

Has Hildegard made the cut for saint and Doctor of the Church?

Jamie Manson | Dec. 21, 2011 NCR Today

There is a story floating around in small but very knowledgeable circles that Pope Benedict XVI will canonize Hildegard von Bingen at a ceremony in October 2012. Word has it that he also plans to name her a Doctor of the Church at the ceremony.

There are 33 Doctors of the Church. As of now, only three are women. (I'll save you a Google: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena and Therese of Lisieux.)

The story [came initially from Andrea Torielli at the *Vatican Insider*](#) [1] on Dec. 16. Rome Reports also picked up the story and [posted a brief video on saint-to-be](#) [2].

Hildegard lived in the 12th century in what is modern-day Germany. She was a theologian, cosmologist, physician, botanist, poet, painter, composer and, last but not least, mystic. She is considered a pioneer in many of these fields.

Hildegard's cause for sainthood was actually opened in 1233, 54 years after her death. But she was never formally canonized.

Tornielli reports that Benedict has long felt connected to Hildegard and cites her as an example of a great woman theologian. Rome Reports writes that Benedict dedicated several of his general audiences to this German nun, saying, intriguingly, that she "served the church in an age in which it was wounded by the sins of priests and laity."

What seems to elude these reports is that Hildegard was also a powerful abbess during a time when, according to scholar Gary Macy, "abbesses were powerful and acted independently not only of the papacy, but also of the local bishop." She even had a male secretary named Volmar.

Benedict has dedicated several of his recent audiences to Hildegard, focusing particularly on Hildegard's understanding of the mystical marriage between God and humanity.

But surely it has not eluded Benedict, a great German theologian himself, that Hildegard is a hero of many feminist theologians. This fact alone is cause to wonder how much of Tornielli's report is based in reality and how much is the product of speculation.

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Links:

[1] <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/documents/detail/articolo/ildegarda-bingen-mistici-mysticos-10825/>

[2] <http://www.romereports.com/palio/pope-to-canonize-and-name-hildegard-of-bingen-as-doctor-of-the-church-english-5666.html>