

Tuesday Evening Forum  
Series #16: Mystics & Meditation  
Week 1: St. Hildegard of Bingen  
Tuesday, April 2, 2019



## St. Hildegard of Bingen

*Abbess, artist, author, composer, mystic, pharmacist, poet, preacher, theologian*

St. Hildegard was born in 1098 in Bermersheim vor der Höhe, Germany into a noble family. She was instructed for ten years by the holy woman Blessed Jutta. When Hildegard was 18, she became a Benedictine nun at the Monastery of Saint Disibodenberg. Ordered by her confessor to write down the visions that she had received since the age of three, Hildegard took ten years to write her *Scivias* (*Know the Ways*). Pope Eugene III read it, and in 1147, encouraged her to continue writing. Her *Book of the Merits of Life* and *Book of Divine Works* followed. She wrote over 300 letters to people who sought her advice; she also composed short works on medicine and physiology, and sought advice from contemporaries such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.



*Universal Man, manuscript illumination from Scivias by Hildegard of Bingen.*

Hildegard's visions caused her to see humans as "living sparks" of God's love, coming from God as daylight comes from the sun. Sin destroyed the original harmony of creation; Christ's redeeming death and resurrection opened up new possibilities. Virtuous living reduces the estrangement from God and others that sin causes.

Like all mystics, Hildegard saw the harmony of God's creation and the place of women and men in that. This unity was not apparent to many of her contemporaries.

Hildegard was no stranger to controversy. The monks near her original foundation protested vigorously when she moved her monastery to Bingen,

overlooking the Rhine River. She confronted Emperor Frederick Barbarossa for supporting at least three antipopes. Hildegard challenged the Cathars, who rejected the Catholic Church claiming to follow a more pure Christianity.

Between 1152 and 1162, Hildegard often preached in the Rhineland. Her monastery was placed under interdict because she had permitted the burial of a young man who had been excommunicated. She insisted that he had been reconciled with the Church and had received its sacraments before dying. Hildegard protested bitterly when the local bishop forbade the celebration of or reception of the Eucharist at the Bingen monastery, a sanction that was lifted only a few months before her death.

In 2012, Hildegard was canonized and named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Benedict XVI. A doctor of the church is a saint whose doctrinal writings have special authority. In early Christianity there were four Latin (or Western) doctors of the church—Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Jerome—and three Greek (or Eastern) doctors—John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nazianzus. To these Eastern doctors Western Christianity adds Athanasius the Great. Since the 16th century dozens have been given the term doctor by proclamation of the Roman Catholic Church, among them Thomas Aquinas (1567), Bonaventure (1588), Anselm (1720), Leo I (1754), Bernard (1830), Francis of Sales (1877), the Venerable Bede (1899), Albertus Magnus (1931), Anthony of Padua (1946), Teresa of Ávila (1970), Catherine of Siena (1970), Thérèse of Lisieux (1997), and Hildegard (2012).

Her Liturgical Feast Day is September 17.

Eibingen Abbey (German: Abtei St. Hildegard, full name: Benedictine Abbey of St. Hildegard) is a community of Benedictine nuns in Eibingen near Rüdesheim in Hesse, Germany. Founded by Hildegard of Bingen in 1165, it was dissolved in 1804, but restored, with new buildings, in 1904. The nuns produce wine and crafts.



Music was extremely important to Hildegard. She describes it as the means of recapturing the original joy and beauty of paradise. According to her before the Fall, Adam had a pure voice and joined angels in singing praises to god. After the fall, music was invented and musical instruments made in order to worship god appropriately. Perhaps this explains why her music most often sounds like what we imagine angels singing to be like.

Hildegard wrote hymns and sequences in honor of saints, virgins and Mary. She wrote in the plainchant tradition of a single vocal melodic line, a tradition common in liturgical singing of her time. Her music is undergoing a revival and enjoying huge public success. One group, Sequentia, is planning to record all of Hildegard's musical output in time for the 900th anniversary of her birth in 1998. Their latest recording *Canticles of Ecstasy* is superb. Be sure to read the translations of the latin text of the songs which provide a good example of Hildegard's metaphorical writing, and are imbued with vibrant descriptions of color and light, that also occurs in her visionary writings.

### Quotes by St. Hildegard

Dare to declare who you are. It is not far from the shores of silence to the boundaries of speech. The path is not long, but the way is deep. You must not only walk there, you must be prepared to leap.

We cannot live in a world that is not our own, in a world that is interpreted for us by others. An interpreted world is not a home. Part of the terror is to take back our own listening, to use our own voice, to see our own light.

Don't let yourself forget that God's grace rewards not only those who never slip, but also those who bend and fall. So sing! The song of rejoicing softens hard hearts. It makes tears of godly sorrow flow from them. Singing summons the Holy Spirit. Happy praises offered in simplicity and love lead the faithful to complete harmony, without discord. Don't stop singing.

Humanity, take a good look at yourself. Inside, you've got heaven and earth, and all of creation. You're a world – everything is hidden in you.

Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars.

Gaze at the beauty of earth's greenings.

Now, think.

What delight God gives to humankind  
with all these things .

All nature is at the disposal of humankind.

We are to work with it. For  
without we cannot survive.

We shall awaken from our dullness and rise vigorously toward justice. If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion.

The mystery of God hugs you in its all-encompassing arms.

Holy Spirit, the life that gives life: You are the cause of all movement. You are the breath of all creatures. You are the salve that purifies our souls. You are the ointment that heals our wounds. You are the fire that warms our hearts. You are the light that guides our feet. Let all the world praise you.

All living creatures are sparks from the radiation of God's brilliance, emerging from God like the rays of the sun.

I am the fiery life of the essence of God; I am the flame above the beauty in the fields; I shine in the waters; I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. And with the airy wind, I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life.

#### Resources

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-hildegard-of-bingen/>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Hildegard>

"The Life and Works of Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)," <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/med/hildegarde.asp>

<https://swordsoftruth.com/2015/09/01/st-hildegard-of-bingen-o-s-b-a-feather-on-the-breath-of-god/>

"Hildegard of Bingen Quotes," [https://www.azquotes.com/author/21274-Hildegard\\_of\\_Bingen](https://www.azquotes.com/author/21274-Hildegard_of_Bingen)