

Medieval Representation of the Cherub and the Diagram in Beinecke MS 416

By: Brian Noell

The cherub with six wings can be traced, if not back to late-antique representation of angelic figures,¹ at least to manuscript illumination of the Carolingian period. A number of these examples are associated with the opening lines of the book of Isaiah: “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’”²

It is notable that depictions of the vision of Isaiah in manuscripts do not always portray the wings of the seraphim as the text describes. The Metz Coronation Sacramentary, for example, contains a rendering of Isaiah’s vision showing the seraphim with two wings covering their bodies.³ Their four additional wings, however, are held aloft. Their hands extend slightly to the sides and their feet protrude from under a robe. The Drogo Sacramentary, another manuscript from the Carolingian era, features an image of a seraph superimposed on the text of the *Sanctus* of the Mass, inspired in part by

¹ There is a sixth century bronze mirror from Aleppo illustrating Ezekiel’s seraphic vision. The angelic being has six wings and stands between two fiery wheels. Two wings are crossed in front of his body, two are extended to sides, and another pair crosses over his head. Similar to later depictions of the seraph, its face is exposed, its hands are open at its sides, and its feet protrude from under its wings. The image appears in Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Angels* (London, 1980), 11 but there is no reference to where the piece is presently held.

² Biblical quotes in English are from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York, 1973).

³ Image in Grover Zinn, “Hugh of St. Victor, Isaiah’s Vision, and *De Archa Noe*,” in *Church and the Arts*, *Studies in Church History* 28 (Oxford, 1992), 108.

Isaiah's text.⁴ Two wings cover the body, two extend to sides, and two are held aloft, crossing each other.⁵

Ezekiel's seraphic vision was another subject of frequent illustration in medieval manuscripts.⁶ The prophet gives a specific description of the bodily appearance of the angelic creatures that he witnessed saying, "they had the form of men, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands." He goes on to say that they spread two of their wings while they covered their bodies with the other set.

A depiction of the vision in the Roda Bible of the mid-eleventh century from the monastery Sant'Pere de Roda in Catalonia features an illustration in which four angelic figures flank Christ in majesty. The seraphim have human heads, while their three additional visages appear above pairs of upraised wings. Their two additional wings cover their bodies. The angelic figures have their hands extended and their hooves protruding from under a tunic.⁷ Another example is found in the Lobbes Bible, written in 1084 at the abbey St. Peter of Lobbes in the Sambre Valley west of Namur. It features an Ezekiel initial with a four-winged tetramorph who covers its body with one pair of wings

⁴ Zinn, "Hugh of St. Victor," 108.

⁵ It should be noted that this image is also has attributes of the seraphim in Ezekiel's vision, notably the four faces.

⁶ Ezekiel seemingly supplied the numerical framework for our diagram as well (30 feathers total, 5 on each wing). The first book opens, "In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), the word of the lord came to Ezekiel the priest..."

⁷ See Wilhelm Neuss, *Das Buch Ezechiel in Theologie und Kunst bis zum Ende des XII Jahrhunderts* (Muenster, 1912), 205.

and raises another set overhead. The creature holds its hands with palms outward and displays its cloven feet.⁸ The Ezekiel initial from the twelfth-century Bible of St. Bénigne of Dijon also contains images of seraphim. In this illumination there are two figures but each have only one face instead of the four described by the prophet. In addition, the seraphim have six wings as opposed to the four in the vision, one pair in front of their robed bodies, the second behind them, and a third outstretched over their heads. Each holds a sword and stands upon two winged wheels.⁹ Finally, an initial from the twelfth-century Winchester Bible depicts the seraphic tetramorph.¹⁰ Like the St. Bénigne example, this one has six wings rather than the four specified in Ezekiel. One pair is crossed in front of the body. Another is opened to the side, while a third extends above its four heads. The legs have a darkish hue recalling Ezekiel's description but the figure's feet are human, unlike those described in the text.

In addition to illustrations of the seraphim in Isaiah and Ezekiel, other angelic prototypes were to be found in medieval book art. Many artists portrayed the golden cherubim that accompanied the Ark of the Covenant described in Exodus and other books of the Pentateuch. The Roda Bible features an image of the dedication of the temple in which the cherubim flanking the veiled Ark are depicted.¹¹ Two wings cover their bodies, two are off to the side and behind, and a third pair stretch out uncrossed above. Their robes are visible with feet protruding beneath and hands extended on either side. The

⁸ Neuss, *Das Buch Ezechiel*, 232.

⁹ Neuss, *Das Buch Ezechiel*, 239.

¹⁰ Neuss, *Das Buch Ezechiel*, fig. 44.

¹¹ Walter Cahn, *Romanesque Bible Illumination* (Ithaca, 1982), 73.

Deuteronomy initial of the Lobbes Bible also features cherubim with the Ark of the Covenant. They have four wings, two of which cover their bodies. Each extends one of its remaining wings over the Ark to shield it while the final one is at rest at the other side of its body. The hands are extended at the waist, palms out.¹²

At the same time that biblical cherubim and seraphim were being depicted in book illumination, these angelic beings were also playing an increasingly important role in Christian thought. According to Henry Mayr-Harting, this was due in part to the diffusion of John Scot Eriugena's mid ninth-century Latin translation of the Pseudo-Dionysius' *De coelesti hierarchia*. The Pseudo-Dionysius set out a well-defined celestial hierarchy with seraphim and cherubim at the pinnacle of the nine choirs of angels. Because they were closest to God in contemplation and received his illumination most directly, they are able to pass this light to the lower orders of angels and to deliver it to the minds of men and creatures. Under the influence of the *De coelesti hierarchia*, western churchmen, monastics in particular, came to see cherubim and seraphim as a class of heavenly *illuminati* mirroring that of contemplatives on earth. This notion dovetailed with Gregory the Great's thought on angels, still exercising a great influence in Western theology in the Central Middle Ages. Gregory taught that angels were models of the balance between contemplation and action. He considered contemplation to be the necessary pre-condition of virtuous action and he heralded angels as those who best exemplified the proper balance of the two poles.¹³

¹² Cahn, *Romanesque Bible Illumination*, 127.

¹³ Henry Mayr-Harting, *Perceptions of Angels in History* (Oxford, 1998), 16.

The cherub with six inscribed wings was linked from early in its existence to the teachings of the twelfth-century educator Hugh of St. Victor, particularly his explication of the meaning of Isaiah 6 in *De arca Noe morali*. Edited by an English Augustinian named Clement,¹⁴ Hugh's discussion of the seraphim appears as early as the latter twelfth-century in a manuscript from the Cistercian monastery of Sawley.¹⁵ In this excerpt Hugh asserts that the seraphim represent the two testaments of the scriptures. He asserts that it is possible for man to climb past the chorus of angels and reach the divine presence through the knowledge of them. However, this is only to be done through submitting the seraphim (scriptures) to threefold exegesis. The three pairs of wings represent the three modes of explication: history, allegory, and tropology. They are in pairs because they lead the spirits of readers to the love of both God and neighbor.

The seraphim cover their bodies with one set of wings. This pair represents historical exegesis, the words and description that introduce the intellect to the actual events of the Bible. It is notable that Hugh departs from the biblical text in describing the disposition of this first pair of wings. Isaiah specifies that the seraphim cover their own

¹⁴ Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, "Alain de Lille: problèmes d'attribution," in *Alain de Lille, Gautier de Châtillon, Jakemart Giélée et leur temps* (Lille, 1980), 27-8. The text as edited by Clement is found in *Patrologia Latina* 210: 269-72. The cherub diagram may have passed from Augustinian circles in England to the continent. Paris, Bib. Nat. MS. lat. 14500, a thirteenth-century manuscript from St. Victor containing the figure and accompanying texts suggests the English connection. The editor of a new catalogue of St. Victor manuscripts observes that the seraph image and its text were executed in a polished English hand at the beginning of the thirteenth century. He also states that there are also a number of cursive notes accompanying the text in contemporary English hands. See Guilbert Ouy, *Les manuscrits de l'abbaye de Saint-Victor*, vol. 2 (Turnhout, 1999), 227.

¹⁵ Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS. 66. Lucy Sandler reproduces the image as plate 43 in *The Psalter of Robert De Lisle in the British Library* (London, 1999) as does Suzanne Lewis in *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica majora* (Berkeley, 1987), fig. 202. Another early example also shows knowledge of this text. Frankfurt Stadtbibliothek Batt. 167 contains a twelfth century version of the image from Eastern France. Censors described in this text as hanging from the second pair of wings are depicted in the image. The drawing is reproduced in Swarzenski and Schilling *Die illuminierten Handschriften und Einzelminiaturen des Mittelalters und der Renaissance in Frankfurter Besitz* (Frankfurt, 1929), pl. 36 and in Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art*, reprint ed. (Toronto, 1989), fig. 63.

faces with one pair of wings and makes no mention of the veiling of their bodies. Hugh conflates Isaiah's vision with that of Ezekiel, with the result that the seraphim veil their own bodies with one pair of wings. This is similar to visual depictions of Isaiah's vision in which the seraphim cover their bodies like Ezekiel's angels and may even suggest that when Hugh was developing his discussion he had such images and not texts in mind.¹⁶

The seraphim use one of the wings in their second set to veil God's head while they cover God's feet with the other. This disposition represents the allegorical understanding of scripture, by which the mind explores God's body. In allegorical exegesis the student searches for the ways in which Old Testament history foretells the incarnation of Christ and the formation of the Church. Yet, the covering of the head and feet represent the fact that, in this mode of exegesis, the nature of God's divinity is not revealed. Neither a beginning nor an end of God can be found. Interestingly, however, Hugh insists that, although the Bible states that the face of God is veiled, he wishes to depict it exposed. Grover Zinn believes that this places the viewer in the position of angel, rising in sanctity to behold the divine vision. Such a state is beyond that of Isaiah's earthly vision of the Lord enthroned in which the face was veiled.¹⁷

The student of the diagram ascends to the vision of the divine with the third pair of seraphic wings. This final set represents tropological exegesis, which the individual uses to exhort others to the study of good conduct. Having engaged in long study of the previous modes and having achieved moral understanding, the spiritual aspirant is finally

¹⁶ Grover Zinn, "Hugh of St. Victor," 106-7. See the St. Benigne and Winchester Bible Ezekiel initials, for example.

¹⁷ Zinn, "Hugh of St. Victor," 109.

encouraged to instruct others in what he has learned. He broadcasts what he perceives to be the ethical import of biblical events, yet he does so praising God and not himself.

This text, passed down with a number of examples of the image of the cherub with six inscribed wings, stresses both the contemplative and the active elements in devotion. Not only should the student attend to the historical content and allegorical meaning of the Bible, he should also seek to garner moral lessons and to share them with his fellows. It is only in this last phase that the devotee can soar towards the beatific vision that Hugh optimistically believes to be attainable by mortal men.

At the same time that the excerpt from Hugh's *De arca Noe morali* was appearing in manuscripts containing the cherub figure, a second text was also in circulation with the image. Unlike the first text, which makes no reference to the categories on the angel's wings, this one directly addresses the content of the diagram.¹⁸ Marie Thérèse d'Alverny believes this tract to be the work of Alan of Lille.¹⁹

The text launches without fanfare into an orderly explication of the diagram's elements.²⁰ The first wing, confession of sin, is defined as the lament for one's infirmity, ignorance, and malice. The author places emphasis on the second feather: integrity. He cautions against spreading confession among different priests, a hypocrisy that can impede the winning of mercy. He also encourages his reader to tell all the details of his

¹⁸ One of the earliest known examples of the cherub figure possessing this text is found in a twelfth-century codex from the German Cistercian monastery of Himmerod, John Rylands Library MS 6. See Montague Rhodes James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Latin Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library* vol. 1 (Manchester, 1921), 12-4. A manuscript from the late-thirteenth century, Bib. Nat. MS. lat. 15988, also presents the image with this text. The image and text is reproduced in Sicard, *Diagrammes médiévaux* as pl. 4.

¹⁹ d'Alverny, "Alain de Lille," 27-28.

²⁰ It is found in *Patrologia Latina* 210: 273-80.

sin in confession and to think of how his repeated sins aggravate God. He should leave no sin unrecalled because such negligence or concealment could be the cause of damnation.

The third feather, firmness in confession, also receives much attention. As in feather two, memory is significant. Alan writes, “Let the studious scrutinizing and recall into memory of motives and works light up the shadows of forgetfulness. Let the fervor of spirit unveil and destroy the torpor and tepidness of negligence. Let absolutely no negligence overlook necessity.”²¹ One must work for one’s own self improvement through examining clearly and thoroughly not only the course of one’s actions but one’s motives for acting.

The second wing is making amends after confession. This cures the illness uncovered by preparatory compunction and recall of sin before the priest. Making amends is the explicit execution of the enjoined penance or a cutting short and correcting of sin which should be done with fear but also with the hope of forgiveness. The measure of correction depends on the quality and quantity of the fault. Punishment must fit the crime but it is better to pay a higher price in penance than to be lax in making satisfaction. As in confession, integrity is a key factor: one must be sincere in the performance of one’s penance in order to attain true forgiveness.

The first feather of the second wing represents the renunciation of sins, particularly those generated by vanity, iniquity, malignancy, and impiety. Vanity reflects on the self; iniquity is done against a neighbor; malign behavior is an offense against a brother; impiety is a crime against God. Each of feathers two to five corresponds to a

²¹ Oblivionis tenebras, morum et operum studiosa perscrutatio, et in memoriam revocatio illustret. Torporem autem et negligentiae teporem, fervor spiritus evellat et destruat. Necessitatem vero nulla omnino praeveniat negligentia.

specific type of person manifesting each type of vice. Thus, effusive tears (the second feather) should be shed by the self-centered. Feather three, wearing down the flesh, is enjoined to a misanthrope. Feather four, largess of charitable giving, is aimed at a greedy man who exploits his brothers. Feather five, devotion in prayer, seeks to correct the impious.

The third wing is purity of the flesh, the conqueror of the vice that eradicates all the virtues: self-indulgence. The first feather is modesty in seeing, that is, avoiding women and their charms. The second feather is chastity of hearing, not listening to lies, criticism, blasphemy, curses, provocations, obscenities, false accusations, immodest songs, or theatrical performances. The third is modesty of smell because, though a man may be seemly on the outside, he may be rotten on the inside. The fourth feather is temperance in taste or moderation in eating and drinking. The fifth is sanctified touch, one's bodily actions remaining in the service of God's commands.

The fourth wing, purity of mind, is one of the most important to Alan. It is the path to contemplation, containing the items necessary for true meditation on the divine. Alan places emphasis on inner disposition rather than on outward action in his explication of this wing. The first feather is genuine emotion. Here the person's desires should be correct and sincere. The devotee is encouraged to desire what he ought to desire and to be sincere when he loves in the way ordained by God and reason. The second feather is delight in God. This enables the individual to feel joy in contemplation. The third is chaste and ordered thought at all times. The fourth is sanctity of will. Willing correctly enables the person to achieve personal peace, which is the foundation of the

Christian religion. Alan asserts that angels hasten to help those who purify themselves by means of good will. Though such men sometimes err, their purity shines through and they are excused for their actions. The final feather on the fourth wing is simple and pure intention. As in so many other instances in Alan's explication of the cherub figure, action is less important here than disposition. Just like a moneychanger one must weigh one's motives to be sure they are correct.

The fifth and sixth wing, love of neighbor and love of God, hardly receive any explication, as if their categories were self-evident. However, Alan's commentary makes clear that they are the crowning achievements of the religious life. The sixth wing, love of God, is particularly significant because it represents the state in the individual's religious life where he attains the heights of mystical ascent. He leaves behind his own property, will, and self, giving himself completely to the will of God.

Like the excerpt from Hugh, Alan's text provides a means for the viewer of the cherub image to ascend in stages to the celestial vision. Yet, whereas Hugh suggests that moral improvement and mystical ascent are begun in study and culminated in action, Alan stresses confession, penance, and virtuous action as the foundation of contemplation. For Alan, it is only in the pursuit of an ethical life that the individual's consciousness can be purified enough to climb to the heights of contemplation of the divine.

In the early stages of the manuscript tradition, the cherub image usually appears with one or the other of the two texts that I have discussed. In the thirteenth century the image came to be associated with another textual tradition, that which reported St.

Francis' reception of the stigmata. Matthew Paris' *Chronica majora*, written and illustrated around 1245 at the Benedictine house of St. Albans in England may have been the starting point for this new association. His description of St. Francis' vision of September of 1224 was accompanied by a drawing depicting the event. Francis is shown dreaming of a six-winged celestial being affixed to a roughly hewn crucifix. The cross-members are labeled "contemplation" and "action." The seraph's wings are numbered and the inscriptions going with each of the thirty feathers correspond to those in the diagram we are studying.²² This combination of images underscored the combination of active and contemplative piety encouraged by Hugh in *De arca Noe morali*.²³ At the same time it affiliated Francis' reception of the stigmata with the moral categories of the cherub drawing itself.

By hitching the diagram to the star of one of the most renowned individuals in thirteenth-century Christendom, Matthew Paris gave the image relevance for a new generation of pious individuals.²⁴ Following his innovation, depictions of the cherub of six wings often featured the stigmata. One example can be found in a late thirteenth century manuscript from the abbey of St. James in Liège. It features a drawing of high quality of the cherub with the stigmata along with a version of Alan of Lille's text (fig.

²² See Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris*, 317-8 and note 56, 503.

²³ Hugh of St. Victor, *Moral Ark of Noah*, translated in *Hugh of Saint-Victor: Selected Spiritual Writings* (New York, 1962), 75. St. Alban's scriptorium was actively engaged in the copying of Victorine works in the late twelfth-century. Thus, Matthew would likely have had access to Hugh's writings. See Aelred Squire, "Introduction" in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, 19.

²⁴ For subsequent depictions in art portraying Francis' stigmata reception see Phillipe Faure, "Vie et mort du séraphin de Saint François d'Assise," *Revue Mabillon* (1990): 143-177.

12).²⁵ Interestingly, this is succeeded by the *lignum vitae* image seen in many *Speculum theologiae* manuscripts as well as the text of the same name written by Bonaventure.

These elements are followed by Hugh's *De arca Noe morali*. This gathering of texts and images clearly illustrates the merging of textual traditions associated with the cherub image. The diagram is accompanied by the two texts with which it was traditionally found as well as by Franciscan literature with which it was increasingly associated.

In the later Middle Ages the cherub figure continued to be copied along with elements from one or more of the three primary textual traditions.²⁶ Increasingly, however, the image is found devoid of explanatory text along with other drawings in *Speculum theologiae* collections.²⁷ The most famous is found in the De Lisle Psalter, executed before 1339, when its original owner, Robert De Lisle, divested himself of his property in order to become a Franciscan.²⁸ The manuscript is richly illuminated and contains a number of the images associated with the *Speculum theologiae*. Among them is a finely rendered version of the cherub²⁹ with curly locks and a scarf around its neck.³⁰

²⁵ Darmstadt, Hessischen Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek ms, Hs 2777. The image on f. 42v is reproduced in Sicard, *Diagrammes médiévaux*, pl. 5. For arrangement of the manuscript see *Die Handschriften der Hessischen Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek Darmstadt*, vol. 4 (Wiesbaden, 1979), 270-7.

²⁶ For example, the figure sometimes carried both the Hugh's text and Alan's tract. An example is Vatican Library, Cod. Pal. Lat. 1047, produced in France in the fourteenth century. Following a sixteenth-century editor, Migne published both texts together in the *Patrologia Latina* under Alan of Lille's name.

²⁷ For a partial list of such manuscripts see Sandler, *Psalter of Robert De Lisle*, 107-15 and Walter Cahn's review of the book in *Art Bulletin* 69 (1987), 473 (footnote 2).

²⁸ British Library MS Arundel 83 II. The book contains an inscription that says it was given at that time to two of his daughters, nuns at the Gilbertine priory of Chicksands', Campton Bedfordshire. See Sandler, *Psalter of Robert De Lisle*, 12.

²⁹ Sandler, *Psalter of Robert De Lisle*, plate 24.

³⁰ The scarf detail is found in a number of examples of the image, most notably Matthew Paris' illustration in the *Chronica majora*. See also Sicard *Diagrammes médiévaux*, plate 4. It also made it into the Franciscan tradition of representing Francis' vision. See Faure, "Vie et mort du séraphin," figs. 5 and 13.

Although the disposition of the wings corresponds with the earlier versions of the diagram, a closer look at the accompanying labels reveals that the subcategories for a number of the wings are completely different from those appearing in earlier examples. In addition to a variety of completely new labels, elements from one category find their way into others. For example, “*Lacrimarum effusio*” should be with “penance” although in the De Lisle example it is found under “confession.” “*Elemosinarum largitio*” which is under “cleanness of body” should appear with “penance.” The category “*Munditia carnis*” refers to the five senses as it does in earlier versions but the nouns used with each sense are different. The De Lisle artist also conceived “*Munditia mentis*” differently than the creator of the cherub, creating completely new categories. In short, the tags for individual feathers on the first four wings diverge significantly from the originals.³¹ They seem to have been copied without concern for the coherence of the categories or perhaps without direct reference to an exemplar.

Like the example in the De Lisle Psalter, the cherub figure in Beineke MS 416 is part of a *Speculum theologiae* collection. Yet, it differs from its near contemporary in significant ways. First, the categories inscribed on the feathers of its wings are in concord with those found in early examples of the figure. Moreover, it is also accompanied by Alan of Lille’s tract explicating the meaning of each item.³² The image in Beineke MS 416 is also dissimilar to the De Lisle figure in that it is not an *objet d’art* but was made

³¹ The fifth and six wings do conform more or less to the original categories, although the order of the feathers is altered in some cases.

³² As with many other textual accompaniments to diagrammatic figures, the excerpt is not complete. The copyist was only able to move through two and four fifths wings, although he manages to finish his thought before running out of writing surface. It is possible that there were more pages of text. However, as Esmeijer has suggested, texts accompanying diagrams were ways of getting started in meditation and did not need to be complete in order to do their job. Esmeijer, *Divina Quaternitas*, 31.

for everyday didactic and devotional use. It delivered its six sets of five data units (around seven units being an ideal number that can practically be memorized at a time)³³ without undue distraction. Unlike the De Lisle Psalter, in which beauty of form seemingly trumped practical function, it did not relegate its messages to second place.³⁴

We are fortunate that the manuscript has a fifteenth-century inscription stating, “Pertinet Monasterio Campensis ordinis Cystericiensis.”³⁵ The monastery in question is Kamp, a Cistercian house in the vicinity of Duesseldorf. The cherub image with which we are concerned was probably not an original component of the codex as produced in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Scholars evaluating the text accompanying the diagram have speculated that its handwriting is of a later age, perhaps dating from the fourteenth or fifteenth century.³⁶ In addition, the image itself departs from the other drawings in its color scheme and in the employment of gold for the figure’s halo.

Whatever its relationship to the other components in this *Speculum theologiae* collection, the cherub image has a number of things to tell us about the monastic context in which it was used. It is worth mentioning that the cherub figure appeared in Cistercian manuscripts from early in the image’s history. We have identified two Cistercian examples of the drawing already, one from England and one from Himmerod, not far

³³ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge, 1990), 84.

³⁴ Mary Carruthers has shown that for many medieval teachers a simple sketch served as a better mnemonic tool than a well-executed figure because it facilitated the fashioning of one’s own image. See *Book of Memory*, 23.

³⁵ Folio 2r. See Barbara Shailor, *Catalogue of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University*, vol. 2 (Binghamton, 1984-92), 330.

³⁶ Shailor, *Catalogue*, 330.

from Kamp itself.³⁷ That the image would be popular among the Cistercians is not surprising considering the fact that they were great readers of Hugh of St. Victor and had accepted Alan of Lille into their order before he died. Moreover, the Order associated the design of its distinctive habit to the cherub of six wings in Isaiah. Two twelfth century Cistercian writers, Idung of Prufening and Otto of Freising, used this figure to explicate the meaning of their costume.³⁸

Our example confirms the Cistercian affection for the image. In addition to the cherub itself, the diagram represents three tonsured figures. Two of them flank the angel while the third stands below it with an open book. This last personage may be a portrait of the artist who produced the image or the patron who commissioned it. An inscription beside his head identifies him as “Hermanus custos” and another on the back of his book expresses the hope that he would be protected beneath the wings of the image. The term “custos” was an official title in the Cistercian Order for the second dignitary after the prelate.³⁹ Thus, we can be relatively certain that the image was produced either by or on behalf of one of the abbey’s officials.

In addition to the statement of Hermanus custos, borrowed from Psalm 16.8, there are other short texts that help us understand the meaning of the image for its monastic audience. Above the head of the cherub is a medallion with the title of the work,

³⁷ See Rudolph Goy, *Die Überlieferung der Werke Hugos von St. Viktor* (Stuttgart, 1976) and Gilian R. Evans, *Alan of Lille: Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), 11.

³⁸ Idung of Prufening, *A Dialogue between Two Monks*, trans. Jeremiah O’Sullivan (Kalamazoo, 1977), 135. Otto of Freising, *Historia* 7.35. See also Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), 192.

³⁹ J.F. Niermeyer, *Media Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden, 1976), 299; DuCange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* (Graz, 1954), 682; Albert Blaise, *Lexicon Latinitatis Medii Aevi* (Turnhout, 1965), 275.

“tractatus super sex alas cherubim de confessione.” The text is notable because it specifies confession as the putative subject of the diagram. This emphasis may offer a clue as to how the Cistercians used the image. By stressing the first element in the diagram, the artist accentuated its utility as a penitential tool over its value in more lofty contemplation. It indicates that the Cistercians likely saw the image mostly as a way to warm themselves to their obligation to confess their sins and to contritely carry out the enjoined penance.

On either side of the title medallion are the images of two doves with a quote from Psalm 67. It reads, “posteriora eius in pallore auri.” The text is a phrase from verse 14, the whole of which might be translated as “You shall be as the wings of a dove covered with silver and the hinder parts with white gold.”⁴⁰ This quote seemingly goes with the scroll being held by the monk at the right of the drawing. It probably refers to the monk as a student of the image, stating, “may he rise into the heavens on the golden wing of the dove.”⁴¹ Both of these inscriptions suggest the promise of grace that is possible to one that would pursue the program advocated in the diagram.

Like his counterpart on the right, the monk on the left of the cherub also uses the jussive subjunctive as a means to make a request, this time on behalf of himself and his brethren, “may the wing of Christ protect us in the time of judgment.”⁴² This recalls the wings of the golden cherubs protecting the mercy seat in Exodus and Jesus’ statement in

⁴⁰ Translation from *Parallel Latin/English Psalter*, <http://members.tripod.com/~gunhouse/psalmstxt/ps67.htm>.

⁴¹ et levet in caelos aurate penna columbae. It also has resonance with 2 Sam. 22.11, Ps. 17.11, and Ps. 54.7.

⁴² tempore iudicii christi nos protegat ala

Matthew's gospel that he wished to shelter the sons of Israel as the hen shelters her brood.⁴³

In addition to these scrolls held by the monastic figures there are two more that extend from the outer wings of the cherub figure to the bottom of the drawing. These both refer to the *Sanctus* of the Mass, which in turn, alludes to biblical passages relating to seraphic figures. The one on the left reproduces the second line of the *Sanctus*, "pleni sunt celi et terra gloria tua."⁴⁴ This in turn refers the statement of the seraphim standing upon the throne in the vision of Isaiah. Unlike Isaiah's angels, however, this quote from the Mass liturgy addresses God directly, encouraging the viewer of the image to do the same. At the right of the drawing, the scroll quotes the opening line of the *Sanctus*, which also has its roots in Isaiah. It reads, "Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus dominus, deus sabaoht." However this utterance has additional resonance with the chant of the four living creatures in Revelation 4, "Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, dominus, deus omnipotens." The inscription, then, encourages the viewer to link the cherub figure to the song of the angelic figures in Isaiah and Revelation, which is reproduced in the liturgy that he sings every day.

The textual scrolls accompanying the cherub with six wings in Beinecke 416 urged the monastic viewer to see a connection between the image, its biblical referents, and his own liturgical practice. It is the latter activity in particular that linked him to the economy of salvation. Like Isaiah himself, the viewer of the image felt his unworthiness in the face

⁴³ Ex. 37.9 and Mt. 23.37

⁴⁴ For the text of the *Sanctus* as well as a discussion of its role in the medieval liturgy see David Hiley, *Western Plainchant: A Handbook* (Oxford, 1993), 8, 19, 161-5.

of the divine. His hope was that, as with Isaiah, the seraph would fly to him with the coal of the altar saying, “Behold this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Is. 6.6-7.