

The St. Anselm Institute for Catholic Thought at UVA

***Voices of Truth in an Age of Corruption
St. Hildegard von Bingen and St. Catherine of Siena
October 27th, 2018***

Letters and Sermons

1. (1153) St. Hildegard writes to Cardinals Bernard and Gregory

Hildegard encourages these Cardinals, sent by the pope to censure Frederick's (improper) deposition of Bishop Heinrich

2. (1153-54) St. Hildegard to Pope Anastasius

3. (1152/53) St. Hildegard to King Frederick

4. (1156/58? Before 1163) Emperor Frederick to St. Hildegard

Frederick writes to acknowledge the truth of Hildegard's previous advice and prophecies.

5. (?) Hildegard to Emperor Frederick

6. (1160-61) St. Hildegard's sermon to Clerics at Trier

Hildegard chastises clerics for corruption and calls them to repentance.

7. (1376) St. Catherine to Pope Gregory in Avignon

Catherine enjoined Gregory to return to Rome quickly and without an army.

Extras

8. (1378) St. Catherine to Pope Gregory

9. (1379) St. Catherine to Italian Cardinals

Catherine enjoins support from her fellow Italian Cardinals who have turned on Pop Urban VI and will elect a second "Pope"

1. (1153) *St. Hildegard to Cardinals*

(Hildegard, of Bingen. *Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*,
1. Trans. J. L. Baird and R.K. Ehrman. Oxford
University Press, 1998.)

The Fountain of Waters cries out to you, his followers: In my powerful and eternal name, chastise and correct those wicked traitors and furtive opportunists who have been turned into lead through their twisted sins, those who are scattered from the north¹ through the iniquities of the devil, and who maliciously strike out at their superiors through their great wickedness. Therefore, cast them out of their pastoral seat, which bears the penalty of dogs.² For even though certain prelates walk in darkness because of the instability of their ways, it is still not proper for them to be cast down by subordinates.³

Therefore, look into these matters with a pure eye lest your own honor be tainted, for, in consequence, this reflects on Him, Who was, and is, upright and just in all His ways in all His servants and Who foresaw all these things before the foundation of time. May He who spurns neither the orphan nor the pauper make your eyes pure [cf. Ps 10.14], because you are the mountain of myrrh and incense [cf. Cant 4.6], towering over the valleys of the filthy pit. Therefore, listen to Him Who is always watchful with living eyes and Who is not wearied by storms, the storms that are the portion of those who are like idols [cf. Ps 10.7], as if they were gods in their prosperity. Yet since you wish to be honored like a great mountain in the King's palace, spread abroad the justice of the Most High for His glory. This is your proper task, because of your illustrious name.

Now, therefore, look to the Fiery Giver who endows mankind with discernment. What person can pit his voice against that which thundered above the heavens and overcame the abyss, ornamenting it with the covering of maternal fruitfulness? And what wings of the winds in their swiftness can outrun that voice? Mankind's voice, after all, cannot make a small feather fly so that no sword can move against it.⁴

Now you, O emulators of the Most High, the Living Fountain cries out these things to you, because it is not fitting for you to have the eyes of the blind nor even a trace of the morals of vipers and the thievery of brigands, stripping bare the altar of God. Why, therefore, are you doing this? But because you are doing so, you are not able to loosen the Lord's shoestring [cf. John 1.27]. Therefore, discipline yourselves.

Notes

1. Associated with Satan and the fallen angels through the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezechiel, north is always an evil direction in Hildegard's work, as in medieval thought generally.

2. Hildegard's phrase (*penam de canibus*) has an odd ring, but see Widukind, *Res Gestae Saxonicae* II.6, where the Saxon king imposes a penalty on certain military leaders: *dedecore canum, quos portabant usque ad urbem regiam quam vocitamus Magathaburg*, i.e., "the disgrace of dogs, which creatures they were required to carry all the way to the

royal city which we call Magdeburg.” We are indebted to Timothy Reuter for calling Widukind to our attention through E-mail from Munich.

3. Since we know that this letter concerns Heinrich, archbishop of Mainz, the sense of this enigmatic language seems to be that those churchmen clamoring for Heinrich’s ouster—since they, of course, would be Heinrich’s subordinates—should themselves be chastised and brought into line.

4. There is a problem of ambiguity here: Hildegard’s inattentive shifting from the one voice (God’s) to the other (mankind’s) renders the last sentence of the paragraph, at least on a first reading, meaningless. At least two scribes were troubled by the sense and sought to correct it, for two of the MSS add *potest* (“can it”) at the end. Hildegard apparently intended the “voice” in this last sentence to be mankind’s, not God’s as it would appear to be from the context. We have handled the problem by simply making explicit the seeming intention.

2. (1153-54) *St. Hildegard to Pope Anastasius*

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Hildegard to Pope Anastasius

1153–54

Anastasius was already in his eighties when he was chosen pope in 1153, elected on the very day of the death of his predecessor Eugenius. He himself died the very next year, in 1154, his period of office lasting from 12 July 1153 to 3 December 1154. The reason for Hildegard’s harshness toward this pope—at least, so one gathers from the scanty evidence available—is his reputation (probably undeserved) for coming to terms too easily with the emperor, and compromising away ecclesiastical privilege.

O you who are the estimable defense and the bulwark of a beautifully adorned city, which has been established as the bride of Christ, hear Him who is eternal and does not grow weary.

You, O man, who are too tired, in the eye of your knowledge, to rein in the pomposity of arrogance among those placed in your bosom, why do you not call back the shipwrecked who cannot rise from the depths without help? And why do you not cut off the root of evil which is choking out the good and beneficial plants of sweet taste and delightful aroma?¹ You are neglecting the King’s daughter who was entrusted to you, that is, heavenly Justice herself. You are allowing this King’s daughter to be thrown to the ground: her beautiful crown and tunic torn asunder by the crudeness of those hostile people who bark like dogs and who, like chickens trying to sing at night, raise up their ineffectual voices. They are charlatans, crying out, ostensibly, for peace, but, all the while, biting each other in their hearts, like a dog that wags its tail among those known to him, but bites the honorable knight indispensable to the king’s household. Why do you put up with depraved people who are

blinded by foolishness and who delight in harmful things, like a hen which cackles in the night and terrifies herself? Such people are completely useless.

Listen, therefore, O man, to the One who loves the power of discernment, so that He himself has established the great instrument of uprightness to fight against evil. But you are not exercising this faculty when you do not root out the evil which seeks to choke the good. Rather, you are allowing evil to raise itself up arrogantly; and you do this because of your fear of those wicked people who lie in wait in the night, and who love the money of death more than the King's beautiful daughter, Justice.

And yet all the works of God are resplendently bright. Hear, O man. For the heavenly Father, before the beginning of the world, intoned in his secret: O my son. And the sphere of the world arose, taking up this word intoned by the Father, while the various species of creatures still lay hidden in the darkness. In that same word that was written, "And God said: Let there be" [Gen 1. 6], the various kinds of creatures came forth. Thus through the word of the Father and because of the word of the Father all creatures were made by the will of the Father.

And God sees all things and foreknows all things. But evil, neither by rising nor falling, is able of itself to make anything or create anything or do anything, because it is nothing but a false choice, an opinion contrary to God's will, and it is through this wrong choice that one does evil.

But God sent his Son into the world, so that He might overcome the devil (who knew evil by embracing it, and made it desirable to mankind) and so that those who had perished through evil might be redeemed. Wherefore God rejects perverse works, like fornication, murder, theft, rebellion, tyranny, and the deceitfulness of sinful people, since He has crushed these things through the Son who has completely scattered the spoils of hell's tyrant.

Wherefore, O man, you who sit on the papal throne, you despise God when you embrace evil. For in failing to speak out against the evil of those in your company, you are certainly not rejecting evil. Rather, you are kissing it. And so the whole world is being led astray through unstable error, simply because people love that which God has cast down.

And you, O Rome, when you are lying at the point of death, you will be so shaken that the strength of your feet, upon which you have stood so far, will no longer sustain you. For you do not love the King's daughter, that is, Justice, with a blazing passion, but with a dull sloth, so that, in fact, you banish her from your presence. Indeed, she is ready to flee from you, if you do not call her back. Yet the high mountains² will offer help to you still, raising you up and supporting you with the branches of lofty trees, so that your nobility (that is, the majesty of your betrothal to Christ) will not be completely destroyed. Thus you will retain some vestiges of your beauty, until the snow of the morals of hostile derision comes, which ends in insanity. Beware, therefore, of becoming entangled in pagan rites, lest you fall.³ Now, hear Him who lives and will never die. The world is now lascivious, and will later become sad. Then will come such great terror that people will not care whether they are killed or not. In the midst of all this: times of wantonness, times of contrition,

times of the thunder and lightning of iniquity. For the eye rages, the nose robs,³ the mouth kills. Yet healing will come forth from the heart when the dawn appears like the splendor of the first sunrise. Those things which will follow in the new desire and the new fervor, however, must not be spoken now.⁴

But He who is great and without flaw has now touched a humble dwelling, so that it might see a miracle and form unknown letters and utter an unknown tongue. And this was said to that little habitation: You have written these things in a language given to you from above, rather than in ordinary human speech, since it was not revealed to you in that form, but let him who has the pumice stone not fail to polish it and make it intelligible to mankind.^{5b}

But, you, O man, since you are clearly the shepherd appointed by God, rise up and run quickly to Justice, so that you will not be accused before the great physician of failing to cleanse his sheepfold and of neglecting to anoint his flock with oil. Still, when a man's will has not consented to wrongdoing and when he himself has not been overwhelmed by desire, he will not be condemned absolutely. The flaw of ignorance can be cleansed by the lash.

Therefore, you, O man, stand on the strait path, and God will save you and bring you back into the abode of blessing and election, and you will live forever.

Notes

1. The image of the garden with fragrant plants is one of Hildegard's favorite tropes in the letters. Cf. *Scivias* I.ii.741ff.

2. Here, once again, *mountains* = *prelates*.

3. Van Acker's text actually reads "The nose tastes or has understanding" (*sapit*), a reading that ill-fits the context of violence here. We have translated "The nose robs" (*rapit*), which is the reading of two MSS—although, it must be admitted, the sense is scarcely improved.

4. Following Christ's own admonition (Acts 1.7), Hildegard regards some events in the salvation history to come, as well as some present mysteries, as forbidden to be revealed, at least completely, and warns against rash inquiry into things not to be searched out. See, for example, *Scivias* III.vii.474–80: "Anyone who searches out what God was before He created the world or what God will be after the last day will be cut off from his portion of the sacred communion, for such things are not to be known by a finite mortal weighed down with sins." See also *Scivias* III.x.171ff and III.xi.826ff.

5. This letter is cited in the *Vita* (II.i.14), but the writer apparently found this passage all too enigmatic and attempted to bring some clarity to it by adding "*in Latina lingua*."

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Hildegard to King Frederick

Before Pentecost 1153 (1152/53)

Hildegard harshly criticizes Frederick.¹

O king, it is imperative for you to have foresight in all your affairs. For in a mystic vision I see you like a little boy or some madman living before Living Eyes.² Yet you still have time for ruling over worldly matters. Beware, therefore, that the almighty King does not lay you low because of the blindness of your eyes, which fail to see correctly how to hold the rod of proper governance in your hand. See to it that you do not act in such a way that you lose the grace of God.

Note

1. Peter Dronke (*Women Writers*, 149) thinks that this letter was written “probably” as late as 1164, when Frederick had set up his second anti-pope.

4. (1156/ 58?) *Emperor Frederick to Hildegard*

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The Emperor Frederick to
Hildegard1156/58
(Before 1163)

In this famous letter, Frederick informs Hildegard that all those things she had predicted to him while she was present in his court at Ingelheim have since come true. Frederick also refers to a matter that Hildegard had submitted to his attention.

Frederick, by the grace of God Emperor of the Romans and always august, sends his grace and every good to the lady Hildegard of Bingen.

We inform you, holy lady, that we now have in hand those things you predicted to us when we invited you to our presence while we were holding court in Ingelheim.⁴ We will continue to strive with all our efforts for the honor of our kingdom. Therefore, beloved lady, we sincerely beseech you, and the sisters entrusted to your care, to pour out your prayers

to almighty God for us so that He may turn us to Himself as we labor on our earthly business and so that we may merit to obtain His grace.

Please be assured that with regard to that matter you directed to our attention we will be swayed by neither the friendship nor the hatred of any person, but we intend to judge with perfect equity.

5. (?) *St. Hildegard to Emperor Frederick*

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Hildegard to the Emperor Frederick

After April 1164(?) 1154–59(?)¹

Hildegard takes Frederick to task—harshly.

He Who Is says: By My own power, I do away with the obstinacy and rebellion of those who scorn Me. Woe, O woe to the evil of those wicked ones who spurn Me. Hear this, O king, if you wish to live. Otherwise, My sword will pierce you [cf. Ex 22.24].

Note

1. The two sets of dates here are the result of Klaes-Hachmüller's challenge of Van Acker's late dating. She thinks that the content and transmission history support the earlier range of years during the pontificate of Hadrian IV.

6. (1160) *St. Hildegard's sermon to the Clerics at Trier.*

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Hildegard to the Clerics

1160-61

In response to the provost's request, Hildegard sends the sermon she delivered at Trier, warning them of God's vengeance because of the corruption among the church officials. The sermon itself was delivered at Trier on the feast of Pentecost, 1160.

I, a poor little form of a woman with neither health, nor strength, nor courage, nor learning, a woman totally subordinate to my superiors,^a I heard these words from the mystical light of a true vision directed to the prelates and the clerics of Trier: The teachers and superiors refuse to blow the trumpet of God's justice. Therefore, the East of good works, which illumines the entire world and is, as it were, the mirror of light, has been extinguished in them. The East ought to have shone in them with the teaching that comprises various precepts, just as the sphere of the sun is

varying. Also, the South of virtues with its heat is as cold as winter in them, because good works kindled by the fiery Holy Spirit is not in them and because they have no viridity and are dry and withered. Moreover, the West of compassion has turned to the blackness of a hair-cloth sack [cf. Apoc 6.12], because they do not cherish the Passion of Christ by living well, Christ Who became human and, in His humility, covered over His divinity, just as, sometimes, the sun is covered from view.

But the North, along with the North wind, is active in them when every one of them acts according to his own will, a fact that will lead to the punishment of their souls, just as a garment of hair-cloth restrain the human body. For they do not rise with the East through good work, and they do not blaze with the heat of the sun, and they do not turn from evil with the West. Rather, with the North wind they hide their elves in the desires of their own hearts.

For this reason, the devil sends three black wind out of the North, winds that whistle mockingly. The first blows with pride and hatred against the East, and overwhelms it. The second blows against the South with forgetfulness of God. The third blows with faithlessness against the West. When the teachers and superiors imitated God by walking uprightly, the East so checked the North in them that it was not even able to rustle up a breeze; the South, with good works, burned the North out of them; and the West cast the Northern power into outer darkness. That was when those masters abandoned the world and their own will, and followed the Lamb [cf. Apoc 14.4]. Now, however, manly fortitude has degenerated into womanish weakness¹ which ought not to have to fight with manly strength, because man is the head^b [cf. I Cor 11.3; Eph 5.23]. This womanish time began under a certain tyrant,² from whom every evil came forth.

I learned in a true vision that often a head of the household, a mighty lord,³ makes clear his righteousness and power and potential to his sons and servants when they displease him by failing to observe his precepts, and, afterward, lifts the rod of correction over them, and scatters them according to the nature of their sins, saying "Where have you been, and why are you not mindful of me?" Likewise, I heard concerning the zeal of the Lord that God does not excuse, without vengeance, the failure to follow His precepts. For Adam turned aside from God's precepts, and, consequently, lost his celestial vision and his resplendent garment; and he was exiled into the land of misery [cf. Gen 3.23]. Also, through the zeal of the Lord, Cain was driven out because he killed his brother and spilled his blood [cf. Gen 4.8]. Many people have arisen from the sons of Adam who so far forgot God that they refused to recognize their own humanity, but lived shameful lives of sin like beasts. The sons of God were different, and they separated themselves from these people and their morals. From these, Noah was born. Then, the zeal of the Lord was lifted up, and "the Spirit of God moved over the waters" [Gen 1.2] and split the clouds and brought forth the waters of the flood [cf. Gen 7.10ff]. So the earth was cleansed from wicked sins and from the blood of Abel, which it had drunk.

For God did these things. And thus the ancient serpent's avaricious neck was crushed [cf. Gen 3.15], and the earth that had been violated with Abel's blood brought forth a new juice from the grapevine, and wisdom became active again.

But the devil mockingly committed a crime through the son of Noah, and, for this reason, the zeal of the Lord gave the sinner over to slavery and withdrew His blessing from him, handing sinners over to the curse of slavery [cf. Gen 9.18–27]. And so a new wisdom became active in heaven and earth. Then, the holy Trinity revealed a great work in Abraham by showing and foreshadowing obedience when Abraham left his homeland [cf. Gen 12.1–4] and circumcised himself [cf. Gen 17.23]. And in this obedience, he foreshadowed those about whom it is said: "Who are these, that fly as clouds?" [Is 60.8], and, in circumcision, he wounded and confounded the ancient serpent. The woman, on the other hand, echoed the foolishness of the first woman by her loud laughter [cf. Gen 18.12], but the Son of God was nevertheless prefigured in her fertility. For in the obedience of Abraham God commuted Adam's sin, and in his circumcision He wounded death, and in the fertility of a barren woman He foreshadowed that another woman would give birth to another son because, by His nativity, the Son of God fulfilled all that had been foreshadowed. God worked it out that Moses the lawgiver, building upon the rite of circumcision, gave the Law. But the children of Israel perverted God's commands, and perished among their idols and other sins. Once more, the zeal of the Lord arose and avenged these sins, inflicting His people with snake bites and other perils and with battles, so that many fell and died [cf. Num 21.6–9].

The zeal of the Lord will continue to purge the world in these ways until the end of time. But when God exercises His vengeance, He frequently announces it in advance through some person or another one of His creations, so that people have no excuse for their evil. Consequently, many frequently arise and do penance, just as was done through Jonah [cf. Jonah 3.1–10]. Thus God is praised by His friends and proclaimed by His enemies. For God has frequently touched the creation of His finger—that is, both men and women—to instill in them the power to make these kinds of revelation, as it is written, "And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" [Joel 2.28].

After God had foreshadowed what He intended to do, He remembered that He had said that He would crush the head of the serpent [cf. Gen 3.15]. Therefore, He suffused and filled a certain woman, that is, the Virgin, with obedience, chastity, and every good quality so that the pride that was in Eve withered away in her. For through the Holy Spirit this Virgin conceived the Son of God, and He proceeded miraculously, and came into the world to work miracles [cf. Matt 1.18–20; Luke 1.35]. Then, God ceased from that work which He had so far brought to pass through the flesh. And He granted to His Son the power to call all things of the flesh back into things of the spirit, because He is the flesh of

holiness which came forth through a nature foreign to itself, and which the cunning of the serpent never violated.^c

The Son of God irrigated the Old Law, when He, in baptism through faith and obedience and abstinence from carnal desires, made clear the way of holiness. He made this way of life clear, too, when He gave penitence to mankind, and when He confirmed all these things in the mortal body by His death, and, also, when He gave signs and miracles to His disciples, even as His Father had given them to Him. For because God appeared as man, He sent a new fire, accompanied with the thunder of His divinity, upon His disciples, a fire that had never been seen before. And the disciples were infused with new tongues of fire [cf. Acts 2.1-4] and with a new knowledge that taught mankind to live in accordance with the celestial harmony. Then the East blazed forth in its might, and the South burned in its heat; and neither did the West do harm, nor did the North revel with the North wind, because they were tempered by Christ's Passion, until there arose a certain tyrant from whose time every sort of wickedness, injustice, and sin has arisen. But even these evils have been destroyed by famine and plague, laid low by battles and wars, and purged by the pains of penitence.

Now, however, the law is neglected by spiritual people, who disdain to teach and do good works. Both the teachers and the prelates are asleep: they have abandoned justice. Therefore, I heard this voice from heaven, saying: O daughter of Sion, your crown will fall from your head, your cloak of increasing riches will shrink, your numbers will be forcibly reduced, and you will be banished from one place to another. Many cities and monasteries will be wrenched away by powerful individuals, and princes will say, "Let us take away from them that iniquity which, through them, is overwhelming the whole world." And I saw and I heard that all these dangers and griefs will befall regions and monasteries because they have turned aside from obedience and other precepts of the law. And I saw that even amidst sins of this kind there are some who will cling to God and will sigh unto Him, just as in the time of Elijah [cf. I Kings 18.18ff]. And because they have turned aside from evil, as Noah and Lot did, these people will be highly honored and will be regarded as a burnt offering to God [cf. Gen 6.8; 19.1ff].

This cleansing will have modest beginnings in this womanish time but later will grow stronger, until a manly time will arise, in which there will be wars and battles arising from God's righteous judgment. And more than half of this womanish time has already elapsed.^d Afterward, the justice and judgment of God will arise, and the people will know the discipline and fear of God. There will also be good and just individuals among the spiritual people, who, nevertheless, will remain few in numbers because of their humility, but who, like the hermits, will turn back to the first dawn. And they will do this out of fear for times past that, they will understand, had been pernicious to them. And, at that time, people will no longer cling to the foolishness of lasciviousness like children; they

will, however, be sad at heart concerning those unknown times which are still to come. Then, courageous men⁴ will arise and prophesy, and they will gather together all things old and new from the Scriptures and all that has been uttered through the Holy Spirit, and they will adorn their understanding of these things as if with a necklace set with precious jewels. Through their influence and that of other wise people, many of the laity will become virtuous and will live saintly lives.

This zeal for sanctity will not wither quickly, but will last for a long time, for all these things will come to pass because of that earlier degenerate time, and in this later time there will be many martyrs for the faith. For a "man of war" [Is 42.13] will accomplish these things, Who sees in them the beginning and end of His works; in this way, He reins in the errant people. For He established the prophets first to be the head, the wise to be the eyes, the teachers to be the mouth, just as all things came into being by the Word of God [cf. John 1.3]. And, then, because the rest of the body, that is, the faithful, will do good works, as I have said, God will place their head in His lap, that is to say, He will reveal the meaning of prophecy to them. Then, princes will turn their harps and drums into sounds of sorrow, just as the sons of Israel had done when they were led into captivity [cf. Ps 136.2-3].

After these things take place, all things spiritual will be strengthened, with no weariness or flaw, and people will look into the eye of the Living Book. Then strength and courage and health will return to the people, because the "man of war" will fill the air with health and will bring forth the viridity of virtues, so that the faithful will not grow weak in body and spirit in this wayward time. That era will last until a wayward time when the faithful will rush to death as if to a feast. And this time of error will endure in this fashion until in His zeal God graciously and compassionately dispels it.

During all these times, the Gardener will cast unwholesome weeds out of His garden and will gather unto Himself all the wholesome plants, just as it is written: "The Lord is the God to whom revenge belongeth: the God of revenge hath acted freely" [Ps 93.1]. Here is the meaning of this verse: In His zeal God crushes the head of all iniquity [cf. Gen 3.15] and brings it down, because all iniquity is of the devil, who is buried in hell. He is "the God of revenge" because He has not looked upon, or regarded, anything that requires either addition or subtraction, for He distributes, establishes, and brings into being each and everything in Himself. And He has acted freely in this way because He alone is just and good, and is greatly to be feared in all His judgments. God takes vengeance on those who are lost because they turned aside from the good, and so He condemns them with the devil. But He willingly bends His head to many who have suffered grief and freely raises them up again to become like the pillars of heaven because of their good works, just as He turned many publicans and sinners into saints.

Then, the devil, raising himself up in his lost son, seeks to fly on the wings of the winds.^e But God arranges all things in Himself as He wishes,

for no one can overcome Him, and He dispels all the devil's might, just as a craftsman destroys all useless material; and in His zeal He extends His hand, just as He did when He cast Satan into the abyss in the first fall. Therefore, just as a snake enters its hole, the devil hides away in the abyss, and will never again raise himself, because he is now totally deceived. Afterward, divinity, unperceived by all creation, will be active, because no human being knows when the world will be cleansed by fire [cf. II Peter 3.10].

I saw that Trier at first was adorned among the faithful with the new fire that appeared to the disciples in tongues of fire [cf. Acts 2.1–4], so that in its golden faith all its streets were spread with miracles. But now it is hedged in by unstable, squalid morals and with weariness as if it did not know God, and it has been polluted with many other evils. It has become worn out with weariness and no longer enjoys the joy and beauty of its original, honorable institutions. It has become heedless of its many sins. Therefore, fiery vengeance will come upon it from its enemies, unless those sins are wiped out by penitence, as happened in the case of Jonah [cf. Jonah 2–3].

Notes

1. Cf. Hildegard's usual denunciation of her age as a fickle, womanish time. See Vol. I, "Introduction," p. 13, and Letter 23, n. 3.
2. Henry IV. See "Introduction," Vol. I, pp. 10–11, 13.
3. Van Acker's use of a capitalized *Dominus* indicates his feeling that God is the reference here, but the context appears to suggest that an earthly lord is intended.
4. *Viri*, not *homines*, that is, men, not people.

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A Priest to Hildegard

Before 1173

After praising her as one of those unlettered individuals who receive divine inspiration as witnessed in the Bible, the priest asks for the consolation of Hildegard's prayers.

To the holy virgin of God, Hildegard, the venerable bride of Jesus Christ, B., by God's grace a priest, of whatever worth, in the church at Trier, although unworthy to hold any priestly office, offers himself in service. Although I only rarely see you with my eyes, still that wondrous

7. (1376) *St. Catherine to Pope Gregory XI, in Avignon*

§

In the name of Christ crucified and of gentle Mary.

Revered father in Christ gentle Jesus,

I Caterina, your unworthy daughter, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, am writing to you in his precious blood. I long to see you a courageous man, free of slavish fear, learning from the good gentle Jesus, whose vicar you are. Such was his boundless love for us that he ran to the shameful death of the cross heedless of torment, shame, insult, and outrage. He suffered them all, totally free of fear, such was his hungry desire for the Father's honor and our salvation. For love had made him completely let go of himself, humanly speaking.

Now this is just what I want you to do, father. Let go of yourself wherever selfish love is concerned. Do not love yourself selfishly, nor others selfishly, but love yourself and your neighbors for God's sake and God for his own sake, since he is worthy of love, and since he is supreme eternal good. Take as your example this slain Lamb, for the blood of this Lamb will give you courage for every battle. In the blood you will lose all fear, and you will become a good shepherd who will lay down your life for your little sheep.

Up then, father; don't sit still any longer! Fire yourself with tremendous desire, expecting divine help and providence. For it seems to me that divine Goodness is about to turn the great wolves into lambs. This is why I am coming there soon, to lay them in your lap, humbled. I am certain that you, as their father, will receive them in spite of their persecution and injustice against you. You will learn from gentle First Truth, who says that the good shepherd, once he has found the little lost sheep, will put it on his shoulders and take it back to the fold.⁴ So do that, father. Once your little lost sheep has been found, take it on love's shoulders and put it in the fold of holy Church. And right after that our gentle Savior wants and commands you to raise the standard of the most holy cross over the unbelievers, and let this whole war be picked up and directed against them. As for the soldiers you have hired to come here, hold them back and don't let them come, for they would ruin everything instead of setting things right.⁵

My dear father, you ask me about your coming.⁶ I answer you in the

⁴ Cf. Lk. 15, 5.

⁵ Catherine must, therefore, have had some notice, perhaps from her disciples already in Avignon, of Gregory's military intentions. Since, however, the papal troops set out on 27 May, the deed would be done before Catherine's letter could reach the pope.

⁶ None of Gregory's communications with Catherine is extant, but here as elsewhere

name of Christ crucified: come as soon as you can. If you can, come before September, and if you cannot come earlier, don't delay beyond the end of September. Pay no attention to any opposition, but like a courageous and fearless man, come! And, as you value your life, see that you don't come with an army, but with the cross in your hand, as a meek lamb. If you do, you will fulfill God's will. But if you come in any other way you will be violating that will rather than fulfilling it. Be glad, father! Be jubilant! Come! Come!

I'll say no more. Keep living in God's holy and tender love.

Gentle Jesus! Jesus love!

Pardon me, father. I humbly ask your dear blessing.

one can have some idea of their import from the tenor of Catherine's response. September is the date Gregory himself had set early in 1376 for his return to Rome. She wants him to come earlier, if possible.

8. (1397-98) *St. Catherine to Pope Gregory*

TO GREGORY XI

Written between Sept 1397 and Jan. 1398

THERE is no evidence as to the date of this letter, but the tone is such that Catherine's latest editor is probably right in placing it after the return of the Pope to Italy. It suggests that a long relation is drawing to a close, and closing, so far as Catherine is concerned, in disappointment. Never, in her earlier relations with Gregory, would she have gone such lengths as here, in her amazing hint that he would better resign the Papacy if he finds himself unable to sustain the moral burdens it imposes. The Pope is at Rome, but he has changed his sky and not his mind. Catherine's letter is a brief and powerful summary of oft-reiterated pleas. In the solemnity and authority of its adjurations, in the distinctness of its accusations, it is surely one of the most surprising epistles ever written by a devout and wholly faithful subject to her acknowledged head. Such a letter proceeds, indeed, from a spiritual region where all earthly distinctions—ecclesiastical as well as intellectual or social—are lost to sight, and the illiterate daughter of the dyer can rebuke and exhort as by her natural right him whom with unwavering faith she believed to be the God-appointed father of all Christian people. Catherine's patience, one feels, is near the breaking point: and heart-break for her is in truth not many years away.

In the Name of Jesus Christ crucified
and of sweet Mary :

Most holy and sweet father, your poor unworthy daughter Catherine in Christ sweet Jesus, commends herself to you

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in His precious Blood : with desire to see you a manly man, free from any fear or fleshly love toward yourself, or toward any creature related to you in the flesh ; since I perceive in the sweet Presence of God that nothing so hinders your holy, good desire and so serves to hinder the honour of God and the exaltation and reform of Holy Church, as this. Therefore, my soul desires with immeasurable love that God by His infinite mercy may take from you all passion and lukewarmness of heart, and re-form you another man, by forming in you anew a burning and ardent desire ; for in no other way could you fulfil the will of God and the desire of His servants. Alas, alas, sweetest “ Babbo ” mine, pardon my presumption in what I have said to you and am saying ; I am constrained by the Sweet Primal Truth to say it. His will, father, is this, and thus demands of you. It demands that you execute justice on the abundance of many iniquities committed by those who are fed and pastured in the garden of Holy Church ; declaring that brutes should not be fed with the food of men. Since He has given you authority and you have assumed it, you should use your virtue and power : and if you are not willing to use it, it would be better for you to resign what you have assumed ; more honour to God and health to your soul would it be.

Another demand that His will makes is this : He wills that you make peace with all Tuscany, with which you are at strife ; securing from all your wicked sons who have rebelled against you whatever is possible to secure without war—but punishing them as a father ought to punish a son who has wronged him. Moreover, the sweet goodness of God demands from you that you give full authority to those who ask you to make ready for the Holy Crusade—that thing which appears impossible to you, and possible to the sweet goodness of God, who has ordained it, and wills that so it be. Beware, as you hold your life dear, that you commit no negligence

in this, nor treat as jests the works of the Holy Spirit, which are demanded from you because you can do them. If you want justice, you can execute it. You can have peace, withdrawing from the perverse pomps and delights of the world, preserving only the honour of God and the due of Holy Church. Authority also you have to give peace to those who ask you for it. Then, since you are not poor but rich—you who bear in your hand the keys of Heaven, to whom you open it is open, and to whom you shut it is shut—if you do not do this, you would be rebuked by God. I, if I were in your place, should fear lest divine judgment come upon me. Therefore I beg you most gently on behalf of Christ crucified to be obedient to the will of God, for I know that you want and desire no other thing than to do His will, that this sharp rebuke fall not upon you : “Cursed be thou, for the time and the strength entrusted to thee thou hast not used.” I believe, father, by the goodness of God, and also taking hope from your holiness, that you will so act that this will not fall upon you.

I say no more. Pardon me, pardon me ; for the great love which I bear to your salvation, and my great grief when I see the contrary, makes me speak so. Willingly would I have said it to your own person, fully to unburden my conscience. When it shall please your Holiness that I come to you, I will come willingly. So do that I may not appeal to Christ crucified from you ; for to no other can I appeal, for there is no greater on earth. Remain in the holy and sweet grace of God. I ask you humbly for your benediction. Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love.

7. (1379) *St. Catherine to Italian Cardinals*

In the Name of Jesus Christ crucified
and of sweet Mary :

Dearest brothers and fathers in Christ sweet Jesus : I Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, write to you in His precious Blood : with desire to see you turn back to the true and most perfect light, leaving the deep shadows of blindness into which you are fallen. Then you shall be fathers to me ; otherwise not. Yes, indeed, I call you fathers in so far as you shall leave death and turn back to life (for, as things go now, you are parted from the life of grace, limbs cut off from your head from which you drew life), when you shall stand united in faith, and in that perfect obedience to Pope Urban VI., in which those abide who have the light, and in light know the truth, and knowing it love it. For the thing that is not seen cannot be known, and he who knows not loves not, and he who loves not and fears not his Creator loves himself with fleshly love, and whatever he loves, joys or honours and dignities of the world, he loves according to the flesh. Since man is created through love, he cannot live without love ; either he loves God, or he loves himself and the world with the love that kills, fastening the eye of his mind darkened by self-love on those transitory things that pass like the wind. In this state he can recognize no truth nor goodness ; he recognizes naught but falsehood, because he has not light. For truly had he the light, he would recognize that from such a love as this naught can result but pain and eternal death. It gives him a foretaste of

hell in this life; for he who immoderately loves himself and the things of this world, becomes unendurable to himself.

Oh, human blindness! Seest thou not, unfortunate man, that thou thinkest to love things firm and stable, joyous things, good and fair? and they are mutable, the sum of wretchedness, hideous, and without any goodness; not as they are created things in themselves, since all are created by God, who is perfectly good, but through the nature of him who possesses them intemperately. How mutable are the riches and honours of the world in him who possesses them without God, without the fear of Him! for to-day is he rich and great, and to-day he is poor. How hideous is our bodily life, that living we shed stench from every part of our body! Simply a sack of dung, the food for worms, the food of death! Our life and the beauty of youth pass by, like the beauty of the flower when it is gathered from the plant. There is none who can save this beauty, none who can preserve it, that it be not taken, when it shall please the highest Judge to gather this flower of life by death; and none knows when.

Oh, wretched man, the darkness of self-love does not let thee know this truth. For didst thou know it, thou wouldst choose any pain rather than guide thy life in this way; thou wouldst give thee to loving and desiring Him who Is; thou wouldst enjoy His truth in firmness, and wouldst not move about like a leaf in the wind; thou wouldst serve thy Creator, and wouldst love everything in Him, and apart from Him nothing. Oh, how will this blindness be reprov'd at the last moment in every rational being, and much the more in those whom God has taken from the filth of the world, and assigned to the greatest excellence that can be, having made them ministers of the Blood of the humble and spotless Lamb! Oh me, oh me! what have you come to by not having followed up your dignities with virtue? You were placed to nourish you at the breasts of Holy Church; you were flowers

planted to breathe forth the fragrance of virtue in that garden; you were placed as masts to strengthen this ship, and the Vicar of Christ on earth; you were placed as lights in a candlestick, to give light to faithful Christians, and to spread the faith. Well you know if you have done that for which you were created. Surely no; for self-love has prevented you from knowing that in truth alone, to fortify men and give a shining example of good and holy life, you were put in this garden. Had you known this you would have loved it, and clothed you in that sweet truth. Where is the gratitude which you ought to have for the Bride who has nourished you at her breast? I see in us naught but such ingratitude as dries up the fountain of pity. What shows me that you are ungrateful, coarse, and mercenary? The persecution which you, together with others, are inflicting on that sweet Bride, at a time when you ought to be shields, to ward off the blows of heresy. In spite of which, you clearly know the truth, that Pope Urban VI. is truly Pope, the highest Pontiff, chosen in orderly election, not influenced by fear, truly rather by divine inspiration than by your human industry. And so you announced it to us, which was the truth. Now you have turned your backs, like poor mean knights; your shadow has made you afraid. You have divided you from the truth which strengthens us, and drawn close to falsehood, which weakens soul and body, depriving you of temporal and spiritual grace. What made you do this? The poison of self-love, which has infected the world. That is what has made you pillars lighter than straw. Flowers you who shed no perfume, but stench that makes the whole world reek! No lights you placed in a candlestick, that you might spread the faith; but, having hidden your light under the bushel of pride, and become not extenders, but contaminators of the faith, you shed darkness over yourselves and others. You should have been angels on earth, placed to release us from the devils of

hell, and performing the office of angels, by bringing back the sheep into the obedience of Holy Church, and you have taken the office of devils. That evil which you have in yourselves you wish to infect us with, withdrawing us from obedience to Christ on earth, and leading us into obedience to antichrist, a member of the devil, as you are too, so long as you shall abide in this heresy.

This is not the kind of blindness that springs from ignorance. It has not happened to you because people have reported one thing to you while another is so. No, for you know what the truth is : it was you who announced it to us, and not we to you. Oh, how mad you are ! For you told us the truth, and you want yourselves to taste a lie ! Now you want to corrupt this truth, and make us see the opposite, saying that you chose Pope Urban from fear, which is not so ; but anyone who says it — speaking to you without reverence, because you have deprived yourselves of reverence—lies up to his eyes. For it is evident to anyone who wished to see, who it is that you presented as your choice through fear—that was Messer di Santo Pietro. You might say to me, “ Why do you not believe us ? We know the truth as to whom we chose better than you.” And I reply, that you yourselves have shown me that you deserted the truth in many ways, so that I ought not to believe you, that Pope Urban VI. is not the true Pope. If I turn to the beginnings of your life, I do not recognize in you so good and holy a life that you would shrink from a lie for conscience’ sake. What shows me that your life is badly governed ? The poison of heresy. If I turn to the election ordained by your lips, we knew that you chose him canonically and not through fear. We have already said that he whom you presented to the people through fear was Messer di Santo Pietro. What proves to me the regular election with which you chose Messer Bartolommeo, Archbishop of Bari, who to-day is made in truth Pope Urban VI. ?

In the solemnity with which his coronation was observed, this truth is clear to us. That the solemnity was carried out in good faith is shown by the reverence which you gave him and the favours asked from him, which you have used in all sorts of ways. You cannot deny this truth except with plain lies.

Ah, foolish men, worthy of a thousand deaths! As blind, you do not see your own wrong, and have fallen into such confusion that you make of your own selves liars and idolaters. For even were it true (which it is not; nay, I assert again that Pope Urban VI. is the true Pope), but were it true what you say, would you not have lied to us when you told us that he was the highest pontiff, as he is? And would you not falsely have shown him reverence, adoring him for Christ on earth? And would you not have practised simony, in trying for favours and using them unlawfully? Yes, indeed. Now they, and you with them, have made an antipope, as far as your action and outward appearance go, since you consented to remain on the spot, when the incarnate demons chose the demon!

You might say to me: "No, we did not choose him." I do not know how I can believe that. For I do not believe that you could have borne to stay there otherwise, had you given your life for it; at least the fact that you suppressed the truth, and did not burst out with it—for this would not have been within your power—makes me inclined to think so. Although, perhaps, you did less wrong than the others in your intention, yet you did do wrong with all the rest. What can I say? I can say that he who is not for the truth is against the truth; he who was not at that time for Christ on earth, Pope Urban VI., was against him. Therefore I tell you that you did wrong, with the antipope: and I may say that he was chosen a member of the devil; for had he been a member of Christ, he would have chosen death rather than consent to so great an evil, for he well knows the truth, and cannot excuse himself through ignorance. Now you have

committed all these faults in regard to this devil : that is, to confess him as Pope, which he surely is not, and to show reverence to whom you should not. You have deserted the light, and gone into darkness : the truth, and joined you to a lie. On what side soever, I find nothing but lies. You are worthy of torture, which, I tell you in truth and unburden my conscience thereof, unless you return to obedience with true humility, will fall upon you.

O misery upon misery, and blindness upon blindness, which does not let its wrong be seen nor the loss to soul and body ! For had you seen it, you would not have deserted the truth so lightly, in servile fear, passionate all, like proud people and arbitrary, accustomed to pleasant and soft dealings from men ! You could not endure, not only an actual correction indeed, but even a harsh word of reproof made you lift up rebellious heads. This is the reason why you changed. And it clearly reveals the truth to us ; for, before Christ on earth began to sting you, you confessed him and revered him as the Vicar of Christ that he is. But this last fruit that you bear, which brings forth death, shows what kind of trees you are ; and that your tree is planted in the earth of pride, which springs from the self-love that robs you of the light of reason.

Oh me, no more thus for the love of God ! Take refuge in humbling you beneath the mighty hand of God, in obedience to His Vicar, while you have time ; for when the time is passed there will be no more help for us. Recognize your faults, that you may be humble, and know the infinite goodness of God, who has not commanded the earth to swallow you up, nor beasts to devour you ; nay, but has given you time, that you may correct your soul. But if you shall not recognize this, what He has given you as a grace shall turn to your great judgment. But if you will return to the fold, and feed in truth at the breast of the Bride of Christ, you shall be received in mercy, by Christ in heaven and by Christ on earth, despite

the iniquity you have wrought. I beg that you delay no more, nor kick against the prick of conscience that I know is perpetually stabbing you. And let not confusion of mind, over the evil that you have wrought, so overcome you, that you abandon your salvation in weariness and despair, as seeming unable to find help. Not so must you do; but in living faith, hold firm hope in your Creator, and return humbly to your yoke; for the last sin of obstinacy and despair would be the worst, and most hateful to God and the world. Arise, then, into the light! For without light you would walk in darkness, as you have done up to now.

My soul considering this, that we can neither know nor love the truth without light, I said and say that I desire intensely to see you arisen from darkness, and one with the light. This desire reaches out to all rational beings, but much more to you three, concerning whom I have had the greatest sorrow, and marvel more at your fault than at all the others who have shared it. For did all desert their father, you should have been such sons as strengthened the father, showing the truth. Notwithstanding that the father might have treated you with nothing but reproof, you ought not therefore to have assumed the lead, denying his holiness in any way. Speaking entirely in the natural sense—for according to virtue we ought all to be equal—speaking humanly, Christ on earth being an Italian, and you Italian, I see no reason but self-love why passion for your country could not move you as it did the Ultramontanes. Cast it to earth now, and do not wait for time, since time does not wait for you—trampling such selfishness underfoot, with hate of vice and love of virtue.

Return, return, and wait not for the rod of justice, since we cannot escape the hands of God! We are in His hands either by justice or by mercy; better it is for us to recognize our faults and to abide in the hands of mercy, than to remain in fault and in the hands of justice. For our faults do not pass

unpunished, especially those that are wrought against Holy Church. But I wish to bind myself to bear you before God with tears and continual prayer, and to bear with you your penitence, provided that you choose to return to your father, who like a true father awaits you with the open wings of mercy. Oh me, oh me, avoid and flee it not, but humbly receive it, and do not believe evil counsellors who have given you over to death! Oh me, sweet brothers! Sweet brothers and fathers you shall be to me, in so far as you draw close to truth. Make no more resistance to the tears and sweats which the servants of God shed for you, but wash you in them from head to foot. For did you despise them, and the eager sweet and grieving desires which are offered by them for you, you would receive much greater rebuke. Fear God, and His true judgment. I hope by His infinite goodness that He will fulfil in you the desire of His servants.

Let it not seem hard to you if I pierce you with the words which the love of your salvation has made me write: rather would I pierce you with my living voice, did God permit me. His will be done. And yet you deserve rather deeds than words. I come to an end, and say no more; for did I follow my will I should not yet pause, so full is my soul of grief and sorrow to see such blindness in those who were placed for a light: no lambs they, who feed on the food of the honour of God and the salvation of souls, and the reform of Holy Church; but as thieves they steal the honour which they ought to give to God, and give it to themselves, and as wolves they devour the sheep, so that I have great bitterness. I beg you by love of that precious Blood shed with such fiery love for you, that you give refreshment to my soul, which seeks your salvation. I say no more to you. Remain in the holy and sweet grace of God: bathe you in the Blood of the Spotless Lamb, where you shall lose all servile fear, and enlightened, you shall abide in holy fear. Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love.