Hildegard of Bingen, Nicole Oresme, and Conjugal Ethics

Renée Mirkes OSF

Some persons are, by their nature, trailblazers, innovators, avant-gardists—just generally ahead of their times. In many ways, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), the subject of this investigation, is representative of such a personality. Embodying enough of the intellectual eclecticism and enthusiasm for the arts and sciences characteristic of the historical period after hers, some twentieth century critics dub this talented polymath a Renaissance woman.[1]

A list of Hildegard's salient accomplishments and personal charisms confirms that appellation at a glance. Hildegard of Bingen, a German Benedictine aristocrat, was a mystic, a visionary, and a prolific writer.[2] Her oeuvre deals with subject matter as diverse as natural science, medicine, theology, biblical exegesis, dramatic poetry, music, hagiography, and linguistics. She was elected Abbess of a community of Benedictine nuns who were attached to the Abbey of Disibodenberg[3] and subsequently founded two other Benedictine houses. Guided by her ecclesiastically sanctioned gift of prophecy,[4] she launched into a missionary style of preaching and teaching aimed at the spiritual and moral reform of the clergy and laity throughout the kingdom of Germany. Undaunted by her lack of formal, classical education or by whatever misogynist tradition prevailed in secular or ecclesiastical circles, she managed to maintain a lively correspondence with kings, queens, emperors, saints, popes, and fellow religious.[5] She wrote a polemical tract against the Cathars, fought lay investiture, and was a consultant exorcist. Such a bio hardly fits the norm of an enclosed medieval Benedictine nun, nor, for that matter, the features of the more progressive lifestyle permitted to the noble or middle class medieval laywoman.

In this paper, I would like to suggest that yet another original contribution, a theological one, should be added to her list of independent and creative accomplishments. I believe Hildegard of Bingen anticipates, by almost 200 years, the theologians who have

typically been credited with advancing a 'new' or 'modern' development in the Catholic theological tradition on marriage, namely, that a couple may licitly engage in intercourse not only to procreate but also to express and deepen their love.[6]

Although Hildegard did not write a separate tract on marriage with a corresponding systematic treatment, she does discuss the subject numerous times throughout her major works.[7] In their totality, Hildegard's remarks supply the foundational outline for the so-called modern development in conjugal ethics.

A bit of background will help to explain how I came to formulate this thesis. In his book *Contraception*, John Noonan, Jr suggests that Martin le Maistre, writing in the late 15th century, was the first to present a theology or ethics of marriage that included the motives of love and sexual fulfilment as licit reasons for engaging in intercourse. That assertion was, in my opinion, successfully refuted by Fabian Parmisano, O.P., who argues that Nicole Oresme (ca. 1323–1382), writing a century before Martin le Maistre, is deserving of that delineation.[8] Using Parmisano's conclusion as the standard, I would like to prove how Hildegard of Bingen's 12th century reflections on marriage anticipate those of Oresme and, therefore, laid the theological groundwork upon which later theologians could build.[9]

In arguing this thesis, I will concentrate on two principal theological strains that were instrumental in shaping a development in marital theology that approved love and sexual fulfilment as licit motives for marital intercourse. The first, popularized by Oresme's vernacular writings, is the theology of the *sacramentum*: the insight that the essence of marriage is the bond between the husband and the wife. The second, discussed by Thomas Aquinas, is the motive for and place of pleasure within the conjugal act. Because this last issue is at least alluded to by Oresme and developed even more by Hildegard, the Thomistic discussion will not be taken up in this paper. We will, then, look at an overview of Oresme's treatment of marital theology, summarize his major emphases, and then compare Hildegard's contribution with his.

Oresme on the *Sacramentum*:

In the third chapter of Book One as well as in the Second Book of his translation of Aristotle's *pseudo-Economics* (1374),[10] Oresme's accompanying commentary to the text deals with marriage, particularly the relation between husband and wife. His comments lead the reader to one overarching conclusion: the bond (*sacramentum*) between the husband and the wife is a bond of love. Implied in this work (French title: *Yconomique*), by the very fact that the relationship between the

husband and wife is the predominant consideration in the sections on marriage, is the point made above, namely, that the new theological insight of his age on marriage was, first, the understanding of the *sacramentum* as the essence of marriage and, second, the liceity of engaging in marital intercourse for the sake of deepening that bond of love. In the *Yconomique* much that Oresme says that points to this conclusion is based on his explication of Aristotle's six properties of the spousal relationship: "(1) natural, (2) rational, (3) amiable, (4) profitable, (5) divine and (6) in keeping with social conventions."[11] In order to see the composite picture of the *sacramentum* that begins to emerge after a consideration of all six characteristics, we will need to consider each point in turn.

First, the bond between husband and wife is natural. Oresme scripturally confirms Aristotle's assertion about the naturalness of the bond by citing Gen. 1:28: Grow and multiply. The begetting of children is natural, and, since children demand a living together, cohabitation in marriage is also natural. While marriage is a law of nature, it is not something that persons are forced to do. A man and a woman entering into a marital union must, of course, do so by choice rather than by some compulsion of nature.

Second, the bond is supra-natural, because sexual activity within marriage is engaged in, not out of instinctual drives as with the animals, but out of deliberate choice. Living together is, on the human level, both natural and rational. At this point Oresme introduces the notion of the love between spouses which sets human copulation apart from that of the animals. Such a love, guided by reason, that exists in two young people before they are married, and hopefully perdures after they are married, is that of a man and a woman who "love each other by special choice from a feeling of joy in their hearts."[12]

Third, Oresme explains that the bond between spouses is amiable, it is based on friendship. Perhaps here as clearly as anywhere, Oresme puts his finger on the essential character of the *sacramentum*. Citing multiple Scriptural texts that highlight the unsurpassable love that exists between married persons, Oresme states:

> This is also clear from the fact that nature granted carnal pleasures to the animals only for the purpose of reproduction; but it accorded the human species this pleasure not only for reproduction of its kind but also to enhance and maintain friendship between man and woman.[13]

Expounding on the character of married friendship, Oresme states that it "comprises at once the good of usefulness, the good of pleasure,

and the good of virtue and double enjoyment— that is, both the carnal and the virtuous or the sensual and the intellectual pleasures.'"[14]

Fourth, the *sacramentum* of marriage is profitable. In agreement with Aristotle, Oresme notes that the profit of marriage is a mutual one: parents help their children by sustenance and education until they grow up, and children care for their parents in their old age. Mutual assistance is also exchanged between the husband and wife. They share the work of nurturing and educating their children as well as sharing the work and tasks involved in maintaining and running a home.

Fifth, the bond between husband and wife is divine. Oresme notes that Aristotle's insight into marriage as a "divine partnership" is correct; God has preordained that a man and a woman live together. Scripture, then, defines marriage as a sacramental union that is indissoluble.[15]

Sixth, the marriage bond is in keeping with social conventions. The strengths of the man complement the weaknesses of the woman, and vice versa. In the case of the strengths of both partners, such diversity of virtues works together for the perfection of the marital union, making the marriage pleasant, profitable, and harmonious. Social mores dictate that the husband should tend to more physical, outdoor work, the woman to less arduous, indoor work. In whatever ways the two help each other as lord and lady of the house, the wife is the best friend and companion a husband could have.[16]

The final remarks of Oresme on marriage are found in Book II of *Yconomique*. They express some of the same strains of thought found in his explication of the characteristics of the marriage bond and are taken up with the practical rules that ought to regulate a man's relationship to his wife. Oresme stresses the respect that should typify a man's attitudes and deeds toward his wife. The wife is a companion, a partner, an equal to her husband. The stress on mutual respect is not, however, to deny that Aristotle and Oresme both agree that there must be a clearcut hierarchical structure within the marriage. The wife is subordinate to and depends on her husband and is expected to receive the husband's permission for certain things and eschew other sorts of activities completely. However, the fact of female subordination does not imply that a woman has less dignity than a man. There is the wife's sphere of activity and there is the husband's sphere; Oresme (or Aristotle) never implies that one is of more dignity than the other. The equal-but-different view of the spouses is subsumed under the umbrella of unity of friendship. Even the wife's likes and dislikes "should correspond to and harmonize with those of her husband,...."[17]

In sexual relations with his wife, the husband is expected to be sensitive, self-restraining, and refined. Fidelity, husband to wife and

wife to husband, is the greatest strengthener of the bond of friendship or love that is of the essence of marriage. "For she (wife) has been brought at great price, that is, as his life's companion...."[18] Virtuous action on the part of both partners, including fidelity, promotes harmony and true friendship and enables them to rule their home "with a common will and purpose." What is more, when a husband and wife live virtuous lives, the good that results redounds to the entire family. And when the children come to assess this benefit, Oresme advises them to "attribute (it) to their parents' virtue and the husband to the wife and the wife to the husband."[19]

Hildegard on the *Sacramentum*:

The essential points of Oresme's thought on the nature of the *sacramentum* and how it defines marriage as well as the acceptability of the procreative and the unitive ends of marital union can be summed up in five statements. Germane to our discussion is the fact that Hildegard, two centuries before Oresme, developed these same insights in her writings. We will, therefore, turn to her *opera* next.[20] As we explore her position, we should keep in mind the thesis of the paper, that is, that Hildegard, in her writings, anticipates the insights of Oresme, et al., and lays a foundation for what is recognized as a genuine development in conjugal ethics. (Cf. p. 3)[21]

1) The essence of marriage is the *sacramentum* (bond); *proles* (procreation) and *fides* (fidelity) are what is intended by marriage.

As if to emphasize that the good of *proles* could not be had apart from the love that brings the couple together in the first place, Hildegard insists on the presence of the two elements of marriage in conjugal sex.

> And God made a form for man's pleasure, and thus woman is the delight (love) of the man. And as soon as woman was formed, God gave that power of creation to man, so that with his love, who is woman, he might conceive sons.[22]

In a theory uniquely her own, Hildegard also illustrates the importance of procreation in the context of love in determining the sex and disposition of the child to be conceived.

> When, however, the man approaches the woman, discharging powerful semen, and he has a right love toward the woman, and she approaches the man with a true love, then, in that same hour, a male child is conceived. Nor is it possible to be otherwise, because Adam was formed of clay which is a stronger material than flesh. And this male child will be prudent and virtuous ....[23]

Although this passage does cast a mechanistic or physiological deterministic hue on human sexuality and human conception, Hildegard illustrates that love within the marital act and within marriage is primary in the context of conception of children.[24] By the very fact that a sexual act devoid of "cherishing love on either side" produces a child with some character defect indicates that Hildegard, although not scientifically accurate according to 20th century standards, was very theologically astute in stressing the necessity for the mutual expression of love within the marital union.

The bond of love that unites the spouses actually facilitates the mingling of blood and perspiration that, by virtue of Hildegard's biological data, is the means of conception. Again we have an example of the relationship between the *sacramentum* and *proles*.

> But because man and woman thus become and truly are one flesh (this fact was hidden in the side of the man, when the woman, taken from the man's side, became his flesh), and so the man and woman thus mingle as one so much the more easily for conception in the blood and perspiration. But God is the power which leads forth a child from its mother's womb, and thus it makes man and woman one flesh.[25]

2) The *sacramentum*, whose essence is love, has been willed by God and is, by its nature, irrevocable.

This theme evident in Oresme's writings is one to which Hildegard returns again and again. In the union of love between the husband and wife, they become one, just as the two elements of the human person, body and soul, form a single entity, a human being.

> For God joined woman to man with an oath of fidelity, in such a way that this trust may never be destroyed in themselves, but that they may agree as one, just as body and soul agree, which God has joined as one.[26]

Such a love, forming the strong warp and woof of the fabric of marital fidelity, is unbreakable, irrevocable. No sooner could one separate the body from the soul, than should a woman be separated from a man to whom she has been joined in marriage. Not only does Hildegard use the analogy of the union of the body and soul to explain the meaning of the *sacramentum*, but she appeals to the fidelity of Adam to Eve after the fall as a cogent example of the irrevocability of the marriage bond.

> And so there ought to be perfect love between these two in the same manner as in those ancestors. For Adam was able to blame his wife because she brought death to him by her advice, but, despite that, he did not dismiss her as long as he lived in this world, for he realized that she was given to him by divine power. Hence, because of perfect love, let a man not abandon his wife except for the reasonable motive which the true Church puts before him.[27]

Even the manner in which Genesis portrays the creation of woman—from the man—constitutes a bond between them, an indissoluble union of betrothal, a prolepsis of their marriage bond. Hildegard eloquently celebrates this natural betrothal as part of the divine plan for marriage in the following:

> But since the first woman was formed from man, this is a union of betrothal of woman to man. This union is not meaningless, nor is it to be carried out oblivious of God, for he who brought woman from man established that union well and nobly, clearly forming flesh from flesh. Wherefore, just as Adam and Eve have existed as one flesh, so now man and woman are brought together as one flesh in the unity of love for the increase of the human race.[28]

3) The *sacramentum*, the love bond, is best characterized as friendship—a mutual relationship that acknowledges the other as a companion, a helpmate, a complement.

Briefly but succinctly Hildegard sums up the reality of complementarity within marriage by saying: "Woman is enveloped by man and man by woman".[29] The man and the woman cannot even be properly named apart from an understanding of the marital unity that exists between them:

> And so man and woman have been given to one another, as work is done through the other, for man without woman would not be called man, nor would woman without man be named woman. For woman is the work of man, and man is a vision of comfort to a woman, and neither of them is able to be without the other.[30]

Perhaps at no other point does Hildegard so clearly anticipate Oresme than in describing the essence of the *sacramentum* in terms of a loving friendship, a relationship based on a coming together of the complementary halves of humanity. In her *Liber divinorum operum*, using the union of Christ's two natures in one person as an example, she compares the woman to Christ's humanity and the man to Christ's divinity. Thus the woman was not a contrasting image to the man (i.e., man as symbol of power, discipline and reason and woman as symbol of

weakness, mercy, and unreason) but rather a complementary one. Each of the sexes is a half of the whole and the fullness of their humanness is only comprehended in their union.

For Hildegard, the act of sexual union between husband and wife is a paradigm of the complementarity between the sexes. Marital intercourse is "the work" in which the spouses "labour as one in the same way that air and wind reciprocally enfold each other."[31]

> So it follows when a man's seed falls into its place, then the woman's blood receives it with an inclination of love and draws it within herself, just as a breathing hole lifts up something into itself. And as the woman's blood is mingled with the man's seed and the blood, then it grows and is increased. And so it is woman taken from man becomes one flesh with man. But the flesh of man grows warm within and without from the heat and perspiration of the woman, and thus from the froth and sweat of this same woman he draws energy within him. For, from the very strong power of the man's will, his liquified blood flows in different directions, and as it is circulated and being displaced, it takes something from the foam and sweat of the woman into him, and thus his flesh is mingled with the woman's in such a way that with her and from her one flesh arises, and since man and woman are thus one flesh, the woman readily conceives offspring from the same man, yet only insofar as she is fruitful with offspring.[32]

As some of the previously quoted excerpts illustrate, rather than presenting women as inferior to men, Hildegard tried to show that they were equal but biologically (and psychologically) different. The weaker, more fragile physiology of the female is contrasted with the stronger, sturdier physique of the male. Although this difference generally forced women to be almost totally dependent on man, occasionally feminine physiological traits would put her in a superior position or at least in a position where she would save the man from himself, so to speak (e.g., in sexual intercourse, the woman's passions are less ardent and, therefore, act as a mitigating force to temper the more inflamed passions of the man). In all of this, one does not get the sense that the fragility of the woman is less worthy than the sturdiness of the man. Quite to the contrary. It was by God's design that strength and weakness, hardness and softness—even the proportionately-sized appendages of the couple—would work together for the benefit of those united in the bond of marriage.

> God created man, making the male of greater strength, of course, and the female indeed of gentler courage, and arranging in correct

> measure the length and width in all the members of that man, just as he also placed in upright posture the height, weight, and width of the rest of the creature, lest one of them should pass over another in a disagreeable manner.[33]

This mutual dependency between husband and wife is a theme that sounds throughout Hildegard's writings. It is not like she debunks the idea that women are subject to men; but she does extend the idea by insisting that the man is also dependent on the woman.[34] She even misquotes Paul for her purposes. In 1 Cor 11:9 he states that "nor was man created for woman, but woman for man." Hildegard insists: "Woman was created for the sake of man, and man was made for woman"[35] and she "performs all her work inseparably with that very person (the husband)...from whom she cannot be separated."[36]

4) The unitive love of the spouses, when expressed and deepened in an act of sexual intercourse guided by reason, can be a source of sensual and intellectual pleasure.

Hildegard discusses sexual desire and sexual pleasure in one of her medical works, *Causae et Curae*. In its second section she explains her humoral theory and how humoral composition has a part to play in the degree of sexual desire experienced by the man or the woman.[37] Since this particular work of Hildegard has no theological purpose but is an exposition of her theories on the cosmos, it is devoid of moral evaluation. Still, her frank manner of describing sexual pleasure within the act of intercourse would, it seems to me, imply that, all things being equal, she believed that the experience of pleasure within marital love-making is a natural phenomenon and a morally acceptable one.

> When a woman is making love with a man, a sense of heat in her brain, which brings with it sensual delight, communicates the taste of the delight during the act and summons forth the emission of the man's seed. And when the seed has fallen into its place, that vehement heat descending from her brain draws the seed to itself and holds it, and soon the woman's sexual organs contract, and all the parts that are ready to open up during the time of menstruation now close, in the same way as a strong man can hold something enclosed in his fist.[38]

Hildegard credits the woman, whose passion is less intense and more easily cooled, for moderating the expression of pleasure within sex.

> But the love of man directed to the love of his woman in the heat of passion is like the fire of burning mountains, which might be able to be extinguished with difficulty, but the love of a woman directed to the love of her husband can be compared to the fire of wood, which is easily put out, as a gentle warmth coming forth from the sun, which produces fruits, is compared to the most consuming fire of wood, since she herself joyfully brings forth fruits in offspring.[39]

5) The union of marriage that has love as its core is mutually perfecting for the husband and wife, and, in turn, perfects the marriage as a whole.

In her discussion of Gen.1:27 Hildegard dwells on the partnership of Adam and Eve. In a phrase that defies translation, she describes Adam's helper as *speculativa forma mulieris*. This might be translated quite literally as the contemplative form of woman or the reflective form of woman, but, taking more poetic license, the passage could be rendered "the mirror image of woman." That Hildegard might see the woman this way makes a great deal of sense in the context of her own visions which were experienced in the form of a light that was like a mirror. When Adam looks at the mirror, Eve, he sees his own glory in her. At the same time, catching the reflection of Adam, Eve contains his glory within her.

> But man lacked a helper who was like him. Thus God gave him a helper, woman, who was his mirror image. In this woman the whole of humanity lay hidden which was produced in the power of God's strength just as the first man was produced in the power of his strength.[40]

This mutual reflection between Adam and Eve and, by implication, between all husbands and wives, enables each of them "to grow in wisdom," each turning away from self and turning toward the other in love:

> For when Adam looked upon Eve, his whole being was filled with wisdom, because he contemplated the mother through whom he was pledged to beget sons. And when Eve looked upon Adam she thus regarded him as if she saw the heavens, and as the soul which longs for heavenly things stretches upward, so her hope is directed to her spouse.[41]

Conclusion:

Having completed our examination of Hildegard's discussion of marriage, especially in light of Oresme's contribution on the subject, I have a confession to make. I would like to revise the tone of my original

thesis. After spending a great deal of time with primary texts, I think I have convinced myself of something I hesitated to assert at the outset. Originally, I had wanted to prove that the distinction of introducing the new development in marital ethics was not to be awarded to Martin le Maistre, or to Nicole Oresme, but to Hildegard of Bingen. But as you can see from the thesis in the introduction, I hedged a bit by taking the more modest stance of saying that she only laid the theological foundation for the theologians of the 13th and 14th centuries.

I decided on this approach for two reasons. First, I felt that Hildegard lacked an indepth treatment of the subject under one cover. However, after working with her primary texts and the *Yconomique* of Oresme, I could see that Hildegard had written almost as much on marriage, in volume and in depth, as Oresme, albeit sprinkled throughout her writings. Second, I was reticent because I was (and still am not) entirely sure whether there might be one or the other theologian, a contemporary or near contemporary of Hildegard's, who may have written more extensively than she, at an earlier date than she, and in the same vein as she. My suspicion, however, is that no one beat Hildegard to the draw, so to speak, and, therefore, I feel justified to revert to my initial, more adventurous thesis. Hildegard of Bingen is the first theologian who introduced the new or modern development in conjugal ethics, namely, that the expression of love and sexual fulfilment are legitimate motives for engaging in marital intercourse. Kudos to Hildegard of Bingen, a woman ahead of her times.

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1 Joseph McLellam describes Hildegard as "a Renaissance woman several centuries before the Renaissance." (*Washington Post*, March 30, 1986, p. H4 quoted in *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works*, ed. Matthew Fox, Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1987, p. ix.)

2 Hildegard's major works are *Scivias* (Know the Way) (1146–1151), *Liber vitae meritorum* (Book of Life's Merits) (1158–1163), and *Liber divinorum operum* (Book of the Divine Works) (1163–1173). They are sometimes thought of as a trilogy because they are similar in their theological content, i.e., Christian doctrine and ethics combined with a cosmology that taught how persons should best live their lives in order to reach the heavenly city, and in their visionary form, i.e., their content was delivered by the voice from heaven which is part of the vision Hildegard received.

3 Susan Mosher Stuard remarks that the Medieval church's opinion about women is a dual one: A more positive inclusive one corresponding to the period before the Gregorian Reform where double monasteries were allowed and the period after in which they were banned, a move that "quite effectively walled women's houses off from the institutional hierarchy of the church." *Women in Medieval Society*, U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1976, p. 8.

4 The abbot of Disibodenberg took the first chapter of Hildegard's first work, *Scivias*, to the archbishop of Mainz, and in 1147 parts of the book were submitted to Pope Eugenius III and St. Bernard of Clairvaux who were together at the Council of Trier. In 1148 Eugenius wrote to Hildegard: "We look on you with admiration, my daughter... for the new miracles that God shows in our time, filling you with his spirit that you might see, understand, and make known many mysteries. Reliable persons who have seen and heard you confirm these things for us. ... Preserve and guard this grace that is in you." PL 197:145AB

5 Caroline Walker Bynum has this to say about religious women and their place in Church leadership: "..., religious women paid surprisingly little attention to their supposed incapacity. Although told by the theological tradition that, *qua* women, they were not created in God's image, women writers ignored the warning. Creation in the image of God and return to his likeness were reiterated and significant themes in their spirituality." Speaking of Hildegard, she says: "The first great woman theologian, Hildegard of Bingen, both used and argued against the idea that woman is to man as flesh is to spirit; she supported the denial of ordination to women, arguing that women's role as bride of Christ (i.e., mystic) was complementary to the priesthood." '"...And Woman His Humanity": Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages' in *Gender and Religion: on the Complexity of Symbols* ed. by C. Walker Bynum, S. Harrell, P. Richman, Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, p. 260, p. 261, respectively. Cf. "Woman" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, pp. 994–5 for a view on the lived reality of women's place in social economics during the Middle Ages. Cf. Eileen Power's refreshing discussion of a medieval women's involvement in the workplace in chapter three of her *Medieval Women*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 3–75.

6 To speak of a modern development in conjugal ethics is, of course, to set it apart

from the prevalent marital theology before it. The latter was, in greater part, the theology of marriage set down by Augustine which Noonan describes as "seriously impaired" because Augustine taught that the only worthy motive for marital intercourse was procreation. (*Contraception*, (enlarged edition) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 304). A balanced presentation of Augustinian marital theology appears in *Catholic Sexual Ethics* (Lawler, Boyle and May, Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1986, pp. 36–41): "Augustine's analysis of the goods of marriage has provided the church with a powerful analytical device for understanding both the human significance and the salvific importance of marriage and human sexuality. Later theologians and the magisterium even till the present time make use of a framework whose full implications Augustine did not grasp. Augustine's study of sexual morality, therefore, even though it has limitations, is an important step in the development of the Church's understanding of sexual morality" (p. 41).

7 The story of Genesis was for Hildegard, as well as for many medieval Christians, the source of meditation on marriage and woman. Marriage is discussed in her first books and still occupied her interest in her last major work *The Book of Divine Works*.

8 Fabian Parmisano, O.P., "Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages—I and II" *New Blackfriars*, (1969), 599–608, 649–660.

9 In this paper, I eschew the question of whether Hildegard's views on marriage are largely those of the theological establishment of her time. Generally speaking, although she does not deviate from common or orthodox teaching of the church, I believe that, in the tension of maintaining fidelity to tradition, she produces creative improvisations on commonly held strains of 12th century marital theology. While her views on marriage were not necessarily new their significance comes from the emphasis she places on specific ideas. Her frequent references to the complementarity of the sexes is a good example. She accepts the wife's submission to her husband while at the same time emphasizing the interdependence of husband and wife. Hildegard does, however, depart from some of the more negative notions held by a contemporary of hers, Hugh of St. Victor. In Book II, chapter II, par. 2 of *Concerning the Sacraments of the Christian Religion*, according to Georges Duby, Hugh "speaks of marriage as a medicine that is the clergy's duty to administer to the laity. So marriage does possess "virtue," or saving grace, as long as it is dissociated from sex." *The Knight the Lady and the Priest*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, p. 181.

10 In the *Yconomique* Oresme not only translates the Aristotelian text (which was originally written in Greek and subsequently translated into Latin) into the French vernacular, but also writes a running commentary (gloss) on the text. The latter becomes a popularized version, readable by lay people, of marital theology written in Latin by the academic theologians of the time. The gloss makes up two-thirds of the French text. Oresme was commissioned to translate and comment on the four treatises of Aristotle (the third of which is the *Livre de Yconomique*, comprising two books) by Charles V who wanted to make these writings available in the French vernacular. The first book of *Yconomique* deals with the economy of a household and divisions of the household and the second book discusses the relationship between husband and wife.

11 *Le livre de Yconomique d'Aristote*, critical edition of French text with English translation and introduction by Albert Douglas Menut, in Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, vol. 47, part 5 (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 811.

12 *Ibid*, p. 812.

13 *Ibid*, p. 813.

14 *Ibid.*
15 *Ibid.*, p. 814.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 815.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 845.
18 *Ibid.*, p. 830.
19 *bid.*, p. 845.
20 An important point to remember is that Hildegard (like Oresme) does not specifically indicate that she is talking about the *sacramentum.* But, in her meditations on the love between the husband and wife, their complementarity, and the indissoluble bond of love that unites them, that is the issue she is developing.
21 I take credit for all errors and clumsiness in the translation of the passages that follow except as indicated in endnt. 38.
22 Et deus fecit formam ad dilectionem viri, et sic femina dilectio viri est. Et mox cum femina formata est, virtutem illam creationis deus viro dedit, ut dilectione sua quae femina est, filios procrearet. *Causa et Curae*, ed. Paul Kaiser, Leipzig: Teubner, 1903, p. 136:17–21.
23 Nunc autem cum vir in effusione fortis seminis sui et in recto amore caritatis, quam ad mulierem habet, ad ipsam accedit muliere quoque rectum amorem ad virum tunc in eadem hora habente masculum concipitur, quia sic a deo ordinatum est. Nec aliter fieri potest, quin masculus concipiatur, quoniam et Adam formatus est de limo, qui fortior materia est quam caro. Et hic masculus prudens et virtuosus erit,....*Ibid.*, p. 35:17–24.
24 Generally speaking, Hildegard's moral evaluations of sexual expression within marriage are ambivalent. Sometimes she speaks glowingly of sexuality, its naturalness, its goodness, but, at other times, she speaks of the exercise of sexuality as hopelessly steeped in vice. She also accepts the medieval notion that a woman was the cause of the fall. Some of her positive descriptions of the relationship between husband and wife refer to Adam and Eve before the Fall, her more negative comments describe the relationship after the fall. In *Scivias*, vision 2, ch. 13, the heavenly voice proclaims: "For since the fall of Adam I have not found in human seed the righteousness which ought to be in it, since the Devil stole it away in the taste of the apple." Be that as it may, I think that Hildegard's purpose in describing the ideal with such poetic force is because she believed that the ideal was realizable. The prelapsarian Adam and Eve are, by Hildegard's intent, meant to be seen as models for husbands and wives who must struggle to become who they are by right of their marriage vows, that is, two in one flesh.
25 Quod autem vir et mulier una caro sic fiunt et sunt, hoc in latere viri latitabat, ubi mulier de latere viri sumpta caro eius facta est, ac ideo vir et mulier tanto facilius ad conceptionem in sanguine et sudore suo sic in unum confluunt. Sed vis aeternitas, quae infantem de ventre matris suae educit, virum et feminam sic unam carnem facit. *Causae et Curae*, p. 68:8–14.
26 Deus etenim mulierem viro cum juramento fidei adjunxit, ita ut fides haec in ipsis nunquam destruatur, sed ut in unum consentiant, sicut corpus et anima, quae Deus in unum conjunxit. *Book of Divine Works*, 1,14 PL 1 97:749D
27 Et ideo perfecta charitas in his duobus esse debet quemadmodum et in illis prioribus. Adam enim uxorem suam culpare posset, quod ei consilio suo mortem intulit, sed tamen eam non dimisit quamdiu in hoc saeculo vixit, quoniam illam sibi per divinam potentiam datam esse cognovit. Unde propter perfectam charitatem non relinquat homo uxorem suam nisi propter rationabilem causam illam, quam sibi fidelis ecclesia proponit. *Scivias*, 1,2 PL 197:392C
28 Quod autem prima mulier de viro formata est, hoc est conjunctio desponsationis mulieris ad virum....Conjunctio ista non est vane neque in oblivione Dei exercenda, quia qui mulierem de viro tulit, conjunctionem istam bene et honeste instituit,

videlicet carnem de carne formans. Quapropter ut Adam et Eva caro una exstiterunt, sic et nunc vir et mulier caro una in conjunctione charitatis ad multiplicandum genus humanum efficiuntur. *Ibid.*, 1,2 PL 197:392C

29 *Causae et Curae*, p. 136.

30 Vir itaque et femina sic ad invicem admisti sunt, ut opus alterum per alterum est, quia vir sine femina vir non vocaretur, nec femina sine viro femina non nominaretur. Femina enim opus viri est, et vir aspectus consolationis feminae est, et neuter eorum absque altero esse posset. *The Book of Divine Works*, 4,100 PL 197:885C

31 . . . quia in uno opere, unum operantur, quemadmodum aer et ventus opera sua invicem complicant. *Scivias* 1,2 PL 197:393B.

32 Unde cum semen viri in locum suum cadit, tunc sanguis mulieris cum voluntate amoris illud suscipit et in se introrsum trahit, sicut spirumen in se aliquid tollit. Et sic sanguis mulieris cum semine viri miscetur, et unus sanguis fit, ita quod etiam caro eiusdem mulieris de hoc permixto sanguine fovetur, crescit et augmentatur. Ac ideo sic est mulier una caro cum viro de viro. Sed caro viri de calore et de sudore mulieris interius et exterius coquitur, atque sic de spuma et de sudore eiusdem mulieris in se introrsum trahit. Nam de fortissima vi voluntatis viri sanguis eius liquefactus diffluit atque ut molendinum circumvolvitur (et) aliquid de spuma et de sudore mulieris in se suscipit, ac sic caro eius de muliere miscetur, ita quod cum ea et de ea caro una fit; et quoniam vir et mulier sic una caro sunt, facile mulier de eodem viro fetum concipit, ita tamen, si fecunda ad fetum est. *Causae et Curae*, pp. 67:29–37 – 68:1–8.

33 Creavit hominem, masculum, scilicet majoris fortitudinis, feminam vero mollioris roboris, faciens et in recta mensura longitudinem et latitudinem in omnibus membris illius ordinans, quemadmodum etiam atitudinem [sic], profunditatem et latitudinem reliquae creaturae in rectum statum posuit, ne aliqua illarum alteram inconvenienter transcendat. *Book of Divine Works*, 5,43. PL 197: 945C

34 For just as woman has been subjected to man, and as she brings forth sons, so too should men hear God's commands *through me* and obey them. (Quemadmodum enim mulier viro subdita est, et ut filios producit sic etiam nomines praecepta Dei per me deberent audire, eisque obedire.) *Ibid.*, PL 197:1014B

35 Mulier propter virum creata est, et vir propter mulierem factus est....*Scivias*, 1,2 PL 197:393B.

36 *The Book of Divine Works*, PL 197:844B.

37 Personality types, classified according to their predominant characteristic: sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, melancholic, are assigned psychosexual traits by Hildegard.

38 Translation of this text taken from Peter Dronke's *Women Writers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 175.

39 Sed dilectio viri ad dilectionem feminae in calore ardoris est velut ignis ardentium montium, qui difficile extingui posset, ad ignem lignorum, qui facile extinguitur; dilectio autem feminae ad dilectionem viri ut suavis calor de sole procedens, qui fructus producit, ad ardentissimum ignem lignorum, quoniam et ipsa suaviter in prole fructus profert. *Causae et Curae*, p. 136:27–33.

40 Sed ipsi adjutorium similitudinis suae defuit. Unde et Deus illi adjutorium, quod speculativa forma mulieris fuit, in qua omne humanum genus latuit, quod in vi fortitudinis Dei producendum erat, sicut et primum hominem in vi fortitudinis suae profecerat. *Book of Divine Works*, 4,100, PL 197:885C

41 Cum enim Adam inspexit Evam, totus sapientia impletus est, quia matrem, per quam filios procreare debebat, inspexit. Cum autem Eva inspexit Adam, sic eum inspexit, quasi in caelum videret, et ut anima sursum tendit, quae caelestia desiderat, quoniam spes eius erat ad virum. *Causae et Curae*, p. 136:21–26.