

# MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

## HILDEGARD VON BINGEN, THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING, JULIAN OF NORWICH

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Illustration on parchment  
The Book of Divine Works By  
Hildegard of Bingen

Vision of Divine Love

Hildegard (inset below) with the nun  
Ricardis and the monk Volmar  
Biblioteca Statale, Lucca  
<http://www.wga.hu>

# Hildegard of Bingen

- 1098-1179 AD.
- Offered while a child as a tithe to God. Benedictine abbess.
- With episcopal consent (following her endorsement by St. Bernard) Hildegard preached publicly. Hildegard strongly believed that divine judgment follows on human sin, particularly on the sins of rulers. She supported Church reform. Hildegard warned that if the princes of the Church did not renounce their greed, fornication, oppression, and negligence, they would be punished by the loss not only of their wealth and power, but even of the dignity they signally abused.

- Her visions are a meditation on the place of the human person in the divine plan from creation through the Incarnation to the Last Judgment and final redemption.
- Meditation on the cosmos and its proportions, which has its analogues in the microcosm of the human body, leads to the same eternal center as meditation on history in its divinely ordained stages: Incarnate Love is the center of time.



Book three, vision one  
The One Sitting Upon the Throne

Paulist Press

- “My soul, as God would have it, rises up high into the vault of heaven and into the changing sky and spreads itself out among different peoples, although they are far away from me in distant lands and places. And because I see them this way in my soul, I observe them in accord with ... other created things. I do not hear them with my outward ears, nor do I perceive them by the thoughts of my own heart, or by any combination of my five senses, but in my soul alone, while my outward eyes are open...

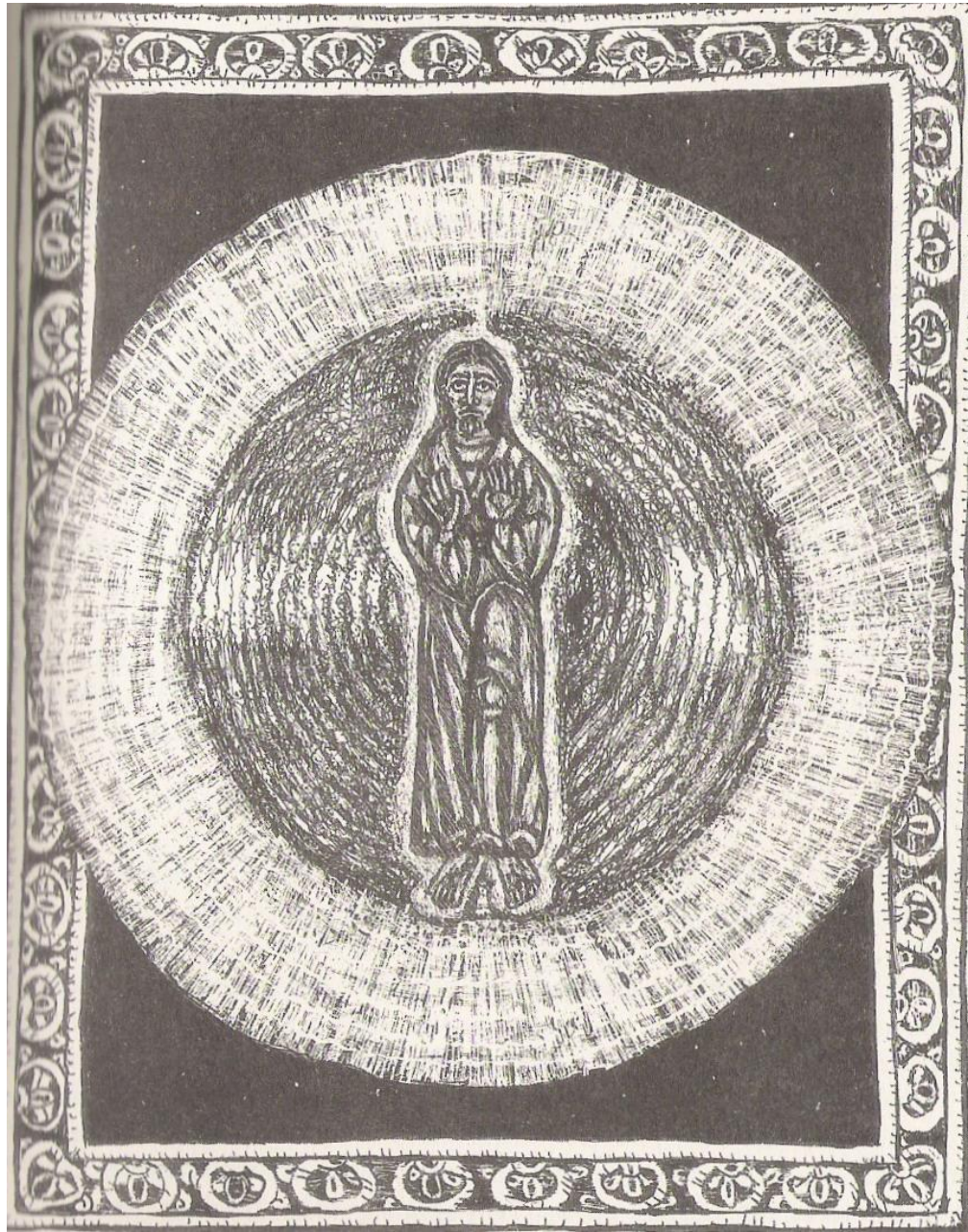
- The light that I see is not spatial, but it is far brighter than a cloud that carries the sun. I can measure neither height, nor length, nor breadth in it; and I call it ‘the reflection of the living Light.’ And as the sun, the moon, and the stars appear in water, so writings, sermons, virtues, and certain human actions take form for me and gleam within it...I see, hear, and know all at once, and as if in an instant I learn what I know. But what I do not see, I do not know...And the words... are not like words uttered by a human mouth, but like a shimmering flame...”

- “Sometimes...I see within this light another light, which I call ‘the living Light.’ And I cannot describe when and how I see it, but while I see it all sorrow and anguish leave me, so that then I feel like a simple girl instead of an old woman.”
- There is a voice that is “a small sound of the trumpet of the living Light.”
- Soul and body are meant to cooperate harmoniously; the body is not inherently evil, but through the Devil’s temptations it is a continual source of tribulation to the soul. The knowledge of good and evil is a gift of God; the sin of Adam is disobedience. Every soul must choose between God and the Devil.



- Baptism illustrates the majestic and mysterious powers granted to the Church: purity of faith, inviolate; never to be conquered by Hell; her secrets beyond comprehension; her crown, apostolic teaching; and her heart, the virginity of Mary.
- Baptism is analogous to circumcision but is accessible to all people, to both sexes, and of any age. It is a rebirth.
- After the faithful are cleansed in baptism, they must receive the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of anointing with holy oil.
- All are called to prophetic awareness.

- Confession resurrects sinners from death; it may be heard by a layman in an emergency; it is strengthened by almsgiving.
- While the sacraments are necessary, they are not sufficient. The sacraments must be accompanied by repentance and good works.



Book one, vision two  
The Trinity in Unity

Paulist Press

- Hildegard emphasizes the liturgical presence of God. She calls for humility, obedience, discretion, love, and strength in spiritual warfare. In ascetic struggle “they conquer themselves, chastising their bodies, and so know they are in (God’s) army.” They are higher than the angels.
- While monastics symbolize Christ’s Incarnation and burial, “secular people who keep God’s laws greatly adorn the Church.”
- “The embrace of God’s maternal love” is charity.

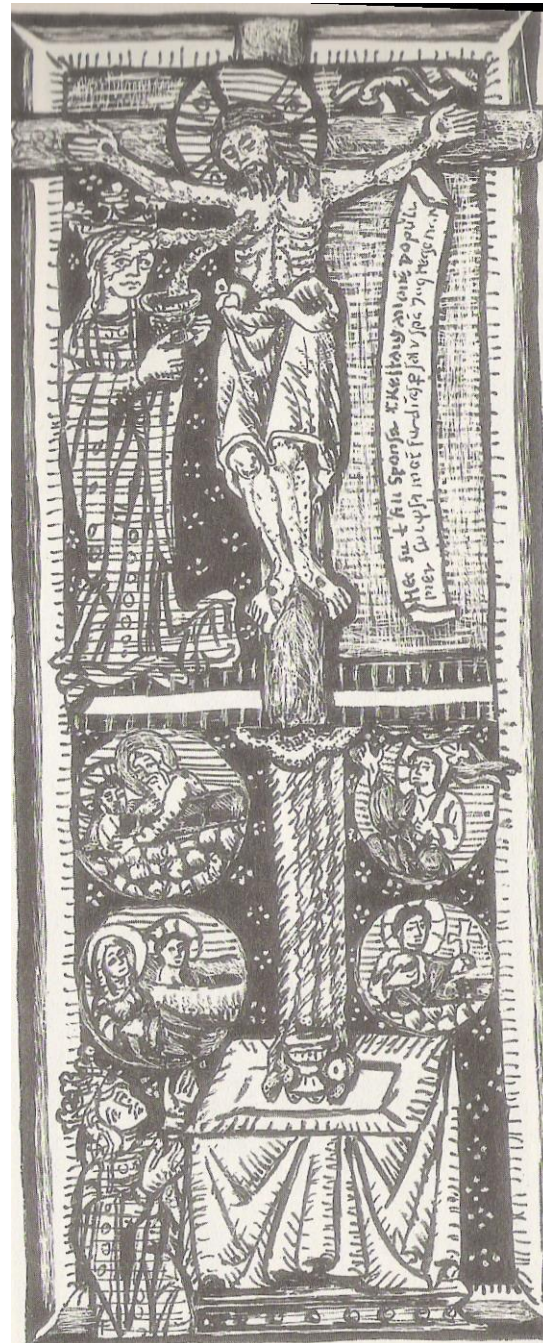
- God's kingdom is stable and strong. The One enthroned is of such great glory that "it blinds the sight." It is the "One in the kingdom of beatitude Who rules the whole world in celestial divinity in the brilliance of unfailing serenity, but is incomprehensible to human minds."
- "Those who fear God and love poverty of the spirit are the guardians of virtues."
- "The aims of human acts cannot be hidden from God's knowledge...Both in admonition and punishment ineffable justice displays sweet and gentle protection and perseveres in true equity."

- “The first woman’s being formed from man means the joining of wife to husband... This union must not ... be done in forgetfulness of God... As Adam and Eve were one flesh, so now also a man and a woman become one flesh in a union of holy love for the multiplication of the human race. And therefore there should be perfect love in these two as there was in those first two.”
- “Man should not examine the highest things since he cannot the lowest ones.”
- “The visible and temporal is a manifestation of the invisible and eternal.”

- “Humans go out of the world whenever their salvation and use is complete...I do not take (the) spirit from (the) body (of one burning for me) before his fruits have fully ripened with sweetest fragrance... (As to) one who is of such frailty that in pain of his body and terror of the evil lurker ... is too delicate to bear My yoke, I take him away from this world before his soul, wasting away in weakness, begins to dry up... I warn and exhort people to do justice.”

- “If you do not contemplate the charity with which God freed you, and if you pay no heed to the number of good things God constantly gives you, and if you do not consider how, when you fall into many sins and love death rather than life, He calls you back from death; nonetheless, when you finally remember the Scriptures and the doctrines of the faithful fathers of antiquity set before you, telling you to avoid evil and do good, then if you say from your inmost heart, ‘I have sinned gravely, wherefore I must return with due penitence to my Father who created me,’ your Father will receive you lovingly and place you in His bosom and clasp you in sweet embraces.”





Book two, vision five  
Christ's Sacrifice and the Church

Paulist Press

- “Almighty and ineffable God, Who was before all ages and had no beginning and will not cease to be when all ages are ended, marvelously by His will created every creature and marvelously by His will set it in its place.”
- “The synagogue is the mother of the Incarnation of the Son of God.”
- “The Church is the bride of Christ, the mother of the faithful.”

- “You see in a true vision the mysteries of Him Who came to Earth to save humanity: His birth from the Virgin, suffering on the cross, burial in the tomb, rising again from the dead and ascension into Heaven. (They) shine brightly in the sacrament of the altar, Since when God’s Only-Begotten lived for a time among people in the world, these things happened to Him in His body by the will of the Father for the redemption of the human race...They will appear before Me in great brightness like the dawn until the end of the world.”
- “When the Lord’s Prayer is said (‘forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors’) Christ’s Passion will move God to mercy.”



Ann Dalton  
Paulist Press

# The Cloud of Unknowing

- Anonymous work of a 14<sup>th</sup> Century English Carthusian.
- “It is not a will or desire but something which you know are at a loss to describe which moves you to desire you know not what.”
- As Augustine noted, it is through our aspirations that God draws us to Him. Beyond anything the mind can comprehend, it is eros that finally enables one to reach to some kind of contact with God.

- We are first called in our response to beauty in the creation; we end with a comprehensive vision of all things.
- Unlike (Pseudo)-Dionysius, the anonymous author does not hold that the mind must first go to its limit before it admits defeat and makes a leap of love.
- Neither learning nor mental proficiency have any direct part to play in contemplation. We are bid to put all thought of creatures under a “cloud of forgetting” as it is beneath our dignity to subject ourselves to creatures. Creatures point us beyond themselves.

- The virtuous (ideal) life is life in accordance with our nature. The supernatural fulfillment of our life in no way violates our nature. Our natural powers will help us toward our supernatural destination if we allow them to fulfill their own functions. It is not our faculties that are capable of realizing our highest ascent to God. It is only our “naked being” that can approach the “naked being” of God. It is that union that anchors our whole life.
- There can be no desire to “un-be.” It is our awareness of our own being, not our being, that interferes with our union with God.

- One should not be confused about the structure of reality (only God is real). The material order is an expression of the spiritual order, and the unique conjunction of the two in man is what makes man the most “seemly” of creatures. As a result of our proper orientation toward God as He is in Himself, we can see the truth of what we are in ourselves (a perfect humility). Each order of creation has its own integrity.
- The artificial cultivation of an emotional response (or imaginative decoration) is an impediment to love.



- Grace is necessary for the forgiveness of past sins; it is not necessary for the avoidance of future sins.
- “Carelessness in venial sin should always be avoided... Otherwise...they soon commit grievous sin.”
- “Aversion from God, which is brought about by sin, is removed by charity, not by knowledge alone. For charity, insofar as it the act of loving God, unites the soul immediately to Him in the bond of spiritual union.”

- “Whoever, then, wishes to undertake this exercise, let him first purify his conscience; and then when he has done all that he can in fulfillment of the Church’s law, let him dispose himself bodily for this exercise.”
- “This is the work of God alone, brought about in a special way in whatever soul that pleases Him, without any merit on its part...The grace is not given because of innocence, nor withheld because of sin...Let it be the one that works; you must simply consent to it... it is God alone who moves your will and desire: he alone, entirely of Himself, without any intermediary.”

- Without compunction, an ascetic life, and prayer, one is not ready to receive God, is not dressed in a “wedding garment.” (Mt 22:11)
- “It is only by His mercy, and without any merit of yours, that you are made a God in grace, united with Him in spirit without any division between you, both here and in the happiness of Heaven without end.”
- “For as all men were lost in Adam, and as all men who bear witness to their desire of salvation by good works, are saved and shall be by the power of Christ’s Passion alone, a soul whose affection is perfectly extended and ... united to God in spirit ... does all that in it lies ... to make all men as perfect in this work as it is itself.”

- Knowledge and sacred learning can be useful in approach to God, but these are not necessary to it, and they can even be a positive hindrance, because the desire for knowledge and understanding tends to provide its own answers, and these almost inevitably lead to the pride “which blasphemes God in his gifts,” and blinds us to the truth that all is a divine gift.
- Love itself is understanding.

- “I cannot see who may truly claim ... fellowship with Jesus and His holy mother, His high angels, and also with His saints, unless he be such a man that does all that in him lies with the help of grace to value time...”
- “In one stirring (as a spark flies up from the burning coal, speedily flying to God), a man can suddenly and perfectly have forgotten all created things. And equally quickly, after each impulse, because of the corruption of the flesh, the soul falls down again to some thought or some deed done or undone. But what matter? ... it rises again.”

- “‘Darkness’ (is) a privation of knowing, just as whatever you do not know or have forgotten is dark to you, because you do not see it with your spiritual eyes. For this reason, that which is between you and your God is termed ...a cloud of unknowing.”

- “About those sounds and that sweetness which come in by the window of your senses, which can be good or evil, exercise yourself constantly in this simple, devout, zealous stirring of love of which I have been speaking. Then I have no doubt that this will be well able to tell you about them. Even if at first it is in some way or other dumbfounded by them, because it is not used to them, yet it will do this for you: it will bind your heart so strongly that you will not be able in any way to give any real credence to them, until you are assured of their authenticity by the spirit of God inwardly in wondrous manner, or else outwardly by the counsel of a spiritual father who has discretion.”

- “There were three men who were chiefly concerned with the ark of the Old Testament: Moses, Bezalel, and Aaron. Moses was taught how it should be made on the mountain of our Lord. Bezalel fashioned and made it in the valley, according to the directions which were revealed on the mountain. Aaron had it in his keeping in the Temple, to touch it and see it as often as it pleased him.”
- Daily confession and devotion are vital. Communion is preceded by confession.





The ancient and miraculous icon of Our Most Holy Kardiotissa Hodigetra or Our Lady of Perpetual Help

# Julian of Norwich

- English Benedictine nun, 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Century.
- It is through Christ she reaches God.
- “The Trinity is God, and God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, our protector, our everlasting lover, our endless joy and our bliss, from our Lord Jesus Christ and in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- “Our light will be full, which light is God our creator, the Father and the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ, our savior.”
- “God is the teaching of Holy Church.”

- We are “drawn and counseled and taught, inwardly by the Holy Spirit, and outwardly through the same grace by Holy Church.”
- Sin is a historical reality, personal and collective, as well as a universal phenomenon embracing everyone, a mystery. Yet this sinner is forgiven and saved because God shared in his human condition, in his pain and joy. Joy and sorrow, which are given by God, transform our human joy and sorrow into that of Christ. Man has to experience and to understand that nothing comes from himself. True spiritual poverty is a complete dependence upon God for everything. Humility, then, is a capacity for universal communion.

- “All the lovely works and all the sweet loving offices of beloved motherhood are appropriated by the second Person, for in Him we have this ‘goodly’ will, whole and safe forever, both in nature and in grace, from His own goodness proper to Him.”
- “The mother’s service is nearest, readiest, and surest; nearest because it is most natural, readiest because it is most loving, and surest because it is truest. No one ever might or could perform this office fully, except only Him.”

- “It is God’s will that we receive three things from Him as gifts as we seek. The first is that we seek willingly and diligently without sloth, as that may be with His grace, joyfully and happily, without unreasonable depression and useless sorrow. The second is that we wait for Him steadfastly, out of love for Him, without grumbling and contending against Him, to the end of our lives, for that will last only for a time. The third is that we have great trust in Him, out of complete and true faith, for it is His will that we know that He will appear, suddenly and blessedly, to all His lovers.”

- “I saw that He is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for His love, which is so tender that He may never desert us...everything has being through the love of God.”
- “For the same virtues which we have received from our substance, given to us in nature by the goodness of God, the same virtues by the operation of mercy are given to us in grace, renewed through the Holy Spirit; and these virtues and gifts are treasured for us in Jesus Christ.”

- “For everything which is profitable for us to understand and know our good Lord will most courteously show to us by all the preaching and teaching of Holy Church.”
- The soul “cannot do more than seek, suffer, and trust”; and the more she does this she is more pleasing to God.

- “It is God’s will ... that we contemplate His blessed Passion in three ways: (one) that we contemplate the cruel pain He suffered (2) with contrition and (3) compassion ... So was our Lord Jesus afflicted for us; and we all stand in this way of suffering with Him, and shall ‘til we come to His bliss...for I would rather have remained in that pain until Judgment Day than have come to Heaven any other way than by Him.”
- “Every creature who is of the devil’s condition in this life and so dies is no more mentioned before God and His saints than is the Devil, notwithstanding that they belong to the human race, whether they have been baptized or not.”



- “By contrition we are made clean, by compassion we are made ready, and by true longing for God we are made worthy. These are the three means ...through which all souls come to Heaven.”
- “When we know and see, truly and clearly, what our self is, then we shall truly and clearly see and know our Lord God in the fullness of joy.”

- “I saw that God rejoices that He is our Father, and God rejoices that He is our Mother, and God rejoices that He is our true spouse, and that our soul is His beloved wife. And Christ rejoices that He is our brother, and Jesus rejoices that He is our savior.”
- “God is God, and our substance is a creature in God.”
- “...for it is nothing else than right understanding with true belief and certain trust in our being, that we are in God and He in us, which we do not see.”

- “And all natures which He has made to flow out of Him to work His will, they will be restored and brought back into Him by the salvation of man by the operation of grace.”
- “Prayer unites the soul to God, for though the soul may be always like God in ... substance restored by grace, it is often unlike Him in condition, through sin on man’s part.”
- “For (sin) is in opposition to our fair nature; for as truly as sin is unclean, so truly is sin unnatural.”

- “He did not say, ‘you will not be assailed, you will not be belabored, you will not be disquieted’, but he said, ‘you will not be overcome’.”
- “Still we should never cease to mourn and to weep in the spirit, because, that is, of our painful longing, until we might see our Creator’s blessed face.”
- “I was taught that though we may be lifted up high into contemplation by the special gift of the Lord, still, together, with this, we must necessarily have knowledge and sight of our sin and of our feebleness; for without this knowledge we may not have

- true meekness, and without this we cannot be safe.”
- “He loves us endlessly, and we sin customarily, and He reveals it to us most gently.”
- “For He regards us so tenderly that He sees all our life here to be penance; for the loving longing in us for Him is a lasting penance in us, and He makes this penance in us, and mercifully He helps us to bear it.”

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