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Hildegard of Bingen

Spring 2025



Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) is difficult to categorize. Abbess, visionary, poet, playwright, preacher, physician, theologian, scriptural exegete, composer, Hildegard is best-known for her idiosyncratic use of imagery for the exploration of Christian doctrine, but only rarely are modern scholars equipped with the technical training to appreciate the various media in which she worked, nor are they typically versed in the cosmological and mathematical studies on which Hildegard's multi-media imagery depended. This course combines study of Hildegard's visionary writings with in-depth attention to the artistic, scientific, liturgical, and institutional context in which she worked. Particular attention will be given to her training in the verbal and mathematical arts, especially music, and to the role of the virtues in her calls for psychological and ecclesiastical reform. Course requirements will include exercises in various arts and a final research paper on select aspects of Hildegard's oeuvre.

Books to buy at the University of Chicago Bookstore

Hildegard, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990)

Hildegard, *The Book of the Rewards of Life: Liber Vitae Meritorum*, trans. Bruce W. Hozeski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Hildegard, *Symphonia*, ed. and trans. Barbara Newman, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998)

Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources, trans. Anna Silvas (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999)
Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998)

On library reserve

Hildegard, *Book of Divine Works*, trans. Nathaniel Campbell (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018)
Hildegard, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Cause et cure*, trans. Margaret Berger (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999)
Hildegard, *Homilies on the Gospels*, ed. and trans. Beverly Kienzle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011)
Hildegard, *Letters*, trans. Joseph Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994-2004)
Hildegard, *Explanation of the Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Hugo Feiss, Peregrina Translation Series 15 (Toronto: Peregrina, 1990)

Margot Fassler, *Cosmos, Liturgy, and the Arts in the Twelfth Century: Hildegard's Illuminated "Scivias"* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022)
Cambridge Companion to Hildegard of Bingen, ed. Jennifer Bain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021)
A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco (Leiden: Brill, 2013)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Throughout her life, Hildegard experimented with a wide range of media and genres to communicate and explain the visions that she had of the Living Light, making her exceedingly difficult to categorize within the disciplines of modern scholarship, even as Hildegard challenged the disciplinary boundaries of her own day. Just as in Fundamentals, you are encouraged to craft your own questions, this course invites you to craft different approaches to engaging with Hildegard and the questions she raised.

1. Reading and regular participation in class (10%)
2. Comparative scholarship review (15%): 4-5 pages, presented in class on the day we discuss the topic, revised after discussion, revision due Monday after our discussion
3. Artistic response (20%): presented in class on the day we discuss the primary text, may be used as preparation for final project
4. Final paper (55%)—10-12 pages, double-spaced, due May 30

READING AND DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENTS

March 27 Chimera of her Age

Theodoric of Echternach, *The Life of Holy Hildegard*, trans. Silvas, pp. 135-210

Barbara Newman, “‘Sibyl of the Rhine’: Hildegard’s Life and Times,” in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 1-29

April 3 Cosmographer

Hildegard, *Scivias*, book I, trans. Hart, pp. 59-148

Fassler, “The Cosmic Egg and the Liturgy,” in *Cosmos, Liturgy, and the Arts*, pp. 128-57

April 10 Theologian

Hildegard, *Scivias*, book II, trans. Hart, pp. 149-308

Constant Mews, “Religious Thinker: ‘A Frail Human Being on Fiery Life’,” in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 52-69

Rachel Fulton Brown, “Hildegard of Bingen’s Theology of Revelation,” in *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars and Beyond. Essays in Honor of Grover A. Zinn, Jr.*, ed. E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 300-27

April 17 Architect

Hildegard, *Scivias*, book III, trans. Hart, pp. 309-536

Fassler, “The Edifice of Salvation and its Virtues,” in *Cosmos, Liturgy, and the Arts*, pp. 158-84

Madeline Caviness, “Artist: ‘To See, Hear, and Know All at Once’,” in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 110-24

April 24 Abbess

Hildegard, *Explanation of the Rule of Benedict*, trans. Hugo Feiss

Hildegard, *Letters*, trans. Baird and Ehrman, selections

John Van Engen, “Abbess: Mother and Teacher,” in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 30-51

Joan Ferrante, “Correspondent: ‘Blessed is the Speech of Your Mouth’,” in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 91-109

May 1 Preacher

Hildegard, *The Book of the Rewards of Life*, trans. Hozeski

Hildegard, *Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. Beverly Kienzle, selections

Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, “Prophet and Reformer: ‘Smoke in the Vineyard’,” in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 70-90

May 8 Natural Philosopher

Hildegard, *Book of Divine Works*, Prologue, Part I: Visions 1-3, trans. Campbell, pp. 29-129

Hildegard, *Physica*, trans. Priscilla Throop, selections

Hildegard, *Cause et cure*, trans. Margaret Berger, selections

Florence Eliza Glaze, "Medical Writer: 'Behold the Human Creature'," in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 125-48

May 15 Composer

Hildegard, *Symphonia*, trans. Newman

Hildegard, *Ordo Virtutum*, trans. Peter Dronke, in *Nine Medieval Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 147-84

Gothic Voices, *A Feather on the Breath of God* (1985)

Sequentia, *Ordo Virtutum* (1985)

Margot Fassler, "Composer and Dramatist: 'Melodious Singing and the Freshness of Remorse'," in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 149-75

Barbara Newman, "Poet: 'Where the Living Majesty Utters Mysteries'," in *Voice*, ed. Newman, pp. 176-92

May 22 Muse

Student presentations on final projects

FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 30