

Daily Meditation 04-13-26

Chaos & Evil Under Trump & MAGA: Lessons From Hildegard

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we're calling on Hildegard of Bingen, and some of her amazing paintings that describe what the price is for ignoring justice, and how the universe and society unravels, comes apart. Chaos reigns when justice is not attended to.

So I'd like to begin with a few of her thoughts about one of the paintings that I've reproduced here, and that is the mandala of the Man in Sapphire Blue. I call it a study in compassion. And this is from my book on *Illuminations*, and this painting of Hildegard's is number one in the 30-some paintings of hers that I share.

And she says, *A most quiet light, and in it burning with flashing fire, the form of a man in sapphire blue.* And she says it's really a painting of the Trinity. The white mandala on the outside is Holy Spirit; the golden ropes represent the Creator; and the man in sapphire blue is the healing Christ. And she says, *The Father is brightness, and the brightness has a flashing forth. And in this flashing forth is fire, and these three are one. The Creator is the Living Light, the Son is a flash of light, and the Spirit is fire.*

Now this seems to echo well with the metaphor of the fireball, which is part of our today's scientific creation story. Now Mircea Eliade, our great anthropologist, talks about how in the East Indian tradition cosmology, thread and cord imagery is prominent. He writes, *Their role is to implement all living unity, both cosmic and human. These primordial images serve at once to reveal the structure of the universe, and to describe the specific situation of humanity. Images of rope and thread succeed in suggesting that all things existing are, by their nature, produced, projected, or woven by a superior principle: that all existence and time implies an articulation or web.*

And of course, Hildegard herself refers to the web of creation, to which we belong, the web of the universe. So her golden rope is a way of talking about the interconnectivity of all being, and of divinity with humanity. She also identifies compassion and wisdom. She says, "To lack motherly compassion is to be foolish. Whoever lacks this dies of thirst." So like Julian of Norwich, she connects motherhood and compassion. So these are some of the meanings, and there are many more, that she lays out about her painting, her mandala here. It's really a triple mandala, you might say, of the Trinity.

Now, let us turn to her commentary on the Antichrist, which is featured also in our daily meditation today. And as I point out in the meditation, the upper left-hand painting is an effort to name the vices behind the unraveling of universe, the vices behind chaos and injustice, because she says, the ropes that you can see in the mouth of each of the five animals, which represent the vices, five vices. This rope is itself about *injustice, the darkness that stretches out many injustices*. She says that's what the rope stands for.

But also in the upper right-hand corner, there is redemption, if you will. There is a youth, she says, *clothed in a purple tunic. I had seen this youth before, on the corner of the junction between a bright stone wall and a building. This youth shines like the dawn, and holds a lyre in one hand (a musical instrument), and has two fingers of the other raised. The wall symbolizes protection*. This is especially important how to see in feudal times that Hildegard was living in and a symbol of strength.

And she says, the youth is *The Son of Man who is the beginning of justice, watching over the strength of the union of speculative knowledge and human work*. Now, speculative knowledge is mirror knowledge. It's kind of holding your soul up to a mirror. It means knowing yourself well and knowing your true self. And because the wall is strong, it represents unity and strength, and Genesis 27: *This stone which I've set for a pillar, shall be God's house*. And also from the New Testament, Matthew 16: *Thou art Peter, upon this rock I will build my church*. And also Psalm 118: Christ is *the rejected cornerstone that has been elevated*. So all these symbols of stone and rock and strength are part of her picture. She says that the Christ figure *reveals the shining of justice in the righteousness of those who worship Him devotedly*.

So notice what a prominent role justice plays in both the left-hand picture at the top and the right-hand picture at the top. And then, of course, in the major picture in the bottom of the painting, we have what she calls *a monstrous and very black head appeared, having fiery eyes, and the ears of an ass, and the nostrils and mouth of a lion, crunching with a great jaw and cutting horribly with horrible iron teeth*. She says this is the invasion of the Antichrist into major institutions, including the church, and that is why the church is depicted as a mother figure with blood on her thighs. See the red on her thighs. And she says, the monster *has a monstrous ugliness and spreads a foul stench on the mountain, and tears institutions (such as the church) to pieces with the crudest greediness*. Greed is playing such a prominent role. This is, she says, *the Antichrist, the son of injustice, the cursed one of the cursed ones*. Notice then, Antichrist, son of injustice. And now, out of three paintings, injustice plays a major role in each.

And she addresses the monster: *Oh, you cave of injustice!* You see, injustice underlies all chaos in her understanding, if our society is to survive. *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 the stench the bitterness of death in the destroyer of destructions. You are the worst of beasts, and you link up with kings and dukes and leaders and those with money and prestige. You steal lands, destroy insight, hollow-out the powers of inner persons who are seeking truth. This devil has no power in good things, but only in evil things of eternal death. Your love of war and war expenditures, you are unraveling the web of the cosmos.

And she's thinking of Psalm 82: *When the weak and the orphaned are deprived of justice, all the foundations of the earth are shaken.* Now she invokes in the upper right-hand corner, Enoch and Elijah, prophets who recognize that "the Son of Man will suffer," but that there will be redemption, their wholeness will return.

And I'd like to close with a passage of hers from the book I allude to, that's called *The Book of Rewards of Life*, in which she names 35 virtues and 35 vices. And there's a section called "The Sound of the Brazen Club."

Oh, destructive mockers who are opposed to God: you want to ascend to the summit, but you will descend into hell. I will drag you away from honor. I will take away your happiness, and I will cast you down into confusion. (This is God talking to Hildegard to talk to society.) I will throw you down like a rotting body that is dead, since you live in the throat of the ancient serpent and boil up out of his mouth so that you can deceive humans. You pour out your unclean scum upon people from your festering wounds. You strike people with a fiery avalanche of your works, and you kill them with the fury of murder. By doing these things, you hope to lead all of God's works into confusion. Therefore I will wage war against you and drive you away. I will show you they do not have God's strength in you, and you will be reduced to nothing.

So you have in Hildegard this immense passion about the forces of evil that have the power to take over institutions, including the church, and to uproot society's progress. So it seems to me that she is a prophetic voice for our time.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.