An In-Depth Look at the Original Production of *Ordo Virtutum* by Hildegard of Bingen

“Daughters of Israel, God raised you from beneath the tree, so now remember how it was planted.” –Humility from *Ordo Virtutum*

Introduction

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was a German abbess in medieval times. She has been a saint of the Catholic church only since 2012, but she was a genius of her time. A woman of many talents, she was a composer, a theologian, an early scientist, writer, and so on. In her lifetime, she only wrote one play, *Ordo Virtutum* (or *The Order of the Virtues*), which was performed in 1152. This project sought to seek as much information as possible on why she created this play and its place in the history of theatre.

Methodology

Finding out what I needed to know was fairly straightforward: read and make conclusions from those readings. Thirteen sources were used for this project. This included biographies on Hildegard of Bingen’s life, other research written on medieval theatre, and an English translation of the original text.

Major Conclusions

• There is a strong possibility that this was the first performance of a play written by a woman with a cast of women in Western theatre history.

• The performance of this work gave Hildegard a loophole to preach in the Christian church where women weren’t allowed to.

• *Ordo Virtutum* gives present readers a greater understanding of what Christians valued in the 12th century, particularly with its emphasis on humility and the virtue of contempt for the world.

• This play provided closure for the qualms Hildegard had with her close friend Richardis of Stade.

• This play marks the transition between the writing of morality plays from liturgical dramas. The plot is structured like a morality play, but the form it’s written in more closely resembles a liturgical play. It’s essentially a morality play written like a liturgical drama.