

Hildegard von Bingen German Philosopher
1098 - 1179

from The Solutiones
one of her last works
translated from Latin to English by
Question 1

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How should that which is read *He who lives into eternity created all things at the same time* be understood when it is told that God distributed his works over six days?*

*Sir 18:1;
Gen 1:31

SOLUTION

Almighty God, who is life without beginning and without end and who has held all things eternally in his knowledge, *created at the same time* the matter of all celestial and terrestrial things, namely, heaven, the lightsome matter, and the earth, which was turbulent matter. But that lightsome matter, from the brightness that is eternity, was glistening as dense light that was shining even above the turbulent matter, in that it was joined to it.¹ Those two matters were created at the same time, and² they appeared³ as one circle. For at the very first *Fiat*, the angels came forth from the aforesaid lightsome matter, along with their habitation.⁴ Because God is God and human, God created angels before the face of the Father, and God formed in his own likeness and image the human, whose clothing he was to don. Thus also, at the command of almighty God, when God said "*Let it be made,*" every

¹ Hildegard uses different words for the effects of light in this passage: *lucidus*, -a, -um (*lucida materia*); *claritas*; *lux* (*spissa lux*); *fulmino*, -are; and *luceo*, -ere.

² R (Riesenkodex) fol. 382^{ra} reads *et*, but PL 197:1040B reads *ut*.

³ PL 197:1040B reads *apparuerint*, subjunctive, in accord with the *ut*. I read *apparuerunt*, in accord with a reading of *et*.

⁴ See *Cause* 1.19, l. 8.

creature whatsoever appeared from the turbulent matter according to the likeness of its own nature. For the six days are six works because the inception and the completion of each single work are called one day.⁵ After creation, there was no delay for the primal matter, but soon, as if in the blink of an eye, *The Spirit of the Lord was borne above the waters*;⁶ nor was there any delay afterward, for God said immediately, "*Let there be light.*"⁷

*Gen 1:2-3

⁵ Hildegard develops the theme of the six days of creation and its relationship to the six ages of humankind in her other works. She, like other theologians of her time and other eras, follows Augustine of Hippo's *City of God* in her discussion of the six ages. See Kienzle, *Hildegard's Gospel Homilies*.

⁶ In Gen 1:2, *Vulg.* reads *spiritus Dei*, while R fol. 382^{ra} reads *spiritus Domini*.

⁷ On primal matter, see Kienzle, *Hildegard's Gospel Homilies*, 202, n. 11.

Question 2

What is it that has been written *God divided the waters that were under the firmament from those that were above the firmament*?* Is it really to be believed that there are material waters above the firmament?

*Gen 1:7

SOLUTION

God indeed divided the waters which were above the firmament from the waters which were under the firmament¹ because the lower waters were present for the earthly things that were established, just as the upper waters would be present for the higher things that were established. For in the upper waters there is nothing of the sort that grows or diminishes, just as in the lower waters whatever is living grows and diminishes the same way as a human does. But the upper waters remain in their original state, just as God established them, and they flow in their own circle.² They are material but not like the lower waters, for they are much more subtle and wholly invisible to our sight. The firmament is solidified from above by the moisture of the upper waters and the heat of the fire coming forth there, just as the body endures through the soul, so that it is not dissolved. But the lower waters from under the firmament are more dense;

¹For the question citing Gen 1:7, R fol. 382^{ra} reads *aquas quae super firmamentum erant, ab his quae super firmamento erant*, an obvious error using *super* twice. PL 197:1040D reads *sub firmamento . . . super firmamentum*, changing the order and correcting the cases. For the response, R fol. 382^{ra} reads *super firmamentum . . . sub firmamento*.

²See Cause 1.24, line 7, on the upper waters.

they are the mirror of the heavenly lights, namely, the sun, the moon, and the stars. Those waters contain infinite living beings of diverse kinds, which are born in them and live. Therefore, the duties of the upper and lower waters are different in all respects.³

³Hildegard discusses the duties (*officia*) of various orders of creation in *Homilies on the Gospels* 1.30–33; 22.101–4. In Homily 22 she particularly expounds the duties of flying creatures and herds.