

## More history of spirituality:

*Some thinkers and mystics between the early Councils and the Reformation*

**Maximos the Confessor** (d. 662) was a Trinitarian who became well-known in his day for doing battle with various heresies. He held that sin, as horrible as it is, does not rob a person of their created goodness as being created in God's image. He was an early theologian of theosis, in which the believer can, through the Spirit's work, reach the point of actually sharing in the characteristics of God (without actually becoming God).

'**Abdisho' (Josef) Hazzaya** (ca. 710) was an East Syrian mystic, a scholar of Eastern monasticism and of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. He believed that the Spirit would lead the ardent Christian to perfection, with the Spirit as a fire in the soul burning away all merely human desires. Hazzaya was dualistic in his view of the world, and made clear distinctions between good/divine and evil. His approach to discerning the spirits is worthy of note. The true signs are :

1. love of God like fire in the heart;
2. growing humility of the soul;
3. true kindness to all, which is shown in key moments through the "gift of tears";
4. a vision of God bright beyond pure light;
5. a mind that sees by the Trinity's light.

As with other Syrian thinkers of his day, he held that one of the results of the Spirit moving in someone is that they would know the ways of both the spirit world and the material world. It is easy for us to wonder about the stranger parts of the Syrian works, but then again, part of any mystery is to wonder if or how it is true.

**Symeon the New Theologian** (949-1022) was the Eastern church's foremost theologian of the inner experience. He held that it was very important to have a direct relationship with God – to become aware of God, even to touch and smell and see and taste God, through the work of the Spirit. Again, theosis makes this possible. The Christian is to be as aware of the Trinity within them as a pregnant woman is aware of the child within her, and is to treasure God like a mother-to-be cherishes the child. Symeon also thought that water baptism and the arrival of the Holy Spirit are separate matters. Water baptism gives the grace of the Trinity, but later actions by the Spirit created a new and overpowering awareness of the constant presence of God. In Symeon's system, though, this didn't happen out of thin air. It took repentance, shown by the sign of uncontrollable tears. These repentance tears would purify the soul and would flow until they became tears of joy responding to God's bathing light. Of the Eastern mystics of his era, Symeon was best at catching the fire of being 'lit up' by God.

**Hildegard of Bingen** (1098-1179) was a Benedictine nun in Germany who received many mystic visions, apparently starting when she was three years old. These were written down in 1130 to make the spiritual classic *Scivias*. Her visions, her hymns and her poetry were vigorous, intimate, sometimes erratic and weird, and crammed full of striking imagery that inspired many of the people around her. She also founded a convent. When modern women began their search for women who left their spiritual mark on the Christian faith, Hildegard's writings were 're-discovered', electrifying yet another generation of folks who seek the Spirit.

**Lutgarde of Aywieres** (1182-1246) was a Cistercian mystic. Her time (as was most of the early second millennium) was one of illness and occasional plagues that, when combined with the hard life most people had to live, made for rather short lives. Lutgarde stands out because of the depths of her compassion for the ill and because, when she touched some people, they were immediately restored to health.