

Daily Meditation 8-17-2026

The Prescient Painting of Hildegard of Bingen on the Antichrist

Good morning.

We're beginning today with evil again, and Hildegard of Bingen is one artist from our tradition who is not afraid to paint evil and to talk about it, and indeed to paint the archetype of the Antichrist.

And we are reproducing here one corner, an important corner of her painting, overall painting of the Antichrist, and its five beasts. And notice she's borrowing this language from apocalyptic literature, such as you find in the Book of Apocalypse, or otherwise known as the Book of Revelation in the Bible — a book that's filled with imagery of great things happening, and great in the sense of big, not always positive. And so she took it upon herself to name what she calls the beasts: the beasts that include a wolf, lion, dog, and so forth. But the beasts she's naming are within our souls, if you will, within the human possibilities, and of course the vices that we can subscribe to, that we can yield to if we do not protect ourselves from ourselves.

And so she's talking about greed. She's talking about luxury living in the presence of poverty. She's talking about warlikeness, as she says. And it's fierce. Her painting is fierce, and her language is fierce, and her message is fierce. That we are a powerful species, powerful for good, but also powerful for evil. For our very mind and imaginations can spend our time inventing new and worse and worse weapons. We can spend our time inventing new and ever more lethal ways to destroy the Earth. So in our greed can grab this much more money, this much more power, no matter what happens to future generations, and so forth. All of this is her mindset, and she's working out of the apocalyptic literature and out of the biblical literature, that says that when there's injustice, that the whole world, the whole cosmos, is off-center.

Psalm 82: "When the weak and the orphan are deprived of justice, all the foundations of the earth are shaken." All the foundations of the earth are shaken, and in this context, of course, heading up the story, the stories surrounding the death of Jesus on the cross, that when justice is missing, all the foundations of the earth are shaken. And it's in that

context that the gospel writers wrote about the earthquake and the eclipse of the Sun and so forth, that happened when Christ died on the cross. They were trying to emphasize that the whole cosmos is involved in making justice happen. Hildegard discusses the balance on the one hand, but when there is imbalance — injustice is imbalance — the whole cosmos is in trouble. And that's what Hildegard is painting so ferociously and vividly in this painting.

And of course I think that Picasso is too, in his painting of war, the Guernica painting, used in our daily meditation as a banner today, is an example of that: of how everything is uprooted in war. Now, Julian Norwich said this. She said, "The sky and the earth failed at the time of Christ dying, because He too was part of nature." I'll repeat it. "The sky and the earth failed at the time of Christ dying, because He too was part of nature." So she too, in reflecting on the crucifixion, says that the whole cosmos was involved. Sky and the earth failed. Why? Because He too was part of nature. Because we humans are part of nature. And Christ, the Cosmic Christ, and historical Jesus both were. I mean, historical Jesus died, and the Christ everywhere, the presence of the divine everywhere, was shaken up, was profoundly affected.

Now I used in the title of this meditation the phrase "prescient," that Hildegard was prescient. And then I looked up what Webster's dictionary said about being prescient. Prescience is foreknowledge of events. It is divine omniscience. It is human anticipation of the course of events. It is foresight. So all those synonyms apply to prescience. What I am saying is, that it is uncanny to me that Hildegard in the 12th century is speaking to us today. The rupture of Mother Earth, the perilous condition that Mother Earth is in today.

And of course, I would say the rupture of democracy, the perilous condition that human governance is in today, when a handful of billionaires want to displace democracy and run the world themselves, of course, to their benefit. It's not just about politics, but as politics is always about economics. Who makes the decisions? Who makes the money? Who unleashes infinite amounts of greed? Greed is never satisfied. That's its very nature. As Aquinas says, "avarice tends to infinity." Tends to infinity. It doesn't want to stop. Millionaires want more millions, and billionaires want more billions, and now we even have a trillionaire wandering this earth, making decisions about so many others, so many of the poor people of Africa, for example. He torched USAID to Africa and other countries.

So these are real things, and evil is big and has big imagination, just as love and community have big imaginations too. So, a few more thoughts from Hildegard. She says that "the inner person can see truth." The inner person and all of us can see truth. And what's that saying is that when the all-powerful hide behind lies and create lies and

incarnate lies, and try to put them into structures — just one example: a lie that a lot of non-citizens are voting in American elections. There's absolutely no evidence of that. They've done a lot of studies, and they've found a handful. It's crazy, and yet they're trying to create laws to prevent this from happening (supposedly). But these laws actually would prevent authentic citizens from voting.

So lies just have no ending. They are also potentially infinite. And that evil of lying can penetrate all kinds of decision making by legislators and even judges. She says, *The Antichrist is a son of injustice, the cursed one of the cursed ones. And the Antichrist takes root because ordinary people stagger in their faith, and the gospel limps in many people. Divine scriptures are rendered lukewarm.* And then she speaks to the monster that is the Antichrist in her painting: *For you cave of injustice, your works seek the pit of hell. You will lie absorbed in your gluttony there, and that hellish place will vomit forth stink. The world will recognize in this stench the bitterness of death and the destroyer of destructions. You are the worst of beasts. The devil has no power in good things, but only in evil things of eternal death.*

So she also paints in the full picture — we have only reproduced one quarter of the picture here. But in the full picture, she paints hope and peace and justice that the Christ brings and that the prophets bring, in particular the prophets Elijah and Enoch, allied with Christ. And she says that “Christ breaks ahead of injustice, and beauty and justice triumph.”

So this is a very powerful statement by Hildegard. And we need artists to speak to us of the power of evil, and that we can shed light on it, and that we can enter into its reality, and become aware that all of us are capable of contributing to evil, but also all of us are capable of contributing to compassion and justice, celebration, and making true community happen.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.