

**Bishops, Infidels, and Baptism in the Buff:
The Social and Religious Construction of Early Christian Confirmation¹**

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In the early fifth century the bishop of Rome, Innocent I, received an inquiry having to do with practice of having a bishop anoint the newly baptized and lay hands on them: How important is this rite? What does it signify? If a bishop is not available, can it be performed by the priest who performs the baptism? Innocent responded, "Now as to the anointing of neophytes, it is clear that this cannot be done by any save the bishop . . . this being the exclusive prerogative of the bishop in imparting the Holy Spirit."² During Innocent's time, the baptism ceremony in Rome was an extended and extensive ritual involving a long period of catechesis, numerous exorcisms and anointings with oil, the triple immersion of the actual baptism (one for each member of the Trinity), and numerous ancillary activities and symbols. Innocent was referring specifically to the final anointing of the rite, a second postbaptismal anointing, which was followed by the laying of hands upon the newly baptized Christian and a prayer for the reception of the sevenfold gift of the Spirit. His insistence that only a bishop had the authority to administer this final anointing denotes a decisive culmination of three centuries of liturgical activity during which Christians had come to conceive of the sacrament that would later be called 'confirmation' as the sole privilege of a bishop and separable from baptism if a bishop was not available to perform it. The elements of this rite—handlaying, prayer, and anointing with oil—were filled with symbolic and theological meaning, each having had a place in Christian liturgy from the time of the Apostles. Yet, I argue that the institution of a second postbaptismal anointing and handlaying for the impartation of the Holy Spirit and the specific

¹ This paper is drawn from part one, "The Origins of Confirmation," of my Ph.D. dissertation, "From Episcopal Privilege to Protestant Church Discipline: The Varied Uses of the Sacrament of Confirmation From its Inception Through the Middle Ages."

² Innocent I, *Epistles*, 25.6, PL 20, 551. The English translation, along with the Latin text from the PL is in Gerald Ellard, "How Fifth-Century Rome Administered Sacraments," *Theological Studies* 9 (1948): 7. Ellard's translation is also available in Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 6 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 78.

requirement that it only be performed by a bishop, the rite that became the sacrament of confirmation, was not demanded by any Biblical, theological, or liturgical tradition. Rather, it was a creative solution to the problems faced within a particular set of ecclesiastical circumstances.

One word about methodology: Scholars have generally studied religious rites, such as baptism and confirmation, from the perspective of their liturgical and theological meaning, assuming that the narrow meanings given a rite by clergy and theologians was accepted by all involved. This top-down methodology does not take into serious account the many non-religious purposes (social, political, etc.) that often motivate the involvement in and development of ritual behavior. Nor does it consider that the meaning of religious rites is shaped not only by those who perform them, but also by their many recipients whose perspective the historian usually finds frustratingly elusive. Nevertheless, my argument is that the rite of confirmation was developed largely in response to the perceived desires and inclinations of these recipients.

In this study we are primarily interested in western practice, because it was only in the West that the postbaptismal anointing broke from the baptism ceremony into a separate rite. One of the foundational liturgies in the west is called the *Apostolic Tradition*,³ an early third century church order attributed to Hippolytus, a leading churchman, heresiologist, and rival bishop of Rome. The ceremony itself included all three parts of what the groundbreaking anthropologist Arnold van Gennep noted as the foundational elements of most rites of passage.⁴

First came rites of separation: Those wishing to convert were first brought to the “teachers” of the church for examination regarding their reason for faith and an inquiry into their manner of life. The latter included questions about marital standing, occupation, status as a slave or free

³ *Apostolic Tradition*, 20.19-22.2, in Gregory Dix, ed., *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, reissued with corrections by Henry Chadwick (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Pub., 1992), 23-39.

⁴ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom, and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). Van Gennep noted three stages in rites of passage: the first stage which he called preliminary, from the Latin *limen* meaning threshold, refers to rites of separation; the liminal stage involves transition rites; and the final, postliminal stage is made up of rites of incorporation.

person, and whether the candidate was under demonic control. Some occupations such as those associated with prostitution, the arts, the theater or the games, and idolatry or magic had to be immediately suspended. Other vocations such as teaching children “worldly knowledge” or involvement in the military were suspect but allowed under specific conditions. Provided that these initial hurdles were cleared, the candidate entered into the rites of transition: Three years of instruction in the Christian faith was the norm, with the proviso that “if a man be earnest and persevere well in the matter, let him be received, because it is not the time that is judged, but the conduct.”⁵ During this time of liminality catechumens heard teaching but when a meeting shifted toward prayer, worship, and the eucharist the teachers would lay hands on them, pray for them, and dismiss them from the assembly of the faithful. Given that they were not yet fully incorporated into the church or, presumably, into the kingdom of God during this long period of teaching it was natural to wonder about the destiny of their soul in case of untimely death. In the case of death caused by illness there would have been time to administer baptism prior to the end, but what about martyrdom? According to the text, the catechumen need not fear “for if he suffer violence and be put to death before baptism, he shall be justified having been baptized in his own blood.”⁶ Upon passing further examination of piety and service the catechumen took on the rank of one who is to receive baptism. At this point a regimen of daily exorcism began and, as the day of baptism (Easter or sometimes Pentecost) approached, there was also an exorcism by the bishop so “that he may be certain that he [the candidate] is purified.”⁷ On Holy Thursday baptismal candidates took a bath and menstruating women were directed to delay their baptism, presumably until Pentecost. Candidates fasted on Friday and Saturday and received a final exorcism from the bishop after which he would “breathe on their faces [exorcism] and seal [anoint] their foreheads and ears and noses [with oil].”⁸ They spent Saturday night in vigil receiving instruction and

⁵ *Apostolic Tradition* 17.2, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 28.

⁶ *Apostolic Tradition* 19.2, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 30.

⁷ *Apostolic Tradition* 20.3, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 31.

⁸ *Apostolic Tradition* 20.8, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 32.

having the scriptures read to them. At sunrise on Easter Sunday, after prayers over the baptismal water, the candidates took off their clothes in final preparation for baptism. (Note: This is where I got part of the title for this paper. As you will see, it is mostly about bishops and infidels. I put included baptism in the buff in hopes of boosting attendance through sex appeal. It is interesting that the earliest records we have of baptisms indicate that the common practice was for the candidates to be naked. It is a richly symbolic act. There is even the barest of hint of this in the New Testament. In Colossians 3:8-14, Paul may have had a baptismal sermon in mind when he instructed his readers to :

- 8 But now you must *get rid* of all such things--anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.
- 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have *stripped off* the old self with its practices
- 10 and *have clothed yourselves* with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.
- 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!
- 12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, *clothe yourselves* with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.
- 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
- 14 Above all, *clothe yourselves* with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

This whole business of naked baptism also makes me giggle whenever I hear people say that the Emperor Constantine destroyed the genuine heart and soul of the church and they want their church to be just like the early Christians.)

After renouncing Satan and all his works they were anointed by the priest with the "Oil of Exorcism"⁹ and were exorcised one final time. Then the candidate, naked and glistening from the Oil of Exorcism, was led to the water and baptized with a triple immersion while affirming their belief in the creed.

And when he who is to be baptized goes down to the water, let him who baptizes lay hands on him saying thus:
Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty?
And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe.
Let him forthwith baptize him once, having his hand laid upon his head.
And after this let him say:

⁹ *Apostolic Tradition* 21.10, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 34.

Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God,
Who was born of Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
Who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate,
And died, and was buried
And rose the third day living from the dead
And ascended into the heavens
And sat down at the right hand of the Father,
And will come to judge the living and the dead?

And when he says: I believe, let him baptize him the second time.

And again let him say:

Dost thou believe in the Holy Spirit in the Holy Church,
And the resurrection of the flesh?

And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe. And so let him baptize
him the third time.¹⁰

Immediately after baptism came the rites of incorporation: The neophyte received from the priest a second anointing with the “Oil of Thanksgiving,” after which he dried with a towel and dressed.¹¹ At this point the bishop became involved. He laid hands on the neophyte and prayed that he would be worthy of forgiveness, regeneration, and the reception of the Holy Spirit, saying

O Lord God, who didst count these Thy servants worthy of deserving the forgiveness of sins by the laver of regeneration, make them worthy to be filled with Thy Holy Spirit and send upon them Thy grace, that they may serve Thee according to Thy will.¹²

Then he anointed the neophyte with oil, made the sign of the cross on his forehead and gave him a kiss and a blessing.¹³ At last the newly baptized Christian was allowed into the Paschal eucharist celebration,¹⁴ taking part in prayers, receiving the kiss of peace, and, in addition to the regular communion elements drank from two more cups. One cup was filled with milk and honey, an Old Testament symbol of the riches of the land promised to Israel by God, the other cup was filled with water from the baptismal font, signifying that baptism was an internal work. The service concluded with an exhortation to do good works and with further teaching on baptism and communion that was given only to initiates.

¹⁰ *Apostolic Tradition* 21.12-18, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 36-37.

¹¹ *Apostolic Tradition* 21.19-20, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 37-38.

¹² *Apostolic Tradition* 22.1, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 38.

¹³ *Apostolic Tradition* 22.2-3, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 39.

¹⁴ *Apostolic Tradition* 23, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 40-43.

The focus of my study is this final anointing and prayer for the neophyte to be worthy of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is likely that the archetypal rite of Christian initiation was much simpler than this richly symbolic number we find two centuries later. It probably consisted of baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins followed by the laying on of hands for the impartation of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ One can understand the addition of a postbaptismal anointing, either as symbolic of the cleansing work of Christ in baptism or as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. But why the addition of a second postbaptismal anointing? And why was the second performed by a bishop? Moreover, how did this small part of the baptism ceremony evolve into the separate rite described above by Innocent I—a rite for the impartation of the Holy Spirit, a rite that could only be performed by a bishop, and a rite that the fifth century bishop, Faustus of Riez, would call *confirmare*, meaning to confirm or more accurately to strengthen?

Regarding the first two questions, I argue that one likely motivator of the liturgical change that brought about the inclusion of a second postbaptismal anointing was the practice of rival Gnostic¹⁶ Christian groups that would have been perceived as schismatic and heretical by the larger 'mainstream' wing of the Christian church. One must bear in mind that second century Christianity was anything but a unified whole. Heresiologists such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Epiphanius listed literally scores of schismatic groups *by name*. The rites in the *Apostolic Tradition* evolved in something of a spiritual free enterprise zone, a relatively free wheeling marketplace in which various religious groups and ideas, many of them Christian, competed for the allegiance of their own and each other's adherents. In the midst of these circumstances of competition and conflict there were apparently some groups that set out to distinguish themselves by means of their initiatory practices. Specifically, there are clear

¹⁵ See Thomas A. Marsh, *Gift of Community: Baptism and Confirmation* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 63-67; and Thomas A. Marsh, "A Study of Confirmation," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39 (1972): 149-63.

¹⁶ The complexities and even contradictions seen within groups that are all termed "Gnostic" has led Michael Williams to call for a discontinuation of the term in favor of descriptors that better illuminate the nature of these groups and more clearly differentiate them from one another. See, Williams, Michael A. *Rethinking "Gnosticism": an Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996

indications of groups that denigrated water baptism while emphasizing anointing with oil as the spiritually more significant act of initiation. Tertullian wrote his treatise, *De Baptismo*, in response to a group led by a “viper of the Cainite heresy”¹⁷ who disparaged water baptism. Unfortunately, Tertullian does not provide any details as to their alternative practices, if any. What he does say is that they intended to “destroy the sacrament of water”¹⁸ by means of their teaching that baptism is not necessary for salvation.¹⁹ Irenaeus, in his *Adversus Haereses*, describes a number of different groups with a variety of initiatory and salvific practices.²⁰ Among them was a group or groups that completely rejected baptism by immersion.²¹ Their practice was to anoint the initiate with a mixture of oil and water while reciting a formula similar to that used by orthodox groups when baptizing. More importantly given the commonly understood authorship of the *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus himself wrote of the Naassenes, a group characterized as Gnostic who purportedly laid claim to a special spiritual status on the basis of a superior anointing. He quotes them as saying, “Of all men, we alone are the Christians who complete the mystery [or sacrament] at the third gate and are anointed with an unutterable anointing [chrisma] from a horn like David, not from a clay vial like Saul.”²² Note the Old Testament basis for their understanding of their anointing as one like David’s that effectively consecrated them to God; not like Saul’s which, in their understanding, still left him vulnerable to involvement with the demonic. Here was a schismatic movement that, in very Christian terms, set themselves apart sacramentally through a rite of anointing.

The existence of such groups is corroborated by direct evidence from a heterodox source, the *Gospel of Philip*, of which the only known copy was found in the Nag Hammadi collection.²³ *Philip* is a collection of sayings thought to have been gathered by an adherent to Valentinianism

¹⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 1.

¹⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 12.

¹⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 11-14.

²⁰ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.

²¹ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.4.

²² Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, 5.9.22.

sometime around the year 200.²⁴ It provides direct evidence of schismatic groups who consciously reconfigured baptismal practices in favor of anointing. In the *Apostolic Tradition* salvation came through baptism. However in some of the sources behind the *Gospel of Philip* baptism alone was not sufficient for salvation. In fact, it was possible to go “down into the water and [come] up without having received anything.”²⁵ The clearest passages privileging anointing are these:

By water *and* fire the entire place is sanctified . . . there is water within water, there is fire within chrism.²⁶

It is necessary to baptize with two things—light and water. And light means chrism.²⁷

From the olive tree comes chrism; and from [chrism] comes resurrection.²⁸

Chrism has more authority than baptism.²⁹

Why this valuation of anointing over baptism? On the surface, baptism certainly had the longer pedigree—Jesus himself was baptized! The difficulty here is our paucity of sources and inability to firmly place them in context. One source hints that it was the association of baptism with death, a motif that goes all the way back to the Apostle Paul,³⁰ that caused them to de-emphasize baptism. Note the concern to disassociate baptism from death in the following passage:

²³ The *Gospel of Philip* was found in codex 2, pages 51-86.

²⁴ For a good brief introduction to the Nag Hammadi Library and the *Gospel of Philip* see, Martha Lee Turner, *The Gospel According to Philip: the Sources and Coherence of an Early Christian Collection*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, vol. 38 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 1-11. See also the introductions to *Philip* in, Bentley Layton, trans., *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 325-328; Wesley W. Isenberg, trans., “The *Gospel of Philip*,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd ed., ed. James M. Robinson (The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 139-141; Hans-Martin Schenke, trans., “The *Gospel of Philip*,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991-1992), 179-187.

²⁵ *Gospel of Philip*, 64.22-24; translation from Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*. This notion that baptism might not always be efficacious was also found in the Valentinian teacher Theodotus. See, Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta Ex Theodoto*, 83.

²⁶ *Gospel of Philip*, 57.22-27; translation from Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* [italics mine].

²⁷ *Gospel of Philip*, 69.12-13.

²⁸ *Gospel of Philip*, 73.18; translation from Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*.

²⁹ *Gospel of Philip*, 74.12; translation from Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*.

³⁰ See, for example, Romans 6: 3-4, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (NRSV); and Colossians 2:12, “When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who

Just as Jesus perfected the water of baptism, so too he drew off death. For this reason we go down into the water but not into death, so that we are not poured out into the wind [or spirit] of the world.³¹

There is also the possibility that within this context chrism offered a rite that was rich with symbolic meaning, as we have seen in the many Old and New Testament uses of anointing, yet free from baptism's symbolic association with death and its liturgical association as the most important rite of what might have been to them a dead mainstream church. We have already looked at the passage that states flatly, "Chrism has more authority than baptism," but note in a fuller reading where that authority comes from.

Chrism has more authority than baptism. For because of chrism we are called Christians, not because of baptism. And the anointed (Christ) was named for chrism, for the father anointed the son; and the son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us. Whoever has been anointed has everything: resurrection, light, cross, [and] holy spirit; the father has given it to that person in the bridal chamber, and the person has received (it).³²

Thus, the connection of anointing with the very name "Christian," with apostolic authority, and ultimately with the authority of God the Father through the Son, his Anointed One, makes a strong positive claim for those who practice it. In the same way that Hippolytus's Naassenes could claim spiritual superiority because they practiced an anointing like David's and not like Saul's,³³ so this group of Christians could claim superiority because their initiation process created an apostolic line of succession that led back to the Father himself.³⁴ Rather than establishing an identity separate from the larger mainstream church by denying the importance of apostolic succession, the rival group represented in this portion of the *Gospel of Philip* asserted its preeminence on the claim of even greater apostolic authority through the sacrament of chrism.

All this took place in an environment of religious entrepreneurialism. Irenaeus described a

raised him from the dead" (NRSV).

³¹ Gospel of Philip, 77.7-12

³² *Gospel of Philip*, 74.12-22; translation from Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*.

³³ Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, 5.9.22.

³⁴ See, Turner, *The Gospel According to Philip: the Sources and Coherence of an Early Christian Collection*, 219-221.

situation in which “every [heretic] hands it [tradition regarding salvation] down just as his own inclination prompts”³⁵ and “those who are recognized as being most modern make it their effort daily to invent some new opinion, and to bring out what no one ever before thought of.”³⁶ Rival practices were not simply a reflection of competing views on insignificant theological niceties, they were means by which contending groups could acquire and/or hold the religious attention of people in search of salvation. The contents of the *Gospel of Philip* indicate that this was a matter of serious concern. The great consternation that church authorities expressed over the presence of schismatic groups indicates that there was a large number of Christians who cared very deeply about their spiritual salvation and were intent on being part of the Christian community that would best achieve that end. Most of these people were illiterate and uneducated—not well versed in the theological concepts and arguments that stood behind the church’s rituals—but they could understand the insertion of additional sacraments into the initiation process, and they might be impressed by the extra attention given to a particular rite like anointing and the special claims of apostolic authority made for it.³⁷

Given these circumstances it is very possible that the episcopal post-baptismal anointing came about as part of the mainline churches response to what it perceived as heretical threat.³⁸ Certainly orthodox church leaders could not back away from their foundational rite of baptism, but they could augment it by giving greater weight to anointing and thereby take away some of

³⁵ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.1.

³⁶ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.5.

³⁷ I am indebted to MacMullen, “Two Types of Conversion to Early Christianity,” for this notion that different classes of people would have been attracted to Christianity for different reasons.

³⁸ Interestingly, in 1951 G.W.H. Lampe came to a very similar conclusion. He wrote, “It is in all probability, then, to these curious [Gnostic] sects that we must go in order to find the source of the separation of Spirit-baptism from water-baptism which we meet from time to time in the third century, and it is to these circles that we probably ought also to look for the introduction of subsidiary ceremonies such as postbaptismal unction; even if these rites did not originate with the Gnostic or semi-Gnostic sects, they probably acquired a new and greatly enhanced significance at their hands” (Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, 127). Gregory Dix, on the other hand, strongly denies this possibility (Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, xxxix). Both men had serious theological concerns that colored their views. Lampe believes that baptism alone was a complete rite, in and of itself, and that the episcopal postbaptismal anointing was a harmful deviation from apostolic practice. Dix believes that, as the title *Apostolic Tradition* implies, the episcopal postbaptismal anointing went back to the apostolic era. The point I am making is not that one group, or the other, *invented* the postbaptismal anointing, but that it was one of many ritual behaviors available to Christians during the second century. An environment of religious competition, as I have described, would create a situation of “liturgical inflation” in which parties on all sides would be inclined to expand the size and significance of their sacramental repertoire.

the appeal of rival groups. Since anointing already had a place in the baptism ceremony and was rich with positive symbolic meaning this adjustment could have been accomplished without serious conflict simply by placing an anointing within the ritual sphere of the bishop and thereby bringing episcopal authority to bear over the contested liturgical matter. The result was that through its placement in the ceremony, through the words spoken with the anointing, and through the status of the person performing it, the postbaptismal anointing was given greater prestige than it previously had. It also, surely as an intended consequence, enhanced the prestige and authority of the bishop as the only one who could speak the final words of impartation of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, this latter factor, the desire on the part of the church to strengthen the power of its bishops, was undoubtedly a crucial reason for the development of the postbaptismal episcopal anointing, whether its initial instigation came from schismatic groups or from some other source.³⁹ Ritual is about power and the negotiation of relationships of power within a community. However, ritual power is never absolute; it is always achieved in relationship.⁴⁰ Therefore, the decision to make a second postbaptismal anointing the exclusive prerogative of the bishop and the incredible perseverance of that decision once it was made indicates the degree to which the all participants, not just the bishops, but also the priests who performed the bulk of the ceremony and people who were baptized, valued the bishops continued involvement in the baptism ceremony.

This important role of the bishop in the early church as spiritual and administrative leader, as gatekeeper, and as conveyer of the Holy Spirit is illuminated by the mid-third century controversy on rebaptism between Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (from c. 249 until his martyrdom in 258) and Stephen I, bishop of Rome (from 254 to 257).⁴¹ The details of this

³⁹ If we could know with certainty how large the groups represented by documents like the *Gospel of Philip* actually were then we could have a much better sense of the degree to which their liturgical practice would have influenced the mainstream church. My hunch, given the size and tone of the heresiological response and the fact that a person the caliber of Tertullian could end up joining a movement like the Montanists, is that they were numerically significant and potentially influential. Unfortunately hard data is not available.

⁴⁰ For a very helpful discussion of the relationship of power and ritual see, Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 83-85; 197-223.

⁴¹ See, J. Patout Burns, "On Rebaptism: Social Organization in the Third Century Church," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 367-403; Maurice Bévenot, "Cyprian's Platform in the Rebaptism Controversy," *The Heythrop*

controversy are too many to elaborate, but they may be summed up in this way: Faced with Novatianist schismatics who wished to be readmitted to the church, Stephen was willing to accept the validity of their previous baptism by heretics, if it was performed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Cyprian was appalled at this approach and insisted that they needed to be rebaptized.⁴² Cyprian argued that only the one true church has the Holy Spirit and since the power of the Spirit is necessary for the forgiveness of sins to take place in baptism, heretical baptism simply cannot be efficacious.⁴³ He used Stephen's laying of hands on the repentant schismatics as proof that they did not in fact have the Holy Spirit:

If they [schismatic groups] do possess the Holy Spirit, then we ask further: why do those who have been 'baptized' with them, when they come over to us have hands laid upon them for receiving the Spirit, whereas the Spirit would most assuredly have already been received at the time it could have been received had the Spirit been there?⁴⁴

What light does this shed on the development of confirmation? Firstly, this controversy illuminates the ecclesiastical centrality of the third century bishop. As primary leader and chief representative of the church, it was around the bishop that all sacred, administrative, legal, and social service functions of the church revolved.⁴⁵ Even at this early date, when the church was relatively small and most bishops lived quite modestly, they still exercised a degree of influence that was disproportional to their wealth. Secondly, and even more specifically, it highlights the commonly perceived role of the bishop as a conduit of the Holy Spirit. Just as in the *Apostolic Tradition*, we find evidence in the records of the rebaptism controversy for a broadly held belief that episcopal handlaying was an essential conclusion to water baptism and bishops had a unique ability to impart the Holy Spirit. This belief was so strong that the Council of Elvira (c. 306) was faced with the need to reassure Christians as to the fate of those

Journal 19 (1978): 123-44; S. G. Hall, "Stephen I of Rome and the One Baptism," In *Studia Patristica*, vol. 17 part 2, 796-98 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982).

⁴² Cyprian's arguments are found in *Epistles*, 69-74. Interestingly, Tertullian, a fellow African, came to the same conclusion half a century earlier. See, *De Baptismo*, 15.

⁴³ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 69.11. So, in the mind of Cyprian those baptized by heretics were not in need of "rebaptism" because they had never been baptized in the first place.

⁴⁴ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 69.11, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 47, 40. See also, *Epistles*, 72.1, 73.6, 73.9, 74.5.

⁴⁵ See, Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 403-405.

who died baptized, but without an episcopal handlaying:

If a deacon in charge of common people with no bishop or presbyter baptizes some of them, the bishop shall perfect them by his blessing; but if they leave this world before that, a man can be regarded as justified depending on the faith by which he believed.⁴⁶

As this issue at the council of Elvira foreshadowed, by linking the reception of the Holy Spirit to the authority of the bishop, the church created an unintended problem for itself later on when growing numbers of believers, geographical dispersion, and increased infant baptisms soon after birth made it impossible for a bishop to be consistently present at most baptisms. An early sixth century letter from an otherwise unknown John the Deacon, responded to the concern that those who had no access to a bishop might not have the Holy Spirit. John the Deacon asserted that, just as in physical birth everything necessary for life is provided, so in the second birth (baptism) everything necessary for salvation is provided.⁴⁷ Thus ironically, in order to insure the notion that all baptized believers had in fact received the Holy Spirit, in the Middle Ages there would be an increasing inclination to view episcopal confirmation as something extra and not completely necessary. But for Cyprian and his third century cohorts this was certainly not the case. Cyprian saw episcopal handlaying as a necessary completion (*consummare*) for the impartation of the Holy Spirit, after cleansing from sin had taken place at baptism. He wrote, "Those who are baptized in the Church are presented to the appointed leaders of the Church, and by our prayer and the imposition of hands they received the Holy Spirit and are made perfect [*consummentur*] with the Lord's seal."⁴⁸ Moreover the African council led by Cyprian in 256 described baptism and episcopal handlaying as separate rites, saying that repentant heretics "need to be born again into the catholic church by both sacraments."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Council of Elvira, canon 77, translated in Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: the Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira*, 135.

⁴⁷ Letter of John the Deacon, 14, in Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 89.

⁴⁸ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 73.9, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 47, 59.

⁴⁹ CSEL 3, 439.

Thus, confirmation, as a rite separate from baptism, was created on the basis of the important role of the bishop in the early church, a circumstance that would only increase into the Middle Ages. One aspect of this episcopal centrality was a widely perceived liturgical role for the bishop as imparter of the Holy Spirit, especially during the third century and beyond. It was this centrality of bishops in the early church, coupled with a desire to enhance their power amidst a variety of competing groups who emphasized anointing over baptism, that was a dominating factor in the creation of confirmation. This is not to say that there were no other reasons for the choice of ritual anointing. Anointing had a rich vocabulary of liturgical meaning in both the Old and New Testament traditions and it came to be used for a variety of functions in early Christian liturgy. Still, although this positive background may have disposed the Roman church toward an episcopal anointing, it was not an inevitable liturgical development. Rather, it appears most likely that it was the practice of some competing Christian groups, like those represented in the *Gospel of Philip*, to tout anointing with oil over water baptism in their initiatory liturgy that motivated the church in Rome to include this use for anointing in their own baptismal liturgy. Thus confirmation, as an episcopal rite connected to baptism but separable when circumstances demanded, appears not to have been a necessary result of any Biblical, theological, or liturgical factor or factors. Rather it was the creative response of a Christian community faced with the need to symbolically bolster its position in the face of religious challenge. By highlighting the honor of the bishop as the only one able to administer this important sacrament, they intended to enhance the prestige of their church and the honor of God.

By way of postscript, I'm hoping that this analysis of one aspect of the development of early Christian baptism will motivate us to consider and shed light on how we practice our own Christian rituals. Two things strike me. First, our church ceremonies spring from a mix of motives—including tradition, convenience, personal preferences, theological beliefs. Second, when we design our rituals we don't often take into serious account the fact that people take part in them for a variety of reasons in hopes of meeting a variety of needs. One exception to these observations might be the marriage ceremony where we often allow the bride and groom a great deal of latitude to design their own ceremony. One non-exception to this observation might be communion, especially as we celebrate it here at NC and in many evangelical churches. I seriously doubt that our use of hygienic individual cups and dainty pieces of stale flour and water communicates the theological reality behind the Lord's supper. And, in absolute contradistinction to the intended meaning of the Lord's supper, it perpetuates the individualism and isolationism within the body of Christ. For the many who come to a worship service needing to connect, not just with God, but with fellow Christians as well, our communion services are anything but a love feast.

Regarding baptism, this study raises a number of concerns:

Who does the baptizing? This is an important consideration because the baptizer, to some degree, represents the Christian community that the neophyte is joining. The baptizer is a symbol of spiritual authority and ongoing pastoral care. Bearing that in mind, may cause us to rethink who does the baptizing and why. For instance, I have attended services where the father of the baptismal candidate was invited to join the pastor in performing the ceremony. I'm not sure I liked this practice, but it did add significant new meanings to the symbolism of the ceremony.

At what age do we accept candidates for baptism? What is symbolically portrayed about the decision to follow Christ when we baptize children as young as 4 or 5 years old?

How many times do we baptize people? When I was baptized at the age of 14, the fellow before me was up for his second baptism within one year. He described this second baptism by saying, "I went through many serious trials during this last year, and I want to get baptized again as a sign of my renewed and final commitment to follow Jesus as my Lord and Savior." What did my pastor's willingness to perform rebaptism communicate regarding the presence, or should I say absence(?), of Christ as we go through serious trials.

Regarding testimonies, which tend to be a staple of our baptism ceremonies, it is remarkable how often they focus on the human decision making process rather than on God's relentless seeking grace? Again, what is the message when we allow this?

What about prebaptismal exorcism? While universal exorcism may not fit our theological paradigm, perhaps it would be good to have baptismal candidates publicly recite a statement of faith or the Apostles' Creed and to then conclude that with a personal renunciation of evil.

Finally, what about anointing? It strikes me as very odd that this important symbol of the Holy Spirit is not a regular part of our baptismal ceremonies.

The point of this paper has been to say that early Christians thought a great deal about the symbolic and spiritual meaning of their rites, they took the perceived concerns and desires of the congregation into account as they created them, and they were not reluctant to modify them as the need arose. My hope is that we would do the same.