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7th October 2006 - Contemplation with Hildegard of Bingen

Song: O vis aeternitatis (Cant.ofEcst.1)

Prayer: I beseech you, my Lord,...
“...Let the one who sees...”

The Call

“Listen: There was once a king sitting on his throne. Around him stood great and wonderfully beautiful columns ornamented with ivory, bearing the banners of the king with great honour. Then it pleased the king to raise a small feather from the ground and he commanded it to fly. The feather flew, not because of anything in itself but because the air bore it along. Thus am I *a feather on the breath of God.*” That is how Hildegard describes herself. And she said further: “The visions that I receive do not happen in dreamlike or trance states, nor with the eyes of the body or in remote and lonely places, but fully conscious, with an awake and alert mind, with the eyes and ears of the inner person, in any kind of place, as God wills.” **(Picture 1)**

Bibliography: Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

Hildegard of Bingen, was born in 1098 and lived until the age of 81 years old, at a time when there were incredible tensions between the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and the Pope and the institution of the Church. She was born of noble parents in a small village of Bimersheim in Rheinhessen, now West Germany, the tenth and last child. When she was eight years old, her parents brought her to the cloister of some nuns who lived in an annexe of the Benedictine Monastery of monks, as an offering to God of the “tenth of their offspring”. Hildegard was brought up the nuns and decided at the age of 16 years to become a Benedictine nun herself.

In that quiet environment she matured to be one of the most gifted, creative, influential and remarkable personalities of the Middle Ages. When she was forty-two years and seven months old, in 1141, she was totally surprised by a vision from God who demanded of her: “Write all that you hear and see! Announce what I tell you!” She noted her visions in a work called “*Scivias*”, meaning “*Know the Ways*” and writing these visions and painting her visions as pictures occupied her from 1141 to 1151. She had been voted Abbess five years before in 1136, after the death of the previous abbess Jutta von Spanheim who had been the person who had cared for her from the age of eight years old.

At the synod of Trier in 1147 Pope Eugene III read from her work *Scivias* extracts to the cardinals and bishops present, and commanded Hildegard to continue noting her visions. From this point onwards, Hildegard's fame spread far and wide, and many people from all walks of life: from the Emperor to poor local people, sought her advice and help. She carried on an extensive correspondence with important personalities in ecclesiastical and temporal circles, as well as turning her energies to compiling encyclopaedic works on natural science and the healing arts.

God had asked her to address clerics and lay people in Trier and in Cologne. On one of these occasions she said to them, "You should be the strong cornerstones of the Church, but instead you have been thrown onto the ground and you are no support for the Church. You do not instruct people properly and to those who seek instruction from you, you say "I am too busy, I can't do everything." Her admonishing and warning words were addressed to Bishops, Popes, Kings and Emperors.

Hildegard was not only prophetess and mystic, but also a naturalist, playwright, poetess and composer. Her compositions are considered among the finest pieces of music written in the Middle Ages. They are so profoundly motivated by Hildegard's devotional life that it is hard to tell whether she is exploring music and poetry through spirituality or vice versa. The songs are conceived on a large - sometimes massive - scale. We will be enjoying today some of her most beautiful cosmic visions as well as listening to her amazing musical works. These works were meant to be sung by her sisters at liturgical and other functions. She called them "Symphonies of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations", a title meant to indicate their divine inspiration as well as the idea that music is the highest form of human activity, mirroring as it does the ineffable sounds of heavenly spheres and angel choirs.

One year before her death she showed once again how unafraid she was and how the virtues of truth and justice that she had been shown so much in the visions earlier, had become part of her personality. The local bishop wanted her to agree to having the corpse of a nobleman, buried in the cemetery of the monastery, removed because he had once been excommunicated. As she knew he had died in peace with God she refused and accepted the interdiction of not being allowed to have Mass said at the convent for several months rather than give in.

The "Sibyl of the Rhine", as she was known as (Sybil or Sybilla was the Greek prophetess or oracle of legend and literature) died at the monastery which she had founded on 17 September 1179. Then, as now, she is admired for fearlessly exploring the cosmos with her vision, for creating a moving feminine theology which nonetheless remains in awe of both the masculine and feminine divine powers. Her ability to function in the real, political world is as impressive as her complete dedication to the life of the soul, and to nurturing it among her cloistered sisters.

Her work and output is vast and we will be able to just touch on three or four aspects. She is someone who reveals HE who IS at the heart of all that is. She proclaims an age which is indeed new and yet the most ancient: that of the Kingdom, of Paradise lost and regained. Hildegard then, invites us to live and be in communion with That which is Beyond time, Eternity, where all times mysteriously meet, the Time of God.

1. The Cosmos (2)

This is the representation of a vision in which she saw the Universe in its material form, and she describes first simply what she saw. Each time following her own description of what she saw, a voice from Heaven gave her the deeper meaning of what she saw and this she noted also. When we

look at this picture we need to remember that all that she saw was seen as a dynamic reality, difficult to represent in the two-dimensional picture. Here we see the universe as the Cosmic Egg - the most feminine of forms, its outer layer being pure Energy, fire. In that fiery region, we see the Sun at the top, supported by a trinity above to keep it in its path, as well as a fiery dynamic breath. Underneath the pure energetic layer is a layer of darkness and within this "I saw huge storms and many pointed stones, big and small, being blown about. Every now and then, from the big fireball huge flames were sent out into the darkness. The dark layer was in terrible uproar and tumult, and thunder rolled across it. The fiery zone sensed this uproar and sent out lightning bolts prior to each roll of thunder. Underneath the dark skin was the purest ether and in it I saw a large white-shining sphere which sometimes lost its shininess. In this layer too a wind blew throughout this strata. Underneath the ether was white air and I saw how it was the source of humidity, in the form of torrential downpours or soft rain. In this layer a wind also had its origin. In the midst of all these elements there was a huge sand ball, held together by the four elements of water (blue), earth (green), air (black) and fire (gold). It sometimes happened that the power of the winds from the different layers made the sand ball reel. "

The Heavenly voice then explained to her, that God had called all into Being so that His Name may be praised and honoured. Not only does he reveal in His Creation that which is visible and temporal, but also the invisible and eternal. That was the meaning of this vision. The outer layer of fire was the fire of purification of all those who had turned towards him. The dark layer represented that state of having turned away from the Light. The big fireball represents the One Begotten by the Father who gives Light to all that is. He is the Sun of Justice burning with Love. The three stars above point to the mystery of the Holy Trinity out of which the Son of God descended to become human so that the human may become god, as the angels announced. The wind in the fiery zone represents the Word of God that reveals the Truth. In the layer of darkness below, there also a wind blows throughout the Cosmos, and these are the false insinuations of the Tempter. The storms of pointed stones represent the violence of all kind that results from following the Devil (lat. *diabolus* = the one who tears apart). The fact that lightning bolts precede from the fiery zone of God into the dark, stormy, thundering zone, means that all godlessness is seen by the all seeing Divine Majesty before it even becomes visible, as before Him all beings are totally naked. The ether beneath the darkness represents the Faith and the desire for God. Just there where the Rebel against God tries to destroy creation, Faith erupts. The white shiny sphere represents God's Church which sometimes dims under persecution or times of sluggishness. Yet forever it is renewed through the fire of the incarnated God. The wind in this layer represents the Unity of Faith and the apostolic function of God's Church. Underneath the layer of faith is the life-bringing water of Baptism. And this Grace of Baptism may pour down in torrents or in mild doses according to God's loving wisdom. The huge sand ball represents the human being, who has been, as David said in Psalm 8 "You have made him little less than a god, you have crowned him with glory and splendour, made him lord over the work of your hands." The elements of earth, water, fire and air are in the human being, that is to say, humankind is inseparable from creation. The fact that the sand ball reeled means that humankind is often shaken under the impact of the realisation both of the immensity of the Cosmos, God's work, and his own fragility and tinyness. Creation is given to us, it is held in being by God and we must care for it because it belongs to Him. But when we ignore its source and fall in love with the creature only, we sin.

Prayer of Thanksgiving :

We will now have 15 minutes to go outside and relate to all we see with an awareness that that animal, plant, human or object, is held in being by God.

Sharing

Song: Caritas habundat in omnia (Cant.of Ecst.9)

COFFEE BREAK (30 minutes)

2. The spiritual journey of the Soul (5 & 6)

In this inner show Hildegard understands something of the relationship between the temporal part of our being, the body, and the eternal, the soul. The body is seen as being the tent for the soul. (5) In this picture, the diamond shape represents the brilliant light of God's all seeing Knowledge, stretching in all directions, all times and within this a glow as a sunrise, symbolising the sending of God's son, conceived through the Holy Spirit by the virgin Mary, to pour out his blood in love for the saving of mankind. In the oval form is mankind, carrying different tendencies - here symbolised as people carrying cheeses made out of their "life juices", as if it were milk, producing strong and wholesome cheese, or a bland tasteless product, or even a product mixed with mould and bitterness. That is to say, some people start on the spiritual journey with courage and determination, others are easily discouraged, and others again are attacked by many storms and disquiet, yet God is ready to help all of them. The figure at the base of the Mandorla represents the secret of the connection between the physical body growing within the human mother's womb and the granting of the soul, the living breath of God to each being, that will be born. Hildegard saw this happening in the form of a fiery sphere coming out of the eternal Knowledge of the Father, and giving life to the body, touching its heart and brain and then pouring out into all the limbs. She saw that after the birth, this fiery sphere changed its colour depending on the deeds of the person.

On the right hand, from the bottom upward, we see the soul being attacked and mistreated by evil forces, yet the soul is determined to stand up and fight. Having been beaten, tortured and poisoned with all sorts of misdeeds to which the soul may have been exposed through the body, she escapes onto a narrow difficult path and withdraws. There she weeps in pain and regret so that all her wounds are washed by her tears and she longs for deliverance. While evil still lurks around the corner, it can only frighten her in this part of her conversion, but not actually bind her as before. In fear and trembling the soul calls out to God - in this vision the soul calls out to Mother Zion, representing her Heavenly Home. And she learns that the Heavenly Father had given her wings which she now uses to fly over the obstacles. The soul now enters into a tent made of hardened steel and there begins to do deeds of Light, and although evil still shoots its poisonous darts at her tent, the body, these cannot penetrate anymore to the inner being, the eternal soul. She can now call out, "Away with you, evil and envious forces, the master builder who has built this tent was stronger than you. You wanted my death, but I have been freed."

(6) This is another inner show in which Hildegard saw a fiery sphere, the soul of a person, being exposed to so many storms that threatened to totally discourage and destroy it. Here, evil tries to come between the soul and her knowledge of her divine origin by insinuating that she was no good, and that God would not want to have anything to do with her. And with the Grace of God the soul determines to fight: **injustice** with **patience**; when **anger** rages and threatens to engulf her she looks upon the **mercy of God** and becomes merciful herself. When **hate** threatens to blacken her, she looks upon the **compassion and passion of God's son**, the Saviour. When **pride** wants to build the tower of vanity in her, she remembers that **she can't do anything good without God's help**. And so doing, the soul becomes a solid stone in the House of God. Then as she looks to the heights of God, she sees there the sweetest good, **humility** which is the sweetness of God perfuming the whole universe.

God, who made the human being in his image as Hildegard often emphasises, gave him manifold gifts of the spirit, through which we can master his own body-soul condition. “The soul is like the sap in a tree and the soul’s powers are like the form of the tree. **The intellect** in the soul is like the greenness of the tree’s branches and leaves, the **will** like its flowers; the **mind** like its bursting first fruits, and its **reason** like the perfected mature fruit; and the senses are like its size and shape. And so a person’s body is strengthened and sustained by the soul. For the soul gives life to the body as fire gives light to darkness, with two principal powers like two arms: **the intellect and the will**. The soul has arms not so as to move itself, but so as to show itself in these powers as the sun shows itself by its brilliance.”

Text: The soul rejoices.....

Yet, the goal of the soul and God’s will for the soul is nothing less than union, the mystical marriage of the spark of God, the soul, in the fire of union with God himself. Text: **The One Husband**

Prayer for Healing: Praying silently for healing of some aspect of yourself.

Song: Spiritus Sanctus vivificans vita (Cant. Of Ecst.7)

3. Sophia - The wisdom of God

The next few images are part of a complex vision Hildegard entitled the “Mansion of Salvation”. (Picture 21). Picture 29 represents the tower of salvation, God’s answer to the soul’s journey, represented by a high ladder on which the powers of God ascend and descend, busy in their work of salvation through the Incarnation of God’s son. Among them seven made a particular impression on her. At the top is a luminous power representing the **Grace of God**, next to her was **Humility**, carrying in her heart the perfect image of God’s Son. Anyone who wants to be the child of humility, needs to start at the foot of the tree and not want to grasp its highest branch first. The second, blue figure is **Love** and speaks: “Lucifer wanted to destroy me out of hatred. But instead I was brought to perfection in the incarnation of God’s Son. My name is used for all sorts of defiling activities but I am forever pure and with you, Humility, I see the smallest openings in those that practise me and so can penetrate into their deepest being. “The form covered in eyes represents the **fear of God**, who seeks refuge always in the One who is true and Just. Below her, we see **Obedience**, whose hands and feet are bound with luminous bands because she acts not according to the Will of the World, but the Will of God. The red figure represents **Faith**, and next to her is **Chastity** under the protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and in her heart is an innocent child. **Hope** raises her hands to the Crucified in whom she trusts.

Next to the tower of Salvation, is to the right the Tower of God’s Church (picture 30) and its people wearing the vestment of Faith. However for some of them, this seems to heavy to carry and they take it off, although some of them might take it up again. To the left, high on shiny columns stood a golden figure flooded in brilliant light, which is **Sophia, Wisdom**. She gazes down to Mankind and calls, “Do not tarry on the Way! As soon as you start on the path, you are already sidetracked by the buzzing of mosquitoes and flies! Why don’t you grasp the fan of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and chase them away? If you are sincere, the hand of God will strengthen you.” Wisdom has been with God before anything was made. She is the perfect rhythm of God’s burning love. All has been created through her. Hildegard could not see her feet, because Wisdom’s path is hidden in the Heart of the Father. She looks lovingly to Creation and protects and guides all those who want to follow her. She walks in the one path of holy and just laws: she first planted “Holy Greenness” in patriarchs and prophets who longed for the coming of God’s Son. Then, later in the dazzling

virginity of Mary, the deep faith of the martyrs, and in the fire of love of all those who are willing to be embraced by the Holy Spirit.

Text: She oversees all people.....

Text: Sophia..... (with image 26)

Song: O viridissima Virga, Ave (Cant. of Ecst. 11)

4. The True Holy Trinity in the true Unity: the Source of Life

Picture 11- Hildegard describes her vision as follows:... And I saw an incredibly brilliant Light (represented by the bright silver disk) and in it a blue form of a human being who was ablaze with a soft red flame. The Light penetrated completely the red flame and the red flame totally the Light. (the red flame is represented by the golden circle with the red wave patterns in it.) And the two, the Light and the Flame penetrated completely the form of the human being, all three being one Light. And she heard the explanation of her vision: Immaculate, without increase nor decrease represents the brilliant Light the Father and within the Father you see the Son, who has existed from all eternity in his divinity, and who was born into time into the world. The soft red flame points to the Holy Spirit from whom the God-Begotten has been conceived and born from the Virgin Mary, flooding the world with God's glory. Their inter-penetration means that the Father, the most just Justice, never is without the Son nor the Holy Spirit, nor that the Holy Spirit, who sets hearts ablaze, ever is without the Father nor the Son, and that the Son, the fullness of all fruitfulness, equally is always with the Father and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are the One and Indivisible Godhead. The Father is revealed through the Son, the Son through the origin of creatures, and the Holy Spirit through the incarnation of the Son. Why? Because the Father has begotten the Son before all time; The Son it is through whom all things were made, and the Holy Spirit was revealed towards the end of times in the form of a dove at the baptism of the Son. That is why the human being should never forget to call to me, the One God in these Three Persons. I have revealed this to humanity, so that my children burn all the more in love of Me."

Prayer of Intercession:

Sharing

Song: O Ignis Spiritus Paracliti (Cant of Ecst. 8)

Finish.