

Hildegard - *Scivias* synopsis

(with acknowledgements to Barbara Newman et al.)

Book One - The Creator and Creation

1. The mountain of God



Hildegard sees the Lord of the universe enthroned as "angel of great counsel" on an iron-colored mountain, which represents the eternity of his kingdom. The commentary contrasts divine majesty with mortal humility, for the two Virtues irradiated by the glory of God are Fear of the Lord and Poverty of Spirit - both images of the seer's own state of mind as she confronts this awesome vision. One Virtue represents the beginning of wisdom, and the other, the first beatitude. Like Isaiah in his vision of the Temple (Is 6:1-8), Hildegard is called and sent by the Lord to proclaim his justice. She is then granted insight into the mystery of human intentions as God sees and judges them.

2. Creation and the fall



In a highly compressed and allegorical form this vision depicts the fall of Lucifer and his angels (represented as "living lamps" or stars) and the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve. The iconography is unusual and full of arcane significance. Eve, for instance, appears as a shining cloud full of stars because she is the "mother of all living," and her unborn children are meant to replace the fallen angels. Hildegard's commentary on the Genesis narrative largely exonerates Eve and lays the greatest burden of blame on Satan, breaking with the usual tendency to interpret this text in a misogynist vein.

Representation of the first human couple serves as a vehicle for teachings on sexuality and marriage. Hildegard's message here is in complete conformity with mainstream Catholic doctrine. She teaches that marriage is good, but virginity is better; divorce, adultery and fornication are wrong; consanguinity is a bar to marriage; procreation is a natural process designed by God but tainted by original sin; and sexual relations are permissible only when both partners are fertile. In the relations between man and woman she affirms male supremacy yet stresses mutuality, even to the point of misquoting 1 Corinthians 11:9. Where Paul said "Man was not created for woman, but woman for man," Hildegard states that "woman was created for the sake of man, and man for the sake of woman." She adds that there is no reason why a menstruating woman should not attend church, although a bride who has just lost her virginity and a man who has been wounded in battle should abstain. The vision ends on a note of reassurance. Although Adam and Eve were cast out of paradise, the sinless Redeemer delivered them by means of chastity, humility, charity and other virtues. Likewise, human disobedience caused the whole creation to rebel, destroying its original harmony, yet God preserved paradise inviolate as a sign of great mercy to come.

3. The cosmos



This vision of the cosmic egg, depicted in loving detail by the miniaturist, represents the universe as a symbolic, layered structure in which God sustains powerfully contesting forces in a delicate balance. Moving from the outermost layer inward, Hildegard sees zones of luminous and shadowy fire, representing divine purification and judgement; pure ether, which signifies faith; a watery layer for baptism; and finally the globe made up of four elements. Each of the heavenly bodies also has its allegorical meaning. the solar disk is Christ, sun of justice; the moon is the church, which reflects his light; stars are the works of piety., and so forth. Surprisingly, Hildegard does not develop the creation and birth mythology that the egg shape may suggest to readers; rather, she represents this form - "small at the top, large in the middle and narrowed at the bottom" - as symbolizing the stages of human history. The rest of the allegory also focuses on the mysteries of the incarnation and the church, in keeping with the overall theme of the *Scivias*.

In the *Liber divinorum operum* 1.2 Hildegard presents an alternative vision of the universe in the form of a sphere. Her interpretation there correlates its proportions with those of the human body, since a major theme of that book is the correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm. To explain the discrepancies between her two visions she remarks that the egg shape better demonstrates the distinction between the various elements, while the sphere more accurately represents the measurements of the cosmos. The vision concludes with a long polemic against astrology, magic and divination. The seer argues that heavenly bodies are the servants of God and have no power in themselves for good or evil; people who scrutinize the stars to learn their fate are guilty of pride and fall prey to the devil's seductions. It is difficult to reconcile this polemic with the deterministic lunar astrology set forth in *Cause et Cure*.

4. Soul and body



In this three-part vision Hildegard begins with a powerful myth, continues with teaching on human nature and psychology, and closes with a series of moral exhortations. The vision must have been a favourite with the artist, who illustrated it with three separate paintings.

The structure is unusual in that a lengthy myth precedes interpretation of the vision proper. Hildegard introduces a lonely pilgrim soul wandering in the "tabernacle" of her body and lamenting because she has lost her mother, the heavenly Zion. The soul's poignant lament recalls the lamentations of Israel in the wilderness, seeking the promised land and the new tabernacle in which God dwelt. Attentive readers will hear echoes of Job, Jeremiah and other biblical sufferers. There is also a strong Platonic coloring, for the soul grieves that it is oppressed by the sinful and burdensome flesh; the mother-daughter dynamics may even suggest Demeter and Kore, with the devil cast in the role of Pluto. The myth is illustrated in the right-hand column of the first miniature, reading from bottom to top; here the artist has depicted the soul led captive by demons, tortured on the rack, assaulted by savage beasts, hiding in a cave, scaling a mountain and, at last, given wings to soar up to its heavenly tabernacle, where the devil continues to attack it in vain. This is the

realized *psychomachia* is akin to the *Ordo virtutum*.



The heavenly voice next explains the vision itself, which represents the infusion of the soul into the embryo in its mother's womb. Conception and pregnancy are described by means of the ancient folk analogy of milk curdling into cheese; the quality of the milk or semen determines the strong, weak or bitter character of the product. This vision is illustrated in the left side of the miniature, which shows men and women—the ancestors of the unborn child—carrying bowls of cheese, into which a devil insinuates corruption. There follows a discussion of the natural powers of soul and body: the intellect or moral judgement, the will, the reason and the senses. Soul and body are meant to cooperate harmoniously; the body is not inherently evil, but, through the devil's temptations it is a continual source of tribulation to the soul. The second miniature portrays a Christian kneeling in prayer to receive strength against demonic attack.

In a third painting angels and demons struggle for possession of the soul as it passes from the dying person's mouth. This image of the four last things (death and judgement, 'heaven and hell) corresponds to Hildegard's classic teaching on the Two Ways. Every soul must choose between the sacred East, where the sun of justice rises, and the bitter North, where Satan rules his realm of darkness and cold (Is 14:12-15).

5. The synagogue

This brief vision personifies the people of the covenant in the form of a woman, Synagoga, who is the "mother of the incarnation" and thus the mother-in-law of the church. Hildegard is adapting a traditional iconography, which depicted the two women as rivals - Synagoga rejected and blinded because of her unbelief and supplanted in God's favour by Ecclesia, or the Gentile church. The stereotype of the Jews as a literal, carnal people is present in force. But the "true believers" in Israel - Abraham, Moses and the prophets-enjoy a privileged status and are allowed to admire the new bride's beauty from afar. Like many of the figures in Hildegard's visions, Synagoga can be "read" vertically from head to feet as an allegory of successive historical periods. In the end, the seer teaches, the Jews will be converted and "run back with great haste to the way of salvation." This commonplace view, derived from Romans ii, was shared by Bernard of Clairvaux, Honorius and many other contemporaries.

6. The choirs of angels



The nine choirs of angels were conventionally ranked, in ascending order, as angels, archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, thrones, cherubim and seraphim, and arrayed in three clusters of three. Hildegard's text supplies an alternative division into two, five and two so that her nine choirs can provide analogues for human nature. Angels and archangels signify body and soul, the cherubim and seraphim, as

orders represent the five senses. Further allegorical details pertain to the incarnation and the life of virtue. From Pseudo-Dionysius Hildegard takes the notion that the celestial hierarchy above mirrors the ecclesiastical hierarchy below. Her vision of the choirs as "armies arrayed like a crown" inspires the artist's brilliant mandala-like image of nine concentric circles ranged about a void to signify the ineffable Presence. The reason for placing the synagogue and the angels in this section of the *Scivias* is not immediately apparent. But Hildegard may have meant to show that while the synagogue prefigures the work of salvation and the angels assist in it, true redemption could not be accomplished until the advent of Christ and the church-the subject of Book II.

Book Two - The Redeemer and Redemption

1. The Redeemer

This initial vision recapitulates important themes of Book 1 - Hildegard's prophetic call, the creation and the fall of man-but the emphasis has now shifted to the Second Person of the Trinity. Vision I.2 focused on Satan and Eve; this vision concentrates on Christ and Adam. Hildegard first sees an unquenchable fire that is "wholly living and wholly Life," with a sky-blue flame to represent the eternity of the Word. After creating the first human being, the triune God offers him "the sweet precept of obedience" in the shape of a fragrant flower, but Adam fails to pluck it and thereby falls into thick darkness. The forbidden fruit of Genesis is here transmogrified into a blossom that the man issued to pluck, so that his sin becomes one of omission; thus obedience is seen as a positive good and evil as a privation. This revisionist view expresses Hildegard's idea that the "knowledge of good and evil" is God's gift to humanity rather than the devil's temptation.

Redemption proceeds in gradual stages. First the night of sin is illumined by the shining stars of the patriarchs, then by the prophets, culminating in John the Baptist; finally Christ appears as the radiance of dawn. By his passion and resurrection he delivers Adam, whose fate is contrasted with that of the unrepentant Satan. In the miniature Adam is represented three times: as the creature fashioned from mud (*adamah* = "red earth"); as the young man who withholds his hand from the flower; and as the old man who has fallen into darkness and "returned to his earth." The artist's vision diverges significantly from the text. He or she has added a central medallion to represent the six days of creation, and the unity of Creator and Redeemer is brilliantly figured in symmetrical spheres of light at the top and bottom of the miniature. A "finger of God" stretches downward from the light to awaken the newly created Adam, while the radiance of the risen Christ flames upward to redeem the fallen Adam.

2. The Trinity



Somewhat illogically, this vision of the triune God follows that of the Redeemer, perhaps because the Trinity was first revealed to humankind through the incarnation. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are signified by a radiant light, a sapphire-hued figure and a glowing fire; the exposition stresses the unity and inseparability of the Persons. Hildegard, then introduces three similitudes from created things: a stone with its dampness, solidity and kindling power; a flame with its light, heat and color; and a word with its sound, breath and meaning. The analogies of the flame and the word are ancient, but they are developed here in original fashion. It is noteworthy that none of these analogues is gender-specific, and the naming of Father and Son is balanced by a reference to "the embrace of God's maternal love," which is charity.

From the rather abstract language of Hildegard's text the artist has conceived another mandala-image. "Light" and "fire" become concentric circles glimmering with gold and silver leaf, and quivering lines suggest the vitality and energy of the living God.

3. The church, bride of Christ and mother of the faithful

This is the first of four visions that centre around the figure of Ecclesia and the sacraments. Baptism, the sacrament of her maternity, is represented in striking imagery faithfully reproduced by the artist. Reading the miniature from top to bottom and from right to left, the four panels illustrate successive moments of Hildegard's vision. (a) Ecclesia, the bride of Christ, lovingly embraces his altar. (b) She prepares to give birth to God's children; festive angels prepare their places in heaven. (c) Baptism. Two ancient images, the womb of Mother Church and the net of Peter, are conflated here. Converts or catechumens, represented as "black children," race to enter their mother's womb to be reborn; she gives birth "through her mouth," that is, through the words of blessing and the breath of the Spirit. The luminous disk, familiar from the previous visions, represents invocation of the Trinity. As the newly baptized Christians emerge, they shed their dark skins and are clothed in the "pure white garments" of initiation. (d) Christ instructs the newly baptized in the Two Ways of sin and justice.

The teaching in this vision emphasizes the majestic and mysterious powers granted to the church as well as the grace of baptism. The church will never be conquered by hell; her secrets transcend comprehension; her crown is the teaching of the apostles, and her heart, the virginity of Mary. Following patristic doctrine Hildegard uses the symbol of Ecclesia's virginity to accentuate her pure faith, inviolate in the face of heresy and schism. But in her capacity as mother, Ecclesia grieves over the sins and rebellions of her children.

Baptism, Hildegard teaches, is analogous to circumcision under the old covenant, but is accessible to people of both sexes and all ages. It opens the kingdom of heaven to believers and remits the sin of Adam. Several brands of Donatism are rejected in passing; for example, baptism does not depend on the holiness of the priest, but on the

may baptize in case of emergency. The symbolism of rebirth inspires an interesting digression on literal birth, which includes a surprising analogy between a man's motives in procreation and God's motives in creation. But the superior excellence of virginity is reiterated.

4. Confirmation

After the faithful are cleansed in baptism, they must receive the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of anointing with holy oil, which is reserved to the bishop. The vision depicts the power of the Spirit as a lofty tower that upholds and strengthens the woman Ecclesia. Her children appear in varying guises to indicate their spiritual and ecclesiastical status; thus, contemplatives are distinguished from lay Christians by the more glorious light on which they fix their gaze. But in each category some are more zealous in devotion, others more vigorous in justice. Hildegard teaches that while the sacraments are necessary for salvation, they are not sufficient; they must be accompanied by repentance and good works.

5. Three orders in the church



Ecclesia appears in her glory, clothed in radiant light of many colours: crystal clarity to signify the priesthood, the rosy glow of dawn for virginity, purple for monastic imitation of Christ's passion, and cloudy brightness for the secular life. This vision strongly affirms the principle of hierarchy in the church: spiritual people are to secular as day is to night, and monks rank as high above clergy as archangels do above angels. It is permissible to move from a lower order into a higher, but not to descend from a higher to a lower.

Hildegard treats the priesthood briefly, stressing clerical celibacy and commending the life of regular canons. Her vision of virginity is more lyrical, characterized by imagery of music, flowers and feminine beauty. Virgins, she says, imitate the example of Christ and John the Baptist; they alone are entitled to sing the new song in paradise [Rev 14:3-4]; they go beyond the letter of the Law to fulfill the counsels of perfection. On the subject of monasticism Hildegard addresses several points of contemporary controversy. Although monks rank higher than priests, they may be ordained and preach if the church has need of them. Since God considers the intention rather than the outward habit of the monk, children should not be offered as oblates without their consent. Renegade monks, on the other hand, must be brought back to the monasteries they have fled. Married couples cannot separate to take monastic vows unless both partners consent.

Although Hildegard's position on oblates and her emphasis on intention are in keeping with the spirit of twelfth-century monastic reform, she expresses a highly critical view of new orders. Praising St. Benedict as a "second Moses," she inveighs against diversity, novelty and singularity and proclaims that God will judge innovators. The faithful monk ought to be "humble and content with what his predecessors instituted for him." This kind of humility is equivalent to conservatism; in her view innovation can spring only from pride.

The last part of the vision celebrates the unfading light of

"blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," which Hildegard defines as despair of God's mercy in the form of either final impenitence or suicide.

6. Christ's sacrifice and the church



This vision, by far the longest in the *Scivias*, deals with subjects of burning interest to twelfth-century theologians: the nature of the eucharist and of the priesthood. In the vision proper Hildegard draws on a patristic typology that enjoyed wide diffusion in medieval art. The crucifixion is represented as the wedding of Christ and the church: As Christ hangs on the cross his predestined bride, Ecclesia, descends from heaven and is united with him, receiving his body and blood as her dowry. Whenever Mass is celebrated, Ecclesia, as heavenly archetype of the celebrant, devoutly offers this dowry to the Father and renews her marriage union with the Son.

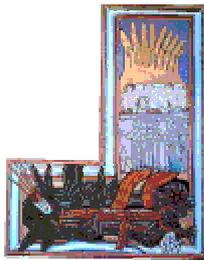
The numerous doctrinal points in this section can be grouped under six headings: eucharistic theology, liturgical practice, communion, requirements for the priesthood, sexual ethics and penance. Under the first heading Hildegard offers a commentary on the Mass, focusing particularly on the consecration of the gifts. Although she does not use the word transubstantiation and its related Aristotelian vocabulary, her teaching is in essence identical with the doctrine later defined by Fourth Lateran and elaborated by Thomas Aquinas. A surprising emphasis falls on the role of the Virgin Birth. The Virgin Annunciate becomes a model for priests, who bring Christ's body into the world by uttering the words of consecration just as Mary did by uttering her fiat; and the wheat of the eucharistic bread is made to symbolize the purity of Christ's virginal flesh. Since original sin is transmitted through the taint of lust, the Redeemer's body and blood must be free from every hint of sexuality in order to cleanse the sinful flesh of mortals.

After treating various points of ritual - fasting before communion, reception in both kinds, the use of traditional words and vestments - Hildegard presents a typology of communicants. The second miniature for this vision illustrates the five types: faithful believers, doubters, the unchaste and lustful, the malicious and envious, the warlike and oppressive. According to the quality of their faith and repentance, Christians may communicate either unto salvation or unto judgement

In the section on priesthood Hildegard condemns simony (the purchase and sale of ecclesiastical office) and pluralism (the holding of multiple benefices by a single cleric). She also reiterates traditional criteria for the priesthood: a candidate must be adult, male and sound in body. (Women, she says, are "an infirm and weak habitation appointed to bear children," but as virgins they can possess the priesthood vicariously through their bridegroom, Christ.) The bulk of this section is devoted to clerical celibacy. Priests must have no wife except for the church and the justice of God; a married priest is an adulterer and serves the devil. Hildegard answers the objection that priests were married in apostolic times by arguing that God formerly permitted this aberration "because there were so few priests," just as he permitted the patriarchs to marry their female kin because there were so few people. "But now the church is adult and strong, and her ministers are many," so a higher standard of celibacy can be enforced

The polemic against clerical marriage leads into a long catalogue of sexual sins: cross-dressing, fornication, homosexuality, "unnatural" intercourse, masturbation, bestiality and "nocturnal pollution." This list of prohibitions in turn raises the subject of confession and penance, which is treated more briefly. Confession resurrects sinners from death; it may be heard by a layman in case of emergency; and it is strengthened by almsgiving - especially if the recipients are among the "deserving poor." Hildegard urges priests to use their power of binding and loosing effectively and condemns those who abuse this authority through anger or negligence.

7. The devil



Hildegard's placing of this vision at this point is pivotal. The threat of satanic temptation ends this book as the promise of angelic assistance ended Book I, but the vision of the devil bound anticipates the dramatic victory that closes Book III.

The hideous multicoloured "worm" or dragon symbolizes the many kinds of vice and temptation with which the Evil One assaults people. As in Hildegard's previous visions of the church, Christians are divided into categories according to their degrees of faith and justice. Satan assaults the "spiritual people" (priests and monastics) in one manner, the secular people in another, while heretics are represented as wholly in his power. Some features of the heresy Hildegard attacks suggest the Cathars; for example, they revile the sacraments and the clergy, feign Catholicism out of fear and lay claim to a pretended sanctity. Other accusations, for instance of devil-worship and obscene sacrifices of human seed, are ancient slanders earlier hurled at Christians and gnostics of the subapostolic age. Satan's power appears to be formidable, even though he is bound firmly by a chain and in the end the saints trample on him.

An interesting feature of the vision is the image of Vanity Fair, possibly inspired by Revelation 13:17 and 18:11-17. This scene is illustrated in the lower panel of the second miniature, where the artist has depicted the sinister merchants in the hats worn by medieval Jews.

Book Three - The Virtues and the History of Salvation

1. God, Lucifer and humanity

This vision at first recapitulates the first vision of Book 1: Hildegard sees a figure of God enthroned in majesty and her calling is reaffirmed. The poignant novelty here is an image of newly created humanity: God "held to his breast what looked like black and filthy mire, as big as a human heart, surrounded with precious stones and pearls." The operative theological idea is an old, half-mythical opinion that humanity was created to replace a "tenth choir" of angels who fell with Lucifer. An eloquent miniature represents Hildegard's vision of these angels as shooting stars that are gradually extinguished as they fall, until only cinders remain. But their departing light is not quenched; it returns to the bosom of God, and since Satan fell "without an heir," God treasures his inheritance of light for a new creation. Unlike the angels, human beings are then fashioned with a "white earthborn" to

preserve them from pride and consequent ruin.

The vision thus supplies one possible answer to a question that must arise among all theists who denigrate the body, namely, why a good God should have created such a "miserable form" in the first place. Despite the wretchedness of human nature, however, the Son of God has assumed it in the incarnation, so that no angel dares to despise it. Moreover, the filthy mire is held firmly to God's heart and adorned with the gems and pearls of sanctity. The vision is meant to inspire humility and gratitude as well as fear of God's justice; the commentary stresses that unlike the fallen angels, human beings can and therefore must repent of their misdeeds.

2. The edifice of salvation

This vision sets forth a blueprint of the symbolic building that will be expounded in detail through the remainder of the book. The miniature provides an indispensable diagram, although it depicts a square building where Hildegard describes a rectangular one. Built on the mountain of God, grounded in faith and fear of the Lord, the city or edifice of salvation has a double symbolism representing, on the one hand, the course of salvation history, and on the other, the doctrines and virtues every Christian must believe and acquire to be saved.

The most important wall links the East (represented on top, as is usual in medieval maps) with the North (shown to the left). In the East lies the figurative realm of Christ, in the North that of Satan, and the luminous wall between the two therefore signifies *speculativa scientia*, or the knowledge of good and evil. This is not "speculative knowledge" in the sense of abstract thought, but "reflective knowledge" in the sense of moral judgement (the adjective is from *speculum*, a mirror); this faculty is the cognitive aspect of free will. The remaining three walls are of masonry, which has several meanings: the joined stones denote human flesh and its labours, the Law and the works of justice. Thus moral knowledge must be conjoined with right action for the upbuilding of salvation.

Hildegard gives two interpretations for the points of the compass. In one reading, East and West signify the dawn of salvation and the sunset of the Law, while North and South represent the fall and restoration of Adam. Alternatively, the diagram may be read counterclockwise beginning at the right. The four cornerstones are successive covenants between God and humanity. At the South stands Adam, at the East Noah (the dawn of justice), at the North Abraham and Moses as representatives of the Law (the beginning of war against Satan), and at the West Christ (the revelation of the Trinity). The proportions of the building also receive numerological meanings.

This vision assigns further theological value to the despised body. Again human beings are contrasted with angels: The latter are purer and more luminous, but humans are more valiant and meritorious soldiers of God because they have to do battle against their own nature. In ascetic struggle "they conquer themselves, chastising their bodies, and so know themselves to be in [God's] army."

3. The tower of anticipation of God's will

From now on the exploration of the building proceeds anticlockwise, beginning with the northeast wall. Hildegard first examines the "tower of anticipation" of God's perfect will, which was manifested in the incarnation and first prefigured in the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision. Aside from foreshadowing baptism, this covenant is taken primarily as a sign of sexual discipline. The initial "cutting off" of unchastity leads by stages to the perfect virginity of Christ and Mary.

Within each portion of the building Hildegard sees a group of feminine Virtues appropriate to that particular moment of salvation history. The Virtues occupy an important place in her theology; they are not exclusively human qualities but "brilliant stars given by God, which shine forth in human deeds." The Latin *virtus* means "energy" or "power" as well as "virtue," and Hildegard plays on both senses. In effect, a virtue is a divine quality that becomes an operative force in willing souls and fully incarnates itself in right action; it is a synthesis of grace and moral effort. As Hildegard puts it, the Virtues do not work of their own accord, but with the cooperation of the person who has received them from God. They appear in feminine form in keeping with a long tradition of virtue-vice allegory that goes back to Prudentius, but also because in Hildegard's symbolic theology the feminine represents the sphere of synergy in which divinity and humanity work together for salvation.

The first three Virtues in this tower represent the initial manifestations, of the ascetic life. Celestial Love, Discipline and Modesty. There follow two christological Virtues: Mercy (associated with the Virgin Mary and Christ's birth) and Victory (connected with his conquest of Satan). Standing somewhat to the side are Patience, who imitates Christ's passion, and Longing, who clings to a crucifix. Hildegard's allegorical technique further characterizes the Virtues by assigning intricate symbolism to their iconography - colours, garments and attributes. In addition, each Virtue utters a self-defining motto; similar formulas recur in the *Ordo virtutum* where they are set to music.

4. The pillar of the Word of God

Near the northern corner stands the pillar of the Word, signifying both the incarnate Word and the written word of Scripture. The latter has not two parts as one would expect, but three. Old Testament, New Testament and commentary, or "the profound and rich wisdom of the principal doctors." Such is the authority that Hildegard, in accord with monastic tradition, assigned to patristic exegesis. The first two sides of this triangular pillar display the saints of the old and new covenants: first, patriarchs and prophets, seen as precursors of Christ, and then apostles, martyrs and other Christian heroes. The third side, representing the exegetes, shows by its shape that wisdom arose from a small beginning, increased in the course of time, but will dwindle again in the last days. At the top of the pillar perches the dove of the Holy Spirit.

The Virtue in this vision is the Knowledge of God, more a divine than a human figure. More awesome in appearance than the other Virtues, she embodies the mystery of God's mercy and judgement in bringing sinners to grace through the resource of calamity. Illness and other

chastisements may redeem sinners by making them physically incapable of their former vices, which otherwise they would never voluntarily leave. These reluctant Christians are the wedding guests whom Christ has "compelled to come in" (Lk 14:23).

5. The jealousy of God

"The Lord is a jealous God and avenging, the Lord is avenging and wrathful; ... The Lord is slow to anger and of great might, and will by no means clear the guilty" (Na 1:2-3). This grim vision presents the vengeance of God against evil, symbolized by a wrathful crimson face and three silently beating wings. Naturally the head faces north, directing its vigilance against Satan and his kingdom.

In the face of God's jealousy no sin goes unpunished. If it is not avenged by voluntary penance it will exact its price either in earthly suffering or in the torments of purgatory or hell. Though vengeance may appear to strike without warning, God is always just, for human beings have been granted judgement to discern good from evil; ignorance of the Law is no excuse. Hildegard's ethical stance is one of uncompromising self-denial; the choice of good is associated with struggle and anxiety, and that of evil with self-will, desire and pleasure. Certain sins, such as desecration or robbery of a church, simony and withholding of tithes, are singled out as special objects of God's vengeance because they defile the honour of his house.

6. The stone wall of the old Law



The northwest wall of the building signifies the Old Testament Law, the period of history between Abraham and Christ, and the political order. Most of the commentary in this vision asserts and defends the principles on which Christian feudal society was based.

The human race, Hildegard maintains, is divided into two unequal orders, the spiritual and the secular, and each of these classes has its proper hierarchy. Among the secular people there are the higher and lower nobility, free men and women and serfs; among the spiritual there are "the excellent and the superior, the obeyers and the enforcers." Hildegard has no doubt that these distinctions were ordained by providence; they "were and are and always will be." Two ideological justifications for hierarchy are set forth. (a) it prevents anarchy, because without rulers people would "kill each other off and perish"; and (b) it teaches by the example of earthly authority how divine authority should be loved and feared. Though the spiritual power is more exalted than the secular, princes as well as prelates represent God's justice and mercy. The "greater" deserve to rule the "lesser" because God has chosen them for their superior abilities - intelligence, integrity, eloquence - just as he chose Jacob to rule over Esau. But usurpation of power, whether through bribery or simony, violence or black magic, is harshly condemned - despite the same Jacob's example! Subjects ought of course to be obedient; if they suffer persecution from rulers, they can imitate Christ's passion.

Eight Virtues inhabit this section of the building. The first group

consists of Abstinence, Liberalitas, and Dicitur self-denial is the

prerequisite for generosity toward God and neighbour. In the second group Truth, Peace and Beatitude appear, representing three stages in the victory over evil. Slightly apart stand two Virtues embodying God's temporal and eternal gifts. Discretion, associated with secular justice, and Salvation of Souls. The latter manifests herself in two phases: In her "Jewish" period she has a swarthy complexion, dark curls and a multicoloured tunic, but after Christ's birth she takes on a luminous white aspect, stripping off all "diversity."

7. The pillar of the Trinity

In Scivias II.2 Hildegard presented the Trinity as an eternal living reality. Her focus in this vision is on the Trinity as a saying doctrine revealed by Christ at a particular moment of history. Hence the pillar appears at the west corner of the building, symbolizing the prophetic "end of the ages." It is triangular, like the pillar of the Word (III.4), and its three edges are sharp swords cutting off all infidels: heretics, Jews and pagans, symbolized respectively by chaff, broken wings and rotten wood. Hildegard adds a lengthy parable, which she then interprets as an allegory of the apostles' preaching, and supplies some rather cloudy similitudes for the Trinity. As if to defend their obscurity, she stresses that this divine mystery must be humbly accepted and not presumptuously scrutinized.

8. The pillar of the Saviour's humanity

This important vision depicts the incarnation as the primary locus of the Virtues, that is, the context in which humanity is enabled to collaborate with God. The pillar closely resembles Jacob's ladder, but in place of the angels seen by the patriarch, Hildegard perceives "all the virtues of God ascending and descending." Her imagery is indebted to that of an earlier visionary, Hermas (third century), who in *The Shepherd* had described a host of celestial maidens in the guise of stonemasons working to build up the church's Hildegard's maidens also carry stones, representing "the winged and shining deeds people do ... to win salvation." These Virtues descend to human beings through the humanity of Christ and return to heaven through his divinity.

The miniature shows the influence of a traditional pictorial motif, the ladder of salvation, whereby Christians climb up from earth to heaven on the rungs of virtue. Based on classic texts like the Benedictine Rule and John Climacus's *Ladder of Perfection*, the image was particularly favoured by monks and nuns. Many representations of it show demons on either side of the ladder, picking off unwary souls with their arrows; Hildegard's image is more positive and depicts supportive Virtues in their place. At the top of the ladder stands the Grace of God, clothed as a bishop to admonish and exhort the faithful.

The seven principal Virtues (proceeding from top to bottom) are Humility, Charity, Fear of God and Obedience on the right, and Faith, Hope and Chastity on the left. Humility is the queen of Virtues, as in the *Ordo virtutum*, but Charity is the most important and has the longest speech. She wears the sapphire blue associated with the Word of God and is assimilated to him as Chastity is to the Virgin Mary. The latter is overshadowed by the dove of the Holy Spirit and

text echoes earlier visions: for example, Fear of the Lord first appeared in I.i, and Hope with her crucifix is very similar to Longing in III.3.

A more perplexing cross-reference points back to I.4, for Hildegard observes that the pillar of the Saviour's humanity stands "in the same place" as the radiant diamond-shaped figure she had earlier seen. But that figure was independent of the allegorical building, so Hildegard must be implying that a consistent "inner geometry" persists through all her visions. In both contexts the figure in question signifies the incarnation, but in I.4 Hildegard was discussing the means by which every soul enters its body when it is formed in the womb, while here she stresses the uniqueness of Christ's birth from the Virgin.

The central teaching of the vision concerns synergy, or cooperation with God. Hildegard teaches that God's grace will not forsake even the most hardened sinner, but it is not irresistible; the human will always retains the freedom to choose or reject salvation. To the sinner grace brings first self-knowledge, then repentance, finally hope and amendment of life. The discourse of this Virtue should be compared with earlier teaching on the Knowledge and the Jealousy of God. In a lengthy digression Hildegard draws an analogy between the seven Virtues and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit resting on Christ [Is II:2], thus reinforcing the centrality of the God-man.

9. The tower of the church

This tower stands at the southern corner of the building and represents the whole history of the church; it is therefore unfinished. But somewhat inconsistently, the seven turrets at its summit, standing for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are already built. This detail clearly indicates how allegorical significance prevails over the logical coherence of the image. The motifs of the heavenly ladder and the cooperation of Virtues are continued from the previous vision.

Wisdom, God's feminine co-worker in creation, stands atop the "house of seven pillars" described in Proverbs 9:1. As the first of the cardinal virtues, she precedes justice, Fortitude and temperance. The last of the four, however, is given not her classical name but the more impressive title of Sanctity - an index of the importance Hildegard ascribed to sobriety and self-denial. Unique among the Virtues, Sanctity has three heads. Two are sexless, but the left one, labelled Self-Sacrifice, is significantly female.

Hildegard's doctrine of the church stresses the role of the apostles and doctors. The faithful, as always, are divided into various categories: some cherish and preserve their baptismal garment, others feel constrained by it but keep on struggling, while still others throw off the garment and return from the church into the world. Worst of all are the simoniacs with their filthy lucre. Continuing her polemic, Hildegard claims that they purchase offices "by means of [their] spiritual father, money - for in that transaction money becomes [their] bishop." But the attack on unjust authority is balanced once again by a call for obedience to the powers that be; they will perish horribly in God's judgement, but the time is not yet.

10. The Son of Man

This vision completes the circuit of the building, returning to the eastern corner where the Son of Man is seated on a throne beneath that of the Shining One (God the Father). He exhorts the people of God on self-knowledge, obedience and sexual discipline, reminding the married that coupling is only permissible out of desire for children, and the celibate that mere outer virginity does not suffice for their salvation. True continence is the gift of God and should not be promised hastily or presumptuously. A consecrated virgin should rely on divine strength alone and prepare for a lifetime of ascetic struggle.

Five more Virtues fill up the complement of the city. They are Constancy, Celestial Desire (symbolized by the thirsty hart of Psalm 41), Compunction, Contempt of the World (safely ensconced within the wheel of God's mercy) and Concord (winged like an angel because she prefigures the life of heaven). Christ appears in his human aspect in a rather understated form. Like Ecclesia, he is visible only from the navel upward because his lower parts represent ages of history yet to unfold. Some of these mysteries will be disclosed in the apocalyptic visions that follow.

11. The last days and the fall of Antichrist



This is the vision that won Hildegard her greatest celebrity as a prophet. Although she draws on earlier apocalyptic scenarios, notably that of the tenth-century monk Adso, the seer adds powerful imagery of her own. Her three principal themes are (a) the "five ferocious epochs" to come; (b) the career of Antichrist; and (c) the rape and recovery of

the church.

The upper left panel of the miniature depicts five beasts that symbolize future epochs of world history: a fiery dog, a yellow lion, a pale horse, a black pig and a grey wolf. Each of these animals suggests the temperament of villainous rulers to come. In the *Liber divinorum operum*, vision III.10, the description of these eras is considerably expanded, and ages of justice and reformation are posited in between the ages of misrule. All the beasts appear in the North, since they belong to Satan's kingdom; but no term is set to their rule. Hildegard says only that the world is now in its seventh age, "approaching the end of time." This is a conventional view, however, which has nothing to do with her symbolism of the beasts. In the sixth age of the world Christ was incarnate, just as on the sixth day Adam was created. The seventh age is a "sabbath," which may be indefinitely prolonged. One apocalyptic sign, however, is the fact that Hildegard herself prophesies. God has called her because his duly appointed authorities now languish in idleness, and the world order is showing signs of decrepitude.

The approaching Antichrist is represented as a parodic inversion of Christ. Born of a harlot who feigns that she is a virgin, he will be wholly possessed by the devil from his mother's womb and trained by her in the magical arts. Through preaching and false miracles, even the feigned resurrection of the dead, he will make many converts; finally he himself will simulate death and resurrection and promulgate his own scriptures. As Hildegard emphasizes Christ's virginity throughout

only is he a child of fornication, but he himself will reject continence and all other forms of self-denial. For a time he will be opposed by the "two witnesses," Enoch and Elijah, whom God is reserving in heaven for the last times, but eventually they will suffer martyrdom for the faith.

The most daring part of the vision concerns the Antichrist's rape and bloody violation of the church, depicted in the lower panel of the miniature. Her private parts now become visible, with the monstrous head of the Antichrist appearing in place of her genitals, for he is both her son and her seducer. As Satan corrupted Eve, so will the son of perdition attempt to corrupt the virgin Ecclesia. But Christ's bride will emerge triumphant, though bruised, bloodied and in large part deceived by his wiles. After enduring persecution and martyrdom, she will be vindicated by her heavenly Bridegroom (upper right panel) and united to him in marriage. Scatology and eschatology merge as the Antichrist, self-exalted on a mountain of excrement, is struck down by a thunderbolt from on high.

12. The last judgement, the new heaven and the new earth

At an unspecified time after the fall of Antichrist, the last judgement with its terrors will come to pass and history will have ended. In Hildegard's vision there are no surprises in the judgement: Good and evil are plainly manifest in the forms of the newly awakened dead. Sentence is passed on the reprobate without appeal, and unbelievers are not even allowed to stand trial, for they are damned in advance. The saints, on the other hand, receive bliss and glory from Christ, who comes in majesty on the clouds of heaven, yet with his wounds still open from the cross.

As the Son of Man sits in judgement, all creation is "shaken by dire convulsions" in which the elements are purged of mortality. Hildegard sees a "black skin" peeled away from them, recalling her image of the newly baptized in II.3. There follows a chillingly Platonic vision of permanence: In the new heaven sun, moon and stars will stand motionless, and on the new earth shall be fire without heat, air without density, a sea without waves. The vision ends on a note of everlasting stasis: "And so there was no night, but day. And it was finished."

13. Symphony of praise



This magnificent coda is not really a vision but a concert. The songs Hildegard records in this section do indeed, as she claims, marvellously summarize all the meanings she has presented before. In the first fourteen pieces she offers praise to the Virgin Mary, the choirs of angels and five categories of saints.. prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins. Each rank of the celestial hierarchy is honoured with an antiphon and a responsory, although the liturgical genres of these pieces are not specified here as they are in the *Symphonia* manuscripts.

Heaven is not populated only with saints, but also with repentant sinners. The second part of this section is a lament and prayer of intercession for the fallen. In the final portion a penitent soul's

dramatic form. The soul slips from well-meaning innocence to impatience when she asks the Virtues for a "kiss of the heart," and they warn instead that she must do battle by their side. At this point the devil intervenes and easily leads her into sin. In contrast to later morality plays, Hildegard is not interested in dramatizing the soul's adventures in evil; instead she presents a verbal contest between the devil and the Virtues to fill the time until the soul's repentance. In the end the Virtues receive the weeping penitent, and led by their queen Humility and celestial Victory, they conquer and bind the devil.

The play is followed by a brief commentary and a tribute to the power of music, anticipating the apologia Hildegard was to write at the end of her life. In liturgical song "words symbolize the body" and the humanity of Christ, she writes, "and the jubilant music indicates the spirit" and the Godhead. An allegorical reading of Psalm 150, in which the different instruments are made to symbolize the varieties of saints, leads into a final affirmation of the prophet's mission and brings the *Scivias* to a close.