

Chapter 3

RELEASING BLOOD AND HUMOURS

SUPPORTED BY RELIGIOUS ideas, medieval medicine tends to describe women's nature as simple and singular, often omitting discussion of their diversity or differences. This tendency especially stands out in comparison to the many medical opinions on men's varied nature and temperaments. Medieval doctors follow the stereotypical belief that women essentially have the same nature as Eve, who was seen as so licentious, lustful, and weak that she was easily deceived by the serpent; differences of humoral composition and temperament from one female to another are often ignored or brushed aside in medieval medical literature. By contrast, Hildegard thoroughly sets out the diversity of women's nature and temperaments, thereby departing from contemporary male medical theorists who did not distinguish among the various proportions of the four temperaments in women.

This approach is important because Hildegard emphasizes gender differences in her temperament theories. For instance, Cadden points out that Hildegard's case is unique in that she did not ignore women in her treatment of the four temperaments or portray women's temperaments as subcategories of men's temperaments. What is more interesting is that her depiction of sexual differences in the four temperaments is closely connected to her view that women and men are different from and complementary to each other, raising important issues of anatomy, physiology, sexuality, reproduction, and behaviour across genders in her religious and scientific writings.¹

The issue of menstruation is a clear example of Hildegard's positive view of the female reproductive body. Some medieval theologians insisted that menstrual fluids were so harmful that intercourse with a woman during menstruation could result in monstrous, leprous, or deformed children.² However, Hildegard's reasoning tends to focus on the common humanity of both sexes, which gives her a more positive view of all bodies and bodily processes. Hildegard does not mention the dangerous pollution of menstruation, as male theologians do. Even when she forbids men to have sexual

1 Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 153.

2 Langum, *Medicine and the Seven Deadly Sins*, 183.

relationships with menstruating women, it is not about pollution; instead, she sympathizes with women who are already suffering menstrual discomfort. Although menstruation was the punishment from God when Eve transgressed, Hildegard argues that it still should not prevent women from attending church.

Moreover, Hildegard emphasizes the complementary roles of the two sexes in reproduction. In Hildegard's cosmological understanding, Adam's semen became poisonous after he sinned against God. By contrast, women do not have this poison in their bodies because of their menstrual flow, which is the parallel change Eve's body underwent after the first sin. Therefore, it is the womb that has to neutralize poisonous semen. In this way, women's bodies have the capacity to nullify men's reproductive toxicity resulting from Adam's fall.

Women as Complete Beings

Hildegard's positive depiction of the female body is supported by her appreciation of the physical body of the human being that was created by God with natural elements. Hildegard's relationship between microcosm and macrocosm is apparent in many places in *Cause et cure*. As Adam's body was created from the elements, so too was God's whole creation, and just as the cosmos contains four elements, so does the human body:

Just as they hold the world together, the elements are the framework of the human body. Their streaming forth and their functions so divide themselves within a person, that a person is held together; just as, poured through the world, they busy themselves. Fire, air, water and earth are in a person, and from them a person is composed. From fire a person has heat, from air, breath, from water, blood, and from earth a person has flesh.³

After this assertion, Hildegard continues her discussion of this analogy by detailing the various symptoms and diseases that people may acquire if the

3 In modifying the translation of this passage, I intentionally used "a person" instead of "he" to reflect gender neutrality, which aligns with contemporary translation practices and acknowledges modern understandings of gender inclusivity. Modified from Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 42. "Nunc autem, ut supradictum est, quemadmodum elementa mundum simul continent, sic etiam elementa compago corporis hominis sunt, atque effusio et officia eorum ita se diuidunt per hominem, ut insimul contineatur, uelut etiam per mundum effusa sunt et operantur. Ignis enim, aer, aqua et terra in homine sunt et ex hiis constat. Nam ex igne habet calorem, ex aere alitum, ex aqua sanguinem et ex terra carnem." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §97, p. 83.

elements in their bodies, based on the four elements of the world, fall out of balance. The key to staying healthy is maintaining the proper proportions of the bodily humours. People become ill when this balance collapses.⁴ However, the correct proportion of the four humours can be different for each person, as expressed in the medical theory of the four temperaments. A person's specific temperament is determined according to which humour is dominant within them. This medical belief prevails among ancient and medieval medical theorists; Hildegard, however, is interesting because she distinguishes women's four temperaments from men's.

Hildegard presents four types of temperament in women after explaining the same four types in men: sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic. Just like men, women have variable bodily humours that determine the degree to which they have different temperamental qualities. In this perspective, even strength of sexual desire (which was often represented elsewhere in medieval writing as uniformly strong and uncontrollable in all women) is different in each woman. Not all women are filled with lust, and not all women desire men equally. Certainly, some women may want sex and need men; however, others do not. In Hildegard's writings, women tend not to fall into one stereotypical type; where males are variable, women are variable, too. Here she describes the sanguine temperament in women:

These [sanguine] women have a clear, white face and are in the embrace of love. They are loveable and exacting in their skills. They are continent in mind and suffer moderately flowing blood in their streams of menstruation. The vessel of their womb is strongly positioned for child-bearing, whence they are fertile and able to receive the male semen. Nevertheless they do not produce many children. If they are without husbands, and do not give birth to offspring, they easily ail in their body.⁵

4 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 48. "Quod si praedicti humores rectum ordinem suum et iustam mensuram, ut praefactum est, in homine seruant, ille in quiete et sanitate corporis est, si autem sibi inuicem repugnauerint, debilem et infirmum, ut prescriptum est, faciunt." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §122, p. 91.

5 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 72. "Et iste claram et albam faciem habent at in amplexione amoris sunt et amabiles atque in artibus subtiles et per se ipsas in animo suo continentes et modice effluentem sanguinem in riuulis menstrui temporis patiuntur, atque uasculum matricis earum fortiter positum est ad pariendum, unde etiam fecunde sunt et uirile semen concipere possunt. Sed tamen plurimos pueros non generant, et si iste absque maritis sunt, ita quod prolem non pariunt, facile dolent in corpore." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §172, p. 126.

Judging from this passage, we can infer that sanguine women may have relatively strong sexual desires for men, since they are happy when they have husbands. The sanguine woman's menstruation is not severe, and her womb is particularly suitable for reproduction, so it seems that these women are the best at having babies. We might say that the sanguine woman benefits from being a wife and mother rather than an ascetic practitioner.

Like sanguine women, phlegmatic women are also described as suitable for reproduction. In the case of the phlegmatic woman, according to Hildegard, childbirth and a sexual life are much desired and encouraged. These women's strong yearning for a sexual life is stated up front in *Cause et cure*. In order to support her characterization of the phlegmatic woman's strong sexual drive and desire to reproduce, Hildegard lists this woman's physical and social characteristics: wide veins, a strongly placed womb, and popularity among men.

They [phlegmatic women] have a stern face of swarthy complexion. Vigorous, useful, with a somewhat virile mind, they sustain neither too small nor too great, but moderately flowing, streams of blood in their menstrual period. Since they have large veins, they are very fecund for offspring and easily conceive. Their womb and all the internal organs are strongly positioned. They attract men and lead them behind them, and men love them. If they wish to keep themselves from men, they are able to refrain from joining with them, which debilitates them a little, but not much. If they avoid joining with men, they become hard to deal with and serious in their behavior; if they are with men, and refuse to hold themselves back from union, they become incontinent and overflow with lust, just like men.⁶

In this view, just like sanguine women, or even more so, phlegmatic women enjoy their sexual lives. They are happy with children and can even become sick if they cannot have intercourse with men, and men like them in return. Certainly, they may experience difficulties if they choose the monastic life.

6 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 72–73. “Et seueram faciem et subnigri coloris habent et strenue et utiles sunt ac aliquantum uirilem animum tenent, atque nec nimis parum nec nimis multum, sed moderate effluentes riuulos sanguinis in menstruo tempore sustinent. Et quoniam grossas uenas habent, plurimum fecunde sunt in prole et facile concipiunt, quia etiam matrix et omnia uiscera earum fortiter posita sunt. Sed uiros sibi attrahunt et eos post se ducunt, et ideo uiri eas amant. Quod si a uiris se continere uolunt, se continere a coniunctione eorum possunt, nec inde multum quamuis parum debilitantur. Sed tamen, si uiros in coniunctione deuitauerint, difficiles et graues in moribus suis erunt, si autem cum uiris fuerint, ita quod se a coniunctione eorum continere noluerint, incontinentes et superflue secundum uiros in libidine erunt.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §173, pp. 126–27.

These women are too fertile to reject husbands and sexual activity; abstinence can make them sick. Also, phlegmatic women are good at giving birth. Like sanguine women, they have wombs that are securely positioned in their bodies. What is more notable, phlegmatic women can deliver a number of children. They release a moderate amount of blood during menstruation. It is interesting that phlegmatic women are desired by men even though they have “manly” souls. In every sense, they seem very apt for reproduction.

Choleric women do not seem unhappy with their sexual lives; however, their mode of behaviour is slightly different in that men tend to avoid these women, although men love them, too. After discussing their physical characteristics, Hildegard turns to the topic of choleric women’s love lives:

They [choleric women] are shown respect by men, and are feared. They suffer in menstruation with very much blood. Their womb is strongly positioned, and they are fertile. Men love their ways, but avoid them a bit. These women do not draw men behind them, alluring them. If they are joined to husbands, they are chaste and observe wifely fidelity. With husbands, they are physically healthy, but if they lack them, they will feel pain in their body, and they will be weak, as much from not knowing to whom they might show womanly fidelity, as from the fact they do not have husbands. If the flows of the menstrual period ease before the due time, they will easily be paralytic and they will be enervated and infirm in their humors, or they will feel pain in their liver, or easily incur the black tumor of *dragunculus*, or their breasts swell up from cancer.⁷

Choleric women have a bit of a complicated character. Men generally love these women, but they are reluctant to be near them, since choleric women do not let men chase after them, unlike phlegmatic women, who seem to easily draw men to them. However, once choleric women are married, Hildegard states that they are loyal to their husbands. In addition, choleric

7 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 73. “Et eis reuerentia ab hominibus exhibetur, et timentur. Sed plurimum sanguinem in menstribus patiuntur, et matrix in eis fortiter posita est, ac fecunde sunt. Et uiri mores earum amant, sed tamen eas aliquantum deuitando fugiunt, quoniam ipse illos alliciendo illos post se non trahunt. Quod si in coniuncione maritorum sunt, caste sunt et fidem uxorum illis seruant atque cum eis sane sunt in corpore, et si maritis caruerint, dolebunt in corpore et debiles erunt tam de hoc, quod nesciunt, cui homini femineam fidem seruare possint, quam de hoc, quod maritos non habent. Et si fluenta menstrui temporis prius, quam iustum sit, in eis cessauerint, facile paralitice erunt et in humoribus suis diffuunt, ita quod in eisdem humoribus suis infirme erunt aut quod in iecore dolebunt aut quod etiam facile nigrum tumorem dragunculi incurrunt aut quod ubera earum de cancro ingrossantur.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §174, pp. 127–28.

women have active sexual lives, and they are healthier when they have husbands. When they are not with men, their bodily systems develop issues that weaken them.

On the other hand, choleric women do not seem to benefit much from reproduction. While Hildegard explains that sanguine and phlegmatic women may have many or few children, she barely discusses reproduction in choleric women, emphasizing instead that choleric women might experience a good deal of pain and copious bleeding during menstruation. However, the good thing about the choleric woman's reproductive system is that her womb is securely positioned in her body, and she has minimal reproductive health issues.

In drawing such distinctions, Hildegard introduces the idea that qualities of temperament vary greatly among women. Sanguine and choleric women have similarities in that both types of women need men in order to remain healthy. They are likely to fall ill if they lack husbands. They are good at having babies, as their wombs are securely placed. But their reproductive strengths also suggest that they may not be well suited for ascetic life, in which women have to avoid all men but Jesus.

At the same time, there are some interesting women who do not need men according to Hildegard's physiology. Or rather, they are healthier when they avoid men. These are the melancholic women. The melancholic woman is different from the other female temperament types, which have strong sexual appetites or a high degree of attractiveness to men. According to Hildegard, melancholic women tend to be busy with their own pursuits and less interested in men. They are easily lost in thought and easily tired. These women are not only indifferent to men but are also ignored by men in return. Furthermore, their bodily characteristics are not the most suitable for conceiving and delivering babies.

They [melancholic women] suffer very much blood in their menstrual period, and are sterile, since they have a weak, fragile womb. Whence they are not able to receive, retain, or warm the man's semen. They are healthier, stronger, and happier without husbands than with them since, if they are with husbands, they are enfeebled. Men turn away from them and flee them because they do not address men affably, and they love men very little. If these women at any time have delectation of the flesh, it quickly ceases.⁸

8 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 73. "Sed et plurimum sanguinem in menstruo tempore patiuntur et steriles sunt, quia debilem et fragilem matricem habent. Vnde semen uiri nec concipere nec retinere nec calefacere possunt, et ideo etiam saniores, fortiores et letiores sunt absque maritis quam cum eis,

These women are not well suited for reproduction, which is the primary duty of women in medieval society outside the monastery. Hildegard argues that many melancholic women can be infertile. It is not their fault, nor is it unnatural. Rather, it is the natural result of their physical disposition and character given by God. These women do not have strong wombs like sanguine and choleric women. Also, melancholic women do not need men as much as sanguine or choleric women. Melancholic women are not happy when men are around them, because they do not want to talk to them, and they become rather sick if they have husbands. Even when melancholic women get a taste of carnal pleasure, they do not enjoy it for long. Hildegard concludes that they are not well suited to conceiving and having babies in general, although there is one exception: even melancholic women can be happy with sanguine men. They can have a happy marriage, as they have natures that correspond and balance each other's temperaments. Otherwise, melancholic women are better off living alone.

Even though Hildegard does not make this explicit, she implies that melancholic women are well adapted to remaining virgins and pursuing a religious life. Since they do not have strong sexual impulses, and these diminish rather quickly when they appear, they have fewer issues with monastic life than sanguine or choleric women, who are known for their inclination towards men. Even better, men do not care much for melancholic women in return. These women could be understood as less dangerous for males in monasteries, since there is less of a chance that they will seem attractive to religious men or lead them to sin. Indeed, as Hildegard comments elsewhere, licentiousness is a problem of individual temperament, not gender-specific.⁹ This understanding is contrary to ancient and medieval male writ-

quoniam, si cum maritis fuerint, debiles reddentur. Sed uiri ab eis declinant et eas fugiunt, quia ipsae uiros affabiliter non allocuntur, et quoniam uiros modice diligunt. Et si iste ad horam aliquam delectationem carnis habuerint, cito tamen in eis deficit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §175, p. 128.

9 "Other people, unrestrained in lust, neither have, nor seek to have, continence. Their blood is often inordinately shaken; like a pot placed on a fire which, getting neither completely hot nor completely cool, holds in filthy matter, without powers enough to throw it off." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 130. "Sunt et alii quidam homines de libidine incontinentes, ita quod nec continentiam habent nec eam habere querunt, unde sanguis eorum sepe et inordinate concutitur, uelut olla ad ignem posita, que nec ex toto feruet nec ex toto frigida est, et sic sordes in se retinet, quia tantas uires in se non habet, quod eas eiciat." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §343, p. 200.

ers' view that women were so incomplete that they might need intercourse with men to stay healthy. For example, the popular gynaecological book *De secretis mulierum* falsely cites Galen to explain that a woman's mysterious symptoms were caused by a lack of sexual activity with men.¹⁰

Clearly, Hildegard does not judge women's nature as though it had one singular characteristic, namely, strong sexuality; instead, she introduces different types of women according to their physiological temperaments and psychological complexions. Just as with men, the intensity of their sexual desire varies, depending on their temperaments. Though she refers to herself as "weak" and "inferior," she writes in a way that shows that women are not any less complex than men, and because they have very different qualities among themselves, they cannot be understood as comprising a single category of licentious, naive, and ill-natured beings.¹¹ Nor can women simply be reduced to one half of the Aristotelian dualistic physiology that casts them as cold and passive.¹² Just like men, some women are more sexual than others. Some are well suited for religious and solitary lives, while others are better suited for various social activities, childbirth, and family life. Women are not equally filled with sexual desire, nor equally licentious, nor equally born to have children. Her account of women's differing temperaments indicates Hildegard's own interest in and dedication to the study of women's physiology. Rather than assigning one

10 "The greater doctor Galen tells about a certain woman who was suffering a suffocation of the womb so serious that it prevented her from talking, and she fell down as if she were dead, with no sign of life...Galen then came on the scene, considered the cause, and freed the woman from this illness. This sickness happens in women because they are full of corrupt and poisonous menses, and therefore it is good that these women, whether young or old, often use men, so that this matter might be expelled. This is especially helpful in young women, because they are full of humidity." Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, trans. Lemay, 132. "Galenus enim magnus in medicina, narrat de quadam muliere, suffocationem matricis patiente, quòd illa causa patiebatur tantum quod non potuit loqui, & cecideit ac si mortua esset, quia nullum signum vitae habuit, . . . Galenus autem superueniēs, causam considerauit, & mulierem à passione illa liberauit. Hęc enim aegritudo contingit in mulieribus ex eo que abundat in eis menstruū corruptum & venenosum. Et ideo bonum est quòd tales mulieres, quaecunque fuerint, siue iuuenes, sine antiquae, saepe viris vtantur, vt materia talis expellatur. Et expedit iuuenibus, quia in eis abundant humidum. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *De secretis mulierum*, 123–24.

11 Relying in part on arguments from Hildegard, Margaret Miles criticizes male-centred history that builds up a singular image of women. Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 172.

12 Cadden, "It Takes All Kinds," 155.

nature or one duty to women, she suggests that women, like men, have different physical and psychological characteristics that make them suited for different possible ways of living.

Menstruation as Punishment

In canon law compilations and commentaries, there was debate about whether women should be allowed in church during menstruation or after delivering a child. Hildegard is different from other canonists before her in that she does not particularly distinguish between men and women in ritual purity. Unlike Gratian, Rufinus, and Paucapalea, Hildegard applies one criterion to both women's and men's bodies—whether they are whole or not. Moreover, Hildegard is interesting because her views are supported by her medical accounts, which we have seen in *Cause et cure*. In her eyes, just as there is no physical reason to see menstruation as polluting, there is no reason to forbid menstruating women from entering the church in *Scivias*. Even when defloration and childbirth seem to justify reading the body as corrupt, Hildegard finds a physical basis for comparing such women's broken bodies to the wounds of men. This distinguishes her views from those of Gratian and Gregory, who allowed women's entrance into the church only because women had already been punished by childbirth despite their "fleshly delight" and Eve's transgression.¹³ Therefore, it is meaningful that even when Hildegard forbade women from entering the church after childbirth, she did not attribute her reasoning to women's sinful or physical nature.

Gratian, a contemporary of Hildegard, took menstruating and postpartum women's side on this issue. Like Hildegard, Gratian argues that men should not approach menstruating women sexually, and that women should not stop nursing their own babies just because they want to have intercourse with their husbands again. Here, he does not give a specific reason for this prohibition, such as women's pain or their polluting nature, other than Leviticus: "For the sacred law [Lev. 20:18] inflicted death on a man who approached a menstruating woman." However, following Gregory the Great, Gratian still argues that menstruating women should be permitted to enter

¹³ "If a woman, in the very hour she gives birth, enters a church to give thanks, she incurs no burden of sin for there is fault in fleshly delight, not in pain...So then, if we were to forbid a woman who has given birth from entering a church, we would be classing her very punishment as a fault." Gratian, *Treatise on Laws*, trans. Gordley, dist. 5, chap. 2, p. 17.

the church.¹⁴ Gregory argued that if these women were forbidden to enter the church, it was like punishing them twice, considering that they already suffer from the punishment of Eve.¹⁵ Moreover, according to Gratian's understanding of Gregory, the church already had an example in the woman with bleeding issues from the Gospel who was healed by touching Jesus' garment. Jesus was not angry with her; rather, he complimented her courage.

On the other hand, a few theologians did not show mercy to women during menstruation or the postpartum period. Rufinus, a twelfth-century commentator on Gratian who was also an influential figure in the later tradition of canon law,¹⁶ disagrees with Gratian and Gregory on whether postpartum women could enter the church. His commentary on the *Decretum* relies more on the old purity laws and Theodore's *Penitentials* to support his position against permitting women entrance into the church right after childbirth.¹⁷ Rufinus refers to Julius Solinus on the harmful effects of menstrual

14 "Nevertheless, a woman undergoing the usual period of menstruation should not be prohibited from entering a church since fault ought not to be imputed to an excrescence of nature. Thus, it is unjust that, on account of what is suffered unwillingly, they be deprived of entrance into a church. For we know that the woman who suffered from the issue of blood, coming up behind the Lord, touched the hem of his garment and was immediately freed from her infirmity [Matt. 9:20–23]. . . . And later: If, then, it was proper that the woman presumed to touch the Lord's garment in her illness, why should what was granted to one infirm person not be conceded to all women who endure a similar infirmity due to a natural debility?" Gratian, *Treatise on Laws*, trans. Gordley, dist. 5, chap. 2, p. 18.

15 On the other hand, Gregory still considered menstruation as a defect, even though menstruating women could enter the church if they really wanted to. "For the menstruous habit in women is no sin, seeing that it occurs naturally; yet still that nature itself has been so vitiated as to be seen to be polluted even without the intention of the will is a defect that comes of sin, whereby human nature may perceive what through judgment it has come to be, so that man who voluntarily committed sin may bear the guilt of sin involuntarily. And so females, when they consider themselves as being in their habit of sickness, if they presume not to approach the sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord, are to be commended for their right consideration." Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistolarum*, trans. Barmby, bk. 11, ep. 64.

16 Raming, *History of Women and Ordination*, 2:80.

17 "Dicitur autem in hac dist. ex auctoritate Gregorii [cap. II, III] quod mulier enixa mox licite potest intrare ecclesiam, ut puer natus statim baptizari; similiter etiam menstruata. Tamen ab utriusque concubitu, dum et illa est in purgatione et ista in profluvio sanguinis, viri se continere debent. Illud de enixa vero muliere hodie evacuatum est propter ecclesie contrariam consuetudinem et maxime propter illud ex penitentiali Theodori, quod est in Brocard. lib. XIX., capitulo (141), 'Mulier que intrat ecclesiam ante mundum sanguinem post partum, si masculum genuerit, XXXIII

blood.¹⁸ Furthermore, he also saw women's pregnancy as polluting because "every unformed foetus displeases God," meaning the female reproductive processes are harmful in general.¹⁹

These debates reveal a negative attitude in the theology of Hildegard's time towards women during or immediately after the loss of blood, showing that Hildegard was on the cutting edge of issues regarding whether women should be permitted to enter the church during menstruation and after childbirth. The ancient belief in ritual impurity to see menstruation as polluting and dangerous lingered in medieval society. Even when theologians granted entrance to the church to menstruating women, they could still blame women's bodies for polluting men, as Gratian's pupil Paucapalea did, citing the *Penitentials* of Theodore in his argument.²⁰ Even when women

dies' – a die octava i. e. circumcisionis; 'si feminam, LXVI' – post quartam decimam diem, quando convenientibus amicis nomen puelle imponebatur – ab ingressu ecclesie abstinence." Rufinus, *Summa decretorum*, ed. Singer, dist. 5, p. 16.

18 "Menstruata autem mulier dicitur a menstruis, i. e. a profluvio sanguinis, quod per menses singulos mulier perfert; hec etiam muliebria nuncupantur. Adeo autem execrabilis et immundus est sanguis ille, sicut ait Iulius Solinus in libro de mirabilibus mundi, ut eius contactu fruges non germinent, arescant arbusta, moriantur herbe, amittant arbores fetus, nigrescant era, si canes inde ederint in rabiem efferantur. Non autem solum propter ipsam immunditiam sanguinis a menstruata arcenda est voluptas, sed etiam ne vitiosus fetus ex illo coitu nascatur; tunc enim testante Ieronymo concepti fetus vitium seminis contrahunt, ita ut leprosi et elephantici ex hac corruptione nascentur et feda corpora in utroque sexu parvitate vel deformitate membrorum appareant; sanies enim corrupta degenerat." Rufinus, *Summa decretorum*, ed. Singer, dist. 5, pp. 16–17.

19 "Quo spatio arcetur mulier ab ingressu templi tamquam immunda, ut per hoc innuatur quod omnis fetus informis displicet Deo; sola enim formosa placent Deo – unde sponsus ad sponsam dicit: Amica mea, formosa mea. Sed iuxta hanc considerationem ab introitu templi prohiberi debuerat, cum fetus in utero informis erat, non post partum, cum iam sit formatus et natus. Quod tamen fit, eo quod nescitur, quo tempore concipiatur, cum in utero illud secretum agitur, ideoque quod [fieri] non potuit eo tempore propter ignorantiam fit eo tempore, quo potest, cum iam scitur: ut scil. post partum mulier illud suppleat, quod secundum ordinem nature ante partum fieri debuerat." Rufinus, *Summa decretorum*, ed. Singer, dist. 5, p. 17.

20 "Menstrua dicitur supervacuus mulieris sanguis. Dicta vero menstrua a lunaria luminis circuito a quo hoc solet evenire profluvium. Luna enim graece mene dicitur. Haec et muliebria nuncupantur. Nam solum mulier menstruale animal est, cuius contactu sanguinis fruges non germinant, acescunt musta, moriuntur herbae, amittunt arbores fructus, ferrum rubigo corrumpit, nigrescunt aera; si canes inde ederint in rabiem efferuntur. Et sciendum est, quod, ut dicit beatus Gregorius: Si mulier hora eadem etc. Sed in poenitentiali Theodori contra legitur, ut si mulier ante praefinitum tempus praesumpserit ecclesiam intrare, tot dies in pane et aqua

were admitted into the church after childbirth, they were allowed to enter only under certain conditions, such as the women's humility and prayer. This implies that women's bodily characteristics were still seen as going against the church's teaching—as something that required penance. Even when male theologians such as Gratian allowed women to enter the church during their periods or after delivering a child, they were not entirely free of negative views towards menstruating or postpartum bodies. According to male theologians, women were allowed into the church “despite” their bodily defects.

In Hildegard's discourse on what women should or should not do, she often omits discussion of pollution, which sharply distinguishes her from male theologians. Even when Hildegard explains why menstruating women should not have intercourse, it is not about pollution but about their physical distress. She argues, in God's voice, that menstruating women should not have intercourse with men—not because they are polluting but because they are already in pain. As women are not polluting but in pain, it is not fair if they are not allowed in church, especially during the time when women need care.²¹ Women with their periods should keep themselves “in hidden knowledge,”²² but this does not mean that they should be prevented from entering the church. A woman's church visit, guaranteed by her faith, is for salvation.

While Hildegard, like Gratian, does not see menstruation as a sufficient reason to keep women from church, she differs from him in viewing childbirth as a valid reason for keeping women away from church. Her view is unique. For example, Gratian, following Gregory, sees no reason to keep women from giving thanks in church after a successful childbirth. Hilde-

poeniteat, quot ecclesia carere debuerat. Solutio. Beatus Greg, illam dicit in hoc non peccare, quae gratias actura humiliter ecclesiam ingreditur. Theodore vero de ea dicit, quae non causa orationis sed alia qualibet necessitate ducta temere ingreditur. Sic et menstrua orationis causa non prohibetur ecclesiam ingredi.” Paucapalea, *Summa*, ed. von Schulte, dist. 5, 11. Translated in Raming, *History of Women and Ordination*, 2:101n45.

21 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 83. “Sed hoc tempus doloris in muliere non abicio, quoniam illud Euae dedi quando in gustu pomi peccatum concepit, unde et mulier in hoc eodem tempore in magna medicina misericordiae habenda est.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 20, p. 27.

22 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 83. “Ipsa etiam se continente in absconso disciplinae, non autem ita ut ab incessu templi mei se contineat.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 20, p. 27.

gard does. Her reason in God's voice for this has to do with bodily wholeness: whether women undergo any processes which might bring about serious injury. It does not specifically concern women's issues. As we have seen in her *Cause et cure*, menstruation simply takes advantage of natural openings in the womb to rid the body of surplus fluids; it does not break a woman's body apart. Childbirth, however, is a more serious event for Hildegard, as it involves a rupture of a woman's wholeness.

In either case, Hildegard does not focus on the polluted or polluting nature of the woman's body in reproductive processes. In particular, menstruation is far from being a matter of pollution, because it does not rupture or wound the female body. Hildegard suggests that a woman's body has a pathway that allows air to enter, which benefits the release of menstrual blood and allows a baby to breathe when needed.²³ When God opened Eve's body after she ate the forbidden fruit, God also opened the bodies of her female descendants. Therefore, menstruation became a routine part of the earthly existence of women. This accounts for why, except when they are pregnant, women are bound to menstruate monthly. Hildegard, like other medieval theologians, understands this "small portion of the pain of childbirth"²⁴ as a part of women's penance; however, she does not portray the bodies of menstruating women as dangerous to men but rather emphasizes women's need for nurturing tenderness in times of menstruation or pregnancy.

However, postpartum women are different because their bodies have such "open" wounds that they should not be allowed in church. Yet, this is not because they are women and have to go through reproductive processes. The reason is physical and not limited to women. Hildegard says that a broken body could be a pollution, but this is not exclusive to women. Pollution from a broken body can happen to men.²⁵ Hildegard elaborates by referring

23 While women were already weak and fragile when they were created by God, a woman's openness increases during menstruation and pregnancy so that the flow of blood and air can come in and go out. For example, a woman's skull is divided, and her skin is thin, enabling these flows. Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 128–29.

24 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 83. "Portionem scilicet doloris partus sui tangens." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 20, p. 27.

25 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 83. "Sed et mulier cum prolem pepererit fractis occultis membris suis templum meum nonnisi secundum legem per me sibi datam ingrediatur, quatenus sancta sacramenta eiusdem templi mei ab omni pollutione et dolore uiri ac mulieris inuiolabilia sint; quia Filium meum purissima Virgo genuit, quae integra absque ullo uulnere peccati fuit. Locus enim,

to Leviticus, which says that a man with wounds is also prohibited from entering a holy place. The wounds that women receive from childbirth and that men receive from “the impact of a blow”²⁶ are treated in the same way. This openness from childbirth is not the same, however, as the openness that enables the menstrual flow in the woman’s body. The former is more like a rupture.

For Hildegard, a rupture matters. She goes on to explain the reason why a person with an open wound is not allowed in church, which is to preserve the wholeness of the Ecclesia; for Hildegard, as she repeatedly emphasizes, this wholeness is analogous to virginity and the wholeness of the Virgin Mary. A rupture of the physical body, which Hildegard traces all the way back to the broken body of Abel slaughtered by Cain,²⁷ meant a schism of the Church, like the schism that Hildegard faced in her time.²⁸ This interpretation is valid because the human being’s physical body is not only analogically but literally the temple of God. Just as the temple of God should not be divided, the ruptured human body should be kept away from the healthy church.

qui in honorem eiusdem Vnigeniti mei consecratus est, integer ab omni corruptione liuoris ac uulneris esse debet; quoniam idem Vnigenitus meus integritatem uirginei partus in se nouit. Vnde et mulier quae integritatem uirginitatis suae cum uiro corrumpit, in liuore plagae suae qua corrupta est ab ingressu templi mei se contineat, usque dum plaga uulneris ipsius sanetur secundum quod ecclesiastica disciplina ipsi de eadem causa certissime demonstrat.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 21, p. 28.

26 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 83. “Uir (apertis uulneribus si integritas membrorum ipsius in tactu percussione diuisa est) templum meum nisi cum timore magnae necessitatis non intrabit ne uioletur.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 20, p. 27.

27 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 83. “Sicut integra membra Abel, qui templum Dei fuit, Cain frater suus crudeliter fregit.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 20, p. 27.

28 After her death, it seems that Hildegard’s writings on schism were understood as authoritative precedents to be consulted for advice in later crises. For example, Pierre d’Ailly (1350/1351–1420), a famous theologian, consulted Hildegard of Bingen’s writings as prophecies about the Great Schism, although Laura Ackerman Smoller argues that it is hard to determine how much she impacted him. Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars*, 97. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski suggests that Hildegard was seen as a major prophet, read more importantly after her lifetime, especially during the time of the Great Schism. Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Visions and Schism Politics,” 173–87.

And even for Hildegard, deflowering and childbirth are not very different from the physical bruises and wounds of men. Hildegard sees them as representing the same level of loss of bodily integrity; wounds are thus treated as corruptions. As she writes: “Therefore, let a woman who breaks the wholeness of her virginity with a man also refrain from entering My Temple while injured by the bruise of her corruption, until the injury of that wound is healed.”²⁹ Hildegard did not treat women’s bodies after intercourse and childbirth as polluted or polluting because they were undergoing uniquely *feminine* processes; rather, her prohibitions are based on the commonalities between men and women. Corruption from bruises could happen to anyone. And once their wounds were healed, whether earned through sexual activity or physical combat, both men and women needed to re-establish contact with the community of the faithful and could enter churches to do so. From this perspective, women’s bodily processes were no more polluting than men’s. In fact, in the context of its necessity as a part of the perpetuation of humankind, sexual intercourse was not dirty. Hildegard thus focuses on the wounding nature of deflowering, without making intercourse itself problematic. For Hildegard, the most important factor in deciding whether someone should be accepted into the church was whether their bodies were wounded or whole.

On a related note, it is also interesting that Hildegard juxtaposes Eve and Cain in explaining whether or not women should be allowed to go to church during menstruation or after childbirth. In some sense, Eve—who introduced original sin and therefore death, and was punished with painful childbirth—and Cain—who committed homicide for the first time, and therefore breached the temple of the body and threatened the wholeness of the church—could be considered similar insofar as they were the first sinners, and thus prompted the association of certain bodily states in men and women with parallel penances. As these passages of Hildegard’s *Scivias* show, she promotes ideas that tend to equalize male and female problems; she does not emphasize the polluting or inferior nature of the female body when she (in God’s voice) allows menstruating women to enter the church.

29 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 83. “Vnde et mulier quae integritatem uirginitatis suae cum uiro corrumpit, in liuore plagae suae qua corrupta est ab ingressu templi mei se contineat, usque dum plaga uulneris ipsius sanetur.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 1, bk. 2, chap. 21, p. 28.

Menstruation as Purgative

Hildegard states that women's menstruation functions to cleanse their bodies by expelling unnecessary blood and humours. However, Hildegard goes further than her contemporaries by suggesting that women's blood also functions to detoxify men's semen, which changed after Adam's transgression; in describing the process of emitting seed and conception, she reverses the normal polarity of heat and cold that characterized women and men in medieval physiology. Describing the condition of the parents' bodies at conception, she writes:

These all create a tempest, from their excessive superfluity. From the blood, they bring forth a poisonous foam, which is semen. When it falls upon its place, the blood of the mother joins with it, from which it will be bloody. Conception of a human being arises from pleasure, which the serpent, in the first fruit, blew into the human; the man's blood is spurred on by pleasure. That blood sends cold foam into the woman; the heat of the maternal flesh coagulates it, spreading it out into a bloody form. The foam, remaining in the heat, soon grows dense, to the stature of a small human being, from the sweat of dry foods of the mother; until the writing of the creator, which formed the human being, overlays a consistent density on the human stature; just as a workman forms a tall vessel.³⁰

In this passage, it is not women's menstrual material but men's semen which is toxic. This idea of poison in the semen is repeated:

In Adam's transgression, the strength in the male's genital member changed into a poisonous foam, and the female's blood changed to a contrary effusion. Because men's flesh was made from earth, his blood has semen of a strong and correct nature. A woman's blood is also of a correct nature. Because she is weak and tender she does not have semen, but emits merely a tiny, watery foam, since she is not of both earth and flesh, as a male, but was taken only from the flesh of the male. And so she is weak and fragile and

30 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 51. "Et hec omnia de nimietate superfluitatis quasi tempestatem faciunt et de sanguine uenenosam spumam, quod semen est, educunt, quod, cum in locum suum cadit, sanguis mulieris illi se coniungit, et ex hoc sanguineum erit. Prima enim inceptio hominis per delectationem, quam serpens in pomo primo homini insufflauit, exoritur, quia tunc sanguis uiri ex delectatione concutitur. Vnde et idem sanguis frigidam spumam mulieri inmittit, que ex calore matris carnis coagulatur et in sanguineam formam extenditur; ac eadem spuma in eodem calore sic permanens postmodum a sudore sicci ciborum matris in spissitudinem parue humane stature crescit, quousque scriptura creatoris, que hominem formauit, eandem spissitudinem humane stature totam perfundit, quemadmodum faber elatum uas suum format." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §129, p. 95.

is the vessel of a man. From the love of the male, her blood is aroused and she sends it, as if a foam, more bloody than white, to the semen of the male.³¹

Hildegard argues that women's wombs have the power to heat men's semen and to neutralize semen's poisonous nature in the complementary process of conception. This view is interesting because traditionally, women's bodies were considered colder than men's. Hildegard also acknowledges this, and she generally follows this Galenic conception of male and female physiology. However, Hildegard emphasizes the complementary relationship between the two sexes to such a degree that she still envisions interactions between women and men during reproductive processes.

It joins with it and shapes it, making it warm and bloody. After it has fallen into its place, and lain there, it grows cold. It is as if a poisonous foam until fire, that is heat, warms it and until air, that is breath, dries it; and until water, that is liquid, allows pure dampness to enter; and until the earth, that is a membrane, constrains it. And then it will be bloody—not totally blood, but combined with a bit of blood. The four humors, which she³² draws from the four elements, remain in moderate balance around this semen until, as if flesh, it is coagulated and firmed so that the shape of a human can be configured in it.³³

31 Modified from Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 51. "Nam in transgressionem Ade fortitudo uiri in genitali membro uersus est in uenenosam spumam, atque mulieris sanguis uersus est in contrariam effusionem. De forti enim et de recta natura uiri sanguis eius semen habet, quia de terra caro factus est. Sed de recta natura mulieris sanguis eius, quia debilis et tenuis est, semen non habet, sed tantum tenuem et paruam spumam emittit, quoniam de duobus modis terre et carnis non est ut uir, sed tantum de carne uiri sumpta est; et ideo debilis et fragilis est et uas uiri est. Et de amore uiri sanguis eius concutitur et uelut spumam, sed magis sanguineam quam albam, ad semen uiri emittit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 1, §129, pp. 95–96.

32 Throop identified the subject as "he" in her translation, but I argue that the subject should be "she" rather than "he" because it is the mother who draws on the four elements and uses them to strengthen the foetus.

33 Modified from Hildegard of Bingen, *Causes and Cures*, trans. Throop, 51–52. "Que se illi coniungit et que illud calidum et sanguineum facit et confortat. Nam postquam in locum suum ceciderit et iacuerit, frigescit. Et tam diu quasi uenenosa spuma est, usque dum ignis, uidelicet calor, illud calefacit, et dum aer, uidelicet spiramen, illud exsiccatur, et dum aqua, scilicet fluore, illi puram humiditatem admittit, et usque dum terra, scilicet cutecula, illud constringit. Et tunc sic erit sanguineum, id est non totum sanguis, sed aliquantulum sanguine permixtum. Et quatuor humores, quos homo a quatuor elementis trahit, ita circa idem semen moderate et temperate manent, usque dum quasi caro coaguletur et confirmetur, ita quod forma hominis in eo figurari potest." Hildegard of Bingen, *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure*, ed. Moulinier and Berndt, bk. 2, §129, p. 96.

Men have to heat women's bodies with their love, and women's foam, the female version of semen, will then warm men's semen. Rather than fixing the binary nature of women and men, Hildegard values the fact that women and men exchange qualities in order to reproduce. Both sexes work together because women and men are made to become one flesh; their natures are complementary (in strength and weakness as well as in heat and cold). However, when Hildegard analyzes the actual process of conception, she reverts to this gendered hot-cold polarity. At the moment of conception, it is the woman's womb that is hotter and does the work of warming men's semen, which is colder.

Hildegard's suggestion that men have poisonous semen represents another major departure from Aristotle, Galen, and their medieval followers, who hold that semen is the purest and most distilled form of blood. During the organic process of conception, semen is joined with women's foam, surrounded by women's humours, and heated by the womb in order to grow into a human form.

Because the womb nurtures and strengthens, the mixture of men's semen and women's foam allows the embryo to develop into a child by eliminating semen's dangerous nature. In this sense, the womb provides not only a nutritive but also a purifying environment for babies. Carrying this idea further, it is ultimately the womb that nullifies the result of Adam's sin in God's creation story by re-creation through the Virgin Mary, who conceived Jesus as a part of God's plan to purify the entire human generation; more on the purifying role of female bodies will be discussed in the next chapter. What is important here is that every woman to some extent engages in a purifying process during conception.

By reframing menstruation as a purgative process rather than the cause and result of pollution, Hildegard ties a medical perspective on female physiology to a theological understanding of redemption. Her appreciation of physical flows as divinely intended mechanisms of balance contrasts with her male predecessors and contemporaries who viewed these reproductive processes primarily as manifestations of Eve's curse. This integration of medical and theological perspectives reinterprets the premodern understanding of the womb and women's bodies through a woman's voice.