

O Euchari (*columba virtutem illius*)
Note by the composer, David Avshalomov

This work was commissioned by Gonçalo Lourenço for his fine Coro Odyssea of Lisbon, Portugal. It is a *faux*-antique setting of a mystical devotional poem of Hildegarde von Bingen directed towards Saint Euchari. His history and attributed miracles are well known on the Iberian Peninsula.

I set this text as an ecstatic meditation. The choral projection of ecstasy builds up across a series of four connected sections (bearing interrelated melodic motives), each of which achieves a gradual incremental increase in intensity of expression by different means:

1. A chant-like modal melody over a drone, spreading to full pungent harmonies that cadence on “in medio Rota *clamavi*”.
2. A background tissue of shifting repetitions on “O Eucari” alternating upper and lower parts, settling to a drone within which the inner parts lay out another simple chant-like tune in parallel sixths, the whole fabric revealing unstable tonal harmonies with a deceptive cadence on “facisti.”
3. The previous shifting motive moves from section to section, the tempo picks up to dancelike energy in the men, and the women burst forth with the previous section’s inner melody in three-part harmony like a fanfare of trumpets. The men throw out single rhythmic accents in, then take the lead in a busy unison line, while the women echo refrains in harmony. Finally all six parallel parts join in rhythmic unison, building to an extended peroration on “ac in Cherubim” that culminates in loud, slow, full “High Church” harmonies reminiscent of the Russian Orthodox service, that cadence on a pure Bb harmony.
4. Immediately the choir fills the space with varied slow repetitions of “O Euchari”, the last an overlapping hushed murmur as though in a trance, all on the same chord and almost without consonants (O E U A I), to a last pure cadence—which is not the end.
5. A retained high pedal tone drops a half-step to recall the opening drone-with-melody; here the upper voice recalls the inner melody of the second section, and the last phrase closes with a poignant slow harmonization of “perfecisti” (with a signature cadence—augmented triad resolving to major—that I invented for my own use as a teenager). Here is perfect, cleansed exhaustion after pure spiritual ecstasy.

TRANSLATION OF LATIN TEXT

O Eucharis, the dove gave you strength
through signs of Him
who once called out from the center of the wheel.
When you no longer saw Him in the flesh
you carried out abundant signs in His shadow.
And so, you sparkled in His soul
and took on form among the Cherubim.

(When you no longer saw Him in the flesh
you carried out abundant signs in His shadow.)

(English translation courtesy of my friend Dr. G. Edward Bruner)

Saint Eucharius

The important German city of Trier was served around the year 250 A.D. by a man named Eucharius; he was sent by the church to be bishop, at that point a Christian term for a pastoral spiritual leader, over the city, and to help convert the city and other local Gallic tribes to the faith. (Catholic legend portrays him as one of the seventy-two disciples of Christ, who was later sent to Gaul by Saint Peter to establish Christianity in the region.) He apparently experienced a vision which set him upon his ministry. His efforts also apparently were blessed by the God he served; in the span of a 23-year ministry in Trier, he not only founded the central Catholic church in the city, but also instituted numerous monasteries. One monastery eventually carried his own name, and it was probably for this St. Eucharius monastery that the Rhineland Abbess Hildegard of Bingen composed a series of poems and musical chants in his honor. Every year on December 8 (also later celebrated as the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary), the monks of his monastery -- and throughout the city -- would sing and pray in his name. Hildegard's composition *O Euchari columba* is a responsory, appropriate for singing during the Mass of this most solemn feast day.

Her Latin text first speaks of the dove (of the Holy Spirit), which "gave him virtue"; she refers several times to the sign that "once cried out in the middle of the wheel [presumably a reference to the vision of the prophet Exechiel]" and later "gleamed in [his] breast, together with the sign given to the cherubim."