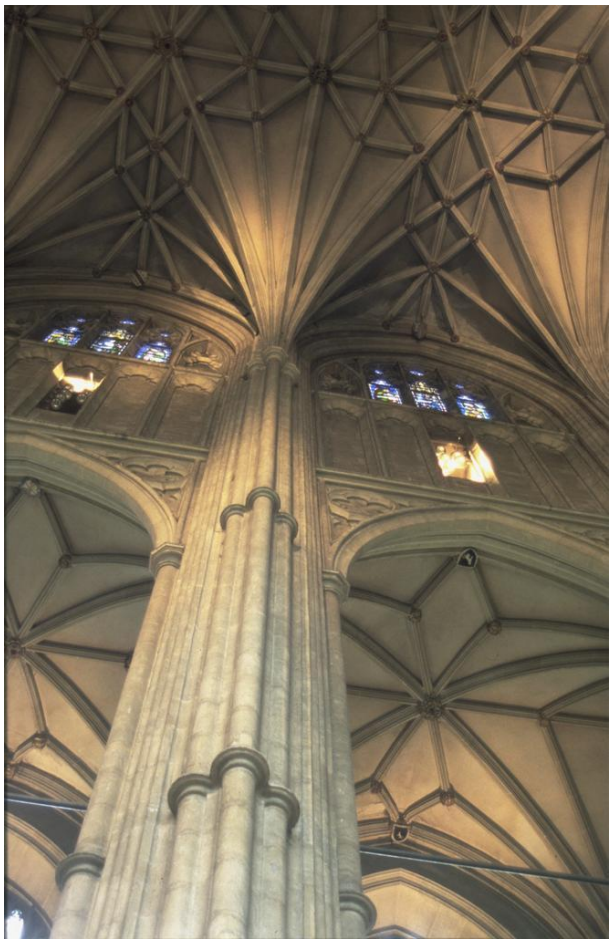


Figure 4.17: Compound piers at Canterbury Cathedral, England (left), and Cathedral of Santo Domingo, Calzada, Spain (right).

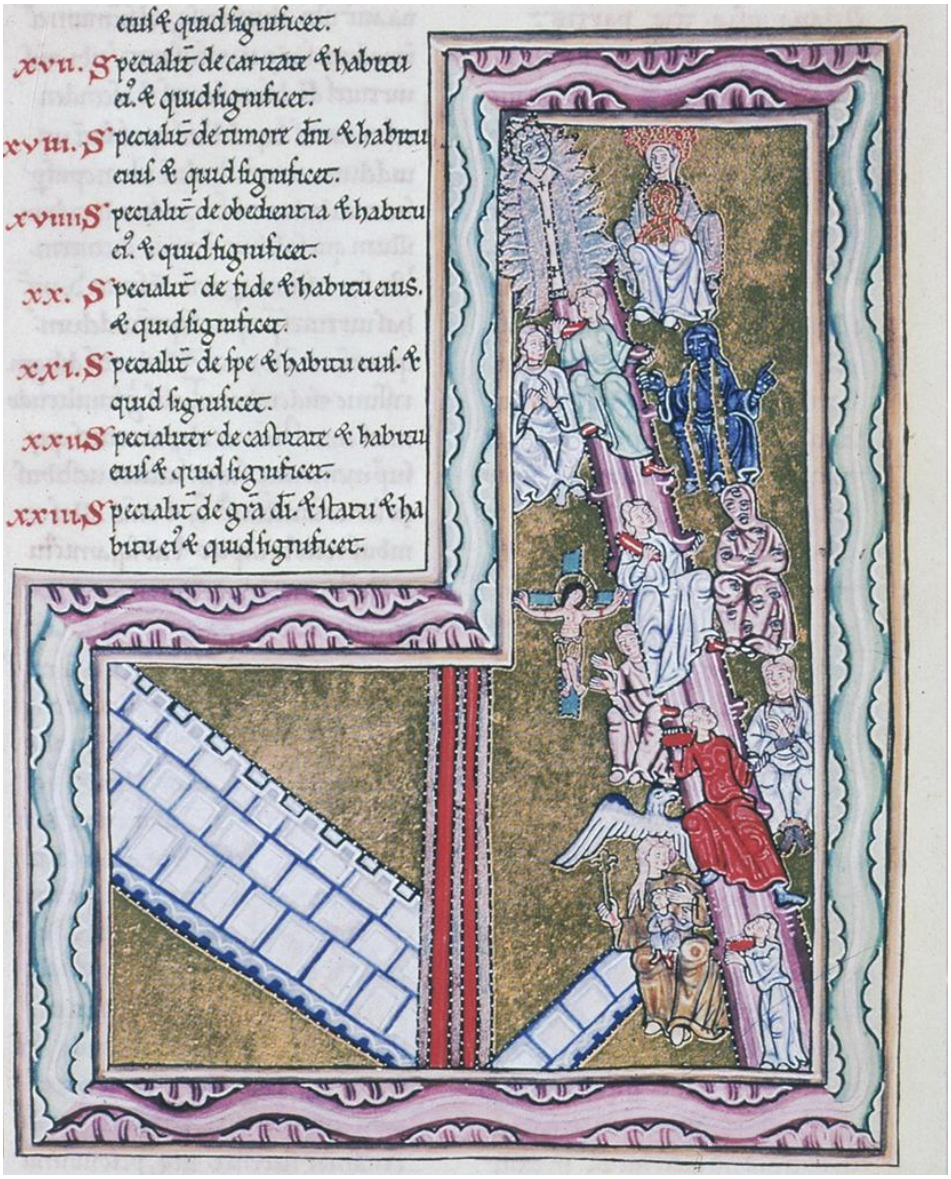


Figure 4.18a: *Scivias* III.8, "Pillar of the Savior's Humanity"

Figure 4.18b: Detail of *Scivias* III.8, "Pillar of the Savior's Humanity"

Figure 4.19a: *Scivias* III.9, "The Tower of the Church"

Figure 4.19b: Detail of *Scivias* III.9, "The Tower of the Church"

Figure 4.20: An illustration of the three visitors to Abraham (the *philoxenia* Trinity), from a German chronicle, ca. 1360, Regensburg, Bavaria. Photo: Pierpont Morgan Library, Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts.

Figure 4.21: *Scivias* III.10, “The Son of Man and the Five Virtues”

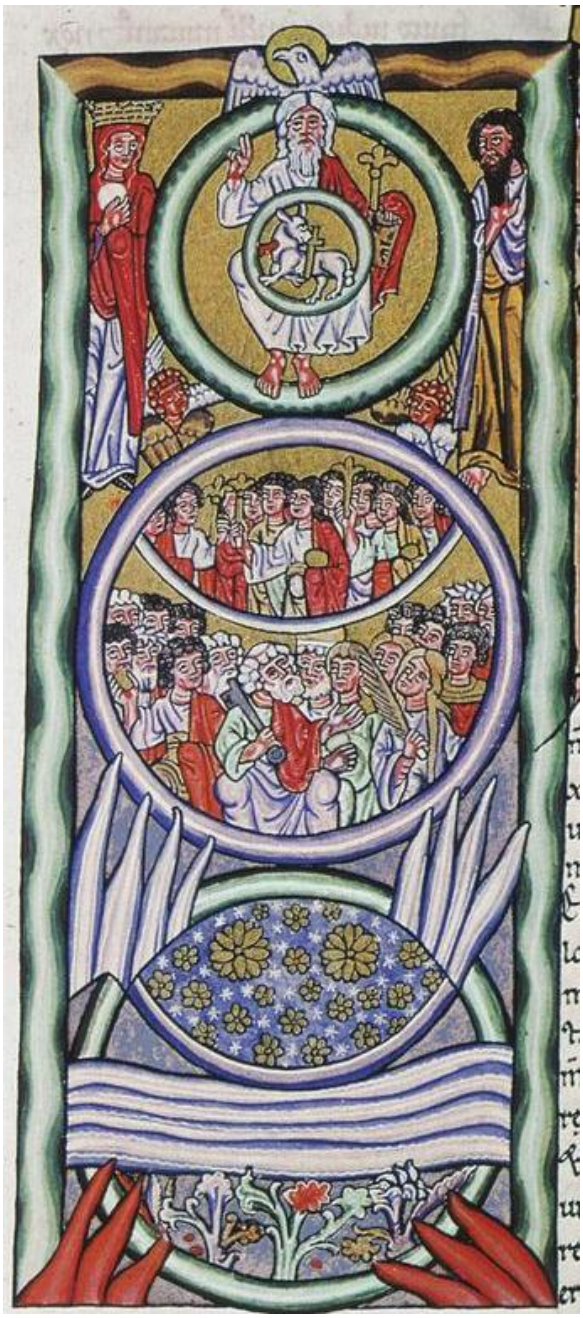


Figure 4.22a: *Scivias* III.12, “The New Heaven and the New Earth”

Figure 4.22b: Detail of *Scivias* III.12, “The New Heaven and the New Earth”

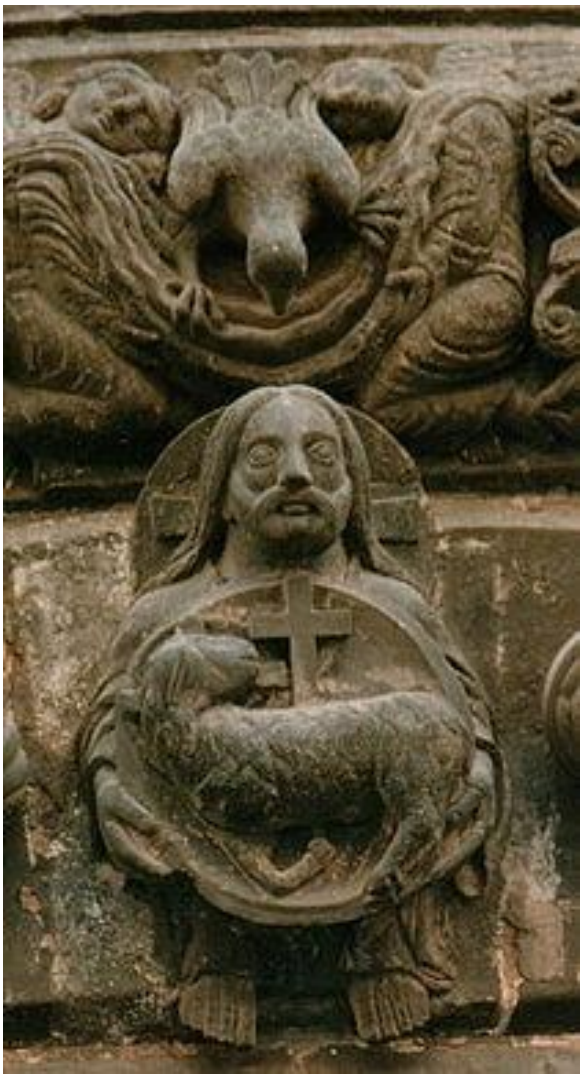


Figure 4.23: Depiction of the Trinity over the main entrance to the abbey church of Saint-Denis, Paris (mid-twelfth century).

Figure 4.24: *Book of Divine Works* I.1, "On the Origin of Life." All pictures from the *Book of Divine W*orks (*Liber divinorum operum*) are taken from the illustrations to the early thirteenth-century manuscript in Lucca (Biblioteca Statale, MS 1942), reproduced in *Liber divinorum operum*, ed. Albert Derolez and Peter Dronke, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 92 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1996).

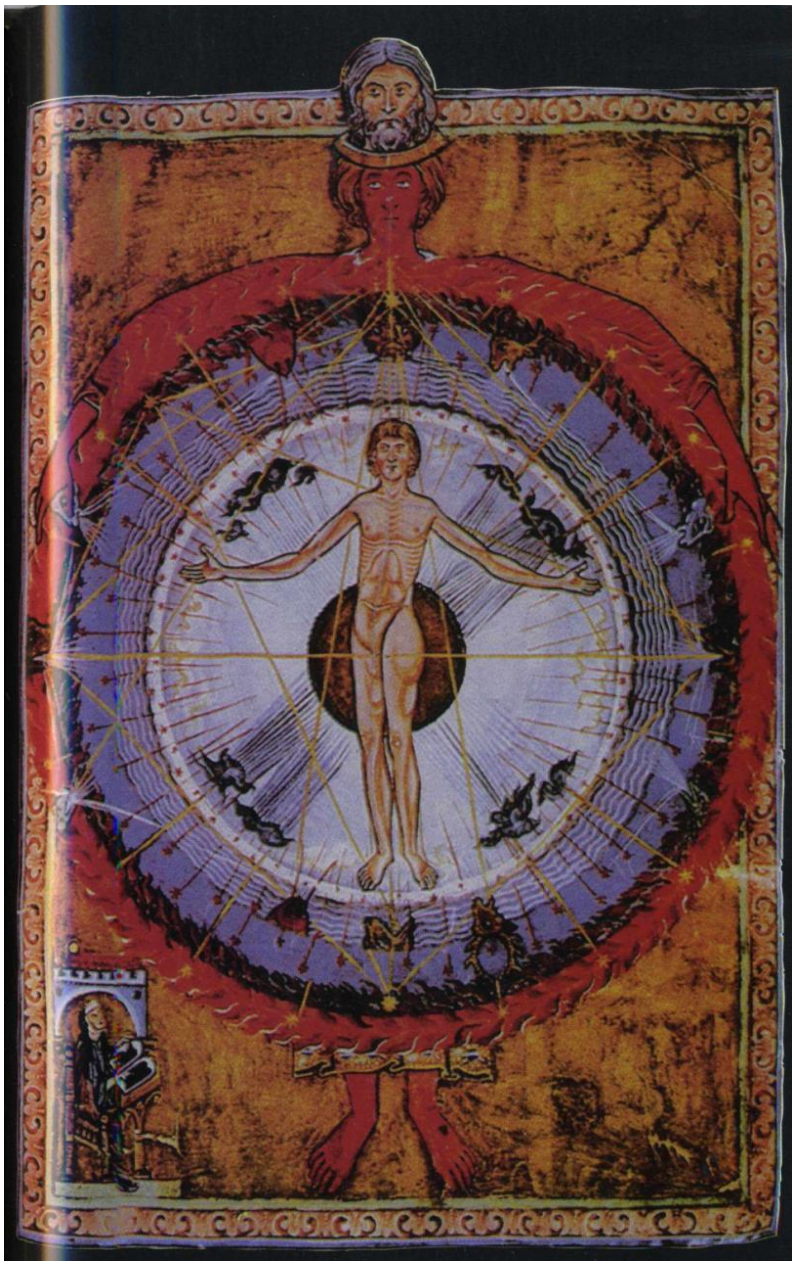
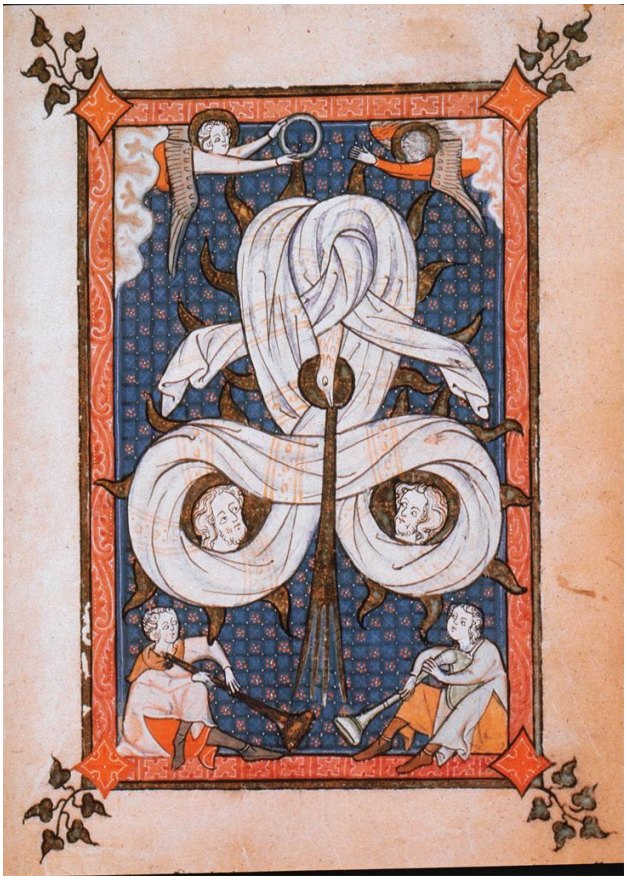


Figure 4.25: *Book of Divine Works* I.2, "On the Construction of the World"

Figure 4.26: *Book of Divine Works* I.4, “On the Articulation of the Body”

Figure 4.27: *Book of Divine Works* III.8, “On the Effect of Love”



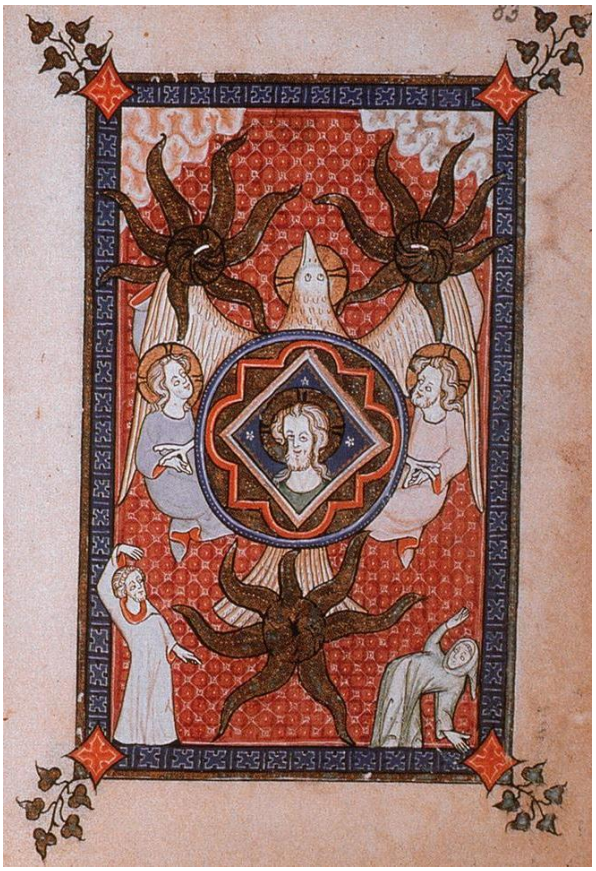


Figure 5.1: Illuminations from the *Rothschild Canticles*, "Mystical Devotions: The Trinity," ca. 1320. MS 404 in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Photos: ARTstor.

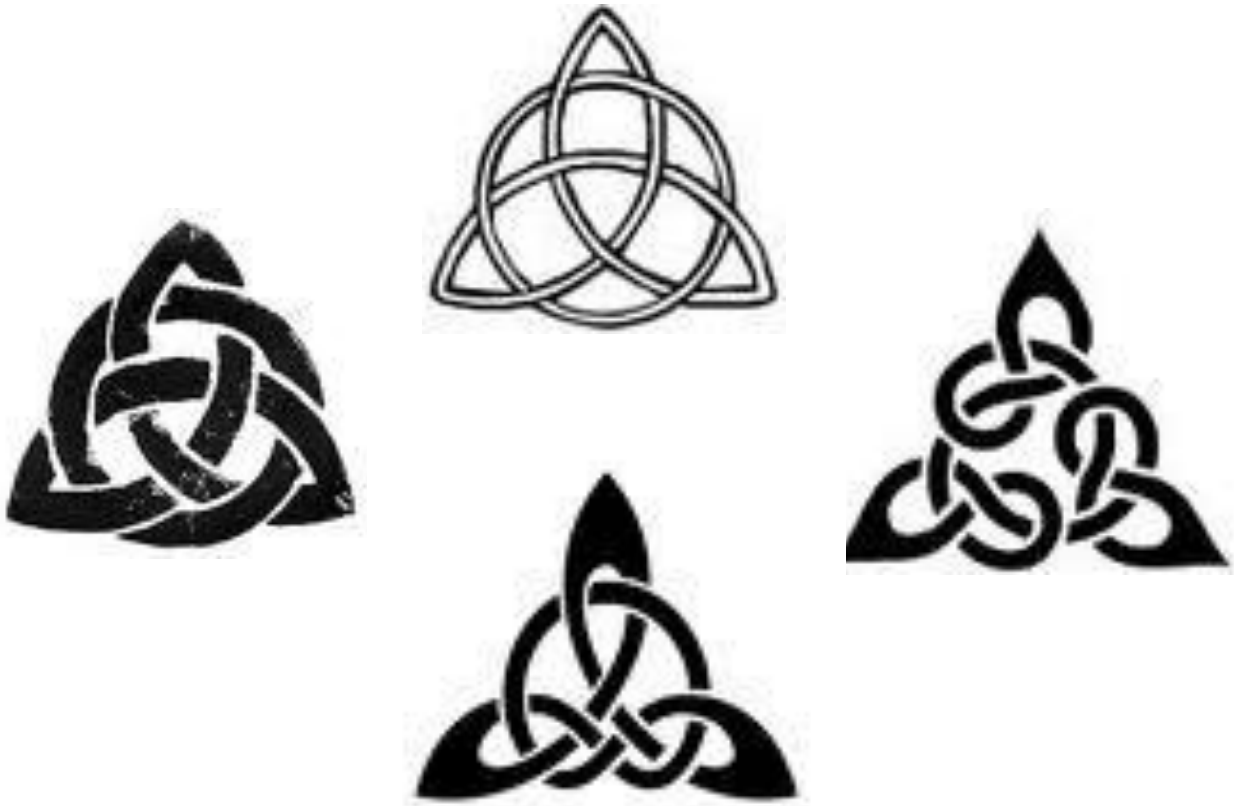


Figure 6.1: Various modern renditions of Celtic knots

Figure 6.2: Introit to Votive Mass of the Trinity, Carmelite Missal, English, ca. 1393. London, British Library, Additional MS 29704, 29705, 44892. Photo: ARTstor.

Figure 6.3: "None of the Trinity," De Bois Book of Hours, English, ca. 1330. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 700. Photo: Pierpont Morgan Library.

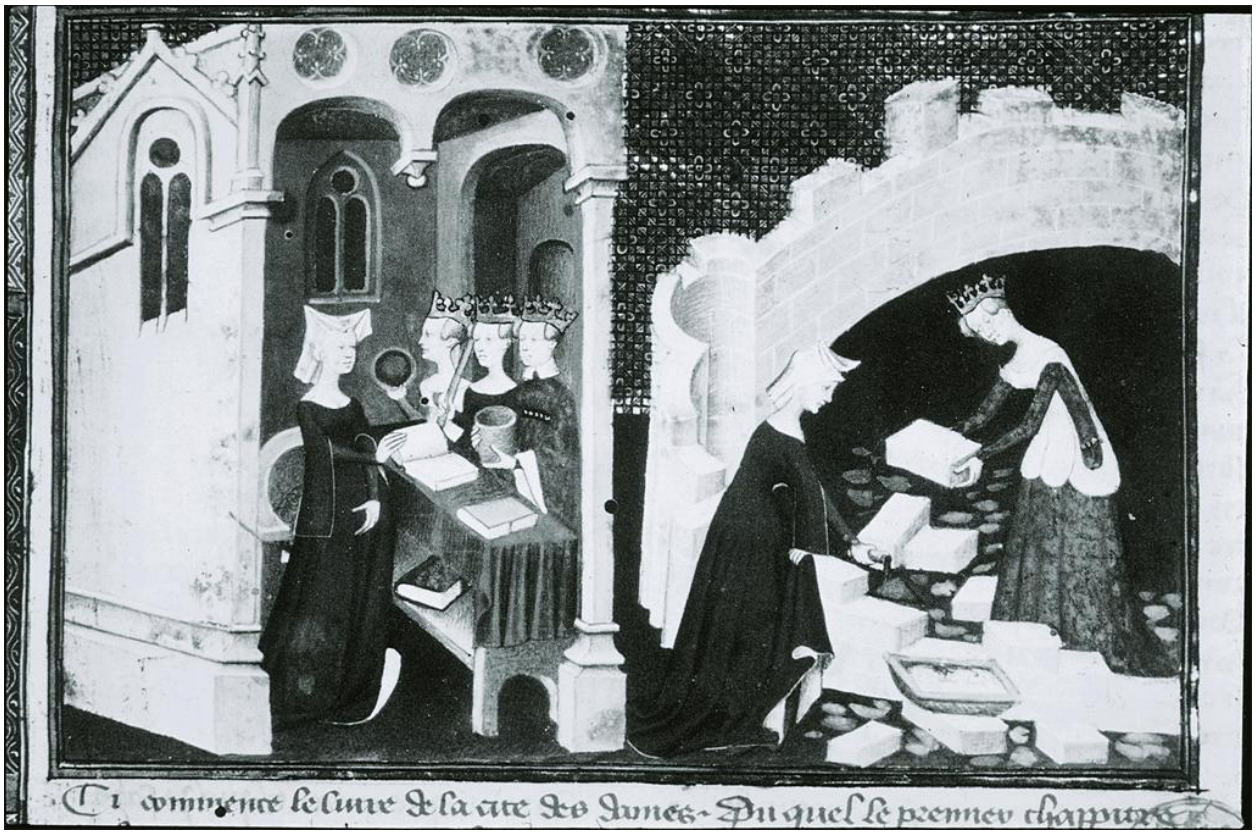


Figure 7.1: Opening miniature in *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Paris, ca. 1405. London, British Library, Harley MS 4431. This manuscript was put together by Christine for the French queen Isabeau of Bavaria. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee, introduction to *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 116. Photo: ARTstor.

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