

# Sacramental Theology and the Decoration of Baptismal Fonts



# Sacramental Theology and the Decoration of Baptismal Fonts:

*Incarnation, Initiation,  
Institution*

By

Frances Altvater

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Incarnation, Initiation, Institution

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*Tolerabimus quod tolerare debemus.*



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## INTRODUCTION

“...between the realms of straight story-telling and learned exposition the frontiers were fascinatingly uncertain.”<sup>1</sup>

Were the Middle Ages “an age of faith?” There is no doubt that Christianity had permeated the general understanding of the culture in Western Europe. There was no monolithic entity that we can call the laity, however; medieval society was highly stratified by class and gender, which radically affected the levels of education, work, and social engagement. Nor was there a monolithic entity that can be identified as the “Church”; rather, it was a layered institution, running the gamut from elite and wealthy bishops to parish priests who lived scarcely differently from those they served, from monastics to canons regular to lay ecclesiastics. To a generalized extent these distinctions served to create broad oppositional characterizations: Christian vs. Non-Christian, orthodox vs. heretical, lay vs. organized.

In medieval Christianity, the sacraments take shape from our very human desire to mark milestones in our life cycle. The number of sacraments—the outward signs of invisible grace—varied in number and function over time, though by the Romanesque period of the late-eleventh to early-thirteenth centuries, Western Christianity had leaned towards seven: baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, penance, unction, marriage and ordination. Baptism had long been one of the most important: a “necessary” sacrament, specifically taught by Jesus in the text of John 3:5, it was the first of sacraments, initiating a more complicated relationship with God through the Church. Being unbaptized revealed a clear moral lapse and created tremendous anxiety about one’s mortal condition. In a society that defined itself as Christian, in opposition to other religious identities, initiation into the Church led to social initiation, the lack of

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<sup>1</sup> George Henderson, “Narrative Illustration and Theological Exposition in Medieval Art” in ed. K. Robbins, *Religion and Humanism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981).

Christianity to social exclusion. Baptism clearly had legal secular ramifications: it determined kinship through godparent sponsorship which affected marriage; it affected legitimacy as a legal witness; it could affect inheritance.<sup>2</sup> During this period, as ecclesiastical courts were progressively solidifying their purview alongside and against civil courts, there was increased social pressure for transparency in the sacramental definition of the individual's secular identity. Finally, the medieval period between 950 and 1250 has been described as a persecuting society, seeking to affirm certain values to the punitive exclusion of others.<sup>3</sup> These social pressures—first, the laity recognizing spiritual occasions; second, the secular ramifications of these observances; third, the exclusionary bigotry of medieval society against Jews, Muslims, and Christian heretics who either did not observe the sacraments or kept them in a different way—combine with the intellectual trend of Scholasticism to push for sacramental delineation.

The Scholastic method has been described as the “intellectual penetration of the faith, systematization of the texts upon which it is based, and dialogue with non-Christian thought”.<sup>4</sup> These rational trends shaped the discussion of the sacraments, trying to take the confusion of beliefs and anxiety over correct observance and turn it into a regular and regulated response. Visual production and reception are a part of this push to define orthodoxy. The iconic presentation of Romanesque imagery, with its “strong dogmatic, even propagandistic, qualities,”<sup>5</sup> often reinforces this sociological operation through the diagrammatic aspects of composition and the narrowed and repetitive range of subjects. This book examines the visual embodiment of sacramental theology and its

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<sup>2</sup> James Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 3, 41-2, 60-61, 70-97. Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and kinship in early medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986)

<sup>3</sup> See R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Calkins, *Monuments of Medieval Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1979), p. 80. Calkins is here asserting, in the broadest summary of a survey text, that Romanesque art in general is designed to combat heresy. While concurring with his position as far as it goes, I have tried to show the principle in greater specificity.

reciprocal reinforcement of that particular theology in the decoration of twelfth-century baptismal fonts.

The relationship of narrative and art in the Middle Ages was rich, vibrant, and changeable. Sometimes it was a matter of active debate—Pope Gregory (590-604) commends the zeal of Bishop Serenus of Marseilles for condemning idolatrous images but insists that the church must tolerate images for the sake of those who cannot read texts to learn and adore God. Four centuries later, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) focuses on monastic communities, condemning church decoration precisely because it beguiles the attention of the illiterate at the expense of the poor, “The church is resplendent in her walls, beggarly in her poor; she clothes her stones in gold and leaves her sons naked...The curious find their delight here, yet the needy find no relief.”<sup>6</sup> Images exert their own influences—they entertain; they illustrate; they frame; they create mnemonic touchstones. Images are “active social agents in their own right.”<sup>7</sup>

Baptismal fonts, like capitals and tympana, display this twelfth-century emphasis on using narrative decoration to delight and enlighten. The period also sees an increase in the production of vernacular literature, particularly troubadour poetry, *chansons de geste* like *Beowulf*, and mystery plays, like the Wakefield Cycle.<sup>8</sup> The twelfth-century Renaissance is an intellectual burgeoning, expressed both textually and visually. Certainly, the narratives on these fonts can be seen simply: within a Christian society, with a largely illiterate populace, these images recall for the viewer key elements of Christian mythology. Unlike a stained glass panel high above the heads of the parishioners or an illumination seen only by an erudite few, the baptismal font is a piece of furniture too substantial in size and weight, too prominently positioned in most churches, and too often used to be ignored. Clearly a space ripe for

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<sup>6</sup> St. Bernard to William of St. Thierry letter, in Caecelia Davis Weyer, *Early Medieval Art, 300-1150: Sources and Documents*, 169-70.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey F. Hamburger, “Introduction”, *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>8</sup> For short introductory summaries of this production, see William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 286-293, and Clifford Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 255ff.

ornamentation (witness the enormous number of fonts decorated with leaves and arches), the font might indeed be seen as a good narrative forum for instruction.

We must ask what the church is trying to teach the laity. Narrative images on twelfth-century baptismal fonts are limited to a few subjects, omitting scenes which might be considered useful for instruction or even integral to a represented story. Stories that appear fairly often in written theologies and liturgies as referring typologically to baptism, such as the Crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14: 21-31) and the Bath of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-14), rarely appear in font decoration. Acknowledging the imprecision of images when compared with texts, medieval authors suggest that pictures function not to teach new material but to remind the viewer of what he or she already knows.<sup>9</sup> “Reading” images has a necessary connection to memory. The images on twelfth-century baptismal fonts evoke this aspect of reading; the scenes are from the most common stories, such as the Temptation of Adam and Eve or the Adoration of the Magi. The modes of representation also reflect this idea of retelling rather than telling: the stories are seldom arranged as continuous narratives with sequential scenes but rather are most commonly arranged in forms that require active viewer engagement. Both the modes of representation and the material addressed suggest that the images are meant to evoke the remembered story, not to teach new ones.

If we consider medieval society as integrally shaped by the political connections created by the context of the Christian church,<sup>10</sup> then the liturgical function of the font begins to provide us with an answer regarding iconographic choices. The images chosen are appropriate because they refer directly to the Church’s teachings about the sacrament of baptism in particular and sacraments in general. These stories are related to the state of incarnation—human fall from grace through Adam

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<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Duggan, “Was Art Really the ‘Book of the Illiterate’?” *Word & Image*, Vol. 5, 1989, particularly pp. 228-232. See also Michael Camille, “Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy,” *Art History*, Vol. 8/1, 1985, pp. 26-49 and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), particularly chapter 1, pp. 15-23.

and Eve's actions, the promise of salvation through Jesus' incarnation, the sacrifice of Christ's incarnate body, and even the hope of bodily resurrection at the End of Time. This visualization of incarnation coincides with the sacramental ritual marking the body as belonging to Christ and opening the way to salvation through the Church. The history of sacramental theology shows that the theological debate is most pressing precisely at the time when these fonts are being made, suggesting that the themes presented on these fonts are at least the indirect result of this discussion.

The venue of the font highlights the importance of the liturgy first to show the symbolic nature of certain narratives, thus inviting theological reflection on the stories, and then to create the authority of the Church as an institution. Rather than being an exhaustive catalog listing of fonts, this book examines these ideas across the Romanesque period, with some sample case studies of individual fonts. There is a visual methodology as strong as the textual scholarship on sacramental theology; indeed, this visual format is actually far more important as a distillation of the most critical elements of period theology for a much wider audience of the lay faithful. The Romanesque period may open with broad-spread anxiety over the sacraments but it closes with the clear codification and strong agency of the Fourth Lateran Council. The strategy for creating a statement of orthodoxy comes from sermons and sentences, from laws and cases, from the rituals performed, and—visually—from the sculptures that the laity saw with their own eyes. As the period theological concerns and perspectives changed, so too did the decoration of baptismal fonts: narrative scenes give way to ornamental decoration, copying Gothic tendencies in art. To borrow from the story of Thomas the Doubter—through these coactive programs in theology, liturgy, and art in the Romanesque period, we believe because we have seen. As the pressure of doubt reduces, shaped by the clarity gained by these coordinated approaches, in the Gothic period, we come to believe without seeing.



## CHAPTER ONE

# SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY AND LITURGICAL PRACTICE

The sacraments were certainly an issue in Christian definition throughout history, most notably in the late fourth and early fifth centuries as orthodox Catholicism struggled to define itself against heresies of men such as Arius and Pelagius, and these early discussions remained authoritative in the positions of twelfth-century sacramental theology. But the sacramental controversies of the Romanesque period are most directly the result of the discussions raised in the ninth century. These moments of sacramental definition are also moments of institutional definition—in the ninth century, reforms of the liturgy and the establishment of the parish system and in the twelfth century, the Gregorian reforms revisiting these Carolingian reforms relating to simony, clerical marriage, and priestly duties.<sup>1</sup>

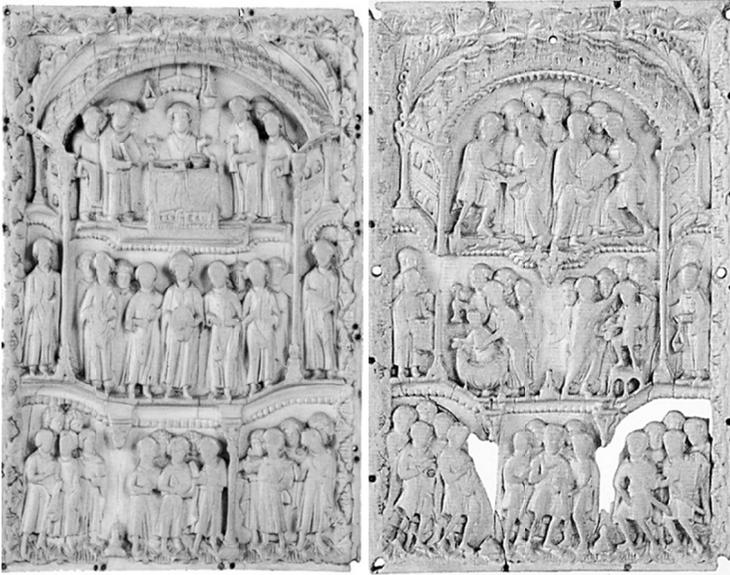
### **The Roots of Controversy**

One visual example can help us clearly understand the Carolingian pressure to define the sacraments in relation to the Church as an institution. Made in France around 870, these two ivories were likely set into the covers of a book.<sup>2</sup> The carving reflects the high quality of the Court School of Charles the Bald, with generally proportionate figures, naturalistic draperies, and sophisticated attention to detail. On one plaque, the lower level shows three tidy groups in an architectural setting; though the figure faces are worn smooth, the costume of shorter tunics clearly

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Coriden, *The Parish in Catholic Tradition: History, Theology, and Canon Law* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 30-31.

<sup>2</sup> Provenance places these two ivories in the treasury of St. Denis. See B. de Montesquiou-Fezensac and D. Gaborit-Chopin, *Trésor de Saint-Denis* (Paris: A. & J. Picard, 1991), 112-115.



**1-1 Sacraments, book cover, ca. 870 (Paris, Louvre, MR 368 and 369) (RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource NY)**

identifies them as laymen. In the second tier are nine frontal figures in the center bay with two standing figures in the niches on either side. Many of the figures once held objects that are now abraded; a censor is still discernable. In the top tier of the plaque, a priest performs the Mass before a draped and set altar table under an elaborate canopy with hanging lamps; a deacon holds an open book for him and there are four other clergy assisting. The second plaque similarly arranges three groups of laymen in the lowest section. The second tier has two distinct scenes. On the left, a figure is baptized in a font by a priest. Five other figures are arranged around the candidate: two represent parents or godparents while the other three are clerical attendants. The carver has added liturgical elements of a candlestick, linen towel, and a ewer. On the right, a group of figures attends while a priest lays a hand on the head of a boy in celebration of confirmation. In the top tier, the group of figures is tightly grouped but there are two scenes of donation here: on the left, a layman offers a crown or a round platter to a clergyman and on the right, a layman offers a book to a clergyman. In their iconographies and compositions, these works

reflect the level of erudition and deliberateness which mark ecclesiastic production of the Carolingian period.

Together, these plaques present the sacraments of the Eucharist, baptism, and confirmation. These three sacraments were the rites that marked all Christians: baptism was necessary as a cleansing from Original Sin in initiation to the Church; confirmation was a sealing of those baptismal commitments, and the Eucharist was the holy mystery established by Christ that served to connect the faithful to Him. The other sacraments—penance, unction, marriage, and ordination—might all be forgone by particular segments of the Christian population, given their own personal spiritual histories. There is also a strong message of connection and cooperation between the laity and the clergy through images of attentive laity, clergy actively serving their spiritual needs, and lay donations for the church. As the covers of a sacramentary, these plaques were visual mnemonics for the liturgies inside and the role of the priest in those liturgies. Designed for an erudite viewer, it is certainly no surprise to see ivories that address the sacraments in the Carolingian period, given the concerns of that era towards clerical reform and sacramental definition.

Carolingian sacramental theology centered on the nature of the Eucharist; these particular concerns about the Eucharist would resolve only with a more systematic approach to theology in the Romanesque period. The monk Pascasius Radbertus concluded that the bread and wine were the true body and blood of Christ, consonant with the historical body, and changed by the power and will of God. This interpretation was passed not only to the abbot of the daughter house of Corvey but later to the court of Charles the Bald.<sup>3</sup> Against contemporaries such as Hrabanus Maurus, Ratramnus of Corbie upheld the idea that although the elements retain their physical perception, there was nonetheless a “true presence” simultaneously.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, “[b]y the end of the tenth century, Heriger of Lobbes could assert that Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory all agreed that the bread and wine were the body and blood of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> In only one hundred years, there developed an intellectual tradition, bolstered

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Radding and Francis Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics in the Eucharistic Controversy, 1078-1079: Alberic of Monte Cassino Against Berengar of Tours*, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Radding and Francis Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Radding and Francis Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 5.

by the claim of orthodox authorities, on the sacramental nature of the Eucharist; writing around 1050, Berengar of Tours was part of an extended scholarly discussion of these issues.

Berengar's position was that the bread and wine elements were transformed into something of spiritual importance but that their physical nature was unchanged: "by consecration at the altar the bread and wine are made into religious sacraments, not so that they cease to be that which they were, but so that they are that which is changed into something else, as the blessed Ambrose says in his book *On Sacraments*."<sup>6</sup> Berengar appeared to refute a key tenet, resting on the very interpretation of Jesus' own words at the Last Supper, that the liturgical pronouncement affected a change in state. Berengar, like his opposition, drew on the statement of Augustine that a sacrament is a holy sign, a *sacrum signum*.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation relies on the idea that the sign is not the thing signified but rather directs the viewer/hearer to the idea of God's grace; for Berengar, bread and wine remain bread and wine but point to Christ's sacrifice for the faithful.

Some of the refutations of Berengar's position rest on precisely the issue of perception which made Berengar reach his conclusion that the elements do not become body and blood. Both Hugh, Bishop of Langres, and Ascelin assert that to deny the change was to constrain God; human perception is simply inadequate in terms of understanding the fullness of God's power. "For just as you do not comprehend how the word was made flesh, so you cannot comprehend how this bread is changed into flesh, and the wine transformed into blood, if faith in omnipotence shall not have instructed you."<sup>8</sup> These issues of similitude versus "true presence" are at the core of the debate.

As several scholars have noted, the position on the nature of the Eucharist was by no means uniform in the eleventh century and Berengar's position was controversial primarily for the way in which he upset the ecclesiastical institution.<sup>9</sup> Various churchmen—Theoduin of

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Radding and Francis Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 10.5.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh of Langres, *De Corpore et Sanguine Christi contra Berengarium*, in ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 142: 1328C.

<sup>9</sup> Gillian Rosemary Evans, "Berengar, Roscelin, and Peter Damian", *Medieval Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 86-89.

Liège, Adalman of Liège, Lanfranc, and Alberic of Monte Cassino—were drawn into the controversy by Berengar’s attempts to define his own ideas. Berengar’s views attracted the attention of church councils in Rome and Vercelli in 1050, councils which were attended by Pope Leo IX; the 1054 council in Tours was attended by the future Pope Gregory VII, and the 1059 council in Rome forced a renunciation oath on Berengar.<sup>10</sup> Church councils through the 1070s continue to be avenues for Berengar’s advocating for his position and for the church to assert its own counter-position. The attention that Berengar’s Eucharistic theology received is not an example of his own success at developing a following, although Bishop Hugh of Langres was clearly concerned about Berengar’s speaking ability; it is a measure of institutional anxiety over the way in which this theological position called into question ecclesiastical authority. If there was no transformation actuated by the priest in the course of the liturgy, then there might be no need for the priest himself to perform the ritual.

Because Berengar stirred up of the issue of the Eucharist, a number of medieval writers addressed sacramental theology as a more coherent whole in response. Lanfranc of Bec, Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1089) is perhaps best well known for his direct refutation, *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini Adversus Berengarium Turonensem*, written around 1063. Over the next century however, they included a wide spectrum of churchmen—canonists like Anselm of Lucca (later Pope Alexander II, d. 1086), Ivo of Chartres (1040-1116), Alger of Liège (d. 1131) and Gratian (ca. 1095-ca. 1160), and theologians like Abelard (1079-1142), Robert Pullens (ca. 1080-ca. 1150), Hugh of St. Victor (ca. 1078-1141), and, with the most lasting influence, Peter Lombard (d. 1160). There is already a trend in theology to systematize, creating a derivative structure of authorities to support a coherent line of reasoning.<sup>11</sup> It is this energy

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Radding and Francis Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21-33. Also Marcia Colish, “Systematic Theology and Theological Renewal in the Twelfth Century”, *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 18/2, fall 1988, 135-156 and Marcia Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition 400-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). For a coherent examination of the period’s sacramental doctrine, see Boyd Taylor Coolman, “The Christo-Pneumatic-Ecclesial Character of Twelfth-Century Sacramental Theology”, *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, edited by Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, Ch. 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

around the topic, rather than one specific work on the subject, which we must see as influential in the design of baptismal iconographies and font decoration. It suggests an anxiety around the sacraments in the institutional church which would have had repercussions for the laity as part of a didactic program.

Looking for patristic, established doctrine, twelfth-century sacramental theology almost always derives directly from Augustine. Augustine, in his work *On Christian Teaching* as well as elsewhere, asserts a fundamental difference between things (*res*) and signs (*signa*).<sup>12</sup> The elements of a sacrament were both *res* and *res sacramenti*: “Take away the word and what is water but water? Add the word to the element, and there results a sacrament, as if itself was also a kind of visible word.”<sup>13</sup> While Augustine was sometimes loose with the application of these terms, including many other liturgical practices than what were considered by later twelfth-century theologians, this idea of elemental transformation through the liturgy in order to convey the grace of God made Augustine a foundation for discussing sacraments. Augustine’s discussion actually forestalled two of Berengar’s problematic interpretations: the elements were transformed from mere things to actual signs, and the process occurred through the liturgy, administered through the authority of the church.<sup>14</sup>

The push towards sacramental definition came from many quarters and is present even in works not specifically devoted to theology. However, for the purposes of this book, I will focus on works which attempted specifically to systematize the sacraments from a perspective of

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<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, bk 3 nos 29-32, ed and trans RPH Green, Oxford Early Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 145-147.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *In Joannem*, Tract LXXX.

<sup>14</sup> Gratian, for instance, divides an almost unlimited range of ecclesiastical practices into sacraments of dignity and of necessity; when discussing sacraments of necessity, such as baptism, which are critically important, Gratian notes that the sacrament cannot be affected by the status or beliefs of the priest administering them. As a canonist, Gratian is trying to define the ways in which the sacrament works in conveying either mystical or earthly community or both and therefore is important to our understanding of how the institutional church addressed authority and the sacraments. See Stanley Chodorow, *Christian Political Theory and Church Policies in the Mid-Twelfth Century: The Ecclesiology of Gratian’s Decretum* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

divine operation within institutional practice. One of the first was Hugh of St. Victor's *De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, written in the first quarter of the twelfth century, which takes an Augustinian definition of the sacraments and then embellishes it: "A sacrament is a corporeal or material element sensibly presented from without, representing from its likeness, signifying from its institution, and containing from sanctification some invisible and spiritual grace."<sup>15</sup> For Hugh, the sacrament must have a tangible presentation directly related to the spiritual element (i.e. physical cleansing and spiritual cleansing in baptism), be derived from an authority (imposition through Christ, ideally, as was directly traceable with baptism and the Eucharist), and have a ritual process (liturgy through the Church) that conveyed that grace. Hugh continues to admit a number of rituals not considered in the main to be sacraments, including aspersion of the community or the reception of ashes at Lent.

One of the most influential of the early *Sententiae* was the *Summa Sententiae*, attributed to Hugh of St. Victor, a work focused on a mystical view of the sacraments, emphasizing the mystery of the sacramental ceremony. Similar to the definitions and usage of "sacramentum" in the earlier *De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, the author/Hugh relied heavily on the Augustinian distinction between sacramental elements and divine grace:

...A sacrament is the visible form of invisible grace gathered in it, which the sacrament itself confers. For it is not only the sign of a sacred thing, but also its efficacy. And this is what distinguishes between sign and sacrament; because for this that it be a sign it does not require anything save that it signify that of which it is held to be the sign, not that it confer it. But a sacrament not only signifies, but also confers that of which it is a sign or signification.<sup>16</sup>

Here the author clearly and without hesitation adopts Hugh's idea of the sacramental sign as affecting a change in the soul of the receiver. This

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<sup>15</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, Book 1, Part 9, ch. ii; trans. Roy J. Deferrari, *Hugh of St. Victor on the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1951), 154-155.

<sup>16</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Summa Sententiarum*, 4th Tractate, c.i, translated in Elizabeth Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System* (Merrick: Richwood, 1976), 55-56.

sacramental theology links the sacraments of baptism/confirmation and the Eucharist as necessary for salvation, while some (unction, marriage, penance) are required for sanctification, and some (ordination) for the preparation of the others; he focuses on but does not limit his assessment to these seven.<sup>17</sup> The *Summa Sententiarum*, while clearly widely circulated, fails to set the standard for sacramental theology, perhaps because it lacked a precise order and format and because it failed to limit the sacraments in a useful fashion.

Peter Lombard's *Libri quatuor sententiarum*, compiled around 1150, represent the most successful medieval systematization of sacramental theology. Unlike previous Sentence collections, they are a coherently ordered and rubricated approach, organized appropriately around the model of *res* and *signa*, bolstered by accurately attributed and quoted statements from canonical authorities from various camps. Peter Lombard reconciles the idea which caused such contention for Berengar—that a sacrament is the visible form of invisible grace—with the orthodoxy taken directly from Hugh of St. Victor—"...a sacrament not only signifies, but also confers that of which it is the sign of signification".<sup>18</sup> For Peter Lombard, reflecting the anxieties of the Church Councils of the previous half-century, sacraments are both the human institution and the divine reality.

Because all of these theologians, from Augustine to Peter Lombard, were interested in defining the form of the sacrament not to delimit God's power but to better understand the ways in which the sacraments conveyed God's grace to sinful mortals, there is a marked tendency within sacramental theology to connect one sacrament to another. Augustine often made allusions to sacramental parallels in sermons for the newly baptized:

Unless wheat is ground, after all, and moistened with water, it can't possibly get into this shape which is called bread. In the same way you too were being ground and pounded, as it were, by the humiliation of fasting and the sacrament of exorcism. Then came baptism, and you were, in a manner of speaking, moistened with water in order to be shaped into bread. But it's not yet bread without fire to bake it...That's the chrism, the

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, 53-54.

<sup>18</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Summa Sententiarum*, 4th Tractate, c.i, in Elizabeth Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, 55-56.

anointing. Oil, the fire-feeder, you see, is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

The rhetorical foundation was laid for comparing the operation of one sacrament to the elements of another, riffing off the Pauline quotation from I Corinthians 10:17: “We, being many, are one bread, one body...”. For Peter Lombard, some of that is the result of the operation of sacramental grace on the mortal soul; for instance, those who have been baptized receive a grace which makes them better able to resist temptation and thus makes penance the more effective as a remedy.<sup>20</sup> Visually, the fonts of the period underscore this verbal trope. The most closely connected sacraments that address mortal salvation—baptism, the Eucharist, and penance—are represented in the forum of the font. In addition to directly baptismal images from the life of Christ, iconographies which focus on Christ’s incarnation and reference the Eucharist through the Last Supper and Crucifixion tie baptism and the Eucharist together; elements of penance can be read from the inclusion of saints on these fonts. Again, the twelfth-century visual corresponds to the verbal in both the theology and its expression.

All of this discussion of sacraments and their effectuation was clearly a matter of theological concern among the erudite elite of the medieval church. The interest in this theology was not geographically specific, nor was it limited to a single identifying group but was pervasive, involving canonists and theologians, monastics and bishops. The transmittal of ideas in the Middle Ages is often difficult to trace and there is frequently a modern assumption of intellectual isolation.<sup>21</sup> The question becomes how these ideas were transmitted to the lay communities, given the importance of the sacraments in the life of the Christian laity.

One place to begin that understanding is with the culminating document of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. As an institutional document, it reflects the deliberation of a massive number of churchmen, including 412 bishops who provide the link between the theoretical discussion and diocesan policy that affected practice in parishes. Canon

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<sup>19</sup> See Augustine, Sermon 9 and Sermon 227.

<sup>20</sup> Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 540.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Homer Haskins, “The Spread of Ideas in the Middle Ages”, *Speculum* i, 1926, 19-30. See also Leidulf Melve, “The Revolt of the Medievalists: Directions in Recent Research on the Twelfth-Century Renaissance”, 32 *Journal of Medieval History*, 2006, 231-252.

1—the first statement that the Council felt it necessary to assert, before any other business of the Council—begins with an assertion of the nature of the Trinity that articulates the incarnation of Christ as both fully human and fully Divine. The discussion then proceeds to tie that nature of Christ to the role of the Church, connecting Second Coming and mortal resurrection, the nature of the Eucharist and transubstantiation, Christ's authorizing of the disciples and the ecclesiastic role of the priest in expressing that sacrament. Canon 1 then concludes:

But the sacrament of baptism, which by the invocation of each Person of the Trinity, namely of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is effected in water, duly conferred on children and adults in the form prescribed by the Church by anyone whatsoever, leads to salvation. And should anyone after the reception of baptism have fallen into sin, by true repentance he can always be restored. Not only virgins and those practicing chastity, but also those united in marriage, through the right faith and through works pleasing to God, can merit eternal salvation.<sup>22</sup>

We must see this canon as a culmination of the debates around sacramental theology in the previous century and a half. Baptism is a necessary sacrament, at the root of salvific inclusion into the community of the faithful. Baptism is expressed in water and the Trinitarian statement in the liturgy, thus clearly requiring the sanction of the Church institution and excluding any other heterodox beliefs or practices. Baptism as a remedy for sin was not repeatable but was thus importantly tied to the sacrament of penance. The last sentence tied baptism to all of the Christian community, and therefore created a link to the selective sacraments of ordination and marriage. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 attempted to create a sacramental statement in this canon, endorsing key ideas of Scholastic sacramental theology such as divine institution, systematic function and operation of all sacraments, and the ecclesiastical authority of the orthodox Church in their performance.

Church councils provided an important articulation of ecclesiastical policy. The Fourth Lateran Council also passed canons which stressed the importance of reaching the laity, no matter what their language (Canon 9), and direct episcopal involvement in the daily life of the faithful or the

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<sup>22</sup> H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 237-238.