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Imago expandit splendorem suum: Los diseños visio-teológicos de Hildegarda de Bingen en el manuscrito Rupertsberg de Scivias

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Abstract: A significant point of contention within studies of the twelfth-century visionary saint and Doctor of the Church, Hildegard of Bingen, is the question of her role in the production of the illuminated *Scivias* manuscript known as the Rupertsberg Codex. While current German scholarship has tended to preclude Hildegard's hand, pre-war German scholars, who had access to the original manuscript before it was lost, and most modern Anglophone scholars have argued more or less strongly for Hildegard's influence on the design. This paper argues for Hildegard's direction of the images based on their function as a theological discourse refracting the text. The images are not ancillary to or derivative of the work; they are integral to it. A key area of the manuscript design that reveals these authorial interventions is the color scheme. The use of certain colors, such as green and red, that have particular meanings in Hildegard's symbolic vocabulary—even when at odds with the colors described in the recorded vision text—reveals the theological place of each image within Hildegard's perception of salvation history. Furthermore, the extensive use of silver, gold, and blue in the manuscript can be understood both through Hildegard's likely use of actual jewelry that contained enamel work and those metals, and through the theological meanings with which Hildegard imbues the metallic pigments. Such visual markers invested with theological significance thus argue for Hildegard's design of the manuscript and aid the viewer-reader in interpreting the complex visual allegories at work in Hildegard's often enigmatic visions. Finally, they reveal the dynamic ways in which Hildegard used the images to emphasize her theological insights into the feminine divine and its connection especially to her and her community as virgin members of a virgin Church.

Keywords: Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, Rupertsberg Manuscript, Text/Image Relationships, Gender, Visual Theology

Resumen: Un punto importante de discusión dentro de los estudios de la santa visionaria del siglo XII y Doctor de la Iglesia, Hildegarda de Bingen, es la cuestión de su rol en la producción del manuscrito iluminado *Scivias*, conocido como el Codex Rupertsberg. Mientras la erudición alemana actual ha tendido a excluir la mano de Hildegard, los estudiosos alemanes de antes de la guerra, que tuvieron acceso al manuscrito original antes de que se perdiese, y la mayoría de los estudiosos anglófonos modernos han argumentado con mayor o menor brío en favor de la influencia de Hildegard en el diseño. El presente artículo razona en defensa de la dirección de Hildegarda sobre las imágenes, basándose en su función de discurso teológico que refleja su texto. Las imágenes no son subsidiarias de o derivadas de la obra literaria, sino que son parte integral de ella. Un aspecto clave del diseño del manuscrito que revela esas intervenciones de la autora es el esquema de los colores. El uso de ciertos colores, como el verde y el rojo, que tienen un significado especial en el vocabulario simbólico de Hildegarda —aun cuando en desacuerdo con los colores descritos en la visión registrada en el texto— revela el lugar teológico de cada

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imagen dentro de la percepción de Hildegarda sobre la historia de la salvación. Además, el amplio uso de la plata, el oro y el azul en el manuscrito se puede entender tanto a través del probable uso de Hildegarda de auténticas joyas que contenían trabajos en esmalte y esos metales, como también a través de los significados teológicos que Hildegarda confiere a los pigmentos metálicos. Dichos signos visuales vestidos de significado teológico abogan así en favor de Hildegarda como la diseñadora del manuscrito, y ayudan al espectador-lector a interpretar las complejas alegorías visuales presentes en las visiones a menudo enigmáticas de Hildegarda. Por último, revelan las dinámicas maneras mediante las que Hildegarda utiliza las imágenes para enfatizar sus intuiciones teológicas sobre lo divino femenino y su relación especialmente con ella misma y su comunidad como miembros vírgenes de una Iglesia virgen.

Palabras clave: Hildegarda de Bingen, *Scivias*, Manuscrito Rupertsberg, Text/Image Relationships, Sexo, Visual Theology

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. The Rupertsberg *Scivias* Manuscript: *Status Quaestionis*. 2.1. *Scivias*: Composition and Themes of the Work. 2.2. Dating the Manuscript. 2.3. The Relationship between Vision, Text, and Image. 3. The Function of the Images as Theological Discourse. 4. Color and Theological Meaning in the Rupertsberg *Scivias*. 4.1. Red and Green. 4.2. Blue, Gold, and Silver. Fontes and Bibliography.

1. Introduction

On travels through the Rhineland in 1814 and 1815 to explore the area's rich history of art and antiquities, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe viewed the growing collection of the state library in Wiesbaden, which included many monastic books that it had acquired at the time of secularization. He noted one in particular, an old manuscript containing the visions of a local saint, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), calling it "merkwürdig."¹ Although that term probably meant little more than "noteworthy" to the great poet, its stronger connotations of oddity and strangeness likely describe the reaction that most readers and viewers have had on first encountering Hessische Landesbibliothek, Handschrift 1: the so-called Rupertsberg Codex of Hildegard's first visionary work, *Scivias*.² One of only two manuscripts of this work to contain illustrations, this late

The seeds of this project were sown in seminars with Profs. Boyd Taylor Coolman, Stephen Brown, and Pamela Berger at Boston College in 2006-2007; they were watered during study with Prof. Christel Meier-Staubach at the Westfälische-Wilhelms Universität, Münster under a Fulbright Fellowship in 2007-2008; and they sprouted and blossomed under the guidance of Profs. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Danielle Joyner at the University of Notre Dame in 2009-2010. Portions were presented in Session 94, "Hildegard von Bingen: Bridges to Infinity," sponsored by the International Society for Hildegard von Bingen Studies, at the 48th International Congress on Medieval Studies, May 9-12, 2013, at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo, Michigan). My thanks also to Prof. Jose Maria Salvador González of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid for his help in publishing this study.

¹ Johann Wolfgang von GOETHE, "Kunst und Altertum am Rhein und Main," in *Goethes Werke in zehn Bänden*, vol. 10 (Artemis Verlag, 1958), p. 231: "Hier ist in gedachter Rücksicht schon viel geschehen, und mehrere aus Klöstern gewonnene Bücher in guter Ordnung aufgestellt. Ein altes Manuskript, die Visionen der heiligen Hildegard enthaltend, ist merkwürdig."

² See Marianna SCHRADER and Adelgundis FÜHRKÖTTER, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1956), pp. 43-4; and the "Einführung" to the critical edition of

twelfth-century book is the only one whose image cycle is not only complete but illuminated: each of the work's twenty-six visions is prefaced by one or more miniatures whose iconographical details are often enigmatic and even confusing.³ Some of the most remarkable full-page miniatures strain to contain immense female figures within the plane of the page, the sparkle of vast fields of silver and gold leaf shimmering before the viewer's eyes (Fig. 12). The visual impact of the book's deluxe design frequently stops academic and non-academic viewers alike in their tracks, enamored, enticed, and enthralled by its seemingly unique visionary quality.⁴ It is not difficult to see why it is frequently assumed that its images are the visual equivalent of Hildegard's often mysterious visions, whose descriptions begin each section of *Scivias*, only then followed by exegetical interpretation offered to Hildegard by the voice she hears from her visionary experience of the Living Light. Rarely are the images fully comprehensible without deep engagement and reference to the text.

A significant point of contention in contemporary Hildegard studies, however, is the question of her role in the production of this illuminated Rupertsberg *Scivias* manuscript. There is no direct documentary evidence attesting to its production, which has left scholars in the uncomfortable position of wide-ranging conjecture. The consensus in

Scivias, ed. Adelgundis FÜHRKÖTTER and Angela CARLEVARIS, CCCM 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1972), pp. xxxii-xxxv.

³ The other manuscript of the work to contain illustrations is Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, cod. Salem X, 16. This Salem Codex, which was once thought possibly to be a copy of the text sent to the Cistercians of Salem during Hildegard's lifetime, contains ten illustrations, none of which bear much resemblance to those in the Rupertsberg manuscript, and at least two of which were based on images found in other manuscripts in the Salem monastery's library. While early scholarship tended to date it to the later twelfth-century, more recent appraisals have pushed its execution as late as the early thirteenth-century. Although its illustrations do not originate with Hildegard, they do provide crucial comparative material for the Rupertsberg manuscript's use of and innovation from standard twelfth-century iconographical forms. See "Einführung" to *Scivias*, ed. FÜHRKÖTTER and CARLEVARIS, CCCM 43, pp. xxxix-xlii; Clemencia Hand KESSLER, "A Problematic Illumination of the Heidelberg 'Liber Scivias'," *Marsyas* v. 8 (1957), pp. 7-21; Christel MEIER, "Calcare caput draconis. Prophetische Bildkonfiguration in Visionstext und Illustration: zur Vision »Scivias« II, 7," in *Hildegard von Bingen. Prophetin durch die Zeiten*, ed. Äbtissin Edeltraud FORSTER (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1997), pp. 340-58; and Madeline CAVINESS, "Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships: Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*," in *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeanette BEER (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), pp. 71-111, at 73-4 and 92.

⁴ See Lieselotte SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen im „Liber Scivias“ der Hildegard von Bingen: die Wucht der Vision und die Ordnung der Bilder* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1998), pp. 12-13. She notes that previous treatments of the images have often assumed either a simple and subsidiary correspondence to the text or taken them as an opportunity for "unhistorical and widely subjective interpretations" (ibid., p. vii: "entweder bloß ergänzendes Medium der Schrift ... oder zum Anlaß genommen worden für unhistorische, weitgehend subjektive Betrachtungen"). This latter category likely refers to such phenomena as the popular but deeply misleading work of Matthew FOX, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Bear & Co., 1985); for an analysis of the difficulties in Fox's treatment of Hildegard, see Barbara NEWMAN, "Romancing the Past: A Critical Look at Matthew Fox and the Medieval Creation Mystics," *Touchstone* v. 5 (1992), pp. 5 - 10.

Anglo-American scholarship dates the manuscript to some point within the last two decades of Hildegard's life and attributes to her some kind of role in the production of the images, even if it is not widely believed that she herself executed them.⁵ One of the principal American scholars on this question, Madeline Caviness, has used a wide range of techniques, including her own experience with migraine pathology, to come to this conclusion.⁶ Significant recent German scholarship, however, has dated the manuscript's production after Hildegard's death in 1179, based on stylistic comparisons to firmly dateable contemporary manuscripts or on the many places where the images in the manuscript diverge from or even contradict the text of the visions, thus minimizing, if not completely negating, her role in their design.⁷ This study will argue that Hildegard did, in fact, direct the iconography and composition of the images in the manuscript in the last decade of her life, but not merely as illustrative counterparts to the textual record of her visionary experiences. Rather, the Visionary Doctor used them as a separate visual and theological discourse, equal to and interacting with the textual record of her visions. The images are not ancillary to the text: they are dynamically integral to the work as a whole.

2. The Rupertsberg *Scivias* Manuscript: *Status Quaestionis*

This manuscript (Wiesbaden, Hessische Landesbibliothek, HS 1) was composed of 235 folios in 27 quires, 32.1 cm. tall by 23.1 cm wide, with a writing area of 24.3 cm by 17.5 cm, divided into two columns of 31 or 32 lines each.⁸ After the *Protestificatio* on both sides of fol. 1, each of the work's twenty-six visions followed the same format: chapter headings, followed by one or more miniatures, and then the text of each vision and its allegorical interpretation. It was an illuminated manuscript of the highest level: a painted palette across the whole range of hues, together with copious amounts of gold and silver. There were a total of thirty-five miniatures—five full-page, single panel; eleven full-page or nearly full page, with multiple panels; fifteen half-page (often columnar); and four quarter-page—offered here in a summary catalogue:⁹

⁵ See Kathryn KERBY-FULTON, "Hildegard of Bingen", in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c.1500*, ed. Alastair MINNIS and Rosalynn VOADEN (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 343-69, esp. pp. 361-4.

⁶ Madeline CAVINESS, "Artist: 'To See, Hear, and Know All at Once'," in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara NEWMAN (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 110-24; eadem, "Hildegard as Designer of the Illustrations to Her Works," in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of Her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles BURNETT and Peter DRONKE (London: Warburg Institute, 1998), pp. 29-62.

⁷ See especially the work of Christel MEIER and Lieselotte SAURMA-JELTSCH, discussed below.

⁸ "Einführung" to *Scivias*, ed. FÜHRKÖTTER and CARLEVARIS, CCCM 43, p. xxxiii.

⁹ The numbering of the miniatures follows that in SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*. The titles given for each miniature have been adapted from her descriptions and from those given in *Hildegard of Bingen: Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba HART and Jane BISHOP (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

1. Fol. 1r: Author portrait accompanying the *Protestificatio* (Fig. 1)
2. Fol. 2r: I.1, The Glorious Splendor of the God enthroned upon the Iron Mountain, with *Timor Dei* and *Pauper(a) Spiritu* at its base
3. Fol. 4r: I.2, The Fall (Fig. 6)
4. Fol. 14r: I.3, The Cosmos in the Form of an Egg
5. Fol. 22r: I.4, The Embodiment of the Soul and its Earthly Life
6. Fol. 24v: I.4, The Virgin Soul Attacked by Demonic Temptations (following ch. 4 in the commentary) (Fig. 7)
7. Fol. 25r: I.4, Death, the Flight of the Soul, and Judgment
8. Fol. 35r: I.5, Synagogue (Fig. 13)
9. Fol. 38r: I.6, The Ranks of Angels
10. Fol. 41v: II.1, Creation, Fall, and Redemption (Fig. 3)
11. Fol. 47r: II.2, The Trinity (Fig. 5)
12. Fol. 51r: II.3, Ecclesia, the Mother of the Faithful in Baptism (Fig. 11)
13. Fol. 60r: II.4, Ecclesia and the Tower of the Spirit in Confirmation
14. Fol. 66r: II.5, Ecclesia's Mystical Body: Her Orders (Fig. 12)
15. Fol. 86r: II.6, Crucifixion, Endowment of Ecclesia, and Eucharist (Fig. 10)
16. Fol. 86v: II.6, Eucharist and its Reception
17. Fol. 115v: II.7, The Devil Bound (Fig. 8)
18. Fol. 116r: II.7, The Tempter's Hell-mouth opposes Humankind (Fig. 9)
19. Fol. 122v: III.1, The One upon the Throne
20. Fol. 123r: III.1, The Fallen Stars (Angels) (Fig. 2)
21. Fol. 130v: III.2, The Edifice of Salvation
22. Fol. 138v: III.3, The Tower of the Anticipation of God's Will
23. Fol. 139r: III.3, The Five Virtues of Heavenly Love, Discipline, Modesty, Mercy, and Victory
24. Fol. 145v: III.4, The Pillar of the Word of God
25. Fol. 146r: III.4, The Virtue of Knowledge of God
26. Fol. 153r: III.5, The Zeal of God
27. Fol. 161v: III.6, The Triple Stone Wall of the Old Law, Spiritual Authority, and Secular Authority
28. Fol. 172r: III.7, The Pillar of the Trinity
29. Fol. 178r: III.8, The Pillar of the Savior's Humanity, with the Seven Virtues of Humility, Charity, Fear, Obedience, Faith, Hope, and Chastity, and with the Grace of God
30. Fol. 192r: III.9, The Tower of the Church and the Virtues of Wisdom, Justice, Fortitude, and the triplet of Sanctity, the Root of Goodness, and Self-Sacrifice
31. Fol. 292v: III.10, The Son of Man and the Five Virtues of Constancy, Celestial Desire, Compunction of Heart, Contempt of the World, and Concord
32. Fol. 214v: III.11, The Five Ages to Come and the Antichrist
33. Fol. 225r: III.12, The Last Judgment
34. Fol. 225v: III.12, The New Heaven and the New Earth

35. Fol. 229r: III.13, The Symphony of the Choirs of Heaven (Fig. 4)

A complicating factor for modern studies of this manuscript is the loss of the original since its evacuation to Dresden for safe-keeping in 1945. Fortunately, a full, hand-painted facsimile was made by the nuns of the modern Abbey of St. Hildegard in Eibingen, working from the original manuscript in the 1920's; there also survive black-and-white photographs made at the same time.¹⁰ Although there are slight stylistic discrepancies between the facsimile and original, as seen in the photographs, the facsimile is nevertheless so exacting in its reproduction that it suffices for a study of this kind.¹¹ Furthermore, two of the earliest studies of the manuscript, by Louis Baillet (1911) and Hiltgart Keller (1933), were made from the original manuscript and contain detailed and precise descriptive catalogues of its images.¹² Comparisons of their observations to the facsimile confirm its accuracy and usefulness as a proxy for study of the lost original.

2.1. *Scivias: Composition and Themes of the Work*

Scivias (“Know the Ways”) was the first of Hildegard’s three large, visionary works, upon which she labored a full decade from 1141 to 1151. It was followed in 1158-1163 by *Liber Vitae Meritorum* (“Book of the Rewards of Life”), and by her final and most definitive visionary theological work, *Liber Divinorum Operum* (“Book of Divine Works”), begun in 1163 or 1164 and completed between 1172 and 1174, when the Visionary Doctor was well into her seventies. All of Hildegard’s extraordinary theological, musical, and artistic work thus belonged to the second half of her life. Each of these three visionary works followed the same compositional format: Hildegard would first describe what it was that she saw in each visionary experience (*et vidi...*, a pattern inherited from the visionaries of Scripture like Ezekiel, Daniel, and John), and then she would record in words dictated to her by the voice of the Light in which she experienced the vision the allegorical meaning of each of its details, following the structural model of standard scriptural exegesis.

The urge to begin writing, however, was a difficult one. We know from several autobiographical passages that her experiences of “the Living Light” and its shadow had

¹⁰ See “Einführung” to *Scivias*, ed. FÜHRKÖTTER and CARLEVARIS, CCCM 43, pp. xxxv-xxxvii.

¹¹ See CAVINESS, “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships: Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*,” pp. 75-76; Lieselotte SAURMA-JELTSCH, “Die Rupertsberger »Scivias«-Handschrift: Überlegungen zu ihrer Entstehung,” in *Hildegard von Bingen. Prophetin durch die Zeiten*, ed. Äbtissin Edeltraud FORSTER (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1997), pp. 340-58, at p. 340; and eadem, *Die Miniaturen*, p. 4.

¹² Louis BAILLET, “Les miniatures du »Scivias« de Sainte Hildegarde,” *Monuments et mémoires publiés par l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* v. 19 (1911), pp. 49-149; and Hiltgart L. KELLER, *Mittelrheinische Buchmalereien in Handschriften aus dem Kreise der Hiltgart von Bingen* (Stuttgart: Surkamp, 1933). Throughout this study, my own observations of the images in the facsimile have been carefully checked against these descriptions of the originals.

been with her since childhood, often with confusing and even frightening results. But “in the forty-third year of [her] earthly course,” as she tells us in the *Protestificatio* (“Declaration”) that prefaces *Scivias*, the brilliant splendor of her visionary experience burst in upon her with an urgent vocation: “Speak therefore of these wonders, and, being so taught, write them and speak.”¹³ She continues:

When I was forty-two years and seven months old, Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning but like a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch. And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures, namely the Psalter, the Gospel and the other catholic volumes of both the Old and the New Testaments (...). But I, though I saw and heard these things, refused to write for a long time through doubt and a 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 [the nun Richardis of Stade] and of that man whom I had secretly sought and found [the monk Volmar of Disibodenberg, her first secretary], I set my hand to writing. (...) And I spoke and wrote these things not by the invention of my heart or that of any other person, but as by the secret mysteries of God I heard and received them in the heavenly places. And again I heard a voice from Heaven saying to me, “Cry out therefore, and write thus!”

The result of this divine commission was a collection of twenty-six visions, arranged into three parts. The first, containing six visions, deals with the order of creation and is built around the relationships in creation between microcosm and macrocosm. Its opening vision confirms Hildegard's divine commission to “cry out and speak of the origin of pure salvation” and “burst forth into a fountain of abundance and overflow with mystical knowledge,” all in a prophetic mission to the Church's wayward ministers, “who, though they see the inmost contents of the Scriptures, do not wish to tell them or preach them, because they are lukewarm and sluggish in serving God's justice” (*Scivias* I.1, Vision). This is followed by an account of creation and the Fall (I.2), an elaborate image of the macrocosmic universe as an egg (I.3), a description of the microcosmic relationship of soul to body (I.4), God's first manifestation to his people in the form of Synagogue (I.5), and the ranks of angels (I.6). The second part, of seven visions, is

¹³ All quotations from *Scivias* will be taken from the translation of HART and BISHOP, with citations offered in-text in the format Part.Vision.Chapter. Occasionally, the translation has been modified to better match particular nuances in the Latin, especially as concerns color-related imagery, as found in the critical edition of FÜHRKÖTTER and CARLEVARIS. For reasons of bulk, I have chosen not to include the original Latin for most quotes from *Scivias* in the footnotes.

focused on the order of redemption, and deals with the Church and her sacraments. Its opening vision recapitulates the story of creation and fall, but brings the story to its fruitful restoration in the work of the Redeemer. After a vision that attempts to grapple with the Trinity in its relationship to creation and the world (II.2), the remaining visions describe Ecclesia in her relationship to Christ (as Bride) and to the faithful (as Mother), culminating in a monstrous vision of the Devil enchained and the temptations with which he entices humankind. Across these thirteen visions, Hildegard articulates the process from Creation through recreative Redemption, perfected once in the Incarnation and sacrifice of the Son on the Cross and perpetuated in history by the work of the Church.

The thirteen visions of the third part deal with the order of sanctification, presented in the image of the “edifice of salvation” and often comprising an extensive commentary on the personified virtues. These architecturally-structured visions allow Hildegard to reinterpret the recreative dynamic from the eschatological perspective. It concludes with a vision of the symphony of the heavenly court, and early versions of some of her musical compositions and her musical morality play, *Ordo Virtutum*. This study will mainly confine itself to the Rupertsberg images accompanying the first two parts of the work, as the image cycle that was produced for the extended description of the Edifice of Salvation that forms the bulk of the third part (*Scivias* III.2-10) operates under its own unified and particular pictorial logic that sets it slightly apart from the other miniatures.¹⁴

Despite its unique structure as a record of visionary revelation, *Scivias* shares an affinity with other twelfth-century attempts to articulate a systematic Christian theology. Barbara Newman, for example, has compared it in breadth and scale to Hugh of St. Victor's *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, produced in the 1130's, and like Hildegard, Hugh is thought to have used visual images in his work (e.g. his treatise on the Ark of Noah).¹⁵ While Hugh divided his work *De sacramentis* into two parts—the first dealing with the Creator and the dispensation of the Law and the second with the Redeemer and the dispensation of Grace—Hildegard's tripartite structure recalls also Rupert of Deutz'

¹⁴ BAILLET even went so far as to suggest that, of the various painters who worked on the miniatures, one group was responsible for miniatures 1-20 (through the first vision of Part III), and another for the remaining fifteen miniatures that comprise most of Part III (“Les miniatures du »Scivias« de Sainte Hildegarde,” pp. 124-31). Although all scholars since then have eschewed so strong a break between the parts, recognizing instead the overall unity of the design amidst discernable differences in execution (owing to multiple painters), the miniatures accompanying the Edifice of Salvation (21-31) do possess their own distinct unity—see SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, pp. 19 and 22-3. As she notes, four of the manuscript's five undivided, full-page miniatures occur in Parts I and II (Fol. 14r, I.3; fol. 38r, I.6; fol. 47r, II.2; and fol. 66r, II.5); the fifth (fol. 192r, III.9), although sharing its universalizing theme with the images of Ecclesia in Part II, utilizes a different format from the other full-page miniatures and shares the multifocal approach found in the other depictions of the many virtues whose allegorical presence dominates the Edifice of Salvation in Part III.

¹⁵ Barbara NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987, 2nd ed., 1997), p. 16; see also NEWMAN's “Introduction” to the HART and BISHOP translation of *Scivias*, pp. 23-4. On Hugh's use of visual images in *The Mystical Ark*, see Conrad RUDOLPH, “First, I Find the Center Point”: *Reading the Text of Hugh of Saint Victor's The Mystic Ark* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 2004).

De Trinitate et operibus eius, an exegetical work of the second decade of the twelfth century; and the Trinitarian schema developed in the last decades of the century by Joachim of Fiore.¹⁶ Joachim also shared a fondness for visual exegesis, and one could be tempted to find his division of salvation history into three ages according to the three persons of the Trinity paralleled in Hildegard's delineation of the order of creation under the Father, the time of the Church under the Son, and the order of the virtues as a work of the Spirit.¹⁷ Where Joachim's emphasis tends to lie on the double role of the Spirit in salvation history, however, Hildegard's focus falls squarely on the Incarnation as that history's central event.¹⁸ Particularly important in this regard is a theological concept in which Hildegard shared an interest with certain other western, twelfth-century thinkers like Rupert of Deutz and Honorius Augustodunensis: the absolute predestination of the Incarnate Christ according to the "eternal counsel" of Ps. 32:11, to which Hildegard made explicit reference at the opening of *Scivias* III.1, in the only place in the entire work in which she herself speaks in reply to "the One Who sat on the throne," albeit "from the inner knowledge of that vision":

Grant me to make known the divine counsel which was ordained in the ancient counsel, insofar as I can and should: how You willed Your Son to become incarnate and become a human being within Time; which you willed before all creation in Your rectitude and the fire of the Dove, the Holy Spirit, so that Your Son might rise from a Virgin in the splendid

¹⁶ For Rupert's still too-little studied work, see John VAN ENGEN, *Rupert of Deutz* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1983), esp. pp. 81-94; the massive work spans four volumes and more than 2000 pages in the critical edition by Hrabanus HAACKE, CCCM 21-24 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971-1972). Rupert's only work to receive illustrations in the manuscript transmission is, however, a separate commentary on the Apocalypse; see Michael CURSCHMANN, "Imagined Exegesis: Text and Picture in the Exegetical Works of Rupert of Deutz, Honorius Augustodunensis, and Gerhoch of Reichersberg," *Traditio* v. 44 (1988), pp. 145-69, esp. 148-153. For a comparison of Hildegard's Trinitarian images to Joachim's, see Bernard MCGINN, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER and Anne-Marie BOUCHÉ (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 186-207.

¹⁷ Christel MEIER has argued for such a Trinitarian interpretation of the three parts of *Scivias* in "Hildegard von Bingen," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, v. 3, ed. K. RUH et al. (Berlin, 1981ff.), pp. 1263-4. Of the extensive literature on Joachim, see especially Bernard MCGINN, *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 97-148; Richard K. EMMERSON and Ronald B. HERZMAN, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 5-35; and Marjorie REEVES, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages. A Study in Joachimism* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1993). Joachim also followed the urge to illustrate his patterns of history in his *Liber Figurarum*, for which see Marjorie REEVES and Beatrice HIRSCH-REICH, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

¹⁸ See E. Randolph DANIEL, "The Double Procession of the Holy Spirit in Joachim of Fiore's Understanding of History," *Speculum* v. 55 (1980), pp. 469-483.

beauty of the sun and be clothed with true humanity, a human form assumed for the sake of humankind.

As Newman has shown, much of Hildegard's theology centers on the various manifestations of that divine counsel within time, and especially the feminine mediators of that counsel, the Virgin Mother Mary and the Virgin Mother Church.¹⁹ Curiously, the former appears in embodied form in the visions of *Scivias* only once, as the Queen of Heaven in the work's final piece (III.13), enthroned in the uppermost medallion as the choirs of heaven sing their celestial symphony. Far more prominent, especially in four of the visions in Part II, is the grand female figure of Ecclesia, to whose extraordinary appearance we will return at the end of this study. For Hildegard, the Incarnate Redeemer born of a virgin, and the Church, his virgin Bride born, baptized, and betrothed in his blood, are the keys to the perfection of creation, even while the synthetic cooperation of all three persons of the Trinity is necessary in the act. Hildegard's notion of a perfection of the physical as well as spiritual order of creation is the hallmark of her unique, sacramental perspective.

2.2. Dating the Manuscript

All studies of the Rupertsberg manuscript agree that it cannot have been either the first fair copy of the work, or even an early copy, given paleographical and stylistic evidence. The earliest full study of the manuscript, by Louis Baillet in 1911, established the range of 1150-1180 for its production, based on the *terminus a quo* of the work's completion ca. 1150, and paleographical evidence and stylistic comparisons, especially of the costuming and armor that appears in certain miniatures of Part III.²⁰ Following the comparative evidence available to them at the time, Baillet's co-author, Puniet, narrowed that window to 1160-1180 and suggested that the manuscript was produced in one of the professional scriptoria in Trier, likely that of the monastery of St. Matthias / St. Eucharius, with whose abbots Hildegard had a warm relationship.²¹ Indeed, it is likely that the monks of that scriptorium were kept busy in the latter half of the twelfth century fulfilling some of the many eager requests that she appears to have gotten for copies of her writings.²² Furthermore, Baillet's foundational study established that the scribes and

¹⁹ NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 42-64 and 156-249.

²⁰ Louis BAILLET, "Les miniatures du »Scivias« de Sainte Hildegarde," *Monuments et mémoires publiés par l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* v. 19 (1911), pp. 49-149, at 139-43.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-9. Hildegard exchanged nearly a dozen letters with the community's abbots and monks over the years (Letters 209-220), as well as several letters with other communities in Trier (Letters 221-222). She also preached one of her powerful sermons on the Feast of Pentecost, 1160, to the cathedral clergy of the city, castigating them for their corruption and prophesying a remarkable future of renewal and holiness (Letter 223r).

²² See Angela CARLEVARIS, *Das Werk Hildegards von Bingen im Spiegel des Skriptoriums von Trier St. Eucharius* (Trier: Paulinus, 1999). For the fulsome praise that Hildegard received from correspondants

the painters (there were likely three of the former, along with two rubricators, and as many as seven of the latter) must have worked closely with one another, as the hand that wrote the inscriptions on several images is the same as one of the scribes of the main text. Finally, the rough layout of the images was clearly planned before the writing of the text, as the layout of the final chapter headings for each vision into one column or into two is determined by the size and shape of each miniature that follows them.²³

In addition to Baillet's, there were two other major studies of the manuscript and its images completed before its disappearance in 1945. Hiltgart Keller's dissertation work, begun in 1928 and completed in 1933, is of particular importance for the precise and copious descriptions she gives of each miniature.²⁴ Unfortunately, its publication in Stuttgart in 1933 was in typescript with hand-drawn figures, and it has remained too little read and too little cited by most scholars since that time.²⁵ Keller, too, recognized the tight connections between manuscripts produced in the scriptoria at Trier and certain features of the Rupertsberg manuscript, especially in the paleography and the slightly old-fashioned style of the decorated initials.²⁶ Yet, the time she spent pouring over the manuscript left her convinced that its unique images could only have been conceived under the direct influence of Hildegard's powerful personality. Based on a report of Guibert of Gembloux from 1177 that indicated that the nuns of her abbey were involved in the production of books, Keller was the first to suggest that the illustrations may have been produced, not in Trier, but in Hildegard's own scriptorium on the Rupertsberg, the independent abbey that she established in 1150 after a two-year battle to free herself and the community of women around her from their ancillary confines at the men's house of Disibodenberg.²⁷ Ultimately, she concluded that the text itself may have been copied in the Abbey of St. Matthias / St. Eucharius in Trier, but that the paintings must have originated under Hildegard's supervision at the Rupertsberg. But when?

who eagerly devoured her writings, see e.g. Letter 200, from the Abbot Gero of Salem, ca. 1165-1173; similarly, Guibert thanks the nuns of the Rupertsberg for sending his community a copy of *Liber Vitae Meritorum* in ca. 1176 (Letter 108a).

²³ BAILLET, "Les miniatures du »Scivias« de Sainte Hildegarde," p. 132.

²⁴ Hiltgart KELLER, *Mittelrheinische Buchmalereien in Handschriften aus dem Kreise der Hiltgart von Bingen* (Stuttgart: Surkamp, 1933).

²⁵ I have worked from a photocopy I made of the copy held by the Seminar für Lateinische Philologie des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit at the Westfälische-Wilhelms Universität, Münster, which was itself a photocopy made by Christel Meier from one of the few original copies held in the Stadtbibliothek Trier.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8. Guibert wrote of the nuns: "In claustro decenter cum silentio sedentes, lectioni et discendo cantui suo student; et...privatis diebus, per officinas competentes, vel scribendis libris, vel texendis stolis, vel aliis operibus manuum intendunt." (In *Analecta Sanctae Hildegardis*, ed. J.-B. PITRA [Monte Cassino: Typis Sacri Montis Casinensis, 1882], p. 406.) As we will see below, there may, in fact, be an important connection between the nuns textile and book production. On the move from the Disibodenberg to the Rupertsberg, see John VAN ENGEL, "Abbess: 'Mother and Teacher'," in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara NEWMAN (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), pp. 30-51, at 37-41.



Fig. 1: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 1r: Author portrait accompanying the *Protestificatio*. From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

Keller narrowed the window of production to the last few years of Hildegard's life, after the death of her long-time and beloved secretary, Volmar, in 1173, and coinciding with the arrival of her long-time admirer, Guibert, to take up the position of secretary in 1177, a position he held until 1180, a few months after her death. She believed that Hildegard used the opening image of the manuscript (fol. 1r: Fig. 1), an author portrait to accompany the *Protestificatio*, as a personal memorial to Volmar.²⁸ Rather than the standard scribe imagery employed, for example, in the Salem *Scivias* Codex or the Lucca manuscript of the *Liber Divinorum Operum*, in this image, Volmar leans intimately in through the window that separates him from the sanctified space in which Hildegard sits, bathed by the warming tongues of divine fire.²⁹ Keller further proposed several pieces of evidence that would indicate that particular features of illustrating *Scivias* were on Hildegard's mind in the early 1170's. For example, in the second vision of the *Liber Divinorum Operum* (completed between 1172 and 1174, around the time of Volmar's death), Hildegard describes a vision of the cosmos as, "a wheel, wonderful to see (...)

²⁸ KELLER, *Mittelrheinische Buchmalereien*, pp. 24-25.

²⁹ There is only one manuscript of Hildegard's final work, *Liber Divinorum Operum*, to contain illustrations: the early thirteenth-century Lucca, Biblioteca Statale, MS 1942. Madeline CAVINESS has suggested its illustrations may, however, also be based on sketches and designs that Hildegard made before her death: "Artist: 'To See, Hear, and Know All at Once'," pp. 121-3.

[that] was nearly like that instrument that I had seen twenty-eight years before, signified in the shape of an egg, as shown in the third vision of the book *Scivias*.” The later interpretation of this specific point of comparison assures us that both images are appropriate, but for different reasons.³⁰ This refers, of course, to the image of the cosmos in the shape of an egg in *Scivias* I.3 (image on fol. 14r).³¹ As we will see below, Hildegard makes another reference to an image from *Scivias*—of the Trinity (II.2, Fig. 5)—in a famous letter she wrote to Guibert in 1175, a short time before he joined her.³²

Keller's late dating of the manuscript received additional support in Albert Derolez's 1998 overview of the manuscript transmission of Hildegard's works. He bases his initial arguments not on the images but on the peculiar structure of the Rupertsberg manuscript's text. By placing the chapter lists before each individual vision rather than grouped together before each of the three main parts, it “differs from the arrangement of all other early manuscripts of this text, made on the Rupertsberg and elsewhere.” He further notes that the main scribe of the Rupertsberg *Scivias* shares affinities with one of the correctors of the Ghent manuscript of the *Liber Divinorum Operum*, which dates from the early 1170's. Indeed, he seems to suggest that the *Liber Divinorum Operum*'s theological scheme may have had a direct influence on the conception of the Rupertsberg manuscript's images, especially in the places where they differ from the text. He thus posits a date for the manuscript of between 1175 and 1180.³³

The other principal study of the manuscript executed before its loss was that of Josef Schomer, published in 1937. This study is most valuable for articulating his theory of the illustrations as a “künstlerische Neuschöpfung”—artistically innovative in ways that are very unusual for medieval art, precisely because Hildegard built entirely new images around traditional theological concepts.³⁴ In dating the manuscript's production, however, he mainly followed Baillet's conclusions: between 1150 and 1180, in the scriptoria of Trier, most likely St. Matthias / St. Eucharius. Although he did consider Guibert's

³⁰ HILDEGARDIS BINGENSIS, *Liber Divinorum Operum*, ed. Albert DEROLEZ and Peter DRONKE, CCCM 92 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996): I.2 (Vision) and I.2.3: “[R]ota mirifice visionis apparuit (...) huius fere similitudinis ut instrumentum illud, quod ante viginti octo annos velut in figura ovi significative videram, quomodo in tercia visione libri Scivias ostenditur.”

³¹ KELLER, *Mittelrheinische Buchmalereien*, p. 27. Keller also suggested that working on the miniature for *Scivias* I.1, in which the iron-grey mountain upon which God is enthroned is full of windows from which little faces peek out, influenced her choice to invoke the image of “the windows of the celestial Jerusalem” in a letter to Abbot Dieter of Maulbronn. However, the revised dating of this letter in the modern edition places its composition in the early 1150's, just after the original completion of *Scivias*, rather than Keller's date of 1170/1 (Letter 171, in *Epistolarium II*, pp. 389-90; trans. *Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 2, p. 130).

³² Letter 103r, in *Epistolarium II*, p. 253; trans. *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 2, p. 24.

³³ Albert DEROLEZ, “The Manuscript Transmission of Hildegard of Bingen's Writings: The State of the Problem,” in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of Her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles BURNETT and Peter DRONKE (London: Warburg Institute, 1998), pp. 17-28, at p. 24.

³⁴ Josef SCHOMER, *Die Illustrationen zu den Visionen der hl. Hildegard als künstlerische Neuschöpfung (Das Verhältnis der Illustrationen zueinander und zum Texte)* (Bonn: Stodiek, 1937).

description of the nuns engaged in the copying of books, he believed that if they were also involved in illustrating them at the level found in the Rupertsberg manuscript, Guibert would have said so explicitly.³⁵

Definitive evidence that the manuscript was produced at the Rupertsberg, however, was recognized by two nuns of the modern Abbey of St. Hildegard in Eibingen, Marianna Schrader and Adelgundis Führkötter, in their magisterial 1956 study, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen*.³⁶ In addition to finally clearing away the doubts that had long clouded Hildegard's definitive authorship of the various works ascribed to her, they recognized that the principal scribe of the Rupertsberg manuscript was the same as the principal scribe of the abbey's ledger book and necrology, where that scribe's contributions to the former run through 1195.³⁷ Furthermore, they argued that a correction that appears in the text of the *Protestificatio* to add the specific detail that Hildegard was forty-two years *and seven months (septemque mensium)* old at the time of the divine command to write, could only have come from Hildegard herself.³⁸ Nevertheless, they maintained Baillet's suggested dating of 1160-1180. When Führkötter collaborated with Angela Carlevaris to critically edit *Scivias* for the *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis* (published in 1978), their introduction offered an estimated date of 1165, but acknowledged the range suggested by Baillet. They also confirmed the assumption that the correction of Hildegard's age must indicate her supervision of the manuscript.³⁹ Furthermore, they followed Schomer's analysis to conclude that Hildegard was "the spiritual creator of the design of the manuscript's images."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, they maintained Baillet's conclusion that the miniatures were likely painted by monks of St. Matthias / St. Eucharius in Trier—perhaps following the observations of Josepha Knipps, the artist at the Abbey of St. Hildegard responsible for painting the images in the facsimile upon which we now rely, who believed categorically that the miniatures must have been painted by men rather than women. They concluded their discussion of the miniatures with a note of caution, however, concerning the thereunto unchallenged assumption of Hildegard's supervisory role in the manuscript's design, based on the recent work of Christel Meier.⁴¹

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-13.

³⁶ Marianna SCHRADER and Adelgundis FÜHRKÖTTER *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1956).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44 and 30. They also identified a third scribe from the *Scivias* manuscript (Hand C), to whom they attribute the inscription on the miniature on fol. 86v as well as parts of the necrology.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁹ "Einführung" to *Scivias*, ed. FÜHRKÖTTER and CARLEVARIS, CCCM 43, pp. xix and xxxii-xxxiii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxxv: "Somit ist Hildegard nicht nur die Verfasserin der Texte der *Scivias*, sondern auch die geistige Urheberin bei der Gestaltung der Miniaturen dieser Handschrift."

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv-xxxvi. Unfortunately, the major work on the relationship between text and image in all of the illustrated manuscripts of Hildegard's works to which Führkötter and Carlevaris refer in n. 72 as forthcoming from Meier (*Text und Werk im überlieferten Werk Hildegards von Bingen*), to which Meier

Meier's pioneering work in exploring the visual vocabularies of a variety of (especially neoplatonic) medieval authors has included several key contributions to the study of Hildegard's work.⁴² Although she has never undertaken to establish different criteria for dating the Rupertsberg manuscript, she has approached it with a newly critical eye, refusing to assume *a priori* that the images must have been designed by Hildegard herself—an assumption she has found suspect, based on its implications of Romantic and modern notions of the solitary artistic genius, an approach foreign to medieval sensibilities.⁴³ Furthermore, Meier has held firmly that the numerous places where the images in the Rupertsberg manuscript diverge from or even contradict the vision text are an indication that “they are not simply to be imagined as overseen by Hildegard.”⁴⁴ Her most important contribution has been to explore the ways in which the images operate within (and against) the established iconographical traditions of medieval Christian art, thus helping to spring them from the art historical isolation (as Saurma-Jeltsch would later term it) into which they had been placed by assumptions of their unique creativity. In setting the images into conversation with traditional visual vocabularies and discourses—and particularly in using the images in the Salem Codex of the work as comparanda to understand how different artists would use those vocabularies in different ways to interpret the text—Meier opened up the possibility of understanding the images as attempts at critical interpretation of Hildegard's vision texts. Indeed, the different paths taken by the Rupertsberg and Salem artists are possible precisely because Hildegard's work offers multiple possibilities of intertextuality and intervisuality.

Meier's challenge to critically examine the images in those wider contexts has been taken up in the last two decades by Lieselotte Saurma-Jeltsch, whose 1998 study of the manuscript's miniatures provides the fullest attempt to date at just such a critical, contextual examination.⁴⁵ By reevaluating all of the evidence put forth for dating the Rupertsberg manuscript, Saurma-Jeltsch has concluded that it was most likely produced in the decade after Hildegard's death in 1179, likely as part of the other projects undertaken at that point—the compilation of her *opera omnia* in the Riesenkodez, and the composition of her saintly *Vita* and the testimonies included in the *Acta Canonizationis* later forwarded to Rome—to ensure the recognition and remembrance of Hildegard's

herself made reference in her chapter on the same subject (“Zum Verhältnis von Text und Illustration im überlieferten Werk Hildegards von Bingen,” pp. 159-69, at p. 159, n. 1, in the 1979 Festschrift *Hildegard von Bingen, 1179-1979. Festschrift zum 800. Todestag der Heiligen*, ed. Anton Ph. BRÜCK [Mainz: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte]), never seems to have appeared.

⁴² See esp. Christel MEIER, “Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegards von Bingen.” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* v. 6 (1972), pp. 245-355.

⁴³ MEIER, “Zum Verhältnis von Text und Illustration,” pp. 159-61.

⁴⁴ MEIER, “Calcere caput draconis,” p. 385: “[A]uch der illustrierte Rupertsberger Kodex, in dessen Miniaturen sich trotz seiner genauen Wiedergabe der Visionstexte gleichwohl zahlreiche Abweichungen von diesen finden, ist, was die Entstehung der Bilder angeht, nicht einfach als von Hildegard überwacht vorzustellen.”

⁴⁵ SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*.

prophetic sanctity.⁴⁶ The paleographical evidence of the Rupertsberg ledger, upon which Führkötter and Schrader relied to secure the *Scivias* manuscript's production at Hildegard's abbey, establishes an absolute *terminus ante quem* at 1195—but, Saurma-Jeltsch argues, there is no reason on that basis alone to place the manuscript's production before Hildegard's death in 1179. Furthermore, she argues, the correction to Hildegard's age in the *Protestificatio* is ambivalent—after all, if the visionary had overseen the manuscript's production, it is hard to see why the error would have been committed in the first place.⁴⁷ Saurma-Jeltsch also questions whether the ever self-deprecating Hildegard would have allowed the author portrait that opens the manuscript to be designed to emphasize so boldly her unique claims to inspired authority.⁴⁸

The most consequential of Saurma-Jeltsch's reconsiderations, however, is stylistic. The sheer range of iconographical vocabularies to which the images owe a debt, as well as the exacting workmanship, indicate the manuscript must have been produced in a professional workshop with access to a wide variety of exemplars. Furthermore, when compared to several securely-dateable manuscripts from the 1160's through the 1190's, the stylistic features and vocabulary of forms argue for a later period of production, likely the 1180's. Particularly noteworthy is the absence of the trough-like drapery found in the so-called Hildegard Gebetbuch, which was produced nearby, perhaps in Trier, in the 1170's.⁴⁹ Instead, Saurma-Jeltsch notes a particular evolution in the drapery that points to connections in the 1180's with manuscripts produced at Andernach or Maria Laach, or perhaps even Cologne.⁵⁰ While other scholars (most notably Madeline Caviness) have emphasized various archaizing and conservative features, often to argue for an earlier date, Saurma-Jeltsch confidently demonstrates that other evolutions in style can only point to the last two decades of the twelfth century.⁵¹

In contrast to the cautious approaches taken by Meier and Saurma-Jeltsch, Caviness has argued strongly in the last two decades in favor of Hildegard's authorship of the images. Indeed, she has criticized many twentieth-century studies for allowing “a good

⁴⁶ SAURMA-JELTSCH, “Die Rupertsberger »Scivias«-Handschrift,” pp. 353-4; eadem, *Die Miniaturen*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.

⁴⁹ On this manuscript, see the work of Elisabeth KLEMM, “Der Bilderzyklus im Hildegard-Gebetbuch,” in the Commentary Vol. to *Hildegard-Gebetbuch. Faksimileausgabe des Codex-Latinus Monacensis 935 der Bayrischen Staatsbibliothek* (Wiesbaden, 1987), pp. 71-356.

⁵⁰ SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, pp. 6-11.

⁵¹ KELLER noted old-fashioned features in the initials, though her analysis also points to stronger connections with Cologne than with Trier (*Mittelrheinische Buchmalereien*, pp. 131-6). For CAVINESS' observations, see “Artist,” pp. 116-7; she posits the Sacramentary of Maria Laach (ca. 1160) as a stylistic parallel, especially for the drapery. SAURMA-JELTSCH disputes this suggestion, arguing that while the stiff drapery in the Sacramentary is simplistic, united to bodily form, and two-dimensional, the Rupertsberg *Scivias* represents a later development of that style, with more movement and freedom from the bodily form even while retaining the bold lines (*Die Miniaturen*, p. 10).

deal of vagueness and confusion” to obscure the question by referring to the images as “inspired” by Hildegard, but by refusing to actually name her as their master designer.⁵² Such equanimity smacks, for Caviness, of earlier interpretative moves that sought to minimize Hildegard’s intellectual contributions. To the lengthy list of Hildegard’s “logocentric” accomplishments that modernity has finally recognized, Caviness strives definitively to add “making pictures” and to declare her perhaps the only true “great master” of the Middle Ages.⁵³

Though never claiming for her the actual role of painter, Caviness posits that Hildegard was directly responsible for all other stages of the images’ design. She interprets the repeated divine command of *Scribe!* in the *Protestificatio* as “a single verb to connote her setting down, or drafting, or sketching, the words and pictures.” Taking the author portrait that accompanies the *Protestificatio* (Fig. 1) as direct evidence of Hildegard’s compositional process, she believes that Hildegard would have sketched the outlines of her visionary images on the wax tablet in her own hands, while “more or less simultaneously” dictating the text to Volmar, who can be seen copying down the dictation on loose parchment leaves.⁵⁴ The dimensions of the wax tablet would then account, for example, for the large number of illustrations that are contained in tall but rather narrow frames, and the borders of the frames would correspond to the thin wooden frame in which the wax had been poured.⁵⁵ These initial sketches therefore originated with the genesis of the work itself in the 1140’s, and then later served as the basis for the designs of the images in the manuscript. Thus, Caviness resists the temptation of later scholars to push the date of the manuscript’s production as late as possible, arguing that the date of 1165 proposed by Führkötter and Carlevaris is sufficient, or even possibly a little late.⁵⁶

To support this theory, Caviness turns to a suggestion first made by the early-twentieth century historian of science, Charles Singer, and later popularized by one of the twentieth century’s greatest neuroscientists, Oliver Sachs: that Hildegard’s visionary experiences can be understood through the pathology of a particular type of migraine aura called “scintillating scotoma”.⁵⁷ Because Caviness herself suffers from this same

⁵² CAVINESS, “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” pp. 77-9.

⁵³ Madeline CAVINESS, “Hildegard of Bingen: German Author, Illustrator, and Musical Composer, 1098-1179,” in *Dictionary of Women Artists*, ed. Delia Gaze (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), pp. 685-7.

⁵⁴ CAVINESS, “Artist,” p. 115; see also eadem, “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” pp. 87-91. KELLER also suggested that, in the context of Guibert of Gembloux’s description of the nuns’ activities on the Rupertsberg, *scribere* could mean all aspects of book production (*Mittelrheinische Buchmalereien*, p. 127).

⁵⁵ CAVINESS, “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” pp. 90-1; eadem, “Hildegard as Designer of the Illustrations to Her Works,” p. 32.

⁵⁶ CAVINESS, “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” p. 73; eadem, “Artist,” pp. 116-7.

⁵⁷ See Charles Joseph SINGER, *From Magic to Science, Essays on the Scientific Twilight* (London: E. Benn, 1928), pp. 199-239; idem, *Studies in the History and Method of Science* (London: W. Dawson &

physical malady, she is in a good position to notice the ways in which the illustrations evoke the experience. Indeed, Caviness' own migraine auras have been triggered by viewing the shimmering effects of the images, which first inspired Singer to investigate whether Hildegard might have experienced the flashes of light and jagged-edged, contrastive architectural shapes that appear in the visual field of patients recorded in the pathology of scintillating scotoma. The widespread use of silver and gold in the manuscript, together with a preference for setting off particular shapes on a highly contrastive palette of blacks, greys, and purples, highlighted with white stippling in the outlines, contributes to an extraordinarily dynamic visual movement in different parts of the images. A particularly impressive example of this is the image of the falling stars accompanying *Scivias* III.1 (fol. 123r, Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 123r: III.1, The Fallen Stars (Angels).
From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

Caviness suggests that these dynamic stars, which are very different from other illustrations of the fallen angels as stars in contemporary Apocalypse illustrations, are

Sons, 1955), pp. 1-55; and Oliver W. SACKS, *Migraine: Understanding a Common Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 55-8 and 106-9.

similar to “the phosphenes or scintillating scotoma (...) of migraine auras.”⁵⁸ While she is careful not to reduce Hildegard’s intellectual accomplishments to a physiological cause, Caviness does believe that the migraine auras likely offered a point of departure for the visionary’s theological imagination.⁵⁹

2.3. The Relationship between Vision, Text, and Image

As a result of her daring suggestion of the simultaneous origins of the visual and textual records of Hildegard’s visionary experiences, Caviness has charted a middle course between the main approaches that have dominated the interpretation of the relationship between the images in the Rupertsberg manuscript, Hildegard’s visionary experiences, and the text. On the one hand, she presumes that the images originate with Hildegard herself. On the other hand, she rejects the notion that the images are based on and thus posterior to the textual record, which she claims is the naïve consequence of “the logocentricity of our discursive practices”, which often prevent us from recognizing places where “visual thinking” takes priority.⁶⁰ By springing the images from the confines of the vision text, she embraces the notion that, insofar as they are different from it, they can anticipate the allegorical interpretations provided in the exegetical text, adapt existing iconographical codes into new meanings, and “add information that is not in the text (or that is a corrective to it).”⁶¹ This allows Caviness to interpret ruptures between text and image as components of a creative dynamic in which Hildegard has mediated her experience into two different discourses, each following its own internal logic and vocabulary. In this sense, she follows some of the critically interpretative modes opened up by the work of Meier and Saurma-Jeltsch, while simultaneously maintaining that Hildegard designed the images as a personal record of her visions. The most important of Caviness’ suggestions, in this regard, is the way in which the images emphasize the power and divinity of the feminine, often in ways that are far more “subversive” than the texts they parallel.⁶²

⁵⁸ CAVINESS, “Artist,” pp. 113-4. See also eadem, “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” pp. 84-6; and eadem, “Hildegard as Designer,” pp. 33-4.

⁵⁹ CAVINESS, “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” p. 87.

⁶⁰ CAVINESS, “Artist,” p. 111. For a different perspective that analyzes the privileged importance of the visual over the auditory in constructing medieval mystical authority, see Anita OBERMEIER and Rebecca KENNISON, “The Privileging of *Visio* over *Vox* in the Mystical Experiences of Hildegard of Bingen and Joan of Arc,” *Mystics Quarterly* 23 (1997), pp. 137–167.

⁶¹ CAVINESS, “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” p. 73; eadem, “Artist,” pp. 115-20.

⁶² This argument runs throughout all of CAVINESS’ contributions: “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” “Hildegard of Bingen: German Author, Illustrator, and Musical Composer, 1098-1179,” “Hildegard as Designer of the Illustrations to Her Works,” and “Artist: ‘To See, Hear, and Know All at Once’.”

The older approach, against whose “logocentrism” Caviness reacts, assumed that the images illustrate the vision text directly, thus necessitating what Schomer called a “Neuschöpfung”:

This term designates the fact that motifs that were already known in medieval iconography were cast into different forms by Hildegard, and thus had to be illustrated by the painter in a different way. (...) Hildegard employed symbolic forms and images for her visionary renderings that, though solidly anchored in Scripture and tradition, nevertheless were completely unprecedented. Only the fundamental idea that lies at the root of the image is retained: the form of its rendering is new.⁶³

Schomer recognized that Hildegard's visions presented a particular difficulty to the medieval painter, because so much of their visual content had no traditional precedent. He believed that the painter of the Rupertsberg manuscript thus strived to reproduce the images described in the vision texts as closely as possible, and only reached for stock images from the iconographical tradition when exact details were lacking.⁶⁴ Thus, he suggests that in places where the images omit details found in the text, it is because it would have been too complex and difficult to illustrate them—for example, details that change in the course of a vision, or areas of the vision field that are described in detail too magnified to fit in the miniature. At the same time, there are several places where the illustrations seem to go further than the text, in the direction of newly invented forms, rather than conforming to standard iconographies.⁶⁵ Schomer finds it hard to believe that a painter would have taken it upon himself to make such changes in a project that otherwise seems to follow the text so meticulously. Thus, he suggests the possibility “that Hildegard herself stood behind the illustration of her work and that in those places where it seemed, for whatever reason, enigmatic, allowed the literal text to be disregarded.”⁶⁶ In this way, the visionary's peculiar spirit lies behind the extraordinary images. He concluded: “We are faced by the astounding fact that, despite medieval art's strong reliance on tradition and despite their unwavering adherence to received teachings as

⁶³ SCHOMER, *Die Illustrationen zu den Visionen der hl. Hildegard als künstlerische Neuschöpfung*, p. 58: “Das Wort Neuschöpfung ist einmal so zu verstehen, daß Gegenstände, die in der mittelalterlichen Ikonographie bekannt waren, von Hildegard anders geformt und infolgedessen vom Maler auch anders dargestellt worden sind. (...) Hildegard dagegen hat für ihre Darstellungen, die in Schrift und Lehrgut fest verankert waren, symbolische Formen und Bilder gefunden, die dem Mittelalter gänzlich unbekannt waren. Nur die den Darstellungen zugrunde liegende Idee ist erhalten geblieben, die Form der Darstellung ist neu.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-33.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61: “Ich möchte aus diesen Gründen für wahrscheinlich halten, daß Hildegard selbst hinter der Illustration ihres Werkes steht und daß sie dort, wo es ihr aus irgendeinem Grunde ratsam schien, den Text außer acht gelassen hat.”

elaborated in the theological schools, Hildegard's literary products were able to produce an iconography that departed from tradition and upon which the medieval tradition exerted only a minor and fleeting influence."⁶⁷

Although it had appeared four years before his own work, Schomer does not appear to have consulted Keller's meticulously detailed study, which for every miniature provides cross-references to a wealth of iconographical and stylistic comparanda (in multiple media, including enamel work), matched again only by Saurma-Jeltsch's comprehensive effort at the end of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Keller also came away with the consistent impression when making such comparisons that the images in Hildegard's manuscript are unique counterparts to Hildegard's unique visionary style. Thus, she could conclude, for example, that the subtleties of the image of Synagogue (fol. 35r, I.5; Fig. 13) are so "powerfully expressive of suffering"—in contrast to more traditional iconography—and "so belie the notion of an illustration mechanically reproducing the text, that one could even say that it is, as it were, a visual correction executed under the eyes of Hildegard herself."⁶⁸

However, this move to privilege the images' design, to set them apart as something unique, has come under significant criticism. The studies of Meier and Saurma-Jeltsch have warned against the danger inherent in privileging the images, strange as they may at first seem, as the unique product of the romanticized artistic and visionary genius.⁶⁹ Twentieth-century scholarship moved early on to spring Hildegard's written work from the contextual isolation into which its own efforts to establish and maintain its visionary and prophetic authority had placed it.⁷⁰ Yet, the images remained for a long time stranded

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 58-9: "So stehen wir also hier vor der erstaunlichen Tatsache, daß trotz der stärksten Traditionsgebundenheit der mittelalterlichen Kunst und trotz ihres unbeirrbareren Festhaltens an überkommenen

und in den theologischen Schulen sich weiterentwickelnden Lehren Hildegards literarische Produkte imstande gewesen sind, eine von der Überlieferung abweichende Ikonographie zu erzeugen, auf die die mittelalterliche einen verschwindend geringen Einfluß ausgeübt hat."

⁶⁸ KELLER, *Mittelrheinische Buchmalerei*, p. 44: "Dennoch ist bei der Synagoge ein überzeugend schmerzlicher Ausdruck erreicht. (...) Der Eindruck gerade dieser [blaß-violetten] Farbe ist so stark und spricht so sehr gegen eine mechanisch wiederholende Illustration nach dem Text, daß man sagen möchte, sie ist sozusagen visuell korrigiert und eben unter den Augen der Hildegard selbst entstanden."

⁶⁹ See, e.g., MEIER, "Zum Verhältnis von Text und Illustration," pp. 159-160; and SAURMA-JELTSCH, "Die Rupertsberger »Scivias«-Handschrift," p. 341.

⁷⁰ The most important early work in this movement was Hans LIEBESCHÜTZ, *Das allegorische Weltbild der Heiligen Hildegard von Bingen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1930); important milestones thereafter can be found in the work of Peter DRONKE, esp. "Problemata Hildegardiana," *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*, v. 16 (1981), pp. 97-131; and several important essay collections: *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles BURNETT and Peter DRONKE (London: The Warburg Institute, 1998); *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara NEWMAN (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998); and *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, ed. Alfred HAVERKAMP (Mainz: Trierer Historische Forschungen, 2000).

by their seemingly artistic isolation. The motivation to treat them almost as talismans of Hildegard's visionary connection to the divine has been strongest in the popular reception, where the images are often called "mandalas" and treated as if their composition were trans- or even ahistorical.⁷¹

In breaking down the iconographical barriers that approaches like Schomer's built around the manuscript's images, Meier and Saurma-Jeltsch have opened up new ways of interpreting the functions of the images in the manuscript by looking at the various visual vocabularies on which they draw. For example, in studying the image that accompanies *Scivias* II.1 (fol. 41v, Fig. 3), Meier begins, not with the text, but with the image alone, to see what it is trying to communicate.⁷² The allure of the image is immediately striking: it draws the viewer in, inviting us to try to understand it. But using traditional iconographical, allegorical, and exegetical tropes, Meier can, in fact, understand most of the image's content—despite Schomer's insistence that the images are radically innovative, they actually utilize a variety of preexisting vocabularies. The medallion that appears in the middle of the image contains a familiar set of six smaller scenes, easily identifiable as the six days of creation described in Genesis. As soon as the viewer recognizes this trope, other pieces of the image fall into place. The concentric circles of blue and gold that echo above the hexaemeral medallion take the same position that, in comparable compositions, would be held by the Creator overseeing his creation. The theological mind might then connect the use of silver and gold to the light of the world that the Prologue to John's Gospel identifies as the Word through which the world was created. A bit more digging in the commentary tradition—including one of most important works for medieval exegesis, Gregory the Great's *Moralia*—helps the viewer to recognize the various stars that appear in the dark brown and black spaces filling the middle of the image as the patriarchs and prophets, their lesser lights foretelling the "dayspring from on high", the coming of Christ, to the dark night of fallen humanity. This connection then lays plain the meaning of the golden figure below, his hand outstretched in the traditional gesture of Christ the Savior. Only one significant detail of the image—the man sniffing a flower in the upper right—remains impenetrable to such analysis, at which point one must turn to the text for answers. The text, in turn, confirms some of the insights that visual analysis alone provided, but appears to contradict others: for example, the vision text describes, not the six days of creation that appear in the middle of the image, but the blazing fire of the divinity hammering upon the dark sphere of the atmosphere like a blacksmith, striking sparks from it "until that atmosphere was perfected and so Heaven and earth stood fully formed and resplendent" (*Scivias* II.1, Vision). Meier interprets these differences as "equivalents" that replace vision elements

⁷¹ See n. 4 above. Although this popular use of the Rupertsberg manuscript's images has often lapsed into abuse, their dazzling visionary quality has also sparked a number of artistic tributes to the Visionary Doctor. For a particularly striking example, see the work of Michael O'Neill McGRATH, described in "Faith Circles," *America Magazine*, October 22, 2012, accessed online on September 1, 2013: <http://americamagazine.org/issue/5155/art/faith-circles>

⁷² MEIER, "Zum Verhältnis von Text und Illustration," pp. 161-5.

that would be too difficult to visualize in book painting with elements that impart a similar meaning drawn from traditional sources known to the painter. The images are complex and unusual, to be sure—but they are not nearly as innovatively impenetrable to iconographical and allegorical analysis as Schomer concluded.

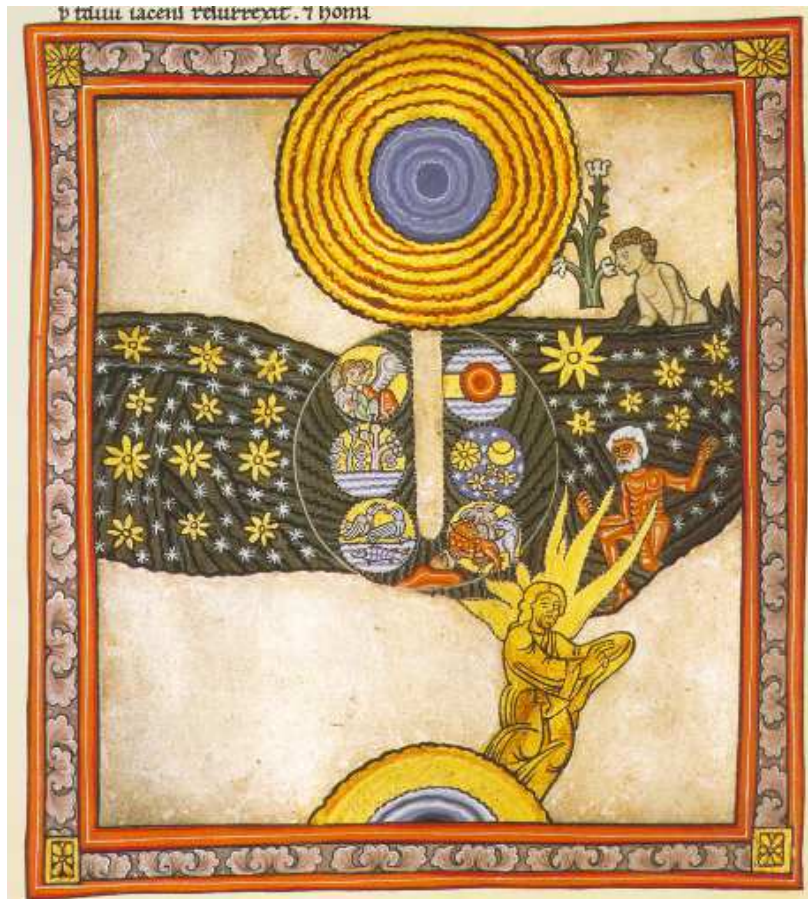


Fig. 3: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 41v: II.1, Creation, Fall, and Redemption.
From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

For Meier, the importance of pursuing such visual analysis lies in “studying on a broad basis the types of transformation from word into image, [to] further gain general insights into the translation from textual syntax to visual syntax, from linguistic structure to image structure, from one semantic system to another.”⁷³ Ultimately, she concludes that the images in the Rupertsberg manuscript function as both a celebration of the work’s inspired authority and as a means of offering the reader (“dem Leser”) a way to

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 167-8: “Im Vergleich der Illustrationen mit dem Text und untereinander, soweit sie parallel verlaufen oder gleiche Gegenstände darstellen, können auf breiterer Grundlage die Arten der Transformation von Wort ins Bild studiert werden bis hin zu generellen Einsichten in die Umwandlung von Textsyntax in Bildsyntax, von Sprachstruktur in Bildstruktur, von einem semantischen System also in ein anderes—unter den Bedingungen einer bestimmten Epoche.”

make the work's difficult visionary descriptions a bit easier to understand by employing a visual vocabulary they may already be familiar with. Yet, she remains skeptical of their independent discursive value. For Meier, the images are always based on the text. Furthermore, in schematizing the ways in which images can translate allegorical texts in which there is both a signifier (*res significans*) and a signified (*significatum*), she limits the function of the Rupertsberg images to illustrating the signifiers alone, i.e. the visual details of each vision text, but not its allegorical interpretations.⁷⁴ Ultimately, this is why the images must, in some cases, diverge from the text and, further, why Meier does not consider Hildegard's hand in their design. Her analysis of Hildegard's allegorical mode suggests that often, details of the vision texts themselves are confusing to the point of incoherence, when taken literally, because the coherence of their meaning depends, not on their relationship to one another, but to their allegorical significations.⁷⁵ By assuming that the visual composition can only operate univocally, Meier concludes that it must remain at least partially foreign to an equivocal textual composition, making a complete complementarity between text and image both impossible and futile.⁷⁶

Saurma-Jeltsch, while following Meier's lead in exploring the various iconographical and formal traditions that were adapted, referenced, or alluded to in the creation of the images, seems to allow for a freer movement between literal and allegorical, concrete and universal, in their interpretative function. A particularly important feature of the language of Hildegard's work, both written and visual, is its polyvalent intertextuality and intervisuality—its ability to bring multiple different layers of previous images and ideas to mind. Drawing on Heinrich Schipperges' identification of the relationship between the key concepts of *vita*, *verbum*, and *opus* in Hildegard's thought and their dynamic movement from conceptual to concrete and back, as well as Meier's application of this to Hildegard's color vocabulary, Saurma-Jeltsch suggests that the illustrations also operate along that dynamic continuum between conceptual and concrete as they work to illustrate the vision text.⁷⁷ That interpretative process means that, even in the most literally illustrated visions, the miniatures contribute to the meaning of the text through their

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 165-7.

⁷⁵ Christel MEIER, "Zwei Modelle von Allegorie im 12. Jahrhundert: Das allegorische Verfahren Hildegards von Bingen und Alans von Lille," in *Formen und Funktionen der Allegorie*, ed. Walter HAUG (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), pp. 70-89, at p. 78.

⁷⁶ MEIER's schema for the ways in which images can interpret allegorical texts is threefold: Either (1) the image represents the signifier alone; (2) the image represents the signified alone; or (3) the image represents both together, but only through multiple types of representation. ("Zum Verhältnis von Text und Illustration," p. 166.) She does not consider the possibility that a visual component could represent both meanings simultaneously. See further Sec. III, "Color and Theological Meaning in the Rupertsberg *Scivias*," below.

⁷⁷ SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, p. 15, referencing Heinrich SCHIPPERGES, ed. and trans., *Hildegard von Bingen: Welt und Mensch. Das Buch »De operatione Dei«. Aus dem Genter Kodex* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1965), pp. 335ff.; and MEIER, "Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegards von Bingen," p. 230.

visual form. As she concludes, “The illustrations ought not to be understood as equivalents to the vision, but rather as the first representative of their interpretation. In no way can they claim to be perceived or understood on their own; rather, they also point back to the text itself. Without the text, the images, like the vision itself, remain incomprehensible.”⁷⁸

3. The Function of the Images as Theological Discourse

Two fundamental problems confront the interpretative study of Hildegard's visionary work, whether written or visual: first, the nature of her visionary experiences, the theological truths revealed through them, and the ways in which these are represented textually and visually; and second, the effort that went into constructing and maintaining the unique authority of her visionary charism.⁷⁹ An essential element in understanding Hildegard's writings is her experience of the visions that, she says, she laid down word-for-word in *Scivias* and her other books. She described the “mode of her seeing” in her famous letter to Guibert of Gembloux in 1175, in a passage that became instantly so important that it was later gathered into the autobiographical sections of her *Vita* (I.8):

Since my infancy, however, when I was not yet strong in my bones and nerves and veins, I have always seen this vision in my soul, even till now, when I am more than seventy years old. And as God wills, in this vision my spirit mounts upwards, into the height of the firmament and into changing air, and dilates itself among different nations, even though they are in far-off regions and places remote from me. And because I see these things in such a manner, for this reason I also behold them in changing forms of clouds and other created things. But I hear them not with my physical ears, nor with my heart's thoughts, nor do I perceive them by bringing any of my five senses to bear—but only in my soul, my physical eyes open, so that I

⁷⁸ SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, p. 23: “Die Darstellungen dürften also nicht zu verstehen sein als ein Äquivalent zur Schau, sondern eher als gleichsam erste Stellungnahme zu deren Interpretation. In keiner Weise erheben sie den Anspruch, autonom rezipiert zu werden, sondern sie wollen im Gegenteil auf den Text selbst zurückverweisen. Ohne ihn bleiben sie, wie die Schau selbst, dem Verständnis entzogen.”

⁷⁹ On the first issue, see especially Peter DRONKE, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages. A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porete (†1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 145-7; Kathryn KERBY-FULTON, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 56-64; and Bernard MCGINN, “Hildegard of Bingen as Visionary and Exegete,” in *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, ed. Alfred HAVERKAMP (Mainz: Trierer Historische Forschungen, 2000), pp. 321-50. On the second issue, see DRONKE, *Women Writers*, pp. 147-56; Barbara NEWMAN, “Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation,” *Church History* v. 54 (1985), pp. 163-75; eadem, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 31-34; John VAN ENGEL, “Letters and the Public Persona of Hildegard,” in *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, ed. Alfred HAVERKAMP (Mainz: Trierer Historische Forschungen, 2000), pp. 375-418; and KERBY-FULTON, “Hildegard of Bingen”, pp. 346-62.

never suffer their failing in loss of consciousness [*extasis*]; no, I see these things wakefully, day and night. (...)

The brightness [*lumen*] that I see is not spatial, yet 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 Light” [*umbra viventis lucis*]. And as sun, moon and stars appear [mirrored] in water, so Scriptures, discourses, virtues, and some works of men take form for me and are reflected, radiant in this brightness.

Whatever I have seen or learnt in this vision, I retain the memory of it for a long time, in such a way that, because I have at some time seen and heard it, I can remember it; and I see, hear, and know simultaneously, and learn what I know as if in a moment. But what I do not see I do not know, for I am not learned. And the things I write [*scribo*] are those I see and hear through the vision, nor do I set down [*pono*] words other than those that I hear; I utter them in unpolished Latin, just as I hear them through the vision, for in it I am not taught to write as philosophers write. And the words I see and hear through the vision are not like words that come from human lips, but like a sparkling flame and a cloud moved in pure air. Moreover, I cannot know the form of this brightness [*lumen*] in any way, just as I cannot gaze completely at the sphere of the sun.

And in that same brightness [*lumen*] I sometimes, not often, see another light, which I call “the Living Light” [*lux vivens*]; when and how I see it, I cannot express; and for the time I do see it, all sadness and anguish is taken from me, so that then I have the air of an innocent young girl and not of a little old woman.⁸⁰

Understanding Hildegard's mode of seeing is essential to making sense of her presentation of theology. As much as the words she records to explain her visions are those she hears in her “soul alone” from the voice of God, the visions themselves and the visual experience of them are the guiding principles of the explication and form the essential skeleton on which Hildegard builds her powerful theology. Yet, her description of a Living Light and its shadow, in which she sees and hears not with the exterior senses but with some type of inner eye and ear, is incredibly difficult to categorize. Despite her protestations that these are not experiences of the outer senses, she uses the visual (sensual) vocabulary of light and its different behaviors to describe them: light that lifts her up into the sky, where she and it are carried about by the refractions of air and clouds that both glow and shadow; light that illuminates via reflections in water; the light of sparkling flame, whose warmth (as she says in the *Protestificatio* of *Scivias*) caresses her

⁸⁰ Letter 103r, in *Epistolarium II*, pp. 261-2; translation adapted from that in Peter DRONKE, *Women Writers*, p. 168.

mind.⁸¹ Furthermore, as Peter Dronke has noted, Hildegard's use of the term *visio* often slides between "three related things: her peculiar faculty or capacity of vision; her experience of this faculty; and the content of her experience."⁸²

Medieval vision theory, which had its basis in distinctions drawn up by St. Augustine in his commentary, *De Genesi ad litteram* (Book 12), differentiated between three basic types: corporeal vision, which sees outward, physical appearances; spiritual vision, which was inner seeing and imagination; and intellectual vision, which was a direct perception of divine truth.⁸³ Hildegard's visionary experiences themselves can be identified with the second category of spiritual vision, which presumes that inner vision is still visual and concrete; only at the further stage of intellectual vision does knowledge become abstracted beyond that of physical representation. But as Bernard McGinn has noted, Hildegard's visions stretched these categories to the breaking point: her inner spiritual vision used concrete visual images to reveal divine truths that, for traditionally-schooled theologians, ought to be perceptible only after one's mind has left the limitations of the imagined entirely behind.⁸⁴ Often, the content of Hildegard's visionary experiences was, theoretically speaking, that of intellectual, not visual, contemplation. Though that last, imageless type of contemplation had always been prized as the highest level of religious experience, theologians especially of the later Middle Ages became highly suspicious of "lower" visionary experiences, often because they relied too heavily on the seer's own visual imagination, rather than properly being gifts from God alone.⁸⁵ Indeed, this very problem confronted the celebrated mystical Dominican preacher Johannes Tauler when, more than a century after Hildegard's death, he came face-to-face with the image accompanying *Scivias* I.1 in the Rupertsberg manuscript (fol. 2r), of the One enthroned upon the mountain streaming his blinding light down upon Hildegard, the *pauper spiritu* (poor in spirit). In 1339, a copy of this image was to be found in the refectory of the nuns of St. Gertrude in Cologne, and Tauler preached to them an extraordinary sermon about it, in which he grapples deeply to come to terms with the ways in which Hildegard's

⁸¹ In *Liber Divinorum Operum* III.3, Hildegard uses the images of shadow and mirror (in the surface of water) to explore the dynamic between God's eternal foreknowledge of all creation and then its manifestation. See NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 51-5.

⁸² DRONKE, *Women Writers*, p. 146.

⁸³ AUGUSTINUS, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, (PL 34, cols. 458-80); trans. J. H. TAYLOR, *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Books 7-12* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 178-222. On Augustine's theory, see Margaret MILES, "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's *De Trinitate* and *Confessions*," *The Journal of Religion*, v. 63 (1983), pp. 125-42; for an overview of the relationship between medieval vision theory and art, see Cynthia HAHN, "Vision," in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad RUDOLPH (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 44-64.

⁸⁴ MCGINN, "Theologians as Trinitarian Iconographers," p. 187; see also idem, "Hildegard of Bingen as Visionary and Exegete," pp. 321-50.

⁸⁵ See Barbara NEWMAN, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* v. 80 (2005), pp. 1-43.

visionary and prophetic insights could be paradoxically aligned with his own mystical teachings, which stressed the imagelessness (“Bildlosigkeit”) of a true experience of divine knowledge.⁸⁶

As with most of her attempts to describe the Living Light, in the letter to Guibert, Hildegard fumbles through several metaphors and half-formed images, trying to express in her “unpolished Latin” the practically ineffable experience. Yet, it is this sometimes anxious search for words that makes Hildegard’s symbolic and poetic language so vibrant. The humility formula of confessing her unlearned, “unpolished” Latin skills is only partially a formula, for Hildegard’s Latin really was a bit roughshod. It was not the elegant Latin learned by the schoolmen or the other, more celebrated Latin poets of her time, like Hildebert of Lavardin, Adam of St. Victor, Peter Abelard, or Bernard Silvestris.⁸⁷ Rather, it was the almost auto-didactic language she acquired in her teens and twenties under the tutelage of Jutta and perhaps a few of the monks at the Disibodenberg—enough to sing and pray the liturgy and to read Scripture and the other writings available in the monastery library (which, judging from attempts to trace her allusions, must have been fairly extensive), but not much more.⁸⁸

The consequence, however, is that Hildegard’s visionary and poetic language offers a raw and unadorned power, its images deeply resonant precisely because they remain unaffected. Without the learned tools of vocabulary and style available to a school master, she must make her rudiments carry staggering depths of meaning. The images in the Rupertsberg *Scivias* manuscript reveal a similarly elastic approach: though appropriating a wide array of traditional iconography, Hildegard’s designs reform and reinvent visual vocabularies to dynamically express theological truths that stretch from the universal, divine exemplar to the concretized image and back again. Newman has described how this theologically poetic process dances through its series of images: “no sooner does one of these yield its weight in concepts than the concepts dissolve into new images, enhancing or correcting the first. The final product is less a doctrine than an iconography, albeit rich with doctrinal meaning.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, “The ‘Various Writings of Humanity’: Johannes Tauler on Hildegard of Bingen’s Liber Scivias,” in *Visual Culture and the German Middle Ages*, ed. Kathryn STARKEY and Horst WENZEL (New York, 2005), pp. 161-205. On the use of visual art objects to stimulate visionary meditation, especially by women, in the later Middle Ages, see also idem, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

⁸⁷ Cf. Peter DRONKE, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in Poetry, 1000-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 178-9; and NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 22-5.

⁸⁸ For both the rich heritage of Hildegard’s allusions and the inherent problems in cataloguing them, see LIEBESCHÜTZ, *Das allegorische Weltbild der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen*; and Peter Dronke, “The Allegorical World-Picture of Hildegard of Bingen: Revaluations and New Problems,” pp. 1-16 in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles BURNETT and Peter DRONKE (London: Warburg Institute, 1998), pp. 1-16.

⁸⁹ NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 93.

This symbolic mode of thinking, though inherited from the Church Fathers, was particularly strong in certain primarily monastic circles in the twelfth century, and Hildegard can be considered one of its greatest exponents. First termed “symbolist” by the early twentieth-century German idealist Alois Dempf, in parallel to expressive modes of early twentieth-century German art and poetry, it was picked up after the war in Horst Dieter Rauh’s magisterial study of twelfth-century symbolist approaches to the Antichrist and the theology of history.⁹⁰ In the current generation of Hildegard scholars, Kerby-Fulton has been at the forefront of using this dynamic approach to understand Hildegard’s visual and visionary approach to what Michael Curschmann has termed, “imagined exegesis.”⁹¹ This “leisurely, richly digressive, meditative approach” to the Scriptures dug deep into the symbolic contours of its revelation of history to uncover and connect correspondences or “concordances” across the Old Testament and into the New Testament, which can then be understood prophetically to reveal within Scripture the life of the Church beyond it.⁹² This method of symbolism is in many ways the fullest expression of the monastic theology, steeped in the rhythms of a scriptural and liturgical life, described by Jean Leclercq and which Dempf set in opposition to scholasticism.⁹³ The hallmark of this mode of thinking is the way that it can pass effortlessly from one symbolic allusion to the next, connecting word after word, image after image, symbol after symbol, in sometimes surprising ways, constructing a vast web or network along which the symbolist mind could dynamically dash and slide as it contemplated everything in the light of the divine plan for salvation history. For Hildegard, this mode of thinking was analogous to her “Platonizing cosmology”—the flow of emanation and return, the cycle at the center of which is the Incarnation.⁹⁴ In this way, her visionary experiences

⁹⁰ Alois DEMPFF, *Sacrum Imperium. Geschichts- und Staatsphilosophie des Mittelalters und der politischen Renaissance* (Munich & Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1929), pp. 229-68, and for Hildegard, esp. pp. 261-8; H. D. RAUH, *Das Bild des Antichrist im Mittelalter; von Tyconius zum deutschen Symbolismus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1973), esp. pp. 474-527 on Hildegard.

⁹¹ See especially KERBY-FULTON, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman*, pp. 26-75; eadem, “Prophet and Reformer: ‘Smoke in the Vineyard’,” in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, pp. 70-90; eadem, “Hildegard of Bingen,” pp. 359-64; and CURSCHMANN, “Imagined Exegesis: Text and Picture in the Exegetical Works of Rupert of Deutz, Honorius Augustodunensis, and Gerhoch of Reichersberg,” pp. 145-69.

⁹² KERBY-FULTON, “Prophet and Reformer,” pp. 76-7; see also RAUH, *Das Bild des Antichrist*, pp. 165-78.

⁹³ Jean LECLERCQ, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961); and DEMPFF, *Sacrum Imperium*, pp. 230-1. For a more extensive study of the contrasts between Hildegard’s theological style and that of early scholasticism, see Constant MEWS, “Religious Thinker: ‘A Frail Human Being’ on Fiery Life,” in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara NEWMAN (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), pp. 52-69.

⁹⁴ NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 44-5: “We might characterize the same movement metaphysically as the cycle of emanation and return, or existentially as that of revelation and response. Hildegard herself

could, in fact, connect the highest levels of contemplative knowledge (of divinity itself) with the lowest levels of concrete images and artifacts.⁹⁵

As Mary Carruthers has tirelessly worked to demonstrate, the construction of such imagined networks within the mind was a central component of the medieval practice of training the memory. Furthermore, the structures of ancient and medieval rhetorical practice were pervasive, not only in the written and spoken arts, but in visual media, as well.⁹⁶ Like a well-prepared speech or sermon, images could have their own *ductus*, “the way by which a work leads someone through itself” on its narrational and experiential journey, and those journeys could possess complex and sophisticated contours.⁹⁷ Modern scholarship has often found those works of medieval art to be most interesting that appear to transgress normative boundaries in constructing those journeys, and in so doing posit enigmas and conundra—works whose rhetorical movements employ antithesis and variety to entice the viewer to want to linger, to look deeper and longer, or perhaps even to wander restlessly from one aspect of the work to another, never quite sure where to allow the gaze to alight.⁹⁸ As Anne-Marie Bouché has said of other theologically and visually complex twelfth-century artistic compositions, “[t]hey are not purveyors of finished statements of dogma, but devices for stimulating intellectual and spiritual experience.” The use of visual enigma and paradox makes them particularly suited, not for playfulness as an entertaining divergence, but for the “serious” play by which the mind explores and grapples with the paradoxes and enigmas that form “the most natural, and the most accurate, language in which to express the unfathomable truth of God.”⁹⁹

perceived it, in her last vision [*Liber Divinorum Operum* III.5], as the endless circulation of the energy of love.”

⁹⁵ On this symbolic mode of allegory in Hildegard's works, see Peter DRONKE, “*Arbor Caritatis*,” in *Medieval Studies for J. A. W. Bennett*, ed. P. L. HEYWORTH (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 207-53, esp. p. 232.

⁹⁶ See esp. Mary CARRUTHERS, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991); eadem, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998).

⁹⁷ Mary CARRUTHERS, “The Concept of *Ductus*, or, Journeying through a Work of Art,” in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. M. CARRUTHERS (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), p. 190. On the rhetorical experience of imagined beauty, see also eadem, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹⁸ See e.g. Michael CAMILLE, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). Despite his emphases on the transgressive, the medieval aesthetic appreciation for antithesis and variety, whether of the monstrous sort or of tamer breeds, operated not only at the margins but also at the center of aesthetic and rhetorical practice, for which see CARRUTHERS, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, pp. 61-78, 135-64, and 187-93.

⁹⁹ Anne-Marie BOUCHÉ, “Anomaly and Enigma in Romanesque Art,” in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER and Anne-Marie BOUCHÉ (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 306-35, at 329-30. On the ways in which playful creativity can be regarded as a “serious” rather than merely comic activity, see CARRUTHERS, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, pp. 16-44. The use of images as gateways to meditative,

The visual puzzles of Hildegard's own images utilize just that language—and the virtue of the symbolic is that it elastically connects the two sides of the paradox, the infinite and finite, the universal and particular, in a single moment.

It is one thing to note that Hildegard's visio-theological imagination worked dynamically within such a symbolist mode. It is another to note that she did so publically. As a woman, she was constantly aware that she had precious little institutional authority to pronounce on theological matters of her own accord—and in rare moments, Hildegard even admitted to the doubts that many had about her visionary charism, especially early on.¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that women could not have a theological voice in medieval Christianity—as the evidence clearly indicates that they did, especially as scholarship has moved in the last few decades to recognize it. But it means that her position was always much more precarious and often required some force greater than herself to validate it. Thus, as Newman writes, “[t]he more vulnerable she knew herself to be, the more emphatically she needed to proclaim that it was not she but the Holy Spirit who spoke.”¹⁰¹ This emphatic insistence revealed itself in several ways: repeated claims of frailty and unlearnedness; a dogged insistence that everything she wrote came, not “from the invention of her own heart or of any other person, but” from God alone (*Scivias, Protestificatio*); and the inclusion of warnings not to change a single word of her divine writings, as at the close of the *Liber Divinorum Operum*:

The Book of Life, which is the writings of the Word of God, through which all creation appeared and which breathed forth the life of everything, as was preordained according to the will of the eternal Father—that Book of Life is, as it pleased, the source [*edidit*] of this writing [*sc. Liber Divinorum Operum*], which was brought forth miraculously not by any teaching of human knowledge, but through a simple, unlearned female form.

Thus, let no person be so bold as to add anything to the words of this writing to increase it, or take anything away from it to lessen it, lest they be erased from the Book of Life and from every blessing that is beneath the sun, unless it is done in copying out corrections [*propter excribationem*] of letters or diction that were revealed simply through the inspiration of the

visionary, and mystical experience is now well-recognized, especially for the later Middle Ages—see Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998). However, as Babara NEWMAN has noted, the use of visual aids to meditation also provoked conflict with the theory of religious experience: “What Did It Mean to Say ‘I Saw’? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture,” *Speculum* v. 80 (2005), pp. 1-43.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. in the second autobiographical passage in Hildegard's *Vita* (II.5), she writes: “Then the ancient deceiver put me to the proof with many mockeries. (...) For indeed many wondered about the revelation, whether it was from God, or from some withering influence of the spirits of the air who lead many astray.” (In *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*, p. 164.)

¹⁰¹ NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 35.

Holy Spirit. Any who should presume to do otherwise sins against the Holy Spirit, which shall not be forgiven either here or in that world to come [cf. Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10].¹⁰²

In the face of such drastic assurances of Hildegard's passive reception of divinely inspired text and certain punishment if anything were to be added or subtracted, scholars such as Meier and Saurma-Jeltsch have found it difficult to think that Hildegard could then have gone and designed images for the *Scivias* manuscript that appear to add to or depart from its text in a variety of ways. Furthermore, Saurma-Jeltsch has taken the humility formulas seriously, concluding that the exaltation of Hildegard's authority in the author portrait of the manuscript does not fit with the visionary's humble character. The latent assumption behind all of their work, therefore, is the primacy of the text.

To assume that the text must be the basis for the images and that divergences thus might violate the divine inspiration of the work, however, is to privilege the textual description of what was first a visual and auditory experience, even if the vision and hearing were those of the inner rather than outer senses. Furthermore, we know that in the last decade of her life, Hildegard and her secretaries worked to actively manage the reception of her authority and public reputation.¹⁰³ Specifically, her *Vita*, an account of her saintly life, was already being drawn up before her death, and its second book is uniquely composed of extensive extracts in her own words.¹⁰⁴ Crucially, there is a slight discrepancy between the *Vita*'s first record of the beginning of Hildegard's religious life—claiming that she was enclosed with Jutta at the Disibodenberg at the age of eight—and Hildegard's own claim in a later autobiographical passage that she was only “offered to God for a spiritual way of life” in her “eighth year” (*Vita S. Hildegardis*, II.2).¹⁰⁵ As

¹⁰² *Liber Divinorum Operum* III.5.38: “Sed liber vite, qui scriptura verbi Dei est, per quod omnis creatura apparuit et quod omnium vitam secundum voluntatem eterni patris, velut in se preordinaverat, exspiravit, hanc scripturam per nullam doctrinam humane scientie, sed per simplicem et indoctam femineam formam ut sibi placuit mirabiliter edidit. Unde nullus hominum tam audax sit, ut verbis huius scripture aliquid augendo apponat vel minuendo auferat, ne de libro vite et de omni beatitudine que sub sole est deleatur; nisi propter excubationem litterarum aut dictionum, que per inspirationem Spiritus Sancti simpliciter prolata sunt, fiat. Qui autem aliter presumpserit, in Spiritum Sanctum peccat. Unde nec hic neque in futuro seculo illi remittetur.”

¹⁰³ KERBY-FULTON, “Hildegard of Bingen”, pp. 346-62.

¹⁰⁴ Barbara NEWMAN, “Three-Part Invention: The *Vita S. Hildegardis* and Mystical Hagiography,” in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles BURNETT and Peter DRONKE (London: The Warburg Institute, 1998), pp. 189-210. For a full translation of all the biographical sources related to Hildegard, see *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*, trans. Anna SILVAS (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999).

¹⁰⁵ *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*, pp. 139 and 158. The Latin of the two passages reads: “Cumque iam ferre esset octo annorum consepelienda Christo....recluditur in monte sancti Disibodi cum pia Deoque dicata femina Iuttha” (I.1); “In octavo autem anno meo in spiritualem conversationem Deo oblata sum” (II.2). From *Vita Sanctae Hildegardis. Leben der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen*, ed. and trans. Monika KLAES (Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1998), pp. 86 and 124.

can be established by other records, Hildegard's own claim is the more accurate, as she was not fully enclosed with Jutta at the Disibodenberg until 1112, at the age of fourteen or fifteen.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Kerby-Fulton has argued that the difference is crucial evidence that Hildegard actively tried to minimize the fact that she had been formally enclosed in 1112, as her later movement to a new foundation (the Rupertsberg) and preaching tours would be a violation of the technical terms of an enclosure.¹⁰⁷

There is other evidence for Hildegard actively managing and editing her writings, despite repeatedly claiming that she was never more than a mere vessel for God's actions—public pronouncements that would seem to forbid her such an active role. For example, the copies of her letters transmitted through the Rupertsberg's Riesenkodez—the definitive manuscript collection of Hildegard's *opera omnia*—appear to have been carefully and surreptitiously edited to “enhance” the authority of her correspondence and minimize criticism, with a variety of both additions and deletions that do not appear in earlier recensions of the letters.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the early Dendermonde manuscript of her music contains several compositions that were left out of the Riesenkodez, likely because Hildegard herself had taken those pieces out of circulation, as it were.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, as both Derolez and Embach have suggested, even though portions of the Riesenkodez may not have been physically produced until after Hildegard's death, its structure and contents almost certainly originated with Hildegard herself in the last years of her life.¹¹⁰ Thus, it is not beyond the bounds of consideration to think that Hildegard might have conceived in the 1170's to design the images in the Rupertsberg *Scivias* manuscript in ways that might, in fact, diverge from the text that was laid down more than two decades earlier. These divergences would then be complementary, not contradictory.

If we view such points of departure between text and image as authorial statements, we can pursue a mode of interpretation similar to that of Saurma-Jeltsch, but with the added benefit of making Hildegard's “the first representative” of her own work's interpretation.¹¹¹ By directing the iconography and composition of the images, Hildegard

¹⁰⁶ See VAN ENGEN, “Abess: ‘Mother and Teacher’,” pp. 32-3.

¹⁰⁷ KERBY-FULTON, “Hildegard of Bingen”, pp. 347-8 and 352-3.

¹⁰⁸ Lieven VAN ACKER, “Der Briefwechsel der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen: Vorbermerkungen zu einer kritischen Edition,” *Revue Bénédictine*, v. 98 (1988), pp. 141-68; VAN ENGEN, “Letters and the Public Persona of Hildegard,” pp. 375-418.

¹⁰⁹ See Hildegard of Bingen, *Symphonia*, ed. Barbara NEWMAN (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988, 2nd ed. 1998), pp. 51-60.

¹¹⁰ DEROLEZ, “The Manuscript Transmission of Hildegard of Bingen's Writings,” pp. 22-3; and Michael EMBACH, *Die Schriften Hildegards von Bingen: Studien zu ihrer Überlieferung und Rezeption im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), p. 36.

¹¹¹ SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, p. 23. See also Monika LEISCH-KIESL, “Irritation des Göttlichen: Zur Frage des Zusammenwirkens von Text und Bild am Beispiel des Wiesbadener »Scivias« Hildegards von Bingen,” in *Theologie zwischen Zeiten und Kontinenten. Für Elisabeth Gössmann*, ed. Theodor SCHNEIDER and Helen SCHNÜGEL-STRAUMANN (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1993), pp. 84-97, esp. pp. 89-90 and 97.

used them as a separate visual and theological discourse, equal to and interacting with the textual record of her visions. The images are not ancillary to or merely derivative of the textual work; they are integral to it. Furthermore, these visual markers invested with theological significance aid the viewer-reader in interpreting the complex visual allegories at work in Hildegard's often enigmatic visions by revealing additional information about the context of each image within the overall narrative of salvation history. By placing them at the opening of each successive vision, Hildegard offers the viewer-reader an initial schematic for orienting the theological implications of what they were about to read.

One of the ways that the images perform this orientating function is by drawing on traditional iconographical forms that may, in fact, diverge from the textual description of the image. We have already seen above in Meier's analysis of the Creation and Redemption vision that opens Part II (fol. 41v, Fig. 3), for example, that the illustration appropriates the standard iconography of the hexaemeron in place of the vision text's more unusual image of God the blacksmith striking sparks from the globe of the atmosphere to fashion it into its final form. Such useful divergences problematize Caviness' claim that the illustrations are based on a visual record of the visionary experience laid down simultaneously with the dictation of the original text. Her suggestion that the divine command to write (*scribere*) was also a command (at least originally) to draw cannot account for those divergences. Furthermore, her invocation of migraine pathology to explain certain stylistic effects fails to address the claim that the experiences were those of the inner rather than outer eyes and ears. Although it is possible that a physiological experience such as migraine auras might elide the difference between inner and outer experience, there is a further difficulty with the tendency to pathologize medieval religious experiences under the rubrics of modern medicine. As Maud Burnett McInerney has suggested, Singer's initial proposal of Hildegard's migraine phenomena can be seen to reflect a male desire to pathologize and thus temper and mollify women's mystical experiences that are perceived as uncomfortable or even threatening.¹¹² Although Caviness herself has championed Hildegard's images of the feminine divine precisely because of their seeming threat to the patriarchal order, the urge to impose modern assumptions upon medieval women that may undercut their own claims to authority should not be indulged lightly.

Furthermore, Kerby-Fulton has recently suggested a striking alternative explanation for some of the visual effects that Caviness ascribed to scintillating scotoma: the influence of contemporary enamel work from Limoges and the Rhineland.¹¹³ This independently revives a suggestion made by Keller's study of the original manuscript before it was lost. In addition to noting striking parallels between such enamel work and the frames and borders of the images (discussed in more detail below), Keller argued that

¹¹² Maud Burnett McINERNEY, "Introduction: Hildegard of Bingen, Prophet and Polymath", in *Hildegard of Bingen: A Book of Essays*, ed. McINERNEY (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), pp. xvii-xxvii, at p. xxiii.

¹¹³ KERBY-FULTON, "Hildegard of Bingen," pp. 362-3.

“the character of the images consists throughout of strongly contoured and outlined figures that rise out of great expanses of gold and silver backgrounds (...). The converse also holds: golden figures upon blue backgrounds, just as they appear in contemporary enamel work.”¹¹⁴ One image in particular exhibits a striking similarity to early- to mid-twelfth-century enamels: the illustration of the choirs of the celestial symphony in the final vision of *Scivias* (III.13, fol. 229r, Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 229r: III.13, The Symphony of the Choirs of Heaven. From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

As Keller notes, it departs both in color and form from all other images of the manuscript; both she and Saurma-Jeltsch have argued that, because the figures in this image consist only of a single layer of paint laid down in a wash, with only summary guides to the folds in the clothing and the faces left the color of the blank parchment, it

¹¹⁴ KELLER, *Mittelrheinische Buchmalereien*, p. 137: “Der Bildcharakter besteht eben doch im ganzen aus stark konturierten, abgegrenzten Figuren, die sich von den großen Flächen der goldenen und silbernen Hintergründe abheben, die nirgends geteilt oder gemustert sind. Auch die Umkehrung: goldene Figuren auf blauem Hintergrund, wie sie in dieser Zeit in den Emailarbeiten auftreten, kommt vor.”

appears “unfinished” when compared to the more complex painting layers found in most of the other images.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, its alternating fields of blue, gold, and silver in the background, together with the grouping of each choir, as well as Mary, the Virgin Queen of Heaven at the top, into medallions, is reminiscent of several chasses produced at Limoges.¹¹⁶

It is also possible to identify a likely area in which Hildegard would have had contact with mid-twelfth-century pieces of enamel work: the jewelry for which she was (in)famous in the clothing of her nuns on great feast days. In a remarkable exchange of letters the visionary made with Tengswich, the superior of a congregation of reformed canonesses at Andernach, around 1150, the latter offers biting criticism of the material and social elitism on display in Hildegard's community:¹¹⁷

They say that on feast days your virgins stand in the church with unbound hair when singing the psalms and that as part of their dress they wear white, silk veils, so long that they touch the floor. Moreover, it is said that they wear crowns of gold filigree, into which are inserted crosses on both sides and the back, with a figure of the Lamb on the front, and that they adorn their fingers with golden rings.¹¹⁸

When her admirer, the monk Guibert of Gembloux, wrote to inquire of Hildegard about her experiences in 1175, her famous response, portions of which have already been quoted above, included an answer to his questions about these very same crowns. She links them directly to the appearance of the order of virgins arrayed around the central virginal maiden held within the breast of Ecclesia in the vision text of *Scivias* II.5 (Fig. 12):

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 124; SAURMA-JELTSCH, “Die Rupertsberger »Scivias«-Handschrift,” p. 345.

¹¹⁶ Compare several pieces from the catalogue, *Enamels of Limoges, 1100-1350*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Harry N. Abrams, 1996), e.g. Entry 9, Chasse of Bellac, ca. 1120-40 (pp. 87-9); and Entry 10, Chasse of Champagnat, ca. 1150 (pp. 90-2). KELLER he further suggested the elaborate metalwork of shrines produced in workshops of the Meuse valley, such as that of St. Mangold of Huy, ca. 1173 (*Die Mittelrheinische Buchmalerei*, p. 126) as comparanda for the medallions.

¹¹⁷ On the exchange, see DRONKE, *Women Writers*, pp. 165-9; Alfred HAVERKAMP, “Tenxwind von Andernach und Hildegard von Bingen: Zwei »Weltanschauungen« in der Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts,” in *Institutionen, Kultur und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Josef Fleckenstein*, ed. Lutz FENSKE et al. (Jan Thorbecke Verlag: Sigmaringen, 1984), pp. 515-548; and NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 221-3.

¹¹⁸ Letter 53, in Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarium I*, ed. L. VAN ACKER, CCCM 91 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), p. 126. The translation is from *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 1, trans. Joseph L. BAIRD and Radd K. EHRMAN (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 127. This text represents the earliest recension of the text; the letter appears in a significantly edited form in the later collection of the Riesenkodez, amongst whose changes is the replacement of the crosses with “images of angels” (*angelicas imagines*). This likely reflects both a change in actual practice and the different description of the crowns given by Hildegard in her famous letter of 1175 to Guibert of Gembloux, as quoted below.

And around that maiden I saw standing a great crowd of people, brighter than the sun, all wonderfully adorned with gold and gems. Some of these had their heads veiled in white, adorned with a gold circlet; and above them, as if sculpted on the veils, was the likeness of the glorious and ineffable Trinity as it was represented to me earlier, and on their foreheads the Lamb of God, and on their necks a human figure, and on the right ear cherubim, and on the left ear the other kinds of angels; and from the likeness of the glorious and supernal Trinity golden rays extended to these other images.

As she elaborates in her later letter to Guibert, to explain and defend her choice to have her nuns wear white instead of black on high feast days:

I saw that all the ranks [*ordines*] of the Church have bright emblems in accord with the heavenly brightness, yet virginity has no bright emblem—nothing but a black veil and an image of the cross. So I saw that this would be the emblem of virginity: that a virgin's head would be covered with a white veil, because of the radiant-white robe that human beings had in paradise and lost. On her head would be a circlet [*rota*] with three colours conjoined into one—an image of the Trinity—and four roundels attached: the one on the forehead showing the lamb of God, that on the right a cherub, that on the left an angel, and on the back a human being—all these inclining towards the [figure of the] Trinity. This emblem, granted to me, will proclaim blessings to God, because he had clothed the first man in radiant brightness.¹¹⁹

If, as Hildegard seems to imply, the crowns she described in the *Scivias* vision served as the model for the crowns she had her nuns wear, it seems highly probable that these descriptions reflect at least in part their physical composition. Furthermore, the multiple colors of the circlet (*rota tribus coloribus in unum coniunctis*) must mean that the headwear is not simply of metal, but contains fields of color, i.e. enamel work. Finally, the association of each of three colors with a person of the Trinity indicates that Hildegard has in mind a particular color scheme connected to the appearance of the Trinity, “as it was represented to [her] earlier” in *Scivias* II.2 (Vision):

Then I saw a bright, calm light (*serenissima lux*), and in this light a human figure the color of sapphire, which was all blazing with a gentle, red-glowing fire (*suavissimus rutilans ignis*). And that bright, calm light bathed the whole of the red-glowing fire, and the red-glowing fire bathed

¹¹⁹ Letter 103r, in *Epistolarium II*, p. 253; trans. Peter DRONKE, *Women Writers*, p. 169.

the bright, calm light; and the bright, calm light and the red-glowing fire poured over the whole human figure, so that the three were one light in one power of potential.

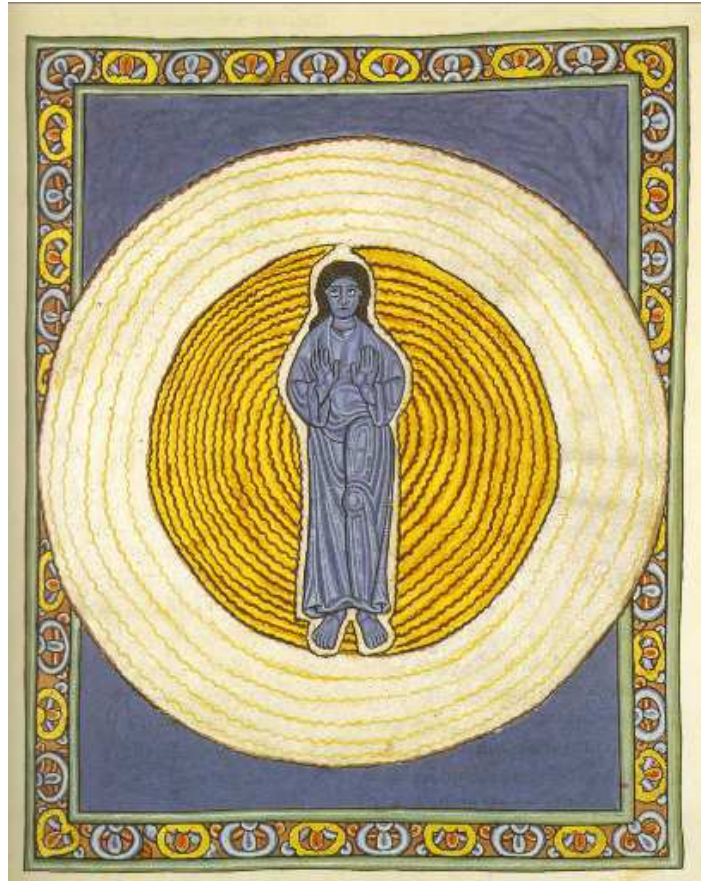


Fig. 5: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 47r: II.2, The Trinity.
From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

The explication tells us that the “bright, calm light” is the Father, the “human figure the color of sapphire” is the Son, and “the gentle, red-glowing fire” is the Holy Spirit. The miniature in the Rupertsberg manuscript (fol. 47r, Fig. 5) develops a specific color scheme for this Trinity: the bright light of the Father is portrayed in an inner circle of gold overlaid with concentric lines of red or brown lacquer; the sapphire Son appears as a blue figure in the center, its hands raised in the orans position; and the gentle, red-glowing fire of the Holy Spirit is an outer circle of silver, overlaid with concentric lines of yellow, and breaking through the boundaries of the gold circle to create a thin outline around the blue human figure.¹²⁰ Although silver is not as frequently used in twelfth-

¹²⁰ SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, p. 93 interprets the gold with red lacquer stripes as the Spirit, based on the description of the Spirit’s fire as *rutilans*, and the silver as the *serenissima lux* of the Father.

century enamel work, gold often forms the standard base metal upon which the fields of enamel were applied; and among the most prominent colors of enamel were various shades of blue. Furthermore, the vision text gives no necessary reason to interpret the *serenissima lux* and *suavissimus rutilans ignis* as circles. If, however, the circles echo the forms of a coronet, then Hildegard's use of two metals and one of the most widely-used colors of enamel to illustrate the Trinity offers the tantalizing possibility that the illustration itself reflects in part the physical composition of her nuns' crowns.

4. Color and Theological Meaning in the Rupertsberg *Scivias*

Thus, a key area of the manuscript design that reveals Hildegard's active role in designing the theological content of the images is the color scheme. Because color is an attribute of visual art that is not lexically confined by the forms into which it is placed, it can be multivocal and polyvalent, conveying multiple meanings at once. In representing both the concrete signifier within the visual image and the more universalized allegorical and theological significations thereof simultaneously, color possesses the unique discursive power of the symbol.¹²¹ The use of certain colors that have particular meanings in Hildegard's symbolic vocabulary—even when at odds with the colors described in the recorded vision text—reveals the theological place of each image within Hildegard's perception of salvation history.¹²² Often, the colors in the image match those described in the vision text; it is those elements that either are not defined in the vision or in fact

However, the appearance of the gold and blue circles together with the silver finger reaching down into Creation in the image for the previous vision, *Scivias* II.1 (fol. 41v, Fig. 4) argues strongly in favor of the reverse. As will become clear below, the gleaming light properties of the Holy Spirit's *suavissimus rutilans ignis* took visual precedence over its redness, thus determining its depiction in silver rather than in red and gold.

¹²¹ For such modes of allegory that embrace the symbolic, rather than cleaving from it, see DRONKE, "Arbor Caritatis," pp. 207-53. I am proposing, as it were, that the use of color transcends MEIER's tripartite schema of the ways in which medieval art could illustrate allegorical and metaphorical meaning (see n. 76 above), which is limited by its presumption that only visual form can bear meaning. MEIER's own foundational study of Hildegard's use of color ("Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegards von Bingen") recognized this fact from the outset, arguing that the complexity of Hildegard's schema of color significations ("Farbenbedeutungen") "is grounded in a theological way of thinking that lies between the descriptive and the abstract" (p. 247). This polyfocal perspective holds the entirety of both each visionary experience and all salvation history in view even as it focuses on particular details, always maintaining the vital connection between part and whole. Yet, MEIER's study limited itself to textual references to color and hesitated to apply her important recognition of color's discursive power to the illustrations in the Rupertsberg manuscript (pp. 250-1, n. 15).

¹²² Wedelin KNOCH has recently pursued a similar line of investigation in regards to the catechetical and theological functions of color, with specific reference to the author portrait (fol. 1r) and the images accompanying *Scivias* I.1 (fol. 2r) and III.8 (The Pillar of the Trinity on fol. 172r): "Visionäre Farbigkeit: Anmerkungen zum *Liber Scivias* der Äbtissin Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)," in *Farbe im Mittelalter: Materialität—Medialität—Semantik*, ed. Ingrid BENNEWITZ and Andrea SCHINDLER (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), Band 2, pp. 791-802.

contradict it that can add the additional level of complexity. This study examines two specific color schemes in the manuscript and their use as theological discourse: first, the contrasting use of red and green; and second, the use of blue, gold, and silver as markers of divine activity.



Fig. 6: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 4r: I.2, The Fall.
From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

4.1. Red and Green

In designing the images in this manuscript, Hildegard invests green with the vital and fertile depth of meaning that *viriditas* has in her theology; by contrast, red frequently connotes the aridity born of sin and fallenness. This contrastive interplay appears already in the image accompanying the second vision of Part I—Creation and the Fall (fol. 4r, Fig. 6). The upper register of Heaven is separated from the lower register of earth by a red-and-white graduated band. Such bands and frames, in which a solid color at the edges is graduated to white at the middle, are used throughout the manuscript to separate panels

and registers within images; and they can be found in various places in different shades of red, blue, light purple, rose-pink, or green.¹²³ Sometimes, the frames also contain more elaborate patterns of waves, palmettes, zig-zags, and other floral and geometric designs. Keller has suggested that the style of these frames is the most readily recognizable formal reminiscence of twelfth-century enamel work.¹²⁴ The various wave, palmette, and cloud forms often echo designs found in frames and borders of mid- to late-twelfth-century book covers and chasses, though the most predominant colors in these enamels are shades of blue set in gold.¹²⁵ Finally, it is important to recognize that the frames and borders constitute the only consistent formal aspect of the illustrations that are entirely their own, i.e. they have no correspondence to details of the vision text. Thus, they can be viewed entirely as an independent interpretative framework, using their symbolic color vocabulary to set contexts—mood lighting, if you will—and draw connections between the theological content of each vision.

Red is a multivalent color in Hildegard's symbolic vocabulary, as Meier's study demonstrated.¹²⁶ Its use in Hildegard's textual works can be broken down, however, into three broad ranges, two of which will be discussed here.¹²⁷ First is the red of fire (*igneus* and *rutilans*), which Hildegard associates quite traditionally with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the fire of God's zealous judgment, but which she also uses for images of *Caritas*, or Divine Love. Second is the red of blood (*sanguineus* and *sanguinolentus*, but also often the more general terms for red such as *rubeus*, *rubor*, and *rubicundus*), whose positive connotations Hildegard associates, via the blood of Christ's passion (whose royal character is often denoted by red's cousin, purple [*purpureus*]), with the blood of martyrdom and thus also the discipline of the ascetic life. Its negative usage, meanwhile, denotes "the savagery of the Persecutor and of the world, of the entire demonic realm that causes innocent blood to be shed and is itself stained by that blood."¹²⁸ Furthermore,

¹²³ Various shades of yellow also appear, but not as frequently, e.g. in the inner half of the waves in the outer frames of the image of the embodiment of the soul on fol. 22r (I.4), or the ochre highlighting the palmettes in the upper and lower frames of the image of Ecclesia on fol. 66r (Fig. 12) and of the Son of Man on fol. 303v (*Scivias* III.10). (See KELLER, *Mittelrheinische Buchmalerei*, pp. 38 and 60; and SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, p. 108.)

¹²⁴ See, e.g., KELLER, *Mittelrheinische Buchmalerei*, pp. 25, 29, and 137.

¹²⁵ For several particularly good examples, see the catalogue *Enamels of Limoges, 1100-1350*, esp. entries 15. Effigy of Geoffrey Plantagenet, ca. 1151 (pp. 98-101); and 16. Chasse of Saint Stephen, ca. 1160-70 (pp. 106-8); and the two book-cover plaques (of Christ in Majesty and the Crucifixion), ca. 1180-1190, on pp. 130-1.

¹²⁶ MEIER, "Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegards von Bingen," pp. 270-7.

¹²⁷ For the third use of red, in reference to the light of dawn, see the discussion of the manuscript's use of gold below.

¹²⁸ MEIER, "Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegards von Bingen," p. 273: "Das Rot des Blutes steht (...) in malam partem für die Grausamkeit der Verfolger, der Welt, des gesamten teuflischen Bereichs, der unschuldiges Blut fließen macht, sich selbst mit Blut befleckt."

when the blood of humans alone is considered, it usually carries the negative connotations of the pollution of the blood inherited from Adam's fall.

The use of red in the frames and borders of the miniatures generally follows these two themes of fire and blood. We will focus here on those places where its connotations are generally negative, via the connotation of spilt and polluted blood. It appears in many of the frames and borders of the visions of Part I, in those specific visions of Part II that deal with the original creation and with the Devil, and in the border and frame of the image of the Fallen Stars from the opening vision of Part III (fol. 123r, Fig. 2). The vivid vermillion red is most noticeable in the illustration of Part I's fifth vision, of Synagogue (fol. 35r, Fig. 13), where the heavy red border echoes Synagogue's large, blood-red (*sanguineam*) feet, which Hildegard tells us are stained with blood, "for at the end of her time she killed the Prophet of Prophets" (*Scivias* I.5.4). Red mixed with brown colors the bodies of the demon spirits in the small, quarter-folio second miniature to accompany the fourth vision of Part I (fol. 24v, Fig. 7), in which the demons attack with arrows of temptations the soul of a woman who is looking up to the hand of God.



Fig. 7: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 24v: I.4, The Virgin Soul Attacked by Demonic Temptations. From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

Likewise, red appears prominently in the images of the monstrous Devil enchaind beneath the feet of the faithful, and his hellish mouth spewing forth flaming streams of

temptation against them in Vision 7 of Part II (fols. 115v and 116r, Figs. 8 and 9).¹²⁹ Although Hildegard's text describes the beast as having five differently-colored sections (green, white, red, yellow, and black—*Scivias* II.7), the monster on fol. 115v appears in the image in black and muddy brown, caught within the vividly bright red chain and spewing forth from his body flaming streams of the same color against the faithful above.¹³⁰ This bright red is echoed in the unusually thick inner and outer linings of the frames. On the facing page, in the upper register flames in the same brownish red that colored the demons' bodies on fol. 24v again spew forth, engulfing entirely many of the groups of people whom the vision describes as wanting to get to Heaven, their hands desperately outstretched to the small celestial cloud burst in the upper right corner. A brighter red, meanwhile, colors the upper and lower bands of the frame, in two shades washing to white in the middle.



Fig. 8: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 115v: II.7, The Devil Bound. From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

Fig. 9: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 116r: II.7, The Tempter's Hell-mouth opposes Humankind. From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

¹²⁹ On this vision, with analysis of its illustration in both the Rupertsberg and Salem manuscripts, see MEIER, *Calcare caput draconis*,” pp. 340-58.

¹³⁰ This divergence between text and image offers further evidence to support dating the design of the manuscript to the 1170's, as Hildegard sees a similar monster trod beneath the feet of the divine Caritas in the opening vision of the *Liber Divinorum Operum* (I.1, Vision), where the five colors of the *Scivias*' monster are replaced by the single “venomous black”: “Quoddam autem monstrum horribilis forme venenosi nigrique coloris et serpentem quondam pedibus suis conculcabat.”

Finally, in the scene below, which depicts what the vision calls “a kind of marketplace displaying human wealth and worldly delights,” several of the figures appear in red-colored clothing, including two with red leggings—details never specified in the vision text. Thus, red is associated in the manuscript with the evil of the Devil, the temptations he and his minions shoot forth against humankind—temptations that hit the mark as we journey through the market of worldly goods—and with the blood that he and all evildoers have on their hands. The red in the middle band of the first creation vision (I.2, fol. 4r, Fig. 6), then, represents both the disobedience for which Lucifer was cast out of Heaven and the break between Heaven and Earth incurred in the Fall, an abyss that can only be bridged by the Redeemer in the cycle of Part II.¹³¹

Yet, that first vision of creation and fall is not without the hope of life amidst the pains of death. The image departs from the text in a significant way in its depiction of Eve's “white cloud” (*candida nubes*), for its white swirls have been highlighted with green, echoing both the green palmettes in the upper frame (from which it is, however, separated by the red band in the middle), and the imaginatively drawn flora of the garden below.¹³² The concept of *viriditas* (“greenness”) is a central motif in Hildegard's thought.¹³³ Drawn from nature, its fundamental meaning of the freshness and vitality of a newly-blossomed leaf informs much of Hildegard's holistic thinking. In her theological works, it describes the essential life-force, both corporeal and spiritual, that animates not only humanity but all the world. She even draws its vitality into the internal living dynamic of the Trinity itself. In the explicatory chapters of the vision of the Trinity in *Scivias* II.2, she offers three additional analogies for the Trinity, in addition to the images of light, sapphire human, and fire of the vision itself (quoted above). The first of these is particularly striking: a stone's damp viridity (*umida viriditas*) to signify the Father; its solidity to the touch (*palpabilis comprehensio*) to signify the Son; and its red-sparking fire (*rutilans ignis*) again to signify the Spirit (*Scivias* II.2.5). Moreover, in describing the relationship of the Trinity to the Incarnation of the Word in the previous vision,

¹³¹ KELLER suggested that the red band separating the two registers in this image represented the “deceitful, vein-shaped form” (*quasi venam visum deceptabilem habentem*) touched by “the loathsome cloud” (*taeterrima nebula*) that emerged from the pit of Hell (*Mittelrheinische Buchmalerei*, p. 30). However, the “vein-shaped form” is clearly meant to represent the serpent in the garden, and has been shaped out of the last tongue of dark cloud on the right into the head of the snake, spewing its venomous deceit upon the green cloud representing Eve, emerging from the side of Adam. The ambiguous form of this dark brown and black cloud has led to many different interpretations, ranging from “a wing or a drooping tulip blossom” (NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 100; CAVINESS also interprets it as a wing, in “Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships,” p. 113), to KERBY-FULTON's recent and persuasive analysis of it as the garden's infamous tree, with “claw-like branches” that recall “contemporary images of the Apocalypse's seven-headed dragon” (“Hildegard of Bingen,” p. 360).

¹³² *Scivias* I.2.28 describes Paradise as “the place of delight [*locus amoenitatis*], which blooms with the freshness [*in viriditate*] of flowers and grass and the charms of spices, full of fine odors and dowered with the joy of blessed souls, giving invigorating moisture to the dry ground.”

¹³³ See esp. Gabriele LAUTENSCHLÄGER, “>Viriditas<”, in *Hildegard von Bingen. Prophetin durch die Zeiten*, ed. Äbtissin Edeltraud FORSTER (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1997), pp. 224-37.

Hildegard tells us that it happened “through the Holy Spirit’s sweet *viriditas*” (*Scivias* II.1.3); and amid the panoply of images that appear in the sequence that Hildegard composed to the Holy Spirit (*O ignis Spiritus Paracliti*), verse 4b declares the Holy Spirit the dispenser of *viriditas*:

From you the clouds flow forth, the wind takes flight,
the stones their moisture hold,
the waters rivers spring,
and earth viridity bedews.¹³⁴

Although Hildegard’s text never ascribes *viriditas* to the cloud that is Eve, the matrix and mother of the human race (envisioned as the golden stars that appear within the cloud, echoing the stars of the angels in the upper register—the stars that fell and whose place, according to tradition, humans are destined to fill), the color has been intentionally added to the image, giving it “the aspect of a tender green leaf” to indicate the fresh life that will flow from her womb.¹³⁵

In contrast to the widespread use of red in the borders lining the frames of several visions in Part I and the opening vision of Part II, which deals again with creation and the fall, green becomes a favored color in the inner and outer linings of Part II, Vision 2 (The Trinity, fol. 47r, Fig. 5) and Vision 5 (The Orders of Ecclesia’s Mystical Body, fol. 66r Fig. 12), as well as in the right and left portions of the unlined frame of Part II, Vision 3 (Ecclesia, the Mother of the Faithful in Baptism, fol. 51r, Fig. 11). Hildegard has used the colors of these frames to establish contexts for their content—in this case, by casting images dealing with the original order of creation and its fallenness into the aridity of sin within red, while marking out images of the new order of creation, established by the Incarnation and infused with the working of the Holy Spirit through the fertile motherhood of Virgin Mother Church, with green. That *viriditas* as a creative and living force makes perhaps its most potent appearance in the image accompanying Part II, Vision 6: the Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross and in the Eucharist (fol. 86r, Fig. 10). Here, the green infuses both the upper and lower frame of the image, as well as the band separating the two registers. Just as the red band separating the upper and lower registers in the image of Creation and the Fall in Part I indicated the entrance of death and sin into the world, so here its presence reminds us that the drama of the Crucifixion and Eucharist is not about death but about Life. The dead body of Christ is, in fact, a sign that Death has been overcome and that Christ and the sacrifice of his body and blood are, in fact, a quickening power to renew Creation. Indeed, we see that the Cross breaks through the entire band in the middle of the image; whereas the heavens and the earth were separated

¹³⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Symphonia*, ed. NEWMAN, p. 150: “De te nubes fluunt, ether volat, / lapides humorem habent, / aque rivulos educunt, / et terra viriditatem sudat.”

¹³⁵ NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 102; see also Rebecca L. GARBER, “Where is the Body? Images of Eve and Mary in the *Scivias*,” in *Hildegard of Bingen: A Book of Essays*, ed. Maud Burnett McINERNEY (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), pp. 103-32, esp. pp. 106-18.

by sin in the original creation, the Cross unites the heavens and the earthly office of the Church in its daily renewal of the sacrifice of the Mass in the lower register. This Cross, however, has a peculiar feature which is neither specified in the text nor drawn from traditional crucifixion iconography: it is executed in silver.



Fig. 10: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 86r: II.6, Crucifixion, Endowment of Ecclesia, and Eucharist. From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

4.2. *Blue, Gold, and Silver*

It is no great surprise to find blue and gold in extensive use in this manuscript, as they were standard in medieval book art—though they also take on a particular meaning within Hildegard's visio-theological vocabulary. It is the extensive use of silver, however, that is remarkable, and for a simple reason. Open a medieval manuscript and its gold leaf will shine as brightly today as it did when it was first laid down many centuries ago. But the same often cannot be said for silver because of its tendency to tarnish. Indeed, as Keller reported, the black-and-white photographs of the original manuscript are sometimes useless in discerning details of certain pages that made heavy use of silver, because the oxidation has rendered the silver almost black.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ See KELLER's discussion of the image of Ecclesia on fol. 66r (Part II, Vision 5): *Mittelrheinische Buchmalereien*, pp. 59-60; and CAVINESS' discussion of the same, with plates comparing the

We have seen already a possible motivation, however, for the costly, labor-intensive, and highly unusual decision to use so much silver: together with gold and blue, it forms the colors of the Trinity in both the image for Part II, Vision 2 (fol. 47r, Fig. 5) and possibly in the symbolic coronets worn by Hildegard's nuns on high feast days. This color scheme of gold, blue, and silver also informs depictions of the Trinity in other images of the manuscript, adapting the circular forms of II.2 in the visions before and after it (II.1, fol. 41v, Fig. 3; and II.3, fol. 51r, Fig. 11), and in other places sprung from their circles, as for example in the background of the image of the celestial symphony, discussed above (*Scivias* III.13, fol. 229r, Fig. 4), silently expressing the triune God's omnipresence in "the lucent sky" (*lucidissimum aerem*). In trying to understand their appearance in the opening vision of Part II with reference first to their iconographical function, Meier noted that one typical use of silver and gold in a manuscript is to represent light, thus drawing on the image of the Word from the opening of John's Gospel, the "true Light" (*lux vera*) of the world by whom that world was created (John 1:9-10).¹³⁷ Yet, as Constant Mews has noted, Hildegard subtly altered that passage in the words with which the voice from heaven spoke to her at the outset of *Scivias* (*Protestificatio*): "I am the Living Light, Who illuminates the darkness" (*Ego lux vivens et obscura illuminans*).¹³⁸ This change in focus, however, is crucial in understanding Hildegard's entire approach: because Hildegard's visionary experiences of the Living Light were dynamic, not static, she does not imagine the divinity as fixed and remote, an inalterable and unapproachable truth. Rather, she focuses on the dynamic vitality of the divinity—its *virtus*, its active, moving power—bursting forth in living light that gives verdant life.¹³⁹

If we turn again to that illustration of the first vision of Part II (fol. 41v, Fig. 3), which recapitulates the Creation and Fall from Part I, Vision 2, by broadening it to include the coming of the Redeemer, we can see how this dynamic movement stretches down into the creation of humankind:

(...) a blazing fire [*lucidissimum ignem*], incomprehensible, inextinguishable, wholly living and wholly Life, [*totum viventem, totumque vitam existentem*], with a flame in it the color of the sky, which burned ardently with a gentle breath [*leni flatu ardentem flagrabat*] (...). Then the

photograph to the facsimile, in "Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships," pp. 75-6 and figs. 7-9.

¹³⁷ MEIER, "Zum Verhältnis von Text und Illustration im überlieferten Werk Hildegards von Bingen," p. 163.

¹³⁸ Constant MEWS, "Religious Thinker: 'A Frail Human Being' on Fiery Life," p. 55.

¹³⁹ Barbara NEWMAN has recently noted a similar quality in the unique Trinitarian iconography used in the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Rothschild Canticles, which she describes as "a playful, intimate approach to the triune God, marked by spontaneity rather than solemnity, dynamism rather than hieratic stasis, wit rather than awe." In "Contemplating the Trinity: Text, Image, and the Origins of the Rothschild Canticles," *Gesta* v. 52, no. 2 (2013), pp. 133-59, at p. 135.

same flame was in that fire and extended itself with that burning ardor [*illo ardore*] to a little clod of mud which lay at the bottom of the atmosphere, and warmed it so that it was made flesh and blood, and blew upon it until it rose up a living human. (*Scivias*, II.1, Vision)

In the explication of the vision, we are told that the “blazing fire symbolizes the Omnipotent and Living God,” and the “flame the color of the sky” is the Son, for “before any creatures were made, the Infinite Word was indivisibly in the Father; Which in course of time was to become incarnate in the ardor of charity, miraculously and without the stain or weight of sin, by the Holy Spirit’s sweet, green freshness [*viriditatem*] in the dawn of blessed virginity” (*Scivias* II.1.1 and 3). The gold and blue circles of the Father’s bright, blazing fire and the Son’s sky-blue flame appear at the top of the image, but the field of the miniature, as well as the finger-like form extending from the Father and Son, are in silver.¹⁴⁰ The vision text itself seems to identify this “same flame in that fire” extending down into creation as that of the Word (Son), and besides the mention of the Spirit’s viridity, the explicatory text never identifies a vision element to correspond to the third person of the Trinity. The use of the silver, however, offers a visual clarification that it is in fact the Spirit, the “burning ardor” and “gentle breath”, whose finger-like flame stretches to the bottom of the circle of creation to touch a human head rising from a gelatinous pile of red clay: the creation of Adam.

The thrust of that creative finger of silver, then, brings us back (or forwards, as it were) to the Crucifixion on fol. 86r (Fig. 10), and the silver Cross bursting through the image’s own limits of narrational space, to bring “a great calmness of light” (*magna serenitas lucis*—*Scivias* II.6, Vision) from Heaven down to bathe the altar and to lift its sacrificial gifts of bread and wine into Heaven, where they are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. The upper register of the image is filled with the symbolic colors of the Trinity: the gold background of three of the four quadrants, together with the hand of God reaching down from heaven in the upper right; the blue of the fourth quadrant; and the silver Cross. It is in this fiery flash, the embrace by the triune God in Heaven of the elements of bread and wine offered in the sacrifice of the Mass, that we discover Hildegard’s program of the Eucharist as a new and perfected creation: as the silver flame and finger of the Holy Spirit reached down out of the Trinity to quicken Adam from the mud, so the silver Cross breaks through time and space to quicken Christ, the new Adam, from the Eucharistic elements of bread of wine. Furthermore, to the left of the Cross and upon a background of the Son’s sapphire blue, the gleaming, golden figure of Ecclesia, the Church, is both baptized in the blood streaming from his side and betrothed to him,

¹⁴⁰ Clemencia Hand KESSLER identified the silver in this image as the Holy Spirit, its use in the background connecting the persons of the Trinity inseparably, although she erred in identifying the gold circles as representing Christ Logos: “A Problematic Illumination of the Heidelberg ‘Liber Scivias,’” p. 14.

she the bride and he the bridegroom.¹⁴¹ This background is continued in the lower register, in which Ecclesia herself stands before the altar, offering up the sacrifice of the Mass.¹⁴²



Fig. 11: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 51r: II.3, Ecclesia, the Mother of the Faithful in Baptism. From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

That blue background, marked with diamond clusters of white dots, brings us to Ecclesia's first appearance in the manuscript, in the third vision of Part II (fol. 51r, Fig. 11): the Church, the Bride of Christ and Mother of the faithful through baptism:

¹⁴¹ The banderole held in the hand of God in the upper right reads, "May she, O Son, be your Bride for the restoration of My people; may she be a mother to them, regenerating souls through the salvation of the Spirit and water." (Text from *Scivias* II.6, Vision.)

¹⁴² Anne W. ASTELL has noted that this image, as well as its companion on the verso side of the folio showing the priest offering the Mass and its various recipients, has "its own memorial logic, reflective of the mind's associative patterns and means of recall", which echo Hildegard's program of the Eucharist as a restorative and regenerative memorial not only of Christ's sacrifice but of "Mary's gift to God as well, her virginity yielding its fruit in a spotless victim, human and divine, and a pure sacramental bread." See "Memoriam Fecit': The Eucharist, Memory, Reform, and Regeneration in Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* and Nicholas of Cusa's Sermons," in *Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal*, ed. Christopher M. BELLITTO and David Zachariah FLANAGIN (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), pp. 190-213, esp. pp. 201 and 207.

After this I saw the image of a woman as large as a great city, with a wonderful crown on her head and arms from which a splendor hung like sleeves, shining from Heaven to earth. Her womb was pierced like a net with many openings, with a huge multitude of people running in and out. She had no legs or feet, but stood balanced on her womb in front of the altar that stands before the eyes of God. (...) I could not make out her attire, except that she was arrayed in great splendor and gleamed with a lucid serenity [*tota lucidissima serenitate fulgens multo splendore circumdata fuerat*], and on her breast shone a red glow like the dawn [*velut aurora rubeo fulgore rutilante*]. (...) And that image spreads out its splendor like a garment, saying, "I must conceive and give birth!" [*Et eadem imago expandit splendorem suum velut vestimentum dicens, "Me oportet concipere et parere!"*]

(...)

And behold, that bright, calm light with a human figure in it, blazing with a red-glowing fire, which I had seen in my previous vision, again appeared to me, and stripped the black skin off each of [Ecclesia's children] and threw it way; and it clothed them in a pure white garment [*candidissima veste*] and opened to them the bright, calm light. (*Scivias* II.3, Vision)

The illustration that accompanies this has been separated into four panels by frames of graduated green.¹⁴³ In the upper left, we see Ecclesia in gold, surrounded by the children whom the banderole she holds declares she will conceive and birth (quoting from the vision text)—her own virginal fecundity signaled visually for us by the verdant green frame. The sideways-set stone stairs and ladder draw from both the architectural image that begins the vision and details in a later vision of Ecclesia's Mystical Body and her orders (II.5, fol. 66r, Fig. 12), from whose illustration they are then omitted.¹⁴⁴ In the upper right, we see Ecclesia before the altar, upon which stands a standard image of Christ, his right hand raised in blessing, his left hand holding the Book of Life. Directly below, we meet Ecclesia's netted womb, through which pass each of her children, their black skin torn away as they come out of her mouth, replaced by the gleaming garment of the catechumen—and the agent of this baptismal rebirth in the corner, the Trinity's concentric circles of blue, gold, and silver. On the lower left, finally, the same Christ from above reappears, holding a banderole that quotes from the words of admonition he speaks after baptizing the children of the Church.

¹⁴³ The illustration also includes details that have been omitted from the quoted vision text.

¹⁴⁴ On images of Ecclesia's eternal exemplar, the heavenly city of Jerusalem, from which spring Hildegard's frequent architectural metaphors for her, see NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 198-204.

Christ's role as Ecclesia's Bridegroom is fulfilled in the background of his blue that accompanies her, a wedding tapestry to celebrate their union. The images of Ecclesia, moreover, appear consistently throughout the manuscript in gold—but the precious metal now represents not so much the *serenissima lux* of the Father as another figure of light, the splendor and glowing red of the dawn (*aurora*). This is the third concept under which Meier categorized Hildegard's use of the color red—but just as with the silver of the Holy Spirit, in the manuscript's images, its properties of light take precedence over its redness.¹⁴⁵ The dawn light is, in Hildegard's visionary vocabulary, the preeminent marker of Christ's Incarnation, the turning point in salvation history. Thus, in the illustration of *Scivias* II.1 (fol. 41v, Fig. 3), the hemisphere of blue and gold that appears at the bottom of the image both echoes the circles of Father and Son above and heralds the dawn light of the incarnate Redeemer, who is thus depicted, not in sapphire blue but in gleaming gold. Furthermore, the Incarnation served as the ideal model for Hildegard's notions of *virginitas*, the order of the Church in which she and her nuns were specially called to imitate the Savior. The connections between Christ, his Virgin Mother, and the Virgin Ecclesia are the hallmark of Hildegard's particular interpretation of the absolute predestination of the Word, which is also why Hildegard tends to emphasize the entire Incarnation, and not just the crucifixion, as the triumphant key to salvation history. As Meier explains: "The dawn, gleaming in purity, red like blood, but also the beginning of a new day (that is, the end of the old darkness and covenant...), can also include the red of the Holy Spirit and its working in the Incarnation; the *gloria* that begins with the Incarnation after it has overcome the ancient disgrace; and the red of the burning love for *virginitas* and, through its renunciation of the world, for heaven itself."¹⁴⁶

In the collection of Hildegard's liturgical musical compositions, which she herself called the *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum*, the "Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations," an early version of which is found in the last vision of *Scivias* (III.13), Hildegard devoted more works to the Virgin Mary (sixteen) than to any other subject.¹⁴⁷ Strangely, however, Mary appears in physical form in the visions of *Scivias* only once—in that last vision of the celestial symphony. Symbolically, however, she appeared in that golden dawn of *Scivias* II.1 (fol. 41v, Fig. 3), for she was the virginal

¹⁴⁵ MEIER, "Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegards von Bingen," pp. 274-7. The gold leaf does, however, frequently appear in the manuscript with various shades or patterns applied over it in a red lacquer finish.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 275: "Das Morgenrot, strahlend in Reinheit, rot wie Blut, zugleich aber Anbruch des neuen Tages, das heißt Ende der alten Finsternis und Verheißung (...), vermochte auch noch die Röte des heiligen Geistes und sein Wirken an der Inkarnation, schließlich den mit ihr beginnenden Zustand der *gloria* (...) nach Überwindung der alten Schande, die Röte der brennenden Liebe zur *virginitas* und zum Himmlischen (bei Absage and die Welt) einzuschließen."

¹⁴⁷ See HILDEGARD of BINGEN, *Symphonia*, ed. NEWMAN; NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 161-6; and Beverly LOMER, *Hildegard of Bingen: Music, Rhetoric and the Sacred Feminine* (Saarland: VDM Verl. Müller, 2009).

matrix through which the Redeemer's incarnate light burst forth into the world.¹⁴⁸ If we choose to conflate that blue and gold hemisphere with the Virgin as herald of the Incarnation, we enter into what Caviness has suggested is the most extraordinary of the Rupertsberg *Scivias* images' functions: the declaration of the feminine divine.¹⁴⁹ As Newman notes, Mary is both the fulfillment of "the sapiential visions" of the eternal counsel, and "the new Eve (...), the exemplar of a new creation." Thus she unites Hildegard's treatment of the feminine divine and mortal women, who receive their new exemplar of virginity in her.¹⁵⁰

As Mary stands at the pinnacle and turning point of salvation history to mediate the divinity of her Son to the world, Ecclesia takes her place as God's face and agent within creation as "it follows its painful but triumphant course through history to a consummation at the end of time."¹⁵¹ It is for this reason that the single most imposing figure throughout all the images of the Rupertsberg manuscript is Ecclesia, who, for example, takes Mary's place as described in the Gospels beneath the beam of the Cross (fol. 86r, Fig. 10). Caviness, however, goes too far in calling these "Goddesses" that "were more subversive than the text and were, therefore, at risk in an investigation."¹⁵² Hildegard did not conceive of the feminine divine as "Goddesses," nor did she ever use the term *dea* ("goddess"). Rather, she believed in the one God (*in unum Deum*) who manifested himself in creation through his Word, preeminently in that Word's Incarnation, but also continuously in the feminine manifestations of that Word's eternal predestination, including both the Virgin Mary and Ecclesia, but also in Hildegard's visionary vocabulary such feminine personifications as *Caritas* (Love), *Sapientia* (Wisdom), *Humilitas* (Humility), or *Pax* (Peace).¹⁵³ Like these, Ecclesia is not a goddess but an emanation of God, the representative of the divine within the world. Her divinity is not her own—it is hers as the Bride of Christ, participating in his divinity while sharing his humanity. The divine feminine, for Hildegard, is the place where God stoops to

¹⁴⁸ Several scholars have also suggested that the white flower of obedience offered to Adam out of the gold and blue circles of Father and Son—a flower he refuses to pluck, thus inverting the traditional image of picking and eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil—invokes the traditional white lily of the Virgin Mary's own act of obedience at the Annunciation: see NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 168; and GARBER, "Where is the Body? Images of Eve and Mary in the *Scivias*," p. 110.

¹⁴⁹ CAVINESS, "Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships," pp. 79-94.

¹⁵⁰ NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 158-9.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁵² CAVINESS, "Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationships," pp. 92-4. One major problem with her argument is its assumption that the images in the manuscript were never copied again, despite evidence to the contrary, e.g. in the fourteenth-century refectory of the nuns of St. Gertrude in Cologne (see HAMBURGER, "The 'Various Writings of Humanity': Johannes Tauler on Hildegard of Bingen's *Liber Scivias*," pp. 161-205).

¹⁵³ See *Liber Divinorum Operum*, III.3 for a particular vision of these female manifestations of divinity; and discussion in NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 51-5.

human weakness and human weakness can reach out to touch the face of God.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, it is in Ecclesia's paradoxically powerful office as Virgin Mother of the faithful that Hildegard recognizes the power of her own office within the Church.¹⁵⁵



Fig. 12: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 66r: II.5, Ecclesia's Mystical Body: Her Orders. From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

Thus, the most powerful yet enigmatic image in the entire Rupertsberg manuscript is that of Ecclesia on fol. 66r (Fig. 12), accompanying a vision that describes the three orders that make up her membership: virgin monastics, clerics, and laypeople (*Scivias* II.5). We have met this image before—it is upon the breast of this figure of Ecclesia that Hildegard sees her own, highest order of the Church, her virgins, resplendent in veils of white and crowned with the very coronets upon which she modeled those used in her own abbey. Several of the women appear wearing veils executed in silver, bound by crowns that have only been sketched in.¹⁵⁶ Here are the other elements of that vision that appear

¹⁵⁴ See NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 42-70.

¹⁵⁵ See Barbara NEWMAN, "Divine Power Made Perfect in Weakness: St. Hildegard on the Frail Sex," in *Medieval Religious Women: Peacemakers*, v. 2, ed. Lillian Thomas SHANK and John A. NICHOLS (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1987), pp. 103-21.

¹⁵⁶ The details of the crowns were likely too small to be executed in the illustration.

in the illustration—many have remarked, however, that it “departs more than usual from the text”:¹⁵⁷

After this I saw that a splendor white as snow and translucent as crystal had shone around the image of that woman from the top of her head to her throat. And from her throat to her navel another splendor, red in color, had encircled her, glowing like the dawn (...) and shining mixed with purple and blue [*pupura hyacintho*]. (...) And where it glowed like the dawn, its brightness shone forth as high as the secret places of heaven; and in this brightness appeared a most beautiful image of a maiden, with bare head and black hair, wearing a red tunic, which flowed down about her feet.

And around that maiden I saw standing a great crowd of people, brighter than the sun, all wonderfully adorned with gold and gems. [Here follows the descriptions of the virgins and their crowns.] And among these people there were some who had miters on their heads and pallia of the Episcopal office around their shoulders.

But another splendor, like a white cloud, decently enveloped that image from the navel down, to the point at which it had not yet grown further. And these three splendors around that image shone afar (...).

The first and the third splendors of this massive, powerful figure, gleaming white as snow and cloud, appear in bright silver, while the middle splendor, glowing like the dawn, is in gold, with the golden wing-like flames of its brightness reaching up behind its shoulders. Furthermore, Ecclesia holds out her golden-cloaked arms in the orans position, while the background behind her has been filled with a darker silver in all areas except those between her long, drooping sleeve-cuffs and the brighter silver mountain-shapes that form her lower half, which have been left as blank parchment.¹⁵⁸ Both Keller and Saurma-Jeltsch indicated that this image is one of only two in the manuscript—the other being the final image of the celestial symphony, *Scivias* III.13 (Fig. 4)—to be left at an early stage of layout, unfinished in all areas except the head.¹⁵⁹ Neither considered the possibility, however, that this could be intentional. The effect in both “unfinished” images, in which figures are left only in the initial sketches, without the heavier outlining found in the rest of the manuscript, their faces the untouched color of the parchment, is one of slight other-worldliness and translucence. These two images come the closest of

¹⁵⁷ E.g. NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 218. I have omitted several of the vision's details—e.g. the “thick darkness” below the orders' splendor, and the steps and ladders—that do not appear in the illustration.

¹⁵⁸ BAILLET indicated that in the original manuscript, these darker areas of silver to the sides were heavily oxidized, perhaps due to being mixed with a black pigment (“Les miniatures du »Scivias« de Sainte Hildegarde,” p. 89 and n. 3).

¹⁵⁹ KELLER, *Die Mittelrheinische Buchmalerei*, p. 59; SAURMA-JELTSCH, *Die Miniaturen*, p. 108.

all the manuscript's illustrations to reaching out and up, across the physical divide, into the world to come, the realm of divinity and living light.

Gold in this image thus represents the dawn, the breaking forth of that divine light into the world through a succession of feminine manifestations, most prominently Mary and Ecclesia. Silver, meanwhile, seems also to take on a new meaning, for it now depicts the *candida nubes*, the gleaming white cloud. We have already seen a *candida nubes* in this manuscript, but not in silver. Rather, in the illustration for *Scivias* I.2 on fol. 4r (Fig. 6), the gleaming white cloud of Eve emerging blossom-like from Adam's side was highlighted in swirls of green, the verdant promise of future life from the mother of all humankind. By choosing two different visual materials to illustrate these two different instances of a *candida nubes*, Hildegard declares the crucial difference between Eve's powerful but flawed maternity and Ecclesia's even more powerful, virginal motherhood.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, however, the use of both green and silver highlights the active role of the Holy Spirit in that office of motherhood. We have already seen that Hildegard textually and musically links the Holy Spirit's activity to *viriditas*, and now we see that she visually links the Holy Spirit's active gift of fertility across salvation history, overshadowing first Eve's verdant, maternal cloud, then scripturally the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35), and finally Ecclesia's gleaming cloud of baptismal regeneration. Thus, we also see that pale green is one of the three wash colors that Hildegard chose for the garments of the virgins (and one bishop) who appear at Ecclesia's breast.

Within the context of salvation history, therefore, gold and silver act as markers of divine activity: the gold of the Father's bright light in heaven becomes the gold of the gleaming dawn that foretells and then fulfills the mission of the Father's Son into the world; the silver of the Holy Spirit's fire becomes the bright and verdant cloud that issues forth life and new life, birth and rebirth. The use of these two metals in the manuscript illuminations thus adds new theological connections that are not found explicitly in the text itself.

These theological meanings, then, inform our understanding of other places where gold and silver, dawn and cloud, appear in the work, e.g. the image of Synagogue on fol. 35r (Fig. 13). The massive, towering female figure seems visually matched to the grand Ecclesia thirty-one folios later, but contrastively so. Her body's two zones of desperate pale purple and disturbing shades of black have no shine or glow, save a ring of gold around her head and a bit of silver around her feet. Furthermore, her crossed arms and closed eyes shut her off from the reception of divinity, in contrast to Ecclesia's piercing gaze and arms open in the orans position. We have already noted Synagogue's bright-red feet, stained by the Savior's blood shed at the very end of her pitiable days—but they are surrounded by a cloud of silver, which the vision text describes as “a cloud of purest whiteness” (*candidissima et purissima nubes*). This silver cloud fortells the coming of Ecclesia, thus linking these feet directly to the silver that colors Ecclesia's head and crown on fol. 66r. The golden circlet about her head is, according to the vision text, “like

¹⁶⁰ On the ambiguity of Eve's cloud, see NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 100-107; on Ecclesia's virginal maternity, see *ibid.*, pp. 228-38.

the dawn”, and it is in this connection that Hildegard offers a glimmer of hope in an otherwise depressingly painful image—for she wears this crown,

because she prefigured in her rising the miracle of God's Only-Begotten and foreshadowed the bright virtues and mysteries that followed. For she was crowned, as it were, early in the morning, when she received the divine precepts, following Adam, who at first accepted God's commands, but afterward by his transgressions fell into death. So also did the Jews, who originally submitted to the divine Law, but then in their unbelief rejected the Son of God. But as humanity in the last days will be snatched from the perdition of death by the death of God's Only-Begotten, so too the Synagogue, stirred up by divine clemency, will before the last day abandon her unbelief and truly attain to the knowledge of God. (*Scivias*, I.5.6)



Fig. 13: Rupertsberg *Scivias*, Facsimile, Fol. 35r: I.5, Synagogue.
From the [Abbey of St. Hildegard](#).

Salvation history is, for Hildegard, a continual series of emanations and irruptions of the divine, of creative emanation from the divine foreknowledge, of falling away therefrom, and of then returning thereto. The image of Synagogue intentionally plays with the ordering of these events in salvation history, for the golden crown both marks the earliest days of humankind and foretells the Incarnation; the silver cloud, meanwhile, looks both back to Eve's verdant but fallen cloud and forward to the virginal motherhood

of Mary and Ecclesia. Conversely, as Newman notes, “the somber yet majestic figure of [Synagogue] rises up between the emblems of Eve at her feet and Mary at her head, for she holds an intermediate place between the fallen mother of all living and the Mother of God.”¹⁶¹

Finally, in Synagogue's arms appears the giver of the divine Law, Moses, cloaked in red and holding the tablets upon which “he brought the divine Law into human hearts” (*Scivias* I.5.5). Following the correlative patterns that are the hallmark of her symbolist thinking, Hildegard returns to the figure of Moses in the explicatory chapters of *Scivias* II.5, to describe the work of St. Benedict in forging the order of the Church to which Hildegard herself belonged. For after the dawn of the apostolic Church (one of Hildegard's favorite metaphors for ecclesiastical reform), the sun shone bright as Benedict, who “like a second Moses, lying in the cleft of the rock and tormenting and repressing his body with great harshness for the love of life, (...) by the sweetness of the Holy Spirit's inspiration made the plan of this order a separate and level path, which before him was an exceedingly hard way of life” (*Scivias* II.5.20).¹⁶²

Echoing Moses at the center of Synagogue's breast, we find at the center of Ecclesia's, however, not St. Benedict, but a woman, her hair unbound and flowing (though parchment-colored rather than the black mentioned in the text), clothed in a flowing red gown, her hands upheld in the same orans gesture as the larger Ecclesia.¹⁶³ This woman, the vision's explication tells us, is *Virginitas* (Virginitas), and she can take St. Benedict's place in the image because, like Benedict, she “honors the Incarnation of [God]'s Son in the garment of [her] way of life” (*Scivias* II.5.20), the resplendent garment lost in the Fall, as Hildegard described it in the later letter to Guibert. Furthermore, the voice from heaven addresses her with a responsory for the high feast of the Assumption of Mary: “This is the blossom of celestial Zion, the mother and flower of roses and lilies of the valley.”¹⁶⁴ In Hildegard's response to the critical letter from Tengsrich of Andernach questioning her choice of virginal garments for her nuns—open

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁶² The comparison of Benedict and Moses likewise appears in Hildegard's commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict: *De Regula Sancti Benedicti*, ed. Hugh FEISS, in HILDEGARDIS BINGENSIS, *Opera Minora*, CCCM 226 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 69; Hildegard also compared herself to Moses in an autobiographical passage that appears in her *Vita* (II.5, in *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*, pp. 164-5), to describe her role in leading her nuns away from the male house of the Disibodenberg into their new, wilderness-like home on the Rupertsberg—see DRONKE, *Women Writers*, pp. 150-3. On the dawn as reformist metaphor, see Kathryn KERBY-FULTON, “A Return to ‘the First Dawn of Justice’: Hildegard's Visions of Clerical Reform and the Eremitical Life,” *American Benedictine Review* v. 40 (1989), pp. 383-407.

¹⁶³ In her analysis of these two images, MEIER mistakenly sets *Virginitas* in parallel with Abraham, who in the image of Synagogue appears below her folded arms, holding up the knife of circumcision: “Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegards von Bingen,” pp. 325-7.

¹⁶⁴ See NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 220.

white veils and golden circlets—on such high feast days, Hildegard defended their custom thus:

[T]hese strictures do not apply to a virgin, for she stands in the unsullied purity of paradise, lovely and unwithering, and she always remains in the full vitality of the budding rod. A virgin is not commanded to cover up her hair, but she willingly does so out of her great humility (...). Virgins are married with holiness in the Holy Spirit and in the bright dawn of virginity, and so it is proper that they come before the great High Priest as an oblation presented to God. Thus through the permission granted her and the revelation of the mystic inspiration of the finger of God, it is appropriate for a virgin to wear a white vestment, the lucent symbol of her betrothal to Christ, considering that her mind is made one with the interwoven whole [*intexte integritati mens eius solidetur*], and keeping in mind the One to whom she is joined, as it is written: “Having his name, and the name of the Father, written on their foreheads” [Apoc. 14:1] and also, “These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” [Apoc. 14:4].¹⁶⁵

The order of virgins surrounding the central figure of *Viriditas* in the Rupertsberg image for *Scivias* II.5 wear those lucent white veils, executed, like the shining white of Ecclesia's head and lower half, in brilliant silver. In studying the words for clothing and jewelry in Hildegard's invented language, the *Lingua Ignota*, Sarah Higley has suggested that Hildegard may have developed one of the two words she gives for “veil”, *Kanulzial*, in parallel to the word for “bishop's stole”, *Tunchzial*.¹⁶⁶ Based on this parallel, the particular dress that Hildegard both describes and defends for her nuns served not only as the modest veil of a nun's habit but as a sign of the dignity and rank of her order of virgins, nestled in the bosom of Mother Church. Furthermore, the Rupertsberg image indicates that the veils are practically sacramental—they mediate divine power as they sparkle in mottled silver, signifying and effecting the interweaving of the virgin's mind and soul with Christ her Bridegroom, joined together like the silver, gold, and blue of the Trinity she wears upon her head. Hildegard claims for herself and her virgin nuns a preeminent place in the Church and her spiritual hierarchy, the corruption of whose institutional counterpart was the target throughout the second half of her life of her unrelenting castigation and reproach.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the very creation of the *Lingua Ignota* likely involved Hildegard's recognition of the failures of the German and Latin languages she knew to fully convey the divine truths she experienced through the Living Light—it was, in Higley's words, “an attempt to provide a post-Edenic equivalent of rational and

¹⁶⁵ Letter 52r, in *Epistolarium I*, pp. 128-9; trans. *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 129.

¹⁶⁶ Sarah L. HIGLEY, “Dressing Up the Nuns: The *Lingua Ignota* and Hildegard of Bingen's Clothing,” in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, v. 6, ed. Robin NETHERTON and Gale R. OWEN-CROCKER (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2010), pp. 93-109, esp. pp. 104-5.

¹⁶⁷ See KERBY-FULTON, “Prophet and Reformer: ‘Smoke in the Vineyard’,” pp. 70-90.

deific language.”¹⁶⁸ The language it strives to recapture is, above all, the angelic voice with which Adam spoke before the Fall, its resonance too powerful now for the ears of weakened mortals—as Hildegard described in her magnificent apologia of music to the prelates at Mainz in the last year of her life as she desperately tried to convince them to lift the interdict under which her abbey had been placed.¹⁶⁹ This language’s connection to musicality was reinforced in an addition made in the Riesenkodez version of a letter Hildegard wrote to Pope Anastasius in 1153, which claims divine inspiration for “uttering an unknown language, that by itself it might sound forth multitudinous, harmonious melodies.”¹⁷⁰

If the crowns her nuns wore were inspired by this vision of them rooted in Ecclesia’s breast, then so too we might think of Hildegard’s musical compositions—the largest repertoire to survive of a twelfth-century composer, regardless of gender—as inspired by that final vision of *Scivias*, whose illustration shares the translucent “incompleteness” of this one. The context for both is liturgical—the *Opus Dei*, the “work of God” as St. Benedict described it in the Rule, of offering musical prayer eight times a day in service of the Lord. For Hildegard, however, the notion of the *opus divinum*, the “divine work”, took on much deeper theological resonances, becoming the thematic title of her last and greatest work, the *Liber Divinorum Operum*.¹⁷¹ In one of the autobiographical passages later gathered into her *Vita* (II.16), Hildegard described the visionary (and almost mystical) insight at the genesis of that work, structured around the opening verse of John’s Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word...” She writes:

For it was the Word, which before all created things had no beginning, and after them shall have no end, which summoned all created things into being. He brought his work into being like a smith causing his work to shower sparks. In this way, what was predestined by him before ever the world was, appeared in visible form. Therefore humankind is the work of God [*opus Dei*] along with every creature. But humankind is also said to be the worker of the Divinity [*operarius divinitatis*] and a shadow of his mysteries, and should in all things reveal the Holy Trinity, for “God made [humans] in his image and likeness” [Gen. 1:26]. (...) And thus the vision mentioned above taught me and allowed me to expound the words of this

¹⁶⁸ Sarah L. HIGLEY, *Hildegard of Bingen's Unknown Language. An Edition, Translation, and Discussion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 32.

¹⁶⁹ See Letter 23, in *Epistolarium I*, pp. 61-6; trans. *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen I*, pp. 76-80.

¹⁷⁰ Letter 8, in *Epistolarium I*, p. 21; trans. adapted from HIGLEY, *Hildegard of Bingen's Unknown Language*, p. 22.

¹⁷¹ On the place of the concept of *opus* in Hildegard’s thought, see Christel MEIER, “Operationale Kosmologie. Bemerkungen zur Konzeption der Arbeit bei Hildegard von Bingen,” in *Tiefe des Gotteswissens—Schönheit der Sprachgestalt bei Hildegard von Bingen*, ed. Margot SCHMIDT (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), pp. 49-83.

Gospel and everything it speaks of, which from the beginning is the Work of God.¹⁷²

Hildegard's symbolist mind could easily connect each of these points—liturgical garments of tri-color crown and pure white veil, forged and donned by divine command; liturgical psalmody as the Work of God; all creation and humankind at its pinnacle as the Work of the triune God—to invest the liturgical service of her nuns with the utmost levels of symbolic meaning. In singing for the Lord, adorned as his Brides, they became themselves actors in the divine drama, feminine agents of divine power. Indeed, they literally acted out those roles when they performed as the various *Virtutes*—not just virtues, but again, emanations of divine power working within the world—in the sung morality play, *Ordo Virtutum*, that Hildegard composed for them.¹⁷³ Just as the veils take on a nearly sacramental status in their silver depiction in this image of Ecclesia, so the music Hildegard composed for them to sing while wearing their veils rose almost to the level of a sacrament, channeling the perfection of divine grace from the heavenly choirs down to Ecclesia's choirs of virgins, where they reflected the symphony in the blessed joy of song.¹⁷⁴ It is no accident, then, that the musical antiphon she composed using melodious words drawn from her newly invented sacramental language addressed, of all subjects, the Church—*O orzchis Ecclesia* (words in the *Lingua Ignota* have been italicized):¹⁷⁵

O *orzchis* Ecclesia,
armis divinis precincta
et iacincto ornata,
tu es *caldemia*
stigmatum *loifolum*
et urbs scientiarum.
O, o, tu es etiam *crizanta*

O Church *immense*,
with arms divine enfortressed
and jacinth set:
You are *the sweet aroma*
of the wounds of *peoples*,
and the city of all knowledge.
O, o, you, too, are *anointed*

¹⁷² Adapted from *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*, p. 179.

¹⁷³ See HILDEGARD of BINGEN, *Ordo Virtutum*, ed. and trans. Peter DRONKE, in *Nine Medieval Latin Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 147-84; and Audrey Ekdahl DAVIDSON, ed., *The Ordo Virtutum of Hildegard of Bingen: Critical Studies* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Institute Publications, 1992).

¹⁷⁴ See Margot FASSLER, "Composer and Dramatist: 'Melodious Singing and the Freshness of Remorse,'" in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara NEWMAN (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), pp. 149-75.

¹⁷⁵ For the Latin text, see *Symphonia*, ed. NEWMAN, p. 252; the translation is my own. The five words from the *Lingua Ignota* are glossed with the following Latin equivalents in its second appearance in the *Riesenkodex*, on fol. 405v: *orzchis* = *immensa*; *caldemia* = *aroma*; *loifolum* = *populorum*; *crizanta* = *ornata* or *uncta*; *chorzta* = *choruscans* (see HIGLEY, *Hildegard of Bingen's Unknown Language*, p. 30; I have emended her reading of the gloss on *loifolum* to that given in *Symphonia*, ed. NEWMAN, p. 316). On this piece, see also NEWMAN, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 203-4.

Nathaniel M. CAMPBELL, *Imago expandit splendorem suum: Hildegard of Bingen's Visio-Theological Designs in the Rupertsberg Scivias Manuscript*

in alto sono
et es *chorzta* gemma.

in soaring song,
you are a *sparkling* gem.

The imagery is dense and cryptic, moving—as Hildegard’s poetic symbols usually do—from register to register without always betraying the connections. It draws upon the Church as the Heavenly Jerusalem, the city described in the Apocalypse of St. John as a Bride adorned, her walls set with precious gems (Apoc. 21) and echoing with the heavenly symphony—a city of (divine) knowledge, but also a city of fragrant, medicinal balm applied to the wounds of sin, to heal her inhabitants thereof.¹⁷⁶ It is also an antiphon whose imagery echoes that of the Rupertsberg figure of Ecclesia: towering and immense, the golden flames reaching up behind her shoulders like the crenellations of a fortress, holding at her breast Hildegard’s virgin nuns as they sing their liturgical songs, adorned like Ecclesia as brides in silver-white veils and golden coronets. The jacinth of the antiphon is both the deep-red gem found in the breastplate of Israel’s high priest (Ex. 28:19) and the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem (Apoc. 21:20), and the deep-purple or blue flower known as the hyacinth—the very same color Hildegard saw intermingled with the red glow of dawn from Ecclesia’s throat to navel in *Scivias* II.5, illustrated with gold, but echoed also in the deep-red cloaks of the figure of *Virginitas* and two of the virgin nuns on either side of her, as well as in the blue-colored vestments of a bishop (identifiable by his pallium) to the left and behind *Virginitas* and a nun to the right.¹⁷⁷

Whether with gems or with silver and gold, this Church immense sparkles and gleams, shining with the divine light—the Living Light—that poured knowledge of “the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures” into Hildegard’s heart, as she tells us in the *Protestificatio* of *Scivias*. That is the light that would have shimmered warmly when, some three decades later, the aged Visionary Doctor saw this grand and glorious image of her own beloved virgin mother Ecclesia, its gold and silver tones glowing beneath the flickering candlelight. Like the image of Ecclesia expanding and spreading out her splendor like a garment to give birth to the faithful (*Scivias* II.3), so Hildegard used the images she designed for the Rupertsberg *Scivias* manuscript to expand and spread out its theological splendor, to conceive and give birth to a new, visio-theological discourse. She then used that imagined discourse to express the awesome divine power that flows, through the Church’s virginal motherhood, into the Church’s most dedicated servants, the virgins whose mother and teacher Hildegard became.

¹⁷⁶ A contemporary echo of this concept may be found in recent remarks by Pope Francis: “I see the church as a field hospital after battle. (...) Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.” Interview with Antonio SPADARO, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *America Magazine*, Sept. 30, 2013. Accessed online, Oct. 15, 2013: <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview>

¹⁷⁷ MEIER focused on hyacinth as a shade of blue expressing the purity of the eternally predestined Incarnation: “Die Bedeutung der Farben im Werk Hildegards von Bingen,” p. 267.

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