

Vision Two of Hildegard of Bingen's *Book of Divine Works*: A Medieval Map for a Cosmic Journey

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Abstract: This article focuses on Vision Two of Hildegard of Bingen's *Book of Divine Works* [LDO]. The main argument is that this vision, understood within the context of the book as a whole, presents a dynamic, allegorical cosmic map which provides guidance for a spiritual journey through life in this world to union with God. A close analysis of the various symbols in the map, their probable sources, and the frameworks that connect them opens up a basic understanding of what this vision is expressing. A parallel insight into the nature of this vision sees it as part of a theological response to the early reformers who would come to be called the Cathars. After considering the nature of Hildegard's work as art and theology, I place Vision Two of LDO in the historical context of the rise of the Cathar movement and argue for an interpretation of the overall vision, as well as many of its specific symbols, as offering a Catholic alternative to the Cathar view of the cosmos.

AS A MEDIEVAL BENEDICTINE SISTER who produced an impressive body of work, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) occupies a significant niche within the canon of Western literature and theology. Among her writings are poems, hymns, dramas, liturgies, and letters as well as works about plants and herbal cures.¹ *The Book of Divine Works* [LDO: Liber Divinorum Operum] (1163-70) is the last of three lengthy volumes that recorded her visions.² The first of these volumes is *Scivias* [SC],

1. See for example, *Secrets of God: Writings of Hildegard of Bingen*, trans. by Sabina Flanagan (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), which contains selections from many of Hildegard's works, including *Causes and Cures*. Many of these writings reveal Hildegard's deep interest in and appreciation of the natural world.

2. Quotations in the text of this article will be drawn from Matthew Fox (ed.), *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works: with Letters and Songs*, trans. Bruce Hozeski (Santa Fe NM:

“Know the Ways” (1141-51); the second is the *Book of the Rewards of Life* [LVM: Liber Vitae Meritorum] (1158-63).

HILDEGARD'S VISIONS AS ART AND AS THEOLOGY

The illustrations of Hildegard's visions cannot be treated simply as her works of art in the same way that a painting by Picasso is Picasso's work of art. There is general agreement that Hildegard likely had some influence on the illustrations of the lost Rupertsberg *Scivias* that were made during her lifetime. One scholar, Madeline H. Caveniss, argues that Hildegard was probably the actual designer of these illustrations as well as that the illustrations of the Lucca manuscript of *LDO* could plausibly have been based on her designs.³ Caveniss' has two concerns: first, that scholars recognise the value of using the texts and the illustrations to shed light on each other; secondly, that Hildegard be included in the canons of art history. Caveniss' perspective, built upon formidable though still speculative arguments, serves as a corrective to any views that would completely dismiss consideration of Hildegard's direct influence on the illustrations.

Hildegard should be read with an openness both to the possibility that her influence on the illustrations was remote and to the possibility that in some cases it may have been direct. Both readings unavoidably involve some degree of speculation. Even without Hildegard's direct influence, her role as artist would still be important. The illustrations would be to the texts of the visions what a musical performance is to a musical composition. Each illustration would be a particular rendering or performance of Hildegard's original vision. In this scenario, Hildegard herself remains an important visionary artist, but the written text takes clear precedence over any particular illustration. In my judgement, even her role understood in this way, as the composer of

Bear and Company, 1987). This condensed version is based on a translation of the original Latin text into German by Heinrich Schipperges, *Welt und Mensch* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1965) and is currently the only English translation available. For my own research, especially for passages not contained in the Fox version, I relied upon the complete Latin text found in A. Derolez and P. Dronke (eds.), *Liber divinatorum operum*, in *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis* 92 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996). A good source for information on original manuscripts is Albert Drolez, “The Manuscript Transmission of Hildegard von Bingen's Writings: The State of the Problem”, in Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke (eds.) *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of Her Thought and Art* (London: Warburg Institute, 1998) 17-28.

3. Madeline H. Caveniss, “Hildegard as Designer of the Illustrations to her Works”, in Burnett and Peter Dronke, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 29-62. An alternative viewpoint that doubts the reliance of the Lucca manuscript on an earlier text is Keiko Suzuki, *Bildgewordene Visionen oder Visionserzählungen: Vergleichene Studien über die Visiondarstellungen in der Rupertsberger “Scivias”-Handschrift und im Luccheser “Liber divinatorum operum” – Codex der Hildegard von Bingen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), cited in Mews, “From *Scivias*”, 46.

visions rendered into art by others, should be sufficient to include her in art history. For Hildegard herself, the vision preceded both the written and the illustrated text.⁴

It is also problematic to consider Hildegard in a simple, straightforward way as the author of the written text of her visions. She claimed that her visions came to her in imaginative mental forms and through a voice. She claimed further that the images and the voice express revelation from God. She did not present herself as the author of the text of her visions in the same way that she was the author of letters or of her book on natural medicine. In most passages, she did not present herself as writing out word for word the dictates of God, but she did assert that she was transcribing content of which she was not the primary composer. She presented herself as a prophet in the way that Ezekiel and Jeremiah were prophets.⁵ God was communicating through her.

Contemporary consideration of the process through which Hildegard received her visions has issued in the somewhat controversial claim that she suffered from migraine headaches.⁶ Many scholars manage to accept this explanation and still attend seriously to her claims to revelation. Her self-understanding as a prophet remains an integral and important if problematic dimension of her work. Some scholars have attributed her strong claims to revelation to the necessity she experienced as a medieval woman to achieve some basis for recognition of her authority.⁷ Others have pointed to a very common literary convention of down-playing one's own ability and role in presenting a religious vision. Hildegard's exaggerated claims to lack formal education and to be poor in Latin can thus be understood as a literary conceit.

Some scholars in the twentieth century have noted the influence of Rupert of Deutz.⁸ Hildegard followed Rupert in judging the learned

4. Marsha Newman, "Christian Cosmology in Hildegard of Bingen's Illuminations", *Logos* 5 (Winter 2002) 41-61, esp. 42.

5. Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 25-34.

6. Barbara Newman, "Introduction", *Hildegard of Bingen: Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990) 11-12. Newman cites Charles Singer, "The Scientific Views and Visions of St Hildegard", *Studies in the History and Method of Science* 1 (Oxford, 1917) 1-55 and also Oliver Sacks, *Migraine: Understanding a Common Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 106-8.

7. See, for example, Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism: from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 13. Weeks notes that the issue of authority is a central one in the history of German mysticism.

8. Hans Liebeschütz, *Das allegorische Weltbild der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen* (Leipzig: Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, 1930, reprint 1964). In his 1964 postscript, Liebeschütz cites two sources concerning the influence of Rupert of Deutz on Hildegard: [1] E. Meuthen, *Kirche und Heilsgeschichte bei Gerhoh von Reichersberg* (Studien und Texte zur

theology of the universities of the time to be dangerous and even demonic insofar as the disputations led to division in the Church. They drew upon Augustine for their belief that reading the text with human learning is not sufficient for interpreting scripture. Rather, one must be illuminated by the light that is above one's mind. Both Rupert and Hildegard made references to Revelation 20:6, a text commonly cited in their day, which spoke of Satan being set loose for a time after a thousand year reign of Christ. They both judged that the problems of the age called for a proclamation of divine truth rather than for learned but divisive disputations.

HILDEGARD: A BENEDICTINE WOMAN WITH A MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Hildegard was sent off to live with Jutta, a Benedictine anchoress, at the age of eight.⁹ From her early years, therefore, as well as throughout her life, she heard or participated in the Liturgy of the Hours chanted in beautiful harmony several times per day.¹⁰ Hildegard herself became a *magistra* in 1136. The integral balance among the various elements of Hildegard's life reflect the Benedictine stress on wholeness and harmony. Heinrich Schipperges, an acclaimed Hildegard expert, illustrates how the Benedictine style of her life and thought represents a medieval worldview *par excellence*.¹¹

The Rule of Benedict was a seminal text for the development of the medieval mystical tradition, particularly in its explication of Jacob's Ladder.¹² The prologue of the *Rule* draws upon Psalm 34:14-15 to address a prospective brother as one who desires life and who would love to see good days. The body and soul constitute the uprights of the ladder. The rungs are the twelve steps of humility, leading ultimately to *Caritas*. As we will see, the human being in Hildegard's cosmos begins

Geistesgeschichte des Mitteltalters, ed. J. Koch; Band 6 [1959]) 117-135; [2] P. Classen, *Gerhoh von Reichersberg: eine Biographie mit einem Anhang über die Quellen, ihre handschriftliche Überlieferung und ihre Chronologie* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1960) 36-40; 317-320.

9. Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179: A Visionary Life*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), offers a basic account of Hildegard's life and works.

10. My thanks to Sister Dolores Super O.S.B. for this insight, as well as to the Sisters of St Benedict in St Joseph, Minnesota for my time spent in their Studium program for visiting scholars. I also gleaned several insights for this article from colleagues and students at the University of Dayton, including Kelly Johnson, Maureen Tilley, Fred Jenkins, and Michael Hebbeler.

11. Heinrich Schipperges, *The World of Hildegard of Bingen: Her Life, Times and Visions*. Trans. John Cumming (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998 [German orig: 1997]).

12. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, one volume edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953 [Swedish orig. 1930-36]) 594-95. Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine also use the image of the ladder to describe the heavenly ascent of the mystic.

with holy longing and then ascends through various circles to reach divine light and love. Although many elements of her vision are highly original, the theme of heavenly ascent through various stages is a common theme in medieval mysticism.

Hildegard's allegorical style of expression, analysed in depth by Peter Dronke, epitomises what medieval thought was all about.¹³ Barbara Maurmann demonstrates that treating a cosmic vision as an allegory of life was common in Medieval Europe as she engages in a comparison of the depictions of the cosmos by Hildegard and by Honorius Augustodunensis.¹⁴ Using the latter as a representative medieval theologian, Maurmann finds many basic shared elements and characteristics between the two. In his work on liturgy, nature study, dogma, and biblical exegesis, Honorius exemplifies how the medieval worldview depended heavily upon a kind of allegorical knowledge.

Honorius and Hildegard are not alone in depicting the universe as a macrocosm and the human being as a microcosm. The Greeks and others had highly developed notions that the individual was a microcosm of society, that society was a microcosm of the cosmos, and that the cosmos operated in accordance with a basic harmony of the spheres. They also held that the various realms influenced each other, and that such influences could be calculated.¹⁵ Honorius' emphasis on four quadrants, on four elements, and on the association of winds and directions and temperatures with virtues and vices represents a reliance on common medieval themes that draw heavily upon Greek and other ancient sources, especially Plato's *Timaeus*. Hildegard's own sources, most fully mapped out by Peter Dronke, include the *Timaeus* in Calcidius' translation and commentary.¹⁶

13. Peter Dronke distinguishes among several different allegorical techniques used by Hildegard in "The Allegorical World-Picture of Hildegard of Bingen", in Burnett and Dronke, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 3-7.

14. Barbara Maurmann, *Die Himmelsrichtungen im Weltbild des Mittelalters: Hildegard von Bingen, Honorius Augustodunensis, und andere Autoren* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976) 14-15.

15. See, for example, M. R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

16. Dronke, "Allegorical World-Picture", 10. The best available study of Hildegard's use of sources is the introduction (in English) to the previously cited Latin text, *Liber divinorum operum*. In addition to Derolez and Dronke, the classic study of Hildegard's sources is Hans Liebeschütz, *Das allegorische Weltbild*. Peter Dronke reviews and updates Liebeschütz's work in "The Allegorical World-Picture", 1-16. Another important study of Hildegard's sources for *LDO* is Maurmann, *Die Himmelsrichtungen*. Further insight can be gleaned from Monika Klaes, "Zu Schau und Deutung des Kosmos bei Hildegard von Bingen", in Adelgundis Führkötter (ed.), *Kosmos und Mensch aus der Sicht Hildegards von Bingen* (Mainz: Verlag der Gesellschaft für Mitterreinische Kirchengeschichte, 1987).

WRITING AGAINST THE CATHARS

Although Hildegard was born ninety-eight years after the turn of the first Christian millennium, millennialist views still strongly informed theological thought throughout her lifetime. Her own reading of Scripture focused on the eschatological and the apocalyptic. Her schema of epochs from creation through the end-times placed her own time very near the end. The calmness with which she reflects on the cosmos is seasoned with an urgency to deliver her message about preparing for God's judgement and being open to God's love.

Hildegard's opposition to the Cathars is important, in this author's view, for understanding her visions.¹⁷ Malcolm Lambert places the emergence of the Cathars within the historical context of the shift from the first to the second millennium.¹⁸ In the tenth century in the Latin West, organised groups of heretics were virtually non-existent. About 950, Adso of Montier-en-Der wrote a work about the coming of the Antichrist. In the writings of Raoul Glaber, the years 1000 and 1033 became a focal point for speculation about the coming of the Antichrist and the setting loose of Satan for a time. In 1018 Adémar of Chabannes identified a group living in Aquitaine whom he labeled "Manichees" and "messengers of Antichrist", who abstained from food and claimed to practise chastity. In 1114, Guibert de Nogent recorded an account of two peasants of Bucy-de-Long, near Soissons, who rejected marriage, infant baptism, and food produced by coition. They spoke out against the corruption of priests and claimed to live the way of the apostles. These incidents of heresy appear relatively sporadic and unorganised. Each of the reporters of these cases drew upon Augustine's descriptions of the Manichees for their assessments.

Lambert describes how the Cathars of Hildegard's Rhineland had bishops and thus presented a parallel structure that threatened the

17. My strong emphasis on *LDO* being directed primarily against the Cathars is currently a minority position, one which I at first arrived at on my own and then found agreement in Karl Clausberg, *Komische Visionen* (Köln: Du Mont Kunstverlag, 1980) 134-60, esp. 145. I first found a reference to Clausberg in Ulrike Wiethaus, "Cathar Influences in Hildegard of Bingen's Play, 'Ordo Virtutum'", *American Benedictine Review* 38 (June 1987) 192-203, esp. 195. The interpretations of Hildegard's works and visions are many; few even mention the Cathars let alone give Hildegard's opposition to them a central role. An excellent overview and evaluation of standard interpretations as well as an historical tracing of Hildegard's own emphases is found in Constant J. Mews, "From *Scivias* to the *Liber Divinorum Operum*: Hildegard's Apocalyptic Imagination and the Call to Reform", *Journal of Religious History* 24 (February 2000) 44-56. See also Mews' essay, "Religious Thinker: 'A Frail Human Being' on Fiery Life", in Barbara Newman (ed.), *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 52-69.

18. Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 4-23.

Catholic Church. They claimed their way of life descended from the apostles, and they regarded the Catholic Church as the Church of Satan. They rejected marriage. They too refused food produced by coition. Rather than give Baptism by water, a material substance, they substituted the laying on of hands. They performed a ritual, *consolamentum*, through which the recipient was made one of the "perfect", a small group of elite, highly ascetical leaders. They performed another ritual for the forgiveness of sins. Members who were not of the elite received the *consolamentum* as a kind of last rites upon their death bed. The Cathars claimed ethical superiority and strongly criticised the status and moral life of the Catholic clergy.

The actual views that these early Rhineland Cathars held of evil are difficult to determine because so much of what we know about them comes through the writings of their opponents. Later Cathars in France and Italy would hold councils and leave written records, particularly about internal disputes between radical dualists and moderate dualists. Radical dualists judged matter to be evil and to be the creation of an evil god. Moderate dualists strongly favored the spiritual over the material, but did not go as far as the radical dualists in judging the material world and its creator as evil. The extreme nature of the beliefs and ascetical practices of the Rhineland Cathars as reported by their Catholic opponents inclines scholars to think that they were probably radical dualists.

The social analysis offered by Lambert is also worth attention.¹⁹ The Peace of God movement, which had never been notably successful in its goal of protecting noncombatants from the violence of local disputes, was in its waning phases. It was resented by some for its associations with ritualism, relics, and oaths. Overall, in the face of many social changes, the Church appeared to side with the lords over the powerless. There was widespread simony encouraged by the benefiting clergy, many of whom were married. Growing literacy resulted in more widespread reading of the New Testament and unfavorable comparisons between apostolic times and the present. Laity, who had played a powerful part in carrying out Gregorian and other reforms, were demanding a greater role in Church matters and were prepared to break with authority.

It is not difficult to place Hildegard's three volumes of visions within the context of the attacks on the Cathar movement.²⁰ Organised groups of those who would be called Cathars appear first in the Rhineland in

19. Lambert, *The Cathars*, 11-16.

20. Philip Timko O.S.B., "Hildegard of Bingen Against the Cathars", *American Benedictine Review* 52 (June 2001) 191-205.

the early 1140s. In a letter written in July 1163, Hildegard speaks of the emergence of the heretics since which time had passed “twenty three years and four months”, thus indicating approximately March 1140.²¹ Hildegard began receiving the visions that would comprise *SC* in 1141. In 1143 there was at least one trial of heretics presided over by the archbishop of Cologne (about 100 miles northwest along the Rhine from Bingen) as a result of which three of them were burned.²² In Hildegard’s letter to Bernard of Clairvaux of 1146 or 1147, in which she tells of her visions, she writes, “I have not dared to tell these things to anyone, since there are so many heresies abroad in the land....”²³

Hildegard would have had at least some second-hand knowledge of the Cathars, considering that Eckbert, the brother of Hildegard’s good friend, Elizabeth of Schönau, is known to have had years of interactions with Cathars prior to his 1163 sermons on them. Hildegard began the first of four speaking tours in 1158. The main subjects of her speeches were clerical reform and the danger of the Cathar heresy. In her letter of July 1163, written in the same year that her visions that comprise *LDO* began, she relates a vision that has strong parallels with the Book of Revelation.²⁴ This vision, an undisguised condemnation of the Cathars, also presents many images that overlap with Vision Two of *LDO*. These temporal and thematic parallels offer strong evidence in support of interpreting Hildegard’s three volumes of visions as directly offering an alternative view of the cosmos from that of the Cathars.

Hildegard and the Cathars had some shared concerns. Both stood strongly against the deterministic use of astrology,²⁵ against corruption in the clergy, and against spiritual complacency. Hildegard’s emphasis on these matters may have been inspired or at least influenced by a need to take seriously the legitimate complaints of her opponents. Hildegard’s stance against astrology, corruption, and spiritual complacency can thus be read as a dimension of her engagement with the Cathars.

21. *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 2, trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 123.

22. Lambert, *The Cathars*, 19-20.

23. *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 1, trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 28.

24. A discussion of the July 1163 letter and its relation to Hildegard’s works can be found in Timko, “Against the Cathars”, 197-203.

25. By “astrology” Hildegard meant relying upon the stars and planets to determine human destiny. Hildegard accepted as basically true many things which today would be considered astrology, such as that the phases of the moon influenced medical practice. For Hildegard to consider such knowledge “astrology”, a determinist understanding that denied God’s providence and human freedom would have to be added.

Hildegard also stood against the political-religious schisms that accompanied the investiture controversy of her times.²⁶ As with her opposition to the theology of the schools, the underlying issue in all of these concerns is the unity of the Church. Hildegard's offering of divine visions to the world is in the service of bringing all people together into one Church as they prepare for God's final judgement. A fruitful interpretive strategy is to emphasise the way in which the visions serve as a direct counter to heretical and schismatic divisions, above all the Cathar vision of the world.

Andrew Weeks explains convincingly and insightfully how the earlier *SC* can itself be read as directed against the Cathars.²⁷ When it comes to *LDO*, however, he emphasises a shift away from a call to action in the direction of contemplation of the cosmos. He also notes an expanded focus on universal, natural symbols. Such a shift may take place to some extent, but, as I will argue, a dynamism directed toward the Cathars remains strong in *LDO* as well as a biblically-based urging to live in harmony with the cosmos as reflective of God's will. I agree with Karl Clausberg that the anti-Cathar theme in *LDO* is pervasive.²⁸

Philip Timko points out that Hildegard herself did not use the word "Cathar", even when she was responding to explicit requests that did name the group; her preferred terms for them were "worshippers of Baal" (idolaters) and "Sadducees" (deniers of the Resurrection).²⁹ The Rhineland Cathars of Hildegard's time, as well as other distinct and diverse groups of medieval Cathars, were different in many ways from the Manichees. The Manichees were followers of Mani, "a Syrian visionary of Judeo-Christian background who lived in Persian Mesopotamia"³⁰ and founded an eclectic religion. Although Jesus was a significant figure for the Manichees, their religion combined elements of Buddhism and Zoroastrianism along with Christianity. The Cathars did not stand in a direct line with them either historically or doctrinally. The Manichean beliefs and rituals were quite distinct from either the Christians of Augustine's times or the Cathars. Still, the Cathars were dualists who, along with the Manichees, could form a Christian

26. An excellent short summary of troubles faced by the Catholic Church in the time of Hildegard can be found in Weeks, *German Mysticism*, 44-47. Weeks relies upon Herbert Grundmann, *Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der religiösen Bewegungen in Mittelalte*, in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze 1* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1976 [English version: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995]) as well as Berta Widmer, *Heilsordnung und Zeitgeschehen in der Mystik Hildegards von Bingen* (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1955).

27. Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism*, 47-49.

28. Clausberg, *Komische Visionen* 134-60, esp. 145.

29. Timko, "Against the Cathars", 193.

30. Iain Gardner and Samuel N.C. Lieu (eds.), *Manichean Texts from the Roman Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) i.

perspective loosely be identified as Gnostics. A century later, Aquinas would call the Cathars of his own time Manichees.³¹ As loose as the general thematic connections appear to a modern historical mind, the ability to draw upon Augustine to expose what were perceived as the flaws of the heretics helped to make the identification appealing.

Timko goes on to state, however, that Hildegard, in contrast to most Catholics, did not make the mistake of thinking of the Cathars as being descended from or in any way associated with the Manichees. Such is a reasonable conjecture if there is no other evidence to the contrary. It may be, though, that Hildegard did see strong parallels between the Cathars and the Manichees. A possible reason for her not calling them "Cathars" or "Manichees" may have been a use of the classical convention of not explicitly naming one's enemy. Evidence supporting the possibility that she saw in the Cathar movement a resurgence of a dualist worldview associated with the Manichees appears in the significant parallels between *LDO* and those passages in Augustine's *Confessions* in which the Manichees are his main opponent.

Like *Confessions*, *LDO* opens with a reflection on the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God. In book seven of *Confessions*, Augustine refutes the Manichees with the help of the Platonists, and he then distinguishes his own Christian faith from Platonism through an exegesis of the prologue of the Gospel of John. Hildegard herself presents Part One of *LDO* as a reflection on the prologue of the Gospel of John, and chapter four, the final chapter of Part One, ends with a lengthy exegesis of the verses. Along with the Book of Revelation, which until modern times was attributed to John, the Gospel of John has often been a focus of debate between Christians and representatives of various movements labeled Gnostic.³² Hildegard's use of this text against the Cathars parallels Augustine's use of it against the Manichees. Moreover, as *Confessions* ends with a detailed exegesis of the opening chapters of Genesis, so does *LDO*.

This is not necessarily to insist that *Confessions* is a direct source for *LDO*. Hildegard was clearly influenced, though, by some primary texts of Augustine as well as by medieval Augustinian theologians.³³ All

31. John Inglis highlights the importance of understanding the Cathar threat for the interpretation of the *Summa Theologiae* in "Emanation in Historical Context: Aquinas and the Dominican Response to the Cathars", *Dionysius* 17 (1999) 95-128. See also Inglis' *On Aquinas* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth/Thompson, 2002) 51-60. Fergus Kerr draws upon Inglis' work in *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 4-5.

32. John Glyndwr Harris, *Gnosticism: Beliefs and Practices* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999) 175-85.

33. Weeks brings out the biblical and Augustinian background of virtually all medieval Christian theology in the West in the twelfth century in *German Mysticism*, 15-37. Some commentators have contrasted Hildegard's nature mysticism and creation-centered

three volumes of her visions are similar in overall structure and themes to medieval works of theology based on Christian scripture and creeds, dealing with God, creation, human nature, fall, redemption, virtue, judgement, and afterlife. Hildegard's visions differ, though, in sounding more like poetry than like philosophical analysis. The outline of the topics covered in *SC* parallels directly a theological text by Hugh of St Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*.³⁴

Hildegard's basic strategy in *LDO*, like that of Augustine in *Confessions*, is to counter the dualist view by setting it within the fuller picture of a universe that contains forces of good and evil in a creation that rests within a transcendent Creator. She then, again like Augustine, counters a purely transcendental view through her focus on the Incarnation of Christ and on the accompanying Trinitarian worldview that supports it. For Hildegard, the central fact that determines the entire meaning of the universe is the Incarnation.

Ioan P. Couliano has shown that most of the commonly used defining features attributed to Gnostics are not universally present among all Gnostic groups. Gnostic groups reflect various amalgams of characteristics. For example, not all are radical dualists who judge the material world to be evil. There are, however, two beliefs that do characterise all of these groups: first, the denial that creation reflects the intelligent purposes of a good God; second, the denial of any mutual link or commensurability between human beings and the universe.³⁵ For people who think more symbolically and allegorically than historically and concretely, connecting the Cathars and the Manichees was not too far of a stretch.

MACRO- AND MICROCOSMIC RELATIONSHIPS IN *LDO*

In Hildegard's *LDO*, the macro- and microcosmic interrelationships among God, the cosmos, and human beings provide the basic framework for the first set of visions and thereby the foundation of the entire work. These interrelationships stand in contradistinction to what Hildegard perceived as the most basic characteristics of the Cathars,

spirituality with what they take to be Augustine's own tendency toward dualism. Augustine's respect for all that God created, however, goes hand in hand with Hildegard's outlook. His rhetorical dismissals of scientific knowledge compared with divine revelation take little away from the many ways in which Hildegard's theology remained deeply Augustinian.

34. Cf. Barbara Newman, *Hildegard of Bingen: Scivias*, 23-24.

35. Ioan P. Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992 [revised from 1990 French original]) xv.

which correspond with the shared characteristics of the Gnostics stated above by Couliano.

The four visions of Part One of *LDO* deal respectively with God, the cosmos, human nature, and the human soul. Although it is Vision Two that focuses directly on the cosmos, Vision Two is also relevant to God, human nature, and the human soul. This is because each succeeding vision is a microcosm which fits and unfolds within the preceding vision. The cosmos exists within and is a microcosm of God. A figure of a human being dominates the vision of the cosmos and is a microcosm of that cosmos. The entire universe is a complex system of interwoven layers of intersecting and interpenetrating webs of cosmic proportions.

This point can also be made in reverse. Human nature is a macrocosm of bodily human existence. The cosmos is a macrocosm of human nature. God is a macrocosm of the cosmos. Each folds within the other somewhat in the way that various systems, muscular, nervous, circulatory, and endocrine, enfold within each other in a human body. The analogy has clear limitations, but also at least one advantage: it is organic rather than mechanical.

These relationships apply to the pieces of Part One of *LDO*. Parts One, Two and Three also interrelate with each other in complex ways. The stories and processes of creation, purification and salvation can also be enfolded within one other.

Vision One begins with the divine essence revealing itself as Love, as Trinity, as the Incarnate Son, and as the source of all life. Placing Vision Two within the context of Vision One represents structurally a clear alternative to the views construed to be those of the Cathars. As Augustine had argued, so Hildegard expresses visually that all that exists has been created and is sustained by God. Everything that God created is good. What might appear to be evil has its place and purpose in God's design. God knows everything in the universe all at once in a way that is beyond time. The trampling of the serpent by Christ symbolises "the true love, which...tramples upon all injustice that is convoluted by the countless vices of dissention".³⁶ The overarching theme of the entire work is summed up: "In God's total design and providence the climax of the highest love was that God's Son in his humanity led the lost human race back to the heavenly kingdom." (12)

Human beings are identified explicitly as an *opus Dei* (18), a divine work, as are all of the elements of creation. The denial that creation is the work of God was Augustine's key charge against the Manichees. *LDO's* Vision One, in line with Augustine's reading of Paul, counsels the reader to scorn earthly things and to embrace the things of the spirit (19-

36. *Book of Divine Works*, 17; *Liber divinorum operum*, 73.

20). Ascetical concerns are not rejected, but are placed within a context that affirms the goodness of all that God created.

VISION TWO OF *LDO*

Vision Two is literally an opening up of the figure in Vision One. The Christ figure opens up to reveal a map of the cosmos with a human being at its center. The somewhat androgynous human being, made in the image and likeness of God, bears a strong resemblance to the Christ figure.

This vision can be read as a map for anyone who is undertaking the spiritual journey of life. Medieval geographical maps of the world are highly symbolic and allegorical, expressing not only geography but also religion and culture through symbolic representation.³⁷ They often express more about the mapmaker's worldview than they do about geography. In a similar fashion, Hildegard's cosmic map expresses an allegory of the meaning of life.

A further comparison can be made with the original 1960 version Milton-Bradley board game, *Life*.³⁸ Each player decides in advance what relative percentage of happiness, money, and fame they are seeking. The game functions as a metaphor for how people might actually think about living their real lives.

I have yet to find a Hildegard cosmic board game in the toy stores, but such a game is not hard to imagine. The outcome of the game would need to depend more upon human decisions to cooperate with the universally available grace of God than on the roll of the dice or on the direction of the cosmic winds. Basically, one would try to advance one's game piece by using the images of fear and judgement as sources of motivation rather than as places in which to be trapped and by using each virtue as a stepping-stone to move on to the next virtue along the path to the luminous fire.

There are six circles or layers that interpenetrate each other. The outermost or sixth circle is one of luminous fire. It represents God's light which illuminates all things. The next, the fifth, circle, only half as large, is of black fire and represents God's judgement which punishes sinners. The second fire is under the power of the first fire. Read as an alternative to what is construed to be the Cathar view, the message is that what can appear to be evil comes fully under God's providence.

37. Maurmann, *Die Himmelsrichtungen*, 22-25.

38. A new version of *Life* was released in 1992. According to reviewers on Amazon.com, the new version is relatively more focused on random chance, money, and political correctness than on strategy and a variety of life goals (Accessed February 2006. These web reviews are no longer posted).



Man as the center of the Universe. From "De Operatione Dei", by Saint Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179, at bottom left). Rupertsburg (Germany), 1200 CE. Cod.lat. 1942, f.9r. Location : Biblioteca Statale, Lucca, Italy
PHOTO CREDIT : SCALA / ART RESOURCE, NY

Both circles merge to form a single circle, such that "God's might and judgement have blended to form a single justice and cannot be separated from each other" (28).

The fourth circle is of pure ether. It is an area of balance and restraint that represents a space for the pure atonement of sinners as they prepare to face judgement. The third layer is of watery air. It represents the holy works of individuals empowered by the fire of the Holy Spirit. It washes away the filth of sin. The second circle is of sheer white clean air. This layer prevents flooding from above. In the spiritual life it represents discretion that strengthens holy works through the practice of moderation and balance. It encourages the person to avoid punishing oneself to excess. This zone is closely tied to the circle of judgement, and represents also God's discretion so that divine judgement does not exceed the measure of the person's sins. The first, most inner circle is a thin stratum of air. This circle represents the desire of holy longing. This circle reaches to the outer circumference by penetrating the other circles.

So, one begins with holy longing. One moves through moderation and good works to the level of atonement that prepares one to pass through judgement to enter into the power and light of God.

Circle 6	Luminous fire	—	Divine power and light
Circle 5	Black fire	—	Judgement
Circle 4	Pure ether	—	Atonement
Circle 3	Watery Air	—	Works through the Holy Spirit
Circle 2	Sheer white clean air	—	Moderation
Circle 1	Thin stratum of air	—	Holy Longing

These layers correspond with the outline of the rest of the book. Vision Three addresses balance and moderation and virtue. Vision four begins with a reflection on creation as a divine work and on the need for human beings to work in accordance with the strivings of their souls. It ends with an exegesis of the prologue of John emphasising the meaning of the Incarnation. Thus ends Part One, which has covered the first three circles.

Part Two consists in Vision Five only. It depicts places of atonement, which is the fourth circle. Such placing corresponds with the written text, in which this circle functions as a middle ground that separates the upper from the lower. Part Three, which consists in the remaining five visions, focuses on salvation history, the Last Judgement and entry into heaven. These correspond with the two upper circles of the cosmos, which are said in a way to form one circle together.

Various scholars have pointed out that apocalyptic elements permeate the entire book and not just the final chapters that are directly

on that topic. One reason for this is that Vision Two contains not only a map of the cosmos but also a kind of table of contents for the remainder of the book. As God perceives the universe and all of its happenings in one eternal insight, so Hildegard's cosmos contains all that ever happens at once in one vast landscape. This mutual interpenetration of themes also corresponds with the common pattern of medieval exegesis. Each passage in scripture is interpreted as bearing simultaneously a literal, allegorical, moral, and eschatological meaning. The cosmic forces that represent the end of time are present at all times, and the winds that they generate keep the universe in motion.

There is movement in this cosmos, which, as depicted in Vision Two, is powered by primary and auxiliary winds that blow concentrically from the mouths of various animals. The primary winds issue forth from a Lion, a Leopard, a Bear, and a Wolf. The first three represent the animals of the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7 as well as features of the beast in Revelation 13.³⁹ The fourth animal, the Wolf, had been interpreted as the devil by both Jerome and Augustine in the story of the Good Shepherd from John 10, an exegetical association that carried through the Middle Ages. The Wolf is further associated with the Lion and the Leopard in Isaiah 11:6 as well as in Jeremiah 5:6.

The three Daniel animals have astrological associations in the ancient world that parallel their placement by Hildegard. The Bear is connected with the North, and is associated with the constellations that most of us know as the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper. The Lion has associations with the South insofar as in ancient times it appeared with the coming of summer. The Leopard, or Panther, is associated with the East. The Wolf, the one added by Hildegard, is not associated with a constellation until medieval times. She connects it with the West. Basically, the West and the North represent evil and the devil. The South and the East represent good.

In Hildegard's vision, the North-South pole is horizontal; the East-West pole is vertical. The East is at the top and the West is at the bottom. The North is to the left of the human figure, and the South is to the right. One might think that, if this were a contemporary map, the North being to the right and the South to the left seems to call for the East to be at the bottom and the West at the top. Such would be the case if the map were made primarily for one to observe from the outside. If one could enter into the world of the map, however, one would find that it is like the world as humans experience it. If one stands with one's left hand pointing toward the North, one is facing West, and the rest of the vision falls into place. This arrangement is necessary for the evil North to be

39. The roots in Daniel were first identified in Maurmann, *Die Himmelsrichtungen*, 68-70.

associated with the left and the good South to be associated with the right if the East is to be at the top.⁴⁰

The four apocalyptic animals are associated with themes of fear and affliction. The East-West fears are vertical and eschatological in type; the South-North fears are horizontal and more human. Yet the East-South fears are more associated with the good and the West-North fears with evil.

Leopard / East	Fear of the Lord
Wolf / West	Punishment of hell
Lion / South	Fear of God's judgement
Bear / North	Bodily trials by afflictions

Each of these winds works in concert with two auxiliary winds. The Crab and the Stag blow vertically along with the East-West winds, and thus complement the Leopard and the Wolf. The Serpent and the Lamb blow horizontally along with the South-North winds, and thus complement the Lion and the Bear. With the exception of the Crab, all of these animals are drawn from the Bible and are associated with biblical characteristics. The serpent is connected with cunning. In the Vulgate version of Matthew 10:16, Jesus tells the disciples to have the *prudencia* of serpents. Hildegard herself uses the term *prudencia* to describe the characteristic of the serpent.

The Stag, as a Christ symbol, is most commonly associated in medieval exegesis with Psalm 42:1: "As the deer pants for the water brooks/ So my soul pants for You, O God" (NASB). The water is interpreted as the water of Baptism; the Stag is commonly found on baptismal fonts. The Stag probably also refers to the Song of Songs, which is not only among the books which Hildegard most often cited, but is one that she and her sister Benedictines read eschatologically. The lovers in the Song of Songs are read as symbols of Christ the Bridegroom and the Church his Bride at the celebration of the heavenly banquet. The Stag represents Christ the lover, the one for whom the Benedictine sisters wait with holy longing.

The Lamb appears several times in the New Testament. In Luke 10:3, Jesus sends the disciples out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Even more pertinent, perhaps, are the many references to the Lamb as a Christ figure in the Gospel of John and in Revelation. The Crab, although it is not biblical, represents a constellation associated throughout ancient and medieval times with faith and steadfastness.

40. My colleague John Inglis reports that in some medieval European congregations, men sat on the South side of the Church and women on the North side. Apart from any symbolic associations, the South side was sunnier and warmer.

The horizontal winds are linked with natural virtues such as patience and prudence. The vertical virtues are linked with faith and holiness. Thus, patience and prudence are needed to deal with bodily afflictions and to counter fear of divine judgement. Fear of divine judgement is an earthly fear, in contrast with fear of the Lord, which is a holy fear that continues in heaven. Trust, faith, and holiness are needed to confront fear of hell and to reap the benefits of fear of the Lord.

The Stag and the Lamb are purely good. The crab is ambiguous in that it both signifies tenacious trust yet can duplicitously walk both forward and backward. The Serpent is ambiguous in that it signifies a necessary prudence yet also stands for Satan and evil.

Crab	Trust, hope for forgiveness, doubt which increases contrition, constancy
Stag	Faith, holiness
Serpent	Cunning, Prudence
Lamb	Patience

These winds all blow toward the human figure in the middle of the vision. One is to catch a hold of these winds somewhat in the way that a surfer catches a wave. It is of utmost importance to maintain one's balance. One wind can lead a person to the next wind, as, for example, the wind of the Crab (a human type of trust) can help one to make it to the wind of the Stag (divine faith).

Other elements of the cosmos, such as the seven planets – which medieval people thought of as Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, the Moon, and the Sun – represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Sun, associated with fortitude (*fortitudo*), occupies the circle of black fire. Above the Sun, in the circle of luminous fire, are planets that represent Wisdom (*sapientia*), Understanding (*intellectus*), and Counsel (*consilium*). Below the Sun, in the circle of pure ether, are planets that represent Knowledge (*scientia*), Piety (*pieta*), and fear of the Lord (*timor Domini*). Ancient associations between planets and virtues are quite similar: Saturn (Wisdom), Jupiter (Understanding), Mars (Counsel), the Sun (Fortitude), Venus (Serenity), Mercury (Piety), and the Moon (Humility).⁴¹

41. *Anecdota de Virgilio: The Secret History of Virgil*, by Alexander Neckam, chapter "Cicero et Templum Ruinosum", *Biblioteca Arcana*. Available from <http://www.cs.utk.edu/~mclennan/OM/BA/AV/cicero.html>

Saturn	Wisdom	Circle of luminous fire (divine light and love)
Jupiter	Understanding	
Mars	Counsel	
Sun	Fortitude	Circle of black fire (divine judgement)
Venus	Knowledge	Circle of pure ether (purification)
Mercury	Piety	
Moon	Fear of the Lord	

The gifts of the Holy Spirit below the Sun prepare one for judgement. Fortitude carries one through judgement. The gifts from above the Sun draw one toward the love of God.⁴²

One who lives a balanced life based on virtue and good works and atonement, that is, a life in harmony with the cosmos, will be lifted up into the East and finally pass through judgement into the Divine light.

DIVINE WORKS AND SPIRITUAL NEGOTIATION: AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE CATHAR COSMOLOGY

The four primary winds are associated with the apocalypse, the terrible period of judgement at the end of time. In a deep way, Hildegard is taking these fearsome apocalyptic forces and reconfiguring them as instruments of God with which human beings can learn how to live in harmony. In contrast to what she takes to be the view of the Cathars, she is telling the story of a universe in which all forces operate according to the will of God, and in which human beings are called to struggle against temptation and to live lives of virtue in gratitude for the gift of salvation merited for them by Christ.

Hildegard's vision links cosmic forces with biblical images. She associates each wind with an energy that motivates one toward spiritual growth. It is important to realise that for Hildegard these forces are not purely negative. That "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" is written in three places in the Old Testament (Ps 11:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10). These forces can help a human being who strives to follow God and to do what is good to achieve a spiritual tension or harmony that will result in a state of repentance.

One who chooses to live an upright life in harmony with these forces, which represent God's will, will be granted salvation. A cosmos in peaceful harmony therefore represents at the same time an individual's or a community's dynamic spiritual journey. If the Cathars preached

⁴² There are yet other elements in the cosmos, such as sixteen stars representing the Ten Commandments and their applications in six periods of history. Minor stars and clouds represent the beatitudes.

that the Catholic deficiencies in spirituality were matched by deficiencies in their cosmology, then Hildegard presents a vision that begs to differ by offering a Catholic cosmology thoroughly bound up with spirituality.

The phrase "divine works" in the book's title has many overlapping meanings, not the least of which is that the planets and stars and cosmic winds are themselves works of God and are always expressive of God's will. It is God's grace and human free will, not the stars and planets and winds, which ultimately determine the course of human life.

The human being is the "divine work" *par excellence*, each one containing the various forces of the cosmos that must be held in harmonious balance if one is to achieve salvation. Rather than seeing negative cosmic forces as a sign of an evil god or demi-urge, the human being is called to appreciate the beauty of an all-good cosmos made by an all-good God. The pathways of the cosmos can be negotiated by those who take proper spiritual motivation from the fearsome apocalyptic elements and base their lives on hope, faith, prudence, and patience, as well as the Ten Commandments, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the Beatitudes.

Hildegard emphasised the organic nature of both human beings and the universe as a whole. Her works express a profoundly integrated view of the divine, the cosmic, the human, and the earthly. She is attuned to the harmony of the spheres. Like Plato and other Greek thinkers, she discerns a deep harmony between the human soul and the cosmic soul. These harmonies are reflected in music and mathematics and virtue. Macrocosmic-microcosmic relationships abound. In many passages, Hildegard finds this world to be as a shadowy representation of an ideal world that lies beyond it.

Yet, like Augustine before her, Hildegard is most concerned with harmonising the views of the ancients with the Christian story of creation, fall and redemption. Her configurations of the heavens are narrative retellings of the Christian story. Like Augustine, she counters the dualists with a type of Platonism and then trumps the Platonism with her emphasis on the Incarnation. The allegorical method she uses reflects her medieval Christian worldview. The harmony and balance that permeate her work as both theme and method reflect her Benedictine heritage.