

The five chants Hildegard offers to the Holy Spirit are cast in three liturgical genres; two short psalm antiphons (#24, 25), one brief votive antiphon (#26), one 13-verse hymn (#27), all for Divine Office, and one sequence of five couplets (#28) for Mass. The Holy Spirit emerges variously as life giver, healer, divine love, as companion to the virtuous, fighter of temptation and sin, and as world soul inspiring peace, bringing together micro and macrocosm in one harmonious universe. All five chants are appropriate to the liturgy of Pentecost.

In these poetic meditations on the Holy Spirit, Hildegard evidently struggles with a notion almost too changing, fluent, and all-encompassing to comprehend and express in mere human language. The poetry of the hymn and the sequence in particular, is even more dense with enigmatic images than most of her other texts, and clearly she is vying for a sense of the inexpressible, ever vital presence of the spiritual force she envisions and in whose shadow she as a seer lived, a force that works transformation and change within a human soul that embarks on a relationship with it.

Musically, too, these pieces seem to be distinct in their ever-present but always changing web of similar melodic motifs. Such motifs are recognizable in their essential identities, but they never return as literal repeats. Instead, they transform themselves into other motifs, modulate their contours, and altogether saturate an eloquent melodic fabric, creating an effluence quite uniquely suited to carry Hildegard's rhapsodic poetry. Instead of approaching her melodic language as a formation of fixed little melodic bits put together like a patched quilt,¹ we might think of her melodies as a smooth, silky musical fabric that weaves together seamlessly and creatively in an ongoing process of change and inspiration.

From such a perspective it is perhaps no longer confounding to see Hildegard violate the traditional forms of hymn and sequence that have been so puzzling to some. Her hymns may not follow the customary strophic musical rendition, her sequences may not adhere to the precise pairing of versicles by way of matched syllable count, equal accent pattern, and melodic repeat, because this would fly in the face of the alacrity of her visions. Only as processes are these traditional and well-sanctioned liturgical forms capable of conveying her spirited revelations of the Divine. Instead of discarding the old genres altogether, Hildegard adapts them, bends their rules and in that way invigorates them with an artistic zeal, aspiring perhaps to a higher degree of intensity than do other chant repertoires. This aspiration toward a heightened tone may pardon her incessant use of the vocative which occurs eight times in *O ignis Spiritus paracliti* alone, and justify the countless action words and participles in *Spiritus sanctus vivificans*-- whose redundancy appears linguistically clumsy.² Viewed as process, a new perspective emerges on both the melodic flexibility and the seemingly free large-scale formal designs of Hildegard's chants.

Although resisting an exact matching of music in the versicle pairs as prescribed by tradition, the sequence *O ignis Spiritus paracliti* (#28) clearly adheres to the tradition of the liturgical genre, relying on broad parallelisms which are treated flexibly in response to the non-parallel text structure. Three of its five verses are closely paired (1a and 1b, 3a and 3b, 4a and 4b). All that differs here are some internal phrase articulations and the choice of single or compound neumes in the visual presentation of the chant. Both differences are occasioned by the text. Yet, interesting expansions and contractions of musical parallels occur in 2a and 2b. Even more extensive changes mark the close of the sequence (5a and 5b), imparting a marked sense of dissimilar melodic pacing. Thus, Tu etiam semper educis (5a) uses 20 notes in its move from final through octave to fifth, while the structurally analogous Unde laus tibi sit (5a) accomplishes the same move in only 11 notes. This is an obvious contraction, a clearly faster pacing, warranted only to a small degree by a textual shortening (nine syllables in 5a against seven in 5b). Conversely, the following doctos, per inspirationem (5a) takes up 16 notes, while qui es sonus laudis et gaudium vite has 26. Again, this melodic expansion surely surpasses the minute increase in syllable count from ten (5a) to eleven (5b). Similarly, the remaining sapientie letificatos (5a) with 16 notes returns, significantly expanded to 28 notes in spes et honor fortissimus, dans premia lucis (5b). Such melodic flexibility, especially when occurring in the context of the traditionally strict sequence form, suggests the event character of Hildegard's musical processes.

An analysis of the short psalm antiphon *Karitas habundat* (#25) compels a further appreciation of musical process, as it manifests itself in a through-composed genre. Here, a perspective of the whole, progressing from text including its various levels of syllable, word, and phrase, through musical motive, individual melodic line, and on to the entire piece, best reveals artfully crafted processes.

In this beautiful poem, Hildegard personifies the Holy Spirit as *Karitas*, a female figure that arises in many of her visions. She commands an importance in Hildegard's sacred environment analogous to the prominence of Lady Love in secular poetry of the twelfth century. *Karitas* permeates the universe with her encompassing charity, and offers the kiss of peace to its Creator. Again, one senses the author's struggle in conveying an omnipresent, dynamic, "fiery force"-elsewhere described as "shining in the waters, burning in the sun, the moon, and the stars"-- within the compressed form of a brief poem.³ Perhaps in answer to this omnipresence, *Karitas habundat* is marked by a striking density of assonances. In five of its six lines, the vowels "i" and "a" (*in, omnia, imis excellentissima, sidera, amantissima, omnia, pacis*) define poetic cadences in the manner of an *homoiooteleuton* in rhetoric. The text seems to gather its internal rhythm through these recurrences of the same vowel sounds.

Musically, there are six very similar cadential moves on these words, each leading invariably back to the final (D), an unusual choice for a short piece such as this. These motifs are not only congruent with the recurring vowels in the text, but they drench the short setting with musical assonances and thereby translate the rhetorical device into the musical domain. The result is an odd redundancy which, taken by itself, might not be very engaging to the listener. Yet, as part of the musical process it becomes a poignant statement designed to draw the listener deep into the piece and elicit an intense contemplation upon the central image, Divine Love. For it appears that the "i" and "a" sounds are inspired by the phonetic properties of the word *Karitas* itself.

That this antiphon can be heard as a meditation upon the all-abounding spirit of *Karitas* is suggested by a further congruence of text and music which centers on the opening melodic gesture. The piece begins, as do so many of Hildegard's D-mode chants, with the rising leap D-a, but then ascends immediately to c, before settling on the fifth a as intermediate tonal goal. This fast pacing, which swiftly traverses a tone space of a seventh, is unusual. It is recalled twice more near the end, first on *quia summo*, and again on *de[-dit]*. This last recurrence fulfills the apotheosis of the opening as the gesture here pushes open the proper octave space (D-d) rather than stopping short just below at the disquieting seventh. The double allusion ("quia" and "dedit") back to the opening "Karitas" induces a keen proximity of these last phrases to the subject of the piece, effecting a cyclical musical process (especially given that the antiphon returns after each psalm verse in a liturgical performance) that inspires a mode of deep pondering in the listener. Moreover, the melodic associations not only mirror the grammatical structure of the text, they also come just at the point where the poem departs from the other formal idea that centered it on *Karitas*, the invariable *homoiooteleuton*. Thus, the melodic reference to the *incipit* at the end refocuses attention on the principal image, Divine Love. And perhaps surprisingly, *Karitas habundat* achieves its exceptional congruence between text and music on various levels of form without reliance on any direct depiction of affect through word painting. This supports John Stevens' observation that in medieval music "words need not be set to music that will express their meaning or emotional quality; rather they both are set to a third thing, a formal idea." For him, as maybe for Hildegard, the congruence of formal ideas "expresses the harmony of the cosmos."⁴

The other chants to the Holy Spirit in this volume, too, furnish plenty of evidence that their ever-changing melodic dispositions of musical motifs are more than simple variations or fanciful adornments of some fixed melodic piece of a patchwork quilt. They suggest an attempt on part of the composer to create fluid, pliable processes in sound, both in words and in music, apt at carrying forth her ardently stirring visions of the Holy Spirit.

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1. Ludwig Bronarski, *Die Lieder der- hl. Hildegard Ein Beitrag zur-Geschichte der geistlichen Musik des Mittelalters* (Leipzig, 1922). Until recently, his approach set the tone for all subsequent discussions of Hildegard's music.

2. Barbara Newman, *Symphonia* 279-80.

3. *ibid.*, 279.

4. John Stevens, *Words and Music*- 382.