Caring for the Body and Soul with Water: Gueric of Igny’s *Fourth Sermon on the Epiphany*, Godfrey of Saint-Victor’s *Fons Philosophiae*, and Peter of Celle’s Letters¹

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Introduction

The use of water as an expressive trope of spiritual hygiene was widespread among monastic writers of the twelfth century, adapted for different uses in different genres. Aqueous imagery was particularly frequent within allegories or didactic *figurae* exploring the care of the soul as if it were a material body, with a constitution that could be promoted or damaged, and a set of behaviors for the encouragement of good health on all levels of Christian life. For monastics, the imagery of bodily cleanliness was an important tool that encouraged a holistic view of the monk as a physical and spiritual being shaped by a life of monastic vows. The moral *topoi* discussed in this essay, expressed in different registers by three very different monastic genres, mapped out multi-faceted guides to behavior and self-examination in which health was holistic—the body and the soul combined. This article is an expansion of an existing essay on the rhetorical *topos* of spiritual nutrition, and its argument that extremes such as hunger or satiety, cleanliness or dirt, exist as part of a multifaceted vocabulary.²

I turn to Aelred of Rievaulx for an introductory vignette to this essay that illuminates the

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necessity of a rich monastic vocabulary of abstract and inner health. In a potent sermon, Aelred demonstrated the facility of powerful spiritual allegory when admonishing his fellow Cistercians to treat their souls as entities worthy of a form of abstracted agriculture:

Ergo, fratres, si et nos uoluerimus ut in nostro corde habitet iste Adam, praeparemus ei paradisum ibi. Sit terra cordis nostri fertilis et fecunda, abundans uirtutibus, quasi spiritualibus arboribus. Sit ibi Spiritus, scilicet fons indeficiens, qui nos irriget spiritali gratia, compunctione, deuotione et omni spiritali dulcedine. Sint ibi quattuor flumina, quae nos abluant ab omni sorde uitiorum et faciant puros et immaculatos, ut possimus esse apti ad amplexus Domini nostri.

[If we should wish, my brothers, to have this [second] Adam [Jesus Christ] dwell in our heart, we must there prepare a paradise for him. May the soil of our heart be fertile and fecund, abounding in virtues like spiritual trees. May the Spirit be there, like a never-failing fountain which irrigates us spiritually with grace, devotion, and all sorts of spiritual delight. May the four virtues be there, like four rivers which wash us clean of all the grime of vice and render us unsullied and unstained. All this so that we may be fit for the Lord’s embrace!]³

In Aelred’s formulation, cultivating the soul also cultivates salvation, a purifying of the inner landscape to resemble the superlative space of paradise. The cleansing effects of salvific knowledge and engagement with the teachings of Scripture were the ultimate expression of spiritual hygiene, an ongoing purification of the inner landscape. The processes of diatetics, bathing, and self-care were not only a visible companion to more abstract ministrations, but an important part of monastic life. Twelfth-century monastic bathing was encouraged as a hygienic practicality, eschewing the extremes of earlier practitioners.⁴

Paolo Squatriti explores the history of bathing in early medieval Italy, highlighting the separation of social and hygienic bathing, with public communal baths giving way to semi-private monastic bathing and eventually private bathing as concerns about water’s “voluptuousness” grew.⁵ By the twelfth century, there was a clear distinction between bathing for cleanliness and for pleasure. The former was good for monks, the latter an attachment to worldly pleasures. Thus it is purity and health, rather than pleasure, that were valorized in the act of monastic bathing; when my three monastic writers discuss pleasure in the context of cleanliness; it is pleasure at cleanliness

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and spiritual purity over pleasure in the act of bathing itself. As Elizabeth Archibald has demonstrated, however, bathing for health and pleasure was widely practiced outside of the cloister. Several essays in this volume expand on this topic, as does the introduction.

**Linked Spaces and Qualities**

Tropes of moral hygiene are difficult to pin down, and their manifestations are many. However, one thing is consistent: attending to the purity of the body leads to an abstract vocabulary for the care of the soul. When he describes a garden for Christ within the soul, Aelred is making a recursive link between environment and abstraction, material cultivation and spiritual cultivation. This is a facet of a wider trope: the soul was the cloister; and the monastery a kind of garden-city spanning Genesis and Revelation, existing as a vehicle of transcendence in which material acts took on a profound and layered significance. For Aelred, water that nourished the inner landscape came from good spiritual health, the imagery of the garden providing a vocabulary of inner cultivation. The study of medieval landscapes is, as Ellen Arnold puts it, the study of “how nature informed cultural metaphors, how it shaped the monks’ religious identity, and how religious culture in turn influenced how the monks acted in their landscape, and used their resources.”

Through the linking of monastic and inner space, the actions of monks could be meaningful in their daily rituals and acts, but also within the spaces in which the inner life was enacted. Conversely, their inner struggles, exegetic speculations, and devotions could bring meaning to their daily management of the landscape. The waters that nourished the soul were present within the material landscape, and vice versa. As a result, monastic rhetoric gave monasteries the power to heal through a combination of physical amenity and spiritual cleansing. In an anonymous

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6 For more on this topic, see Belle Tuten’s article in this volume, entitled “The ‘Necessitas Naturae’ and Monastic Hygiene.”
8 See the editor’s introduction, and the essays in this volume by Rosa A. Perez, entitled “Troubled Waters: Bathing and Illicit Relations in *Equitan* and *Flamenca*”; and Albrecht Classen, entitled “The ‘Dirty Middle Ages’: Bathing and Cleanliness in Medieval German Courtly Romances: Another Myth Buster” for new work on the topic of courtly bathing.
11 For an extended discussion of this trope, see Smith, “Water as Medieval Intellectual Entity” (see note 1).
12 For more on this topic in an early medieval context, see the essays in this volume by Warren Tormey, entitled
twelfth-century description of Clairvaux, for example, the grounds of the monastery cleanse and heal the ailing spirit:

Sedet aegrotus cespite in viridi, et cum inclementia canicularis immiti sidere terras excoquit, et siccat flumina, ipse in securitatem et absconsionem et umbraculum diei ab aestu, fronde sub arborea ferventia temperat astra: et ad doloris sui solatium, naribus suis gramineae redolent species. Pascit oculos herbarum et arborum amoena viriditas, et pendentes ante se, atque crescentes immensae ejus deliciae, ut non immerito dicat: Sub umbra arboris illius, quam desideraveram, sedi, et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo.

[The sick man sits on the green turf, and, when the merciless heat of the dog days bakes the fields and dries up the streams, he in his sanctuary, shaded from the day’s heat, filters the heavenly fire through a screen of leaves, his discomfort further eased by the drifting scent of the grasses. While he feeds his gaze on the pleasing green of grass and trees, fruits, to further his delight, hang swelling before his eyes, so that he cannot inaptly say “I sat in the shadow of his tree, which I had desired, and its fruit was sweet to my taste.”]^{13}

Quoting the *Song of Songs*, the anonymous narrator of the abbey and its grounds has evoked all of the classic elements of the paradisiacal garden. Even when the landscape is parched and dry, the garden of the abbey evokes a bountiful *locus amoenus* of the soul. The monastic landscape, fed by the nurturing Aube, creates a redeemed space shaped by the imagining of its inhabitants. The curative properties of monastic life appear again in William of Saint Thierry’s account, in which William claims that “[at Clairvaux] the insane recover their reason, and although their outward man is worn away, inwardly they are born again.”^{14}

Water was the agent for cleansing and ritual purification, and took on an important resonance. The spiritual effect of water in quotidian life was paired with the healing effect of salvific waters on the soul. The two worked in concert, and it is impossible to separate or distinguish between the healing of the body and the healing of the soul. Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) claimed that, “it is through the little brook springing from stones in the east that other

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bubbling waters are washed clean, for it flows more swiftly. Besides, it is more useful than the other waters because there is no dirt in it.”

Attention to Christ, a spiritual East to match the material east of Eden, had a corresponding effect. Impurities were purged from the waters of the world by superlative principles embodied in Christ, introduced through baptism and emulated through his example; contemplating this reality sharpened one’s powers of imagination, and brought about its realization in the next life.

Hildegard, like many of her contemporaries, understood the powerful link between the cleansing powers of water, and the corresponding curation and purification of the soul. For her, water was the bridge between categories of temporal existence that, despite their seemingly disparate nature, could be traced back to the primordial source of things by shared pathways. The force of similarity in the formation of medieval abstractions can easily be overemphasized, but it was the causation of similarity that gave meaning to likeness for medieval thinkers, and thus resemblance formed a bond stronger than what we moderns derive from a simile. To say that something is “like” another thing is a semiotic shortcut in the twenty-first century, a figure of speech, but it was a truth claim in the twelfth. Caroline Walker Bynum points to the classical trope of “like from like” prevalent within medieval thinking. As she describes it, “like is generated from like, like returns to like, like knows like via likeness.”

Thus, to draw on the resemblance of two things is to make a claim as to a hidden but true structure within Creation. The secrets of the Sun’s rays, of the tides, of the trembling of the earth: all of these things were the essence of God writ large across the face of the earth. Everything was known to have a divine meaning, although it was obscured by a façade of nature, encapsulated within an *integumentum*. Interrogating such an object required a “natural question,” as the title of a treatise by Adelard of Bath (*Quaestiones naturales*) implies. Thus, everything within nature was, by its provenance, imbued with the essence of its divine source. “There, marked down by the finger of the Supreme Scribe,” wrote Bernard Silvestris in his *Cosmographia*, “can be read the text

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15 *Hildegard of Bingen’s Book of Divine Works*, trans. Matthew Fox (Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Co., 1987), 292. For more discussion of Hildegard’s treatment of water for healing and spiritual transformations, together with a nuanced examination of aqueous attributes, see Debra L. Stoudt’s contribution to this volume, entitled “Elemental Well-Being: Water and Its Attributes in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period.”
of time, the fated march of events, the disposition made of the ages.”

To Bernard, “The sky is like a book with its pages spread out plainly, containing the future in secret letters.” Speculation upon these links was, in the words of Robert Javelet, a vision of the truth navigated “by the mediation of likenesses.” The use of exegesis within sermons, didactic texts and spiritual works relied heavily on typology, a deployment of likeness familiar to medievalists in diverse forms. Likeness went beyond biblical links, however, drawing on similarities within the natural world. Dale Coulter describes the hermeneutic effects of these likenesses upon the arts of memory and composition as an escalating process of meditation upon the links from the visible to the invisible. As Coulter puts it, “the mental image is itself a reflection of the created object. As such the mind can begin to meditate upon it and to investigate its various features. Investigation of individual features prepares the mind to extract analogies that serve as windows into other realities.”

My case studies explore the self-expression of three twelfth-century monastic figures: the Cistercian preacher-abbot Guerric of Igny; the Victorine canon regular Godfrey of Saint-Victor; and the letter-writing Benedictine abbot Peter of Celle. The essay will also explore three forms of monastic literary expression: one a sermon with a deft use of allegory; one a rhyming didactic poem exploring and teaching the seven liberal arts as a river system; and one a corpus of letters embedded in Scriptural allegories and spiritual metaphors of cleansing, refreshment and health.

The True Jordan: Guerric of Igny’s Fourth Sermon on the Epiphany

The hydrology of the medieval Holy Land—its rivers, seas, lakes, and springs—were an active site of a commodious and transferrable parable replicated across time and space. The bond between literal landscape, allegory, morality, and anagogy were tightly enmeshed. For Guerric of Igny in his Fourth Sermon on the Epiphany, the landscape of the Bible was a space of moral danger and hygiene made relevant to the faithful through the senses of Scripture.

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22 Coulter, “Contemplation as ‘Speculation’” (see note 21), 224.
Guerric (ca. 1070/80–1157) was born near Tournai and drawn to the Cistercian Order relatively late in life, growing into a preacher-abbot in the mould of Bernard of Clairvaux, his mentor.\textsuperscript{23} Bernard had argued that to be a shepherd to the flock was to nourish them, just as Christ admonished Peter to “feed my lambs.”\textsuperscript{24} Thus, as Hughes Oliphaunt Old puts it, “[the Cistercian sermon], its preparation, and its hearing were moulded by the monastic life, and more and more the sermon became the fruit of long meditation on the Scriptures.” Edited and cultivated for re-reading and reflection, sermon collections such as those inherited from Guerric became a crucial part of the Cistercian \textit{lectio divina}.\textsuperscript{25} After becoming abbot of Igny in the diocese of Rheims—daughter house of Clairvaux—in 1138, Guerric created 54 liturgical sermons before his death.\textsuperscript{26} They reveal an adept preacher and master sermon-writer at work, lovingly embellished and curated for Cistercian reflections and devotional study.

Guerric launched into an acrobatic deployment of the new Cistercian devotional \textit{ars praedicandi} in his fourth sermon; the force of his preaching was made possible by a body of water whose genus was one, and yet had manifold allegorical species.\textsuperscript{27} The universal image of a river carrying salvation from Trinity to Creation was a grand pattern, and interacting with its waters through manifestations such as the earthly river Jordan enabled immersion in a healing salvific force. On the occasion of the Epiphany, the fourth sermon explores the theme of Christ’s baptism through the theme of Naaman of Syria, the leper King healed by the waters of the Jordan.\textsuperscript{28} In that episode, the King refuses to come to the Jordan and immerse himself seven times, as advised by the prophet Elisha, arguing proudly that the waters of his own land were just as fitting. Guerric takes this as an opportunity to reflect on the wonder of Christ’s seminal immersion in the waters, and the revelation of Christ the Son. He plays on Scriptural material that traces interactions with the literal river in the Holy Land, and maps them onto the allegorical, moral, and anagogic senses through deft exegesis. By discussing the river that baptized Christ as a site of moral purity and transference, the sermon gives abstract cleanliness and contamination a material form. Just as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} John 21:15–16, Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Old, \textit{The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures} (see note 23), 284.
\item \textsuperscript{27} For a detailed study, see Kilian McDonnell, \textit{The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).
\item \textsuperscript{28} 2 Kings 5.
\end{itemize}
Christ as man gave a human form to the Trinity, so too does his baptism give spiritual force to interactions with water. As Tertullian admonishes in *De Baptismo*,

> Ne quis ergo dicat: “numquid ipsis [enim] aquis tinguimur quae tune in primordio fuerunt”? non utique ipsis, si non ex ea parte ipsis qua genus quidem unum, species uero conplures; quod autem generi adtributum est etiam in species redundat.

[Let no one [. . .] object, “But are we then baptized in those same waters which were there in the beginning?” Not those very same—yet still the same, to the extent that the species is one, though there are many individual instances, and that which has become an attribute of the species overflows into the individuals.]\(^{29}\)

Within the localized traits of the landscape in which Christianity was born—its spaces, sites, and environment—an archetype for the valence of water was spread and multiplied within the properties of all waters. This dispersal of religious symbolism, like the distribution of water across the face of the earth, reveals much about medieval material imagination and typological transferability of the Holy Land. The river Jordan represented a cultural flow of history, time, and narrative that surrounded and encapsulated the diverse *loci* of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The definitive nature of Christ's life within the typological arrangements of Christian thought patterned the global waters with the imprint of his bodily immersion and baptism, and yet preserved the name “Jordan” as the title by which this universal principle would be imagined. As Thomas Aquinas put it, “the power of Christ flowed into all waters not because of physical continuity, but because of likeness of species.”\(^{30}\)

**Preaching the Jordan**

Through the power of typological links, the activities of the Jordan described within Scripture spread beyond their context. In Guerric’s sermon-writing, we see these links deployed to create a powerful rhetoric of spiritual ontology in which physical and spiritual cleanliness and realization are compared and contrasted for the purposes of spiritual edification. The lowly state of the fallen soul is likened to a debasement of the body, its remedy it linked to a new baptism through immersion in Christ:

> Ecce fratres qui pri mi gratiam baptismatis tantis uolutati sordibus amisimus ecce uerum


iordanem descensum scilicet humilium ubi pie rebaptizari licet inuenimus. Hoc tantum est
ut non parcamus nobis de die in diem descendere profundius et plenius mergi christo que
penitus consepeliri.

[We have lost the grace of our first baptism by wallowing in [...] filth: behold the true
Jordan, that is the descent of the humble, in which we find that we may be devoutly
rebaptized. All that is required is that we should not be reluctant to go down day by day more
deeply, be submerged more completely, and be wholly buried together with Christ.]\textsuperscript{31}

The “true Jordan,” as discrete from the historical river Jordan, was the nexus point of properties
introduced into the global hydrological cycle by sacred interactions with the waters of the Holy
Land. By living a spiritual life in Christ, the material interactions with water that characterized
monastic existence could purify body and soul alike. Those who refused to participate in its
cleansing force were Naaman, capable of worldly riches and status, but stricken with a leprosy of
the spirit. Without intent, the action was meaningless. The true river Jordan (spiritual purification)
was superior to all of the waters of Damascus (worldly ambitions):

O uos naaman syri non enim unus sed innumeri o inquam diuites sed leprosi superbi sed
criminosi quare tam uehemeneter abhorretis lauari his medicinalibus aquis. Cur uobis ita uiluit
noster iste iordanis prae fluuiis damasci. Dicitis enim si forte quaerentibus aliquando
consilium salutis imitanda praedicetur humilitas et paupertas chri: numquid non meliores
sunt fluuii damasci omnibus aquis israel ut lauer in eis et munder. Numquid non melius est
et ad purgationem peccatorum efficacious cotidie benefacere de affluentia mundi quam semel
omnia relinquendo pauperem fieri.

[O you, Naamans of Syria, for it is not a question of one man but of countless; O you rich
but lepers, proud but sinful, why do you feel so vehement a repugnance to wash in these
healing waters? Why does this Jordan of ours seem of such little account in comparison with
the rivers of Damascus\textsuperscript{32} For when you happen to seek some salutary advice and you are
told to imitate Christ’s humility and poverty, you say: “Are not the rivers of Damascus better
than all the waters of Israel for me to wash in them and be cleansed?” Is it not better and
more efficacious for the purifying of sins to make benefactions daily from one’s worldly
wealth rather than leave everything once and for all and become poor?]\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Guerricus Igniacensis, \textit{Sermones}, SChr 166, “In epiphania Domini 4,” 304, lines 226–229, Brepols Library of
translated by the Monks of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1970), 98. This section
plays on 2 Kings 5:14, “[Naaman] went down, and washed in the Jordan seven times: according to the word of the
man of God [Elisha], and his flesh was restored, like the flesh of a little child, and he was made clean.”

\textsuperscript{32} 2 Kings 5:12.

\textsuperscript{33} “In epiphania Domini 4,” 298, lines 145–51, Brepols LLT-A. Guerric of Igny, “The Fourth Sermon for the
Epiphany” (see note 31), 95.
Worldly achievements, conversely, were a polluted source, a breeder of spiritual malaise. The experience of corporeal health, be it that of the pure or the leper, the humble or the proud, maps onto diverse Christian spiritual ontologies with ease. The capacious nature of the body as a map of spiritual experience proves its worth to Guerric. Cleanliness without humility is like a divine cure without the healing power of the Jordan; the process of purification alone is not enough, and the correct nexus between salvific force and worldly water is required. The cause of the affliction, the World, could not be its cure:

Damascenus secundum nomen suum ciuitas sanguinis est et aquae eius sanguine mixtae sunt quia opera etiam bona carnalium et saecularium uix a quocumque peccato pura sunt. Et quomodo id quod infectum est sanguine mundabit. Qua ratione leprom id quod leprosum est curabit.

[The name Damascus means “city of blood” and its waters are mixed with blood, for even the good deeds of carnal and worldly men are hardly pure of all sin. And how shall that which is contaminated by blood cleanse blood: In what way shall what is leprous cure leprosy.]³⁴

The “true Jordan” was present not only in the river that gave it a name, but in an ecumenical principle of universal immersion in salvation, an abstraction of Christ’s seminal baptism. Through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, the human body of Christ was able to bond heavenly and worldly waters through the mediating bond of their likeness. The rivers of Damascus, tainted with worldly sin, could never truly cleanse. The ability of water to carry the sacrament of baptism allowed the link between bodily and spiritual cleansing—a physical act (human bodily interaction with water) could bring with it a more powerful cleansing (spiritual interaction with the Trinity through the Holy Spirit). Hugh of Saint-Victor described it as “superadded institution,” an addition of meaning infused into water by Christ’s baptism in which “the Saviour came and instituted visible water through the ablution of bodies to signify the invisible cleaning of souls through spiritual grace.”³⁵

Through its participation in the Old and New Testaments, the historical river became a hermeneutic vehicle for the hydrological narrative of salvation, the passing of the salvific power of the Holy Spirit into the waters through Christ’s baptism by John. Scripture was, as Henri De

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Lubac puts it, the power that caused living water to well up within the interior landscape, to show the unity of the source and to advocate a drawing of water from inner reservoirs.36

The Holy Land was a repository of divine valence *par excellence.* The density of its intersections with Scriptural history, Old and New Testaments alike, had created an intellectual entity that could never be imagined wholly in terms of its historical dimension. Like other densely connected symbols of Christian typology, the Jordan provided a singular image for the plurality of baptism. The power of water as genus, as ur-principle, continued its reduplication in the species. Patristic writings on the subject set a precedent of Scriptural interpretation and liturgical convention that would continue to flow through the later intellectual traditions of the Middle Ages. In essence, the salvific power of water was not confined in one locus, but distributed throughout the waters of the world, as Tertullian claimed, “it makes no matter whether one is washed in the sea or in a pond, a river or a fountain, a cistern or a tub.”37 Despite the ecumenical efficacy of water in the symbolism of baptism, it was the Jordan that held the unique power of serving as a historical linkage. The waters of a single, discrete, material, and historical river were the site at which the universality baptism entered the world. Before God mandated the miracle-working properties of the water, the oceans were imbued by the spirit of God at the beginning, and yet inactive in their power.

For Guerric, expounding upon a theme of moral hygiene for the occasion of the Epiphany opened up an opportunity to deploy the intellectual patterns of water. Through the intermingling of biblical and material, historical and abstract, the sermon reminds the audience of the process by which Christ’s baptism imbued the universal waters of the “true Jordan” into the temporal world, a force revived through the sacrament of subsequent baptisms. By linking leprosy of the body to disease of the soul, and the relative merits of the waters to valences of spiritual behavior, Guerric reminded the faithful—and we moderns who take an interest in his sermons—of the power of spiritual hygiene as a complex allegory. His principle lesson in the context of this essay is that hydrology linked baptism to daily practice, making episodes of biblical history ever relevant, not only through typological resemblance but through a shared mechanism of nutritive force delivered through moral rectitude and ritual immersion.

37 Tertullian, *On Baptism* (see note 29), 4:15, 11.
Spiritual Dietetics: Godfrey of Saint-Victor and the Fons Philosophiae

Godfrey of Saint-Victor was a canon regular at the Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris, the home to some of the most famous twelfth-century mixtures of the mystical and the scholarly tradition. Eclipsed in our understanding of the Victorines by giants such as Hugh, Andrew or Richard, Godfrey has something to teach us about the themes of this essay. A schoolman and master of the liberal arts from approximately 1144–1155 prior to joining the Victorine order, Godfrey, according to Françoise Gasparri, studied and taught theology at the school of Petit-Pont founded by Adam of Balsham (called Adam Parvipontanus) in 1132. Upon joining the order of canons at Saint-Victor Abbey in Paris in about 1155–1160, Godfrey turned his attention to creating a series of poems and treatises devoted to the cultivation of liberal arts wisdom and the mystical contemplation of human spirituality. In the tradition of his order, Godfrey was a schoolman, but also a mystic and metaphysician, exhibiting both the systematic intellectualism of a schoolmaster and the mystical emphasis of the Victorine order.

Philippe Delhaye, transcriber of Godfrey’s Microcosmus, describes the text as a simple versified summary (résumé versifié) of Hugh’s Didascalicon, a work more strongly related to Hugh than to his predecessor Richard. Gasparri has agreed with this assessment, arguing that although Godfrey was a contemporary of Richard, his ideas more closely reflect those of Hugh—the “Didascalic” tradition taught at the school at this time—with elements of Godfrey’s exegetical liberal arts studies at Petit-Pont. As an eccentric rendering of a widely studied twelfth-century texts such as the Didascalicon and Metalogicon, the Fons Philosophiae offers an opportunity to study the role of what I characterize as a hydrological form serving as a framework for systematized Victorine—and twelfth-century scholastic—content. In the poem, Godfrey appears as a pilgrim searching for the sweet murmurs of water, driven forward by the guiding of the Paraclete. When he hears sweet murmurs, the pilgrim marvels at the many streams before him.

38 Notable examples are the Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint-Victor, a mixture of mystical and scholastic learning or the De Trinitate of Richard of Saint-Victor in which the author attempts to reconcile dogmatic theology and reason.
42 Gasparri, “Philosophie Et Cosmologie” (see note 40), 120, 123.
Gazing upwards, he apprehends the distant source at the top of a lofty peak:43

Emanabat uertice | montis fons illimis, Quem natura fecerat | a diebus primis, Uiue
scaturiginis | inexhaustus nimis, Qui de summo decidens | influebat nimis.

[From the mountain’s summit an unpolluted spring (fons) was flowing down, which nature
had made in the earliest days; it was gushing, living, and inexhaustible. Coming down from
the summit, it flowed to the lowest levels.]44

Whereas spiritual knowledge leads the mind upwards to an illumination of what is possible and
desirable to know, worldly knowledge mistakes the path to knowledge as knowledge itself. In
Godfrey’s poem, the source of pure and potable knowledge pours down from above, dividing into
the streams of the Seven Liberal Arts to nourish the scholars that imbibe it.45 It was a pure and
unpolluted spring, a source of intellectual salvation just as Gueric’s waters of the Jordan were a
spiritual salvation. This was a fitting motif for Victorine canons, who sought to honor their vows
through mystical scholasticism and humanism rather than through affective piety or bodily
abnegation.

The Hydrology of Hygiene

The aqueous qualities of the *Fons Philosophiae* moves beyond a structural narrative of learning
into a treatment of moral purity. For a scholar-monastic, the path to superlative principles was
apprehensible through discerning the qualities and flavors of mediating knowledge. The rivers of
the *fons* flowed from the same principle as Christ instituted within the river Jordan, another link
between the superlative purity of the Trinity and worldly things. For an order of quasi-schoolmen,

43 For more on the epistemological qualities of mountains, see Albrecht Classen, “The Discovery of the Mountain
as an Epistemological Challenge: A Paradigm Shift in the Approach to Highly Elevated Nature. Petrarch’s
*Ascent to Mont Ventoux* and Emperor Maximilian’s *Theuerdank,*” *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages
and the Renaissance,* ed. David Hawkes and Richard G. Newhauser. Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and

44 All quotes are from Hugh Feiss’s English translation of Pierre Michaud-Quentin’s Latin transcription. The
*caesurae* and formatting here has been inserted to preserve the scansion of the poem. Lines 45–48, “Godfrey of
Saint-Victor: The Fountain of Philosophy—Introduction and Translation by Hugh Feiss, OSB, “Interpretation of
Scripture: Theory,” ed. Franklin T. Harkins and Franz van Liere. Victorine Texts in Translation, 3 (Turnhout:
Pierre Michaud-Quentin (Namur: Editions Godenne, 1956), 36. The Michaud-Quentin Latin is now available from
the Brepols Library of Latin Texts A (LLT-A).

45 The poem is presented in the form of a meditative spiritual ascent, in the tradition of texts such as Augustine’s
*Confessions,* the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius, or later St. Anselm’s *Proslogion* and followed in the
thirteenth century by Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in the fourteenth
century. Robert McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, &
Dante* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).
however, the mediating pattern was ordered. This is achieved through a complex hybrid of material imagery, in which the pilgrim encounters the offensive and stagnant pool of the mechanical arts, more akin to a swamp than to a river:

Cum uenissem proprius | inuenitur primo, Locis in campestribus | pede montis imo, Quem dicunt mechanicum | fons obductus limo, Ranarum palestrium | sordidatus fimo.

[When I have come closer, first I find in the fields, at the very base of the mountain, a spring drawn up from the mud that people call “mechanical,” soiled with the dung of wrestling frogs.]46

By describing the river of the mechanical arts overcrowded, polluted, and occluded, Godfrey has made an argument on many levels for another path. Those who fail to take his advice are poisoned, too indiscriminate to detect the intellectual toxins in their drink.47 One gets the impression from this passage that Godfrey has appointed himself as spiritual “dietician,” attempting to judge the comparative nutritive merits of each river he encounters. This would make the mechanical arts a form of spiritual and intellectual “junk food,” appearing to offer satiety yet giving none: empty calories for the soul. Godfrey expresses his distaste for the mechanical arts by combining a lack of spiritual substance with the implication of moral turpitude through pollution.48 It is important to note at this point that this seems to be a personal bias on the part of Godfrey, for the mechanical arts were commonly thought at the time—even by other Victorines—to remedy indigence of the body, one of the “three plagues of man” identified in the twelfth-century Dialectica Monacensis.49

By introducing the notion of knowledge valence through a distinction between aqueous purity and pollution, the text offers not only structure, but moral instruction.

In the description of the Liberal Arts, we see the manner in which Godfrey merges the hydrological form of the poem with his desired didactic message. His exploration and delineation

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46 Lines 21–24, Feiss, 390; Michaud-Quentin, 36 (see note 45).
47 Lines 25–27, 33–36, Feiss, 390; Michaud-Quentin, 36 (see note 45).
49 The three “plagues” of human nature were as follows: ignorance of the soul, indigence of the body and vice of body and soul combined. Against these plagues three remedies were provided: the ability to acquire the liberal arts to school the soul, the mechanical arts to make the indigent body productive and the ability to acquire virtues for the negation of vice. “Dialectica Monacensis (anonymous, twelfth-century) on the Division of Science,” in Medieval Philosophy: Essential Readings with Commentary, ed. Gyula Klima, with Fritz Allhoff and Anand Jayprakash Vaidya. Blackwell Readings in the History of Philosophy (Malden, MA, Oxford, and Carlton: Blackwell, 2007), 43.
of riparian structures within knowledge came with a series of “taste tests,” assessing the waters to learn their curative or detrimental properties. The course of learning passed from knowledge to beatitude, as the title of a notable book on the order and its milieu puts it.50 Victorines sought to cleans their spiritual bodies just as Cistercians did, but their purity was framed in the mediating discourse of an intellectual. The language used to articulate this register of moral hygiene tropes valorizes the careful assaying of knowledge rather than a bien-pensant attitude. On the topic of “those who are students of the Arts,” the poem uses the motif of drinking to urge caution and a focus on divine things over hasty, foolish, intemperate clamoring for knowledge:

His fluentis assident | haurientes multi. Hinc adolescentuli bibunt | hinc adulti, Quisquis suo modulo | sapientes, stulti, Quamuis preter ordinem | ruunt inconsulti...Cumque credant alia | gusto suauiora, Prima cece transeunt | ut abiectiora, Nec aduertunt stolidi | quod ulteriora, Sine fundamentis his | ruunt absque mora.

[Many drink eagerly from these waters. From them teenagers drink, from them adults drink. Each does so in his own way, whether he is wise or foolish, although the rash rush in without order. Inexperienced in things, they run without order, they do not have the clear eye of reason. Therefore, they pass by without seeing the truth, unless finally the evening light shines for them.]51

Godfrey appears to be arguing for due diligence in the experience of imbibing these waters. In addition to the structure and moral valence of the waters, there ever remains a human element to the interaction with this river. In seeking the source of the river, there is a correct time, and a correct place, to experience each taste, to view each stream, on the path to mystical revelation at the summit. And when the time is right, both in the implied course of Godfrey’s own education and the desired rectitude of the reader’s, the narrative moves on from the Trivium into the realm of the practical arts, the Quadrivium of natural philosophy. Failure to imbibe in the correct order leads to poisoning. Godfrey’s pilgrim shuns through applying spiritual knowledge the crudities of lesser arts and continues his journey toward the fons, avoiding pollution and contamination in search of purer waters. He admires the beauty of the landscape engendered by arts such as rhetoric, which runs “frolicking through charming meadows, [and] makes verdant with varied flowers.”52

Later in the poem, the pilgrim ascends into the rarefied realm of theology, the superlative

50 See From Knowledge to Beatitude, ed. E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith (see note 21).
51 Lines 97–100, 105–08, Feiss, 393; Michaud-Quentin, 38 (see note 45).
52 Lines 77–80, Feiss, 392; Michaud-Quentin, 38 (see note 45).
river which “carries its head higher and reaches toward God by a higher way.” The fountain represents both the pilgrim’s journey through life and a kind of pilgrimage back through time to the original Creation. Simultaneously, the narrative flows into the anagogical realm—extant as a universal without change or flaw. The river of the Heavenly Jerusalem flows from the divine through typology, appearing throughout the New and Old Testaments in the form of diverse miracles back to the creation of the universe, the moment at which the four rivers spring from the primordial paradise:

Labitur per medium | ciuitatis riuus, nullo quidem strepitu | sed effectu uiuus, omnis efficaciter | morbi sanatius, et ipsius etiam | mortis expulsius.

[A stream flows through the middle of the city, without noise but lively in effect, an effective cure for every illness; it even drives out death itself.]

Reminiscent of the vision of John the Divine in Revelation, the passage brings the journey to the headwaters of knowledge, to a locus that exists out of space and out of time, waiting in potential for the day of judgment. It is, in effect, the realization of water symbolism; it is a perfect river from which all others flow, demarcating the boundary between this life and the next, between perfection and imperfection, and between the finite and the infinite. It is the last frontier of the changeable world, the point at which the human passes into eternity. It is the medicine for all ills, the healing of all infirmities. It is the representation of salvation as a state of superlative spiritual well-being and wholeness.

Godfrey demonstrates the efficacy of a water metaphor when used at length to sketch the entire structure of a curriculum. By linking the structure of liberal arts learning to the proper treatment of water as a source of nutrition and cleanliness, Godfrey has linked the quest for good bodily healthy and the assessment of drinking water to the quest for knowledge and a divinely inspired search for hidden knowledge. For the *Fons Philosophiae*, knowledge brings physical health, but only when pursued with rectitude. There is a right and a wrong way to study the liberal arts; to pursue the wrong kind of knowledge in the incorrect manner will lead to ill health, focusing the mind on pointless worldly things rather than directing it upwards to the contemplation of superlative principles. Through his journey into knowledge, Godfrey’s pilgrim ultimately finds the pure source of the Trinity, the drink which is “more sacred (divinus) than the rest, known more by

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53 Lines 321–24, Feiss, 400; Michaud-Quentin, 46 (see note 45).
54 Lines 525–28, Feiss, 406; Michaud-Quentin, 53 (see note 45).
experience (*usu*) and less by understanding.”

**Cleanliness of Habit: Peter of Celle and his Letters**

Peter of Celle (ca. 1115–ca. 1183) was abbot of Montier-la-Celle (by ca. 1145) and Bishop of Chartres (ca. 1181). Born at Aunoy-les-Minimes to a Champenois family of the lesser nobility, Peter is thought to have been a monk for some time at the Benedictine monasteries of Saint-Martin-des-Champs and Montier-la-Celle—former home of Robert of Molesmes, founder of Citeaux—before becoming abbot of the latter. Peter later became Abbot of Saint Remi de Rheims from 1162–1181 and succeeded John of Salisbury as Bishop of Chartres for the last years of his life. Unable to attend the Third Lateran Council due to ill health, Peter was denied the opportunity to become a cardinal despite being described to Alexander III in a letter of nomination as “by far outstanding among the other abbots of [his] land.”

Peter was a regular correspondent of many of the key Church figures of his age, including Peter the Venerable, Hugh of Cluny, Thomas Becket, and the brothers John and Richard of Salisbury. He was an enthusiastic supporter and correspondent of both the Cistercian community of Clairvaux and the Carthusian priory of Mont-Dieu.

A blend of monk and Church magnate, Peter demonstrated a mix of priorities in his writing. Described by Ronald Pepin as “a pious man of glad temperament whose interests were never far removed from religious concerns,” Peter gravitated between scorn for worldly affairs and a manifest enjoyment of his literary friendships. The fame of Peter in monastic circles is attested by Nicolas of Clairvaux, who in a rapt letter exclaimed that “before I set eyes upon you, I loved you, and the basis of the love was the testimony to your piety, which I heard of from religious

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55 Lines 785–86, Feiss, 414; Michaud-Quentin, 62 (see note 45).
60 Carruthers. “On Affliction and Reading” (see note 58), 3.
men.”62 His network of correspondents was extensive, spanning northern France and southern England, and imparting a sense of spiritual friendship to many of the contemporary intellectual elite.63

Peter is an interesting case study for the topic of moral hygiene, for a great deal of his writing contains moral admonitions, or statements of literary or monastic friendship based on the imagery of bodily cleanliness. For Peter, the soul was another kind of intangible corpus, superior to the perishable flesh and yet governed by the same rules. To think of spiritual health in bodily terms was not to fixate on worldly things, but to understand that the soul was not something abstract and intangible, but something with skin, clothes, an anatomy, parts—at least in an allegorical sense. For monastics, a detailed proprioception of the soul was necessary. One needed to know where the spirit resided, the effects of different metaphorical actions and behaviors, and how to keep it pure.

**Moral Cleansing**

Within his treatise *On Conscience*, Peter of Celle explicitly compared the outflowing waters within the cloister with those of eternal life gifted from Christ for the purification of souls, “to your eyes that they may flow with tears, and to your ears that they may hear the voice of God’s praise, and to your hands that they be clean of the blood of cruelty and lust, to your feet that the dust of earthly desires may be shaken off.”64 To cleanse the soul of dirt was to shed the detritus of the world—imagining the soul as corporeal was a negation of carnality. As with Guerric of Igny and his allegorical Naaman, Peter asserts that spiritual health can only be achieved through the correct form of exertion. In addition, it was necessary to preserve the link between worldly sources of water and heavenly waters the mind’s eye. The path flowing from Christ into the World also linked body and soul through a likeness of form, linking the ritualized life of the monastic within his cloister to the cleansing of a pure source:

Officinas denique claustris nostris circumeat descendens a superioribus usque ad inferiorem Oratorium piscinis exornet tam ad abluenda sacrificii pro peccatis animalia quam ad expianda ipsa animae sanctuarium, ut iuxta altare ad pedes sacerdotis fossam habeant.

63 By “friendship,” as Haseldine (239) points out, we should understand a wider network of political and social ties than can be encapsulated by the modern use of the word. Haseldine, “Understanding the Language of *Amicitia*” (see note 63), 241.
64 “On Conscience,” in Feiss, *Peter of Celle* (see note 58), 184
[Finally, flowing down from the heights to what is lower, this stream goes around the workshops of our cloister. It decorates the chapel with pools—both for washing the animals offered up for sin and for cleansing the very sanctuary of our soul—in such a way that it has a channel next to the altar at the priest’s foot.]65

Individualized acts of monastic devotion function like a form of miraculous plumbing, the pure source of a godly community dividing and flowing to each individual act of worship like the waters of the Heavenly Jerusalem flowing from the Throne of the Lamb to the individual spaces within the sacred metropolis. Just as the water that nourished, cleansed, and powered the monastery was a source of purity and industry, so too do anagogic references to water point the mind to a higher form of nourishment, industry, and cleanliness. Peter invites the reader to take a tour through a salvific landscape, to imagine the provenance, division, function and end of its saving waters in their daily lives:

Intra et uide situm et dispositionem ciuitatis cuius platee sternuntur auro mundo, ubi uitreis canalibus, immo cristallinis, id est inspiratione inuisibili, aque uiue do trono ad singulas sanctarum conscientarum tanquam cellas in plenitudine gratiarum profluunt siue ad bibendum propter gandum propter fecunditatem.

[Enter and see the site and arrangement of the city whose broad streets are paved with fine gold, where living waters flow forth in fullness of blessings through glass, or rather crystalline, channels, that is by invisible inspiration, from the throne to each of the cells, as it were, of holy consciences, whether for drinking for the sake of pleasure, of for washing for the sake of cleanliness, of for irrigation for the sake of fertility.]66

The “holy consciences” of the monks receive an abundant source of spiritual edification. Each monk had access to their own personal source, a way to wash the mind, nourish its intellectual crops, enrich its soils. The soul, like a field, was a space that could grow and thrive with the right source of energy, bringing forth new life and a useful spiritual harvest. Peter also admonishes the reader that ignorance of this miracle is a sin, and that a failure to thrive in the spiritually wholesome space of the cloister is a result of moral failing. To ignore the typological links between Christian salvation and the language of hygiene was to lose a crucial spiritual conduit:

Habete uascula munda, iuxta namque et in oculis preterfluit aqua. Sed numquid uane? Sed numquid gratis? Plane supine et crassa negligentia imputanda est singulis nisi sint omnia munda, quibus et copia aqurarum redundat et temporis opportunitas superest et amor incumbit

It is incumbent upon those cleansing and imbibing within the sacred precincts of Peter’s allegorical Jerusalem to maintain their purity, drink with correct motives, taking advantage of the ample opportunities offered by the monastic life. The notion of “complete cleanliness” is an apt image for the purposes of this essay, describing the holistic health regime of body and soul.

The monastic life, as Peter reminds us, provides the opportunity to cleanse both the body and the soul, and failure to do so is a great waste. Peter laments the fact that he himself has not felt the joyfulness of salvation more keenly in his life, that he has not spent more of his days attending to acts of spiritual cleansing rather than daily affairs. He laments the quotidian ablutions he has undertaken for the sake of his body at the expense of the corresponding and abstract purification of the soul:

Sic est, ego uidi, ego interfui, et utinam totiens et tam sedulo cor expurgassem quotiens et quam indesinenter manus et faciem die et nocte rigaui, non lacrimus sed aquis.

Rendering the monastic life in terms of bathing and personal hygiene was only one rhetorical color of a well-stocked arsenal, and yet it was a potent one. The motif of washing with tears is interesting, for it highlights the fact that affective devotion and love of Christ are purifying agents, with exertions of pious emotion serving to cleanse the soul. Although abasement of the body and denial of its needs could lead to spiritual purity, the language of ritual purification and cleanliness served as a model for the far more important task of keeping the soul in good health. To go through the routines of monastic life and to care for the body without attending to the corresponding

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cleanliness of the soul was an empty act.

Peter’s letters have been presented as didactic documents, collated, re-edited, rearranged after his death and always mediated. As Walter Ysebaert pleads for historians to recall, letter collections are never transparent or simple; they have been dictated, ordered, disseminated, curated, often rewritten, often rearranged, kept, altered and continually reused after the death of the author. They are organic entities, and should be treated with respect and scrutiny. The fact that they have come to us with such a clear didactic message implies a strong rhetorical stream of thought that Peter, his readership and his successors considered vital for their moral self-care and imagination. In a monastic life where nuance of spiritual self-awareness was key, tropes of moral hygiene were potent tools. Peter’s audience, like those of Guerric and Godfrey, were in need of mnemotechnical patterns for the apprehension of moral self-fashioning. The letters are greater than the sum of their parts, cultivated to provide reinforcement of key imagery. Water and its curative properties appear frequently because the *topos* that they enable appears frequently. Its frequency is determined by virtue of its great didactic importance.

**Conclusion: Holistic Monastic Hygiene**

In each of the three genres of text discussed above, the twelfth-century author in question has approached the task of writing with a strong didactic goal in mind. Guerric of Igny sought to lend power to his sermons; Godfrey of Saint-Victor sought to present the liberal arts in a novel arrangement; and Peter of Celle’s letters come to us as a repository of sculpted, adapted and artfully arranged lessons for the readership and their religious communities. For all three, hygiene, good health, and well-being were a state not of the body alone, but of the immortal soul. For each, the genre differed in its affordances, and yet each chose to reinforce a powerful trope of self-care through the analogues of material body and immaterial spirit. None of the three relegated the flesh to the status of insignificance, although all stressed the pre-eminence of the soul. In each genre, engagement with Christ and the Trinity was the superlative cleansing: through immersion in the true Jordan for Guerric, through imbibing Theology for Godfrey, and through a vision of the waters.

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flowing through the Heavenly Jerusalem for Peter.

Within the broader study of medieval hygiene, medicine and well-being, this essay and its monastic subject matter demonstrate a respect for the body, not as a prison, but as a companion to the spiritual. Although denial of the flesh is at the heart of the monastic mentality, Guerric, Godfrey and Peter remind us that the body is a vehicle of spiritual allegory, a way to understand the hidden needs of the soul through the maintenance of the flesh. Water was key in this process, for it bridged the two realms of existence. The divine and the mundane mingled through baptismal imagery, through the nutritive flow of knowledge from Trinity to artes, and through the intricate shared space of nourishment and cultivation glimpsed within Peter’s letters.

Water exists both in the quotidian lives of monastics, and in the most superlative of eschatological imagery—the river of life springing from the Throne of the Lamb, for example. Its mediative and ecumenical properties mingle with its curative properties—and its potential to poison or disrupt—to provide potent rhetorical tropes. Recourse to hygiene on a bodily level leads to an insight into greater acts of spiritual hygiene to come.

The three monastic texts in this essay, and their three twelfth-century authors, demonstrate that similarity is not merely a convenient technique for rhetoric: it is a causative act. For the flesh to be similar to the spirit in that it must be bathed, or for the mind to be similar to the soul in that it must be cultivated, they must be similar in nature rather than form alone. It reminds us that neglect and care of the body are not mutually exclusive—although denial of the flesh had its place, it is equally true to observe that neglect of the body provides a poor analogy for care of the soul. This is the reverse face of the coin that is medieval human nature. We see the more familiar face frequently in the admonitions of medieval thinkers to shun worldliness and sin, the corrupters of the body. The opposite is also true: care of the body inspires care of the soul, and vice versa.