

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1197)

At the beginning of the High Middle Ages a spiritual star was born, a baby girl who would combine divine and human learning in a way that would spur spiritual growth for many people. At age eight, Blessed Hildegard of Bingen was sent to be tutored by the anchoress Jutta in the Rhine valley. A number of girls from other families joined her for the lessons and, like her, were attracted to the consecrated life. Hildegard's daily contact with this holy woman over the years inspired her to commit herself to a similar vocation.

During these formative years Hildegard experienced visions. She confided these visions to Jutta and a monk named Volmar who were instructed by her to keep these experiences confidential. Volmar became her secretary, writing down her reflections that in time became books. Eventually she had a vision that profoundly affected her life:

And it came to pass when I was forty-two years and seven months old, that the heavens were opened and a blinding light of exceptional brilliance flowed through my entire brain. And so it kindled my whole heart and breast like a flame, not burning but warming...and suddenly I understood the meaning of the many expositions of the books.

This vision marked her founding of a monastery of Benedictine nuns at Bingen. For the next thirty-six years she wrote books on theology, the practice of virtues, texts for her liturgical musical compositions, and scientific and medical matters. Her young years listening to monastic chant and music for the Mass influenced her style as a composer. She composed musical plays for her abbey. Currently, there are a number of CDs of her compositions. Observers call her a renaissance woman because of her broad intellectual and artistic interests.

As her fame spread she was contacted by a wide number of spiritual, academic and secular leaders for advice regarding prayer, spiritual development and even on medical matters. Many traveled to her abbey to meet her personally and benefit from her wisdom. Doctors who have studied the symptoms recorded about her numerous bouts of illness have concluded she suffered all her life with migraine headaches. A few judged that this affliction was the cause of her visions, discounting the spiritual origin of her revelations. However, she herself distinguished between divinely caused visions and phenomena due to her headaches.

She was never formally canonized a saint, but local popular devotion has treated her as Blessed Hildegard and through the centuries she has been honored as a holy woman whose intercession with God they treasure.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

One of the greatest events in the course of Christian history was Thomas' writing of the *Summa Theologica*. This theological work, used now by Catholic and Protestant scholars alike, continues to be influential even seven hundred years after its publication. The *Summa* was never fully completed, however. Three months before his death, Thomas had a mystical experience after which he said, "All that I have hitherto written seems to me nothing but straw compared to what has been revealed to me." Thomas wrote no more before his death in 1274.

Endorsement

"The Story of the Church is a triumph. It succeeds in narrating the church's long and complex history in an inviting and informative manner... a 'must read' for those who want to enter into, and not just read about, the history of the Catholic Church."

Most Reverend Donald W. Wuerl, S.T.D.
Archbishop of Washington, D.C.

Congratulations, Sr. Joseph, on this your Golden Jubilee as a Sister of Mercy. For thirty-nine years you have totally committed yourself to making our school a great school. Thank you so much. Ad multos annos!

Have a blessed week,

