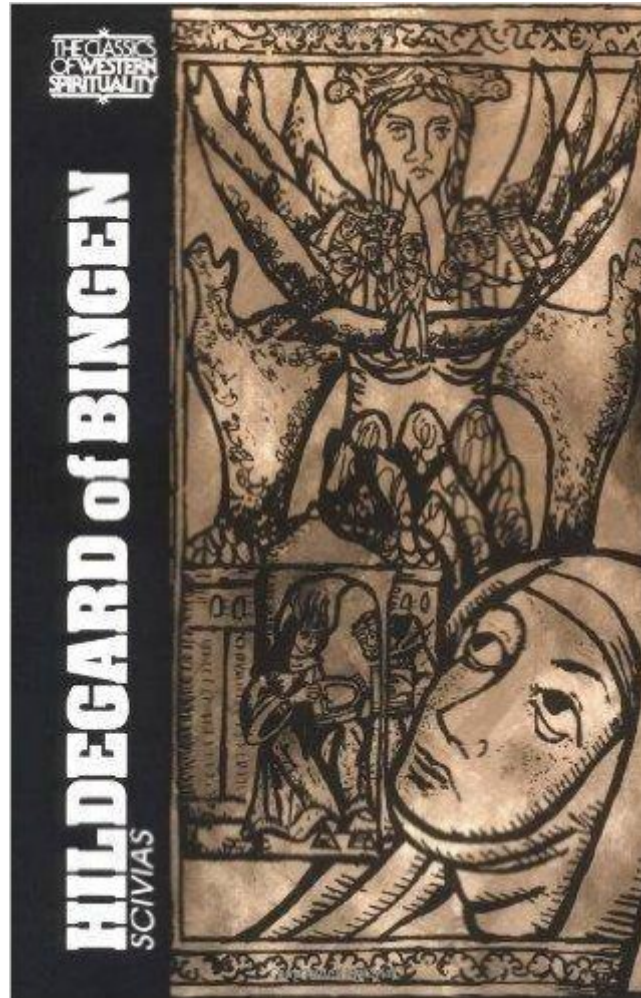


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Hildegard Of Bingen: Scivias (Classics Of Western Spirituality (Paperback))



Synopsis

This work contains the 26 visions of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), who was the first of the great German mystics, as well as a poet and a prophet, a physician and a political moralist.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Hildegard von Bingen, one of the prominent German mystics in the Middle Ages, stands as an anomaly amidst the whole host of Christian mystics. One reason to account for this is the fact that instead of advocating reform of the church in a confrontational manner, she often deflects it by recourse to God's voice. The voice that speaks in Scivias is more often than not the 1st person voice of God, and the persona of Hildegard the receptor of the visions occupies technically the position of a third person glossator and observer. On top of that, the chief focus of her 'reform' is of 'ordo virtutum', a reform that works from within as opposed to the outright opposition(or confrontational gestures) offered by English Lollards in their translation of the Latin Vulgate into the vernacular Middle English tongue, or the Beguines' usurpation of the Catholic church's monopoly to Biblical interpretation. Another reason to account for her special status as a medieval mystic is the absence of any so-called phenomenon of stigmata, trance-like swoonings, fleshly ecstasies like those of Margery Kempe or Teresa D'Avila. Hildegard received these purported visions without the influence of drugs and she transcribed them in a state of clarity unlike any other female mystics of her time. What I appreciated about this edition was that they placed the pictorial depiction of her

visions side by side with her writings and expositions of their meanings. The pity however is that these pictures(illustrated plates in the original medieval manuscripts) are not coloured, and one suffers from disappointment since he is not able to re-construct exactly the details(right down to the colour and shade Hildegard mentions) as in the original.

Hildegard was one of the most famous mystics of the medieval period. A rarity among women of that time, she conversed with learned theologians and even the pope, was given considerable autonomy to learn and teach, and was a very gifted writer, poet, theologian, mystic, and scientist. Hildegard's visions, which are included in this collection, form a larger set of works of hers which include poems, songs and music, and various encyclopedias. Hildegard was a very learned woman for her time. Her visions are very complex and involve many elements and themes. Some deal with classic theological motifs from the medieval period, such as the Church, Christ, heaven and hell, the last judgement and the fall. Others deal with the relationship between man (the microcosm) and the universe, while others deal with the mysteries of the Triune God and God's presence in nature. Most striking in Hildegard's visions is the intimate connection between man, God, and the creation. Mathew Fox rightly said Hildegard is a creation mystic; for her, the divine spirit fills and energises the universe, and the Earth itself is seen in terms as our mother and as sacred. Hurting creation is in fact a way we hurt ourselves, an ecological ethic which can certainly say a lot to us in this time, where our greedy carelessness towards the world and its resources threatens to imperil our very survival as a species. Hildegard also quite rightly and perceptively understands the goodness of creation in terms of the goodness of God, whose abundance is given to us freely out of love. Our sin in Hildegard's system very much boils down to our selfish tendency to only see ourselves and our wants, rather than our relationship with the creation and the creator.

This book is everything I had hoped for and all that I truly expected it to be. I will be honest, in as much as I have only read a small portion of the book. I found to my surprise one of the most amazing pieces of written prose that I have ever read. I hope I am not infringing in any copyrights because I am going to post a portion right here: (from vision

4) _____ 1 Lament of the soul returning by God's grace from the path of error to Zion "A pilgrim, where am I? In the shadow of death. And in what path am I journeying? In the path of terror. And what consolation do I have? That which pilgrims have. For I should have had a tabernacle adorned with five square gems more brilliant than the Sun and the stars, for the Sun and the stars that set would not have shone upon it, but the glory

of the angels; the topaz would have been its foundation and all the gems its structure, its staircases made of crystal and its courtyards paved in gold. For I would have been a companion of the angels, for I am a living breath, which God placed in dry mud; thus I should have known and felt God. But alas! When my tabernacle saw that it could turn its eyes in all the ways, it turned its attention toward the North; ach, ach! and there I was robbed of my sight and the joy of knowledge, and my garments all torn. And so, driven from my inheritance, I was led into a strange place without beauty or honor, and there subjected to the worst slavery. Those who had taken me, struck me and made me eat with swine and sending me into a desert place gave me bitter herbs dipped in honey to eat. Then, placing me on a rack, they afflicted me with many tortures.

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