

## A STUDY OF “THE SAINTS THROUGH THE CENTURIES”

By Richard Thornton

### SAINT HILDEGARD OF BINGEN (1098-1179) – TWELFTH CENTURY

Saint Hildegard was an extraordinary woman from the 12<sup>th</sup> century known for her work as a writer, philosopher, theologian, composer, poet, playwright, scientist, physician and more. One of the most remarkable women of the Middle Ages.

When seven years old, her parents resolved that she should become a religious, and so entrusted with a tutor she was assigned to live in a stone cell that was next to a Benedictine monastery, and there Saint Hildegard lived, studied, worked, and prayed for thirty years. When at the age of thirty eight she was chosen to lead the community of religious women.

Saint Hildegard’s life changed radically when she was forty-two. She had the most powerful vision of inspiration, of understanding, an infusion of knowledge about the meaning of Holy Scripture and the whole content of faith. She also received the command to write down what she learned.

She was a prolific writer and wrote many books on a variety of subjects including theology, poetry, music, medicine, nature and science.

Her best known work is “Scivias” (Know the Ways of God) based on her visions and which took her 10 years to write.

Music was an important part of convent life and she was an accomplished musician. She composed 77 chants and the first musical play in history.

People flocked to hear Saint Hildegard speak, to receive her blessing, and to receive treatment for their ailments. She later published a large writing about many sicknesses and the way to cure them using plants and herbs.

In Addition to medical writings, she wrote books explaining how nature works according to God's mysterious precepts. She also composed 70 songs and a musical morality play about the Christian virtues.

She spread the word of God's revelation till the end of her days. Beginning in her sixties, she went on four lengthy tours through the countryside, preaching (with Papal approval), to the Church, clergy and laity alike.

Saint Hildegard believed that the Church isn't only the Vatican and the Bishops, but every member of the Church – a truth articulated by the Second Vatican Council in 1962 – Saint Hildegard calls upon us to find the strength that spiritual warriors all required. The second Vatican Council was a worldwide gathering of Bishops and theologians called by Pope Paul XXIII in 1962 to “open the windows” of the Catholic Church and to bring about a religious reform and awakening. One of its declarations was that the Church is “the people of God”, not just the hierarchy. It is in the spirit of Vatican Two that Saint Hildegard stresses that it isn't only the leadership, but the members who are called to be the Church.

As you read About Saint Hildegard, her main theme is that we should “wake up”. Jesus said “the kingdom of God is among you” which implies we better wake up and experience it.

Her 81 years vibrated with so much creativity that she calls us still, over 800 years later, to “rise from our sleep” and “live with passion”. In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed Saint Hildegard of Bingen, A Doctor Of The Church.