Scivias

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

# Scivias

Scivias

*Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited*



FORAGE
forage.com

*Scivias* · Hildegard of Bingen

Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/hildegard/scivias

Latin text: *Scivias sive visionum ac revelationum libri tres*, in J.-P. Migne (1800–1875), ed., *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 197 (Paris, 1855), cols. 383–738, reprinting the first edition by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (d. 1536; Paris: Henri Estienne, 1513). Public domain. Transcribed for Forage from the Internet Archive scans of three copies of the volume, collated from their OCR and proofread twice, independently, against the page images; obvious misprints are corrected, Migne's chapter summaries and Bible references are omitted, and the ae/oe ligatures are written out. English: translated from the Latin with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are book, vision and chapter (1.1 = the text of Book One, vision 1; 1.1.3 = its chapter 3; Pr = Hildegard's declaration); chapters follow the capitula printed before each vision.

The original text is in the public domain. This translation is free to share and adapt under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0): creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

Set in Source Serif 4.

# CONTENTS

**Introduction** ..... vii

**Book One** ..... 1

Declaration ..... 1
Vision One: The Iron Mountain ..... 4
Vision Two: The Fall of the Angels and of Adam and Eve ..... 7
The serpent deceives Eve ..... 11
Vision Four: The Soul and Its Tabernacle ..... 12
A soul at war with its body ..... 17
Death, judgment and God's knowledge ..... 21
The cheeses and the child in the womb ..... 25

**Book Two** ..... 29

Vision One: The Redeemer ..... 29
The fall and the Redeemer explained ..... 34
Vision Two: The Trinity ..... 40
Stone, flame and word ..... 42
Vision Six: The Sacrifice of Christ and the Church ..... 46
The light over the altar ..... 51
Bread and wine become flesh and blood ..... 56

**Book Three** ..... 63

Vision One: The One Enthroned ..... 63
The clay on God's breast ..... 67
The circle of God's power ..... 72
Lucifer's fall explained ..... 75
Vision Eight: The Pillar of the Savior's Humanity ..... 79
Grace speaks ..... 84
Grace's beloved children ..... 89
The pillar of Christ's humanity explained ..... 92
Vision Thirteen: The Symphony of the Blessed ..... 94
The play of the virtues ..... 99

What the music means . . . . . 103
Warning to readers . . . . . 107

# INTRODUCTION

In AD 1141, when she was forty-two, Hildegard, a Benedictine nun at Disibodenberg in the Rhineland, saw "a fiery light of great brilliance" pour into her mind and heard a voice telling her to "say and write" what she saw. She had had visions since the age of five, she says, but told almost no one. Over the next ten years she wrote *Scivias*—short for *Sci vias Domini*, "Know the ways of the Lord"—with the help of her secretary, the monk Volmar, and her companion Richardis. Pope Eugenius III read part of it at the synod of Trier in 1147–48 and encouraged her to go on; she became the most famous visionary, preacher and correspondent of her century, and also a composer and writer on medicine and natural history.

The book has twenty-six visions in three books: creation and fall, redemption and the Church, and the building of salvation up to the end of time. Each follows the same pattern. Hildegard first describes what she saw—an iron mountain with a radiant figure enthroned on it, a woman carrying a fully formed child, a pillar of shadow climbed by the virtues—and then a voice from heaven explains it point by point, in chapters.

This selection gives Hildegard's opening declaration and ten visions: from Book One, visions 1 (the iron mountain) and 2 (the fall of the angels and of Adam and Eve, up to the temptation), and 4 (the soul's laments and its life in the body, through chapter 17); from Book Two, visions 1 (the Redeemer) and 2 (the Trinity) complete, and the first eighteen chapters of vision 6 (Christ, the Church and the Eucharist); from Book Three, vision 1 (God enthroned and the fall of Lucifer, through chapter 15), vision 8 (the pillar of Christ's humanity and its seven virtues, through chapter 12), and the closing vision 13 complete, with its songs, the short drama of the virtues that grew into her *Ordo Virtutum*, and the final warning to readers. In each, the vision itself is giv-

en whole; chapter numbers follow the capitula that head each vision.

# Book One

*Hildegard's declaration; the iron mountain; the fall of the angels and of Adam and Eve; the soul's journey from the womb.*

## DECLARATION

*Hildegard tells how, at forty-two, a voice from heaven ordered her to write down what she saw.*

Pr And behold: in the forty-third year of my earthly course, as I clung to a heavenly vision with great fear and trembling attention, I saw a very great radiance. In it a voice came from heaven to me, saying: O fragile human, ash of ash and rot of rot, speak and write what you see and hear. But because you are timid in speaking, simple in explaining, and unlearned in writing these things, speak and write them not according to the mouth of a human being, nor according to the understanding of human invention, nor according to the will of human composition, but according to what you see and hear of them on high, in the heavens, in the wonders of God. Bring them forth by setting them out, just as a listener who takes in the words of his teacher makes them known according to the tenor of that teacher's speech, as the teacher wills, shows and commands. So you too, O human, speak the things you see and hear, and write them not according to yourself, nor according to any other human being, but according to the will of him who knows, sees and arranges all things in the secrets of his mysteries. And again I heard a voice from heaven saying to me: "Speak, then, of these wonders, and write them, taught in this way, and speak." It happened in the year 1141 of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,

when I was forty-two years and seven months old. A fiery light of the greatest brilliance came flashing from the open heaven and poured through my whole brain. It kindled my whole heart and my whole breast like a flame—a flame that did not burn but warmed—as the sun warms anything on which it sends its rays. And suddenly I grasped the meaning of the exposition of the books—that is, of the Psalter, the Gospels and the other catholic volumes of both the Old and the New Testament. I did not, however, know how to interpret the words of their text, nor how to divide the syllables, nor did I have any knowledge of cases or tenses. But from girlhood—that is, from the time I was five years old—up to the present, I had felt in myself, in a wonderful way, the power of mysteries, of secret and marvelous visions, as I still do. Yet I revealed this to no one, except a few religious people who were living the same way of life as I was. In the meantime, until the time when God by his grace willed it to be revealed, I kept it suppressed in quiet silence. As for the visions I saw: I did not perceive them in dreams, nor asleep, nor in delirium, nor with the bodily eyes or ears of the outer self, nor in hidden places. I received them awake, alert, with a pure mind, with the eyes and ears of the inner self, in open places, according to the will of God. How this can be is hard for a fleshly human being to search out. But when the bounds of girlhood were past and I had reached the age of full strength I mentioned, I heard a voice from heaven saying: I am the living light, who illuminates what is dark. This human being, whom I willed and whom I struck in a wonderful way as it pleased me, I have placed among great wonders, beyond the measure of the people of old who saw many secrets in me. But I have laid her low on the ground, so that she might not lift herself up in any arrogance of mind. The world, too, found in her no joy, no delight, no activity in the things that belong to it. For I drew her away from stubborn boldness, so that she was full of fear and anxious in her labors. She suffered in the marrow and in the veins of her flesh. Her mind and senses were constrained, and she endured much bodily suffering, so that no sense of security dwelt in her, and in all her

affairs she judged herself to be at fault. For I hedged in the ruins of her heart, so that her mind would not exalt itself through pride or vainglory, but would feel fear and pain in all these things rather than joy or wantonness. So, in my love, she searched in her mind for where she might find someone who was running the way of salvation. And she found someone and loved him, recognizing that he was a faithful man and like herself in some part of the labor that strives toward me. Holding him close, she strove together with him in all these things with heavenly zeal, so that my hidden wonders might be revealed. And this same human being did not exalt herself above herself, but with many sighs bowed toward the one she had found, in an ascent of humility and with the intention of good will. You, then, O human, who receive these things not in the turmoil of deception but in the purity of simplicity, and who are directed toward the revealing of hidden things: write what you see and hear.[1]

But although I saw and heard these things, I still refused for a long time to write them—not out of stubbornness, but out of the duty of humility—because of doubt and bad opinion and the variety of human talk. This went on until, pressed down by the scourge of God, I fell onto a sickbed. At last, compelled by many illnesses, and with the witness of a certain girl of noble birth and good character, and of that man whom I had secretly sought and found (as was said above), I set my hand to writing. While I was doing this, I sensed the deep profundity of the exposition of the books, as I said before, and recovering my strength I raised myself from my sickness. With difficulty I brought this work to its end, completing it in ten years. These visions and words took place in the days of Henry, archbishop of Mainz, of Conrad, king of the Romans, and of Cuno, abbot of Disibodenberg (the mountain of the blessed bishop Disibod), under Pope Eugenius.[2] And I

1 This man is generally identified as Volmar, a monk of Disibodenberg who became Hildegard's teacher and secretary.

2 The girl is usually identified as Richardis of Stade, a young nun of Hildegard's community. Henry was archbishop of Mainz 1142–1153, Conrad III German king 1138–1152, and Eugenius III pope 1145–1153.

spoke and wrote these things not according to the invention of my own heart or of any human being, but as I saw, heard and perceived them in the heavens through the secret mysteries of God. And again I heard a voice from heaven saying to me: "Cry out, then, and write thus."

### VISION ONE: THE IRON MOUNTAIN

*God sits enthroned on an iron mountain, with the fear of the Lord and poverty of spirit before him.*

1.1 I saw what seemed to be a great mountain, the color of iron. On it sat someone of such great brightness that his brightness dulled my sight. From him, on either side, a soft shadow stretched out like a wing of wonderful breadth and length. Before him, at the foot of the mountain, stood a figure full of eyes on every side; because of the multitude of eyes I could make out no human form in it. In front of this figure was another, of a child's age, clothed in a pale garment but with white shoes. On its head such great brightness came down from the one who sat on the mountain that I could not look at its face. And from the one who sat on the mountain many living sparks came forth, which flew around these figures with great sweetness. In the mountain itself there could be seen what seemed to be a great many little windows, in which appeared what looked like human heads, some pale and some white. And behold, the one who sat on the mountain cried out in a very strong and piercing voice, saying: O fragile human, dust of the dust of the earth, and ash of ash, cry out and speak of the entrance into incorruptible salvation. Do this so that those may be taught who see the marrow of the Scriptures but will neither speak nor preach it, because they are lukewarm and sluggish in keeping the justice of God. Unlock for them the enclosure of mysteries, which they, being timid, hide in a hidden field without fruit. Spread yourself out, then, into a fountain of abundance, and overflow with mystical teaching, so that those who want you to be held in contempt because of Eve's transgression may be shaken by the flood

of your watering.[3] For you receive the keenness of this depth not from a human being, but from above, from the Judge on high who is to be feared, where this serenity will shine strongly in glorious light among the shining ones. Arise, therefore, cry out and speak the things that are revealed to you by the very strong power of divine help. For he who rules all his creation with power and kindness floods with the glory of heavenly illumination those who fear him and serve him with sweet love in a spirit of humility, and he leads those who persevere in the way of righteousness to the joys of eternal vision.

1.1.1 And so, as you see, this great mountain the color of iron signifies the strength and stability of the eternity of the kingdom of God, which no shock of slipping, shifting change can destroy. And the one sitting on it, of such great brightness that his brightness dulls your sight, shows in the kingdom of blessedness him who, ruling the whole world by his divinity on high in the brilliance of unfailing serenity, is beyond the grasp of human minds. But on either side of him a soft shadow stretches out like a wing of wonderful breadth and length. This is the sweet and gentle protection of his blessed defense, in admonition and in chastisement alike, which justly and kindly shows forth his ineffable justice in the perseverance of true equity.

1.1.2 And before him, at the foot of the same mountain, stands a figure full of eyes on every side. This is because, standing before God and gazing in humility on the kingdom of God, it—fenced about by the fear of the Lord and by the clear sight of a good and just intention—exercises its zeal and steadfastness among human beings. So you can make out no human form in it because of those eyes. For with the keenest edge of its gaze it so casts off all forgetfulness of the justice of God, which people

3 Eve's sin in Genesis 3 was often cited in medieval writing as a reason why women should not teach.

often feel in the weariness of their minds, that mortal inquiry, in its weakness, cannot search out its vigilance.[4]

1.1.3 And so before it appears another figure, of a child's age, clothed in a pale tunic but with white shoes. For where the fear of the Lord goes before, those who are poor in spirit follow after, since the fear of the Lord, in the devotion of humility, holds fast the blessedness of poverty of spirit. This poverty does not seek boasting or exaltation of heart, but loves simplicity and sobriety of mind. It attributes its just works not to itself but to God, in the pallor, as it were, of submission, like the garment of a pale tunic; and it faithfully follows the white footsteps of the Son of God. On its head such great brightness comes down from the one sitting on the mountain that you cannot look at its face. For the serenity of the visitation of him who rules all creation in a manner worthy of praise pours into it so great a power and strength of blessedness that you cannot grasp its abundance with mortal and feeble contemplation. For he, too, who possesses the riches of heaven humbly submitted himself to poverty.

1.1.4 But from the one who sits on the mountain many living sparks come forth, which fly around these figures with great sweetness. This means that from almighty God come various and very strong virtues, shining in divine glory. Surrounding with their help and protection those who truly fear God and faithfully love poverty of spirit, they ardently embrace and soothe them.

1.1.5 And so in the mountain itself there seem to be a great many little windows, in which appear what look like human heads, some pale and some white. For in the highest height, the strivings of human deeds can be neither concealed nor hidden from the most profound and penetrating knowledge of God, since they very often show in themselves both lukewarmness and whiteness. For now people, weary in their hearts and in their deeds, doze in disgrace; now, roused, they wake to honor,

1.1.6 as Solomon testifies by my will, saying: "A slack hand has brought about poverty, but the hand of the strong prepares

riches." This means that the person who would not work justice, nor blot out iniquity, nor forgive a debt, made himself weak and poor, since he remained idle, far from the wonderful works of blessedness. But one who works the strong works of salvation, running the way of truth, takes hold of the leaping fountain of glory, in which he prepares for himself the most precious riches on earth and in heaven. So whoever has knowledge in the Holy Spirit and wings in faith, let him not transgress my admonition, but take it in, embracing it with the taste of his soul.[5]

## VISION TWO: THE FALL OF THE ANGELS AND OF ADAM AND EVE

*The rebel angels fall into a burning lake, and the devil's mist drives Adam and Eve from paradise.*

1.2 Then I saw what seemed to be a very great multitude of living lamps, full of brightness, which, receiving a fiery brilliance, gained a most serene radiance. And behold, there appeared a lake of great breadth and depth, with a mouth like the mouth of a well, belching out fiery smoke with a great stench. From it, too, a most foul mist breathed out and reached out to an end that seemed beyond the reach of sight. In a certain bright region it blew upon a white cloud, which had come forth from a beautiful human form and held many stars within it; and it drove that cloud and the same human form out of that region. When this was done, a most shining radiance surrounded that region. And so all the elements of the world, which before had stood in great quiet, were turned to the greatest turmoil and displayed horrible terrors. And again I heard the one who had spoken to me before, saying:

1.2.1 Those who follow God with faithful devotion, and who in their love for him burn with a love worthy of him, are not drawn away from the glory of heavenly blessedness, frightened by any

4 As the next section shows, Hildegard identifies this figure with the fear of the Lord.

5 Proverbs 10:4. Solomon was traditionally regarded as the author of Proverbs.

thrust of injustice. But those who attend to God falsely are not only not advanced to greater things; they are even cast down, by just examination, from what they falsely think they have. This very great multitude of living lamps, full of brightness, shows this too. It is the vast army of heavenly spirits, shining in the blessed life and dwelling in great beauty and adornment. For when they were created by God, they did not seize on proud exaltation, but stood firm in divine love. They received a fiery brilliance and so gained a most serene radiance. For when Lucifer with his followers tried to rebel against the Creator on high, these spirits, filled with zeal for God at the fall of Lucifer and of those who consented with him, put on the vigilance of divine love, while the others fell into the blindness of ignorance by which they refused to know God. How so? At the devil's fall, very great praise arose among those angelic spirits who persevered with God in uprightness. For, their sight enlightened, they recognized clearly that God remains unmoved in his power, without any change of any mutability, so that no warrior will ever be able to overcome him. And so, burning in his love and persevering in uprightness, they scorned every dwelling place of injustice.[6]

1.2.2 But Lucifer, who was cast out of heavenly glory because of his pride, was at the beginning of his creation of such quality and greatness that he felt no defect either in his beauty or in his strength. So when he looked at his beauty and considered within himself the force of his strength, he found pride. Pride promised him that he might begin whatever he wished, because he could finish whatever he had begun. And seeing a place where he thought he could set himself, and wishing to display his beauty and strength there, he said within himself: "I want to shine there, just as he does here." And his whole army gave him its assent, saying: "What you want, we want too." And when, puffed up with pride, he wanted to accomplish what he had planned, the zeal of the Lord stretched out and cast him down,

6 Lucifer ("light-bearer") is the name traditionally given to the rebel angel, drawn from Isaiah 14:12.

with all his company, in fiery blackness, so that they were made dark, the opposite of the serenity they had had.

1.2.3 What is this? If God had not cast down their presumption, he would have been unjust, for he would have been cherishing those who wanted to divide the wholeness of the divinity. But he cast them down and reduced their impiety to nothing, just as he also removes from the sight of his glory all who try to oppose him,

1.2.4 as my servant Job shows, saying: "The lamp of the wicked will be put out, and a flood will come upon them, and he will deal out the sorrows of his wrath. They will be like chaff before the face of the wind, and like ashes that the whirlwind scatters." This means: the glory of proud wickedness arises from false prosperity, like a light of honor proceeding from the fleshly will of those who do not fear God. They spurn him in perverse impiety, disdaining to know that no one can defeat him, and they want to burn up in the fire of their ferocity whatever stands against them. In the hour of God's vengeance this glory is trampled like earth. And by the judgment from on high, the rejection born of the indignation of all things under heaven will fall upon those same wicked ones, so that they will be a burden both to God and to human beings.[7] And so, because God does not let them have what they want, they are worn down by pain on every side and rage among people in the frenzy of their madness, burning to possess what God does not allow them to devour. And when they withdraw from God in this way, they are likened only to useless things, so that they would want to do nothing good either toward God or toward human beings; and they are cut off from the grain of life in the foreseeing eye of God's gaze. For this reason those who are scattered in the lukewarm taste of wicked rumor are handed over to such crushing, since they do not receive the coming rain of the Holy Spirit.

1.2.5 But that lake of great breadth and depth that appears to you is hell. As you see, it contains within itself the breadth of the vices and the depths of perdition. It also has a mouth like the

7 Job 21:17–18.

mouth of a well and sends out fiery smoke with a great stench. For in its voracity it holds souls drowned: while it shows them sweetness and delight, it leads them by twisted deceit to the perversity of torments, where fire burns with a most foul outpouring of smoke and streams out with a seething, deadly stench. These dire torments have been prepared for the devil and for those who follow him—who turn away from the highest good and have not cared to know or understand it. And so they have been cast down from all good, not because they did not know it, but because they despised it in great pride.

1.2.6 What is this? This outer darkness, which holds within it every kind of punishment, was set in place when the devil was cast down. Instead of the glory that had been prepared for them, these evil spirits received the misery of many kinds of punishment, and instead of the brightness they once had, they put on the densest darkness. How so? When the proud angel reared himself upward like a snake, he received the prison of hell, because it could not be that anyone should prevail over God. For how could it be fitting for one breast to hold two hearts? In the same way there ought not to be two gods in heaven. But because the devil and his followers seized on proud presumption, he found the pit of perdition prepared for him. So too the people who imitate them in their deeds are made sharers in their punishments, according to what they deserve.

1.2.7 Some souls bear a heap of damnation and have been cast out from the knowledge of God, and so they will suffer the punishments of hell without the consolation of rescue. Others are not in God's forgetfulness. In the higher trials they receive the purging of the sins into which they fell, and at last they feel their chains loosed and are rescued and come to rest. What is this? Gehenna confronts those who, without repentance, hold God in the forgetfulness of their heart. The other torments await those who do evil deeds but do not persist in them to the end, and at last look back to God with groaning.

1.2.8 Therefore let the faithful flee the devil and love God. Let them cast off evil deeds and carry out good ones with the beauty

of repentance, as my servant Ezekiel, inspired by me, urges when he says: "Turn and repent of all your iniquities, and iniquity will not be your ruin." This means: O you people who until now have lain in sins, remember your Christian name and turn to the way of salvation. You who once committed many crimes in many vices, do other deeds in the fountain of repentance. And so, as you rise from your evil habit, the iniquity in which you were soiled will not press you down into the ruin of death, because you cast it off on the day of your salvation.[8] In this way the angels will rejoice over you, because you have withdrawn from the devil and run to God. Through good deeds you now know him better than you knew him before, when you were the laughingstock of the ancient seducer.

### THE SERPENT DECEIVES EVE

*The voice explains how the devil used the serpent to deceive Eve, and through her Adam.*

1.2.9 A most foul mist breathed out from that same lake and reached out to an end that seemed beyond the reach of sight. This means that the devil's fraud, emanating from the deepest perdition, came through the venomous serpent, which held within it the wickedness of a purpose bent on deceit, and secretly invaded the human being. How so? When the devil saw the human being in paradise, he cried out with great indignation, saying, "Oh, who will follow after me into the dwelling of true blessedness?" He knew within himself that he had not yet worked out in any other creature the malice he held within him. But when he saw Adam and Eve living in childlike innocence in the garden of delights, he rose up with great cunning to deceive them through the serpent. Why? Because he understood that the serpent was more like him than any other animal. He set himself to accomplish secretly, through the serpent's cunning, what he could not accomplish openly in his own form.

8 Ezekiel 18:30. Ezekiel was a Hebrew prophet of the sixth century BC, among the exiles in Babylon.

1.2.10 So when he saw Adam and Eve turn away, in both soul and body, from the tree forbidden to them, he understood within himself that they had a divine command concerning it, and that he could very easily bring them down in the first deed they undertook. He did not know that the tree was forbidden; he learned it only by testing them with his crafty question and from their answers. Therefore, in that bright region, he breathed upon the white cloud with that most foul mist, which had come forth from the beautiful form of a human being and held many stars within it. For in that same place of delight the devil, through the serpent's seduction, invaded Eve, who had an innocent mind, to bring her down. Eve had been taken from innocent Adam, and she carried in her body the whole multitude of the human race, shining in God's foreordination. Why is this? Because he knew that the woman's softness would be more easily conquered than the man's strength. He also saw that Adam burned so fiercely with love for Eve that, if he conquered Eve, Adam would do whatever she told him. So the devil cast her and the human form out of that region. By his deception, the ancient seducer drove Eve and Adam from the seat of blessedness and thrust them down into the darkness of ruin. How so? He seduced Eve first, so that she would coax Adam into giving his consent. She could lead Adam to disobedience more readily than any other creature, because she had been made from his rib. For this reason a woman brings a man down more quickly when he does not shrink from her and readily takes up her words.

## VISION FOUR: THE SOUL AND ITS TABERNACLE

*A soul enters a child in the womb, then laments its captivity and builds a tabernacle against its enemies.*

1.4 And then I saw a very great and most serene radiance, flaming as if with many eyes, with four corners turned toward the four parts of the world. It signified the secret of the Creator on high and was revealed to me in a very great mystery. Within it

another radiance also appeared, like the dawn, holding in itself the brightness of a purple brilliance. And behold, I saw people on the earth carrying milk in earthen vessels and making cheeses from it. Part of the milk was thick, and strong cheeses were made from it. Part was thin, and weak cheeses were curdled from it. Part was tainted with corruption, and bitter cheeses came from it. And then I saw what seemed to be a woman who had, as it were, a complete human form in her womb. And behold, by the secret design of the Creator on high, that form gave the movement of living motion. A fiery sphere with no features of a human body took possession of the heart of that form, touched its brain, and poured itself through all its limbs. Then that human form, brought to life in this way, came forth from the woman's womb, and it changed its color according to the movements the sphere had within it. And I saw many whirlwinds assail one such sphere dwelling in a human body and bend it down to the earth. But it regained its strength, raised itself up bravely, and bravely resisted them, and with groaning it lamented thus:

1.4.1 I, a stranger—where am I? In the shadow of death. And by what way am I going? By the way of error. And what consolation do I have? Only what strangers have. I ought to have had a tabernacle adorned with squared stones brighter than the sun and the stars. The setting sun and the setting stars were not meant to shine in it. Angelic glory was meant to be there, for topaz was to be its foundation and every gem its structure, its stairs were to be set of crystal and its streets paved with gold. For I ought to be a companion of the angels, since I am a living breath of life that God sent into the dry clay. So I ought to know God and perceive him. But alas! When my tabernacle realized that with its eyes it could look down every road, it set its instrument toward the north. Ah! Ah![9] There I was captured and robbed of my eyes and of the joy of knowledge, my garment torn to pieces, and so I was driven from my inheritance. I was led into a foreign place that

9 The description echoes the heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation 21. In Hildegard's symbolism the north is the region of the devil and of evil.

lacks all beauty and honor, and there I was subjected to the worst slavery.

1.4.2 Those who had captured me struck me with their fists and made me eat with the pigs. They sent me into a desert place and offered me the bitterest herbs dipped in honey to eat. After that they stretched me on a winepress and afflicted me with many torments. Then they stripped me of my clothes, inflicted many blows on me, and handed me over to the hunt. There the worst and most venomous serpents, such as scorpions and asps and the like, caught me and sprinkled me all over with their venom, so that I became utterly enfeebled and weak. Then they mocked me and said, "Where is your honor now?" Ah! Then I trembled all over, and with a great groan of grief I said silently to myself: Oh, where am I? Ah! How did I come here? And what comforter shall I seek in this captivity? How shall I break these chains? Oh, what eye could look upon my wounds? And what nostrils could bear this foul stench? Or what hands will anoint them with oil? Ah! Who will show mercy to my pain? Let heaven hear my cry, then, and let the earth tremble at my grief, and let everything that lives bend down in pity toward my captivity. For the bitterest pain presses on me, since I am a stranger without consolation and without help. Oh, who will comfort me, since even my mother has forsaken me because I strayed from the way of salvation? Who will help me but God? When I remember you, O mother Zion, in whom I should have dwelt, I look upon the bitterest slavery to which I am subjected. And when I call to mind every kind of music that is in you, I attend to my wounds.[10] But when I also remember the joy and gladness of your glory, then I loathe the poisons with which I am infected. Oh, where shall I turn? And where shall I flee? My pain is beyond counting, for if I persist in these evils, I shall be the companion of those with whom I lived shamefully in the land of Babylon. And where are you, O my mother Zion? Alas for me, that I so unhappily withdrew from you! If I did not know you, I

10 Zion, the hill of Jerusalem, here stands for the heavenly city, the soul's true home.

would bear my pain more lightly. But now I will flee my most wicked companions, for unhappy Babylon has set me on a leaden scale and crushed me under enormous beams, so that I can scarcely breathe. And when I pour out my tears and my groans to you, O my mother, unhappy Babylon sends forth such a roar of rushing waters that you do not heed my voice.[11] So with great care I will seek narrow ways by which I may escape my most wicked companions and my unhappy captivity. When I had said this, I slipped away along a narrow path and hid myself in a little hollow facing north, weeping most bitterly because I had lost my mother. There I considered all my pain and all my wounds, and, weeping and weeping, I shed such floods of tears that all the pain and all the bruising of my wounds was drenched and soaked by them. And behold, the sweetest fragrance, like a gentle breeze sent from my mother, filled my nostrils. Oh, how many groans and how many tears I poured out then, when I felt that small consolation near! And I cried out so loudly, weeping abundantly for joy, that even the mountain in whose hollow I had hidden was shaken by it. And I said: "O mother, O mother Zion, what will become of me at last? And where is your noble daughter now? Oh, how long, how long am I to be without your motherly sweetness, you who had gently nourished me with many delights?" And I took such delight in these tears that it was as if I were seeing my mother. But my enemies heard my cries and said: "Where is she whom until now we have kept in our company at our will, who until now has done all that we willed? Look, now she is calling on the dwellers of heaven. So let us rouse all our arts and guard her with such zeal and such care that she can never escape us, since we had already made her wholly subject to us. If we do this, she will follow us again." But I secretly left the hollow in which I had hidden, longing to go to some height where my enemies could not find me. But they set against me a sea of such seething heat that I could in no way wade across it. There was a bridge there too,

11 Babylon, the city of Israel's exile in the Bible, stands here for the world of sin and captivity.

but so small and narrow that I could not cross by it either. At the far end of that sea there appeared a range of mountains with peaks so sharp that I felt no path could be found there either. And I said: "Oh, what shall I do now, wretched as I am? Just now I felt a little of my mother's sweetness, and so I thought she wished to lead me back to her. But ah! Will she abandon me again? Ah! Where shall I turn? For if I now fall back into my former captivity, I shall be more of a laughingstock to my enemies than before, because I wailed faithfully to my mother and felt a little of the sweetness of her gentleness, and now I have been abandoned by her again." Yet through the sweetness I had felt coming from my mother, I still had such strength that I turned to the east and began once more to attempt the narrowest paths. But those paths were so hedged with thorns and thistles and other such obstacles that I could scarcely set a foot in them. Still, at last, with the greatest labor and sweat, I barely made my way through them, and that labor brought on such exhaustion that I could scarcely breathe. So at last, utterly weary, I came out onto the summit of the mountain in which I had hidden before, and I bent down toward its valley. As I was about to descend, asps, scorpions, dragons, and other such serpents rushed at me together and hissed at me. Terrified, I let out loud wails, saying: "O mother, where are you? "I would grieve more lightly if I had not felt the sweetness of your visit before, since now I shall fall again into the captivity in which I had long lain. Where, then, is your help now?" Then I heard my mother's voice saying to me:

1.4.3 "O daughter, run! For wings to fly with have been given to you by the mightiest Giver, whom no one can resist. So fly swiftly over all these obstacles." Strengthened by great consolation, I took up those wings and swiftly leapt over all those poisonous and deadly things. And I came to a tabernacle that was built entirely, on the inside, of the strongest steel. I entered it and did works of brightness, whereas before I had done works of darkness. In that tabernacle, toward the north, I set up a column of unpolished iron, on which I hung fans of various feathers that

moved this way and that; and finding manna, I ate it. Toward the east I built a bulwark of squared stones, and kindling a fire in it, I drank wine mixed with myrrh, together with new wine.[12] Toward the south I built a tower of squared stones, in which I hung red shields, and in its windows I placed trumpets made of ivory. In the middle of that tower I poured out honey, and from it, with other spices, I made a precious ointment, so that a very great fragrance spread from it through the whole circuit of the tabernacle. Toward the west I set no work, because that side was turned toward the world. Meanwhile, as I was busy with this labor, my enemies seized their quivers and attacked my tabernacle with their arrows. But I was so intent on the work I was doing that I paid no attention to their madness until the doors of the tabernacle were full of arrows. Yet none of the arrows damaged the door or could pierce the steel of the tabernacle, and so I could not be harmed by them either. When they perceived this, they sent forth a great flood of waters to overthrow me and my tabernacle, but in this malice of theirs they achieved nothing. So I boldly mocked them, saying: "The craftsman who built this tabernacle was wiser and stronger than you. So gather up your arrows and lay them down, for from now on they will win you no victory over me for your will. Look—what wounds do they show? With much pain and toil I have fought many battles against you when you wanted to hand me over to death. Yet you could not, because I was armed with the strongest weapons, and I brandished sharp swords against you and defended myself vigorously from you. Withdraw, then, withdraw, for you will not be able to hold me any longer."

### A SOUL AT WAR WITH ITS BODY

*A second soul describes its struggle with the body's desires and with the devil's doubts.*

1.4.4 But I, fragile and unlearned, also saw many whirlwinds rush against another sphere, wanting to throw it down, but they

12 Manna was the food God gave the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16).

could not, for it resisted strongly and gave them no room to rage. Yet it spoke thus in lament: Although I am a poor little creature, I have been given a great office. Oh, what am I? And what is the complaint of my cry? I have been placed as a living breath of life in a human being, in a tabernacle of marrow, veins, bones, and flesh, so that I give that tabernacle its vigor and carry it about everywhere in its movements. But alas! Its sensuality brings forth filth, lewdness, wantonness of conduct, and every kind of vice. Ah! Oh, with what great groaning I lament this! When I have a prosperous life in the works of my tabernacle, the devil's persuasion meets me, ensnaring me in everything and lifting me so high on the breath of pride that I often say: "I want to act according to the appetite of the powers of my earth, for in my tabernacle I understand all works." But I am so hindered by its desire that I do not discern my works until I feel cruel wounds within me. Oh, what lamentation I utter then! And I say: "O God, did you not create me? Look, vile earth oppresses me." And so do I take flight in it? How so? When my tabernacle has carnal desire, then, because I take pleasure in the deed, I carry out that deed with it. But reason, which flourishes in me together with knowledge, shows me that I was created by God. In this reason I also perceive that Adam, when he had transgressed the divine command, hid himself in fear. So I too, in fear, hide myself from the face of God when I feel that my works in my tabernacle are contrary to God. But when I weigh them on the leaden scale of sin, I despise all the works that burn with carnal desires. Alas for me, wandering as I am! How shall I hold out in these dangers? And when the devil's persuasion attacks me, saying, "Is this good, which you do not know, nor see, nor are able to do?"—what will happen then? And when it says again, "What you know, and understand, and are able to do—why do you abandon it?"—what shall I do then? Full of pain I will answer: Ah, wretched me! For through Adam harmful poisons were breathed into me, when he transgressed the divine command and, cast out onto the earth, joined fleshly tabernacles together. In the taste he tasted in the apple through dis-

obedience, a harmful sweetness thrusts itself into blood and flesh and so produces the pollution of vices. Hence I feel the sin of the flesh in me, and I neglect the most pure God, because I have been made drunk through guilt. But I must not follow what the taste of my tabernacle holds. For because Adam was created pure and simple by God when he first appeared, I fear God, knowing that through him I was created pure and simple. But now, through the evil habit of vices, I am turned to restlessness. Oh, in all these things I am a stranger and a wanderer!

1.4.5 Therefore whirlwinds of many different sounds bring forth many lies, which rise up in me, saying: "Who are you? And what are you saying? And what kind of battles are these that you are waging? You are wretched. For you do not know whether your work is good or evil. Where will you go in the end, and who will keep you safe? And what are these errors that are driving you to madness? Will you do what delights you, or flee what distresses you? Oh! What will you do, since you know this and are ignorant of that? For what delights you is not permitted to you, and what distresses you is what God's command compels you to do. And how do you know whether these things are so? It would be better for you if you had never existed." And once these whirlwinds have risen up in me like this, I begin to walk another path, one that is hard for my flesh, because I begin to practice justice. But again I doubt within myself whether this comes from the gift of the Holy Spirit or not, and I say: "This is useless." And then I want to fly above the clouds. How so? I want to climb above my understanding and to begin things I cannot finish. But when I attempt this, I stir up the deepest sadness in myself. So I complete no work, either on the heights of holiness or on the plain of good will. Instead I feel within me the unrest of doubt, despair, grief and the oppression of all things. And when the devil's persuasion unsettles me in this way—oh, what calamity then overwhelms me! For all the evils that are or can be, in reproach, in cursing, in the mortification of body and soul, in foul words against the purity, salvation and loftiness that are in God—all these come upon me, wretched as I am. From this, too,

this wickedness rises up against me: all happiness and every good, in human beings as well as in God, becomes burdensome and heavy to me, setting death before me rather than life. Ah! How wretched is the struggle that forces itself on me like this, from toil to toil, from sorrow to sorrow, from division to division, taking all happiness away from me!

1.4.6 But where does the evil of these errors come from? From this. The ancient serpent has in himself cunning, deceitful craft and the deadly poison of wickedness. With his cunning he thrusts on me obstinacy in sin, taking the fear of the Lord away from my understanding, so that I do not fear to sin, and I say: "Who is God? I do not know who God is." With his deceitful craft he brings a blockage on me, so that I am blocked fast in evil. And with the deadly poison of wickedness he takes spiritual joy away from me, so that I cannot rejoice even in God. And so he brings on me the doubt of despair, in which I doubt whether I can be saved or not. Oh, what are these tabernacles, which endure such dangers in the devil's deception? But when, by God's gift, I remember the things that God has created, then amid these oppressions I answer these diabolical persuasions in this way: "I will not yield to the frailty of earth, but will wage the fiercest wars." How so? When my tabernacle wants to do works of injustice, I will defend myself by crushing marrow, blood and flesh in the wisdom of patience, as a strong lion defends himself, and as a serpent hides in its cave to escape the deathblow. For I must neither take in the devil's arrows nor carry out the will of the flesh. How so?

1.4.7 When anger tries to bear down on my tabernacle, I look to the goodness of God, whom anger has never touched. And so I become gentler than the air, which waters the dryness of the earth with its mildness, and I have spiritual joy when the virtues begin to show their vigor in me. And so I feel the goodness of God. When hatred tries to blacken me, I look to the mercy and the martyrdom of the Son of God. And so I restrain my flesh, taking in through faithful remembrance the sweet fragrance of roses that spring from thorns, and so I recognize my Redeemer.

But when pride strives to set up in me the tower of its vanity without a foundation of rock, and to raise in me that height which wants to have no equal but always to seem higher than the rest— oh, who will help me then, since the ancient serpent, who wanted to be above all and fell into death, is trying to throw me down? Then I say in grief: "Where is my king and my God? What good can I do without God? Nothing." And so I look to God, who gave me life, and I run to that most blessed Virgin who crushed the pride of the ancient cave. So, having become a most solid stone in God's building, I can no longer be overcome by the most ravenous wolf, who was strangled by the hook of divinity. And so I come to know the sweetest good—that is, humility in the height of God, and the remembrance, among all, of the humility of the most blessed Virgin—and I sense the sweetness of unfailing balsam. And so, rejoicing in God's sweetness as if I were amid the fragrance of all spices, I cast down the other vices too with the mighty strength of humility.[13]

### DEATH, JUDGMENT AND GOD'S KNOWLEDGE

*A soul leaves its body for judgment, and the voice explains the radiance as God's foreknowledge.*

1.4.8 And then I, a poor little creature, saw that another sphere, contracting itself from the outlines of its form, loosened its fastenings, drew itself away from them with a groan, and in grief broke apart its dwelling. And it said: "I will go out from my tabernacle. But I, wretched and full of grief, where shall I go? By dreadful and fearsome paths to judgment, where I shall be judged. For I shall show the works I have done in my tabernacle, and there I shall receive recompense according to my merits. Oh, how great the fear! Oh, how great the anguish there will be for me there!" And as it was loosening itself in this way, certain

13 The most blessed Virgin is Mary, who in medieval reading crushes the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). The "hook of divinity" recalls an image found in Gregory the Great: Christ's humanity as bait concealing the hook of his divinity, on which the devil was caught.

spirits came, both bright and shadowy. They were companions of the way of life by which it had moved in its dwelling, and they were waiting for its release, so that once it had freed itself they might lead it away with them. And I heard a living voice saying to them: "Let it be led from place to place according to its works." And again I heard a voice from heaven saying to me: "The blessed and ineffable Trinity revealed itself to the world when the Father sent into the world his Only-Begotten, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin. He did so in order that human beings, born in great diversity and bound by many sins, might be brought back through him to the way of truth; and that, released from the bonds of their bodily mass and carrying good and holy works with them, they might attain the joys of the heavenly inheritance."

1.4.9 So that you may grasp this more deeply, O human, and judge it more clearly: you see a very great and most serene radiance, flaming as it were with many eyes, with four corners turned toward the four quarters of the world. This signifies the knowledge of God, great in its mysteries and pure in its manifestations. It shines with the greatest depth of clarity and stretches the keenest edges of its fourfold stability to the four regions of the world. There it foresees most keenly both those who are cast away and those who are gathered in as they come. And it shows the mystery of the supreme majesty, which, as you perceive, is displayed to you in the figure of the utmost height and depth. In it there also appears another radiance, like the dawn, holding within itself the brightness of a purple brilliance. For the knowledge of God also shows this: that the Only-Begotten of the Father, taking flesh from the Virgin, deigned to shed his blood in the pure whiteness of faith for the salvation of humankind. In this knowledge of God both good and evil are shown, since it is clouded by no obscurity in anything. But you, O human, say: "What will a human being do, since God has foreknown everything that person will do?" To which I reply:

1.4.10 O fool, in the wickedness of your heart you imitate the one who first refused the way of truth and set a lie against the

truth, when he wanted to make himself like the highest goodness. Who could hide the beginning and end of all things whatsoever from the One who is, who was, and who will remain? But who are you? You are an ember of ash. And what did you know when you did not yet exist? Yet you, whose beginning is lamentable and whose end is miserable, contradict what you neither know nor ought to know: the incomprehensible beauty of God's justice, in which no suspicion of injustice is found, nor ever has been found, nor ever will be. O fool, where do you think the father of iniquity is, whom you imitate? What does this mean? When pride puffs you up above the stars, you want to be raised above the other creatures, and above the angels, who fulfill God's commands through all things and above all things. But you will fall just as he fell, who set a lie against the truth. For he loved the lie, and so, wrapped in death, he plunged into the abyss. Therefore, O human, pay attention. You do not look upon the love with which God set you free, nor notice how many good things God constantly bestows on you, nor consider how he calls you back from death; and so you often fall into sins, where you love death more than life. But if you then at last recall to mind the Scriptures and the teachings that your ancient and faithful fathers set before you—that you must avoid evil and do good—and if you then say from the depths of your heart, "I have sinned grievously; therefore I must return with fitting repentance to my Father, who created me," then your Father receives you kindly, takes you back into his bosom and embraces you with tender arms.[14] Now, however, you scorn to know the blessedness that God has set before you, and you refuse to hear or to do God's justice. If it were possible, would you call God's judgment unjust rather than just? Had you not been redeemed by the blood of the Son of God, you would lie lost in perdition. But God's judgment is true and just. So, O human, what profit do you gain by tearing yourself to pieces over my judgment? In the choir of angels and in my chosen vineyard rises the praise of those who praise and say: "Glory to you, O Lord, who are just

14 The return to the Father echoes the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).

and true." My judgment is not contradicted by them, since they are just. But what did it profit the devil to set himself against me?[15] When he saw that he had great brightness, he wanted to exalt himself above all, and a countless host of proud spirits consented to him. Divine power, in the zeal of its justice, cast them all down together with him. In the same way all are cast down who, persisting in evil, try to set God's justice aside, since they labor to pervert the highest good into the perversity of wickedness. Therefore God has in no way established what is unjust; rather, he has ordered all things rightly in the equity of his goodness.

1.4.11 Those people, too, who in their unbelief cast God away and made carved images for themselves—images the devil entered in order to delude them—rose up in the madness of this kind of vanity after the generation had passed away to whom Adam and Eve had told how they were made by God and how they were driven out of paradise. Others followed them in the same perversity and worshiped God's creation rather than its Creator, and they thought that things which do not live governed their life. So let those who are still defiled by that unbelief abandon their folly and turn faithfully to the one who crushed the devil's snares, putting off the oldness of ignorance and embracing the newness of life,

1.4.12 as my servant Ezekiel urges, saying: "Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit." This means: O you who wish to persevere in uprightness in the sun of righteousness, whose paths the blessed sheep run, cast out from the conscience of your heart the prying into those hidden things that are of no use to you for necessary and saving doctrine. In them you wanted to fly to a vain height, when in fact you were plunged into a steep pit where no order dwells, but only that horrible confusion that does not know God. And when you have done this, follow the way of truth for your salvation. There you

15 The words of praise echo Revelation 15:3 and 16:7.

will find in your heart the newness of the glowing heaven, and you will possess it in your spirit as a life-giving breath.[16]

### THE CHEESES AND THE CHILD IN THE WOMB

*The voice explains the milk and cheeses as human seed, and how the soul brings the child to life.*

1.4.13 You also see on the earth people carrying milk in earthen vessels and making cheeses from it. These are the people in the world, men as well as women, who have human seed in their bodies, from which the race of the various peoples is begotten. Part of it is thick, and from it firm cheeses are made. For that seed, usefully and well cooked and tempered in its strength, produces vigorous people, to whom great brightness of spiritual as well as bodily gifts is granted, in great fathers and eminent persons. So in their works they flourish visibly, before God and before people, in attaining prudence, discernment and usefulness of life, since the devil finds no place in them. Part of it is thin, and from it weak cheeses curdle. For this seed, imperfectly cooked and tempered in its frailty, brings forth frail people, who for the most part are found foolish, lukewarm and useless in their works, both before God and before the world, and who do not seek God vigorously. Part of it, too, is mixed with corruption, and from it bitter cheeses are made. For that seed, badly brought forth in the weakness of its mixing and uselessly blended, produces ill-formed people, who often have bitterness, hardship and oppression of heart, so that they cannot raise their minds to higher things. Yet many of them become useful. They suffer many storms and disquiets, both in their hearts and in their behavior, but they come through as victors; for if they gave in to their disquiet, they would make themselves lukewarm and useless. So God helps them by restraining them, and leads them to the way of salvation,

1.4.14 as it is written: "I will kill and I will make alive; I will strike and I will heal, and there is no one who can deliver out of

16 Ezekiel 18:31. The "sun of righteousness" recalls Malachi 4:2.

my hand." This means: I who am, having neither beginning nor end, destroy shameful people in their deeds—those who are worn down in vices by the filth of the devil, and those who, in the portions of the unhappy seedbed, are deceived through the devil's caves. Oh, how cunning is the viper's jaw that puffs them up so that death steals into them! Therefore I take away from them the prosperity of this world, so that they are killed by the many hardships they cannot overcome, but which by just judgment are always with them.[17] But I, who am cast down by no malice, also often make these people live, though miserably, in another respect: living in them, I draw their breath of life upward away from earthly things, so that it does not perish in them. At times I also afflict with blows, through much infirmity in the toil of their life, those who in pride long to climb to a height harmful to their minds, thinking that no one can cast them down. And I, who am present everywhere, sometimes raise them upward in this way to true health, so that they are not consumed in deceptive dangers by deceptive vanities. But in all this there is no human being and no other creature that can turn aside such works of mine by its own cunning or insolent power; for there is no one who can resist my will and my justice.

1.4.15 Often, too, as you see, the union of man and woman takes place in forgetfulness of me and to the devil's mockery, and then children are born with contracted limbs. This happens so that, because their parents transgressed my commands, they may be tormented in their own children and return to me in repentance. Often, too, I allow this wondrous formation to happen in human beings for my glory and that of my saints, so that when those whose bodies are bent in this way are restored to health through the help of my chosen ones, my name may be glorified all the more ardently by people. But those who bind themselves by this law, so that they seek the honor of virginity, ascend like the dawn to the heavenly secrets, because for love of my Son they cut themselves off from the delights of their bodies.

1.4.16 But you see what seems to be a woman who has, as it were, the complete form of a human being in her womb. This means that after a woman has conceived human seed, the infant is formed with its limbs complete in the hidden chamber of her womb. And behold, by the secret disposition of the Creator on high, that form gives the movement of living motion. For when, by the secret and hidden command and will of God, the infant in its mother's womb has received the spirit at the fitting time rightly appointed by God, it shows by the movement of its body that it is alive—just as the earth opens and brings forth the flowers of its fruit when the dew has fallen on it. Then something like a fiery sphere, having none of the outlines of a human body, takes possession of the heart of that form. For the soul, burning in the fire of profound knowledge, discerns various things within the circuit of its comprehension. It does not have the form of human limbs, since it is neither bodily nor perishable as the human body is. It strengthens the human heart, which, being as it were the foundation of the body, rules the whole body and, like the firmament of heaven, holds together what is below and covers what is above. It also touches the human brain, since in its powers it savors not only earthly but also heavenly things, when it knows God wisely. And it pours itself through all the limbs of the human being, since it gives vigor to the marrow, the veins and all the limbs of the whole body, just as a tree imparts sap and greenness from its root to all its branches.[18] Then that human form, brought to life in this way, comes out of the woman's womb, and it changes its color according to the movements that the sphere has within that human form. For after a human being has received the vital spirit in the mother's womb and so been born, and has set its activity in motion according to the works that the soul performs with the body, its merits also come about according to these

17 Deuteronomy 32:39, from the Song of Moses.

18 Greenness (*viriditas*) is Hildegard's characteristic word for the vital, life-giving force at work in all creation.

works; for it clothes itself in brightness from good deeds and in darkness from evil ones.

1.4.17 The soul also shows its powers according to the powers of the body. In a person's infancy it brings forth simplicity, and in youth strength. In full maturity, when all a person's veins are full, it displays its mightiest powers in wisdom—just as a tree, tender in its first shoot, then shows fruit on itself, and at last brings it forth in full usefulness. But afterward, in a person's old age, when the marrow and veins have begun to bend toward weakness, the soul shows gentler powers, as if from weariness of human knowledge—just as the sap of a tree, when winter is coming on, draws back in its branches and leaves, and the tree in its old age begins to bend.

# Book Two

*The Redeemer; the Trinity as light, fire and a sapphire figure; the Church joined to Christ on the cross, and the Eucharist.*

## VISION ONE: THE REDEEMER

*A living fire creates the world; Adam falls into darkness, and a radiant man rises from the dawn.*

2.1 And I, a human being not versed in letters as strong lions are, nor taught by their instruction, but remaining in softness, a fragile rib, filled with a mystical breath, saw what seemed to be a most luminous fire. It was incomprehensible, inextinguishable, wholly living and wholly existing as life. Within it was a flame the color of air, which burned ardently with a gentle breath, and this flame clung to the luminous fire as inseparably as the inner organs cling within a human being. And I saw that the flame flashed like lightning and glowed white-hot. And suddenly a dark, round expanse of air of great size arose. The flame struck it several blows, drawing a spark from it each time, until the air was brought to perfection, and so heaven and earth shone out in their full establishment. Then, in that fire and heat, the same flame stretched itself out toward a small clod of muddy earth lying at the bottom of the air. It warmed the clod so that it made it flesh and blood, and it breathed on it so that it became a living soul. When this was done, the luminous fire, through that same flame burning ardently with a gentle breath, offered the human a pure white flower, hanging in the flame as dew hangs on grass. The human sensed its scent with his nostrils, but he did not taste it with his mouth or touch it with his hands. And so he turned away and fell into the thickest darkness, from which he

could not lift himself up. And that darkness grew, spreading more and more through that air.[1] Then three great stars appeared in that darkness, joined to one another in their brilliance. After them came many others, small as well as great, shining with abundant radiance, and then a very great star, beaming with wondrous brightness and directing its brilliance toward the flame I have described. And on the earth there also appeared a brilliance like the dawn, into which the flame above was wondrously poured, yet without being separated from the luminous fire described above. And in that brilliance of the dawn a supreme will was kindled. When I wished to consider the kindling of this will more closely, a secret seal was set upon me in this vision, and I heard a voice from on high saying to me: "You will not be able to see anything more of this mystery, except as is granted to you for the miracle of believing." And I saw a most splendid human being coming forth from that same brilliance of the dawn. He poured out his brightness on the darkness and was beaten back by it. Turning to the red of blood and the pallor of whiteness, he struck the darkness with such force that the human who lay in it, appearing at that touch, shone, and so rose up and came out. And so that splendid human who had come forth from the dawn, appearing in a brightness beyond what human tongue can express, made his way into the loftiest height of countless glory, where he shone magnificently in the fullness of every kind of abundance and fragrance. And I heard a voice from that living fire saying to me: "You who are fragile earth, and, as one bearing the name of woman, untaught in all the learning of human teachers—that is, in reading letters with the understanding of the learned—but only touched by my light, which touches you inwardly with a burning like the blazing sun: cry out, tell, and write these mysteries of mine that you see and hear in mystical vision. So do not be timid, but say what you understand in the spirit, as I speak it through you. Then those will be put to shame who ought to

1 The phrase "living soul" echoes Genesis 2:7, where God breathes into the first human, who becomes "a living soul."

show my people the way of uprightness, but who, out of the perversity of their ways, refuse to speak openly the justice they know. They are unwilling to refrain from their evil desires, which cling to them as though they were their masters, and which make them flee from the face of the Lord and blush to speak the truth. "Therefore, O little one, you who are taught inwardly in your mind by mystical inspiration, although you are held down by the male sex because of the transgression of Eve, speak nevertheless the fiery work that is shown to you in most certain vision. For the living God, who created all things through his Word, has through that same Word made flesh brought back to faithful salvation the wretched human creature that had plunged itself into darkness."

2.1.1 What does this mean? That most luminous fire which you see signifies the almighty and living God, who in his most clear serenity is never darkened by any wickedness. He remains incomprehensible, because he cannot be divided by any division, nor can he be comprehended as he is, whether by beginning or by end or by any spark of knowledge of his creatures. He is inextinguishable, because he is that fullness which no end has ever touched. He is wholly living, because there is absolutely nothing hidden from him that he does not know. And he is wholly existing as life, because everything that lives receives its life from him,

2.1.2 as Job, inspired by me, shows when he says: "Who does not know that the hand of the Lord has made all these things? In his hand is the soul of every living thing and the spirit of all human flesh." What does this mean? No creature is so dull in its nature that it does not know the changes of its fullness in those conditions in which it stands fruitful. How so?[2] Heaven holds light; light, air; air, the birds; and the earth nourishes green things, green things fruit, and fruit animals. All of these bear witness that a most mighty hand set them in place—that is, the supreme might of the Ruler of all. In the capacity of his power he has so wrought all things that they lack nothing for their

2 Job 12:9–10.

uses. And in the omnipotence of the same Maker lies the movement of all living and earthly creatures, such as the beasts that seek the earth among earthly things and do not have within them the rationality of God's breath of life. In it too lies the stirring of the spirits that dwell in human flesh, in which there is rationality, discernment, and wisdom. How so? The soul goes round among earthly affairs, laboring in many different ways, as the habits of the flesh demand. The spirit, however, raises itself up in two ways: either sighing, groaning, and longing for God, or seeking lordship, rule, and choice in various matters, as if by command; for it has discernment in its rationality. Hence the human being also contains within himself the likeness of heaven and earth. How so? He has a circle in which clarity, the breath of life, and rationality appear, as the lights are seen in the sky. He has a spirit that moves swiftly through every sense and motion, as the air holds the birds. He also has a receptacle for moisture, in which moisture is seen and sprouting and bringing forth appear, as on the earth there are green things, fruit-bearing things, and animals. What does this mean? O human, you are wholly present in every creature, and you forget your Creator. The creation subject to you obeys him as was ordained for it, and you transgress his commandments.

2.1.3 But you see that the same fire has within it a flame the color of air, which burns ardently with a gentle breath and is as inseparably within that luminous fire as the inner organs are within a human being. This is the infinite Word, who was in eternity before creation was established in time. In the ardor of love, in the course of the passing ages, he was to be wondrously made flesh in the dawn of blessed virginity, without the stain and burden of sin, through the power of the sweetness of the Holy Spirit. Yet this was to happen in such a way that, as he was indivisibly in the Father before taking on flesh, so he would remain inseparably in him after assuming humanity. For as a human being is not without the life-giving touch along the passage of the heart, so the Father's life-giving Word was by no means to be separated from him.

2.1.4 And why is he called the Word? Through a word bound to place, which is transitory in the earthly dust of a human being, the orders of a commander are wisely understood by those who know and foresee the command of the one who gives it. In the same way, through the Word not bound to place, which is not transitory because of the inextinguishable life that lives in eternity, the power of the Father is truly known by the various creatures of the world, which perceive and understand him in the origin in which they were created. And as the power and honor of a human being are known through a word of office, so the holiness and goodness of the Father shine out through the divine Word.

2.1.5 You see how that flame flashes like lightning and glows white-hot. This means that the Word of God showed his power, as if blazing up, when all creation was made through him; and he glowed white, as it were, when he was made flesh in the dawn and whiteness of virginity. And from him all the virtues flowed down drop by drop into the knowledge of God, when the human being came back to life in the salvation of souls.

2.1.6 But a dark, round expanse of air of great size also suddenly arose. This is the instrument of all these things in the obscurity of imperfection—that is, not yet lit up by the fullness of creatures. And it is round because it lies under the incomprehensible power of God, and the divinity is nowhere absent from it. Yet it rose in the supreme might of God, raised up as if in the blink of an eye by the will on high. The flame struck it several blows like a smith, drawing a spark from it each time, until that air was brought to perfection. For heaven and earth shone out in their full establishment when the one who surpasses all creation, the Word on high, showed the power of his strength from his instrument in creating the creatures that render service. He brought forth the various kinds of creatures, shining in the wondrous origin of their making, as a smith skillfully forges his shapes out of bronze, until those creatures shone in the beauty of their fullness. Above and below they had the beauty and sta-

bility of his perfect creation, for the higher things shone from the lower, and the lower from the higher.[3]

### THE FALL AND THE REDEEMER EXPLAINED

*The voice explains Adam's refusal of the flower, the patriarchs and prophets, and Christ's birth, death and rising.*

2.1.7 Then, in that fire and heat, the same flame stretches itself out toward a small clod of muddy earth lying at the bottom of the air. This means that, when the other creatures had been created, the Word of God, in the strong will of the Father and in the love of the sweetness on high of the Holy Spirit, looked upon the fragile matter of the soft and tender frailty of humanity—of all the human beings, bad as well as good, who were to be begotten. It lay held fast in the depths of its insensibility and heaviness, not yet stirred by an effective and life-giving breath. Cherishing and warming it, he makes it flesh and blood, pouring heat into it with power; for the earth is the fleshly matter of the human being and nourishes him with its fruit, as a mother nourishes her children with milk. And God breathed on it so that the human being was made a living soul; for he stirred it by power from on high and wondrously brought forth from it a human being with discernment in soul and body.

2.1.8 When this was done, the luminous fire, through that flame burning ardently with a gentle breath, offered the human a pure white flower hanging in that flame as dew hangs on grass. For when Adam had been created, the Father, who is the most luminous light, gave Adam, through his Word and in the Holy Spirit, the sweet command of shining obedience, which clings to that Word in an abundant shower of fruitful virtue. For through that Word the sweetest moisture of holiness dripped down from the Father in the Holy Spirit, producing the greatest and most abundant fruit, just as pure moisture coming down on grass makes it fertile for abundant growth. The human sensed its

3 The Latin *ex aere* can mean either "out of bronze" or "out of air," a play on the expanse of air in the vision.

scent with his nostrils, but he did not taste it with his mouth or touch it with his hands. For he drew in the precept of the law with the understanding of wisdom, as if through his nostrils, but he did not fully take the force of its inner perfection into his mouth, nor did he fulfill it by the work of his hands in the fullness of blessedness. And so he turned away and fell into the thickest darkness, from which he could not lift himself up. For at the devil's prompting he turned his back on the divine command and plunged into the abyss of death, because he did not seek God either in faith or in deeds. So, weighed down by sins, he could not rise to the true knowledge of God until the one came who obeyed his Father fully and without sin. But that darkness grew, spreading more and more through that air. The power of death in the world kept increasing in the breadth of vices, as human knowledge moved into the variety of many vices and foul sins that arose through error.

2.1.9 Three great stars appeared in that darkness, joined to one another in their brilliance, and after them many others, small as well as great, shining with abundant radiance. These are the great lights that prefigure the Trinity on high: namely Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They embrace one another both in faithful deeds and in the bond of the flesh, and they strike back the darkness of the world with their announcements. After them follow very many others, the major and minor prophets, shining with great and marvelous miracles.[4]

2.1.10 Then there appears a very great star, sparkling with wondrous brightness and directing its brilliance toward the flame mentioned before. This is the foremost prophet, namely John the Baptist. He shone in mighty works through his most faithful and most radiant deeds, and in them he pointed out the true Word, that is, the Son of God. For he did not yield to wickedness but trampled on it vigorously and bravely in works of justice.[5]

4 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the patriarchs of Genesis—grandfather, father, and son—hence their "bond of the flesh."

5 John the Baptist, the prophet who in the Gospels baptizes Jesus and points him out to his followers.

2.1.11 On the earth a brilliance like the dawn appears, into which the flame above was wondrously poured, yet without being separated from the luminous fire described above. This means that God planted a great radiance of glowing light in the place of things that are begotten, and sent his Word into it with perfect will, yet without its being separated from him. He gave him as abundant fruit, and brought him forth as a great fountain, from which every faithful throat that drinks will never again be parched with thirst. And so in that brilliance of the dawn a supreme will was kindled; for in the brightness of a rosy serenity the power of the great and ancient counsel was made known, so that all the legions mentioned above and the ranks of the heavenly spirits marveled at this in most luminous happiness.

2.1.12 But you, O human, when you desire to know the height of this counsel more fully, in a human way, find a barrier of concealment set against you. For you must not search into the secrets of God further than it pleases the divine majesty to reveal them for love of those who faithfully believe.

2.1.13 You see a most splendid human being coming forth from the brilliance of the dawn, who pours out his brightness on the darkness and is beaten back by it. Turning to the red of blood and the pallor of whiteness, he struck back that darkness with such force that the human who lay in it, appearing at his very touch, shone, and so rose up and came out. This signifies the Word of God, made flesh inviolably in the whiteness of undefiled virginity and born without pain, yet not separated from the Father. How so? When the Son of God was born into the world from his mother, he appeared in heaven in the Father. And so the angels at once trembled and, rejoicing, sang honey-sweet praises together. This Son of God, living in the world without stain of sin, sent forth the most luminous teaching of blessedness and salvation into the darkness of unbelief. But he was rejected by an unbelieving people and led to his passion; he shed his rose-red blood and tasted the gloom of death in the body. By this he overcame the devil and freed from hell his

elect, who had been held and laid low there, and by the touch of his redemption he mercifully led them back to their inheritance, which they had lost in Adam. When they came into their inheritance, drums and harps and all the concord of musicians were roused in countless beauty. For the human being who had lain in perdition, now raised up in blessedness, had escaped death, set free by power from on high,

2.1.14 as I said through my servant Hosea: "The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hidden. The pains of a woman in labor shall come upon him; he is an unwise son. For now he shall not stand in the crushing of the children. From the hand of death I will free them; from death I will redeem them. I will be your death, O death; I will be your bite, O hell." What does this mean? The perversity of the devil's wickedness is bound by the force of a binding, so that it does not deserve to be released from the zeal of God's wrath. For God never saw him thinking what is right, and so those who faithfully fear God do not look upon him either. He always exalts himself against God, saying that he is God, always going astray against God, and for that reason speaking against the Christian name.[6] And so his malice is sunk so deep that no medicine of restoration can make his sin worthy of salvation, the sin he impiously committed in the most contemptible pride. Therefore he will remain in enduring pain, like a woman in labor in the anguish of despair, who has lost hope that she can survive the opening of her womb. For this misery will always remain upon him: that he has been cast out of blessedness. The wisdom of children flees from him, because he does not come back to himself, as the prodigal son came back to himself and returned from his iniquity to his father. Therefore he will never have confidence in that crushing by which the children of salvation, through the death of the heavenly Son, crush the death of the most savage iniquity. The cunning serpent himself made that death boil up when he suggested to the

6 Hosea 13:12–14. Hosea was an Israelite prophet of the 8th century BC, and Ephraim is his name for the northern kingdom of Israel.

first human being a deceit the human being had not known.[7] But because the children of the Savior scorn the deadly poison of that suggestion and look to their salvation, I will free them from slavery to idols. From slavery, I say, to idols, which hold deceit in the power of perdition, and for which unbelievers exchange the honor due their Creator, entangling themselves in the devil's snare and carrying out their works according to his will. And so I will redeem from the punishment of hell the souls of those who worship me, that is, the souls of the holy and the just. For no human being could be rescued from the devil's chains, in which humanity was bound by the harshest death for transgressing God's commandments, except through the redemption of the one who was to redeem his chosen with his own blood. There, O death, I will slay you to utter destruction. That in which you think you live I will draw out of you, so that you will be called a useless corpse. For you will lie struck down in your mightiest strength, just as a body deserted by the soul is struck down entirely to its ruin. The fountain of living water will choke you, when blessed souls are mercifully caught up into heavenly blessedness through the new man, who will be innocent of the poisonous deception. Therefore, to your shame, I will also be your bite, O hell, when my power in its great strength strips from you the spoils you seized by fraud. So you too, O death, justly despoiled, will never again appear full of your riches, but pierced with wounds and lying struck down in foulness, you will bear your shame forever.

2.1.15 But, as you see, that shining man who came forth from the dawn appears in a brightness beyond what any human tongue could express. This shows that the most majestic body of the Son of God, born of the most beautiful Virgin and laid in the tomb for three days—to make known that there are three persons in one divinity—was shone upon by the Father's glory. And so it received the Spirit and rose again in a most brilliant immortality that no human being could unfold in thought or word. And the Father showed him, with his wounds laid bare, to the

7 The parable of the prodigal son is told in Luke 15:11–32.

heavenly choirs, saying: "This is my beloved Son, whom I sent to die for the people." Because of this, a joy beyond counting and beyond human understanding was renewed in them. For the blind forgetfulness in which God was unknown was so beaten down that human rationality, which had lain prostrate at the devil's persuasion, was raised up to the knowledge of God. Through the highest blessedness the way of truth was shown to humanity, the way by which it was led back from death to life.[8]

2.1.16 But just as the children of Israel, set free from Egypt, crossed the desert for forty years and came into the land flowing with milk and honey, so the Son of God, rising from death, kindly showed himself for forty days to his disciples, together with the blessed women who sighed after him and longed with great desire to see him. He did this to strengthen them in faith, so that they would not doubt and say: "We have not seen the Lord; so we cannot believe that he is our salvation." Instead he often revealed himself to them, to make them strong so that they would not fall.

2.1.17 And that he rose up to the loftiest height of countless glory, where he shines wondrously in the fullness of every kind of abundance and fragrance: this means that the same Son of God ascended to the Father. To the Father, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, belongs the loftiest and most surpassing height of unspeakable joy and gladness. There the same Son appears gloriously, in an abundance of most brilliant holiness and blessedness, to his faithful, who believe with a pure and simple heart that he is true God and man. For then, too, the new bride of that same Lamb was presented to him in various adornments, with which she is to be adorned in every kind of virtue through the mighty struggle of the whole faithful people, who are to fight against the cunning serpent. But let whoever sees with watchful eyes and hears with attentive ears offer the kiss of

8 The Father's words echo Matthew 3:17 and John 11:50.

embrace to my mystical words, which flow from me, the Living One.[9]

### VISION TWO: THE TRINITY

*Hildegard sees a sapphire-blue human figure within light and fire, an image of the one God in three persons.*

2.2 Then I saw a most radiant light, and in it the appearance of a human being, sapphire in color, all ablaze with a most gentle glowing fire. And that radiant light poured through all of the glowing fire, and the glowing fire through all of the radiant light, and the most radiant light and the glowing fire through the whole appearance of the human being, existing as one light in one power and might. And again I heard that living light saying to me:

2.2.1 This is the meaning of the mysteries of God: that one may clearly discern and understand what that fullness is which has no beginning and lacks nothing, and which with mightiest power planted all the streams of the strong. For if the Lord were empty of his own power, what then would his work be? Surely it would be empty. And so in the perfect work one sees who its maker is.

2.2.2 Therefore you see a most radiant light, which is without beginning and can lack nothing: it signifies the Father. And in it the appearance of a human being, sapphire in color, without any stain of imperfection, envy, or iniquity, reveals the Son, begotten of the Father before time according to his divinity, but afterward, in time, made flesh in the world according to his humanity. This figure is all ablaze with a most gentle glowing fire, and that fire, untouched by any dry and dark mortality, shows the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit the same Only-Begotten of God was conceived according to the flesh and born in time of a virgin, and poured into the world the light of true brightness. And that radiant light pours through all of the glowing fire, and the glow-

9 The bride of the Lamb is the Church, an image drawn from Revelation 19:7 and 21:9.

ing fire through all of the radiant light, and the radiant light and the glowing fire through the whole appearance of the human being, existing as one light in one power and might: this means that the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son are inseparable in the majesty of divinity. The Father is supreme equity, but not without the Son or the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is the kindler of the hearts of the faithful, but not without the Father and the Son; and the Son is the fullness of power, but not without the Father and the Holy Spirit. For the Father is not without the Son, nor the Son without the Father, nor the Father and the Son without the Holy Spirit, nor the Holy Spirit without them. These three persons exist as one God in the one entire divinity of majesty, and the unity of the divinity lives inseparably in these same three persons, because the divinity cannot be split; it always remains inviolable, without any changeableness. And the Father is made known through the Son, the Son through the coming into being of creatures, and the Holy Spirit through that same Son made flesh. How so? The Father is the one who begot the Son before the ages; the Son is the one through whom all things were made by the Father at the beginning of creation; and the Holy Spirit is the one who appeared in the form of a dove at the baptism of the Son of God at the end of the ages.

2.2.3 Therefore let no human being ever forget to call upon me, the one God, in these three persons. For I revealed them to humanity so that humanity might burn all the more fervently with love for me, since for love of humanity I sent my own Son into the world,

2.2.4 as my beloved John testifies, saying: "In this the love of God appeared among us: that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love: not as though we had loved God, but that he first loved us and sent his Son as a propitiation for our sins." What does this mean? [10] In that God loved us, a salvation arose different from the one we had at our first origin, when we were heirs of innocence and holiness. For the Father on high showed his love in our dangers,

10 1 John 4:9–10.

when we had been placed under punishment: by heavenly power he sent his Word, alone in perfect holiness among the children of humankind, into the darkness of the ages. There that Word, working every good thing, by his gentleness led back to life those who had been cast down by the uncleanness of transgression and could not return to the holiness they had lost. What does this mean? For through that very fountain of life came the fatherly love of God's embrace, which brought us up to life and was our helper in dangers. It is the deepest and sweetest brightness, teaching us repentance. How so? God mercifully remembered his great work and his most precious pearl—the human being, I mean, whom he formed from the clay of the earth and into whom he breathed the breath of life. How so? He established life in repentance, whose power will never perish. For the cunning serpent deceived the human being by a proud assault, but God cast him down through repentance, which displays humility. The devil neither knew humility nor practiced it, for he did not know how to rise to the right path. So this salvation of love did not arise from us, for we neither knew how nor had the strength to love God unto salvation. It arose because the Creator and Lord of all so loved the world that for its salvation he sent his Son, the prince and Savior of the faithful, who washed and wiped our wounds. And from him the sweetest medicine exuded, from which all the good things of salvation flow.

### STONE, FLAME AND WORD

*The Trinity is compared to the three powers in a stone, a flame and a word.*

2.2.5 Therefore you too, O human, understand that no unsteadiness of change touches God. For the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son, the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit: three persons living indivisibly in the unity of divinity. How so? There are three powers in a stone, three in a flame, and three in a word. How so? In a stone there is the power of moisture, the power of tangibil-

ity, and a fiery force. It has the power of moisture so that it does not dissolve and crumble; its tangible solidity so that it can provide a dwelling and a defense; and its fiery power so that it is warmed and made firm in its hardness. The moist power signifies the Father, who never dries up or comes to an end in his power. The tangible solidity signifies the Son, who, born of a virgin, could be touched and grasped. And the force of the glowing fire signifies the Holy Spirit, who is the kindler and enlightener of the hearts of faithful people. What does this mean? Just as anyone who often draws the moist power of a stone into the body grows weak from it and falls ill, so too anyone who rashly wants to gaze upon the Father through the unsteadiness of their thoughts perishes in faith. And just as people make their dwelling in the tangible solidity of stone, defending themselves by it against their enemies, so too the Son of God, who is the true cornerstone, is the dwelling of the faithful people, protecting them from evil spirits. And just as glowing fire lights up dark places, burning whatever it settles upon, so too the Holy Spirit puts unbelief to flight, removing all the rust of iniquity. And as these three powers are in one stone, so too the true Trinity is in one deity.

2.2.6 Again, just as a flame has three powers in one fire, so the one God is in three persons. How so? A flame consists of radiant brightness, inborn vigor, and fiery heat. It has radiant brightness so that it may shine, inborn vigor so that it may thrive, and fiery heat so that it may burn. So in the radiant brightness consider the Father, who with fatherly tenderness spreads his glory over his faithful. In the inborn vigor of the radiant flame, in which this flame shows its power, understand the Son, who took a body from a virgin, in which the divinity displayed its wonders. And in the fiery heat perceive the Holy Spirit, who gently burns the minds of believers. But where there is neither radiant brightness nor inborn vigor nor fiery heat, no flame is seen there either. So too, where neither the Father nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit is worshiped, there God is not worthily revered.

Therefore, just as these three powers are seen in one flame, so let the three persons be understood in the unity of divinity.

2.2.7 So too, just as three powers are to be noted in a word, so the Trinity is to be considered in the unity of divinity. How so? In a word there is sound, power, and breath. It has sound so that it may be heard, power so that it may be understood, and breath so that it may be brought to completion. In the sound, then, note the Father, who with unspeakable power makes all things known; in the power, the Son, who was wondrously begotten of the Father; and in the breath, the Holy Spirit, who "breathes where he wills," so that all things are brought to fulfillment. But where no sound is heard, no power is at work and no breath rises; so neither is the Word understood there. So too the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not divided from one another, but do their work in one accord.[11] So, just as these three things are in one word, the Trinity on high is in unity on high. And so: in a stone, the moist power neither exists nor works without the tangible solidity and the fiery power, nor the tangible solidity without the moist power and the fiery vigor of the glowing fire, nor the vigor of the glowing fire without the moist power and the tangible solidity. In a flame, the radiant brightness neither exists nor works without the inborn vigor and the fiery heat, nor the inborn vigor without the radiant brightness and the fiery heat, nor the fiery heat without the radiant brightness and the inborn vigor. And in a word, the sound neither exists nor works without the power and the breath, nor the power without the sound and the breath, nor the breath without the sound and the power; they cling to one another indivisibly in their work. Just so, these three persons of the Trinity on high live inseparably in the majesty of divinity and are not divided from one another. So, O human, understand one God in three persons. But in the foolishness of your mind you think that God is so powerless that he cannot truly subsist in three persons, but can exist only in one—when you see that not even a voice exists without three. What

11 John 3:8.

does this mean? God is surely, in three persons, the true and one God, the first and the last.

2.2.8 But the Father is not without the Son, nor the Son without the Father, nor the Father and the Son without the Holy Spirit, nor the Holy Spirit without them, because these three persons are inseparable in the unity of divinity. It is like a word that sounds from a person's mouth: there is no mouth without the word, and no word without life. And where does the word dwell? In the person. Where does it come out from? From the person. How so? While the person is alive. So the Son is in the Father, the Son whom the Father sent to earth for the salvation of human beings sitting in darkness, and who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin. This Son is only-begotten in divinity, and he is equally only-begotten in virginity. As he is the only Son of the Father, so he is the only Son of his mother. For as the Father begot him alone before time began, so his virgin mother bore him alone in time, since she remained a virgin after giving birth. Therefore, O human, understand in these three persons your God, who created you in the strength of his divinity and who redeemed you from perdition.

2.2.9 So do not forget your Creator, as Solomon also urges you when he says: "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the time of your affliction comes and the years draw near of which you will say, 'They do not please me.'" What does this mean? With the understanding of your mind, remember him who made you. Remember him at the time when, in the days of your foolish self-confidence, you think you can climb as high as you desire, while in fact you are throwing yourself headlong into the depths, and, standing in prosperity, you are falling into the worst of miseries. For the life that is in you always strives to be brought to completion, until the time when it appears complete. How so?[12] A child grows from its first birth to full stature and then remains at the full age of life. Leaving behind the wanton ways of foolish youth, the grown person now considers only, with great care and concern, what must be done

12 Ecclesiastes 12:1. Medieval tradition attributed the book to King Solomon.

in his affairs. He never did this while foolish youth was seething with inconstancy. Let the faithful person do the same. Let him leave childish ways behind and climb to the summit of the virtues, persevering in their strength. Let him abandon the arrogance of his desire, which sprouts in the madness of the vices, and in his distress let him anxiously ponder what is useful for him, now that he has turned away from the childishness of boyish ways. Therefore, O human, embrace your God in this way in the strength of your vigor, before the hour comes for the purging of your works. Then all things will be made manifest and nothing will be left hidden, when the times come that will never fail in their duration. Do not murmur with your human mind and say of these times, "They do not please me, and I do not understand whether they will bring prosperity or misery." For the human mind is always doubtful about this. Even when it does good works, it is anxious whether they please God or not, and when it commits evil, it fears for the salvation that forgiveness brings. But let whoever sees with watchful eyes and hears with attentive ears offer the kiss of embrace to my mystical words, which flow from me, the Living One.

### VISION SIX: THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

*The Church is wedded to Christ on the cross; Hildegard watches the Mass and the souls of communicants.*

2.6 And after this I saw, when the Son of God hung on the cross, that the female figure I described before came swiftly forth from the ancient counsel like a shining radiance and was led to him by divine power. She was drenched by the blood that flowed from his side and rose upward. By the will of the Father on high she was joined to him in a happy betrothal and nobly endowed with his flesh and blood. And I heard a voice from heaven saying to him: "Let her, my Son, be your bride for the restoration of my people. Let her be a mother to them, regenerating souls through the salvation of the spirit and water." And as this same figure was growing in her powers in this way, I saw what seemed to be

an altar. She often came to it, devoutly revisiting her dowry and humbly showing it to the Father on high and to his angels.[13] So, too, when a priest clothed in sacred vestments approached that altar to celebrate the divine sacraments, I saw a great serene light suddenly come from heaven with an attendance of angels and shine all around that altar. It remained there until the sacrament was completed and the priest withdrew from the altar. When the Gospel of peace had been read there and the offering that was to be consecrated had been placed on the altar, the priest sang the praise of almighty God, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," and so began the mysteries of the ineffable sacraments. Then suddenly, as heaven opened, a fiery flash of inestimable brightness came down upon that offering and suffused it entirely with its brightness, as the light of the sun illumines anything it pierces with its rays.[14] And while it irradiated the offering in this way, it lifted it invisibly up to the secret places of heaven and sent it back down again onto the altar, as a person draws breath in and lets it out again. So the offering was made true flesh and true blood, although in human sight it appeared as bread and as wine. As I watched this, at once the signs of the nativity, passion and burial, and also of the resurrection and ascension of our Savior, the Only-Begotten of God, appeared as if in a mirror, just as they were accomplished in him when the Son of God was in the world. But when the priest sang the song of the innocent Lamb, "Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world," and prepared to receive holy communion, the fiery flash withdrew into heaven. When heaven had closed, I heard a voice from it saying: "Eat and drink the body and blood of my Son to abolish the transgression of Eve, so that you may be restored to your rightful inheritance." And as the rest of the people also came to the priest to receive this sacrament, I perceived five kinds among them. Some were bright in body and fiery in soul. Others seemed pale in body and dark in soul. Some were shaggy

13 The female figure is the Church, whom Hildegard saw in the preceding visions.
14 The Sanctus, sung at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass, is based on Isaiah 6:3; "Sabaoth" is Hebrew for "hosts" or "armies."

in body and filthy in soul, drenched in much uncleanness of human pollution. Some were hedged about in body with the sharpest thorns and appeared leprous in soul.[15] Others seemed bloody in body and foul in soul, like a rotting corpse. And as some of all these received the same sacraments, some were suffused as if with a fiery radiance, while others were darkened as if by a dark cloud. After the sacraments were completed, as the priest withdrew from the altar, the serene light that had come from heaven and shone all around the altar, as I said, was drawn back up to the secret places on high. And again I heard a voice from the heights of heaven saying to me:

2.6.1 When Christ Jesus, the Son of God, hung on the wood of his passion, the Church was joined to him in the secret of the heavenly mysteries and endowed with his purple blood. She herself shows this when she often comes to the altar and asks again for her dowry, and considers most attentively with how much devotion her children receive the divine mysteries when they approach them. Therefore you see, when the same Son of God hung on the cross, that the female figure I described came swiftly forth from the ancient counsel like a shining radiance and was led to him by divine power. For when the innocent Lamb was lifted onto the altar of the cross for human salvation, the Church, in the pure whiteness of faith and the other virtues, suddenly appeared in heaven out of the divine secret through a most profound mystery, and was joined to the Only-Begotten of God by the supreme majesty. What is this? When blood flowed from the wounded side of my Son, the salvation of souls at once arose. For the glory from which the devil was expelled with his followers was given to humankind when my Only-Begotten underwent death on the cross in time, despoiled hell, and led faithful souls to heaven. So, too, faith began to grow and be strengthened in his disciples and in those who sincerely followed them, so that they might become heirs of the heavenly kingdom. Therefore that figure, drenched by the blood that flowed from his side and rose upward, was joined to him in a

15 The Agnus Dei, sung before communion, is drawn from John 1:29.

happy betrothal by the will of the Father on high. For the strength of the passion of the Son of God flooded forth ardently and rose wondrously to the height of the heavenly mysteries, as the scent of fine spices spreads upward. By it the Church was strengthened in the shining white heirs of the eternal kingdom and faithfully joined to the Only-Begotten of God by the ordinance of the Father on high. How so? A bride, subject to her bridegroom in the service of submission and obedience, receives from him the gift of fruitfulness, with the love of their covenant, for the procreation of children, so that she may bring them to her inheritance. So also the Church, joined to the Son of God in the office of humility and love, receives from him the regeneration of the spirit and water, together with the salvation of souls, for the restoration of life, and sends those souls on to the heights. Therefore she was also nobly endowed with his flesh and blood. For the Only-Begotten of God himself bestowed his body and blood in surpassing glory on his faithful, who are both the Church and the Church's children, so that through him they might possess life in the city on high. How so?

2.6.2 He gave his flesh and blood for the sanctification of believers, as the heavenly Father also handed him over to his passion for the redemption of the peoples. So the Father conquered the ancient serpent through him in humility and justice, not wishing to overcome him by his own power and strength, since God is just and does not desire iniquity,

2.6.3 as the psalmist says: "Blessed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of pestilence." What does this mean? God is the author of all the blessedness and happiness of his creatures, and he shows many and various signs in those creatures. So, too, the incarnation of his Son distilled a most delightful taste in great sweetness, when the heavenly virtues built many edifices in him, through which humankind might return to the kingdom on high, which no shadow of death has darkened. And so, too, the mightiest powers of all the virtues were shown to be present in the Father on high himself. For

through his Only-Begotten he valiantly killed death and broke hell, and on the last day he turns the world into another and better newness.[16] Therefore, too, through the generosity of his heart, he did not walk in the wavering paths of the evil spirits, who abandoned truth and seized upon falsehood. How so? They wanted to divide truth by falsehood. How so? They wanted to overthrow the Ancient of Days, who existed before the time of days and hours, and they longed to make the ancient serpent, who did not exist before the time of times, his partner. But this could not be, nor should it be, for God is one. That is why the devil is a liar. For he withdrew from God, deserting life and finding death. And so, too, God did not stand in the way in which sinners plant their steps. He rejected the way of Adam and did not love his sin, but cast him out of paradise when he had been seduced by the devil.[17] Nor did he reign in the power of that iniquity in which the whole human race is entangled in death, sitting in the shadow of death, when the human race proudly abandons truth. What does this mean? God did not resist either the devil's presumption or human negligence with his power in such a way as to cast them down by his strength. How so? Suppose there were two fighters, and one far surpassed the other in strength. Surely the stronger would display against the weaker greater feats of combat, as far as he was able, so as to confound him and force him into submission, and he would not want to yield to him in anything. But God did not do so. He resisted the work of iniquity through his supreme goodness, by sending his Son into the world, who in his body, with the greatest humility, led his lost sheep back to heaven. How so? The blood that came out of his body, as soon as it flowed from his open wounds, appeared in the secret places of heaven and asked that the salvation of souls be sent forth. How so? All creation shows in the Son of God that through his passion and death the perdition of humankind has been restored to life. How so? The Only-Begotten of God, who is life, offered himself to the passion on the altar

16 Psalm 1:1. Hildegard reads the "blessed man" of the psalm as referring to God.
17 "Ancient of Days" is a title for God from Daniel 7:9.

of the cross for the redemption of the human race. There, too, as you perceived with true hearing a voice resounding from the secret places on high, he chose the Church as his bride, so that she might be a mother for the restoration of salvation to the believing peoples—namely, so that she might send them on to heaven without stain through spiritual regeneration.

2.6.4 But as that figure is growing in her powers in this way, you see what seems to be an altar. She often comes to it, and there she devoutly revisits her dowry and humbly shows it to the Father on high and to his angels. For as the Church, as has been said, gains increase in blessed and mighty virtues—as is shown to you at once by a plain demonstration—the sanctification of the mystical altars has arisen, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in the depths of the sighs of the faithful. There the same Church, with constant purpose, sets down the footprints of her examples and contemplates her dowry, that is, the body and blood of the Son of God, with the deepest devotion. She offers it to the Creator of all in the submission of the humblest obedience, in the sight of the living and burning lights, that is, the citizens on high. What does this mean? As the flesh of my Only-Begotten arose in the undefiled womb of the Virgin Mary and was afterward handed over for human salvation, so also now his flesh, multiplied in the incorrupt integrity of the Church, is often given for the sanctification of the faithful. For as a goldsmith at one time melts his gold in the fire and fuses it, and at another divides what he has fused, so I, the Father, at one time glorify the flesh and blood of my Son in the offering through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, and at another distribute it, once glorified, to faithful people for their salvation.

### THE LIGHT OVER THE ALTAR

*The voice explains the light over the altar and Christ's offering of his passion to the Father.*

2.6.5 So, too, when a priest clothed in sacred vestments approaches the altar to celebrate the divine sacraments, you see

a great serene light suddenly come from heaven with an attendance of angels and shine all around that altar. For when the steward of souls, wrapped in his sacred vesture, approaches the life-giving table for the sacrifice of the innocent Lamb, suddenly a great brightness of the heavenly inheritance that drives away the thick darkness shines out from the secret of the heavens, as heavenly spirits are sent down, and irradiates that whole ordered place of sanctification. For there the refreshment of souls is carried out for the salvation of believers. How so? The Church, through the voice of the priest, asks again for her dowry, which is the body and the shed blood of my Son, so that she may be fit for a blessed childbearing in the salvation of souls; for through the shedding of this precious blood she has also gained increase in a great multitude of peoples. Then I, who am the unfailing light, irradiate that place of sanctification in my holiness, in honor of the body and blood of my Only-Begotten.

2.6.6 For when the priest begins to call upon me over the consecration of the altar, asking me to look upon the bread and wine that my Son offered me at the supper of his death, when he was about to pass from the world, then I see that my Son himself showed me this in the hour of his passion, when he was about to die on the wood of the cross. By this he signified that I should always keep that same passion of his in my sight, and never erase it from my most piercing vision, as often as the blessed offering of the most holy sacrifice should be offered to me through the priestly office. For he too, in the shedding of his blood, offered me the bread and the cup, casting down death and raising up humankind.

2.6.7 But the dignity of the one who entered and came forth from the enclosure of virginal chastity belonged not to human nature but to divine power. Therefore this too can be: that in the consecration the flesh of my Only-Begotten is brought forth again from the bread of wheat, and his blood from the wine of the grape mixed with water,

2.6.8 as I showed through my faithful servant the prophet Joel, saying: "And the threshing floors shall be filled with wheat, and the presses shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust and the grub, the rust and the caterpillar have eaten. My great strength, which I sent among you. And you shall eat abundantly and be filled, and you shall praise the name of your God, who has done wonders with you; and my people shall not be put to shame forever." What is this? Through God's wondrous ordinance the threshing floors of faith of the believing Church will be filled with every good thing. For I turn the fruit of the wheat into the flesh of my Son. So too, in the true salvation by which my faithful will be called back to their homeland, those crushings will abound in which they crush the desires of their flesh for my name's sake. There I also turn the juice of the grape into the blood of my Only-Begotten, and give them the oil of mercy as well. How so?[18] For in another way—that is, in your salvation—I will restore to you the cycles of those vanities which the locust of forgetfulness devoured through the unbelief of ignorance, when wickedness first arose in the children of Adam. They held the fruitfulness of my justice in forgetfulness, just as a person forgets the food he needed once he has passed it into his stomach. In their impiety they tore my justice to pieces, just as the locust gnaws away the fruit. How so? Where the locust of negligence carries off the usefulness of good fruits through sloth of mind, there the grub of foulness also wallows in the dregs of uncleanness. For people of this kind wallow in the filth of unbelief in idols and other similar schisms, in diabolical consultations and magic arts, in scrutinizing the creatures of the Creator, in the chance happenings of human affairs, and in the vilest foulness of murders and fornications. They feed on these things just as the grub is nourished on mud. How so? Where the grub of baseness loves the stench of filth, there too the rust of bitterness eats away the metals of faithful radiance. For those people, standing opposed to God's justice, labor to darken it, just as rust usually takes away the beauty of

18 Joel 2:24–26.

metals. How so? Where the rust of corrosiveness taints the brilliance of good deeds, there too the caterpillar of harmful action spoils the green plants of great usefulness. For such people, through the malice of their wickedness, cast away from themselves the brightest virtues—such as simplicity, chastity and strong constancy—which the Holy Spirit makes to shine in all the greenness of blessedness. So they try to destroy them, just as the caterpillar diminishes the usefulness of plants. And in all these things my very great strength is made plain, which by the greatness of its power overcame the assaults of the devil when I sent it among you for your salvation. How so? I, the Father, sent my Son into the world, born bodily of the Virgin, so that through him I might redeem you from the perdition of death. So I would dwell in you and you in me, since my Son, as he went to his passion, also gave you his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. Therefore you will devoutly eat this sacrament for your salvation and feed on it happily. So, through the oil of my mercy, you will be filled after the hunger of the soul's perdition. For my Son also brought the medicine for your wounds in repentance, and the bride of my Son is adorned with all justice and truth. Therefore you will faithfully praise my name—I who, being one God in the true Trinity, govern you and show my wonders in you, rescuing you unshakably from the power of the devil. And so my people, whom I willed to lead out so wondrously from the jaws of hell, shall not be put to shame by the shame of death in the eternity to come.

2.6.9 And you see that the serene light just described remains on the altar until the sacrament is completed and the priest withdraws from the altar. For that serene light, the light of the eternal vision, is shown most clearly in those wonders until the mysteries of that most holy office have been performed, and the one who is the dispenser of those sacraments withdraws from the consecration and completes the secret mysteries. What does this mean? It is fitting that the divine majesty should manifest its power most fully in these most blessed sacraments; and as

long as a person remains in the things that belong to God, God's help does not desert him.

2.6.10 Then the Gospel of peace is read, and the offering to be consecrated is placed on the altar. The priest sings the praise of almighty God, which is "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," and so begins the mysteries of the ineffable sacraments. At that moment the heavens open, and a fiery flash of inestimable brightness suddenly descends upon the offering. For the power of the living breath has been brought forth in the kiss of the King, and the fruit of the brightness of life has been laid down, to be made shining white in the consecration for the building of God's wall. Then the messenger of truth sends forth the sweetest sound in praise of the Creator of all, with the threefold invocation of the anointing of the Lord of hosts. And so he begins the hidden things of the brilliance of the dawn—that is, of the Son of God made flesh from the Virgin. At that moment the most bright tabernacle opens, and an impenetrable serene light of incomprehensible height suddenly bends down over the mysteries of the most holy sacrament. It floods the whole of it with its brightness, as the light of the sun illumines a thing that it pierces with its rays. For the most holy heat, in the power of the Father, floods the glowing circle of that offering, just as radiant brilliance enters the thing over which it spreads itself. What does this mean? The bride of my Son offers the offering of bread and wine on my altar with the most devout intention. How so? Through the hand of the priest, in faithful remembrance, she reminds me to give her the flesh and blood of my Son in that same offering. How so? Because the sufferings of my Only-Begotten always appear in the secret places of heaven, that offering is so united to my Son in my burning heat, in deepest wonder, that it becomes his flesh and blood in most true certainty. By this the Church is strengthened with most blessed vigor.

### BREAD AND WINE BECOME FLESH AND BLOOD

*The offering is drawn up to heaven and becomes Christ's flesh and blood, though it still looks like bread.*

2.6.11 While that brightness irradiates the offering in this way, as has been said, it raises it invisibly up to the secret places of heaven. For that fiery flash, while it floods the sacrament with its illumination, draws it up by invisible power to those hidden things which no mortal eye can see. And it sends it back down again onto the altar, for its condescending regard sets it down most gently upon the table of consecration. It is like a person who draws his breath inward and then sends it out again: by God's wondrous ordinance he takes into himself the breath of life, the living vigor by which he lives, and then sends it out of himself again so that he can go on living. So the offering is sent back, made true flesh and true blood, although in the sight of human beings it appears as bread and wine. For as God is true, without illusion, so the height of that sacrament is a firm height that no one can cast down, for it is true flesh and blood without deception. Just as the soul truly thrives in flesh and blood while a person lives in the body, so too this mystery is in the bread and wine wherever it is honored in true celebration. And it appears to human beings in this way because, just as the blind human eye cannot see God perfectly, so a human being cannot gaze upon these mysteries with bodily sight. For as one person sees another's body and not his spirit, so a person can perceive the appearance of bread and wine, but not these sacraments themselves. What does this mean? The brightness that appeared over the body of the Son of God as it lay buried in the tomb, raising him from the sleep of death, also shines on the altar over the sacrament of the body and blood of my Only-Begotten. It covers it in the sight of human beings, so that they cannot see its holiness except in the appearance of bread and wine, as that offering was placed on the altar. In the same way the divinity that was in the Son of God was so veiled from human beings by his

humanity that they could see him only as a man, as he lived among them as a man, yet without sin. What does this mean? I who created all things receive that offering kindly when it is offered to me by the Church through the priest's hand. For as the Divinity showed its wonders in the Virgin's womb, so too it reveals its secrets in this offering. How so? Because the flesh and blood of the Son of God are made manifest. How so? While that offering is drawn up invisibly by the power of God, as if in a single instant, and sent back again, it is so warmed in the heat of the divine majesty that it becomes the flesh and blood of the Only-Begotten of God.

2.6.12 This same mystery, which people do not perceive with their bodily senses, is as if someone wrapped a most precious ointment in plain bread and put a sapphire into wine, and I turned it into so sweet a taste that in your mouth, O human, you could not tell apart the bread with the ointment or the wine with the sapphire, but would sense only a sweet taste—for my Son too is sweet and gentle. What does this mean? By this ointment is understood my Son, born of the Virgin, who was anointed with most precious ointment. How so? Because he was clothed with holy humanity, which is so precious an ointment that with its sweetness it floods the deadly wounds of human beings, so that when they turn to him they no longer rot or stink in the perdition of Adam. In this sapphire, however, is denoted the divinity that is in my Son, who is the cornerstone, gentle and humble. For he did not take root from the root of human flesh that comes from man and woman, but was wondrously made flesh in my heat from the most gentle Virgin. Hence his flesh and blood must also be believed to be sweet and pleasant to receive.

2.6.13 But you, O human, cannot receive this spiritual gift visibly, as though you were eating visible flesh and drinking visible blood, for you are rotting clay. Rather, as your living spirit is invisible within you, so this living sacrament, which is invisible in this offering, must be received by you invisibly. For just as the body of my Son arose in the Virgin's womb, so now too the flesh of my Only-Begotten ascends in the consecration of the altar.

What does this mean? The human spirit, which is invisible, receives invisibly this sacrament, which is invisible in this offering; and the human body, which is visible, receives visibly this offering, which is visible in the sacrament. Yet they are one sacrament, just as God and man are one Christ, and as the rational soul and mortal flesh in a human being are one human being. For whoever looks to me with right faith receives this sacrament faithfully for his own sanctification when he takes it. What does this mean? My Son was wondrously born of the wholly untouched Virgin, whose flesh never seethed with the pleasure of lust, but remained always intact. For the vessel of that Virgin was most pure, and in it I willed my Only-Begotten to be made flesh. Therefore I did not allow the vessel of that most gentle Virgin to melt away in the heat of passion, for in it my Son wondrously took on a human body.

2.6.14 The most blessed Virgin heard a true address through the angel's words in that secret place, and, made believing by it, lifted the sighs of her mind upward when she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." At once, as the Holy Spirit came upon her, she conceived the Only-Begotten of God. This signifies that almighty God is to be invoked through the words of the priest in the priestly office. So the priest, believing faithfully in God and offering him a pure offering with the devotion of his heart, will speak the words of salvation in humble service; and there the majesty on high receives that offering and transforms it by wondrous power into the flesh and blood of the loving Redeemer. How so? Just as my Son first wondrously took on humanity in the Virgin, so now this offering wondrously becomes his flesh and blood on the altar.[19] Hence this sacrament is whole and entire, being both invisible and visible, just as my Only-Begotten is whole and entire: invisible according to his divinity, and visible according to his humanity as he dwelt in the world.

2.6.15 For as a chick comes out of an egg, and a little winged creature arises from a tiny seed, and when the creature flies

19 Luke 1:38, Mary's reply to the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation.

away, what it came from remains behind, so too in this offering the truth of the flesh and blood of my Son must be held by faith, although the offering appears in the sight of human beings as bread and wine.

2.6.16 Hence also, as you see, the signs of the birth, passion and burial, and also of the resurrection and ascension of the Savior, the Only-Begotten of God, appear there as in a mirror, just as they were accomplished in him when the Son of God was in the world. For—that you may consider it as a true manifestation—the mysteries of him who was born of the Virgin, suffered on the cross, was buried in the tomb, rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, that is, of him who came to earth for the salvation of humankind, shine with the purest brightness in these sacraments. They shine just as the Only-Begotten of God, when he lived among people for a time in the world, suffered these things in his body by the Father's will for the redemption of the human race. What does this mean? What my Son suffered in the world for love of humankind appears before my eyes. For the birth, passion and burial, the resurrection and ascension of my Only-Begotten killed the death of the human race. Hence they shine before me in heaven, for I have not forgotten them; until the end of the world they will appear before me like the dawn, in great brightness.

2.6.17 What does this mean? In that passion I foresee, up to the end of the world, all those who will believe in it and those who will reject it. For it will always shine before me as long as people must say what my Son taught his disciples when he taught them to pray to God, as it is written: "And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." What does this mean? You who hold all things in your power, look upon the shedding of that blood which was poured out for the human race, and forgive us, who are children of transgression, our debts, which we ought to have paid you but did not, because of the fleshliness of our hearts. What does this mean? That we do not fulfill what we promised in baptism. For we have transgressed your commandments and cast away innocence, just as Adam disobeyed you in paradise

and spoiled the garment of innocence.[20] But you who are merciful, do not punish us according to our wickedness, but release us from our transgression according to your mercy. For we too, who are transgressors, though we have much malice in us, nevertheless forgive our debtors from our hearts the injury they have done us, out of fear and love of our Savior. How so? There are those who ought to love us because we are human beings, yet trouble us in many ways, and so do not love you but neglect your commandments. We do not pursue them according to the malice they have shown us, but, looking to your just judgment, we refrain as far as we can from avenging ourselves on them. So may you too, O God, be gracious to us, for you are just and good. So listen, O human: as long as you need help, and as long as you can help other people, so long will the passion of my Son appear before me in mercy. And so long too will his flesh and blood be consecrated on the altar to be received by believers, for their salvation and the cleansing of their wrongdoings. For when my Only-Begotten was in the world in the body, his body was sustained by wheat and wine as nourishment for his flesh and blood. Hence now too his flesh and blood are consecrated on the altar in the offering of wheat and wine, so that faithful people may be refreshed by it in soul and body. For my Son wondrously redeemed humankind from the perdition of Adam, and now too he mercifully absolves people from the daily evil into which they often slip. For in the consecration of this offering there appears whatever my Son suffered bodily in his flesh for the redemption of humankind, and I do not wish to hide this. For I draw his elect up to heavenly things, so that through them his body may be brought to completion in those members.

2.6.18 Therefore I wondrously display all these sacraments in this offering. When they have appeared on the altar, that same offering becomes the flesh and blood of my Son, though in the sight of human beings it appears as bread and wine. For human frailty is so tender that it would shrink from receiving raw flesh and raw blood. A mortal human being cannot behold the Divin-

20 Matthew 6:12, from the Lord's Prayer.

ity as long as he is mortal. Hence this mystery, which belongs wholly to the Divinity, is hidden from humankind, so that they receive it invisibly—for my Only-Begotten, now immortal, dies no more. Therefore, O human, I give you his flesh and blood in the offering of bread and wine, so that through what is visible you may receive what is invisible in true faith. And you receive this same sacrament in true certainty through divine power, yet in such a way that it does not appear visibly to you—although at times, in great need, it has been shown to my elect when they were in great distress over this. All these things I do for love of humankind and for its benefit. Every creature is subject to my commandments; but you, O human, are always rebellious toward me. So you are blind and deaf, and yet you cannot rebel against me. Do I not do what pleases me while you do not see it? You do not see with your eyes or hear with your ears in the flesh how I send a person's soul into the body, and how I take it out of the body; but your soul will understand me when it has left its mortal body. In the same way I give you my Son's flesh to eat and his blood to drink, and I accomplish this by my power, O human, while you do not see it.

# Book Three

*God enthroned and the fall of Lucifer; the pillar of Christ's humanity and the virtues; the closing symphony of songs.*

## VISION ONE: THE ONE ENTHRONED

*God sits enthroned on a great iron-colored stone, holding muddy clay on his breast; Lucifer and his followers fall.*

3.1 And I am a human being taken from among other human beings, and I am not worthy to be called a human being because of my transgression of the law of God. I ought to be just, and I am unjust, except that by his grace I am God's creature, and that grace will also save me. I looked toward the east, and behold, there I saw what seemed to be a single stone, wholly entire, of immense breadth and height, the color of iron. Above it was a white cloud, and set upon the cloud was a round royal throne. On it sat a shining youth of wondrous glory, and of such brightness that I could in no way look at him clearly. On his breast he had, as it were, a black, muddy clay, as broad as a human breast, surrounded by precious stones and pearls. From the shining one seated on the throne there stretched out a great circle, golden like the dawn (its breadth I could in no way grasp). It circled from the east to the north, then to the west and to the south, and so bent back to the east, to the shining one himself, and it had no end at all. That circle stood at such a height from the earth that I could not grasp it. From itself it gave off a most terrible radiance, the color of stone, of steel and of fire. On every side, across its whole breadth, this radiance extended upward into the height of heaven and downward into the depth of the abyss, so that I was not able to see any end to it. Then I also saw a great

star of exceeding radiance and beauty coming forth from the secret place of the one seated on the throne, and with it a great multitude of gleaming sparks. All of them were led out with that star toward the south. They looked at the one seated on the throne as if at a stranger, and turning away from him, they gazed greedily toward the north rather than wishing to look at him. But at once, in that very turning away of their gaze, they were all extinguished and so turned into the blackness of coals. And behold, a whirlwind arose from them. It immediately hurled them from the south, behind the one seated on the throne, to the north, and cast them headlong into the abyss, so that I could no longer see any of them. And the great radiance that had been taken from them I saw suddenly return, at the moment of their extinction, to the one seated on the throne. And I heard the one who sat on the throne saying to me: "Write what you see and hear." And I answered from the inner knowledge of that vision: "I beg you, my Lord, give me understanding, so that I may set forth these mysteries in words that can be told. Do not forsake me, but strengthen me in the dawn of your justice, in which your Son was made manifest. Grant me to know how I can and how I ought to set forth the divine counsel that was ordained in the ancient counsel. This is how you willed your Son to become incarnate, so that he would become a human being in time. You willed this before all creation, in your simplicity and in the fire of the dove, that is, of the Holy Spirit. Your Son, rising wondrously like the shining form of the sun, would then truly be clothed with humanity at the very beginning of virginity, taking on human form for the sake of humankind." And again I heard him saying to me: "O how beautiful are your eyes in the divine telling, while the dawn rises there in the divine counsel!" And again I answered from the inner knowledge of that vision: "In the bosom of my mind I appear to myself like the ash of ashen decay and like the dust of instability. So I sit trembling in the shadow like a feather. But do not blot me out from the land of the living as a stranger. I labor with great sweat in this vision, and because of the baseness of my foolish senses, which are

mine in the flesh, I often count myself in the least and lowliest place. I am not worthy to be called a human being, for I am greatly afraid and do not dare to tell your mysteries. O good and gentle Father, teach me what your will is and what I ought to set forth. "O you Father to be feared, and O you most sweet, and O you full of all grace, do not forsake me, but keep me in your mercy." And again I heard the same one saying to me: "Now speak as you have been taught. I want you to speak, though you are ash. Speak the revelation of the bread that is the Son of God. He is life in fiery love, raising up every dead one in soul and body and releasing dissolute sins in serene brightness. He himself is the beginning of the awakening of holiness in a human being, before it is awakened within that person. Therefore the magnificent, glorious and incomprehensible God gave a great safeguard, sending his Son into the chastity of virginity. That virginity could have no variety of stains by which it might be weakened. "There could not and ought not to be any pollution of the flesh in the Virgin's mind. For the slayer and destroyer that is the death of the human race was deceived, unknowing, as if in sleep, when the Son of God came in great silence into the dawn, that is, into a humble girl. Death went forth as though secure, not knowing the life that the sweet Virgin carried, for her virginity was hidden from it. The Virgin herself was poor in earthly wealth, because the divine majesty willed to find her so. Now write thus of the true knowledge of the Creator in his goodness."

3.1.1 God created all things, and he ordained humankind for that glory from which the lost angel was cast down with his imitators. He is to be venerated and feared by all his creation with the greatest honor and fear. For it is just that the Creator of all should be shown veneration by his creation, and that God should be worshiped most faithfully above all things. This is what the stone you see most surely signifies. In its mystery it is the greatness of the fear of the Lord, which must always arise and endure with the purest intention in the hearts of the faithful. You see it wholly entire, of immense breadth and height, and the color of iron. This means that this firm and great great-

ness of the fear of the Lord must be held most firmly. For God is to be feared by all creation in complete integrity, so that he may be known to be the one true God, since there is none besides him and none like him. In him is immense breadth, for he is incomprehensible in all things and above all things. And in him is height, for no one can comprehend the holy divinity or reach it with the height of their understanding, since it is above all things. Its likeness to the color of iron means that it is burdensome and hard for human minds to fear God. This is very heavy for the softness of fragile ash, because the human creature is rebellious against him.

3.1.2 The white cloud above the stone is the clear wisdom of the human mind. The round royal throne set upon the cloud is the strong and princely faith that circles among the Christian people, by whom God is faithfully known. Where the fear of the Lord takes root, there the wisdom of the human mind will also appear above it. Then, with God's help, faith will be set upon this wisdom, and in faith God prepares a resting place for himself. For when God is feared through the wisdom of the human mind, he is understood in faith. With these he is to be touched, as a seat touches its lord. Then in these God prepares a seat for himself, being supreme above all things. He cannot be grasped by power or dominion, but rests in single and pure faith, since there is one God who is to be believed above all things.

3.1.3 So the shining youth sits on the throne, of wondrous glory and of such brightness that you could in no way look at him clearly. On his breast he has, as it were, a black, muddy clay, as broad as the breast of a large person, surrounded by precious stones and pearls. He is the one God reigning over all things, shining in goodness and wonderful in his works. No human being can perfectly look upon his immense glory in the depth of his mystery, except so far as it is grasped and carried by faith. A seat holds and surrounds its lord, and is so subject to him that it cannot raise itself against its lord. In the same way faith does not desire to gaze proudly upon God, but only touches him with inward devotion.

### THE CLAY ON GOD'S BREAST

*The clay is redeemed humankind, whom God loves like the father welcoming back the prodigal son.*

3.1.4 On his breast, as it were, that is, in the wisdom of his mystery, he holds through the love of his Son the weak, feeble and poor clay that is humankind. It is black in the blackness of sins and muddy in the pollution of the flesh. It is broad in the likeness of a human breast, which is the expanse of the deep and great wisdom in which God created humankind. He looks upon those who are in the salvation of the soul through repentance. Whatever the crime in which they kick against God in their weakness, they will come to him in the end. These are surrounded by the many ornaments of those who rise among them. Like precious stones are the great persons who are the martyrs and the virgins of holiness. Like pearls are the innocent and the penitent, the children of redemption. With these the clay is richly adorned, since in the human body there shine such great virtues, virtues that shine in God in all brightness. For he who established the breath of life and the life of human beings looked upon himself. How so? He did so with redemption, when in his predestination he foreknew that his Son would become incarnate, so that in his body every stained variety of crimes would be wiped away. So he also sees the souls that will be justified, while they are still in their bodies, after a multitude of excessive sins. He sees the souls that will grow used to walking in God's justice after their many errors. He sees how they stand firm in God, how they cease from their great forgetfulness, and how they turn back from each vice that wounded them when they fell into mortal sins. Many peoples have risen from the wandering ways in which they walked, full of wounds and stricken with the worst of blows, and have been restored from the death of foul crimes. Just as these souls see that, so too many come who are so gravely wounded in the bitterness of the sharp pain of sin that they grow utterly weary of the habit of evil ways

in which they sinned beyond measure. They can no longer draw breath amid the waves to do the deadly work of adultery and murder and the excess of every evil.

3.1.5 O you wretched ones, do they not come like strangers from a far country? Scripture says so in the Gospel, where the younger son said: "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants.'" That is to say:[1] A person who comes back to himself from the fall into sin, through the admonition of the Holy Spirit, says: "I want to arise from unbearable sins, which I can in no way endure, and from grave guilt. I will turn back in the remembrance of my mind, lamenting and grieving over my sins. So I will come to my father, who is my father because he created me, and I will say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, that is, against the heavenly work that I am. You formed me by your will, and you touched me in that very creation in such a way that I too ought to have been heavenly in my deeds. But I bound myself up with the foulest works, and I sinned before you as well, for I have forsaken human nature in myself. How so? "'In many abominations. Therefore I am guilty, both to my own perdition and against your majesty. I am not worthy to be called your son, for through the wickedness of my heart I have led your creature in me into a way other than the one in which you established me. But now make me your servant, redeemed at the price of the blood of your Son. You gave him as so great a price that death can never repay it with any recompense. That price sets sinners free through the repentance that arose in the passion of your Son. I lost the rightful inheritance of sons in Adam, who was created a son and was justly stripped of the glory of happiness. But now repentance must redeem human sins with the blood of your Son.'" This must be said by those who repeat the fall of Adam and afterward return through repentance, and so reach salvation. They remember that they

1 Luke 15:18–19, from Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, who squanders his inheritance and returns home to his father.

have heard many admonitions, told from the Scriptures and about the torment and the blood of their Redeemer. They recall with groans that they transgressed even as they heard. By that hearing they ought to have learned eagerly how to keep the word of God, but they neglected his law, which had been set for them to keep. In the ordinance of the commandment they refused to consider what they ought to do or what they ought to leave undone for the fear of the Lord. Yet they come to the truth, remembering what they heard or knew from God. Before, they had been so blinded that they wholly refused to know his justice, and so they would not incline themselves to set it above their sins. Instead they spurned it, cast the word of God behind them and rejected his law. Many of these will abound in good works, so that they are never satisfied. It is not enough for them to feast in the house of God by celebrating the divine office and by doing his justice in abundance. They are always weeping, and they remember in sorrow the evils they committed in times past, when they practiced unlawful deeds and passed over the lawful things of God's law.[2]

3.1.6 This is the muddy clay that you see on the breast of the loving Father. How so? The Son of God went forth from the heart of the Father and came into the world. The believing people are present to him, and they cleave to him with that intention with which they believe in him. Surely it is for this reason that they also appear on the breast of the loving Father, so that neither angel nor any creature may despise humankind. For the Son of the most high God, made incarnate, has the form of a human being in himself. The blessed choir of angels holds humankind in indignation because it grows so filthy in its sins. The blessed angels themselves are inviolable, without any transgression of justice, and always look most attentively upon the face of the Father. And what is loved by the Father, they also love in the Son. How so? They love that the Son of God was born a human

2 The divine office is the daily cycle of prayers and psalms sung at set hours, especially in monasteries.

being. For I, the Father, have set my Son, born of the Virgin, for the salvation and restoration of humankind,

3.1.7 as Isaiah the prophet, my servant, announces to you: "As a shepherd he will feed his flock; he will gather the lambs in his arm and lift them into his bosom; he himself will carry the ewes that are with young." That is to say: As a shepherd feeds his flock, so my Son, the good shepherd, will feed his redeemed flock. How so? He feeds it with his law, which he himself planted through me. So in his outstretched power, as in his arm, for this my Son is a human being, he will gather the innocent lambs from the guilt of Adam through the innocence of baptism, when the old self with its deeds is stripped from them. And he will lift them into his bosom, in his virtues and in his law. How so? He lifts them up above the heights of the heavens in such a way that they become his members.[3] Therefore humankind appears in the inner secret place of the Godhead in its own form, which neither the angels nor any other creature have. For my Only-Begotten took on human form in virginal flesh for the redemption of the human race. He will also carry the ewes with young in his body. How so? My Son carries human beings in his blood, so that they are saved through his five wounds. Whatever they have sinned through their five senses will be wiped away by the highest justice after repentance. He himself carried them in this way: he became incarnate, he suffered five wounds on the cross, he died and was buried, and he rose from the dead. He also stretched out his hand to them when he drew them back to himself. How so? My Son took on humanity for those who thought they had perished forever because of Adam's fall. My Only-Begotten also conquered death, so that it could no longer rule over them. So he knows them in the power of his glory, as they are to come into the cleansing of repentance. You see them appear in the bosom of the Father, and this means that the Son of Man is made complete with his members in the secret place of the Father. How so? When the world is completed, then the

3 Isaiah 40:11.

elect of Christ, who are his members, will also be made complete. O how beautiful he is,

3.1.8 as the Psalmist also says: "Fair in form beyond the sons of men." That is to say: The loveliest beauty of the brightest form shines in him, without any stain of sin, without the fluid of human foulness, and without any lust for the deed done in sinful desires, which the flesh of mortal weakness demands. None of this ever touched this man. And that form of the Son of Man was born in simplicity beyond other human beings, so that the unharmed Virgin bore her child in ignorance of sin, not knowing what it was to have a son in affliction. How so? Because she felt no touch of sin, she knew no pain in giving birth; instead, within her, the integrity of her body rejoiced. O how fair in form![4] But let people know that the beauty of his flesh was no greater than what the ordering of deep wisdom established for the human form. For the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God in three persons, does not delight in beauty of the flesh, but in the great humility with which the Son of God clothed himself in humanity. In the form of the Son of Man, however, there was no blemish, such as sometimes disfigures a person with a troubled face through irregularity of the body. This lies in the judgment of God: namely, when a person's limbs are misshapen and not rightly ordered, as with the infirm, which is not according to the nature of formation in the human body but according to the judgment of God. Strong nature shows itself in right formation, but weak nature slips away into an irregular formation contrary to the proper form; and this was not to be in my Son as man.

Yet, I say, let human beings differ greatly in their limbs, so that they are blackened, foul, defiled, leprous, dropsical and full of vices. Let them even bear the rust of sorcery through the persuasion of the devil's art, be foolish and slow to see the good things of the Lord, and deserve to be accused and blamed for great forgetfulness, because they ought to have done justice and instead do evil and abandon the good, despising the cross and

4 Psalm 44:3 (45:2 in most English Bibles).

the martyrdom of their Lord. God the Father nevertheless looks, with the intention of his goodness, upon the work made from clay, as a father looks upon his children while he lifts them into his bosom. And because he is God, he has a loving father's love for his children. For the inner love of his heart toward humankind is such that he sent his Son to the shame of the cross, like a gentle lamb carried off to be slain as a sacrifice. So my Son, having taken on humanity, carried back on his shoulder the lost sheep that he had snatched from the jaws of the wolf, bearing it in great pain when he deigned to die for his sheep. Among these people there are many surrounded with ornaments, adorned with the precious finery of the virtues. They are the martyrs, the virgins, the innocent, the penitent and those who are subject to their teachers, as has already been said; and those who make themselves aware of their offenses and torment themselves over them in an unconquerable struggle, denying in themselves what they are. Here it must not be said who they are, or where the elect are; for all of them have been counted. Who is there who can look into the deep wisdom of the Most High, and into the discernment of his knowledge, to see whom he holds in the number of those to be saved? His judgments are incomprehensible to all human beings. You must run, for the kingdom of God is prepared for you. For according to the zeal of the faithful who work the justice of God, who have been washed in baptism and are known in faith, so shall their reward be.

### THE CIRCLE OF GOD'S POWER

*The golden circle is God's endless power and work, which no creature can measure.*

3.1.9 As for what you see—that from the one seated on the throne there stretches a great circle the color of gold, like the dawn, whose breadth you can in no way comprehend—this means that from the almighty Father extends his mightiest power and his mightiest work, embracing all things in his might. With it he works in his Son, whom he has always had with him in the

majesty of divinity, and through him he orders and accomplishes all his works, before the world and in the world from the beginning. And the circle glows red like the dawn with the loveliest brilliance, because the Son became incarnate in the most wise Virgin, whom the dawn signifies, through the inspiration of the finger of God, who is the Holy Spirit; in whom, too, every work of the Father was made. You can by no means comprehend the circumference of this glory. For there is no measure of his power or of his works, nor is there any measure of any goodness or power that is, or was, or is to be in any creature by which it could be measured—only this: that God is beyond reckoning and beyond comprehension in his power, and unconquered and wondrous in his work.

3.1.10 And the same circle turns from the east to the north, and to the west and to the south, and bends back to the east, to the one seated on the throne, and it has no end. This means that the power and the work of God go round, embracing every creature. How so? By the will of the Father, who with the Son and the Holy Spirit is one God, all creatures arose, and all of them feel him in his power. How so? In their creation all of them feel him turning: from the east, that is, from the rising of all justice; moving toward the north, to the confounding of the devil; and toward the west, where the darkness of death seeks to crush the light of life—yet the light rises again and the gloom of darkness is overcome; and toward the south, where the burning ardor of God's justice blazes in the hearts of the faithful. Turning at last to the rising of justice, he returns, as it were, to the east. What does this mean? When, through the supreme power, the work of God has been accomplished among human beings in this world according to the time ordained beforehand by God, then the circuit of the world itself will also be fulfilled. Brought to completion at the end of time, on the last day, all the works of God will shine out in his elect, while the one seated on the throne has no end. For God is perfect in his power and in his work: he was and is and will remain without any beginning of any time in his divinity, so that it is not that he was, but that he is.

3.1.11 And that the circle is so high above the earth that you cannot comprehend it means that the power on high is so exalted above all the lives of creatures, in human perception and understanding, and so incomprehensible in all things and above all things, that no creature will be able to measure it with any capacity of perception without its being far more sublime than that creature can know. That is why the angels continually make God resound in praises. For they see him in his power and glory; yet even as they gaze on him, they cannot comprehend him perfectly, as if they could reach an end, nor can they ever be seized by the weariness of having had their fill, either of his greatness or of his beauty.

3.1.12 As for its giving off from itself a most terrible radiance, the color of stone, of steel and of fire: this means that the divine power shows from itself a hard strength, in great severity against iniquity that is concealed, unrepentant and unpunished. It is fearsome, and like steel, for God is clear justice that has no injustice of yielding softness (for what does not please God is, as they say, unjust, like dust). Rather, he is that justice which, like steel, has strengthened all other justice; and all other justice is far more fragile than his, as iron yields to steel. And it is also like fire, for he is the fire of judgment that burns up sin, on account of all the injustice that never wished to turn to him and seek his mercy. God is also like stone for humankind, for he is true and just without any change: as stone cannot be turned to softness, so he undergoes no change. And he is like steel, for in his power he passes through all things without any change of place or time, because he is God, existing above all things. He is also like fire, for he kindles, sets ablaze and illuminates all things without any change brought by succeeding time and its newness, because he is God.

3.1.13 And that this radiance extends in every direction according to its breadth, up to the height of heaven and down to the depth of the abyss, so that you can see no end of it: this means that the strength of God's power and work, and his justice and most upright judgment, in their incomprehensibility have no

end anywhere—neither in the heights of heaven nor in the depths of the abyss—that could be comprehended by human perception, since it is above all things.

### LUCIFER'S FALL EXPLAINED

*The voice explains Lucifer's pride and fall, and God's judgment on him in the words of Ezekiel.*

3.1.14 You also see coming forth from the secret place of the one seated on the throne a great star of the greatest radiance and beauty, and with it a great multitude of falling sparks. This is because, at the command of the almighty Father, the angel Lucifer, who is now Satan, came forth at his origin adorned with great glory and clothed with much brightness and beauty; and with him came all the sparks of his host, glowing then in the brilliance of light, but now extinguished in the gloom of darkness. For, inclined toward evil, he did not look to me, the only perfect one; but, trusting in himself, he thought he could begin whatever he wished and finish whatever he began. So the honor he owed to the one seated on the throne, since he had been created through him, he turned back upon himself, and in this very act he turned aside toward evil. As for the fact that all those brought forth with that star toward the south gazed upon the one seated on the throne as though at a stranger, and, turning away from him, gaped toward the north rather than wishing to look at him: this means that Lucifer and his whole company, though created in the burning goodness of God, stood there wretchedly, as it were askance—that is, in pride, scorning the one who reigns in heaven. For all of them, as they arose in creation, tasted from the beginning the impiety that turned toward perdition. They looked at God not because they wished to know him in his goodness, but because they wished to raise themselves above him as above a stranger; turning away from knowledge of him in burning arrogance, they strove more toward their own fall than they desired to know God in his glory. But that all of them, in the very turning away of their gaze, were at

once extinguished and turned black as coals means this: when they proudly scorned to know God, Lucifer himself, with all his followers, was in his malice extinguished from the brilliance of the clear radiance with which he had been clothed by divine power. He destroyed in himself the inner beauty that he should have used for good, and stretched himself out to swallow down impiety; and so he was extinguished from eternal brightness and fell into eternal perdition. That is why they were all turned black as the coals of a fire gone out: with their leader, the devil, they were stripped of the brightness of their radiance and so extinguished in the darkness of perdition, lacking all the glory of blessedness, as a coal lacks all the light of a fiery spark. As for the whirlwind that arose from them and at once hurled them from the south, behind the one seated on the throne, to the north, plunging them into the abyss so that you could no longer see any of them: this means that a mighty blast of impiety rose up in those angels of iniquity when they wanted to prevail over God and crush him through pride. That blast was blown out into the bitterest blackness of perdition, and it hurled them back from the south—that is, from the good—into forgetfulness of God, who rules all things, as it were toward the northern region. So where they wished to be proudly exalted, there, confounded, they found their fall; because of their pride they were hurled into the abyss of eternal death, which is their perdition, so that they are no longer seen in any brightness,

3.1.15 as I said through my servant Ezekiel to the southern forest, which ought to have borne the fruit of justice ardently but did not: "Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and I will burn up in you every green tree and every dry tree. The flame of the burning shall not be quenched, and every face shall be burned in it from the south to the north. And all flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it, and it shall not be quenched." That is to say:[5] O fool, who in your pride raised yourself up against me! I, who have neither beginning nor end, will cause the fire of my indignation to be kindled in you in my zeal. By it I will burn up

5 Ezekiel 20:47–48.

in you all your greenness, with which you wished to begin a work, trusting in false vigor, in yourself rather than in me—for in your foolish knowledge you chose to exist according to your pride. And I will burn up in you all that dryness of your sin and of the other lost ones, when you suggest to human beings, who are ashes, the sin that is dry of good; for your suggestion will receive no salvation in you, but will become eternal fire in you. No reward of salvation remains for you, nor for those who follow your example. And that burning of punishments will not be quenched in its torments, but will burn up headlong pride, as it were in the face of the lust for the show of honor that you conceived the wish to have in yourself—you who have been cast out of all your glory, rising, that is, from the south in burning and brightest light, and falling into the darkness of the north, that is, of hell. And every human being will see this: the elect and the reprobate will both know Gehenna—the elect because they have escaped it, the reprobate because they will remain with it in torment—knowing that I, the Lord almighty, kindled it in requital for your evils, O devil, and that it will not be quenched, either in your evils or in those of your followers.[6] And so the perdition of diabolical pride cast Satan and his angels into the outer darkness of eternal torments, without any consolation of light, so that no place was found for him in the eternal light. And you, O fragile human, trembling and astonished, could see nothing more of them. As Ezekiel too, in my spirit, says to the king of Tyre under a mystical meaning: "All who see you among the nations shall be astonished at you. You have come to nothing, and you shall not be forever." That is to say:[7] All the upright of heart who see you, O devil, drunk with vices among those nations that embrace you in transgression of God's law, will wither in astonishment at your filth—at how, by your suggestion, you defile the temple in God's building, which is the

6 Gehenna, named after the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, is a biblical name for the place of punishment.

7 Ezekiel 28:19. Tyre was a wealthy Phoenician port city on the coast of present-day Lebanon.

human being. And therefore you have come to nothing through your pride, in which you fell from all the glory of salvation; for you are no vigor at all, in no happiness, nor will you be found to have any glory any longer in the eternity of the heavenly ones, for you are put to shame among them forever, without end. … ought. Therefore you who do these things presumptuously and cruelly, by killing, kill in yourself the blessed understanding of royal prophecy; for your soul ought to provide itself with pure knowledge—faithfully, that is, in the simplicity that is fitting—and to believe in God.[8] Then God, in the zeal of his purest justice, which has no stain of iniquity, summoning him through the most upright unity of the judgment of his judgments, gives the command, saying: "Hurry and strike him down from the good knowledge he had, so that he may not rest in any happiness of his mind; for he has given me no rest in my heart." And so the stroke of the Lord's zeal strikes him, so that not a single little spark of any eye remains to him for seeing—that is, for knowing—God. And so he dies to the justice of life-giving consolation, unable to govern himself. Then God says to him: "Let your bloody crime, by which you lift yourself up to those heights you cannot behold, be upon your mind, which you unjustly raise against me. Let that evil trample you down into a low place from which you cannot lift yourself to the right measure of the proposition of faith—you who refused to walk in right footsteps and sought a great schism in your own mind. For let your mouth be bereft of the words of wisdom, since it has spoken against your salvation, when you deceitfully probed the secret and incomprehensible divinity, presuming to know what is not to be known and rashly saying within yourself, 'I know well what God is.' By that rashness you killed your inner salvation, since you would not believe in God with caution, but proudly raised yourself against him." But let whoever has keen ears of inner understand-

8 The printed Latin seems to break off here (a lone "debuit," "ought"); what follows appears to interpret the story of the man who claimed to have killed King Saul (2 Samuel 1:1–16), whose beginning is missing.

ing pant for these words in burning love of my mirror and write them in the conscience of his soul.

### VISION EIGHT: THE PILLAR OF THE SAVIOR'S HUMANITY

*A shadowy pillar is climbed by the virtues; seven of them speak, and Grace appears at the top.*

3.8 Then, in the southern region, on the stone wall of the building that had been shown to me, beyond the pillar of the true Trinity already described, I again saw what seemed to be a great, shadowed pillar, visible both inside and outside the building. To my sight it appeared so shadowy that I could make out neither its size nor its height. Between this pillar and the pillar of the true Trinity there was a gap three cubits long. It was empty, without a wall, as was shown above, and only the foundation had been laid there.[9] This shadowy pillar stood in the building at the very place where, high above in the heavenly mysteries before God, I had earlier seen that great, square radiance of most brilliant whiteness. That radiance signified the secret of the Creator on high and had been revealed to me in the deepest mystery. Within it another radiance also shone, like the dawn, which held in itself, high up, an airy brightness of purple light. Through it the mystery of the incarnate Son of God had been shown to me in a mystical revelation. In this pillar there was a way up like a ladder, from its base to its top. On it I saw all the virtues of God descending and ascending, laden with stones, going to their work and intent with eager zeal on completing it. And I heard the shining One who sat on the throne say: "These are God's mightiest workers."[10] Among these virtues I saw seven in particular, and I studied their forms and their dress with the greatest care. This is how they were alike: like the other virtues mentioned above, all of them were clothed as it were in garments of

**9** The building is the edifice of salvation that Hildegard has been describing since Book 3, Vision 2. The pillar of the Trinity was the subject of the previous vision.
**10** The virtues "descending and ascending" recall the angels on Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12).

silk. All of them went bareheaded, with white hair, and without cloaks—except the first, whose head was veiled in the manner of a woman and who was clothed in what seemed to be a chasuble, translucent as crystal; and except the second, who had black hair; and except the third, who seemed unlike a human form. The first, the fourth and the fifth were dressed in white tunics. All wore white shoes, except the third, who, as was said, did not appear in human shape, and except the fourth, who was shod in crystal shoes that shone wonderfully. And these were the differences among them.[11]

The first figure wore a golden crown on her head, with three branches rising high above it. It gleamed with rich ornament of most precious stones, green and red, and of white pearls. On her breast she had a brilliant mirror, in which the figure of the incarnate Son of God appeared with wonderful brightness. And she said:

3.8.1 I am the pillar of humble minds and the slayer of proud hearts. I began in the least and climbed to the heights of heaven. Lucifer raised himself up above himself, and fell down beneath himself. Whoever wants to imitate me, longing to be my son, and thirsts to embrace me as his mother by carrying out my work in himself, let him touch the foundation and climb gently up to the heights. What does this mean? Let him first look at the lowliness of his flesh, and so advance upward step by step, from virtue to virtue, with a calm and gentle spirit. For whoever grabs the highest branch of a tree first in order to climb it very often comes down in a sudden fall. But whoever wants to climb and begins from the root does not fall so easily, if he goes carefully.

The second seemed entirely like a hyacinth stone, of the color of the upper air—both her form and her tunic. Two bands, adorned with gold and gems beyond all reckoning, had been wonderfully woven into this tunic, so that over each shoulder of

11 Hildegard later identifies the seven as Humility, Charity, Fear of the Lord, Obedience, Faith, Hope and Chastity. A chasuble is the outer vestment a priest wears to celebrate Mass.

the figure one band ran down to her feet, in front and behind. And she said:[12]

3.8.2 I was provoked to indignation in heaven when Lucifer gnawed at himself with hatred and pride. But O, O, O Humility! She would not endure it. For this he was cast down in a great fall. And when the human being had been formed—O, O, O most noble seed, and O, O, O sweetest shoot!—the Son of God was born a human being for humankind's sake at the end of the ages. And because Lucifer wanted and tried to tear my garment and my integrity, I appeared as the most brilliant radiance in God and in the human being. Now, however, the blind and the dead call those who share my name brothels, prostitutes and impure women. But just as it is impossible for mud to touch heaven, so it is impossible for this filth to touch my will. So I will make myself wings among the other virtues, and with them I will cast away these useless things that Lucifer has scattered through the world. O virtues, where is Lucifer? He is in hell. So let us all rise and draw near to the true light, and let us build the greatest and strongest towers in every region, so that when the last day comes we may bring in abundant fruit, in spiritual things and in bodily things alike. And when "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in," then we too shall bring our work to completion, on earth and in heaven. O most foul Lucifer, what good did your sudden recklessness do you? In your first radiance, when you were created by God, you wanted, raving and running wild, to trample me down and cast me out of heaven. But you fell into the abyss, and I remained in heaven, and afterward I came down to earth in the incarnate Son of God. Through me the multitude of the faithful has been made complete, armed with a thousand just and good arts—arts you would long ago have gladly torn from them, if you could.[13] O Humility, you who raise up to the stars those who are trampled and crushed like the earth! O Humility, most glorious queen of the virtues, how strong and unconquerable a protection you are to your own

12 In medieval usage the hyacinth is a blue gemstone.
13 Romans 11:25.

everywhere! No one who loves you with a pure heart falls. Just so, I too, together with you, am a most useful and much-desired defense to my own. For I am very slender and fine, and I seek out the tiniest openings in those who cherish me, and pass through them most keenly.

The third figure I saw in the same form in which I had seen her in an earlier vision. She was greater and taller in stature than the other virtues and unlike a human form, with many eyes all over her, and wholly alive in wisdom. She was clothed as it were in a shadowy garment, through which the eyes looked out, and she trembled with great fear before the shining One already mentioned, who sat on the throne. And she said:[14]

3.8.3 O woe to wretched sinners who do not fear God but treat him as if he were a mocker! Who can escape the fear of the incomprehensible God, who lets the guilty perish if they do not cast evil away from themselves? Therefore I will fear the Lord God greatly, greatly. Who will help me before the true God? Who will free me at his dreadful judgment? No one at all but that same just God. So I will seek him; to him I will always flee.

The fourth wore a snow-white bond around her neck, and her hands and feet were tied with a white cord. And she said:

3.8.4 I cannot run as I please along the way of the world, nor through the contagions of human will. And so I wish to return to God, the Father of all, whom the devil rejected and refused to obey.

The fifth wore a red collar around her neck, and she said:

3.8.5 God is one in three persons, of one essence, and is to be worshiped in equal glory. So I will have faith and trust in the Lord, and I will never blot his name out of my heart.

The sixth was clothed in a tunic of pale color. And the cross of the passion of the crucified Son of God appeared in the air before her. She raised her eyes and hands to it with great devotion, and said:

14 In Book 1, Vision 1, Hildegard describes the Fear of the Lord as a figure covered with eyes.

3.8.6 O loving Father, spare those who sin! You did not abandon the exiles but lifted them onto your shoulders. And so we no longer perish, since we have hope in you.[15]

The seventh was clothed in a tunic brighter and purer than crystal, which shone in its whiteness as water gleams when it is flooded with sunlight. On her head stood a dove with its wings spread as if to fly, turned toward her face. There also appeared, as it were in her womb, as in a mirror, a radiant white infant, on whose forehead was written "Innocence." In her right hand she held a royal scepter, and she had laid her left hand on her breast. And she said:

3.8.7 I am free and unbound. I have passed through the purest fountain, that is, the sweetest and most loving Son of God. I passed through him and came forth from him. And I trample on the most proud devil, who has no power to bind me. He is cut off from me, for I always abide in the Father on high. But at the top of the shadowed pillar I have described, I saw another, most beautiful figure. She stood bareheaded, with curly, dark hair and a man's face of such burning brightness that I could not look at it clearly, as one looks at a human face. She was clothed in a tunic of purple and blackish color, into which a band of reddish saffron color had been woven over each shoulder, reaching down to her feet in front and behind. Around her neck she wore a bishop's pallium, wonderfully adorned with gold and most precious gems.[16] A radiance of the purest white surrounded her on every side, so that I could see her nowhere except in front, from her head down to her feet. Her arms, hands and feet were shadowed to my sight. And the radiance that surrounded her was full of eyes everywhere and wholly alive. It spread this way and that, as a cloud tends to drift apart, so that it made itself now wider, now narrower. And this figure cried out to the world in a loud voice, saying to humankind:

15 The image recalls the shepherd who carries the lost sheep home on his shoulders (Luke 15:5).

16 The pallium is a band of white wool worn around the shoulders by archbishops as a sign of their office.

### GRACE SPEAKS

*Grace explains how she moves a sinner toward repentance, and how the will must master the senses.*

3.8.8 I am the Grace of God, my little children. So hear and understand me. I give the light of the soul to those who understand me in my admonition, and I keep them in that same blessedness, so that they do not turn back to iniquity. And because they have not despised me, I want to touch them with my admonition, so that they may begin to do good; and I declare myself to those who seek me in simplicity and purity of heart. I bestow pearls of good when I admonish and exhort a person. That is, when a person's understanding is touched by me, I am a beginning for him: when a person's senses grasp my admonition by hearing, so that those senses are led to consent to my touch in his soul, then I am in him the beginning of the good that he must begin, and so I am his helper. Then and there a struggle begins over whether what I give will be brought to completion or not. How so? I want it understood like this. Suppose I admonish a person in such a way that he begins to groan and weep over his sins. His will may then yield to the admonition I have given him; for a person perceives in his senses the change in his soul, as he lifts his eyes to see, his ears to hear, his mouth to speak, his hands to touch and his feet to walk, according to the desire within his soul. If, then, the will has accepted my admonition, it at once rises up, presses down the senses and overcomes them, so that the senses learn things unknown to their habit. How so? They change, because, whatever they may be, they must follow, unwilling, the will that is above them. For they are subject to it in service. Since they are lower than it, they will follow it whether they want to or not. For I give the good at the beginning, and I warm it in the mind, and I give the will the work to accomplish. I do this by admonition, by exhortation and by the warmth of the gift of the Holy Spirit's inspiration. But if the will resists these gifts, then the things I have mentioned are reduced to nothing. So at the very

time when a person is able to receive, in the blaze of the gifts, the signs of the message that arises from me, let him hasten toward it; and let the will come all the more quickly in good things, and accomplish this work in brightness. For a human being has knowledge of good and evil so that in all his works he may understand God all the better, by avoiding evil and doing good. In this way he worships God with fear and embraces him in perfect love. How so? That is to say, if he opens the inner eyes of the spirit to the good, and if in the outer self he refuses and casts away the evil he could have done. For this reason, too, earthly creation is placed under his power, so that he may understand and love God all the more, and thereby carry out the work of his knowledge with understanding, through which he may fear and love the Almighty, who assigned him the great honor of being served by so many creatures. For these reasons, then, a human being pours out what he knowingly grasps in his understanding: discernment among creatures, so that he knows which are to be loved and which hated, which are useful and which useless; and further, that all his works are then enclosed in the faith by which he understands God, so that they please both God and his angels. Sometimes, too, I touch a person in his soul and admonish him to begin to work righteousness and avoid evil. But he scorns me and thinks he can do whatever he pleases. He sets himself a time for repentance, putting it off until his body falls in with him in the simplicity of cold old age, and until, because of his age, he is too weary to sin any more. Then I admonish him again and urge him toward the good, and to resist his own impulses. When he neglects me, he is often brought, through the many adversities he suffers—in his wealth and in other such things—to the point where he must do good as if unwillingly and against himself. And in so embittered a mind he takes little pleasure in fulfilling what he had earlier planned to accomplish in prosperous times. Back then it seemed to him that nothing adverse could harm him, for he had resolved within himself to do those things at whatever time he pleased. If this person receives me with hesitation, I still do not want to

abandon him; for though he has received me in this way, he has not utterly despised me. So I have not labored in vain in him. For it does not weary me to touch festering wounds, surrounded by the gnawing worms of countless vices, by the stench of evil report and disgrace, and by the sickness of long-standing iniquity of sins. Nor will I disdain to handle them gently at the time when I begin to draw out the consuming livid matter of malice—that is, when I look upon those wounds and touch them with the gentle warmth of the Holy Spirit's inspiration. But often such pain grows chronic through long festering, so that the sin begins to burn hot in the person's soul. The wounds of sin then break out in pain, and they become a clotted mass of this uncleanness, like a lump and heap rising up from a great filth of worms and from the festering of tangled mud, out of which spring the deadly poisons of scorpions, snakes, frogs and other such venomous vermin. And then they harden like stone, into such hardness that no one thinks of breaking it. These are the unbearable burdens of crimes in those people who are weighed down by the heavier burdens. What then of this? Then, indeed, people cannot trust, because of their unbelief, that it is possible for this person to turn to God from his iniquity, because they see him as, so to speak, the devil's food. Yet I do not want to abandon that person. I want to stand for him in the struggle with my intervening help and combat. There I first begin gently to touch, as it were, the stony hardness of that sin, since it is, as it were, hard for it to be broken amid so great a stench of horrible crimes. These crimes are for him the causes of great filth and wickedness already described; they are like a rotting corpse and the devil's food, which the devil has most certainly swallowed into his belly. How so? Scripture says of the Son of God: "My food is to do the will of my Father." Conversely, the devil's food is to drag a person down into death, and through it he breathes such poisons, as was said, upon those who consent to him in their will and turn aside after him. And this is the devil's very desire and constant pursuit, for from this filth all evil springs.[17] But

17 Compare John 4:34.

many of these people do understand me. How so? When I first touch them, such a person says within himself: "What is the matter with me? I know no good, nor do I know how to think of any." And again, not knowing, he sighs and says: "Alas, sinner that I am!" But he feels nothing more, for he is weighed down by the mass of his sins, and the darkness of iniquity has thrown him into confusion. Then I touch his wounds again. And because he had been admonished by me before, he now understands me better, and, looking into himself, he says again: "Woe is me! What shall I do? I do not know, nor can I work out what will become of me because of my many sins. Ah! Where shall I turn, or to whom shall I hurry for help, so that I may cover and blot out in repentance the foul crimes within me?" So he looks into himself again with the same struggle he once had in his eagerness to sin, and he turns to true repentance with the same desire with which he used to pursue his sins. And because that person has thus awoken, through my admonition, from the sleep of death that he had chosen in place of life, he no longer wants to sin in thought, word or deed, which he had once given over so ardently to crime. Instead, with the greatest zeal, he raises himself to me in the strongest repentance. Therefore I at once receive him wholly, and from then on I let him go as if free, so that he will no longer suffer grave assault from the desires I have described—as my dearest sons endure, whom I admonish through manifold misery by the fiery arrows of the devil's persuasions—for he then has no need of these. For he will always grieve over his past sins, so that, angry even with himself, he repents so bitterly that he thinks himself unworthy even to be called a human being. This is victory amid the stench of the filth of those people whom I will not cast away, because after their sins they have at last sought me. For to those who do not spurn me but accept my admonition and seek me devoutly, I am ready to do whatever they wish. But those who scorn me and cast me away are dead, and I do not know them.

For there are many people who, when they feel me present and understand that their mind has been touched by my

admonition, flee from me through the evil habit of the sins they have conceived, which they swallowed into themselves by will, consent and deed. So they too are reckoned before God as nothing and emptiness, because they do not want to be aware of what they could do once touched by me. But I do not want to be in the pollution of these sinners who will not accept my admonition. They will not cleanse themselves through that exhortation so as to turn away from their sins. They do not desire to eat that food which is the Scripture of the Gospel, with which all the faithful ought to be filled, nor to taste its savor as it has been given to them. Instead they hurry to flee the grace of God, for they will neither see, nor hear, nor consider what they ought to do when they are called by the admonition of good. They flee good admonition like a worm that goes into the earth, hiding itself from all the beauty of this world. So too do these most wicked people, fleeing the commandments of God and defiling themselves in the dregs in which they roll themselves toward death, when they hide in their malice and will not come out from the stench of wickedness into the light. Those who are like this do not belong to me. For I do not want to be divided this way and that in the pollution of mud. How so? I want to be with those who understand me through pure repentance; there I even join myself to human corruptibility, for I want to cleanse it. But those who will not receive me I cast away from me, not wanting to be with them. For I have no part with them, since they are on the side of foolish ignorance and will not understand me, and since I do not want to be in a work that belongs to the cementing of hardened perversity, which leads to death. And those who spurn me in this way imitate the lost angel, who, when he could see God, would not look upon him so as to acknowledge him humbly. And so he suddenly fled all heavenly glory and fell into death, when he wanted to be made like God in equal honor. These people despise me because they do the work of evil, as the unlawful desires of the flesh demand in their pleasures. And because they despise me, they do the evil they want. They scorn God, and so they also neglect his commandment. So, very often,

in my indignation, they are allowed to do whatever they wish to the full measure of their minds. The life of eternal happiness flees from them as though they were nothing, and often they also fail both in the prosperity of the present life and in that of the life to come, because they are hard and unmoved toward the happiness of the good. For I abandon the stubborn sinner who persists in his evil deeds. But I give life to the one who looks into himself and, in fear of me, turns from his sins to me with pure repentance. For I am a pillar of firm stability, and I never abandon the one who seeks me. Whoever takes hold of me and joins himself to me closely and faithfully will never fall into perdition. But there is the one who lets me slip from his mind and in his pride raises himself above me. That is, he trusts in himself more than in me, and so scorns to put his confidence in me, because he counts the grace of God as nothing, for in his mind I am even a gust of whirlwind. He holds me carelessly in mockery, and proudly, with arrogance, in despair. This is not because of the weight of the sins he has committed. Out of pride he mocks me, saying, "What is the grace of God?" Him I will cast down and kill, and I will not raise him up to be among my chosen, because he is dead to eternal happiness. Then there are those who have no confidence that they can rise again from the graver faults of their sins, and so cast away almighty God and his grace. They despair, that is, in excessive sadness, as though they could not be saved from the enormity of their crimes. They fail, thrown away from me, and fall bitterly into death, dying in hell in the deeper torment of eternal death.

### GRACE'S BELOVED CHILDREN

*Grace tests those who welcome her through hardship, and urges them to do good while they can.*

Now I will also speak of my beloved children. They receive me with an open mind, a willing spirit and a keen understanding. They touch me with sighs and weeping, welcoming me with joy and embracing me with all their intent. O my flowers, who, as

soon as they feel me present, suddenly rejoice in me, and I in them! They are sweeter and more delightful to me than the love of the most precious stone, and than gleaming precious pearls are to the minds of people who embrace them with burning desire. They are also my most noble squared stones. Because they are always lovable to me in my sight, I want to file and cleanse them unceasingly, so that they may be set rightly and fittingly in the heavenly Jerusalem. For in their minds they always feast with me in good will, and they can never have their fill of my justice. For as soon as they feel my touch they hurry to me, like a deer to a spring of water. But I often leave them, so that it seems to them as if they were without help. I do this so that the outer person in them may not be puffed up with pride. Then they weep and mourn, thinking that I have taken offense at them. In this way I search out their faith. Yet I hold them with a strong hand, taking pride away from them and not letting them know what they are in the hidden good that is in them, because I want to produce manifold fruit in them while their souls grieve and their hearts are wounded with sorrows.[18] For I often allow the persuasions of the devil to invade them with fiery arrows, from the unclean blast of the burning fire of the spirit of fornication, and these wound their bodies in the weakness of their frail nature. I allow this so that in this way they may be imbued so strongly with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that they also become outstanding heralds, ablaze in the virtues. For they will be tested like gold in the furnace. That is, they will be tested by mockery and contempt, so that they will be counted as nothing. Very often robbers will strip them of their property, and through the hostility of the people they will be torn apart in their adversities, like lambs by wolves. Yet when the wolf scatters and disperses the sheep, they still do not die. In the same way these people do not die the death of the soul. Instead they live all the more, purified by adversity. For a good tree is watered, pruned and dug around so that it may bear fruit, and caterpillars are removed from it so that they do not gnaw away its fruit. What

18 The deer at the spring echoes Psalm 41:2 (42:1 in most English Bibles).

does this mean? A good person should not be hard or ill-disposed toward the justice of God, but gentle and pliant toward every good. He should cut evil away from himself, consider himself by examining his deeds, and drive off the attacks of the enemies who harm him. And yet, even before a person feels me in his thoughts or his understanding perceives me within him, I am for him the head and root of fruitfulness, and the power and strength of a firm city built upon solid rock. So let every faithful person hear me saying to him: O human, is it fitting and proper that a rational human being should be without understanding, like an irrational beast that does nothing except what its appetite craves? O wretched people, who do not want to know the great glory that God gave them in his own likeness! It cannot be as they wish, that they may freely, as if by hereditary right, do all the evil they desire, as though they possessed this from the nature of their body. They refuse to consider that they have this honor: that they are able to do good works. God has established all things justly in his ordering. And who can resist him? What does this mean? It means a comparison of this kind: could anyone, by any similar example, be likened to the ordering of God, either in wisdom or in discernment in the things that are his? And why is it that they refuse to take away from themselves the power that has been given to them, namely, that they can do both good and evil? How so? When I admonish them with my touch, those who take hold of me as soon as they feel me present are able, with my help, to bring to completion the good work they desire. But those who despise me collapse into their own weakness and into evil. Yet wicked people try to excuse themselves by claiming that they cannot do good works. They do this so that the outer person in them may exercise its will in freedom. Now, O my dearest children, who are sweeter to me in fragrance than all spices, listen to me as I admonish you. While you have time to do good and evil, worship your God with sincere devotion. O you, once more, my sweetest children, who rise like the dawn, you who ought to burn with love as the sun burns in its rays: run and hurry, my dearest ones, along the way of truth.

That way is the light of the world, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who redeemed us with his blood at the end of the ages, so that after your passing you may come to him with joy. And again I heard the One who sat on the throne saying to me: Those who long for heavenly things must believe faithfully, and not examine obstinately, how the Son of God, sent into the world by the Father, was born of a virgin. For human perception is weighed down by a frail and mortal body and by the very heavy burden of sins. It will not be able to discern the secrets of God any further than the Holy Spirit reveals them to whomever he wills.

### THE PILLAR OF CHRIST'S HUMANITY EXPLAINED

*The voice explains the pillar as Christ's humanity, shadowed and beyond human understanding.*

3.8.9 Therefore, in a mystical mystery, this pillar that you see on the southern side signifies the humanity of the Savior. It stands in the stone wall of the building shown to you, beyond the pillar of the true Trinity already described. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the most gentle Virgin. He is the Son of the Most High, the mightiest pillar of holiness, and he supports the whole edifice of the Church. His humanity appears in the burning faith of the stones, the faithful peoples, who work most mightily in the goodness of the Father on high. It was made manifest after the Trinity had been declared. Once the believing people had been made certain of the Trinity in one God, they also believed in the incarnate Word of God: true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the unity of divinity, to be worshiped in the one true God.

3.8.10 This pillar is great, and it appears shadowed both inside and outside the building. This is because the holiness of the true Incarnation, great and beyond estimation, is so shadowed to human minds that it cannot be contemplated except so far as faith makes it possible to behold it. Those within, who labor in divine worship, know it through faith and deed. To those outside, who are given over to idleness, it is made known by report

and by word. To your sight it appears so shadowy that you cannot make out either its size or its height. This is because my Son appeared among humans in the mortality of the flesh as if shadowed, since he was to undergo death for the people. He was mortal, that is, yet without any stain of sin. Even so, his true Incarnation is incomprehensible in the mystical greatness of the secrets of God and beyond estimation in the excellence of divine power, so that it exceeds all knowledge of human understanding.

3.8.11 Between this pillar and the pillar of the true Trinity there is a gap three cubits long, empty and without a wall, as was shown to you above. This means that the incarnate Son of God, who is true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, still lies hidden in his members. These are the faithful people who are to be born until the end of the world, and who are made members of their head through living works, as you were wonderfully and figuratively taught above. How many they will be, and of what kind, in the long course of the times to come, is hidden in the mystery of the ineffable Trinity. They will adore that same Trinity in the unity of divinity with faithful worship. Their place is empty, since they are still to be born, for it lacks the built wall of good works. Yet the foundation has been laid there, because they are present to God, and because it already stands firm, laid through faith in the salvation they will have. So a person should have hope and trust in no one but God, not wavering about his mercy but trusting in him. This is the strongest foundation of the faithful soul.

3.8.12 This shadowy pillar stands in this very building at the place above which, in heavenly mysteries before God, you earlier saw that great, square and most brilliant radiance of whiteness. That radiance was revealed to you as signifying, in a supreme mystery, the secret of the Creator on high. This means that the incarnate Son of God fulfilled, according to the secret will of the Father, all the works he performed bodily in the world, where he suffered many injuries. And what does that radiance signify? It is great, that is, in signifying the mysteries

of God. It has four corners, because many of those born in the four parts of the world will come to the knowledge of Christ. It is of exceptional whiteness, because no darkness can obscure the most luminous divinity. There the same secret of the supernal and glorious majesty is figuratively disclosed, in the great depth and mystery of the knowledge of the Creator of all, who created all things. No one came to the Creator's aid in this, and no one opposed him in it by resisting, for he created those things only by the will of his goodness, through his Word. So within it another radiance shines like the dawn, holding in itself, on high, the airy brightness of a crimson light. Through it the mystery of the incarnate Son of God was shown to you in a mystical revelation. For in the secret of the most high God the brightness of the dawn is declared, that is, of the Virgin Mary. She bore in her womb the Son of the heavenly and most high Father, who poured out his crimson blood, shining with the brightest light of salvation. In just this way this secret vision shows you the Incarnation of that same Son under a mystical overshadowing.

### VISION THIRTEEN: THE SYMPHONY OF THE BLESSED

*Hildegard hears songs to Mary, the angels, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins.*

3.13 Then I saw a most luminous air. In it I heard, wonderfully, in all the meanings described above, a varied kind of music. There were praises of the citizens of the heavenly joys, who persevere bravely on the way of truth. There were laments of those who are being called back to the praises of those same joys. And there was the exhortation of the virtues, who encourage one another toward the salvation of the peoples, whom the snares of the devil oppose. But the virtues crush those snares, so that in the end the faithful pass from their sins to the heavenly realm through repentance. And that sound, like the voice of a multi-

tude singing in harmonious symphony its praises of the heavenly ranks, said this:[19]

3.13.1 O most splendid jewel, the serene beauty of the sun is poured into you. That sun is the fountain springing from the heart of the Father, his only Word, through whom he created the first matter of the world, which Eve threw into disorder. This Word fashioned a human being in you, and you are that shining jewel from whom the Word himself brought forth all the virtues, just as from the first matter he brought forth all creatures. O you sweetest branch, budding from the stem of Jesse, O how great a power it is that the divinity looked upon the most beautiful daughter, as the eagle fixes its eye on the sun! So the Father on high gazed on the brightness of the Virgin when he willed that his Word should become flesh in her. For when the Virgin's mind had been enlightened in the mystical mystery of God, a wonderfully bright flower came forth from the Virgin herself. And again it said:[20]

3.13.2 O most glorious living light, you angels who, beneath the divinity, gaze with burning desire on the divine eyes amid the mystic darkness of all creation, a desire of which you can never have your fill! O how glorious are those joys that your form possesses! In you that form remains untouched by every wicked deed, the deed that first arose in your companion, the lost angel, who wanted to fly above the innermost hidden pinnacle of God. So the twisted one was plunged into ruin. But he turned the instruments of his fall into the counsel of his suggestion against the creature made by the finger of God.[21] For, O you Angels, who guard the peoples, whose form shines in your face; and O you Archangels, who receive the souls of the just; and you Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominions and Thrones, who are coun-

19 Many of the songs in this vision also appear, with music, in Hildegard's song collection, the *Symphonia*. The vision closes with the sung drama of the virtues later known as the *Ordo Virtutum*.

20 This song is addressed to the Virgin Mary. The "stem of Jesse" recalls Isaiah 11:1; medieval writers read the *virga* (branch) as Mary, with a play on *virgo* (virgin).

21 The "creature made by the finger of God" is humankind, whom the fallen angel tempts.

ted in the fifth secret number; and O you Cherubim and Seraphim, seal of the secrets of God: praise be to you, who gaze into the little chamber of the ancient heart in the fountain. For you see the inner force of the Father, which breathes from his heart like a face. And likewise it said:[22]

3.13.3 O you admirable men, who passed through hidden things, looking with the eyes of the spirit! In a shining shadow you proclaimed the keen and living light that buds in the branch, the branch that alone blossomed from the entry of the light taking root. You holy ones of old foretold the salvation of exiled souls that had been plunged into death. You circled like wheels, speaking wondrously the mysteries of the mountain that touches heaven, passing over and anointing many waters. Among you there also rose a shining lamp, which runs ahead of that mountain and lights it. O you happy roots, with whom the work of miracles, and not the work of crimes, was planted along the rushing path of the clear shadow! And O you ruminating fiery voice, forerunner of the polishing stone that overturns the abyss: rejoice in your head. Rejoice in him whom many did not see on earth, though they called on him ardently. And again it said:[23]

3.13.4 O cohort of the army of the flower of the thornless branch! You are the sound of the whole world, circling the regions of maddened minds that feast with swine. You overcame them through the Helper poured into you, the Helper of the One who sets roots in the tabernacles of the full work of the Father's Word. You are also the noble people of the Savior, entering the way of regeneration by water through the Lamb. He sent you with the sword among the most savage dogs. They destroyed their own glory in the works of their fingers, setting the One not made by hands in subjection to their hands, and in those works they did not find him. For, O most shining band of apostles, you

22 Hildegard names the nine orders of angels of the traditional medieval hierarchy, as handed down by Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory the Great.

23 This song addresses the patriarchs and prophets. The "shining lamp" and the "fiery voice" are John the Baptist, called "a burning and shining lamp" (John 5:35) and "the voice of one crying" (John 1:23).

rise in true knowledge and open the enclosure of the devil's teaching, washing the captives in the fountain of living water. You are the brightest light in the blackest darkness, and the mightiest race of pillars, supporting the bride of the Lamb in all her adornments. Through her joy the Mother and Virgin herself is the first standard-bearer.[24] For the spotless Lamb is the bridegroom, and his bride is spotless. And likewise it said:

3.13.5 O most victorious conquerors, who greeted the building of the Church with the shedding of your blood and entered into the blood of the Lamb, feasting with the slain calf! O how great a reward you have, because while you lived you despised your bodies, imitating the Lamb of God and adorning his suffering, by which he led you into the restoration of your inheritance. You flowers of roses, who are blessed in the shedding of your blood amid the greatest joys! Those joys are fragrant and flowing in the purchase that streamed from the inner mind of counsel, and they abide before time in him in whom there was no establishing. From the head be honor in your fellowship, you who are the instrument of the Church, and who surged in abundance in the wounds of your blood. And again it said:[25]

3.13.6 O successors of the mightiest lion, ruling between temple and altar in his service! As the angels resound in praise and stand by the peoples to help them, so you are among those who always do these things, keeping watch in the office of the Lamb. O you imitators of the exalted Person, in a most precious and most glorious sign—O how great is your adornment! There a human being goes forth loosing and binding in God the sluggish and the strangers, adorning both the shining and the darkened, and remitting great burdens. For you also hold the offices of the angelic order, and you know beforehand wherever the strongest

24 This song addresses the apostles. The "Helper" is the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete of John 14:26.

25 This song addresses the martyrs. The "slain calf" recalls the feast in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:23), which medieval readers took as a figure of Christ.

foundations are to be laid. Therefore great is your honor. And again it said:[26]

3.13.7 O beautiful faces, gazing on God and building in the dawn! O blessed virgins, how noble you are! In you the King beheld himself when he prefigured in you all the adornments of heaven, and there you are also the sweetest garden, fragrant with every adornment. O most noble greenness, you are rooted in the sun, and in clear serenity you shine within a wheel that no earthly excellence can grasp. You are encircled by the embraces of divine mysteries. You glow red like the dawn and burn like the flame of the sun.

3.13.8 And again that sound, like the voice of a multitude, lamented in harmony over those who were to be called back to these same ranks. It complained thus: O, this is a wailing voice of the greatest sorrow! Ah, ah! A wondrous victory has arisen in a wondrous longing for God, and in it the delight of the flesh secretly hid itself. Alas, alas! Where the will knew nothing of crime, where human desire fled from wantonness—for so few come to you! Mourn, then, mourn for these, Innocence. You did not lose your integrity in good modesty, and you did not swallow there the greed of the ancient serpent's throat—for people heed you so carelessly. O living fountain, how great is your sweetness! You did not lose sight of their faces in yourself. Instead, you keenly foresaw how you would draw them back from the angelic fall—those who thought they possessed what cannot be allowed to stand that way. Therefore: "Rejoice, daughter of Zion," for God is restoring to you many whom the serpent wanted to cut away from you. They now shine in greater light than their condition had been before. For the living light says of them: I have made the twisted serpent stumble over his own temptation, which was not as complete as he supposed. Therefore I have sworn by myself that in these cases I have done ever more and more than was in them. O serpent, your joy would

26 This song is addressed to the confessors, the priests and bishops. The lion is Christ, the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5), and binding and loosing echoes Matthew 16:19.

betray you, for I cut you off in your own temptation—something never found in your savagery, O foulest of deceivers.[27]

### THE PLAY OF THE VIRTUES

*In a short sung drama, the virtues rescue a faithful soul from the devil and bind him.*

3.13.9 And again that sound, like the voice of a multitude, cried out thus in harmony. In it the virtues urged one another to help humankind and resisted the opposing arts of the devil, the virtues overcame the vices, and people at last returned to repentance through divine inspiration: We virtues are in God, and in God we remain. We are soldiers of the King of kings, and we separate evil from good. For we appeared in the first contest, and there we stood victorious, when he fell who wanted to fly above himself. So let us fight now too, coming to the aid of those who call upon us, trampling the devil's arts underfoot, and leading those who wish to imitate us to the blessed dwellings.

ANIMAE IN CARNE POSITAE O, we are strangers! What have we done, straying into sins? We should have been daughters of the king, but we fell into the shadow of sins. O living sun, carry us on your shoulders into the most just inheritance that we lost in Adam. O King of kings, we fight in your battle.

FIDELIS ANIMA O sweet divinity, O gentle life, in which I shall wear a radiant robe, receiving what I lost at my first appearing: I sigh for you, and I call on all the virtues.

VIRTUTES O happy soul, O sweet creature of God, built in the deep height of God's wisdom, you love much.

FIDELIS ANIMA O, gladly will I come to you, so that you may give me the kiss of the heart.

VIRTUTES We must fight alongside you, O daughter of the king.

27 "Rejoice, daughter of Zion" echoes Zechariah 9:9 and Zephaniah 3:14.

FIDELIS ANIMA O heavy toil, O hard burden that I bear in the garment of this life! It is too heavy for me to fight against the flesh.

VIRTUTES O soul established by the will of God, O happy instrument, why are you so weak against what God crushed in the virgin nature? In us you must overcome the devil.

FIDELIS ANIMA Come to my rescue and help me, so that I can stand firm.

SCIENTIA DEI See what it is that you are clothed with, daughter of salvation. Be steadfast, and you will never fall.

FIDELIS ANIMA O, I do not know what to do, or where to flee! O woe is me, can I not bring to fulfillment what I am clothed with? Surely I want to cast it off.

VIRTUTES O unhappy conscience, O wretched soul, why do you hide your face before your Creator?

SCIENTIA DEI You neither know nor see nor savor the one who made you.

FIDELIS ANIMA God created the world. I do him no wrong if I want to use it.

DIABOLUS Fool, fool, what good does your toil do you? Look to the world, and it will embrace you with great honor.

VIRTUTES Alas, alas! Let us virtues weep and mourn, for the Lord's sheep is fleeing from life.

HUMILITAS I, Humility, queen of the virtues, say: Come to me, all you virtues, and I will nourish you to seek the lost coin and to crown it, happy in its perseverance.[28]

VIRTUTES O glorious queen, O sweetest mediator, gladly will we come.

HUMILITAS Therefore, most beloved daughters, I keep you in the royal bridal chamber. O daughters of Israel, God raised you

28 The lost coin (*drachma*) comes from Jesus' parable in Luke 15:8–10; here it stands for the straying soul.

up under the tree, so remember his planting at this time. Rejoice, then, daughters of Zion.[29]

DIABOLUS What is this power, that there should be no one besides God? But I say: Whoever wants to follow me and my will, I will give him everything. But you and your followers have nothing you can give, because none of you even knows what you are.

HUMILITAS My companions and I know well that you are that ancient dragon who wanted to fly above the highest. But God himself hurled you down into the depth of the abyss.

VIRTUTES But we all dwell in the heights.

FIDELIS ANIMA O royal virtues, how beautiful and how shining you are in the highest sun, and how sweet is your dwelling! And so woe is me, for I fled from you.

VIRTUTES O fugitive, come, come to us, and God will receive you.

FIDELIS ANIMA Ah, ah! Burning delight swallowed me up in sins, and so I did not dare to come in to you.

VIRTUTES Do not fear and do not flee, for the good shepherd is seeking in you his lost sheep.

FIDELIS ANIMA Now I need you to receive me, for I reek with the wounds with which the ancient serpent defiled me.

VIRTUTES Run to us and follow those footsteps in which you will never fall in our company, and God will heal you.

FIDELIS ANIMA I am a sinner who fled from life. Full of sores, I will come to you, so that you may give me the shield of redemption.

VIRTUTES O fugitive soul, be strong, and put on the armor of light.

FIDELIS ANIMA O all you army of the queen of the virtues, and you, her white lilies with the rosy purple, bend down to me. As a

stranger I have been exiled from you. Help me, so that I may rise again in the blood of the Son of God. And O Humility, true medicine, give me help, for pride has wounded me in many vices and laid many scars upon me. Now I flee to you, so receive me.[30]

HUMILITAS O all you virtues, receive this mourning sinner with her scars, for the sake of the wounds of Christ, and bring her to me.

VIRTUTES We want to lead you back, and we will not abandon you, and all the army of heaven rejoices over you. So it is fitting for us to sound out in symphony.

HUMILITAS O wretched daughter, I want to embrace you, for the great physician suffered harsh and bitter wounds for your sake.

DIABOLUS Who are you, and where do you come from? You embraced me, and I led you out. But now by turning back you put me to shame. I will cast you down with my fighting.

FIDELIS ANIMA I have recognized that all your ways are evil, and so I fled from you. But now, O deceiver, I fight against you.

So, Queen Humility, help me with your remedy.

HUMILITAS O Victory, who once overcame him in heaven, run with your companions, and all of you bind this devil.

VICTORIA O bravest and most glorious soldiers, come and help me conquer this deceiver.

VIRTUTES O sweetest warrior in the rushing fountain that swallowed the ravenous wolf, O glorious crowned one, gladly we fight with you against the deceiver of souls.

HUMILITAS Bind him, then, O radiant virtues!

VIRTUTES O our queen, we will obey you and fulfill your commands in all things.

---

29 "Under the tree" echoes Song of Songs 8:5: "Under the apple tree I raised you up."

30 White lilies and rosy purple are traditional emblems of the virgins and the martyrs.

VICTORIA Rejoice, O companions, for the ancient serpent is bound!

VIRTUTES Praise to you, Christ, King of angels! O God, who are you, who held within yourself this great counsel? By it you destroyed hell's swallowing in tax collectors and sinners, who now shine in the goodness on high. Therefore, O King, praise be to you. O almighty Father, from you flows a fountain in fiery ardor. Lead your children with a fair wind in the sails across the waters, so that we too may lead them in this way into the heavenly Jerusalem.

And these voices were like the voice of a multitude when a multitude lifts its voices on high. And their sound passed through me in such a way that I understood them without difficulty or slowness.

### WHAT THE MUSIC MEANS

*The voice explains the music: symphony softens hearts, and the psalm's instruments stand for the saints.*

3.13.10 And I heard a voice from that same bright air, saying to me: Praise must be given to the Creator on high with the unceasing voice of heart and mouth. For by his grace he sets in the heavenly seats not only those who stand upright, but also those who fall and are bent down. Therefore, O human, you see the brightest air, which signifies the radiance of the joy of the citizens on high. In it you hear, in all the meanings described above, a wondrously diverse kind of music. It sounds in the praises of the citizens of the joys on high, who persevere bravely in the way of truth, and in the laments of those called back to the praises of those same joys. For as the air encompasses and sustains the things beneath heaven, so, as you hear, in all the wonders of God shown to you before, a sweet and gentle symphony sounds in joy the marvels of the elect, who dwell in the city on high and persist in God with sweet devotion. And in laments it sounds the bowing down of those whom the ancient serpent tries to destroy, but whom divine power bravely leads into the fellowship of

blessed joys: it brings forth in them those mysteries that are unknown to human minds bent toward the earth. It also sounds in the exhortation of the virtues, who urge one another on for the salvation of peoples. The devil's snares fight against these peoples, but the virtues themselves crush the snares, in such a way that faithful people at last pass from sins to the things on high through repentance. For there, in the minds of the faithful, the virtues resist for their redemption the vices by which they are wearied through the breath of the devil. When these vices have been overcome with mighty strength, people who had slipped into sins return to repentance at God's bidding, as they search out and weep over their past deeds, and consider and guard against what is to come.

3.13.11 That is why that sound, like the voice of a multitude, makes symphony in harmony in praise of the heavenly ranks. For symphony, in unanimity and concord, ruminates on the glory and honor of the citizens of heaven, so that it too lifts on high what the word utters openly.

3.13.12 So the word signifies the body, while symphony manifests the spirit. For heavenly harmony proclaims divinity, and the word makes known the humanity of the Son of God.

3.13.13 And as the power of God, flying everywhere, encompasses all things and no obstacle resists it, so too human rationality has great power to sound in living voices and to rouse sluggish souls to wakefulness in symphony. David proves this in the symphony of his prophecy, and Jeremiah shows it with a mournful voice in his lament.[31] So you too, O human, who are a poor little creature, frail by nature, hear in the symphony the sound of the fiery ardor of virginal modesty in the embraces of the words of the flowering branch. You hear the sound of the keenness of the living lights shining in the city on high; the sound of the prophecy of deep sayings; the sound of the spreading of the apostolate's wondrous words; the sound of the shedding of the blood of those who faithfully offered themselves; the sound of

31 Medieval readers took David to be the author of the Psalms and Jeremiah the author of Lamentations.

the priestly office of the mysteries; and the sound of the virginal rank of those who blossom in heavenly greenness. For his faithful creature resounds to the Creator on high with a voice of exultation and gladness, and gives him thanks again and again. But you also hear a sound like the voice of a multitude, resounding in harmony in the laments of those called back to these same ranks. For symphony does not rejoice wholly in the unanimous exultation of those who persevere bravely on the way of uprightness. It also exults in the concord of raising up those who have fallen from the way of justice and at last have been lifted to true blessedness. For the good shepherd, too, carried back with joy to the flock the sheep that had been lost. Again, as you hear, that sound, like the voice of a multitude, cries out in harmony. In it the virtues urge one another to help humankind and resist the opposing arts of the devil; the virtues overcome the vices, and people at last return to repentance through divine inspiration. For there is a sweet embrace in the virtues, which draw faithful people to true blessedness, but a dreadful heaping-up in the vices of the devil's snares. This does not mean that the virtues fail to overcome the vices. Rather, the virtues weaken them utterly, and with the help of aid from on high they lead those who consent to them to eternal reward through true repentance, as has also been shown to you in the voices of their harmony.

3.13.14 For symphony softens hard hearts, brings into them the moisture of compunction, and calls down the Holy Spirit. So too these voices you hear are like the voice of a multitude when a multitude lifts its voices on high. For praises of jubilation, uttered in the simplicity of unanimity and love, lead the faithful to that unanimity where there is no discord, as they make those still on earth sigh with heart and mouth for the heavenly reward. And their sound passes through you in such a way that you understand them without difficulty or slowness. For wherever divine grace has been at work, it takes away all the darkness of shadow and makes pure and clear the things that are obscure to the senses of the flesh in the weakness of the flesh.

3.13.15 Therefore let whoever faithfully understands God offer him tireless praise, faithfully, and rejoice in him unceasingly with faithful devotion,

3.13.16 just as David my servant, filled by me with the spirit of depth and height, urges when he says: "Praise him with the sound of the trumpet; praise him with psaltery and lyre. Praise him with timbrel and dance; praise him with strings and organ. Praise him with well-sounding cymbals; praise him with cymbals of jubilation. Let every spirit praise the Lord." That is to say: You who know, adore and love God with simple intention and pure devotion, praise him with the sound of the trumpet—that is, with the sense of rationality. For when the lost angel fell into perdition together with those who consented to him, the hosts of the blessed spirits stood firm in truth through reason and clung to God with faithful love.[32] And praise him with the psaltery of deep devotion and with the lyre of honey-sweet song. For when the trumpet sounds, the psaltery follows, and when the psaltery sings, the lyre follows. So too, when the blessed angels had persevered in the love of truth, and humankind was then created, the prophets arose with wondrous voices, and the apostles followed them with the sweetest words. And praise him with the timbrel of mortification and with the dance of exultation. For after the lyre comes the timbrel, and after the timbrel the dance exults. So too, as the apostles preached the words of salvation, the martyrs endured various tortures in their bodies for the honor of God, and from among them there afterward arose truthful teachers of the priestly office. And praise him with the strings of human redemption and with the organ of divine protection. For while the dance exults, the voices of the strings and of the organ make themselves heard. So too, when the true teachers were showing the truth in the office of blessedness, virgins came forth who loved the Son of God as true man, as if on strings, and adored him as true God, as if on the organ, since they believed him to be true man and true God. What does this mean? When the Son of God took on flesh for the salvation

32 Psalm 150:3–6.

of humankind, he did not lose the glory of his divinity. So the blessed virgins, choosing him as their bridegroom, embraced him with faithful devotion: as true man in betrothal, and as true God in chastity. And praise him with well-sounding cymbals—that is, with those declarations that make a good sound in true joy, when people lying in the depths of sin, pierced with compunction by divine inspiration toward the heights above, lift themselves up out of the depths. And praise him with cymbals of jubilation—that is, with declarations of divine praise, where the mighty virtues, winning victory most bravely, crush the vices in people and, with strong desire, lead them as they persevere in good to the blessedness of true reward. Therefore let every spirit that has the good will to believe in God and to honor him praise the Lord—that is, him who is Lord of all. For it is right that whoever desires life should glorify him who is life.

### WARNING TO READERS

*A voice from heaven blesses those who accept this book and threatens those who reject or alter it.*

And again I heard a voice from the bright air I have spoken of, saying: "O King most high, praise be to you, who do these things in a simple and unlearned human being!" And again a voice from heaven cried out with a mighty shout, saying: Hear and pay attention, all you who desire to have heavenly reward and blessedness! O you people who have believing hearts and await the heavenly reward, receive these words and set them in your inmost hearts, and do not refuse this admonition when it visits you. For I, the witness of truth, the living and true God, who speak and am not silent, say and say again: Who will be able to prevail against me? Whoever attempts it, I will cast him down. So let no human being lay hold of the mountain he cannot move; let him stay instead in the valley of humility. But who leaps across roads without water? He who winnows himself into the whirlwind, and who shares out fruits that give no refreshment. And how will my tabernacle be there? But my tabernacle

is where the Holy Spirit pours out his watering. What does this mean? I am in the midst. How so? Whoever lays hold of me worthily will fall neither into height, nor into depth, nor into breadth. What does this mean? I am that love which blazing pride does not cast down, deep falls do not shatter, and the breadth of evils does not crush. Can I not build on the height of the footstool of the sun? The strong, who display their strength in the valleys, despise me; the dull cast me away in the roar of whirlwinds; the wise refuse my food—and so does anyone who builds himself a tower according to his own will. But I will confound them by means of the small and slight, as I cast down Goliath by a boy, and as I overcame Holofernes by Judith.[33] So whoever rejects the mystical words of this book, I will bend my bow against him and pierce him with the arrows of my quiver. I will strike his crown from his head and make him like those who fell at Horeb when they murmured against me. And whoever utters his curses against this prophecy, the curse that Isaac uttered will come upon him. But whoever embraces it, holds it in his heart and brings it out onto level paths will be filled with the blessing of the dew of heaven. And whoever tastes it and sets it in his memory will become a mountain of myrrh and frankincense and of every spice, and a spreading-out of many blessings, ascending from blessing to blessing like Abraham. And the newly wed bride of the Lamb will join him to herself as a pillar in the sight of God, and the shadow of the Lord's hand will protect him.[34] But if anyone rashly hides these words of the finger of God, or diminishes them in his madness, or carries them off to a foreign place for the sake of some human notion and so mocks them, he will be reprobate, and the finger of God will crush him. Praise, then, praise God, O blessed hearts, in all these wonders that God established in the soft form of the beauty of the Most High, which he foresaw at the first appearing

33 The boy David killed the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17); Judith beheaded the Assyrian general Holofernes (Book of Judith).

34 Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where the Israelites who worshiped the golden calf were struck down (Exodus 32). Isaac's blessing on Jacob (Genesis 27:28–29) promises the dew of heaven and curses whoever curses him.

of the rib of that man whom God created from the clay. But let whoever has keen ears of inner understanding pant for these words in burning love of my mirror and write them in the conscience of his soul. Amen.