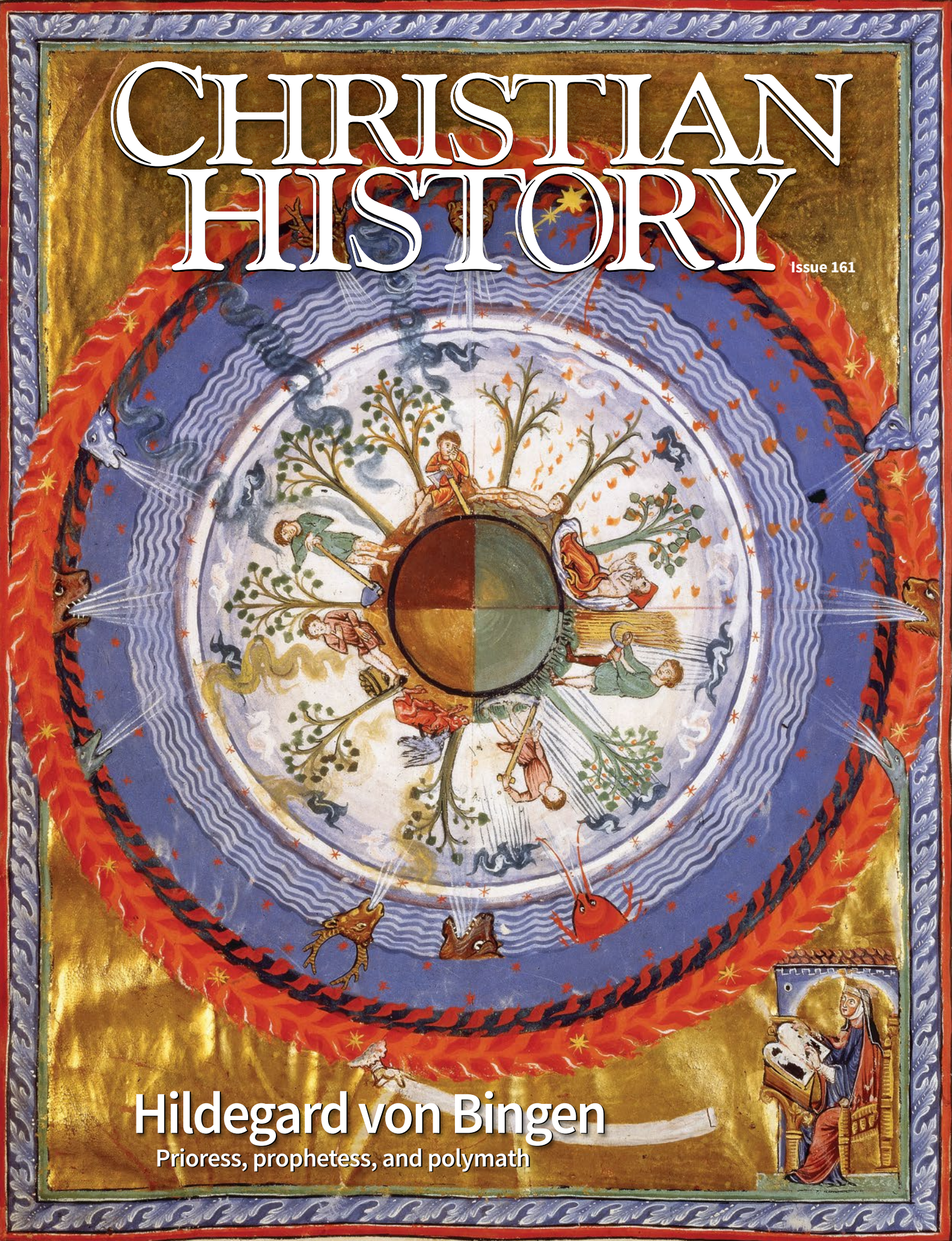
CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 161



Hildegard von Bingen

Prioress, prophetess, and polymath

Did you know?

ENTER THE MEDIEVAL WORLD OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN



ORDERS AND ABBEYS

Monasticism in the life of the church began as early as the third century. By the Middle Ages, thousands of monastic communities could be found across Europe. The twelfth through fifteenth centuries saw the rise of numerous mystics, lay movements (such as the Beguines), and mendicant orders (such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans; for more on all of these, see *CH* issues #127 and #149). During Hildegard's lifetime, the best-established and influential were the Benedictines, who followed the Rule of Benedict (a monastic tradition established by sixth-century monk, Benedict of Nursia), and the Cistercians, a reforming order within the Benedictines.

NOBILITY, NORTHMEN, AND NUNS

After the reign of Charlemagne (768–814), much of Europe evolved into a decentralized system of government and economics known as feudalism. Rather than the well-organized nation-states that we think of today, Europe's barter economy and rulership revolved around the local castles and their surrounding lands. Knights—the lowest level of the nobility—lived in small castles or large fortified manor houses and owned tracts of land that were worked by peasants. In times of threat, the knight's family and hopefully some peasants would scurry into the castle for protection.

This decentralized system of defense was necessary because of the constant threat of Viking raids, which began during Charlemagne's reign and continued for three centuries (see *CH* #160). Instead of amassing a large invasion force, the Vikings of Scandinavia sent out small groups of longboats, each holding several dozen warriors. These boats traveled quickly, which enabled them to pass from the North Sea through the English Channel to the Atlantic Ocean and then into the Mediterranean Sea. From there they would paddle up various rivers along which they could attack by surprise. The Northmen



RANSACKING RAIDERS A medieval French abbey folio pictures seafaring warriors (often said to be Vikings, *above*).

VISIONARY CHURCH You can see a large-scale re-creation of one of Hildegard's visions of God at the church of St. Hildegard in Eibingen (*left*).

PARIS, BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE DÉPARTEMENT DES MANUSCRITS NAL 1390 (ILLUSTRATIONS DE LA VIE DE SAINT AUBIN D'ANGERS, 1050/1150), FOL. 7R—PUBLIC DOMAIN. GALLICA • HILDEGARDISKIRCHE—© MARLIES STEINMETZ / ROMANTISCHER RHEIN TOURISMUS GMBH





HELD IN HIGH REGARD Germany continues to honor Hildegard. A 1979 stamp shows her in her abbey (*right*) while a 1998 commemorative coin celebrates her 900th birthday (*far right*).

raided villages, killing and pillaging, as well as kidnapping and enslaving young girls. Thus, small local castles, within easy running distance of a threatened farm or village, provided the inhabitants their best hope of safety from the Vikings.

Knights swore fealty to their local count, the ruler of a sizable county. The knights promised to go to war for the count, and the count promised to protect the knights. On their part counts would swear fealty to dukes who truly held the power in medieval Europe. Not infrequently two or more powerful dukes would claim kingship over the same territory and fight for it.

Monasticism was closely connected to the landed nobility who were the backbone of feudalism. Noble families would often establish monasteries, endowing them with lands that the peasants would tend for them. Well-built monasteries, therefore, functioned as strongholds for monks, nuns, and peasants. Those noble families also often placed one of their younger sons or daughters as abbot or abbess over the monastery. (Older sons and daughters were given in strategically arranged marriages that helped the family gain territory and power.)

While such a close connection between monasteries and the local nobility worked well in some situations, at times it opened the door for less-than-godly noblemen to control the monasteries, leading to lax spiritual practices and slack moral standards.

ABBESS OR PRIORESS?

Just as Benedictine monasteries of men were governed by an "abbot" (meaning "father," from Aramaic *abba*), many monasteries of women were ruled by an "abbess" or spiritual mother to the nuns. In an abbey the abbot's deputy is usually designated "prior"; in a priory the prior is the superior under the local overseeing abbot. Thus some women's monasteries were governed by a "prioress" who was under an abbess or abbot of a nearby monastery.

Although today Hildegard of Bingen is regularly referred to as an abbess, she never held this title. Technically she was always a prioress, or *magistra* (teacher), and remained under the supervision of the abbot of Disibodenberg. Not until after her death did the monasteries that Hildegard founded gain full self-jurisdiction as abbeys.

CRITICAL DOCTORS

While women in general had little voice in the Middle Ages, a number of saintly women boldly spoke out in their day against corruption, both in the church and the state. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) lived at home and became part of the Third Order of Dominicans. She confronted Pope Gregory XI for living in Avignon, France, rather than in Rome (since the pope, by definition, is the bishop of Rome!). Quite possibly her voice of correction played a role in Gregory's return to Rome in 1377. Hildegard similarly addressed issues in both church and state (see p. 16). Interestingly authorities silenced neither woman in her day; and, in the past 60 years, both women have been recognized as doctors (teachers) of the Catholic Church.

WALK WITH HILDEGARD

Anyone can still visit the second monastery that Hildegard established in Eibingen, which overlooks the city of Rüdesheim on the Rhine River. Rebuilt in 1904, the structure houses an active Benedictine convent today. A short walk from the monastery leads to St. Hildegard Parish and Pilgrimage Church, built on the original foundation of the Eibingen convent where her relics are housed today. Just across the Rhine River is the city of Bingen, where one can visit the ruins of Hildegard's first monastery (see pp. 40–41 for more). CH

Glenn E. Myers, a retired professor of church history and theological studies, is this issue's scholar-advisor.

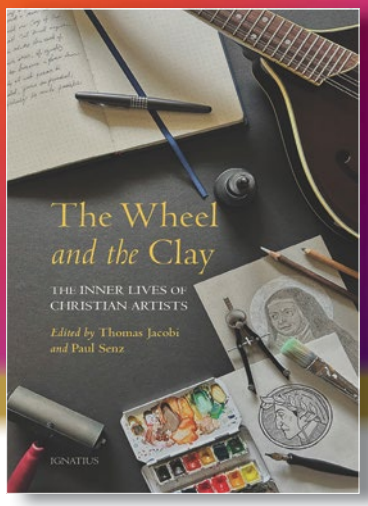


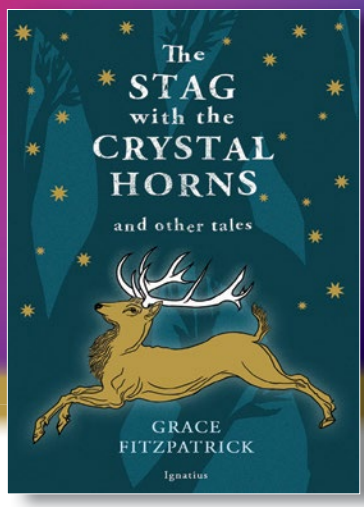
ICONIC WOMEN Modern icons depict the female doctors of the Catholic Church (*right*): Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux, Catherine of Siena, and Hildegard of Bingen.

DEUTSCHE BUNDESPOST, 110 PFENNIG STAMP IN HONOR OF HILDEGARD VON BINGEN, 1979—EBAY • MOHAMMAD NEMAT ZADEH (PHOTOGRAPHER), 10-DEUTSCHE MARK COMMEMORATIVE COIN OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY ISSUED IN 1998 TO MARK THE 900TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN—[CC0 1.0 UNIVERSAL] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS • RUTH A. STRICKLIN (ARTIST), *THE FOUR WOMEN DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH*, NEW JERUSALEM STUDIOS, PHOENIX, AZ. FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT WWW.NEWJERUSALEMSTUDIOS.COM.

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STAGP . . . *Sewn Softcover*, $17.95

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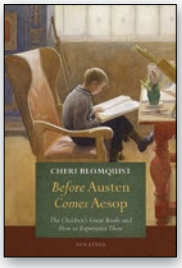
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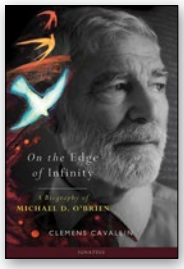
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Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

STILL ON THE SEAS

While attending seminary in Lansdale, PA, I became a charter subscriber to *CH* magazine. I even have the coveted blue-covered *Heritage of Freedom* (*CH* #9). As I was reading the latest issue, "Christianity on the seas," I thought about how much I look forward to each issue, even when initially the topic doesn't really interest me. It is to your team's credit that when I begin to read such issues, I become fascinated by the articles because of their presentation and depth. And, although not all "Christian history" is "Christian," we can still learn from, and appreciate, the contributions of others to Christendom. For over half of my life, and all but one year of my Christian life, CHI has intrigued and educated me. Thank you, CHI-ers, past and present!—*Alan Allegra, Bethlehem, PA*

The sea makes me queasy, but your great issue calmed my nerves!—*D. Michael Blackie, Rossiter, PA*

Dawson Trotman prayed me into the kingdom. What a guy! I can't put down *Christian History* magazine when it comes.—*Robert Hill Durham, Abington, PA*

SATING SUBSCRIBER CURIOSITY

Just a note to say how much I appreciated the issue on Oswald Chambers [*CH* #154] and the one on the 12 apostles and others [*CH* #156]. The latter because I wondered where they went. Most aren't mentioned in Acts. Oswald Chambers because I knew only the book, *My Utmost for His Highest*. I received a copy from my mother-in-law early in my marriage, because it was special to her and she wanted me to have one, too. Thanks for all your diligent research and thorough, gracious, balanced presentations.—*Kayleen Nichols, Englewood, CO*

ANGLICANS APPRECIATION

We enjoy *Christian History,* especially #160 about the Anglicans. We have benefited from the work of John Stott, J. I. Packer, Fleming Rutledge, N. T. Wright, and Alister McGrath. *Christian History* is skillfully and beautifully written.—*Charles and Judy Hunt, Holland, MI*

The unidentified cleric in the right picture on page 32 of [*CH* #160: Anglicans] is Bishop James A. Pike. He was an attorney before ordination and when the church tried to use canon law against him, he just tied them in knots. . . . I heard him speak once. He was a great influence on my development although I am UCC.—*Robert L. Anderson, York, PA*

SUBSTACK SHOUTOUTS



One year ago Christian History *began sharing magazine articles and blog posts on Substack.com, a long-form content platform where online readers can share their thoughts on what they've read. Here's what they have to say.*

FASCINATING!!!! What a great article ["Anchored in Christ" by Jason Zuidema, *CH* #159]! I had no idea about any of this history! Having served in the US Marine Corps in the early 1990s, I can confidently assert that "crimping" is alive and well, or at least was at that time. Although thankfully, the practice of depositing a drunk sailor or marine on board an outgoing vessel is no longer a thing (at least in my own experience).—*Matthew Parker*

"Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters, They see the works of the Lord, And His wonders in the deep." A close family member has spent a lot of time at sea. This makes me think of him and the awe in his voice when he talks about what he's seen, especially the moon shining across the ocean.—*Michelle Ule*

I received my issue [*CH* #160: Anglicans] yesterday in the mail and it was the first time I had ever seen the magazine. My first response: Very nice indeed. I will surely read more but the first article I landed on, "No poet is an island" by Karen Swallow Prior, was excellent. Having read many of those authors, I knew very little about their religious backgrounds and learned a lot. Bravo! . . .

[S]ince you so kindly asked for my thoughts, I went on to read "Religious whiplash," followed by Calvin Lane on Henry VIII and company; then Jonathan Reimer on Thomas Cranmer. I found items of historical interest and insights and entertaining anecdotes in all. I knew a little about these people and events before, and now I know more than I did. Loved the art too. What more can you ask of short magazine pieces? Thank you for your good work.—*Kevin Nelson*

Want to join the conversation? Find us on Substack @christianhistoryinstitute. CH

Editor's note



On the last day of our vacation, my husband and I stood on the big rock that overlooks the Maine lake where the old family cabin resides. A steady breeze stirred the usually mirrorlike surface into playful waves. We watched them break into a fine, cold spray against the rocky shore, enjoying the view and the September sunlight just warm enough to stave off a growing autumnal chill. Already some trees around and beyond us had begun to don the reds and yellows of fall—pops of color in a mountainous swell of evergreens.

This, I thought, is just as close to perfect as it gets. This is a place where God lives and speaks, and that, I hope, he'll re-create in eternity to come. A place where this quotation by the twelfth-century Benedictine nun, Hildegard of Bingen, certainly applies: "Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars. Gaze at the beauty of the earth's greenings. Now, think."

RENAISSANCE WOMAN

If anyone could make us think of God's life as "verdant greening" and of creativity as "manifest . . . in every creature," it would be Hildegard. You might know little of this medieval nun, but she is worth knowing.

Often historians refer to her as a "Renaissance" woman (despite preceding the actual Renaissance by several hundred years) because she was a polymath—that is, an individual whose knowledge was both wide and deep in various subjects. Being a polymath is impressive for anyone, but in the twelfth-century world in which literacy and knowledge were much harder to come by (especially for women), Hildegard's skill and expertise in multiple disciplines are particularly remarkable.

This issue will walk you through the main roles of the gifted polymath: the prophetic monastic who admonished kings and popes; the thoughtful creative who composed beautiful sacred music and the first-known morality play; the natural philosopher who carefully cataloged the natural world and studied and practiced healing; and finally, the visionary theologian whose focus on the Incarnation and God's love suffusing the cosmos painted anew the beauty of creation and redemption for generations to come.

HILDEGARD FOR TODAY

In the 1920s Benedictine nuns carefully re-created a copy of Hildegard's Rupertsberg *Scivias*, an illuminated manuscript that recorded one of her major visions. The copy providentially preserved her words when the original manuscript was lost during World War II. In the decades after the war, a revival of interest in Hildegard's visions and theology took place—thanks in part to this preservation—all of which led to her being recognized as a doctor of the church (see "Did you know?"). As you enter into this latest issue of *CH*, get to know the woman who spoke presciently to a medieval church stuck in patterns of spiritual laxity—patterns that in many ways mirror our own.

Indeed her voice remains a clarion call for believers today. When the world is not as it should be, says Hildegard, our response can never be to sink deeper into resigned stupor and lazy spirituality. Instead she urges us: return to your first love, shake yourselves awake, taste and see how alive, interconnected, and unmeasurably awesome God's cosmos truly is, and worship him. As one of our authors, Nathaniel Campbell, was inspired to write on Hildegard's September 17 feast day:

O clear-eyed voice,
Speak to us sluggish sinners
Of the origin of pure salvation,
That from the outpouring of your vision's watering
The fount of the water of life
Might rise up and overflow
In our dried up, torpid hearts. CH



Kaylena Radcliff
Managing Editor, Christian History

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Look for our next issue #162 on Christianity along the Silk Road.

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VISION VIDEO/CHI HEADQUARTERS—DRAWING BY DOUGLAS JOHNSON
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Christian History







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Christian History is published by Christian History Institute, P. O. Box 540, Worcester, PA, 19490 and is indexed in *Christian Periodical Index*, ISSN 0891-9666. **Subscriptions** are available on a donation basis. **Letters to the editor** may be sent to editor@ChristianHistoryInstitute.org and **permissions requests** to info@ChristianHistoryInstitute.org.

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Renaissance woman

HILDEGARD VON BINGEN: MONASTIC, CREATIVE, AND POLYMATH

Glenn E. Myers

Canonized as a saint on May 10, 2012, Hildegard von (of) Bingen was declared a doctor (teacher) of the Catholic Church only five months later, on October 7, by Pope Benedict XVI. She is only the fourth woman to receive this exceptional honor. Today her music, which can be heard on YouTube, is also being performed across America and Europe, yet she is still relatively little-known. So, who is Hildegard?

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) stood as a spiritual, intellectual, and cultural giant of the twelfth century, with accomplishments so wide ranging that she defies most classifications. Later referred to as a "Renaissance woman," Hildegard was a polymath (one knowledgeable of and skilled at many disciplines) centuries before the Renaissance really began.

She wrote on herbal medicine and natural philosophy (the older term for what we would now call "science"), serving as a pharmacist-physician.She also cultivated a deep spiritual life, interpreted Scripture, wrote three large volumes of theology, and served as the mother superior over two monasteries that she founded. Hildegard also composed liturgical music for worship, wrote the earliest surviving morality play of the Middle Ages, and, like J. R. R. Tolkien eight centuries later, created her own language, the *Lingua Ignota* (Unknown Language), which was likely used in her monasteries.

This gifted woman also traveled as an itinerant preacher on four tours (in her sixties and early seventies, no less!) confronting the immorality and laxity of clergy, monks, nuns, theologians, and laypeople. Toward the end of her life, she engaged in a heated dispute with the powerful emperor Frederick Barbarossa and even rebuked him as a mother would a child.

First let us look at her extraordinary life. Then let us explore several interpretive keys that help us understand Hildegard's abounding energy and how the wide-ranging activities in her life fit together as a whole.



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BRILLIANT BENEDICTINE Prioress Hildegard of Bingen was an uncommonly gifted, prolific, and influential 12th-c. woman.

A NOBLE CHILD

Hildegard was born in 1098 to Mechtild and Hildebert of Bermersheim, a family of the lower nobility in the Rhineland area of Germany (see pp. 22–23). Hildegard was one of the youngest children of a large family, and her parents decided to offer her as a "tithe" to the church, a relatively common practice among the nobility in her day. At eight years old, she was entrusted to the care of Jutta (1091–1136), a hermitess and friend of the family who taught Hildegard how to read and write in Latin, as well as developing Hildegard's devotional life, helping her to memorize the psalms and to recite them throughout the day (see pp. 12–15).

When Hildegard was 14 years old, both she and Jutta took formal vows to become Benedictine nuns associated with the monastery of St. Disibod, which was being reconstructed on the ruins of an older monastery. Jutta



BOUND TO SERVE An arch at Eibingen Abbey imagines eight-year-old Hildegard coming into the care of Jutta of Sponheim at Disibodenberg (*above*).

served as *magistra* (mother superior and teacher, see "Did you know?," inside front cover) under the jurisdiction of St. Disibod's abbot. In time some 20 young women of noble families joined their number, bringing with them substantial dowries and gifts that helped with the construction of a comfortable life at the monastery.

Establishing monasteries and endowing them with such funds was standard practice among the nobility of the day. In the High Middle Ages, all Europe was Christian, at least in name. While the relative powers of church and state were fiercely contested, "secular" nobility often appointed bishops, and archbishops helped to elect emperors.

This was also the era of European feudalism (see p. 11). Before the establishment of nation-states as we know them, noble families owned the vast majority of the land and governed their various territories. Wealthy nobility of all ranks not only protected the people of their territories, they also helped build churches and found monasteries for monks and nuns, often installing their daughter or son as abbess or abbot in charge. When Hildegard was 38, Jutta died and Hildegard was elected as *magistra* by the other nuns, who recognized Hildegard for her holy way of life and close connection with Jutta. Hildegard led in this capacity under the auspices of Abbot Kuno of Disibod (d. 1155).

"KNOW THE WAYS"

At 42 Hildegard had a vision of fiery light that suffused her whole heart and mind. She had seen visions since she was a small child but had not known how to interpret them. At this time, however, Hildegard tells us that she was given understanding of the vision as well as of all Scripture. Moreover she was charged to "cry out and write!" Thus, with fear and trepidation, Hildegard began to compose her first and most famous work, *Scivias* (a contraction of *Scito vias Domini*: "Know the Ways of the Lord"). This was the first of her three visionary theological writings covering creation, the fall of Satan, the fall of humanity, the Incarnation, redemption, spiritual growth through the cultivation of virtues, and the end times (see pp. 25–29).

Hildegard was undoubtedly fearful about embarking on such writing. She did not want to propagate





SEER OF THE RHINE Hildegard's church in Eibingen overlooks the Rhine River on a misty morning in the 1930s (*top*). While Hildegard originally lived at the Disibodenberg monastery on the Rhine's other side (near Bingen), she later established two more monastic communities: first in Rupertsberg (unlabeled on map *above*, but east of Weiler) and then in Eibingen.

any theological error and displease God, nor did she want to face a heresy trial. As a woman in this age, she was not officially allowed to interpret Scripture; instead she had to lean on the authority of her prophetic visions. To ensure that her writing was orthodox, Hildegard sent a copy of her unfinished *Scivias* to the famous Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) for theological review.

Not only did Bernard approve of the accuracy of her writing, he passed it on to one of his former disciples, now Pope Eugenius III (r. 1145–1153). Likewise pleased with Hildegard's work, Pope Eugenius had some of it read before the powerful prelates and noblemen gathered at the Council of Trier in 1147–1148 (see pp. 36–39). The approval of Bernard, as well as encouragement from the pope to continue, gave Hildegard the confidence to keep writing, which she did for the remainder of her life. Thus, in a very short time, she became well known throughout the Rhineland and beyond.

FR PAULUS KREBS (PAINTER), *HILDEGARD IM ALTER VON ACHT JAHREN DER MEISTERIN JUTTA VON SPANHEIM ZUR ERZIEHUNG UEBERGEBEN WIRD*, 1907/1913, ABTEIKIRCHE, BENEDIKTINERINNENABTEI SANKT HILDEGARD, RÜDESHEIM AM RHEIN—AKG IMAGE / PICTURE ALLIANCE / RAINER OETTEL • *RIVER RHINE AT BINGEN WITH ST HILDEGARD'S CHURCH AND THE SKYLINE IN THE MORNING FOG*, 1930s (B&W PHOTO)—UNITED ARCHIVES/LÄMMEL / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES • [VICINITY OF BINGEN], THE RHINE FROM ROTTERDAM TO CONSTANCE: *HANDBOOK FOR TRAVELLERS*, 5TH ED. REV. AND AUGM. (COBLENZ & LEIPSIC: K. BÆDEKER, 1873), BETWEEN PP. 94 & 95





FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES Powerful men in the church, such as Pope Eugenius III (seal *above*) encouraged Hildegard to keep writing, which the prioress (*left*) became well known for. Others, such as Archbishop Philip I (coin depicting him *above left*) helped Hildegard when she conflicted with other clerical authorities.

When Hildegard was 50, she received a revelation from God to leave Disibodenberg. She founded her own abbey in Bingen, rebuilding a long-abandoned monastery on Rupertsberg Mountain (Mount St. Rupert). Many of the noble families with daughters under Hildegard's care looked on the move with disfavor. They had already given large sums of money for the rebuilding project and did not want their daughters to live in hardship while the work took place. In addition Abbot Kuno of the Disibod monastery refused to allow her to relocate the women from under his authority. It took the intervention of Archbishop Henry of Mainz (r. 1142–1153)—and Hildegard's sickness from God (see pp. 12–15)—to convince the abbot to allow the move.

Thus, when Hildegard was 52, she and 18 of the nuns gave up their comforts of the now-established living quarters at Disibodenberg to found a new abbey. Archbishop Henry supplied her with a charter for her abbey, helping to secure the abbey as well as donations from noble families. A decade later Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (r. 1155–1190) likewise provided her with a charter of imperial protection, highlighting the interlinking of church and state.

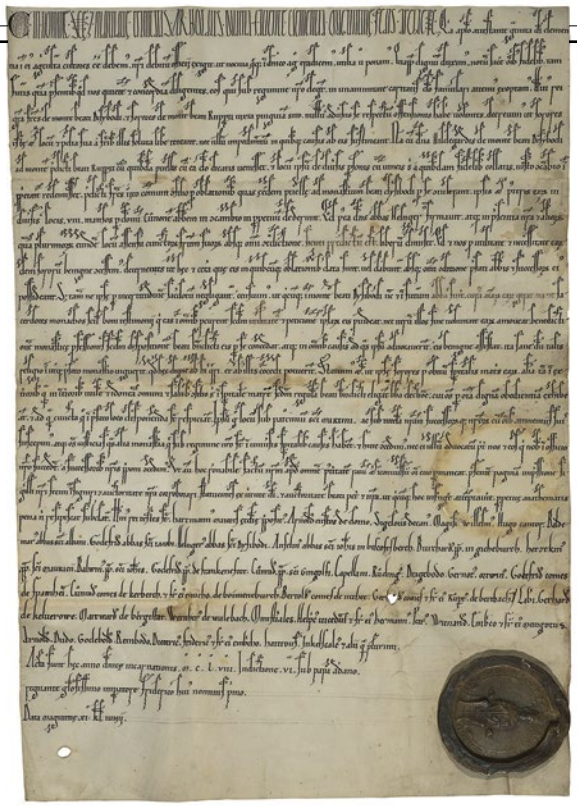
Because the number of nuns at Mount St. Rupert grew quickly, Hildegard founded a daughter house across the river at Eibingen when she was 67. Normally Hildegard would have been installed as abbess over both houses. However, wanting to maintain authority over the new monastic houses as well as retain dowries, Abbot Kuno blocked Hildegard's monasteries from becoming independent abbeys. After the involvement of more than one archbishop in the affair, Hildegard received the dowries to help her rebuild her monasteries, but she never received the title of abbess, retaining instead the designation of *magistra* under the auspices of the Disibodenberg monastery.

NO REST FOR THE WEARY

All the while Hildegard continued writing extensively, as well as conducting preaching tours along all four compass directions. From 1158 to 1163, she wrote her second theological work, *Liber vitae meritorum* (*Book of Life's Merits*), which could be considered a work on practical theology—guiding Christians, and especially her nuns, to make progress in their spiritual life. She emphasized the battle between vices and virtues that all believers face, noting the spiritual warfare between angelic and demonic hosts that accompanies our human struggle. Hildegard drew upon psychological insights that she gained from directing others spiritually, stressing the importance of confession and penance to break free from the flaws of our human fallenness.

When Hildegard was 65 years old, she had a vision that she described in her memoirs: "I saw the height and depth and breadth of the firmament, and how the sun, moon, and stars are arranged in it." From this vision in 1163, Hildegard spent 10 years writing her third and final theological tome, the *Liber divinorum operum* (*Book of Divine Works*). This work, her magnum opus, synthesized her understanding not only of the created universe but also of salvation history, the Incarnation, and the Trinity. All the while Hildegard continued to compose liturgical music and to write on natural medicine.

CHRISTOPH DORSCH (STEINSCHNEIDER), POPE EUGENIUS III, c. 1722 (ROTER SIEGELLACK), SKULPTURENSAMMLUNG, STAATLICHE KUNSTSAMMLUNG DRESDEN ASN 5420,174—© STAATLICHE KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES • SILVER DENARIUS OF PHILIP I, ARCHBISHOP OF COLOGNE, 1167–1191, MÜNZKABINETT. STAATLICHE KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN DRESDEN NO. AOB462, OBVERSE & REVERSE—© STAATLICHE KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES • ROMKEHOEKSTRA (PHOTOGRAPHER), ALTERBYLD HILDEGARD FAN BINGEN, ROCHUSKAPEL, BINGEN, 2020—[CC BY-SA 4.0] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS





POWER STRUGGLE While the abbey in Rupertsberg was first under the authority of Abbot Kuno at Disibodenberg, Hildegard fought for its independence. A letter from Arnold, archbishop of Mainz, confirmed it in 1158 (*left*). In 1165 Hildegard would also establish Eibingen (20th-c. reconstruction, *above*) to accommodate the quick growth of her Rupertsberg monastery.

Despite her renown and her friendship with so many church and secular authorities, challenges lasted to the very end of the *magistra*'s life. Ever the prophetic voice, Hildegard confronted her friend Emperor Frederick Barbarossa for his support of several antipopes (see pp. 36–39). Then in 1178 the canons of the archbishop of Mainz placed an interdict (a formal church prohibition) on the Rupertsberg Abbey for allegedly allowing a man outside the church to be buried on monastery grounds. A crushing blow to Hildegard and her nuns, the interdict prevented them from receiving the sacraments or singing the liturgy. Finally in March 1179, Hildegard's friend, Archbishop Philip of Cologne (r. 1167–1191), came to her rescue and lifted the interdict. Six months later Hildegard passed away on September 17 at 81.

GOD, THE SUFFUSING FIRE

To understand Hildegard and all her diverse interests, we must get a glimpse of her grand vision of reality.

First Hildegard was enthralled with the cosmos. She never tired of telling how God the Father not only fashioned the universe in the beginning through his Word, God the Son, but also remains immanent in creation. "Any and all creation takes its being from him," wrote Hildegard. God is "the unique Life from which all life breathes; he is the Fire that suffuses every created thing." In *Liber divinorum operum*, Hildegard wrote that the Spirit of God declares:

> I am . . . the fiery life of the essence of the divinity; I flame above the beauty of the fields, and I shine in the waters, and I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars.. . . Therefore I, the fiery force, lie hidden within things, and they burn because of me, just as breath continually moves a human being and a flickering flame exists within the fire.

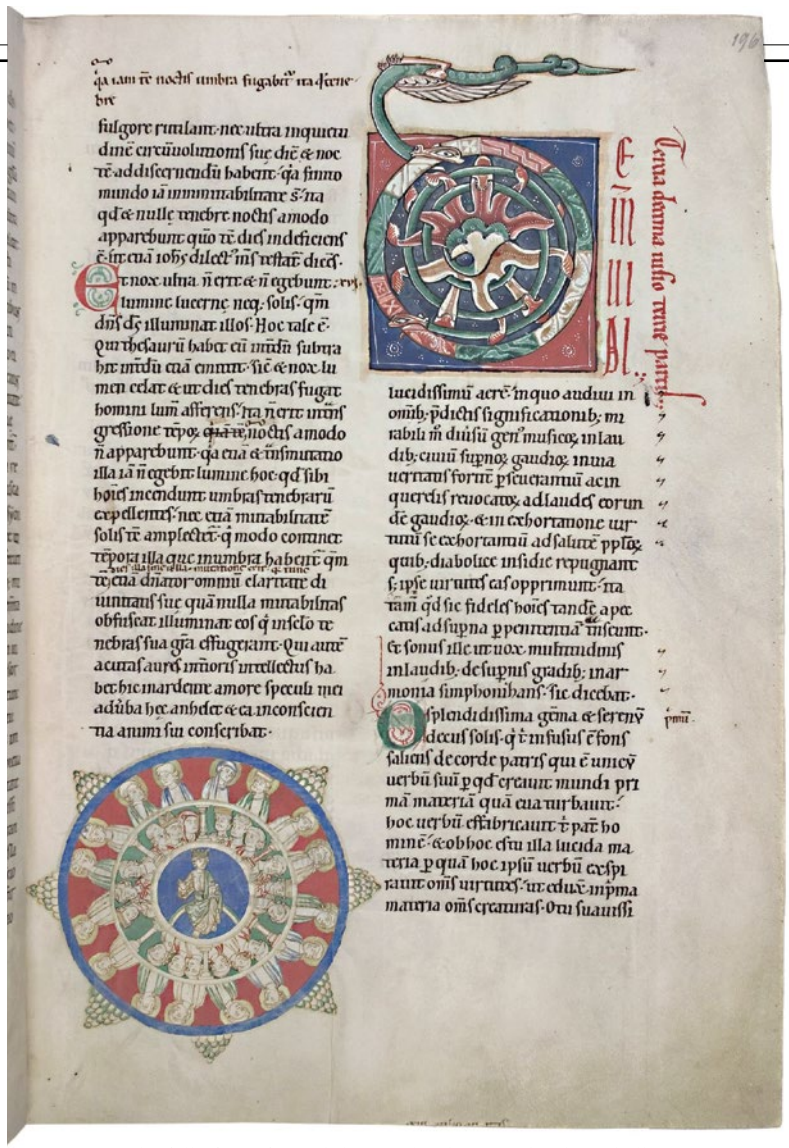
Precisely because creation came through the Word, the cosmos was established in reason and logic, since words convey reason. The Son of God is "the ordering principle of all order, the light of every light," endowing the material world with value and establishing purpose for each individual thing in the universe. The material realm and all that fills it was created good, and man is "the signature work and light of God," created to reveal the Trinity. The cosmos was made to serve humanity, who is charged to oversee and tend this garden, while the garden is meant to supply our needs. Humanity is the microcosm, and the universe is the macrocosm, fashioned to correspond to humankind.

As a result all of Hildegard's works—ranging from natural cures to theology to sacred music—reverberate with her grand vision of reality in which God not only created the cosmos, but the universe discloses the Creator. Even more, humanity reveals God, since we were created in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26–27).

In light of this understanding, Hildegard likely wrote on natural philosophy and medicine in two works, the *Physica* (or *Liber simplicis medicinae*, the *Book of Simple Medicine)* and *Causae et curae* (*Causes and Cures).* And as a pharmacist-physician, she helped many with illness (see pp. 17–20). She also wrote beautiful music to accompany liturgical gatherings for prayer throughout the day and oversaw the colorful illustrations of her visions that enriched her works of theology (see pp. 31–34).

The second key to Hildegard's grand vision is the narrative of God's love for humanity—the story of salvation history—which Hildegard told repeatedly. Beginning with

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A FINAL WORD Near the end of the Salem *Scivias*, a miniature features God surrounded by saints. It ends with a warning for teachers to "not spurn these words but exalt them."

RAD MIT HEILIGEN UM DEN WELTENRICHTER & ZIERINITIALE, PARS III. VISIO TERTIA DECIMA (BUCHMALEREI), UNIVERSITÄTSBIBLIOTHEK HEIDELBERG COD. SAL. X,16 (*LIBER SCIVIAS*, ZWIEFALTEN UND SALEM, 1195/1220), FOL. 196R—PUBLIC DOMAIN MARK 1.0, HEIDI

the fall of Lucifer and the angels who joined in his rebellion, she proceeded to describe the fall of Adam and Eve, placing the greatest blame on the serpent, symbolizing Lucifer.

Because of the fall, some parts of nature were corrupted and became harmful to humanity. Nevertheless much of the goodness of creation remained. Through the wholesome earth, God provided not only food and drink but also herbs and natural cures for the humanity that he loved and created in his image.

Salvation history then moved on to God's election of Israel, leading up to the Incarnation in which God the Son—the Word through whom the world was created—became part of this world to bring redemption. God's saving work continues on through his church, moving toward the end of the age when the Creator will draw us to himself.

The third theme of Hildegard's grand vision brings the storyline down to each believer. As spiritual mother Hildegard guided the young women in her monastery to learn Scripture and prayer and exhorted them to obedience and the cultivation of the virtues as they struggled against temptations and vices. She even wrote a musical drama illustrating the struggle of spiritual growth entitled *Ordo virtutum* (*Play of Virtues*). This is the first extant European morality play, a genre that became popular in the late Middle Ages.

Likewise Hildegard wrote a number of significant works as aids to those in her monastic community. She penned a *vita* (a book on a saint's life, deeds, and miracles) on the lives and miracles of both St. Rupert, patron saint of the Rupertsberg abbey, and St. Disibod. She also wrote an explanation of the Rule of St. Benedict for the benefit of her nuns, since this rule governed all Benedictine communities. In addition she also penned a commentary on the Athanasian Creed to guide the women in understanding their trinitarian faith.

To serve her community in their corporate worship throughout the day and in the middle of night, Hildegard wrote both words and music for many parts of the liturgy, including hymns, antiphons, sequences, and responsories. With their hauntingly beautiful melodies, 77 of these were compiled as the *Symphonia*.

THE ETERNAL SYMPHONY

It is little wonder Hildegard has been declared a doctor of the church: she has so much to teach us. Hildegard's visions, music, theology, musings on natural medicine, morality play, scriptural interpretations, spiritual direction, and leadership come together in one grand vision of reality in which the heavenly realm permeates the world. God not only created the universe and placed it under the care of humankind, the Maker also continues to fill the cosmos with his fiery presence that sustains it, revealing himself and drawing humanity to himself.

Hildegard understood that Christians are called to live out their salvation through practical obedience, cultivation of the virtues, and continuous worship. In the end, Hildegard's grand vision culminates in a new heaven and earth in the eternal symphony of God's worship. Indeed the full title of Hildegard's *Symphonia* is the *Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations*. In it creation, music, worship, and theology merge to declare the glory of the Lord and to draw humanity into eternal worship of our triune God of love. CH

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Hildegard's world

Life in Europe's High Middle Ages



FOR THE LORD'S SERVICE The biblical account of Hannah dedicating Samuel to God became the basis of the medieval practice of child oblation. Noble families commonly gave children to monasteries.

WILLIAM DE BRAILES (ARTIST), *HANNAH BRINGS SAMUEL TO THE TEMPLE*, BALTIMORE, WALTERS ART MUSEUM W. 106 (BIBLE PICTURES BY WILLIAM DE BRAILES, C. 1250), FOL. 17V—CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Around the time of Hildegard's birth (1098), crusaders conquered Jerusalem. Thirteen years after her death in 1179, Richard the Lionheart fell short of reconquering it from Saladin.

This was the era of Robin Hood's fabled adventures and the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket; of scandalous intellectual Peter Abelard and controversial preacher Peter Waldo. A proto-Renaissance flourished, and several monastic renewal movements arose. Europe's growing population enabled greater division of labor, especially in the loose German political patchwork later dubbed the "Holy Roman Empire."

Hildegard lived on the German kingdom's western edge in the Rhineland. New homes, farms, and monasteries abounded here, and the Rhine River was a watery highway for exports of wine, metal ores, and ceramics. Meanwhile the German emperors were locked in conflict with increasingly emperor-like popes. Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII's contest over which had authority to appoint bishops led to attempts to depose each other and irreconcilable claims of divine right.

WOMEN'S WORK

Hildegard's brilliance would have been impressive in any age, but special circumstances put her on a different path from most women of her day. A noblewoman such as Hildegard would normally have been expected to enter an arranged marriage for financial or political reasons, sometimes at a young age. In addition to motherly responsibilities, some wives were de facto co-rulers with their highly placed husbands; even more often, they acted as estate managers or diplomats for their families.

Townswomen similarly worked alongside husbands and sons as merchants or artisans; the poor or unmarried tended to be servants, laundresses, or market vendors. Most people lived in the countryside, however; as in any age, farm women did many kinds of work.

Though the fight against clerical marriage continued, leading theologians strongly encouraged lay marriage. Church authorities grew far stricter about marriage being consensual and indissoluble; these trends sometimes provided women more protection.

A SPECIAL CALLING

Hildegard was removed from secular life, however. Following a Benedictine tradition of "child oblation," based on the example of the biblical Hannah dedicating Samuel to God's service, Hildegard's parents pledged her as a child to study for a monastic life.

A nun's life entailed many sacrifices but also many opportunities. Although convents always fell under male authority in some way, women experienced much of monastic life similarly to men in terms of training in both reading and writing. For Benedictines reading was especially emphasized.

The High Middle Ages also ushered in increasingly diverse forms of monastic devotion for women that could be temporary, allow married couples, or involve significant direct cooperation with male monastics. This trend did not fit neatly into existing church structures and created friction with episcopal authorities, who sought to maintain male leadership.

For the most part, the church welcomed Hildegard's bold voice, not only because of her consistent humility and skillful diplomacy, but also because of her officially endorsed status as a prophetess after the model of biblical seers such as Deborah, Huldah, and Anna. Most women, even devout and talented nuns, were not asked to go on exhortative tours! Careful investigation into her teachings led popes, bishops, and fellow monastics to believe that God himself was making an exception.

—Nathan K. Hillanbrand, public historian, freelance writer, CH *editorial coordinator*

Born for such a time

HILDEGARD'S MONASTIC LIFE AND RELIGIOUS CALLING

Beverly Mayne Kienzle

Few medieval men, much less medieval women, achieved the height of spiritual authority that Hildegard of Bingen held in late twelfth-century society. Her literary and artistic production as an adult solidified her influence, but what set Hildegard apart started long before her years of faithful monastic living and learning. Her calling, rooted in her extraordinary spiritual gifting, began early in her childhood. This would inform her monastic journey and lay the groundwork for her religious leadership.

A TIME OF SPIRITUAL SLACKENING

Hildegard of Bingen was born during the decades of the Investiture Controversy (the eleventh and twelfth centuries), when conflicts raged over who had the authority to invest church leaders with the symbols of ecclesiastical office—other church leaders or the state. In her autobiography, Hildegard wrote:

> For by the one thousand and one hundredth year after the incarnation of Christ, the teaching of the apostles and the burning righteousness which he had established in Christians and in the spiritual began to slacken and turn to wavering. It was in those times I was born.

Power struggles between the church and the empire interconnect with the history of Disibodenberg, the monastery where Hildegard was later immured (enclosed or confined) with Jutta of Sponheim, her spiritual mentor. Disibodenberg, founded originally in the seventh century by the Irish missionary Disibod, fell into disrepair during the absence of Ruthard, archbishop of Mainz (d. 1109), exiled by Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV (r. 1084–1105) in 1098.

Not until 1105 did Ruthard, whom Hildegard characterized as "pious, humble, and contrite of heart," return to refound Disibodenberg as a Benedictine monastery. The Benedictines, a monastic order founded by sixth-century Benedict of Nursia, lived a contemplative religious life, usually in separate male and female communities. Disibodenberg eventually became a double monastery, or a dual community in which both nuns and monks lived.

The monastery's new church was dedicated in 1108, around the time that Hildegard's parents were making the decision about their precocious child's future. Mechtild and Hildebert, who ranked in the lower free nobility, reportedly recognized the predictive ability of their five-year-old daughter when she accurately foretold that a pregnant cow's offspring would be white and covered with spots of a different color. They devoted their young daughter, born in 1098 at Niederhosenbach (near Mainz), to a religious life and placed her in the care of the holy woman Jutta. Paternal

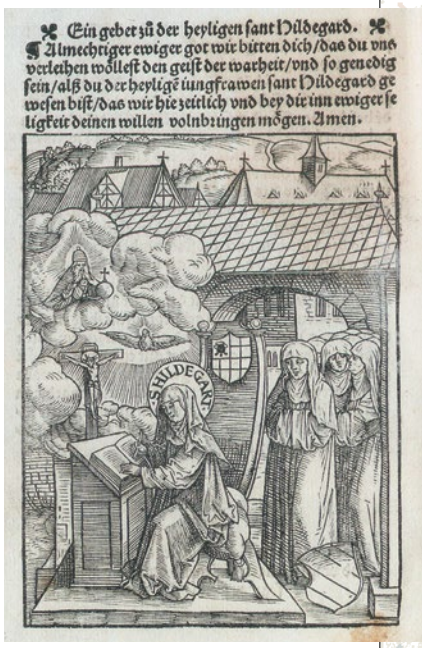


CALLED TO WRITE An image from the Salem copy of *Scivias* depicts Hildegard with a tablet and stylus to record her visions. Below her is Volmar, a Benedictine prior who served as her tutor, secretary, and friend.

DIE VISIONÄRIN HILDEGARD VON BINGEN UND DER SCHREIBER MÖNCH VOLMAR VON DISIBODENBERG (BUCHMALEREI), UNIVERSITÄTSBIBLIOTHEK HEIDELBERG COD. SAL. X,16 (*LIBER SCIVIAS*, ZWIEFALTEN UND SALEM, 1195/1220), FOL. 3V —PUBLIC DOMAIN MARK 1.0, HEIDI







CONTEMPLATIVE CHOIR A 15th-c. French Psalter pictures Dominican nuns in worship (*above*), reflecting the typical experience of monastic life in medieval Europe.

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH A 16th-c. woodcut pictures Hildegard on her sickbed (*middle*). A similar woodcut records a prayer that references God's graciousness to her (*far right*).

ties between Hildegard's father and Jutta's father, the count of Sponheim, doubtless facilitated an arrangement for the young girl to reside at Sponheim, where a community grew under Jutta's tutelage.

Hildegard remained under Jutta's direction for around 30 years and was schooled in understanding and singing the Divine Office, especially the Psalter. Sisters were expected to sing the psalms properly in their communal life, understanding both the grammar and the theological meaning. The *Life of Hildegard* (*Vita Hildegardis*) by Benedictine monk Theoderic of Echternach (written c. 1180 to 1190) recounts that Jutta instructed the young girl on "the psalms of David and showed her how to make a joyful sound on the 10-stringed psaltery."

Jutta and Hildegard were immured at the Benedictine monastery of Disibodenberg on All Saints' Day, November 1, 1112, when Hildegard was 14 or 15. Jutta's renown influenced other noble parents to vow their daughters to her. The enclosure expanded to become a *schola* (religious school), and a small women's Benedictine community developed that dependended on the abbot of Disibodenberg with Jutta as superior.

UNTAUGHT AND UNVERSED?

Once installed at Disibodenberg, Hildegard, Jutta, and the other women heard the Divine Office recited day and night by the monks, their cells located near enough to the monks' cells for that very purpose. The Rule of Benedict, written by Benedict of Nursia, governed communal life and provided a program for daily life and learning at Disibodenberg. The Rule mandates prayer according to the Divine Office seven times during the day and once at night and the recitation of the entire Psalter each week, beginning every Sunday at the Night Office. Hildegard also listened to patristic homilies read during the Divine Office. She and other sisters became immersed in Latin, the language of the medieval Western Bible, the liturgy, and the patristic readings incorporated into the Night Office.

Given this constant exposure to theological education, why did Hildegard call herself "untaught" and "not versed in the Scripture and instructed by no earthly teacher"? The answer lies in the education that girls and women generally received in the monastery in contrast to boys' education. While grammar was taught through the Psalter to girls and boys, boys continued studying at a higher level.

Even so, Hildegard's Psalter-based education involved far more than rote memorization. Glossed manuscripts of the Psalter, used for instruction in monasteries—for women as well as men—reveal commentary on grammar as well as the proper pronunciation of words. The glosses (marginal and interlinear notes) include the paraphrase in simple Latin of psalm and hymn verses with complex syntax. The sense of the text mattered, as did its grammatical features. The nuns were taught the theological content of the psalms and were expected to convey meaning through correct pronunciation and intonation. Furthermore historical evidence indicates that for women of noble birth, education did not stop with the Psalter.

In this context Hildegard stood out as an extraordinarily gifted student. Jutta assigned her a personal tutor, Volmar, to guide her further learning. Volmar, who was a monk, prior, and father confessor at Disibodenberg, taught Hildegard the

DOMINICAN NUNS IN CHOIR, LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY COTTON DOMITIAN A. XVII (*PSALTER OF HENRY VI OF FRANCE*, 1400/1420), FOL. 177V—BRITISH LIBRARY ARCHIVE / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES • *DIE LEGEND DES HEYLIGEN HERTZOGEN SANT RUPRECHTS BEY BYNGEN UFF SANT RUPRECHTS BERG LEYPLICH RASTENDE* ([OPPENHEIM]: [KÖBEL], 1524), P. XVIII—BAYERISCHE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK MUNICH / MDZ • *DIE LEGEND DES HEYLIGEN HERTZOGEN SANT RUPRECHTS BEY BYNGEN UFF SANT RUPRECHTS BERG LEYPLICH RASTENDE* ([OPPENHEIM]: [KÖBEL], 1524), P. [XIV]—BAYERISCHE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK, MUNICH / MDZ





"LIGHT FROM HEAVEN" Hildegard receives divine inspiration to write and dictates what she has heard to Volmar in this illustration (*far left*).



theological concepts and language needed to describe her visions. She also learned from other secretaries and from exchanges—both written and oral—with visitors. Upon Jutta's death in 1136, Hildegard became the nuns' superior—*magistra* (teacher) and *prioressa* (prioress), but not abbess. The sisters remained subordinate to the abbot of Disibodenberg. Volmar served as Hildegard's secretary.



THEOPHANY OF DIVINE LOVE The fiery figure of Jesus stands on the serpent in this image (*middle*), which Hildegard explains in her third visionary work.

PIOUS PENPALS Though they never met in person, Bernard of Clairvaux (*above*) and Hildegard corresponded. It seems he approved of her visions (his seal at *left*).

VISIONS AND AUTHORITY

In 1141, 43-year-old Hildegard received the first of three elaborate visions, the basis for her visionary treatises: *Scivias*, *Liber vitae meritorum*, and *Liber divinorum operum* (see pp. 24–28). Counseled by Volmar and her fellow nun, Richardis, Hildegard received permission from her superior at Disibodenberg, Abbot Kuno, to accept the divine order to "speak and write." Passages from her writing gained favor from Pope Eugenius III and Bernard of Clairvaux, presumably after Abbot Kuno showed her writings to Archbishop Henry of Mainz. Bernard and Pope Eugenius both praised the power of the Holy Spirit speaking through Hildegard. This constituted the men's approval but not their formal permission.

Hildegard completed her account of the vision in *Scivias* after about 10 years and began to record and interpret a second lengthy vision of virtues and vices in the *Liber vitae meritorum* (*Book of Life's Merits*), completed in 1157. In 1163 Hildegard's third vision at age 65 shook and stirred her to undertake the highest goal for Christian exegetes, the relationship between Genesis 1 and John 1. After years of grappling with her visions and the biblical texts, she completed the *Liber divinorum operum* in 1173.

In addition to laboring over her complex visions, Hildegard established new houses for her nuns and ventured to take her message outside the monastery walls. Hildegard resolved to move her community to Rupertsberg, but Kuno resisted her plan. He relented only after her illness and inability to write convinced him of her suffering. She finally obtained permission to establish a new community for women around 1150 with a man of her choice as provost (in Benedictine communities, a provost served as "second-in-command" and oversaw the administrative needs of the monastery). She chose Volmar, who continued to work as her secretary and provided testimony on her sacred activities.

In 1165 some sisters were sent to Eibingen, founded across the Rhine from Bingen. As the superior of both communities, Hildegard took on responsibility for preaching to them, crossing the river to Eibingen and back once per week. The *Life of Hildegard* attests that she regularly crossed the river near Rüdesheim to visit Eibingen. When her boat came close to the shore, people approached her to seek healing. A miracle story rich in biblical symbolism recounts an instance when Hildegard, in the boat, blessed the river water, sprinkled it on the eyes of a child in her mother's arms, and restored her sight.

Over the years Hildegard would visit with numerous religious communities, both male and female, to offer counsel and admonitions. Clergy and early historians were careful not to call these teaching tours "preaching," but nonetheless

EIBINGEN, KLOSTERBIBLIOTHEK ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD, COD. 1, PERGAMENTFAKSIMILE VON WIESBADEN, HESSISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK, HS. 1, FOL. 1 (WWW.HILDEGARD-AKADEMIE.DE/DE/SCIVIAS-CODEX) • EIBINGEN, KLOSTERBIBLIOTHEK ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD, COD. 1, PERGAMENTFAKSIMILE VON WIESBADEN, HESSISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK, HS. 1, FOL. 1—ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD EIBINGEN • OXFORD, BODLEIAN LIBRARY MS. LAUD MISC. 385 (FLORES BERNARDI), FOL. 41V—[CC BY-NC 4.0] DIGITAL BODLEIAN • SEAL OF BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX—[CC BY-SA 4.0] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

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A LIFE'S WORK The massive Rupertsberg *Riesencodex* contains almost all the collected works of Hildegard of Bingen.

the effect of her speaking was that of a sermon (see p. 30).

When Volmar, Hildegard's lifelong friend and secretary, died in 1173, the *magistra* cried out to God for help: "O my God, you have done as it pleased you with your servant whom you gave me to help with these visions. Now help me as it befits you!"

Hildegard's nephew Wezelin, prior of St. Andrew's, Cologne, came to his aunt's rescue and assisted her with her writing. He diligently "listened to and noted down the words of these visions." Wezelin comforted his aunt in her grief and through "other wise men." He also appointed Godfrey of Disibodenberg as provost of Rupertsberg, where Godfrey stayed from 1173 until his death in 1176. While at Rupertsberg, Godfrey composed a "little book" (*libellus*) about Hildegard's life that became the first book of the *Vita Hildegardis*.

Succeeding Godfrey was Guibert of Gembloux (c. 1124–1214), a learned monk present at Rupertsberg from 1177 to 1180, who described his discussions with Hildegard during the last year of her life:

> I am guided by her counsels . . . and daily refreshed by conversations with her. . . . nothing would please her more to see . . . that I stay here . . . and undertake the spiritual service of herself and her daughters and examine the books she has written.

Hildegard valued not only Guibert's spiritual direction and friendship but also his reading and checking of her works. A manuscript of *Liber divinorum operum* in the University Library at Ghent shows corrections made by Guibert as well as Hildegard's acceptance and rejection of the same.

CORRUPTION AND THE CATHARS

At several key points during Hildegard's years as *magistra*, she disagreed with ecclesiastical leaders and faced crises of authority. In the 1160s the Cathar heresy gained a stronghold in the Rhineland (see p. 24). Hildegard denounced this austere, dualistic heresy and the worldly and ecclesiastical corruption that she considered responsible for its rise. Her differences with the emperor can be discerned from her works, especially her letters, but her call to combat heresy resounds even more strongly. Moreover in Hildegard's account of the life of Disibod, one may readily imagine that the description of the past schisms and quarrels with imperial power, which plagued the saint and the history of Disibodenberg, allowed her to speak loudly if not directly against the schism of 1159–1177.

Hildegard also opposed Archbishop Christian and the prelates of Mainz in 1178–1179 over the burial of a deceased man at Rupertsberg. The Mainz prelates claimed that he was still excommunicated, but Hildegard adamantly refused their order to have the body exhumed. During the archbishop's absence, the prelates imposed an interdict, 1178–1179, banning the sacraments and sacred music at Rupertsberg.

Hildegard's Letter 23, a beautifully composed masterpiece of theological reasoning, responds forcefully to the prelates who imposed this interdict. She boldly asserts that God implanted the authorizing vision for the letter in her soul before her birth. Her comprehension of Adam's transgression in the plan of salvation history leads her to determine what constitutes obedience and disobedience. When Adam disobeyed he lost the divine voice of Spirit for himself and for humankind. However, God renews the hearts of the elect through music, and for that reason, God commands the elect to praise him with music. Voices and instruments aid the restoration of the soul to its heavenly condition, and the ability to hear the celestial symphony becomes manifest when the community sings. Much to Hildegard's distress and sadness, the interdict was not lifted until shortly before her death.

Historians recognize Hildegard as the most influential woman of the twelfth century, and for good reason. However, for her religious community, Hildegard was more: a Spirit-empowered prophetess who imagined and explained God's truth in novel ways. In an 1170 epistolary sermon to Abbot Helenger of Disibodenberg, Hildegard reflected on the ages of human life and human history, explaining that a child sucks her mother's milk, next eats soft food, then makes choices and chews what she wishes to eat. After reaching maturity, the human's marrow in brain and bone fills up with all knowledge and she knows the truth. In the same way, Hildegard helps believers progress from milk to marrow; ultimately her visions, admonitions, and systematic exegesis of Scripture would fill the church with knowledge for ages to come. CH

Beverly Mayne Kienzle, who retired as the John H. Morison Professor of the Practice in Latin and Romance Languages at Harvard Divinity School, is the author of five books on Hildegard of Bingen and translator of several of her works.

Hildegard speaks

Annette Esser's **Hildegard Speaks** *contains 10 short reflective texts for reading on the pilgrimage route, the Hildegard Way (see pp. 40–41). She writes from Hildegard's perspective but also includes Hildegard's original words (italics or block quotes). In this excerpt Esser imagines Hildegard speaking out her prophetic calling and how she rebuked clergy, a pope and antipopes, and even an emperor.*

Because many have already asked how I, as a prophetess, was able to speak so powerfully and even rebuke the emperor and the clergy of Cologne so sharply. . . . I would still prefer to call myself "*una paupercula feminea forma*," a poor woman—if, yes, if the *writings, words, virtues, and deeds of men* were not reflected to me in the living light. It is this spirit in which words flow from my feather, and in which I give answers to my correspondences. In short I write in concern of the church, *ecclesia*, and the Holy Roman Empire. That is my calling. . . .

REBUKING POPES AND PRELATES

Thus I wrote my letter to the clerics of Cologne only after I had already returned from my preaching tour:

> Oh my sons, you who feed my flocks . . . why do you not blush? . . . I set you like the sun and the other luminaries so that you might bring light to people through the fire of doctrine, shining in good reputation and setting hearts ablaze with zeal. . . . But your tongues are silent, failing to join in with the mighty voice of the resounding trumpet of the Lord. . . . The trumpet of the Lord is the justice of God, which you should meditate upon zealously in holiness. . . .
>
> But you are not doing this on account of the waywardness of your own will. Thus, the luminaries are missing from the firmament of God's justice in your utterances, as when the stars do not shine, for you are the night exhaling darkness, and you are like people who do not work, not even walk in the light because of your indolence. But just as a snake is hiding in a cave after it has shed his skin, you walk in filth like disgusting beasts. . . .
>
> Through the teaching of the Scriptures which were composed through the fire of the Holy Spirit, you ought to be the corners of the Church's strength, holding her up like the corners that sustain the boundaries of the earth. But you are laid low and do not hold up the Church, retreating instead to the cave of your own lust. And because of the tedium brought on by your riches, avarice, and other vain pursuits, you do not properly teach your subordinates, nor indeed do you even allow them to seek instruction from you. . . . You ought to be the day, but you are night. . . . Rather, you are the darkness, in which you lie as if you are already dead.



SEAL OF APPROVAL A letter with Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I's seal granted official protection to the Rupertsberg sisters. Even so Hildegard boldly admonished him for interfering with ecclesiastical authority.

Also I wrote to Emperor Barbarossa with great concern about the splitting of Christianity. This was after I had visited him in his palace in Ingelheim and also after he had issued a letter of protection to our monastery on the Rupertsberg. Now he had divided the church by appointing a first and then even a second antipope. . . . When he still remained stubborn and already appointed the third antipope, I felt compelled to prophetically name God's judgment to him:

> He Who Is says: By my own power, I will destroy the obstinacy and rebellion of those who scorn me. Woe, O woe to the evil deed of those wicked ones who spurn me! Hear this, O king, if you wish to live. Otherwise, My sword will pierce you.

Even though at this point he stood and refused to turn back, he still had enough brains to maintain his imperial protection for our monastery.

The correspondence that concerned me most recently has been with the prelates of Mainz . . . they had submitted me and my sisters to an interdict. According to this, we were forbidden to sing together in our church. . . . I wrote to them:

> Therefore, those who, without cause, impose silence on a church and prohibit the singing of God's praises, and those who have on earth unjustly despoiled God of His honor and glory will lose their place among the choirs of the angels.

Thus to forbid an abbess and her community of sisters to sing is a sin—a forced separation from our God. For from the beginning up to the end of times, God, our Creator, has uttered his words not in dry words but has let them sound symphonically in music.—*Annette Esser, Hildegard scholar and founder of the Scivias Institute*

PRIVILEGE GRANTED BY FREDERICK BARBAROSSA TO RUPERTSBERG ABBEY, APRIL 18, 1183—PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Humors and conditions

HILDEGARD'S WORLD OF NATURE AND HEALING

Debra L. Stoudt

The first German woman physician, the mother of German botany, a pioneer of ecological thought, an advocate of "creation spirituality": these modern titles for Hildegard of Bingen contain a kernel of truth and contribute to her reputation as a polymath. They also suggest a secular path in life parallel to her vocation as a Benedictine nun, but this does not reflect what we know about Hildegard: she was a religious woman through and through. Even so, her knowledge of and appreciation for the natural world as well as her concern for the sick and her personal suffering were essential to her worldview and her life's work.

MONASTIC MEDICINE

It is not surprising that Hildegard was familiar with time-honored medical concepts, basic diagnostics and treatments, and recipes for various cures. Before universities became the seat of medical study and training in Europe in the thirteenth century, medieval monastic communities played this role. Monks and nuns created medical manuscripts from learned classical and contemporaneous sources as well as folk medicine traditions; they recorded the information and preserved it in their libraries. In their gardens they grew not only fruits and vegetables but also herbs and plants with recognized healing properties. In a time before hospitals became widespread in Europe, the sick and injured sought treatment in religious communities (see *CH* #101).

Hildegard had no formal medical study or training. She would have gained knowledge of the healing arts from her mentor and teacher Jutta of Sponheim, the monks and their library, or visitors to the monastery. Before the Benedictine nun founded her own religious community at Rupertsberg, she may have gained practical experience gathering ingredients and preparing medicines or serving as an infirmarian. As her reputation as a holy seer grew, individuals traveled to the monastery for her advice, blessing, and healing. Her *Vita* records the miraculous cures she performed and notes that almost every sick person who came to her recovered.

Hildegard's medical reputation today is based on two works, the *Physica* and *Causae et curae*, or *Causes and Cures* (composition dates of both manuscripts are unknown). Though these works have long been attributed to the saint, recently scholars have questioned their authorship. Much of their content is nonreligious, and the writing differs in style from her genuine works. Relatively few manuscripts of each survive, and none were written during Hildegard's lifetime. Neither work was included in the *Riesencodex*, the giant manuscript compiled shortly after the saint's death that provides a nearly complete collection of her writings.



MONASTIC NATURALIST Hildegard is depicted recording visions beneath a spherical Earth. Her interest in the natural world is apparent in her many writings.

On the other hand, two of Hildegard's visionary works allude to her writing about the natural world and give us good reason to believe she authored the *Physica* and *Causae et curae*. In the prologue to the *Liber vitae meritorum*, she states that in the previous year, a vision had shown her "the simplicity of the various natural creatures," and the *Liber divinorum operum* describes how she "revealed certain natural powers of various things." In the 1150s, before writing the *Liber vitae meritorum*, Hildegard probably began to record and organize what she had learned about the physical world and the function of and care for the human body. The result, which is known as the *Book of Subtleties of the Diverse Nature of Creatures*, was originally a single medical-scientific work; copyists had divided it into two by the 1220s.

HILDEGARD VON BINGEN <SANTA>. *LIBER DIVINORUM OPERUM* (SEC. XIII). BIBLIOTECA STATALE DI LUCCA, MS. 1942, CARTA 38R. SU CONCESSIONE DEL MINISTERO DELLA CULTURA | BIBLIOTECA STATALE DI LUCCA









RESTORING ORDER Illustrations from *Scivias* depict the four elements in revolt (*above*) and rightly ordered (*above left*). Medieval healers thought plants (*left*) as well as minerals and gems (tin ore, *middle, p. 19*) healed by balancing bodily humors related to the elements.

HUMORS AND HEALING

Each of the nine books of the *Physica* deals with categories in the natural world: plants, elements, trees, stones, fish, birds, animals, reptiles, and metals. Hildegard does not describe objects physically but rather in terms of their characteristics, especially their hot, cold, moist, or dry qualities. These relate to the four humors of classical medicine that in turn were thought to affect people's physical and mental health. A "hot" remedy or treatment is recommended for a "cold" illness to balance the humors.

The first book explains what medical condition a plant cures and how the healer should prepare the remedies. It describes flowers and herbs that grew in the nuns' gardens as well as exotic ones such as frankincense and myrrh. Similar passages exist about vegetables and common cooking ingredients such as salt, milk, and eggs.

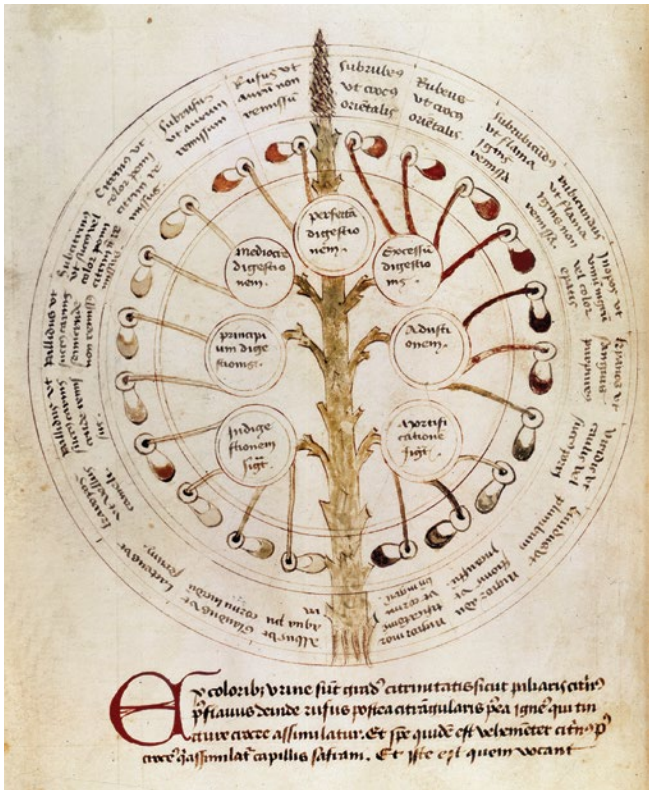
The other books also provide a mixture of common knowledge, traditional folk wisdom, and learning from sources that remain unnamed. Few remedies involve fish, birds, animals, and reptiles since most of these creatures are of little medicinal use. The book on the elements discusses only air, earth, and water, although fire appears frequently elsewhere in the *Physica*.

Hildegard mentions by name the Nahe and Glan Rivers, local waterways that had special significance for her. The Disibodenberg monastery stood above the spot where the Nahe and Glan flow together, and Hildegard had her monastery at Rupertsberg built where the Glan empties into the Rhine. The Nahe valley is a scenic, verdant region; the river begins in mountains with volcanic soil that still produces minerals and gemstones today. Hildegard appreciated the beauty of her surroundings and recognized the value of the nearby natural resources. They likely inspired her to write about the splendor, practical use, and curative powers of the natural world.

The first book of *Causae et curae* describes how God created the world in the manner God wished. It explains the existence and meaning of objects in the cosmos such as stars, planets, and elements as well as natural phenomena like winds, thunder, and dew. Humankind takes center stage in the second book, which repeatedly discusses procreation and the related topics of semen, conception, menstruation, and childbirth. Many passages mention the humors and conditions caused by their imbalance along with descriptions of individual physical, psychological, and diet-related ailments.

The author answers questions about the natural world such as what phase of the moon is most favorable for conceiving a child, why humans have two kidneys, and what happens when people dream. She also occasionally shares views on theological issues, such as how Adam was created and why

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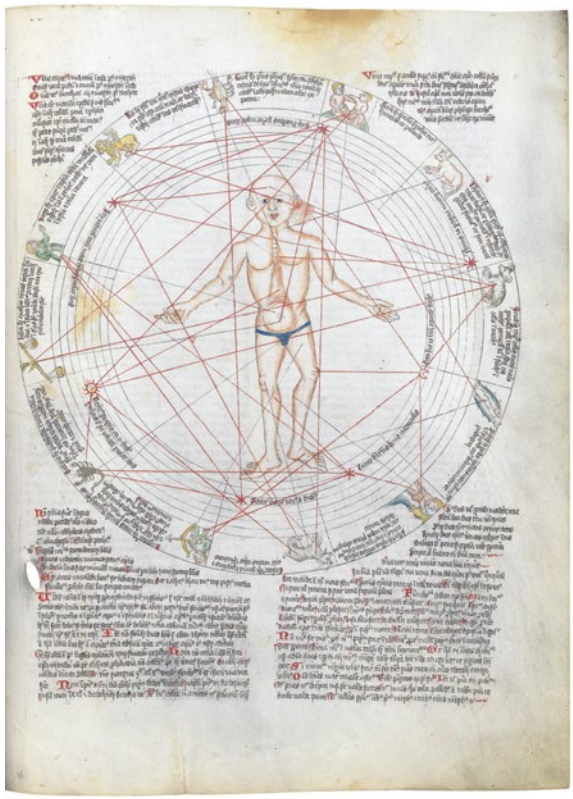


TABLE FOR URINE ANALYSIS, PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, MS LAT 11229 (PETIT TRAITE D'HYGIENE ET MEDECINE, 13TH CENT., VELLUM), FOL.19R—© ARCHIVES CHARMET / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES • BLOODLETTING MAN, SHOWING THE INFLUENCE OF THE ZODIAC AND THE PLANETS—CC BY 4.0, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS • CARLESMILLAN (PHOTOGRAPHER), TIN ORE (CASSITERITE) SURROUNDED BY MUSCOVITE (2010)—CC BY-SA 3.0, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

BLOOD AND BILE Medieval diagnoses often came from studying bodily fluids such as urine (*above*). Remedies sometimes involved removing fluids, as in the practice of bloodletting (*above right*).



Eve sinned first. In addition Books 2 through 4 contain cures and remedies. The author seldom mentions the quantity of individual ingredients but provides directions for preparation and occasionally an explanation of why healing occurs. The fifth book contains practical information for healers, including identification of signs of life and death, and details on the visual inspection of urine, a common method for identifying illness. Finally, the last book predicts the personalities of men and women based on the day of the month they were conceived.

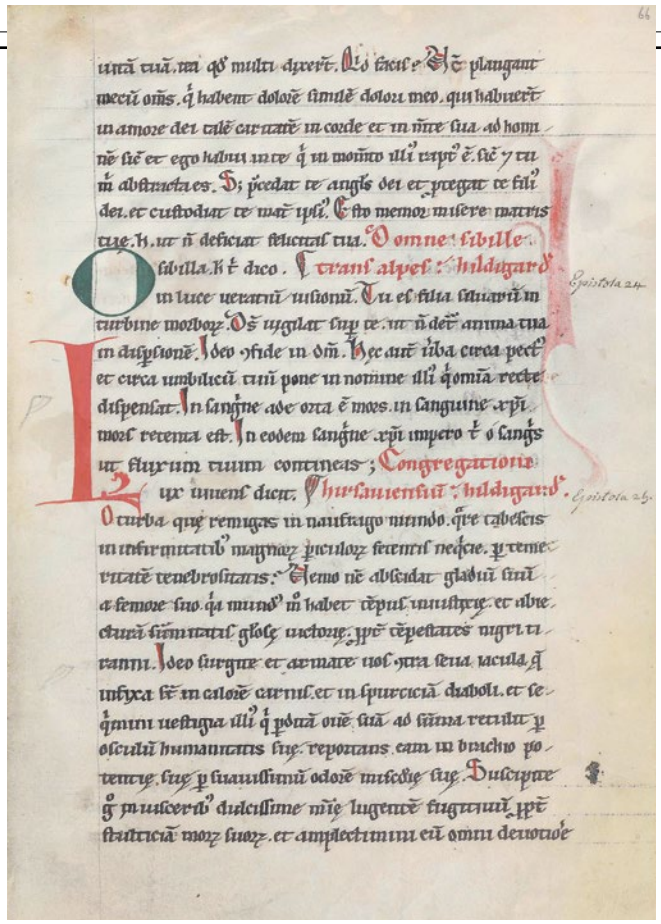
MAGIC OR MIRACLES?

Both the *Physica* and *Causae et curae* reflect commonly accepted beliefs and theories about the natural world and medicine based on the writings of classical scholars such as Dioscorides (40–90) and Galen (c. 130–c. 216). But some of the ideas are unique, especially concerning the humors and conception. Recommended cures include herbal remedies, bloodletting, the use of gemstones, and the recitation of incantations—a mixture of the natural and the supernatural. The books often include a caveat that the treatment will be effective only if it is God's will.

Several of Hildegard's letters and the *Vita* relate how Hildegard cured illnesses of the body and the mind. According to these accounts, she offered medical advice and healed fever, tumors, epilepsy, and even lovesickness through the laying on of hands or blessing with the sign of the cross. If the afflicted person could not travel to Rupertsberg, Hildegard blessed water or bread and had it sent to the person, who then consumed it and recovered. Sometimes the saint's prayers on the sick person's behalf sufficed, and sometimes she resorted to other measures. For example Hildegard sent Sybil, who suffered from a hemorrhage, a letter with these words and instructions:

> In the name of him who disposes all things rightly, place these words next to your heart and your navel: "In the blood of Adam, death arose, in the blood of Christ, death was extinguished. Through the same blood of Christ I order you, O blood, to check your flow!"

Pagan societies used incantations for healing purposes, and Christianity also recognized the power of words to heal. Religious and lay healers recited prayers or parts of the liturgy to cure in addition to or in lieu of other remedies. For example a demon-possessed woman, Sigewize, required a special cure. Hildegard provided the woman's local priests with the text for an exorcism. When their attempt proved unsuccessful, they sent Sigewize to Hildegard, who was able to expel the demon. Hildegard never addressed the evil power, and her words and actions did not violate the



"O BLOOD, CHECK YOUR FLOW!" This letter from Hildegard (*left*) gives instructions to verbally rebuke a bleeding condition by the blood of Christ.

GREENING GARB A stamp from Liechtenstein commemorates Hildegard's 925th birthday with a nod to her concept of *viriditas,* or "greening power" (*below*).

expectations of the church, so her treatments with incantations and exorcism were considered miraculous rather than magical.

Hildegard herself suffered serious illnesses on many occasions throughout her life. She became sick when she refused to write down the visions God had granted her, and she fell deathly ill when Abbot Kuno refused to permit her to leave Disibodenberg and establish her own community (see pp. 12–15). In both cases she felt God afflicted her because of disobedience or stubbornness; once she or others obeyed God's will, she regained her health. Hildegard's theology frequently depicts illness as punishment for sin. The saint never employed remedies for any of her own illnesses but accepted her condition and waited for God's healing.



HOLISTIC HILDEGARD

Despite recent skepticism regarding their origin, the medical-scientific perspectives of the *Physica* and *Causae et curae* complement the theology in Hildegard's visionary works, giving credence to the long-standing tradition of her authorship. While the former writings deal with the healing of the physical body and the mind, the latter address spiritual wholeness and the soul's well-being, which the body's condition affects. Hildegard's final visionary work, the *Liber divinorum operum*, synthesizes the physical and theological worlds, expanding her vision by discussing the elements, humors, illnesses, and other topics found in her medical-scientific works.

Hildegard's worldview emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between Creator and creation. God is life and made all things for the good of humankind. The creation story in the *Physica* focuses on the importance of humanity:

> With earth was the human being created. All the elements served mankind, and sensing that man was alive, they busied themselves in aiding his life in every way. And man in turn occupied himself with them.

In the *Liber divinorum operum*, God as Creator speaks:

> I flame above the beauty of the fields, and I shine in the waters, and I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. With the airy wind I quicken all things with some invisible life that sustains them all.

Hildegard's later visions see God embracing the universe as supreme judge and ruler, the macrocosm, with humankind situated at the center, the microcosm (see pp. 25–29). She reminds readers that God created the natural world for the benefit of humankind and admonishes them to care for this gift from God.

The physical greenness of plants and trees has a sacred counterpart in Hildegard's concept of *viriditas*. God infuses life into all creation through this "greening power" or "greening force," which provides not only for physical existence but for spiritual energy and health. Viriditas epitomizes the relationship between the natural and spiritual worlds, between God as Creator and the created world.

The depth and breadth of Hildegard's medical-scientific knowledge was extraordinary, especially for a woman in the time and the place she lived. She wrote about traditional beliefs and practices, interpreting them according to her own understanding and incorporating her own ideas, some of which evolved over her lifetime. Most remarkable was her ability to make the natural world an essential part of her visionary experiences and to demonstrate the wonder of God's creation. CH

Debra L. Stoudt is a professor in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures at Virginia Tech. She is also an author of works on medieval German mystics and coeditor of A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen.

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN, LETTER 338 TO SYBIL (FROM GREEN O TO LAST WORD IN BLACK BEFORE RED C), BERLIN, STAATSBIBLIOTHEK ZU BERLIN, PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ MS. THEOL. LAT. FOL. 699 (12TH CENT.), FOL. 66R, HTTP://RESOLVER.STAATSBIBLIOTHEK-BERLIN.DE/SBB0001FCBF00000135—PUBLIC DOMAIN MARK 1.0, TUDIGIT• LIECHTENSTEINISCHE POST AG, 1.80 CHF STAMP IN HONOR OF THE 925TH BIRTHDAY OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN—PHILATELIE LIECHTENSTEIN

Light and splendor and life

Excerpts from Causae et curae
and the Physica, *attributed to Hildegard*



BOUND LIGHT This illustration from the Rupertsberg *Scivias* reflects Hildegard's teaching in *Causae et curae* on the creation of the soul, in which the light God created is bound to the human body.

CREATION ORIGINS

On the creation of the world. God was and is without beginning, before the creation of the world. He himself was and is light and splendor, and he was life. When therefore God wanted to make the world, he made it out of nothing, but the matter of the world was in his will.

On matter. For just after the will of God manifested itself to work the work [of creation], the matter of the world proceeded forth from that very will, in the manner God willed, like a dark and formless globe.

On the creation of the soul. God made the light, which was swift and could fly everywhere. But in the same counsel by which he made the light, he determined to give a bodily structure to spiritual life, which was the breath of life. This structure was a form drawn out of the clay of the earth. It would not be able to fly or blow away. Due to its lack of capacity it would not even be able to raise itself. It would be bound in this way so that it might look up to God more intensely. The ancient serpent hated this bond [between the human body and soul], because even though human beings were heavy due to the body, they could raise themselves to God through the capacity for reason.

On the elements and the firmament. And God made the elements of the world. They are in human beings, and humans work with them. For there are fire, air, water, and earth. These four elements are so wound together and joined together that none of them can be separated from the others. They contain each other in such a way that, together, they are called the firmament.

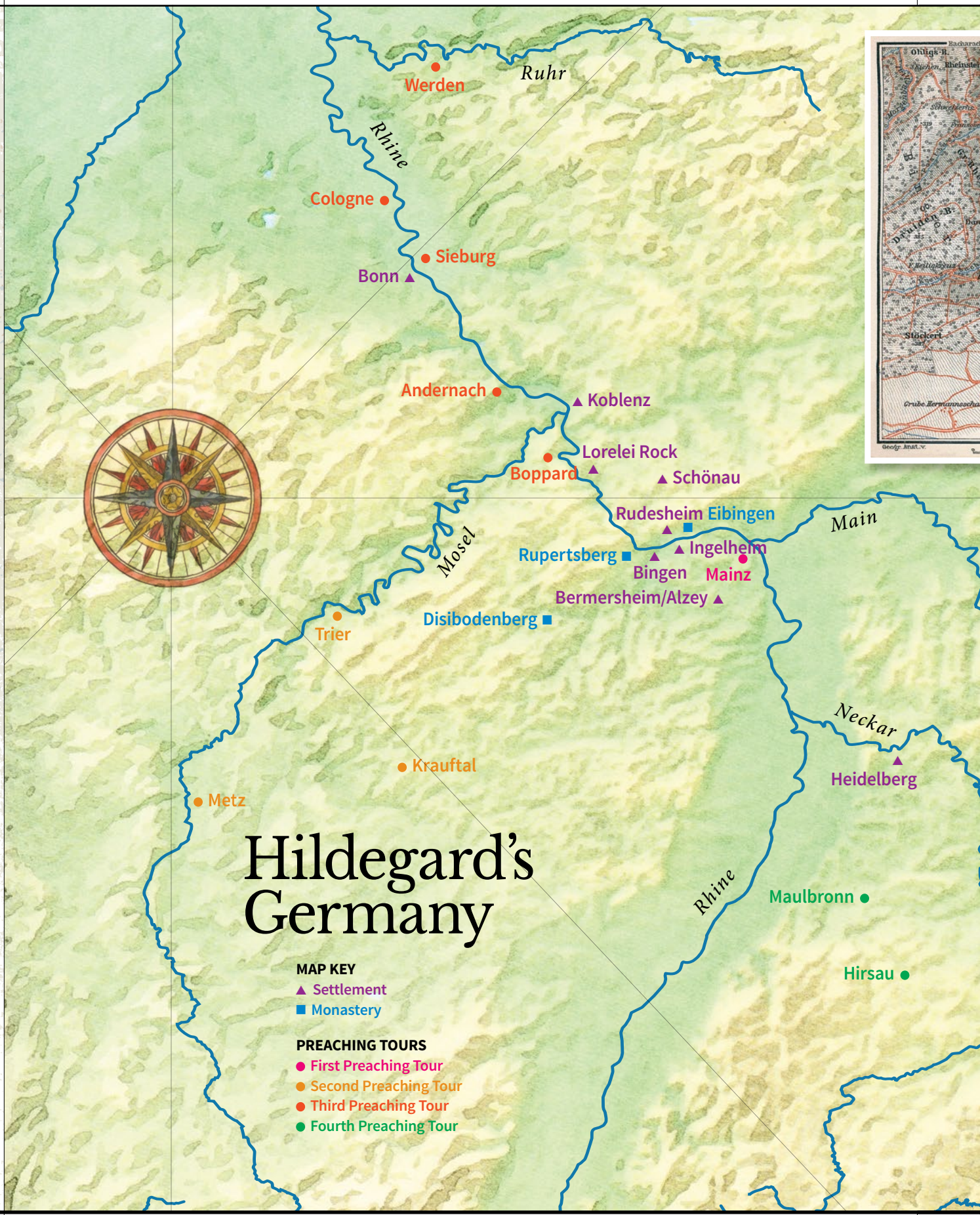
On the sun and the stars. The sun, which I might call supreme among these elements, sends out its radiance and fire through them. Around it are stars of such size and brightness that they reach through the firmament to the earth like mountains. Hence the closer they are to the earth, the more brightly they appear to shine. Around this same sun are other stars of less size and brightness. They are like valleys compared to the stars mentioned earlier, so that they appear less clearly. (*from* Causae et curae, *translated by Edwin Woodruff Tait*, *contributing editor to* CH)

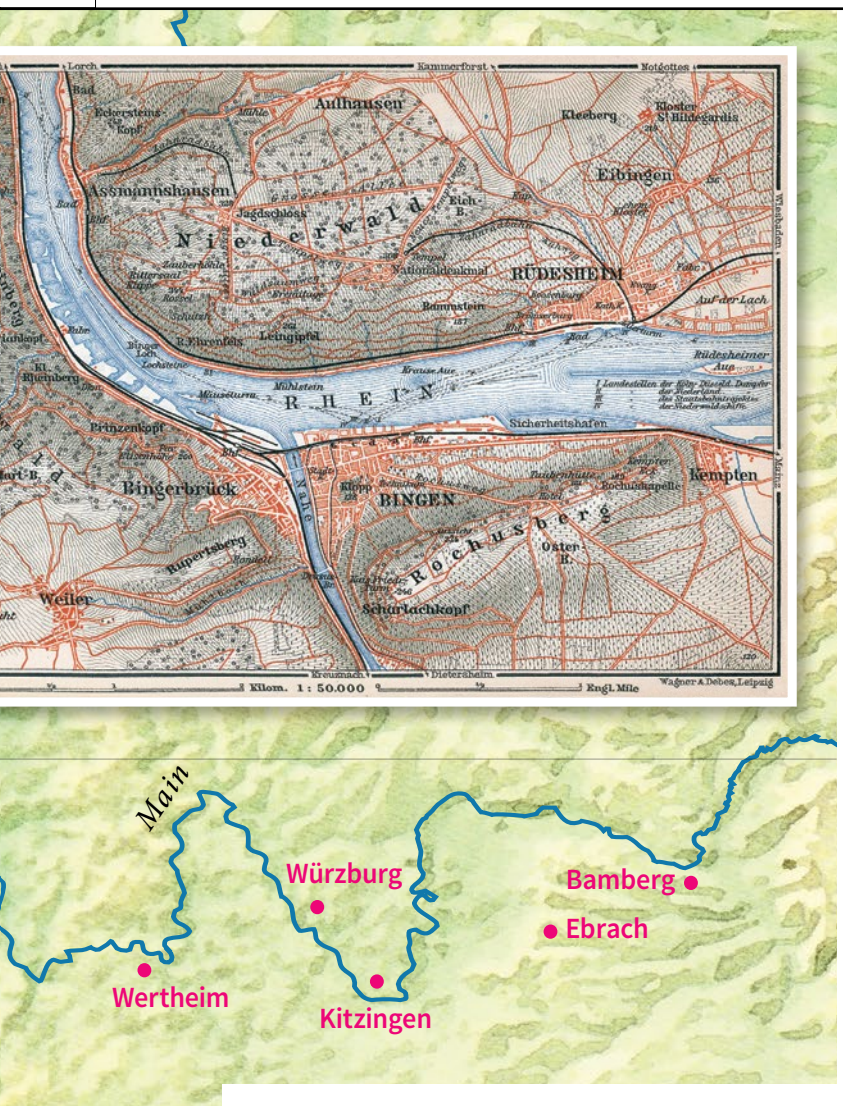
CREATION USEFULNESS

In the creation of humanity, another earth was taken from the earth. This other earth is the human person. All the elements served him, because they sensed that he was alive. In all his proceedings they worked with him, and he with them. The earth gave its vitality, according to the kind and nature and behaviors of the human person and all his activity. With its useful plants, the earth distinguishes and manifests the activity of the spiritual characteristics of the human person. But with its useless plants the earth points out his useless and diabolical characteristics. . . .

Certain plants grow in the air. These are light on the digestion and are of a joyful nature. Thus they make the person who eats them joyful. They are likened to human hairs, because human hairs are always light and airy. But certain other plants are windy, so that they grow from the wind. They are dry and heavy on the digestion. And they are of a sad nature, so that they make the person who eats them sad. They are compared and likened to human sweat. But the juice/sap of useless and inedible plants is poisonous, because those plants themselves are deadly as food for humans. They can be compared to human excretion. (*from* the Physica, *translated by Edwin Woodruff Tait*)

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Rupertsberg
Ingelheim
Bingen
Mainz
Bermersheim/Alzey
Disibodenberg
Trier
Neckar
Heidelberg
Krauftal
Metz
Hildegard's Germany
Rhine
Maulbronn
Hirsau
MAP KEY
Settlement
Monastery
PREACHING TOURS
First Preaching Tour
Second Preaching Tour
Third Preaching Tour
Fourth Preaching Tour



Hildegard's geographic context as well as the cultural milieu of her day shaped her life and ministry. Here are a few locations key to that journey.

HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Hildegard spent the whole of her life in German-speaking territories of the Holy Roman Empire. A confederacy of territories ruled by various knights, barons, counts, margraves, and dukes, the Holy Roman Empire covered a large part of central Europe, especially the German-speaking territories. It was ruled by a diet (parliament) headed by an elected emperor. The empire was named as such because it was seen to be the Christian revival of the old Roman Empire. With close ties to the papacy, the emperors assumed that they had the right to determine who would be the next pope; meanwhile, the popes tried to control the emperors. Such was the political climate in which Hildegard lived, established her two monasteries, and sought to bring God's word to the leaders of her day.

MAP DESIGNED BY ZAGNUT DESIGN. [INSET: VICINITY OF BINGEN] THE RHINE: INCLUDING THE BLACK FOREST & THE VOSAGES: *HANDBOOK FOR TRAVELLERS*, 17TH REV. ED. (LEIPZIG: KARL BAEDEKER, 1911), BETWEEN PP. 240 AND 241.

HILDEGARD'S LIFE

▲ In the center of the map just south of Mainz we see **Bermersheim**, where Hildegard lived as a child.

■ At 14 Hildegard took vows to be a Benedictine nun at **Disibodenberg**, some 30 miles west of Bermersheim.

■ When Hildegard was 52, she founded the abbey at **Rupertsberg** in Bingen, which is near the confluence of the Nahe and Rhine Rivers (see inset map).

■ Fifteen years later she established her second abbey just across the Rhine at **Eibingen**, a district of Rudesheim.

PREACHING TOURS

From 1158 to 1170, when establishing her second monastery, Hildegard embarked on a series of preaching tours. She addressed monks, nuns, clergy, and sometimes crowds that included laypeople. Not only were these itinerant preaching tours remarkable because travel was difficult and Hildegard, who was in her sixties and seventies, was in poor health—they were also highly unusual because only men could officially preach. Being the *magistra* of two abbeys, however, gave her a platform; moreover, she was well known at this point in her life for her orthodox teaching and supported by many in high places.

● ***East and Mainz*** (1158–1161): Hildegard traveled eastward several times, reaching as far as Bamberg, a 150-mile journey each way along the Main River. These visits spanned three years, and Hildegard preached primarily at cathedrals and monastery chapter houses en route, addressing clergy and monastics.

● ***West and Trier*** (1160): Hildegard also traveled nearly as far westward along the Mosel River. This tour included Trier, Metz, and the monastery at Krauftal. The latter two are now in the Alsace region of France.

● ***North past Cologne*** (1161, 1163): In both 1161 and 1163, Hildegard traveled northward along the Rhine and Ruhr Rivers as far as Werden.

● ***South*** (1170): When Hildegard was 72, she took her longest and most difficult trip, traveling south along the Neckar River and then across rolling hills to Zwiefalten Abbey.

SIGNIFICANCE OF MAINZ, TRIER, AND COLOGNE

Rather than having a hereditary king, the Holy Roman Empire had an emperor who was elected by seven dominant figures within the imperial territory. Four were influential lords: the duke of Saxony, the king of Bohemia (Czech), the count Palatine of the Rhine, and the margrave of Brandenberg. The other three electors were the archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne. These clergy were powerful political figures as well as ecclesiastical leaders.

It is significant that Hildegard visited the cities of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne on her preaching tours. There she visited and possibly preached before the three elector-archbishops of the Holy Roman Empire, two of whom were her close allies.

—Glenn E. Myers, CH #161 issue advisor and retired professor of church history and theological studies at Crown College

Hildegard against heresy

Defending the Incarnation against Cathar inventions



CRUSADE AGAINST THE CATHARS A 14th-c. illumination shows soldiers on horseback turning swords on a group of Albigenses in France. In 1209 Pope Innocent III declared a holy war against the Cathar sect.

> "There will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars," that is, portents in Christ so that those in error will oppose the humanity of the Savior, and in the church when heretics will attempt to attack the church, and among priests, teachers, and the spiritual people when they will turn away from the truth toward falsehood. (Hildegard, *Homilies on the Gospels*)

The Cathars (Cathari) or Albigenses were a self-identified Christian group found mostly in Germany, France, and northern Italy. They called themselves Christopolitans or Bogomils (loved by God). Some leading ecclesiastical writers of the twelfth century, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot Evervin of Novertine, Elizabeth of Schőnau, Ekbert of Schőnau, and Hildegard, accused the Cathars of heresy. These thinkers spoke for many medieval Christians, who thought of the movement as a revival of docetism, a form of gnosticism that plagued early Christianity. Cathar doctrine seems to resemble the spiritual dualism held by Manicheans of Augustine's time. However, much of what we know comes from the Cathars' Christian opponents, as we do not have any of their own writings until the late thirteenth century.

VISIONS AGAINST SCHISMS

In her writings Hildegard primarily dealt with clergy corruption and neglect, which she felt made the laity much more susceptible to heretical teaching. Her principal concern was orthodoxy and being faithful to Christian truth and the Gregorian Reform. In the midst of papal schism and the rise of heretical groups, Hildegard cast her response in a visionary and apocalyptic manner.

Four works of Hildegard reflect her attitude toward the Cathars. According to Beverly Kienzle, allusions to them are included in Vision 7 of Book 2 of *Scivias* (1151); a letter that was originally a sermon delivered in Cologne; another letter that was originally a sermon delivered at Kirchhiem; and a sermon that is based on Luke 21:25–33 that she includes in her *Expositiones evangeliorum*. These writings come principally from her four preaching tours (see pp. 22–23).

One of her main criticisms of the Cathars deals with their belief that created reality cannot convey grace and is in fact, evil. They did not believe, therefore, in Christ's Incarnation nor in the validity of the Eucharist and water baptism. Cathars were known for rejecting the Catholic Church because of its corruption; they believed that they themselves were living a purer form of Christianity. (*Cathari* derives from the Greek, meaning "pure ones.")

As one of a number of popular lay movements of the twelfth century, they sought to live the life of the apostles (*vita apostolica*). They also saw their sacramental life as principally a baptism in the Spirit by laying on of hands (*consolamentum*) that remitted all sins even at the moment of death.

Given what Hildegard wrote about sacraments in Vision 6 of Book 2 of *Scivias*, it is consistent with her theology to strongly condemn as heretics those who deny the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist bread. Hildegard also rejected the Cathars' promotion of celibacy, which she saw as an expression of their dualist beliefs as well as denying the good sacrament of marriage. Finally her great love of creation may have led her to determine that the Cathars were heretics. These errors inspired her to defend these essential Christian truths.

—Steven J. McMichael, associate professor of theology, University of St. Thomas

THE CRUSADE AGAINST THE ALBIGENSES, LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY ROY 16 G VI (*CHRONIQUES DE FRANCE OU DE SAINT DENIS*, 1325/1350), FOL. 374V—BRITISH LIBRARY ARCHIVE / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

"Know the ways"

HILDEGARD'S VISIONS AND INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY

Nathaniel M. Campbell

> O human, who are fragile dust of the earth and ashes of ashes! Cry out and speak of the origin of pure salvation until those people are instructed, who, though they see the inmost contents of the Scriptures, do not wish to tell them or preach them, because they are lukewarm and sluggish in serving God's justice. Unlock for them the enclosure of mysteries that they, timid as they are, conceal in a hidden and fruitless field. Burst forth into a fountain of abundance and overflow with mystical knowledge, until they who now think you contemptible because of Eve's transgression are stirred up by the flood of your irrigation.—Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*

In 1141, at the age of 42, Hildegard heard these words from God in the first vision of what would become her first book, *Scivias*. She experienced such visions while fully awake but with her inner eyes and ears, and they had been with her since childhood. Early on she felt as much fear as wonder in "the shadow of the Living Light." As a child she was met with confusion when she tried to share what she saw, and so she learned to keep it to herself. But now, in the second half of her life, things changed; her mind was opened to know the meaning of the Scriptures. And she wasn't supposed to keep it to herself anymore.

For many later medieval women, their experience of mysticism centered on union with the Godhead, whether as ecstasy or as annihilation. But Hildegard's mystical experiences were missions. God had something to say to his people, and he had chosen Hildegard to relay the message as a prophet and a teacher. The Christian world was experiencing an extreme drought of holiness, and Hildegard's visions could provide life-saving irrigation. She had work to do.

VISIONS AND REVISIONS

In her visions Hildegard saw images with exotic features and elaborate costumes. She saw landscapes and buildings through which her soul would fly, a feather blown on the breath of God. She saw cosmic spheres, circles of fire, and the powerful female representations of the church, Wisdom, and Love (*Caritas*). And then came the words. A voice from heaven explained every detail. Each color had a meaning, each figure was a symbol, each room in each building, each circle of the cosmic wheel. Out of these visions, Hildegard recast the full message of Christianity. She was not inventing it out of her own heart, however. Instead she was clothing God's eternal story with new images to awaken the dry hearts and sluggish minds of her contemporaries.



THE SHINING ONE "I looked and I saw something like a great, iron colored mountain," Hildegard wrote in her first vision. "On it sat a being of such glorious light that its splendor dazzled my eyes" (*above*).

Hildegard's theology is quite traditional, but the language in which she writes about God is lively and fresh. For example, in her vision of creation in *Scivias*, she sees the Trinity as "a blazing fire" (the Father), "with a flame in it the color of the sky" (the Son), "which burned ardently with a gentle breath" (the Spirit). In Genesis God's breath moves across the waters and the Word speaks to create. In Hildegard's vision the Word's flame beats on the dark atmosphere

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COSMIC EGG Hildegard's first vision of creation imagines the universe as an egg bursting with verdant life (*left*). In contrast the fall of man (*above*) shows humanity captive in an arid and static state, separated from viridity (greenness or greening) by the red barrier of sin.

like a blacksmith, striking sparks and shaping it "until each creature was radiant with the loveliness of perfection." Nothing Hildegard says contradicts the scriptural creation story—but her images flash with vibrant imagination.

Later she sees the trinitarian fire "offer to the [first] human a white flower, which hangs in that flame as dew hangs on the grass. Its scent comes to the human's nostrils, but he does not taste it with his mouth or touch it with his hands, and thus he turns away and falls into the thickest darkness."

This is Adam's fall, but the traditional image has been turned upside down. In Genesis 3, Adam sinned when he plucked and ate the forbidden fruit. In Hildegard's reimagining Adam has instead been offered "the sweet precept of obedience," but though "he tried to know the wisdom of the law with his intelligence, as if with his nose, he did not perfectly digest it by putting it in his mouth, or fulfill it in full blessedness by the works of his hands."

Hildegard casts Adam's disobedience in a new light. Instead of a fall from perfection, she sees it as a failure to live out God's mission for him. Thus Hildegard seeks to help us acknowledge and fulfill our human mission, made in God's image and likeness and predestined to be what she calls "workers of the Divinity."

Hildegard organized her teaching visions into three major works. The first, *Scivias* (composed 1141–1151), summarizes Christian theology from creation to the end of time. Its first part tells the story of creation and fall—what the world was supposed to be and how the world is. The second part starts again from creation and fall but pushes forward to the Redeemer and the church he established to set aright the fall's disorder. The third part retells the whole story, imagined as a grand edifice whose walls and ramparts represent the history of salvation. The actors on its stage are personified virtues who guide us on the way to God, fulfilling the meaning of the book's title, *Know the Ways*.

Hildegard's next visionary volume was the *Liber vitae meritorum* (composed 1158–1163). This book is about sin and its consequences. It includes alluring speeches from grotesque personified vices and sensational scenes of punishments meted out after death to those who fail to repent. But the virtues from *Scivias* answer each misguided enticement with truth's corrective. The effects of sin are not just personal—they are cosmic. In the book's third vision, the elements of the world lament the harm done to creation by the chaos of human sin. Order is restored through Christ alone, both for each person's soul and for the whole universe.

The third volume, the *Liber divinorum operum* (composed 1163–1174), was triggered by a mystical

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CELESTIAL CIRCLE This miniature from the Rupertsberg *Scivias* depicts the angelic choir's hierarchy in concentric circles.

experience related to the prologue of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word…" Its visions explore the full range of the created cosmos, the human person, and the spiritual realities connecting them. The volume opens and closes with the figure of Divine Love holding the world and its spiritual history. The first part of the work culminates in Hildegard's exegesis of John 1:1–14, while the second part is dominated by her lengthy exegesis of the creation story in Genesis 1. The Word links them together—the Word that creates and the Word that becomes human.

INCARNATION AND THE MICROCOSM

Hildegard's theology began from the everyday world and worked its way up to eternity. But she was only able to do that because eternity had already beamed its way down into everyday life in the incarnate Word. Her visionary perspective constantly moved up and down that ladder, and her most arresting images connected the top and bottom rungs. We see this dynamic in one of her chants, "O vis eternitatis":

> O power of Eternity:
> All things you held in order in your heart,
> and through your Word were all created
> according to your will.
> And then your very Word
> was clothed within
> that form of flesh
> from Adam born.…
> And so his garments
> were washed
> from greatest suffering.

This piece starts in eternity and zooms down to the "garments" of the human body. The connection? The Word. The key is what theologians call the eternal predestination of the Word, or the idea that God willed from eternity that he would enter into time; his Son would become a human being.

Glimpses of this idea appear in Scripture—for example, God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world," Paul writes in Ephesians 1:4. But the phrase that Hildegard latched onto came from the Psalter: "the counsel of the Lord stands forever" (Psalm 33:11). As she prayed in the vision of *Scivias* 3.1:

> Grant me to make known the divine counsel, which was ordained of old . . . how You willed Your Son to become incarnate and become a human being within Time; which you willed before all creation in Your rectitude and the fire of the Dove, the Holy Spirit, so that Your Son might rise from the Virgin the splendid beauty of the sun and be clothed with true humanity, a man's form assumed for Man's sake.

Because Hildegard saw the Incarnation woven into the very fabric of history, she focused on the process by which that fabric unfolded. Every detail of the physical world is a sign, pointing us to see the reality that God became human. Every stage in sacred history is a prophetic light, shining through shadow to reveal that destined day of Incarnation.

"But man is also said to be the worker of Divinity and a shadow of his mysteries," Hildegard wrote in an autobiographical passage later included in the *Life of St. Hildegard,* "and should in all things reveal the Holy Trinity, for God made him in his image and likeness." When God created humankind (Genesis 1:26), he did it because the Son would eventually become human too. Human nature is built with this purpose in mind.

For Hildegard the image of God in which we are made is the "garment" of our flesh, the very same put on by the incarnate Christ. To be made in God's likeness, meanwhile, means to share in the rationality of the Word by which God created the world. Those two things work together: we are rational souls who must use our wisdom and knowledge to act through the physical body to fulfill God's will. God's acts of creation are a model for us. The work of God is,

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FROM CREATION TO COMPLETION Hildegard uniquely represents the creation and fall with Adam refusing the flower of obedience (*left*); later the human figure connects all creation as a complete work of God (*above*).

EIBINGEN, KLOSTERBIBLIOTHEK ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD, COD. 1, PERGAMENTFAKSIMILE VON WIESBADEN, HESSISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK, HS. 1. FOL. 41V—ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD EIBINGEN • HILDEGARD VON BINGEN (SANTA), *LIBER DIVINORUM OPERUM* (SEC. XIII), BIBLIOTECA STATALE DI LUCCA, MS. 1942, CARTA 28V. SU CONCESSIONE DEL MINISTERO DELLA CULTURA I BIBLIOTECA STATALE DI LUCCA

therefore, both humankind and all of creation—and Hildegard sometimes says that "humankind is all of creation." What does that mean?

In the first part of her third volume, Hildegard sees the whole universe, with Earth spinning amid the swirling spheres of atmosphere, ether (outer space), and fire. Standing astride the cosmos is a human figure, arms and legs outstretched, connecting every level of the physical world. Because humans are "the complete work of God, divine by soul and earthly by earth," they contain every level of creation, from the most concrete piece of the physical world straight up to the angels in heaven.

This is the idea that humans are microcosms, or "mini-universes," of the macrocosm (the universe at full scale). It also means that every physical element of the world is interconnected and has a spiritual significance. For example, Hildegard sees a network of winds circling the globe, moving the atmosphere and entering into the human body to sustain and connect us to the rest of the world. But those winds are also virtues, spiritual forces that enter into our souls to uphold and guide us on our journey to holiness.

VIRIDITY AND VIRTUES

When the physical elements of the world are in balance, the world is healthy. Hildegard calls this *viriditas*, which literally means "greenness" but also connotes freshness, vitality, and even fecundity. Viridity isn't just a physical concept for Hildegard. It is also a spiritual concept—the soul is fresh and healthy when it has viridity too. She even made viridity a characteristic of God. In one of her analogies for the Trinity in *Scivias*, the moist *viriditas* of a stone represents the Father (while its concreteness represents the Son and its ability to strike fire represents the Holy Spirit), and she often spoke of the Holy Spirit's viridity distilling upon the world like dew upon the grass.

But what happens when the elements of the world are out of balance? Viridity dries up, the freshness withers. And because Hildegard always sees the physical and spiritual as intertwined, spiritual aridity (i.e., sin) could often be the cause for that physical imbalance. As she explains in *Causae et curae*:

> For the elements were made subject to humankind, and they usually exercise their functions in accordance with how they are impacted by human deeds. For when humans are entangled in fighting and terror, in hatred and envy, and in other contrary sins, [the elements] are overturned into another, contrary mode, whether of heat or cold or great downpours and floods. . . . But when humans keep to the right path and act with moderation in good and evil, then the elements exercise their functions by God's grace according to human need.





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CITY OF GOD Hildegard envisions the city of God, where angels praise God in harmony against reprobate spirits and appear to humans as commanded (*above*). She also illustrates the city assailed by darkness (*right*); Wisdom stands with the triune God (symbolic representation at *bottom center* of image) as he unfolds his redemptive plan.

So how do we stay on the right path that keeps both us and the world in balance? The Virtues. The Latin term *virtus* means both "virtue" and "power." Hildegard sees the Virtues much like the Eastern Orthodox idea of divine *energeia*, or energies that flow from divinity into the world. She speaks of them the way many theologians speak of sanctifying grace. They bring God's power into action in our lives and "lead God's elect to the heavenly places."

When God declared Hildegard's mission in the opening vision of *Scivias*, she saw him enthroned upon a mountain, with two figures standing at its base. The first figure is Fear of the Lord. This watchful Virtue keeps us pointed in the right direction toward holiness, for "she counters all forgetfulness of God's justice." The second figure appears like a child irradiated by God's glory. She is Poverty of Spirit, "for when the Fear of the Lord leads, they who are poor in spirit follow."

These are just two of the panoply of Virtues that Hildegard sees surrounding us, helping us turn back from pride and sin and tread the hard path of salvation. She wrote a musical play to dramatize this, the *Ordo virtutum* (*Play of the Virtues*). The story follows Anima, a soul who has strayed from the path and must be guided back by the Virtues. When at last she returns triumphant, they sing the final chorus together. It sums up Hildegard's theology, from a world that began in viridity to the purpose of the Incarnation. The Warrior (a biblical figure from Isaiah 42:13) is the Incarnate Son, pleading to God the Father for the salvation of humanity:

In the beginning all creation was verdant,
flowers blossomed in the midst of it;
later, greenness sank away,
and the Warrior saw this and said:
"I know it, but the golden number is not yet full.
You then, behold me, mirror of your Fatherhood:
in my body I am suffering exhaustion,
even my little ones faint.
Now remember that the fullness which was made in the beginning
need not have grown dry,
and that then you resolved
that your eye would never fail
until you saw my body full of jewels.
For it wearies me that all my limbs are exposed to mockery:
Father, behold, I am showing you my wounds."
So now, all you people,
bend your knees to the Father,
that he may reach you his hand. CH

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MEDIEVAL MARY MAGDALENE This early 12th-c. illustration shows Mary Magdalene proclaiming the Resurrection to the disciples. Hildegard has often been compared to Mary Magdalene, especially in debates about women preaching.

Preaching prioress?

Hildegard's admonitions in context

Did Hildegard of Bingen preach despite ecclesiastical injunctions against it? Hildegard certainly uttered words from God's mind and her own thoughts. Hearers described her holy discourse in different ways: teaching, prophecy, speaking, announcing, admonishing, proclaiming, but generally not preaching. The choice of words reflects the speaker's or author's point of view and relationship to ecclesiastical authority. Transgressing the boundary between prophecy and preaching proved dangerous for a woman. For example a self-called prophetess, Theuda, claimed divine revelation and prophesied publicly in 847 that the end of the world was near. For usurping the office of preaching, she was sentenced to public flogging in the city of Mainz.

Arguments for and against women preaching often centered on Mary Magdalene, specifically her announcement to the disciples that Jesus Christ was risen. The Benedictine Geoffrey of Vendôme (1093–1132) taught that Mary Magdalene preached widely and was the "apostle of Christ's Resurrection." Later churchmen, including Dominicans Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264) and Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419), added that while Mary did preach, she repented and desisted after hearing that Paul prohibited it. Still others, such as Dominican Moneta of Cremona (d. 1240), did not recognize Mary's proclamation of the Resurrection as official preaching before the church.

A HOLY COMMAND

When Hildegard received God's command in 1141 to "speak and write" what she heard and saw, she "knew the meaning of the exposition of the Psalter, the Gospels, and other catholic books from the volumes of the Old as well as the New Testaments." In 1158 the inspired *magistra* began composing her *Liber vitae meritorum*; at the same time, she was establishing her second monastery in Eibingen and beginning her visits or tours to cathedrals and monastic communities.

About her first tour, which took place between 1158 and 1161, Hildegard wrote, "I also journeyed to the locations of other congregations and there explained the words which God has ordered."

Theodoric of Echternach, author of the *Life of Hildegard* (completed in 1191), compared Hildegard to Moses, John the Evangelist, and Deborah. He praised her preaching and named 21 places where she preached: 5 cathedral cities and 16 monasteries. On a later tour (1167–1170), she affirmed God's direction, writing, "It was shown me in true vision that I would go to see certain communities of spiritual men and women and openly declare to them what God had shown me."

Clerics close to Hildegard observed that she possessed a Spirit-given dispensation to speak God's words. Robert, abbot of Val-Roi, wrote in a letter to Guibert of Gembloux:

> The apostle does not allow a woman to teach in the church; but this woman, through receiving the Spirit, has been freed from that condition and instructed by the Spirit's teaching. In her heart, through her own wisdom, she has learned by experience what is written: "Blessed is the person whom you have instructed, Lord, and you have taught that person from your law." [Ps 93:12]

Indeed Hildegard's words encouraged and edified her listeners, as Philip, dean of the cathedral at Cologne, wrote:

> Because we esteem your maternal piety, we want to inform you that after your recent visit to us at God's command when, through divine inspiration, you revealed the words of life to us, we were greatly astonished that God works through such a fragile vessel, such a fragile sex, to display the great marvels of his secrets. "But the Spirit breathes where it will." [John 3:8] For since it is abundantly clear that the Spirit has chosen a dwelling that pleases it in your heart, understandably we come to you in admiration as if to the living temple of God to offer up prayers, and we seek responses of truth from your heart, as from the very oracle of God. We further request that you commit to writing and send us those things that you spoke aloud to us earlier.

So did the prioress preach? Yes she did, but some would not call her words "preaching." One thing remains clear: Hildegard spoke with authority, and like Mary Magdalene, proclaimed the very "words of life."

—Beverly Mayne Kienzle, scholar and author

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Symphonia of vision

HILDEGARD'S SACRED MUSIC

Sara Salvadori

At dawn on the feast day, songs of praise resound within the walls of Disibodenberg Abbey. The sound of female voices is echoed by the sound of male voices nearby. The psalms chanted follow one another in the order established by Saint Benedict when he sang with his brothers within the walls of Montecassino and was answered by the female voices of Saint Scholastica (480–547) and the other nuns from the nearby monastery of Piumarola.

The Sunday psalms are psalms of praise and joy. They invite participants to praise God with "sincerity of heart," to "receive wisdom within," after being purified with hyssop that makes us "whiter than snow." The heart, "quenched in the soul and satiated in love," brings forth a new song. It is a time of "dancing and celebration, of trumpet sound and the clash of cymbals."

During the first 40 years of her life, Hildegard would have sung these words thousands of times. Moreover her experience of sacred music was deeply theological and visionary: a time of deep listening and even gestation, when earthly words and images were joined by otherworldly words, images, and music that in vision form an open window to the beyond.

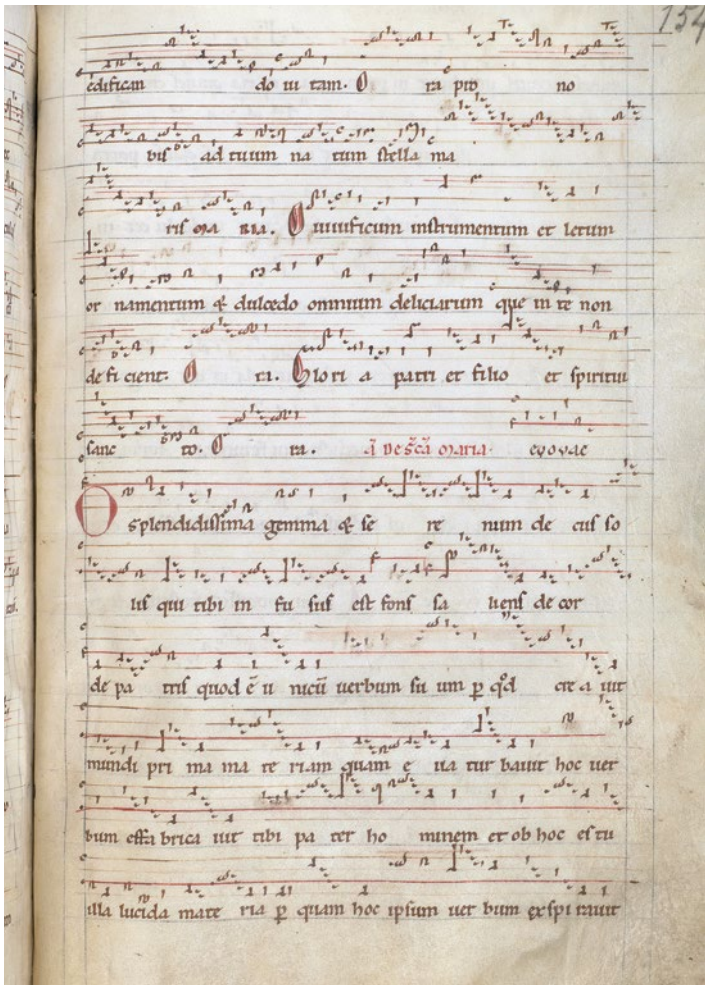
Here the divine message pervaded and infused her, the soul's sphere of fire resonating with the divine sphere of fire, like a string that begins to vibrate through sympathy without being struck. It was a time of bliss and joy. Hildegard wrote, "the soul is symphonic," because the moment it is infused into the body, it is endowed with the capacity to resonate and vibrate with the symphony of creation—God's great work—leading the body to live in harmony, to act virtuously, and to build the great city of living stones.

MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE Saints praise God in his heavenly city in this vision in Hildegard's *Liber divinorum operum*.

This is the sacred and symphonic journey Hildegard traveled and to which her work bears witness.

NEW MELODIES, TIMELESS TRUTHS

Fragments from Hildegard's everyday life come to us from her letters and the accounts of her biographers. In the cloister, for instance, her sisters heard her singing new music she had composed: a song addressed to Mary, "Virga ac diadema," "scepter and crown of the king," while enclosed in her cell and welcoming the Word of divine light. The opening verses of the composition almost seem to capture Hildegard's destiny; in her monastic seclusion, she could recollect herself, listening in obedience, in the humility of the blanket of earth, in the resonant vessel of her womanly body, and cherishing the gift of the revealed vision, keeping it in her heart, like Mary. There she meditated,





TOOLS OF PRAISE The harp and portative (table) organ (*above*) were commonly used medieval instruments; however, Hildegard's compositions were primarily vocal.

EBB AND FLOW The melodic elongation of the word *maris* (end of line 2 to line 3 at *left*) alludes to sea waves in this hymn composed by Hildegard.

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN, "O CLARISSIMA MATER SANCT[AJE MEDICIN[AJE" (WORD "SEA" [MARIS] IN LINES 2 AND 3), LEUVEN, KU LEUVEN LIBRARIES, MAURITS SABBE LIBRARY PM0045/V (12TH CENT.; FORMERLY DENDERMONDE, ST.-PIETERS-&-PAULUSABDIJ COD. 9), FOL. 154R • THOMAS HUMMEL (PHOTOGRAPHER), HOFFNUNG FÜR ALLE...: HARFE UND GESANG VON HILDEGARD VON BINGEN BIS ZUR GEGENWART. KONZERT MIT SABINE LINDNER, KATHOLIKENTAG, ST. CRUCIS, ERFURT, JUNE 1, 2024—[CC BY-SA 4.0] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

emerging as if from the tabernacle to spread a perfume made of words, sounds, and images.

The fame and the beauty of Hildegard's compositions, made up of around 80 hymns, antiphons, and sequences, spread far. In 1148 a letter arrived from Odo of Soissons (died c. 1170) consulting her on theological questions, but not before expressing admiration for her as a writer and composer. "It is said that you are transported to the heavens, to see and to narrate, through writing, infinite things," Odo wrote. "And that you compose songs with a new melody, although in this you have never been instructed."

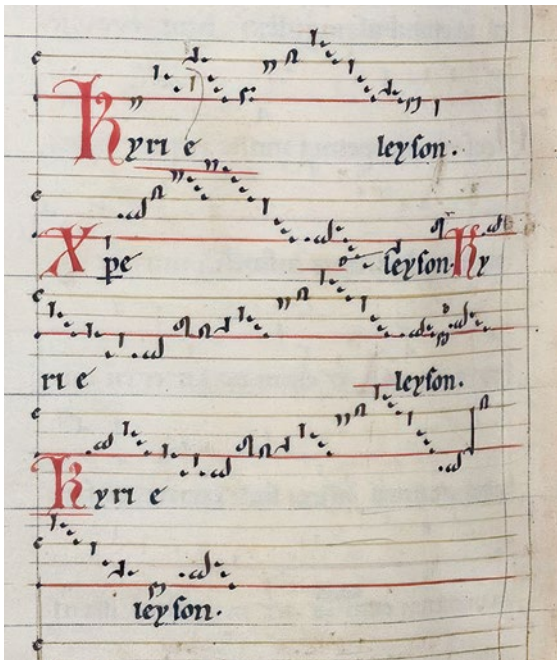
She also decided to combine words and sounds with the design of images. Long melismas (vocal runs in which one word moves through many notes) expand across the horizontal dimension of time. Broad pitch intervals extend high and low within the vertical dimension of space, from the depths of the earth's deep sounds to the sidereal heights of high notes. Hildegard conveys through sound the divine love embracing a vast creation. Her songs still amaze today for their beauty and unique style.

When she sings of Mary, Star of the Sea, in the hymn "O clarissima mater sanctae medicinae," she stretches the word "sea," chanting it in 19 neumes (a form of musical notation predating the five-line staff). In the original Gregorian chant inspiring it, "Ave maris stella," there were only nine. The listener perceives the voice coming and going; in the musical score the neumes move, rising slightly and then falling back on themselves—like the waves of the sea on which shines the light of Mary, star and guide for navigating sailors (see *CH* #159 for more on Mary as Stella Maris).

In her Kyrie the voice spans almost two octaves. Sounds rise at the top and then descend again at the bottom. The movement, repeated several times, outlines the shape of a mountainous landscape on which the wind blows. The sound guides listeners into the interior landscape and invokes divine mercy in prayer. It is music that broadens the gaze by placing itself outside the firmament.

From this perspective Hildegard illustrated her vision of divine creation, seen first as an egg (p. 26), then as a wheel, and finally as a whole, complete, and revolving sphere (p. 17), with the earth/humanity at its center, surrounded by all the elements. The divine Caritas, God's love infused throughout creation, embraces the sphere. To convey the circularity of the wheel and of the globe, Hildegard invites the viewer to perceive that what is "below is also above," and vice versa. In her musical writing, she paired the word "abyss" with high-pitched sounds and the word "stars" with low-pitched sounds, as in the song "Caritas abundat." This shift forces both singer and listener to broaden their perceptual boundaries and sense themselves within a sphere held within the heart of God.

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN, KYRIE, WIESBADEN, HOCHSCHUL- UND LANDESBIBLIOTHEK RHEINMAIN HS. 2 (*RIESENCODEX*, 1180/1190), FOL. 472V—[CC BY 4.0] KULTURELLES ERBE DIGITAL. HOCHSCHUL- UND LANDESBIBLIOTHEK RHEINMAIN • EIBINGEN, KLOSTERBIBLIOTHEK ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD, COD. 1, PERGAMENTFAKSIMILE VON WIESBADEN, HESSISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK, HS. 1, FOL. 66—ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD EIBINGEN





DIVINE ILLUSTRATIONS Hildegard's Kyrie (*above*), shaped like a mountain range, purposefully draws listeners into God's "supreme harmony" in creation. Illustrations of her visions, such as this reversed "L" shape (*right*), also demonstrate God's creative perfection.

In her vision, from the mouth of Caritas, descend golden threads that hold together the sphere of creation, the image of "the supreme harmony of divine order." Hildegard depicted this golden dimension in both her musical compositions and in the construction of *Scivias*'s illuminated works. In the chants she does so through using intervals of the third, fifth, octave, and thirteenth. In *Scivias* she places three miniatures with a distinctive "L" shape at the same intervals, indicating an ideal turning point in the journey, demonstrating how the map of the work coincides with the shape of the golden rectangle, an image of God's perfection in her visions.

INSPIRED HYMNS

The year 1147–48 marked the public recognition of Hildegard's prophetic role and the establishment of Rupertsberg monastery. Leaving cloistered protection she crossed the threshold, taking up the royal scepter and donning the crown of her habit, as in the words of the hymn "Virga ac diadema," imitating the strength of Saint Ursula (died c. 383) and the 11,000 virgins, to whom Hildegard would dedicate inspired hymns.

The call of the divine voice, "write and cry," which she had received a few years earlier, brought about a shift from the time of gestation to the time of birth, from the time of deep listening to the time of writing. Her writing was rooted in the shared chorality of the monastery, as in her vision in which Virginitas, a splendid young woman in a red dress and loose hair, stands tall in the ample bosom of the great woman, the church, surrounded by a choir of women and men (see p. 34).

The figure demonstrates the beauty of those who live in self-integrity, who have recomposed the gift received on their journey and can now spread their calling and their talent. Her voice, anchored in her body and in the earth's depths, can soar freely to dizzying heights. The female figures around Virginitas wear headdresses with two intertwined arches. In her written vision, Hildegard describes the shining sphere of the Trinity at the center, a symbol of creative and dancing life.

The construction of the new monastery likely coincided with the writing of Hildegard's visions describing the "Building of Salvation" (found in *Scivias* III.2). Here the human journey, sustained by virtue, culminates in judgment, and the *Symphonia* of paradise where the joyful praises of the inhabitants of the heavenly city unfold. In her description Hildegard centers the first songs of the *Symphonia* and a portion of the dialogues of the *Ordo virtutum*, a sacred drama written by Hildegard, and wrote: "If the word is the voice of the body and humanity of the Son of God, the song is the voice of the spirit, the image of the divinity of the Son."



TRIUMPHANT VIRGINITAS In this vision of Hildegard's, the central young woman in red (Virginitas) represents the beauty, freedom, and eternal destination of virtuous women.

Scivias concludes with the exuberance of Psalm 150: "Praise God with the sound of the trumpet…praise him with the clash of cymbals."

HEAVENLY SYMPHONY

On May 1, 1152, in the month of Mary, the chapel of the new Rupertsberg monastery was inaugurated with a performance of the *Ordo virtutum*. In this sacred drama, the singing women—adorned with jewels, loose hair, and silk robes—represent the divine Virtues, faithful and precious companions who help Anima free herself from the devil's temptations. They lead her to the nuptial bed to receive the kiss of peace from her bridegroom, Christ. Throughout, the devil's graceless voice is devoid of melody. The Virtues remind Anima not to be like Adam, who, in his initial disobedience, lost his angelic voice, forcing humanity from then on to seek the lost harmony.

This reflection on music, present throughout Hildegard's work, is beautifully conveyed in a testamentary letter written a few months before her death. She addressed this letter to the prelates of Mainz who, due to a well-known incident, had forbidden her and the other nuns from singing and receiving the Eucharist. It almost seems as if God compelled her to write a testamentary letter explaining that praising God with song and dance is the path to the wedding, to reunion with God, as in the words of the hymn "Laus trinitati": "Praise to the trinity, the sound and life and creative life of all within their life."

In the following years, from 1151 to 1158, Hildegard completed writing the *Symphony of the Harmony of the Celestial Revelation* (*Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum*). By the end of her life, the *Symphonia* consisted of more than 70 antiphons, responsories, sequences, and hymns. Her music was well known. The Belgian community of Villares requested her written scores, thus creating the manuscript now known as the *Dendermonde Codex*.

Around 1170 Hildegard experienced a second period of transition and expansion, likely with the construction of a second monastery and her preaching travels (see pp. 22–23). At the same time, the Rupertsberg Scriptorium became a major production site. Aware of her journey's significance, Hildegard decided to collect her entire work in the great manuscript project of the giant codex, *Riesencodex*, where the words and music of her songs were written in the supple script of an early form of Western musical notation known as St. Gall neumes.

Thus was born her last work, the illuminated manuscript of *Scivias*, in which she channeled all the wisdom she had gathered over her 80 years through the quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Throughout the work images of concentric circles represent the celestial hosts adoring the white circle of divine light. Each circle in the work is the image of a sound, and together they create a musical score that, in the final moment of Paradise, gives rise to perfect consonance, the supreme image of harmony and praise. The work concludes with the seven circles in which Mary, the angels, and the Just (saints) sing hymns. In the center is the circle of women, the Virgins, who, like the Virtues, sing of their joy, "the fruits and flowers of the fragrant earth" placed like "a honeycomb dripping with honey," at the center of the firmament in the heart of God. CH

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Overcoming the devil



VIRTUES PERSONIFIED One version of Hildegard's *Scivias* illustrates the five Virtues of Love, Discipline, Modesty, Mercy, and Victory.

In the opening scenes of Ordo virtutum (The Play of the Virtues)*, the Virtues appear and attempt to guide a struggling Soul. As the play continues, the Virtues each introduce themselves to the Devil (and the audience), then receive the penitent Soul who has sinned, and finally announce the defeat of the Devil through Christ's Incarnation.*

PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS
Who are these, who seem like clouds?

VIRTUES
O ancient holy ones, what about us makes you marvel?

The word of God gleams forth in human form, and therefore we shine clear with him, building up the parts of his beautiful body.

PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS
We are the roots, and you are the branches: you are the fruit of the living eye, and we were his shadow.

The lament of embodied SOULS
Oh, we are pilgrims!

What have we done, wandering into sins?!

We were destined to be the king's daughters, but we have fallen into the shadow of sins.

O living sun, carry us on your shoulders to the righteous heritage which we lost through Adam!

O king of kings, we are fighting in your battle.

A happy SOUL
O sweet divinity, O pleasant life, in which I will wear a brilliant robe, receiving what I lost in my first manifestation, I sigh in longing for you and invoke all the Virtues.

VIRTUES
O happy Soul, sweet creation of God, built up in the deep height of God's wisdom, you love abundantly.

The happy SOUL
Oh, let me come to you gladly so that you may offer me a kiss from your heart.

VIRTUES
Our duty is to fight together with you, O daughter of the king.

But the troubled SOUL *laments*
O what hard labor, O what a heavy weight I have in this robe of life, because it is so difficult for me to fight against the flesh.

VIRTUES *to the Soul*
O Soul, created by God's will, O happy instrument, why are you so tearful over the problem God solved with the virgin birth?

Your duty is to overcome the Devil through us.

The SOUL
Hasten to help me, that I might stand firm!

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD *to the Soul*
Behold the raiment you are wearing, daughter of salvation; if you are steadfast, you will never fall.

The SOUL, *unhappily*
Oh, I do not know what to do or where to flee!

Woe is me! I cannot fit into this garment in which I have been clothed.

Indeed, I want to take it off.

VIRTUES
O unhappy thought, O miserable Soul, Why do you hide your face before your Creator?

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD
You neither know, nor see, nor understand the one who created you.

The SOUL
God created the world: I do him no harm, but I want to enjoy it.

The DEVIL, *shouting to the Soul*
Fool! Fool! What do you gain from your labor?

Look to the World, and it will embrace you with great honor.

VIRTUES
Oh, this wailing voice of utmost sorrow!

Ah, ah, a miraculous victory had arisen through her marvelous desire for God, but, in this desire, love of the flesh had hidden itself—alas, alas—there where the will knew no guilt and where the desire fled human lewdness.

Mourn, mourn for this, Innocence, who, in lovely purity, have not lost your righteousness, and who have not devoured the avarice of the ancient serpent's throat.

—translated by Linda Marie Zaerr

EIBINGEN, KLOSTERBIBLIOTHEK ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD, COD. 1. PERGAMENTFAKSIMILE VON WIESBADEN, HESSISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK, HS. 1, FOL. 139—ABTEI ST. HILDEGARD EIBINGEN



WELL-KNOWN NUNS A 20th-c. mural of five Benedictines can be found in the abbey Church of St. Hildegard. Jutta of Sponheim stands in the middle of this image; Elisabeth of Schönau (see p. 37) is on the far right.

FR. PAUL KREBS (PAINTER), *FIVE BENEDICTINE NUNS*, 1913 (WALL PAINTING), KIRCHE DER ABTEI ST.HILDEGARD, RUPERTSBERG—WALTER ALLGOEWER / BILDARCHIV STEFFENS / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Ancestors, advisors, approvers, and antagonists

PEOPLE IN THE LIFE OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

Steven J. McMichael

DISIBOD (619–700) AND RUPERT (c. 712–732), SAINTLY FORERUNNERS

One of the hagiographies that Hildegard wrote later in life was dedicated to Saint Disibod. Hildegard tells the reader that she was requested and commanded to write Disibod's *vita*, or biography, "as God wished I looked in mystic vision upon the life and merits of that same blessed father."

The Irishman lived an exemplary Christian life as a child and became a priest at 33 years old. Though he preferred the life of solitude, he was chosen to be the local bishop, a position that he reluctantly accepted. This leadership position was difficult for Disibod as a plethora of local deviant and heretical groups prevented him from maintaining Christian unity. Because of the strong resistance to his teaching on Christian justice, he left Ireland with a group of supportive religious brothers. They ended up in Germany and settled in a hilly area—the place where Hildegard would eventually enter religious life—near the Glan and Nahe Rivers. He lived as a hermit, whereas the others embraced a communal life based on the Rule of Benedict.

Hildegard also wrote a vita of Saint Rupert of Bingen, who was linked with the location of the new monastery where Hildegard and her monastic community eventually moved. She said that she had a vision from God that justified this move from Disibodenberg and also supported the saintliness of Rupert.

Rupert was born to a worldly pagan father and a pious Christian mother. He followed in his mother's footsteps, living a holy and moral life even as a youth. When he was 15 years old, he went on pilgrimage to Rome where he was advised by some religious individuals to live as a true disciple by selling all his goods, giving everything to the poor, and following Christ. When he returned home, he used his money to build churches and hospices for the poor. He died at the age of 20, and his burial place became known as Rupertsberg (the Mount of Saint Rupert).

Hildegard honored Rupert's holiness but also made her justification for the monastery's move to the new site by stating in her biography of him that

> [H]e labored in good works and served God in chastity, humility, and holiness, trading perishable and temporal goods for eternal rewards. I will speak of him as the living light showed me in true vision and as it taught me. . . . In blessed Rupert there was true holiness, as the divine majesty has made clear, for it transferred me and some sisters with me to the resting place of his relics by a great miracle of great wisdom, as is apparent to all who see and wish to know.

JUTTA OF SPONHEIM (c. 1091–1136), NOBLE *MAGISTRA*

The noblewoman Jutta of Sponheim was the daughter of Count Stephen of Sponheim in the Rhineland of Germany. When she was 14 years old, she became an anchoress—a woman who chooses to withdraw from society and live in seclusion (usually enclosed in a small room built within a monastery or church) to focus intently on spiritual disciplines. Hildegard joined her enclosure around 1106, and in 1112 they took their religious vows together. Their educational program led by Jutta included the Scriptures (especially the Psalms) and various forms of writing. Jutta continued to be Hildegard's *magistra* when they both entered the enclosure of the new convent of Disibodenberg, a teacher-student relationship that lasted 30 years. Jutta's spiritual program was unusually rigorous; it went well beyond ascetical practices outlined in the Rule of Benedict. Hildegard succeeded her as *magistra* of Disibodenberg when Jutta died in 1136.

ARNOLD OF SELENHOFEN (c. 1095–1160), AUTHORITARIAN ARCHBISHOP

When Hildegard moved to Rupertsberg from Disibodenberg, she came under the spiritual authority of the





HILDEGARD'S HEROES Disibod (*right*) was a 7th-c. priest who left Ireland and founded the religious community that became Disibodenberg. An 8th-c. German, Rupert (*far right*), died young but had an extraordinary Christian witness. Hildegard wrote biographies about both men and championed Rupert's sainthood.

RAPHAEL SADELER (ENGRAVER) AFTER A PAINTING BY MARTEN DE VOS, ST. DISIBOD MIT GEFÄHRTEN UND LANDSCHAFT, 1584 (ENGRAVING)—ALAMY • RUPERTSBERG MONASTERY FACING BINGEN, WITH ST. RUPERT & HILDEGARD IN FOREGROUND. ERRONEOUSLY (?) ASCRIBED TO JACOB KOEBEL, *DIE LEGEND DES HEYLIGEN HERTZOGEN SANT RUPRECHTS, BEI BYNGEN UFF SANT RUPRECHTSBERG LEYPLICH RASTENDE* (KOEBEL, 1524) • PFENNIG ISSUED BY ARCHBISHOP OF MAINZ ARNOLD VON SELENHOFEN, 1153/1160, STADTARCHIV MAINZ MK / 244 E 1—DATENBANK, STADTARCHIV MAINZ

archbishop of Mainz, Arnold of Selenhofen (r. 1153–1160) who was chosen for this position by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Arnold's sternness with the citizens of his area and his support for Frederick's war against Italy (funded by taxing the people of the archdiocese) led the citizens of Mainz to murder him.

Arnold supported the almost complete independence of Hildegard's new monastery at Rupertsberg from the one at Disibodenberg. Two existing documents from Arnold testify to this support (see p. 9). The archbishop provided secular and ecclesiastical support to the sisters under the care of Hildegard; still, Disibodenberg was required to provide spiritual care in terms of priestly ministry for the nuns at Rupertsberg.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX (1090–1153), FAMOUS FRIEND

Bernard of Clairvaux was a Cistercian monk and one of the most significant characters of the twelfth century. He was an advisor of popes, preacher of the Second Crusade, defender of the faith, healer of a schism (by lending his support to Innocent II against the supporters of the antipope Anacletus II in 1130), reformer of the Benedictine tradition, Scripture scholar, theologian, and eloquent preacher. He was one of the most influential writers of the twelfth century, composing many theological texts, sermons, and letters. His most noteworthy writings are *On Loving God*, *The Steps of Humility and Pride*, *On Grace and Free Choice*, and his commentary on the Song of Songs. Hildegard sent her incomplete *Scivias* to him, and he responded to her in a letter in which he recognized her visionary gifts:

> I congratulate you on the grace of God that is in you and admonish you to regard it as a gift and respond to it with all humility and devotion in the sure knowledge that "God flouts the scornful and gives the humble man his grace."

KUNO OF DISIBODENBERG (d. 1155), ADVERSARIAL ABBOT

Abbot Kuno became the spiritual leader at Disibodenberg at some point during Hildegard's monastic life there. After Jutta died, Hildegard was elected magistra of the monastery. Hildegard received a divine message while at prayer in 1147 that she should move the nuns to a new monastery at Rupertsberg. Abbot Kuno, for various reasons, did not support this move. When Hildegard experienced a severe, paralyzing illness that Kuno interpreted as a divine sign, he then allowed the nuns to move.

UNPOPULAR ARCHBISHOP Arnold, archbishop of Mainz (*below*), met an untimely end at the hands of his city's citizens. He did, however, support Hildegard.



VOLMAR (d. 1173), FRIEND AND FATHER CONFESSOR

Little is known about Volmar, the Benedictine monk who was one of Hildegard's most trusted friends as well as her father confessor and collaborator for nearly 30 years before his death. He served an especially important role in her life as a transcriber of her visions and editor of her writings. Concerning Volmar, Hildegard wrote in her preface to *Scivias*:

> Hence in My [God's] love she [Hildegard, referring to herself in the third person] searched in her mind as to where she could find some who would run in the path of salvation. And she found such a one and loved him, knowing that he was a faithful man, working like herself on another part of the work that leads to Me. And, holding fast to him, she worked with him in great zeal so that My hidden miracles might be revealed.

Their relationship shows how collaboration between monks and nuns was essential to medieval spirituality.

RICHARDIS VON STADE (c. 1124–1152), ADVISOR AND ABBESS

Richardis von Stade was a nun who acted as secretary and advisor to Hildegard at both the abbeys of Disibodenberg and Rupertsberg. She did much for the literary production of Hildegard's works, and she is especially associated







CONTEMPLATIVE COMPANION Volmar (monk at *left*) spent years teaching, counseling, and transcribing for Hildegard. He was likely one of her closest friends.

HILDEGARD'S POPE Eugenius III (*middle*) was the first Cistercian pope. He was also a supporter of moral reform, the Second Crusade, and Hildegard's calling.

IT'S COMPLICATED Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (*above*) legally protected Hildegard's Rupertsberg convent, but their cordial relationship soured when he later supported an antipope.

with Hildegard's first work, *Scivias*. Richardis was elected abbess of Bussum Abbey in 1151, with great support from her brother Hartwig who was the bishop of the Diocese of Bremen. But Richardis's move did not please Hildegard. In fact she wrote to Hartwig that this transfer and elevation was not in accordance with God's will:

> May God grant you the blessing of the dew of heaven and may all the choirs of angels bless you if you listen to me, God's servant, and if you fulfill God's will in this matter.

Hildegard wrote to a number of ecclesiastical and civil leaders—including Pope Eugenius—without any effect as Richardis remained abbess at Bussum Abbey. As it turns out, after having expressed her desire to return to Rupertsberg, Richardis died before that could happen.

ELISABETH OF SCHÖNAU (1129–1164), PEER PROPHETESS

Elisabeth of Schönau was a German Benedictine nun and the abbess of the Schönau monastery during the last seven years of her life. Like Hildegard of Bingen, she was an author of several works that were published in the twelfth century. These books are called *The Three Books of Visions* (*Liber revelationum*), *The Book of the Ways of God* (*Liber viarum Dei*), *Revelations about the Sacred Company of the Virgins of Cologne* (*Liber revelationum Elisabeth de sacro exercitu virginum Coloniensium*), and *The Resurrection of the Blessed Virgin* (*Visio de resurrection beate virginis Mariae*). Many of these works were edited and promoted by her brother Eckebert, who was the abbot at the monastery of Schönau from 1166 to 1184.

Elisabeth wrote letters to many individuals—among whom were abbots. Of 22 that survive, two were written to Hildegard. Elisabeth and Hildegard not only wrote to each other but also conversed with many leading figures of the twelfth century by letter. In her letters to Hildegard, Elisabeth sought reassurance about the authenticity of her visions and her perception concerning the corruption of the contemporary church.

Much of her spirituality reflected her strict following of the Rule of Benedict. She observed a penitential lifestyle that many considered too severe. For example Hildegard wrote to Elisabeth cautioning her about her extreme mortification. Like Hildegard, Elisabeth was very concerned about the spiritual renewal of the church, the corruption of the clergy, and the heresies of the Cathars.

Elisabeth started to experience visions right after Hildegard published *Scivias* in 1151. These visions usually occurred during communal worship and on holy days. Elisabeth is remembered for her remarkable eucharistic piety, her devotion to the humanity of Christ, and her identification with Christ's physical suffering during the Passion in her own spiritual experience.

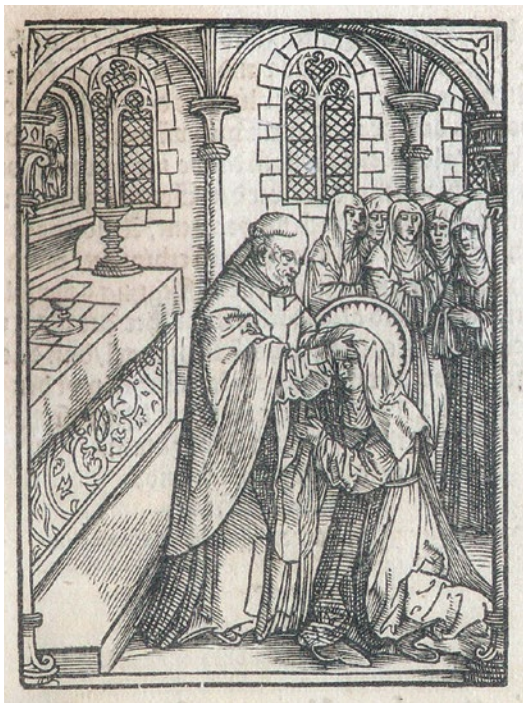
BERNARDO PIGNATELLI (d. 1153), POPE AND PROMOTER

Pope Eugenius III was born Bernardo Pignatelli near Pisa at the beginning of the twelfth century. He was the prior at Saint Zeno before meeting Bernard of Clairvaux and becoming a Cistercian monk, and as such he eventually became the abbot of Saint Anastasio in Rome. He became the first Cistercian pope when he was elected in 1145.

During his pontificate he supported the Second Crusade and was a promoter of the moral reform of the clergy. He

HILDEGARD VON BINGEN [SANTA], *LIBER DIVINORUM OPERUM* (SEC. XIII), BIBLIOTECA STATALE DI LUCCA, MS. 1942, CARTA FOL. 1V (DETAIL), SU CONCESSIONE DEL MINISTERO DELLA CULTURA | BIBLIOTECA STATALE DI LUCCA • POPE EUGENIUS III, IN GIOVANNI BATTISTA CAVALIERI, *PONTIFICUM ROMANORUM EFFIGIES* (ROMA: EX TYPOGRAPHIA DOMINICI BASAE, APUD FRANCISCUM ZANETTUM, 1580)—[CC0 1.0] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS • KAISER FRIEDRICH I BARBAROSSA MIT DREI UNTERTANEN (BUCHMALEREI), COD. PAL. GERM. 137 (CHRONICON PONTIFICUM ET IMPERATORUM, IN GERMAN, 1450/1470), BL. 109V—PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS







CRUSADE PREACHER Bernard of Clairvaux (*left*) is considered the most influential 12th-c. figure, though perhaps also controversial because of his Crusade support.

CONTENTION OVER CALLING We know of Abbot Kuno because of his conflicts with Hildegard, but he also recognized her gifts and gave her his blessing (*middle*).

PROBLEM-FILLED PAPACY Pope Alexander III (bust *above*) spent most of his reign battling antipopes, clergy, and laypeople who opposed his succession.

began his support of Hildegard at the Synod of Trier (1147–1148) and, after a theological investigation, confirmed her spiritual gifts. This synod was convened to deal with such issues as the condemnation of the Breton heretic Éon de l'Étoile and the Anacletans who supported the antipope Anacletus II (who died in 1138). Eugenius's affirmation, along with the support of Bernard of Clairvaux and other church leaders, gave Hildegard the ecclesiastical endorsement that her writings deserved.

FREDERICK BARBAROSSA (1123–1190), ANTAGONIZED EMPEROR

Frederick I (Barbarossa) became duke of Swabia in 1147 and Holy Roman Emperor in 1152; he served in that role until he died in 1190 on the Third Crusade. He was involved in many conflicts between the civil and ecclesial powers throughout his reign. Hildegard was summoned to the royal court at Ingelheim where Frederick recognized her spiritual gifts. He gave support to the new convent at Rupertsberg in 1163. This story reveals that she received support from ecclesiastical and secular authorities based on her charismatic life and writings.

However, Frederick and Hildegard's relationship became strained when her support of Pope Alexander III came into conflict with Frederick's support of a succession of antipopes. Hildegard wrote four letters to Frederick in which she warned him of his worldly and vain ways (see p. 16). In one of these letters, she reminded him that he was responsible for protecting the poor and weak in his realm and that he must uphold divine justice. Her final letter to him, in which she sounded much like an ancient prophet, stated that he was behaving like an infant under the influence of the devil and warned him about divine justice.

VICTOR, PASCAL, AND CALLIXTUS, ANTIPOPES

The twelfth century witnessed a number of contentious issues between church and state, including the Investiture Controversy (see pp. 12–15) and the appearance of certain antipopes who opposed the established papacy. The three main antipopes arose during the reign of Pope Alexander III (r. 1159–1181). After the legitimate election of Alexander III, five cardinals, the clergy of St. Peter's, and the Roman populace refused to recognize him, and they elected their own candidate. Victor IV was antipope from 1159 to 1164 and was supported by Emperor Frederick.

Pascal III followed Victor and ruled until 1168; he is remembered as the pope who canonized Charlemagne at Aachen in 1165. This canonization was subsequently annulled at the Third Lateran Council (1179). Callixtus III was elected in 1168 and reigned until 1178 when he surrendered his claim to the papacy. CH

Steven J. McMichael is associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas and the general editor of the Medieval Franciscans series.

WORKSHOP OF FILIPPO LIPPI, SAINT BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX,1447/1469 (TEMPERA AND GOLD ON WOOD), ROBERT LEHMAN COLLECTION, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART 1975.1.70B—[CC0 1.0] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS • *DIE LEGEND DES HEYLIGEN HERTZOGEN SANT RUPRECHTS BEY BYNGEN UFF SANT RUPRECHTS BERG LEYPLICH RASTENDE* ([OPPENHEIM]: [KÖBEL], 1524), P. XVI—BAYERISCHE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK MUNICH / MDZ • LORENZO OTTONI (SCULPTOR), POPE ALEXANDER III, 1691/1700 (MARBLE)—WILLIAM C. YAWKEY FUND, © DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES





REMEMBERING HILDEGARD This gold reliquary (*above*) was crafted in 1929 to house Hildegard's relics (see p. 41), but a modern revival of interest in Hildegard really began in the 1980s. A sculpture of Hildegard (*left*), created in 1998, stands before Eibingen Abbey to honor the saint.

Walking with Hildegard

Annette Esser, PhD, is a teacher of Catholic and Protestant theology, visual art, geography, and psychology, as well as an author and editor of various books, many of which focus on Hildegard of Bingen; she is interested in the place where academics and practical application meet. Christian History *spoke with her about her research on Hildegard and founding her initiatives, the Scivias Institute for Art and Spirituality and the Hildegard of Bingen Pilgrimage Way in Germany.*

***CH**: When did you first encounter Hildegard, and what about her life, work, and theology captured you?*

ANNETTE ESSER: As a German theologian, I have known about Hildegard since early childhood, partly because my aunt was a teacher in Bingen. But at first I was not drawn to this German woman mystic but rather to the Spanish Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) on whose mysticism I wrote my first thesis. Just after the exam, my aunt who had read this asked me: "Why don't you now do something on Hildegard of Bingen?" Then it occurred by chance that a major German publishing house requested that I translate the first monograph on Hildegard in the English language; this was Barbara Newman's *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine*.

Of course at that time, there was no Google Translate or any digital support of that kind. This was my first work on a PC—I spent two years (1992–1994) translating this major book on Hildegard of Bingen from English (and also Latin!) into German. It is remarkable that Barbara Newman herself had chosen Hildegard as topic for her dissertation, because in the 1980s not much had been published on her in the English language; there were merely some German dissertations of the 1930s. When I was translating Newman's book, I was fascinated. I was stunned by it.

***CH**: Was it after this you began thinking of the Scivias Institute?*

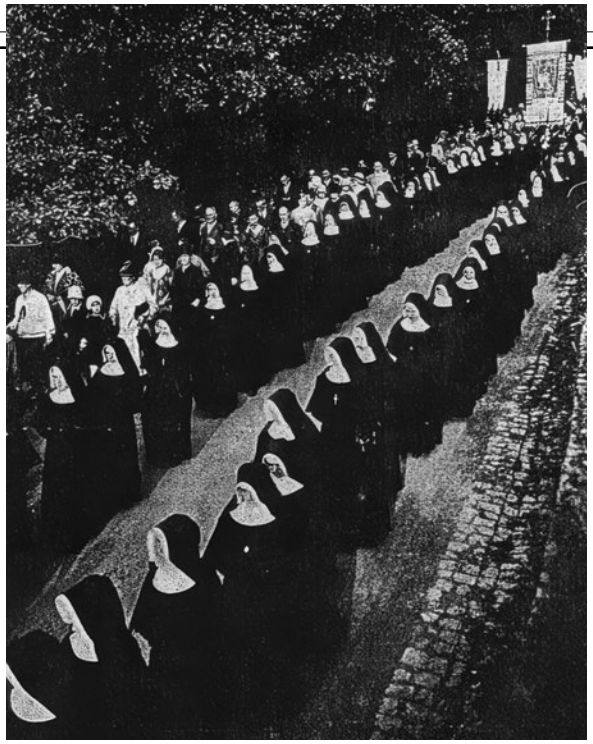
AE: Yes, Hildegard was in my mind since, but not at once the vision of the Scivias Institute. After my studies in Germany, I got the chance for a second study in New York where I wrote my master's paper on Hildegard. Yet, later on, my dissertation (2007) was on women's spirituality, not on Hildegard. And only after this, during a 2008 visit in New York, my friends there reminded me of when I spoke about Hildegard in class. It was then that my vision of the Scivias Institute for Art and Spirituality was born. Back in Germany, I founded the institute as a nonprofit organization together with other theologians, artists, and psychotherapists using the name of Hildegard's major mystical work *Liber scivias* (*Know the Ways*). The foundation in Cologne in 2009 was then followed by my move to Bad Kreuznach near Bingen, where my whole maternal family is located, in the middle of the historic "Land of Hildegard."

The Scivias Institute is connected to the mystical, prophetic, medical, literary, and musical legacy of the "Seer of the Rhine" in many ways. In our "Scivias Work," we aim to bring together people who, on their creative and spiritual paths, consciously wish to follow Hildegard's exhortation to "Know the ways of Living Light." We work in teams, develop projects, offer workshops, and organize events, such as the Hildegard Week around her feast day in September.

***CH**: How did Hildegard's canonization and recognition as a doctor of the Roman Catholic Church affect your work?*

AE: Sister Hildrud Gutjahr O.S.B. of St. Hildegard Abbey reached out to me in 2012 with the news that German Pope Benedict XVI intended to promote Hildegard von Bingen as a doctor of the church (*doctor ecclesiae universalis*). This would probably happen around the time of the Bishops' Conference in October. Therefore, together with the Scivias Institute, I organized an international conference in Bingen at the end of October. One result of this was my book on Hildegard as a new doctor of the church (*Die Kirchenlehrerin Hildegard von Bingen*).

GERDA ARENDT (PHOTOGRAPHER), KARLHEINZ OSWALD (SCULPTOR), HILDEGARD OF BINGEN, EIBINGEN, MARCH 24, 2024—[CCO 1.0 UNIVERSAL] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS • ROMKEHOEKSTRA (PHOTOGRAPHER), SKRYN FAN HILDEGARD, EIBINGEN, NOVEMBER 1, 2024—[CCO 1.0 UNIVERSAL] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS





PILGRIMAGE AND PRESERVATION On the 750th anniversary of Hildegard's death in 1929, a crowd of 25,000, including all the nuns of St. Hildegard's Abbey, proceeded with the saint's relics to Eibingen (*left*). Today, the Hildegard Way Pilgrimage (*above*) concludes at the Eibingen church where Hildegard's shrine is.

Then in 2014, after my own pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago in Spain and as a new member of the local district parliament, I initiated the Hildegard of Bingen Pilgrimage Way where the saint lived in the twelfth century. This was realized in 2017. Connected to this I compiled the German *Pilgerbuch* in 2019 and then *The Hildegard of Bingen Pilgrimage Book* in 2022. The English version received an award, which I think was important in gaining recognition for the Hildegard Pilgrimage Way internationally.

As if this was not enough, the local tourism authorities asked me to write a podcast in which Hildegard speaks herself. This became my third book on the saint: *Hildegard Speaks*. In 2019 I filmed this book with American filmmaker Michael Conti in the English and German languages. Now in 2026 I am doing a supplemental version of the pilgrimage book because the Hildegard Way has been extended to include Bad Kreuznach. This excursion adds more tableaux, especially on Hildegard's art of healing, which is of special interest to many people—for example, medical students from America that we guided here!

***CH**: Can you tell us more about the pilgrimage route?*

AE: The route goes through the historic land where Hildegard actually lived. Most people know the name Bingen, which is here on the Rhine River. Yet they do not know that Hildegard actually lived in the beautiful Nahe Valley.

Thus, the Hildegard Pilgrimage Way begins in Idar-Oberstein, City of Gems, and then goes along the River Nahe. Important places include the medieval town of Herrstein; Niederhosenbach, where Hildegard probably was born; Disibodenberg, where she lived for almost 40 years, then twelfth-century Sponheim Castle, and nearby Sponheim Minster, a most impressive Romanesque church; then Rupertsberg, where she founded her own monastery in 1150.

The goal of the Hildegard Way is then on the other side of the Rhine in Eibingen. There is the Pilgrimage Church with the shrine of the saint, and finally on the height is Saint Hildegard Abbey that no pilgrim and Hildegard-friend should miss. Along the way are 31 information tableaux on historic sites and on Hildegard's works, as well as 27 meditation tableaux on her *Liber scivias*.

In total the pilgrimage route is 140 kilometers (c. 87 miles), which can be completed in 10 stages on 10 days. This is not yet a very touristic path but rather a pleasant, green walk with vineyards and forest through a beautiful landscape.

***CH**: What has been especially meaningful for you about the Hildegard Way?*

AE: Germany has been split between Catholic and Protestant regions. The Hildegard Way integrates both. Today Protestants show an interest in Hildegard and also in pilgrimage—which years ago, when both were regarded as Catholic things, was unthinkable.

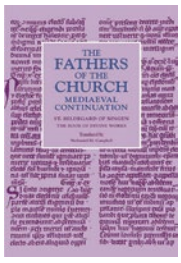
***CH**: Why is Hildegard so important for today?*

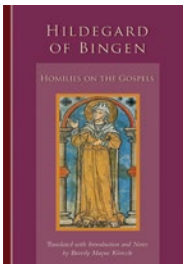
AE: I think many people are interested in her because of her holistic and cosmological approach of looking at the human being. Her teaching is not merely psychological and individualistic. She gives us the big picture of understanding the relationship between the soul, the body, and the cosmos. In her *Liber scivias*, she invites us to look at the whole of the history of salvation—from creation to Incarnation to the Last Judgment. This includes her apocalyptic visions which are of great interest again today. Thus when I think about our time, and when I think of her time in the Middle Ages, I see that maybe we are living in a similar age. In short, Hildegard is also speaking to us today. CH

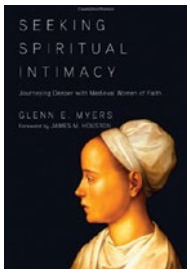
NONNEN BEI DER RELIQUIENPROZESSION ZUM 750.-TODESJAHR DER HL. HILDEGARD VON BINGEN, 1929—BINGER ST. ROCHUSBRUDERSCHAFT, HTTPS://BISTUMMAINZ.DE/PFARREIENVERBUND/BINGEN/ROCHUSBRUDERSCHAFT/WALLFAHRTEN/ROCHUSWALLFAHRT-1850-1944/ • © SUSANNE SCHIMA (PHOTOGRAPHER), HILDEGARDWEG SIGNPOST—HESSEN TOURISMUS BILDDATENBANK VIA RÜDESHEIM TOURIST AG & ULTIMATELY RHEINGAU-TAUNUS KULTUR UND TOURISMUS GMBH

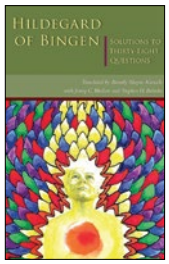
Recommended resources

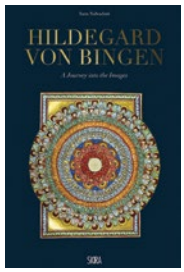
WANT TO DIVE DEEPER INTO HILDEGARD'S WORLD? CONTINUE LEARNING WITH THESE RESOURCES RECOMMENDED BY OUR EDITORS AND AUTHORS.

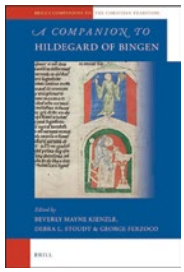












BOOKS

Receive an **introduction to Hildegard** with Barbara Newman, ed., *Voice of the Living Light* (1998); Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke, eds., *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of Her Life and Thought* (1998); Fiona Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Woman of Her Age* (2003); and Debra Stoudt, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Kienzle, eds., *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen* (2013).

Focus on Hildegard's view of **health and healing** with Gottfried Hertzka and Wighard Strehlow, *Hildegard of Bingen's Medicine* (1987); and Jany Fournier-Rosset, *From Saint Hildegard's Kitchen: Foods of Health, Foods of Joy* (2010).

For Hildegard's **music**, see Maureen Epp and Brian Power, eds., *The Sounds and Sights of Performance in Early Music* (2009); Sara Salvadori, *Hildegard von Bingen: A Journey into the Images* (2019), *Hildegard von Bingen: In the Heart of God* (2021), and *Hildegard von Bingen: The Fountain of Wisdom* (2026).

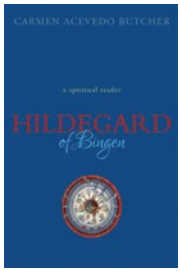
And for a little more on her **theology**, see Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (1998); Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Spiritual Reader* (2007); and Beverly Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen, Gospel Interpreter* (2020).

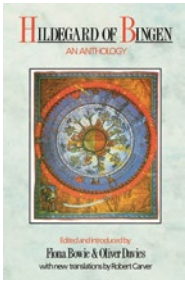
Learn about the lives of some of Hildegard's contemporaries, starting with **Bernard of Clairvaux** in Gillian Rosemary Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (2000) and Brian Patrick McGuire, *Bernard of Clairvaux: An Inner life* (2020). For **Jutta of Sponheim**, see Anna Silvas, trans., *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources* (1999). Read **Elisabeth of Schönau** in Anne Clark, trans., *Elisabeth of Schönau: The Complete Works* (2000). For **Pope Eugenius III**, see Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *Pope Eugenius III (1145–1153): The First Cistercian Pope* (2025). Finally, read about **Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa** in John Freed, *Frederick Barbarossa: The Prince and the Myth* (2016).

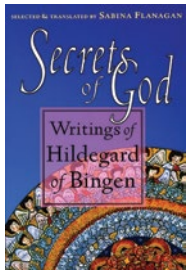
For Hildegard's context in **medieval Europe**, including monastic, political, and geographical spheres of life, see Alfred Haverkamp, Helga Braun, and Richard Mortimer, *Medieval Germany, 1056–1273* (1992); Beverly Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade (1145–1229): Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard* (2001); Glenn E. Myers, *Seeking Spiritual Intimacy: Journeying Deeper with Medieval Women of Faith* (2011); Judith Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (2013); S. J. Allen, *An Introduction to the Crusades* (2017); Alison Beach and Isabelle Cochelin, eds., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West* (2020); and Peter Wilson, *Heart of Europe: A History of the Holy Roman Empire* (2020).

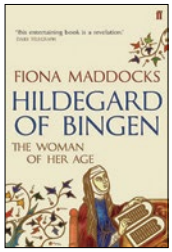
HILDEGARD IN HER OWN WORDS

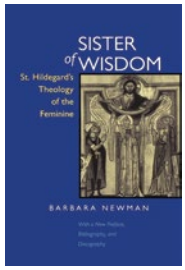
Many of **Hildegard's writings** have been translated into English. Those relevant to this issue include Jane Bishop and Columba Hart, trans., *Scivias* (1990); Hugh Feiss, ed. and

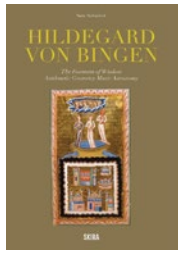












trans., *Explanation of the Rule of St. Benedict* (1990); Bruce Hozeski, trans., *Liber vitae meritorum* (1997); Barbara Newman, ed. and trans., *Symphonia* (1998); Priscilla Throop, trans., *Physica* (1998); Margaret Berger, trans., *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Cause et Cure* (1999); Joseph Baird and Radd Ehrman, trans., *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, Volumes 1–3 (2001); Beverly Kienzle, *Hildegard of Bingen and Her Gospel Homilies: Speaking New Mysteries* (2009); Christopher Evans, ed., and Hugh Feiss, trans., *Two Hagiographies: Vita sancti Ruppert confessoris; Vita sancti Dysibodi episcopi* (2010); Beverly Kienzle, trans., *Homilies on the Gospels* (2011); Beverly Kienzle, trans., and Jenny Bledsoe and Stephen Behnke, eds., *Solutions to Thirty-Eight Questions* (2014); and Nathaniel Campbell, trans., *The Book of Divine Works* (2018).

For many readers **anthologies and selected writings of Hildegard** may prove more accessible—see Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies, eds., *Hildegard of Bingen: An Anthology* (1990); Sabina Flanagan, trans., *Secrets of God: Writings of Hildegard of Bingen* (1996); and Mark Atherton, trans., *Selected Writings: Hildegard of Bingen* (2001).



VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

Vision Video has several films related to this issue, including *The Christian Story*, *History of Christianity*, *Hildegard*, *Pioneers of the Spirit: Hildegard of Bingen*, and *Monasteries*. Find these titles and more on Vision Video's streaming service, RedeemTV.



PAST *CH* ISSUES

Several past issues of *Christian History* relate to this one. Some physical copies are still available for purchase, but you can access the text of all past issues on our website.

#24: *Bernard of Clairvaux*
#30: *Women in the Medieval Church*
#40: *The Crusades*
#49: *Everyday Faith in the Middle Ages*
#93: *St. Benedict and Western Monasticism*
#101: *Healthcare and Hospitals*
#119: *The Wonder of Creation*
#127: *Medieval Lay Mystics*
#134: *How the Church Fostered Science and Technology*
#149: *Revival: The First Thousand Years*



WEBSITES

See the usual collections at Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Gutenberg.org, and Internet Modern Sourcebook for access to primary sources since many of Hildegard's writings are in the public domain.

Medieval studies websites related to this issue include The Rule of St. Benedict, The Orb, and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. You can find specific online resources related to Hildegard at the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Hildegard and International Society of Hildegard von Bingen Studies (this features work from some of the issue's authors). Find translations of Hildegard's writings



at Fides Quaerens Intellectum by Nathaniel Campbell, as well as a comprehensive website about Hildegard at Saint Hildegard von Bingen. Also explore the Scivias Institute and the pilgrimage on the Hildegard Way, as mentioned in this issue.

Be sure to give the ensemble Sequentia a listen—since the 1980s, they have recorded an impressive collection of Hildegard's musical works (their performances are available for purchase but can also be heard on YouTube).

Finally, obtain free downloads of Hildegard's compositions, such as *Sequences and Hymns* or *Werke*, at Internet Archive. CH

Questions for reflection

The life and times of Hildegard of Bingen



WOMAN OF VISION The 2009 film *Vision* brought Hildegard's story to the silver screen. Barbara Sukowa (*left,* with palm raised) portrays Hildegard with the sisters of Disibodenberg in this scene.

BARBARA SUKOWA (CENTER LEFT) AS HILDEGARD VON BINGEN AND PAULA KALENBERG (CENTER RIGHT) AS SISTER CLARA IN *VISION: FROM THE LIFE OF HILDEGARD*, AS DIRECTED BY MARGARETHE VON TROTHA IN 2009—ZEITGEIST FILMS

Let these questions help guide your understanding of Hildegard's story.

1. How did feudalism in medieval Europe work (see "Did you know?"), and how was this system instrumental in the trajectory of Hildegard's life (pp. 6–10)?

2. What is the difference between an abbess and a prioress? Which position did Hildegard actually hold, and why? ("Did you know?" and pp. 12–15)

3. Why is Hildegard referred to as a "Renaissance woman" (pp. 6–10)?

4. What is child oblation, and why did medieval families participate in it (p. 11)? What other features of medieval life discussed in this issue were different from life today?

5. What education and experiences contributed to Hildegard's monastic leadership (pp. 12–15)? What challenges did Hildegard face as *magistra*?

6. Consider the letters Hildegard wrote to rebuke clerics and even the emperor on page 16. Do you think her strong words were justified?

7. After reading "Humors and conditions" (pp. 17–20), do you believe Hildegard was likely the author of *Physica* and *Causae et curae?* Why or why not?

8. How was Hildegard's interest in healing and the natural world connected to her faith and theology?

9. How does Hildegard's natural philosophy differ from modern scientific approaches (p. 21)? What, if anything, can we apply from her ideas today?

10. Who were the Cathars (p. 24), and why did Hildegard consider their movement heretical?

11. What were the titles of Hildegard's three major visions, and what was each about? (pp. 25–29)?

12. What themes stand out as most important in these visions, and what do they tell us about Hildegard's theology?

13. Consider the debate concerning women preaching and Hildegard's spoken admonitions to mixed audiences on page 30. Was Hildegard preaching? Why or why not?

14. How does Hildegard's sacred music reflect the theology of her visions (pp. 31–34)? What is one example of her unique creativity in these compositions?

15. The excerpt from Hildegard's *Ordo virtutum* (p. 35) personifies the Virtues. How do the Virtues contrast with the Devil and help the troubled Soul?

16. Consider the gallery of Hildegard's contemporaries on pages 36 to 39. Which figures were the most influential on Hildegard's life and spiritual journey? Why?

17. What did you learn about the continuing legacy of Hildegard in *CH*'s interview with Annette Esser (pp. 40–41)?

18. How is Hildegard of Bingen important for Christians today? CH

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