



# Hildegard von Bingen: Transcending a Woman's Status in Medieval Europe

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# Thesis

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- Hildegard von Bingen was a distinctive woman during the High Middle Ages. Her visions from God as well as her passion and love for the church provided her opportunities for theological writing, various avenues of research, and music that would surpass many of her contemporaries.



# The Typical Medieval Woman

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Few women were prominent in male-dominated activities.

Women incapable of looking after their own interests

Many nunneries existed on the edge of penury.

# Hildegard's Early Life

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- Began experiencing visions from God at a very early age.
- Hildegard became an oblate at 8, then a novitiate at 15.
- Because of her young age, this became all that she ever knew.








# Accomplishments

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Founded her own convent and began teaching.



Had to negotiate with the monks of Disibodenberg for land they would not give up in order to expand her convent.



Convent finally gained independence in 13<sup>th</sup> century

# Hildegard's Visions

- Sent to her directly from God.
- Started telling about them when they commanded her to, “Write what you see and hear!”
- Shared the most about them when she was older in her book *Scivias*



# *Scivias*

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Covered themes of Divine Majesty, the Trinity, creation, the fall of Lucifer and Adam, and also covered an entire sweep of salvation history (the Incarnation, the sacraments, the virtues, and the end of the world.)

“O frail mortal... say and write what you see and hear... write not according to human words nor following the understanding of human intelligence... but according to what you see and hear in the heavens above and in God’s wondrous works.”

She became ill when she at first refused God, but renewed her strength when she began writing this book.

# The *Book of Life's Merits*

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- Another smaller book of visions that followed Scivias.
  - All visions are variations on the immense figure of a man superimposed on the world who observes the various interactions of the powers of light and dark.



# The *Book of Divine Works*

- Another smaller book of visions
- Contains Hildegard's most mature consideration of cosmology, salvation history, and eschatology, with particular reference to the favored place of humanity in creation.

# Theological Influence

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Religious figures became interested in her work.

Seen as a trusted figure; this allowed her to give advice and speak her mind.

Didn't want her advice only to be used by officials- began preaching.

# Her Letters

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- She wrote a total of almost 400 letters.
- Main reason for these letters was to act as God's mouthpiece and relay His warnings about failure of leadership to the high ecclesiastics and to give direct advice about how to deal with spiritual problems to those who were in the religious life and the privileged laity.



# Musical Influence

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- Wanted to spread her theology in a more impactful way.
- It would reach all those who wanted to receive the news.
- Wanted it to be different from anything ever before.



# Musical Works- *Ordo Virtutum*

- Wanted it to be relevant for her convent and the nuns that lived there.
- Provides a model for self-understanding in the female religious community.
- First morality play with new words and melodies





# The *Symphonia*

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She wrote her music for the communal worship of her establishments, and later she provided pieces for other monasteries (celebrating St. Disibod for Disibodenberg.)

By the end of her career she had composed one Alleluia, one Kyrie, seven sequences for the Mass, 43 antiphons, 18 great responsories, three hymns, four devotional songs for the Divine Office, and one morality play.

# Medicinal Influences

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Researched plants for medicinal purposes and shared her discoveries.



# The *Natural History*

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- Also known as the *Book of Simple Medicine*
- Composed of 9 parts. The longest section covers more than 200 plants while the rest are devoted to the elements, trees, precious stones, fish, birds, mammals, reptiles, and metals.
- Not presented in a visionary form, but it's possible that a visionary preamble has been lost.



# *Causes and Cures*

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Also known as the *Book of Compound Medicine*.

Starts with an account of cosmology and cosmography and continues to outline mankind's place in the world.

This is followed by a summary of the basis of humoral medicine.

Gives remedies for things such as migraines, balding, and insomnia.



# Modern Influence??

- Convent still exists today.
- Rediscovering of her prescriptions.
- Letters were preserved.
- Music has been performed.



# Thesis Restated

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- Hildegard von Bingen was a distinctive woman during the High Middle Ages. Her visions from God as well as her passion and love for the church provided her opportunities for theological writing, various avenues of research, and music that would surpass many of her contemporaries.