

SYMBOLA ET EMBLEMATA

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SYMBOLIC SCORES

Studies in the Music of the Renaissance



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BY

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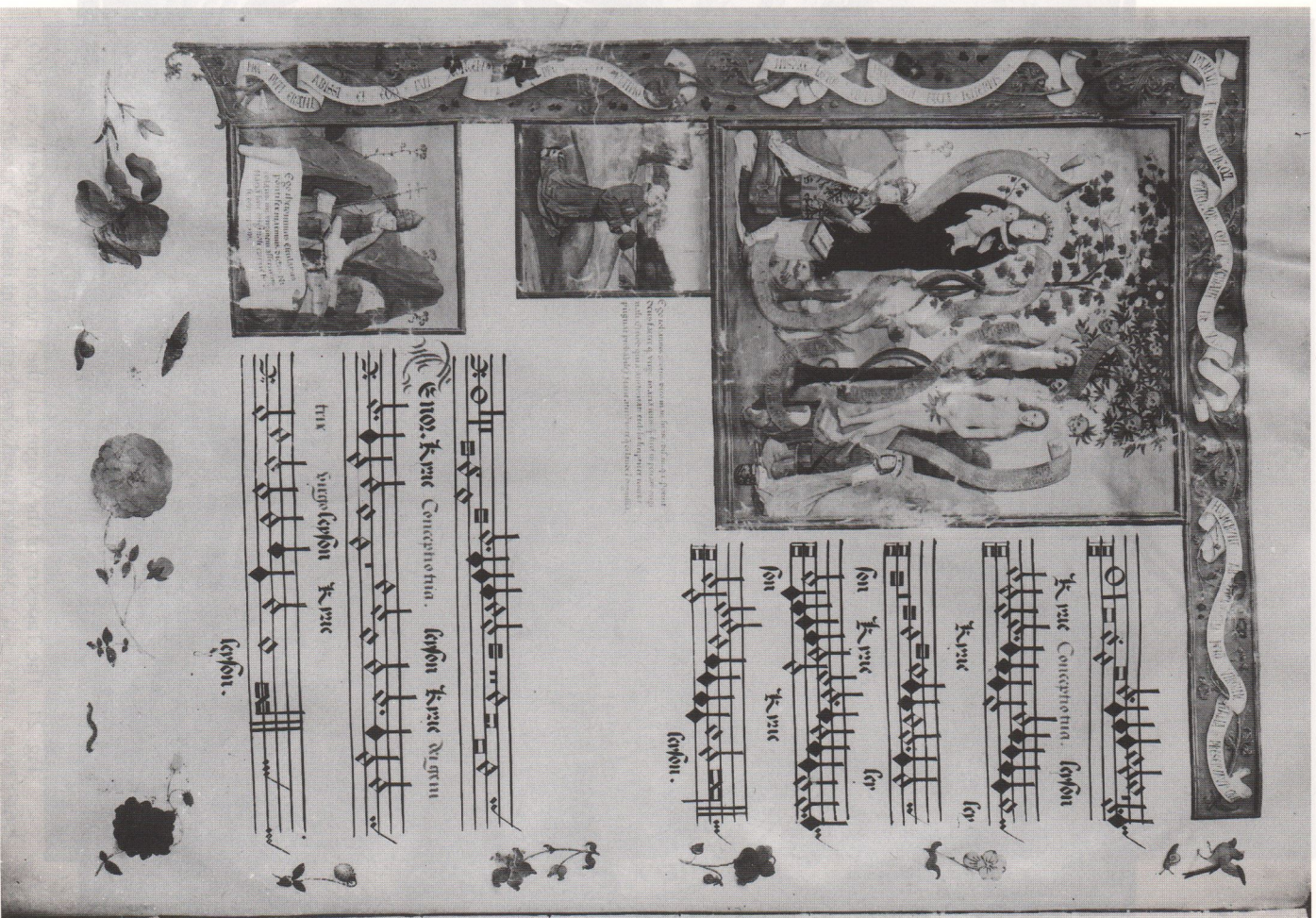


Fig. 22. The Virgin as the Queen of Heaven (1512-18).
Illumination from Jena, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. 4, fol. 29v.
The kneeling friar in the second miniature from the top is Duns Scotus.
The inscription refers to his doctrine on Mary's immaculate conception.

CANON AND IMITATION AS MUSICAL IMAGES OF THE THREE DIVINE PERSONS*

The mystery of the Trinitarian dogma 'one God in three Persons' has not only fascinated theologians since the early days of Christianity, it has also impressed on artists, poets and musicians from the Middle Ages onwards. The present article deals with some compositions which exemplify two related contrapuntal techniques used by musicians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to contribute to the rich diversity of Trinitarian representations.

Although neither the word Trinity nor the doctrine as such appear in the New Testament, the apostolic teaching expressed in such passages as Matthew 28:19,¹ the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians 13:13,² and other New Testament texts have formed the basis for the definition of both the distinctness and the unity of the three Divine Persons. In 325, as a counter to heterodoxy the Council of Nicaea stated formally the divinity of Christ, confessing that the Son is "of the same substance as the Father" (*consubstantialis patri*). In the same century, the first Council of Constantinople (381) extended this definition to the divinity of the Holy Spirit as well. This twofold determination of codivinity has proved decisive for the formulation of the Trinitarian dogma. The doctrine that God is of one nature yet three persons was expounded by St Augustine in his great treatise *De Trinitate* (400-416). The Church Father thought of God as one single personal being "who exists in three forms or manifests himself in three ways."³ In the first ten books Augustine brings together the texts of Holy Scripture which witness to this mystery of the faith; in the following books he attempts to provide some clarifications. Since man as a spiritual being was created according to the image of God, Augustine used the basic structure and faculties of the human mind to shed some light on the central mystery of the Christian faith. The Father was compared to memory, the Son to understanding, and the Holy Ghost to will and love. Augustine's writings as well as those of such Eastern Fathers as Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Cappadocia were instrumental in giving the Trinitarian mystery a central place in Christian worship.

The doctrine of the consubstantiality, which was disputed by the Arians but defended by Athanasius and defined at Nicea, continued to develop gradually over several centuries before being further elaborated. At the Synod of Toledo in 589, the text of the Nicene Creed was adopted in the Ordinary

* I am grateful to Paul Raasveld for his careful reading of the manuscript.

¹ "Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

² "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the charity of God, and the communication of the Holy Ghost be with you all."

³ A.C. McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York/London 1947), vol. 2, p. 87.

of the Mass. With regard to the procession of the Holy Ghost the article "Qui ex patre, filioque procedit" (Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son) was added. The Eastern Church, however, never accepted the "filioque".⁴

The Trinity has always had a special place in worship. In all Christian regions, churches and monasteries were erected in honour of the three Divine Persons. Sometimes the form of these buildings reminds one of the number three. For example, the foundations of the monastery at Fleury (St Benoît-sur-Loire) were shaped like a triangle (see below).⁵ At St Riquier (Picardy), Angilbert (ca. 740-814) had three small churches built at the three entrances of his abbey. This former prelate at the court of Charlemagne selected three hundred monks and one hundred boys who together formed three independent choirs which collectively sang the office but at the same time acted separately.⁶ One only has to imagine these three ensembles singing the lesser doxology at the end of the psalms at office⁷ to become aware of the extent to which medieval worship was placed under the sign of the Trinitarian dogma.

Symbols of the Trinity in Art and Music

Probably because the reluctance of the Church "to represent naturalistically the first person of the Trinity who, being unseen, was unknowable",⁸ the Trinitarian theme appears rather late in art and was first expressed in symbolic form. The oldest ideogram is the equilateral triangle. It occurs in Manichaeism but was opposed by Augustine, and it subsequently disappeared until its further employment in the eleventh century.⁹ Other symbols were the three concentric or intersecting circles. The first was described by the Rhineland mystic Heinrich Suso (1295-1366);¹⁰ it is frequently found as an expression of Eastern ecclesiastical theology.¹¹ The three intersecting circles, bearing the inscription *Trinitas / Unitas*, are depicted on a French miniature dating from the end of the thirteenth century.¹² (Fig. 23) Below I will refer again to this symbol. In later medieval and Renaissance naturalistic Trinitarian representations, we see that either the Unity of divinity may be emphasized or the Three Persons may be depicted. A remarkable example of

the art of representing the doctrine "One in Three and Three in One" is the three-headed figure of God. (Fig. 24) A fine example of the portrayal of the three individual Persons may be found in the so-called *Credo of Siena*, a series of twenty-two inlay works in wood by Domenico di Niccolò (1415-28), which depict the various articles of the Creed. (Fig. 25) The most common representation of the Trinity, however, shows God the Father as an old man, holding before him the body of the dead Christ, or Christ on the cross; the dove – a symbol of the Holy Ghost – is placed above the head of Christ or that of the Father. This representation has become known as the 'throne of mercy', a name proposed by Luther, who used the term in his translation of Hebrews 9.5 – "Oben drüber aber waren die Cherubim der herrligkeit, die vberschatteten den Gnadenstuhl."¹³ The theme of the 'throne of mercy' is found in painting, sculpture and book illumination from the twelfth century onwards. Its occurrence on medieval gravestones shows that this Trinitarian portrayal had become a devotional theme. Among the most famous examples are Masaccio's *Trinity* (ca. 1427; Santa Maria Novella, Florence), *The Trinity* by the Master of Flémalle (ca. 1430; Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt a. M.; Fig. 26), Albrecht Dürer's *Adoration of the Trinity* (1511; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), and El Greco's *Trinity* (1577; Chicago Art Institute).

The Middle Ages witnessed a growing number of secular and ecclesiastical brotherhoods which placed themselves under the protection of the Trinity. One of the most famous ecclesiastical orders was that of the Trinitarians, founded in France in 1198 to free Christian slaves from captivity in the Near East. These corporations had a need for representations of the Trinity as an ornament in church and chapel. Artists were therefore commissioned to portray the three divine images.¹⁴ In view of this situation it should not surprise us to learn that composers of sacred music also sought particular means to convey the Trinitarian dogma. Because the various musical possibilities of expressing the concept 'three-in-one' almost have the character of an ideogram, a composer had to be less concerned about the theological problems involved in any naturalistic visualization than the painter or sculptor.¹⁵ A further advantage for the musician was that the creation of a musical image of the Divine Persons could be intimately bound up with texts that were part of the liturgical celebration of the Trinitarian mystery.

The dogma 'one God in three Persons' can be musically represented in the following ways:

⁴ Cf. The New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 14, p. 301.
⁵ Cf. A.H. Didron, *Iconographie chrétienne* (Paris 1843), p. 530.
⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 531. For more details on Angilbert's ideas on music in worship, see my study *The Conception of Musica celestis* ..., p. 222.
⁷ This doxology consists of the phrase "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and to the ages of ages."
⁸ J. Hall *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York 1979), p. 309.
⁹ Cf. W. Braunfels, *Dreifaltigkeiten*, in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. by E. Kirschbaum (Freiburg i. B. 1968-1976), vol. 1, col. 528.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹ See O. Messner, *Die konzentrische Trinitätsdarstellung als genuiner Ausdruck der ostkirchlichen Theologie*, in *Actes 1er Congrès international des études balkaniques et sud-est européennes*, Sofia 1966 (Sofia 1969), vol. 2, pp. 961-3.

¹² Chartres, Bibliothèque communale, Ms. 1355.

¹³ Quoted after *Die Bibel ... in der deutschen Übersetzung von D. Martin Luther* (Gütersloh 1986).

¹⁴ Cf. G. Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals* (London 1981), p. 238.

¹⁵ Nicholas of Cusa, for example, says: "When there is question of the Divine Oneness-Trinity, it cannot be that with this triunity a threesome is meant such as is communicated by arbitrary created objects. Cf. W. Schulze, *Zahl, Proportion, Analogie: Eine Untersuchung zur Metaphysik und Wissenschaftslehre des Nikolaus von Kues* (Münster 1978), p. 70.

(a) the number three can be expressed in the rhythmic movement of the composition, *viz.* by means of perfect mensuration or *proportio sequialtera*;

(b) the concept 'three-in-one' may be symbolized in the triad;

(c) the same concept can also be expressed by way of three canonic voices.

Perfect mensuration is indicated in early musical practice by the whole circle, a geometric figure that, because it has no beginning and end, was used as a symbol of God. It is already mentioned by some medieval theorists,¹⁶ and is sometimes found in settings of the article of the Creed, "Qui cum patre et filio simul adoratur". However, as I have argued in my earlier monograph on symbolism, passages in triple mensuration are often introduced into compositions governed by duple mensuration in order to bring about a greater rhythmic variety.¹⁷ The setting of the respective text should therefore be studied in the context of this whole section of the Creed before proposing any symbolical connection.

The occurrence of the triad as a possible symbol of the Trinity must clearly be approached with even more caution. The thirteenth-century poet Pierre de Peckham, perhaps inspired by Augustine's interpretation of the ten strings of the psaltery as representing the Ten Commandments,¹⁸ remarks that three strings of the harp, vibrating 'in unity',

Sount par accord come la trinite¹⁹
(Sound in accord as the Trinity).

It is also tempting to see the notes *c-g-e* held by the angel playing the positive in Jan van Eyck's *Adoration of the Lamb* as a reference to the Trinity, which forms the central image in the upper level of the retable.²⁰ Yet it is hard to give evidence of this particular use of the triad as an image of the Trinity in Renaissance composition. Until the sixteenth century the theory of polyphonic composition considered triadic chords as complexes of two harmonic intervals. Thus, though it is true that Walter Odington (*fl.* 1298-1316) already recognized the third as a consonant interval,²¹ and while it cannot be denied that the triad became a common phenomenon in three-part music from about 1300 onwards, the chord as an indivisible unit is only described much later. In his *Synopsis musicae novae* of 1612, Johannes Lippius says the following: "The simple harmonic triad is the true and three-in-one sounding root of all the most perfect and complete harmony found in the world ... and the image and shadow of that great divine mystery, which alone is to be

adored, the Unity." ²² If we further take into account that triads occur as often in settings of texts dealing with the Trinity as they do in settings of other texts, it becomes apparent that any possible symbolic purpose of the major and minor third will not be easy to prove.

The third means of representing musically the Divine Persons, that is, by way of canonic writing, forms the actual theme of this study. In the following paragraphs I will deal with this subject in more detail.

The Father and the Son

If we define 'imitation' as "the restatement in close succession of a melody (theme, motif) in different parts of a contrapuntal texture", ²³ it is obvious that the technique used in canonic writing differs from imitation only by virtue of the extension of the imitated voice-part and the greater strictness with which this latter technique is applied. The imitating parts follow generally at a short temporal distance and at different lower or upper intervals. A very complex form, which is important for our subject, is the so-called mensuration canon, that is, a canon by augmentation, diminution, or by proportional changes of note values.

The application of canonic writing as a musical image of the Divine Persons coincides with its classical stage of development – the period from about 1450 until approximately 1550 – and it is found in particular in the works of those Netherlandish masters who dominated the musical scene in Western Europe at that time. Among these are Guillaume Dufay, Josquin des Prez, Pierre de la Rue, and Adrian Willaert.

Arnold Schering is the first music historian to point out that, already in Dufay's time, canonic writing was employed to symbolize the Trinity of the Divine Persons. In order to illustrate his thesis, the author referred to some Mass sections in the Trent codices found in vol. 61 of the *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich*, on pages 28, 73, 74, 78 and 96.²⁴ Schering's remarkable observation, albeit basically correct, does however hardly apply to these respective passages. While these pages show imitation technique at places where the text deals with one of the Divine Persons, there is no question of the musical representation of either two or of all three Persons. The sole instance that seems to support Schering's thesis is the article "Qui cum patre et filio simul adoratur" in a Credo by Dufay on p. 74: the idea of the Holy Ghost being adored *together with* the Father and the Son finds expression in the close succession of *three* imitating voices. The preceding article, "Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son", is set to a two-part canon in the superius and tenor voices. Here, the number of two voices cannot be related

¹⁶ Cf. G. Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages* (London 1941), p. 274.

¹⁷ See *Studien zur Symbolik in der Musik der alten Niederländer* (Bilthoven 1968), pp. 24ff. and 148ff.

¹⁸ See the Introduction, p. 2.

¹⁹ For the literary source of this comment see A. Pirro, *Histoire de la musique de la fin du XIV^e siècle à la fin du XVI^e* (Paris 1940), p. 53.

²⁰ On the interpretation of the central figure as the Trinity, see L. Brand Philip, *The Ghent Altarpiece and the Art of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton 1971), p. 54.

²¹ Cf. NGD 13, p. 502.

²² Quoted according to NGD 11, p. 17; see also R. Dammann, *Der Musikbegriff im deutschen Barock* (Cologne 1967), pp. 40-9.

²³ W. Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), p. 402.

²⁴ *Das Symbol in der Musik* (Leipzig 1941), p. 29.

to the three Persons, but the imitation as such may have been conceived to allude to the idea expressed in the words "proceeding from".

Half of the Credo text is devoted to the Son. His relationship to God the Father is described in the following way: "Born of the Father before all ages; God of God, light of light, true God of true God." At this place in his *Missa Ave regina celorum* – the Mass was perhaps composed for the dedication of the Notre Dame of Cambrai on July 5, 1472²⁵ – Dufay introduces a long duo in overlapping imitation. During the first seven bars the altus follows the superius at the unison; thereafter, perhaps to stress the significance of the words "light of light", the imitation is at the octave (Ex. 1):

Ex. 1

Et ex pa-tre na-tum an-te o-mni-a
sae-cu-la. De-um de de-o, lu-
te o-mni-a sae-cu-la. De-um de de-o,
lu-men de lu-mi-ne, de-um ve-rum
lu-men de lu-mi-ne, de-um ve-rum

Although imitation becomes more common in Dufay's later Mass cycles and although the Credo of *Missa Ave regina celorum* exhibits still two more imitative passages, the possibility that the composer employed this technique for other than purely musical reasons cannot be ruled out. As has been said in the introduction to this study, the mystery of the divinity of the Second

²⁵ Cf. A.E. Planchart, *Guillaume Dufay's Masses: Notes and Revisions*, in MQ 58 (1972), pp. 21-2.

Person strongly fascinated medieval and Renaissance artists. However, the depiction connected with the words "Deum de deo ..." in the above-mentioned *Credo of Siena* very appropriately illustrates how difficult it was for people not schooled in theology to reach some understanding of what the Trinitarian doctrine implied. The text points to both the unity and the otherness of Father and Son. But Domenico di Niccolò, by portraying the seated figure as a young man and by giving him a cross nimbus, places Christ in the centre of the scene. (Fig. 27) His interpretation of the text seems therefore to be that the *pre-existing* Son, obeying the order of the (invisible) Father – Christ raises the finger of his right hand, – shows his face as incarnate God, "shining like the sun" (Marth. 17:2).²⁶ If this is true, one can well say that this artist, unlike Dufay, failed to grasp the deeper import of the text. None the less, Domenico's picture may help us to explain the second passage of imitation. Anticipated by a point of imitation at the words "Who for us" in bars 54-56, the two upper voices follow each other at the interval of the octave from bar 61 to bar 69. The text of this passage reads: "And [who] for our salvation came down from heaven." This article of the Creed establishes both the divine and human nature of Christ. In other words, Christ's two natures "do not exist beside one another in an unconnected way but, rather, are joined in him in a personal unity."²⁷ Should we thus not assume that Dufay's aim was to emphasize this mystery of the sonship of God by symbolizing Christ's divine nature in the high voice and his human nature in the lower one? Needless to say, the octave interval between the two voice-parts makes this mysterious distinction almost 'audible'.

At the end of the Credo section dealing with the Second Person of the Trinity, Dufay once more uses the technique of imitation. The respective articles read: "And he ascended into heaven ..." (bars 109-117); "And he shall come again with glory ..." (bars 117ff.). The imitation occurs again in the superius and altus, at the octave, but this time a bass part is supplied as well. Must we assume that the technique here, too, serves an extra-musical purpose? The use of a rhetorical figure (*anabasis*) in the bass at bars 109-111 confirms that the composer did indeed have some form of symbolism in mind. The Ascension crowns the whole of Christ's life on earth, and it is only by the union of the triumphant ascension with Christ's passion and resurrection that man is saved.²⁸ The Ascension, too, underlines both the divine and human nature of Christ: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, as you have seen him going into heaven" (The Acts 1:11). That Christ, at the Last Day, will appear once more in his two-fold nature is also testified in Matthew 24:30 – "and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty." By musically connecting the present

²⁶ Cf. F. Boespflug, *Das Credo von Siena* (Freiburg i. B. 1985), p. 18.

²⁷ E. W. Benz, *Christianity*, in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Macropædia 4, p. 481.

²⁸ See *The Saint Andrew Daily Missal*, Large edition (Montreal 1943), p. 679.

articles with the one that determines Christ's descent to earth (bars 61-69), Dufay shows that he was perfectly aware of the relevant Christian import of this part of the Creed. This aspect of the composer's religious attitude undoubtedly developed from his theological training as a seminary student.

The Credo of Dufay's earlier Marian Mass, based on the antiphons "Ecce ancilla domini" and "Beata es Maria", exhibits various points of imitation, especially between the two upper voices. Clearly, here the technique is integrated into the texture as a means to achieve a higher degree of homogeneity in the sections without a cantus firmus. The only duo in the two contratenor voices occurs in the article: "Begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made." The central part of this phrase, "consubstantialem patri", is treated in imitation, and the passage as such is very remarkable indeed. I think we may therefore assume that Dufay wanted to symbolize the idea of the unity between the Father and the Son through this two-part imitation.²⁹

In the later decades of the fifteenth century, the technique of imitation gradually took the place of the cantus firmus technique. An investigation of Josquin's compositional style shows that imitative writing is a regular source of his counterpoint. Yet it seems that Josquin, too, was familiar with the use of imitation as a musical image of the Divine Persons, and that he sometimes availed himself more intensively of this particular technique in order to establish a symbolic relation between words and music. For example, the Credo of the *Missae Hercules Dux Ferrarie* contains two long passages in strict two-part imitation. Extending over eight bars, these imitation points are at the unison (bars 16-23) and the fifth (bars 33-40) resp., and occur in the section dealing with Jesus Christ. The first article of this section reads: "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God." The fourth article reads: "Begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made." (Ex. 2) In both passages the two voices are singled out in the overall scoring. Since the articles emphasize the relationship between the Father and the Son, the purpose of the imitation at this place in the Creed can hardly escape the attentive listener.

Proceeding chronologically, our next example of two-part counterpoint symbolizing the first two persons of the Trinity is found in the hymns of Costanzo Festa. Since two of his compositions seem to have originated in France, it is not unlikely that the composer knew Jean Mouton and was influenced by him. Festa's predilection for canonic writing, which comes to the fore in his music for the vesper services, could have its roots in Mouton's great contrapuntal skill. The collection of thirty hymns for the church year contains a setting of the "Pange lingua". According to tradition, the even-

²⁹ How earnestly Dufay was concerned to elaborate upon the contents of the Mass text goes also from the way in which he combines the textual elements of the two *cantus prius facti* in his *Missae Ecce ancilla domini*; see M.J. Bloxam, *A Survey of Late Medieval Service Books from the Low Countries: Implications for Sacred Polyphony 1460-1520* (Ph.D. diss. Yale Univ. 1987), pp. 232-7.

Ex. 2

numbered verses are set polyphonically and they alternate with chant. The last strophe reads:

Genitori, Genitoque
Laus et jubilatio;
Salus, honor, virtus quoque
Sit et benedictio:
Procedenti ab utroque
Compar sit laudatio.

(To the everlasting Father,
And the Son who reigns on high
With the Holy Ghost proceeding
Forth from each eternally,
Be salvation, honour, blessing,
Might and endless majesty.)

Our initial reaction might be to suppose that the opening words of the strophe prompted the two-part canon at the lower octave. However, the mention of the Holy Ghost in the following lines, as well as the fact that all of Festa's thirty hymns contain a canon in at least one of the polyphonic strophes, should recommend caution in interpreting the function of this technique.

The purpose of canonic writing is more obvious in the seven-part motets of Adrian Willaert's *Musica nova* of 1559. As is the case with Festa's *Pange lingua*, the hymn *Verbum supernum* belongs to the office of the Feast of *Corpus Christi*. On this day of the liturgical year the Church celebrates the presence of Christ in the Eucharist; in other words, the remembrance and reenactment of the Last Supper and Christ's death on the cross are celebrated through the consecration of the bread and the wine. Receiving the Eucharist symbolizes a spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and with other Christians. Both "Pange lingua" and "Verbum supernum" were most likely written by Thomas Aquinas in or shortly after 1264, and became familiar hymns when, in the fourteenth century, the Feast of *Corpus Christi* developed into an annual celebration on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday.³⁰ All six strophes of Willaert's hymn are set for seven voices, and all state a paraphrased version of the hymn's chant melody in the tenor and altus at the interval of the fifth. In strophes one to five, the canonic voices bear the text of the popular fifth strophe, "O salutaris hostia ..." (O saving Victim, opening wide / The gate of heaven to man below! / Our foes press on from every side: / Thine aid supply, Thy strength bestow). The last strophe has the text "Unitinoque domino ..." in all voices.

It seems clear that the key to understanding the two-part canon must be sought in the particular theme of the Feast of *Corpus Christi*, which is manifested in the third strophe of Thomas's hymn. This strophe deals with the Lord's presence under the appearance of bread as being that of the body of Christ, and under the appearance of wine as being that of his blood. Here a reference can be made to Jesus's own words as recorded in John 6:56 – "For my flesh is meat indeed: and my blood is drink indeed." Proof of Willaert's intention to symbolize the deeper meaning of the hymn text musically can also be found in the rhythmic movement of the final strophe. While this strophe glorifies the Trinity, the sign of the circle that changes the binary mensuration into *tempus perfectum* at this point in the text, acts as an index of the holy number three.

The last example of a two-part canon as a musical image of the Divine Persons comes from Spain. Some years before his ordination in 1584, Fernando de las Infantas published a number of motets and counterpoints, one of which reflects his interest in theology.³¹ As Rafael Mitjana has pointed out, the motet *Domine ostende nobis patrem*, written for the Feast of the apostle Philip, is based on John 14:8-10 and contains a symbolic two-part

³⁰ Thomas was requested by Pope Urban IV (1264) to compose the liturgy for the Feast of *Corpus Christi*. Thomas used some existing texts and hymns, revised them and wrote new ones: "Pange lingua" (concluding with the "Tantum ergo"), "Sacris solemnia" (concluding with the "Anis angelicus"), "Verbum supernum" (concluding with "O salutaris hostia"), and the sequence "Lauda Sion". There is no sufficient reason to doubt the testimony of Tolomeo of Lucca in favour of Thomas's authorship of these hymns. See J.A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas de Aquino, His Life, Thought and Works* (Washington 1974), pp. 176-85; 400ff.

³¹ In 1601, Infantas published three theological treatises in Paris.

canon.³² The Johannine text relates how Philip asks Jesus to show unto him the Father. Christ answers: "Have I been so long a time with you; and have you not known me? Philip, he that seeth me seeth the Father also. How sayest thou, Shew us the Father? Do you not believe, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" These last words are sung by the soprano and bass parts in canon, the significance of which is obvious.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: Trinities in unitate

As the dogma 'one God in three Persons' lends itself so perfectly to being expressed in a three-part canon, one easily understands why composers invented this form of musical allegory soon after two-part imitative writing had become a new symbol for the Father and the Son. Probably the earliest composition to contain the unambiguous direction "Trinitas in unitate" is the chanson *Ha que ville* of Antoine Busnois.³³ Remarkably, this work seems to offer two possible realizations: the performer can choose the standard, non-imitative texture of the *rondeau quatrains*, or he can separate the highest voice from the two lower ones and turn it into a three-part canon which, for instance, could serve as *ad libitum* music for the second *quatrains* of the *rondeau*.³⁴

The question why Busnois gave his love song, which is dedicated to Jacqueline d'Haqueville, the form of a *double entendre*, is intriguing. The text of the chanson offers no obvious clues and to explain the canon only as a musical variant of the non-imitative setting would mean that one has to accept the composer making a peculiar exception to the rules governing the *formes fixes* of the fifteenth century. I am therefore rather inclined to assume that Busnois included the canon as an independent piece of instrumental music in this love song in order to show Jacqueline his great ability both as poet and composer.³⁵ It is written at the interval of the unison in the form of a round, which suggests that the music could sound without ceasing: the superius part of the chanson *Ha que ville* is surely a fine specimen of a Trinitarian canon (Ex. 3).

³² *Don Fernando de las Infantas, teologo y músico* (Madrid, 1918), p. 74.

³³ Depending on the source the canon reads "Trinitas in unitate" or "Trinitas in unitate". In the transcription by A. de la Fage, *Essais de diphtérogaphie musicale* (Paris 1864; R1964), vol. 2, no. 10, the direction reads: "Trinitas in unitate veneremur". It may well be that this wording stems from Giuseppe Baini, the Roman musicologist whose library was consulted by La Fage for the publication of the musical documents in his *Diphtérogaphie*.

³⁴ Catherine Brooks, *Antoine Busnois, Chanson Composer*, JAMS 6 (1953), p. 114, correctly points out that the canon does not allow for a medial cadence. Yet Joshua Rifkin, in his performance of the chanson for Nonesuch H-71247, uses the canon for the medial strophes. His treatment of the second voice in bar 14 is, however, not convincing.

³⁵ *Ha que ville* is one of four chanson texts by Busnois which include the name of Jacqueline d'Haqueville, wife of a Parisian councillor.

Ex. 3



Conceived as it was in France, the country that contributed so strongly to the Trinitarian cult, one may well wonder whether Busnois's circular canon was perhaps not inspired by one of those circular ideograms which occur in French manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (see above). Another source of inspiration may have been Dante's *Divine Comedy*. At the end of his journey through Paradise the poet describes his vision of the Trinity as follows: "In the profound and clear ground of the lofty light appeared to me three circles of three colours and of the same extent, and the one seemed reflected by the other as rainbow by rainbow, and the third seemed fire breathed forth equally from the one and the other" (*Canto XXXIII*, 115-120).³⁶ In using the circle as an emblem of perfection, Dante for his part was perhaps influenced by Thomas Aquinas, who transposed this Neoplatonic

³⁶ Quotation taken from *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Translation and Commentary by J. D. Sinclair (London 1971). The structure of Dante's *Commedia* is generally regarded as being modelled on the Trinitarian concept. Divided into three books, each having 33 *canti* which are composed of hendecasyllables in *terza rima*, the whole work comprises one hundred *canti*. (The first one is a prologue.) Thus the number three, a symbol of the Trinity, is present in every part of the work, and the number one hundred symbolizes perfection and completeness.

theme so as to express the return of all created things to God: "Circularity completes the movement of the soul in that it leads to God."³⁷

The Trinitarian Canon in Mass

If Busnois's chanson is the first example of a Trinitarian canon, the most famous one is certainly by Josquin. The second Agnus dei of his *Missae L'homme armé super voces musicales* is a canon for three voices, which are derived from a single notated part by performing each voice in a different mensuration. The Mass is preserved in almost twenty sources. Additionally, the canon appears – obviously due to its ingenuity – in some theoretical treatises and didactic anthologies. The painter Dosso Dossi inscribed the music in the form of a triangular canon in his *Allegory of Music* (ca. 1524-34; Florence, Museo Horne). According to H. Colin Slim, Dossi uses the triangle as a visual symbol for musical perfection.³⁸ The canon was, curiously enough, also depicted on the back of a choir-stall in the Basilica of S Sisto in Piacenza in 1514, where a fourth mensuration sign was added.³⁹ The anonymous artist took a Latin distich instead of the text of the Agnus dei; it can be translated as follows: "This [i.e. Josquin's] well-known talent has brought all the arts to life and the whole world rejoices in eternal song." In fact, the Piacenza reading deprives the canon of its original meaning which is revealed in the motos that occur in the musical sources. Among these motos we find, "Trinitas" (Modena, Ms. α.M.1.2; Cappella Sistina Ms. 197; Vienna Ms. 11778), "Tria in unum" (Petrucchi 1502), and "Sancta Trinitas, salva me" (Basel Ms. F.IX.25).

Even if the text of the Ordinary of the Mass is a more appropriate place for introducing a canon as the musical image of the Trinity than a French love song, yet one would not expect Josquin to employ this symbol for the text "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us" unless he had given the matter careful consideration. In view of the presence of some two-part mensuration canons in the Kyrie of the same Mass, the three-part canon at the end may therefore have been planned in order to achieve a compositional climax. None the less, if we assume that Josquin conceived this canon with the three different voice-parts as an image of the three Divine Persons – the motos quoted above are an indication of this – each of the voice-parts may well stand for a particular Person. (For another example illustrating a similar musical expression of what is proper to each of the Persons, see below.) In this case, the voice symbolizing the Father takes the middle position – it starts on *a*, and it has the longest note values, thus

³⁷ Cf. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. Translated, with a Commentary, by Ch. S. Singleton (Princeton [1970-75]), Commentary on the *Paradiso*, p. 589.

³⁸ Dosso Dossi's *Allegory of Music*, in *JAMS* 43 (1990), pp. 43-98, esp. p. 66.

³⁹ See J. van Benthem, *Einige Musikinstrumenten des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts in Piacenza und Josquins Proportionskanon "Agnus Dei"*, in *TVNM* 24 (1974), pp. 97-111.

acting as the moderator of the outer voices.⁴⁰ The voice symbolizing the Son takes the lower position, as is usual in the plainsong Passion – it starts on *d*, and it has shorter note values. The voice symbolizing the Holy Ghost takes the highest position – it starts on *d'*, and has the liveliest rhythm, which seem to suggest a portrayal of the rays of light or flames that appear in representations of Pentecost (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4

The musical score for three voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) in G major, 4/4 time. The Soprano part starts on G4, the Alto on E4, and the Tenor on C3. The lyrics are: 'A-gnus dei, qui tol- A-gnus dei, qui tol- A-gnus dei, qui tol-'. The score shows the first three measures of the piece.

I do not deny that this is a daring interpretation. Yet it offers the key to understanding why Josquin actually conceived this canon in the *Agnus dei*. His arrangement of the Three Persons corresponds with that found in the so-called 'throne of mercy', a Trinitarian representation which, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was widespread in the Southern Netherlands and was also found in other West-European countries (see above). In this image the Father shows the spectator the body of the crucified or dead Christ, that

⁴⁰ Another example of a voice-part forming the structural basis of the composition and acting as the moderator of the other voices can be found in Robert Wyllkynson's nine-part *Salve regina*. In this work the tenor symbolizes the Powers, the order of angels that keeps all things within bounds; see my study *The Conception of musica celestis* ..., pp. 224-7.

is, the Lamb of God. In the *Agnus dei* it is this Lamb of God to whom the believer prays for mercy.⁴¹

Three other Masses also have three-part canons in the *Agnus dei*, each headed by the motto "Trinitas in unitate". The earliest of these, the *Missa Salve regina*, is anonymously preserved in the Ms. Vienna 4810, a choirbook dating probably from ca. 1521-25 and belonging to the Netherlands court complex.⁴² The two other Masses are the *Missa Ad fugam* by Palestrina, published in 1567, and the *Missa Benedicta es* by George de la Hèle, published in 1578.

The first of these Masses, which is based on the well-known Marian antiphon of the same name, is scored for four voices. The *Agnus dei*, consisting of three independent sections, is set for four, three and six parts respectively. The latter section contains the three-part canon sung by the higher voices to the text, "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace." The antiphon's incipit is quoted in long notes. In the *Missa Ad fugam* both the two upper and the two lower voices are written throughout in canon at the fourth. As is usual in Palestrina, the Mass ends with an *Agnus dei* which has one voice more than the former sections, and which means that here a two-part and a three-part canon are combined. The latter is worked out in the high voices at the unison and the upper fourth. In La Hèle's *Missa Benedicta es*, the *Agnus dei* is through-composed. The Mass is scored for seven voices, a symbol of the Holy Virgin.⁴³ The number of voices increases by one in the *Agnus dei* to include three canonic voices written in long note values and set at large time intervals. Because this canon cannot be called a great contrapuntal achievement – the freely-written parts hardly overlap – its symbolic purpose comes clearly to the fore. It is difficult to say whether any of the "3 ex 1" canons in these Masses was inspired by the famous piece of Josquin. None of them is a mensuration canon, but in view of the popularity of the 'throne of mercy' as a Trinitarian image, it seems reasonable to assume that Josquin's famous example paved the way for the symbolic connection of the *Agnus dei* text with three-part canonic writing as an image of the Trinity.

Another remarkable canon is found in an anonymous treatise on music, which was copied ca. 1580 in Scotland. The manuscript, presently known as London, British Library, Add. 4911, contains a chapter with a large number of canons in the section on mensural music; one of these canons, example 57,

⁴¹ In his recent monograph on Bach's St John Passion (Munich 1991) Martin Geck suggests that the Trinity is symbolized in the three motivic-semantic strands which characterize the orchestral part of the opening choir, and he likewise sees a connection between the conception of this music and the 'throne of mercy' (cf. pp. 45-50). A painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder, which represents God the Father holding before him the body of Christ while the Holy Ghost sits on Christ's left knee, hung in Bach's time above an altar in the Church of St Nicholas in Leipzig.

⁴² Cf. *Census-Catalogue of Manuscript Sources of Polyphonic Music 1400-1550*, vol. 4, p. 88.

⁴³ See also my study *Music and Number* ..., p. 166.

is the Agnus dei II from Josquin's *Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales* (fol. 42v). The thirteenth canon (example 36) can best be labelled a Trinitarian canon. The two tenor parts are derived from the same melody notated in breves; the melody has two *tempus perfectum* mensuration signs at the key, one on the line for *d*, and one on the line for *a*. The rhythm of these two voices is indicated by a series of figures, namely 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, and its retrograde. (One stands for a minim, two for a semibreve, three for a perfect semibreve, etc.)⁴⁴ The superius voice has its own melody, also in perfect time. Whereas the two tenor parts each have 37 notes and are rather ponderous, the superius contains no less than 103 notes and is very lively. The text (or inscription) explaining the canon allots the three voices to the three Divine Persons: "Pater in filio, filius in patre, spiritus sanctus ab utroque procedens" (The Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Holy Ghost proceeding from both). Because of this indicative character of the parts – the two melodically identical lower voices representing the Father and the Son, and the richly embellished higher voice representing the Holy Ghost – I think that we can view this assignment of voices as very appropriately Trinitarian indeed.

A Mass setting wholly devoted to the Trinity is the *Missa Trinitas in unitate* by P(ierre) de Villiers, a French composer active from 1532 to about 1550. It is Villiers's only Mass, and was published in Moderne's *Liber decem missarum* of 1540 where it is listed in the table of contents as "Missa de beata virgine". Since, however, the Mass includes no references to any chant in honour of the Virgin, the title heading the music may well be the original one. This is also confirmed by the incipit of the Kyrie, which is identical with that of Kyrie XI in the *Liber usualis*. To this Kyrie the trope "Orbis factor" (Maker of the earth) is sung, a text which clearly praises the Trinity – the trope's second-last line reads: "Deum scimus unum atque trinum esse eleison" (We know that God is three in one and one in three, have mercy on us).

The direction related to the canonic voices is as follows: "Incipe parve puer cantus proferre suaves. Ad duplam bassus quartam tenor apte sequentes" (You, little boy, begin to put forth the sweet songs. The bass aptly follows after two breves, and the tenor after four).⁴⁵ Written for three voices throughout – the bassus is at the lower octave, the tenor at the lower sixth – and stemming from a composer who is further only known for five motets and a number of French chansons, the Mass occupies a special place in the liturgical repertoire of the period. As to the reason for its origin, it has been

⁴⁴ Cf. J.D. Maynard, *An Anonymous Scottish Treatise on Music from the Sixteenth Century, British Museum, Additional Manuscript 4911*. Edition and Commentary (Ph.D. diss. Indiana Univ. 1961), vol. 1, pp. 60–1; vol. 2, pp. 95–6.

⁴⁵ Samuel F. Pogue's translation of the direction – "Bass and tenor follow at the fourth"; cf. his monograph *Jacques Moderne, Lyons Music Printer of the Sixteenth Century* (Geneva 1969), p. 66 – is both incomplete and incorrect.

suggested that the composer dedicated the Mass to the Collège de la Trinité at Lyons, where he may have taught music.⁴⁶ If so, the composition was primarily of local importance. One motive for its publication in Moderne's second Book of Masses is perhaps to be found in the circumstance that the composer offered musical assistance to the publisher⁴⁷ – the musical prints of Moderne are of special importance for Pierre de Villiers. A second motive may have been that the publisher had a particular group of users in mind, namely the Trinitarians. This Order of the Most Holy Trinity, which had been founded in the diocese of Meaux in 1198, had many settlements scattered all over Europe and would certainly have been interested in a polyphonic Mass which so clearly featured the doctrine that God is of one nature and yet three persons.

The Trinitarian Canon in the Motet

In the last section of this study I will deal with some motets which contain Trinitarian canons. Among Pierre de la Rue's 20-odd motets there are a few that show the composer's predilection for the application of canon technique. He even gives the impression of having compiled a single text for two different works, one which could suitably be combined with symbolical canonic writing. The four-part *Laudate dominum omnes gentes*, preserved as 'unicum' in the Ms. Kassel 24, is based on Psalm 116, which summons the nations to praise the Lord and is the shortest of all the 150 psalms. An initial perusal of the text reveals that neither of its two verses contains an idea that could convincingly be expressed as a three-fold canon. However, after the psalm's second verse La Rue repeats the first verse, using it as a transition to some new lines of text. The motet's final part reads as follows:

Laudate dominum, omnes gentes,
Laudate eum, omnes populi:
Gloria tibi, domine,
Qui natus es de virgine,
Cum patre et sancto spiritu,
In sempiterna secula. Amen.

(O praise the Lord, all ye nations:
Praise him, all ye people.
Glory to thee, o Lord,
Born of a Virgin,
Together with the Father and the Holy Ghost,
For ever and ever. Amen.)

From this quotation it can be seen that the text of Psalm 116 is transformed into a hymn devoted to Christ and the other Divine Persons. The direction "3 ex 1" signifies that the superius is imitated by the tenor an octave lower

⁴⁶ Cf. F. Dobbins, *P(ierre) de Villiers*, in NGD 19, p. 777.

⁴⁷ Cf. S. Pogue, *Jacques Moderne*, in NGD 12, p. 453.

and by the altus a fourth lower. The free bass voice sometimes alludes to the canonic melody. Example 5 is drawn from the beginning of the final part:

Ex. 5

The text of La Rue's second Trinity motet, the six-part *Pater de celis*, consists of two *parts*. The *I. pars* is based on the four Trinitarian invocations that occur in all litanies, the *II. pars* comprises the verses sung after the Te Deum, and the motet closes with the text of the blessing "Benedicat et custodiat nos omnipotens deus, pater et filius et spiritus sanctus. Amen" (May the almighty God bless and guard us, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen). The sole theme, thus, of all three sections is the praise of the three Divine Persons. Set for six voices and containing more than 300 bars, the motet offers a splendid example of La Rue's superlative skill in developing an extended strict three-part canon, while the non-canonic voices, though structurally independent, derive much of their melodic material from the canon. *Pater de celis* was first published in Augsburg by Grimm and Wyrtsung in the

Liber selectarum cantionum of 1520. The diffusion of most of La Rue's motets in Lutheran Germany, where many choirs kept these works in their repertoire until the middle of the sixteenth century, shows that this country attached special value to his oeuvre.

Among the hymns of Cosanzo Festa there is one based on the text "O lux beata trinitas" which is sung on Trinity Sunday. After Alcuin had compiled the text of the Mass proper in ca. 785, Bishop Stephen of Liège (d. 920) added a complete office to it. Thereafter, the celebration of the Feast of Trinity spread widely and in 1334 Pope John XXII, who resided at Avignon, extended the observance of the feast to the universal Church. "O lux beata trinitas" is the only hymn which has all its strophes set polyphonically. The number of voices increases by one in each of the three strophes. In strophes 2 and 3, composed for five and six voices, Festa employs a canon "3 ex 1" which paraphrases the chant melody. These two groupings of canonic voices are set at the upper octave and upper fourth, and at the upper fourth and lower fifth respectively, and both reveal their symbolic purpose in the directions given. In the second strophe the direction reads: "Quicumque vult salvus esse de trinitate sentiat" (Whoever wants to be saved must believe in the Trinity); in the third strophe it reads: "Pater, filius et spiritus sanctus".

Like Festa, Adrian Willaert used the canon to symbolize the numbers two and three as a reference to the Divine Persons. In his seven-part motet *Te deum patrem*, published in the *Musica nova* of 1559, the composer combines two antiphon texts from the Second Vespers of Trinity Sunday. The *I. pars* is based on the Magnificat antiphon, the *II. pars* on the antiphon to the fourth psalm. Both canons derive their melodic material from chant and the *resolutiones* are carried out at the upper fifth and octave. While the text of each *pars* mentions all three Persons individually, that of the *I. pars* also displays the mystery of the only and undivided Trinity. The number of seven voices clearly symbolizes the act of praise which finds expression in the following words: "With all heart and voice we confess, praise and bless: to thee be glory for ever." This symbolic significance of the number seven is testified by verse 164 of Psalm 118: "Seven times a day I have given praise to thee, for the judgments of thy justice."

Willaert's second Trinitarian canon is found in the seven-part *Preter rerum seriem*. This motet has Josquin's six-part motet of the same name as its model, as is also the case with the Masses by Cipriano de Rore, Mattheus Le Maistre and Ludwig Daser, and the Magnificat by Orlando di Lasso. Like Josquin, Willaert uses the medieval sequence as *cantus prius factus*.⁴⁸ But unlike Josquin who, in the *I. pars*, has each of the chant's successive phrases sung alternately by the first tenor and the superius, Willaert treats the melody

⁴⁸ For the origin of this sequence see M. L. Gollner, *Præter rerum seriem: Its History and Sources*, in Von Isaac bis Bach. Studien zur älteren deutschen Musikgeschichte (Festschrift Martin Just zum 60. Geburtstag), ed. by F. Heidlberger, W. Osthoff and R. Wiesend (Kassel 1991), pp. 41-51.

in a strict three-part canon headed by the motto 'Trinitas in unitate'. Yet it is difficult to say that the result is a fine piece of counterpoint: in the *I. pars* only the third canonic voice coincides for the duration of one phrase with the first canonic voice, and bar 12 shows a variant compared to the original version of the chant – the fourth note of the second phrase is changed from *b*-flat to *g* – in order to accommodate the two canonic parts. Likewise, the *II. pars* shows hardly any overlapping of the canonic voices. Rather, the compositional procedure stresses the composer's main concern, namely to symbolize the theological contents of the text. Though it is a Christmas song that sets forth the mystery of the birth of a child from a virgin contrary to the order of nature, each of the three text strophes deals with one of the three Divine Persons. The subject of the first strophe is Christ who was born from the Virgin, that of the second strophe is the Holy Ghost by whose power the heavenly work was accomplished, and that of the third strophe is the Father who is praised for his sweet providence. Although Willaert's *Musica nova* contains two more seven-part motets which include three-part canons bearing no relation to the text of the composition – these motets are *Inviolata* and *Benedicta es*, both devoted to the Virgin – I believe we need not doubt the symbolic function of the canons in *Te deum patrem* and *Preter rerum seriem*.

The last example of a Trinitarian canon may be found in an anonymous setting of the hymn "Eterna mundi serie". The piece is preserved in the Ms. Cappella Sistina 57, fol. 116v-122r, a composite choirbook, the fascicles of which date from about 1535 to 1577.⁴⁹ As in Willaert's *Te deum patrem*, both the seven-part scoring and the three-part canon convey symbolic numbers: the number seven stands for the act of praise, the number three symbolizes the three Divine Persons who sit "on the throne of glory". (The first line of the *II. pars* reads: "Tres sunt in throno glorie".) The canon direction also emphasizes the doctrine of the Trinity: "Tres sunt qui testimonium dant in celo, et hi tres unum sunt" (There are three who give evidence in heavens, and these three are one). Finally, the text of the canon melody, a freely-composed cantus firmus that occurs once in each of the two *partes*, leaves no doubt as to the intention of the composer. (Fig. 28)

⁴⁹ Cf. *Census-Catalogue of Manuscript Sources of Polyphonic Music 1400-1550*, vol. 4, p. 54.

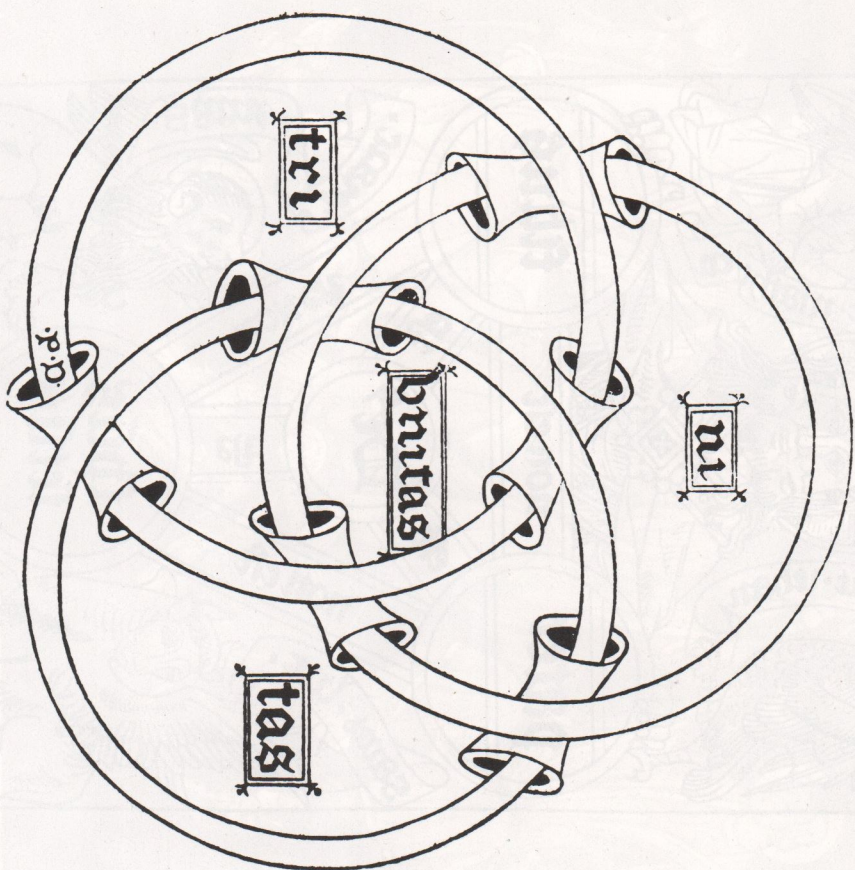


Fig. 23. The Trinity represented by three intersecting circles.
Chartres, Bibliothèque communale, Ms. 1355.
(Reproduced from A.H. Didron, *Iconographie chrétienne* (Paris 1843), p. 545.)

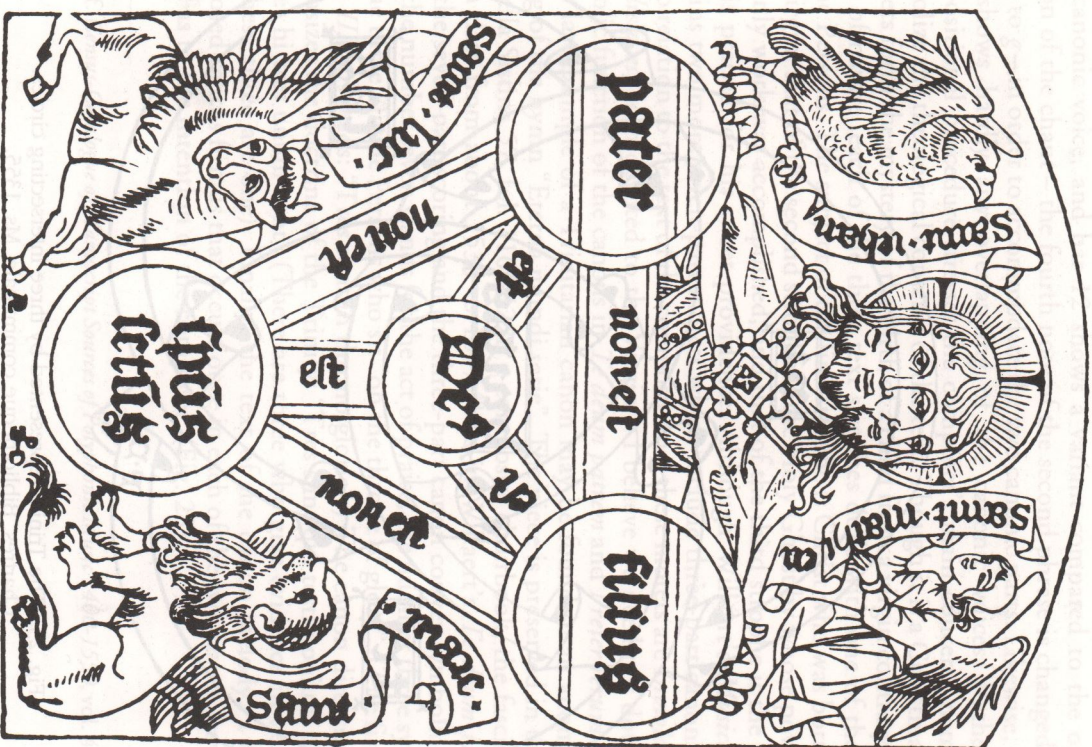


Fig. 24. The Trinity, represented as a person with three heads, and the four evangelists. The inscription reads as follows: "The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father." The picture of three faces on one the body was forbidden by Pope Urban VIII in 1628.

Woodcut in a book of hours, printed by Simon Vostre (Paris 1524).



Fig. 25. Domenico Spinelli di Niccolò, Scene from the choir stalls, depicting the Creed article "And the life of the world to come" (1415-28).

Stena, Palazzo Pubblico.

