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# **PART THREE**

## **Chapter Ten    A Unique Circle of Understandings**

### **10.1                      The Essential Message from Hildegard's Visionary Circles**

In total, the associations ascribed to the circles in Hildegard's visions can be likened to a coin, weighted in favour of goodness. The fact that there are visions in which the circle is associated with evil or unfavourable traits cannot be ignored, nor is their comparative infrequency sufficient reason to ignore their presence. The analogy of a weighted coin describes just such a situation in which a quality may have both positive and negative associations, yet the frequency of positive occurrence greatly outweighs the negative.

It is the duality of the circle's ability to represent movement which is discussed by Hykel Hunt (p.c. 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2002), who comments that the potential to move forward decisively and with purpose compares favourably with its counterpart quality of rushing round in a frenzy of activity and achieving little except exhaustion. Of the few unfavourable associations of the circle in Hildegard's visions, the majority reflect this property of movement. Similarly, in the only other negative association of the circle amongst Hildegard's visions, it is the strength of the circle which is associated with the devil trapping people. Conversely, strength is associated positively with the circle on numerous occasions throughout the visions.

Of the messages to be read from Hildegard's visionary circles, this duality serves as a subtle reminder to her audience of the constancy of the choice between good and evil. In relation to this research, the essential message is that the circle is the overwhelming shape of choice through which to represent all things good. An overwhelming proportion of the qualities associated with the circle in her visions can also be interpreted in terms of healing.

When the individual associations of the circle in each of Hildegard's visions are grouped by similarity, the result illustrates that the essential quality represented by the circle is a positive one, even when this exercise is conducted in the least generous manner. Totalling the number of separate visions in which an association occurs (not counting multiple occurrences of the same association in one vision), and taking the entire work of *Liber Vitae Meritorum* to be the single vision which Hildegard describes it as, the numbers speak volumes of the circle's associations in her visions. Table 10.1.1 details the frequency of specific associations throughout Hildegard's visions.

**Table 10.1.1: The Number of Hildegard's Visions in which Specific Associations of the Circle Occur, in Order of Frequency**

(Associations are in alphabetical order when two or more associations share the same frequency.)

Association of the Circle	Number of Visions in which it Occurs
God, The Trinity, The Holy Spirit, Jesus	22
Strength, Protection, Benediction	15
Endlessness, Eternity	11
Power	9
Virtue	9
The Shape of the World or Universe	7
The Soul	6
Miracles	4
Movement	4
Balancing Qualities	3
Wholeness	3
The Church	2
Wisdom	2

These frequencies demonstrate that the circle features in either the image or the text, and is associated with the divine in some form, whether this is God, the Trinity, the Holy Spirit or Jesus, in sixty per cent of Hildegard's thirty seven visions. Forty per cent of her visions contain an association of the circle with one of the qualities of strength, protection, or benediction and, after the circle's association with endlessness or eternity,

the two associations of the circle to enjoy the same frequency of occurrence are power and virtue, which each feature in twenty four per cent of the visions.

The remaining associations also continue the circle's theme of positivity. In combination with the percentages noted above, the contents of the Table 10.1.1 points to the essential message of the circle in Hildegard's visions. With an incidence of sixty per cent, the visions show that the circle is the shape which, for Hildegard, most frequently represents God; the association of circles in her visions with qualities which are also attributed to God by Hildegard reinforces this argument.

The most direct association of the circle with healing in Hildegard's visions is its association with the property of wholeness. The additional associations of strength, protection and benediction which feature in forty per cent of the visions can also be considered to be closely related to the spiritual healing theme. The fact that power, goodness, miracles and balance are all properties which are associated with the circle in Hildegard's visions coalesces in an overall picture of a shape whose associations are predominantly of a spiritual healing nature.

From the perspective of Hildegard's beliefs, close inspection of the content of the visions reveals the potential to explain why the circle is the shape associated with spiritual healing. Firstly comes Hildegard's association of the circle with God, which is sufficient to explain the origin of the circle's link with spiritual healing, in terms of belief. The omnipotence believed of God within Christianity includes the power to heal, and so the circle is associated with this power.

Though the soul is not generally considered to have either physical form or mass, Hildegard nonetheless shows the soul as a sphere amongst its depiction within her visions. Introducing her audience to the possibility that the soul might have a physical shape in the metaphysical realm, be perceived to have a shape, or be represented by a

shape, this second association has the potential to reinforce the circle's association with spiritual healing.

If the soul, as depicted by Hildegard, is a sphere, then the mind's production of circular imagery could be caused by the soul presenting itself in time of crisis (in contrast to a symbol of the Self from a Jungian perspective). Similarly, the mind's production of circular imagery could serve as a prompt to reflect upon one's inherent ideal state and thus promote healing. Deliberate interaction with circular images for healing purposes could also, according to this notion, function in the same manner.

The statement by the figure Love that the human soul possesses "the ability to arrange everything according to its own wish" (Fox, 1987:204) in the Eighth Vision of *De operatione Dei* applies to the same hypothesis and develops it further. The addition of this belief highlights the spiritual possibility that it is the soul which causes the circle's shape to occur at times of, and be associated with, healing. This resonates with the origin of the same circle being in the mind. The distinction between the mind and the soul is, of course, open to interpretation, as acknowledged in Chapter One.

The fourth example with the potential to explain the circle's association with healing from Hildegard's visions is the placement of a spiritual structure in the mind by the circle of divine mercy in the Tenth Vision of the Third Part of *Scivias*. The global occurrence of the circle in association with spiritual healing could easily be a function of such a spiritual structure in the mind. Though the shape of this spiritual structure is not specified, its positioning in the mind by the circle of divine mercy provides a circular reference for it. In context, this circle of divine mercy fights the Devil's arts with God's secret power, adding holy and protective properties to the circle which creates the mind's spiritual structure, as perceived by Hildegard.

## **10.2**                      **The Associations of the Circle in Hildegard's Visions** **Compared with those of the Primary Cultural Contexts**

Table 10.1.1 also provides a framework within which to compare Hildegard's associations of the circle with those of the primary cultural contexts explored in Phase Two of the research. Her associations will thus be taken in order and their content examined alongside those discussed in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

### **10.2.1**                      **The Divine Circle**

The first of Hildegard's associations, which enjoys this priority due to its frequency of occurrence, is that of God, or the divine in some form. The circles in Hildegard's visions at times illustrate God, the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, or Jesus and, at others, are considered alongside their divine qualities. Comparable concepts can be found in Tibetan Buddhism and Shamanism.

During the ritual construction of a Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala, a deity or deities are invoked. A properly constructed mandala is then considered to be the place of residence of such a deity or deities. Further to this, a mandala is believed to be the deity, rather than just its representation or temporary home. The multidimensional representational qualities attributed to a Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala allow the mandala to be the deity, house the deity, and also represent its qualities in the metaphoric representation of its palace and surrounding universe.

Navajo sand paintings contain comparable divine components, when accurately constructed in the appropriate ritual ceremony. The gods are likewise believed to reside within the image, bound by a circle. Meeting and communicating with spiritual entities is also one of the activities associated with the medicine wheel, and these spiritual entities are accessed through the use of the medicine wheel. In all three contexts, the

circle is thus associated with divine beings, and has to be recognised as a common attribution.

### **10.2.2 The Circle's Strength, Protection and Benediction**

Next in order of frequency in Hildegard's visions come the closely related attributions of strength, protection and benediction. The belief that the circle is of benefit is certainly familiar in all primary contexts explored. Hildegard associates the circle with these qualities on at least fifteen occasions across fifteen visions. The strength and protection afforded by her visionary circles applies to people in some circumstances, and to the world in others. God's blessing in the form of a crown appears in association with lay people, people of religious significance, and establishments such as the Catholic Church.

A Tibetan Buddhist mandala is believed to transmit positive energies to the world even before its completion. Upon its destruction it is poured into running water so that it can act as a vehicle for the continued carriage of the mandala's beneficial qualities. A circle of protection is also a feature of the early practices of a mandala's ritual construction. Navajo sand paintings are associated with similar qualities of beneficial effect, demonstrated by the audience as they daub material from the sand painting on their own bodies to protect themselves from the imbalance for which the *one sung over* has been ritually treated. The medicine wheel is also described as providing a place of protection.

Similarly beneficial properties are also associated with the circle in some of its other appearances in Western Spirituality. According to modern theories of colour therapy, the light of a rose window has a positive impact on one's energetic field. Another example is that of the Scandinavian fishermen who, historically, sought protection prior to their voyages by trapping harmful spirits in labyrinths.



### **10.2.3                      The Circle's Endlessness**

In addition to Hildegard's visions, the circle's representation of endlessness or eternity is also found in Tibetan Buddhism and Shamanism. The *Kalachakra* sand mandala discussed in Chapter Three is translated as the *Wheel of Time*. This describes eternity in its name, as the constantly turning wheel has no beginning or end. The achievement of enlightenment which is the goal of Tibetan Buddhism removes one from the perpetual cycle of reincarnation, leading to Nirvana. This does not result in the end of the *Wheel of Time*, but rather in the liberation of oneself from its ongoing impact on one's soul.

The medicine wheel is also associated with endlessness, which is demonstrated in Chapter Four in a citation of the wheel's function as a tool enabling connection to infinity. Of the contexts explored during the course of this research, it is the frequency of the circle's association with the eternity of God and the infinite universe in Hildegard's visions which provides the most significant association of the shape with this attribute. For Hildegard, it is as though this is one of the defining properties of the circle, and one of the most decisive factors influencing its association with such profound spiritual concepts.

### **10.2.4                      The Circle's Power and Associations of Virtue**

Next in the order of frequency reported in Table 10.1.1 come the associations of power and virtue. The circle's attribution of spiritual power is a consistent theme throughout the exploration of the primary cultural contexts of its association with healing. The belief in the circle's power could even be described as an essential component of this study's research. The ability to exert an effect on health is, in itself, a power; as a result, any association of the circle in the contexts studied involves the circle's attribution of power. This is clearly demonstrated in the power of a Tibetan

Buddhist sand mandala to transmit positive energies to the world, the power of the medicine wheel to facilitate contact with spiritual entities, the power of the labyrinth to exert a measurable effect on brainwave patterns, and all the powers associated with the circle in Hildegard's visions.

Virtue, or goodness, requires comparatively more thought in order to find its associations with the circle in each of the primary contexts, yet the feat is nonetheless feasible. The deities associated with both Tibetan Buddhist sand mandalas and Navajo sand paintings have the tendency to be beneficent, but also have the potential to be malevolent if treated improperly. The quality of virtue associated with each of these instances of the circle thus takes the form of the relationship between the people and the deities. The proper or virtuous treatment of the mandala, sand painting and thus respect for the deity maintains the deity's virtuous effect. Virtue, in effect, begets virtue.

#### **10.2.5 The Universal Circle**

Hildegard's visionary association of the circle with the universe, in shape and representative quality, is another of the examples which is also readily found in the circle's associations within Tibetan Buddhism and Shamanism. The medicine wheel represents the entire universe, and is described as containing everything which is in the universe. The universe is also one of the many representations of the Tibetan Buddhist mandala's multidimensionality.

#### **10.2.6 The Circle's Representation of Microcosm and Macrocosm**

Closely related to this representation of the universe as circular is the concept of the human as a microcosm of the macrocosm. In Hildegard's Fourth Vision of *De operatione Dei*, the relationship described between human beings, the universe and God presents this concept as a theme rather than as a specified term or quality. Tibetan

Buddhist sand mandalas may equally represent a deity, be a manifestation of a deity, and represent the universe. The addition of the belief that each person is also a mandala, and that the ritual purpose of mandala creation is to become one with it and its properties results in full compatibility with the concept presented in Hildegard's visions. Added to this, the belief that everything in the universe is interconnected, and that nothing can be seen as truly separate, reinforces Tibetan Buddhist beliefs as including the concept of the human as a microcosm of the macrocosm.

Interconnectedness of everything included within the medicine wheel, which is the entire universe, is a belief embedded in the Shamanistic way of life. The picturing of oneself as the centre of a medicine wheel further illustrates that a comparable association of the self with the universe and the circle is likewise present in Shamanism. This association of the self at the centre of the circle is found in another of Hildegard's visions, as the apostles returned the centre of faith and therefore strength to those who chose faith within the Seventh Vision of the Third Part of *Scivias*. To believe oneself to be a mandala places a parallel centre of faith at one's own centre. This comparison is made all the stronger by the mandala's associated properties of healing, which certainly equates to strength.

The centre of the labyrinth is also the destination at which, Lonegren (2003c) asserts, one will benefit from easier access to one's intuition, bringing a second association from the realm of Western Spirituality. Hykel Hunt's (p.c. 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2002) belief that the physical form of the labyrinth is a representation of the same journey in the mind, forms a map of the mind, and is derived from its form in the mind which creates a conceptual link between eminently current thought and practice in Western Spirituality and Hildegard's visionary comments on the spiritual structure placed in the mind by the circle of divine mercy.

### 10.2.7

#### **The Circle's Relationship with the Soul**

The soul as sphere is another element of Hildegard's visions which, similarly, could be related to the structure of the labyrinth. This is the next association to be addressed according to the frequency of occurrence charted in Table 10.1.1. The circle is linked with the soul in Shamanism in reference to illness, which can be considered to be caused in a person through the loss of part of his or her soul. The shaman's involvement of the medicine wheel in his or her job of finding this lost part of the person's soul brings the two into direct association.

In Tibetan Buddhism, there are two separate sources which combine to relate the soul to the mandala, albeit in the absence of any direct reference in the material cited. The first is the explanation that the mandala describes any ideal system of ideas and or energies. When this is combined with the assertion that the human spirit at one's core is ultimately perfectible, the mandala might be regarded as describing the spirit in its state of perfection.

### 10.2.8

#### **The Circle's Miracles**

Next, according to Table 10.1.1, is Hildegard's association of the circle with miracles. Whilst it would be plausible to argue that examples such as a change in one's atomic structure brought about by prolonged Tibetan Buddhist practice could be construed as referring to miraculous events, the truth is that none of the sources cited in Chapter Three mention miracles directly. This is, therefore, the first of Hildegard's associations of the circle which is not readily demonstrated able as enjoying a comparable association in Tibetan Buddhism. The same is not true for Shamanism, as Andrews (p.c. 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2002) describes the medicine wheel's use for healing by trained individuals as miraculous; an association enhanced by his comment regarding his perception of its magical properties.

### 10.2.9

#### **The Circle's Movement**

The association of the circle with the property of movement shares the same frequency of occurrence in Hildegard's visions as miracles, and, unlike the last, this is an association found in all three contexts. For the circle in Shamanism, the relationship with movement is exemplified by the medicine wheel, which revolves just as any wheel. Its representation of the cycles of life, birth, death, and the seasons confirm the validity of this. The same association of motion occurs in Tibetan Buddhism, as in the example of the Wheel of Time sand mandala. Prayer wheels provide a second example in support of this association.

Movement is another of the associations of the circle in Hildegard's visions which is also associated with the circle in other aspects of Western Spirituality. The labyrinth would be futile without the property of movement, since even the inner journey along its path described by Hykel Hunt (p.c. 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2002) involves movement in the mind's eye which represents physical movement. She also associates the circle *per se* with movement in its psychic occurrence for her when she sees shapes in relation to a person's name. The circle is the only shape to appear in every person's name, and plays the part of the motivator, which she likens to a battery pack. In the event that there is another circle in a person's name, it is always significant of movement, either of a positive or negative nature as discussed earlier.

### 10.2.10

#### **The Circle's Balance**

The association which follows movement in Table 10.1.1 is that of balance, which again is associated with the circle throughout the contexts explored in this study. The overarching theme of the healing nature in Shamanism is one of balance, most clearly demonstrated by the goal of Navajo sand paintings to achieve a state of *hózhó*, which includes balance in the translation which attempts to define it. In Tibetan

Buddhism, inner balance is one of the qualities believed to be brought to the individual who constructs a Peace Lotus mandala.

### **10.2.11                      The Whole Circle**

Wholeness is the circle's association which shares the same frequency as balance in Hildegard's visions. The term's shared origin with the verb *to heal* means that its presence is thematic throughout the primary contexts explored in Phase Two. Amongst the beliefs documented in Chapter Three, the Tibetan Buddhist mandala is described as representing the whole cosmos (Brauen, 1997), and extends its healing power to the whole world (Smithsonian Institution, 2004). In addition, the concept of wholeness is implicit in the beliefs that a mandala is a symbol of a perfect world and perfect individual (Segal and Segal, 2002), and that a mandala ritual leads to the transformation into the ideal version of oneself (Gold 1994)<sup>23</sup>. This perfect state is necessarily whole, and arguably associates the circle with wholeness in Tibetan Buddhism. In the realm of Shamanism, Meadows (1990) plainly asserts that the medicine wheel restores wholeness in its healing role. In addition to Hildegard's association of the circle with wholeness in Western spirituality is Jung's (1973) theory that the mandala could be termed the *archetype* of wholeness.

### **10.2.12                      The Circle as a Place of Worship**

Hildegard's frequent association of the circle with the Church may appear, at first glance, not to offer a compelling basis for comparison with alternative belief systems. If one were to look for the association of the circle with the Church in either Tibetan Buddhism or Shamanism, the search would be expected to be long and unrewarding. However, the spiritual Church to which Hildegard refers is a symbol of

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<sup>23</sup> The ideal version of oneself here is noted to be different from the Self referred to by Jung (1973)

faith which is akin to both the medicine wheel and the Tibetan Buddhist mandala, since each is not only likened to temples but is also an integral component of their respective religious ways of life.

### **10.2.13                      The Circle of Wisdom**

Finally, the last association of the circle to be featured in Table 10.1.1, sharing the same frequency in Hildegard's visions as the Church, is wisdom. This is one of the common associations of the Northern lodge of the medicine wheel in Shamanism. Its association with the circle in Tibetan Buddhism is more thematic, since the entire principle of the mandala is to promote wisdom, which burns ignorance, leading to enlightenment.

In itself enlightenment is a term which compares with that of illumination; the word used by Hildegard to define the purpose of sharing the visions in the forms of text and images. The heavenly voice heard by Hildegard explains this directly in the form of an order:

‘Transmit for the benefit of humanity an accurate account of what you see with your inner eye and what you hear with the inner ear of your soul. As a result, human beings should learn how to know their Creator and should no longer refuse to adore God worthily and reverently’. (Fox, 1987:5)

This has the effect of criticising the contemporary practice of Christianity, which is further demonstrated by Hildegard's habit of writing letters to members of the clergy chiding them to exercise more justice in their religious work. The Pope's approval and encouragement of her visionary works demonstrates their acceptance in Hildegard's time, and the visions were selected for exploration here because of their subsequent

varied acceptance, with the anticipated result of bringing fresh insight into the circle's healing associations.

### **10.3 Hildegard's Wisdom Regarding the Circle's Relationship with Healing**

Though Hildegard's observations on the subject of the circle's relationship with healing are inconclusive, her illuminations speak volumes. In her own time, the effect on the Church of sharing her illuminations was intended to be a form of spiritual healing, as implied in the previous citation in relation to the transmission for humanity's benefit and its anticipated result. The healing of the weaknesses perceived in Christian worship by Hildegard is, according to one possible interpretation of this passage, to be effected in the education of humanity through her visions. Within these, the Church is also illustrated and described in the form of a circle.

The circle in Hildegard's visions represents qualities such as eternity, equality, balance, justice, power, protection, strength, wholeness and divinity. The challenge for the medieval male-dominated Church to alter its behaviour to embrace the egalitarian principles of these qualities would have been all too easy to ignore after Hildegard's death. The remarkableness of her life's example tells that there would not automatically have been another woman with such courage and authority, let alone mystic ability, to take Hildegard's place and continue her efforts to change the form of Christianity.

The Church's evolutionary tendency to embrace or reject ideas is illustrated in the inconsistency observed in 5.5. The example of the labyrinth's popularity shows how new ideas can be embraced by the Church with such enthusiasm that it is built into the architecture, only to be forgotten when it falls from vogue, and yet return hundreds of years later when the contemporary society is again receptive.



The interesting point about the labyrinth is the contemporaneity of its popularity with the visions of Hildegard. While the Church embraced each of them in the Middle Ages, they subsequently vanished from mainstream Christian practice, and enjoyed concurrent resurgences in interest commencing at the end of the twentieth century. One could conclude that this return of the circle coincides with the increased egalitarianism of Western Spirituality, given the ordination of female priests in some Christian churches which has, after many struggles, eventually followed the introduction of a woman's right to a political vote.

The extent to which Hildegard's work has returned to popularity could be greater than previously realised. Jung (1973) included the Fourth Vision of *De operatione Dei* in his illustrations of *Mandala Symbolism* (Jung, 1973), contributing four lines on its subject. His awareness of her visions is thus evident. There is, within the texts accompanying the illustrations of Hildegard's visions, evidence of a number of her beliefs which, taken together, support Jung's (1971) (1973) theories of the *collective unconscious* and the *archetype of wholeness*. These same beliefs also encapsulate, in Medieval Catholic vocabulary, aspects of the *collective unconscious*, including the *archetype of wholeness*. Though the citations have been included previously, they are reiterated below in the interest of clarity.

In the description and explanation of her visions, Hildegard sees the soul as a sphere, originating from God and "burning with the fire of understanding" (Hozeski, 1995:50), explaining that, in one of her visions,

This burning sphere touched the mind of the complete form of the person in the woman's womb. This means that the soul has not only earthly powers but also heavenly powers when it knows God wisely (Hozeski, 1995:50).

Also in relation to the soul, the figure of Love explains to Hildegard during the course of her visions that

‘The human species has within its soul the ability to arrange everything according to its own wish,’ (Fox, 1987:204)

which is reinforced by the heavenly voice heard by Hildegard, declaring that the powers of the soul are

‘... more powerful than those of the body. Just as the heart of a human being rests hidden within the body, so also is the body surrounded by the powers of the soul since these powers extend over the entire globe.’ (Fox, 1987:36)

These beliefs regarding the associated shape and properties of the soul are combined not only with a regular association of the shape with wholeness throughout her visions, but also with

... the circle of divine mercy, which fights the arts of the Devil by the secret power of God, and builds a spiritual structure in human minds. (Bishop and Hart, 1990:484)

It is suggested here that these beliefs expressed by Hildegard encapsulate qualities, properties or powers which are comparable to aspects of the *collective unconscious*. Embedded within Hildegard’s beliefs is a source of spiritual power which is common to all people and/or shared with global applicability. While the religious vocabulary certainly differs from that chosen by Jung (1971), and Hildegard does not refer specifically to all the *archetypes* nor explain their meaning, the availability to every person of spiritual power from a common source is certainly similar to

... a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us, (Jung, 1971:4)

which forms part of Jung's (1971) introduction to the *collective unconscious*.

The fact that Hildegard's beliefs include the circle of divine mercy's placement of a spiritual structure in the mind, along with the soul's perceived sphericity, ability to arrange everything according to its own wish, and the common attribute of wholeness applied to the circle throughout Hildegard's visions present a set of beliefs which also compare with the *archetype of wholeness* described by Jung (1973). While the religious vocabulary is different, and Hildegard speaks of the soul rather than the Self, key concepts are nonetheless identifiable. Each allow for the circle to occur in association with wholeness in the mind of any person, and each likewise explains the global association of the circle with healing.

This at once provides evidential support for Jung's (1971) (1973) theories, and also implies their potential influence on his conclusions, suggesting that Hildegard's beliefs might have returned to popularity to a greater extent than previously realised. Given his acknowledged awareness of Hildegard's work, might it be that her visions provided more inspiration for Jung's (1971) (1973) theories than one is led to believe by the four lines of *Mandala Symbolism* (1973) which refer to them? Or is the overarching similarity in the concepts discussed by the two authors simply evidence of the *collective unconscious* and support for Jung's (1971) (1973) theories?

#### **10.4 Essential Messages from the Research**

The reasonable generalisations from the preceding analyses would seem to be that:

- The circle is associated with such properties as divinity, strength, protection, benediction, endlessness, power, virtue, the universe, soul, movement, balance, wholeness, sacred space and wisdom, across Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism, and the visions of Hildegard of Bingen.

- The circle is associated with spiritual healing because of its singular ability to represent these qualities, which best describe a healed or ideal state.
- Within her visions, Hildegard of Bingen describes fundamental elements of the *collective unconscious* including an equivalent to the *archetype of wholeness* in terminology specific to her religion, eight hundred years before Jung published *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1971) and *Mandala Symbolism* (1973).

Given Jung's (1973) presentation of the circle's relationship with healing in a style which has no allegiance to a specific religion, religious beliefs are not a predominant feature of his theory of the circle's role as the *archetype of wholeness*. Nonetheless he asserts that

There is, however, a strong empirical reason why we should cultivate thoughts that can never be proved. It is that they are known to be useful. (Jung, 1964:89)

This permits beliefs to coexist with his theories without conflict, and for healing's shared root with wholeness and holiness to provide a possible answer to the question of why it is the circle which is linked with healing.

The beliefs within Hildegard's visions offer just such an explanation of the circle's association with healing. If one were to adopt a belief in the interest of self benefit and derive wisdom from Hildegard's visions, one might potentially choose to perceive one's soul as spherical (whether literally or merely represented by the shape). If this is the reason that the circle is associated with healing the world over, regardless of whether or not there is any known means of proving it to be true, then doing so may be good for one's health, in body or spirit.

# **Chapter Eleven Directions from and Implications of the Research**

## **11.1 Directions from the Research**

Chapter One pointed to the myriad associations of the circle and, indeed, this thesis has come full circle through the beliefs of individuals and cultures, choosing three types of belief system as the backdrop against which to select a case study. This body of research has demonstrated that this author is clearly in considerable company among those for whom the circle has generated significant interest over an extended period. The imaginative path laid out in Chapter One introduces the circle's capacity to represent a more significant array of properties than either the triangle or square, and highlights some of the naturally occurring circles which are of importance to life, and which lead to the development of the study's aims.

It is acknowledged that there may exist, or have existed, documentation which is not included in this study's research. Since the content of such documentation could not reasonably be known nor guessed, the availability of documentation has inevitably played an integral role in the methodology. In this context, the response to the study's aims has, to the best of this author's knowledge, yielded the following contributions to the field of study:

- Confirmation of the wide geographical and chronological distribution of the circle's association with spiritual healing (Chapter Two's trace of such associations – aim one).
- Documentation of the spiritual healing associations of the circle as a visual art form in Shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism and Western Spirituality up to and including present day practice (aim two).

- As far as can be ascertained, the first documented, detailed comparison of the spiritual healing associations of the circle as a *visual art* form in Shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism and Western Spirituality, employing unique contributions from contemporary practitioners as corroborative evidence.
- The identification of a previously unexplored avenue of research which offers sufficient documentation to enable research, and the exploration of an exemplar as a case study regarding the spiritual healing associations of the circle within Western Spirituality.
- As far as can be ascertained, the first documented analysis of the spiritual healing associations of the circle within the texts and images of Hildegard of Bingen's visions.
- An initial documented, detailed comparison of the spiritual healing associations of the circle in Hildegard of Bingen's visions with those documented in Shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism and Western Spirituality.
- As far as can be ascertained, the first documented discussion and analysis of the similarity between Hildegard of Bingen's beliefs and Jung's (1971) (1973) theories of the *collective unconscious* and the *archetype of wholeness*.
- The identification of embedded beliefs which offer possible explanations in answer to the question of why it is the circle, above all other shapes, which is so universally associated with spiritual healing.

This final point takes the widely accepted theories of Jung (1971) (1973) one step further. This study's deduction that the circle is associated with spiritual healing because it is the shape which best represents ideal qualities of wellbeing could also be argued to define the *archetype of wholeness*. Likewise, the manner in which the circle embodies a universal visual shorthand for the properties which it represents can be

reworded in the theory of the *collective unconscious*. The beliefs expressed by Hildegard of Bingen regarding

- the soul's sphericity,
- the extension of its powers around the globe,
- its ability to bring order to one's life, and
- the circle of mercy's placement of a spiritual structure in the mind

not only describe, in religious terms, an equivalent to the *archetype of wholeness* and aspects of the *collective unconscious* eight hundred years prior to their introduction to Psychology but, in so doing, offer a possible explanation of their source. Questioning why it is the circle which is associated with spiritual healing is, after all, akin to demanding the origin of the *collective unconscious* and its *archetypes*.

Given Jung's (1973) acknowledged research into medieval philosophy in his attempts to understand the healing relationship between circles and the patients who created them, as well as the beliefs expressed by Hildegard in her visions, the logical place in which to seek further instances of congruence would be medieval thought and belief systems. The Christian beliefs which form the focus of Hildegard's visions were integral to medieval beliefs prior to her visions. Since the contents of Hildegard's visions are so compatible with the theories of the *collective unconscious* and *archetype of wholeness*, might it be that such concepts also formed a part of medieval thought and belief?

## 11.2 Implications for Further Research Specific to the Field of Study

- Among the suggestions for further research which follow logically from this point, the primary one is that of studying medieval literature and documentation, including the other written works of Hildegard, for further evidence of the

presence of Jung's (1971) (1973) theories reflected in the beliefs of the time. This would serve to identify Hildegard as either the medieval pioneer of such principles or, alternatively, as the voice of her contemporaries' beliefs.

- As a direct trajectory from the aims of this thesis, there are a number of possible avenues along which the research might be extended. Given the highly visual nature of the material studied, and its resulting message that the development of one's relationship with the shape of the circle and its associated properties has a documented beneficial effect in each of the three primary cultural contexts studied here, the creation of a book or DVD combining the spiritual healing associations of the circle with accompanying visual material has a significant potential for extending this message in a format accessible to the general public.
- The opportunity to create original illustrations for such a document brings with it the potential to research the hypothesis that the deliberate creation of circular imagery would have a healing effect. Such an illustrative process thus allows for the observation of the effect of the formation of the circular images on the artist. A diary documenting changes in health, both physical and spiritual, concurrent with their creation would allow for the observation of the truth in relation to this hypothesis. Similarly, the creative and analytical processes would also allow for the observation of the tangibility of the message of this research, which could then be included within the resulting publication.
- The same creative project raises a second question worthy of further research, which is that of whether viewing circular images and considering one's relationship with the circle and its representative properties might constitute passive art therapy. Following publication and distribution, the formulation of a means of measuring the efficacy of the publication on its readers or viewers in



this regard would have implications for the therapeutic treatment of those who are unable to participate in art therapy in its standard form of activity.

- A further development of the research would involve a return to the second chapter and a removal of some of the limitations which were necessarily placed upon the study's scope due to time and practicality. Any of the circles described in this overview could be studied in depth for their spiritual healing associations, including crop circles, witchcraft, Sufi dancing and astral projection. Stepping outside the criteria of visual art forms or key cultural contexts offers the most obvious methods of extending the research. Taking the example of Australian Aboriginal culture, for which the traditional means of passing on wisdom prevent its ready access in conventional literature sources, it may be possible to extend the research into this realm if it were possible to identify an elder willing to share information for the purposes of respectful research rather than initiation. The methodology of such a study would obviously have to be altered to accommodate the ethical implications of the change in information source, though the same criteria of visual art form and established cultural context would remain.
- Chapter Two's brief mention of artists who employ, or have employed, the circle as a primary feature in their works alerts one to the possibility of extending research into this area also. A study of such artists, their work and patterns of health following the execution of their circular imagery would offer the potential to explore first hand experiential accounts with which to compare those documented here. This would also extend research into a wider range of artists, and therefore experiences, developing from the earlier suggestion of

monitoring the effect of the creation of circular images from a personal perspective.

- The second phase of the research yields additional implications for further study. Given the extraordinary similarity of the properties associated with the circle in Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism and Hildegard of Bingen's visions, the division of the circle by the four cardinal directions found in each context also warrants further exploration. The import of this thesis and, in particular, its identification of inherent wisdom, would be further substantiated by the addition of the identification of points of convergence and divergence among the properties associated with the four directions in each context.
- Similarly, the opportunity to compare the herbal remedies from the three contexts of the previous paragraph has never been more feasible than currently, since Hertzka and Strehlow's (1987) translation of Hildegard's remedies from medieval Latin into English, the increasing availability of Shamanistic literature online and in publications such as those of Baar and Kavasch (1999) and Baker's (1997) publication of traditional Tibetan remedies. Such a study's closer focus on healing rather than circles has the potential to yield results highlighting the ubiquity of either the circle's spiritual healing associations, and/or the constancy of inherent wisdom.

### **11.3                    Implications for Further Research Tangential to the Focus of this Study**

Given the all encompassing property ascribed to the circle within this research, it is not surprising that its study yields suggestions for further research tangential to the specific aims of this thesis. How could it otherwise be described accurately as ubiquitous? These suggestions include studies into

- The beliefs surrounding wedding rings. To what extent does the belief that they protect and bless the marriage lower divorce rates? This might begin with historical research and progress to a longitudinal study of couples who do / do not believe in the protective powers of their wedding bands.
- How consistent is the phenomenon of individual directional preference for walking or tracing a labyrinth, taking polarities in human characteristics such as logical versus intuitive as a starting point?
- The shape of the circle's relationship with the efficacy of medications taken in tablet form. Are circular tablets more effective than those of any other shape?
- The effect of circular features in landscape and architecture on the health of those living in their vicinity.
- The effect of circles in literature on the health of those who read it.
- The magnetic fields of Hildegard's cells and home, and the extent to which they constitute a realistic influence on her visionary propensity.
- Hildegard's other writings for further comment on the properties ascribed to circles, including the original Latin versions to establish whether relevant comments are altered or lost in translation.
- Medieval German imagery and literature for possible explanations for the five petalled flower encircling the divine hand in Hildegard's final vision, and also for the mirrors which describe circles in her visions.
- The relationship between the belief in the soul's perfect sphericity and good health. Possible avenues could include the observation of the effects on the health of prayer groups, or a survey correlating people's beliefs combined with their health status over time.

- Children's associations with the circle. As the group of people least influenced by external opinion on the subject, research into beliefs held by children about the circle's properties has the potential to contribute evidence regarding the innateness of wisdom on the subject of the shape's healing effect.

#### **11.4 Reflections on the Shape of the Study**

Reflecting on the development of this research offers the opportunity to identify the research challenges which, in hindsight, might have been circumnavigated differently, and thus which may be of benefit to further research. The first of these is the necessity to limit the research in terms of focus and manageability. Hence, the broad chronological and geographical distribution of the circle's association with spiritual healing demonstrated in Chapter Two serves both as evidence of the extent of the potential field of study, and as a caution to establish realistic limits for the research from an early stage. Given the same project again, or an extension of it in the further research discussed earlier in this chapter, the potential researcher should be careful to determine the boundaries of the study as far as possible in advance of the research, since the range of opportunities can otherwise present a road ahead so extensive as to have the potential to immobilise the researcher.

The second insight was gained at a much later juncture in the research. Given the opportunity to start again, the illustration and creation of a book or DVD described in an early suggestion for further study would have been this author's preference. While this initially seemed not feasible and remained the case until the closing stages of the study, the realisation that the research conducted within this thesis had provided a basis for such a publication which it would otherwise lack, this researcher is therefore grateful that this study took its current shape.

## 11.5

### Closing the Circle

Many of the rituals studied within this research include a ceremonial closing of the circle created. Following this example, a thesis researching the spiritual healing associations of circles would not be complete without reference to the adage that the eyes are the windows to the soul, since their appearance takes circular form, as does the manner in which one sees through them. The aptness of this commonly cited phrase is deepened by its longevity and endurance made evident in its use by Hildegard, who is cited in *Hildegard of Bingen's Medicine* as stating precisely that "... the eyes of a person are the windows to the soul" (Hertzka and Strehlow, 1987:3). In the context of this reference, the window into a person's soul may refer equally to the reflection of its shape in that of the eyes as the means of subliminal communication afforded through the subtleties of their expression.

Given the visual prompt of the shape of the eye to inspire one to consider the applications of the circle, there is another circle of significance to humankind which warrants mention here. The invention of the wheel is, as discussed briefly in Chapter Two, considered to represent a benchmark of human development. Since the message embedded within the research of this thesis that it is one's relationship with the circle and its associated properties which influences the shape's healing effect, it is argued here that the invention of the wheel is of greater significance to humanity than its use for travel purposes alone. The metaphysical counterpart of the wheel has, according to this research, the potential to make it easier to travel through one's life and carry heavy burdens with greater ease. This author will certainly never look at another circle in the same way again.