

GIVING BIRTH TO A BABY AND GIVING SPIRITUAL BIRTH TO HUMANKIND

IN *SCIVIAS*, HILDEGARD adapts the operations of a woman's body to represent the work of Ecclesia. Furthermore, the woman's reproductive role and its physical characteristics are used allegorically to explain the salvational function of Ecclesia. Hildegard's exegesis is somewhat novel insofar as it depicts women's reproductive processes more vividly than other theologians do, although she still relies on the traditional image of Ecclesia as a female figure. In medieval writing it is not difficult to find certain abstract Christian concepts or symbols, such as the Synagogue or Sophia, described as female characters.¹ Hildegard, however, adds a new dimension to this tradition by carefully exploring the allegorical potential of women's reproductive systems, providing her with new images showing how holiness may be contained in women's physical bodies. *Scivias*, specifically in the second book where Hildegard's vision depicts the present condition of human beings, shows in detail how Hildegard works with and changes standard conceptions of the woman's body as a vessel. In this vision, Hildegard describes Ecclesia as a female body and Ecclesia's salvational role as a distinctly feminine process of re-creation.

In her major vision in *Scivias*, Hildegard represents Ecclesia as having a woman's body going through purgation, pregnancy, and childbirth comparable to its salvational process. This vision highlights the medical notion of female porosity and religious ideas of female vulnerability, turning them into possibilities of redemption. Also, this femaleness in salvation is linked to Hildegard's understanding of God as a motherly figure, feeding people with milk. The holy representation of the female body, including the Virgin Mary's body, manifests the tension between porosity and integrity. While the virginal body of Jesus's mother had to be sealed, the possibility of pregnancy

¹ In the first book of *Scivias*, Hildegard represents Synagogue as a pale blind woman. Although Synagogue is an important figure as "the mother of the Incarnation of the Son of God," Hildegard still uses her disability to identify her as "the holy forerunner" of the more important figure Ecclesia, following the medieval tradition of the Song of Songs. Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 133. "Quae est synagoga mater incarnationis Filii Dei" Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, bk. 1, chap. 5, p. 94; Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*, 92.

and childbirth in the lives of all women is seen by Hildegard as enabling the flows needed for health, salvation, and the celestial order by keeping the right balances and allowing motion to continue. In other words, the weaker female body allows flows so that it can conceive and be purged not just in physiological processes but also in cosmological and salvational ones.

The Salvational Flow of Ecclesia

Following medieval theological tradition, Hildegard represents Ecclesia in *Scivias* as female and identifies her with the Virgin Mary, as we have seen in the commentary tradition of the Song of Songs. However, what is unique about Hildegard's version of Ecclesia is her particularly vivid description of childbirth. While others may represent Ecclesia as female and compare Ecclesia's pain to labour, Hildegard's representation includes an unusual amount of detail and—even as an inversion of a normal process—shows she is thinking like a person with gynaecological knowledge. For her, the womb offers an important space to enable purification and to give people new life, in other words, salvation. Hildegard not only uses the traditional praises of the womb drawn from the Song of Songs but also develops this conventional and salvational idea into a more vividly physical representation.

Hildegard's description of Ecclesia characterizes her at once as a building, a queen, and a strangely perforated body. In this passage, the woman's body is not only positive but also redemptive. Here is Hildegard's description:

After this I saw the image of a woman as large as a great city, with a wonderful crown on her head and arms from which a splendor hung like sleeves, shining from Heaven to earth. Her womb was pierced like a net with many openings, with a huge multitude of people running in and out. She had no legs or feet, but stood balanced on her womb in front of the altar that stands before the eyes of God, embracing it with her outstretched hands and gazing sharply with her eyes throughout all of Heaven.²

2 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 169. "POST HAEC uidi quasi muliebrem imaginem tantae magnitudinis ut magna ciuitas est, habentem caput miro ornato coronatum, et brachia de quibus splendor uelut manicae pendebat, a caelo usque ad terram radians. Venter autem eius erat in modum retis perforatus multis foraminibus, in quibus maxima multitudo hominum discurrebat. Crura uero et pedes non habebat, sed tantum super uentrem suum ante altare quod est ante oculos Dei stans, ipsum expansis manibus circumplectebatur, et oculis suis per omne caelum acutissime uidebat." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, p. 134.

But this is not a normal figure of a virgin queen:

And that image spreads out its splendor like a garment, saying, "I must conceive and give birth!"

Then I saw black children moving in the air near the ground like fishes in water, and they entered the womb of the image through the openings that pierced it. But she groaned, drawing them upward to her head, and they went out by her mouth, while she remained untouched. And behold, that serene light with her figure of a man in it, blazing with a glowing fire, which I had seen in my previous vision, again appeared to me, and stripped the black skin off each of them and threw it away; and it clothed each of them in a pure white garment and opened to them the serene light.³

Here, Hildegard reports that she saw Ecclesia as a womanly figure whose womb has many openings just like a net. In the same way that conception occurs (i.e., via uptake into the lower parts), in this passage Ecclesia draws sinful souls into her belly, or her womb, through its openings. When the souls pass through her body, they are cleansed and finally sent onwards to heaven through Ecclesia's mouth. These processes strongly evoke an image of childbirth; however, they are an alternative vision of it. We might also call this scene an inversion of the Virgin Mary's childbirth, perhaps relating to certain medieval beliefs that before delivering Jesus from her womb, Mary conceived through her mouth.⁴

While the womb is traditionally seen as a space of physiological vulnerability or danger, Hildegard inverts this view. The same permeability that once symbolized Eve's weakness now enables Ecclesia's redemptive labour. Through the act of receiving and transforming, the womb becomes a theological site of sanctification. And though Hildegard underscores Ecclesia's intact virginity—aligning her with the Virgin Mary—this does not contradict her openness. Instead, it reinforces the paradox at the heart of Hildegard's

3 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 169. "Et eadem imago expandit splendorem suum uelut uestimentum dicens: 'Me oportet concipere et parere.'... Deinde uidi nigros infantes iuxta terram in aere quasi pisces in aqua pergentes, et uentrem eiusdem imaginis in foraminibus ubi perforata erat intrantes. At illa ingemuit, sursum eos ad caput suum trahens, ubi ad os eius exierunt, ipsa tamen integra permanente. Et ecce illa serena lux et in ipsa species hominis tota rutilante igne flagrans (secundum uisionem quam prius uideram) iterum mihi apparuit, et singulis eorum nigerrimam cutem abstrahens ac extra uiam easdem cutes proiciens, singulos illorum candidissima ueste induit ac eis serenissimam lucem aperuit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, p. 135.

4 Constat, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin*, 278.

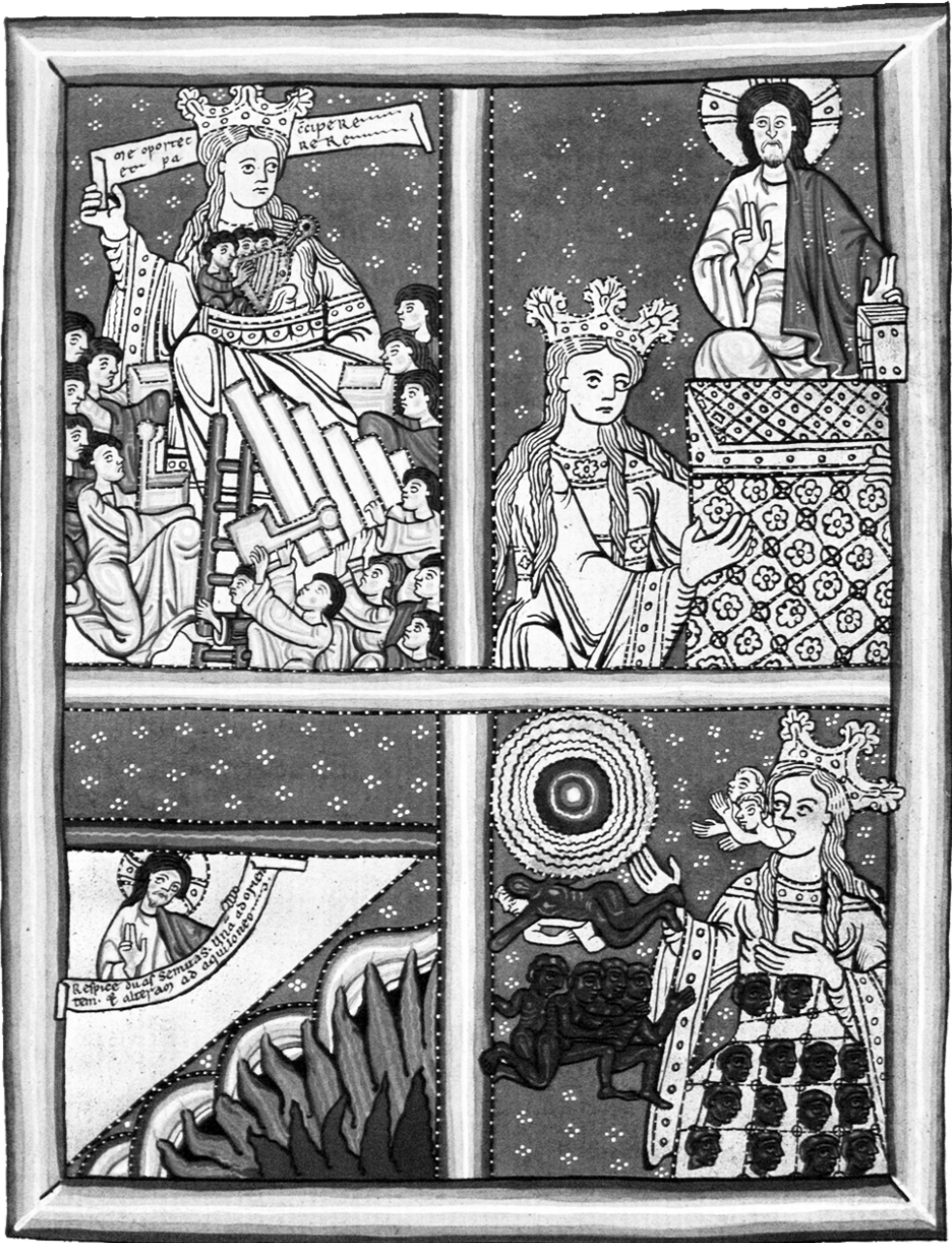


Figure 3. "Ecclesia, the Mother of the Faithful and Baptism." In Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias Codex*, pt. 2, vision 3, fol. 51r, ca. 1175. Original lost, hand-copied on parchment, ca. 1930. Rüdeshcim-Eibingen, St. Hildegard's Abbey. Courtesy of St. Hildegard's Abbey.

vision: a sealed virgin who is simultaneously a conduit, an ever-flowing vessel of divine grace.

Compared to actual bodily childbirth, this process in Hildegard's vision can be seen as soul rebirth. The difference is that this salvational process is done in the reverse order from physical childbirth. Still, the processes are similar in many respects. The lower part of Hildegard's Ecclesia and the actual wombs of normal women are both spaces for containing something related to life. Ecclesia receives and nurtures the floating souls inside her, as the normal womb accepts semen, grows an embryo with a soul, and nurtures it within its inner space. In Hildegard's vision, Ecclesia provides the sinful black souls with a process of rebirth by purifying them, or causing them to become white, and then setting them free. A normal woman grows a new human life in pregnancy and then "sets it free" through labour. These two processes are also related through their involvement of the mouth, through which Ecclesia sends out souls and through which mothers feed an embryo.

In addition, the salvational procedure of Ecclesia and the reproductive course of the womb are necessarily accompanied by physical pain. In *Scivias*, while Ecclesia cleanses the black souls by drawing them from her stomach to her mouth, Hildegard describes her as groaning. The salvational process is "the true ablution"⁵ that allows Ecclesia to guide the souls to God. This purification is painful since the souls have to travel through her body from the bottom to the top. It goes without saying that even normal childbirth can be physically tortuous. It is well known that medieval childbirth was so dangerous that many women died in labour due to lack of nutritional and medical resources. In both cases, however, pain was treated as an essential part of accomplishing these female duties.

These similarities between Hildegard's vision of Ecclesia and the actual childbirth process point to Hildegard's view of the salvational or new-life-giving function of women. Hildegard's representation of the reproductive body does not evoke the inferior or degraded status of women. Rather, a woman's capacity for generation, labour, and maternal care is foregrounded and symbolizes the concrete operation of God's will to save people from sin and cleanse their souls for eternal life. This salvational process uses the woman's body as an important metaphor for the holiness of the entire dispensational process governed by God and for its material and immaterial parts working together.

5 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 171; Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 6, p. 139.

Although the direction of spiritual rebirth is opposite to that of actual childbirth, both processes signify a new birth. Hildegard's use of the female body has two positive aspects. First, the woman's body is not defiled but purifying. Hence, the physicality of the female reproductive organs and their specific processes become a metaphor for salvation. Second, the body of the woman is not simply a vessel that remains passive when it receives semen or while it allows the baby to develop. Rather, the womb has an ongoing and active role in purifying the woman's body. The womb is not just a passive place of containment; it is an active living organ with important work. For this reason alone, the womb also becomes an allegory of soul cleansing.

God's Maternal Love with Fluidity

Ecclesia's care for her children also does not end with birth but continues with the provision of both love and milk. God's divinity is fluid, and sometimes Ecclesia stands in as a figure of maternal love. But the imagery is very similar. God's maternal love is inherited by the Church, also the mother of believers in *Scivias*. Hildegard often uses the analogy of a mother's love, especially when describing unconditional love. The following passage from *Scivias* compares the Church's love to a mother's breast milk.

And as a baby is nourished in its body by milk and the food another grinds up for it, so also a baptized person must observe from his inmost heart the doctrine and the faith given to him in his baptism. But if the baby does not suck at its mother's breast or take the food ground up for it, it will die at once; and so also if a baptized person does not receive the nurturing of his most loving mother, the Church, or retain the words his faithful teachers proposed to him at baptism, he will not escape a cruel death for his soul, for he has refused his soul's salvation and the sweetness of eternal life.⁶

6 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 183. "Sed sicut infans de lacte et de escis ab alio sibi contritis corporaliter pascitur, ita etiam doctrinam et in baptisate sibi propositam fidem ex intimo corde obseruabit. Quod si ubera matris suae non sugit nec contritas sibi escas suscipit, incunctanter moritur, sic etiam si nutrimenta piissimae matris ecclesiae non accipit, nec uerba fidelium doctorum quae sibi in baptisate proposita sunt retinet, crudelitatem mortis animae non euadit; quoniam saluationem animae et dulcedinem aeternae uitae recusauit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 2, chap. 33, p. 155.

Here, the Church's teaching regarding God is presented as being like milk, which even babies can swallow and digest without difficulty.⁷ Babies, lacking teeth and having sensitive stomachs, cannot consume solid food like adults; they need milk or predigested ingredients. If they do not receive food in this way, they will die of hunger. Hildegard explains that the church's teachings are so soft and easily understood that even those who lack high intelligence or education can easily grasp them and so receive the benefits of salvation. God provides the Church as a means for humanity's survival. His teachings through the Church are conceived of here as a person's very first source of nourishment. Hildegard uses this analogy to foreground the motherly nature of God's love by emphasizing that he made the Church's teaching simple and basic so that anyone can receive it.

In her exegesis of Vision One in Book Two, when Hildegard presents God's process of creating humanity, she compares the mud moistened by God to a baby fed with mother's milk. As she describes the vision:

Then the same flame was in that fire, and that burning extended itself to a little clod of mud which lay at the bottom of the atmosphere, and warmed it so that it was made flesh and blood, and blew upon it until it rose up a living human. When this was done, the blazing fire, by means of that flame which burned ardently with a gentle breath, offered to the human a white flower, which hung in that flame as dew hangs on the grass. Its scent came to the human's nostrils, but he did not taste it with his mouth or touch it with his hands and thus he turned away and fell into the thickest darkness, out of which he could not pull himself.⁸

7 Hildegard must have related this imagery to the milk and meat trope in the Pauline epistles, such as 1 Corinthians 3:2, "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able," and Hebrews 5:12, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."

8 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 149. "Deinde etiam eadem flamma in igne et ardore illo extendit se ad paruam glebam limosae terrae iacentem in fundo eiusdem aeris eam calefaciens, ita quod caro et sanguis effecta est, eamque aspirans, ita quod uiuens homo erecta est. Quo facto ille lucidus ignis praebeuit per eandem flammam leni flatu ardentem flagrantem ipsi homini candidissimum florem pendentem in eadem flamma ut ros pendet in gramine, cuius odorem idem homo naribus quidem sensit, sed gustum eius ore non percepit, nec manibus eum tetigit, ita uidelicet se auertens atque cadens in densissimas tenebras, de quibus se erigere non ualuit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 1, p. 110.

Then Hildegard presents her readers with an exegesis.⁹ The mud in this vision was at first weak and fragile, and it remained motionless until God heated it. Then, the body became flesh from the mud, and blood flowed through it. In order to fully become flesh, however, the mud still had to be nourished with moisture, which Hildegard compares to mother's milk. Or we might say that mother's milk enlivens a baby through nourishment, as God made mud into flesh through the animating power of heat. In this sense, both women's moisture and their milk, which are flows in their bodies, were understood as qualities with creative power.

Hildegard represents the woman's reproductive role through language that foregrounds God's provision of support and loving care.

"And the children of those who afflicted you shall come and bow down to you, and all who slandered you shall worship your footsteps" [Isaiah 60:14]. What does this mean? O You Who are celestial Peace and the purest Sun. By You shall burst forth the living root, which is regeneration by the Spirit and water, and those who had lain prostrate under the heaviest curse in the filth of horrible impurity shall come eagerly to acknowledge You and thus bowed down, they will rise at last to truth and justice. How? They will suck the maternal sweetness of the true faith, not knowing it by sight but grasping it by faithful belief. And who are they? Those who sprang in sin from a race that never saw You in Your burning charity but persistently afflicted and oppressed You as if You were not their destined ruler; but who came to their senses and most sweetly loved You.¹⁰

9 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 152. "Quod autem deinde eadem flamma in igne et ardore illo extendit se ad paruam glebam limosae terrae iacentem in fundo eiusdem aeris: hoc est quod creatis aliis creaturis Verbum Dei in forti uoluntate Patris et in amore supernae suauitatis inspexit pauperem et fragilem materiam mollis et tenacis fragilitatis humanitatis tam malorum quam bonorum procreandorum hominum in imo insensibilitatis et ponderositatis suae detentam et necdum acuto et uitali flatu excitatam; et eam calefaciens, ita quod caro et sanguis effecta est: id est in uiriditate calorem ei infundens, quoniam terra est carnalis materia hominis, nutriens eum suco suo sicut mater lactat filios suos; eamque aspirans ita quod uiuens homo erecta est: quia ipsam per supernam uirtutem excitauit atque in anima et corpore discernentem hominem mirabiliter eduxit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 1, chap. 7, pp. 115–16.

10 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 179. "*Et uenient ad te curui filii eorum qui humiliauerunt te, et adorabunt uestigia pedum tuorum omnes qui detrahebant tibi.* Quid est hoc? O tu, qui es superna pax et purissimus sol, per te ebulliet uiuens radix, quae est regeneratio Spiritus et aquae, cum illi sollerter uenient ad agnitionem tuam qui in spurcitia nefandissimae immunditiae sub grauissima maledictione prostrati erant: quoniam ipsi hoc modo quasi curui uix tandem ad ueritatem et ad iustitiam surgent. Quomodo? Ipse maternam dulcedinem uerae fidei sugent, eam uisibiliter uidendo nescientes, sed tantum illam fideliter

In this passage, Hildegard provides readers with her exegesis of a portion of Isaiah. She presents this passage as signifying how people were to come back to God from their sinful life. Although God was betrayed by his own creatures, he still loves them. Hildegard thus describes his love as maternal. As mothers feed their babies with milk, God feeds them with the “maternal sweetness of the true faith.” According to Hildegard, the unconditional love of God is like a mother’s love because God loves all his children, even the sinners, as a mother loves her children. Also, human beings suck in God’s love without knowing what it is, as babies suck in their mothers’ milk even though they do not intellectually understand what it is.

The Porous Womb, the Sealed Womb

There are certainly differences between Ecclesia and real women regarding the giving of life. Normal women were not considered “intact” after intercourse and childbirth, but Hildegard emphasizes that Ecclesia is still intact although she constantly draws in and emits souls through her body. In her virginity, she is linked to Mary. Hildegard relates Ecclesia’s breasts glowing red to the heart of the Virgin Mary glowing with fiery devotion; both are to be praised, “like the dawn, greatly sparkling,” for their virginity.¹¹ There is again a further exegesis of this vision in which Hildegard explains how Ecclesia’s virgin body represents the wholeness of the Church:

But she groans, drawing them upward to her head, and they go out by her mouth, while she remains untouched. For this blessed mother sighs inwardly when baptism is celebrated by the sacred anointing of the Holy Spirit, because the person is renewed by the true circumcision of the Spirit and water, and thus offered to the Supreme Beatitude Who is the Head of all, and made a member of Christ, regenerated unto salvation by invocation of the Holy Trinity. But in this that mother suffers no hurt, for she will remain for-

credendo rapentes. Et qui sunt illi? Videlicet isti qui in materia peccati de his orti qui te in ardenti caritate numquam uiderunt, sed qui te crudeliter opprimendo pertinaciter affligerunt quasi tu illorum non dominareris, te in bono sensu dulcissime amauerunt.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 25, pp. 149–50.

11 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 172. “In pectore eius uelut aurora rubeo fulgore rutilante: quia in cordibus fidelium integritas beatissimae Virginis Filium Dei generantis ardentissima deuotione fulget, ubi etiam multimodo genere musicorum audis de ipsa ‘quasi aurora ualde rutilans’ decantari: quoniam omnis uox credentium, ut intellectui tuo infunditur, uirginitatem eiusdem illibatae Virginis tota intentione in ecclesia amplecti debet.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 9, p. 140.

ever in the wholeness of virginity, which is the Catholic faith; for she arose in the blood of the true Lamb, her intimate Bridegroom, Who was born of the untouched Virgin without any corruption of integrity. So too that Bride will remain untouched, so that no schism can corrupt her.¹²

For Hildegard, Ecclesia's virginity is not just about physical or spiritual integrity. Her unbroken body demonstrates the unbrokenness of the Catholic Church, just as Mary was the virginal mother of the Saviour.¹³ Hildegard equates Ecclesia with the Virgin Mary and Ecclesia's giving birth to cleansed souls with Mary's giving birth to Jesus. This means not only that Ecclesia has to remain virginal like the Virgin Mary, but also that both virginal bodies serve as symbols of the integrity of the Church.

While schisms have been viewed as deeply problematic throughout Christian history, maintaining the unity of the Church was of special importance in Hildegard of Bingen's time. The importance of Church unity was often emphasized through symbolic representations, mystical interpretations, and biblical exegesis, which all appear in Hildegard's writings. In the period of Hildegard's lifetime, the Church experienced major ruptures, such as the East–West Schism of 1054, earlier in the century of her birth, the effects of which continued to shape the ecclesiastical climate she inhabited. Her era also saw numerous papal resignations, with twenty-four popes elected and stepping down, though not all were considered legitimate. Among them,

12 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 173. “Vnde et illa ingemit, sursum eos ad caput suum trahens, ubi ad os eius exeunt, ipsa tamen integra permanente: quoniam haec beata mater intima suspiria trahit, quando baptismum cum chrismate in sanctificatione Spiritus sancti consecratur, cum homo in uera circumcisione Spiritus et aquae innouandus est, ita illo summae beatitudini, quae caput omnium est, oblato et membro Christi facto, cum per inuocationem sanctae Trinitatis quasi per os beatae matris ad saluationem regeneratur, nullam laesionem eadem matre patiente, quia ipsa in aeternum permanebit in integritate uirginitatis suae, quae fides catholica est; quoniam exorta est in sanguine ueri agni uidelicet intimi sponsi sui, qui sine ulla corruptione integritatis ex integerrima Virgine natus est. Sic et eadem sponsa integra permanebit, ita quod nullum schisma eam corrumpere poterit.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 12, pp. 141–42.

13 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 173–74. “Vnde et ecclesia omnium Christianorum uirginea mater est; quoniam in secreto Spiritus sancti eos concipit et parit, illos Deo offerens, ita quod et filii Dei uocantur. Et ut beatam Matrem Spiritus sanctus obumbravit, ita quod sine dolore mirabiliter Filium Dei concepit et peperit et tamen uirgo permansit, sic et ecclesiam felicem matrem credentium Spiritus sanctus illustrat, ita quod sine ulla corruptione simpliciter filios concipit et parit et uirgo perdurat. Quid est hoc?” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 12, p. 142.

Hildegard particularly criticized the papal schism of 1130–1138 following the death of Pope Honorius II, when two popes were appointed and created confusion in religion and politics.¹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen advocated for Church reform. She perceived that the Church and its male authorities were not fulfilling their responsibilities adequately.¹⁵ As noted above, this led her to characterize her era as “effeminate,” and she did not hesitate to critique male clergy not for being “manly” enough. Her visions of Ecclesia, on the other hand, highlighted its integrity, just like that of the Virgin Mary.

Not only did Hildegard warn about schismatic tribulations in her lifetime through her writings, but she was also later regarded as one of the major apocalyptic figures who foresaw the coming ecclesiastical divisions. Later, her works gained particular relevance during the Western Schism (1378–1417), underscoring her enduring importance in Church history and her role in advocating for ecclesiastical reform.¹⁶

Imperfection and Wounds Enabling Flows

At the same time, however, in Hildegard’s vision, openings and flows are integral parts of Ecclesia. Her body is not closed off or sealed like the ideal female body of the Virgin Mary. Hildegard highly valued the virginal body of women and understood sexual experience as rupture or a higher degree of openness.¹⁷ These open features of Ecclesia might be viewed as inferior and incomplete. Nevertheless, they allow her to receive, purge, and release sinful

14 For more information regarding the papacy in Hildegard’s time, see Corrigan, “Hildegard of Bingen,” 359–61.

15 This criticism of the Church was picked up by Pope Benedict XVI in a General Audience Address in 2010. The pope used her allegory of the open wounds of Jesus in criticizing the clergy’s response to child abuse among the priesthood. Campbell, “The Prophetess and the Pope,” 23–24.

16 Magda Hayton has closely examined how Hildegard was incorporated into the apocalyptic traditions of late medieval France. See Hayton, “Hildegardian Prophecy and French Prophecy Collections,” 453–91.

17 Hildegard praises virginal women: “O dearest seeds, O flowers sweeter and more exquisite than any perfumes, whose soft fragility rises like the dawn to betrothal with my Son, loving Him dearly with chaste love, she is His bride and He is her Bridegroom, for this race of virgins loves Him dearly and so is to be adorned in the Heavenly Kingdom with glorious ornaments!” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 178. “O carissima germina et o dulciores et suauiores flores super omnia aromata, ubi mollis et fragilis natura quasi aurora ad desponsationem Filii mei consurgit, casta dilectione ualde amans eum, ipsa scilicet ei sponsa et ipse illi sponsus, cum hoc genus uirginum ualde diligit eum in superno regno insignibus

souls. Ecclesia's imperfection enabled her to save humankind, although it caused her to suffer in the fight against evil.

A woman's body, compared to a man's body, is weaker in Hildegard's religious and medical accounts and thus is often understood as imperfect. Eve was created out of Adam's flesh, having the softer and weaker body. Eve was already breakable and permeable to sin, which we see through her being tempted and deceived first by evil. What is even worse, Eve's original sin made her body open to flux, such as menstrual flow and the reproductive process. The perforated bodies of women and the flow of blood and child-birth were used to support belief in the weakness of women.

However, as I have already discussed, the less perfect bodies of Eve and women helped them to avoid the aftermath of original sin. And this imperfection allows women to menstruate, thereby purging their bodies and having babies through their porous wombs. Unlike the man's body, which is relatively more closed up and solid, the woman's weakness opens the gate to reproduction through her own body. Likewise, Ecclesia, which of course has a female body, is imperfect in order to become perfected and then elevated to Jerusalem. The wounds and pain caused by Ecclesia's flawed body are what make her unimpaired as the bride of Christ and the mother of Christ's offspring. Through her maternal compassion in saving souls with her imperfect body, Ecclesia ultimately becomes the mother who bears Christ's spiritual children.

In the exegesis of her mystical experience, Hildegard explains the image of Ecclesia as the manifestation of God's love. She interprets Ecclesia as having "maternal" kindness. The many holes in her belly allow Ecclesia to capture as many fish-like souls as possible in order to save them, recalling Jesus's analogy between fishing and his own salvational role as a process of making his followers "fishers of men" in Matthew 4:19. Ecclesia shares this duty with the followers of Jesus. Ecclesia's womb is perforated with many holes so that it can catch as many souls as she can. Now, Ecclesia can accomplish Jesus's role as a net catching fish.¹⁸

ornamentis uidelicet adornandum!" Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 23, p. 148.

18 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 171. "Quod autem uenter eius est in modum retis perforatus multis foraminibus, in quibus maxima multitudo hominum discurrit: hoc est materna benignitas ipsius quae ad capturam fidelium animarum perspicua est diuerso acumine uirtutum, in quibus credentes populi per fidem uerae credulitatis deuote conuersantur. Sed is qui rete suum proiecit in capturam piscium est Filius meus, sponsus dilectae ecclesiae suae, quam in cruore

Hildegard even suggests that Ecclesia needs to endure more pain to gain perfection in the future. According to her, Ecclesia in her vision is not perfect, which is manifested as the body without legs or feet. Her imperfection lets her suffer on the last day of the world, “when the son of perdition comes to delude the world.” However, Ecclesia’s “bleeding” wounds from her battles against evil will accomplish her perfection. With this perfection, Ecclesia is reborn through the blood of Jesus as a new bride in Jerusalem.¹⁹ And this scene reminds readers of how Jesus as Christ came to the world. In Christian theology, he came to the world, suffered, and was killed in a human body, which was degenerate and perishable due to Adam’s transgressions. When Jesus’s weak point was mortality, however, it was death that made Jesus perfect. Through his death, he was able to sacrifice himself in order to save humankind from their evil deeds.

In Hildegard’s vision of the foreseen Last Judgement, blood is again emphasized and signifies the suffering of both Ecclesia and Jesus.²⁰ Ecclesia bleeds from evil’s attack on the Last Day; Jesus shed blood in his sacrifice. Additionally, Ecclesia is perfected through the shedding of her blood, while Jesus accomplished his salvational role in his crucifixion, when he shed blood from his side, as vividly depicted in medieval paintings. Just like Jesus’s death, the process of Ecclesia painfully purifying souls is a sacrificial act. As human beings constantly sin, Ecclesia continually suffers, which Hildegard explains as “the sweetest sacrifice.”²¹ Through endless labour, she continues to perfect the heavenly plan to save people. However, this is not the only pain she will endure. Hildegard foresees that more suffering awaits

suo sibi desponsavit ad reparandum casum perditionis hominis.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 4, p. 138.

19 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 171. “Quae nondum crura aut pedes habet: quia nondum ad fortitudinem constantiae suae, nec ad candorem completionis suae perducta est; quoniam circa tempus filii perditionis, qui mundo errorem inducet, igneam et sanguineam crudelissimae peruersitatis angustiam plenissime in membris suis patietur, per quam calamitatem in sanguineis uulneribus ad perfectum perducta propere currat in caelestem Ierusalem, cum etiam in sanguine Filii mei noua nupta suauiter exorta est, ipsa hoc ardore intrans uitam in plenitudine gaudii subolis suae.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 5, p. 138.

20 In a study focused on a period much later than Hildegard’s time, Bynum points out that devotion to Jesus’s blood flourished in Northern Europe especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 6.

21 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 171; Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 6, p. 139.

Ecclesia, but that it will make her perfect—a perfection through suffering which is described in Hildegard’s Book Three.

The Sun, Moon, and Stars in Flows

For Hildegard, flow is important in salvation and happens in and through Ecclesia’s body. In the time before Noah, God had to destroy the world to cleanse it because there was no way to create a flow of penance that could match the flow of sin. People did not repent or ask for forgiveness from God. They were moving in one direction—away from God—by sinning and could not return themselves back to God. In this way, humanity failed to complete the cyclical flow, which was why they were killed by God’s judgment to cleanse all the filth from the world. However, according to Hildegard, Jesus enabled a more consistent flow of souls back to God. God did not need to repeat this mass killing once he sent Jesus into the world through the virginal womb of Mary and instituted the sacraments of the Church as a means of continuous purgation of sin to complete the cycle.

In Vision Five of Book Two, Hildegard describes the church as having a cycle itself in the form of the three orders of the church, monasticism, priesthood, and secular life, which operate according to a hierarchy. Hildegard uses the celestial system to explain the salvational economy, as each part makes circular movements. According to Hildegard, there is a hierarchy among the sun, moon, and stars. The sun is Jesus, who flows from the heart of God to the womb of the Virgin Mary. He illuminates the world. Flow is emphasized once again, as the sun makes its way from sunrise to sunset, and its light appears and disappears as it follows its daily course. The moon represents Ecclesia, betrothed to Jesus, the sun. The Church and the moon flow through waxing and waning, which Hildegard calls “a cycle of movement.” Unlike the sun and Jesus, the moon and the Church do not have a blazing light. Instead, Jesus and the Church have complementary roles just as the sun and moon do; when the sun and Jesus shine, the moon and the Church do not illuminate. But when the sun and Jesus are not present in this world, as at night, the moon and Ecclesia receive their salvational roles, although the impact might be milder. In this “cycle of movement,” the Church inflates with more children and deflates with fewer children depending on the increase of virtue or evil. Ecclesia could suffer and be harmed by malicious people, whom Hildegard refers to as bad Christians, Jews, or pagans. However, Ecclesia will continue to shine because her light is coming through Jesus from God, similar to the moon receiving its source of light from the sun. Finally, there are the stars, in the

lowest position in this celestial order. The stars are religious people who have joined the orders of the Church.

These are great mysteries. For consider the sun and the moon and the stars. I formed the sun to give light by day, and the moon and stars to give light by night. The sun symbolizes My Son, Who went forth from My heart and illuminated the world when in the latest times He was born of the Virgin, as the sun goes forth and lights the world when it rises at the end of the night. And the moon symbolizes the Church, betrothed to My Son in true and celestial betrothal. And the moon is so made that it always increases and decreases, but does not burn of itself unless it is kindled by the light of the sun, so too the Church has a cycle of movement: her children sometimes rise in increase of virtues and sometimes decline by inconstant behavior or harm by outside forces. For she is often assailed in her mysteries by ravening wolves, that is to say malicious people, whether bad Christians or Jews or pagans; and she is not fired to endurance by herself, but lit up by Me through My Son to persevere in good. But the stars, which differ from each other in the brightness of their glory, symbolize the people in the differing religious orders of the Church.²²

In this vision, which alludes to 1 Corinthians 15, God tells Hildegard that Jesus is like the sun, the Church like the moon, and people like the stars. In 1 Corinthians 15:40–42—“There are bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial: but, one is the glory of the celestial, and another of the terrestrial. One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars. For star differeth from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption: it shall rise in incorruption”—the sun, moon, and stars are all compared to different kinds of people.

22 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 202. “Magna mysteria sunt haec. Considera enim solem et lunam et stellas. Ego formaui solem ut luceat in die et lunam et stellas ut luceant in nocte. Sol autem significat Filium meum, qui de corde meo exiuit et mundum illuminauit cum natus est ex Virgine in fine temporum, sicut et sol egrediens mundum illustrat cum oritur circa finem noctis. Sed luna ecclesiam eidem Filio meo in uera et superna desponsatione desponsatam designat. Et ut luna semper incrementum et defectum in sua constitutione habet, sed a se ipsa non ardet nisi quod a lumine solis incenditur, sic et ecclesia in circuituione motionis est, ita quod filii eius saepe proficiunt in incremento uirtutum, et quod saepe deficient in diuersitate morum atque in dispersione aduersitatum, ita quod multoties in mysteriis suis per rapacissimos lupos impugnatur, uidelicet per malignos homines tam malorum Christianorum quam Iudaeorum et paganorum, et in hoc per semetipsam ad tolerantiam non accenditur, sed in me per Filium meum ut in bono perseueret illuminatur. Stellae autem a se differentes in claritate fulgoris sui significant populum diuersi ordinis ecclesiasticae religionis.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 5, pp. 176–77.

Hildegard builds on this comparison: In the beginning Jesus is identified with the sun because of his strong power to shine, and at the end, the stars are interpreted as the religious orders. In the middle, the Church is thought of as the moon, because the moon reflects the sun's light and because of its cyclical movement. Hildegard connects the waxing of the moon to the good deeds of Christians: if people follow what God commands, the church will wax like the moon. By contrast, if people commit sin through bad behaviour or by denying Christ as the Jews or pagans did, the Church will wane just like the moon. The moon is an important symbol because its changes in size are visible; it is the only celestial body with visible phases, waxing and waning.

While Hildegard does not comment on this, it is interesting how the identification of Ecclesia with the moon adds another feminine dimension to Ecclesia. The association emphasizes their cyclical nature: Ecclesia, like the moon, increases and decreases as the number of good Christians changes. The Church goes through its own cycle by receiving a flow of good Christians and expelling a flow of "malicious" Christians and nonbelievers. Implicitly, this cyclical process is meant to resemble how the human body keeps its balance.

The Woman's Body is Open to Purge and Therefore Save People

The vision of Ecclesia in *Scivias* shows how Hildegard uses the female body and a woman's reproductive process to illustrate how God's salvation works. While Hildegard is fully in line with the traditional depictions of Ecclesia here, she interestingly presents the detailed steps of a process through which the female body of Ecclesia could cleanse and save people. She intentionally adapts images of childbirth and purgation which are presumably drawn from her medical knowledge of gynaecological practices. An important feature of this complexity of roles and representations of femininity is the understanding of flow.

In *Scivias*, it is clear that Hildegard attaches religious importance to flow. As we have seen in her *Cause et cure*, Hildegard appreciates the medical importance of bodily flow as a key method of keeping the body in balance. The human body, in this view, communicates with the world by receiving needed elements and expelling superfluous materials. Viewing it as an expulsion of superfluous materials, Hildegard presents a positive view of menstruation; it is the way in which the female body cleanses itself through its openness. Likewise, Hildegard believes that flow is essential for human salvation. In *Scivias*, holy flow could signify the movement of divinity into

matter, as when Jesus descends from heaven into the womb of the Virgin Mary. Flow could also signify purgation, as in the washing away of sin. Women's bodies, characterized by greater porosity in Hildegard's and other medieval medical understandings, served as ideal vessels for facilitating this essential flow not only in physical ways but also in spiritual ways.

Ecclesia's cleansing is connected to baptism and the flow of water. Hildegard continues to emphasize baptism in *Scivias* as a replacement for circumcision. She explains the process of Ecclesia's purgation as the fountain of baptism. While circumcision was the custom of the patriarchs, baptism is the new treatment for the sinful.²³ The physical covenant of circumcision was replaced by Jesus's "true font of baptism" when he came to the world. At the same time, baptism is akin to a weapon that people can use to protect themselves.

The font and the pouring of water vivify not only human beings but Jesus as well. According to Hildegard, divine power created Jesus's body, and the Holy Spirit brought his soul to life "by the pouring out of water" like other human beings.

It receives into Itself the spirit of the person, restoring him to life, as he is first brought into life on a wave of blood when he comes out of the vessel of the body. And just as a human form is then lovingly formed and called human, so now the soul of the person is vivified in water before the eyes of God, so that God knows that he is an inheritor of life.²⁴

Hildegard continues that baptism is open to everyone regardless of their age or sex. While circumcision is limited to men and predominantly performed for a certain age group, baptism can be performed for any gender and is not

23 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 175. "Nam duo signa legis signatorum tradita noscuntur hominibus, scilicet circumcisio in antiquis patribus et baptismus in novis doctoribus, per quae iugati sunt homines ut bos iugo suo; quoniam quamvis ille stimulo corripereetur, tamen curvum sulcum faceret, si iugo ligatus non esset." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 16, pp. 144–45.

24 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 181–82. "Ita quod homo per illud in regeneratione uiuit. Nam sicut homo nascitur ex carne, diuina potestate in forma Adae illum creante, ita Spiritus sanctus recuperat uitam animae per inundationem aquae, cum ipsa spiritum hominis in se accipit eum resuscitans ad uitam, ut prius in unda sanguinis suscitatus est, cum in corporali uasculo manifestatus est. Vt enim forma hominis tunc amabiliter formatur, ita quod homo dicitur, sic spiritus hominis ante oculos Dei nunc in aqua uiuificatur, ita quod eum Deus ad hereditatem uitae nouit." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 30, p. 153.

limited to any age group. Of course, baptism is accessible to women, including Hildegard of Bingen herself.

Hildegard describes Ecclesia giving birth to souls in Book Three of *Scivias*. In the same vision, Hildegard explains that a salvational flow courses through Ecclesia's body:

*And the children who have passed through the womb of the image walk in the splendor that surrounds her; which means that they, who through the font of sacred baptism have the Church as their happy mother, should remain in and keep to the divine law by which that mother is illuminated and adorned, for if they renounce it by infidelity they will again be stained by the sins from which they had been cleansed.*²⁵

Here, Hildegard comments on the children who have passed through Ecclesia's womb and are walking in "the splendor that surrounds her." She interprets this "splendor" as the divine law by which Ecclesia is illuminated. This law is meant to be followed by the baptized congregation; implicitly, if too many people failed to obey the law, their mother Church would lose her illumination. Thus, to maintain the illuminating law of the Church, people must continually flow into her body, where they are cleansed and then returned. The flow of people into the Church enables the mother's divine light to stay alive. Ecclesia is the everlasting flow of a cleansing fountain inasmuch as she is able to repeatedly purify any sinner. At least three kinds of flow overlap here: the flow of people, of the Church's divine illumination, and of the Church's cleansing grace. If any one of these flows stopped, the whole process would collapse.

The flow is important and should be continuous. According to Hildegard, human beings corrupt themselves by committing sin again and again while they are alive. Therefore, if any person wants to go to Heaven, they should be revived through baptism or "water and the Spirit," as John 3:5 says in the New Testament.²⁶ Why? Hildegard traces the problem back to the first human beings who committed the original sin. Human beings are already

25 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 175. "Sed quod infantes qui uentrem praedictae imaginis transierant in splendore qui eam circumdederat ambulant: hoc est quod hi quorum mater felix ecclesia per fontem sacri baptismatis existit, in lege diuina, qua eadem mater illustrata et ornata est, permanere atque eam conseruare debent, ne si eam infideliter abiecerint, rursum peccatis a quibus mundati erant inquinentur." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 14, p. 144.

26 "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

polluted when they are born due to “burning heat” and “a poisonous form.”²⁷ Here, it is interesting that both heat and poison are more closely linked to Adam, as Hildegard’s *Cause et cure* explains. It is the woman, the Virgin Mary, who makes it possible for human beings to be cleansed by “the water of sanctification and the spirit of illumination” from innate sin.

For Hildegard, human beings are to be enlivened twice. When they are conceived and while they develop in their mother’s womb, they are to have a soul poured into them. And in order to achieve salvation, they must have spirit poured into them through baptism. For Hildegard, reproduction is also purification. The poisonous semen that originated from Adam is nullified and heated in the womb. Baptism gives people the “birth of joy.” Both processes are purifying; while birth is to be cleansed from original sin, rebirth is from the sin that people constantly commit.

Hildegard explains sanctification in terms of cleansing flows. She suggests that people flow in spirit, like water, by nature. Her thought process then turns to the water of baptism. Just as dirt is cleansed by water and spirit animates lifeless matter, humans need to be reborn in water and spirit before they are accepted into Heaven. The human spirit’s watery nature reflects the divine flow. As with the symbolic connection between the flood’s enormous cleansing power and the advent of Christ above, humanity itself is depicted as an image of the flow of “enlivening” spirit (*spiritus vegetationis*)—a flow that merges with baptismal purging in this passage, which is closely connected to Hildegard’s emphasis on *viriditas*. In this way, Hildegard identifies

27 “With firmest certainty and not with wavering doubt, I say to you who are born of filth that Man, risen out of burning heat and wrapped in a poisonous form, will be confounded by his apathy unless in the true joy of a new child he is born again from the water of sanctification and the spirit of illumination. How? Because Man, who overflows like water with the spirit of his enlivening, will not be able to enter into salvation as an heir to the Kingdom of his Creator unless he is purified by the true regeneration, as water cleans the dirty and spirit gives life to the inanimate; for he is guilty of the sin of the first parent, who was fraudulently deceived by the Devil.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 180. “*Amen, amen, dico tibi, nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu, non potest introire in regnum Dei. Quid est hoc? Constantissima certitudine et non instabili ambiguitate dico tibi, qui natus es ex putredine, quia homo qui exortus est de ardenti calore et inuolutus uenenosae facturae, nisi in uero gaudio nouae subolis renascatur ex aqua sanctificationis et Spiritu illuminationis, in tempore neglectus sui confunditur. Quomodo? Quia homo uelut aqua cum spiritu uegetationis suae inundans, quoniam ut aqua sordes emundat et ut spiritus inanimata uiuificat, nisi in uera regeneratione purgetur, non poterit per introitum saluationis heres regni creatoris sui fieri; quia in peccato primi parentis quem diabolus fraudulenter decepit obligatus est.*” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 3, chap. 27, p. 151.

the flow that sustains earthly life with the process of purification that leads to everlasting life. The flow must continue to advance God's design.

In another vision, Hildegard sees the same children who have passed through Ecclesia's womb and observes that some now seem healthier than others:

And I saw those children who, as mentioned before, had passed through the womb of that image, shining with great brightness; some of them were adorned with gold color from their foreheads to their feet, but others lacked that color and had only the brightness....Of those who were meditating on the pure and brilliant splendor, some had clear eyes and strong feet and were marching forward vigorously in the womb of the image; but others had weak eyes and crippled feet and were blown here and there by the wind.²⁸

Like the previous vision, this Vision Four of Book Two represents souls as children and Ecclesia as a female body able to wash away their sins. Here, the souls are distinguished according to their merits. Those who are described with "healthier" features, such as clear eyes and strong feet, voluntarily enter the church (the womb of Ecclesia) to do penance and be purified. On the other hand, the souls with "weaker" bodies, which can be seen as disabilities, merely return to the same place. In the sixth exegesis of this vision, Hildegard says:

And you see those children who, as mentioned before, had passed through the womb of that image, shining with great brightness. These are they who in the innocence of a clean and pure heart have gained a mother, the Church, in the font of regeneration, as was shown to you before, and are children of light, for their sins are washed away.²⁹

There are also children, or souls, who never undergo the process of penance and purification. Whether they have clear or weak eyes and strong or

28 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 189. "Et infantes illos qui uentrem eiusdem imaginis, ut praedictum est, transierant uidi multa claritate fulgentes...Sed ex his qui ipsum purum et lucidum splendorem considerabant quidam claros oculos et fortes pedes habebant ac in uentre eiusdem imaginis fortiter incedebant. Alii autem infirmos oculos et debiles pedes habentes huc et illuc a uento proiciebantur." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 4, p. 160.

29 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 192. "Et quod uides infantes illos qui uentrem eiusdem imaginis, ut praedictum est, transierant, multa claritate fulgentes: hoc est quod hi qui in innocentia munditiae puri cordis per fontem regenerationis matrem scilicet ecclesiam, ut tibi praemonstratum est, adepti sunt, filii lucis propter ablutionem peccatorum suorum existunt." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 4, chap. 6, p. 164.

weak feet, some children succeed in bringing themselves in front of Ecclesia so that they can touch her. However, others do not approach Ecclesia and are left “in the elation of the way of death.”³⁰ In this vision, then, Hildegard emphasizes the cleansing function of Ecclesia’s female body for the sake of humanity’s salvation. In whatsoever manner, once children enter Ecclesia’s womb, they are cleansed and saved.

This emphasis on flow appears again in Vision Four of Book Two, where Hildegard explains her unique vision of confirmation in Mother Church. Here, Ecclesia stands before a white tower, which signifies “the flaming forth of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”³¹ It seems that Hildegard views Ecclesia as being supported by the Holy Spirit, which protects her against evil as a tower defends a city.³²

Hildegard also relates Ecclesia’s duty through baptism as purification through a reference to Hebrew scripture. Referring to 2 Kings 1:23, “The King went over the brook of Cedron, and all the people marched toward the way of the olive trees, which led to the desert,” she interprets the sentence about the king crossing the brook as signifying the baptism of Christ. Hildegard contrasts “the flowing waters of the blessed washing” to “the desert of Adam’s sin.” According to Hildegard, Jesus brought salvation and thus provided ever-flowing water to people who would have wandered in the desert because of their original sin. Flow is as important in anointing as in baptism and salvation.³³

30 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 189. Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 4, chap. 30, p. 160.

31 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 190. “Flagrationem donorum Spiritus sancti.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 4, chap. 1, p. 161.

32 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 191. “Quia Spiritus sanctus in maxima fortitudine incarnationis illius qui uerus sponsus ecclesiae existit mirabilia sua mirabiliter operatus est, et ecclesiam tam fortem in defensione munitionis suae ostendit, quod ita prae fortitudine illa sua ab igneo dono eius munita est numquam in errore ullius peruersitatis dei potest; quoniam per supernam protectionem in amore sponsi sui sine macula et sine ruga semper gaudebit, quia et idem Vnigenitus meus de Spiritu sancto conceptus nobiliter sine macula ex Virgine natus est, quemadmodum ad Moysen locutus sum.” Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 4, chap. 4, p. 163.

33 Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Hart and Bishop, 192–93. “Rex quoque transgrediebatur torrentem Cedron, et cunctus populus incedebat contra uiam oliuae, quae respiciebat ad desertum. Quid est hoc? Filius Virginis, qui dominatur uniuerso mundo ut rex terrenus reliquo populo, transgressus est torrentes aquas beati lauacri, quod in admonitione Spiritus sancti forti desiderio uiam salutis demonstrat. Quid

In *Scivias*, Hildegard emphasizes the importance of keeping the flow of repentance ongoing to fully atone for one's sin. In her view, human beings are bound to commit sin repeatedly. After Adam committed his first sin, people became so weak in body and spirit that they were easily distracted by evil temptation, like those children with weaker bodies who were easily blown away. However, according to Hildegard, people would be saved as long as they recognized and continually repented for their faults. God would accept them whenever they returned to him because he loves them as his children. In this sense, Hildegard's theology emphasizes the significance of flow to both the commission and the purgation of sin. Just as women have to menstruate in order to purge superfluous fluids, Christians have to take action to return to God because they frequently make mistakes.

For Hildegard, flow encompasses women's roles in reproductive processes. Constant flows are represented through menstruation, conception, lactation, and childbirth. And the same flow vividly characterizes God's salvational plan through Ecclesia. While Hildegard of Bingen sees Ecclesia as having a female body, especially a womb, Ecclesia's main role is to receive people who have sinned and send out them cleansed in a constant circle. This process is not dissimilar to a woman's purgative menstruation and reproduction, which is possible due to the woman's porous body, not the man's relatively closed body. Furthermore, this is why the Virgin Mary could receive the Holy Spirit into her womb and send Jesus into the world.

Through her portrayal of Ecclesia, Hildegard directly bridges medical concepts of childbirth and bodily flow with theological visions of salvation in *Scivias*. The perforated womb that receives, transforms, and releases souls parallels the physiological functions she describes in *Cause et cure*. Hildegard thus affirms that the physiological porosity of women's bodies serves as both metaphor and mechanism for spiritual renewal, elevating medical knowledge to salvational significance.

est hoc? Ipse reliquit mortem transiens ad uitam, cum in regeneratione Spiritus et aquae, id est in magno ornamento urbis caelestis Ierusalem, quae numquam deficit, summam beatitudinem enuntiauit. Vnde omnis populus qui in illum credebatur iuit per inspirationem sancti Spiritus ad uitam illam quae absconsa erat, in unctione olei respicientis ad praeuocationem Adae, quae deserta erat pulchritudine hereditatis iustitiae Dei, et considerantis utrum illa ad salutem redire uellet an non: quia uulneratum peccatum primi hominis necesse habuit ut per sacerdotale officium inungeretur, quod Filio Virginis necesse non erat, quoniam ipse totus in sanctitate conceptus est, non uulnerato nec corrupto Matris suae utero, sed in integritatis honore perseuerante." Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, ed. Führkötter and Carelvaris, pt. 2, bk. 4, chap. 7, p. 165.