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Healing Logics

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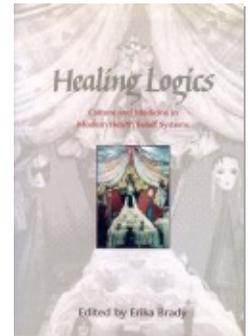
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EVERGREEN: THE ENDURING VOICE OF A
NINE-HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD HEALER

FRANCES M. MALPEZZI

A blurb on the cover of the June 1998 *Lapidary Journal*, “The Comeback Mystic: Hildegard von Bingen,” announces an accompanying article by Si and Ann Frazier entitled “Woman of the Millennium.” The website for Wellspring, a company offering products that promote wellness of mind, body, and spirit, touts this same visionary as “A 12th Century Mystic, A 90’s Woman” (wellmedia.com/news/week54/mystic.html), and an electronic advertisement for Heinrich Schipperges’s *Healing and the Nature of the Cosmos* explains Hildegard “is once again a cult figure with CDs and T-shirts celebrating her popularity” (raw.rutgers.edu/raw/publisher/hist/vonbingen.htm). The plethora of attention devoted to Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), a “saint” canonized only through the vox populi, suggests these designations are more than mere hyperbole. A guest at Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*, Hildegard is now the subject of two recent novels, an opera, several videos, and a soon-to-be-released film.¹ Nine hundred years after her birth numerous books both by and about Hildegard are readily available. The 1997–98 *Books in Print* lists over two dozen works, ranging from scholarly monographs to new age publications. These include editions of her letters, visions, songs, and drama as well as biographies, critical studies, and works focusing on her regimen for physical and spiritual well-being. Her music is internationally known, and a variety of CDs can be found at most music stores. A publishing company in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, designed to “promote and preserve the music of women composers of the past and present” has been named after her as has an Australian electronic mailing list that serves as a communication channel for teachers involved in science and technology because Hildegard was “probably one of the

first women to write about the method of scientific investigations” (edx1.edu.monash.edu.au/projects/hildegard/). And even the most cursory internet search yields an astounding number of items. Hildegard appears on websites devoted to early women writers, female composers, Catholic saints, as well as on sites for alternative and new age medicine.² Biographical and bibliographic information about Hildegard and selections from her works can be gleaned from academic websites such as Bonnie Duncan’s “Women Writers of the Middle Ages” (www.millersv.edu/~resound/women.html) and “Medieval Women” (www.georgetown.edu.labyrinth/subjects/women/women.html) or at a site devoted to the Benedictine order (www.osb.org/osb/index.html); her illuminations adorn each page of “The Cosmic Egg” web page (www.cltr.uq.oz.au8000/~pandora/welcome.html); “Motherheart: Health and Wholeness” (gnv.fdt.net/~mother/health_index.html), a website for those who believe health involves “nurturing our unified being” includes the illumination *The Tree of Life* “painted by Hildegard of Bingen” and a link to Bonnie Duncan’s material; “One Degree Beyond” (www.whidbey.com/onedegreebeyond/per-slink.htm) contains links to web pages on new cosmology, on Reiki, and to the Memorial University of Newfoundland Hildegard of Bingen page. One can purchase her books and CDs on a variety of websites. References to her appear on a listserver devoted to the history of brewing because she may have been the first person to describe hopped beer (<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/hist-brewing/archive/0162.html>). The recipe for “St. Hildegard’s Cookies of Joy” can be found on a Boston public radio site (www.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/pri/spirit/specials/recipes/311recipes.html), and her herbal remedies are recommended on a variety of sites. There is even a website for a Generation X young man who believes he is the reincarnation of Hildegard (www.ordovirtutum.com). Wired as well as feted on several continents with concerts, lectures, conferences, and tours in honor of her nine-hundredth birthday, Hildegard indeed seems to be the woman of the millennium in her widespread appeal to a very disparate audience.

Clearly the interest of academicians in the work of this multitalented and complex woman is understandable, especially on the part of those concerned with expanding a heretofore patriarchal canon. However, the profusion of material about her is obviously not limited to dry tomes by medievalists exploring early music and literature nor to mainstream religious studying the history of Benedictine spirituality or Christian mysticism. Hildegard’s appeal is neither strictly academic nor elite; it is a mass appeal. Her followers include scholars as well as new age adherents. One academic website bemoans the current popular appropriation of Hildegard: “Less fortunately, Hildegard’s visions and music have been hijacked by the New Age

movement, whose music bears some resemblance to Hildegard's ethereal airs" (tweedledee.ucsb.edu/~kris/music/Hildegard.html). Although some academics are discomfited by Hildegardian enthusiasts who do not always understand the complexities of her religio-historical context (some, in fact, even assigning her to an incorrect century), one cannot help but be astounded by the international recognition of this woman who until quite recently would not even have been taught in specialized upper-level university classes. For those inspired by her beliefs, admiring of all she accomplished, finding her medical concepts relevant, the voice of this nine-hundred-year-old woman who considered herself a feather on the breath of God resonates in our time.

Details of Hildegard's life can be culled from the numerous letters she left behind; from the biography composed by two monks, Gottfried and Dieter, incorporating memoirs dictated by Hildegard; and from the fragmentary biography produced by Guibert of Gembloux. Condensed biographical information about Hildegard is available on many internet sources and is included in many scholarly studies, such as Peter Dronke's *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984) and Barbara Newman's *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (1989). A fuller study of her life is Sabina Flanagan's *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098–1179: A Visionary Life* (1989). Hildegard's popularity can be attested to by Routledge's 1998 release of a second and revised edition of that work.

The tenth of her parents' children and, thus, their tithe to God as they dedicated her to the religious life when she was only eight years old, Hildegard of Bingen might, at first glance, seem an unlikely figure to capture the imagination and admiration of a twenty-first century popular audience. Even those who would romanticize the medieval past might have difficulty identifying with a child immured to the world when she was placed in the charge of Jutta of Sponheim, an anchoress whose enclosure was attached to the Benedictine monastery at Disibodenberg, Germany. When Jutta's spirituality attracted more disciples, their cell was eventually transformed into a Benedictine convent. Hildegard professed her vows as a young woman of fifteen or sixteen, committing herself to obedience, stability, and conversion of life under the Rule of St. Benedict. With Jutta's death in 1136, Hildegard was the choice of the other nuns to assume the leadership role. In 1141, after first seeking counsel from Bernard of Clairvaux, she responded to a divine imperative to write about the visions of the living Light that she had experienced since childhood. Ultimately, the increase in nuns and divine instigation prompted Hildegard to move the convent to Rupertsbert, in spite of opposition from church hierarchy. Hildegard proved herself a capable administrator and a prolific writer. Her fame and her convent grew until she founded a second convent at

Eibingen. Hildegard recorded her visions in the *Scivias* (*Know the Ways of the Lord*), *Liber vitae meritorum* (*Book of Life's Merits*), and *Liber divinorum operum* (*Book of Divine Works*). She also supervised illuminations illustrating her visions; these were probably produced by the nuns in the convent's scriptorium. She is responsible for the first extant morality play, the liturgical drama *Ordo virtutum* (*Play of the Virtues*). She composed a cycle of seventy-seven songs, *Symphonia harmoniae caelestium revelationum* (*The Symphony of the Harmony of Heavenly Revelations*). She is often designated Germany's first woman doctor and scientist because of her encyclopedic *Subtilitates naturarum diversarum creaturum* (*The Subtleties of the Diverse Natures of Created Things*), which includes both her *Causae et curae* (*Causes and Cures*) and *Physica* (*Natural History*) or *Liber simplicis medicinae* (*Books of Simple Medicine*). In addition she carried on such an extensive correspondence with religious and secular figures from all walks of life who sought and received her frank advice that she has been likened to a medieval "Dear Abby" (Petroff 1986, 142). She embarked on four preaching tours, wrote a life of Saints Rupert and Disibod, a treatise on the Benedictine Rule and the Athanasian Creed, and is responsible for an invented language.

Far from silent in her own time, Hildegard continues to speak to our age, most notably in her role as healer, a role that in many ways unifies her other roles as prophet, visionary, abbess, composer, scientist, herbalist, and dramatist. Ruth M. Walker-Moskop has argued for the centrality of healing to all Hildegard's works; she asserts that health "is a unifying theme in each of her books" (1985, 19). In her visionary *Scivias* she "outlines the way to health through faith" as she "describes the way to harmony with God, a necessary prerequisite for a person's internal spiritual and physical health" (1985, 20); in the *Physica* and *Causae et curae* she focuses on "how to promote physical health" by providing a "practical handbook on medicine" in the former and a "holistic philosophy of healing" in the latter (1985, 21); in *Liber vitae meritorum* she writes "a prescription to cure a sick soul" (1985, 22); and in *Liber divinorum operum* she "describes the ultimate cosmic bonds on which human health depends" and provides a "guide for healing the body and soul" (1985, 22). Many are specifically interested in the natural remedies she provides in her scientific works. Her *Natural History*, divided into nine sections, contains descriptions of plants (including about three hundred herbs), animals, metals, stones, and minerals, focusing on their medicinal properties; and the *Causes and Cures*, divided into five sections, discusses the origin and treatment of disease with precise "recipes" for natural treatment. Yet, the philosophy of holistic healing that integrates the health of body and soul articulated in these and her other works is a major reason for her current following. As

her own illnesses were pivotal factors in her life, healing the body, the spirit, and the mind was Hildegard's life and work. Her hands-on practice of medicine, her writing, her music, her art all focus on this multifaceted concept of health. To understand Hildegard as healer is to recognize that health is more than the absence of disease or a palliating of the symptoms of disease. According to Walker-Moskup, "Hildegard understands health in a broad, holistic sense. For twelfth-century thinkers, health was clearly a multidimensional concept that involved striving for harmony with God, for inner spiritual harmony, for balance among the physical humors, for concord between soul and body, and for harmony between human beings and the cosmos" (1985, 19). Hence, a 1994 edition of *Causae et curae*, an English translation of the German translation of the Latin text, is entitled *Holistic Healing*—taking liberties with the letter but not the spirit of Hildegard's title.

Although there is some disagreement whether her *Natural History* and her *Causes and Cures* are based on visions, on Hildegard's experience as a practicing physician in the tradition of Benedictine medicine, or on some combination of the two, the material in these scientific works as well as her music, the illuminations accompanying her visions, and her philosophy of holistic health lend themselves to the adaptation of those concerned with alternative medicine with its stress on the importance of balance and harmony in life and components such as proper diet, herbalism, aromatherapy, and sound therapy. Moreover, there are those like Matthew Fox who see Hildegard as affecting more than the health of the individual. Fox argues she is a force for healing society and the church:

Hildegard gifts us today because she *heals*. She awakens and she heals. She awakens Christianity to some of the wisdom of the ancient women's religions and thereby offers healing to the male/female split in religion. She awakens the psyche to the cosmos and thereby offers healing to both. She awakens to the holiness of the earth and thereby heals the awful split between matter and spirit in the West. She awakens art to science and science to music and religion to science. And thereby heals the dangerous rift between science and religion that has dominated the culture the past three hundred years in the West. (1988, 20)

For Fox, disseminating an understanding of Hildegard's philosophy as it is expressed in her writing, her music, and her art has a therapeutic value that is truly transformative.

Although Hildegard often appeals to those dissatisfied with conventional or orthodox medicine and religion, the philosophy Hildegard espouses is one which in its emphasis on the interrelationship of the physical, mental,

emotional, and spiritual is wholeheartedly the product of medieval and Renaissance Christianity. Barbara Newman cautions, “The stunning originality of her formulations must not be allowed to obscure her fundamental orthodoxy or her classic Benedictine approach to the spiritual life” (1989, xvii). Likewise, Sabina Flanagan notes, Hildegard is far from unconventional in her time: “Contrary to some modern perceptions of Hildegard, her thought was in many ways more conservative than revolutionary, depending on the time-honored methodology and learning of the monastic milieu in which she spent her life” (1996, 2). From the perspective of this worldview, humankind at creation was in harmony with the divine. Sin injected the discordant note, a cacophony that had a range of physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social ramifications. The equation between sin and sickness (both physical and spiritual) is consistent throughout the medieval and Renaissance period. Sin debilitates in a variety of ways. One need only consider Dante’s graphic tenth *bolgia*, the Valley of Disease, in circle 8 of *The Inferno*; Edmund Spenser’s parade of the seven deadly sins—each afflicted with an appropriately corresponding physical malady—in the House of Pride in book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*; John Donne’s extended treatment of the analogy between physical and spiritual health in his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*; or John Milton’s catalog of human suffering in Adam’s vision of the Lazar-house in book 11 of *Paradise Lost* as the archangel Michael instructs him about the consequences for humankind of the intemperance and disobedience of the first parents. Hildegard is part of an extensive Christian tradition that sees illness as a result of the Fall and recognizes health as more than a physical matter. At the same time Hildegard is also part of a Christian tradition that sees creation as a reflection of the Creator and recognizes both the symbolic and practical use of all aspects of creation. As Katharina M. Wilson notes in her introduction to selections from Hildegard in an anthology of medieval women writers, “For a person of the twelfth century, the world was a storehouse of meaning, all its objects and activities referring ultimately to a realm both transcendent and divine” (1984, 118). Hence, herbs, precious stones, and animals have special application in the healing process of humankind. Heinrich Schipperges maintains Hildegard’s “religious teachings contained nothing new; they simply sought to explain and proclaim traditional doctrine” (1997, 4):

Hildegard’s writings show us the structure of the universe as a unified whole—a universe, though, that is out of joint—and how the parts will be conjoined again for the salvation of humankind. The interrelatedness of everything—humankind and the cosmos, body and spirit, nature and grace—and the interdependence of everything were not just so many

empty words to Hildegard. They went to make up a functional holistic picture of the world, down to the minutest detail. Her entire work is characterized by a clear-headed realism that focuses on the history of salvation: the vision of a world created out of nothing; the creation and fall of humanity; the Incarnation of the son of God; and the resurrection of the body at the end of time. (3–4)

Hildegard's worldview of the interconnectedness of Creator and all of creation is wholly consistent with the Christian tradition she is embedded in and underlies her medical practice.

That medical practice itself was based on conventional science. Elisabeth Brooke in her study of the tradition of women healers notes that Hildegard "was familiar with classical authors such as Pliny and Galen, as well as with contemporary medical texts from Salerno and other medical schools" (1997, 23). Timothy P. Daaleman has examined the way Hildegard was influenced by classical medicine and by the tradition of "monastic medicine" which "assimilated the local traditions which existed outside the cloister walls" (1993, 282). The foreword to *Holistic Healing* acknowledges: "*Holistic Healing*, as a handbook providing information and suggestions in matters of sickness and healing, stands foursquare in the tradition of monastic and popular medicine which itself was based on the medical knowledge of antiquity. Added to this are oral traditions and Hildegard's own experience in medicine and care of the sick. The entire book bears the stamp of the author's faith and Christian culture" (Hildegard 1994, xiii). Hildegard's understanding that disease is the result of an imbalance of the humors (though she makes some significant adaptations) comes from the classics, but she also blends into her practice folk and magical traditions—the latter most notably demonstrated through her use of charms and incantations. The power of these is recognized by her followers today and one can find Hildegardian charms on the internet (webs.linkport.com/~grimnir/magichealing/charms.htm) against mental illness, against bewitchment, to heal jaundice, against melancholy, against migraines, against obsessions, and to ease delivery; others are occasionally included in texts such as Elisabeth Brooke's *Medicine Women* (1997, 35–36).

A key Hildegardian concept, *viriditas*, while uniquely expressed, illustrates Hildegard's orthodoxy. Barbara Newman comments: "*Viriditas* for Hildegard was more than a color; the fresh green that recurs so often in her visions represents the principle of all life, growth, and fertility flowing from the life-creating power of God" (1989, 102). Flanagan notes that even some of Hildegard's cures involving trees "derive their effectiveness by association from other qualities of the tree, such as its vigour or *viriditas*, freshness, or tenderness" (1989, 85).

According to Strehlow and Hertzka, “Hildegard uses the word *viriditas* to refer to all living things, the energy of life which comes from God, the power of youth and of sexuality, the power in seeds, the reproduction of cells, the power of regeneration, freshness, and creativity” (1988, xxvii). In contrast, illness is the drying out of this life-force. Because this life-force comes from God, healing must be more than a physical process. Matthew Fox discusses this core component of Hildegard’s belief and imagery and finds three sources for her use of *viriditas*: Scripture, her environment (the lush Rhine Valley), and her own surge of creativity (1985, 32–33). The Judeo-Christian associations of fructification and dessication are long-standing. The withered garden and the burgeoning Eden have long emblemized the physical, spiritual, and creative status of humanity. The psalmist thirsting for God as the hart for flowing streams (Psalms 42), thirsting for God as his flesh fainted for him “as in a dry and weary land where no water is” (Psalms 63) decried the aridity of the soul cut off from the fountain of life. Edmund Spenser’s Colin Clout, the shepherd-poet wasting away physically and spiritually in the “December Eclogue” of *The Shepherdes Calender* laments that the flowers which once bloomed in his garden had withered, their roots dried up for lack of dew. He and his poesy are blighted gardens. Having sinned against Nature and God, Coleridge’s ancient mariner is surrounded by undrinkable water. His burning thirst on the sea externalizes the spiritual thirst of the man who has cut himself off from God. In our own time, poets such as T. S. Eliot have led readers through heaps of broken images, dead trees, and dry stones, the wasteland of hollow men. Aridity is sickness, sin, sterility. For the heart is the biblical *hortus conclusus*, the enclosed garden. When its center is God, the fountain of life, grace transforms that garden to the restored Eden raised in the waste wilderness of postlapsarian humanity, the paradise within. The seventeenth century British poet-priest George Herbert compared the sterility of the soul to a withered garden in his poem “Grace” (Hutchinson 1941, 60–61), and in “The Flower” (165–167) he describes the spiritual renewal through grace as he rejoices that his “shrivel’d heart” has “recover’d greenesse” (2.8–9). This influx of grace brings with it the creative spirit: “After so many deaths I live and write” (1.37). Like Hildegard, he associates sin not only with dessication but also with disease as his speaker complains in “The Sinner”: “I am all ague” (1.1; see Hutchinson 1941, 38). The pattern is a conventional one: the Christian spirit knows both paradise lost and paradise regained in the cyclic fall and spring of the soul. Adamant in sin, the hardened heart is a cursed ground bearing little fruit; or a *hortus* green with energized life. This is the great Christian narrative that spans the arid deserts of the individual’s separation from God (bringing with it physical illness and the drought of creativity) as well as the oases of spiritual renewal when the presence of grace brings harmony with the divine and

consequent physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The heart of Hildegard's imagery is very traditionally Christian. Both in spite of and because of her own religious and medical orthodoxy, Hildegard's appeal today is to those looking for alternatives to conventional medicine. Some of her followers are devoted Christians who regard Hildegard as a spokesperson for the divine; others are seeking religious as well as medical alternatives and see Hildegard as the wisdom of the past that legitimates the choices they make. In her doctoral dissertation, Sue Spencer Cannon documented the relevance of Hildegard's medicine for a modern audience: "Hildegard's medicine, in many of its facets, is seriously practiced today in Western society as an alternative to Western biomedicine by a growing number of people" (1993, 124). In Europe this has been formalized in the practice of Hildegard-medicine, primarily as a result of the work of Dr. Gottfried Hertzka and his successor, Wighard Strehlow. Hertzka, a graduate of the University of Vienna medical school, opened the Hildegard Practice in Konstanz and published several books on Hildegard's medicine. Currently there are in Europe a number of societies, journals, and symposia offered for adherents of Hildegard-medicine. For Hertzka, Hildegard-medicine is of value for reasons "based on the considerations, stemming from his Catholic faith, that Hildegard was not an innovative twelfth-century thinker, but rather a mere conduit through which God revealed his medicine to humankind" (Cannon 1993, 147). Hertzka is one of those who interprets Hildegard's medical material to be a direct result of her visions and sees her functioning as the Holy Ghost's secretary (Cannon 1993, 162). For Hertzka and many others, Hildegard-medicine "is desirable to its adherents because it is medicine from the most knowledgeable source possible: humankind's creator. For the faithful, Hildegard-Medicine becomes a comfort whether an ailment is relieved or not because it allows them the conviction that whatever the outcome, it is the will of God and therefore the best for them" (Cannon 1993, 173).

While the impetus for the formalization of Hildegard-medicine stemmed from Hertzka's Catholic faith, the adaptability and applicability of this practice extends beyond such mainline religious beliefs. Hildegard has gained a significant following among those searching for medical and religious alternatives, including new age adherents. This has occurred for several reasons:

(1) *Gender.* As a woman who lived in what is perceived to be an extremely restrictive and chauvinistic age, Hildegard accomplished a great deal and was outspoken in her dealings with a number of male authority figures from abbots and bishops to emperors. Further, her visions of the feminine divine in the form of *Sapientia* and *Caritas*, while deriving from the ancient Wisdom

tradition, strike a very modern note. Moreover, she not only discusses matters of human sexuality openly in her writings but specifically treats medical matters of concern to women: “conception and birth, complications in childbirth and gynecological diseases, menstruation and menopause are all extensively described” (Hildegard 1994, xix).³

(2) *Holistic health.* Her approach to health care is a holistic one that encompasses body, mind, spirit, and cosmos. She believes that the individual is a microcosm of the greater world, that the harmony of both was disrupted as a result of the Fall, and that for true health both must be re-tuned to the divine symphony. Health is more than the absence of symptoms of disease but calls for balance and moderation in all aspects of life and cannot be effected without the operation of grace.

(3) *Variety.* Her health care methodology incorporates many aspects from which a modern audience can pick and choose: herbalism, aromatherapy, diet and fasting, laying on of hands, therapeutic stones, prayer and incantation, light energy, sound therapy, art therapy, and hydrotherapy. One need only skim through the table of contents for a reference work such as *Alternative Medicine: The Definitive Guide* (1994) to recognize how relevant the many facets of Hildegard’s medicine are today.

(4) *Ecological consciousness.* As Matthew Fox argues, “Hildegard is deeply ecological in her spirituality” (1985, 8). Because she believes in both the sacrality and the interconnectedness of all creation, she respects Nature and recognizes its power. Those interested in Green Power cannot help but find the Hildegardian image of *viriditas* intriguing.

When Bear and Company, a new age publisher, provided an English translation of Strehlow and Hertzka’s work (1988), basic concepts of Hildegard-medicine were made accessible to a larger and specifically new age audience. As Michael D’Antonio has shown in *Heaven on Earth*, healing is “one of the primary concerns of the New Age”: “The New Age has also fostered a proliferation of alternative therapies: herbal medicine, acupuncture, Reiki massage, enema therapy, even flower essence treatments. In virtually every case, advocates claim these remedies are based on ancient wisdom and that they bring relief without pain” (1992, 67). The introduction to *Alternative Medicine: The Definitive Guide* reinforces this concept that alternative medicine has a significant tradition:

The underlying concepts of alternative medicine are not new. They represent a return to the principles that have been part of human understanding

of health and disease for thousands of years. Over the centuries, medical wisdom evolved within a framework which linked health to a state of harmony or balance, and disease to a state of disharmony or imbalance, and took into account the factors that contributed to both. (1994, 5)

References to Hildegard often legitimate alternative treatments. As a twelfth-century visionary and “saint” (albeit uncanonized), she is the “ancient wisdom” that lends a stamp of authority to modern practitioners. She is often referred to in advice provided by modern herbalists. For example, Michael Castleman in *The Healing Herbs: The Ultimate Guide to the Curative Power of Nature’s Medicines* cites numerous Hildegardian remedies throughout his book and finds her unique as “the only medieval woman who left any account of ‘wise woman’ healing practices” (1995, 17). He finds her recommendations for a balanced diet and tooth brushing with aloe and myrrh especially sensible (1995, 7). Rosemary Gladstar in *Herbal Healing for Women* cites Hildegard’s recommendation of comfrey for wounds (1993, 237), the inclusion of licorice in her materia medica (1993, 247), and the use of valerian as a sedative (1993, 256). On the internet a page on healing herbs recommends vervain to aid digestion, relieve depression, and ease headaches and aches and pains and points out, “The twelfth-century German abbess and herbalist Hildegard of Bingen prescribed a medicinal tea of vervain and vermouth for ‘toxic blood’ (infections), toothache and ‘discharges from the brain to the teeth’” (www.healthyideas.com/healing/herb/her). The same website also cites Hildegard in its recommendation of cinnamon and notes that she used it “as ‘the universal spice for sinuses,’ and to treat colds, flu, cancer and ‘inner decay and slime,’ whatever that means.” Yet another website from Snow Mountain Botanicals argues for the importance of valerian as a safe and effective medicine by noting, “Hildegard of Bingen [*sic*], famous abbess/herbalist of Germany, used it as a sedative in the twelfth century” (www.pacific.net/~smb/valerian_notes.html). Another website points to Hildegard’s recommendation of tansy to treat a cold and includes a passage from Hildegard on the humors (homepage.rconnect.com/Karyn/colds.htm). The resume for the nutritionist Ward W. Bond of Carol Bond Health Foods not only lists his membership in such organizations as the Herb Research Foundation and the Herbalist Guild but also in the International Society of Hildegard von Bingen (www.carolbond.com/ward.htm). The mention of this twelfth century visionary’s name confers authority on the advice and advisors of herbal lore. Moreover, she confers not only authority but the authority of a Western rather than Eastern tradition, an important distinction David Frawley makes in his foreword to the English translation of the Strehlow and Hertzka book as he asserts that Hildegard’s “knowledge can help Western herbal medicine

return itself to an equal level of sophistication with the Eastern systems that are becoming popular today. Hildegard's medicine, therefore, has a special import today for this regeneration of our own older natural-healing tradition" (1988, ix).

Authentication through association with Hildegard occurs not only with herbalists but also with those concerned with the therapeutic use of stones. As Si and Ann Frazier remark, "A small portion of her commentaries describes the medicinal uses of gemstones, a fact that makes Hildegard von Bingen very big among those with a 'metaphysical' interest in minerals, the phenomenon that has put the word 'crystal' into the everyday vocabularies of many people who previously never gave minerals a thought" (1998, 34). The Fraziers note Hildegard's popularity in German and Swiss metaphysical circles and her increasing popularity in the United States. Cannon writes of attending a symposium on Hildegard in Engelberg, Switzerland, in 1991: "I met several people who, following Hildegard's advice, wore pelts or jewelry which they believed had healing and protective qualities. My symposium session neighbor, Frau Grun, who told me that she specialized in Hildegard's lapidary medicine, sincerely believed in the healing powers of semi-precious stones as described by Hildegard" (1993, 170). Hildegard included material on twenty-six precious stones in her *Natural History*. On her use of gems, Frawley comments,

Like the medieval alchemists with whom she has much in common, Hildegard integrates the use of gems and minerals into her usage of herbs. She recommends such remedies as gold for arthritis, emerald for heart pain, jasper for hay fever or for cardiac arrhythmia, gold topaz for loss of vision, and blue sapphire for eye inflammation. She uses gem wines, similar to the gem tinctures now being used more widely today. (Strehlow and Hertzka 1988, xii)

As with her comments on herblore, her lapidary prescriptions are part of an important Western tradition for those who believe in the medicinal use of crystals and stones today.

For Hildegard, music served an important liturgical function. As a reflection of divine harmony, music could both praise the deity and bring the individual into harmony with God. Fox regards Hildegard's music as "cosmic" and says of *The Symphony of the Harmony of Heavenly Revelations* that Hildegard "expressed musically and poetically her deep mystical experiences of the Cosmic Christ. She believed that singing of words reveals their true meaning directly to the soul through bodily vibrations. Even today these songs evoke mystical experiences in those who sing them" (1988, 110). And, indeed, her music is seen to elicit both mystical and healing experiences. One of the forms of alternative medicine practiced by some Hildegardian followers is

sound therapy, a belief in the therapeutic power of sound. A web page maintained by Bison Publishers on Sound and Healing notes,

Each and every person has a core sound, a vibration or set of vibrations that emanate from our being and our body. Sounding this sound restores us to balance, aligns our energies, releases our powers. When we are diseased, our bodies vibrate in dissonance to our being. We can help ourselves return to health and balance by recalling and reinforcing our natural sound vibrations. You can sing yourself back to health. This is the essence of sound healing.

Arguing that this is not a new concept but one that was recognized by “ancient tribes of humankind,” this document also cites Hildegard as an ancient practitioner who “employed these sounds to effect change in the real world of here and now.” The site designed “to provide a bibliography of recorded, printed and Web-published resources on the use of sound for healing” includes information about Hildegard’s music (www.bison.com/healing.html). The web page of Norma Gentile also testifies to the importance of Hildegard’s music as part of a healing methodology. Gentile is a professional singer, vocal coach, and auric healer. She has recorded two CDs of Hildegard’s music, *Meditation Chants* and *Unfurling Love’s Creation*. In an article from *Continuo* magazine (www.continuo.com/oct97/gentile3.htm), she discusses her discovery of Hildegard’s music and her own role as healer and musician. Through Hildegardian chants she experienced “healing currents in sound” and now performs concerts, offers workshops, and leads seminars in the use of sound for healing and meditation. Like Matthew Fox, who sees Hildegard offering a “radical opportunity for global religious ecumenism” (1985, 16), she is impressed by the diversity of those interested in Hildegard, the ecumenical outreach Hildegard encompasses. Gentile writes,

In the past year I’ve shared Hildegard’s music with a Motherhouse of nuns, a Wiccan conference, a gathering of feminists, members of the Creation Spirituality movement, scholars attending an International Medieval Studies Institute, and religious groups from mainstream Catholics to liberal Protestants and the metaphysical Unity Church. I am amazed by the entry that Hildegard’s music allows me into different worlds.

In addition, a website for Healing Yoga classes provides a catalog of music used in these classes. One of the offerings includes Richard Souther’s *The Music of Hildegard von Bingen* with the notation that this CD is appropriate for use with the Sun Salutations series (www.io.com/helinyoga/cd.html). Just as Hildegard

maintains an active role as healer through her literary work, she also continues to function as healer through her music. Nancy Fierro explains, “The word ‘symphonia,’ or symphony, had a special meaning for Hildegard. Living in symphony meant living a life of virtue in tune with the harmonious praises of the nine choirs of angels in paradise. Such a life would be inspired, filled with Divine purpose, and so powerful that everything would work together for the person in a harmonious way” (1994, 24). In other words, Hildegard believed music could effect the holistically healthy individual. Many of Hildegard’s followers believe that as well and see her music as especially effective in this health process.

The illuminations of Hildegard’s visions are also perceived as therapeutic, especially in her use of the mandala, that magic sphere Carl G. Jung—a major influence for many new agers—saw as a “symbolic representation of the ‘nuclear atom’ of the human psyche” (1964, 213). Jung believed many cultures used the mandala as a healing tool to restore psychic balance, to bring the sick individual “back into harmony with himself and with the cosmos” (1964, 213). Fox perceives Hildegard’s mandalas as fulfilling such a healing function for her and for others:

Readers and pray-ers of Hildegard’s illuminations will see many examples of mandalas, those “Maps of the cosmos” developed in East as well as in the medieval West to “liberate the consciousness” and return us to a primeval consciousness which is fundamentally one of unity. Clearly, Hildegard’s illuminations played that role with herself, a role of reintegration and holistic relating, which is her intention in sharing them with others that they too may be healed. For Hildegard, her mandalas become a primary means by which the microcosm/macrocosm, the human and the universe, are brought together again. (1985, 16)

Fox points to the way Hildegard through these illuminations enables us to “connect” with an “essential pattern” and thus “to find God again, to find salvation or healing for self and others” (1985, 25). Like Fox, others see Hildegardian mandalas as both salubrious and salvific. A website on healing and dreams maintained by Harry Bosma stresses the importance of mandalas (www.xs4all.nl/~hbosma/healing_dreams/mandala.html) and includes a depiction of *Tree of Life* “painted by Hildegard of Bingen” with information on how to access others of her mandalas on the Bonnie Duncan website. “Veriditas: The World Wide Labyrinth Project,” developed by Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, has been much influenced by the illuminations of Hildegard. The project itself is “committed to reintroduce the labyrinth in its many forms as a spiritual tool. Its deeply healing qualities have been lying dormant for centuries so labyrinths need to be established in cathedrals, churches, retreat centers, hospitals, prisons, parks, airports and community spaces around

the world” (www.gracecom.org/veriditas/press/sfpreskit.shtml). Dr. Artress presents workshops and lectures worldwide on labyrinths and on Hildegard and planned to conduct a tour in 1998, “Labyrinths of Europe: Walking a Sacred Path,” that included a stay at Bingen to participate in the festivities connected with the celebration of Hildegard’s nine-hundredth anniversary (www.noetic.org/Travel/labyrinths.html). A licensed psychotherapist, Dr. Artress sees the labyrinth as a mandala that can bring healing change to the individual and society. “Earth Echo,” a website maintained by artist Fred Casselman, contains a section on healing images and features “images empowered to assist in our personal and planetary healing” (www.earthecho.com/heal/_healing.html). One of the galleries includes a painting titled *Fires of Saint Hildegard*, dedicated to her with the comment “We love you Saint Hildegard.” The Word Gallery has an artistic rendering of the following phrase from Hildegard. The first five lines radiate from a circle formed by the words of the last two lines:

The earth should not be injured
 The earth should not be destroyed
 As often as the elements, the elements of the world
 Are violated by ill-treatment. So God will cleanse them
 God will cleanse them thru the suffering, thru the hardships of
 humankind.
 God desires that all the world
 Be pure in his sight.

At the center of the circle we find the words “Hildegard of Bingen.” The image visually illustrates the importance of healing Mother Earth which Matthew Fox sees as one of Hildegard’s roles. Information is also included on other websites where one might gain information about Hildegard (www.earthecho.com/words/hild.html). “Earth Echo” affirms the power of art to heal and celebrates the individual, ecological, and cosmic power of Hildegard’s healing art.

One of the more remarked upon aspects of Hildegard’s life has been her longevity in an age of typically abbreviated life-spans. Even more remarkable is the longevity of her healing practice. Today, through technology, her medical practice may be more extensive than it was in her lifetime as she continues to apply her healing touch through the dissemination of her writing, music, and art. While some may scoff at the popular appropriation of her work by an audience largely incapable of reading her material in the Latin original and not fully aware of the religious, historical, literary, and musical traditions that contextualize her, the same might well be said of her contemporary patients. Hildegard speaks to the learned and the unlearned, to those in the mainstream of religious tradition and those on the periphery. The proliferation of books, CDs,

and internet resources clearly indicates the number of people turning to her for healing of the body, of the spirit, and of the earth. Representative of their need is one web page that contains an illumination of Hildegard at work, a depiction of the current Abbey of St. Hildegard in Ibingen, Germany, and an eloquent prayer lamenting the pain of individual souls and of the earth itself. The prayer calls upon Hildegard for help:

Guide us to participate in the healing of suffering souls. Let us restore the earth and her children to the joy of singing to You. Find the musical tones that once played the Fall. Teach us to sing with the Angels, Saints, and our Ancestors, in the praise and worship of the Trinity.
(ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/PTBrown/)

Viriditas: through the wisdom preserved in her writings, through herbal remedies, charms and lapidary prescriptions, through music and art, the ever-green voice of Hildegard of Bingen endures today as her writings, music, and art provide answers to the prayers of the sick who come to her for holistic healing.

NOTES

1. The novels are Barbara Lachman's *The Journal of Hildegard of Bingen* (1996) and Joan Ohanneson's *Scarlet Music* (1997). The British composer Brian Inglis completed the opera *Hildegard of Bingen* in June 1997 (www.composer.co.uk/composers/inglis.html). An informative video is *Radiant Life: Meditations on the Life of Hildegard of Bingen* from Wellspring Media (1996). The film in progress is the work of Jeanne Spicuzza and her Seasons and a Muse Productions (www.charmrec.com/jeanne/hilde.htm).
2. Two of the best places to discover web resources for Hildegard are the list maintained by the University of Mainz (www.uni-mainz.de/~horst/hildegard/links/links.html) and the links provided with information about the Greenest Branch Conference as part of the celebration of Hildegard's nine-hundredth birthday (www.trinityvt.edu/hildegard/internet.htm). All websites referred to in this chapter were accessed in the summer of 1998.
3. For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Fiero (1994) and Newman (1989).

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