

## **Hildegard of Bingen: letter sent in 1179 to the Prelates of Mainz**

*In the absence of the bishop detained in Rome by a council, the prelates of the archbishopric censored the convent at Rupertsberg, placing it under interdict (that is forbidding there the celebration of all worship and the ministration of sacraments). This measure amounted to the exclusion of the nuns from the Christian realm. The prelates blamed them for allowing the burial in their graveyard of a nobleman who had been publicly excommunicated and who as such was not, in their view, entitled to rest in holy ground. However this nobleman had been reconciled to the church before his death. Hildegard refused to exhume the body. In the name of what she perceived as God's (higher) desire, she was prepared to disobey the (lesser) wishes of churchmen.*

“By a vision, which was implanted in my soul by God the Great Artisan before I was born, I have been compelled to write these things because of the interdict by which our superiors have bound us, on account of the certain dead man buried at our monastery, a man buried without any objection, with his own priest officiating. Yet only a few days after his burial, these men ordered us to remove him from our cemetery. Seized by no small terror, as a result, I looked as usual to the True Light, and, with wakeful eyes, I saw in my spirit that if this man were disinterred in accordance with their commands, a terrible and lamentable danger would come upon us like a dark cloud before a threatening thunderstorm.

Therefore, we have not presumed to remove the body of the deceased inasmuch as he had confessed his sins, had received extreme unction and communion, and had been buried without objection. Furthermore, we have not yielded to those who advised or even commanded this course of action. Not certainly, that we take the counsel of upright men or the orders of our superiors lightly, but we would not have it appear that, out of feminine harshness we did injustice to the sacraments of Christ, with which this man had been fortified while he was still alive. But so that we may not be totally disobedient we have, in accordance with their injunction, ceased from singing the divine praises and from participation in Mass, as had been our regular monthly custom.

[...]

. And so God has commanded me to report these things to you, our lords and prelates. Further, I saw in my vision also that by obeying you we have been celebrating the divine office incorrectly, for from the time of your restriction up to the present, we have ceased to sing the divine office, merely reading it instead. And I heard a voice coming from the Living Light concerning the various kinds of praises, about which David speaks in the psalm: “Praise Him with sound of trumpet: praise Him with psaltery and harp,” and so forth up to this point: “Let every spirit praise the Lord.” (Ps 150.3-5) These words use outward, visible things to teach us about inward things. Thus the material composition and the quality of these instruments instruct us how we ought to give form to the praise of the Creator and turn all the convictions of our inner being to the same.

[...]

Therefore, you and all prelates must exercise the greatest vigilance to clear the air by full and thorough discussion of the justification for such actions before your verdict closes the mouth of any church singing praises to God or suspends it from handling or receiving the divine sacraments. And you must be especially certain that you are drawn to this action out of zeal for God's justice, rather than out of indignation, unjust emotions, or a desire for revenge,

and you must always be on your guard not to be circumvented in your decisions by n, who drove man from celestial harmony and the delights of paradise.

[....]

Therefore, those who, without just cause, impose silence on a church and prohibit the singing of God's praises and those who have on earth unjustly despoiled God of His honor and glory will lose their place among the chorus of angels, unless they have amended their lives through true penitence and humble restitution.

Source : Letter 72, *The Personal Correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen*, Ed. Joseph L. Baird, Oxford University Press, USA, 2006