

The Person and the Place—V: Herrad and Her Garden of Delights

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Commenting on two famous medieval encyclopedias, the *Liber Floridus* of Lambert of Saint Omer, and the *Hortus Deliciarum* of Herrad of Landsberg, Carl Nordenfalk observes how these authors 'combine a broad universal vision with a special interest in their home surroundings'. In Herrad's case this is certainly most striking. Her vision could hardly be broader (it is even comparable to Saint Hildegard's), yet the picture which she paints of Hohenburg, the shrine of St Odile where she was abbess, leaves no doubt about the central point of her vast twelfth-century universe. The monastery stands on a green mound, without perspective, decorated by three enlarged sprigs of clubmoss for trees. The nuns are grouped in a harmonious ensemble of purple, green, blue and black gowns, with brown cloaks. The *congregatio religiosa . . . in dei servicio in Hohenburc caritative adunata*, is Herrad's first preoccupation, and if, for *caritative*, we are meant to read *cantative*, as one authority suggests, the picture is even more charming. It was for them that she compiled her great work with its hundreds of pictures, the 'flowers gathered from the books of theology and philosophy' which she hoarded 'like a bee . . . so that, nourished on spiritual pleasure, the sisters might give up worldly things more easily, and so come to eternal joy'.

Herrad's affections had been connected with Hohenburg probably from an early age. The abbess before her, one Rilindis, had been responsible for putting the community on its feet after a period of decline. Barbarossa had had her brought from Berg, in the Diocese of Richstaedt, in 1141, and she, finding that the existing community was not well adapted for the Benedictine rule, changed forthwith to the Augustinian, and so they became canonesses. When Rilindis died in 1167, Herrad was already there to continue the good work of putting Hohenburg in order. The new superior was very practical and very

cultivated, firm and gentle at the same time. She concluded that the chief difficulty in leading a religious life in this inaccessible spot was the lack of a resident chaplain. Since the time of the donation of land from Duke Etticho to his daughter St Odile, the Bishop of Strasbourg had been technically responsible for saying mass for the nuns, but the journey was long and arduous and they had been neglected. But now, since this was Salic land, Herrad decided to exercise her right and provide her own chaplain. In 1178 she was able to invite the Premonstratensians from Ettal, building them a chapel and a priory, giving them a good benefice and exchanging suffrages. And in 1180 she went a step further and brought twelve Augustinian canons from Truttenhausen to start a hospice. In the course of time she had recovered all the property that had been either usurped or squandered over the years, and each vigil of St Odile she held her assize, to which all the tenants and serfs were summoned. Each of the peasants would bring her his due of a load of firewood, cut in her forests under the supervision of her men, and each would receive in return a generous dish of meat, a measure of her best wine, and a white loaf to take home with him.

It is obvious, from the nature of her office as abbess and landed proprietor, that Herrad must have been a busy woman. This alone might make one wonder how she could have been responsible for composing the *Hortus Deliciarum*, even in the thirty years of her administration of Hohenburg. Marignan, writing in 1910, objected to her authorship on various grounds, but principally 'because the work is worthy of Honorius of Autun, or Vincent of Beauvais'. But there is no real objection here. German women, as Nordenfalk reminds us, with the amazing thirst for culture which they showed in the twelfth-century, could be expected to be well read. Herrad conscientiously quotes all her sources, and acknowledges all her debts. These are flowers she has gathered: She has only arranged them. Even the title comes from a lovely passage of Honorius—'Paradise, or the garden of delight, is the Church. All the pleasures of holy scripture are to be found there . . . and in the midst of paradise rises a fountain, where Christ, the source of all goodness, is born of a pure virgin'.

With a truly enormous amount of erudition at her finger-ends, a keen desire to instruct, and a very sure idea of the kind of work she wished to produce, Herrad's theme is as simple as its treatment is grandiose. The *Hortus* is concerned with the history of salvation. It uses the bible narrative, from the story of the creation to the final welding of St Paul's Churches to the Jewish Church at Jerusalem.

From salvation in general, Herrad goes on to salvation in particular, taking now the theme of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, the battle of the vices and virtues. Finally, Herrad's apotheosis of the Church gives us the destruction of Antichrist, the baptism of the synagogue, and the dead rising to meet Christ on his rainbow throne, while the Saviour unfolds the scroll of the judgment over Hohenburg, where our Lady and St Peter, Duke Etticho and St Odile, Rilindis, Herrad, and all the community appear with their names written—Adelheid, Gertrude, Demut, Richinza, Hedwig, Cunigunde, Hazicha, Clementia . . .

From the start, one has the feeling that Herrad really knew the wavelength, as we would say, of her nuns. Her endeavour is to give them something readable, interesting, attractive. To save the work from any possibility of dullness there are the magnificent illuminations, sometimes taking up a whole page at a time, often revealing more than the text offers at first glance, and growing curiously larger until at the end, the effect is monumental. Then there are the charming sequences set to music, like the one with which the book opens:

*Salve cohors virginum, Hohenburgiensium
Albens quasi lilium, amans dei filium.
Herrad devotissima, tua fidelissima,
Mater et ancillula, cantat tibi cantica.*

*Te salutat millies, et exoptat indies,
Ut laeta victoria, vincas transitoria.
O multorum speculum, sperne, sperne seculum
Virtutes accumula, veri sponsi turmula.*

If we can forget the period flavour of the words, or rather remember (more important still) that they are written precisely in the taste of the time, we can judge more easily the frame of mind which Herrad intended the book to evoke. One is reminded of the serious nun who asked the conferencier what dispositions she should have at the beginning of her retreat, and was answered 'Dispositions? Perhaps a mild spiritual dissipation'.

The things of the spirit, in this broad twelfth-century *Weltanschau*, were always involved in all the other things. To flee the world, Herrad insists, does not mean turning away from the symbolism of creation, the images and vestiges of God in his work. It implies, rather, a retreat into the kind of silence in which one may more easily pause, reflect, and contemplate the many-faceted wisdom, both sacred and profane, which has made its triumphal progress through the dark ages, to be

synthesized in so many *summae* and *specula* of the Middle Ages. When, for instance, she has described and illustrated the creation of the elements, and of man the microcosm who contains in himself something of every part of creation, Herrad interrupts her résumé of Genesis at the tower of Babel, to digress on the muses and the birth of the seven arts. Grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, form a rose window round philosophy, a female figure crowned with a triple head for ethics, logic, and physics. At the foot of the page, Horace, Virgil, Cicero and Ovid sit like four scribes writing at the dictation of four black crows (antitheses of the Holy Spirit as a dove). They are excluded from the circle of the wise, yet none the less they figure in Herrad's scheme since they still count as *clerici gentium*, like Socrates and Plato who are put within the circle of wisdom. Their work only needs the expurgation of a moral interpretation to make it valuable.

The bible narrative continues, to dwell particularly on the types of salvation. The sacrifice of Isaac, Jacob wearing his goatskin gloves, the story of Joseph, the burning bush, the manna, the ark, each is treated with fascinating detail. Each of the stopping places of the Israelites in the desert is pictured as a town, with a church or some other building to distinguish it. When Moses is buried by God's hand in a stone coffin, Satan tries to catch him by the foot, but Michael prods the devil with a large oven-fork. We see Job and the comforters, Tobias under the disastrous swallows' nest, Judith and Esther as examples of prompt justice, and Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes sitting together rather like the Trinity, to announce to Esdras that the exile has come to an end. The twelve prophets appear, each with his scroll and a quotation to identify him.

As the Old Testament approaches its fulfilment in the New, Herrad makes the connection between the two explicit in a series of symbolic compositions. There is a two-headed figure of Moses-Christ, a Jesse tree showing the patriarchs and kings of Christ's ancestry, with our Lord blooming from Mary's head, and a most original piece that shews Christ fishing for Leviathan (the devil), by means of a line that is composed of medallions that portray Christ's ancestors, while the hook takes the form of the cross. After the birth of John the Baptist, Herrad inserts some more sequences of her own composition on the Nativity, to be sung and danced to, as vigorous as anything in the *Carmina Burana*.

*Sol oritur occasus nescius
Et filiae fit pater filius,
O, o, o, pro populo!*

*Leta, leta concio
Cinoel resonat in tripudio,
Cinoel hoc in natalitio
Cinoel, cinoel, noel, noel!*

Most of the material which Herrad has incorporated into her *Hortus* thus far comes from Augustine and Gennadius, Isidore, and the *Gemma Animae* of Honorius of Autun, with some gleanings from Freculph of Lisieux. When she gets to the ministry of our Lord, she dwells on the significance of the parables in verses of her own composition, in which the Samaritan is a type of mankind being saved from the robbers of hell. The passion narrative relies on St Anselm's *de Sacramentis novi sacrificii*, and is illustrated by another very splendid allegorical composition, where *Ecclesia* on a four-headed mount gathers the precious blood in her chalice, while *Synagoga*, blindfold, and with her banner falling from her grasp, faints onto the neck of her donkey. Adam's tomb opens beneath the cross, and at this point Herrad cannot resist recalling the legend that the wood of the cross grew from a slip of the anti-rheumatic tree, which the angel kindly allowed Abel to gather from Paradise when Adam was suffering from gout. The most remarkable thing about Herrad's crucifixion is the way in which Christ's willingness to be sacrificed is emphasized, together with the absolute victory of that sacrifice, and its shattering effect on all history and creation. All the characters gathered about the cross are splendid and noble, except of course the synagogue, and *Ecclesia* is clothed and crowned in a manner which strictly imitates the pictures of Theophano, the Byzantine wife of Otto II, who was so important an influence in the infiltration of Eastern Christian art to the west, and to works like the *Hortus Deliciarum*.

After the Ascension, with Christ in a mandorla, and the dove of Pentecost from whose beak the gifts pour down on the apostles, the illuminator depicts St Peter working miracles with his shadow (which has to be green, the colour of life and vitality), and St Paul's conversion on the way to Damascus, where a wolf and lamb at the roadside emphasize the words of Christ, 'Why persecutest thou me?' With Paul symbolically baptising an Ethiopian woman, and making the collection

for Jerusalem among his converts in Asia Minor, the bible narrative comes to an end. The history of the Christian Caesars and the early heresies follows, drawn from Freculph. And it is at this point that the artist makes the most of the very stirring subject matter provided by the *Psychomachia*, in which Prudentius' allegorical figures of Faith overcoming Idolatry, Patience and Humility destroying Wrath and Pride, become Amazons wearing the armour of Frankish barons. The vice of *Luxuria*, a very real menace in Herrad's community, drawn from the aristocratic families of the neighbourhood, fights not with arrow and lance and sword, but with the violets and rose petals of sensual pleasure. The only capable adversary against her is Sobriety, who thrusts her shining cross against the chariot of *Luxuria*, and so throws the whole platoon—*Pompa*, *Jocus*, *Voluptas*, *Turpitude*, *Blandiciae* and the rest. The vitality in the drawing of these figures helps to show how clearly Herrad has weighed up and experienced all the factors that make the Christian life a battle-field in the most literal sense. Even when the battle seems to be over, Discord is waiting to stab Concord, and only Faith has the power to overcome Heresy. 'Faith and Concord reign', Prudentius says, 'preaching a lesson to the whole soul that the will must be undivided, and that body and soul must work together, governed by the Spirit of God'. When body and soul are cleansed, Solomon's temple, the new Jerusalem, may be built there.

Solomon's canticle, which ever since Origen and Gregory had been the most important text for those dedicated to the spiritual craft, provides Herrad with plenty to comment on. The illuminator shows Solomon, as a figure of Christ, resting in the lap of *Ecclesia*, celebrating his marriage feast surrounded by the sixty stalwarts of the canticle, while bishops credence his wine at the altar, and the daughters of Jerusalem sing his praises. And to continue the opposition between the delights of the world to come and the vanity of vanities which worldly society offers, we are reminded that Solomon's throne is now occupied by that prince of darkness, Saladin, but since Fortune turns the wheel, there is no knowing how long any temporal throne will last, and very little reason for bothering about the puppet show of worldly prestige. On the ladder of virtue, while all sorts and conditions of men fall for ease, or money, or luxury, charity alone can resist the assaults of the devils, and climb to the top, and win the eternal crown. Each one of these subjects is magnificently treated, in text and verse and illumination. The concluding pages, as we would expect, give us a cross-section

of the glorious Church with Christ enthroned, the instruments of the passion borne aloft by angels, and the book of the doom lying open before the cross. The heavens are unrolled, the earth consumed by fire, and made new again as Christ's face appears in the centre of a new universe.

Herrad, living at the end of the twelfth century, is conscious of new influences, but is at the same time so deeply familiar with the whole of Christian tradition that she, like most of her contemporaries, can only visualize God's creation and the history of salvation as a carefully worked-out pattern. There are no loose ends, no insoluble problems. She shows us, with no conscious effort, her conviction that everything is contained in the wisdom of God, just as Hildegard sees all things contained in the vast cosmic Christ of her visions. We may call such conviction naive. We may comment on the fact that it was destined to pass, as the twelfth century tradition came to its fulfilment in the thirteenth, and from then on flamboyantly declined. But we cannot deny that, for all its incidental imperfections, the twelfth-century outlook as embodied in the *Hortus Deliciarum*, to take one masterpiece at random, is essentially valid, satisfying, and worthy.

Lumen Vitae

SISTER JOSEPH OF THE ANGELS, S.N.D.

'The most significant factor of the last one hundred and fifty years is the urbanisation of the world' said Fr Houtart, Secretary of the International Centre for Research in Religious Sociology. Addressing the members of the International Catechetical Year at *Lumen Vitae*, he compared the revolution caused in society by this phenomenon to the barbarian invasions of the fourth century, which changed the face of the world as it was then known. This signifies, he said, far more than an increased density of population in the cities; it is a real transformation of social life. M. Labbens, President of this Society, also speaking during this course of lectures in religious sociology, went so far as to assert that 'The world is about to give birth to a new civilisation'.