Hildegard’s final and greatest visionary work was the Liber Divinorum Operum, the “Book of Divine Works.” Completed in 1174, its ten visions are the most complex of Hildegard’s corpus, each revealing different aspects of the Divine Work, i.e. the history of salvation and the place of human beings within the created world.

In an autobiographical passage included in the Life of St. Hildegard (II.16), the Visionary Doctor describes the genesis of the work in her meditations on the Prologue to the Gospel of John. Each vision of the work elaborates the dynamic Word of God, present before and then within Creation, becoming a human being to bring the Work of God—humanity as the pinnacle and microcosm of all creation—to perfection. The figure of Caritas or Divine Love is the central character in the opening vision below, and she returns again and again throughout the book, intertwined with the other allegorical, theophanic figures that Hildegard saw in her visions. Drawing inspiration from the declaration of the First Letter of John (4:8) that “God is love,” Hildegard connects several biblical images—the Ancient of Days, the woman clothed with the sun (Apocalypse 12:1), the Lamb of God, the wings of the seraph—to describe, in a whirl of symbols and ideas, the cosmic drama of creation and salvation. At center-stage of this drama is this figure of Caritas—Divine Love, the “supreme and fiery force” that both sparked and sustains creation, and at the same time reflects and sets alight the body, soul, and mind of each human being. The scope of Hildegard’s visionary theology is both cosmic and close—reflections of God’s loving revelation of himself to humanity are both grand and utterly intimate, as the Work of God reaches from the very heart of infinity down into every smallest detail of the created world.

This introduction and translation by Nathaniel M. Campbell is under copyright of The Catholic University of America Press, in whose series, “Fathers of the Church, Medieval Continuation,” his translation of Hildegard’s complete Liber Divinorum Operum will appear in 2016.

1. And I saw as it were in the middle of the southern sky an image, beautiful and wonderful in the mystery of God, like a human in form. Her face was of such beauty and radiance that I could easier look at the sun than at her; and a great circket of golden color surrounded her head. Above that head, moreover, in the same circlet appeared another face like an old man, whose chin and beard touched the crown of the [lower] head. And from each side of the figure’s neck a single wing came forth, which rose up to join together above the aforementioned circket. At the tip of the arc where the right wing curves back, I saw as it were the head of an eagle, which had eyes of fire, in which appeared the brilliance of the angels as in a mirror. But at the tip of the arc where the left wing curves back there was as it were a human face, which shined like the brilliance of the stars. And these faces were turned towards the east. Furthermore, from each shoulder of this image, a single wing stretched forth down to her knees. She was clothed with a tunic like the brilliance of the sun, and in her hands she held a lamb, shining like the light of day. Moreover, she was treading with her feet a monster, dreadful in appearance and venomous and black in color, and also a serpent that had fixed his mouth upon the right ear of the monster and, wrapping the rest of its body around the monster’s head, had stretched its tail along the monster’s left side all the way to its feet.

2. And this image spoke: “I am the supreme and fiery force, who sets all living sparks alight and breathes forth no mortal things, but judges them as they are. Flying around the circling circle with my upper wings—with wisdom—I have ordered all things rightly. But I am also the fiery life of the essence of divinity—I flame above the beauty of the fields and I shine in the waters and I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. With the airy wind I rouse to life all things with some invisible life, which sustains all things. For the air lives in viridity and in the flowers, the waters flow as if they are alive, and the sun lives in its own light. When the moon has waned, it is rekindled by the light of the sun so that it might as it were live anew, and the stars shine bright by living as it were in their own light. I have also established the pillars that contain the whole circle of the earth—the winds. The stronger winds have wings set below them, which are the lighter winds, and these uphold the stronger winds with their lightness, lest they dangerously unleash themselves; in the same way the body covers and contains the soul, lest it should expire. Likewise, as the breath of the soul binds together the body by strengthening it so that it does not weaken, so the stronger winds also animate those subject to them, so that they can fulfil their duties appropriately.

“Therefore I, the fiery force, lie hidden in these things, and they burn because of me, just as breath continually moves a human being and a flickering flame exists within the fire. All of these things live in their essences and were not found in death, because I am life. I am also rationality, possessing the wind of the resounding Word, through which every created thing was made; and in all these things I blow, so that none of them might be mortal in its nature, because I am life.

1 Cf. Hildegard’s antiphon O virtus Sapientie (Symphonia 2, ed. B. Newman, p. 100): “O virtus Sapientie, / que circuiens circuisti, / comprehendingo omnia / in una via que habet vitam, / tres alas habens…”
2 “viridity”: viriditas. This key term in Hildegard’s symbolic vocabulary literally means, “greenness.” Its depth of meaning, however, extends beyond a simple color to encompass notions of “freshness, vitality, fertility, fecundity, fruitfulness, verdure, growth” (Constant Mews, “Religious Thinker: ‘A Frail Human Being’ on Fiery Life,” in Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World, ed. B. Newman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), pp. 52-69, esp. 57-8). For Hildegard, viridity was the fundamental marker of the abundant, fecund, holy life that creation, the “work of God,” receives from its Creator. It often makes an appearance in her organic analogies for the Trinity, especially in connection with the Holy Spirit, thus serving as a hallmark of God’s creative fertility, the maternal goodness that gives birth to and nurtures the whole world.
3 For Hildegard, these are Trinitarian images: cf. Explanatio Symboli Sancti Athanasii, ed. C. P. Evans, in CCCM 226, pp. 116-7.
“For I am life, pure and whole, which was not hewn from stones, neither blossomed from branches nor took root from man’s sexual power;\(^4\) but every living thing has taken root in me. For reason is the root, and the resounding Word flourishes within it.

“Therefore, because God is rational, how could it possibly be that he would not actively work, since his every work flourishes through humankind, whom he made in his image and likeness and in whom he marked out all created things according to their measure? For it was always determined from eternity that God would will his work—humankind—to come into being; and when he perfected this work, he gave all creation to humankind so that humans might do their work with it, in the same way that God himself had made his work, that is, humankind.

“But I also fulfill my duty, since all living things are set ablaze from me; and I am uniform life in eternity, which neither begins nor ends. God is this life, working and moving itself, and yet this life is one in three forces. Therefore Eternity is called the Father, the Word is called the Son, and the breath connecting these two is called the Holy Spirit, just as God is signified in human beings, in whom are body, soul, and rationality.\(^5\) Moreover, because ‘I flame above the beauty of the fields,’ this signifies the earth, which is that material from which God made human beings. And because ‘I shine in the waters,’ this accords with the soul, since, just as water floods the whole earth, so the soul permeates the whole body. But because ‘I burn in the sun and in the moon,’ this signifies rationality, and the stars are the countless words of rationality. And when ‘with the airy wind I rouse to life all things with some invisible life, which sustains all things,’ this is because by the air and wind subsist those living things that grow, moved out of nothingness into existence.”

3. And again I heard a voice from heaven saying to me: God, who created all things, made humankind in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26), and in humankind he signified both the higher and the lower creatures. He held humankind in such loving affection, that he destined them for that place from which the falling angel was cast out, and he ordained them for the glory and honor in blessedness that the fallen angel had lost.\(^6\) This is what this vision that you have seen demonstrates.

For when you see\(^3\) as it were in the middle of the southern sky an image, beautiful and wonderful in the mystery of God, like a human in form, this is because Divine Love is beautiful because of her election in the strength of unfailing divinity, and wonderful in the gifts of the heavenly Father’s mysteries: and thus Divine Love reveals humankind. For when the Son of God put on flesh, he redeemed fallen humankind through the service of Love. Thus her face is of such beauty and radiance that you could easier look at the sun than at her: for the abundance of Love is of so great an excellence in the flashing gleam of her gifts, that she surpasses all human understanding and the faculty of knowledge by which humans are able to understand various things in the soul. This transcendence is so great that humans cannot in any way grasp Love with the senses. But this shows symbolically that through her, he is recognized in faith who is not seen visibly with the visible eyes.

\(^4\) “from man’s sexual power”: de uirili ui; cf. Hildegard, *Explanatio Symboli Sancti Athanasii*: Christ “is indeed fully God in the wholeness of eternity, and fully human with a rational soul and pure flesh and without the male sexual commingling of human nature” (Ipse etenim plenus Deus est in integritate eternitatis plenusque homo cum racionali anima et carne munda et absque uilla uirili commixtione humane nature; in CCCM 226, p. 125).


\(^6\) This refers to the notion that redeemed humanity shall refill the tenth choir of angels that had been emptied by the fall of Lucifer and his companions; cf. c. 9 below, and *Scivias* III.2.19.
4. And a great circlet of golden color surrounds her head, because the catholic faith, spread throughout the whole world and rising in the first dawn of exceptional brilliance, embraces the excellence of true Love’s abundance with every devotion, as when God redeemed humankind in the humanity of His Son and strengthened them through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Thus is one God understood in Trinity, who without temporal beginning before the ages was God in divinity. And when above that head in the same circlet appears another face like an old man, this means that the all-surpassing goodness of divinity, which is without beginning and end, brings aid and comfort to the faithful, so that this face’s chin and beard touch the crown of the [lower] head. For divinity holds fast the lofty reaches of supreme Love by arranging and protecting all things, as when the Son of God in his humanity led lost humankind back to heavenly things.

And from each side of the figure’s neck a single wing comes forth, which rise up to join together above the aforementioned circlet. For love of God and love of neighbor are not to be separated from each other, for they proceed through the power of Divine Love in the unity of faith and embrace that faith between them through supreme desire. For holy divinity keeps the countless splendor of its glory hidden from humanity, so long as they dwell in the shadow of death, devoid of the heavenly robe that they lost because of Adam.

5. At the tip of the arc where the right wing curves back, you see as it were the head of an eagle, which has eyes of fire, in which appear the multitude of the angels as in a mirror. For when in the soaring heights of triumphant submission, someone makes themself subject to God and overcomes the Devil, they are made lofty in the blessedness of divine protection. And when, set on fire by the Holy Spirit, they lift up their mind and fix their attention on God, the blessed spirits shall clearly appear in it and offer to God the devotion of that person’s heart. For in the eagle are signified those spiritual people who, with every devotion of the heart and in contemplation, gaze often upon God like the angels. For this reason the blessed spirits, gazing intently upon God, rejoice because of the good works of the just and show forth these works in themselves, and so they continue in their praise of God and never grow weary, for they can never reach the end of his praise. For truly, who can count the numberless wonders that God does in the power of his ability? No one. Indeed, there is present to the angels a many-mirrored flash in which they see that none can act and none has such power as God: there is none like him, for he has no temporality.

6. Indeed, all things that God has worked, he held in his foreknowledge before the beginning of time. For in the pure and holy divinity, all things visible and invisible appeared without movement and outside of time, before the ages, just as trees or other creatures near water are seen in the water,
for although they are not physically in it, their every shape appears in it.\(^{11}\) For when God said, “Let there be…” (Gen. 1:3 etc.), immediately they were clothed with form, as his foreknowledge saw them before the ages when they did not yet have physical bodies. For as all things shine in the mirror before which they stand, so in the holy divinity all his works appeared outside of the passage of time. And how could God lack the work he foreknew, since his every work, after it is clothed with a body, fulfills the task appointed for it, because the holy divinity foreknew how to be present in knowing, understanding, and serving? For just as a ray of light reveals the particular shape of a created thing through its shadow, so God’s pure foreknowledge looked upon the form of every created thing before it was embodied. For the work that God would make glemmed in his foreknowledge according to its likeness before it was embodied, just as a person sees the splendor of the sun before they are able to look upon its substance. And as the splendor of the sun points to the sun itself, so also the angels reveal God by their praising; and as it is not possible for the sun to be without its light, so neither can the Divinity be without the angels’ praise. God’s foreknowledge both preceded and followed his work; and if God’s foreknowledge had not existed first, his work would not have appeared. For if a person’s face cannot be seen, their body cannot be recognized; but when a person’s face is seen, their body can be praised. Thus God’s foreknowledge and his work exist in him.

7. There was, however, a numberless multitude of angels who wished to exist on their own, for when they saw their own radiance, great and glorious in its flashing brilliance, they forgot their Creator. And even before they began to praise him, they were calculating among themselves that their honor’s brilliance was so great that none could resist it—this is also why they wished to vilify God. For when they saw that they could never reach the end of his wonders, they hated him; and though they ought to have praised him, with a foolish thought they declared that in their great splendor they would choose another god. Thus they fell into darkness, reduced to such impotence that they could do nothing to any creature except inasmuch as it was permitted to them by their Creator. For because God had adorned the first angel, who was called Lucifer, with all of the ornaments of creation that he would give to every created thing, so that the whole rank [of angels] received its splendor from him, so, when he set himself against [God], he was made more horrifying than every horror, for the holy divinity in its zeal cast him out into the place that is without light.

8. But at the tip of the arc where the left wing curves back there is as it were a human face, which shines like the brilliance of the stars. This means that in the summit of conquering humiliation, when humans crush with humility the earthly circumstances that stand in their way—on the left, as it were—and turn themselves to the defense of their Creator, they shall come to possess their human countenance, for it is not according to herd animals but according to that which human nature teaches them that they begin to live in moral integrity.\(^{12}\) Thus, in their righteous works, too, they show that the good intention of their hearts shines like an outstanding splendor.

9. For when God said, “Let there be light!” (Gen. 1:3), a rational light arose—the angels, both those who remained with God in truth and those who fell into the outer darkness without any light, because they denied that the True Light (John 1:9), which existed in brilliance without beginning before the ages, was God, and because they wanted to be like him in a way that was not possible.\(^{13}\)

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\(^{11}\) Cf. LDO III.3.1.


\(^{13}\) “a rational light—the angels”: cf. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 11.9 (on Gen. 1:3); “the outer darkness”: cf. Matt. 25:30.
Then God caused another life, which he contained within a body, to arise, and this is humankind. To them he gave the place and the glory of the lost angel, so that they might in the praise of God complete that which he had refused to do. Moreover, in that human face is signified those people who, though given to the world in body, yet serve God continually in spirit and do not, on account of this body that remains in and of the world, forget the things which are of the spirit in the service of God. And these faces are turned towards the east, because both spiritual and secular people who desire to serve God and keep their souls in life, ought to convert themselves to the dawn of a holy way of life and blessedness.

10. Furthermore, from each shoulder of this image, a single wing stretches forth down to her knees, because in the strength of Divine Love the Son of God brought to himself the righteous and the sinners and lifted them both by the shoulders, because they had lived rightly, and by the knees, because he had recalled them from the way of injustice; and he made them consorts of the citizens of heaven. Likewise, a person lifts those things that they carry with both the knees and the shoulders. For in the knowledge of Love, humankind has been led in soul and body to the fullness of pure integrity, though they are very often moved away from an upright and steadfast posture. When the gifts of the Holy Spirit pour forth from above upon humankind in pure and holy abundance, they teach them many things about heavenly and spiritual matters. They also instruct humankind in a different way about earthly concerns for the necessary use of the body; nevertheless, humans understand in these matters that they are weak and infirm and mortal, although they are defended by these manifold gifts.

11. Because she is clothed with a tunic like the brilliance of the sun, this means that in Love, the Son of God put on a human body without any spot of sin, in the likeness of the sun’s beauty. For as the sun shines before the rest of creation at so great a height that no person can touch it, so also no human knowledge is able to grasp the humanity of the Son of God and how it came to be except by believing. And in her hands she holds a lamb, shining like the light of day, because in the works of the Son of God, Love offered the gentleness of true faith, shining above all things, when he chose from among the tax collectors and sinners his martyrs, confessors, and penitents, and when out of the wicked he made the righteous, as when he made Paul from Saul, so that they might fly upon the wings of the winds (Ps. 17:11[18:20]), that is, upon the heavenly harmony. Thus, Love completed her work deliberately, one small and distinct piece at a time, so that in it there would be no weakness but rather every fullness. Humans cannot do this, for when they have even the slightest potential of doing something, they can barely keep at it long enough to bring it to completion so that others can see it. A person should think upon these things within themself, for the little bird, when it first hatches from the egg and does not yet have feathers, does not hurry to fly; but after it has received its feathers, it flies to the place it sees as most fitting for itself.

12. Moreover, she is treading with her feet a monster, dreadful in appearance and venomous and black in color, and also a serpent. This means that true Love, through the footsteps of the Son of God, bruises discord’s injury, which is misshapen by its excessive vices and horrifying because of its many perversities, and poisonous in deception and black in perdition. Likewise, she bruises the ancient serpent as he lays traps for the faithful, for upon the Cross the Son of God brought him to nothing. The serpent has fixed his mouth upon the right ear of the monster and, wrapping the rest of its body around the monster’s head, stretches its tail along the monster’s left side all the way to its feet. For the devil, while pretending to act benignly, sows his deceit and discord, and lightly littering every type of vice here and there at their beginning, in their end he shows himself to possess the
perversity of discord’s worst fulfillment. For the serpent, who in his trickery is more cunning than other worms (Gen. 3:1), destroys in that cunning everything he can and turns it to himself in the worst possible way, which is signified by the various colors of his skin. Satan, too, acted this way, for when he recognized his own beauty, he wished that he could be like his Creator. This is also what he whispered to humankind through the head of the serpent, as it were, and he shall not stop doing so until the end of time, as signified by his tail.

13. And so Love is in the wheel of eternity outside of time, just as heat is in fire. For God foreknew in eternity all of his created beings, which he brought forth in the fullness of Love so that humans would lack no refreshment or service in them, for he joined them to humankind as flames are to fire. Moreover, God established the first angel with very many adornments, as was said above, but when the latter saw himself, he looked upon his Lord with hatred and wished himself to be lord. But God cast him down into the well of the abyss. Then that transgressor introduced his evil plan to humankind, and humankind consented to it.

14. For when God created humankind, he clothed them with heavenly clothing, so that they might shine in great radiance. But the devil, seeing the woman, recognized that she would be the mother of a great world, and with the same malice by which he fell from God, he undertook to overcome God by the latter’s own work—so he turned the work of God, which is humankind, into his own ally. Then the woman, sensing that in tasting of the fruit she had become something different, gave the fruit to her husband; and so both lost their heavenly clothing.

15. But when God then said, “Adam, where are you?” (Gen. 3:9), he signified by this that Adam should remember that God had made him in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26), and that God wished that he would return to him. When God sent Adam into exile, God’s own desire to serve compelled him to cover up Adam’s nudity, so that in place of the shining vesture, he received an animal skin, just as he exchanged paradise for exile. Indeed, God joined woman to man by the oath of fidelity, so that this fidelity between them might never be destroyed, but that they should come together as one in mind, just as God joined them together into one, body and soul. Therefore, whoever should destroy this fidelity and should thus remain impenitent and without correction, shall be cast into the land of Babylon, into the land of confusion and drought, which shall so remain without the beautiful viridity of the field, that is, of the blessing of God. And the vengeance of God shall fall upon him, even to the last line of descendants proceeding from his hot blood, because this sin has touched that man.

16. And as Adam is the father of the whole human race, so also through the Son of God, who was incarnate in virgin nature, has come forth a spiritual people, who shall ascend as God promised to Abraham through the angel, that his seed should be as the stars of heaven, as it is written: ‘‘Look up to heaven and number the stars, if you can.’ And he said to him: ‘So shall your seed be.’ Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15:5-6) The meaning of this should be understood thus: You, who worship and venerate God with a good will, look upon the secrets of God and examine the reward of their merits who shine before God day and night—if this is even possible for a human being, who is burdened by the weight of the body. For as long as humans taste of those things that are of the flesh, they will not be able to fully grasp those that are

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14 Cf. LDO III.5.
15 Here Hildegard censures the adulterer, whose “hot blood” withers the holy viridity of the sacrament of marriage.
of the spirit. And in true revelation it is said to that person who labors to worship God with the upright sighs of their heart: “In this way shall the seed of your heart be multiplied and enlightened, that what you have sown on good ground has been watered by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It shall rise up and shine many times over in blessed virtues before God Most High, just as the stars twinkle in the firmament.” Therefore, whoever should faithfully believe the divine promise and hold the lofty height of true faith in God, so that they despise all earthly things and reach out towards the heavenly, shall be accounted righteous among the children of God, for they have loved the truth and have had no guile in their hearts.

17. For God also recognized that Abraham’s spirit was without the serpent’s guile, for he did his works to the injury of none. Thus God chose from his stock that sleeping earth that had no knowledge at all of that by which the ancient serpent deceived the first woman. This earth was prefigured by the staff of Aaron (Num. 17:8) to be the Virgin Mary, who in her great humility was the enclosed bedchamber of the King. For when she received from the throne the message that the Highest King wished to live in her enclosure, she looked upon that earth from which she was created and replied that she was the handmaid of God (Luke 1:38). The woman who was first deceived did not do this, since she desired to have that which she ought not to have had. But the obedience of Abraham, in which God proved Abraham’s faith when he showed him the ram caught in the thorns (Gen. 22:13), prefigured the obedience of the Blessed Virgin, who, believing the word of God’s messenger, wished that it should be done unto her according to that messenger’s word (Luke 1:38). Thus, the Son of God, whom the ram hanging in the thorn-bushes had prefigured, put on flesh in her. Furthermore, when God said that the race of Abraham would be multiplied according to the stars of heaven, he foresaw that this race should be reckoned as the full number of the celestial court. And since Abraham trusted faithfully in God in all things, so he is called the father of those who shall be the heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And so every person who fears and loves God should lay open the devotion of their heart to these words and know that they have been offered for the saving of humans in body and soul, not indeed by a human being but by me, the one who am (Ex. 3:14).

17 This formulaic exhortation closes each of Part I’s four visions; the single vision of Part II has its own unique closing, while the five visions of Part III share a similar, though modified, exhortation to Part I. Hildegard employed similar exhortations at the close of each vision in Scivias and Liber Vite Meritorum, as well.