

Hildegard of Bingen as a Holy Healer: Healing the patient, restoring the world

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HILDEGARD OF BINGEN AS A HOLY HEALER: HEALING THE PATIENT, RESTORING THE WORLD

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Abstract

By examining the five letters exchanged between Hildegard of Bingen and two monks concerning a demon-possessed woman, this article explores the ways in which twelfth-century ecclesiastics understood and treated demonic possession. A close examination of the letters reveals that demonic possession was considered as a communal illness that threatened not only an individual's well-being but also the spiritual integrity of the community. The identification of demonic possession as a communal disease explains why an ecclesiastic had to write to implore the help of Hildegard, who was known to her contemporaries as both a saint and a healer. Medieval understanding of demonic possession required a specific kind of cure: miraculous healing performed by a saint. This healing was culturally constructed in a way to restore the spiritual well-being of the community that medieval subjects imagined demonic possession disrupted.

Among contemporary churchmen and churchwomen, a twelfth-century German abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was renowned for being both a healer and a saint. Of the 390 surviving letters exchanged between Hildegard and her correspondents,¹ there are at least twenty-three in which ecclesiastics implore her help in dealing with their own or other's physical and

¹ All 390 letters are translated in *Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994-2004) Vol. 1-3, hereafter referred to as *Letters*.

psychological ailments. In her letters, Hildegard rarely reveals the practical side of her healing practices, although she sets these out in the two medical works attributed to her, namely *Cause et cure* and *Physica*.² As if purposely, she prescribes only religious rites as treatment to her respondents.³ Such valorization of religious knowledge over medical is particularly noteworthy in the five letters exchanged between Hildegard and two monks concerning a demon-possessed parishioner. These letters are significant as they demonstrate a critical aspect of holy healing as a cultural construct. The epistemic hierarchy between religious and medical, I hypothesize, was likely something Hildegard and her respondents considered a cultural necessity in order to effectuate holy healing. Such cultural construction was particularly meaningful in these letters where Hildegard is asked to cure a possessed woman. The letters reveal that demonic possession was considered a complex supernatural illness that disrupted not only the well-being of the possessed person, but also the spiritual order of his or her communities. The close examination of these letters reveals why an ecclesiastic had to write to implore the help of “the saintly lady” Hildegard; demonic possession required a saint not just to cure the possessed person, but also to perform miraculous healing to restore

2 In contrast to the miraculous nature of her healing acts, Hildegard’s extensive medical knowledge is revealed in two encyclopedic medical texts attributed to her. Scholars speculate that she must have been familiar with Galenic medicine and even some of the most advanced contemporary medical texts such as those translated by Constantine the African (ca. 1020-87). See “Introduction,” Laurence Moulinier’s *Beate Hildegardis Cause et cure* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 67, and also Suehiro Tanemura, *Bingen no Hirudegarudo no Sekai* [The World of Hildegard of Bingen] (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2002), 310. Some scholars such as Laurence Moulinier and Charles Singer doubt whether Hildegard really wrote *Cause et cure*, although scholars agree that *Physica* was written by her. Victoria Sweet, however, claims that *Cause* is written by Hildegard. The fact that somebody attributed the work to Hildegard seems to indicate that she was at least known to her contemporaries for having a significant amount of medical knowledge.

3 Neither does Theoderic of Echternach, who composed her *Vita*, refer to Hildegard’s medical knowledge or to any practical medical care she may have provided. The hagiographer’s exclusion of this kind of knowledge is intriguing especially since his Abbey of Echternach formerly owned a ninth-century MS collection of medical literature, which included works by Hippocrates, Galen, and Soranus. See Florence Eliza Glaze, “Medical Writer: ‘Behold the Human Creature,’” *Voice of the Living Light*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 130.

the spiritual order of the society at large that medieval ecclesiastics imagined demonic possession disrupted.

The five letters in question were exchanged between Hildegard and two ecclesiastics, Abbot Gedolphus of Brauweiler and a dean of the Church of the Holy Apostles of Cologne;⁴ they concern the exorcism of a noble woman by the name of Sigewize (otherwise unknown), who has been possessed by “an evil spirit” for a full seven years.⁵ These letters adhere to the epistemic hierarchy of religion and medicine as if it were an unspoken rule. When asked how to exorcize the woman, Hildegard provided only the manual of religious ritual, and when the woman was cured, the saint attributed the recovery to the spiritual merit of the people who prayed for her recovery. In contrast to these strictly religious accounts, the passage on demonic possession in one of the medical texts attributed to Hildegard, *Cause et cure*, reveals that she had (or was considered to have) at the very least a more theoretical knowledge of diabolical possession, and that she did not consider possession a completely spiritual disease:

If the dry or the moist humours, that in this case constitute the approaching slime of the above-mentioned phlegm—that is, of the foamy and the lukewarm which ought to comport themselves peacefully—exceed their proper amount, the spiritual consciousness of that person shrinks and perishes, and also his sense of taste and his senses. Then the spirits of the air threaten him, incite him to heresy, and surround him with a wall since his spiritual consciousness has fallen asleep. Such a person finds himself in great danger if God does not drive away these spirits. For this reason, such a person withers within and cannot live a long time in this condition.⁶

4 These letters are numbered as 68, 68r, 69, 158, and 158r, and were written around 1169. The original Latin texts of the letters 68, 68r, and 69 with additional hagiographical accounts are in Godefridus and Theoderic, *Vita sanctae Hildegardis*, ed. Monica Klaes (Turnholti: Brepols, 1993), and letters 158 and 158r in *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium*, ed. L. van Acker (Turnholti: Brepols, 1991). There are an additional two letters (27, 27r) exchanged between Hildegard and her nephew Arnold Archbishop of Trier concerning the exorcism of Sigewize, yet the focus of this paper will be only on the five letters 68, 68r, 69, 158, and 158r.

5 Letter 68, *Letters*, Vol. 1, 147.

6 Hildegard of Bingen, *Holistic Healing*, trans. Manfred Pawlik and Patrick Madigan (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994), 51.

To note, this theory of demonic possession as a psychosomatic disease appears also in Hildegard's letter to her nephew Arnold Archbishop of Trier. The letter is a response to Arnold's inquiry about how Hildegard cured Sigewize. Unlike the above-mentioned five letters she wrote to the two monks, this letter relates that Sigewize was suffering from an infirmity, which the patient herself was unaware of, and that the woman became sound in both body and soul after the exorcism.⁷

Furthermore, studies by Peter Dronke and Barbara Newman show that the specific kind of demonic possession Sigewize had is a sort of psychosomatic disorder. According to Dronke, Sigewize was "obsessed" (*obsessio*) rather than "possessed" (*possessio*); while *obsessio* is a type of possession where "a demon attacks, lays siege, from without," *possessio* is where a demon "takes possession of a soul and lodges in it."⁸ Based on Hildegard's auto-hagiographical account of the exorcism, the scholar concludes that the particular demon that "obsessed" Sigewize "was thought to have afflicted [the patient's] private parts."⁹ Newman also asserts that *obsessio* afflicts not only the body but also the mind. She writes that the term *obsessio* is "used to describe and explain feelings of despair, unshakable guilt, temptations to blasphemy, suicidal thought, and terrifying vision—all symptoms of what we would now call depressive illness."¹⁰ From these studies, we can conclude that Hildegard and at least some of her contemporaries understood that the kind of demonic possession Sigewize had affects both body and mind (or "spiritual consciousness" in Hildegard's own words).

Curiously enough, in the five letters in question, Hildegard never provides Abbot Gedolphus or the dean of the Church of the Holy Apostles of Cologne with information regarding the physical ailments Sigewize previously suffered or the psychosomatic nature of the particular demonic possession she had. In these letters, Hildegard mentions only the spiritual aspect of possession, and prescribes only exorcist rites when asked how to cure Sigewize. This epistemic hierarchy invites much speculation. Why does Hildegard not mention

7 Letter 27, *Letters*, Vol.1, 89-90.

8 Peter Dronke, "Problemata Hildegardiana," in *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*, 16 (1981), 118, n. 64.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Barbara Newman, "Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century," *Speculum* 73 (1998), 740-41.

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her medical understanding of the causes and cures of possession? Why does she not refer to the infirmity of Sigewize or the physical side of *obsessio* in her letters to the two monks? As far as I know, no scholar has dealt with or even raised these questions. Even though Dronke's study indicates that Hildegard knew the specific kind of physical illness Sigewize was suffering from, the scholar does not question Hildegard's "candour and modesty" when the saint writes that Sigewize was freed due solely to "[God's] grace that was sought and found through shared ascetic effort."¹¹ In my view, Hildegard's response is not only a modesty topos but also a way of fulfilling her role as a saint and a holy healer. By focusing specifically on the letters concerning the saint's successful healing of Sigewize, this paper aims to contribute to the study of the nature and mechanism of holy healing for which Hildegard was renowned.

Brief Summary of the Five Letters in Question

The exchange of letters begins with Abbot Gedolphus consulting Hildegard about how to cure the possessed woman Sigewize. Hildegard responds by sending him a detailed manual of the rite of exorcism. In the second letter to the saint, the abbot writes that the rite worked initially, but that the demon soon repossessed the woman; the abbot therefore sends the possessed woman to Hildegard's abbey. Having heard the rumour about Hildegard's successful exorcism of Sigewize, another ecclesiastic, the dean of the Church of the Holy Apostles of Cologne, writes to Hildegard. Acknowledging that Sigewize, who is from the noble family of Cologne, is "a very good friend" of his church, the dean expresses his joy and curiosity regarding the exorcism. He specifically asks Hildegard to "inform [him] in a return letter the manner and rite of [the demon's] expulsion."¹² In response, Hildegard writes that the exorcism was completed through the spiritual merit of the community, reinforced by communal prayer, alms-giving, fasting, and scourging.

Cultural Construction of Demonic Possession

According to these letters, demonic possession was considered not

¹¹ "Problemata Hildegardiana," 118.

¹² Letter 158, *Letters*, Vol.2, 105.

just an illness that afflicts an individual; it was a special kind of disease that was interpreted as a sign of spiritual disorder. In the first letter to Hildegard, Abbot Gedolphus explains the problem he and his abbey are facing: he has been unable to exorcize the evil spirit that has possessed Sigewize for the past three months. The letter begins in a sorrowful and dejected tone: “Gedolphus, abbot, although unworthy, of the monastery at Brauweiler, and his brothers in this vale of tears, offer their prayers and devoted service as best they can to the lady and mother Hildegard.”¹³ The letter implies that he and his community have been possessed by sorrow, shame, and guilt:

all of us [i.e., the ecclesiastical community of Brauweiler], along with the host of the people, have striven for three months in every conceivable way to free that woman, but it grieves us to report that, because of our own sins, we have made no progress whatsoever.¹⁴

Such a sense of shame and guilt is expressed again in the abbot's second letter to Hildegard after he had sent Sigewize to her abbey. He writes how the demon repossessed Sigewize after performing the exorcism as prescribed by Hildegard:

We are informing you of this for her sake, saintly lady [sanctitatem vestram], so that the Lord may accomplish what we, because of our sins, have not merited, and so that He Who rules over all may be glorified in you when the ancient enemy has been cast out.¹⁵

These two passages reveal that the abbot believes that the failure of exorcism is the result of the sinfulness of his community.

It is notable that in this passage, while confessing his own community's sin, Gedolphus addresses Hildegard specifically as “sanctitatem vestram” or “saintly lady.” In the beginning of his first letter to Hildegard, the abbot praises Hildegard's sanctity:

13 Letter 68, *Letters*, Vol. 1, 147.

14 Ibid.

15 Letter 69, *Letters*, Vol.1, 152.

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In our country indeed it is on everyone's lips what the Lord has done for you, because 'he that is mighty, hath done great things' for you, and 'holy is his name' [Luke 1.49]. Both the clergy and the laity know how great are the miracles that the Fountain of Living Light manifests in you, and the outcome of events testifies to their truth. For not human but divine accomplishments shine forth in you, and grace goes before you, that mighty gift which comes not from human reason but proceeds from the bright Fountain.¹⁶

He also refers to her elsewhere as a "pious lady" of "sweet sanctity."¹⁷ These references to Hildegard's sainthood hint that he is asking Hildegard to perform a task only a saint is capable of. This task includes mediating between his community and God: Gedolphus is writing to her so that the "Lord may accomplish" what they cannot accomplish because of their sins and lack of spiritual merit. The logic behind this is that God will help Hildegard accomplish exorcism due to her spiritual merit and sanctity. Such interpretation of demonic possession as an illness cured through spiritual merit indicates the challenge an unsuccessful exorcism posed to an ecclesiastical community. Thus demonic possession, culturally constructed in such a manner, was an ontologically problematic communal illness; it was a malady that challenged the authority and the very existence of professional churchmen.

Another passage from Gedolphus's first letter to Hildegard implies the close relationship between the medieval ecclesiastics' concept of demonic possession and that of holiness:

Now all our hope, next to God, rests on you. For that demon, when he was conjured one day, finally revealed to us that this possessed woman could be freed only through the strength of your contemplation and the magnitude of divine revelation. Does not God intend great things in her liberation? Surely, He does. Thus, through you, the abundant benevolence of our Redeemer will deign to consummate the labour of our efforts and grief, but also of our joy and exultation, when He

¹⁶ Ibid., 147.

¹⁷ Ibid.

wipes away every error and infidelity of mankind and frees
the possessed handmaiden of God.¹⁸

This is an important passage because it communicates the abbot's specific request to "the saintly lady."¹⁹ He is asking her to free Sigewize and at the same time, let God "wip[e] away every error and infidelity of mankind." In this narrative construction, the body of the possessed woman is transformed into the microcosmic battlefield between the church and the devil, for which God's assistance—mediated through a saint—is an absolute necessity. The correlative relationship between the possessed woman and the world at large is analogous to the correlative relationship between microcosm and macrocosm, which was a fundamental part of the worldview in this drama of the participants and of their contemporaries. In this cosmology, each human being is a microcosm and the universe a macrocosm. Microcosm and macrocosm are interrelated in such a way that the human condition (such as order and disorder) was considered to reflect that of the universe.²⁰ This worldview logically leads to the conclusion that through Hildegard's healing of this possessed woman, the Brauweiler community, and even humanity at large, will be healed.

Theoretical Approach to Demonic Possession

Abbot Gedolphus's dramatization of the exorcism of Sigewize in his letters reveals another crucial aspect of the medieval concept of demonic possession: demonic possession was perceived as a real threat to the world. Such a sense of threat is identified clearly in the abbot's first letter.²¹ Referring to "the menacing enemy" that keeps possessing Sigewize, Gedolphus writes that "the insidious evil of this most shrewd and wicked enemy has brought so many thousands into error and doubt that we greatly fear harm to [the] Holy Church."²² From

18 Letter 68, *Letters*, Vol.1, 147-8.

19 *Ibid.*, 148. Hildegard is also referred to as "beloved lady" and "pious lady" (147). In Letter 69, the abbot refers to her as "saintly lady" twice (151, 152).

20 See Charles Singer, "The Scientific Views and Visions of Saint Hildegard (1098-1180)," *Studies in the History and Method of Science*, ed. Charles Singer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917-1955), esp. "VII. Macrocosm and Microcosm," 30-43.

21 Letter 68, *Letters*, Vol.1, 147-8.

22 *Ibid.*, 147.

the modern perspective, he seems to be exaggerating the situation by locating the sick woman in the centre of the epical religious-historical drama of the battle between the church and Satan. Yet to dismiss this passage as an exaggeration does not help us understand the minds of our subjects.²³ To return to the problem of the epistemic hierarchy of religion and medicine, we know that at least Hildegard and the author of the *Vita* who compiled the saint's letters had access to the more practical medical knowledge of demonic possession.²⁴ Nevertheless, they actively participated in this religious-historical drama of exorcism, indicating that they, as professional churchmen, considered such dramatization necessary and meaningful. From this point of view, Gedolphus's narrative construction likely reflects the medieval ecclesiastics' view of demonic possession as a world-destroying phenomenon.

The abbot's view of demonic possession as a world-destroying phenomenon becomes more understandable in the light of the legal theory of the jurist Robert Cover. According to Cover, "we inhabit *nomos*—a normative universe."²⁵ Cover uses the term *nomos* to denote social, cultural, ethical, and religious laws, orders, precepts, customs, or habits that regulate human mind and behaviour. *Nomos* is our imaginative and cultural construction of the normative world projected upon the physical reality. He writes, "[t]o live in a legal world requires that one know not only the precepts, but also their connections to possible and plausible states of affairs. It requires that one integrate not only the 'is' and 'ought,' but the 'is,' the 'ought,' and the 'what might be.'"²⁶ One imagines what is, ought to be, and might be normative behaviour, and one commits to this imaginary normativity in the hope of realizing the alternative reality—the ideal.

23 See Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 103-52.

24 See footnote 3.

25 Robert Cover, "Foreword: *Nomos* and Narrative" in *Narrative, Violence, and the Law: the Essays of Robert Cover* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 95. *Nomos* means "the law; the principles governing human conduct, esp. as defined by culture or custom" (OED). By "*nomos*—a normative universe," Cover refers to the "world of right and wrong, of lawful and unlawful, of valid and void [that we constantly create and maintain]" (95).

26 *Ibid.*, 102.

This alternative reality, according to Cover, is as real as the physical reality as long as the members of a given group commit to it. An extreme example of the commitment to a vision is martyrdom. Cover writes elsewhere that martyrs build and protect their group's normative world by "[placing] their bodies on the line."²⁷ Such commitment to an imagined normativity is a way of bridging the chasm between reality and vision. This theory helps us to understand Abbot Gedolphus's fear of the potential harm to his normative world; the abbot is properly interpreting demonic possession as a real world-destroying phenomenon, for his inability to expel the demon indicates not only his community's, but also the church's, defeat by Satan. The failure could also be evidence that God has abandoned the Brauweiler monastery due to its moral failure, which greatly undermines its authority as an ecclesiastical community.

The abbot's repetitive use of "error," "doubt," and "infidelity" in the first letter hints at what he fears in particular.²⁸ He fears that "error and doubt" will "harm [the] Holy Church," and hence he requests Hildegard to let God purge "error and infidelity of mankind."²⁹ The terms error, doubt, and infidelity have strong religious connotations; they imply the swerving from the path that *fidelis*—a Christian and a believer—should follow, and the disbelief that destroys the foundation of their carefully constructed spiritual world. The repetition of such words implies the gravity of the case of Sigewize, indicating that the spiritual as well as the ontological well-being of the abbot's community is tightly bound with the fate of Sigewize.

Healing the Patient, Restoring the World

After Hildegard successfully expelled the demon from Sigewize, two letters were exchanged between Hildegard and the dean of the Church of Holy Apostles of Cologne. This exchange of letters is noteworthy since it provides Hildegard's own account and interpretation of how the exorcism was completed. Hearing the rumour that "the ancient enemy has been cast out by [Hildegard's] prayers," the dean first

²⁷ Robert Cover, "Violence and the Word," *Narrative, Violence, and the Law: The Essays of Robert Cover*, 208.

²⁸ Letter 68, *Letters*, Vol.1, 147-8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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expresses his joy: “we, and indeed the entire city of Cologne, have been enkindled to the love of spirituality by the will of God.”³⁰ Then he asks her “the manner and rite of [the demon’s] expulsion so that [he and his community of Cologne] may rejoice with [Hildegard] and join [her] in praising the Lord with ceaseless devotion.”³¹

In a return letter, comparing the process of the exorcism of Sigewize with the cyclical motion of the day, Hildegard explains how and why Sigewize was cured; the woman was freed because

[o]n her behalf, the exalted, and the even more exalted, the lowly, and even more lowly, have spoken as one with their labors and prayers, and have clamored as individuals, in accordance with the instructions of the Holy Spirit. For some individuals have labored on her behalf through signs of compassion; others, by prayers and vigils; and others, by fasts and scourgings. Moreover, many have given alms for her sake, and a large number of others have taken her part by helping her with all the good in their power. Others have brought this duty to completion with their great and persistent zeal. Thus, just as the day completes its cycle, all were looking to God at the same time for her sake.³²

In short, Hildegard explains to the dean that Sigewize was cured through the communal effort of prayer, alms giving, fasting, and scourging. This response coheres with Abbot Gedolphus’s understanding that spiritual merit is necessary to expel the demon. Just as the abbot sees the connection between his monastery’s failure to exorcize the demon and its lack of spiritual merit, here Hildegard attributes the patient’s recovery to the spiritual merit of the community.³³ By emphasizing the importance of spiritual merit in effecting the exorcism, Hildegard confirms the necessity of holy healing. This confirmation implies the importance of her role as a mediator between the afflicted community and God.

Here we can observe several practical aspects of Hildegard’s

30 Letter 158, *Letters*, Vol.2, 105.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 106.

33 Ibid.

narrative construction. Her letter to the dean is practical since by testifying to the spiritual merit of all who prayed for Sigewize, it helps restore the authority of Abbot Gedolphus and his monastery. Her explanation also testifies to the power and authority of the church; after all, she has defeated the demon in Sigewize. Lastly, by confirming the spiritual merit as a requirement for curing demonic possession, Hildegard proves indirectly that her healing performance was of a miraculous nature, which both Gedolphus and the dean regard as an essential means of strengthening faith and also protecting the integrity of their spiritual world. To repeat Gedolphus's words, holy healing meant that "through [Hildegard] the abundant benevolence of [the] Redeemer will deign to consummate the labour of [the communal] efforts and grief" and heal the woman.³⁴ In other words, holy healing is a testimony to the benevolence of God.

Similarly, the abbot writes to Hildegard that if she could successfully exorcize the woman, his community will be able to "say with the prophet: 'This is the Lord's doing; and it is wonderful in our eyes [Ps 117.23]; and the snare is broken, and we are delivered' [Ps 123.7]."³⁵ Here the abbot quotes from Psalms 117 and 123. Psalm 117 refers to God's love towards humans and the importance of faith. Psalm 123 includes the following lines, lines that reflect the abbot's concern for the reputation and authority of his abbey:

Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us,
for we have endured much contempt.
We have endured much ridicule from the proud,
much contempt from the arrogant. (Psalm 127:3-4)

Gedolphus thus sets out the expected result of Hildegard's holy healing: a confirmation of God's love, revitalization of faith, and restoration of authority and reputation of his abbey. As if to prove the abbot's foresight, the dean of the Church of Holy Apostles writes how Hildegard's success has spiritually invigorated the city of Cologne. Both accounts reveal the twelfth-century churchmen's understanding of the practical role holy healing plays in revitalizing faith and spirituality.

³⁴ Letter 68, *Letters*, Vol.1, 147.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

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In her narrative construction, we can witness Hildegard's practical and truly saintly role as a synthesizer of two worlds: the real physical world manifested by Sigewize's illness and the spiritual world. Through her care for Sigewize and narrative construction, Hildegard makes the two worlds one comprehensible whole. Hence the Dean of Cologne says that Hildegard's healing has inspired in them the love of spirituality. We do not really know how Hildegard cured the woman except for the miraculous account recorded in the *Vita*. Yet what we can observe in these letters is that both her treatment of the sick and her narrative construction contributed to the ontological well-being of the ecclesiastical community; in other words, Hildegard helped strengthen these monks' sense of well-being by proving the power of saints, the meaningfulness of the cult of saints, and the importance of Christian faith. Her saintly ability emanates here as she mends the ontological crisis of the churchmen faced with demonic possession.

It is difficult to truly comprehend the significance and role of what Hildegard did and how she served her community in the eyes of medieval ecclesiastics, for it is a kind of religious phenomenon where one plus one seemingly produces more than two. The letters reveal three things: 1) Hildegard restored Sigewize's health; 2) Hildegard explained that Sigewize was cured because God finally favoured the afflicted communities for their spiritual merit; and 3) the ecclesiastical communities rejoiced at the miraculous healing Hildegard performed and their faith was revitalized. It is remarkable that the healing of just one sick individual could bring such a sense of revitalization of faith. Perhaps here we can see why Hildegard and her respondents carefully kept the epistemic hierarchy between religion and medicine.

Conclusion

By focusing specifically on the treatment of demonic possession in the letters exchanged between Hildegard and the two ecclesiastics, I have examined why holy healing was necessary and why Hildegard's help was necessary. The perilous nature of demonic possession means that if the exorcism fails, the ecclesiastical community in charge as well as the church could face a serious spiritual and ontological crisis. This is the case of our subject Gedolphus who sees a spiritual battle between the church and Satan taking place on Sigewize's body. And this is precisely why Hildegard was called in. Her job was to restore

the *nomos*—the normative world—by healing a sick woman. Here holiness and healing intersect, for holiness is the necessary power that mediates between the human and the divine in order to effect healing. As Roy Porter writes, “[r]eligion and medicine share a single aim, that of making whole. It is no accident that ‘holiness’ and ‘healing’ have a common etymology, rooted in the idea of wholeness.”³⁶ Thus the concept of holiness is intricately bound with the medieval ecclesiastics’ understanding of the goal of healing, i.e., wholeness. In this respect, my paper has reasserted Peter Brown’s claim that a given society’s value is reflected in the kind of healing it seeks.³⁷ In both the Neo-Platonic worldview³⁸ and the Hippocratic medical philosophical view, wholeness or *eukrasia* is considered the harmony and balance that ideally penetrates both microcosm and macrocosm, thus making the entire universe as one congruent and whole cosmos. In the same coherent manner, medicine and religion intersect in Hildegard’s practice of holy healing as they work toward wholeness and order in both individuals and society. Such intersection testifies to the holistic nature of the medieval ecclesiastics’ worldview and the healings such ecclesiastics aimed to accomplish. It also testifies to the practical nature of the works of saints. And in this world, the cult of saints thrived.

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37 “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” 142.

38 For the popularity of Neo-Platonism in the twelfth century, see Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard’s Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 259.

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