

Fall 2014

Hildegard of Bingen: Mystic of the Rhine

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.mr5n-gca5>
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Hildegard of Bingen: Mystic of the Rhine

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Zachary J. Young
December 2014

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HILDEGARD OF BINGEN: MYSTIC OF THE RHINE

by

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2014

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ABSTRACT

Hildegard of Bingen: Mystic of the Rhine

by Zachary J. Young

Hildegard of Bingen has a storied past and, as such, has been called many things. Among these are Sybil of the Rhine, Doctor of the Church, and mystic. This last title has given some pause, most notably Caroline Walker Bynum and Barbara Newman, who deny her the title in their preface and introduction to Hildegard's flagship work, *Scivias*. Scholars such as these fail to analyze Hildegard and her works on their own merits, instead comparing her to other female mystics rather than mystics in general. Although Hildegard does not experience the physical union that is the hallmark of the false construct of 'feminine mysticism,' she does not embrace union as the theme of *Scivias*. When analyzing Hildegard's work with a clear definition of mysticism at hand, one can confidently declare her a mystic.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to:

My mentor, Dr. Kevin Roddy, for using his wisdom, patience, and enthusiasm to encourage my own passion and thirst for both knowledge and wisdom.

My advisor, Dr. John Bernhardt, for imposing his high standards and expectations on all of my writing, and for helping to continue in the grand tradition of Medievalists.

My wonderful fiancé, Mikaela Schumacher, for her constant optimism and encouragement, and for enduring countless long nights of my time being devoted to writing.

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Abbreviations

SEoP: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

TVoRE: The Varieties of Religious Experience

Introduction

Hildegard of Bingen is one of the most interesting, most underappreciated, figures of the medieval period. Her memory defies both the common misconception that all wisdom and ingenuity were lost during the European Middle-Ages and the very antiquated notion that women were inferior to men. With both artistic talent, as demonstrated in her musical compositions and her widespread plays, and a very active mind, showcased by her medical text and her thriving convent, she left an indelible mark on the world. Hildegard made her biggest impact within the Christian faith, rising to such heights that the Church awarded her the lofty titles of Saint and Doctor of the Church. Even those who acknowledge the brilliance of one of the brightest medieval minds, namely Barbara Newman and Caroline Walker Bynum, question one of her more notable titles, that of ‘mystic’.

Hildegard of Bingen grew up in an expanding convent. Born the tenth child of a wealthy family in 1098, Hildegard was given to a hermitess in 1106 as a tithe, a literal gift to God.¹ As Hildegard learned to praise God, to “read the Latin Bible, particularly the Psalms, and to chant the monastic Office,”² a convent grew around her. After Jutta, the hermitess that raised her, died in 1136, Hildegard began her reign over the growing nunnery at St. Disibod.³ She began to experience her mystical visions in 1141,⁴ and

¹ Barbara Newman, introduction to *Scivias*, by Hildegard of Bingen (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), 11.

² Newman, introduction, 11.

³ Newman, introduction, 11, 13.

⁴ Newman, introduction, 12.

though scholars have been quick to attribute these visions to her illnesses,⁵ she claimed that they were divinely inspired, not just the result of pain or psychosis.⁶ She did not reveal these immediately, but rather after she was assured by both Bernard of Clairvaux and his pupil Pope Eugenius III of her gift.⁷ She continued to demonstrate her humility into her advanced age, focusing on the health and welfare of her convent and nuns rather than retire to focus on her own salvation. She advocated for independence from their brother monastery, supplemented the monastic Office with hymns, and wrote her two scientific texts, *The Book of Simple Medicine* and *The Book of Composite Medicine*.⁸ Controversy marked her final years, as her reluctance to retreat from her theology led to an interdict on her convent. She persevered, getting the interdict lifted before her death in 1179.⁹

In order to determine if Hildegard was a mystic, one must clearly define the dynamic terms ‘mystic’ and ‘mysticism’. When one knows the intricacies of both terms, one can approach mystical texts analytically, rather than being confused by an ill-informed understanding of what many consider to be a hazy, paranormal state of being; knowing what markers to seek allows the reader to find elements that would denote a mystic. The working definition to follow comes from the combination of two previous, but limited, definitions. The first definition, that of the William James, from his outstanding *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, one used by many scholars, is

⁵ Newman, introduction, 11.

⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), 60.

⁷ Newman, introduction, 13.

⁸ Newman, introduction, 13-14.

⁹ Newman, introduction, 16.

complemented by the definition given by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, a definition used by the next generation of scholars. Although these two sources discuss different aspects of mysticism, they both agree that the heart of the definition resides in the focus on the unity between God and Man.

This unity is on full display in the late medieval period, with female saints such as Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa fully displaying this unity and demonstrating the many qualities in both *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Their very physical style of mysticism, notably their focus on connecting with the body of Christ (specifically through eating it), has been called ‘feminine’, and connected to that of nuptial mysticism practiced by earlier female mystics, like Gertrude of Helfta. While all of these noted saints clearly meet the definition of ‘mystic’, to declare their mysticism as the only path for a female mystic creates a false construct, an anachronism that creates a separation between mystics that did not exist.

Bernard of Clairvaux also experienced physical union, as demonstrated by the several paintings of his nursing from the Virgin Mary, and did preach about the virtues of mystical marriage, but his focus on humility was more important to his role as a mystic. He taught that the method to achieving unity with God was through humility and did so using his treatise, *On Humility and Pride*, which detailed the twelve steps of pride. Hildegard’s visions had a very similar emphasis, aligning her style of mysticism much more closely to that of Bernard than the other noted female mystics. Hildegard grouped

her visions into three books within her *Scivias*, and the three books make up her contribution to theology. The first book, “The Creator and Creation”, acts as a more vivid, more visual, more symbolic explanation, of Bernard’s *On Humility and Pride*, stressing the idea that humility leads to union with God. The second book, “The Redeemer and Redemption”, explains that the reward for this union, and implicitly for humility, is salvation. Hildegard expands upon both of these concepts in her third book of *Scivias*, “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building”. This text that acts like a glossing of the other two, explaining some of the passages, supplementing their content with additional meaning

Both Barbara Newman and Caroline Walker Bynum deny Hildegard her title of mystic because she does not conform to the standard understanding of a female mystic and does not focus on a physical connection between herself and God but rather believes, like Bernard, in a focus on humility and using it as the path to union. Hildegard does not speak of solely eating the Eucharist as both Catherines do, and does not speak of herself as a bride of Christ in her *Scivias*, as Gertrude of Helfta does. Rather, she focuses on the union between Man and God as a whole, emphasizing Christ and the Church as worldly combinations of mortal and divine. While Bynum claimed that Hildegard “wrote not about union but about doctrine,”¹⁰ a close analysis reveals that union is the key to her writing; Newman’s claim that Hildegard “did not follow the unitive way”¹¹ also fails to acknowledge the whole scope of Hildegard’s work as while Hildegard does not relate a

¹⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, preface to *Scivias*, by Hildegard of Bingen (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), 3.

¹¹ Newman, introduction, 17.

physical individual union, but rather a union between Mankind and God, one which she both initiated and participated. Hildegard's work demonstrates that while she was not a typical female mystic, she embodied every quality that signifies a mystic, and highlighted a clear pathway for others to do so also, at the same time.

Using a definition of mysticism derived from the amalgamation of those of James and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, one can analyze the works of any mystic to determine the validity of the title. The works of Catherine of Genoa, Catherine of Siena, and Gertrude of Helfta certainly contain many mystical elements, but have other qualities that link them together. The works of Bernard of Clairvaux contain the same mystical elements, yet he is rarely linked to these mystics in a similar fashion as Hildegard of Bingen. By this definition, Hildegard should not be denied the title of mystic, yet she is rejected by the aforementioned scholars because she does not fit the mold of the typical female mystic. Without relying on an anachronistic and false construct, nobody can legitimately deny Hildegard of Bingen her well deserved title. Hildegard deserves to take her honored place amidst the great mystics of history, and this thesis shall be a ringing endorsement for her candidacy.

Defining Mysticism

Imagine a young scholar walking through the giant stone archway of the Cathedral Church of Christ, Blessed Mary the Virgin, and Saint Cuthbert of Durham, or more commonly known as Durham Cathedral, and taking a moment of peace to absorb his surroundings. Rather than being overcome by the long history of the culturally important church, or the way the acoustics mimic those of a modern opera house, or even the magnificence of the size of the brilliant rose window in the east wall, he simply feels the presence of God, a presence that is beyond explanation, that he cannot describe with any combination of words. This presence, running through him, more than compels him, but physically moves his limbs, as he moves towards the east end, towards the tomb of Saint Cuthbert. As he is forced to his knees, he understands the importance of solidarity, and the keys to the unity of people. A moment later, he realizes that he is still in the doorway. This fits the definition of a mystical event, according to William James, despite the lack of such extravagant features such as prolonged fasting, stigmata, or life-like visions.

In his seminal work, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, James cautions religious scholars that “[t]he words ‘mysticism’ and ‘mystical’ are often used as terms of mere reproach, to throw at any opinion which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental and without a base in either facts or logic,”¹² warning them that their work

¹² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Random House, 1929), <http://web.archive.org/web/20110221111441/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=JamVari.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=11&division=div1>, lectures 16 and 17, chapter 370.

may be regarded as nearly pointless. To combat this false conception, any analysis of mysticism or mystical experiences must begin with a definition of mysticism and a declaration of the assumption of legitimacy. Without defining mysticism, it carries the popular view with its connotations of absurdity and superstition. Without the assumption of legitimacy, that the visions or other experiences were genuine and religiously inspired, any argument emphasizes the suspect veracity of the experiences and the claims of the mystic, rather than an analysis of the experience itself.

As noted by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, mysticism is derived from the Greek word $\mu\upsilon\omega$ (I conceal), as it referred to the secret rituals practiced in Hellenistic Greece.¹³ The meaning changed, however, during the spread of Christianity, to reflect the secret meanings of scripture, the allegorical meanings of scripture that were often outlined by Augustine of Hippo in his numerous writings. This understanding of the secret meanings of scripture eventually led to mysticism as referring to a direct experience of the divine, and even if not successful, the method of attempting to achieve that direct experience.¹⁴ As the *SEoP* states, ‘mysticism’ is “a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined in different traditions.”¹⁵ This leads to the key question, what is a mystical experience? According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, it is

¹³ “Mysticism,” last modified March 3, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mysticism/#Oth>, section 1.

¹⁴ “Mysticism,” 1.

¹⁵ “Mysticism,” 1.

A (purportedly) super sense-perceptual or sub sense-perceptual experience granting acquaintance of realities of states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection.¹⁶

The *SEoP* explains its definition by clarifying several of the terms. By using the qualifier ‘purportedly’, a focus can be placed on the experience, rather than on questions of the authenticity of the experience.¹⁷ This also eliminates questions about the experiences regarding the medical condition of the mystic or, as in Hildegard of Bingen’s case, the accuracy with which her scribe recorded her visions. ‘Super sense-perceptual’ experiences describe the most frequent type of episodes, in which the experience is full and vivid, where knowledge seems to come from beyond the senses, while the term ‘sub sense-perceptual’ experiences refer to the experiences when everything seems to blend together, in a rather hazy, nebulous sense.¹⁸ The ‘super-sensory’ experiences, or ‘extrovertive’ as the *SEoP* has dubbed them, tend to be the most memorable to the audience, due to the very vivid details that the mystic shares. The ‘introvertive’ ‘sub-sensory’ experiences emphasize the unity of emptiness. ‘Acquaintance of realities’ refers to the awareness of multiple realities, that of the phenomenal world, and that of the vision.¹⁹ For the mystic, understanding that the reality of the experience and the reality of life are distinct is important so that they understand that the vision is meant to pass on wisdom, not to replace life. ‘States of affairs’ refers to the

¹⁶ “Mysticism,” 1.

¹⁷ “Mysticism,” 1.

¹⁸ “Mysticism,” 1.

¹⁹ “Mysticism,” 1.

knowledge, which as previously mentioned, can come after the vision itself.²⁰ This is the knowledge that the mystic gains and is expected to reflect upon and share. Lastly, the somatosensory modalities refer to “the means for sensing pain and body temperature, and internally sensing body, limb, organ, and visceral positions and states.”²¹ These are the qualities that describe the foundation of the ordinary experience, but there are very extraordinary effects that characterize what the mystic encounters during the experience. Once one understands the structure of a mystical experience, the content of the vision can be analyzed on a truly meaningful level.

In the previously mentioned *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, William James spoke of four significant features that are consistently in mystic visions.²² James claims, as a first feature, that visions are always ineffable, that the experiences cannot be fully expressed in words.²³ This complements the *SEoP*'s definition, as only the phenomenal world can completely be described in words. The ineffability of these visions, the inability to completely share the vision with anything but negative terms, means that the visions must be personally experienced to be fully understood. In being so, he declares they are closer to emotion than intellect, mentioning such concepts as love and music.²⁴ Just as one who has never heard music cannot fully understand what a musician is trying to convey with his music, neither can one who has not felt love cannot fully

²⁰ “Mysticism,” 1.

²¹ “Mysticism,” 1.

²² James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

²³ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

²⁴ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

understand when people speak of love, the inexperienced reader cannot fully understand the visions.²⁵ The *SEoP* brings up Augustine's observation about ineffability, that in declaring something ineffable, one have given it a positive attribute.²⁶ However, this is simply arguing semantics, as it does not allow anyone to fully understand a vision, simply because it can be called indescribable, and thusly draws attention away from the more important idea – that the vision is completely experiential. Although in an academic sense, declaring something to be indescribable is describing something about it, in a more practical sense, focusing on this contradiction leaves the reader lost and confused, not understanding any other aspect of it. James reaffirms his observation of ineffability with his mention of Dionysius the Aeropagite, whom he calls the “fountain-head of Christian mysticism,”²⁷ and the comment that ‘absolute truth’ can only be defined negatively.²⁸ This affirmation that ‘absolute truth’ can only be defined negatively returns to the idea that it is not part of the phenomenal world and cannot be grasped through intellect alone.

The second significant aspect of mysticism, the noetic quality of the vision, was of paramount importance to William James, as he proclaimed, “[t]hey are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate as they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for

²⁵ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

²⁶ “Mysticism,” 3.1.

²⁷ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 407.

²⁸ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 407.

after-time.”²⁹ James clearly states that the knowledge passed on to the mystic is not pertinent solely to the tangible, phenomenal world, but meant to be used in and in pursuit of the afterlife. This is also reflected in the definition given by the *SEoP*, specifically in the phrase “granting acquaintance of realities of states of affairs,”³⁰ which implies a difference between reality and the vision, but also between reality and the afterlife. Though the experiences often overwhelm the senses and cause emotional changes, the key to the experience is the wisdom that is passed on to the mystic. James continues to stress the point of knowledge by declaring meditation to be the basis of Christian mysticism.³¹ James implies that meditation -- the conscious reflection of wisdom, which is the proper application of knowledge -- begets more knowledge, and more pointedly, unity with God. Without the knowledge bestowed during these experiences, they would simply be hallucinations; they are not meant to scare the mystic, but rather to establish truth.³²

The third pillar of mysticism is transiency. Though not every mystical experience is short, most cannot be sustained for a long period of time.³³ They are often short, and almost always physically draining on the mystic. A second implication of this can be seen in the reproduction of these experiences, as they are shown to be in constant state of flux. Whether recreated in the memory of the

²⁹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

³⁰ “Mysticism,” 1.

³¹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 397.

³² James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 407.

³³ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 372.

mystic, as James mentions,³⁴ or in their writings, these experiences are imperfect. They are subject to change from one instance to the next, in what James has called “continuous development.”³⁵ Perhaps this reflects the first attribute of mystical visions, their ineffability, as the mystic continuously tries to develop a method of explaining his experience, yet continuously fails to find a perfect explanation. It certainly returns to the *SEoP*'s definition, as it reflects the phenomenal reality, a world in continuous, inconsistent flux.

The final key element to a mystic vision, James claims, is the passivity of the mystic. The will of the mystic is restricted, he argues, as the mystic acts as if he is uplifted by, and moved, as if he were a marionette, by a superior power. This can manifest itself in many forms, “such as prophetic speech, automatic writing, or the mediumistic trance.”³⁶ In each case, the mystic is used as a tool to spread wisdom. This returns to the second facet of any mystic experience, the noetic quality that James noted, in that the wisdom is the key.

The *SEoP* subsequently clarifies its definition to include a focus on union with the transcendent³⁷ and is careful to explain that the unity in mysticism can be both metaphorical (noting Bernard of Clairvaux's *Mutuality of Love*)³⁸ and physical, citing Jan van Ruysbroeck's example of the iron in the fire.³⁹ These

³⁴ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 372.

³⁵ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 372.

³⁶ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 372.

³⁷ “Mysticism,” 1.

³⁸ “Mysticism,” 2.

³⁹ “Mysticism,” 2.

examples support the ideas James voiced on unity, as he quotes Paul,⁴⁰ “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”⁴¹, and expands upon that with Saint Teresa’s view “[i]n the orison of union, the soul is fully awake as regards God, but wholly asleep as regards things of this world and respect of herself.”⁴²

So, what is mysticism? Mysticism is the pattern of experiences that fit a very comprehensive, yet fluid, form. The most important factor, their unitive properties, is always the focus of the vision. Though each mystic may amalgamate with the divine differently, without union, a religious figure has failed to achieve mystic status. The mystic should be overwhelmed during the transient, evanescent experience, either from his senses being flooded with new phenomena or from the vast emptiness, which Meister Eckhart tells us, is really one-ness. These super-super-sensational moments should render the mystic unable to fully express his experiences, as they are beyond words fit to describe this world. Wisdom should come from the information that the mystic gathers in his awestruck state; knowledge is gained during the event, and wisdom after, as the mystic applies this knowledge from the experience to the phenomenal world. This knowledge and wisdom are not sought by the mystic however, he acts merely as a medium, often acting as a tool for God’s use, a marionette under his deft fingertips.

⁴⁰ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 409.

⁴¹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 409, Galatians 2:20

⁴² James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 400.

Although defining the term mystic can be as simple as ‘a person who either experiences or cultivates mystical experiences’, discussing mysticism in the abstract beyond the outlines given by both William James and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is difficult because each experience is so different; and although there are certainly trends in mystic experiences, those trends change over time, and from one gender to the other. Some mystics buck the trends all together, making them even more distinct among a group of extraordinary individuals. Others stand out as more typical, and can be analyzed when an understanding of mysticism is needed. Both Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa were more typical mystics and were engulfed by the unity voiced by Paul, explained by Saint Teresa, and analyzed by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and William James, so their actions help elucidate the definition of a mystic.

Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena: Mysticism Flamboyant

Two of the most celebrated mystics in the history of the Church are Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa. They are revered for both their charitable acts and their direct experiences of God. Though many may miss the connection between aspects of these saints, Benedict J. Groeschel certainly saw it, stating in his introduction to Catherine of Genoa's works that "[i]n considering mystical phenomena, one must look at the entire life and functioning of the individual, because these occurrences will always be part of the whole pattern."⁴³ For both Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa, constant fasting and feeding the sick were not simply ways of life; they were a continuation of their experiences. They lived their divine teachings. Both Catherines continued to experience God through their actions, a form of unity that is key to mysticism. Caroline Walker Bynum stated most beautifully in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, "[b]oth Catherines fed the destitute by ordinary charity and by miracle: Both ate the filth of the sick they tended. Both felt that it was in the excruciating pain of more than earthly hunger that they fused with the agony of Christ on the cross and offered up such agony for the salvation of the world."⁴⁴ For both of these celebrated saints, experiencing God through their visions was not enough; they were compelled to continue their holy methods and experience God through their bodies.

⁴³ Benedict J. Groeschel, introduction to *Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, by Catherine of Genoa (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). 7.

⁴⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 165.

Catherine of Siena has three written legacies, her *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, her prayers, and her collection of letters. Her collection includes several letters to Pope Gregory XI, at least one to Charles V of the France, and several to lesser figures including multiple cardinals, a bishop, a duke, and the queen of Naples. The letters to her confessor, Frate Raimondo da Capua, detail the extent of her mysticism. These letters explain both her visions and how they impacted her life, and by extension, how she expected them to impact the life of Frate Raimondo. One of these letters came at a very troubling time for the Catholic Church, the beginning of April, 1376.

By 1376, the papacy had resided in the city of Avignon, far from Rome, the traditional See of St. Peter, for over fifty years, a very public sign of a fissure within the Church. Catherine sought to bring the Church back to its spiritual home and to help reform it. An experience she had while praying on April 1, 1376, gave her the knowledge to do so. Even before getting to details of her vision, she told Frate Raimondo about many aspects of her experience that are noticeably mystical:

For on the night of April first God disclosed his secrets more than usual. He showed his marvels in such a way that my soul seemed to be outside my body and was so overwhelmed with joy that I can't really describe it in words. He told and explained bit by bit the mystery of the persecution holy Church is now enduring, and of the renewal and exaltation to come.⁴⁵

The first sentence demonstrates that Catherine understood that the experience was beyond the phenomenal world; her differentiation between the vision and her usual praying is key to noting her realization. By stating that her soul “seemed to be outside”

⁴⁵ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena* (Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1988), 207.

her body, Catherine draws attention to her passivity, essentially saying that she had no control of her actions. Her body, she implies, is beyond her control. By focusing on the overwhelming joy, she demonstrated for Frate Raimondo parts of both William James' and the *SEoP*'s definitions of mysticism. Overwhelming joy is certainly "super sense-perceptual"⁴⁶, as it goes beyond any normal sense of joy, and Catherine herself defines the joy, and the vision itself, as ineffable when she says she 'can't really describe it in words.' The last sentence details yet another aspect James embraced, the noetic quality of the vision. Catherine told Frate Raimondo what knowledge God had imparted upon her, knowledge that she could not receive from any human senses.

As Catherine moved into the details in her recollection, including quoting Christ quoting scripture, she demonstrated yet another facet of the noetic quality that James had expounded. James declared the basis of mysticism in meditation,⁴⁷ Catherine exemplified it, by taking Jesus' quotation, "It is inevitable that scandal should come into this world, but woe to the one by whom the scandal comes,"⁴⁸ paraphrasing it, and explaining to Frate Raimondo the practical significance it had to their dilemma. In refashioning the quote, Catherine unified herself with Christ, as it demonstrated her attempt to be Christ. This becomes even clearer as she continued to give details, as she stated:

The fire of holy desire was growing within me as I gazed. And I saw the people, Christians and unbelievers, entering the side of Christ crucified. In desire and impelled by love I walked through their midst and

⁴⁶ "Mysticism," 1.

⁴⁷ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 397.

⁴⁸ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 207. Matthew 18:7, NIV.

entered with them into Christ gentle Jesus. And with me were my father Saint Dominic, the beloved John, and all my children. Then he placed the cross on my shoulder and put the olive branch in my hand, as if he wanted me (and so he told me) to carry it to the Christians and unbelievers alike. And he said to me: “Tell them, ‘I am bringing you news of great joy!’”⁴⁹

Her pursuit of unity with Christ ended with a physical union, entering through the wounds in his side. However, this simple passage again embodies more than one mystical aspect, as she notes the super sensory aspect of the fire of holy desire, and her passive response to it, being impelled to walk into Christ. She also reiterates that it is a noetic vision, as she is to spread the word of joy. This letter provided many examples of Catherine’s mystic visions, along with a description of how she tried to live her life in accordance with the principles of her vision. Another letter she wrote to Frate Raimondo demonstrated the two aspects of her mysticism, but with the focus more specifically on her mystical life.

Catherine’s letter to Frate Raimondo came under rather unusual circumstances, as the saint had been asked to comfort a condemned man, mentioned in the letter only as “a young Perugian.”⁵⁰ The circumstances were not the only unusual facet of the letter, as Catherine described one of her mystic visions, the prominent aspect of the letter contains her description of leading the condemned man through his own mystic experience. First, Catherine tells her confessor, she took the young Perugian to hear mass and to receive holy communion.⁵¹ Hearing mass certainly fulfills the noetic quality of the James’ definition, as he would have listened to the homily, and felt invigorated by the message.

⁴⁹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 207-208. Luke 2:10, NIV.

⁵⁰ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 107.

⁵¹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 109.

Receiving holy communion fulfills many requirements for a mystical experience: The ineffability of absorbing God; the union with the divine, from absorbing God; and the super-sensory aspect of being overwhelmed with the presence of God. Catherine even commented on his passive state during the entire morning, saying “[h]is will was in accord with and submissive to God’s will,”⁵² as well as noting that he was considering the afterlife, “[h]is only fear now was not being strong at the final moment.”⁵³ His final moments led to Catherine’s vision.

Just after the condemned man was beheaded, Catherine saw Christ appear as “one sees the brilliance of the sun,” an overwhelming of her senses, though the union she saw immediately was that of the young Perugian and Jesus. Catherine described the union in a similar fashion to other times that she had been one with Christ, “After he received his blood and his desire, [Jesus] received his soul as well and placed it all mercifully into the open hostelry of his side.”⁵⁴ Just as she had often spoken of being combined with Christ through his wounds, or suckling at his wounds,⁵⁵ Catherine described the two executed men as uniting. The final aspect of her vision signifies her importance during the Perugian’s mystical experience: “[the Perugian] turned as does a bride when, having reached her husband’s threshold, she turns her head and looks back, nods to those who

⁵² Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 109.

⁵³ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 109.

⁵⁴ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 110.

⁵⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 166-168.

have attended her, and so expresses her thanks.”⁵⁶ She had brought him to union with God, the epitome of living a life infused with her mystic values.

As elucidated by Caroline Walker Bynum, Catherine’s mysticism influenced her life beyond the examples she shared with Frate Raimondo. After mentioning that Catherine had many different visions about food, including nursing from Christ’s wounds,⁵⁷ fruit trees,⁵⁸ and being commanded to eat,⁵⁹ Bynum expanded upon the Saint’s inability to eat, including placing it in the same context as her losing the ability to understand phenomenal sensations.⁶⁰ Catherine’s failure to eat stands at the heart of her lived mysticism, as it caused her great pain. This pain, Bynum argues, is the union between her and Christ, as “Catherine saw her suffering as quite literally merged with Christ’s agony on the cross and with the pains of purgatory. She therefore knew with utter confidence that her pains did save souls.”⁶¹ This knowledge fills the noetic requirement, as she did not simply fast but fasted for the knowledge that she made a difference in the lives of others. It also implies a pain beyond what the normal senses could feel, as it would be equivalent to that of Christ, as well as the oft noted unity aspect. As Bynum put it, Catherine believed she was “[s]erving as well as suffering.”⁶²

The most important mystical teaching from Catherine of Genoa can be found in her *Purgation and Purgatory*. This collection, though not directly written by Catherine,

⁵⁶ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 110.

⁵⁷ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 166-168.

⁵⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 168.

⁵⁹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 168.

⁶⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 169.

⁶¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 171.

⁶² Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 171.

is composed of her sayings and teachings on the subject of purgation.⁶³ Groeschel is careful to say that the text should not be discarded though, noting that some glosses came out prior to the official publication.⁶⁴ This implies that written versions of Catherine's teachings were being spread and thus recorded before her death. Bynum focuses on two key aspects of the *Purgation and Purgatory*, the *Imitatio Christi* and the recurring themes of hunger, desire, and bread.

Catherine declares that souls in purgatory “have no concern for themselves but dwell only on their joy in God’s ordinance, in having Him do what He will. They see only the goodness of God, His mercy towards men.”⁶⁵ She outlines their sole goal, to move towards God’s goodness, regardless of the world around them. She continues with an explanation of their journey, saying “[t]his joy increases day by day because of the way in which the love of God corresponds to that of the soul, since the impediment to that love is worn away daily. This impediment is the rust of sin. As it is consumed, the soul is more and more open to God’s love.”⁶⁶ This understanding of purgatory mimics the ideals of the *Imitatio Christi* movement of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, as by attempting to live like Christ, one can attempt to brush away the ‘rust of sin’. Just as many people joined brotherhoods to imitate Christ -- often through poverty and charitable works, but mostly through a life focused on God – the soul focuses on God during purgatory, releasing all of its desire to sin, and being released from all of the holds

⁶³ Groeschel, introduction, 21.

⁶⁴ Groeschel, introduction, 21.

⁶⁵ Catherine of Genoa, *Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, 71.

⁶⁶ Catherine of Genoa, *Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, 72.

of sin. Bynum is careful to note that though it is an *Imitatio Christi*, it is not completed, as Catherine describes it as an experience, not a benchmark.⁶⁷

In addition to focusing on the unitive aspect of the *Imitatio Christi*, Bynum has highlighted the themes of hunger, eating, and bread in one passage of *Purgation and Purgatory*.⁶⁸ She prepares the reader for Catherine's argument by explaining that hunger represents desire, eating represents love, and that the bread represents a connection between God and self. Catherine details the following scenario: There is one bread in the whole world, and simply looking at the bread is nourishing. A healthy, hungry, man would seek that bread, but if he could not find it, his hunger would increase. Hell, then, would be knowing that the bread could satiate the man, but knowing he could never find it. Purgatory, she claims, has hungry souls, but they know they will find the bread some day.⁶⁹

Using Bynum's analysis, one can clearly see that Catherine meant that the ultimate goal was to achieve union with God, a reflection of the mystical literature that had come before her, whether it be Gertrude of Helfta, Bernard of Clairvaux, or Hildegard of Bingen. This love, which she had already described the importance of, is nourishing and satisfying and is all that is necessary for salvation, while being denied this

⁶⁷ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 183.

⁶⁸ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 185.

⁶⁹ Catherine of Genoa, *Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, 76

love is the only meaning of Hell. This endless desire to be one with God is evil, she claims, saying “[a]ll goodness is a participation in God and His love for His creatures.”⁷⁰

Just as her predecessor did, Catherine of Genoa also lived her mysticism. Most notably she took communion daily for more than half of her life and had extended fasts,⁷¹ but these meant little in comparison to her charitable works. She and her protégé, Ettore Vernazza, tended to the sick during the plague epidemic,⁷² and Groeschel has noted that she was particularly generous to “foundlings and orphans.”⁷³ This worldly Catherine matched the internal Catherine, who was very critical of her mystical aspects. Catherine is one of many mystics who questioned her or his relationship with God, and the validity of her or his experience. “Her own doubts about the supernatural origin of her fasts and illnesses, her willingness to listen to others, to be skeptical about the spiritual value of a forty-day fast attest to a degree of reality testing inconsistent with any psychotic process.”⁷⁴ She knew her experiences were not normal, as she correctly deduced the absurdity of a forty-day fast, but it did not stop her from living by the wisdom they granted her anyway.

Both Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa are regarded as important mystics and saints. They did not receive these distinctions solely for their visions, however, as noted by both of their biographers and by Caroline Walker Bynum. They both lived their lives based on the wisdom of their mysticism, attempting to achieve

⁷⁰ Catherine of Genoa, *Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, 73.

⁷¹ Groeschel, introduction, 6.

⁷² Groeschel, introduction, 15.

⁷³ Groeschel, introduction, 18.

⁷⁴ Groeschel, introduction, 9.

union with God not only in their transient experiences, but also their lasting experiences in the phenomenal world. They also both experienced God through a very physical form of mysticism, a form of mysticism that focuses on the humanity of Christ. Bynum simplified their mysticism by saying:

Women fast – and hunger becomes an image for excruciating, never satiated love of God. Women feed – and their bodies become an image of suffering poured out for others. Women eat – and whether they devour the filth of sick bodies or the blood and flesh of the eucharist, the foods are Christ’s suffering and Christ’s humanity, with which one must join before approaching triumph, glory, or divinity.⁷⁵

Bynum’s explanation of lived mysticism fits perfectly for both Catherines, as it focuses on their love of God, and their efforts to ensure their union with God through their work in the world. While Catherine de Hueck Doherty prefaced *The Works of Catherine of Genoa* with “[a] mystic is simply a man or woman in love with God,”⁷⁶ Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa proved they were more than that, using their love of God to create more good in the world.

⁷⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 186.

⁷⁶ Catherine De Hueck Doherty, preface to *Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue*, by Catherine of Genoa (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), xiii.

Gertrude of Helfta: The Beginning

Gertrude of Helfta is less known than her successors, Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa, but her contributions to the development of mysticism were no less important. As noted by Caroline Walker Bynum in “Women Mystics in the Thirteenth Century: The Case of the Nuns of Helfta”, “[f]ew medieval women before the thirteenth century speak to us directly about their inner religious experiences.”⁷⁷ This fact explains why defining patterns in women’s mysticism before this period is impractical, while Bynum implies that defining female mysticism as being “synonymous with ‘nuptial mysticism’”⁷⁸ when it is not “characterized primarily or universally by the use of bridal images”⁷⁹ is both short-sighted and lazy. Bynum is correct in stating that “female mysticism was not merely one type among many,”⁸⁰ but she does not explain that there are certain trends in mysticism among women, including bridal imagery, but also many other physical images, mainly the stigmata and, in many forms, nursing. Female mystics sought the same goal as male mystics, union with the divine, but the trends in their experiences tend to have either a more intimate nature, as with nuptial imagery, or a more physical nature, as with the stigmata, or a combination of the two, as with the varied and ever-present nursing imagery. Gertrude of Helfta (1256-c.1301)⁸¹ was among the first to display some of these aspects, opening the door to what is, fairly or unfairly, seen as ‘feminine’ mysticism.

⁷⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 170.

⁷⁸ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 171.

⁷⁹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 171.

⁸⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 171.

⁸¹ Sister Maximilian Marnau, introduction to *The Herald of Divine Love*, by Gertrude of Helfta (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), 6.

The first step in understanding the role that Gertrude of Helfta played in the creation of ‘feminine’ mysticism is to understand her as a mystic. In her influential text *The Herald of Divine Love*, she details several of her visions. As she began to recount her first vision, she demonstrated aspects of both the foundation and the content of a mystic vision, according to the definitions given by the *SEoP* and William James’ *TVoRE*, while also displaying one of the qualities of ‘feminine mysticism’. Describing the actions of an attractive young man, Gertrude states:

While he was speaking, although I knew that I was really in the place where I have said, it seemed to me that I was in the Choir, in the corner where I usually say my tepid prayers; and it was there that I heard these words: “I will save you. I will deliver you. Do not fear.” With this, I saw his hand, tender and fine, holding mine, as though to plight a troth, and he added: “With my enemies you have licked the dust (cf. Ps. 71:9) and sucked honey among thorns. Come back to me now, and I will inebriate you with the torrent of my divine pleasure (Ps. 35:9).”⁸²

The first line demonstrates an acknowledgement of two different states, that of the phenomenal world where she was still in the middle of the dormitory,⁸³ and that of the vision when she is talking to a young man, and in the corner of the Choir. This understanding proves that though Gertrude was inexperienced in terms of mystic experiences, she still understood the gravity of the experience and was aware of her senses. This is one part of the framework of an experience, while the content is heavily shaped by the passive role that Gertrude played. All of the actions are taken by the young man, including touching her hand, but more notably, telling her things that will happen, and commanding her. By telling her

⁸² Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), 95.

⁸³ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 95.

that he will save her, and he will deliver her, the young man demonstrated his ability to act on Gertrude, and her limited ability (or possibly inability) to act. He is also forceful with his commands, regardless which command one focuses on, between ‘Do not fear’ and ‘Come to me now’. The action of taking her hand is very telling, as it is an intimate gesture to begin with, but is impregnated with meaning by the phrase “as though to plight a troth”, in this case referring to a vow of marriage. This simple phrase is the beginning of nuptial imagery, and while this imagery is not the only aspect of ‘feminine’ mysticism, it is among the most notable.

Gertrude invokes more physical imagery within the same vision, saying “...on the hand with which he had just given me his promise I recognized those bright jewels, his wounds, which have canceled all our debts (Col. 2:14).”⁸⁴ She focuses on the stigmata as a form of unity, sharing it between Christ and herself through the bond created by their holding hands. This physical imagery is partnered with the other notable aspect of Gertrude’s mysticism, the balance of all things, ranging from tradition and modernization,⁸⁵ to ecstasy and sobriety. She claims she was “burning with desire and almost fainting,”⁸⁶ but clearly she is still in complete awareness of her surroundings, as she is able to compare her situation from before to her situation now, saying “...I found your yoke sweet and your burden light (Matt. 11:30) which a short time before I had thought to be

⁸⁴ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 95.

⁸⁵ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 186.

⁸⁶ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 95.

unbearable.”⁸⁷ These two passages work together as an example of the balance between tradition and modern understandings of God that Bynum noted, as the commands ‘Do not fear’ and ‘Come back to me’ are proof of God as judge⁸⁸ and the gestures surrounding their hands are clear demonstrations of God as comforter.⁸⁹ The commands are given as if Gertrude is about to be judged, and that justice is inevitable. As Bynum states, for Gertrude, “to question or circumvent his justice is as unthinkable to question as his love.”⁹⁰ Gertrude saw God in a similar fashion as did many who saw paintings of the Christ Pantocrator; she understood the traditional idea of a powerful, just God, and the newly popular focus on the humanity of Christ.⁹¹

Gertrude cultivated another aspect of ‘feminine’ mysticism; she was seen as serving, just as Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena would be later. This is a perception of Gertrude beyond that of any historian, as it comes directly from those closest to her, those who wrote the first book of her *The Herald of Divine Love*.⁹² While she is not seen serving food, nor tending to the wounded, as both Catherines are seen doing, Gertrude serves others spiritually. Caroline Walker Bynum lists three different examples from *The Herald of Divine Love*, including translating scripture and composing prayers, offering spiritual

⁸⁷ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 96.

⁸⁸ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 186.

⁸⁹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 186.

⁹⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 186.

⁹¹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 187.

⁹² Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 196.

counseling, and being a cautionary tale against vice.⁹³ Bynum also connects these actions to Gertrude's "monastic vocation"⁹⁴, as "[Gertrude] is certain that her own extraordinary spiritual experiences are secondary to service of others."⁹⁵ In this way, Gertrude recognized that union with Christ through similar actions, the heart of the *Imitatio Christi*, was a greater demand of her God than union through God's actions or her own experiences. This again shows the magnificent balance that Gertrude was able to maintain, between embracing the established *Imitatio Christi* and innovating 'feminine' mysticism with the physical aspects that become more common after her time.

The first example of Gertrude serving others that Bynum notes comes from the chapter "Her Zeal for the Salvation of Souls", from the first book of *The Herald of Divine Love*. That first book differs from the second in that it was not written by Gertrude, but rather after her death by her followers.⁹⁶ This allows the reader to understand how Gertrude was seen by her contemporaries and often creates a more accurate representation of the figure than a historian could. Bynum notes that Gertrude translated scripture and composed prayers,⁹⁷ but the author of the original text explained the reasoning behind the actions. She did not translate random passages, or the entire text, but rather important passages, or

⁹³ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 196.

⁹⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 197.

⁹⁵ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 197.

⁹⁶ Marnau, introduction, 12.

⁹⁷ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 196.

passages that were difficult for others to understand.⁹⁸ To supplement these helpful acts, she spent much time “abridging long passages or explaining difficult ones, to the glory of God which she so much desired and for the salvation of others.”⁹⁹ For Gertrude, as Bynum explained, speaking of God was not enough, nor was being in union with God, but the critical aspect was that she help others, especially with their pursuits of union with the divine. For Gertrude, there was a fate worse than death: A soul of another facing eternal damnation.¹⁰⁰

Bynum’s second example of Gertrude’s service, that of providing spiritual counsel, is based in the second part of the same chapter. From a letter written to Gertrude, by a “devout servant of God,”¹⁰¹ “[t]he divine heart feels for your soul a very tender affection, an ineffable love, because of the devotion with which you have employed our strength unsparingly in the defense of truth.”¹⁰² She (most likely) would go on to say, “In seeking God’s glory and not your own is all that you do, you are offering to your Beloved the hundredfold of all that you would like to do yourself and to see accomplished in others.”¹⁰³ These quotes work together to demonstrate the importance of Gertrude’s work within the community at Helfta, even without her response to the nun, and demonstrate that the other nuns could see the importance that she placed on their souls rather than on her

⁹⁸ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 64.

⁹⁹ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 64.

¹⁰¹ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 65.

¹⁰² Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 65.

¹⁰³ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 65.

own. Her selflessness is clearly on display, and clearly the nuns around her embraced her because of it.

The author of the first book held Gertrude up as an example in the chapter entitled “The Virtue of Humility, and Her Several Other Virtues, Discussed Together,” much the same way as Gertrude acted as an example during her lifetime. As Bynum pointed out, Gertrude is shown as feeling her significance to be similar to that of a scarecrow;¹⁰⁴ however, the author failed to see the difference between Gertrude’s actions and the use of a scarecrow. Gertrude is portrayed as acting with the hope that others would imitate her and thus be closer to, and praising, God, without taking credit for spreading the action by speaking about it.¹⁰⁵ While a scarecrow is supposed to modify behavior when seen, the crows are not expected to act as the scarecrow does, protecting the field, but rather to be fearful and stay away from it. Although Gertrude practiced a highly tuned sense of humility, she did not embrace her sins but rather a strong desire to improve and to be reborn in the eyes of her God. Once again though, one must note that she felt it was important to improve in order to help others improve, returning to the theme of service.

Gertrude demonstrated many of the aspects of mysticism that historians and theologians have come to describe as ‘feminine’ and did so without compromising the initial goal of mysticism: to find unity with the divine. She

¹⁰⁴ Gerturde of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 71. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 196.

¹⁰⁵ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 71.

exhibited quite an aptitude for serving others; and while she did not focus on food, as Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa did, she did embrace a physical, intimate unity upon which her successors would build. She had nuptial visions and experiences of the stigmata, but as Bynum implied, these are merely symbols for a more potent meaning in her visions;¹⁰⁶ Gertrude experienced and lived many of the aspects of mysticism that have been declared 'feminine', but the unity with God that she achieved was no less meaningful nor less potent than any union that another mystic experienced.

¹⁰⁶ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 171.

Bernard of Clairvaux: The Forebear

According to G.R. Evans, Bernard of Clairvaux made an impact because he had words of “perennial relevance to the understanding of the human condition”¹⁰⁷ and often times “a fresh insight of enduring value.”¹⁰⁸ This is critical to our modern understanding of St. Bernard but fails to elaborate on Bernard’s historical position. In order to appreciate Bernard’s role as a mystic, one must analyze his views on both mysticism and how to achieve a mystic state.

Though his thoughts on mysticism seemed to be quite different from the also orthodox John of the Cross¹⁰⁹ and possibly related to the ‘feminine’ mysticism that would spread after his death¹¹⁰, one must understand Bernard’s beliefs in context, and to understand how his theology manifests itself completely before comparing him to other mystics. While both St. Bernard and St. John of the Cross spoke of nature and its importance in relation to achieving unity with God, they spoke of two very different states. Bernard embraced nature, saying that union is only possible when all obstacles between the believer and God had been removed, when the believer had been returned to a state of nature.¹¹¹ Here, he spoke of nature as in Eden, a state without blemish, a state that is as God intended. John of the Cross claimed, however, that “by nature the soul is so weak and impure that it cannot receive [union with God],”¹¹² seemingly creating an

¹⁰⁷ G.R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

¹⁰⁸ Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 165.

¹¹⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 192.

¹¹¹ Merton, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard*, 167.

¹¹² Merton, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard*, 167.

orthodox contradiction. However, John of the Cross was referring to ‘nature’ as the current, sinful, state of the soul. Aside from his focus on ‘nature’, Bernard commanded his monks “to seek perfection in the mystical marriage,”¹¹³ in what some scholars, those who believe as Bynum and Newman do, would call a link to the ‘feminine’ style of mysticism that would soon rise to prominence. However, what many fail to see is that these two ideas are related; Bernard felt that mystical union, marriage with the divine, was only possible when one had moved from the current state of nature to the perfect state of nature. To Bernard, the path from sin to purity is the key, the difficult part; and while the union is ultimate goal, it is only possible after the journey, and as a reward for proper living. This understanding of nature having no obstacles between the believer and God, with God being the sole concern and the sole goal of the believer, is reflective of the biblical understanding of pride, “In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts, there is no room for God.”¹¹⁴ He ensures that the connection is understood by quoting the gospel of John, and explaining it with a quote from Paul’s letters in first Corinthians. “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). The way he says, is humility, which leads to truth. The first is labor; the second is the reward for the labor (1 Cor 3:8).”¹¹⁵ Bernard understood that the effort to constantly focus on God was rewarded with the experience of God. These explanations emphasize why St. Bernard’s treatise *On Humility and Pride* is such an important mystical text.

¹¹³ Merton, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard*, 163.

¹¹⁴ Psalms 10:4, NIV.

¹¹⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” in *Selected Works*, trans. by G.R. Evans (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987), 102.

When asked to discuss the steps of humility, Bernard responded to his former prior Godfrey by explaining the twelve steps of pride. He told him that unlike Saint Benedict, he could only “set before [him] the order of [his] descent.”¹¹⁶ Since he only knew the twelve steps of pride, Bernard outlined them with the hope that Godfrey and his monks would be able to reverse them on their path to union with God. Broadly, Bernard listed three qualities that the humble possess: “the grief of repentance, the desire for righteousness, [and] perseverance in the words of mercy.”¹¹⁷ These qualities, he declares, are used to fend off “ignorance, weakness, [and] jealousy,”¹¹⁸ qualities that are displayed by those walking the twelve steps of pride. As Bernard lists the twelve steps of pride, he clearly felt that ignorance led to jealousy, and in turn to weakness, just as each step led directly into the step after it.

The first step of pride is curiosity, or idleness of the mind. While it is not sinful in itself, idleness does create opportunity for sin, as a wandering mind seldom finds its way to God. Bernard is clear about this, saying “And truly, O man, if you concentrate hard on the state you are in it will be surprising if you have time for anything else.”¹¹⁹ By focusing on oneself and one’s relation to God, one has little time to wander to other thoughts. Beyond being the same justification for the celibacy of priests, this is the reasoning behind cloistering monks and nuns, since prayer was intended to be their singular concern. This idleness, or opportunity to, along with curiosity of, the action of

¹¹⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 142.

¹¹⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 115.

¹¹⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 115.

¹¹⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 123.

watching others, leads to the second step of pride:¹²⁰ Light mindedness. Watching others allows one to understand differences between one another, noticing one's strengths and weaknesses as compared to others in the cloister. This, Bernard argues, leads to depression when one finds himself lacking. This pulls one farther from God, and leads directly into foolish merriment, the third step of pride. In an attempt to avoid sadness, one begins to search for humor, causing a larger divide from God. Bernard chimes in disdainfully, saying the proud person "giggles. He preens himself. He is always joking and ready to laugh at the slightest thing."¹²¹ One's thoughts only move toward what will keep him in a good mood, though Bernard does little more than list the signs of the third step, before moving on to one of the methods advocated by the foolish merriment: boasting.¹²² Boasting is tied directly to the step after it, trying to be different. These steps are only different in that boasting takes the form of speaking widely on topics, often without provocation, and often presenting oneself as an expert.¹²³ Trying to be different, or as Bernard calls it alternatively, 'singularity', raises boasting to a new level, as it emphasizes that the expertise that the one has displayed has earned one special privileges.¹²⁴ Bernard explains the other danger of singularity, describing the narcissistic obsession with appearing to be the most holy, and explaining that it leads to less time focused on God.

If he sees anyone thinner and paler than he is, he despises himself
and cannot rest. And although he cannot see his own face he wonders

¹²⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 131.

¹²¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 132.

¹²² Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 132.

¹²³ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 132-133.

¹²⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 100.

what others think of it, and he looks at his hands and arms, so as to test the pallor or color of his face from that of his members. He is very anxious to perform his own special exercises and lazy about performing the common ones everyone else does.¹²⁵

At this point, the monk that Bernard is describing has moved from bragging about his abilities to claiming special rights for himself because of these abilities, and in turn approaches the next step, which Bernard has titled arrogance. The arrogant monk, he argues, basks in the warmth of the compliments of other monks for his apparent holiness and begins to believe them, creating a false sense of holiness for oneself.¹²⁶ This increased, albeit falsified, sense of holiness leads one to interfere with others' actions and causes one to rarely deign to do humble tasks, "thinking that he ought not to be bothered with trivial things. For he feels himself to be fitted for great tasks."¹²⁷ One places oneself above others and has begun act upon this belief.

Bernard separates these six steps from the others, explaining that at this level, one has contempt for his equals and in, the specific case that Bernard was addressing, contempt for the brothers.¹²⁸ Bernard places these as the first steps of pride, and their inverses as the last of the steps of humility, because the hardest respect to give, and the easiest to take away, is that for people around one. A superior is often afforded respect based on his experience and rank, while God is

¹²⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 134.

¹²⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 134.

¹²⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 135.

¹²⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 137.

given respect out of love and fear for his awe inspiring power, but others with similar abilities and situations to the prideful man are often forgotten. The next step, however, is to feel more important than others in the community.

The claiming of special rights, an evolution of the idea that one is only meant to do great tasks, is hallmark of the seventh step, presumption. Self-justification, mainly for this type of behavior, is the eighth step of pride. While one may justify his actions many ways, as Bernard writes, the prideful man cannot admit he knowingly chose to do something wrong.¹²⁹ The ninth step of pride, according to Bernard, is insincere confession. Bernard expounds upon the idea, explaining that in attempts to either cast doubt upon his guilt, or to draw attention away from his guilt, a sinful man will over emphasize his sin in his confession. Bernard argues that when guilt is certain, a bloated confession could cause others to doubt their opinions of the guilty and thus reconsider his guilt.¹³⁰ Another possible outcome is to emphasize the confession, and the false penitence, rather than the sin itself, as to cause others to forget the sin. Step ten, which Bernard does not comment on beyond listing it in the outline, is rebellion against superiors. While curious that he does not elaborate upon the step, Bernard may have seen this as simply an expansion upon the seventh step, presumption. While presumption can be defined as claiming special rights, rebelling against superiors can be seen as claiming special rights after being denied them by superiors.

¹²⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 135.

¹³⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Steps of Humility and Pride," 136.

These four steps have been classified as “contempt for superiors.”¹³¹ Beyond offending the others in the community, one has clashed with his superiors by disregarding their roles of power and leadership and rejecting their experience and expertise. He attempts to place himself in a leadership role, and in doing so, threatens the security of the community by leaving the members of the community ill prepared. The prideful person quickly approaches the last two steps of pride, which Bernard declared showed “contempt for God.”¹³²

The eleventh step of pride is the freedom to sin. The prideful man no longer fears repercussions, as he has rejected authority, and fears no punishment.¹³³ He no longer has fetters to restrict his appetites and will act upon them rather than upon his intellect. Bernard draws a parallel between this step and the next by referring to one entering a river. He explains, “[I]ike someone entering a river, he does not plunge, but goes step by step into the torrent of vices.”¹³⁴ Rather than diving into the icy depths of the water, one will slowly walk into it, to prepare the body for the temperature of the water. The path to sin is similar to that to pride, as the freedom to sin becomes the path to habitual sin. This final step of pride is a demonstration of pure contempt for God. The only thing that is important to the prideful man is himself, as “nothing holds him back, in mind hand, or foot, from wrong thoughts, plans, or action.”¹³⁵ His thoughts

¹³¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 137.

¹³² Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 137.

¹³³ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 138.

¹³⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 138.

¹³⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 138.

and actions are unchecked, as Bernard notes, he “does not govern himself with reason and he is not bridled by fear.”¹³⁶

The importance of this text as a mystical text is abundantly clear: Following the steps of pride will preclude one from any union with God. Bernard understood the path to God, and he sought to guide others along that path, with the humble thought that their eternal life was more important than his own. What many may not understand is that though Bernard spoke of mystical marriage, the result of this humility and union is not physical, but rather, as Thomas Merton pointed out, a union of wills.¹³⁷ He declares:

We cannot, then, become one substance with God. But the union we can achieve with him is only one degree less perfect than this. The union of *wills*, making us one Spirit with God, is the highest and the purest and the most intimate union that can possibly be achieved by two individuals remaining essentially distinct.¹³⁸

Merton clarifies Bernard’s point of view, that while nobody can be God, one can share his will and be part of him in that fashion. For Bernard, mysticism was not about visions of marriage or experiencing the stigmata, but rather about experiencing life as God intended and helping others to do so. For Bernard, there was nothing more important than sharing God’s will and leading others to the same destination, their own garden of Eden.

¹³⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On the Steps of Humility and Pride,” 139.

¹³⁷ Merton, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard*, 153.

¹³⁸ Merton, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard*, 153.

Hildegard of Bingen: The Defense

People throughout the world know of Hildegard of Bingen and her many talents. Her management of a thriving convent, her writing talents, including both her *Scivias* and her medical text, and her numerous productions, namely her musical compositions and her well-traveled plays, have brought her much recognition and deserved fame. For some however, this all pales in comparison to her role as a Doctor of the Church and as a leading theological figure in the Middle Ages. Her most interesting role, that of mystic, invites debate, as two of the leading scholars, Barbara Newman and Caroline Walker Bynum, both deny her the title of ‘mystic’. Neither argues with the basic tenets of the definition of mysticism noted above, as Newman states, “[c]lassical definitions of mysticism stress the union of the soul with God and the whole system of ascetic and contemplative disciplines that aim to facilitate that union.”¹³⁹ Bynum intimates the same thing when she says of Hildegard, “[s]he wrote not about union but about doctrine,”¹⁴⁰ implying that the key to mysticism is union, and as Newman also states, that Hildegard does not speak of union. “Hildegard, while she certainly had a powerful sense of the divine presence, did not follow the unitive way.”¹⁴¹ Newman’s claim is closer to accurate, as she notes the connection between Hildegard and God, but both scholars fail to acknowledge the union that Hildegard wrote of in her mystical text, *Scivias*. Hildegard did not write about her own union with God, as she did not consistently share a physical relationship with him as Catherine of Genoa, Catherine of Siena, and Gertrude

¹³⁹ Newman, introduction, 17.

¹⁴⁰ Bynum, preface, 3.

¹⁴¹ Newman, introduction, 17.

of Helfta did, but rather she emphasized the union between Man and God, specifically the path to it, throughout the first book of her text, “The Creator and Creation”. One must acknowledge this form of union as critical to the understanding of *Scivias* as a whole, as it is the first part of a two part promise that is quite literally biblical. The second book, “The Redeemer and Redemption” also speaks often of this union between the mortal and the divine and requires the same acknowledgment. In “The Redeemer and Redemption”, the visions depict the reward for achieving union with God and did so not by emphasizing Christ, but rather the redemption that he brought. The third and final book of *Scivias*, “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building” does not add a third prong to the promise, but rather acts as a supplement to the other two books, clarifying and complementing individual visions as necessary. Though both Barbara Newman and Caroline Walker Bynum deny Hildegard the title of ‘mystic’ because of their claims that she does not enjoy union with God, Hildegard outlines the path to union with God in a single word, a word that she lived, *humility*. She also shares the reward for that promise, as God had expressed it to her in her visions, as eternal life.

Hildegard began her *Scivias* with a simple, yet powerful declaration. “These Are True Visions Flowing From God.”¹⁴² In outlining the circumstances of her experiences, and explaining her declaration, Hildegard demonstrated several of the aspects of mysticism even before she began dictating her visions. First, she indicates that it was divinely inspired, “a voice from Heaven.”¹⁴³ This point garners support from her claim

¹⁴² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 59.

¹⁴³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 59.

that “the visions [Hildegard] saw [she] did not perceive in dreams, or sleep, or delirium,”¹⁴⁴ but rather while she was awake and aware. Hildegard experienced these visions because of her connection with God, not as the result of disease, sickness, or fatigue. She also explains that she was not just a prophet, spreading a message, but rather that she was unified with God.

Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and whole breast, not like a burning but like a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch. And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures, namely the Psalter, the Gospel and the other catholic volumes of both the Old and the New Testaments, though I did not have the interpretation of the words of their texts or the division of the syllables or the knowledge of cases or tenses.¹⁴⁵

Her claim to be filled with God, embodied by God, is supported by the wisdom that she suddenly gained, wisdom that she had not previously attained despite having spent more than thirty years in a monastic life with daily interaction with the knowledge that she mentioned. The understanding that she gained from these visions was not accessible to her through sensual perception, a return to the *SEoP*'s definition, which states that the “realities of the states of affairs”¹⁴⁶ can only be understood through extra-sensory perception.

Despite Bynum's aforementioned claim,¹⁴⁷ Hildegard highlighted union, specifically with the divine, throughout the first book of her *Scivias*. She did analyze her

¹⁴⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 59.

¹⁴⁶ “Mysticism,” 1.

¹⁴⁷ Bynum, preface, 3.

visions, explaining to the reader the insights that she was awarded, to the best of her ability, just as Bynum claims she did,¹⁴⁸ but this certainly did not prevent her from experiencing the visions the first time, nor from attaining the secret knowledge they were emitting. She embraced ideas of order, most specifically with the *God Enthroned Shows Himself to Hildegard* establishing the dominance of God, and *The Choirs of Angels* establishing a hierarchy in heaven. The visions, specifically the aforementioned two, preached humility. She stresses humility both in traditional sense in *God Enthroned Shows Himself to Hildegard* and in the biblical sense, placing nothing between one and God, in *The Choirs of Angels*. While hidden in the extended foci of order and humility, union with God remains the key to “The Creator and Creation”. It is elevated as the most desirable status possible, compared several times to paradise, and shown as the best state that any being could experience.

In the first vision, titled *God Enthroned Shows Himself to Hildegard*, Hildegard sees a blinding figure atop an iron mountain,¹⁴⁹ a clear image for God upon a solid foundation, which Hildegard names as the eternal kingdom of God, with a small child at the foot of the mountain.¹⁵⁰ She also saw several aspects with ties to vision, including “an image full of eyes on all sides”¹⁵¹ and “many little windows,”¹⁵² which she mentions as revealing other aspects in her vision. She explains the eyes allow for the fear of God

¹⁴⁸ Bynum, preface, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 67.

¹⁵⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 67.

¹⁵¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 67.

¹⁵² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 67.

to watch over Christianity, “exercising her zeal and stability among humans,”¹⁵³ while the windows ensure that all human intentions are revealed.¹⁵⁴

Some of the more mystical aspects come from the distinct diction that Hildegard uses, mainly in the description of a child and her knowledge of the mountain with the windows. The child is described as “wearing a tunic of subdued color but white shoes, upon whose head such glory descended from the One enthroned...”¹⁵⁵ This combines both the extra-sensory and sub-sensory aspects that the *SEoP* indicated may be present. The subdued color is almost below the level of sight, just as the white shoes and the glory from God are meant to illustrate the other end of the spectrum. A similar argument can be made for the statement “I perceived in this mountain many little windows,”¹⁵⁶ as Hildegard does not claim to see or feel the windows but simply perceive them. She attains this knowledge without the use of any normal sense, a quality of a mystic vision.

Her second vision, entitled *Creation and the Fall*, can be seen in the same mystical sense as Bernard’s twelve steps of pride. Hildegard begins by describing a series of lamps, meant to represent Eden (and in the more personal sense, a union between God and the individual), before introducing a second aspect to the retelling of her vision, a rather daunting landscape.¹⁵⁷ She does not simply call it a chasm or a hole, but rather a “pit of great breadth and depth... emitting fiery smoke with great stench,

¹⁵³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 68.

¹⁵⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 67.

¹⁵⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 67.

¹⁵⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 73.

from which a loathsome cloud spread out...”¹⁵⁸ By describing the serpent (or pride, in the personal sense) as large and having several aspects, between the physical topography of a pit, the smell of the smoke, and the heat from the fire, Hildegard has shown the varied nature of pride and numerous methods it could take to endanger the reader, in addition to the magnitude of the danger that pride provides. As if the threat was not enough, Hildegard clearly explains the result of pride, stating that the “loathsome cloud”¹⁵⁹ had expelled a second cloud and the human form that had produced the second cloud. Pride placed itself between God and the individual, just as the serpent had placed itself between man and Eden.

Hildegard uses her explanation of her second vision as an opportunity to discuss several facets of marriage, ranging from the proper age for marriage to the reasons for (and the eventual ban) on polygamy. The most important facet, mystically, that she discusses is divorce. She declares that “there should be perfect love in [man and woman] as there was in those first two.”¹⁶⁰ Hildegard praises Adam for not blaming Eve for his downfall, but also for staying by her side after the expulsion. She pleads with her reader, saying “let them by no means separate from each other, just as blood cannot be separated from flesh,”¹⁶¹ emphasizing the union between man and woman, as anointed by the divine, is indestructible. This is meant to be seen as comparable to the marriage between Christ and the Church, another holy union. Hildegard emphasizes this connection with her explanation of Adam’s continued support for Eve after the expulsion, saying he

¹⁵⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 73.

¹⁵⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 73.

¹⁶⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 78.

¹⁶¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 78.

continued to support her because “he knew she had been given to him by divine power.”¹⁶² This connection would not be missed by the reader, despite the reversal of the gender roles, with Christ, understood to be the groom in the mystical marriage, being the gift from the divine power.

The final explanation Hildegard provided for her second vision delineated the rewards of humility and clearly alluded to a mystical union without using the exact words. She makes the powerful claim “humility caused the Son of God to be born of the Virgin,”¹⁶³ explicitly stating that the pinnacle of gifts was a reward for humility, even without stating that the gift was a fusion of Man and God, a union of mortal and divine. This union stands in stark contrast to the images of her vision, in which man is expelled by pride and sent forth into chaos, where “all the elements of the world which before had existed in great calm, were turned to the greatest agitation and displayed horrible terrors.”¹⁶⁴

Hildegard does not directly experience union with God in the vision. She has no marriage to Christ, but she did come to understand the importance of the union between man and woman, and the relationship it has to the union between Man and God. Equally as important, she came to understand the relationship between pride and expulsion,

¹⁶² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 78.

¹⁶³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 89.

¹⁶⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 73.

humility and union. In this action she grew closer to God, emphasized by her admonition: “let anyone who wishes to conquer the Devil arm himself with humility.”¹⁶⁵

The Universe and Its Symbolism, Hildegard’s third vision, is one of the most complicated in the first book, consisting of a rather complex representation of the universe, which makes little sense without Hildegard’s own explanation. Her delineation of the vision is significantly more straightforward than the vision and clarifies that without her explanation, that the vision would have no meaning to the reader. This demonstrates the noetic quality of the vision that William James detailed in *TVoRE*, as Hildegard gained special knowledge through her vision.¹⁶⁶ It also demonstrates the ineffable quality that James outlined,¹⁶⁷ as when the vision itself is described it cannot be comprehended, but the meanings can be outlined more clearly.

Hildegard describes an egg-shaped object surrounded by fire. The fire is surrounded by a storm, with excessive thunder. She even mentions that she could not look at the storm and fire because of the darker fire but contrasts the dark, stormy images with the “purest ether”¹⁶⁸ and a “globe of white fire”¹⁶⁹. She once again contrasts these images, but rather than comparing the color, between dark and light, she compares elements. She pairs the “globe of white fire”¹⁷⁰ with “watery air.”¹⁷¹ This continues with

¹⁶⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 89.

¹⁶⁶ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

¹⁶⁷ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

¹⁶⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 93.

¹⁶⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 93.

¹⁷⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 93.

¹⁷¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 93.

mentions of a “sandy globe of great magnitude”¹⁷² and “a great mountain”¹⁷³ “between the North and the East”¹⁷⁴. These contrasting images emit little understanding, even when the subject is known, but Hildegard goes on to shed worlds of light upon the symbolism that the vision presented to her.

She explains that the egg shape is humanity, which has grown over time but “is destined to be beset with many tribulations.”¹⁷⁵ The fire, which often represents God, surrounds humanity and represents Christ on earth. She does not mention the union of Christ with humanity, as demonstrated by the egg figure inside of the fire, but she does mention the ineffability of the fire.¹⁷⁶ The storm around the fire is the beginning of human sin, but the white fire represents the Church, which “asserts in faith innocent brightness and great honor.”¹⁷⁷ The final part of the vision, the sandy globe and the mountains, again represent Man, and the survival of him and his will.¹⁷⁸ Hildegard explained that though Man faces many trials and defeats, he survives because he is protected by God and the Church, surrounding and engulfing him, by being part of the Church and of God by having unity with God. Perhaps just as important as the emphasis on unity is the understanding that she could do nothing but watch. Hildegard had no

¹⁷² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 93.

¹⁷³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 94.

¹⁷⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 94.

¹⁷⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 94.

¹⁷⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 94.

¹⁷⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 96.

¹⁷⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 98-99.

influence on the situation, and her inability to act reflects the fourth aspect of mysticism that William James highlighted, the passivity of the mystic.¹⁷⁹

The fourth vision, *Soul and Body*, revolves around the differences between the two aspects of Man. Beyond the clear association of the soul with the divine and the body with mortal Man, the vision emphasizes the union of the two when a human form dictates to Hildegard “I am a living breath, which God placed in dry mud; thus I should have known and felt God.”¹⁸⁰ Man himself is a union of man and God, because of the two aforementioned aspects, but he can be corrupted by vice and sin, specifically pride. The vision demonstrated this for Hildegard, as she saw:

people carrying milk in earthen vessels and making cheese from it; and one part was thick, and from it strong cheeses were made; and one part was thin, and from it weak cheese were curdled; and one part was mixed with corruption, and from it bitter cheeses were formed.¹⁸¹

The body, as represented by the earthen vessel, is filled with the soul, the milk.

Hildegard spoke of the diversity of semen in reference to the milk, but the argument is still the same, as she declares that strong cheese is equivalent to those who “flourish in prudence, discretion,”¹⁸² while those made of weak cheese are “foolish, languid”¹⁸³ and are “not actively seeking God.”¹⁸⁴ The bitter, she declares, are based in “weakness and

¹⁷⁹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 372.

¹⁸⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 109.

¹⁸¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 109.

¹⁸² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 118.

¹⁸³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 118.

¹⁸⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 118.

confusion.”¹⁸⁵ Once again, the key to union with God, to being “well matured and tempered,”¹⁸⁶ is to have no distractions, nothing between one and God.

Beyond the emphasis on unity through the combination of soul and body, *Soul and Body* epitomizes one of the main aspects detailed in the SEoP definition of mysticism. The special knowledge, unattainable through other means, is blatantly referred to twice in the opening paragraph of the vision, as Hildegard speaks of the “secret of the Supernal Creator” and the “secret design of the Supernal Creator” that were shown to her, which Hildegard calls “the knowledge of God, great in its mysteries and pure in its manifestations, radiant with the most profound clarity.”¹⁸⁷ This knowledge is only given to Hildegard through her vision, and only because she recognized that she was “fragile and untaught,”¹⁸⁸ the vocalization of her humility.

Hildegard’s fifth vision, *The Synagogue*, was significantly shorter, and more clear, than the previous two. She saw the Jewish faith in the form of a woman, in varying colors, with Abraham, Moses, and the other prophets within her body. The woman is shown to have a white torso and head, where “in her heart stood Abraham, and in her breast Moses.”¹⁸⁹ These two figures are connected to the purity of the faith, figures who were humble enough to raise God above all else in their lives. Abraham, who did not even withhold his son when requested,¹⁹⁰ and Moses, who obeyed God’s command to

¹⁸⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* 118.

¹⁸⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* 118.

¹⁸⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 116.

¹⁸⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 112.

¹⁸⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 133.

¹⁹⁰ Hebrews 11:17, NIV.

return to Egypt¹⁹¹ despite knowing he was in danger,¹⁹² represent the best of the faith, and the unity that can be achieved through humility. Moving down past the prophets, who reside in her womb, the body was “black from her navel to her feet.”¹⁹³ This is a representation of the fall of the faith, when “she was soiled by deviation from the Law”, along with the rise of pride, which meant that they “disregarded the divine precepts in many ways.”¹⁹⁴

The key to the vision, however, is the red feet are surrounded by a white cloud. The white again represents purity, the purity that comes only from the union with the divine. By returning to God, through Christ, the faith has returned to purity in the form of the Christian faith. This understanding is encouraged by the lack of eyes and the red feet of the figure known as the Synagogue. The red feet are symbols for the blood lost by Jesus on the crucifix,¹⁹⁵ while the lack of eyes represents the disbelief in his divinity.¹⁹⁶ Hildegard does declare that these errors will be corrected, that the Jewish faith will find unity with God, and in doing so, “truly attain to the knowledge of God.”¹⁹⁷

The sixth vision, *The Choirs of Angels*, begins by alluding to a secret knowledge once again. By mentioning the “secret places in the heights of heaven,”¹⁹⁸ Hildegard has fulfilled James’ requirement of a noetic vision,¹⁹⁹ as she gains insight to the structure of

¹⁹¹ Exodus 4:18, NIV.

¹⁹² Exodus 2:14-15, NIV.

¹⁹³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 133.

¹⁹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 134.

¹⁹⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 134.

¹⁹⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 134.

¹⁹⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 135.

¹⁹⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 139.

¹⁹⁹ James, *The Varieties or Religious Experience*, 371.

heaven, which she implies mirrors the precise structure of the rest of creation, while directly stating that this knowledge was not accessible through sensual means: "... as is shown to you in the height of secret places that the bodily eye cannot penetrate but the inner sight can see."²⁰⁰ This secret information extends beyond the structure of heaven, to the hierarchy of the angels. Hildegard lists them as the angels, archangels, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim. Each represent a different aspect of God or the influence of God on Man, "but all these armies, as you hear, are singing with marvellous voices all kinds of music about the wonders that God works in blessed souls, by which God is magnificently glorified."²⁰¹ They act in unison to celebrate God, spreading their song beyond the heavens, celebrating the unity that God and Man can achieve. Hildegard displays the passivity that James spoke of with the added clarification 'as you hear',²⁰² she no longer even hears the song herself but now experiences it through others and their actions.

Possibly the most crucial to the continued trend of unity throughout Hildegard's visions, the Seraphim glorify those in the Church who are pure in both secular and spiritual matters.²⁰³ These angels represent the unity between the body and the soul, between mortal and divine, between Man and God. Hildegard's other focus, that this unity is the result of humility, is explicitly stated in her explanation of the Seraphim: "Therefore all who, loving sincerity with a pure heart, seek eternal life, should ardently love God and embrace Him with all their will, that they may attain to the joys of those

²⁰⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 140.

²⁰¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 143.

²⁰² James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 372.

²⁰³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 143.

they faithfully imitate.”²⁰⁴ For Hildegard, the reader must understand the importance of this union and the method of achieving it, for the union is paradise, and the method is faith itself.

Hildegard did not simply write about union in “Creator and Creation”, she emphasized it. She did not have visions of her own union with God, but rather an encompassing union, between Man and God, in general. Throughout the first book of *Scivias*, Hildegard retold the extended metaphor that she learned, explaining all three steps (and types) of union. She wrote about the union between body and soul, then how it evolved into a union between mortal and divine, and finally manifested itself in the form of the union between Man and God. This focus takes precedence over order and humility, despite the order’s importance to Hildegard’s monastic profession, but only slightly over humility, due to the importance of humility in attaining union with God.²⁰⁵

Though the first book of Hildegard’s *Scivias*, “The Creator and Creation” has an emphasis on unity between Man and God, and specifically how to achieve this unity, and the second “The Redeemer and Redemption” has a focus on Christ, the embodiment of the union of Man and God, the path to achieving unity is not emphasized in the second book. The union does continue to be the central idea, but the Hildegard’s attention was shifted to the rewards of this union. The seven visions of “The Redeemer and Redemption” work together to delineate a relationship between the union that is possible

²⁰⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 143.

²⁰⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 143.

through the implied steps of “The Creator and Creation” and the eternal life that as the Bible explains, is possible through Christ’s sacrifice and God’s mercy.

Hildegard was witness to several familiar images, ranging from man being created from the clay of the earth, and the devil in the form of a serpent, to the Church as a pure, glowing woman, and the nuptial imagery of the Church and Christ. These images took on new meanings, often having to do with the union that is the most important theme in the visions. One must note when these familiar images gain new significance, as the change in meaning emphasizes the importance of the message behind the events that Hildegard saw.

Hildegard also was subject to much theology about the Trinity, which is an easy parallel for union, but may be under represented in this analysis. Though the theology is as interesting as it is intricate, it ultimately is not a key concept in comparison to the unity that Hildegard is told to embrace. Detailing the explanation that Hildegard received for the symbolism of the Trinity would inevitably lead down a long, meandering road, to a focus of the unity of God within himself, rather than on God and Man.

“The Redeemer and Redemption” works as both an explanation of the power and potential of the union between Man and God and as an outpouring of praise for the magnificence of God. The awe inspiring images of God and his abilities act as the best evidence presented to Hildegard of the power of union, demonstrating even at one point to crush the devil’s pride, and to have power over death.²⁰⁶ While “The Creator and

²⁰⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 296.

Creation” acts more like the handbook Dhuoda wrote for her son, as it gives step by step instructions, “The Redeemer and Redemption” feels much more like the hymns written for a modern church, since it focuses more on praising God and detailing the glory of salvation.

The Redeemer, the first vision of “The Redeemer and Redemption”, has the parallel parts of mysticism that were discussed in the comparison of the *SEoP* and William James’ *TVoRE*, it has the content James embraced, within the structure that the *SEoP* touts as the key to the experience. First, her passivity was impressed upon Hildegard (and the reader) with the telling statement: “And I, a person not glowing with the strength of strong lions or taught by their inspiration, but a tender and fragile rib...”²⁰⁷ The emphasis on her weakness is a method for demonstrating the greatness of the actions and events around Hildegard, a medium for a message of relativity, the passive nature of the mystic that James held up as the third aspect of mysticism²⁰⁸. This is also supported by the symbol of God, a “blazing fire, incomprehensible, inextinguishable, wholly living and wholly Life.”²⁰⁹ This certainly is an awe inspiring image, especially when compared to the denigrated figure from before. Declaring this fire to be incomprehensible, Hildegard has spoken directly to one of the key aspects of the *SEoP*’s definition of mysticism. The knowledge of God is not to be attained through the senses or introspection; rather, this knowledge must be given to be attained. This knowledge cannot be fully understood, however, fitting perfectly within James’ claim of ineffability,

²⁰⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 149.

²⁰⁸ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 372.

²⁰⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 149.

as Hildegard explains that the fire was “incomprehensible, because He cannot be divided by any division or known as He is by any part of His creatures’ knowledge.”²¹⁰

Hildegard could not explain a single part of God, as she claims he is indivisible and thus has no individual parts, and that he is also inexplicable as a whole.

Once again, the vision features a powerful image of union, with the aforementioned flame entering a “little clod of mud;”²¹¹ the image of God giving life to Man, but also of being one with Man. God was enveloped by man, just as the fire was inside the mud, and for that moment, they were one; the Mortal and the Divine, Body and Soul. This image, the union of God and Man, is key to the entire *Scivias*, but also to this specific book and vision. For Hildegard, this union brought life, that beyond being the reward of humility, it also guided one toward life; for Hildegard, union with God was a transformative, transcendent experience.

The second vision, *The Trinity*, did not express any examples of union between Man and God, but rather between the figures of the Trinity. Depicted as a light, a flame, and a “man the color of a sapphire,”²¹² the Trinity is shown as a single entity, each part consuming and being consumed by the others. This is meant to show that God is indivisible but has many qualities. God can do several things and appear several ways but only has one part. Hildegard explains this through a metaphor about the qualities of a flame. It has the light that guides, as God guides, the strength of the fire that causes it to endure, just as Christ causes others within him to endure, and the heat, that warms as the

²¹⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 150.

²¹¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 149.

²¹² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 161.

Holy Spirit warms the faithful.²¹³ This metaphor is joined by others, for the three qualities of a stone, or of words, but these do not display the same qualities of God.

The key to the vision is still related to unity, though not in the same vein as any of the previous visions. While before the unity was shown between Man and God, union was shown to Hildegard this time as being solely within the divine for the purpose of displaying two qualities. The first, to act differently, with seemingly opposite methods, just as God and Man are to act with different methods even during their union, is a message of constancy for Hildegard. Man is to continue to be humble, to continue to seek union. The second, the permanence of union, is meant as a promise of eternal life through the union. These dual features, a directive and a promise, are reminiscent of the covenants of the Torah, which featured both a command and a reward.

The Church, Bride of Christ and Mother of the Faithful, the third vision of “The Redeemer and Redemption”, features a motif that been mentioned several times already, bridal imagery. Hildegard does not elevate herself as a bride of Christ, as others seem to do, but lifts the Church as a whole to the sacred position. She declares that the Church is wearing a crown, understood to represent the apostles and martyrs,²¹⁴ and that as it is unfinished, it has no legs.²¹⁵ We know this to be bridal imagery as the Church stands “in front of the altar,”²¹⁶ “embracing it with her outstretched hands.”²¹⁷ Since the Church was depicted as the Bride of Christ rather than Hildegard, the vision is consistent with

²¹³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 163-164.

²¹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 170.

²¹⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 171.

²¹⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 169.

²¹⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 169.

Hildegard's other visions, in that rather than simply encouraging her own union with God, Hildegard experienced union through Man as a whole. Rather than uniting with Christ individually, Hildegard witnessed the Church unite with Christ; and being part of the Church, she was also part of the union.

The second aspect of *The Church, Bride of Christ and Mother of the Faithful*, the Church as a caring mother and as a medium of change, reinforces the idea of union. Several figures are seen entering the Church and being purified,²¹⁸ something that would take a divine presence. This encourages the belief in the divine aspect in the men of the Church, and thusly that the Church itself is a union of Man and God. This also returns back to the ideas from *The Trinity*, as though the Church "has not yet been brought to the full strength of her constancy or the full purity of her fulfillment,"²¹⁹ she will still "rise anew as a bride in the blood of [Christ]."²²⁰ The union between Man and God was a covenant to Hildegard, and the Church was a very palpable symbol of that for Hildegard.

Hildegard expounded upon this rebirth of pure souls, declaring that baptism is legitimate even for infants, despite the claims of "certain false deceivers."²²¹ Hildegard explained that the parents of an infant may request his baptism, just as they would have previously requested circumcision and, in doing so, direct the child into the family of God. This is important for Hildegard's visions, as her focus on guiding others to union

²¹⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 169.

²¹⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 171.

²²⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 171.

²²¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 182.

with God takes precedent over her own union. She acts in a similar fashion as a priest, focusing on her flock rather than on herself and her own spiritual needs.

The Holy Spirit is the key figure of the Trinity in *Confirmation*, the fourth vision of “The Redeemer and Redemption”. As the idea behind the “immense round tower”²²² that sits within the previous depiction of the Church, the Holy Spirit protects the Church²²³ and infuses it with the divine aspect that allows for it to purify the souls of those who enter. The three windows in the tower “were adorned all round with beautiful emeralds,”²²⁴ for they were to represent the verdant virtues in which the Trinity manifests itself.²²⁵ The virtues are not the only living things though, as the liveliness of the windows also expresses the Living Word.

Hildegard sees more than the Holy Spirit embodied in the tower, however, as most of the vision discusses the people that make up the church. She saw those who had been faithful and had “from their beginning[s] in good works to their end[s] in sanctity”²²⁶ been clad in gold “from their foreheads to their feet.”²²⁷ The gold was clearly meant to glorify the saintly, but others lacked the gold hue, while still retaining the brightness. These people had been baptized yet never confirmed.²²⁸ Of these, some watch the “turbulent red flash”²²⁹ and experience spiritual purity.²³⁰ They are meant to be

²²² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 189.

²²³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 190.

²²⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 189.

²²⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 190.

²²⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 192.

²²⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 189.

²²⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 193.

²²⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 189.

²³⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 195.

the monks and priests, those who focus on God above all else. Those with “clear eyes and strong feet”²³¹ uplift their thoughts to God but still act in the celestial world.²³² They stand in harsh contrast to those with “weak eyes and crippled feet,”²³³ who use the Church for selfish reasons and are unable to follow the path that the others present.²³⁴ Others flounder, in the middle of this scale, either unable to act as God commands despite their understanding or unable to understand God’s commands despite acting upon them.²³⁵

For Hildegard, the multitude of types of believers is the ‘assignment’ part of the covenant. Her goal of guiding them to union with God was paramount. She quotes from Ezekiel, referring to Judgment Day, “Therefore I will judge them according to their own judgments, which are the works they desire and do”²³⁶ so that the reader will understand her goal, along with the reward part of the covenant: “But let the one who sees with watchful eyes and hears with attentive ears welcome with a kiss My mystical words, which proceed from Me who am life”²³⁷

The Three Orders in the Church, vision five of the second book in *Scivias*, continues to depict the Church as a woman, this time of varying color. Her head is “a splendor white as snow and translucent as crystal”²³⁸ and meant to represent the clergy.

²³¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 189.

²³² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 195.

²³³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 189.

²³⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 195.

²³⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 196.

²³⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 197.

²³⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 197.

²³⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 201.

The apostolic followers²³⁹ are meant to teach the Church how to live within God, to protect their flock from danger. They are expected to embody the morals that they preach. Her torso is red, “like the dawn from her throat to her breasts,”²⁴⁰ representing those who have taken vows of virginity. While “from her breasts to her navel [the red is] mixed with purple and blue,”²⁴¹ representing the monastic orders. Hildegard heard great praise for them, as they are depicted as following the examples of Christ, even modelling their unique clothing on the death and resurrection of Christ.²⁴² In her explanation, Hildegard lauds Benedict, the author of the Benedictine Code, as a second Moses, for creating the Benedictine order and allowing for more men to learn the apostolic way.²⁴³

Hildegard saw these three orders as elevated because they are meant to be examples for all others. The dialogue at the end of the vision emphasizes this understanding of her situation, as she is given a comparison to the Sun, which is meant to guide people by day, and the moon and the stars, which are meant to guide people by night.²⁴⁴ Together, the clergy, the lay leaders, and the monastic orders are meant to guide the faithful, a directive that Hildegard took to heart.

The sixth vision of “The Redeemer and Redemption”, *Christ’s Sacrifice and the Church*, is rife with nuptial imagery. Hildegard saw the Christ on the cross, and the Church, still in human form from before:

²³⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 202.

²⁴⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 201.

²⁴¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 201.

²⁴² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 212.

²⁴³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 213.

²⁴⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 202.

By divine power she was led to Him, and raised herself upward so that she was sprinkled by the blood from His side; and thus, by the will of the Heavenly Father, she was joined with Him in happy betrothal and nobly dowered with His body and blood.²⁴⁵

As has been discussed, this metaphor of marriage is a powerful one for union, representing a heavenly bond with an earthly one. This union, as per the usual with Hildegard, does not simply unite herself with the divine, but rather the Church and God, once again emphasizing that Hildegard's own union was secondary to her role guiding others to this union. Another major focus of this passage is the necessity for divine grace, as the Church was led by "divine power"²⁴⁶ and only joined with Christ "by the will of the Heavenly Father."²⁴⁷ This implies that union, and mysticism, is not possible without the actions of the divine. One can prepare oneself for union, but it is not achieved until God acts upon it. This is connected to the Catholic understanding of eternal life, as though one can prepare himself for heaven through good deeds and confession, one is only uplifted because of the grace of God; though man must obey the laws of God, he is still saved by the God's will, just as though a mystic must contemplate God and practice humility, one still is not blessed with an experience until God communicates with one. This connection illustrates the correlation between mysticism and salvation, showing it to be a form of eternal life.

This same correlation is also encouraged by what Hildegard heard God say later, "Eat and drink the body and blood of My Son to wipe out Eve's transgression, so that you

²⁴⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 237.

²⁴⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 237.

²⁴⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 237.

may be restored to the noble inheritance.”²⁴⁸ Holy Communion is seen as a form of union, of having the divine physically inside of one, and it is demonstrated as being the same as eternal life, as salvation. This imagery demonstrates that mysticism is not only meant as solely a guide to life, but the goal of faith and religion.

The Devil is the last vision in “The Redeemer and Redemption” and the outlier in the book, as it focuses on attaining unity, in so far as it highlights the dangers to unity. The Devil is depicted as “a monster shaped like a worm, wondrously large and long, which aroused an indescribable sense of horror and rage.”²⁴⁹ This monster had a bazaar selling a cornucopia of tangible treasures, representing worldly desires. He was also “divided into five sections from his head down through the belly to its feet, like stripes. One was green, one white, one red, one yellow and one black; and they were full of deadly poison.”²⁵⁰ Hildegard explained the meaning of the stripes, as they represented the five senses that humans possess, and that the devil uses to try to tempt humanity.²⁵¹ These are reminders that the world is full of threats, and that one must keep one’s eyes on God to achieve union. This warning is accompanied with a demonstration of the dangers of pride. Hildegard explained that monster’s crushed head was a symbol of the Devil’s pride, as it had been destroyed by Christ, meaning that “the enmity of death is already destroyed and cannot exert its full strength of bitterness.”²⁵² Christ, the embodiment of union, destroyed the pride of the Devil and created a path to salvation. Once again,

²⁴⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 237.

²⁴⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 293.

²⁵⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 293.

²⁵¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 296.

²⁵² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 296.

Hildegard's vision demonstrated to her the connection between mystical union and eternal life.

“The Redeemer and Redemption” is an ironic name for a book that emphasizes the key features of The Old Testament. Though it focused on Christ and the Trinity, on eternal life as the result of the union between Man and God, it did so as the reward for obeying the command presented in the previous book, “The Creator and Creation.” The combined features of command and reward, directive and gift, are reminiscent of the covenants made with figures from The Old Testament, most notably Noah, Abraham, and Moses. However, the focus on Christ and eternal life still gives the second book of Hildegard's *Scivias* the trappings of the New Testament, as the name of the book implies. This juxtaposition of ideas from both parts of the Bible, along with the renewed focus on the parts of a covenant, causes the reader to see the Bible in a new light. The Old Testament represents the command, with its emphasis on law and avoiding sin, while the New Testament showcases the reward, with its tales of glories of Christ and the spreading of his message. Hildegard clearly understood this and saw the Church, a symbol for the New Testament, as betrothed to Christ and lifted into eternal life. For Hildegard, eternal life is the result of the union for which she clamored.

The third book of *Scivias*, “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building”, acts in a significantly different fashion than the previous two books. “The Creator and Creation” had a consistent theme of the path to union between Man and God, both on an individual and a communal basis, and “The Redeemer and Redemption” constantly

emphasized the reward of this union. In contrast, the visions in “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building” relate to each other by creating an image of a building, but to the entirety of the text by supplement the previous visions with continued explanation. These glossings may not link with each other to create a third aspect to Hildegard’s theology, but they do link with the grander scheme and help make the link between the other two books much more clear.

The first vision of Hildegard’s “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building”, *God and Man*, fulfills many of the characteristics that William James listed in his *TVoRE*. The ineffability of the vision²⁵³ is evident in the imagery of God, who Hildegard said was “so bright that [she] could not behold Him clearly”²⁵⁴ and, therefore, could not adequately explain him, and “whose width [she] could not take in,”²⁵⁵ as it enveloped her.

James noted the noetic quality of a mystic’s visions, that a vision provides a mystic with knowledge, as the second component of a mystic vision.²⁵⁶ God has given Hildegard the command “Now speak as you have been taught!”²⁵⁷ The instruction conveys to the reader that God had given Hildegard a special knowledge, and that He expected her to share with her community. This was a new talent for her, not just a skill that she had previously possessed, as she had denigrated herself and had begged Him, “I

²⁵³ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

²⁵⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 309.

²⁵⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 309.

²⁵⁶ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 371.

²⁵⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 310.

beseech you, my Lord, give me understanding.”²⁵⁸ Hildegard gained this knowledge to act as God’s tool, as shown with the next quality that James detailed.

James outlined the passivity of the mystic as the final quality of mysticism;²⁵⁹ Hildegard was demonstratively passive throughout the end of the vision. James listed many methods that display the passiveness of the mystic, specifically naming automated writing. First Hildegard is told to “[w]rite what you see and hear.”²⁶⁰ This command demonstrates that God was using Hildegard as a medium to spread his message, as He expected her to write despite not fully understanding. Two more commands follow, showing similarities to the mediumistic trance and the prophetic speech that James also listed as common forms of passivity. Hildegard heard the command “Now speak, as you have been taught!...Now write about the true knowledge of the Creator in His goodness.”²⁶¹ She was expected to extol the glories of God and His promises of redemption and eternal life.

God and Man clearly demonstrates that Hildegard deserves the title ‘mystic’, as the vision showcases God working through Hildegard, using her as a vessel to spread His message, filling her with the Holy Spirit and sending her forth to spread the word and, by extension, guide others to eternal life. This unity, the Holy Spirit running through her, acting through her person, was supported by feelings that Hildegard could not positively define, knowledge that came from God alone, and humility that allowed her to bend her

²⁵⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 309.

²⁵⁹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 372.

²⁶⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 309.

²⁶¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 310.

will to God's. Just as importantly, this vision demonstrated that though Hildegard humbled herself and continued to look solely towards God, she did not achieve mystical union until God willed it,²⁶² a reminder of the power of God that she experienced in the visions of her previous book.

The Edifice of Salvation, the second vision of "The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building", one could argue, has only slight mystical qualities, except its position in the series of visions, and the overwhelming feeling that Hildegard experiences during the vision. However, one would fail to note the emphasis of union, between Man and God, explained in the second part of the vision's analysis, and its rewards. Hildegard saw the iron mountain and the figure on the throne from the previous vision, sitting on an "immense block of stone,"²⁶³ still representing God and faith in God. Upon this stone sat a building in the shape of a city, with each corner in a cardinal direction. These walls represent the good works that are built upon faith, as was explained to Hildegard: "from the Son came forth true faith, which was the first foundation of the good works..."²⁶⁴ This shows that good works, the walls, come directly from faith, the ground beneath the walls; faith leads to the union of Man and God, as represented by Christ, the embodiment of the union. These good works spread across the world, to "all four corners of the earth."²⁶⁵ The final destinations of the good works are nearly as important as their origins; Hildegard needed to understand not only how to achieve union, but the greatest effects of it.

²⁶² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 311.

²⁶³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 325.

²⁶⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 326.

²⁶⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 326.

A great wall, made entirely of two materials, defends the city. The first, the “shining light like the light of the sky”²⁶⁶ is a metaphor for knowledge and wisdom, the knowledge of multiple paths, and the wisdom to travel the path that leads to union.²⁶⁷ The second, “stones joined together,”²⁶⁸ represents a more earthly sensation, actions and deeds. Wisdom and deeds work together to give people “unbroken security, in the form of fortification and defense of their good works.”²⁶⁹ This highlights another combination of the physical and the spiritual, of the mortal and divine, a connection that cannot be overlooked. Once again, Hildegard witnesses what the union of Man and God can do, as it protects man from attacks on his salvation.

The Tower of Anticipation of God’s Will continues the series of connected visions by displaying a four-cubit-by-seven-cubit iron tower, to Hildegard.²⁷⁰ This tower, implied to be as constant and solid as God, combines the four elements of the physical world with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.²⁷¹ Hildegard continued to run into the message of eternity with regard to the union of physical and spiritual, of mortal and divine. This tower had five figures standing within the wall itself, the first figure wearing a mitre and a pallium, holding both lilies and a palm.²⁷² The first two are symbols of a bishop, and Hildegard explains the figure wears these because she “was crowned in the

²⁶⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 325.

²⁶⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 328.

²⁶⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 325.

²⁶⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 325.

²⁷⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 343.

²⁷¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 345.

²⁷² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 343.

High Priest Jesus Christ”²⁷³ and because “the grace of God surrounds her in gentle purity.”²⁷⁴ Heavenly love, as she is denoted, represents the unity of Christ and enjoys union with God through the pallium, as the symbol of the bishop envelops her and guides her in her actions, “which [are] made up of two parts, God’s love and the [hers].”²⁷⁵ The plants in her hands represent the reward for her union, the eternal life that God grants. As Hildegard was reminded, lilies are the symbol of Heaven, while the palm represents martyrdom. Both speak of the eternal life that is presented to the faithful though, again showing the dual aspects of union, the process of uniting with God and the reward of salvation.

The second figure is Discipline, derived from Divine law. She is “clothed in a purple tunic”²⁷⁶ and appears to be nearly as regal as her sister, Heavenly Love. Modesty follows her, and hides her face to protect her innocence, hence, the white silk that she wears.²⁷⁷ A disguising veil and a yellow cloak decorate Mercy, as she can hide all marks and warms those with “the shining sun.”²⁷⁸ The final figure, Victory, stands armored, prepared for her fight with the Devil.²⁷⁹ Her dominance is foretold though, as she stood atop of a lion, “its mouth open and its tongue hanging out.”²⁸⁰ The key to Hildegard’s vision, victory over the Devil, exemplifies the eternal life that she seeks. In addition to these five figures, two figures reside inside the tower, Patience and Longing. Patience

²⁷³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 347.

²⁷⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 347.

²⁷⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 347.

²⁷⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 343.

²⁷⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 348.

²⁷⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 349.

²⁷⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 350.

²⁸⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 344.

stands in a “fiery splendor,”²⁸¹ demonstrating that though she is tested, she prevails. Longing “surpasses this power”²⁸² though, as she is “free from the power of this world.”²⁸³ Hildegard sought to overcome her worldly desires, knowing that her union with God unlocked the doors to salvation.

Hildegard learned that these figures worked together, each virtue only appearing to her after the previous virtue was established, to form a protective barrier around Patience and Longing. They are aspects of humility designed to protect the union of Patience, who is depicted as earthly, as the element of fire is one of the four elements of the physical world, and Longing, who is demonstrably not of the physical world, as the celestial partner. These facets of humility act to protect this pair, who together represent another form of the union of mortal and divine, of God and Man.

The Pillar of the Word of God built upon the first visions of “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building”, adding more details to the building of the city. The fourth vision adds “a pillar the color of steel.”²⁸⁴ This three-edged pillar has the prophets, in chronological order, rising from the bottom of the pillar to the endlessly high top.²⁸⁵ The second edge was overwhelmingly bright, with the forms of martyrs and saints

²⁸¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 344.

²⁸² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 352.

²⁸³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 352.

²⁸⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 357.

²⁸⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 357.

inside.²⁸⁶ The third edge, also notably bright, narrowed from a broad base to a pointed top, with a perched dove sitting atop the edge.²⁸⁷

This pillar, known to be Christ, as it is referred to as the *Pillar of the Word of God*, and Christ was often called the *verbum incarnatum*. The vision emphasized the pillar's infinite nature by noting that it stood out because of its "color of steel."²⁸⁸ Like steel, Christ cannot be eroded or tarnished, conquered or overcome but is constant and everlasting. Though the number three is often connected with the Holy Trinity, in this vision the three edges of the pillar symbolized a different trinity, the time of the Bible, namely the Old Testament, the time of the Church, and the time of the second coming of Christ.²⁸⁹ These symbolize the infinite nature of Christ, as he lasts beyond the biblical times (represented by the prophets), through the contemporary era (represented by the martyrs and the saints), until the time of the reckoning (represented by the narrowing edge) until He alone remains. The second symbol from the image of the pillar is just as important; Christ creates a stable base upon which all of the rest of the faith stands. This implies the same message as the one that has been trumpeted throughout the *Scivias*, that the union between God and Man is the base of faith, through which all else is possible. Only through this union can one reach the pinnacle of faith, salvation.

The fifth vision of "The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building", *The Jealousy of God*, may catch some readers by surprise, as they could question why an all-

²⁸⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 357.

²⁸⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 357.

²⁸⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 357.

²⁸⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 359.

powerful God would be jealous. As Hildegard learns, however, she does not witness the jealousy of God, as the vision's title states, but rather the wrath of God. As Hildegard hears in the explanation to the vision, "[T]he jealousy of God is in the form of a head; for, of all the fear it inspires, it is known best for the severity of its vengeance, as a person is known for his face."²⁹⁰ God is shown here to be not just a powerful figure, but the most powerful figure, who seeks to protect Man from the wiles of the devil.²⁹¹

This head had three wings attached to it, one on each side, and one extending from the throat.²⁹² As could be expected, these three wings represent the Holy Trinity, and how the God acts in unison, rather than as three separate parts. These three wings demonstrate unity with each other by acting together to punish the regions that were within their range, while also demonstrating that God punishes the wicked on Earth. This is complemented by the height of the head, set at the same height as the wall, "and no higher."²⁹³ Hildegard is told that the head, and God's just wrath "towers above all earthly things,"²⁹⁴ echoing both the supremacy of his punishments and the breadth of his realm, hence, the necessity for the wings to work in unison. This is paired with the additional caveat of "and no higher"²⁹⁵ as it implies balance, that while powerful, God is also just and only punishes as necessary.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 372.

²⁹¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 372.

²⁹² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 371.

²⁹³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 371.

²⁹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 375.

²⁹⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 371.

²⁹⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 371.

This head garnered the qualification of “immovable,”²⁹⁷ a term which carries a few implications for being a single word. God’s wrath, as Hildegard understands it, cannot be tempered by deceit.²⁹⁸ God’s justice is a perfect fit, the epitome of the paradigm of equality; God uses only the most just punishments; thus there is no reason to temper his wrath. It also speaks to power of his wrath, that it cannot be removed, that it “resists the Devil and his followers.”²⁹⁹ God offers Hildegard a reprieve though, as not all sins are punished so harshly, for God is only immovable on the “judgment of unatoned sins.”³⁰⁰ For Hildegard, even the wrath of God is tied to salvation.

The Stone Wall tells of a tripartite wall, with eight figures looking at the pictures of humans adorning the inside of the wall.³⁰¹ The central wall represents God and his authority, while the farthest outside wall represents secular authority. Both walls protect and overrule the middle wall, as the inner wall represents those who live under the power of both God and worldly authorities, meaning all law abiding Christian citizens.³⁰² These outer walls are smaller but built in a similar fashion, as the outside is meant to mirror the inside,³⁰³ just as Man is meant to mirror God.³⁰⁴ The three walls working together also simulate unison between Man and God, in a method that is similar to the unity that Hildegard has depicted in the other books; the outer walls surround the inner wall, just as

²⁹⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 371.

²⁹⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 375.

²⁹⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 375.

³⁰⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 375.

³⁰¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 389.

³⁰² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 394.

³⁰³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 394.

³⁰⁴ Genesis 1:27, NIV.

the soul resides in the body. They both depict God within Man, rather than Man within God.

Six of the aforementioned figures, named as Abstinence, Liberality, Piety, Truth, Peace, and Beatitude,³⁰⁵ “stand before the wall as a preview of things to come.”³⁰⁶ These six maidens foretell the future because they cause the future; the union of Man and God comes through humility, but only with the addition of the virtues that support the greater good. The first of the final two figures, named Discretion, represents the aspect of Christ that judges the deeds of people,³⁰⁷ and is the rock that supports Man “until the end of the world.”³⁰⁸ This figure is paired with Salvation,³⁰⁹ who arose from “the shadows of the old Law [being] transmuted by the faith of the Holy Trinity into the true light of justice.”³¹⁰ Salvation comes from the divine presence influencing the old law. Just as importantly, her position atop the wall demonstrates her supremacy, her importance clear to those who see her. This pairing is a familiar concept to Hildegard’s readers, as it is a reframing of the key concept in “The Redeemer and Redemption”, that union between Man and God is a covenant between Man and God. The requirement of discretion, of observing the old Law and practicing the virtues of piety and truth, leads to the reward of Salvation.

³⁰⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 390-391.

³⁰⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 399.

³⁰⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 400, 405.

³⁰⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 400.

³⁰⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 406.

³¹⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 400.

The Pillar of the Trinity is the outlier in the “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building”, as it does not focus on the unity of Man and God or the salvation it brings for most of the vision, but rather on the magnificence of God. In the first part of the visions, Hildegard describes the pillar as “wondrous, secret and supremely strong,”³¹¹ but these descriptions are only the tip of the iceberg, as the imagery that she describes tells more than these simplistic words. Hildegard noted the “purple-black”³¹² color of the pillar, a majestic color, meant to inspire reverence because of its rarity. She failed to comprehend the magnitude of the pillar, saying “neither its size nor its height was clear to my understanding,”³¹³ demonstrating the boundless realm and power of God. Together, these concepts emphasize that God is Lord of all, a figure to aspire to, an ever present divine presence. The position of the pillar represents this all-encompassing God, as it resides “in the corner that it protruded both inside and outside the building.”³¹⁴ Just as the pillar stands both inside and outside the wall, present everywhere within the realm of the building, He reigns within the realm of life as an omnipresent, omnipotent God. Hildegard discerned one thing for certain about the pillar, “that it was miraculously even and without roughness.”³¹⁵ This does not only refer to the equality of God’s justice, as preached in *The Jealousy of God*, but also to God being unblemished, or in the form of Christ, the perfect lamb. When combined with the following description of “three steel-colored edges,”³¹⁶ this description helps the reader understand that although the trinity

³¹¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 411.

³¹² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 411.

³¹³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 411.

³¹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 411.

³¹⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 411.

³¹⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 411.

has three distinct parts, that God exists as only one figure, smooth and seamless, without differentiation between His different qualities, just as fire is simply fire, despite its ability to warm, burn, and temper.

The second part of the vision is God's command to Hildegard at the end of the vision.

“To you I explain these mystical and miraculous unknown gifts in all their fullness and grant you to speak of them and show them; for, O human, they appear to you clearly in the true light. I do this to enkindle the fiery hearts of the faithful, who are the pure stones that will build the celestial Jerusalem.”³¹⁷

This is the mystical part of the vision, as it demonstrates union between God and Hildegard. She becomes His vessel; He used her to spread the Holy Spirit, to “enkindle the fiery hearts.”³¹⁸ God gives her the directive to spread the wisdom of unity and the salvation it brings, and in recording the vision, Hildegard obliges.

The eighth vision of the book, *The Pillar of the Humanity of the Savior*, immediately returns to focus on the union of Man and God, specifically in the form of Christ. Named a “shadowed pillar,”³¹⁹ Hildegard witnesses Christ as not being completely light, but rather as having human aspects. Hildegard describes the pillar as having a “deep purple light glowing within it,” demonstrating Christ's royal and godly qualities and his place as the King of Kings.³²⁰ Just as the Pillar of the Trinity sat both

³¹⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 411.

³¹⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 411.

³¹⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 425.

³²⁰ Revelations 17:14, NIV.

inside and outside the wall, the Pillar of the Humanity of the Savior extended both inside and outside the wall, representing Christ's dual role as both Man and God.

The ladder that rises from the bottom to the top of the pillar showcases another key feature of the pillar in question. Many figures move up and down the latter, working constantly, each adorned differently, but seven in particular stood out to Hildegard. She understood them as virtues present in Christ namely Humility, Charity, Fear, Obedience, Faith, Hope, and Chastity.³²¹ All of these virtues were present in Christ, and were expected to be present in those who followed him. Each of the virtues spoke of how they defeat the threat of pride, teaching Hildegard specific methods to increase her humble piety.³²² They instructed Hildegard to teach others to be like Christ, an idea that would spread after her death in the form of the *Vita Apostolica*.

Following the virtues, the Grace of God appeared in an almost human form and radiated an overwhelming light. A bishop's stole adorned his shoulders, a black and purple tunic his torso.³²³ The Grace of God, Christ (as represented by the purple once again), covers all sins (the black) and does so through the Church (symbolized by the Bishop's stole). In addition, his radiance washes over everything, just as God reigns over an all-encompassing realm.

The Tower of the Church, Hildegard's ninth vision in "The History of the Salvation Symbolized by a Building", introduces a new symbol for the union between

³²¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 426-428.

³²² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 426-428.

³²³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 428.

Man and God, the Church itself. The tower representing the Church has a radius of five cubits on the ground,³²⁴ demonstrating both its worldly nature and its position within the realm of human comprehension. Its endless height demonstrates its heavenly aspect, and its eternal constancy.³²⁵ Hildegard understood that an earthly tower rising to the heavens combined the aspects of both Man and God and acted as a symbol of their union.³²⁶

The construction between the Tower of the Church and the Pillar of the Humanity of the Savior alludes to the people working towards the end of days, when the Church will reach its full status, by “swiftly passing time and by the means of her children.”³²⁷ Hildegard understood that though the Church was not perfect, not complete, it would bloom because of the virtues of Christ, enacted in the mortal world by his followers. Thus, the passage way between the Church and the Savior did not extend solely one direction. Just as members of the Church would eventually prepare the world for the end of days because of what they learned from the Church, they also guide the Church to its apex using the virtues of Christ that they imitate.

The ladder that rises from the base to the acme of the tower, elevating several people to different rungs, signifies the work done by Church doctors to guide the sick and infirm back to spiritual health.³²⁸ These saints wear “white garments, but black shoes,”³²⁹ the white signifying their purity and good works, the black the dirty, dangerous roads that

³²⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 451.

³²⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 451.

³²⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 455.

³²⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 456.

³²⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 456.

³²⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 451.

they travel. They have tended to unbelievers and “converted them to the way of justice,”³³⁰ earning them their honorable titles. This plaudit of the holy emphasized the importance of the directive that Hildegard received, as it demonstrated the praise that good doctors, good shepherds, received from God for their works. This directive aligned with her devotion as a nun, as she wished to be like the doctors of the Church who continue to watch the church, who “are always there to help the Bride of God in divine love and solicitous piety, so that she can continue in perfect strength.”³³¹ Hildegard received praise for her devotion, but also a glimpse at a greater reward for her continued efforts.

Christ makes his appearance in human form in the tenth vision, *The Son of Man*. His purple tunic showcased his majesty,³³² but his throne, atop the corner of the shining and stone walls, reigns as the most powerful image. This combination of worldly and celestial walls is a continuation of the theme of union between mortal and divine that Hildegard experienced. These images highlight that Christ existed as the union of Man and God, and as the King of Kings.³³³ In addition to Christ, five figures watched him. They were introduced to Hildegard as Constancy, Desire, Compunction of Heart, Contempt of the World, and Concord,³³⁴ when they “showed themselves”³³⁵ and “when justice arose and bore down on carnal desire.”³³⁶ Hildegard returns to the path to union

³³⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 457.

³³¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 457.

³³² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 473.

³³³ Revelations 17:14, NIV.

³³⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 480-481.

³³⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 484.

³³⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 484.

between God and Man by focusing on spreading virtues that encourage thought of God and rejection of the world. The virtues that were espoused to Hildegard in this vision supplement the virtue of humility that she saw emblazoned on every banner in aforementioned book.

“The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building” seems to take a darker path in *The Last Days and the Fall of the Antichrist*, as it starts with the description of five creatures bound to five separate hills. The first creature, “a dog, fiery but not burning”³³⁷ represents the boastful, but those who “do not burn with the justice of God.”³³⁸ They languish in their own pride, never knowing anything greater. The “yellow lion”³³⁹ stands in for the material driven people, who care for nothing more than shimmering gold. The “pale horse”³⁴⁰ does not refer to the physically dead, but rather to those who enjoy “their licentious and swift moving pleasures.”³⁴¹ Those who put their efforts solely towards the pleasures of life are seen to be spiritually dead, as they care not for the pleasures of the afterlife. The “black pig”³⁴² lives in his own misery, without the happiness that hope brings. He is desperate, “and will plot to diverge from the holiness of God’s commands.”³⁴³ He cannot shake himself from the filth in which he lives. The fifth creature, the wolf, which is “grey in [his] cunning,”³⁴⁴ uses his guile to steal from the wealthy, similarly to the yellow lion. The hills they are bound to are “the power of carnal

³³⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 493.

³³⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 494.

³³⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 493.

³⁴⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 493.

³⁴¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 494.

³⁴² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 493.

³⁴³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 495.

³⁴⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 495.

desire,³⁴⁵ from which they cannot escape. Their ropes reach various lengths, as each will go to different lengths to achieve their goals.³⁴⁶

Both Christ and the Church demonstrate their lasting qualities by surviving until the end of days, emphasizing the union between God and Man that they represent is also eternal. They are not injured or decaying, but rather Christ, down to his feet, “was whiter than milk”³⁴⁷ demonstrating both purity and perfection. The Church survives, still equally strong, as although it suffered an attack from a “black and monstrous head,”³⁴⁸ and the head made her “[shake] through all her limbs,”³⁴⁹ she survived the assault, and her feet “glowed white, shining with a splendor greater than the sun’s.”³⁵⁰ The holy figures did not perish; no, the besieged figures not only survived the final clash, but rather thrive and loudly proclaim their power and dignity.

The death of the monstrous figure comes from a rather godly action, reminiscent of Zeus even, as “there came suddenly a thunderbolt, which struck that head with such great force that it fell from the mountain.”³⁵¹ While this may clearly demonstrate the power of God, the reader may miss that this action also demonstrates the fulfillment of God’s promise. This proclaims the reward part of the covenant that God made with Man during their union, lifting him to salvation. Just as Man is faithful and continues to live in God’s image and through his Word, God ensures that Man enjoys the fruits of the

³⁴⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 495.

³⁴⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 495.

³⁴⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 493.

³⁴⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 493.

³⁴⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 493.

³⁵⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 494.

³⁵¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 493.

afterlife, protecting the eternal salvation of Man by striking down the Antichrist. The symbolism of such an ending would not have been lost upon Hildegard and surely energized her efforts towards guiding others towards the goal of union with God.

The New Heaven and the New Earth continued the pattern of “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building”, not by explaining yet another part of the building, but rather by complementing the aspects of union that the two previous books had promoted. Though “all the elements and creatures were shaken by dire convulsions,”³⁵² demonstrating the chaos of the world, and “all that was mortal expired,”³⁵³ leaving nothing of worldly significance, the union of Man and God remained strong. Rather than the symbol of the union of Man and God perishing, Christ sat on “a throne of flame”³⁵⁴ accompanied by the “angelic choirs.”³⁵⁵ His victory over the end of days, a symbolic as much as literal death, signified the longevity of union with the divine. Christ himself emphasized the importance of this union:

And those who had been signed were taken up into the air to join Him as if by a whirlwind, to where I had previously seen that radiance which signifies the secrets of the Supernal Creator; and thus the good were separated from the bad. And, as the Gospel indicates, He blessed the just in a gentle voice and I pointed them to the heavenly kingdom, and with a terrible voice condemned the unjust to the pains of Hell, as is written in the same place.³⁵⁶

For Hildegard, this demonstrated both the reward for following the requirement of the covenant, and the damning consequences of disregarding it. Though she had seen the

³⁵² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 515.

³⁵³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 515.

³⁵⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 515.

³⁵⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 515.

³⁵⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 515.

devil, the antichrist, and several other non-descript figures that had turned from God, and the punishments they earned, in her visions, this admonition is perhaps the most fear-inspiring and convincing in the entirety of her *Scivias*.

After the chaff was separated from the wheat, calm washed over the world, and “the elect became more splendid than the splendor of the sun, and with great joy they made their way toward Heaven with the Son of God.”³⁵⁷ This supplements the theme of “The Creator and Creation”. A calm mind, focused solely on God, guides one to union. As the union cannot be achieved without help, Christ guides the faithful to union, with the final destination of their journey being the salvation. This vision was among the shortest in the entire *Scivias* and required little explanation, implying that the message is very evident, almost instinctual.

The final vision in both “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building” and *Scivias, Symphony of the Blessed* revolves around heavenly choirs. Hildegard experienced this vision on three levels, visual, instinctual, and aural. She enjoyed the brightness of the “lucent sky,”³⁵⁸ recognized the embodiments of the meanings³⁵⁹ that she had gained in the visions before, and heard “different kinds of music” that sounded like “the voice of a multitude, making music in harmony.”³⁶⁰ That is to say, Hildegard did not simply see or hear God during her visions but experienced him permeating her every action, her every thought. Although the vision only details the simple act of singing, it

³⁵⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 515-516.

³⁵⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 525.

³⁵⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 525.

³⁶⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 525.

focuses on the same topic as the many of the other visions, the unity between Hildegard and God, and between Man and God. Angels, men, and virtue emphasize this union, together lifting their voices in song to God.

The “History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building” acts as the glue binding Hildegard’s *Scivias* together. By further explaining the visions of “The Creator and Creation” and “The Redeemer and Redemption”, as well as by clarifying the link between the other two books, “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building” emphasizes its own importance and demonstrates that Hildegard’s visions did not just give her random bits of knowledge and wisdom, scatter shot pieces of theology, but rather a theology in its entirety, designed to be fulfilling in its own right. “The History of Salvation” ensures that the Hildegard’s readers understand that the visions must be understood all together, that they all form an overarching message, that humility leads to a union with God, and thus everlasting life.

Hildegard of Bingen did not focus on any physical connection strictly between herself and God in her *Scivias*. Both Caroline Walker Bynum and Barbara Newman correctly indicate this. Hildegard does not fit the mold of a typical female mystic. However, being atypical does not disqualify her from the title of ‘mystic’. Contrary to their claims though, she not only discusses union but focuses on it, embraces it, and emphasizes it as the theme in all three of the books of her text. Her focus on the union between Man and God has mystical elements, even if she does not express anything about a physical connection between herself and God. She experienced a spiritual union

with God as she dictated a dogma, a dogma based in union. *Scivias* showcased this dogma, with each book acting as a pillar of belief, working together to hold up a structure of faith.

“The Creator and Creation” acted as the command part of the biblical-style covenant, as it gave an, at times cryptic, at times detailed, directive to be humble, with the intent of uniting with God. The second, fourth, and fifth visions embody this directive to be humble. In *The Creation and the Fall*, Hildegard says “let anyone who wishes to conquer the Devil arm himself with humility,”³⁶¹ giving the most clear directive in the entire text. Union steps completely into the spotlight in *Soul and Body*, with the focus on the divine and mortal parts of Man, and the parallel that is drawn with the union of God and Man. Finally, *The Synagogue* demonstrated both that Christ, a figure understood to be corporeal form of the union between Man and God, had all the traits necessary for union, most notably humility. It also foreshadowed the content of the “The Redeemer and Redemption”, as it presented Christ as the figure that would return the synagogue to a state of grace.

“The Redeemer and Redemption” demonstrated the promise of the biblical-style covenant, the reward for achieving union with God as directed in the “The Creator and Creation”. Salvation dominates the visions as the reward, with the image of God breathing life into a clay human form in the first vision, *The Redeemer*. This focus on salvation partners with the demonstration of the power of unity, namely to defeat the devil, and the perils of life without unity, the devil’s wiles, in the final vision, *The Devil*.

³⁶¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 89.

“The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building” clarified and summarized the message that was presented to Hildegard. In addition to lifting the idea of ‘salvation’ into the title, emphasizing to every reader that the reward for union, “The History of Salvation” also reinforced the pathway from humility to union, from union to salvation. Throughout, the text described a pair of walls, one made of stone, the other of light, coming together at one point, representing the union between Man and God, because these walls symbolize the earthly and heavenly, respectively. The stone wall also has figures carved into it, representing the virtues that lead to union, including humility. These walls help to protect the inner structure during the end of days, as described in the last few visions of “The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building”.

While Hildegard did not emphasize her own physical union with God, a fact made noticeably clear when there was no union during the two separate nuptial images, she did embrace union with God for all of Mankind. The union that she achieved was not a physical one, with Hildegard suckling at Christ’s wounds, or him taking her by the hand, but rather a spiritual union, a union of souls, between God and herself, between God and humanity. This all-encompassing union held more importance to her, as she cared more for the whole of humanity than for herself. This selfless humility was the embodiment of the ideal that she was shown in “The Creator and Creation”. Hildegard did experience union, both with humanity, and through it, with God.

There are two important premises in analyzing the question of Hildegard’s title of mystic. The first is the definition of the term mystic and, just as importantly, mysticism.

As demonstrated, an emphasis on union with God, often times through a mind-bending, life-altering experience, defines mysticism, and those who cultivate or achieve this union as mystics. William James and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* both attest to unity being the key aspect of a mystical experience. James points out that this unity leads to some kind of special knowledge, and the *SEoP* declares that this unity is often times enveloping and overwhelming. With this understanding, as well with as the multitude of female saints who told of nuptial or otherwise physical experiences, not surprisingly, historians and other religious scholars have adopted the false construct of ‘feminine mysticism’. Caroline Walker Bynum warned of this anachronism, noting that though the methods may be different than masculine mystics, both male and female mystics embraced union as the goal and focus of mysticism.³⁶² However, she, like Barbara Newman, fell into the trap of only considering this kind of mysticism when considering the question of the correctness of the term for Hildegard. While Catherine of Siena revealed visions of herself walking into the wounded Christ,³⁶³ Catherine of Genoa sought daily union with Christ through the Eucharist,³⁶⁴ and Gertrude of Helfta saw herself as a literal Bride of Christ in her first vision,³⁶⁵ Hildegard did not exhibit an overt focus on physical union between herself and God. This apparent lack of focus on union misleads scholars however; Hildegard demonstrated the importance of humility, and the union between God and Man to which it leads, in her twenty-six visions, spread over three books.

³⁶² Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 17.

³⁶³ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, 207-208.

³⁶⁴ Groeschel, introduction, 6.

³⁶⁵ Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*, 95.

Conclusion

Why does Hildegard receive such treatment? Why do scholars deny her proper assessment? When one considers male religious figures, one does not classify primarily by gender. One does not first consider (if at all) the gender of St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, or Martin Luther, but rather their religious affiliations. Scholars do not look at them as men, but rather as a Franciscan, a Dominican, and an Augustinian. Scholars compare them first to other Franciscans, other Dominicans, other Augustinians, not just to other men. Hildegard garners different treatment though. She is denied the title mystic because she does not compare as similar to Catherine of Siena, Catherine of Genoa, Gertrude of Helfta, or many others in a long list of female mystics. Rather than comparing her to these mystics, who were a Dominican, unaffiliated, and arguably a Benedictine respectively, one should compare her to other Cistercians.

Hildegard should be compared to her contemporary Cistercians, namely Bernard and William of St. Thierry. While Bernard did have visions of physical union, similarly to feminine mystics, his treatise *On Humility and Pride* detailed his mystical theology, mirroring that of other Cistercians: one must be humble to walk the path to knowledge of God, and union with God, and therefore salvation. William of St. Thierry embraced the connection between humility and eternal life, saying:

So I, thrown out, come back; shut out, I yelp, and whipped off,
fawn. A dog cannot live without man's companionship, and nor can my

soul without the Lord its God. Open to me therefore, Lord, that I may come to you and be illumined by you.³⁶⁶

William believed one must humble oneself before God to unite with God, while also emphasizing that the reward for this union was salvation. Hildegard's visions mirrored this pattern, with the introduction of humility as the path to union in the first book, and the demonstration of salvation as the reward for union in the second and third books. Comparing Hildegard to these mystics allows one to see the similar styles of mysticism and justifiably declare her a mystic.

The analyses of Hildegard's twenty-six visions constitutes the second premise. Hildegard separated those visions into the three books of her *Scivias* thematically, with the first group being called "The Creator and Creation". It explained that humility removed the objects that pride had placed between Man and God.³⁶⁷ This was a succinct summary of the more detailed path between humility and union, as the reader was guided through by Bernard of Clairvaux's *On Humility and Pride*, which gave a detailed account of the twelve steps of pride. For Hildegard, this first book acted as a directive, a command to live humbly and by the laws of God. The second book, "The Redeemer and Redemption", explained and overtly emphasized the reward for this devotion and this union, salvation. The seven visions worked in unison to demonstrate that Christ, the symbolic union of Man as a whole and God, caused the salvation that was being offered to Hildegard. As if she needed more convincing, Hildegard was granted thirteen more visions in "The History of Salvation Symbolized by a Building" to reinforce the ideas of

³⁶⁶ William of St. Thierry, "Three Meditations," in *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Pauline Matarosso (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1993), 111.

³⁶⁷ Psalms 10:4, NIV.

the previous thirteen visions. Even if she was not convinced before, Hildegard was convinced by the walls, a combination of worldly brick and heavenly light, that provided the structure for the symbolic building of salvation.

In comparing Hildegard first to other female mystics rather than to other Cistercian mystics, scholars have placed her into a sexist juxtaposition rather than an accurate one. To understand Hildegard's role in the history of theology, one must be able to analyze Hildegard in her own light, one must focus on the mystical elements that are present, not the ones that are missing. Analyzing Hildegard reveals that she shared many traits with other Cistercian mystics, even though she did not have similar visions as other female mystics. Hildegard was not blessed with visions of her own union with God, but rather of a universal union with God. She was tasked with acting on behalf of humanity, with spreading the wisdom of humility and the promise of the salvation that came with it. Her role as a mystic is not one of many, a sheep among the holy flock, but rather closer to the shepherd, guiding others to the salvation in a method that is certainly deserving of the term *Imitatio Christi*. Hildegard's lack of physical union does not disqualify her from earning the title of mystic but rather demonstrates that she had already achieved union and sought a more enveloping, more overwhelming, union.

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