

# Sacraments

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CATHOLIC STUDIES  
ACADEMY



# Sacraments

## Syllabus & Objectives

This course is designed to advance the students' understanding of the sacraments according to the teaching and tradition of the Catholic Church, including some of the pivotal theological questions the Church has considered, concerning the sacraments, in the course of the centuries, and is considering today. Our intention is to move beyond a merely catechetical understanding of the Church's formal propositions regarding the sacraments, to a deeper theological appreciation of the reasons behind these propositions, founded in Scripture and Tradition as they have been engaged by reason throughout the life of the Church.

Students who complete this course will be equipped to:

- Offer a coherent and nuanced definition of the concept of sacrament according to Catholic teaching, as distinct from other sacred acts and objects entrusted to the Church;
- Name each of the seven sacraments recognized by the Catholic Church and explain how each relates to the process of salvation, so as to be necessary for the life of the Church, according to God's design for the Church, accounting for different senses of the phrase, "necessary for salvation" as applied to the sacraments;
- Identify several major historical controversies surrounding the sacraments, explaining what was at stake, theologically, in those controversies and how the Church's teaching developed in response to them;
- Explain the sense in which the Church itself can be seen as a "sacrament".

# Sacraments

## Lectures

The following lectures will be provided in this course:

1. Defining our terms: the formalization of the terms sacramentum, and mysterion in the early Church, in contrast to other, related ideas
2. Old Testament vs. New Testament Sacraments
3. Numbering and categorizing the sacraments in Catholic vs. Protestant systems
4. Three dimensions of the sacramental reality: sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, res tantum
5. Baptism
6. Confirmation
7. Eucharist
8. Holy Matrimony
9. Holy Orders
10. Reconciliation
11. Unction
12. Other controversies and concluding comments

Texts:

1. Peter Lombard, *The Sentences, Book 4: On the Doctrine of Signs*, Guilio Silano, trans., *Mediaeval Sources in Translation* 48 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010).
2. Additionally, each lecture in this course includes recommended readings, many of which are taken from other sources. For these texts, a hyperlink is provided for open, online access.
3. The exception to this rule is in the case of readings taken from Holy Scripture, on the presumption that the student is already in possession of a Bible.

# Defining our Terms: the formalization of the terms sacramentum, and mysterion in the early Church, in contrast to other, related ideas

Suggested readings: St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians; Tertullian, On Baptism (CHURCH FATHERS: On Baptism (Tertullian) (newadvent.org)),

Daniel G. Van Slyke, "Changing Meanings of sacramentum: Historical Sketches, Antiphon 11.3 (2007): 245 – 279.

[https://www.academia.edu/7797879/The\\_Changing\\_Meanings\\_of\\_Sacramentum\\_Historical\\_Sketches](https://www.academia.edu/7797879/The_Changing_Meanings_of_Sacramentum_Historical_Sketches)

Questions:

What does the term mysterion mean, and what difficulty arises when applying this term to a distinct and privileged set of realities in the life of the Church?

Based on Tertullian's treatise on Baptism, how does his use of the term sacramentum unite the idea of a Christian initiation rite with the customary use of this already familiar Latin word? How, further, does his discussion of Baptism correspond with the Greek concept of mysterion, used in New Testament and Patristic writings?

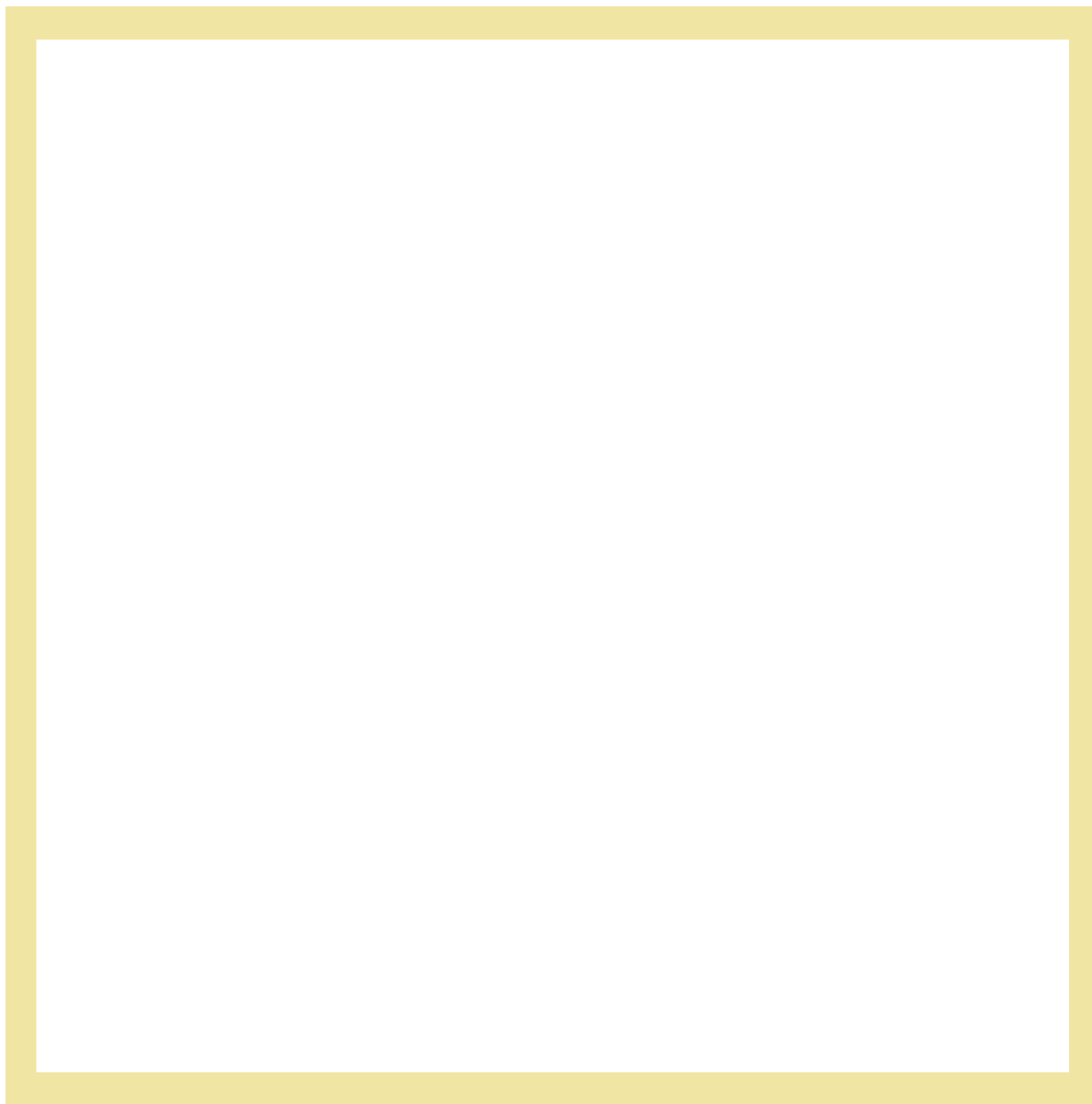
The use of terms like mysterion and sacramentum underwent refinement over the course of centuries in the early Church. What false inferences should we be careful to avoid when thinking about this fact in relation to the Church's perennial belief concerning the sacraments?

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Defining our Terms: the formalization of the terms sacramentum, and mysterion in the early Church, in contrast to other, related ideas

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# Old Testament vs. New Testament Sacraments

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Suggested readings: Summa theologiae III.62  
<https://www.newadvent.org/summa/4062.htm>  
Peter Lombard, The Sentences Book 4, Distinction I.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, were there sacraments in the Old Covenant? Can you explain his reasons for saying what he does? What about Peter Lombard? Whose view do you find more compelling? Is this a significant disagreement or a matter of semantics?

According to St. Thomas, Did the sacraments of the Old Covenant convey grace?

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# Old Testament vs. New Testament Sacraments

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How does Peter Lombard answer the question of sacramental grace in the Old Covenant, specifically as concerned circumcision? Do you think Lombard is correct or incorrect in his view, in general, and specifically, as concerns the effects of circumcision since the moment of the death of Christ?

Why did the New Covenant bring new sacraments, replacing the sacraments that already existed in the Old Covenant?

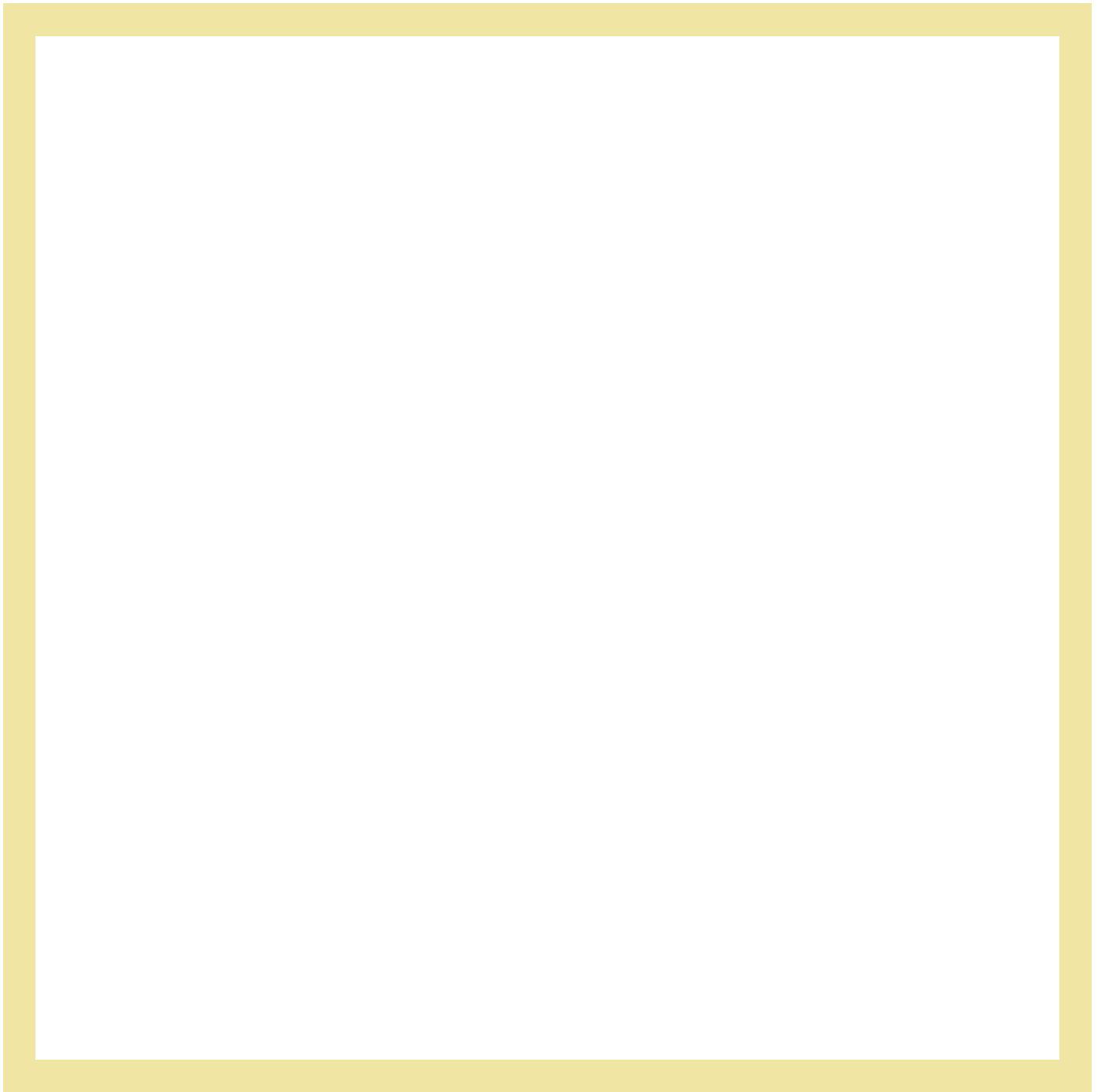
What is the essential difference, according to St. Thomas, between the sacraments of the Old Covenant and those of the New?

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# Old Testament vs. New Testament Sacraments

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# Numbering and categorizing the sacraments in Catholic vs. Protestant systems

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church, §§ 1113 – 1134, 1210 – 1211.  
Vatican Council II. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (21 November 1964), §§ 1 – 17. Lumen gentium (vatican.va)

In The Catechism of the Catholic Church, sacraments are categorized according to the role they play in the Christian life, broadly speaking. What are the three categories the Church identifies here, which sacraments are situated in each category, and why?

According to Catholic teaching, some sacraments impart an “indelible character” on the soul. Which sacraments are they, and how does the Hebrew concept of b’rith help us to understand this teaching about the sacraments?

# Numbering and categorizing the sacraments in Catholic vs. Protestant systems

Most Protestant denominations do not recognize all seven sacraments recognized by the Catholic Church and the other churches of apostolic origin, but they vary between one another in which sacraments they do recognize. Returning the idea that a sacrament must be “instituted by Christ,” and recognizing the priority placed in Protestant theology upon clear Scriptural witness, explain why certain Protestants will accept the sacraments they do and reject others.

In this lecture, we suggest that it is important, in the divine plan, for the New Covenant to involve seven sacraments, specifically. Explain this view.

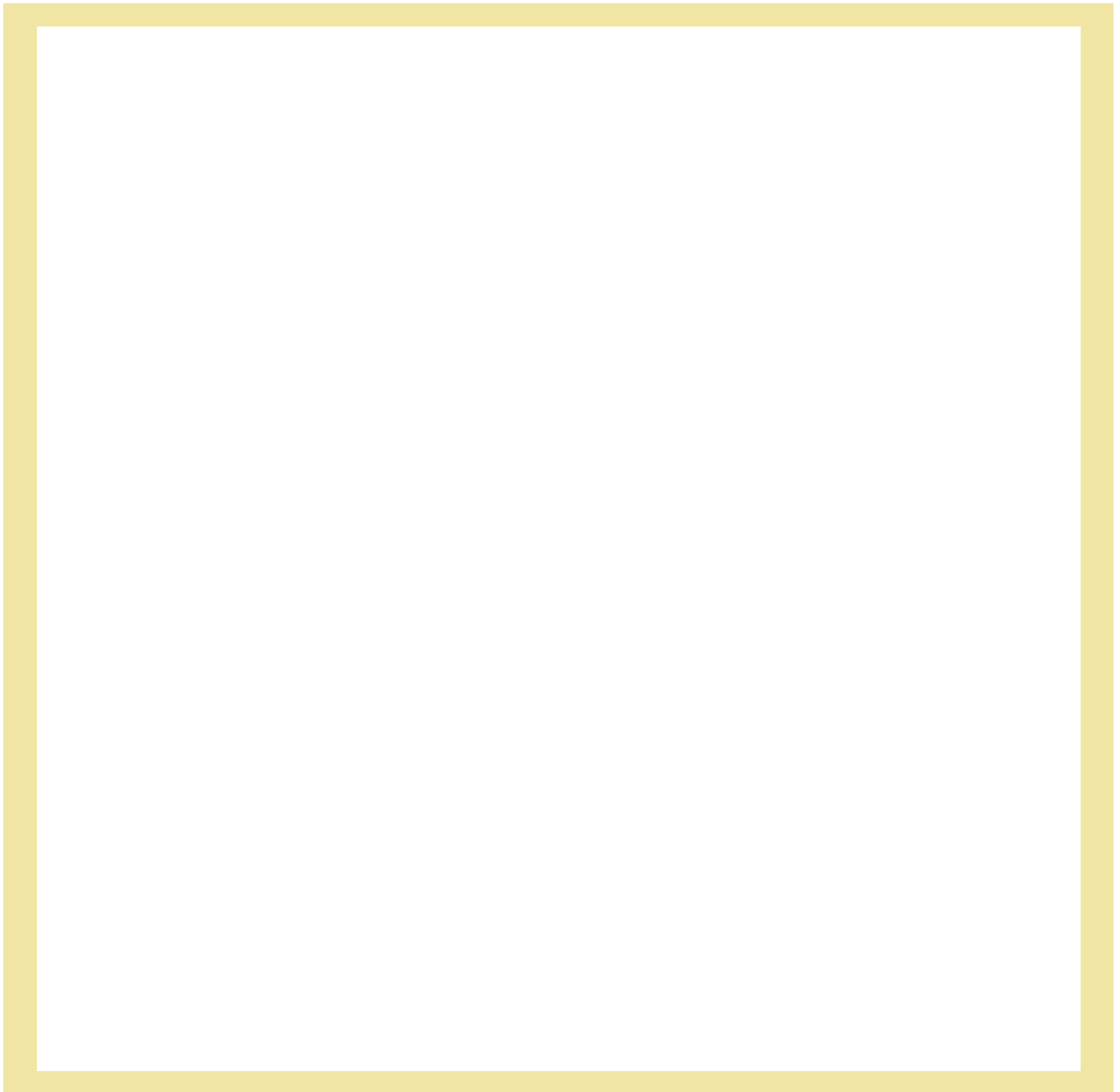
In what sense can the Church be considered a “sacrament”?

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# Numbering and categorizing the sacraments in Catholic vs. Protestant systems

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# Three dimensions of the sacramental reality: sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, res tantum

Suggested readings: Reginald Lynch, O.P., The Sacraments as Causes of Salvation, *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2014): 791-836

[https://www.academia.edu/10645482/The\\_Sacraments\\_as\\_Causes\\_of\\_Sanctification](https://www.academia.edu/10645482/The_Sacraments_as_Causes_of_Sanctification)

To whom is the three-fold distinction of sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, and res tantum attributed?

What is meant by the term sacramentum tantum? Provide an example of this dimension of sacramental reality.

What is meant by the term res et sacramentum? Provide an example of this dimension of sacramental reality.

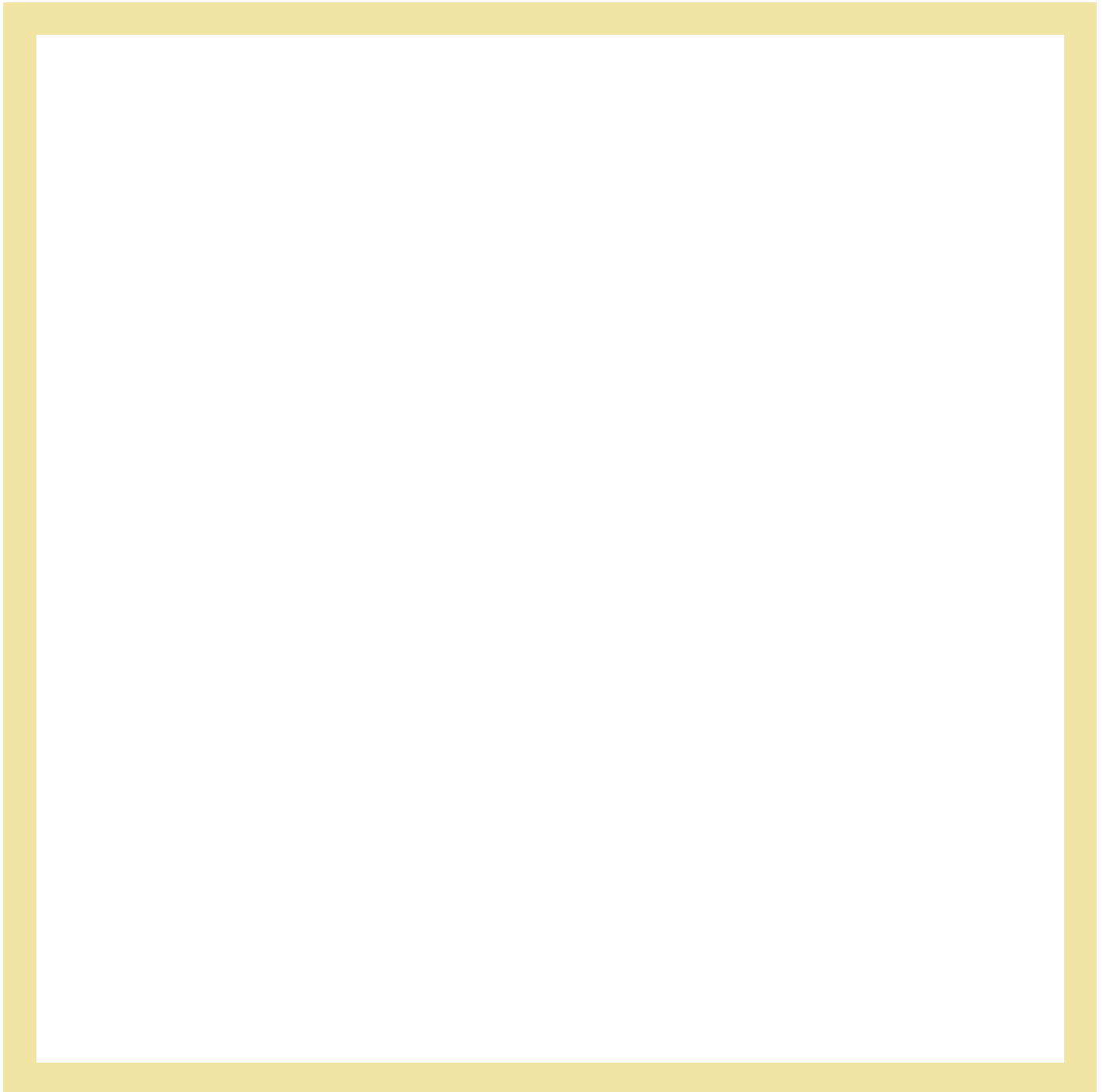
What is meant by the term res tantum? Provide an example of this dimension of sacramental reality.

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Three dimensions of the sacramental reality:  
sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, res  
tantum

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# Baptism

Suggested readings: Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* Book 4, Distinctions 2 – 6.

The sacrament of Baptism, as a ritual, takes its roots from the Essene ritual of Baptism. How does the Christian ritual differ from the Essene ritual and the ritual as it was performed by John the Baptizer prior to Christ's appearance?

The determination was made at the Council of Jerusalem that, under the New Covenant, circumcision was no longer needed as a sacrament of initiation. From that point forward, it was clear that the sacrament of Baptism had taken its place. St. Paul subsequently speaks to the Romans of a "circumcision of the heart," which is not necessarily mirrored in the flesh. Explain the relationship between Baptism and circumcision and an important difference between the two.

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# Baptism

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Baptism is understood to bring about several important effects, according to Catholic teaching. Name and explain these effects in light of the Church's teaching that Baptism is "necessary for salvation." How, further, is that teaching to be understood?

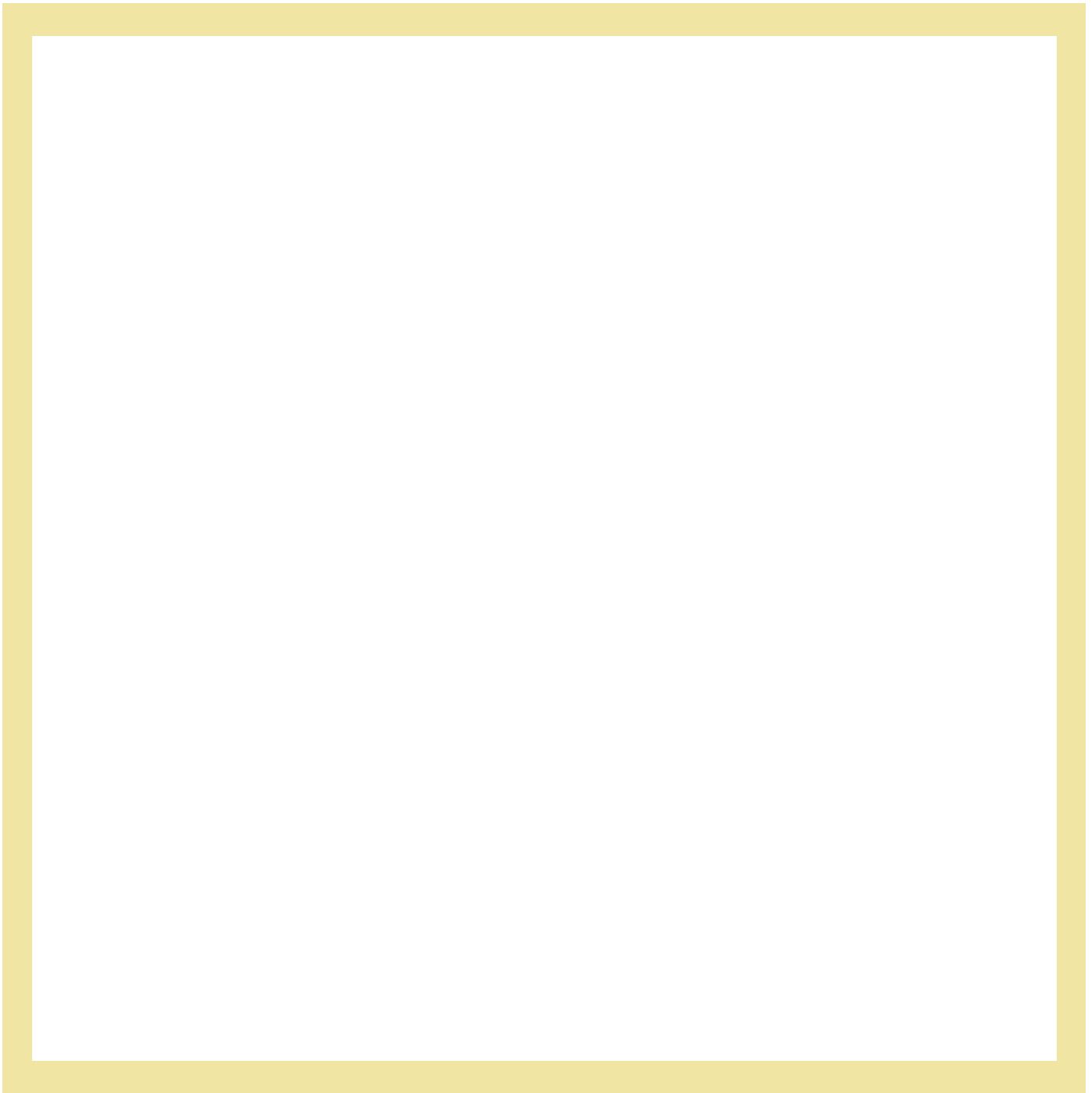
A formula for Baptism is given in the New Testament but it has long been recognized that other formulas were used in the Church in the first and second centuries. At the same time, it has been understood that the formula given in the New Testament isn't sufficient by itself for "validly" or sacramental effect. What teachings about sacramental validity developed as a result of these controversies?

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# Baptism

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# Confirmation

Suggested readings: Ephesians 1:3–14; Acts 8:5–25; Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* Book 4, Distinction 7.

The witness of the sacrament of Confirmation in the New Testament is less than explicit, but it is present. Name two passages in the New Testament that seem to provide witness to this sacrament and explain how those passages appear consistent with the Church's ancient practice surrounding this sacrament.

It is sometimes said that Confirmation is a sacrament in need of a theology. This view is based upon the way the sacrament is generally presented catechetically, as a “strengthening” of the grace of Baptism or a “deepening” of the gifts received therein, leaving one to wonder what unique grace this sacrament actually comports that makes it, like Baptism, unrepeatable. Explain how the Old Covenant concept of inheritance provides the key for a more fully developed theology of Confirmation.

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# Confirmation

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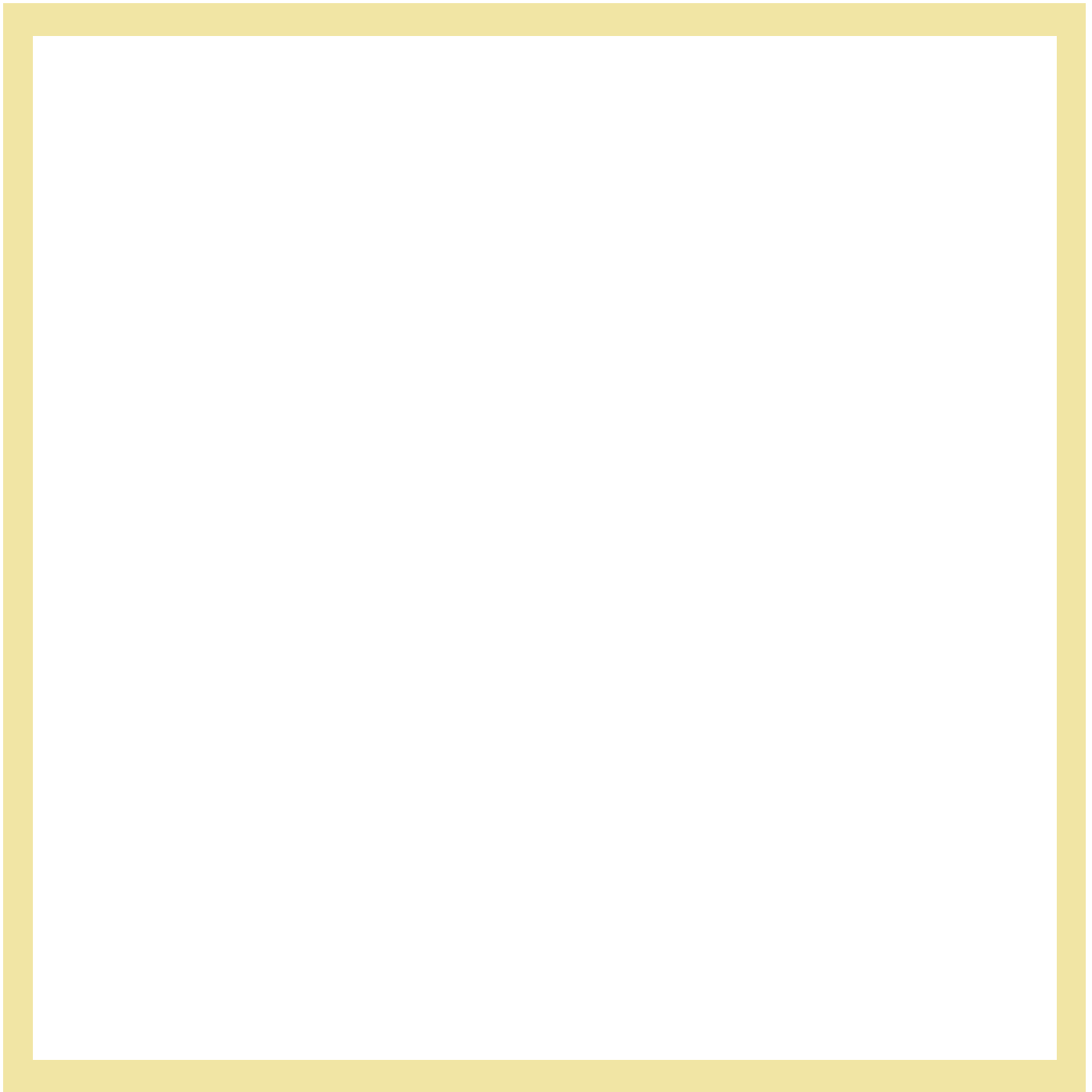
Explain the differing practices concerning the administration of this sacrament in Eastern vs. Western Christianity and how each practice reflects an attempt to address a particular concern.

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# Confirmation

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# Eucharist

Suggested readings: Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* Book 4, Distinctions 8 – 13.  
Hebrews, 7:1 – 10:18.

Recalling lessons from our courses on Fundamental Theology, Ecclesiology, and Christology, explain the idea of “transubstantiation” and how it relates to the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ. What is it about this concept that makes the Eucharist “necessary for salvation”?

There’s no question that the Eucharist was celebrated in the time of the Apostles and continuously throughout the life of the Church, long before it became the subject of doctrinal disputes. What early heresy first attacked the Church’s belief in the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and how did that controversy help to drive the development of the Church’s sacramental doctrine?

# Eucharist

In Hebrews, we see a theological explanation of the reason Christ's sacrifice fulfills all prior sacrifices. How does this passage help us to understand the Church's Eucharistic doctrine more fully?

Who was Berengar of Tours? What did he teach and how did his condemnation intersect with a period of further development of the Church's Eucharistic doctrine?

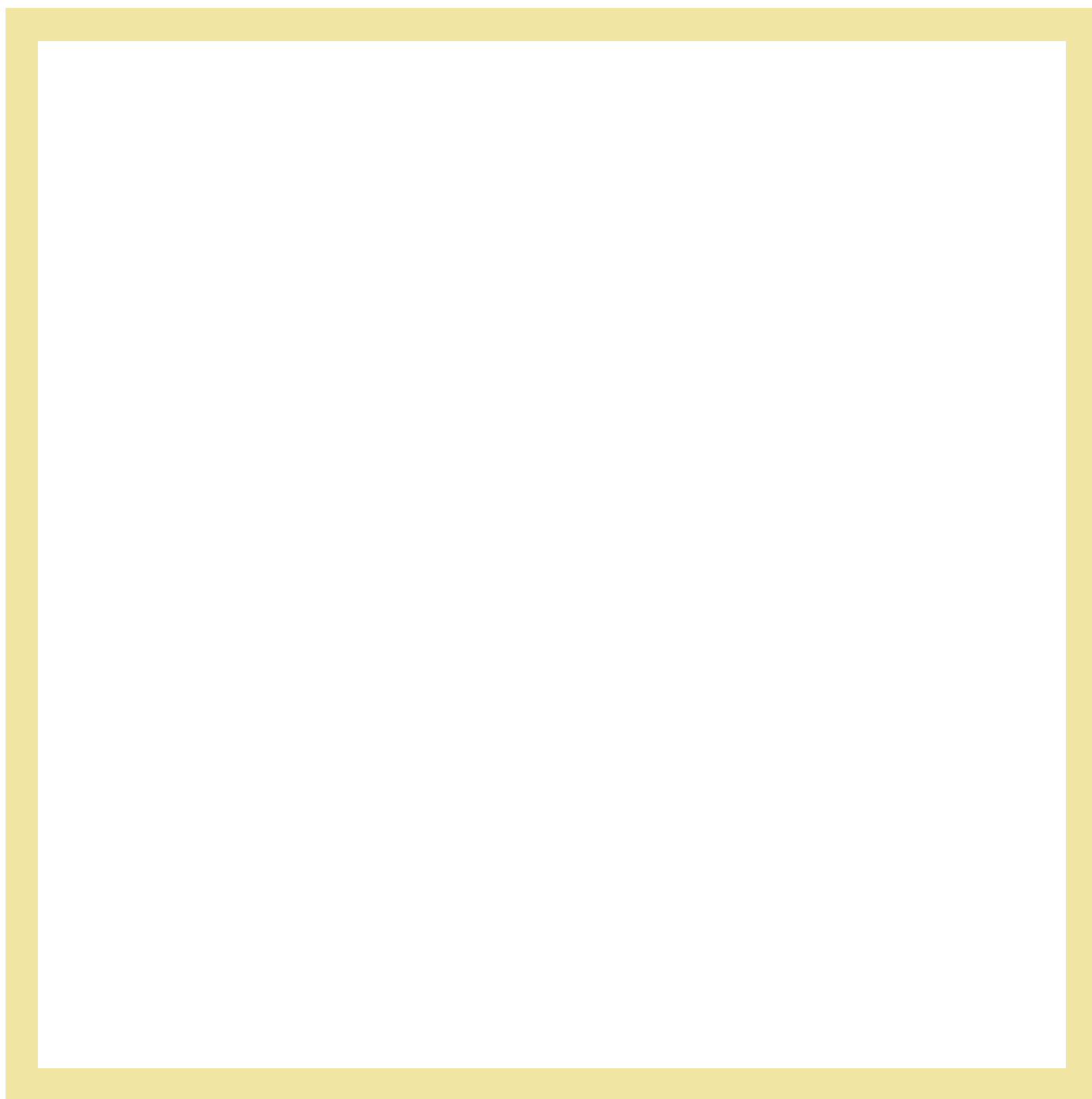
The period from the Protestant Reformation until now has revealed both departures from Tradition on the part of many Protestants and certain conceptual limitations on the part of Catholic teaching regarding the Eucharist. Can you explain these issues? What is at stake in the controversies and what must the Church preserve, regardless of any hypothetical refinements in the language to be employed in her formal teaching about the Eucharist?

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# Eucharist

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# Holy Matrimony

Suggested readings: Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* Book 4, Distinctions 26 – 42.

One of the great difficulties of the Faith is the fact that polygamy was permitted in the Old Testament, and, even if it was not viewed as an ideal, it was protected under the Old Law, but Christ's prohibition against divorce and remarriage, not only for women but also for men, and St. Paul's explicit statement that a man is permitted one woman only, appear incompatible with Old Testament observance. How do the narratives about the pre-lapsarian state in the first chapters of Genesis, and the thought of the Fathers on pagan vs. Christian marriage, provide a framework for understanding the Old Testament provision for polygamy?

How does St. Paul's discourse on marriage and the Church in Ephesians 5 help us to understand the *res et sacramentum* and the *res tantum* of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony?

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# Holy Matrimony

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In the early Church, many prominent Fathers saw marriage as a serious moral compromise, some even going so far as to say that participation in the conjugal life by Christians was sinful, even gravely so, and that actual holiness could not be achieved until their conjugal union had been transcended. The Church as a whole never ratified this view, but thought it seems to preclude a sacramental view of Matrimony (as no sacrament can be evil in itself), what important insights did these Fathers bring to the Church's understanding of Matrimony as a sacrament in the Church? How do these insights help us to understand the relationship between the procreative and the unitive dimensions of Matrimony correctly?

Joseph Martos has said that Matrimony was not, in fact, a sacrament in the Church until the second millennium. Why does he hold this view and why does Dr. Bulzacchelli reject it?

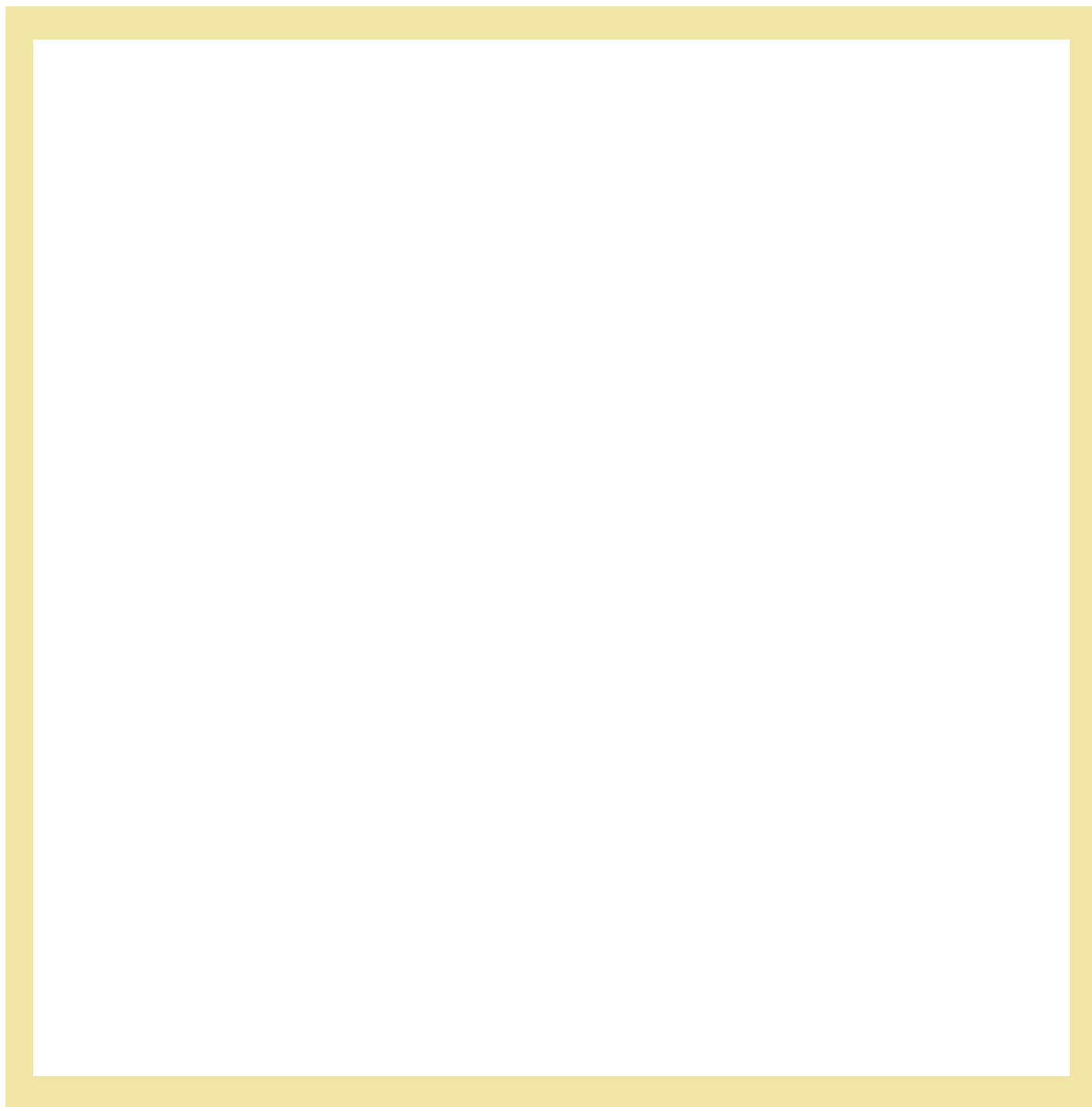


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# Holy Matrimony

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# Holy Orders

Suggested readings: Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* Book 4, Distinctions 24 – 25.

The Church recognizes three degrees of Holy Orders, but teaches, at the same time, that Holy Orders is one sacrament, not three, and that it imprints an indelible character on the soul. Based on Christ's establishment of the Twelve as the communicators of all future orders, how can we understand both the unity and irrevocability of this sacrament as well as the multiplicity of degrees in which it can be communicated and received?

We normally think of Holy Orders as a ladder moving upward from deacon to priest or presbyter, and again, from priest or presbyter to bishop. Why is this model incorrect? Can we have a Church, hypothetically, with only bishops but no presbyters or deacons? Can the reverse be true? How does this issue come to bear on the way Eastern Orthodox Christians sometimes think about the transferability or non-transferability of Holy Orders at the diaconal and presbyteral level?

# Holy Orders

In the Middle Ages, the distinction between presbyter and bishop was a matter of theological debate, with many holding that the distinction was purely juridical—that the Church communicated to a particular presbyter a certain authority to govern, but that, much as with succession to the Petrine Office, no change occurred in the order of being. Leaving aside the Church’s subsequent formal teaching on this matter, consider the merits and demerits of this view as it relates, on the one hand, to the mystery of the Petrine Office and, on the other hand, to disputes over ecclesiology and apostolic succession within Protestantism.

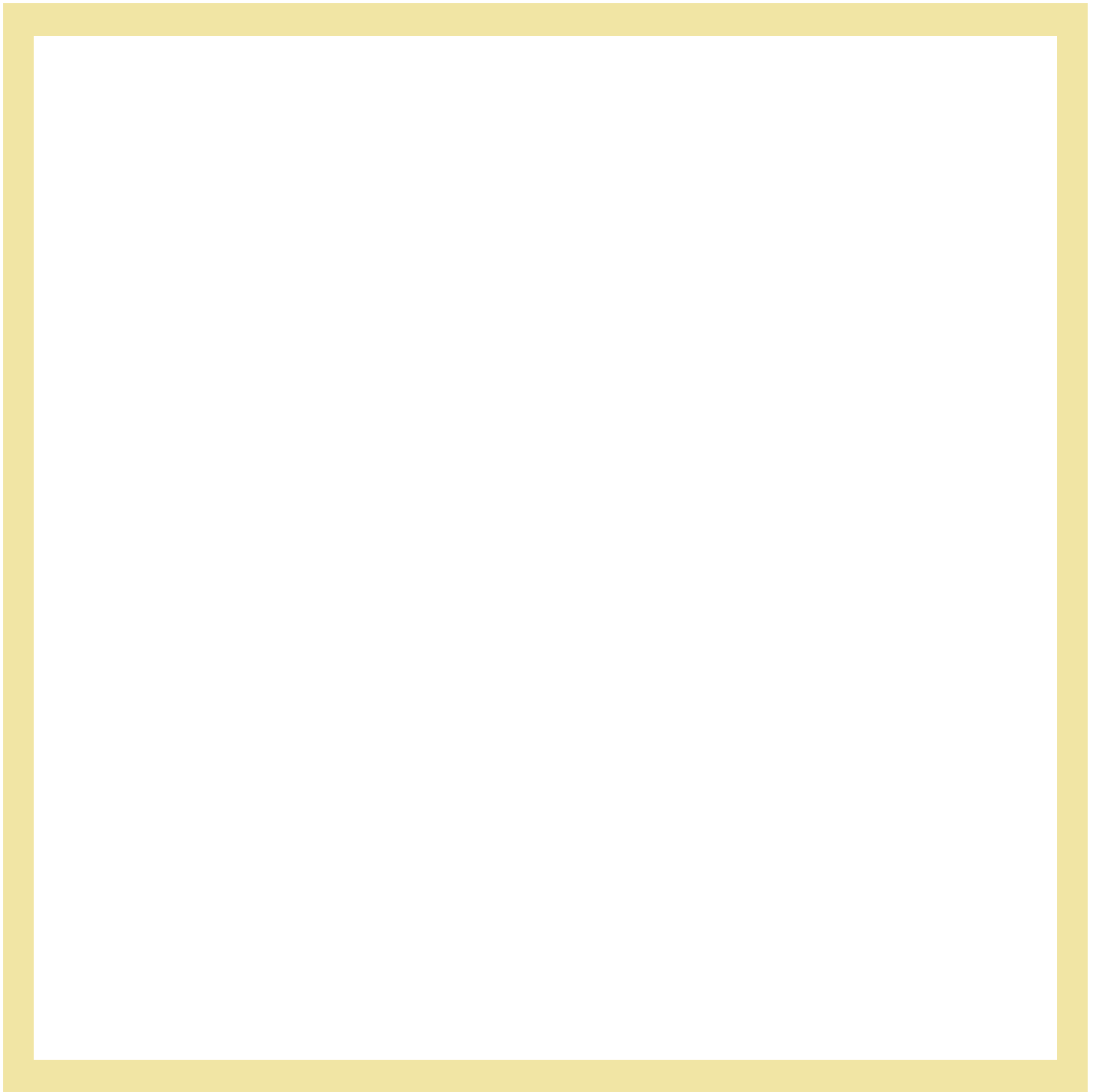
There can be no question that the connection between Holy Orders and the exercise of authority in the Church has often presented difficulties for the Church due to the sinfulness and imprudence of those who have been entrusted with that authority and the Church’s inability to do anything about it. Given that God has his reasons for doing things the way he has, what, hypothetically, does Holy Orders give to the Church that, in spite of everything, advances the realization of the eschaton?

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# Holy Orders

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# Reconciliation

Suggested readings: Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* Book 4, Distinctions 14 – 22.

The sacrament of Reconciliation has taken many concrete forms throughout the history of the Church. How can we be sure that it has always been the same sacrament?

In the primitive Church, and, indeed, for many centuries, controversy raged in the Church over the use or abuse of the sacrament of Reconciliation, with opinions ranging from the laxism to extreme rigorism. Where do you think we fall on this spectrum today?

From the evidence of the controversies over the use or abuse of the sacrament of Reconciliation, Peter Lombard articulates a standard for assessing the proper use of the sacrament, including the conditions under which absolution would be efficacious. How does he explain this?

# Reconciliation

The Church teaches that the sacrament of reconciliation is “necessary” for salvation, but this teaching involves numerous caveats, which Peter Lombard addresses in some detail. How would you describe the sense in which this sacrament is “necessary” for salvation, based on what you have learned from the recommended readings and this lecture?

The sacrament of Reconciliation (or at least a simulation of it, if Holy Orders were not passed down) did not fall into immediate disuse among Protestants but was retained for a significant length of time in many Protestant communities. The Augsburg Confession articulates a theology of the sacrament of Reconciliation that, while correct in what it says falls short in what it leaves unsaid. How well does this early Lutheran view reflect the opinions discussed in Lombard’s treatment of this sacrament?

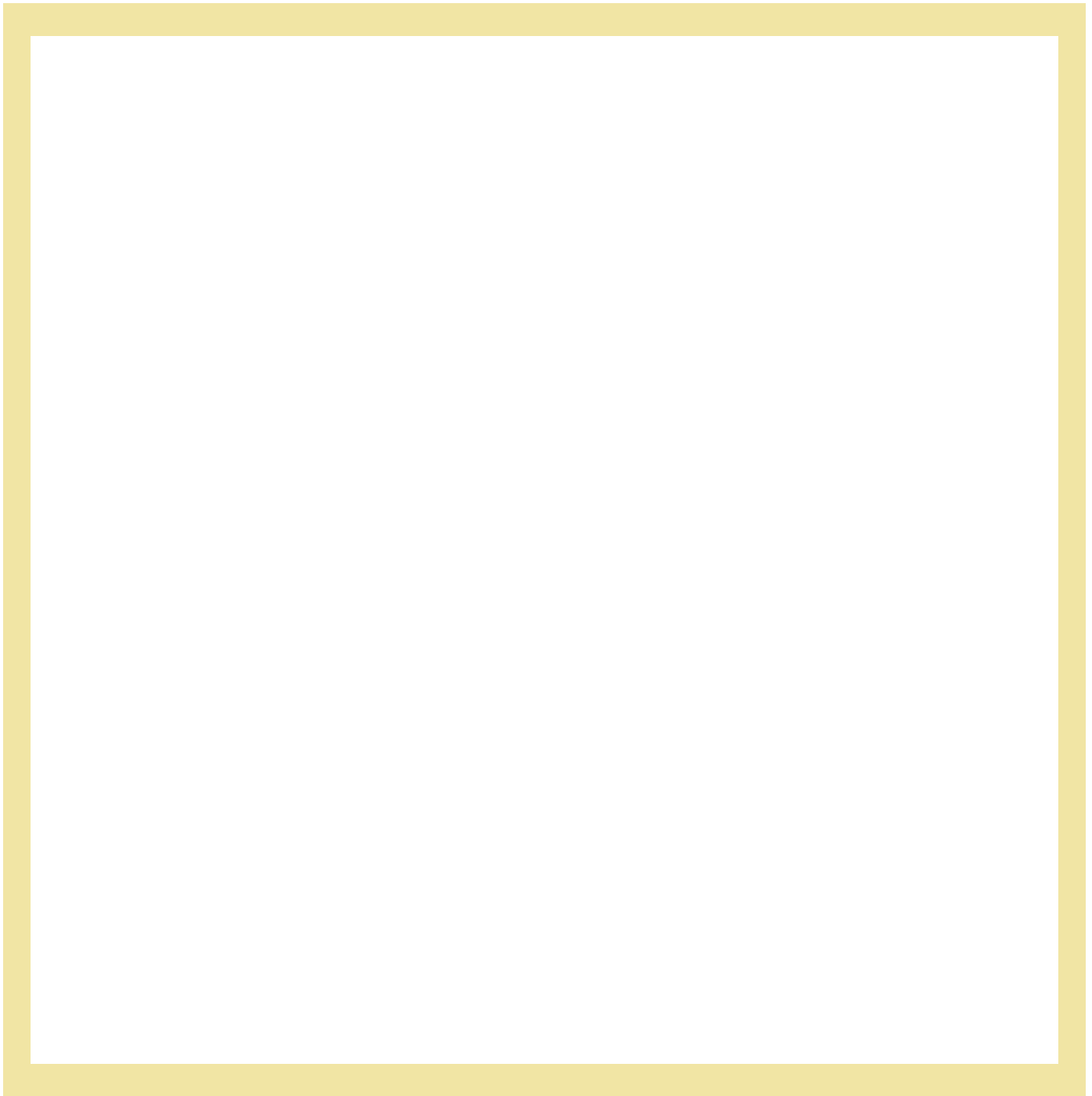
According to the lecture, the sacrament of Reconciliation involves not only the confession of sins but the confession of faith. How does this interpretation of the meaning of the sacrament address the Protestant concerns regarding the idea of salvation by grace through faith without forfeiting the Catholic view that this sacrament is productive of an effect for the remission of sin and the restoration of grace?

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# Reconciliation

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# Unction

Suggested readings: Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* Book 4, Distinction 23.

Where do we find a Scriptural witness to the sacrament of Unction?

Peter Lombard's treatment of the sacrament of Unction is surprisingly brief, seemingly appended to his rather lengthy treatment of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Nonetheless, even this concise treatment of Unction offers a great deal of clarity. He mentions that the sacrament has two purposes, one pertaining to physical health and the other to spiritual health. Why, according to Lombard, does the sacrament only seldom induce the result of physical healing?

What does Dr. Bulzacchelli say is the essential meaning of the sacrament? What soteriological and eschatological reality does it express, and how does this expression serve as a means of grace?

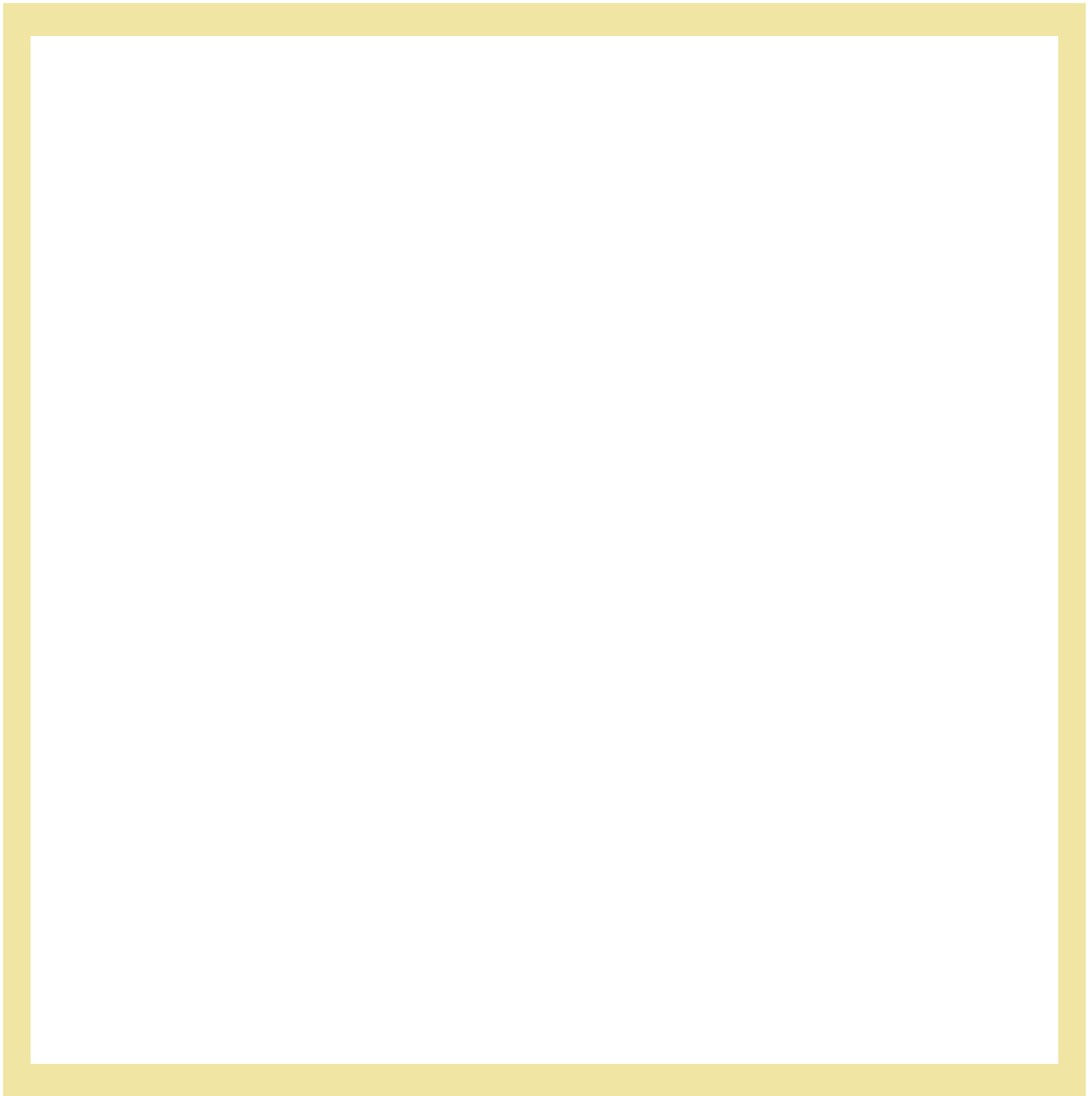


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# Unction

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# A review of controversies: application of principles and methodology for Sacramental Theology

Suggested Readings: Pope Leo XIII, Bull, *Apostolicae curae* (15 September 1896).  
<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leol3/ll3curae.htm>

In the early Church, numerous controversies arose concerning the validity of sacramental actions performed by heretics. Among these was the question of whether the personal sanctity of the minister was necessary for the validity of the sacraments the minister attempted. Explain the principle, *ex opere operato* and how it offers a response to this question.

In the early Church, a controversy arose over the validity of the sacrament of Baptism at the hands of the Paulinists, and later, the Pneumatomachoi, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit, though they baptized according to the Matthean formula (in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit). What principle did the Fathers use to resolve this controversy, denying the validity of their baptisms, and how was that same principle employed in more recent time, in the controversy over the validity of Anglican orders, which Pope Leo XIII resolved in his bull, *Apostolicae curae*, declaring them null and void?

# A review of controversies: application of principles and methodology for Sacramental Theology

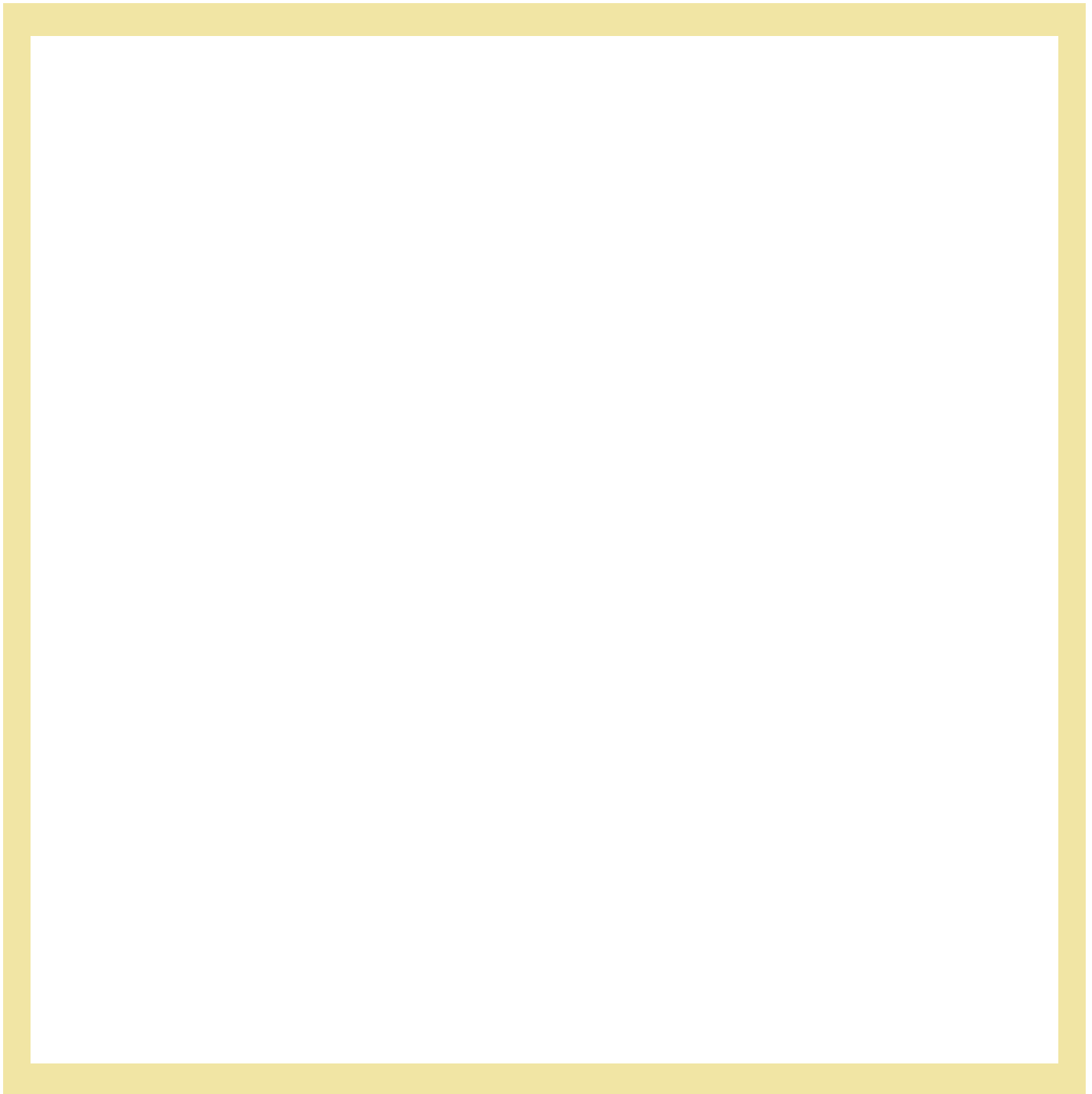
The Church has always acknowledged that the sacrament of Holy Orders was indelible and, therefore, unrepeatable, as seen in early controversies concerning how to deal with members of the clergy reconciled to the Catholic Church from schismatic and heretical bodies, and it was determined that those whose faith was fundamentally Christian (as opposed, for example, to Arian or Paulinist) should not be re-ordained, but, upon their reception into the Catholic Church, should be admitted directly to the ministry they had formerly practiced. Yet, the fact that the Church had long recognized a distinction between deacons, priests, and bishops, complicated the question, since each of these ministries was received by the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. The question eventually arose as to whether bishops and presbyters were distinguished ontologically from one another—by virtue of an indelible character—or if they were distinguished only juridically—as a matter of law and ecclesial authority. Explain how some Protestants attempted to advocate for apostolic succession on the basis of the opinion that the distinction between presbyters and bishops was only juridical. What evidence can these thinkers advance in support of their position, and how, today, might we respond to that line of reasoning from within a Catholic theological perspective?

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# A review of controversies: application of principles and methodology for Sacramental Theology

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# Further Notes

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