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A Further Source for the Ghent Altarpiece? The *Revelations* of Bridget of Sweden

The fact that so many of the iconographical details of the Ghent Altarpiece are derived from the Apocalypse of John makes it easy to overlook the fact that others are not. Whoever was responsible for the iconographical program of the altarpiece clearly drew on several subsidiary sources besides the bible. In this paper it is suggested that one of these subsidiary sources was the *Revelations* of Bridget of Sweden. Reminiscences of Bridget's visions may be found not merely in the iconography of the altarpiece, but also in its inscriptions.

The iconographical program of the Ghent Altarpiece, with its almost overwhelming richness of detail, has long been the subject of vigorous discussion and diverging conclusions.[1] Fortunately, the inscriptions on the painting provide some points of reference.[2] They assist the viewer not merely to understand the individual details of the work, but also — by constantly pointing the eye to other locations within the painting and by emphasising the dialectic between its elements — to make connexions between the parts and thus to 'read' the narrative of the entire composition. Being verbal, the inscriptions also link the imagery of the painting to texts, particularly to the rich tradition of biblical commentary and devotional literature with which the clergy and the more literate laity were intimately familiar. Some of these inscriptions have been identified as deriving more or less faithfully from authorities such as Augustine, and such associations have clarified the iconography to a certain extent. But there is still much that remains unclear. The present paper proposes that many details that have hitherto resisted interpretation may be elucidated by reference to the *Revelations* of Bridget of Sweden (Birgitta Birgersdotter, 1303-1373).

In a way this suggestion should not be startling. As long ago as 1945, Millard Meiss suggested that Bridget's *Revelations* were an important source for the iconography of Robert Campin's Dijon *Nativity*.[3] Bridget's works were immensely popular in the fifteenth century, and survive in dozens of manuscript copies. The 1467 catalogue of the library of the Duke of Flanders at Bruges contains a manuscript of the *Revelations* of Bridget, while the 1487 catalogue of the *Chambre de la Garde des Joyaulx* in Brussels contains two partial copies of the work.[4] The Royal Library in Brussels still holds a number of early manuscripts of the *Revelations* from the Southern Low Countries.[5] The City Library in Bruges also has a fragmentary manuscript of the *Revelations* copied there in 1487–1488 (ms 408).[6] In the enthusiasm for Bridget in fifteenth-century Flanders, a Bridgettine nunnery, Mariënthron, was founded at Dendermonde (Termonde), half way between Mechelen and Ghent, in 1466.[7]

The Ghent Altarpiece was of course made to stand on the altar in the Vijd Chapel at St John's (now St Bavo's) church in Ghent. Its splendour naturally dominates the small chapel and immediately draws the gaze of the onlooker, but the ostensible purpose of the altar was not so much to draw attention towards itself as to point towards the sacramental action performed upon the altar below, and to comment on the wider implications



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Jan (and Hubert?) van Eyck, panel 9 ('Knights of Christ') (detail) of *Ghent Altarpiece*, *c*. 1430-1432, Ghent, St Bavo's church. Image courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels, project *Closer to Van Eyck: Rediscovering the Ghent Altarpiece*.

of that action. This deictic function is also a fundamental characteristic of sacraments, which are held to point towards something happening somewhere else, either in heaven or within the believer. As Augustine put it, sacraments are 'signs that relate to divine things.'[8]

Just as the altarpiece points away from itself, several iconographical elements in the altarpiece likewise direct the gaze of the attentive viewer elsewhere. For example, the figure of St George in the lower register (fig. 1) directs the eye to the figure of St Michael on the angels' lectern above (fig. 2). More complex chains of association are set up by means of the inscriptions. The monogram IHESVS XPS and the eucharistic images of the grapes, pelicans and pomegranate blossoms woven into the cloth of honour behind the divine figure (fig. 3) allude to the eucharistic scene in the lower panel, and beyond that to the sacramental drama enacted at the real altar on which the retable stood.[9] The floor tiles on which the angel-musicians stand bear a number of symbols, including the monogram AGLA (on some tiles in the semi-Hellenized version AГLA, fig. 2), which stands for the Hebrew words *ata gevir le'olam, Adonai* (אתה גבור לעולם אדוני: 'You are

mighty for ever, o Lord').[10] This monogram is echoed in the shield of St George in the lower panel (fig. 1), which bears the inscription, 'Mighty is God the Lord Adonai Sabaoth or || Emmanuel, Jesus Christ agla' (DEVS FORTIS ADONAY SABAOT V[E]L || EMANVEL IHS XPC AGLA). The SABAOT on St George's shield in turn draws the eye to the word SABAΩT inscribed on the stole of God in the upper panel (fig. 4). This word is echoed audibly in the *Sanctus sanctus sanctus dominus deus sabaoth* spoken or sung at the real altar during the mass.[11]

The iconography of the *Adoration of the Lamb* in the lower tier is complex. It combines the vision of the 'Adoration of the Lamb' in the Apocalypse of John, which has no specifically Eucharistic context, with the heavenly liturgy described in the Letter to the Hebrews.[12] The focus on the Lamb upon the altar in the painting and especially the inscription on the superfrontal on the altar in the painting (AGNVS DEI QVI TOLLIT PECCATA MVNDI) suggests that the action occurring on the altar in the church in Ghent is part of the heavenly liturgy, as the eucharistic preface promises (*Et ideo cum angelis et archangelis, cum thronis et dominationibus, cumque omnia milita cælestis exercitus, hymnum gloriæ tuæ canimus*). The inscription on the superfrontal also draws the eye upward to the figure



2
Jan (and Hubert?) van Eyck, panel 2 ('Singing Angels') (detail) of *Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1430-1432, Ghent, St Bavo's church. Image courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels, project *Closer to Van Eyck: Rediscovering the Ghent Altarpiece*.

3
Jan (and Hubert?) van Eyck, panel 4 ('Deity Enthroned') (detail) of *Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1430-1432, Ghent, St Bavo's church. Image courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels, project *Closer to Van Eyck: Rediscovering the Ghent Altarpiece*.



of John the Baptist, who first announced Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). This proclamation is made explicit on the outer wings of the altarpiece by the *grisaille* statue of John the Baptist holding a lamb. The inscriptions on the altarpiece thus have a far more than merely descriptive purpose. They suggest associations within the painting and in the viewer's memory, and connect the scenes depicted in the painting with the liturgy enacted at the altar.[13]

To date, no single text has been identified which elucidates all the iconographic details of the altarpiece, or provides a source for all the inscriptions. Clearly the most important source is the bible. Indeed, the altarpiece itself might be considered a huge commentary on Scripture, rather in the manner of the *Catena*, a 'chain' of comment taken from the writings of the Fathers. De Baets (1961) identified many of the links of this chain through his philological study of the inscriptions. Goodgal (1981) identified Olivier de Langhe as another important source. Without wishing to duplicate unnecessarily the important work of these predecessors, we shall here identify a number of further links in this chain.

The iconography of the altarpiece recalls two pericopes from the Apocalypse of John which describe the 'Adoration of the Lamb' (Apoc 5:6-14, 7:9-12). The figure in the centre of the upper tier recalls Apoc 4:2: 'a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.'[14] The inscription on the fountain in the lower panel is adapted from Apoc 22:1. The figure of Michael battling the dragon on the angels' lectern recalls Apoc 12:7. The frame of the left-hand angel-panel bears an inscription (GRATIARVM ACTIO) that recalls Apoc 7:11-12:

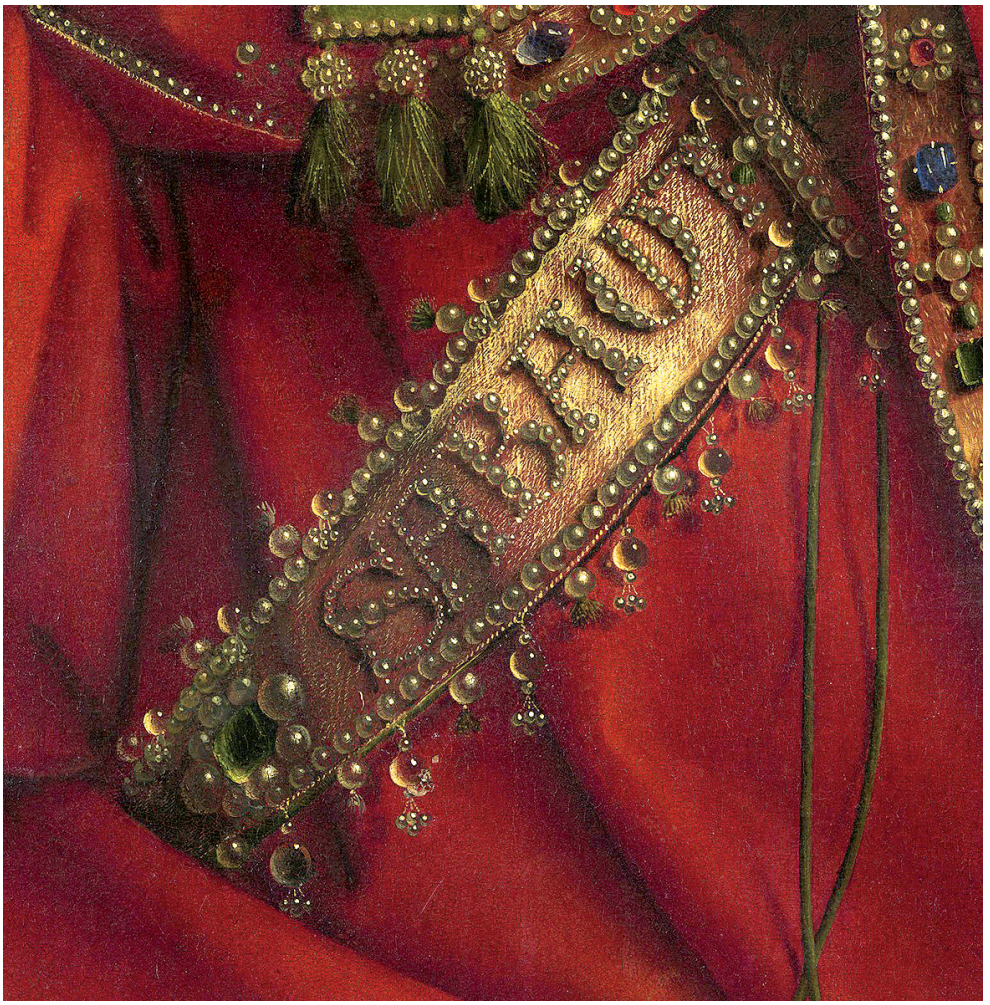
> And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving [*gratiarum actio*], and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

But, as Volker Herzner (1995) pointed out:

> The cited pericope from the Apocalypse reveals itself as a meagre source when it comes to the other relevant objects and forms of the altarpiece, namely the fountain of life and the dove of the Holy Spirit in the lower tier; Christ, Mary, John the Baptist, the angel musicians, Adam and Eve in the upper. They are not mentioned there at all.[15]

Many of the features that Herzner failed to find in the Apocalypse of John may be found in the *Revelations* of Bridget of Sweden. At one point, Bridget has a vision of God and Mary in heaven:

> I saw a huge palace of incomprehensible size, like a serene sky [...]. And in the palace I saw a marvellous throne, on which sat a man brighter than the sun, a Lord of incomprehensible beauty and immense power, whose splendour was incomprehensible in its length, depth and breadth. And a certain Virgin stood beside the throne, shining with an amazing brightness, and wearing a precious crown on her head. And all those who were standing by did homage to the one who sat on the throne, praising him in hymns and canticles, and they honoured that Virgin reverently as the Queen of Heaven. And then the one who sat on the throne said to me with a very dignified voice: 'I am the creator of the heaven and the earth, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the true God. For God is Father, God is Son and God is Holy Spirit: not three gods but three persons and one God. Now then, you will ask: "If there are three persons, why are there not three Gods?" I tell you: it is because God is power itself, wisdom itself, and goodness itself [...]. Hence there is one God and three persons,



4
Jan (and Hubert?) van Eyck, panel 4 ('Deity Enthroned') (detail) of *Ghent Altarpiece*, *c*. 1430-1432, Ghent, St Bavo's church. Image courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels, project *Closer to Van Eyck: Rediscovering the Ghent Altarpiece*.



5
Jan (and Hubert?) van Eyck, panel 4 ('Deity Enthroned') (detail) of *Ghent Altarpiece*, *c.* 1430-1432, Ghent, St Bavo's church. Image courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels, project *Closer to Van Eyck: Rediscovering the Ghent Altarpiece*.

> because all three have one nature, one operation, one glory and power. [...] Indeed, the godhead sent his Word to the Virgin Mary through his angel Gabriel. Yet the same God, sender and sent by himself, was nevertheless there with the angel, was there in Gabriel and before Gabriel in the Virgin. When the Word was uttered by the angel, the Word was made flesh in the Virgin. I who speak to you am that Word. [...] I am thus the true Lord, and no one is truly to be called Lord but I alone, for all power and dominion are from me, and no one will be able to resist my power. I am also Lord of the crown. Do you know, my Bride, why I said "Lord of the crown"? Assuredly it is because my deity was without beginning, is and ever shall be without end. Therefore this deity is rightly compared to a crown, because a crown is without beginning or end.'[16]

There is much here that recalls the iconographic program of the Ghent Altarpiece. In Bridget's vision, Christ is enthroned in power and majesty, radiant with light, just as in the altarpiece.[17] Christ explains to Bridget that God, though three persons, is one in power, wisdom and goodness, a description that recalls the inscription around the head of God in the altarpiece (fig. 3): 'This is God, most powerful because of his divine majesty; highest of all because of the goodness of his sweetness; a most generous remunerator because of his immense generosity' (HIC EST DEVS POTENTISSIMVS PROPTER DIVINAM MAIESTATEM ✠ SVMMVS OMNIVM PROPTER DVLCEDINIS BONITATEM / REMVNERATOR LIBERALISSMVS PROPTER IMMENSAM LARGITATEM). (The absolute qualities of 'power itself, wisdom itself and goodness itself' described by Bridget are equivalent to the superlative forms encountered in Van Eyck's inscription.) The Annunciation, in which Bridget particularly emphasised the uttered Word, is depicted on the exterior of the wings of the altarpiece. Like Bridget, Van Eyck emphasises the words of Gabriel and Mary by making them visible, drawing further attention to them by inverting Mary's words toward heaven. In Bridget's vision, as in the altarpiece, the Virgin sits beside God, shining and wearing a crown. The angels singing hymns and canticles in Bridget's vision recall those in the upper tier of the interior of the altarpiece. The 'serene sky' mentioned in Bridget's vision recalls the blue heavens visible behind Van Eyck's angels.

One detail in Bridget's account is of particular interest in relation to the altarpiece: God calls himself 'Lord of the crown,' and explains that the crown is a symbol of eternal life (cf. Apoc 2:10). The crown at the feet of the divine figure in the altarpiece (fig. 5) has been the source of considerable disagreement.[18] Interpreters have often wondered about the iconographical significance of the crown, which seems superfluous besides the triple tiara on God's head, often understanding it is an oblique reference to Apoc. 4:10 ('the

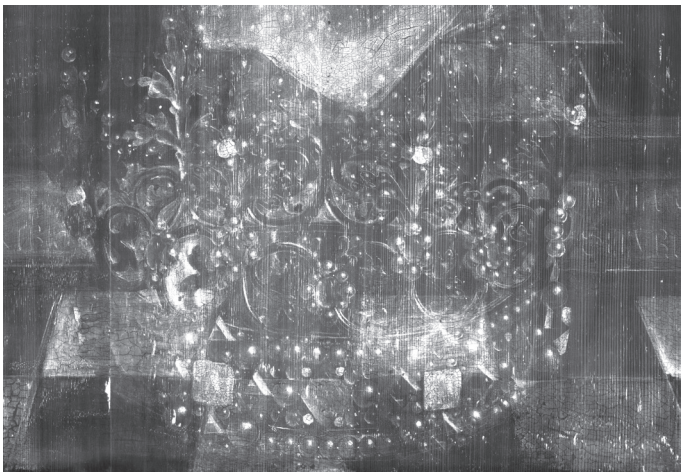
twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne'). Moreover, its presence within the original conception of the painting has been debated since Coremans (1953) suggested on the basis of a laboratory examination that the quality of painting on the crown, the tiles at God's feet and the accompanying inscription was of an inferior quality to the rest. Coremans and his team also found that the inscription in its present state was painted over an earlier version. These findings led him to suggest that these details had been added later, though before 1557, when a painted copy including the details in question was made.[19] Panofsky (1956) disagreed with Coremans' opinion that the quality of this section of painting was inferior to the other parts that Coremans had deemed original, though he did agree that there seems to be some overpainting. More importantly, Panofsky pointed out that these details are mentioned in the *Kronyk van Vlaenderen*, in a description of an 'enactment' of the altarpiece in 1458, in which the crown is clearly described. Panofsky suggested on this basis that the crown superimposed over the tiles, and the later version of the inscription, were the result of modifications made by Jan van Eyck to the work inherited from his brother.[20] Panofsky's conclusions were supported by Otto Pächt (1956).[21] However, in 1979 J.R.J. van Asperen de Boer, a former student of Coremans, re-examined the panels using infrared reflectography, and concluded that the crown (like the inscription on the steps) was incised in the ground; the tiles and pearls were then painted over the top, and finally the crown and inscription were painted on top of the tiles, using the incised outline as a guide (figs. 6, 7). 'It is difficult to see,' concludes De Boer, 'how these observations are compatible with the non-originality of the crown suggested by Coremans (p. 104), because in that case abrasion and overpainting should be evident.'[22] Van Asperen de Boer's evidence has thus laid to rest any doubts regarding the place of the crown in the original plan of the altarpiece.

It is suggested here that Bridget's interpretation of Christ as 'Lord of the crown,' that is, Lord of eternal life, gives a convincing explanation for this conspicuous and controversial element of the iconography of the altarpiece, an explanation that ties it to the iconographical scheme of the entire work. The theme of eternity is announced by the inscription on the step behind the crown: 'Life without death is on his head; youth without age on his brow; joy without grief to his right; security without fear to his left' (VITA SINE MORTE IN CAPITE IVVENTVS SINE SENECTVTE IN FRONTE GAVDIVM SINE MERORE A DEXTRIS, SECVRITAS SINE TIMORE A SINISTRIS). De Baets suggested that this inscription is derived, at least in part, from Augustine's *Sermon* 65: 'Every Christian person,' says Augustine, 'ought to desire the heavenly homeland, and God the Father almighty, who lives in the heavens.' In contrast to the trials and horrors of our finite earthly life, our joyous heavenly home, 'where God lives with his holy angels and his elect,' is eternal. Rather than seeking after the anxious and laborious food of earth,

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Jan (and Hubert?) van Eyck, panel 4 ('Deity Enthroned') (detail, infrared reflectography) of *Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1430-1432, Ghent, St Bavo's church. Image courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels, project *Closer to Van Eyck: Rediscovering the Ghent Altarpiece*.

7
Jan (and Hubert?) van Eyck, panel 4 ('Deity Enthroned') (detail, X-ray photography) of *Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1430-1432, Ghent, St Bavo's church. Image courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels, project *Closer to Van Eyck: Rediscovering the Ghent Altarpiece*.





we should, 'as free children, long for the celestial food and drink' enjoyed by those in heaven. We ought, Augustine exhorts his hearers, to hasten to that place,

> where we hope to dwell without interruption; where there is no fear of death, no anxiety about our enemy. In that place is life without end, youth without old age, light without darkness, joy without sadness, will without compulsion, rest without labour, satiety without nausea, brightness without clouds.[23]

Of the many paraphrases of Augustine's description of paradise to be found in the works of his mediaeval followers, one by Hugh of St Victor resembles the inscriptions on the Ghent altarpiece even more closely than does Augustine's original:

> Indeed, in that heavenly homeland there is *life without death*, *youth without senescence*, health without infirmity, rest without labour, *joy without sadness*, peace without discord, delight without satiety, light without darkness, beauty without ugliness, agility without weightiness, strength without weakness, freedom without servitude, pleasure without anxiety, longevity without an end to life, wisdom without foolishness, friendship without enmity, concord without discord, honour without disgrace, *security without fear*.[24]

All the elements of Van Eyck's inscription are here in Hugh's extravagant piling up of anthitheses, with the sole difference that Hugh has *gaudium sine tristitia* ('joy without sadness') where Van Eyck has the synonymous *gaudium sine merore* ('joy without mourning'). However, the formulation *gaudium sine merore* is to be found in other examples of this vision of a paradise in which all badness has been negated.[25] Bridget, picking up on this topos, noted that Adam and Eve lost the glories of this heavenly kingdom when they succumbed to sin. Instead of the 'security without fear' (*securitas sine timore*) of paradise, they harvested the exact opposite (*timor pro securitate*):

> Then indeed those first humans felt justice when they received nakedness in place of the vesture of glory, hunger instead of abundance, the desire of the flesh instead of virginity, *fear instead of security*, labour instead of rest.[26]

The crown at God's feet in Van Eyck's painting, along with its accompanying inscription, thus promises the naked and vulnerable Adam and Eve the restoration of the eternal life which they lost through their primeval disobedience.

Besides the crown at his feet, the figure of God also wears a richly decorated triple tiara on his head (fig. 3). This element could refer to the doctrine of the Pope as Vicar of Christ, a dignity that the recently deceased Pope Martin V († 1431) had attempted to restore after the disgrace of the Great Schism. It might also allude to the vision of paradise experienced at the altar by Pope Gregory the Great, as related in the *Golden Legend*.[27] The three crowns united in one tiara might also refer to the Trinitarian doctrine implicit in Van Eyck's depiction of the Godhead. A further understanding of the tiara may be gained from Bridget's *Revelations*, one that connects it firmly with other elements of the iconography of the altarpiece:

> Thus one must believe that the number of crowns with which God himself shines most sublimely is inestimable; his virtues incomparably excel all things that have been, that are and will be, in their great number, their magnitude and their dignity [...]. But three virtues in particular adorn him more gloriously like three most splendid crowns. That virtue by which he created the angels was his first crown [...]. Moreover, that virtue by which he created mankind was his second crown, of which man himself, succumbing to the suggestion of the enemy in his foolishness, was suddenly deprived. [...] And that virtue by which he created you, o desirable Virgin, for eternal glory, glorified him like a third crown.[28]

The triple tiara in the painting may thus be understood as a reference to the creation of the figures that surround God: 'the angels Adam and Eve; and the Virgin.'

In one of Bridget's visions, the bride (the author's mystical persona) describes Mary's appearance in considerable detail:

> The bride saw the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of God, with a precious and inestimable crown on her head, hair of wonderful beauty spread over her shoulders, a golden tunic flashing with ineffable splendour, and a blue mantle the colour of azure or a serene heaven. And as the bride was marvelling greatly at this delightful vision, and in this wonderment stood caught up in a kind of internal stupefaction, suddenly St John the Baptist appeared to her and said to her: 'Listen carefully to what this means. The crown means that she is Queen and Lady, and mother of the King of Angels. The long hair means that she is a most pure and immaculate Virgin. The mantle the colour of the heavens means that all temporal things were as good as dead to her. The golden tunic means that she was burning and aflame with divine charity, both within and without.'[29]

John the Baptist then provides a detailed exegesis of Mary's crown, which Jesus has adorned with seven lilies and seven precious stones. The seven lilies signify Mary's seven virtues: humility, respectfulness, obedience, patience, stability, gentleness and mercy to those in need. The precious stones signify her unique virtue, her perfect purity, her beauty, her wisdom, her fortitude, her brightness, and her spiritual sweetness.[30]

Many details of this vision seem to be reflected in the iconography of the Ghent Altarpiece. John the Baptist does not look at God in his traditional role of forerunner (*prodromos*); rather, he points at Mary, as if explicating the details of her appearance, as in Bridget's vision. Mary's mantle in the altarpiece is the traditional azure, as in Bridget's vision.[31] Van Eyck also makes a particular display of Mary's hair, which flows over her shoulders, as in Bridget's vision. Van Eyck paints Mary's crown studded with pearls and precious stones (seven large ones are visible to the viewer, recalling Bridget's total), and conspicuously set with white lilies, alternating with roses, lily of the valley and blue columbines, flowers with further Marian associations (cf. Song of Songs 2:1–2).[32] Van Eyck combines the stones and lilies enumerated by Bridget with the stars that crown the woman of the Apocalypse (Apoc 12:1) (fig. 8).[33]

The inscription above the Virgin in the Ghent Altarpiece draws on two verses in the book of Wisdom (7:29, 26): 'For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars: being compared with the light, she is found before it; For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the spotless mirror of God' (HEC EST SPECIOSIOR SOLE / SVPER OMNEM STELLARVM DISPOSICIONEM LVCI COMPARATA INVENITVR PRIOR CANDOR EST ENIM LVCIS ETERNE / SPECVLVM SINE MACVLA DEI). (The same inscription is painted on the frame of the *Van der Paele Virgin and Child*, and on the hem of Mary's gown in Van Eyck's Berlin *Virgin and Child in a church*.) In the book of Wisdom, these lines refer to the figure of Wisdom herself. However, most patristic and medieval writers relate this image either to divine Wisdom or to Christ himself, 'the power of God, and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1:24). The words are seldom related to Mary, except by Bonaventure[34] and in the Little Chapter of Lauds for the feast of the Assumption current in several northern uses, such as those of Bruges, Trier, Leuven, Brussels, Mons, Saint-Omer and Liège, where the two verses occur in the same inverted order as in Van Eyck's inscription.[35] Bridget too draws on the imagery from Wisdom to elucidate Mary's qualities. According to Bridget, Mary's wisdom, 'filled with all divine wisdom with God' (*impleta* [...] *omni diuina sapiencia cum deo*), is one of the qualities symbolised by the stones in her crown, along with the divine qualities of power, plenitude and spiritual sweetness. In Bridget's vision, Mary explains to the bride that she has been so honoured by her Son above the angels and all mankind that there is no divine virtue that does not shine out in her. Her soul and body, she continues, 'are more pure than the sun and more spotless than a mirror. Just as three people standing before a mirror would be visible in it, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit can be seen in my purity.'[36]

Mary's role as a visible reflection of the Trinity is emphasised by the way in which Van Eyck has abbreviated the second part of her inscription. In its entirety, the scriptural source (Wis 7:26) reads: 'For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror



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Jan (and Hubert?) van Eyck, panel 3 ('Virgin Enthroned') (detail) of *Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1430-1432, Ghent, St Bavo's church. Image courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels, project *Closer to Van Eyck: Rediscovering the Ghent Altarpiece*.

of the power of God, and the image of his goodness' (*candor est enim lucis æternæ et speculum sine macula dei maiestatis et imago bonitatis illius*).[37] Although the *maiestas* and *bonitas* are lacking from the inscription around Mary's head, they reappear in the inscription around the head of God, thus drawing the two inscriptions into one.[38] The merging of the inscription around Mary's head into that around the head of God perhaps illustrates Bridget's notion that the purity of the Virgin is as a mirror reflecting the qualities of the divine Trinity.

To date no direct source has been found for the inscription above God's head (cited above), which declares the divine qualities of 1) supreme power and majesty, 2) sweetness and goodness, and 3) generosity according to our deserving. However, there are some illuminating parallels in Bridget's works. In one of Bridget's visions, Christ states:

> I am the creator of the heavens and the earth. I have three properties at my disposal. I am most powerful (*potentissimus*), I am most wise, I am also most virtuous. For I am so powerful that the angels in the heavens honour me [...]. I am so virtuous that from me, as if from the fount of goodness, all good emanates, and as if from a good vine all sweetness (*dulcedo*) flows.[39]

According to Bridget, Christ possesses the kingly qualities of abundance, gentleness, wisdom and charity. He is so abundant that his stores are not diminished when he gives to all what they need. He is so mild that he is ready to give to all who ask. He is so wise that he knows what each person deserves to receive. He is so generous that he is more ready to give than we are to ask.[40] Indeed, Bridget ecstatically declares: 'You pour yourself into us with superabundant generosity (*superabundanti largitate*), or rather, if I may say so, you are prodigal even beyond our desire.'[41] The divine qualities of *maiestas*, *dulcedinis bonitas* and *largitas* enumerated in Van Eyck's inscription are thus all present in Bridget's writings as attributes of Christ, while the sweetness of the vine is suggested by the grapes in the cloth of honour behind the divine figure.

The similarities between the iconography of the Ghent Altarpiece and the visions of Bridget continue in the lower tier, the scene of the Adoration of the Lamb. Many elements that cannot be found in the Apocalypse of John are present in one of Bridget's visions:

> And suddenly those things I saw were not corporeal but spiritual, and my spiritual eyes were opened to hear and to see [...]. Then Adam and Eve came with the martyrs and confessors and all the other saints and their descendants. And the humanity of Christ was not yet visible, nor the body of his blessed mother, but all were waiting for them to come. The earth and also the water were seen to be elevated up to the heavens, and all things in them prostrated themselves and knelt with reverence before his power. Then I saw an altar, which was in the seat of majesty, and a chalice with wine and water, and bread in the form of a host offered on the altar. And then I saw, just like in a church on earth, a priest began mass, dressed in priestly vestments. Having performed all those things relating to the mass, when he came to the words with which he would bless the bread, I saw that it seemed as if the sun and the moon and the stars and all the planets and all the heavens with their courses and motions resounded with alternating voices and a sweet-sounding tone, and every kind of song and modulation was heard. And also innumerable kinds of musicians were seen, but it is impossible to express in words how my senses comprehended their most sweet sound. [...] And when the priest uttered the words of God over the bread, it seemed to me that the same bread was in the seat of majesty in three figures, yet remaining in the hand of the priest. And the bread itself became a living Lamb [...] and all the angels served them, who were as many in number as the mites in sunlight, and a marvellous radiance proceeded from the Lamb.[42]

Some of the elements in Bridget's narration, such as the figure of the priest, are not present in the Ghent Altarpiece. Nevertheless, the scene painted by Van Eyck in many respects resembles Bridget's vision much more closely than the Apocalypse of John. Firstly, the scene in John's Apocalypse takes place around a throne; in Bridget's *Revelations*, the action occurs around an altar. In the Apocalypse of John, the Lamb is worshipped after taking the book; in Bridget's *Revelations*, the Lamb, streaming with light, is adored on the altar. In John's Apocalypse, the scene of the adoration is not specifically eucharistic; in Bridget's it is. And unlike John, Bridget draws Adam and Eve, the martyrs and the confessors into her vision of paradise.

In summary: several details of the iconography of the Ghent Altarpiece and its inscriptions bear striking resemblances to the *Revelations* of Bridget of Sweden. In Bridget's vision and in the altarpiece, Mary appears beside Christ, attended by angels. In both Bridget and the altarpiece, God's Trinitarian nature is emphasised strongly. In both Bridget and the altarpiece, the crown at the feet of Christ is a symbol of eternity. Bridget's interpretation of the triple tiara on God's head as relating to the creation of the angels, of Adam and of Mary recalls the figures in the upper register of the interior of the altarpiece. Several details in the depiction of Mary, such as her hair, her blue robe and her golden crown set with lilies and precious stones, are interpreted explicitly by John the Baptist in Bridget's vision. The divine qualities of power, sweetness and generosity in the inscription surrounding Christ's head in the altarpiece are also attributed to Christ by Bridget. Finally, Van Eyck's scene of the Adoration of the Lamb in the eucharist, in particular the transformation of the host into a living lamb streaming with light, recalls Bridget's text closely. These numerous conspicuous similarities suggest that the *Revelations* of Bridget likely represent an important source for the iconography and inscriptions of Van Eyck's masterpiece.

NOTES

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1 On the iconography of the Ghent Altarpiece, see especially W.H.J. Weale, *Hubert and John van Eyck. Their Life and Work*, London 1908; E. Panofsky, 'The Friedsam Annunciation and the Problem of the Ghent Altarpiece', *The Art Bulletin* 17 (1935), pp. 433-473; E. Panofsky, 'Once More "The Friedsam Annunciation and the Problem of the Ghent Altarpiece"', *The Art Bulletin* 20 (1938), pp. 419-442; L.B. Philip, *The Ghent Altarpiece and the Art of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton 1971; E. Dhanens, *Van Eyck: The Ghent Altarpiece*, New York 1973; D.R. Goodgal, 'The Iconography of the Ghent Altarpiece', Diss., University of Pennsylvania 1981; C. Harbison, *Jan van Eyck: The Play of Realism*, London 1991; V. Herzner, *Jan van Eyck und der Genter Altar*, Worms 1995; H. Van de Perre, *L'Agneau mystique*, trans. D. Cunin, Paris 1996; M.B. McNamee, *Vested Angels: Eucharistic Allusions in Early Netherlandish Paintings*, Leuven 1998; P. Schmidt, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, trans. L. Preedy, Leuven 2005.

2 On the inscriptions, see J. de Baets, 'De gewijde teksten van "Het Lam Gods", kritisch onderzocht', *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* 10 (1961), pp. 531-614.

3 M. Meiss, 'Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings', *The Art Bulletin* 27 (1945), pp. 175-181, at 176; M.B. Freeman, 'The Iconography of the Merode Altarpiece', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, 16 (1957), pp. 130-139, esp. pp. 133-134.

4 Jean Barrois, *Bibliothèque protypographique, ou Librairies des fils du roi Jean, Charles V, Jean de Berri, Philippe de Bourgogne et les siens*, Paris 1830, pp. 165 (nº 1077), 285 (nº 2003, 2004).

5 These manuscripts, some partial or fragmentary, are: a Latin manuscript from the fourteenth century (ms 9523 [Cat. 2098]); a Latin manuscript dated 1490 (ms 1451-1453 [Cat. 2099]); a fifteenth-century copy containing a partial Flemish translation, formerly owned by the nunnery of Our Lady of Galilee in Ghent (ms 3045-3049 [Cat. 3000]); two fifteenth-century manuscripts from the Benedictine nunnery of Vorst (3026-3030 [Cat. 2369] (fragment); 4904-4906 (Cat. 2402) [IV-124]); one copied in about 1500 at the Augustinian monastery of Hoeilaart (2992-2993 [Cat. 832]); and one from the Augustinian nunnery of 's-Hertogenbosch (IV 242). See J. van den Gheyn, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Tome troisième: théologie*, Brussels 1903, pp. 290-292. Further, see I. Uyttenhove, '"Openbaringen" van de Heilige Birgitta van Zweden in het Nederlands', M.A. thesis, Universiteit Gent 2008/2009, p. 56; U.S. Olson, 'The Life and Works of St Birgitta in Netherlandish Translations', in B. Morris and V.M. O'Mara (ed.), *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernacular*, Turnhout 2000, pp. 117-151.

6 Uyttenhove 2008/2009 (note 5), p. 56.

7 S. Carpels, 'Het klooster Maria Troon in Dendermonde. Een studie naar de identiteit van de Birgittinessen in de laatmiddeleeuwse Nederlanden', M.A. thesis, Universiteit Gent 2009/2010.

8 Augustine, *Ep.* 1387, in *Patrologiæ cursus completus, Series Latina* [*PL*], ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols, Paris 1844-1865, vol. 33, col. 527: 'Nimis autem longum est, convenienter disputare de varietate signorum, quæ cum ad res divinas pertinent, sacramenta appellantur.' See also W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids 1994, vol. 3, p. 349.

9 See D.M. Cottrell, 'Birds, Beasts, and Blossoms: Form and Meaning in Jan van Eyck's Cloths of Honor', Diss., Case Western University 1998, esp. pp. 39-45.

10 Weale 1908 (note 1), p. 41. This monogram was considered to have magical force in the middle ages. The Museum of London has a

thirteenth- or fourteenth-century brooch used as an amulet against fever (Accession number 80.73/1), bearing the inscription +a+g+l+a+ avemariagra.

11 For the inscription on the hem of God's robe, see Apoc 19:16: 'Et habet in vestimento et in femore suo scriptum "Rex regum et dominus dominantium."' This is picked up by Bridget of Sweden, *Revelationes extravagantes* 17, in Bridget of Sweden (Birgitta Birgersdotter), *Revelationes*, Lübeck [before 25.11.1492], *GW* 4391, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, shelfmark 2° Inc. c. a. 2689, fol. A4r: 'O quam honeste et morigerose oportet eas in conspectu intuentium eas. cum verbis et moribus incedere: cum inuitati ad nuptias intuentes eas. sint scilicet virgo maria mater dei cum toto celesti exercitu. Sponsus vero desiderans eas est verus deus. rex regum et dominus dominantium [Apoc 19:16]: potensque super omnia creata.' C.J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton 1982, p. 18, points out that a similar phrase begins one of the prayers said by a priest prior to offering the mass according to the use of St Donatian in Bruges, which may be taken as typical of Flemish uses; see *Breuarium ad vsum insignis ecclesie sancti Donatiani Brugensis Dyocesis Tornacensis*, Paris 1520, fol. lxxijv (=Iviijv) in the section 'Dominicis diebus': 'Domine iesu christe deus meus *rex regum & dominus dominantium* creator omnium rerum qui non spernis preces pauperum exaudi me indignum famulum tuum [...].' Purtle mistranscribed 'spernis preces' as 'supernis principes.'

12 Further, see K. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice*, Cambridge 2007. I refer to the biblical book as the 'Apocalypse' to prevent confusion with the *Revelations* of Bridget.

13 Further, see particularly M.J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge 1992.

14 There has been some debate whether the central figure is intended as a depiction of God the Father or of Christ. The Trinitarian emphasis of the texts examined in the present paper, notably Bridget and ps.-Augustine's *Soliloquium*, suggests that the figure is intended to represent God as Trinity, avoiding the somewhat grotesque three-faced figures by which the Trinity was sometimes depicted, on which see R. Pettazzoni, 'The Pagan Origins of the Three-Headed Representation of the Christian Trinity', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 9 (1946), pp. 135-151.

15 Herzner 1995 (note 1), p. 32: 'Die zitierte Apokalypsen-Perikope erweist sich auch als unergiebige Quelle, was die anderen wesentlichen Gegenstände und Gestalten des Altares betrifft, nämlich den Lebensbrunnen und die Taube des Heiligen Geistes im unteren Register; Christus, Maria, Johannes den Täufer, die musizierenden Engel und die Stammeltern im oberen. Sie finden überhaupt keine Erwähnung.'

16 Bridget, *Revelationes cælestes* VIII.1, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. bb1r-v: 'Vidi palacium grande incomprehensibile magnitudine: simile celo sereno [...]. In palacio vero vidi thronum mirabilem. in quo sedebat quasi vnus homo fulgentior sole: incomprehensibilis pulcritudinis. et immense potentie dominus; Cuius splendor erat incomprehensibilis. in longitudine et profunditate et latitudine; ¶ Virgo autem quedam stabat iuxta sedem throni. mirabili fulgore coruscans: habens in capite preciosam coronam; Et omnes illi assistentes seruiebant sedenti in throno. laudantes eum in hymnis et canticis: et honorabant illam virginem reuerenter. vt reginam celorum. ¶ Ille igitur qui sedebat in throno / voce honestissima dixit michi; Ego sum creator celi et terre. vnus cum patre et spiritu sancto verus deus. Quia deus est pater / deus filius / deus spiritus sanctus: non tres dij. sed tres persone et vnus deus; Nunc autem querere poteris Si tres sunt persone. quare non tres dij? Respondeo tibi. quod deus est ipsa potentia. ipsa sapientia. ipsa bonitas. [...] Vnus ergo deus & tres persone. quia vna natura trium. vna operatio et voluntas: vna gloria & potestas. [...] Deitas quippe misit verbum suum marie virgini: per angelum suum gabrielem. Nichilominus tamen idem deus mittens et missus a seipso. erat cum angelo: erat in gabriele. et ante gabrielem in virgine; Dicto autem verbo ab angelo: verbum factum est caro in virgine; Hoc verbum ego sum qui loquor tecum. [...] [fol. bb1v] Ideo ego sum verus dominus. nec aliquis vere dominus dicendus est nisi ego solus. quia a me est omnis potestas et dominatio: & potentie mee nullus resistere poterit; Ego eciam sum rex corone; Numquid sponsa mea scis tu quare dixerim rex corone? Certe deitas mea sine principio erat: et sine fine erit et est; Hec igitur deitas merito corone assimilatur. quia corona sine principio et sine fine est.'

17 As well as expressing the scriptural themes of the glory of God in the heavens (Ps 19:1) and in his temple (Ps 29:9), and of Christ as the radiance of the divine glory enthroned by the divine majesty (Heb 1:3) and worshipped by the angels (Heb 1:6), the streaming light also hints at the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation, mediated to the Western middle ages by ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite.

18 Philip 1971 (note 1), pp. 70-75, 80, 98; Herzner 1995 (note 1), pp. 45-47.

19 P. Coremans (ed.), *L'Agneau Mystique au laboratoire*, Brussels 1953, pp. 103-104.

20 E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, 2 vols, Cambridge 1953, vol. 1, pp. 228-230.

21 O. Pächt, 'Panofsky's *Early Netherlandish Painting*-II', *The Burlington Magazine* 98 (1956), pp. 267-279, at 267-269.

22 J.R.J. van Asperen de Boer, 'A Scientific Re-examination of the Ghent Altarpiece', *Oud Holland* 93 (1979), pp. 141-214, at 176.

23 Augustine, *Sermo* 65 (*De exhortatione ad generalem hominum instructionem pro desiderio vitæ cælestis, et contemptu præsentis*), *PL* 40, cols. 1350-1351: 'Omnis enim homo christianus desiderare debet patriam cœlestem, et Deum Patrem omnipotentem qui in cœlis habitat [...]. Illa vero patria cœlestis, in qua Deus cum sanctis Angelis et electis suis habitat, finem non habet. [...] De hac igitur captivitate, de hoc tenebrarum carcere eripi laboremus, et non ut servi hunc cibum et potum vanitatis præsentis anxium et laboriosum appetamus, sed ut filii liberi cœlestem desideremus cibum et potum, hunc videlicet qui plena satietas est civium supernorum. [...] Illuc enim summo studio properare debemus, ubi sine interruptione manere speramus, ubi nullus timor de morte, nulla dubitatio de hoste. Ibi vita sine fine, juventus sine senectute, lux sine tenebris, gaudium sine tristitia, voluntas sine molestia, requies sine labore, satietas sine fastidio, claritas sine nube.'
The association with Augustine is made by De Baets 1961 (note 2), pp. 595-596.

24 Hugh of St Victor, *De anima* IV.16, *PL* 177, col. 189: 'In ea siquidem cœlesti patria est vita sine morte, juventus sine senectute, sanitas sine infirmitate, requies sine labore, gaudium sine tristitia, pax sine discordia, delectatio sine fastidio, lux sine tenebris, pulchritudo sine turpitudine, agilitas sine ponderositate, fortitudo sine imbecillitate, libertas sine servitute, voluptas sine

anxietate, longævitas sine vitæ termino, sapientia sine insipientia, amicitia sine inimicitia, concordia sine discordia, honor sine dedecore, securitas sine timore.' Cf. De Baets 1961 (note 2), pp. 595-596.
A parallel passage is found in ps.-Augustine, *Soliloquia animæ ad deum* XXXV, *PL* 40, col. 895: '[N]on erit hostis impugnans, nec ulla illecebra, sed summa et certa securitas, et secura tranquillitas, et tranquilla jucunditas, et jucunda felicitas, et felix æternitas, et æterna beatitudo, et beata Trinitas, et Trinitatis unitas, et unitatis deitas, et deitatis beata visio, quæ est gaudium Domini mei [...]. O regnum beatitudinis sempiternæ, ubi tu, Domine, spes sanctorum et diadema gloriæ, facie ad faciem videris a sanctis, lætificans eos undique in pace tua quæ exsuperat omnem sensum! Ibi gaudium infinitum, lætitia sine tristitia, salus sine dolore, vita sine labore, lux sine tenebris, vita sine morte, omne bonum sine omni malo.'
The following passage from *Soliloquia* XXXVI (also included in the *Glossa Ordinaria* on Apoc 22:4) contains much of the imagery of the celestial *patria* also found in the Ghent Altarpiece; see *PL* 40, cols. 895-896; *Biblia sacra cum Glossa ordinaria*, 6 vols, Rome 1603, vol. 6, cols. 1687-1688: 'Cum ergo pervenerimus ad te sapientiæ fontem, ad te lumen indeficiens, ad te lucem inexstinguibilem, ut te non jam per speculum in ænigmate, sed facie ad faciem videamus [1 Cor 13:12]; tunc satiabitur in bonis desiderium nostrum, quia nihil erit exterius quod desideretur. Tu, Domine summum bonum, eris præmium beatorum, et diadema decoris eorum, et lætitia sempiterna super capita eorum, pacificans eos intus et extra in pace tua quæ exsuperat omnem sensum [Phil 4:7]. Ibi videbimus, amabimus et laudabimus. Videbimus in lumine tuo lumen tuum. Quoniam apud te est fons vitæ, et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen [Ps 35:10]. Quale autem lumen? Lumen immensum, lumen incorporeum, incomprehensibile, lumen indeficiens, inexstinguibile et inaccessibile, lumen increatum, lumen veridicum, quod illuminat oculos Angelorum, quod lætificat juventutem sanctorum, quod est lumen luminum et fons vitæ, quod tu es, Domine, Deus meus. Tu es quippe lumen, in cujus lumine videbimus lumen: te scilicet in te, in splendore vultus tui, quoniam te videbimus facie ad faciem. Quid est videre facie ad faciem, nisi quod ait Apostolus, cognoscere sicut et cognitus sum [1 Cor 13:12]? Cognoscere Trinitatem tuam, hoc est videre facie ad faciem. Cognoscere Patris potentiam, Filii sapientiam, Spiritus sancti clementiam, ipsius summæ Trinitatis unam et indivisam essentiam, est videre faciem Dei vivi. Hoc est summum bonum, gaudium Angelorum atque omnium sanctorum, præmium vitæ æternæ, gloria spirituum, lætitia sempiterna, corona decoris [Jer 13:18], bravium felicitatis [Phil 3:14], requies opulenta, pulchritudo pacis, intimum et æternum gaudium, paradisus Dei, Jerusalem cœlestis, vita beata, plenitudo beatitudinis, gaudium æternitatis, pax Dei quæ exsuperat omnem sensum [Phil 4:7].'
This tradition is picked up later, for example in Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherii Comoediam*, ed. J.P. Lacaita, Florence 1887, vol. 4, pp. 173-174, commenting on *Purgatorio* XXVIII.91-96.

25 See for example Hugh of St Victor (?), *Elucidationes variæ in Scripturam moraliter* CXIX, *PL* 177, col. 545: 'Merces est vita sine morte, gaudium sine mœrore, jucunditas sine dolore.' Neither De Baets 1961 (note 2) nor I were able to find a source corresponding exactly to Van Eyck's inscription. Goodgal 1981 (note 1), pp. 236 n6, 355, convincingly relates the theme of left and right (reversed to be seen from God's perspective rather than the viewer's) to Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel*, *PL*, col. 389, and the theme of headship to Christ's headship of the church. Bridget's explanation of eternity as God's crown unites the elements of the inscription even more closely.

26 Bridget, *Revelationes cælestes* VIII.48, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. cc2r: 'Tunc vero illi prothoplasti senserunt iusticiam. quando nuditatem obtinuerunt pro vestitu glorie. famem pro abundantia. pruritum carnis pro virginitate: timorem pro securitate. laborem pro quiete.'

27 Weale 1908 (note 1), p. 37.

28 Bridget, *Revelationes* XI.6 (*Sermo angelicus*), in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. ee4r-v: 'Vnde inestimabilis vere credendus est. coronarum numerus. quibus ipse Deus sublimissime fulget. cuius virtutes omnia que fuerunt [fol. ee4v] que sunt et erunt. pluralitate et magnitudine et dignitate incomparabiliter excedunt [...]. quem tamen specialiter tres virtutes veluti fulgidissime tres corone. gloriosius exornant; Virtus namque illa. qua creauit angelos. erat ipsius corona prima [...]; Illa quoque virtus. qua creauit hominem, erat ei corona secunda. qua et ipse homo. ex insipiencia sua. hostili suggestori consentiens subito priuatus est. [...] Virtus vero illa. que [*sc*. qua] te o virgo desiderabilis. ad suam eternam gloriam creauit. ipsum glorificauit quasi corona tercia.'

29 Bridget, *Revelationes cælestes* I.31, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. c1ov: 'Videbat sponsa reginam celi matrem dei Habentem preciosam coronam inestimabilem in capite suo. & capillos extensos super spatulas admirabilis pulcritudinis. Tunicam auream splendore indicibili choruscantem. Et mantellum blaueum de azuro seu sereni celi coloris. Cumque de tam speciosa visione vehementer admiraretur sponsa. et in tali admiratione tota staret quodam interno stupore suspensa. Illico apparuit ei beatus iohannes baptista. qui ait illi. Audi diligenter quid hoc notat. Corona igitur notat. quod regina et domina est & mater regis angelorum Capilli protensi. quod virgo est purissima & immaculata Mantellum celi coloris. quod omnia temporalia erant ei quasi mortua. Tunica aurea notat. quod diuina caritate ardens. & feruida fuit. interius et exterius.'

30 Bridget, *Revelationes cælestes* I.31, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fols. c1ov-d1r: 'In corona autem eius posuit filius eius septem lilia. et inter hec lilia posuit septem lapides Primum igitur lilium est humilitas eius. Secundum timor. Tercium [fol. d1r] obediencia. Quartum patiencia. Quintum stabilitas. Sextum mititas. quia mitis est dare omnibus petentibus; Septimum est misericordia in necessitatibus; In quacumque enim necessitate fuerit homo. si hanc toto corde inuocauerit. saluabitur. Inter hec fulgentia lilia. posuit filius eius septem lapides preciosissimos; Primus lapis est virtuositas singularis. quia non est aliqua virtus in aliquo spiritu siue in corpore aliquo. quam ipsa hanc eandem virtutem non habeat excellencius; Secundus lapis est perfectissima mundicia, quia ista regina celi sic pura fuit. quod vna macula peccati inueniri numquam potuit in ea. a principio ingressus eius in mundum vsque ad vltimam diem mortis ipsius; Nec omnes dyaboli tantam impuritatem reperire poterant in ea. vbi cuspis acus poni posset; Ipsa vere erat purissima Nam non decuit regem glorie iacere nisi in vase purissimo. et mundissimo et electissimo. pre omnibus angelis et hominibus. Tercius lapis fuit pulcritudo eius. quia deus de pulcritudine eiusdem matris sue iugiter laudatur a sanctis suis. et gaudium sanctorum angelorum et omnium sanctarum animarum. impletur ex pulcritudine eius; Quartus lapis preciosus corone. est sapientia eiusdem virginis matris. quia ipsa impleta est omni diuina sapiencia cum deo. et ex ea omnis impletur et perficitur sapientia; Quintus lapis est fortitudo. quia ipsa sic est fortis cum deo. quod omnia quecumque creata et facta sunt. potest deprimere; Sextus eciam lapis est claritas eius que sic clara est. quod angeli qui habent

oculos clariores luce. illuminantur ex ea. et demones non audent respicere in claritatem eius; Septimus lapis. est plenitudo omnis delectationis et eciam spiritualis dulcedinis. que in ea sic plena est. quod non est aliquod gaudium quod non augetur ex ea. nulla delectatio que non plenior fit et perficiatur ex ea. et ex eius visione beata. quia ipsa impleta et repleta est gracia. et vltra omnes sanctos; Ipsa est enim puritatis vas in quo iacuit panis angelorum. & in quo est omnis dulcedo et pulcritudo; ¶ Hos septem lapides posuit filius eius inter hec septem lilia. que erant in corona eius. Ipsam ergo o sponsa filij eius. honora & lauda toto corde tuo. quia vere ipsa est omni laude et honore digna.'

31 While blue is of course the most traditional colour for the Virgin, as seen in Van Eyck's *Virgin and Child by a fountain* and *Virgin and Child in a church*, it is by no means inevitable. In the Annunciation scene on the exterior of the Ghent Altar, the Virgin is dressed in white; in the *Rolin*, *Lucca* and *Van der Paele Virgin and Child* she wears a red mantle.

32 Further on Mary's crown (though without reference to Bridget), see Purtle 1982 (note 10), pp. 35-36. An earlier literary source for the crowning with lilies and roses could be Bonaventure's *Psalterium BVM*, Psalm 16: 'She will give you as your Spouse the Son of the Father: and a crown incomparably radiant with the lilies of Paradise' (*Sponsum dabit vobis Patris Filium: et de Paradisi liliis coronam imcomparabiliter radiantem*); and *Psalterium BVM*, Psalm 47: 'Thou hast ascended, hymned by the angelic choirs: buoyed by the archangels, crowned with lilies and roses' (*Ascendisti, alternantibus hymnidicis angelicis choris: archangelis constipata, rosis et liliis coronata*); in Bonaventure (Giovanni di Fidanza), *Opera omnia*, ed. A.C. Peltier, Paris 1868, vol. 14, pp. 202, 206. However, Bonaventure makes no mention of the precious stones on the crown that appear both in Bridget and Van Eyck. Another source could be the extravagant *Book of the Virgin's crown* (*Libellus de corona Virginis*) by ps.-Alfonso of Toledo, *PL* 96, cols. 285-318, which describes no less than twenty-four items on Mary's golden crown, namely twelve different stones (topaz, ruby, chalcedony, sapphire, agate, jasper, garnet, emerald, amethyst, peridot, chrysoprase, beryl), six flowers (lily, crocus, rose, violet, sunflower, chamomile) and six heavenly bodies or constellations.

33 There was some disagreement amongst the commentators whether the woman was intended as a cipher for Mary or the church; see the comments by Andrew of Caesarea on Apoc 12:1, in *Glossa ordinaria* 1603 (note 23) vol. 6, col. 571: 'Hanc mulierem nonnulli Dei genitricem virginemque matrem per omnia sanctissimam interpretati sunt, quam ea omnia quæ ordine hunc consequuntur, prius perpessa autumant, quam diuinus illius partus perfecte cognosceretur. At magnus ille Methodius ad ecclesiam retulit [...].'

34 Bonaventure, *Sermo* 61 (*In festo omnium sanctorum*), repr. in *Sermones de diversis*, ed. J.G. Bougerol, 2 vols, Paris 1993, vol. 2, p. 824, applies Wis 7:29 to Christ, relating this image to that of Christ as the sun in Apoc 21, commenting: 'Non eget sole neque luna ratione illius pulchritudinis; et pulchrificat ipse Filius sive Agnus qui est candor et substantia lucis æternæ et speculum sine macula.' Bonaventure applies Wis 7:29 to Mary in *Sermo* 50 (*De assumptione BVM*), ed. Bougerol, vol. 2, p. 264; and *Sermo* 53 (*De Nativitate BVM*), ed. Bougerol, vol. 2, p. 684. More generally on the iconographical significance of crowns as attributes of virgins, martyrs and doctors of the church, see E. Hall and H. Uhr, 'Aureola super Auream: Crowns and Related Symbols of Special Distinction for Saints in Late Gothic and Renaissance Iconography', *The Art Bulletin* 67 (1985), pp. 567-603; see also Meiss 1945 (note 3), p. 180.

35 At lauds for the feast of the Assumption, see Weale 1908 (note 1), p. 79; W.H.J. Weale, *The Van Eycks and their Art*, London 1912, p. 123; Panofsky 1938 (note 1), p. 428; Purtle 1982 (note 11), pp. 76-77, 416-419.

36 Bridget, *Revelationes cælestes* I.42, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. d7r-v: 'Ideo tripliciter honorata sum a filio meo. Nam primo facta sum angelis & hominibus honorabilior. ita vt nulla sit virtus in deo que non fulgeat in me. licet ipse sit fons & omnium creator. [...] Anima et corpus meum puriora sunt sole. et mundiora speculo. Unde sicut in speculo viderentur tres persone si astarent sic in puritate mea videri potest pater et filius et spiritus-sanctus.'

37 I could only find two other examples of these two verses cited in this order; the first is in Wolbero S. Pantaleonis, *Commentaria vetustissima et profundissima super Canticum Canticorum Salomonis*, *PL* 195, cols. 1191-1192 (on Song of Songs 5:10): 'Et de sapientia Dei Patris quæ ipse est scribitur: Super omnem pulchritudinem stellarum [col. 1192] luci comparata invenitur prior; candor est enim lucis æternæ et speculum sine macula Dei majestatis.' Wolbero does not particularly associate this imagery with Mary. The other example is a macaronic English treatise on the figure of Wisdom, in W.K. Smart, *Some English and Latin Sources and Parallels for the Morality of Wisdom*, Menasha 1912, p. 10, but this is unlikely to have been a source for Van Eyck.

38 Another possible source is Bernard of Clairveaux's *Parable* I, *PL* 183, col. 757, in which he describes the father of the prodigal son: 'Et ubi modo est pater ille potentissimus et dulcissimus atque liberalissimus?'

39 Bridget, *Revelationes cælestes* I.19, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. c4v: 'Ego sum creator celi et terre. Ego habeo tria mecum. Ego sum potentissimus. ego sapientissimus. ego eciam virtuosissimus Ego namque sum ita potens. quod angeli in celo honorant me. Demones in inferno non audent inspicere me Omnia elementa stant ad nutum meum; ¶ Sum eciam ita sapiens. quod nullus valet inuestigare sapientiam meam; Ita sciens. quod omnia que iam fuerunt. & ea que futura sunt ego scio Sum quoque ita rationabilis. quod nec minimum quidem siue vermis. siue aliquod aliud animal quantumlibet deforme sit. est sine causa factum. ¶ Sum eciam ita virtuosus. quod a me tanquam a fonte bono. omne bonum emanat. Et sicut a vite bona. omnis dulcedo procedit.'

40 Bridget, *Revelationes cælestes* I.15, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. c1r-v: 'Ego sum sicut vnus rex magnus et potens. Ad regem enim pertinent quatuor. Primo debet esse diues. Secundo mitis. Tercio sapiens. Quarto caritatiuus. Ego vere sum rex angelorum et omnium hominum. [fol. c1v] Ego eciam habeo illas quatuor proprietates quas dixi Primo namque sum ditissimus. quia omnibus do necessaria. nec minus habeo post datum; Secundo sum mitissimus. quia omnibus petentibus paratus sum dare Tercio itaque sum sapientissimus. quia scio quid vnicuique debetur et expedit; Quarto eciam sum caritatiuus. quia paratior sum dare quam aliquis petere.'

41 Bridget, *Revelationes extravagantes* 37, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. A9v: 'Vere superabundanti largitate te effundis in nos: ymmo si dici phas est. prodigus tu es pre desiderio nostri.'

42 Bridget, *Revelationes cælestes* VIII.56, in Bridget 1492 (note 11), fol. dd1r: 'Et statim illa que vidi non erant corporalia sed spiritualia: & oculi mei spirituales aperiebantur. ad audiendum et videndum. [...] Deinde veniebant adam et eua cum martiribus et confessoribus. & omnibus alijs sanctis ab eis

descendentibus: humanitas
vero christi nondum videbatur.
nec corpus benedicte matris eius:
sed omnes expectabant quod
venirent; Terra quoque et aqua.
videbantur eleuari vsque ad celos et
omnia que erant in eis humiliabant
se: et cum reuerentia incuruabant
se potestati. [N] Post hec autem
vidi vnum altare quod erat in sede
maiestatis. et calicem cum vino
& aqua et panem in similitudine
hostie oblate in altari; Et tunc vidi
qualiter in vna ecclesia in mundo.
quidam sacerdos inchoabat mis-
sam. indutus vestibus sacerdotali-
bus. qui peractis omnibus pertinen-
tibus ad missam: cum peruenisset
ad verba quibus benediceret
panem. videbam quod quasi sol et
luna et stelle cum planetis omnibus.
et omnes celi cum cursibus &
motibus suis. alternantibus vocibus
cum dulcisona nota resonabant:
omnisque cantus et modulatio
audiebatur Innumerabilia quoque
genera musicorum videbantur.
quorum dulcissimum sonum. sensu
comprehendere impossibile est et
effari; [...] Prolatis igitur verbis dei
a sacerdote super panem. videbatur
michi. quod idem panis erat in
sede maiestatis in tribus figuris.
nichilominus manens in manu
sacerdotis. Et ipse panis fiebat
agnus viuens. [...] et omnes
angeli seruiebant eis. qui tante
multitudinis erant sicut athomi
in sole: et procedebat fulgor
mirabilis de agno.'