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Seeing the Invisible Theory of Vision in Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* II.6

Abstract

Augustine's followers – Hildegard of Bingen, among them – inherited an unclarity about the possibility of knowing the invisible God through the visible nature. On the one hand, Augustine discussed how the physical visible world points to God as its creator. On the other hand, he demonstrated that knowledge derived from sensory perceptions of the visible is limited and inferior to inner learning. Although Hildegard embraced Augustine's opinion that sensory perceptions are limited, she still considered them important for believers. Vision 6 in *Scivias* II depicts a complex relationship between the visible and the invisible with regard to the Eucharist: Christ's blood and body are not only superior to the wine and the bread, but are also identical to the latter and complete it. Thus, visible objects are not mere creations of the invisible but also reflect the invisible reality. In the first two sections of this article, I examine these theological dissimilarities. The last sections of the article suggest that the importance of the visible affected the structure of Vision II.6. Moreover, the illustrations of Vision II.6 present the complex relationship between the visible and the invisible. These illustrations display how an invisible concept may be reflected in a visible depiction.

Keywords: Eucharist, inner seeing, physical world, image-text relationship, *Scivias*.

Medieval studied Authors: Hildegard of Bingen, Augustine of Hippo.

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I thank my Ph.D. advisor, Prof. Yossef Schwartz for his guidance and support. Part of this work was carried out during a stay at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, Germany, at the Research Group of Prof. Katja Krause. I thank the MPI and Prof. Krause for the kind hospitality. I thank the Benedictine Abbey of St. Hildegard in Eibingen for the permission to use the images in this paper.

Vendo o invisível. Teoria da Visão em Hildegarda de Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6

Resumo

Os seguidores de Agostinho – Hildegarda de Bingen, entre eles – herdaram uma falta de clareza sobre a possibilidade de conhecer o Deus invisível através da natureza visível. Por um lado, Agostinho discutiu como o mundo físico visível aponta para Deus como seu criador. Por outro lado, demonstrou que o conhecimento derivado das percepções sensoriais do visível é limitado e inferior à aprendizagem interior. Embora Hildegarda tenha abraçado a opinião de Agostinho de que as percepções sensoriais são limitadas, ela ainda as considerava importantes para os crentes. A Visão 6 em *Scivias* II descreve uma relação complexa entre o visível e o invisível no que diz respeito à Eucaristia: O sangue e o corpo de Cristo não só são superiores ao vinho e ao pão, como também são idênticos a este último e completam-no. Assim, os objetos visíveis não são meras criações do invisível, mas refletem também a realidade invisível. Nas duas primeiras secções deste artigo, examino estas dissimilaridades teológicas. As últimas secções do artigo sugerem que a importância do visível afetou a estrutura da Visão II.6. Além disso, as ilustrações da Visão II.6 apresentam a complexa relação entre o visível e o invisível. Estas ilustrações mostram como um conceito invisível pode ser refletido numa representação visível.

Palavras chave: Eucaristia, visão interior, mundo físico, relação imagem-texto, *Scivias*.

Autores medievais estudados: Hildegarda de Bingen, Agostinho de Hipona.

A body and mind have been granted to me, one outer, the other inner. But by which of these should I have sought my God, Whom I had already sought through the body from earth to heaven as far as I could send the beams of my eyes as messengers? Seeing Him through the mind is the better way. To the mind, as to a presiding judge, all the messengers of the body have reported the answers of heaven and earth and all that is within them, all saying, «We are not God, but He made us». The inner man knows this through the ministry of the outer man: I, the inner I, received these answers: I, the inner mind, through the senses of my body asked the entire mass of the World about my God, and it replied, «I am not He, but He made me»¹.

In this passage, Augustine raised essential questions about Christianity: How do the senses of the outer man inform the inner mind? Which information does the world hold about the divine? In this paper, I discuss Hildegard of Bingen's (1098-1179) answers to these questions. Hildegard outlined a complex relation-

¹ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* X.6: «Et ecce corpus et anima in me mihi praesto sunt, unum exterius et alterum interius. Quid horum est, unde quaerere debui Deum meum, quem iam quae-siveram per corpus a terra usque ad caelum, quousque potui mittere nuntios radios oculorum meorum? Sed melius quod interius. Ei quippe renuntiabant omnes nuntii corporales praesidenti et iudicanti de responsionibus caeli et terrae et omnium, quae in eis sunt, dicentium: 'Non sumus Deus', et: 'Ipse fecit nos'. Homo interior cognovit haec per exterioris ministerium; ego interior cognovi haec, ego, ego animus per sensum corporis mei. Interrogavi mundi molem de Deo meo, et respondit mihi: 'Non ego sum, sed ipse me fecit'». Ed. Lucas Verheijen, in *MCCC (Corpus Christianorum - Continuatio Mediaevalis, 27 – Confessionvm)*, Brepols Publishers, Turnhout 1981, p. 159-60, l. 33-43.

ship between the visible and the invisible; even her writing process demonstrates this complex relationship. Hildegard wrote on abstract subjects as she had miraculously perceived with her «inner eye» and with her «inner ear». However, this paper does not focus on Hildegard's mystic experiences, but on the theory of perceiving the invisible, as described in her visionary text. For this purpose, I focus on a vision Hildegard had of the Eucharist (*Liber Scivias* II, Vision 6). As argued in Vision II.6, the Eucharist is the most miraculous encounter between the visible and the invisible: God, the highest essence, takes the form of simple bread and wine². The commentary of Vision II.6 elaborates on the visible and the invisible oblation, their relationship and how each of them affect the receiver. According to Vision II.6, the invisible is superior to the visible, yet simultaneously completes it and identical to it. Hence, the visible is also important for receiving the sacrament. The first two sections of this article present this complex relationship and how it relates to Augustine's views.

The third and fourth sections discuss how the relationship between the visible and the invisible shape the presentation of Vision II.6. While the third section elaborates on visible elements in the text, the fourth section is dedicated to the only medieval illustrations of Vision II.6 – a pair of illustrations from Rupertsberg Codex³. I will try to demonstrate that these illustrations visibly convey that the invisible is superior to the visible, yet also completes it and is identical to it.

1. Abstract Perceptions

The essence of the Eucharist's oblation – God's flesh and blood – is inconsistent with its appearance as bread and wine. In the 11th century, in response to

² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II.6.11, ed. A. Führkötter, in MCCC (Corpus Christianorum - Continuatio Mediaevalis, 43 – *Liber Scivias* 1-2), Brepols Publishers, Turnhout 1978.

³ Formely, Wisbaden, Nassauische Landbibliothek, MS 1. In World War II, this manuscript was lost from Dresden. Luckily, the nuns of Eibingen had created two copies of the codex in the 1920s: by hand in color by Josepha Knips and photographed in black and white (the negatives are in the Rheinische Bildarchiv in Cologne). For more on these copies, see: M. Caviness, «Gender Symbolism and Text Image Relationship: Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*», in J. Beer (ed.), *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages*, Medieval Institute Publications, Kalamazoo 1997, pp. 73-75; and M. Embach, *Die Schriften Hildegards von Bingen: Studien zu ihrer Überlieferung und Rezeption im Mittelalter und in Frühen Neuzeit*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2003, pp. 95-6. There is a second illustrated MS of *Scivias* (Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Sal. X, 16), but without any illustration in the *Scivias* second book.

Berengar of Tours' attack on the Eucharist, Lanfranc of Bec explained how and why the oblation is inconsistent. Likewise, Vision II.6 broadly discusses this inconsistency⁴. Hildegard heard the divine voice declaring that what seems to us humans as bread and wine is actually flesh and blood⁵. The voice explained to her how God miraculously changes the bread and wine to blood and flesh⁶, and that this miracle repeats the greater miracle of the incarnation⁷. It also clarified why wine and bread were chosen⁸. In addition, the divine voice noted that the Eucharist is invisible only because of our limited abilities⁹; if we would receive real flesh and blood, we would shrink back in disgust (*abhorreo*)¹⁰. Many of these arguments are similar to those of Lanfranc. After explaining the inconsistency, the divine voice scolds us for questioning the existence of the miracle¹¹.

Despite the inconsistency of the Eucharist, the divine voice asserts that with faith, people will be able to perceive the true essence of the Eucharist:

And so, O human, I give you His body and blood in the oblation of bread and wine, so that in

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- ⁴ For more connections between Vision II.6 to other contemporary theology see H. Feiss, «Hildegard's Vision of the Eucharist (*Scivias* 2.6): Theology and Personal Practice», *The American Benedictine Review* 49 (1998) 172-3, 194.
- ⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, cit. 2, 6.8; 6.12; 6.18; 6.29; 6.43. Lanfranc of Bec made similar claims: Lanfranc, «On the Body and Blood», ch. 2, 410c-412a, ch. 8, 419a-b, ch. 12, 422c-d.
- ⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, cit. 2, 6.13, 6.36, see similarly in Lanfranc: Lanfranc, «On the Body and Blood», ch. 14, 423c-d and ch. 20, 436b-d.
- ⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, cit. 2, 6.14, 6.15, 6.29, 6.36; The divine voice also compares the Eucharist to the miraculous resurrection: 6.13; and to the creation of man: 6.24, 6.43. Lanfranc also compared the Eucharist to the incarnation: Lanfranc, «On the Body and Blood», ch. 15, 425c, ch. 18, 430c.
- ⁸ According to the divine voice, wine and bread were chosen because Jesus was sustained by them in his earthly life: Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, cit. 2, 6.18; on the advantages of wheat over other fruits: 6.26; and on the benefits of wine: 6.18. Ortúzar Escudero discusses the flavor of the oblation as a connection between the believers and the Son: M. J. Ortúzar Escudero, *Die Sinne in den Schriften Hildegards von Bingen*, Hiersemann, Stuttgart 2016, pp. 239-244.
- ⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, cit. 2, 6.14, 6.16, 6.19, 6.36, 6.43.
- ¹⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, cit. 2, 6.19. See similarly in Lanfranc: Lanfranc, «On the Body and Blood», ch. 18, 430c.
- ¹¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.60: «sed si tu, homo, in instabilitate cordis tui in temetipso dixeris, quomodo oblatio ista in altari corpus et sanguis Filii mei efficiatur, tunc et ego tibi respondebo: 'Cur hoc, o homo, interrogas, et quare haec sciscitaris? Num haec a te requiro? Quid scrutaris secreta mea de corpore et sanguine Filii mei? Nec ista a te requirenda sunt, sed tantum in magno timore et ueneratione ea suscipiens diligentur custodi, et amplius de hoc mysterio noli haesitare'», Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II.6.60, cit. 2, pp. 278-9. Also Lanfranc asserts that humans must not doubt the sacrament: Lanfranc, «On the Body and Blood», ch. 9, 420a, ch. 17, 426d-7a.

true faith you may perceive what is visible and what is invisible. And you receive this sacrament with true certainty by the divine power, yet so that it is not visible to you, [...] ¹². [The body and blood of the Son] cannot be seen by a carnal eye, as long as it is ashes, except by the perception of humble devotion. How? As a bird sees that an egg has been laid in the nest; it eagerly flies to cover it and nurtures it with its warmth until the chick emerges; and then the shell remains, and the chick flies away ¹³.

The receiver perceives the essence of oblation despite its invisibility, the way a bird perceives the chick inside the egg despite the shell. Here, perceiving means grasping the presence of an invisible entity in the same way that sensory perception informs us of the presence of corporal entities. Hence, we can conclude that the invisible essence of the oblation can be perceived abstractly. The abstract perception helps believers to understand the invisible and feel close to it.

In order to abstractly perceive the Eucharist, one needs to receive it with faith. Consequently, receiving the communion is not a passive act, but depends on the receiver's state of mind and mental preparation ¹⁴. The Eucharist is intended for believers who have reached the appropriate state of mind ¹⁵. The strength of the receiver's faith determines how effective the Eucharist will be:

But this sacrament will not be holier for the one who receives more of it, nor of lesser effect for one who receives less of it; but it will illumine the recipient according to his faith. Therefore, O human, it does not need to be taken in great quantity, for the mighty God is in a small oblation of this mystery, as it is in a great one, [...], those who have God, the three and the one, in their hearts with firm and whole faith ¹⁶.

¹² Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.19, cit.2, p. 247, l. 757-61: «Quapropter, et ego, o homo, carnem et sanguinem, eius in oblatione panis et uini trado, quatenus per illud quod uisibile est illud quod inuisibile est in uera fide percipias. Et idem sacramentum in uera certitudine per diuinam potentiam suscipis, ita tamen quod tibi uisibile non apparet, [...]». All translations to English in this article follow Hart and Bishop with small changes: Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, trans. *Scivias* (Paulist Press, New York 1990). Lanfranc said that faith may grow from the inconsistency of the Eucharist, but he did not mention faith as a key to perceiving it: Lanfranc, «On the Body and Blood», ch. 18, 434a-b.

¹³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.36, cit. 2, p. 264, l. 1336-40: «[Corpus et sanguinis Filii] quod carnalis oculus, quamdiu cinis est, uidere non poterit nisi in fide illud humili deuotione perspiciat. Quomodo? Cum ales ouum sibi in nidum suum poni uiderit, ardens super illud uolat et calore suo illud fouens pullum educit, ita quod testa oui remanet et quod pullus ille euolat».

¹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.14, 6.16, 6.21, 6.22, 6.26, 6.27, 6.42, 6.50, 6.51, 6.57, cit. 2. On this point see also: Ortúzar Escudero, *Die Sinne in den Schriften Hildegards von Bingen*, cit. 8, pp. 216-220.

¹⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.20, 6.22, 6.23, cit. 2.

¹⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.42, cit. 2, p. 267, l. 1435-42: «Sed idem sacramentum non erit huic sanctius qui plus ex eo perceperit, nec illi contractius qui minus ex eo sumpsit, sed

The concept that the receiver's state of mind influences the reception of the Eucharist is consistent with Augustine's *Confessions*¹⁷. According to Augustine, God is revealed as the creator of the visible nature only to those who connect to their invisible inner-self: «[nature] speaks to all, but only those will understand who compare its voice that comes from outside with the truth within themselves»¹⁸. Both Augustine and Hildegard argued that only those with the appropriate state of mind will abstractly perceive the invisible in the visible. The next section discusses a difference between Augustine and Hildegard in how they valued these abstract perceptions.

2. The Importance of the Visible

Augustine argued that sensory perceptions help us when we commence our quest for God. However, one must rise beyond the senses and physical nature for the remainder of the quest¹⁹. Reception of the Eucharist is only complete when accompanied by spiritual understanding: «Although it is needful that this be visibly celebrated, yet, it must be spiritually understood»²⁰. Likewise, Lanfranc did not elaborate on the corporal elements of the receiving of the Eucharist²¹. In contrast, Hildegard's text clarifies that the visible experiences are important for the receiver²².

secundum fidem suam qui illud percipit, ita et eum illuminabit. Quapropter, o homo, in magnitudine percipiendum non est, quia fortissimus Deus tam in parua quam in magna oblatione huius mysterii est, [...], quod trinum et unum Deum firma et integra fide in corde suo habeant».

¹⁷ On Hildegard and Augustine see: Ortúzar Escudero, *Die Sinne in den Schriften Hildegards von Bingen*, cit. 8, p. 214; N.M. Campbell, «*Imago expandit splendorem suum: Hildegard of Bingen's Visio-Theological Designs in the Rupertsberg Scivias Manuscript*», *Eikón / Imago* 4 (2013) 27-28.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confesiones*, X.6.10, p. 60, l. 54-55«[natura] omnibus loquitur, sed illi intellegunt, qui ei us vocem acceptam foris intus cum veritate conferunt».

¹⁹ Cfr. Augustine, *Confesiones* X.7.11.

²⁰ «Etsi necesse est, illud uisibiliter celebrari oportet tamen inuisibiliter intelligi», Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, PL XCVIII.8, eds. Eligius Dekkers and Johannes Fraipont, in CCSL (Corpus Christianorum – Series Latina, 39 – *Enarrationes in Psalmos* LI-C), Brepols Publishers, Turnhout 1956, p. 1386, l. 61-62.

²¹ Lanfranc did not broadly refer to the visibility of the Eucharist, nor to sensory experiences of the divine (except the revelations of the Son after His death: Lanfranc, «On the Body and Blood», ch. 17, 427a-b). Lanfranc discussed the visible element of the oblation only in relation to God's human nature, without relating to the receiver's nature: Lanfranc, «On the Body and Blood», ch. 10, 421b-d, and ch. 17, 429b-c.

²² The difference between Hildegard and her previews can be explained by her *Geist Zeit*: Physical nature was a main issue in the renewal of the 12th century, also before the texts of Aristotle were

Although the invisible is superior, the visible aspect of the Eucharist is essential to ensure its proper reception:

The human soul that exists invisibly, receives the sacrament invisibly, which is invisible in the oblation, as the human body, which is visible, visibly accepts the oblation that exists visibly in that sacrament; the two exist as one, just as Christ is God and man, and the rational soul and the mortal flesh make up one human being; and so a person who examine Me in right faith, and so accepts the sacrament, receives holiness faithfully²³.

The visible reception of the communion is just as essential as the abstract reception; the visible is not a mere starting point, it physically completes the invisible process²⁴.

Since the invisible soul completes the visible body, one must clean their senses from sins before taking the Eucharist:

But you [Hildegard], O human, as other people approach the priest to receive the sacrament, notice five modes of being in them: For those who wish to receive the divine mystery from their priest should cleanse the five senses of their body from the dregs of their sins and worthily and laudably keep themselves from furtive uncleanness, that they may healthfully receive the sacrament²⁵.

translated: A. Speer, *Die entdeckte Natur*, Brill, Leiden, New York, and Köln 1995, pp. 8-11. Constant Mews suggests that the interest in nature was mainly strong among German writers: C. Mews, «Hildegard and the Schools», in C. Burnett and P. Dronke (eds.), *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art*, The Warburg Institute, London 1998, p. 99; C. Mews, «Hildegard of Bingen and the Hirsau Reform in Germany 1080-1180», in B.M. Kienzle, D.L. Stoudt, and G. Ferzoco (eds.), *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, Brill, Leiden and Boston 2014, p. 74.

- ²³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.14, cit. 2, p. 243, l. 628-37: «Nam spiritus hominis qui inuisibilis existit, sacramentum hoc, quod in oblatione ista inuisibile est, inuisibiliter suscipit, corpore hominis, quod uisibile est, oblationem istam quae in eodem sacramento uisibilis existit, uisibiliter accipiente, ita tamen unum existentibus sicut Deus et homo unus Christus est, et ut anima rationalis et caro mortalis in homine unus homo existit; quoniam homo qui recta fide me inspicit, cum sacramentum istud accipit, ad sanctificationem sui illud fideliter suscipit».
- ²⁴ See also Campbell and Ortúzar Escudero has suggested similar conclusions: N. Campbell, «*Imago expandit splendorem suum*», cit. 17, pp. 29-30. Ortúzar Escudero, *Die Sinne in den Schriften Hildegards von Bingen*, cit. 8, pp. 209-210. However, Caroline Bynum claims that Hildegard represented the soul with living organic images and the body mostly as ashes: C.W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, Columbia University Press, New York 1995, pp. 159-161.
- ²⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.52, cit. 2, pp. 272-73, l. 1603-1609: «Sed tu [Hildegard], o homo, dum ceteri homines ad percipiendum idem sacramentum accedunt, quinque modos in eis consideras: quia illi qui perceptionem diuini mysterii a sacerdote suo accipere desiderant, quinque sensus corporis sui a faece peccatorum suorum emundant et eos a surripiente immunditia dinge et laudabiliter custodiant, ut tantum salubrious idem percipiant».

Most sins are a visible and tangible action and so they are reflected in the bodies of the sinners. The moral level of the body is equivalent to the level of the soul. Thus, the invisible is not simply superior to the visible; they are identical and complete each other. Based on Vision II.6, we might conclude that this complex relationship allows us to understand the spiritual world through the corporal world.

3. Visible Elements in the Text of Vision II.6

In *Scivias*, the visible is important on a theoretical and on a practical level. Each chapter starts with a description of the vision that Hildegard saw, followed by a commentary that Hildegard heard. Thus, all the theological argumentations are based on visual descriptions²⁶, which the reader can imagine. This is especially true for Vision II.6, which describes a celebration of the Eucharist, which readers recognize from their own life.

The vision starts with the sight of Ecclesia moving towards Christ on the cross. Christ's blood flows out of him, touches Ecclesia (*fluo se*), uniting and betrothing them (*desponsatione associata*)²⁷. Afterwards, Ecclesia approaches an altar²⁸. Hildegard also mentions a priest who approaches the altar for the celebration of the Eucharist:

Hence when a priest clad in sacred vestments approached that altar to celebrate the divine mysteries, I saw that a great calm light was brought to it from heaven by angels and shone around the altar until the sacred rite was ended and the priest had withdrawn from it²⁹.

The aforementioned quote describes how the visible and the invisible come together in the Eucharist³⁰; the Divine and the priest approach the altar for the

²⁶ See also recent studies: M. Zátanyi, *Vidi et intellexi: die Schrifthermeneutik in der Visionstrilogie Hildegards von Bingen*, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster 2012; M. Jose Ortúzar Escudero, *Die Sinne in den Schriften Hildegards von Bingen*, cit. 8, pp. 220-222.

²⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6. vision's description, cit. 2, p. 230, l. 190-97.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 202-206.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 206-13: «Vnde etiam cum sacerdos sacris uestibus indutus ad celebranda diuina sacramenta ad idem altare accederet, uidi quod subito magna serenitas lucis cum obsequio angelorum de caelo ueniens totum illud altare circumfulsit, et ibi tamdiu permansit quousque post completionem eiusdem sacramenti idem sacerdos ab altari secederet».

³⁰ Zöllner states that the discussion about the Eucharist includes various layers of meaning: M. Zöllner, «Aufschein des Neuen im Alten. Das Buch der Hildegard von Bingen im geistesgeschichtlichen Kontext des zwölften Jahrhunderts – eine gattungsspezifische Einordnung», in A. Haverkamp

celebrations. Vision II.6 describes the visible and the invisible and thus connects the spiritual and the corporal.

The familiar visible and audible events of the Eucharist continue to appear alongside invisible mysterious phenomena: the reading from the Gospel³¹, the placing of the bread and the wine on the altar³², and the priest singing *sanc-tus sanctus sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth*³³ are followed by visions of events from the Son's time on earth. These events appeared to Hildegard as in mirrors (*uelut in speculo apparuerunt*)³⁴. Then the ceremony continues with the singing of *agne Dei qui tollis peccata mundi*³⁵, after which Hildegard heard the Divine voice command to eat and drink the communion (*«Manducate et bibite corpus et sanguinem Filii mei ad abolendum praeuaricationem Euae, quatenus in rectam hereditatem restauremini»*)³⁶. As the audience approach the altar to receive the communion³⁷, Hildegard notices that they are divided into five groups based on their moral level³⁸. Throughout Vision II.6 the spiritual and the corporal are continuously connected and appear alongside each other.

In addition to the visual descriptions, the commentary of Vision II.6 also includes explanations of invisible concepts by drawing analogies to visible objects³⁹. In these analogies, the visible is identical to the invisible. The analogies make abstract concepts more familiar and understandable for the reader. Through deeper examination of the analogies readers can recognize some differences between the visible and the invisible, including the superiority of the invisible. Thus, the effect of these analogies is similar to abstract perception.

(ed.), *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz 2000, p. 290.

³¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6. vision's description, cit. 2, l. 213-14.

³² *Ibid.*, l. 214-15.

³³ *Ibid.*, l. 215-17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 230-35.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 235-37.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 240-43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 243-46.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 246-57.

³⁹ A few examples: an analogy between God and the communion and gold and a goldsmith: Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.5, cit. 2; an analogy between the changing of the essence of bread and wine and ointment and sapphire in bread and wine: 6.13; an analogy between the invisible and a chick in an egg or a butterfly in a cocoon: 6.16; between the gifts of God in the Eucharist and the believers and earthly fruits: 6.22; between the fire that bakes breads and the holy spirit that incarnates in the virgin: 6.32.

4. Invisible Elements in the Illustrations of Vision II.6

Rupertsberg Codex, which includes two illustrations of Vision II.6, was created in Hildegard's cloister during her lifetime⁴⁰. However, scholars disagree on the involvement of Hildegard in the creation of the miniatures⁴¹. These discussions are less relevant here as this paper focuses on the experience of the viewer. This section analyzes the two illustrations based on the assumption that the visible is important for human understanding, as the commentary demonstrates. The illustrations visually convey the complex relationship between the visible and the invisible.

The first illustration of Vision II.6 (figure 1) was placed after the table of contents, on the right side of the right folio; the second illustration (figure 2) was placed on the left side of the left folio, before the description of the vision. Thus, the two illustrations are placed back to back to each other on the same parchment⁴². Both illustrations have a narrow format that is horizontally divided

⁴⁰ M. Schrader and A. Führkötter, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen*, Böhlau Verlag, Köln – Graz 1956, p. 44; A. Derolez, «The Manuscript Transmission of Hildegard's Writings: The State of the Problem», in C. Burnet and P. Dronke (eds.), *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of Her Thought and Art*, The Warburg Institute, London 1998, p. 24; M. Embach and M. Wallner, *Conspectus der Handschriften Hildegards von Bingen*, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster 2013, p. 307.

⁴¹ For interpretations asserting that Hildegard took part in the creation of the illustrations see: A. Führkötter and A. Carlevaris, Einleitung zu *Scivias*, von Hildegard von Bingen, in MCCC (Corpus Christianorum - Continuatio Mediaevalis, 43 – *Liber Scivias* 1-2), Brepols Publishers, Turnhout 1978, pp. xxxii-xxxv; M. Caviness, «Anchoress, Abbess, and Queen: Donors and Patrons or Intercessors and Matrons?», in J. Hall McCash (ed.), *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, University of Georgia Press, Athens and London 1996, pp. 113-7; R.K. Emmerson, «The Representation of Antichrist in Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*: Image, Word, Commentary, and Visionary Experience», *Gesta* 41 (2002) 105. For interpretations rebutting Hildegard's participation see: C. Meier, «Zum Verhältnis von Text und Illustration im überlieferten Werk Hildegards von Bingen», in A. P. Brück (ed.), *Hildegard von Bingen 1098-1179: Festschrift zum 800. Todtag der Heiligen*, Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, Mainz 1979, p. 160; L. E. Saurma-Jeltsch, *Die Miniaturen im «Liber scivias» der Hildegard von Bingen*, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden 1998, pp. 5-11. However, Saurma-Jeltsch also suggested that Hildegard planned the illustrations: L. E. Saurma-Jeltsch, «Die Rupertsberger *Scivias* – Handschrift Überlegungen zu ihrer Entstehung», in E. Forster (ed.), *Hildegard von Bingen: Prophetin durch die Zeiten. Zum 900. Geburtstag*, Herder, Freiburg, Basel und Wien 1997, p. 353. For a comprehensive review of the discussion see N. Campbell, «*Imago expandit splendorem suum*», cit. 17, pp. 10-19.

⁴² The frame of the second illustration can even be seen above the first illustration, as depicted in the facsimilia. See Tablet 16 in cit. 2.

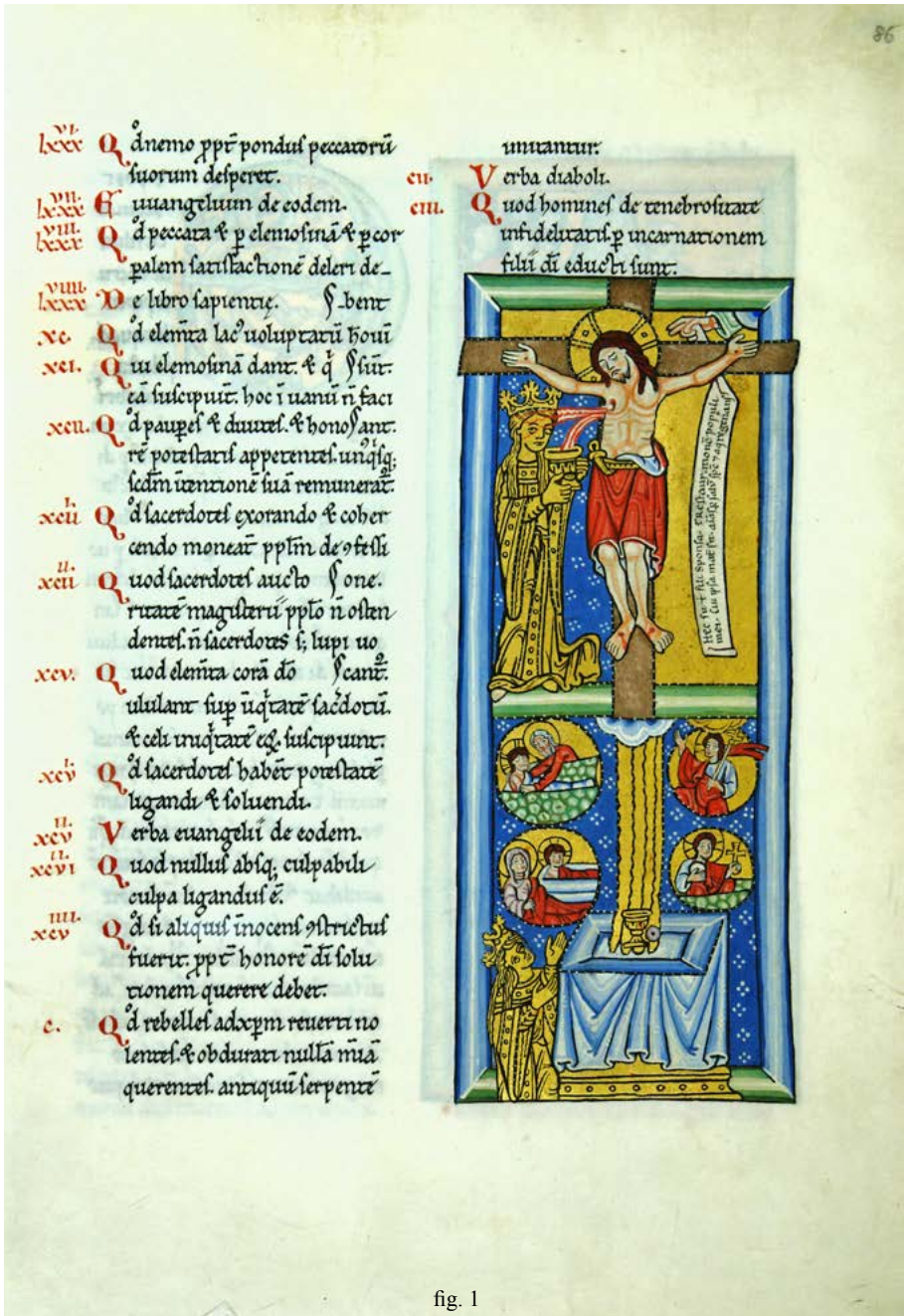


fig. 1



fig. 2

into two scenes. Hence, the vision is depicted in four scenes in total, which all depict the sacrifice of God to mankind. The relationship between these scenes presents the complex relationship between the visible and the invisible, as I will now elaborate.

The upper scene of figure 1 depicts the crucifixion, the historic event of the sacrifice and its meaning. Fluids flow from Christ's fifth wound to Ecclesia, who stands under the cross⁴³. Christ's sacrifice flows and connects to Ecclesia and its members. Some of the fluid is collected in Ecclesia's cup and some of the fluid enters her directly. In the upper right corner, a hand extends out of a cloud holding a parchment, on which is written a sentence that Hildegard heard in her vision (*Haec, Fili, sit tibi sponsa in restaurationem populi mei, cui ipsa mater sit, animas per saluationem spiritus et aquae regenerans*)⁴⁴.

The bottom scene in figure 1 depicts Ecclesia approaching an altar with the oblation (a cup and a piece of bread). The altar is illuminated by a golden light from a cloud above⁴⁵. The light is surrounded by four small scenes, framed in small circles – in her vision, Hildegard saw these scenes portrayed in a mirror – depicting events from Christ's earthly life: nativity, burial, resurrection and ascension. These events summarize the history of God's body, as it arrived and left the world.

The scenes in figure 2 emphasize the ritualistic aspect of the Eucharist. The upper scene of figure 2 depicts a priest celebrating the Eucharist in front of angels. On the altar are the prayer book Missal and the oblation covered by a corporal (the cloth that cover the oblation). On the folios of the Missal we can find the words that start the pray of Eucharist: *Te igitur clem[entissime] p[ater]*.

The bottom scene depicts the audience of the Eucharist as they approach the altar for the sacrament. The audience includes sinners, as not all the members

⁴³ According to the commentary, these fluids free the believers: Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.28, cit. 2. The fluids are illustrated as three red lines separated by two white lines. One interpretation is that the white lines symbolize water. According to the commentary, the wine of the obelion symbolizes Jesus' divine part, which blends with water that symbolizes His human part: *Scivias* II, 6.30. Sara Salvadori interprets the three red lines as symbolizing the trinity: S. Salvadori, *Hildegard von Bingen: A Journey into the Images*, Skira, Milano 2019, p. 128. According to Salvadori, the figure of Ecclesia refers to Mary, who usually stands under the cross. Thus, she becomes the Bride of Christ and the mother of the living: S. Salvadori, *A Journey into the Images*, p. 158.

⁴⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6. vision description, cit., p. 230, l. 198-201.

⁴⁵ Saurma-Jeltsch demonstrates that this is a common iconography: L.E. Saurma-Jeltsch, *Die Miniaturen im «Liber scivias» der Hildegard von Bingen*, cit., p. 116.

of the church are free from sin, but all are allowed to receive the communion⁴⁶. The audience is divided into five groups – as in Hildegard’s vision – presented in three lines. The upper line consists of a group of men and women, lay people and religious figures. Some of the group members have gold skin, the others have pale skin. The middle line is divided into two groups: the members on the left are colored red and the members on the right are colored in a dark shade. The members of the two groups in the bottom line are a mix: the ones on the left are half pale-skinned, half gold-skinned; the ones on the right are half red-skinned and half dark-skinned. This visual depiction of the groups is not entirely consistent with Hildegard’s textual description of the vision. According to Hildegard’s description⁴⁷, the first group had bright body and fiery soul; the people in the second group had a pale-skinned body and shadowed soul; the third group were hairy in body and dirty in soul; the bodies of the fourth group were covered with sharp thorns and their souls with leprous; the people in the last group had blood-covered bodies. Although some characteristics in the visual representation also appear in the textual description, the two do not match perfectly.

The subject of all four scenes in the two illustrations is identical and interchangeable; they all depict the sacrifice of God. However, the scenes also complete each other by emphasizing a different aspect of the oblation. Figure 1 depicts the historical and allegorical sacrifice, while figure 2 completes it by presenting a ritual celebration of the same sacrifice. Moreover, the pair of scenes in each of the illustrations also complete each other. The upper scene in figure 2 depicts the priest performing the sacrament, the bottom scene the community arriving to receive it; the celebration would not be complete without the presence of both parties.

In figure 1, this complementary relationship is more complex. The upper scene in figure 1 emphasizes the liquids of the Eucharist by showing the fluids flowing out of Christ to Ecclesia. The bottom scene emphasizes the flesh by depicting the four smaller scenes in the same shape of the bread on the altar. As mentioned before, the scenes present the history of God’s body, i.e. God’s flesh⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ The commentary acknowledges that not all the church members are without fault and that many had sinned, however all of them receive the communion. Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.98, cit. 2.

⁴⁷ Salvadori has suggested an identification of the different groups based on their order: S. Salvadori, *A Journey into the Images*, cit., p. 70.

⁴⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.17, cit. 2. Salvadori rightly connects the shape of the cradle to the tomb, referring to the end of Jesus: S. Salvadori, *A Journey into the Images*, cit., p. 155. I sug-

Both parts of the obelion appear in both scenes, while each scene emphasizes a different part of the obelion. According to the commentary, the Eucharist is only complete when it includes wine, bread and water, signifying the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit⁴⁹. The two scenes in figure 1 also complete each other by presenting Christ's life and death. The light that shines from the cloud in the bottom scene is a continuation of the cross of crucifixion in the scene above⁵⁰. The scenes of nativity and burial on the left side of the light and the scenes of resurrection and ascension on the right side of the light together represent all the main events of Christ's body.

Lastly, there is a hierarchical relationship between the illustrations and the scenes. Figure 1 with its allegorical meaning is superior to figure 2 and at the same time, the two illustrations are identical and complete each other. As mentioned before, the illustrations are on different sides of the same parchment; one cannot view both illustrations at once. The viewer first views the allegorical meaning and then turns the page to view the representation of the ritual. While viewing figure 2, the allegorical representation of figure 1 is invisible, but present in the viewer's mind. Figure 1 and its meaning is perceived abstractly while viewing figure 2.

The most superior scene is the upper one in figure 1, which depicts the original sacrifice with the blood flowing into Ecclesia⁵¹. Light descends from the crucifixion in the upper scene and illuminates the altar in the bottom scene; on an abstract level, this sacrifice illuminates the ritual and gives it meaning. Ecclesia appears in both scenes, but even in the bottom scene, her gaze is directed at Christ in the upper scene. In addition, Christ's life is the main subject of the upper scene,

gest an additional connection, to the shape of a tabernacle, which contains God's flesh. The light shining above the altar continues the emphasize on God's body, as the commentary compares it to the light that shined over the body of Christ during His burial and resurrection: Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.12, cit. 2.

⁴⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.44, cit., p. 269, l. 1483-87: «Hoc autem idem sacramentum in tribus causis mihi offerendum est. Quomodo? In pane, et uino et aqua, ob honorem Trinitatis. Vnde si de his tribus aliquid defuerit, tunc ibi Trinitas ueraciter non colitur; quoniam in uino intellegitur Pater, in pane Filius et in aqua Spirtus Sanctus».

⁵⁰ According to Salvadori, this is a sign of God's help to us. The same descending of light and the shape of the cloud also appear in other illustrations, representing God's help: S, Salvadori, *A Journey into the Images*, cit., pp. 122, 129. Campbell interprets the green color as a symbol of the life that the obelion gives its receivers: N. Campbell, «*Imago expandit splendorem suum*», cit., p. 45.

⁵¹ Fleiss also explains that the crucifixion in the centre of Vision II.6: H. Feiss, «Hildegard's Vision of the Eucharist (*Scivias* 2.6)», cit., p. 183.

while in the lower scene, it is a secondary subject depicted in framed ‘mirrors’. Sara Salvadori claims that the different background colors in figure 1 present a hierarchy: the superior gold background signifies the space in which God acts, while the blue signifies the spaces of man and the celestial spirits⁵². I would like to suggest another hierarchy related to the gold color, a hierarchy between the two illustrations.

The background of figure 2 is completely gold, the same color as Ecclesia in figure 1. This might suggest that the second illustration takes place inside Ecclesia, which is consistent with the meaning of the illustrations. The celebrations of the Eucharist in figure 2 take place in churches – in Ecclesia – with the members of the church. Consequently, figure 1 presents the general context of the events in figure 2. The upper scene in figure 2 is superior to the bottom one, which is the inferior scene of the four scenes in these illustrations. The moral superiority of the priest over the community is explained repeatedly in the commentary⁵³. The two scenes are completely separated by two thick lines, emphasizing the distinction of the priest.

There is also a hierarchical relationship within each of the scenes. In the upper scene of figure 1, between Ecclesia and the divine hand; in the bottom scene, between Ecclesia and the events from Christ’s life. In the upper scene of figure 2, there is a hierarchical relationship between the priest and the angels, while the bottom scene depicts a hierarchy between believers based on their moral level. With the exception of the bottom scene in figure 2, all the hierarchical elements are connected to God’s sacrifice, depicted as a cross or an altar⁵⁴. In addition, several details in the scenes cross over into the frame, indicating that they are of a higher hierarchical level: the altar at the bottom of figure 1, the shoes of Ecclesia in the upper scene and those of the priest in figure 2, and the hand of one of the gold-colored believers. The cross, the most superior detail, even exceeds the boundaries of the frame⁵⁵.

⁵² S. Salvadori, *A Journey into the Images*, cit., pp. 132-136. Campbell interprets the colors of the upper scene (silver, gold and blue) as a symbol of the Trinity by comparing it to other illustrations in the codex: N. Campbell, «*Imago expandit splendorem suum*», cit., p. 48.

⁵³ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* II, 6.66, pp. 283-84, l. 1975-88; see also 6.62-75: «illi qui idem sacrificum oblaturi sunt sine spurcitia pollutionum esse debent, se etiam continentes ab epulatione et ebrietate, a ioco et a risu atque a leuibus et incompositis moribus, [...]».

⁵⁴ I want to thank Yosef Schwartz for this comment.

⁵⁵ See also N. Campbell, «*Imago expandit splendorem suum*», cit., p. 48.

In addition to the visible elements that are depicted, other invisible elements are also present in the illustrations on an abstract level. God's sacrifice, in all its abstract meaning, is present, too invisible to be depicted. Likewise, the ritual of the Sacrament that viewers know from their life is also present; perhaps the illustrations and commentary of Vision II.6 will continue to be present in the viewers' mind as they attend their next Eucharist. Then, they would be reminded of the meaning of the sacrament and the importance of receiving it with pure faith. Lastly, perhaps Hildegard's vision is an invisible element that is present on an abstract level in the illustrations. Hildegard saw this invisible vision, as Ecclesia in the bottom scene sees Christ beyond the inner frame⁵⁶.

The two illustrations represent the complex relationship between the different levels of reality: the four scenes have a hierarchical, complementary and indistinguishable relationship, just as the one that exists between the visible and the invisible. A viewer with an appropriate state of mind is able to recognize these complex relationships through the details in the illustrations. Each type of relationship depends on different details. The two illustrations are a practical example of how invisible ideas may be conveyed through the senses.

Conclusions

Hildegard's *Scivias* presents a complex reaction to Augustine's theory of vision. Like Augustine, *Scivias* indicates that the senses can perceive only hints of the invisible, since the invisible is superior to nature. However, unlike Augustine, Vision VI in the second book of *Scivias* emphasizes how these hints are important to the perceiver. According to *Scivias*, these hints emerge because the invisible is identical to the visible and completes it; it is not merely superior to it. Accordingly, *Scivias* is structured around sensory experiences. The two illustrations of Vision II.6 are a practical example of visually conveying an abstract concept – that the invisible may be seen in visual objects.

⁵⁶ Saurma-Jeltsch also suggests this comparison between Ecclesia and Hildegard: L.E. Saurma-Jeltsch, *Die Miniaturen im «Liber scivias» der Hildegard von Bingen*, cit., p. 114.

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