

Tagbuch Entries of Hildegard von Bingen

Advent I 1151 - Epiphany 1153

by  
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First Sunday in Advent

To eat the Host is to become the Tree. The Host is the Heart of this Tree. Singing the Divine Office, with the ultimate responsibility for the music resting in my lap, it is harder to maintain the contemplative state. Thank God for the bells, the protection of the Angelus, the calls to prayer, the assurance of privacy, the practice of the Vows, the familiarity and friendly, consistent demands of the Rule.[1] If only my young ones, my raw-from-the-world recruits could see that, far from tearing and pulling them away from something, these are blessings that grace the monastic life.

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[1]The Benedictine Rule was set down in the 6th century by Benedict of Nursia, and has been followed by Benedictine communities of monks and nuns ever since. The Rule prescribes in remarkable detail and balance a particular order of living for all who formally profess and dedicate themselves to a life in community where the opus dei (singing the Divine Office) is the center. The ordo for the Divine Office begins with the great Night Office we call Matins (Benedict referred to it as Vigils or Nocturns), followed by the day offices of Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, and None, and ends with Vespers and Compline in the evening. In addition, the Rule indicates the number and order of Psalms for each Office. Seasonal differences between summer and winter are considered, as well as the duties of particular members of the community, such as cellarer, portress, and prior. For a history of monastic rules and annotated text of the Benedictine Rule, see RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981). The editors of this comprehensive volume note the absence of information on the history of Benedictine women; thus it includes no information on the ancient Consecration of Virgins, nor any other particulars about the profession of women or what kind of labor nuns might have done in place of the Manual Labor prescribed for monks during the work periods. Hildegard wrote a Commentary on the Rule (see Migne, Patrologia Latina, hereafter cited as PL, vol. 197, pp. 1053-66), which is dismissed in standard works on the Commentaries to the Rule. The first informed study of women monastics was Lina Eckenstein's *Woman Under Monasticism* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1896), which, excepting the work of Eileen Power, continued to be the only study-source for the first half of this century; in the last twenty years, many studies and source books have been written. A valuable collection, with particularly comprehensive bibliographic sources cited, is Nichols and Shank, eds., *Distant Echoes* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984).

The public responsibilities of this new state cloud my inner life until it is nearly invisible. This is the second full year of pleading and arguing, negotiations for new lands, transference of dowries from St. Disibode against the wishes of my old Abbot Kuno, and always at the expense of my frail health; protection of the Archbishop at Mainz is secured, permission for my writing to continue is granted through the Cistercian pope with the support of Br. Bernard of Clairvaux[2], but, with each day here, the responsibilities multiply. My head is constantly crowded, crawling with petty details of food and supplies, programs of instruction for the novices, decisions to be made at every juncture for the building of the cloister church.

And how can I ignore the letters? They find me here; they seek me out, in need of advice and encouragement, and even dear Volmar's willingness to record whatever I dictate doesn't relieve me of the responsibility to answer each one.[3] The whole body of Advent music lies before us, and I am the only one who knows it and therefore must teach it. Underneath it all, I am plagued by the desire to begin as soon as possible on music for all of the offices for the Feast of St. Ursula. It is early yet, but by next October I pray that we can honor her with music of our own, because a vision as strong as hers will inspire my women to go

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[2] Hildegard wrote a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux (see Epistle 29 in PL, vol. 197, pp. 189-190) some time after she had begun the first book of visions, *Scivias*. In addition to encouraging Hildegard, Bernard recommended her the following year to Pope Eugenius III, at a Synod in Trier (1147-1148). A delegation was sent to examine her writings, and, as a result, the pope confirmed Hildegard's charism of prophecy and gave his blessing to her continuing to set down her visions.

[3] Volmar, Hildegard's magister and loyal supporter as she began her writing at St. Disibode, was Hildegard's secretary until his death in 1173. In addition to the many difficulties involved in breaking away from St. Disibode and establishing her women as an independent Benedictine community at Mount St. Rupert, she had to win permission to take Volmar with her as priest of her new convent.

beyond their grumblings and limitations. The music comes when it will come, and I must find a way to stay open to it in the midst of all the chaos.

Two extremes tempt me these days: a deep longing for the simplicity, the real anonymity and isolation of my long novitiate with Blessed Jutta at St. Disibode[4], and the brilliance of the ecstatic state--allowing myself to be taken over by such powerful inner sights and sounds that I am forced to give up my administrative shepherding of these women for hunks of time and lose contact with the sensory world altogether.[5] But not today. Today it begins. The season of the Coming is upon us. It is the first of a new liturgical year, and--like any birth--the Advent and labor are intractable once begun: I must do all.

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[4]Hildegard refers to the male monastery of St. Disibode, which housed her from the time she was entered by her parents, at age eight, until she was fifty-two. She was entered under the care and tutelage of Jutta, the anchoress. Jutta died in 1136, at which time Hildegard became the head of the small group of women who had subsequently gathered there, taking the Rule of St. Benedict, under the protection of the monastery of St. Disibode.

[5]Only once, in the writing of her last book of visions, the *Liber divinorum operum*, did Hildegard in fact allow herself to enter the ecstatic state. For the rest, she says, "Truly I saw these visions not in dreams, neither in sleep nor in ecstatic trance, neither with the human bodily eyes or external ears, nor did I sense them by withdrawing myself to hidden places; rather did I willingly receive them--vigilantly, considering them carefully, in clear thought according to the will of God, in open, accessible places with my human interior eyes and ears." (PL, vol. 197, p.348B).



December 8, 1151

2nd Sunday in Advent

Sometimes I am so hopeful, so filled with the light of Christ, and some days I think my women understand nothing. Volmar tells me that the ordo of the Mass this morning was in jeopardy, because Gertrudis, my sacristan, was so distracted she neglected to bring the bread from the bake-house for consecration. Who here really knows enough to be sacristan besides Rikkarda, who's already my prioress?[6] And Volmar, my poor priest. After all my successful pleading with Abbot Kuno to have Volmar with me, I begin to realize it is I who have the ultimate responsibility for teaching them how to order their lives. He celebrates our Mass with such great beauty; he still finds time to encourage me to dictate to him. He knows that even though the Scivias visions are recorded at last, there is more for me to write besides letters.

But even my dear Volmar cannot teach them about the Divine Office or the arrangement of the calendar, to say nothing of the meaning of that calendar: the successions and fulfillments of one Season by another, the glorious tension between

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[6]Rikkarda, Hildegard's favorite, was daughter of the Marchioness von Stade, whose wealth and influence helped Hildegard to establish her convent on the Rupertsberg. In 1151, Rikkarda was unexpectedly chosen to be abbess at Bassum (perhaps engineered by her brother Hartwig, then the ambitious archbishop of the diocese of Bremen), an appointment bitterly opposed by Hildegard. Letters documenting the disputed appointment were sent between Hildegard and the Marchioness, Henry the Archbishop of Mainz, Hartwig of Bremen, Pope Eugenius III (only his reply is extant), and Rikkarda herself. A young niece of Rikkarda (daughter of the sister of Rikkarda, who by her third marriage was Queen of Denmark), also of Hildegard's convent, was at the same time elected abbess of Gandersheim; but, after a brief complaint in the first letter of Hildegard to the Marchioness, this matter was dropped and the niece seems to have left without further opposition.

a specifically dated and fixed Feast, such as a Saint's Day, and a Feast like Pentecost, that moves with the Season and may therefore intersect with the other in a way that comments anew on the meaning of both. That is my job, and this is the time to begin in earnest, now that we have divided our space and created enough physical order to attend to our real work, the singing of the Divine Office. They will learn by doing. They will sing eight offices a day without fail, and the order and design will begin to emerge for them from the blessed dailiness of the singing. Singing the Psalms in their ritual order each week will bring a knowledge that is not easily forgotten!

It is clear that music--singing the offices and listening to the sacred texts, even adding some of my own--is my best hope for teaching. At the same time, I must attend my own vision and dare to bring forth again what music God brings to this newborn community through gifts inhabiting my own frail form. It is the Virgin whose antiphons present themselves to me most often; it is She who is singing in my inner ear. Men who survive and return from the Holy Jerusalem War say that in Byzantium She is called Theotokos, Mother of God. Surely Theotokos, Mother of God and Most Blessed Virgin, will guide us as a new order of Virgins. We are still so freshly in this spot on the Rupertsberg: yet untried as a productive Benedictine community, but already survivors of a privation and physical hardship previously unknown to most of the noblewomen in my care.

So many of them are errant and headstrong and require the limits of my patience in my shepherding, that my sleep is terrible. This morning I woke long before dawn, well before the first bell for Lauds. (At least the bells ring now; that in itself signals progress, because last year during Advent we could not hope for such regularity.) Accompanying the cry of the earliest rooster, I heard with

my inner ears the trumpeting of the antiphon for the Christmas Magnificat Canticle:

Today the Christ is born, today a saviour has appeared; today on earth angels are singing, archangels rejoicing; today the righteous exult and say, Glory to God in the highest, Alleluia![7]

Mother of God, this morning the herald of that glorious antiphon only reminded me that by this eighth day of Advent the Season of the Coming is already well upon us. Before we know it, we will be pulled headlong into the final week of Advent, with its seven Great Antiphons encircling the Magnificat Canticle each day, so deeply engraved in my soul. Of these, each text is more expectant and lucently beautiful than the next,[8] and they in turn bring us almost without rest to the moment of the birth itself: Christmas Vespers and Matins, the delivery, and our deliverance through Christ in His Nativity. Only once before have we sung the "O Antiphons" in our own home, our own community and choir, with their direct, beseeching openings that thrust us into liturgical time.

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[7]Hodie Christus natus est: hodie Salvator apparuit: hodie in terra canunt Angeli, laetantur Archangeli: hodie exultant justi, dicentes: Gloria in excelsis Deo, alleluia. The appearance of "Hodie" as the first word of antiphons is a kind of signal that we have arrived, liturgically, at a time of highest expectation. Most typically, at the end of the long expectations set up by the season of Advent (itself intensified and then characterized as it climaxes in the "O Antiphons"), we hear "Hodie scietis quia veniet Dominus" at Terce on Christmas Eve. At the Mass it serves as text for Introit and Gradual. At Matins on the eve of Christmas Day, "Hodie nobis caelorum Rex" is the first Responsory, and "Hodie nobis de caelo," the second, both for the First Nocturn. Finally, as quoted above, "Hodie Christus natus est" is sung as the Magnificat Canticle for 2nd Vespers on Christmas Day, the feast itself. By association, as more feasts for the Virgin were added to the calendar (already during Hildegard's lifetime the Annunciation, Assumption, Nativity, and Purification were fixed), an opening "Hodie" was common. Thus for September 8 (Nativity of the Virgin) the responsory in Codex Albensis is "Hodie nata est/beata virgo Maria". "Hodie beata virgo" is an antiphon for the Purification, and "Hodie Maria virgo" for the Assumption. In the older monastic practice of the Hartker Antiphonale, these are likewise found, plus "Hodie sanctus benedictus" for the Feast of the Annunciation, and the use of "Hodie beata virgo" for the Vigil of the Feast of St. Agatha (whose texts, along with those of Agnes and the Virgin, become the basis for the Common of Virgins).

[8]See Appendix \_\_\_ for discussion of the "O Antiphons" of Advent.

But in this, our second year of Advent at Rupertsberg, my women need to understand a further meaning of the season. This time at Advent we both initiate and complete the temporal cycle of the liturgical year with our praises for the hope of the world. In the larger sense of time, they must understand and celebrate not only the coming of Christ at His birth, but also the coming of Christ at the end of time--the Parousia! Gospel texts of the last things, of the destruction of the temple, suggest this understanding,[9] but they hardly grasp the enormity of the Second Coming, the way that all things shall be fulfilled and made right, even taking us back to Paradise and the Tree of Life, righting, through the womb of the Virgin, the loss of Eternity in the Garden.

They need so much education that I am sometimes seized by melancholy. And my own needs are not simple; if I wait, the Virgin inevitably appears to me, sometimes subsumed in the sparkling sapphire figure of Sapientia, surrounded by the embracing circles of infused light that both support her weight in gravity and themselves wheel 'round her as the form of the living movement of the Trinity, as it moves in the world. Sometimes she appears monumental and iconic, as Ecclesia, towering over the earth in cosmic proportions that dwarf our poor, womanly forms.[10] Though frail, new and untried, we seem to be struggling into a new possibility of service as women, extending the hope of the world in what emerge increasingly as womanish times, since clerics neglect their duties, preoccupied by worldly ambitions. But it is not only clerics, because even our Benedictine

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[9]In the Masses for the last Sunday after Pentecost and the First Sunday in Advent, Gospel texts: Matt. 24:15-35 and Luke 21:25-33, respectively.

[10]For illuminations depicting Ecclesia in this form, see Adelgundis Fuhrkotter, *The Miniatures from the Book Scivias* (Brepols-Turnout, 1977), plate 12/II, 3, plate 12/II, 4, and, most pointedly, plate 14/II, 5.

brothers become less attendant upon the opus dei, the singing of the Divine Office, as they become busy with the duties that follow from their seemingly inevitable ordination as priests. Our voices and prayers are needed in such a void, and there appears a way in which we inherit a particular role in the history of salvation as orders of Virgins intent on carrying the monastic way of life more authentically forward into these new times.

And so it is fitting that we pointedly honor the Blessed Virgin at the climax of Advent. On the Eve of Christmas, preceding the "Hodie Christus natus est" I heard with the roosters this morning, we will announce both the Birth and the Parousia through the womb that incarnates Him in a new, more specific antiphon for Her Magnificat: at First Vespers on the Eve I will myself intone "Hodie aperuit" as the antiphon for Our Lady:

Today  
the closed gate  
has opened to us,  
because the serpent has suffocated  
in the woman.  
Therefore the flower of the Virgin Mary  
Radiates illuminated in the first blush of daybreak.[11]

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[11]Hodie aperuit nobis clausa porta, quod serpens in muliere suffocavit. Unde lucet in aurora flos de Virgine Maria. Latin text in Barth, Ritscher, and Schmidt-Gorg, Hildegard von Bingen Lieder, hereafter cited as Lieder, (Salzburg: Otto Muller, 1969), p. 218. Hildegard's paraphrasing of "Hodie ...apparuit" with "Hodie aperuit" is clear; the interpretation of the meaning, more complex. In several of her songs for the Virgin, Hildegard plays upon that familiar opposition between Eve and Mary, stereotypically characterized by the "Eva" - "Ave" play on letters. In addition, there was the Biblical opposition from Gen. 3:15-16, in which  
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This honors Her at the birthing of her Son, framing with a new song the ordinary Magnificat that we sing with her each day of the year.[12] The more we contact her real Presence, the greater our strength on this mountain.

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God speaks to the serpent, saying, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." (Douay transl) This text quickly took on a Messianic interpretation, in which Mary, as the second Eve, crushes the serpent through the fruit of her womb, destroying evil and--by extension--death. However, the phrase "clausa porta" refers specifically to the Virgin, not to Eve. (See, for example, in J.F.E. Raby, *The Oxford Book of Medieval Verse* (Oxford, 1959), this use of "clausa porta" in the anonymous 9th-century sequence "Beata tu, Virgo Maria" on pp. 92-93, the anonymous 11th-century "Sequence to the Virgin", pp. 162-163, and the more famous "Sequence for the Nativity of the Virgin Mary" of Adam of St. Victor, pp. 232-244.) This numinous meaning of "clausa porta" stems from the vision of Ezekiel (Ch. 44:1-3), where it represents the holy of holies. The "clausa porta" as embodied in Mary becomes the intact vagina behind which lies the womb-garden that only the King may enter. Hildegard may also have known the "clausa porta" embodied in song in two of the monastic "O Antiphons". In one, the Virgin is speaking to Gabriel: "O Gabriel...who entered by the closed gates to me, and announced the Word (Qui januis clausis ad me intrasti). The other is addressed to Christ as King of Peace: "...come out by the golden gate..."(per auream egredere portam). Such interpretation, i.e., this general sort of Marian understanding of clausa porta, expresses Hildegard's concern to glorify and sanctify the state of Holy Virginity and to express the Parousia and Birth of Christ in the most cosmic terms. She does a similar thing in her one Mass-Alleluia "O Virga Mediatrix" (#70 in *Lieder*, pp. 145-146), whose text is "O virga mediatrix, sancta viscera tua mortem superaverunt et venter tuus omnes creaturas illuminavit in pulcro flore de suavissima integritate clausi pudoris tui orto." (O fecund green shoot and mediatrix,/your holy viscera/ overpowered death/ and your womb/illuminated all creatures/in the beautiful flower/born of the sweetest integrity/of your sealed chastity.) Here the emphasis on the fecundity of the sealed womb, and the sanctity of chastity, is even more pointed.

[12]The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), whose text begins "My soul doth magnify the Lord/And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior/Because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid/for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." This New Testament Canticle is sung each day at Vespers, and its antiphon therefore varies according to the day's celebration.

December 25, 1151

Feast of the Nativity

Volmar's visitor from Anglia tells him that in the great house of St. Gall, where he has visited at length, they sing additional "O Antiphons" while processing to the cross during those last pressing days of Advent.[13] A waiting dance of sorts while singing the best of them--"O virgo virginum," "O domina mundi," "O Jerusalem." To process for feasts is part of the journey, the monastic pilgrimage open to women. When they write to me, the abbesses and dominae, complaining of restlessness, the need to travel, the desire for Jerusalem, to go to the holy places and see the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Mount of Olives, to fast where Christ fed the multitude, I sense they are tired of shepherding their own meager flocks, starving for nourishment, and in need of obedience that is meaningful.[14]

The notion of "domina mundi" is open to all of us.[15] The hoped-for

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[13]See *Antiphonaire de Hartker*, (MSS St. Gall 390-391), ed. Dom Jacques Froger, Solesmes (Berne: Editions Herbert Lang & Cie SA, 1970), whose contents were written down between 980-1011. See pp. 40-41 for the 12 "O Antiphons" of St. Gall usage, complete and noted in campo aperto. On the top of p. 44, following the Magnificat Antiphon for First Vespers of the Nativity, the rubric "ad crucem" appears, followed by the incipits of two antiphons "O Jerusalem" and "Ave Maria", which indicates a procession to the cross. See Appendix \_\_\_ below for further discussion of the "O Antiphons" of Advent.

[14]Hildegard's correspondence (about 300 extant letters are attributed to her) in Latin can be found primarily in PL, vol. 197 and Pitra, *Analecta Sacra VIII, Sanctae Hildegardis Opera*, (Monte Cassino, 1882). A particularly lucid discussion of the letters is in Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, A Visionary Life*, (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 158-171.

[15]For the complete text of "O domina mundi" ("O mundi domina" in the 10th century Antiphonale of Hartker), see Appendix \_\_\_. The term "domina" refers in the "O Antiphon" to the Virgin and was perhaps the most common term in the Middle Ages to refer to the woman head of a monastery. Hildegard was herself  
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journey to Jerusalem, the long route to Compostela, the mountainous crossing to Rome are ours for meditation and inspiration. Processing from one holy spot to another in our new cloister church will illuminate and specifically mark those places where our feet will tread again and again.

The Christmas Matins are endless, and only by starting in the middle of the night could we have managed it at all. Rendering the music for the three Masses for the Day of the Nativity is still beyond us; Volmar and I agreed on only one, and so it was the Missa Prima in galli cantu we sang, leaving at least a brief space for sleeping before Lauds and Prime. Festivities will come at midday and be not entirely of our own making, for three of the nearby families of my Virgins have insisted on sending their servants with pieces of their feasts for our table. The joy of goose and duck, preserved quince, plus the first fruits of our own vineyards! We will warm the fowl in our ovens so the wonderful aroma fills the house, and they will forgive all the fasting and boredom of salt herring and beer.

The ropes of green larch, scents of pitch and resin from the boughs of pine fill our refectory and temporary chapel, and they all are nearly childishly delighted to prepare in this way for the feast. It is such a deep part of us, the need for green in the north, and no doubt in Rome and Jerusalem the birth is always attended in green. The martyr's palm I've seen in the precious manuscripts, those illuminations gilded and blessed with powdered lapis for the gown of the Virgin and gold for her crown, the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem so studded with

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often addressed as "Domina" in letters. The word survives today in English Benedictine houses as "Dame" for fully professed nuns and, in this country, in the Benedictine Abbey of Regina laudis (Bethlehem, CT), where the head of the abbey is addressed as "Lady Abbess".



topaz, sapphire, and other jewels that the eye is dazzled with light. When the Christ rode into Jerusalem, the palms were fresh and green. They use them to sweep, to write texts upon, to crown the heads of those victorious in contests. How different from the dull, browning dry shards I have had as gifts from pilgrims who stopped at Disibodenberg, breaking off sacred pieces to share the sense of their journeys!

For us, the light of Christ is eternal, but verdancy is seasonal. That which could be perpetually green is blighted by fire, drought, and frost. On this mountain, the light in October is magical, but in March the same light fails to stir us because there is no color to filter its angled rays. In October, we sense the light through the butter-yellow of delicate mulberry leaves, still hanging on and fluttering like perpetual candles, and bronze oaks whose browning leaves are saturated with royal garnet. And so the position of the sun is itself part of our ritual. The shortest day, the sharpest angle of the sun, absent of any real color, the hardest to bear in our bones, is made hopeful by the expectation already come with His birth. The solstice on the 21st is the worst of it, the point at which we start collecting the greens for Christmas Day.

But the colorful journey of travel has been given to precious few women, and most of them we honor with the Martyr's palm. Consider the passion of Ursula, herself a Christian long-awaited child of royal parentage. So long had they prepared for a son, that God in his infinite wisdom sent them a daughter whom they named after the little fierce she-bear, small, and chosen like David in his contest with Goliath. Graced with radiant beauty and intelligence from the first, she was spoken for very early by the son of a Gentile prince, politically powerful, but unbaptized in the faith.

A vision overtook Ursula with deep urgency, and her answer to her father was that she would honor such a contract, but not until she had been allowed a three-year sea voyage with Virgin companions, destined for the holy places. Her pilgrimage granted and ships fitted out, already she was taunted and teased as she declared her yearning love for Christ, the passion that filled the very sails of the triremes and allowed her to abandon her espoused with such un-earthly joy. Her single-mindedness and determination, her scorn for the things of this world, her fierce devotion to her Vision, her firm insistence that it originated not in her lovely self but in the Most High, ignited scorn and hatred from worldly men and a passionate devotion in her women companions.

There were holy men who honored them as Ursula set out like Abraham, leading an unlikely band of women across the sea, the banners on their ships like the vexillae of Christ, a truly royal contingent of Holy Women led by one whose vision made her larger than life. Their voices raised, their music fanned the air and swelled to great volume as they progressed, even crossing the Alps, and, when they were struck down in the city of Cologne by the devilish Huns, pagan, and eager to do the evil wishes of the devil who hates music, the physical world convulsed in shock. Their crimson blood colored the water of the harbor, and the martyrdom of St. Ursula joined her forever to that of her beloved, her Lover of Light.

The precious bones of her band of women were buried in Cologne where they had been slaughtered like so many innocent lambs, and their relics are newly uncovered and sought after in our lifetime. But it is Ursula herself who inspires me, that woman so driven by the Holy Spirit to fulfill her journey that, to me, she is baptized Columba in her holy martyrdom. She is the chosen one, the one

clothed in varieties of gold and sparkling jewels, whose sound is of the Psalms and of the elemental rushing of waters.[16]

The brilliance of her journey will surround my women here. Their pilgrimages will process from one stage to another of her illuminated vision. We will attend such a journey with many candles and exulting, with evergreening boughs at Christmastide and dried martyrs' palms, burned and borne in ash on our foreheads

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[16]See Appendix \_\_\_ for the texts of Hildegard's thirteen songs for St. Ursula. The story of Ursula and her Virgin followers is known to the modern world primarily through its retelling in *The Golden Legend* of Jacobus Voragine, its manifestation in the paintings of Carpaccio and Memling, and through the efforts of the Ursulines, the first order founded expressly for the education of women. The Church long ago eliminated all of the the Proper music and texts honoring St. Ursula, and finally her Feast, because of skepticism about the relationship between the elaborated legend and the 4th-century inscription in Cologne (which remains unchallenged) that originally inspired it. The popularity of the Feast of St. Ursula in the Middle Ages is remarkable. Every medieval liturgical calendar and choir book I consulted included her Feast on October 21, and many of them included texts and music composed specifically for her. It was precisely during Hildegard's lifetime that the great zeal for St. Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins (a scribal error; at a certain point in the transmission of the legend, someone mistakenly transcribed XI MV as 11 mille virgines instead of 11 Martyr Virgins) intensified and spread. In 1106, workmen, enlarging the walls around Cologne, struck what must have been an ancient Roman burial ground right outside the Church of St. Ursula, and the belief was that the bones were those of Ursula and her followers. The sale of relics was enormous throughout Europe. Finally, in the 1150's, Elisabeth of Schoneau, a German nun thirty years younger than Hildegard, had a series of fantastic visions about the martyrdom; they even explained in detail the presence of the bones of men and babies among the relics. Elisabeth wrote several letters to Hildegard (asking for encouragement in her life), but there is no mention of the Ursula material in them. Elisabeth's version, "The Book of Revelations of Elisabeth, of the sacred band of the virgins of Cologne," is very different from that of Hildegard. External evidence suggests that Elisabeth's visions were unknown to Hildegard while she was writing her songs for St. Ursula, since Elisabeth only began dictating her visions to her brother Egbert in 1156. Based on internal evidence--that is, a careful examination of Hildegard's texts--it is likely that Hildegard knew two early passions written about the life of St. Ursula, one known as *Passio I*, written by a Flemish monk in 975; the other, *Passio II* ("In regnante domino"). For further information about the provenance and details of the contents of these two *passio*, see *The Passion of St. Ursula [Regnante Domino]*, translated with notes by Pamela Sheingorn and Marcelle Thiebaut (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1990).

during Lent. Processing to the Cross is the goal of Christmas, and we will be colored in boughs of green, candles of light singing with the warbling Dove. The long-awaited child in each of us will be born and blessed and nurtured in such vision.

December 28, 1151

Feast of the Holy Innocents

Within the Octave of Christmas

Nothing seems to work as efficiently as it did at St. Disibode, but I will not breathe a word of this to my women, they are so pulled down by their own complaints and discouragements. We are understandably still far from self-sufficiency in many things, but these grim winter months are the most constant reminder of how much harder is mere survival with the short hours of daylight and the relentless cold. Even the bell sounds of the Angelus were muffled this morning. The wet snow began in the evening, shortly after Compline, but tentatively in localized, swirling gusts driven by a strong wind out of the northeast. My old portress came to consult about putting down fireplace ashes for the last part of the climbing path, but it always seems worthwhile to wait out the storm before laying down ash. It can easily be covered in an hour's fall, and then the new fall freezes over it. So it continued through the night, and I was the first to wade into its depth before dawn.

I made my trip to the gate shortly before Lauds, as I do every morning at this season to watch the first light. Deep silence was not only due to the amount that blanketed the ground in soft waves like the floor of the sea. The snow lay almost in drifts on the winter-bare branches of deciduous trees, like soft clumps of sheep's wool bleached white by the pale winter sun, but no cloth that we weave is so starkly white as this snow; not sheep wool, goat hair, nor the mane of our palest horse. The white of our wimples and veils looks soiled and dark by comparison.

Timbers for our cloister church, some half-hoisted into place, others laid out on the ground like the pieces of a remarkable puzzle, began to emerge as I approached them. The bowl of sky behind was first yellow as a lemon, with those ink-black, squared-off silhouettes vaulting up and against it. One softer pink corner appeared in the extreme lower right stretch of horizon; the yellow paled further, before the real rose of dawn emerged, giving the cut and shaped timbers both color and dimension. With my hands snug in the new knitted gauntlets and each tucked into the other's sleeve, I stayed warm enough to watch both cut timbers and live rooted trees emerge, take on full form in first light. Timbers and trees both speak for the solidity that will mark our cloister church. They assure me that--unlike the early fortunes of Disibodenberg, of communities that come and go, appear and fail--ours will remain.[17] Our community will continue to be stable, and we will ultimately have agreement about the architectural expression of our spirit.

It has not been easy, the planning of the cloister church. Oh, the name, the translation of the relics, the finding of a stone suitable in size and color in which to house the sacred bones, these were relatively simple matters, determined by custom and by reliable witnesses to the sacred life of Rupert, his early mission and history on this mountainside, now our sacred inheritance.[18] He is honoured

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[17]According to chronicles, the early history of St. Disibode was relatively unstable, and, from 1098-1105, the monks had abandoned it. See Miriam Schmitt, OSB, "Blessed Jutta of Disibodenberg: Hildegard of Bingen's magistra and Abbess," in *American Benedictine Review*, 40:2, June 1989, pp. 170-189.

[18]Hildegard founded her convent on the site of a ruined church, monastery, and tomb that had been built through the generosity of the mother of a ninth-century nobleman named Rupert. (See Barbara Newman, *Symphonia*, Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, pp. 293-294) Hildegard did a great deal to revive, if not create, reverence for St. Rupert, whose youthful pilgrimage, piety, and death  
[footnote continued]

in our coming, and his bones are now in our sacred trust. Much more complex are decisions about the height of our church, the nature of its glass: should it be of dazzling color, the heavenly Jerusalem's jeweled walls expressed as they are in the Cluniac houses, as urged by Odo, or is it as Br. Bernard so vehemently insists, that the open space of their Cistercian houses, with its clear glass, the honest and simple proportions themselves, carry the Divine Office more directly to The Most High? I still tend towards the color, the warmth and passion of representation and color. I have the intention that, as my women and I enter into liturgical time, through the contemplative act of singing, we can also focus and meditate upon representations of exemplary lives painted on the ceiling or the walls that will mirror our sounds in a spectrum of color.[19]

Most of all I hope to have the whole journey of St. Ursula spread around us like the sides of the world--a map of her journey, a record of her travels, colored in the finest paints and powders we can find and afford. For most of my women, the journey will be an inner one entirely, a point of initiation, a ritual of consecration, in which their veiling and clothing is the outer sign of ever-deepening vows; later, moments of illumination, doses of learning and accomplishment, texts understood and inscribed in their hearts and minds, songs of praise spun out of their mouths like feathery, winged September seeds. Very few will pass beyond

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[footnote continued]

made him a good subject for one of Hildegard's most artfully constructed sequences. Her cloister church was dedicated to St. Rupert, as well as to Sts. Philip and Martin, James, and the Mother of God (*Ibid.*, p. 295).

[19]Stave churches in Scandinavia remain as examples of the typical Romanesque practice of painted wood walls and/or ceilings in churches long since rebuilt or destroyed by fires and wars. An extant example, whose paintings and construction have been painstakingly analysed and photographed in color, can be studied in Ernst Murback, *The Painted Romanesque Ceiling of St. Martin in Zillis* (NY: Praeger, 1967).

these walls before they die, but they must have an urgent sense of movement and direction.

To some of this I will myself attend, with Volmar's support and still greater experience in matters of learning. I can read to them, focus their minds through texts, sung and spoken, through attention to the smallest detail of liturgy and of the quality of their communal life. There is also the beauty of paint and color as they find themselves fairly embedded in a matrix of meaning.

We argue constantly about the outside shape and style of the church. No one apparently believes that I--a mere woman, frail and untaught--have seen enough of the architectural jewels of the world to understand what we need.



January 6, 1152

Feast of the Epiphany

I am so little interested in His humanity that the voguish wave for depicting His tender birth and infancy repels me.[20] The Cistercians write whole treatises on these subjects, are moved to circulate them among their ever-proliferating houses, as a salve to all of us, warm ointment, a moist balm for our consciences. How little I need reminding about the pathetic nature of being human. What glory in circulating stories of His humble birth, His sharing a stall with smelly animals, His birthing in straw, Her swollen discomfort in searching out a place of respite, teetering hugely on a clumsy, plodding ass, poor beast of burden? Surely this is not to elevate or soothe the masses of humanity living just that way, braying with asses, who swarm the countryside, drag themselves into our parish and monastic churches, looking to us for signs of something better than they can know with their rough hands and dirty feet. Why feed the laity with more assurances about suffering humanity?

And what more do I need to know of humanity, with our fallen selves in painful evidence everywhere? Behold the humanity of the clergy, the worldly clerics and priests so easily bought and sold as they run after temporal as well as ecclesiastical power. Such comfort to know that He was not only Christ the King, but now the poor human Jesus: so the clergy are comforted in their human laxity, lax

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[20]All of Hildegard's writings substantiate the fact that she was going against the growing theological concern and writings about the humanity of Jesus--the details of his human birth and infancy, as well as those of his suffering. Similarly, Hildegard's extensive portrayals of the Virgin present her not at all as the human mother of Jesus, but in her numinous aspect, as with Sapientia, Ecclesia, and the Virtues of Ordo virtutum.

in the responsibilities, and misguided as to the possible uplifting and true elevation of office.

Let Him remain in His majesty, enthroned with His mother suspended on a pillar of light, the everturning crest of the fountain! The more I can explain and classify the known elements, the huge families of plants and trees, minerals, animals and color-filled wonders of this world, all the more inspired I am to sing its wonders: the mystery of grace, the grandeur of His saving, the wonders of Ecclesia's healing, light-giving love, and the terrifying powers of darkness--for even they are much larger than simple humanity.

The dragon's dark powers are wily and concentrated[21], and it seems that I deal constantly with them. The most beautifully embodied souls are his prey, and with such trophies would he decorate his world. His desire for them is endless, and his potency undiluted by doubts, care, reason, or love. Little enough does he care about humanity, save to vie with the glory of God, and that singlemindedness gives him great persuasive power. He hates music, opposes it everywhere for its beauty and true power in praise of the divine mysteries he would unravel and drown like wet kittens. I could never oppose him nor persist in ferreting him out of helpless bodies, without the assurance that we are not merely so much fallen humanity after all.

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[21]For Hildegard, Evil is a powerful reality. She often refers to him with the Latin *draco*, *draconis*, in a form reminiscent of that beast in the book of the Apocalypse. She may also refer to the Devil as the Evil One, the Tempter, or Diabolus; or--always with more subtlety--as Lucifer, who tried to be a lamp, rather than a mirror for God, before his banishment.

Constantly, recurrently and with greatest anguish have I experienced my own powerlessness in the face of suffering. Entire Days, Octaves, and Seasons have found me prostrate on my bed and racked with pain, feverish with unrealized plans for my women, never-ending pressure behind my eyes, and knowing only the ears of authority that are deaf to my pleas. Tell me about fallen humanity, drown me in its helpless waves of misery! Of what possible use to tell me drivel about suffering humanity, anyone's suffering! For I have rolled plentifully in my own; I've witnessed the smelly, helpless birthing and the slow, anguished dying of the healthy as well as the sick: arbitrary and humanly senseless.

Only God's grace has saved me. Remind me, then, nothing, of anyone's suffering! Rather tell me of the sparks of divinity, tell me stories of the uplifting by God's green finger of the most despised of us all. Tell me of the glory of an Ursula who saw and followed an impossible vision, attracting untold thousands of frail women in the gleaming mystery of her divine beauty. Of saints whose human powers were so uneven, humours so unbalanced, who shimmered in their triumphs over powers of darkness.

We all thirst so after beauty, after openings into the vault of heaven, after sights and sounds symbolic of the possibility of breaking the all-too-human sizes and shapes we assume, the well defined and measured restrictions on what is possibly human.

Our simple limitations impress me not at all. They collapse the vault of heaven and dry up the dripping red rose of divine promise.

And so I go into battle with the stupidity of those men who still will not

grant that we have earned our right to hold and manage all the lands of our well dowered women.

Do you think that the winning of all I have won has a shred to do with my humanity? No; what inspires people to listen at all are the divine sparks, the prophetic power of the mysteries I have finally sung and described, beauties so clean to my inner senses that they color in dazzling green and gold every tendril and branch of every vine and tree shrouding the hills between Nahe and Rhine.

January 18, 1152

Feast of St. Prisca

Volmar thinks we're ready this year and suggests I think about receiving public penitents for the period of Lent. Directing them to bed down with the sheep is surely best for all, since they can neither bathe nor shoe their feet during this interval. Some warmth will keep them there, and their cries of separation, longing for missed family and loved ones, will blend into the bleating of sheep and nickering of goats. If they will truly honor their fasting and keep from sucking the full udders and warm teats of those ewes yet to lamb, they can share the clean straw, hear animals converse while keeping silence, yet know some comfort.

Our Lenten Cloth grows larger and larger on the loom; I pray that it will be ready for the Lenten season.[22] Suspended in front of the sanctuary, and richly purple, it will not only symbolize being cut off from the sight of the altar in this long time of penance, it will also serve to insulate us against the bitter northeast winds that come most nights with Compline. If only the light would last a bit longer, the sisters could return to the work for a bit after the evening office without breaking the Great Silence. Perhaps we need to place the loom inside the chapter house where western exposure will capture the lengthening light between Vespers and Compline. Sister Birgitte has devised coverings for the hands, knitted for each palm, ramifying for digits, but leaving all the fingertips exposed to

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[22]See Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs*, (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952), pp. 176-177 for discussion of the use of this traditional Lenten cloth.

allow the sensitive threading of warp and weft.\*\*

Meanwhile, this winter week has been unbearable for all of us. I suffer silently, but bitter cold sits in my joints, and sharp daggers of ice assault my entire spine. Knitting woolen undergarments becomes more valued in this house than singing psalms, and lay sisters serve the choir nuns with their skilled hands. Some of the turnips and rutabagas have frozen in the root cellar and turn to mush in the soup. Sr. Adelgundis refuses all food for the twelfth day.

Other things progress. I have examined three more women of our town of Bingen, bringing them up the steep mountain by sledge through the snow. They are indeed steeped in the wisdom of herbs and medicinals; I am sure they can be relied upon for earliest gathering in late March. By that time, I need to begin cataloging these precious substances, assigning their places in the great design of healing, their respective qualities and curative powers.[23] For some, the season of safe gathering is so short; pokeweed, for example, comes so quickly in the spring and as quickly becomes toxic--a deadly hallucinogen--so there needs to be a kind of calendar as part of the catalog. Perhaps what we also need is a map, no matter how crudely drawn, figured by these wise old women, drawn by one of my lettered women--the infirmarian perhaps--so that locations of vital medicines become commonly known to the lay sisters. Even Radegund, blind for six years now, can be taught to recognize the square stems of the mint family by touch, further differentiating by smell whether it is Pennyroyal, spearmint, Nepeta, or our carefully tended bed of Patchouli, its seeds brought back as a gift from the

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[23]Hildegard was working on her physical treatises, known to us as the *Physica* and the *Causae et curae*.

Crusade, its oil so thick and precious, to be saved for our sacramental anointing of throats and brows.

How like the miracle of God's usage of us, this naming and calling into being of plants! Volmar warns that I am criticized for spending so much time on the planning of our crops, my attention to the details of healing and medicinals, my desire to catalog what is available to us on this mountain for healing the sick. Without such attention, most of these plants grow rampant, wild on the slopes, and in the meadows and stream banks, living only in a wild world of potential. They require naming, calling into being, description, use, and--in some cases--careful cultivation and fertilization to enhance their powers, strength, vitality, and size. Such is the power of naming, baptism, the recognition of vocation, the taking of vows. How I wish that each of my women, in their clothing and consecration, could formally take on a name for this new life.

St. Agnes is the best exemplar for our meditation. Let them consider what the good Bishop St. Ambrose said about her. In the 2nd Lesson of her Matins office, he says, "But how shall I set forth the glory of her whose very name is an utterance of praise? It seems to me that this being, holy beyond her years, and strong beyond human nature, received the name of Agnes, not as an earthly designation, but as a revelation from God of what she was to be." So I believe it is with St. Ursula. Her sacred life, which I have read again and again, tells us the significance of her naming--the fierce she-bear, the little fierce she-bear, who, like David, God intended to fight the giant. The very climax of my hymn for her bears witness to this sacred power of naming, and so I have the priests--those who have official ordination--say to her women:

"O Most excellent flock,

This virgin who on earth is called Ursula

Is named in highest heaven Columba..."[24]

She is consecrated in the name of the Holy Spirit, just as Agnes has received the name of the Christ, the Lamb, the one chosen of God.

Let my women listen carefully as they sing the canticles for the lessons of the 3rd Nocturn of Matins on Agnes's feast, "and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. And thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God... Thou shalt no more be called Forsaken, and thy land shall no more be called Desolate: but thou shalt be called My pleasure in her, and thy land inhabited."[25] Let them understand the exceptional possibilities of being called into a vocation whose very nature is that of virginal fecundity.

To be a lily of the field is enough. To be a lily whose color is exceptional in the light that God casts upon it, to be fertilized and watered, encouraged to grow, to provide beauty and even shade and support in some cases, is more. But to be transformed and re-named in that calling is the greatest grace, and is to grow into the limbs of the Tree of Life.

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[24]Hildegard's Hymn for St. Ursula, "Cum vox sanguinis," see Appendix \_\_\_\_.

[25]Three Canticles (used as Psalms with antiphons surrounding each) appear in the monastic usage of the 3rd Nocturn for the Matins office in the Common of Virgins (but not in the cathedral offices); these are Ecclesiasticus 29:17-21, Isaias 61:10-11 & 62:1-3, and 62:4-7. The lines quoted above are from the 2nd and 3rd Canticles. As far as I have been able to discover, the custom of taking a new name "in religion" was not yet the practice for Benedictine nuns in Hildegard's time; nevertheless, it is clear from the monastic texts that the issue was already important, with its roots in the Old Testament power of naming.





January 20, 1152

Feast of St. Agnes, Virgin and  
Martyr

Discussing it with Volmar would be a comfort. His way of listening would perhaps allow even more of the meaning to come out and might also make it less frightening. The first one started on the night of the Vigil for the Feast of Epiphany, which must be more than two weeks ago now. The dreams seem to begin shortly before I hear the waking bells for Matins, and, once we have completed the office, I promptly fall back into the same murky place and dream a variation on the same dream that preceded Matins.

Several times the frightening characters in the dreams have hovered around my head during Matins, so much so that I can feel their hissing breath in my ear during all three of the Nocturns. Always so much is demanded of me: I am somehow responsible for the pending deaths, the debilitating illnesses of hundreds of people, all of them relatively unknown to me. It is not at all clear in what way I am responsible, only that I am responsible. There is something I must do.

Sometimes the hordes of people who are sick don't even speak a language I understand. At least once upon waking I thought they might be Saracens, Greeks, infidels from the Holy Land, or Albigensians from the south of France, people whose souls cry out for conversion, whose language cannot reach my ears, who do not know the cadences of Latin because they are unbaptized.

The restlessness these dreams have caused me is remarkable considering how little of substance actually transpires in the dreams, how little I understand or

even remember of what has happened in those minutes--or is it hours?--when they invade my sleep. And where is it happening, exactly? Most of all, I wonder about the source of such dreams.

Surely they are not in the same category with my visions, for those come to me with my eyes open, through my inner senses, in the clear light of day, but lit from above, in the Shadow of the Living Light. These dreams that are plaguing me come only when I am deeply, nearly deathly, asleep, in a sleep that is both deeper and more troubled than is normal for me. And what do they prophecy? Not in the sense of telling future events, for we do not normally understand the gift or act of prophecy in that way. When Daniel was able to explain the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, the signs and gestures that were presented had meanings connected to the divine mysteries, even though the dreamer himself was an infidel. And of the other Old Testament prophets, as well, their role was never to predict, but to interpret. Just so, in my visions, the Voice of Wisdom explains the significance of particular colors and figures, the lessons and meanings condensed into gestures, actions, and even tableaux that unfold to me in the Shadow of the Living Light. [26]

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[26]The clearest physical description of the two modes of seeing that Hildegard experienced comes from a long letter written to Guibert of Gembloux very late in her life, and it is this letter that caused Guibert to leave everything he was doing and become her secretary for the last few years of her life, following the death of Volmar. A Latin text of this long letter does not exist in PL, vol. 197, but can be found in J.B. Pitra, *Sanctae Hildegardis Opera* (Monte Cassino, 1882). Peter Dronke has presented a corrected edition, using all available MS sources, in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge University Press, 1984). The translation and Latin text, below, are his, pp. 168 and 252-53, respectively: "The brightness I see is not spatial, yet it is far, far more lucent than a cloud that envelops the sun. I cannot contemplate height or length or breadth in it; and I call it 'the shadow of the living brightness'. And as sun, moon and stars appear [mirrored] [sic] in water, so Scriptures, discourses, virtues, and some works of men take  
[footnote continued]

These dreams are different, unclear and confusing, without any interpreting voice; they are never direct with me. What is their relationship to me? Is it possible--and of course this is what I fear most and what has prevented me from speaking about them as yet to Volmar, a poor decision on my part--could they be of the Devil? Is the old Dragon at it again, and just how is he trying to get at me this time? And what could I have done, specifically, that evoked him, if it is he in the guise of my recent bouts of dreaming?

The last time I felt he was sniffing me out--for he is closely connected to the sense of smell, almost "an olfactory presence," you might say (I feel I can smell him and he in turn is sniffing me out)--I protected myself with the power of chanted prayer and words. He is repelled by our singing the Divine Office, and we in our singing expressly exclude, almost preclude his being, in the act of praising God with our voices.[27]

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[footnote continued]

form for me and are reflected radiant in this brightness... And in that same brightness I sometimes, not often, see another light, which I call 'the living light'; when and how I see it, I cannot express; and for the time I do see it, all sadness and all anguish is taken from me, so that then I have the air of an innocent young girl and not of a little old woman." (Lumen igitur quod viduo locale non est, sed nube que solem portat multo <et multo> lucidius, nec altitudinem, nec longitudinem nec latitudinem, in eo considerare valeo, illudque umbra viventis luminis michi nominatur; atque ut sol, luna et stelle in aqua apparent, ita scripture, sermones, virtutes, et quedam opera hominum formota in illo michi resplendent... Et in eodem lumine aliam lucem, que lux vivens michi nominata est, interdum et non frequenter aspicio, et quando et quomodo illamvideam proferre non valeo, atque interim dum illam intueor, omnis tristitia et omnis angustia a me aufertur, ita ut tunc mores simplicis puelle, et non vetule mulieris, habeam.) Neither of these states is ecstatic, and Hildegard continues to be fully aware with her outer senses, in both of them.

[27]Hildegard wrote down her lifelong and passionate beliefs about music during the last year of her life, in a letter to the Prelates of Mainz. (For the Latin text of this letter, see "Epistola XLVII" in PL, vol. 197, 218-243.) Deprived by interdict of the daily singing of the Divine Office, she produced a lengthy, reasoned argument for what amounts to a theology of music in which all sacred

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But going back to the last time, it was when Engwis had the issue of blood. She was hemorrhaging so that it left her whole face and body skin the color of lead. The rhythms in her wrists were faint but racing, and we all feared she could be without life if the loss of blood continued even a day or two longer. I knew there was prayed a connection between Christ's blood and her issuance of blood. Only the King Himself could in His mercy staunch and heal what was already beyond human bodily endurance. We had already applied poultices, bindings, warmth and cold, herbs specific and general, tried elevation of the lower body and night-long vigils of prayer by the professed choir nuns in rotation. The need was there to formalize the prayer--to instrumentalize it--to make it nearly a sacrament of blood, equating the blood that poured out of the lance-pierced side with the blood that gushed from the womb of this simple woman who had desperately sought our help. If a liturgical act was required to embody the prayer, there was none; in that faith, thus I spoke:

In the blood of Adam death arose; in the blood of Christ  
death was restrained. In that same blood of Christ I command  
you, blood, to cease your flowing.[28]

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[footnote continued]

music--instrumental as well as vocal--functions as the bridge for humanity to life before the Fall. The "spiraculo," the breath of life that God breathed into the first human being in Genesis 2, is to be used to sing the praises of God, either with the sound of voices or of instruments, as we are reminded again and again in Psalm 150. The devil, as soon as he heard humankind singing through the inspiration of God, began to oppose it, which he has done consistently ever since. Hildegard's beliefs also informed her decision, in her sung morality play *Ordo virtutum*, to have the part of the devil be the one part without any music.

[28]I am grateful to Barbara Newman for bringing Hildegard's "healing charm" to my attention, and for answering questions about its several appearances. The Latin text, "In sanguine Ade orta est mors; in sanguine Christi mors retenta est. In eodem sanguine Christi impero tibi, o sanguis, ut fluxum tuum contineas," appears in a letter reproduced in *Pitra* as Epistle 36 and also in a thirteenth-century MS (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 1016), where it is

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It was clear enough to me then that I must protect myself from the Devil in this act, that he was lurking, and that my calling forth the blood of Christ for this simple woman could open me to him; but Engwis did recover, by the grace of God, and the Devil was put down again.

Perhaps this now is his latest way of opening up his old quarrel with me. Is it another guise of the heavily populated dream that disturbs and frightens me? There are some of his characteristics I recognize; for example, wherever he appears, he threatens my identity. He threatens my authority to act, to speak, to heal, to sing. My role becomes fuzzy, my responsibilities vague but overwhelming. There is nothing I am actually empowered to do; only everywhere there is the felt accusation that, had I been able to understand what seemed undecipherable words and gestures, I might have prevented needless suffering in scores of people.

Is this pride? That in itself is enough to evoke the Devil.

Then again, the meaning could be so much simpler, so much more benign. The dreams could be speaking to me, and through me to my women, of the need to understand more about the nature of responsibility. Perhaps they are simply telling me I must use the time in refectory or in chapter to talk about responsibility. Enough, I will talk with Volmar, my trusted magister.

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[footnote continued]

preceded by letters from Hildegard's intriguing *lingua ignota*, placed on lines as of a musical staff. The Newman's English translation, with a brief discussion, is found on page 33 in Newman, *Sister of Wisdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): " 'In the blood of Adam death arose; in the blood of Christ death was restrained. In that same blood of Christ I command you, blood, to cease your flowing.' "

February 2, 1152

Sexagesima Sunday and

Purification of Virgin Mary

The relationship between women and blood is ongoing, and it is crucial for me to understand it, whether in an ancient ritualized form as with the Mother of Christ in her purification, or the hemorrhaging that threatened the life of Engwis and could only be staunched in its relation to the blood of Christ. In the case of my Ursula, her passion is so womanly and zealous, her blood so heated in her desire for consummation, that its shedding at her martyrdom becomes a sign of her royalty, precious in the sight and service of God. Her womanly blood, shed out of love for Christ, endows her with a kind of divine and immortal protection against evil. The special antiphon I have done for her to be sung at the office canticle will make that clear:

O royal redness of blood,  
You flowed down from a high place  
Which divinity has touched;  
You are the flower that winter never damaged  
With the freezing blast of the Serpent.[29]

For me, at this age, the bleeding is nearly finished: the unpleasant smells and chafing, the endless soiling and washing of cloths, the bloating of breasts and swelling of ankles. Nevertheless, compared with the pains I have endured in my bones and joints, the awful sensitivity behind my eyes to certain light--my own

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[29]O rubor sanguinis,/qui de excelso illu fluxisti,/quod Divinitas tetigit,/tu flos es,/quem hiems da flatu serpentis numquam laesit.

monthly cycles have never been severe enough to distract me from liturgical cycles, their duties and offices.

For three of my women, the monthly cyclical bleeding is agony. I sometimes hear them sounding like desperate, wild she-cats in the night, their moans and gasps muffled and the more penetrating for all that effort at concealment. The particular configuration of planets at each one's birth I could guess, but would not ask. They have died to the world, but what they suffer in their bodies is real enough, Holy Mother of God. I have given them each meditations on things of Holy Beauty as well as strenuous responsibilities out of doors to exercise them physically. They function well in choir; two of them are perhaps even more quick of mind than most, but some bodily fixation prevents the physical problem from being transformed through their immortal souls. In Christ we are neither male nor female, I remind them, the soul is the bride of Christ, I repeat, but the painful disjuncture persists, and, as stern as I am with all three of them, my reasoning heart knows that their suffering is real--though I can increase my demands on their performance in any area of our monastic life and they will fulfill it to the letter. Something yet unknown to me is required for healing such rifts. It is of course grace, which is divine, over which I have no control, which can only be prayed for; but, if it should come, it must also have a way of taking root in their physical natures.

In the meantime, herbs and some minerals are a temporary and only partial solution, for while they ease the monthly pains and holding of fluid, the sounds I hear are not only those of suffering but of a longing in the world that I fully expected would recede--at least in the case of Brigitta--with her ceremony of Consecration. Her lineage is perhaps the best of any of my women, but her



humour is melancholic, and it would not be prudent for me to treat her condition as either disobedience or weakness. One of my lay sisters, Gertrudis, a corporeal behemoth but wise and generous in her knowledge of the physical body, serves in the dispensary now with skilled hands and tells me of certain techniques of Breathing. She claims that they balance and join these warring factions, and I defer to her judgment in this case. Tomorrow I will assign Brigitta to duties in the dispensary.

I feel lonely in these matters.

February 5, 1152

Feast of St. Agatha, Virgin  
and Martyr

The Purification is behind us, the Season of Lent begins in exactly one week, and thoughts of Rikkarda continue to distract me. Let her be gone, I keep thinking, but my constant prayers ask that she remain in community with us always. Letters to her mother the Marchioness go unanswered, and the peremptory tone in the recent letter from my heretofore supporter Henry, Archbishop of Mainz, suggests what I know far better than he: although she is still young, her leadership skills set her apart from the rest, shine in her like Venus in the blackening, yellow-streaked dusk of winter skies. But prioress here--is that not sufficient to hold her?

Surely, she knows how necessary she has been to our arrival here. Would the prelates of Mainz ever have supported me, finally facilitated our move without the support and generosity of the Marchioness? Was the Tempter himself already whispering in her ear about higher placement when, caught in the lashing whirlwind of our first year here, I looked within the rare planes of her forehead-to-cheekbones, into the calico flecked eyes, sensed her rapt inner attention, and read there a deeply contemplative state? Was it never love then that I felt from the moisture of her sweet breath as we discussed the endless details of the move, nor compassion from her long-fingered hands that I trusted to turn me on my bed at St. Disibode when, for months at a time, the pain in my body seemed to radiate from my core to every curve and surface to such a degree that the sensation of my own much-diminished weight contacting the hard pallet beneath me was like the relentless bruising of blunt stones? That long bout of the awful

illness when the alternate shuddering and burning of my frame--more, of my very guts--parched and swelled my throat until it became a papery husk that rattled, peeling my lips in such dry shreds that the wetness of my bleeding mouth surprised me for its moisture and salt.

How well I knew what I wanted to say, what the visions were telling me, had been telling me for so long. Still, silence seemed the only possibility in those days, while all the time the forms and pictures emerged in my wracked self at accelerating intervals, insinuating themselves from a shadowy flicker into light more sparkling than the noonday sun on the Rhine in July, so brilliant that I've watched it suddenly tear and then lift away huge canopies of fog hanging late in the valley. When Rikkarda listened and heard, when Abbot Kuno finally accepted my vision, when Volmar listened and insisted on writing down what I told him, then the relentless pain would lift and be burnt away like that fog, would lift right out of my body, accompanied by the Voice of Wisdom, melodious, arching in modulations that build and play upon one another like music.

Today, the hymn that arose in me seemed threaded together as it came, in a way that I have not heard before. The music did not repeat with each new section of the words as hymns so often do; nor did I hear the rhythmic alternation of textures that comes when antiphonal voices sing in turn, the way we sing our psalms for the Offices each day. And it does not emerge the way music happens when a particular antiphon sets off a familiar psalm, clarifying its meaning by juxtaposition--new setting--like lifting the sapphire from its clasp of heavy gold to a more open filigreed winding, a tracery of sheen that plumbs its depths and alters its color.

The shaping of this hymn is more subtle; it has its varieties, but is all of a piece and threaded together from start to the end. Like a string of gold, one continuous voice seemed to shimmer throughout the sounds, moving only rarely from its resting place at the finalis, somehow giving voice to sound that was always there, dreaming its way through the fabric of the melody, allowing that main melody to loop and swirl to farther reaches the way an endless and flexible tether connects the plump ram to the roaming mountain ewes, serving them well. As they climb higher and higher, sure-footed in the powdery-soiled crags, nuzzling delicate strawberries in openings-of-meadows, surprising the nesting oven-bird higher yet to where hyssops and heathers are gray like the lichened rocks they adorn, but richer for the mineraled soil they spring from; pulled on towards the sun by a thinner, rarer air closer to the aether that touches the firmament itself. And perhaps it is the smell of the stud ram, the sheer fragrance of the horned stolidity of him that acts like the invisible tether, both connecting and freeing, and ultimately drawing them back.

But I have gone very far afield in trying to understand the newness of the way this music moves. This time I have gone so far I have succeeded in nearly forgetting her.[30]

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[30]See Appendix \_\_, p.\_\_ below for choral notation of Hildegard's hymn for St. Ursula, using an organal drone voice, implied by the melody itself, and used in presentation of "A Dripping Honeycomb, 12th-Century Songs for St. Ursula by Hildegard von Bingen," presented at Memorial Chapel, Wesleyan University, February, 1987.

February 12, 1152

Ash Wednesday

In order that the things without be created by the things within, we are building the Heavenly Jerusalem out of sound and light, carving out the two choirs of the cloister church for our antiphonal singing.[31] In doing this, we become the daughters of Sion, the new builders of this city which is in unity with itself, and this is a heavenly conception, born of praise and thanksgiving, enwombed in our perpetual Virginity.[32]

It is not that I would ever array myself with those of our illustrious Fathers who have spoken out against marriage, for, at its finest and in its ideal, procreation partakes of creation itself. The seed of the man and the seed of the woman commingle in an act whose issue can be truly creative.[33] Ours, however, is of a higher order; to us is given all of the sensuousness, the nobility, the intentionality of the Heavenly Bridegroom for the daughter who is wooed through her ear, "Audite filia" (Ps. 44), the splendor of the woman clothed in the sun

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[31]See Hildegard's Sequence for St. Disibode (#30 in *Lieder*), where she refers clearly to antiphonal singing in the fourth antistrophe: "O Disibode/in your light/through expressions of pure sound/you have built limbs of wondrous praise/in two parts/through the Son of man." (O Disibode/in tuo lumine/per exempla puri soni/membra mirifice laudis edificasti/in duabus partibus/per Filium hominis.)

[32]"Jerusalem, quae aedificatur ut civitas, cujus participatio ejus est in idipsum." Psalm 121:3.

[33]Hildegard consistently makes statements about the relationship between the physical act of procreation in marriage and that of Creation itself. In her medical-physical treatise *Causae et curae* she explicitly sets forth the process of conception as she understood it: both men and women have semen or seed; when the two commingle in intercourse, a child is produced, and the characteristics of that human being vary physically according to the seed, psychological humour, and physical characteristics of each of the marital partners.

with the moon under her feet as a great sign in heaven (Apoc 12). Such women are graced with a conception in mente, as Ursula conceived her entire flock and pilgrimage by receiving a divine vision from the Holy Spirit:

Honor the Holy Spirit,  
Who gathered in the mind of the virgin Ursula  
A virginal flock like doves.  
Like Abraham she set out,  
Leaving her homeland behind,  
And just for the loving embrace of the Lamb,  
She broke from her chosen betrothed.[34]

Every day and from all around we see what is begotten at best, physically--the sufferings of birth, the strain of labor, the uncertain state of life itself for the mother, the life in perpetuity for the woman subject at all times to the whims and sudden desires of her husband, needing her health and strength for the physical nourishment of a nursing child, her body perhaps required at the same time in the fields for sowing or harvesting spelt, rye, and wheat, for dressing and tying up the tender shoots of grape vines.

With what joy, therefore, are we called by the King for our beauty and chosen to learn all the praises, sing all the Offices, cast off our garish clothing to take on the royal nuptial veils with our consecration and vows. Our spirits, hearts, and minds gradually free themselves, with God's help, for that kind of

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[34]First verse, with its repetenda, of Hildegard's Responsory for the 11,000 Virgins, #45 in *Lieder*: Spiritui Sancto honor sit/qui in mente Ursulae virginis/virginalem turbam velut columbas collegit./Unde ipsa patriam suam sicut Abraham reliquit/et etiam propter amplexionem Agni/desponsationem viri sibi abstraxit.

enlightenment that entered the heart of the Virgin in bearing Her Son, not earthly union but pure conception.

So Ursula conceived her life, her flock and its journey in light of the Spirit-filled vision she had received, inspiring a pilgrimage of thousands, as well as the final baptism of her betrothed at the consummation of the martyrdom. Her own individual martyrdom remains a great mystery, but it is clearly enjoined to the passion of her greatest beloved, the King, about whom she sings:

With great yearning  
Have I longed to come to you  
And to sit at your side  
For the heavenly wedding feast,  
To stream towards you in a strange way,  
Like a cloud which streams sapphire in the purest air.[35]

So it is that I have been given to birth not one child but twenty-four daughters, unruly, untaught, variously gifted in beauty, in music, in visual and manual dexterity, disobedient nearly all of them, some amenable to learning letters and copying, others trainable enough in needlework or preparation of medicinals, all of them looking to me with mixed emotions as their Mother Abbess.

And not only women are capable of receiving this God-given gift of higher conception, for think of old Disibode, the ancient founder of my childhood

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[35]See Strophe 3 of Hildegard's Sequence for St. Ursula, #54 in *Lieder*, In multo desiderio/desideravi ad te venire/et in celestibus/nuptiis tecum sedere,/per aleinam viam ad te currens/velut nubes quae in purissimo aere/currit similis saphiro.

monastery, who isolated himself in total service to God, was used in fact as God's own green finger[36], fecund enough (though only a man) to found a monastery, fecund enough a monastery to house my beloved old teacher Jutta, my dearly beloved magister and confidante Volmar, to hold out its arms to me and then to other women, although Disibode himself maintained his own loneliness, his own hermitage not out of pride but out of respect for his vision of the singleness of his service, the absolute need for contemplative time, vigilant always against the dangers and allures of the world's demands, even on priests, nuns, abbots and abbesses.

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[36]See opening of Hildegard's Responsory for St. Disibode, patron saint of the monastery in which she was formed and where she lived for over thirty years. #29 in *Lieder*, "O you greenness of the finger of God/in whom God planted a vineyard/which shines out in heaven like a column built of light,/You are glorious in your building for God." (O viriditas digiti Dei,/in qua Deus constituit plantationem, quae in excelso resplendet/ut statuta columna,/tu gloriosa in preparatione Dei.)



February 23, 1152

Second Sunday in Lent

The disturbing dreams have returned. Extremities abound. As before, all the responsibility falls to me, but this time the obstacles are clearer, as are the details of physical distress. At the beginning of the scene, we are in some kind of a vehicle--perhaps it is the kind of wagon I've seen some of our tenants use on our leased, farmed lands. This time, however, I am the driver. To my right is a wailing infant, incontinent and deeply distressed, as if incontinent at both ends at once. On a back seat is an ancient, tiny and frail crone, also incontinent, her clothing soiled under her bottom, the clothing under her visibly disintegrating from the constant soiling. Others sit among us, but these two are my principal charges--in addition to driving the vehicle. I need perpetually to rearrange these two--the ancient and the infant--and, each time I do this, my hands are soiled by their excreta and the two seem to crumple, to wither in my hands. They are without any internal support; they have no skeleto-muscular frame, melting pitifully in and on my hands.

At some point, we are going up a steep incline, the vehicle stops for an obstacle in front of us, and I realize we are sliding backwards down the incline, until it is clear we are about to hit another wagon that is moving behind us. I reach for the stick that should brake the back wheels, and it comes off in my hand. At another point, there are large doors; we are now in an enormous barn and need to drive out, but I cannot find a way to open the doors. They are somehow held closed from the outside, and the operations that will open them elude me completely. Finally, after I have further juggled the dribbling, now crying bodies and sought diligently for a way to maneuver our wagon through the doors,

I find myself coming into another building, not a building for animals, but for people. Immediately I come upon a man without a leg, and then one who has so freshly lost his arm that the stump is bloody and ragged, his limb on the floor, his eyes pleading for help. I am shocked that he is upright, able to stand and withstand his wounding.

I awakened to find my own body sore and aching, though not in any of the places specified by the dream that woke me; nevertheless, I am reminded of the torments of my own worst bouts of illness. I remember wondering at that time what the meaning of my suffering was, what the testing was about, and, losing all sense of time and place at times, questioning whether there was any possibility of progression in purgatory. The two barely human, helpless creatures in my dream were so extremely opposed in age, so identical in their pathetic dependency, not on God, but on me. The vehicle, the farm wagon that I cannot brake, can only be driven where it already goes. To try to stop it myself is to cause damage, possibly to slide backward into oblivion. To slide backwards is unthinkable now that we have finally arrived and won our right to be here. The possibilities for healing and teaching are breathtaking.

Even thinking about the years that went before is to recognize the extreme dependency of our lives as women at St. Disibode, not so different from that of the infant or the senex of my dream. In truth it is my own demon, this fear of dependency, and in that old dependency the intensification of my debilitation when physical ailments virtually paralyzed me, made any movement impossible and confined me to bed, totally helpless. Neither could I write nor dictate at those times what was seething inside of me, totally inaccessible, even to my inner senses. What prayers I could manage were too involved with my will, and it is certainly

true that time itself seemed helplessly stuck, that the sharp black ice of February seemed to have encased my body and frozen above my head.

I am here, here with my women, only by the grace of God. The inherent strength of psalms intoned over and over again sustained me, the movement of the inner life invisible to the outer eyes. The soiling smells come back, of stale bedding, soaking, the confinement of my cell, the several times my outer vision was rent in two, where one jaggedly bordered half had dropped beyond, out of the firmament altogether. Even to gaze at my then faithful Rikkarda as she tended me with her gentle eyes was to risk seeing only one half of her face; the other disappeared as if into a vacuum, I wishing desperately to touch with my fingers, to test and see if there was something palpable taken from my field of vision that could still be known through other natural senses; fearful that, if I did, and discovered that my touch merely confirmed what my eyes didn't see, I would know myself for a madwoman.[37]

The cold clang of the bell, Vespers, and the Magnificat.

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[37]See Oliver Sacks, *Migraine: Understanding a Common Disorder* (Berkeley: Univ Cal Press, 1985), especially Ch. 3, "Migraine Aura and Classical Migraine," for discussion and illustrations of various migraine scotomata. Sacks addresses the condition as it applies specifically to Hildegard on pp. 106-108, and this line of thought was begun in the 1920s by Charles Singer. His discussion of the migrainous basis of Hildegard's visions can be found in *From Magic to Science: Essays on the Scientific Twilight* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1928), Ch. VI, pp. 199-239. Although Singer presented a rather reductionist view of Hildegard's visions, he was among the first in this country to give serious attention to her works, and the plates, tipped-in, from the *Scivias*, are far better than any of the reproductions produced in any books outside of Germany.

March 9, 1152

4th Sunday in Lent

Three stones fell this morning as they were completing the archway for the west portal. The noise was deafening. In our still uncompleted choir we were singing Prime, and, as the Divine Office was torn into tatters with the sound, I thought immediately about the stone that was rejected: Christ as the noble lapis who forms with his own body the cornerstone of the holy city[38]. Apparently we have no proper cornerstone for that archway, I thought, but my Master Builder said, No, it wasn't the keystone at all, and showed me that the damage was minimal. The three stones that fell were not structurally important, but were merely facing for surface. What's important is the portal itself, the door that leads to the area where the baptismal font will stand. I pray and cherish the hope of having the font completed for baptisms by Easter.

I suppose the pelican persists for me as the image I will have forming the stone font, because it is such a complex creature, a bird I've never seen, a creature of waste places, as we are reminded again and again in the penitential psalm that will lead us into the Triduum of Holy Week. "I am become like a pelican of the wilderness,"[39], cries the psalmist. The nobility of such a creature is lonely and

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[38]See Fuhrkotter, *The Miniatures from the Book of Scivias* (Brepols-Turnout, 1977), plate 21, from Book III, Vision 2, for the most graphic illustration of Hildegard's conception of Christ as the cornerstone of the wall of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

[39]Psalm 101:7, Douay transl. For repeated and varied liturgical use of verses of Psalm 101 as text for Tract, Offertory, and Communion at Feria IV in Holy Week, see entry for same below, p.--. For general identification of pelican as prominent symbol in early Christian iconography, see Mrs. Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, vol. I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1893), p. 30.

and isolate; its voice, rarely heard, is like that of the Baptist himself, the voice crying in the wilderness. If we could, as Adam before the Fall, hear all the sounds in the universe, all the hummings of earth and the music of the spheres, would the sound of the pelican be as the call to baptism? In part, it must be the voice of the primordial, cleansing waters. And the music of water will be ever varied, from the first sound of the snow-melted, spring freshet that swells the mountain brooks in the woods on the Rupertsburg, to the meandering flow of our lazy River Nahe, the joining of it with the grander Rhine, and all the way to the great oceans that surround the earth and support the firmament. So for the noble pelican there are all these watery varieties of sound in its music, plus the sound of its isolated stance, its brooding silences, and even the rhythm of these brooding silences.

No less important is the half-forgotten female nature of this creature of the Nile. St. Augustine, great teacher of the Church, has in a sense re-baptised for us in Christian vestment the ancient pagan story of the pelican as the one whose young will time and again poke at its breast and eyes until their own deaths must result, but whose mother-blood, pulled in sorrow from its breast with its own beak, then serves to restore their lives. Such is the Creator bird, the Holy Spirit, brooding bird who carries the Ruach, the terrifying roar and rush of primal waters, bird who broods over the creation in Genesis as upon a clutch of eggs that must be brought to being with the life-giving warmth of her own breast.[40]

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[40]See Newman, *Sister of Wisdom* (Univ of California: Berkeley, 1987), pp. 190-91, for discussion of Hildegard in relation to this variant, Sapiential, reading of Genesis, and the revival in the twelfth century of the "ancient notion of the Annunciation as a second Genesis." During Hildegard's lifetime, Peter Abelard most expressively and explicitly discussed the Creation in terms of the Holy Spirit

[footnote continued]

And breath! I hear the sounds of God's spiraculo, breathing life into what is otherwise clay, and only of deep earth. The breath of life, and of singing praise, and music-making for the glory of God, in harmony with the music of the heavenly spheres, even though we may not be able to hear them clearly in these fallen and corrupted times. Underneath all the texts, all the sacred Psalms and Canticles, these watery varieties of sounds and silences, terrifying, mysterious, whirling and sometimes gestating and gentle must somehow be felt in the pulse, ebb and flow of the music that sings in me. My new song must float like a feather on the breath of God.[41]

So I give thanks that we have found in Fulbert, our master mason, a man who can carve the noble pelican, bring it into its shape, even with the motherly breast that supports the basin itself. As a lay brother, borrowed from the Cistercian house of Rievaulx, he surprised me with his love for the three-dimensional forms of sculpture, so frowned upon in Cistercian houses but not to be despised for their beauty in shape and texture. He and I have talked often enough that I am assured of his deep understanding of these mysteries, even within his seeming rusticity of speech. His gift is in his hands, in their connection to his

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[footnote continued]

brooding on an egg in his *Expositio in Hexameron*, written between 1135-1139. Peter Dronke quotes and discusses the relevant passages from Abelard in relation to Hildegard's notion of The Cosmic Egg, in *Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), pp. 94-97.

[41]Hildegard often uses the image of a feather when referring to herself, in much the same way as she uses the image of trumpet or mouthpiece of God, in order to illustrate the way she is used as an instrument of the divine in all her human, womanly, bodily weakness. See, for example, the opening paragraph in her long letter to Guibert of Gembloux, Latin text in *Pitra, Analecta Sanctae Hildegardis Opera* (Monte Casino, 1882), p. 332. For a critical edition of this letter, with variants from other manuscript sources, see Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (hereinafter cited as *WWMA*) (Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 250ff., Dronke's English translation, pp. 168 ff.

simple heart. His work with stone is a contemplative act, a prayer that discovers and connects every curve and color of the mineral-laced stone he has found for the purpose. Three catechumens will be ready for baptism at the Easter Vigil this year, in the shadow of the cross from the font of the pelican.

In less than three months' time, even before Ascension Day, Archbishop Henry of Mainz will come to consecrate our cloister church. He and I are deeply in disagreement over the appointment of Rikkarda, our church will not be finished, but our baptisms will be accomplished and heard.

March 16, 1152

Passion Sunday

For once they took me at my word when I insisted on not being interrupted during the work period between Sext and None. Had I known the extent of the man's pain or how frightening to him the visual excitations that accompanied it, I would have taken time from dictating to Volmar and put hands on immediately. The shape of his head was visibly distorted; that and his intermittent raving, describing the searing lights that were tearing across his visual field, prompted the Infirmarian to come after me. His eyes were unusually dark, with no visible pupils at the centers; and one eye looking warily off to the side with darting movements. He was heavy set, determined and intelligent-looking, clearly in prayer at the moment I first observed him, and unmindful of being observed.

First I needed to determine whether this could possibly be another case of possession. It's not that charms or even exorcisms are too difficult for us, but the forces of evil are devious in the extreme; they may lie and feint and are full of treachery. It is important that they be recognized and named. In them there is a murky presence, an almost palpable cloud in which they carry their being, and I am getting better at knowing when they are there. Unacknowledged, they could even enter my own person: I must invoke God's protection for my person and that of my community, but especially, these days, for my own person.[42] I

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[42]Such an exorcism of Hildegard's can be found in the 13th-century MS, Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 1016, 119r. (*Altitudo quam nunquam altitudo tetigit, et profunditas quam nunquam profunditas vallavit, et latitudo quam nunquam lititudo comprehendit, liberet me ab omnibus inimicis meis et a diabolicis artibus.*)



still can't be sure whether my extreme physical relapse two years ago might not have been occasioned by the unrecognized demons in the possessed woman at St. Disibode. My physical symptoms at the time so imitated hers. By not naming them, rather than dissipating the cloudy presence I may have eliminated her symptoms by taking on her demons, allowing their vapors to soak into my being in unaware obedience until it was far too late. This phenomenon is a possibility even in the absence of demons, but simply with any extreme symptoms of illness that I am able to heal with prayer and the laying on of hands; but the control it then exerts over me is much greater in the case of possession, because it involves the invasion of soul as well as body.

In the case of the dark young man, it became clear that it was not possession; his reason and thinking faculties were his own. His senses were distorted by the degree of pain and fear his symptoms were causing. As I stood in front of him, he suddenly bowed his head, and the huge swelling at the edge of his skull on the lower left condyle protruded even through the masss of dark, wiry hair. I wondered about his coloring and that intent density in his eyes. He might have come back from the Jerusalem Wars: for a moment I thought him a Saracen. But he was clearly at prayer and his heavy lips moved quickly, with some audibility. As I came close enough to apply my right hand to the swollen knob on the lower edge of his skull, I heard the rhythms of his prayer. It was not Latin.

I suppose a silent Pater noster is what I was saying as I began to get the first hint of change in the swollen protuberance, and, although I could tell from the movements in his body that the reduction in swelling was causing him some sharp pain in the immediate area, I didn't let up at all on the intention I sent

through my hands until I could feel that the swelling was reduced. Then, with the fingers of my left hand half an inch or more above the surface of the rough mustard-colored wool shirt that covered his upper body, I quickly scanned his back as he sat looking away from me. The area around his heart was clearly warmer than anything else, and I anchored my right hand there. It felt more and more that my right palm was receiving something--it tingled and trembled--and I let all my attention go into the filling of that palm as I continued my prayers and he continued his, although his sounds were still unrecognizable to me. It occurred to me then that he might be chanting Hebrew.

When it was all over, his body temperature uniform, and the two sides of his skull nearly identical, I asked the Infirmarian to stop bustling around us, and we had a few minutes to talk. His gratitude at the relief of pain and symptoms precluded any deception about his identity, and I learned he was a Jew, a scholar of the Torah and student of the mysteries of something he identified as Kaballah. His knowledge of patriarchs and prophets was vast; his curiosity about the more arcane knowledge to be gained through contemplation of certain symbols (one of them in the figure of a cross) in connection with Kabbalah was intriguing. I asked him to chant some of his Hebrew prayers aloud, and the music was different from anything I had previously heard. It was high, on the edge, and he sang through the nasal passages in a way that gave it a kind of insistence; this, coupled with a frank and exact repetition of portions that made it sound almost instrumental and hypnotic, like a tiny reed with air, words and peculiar rhythms pushing through it with very great effort.

He then told me that he had suffered the one-sided swelling in his skull before, and that it was always accompanied by excruciating pains behind both eyes.

His outer vision was greatly impaired. Showers of stars raced across his inner vision; they were of a gold so glittering that the entire inner surface of his skull felt bruised by the charge of their motion and brightness. Sometimes these showers would suddenly darken, blacken really, and whole sections of the air they filled would tear off and disappear, as if part of some horrifying void had swallowed up the too-bright, glittering activity. His fear as he described these things was very apparent; his breathing was eruptive, and it was difficult to calm him. I understood what he was describing, and I knew in my heart that something about this poor Jew's painful apparitions was holy. They were from God the Father, just as my visions are from the Holy Spirit through the voice of Wisdom. Perhaps the extreme physical symptoms and distortions of his head and eyes were caused by his fear at seeing with his inner senses, some way in which he was not able to accept the depth of where these visions were sourced. His heart is closed to Christ and Ecclesia, but in relation to his people he could be a prophet who must master his fear and teach.

He will stay with us for a few days.

March 21, 1152

Feast of St. Benedict

Another vision came, unexpectedly, this time through the beech tree. Crossing the cloister after Matins to make a brief visit to the makeshift dispensary to ease dying cries from pre-dawn silence, feeling my own aerial spirits circulating damp anguish, which blocks my freedom to move about with any fluidity at all. Wondering when I can once again insist upon Matins in its proper middle-of-the-night place without defections on every side. The grumblings and threatened defections of my women so used to the well-endowed comforts at St. Disibode, finding such barrenness here, knowing nothing of the promise our community holds. And, now, just as we are given the wine grapes newly planted down the mountain, given the fertile farms worked along the steep banks of the Nahe, making our lives secure enough so that I can proceed with things like carrying away the dirty water in the Roman way,[43] the rude letter comes snatching my beloved Rikkarda and I can hardly think.[44] And yet the music sings in me, comes when least I would have it. Crossing the cloister at dawn, barely any peach-orangey-rose in the sky at all, certainly not any that would rise above the cloister wall at this

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[43]Guibert of Gembloux attested to the remarkable facilities he found in Hildegard's convent--including running water in all the workshops--in a letter, translated by M. Joanne Moggli and excerpted in Carol Neuls-Bates, ed., *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 11-12.

[44]Hildegard probably refers here to the letter she received from Henry, Archbishop of Mainz between 1142 and 1153, warning her that he was sending escorts for Rikkarda who would accompany her to her new post. Hildegard responded with a sharp, admonitory letter to the archbishop which warns him--among other things--about clerical abuses, the buying and selling of offices, and the particularly short-lived reign of fate of Nebuchadnezzar. For Latin texts of both, see Migne, PL, vol. 197, p. 156.

hour and season: and yet the light appears, and of such a saturated shade it begins to acquire an odor of late-March earth as well. Hyacinths and crocus bulbs planted only last fall, nestling into the bases of our dun walls, push up thickly green. My eye following their path of bloom and bud, spiraling within the barely greening patches of earth thawing within the cloister, and, in the Shadow of the Living Light, the giant beech tree is suddenly transformed, and she is there before me as a tree, speaking with the voice of Wisdom. Her whole torso takes on the strong contours of the beech trunk, but whose bark is patterned in plates and scales, as of a giant fish. I am acutely aware of my hands, their tingling almost to itchiness, and I place them first on the smooth trunk, then gently cupped to my ears, knowing the connection between us needs to be sounded into more being. I hardly dare raise my eyes, knowing the saturated brightness that will be generated, knowing it will at first make me dizzy, and lightheaded in its suddenness, although its energy is so welcome. But it isn't the Blessed Virgin, after all. There is no nest in her hair[45]. Nor do birds nest in her, or sing. It is my beloved Ursula, and hers is a very different sound. She is herself the size of the tree, crowned as Ecclesia. She requires that we sing a new song, that my virgins and widows sing, and we will celebrate her feast this October with Offices of her making; but this song will be more than Office music, this is the sequence for the Eucharistic feast itself, and Father will celebrate with it, feeling its power in us, allowing it to soar above the Propers and Ordinaries that surround it. She will have her day. Below the waist, her trunk is silver like the beech itself but

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[45]See Hildegard's song for the Virgin "O viridissima virga," #71 in *Lieder*, for image of the Virgin as a tree, with the birds of heaven nesting in her (*quoniam volucres caeli nidos in ipsa habuerunt*). Hildegard may have been thinking of the parable of the tree of the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 13:31-32 which begins as a grain of mustard seed.

shiny, very shiny. Above the waist she is both strangely armless and as having many, many arms of bright gold, emanating like the calyx of a lotus whose efflorescence is her own crowned head; some of the sepals over her breasts hold throngs of people--patriarchs, prophets, but most of all women, all of them bright and beautiful, bright and beautiful, all of them gifted with sound, and singing like great, wild birds. -The Angelus calls me to Lauds.[46].

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[46]See Fuhrkotter, *The Miniatures*, plate 14, Vision II, Vision 5, for a rendering of this image, depicted as Mater Ecclesia. In Hildegard's lexicon of iconic women, Ecclesia, Caritas, Sapientia, the Virgin, and Ursula sometimes become conflated in their functions and appearances.

March 23, 1152

Palm Sunday

I went into the Great Silence hearing the sound of Rikkarda's voice practicing "Cum fabricator mundi" as we had gone over it together so many times in the past. I cannot imagine that even the papal schola cantorum can manage the piece except soloistically. The long, long lines are as brutal to sustain as the events it narrates, and it is powerful the way she has learned to deliver it.[47] It makes me hopeful that even now something will happen to change their minds, so that she will sing it for us on Good Friday--that I can save my voice for the Lamentations this last week and concentrate my teaching energies on the difficult Matins responsories.

My inner senses are always open to the sights that God will reveal to me, my ears alert to the Voice of Wisdom, but the blessings of the Great Silence are particularly rich, and it is then that I most often receive and shape my new music, daughter of Zion rejoice! Last evening during the Silence Ecclesia appeared

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[47]The liturgical use of the antiphon "Cum fabricator mundi" is interesting when we think about possible liturgical practices in Hildegard's convent, because its musical demands and soloistic character are similar to those in some of Hildegard's own liturgical pieces. No longer in liturgical usage, the antiphon may be found in transcription in Appendix\_. The composer has set the text to great effect and with a great deal of word painting, carefully differentiating the more declarative and syllabic body of the text from the shimmering, lyrical meditation of the verse that closes the piece. The music ranges freely over thirteen pitches, as does Hildegard's sequence for St. Ursula (q.v., Appendix\_); the musical demands of her Sequence strongly suggest that it was sung as a solo, and such is the case with this antiphon. In a remote, nearly autonomous women's monastery, the likelihood is that both of these pieces would have been sung by Hildegard herself, or by her cantrix. Hildegard's sequence for St. Ursula would have been sung following the Alleluia of the Mass for St. Ursula and the 11,000 on October 21 (see entry for Feast of St. Benedict, above).

to me in her Exultet form, adorned in dazzling light [48] and quite beautifully confounded with both the Queen Bee and the Paschal candle itself.[49]

In the vision, the bees began at a great distance, so far away that I could barely hear them. Without alarm, I remembered how the bee sting almost instantly relieves pain in the joints and tissues where they sting, how the controlled use of the bee sting is both a penetration and a healing. But these bees were swarming, and there were thousands of them. In the Shadow of the Living Light I watched them circling the trees, approaching like an undulating cloud whose shape changed in swirls from within, like the woven texture of a tapestry that repatterns and reweaves itself from within ever-changing borders.

They arrived at an orchard, which was also a cemetery, beautifully planted with fruit-bearing trees, thirteen fruit-trees, arranged around a hawthorn tree so covered with white blossoms it was dazzling to the eye. Fourteen burial plots were arranged symmetrically, seven and seven, those fruit trees between them

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[48]The Exultet, a 4th-century prose-poem, perhaps by Ambrose, chanted (usually by a deacon) at the beginning of the Paschal Vigil. Ecclesia is the third in a trinity evoked therein, following the rejoicing of the heavenly hosts and that of the earth: "Let Mother Church also rejoice, adorned as she now is in dazzling light; and let this building resound with the joyful voices of God's people." (Laetetur et mater Ecclesia, tanti luminis adornata fulgoribus: et magnis populorum vocibus haec aula resultet.) Thus is established the theological theme of the ancient Paschal Vigil, not the agony of the crucifixion, but the cosmic rejoicing sounded to mark the triumph of the light in the darkness.

[49]"But this is enough of the glory of this candle: the glowing flame kindles it in God's honour. Even if the flame is shared by others, it loses nothing of its brightness, for it is always fed by the melting wax, which the mother bee brought forth to be the substance of this wonderful light." (Sed jam columnae hujus praeconia novimus, quam in honorem Dei rutilans ignis accendit. Qui licet sit divisus in partes, mutuati tamen luminis detrimenta non novit. Alitur enim liquantibus ceris, quas in substantiam pretiosae hujus lampadis, apis mater eduxit.) from chant of the Exultet, as above.



bright with blooming flowers in shades of rose and peach.[50] The buzzing sound becomes painfully loud as they swarm into the orchard; then suddenly the huge swarm divides itself into thirteen spiraling smaller swarms, lacing themselves around the branches of each of the blossoming fruit trees. In the center, a domed honeycomb emerges out of the hawthorn tree, golden wings threading through and out of it, Ecclesia's crown below it, the whole encased in a shimmering aureole of light.[51] Ecclesia, the Queen Bee, is dripping honey and milk. The bees in the thirteen trees become women, holy virgins, perched among the branches; the blossoms become garlands, rosy diadems for each head; the Queen emerges as Ursula.

At first the swarm of women is only buzzing, but once she fully occupies the center, once the dome of the hive clearly houses Ursula the Queen, yellow liquid paths of honey and undulating ribbons of wax begin to connect them as in a dance. Its smell is overpowering, exuding the pungent odor of balsam.

It ends abruptly; I find I am dripping with sweat, from the movement of the molten matrix, the warmth of the new fire, the pillar of light, this birth of the Paschal candle itself. Sounds begin to differentiate themselves, slow and condensed as if starting from the enflamed gathered place of the central dome. It is clear to me how it moves and where the words go.

A dripping honeycomb

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[50]See the Orchard-cemetery in Plan of St. Gall in Brief for a similar design. (Lorna Price, based on work by Walter Horn & Ernest Born, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, pp. 66-67.)

[51]See illumination in Scivias, Bk. II, Vision 4, in Brepols edition.

Was the virgin Ursula  
Who longed to embrace the Lamb of God.

Honey and milk under her tongue,  
Because she gathered to herself  
A fruit-bearing garden and the most fragrant flowers  
In a swarm of virgins.

Therefore, daughter of Zion, rejoice  
in this most golden dawn!  
Because she gathered to herself  
A fruit-bearing garden and the most fragrant flowers  
in a swarm of virgins.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
And to the Holy Spirit.  
Because she gathered to herself  
A fruit-bearing garden and the most fragrant flowers  
In a swarm of virgins.[52]

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[52]Responsory for Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins: Favus distillans/Ursula virgo fuit,/quae Agnum Dei amplecti desideravit./Mel et lac sub lingua eius,/quia pomiferum hortum et flores florum/in turba virginum/ad se collegit./ Unde in nobilissima aurora gaude,/filia Sion./Quia pomiferum hortum et flores florum/in turba virginum/ad se collegit. Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto./Quia pomiferum hortum et flores florum/in turba virginum/ad se collegit. Note the similarity of the language (from the Song of Songs) to that of an Antiphon for the Feast of St. Agnes, used as well for the Ceremony for the Consecration of a Virgin: "Honey and milk have I received from his mouth, and his blood has adorned my cheeks." (Mel et lac ex eius ore suscepit et sanguis eius ornatur genas meas.)



March 25, 1152

Feast of the Annunciation

Huge crows and raucous starlings descend ravenously on the newly plowed fields. Their Lenten fare is juicier than ours, as two of the Sisters remind me. The cows and goats freshen, and so we are temporarily out of milk at the end of Lent; the cellaress receives these complaints and hunts for other sources nearby.

Although the moon is new, it is in Scorpio, and so further cultivation of herbs is still delayed [53], and--until our own lands are more productive of medicinals and foodstuffs--we still lack the real autonomy I so desire, that will finally preclude any dependence on other people's harvests, especially those at St. Disibode. I fear that the wrenching disruptions of our breaking away have made wounds that are slow to heal, even after two years. My persistent tenacity about my dear secretary and magister [54] Volmar was the final formal issue, and just as

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[53]In the twentieth century, as first revived in Rudolf Steiner's concepts of biodynamic gardening, gardeners have again begun to consider the effects of the positions of the moon and planets on organic growth. In liturgical calendars of the 12th century, astrological-astronomical information was always included and was an essential part of the computation of the date of Easter each year, upon which the dates of all movable feasts turned.

[54]"And in accordance with what I perceived in my true vision, I said to the Father Abbot: 'The serene light says: You shall be father to our provost, and father of the salvation of the souls of the daughters of my mystic garden. But their alms do not belong to you or to your brothers--your cloister should be a refuge for these women. If you are determined to go on with your perverse proposals, raging against us, you will be like the Amalekites, and like Antiochus, of whom it was written that he despoiled the Temple of the Lord. If some of you, unworthy ones, said to yourselves: Let's take some of their freeholds away--then I WHO AM say: You are the worst of robbers. And if you try to take away the shepherd of spiritual medicine [i.e., Provost Volmar], then again I say, you are sons of Belial, and in this do not look to the justice of God. So that same justice will destroy you.

And when I, poor little creature [Paupercula forma], had with these words  
[footnote continued]

threatening to Abbot Kuno as was our winning the lands for the Rupertsburg and being granted permission for the establishment of our community from the See at Mainz.

We still sing badly in choir much of the time, still weaning ourselves from what I scarcely realized was a sort of moral support for our sound, coming from our Brothers in Christ at St. Disibode. Our psalms are still ragged. Nevertheless, our singing improves, and my women begin to live according to the Rule as it has been shown to me. They begin to have a feel for the psalm tones and cadences as I lead them. My hand indicates the rhythm and shape of each rise and fall, at the same time informing the musical line with a wholeness, and the ancient Biblical texts take on some passionate meaning when they are pointed correctly.

Perhaps the songs I have done in honor of St. Disibode will help salve the wounds of my old abbot; I was encouraged when I heard his response, which he sent last week with Br. Andrew. Not only is he pleased with the Sequence for Disibode; he is eager for the Antiphons and Responsories as well, saying something like "if they should come to you, I would be pleased to have such music in the Divine Office that day for our patron saint." [55] I hear these as generous and forgiving words, unless Br. Andrew took the rougher edges from his abbot's message and embellished them with gold out of his own sorrow for our poor, and undeservedly bad, reputation among them.

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[footnote continued]

petitioned the abbot and his confreres for the freehold of the site and domains of my daughters, they all granted it to me, entering the transfer in a codex." An autobiographical fragment from the Vita of Hildegard, translated by Peter Dronke WWMA p. 153.

[55]A paraphrase of a part of a letter from Abbot Kuno to Hildegard. See Epistle 38 in PL, vol. 197, p. 203b.

I remember, once in the old days at St. Disibode, foraging for early plants with Rikkarda, both of us fairly smeared with and smothered by the smells of the herbs and simples of spring on that noble mountainside that heaves up out of the broad valleys around. I dizzy easily in its contemplation, which begins to fill my head and inner senses with its insistent light. I am filled with the figure of Disibode in the Responsory. He sings himself as the greening of God's finger, transforming the entire mountain from a bleached-out, barren cone into its fructification as the plantation of God. Even the sounds center and descend from above, starting not from a resting place, but descending out of the hand of God from the reciting tone of the mode, as the green creative finger refuses to rest.[56]

When our mountains first turn fully green, I know that the Resurrection is with us renewed. No wonder that the Holy Land is always green, that Jerusalem is never cold, barren, or dulled like our Lenten Februarys, when the stretching light is the only hope. Or the deception of our entire month of March, when a day may begin with fresh odors and bird calls, only to bring gale winds, freezing, rutted roads, blinding flurries of snow that sticks. Horrid bleak stretches, were it not for the promise of Gabriel's Annunciation on this very day.

I hear lambing sounds, and so it goes with most of the peasant women of Bingen, such regular yearly birthings; but not so for Guidelbert last night, gray with loss of blood when she arrived at our door, carried by her kinsman ignorant of ways of retrieving the afterbirth, too terrified at the sight of the monster-child

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[56]See n. 36, p. 27 above.

that was to have been their first. Mother of God, speak to me! Tiny daggers of ice ring my joints, still swaddled this late in the year with woolen cloths. How I long for the honey-warmth in my limbs! At least the sun climbs high enough to enter the casement for the Office of Lauds, so that the whole interior of the choir was illuminated for Lauds of the Annunciation. At First Vespers last night our pans of paper-white narcissus incensed the space with their starry blooms--the heat of the sun having increased their moisture and perfume as we framed the fourth and fifth psalms with two of my most beloved antiphons: "Now the winter is past, the rains are over and gone; arise, My beloved, and come!" and "You are beautiful and sweet in your delights, holy Mother of God."

And when the creative green finger of God descends each spring to touch our Rupertsburg lands, dozens of different shades of green sculpt whole curved sections into the faces of our mountains: emerald ovals of meadow grass, looking shaved from this distance, where the sheep can once again leave our shelter safely to graze; faces of cliffs dotted with shimmering clumps of wet moss and newly sprouting grey-green of wild columbine waiting to unfold whorls of juxtaposed yellow and orange trumpeting tubes; and deeply forested patches of pine and balsam that never entirely lose their green, except as it dulls in the meagerly lighted days surrounding the winter solstice. Our Vigil may take us to bright April some Easters: then the glory of the renewed Christ illuminates those other stands of great trees. Their skeletons have stood ugly brown to winter blasts, nakedly exposed to chilling swaths of snow, repeated girdlings of ice, desolate of all birds except the occasional preying hawk or owl. April is theirs, as fat, waxy leaf-buds continue to moisten and swell in their first appearance, like burnished minerals with sheened colors of copper, garnet, and bronze. Finally in May--after the the ferns have all uncurled, the shaved meadows stabilized their green two shades

darker, all the corms, bulbs, and tubers have blossomed so that our eyes have been taken by a dazzling array of coloring closer at hand--we suddenly notice that the dangling catkins have already come and tassled each twig, that the explosion of finely fingered maple and oak, deeply pleated birch and beech can blaze their towering paths through, up, and around the mountain slopes, even around our own arable fields and fruit-bearing meadows, processing up to our very portal and surrounding us like a bird-infested sanctuary of green.

My portress today received a priest and colleague of Volmar who talks of hearing several remarkable sermons of Bernard from Clairvaux, sermons turning on his contemplation of the mulier amicta sole from the Apocalypse, the woman with the moon under her feet, and with the twelve stars on her head for a crown; pregnant, and in labour, crying aloud in the pangs of childbirth.[57] My women need to understand that there are other labours and birthings besides what we observe among the peasants of Bingen.[58] Volmar agrees with me that we need readings like this in chapter and even at refectory to augment Commentaries from the Fathers; perhaps a section of one of Bernard's sermons about the woman clothed in the sun can serve as a Lesson for a Nocturn in Matins during the Octave of Pentecost, though I doubt we could possibly have it soon enough with roads flooded out.

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[57]Apocalypse 12:1&2 (The Jerusalem Bible).

[58]See the refutation of Satan's argument about the necessity for physical birth and intercourse, by the female Virtues in Hildegard's *Ordo virtutum*.





March 26, 1152

Feria IIII

Wednesday in Holy Week

Ite missa est. She left on Sunday with the dismissal,[59] having done her confession with Volmar; he therefore being the last to have shared her private sounds and prayers; he therefore being too busy--otherwise occupied--to come to the aid of the old abbess, to work out the thousand details for this day, let alone the next in this endless agonizing week. And who now besides myself can sing the Lamentations for Thursday's Matins?[60] Delictissima of God! She could already be in place by Friday to preside, in her own house, chief witness among her women to the disintegrating of the liturgy, the chilling absence of the Eucharist, the chanting of John's account, the betrayal, his heartbroken Passion.[61]

But the Passions are for Volmar to chant: long, arduous, and exhausting as it was on Sunday when she left, when he had to do it completely without the young deacon promised from Mainz, who may yet arrive to assist him this day; or else he will not, and, like me, Volmar will sing it alone in his own loneliness. own

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[59]The final words at Mass, sung from the altar.

[60]The Lamentations of Jeremiah are an important part of the liturgy Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of Holy Week. This particular usage cannot be found in ancient monastic MSS such as the 10th century Hartker, because the Lamentations were not part of the choral parts of the Office. Rather, they were considered part of the Lessons of Matins and, as such, sung by a cantor. For their antiquity and usage as stated above, see Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge: The Interdependence of Liturgy and Music in Synagogue and Church during the First Millennium* (NY: Columbia Univ Press, 1963), pp. 476ff. and 517 ff.

[61]Accounts of the Passion: Palm Sunday, according to Matthew (26:36-27:60); Tuesday in Holy Week, according to Mark (14:32-15:46); Wednesday, according to Luke (22:39-23:53); Good Friday, according to John (18:1-19:42).

He who is my dear magister, my own symmysta,[62] won as my own personal secretary and attendant, spent these last days with her when I should have been the one to prepare her for the position, answer her questions and insecurities about the office like the wise abbess and good mother. Clearly, I was unable. The symptoms returned with intensity, and my care for my own flock--the ones still loyal--must be first for me, to lead them praising through His death and resurrection with whatever diminished strength remains.

This day, this Mass for this Holy Wednesday, is filled with wretchedness: Psalm 101 at Offertory and Communion[63] can be sung by the choir, but the Tract before the Gospel (Luke's Passion) is my own solo; thereto I add my own wretchedness and let it be cradled by the crying misery of the Psalmist:

O Lord, hear my prayer and let my cry come unto thee. *V.* Do not turn thy face away from me, but lend my thy ear in time of affliction. *V.* Give me swift audience whenever I call upon thee. *V.* See how this life of mine passes away like smoke, how this face wastes as if melted in an oven. *V.* Drained of strength like grass the sun scorches, I leave my food untasted, forgotten. *V.* Surely thou wilt bestir thyself, Lord, and give Sion redress: it is time now to take pity on her.[64]

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[62]Hildegard's occasional use of this (essentially Greek) word in reference to Volmar would indicate the awareness of their relationship as spiritual colleagues.

[63]The text for the Offertory with its verses: "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee. *V.* Do not turn thy face, do not turn thy face from me (Ne avertas faciem tuam, ne avertas faciem tuam a me). *V.* For I have forgotten to eat my bread [Quia oblitus sum manducare panem meum]. *V.* Thou wilt bestir thyself, and give Sion redress; it is time now to take pity on her, for the time has come (Tu exurgens misereberis Sion: quia tempus miserendi eius, quia venit tempus). For the Communion: "I drink nothing but what comes to me mingled with my tears, so low thou hast brought me, who didst once lift me so high; I waste away like grass in the sun: Lord, thou endurest for ever: surely thou wilt bestir thyself, and give Sion redress; it is time now to take pity on her. (Potum meum cum fletu temperabam/quia elevans allisisti me et ego sicut fenum arui/tu autem, Domine, in aeternum mermanes/tu exurgens misereberis Sion, quia venit tempus miserendi ejus.) Roman Missal [Knox], (London: Burns & Oates Ltd., 1961) facsimile of 12th-century MS Graz 807, f.90v, (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1974.)

[64]Psalm 101: 2-5, 14. See Graz 807, f. 90r, for the chant.

Before Vespers

Still this day goes on and is beyond relief. It is dry beyond belief, with no water at all. There are no tears. Texts catch in my jaws, the pitches in my throat, filled with dust and ashes. Bitter thoughts line my brain. Who and how am I to wash the feet of any tomorrow, the first day of the Great Triduum?[65]

March 27, 1152

Feria V in Parasceve

[Thursday in Holy Week]

It is nearly time for Matins, and everything in my own body seems to be breaking down and pulling apart. The Great Triduum is upon us, I, bent and spent under this burden of loss and what feels like betrayal. No one cares for these old bones and tired throat. Washing and wailing are what are required. For the Jeremiah, to be a bird, to be only a winged singer is how to get through. The Lamentations are mine.

Jod. The enemy has stretched out his hand over all her precious things: yea, she has seen that the nations invade her sanctuary, whom you forbade to enter your congregation. Caph. All her people groan, they seek bread: they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength: see, O Lord, and consider; for I am become vile. Lamed. Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold, and see if there is any

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[65]Hildegard refers to the traditional Washing of the Feet on Maundy Thursday, when it is common in monastic houses for the abbot or abbess to wash the feet of those in her charge in imitation of Christ's washing of feet of his disciples.

sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger. Mem. From on high he sent fire; into my bones he made it descend. He spread a net for my feet, he turned me back; he has left me stunned and faint all the day. Nun. The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand; they were fastened together, and set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail, the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return unto the Lord your God.[66]

March 28, 1152

Feria VI in Parasceve

[Friday in Holy Week]

Antiphon to the Hymn[67]

Faithful Cross, of trees created,

Noblest tree of all art thou,

Forest none bears trees as thou art,

Like in leaf, or flower, or bough.

Dear the nails, and dear the timber:

Dear the load they bear aloft.

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[66]See LU, Matins for Maundy Thursday, Lesson III at First Nocturn.

[67]This antiphon is--atypically--sung repeatedly with each verse of the ancient hymn "Crux fidelis," as can be seen pre-eminently in the Cantatorium St. Gall 356 (c.900).

April 6, 1152

First Sunday after Easter

The cloister garden has begun to bloom, but they have planted it so far with little regard for the final shapes and colors it may assume. Simply filling in spaces, as we did at Disibodenberg, no longer proves practical or pleasing; we, like the garden, must create our own rhythms and patterns within the ordered structures of the Rule. With the gifts of two more hillsides in writing, three in promise, the Cistercian success with viniculture could be ours as well, and the handsome diagonal stripes on the curving bellysides of the Nahe will speak of salts and rocks, minerals fertile to the cuttings we plant. Who knows what wonderfully bouqueted wine our own river banks may in time produce? Mists perpetually hiding in the clefts of these hills most April mornings promise palpable moisture, and so we need not fear the aridity of parched earth as a growing medium.

Our enclosed cloister gardens should fare as well. Already the wild April meadow harvest gives us simples--green herbs for our table, and these not without colorful blossoms. Yellow mustards and dandelions serve for table greens as well as poultices. For our own cultivation we must provide the medicinal herbs to staunch wounds, ease joints, relieve congestion, not only in our own new house, but for those who inevitably seek hospice here, just as they did at St. Disibode. Our healing skills are known in the area before we are fully established; we are sought out by individuals as diverse as the simple women with complications of birthing and the Jewish student of the Talmud and Kaballah so recently in my care. Lord knows how we will house them all--travelers needing temporary, safe hospice or those seriously ill who are desperate for nursing attention--if their numbers continue to increase as they have over these first two years.

But back to the cloister garden, for my mind circles and wafts like the April breezes, as if some kind of whirlwind in the middle were to be avoided at all cost. In the center of the enclosed garden is the hawthorn we planted last September, for the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin, before the frost set in. The artfully arranged branches boast sharp straight thorns with leaves deeply lobed, now newly green, promising both fragrant flowers and fruit for healing the heart. Mostly, though, I prize it as the center for the knotted herb garden; sweet and straight with its deep pink, umbrelled flowers already budded out, the center from which the planting of reviving perennials can be measured, and this year's new annuals can be seeded in rows that radiate out from it like the spokes in a wheel. It is our own sweet paradox: the thorn among what will be roses.

And so the thorn is at the center again, like the fixed thought of Rikkarda pricking at me, for she above all would joy in this movement towards fruition, so like a druid herself in her knowledge and love of the mysteries of petals and plantings, hand-pollinating for new shades of coloring to the love of bees, combining for best-flavored honeys, from the dusky-dark buckwheats to light amber mint- and thyme-fed. Who now has the power to bring her back? If it is pride that is goading me, eating me away, let God in heaven punish me. The letter is nearly finished--too sensitive for dictation to Volmar or for the ears of any other scribe. I will finish it myself, be done with it, and send it myself before Vespers... "Woe is me, your mother, woe is me, daughter--why have you abandoned me like an orphan? I loved the nobility of your conduct, your wisdom and chastity, your soul and the whole of your life, so much that many said: What are you doing? Now let all who have a sorrow like my sorrow mourn with me--all who have ever, in the love of God, had such high love in heart and mind for a human being as I for you--for one snatched away from them in a single moment, as you were

from me. But may the angel of God precede you, and the son of God protect you, and his mother guard you. Be mindful of your poor mother Hildegard, that your happiness may not fail." [68]

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[68]The full letter is translated and analysed in Dronke, *WWMA*, pp. 156-158. Two things stand out particularly in the closing section quoted here. One is the pointed reference--nearly Biblical quotation of--the Lamentations of Jeremiah (1:12), which, as we have seen, is given to the cantor or cantrix to deliver soloistically in an agonized cry during the Triduum in Holy Week. Liturgically, it is the epitome of loss, betrayal, and mourning. The second is Hildegard's passionate abandonment of caution in her love for Rikkarda, so much so that it prompted "many" to say, "What are you doing?" This seems so much an echo of the part of Hildegard's sequence for St. Ursula in which Ursula has dared to voice her vision and passionate yearning for Christ, which is answered: "And after Ursula had so spoken,/Popular opinion spread among all people everywhere./And the men said,/'The innocence of this ignorant girl!/She doesn't know what she's talking about!'" (Et postquam Ursula sic dixerat/rumor iste per omnes populos exiit./Et dixerunt: "Innocentia puellaris ignorantiae/nescit, quid dicit.") As such, it gives further evidence for the strong identification that Hildegard felt with Ursula.



April 20, 1152

3rd Sunday after Easter

A courier appears from Aachen with the news that my letter to Frederick, now Holy Roman Emperor, was received in time for his crowning on March 9th.[69] Read aloud amidst all of the congratulatory flattery, the admonitory tone of the letter may have scorched the ears of the German court. My source is the only one to be trusted: let Frederick be warned about the reality of the times and the state of the Church in his Empire. Abuses fulfill temptations, and there is no corner of the realm that is clean. Look how the growing diocese of Bremen is stuffed with a whole succession of newly-created offices, and those filled with men and women lacking the proper age or experience to exercise their offices. Adelheid, too young even to have taken her own vows with us, and she's named and placed as abbess at Gandersheim! Consider that our own archbishop, Henry of Mainz, wrote to tell me that escorts sent to accompany Rikkarda to her new post at Bassum would arrive with his full knowledge and consent, that I was to relinquish her without further opposition! Let it be known that he was warned about the sale of ecclesiastical offices in the reply I sent, that he was warned in addition about the fate of those who prevail against the will of God.[70] Not that he had ears to listen.

I wonder how it will go between us on the 1st of May. We will be obedient to

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[69]Hildegard corresponded with both Frederick Barbarossa (1152-1190) and with his predecessor King Conrad (1138-1152), who had written asking specifically for her prayers for Frederick as heir apparent. Texts of Hildegard's letter from and to Conrad, plus a letter from and to Barbarossa, are in PL, vol 197, pp. 185-187.

[70]See PL, vol 197, pp. 156 & 157, for the letter of Archbishop of Mainz to Hildegard concerning the release of Rikkarda, and her reply to him.

his office. He comes officially to consecrate our unfinished church to the Mother of God, Saints Martin, Philip and James, and to our patron Saint Rupert[71]. It is perfectly clear that the building cannot be completed in time--the painting is not half done--but in the Mass will be the new sequence for St. Rupert and the hymn for the Virgin. They are inspired; they come from God, not from my own frail self, and they are ready to be sung. Let him listen this time. Let him see the curved wonder of the pelican breast of the baptismal font, the simplicity of the altar that houses the bones of our blessed Rupert, and the glowing colors that move in the compositions being painted on the wooden panels. Then let him take note of the beauty that exists in our church in potentia, a beauty that has grown from the inside out, so that when the painted depiction of the Heavenly Jerusalem is completed, he will return to see that it is a true symbol of what exists already in spirit today.

It isn't the easiest way to do things, trying to flesh out a vision so clear on the inside, so hard to manifest in this world. Problems arise that I couldn't have imagined. The workmen try to piece together the panels without consulting me, and complain when it turns out badly. Of course each panel needs to be either entirely of larch or entirely of pine; to combine planks of the two kinds of wood within a single panel changes the colors of what is painted, and so in a pieced panel we end up with a botched, polyglot tryptich instead of a single scene. Pegged and glued with infinite care, the colors still change dramatically when, for instance, two of the planks are of pine and one of larch. My Master-builder thinks to hide the fault by directing the painter to lay an extra coat of gesso on

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[71]Newman, *Symphonia*, p. 295.

the surface before sketching, but it is still obvious to my eye.

It is why I have insisted on seeing each panel when the carpenters have done with their hatchets and checked their division of planks, and now I have set the painter with a three-foot mount for his easel in the cloister outside my own window for the good weather. My impatience outruns me, I know, but I will have both Ursula's journey and the Heavenly Jerusalem as perfect as they can be made. In a sense, the panels are born of me, and so my responsibility. These are like visual manifestations of the Ursula lyrics that have come to me; such paintings also bear unexpected fruit among some of my women. For the third day two young novices, with my permission, have spent their recreation period enrapt in contemplation of the painting going on in the courtyard cloister. Yesterday my Mistress of Novices reported that she noticed some of the green earth used to paint the panels hidden in Christina's cell, her failure to ask permission making this a clear infraction of the Rule. She may yet have the courage to ask; I pray that she will. Verdigris makes for a brilliant green, so much better than the olive green from the buckthorn,[72] and I am interested to see what kind of shape may emerge on the wall of her cell if she dares. Christina has a great zeal as she watches; I have observed elsewhere that her hands and eyes work well together, and I feel she could be part of the seeding of our own scriptorium in time; illuminations bring a strong sense of life to manuscripts.

I myself have hoarded colors for years...how else would we have the yellow

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[72]See Daniel V. Thompson, *The Materials and Techniques of Medieval Painting* (NY: Dover, 1956), pp. 160-174 for materials and techniques used to produce a variety of greens in medieval wood, plaster, and manuscript painting.

orpiment for the auras that surround the heads of the holy or the exact ultramarine we need for the vast sea? The flowers begin to bloom in the newly raised beds outside the window, suggesting further colors, while those of my visions are still more varied. Of all of them, it is the gold that is hardest to come by: the powder is costly and scarce, and I would never dare to direct its use but for illuminations on vellum. There I will someday have it, because there is no other way of portraying the radiance that both warms my physical body and glitters behind my eyes.

May 8, 1152

Feast of The Ascension

I was delectating in colors when they rang the bell for me. A man had been brought from some distance, probably having traveled through at least one night without food or rest. I don't know who looked more distraught and weary, the man himself or the woman whose hand he clutched. His eyes were intense and agitated, alternately darting in fear and then deeply melancholic. They were of a slate blue so deep as to seem gray-black. Here were colors of such complexity and carrying such a rich emotional content that my mind wandered for a moment to the selection of colors I had long been collecting for the purpose of illuminating visions, the colors I had reluctantly hidden away in a cupboard when the bell called me to the parlor.

An awful groan eructating from his belly through his throat shut out the other colors and pulled me, bent me to this agonized man and his eyes, with triangularly-peaked flesh above the lids, like a pointed arch directly over the middle of each eye. The result was something nearly demonic about the eyes, and I knew then that there was likely a spiritual cause for the physical agony that coursed through him. About the woman, I could see nothing, because fear and what may have been a kind of grim determination held her face from free expression, but I sensed a particular strength in her, if only in the hand that he held; it looked as though her one tightly held hand was the single support for his much larger body, head, and his peculiarly large hands.

The fingers of his hands were remarkably long, not tapered at the tip, but spatulate--a perfect hand for describing the neumes, it occurred to me. I

wondered briefly whether he might be a cantor, with that hand; of course if he were a monk, he would then have gone to his own dispensary or confessor and not mine, not to speak of the puzzle of his female companion. A renegade monk perhaps, I was thinking, when another droning sigh interrupted. Quickly I raised my right hand to his upper spine between the two shoulder blades, my left to the front of his chest in the area of the sternum. Placed in this way, my hands were listening, although they barely touched the dark cloth of his shirt, and I was able to monitor the thudding movement and sounds that informed me that he was both highly agitated and collapsed in upon himself at the same time.

The heart was unusually loud, somewhat irregular, pausing briefly when the terror stormed through, then pushing on with accelerated force as if to overcome or deny what had so briefly but dramatically silenced and immobilized it. The notion of exorcism began to push at me, and, immediately, words came to mind and began to fill me with their power. Then a strange thing happened: I noticed the man had grown much paler, was breathing in a shallow, overexcited manner, and that I had lost touch with all of the information I was getting from my hands. I could practically see that wild and irregular heartbeat in the movement of his chest, but my hands picked up nothing. They were suddenly useless as sensitive instruments that I rely on.

I must have given an involuntary groan of despair, which was immediately echoed by a much louder and deeper groan from him; his breathing became deeper, and I realized that it was I who had disrupted both of our breathing patterns. In my zeal for routing out the devil, in my excitement to open the way for God's righteousness to enter, and caught up in my own concern for seizing the most powerful words I could find, I was hardly breathing at all, which then curtailed

his breathing and closed off all the rich communication that was between us through my hands. I couldn't help but laugh at myself, so busy routing out the devil in him while I was getting all puffed up with pride. He laughed as well--out of relief, I suppose--and then began to talk.

It was the hero of Psalm 37 who now sat before me. It was there in everything he said:

I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end: I walked sorrowful all the day long. For my loins are filled with illusions; and there is no health in my flesh. I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly: I roared with the groaning of my heart.[73]

Unlike his groans and sighs, which were so loud, his words were low and terribly difficult to understand. His woman companion and I had to huddle around him in order to hear. I sat down on a stool; she, on the floor near his knees.

The bell.

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[73]Psalm 37, 7-9 (Douay ed.)

May 11, 1152

Sunday after Ascension

I learned on Friday that he comes to us from the splendid church of St. Gereon in Cologne, where martyrs of the Theban legion are depicted in mosaics of such rich colors that I have heard people call them the Golden Saints.[74] His name is Basel, of Cologne, where he knows every church and monastery within the city walls. He has prayed in the church of St. Ursula and is a living source of information about Cologne: its church architecture and liturgy, the ever-increasing number of heretics there known as Cathars, and of course about music, because my observation about his hands was correct. He was cantor, although a secular priest and not a monk; clerical, and not monastic. Thus I can be sure of the rifts that separate us, in the ideal as well as the living of our spiritual lives. It is also true that the man has much from which I could learn. He has been librarian and scribe; his knowledge and skills are extremely broad. Of his depth, I can only surmise, for his mind is agitated, his soul disordered, his body therefore in a state of total exhaustion. Still, the eyes give evidence of great depth, which is verified by the wordless information my hands received on evaluating his heart, even through all the rough cloth on his back and his chest.

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[74]Romanesque church in Cologne, dedicated to St. Gereon and his Companions. These several hundred martyrs, mentioned in Bede's Martyrology and included in the Sarum Calendar for October 10 (under the name of St. Gereon), achieved renewed popularity in the twelfth century, and especially in Cologne itself. The group was believed to have been separated from a Theban legion and martyred in the 4th century, perhaps at Agaunum, in Switzerland. At Agaunum, a monastic foundation (Abbey of St. Maurice) in honor of the Theban Martyrs achieved liturgical importance in the sixth century for their innovative singing of the *laus perennis*.



Meanwhile, the shiny, swollen joints in his feet tell of gout too painful for walking, and the wildly irregular, disordered heart calls out for rest. As passionate as I feel, I will not begin by debating with him at this point about issues of clerical reform, and I would not refuse him help. The ringing of the bell cut us short before I could learn anything of his life on Ascension, the day he came, and on my way to Vespers I instructed my Infirmarian to house him in the dispensary with as much privacy as is physically possible at present (he actually has a nice view of the growing structure of our cloister church), and to have his woman companion stay in the quarters with our lay sisters, at least until I can better assess their relationship as well as her character.[75] Today I learned from my feisty old Matilda that the companion, whose name is Agethe, is a skilled gardener and keeper of bees. She suffered urban confinement living within the city walls of Cologne, is excited by and intensely curious about our raised-bed system of gardening, and eager to help old Matilde, which is a blessing, since now that crone, who is my best gardener, propels herself in our lands with little else besides pure Spirit and vernacular curses, according to my daily observations.

For me, I thought on my way to singing Vespers that day, my hope is in the living God, yes, but there are days when the terrors of decision-making are particularly loud and God strangely quiet. Volmar is supportive of my decisions about Basil; still I wonder at such a powerful intelligence and deep commitment gone astray. I wonder at some people being choked by ecclesiastical offices,

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[75]It is unlikely that the priest would have been married, because the prohibition against married clergy was widely accepted (following the reforms of Gregory VII) by this time; it is most probable that she would have been his concubine, and that this would not have been an unusual situation, nor damaging to his clerical status, regardless of Hildegard's personal opinion about it.

others buying and selling them, the strain on the heart and the nerves. Singing Vespers, intoning the psalms for my women, observing the tolling angelus after Compline, I wonder whether the Psalms aren't my only consolation. Not just the sounds, but also the shapes of the cadences are so beautiful! Each ending differentiates itself in the way that it falls a bit, then rises before its final descent, or perhaps climbs in gentle whorls and risings before finally falling. Each cadence is a way of framing the psalm-verse it surrounds, but it also bridges a psalm and its antiphon, which is itself another piece of a psalm, a fragment embedded in a melody that perfects it and makes it whole.

Not so with people and human events these days, where it's mainly a series of interruptions that characterize my life, rather than the precious beads of the Divine Offices that make up the necklace, that set the jewel of the Mass. The clamouring of outer events has grown louder than the opus dei and presents itself piecemeal: broken hearts and bones, spoiled meat, scorched altar cloths, exhaustion of medicines, withering spirits, the never-ending jealousies in the novitiate, and I suppose it was always the smooth touch of Rikkarda that sang them together for me. It is certainly not I, not the abbess on this God-forsaken mountain who has strung the beads smooth, unruffled the feathers, or stilled homesick sobs in this night.

It has been for me to oppose the opposition, over and over again, win the scorched earth, battle for our autonomy, plot out the quarters and the cloister and the vineyards. To prescribe for each patient in the dispensary, set out the plan for the novitiate, interpret the Rule, choose the refectory readings, lead the Offices with voice and hand, rouse them all to whatever learning they will have at all; yet now I know that the care of their hearts was more hers than mine.

So I discover it is not just my own heart but all of them Rikkarda tended as my grey-eyed prioress, all of our tender hearts she has soothed and wrapped and given connection. But now what of hers? Now that she has strung all our hearts like delicate living pearls made of blood, of a loving pattern that pleases us all and makes our music more harmonious and my tender joints not so painful, it is hers simply to move on, and to a foundation better endowed, much longer established. I wonder whether she ever really thought of our souls, of our spiritual selves at all. What feels like my soul, was perhaps my heart all along, and could I have been betrayed by my own heart after so much suffering, such difficult years of growth, and so much attention to detachment from the more ordinary, obvious, clamouring temptations that buzz at me now as if they were truly my life? What a great failure that would be!

I go to Mass having heard my own confession.

May 18, 1152

Feast of Pentecost

Much to my surprise, they came on the 1st bearing gifts. Archbishop Henry arrived at the gate with his entourage, announced with alarm by my anxious portress, horses lathered and weary from the long, stony trek from Mainz. Almost as soon as perfunctory greetings were said, the bell rang for Prime. Let them be rubbed down, fed and bedded in the carefully guarded remains of last-year's sweet hay, and they'll be more comfortable than we who have to face each other, sing to one another, and meet at the altar to be dedicated in space smelling of fresh paint and resins.

But thank God, the incense was there to cover. The incense will cover us all. The first gift was the genuine kindness and pleasure with which he received our gift, for we had used the prized sheet of vellum well: it was actually Volmar's suggestion that the sequence for St. Rupert be written out in careful text--that he himself would prepare it--with decorated initials at the words "O Jerusalem" at the first and last verses.[76] He intertwined them with acanthus leaves, with grape vines and braided knots, all colored with the fine powders the painter for the Church has been using for the panels. On the creamy white skin the same colors glow even more like precious stones than on the darker wood panels.

A painting of the architecture of our cloister church was above the text; following that, the date of the dedication plus the name of Henry the Archbishop.

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[76]See Latin and English texts for the Sequence for St. Rupert at p. \_\_\_\_.

At the end of our long sequence for St. Rupert, we added the text of the dedication hymn we favor, the "Urbs beata Ierusalem:"

Jerusalem, blest city,  
named 'vision of peace,'  
Builded in the heavens  
from living stones...

By hammering and beating  
your stones are polished  
And fitted to their places  
by the Artist's hand,  
Laid in this everlasting  
consecrated house.[77]

Done with such care and beauty, it was unlikely that he would disagree with its use in the Ordo we had prepared. Had he simply done what was required of him liturgically, it would have been enough; but he did more: he truly was observant of our progress in both building and planting, grateful for some degree of comfort in the lodgings we had prepared, and surprised at the glory of the sound that rose with the incense in the candled space where the choir sang: for it fanned out in such a wafting way, but with such clarity as well, that when we ended with the hymn-recessional "O virga ac diadema,"[78] dividing ourselves into two members that moved slowly down opposite aisles of the Church, our alternations overlapped beautifully, the antiphonal pairing carrying across and echoing both heavenward and bouncing out of all the angles of the walls.

His official gifts to us were three, like those of the Magi. The first was his signature, with mine on a charter, an agreement about further land being granted directly to ourselves, another step in our economic independence. The second was

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[77]From *Analecta hymnica* 2:73, no. 93, quoted in relation to Hildegard's Sequence for St. Rupert by Newman, in *Symphonia*, p. 295.

[78]For English and Latin texts of this hymn, reported by one of her nuns to have been her favorite, see page \_\_\_\_

a ring for myself, a small ring for an abbess, the kind that seals documents, carved in ivory, delicate and simple in its beauty, the lone initial slightly retrocurved at the ends of the vertical strokes, like the petals of the freckled orange daylilies of our midsummer fields. The ring itself is of bronze, beaten and polished with a raised bezel in the center that holds the oval of carved ivory.[79] It could hang from my cincture. If I keep it on my hand, it is always ready for sealing the hot wax on letters and documents. But its own heat is noticeable if I rub it. It grows warm when I rub it, and it will stay on my hand.

The third gift was for feeding through the eyes. The painting he brought for us is of great perfection, and of course entirely in keeping with the event we celebrated, for it is a copy of a painting of St. Augustine's City of God. In the painting, the City is well built and walled, bounded by tall towers, hung with banners of texts; the four evangelists have triple pairs of wings, each appearing in his proper iconographical aspect, so that Mark, Luke, and John are magnificent beasts. Busts of all the haloed, blessed ones stretch in slightly curving horizontal bands across the whole City, underlined with messages painted on scrolls. The

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[79]An abbess's ring, similar to the one described above, is usually on exhibition as part of the medieval collection at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland. On the subject of adornment of Hildegard and her Virgins, we have the letter of Tengswich, abbess of Andernach, who wrote asking Hildegard whether it was true, as she had heard, that on feast days Hildegard allowed her Virgins to wear rings, white veils, and crowns bearing the image of the Lamb. Hildegard's long reply gives a forceful theological justification for such a practice, while never actually saying whether or not the practice was hers. She points out that married women who are devout should follow the modesty requirements of I Timothy 2:9 insofar as they are identified with Eve and must obey their husbands. Professed Virgins, on the contrary, are appropriately splendid in their perpetual, ever-renewing greenness (*viriditas*) and, like the Virgins in the Book of Apocalypse, are seemly when wearing on their person the image of the Lamb. Their modesty is sufficiently veiled by their virtue of Humility. See PL, vol. 197, pp. 336-338, for the texts of these two letters.

Creator is enthroned on the rim of the circling orb, his feet rest on a parallel, lesser orb. The lamb of the Apocalypse is held in a lapis-filled circle in his right hand, the dove encircled the same way in his other hand, with a beautifully lettered scroll stretched between them. The figures of Wisdom and Jacob are prominent, one on either side of the golden aureole that surrounds the barefoot Creator. They also carry lettered scrolls.[80] Like that city Augustine described, the painting is measured and perfect, ratios expressed, proportions figured, multitudes and triumphs contained. Nothing has been overlooked.

Looking at it now, I wonder how the perfection of such a painting so eludes my inner senses; I wonder if its containment deadens them, for I have feasted my eyes now for each day of the weeks since it came. Its theme is so to my liking; more, to my heart and purpose here, the building and teaching, the order and measure of what must be accomplished; nevertheless, it is not what I experience in my gifts. It is not even the way I have learned what I know. It is not the way that my knowledge is acquired. It lacks the warmth of the bronze, the strong metal rounding my finger, rubbing to fiery glow in my hand. It streams not at all like the torrential fountains of fiery light that invaded my brain and whole being now ten years past. Tongues of Pentecostal fire burned into me, informing meanings and language: brilliant wings with eyes of God whipping the air to a frenzy of bright movement.

My frame is too frail to contain all this. I knew it to be physically true, that

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[80]See plate 23, *De Civitate Dei*, Bohemian, ca. 1140 (Prague, Capitular Library, ms A 7), in Sabrina Mitchell, *Medieval Manuscript Painting* (New York: Viking, 1964).

I had been weakened further and further by illness, debilitated, having no strength for living in that place where I needed both to lead and to obey. But like the terrible Burning Bush of Moses this fire did not consume me; it branded me open, burned out any protection of innocence, melted my human resistance, emblazoned words clarion-clear, blown like horns of salvation, and poured them into my poor form the way a crucible is filled and brought to unbearable heat and, in breaking open, pours out its beauty like a molten river!

The power was not orderly or perfect: too dangerously bright, nearly blinding the way it surrounded and carved out knowledge and images I couldn't have known, never had read, neither seen nor even heard from the lips of Jutta or Volmar. Totally inexplicable in the light of my human frailties and lack of education, but clear and energized, shaped by the heat of the finger of God.



June 5, 1152

Feast of St. Boniface, apostle

Many of the songs that I have composed we are now able to sing for the Divine Office here; they are recorded in the Scivias[81], but I hadn't really thought much about the possibility of writing down the melodies as well as the texts until yesterday, when, for the entire time between Prime and Terce, Basel, Volmar, and I discussed reasons for continuing to write things down now that the Scivias is completed. Basel suggested that I think about how carefully I keep our calendar and how indispensable it is to the life and liturgy of our community. He said that it is also a record of the particular way we celebrate here, the fact that we

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[81] Hildegard set down the lyrics for fourteen pieces before the year 1152 as part of the 13th vision, Book III of Scivias, where they precede a first version of the morality play *Ordo virtutum* (see PL, vol. 197, pp. 729-38). These fourteen pieces are "O splendidissima gemma" and "O tu suavissima virga" (an Antiphon and Responsory for the Virgin); "O gloriosissimi lux vivens angeli" and "O vos angeli" (same, for angels); "O spectabiles viri" and "O felices radices" (for patriarchs and prophets); "O cohors micie floris" and "O lucidissima apostolorum turba" (for apostles); "O victoriosissimi triumphatores" and "Vos flores rosarum" (for martyrs); "O successores" and "O vos imitatores" (for confessors); and "O pulchrae facies" and "O nobilissima viriditas" (for virgins). Since only their texts appear in the Scivias, there is no definitive answer to the question of whether Hildegard composed the words and music at the same time; however, because of the repeated references to music in the texts of all of the visions in Bk. III, vision 13, my guess would be that these existed in both music and words in a version that--like the *Ordo*--was musically elaborated for regular liturgical use, and eventually recorded in notation during the early years at St. Rupertsberg. A letter to Hildegard from Odo of Soissons written in 1148 (PL, vol. 197, Epistle 127, p. 352) attests to the fact that some songs of hers (*modos novi carminis*) were known abroad before she left Disibodenberg; however, the likelihood is that by *carminis* Odo refers to the texts--just as we, unfortunately, have for at least 1500 years said hymns when we really mean hymn texts, usually set to traditional melodies. Hildegard's melodies were far from traditional, even those of her hymns, so it is possible that the melodies themselves were not known outside Hildegard's community before she sent them to the monks of Villers in the form of what is now known as Codex D (Codex 9 at the library of Sts. Pieters & Paulusabdij, in Dendermonde, Belgium), which was made c. 1175 at the scriptorium of Saint Rupertsberg.

celebrate the feast of our blessed Rupert on May 15, for example, making us different from Benedictine communities in France and England.[82] The music that we sing in praise of St. Ursula in October is unknown except to the singers. And notating the melodies and texts of my new songs on vellum would result in a permanent descriptive record of how we praise God in this convent. Volmar, of course, was in agreement.

When I then protested my ignorance of the rules of notation, Basel pointed out that the neumes are simply transcriptions of the hand signs that I always use as *praecentrix*; that, just as Volmar has written down the words I dictate, so he could write down the new songs that we sing, transcribing from my hand and voice, as it were. Using the manuscript that Basel had brought from Metz as an exemplar, Volmar was able to grasp the conventions of the process without difficulty.[83] He could even train one of my women to do the same, he suggested,

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[82]Books and MSS used to corroborate the names and dates for the feasts of the Sanctoral Cycle in Hildegard's liturgical calendar are identified in full in the Bibliography.

[83]Late in her life, Hildegard was quoted as saying that she brought forth and sang chant with music in praise of God and the saints without the instruction of anyone, and sang although she had never learned either musical notation or singing. (*Sed et cantum cum melodia in laude dei et sanctorum absque doctrina ullius hominis, protuli, et cantavi, cum nunquam vel neuman vel cantum aliquem didicissem.* Vita 2.17 in PL 197, p 104A, as emended by Peter Dronke from Berlin MS lat. 674, fol. 7v, in "Problemata Hildegardiana," *Mitellateinisches Jahrbuch* 16 [1981], p. 107.) When she says this, it is more than saying she has not been to a school, because what was taught in school was called *Musica*, not *Cantus*, and was theoretical (theorems of Pythagoras, ratios, modes, music of the spheres, its relationship to geometry and arithmetic) rather than the practical matter of singing the corpus of Mass and Divine Office chants; these were taught by the *praecentrix* and prioress, or novice mistress, in the novitiate of the convent. Hildegard is protesting that she didn't even have that kind of formal training--which makes the exercise of her musical gifts all the more remarkable. Regarding the nature and functions of the neumes themselves, two ninth-century commentators on Martianus Capella's late fifth-century *Wedding of Mercury and Philology* defined the neume as "the motion or the gesture, the rhythm by which dancers [feminine] and reciters  
[footnote continued]

and she could then be responsible for being my musical scribe. It is not for teaching the songs, which must always be through the body--from my inner ears and hand to their outer eyes and ears--but for describing our practice here, ensuring its consistency, and aiding my memory as cantrix. It could help my women begin to think of themselves as members of a Benedictine community that exists at a particular place and time, and for a reason we may not yet fully comprehend. I think of it as a sense of history, an awareness of our particular role in the history of salvation.

It is an intriguing suggestion; of course, Basel could not know to what extent the "writing down" of things has already plagued me: the Voice of Wisdom that exhorts me to write things down has been with me for such a long time now, and, for the many years that I ignored her, I suffered horribly in my body, for in that sense the "body is the garment of the soul." [84] When Pope Eugenius, at the Synod of Trier, identified my gift as the charism of prophecy, and encouraged me to continue the setting down of my visions, the illnesses that had intensified prior to beginning the formal recording of Scivias were largely assuaged. During the years preceding, as I suffered physical torments, I thought often about all the power-filled prophets of the Old Testament, like Ezekiel and like Jeremiah, who saw so deeply into the divine mysteries. These were men powerfully gifted to see,

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[footnote continued]

express the chants" (in unpublished paper of Suzanne Martinet, Bibliothecaire honoraire, Bibliotheque Municipale, Laon, "Discoveries about Music at Laon in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," translation by Franz D. Jolowicz).

[84] Hildegard uses this phrase often; see, for example, Epistle 47 to the Prelates of Mainz, where Hildegard says, "The body is truly the garment of the soul, which has a living voice; for that reason it is fitting that the body simultaneously with the soul repeatedly sing praises to God through the voice." (corpus vero indumentum est animae, quae vivam vocem habet, ideoque decet ut corpus cum anima per vocem Deo laudes decantet) from PL, vol 197, 221B.)

even to speak, but they were not instructed to write down what they saw. During those years at St. Disibode, whenever liturgical lessons at Matins or at Mass were from the prophetic books, I would listen with greatest care and meditate upon them in my mind, hoping that, the more I understood about the Old Testament prophets, the better the possibility for me to understand and be obedient to my own gift.

Jonah was also reluctant to do what he seemed chosen to do. He was stubborn in his body, and, again and again, his own willful pride attempted to interfere with God's plan for him. But for Jonah not to interfere with God's plan was simply to be. Not to interfere with God's plan for Jeremiah was simply to bear witness to the wrongs his people did all around him, to understand how they were rejecting God Himself, betraying His love for them. He needed simply to stand in the marketplace and express his sorrow, to open his mouth so that God's anguish and misery with His treacherous people could be heard. It was different for me, and I was still in doubt about the particular demands for writing things down that God placed on me through the Voice of Wisdom. For one thing, as a woman I had never received formal training in grammar and rhetoric, and was not in the habit of writing things down; furthermore, as a woman I was expressly forbidden to teach publicly, even if my visions and prophecies were a gift from God.[85]

Nevertheless I persisted, and it was through my deep understanding of two

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[85]For the first handicap, see PL, vol. 197, cols. 383-384. For the second, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars ed., 1969; Question 177, Article 2 (vol. 45, pp. 133-135) codifies in the century following Hildegard what had been the practice since the fourth century, as is well documented by the Church Fathers, Johannes Quaesten, and others.

prophetic books--the Book of the Apocalypse and my most beloved Book of Psalms--that led me to begin dictating my visions to Volmar. In the Book of the Apocalypse appears the woman clothed in the sun, whose particular shape and glory we revere in the liturgical texts on August 15th, for the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin. She is especially beloved to me because of the particular quality of radiance she bears, so like the light that emanates from my visions of the figures of Ecclesia, Caritas, Sapientia, and the Virgin Mother of God. In the Apocalypse, she is crowned with stars, with the moon under her feet, and it is the earth that saves her from the forces of evil that threaten her own life and that of the child she bears.[86] I began to understand a relationship between these numinous women who appeared to me transfigured--so illuminated from within by a divine radiance that it filled them, and extended outwards all around them as if wrapping them in the very light they had emanated--and the remarkable woman in the Apocalypse. I began to pay more attention to the words and the form of the Apocalypse of John the Evangelist[87]. The scrolls, I thought, the scrolls: here is a prophet who is told he must write what he sees, no matter how strange it may sound; over and over again it is the scrolls that are evoked to reveal these mystical texts, so that we understand their mysterious cadences as being read and sung, not simply spoken.[88] We have these visions because St. John did what he

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[86]"The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth." (Apoc. 12:15-17)

[87]For HvB, both the Gospel and the Apocalypse were without question written by the same disciple.

[88]Various commentators have noted this difference, as well as the approbation of charismatic ministry in the Apocalypse, which surely supported Hildegard's decision to be heard. For example: "In St. Paul's time the utterances and exhortations of the prophets were wholly oral. Later, in the Apocalypse, prophecy under the new covenant takes a written form. Both the prologue and the epilogue  
[footnote continued]

was ordered. Something about the writing slipped into place for me, and the possibility that it was not humility, but pride, that was keeping me from writing presented itself as well.

After that, I began to realize that the one hundred-fifty Psalms that we sing each week of the year, year in and year out in the Divine Office, make up a Book of Psalms, that it too is a prophetic book, and that these prophecies are also--and have always been--embodied as songs. Dearer to me than almost anything I know, my greatest comforters, God's highest praises and thanksgivings: the Psalms are prophetic, they are songs, and they are a book! In this way it seemed possible, according to what I knew, to embody my own prophetic gift in songs and words, and I zealously began to obey the voice of Sapientia by recording what I saw and heard in the book of visions that came to be called Scivias. What still hadn't occurred to me before Basel's suggestion of yesterday was to record the shapes of the melodies themselves, not only the words. I feel this might help me to stabilize the ever-increasing variations of music I must organize and teach for the performance of the play of the sixteen Virtues and their Queen.

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[footnote continued]

claim that the Apocalypse is a prophecy and the prophet is a prophet who has brother-prophets (22:9). The Church, as viewed in the Apocalypse, is Spirit and Bride, the charismatic ministry and a body of believers. No special place is assigned to bishops, priests, deacons--unless they were also prophets, as may sometimes have happened. We read of 'prophets and saints,' 'saints, apostles, and prophets.' Unlike St. Paul, the Apocalyptist's view of the Christian ministry is wholly charismatic and prophets are held in high esteem.... It is usually thought that prophecy as an institution or element inherent in the life and worship of the Church suffered an eclipse in the second century." Appendix 4, p. 159 of Blackfriars ed. of Aquinas, ST, vol 45, Roland Potter, O.P., ed.



June 22, 1152, solstice

and

5th Sunday after Pentecost

The light is delicious. We were able to have a long practice between Vespers and Compline to learn the music for the Vigil of St. John the Baptist. Now a melon-colored light still remains and will continue long enough for me to observe the turn-around-the-poles of the summer solstice as I write to young Elisabeth of Schoneau[89]. News has come that she was deathly ill for several weeks beginning at Pentecost, and I am not surprised, considering the anguish she has expressed to me, with her extreme fear of criticism. Even though I cannot dictate to Volmar into the Great Silence at this hour, she will hear from me; my wax tablet will suffice.

Listen, then, my troubled daughter: The whispering of the ambitious serpent sometimes seeks to wear down precisely those people our God instructed through divine inspiration. For when the old snake spots a gem of special worth, he hisses, raising himself up, and says: 'What is that?' And then he torments with many afflictions the heart that longs to fly above the clouds (as the old serpent himself once did), as though human beings were gods.

And now I want you to listen further to me. Those who long to bring God's words to completion must always remember that, because they are human, they are vessels of clay and so should continually focus on what they are and what they will be. They should leave heavenly things to the One who is heavenly, for they are themselves exiles who do not recognize what is heavenly. They only announce the mysteries like a trumpet, which indeed allows the sound but is not itself the source that produces the note. For someone else is blowing into the trumpet and causing the note to be produced.

They should put on the armor of faith, being mild, gentle, poor, and despised. This was the condition of that Lamb whose trumpet notes sound in them from the childlike intuition of their behavior. But God always disciplines those who blow God's trumpets, and God sees to it

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[89]German Benedictine nun, 1129-1165, see note 16, p. 9, above.



that the earthen vessel does not break, but pleases the Divine.[90]

How well I remember as a young nun the torment of keeping silence for all of those years, and until I was much older than Elisabeth is now. The intensity of what I saw and heard made it even more frightening; the clarity sometimes led me to suspect that people around me could see what I was witnessing, and their derision was therefore more devastating.

One of the few things I recall from the days before St. Disibode, as a very small child, is that peculiar quality of light one Midsummer Eve in which I began to see with my inner senses; first, the figures were in silhouette, the way they look in the west as the sun sets and shapes of trees or a single twisted branch make dark calligraphs that seem to come forward. It took months before the light really filled the figures and brought them to life, colors gradually permeating the calligraphs, calligraphs beginning to assemble themselves into larger figures, recognizable physiognomies, whole landscapes. But one day, there it was, bright and wordless, a mysterious, silent world so different from the commerce, the business of my father's house, the bustle of those in attendance, the cries and arguments and play of my sisters and brothers who were all older and more able, somehow more vigorous, more familiar with one another and with what the world would require of them.

Perhaps it was the succession of plants that began to give me a sense of some design that included me, plants whose colors and fragrances so suffused my senses

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[90]English translation by Ronald Miller, from Fuhrkotter's German translation (Salzburg, 1965), in Hildegard of Bingen's *Book of Divine Works with Letters and Songs*, edited and introduced by Matthew Fox, (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1987), pp. 339-340. Latin text in PL, vol. 197, pp. 216-218.

that I could carry them with me, pull them in to my soul where they could be mysteriously watered by the fountain of the Father and begin to inform me of other ways of knowing. Starting in earliest spring, the first blossoms I found were low and hidden, pungent and musky smelling, darkly colored, carpeting the banks of brooks and spreading gradually from lowlands through a whole spectrum of colors until--at midsummer--the yellows of helianthus and solidago blazed with the fuschia of wild phlox while the vermilion of bergamot was like molten fire.

I remember gathering leaves, petals, and whole flower-heads in my small, sticky hands, palming their silky surfaces until they had given up all their oily fragrances into the skin of my hands. Finally, when they became papery, I would put collections of them under my light summer quilt. But some of the smells always remained, or mysteriously returned, and it was like sleeping in a fragrant meadow; after a while I could even carry the secret fragrance with me into the clear light of day. More and more I learned the way to coax myself into the inner world, all the while believing that this was the silent part of the development of all children. For it somehow seemed safe to see the stange pictures of my inner landscape while resting in such a fragrant meadow.

June 24, 1152

Nativity of John the Baptist

Matilda is the first of us to die here, and that totally without warning, unshriven, sprawled among knots and curves of the garden of medicinals and herbs she had tended, nursed, and brooded over since our move to this mount of blessed Rupert.

During all my years at St. Disibode, the only professed woman to die in our community was my old teacher Jutta. Most of the rest are so much younger, so full of health and tenacity and the kind of worldly vanity that gives tremendous vitality when snared by the Holy Spirit: it is what I secretly love to see in my raw novices, what provides substance for the formative Rule to which we all yield.

What a difference in these two deaths--the shock of Matilda against that of Jutta[91] so worn, my mother in spirit and in learning, my first experience of cantrix, of wise healer, gentle keeper! With all that, I know her way was never totally at home in community. Her growing life had ripened her as an anchoress; much as she cared for me and mothered me well, even as a youngster when it was only the two of us, I was never unmindful that my entrance into her life, the responsibility she acquired with my care, would not have been her choice. "Not my will but Thine" took on a poignancy and personal meaning for me because of Jutta, for I knew how dearly she had won her solitude and what a strange twist it was

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[91]See n. 4, p. 2 and n. 17, p. 11 above for further information on Jutta.

that, with the advent of my care and my own subsequent maturing vocation, our small female community would inevitably grow, in spite of that abbess whose heart longed for nothing but God and pure aether.

Even the birds seemed to intrude on poor Jutta, and it was a large part of my job as her protege, and later as prioress, to protect her from sounds of giddy girls, suffering penitents, and even warbling birds at the early Angelus.

So it came to be that her long, slow suffering approach to death afforded her the solitude she so desired. It must have been during those long months that I began to understand our enormous differences, and to wonder at them. I became more and more conscious of how carefully and precisely I could carry on my outer life--and not with any disconnection from the spiritual life--while allowing my inner ears and eyes to remain wide open. I could be a kind of sieve like the pelican's mouth, so that any contemplative wonder, picture or mystery might breeze by in the shadow of the living light, be caught, be turned like a many-faceted prism, sing or shine its hidden nature, while all the while I was teaching a lesson, praying the Psalter, or even pleading a case.

In fact, this became a particular blessing when I was nursing the sick those many years of my healing apprenticeship in the dispensary at Disibodenberg, and it is what sustained me through Jutta's long dying. Had I not recognized this way of using both inner and outer senses simultaneously, I could not have arrived here in this strange new land, nor survived these first two years at all intact. Furthermore, had my old Jutta been able to develop this kind of constructive duality, I am convinced her life could have been longer and her death less of an agony. As it turned out, her concentration was so extremely delicate that any unwonted

stimuli, whether inner or outer, interrupted her prayers and disrupted her contemplative life. Physical pains, even twinges or rumblings from her weakening gut were rending interruptions, as were any sounds of the ordinary day's chores and constructions, and her last days were a torment from trying to focus. Bits of oiled milkweed silk I daily prepared and warmed in my praying hands to put into her ears each morning as the day's sounds began, and then more medicinals and even narcotics I prepared to dull and still her as far as I dared.

Towards the end, her torment was so great, her energy so dissipated and her attention so impossible to focus, that I would elevate her upper body where she lay, then climb onto the bed behind and under, straddling my legs beneath her withered pelvis. Then I would breathe audibly, coaxing her breathing into a more monotonous regularity with my breathing, in tune with my body, so that, when we began to sing, we could be as one and her spirit finally could be free in its solitary search after God. Still, it was a difficult going-out for Jutta. At the end, her room had to remain dark at all times, and my tending her was clumsy with fumbling and stumbling in the shadows. There was some way in which her faith was failing her, and her reasoning mind scrambled to prepare for what she could neither envision nor trust. And so the darkness, as if to force herself into submission for the worst she could imagine. This wonderful woman who had guided me in observing the range of positions of the rising and setting sun, who had had me mark with a crayon on a wall the time and place where the warming sunlight first appeared in the morning and finally disappeared each and every day of my eleventh year, ended by begging me to bind her eyes to the already dim shadows in her one-windowed dying room.

And now this sudden death of Matilde, at a midday, fragrant herb-stalks still

pressed in one leathery hand; bright death splayed amidst the roses and beetles; aphids and buzzing bees mingling around the wreath she had on her head in late June. Clogs on her calloused, blackened feet, this wonderful old lay sister who joined us at age fifty-eight, mother of seventeen children, eleven living and troublesome, all from one mean buzzard of a husband, his death attested by friends and relatives, yet he no doubt foraging yet across the Rhine in someone's fields for food, shelter and a tired woman to bed him again. But Matilde was ours for eight years. She almost singlehandedly transplanted what she could ransack with impunity from Disibodenberg's gardens, and also started anew herbs, flowers, and simples for our table, resurrected the orchard that gives shape and fragrance to our cemetery, all this with joy and curses regularly howling at the elements. Dear my God, we are blessed in the death of such passionate life!

July 22, 1152, Midsummer Eve

Feast of St. Mary Magdalene

Hours after Compline, the sky still held the light; the feverishness began once again in my feet. It is not only the burning sensation, but the toes and soles actually change color as if the blood and air fan each other, and so deepen the skin. Walked briskly in the cloister to disperse the burning as well as the thoughts that come almost nightly now to plague me about Rikkarda. Could I have done more to prevent it? Did she actually seek out the appointment, never telling me in order to spare my all-too-human feelings? Sweet woodruff in sprightly clumps strews itself between the stones that delineate paths in the herb garden here, guiding my poor feet with its apple-green, and the perilously sharp-thorned hawthorn tree begins to show its heart-easing berries now that the rosy blooms have gone, and my agitated state begins to be eased as well. The long row of linden trees, like puffy, rooted clouds, is even more pungent in the evening air than by day, and we have already begun the drying of its blossoms, enough to guarantee its fragrant tea over the length of the winter. It is time now to train the quince tree against the south wall of the building, letting it configure the outstretched arms of the crucified, of the cross itself: such drastic training of branches, pruning to one recognizable, austere shape so ruthlessly effective in focusing its vital growth. The day warmth of the late July sun has soaked into the cloister wall; as I search for the outline the espaliered quince will take, its rough warmth livens the tips of my fingers, soaks into my palm. Evening prepares for the very late-rising of the full, midsummer moon with a glow almost like dawn halloing the trees silhouetted on the mountainous horizon, and in a quick moment the warm wall exudes a figure. A woman emerges in the wall, not silhouetted by the setting sun, but bathed and dripping with light. She is *mulier amicta sole*,

clothed with the sun, the moon and stars under her feet, her head crowned as befits our woman of Psalm 44 with whom we sing, "Harken, daughter, and incline thy ear, for the King greatly desires you." [92] And my own frail frame feels chosen and radiant, the music begins to move itself through my chest and ears, and she is moving her hand to the shape of a new song. It is not really separate neume-shapes she describes, though her shapely hand moves, palm down, fingers together and slightly angled at the large knuckle just like a tractulus, the inverse of our darting barn swallows in flight; rather, it is her whole arm, arched at the elbow, inscribing arcs and ellipses and then complete circles growing larger and larger as they finally stream from the radiant arched arm itself into curved ribbons of light across the whole sky. The music is strong and circular, slowly climbing in rounded turnings to surround the reciting tone where it hovers and undulates. [93] It fills my inner ears like the rush of a waterfall, and I see each virgin face, familiar, encircling me like a collar on the choir of angels. They, my builders in the dawn, my lovely artisans of Jerusalem, my goddesses of dawn and bringers of life, reflecting Christ the King himself. They are the living stones of the City, first earth-colored, then coloring to lapis, topaz, and emerald green, burning into the angles and facets of jewels, yet again transforming to the garden

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[92] This text, and other verses of Psalm 44, plus choral texts borrowed from the propers of some of the Church's earliest venerated virgins, such as Agnes and Agatha, are the substance of Offices for the Common of Virgins that gradually emerged as a separate section in monastic choral books during the medieval period. (The grouping of texts for the various feasts of the Virgin is a clear example of this historical development; its eventual result was a Common for all Marian feasts, which was used in combination with several particular texts uniquely proper to her Birth, Purification, Annunciation, and Assumption, the four Marian feasts universally in place in Western Christendom by the twelfth century.) The opening incipit of Psalms 44 appears as well in the earliest written *passio* for St. Ursula, which was probably known to Hildegard. (See Sheingorn and Thiebaut, *The Passion of St. Ursula*, 1990.)

[93] ref. to section of musical examples.



of blossoms and finally wafting away in a long drawn-out endless sigh of sound,  
the sound itself exuding the odor of flowers:

O you beautiful faces,  
Beholding God and building in the dawn,  
How noble you are  
In whom the King reflected himself  
When he showed forth in you all the heavenly jewels;  
And as you are also redolent with all those jewels  
You are also the sweetest garden.[94]

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[94]"O pulchrae facies,/Deum aspicientes et in aurora aedificantes,/o beatae virgines, quam nobiles estis./In quibus Rex se consideravit,/cum in vobis omnia caelestia ornamenta praesignavit,/ubi etiam suavissimus hortus estis,/in omnibus ornamentis redolentes." This antiphon is clearly written for Hildegard's own virgins, condensing some of her most cherished beliefs about their sacred role as builders of the Heavenly Jerusalem. (See #38 in *Lieder*, pp. 97-98, for Latin text and music in Gregorian choral notation.)

July 27, 1152, 10th Sunday

after Pentecost

These "monk-priests"! I hear they "say" their masses, some in separate chapels, eliminating the singing of Ordinaries that rightfully belong to the people as well as of the choral Propers, the beloved province of scholae or choir.[95] No need for Introits, when no one enters--least of all Christ the King! no need for Offertories with their winged, cantorial verses, when no one brings gifts, neither the local community nor the larger community they might serve. New books are produced, but in the service of whom? What they are calling Missales contain all the choral propers (to be mumbled), the collects and readings for every day, no longer observing the injunction of Christ Himself that the Thanksgiving banquet be celebrated where and when two or three faithful are gathered, ignoring the rule of Psalm 150 that always and forever we need to be praising Him in song.

The Dragon must be delighted at such developments, full of himself, swishing his tail at such observances. The elimination of music in praise of God can be the work of none other. "Saying" the Mass in regard for someone's private soul has no place in the life of either the cathedral clergy or the monastic community. Basel tells me as well of books called Breviaries, whose use began as a convenience for monks who were traveling from their houses on various missions; now Breviaries are produced in ever greater number, encouraging private recitation of the Office,

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[95]Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections*, trans. John Halliburton (2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 101-113, and Robert Taft, S.J. *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986) ch. 18, "From Liturgy to Prayerbook: The Office Becomes the Breviary in the West," pp. 297-306.

just as Missale do for the Mass. So even the Divine Office falls prey to such abuses. I understand from Basel they must now build their monastic churches with such practices in mind--with small, private chapels, hidden sanctuaries off the nave and transepts where individual monk-priests can whisper their individual prayers and offices, where individual priests can minister to no one but themselves, perhaps receiving money as well for a Mass in memory of one who needs indulgences to atone for the sins of this life.

It is against such odds that Basel returns to Cologne, to his former post as cantor at St. Gereon's, for of course there are yet important feasts and celebrations for which his services remain useful. Some of the clergy there still remain faithful to sung Offices, and music must be taught and sung for those who continue to minister to the people of his congregation when they celebrate the Eucharist. Not that I wasn't myself somewhat taken aback to discover that Basel was leaving today. A message through Volmar indeed! giving thanks for our nursing him back to health and, having been called back to St. Gereon's with impunity, wishing us well in all of our musical endeavors! And Basel having just begun to take down the music of my play of the Virtues. Had I been given the opportunity to remonstrate, he would probably have assured me that Volmar--soon Anna as well--can carry on the task of notation with competence. So be it.

By the time of our next Advent-Epiphany/Parousia season, the *Ordo virtutum* can be performed in our cloister church, even if it takes many more months before either the church or the play of the Virtues is completed. No private chapels here. For me, in planning the church, the openness was crucial, the inclusiveness, the nobility of a place of beauty where people can worship and learn. We could have been a Roman basilica, a large house in Jerusalem, but always warm

and open, with ratios that carry sound in its own proportions. Bernard's Cistercians are insistent upon ascetic plainness in spaces of worship, that they be clear and without any color or adornment; indeed, Bernard presses this argument in theological texts of such elaborately beautiful prose that they themselves become carefully colored flowers of persuasion. Growing up as I did with the ideals of Cluny transplanted in the wilds of Disibodenberg, the colors and curves are almost a part of the nature of community praise for me.

Still, so much of that beauty was denied to us for so long, so much left to our young imagining.[96] Tucked into the wall for most of the day at the very beginning, when Jutta was still housed as a hermitess,[97] singing our Offices not in the large Church with the rest of the monastic community, who were monks, but in the small Lady Chapel where visitors and common townspeople gathered, we heard our voices as lonely animal sounds in that space, unsure of the psalm tones

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[96]Disibodenberg, founded in the eighth century as a monastery by Irish monks, was Hildegard's home for forty years. It was completely destroyed in the 18th-century, but carefully planned archaeological excavation has recently been undertaken. The results of this study and rebuilding promise to add to our knowledge of the housing of Hildegard and Jutta and of the small women's community that developed there. Many questions remain, but it seems certain from records that, during Hildegard's lifetime, the large monastic church at Disibodenberg (claimed to be almost as large as Mainz Cathedral) was built. It is unlikely that men and women sang the Divine Office together, even though some Hildegard scholars now refer to St. Disibode as a "double monastery". A visit to the site in 1987, at the very beginning of its excavation and including complete projected architectural renderings, made a lasting impression on me and suggested as many historical questions as solutions. For further information about the rebuilding of St. Disibode, there is now a foundation, needful of contributions, and willing to send literature, which may be contacted through Scivias-Stiftung, 6559 Odernheim.

[97]The exact terms under which Jutta entered St. Disibode, as well as the dates, in relation to Hildegard's arrival, remain somewhat puzzling. For further information, see Miriam Schmitt, OSB, "Blessed Jutta of Disibodenberg: Hildegard of Bingen's Magistra and Abbess," in *American Benedictine Review*, 40:2, June, 1989, 170-189.

and cadences, especially when it was, at the first, just Jutta and I. The joy of having our numbers of women grow so that the sound could be raised! And finally, our housing space was clearly not large enough, as more and more of us gathered and our singing space needed to be separate from those visiting worshipers.

Our own church at St. Rupertsburg will hold all of us, as well as the visitors from Bingen--can hold us and hear us, still hold us as we continue to grow. The formal dedication is behind us now, but more seems required to make it our own. By October we will have learned all of the new music for both Mass and Offices to celebrate St. Ursula's Feast Day; in December or January we will do the *Ordo virtutum*. The singing of the Virtues will carry beautifully within these walls and set a tone congruent with the particular ideals of this female community. My visions are persistently filled with the Virtues of late. They come in their characteristic colors, moving in their prophetic, emblematic trappings. The first fruits of this vision appeared as words in the *Scivias*, [98] but they grow with their music like an evergrowing garden in my mind now that we are settled in our own home. Indeed, just in the last week, something about having seen some of it on the page immediately suggests further varieties and expansions of the melodies.

We wish for Basel a safe return to Cologne.

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[98]See *Scivias*, Book III, Vision XIII, and n. 81, p. 57, above.

August 3, 1152, 11th Sunday

after Pentecost

First they rule the vellum with scribing tools, paint the line for the fa clef in yellow, and the one for the ut clef in red;[99] the cheironomic gestures are then superimposed on the whole structure, so there is no mistaking the amount one is required to travel in the hexachord when singing through that phrase of the text. No longer is this simply a general description or reminder: suppose, the next time that we sing this song, the music coming through my body and into my cheironomic hand describes something slightly different; which is correct, the movement of my hand, or the neumes on the vellum? And, while the pitches are precisely indicated, the rhythm of the words and the movement of the spiritual line--especially at melismas--are less clear with the incised lines and prescribed neumes. Nevertheless, it gives a visual dimension that was before totally lacking.

As the melodies for the play of the Virtues are notated, and the neumes spin in and around--and sometimes over and above--the four scribed lines, I see in a new way the ugliness of the Devil, for only the Devil has no music.[100] Now I

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[99]Hildegard refers to what we know as the F clef and the C clef, with their respective signs as they appeared on a 4-line musical staff in the 12th century. For an excellent facsimile of the MS of Hildegard's songs written during her lifetime, see Hildegard of Bingen: *Symphonia Harmoniae Caelestium Revelationum*, Dendermonde St.-Pieters & Paulusabdij MS. Cod. 9 (Belgium: Alamire, 1991). Details of particular notation practices are remarkably clear in the facsimile, as compared with the photocopy and/or microfiche renderings I have been able to obtain.

[100]The best source for the Latin text of the *Ordo virtutum* is found in Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.180-192. Dronke used as his source the Joseph Gmelch facsimile of the *Riesenkodex* (which includes the notation of the melodies) and on a microfilm of the same from the Hessische Landesbibliothek, folios 478<sup>va</sup>-481<sup>vb</sup>. He used (and

[footnote continued]

see his words all bunched together, crammed into a dense pocket of evil, lacking entirely the sense of movement and space that allows the songs of the women to breathe and dance on those lines, and only now do I understand why he has none: for all of these weeks that the songs of Castitas, Contemptus mundi, Discretio, or Humilitas (there are now sixteen female virtues and their queen) have been singing in my inner ear, it never occurred to me that the reason I heard no music for the Devil was because it is the Devil's job to silence the music.[101]

He refuses to acknowledge the power of music, just as he doesn't really see the women, or recognize the strength of their virtues. This is a vision that came to me several years ago, with the last of the Scivias material, in words and images I barely understood at the time. For performance in our own cloister church, my virtues will add their own voices, each have her own music, and incarnate. If the body is truly the garment of the soul, these virtuous souls will move in the bodies of my (not so virtuous) women. They clamor for the gowns and colors this affords, and it is a way for them to understand the Psychomachia that the Iberian Isidore portrayed[102]--the inner activity of good and evil when they are lifted

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[footnote continued]

himself collated), in addition, MS B.M. Add. 15102, fols, 207<sup>r</sup>-221<sup>r</sup>. Other interesting editions of the play are Bruce Hozeski, 'Ordo Virtutum': Hildegard of Bingen's Liturgical Morality Play (University Microfilms, 1969), without music; Hildegard von Bingen Ordo Virtutum, edited by Audrey Ekdahl Davidson (Medieval Institute Publications, 1985), performing edition with music.

[101]See Hildegard's Epistle 47, PL, vol. 197, 218-243, for an elaboration of an idea about the devil and music developed throughout her life. Although Epistle 47 was written during the last year of Hildegard's life, she begins writing her ideas about the centrality of music in her first work. See, for example, Book Three, Vision 13 of Scivias, which is really an exegesis on Psalm 150. See also n. 103? p. 73 below.

[102]Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636), author of Etymologiae, canonized in 1598 and given title of Doctor of the Church in 1722, had virtually received the latter (nostri saeculi doctor egregius) by 653, at the Eighth Council of Toledo. His Psychomachia deals with Christian ascetism through the allegory of spiritual

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into the light. The virtues arrange and rearrange themselves to my inner senses in a way that is never profane, and the fools who oppose it fail to see that, far from being a worldly show of activity, it is precisely the fruit of my contemplative life incarnate.

Nor am I presuming to create new liturgy, which is fixed for all time, and was made eternal by its consecration. When we eat the Body and drink the Blood, it is the anamnesis in which we truly participate. We enter the eternal moment: it is always the same, though we ourselves age, wither, grow sick, recover, grow thin or fat, wise or foolish. Our participation in this eternal present is constant in the Eucharist: singing the prescribed choral Propers and leading the people in Ordinary sections of the Mass.

Our particular work is the singing of offices by day and by night. In this continual work, our participation in the Divine Office, we have both more variety and more autonomy than in the Mass. We are not dependent upon priests, and we engage in every variety of prayer and thanksgiving, listening and learning, honoring and bearing witness not only to Christ and His Holy Mother of God, but to all the saints and doctors, wise teachers and holy women in the historical life of our Church. The time is sacred time, but very much dependent for its being and perpetuation on re-creation in the dedicated life of our community. For our community, the order of the sacred hours, the calendar of saints, the particular psalms for each Divine Office are fixed partially by a canon of laws and by the

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warfare, and the treatise may have been known to Hildegard, although I am not suggesting that Hildegard's para-liturgical morality play has any dependence on Isidore's work.



Rule of St. Benedict. By our faithful observance of the Rule, we in a sense become lifegivers to this sacred history of the Church on Earth.

But there are still other ways that we as holy Virgins can ourselves participate in this ongoing history. As exemplars, we have women from the very earliest days, starting with the three Marys at the tomb. The *Quem queritis* dialogue that we sing in the Easter Matins Nocturn exclaims an extraordinary faith, and it is fitting and just that they flesh out the dialogue among themselves as they fan the Spirit that hovers around and through them.[103]

In the order of *Virtues* that has appeared to me, they are not Biblical women like the three blessed Marys, nor do they have their origin among the company of saints or holy women of history. They are creatures whom we will animate, whose reality becomes clear only as they acquire the capacity for thought and reason, movement and sound. All prayer is heightened in music, and so their words become elevated in the eyes of God. Volmar continually warns that the Prelates of Mainz will ask about my sources, but it is of course God, through me, as the merest feather on His breath.[104] I wonder how they will greet the gowns! His Holiness at Rome moves about His Holy See to various stations in his finest garb.

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[103]For a discussion of the *Quem queritis* dialogue and its place in the liturgy as it relates to early Medieval Latin drama, see O.B.Hardison, Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), Essays V and VI, pp. 178-252.

[104]As noted before, Hildegard uses this image for <sup>her</sup> herself in several places. (See n. p. above.) In another context: "Listen: there was once a king sitting on his throne. Around him stood great and wonderfully beautiful columns ornamented with ivory, bearing the banners of the king with great honour. Then it pleased the king to raise a small feather from the ground and he commanded it to fly. The feather flew, not because of anything in itself but because the air bore it along. Thus am I..." Translated and quoted by Christopher Page in liner notes for *Sequences and Hymns by Abbess Hildegard of Bingen*, Hyperion A66039.

He moves with all of his co-celebrants and fellow servants to stations at Maria Maggiore, St. John Lateran; they process in their finest, believing that nothing less can appropriately honor the Father through His Son. No one questions the honour they bestow. Just so do the things of the outside inform us of the things of the inside.

Even the colors are clear to me now, truly dazzling in their splendour. Faith wears brilliant scarlet, Chastity is in gold, holding a royal sceptre with a white infant over her womb and a dove with outstretched wings brooding above her head. The unhappy anima begins in pure white, the sullied filth of the world rubbing against her with the oily filth of the Devil as the procession moves on--and there is the point: even though the three Marys bore witness to a real change in the order of things, that newer and purer order is always being threatened and always needs defending in our mutable world. The victory of the 16 female Virtues and their queen over the Devil is a manifestation of that always precarious struggle. The Virtues have their being not in the Vulgate or the Calendar of Saints, but in the vision that has appeared to me, and it is with great fear and faith that I encourage their beings. The texts and songs live inside me, and in bits and pieces on my wax tablet, but without Volmar to record them they might never get out, for I have still not learned properly to place the neumes on ruled lines on a leaf of vellum. For me, it is enough that the tones and rhythms of the music are alive in my hand when as praecentrix I instruct my women, shaping the neumes and stretching the musical line as they sing.

Nothing is repeated exactly in this music, nothing occurs exactly the same more than once. My processional play exists not in eternal time, but in our time, which is the world of perpetual change, of mutability, of musica mundana. And

how I love its continual surprises! Even the colors of their gowns will change from moment to moment as the light in the cloister church changes its angle and degree of penetration, as the candles burn down, as the dramatic action unfolds.

Last night I dreamed that I began teaching them the music. In the dream, they giggled and stumbled and behaved like sheep--no, more like goats. They hissed when the devil appeared and rolled their eyes. Never mind. It is begun.

August 10, 1152, 12th Sunday

after Pentecost and

Feast of St. Laurence, martyr

Thinking more about the Ordo this morning, it seems ironic that Volmar, of all people, should be called upon to oppose all the Virtues, to vie with us and accuse us of wasting our lives. He, who was the first to understand what I needed to do, that I needed to record the visions in writing before they paralyzed me, my amanuensis and symmista. In all of the bitter negotiating I did with Abbot Kuno, Volmar understood in his heart that he would come with me, that his own service to God had something to do with being of service to me. For him, it was simply a matter of waiting patiently until Kuno achieved the same clarity. And here I go casting Volmar in the role of Devil, the same Devil who opposes music and drags the wandering soul into the snares and temptations of worldliness!

On the other hand, what alternatives do I really have? Aside from the real spiritual dangers of such a risk for most of them, having one of the women play the Devil is ludicrous in the extreme, for there simply isn't that resonance and threatening power in our voices that I need from the devil. Oh, we can be giddy and petty and shrill and frightening in all those ways that chill like icy winds along the spine, but not in the ways that rush plummeting into your bowels and make you examine your heart's true intentions. In fact, Volmar himself has told me that in several male monasteries where they have enlarged their great Easter and Advent-Nativity octaves with graceful embellishments of the liturgy, the monks portray all of the characters, even the the three Marys at the tomb.

But having monks take all of the parts is not so strange, after all, for there are men with such tender sensibilities as would make this possible, men, large and tall, bearded though they may be physically, whose voices surprise us with their sweetness and treble sound, and do so for the extent of their adult lives. Just so I heard many of the psalms and offices sung at St. Disibode for more than forty years. The diversity among the men was sufficient to allow for antiphonal singing at the diapason without sacrificing any melodic integrity.

But the women, no. True, some of us have fairly expansive areas of sound. But others make only the most timid and timorous, bird-like scratchings, weak and without substance. There are those who seem to increase in volume in the higher reaches, seem to fill the surrounding air with sounds like wild dogs and piercing whistles. Some sound like warmly vibrating strings, and a very few have voices that sail into our valley with the quality of well-tempered bells pounded out of the most precious metals, that vie with Adam before the Fall in depicting the whole range of the heavenly spheres.[105] The variety and diversity is intriguing, and may even be linked to subtle differences in individual souls. It certainly supports and gives clarity to encouraging each of the female virtues in my *Ordo* to

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[105]Several times, but most explicitly in Epistle 47 (PL, vol. 197, 218-243 for Latin text) Hildegard expressed her belief that what most characterized Adam before the Fall was the fact that he was capable of making and hearing every possible musical sound, including those of the heavenly spheres. For example, "In this way can they also recall Adam, formed by the hand of God which is the Holy Spirit) in whose voice was the tone of every melody and the sweetness of the totality of musical arts before he transgressed, and would have remained, were he still in the state in which he was created..." Already in her medical treatise, *Causae et curae*, which was written during the first years at St. Rupertsberg, Hildegard was expressing this same concept about Adam's musical capabilities before the Fall in her consideration of sexuality. For example: Adam quoque ante prevaricationem angelicum carmen et omne genus musicorum sciebat, et vocem habebat sonantem ut vox monochordi sonat...(Latin text by Peter Dronke in *WWMA*, p. 245.)

differentiate herself not only by what she sings but also by the quality of sound she brings.

Contemptus mundi needs to be one of our older frog voices, proud and hoarse with a watery gargle, while Humilitas has not a simple, but tempered sweetness;

Discretio, a voice of controlled intelligence; and Castitas may surprise them all with the sensuous range and roundings of her passionate melodies.

Still, it is a far different thing from the kind of high-voice, low-voice division that characterizes the monastic choirs in men's houses. Also, men's voices have a natural carrying quality we cannot take for granted as women: with rare exceptions, men have only to open their mouths to sing, and a certain rich fluidity results. It has conviction and weight and a spiritual anonymity that is noble. It is easy on the ear of God, I think; but the ears of the prelates of Mainz will be engaged by the variety and insistence of the sounds produced by each of the Virtues. The Devil will meet opponents who are passionate, penetrating and tenacious, vicious in their abhorrence of evil, and merciless in their pursuit of God's justice through the heavenly harmony.

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It is strange how different and muffled the Angelus sounds when the air is so terribly still. It is already after Sext, but the fog remains, brooding heavily over the river, and even the extreme, fiery heat of the sun cannot burn it away as it usually does at least before None at this time of year. The air itself is oppressively viscous, with no movement at all. Whether from heat or from this pressure of the air, birds seem neither to fly nor cry nor call. It reminds me again of the

initial stillness of my inner world.

That strangeness became more familiar through sound, but it didn't happen until I had been singing the liturgy with Jutta at St. Disibode for many years. Already I had gathered courage sufficient to ask my dear teacher whether she also saw the moving pictures and appearances that presented themselves to my inner senses. Her gentle but negative answer, echoed also by my devoted magister Volmar, was bewildering to me, and it forced my inner world to retreat further into hiding. Now I deliberately hid this difference in me, away from the eyes of men in the outer world who might guess, intrude, and ridicule the strangeness in me. Then, for a while, its silence became shaming, and I began to seek it only in the times just before and after the Offices and the singing of the Mass, when the sounds of the chant would lend its own auditory beauty, clarity, and spiritual power to bring my silent world into liturgical time. This went on for some while, at least until my fifteenth year.

One evening, towards the end of First Vespers for the Vigil of the Feast of the Annunciation, we had just finished the repetition of the antiphon for the Magnificat. In the quiet of the silent Pater noster, I heard a rich clear voice which said, "I am the Voice of Wisdom," and my beautiful inner world opened to the world of sound in the Shadow of the Living Light. Hers was a richly musical, but disembodied voice, for I could not yet locate Wisdom among the figures and tableaux that appeared to me. Yet the sound of her voice was a great comfort to me, and she began to explain many of the visions in great detail, sometimes telling the many levels of symbolic meaning not apparent to my inner eye.

It was much later that other sounds and voices gradually entered that world,

making it always richer and--strangely--more familiar, while more filled with mystery. But then, periodically, the Voice of Wisdom would take on an admonitory tone, and I began to feel it in my body and dread her admonitions for the conflict it would cause in me. She might advise me to write down what I saw and heard, at first gently, then sometimes not-so-gently. There was often an insistence, a pressure in her commands that would actually feel like a dull, nasty blade pressed the length of my spine, threatening to crush into my pelvis and even into my legs. It would frighten and bewilder me; for years I didn't dare mention it to anyone, though several of my dear sisters and brothers in Christ observed the suffering of my poor frail frame and wondered at the punishment.[106]

The bell rings from the refectory, and I will read them Jerome's letter to Eustochium before Vespers.

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[106]Most of this material is told by Hildegard herself in the the Preface to her first written work, *Scivias*. See, for example, the English translation by M. Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (NY: Paulist Press, 1990), 59-61, from which I quote, "I heard a voice from Heaven saying, 'I am the Living Light, Who illuminates the darkness...O human, who receives these things meant to manifest what is hidden not in the disquiet of deception but in the purity of simplicity, write, therefore, the things you see and hear.' But I, though I saw and heard these things, refused to write for a long time through doubt and bad opinion and the diversity of human words, not with stubbornness but in the exercise of humility, until, laid low by the scourge of God, I fell upon a bed of sickness; then, compelled at last by many illnesses, and by the witness of a certain noble maiden of good conduct [Rikkarda] and of that man whom I had secretly sought and found, as mentioned above [Volmar], I set my hand to the writing."



Aug 15, 1152

Feast of the Assumption

of the Blessed Virgin

The light began to fail so quickly after First Vespers for Our Lady, I suddenly realized our long summer evenings are finished for the year. Heavy dew has already fallen, and, if the lower fields were not gathered as soon as they were cut this afternoon, the hay would already have started to mould where it lay. The moon clears the trees in the East as I watch, so heavy and full that it threatens to roll out of the sky with its own weight. Dozens of crops need harvesting and careful storage before the next, most orange moon of our year; the drying of herbs continues, and this year should see the beginnings of self-sufficiency for most of the necessities of our own dispensary.

It is the use of minerals and gem-stones, most of all, that elude people's understanding. Their properties absorb heat and light from the sun, and then concentrate them even more than plants do. Their many-faceted surfaces reflect the source, just the way jewel-like flowers exude fragrance and therefore must have healing powers. We are so criticized for wearing, admiring, "attaching ourselves" to these incarnate jewels, without any sense of how deeply connected they are to the very Source and Fountain of Light. Surely there are mysteries mirrored here in the refractions of light itself, and who is to speak for the healings that have been accomplished with the use of these stones?[107]

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[107]For further information on, and specific instances of, Hildegard's use of gems for healing see Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987) pp. 142-150.

I think of the the glorious, cerulean blue sapphire,[108] gold-flecked and heavy with symbolic meaning for those of us who adore the stone most rejected, that lapis who is Christ, who becomes the cornerstone of the Heavenly Jerusalem. In the case of Radegund, it was not so much the periods of intractable pain, for that is a familiar to most of us from time to time. Rather, it is the loss of perception, of balance, the spells of dizziness, attacks of vertigo, the severity increasing to loss of consciousness on at least two occasions. And this in the only logical successor to Rikkarda, whom I have chosen as new prioress, to replace my lost sheep. In addition, I have trained her well as cantrix, and she is the one responsible for preparing Christina and Gudrun for their Ceremony of Consecration on the Feast of St. Matthew, less than two months from now. Her symptoms are confusing. Whether it could be the responsibility for teaching all of the younger ones the intricacies of psalm tones, my own criticism of some of the Office music in its lack of clarity, my impatience with their lack of understanding of images which have always spoken for themselves--a lack of hearing and "knowing" unconscionable for women of such noble origins, betrayal of basic responsibilities of their vocation....

But fainting on two occasions, just after the Sequence and just in preparation for receipt of The Host at this Mass, is impenetrable. There is no one else to fix Father's Service Books. Now that Rikkarda is gone, there is no one else who so deeply understands the significance and order of the ecclesiastical year, the dovetailing of fixed and moveable feasts, or even the small triumph of achieving

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[108]According to Newman, Hildegard's Latin "saphirus" is our modern lapis lazuli. See *Ibid.*, p. 149.

mastery over what is proper to any one saint versus what is required by the Season. How much better to allow Radegund--encourage her even--to wear the jewel over her breast, like a pectoral cross, to ring her delicate head with a crown of stones if necessary, in order to reinforce that passage of light and energy through a delicate, melancholic temperament. For if the balance is overstepped so badly that, even in the act of contemplating the coming to life of the gifts, her body and mind are overwhelmed, then conduits to prayer are indeed required.

Small cliff swallows dart deeply into the crevasses of the mountainside, their forked tails curiously airborne though Luciferan. Surely their balance is perilously achieved by being able to encompass the totality at any given moment. So let the stones gather light from the sun, dense rays buried in the earth and beams from distant stars and visible planets, if that is what is required for her health and the life of our music.

August 28, 1152

Feast of St. Augustine,  
Bishop and Confessor

The pelican again appeared to me, her bleeding breast belying all that is whole and healthy in her plumage. She was brooding, as had Wisdom on the water,[109] I mean shimmering over its surface with wondrous wings--I have seen them--like those of the seraphim, beating so rapidly, fanning the air in gold with a sound more like whispered litanies through fluttering eyelids, not lips, as if praying eyes themselves could fan the light to paint the golden wings of angels.

But meanwhile, the grain is wet and moulded from all the rain, stinking of that insidious fungus[110] that sneaks up on people's minds and thinking. This means that either I give way to the clamoring voices of my spoiled women

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[109]Peter Abelard's statement of this reading of Genesis (see p. 33, n.40, above), from his *Expositio in Hexameron*, is translated and quoted by Peter Dronke in his *Fabula* (Leiden und Koln: E.J. Brill, 1974), pp. 95-96, "Therefore, just as the bird brooding on the egg and devoting herself to it with extreme ardour warms it with her own heat, forms the chicken and brings it to life, so divine goodness--that is understood as the Holy Spirit and truly called God's love, which, infused in the hearts of believers, makes them burn towards God and so makes them hot as it were by its own warming--so this goodness is said to be set over that still fluid and unstable mass as over waters, that presently it might bring forth living creatures from it..."

[110]*Claviceps purpurea*, or ergot, is a fungus found on grain, but particularly on rye, which was one of the most common grains used for bread during the Middle Ages. Large outbreaks of ergot poisoning were reported in Germany as early as the 9th-century, involving hallucinatory experience and other symptoms of nervous disorder. As with any plant fungus, the proliferation of ergot was greatest during growing seasons having an excess of rain and dampness. Often called "St. Anthony's Fire," it was sufficiently prevalent in the 12th-century to require hospitals being built to treat those who suffered from the disease. For an interesting discussion and bibliography of this material, in relation to Hildegard's visions, see Kent Thomas Kraft, *The Eye Sees More Than the Heart Knows: the Visionary Cosmology of Hildegard of Bingen* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1978), pp. 106-112.

demanding their potted meat, their spitted lamb and goat, or take the risk of ergot poisoning by insisting they go without meat entirely, which seems a foolish interpretation of the Rule at this point, at least until the harvested grain is dry, the weather changes.

Perhaps it is worse for women's minds, being weaker to start with, as a rule. Take for example what happened today during recreation, time set aside from our usual silence, for sharing our humanity. I was walking in the cloister for exercise of these limbs aching so from the persistent rain, seeking just a few minutes' intercourse with an escaped white cloud in blue sky before the gray deluge closed over again, when I overheard a conversation between Christina and Radegund.

During recreation at Citeaux, in Abbot Bernard's Cistercian house, I would no doubt be hearing heady philosophical arguments, disputing the merits of Augustine's Ciceronian rhetoric, or the themes of any of our Church Fathers, the real theologians. Or they might be discussing more worldly things, but things affecting the state of the whole Church, like the cost of the Crusades. One of the monks in the community might be preparing to undertake a pilgrimage (or engaged to guide several lay pilgrims) to Compostela, to follow that famous route through the Iberian mountains in order to see the true relics of St. James, past the Black Virgin at Chartres, the one at Montsarrat--the mystery of her absolute darkness answerable only in the beloved Shulamite in the Song of Songs. Nigra sum, she says, and we comprehend her darkness as intensity, richly gathered color as in the royal purple, the gold, the crimson, the depth of color that penetrates our eyes as the learned masters of the science of Optics love to explain.

Then there is the cost of the Crusades. That is a matter for the Pope and

the Princes of the Church, although its military logistics may be attended by Kings who need the spiritual arm of the Holy See behind them. Imagine the provisioning of an army, the moving of a royal household from West to East. Henry II of England or Frederic Barbarossa, taking a retinue from London over seas, from Germany over land and then sea to the Holy Land. Feeding them all. Armoring them, or not, vesting some of them, feeding them bread, welding their arms, contracting the boats, all with the blessing of the Holy See.

When I was at the Synod of Trier for the examination of my first writings, food seemed simply to appear, to be served us all, at fairly regular hours, to be on the tables after the serious business of examining, of taking notes, listening, evaluating, waiting, being witnessed. Fascinating conversations among the delegates ranged through subtle theological symbolism in liturgy, musical practices, the finest points of the interpretation of the Rule. Everyone was fed. The Holy Father travels with a machinery, a retinue, and an organization so oiled and powerful it may extend back to the days when Rome was entertaining itself with the sacrifice in the circus maximus of Christian martyrs.

But, of course, this is sheer fancy. I, poor frail woman that I am, I was not invited to Trier, so how would I know? Reports about my writing apparently went from Volmar to Abbot Kuno, from Kuno to Archbishop Heinrich of Mainz, from Heinrich to Pope Eugenius, with the added encouragement of his much-admired, fellow Cistercian, Bernard, who was attending the Synod and knew of my work through letters we had exchanged.[111]

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[111]The Synod took place between November, 1147 and February, 1148.  
[footnote continued]

I never attended the Synod of Trier; rather, Eugenius III sent his legates to St. Disibode to collect what writings I had so far completed. They were read aloud and examined in my absence, and I can only imagine the enormity of the preparations, the care and feeding of those important men, as I wrestle with the care and feeding of my own community now, five years later.

The greatest problem now lies in trying to integrate it all, invest all with meaning, see all as part of a larger plan, insist upon a larger, more meaningful life with common goal. Let the food be simple and fresh, and let the lay sisters cook it and care for us, freeing my choir nuns for other things; but for what? Complaining about food? Arguing among themselves about whose responsibility it was to...? The argument, rather the chattering conversation overheard during recreation, comes once again to mind. It seems to have been a reminiscence of two different houses, of two different childhoods, compared. On the one side was Christina, brimming with gifts and intelligence, recalling her repeated attempts to befriend a cranky scribe who was in the retainer of her father for the purpose of teaching her brothers, her fascination with the shapes of letters, the sounds of phrases, not only of sung music but of spoken sounds, those that are carefully formed, rounded, reworked and perfected out of love and vision. Her notion, opposed absolutely by her father, was that she might have been allowed to do more than pine while learning the arts of tapestry. She longed to extend the meanings and explorations of words themselves.

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[footnote continued]

Portions of Hildegard's *Scivias* (or the work that later received that title) were apparently read aloud by Eugenius himself to those assembled. It was received with enthusiasm, and, as a result, Pope Eugenius III wrote a formal letter of apostolic approval to Hildegard, at St. Disibode, indicating that she was to continue with her writing.

The other side came from Radegund, whose household, equally noble in respect to lineage as Christina's, was relatively impecunious, its functioning precarious for lack of funds but at the same time delectating in a hopeful improvisation. Her father was off to the Holy War; her mother, unusually able, loved to make order in a diminished household. Stewards' lists, planting charts, maps revered because of newness of tasks and isolation. The woman had not learned such things by gender or upbringing or any other training, but she accomplished them well. Such are the rare challenges and unlooked-for opportunities for taking responsibility, even developing the skills of reading and writing.

Still, compared with conversations that must take place at Synods like Trier, or even at monasteries like Citeaux, ours are more often petty, lacking the knowledge that provides at least aesthetic, if not theological, dimension. Imagine, instead of condemning women for their seemingly perennial weakness of thinking, imagine investing their lives and service with a seriousness of purpose, with goals equivalent to winning the Holy Land: birthing productive children, feeding their minds and hearts with learning. They could be challenged to produce and refine indigenous medicinals, medicinals tried for their efficacy, not used automatically because of Greek philosophical speculation about medicinal use of plants, slavishly copied into book after book without fresh trial.[112] Though physical ailments lack all nobility, are more an embarrassment in the eyes of the world than

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[112] Hildegard's use of German words for certain plants and medicinals in her two physical-medical treatises is strong evidence that her medical knowledge was empirical, rather than rote knowledge of what would then have been the standardized Greek sources, even supposing that Latin transcriptions might be available to her. See Ruth Marie Walker-Moskop, *Health and Cosmic Continuity in Hildegard of Bingen* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1985) for a thorough discussion of Hildegard's medieval sources in her writings about health.



anything else, and a punishment in the eyes of the Church (witness Job), we would have our knowledge about disorders of the body, its causes and cures, recorded in our scriptorium. We would not go so far as to busy our scriptorium with adornment or illumination of works of a physiological nature. Gold and precious colors will be saved for divine mysteries and liturgical books; but the knowledge of our experience needs to be preserved. Our minds and hands will continue to be occupied with healing the body as well as the soul.

September 8, Feast of

Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary

Today, nothing but palpable problems demand every bit of my attention, and I marvel at the philosophical speculations I've been able to consider and record here recently. The continuing, intense, and now untimely heat spoils even the food that is spiced as well as cooked. It sours our milk but precludes the proper curd for making the cheese that would be welcome. My women tire of over-ripe fruit. They complain about the heaviness of their black habits.

I am grateful for the thickness of our walls because they insulate us from the worst of the sun; but the herbs don't dry for all our careful gathering, sorting, and labelling, and for all that strong sun, because the air is so filled with moisture that they mould. As do peaches, pears, and early apples. Certain of the grapes unacceptable for the last wine pressing, normally sun-dried to raisins, rot even on the vines, and I fear that our second-year harvest will disappoint us. So much for the recent efforts of the joiners and for the proud new ladders propped against the orchard trees, with all the rotting fruit dangling above them!

Creatures that fly and buzz and bite and sting collect around food, in the refectory, and even on ourselves. Daily odours of sweat that are usually at most sour have become so fetid that I have advised both Volmar and my sacristan to increase the use of incense. For now, we incense the choir for the Divine Office as well as for Mass. However, this evening one of my women fainted in choir at 1st Vespers for the Vigil of the Birth of Our Lady, and I must assume it was for lack of air to breathe and an excess of incense. The other possible reasons that occur

to me are more than I wish to consider at this juncture, although I continue always to ask for divine guidance in all such matters. Proper fasting is a blessed practice, but unnatural fasting, another thing; for when the human will grows so overdetermined, the Spirit finds it hard to enter.[113]

Once again I hear renewed complaints about the length of the Vigils, the volume of music to be learned by the novices. The amount of music to be learned for the Play of the Virtues continues to grow. The hymn for St. Ursula turns out to be long and complex, with new music for every stanza, and yet they do not fail in their enthusiasm for St. Ursula herself. Their devotion to the one true relic of hers that we house is as real as the bone itself. Inspired by her courage and vision, we all hunger for any and all information about her life; but one wonders about the revelations about her that continue to proliferate, coming now from Schoneau, Deutz, Mainz, and Cologne itself. One begins to smell worldly gain more than divine source. The hysteria that mounts with the proliferation of saleable relics from the graveyard at Cologne does not sully our house, and I pray that the music I have received will honor her true nature when we sing it October

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[113] Hildegard's views against excess fasting are strong and clear. See her answer to a letter from the abbess of a Cistercian monastery at Wethderswinkele who had written asking for general advice for herself and her nuns, PL, vol. 197, Epistola XVIII, 319C-320B. The abbess had said nothing about fasting in her letter; evidently, Hildegard had either heard something about their practices or she was concerned about the issue in her own community. Her answer addresses only the issue of fasting, and is a polemic based on the metaphor of dry, arid, or over-ploughed land producing empty sham as opposed to the kind of balanced nourishment necessary for "viriditas" and the development of the virtues, especially of Humility and Love (Caritas). For modern discussion of the complex phenomena of food and fasting among monastic women of the Middle Ages, see Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) and, even better, Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

21st; for, although they have protested difficulties learning the songs for Ursula in time for the offices of her feast day, I have no doubt it will be accomplished, even if I have to sing the Sequence for the Mass myself.

It is, after all, simply an instance of *canticum novum*, a kind of song renewed as it comes through me. We are exhorted always to come to Him with a new song, as we are told again and again each week in our singing of Psalm 150. What reason would we ever have to believe He loves only what is entirely familiar? Furthermore, when the words come, they are merely empty shells without the music. They live as they are sung, for the words are the body and the music the spirit.[114] Words and music become inextricable for me, and once I can hear it with absolute clarity through my inner ears, I can sing it with surety.

The real problem lies in teaching it. No longer is solmization sufficient, because the music I hear breaks through the customary qualities and divisions of the modes and generates a different kind of structure. No longer do the "ears of memory" suffice for my women; rather, their outer ears must familiarize themselves with, and then recognize, small shoots of melody which may then reappear shortly in another mode, at another pitch, slightly lengthened perhaps, elaborated or simply extended, always pushing the boundaries of our human, limited, female voices higher and higher until at some some point, finally, only the very highest of my women will be able to pierce the climaxing tones. But they are supported everywhere by these constantly changing, nourishing shoots, and, as the voices come

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[114]Sic et verbum corpus designa; symphonia vero spiritam manifestat, quoniam et coelestis harmonia divinitatem denuntiat, et verbum humanitatem Filii Dei pro palat. Hildegard, Scivias, Latin text in Migne, PL, vol 197, 735-736.

down from the heights, they are joined once again by all the others for their earthly descent. Only in the sequences and hymns, the really extended pieces, is the range so demanding.

By comparison, the antiphons are simpler and easier for the women to grasp. Today, Archbishop Henry sent two of his prelates from Mainz for a visitation on the Rupertsberg. They were here for the Office when we sang one of my Marian antiphons, and it went well. Their interest is of course combined with what they feel is their duty to make certain that we continue to warrant their support, that our independence from St. Disibode has not resulted in lapses in the rule that women so often fall into. I trust they were satisfied by the end of Vespers.

September 21, 1152

18th Sunday after Pentecost and

Feast of St. Matthew, apostle

and evangelist[115]

Truly, I did not expect that the Archbishop would himself come this distance for the sake of celebrating the Consecration of a Virgin for just two of my women. In fact, I am pleased that he has not only sent Bishop Karolus this morning, but he has sent his elaborate Pontifical as well, the book in which all the parts that are his to chant are included. The ancient Ceremony has been repeated with us so many times--first at Disibodenberg and now at St. Rupert's--that most parts are lodged in my head and my heart; but, now that I am growing so fond of the fruits of scribal records, I enjoy seeing the physical plan on the page. I marvel at the care taken to flourish certain initials and paint them in many colors, to rubricate in red the beginning of each new sentence. For each line of text, lines are inscribed straight and exactly parallel, then the curving strokes of uncial script break the perfect angularity of the lines at every juncture. It seems strange, but according to what Basel tells me, the Ceremony for the Consecration of a Virgin, so central to the life and purpose of Benedictine women's convents, has never been lodged in its own records or choir books.

Perhaps it is the necessity for having the Bishop perform the ritual that determines the place of the liturgy in the Bishops' own book, where it is, in this

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[115]According to ancient tradition confirmed in personal correspondence with the Benedictines of Stanbrook Abbey, Worcester, England, the Ceremony of Consecration could take place only on the Feast of the Epiphany, during the Easter Octave, or on the feast of an apostle.

case, surrounded by texts and ordos for the ordination of a bishop, dedication of a church, episcopal blessings of vestments, vessels, crosses, statues, bells and weapons, expulsion of public penitents on Ash Wednesday and their Reconciliation on Thursday of Holy Week, elevation of archbishop and cardinal, even the rites for excommunication and absolution. Not that such books matter at all to our participation in the Ceremony or affect our understanding of vows or profession in our community. The choir music we sing, and the antiphons and responses of the consecrated one in dialogue with the presiding cleric, are borrowed from other feast days, primarily from the Feast of St. Agnes, and these we know well.[116] Acknowledging the sanctity bestowed on the new vestments as blessed by the Bishop, the Virgins sing as did St. Agnes, "God has clothed me with a robe woven with gold, and provided me with vast necklaces." [117] Such is the glory that befits our poverty before God that they always look so radiant in their veils, marked with the single cross embroidered in red.

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[116]For further discussion of the nature and chronology of these borrowings, see Anne Bagnall, *Musical Practices in Medieval English Nunneries*, Ph. D. dissertation, University Microfilms International, 1979. Ch. IV, 130-156, and Appendix III, 213-214. Of the chants that would have been used during Hildegard's lifetime, one antiphon and one responsory are taken neither from the Feast of St. Agnes (the source for the largest number) nor of St. Agatha. These I have pursued, and found the antiphon "Venite, venite, venite filii, audite me timorem Dominum docebo vos" to be used consistently for the Ceremony of Reconciliation that preceded the Mass on Thursday of Holy Week. (This concerns all those penitents who had been separated since Ash Wednesday.) For this usage, with its neumes, see, for example, *Frere, Graduale Sarisburiense*, p. 94. The text of the antiphon is from the long Psalm 33 (old numbering), and several of its verses are sung during the Reconciliation Ceremony. Its concerns speak beautifully as well to the Ceremony of Consecration, to those women who--having set themselves apart from the world, and intensely so during a novitiate--are brought into the love of the Lord who loves Justice. For the responsory, "Audi, filia et vide et inclina aurem tua et obliviscere populi tuum et Domum patris tui...", whose text is also taken from Psalm 44, see n.87, p.66, above.

[117]Induit me dominus cyclade auro texta, et immensis monilibus ornavit me.

Today both aisles are strewn with containers of flowers for the occasion, filled first with asters, pale lavender and white, looking like so many stars fallen down from the sky of green fields where they grow, starting immediately to shed their hair-like petal rays as soon as they are picked. Never mind. They are only for today. Four varieties of goldenrod, boneset the color of good parchment, deep crimson roses, and the delicate, flowering stems from our rampant bed of mint may well cause the bees to swarm right into the church, through the open doors that bring the green light from outside to the interior. The smell of the mint is particularly pungent, adding its late September incense to the smoky odours that will precede my two virgins as they return from the sacristy clothed in their new vestments, singing together the wonderful Responsory from St. Agnes's feast:

I love Christ, into whose chambers I have entered, whose Mother is a Virgin, whose Father knew not a woman, and whose instruments sing to me with measured voices: whom when I shall have loved I am chaste, when I shall have touched I am clean, when I shall have received I am a Virgin. *W*.Honey and milk from his mouth have I taken, and His blood hath adorned my cheeks.[118]

after Compline

It doesn't always happen. Often we wait for it in vain. This time the colors of her body itself changed, the body being the garment of the soul. The two of them came, first with their garments to be blessed by Bishop Karolus, then with

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[118]Amo Christum in cuius thalamum introivi, cuius mater virgo est, cuius pater feminam nescit, cuius mihi organa modulatis vocibus cantant, quem cum amavero casta sum, cum tetigero manda sum, cum acepero virgo sum. *W*Mel et lac ex eius ore suscepi et sanguis eius ornavit genas meas. The verse of the Responsory, originally inspired by the Song of Songs, was clearly in Hildegard's head when she composed the Responsory for St. Ursula, whom she first describes as "a dripping honeycomb" (*favus distillans*) "Who longed to embrace the Lamb of God" (*quae Agnum Dei amplecti desideravit*), with "Honey and milk under her tongue" (*mel et lac sub lingua eius*). See Responsory "*Favus distillans*" in Appendix\_\_ for complete text and translation.



their newly clad selves, each time answering the bishop's call of "Venite, venite, venite," inviting them to come forward into the fold, to be numbered among God's true aristocracy.

It was Christina who was transfigured by her Consecration. Christina, whose parents so clearly despised her and came so begrudgingly to the Ceremony. She who was now in the habit of painting during her free time, a habit initiated and inspired by her stealing the green pigment from the painter of our wall panels. Rebellious and even surly at times according to my own observation, but with gifts of pictures that pour from her fingers like ribbons of wax. Yet she cares little for what she does, only that she does it.

Thin and long-boned, with a curtain of dark hair we removed, her being intimidates others easily, though her skills in other areas are underdeveloped. Her participation in choir, for example, is erratic, and I would love to be able to depend on it more. Her range of voice so much lower than her other sisters, it is nearly like having a male voice among us, and it is she to whom I assign the drone that supports any organal singing we do, she who will support the movement of the higher, piercing flying birds in my hymn for St. Ursula in October.

Her presence is commanding; she is abnormally tall. Her eyes, eagle-like, piercing but at the same time curtained, drawn inward to a more colorful landscape perhaps than the one I have pressed upon her service. We rarely have spoken about things of substance, except what I have formally taught. She is one of the few who came to us with Latin as well as common speech, and I encourage her now to concentrate her skills, to channel them into scribal duties, helping me with my ever-growing correspondence. She never fails to write with flourishes, adding

here and there a border of flowers, acanthus leaves, or even watery shapes whose meaning is not clear, even to me. She has not been entirely happy in this work, nor I with her.

But it is to her own color we were all drawn at her Consecration. The choral propers of the Mass that had already been sung--the Introit and Gradual--were from the Season of Lent, with their typically penitential character. Her solemnity and bearing as she approached with her long fingers wrapping the lit candles was striking, almost fierce. Briefly, the thought flashed through me that she might refuse, might renege, might push herself back into the world where she could so easily tower, and even reign with elegance as a Countess or Marchioness. The moment passed. Her usual deep voice seemed to originate somewhere in her knees, and then, as she suddenly dropped and prostrated herself, it became an even deeper buzzing sound.

Called into new being by the bishop, her face turned colors, but many colors, *circumamicta varietatibus* with the chosen queen of the Psalm.[119] First her

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[119]From Psalm 44 (*Eruclavit cor meum*), Verse 11, describing the queen, "clothed in gold, surrounded with variety" (*in vestitu de aurato: circumdata varietate*), and again in Verse 15, "All the glory of the queen is within, in gilded borders, surrounded in variety". Hildegard expands this image and then transfers it into the realm of sound in the climax of her hymn for St. Ursula, where her "innocent flock," her consecrated virgins "shouted out in the most brilliant voice,/A sound of purest gold,/Of topaz, and of sapphire, all clothed about with gold." (*cum clarissima voce clamavit/in purissimo auro, topazio,/et saphiro circumamicta in auro.*) This is the same iconography found in the description of the woman in the Apocalypse, Chapter 12, who is clothed with the sun (*amicta sole*), about whom Bernard of Clairvaux wrote so many of his sermons. Other verses of this psalm were used, already by the tenth century, in Offices for the four Marian feasts then officially in place, and in the Masses for the same, for example, "With thy comeliness and thy beauty set out, proceed prosperously, and reign." (*Specie tua et pulchritudine tua intende, prospere procede, et regna.*)  
[footnote continued]

own hidden green, so strongly so there was a general spontaneous movement among us to support her, the color of her face was so green, and then mustard and rose and violet, to pure gold. She stood before us radiating from her body through her new garments, rained on by particled streams of gold penetrating the open doors and windows, tiny globules of gold dust dancing on the lids of her rapt eyes, her swan-necked hands and wrists articulating liquid shapes like two swarms of bees.

Finally pressing in, we closed ranks around her, singing our office hymn of perfection, the *Veni Creator Spiritus* from Pentecost, knowing God's finger had touched this young woman, transformed her to a respected stranger among us, in the act of her binding herself to the community in perpetual service to God.

May God's gold infuse any books of ours she may decorate in glory.

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[footnote continued]

In addition, the responsory "Listen daughter, look and incline thy ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house..." (*Audi, filia, et vide, et inclina aurem tuam: et obliviscere populum tuum, et domum patris tui...*) is part of the Consecration Ceremony, see above, as well as a gradual for the Feasts of St. Cecelia (For the latter, see, for example, MSS Einsiedeln 129 and St. Gall 339).

September 30, 1152

Feast of St. Jerome, presbyter

There can be no argument about cultivation of new vines, since nothing could be more productive on the steep hillbanks of our meandering river. All up and down the nearly vertical slopes, the soil is rich in minerals. It has supported little else besides the grazing of goats. That much is clear; and it would be foolish to encourage planting grain anywhere except on those lands deeded to us that lie much lower in the valley. We have revived an old orchard on the site of our cemetery whose apples and pears are only of fair quality, but whose quinces are outstanding in both their beauty and salutary uses. Mulberries, hazel, and chestnuts thrive on some of the lands we have acquired at long last from Disibodenberg; others, cleared and planted for years support fruit-trees of many varieties, including both cherry and plum. The soils vary widely from place to place, and the wine we have so far produced on our lands is light and fruity, its color remarkably clear. The same vines on the newly acquired lands, with soil that is clearly more acetic, may produce a wine that has even more fragrance, or whose taste remains more substantive when mixed with bitter herbs for medicinal purposes. Our climate and stony riverbanks are favorable, and I am increasingly convinced, any land that goes newly into cultivation should be given to viniculture.

All of this came clear two weeks ago, when Volmar and I sat with all our deeds and maps spread out before us, piecing together our holdings like a gap-toothed puzzle. Many pieces are missing; yet, with each new dowry, there is the real possibility of filling in those gaps here and there, either by receiving pieces as gifts or by using monies received to buy parcels we know to be

contiguous and available. We might in time produce enough good wine on our lands that it could even be a source of income, as I hear of at least one Cistercian house. The success with vines is spoken of everywhere and may in time overshadow the production of the older, Benedictine vineyards. To the West, at Trier, lie the lands held by the Benedictines of St. Matthias and St. Eucharius, to whose houses I have recently sent music in honor of their patron saints.[120] Their lands have produced good wines for centuries, perhaps even since the pagan Romans first took the area, for the habits of Roman soldiers are notorious: they were wild and extreme, and they drank wine and lusted to great excess.

According to St. Benedict's Rule, we learn the wisdom of moderation in all things, that the evil of wine lies in its abuse rather than in its use, for what Christ consecrated for us as his blood in the Eucharist could hardly be evil. A half-pint a day St. Benedict recommends, outside of the sanctified wine we partake from the chalice.[121] Its measure may vary further according to the season, the size of the person, the amount of labor produced, for wine is food as well as drink for our working bodies. Yet we hardly can be said to labor in the fields. Many of the medicinals we have learned to prepare and use constantly are more effective when the herbs are cooked in wine as a tincture; and wine is our best antiseptic for the cleansing of wounds. Even the green vines themselves have their uses. Those pruned out in the early spring are cut into pieces for tying up the main stems of grape vines as well as for training and securing other plants in

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[120]Hildegard wrote a hymn, "Matthias sanctus," for Saint Matthias in Trier. (See HvB Lieder, #72.) For the house of St. Eucharius, she wrote three songs, a Responsory, "O Eucharico columba" and a Sequence, "O Eucharico in laeta via" for their patron saint, and an extremely powerful sequence for St. Maximin (a fourth-century bishop of Trier), "Columba aspexit." (Ibid., #74, 74, and 76.)

[121]See RB, chapter 40.

need of support, for young grape vines are unusually pliable and yet strong by their nature. Their blossoming in June is an unfailing lure to swarming bees.

Across the river, on the East bank of the Rhine, the soil is so congenial to the vines that much is now produced to be sold, and last October and November we witnessed boats loaded with casks of new wine to be sold further to the south. So successful is wine-production in this particular area that the Cistercians at Eberbach, as soon as a hectare of forest can be cleared, have it planted by their lay brothers, who serve as their own vigneron, naturally more productive than random peasantry. So impressive is their production of wine in this way, that they have received more and more benefices of land, some even at great distance from the monastery, where granges serve whole seasons as temporary housing for lay brothers; and I discovered recently that a bundle of new lands were given them by the Archbishop from Mainz.[122]

For ourselves, it is a more risky venture, except for those lands already under cultivation for the grape. Our side of the river has not known a long tradition of growing grapes, and the fineness of taste required for profitable selling depends entirely on the various properties of the soil. The powdered stones we find in our own banks may not be as favorable as the the chalky white marl that sustains such good taste in the mountains of southern Gaul. The same vines planted there, or in Trier, or even directly across the river, will produce grapes that taste very different when planted here, and so will the color and taste of our wine vary. These may be ambitious ideas, but with our numbers always growing,

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[122]See Jean Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine* (Penguin, 1976), pp. 47-55, and Desmond Seward, *Monks and Wine* (NY: Crown, 1979), pp. 61-77 and 51-56.

we have deep need to ripen to a fully secured autonomy.

Like the new Cistercian houses spreading out from Bernard's Citeaux, we seem to be petitioned more and more by young adults, and the character of our novitiate continues a change already underway during the last years at St. Disibode. Whereas I, the youngest of 10 children, was offered at age eight to Jutta, the anchoress at the male monastery of St. Disibode, so that I was entirely formed by the ideals of that woman who nurtured me and by the Rules of the Benedictines of the community that housed us both, how different it is now! Here at St. Rupbertsberg, the head of a family may arrive at our gates offering a young woman in her twenties, and I as abbess find it challenging, difficult, and sometimes nearly impossible to form them.

It is true, several of these women have proved extraordinarily capable; some worldly responsibilities are successfully transferrable. Agathe is proving a skillful cellaress; since I named her just two months ago, nutrition has improved, crops somehow reach us on time from farmers on our tenancies, and there is order for the first time in both kitchen and storage areas. The managing she did on her father's lands at a young age when her mother died, her father unconcerned with the running of the household, is all to our benefit.

For others, having been formed in the world means having acquired worldly values deeply ingrained, perhaps intractable in one or two. If they are then consecrated before these values are rooted out, the ancient ritual of their clothing becomes a sham, simply a way of covering them over, instead of initiating a perpetual inner conversion to God. Lacking that crucial devotion to contemptus mundi, worldly thoughts and desires sharpen to become a continuous form of

temptation. My new prioress, Rikkarda's successor, reports finding clothing and jewels secreted in two straw-filled pallets in the area for novices. And, of course, they are the same two novices who complain that our pallets are not soft enough to afford them decent sleep, the same women who complain about rising at 3 a.m. to sing the Nocturns and Responsories now that ~~M~~atins is in its proper hour for the season. I wonder what will happen when the freezing nights return and how we will get them into their choir stalls then?

Clearly, anticipating problems is a temptation of mine, which I will root out with thanksgiving, for I had today a chance to view with my own eyes these landholdings of ours. Riding out with Volmar as soon as the day's Mass was dismissed, my eyes followed with joy the curved, scalloped ribbons of goldenrod still blooming next to the lavender of asters and of joe pye-weed, fluffy and pale as it matures into its gone-to-seeding stage. Patches of yellow leaves lit many trees, and bold vermilion creepers wound around trunks and threaded through evergreen boughs of our blue-green cedars. The air now is remarkably like clear water; the light, a pale rose. Apple and quince trees support ladders for picking, and grapes are pendulous, of a matte grey-green like weathered copper, ready to be collected in canvas and leather buckets, oaken barrels. The fecundity of this glorious spot of ours, sacred to St. Rupert whose precious bones are buried since the time of Boniface, is just another confirmation of the correctness of our move here, a justification of all the pain and illness it caused me to convince abbot Kuno that it was not willfulness or worldly desire on my part to establish an autonomous community of women, that my visions were the gift of God and fully supported this venture; nay, inspired it from the first.

This afternoon I thought the precise diagonal rows of newly planted wine



grapes spoke eloquently of our own growing culture on this mountain, in contrast to those curved ribbons of wildflowers. Planted, pruned, and fertilized to fecund maturity, they speak of planning, training, and priorities in our lives as opposed to the chaotic sensuality of nature, which I also love.

October 18, 1152

Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist

The colors on our mountainside remind me how little time remains for gathering the last of this year's medicinal plants. Already, the tender perennials have blackened in the first frosts, the last annuals blaze, and even the hardier mints and artemesias are ragged and no longer fit for our insides. Vines that cling to the trees are still brilliant scarlet, some beech trees are still green, while lindens are almost transparently butter-yellow. It is the quality of the light in October that creates this palette--the sun's angle and placement in the sky as it illuminates the last leaves.

St. Luke as physician was the theme of my teaching to the women in chapter today, the subject of my own meditation as well. I tried to impress upon them that wisdom in the soul is necessary for healing the body. I wonder if we will ever have the kinds of facilities for healing the sick that we had at St. Disibode, where the hospice was one of the largest buildings, heated by three ample fireplaces[123]; not many came to our remote hilltop to stay as guests en route to somewhere else, but the sick and ailing found us and took refuge in what healing we could provide, some with torn flesh and some torn in ways less visible, responsive as well to the herbs and tinctures we used, the poultices we made. Jutta encouraged me, and the sights and smells grew less offensive the more skill I de-

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[123]Personal photographs of early stages of excavation at Disibodenberg support this, as well as most recent brochures about Disibodenberg published by its present owner, Baron von Racknitz, under the titles "Kloster Disibodenberg" and "Scivias-Stiftung."

veloped in treating them.[124]

If my women could understand the physician as friend to death, perhaps they could understand St. Luke's vision of the Nunc dimittis--the long loneliness of old Simeon's waiting and, finally, his joy at being able to welcome death peaceably, having seen his hope manifest. They are mostly too young. God knows there is no one to inherit my crozier now that Rikkarda is gone, and I shudder to think of what could happen at my death; I need more thought for these things. Practical matters are at me all the time, and the feast that pulls most for my attention approaches fast. We will try to have all my new songs for St. Ursula on the 21st; those for the Divine Office are already well in hand, though the women balk at the words of my hymn Cum vox sanguinis. They don't understand them. They don't understand them because they haven't experienced divine mysteries on that level.[125] We shall sing the hymn regardless, and we will sing it at both First and Second Vespers. At the night office, the great events of her life will be narrated. I myself will chant the tripartite passio during the second Nocturn; the old sermo, during the third.[126] Not only will these serve as inspiration for the few

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[124]John Riddle, historian of medieval medicine and pharmacology, author of *Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine*, 1985, gives evidence supporting this author's belief that the knowledge conveyed in Hildegard's two scientific works (*Physica* and *Causae et curae*) is largely empirical. In a paper delivered at a conference on Hildegard sponsored by Washington Cathedral in January, 1989, Riddle spoke of Hildegard's time as "apprentice in the dispensary" and gave extensive linguistic evidence for her empirical knowledge of medicine and pharmacology.

[125]See Appendix \_\_\_ for text and translation of hymn for St. Ursula.

[126]According to the *Breviarum Monasticum*, a hymn proper to the feast of a patron saint, or a saint of particular importance to an Order or community (e.g., the Feast of St. Benedict), would generally be used for Vespers; for Lauds, the hymn would come from the Common of the Saints (in the case of Ursula, from the Common of a Virgin Martyr). The life of the saint would be divided among three of the Lectons of the 2nd Nocturn, and a sermon by or pertaining to the life of the

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among my own who have embarked upon their own voyages; they may also quell the current, generalized groundswell of grumbling, and help them all to understand what contemptus mundi could require of any of us.

I fear that what I have so far heard of Elisabeth's visions at Schoneau elaborate details too fantastic for the minds of most, fanning the traffic in relics more than feeding us from the inside or informing us with a special way of knowledge. My visions tell me of mysteries greater than all the combined details of the slaughter of Ursula and her 11,000 companions: passion that is devotion, consummation, and steadfast love. Elisabeth has recently written that she is slandered and misunderstood and looks to me for sisterly support.[127] I can sympathize; nevertheless she is imprudent, without discretio, and I fear she will unwittingly serve those whose coffers overflow from the sale of those beautiful heads and lustrous bones so revered in Cologne. The elaboration of such details says little to illuminate the extraordinary depth of Ursula's experience, or of Ursula's steadfast courage when the forces of worldly men are thrown up against her in jeers and actions.

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[footnote continued]

saint would be divided among three of the Lectons of the 3rd Nocturn in the Matins office. For the origins of this practice, see E. Catherine Dunn, "French Medievalists and the Saint's Play," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, N.S. 6 (1975), pp. 51-62. Dunn cites evidence from the time of the 6th century for "the custom of marking a saint's feast by public recitation of his vita at the Mass of his day" (p.53) as part of the ancient Gallican liturgy. Although this usage was suppressed in most places with the imposition of the Roman rite under Charlemagne, Dunn cites evidence for the resurfacing of the chanted hagiography in the office of Matins by the 10th century. For further development of her thesis, see E. Catherine Dunn, *The Gallican Saint's Life and the Late Roman Dramatic Tradition* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989). For the text of the passio that Hildegard might have read to her nuns, see *The Passion of Saint Ursula (Regnante Domino)*, translated with notes by Pamela Sheingorn and Marcelle Thiebaut (Toronto, Ontario: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1990).

[127]For text of this letter, see Migne, PL, vol. 197, Epistola XLV, 214-216.

But my texts in her honor are everywhere concerned with these matters. And if my women balk at the demands of my new music, it is probably because of its physical and emotional range. Let their boundaries be stretched! Why should we not be the vessels joining heaven and earth, soaring with the highest eagles and dipping down again like old buzzards at the dropped carrion or seed? There are at least five of us in the schola who can produce such sounds and stretch such a line. Let the schola carry my hymn for St. Ursula--an inspired gift of the Most High throughout--and the rest will be responsible only for the short antiphons that frame the Psalms for all the Offices of her feast. Each narrates a small portion of her outward journey, their music is simple, and they are easy to learn. It is not necessary that they all understand, but Mother of God bless me with two or three women who can appreciate what has spoken powerfully through me, so that we can be inspired in our own vows by the mystery and majesty of an Ursula. The cold, lonely going-out required to realize any vision binds me to this woman's story, and her struggle continues the terrible demands that were made on Abraham, on Moses, on all of us forced to go into the loneliest places--like the pelican--in search of the face of God, weighted with our own living bodies and daring to come out with more than ourselves.

Oct. 21, Feast of St. Ursula  
and the 11,000 Virgins

It was glorious, exhausting, and entirely fitting! Never have we had so many people from the town of Bingen for Mass in our church; and today some came even from Cologne to hear our songs for St. Ursula, her story chanted, her life and passion joined, through Christ, in our own humble bodies.

The journey of Ursula is alive on our walls, and the panels glowed fiercely in the light of the scores of candles ensconced beneath them.[128] The same narrative Antiphons we use for the Divine Office function beautifully here as well. We processed from panel to panel as we sang Antiphons and the Psalms they framed; we recounted her journey as a grand procession preceding the Mass itself. Then, after Volmar had chanted the gospel, the Alleluia was sung, and finally came the moment for my gift to her, to Ursula as our most passionate Mother Church, the Beloved in the Song of Songs, the Sponsa Christi, and our consummate exemplar of the woman whose powerful vision, though mocked in the eyes of the world, was strong enough to carry thousands of women on a pilgrimage requiring extraordinary courage. At the last moment, it was I alone who sang the Sequence, the "O Ecclesia", and not the schola, even after the many days of feverish preparation.

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[128]For examples of painted panels built into a church during Hildegard's lifetime, see Ernst Murbach and Peter Heman, *The Painted Romanesque Ceiling of St Martin in Zillis* (New York: Praeger, 1967), in which the theological significance of the arrangement of the ceiling panels is described as well. For examples from the 13th century, see *Norway Paintings from the Stave Churches* (Paris: UNESCO, 1955). Artistic conservatism there accounts for the fact that what was basically an earlier Romanesque architectural tradition in northern Europe was still being used in Scandinavia a century later.

Never mind; it has been sung and heard, and it hallows the inner space, the stone walls of our newly functional church. Her substance, her bits of bone in our reliquary may not be imbedded in our altar, for St. Rupert's bones occupy that place of honor, but her reliquary is exquisite: her vision is deeply engraved in the metal and seven lustrous gems further adorn both front and back.

The Hymn, sung as a choral piece, was ragged, and it was fortuitous that I designated some of the women to sing an organal, drone voice at several of the most difficult points. For this year, we have one more chance to sing the Hymn as a group this evening at Second Vespers. Even I know what a struggle this is, how few of my women can float their voices in the empyrean where the most glorious text lies, where the sound is one of most precious jewels surrounded in gold, like the woman clothed in the sun. It seems the only way I can get the richness here is by having some of them sing a harmonious drone, reinforcing the melody at those intervals sacred to Pythagoras and Boethius, that harmonize the heavenly choirs of angels, perhaps the spheres themselves. The cheironomy for the piece is perhaps distracting them from the wonderful mysteries embodied here; the mystical text should be an inner dance of contemplation, and I would hope that when next year we sing it, the schola can manage without my hand and arm being quite so obtrusive.

The river is always behind my eyes when I listen to the piece with my inner ears. The piece is filled with water, with the water journey, with the blood and water of sacrifice. Rarely do I actually take the time to observe the Nahe, less rarely still the Rhine; nevertheless, it is that sea journey to death that moves the line, far beyond the control of my good right arm, and it is that sense that always fails my women when left to their own devices. Sometimes they are so bloodless,

and I wonder where I am taking them, and whether I am truly going alone, and I continually ask the mother of God for reassurances about my flock, though I know there can be none.

Next comes my own devastating crash of spirits which I plan to avert by working hard on the play of the Virtues. Having placed it on our calendar as part of this Advent-Parousia cycle, its date assigned as December 27, Feast of St. John the Evangelist, I pray it be infused with the sacred spirit of the Fourth Gospel. Our presentation of the Ordo will take the Archbishop completely by surprise, and I pray that it may also be the authentic Word of God. As one by one the female Virtues identify themselves, and array themselves against the powerful forces of Evil embodied in the Devil, the Archbishop and those Prelates who accompany him will begin to grasp the deep spiritual level from which this comes.



October 28, 1152

Feast of Sts. Simon and Jude

The reasons are too obscure to justify more formal investigation. It was Volmar who brought it to my attention, and with his usual diplomacy. No need to name names: suddenly I knew her as an instigator. Volmar insists that the problem is fed by jealousy, and he, after all, is our confessor; but what comes brutally to my attention, finally, now that I am faced with it, is her searing anger. Not that she has expressed anything to me directly. In many ways that would be easier, because it might clarify the problem. Instead, a cauldron of some stinking brew simmers under the surface between us, while superficially she maintains her vow of obedience to perfection.

I suppose I might have been more attentive to the source of the complaints that my women have had over the last two years, but it has been absolutely necessary for me to retain what is positive, and to move forward. I never expected they would remain cheerful in the face of such a difficult beginning. In all of our struggles to civilize the wild mountain terrain we have finally acquired, the physical discomforts we have withstood, and the dogged persistence with which we have had to sing our rounds of Psalms and Offices, day and night in makeshift quarters as the skeleton of our cloister church took shape, I was not surprised by their regular complaints. Given the high-born houses of origin my women have left behind, and the easy assurance of the basic requirements of regular food and shelter for those who had been part of our little community at Disibodenberg before we came here, little wonder that many have been discouraged these two years.

I knew that their discontents were born of fatigue, physical discomfort, and

lack of the secure regularity that sustains the monastic life; and I saw their murmurings as small brushfires, snaking through the undergrowth and occasionally flaring up with great energy as we encountered particular crises. Therefore, the way I have dealt with the fires that have erupted periodically during our new life at St. Rupertsberg has been to contain them and let them die out, at the same time treating the real causes with all of the energy, intelligence, and prayer I could gather, knowing that our stability depended on my women seeing regular, rapid progress as a recognized functioning community.

What had not occurred to me is the idea that one of my own women might be regularly fanning the fires and that--if Volmar is correct--she does it as a kind of spoiler, out of jealousy; and is it then jealousy of my freely-elected, God-given, and extremely lonely authority over the rest? Indeed, my vision for this autonomous women's convent must be greater than any of theirs, as is my recognition of their individual gifts and their best possible expression in the community. Nevertheless, all of our intentions must be in agreement. Together we must abide in faith, praise God, continually praise and petition Him and His Mother to help us to flourish according to the Rule of St. Benedict. Our observance of the Rule must be regular and consistent. My faith must be that it is the hand of God that guides me here and fills me with visions for the instruction of the faithful, that the tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit inform my decisions for our future as St. Benedict's Rule shapes our days.

But my Sister in faith would suggest to them otherwise about my leadership. In my presence, her anger is like ice, though she is supple and animated with the others, as I've observed her in conversation during Recreation time. Her hands darted like swallows when she threaded the complicated lampas weave on the loom,

sketching the pattern on wax tablet in advance of its execution for my approval. For the weaving itself she has chosen the most dexterous and quick to assist in the work, assigning their places in the project and artfully teaching the craft to each of them in turn. In all of these tasks I have encouraged her, and I have allowed her far greater exercise of control over others than I might, genuinely admiring her skill and rewarding her initiative, all in appreciation for the work accomplished for the good of the community.

She was already a young woman when she joined us in our last years at Disibodenberg, and she brought her skills with her. She had learned to weave as a child, at her mother's knee, in her father's baronial house, but she had had no opportunity to exercise this art with us until we began the simple Lenten cloth last winter, on a loom presented as a gift by her family. I myself told her the details I had heard about the imperial alb worn by Barbarossa at his recent crowning, so she was already inspired by that when she had the opportunity to study first-hand the gowns worn by Archbishop Henry and the prelates from Mainz who served with him at the dedication of our church. Anyone visited by the imperial household notices that it is not the impressive strip of gold brocade stretched along the broad hem of Barbarossa's imperial alb--which of course the priests wouldn't wear--that so amazes; rather, it is the fineness of the weave itself, of white linen so smooth and lustrous it could be silk; and so it was with the albs we saw in procession here in May.

Even now I recall the physical flush of excitement I felt when she suggested shortly afterwards that we ourselves weave some fine fabric for clothing the Virtues in the Ordo performance. We compared what we had each observed about the construction of the fine albs of the Prelates. (They were made of very broad

lengths of cloth, so they required few seams.) Some time later, when the weaving was already underway, I discussed the matter of fine albs with Basel during one of his periodic stays at the dispensary. It was he who told me about the beautifully shaped gussets under the arms and the panels of tiny pleats at each side, on the level of the knees for each person, which give perfect freedom of movement for both legs and arms in procession and ritual. He encouraged me to allow her to pursue the project, since it was in such perfect accord with the visions I had had about the clothing of the Virtues.

It was she who enabled us to secure the great quantity of linen thread, which was again a gift from the estate of her family. It was her own idea that the thread remain in its natural, undyed state for the weaving. Only after each garment was sewn would it be dyed, the color for each Virtue a different hue, as I had envisioned it. Creating the iridescent effect of the lampas weave was her own inspiration, threading the loom with one set of warps and wefts for the background while another set formed the pattern. The variation between them produces two different textures, each of which reflect the light differently.[129] Her energy for the task seemed inexhaustible, and I never questioned her activity and dedication. It is only now that I begin to catch the whispered goad behind the complaints of those less quick of hand and mind whom she has instructed for the task:

The Lady Abbess wishes to advance herself in the eyes of the Prelates.

Our Domina wishes to glorify herself in the colors of our toil. Our

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[129]See Rebecca Martin, *Textiles in Daily Life in the Middle Ages* (The Cleveland Museum of Art with Indiana University Press, 1985).

Mother in Christ drives us unmercifully for her own sake, for the sake  
of her own Name...

Is it possible that the whispering is my own sheer exhaustion, allowing the Devil to tempt me again into doubting my own vision? The trials here are endless, and some, like the heartbreak of Rikkarda, and like this, are unanswerable, for the jealousy Volmar observes in her is not of my outer accomplishments, station, or authority, but of my inner spiritual state.

The trial will continue until she yields her quarrel with grace, nor will I succumb to temptation, and the Virtues will be clothed in mantles of great variety, in cloth of fine weave.

Friday, October 31, 1152

Feria [Allhallows' Eve]

The news of Rikkarda's sudden death arrived during the midday meal. It was my turn to read in the refectory, and I had barely begun; but I knew as soon as I heard the sharp sound of the hooves of the messenger's horse on the frozen, rutted road up the mountain that leads to our gate. I may even have known before Lauds, getting up long before the cold dawn with stabbing in every joint, a strong harness of pain around my ribcage, and a stone in my heart. Each circular segment of my throat had a separate aching, and the impulse to moan from each segment far outweighed the desire to sing Lauds, praise Him, or even support my poor bones. Upon hearing the news, whispered hoarsely to me by the exhausted Brother Nicholas who had ridden all day in freezing rain without food in order to deliver the letter from the Archbishop of Bremen--her brother, Hartwig, my enemy--I heard several of my women gasp aloud and realized that my frame had simply gone down under the weight of the news. It was as if I were sinking through the earth. I remember seeing my own hands, suddenly agitated and fluttering like so many sparrows, strangers to my arms and trunk. The low-angled winter light was playing shadowed patterns against the wall closest to the small window where it found entrance. Parts of me disengaged and had no center and flew about; at the same time something vital had gone entirely rigid, had frozen stuck. I felt certain that if I did not make a definite movement, and speak as well, I would find that my body and all my senses had disconnected from me. I would disintegrate like a heap of clay shards. With enormous effort, I found a piece of my voice way under my belly and dragged it up with the suggestion to Brother Nicholas that we walk outside. From my women whispers, buzzings, and a few choked-off sobs pushed my ears as we left the room. In the letter, her

brother attested personally to the fact of her death and informed me that she had made her confession, been anointed with holy water and, "committing herself to the Lord through His Mother and St. John three times in the sign of the cross, confessing the Trinity and the Unity, she died in perfect faith, hope and charity, I am sure, on the 29th of October." [130] I asked only the few questions that befit an abbess, never able to ask the ones that press me--about the small details of how she died, the looks and smells of her adopted monastery, how she looked as Lady Abbess, what it sounded like when she, with her large frame and beautiful movements, tapped her abbatial staff to begin an Office. Did her women's voices respond in sweet, sure arcs of sound? Did their eyes seek her approval, her steady, encouraging, grey eyes, simultaneously deep and piercing? They were always like that.

They were always like that even at Disibodenberg, where she first came as a young adolescent. Our blessed teacher Jutta was still very much alive at the time. I remember walking with Rikkarda during afternoon work period. We were sent to find belladonna and the mushrooms that eased the pains of the two men dying at the time in our dispensary. The infirmarian trusted me to identify mushrooms without error, because my God-given sense of smell and vision had been outstanding in me since childhood. They would not have to fear the toxic and often deadly reaction to the Destroying Angel (*Amanita virosa*) that so much resembles the medicinal variety, because I identified mushrooms on the basis of their

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[130]PL, vol. 197, Epistle X, 161-162. The section of the letter quoted above reads, "et sanctae et pie confessam fuisse, et inunctam oleo sancto post confessionem, habita plena Christianitate, et claustrum tuum ex toto corde lacrymabiliter desiderasse, seque Domino per matrem et Joannem committens, et signo crucis tertio signato, Trinitatem et unitatem confitens in perfecta fide Dei, et spe, et charitate, certi sumus, IV Kalend. Novemb. obiit."

spore patterns as well as the particulars of size, shape, and smell. We walked for a hundred paces in deep silence, searching the ground at our feet, then looking far below to the valley that lay beyond the orchard and the woods, that circled all around our monastery, itself a dome on the top of a domed hillside. It was a shock to walk out of those thick rock walls that contained us in safety and see the almost immediate, steep drop away down the sides of our sanctuary. Only the ribbon of a road that spiraled around through the dense woods to the widely curved meadow below made a kind of winding boundary between us and the rest of the world, between the solidity of the many joined buildings that formed the organized pattern of our community up on the top and the unpredictable, random scattering of a few farm buildings that poked up here and there out of a clearing of meadows thousands of meters below us. The dizziness of the shock recurs. It is deadly. It is death, Mother of God, and there is no medicine.



Saturday, November 1, 1152

Feast of All Saints

The news of her death must have been like a puncture wound to my chest in which the breath escapes, for I feel I am still collapsing in upon myself. I can neither sing nor speak aloud. Luitgard was cantrix for today's Offices and Mass, as she was last evening at First Vespers. I will not cantor Sunday's liturgy either, but will shepherd my strength for night Matins, when we shall honor her directly by singing the Office for the Dead. I had not thought I would live to place her among the souls of the departed.

Matins

Lesson

Job 14, 1-6

Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower; and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state. And dost thou think it meet to open thy eyes upon such an one, and to bring him into judgment with thee? Who can make him clean that is conceived of unclean seed? Is it not thou who only art? The days of man are short, and the number of his months is with thee: thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed. Depart a little from him, that he may rest, until his wished for day come, as that of the hireling.

I was so totally unprepared. She was so young, and so terribly strong. The brutality comes not from death, but from its unexpectedness. It is as if all the righteous and justifiable anger I had been carrying around for so long were the lining of a large pig bladder that had stretched tighter and ever tighter with the passage of time. Now it has burst, and I move in a vacuum.

R. Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death, in that dreadful day, When the heavens and earth are to be moved, When thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.....

Absolve, we beseech thee, O Lord, the soul of thy servant Rikkarda, that, being dead to this world, she may live to thee: and whatever sins she has committed through human frailty, do thou wipe away by the pardon of thy merciful goodness. Through our Lord Jesus Christ.

V. Eternal rest give to her, O Lord.  
R. And let perpetual light shine upon her.  
V. May she rest in peace.  
R. Amen.

November 16, 1152

26th Sunday after Pentecost

Suddenly the symptoms descended. Or so I suppose, because I'm already their too familiar victim, ignorant of exactly when and how they began, frozen into the paralyzing pains all over again. Any stronger pain in my knees will force me to lie flat. The bad taste in my mouth--chalky and dry and foul all the way from my gut--doesn't go away with herbal rinses. A filmy residue collects in each irritated eye and than dries like a hard crust of bread. The eyes itch fiercely. The joints of my fingers are shiny, swollen, and unbearably tender; even holding the stylus as gingerly as possible is extremely painful, and the movements and impressions I record on the wax are nearly indecipherable. Turning my head becomes unbearable, my lower back pulls more and more, sitting is terrible, and going from sitting to standing is worse. The closer to the ground I remain the better; were it not for my knees, a position of continual prayer would be safest.

Quick winter sunset, now it is pitch dark, and the decision must be made: someone else must cantor Vespers and Compline today; they must bring me straw wrapped in pillow-cloths, heated coals and irons. I will attack this wracking body with warmth, prop it into a manageable position, and sing myself alone into the evening of the world.

The bells tell me the Offices have been sung. My candles, though they sputter in the cold wind that leaks into the room, are still lighted, the shadows a dancing comfort bobbing and turning on the hangings that line my walls. I begin to sense the possibility of sinking into my own inner source, to see the flicker of the Shadow of the Living Light. Not that it ever goes away entirely, but I do

have to allow it to come fully into my awareness, clear away the debris that hides it from me, whether worldly responsibilities, nagging personal complaints, harsh criticism, or even the confusion of the chaotic sounds that have surrounded us for over a year here as basic shelters are fixed and fitted out.

Intense pain can also obscure it, though I have often gotten through the pain to the light. When that happens, it is as though I have first to go through my physical body, pain by wracking pain, forgetting neither the nausea nor the tight catches in my breathing. Thus catalogued and acknowledged, located, joined and mapped like a pilgrimage, the physical symptoms convert themselves to sounds, jaggedly separate and screeching at first, each crying out for its hearing to predominate as I scan them. Then, if I push on with this prayerful search, these catalogued sounds, the roaring taxonomy of pains begins to coalesce, to symphonize itself, coming into a droning, but strangely fluid harmony of such an arrangement that the Shadow of the Living Light melts the various shapes into swirling building blocks, sculpting out of sound and light a brilliant architecture.

And then the crystalline voice emerges out of the landscape of articulated, moving parts. It is the voice of Wisdom, she who has been with God from the beginning, from before the Fall, from beneath the Day Star. And her voice tells me that the time of mourning is past, the time of righteous anger no longer necessary, for God Himself has declared His passion for His best-beloved and taken her against the snares and temptations of the world that were trying to claim her, those that promoted worldly ambition and simony, those that tempted her into disobedience.

The Voice of Wisdom swells to bell-like resonance. It fills my head and

beyond, to reverberate from the candlelit walls that enwomb me here. It is remarkable to see in this light how Rikkarda is loved by the Beloved. All those who loved her in her bodily nobility, and even I, in my gratitude, my dependence on her human competence and diligent support, I, in my battle with the lords of the world clothed as prelates and clerics who took her from me, we are all as nothing compared with the powerful embrace of the King who had chosen her out from the very beginning, whose love is so fierce in its heat that infused circles of boiling light rotate around her within a giant aureole. As beautiful in death as in life, she rises ravished and ravishing in the encircling light, until she merges with the path of the sun. Poor golden sun, whose jealous splendour couldn't leave her behind for a fading moment of night or even a single shadow of dusky sunset, but must carry her with him to the ends of the earth and beyond to the East and the gates of Paradise itself! There he plants her, deep tree in the garden, roots nuzzling into the earth, glinting water lapping in hungrily to nourish while branches above flourish fruit, leaves, and cascading flowers in fecund bowers of perpetual bridal splendour.

November 23, 1152

Last Sunday after Pentecost

and

Feast of St. Clement

Meditating again upon her brother Hartwig's letter brings consolation now. Strange that I see and understand things in it today that are so different from the pain and shock of the news brought hastily from that ambitious prelate in Bremen nearly a month ago. Then, I was struck helpless by the fierce untimeliness of her death, and I suffered deeply from the knowledge that rankling differences had been left hanging between Rikkarda and me (not to speak of the anger I harbored against Hartvig). I could barely hear or read, and then only with relief that she did not die unshriven; that she had been confessed and anointed in perfect faith.[131] Now I understand even that she loved us, loved us and intended to see us again. His letter says:

So I ask you with all my power, if I am worthy to ask, that you love her as much as she loved you. And if she seems to have failed in any way--since this was due to me, not to her--that at least you consider the tears she shed for having left your convent, tears that many people witnessed. And if death had not prevented her, she would have come to you--the permission had only just been given.[132]

Lord knows what I am to make of it all, how much Hartvig can ever again be trusted when his worldliness is common knowledge; even now he tries to control those things that he is not fit to touch.

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[131]See note 130 above.

[132]This section of the letter translated by Peter Dronke in WWMA, p. 158. The Latin text of the letter in its entirety is found in PL, vol. 197, pp. 161-162. I agree with Dronke's opinion that the clause "et nisi mors impedivisset, vix habita licenti te venisset," suggests a projected visit to St. Rupertsberg, not the giving up of her position and a permanent return, which has been suggested by some translations of this letter.

Still, something is required of us. The Introit we sang for the Mass today speaks clearly of bringing scattered exiles home[133]; the Gospel chants with terrible surety the coming of the Last Days, the chaos at the end of Time, before the Parousia.[134] It is urgent that we do what is fitting for her. In five days, on November 28, just between this last Sunday of Pentecost and the First Sunday of Advent, it will be the prescribed thirty days from the day of her death, and I will ask my dear Volmar to do a Requiem with me, for Rikkarda.

Had we her precious body and blood at St. Rupertsberg, if, at the end of the Absolution, we could bear her dear body aloft among us, process her down to our own cemetery as we did with Matilda, our last canticle would be accompanied by the few winter birds--hawks, crows, and a single owl--that remain! Matilda we bore proudly among us to the happy carolling of our bells, all the way down to the verdant June richness of the cemetery, centered on the thorny hawthorn blooming deep rose, all of us contributing our sung prayers and handfuls of sun-warmed soil to her resting place. Rikkarda's Requiem will be different: stark and bodyless, but of great beauty and presence.

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[133]Introit for last Sunday after Pentecost (usually the 24th, but, not for the year 1152, according to the dating of Easter on March 30): Jeremiah 29: 11-14.

[134]Matthew 24: 15-35.

November 28, 1152

Feria

From Abbess Hildegard of St. Rupert of Bingen to the Marchioness von Stade:

As you know, it has been the custom with us to celebrate the Requiem Mass at the time of burial, and on the third, 7th, or 30th day following the death or burial. In consideration of the day of burial of your beloved daughter, Rikkarda, our Sister in Christ and lately elected Abbess of Bassum in the diocese of Bremen, falling on October 31, 1152, when news reached our convent walls through a letter sent by her brother and your beloved son, Hartvig, Archbishop of Bremen, we remembered her and all the faithful departed in the singing of the Office for the Dead in Matins early in the morning of Monday, November 3rd, while the night was still its course.[135] In addition, we have celebrated today, since it is the 30th day after her death, the full Requiem Mass for the soul of the same dearly departed daughter. Fr. Volmar, whom you know, chanted the Prayer of Absolution, and

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[135]As Jungmann points out (*The Early Liturgy*, 1959, 142-145), liturgical practices for dating memorials for the dead go back to the earliest days of the Church and are pre-Christian and Oriental in origin, having to do with popular beliefs about the time that lapses between death and the separation of the soul. Since the Fathers of the Church were unsuccessful in expunging these beliefs, the commemorative days were Christianized: the third day is in keeping with the Resurrection, as is the 7th; the 30th (as opposed to the 40th of Ascension) is in keeping with the number of days of mourning observed after the deaths of Moses and Aaron. We cannot be sure of the date of the burial of Rikkarda, only of her death, and that certain preparations would have been required for liturgical celebration of the death and burial of an abbess. If she were buried two days after death, the third-day commemoration would have fallen on November 2nd, the Feast of All Souls, which was probably included in the calendar at St. Rupertsberg by this time, its observance having been regularized among the Benedictines by Odilo of Cluny in 1148; since in the year 1152 that Feast fell on a Sunday, the commemoration of Rikkarda and all the faithful departed would have been made on November 3rd.



I, the Responsory, with the rest of the choir in full attendance, believing as we do in the strength of our combined prayers and the efficacy of sacramental Absolution for the aid of the soul of the departed. We also further wish to inform you of our intention of dedicating to her our presentation of the Ordo virtutum, a Play of the Virtues, concerning the journey of a Soul, to be presented in our cloister church on the Feast of John the Evangelist, December 27, following the Office of Lauds and preceding the Mass of the Day. We expect the Prelates of Mainz and other official guests to be with us on that occasion, and your presence would be most welcome.

(to be copied and sent on good vellum)

From Abbess Hildegard of St. Rupert of Bingen to Fr. Basel of St. Gereon:

Two varieties of beauty I send from the Requiem we did today for Rikkarda, one is beauty of movement and sound; the other is visual. Of sound and movement, first: the bells were simply beautiful, three of my women pulling with all of their strength, and then having at one point to withhold and ground each other by the waist, as the momentum of those great clanging weights threatened to catapult them into the vault of the tower itself. For visual beauty, picture the steady light of twenty-two candles surrounding the empty catafalque, Volmar at the one end and I at the other. As the Responsory after the absolution, perfectly resonating the theme of light from the "Ego sum resurrectio et vita" of the Communion, I sang our Responsory for a Virgin, "O Nobilissima viriditas," which you may not have heard though it is an early one, and which I have even tried to

notate here:[136]

You most glorious greenness,

You are rooted in the sun

And out of the dazzling brightness of the clearest day

you shine forth in a wheel

Which no earthly excellence comprehends;

You are encircled, embraced by the divine mysterium.

¶ You blush like the dawn and you burn like a flame of the sun.

You are encircled, embraced by the divine mysterium.[137]

I am content that her soul is planted among us. I ask that you join with us for the performance, given in her memory, of the Ordo, which we will do on the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, as planned.

(to be copied and sent on used vellum)

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[136]Traditionally, following the Mass for the Dead, the celebrant and those serving him go to the bier, or to an empty catafalque if no body is present. A crucifer stands at the head, the priest at the foot, where he delivers the Prayer of Absolution. The cantor then intones the great Responsory, "Libera me"; however, the "Libera me" was not fixed in this place after the Requiem Mass until the 14th century but was used in the Office for the Dead, nor could I find it in any of the medieval Mass MSS I consulted for this study, including even the 13th-century Missal Verdun 759, which represents German usage just after the time of Hildegard. In such circumstances, the use of Hildegard's own composition, a Responsory common to Virgins, would seem appropriate. Its text, like those in place for the Requiem, is built around the themes of light and mystery, but adds the characteristic presence of greenness--perhaps even evergreenness--as an expression of Paradise. The mystical figure becomes a cosmic tree, then a burning bush, enflamed and illuminated by the orb of the sun.

[137]O nobilissima viriditas/quae radicas in sole,/et quae in candida serenitate lucet in rota,/quam nulla terrena excellentia comprehendit,/tu circumdata es amplexibus divinorum mysteriorum.¶ Tu rubes ut aurora et ardes ut solis flamma.

December 7, 1152

Second Sunday in Advent

I know the grace has been given to me to praise consecrated Virginity in song, and I begin to see the subtle varieties that can be achieved musically. We have done songs for the Virgin, for Ecclesia, and Sapientia.[138] For Ursula we have this year done an entire set of narrative Antiphons that tell the saint's life, with a Hymn and two Responsories for the Offices of her Feast Day, and a long Sequence for the Mass of the Day in which we behold the majesty of Ursula and her vision mediated through the iconic figure of Ecclesia clothed in the four elements.[139] The more I enter into the the mystery of her Vision, the more subtlety is required of the music as well as of the text. When I write a Hymn on this level of experience, it is not possible simply to repeat the music stanza after stanza, as most have done, because the text is always growing and changing. Nor is the form of the Sequence as simple and straightforward as others may have it. In my Sequence for St. Ursula, there may indeed be special inner relationships between each pair of half-strophes, but that relationship is never one of simple repetition. The more extended a piece becomes, the more complex the inner relationships. I see this more clearly as my play of the female Virtues grows towards completion: without any of the formal suggestions of liturgical pieces like Responsory, Antiphon, Hymn, or Sequence, its design and forward movement

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[138]See HvB Lieder, #3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 56, 57, 62, 63, 67, 68, 70, and 71.

[139]The opening stanza of the Sequence for St. Ursula: "O Ecclesia, your eyes are like sapphire,/Your ears like the mountain of Bethel;/Your nose is a column of incense and myrrh,/And your mouth is the sound of abundant waters." In Latin: "O Ecclesia, oculi tui similes saphiro sunt/et aures tuae monti Bethel,/et nasus tuus est sicut mons myrrhae et thuris,/et os tuum quasi sonus aquarum multarum."

depend increasingly on the interplay between the developing text and its music. Now that we progress with the depiction of the 16 Virtues and their Queen in the *Ordo virtutum*, I am challenged to discover further ways of varying the music in order to differentiate the many characters in a progressively dramatic confrontation of considerable length.

The life of St. Ursula is very much alive to me. It has been real in my heart since I first heard her noble story many years ago and learned about the Virgins consecrated to her name in Cologne. Her history has existed in the Sanctorale of our tradition for as long as I have known it, and the ripening of my own spiritual understanding was the main prerequisite for praising her in new music. The genesis of the *Ordo* material is different. The idea of the struggle between the Devil, as the force of Evil, and the female Virtues first presented itself to me with the last of the Scivias visions.[140] Until our arrival here at St. Rupertsburg, the material was visually rather flat, its sounds were sparse and dry. But our practice as a community in these extraordinarily demanding circumstances has given an outer habitus to the stark encounter. It has proved a real locus for fleshing out what was already there, only in skeletal form. As I was able to understand the Virtues in the way that the root meaning of the language so richly provides--not just as allegorical Virtues as opposed to Vices, but each one as virtus, a particular potency--their individual sensibilities began to emerge in my visions as their sounds caught my inner ear.

Although spiritual depth is always an issue in creation, my progress with the

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[140]See n. 81 of June 5 entry, above, regarding texts of musical material set down by Hildegard as part of Scivias visions between 1147-1150.

Ordo virtutum has been somehow more dependent upon the outer events of my human experience than were any of the liturgical songs. Once Basel had convinced me of the validity of notating the music that sang through me, once I had the opportunity to see as well as hear it, new possibilities suggested themselves having little to do with solmization, ecclesiastical modes, or the hexachords. A simple musical idea had its own shape, acquired a slightly different shape with simple variation, proliferated to take on yet a more elaborate shape, but still retaining within its new form the original germ. In the same way a kernel first receives moisture and soil, swells and sends down roots, as a single pair of simple leaves emerge in the exact shape of the planted kernel. Next, pairs of leaves emerge (on a strengthening stem) that look quite different from the original pair, and finally buds and blossoms emerge among the leaves, blossoms all the while carrying in their centers the fruits that will replicate the shape of the original kernel.[141] So the phrases of my melodies develop, all the while being modified by the suggestions of the particular words of the texts: if blood flows or water falls, the shape of the melody itself will be so informed. In the case of my new Magnificat Antiphon for St. Ursula, emanating from the cascading of salvific blood from divinity through humanity, it is nearly as though the words of the text themselves paint the sounds in their own shapes.

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[141]For a discussion of Hildegard's utilization of a kind of formal variation principle in her musical composition, see Appendix "Hildegard's Music: Through-Composition in an Oral Tradition."

Finally, there is for me a new understanding of the role of deepened earthly convictions, my loves and angers, admirations and disgusts. For so long I ignored them, tried to overcome them, became ill of them, trying to control them lest they betray or burst me with their strength. Now I see how they too can be tuned, powerful tools for Beauty. Nowhere has this been clearer than in the central song and response between Castitas and the Virtues,[142] a piece that grew out of my struggle to understand Rikkarda's seeming betrayal and the shock of her untimely death. My feeling now stands poised, transformed as the turning point of the entire play.

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[142]Compare the two musical exmples above; one, the Antiphon for St. Ursula, "O rubor sanguinis;" the other, "O Virginitas," a song of Castitas in the *Ordo virtutum*. Both songs present immortality through an image that Hildegard takes from the plant world that she knew so well. In the Antiphon, St. Ursula is the flower that can never be felled by the evil blast of winter, which governs the natural cycle. Her immortality is assured by the shedding of her blood, touched by divinity at the time of the consummation of her great love. Her sanctified blood flowed from a great height, just as the blood of Christ flowed when his side was pierced, and it flowed down from the height of the cross. Ursula unites the heavenly and divine realms through her sanctified blood. In the song of Castitas, immortality is assured through more explicitly sexual consummation: "O Virginitas, you remain within the royal bedchamber./You burn with such sweetness in the embraces of the King/when the Sun irradiates through you/so that your noble flower never falls./O royal virgin, you will never know the shadow that fells the dying flower." (O virginitas, in regali thalamo stas. O quam dulciter ardes in amplexibus Regis, cum te sol perfulget, ita quod nobilis flos tuus numquam cadet. O virgo nobilis, te numquam inveniet umbra in cadente flore.) In both songs, because of the language Hildegard has specifically chosen, the flower carries the sexual fecundity of the Song of Songs on the one hand, and the divinity of Christ (and sometimes, by extension, of His Mother) on the other. In the play, the image expressed by Castitas is further expanded by the Virtues, who continue: "The flower in the meadow falls in the wind, rain splatters it. O Virginitas, you remain in the music of the heavenly subjects [beings]: you are the tender flower that never grows dry." (Flos campi cadit vento, pluvia spargit eum. O Virginitas, tu permanes in symphoniis supernorum civium: unde es suavis flos qui numquam aresces.) I believe that both the Magnificat Antiphon for St. Ursula--whose text is entirely different from all the rest of the narrative Antiphons for that Feast--and the "O Virginitas" song and its extension by the Virtues, were written in response to the death of Rikkarda. Neither is found in any form in the pre-1151 lyrics of the 13th Vision of the Scivias.

December 14, 1152

3rd Sunday in Advent

Today I was told tearfully by Christina, one of the best among us, that my expectations are too high. I am too demanding; her instruction in the novitiate was not sufficient to handle the material I have given her to learn for the Ordo virtutum. It was not a case of her disobedience. She simply broke down, and when I ordered a private conference with her during the afternoon, it all came pouring out. I had thought that giving her some scribal tasks would be good for all of us, keeping track of expansions I have made in the play as we approach the performance. Her skill with recording the music in neumes has sharpened as Basel has provided me with more examples of notation for her to see, and her facility to read texts has grown as well. It is not true that I expect all of them to be able to read before they are clothed, but they must be literate in this tradition, which means they must be capable of making their vows in knowledge. They must have knowledge of the Rule and of the Psalms; the Vulgate must be their familiar, at least in the texts of the Office Antiphons and the choral Propers we sing for Mass. In addition, I expect of the choir nuns that they have a strong desire for--if still burgeoning understanding of--what it means to enter into liturgical time, in order to be sure enough of a vocation before engaging with the Archbishop in the ancient Ceremony of the Consecration of a Virgin.

Perhaps my expectations are too high after all, for I think it not enough if we only experience divinity when we eat His body and drink His blood. The experience needs to be part of our own bodies: we must know the sanctity of the blood we ourselves shed. Nor is extreme fasting a correct practice, either as proof of piety, or as the assured pathway to union with the divine. Women who

habitually starve themselves for days prior to the monthly Eucharist and fall into deep ecstasy when they receive the Host in their peeling, hungry lips should better attend to some balance in their lives.[143] I would rather their contemplation include sufficient knowledge of their own bodies so they became aware that one result of their excessive fasting is to prevent the monthly flowing of their own lifegiving blood, that they become brittle and dry, unreceptive to growth of any kind.

It is my intention for them that my professed nuns learn to step into the ever-present liturgical time with each of the eight sung Offices; that we anchor ourselves there with each individual Psalm, Antiphon, and Canticle we sing at each Office, every day. And so we invoke the divine presence by singing directly to the holy ones. In our songs of praise, we address them as "you," not only as "he" or "she." When I write a sacred song for St. Disibode, for Wisdom, for Ursula, or for the Virgin, I both directly invoke your name and address you, just as in the old "O Antiphons" of Advent that lead us through the week preceding the Nativity. "O radix jesse," we sing, "O domina mundi," "O Sapientia," so that we step out of own limited time into their ever-present time with our senses fully alive. Rather than starve ourselves, we must nourish ourselves to the task. In so doing, we too fulfill the prophecies of the ancient patriarchs and prophets. We grow on the same sacred tree and recognize one another by our gifts as well as being present to one another.[144]

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[143]For Hildegard's views about fasting and excess, see n. 113, p. 83 above.

[144]Hildegard's *Ordo virtutum* opens:

Patriarchs and Prophets: Who are these who look like clouds?

Virtues: O holy ones of old, why do you marvel at us? The word of God  
grows bright in the form of man, and thus we shine with him,

[footnote continued]



The real problem for Christina is not her role as my musical scribe. It is in singing a part that was conceived and nurtured with Rikkarda in mind; but she doesn't know that, nor will I tell her. In the end, Christina will sing the role and sing it well, observing the seasonal loss of greenness as inevitable loss and renewal. It is I who grapple with the deeper meaning of loss, with an innocence no longer available, and of what is possible in its stead.

In the beginning all creation was verdant,

flowers blossomed in the midst of it;

later, greenness sank away.

And the champion 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...'

What seems most impossible is to let life come when our wounds are all stinking. I dread what more will be demanded, what else could be taken away, snatched from our care and the functioning of a whole community. There is little possibility for being available to grace without protection from such deep wounds. There is little possibility for balance or stability without protection from deep wounds. I dread the unpredictable return of those occasions when half of my field of vision

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[footnote continued]

building up the limbs of his beautiful body.

Patriarchs & Prophets: We are the roots, and you, the branches, fruits of the living eye, and grew up in its shadow. (translation Peter Dronke, 1981, Latin text: Patriarche et Prophete: Qui sunt hi, qui ut nubes?/Virtutes: O antiqui sancti, quid admiramini in nobis? Verbum dei clarescit in forma hominis, et ideo fulgemus cum illo, edificantes membra sui pulcri corporis. Patriarche et Prophete: Nos sumus radices et vos rami, fructus viventis oculi, et nos umbra in illo fuimus.)

suddenly disappeared, blackened and negated, torn from me as if out of its own existence.[145] This makes me like those ignorant sailors who fear falling off the edge of the earth, as if the universe were a sharp-angled square rather than an egg.[146] Even I can see the rounded way things present themselves on the horizon as they approach our view.

'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.'[147]

I bleed, and I bleed internally. The river of life goes on, and the worst wounds are the internal ones, those that threaten to fester because they have no outlet. To expose the wounds to the possibility of mockery means giving voice to the blood, allowing my blood to sing.

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[145]For schematic representation of such migrainous phenomena and detailed descriptions, see Oliver Sacks, *Migraine*, (Berkeley: Univ Cal Press, 1985) pp. 59-69.

[146]See "The Cosmic Egg" illumination in *Scivias*, for Hildegard's notion of the shape of the universe during this period of her life.

[147]This and the preceding quote from Hildegard's *Epilogue to Ordo virtutum*. Translation by Peter Dronke, 1981: Latin text: *In principio omnes creature viruerunt,/in medio flores floruerunt;/postea viriditas descendit./Et istud vir preliator vidit et dixit:/Hoc scio, sed aureus numerus nondum est plenus./Tu ergo, paternum speculum aspice:/in corpore meo fatigationem sustineo,/parvuli etiam mei deficiunt./Nunc memor esto, quod plentiudo que in primo facta est/aescere non debuit,/et tunc in te habuisti/quod oculus tuus numquam cederet/usque dum corpus meum videres plenum gemmarum./Nam me fatigat quod omnia membra mea in irrisionem vadunt./Pater, vide, vulnera mea tibi ostendo.*

December 24, 1152

Eve of the Nativity

Prayer and thanksgiving are impossible while my mind is so distracted with preparations for our presentation of the *Ordo virtutum* on the Feast of St. John the Evangelist. Now that we are no longer under the protection and authority of Abbot Kuno at Disibodenberg, it is I who must take the full responsibility for deciding, as abbess, what it is we want to manifest as a community, and to whom. Whether or not the Archbishop is supportive of our intentions, mine must be clear. Each time we approach a confrontation with the world, each time I know I have created a situation in which my women must confront the world and its values--whether it is in the form of a retinue of clerics or a group of poor townspeople--I am once more facing the intertwining issues of enclosure and stability.[148]

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[148]For an excellent discussion of the historical complexity of the meaning of enclosure for women, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg's "Strict Active Enclosure and its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca. 500-1100) pp. 51-86, in *Distant Echoes* (Cistercian Publications, 1984). Schulenburg points out that, although it was not until 1298 that Boniface VIII decreed "universal enclosure for women," the practice had a long, and sometimes inconsistent, history. Particularly relevant to Hildegard's situation is a document of reform written by Idung of Prufening, a twelfth-century Cistercian monk in Germany. Beginning his argument for differences in the rule of enclosure for the two sexes with the usual premise concerning the relative weakness of women, he says "the feminine sex...has four formidable and declared enemies. Two are within the sex itself: lust of the flesh and frivolous feminine inquisitiveness. Two are without: the casual lechery of the masculine sex and the wicked envy of the devil. To these are added [the fact] that a woman can lose her virginity by violence--a thing which in the masculine sex nature itself prevents...". He goes further: "[Benedict] wrote no rule for consecrated virgins nor was it necessary to write any, because in those times monasteries of virgins existed only under the guardianship of abbots. And with good reason! It is not expedient for that sex to enjoy the freedom of having its own governance--because of its natural fickleness and also because of outside

[footnote continued]

Although, "In Christ is neither male nor female,"[149] the fact is that the practice of enclosure is different for consecrated virgins than for professed monks, and St. Benedict did not address the issue in his Rule. We know what St. Paul, the Church Fathers, Caesarius of Arles have said about the inherent weakness of women, and this would seem to require rules different from men. We know that, in the world, women's weakness make them subject to violation by men, and their lack of education prevents them from teaching or otherwise exercising moral authority. But in Christ is neither male nor female; therefore our vows of perpetual Virginité set us apart from women in the world. Our vows should accord us certain strengths and privileges, opportunities for education and appreciation of Beauty. And what about the abbess of the community herself and her ability to exercise her responsibilities? It would seem that in some cases she needs the freedom guaranteed by autonomy, free from subjection to the wishes of an abbot. Letters come from heads of convents, desperate for my advice. Often what she is really asking is whether to leave her responsibility and go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem or--at another extreme--to become a solitary anchoress. Surely, some women as well as men are called to go on pilgrimage. And I myself see that the time may

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[footnote continued]

temptations which womanly weakness is not strong enough to resist;" cited in Schulenberg, pp. 62 & 63. Hildegard would have been in agreement with the first and, even, with a good deal of the second of these statements. But in her solution to the problem lies a world of difference from the consistently negative approaches of the male clergy who had written about it, and her insistence on autonomy is unique among the women of her time.

[149]St. Paul's dictum "In Christ..." is of critical importance to Hildegard, owing to her beliefs about the sexes, which are clear throughout her writings, both visionary and physiological-psychological. They have been discussed at length by such scholars as Barbara Newman, Peter Dronke, and Bernhard Scholz, addressing her dualistic view of human nature. In fact, she plays upon the notion that women are so much the weaker sex: when she is criticizing the laxity or abuses of the (male) clergy, she points to the "womanish" times in which those men find it hard to accept their natural responsibility in leadership; and she develops with artistic irony the idea that "a poor, untaught woman" is the more accessible instrument of God, who loves us in our weakness.

come when I am called upon, not by the world, but from within, to teach by preaching to others, men as well as women, in monasteries and cathedral chapters. Thus far, I have answered the letters from the women by advising them to stay with their responsibilities, to tend to their flocks, not because of enclosure but because of the vow of stability.

The Rule of St. Benedict is perfectly clear on the importance of stability. For Benedictines, vows of chastity and poverty are not sufficient for community. Stability is crucial. It is the vow that Rikkarda violated in going to another house, against my wishes and judgment. Not that living in a stable community is the only way to live a religious life, but it is the only way to do it as a Benedictine. From the earliest times, Christians have gone off to the desert to live eremetical lives of prayer; but I believe that living in community is of a higher order. Already in the fourth century, St. Jerome indicated this in his letter to Eustochium, which I read to my women.[150] He described the three different kinds of monks living in Egypt, for he was at that time a traveler, and he made it clear that those living as cenobites, in community, were of a higher order. He himself lived a life of great service to the world, mastering strange languages, translating all we have of the word of God for our Vulgate Bible, was teacher of holy women and friend to educated widows--but ended his fruitful life leading a community of monks, in Bethlehem.

Not only do we live together in a community, as did St. Jerome in the end, we also follow a Rule of great wisdom and moderation, conceived and written down

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[150]Written in 384; Migne PL, vol. 22, 34.

by blessed Benedict of Nursia. The Rule we live by today first bound Benedict at Monte Casino, and also his dear sister, St. Scholastica. It prescribes the order of our work, the *opus dei*, even the number of psalms we sing for each of the eight Offices. It describes the nature of each job I assign, whether cellaress, portress, prioress, or sacristan. It requires periods of total silence, the daily reading in the refectory as we eat. It demands of us the vows of poverty, chastity, and stability. There remain some things not spelled out by St. Benedict. The abbot of each community must be the decision-maker for the issues that remain, and it is a part of why I insisted with such dogged certainty on leaving St. Disibode with my women: obedience to Abbot Kuno is no longer required of me, and when he asks me for liturgical songs for their patron saint, I do it out of Charity, not obedience.

Although it is perfectly true that women are weaker than men, we are set apart in the religious life. Our vows protect us. In Christ is neither male nor female. We are not subjected to the rule of husbands, the mortal dangers of childbirth, or the physical terrors I see reflected in the the frightened eyes of the townswomen of Bingen. As abbess, I am the arbiter for the issues not clarified by the Rule, and I depend for guidance on my understanding of the vow of stability. In the case of Rikkarda, my obedience to the Archbishop of Mainz was forced upon me in violation of that guide. In truth, there are still differences between the religious life for men and for women, and to sort them all out in detail would require that I write my own Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict.[151]

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[151] Hildegard did write a Commentary, using as the occasion a request made of her by the Convent of Hunniensis. For the Latin text, see PL, vol. 197, 1053-1066. For a good English translation, see Rev. Hugh Feiss, OSB, "Explanation of the Rule of Benedict," *Vox Benedictina* 7.2 (Apr., 1990): 117-58.

The complexity of these issues for an autonomous community of women like ours at St. Rupertsberg is nearly unprecedented, and, now that I hear rumors that full and absolute enclosure for women may be mandated by papal bull, I am of two minds. Enclosure for women has been the practice from the days of the earliest groupings of consecrated virgins. Understood from within, it protects our time and physical selves, our attention to contemplation, to learning and practicing psalmody, to singing praise, which is after all our vocation. Should it be imposed unilaterally from Rome, it could prevent our serving the bodies and souls of both women and men. I fear some of the consequences. My own medical skills and spiritual gifts serve well those who have climbed the steep road to our gate. My need to oversee physically what our landholdings actually comprise, especially since we are so new, is not to be discounted. Last but not least, there are contacts that are sources of knowledge for us that require some regular comings and goings: inspired writings of men such as Bernard of Clairvaux or Rupert of Deutz, the long conversations I've shared with dear Basel of Cologne, who encourages me to notate my music and speak my prophecies to other communities.

We do not attend synods; we are already cut off from the possibility of sending representatives from among us to visit the foundations with great libraries or holdings of works of art. Letters are important links of communication, and eventually we need a working scriptorium within our own walls, to copy what is most valuable, most beautiful, most elusive to remember. Like my visions. Is it ambition in me that so desires this possibility? My mind sometimes feasts on the thought--the powders, colors, inks from the East, the bits of lapis and gold that could set down in gleaming illuminated paintings the experience that floods my brain in the Shadow of the Living Light. There is a way in which the experience is all wordless, and squeezing it into the thousands of words I extract sucks me

dry.

O magnum mysterium![152] Tonight we celebrate the coming forth of our Saviour through the royal gate, and it is my great joy that townspeople from Bingen can flock to our midnight Mass this year, that guests will arrive for the Ordo on the 27th. The consecration of our virginity is our sanctified power, our protection, and our opportunity to live educated, informed, spiritual lives. We can protect ourselves with walls of ritual that allow us to express our fervent longing for the rightful Bridegroom in sensuous color and song. So long as we live our lives in the spirit of *contemptus mundi*, it should not be necessary that physical walls of stone be builded by strangers to our lives. Let us be our own keepers of the gate.

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[152]The text of the fourth Responsory in the second Nocturn of Christmas Matins, although it is not one of the "O Antiphons," is the only text on that day to retain that characteristic opening, discussed in Appendix --. It directly addresses the divine mystery itself: "O magnum mysterium, et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum, jacentem in praesepio: \*Beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Christum. V. Ave, Maria, gratia plena: Dominus tecum. \*Beata... (O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger: \*Blessed is that Virgin, whose womb deserved to bear Christ our Lord. V. Hail, Mary, full of grace: the Lord is with thee. \*Blessed...)



December 27, 1152

Feast of St. John, Evangelist  
and Apostle

Until the first sounds of our singing--and even for a few seconds afterwards, until my concentration was entirely focused--I expected to encounter the fierce gaze of Basel in the cloister church. I can only guess that his absence was due to some sudden incapacity; as recently as Christmas Day, I received his message assuring us how expectantly he anticipated being with us for the Ordo, and how he was at the instant rejoicing with shepherds and all believers in the Great Mystery surrounding us.[153] He of all people would most deeply have understood the complex perfection in the intertwining of religious celebration, particular Feast, and climax of a particular Season in which the performance of the Play of the Virtues found its meaning. In the apocalyptic vision of St. John, the great war between Good and Evil manifests itself in the most cosmic terms--in seals, scrolls, beasts, and natural cataclysms far beyond rational imagining. And yet, unless one is truly the painter with the entire firmament for a canvas, or the angel floating in the empyrean who is privy to all the heavenly harmonies and to the spheres as well, such powerful visions, as they come from the Creator, are as likely to strike us dumb, blind our eyes, or seal our lips for ever after. The only remedy for those of us who wait zealously, our ears so painfully enlarged through Fear of God, is to be instructed by the Prologue to St. John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word..." as Basel emphatically reminded me, with some

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[153]See n. 152, above.

impatience, in conversation after conversation.[154]

I pray that his person is not in danger, and I deeply regret his absence from the faithful and the watchful at our performance today. What I could not have foreseen, but what finally became clear in performance, is the extent to which each one became the Virtue she portrayed in the *Ordo virtutum*. More than anything else, it was in the nature of the music each woman sang, I think. I hadn't really planned it that way, for I only received what I heard with my inner ear; and, as I taught them the music, the difficulty of stumbling and repeating, then again stumbling and repeating, precluded my being able to hear the consistency of the music for each Virtue. *Humilitas*, for example, sings the melodies most heavily embroidered: the decorations around the main tones are extremely complex and most difficult to sing. On the other hand, no one could mistake the triumphant cry of *Victoria* just after the Virtues have bound Satan, because her long melisma on "*Gaudete*" lies high in the firmament and seems itself to set off the celebratory pealing of bells. The tessitura of the music for *Castitas* is entirely different. It lies much lower, yet her music has a more insistent quality than all the others. Within a narrow range of notes--relative to the other Virtues--*Castitas* is yet the one most directly to confront the devil.

And what a terrifying Devil *Volmar* turned out to be! Again, it is something no one could have guessed as I taught them their parts, since *Volmar* was, at the time, always attending to his own duties. He learned to speak his speeches with me, apart from my practices with my women, where my rendering of the Devil's

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[154]NB: For Hildegard, the author of the Fourth Gospel and the Book of the Apocalypse are one and the same.

speeches, *submissa voce*, elicited nothing but embarrassed giggles. In the performing of it, we all recoiled visibly the first time he came thundering in at us with his accusations ending in the charge, "none of you even know what you are!"[155] The next time the Devil had a speech, I prepared myself for what was

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[155]In the opening scene of the play, the Devil caps his first exchange with the Virtues: "What power can claim that there is none but God? I say, whoever wants to follow me and do my will, I'll give him everything. As for you, Humility, you have nothing that you can give your followers: none of you even know what you are! (*Que ist hec potestas, quod nullus sit preter deum? Ego autem dico, qui voluerit me et voluntatem meam sequi, dabo illi omnia. Tu vero, tuis sequacibus nichil habes quod dare possis, quia etiam vos omnes nescitis quid sitis.* Translation, Peter Dronke in liner notes for *Harmonia Mundi* recording, 1982.) Even at the close of the play, after the Devil has finally been bound by the Virtues and *Castitas* has proclaimed their victory in terms of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, the Devil cannot refrain from repeating his taunt: "You don't even know what you are nurturing, for your belly is devoid of the beautiful form that woman receives from man; in this you transgress the command that God enjoined in the sweet act of love; so you don't even know what you are!" (*Tu nescis quid colis, quia venter tuus vacuus est pulcra forma de viro sumpta--ubi transis preceptum quod deus in suavi vopula precepit; unde nescis quid sis!* Translation, Peter Dronke as in above.) Modern scholars have identified the theme of the *Ordo virtutum* in a variety of different ways, generally classifying it as the earliest morality play, pointing out its similarities and differences with its only possible progenitor, *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, in which the Devil is not anywhere present. In Hildegard's play, the Devil is the most prominent character: the only male role and the only non-singing role. He alone represents Evil (in Prudentius, full armies of allegorized Virtues and Vices are opposed). Ulrike Wiethaus sees this as a persuasive argument for identifying Hildegard's play as a didactic, even doctrinal work directed specifically against the historical activities of the Cathars at this particular time and place (especially in Cologne). ("Cathar Influence in Hildegard of Bingen's Play 'Ordo Virtutum'," *American Benedictine Review*, 38:2, June, 1987.) I am reasonably convinced of the influence cited, but, consistent with a larger vision of her work and life, I believe the placement of the play within the liturgical year to be the crucial factor in its understanding. An idea has developed among modern scholars of Hildegard's work that the *Ordo* was first performed at the dedication of the cloister church, on May 1, 1152, which I believe cannot be correct for the same, liturgical, considerations. The play concerns the apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, which explicitly dictates its liturgical placement in the Advent-Parousia cycle. The most eloquent spokeswoman for the Virtues is *Castitas*, a clear indication that Hildegard has taken this opportunity to develop her belief about the role of sanctified virginity in the struggle against evil in her own time (which she may have understood in terms of "the last times" by dint of the corruption and decadence against which she preached and taught). She believed that procreation was good and was in fact a continuation of God's Creation; however, spiritual creation, or procreation in *mente*, was an even higher and more powerful act.

coming and was better able to observe how it affected others. There were gasps and groans from everyone, including the visiting Prelates of Mainz, each time, at each encounter. Volmar had a way of spitting out his first few words, and, in so doing, practically tearing through the last tones of the singer he followed. It was almost as though he was physically leaping out of darkness to pounce upon the sweet sounds of his intended victims. He overlapped the ends of the melodies of the Virtues the way we do our antiphonal singing, giving a sense of urgency through the overlapping, then taking all kinds of pauses, slowing-downs, and even real stops within his own delivery. In the end, the Devil enhanced the courageousness of the Virtues by erupting so stormily with each vicious attack.

But nothing could have prepared them for the two piercing upward leaps in the incipit of the last chorus of the Virtues. Those who could manage the intervals--exceeding the span of the diapason in a way no one had heard sung in music before--were nearly ecstatic in its accomplishment.[156] The chorus of Virtues is not for the fainthearted, and I believe the experience of doing the Ordo was ennobling for us all. We have much more of a sense of community for having done it, and, true to the Season of the Parousia, we have been tested and not found wanting.

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[156]The figure, consisting of two ascending perfect fifths in succession is underlined in the musical example quoted above. These two examples are the only occurrence of the figure in Hildegard's musical compositions. (Fairly often, for emphasis, she will open a phrase with the leap of a perfect fifth [diapente] followed by a perfect fourth [diatesseron], outlining the octave [diapason]; it goes without saying that this figure breaks any modal sense of structure.) Given the tessitura of these leaps, and the contrasting nature of the strikingly low tessitura and conjunct movement of the melody of Castitas which precedes it, the effect is strikingly dramatic. In addition, the text, as shown above gives the final blow to the devil's repeated taunt about the Virgins and their lack of identity. These expansive leaps declaim the fact that the Virtues find their meaning and identity exactly in the great being and actions of God.



December 28, 1152

Sunday after the Nativity

and

Feast of the Holy Innocents

I pray that his person is not in danger. Basel has been in my prayers at every office and continually in between, and I realize how much his absence from the performance yesterday alarmed me. Months ago, at the time when he had recovered sufficiently to leave our dispensary, it somehow didn't occur to me to realize from what great depth our friendship had taken root. Even with Volmar, whose loyalty and service has never failed but only grows, whose being radiates warmth, constancy, and concern, the friendship is not this way. At times, especially when Basel and I have talked about music--indeed, once when he was most ill and we sang the Psalms of Vespers together in the dispensary--there has been an urgent, probing quality in the air between us that generates its own heat and energy. His cheironomic hand is a marvel, makes my listening new, and when he leads me in singing or sings a liturgical piece himself in example, the line of melody never flags and each word of text is as if painted in air with the shapes of its neumes. The beauty of mystery is loved equally between us; although he claims never to have seen with his inner eyes the scenes I describe, he recognizes their beauty immediately and senses the same depth from which they are sourced.

How well he understands my impatience with the eagerness most people have to reduce deep mystery to its most trivial details. For years now, the excitement about Ursula and her virgin martyrs has grown more superficial, and most of it emanates from the sale of relics unearthed by the thousands in the cemetery near the Church of St. Ursula. Having lived for so long in Cologne, Basel hears it

all--the distractions that people fasten their thoughts upon: why the large femurs if there were no men among the group, and, if there were holy men who went out of respect as protectors, how the virgins could have remained chaste? They point to the tiny bones that were dug up, skeletal parts of infants, babies born of the Virgins of Ursula, they charge. How the "faithful" love the scandalmongering, and how effectively it keeps them from noticing the pathetic failures of their own priests, the buying and selling of clerical offices, the maneuvering of the secular powers to gain control over those Church offices, not excepting even the Office of the Bishop of Rome himself.

We have spoken about the mysterious qualities of true relics. The basis of belief must be in the Incarnation, the embodying of the Word, as in the Prologue to John's gospel. Eternal divinity embodied in bones, the Light of the World buried in flesh, taking root in a heart, mind, and spirit to move among those longing for a sign, is a great power. Miraculous healings occur, people understand, see, and listen for the first time. Buried in the altar, the bone is alive, as well as the piece of wood of the cross brought to serve in our Mass, as part of our celebration of the inner life. Basel says that the bones of the Theban martyrs create such a golden glow that the air in the North chapel of St. Gereon's is colored as if in the glow of the full moon.

But the corruption and selfishness of the present cathedral hierarchy is just as real as the moonlight. There are six priests whose duties have little to do with serving the flock and whose personal abuses are obvious to any who would dare to look through the armour of the offices they use to protect themselves and deceive the rest of the world, for their concern for the eyes of the world is the force that drives them, not any inner light or love of God. They abbreviate their Offices,

until their singing of divine praise is a mere token and may be only mumbled rather than sung. Basel as cantor, instead of being the liturgical servant of the glorious melodies praising God in this cathedral, becomes less and less important. One after another, the priests scurry into private chapels to say offices, even to say private, devotional masses as well, for a price; the body of Christ, the voice and corporate building of that body in sung praise, becomes a sham.

His pain at abuse and deceit is great, I am sure, but when the abuse turns inward, he loses his ability to distinguish inner from outer. Since the first time he arrived at our door he has once been brought back in a litter, and once tied to the saddle by a friend. No longer does his woman companion serve him, for she has chosen to stay with us. It surprises me that he has never opposed her decision; first, that he honored her right to make the decision, and second that he has never resented our taking her from him. Although it is clear to me that it is the Mother of God whom she serves in all she does, and not ourselves, in the case of lay-sisters it is easy to understand that human wishes and needs may intervene. Basel has never indicated anything to me but respectful acceptance of her life with us and hears with apparent pleasure the reports I have made at her evergrowing competence in attracting new swarms of bees for our honey and wax-candle supply, her instinctive skills with training the sweet-peas on trellises, and her cleverness at devising new methods of drying and preservation of harvested fruits.

So he wrestles the demons without her, and it is horrible when he plunges into the abyss. Once it was so severe that all four of his limbs jerked as if convulsing, each out of harmony with every other. For a night and a day, he had no control over his poor body: constantly and uncontrollably he voided his gut,



and the dehydration made his thirst unquenchable. I had water and weak broth administered hourly, and feared he would bite off his tongue with the strength of the convulsive-like shudderings. When such breakdowns occur, the deep link between us disappears, the rare experience of equality between man and woman becomes impossible, for his dependence is total: his music-making hands are useless, his intuitive powers blinded, and his confusion like that of an obstinate, belligerent child.

We pray and God heals, but not having access to his deep soul has been the greatest sorrow for me at such times. I pray that his person is not in danger.

January 6, 1153

Feast of Epiphany

This day was nearly balmy. One of those singular January days when the unbroken sound of water dripping from all the eaves reminds me that the angle of the sun has changed, the light is stronger: the light of the world is manifest today.

Begotten before the daystar,

And before all ages,

The Lord our Savior is

This day made manifest to the world.[157]

Even before Lauds, awake before dawn, I puzzled over teaching them how to understand the two highly compressed texts about three miracles. I anticipated they would ask about the three miracles in the Antiphon for the Benedictus at Lauds:

This day is Ecclesia united to the heavenly spouse,  
for Christ, in the Jordan, washes away her sins:  
the Magi run to the royal nuptials with gifts,  
and the guests of the feast are gladdened by the  
water turned into wine, alleluia.

And so I read to them in the refectory from Jerome. Volmar and I had earlier discussed the highly compressed nature of the texts of the most important antiphons for today, and we had agreed that he would use an Epiphany sermon of Augustine for the Mass today that would shed some light on both the Benedictus antiphon and the one for the Magnificat at Second Vespers:

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[157]1st Antiphon for Vespers on Epiphany.

We celebrate a holy day adorned by three miracles:  
this day, a star led the Magi to the manger:  
this day, water was changed into wine at the marriage-feast:  
this day, Christ vouchsafed to be baptized by John in the Jordan,  
for our salvation, alleluia.

But the explanations were all so much words: mine, Volmar's, even St. Jerome's and St. Augustine's. We all betray our experience of the divine, if we fail to convey that "In the beginning was the Word" is neither the word as it appears so beautifully on the page, nor the word polished rhetorically and delivered from the ambo. It is the word coming into being, even the capacity of the word to come into being.

So much for exegesis. It hardly mattered anyway, because what they really asked this morning--the few who bothered--was not about those three complex manifestations. They asked about the miracle of the three Kings, by which they meant the nature and meanings of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Simple and solid, I thought, and all of my teaching for naught; but I should not have been so disappointed or surprised. Why, after all, not? Why water into wine, why not ice dripping into water? Brown turning to green? Night becoming day? Like plants, we take in water and sun and grow. Or we don't. Over this liturgical year, our cloister church has miraculously materialized, manifest from stone, wood, shapes of arches, proportions of certain ratios to amplify certain configurations of sound. And we ourselves have brought forth new songs of praise, and will continue to grow and change and bring forth fruit. Or not.

after Compline

Some evenings I find myself speaking wearily to a woman carved of wood I call Ursula. I think of her that way, not merely as anonymous statue, though her origins are unknown to me. She sustains me in her Presence: for my part, I often rail and gnash my teeth as well as pray; her mode is Silence. She is wonder itself, a tree transformed.

I do not share her with anyone; she is the guardian of my private quarters, and my comfort is in that moulded Silence. Her knee is just slightly bent, not in obeisance, but to show the curve of energy in repose. Her face and whole stretch of high forehead are not shrouded by her habit; rather, the head comes forward, emerging lucent blossom, from the sepaled layers of her nunly veil, and waits. Her throat, the calyx, is wrapped, supported by the winding vine of limbs. Who waits to sing the word.

A sculptor took such care to wrap your head in  
Swaddling clothes,  
Someone to protect the fecund swarming thoughts and sightings,  
Shelter head from icy blasts and scalding sun:  
I know you for a World.