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James R. Heugel

**“Graunted of the Bysshop Honde”: The Meaning
and Uses of the Sacrament of Confirmation From
its Inception Through the Middle Ages**

James R. Heugel

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James R. Heugel

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Robert C. Stacey

Reading Committee:

Robert C. Stacey

Mary R. O'Neil

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Abstract

“Graunted of the Bysshop Honde”: The Meaning and Uses of the Sacrament of Confirmation From its Inception Through the Middle Ages

James R. Heugel

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Professor Robert C. Stacey
Department of History

This dissertation is a social history of the sacrament of confirmation in western Christianity from its beginnings in the early third century through the Middle Ages. It is an exploration of the meanings attached to the rite, the uses to which it was applied, and the experiences of those who practiced it. Based primarily on the evidence found in liturgies, theological works, devotional manuals, the records of church councils, and saints' lives, it concludes that, prior to the sixteenth century, confirmation was largely defined by the office and status of the bishop, and through him it connected people of both sexes and all ages and classes to the power and prestige that he represented. In addition, confirmation served as a potentially significant element in the life of Christian devotion, as a source of supernatural power which could be applied to a variety of ends, and through the practice of godparenthood, as a useful social instrument for the creation and extension of kinship networks.

Part one analyzes the creation of confirmation in the third through fifth centuries by looking at the role that anointing and handlaying played in

Judaism and early Christianity, the diversity of initiation practices in the classical Christian world, and the values that led to the decision in the west that only the bishop could administer the rite. It suggests that this episcopal exclusivity arose, at least in part, in response to the kind of sectarian challenge posed in the Valentinian *Gospel of Philip*. Part two looks at the development of confirmation as a separate sacrament and the variety of roles it played in the early Middle Ages. Importantly, we find that confirmation was not introduced to the Franks during the Carolingian dynasty, as has been generally thought; rather, there is clear evidence that Merovingian bishops regularly performed this rite. Part three contends that the rite of confirmation continued to develop through the high and late Middle Ages. Bishops used it in their attempts to renew lay piety, and its identity came to be associated with important contemporary social institutions such as monasticism, chivalry, and crusading.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCCM	Corpus Christianorum continuatio mediaevalis (Turnholt: Brepols, 1966-).
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum series Latina (Turnholt: Brepols, 1954-).
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (1866-).
Mansi	Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio (Paris : H. Welter, 1901-1927)
MGH AA	Monumenta Germaniae historica, <i>Auctores antiquissimi</i> (1883-1919)
MGH Capit	Monumenta Germaniae historica, <i>Legum</i> , section 2: <i>Capitularia regum Francorum</i> (1883-1897)
MGH Capit Ep	Monumenta Germaniae historica, <i>Legum</i> , section 4: <i>Capitula episcoporum</i> , (1984-)
MGH Conc	Monumenta Germaniae historica, <i>Legum</i> , section 3: <i>Concilia</i> (1893-)
MGH Epist	Monumenta Germaniae historica, <i>Epistolae</i> (1887-1939)
MGH SRGNS	Monumenta Germaniae historica, <i>Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, Nova series</i> (1922-)
MGH SRM	Monumenta Germaniae historica, <i>Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i> (1885-1951)
MGH SS	Monumenta Germaniae historica, <i>Scriptores</i> (in Folio) (1826-)
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version Bible</i> , 1989.
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina, 221 vols., ed. J. P. Migne (1844-1891).

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unflagging good will, this simply could not have been. Michael Polanyi's assertion, "we know more than we can tell," was never more true than in this inadequate attempt to convey the profound feelings of love and gratitude I have for her.

DEDICATION

To Cherie

INTRODUCTION

The sacrament of confirmation began as part of the early Christian baptism ceremony. More specifically, it grew out of a final anointing, handlaying, and prayer commonly given neophytes as they came out of the baptismal waters, just before they celebrated the eucharist for the very first time with the rest of the Christian community on Easter Sunday morning. When the western church declared that this final ritual act could only be performed by a bishop, it created the circumstances that would eventually separate the anointing and prayer from baptism and turn it into an independent rite. In its simplest terms, two factors brought this about: first, Christian families began regularly baptizing children soon after birth, not waiting for large group baptism ceremonies at Easter; and second, Christianity's geographical spread, numerical growth, and increasingly large dioceses made it likely that many if not most Christians would never encounter a bishop during their lifetime. By the fifth century, especially in the north, it was common practice for parish priests to perform the entire baptismal ceremony without the final anointing and prayer, with the expectation that the missing piece would be added by a bishop whenever the Christian had the opportunity to encounter one. In this way a separate rite, soon to be called confirmation, had its beginning.

It is extremely unlikely that any second-century Christian could have predicted that this relatively minor liturgical act, born out of the various handlayings and

anointings that concluded early Christian baptism ceremonies, would be adapted and enlarged into an independent rite and eventually stand as one of only seven sacraments of the Catholic church. Our hypothetical Christian would not have predicted it because, of all the activities associated with baptism—exorcism, catechesis, anointing, handlaying, immersions, and the eucharist—handlaying and anointing had the least inherently fixed meaning. Indeed, it may have been this lack of rigid theological definition that gave this episcopal anointing its malleability and allowed it to break off and take on meanings beyond, though never completely disassociated with, Christian initiation.

Moreover, these characteristics—relative independence, symbolic malleability, and a certain openness of theological meaning—make a social history of the sacrament of confirmation particularly inviting. To this point, almost all scholarly work on confirmation has focused on liturgy and theology, with much less attention being paid to the role confirmation played in other aspects of the church and in the lives of the Christians who practiced it. This has led to a limited and sometimes mistaken understanding of the sacrament of confirmation. All liturgical practice is constructed to express a combination of beliefs and values within, and perhaps in response to, a larger set of religious and social circumstances. And because of its relative lack of firm liturgical and theological boundaries, confirmation particularly lent itself to a great diversity of interpretations and applications. Based on this premise, the goal of this dissertation is to explore the meanings attached to the rite of confirmation and

the uses to which it was applied, from its beginnings in the early third century through the Middle Ages. Topics of interest include: 1) the many changes that occurred to the ritual itself, both internally and in its application, and how these changes reflected the values and concerns of all the parties involved, not just the church leaders who were officially charged with liturgical authority; 2) the interaction between the practice of confirmation and the theological beliefs associated with it; and 3) the multifarious secondary meanings and uses, religious and otherwise, that confirmation carried throughout the centuries.

The story of confirmation is inextricably linked to the position, power, and prestige of the bishop. Bishops utilized their exclusive right to perform the sacrament of confirmation in many ways—it augmented their authority, it provided an avenue for practical ministry and pastoral care, and especially in the later Middle Ages, it was a tool for their attempts at spiritual reform and Christian indoctrination. Conversely, confirmation connected ordinary people, men and women of all ages and classes, with the spiritual and temporal prestige of the bishop, and through him, with the majesty and authority of the holy catholic church. Finally, through the institution of godparenthood, confirmation served to foster the creation of intricate kinship networks, which were understood by people in the Middle Ages to play an indispensable role in their social, economic, and military survival.

In order to explore these questions and themes over a very large expanse of time, this work is divided into three major sections. Part one analyzes the

background of anointing and handlaying in Jewish and early Christian liturgical practice. It studies the development of the postbaptismal episcopal anointing that became confirmation in light of the diversity of baptism rites practiced in the classical Christian world and suggests the possibility that the unique identity of confirmation and its association with the person of the bishop arose, at least in part, due to the direct challenge posed by Valentinian Gnostic sects and the prominence they gave to anointing in their rites of initiation.

Part two investigates the development and meaning of confirmation in the early Middle Ages, the time period in which the rite formalized its distinctive identity. Particular attention is paid to the Franks, not because their liturgical experience was especially unique—indeed we will see that it was not—but because Charlemagne’s liturgical reforms stirred up a great deal of interest in liturgically and theologically defining the process of Christian initiation, the records of which are still available. Two important conclusions emerge. First, a rite of confirmation was not introduced to the Franks during the dynasty of the Carolingians, as has generally been thought to be the case. Rather, there is clear evidence that Merovingian bishops performed this rite as an important aspect of their episcopal identity. Second, during this era, the meaning of confirmation in the lives of those who practiced it was not single-faceted. Instead, confirmation carried many symbolic meanings and lent itself to myriad uses—religious, spiritual, social, and some that we would call magical—in spite

of the fact that its actual practice was probably severely limited due to geographical constraints and the spiritual inattentiveness of bishops.

Part three explores liturgical continuity and change in the high and late Middle Ages. Many beliefs about and uses attached to confirmation remained intact up to the sixteenth century and beyond. At the same time, the rite itself came to incorporate a new act, a ritual slap that symbolically associated confirmation with such important contemporary social institutions as monasticism, chivalry, and crusading. Furthermore, confirmation was being applied to new uses; thirteenth-century bishops and church councils eagerly adopted it into their plans for church renewal and increased catechization among the laity. These changes indicate that confirmation had not become, as some have contended, a liturgical relic passed down from an earlier era without genuine meaning to those who practiced it; rather it was a living ritual, adapting and being adapted to the concerns, values, and interests of the time.

As with most efforts of scholarship, this work enters into a conversation that has been underway for some time. Much of the interest in confirmation was started by Anglicans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time when the purpose of confirmation was under great scrutiny.¹ Early historical works generally took the form of a chronological listing, plus

¹ See Peter J. Jagger, *Clouded Witness: Initiation in the Church of England in the Mid-Victorian Period, 1850-1875* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1982); and Colin O. Buchanan, *Anglican Confirmation*, Grove Liturgical Study, No. 48 (Bramcote Nottingham: Grove Books, 1986).

commentary, of references to confirmation. Writers had a distinctly didactic purpose, usually either to defend a particular theological approach to confirmation, or to demonstrate the legitimacy of modern confirmation by showing a continuity of usage from the apostolic church to the present time. The value of these works for current scholarly research is extremely limited. More positively during this time period, the Alcuin Club, an Anglican society which has published many useful books on Christian liturgy, including confirmation, was founded in 1897.² Two mid-twentieth-century controversies, both focused on liturgical practice in the first few Christian centuries, fueled scholarly interest in and provided a more scholarly footing for the study of confirmation, though the purpose of those involved was still to make use of their research to inform present-day practice. The first was a debate in the 1940s and 1950s, begun by Gregory Dix and continued by G.W.H. Lampe and L.S. Thornton, over early Christian initiation; specifically they argued over the nature of the connection between confirmation and baptism.³ The second began in 1960 when Joachim Jeremias asserted that infant baptism for the children of Christian parents was the continuous practice of the church, except during the fourth-century 'crisis' when it became normative to delay baptism.⁴ In reply, Kurt Aland argued that no clear evidence exists for infant baptism until the

² See Peter J. Jagger, *The Alcuin Club and Its Publications, 1897-1987: an Annotated Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Norwich, Norfolk: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 1986).

³ See Burkhard Eric Steinberg, "The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism: A Mid-Twentieth Century Debate in the Church of England" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of St Michael's College, 1999).

⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, trans. David Cairns (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

turn of the third century.⁵ This pedobaptism debate dealt less overtly with confirmation, but it was present as a subtext. Since the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s, Catholic scholars have had a renewed interest in confirmation as well. This is reflected in the work of, among others, Aidan Kavanagh, Thomas Marsh, Frank C. Quinn, and Paul Turner.

Currently, the greatest interest in the early development of confirmation in classical Christianity is in the dynamic field of early liturgical studies by scholars like Paul F. Bradshaw,⁶ Aidan Kavanagh,⁷ and Gabriele Winkler.⁸ Moving to the Middle Ages, the first and best comprehensive work on confirmation was done by J.D.C. Fisher,⁹ followed by a very helpful and extensive dissertation by Eugene M. Finnegan.¹⁰ Both of these scholars are primarily interested in the factors that led to the creation of the sacrament of

⁵ Kurt Aland, *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963). Jeremias's reply is found in Joachim Jeremias, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1963).

⁶ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002).

⁷ Aidan Kavanagh, "Confirmation: A Suggestion From Structure." *Worship* 58 (1984): 386-95; idem, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1988); and idem, "The Origins and Reform of Confirmation," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 33 (1989): 5-20.

⁸ Gabriele Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications," *Worship* 52 (1978): 24-45; and idem, "Confirmation or Chrismation? A Study in Comparative Liturgy," *Worship* 58 (1984): 2-16.

⁹ J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, Alcuin Club Collections, no. 47 (London: S.P.C.K., 1965). A useful summary of this work can be found in J.D.C. Fisher and E.J. Yarnold, "The West from about A.D. 500 to the Reformation," in *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 110-117. See also Nathan D. Mitchell, "Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation," in *Made Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate* (Notre Dame: Univ. Of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 50-82.

¹⁰ Eugene M. Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation in the Western Church" (Ph.D. dissertation, Trier, Germany, 1970).

confirmation as a rite separate from baptism. The focus of interest in confirmation in the later Middle Ages, as reflected in the work of Michael Kevin O'Doherty¹¹ and Kilian F. Lynch,¹² has been its treatment by scholastic theologians. In their attempt to understand confirmation practice, many of these scholars have a strong tendency to privilege theological and liturgical material over other types of evidence. From the standpoint of an historian, however, what makes this approach incomplete, as Richard Pfaff insightfully points out, is the

large disjunction between what the words [of the liturgy] say and what the total impact of the service most likely was: an impact compounded of such elements as squalling infants, a frigid building, an impatient lord, and very likely a somewhat defective service book. . . . Literary analysis of liturgical texts is a viable, if somewhat elevated, topic but it is not the same as an historical account of what the liturgy was about at any given time and place.¹³

In this regard, two other works are worth mentioning because, although they do not deal exclusively with it, they do cover confirmation to some degree, and they take a social, rather than liturgical, approach to the material. In *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200-c. 1150*, Peter Cramer traces what he sees as the growth of baptism as sacrament, followed by its decline as symbol

¹¹ Michael Kevin O'Doherty, *The Scholastic Teaching on the Sacrament of Confirmation*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology, (second series) no. 23 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1949).

¹² Kilian F. Lynch, *The Sacrament of Confirmation in the Early-Middle Scholastic Period*, Vol. 1: Texts, Franciscan Institute Publications Theology Series, no. 5 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1957); and idem, "The Sacramental Grace of Confirmation in Thirteenth-Century Theology," *Franciscan Studies* 22 (1962): 32-300.

¹³ Richard W. Pfaff, review of *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200-c. 1150*, by Peter Cramer, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46 (April 1995): 131.

succumbed to the interrogation of theology.¹⁴ Many have criticized Cramer's work for, among other things, not understanding the subtlety of liturgical developments in the early church and for an apparent lack of awareness of the work of scholars such as Kavanagh.¹⁵ The little he presents on medieval confirmation suffers in the same way from an indiscriminating reading of Fisher, on whom he relies heavily. More successful is the work of Joseph H. Lynch,¹⁶ which includes a great deal of very helpful material on the social function of confirmation. His are delightful studies—comprehensive and drawing from a wide breadth of sources—on the widespread use and the social function of baptismal and confirmation sponsorship for the purpose of kinship development. It is this sort of balanced study to which this work aspires.

A note on Latin translation: I have utilized English translations of Latin texts whenever they are available. However, most translations, especially in parts two and three, are mine and can be recognized by the inclusion of the Latin original in the footnote. In other words, unless otherwise noted, whenever the Latin original has been supplied in the footnote, the translation is mine.

¹⁴ Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200 - c. 1150* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993).

¹⁵ See reviews by Paul F. Bradshaw, *Journal of Religion* 75 (July 1995): 416; Judith McClure, *English Historical Review* 61 (April 1996): 407; and Maxwell E. Johnson, *Theological Studies* 44 (December 1994): 750.

¹⁶ Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); and idem, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

PART ONE

“There Is Fire Within Chrism”: The Origins of Confirmation

“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.”¹ These words were written in the early fifth century by Innocent I, Bishop of Rome, in response to an inquiry from Bishop Decentius of Eugubium (present day Gubbio in Umbria, Italy). At this time, the baptism ceremony in Rome was an extensive ritual involving a long period of catechesis, numerous exorcisms and anointings with oil, the triple immersion of the actual baptism, 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 the sacrament that would be called “confirmation” came to be conceived of 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

¹ Innocent I, *Epistles*, 25.6, in PL, vol. 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.

anointing with oil—were filled with symbolic and religious meaning, each having had a place in Christian liturgy from its earliest manifestations and each having meanings that would carry over into the new rite. Yet, I will argue in part one that the institution of the episcopal postbaptismal anointing and handlaying for the impartation of the Holy Spirit, 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—it appears that an outlaw Christian church, beleaguered by the threat of persecution on the one side and by sectarian challenge on the other, developed this rite as a way of augmenting the gravitas of both its rites of initiation and the bishops who oversaw them. Nevertheless it was the rich meaning that was traditionally associated with these symbols, especially anointing, which provided the liturgical basis for the eventual shape that the rite of confirmation would take.

Chapter 1: Anointing in the Jewish and Earliest Christian Traditions

Anointing in Jewish Scriptural Traditions

It is not surprising that the scholar in search of the meaning, or meanings, that informed the various anointings associated with Christian initiation would begin with Judaism. Granted, after a century or so, as Christianity was establishing its identity as a gentile religion,¹ an increasingly smaller percentage of those who underwent baptism would have had any prior first hand experience with the Jewish scriptures, either in Hebrew or in the Greek translation called the Septuagint (LXX)² which was widely used during the first centuries B.C. and A.D. and provided the basis for a large portion of the theological vocabulary of early Christianity, including the vocabulary of anointing. Nevertheless, given the clear Jewish context of the earliest Christian writers, one might naturally expect to find in this Jewish heritage an underlying

¹ See chapter 7, “The Emergence of Orthodoxy 135-93,” in W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 229-266. For an argument for an ongoing and significant number of Jewish converts to Christianity throughout these early centuries, see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 49-71.

² “Septuagint” means “seventy” (hence the abbreviation LXX). The LXX was the standard Bible of the early Christians. The translation got its name from a tradition contained in the second-century B.C. *Letter of Aristeas* that the LXX was translated by seventy-two Jewish elders for Ptolemy II Philadelphus in the late third century B.C. Early Christian writers enhanced the legend with the notion that the seventy-two scholars worked independently on their translations and upon comparing their finished products they found that they were miraculously identical. The legend contains elements of truth, insofar as the Pentateuch was translated during the third century B.C. The remainder of the LXX was translated in stages and completed by 132 B.C. See “Septuagint” in George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. 4, 273-278, and Supplement, 807-815; and in Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

significance for Christian anointing. And to some extent, this was certainly the case, but rather than any single unified meaning that directly led to Christian anointing practices, in the Jewish tradition the practice of anointing with oil was infused with a variety of cultic, medicinal and social meanings—meanings which in turn informed Christian anointing and precluded it from partaking of a single, or simple, symbolic significance.

Old Testament Vocabulary

A number of Hebrew words are associated with anointing.³ Foremost of these is *mashach* (xwm) and its variants, which have the basic meaning of “to smear” or “to rub.”⁴ There is also *suk* (lvc) which means “to pour.” Both are translated “to anoint” in contexts that involved rubbing or pouring oils and ointments.⁵ The LXX translates these words using *aleiphō* (ἀλειφω) and *chriō* (χρίω).⁶ Except for two instances where it translates *suk*,⁷ *chriō* always stands for the Hebrew *mashach* which is more typically used in ritual contexts.⁸ *Aleiphō* is used in a

³ For this discussion on vocabulary, see “ἀλειφω” (vol. 1, 229-232), “μύρον” (vol. 4, 800-801), and “χρίω” (vol. 9, 493-580), in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964-1974); “Anoint” (vol. 1, 119-124), “Incense” (vol. 2, 293-295), and “Oil” (vol. 2, 710-713) in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975-1978); “Anoint” (vol. 1, 138-139), “Oil” (vol. 3, 592-593), and “Ointment” (vol. 3, 593-595) in Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Dictionary*.

⁴ The variant *mashiyach* (xywm), “anointed,” is the source of the English term “messiah.”

⁵ Another word, *dashen* (jwd), meaning “to prosper,” “to thrive,” “to give health,” is traditionally translated “anoint” in Psalm 23:5, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows” (New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)).

⁶ The LXX translation of the Hebrew vocabulary is important to note because it provided the basis for the terminology in the New Testament and other early Christian sources.

⁷ Deuteronomy 28:40; Ezekial 16:9.

⁸ The English word “Christ” comes from *christos*, a variant of *chriō*. It means “anointed” and is

cultic context, for *mashach*, in a few instances; however, it usually translates *suk* to convey the variety of common anointings, for health, physical comfort, and social interaction, which were practiced on a daily basis.

While understanding the vocabulary of anointing is helpful, it is the act of anointing and the significance given to that act that must be kept in focus. In a number of instances, the LXX uses neither *chriō* nor *aleiphō* to describe scenes of anointing.⁹ When anointing did occur, either by rubbing or pouring, it involved the use of oil, usually olive oil, either pure or perfumed with spices. The Hebrew words associated with oil or ointment are *shemen* (šmw) and *yitshar* (rhjy), both referring to oil or olive oil, and *raqach* (xqr) which signifies the process of creating fragrant ointment with spices and is translated in various ways, including “spiced,” “ointment,” or “perfumer.” For example, in Exodus 30:22-25 one finds the recipe used by Moses at the consecration of the tabernacle to make what must have been a distinctively fragrant anointing oil.

The LORD spoke to Moses: Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is two hundred fifty, and two hundred fifty of aromatic cane, and five hundred of cassia—measure by the sanctuary shekel—and a hin of olive oil; and you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil (NRSV).

equivalent to the Hebrew *mashiyach*.

⁹ For example, see Genesis 50:2; 2 Chronicles 16:14; Isaiah 1:6 and 61:3; Jeremiah 51:8.

In this context, the LXX uses the terms *elaion* (ἐλαιον) for “oil” or “olive oil,” and *myron* (μύρον) for “ointment” or “perfume.”¹⁰

Old Testament Anointing Practices

In the culture portrayed in the Jewish Scriptures, anointing with olive oil had a wide breadth of uses, from mundane to sacred.¹¹ Anointing one’s head was a routine part of the physical comfort and grooming associated with a good life.¹² It connoted blessing, joy, honor, and celebration.¹³ Anointing the face and body, especially with perfumed oil, was also linked to eroticism.¹⁴ Doubtless it was on account of all these positive associations that Jews discontinued personal anointing during periods of fasting or mourning.¹⁵ Oil was also used medically as a treatment for wounds and as an aid in healing.¹⁶ This use carried a certain ambiguity of meaning because Jews did not make a clear distinction between the physical and spiritual worlds, especially when it came to the causes and effects of disease. So, as in the case of a cleansing ceremony for a person

¹⁰ The LXX makes a clear distinction between *myron*, “ointment,” and the word for myrrh, *smyrna* (σμύρνα), though the former may be perfumed with the latter. See “μύρον,” in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, vol. 4, 800, n. 2-3.

¹¹ See J. Roy Porter, “Oil in the Old Testament,” in *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell (London: SPCK, 1993), 40-42; and “Anoint” in Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Dictionary*, vol. 1, 138-139.

¹² 2 Samuel 12:20; Ecclesiastes 9:8.

¹³ Psalm 23:5, 45:7; Amos 6:6.

¹⁴ Ruth 3:3; Esther 2:12; Judith 16:7; Song of Songs 3:6, 4:10.

¹⁵ 2 Samuel 12:20, 14:2; Judith 10:3; Isaiah 61:3; Daniel 10:3; Micah 6:15.

¹⁶ See Isaiah 1:6; Ezekiel 16:9; and the use of oil as medicine in Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:34.

suffering with leprosy,¹⁷ the use of oil, though clearly associated with healing, often carried a significance less medicinal than cultic. This same ambiguity will be evident in the use of anointing in early Christianity; oil for healing touches both the mundane and the sacred.

In the realm of the sacred, the essential meaning of anointing was consecration—to make holy and to set the anointed apart as uniquely intended for service to God. In the context of the Jewish Scriptures it was not only humans who were symbolically set apart in this fashion; sacred anointing was applied to inanimate objects as well. Moses used the sacred oil mentioned above to anoint many pieces of the newly created tabernacle, including “the tent of meeting and the ark of the covenant, and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand.”¹⁸ According to this account God told Moses, “You shall consecrate them, so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them will become holy.”

In Jewish practice, the only humans to be regularly ritually anointed in this way were the high-priest and the king.¹⁹ Anointing these men created not only

¹⁷ Leviticus 14:15-18.

¹⁸ Exodus 30:26-28 (NRSV).

¹⁹ The anointing of prophets is mentioned as well, but is not instituted. Elijah was commanded to anoint Elisha as a prophet in 1 Kings 19:16. 1 Chronicles 16:22 and Psalm 105:15 refer to prophets as anointed ones, but the “prophets” being referred to appear to be the people of Israel as a whole.

Giovanni Garbini asserts that priestly anointing was fundamentally different from royal anointing because the latter “materially sanctions a designation already made or a quality

an objective holiness like that given to ceremonial objects, but a subjective awareness of personal holiness as well. Anointing set

the recipient apart from the circumstances of ordinary human life by creating a specially intimate relationship between him and God, and hence the anointing oil, in the case of the high-priest, is described as the oil ‘of his God’.²⁰

The first instance of priestly anointing narrated in the Torah occurs when Moses pours the same sacred oil that had been used in the tabernacle on the head of his brother Aaron, consecrating him as the first high-priest.²¹ Royal anointing was is to Saul by the prophet Samuel.²² It confers the special character of one filled with the spirit of Yahweh²³ and, as such, the king

already possessed,” while the former “confers a particular quality” (*History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1988), 67; cited in Porter, “Oil in the Old Testament,” 38). I must demur. Princes were designated as kings before their anointing, but this was also the case with the sons of high-priests who regularly succeeded their fathers. Moreover, what follows demonstrates that the Hebrew Scriptures clearly portrayed royal anointing as conferring a quality.

²⁰ Porter, “Oil in the Old Testament,” 37; the reference is to Leviticus 21:12. In that same context it says that a high-priest was “exalted above his fellows [the other priests]” because of his anointing (Leviticus 21:10). As a result of the special relationship with God created by anointing, the high-priest was held to higher standards of behavior. Unlike other priests who could “defile” themselves by touching the dead body of a very close relative, the high-priest must never engage in acts that lead to ritual defilement, regardless of the circumstances. See Leviticus 21:1-14.

²¹ Exodus 30:30; see also Leviticus 8:12 and Psalm 133:2. Exodus 30:30 and other passages extending the practice of anointing and priestly regulations to Aaron’s sons (Exodus 40:15; Leviticus 7:35-36; 10:7; Numbers 3:3) can be taken to indicate that ordinary priests were anointed in the same manner as the high-priest. However, Porter believes that designating ordinary priests as anointed refers, instead, to a sprinkling of blood mixed with sacred oil on Aaron and his sons (see Exodus 29:21 and Leviticus 8:30). This qualified all priests to be called “anointed,” but in fact only the high-priest, Aaron, had the sacred oil poured on his head. This is significant because it suggests that when the early Jewish Christians began anointing with oil as part of their initiatory practices, they likened that to the anointing of a high-priest who, in the Jewish worship associated with the tabernacle and the first temple, was the only person allowed to enter ‘the most holy place’ and encounter Yahweh face to face. This is made all the more striking because passages in the Mishnah (Horayoth 3:4; Makkoth 2:6; Megillah 1:9) indicate that anointing of high-priests was abandoned “in the Herodian and Roman periods, so that all priests were installed by putting on the vestments appropriate to their particular status” (Porter, “Oil in the Old Testament,” 36).

²² 1 Samuel 10:1.

²³ 1 Samuel 16:13, 10:1; see also 2 Samuel 23:1-2.

receives the title of “Yahweh’s anointed.” The king was inviolate²⁴ because of his status as the representative of Yahweh²⁵ who was considered the ultimate and true King of Israel.²⁶

Anointing in the Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods

Thus in terms of formal Jewish liturgy, the only place for anointing was in the making of a high priest or a king—anointing set one apart for divine service as a leader in the community. In the Second Temple and Mishnaic periods of Jewish history—the centuries before and after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 which correspond to the time of the birth and early development of Christianity—this exclusive use of anointing did not change and there is no evidence of any widespread formal religious use of anointing. Emil Schürer’s multivolume work, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, only mentions anointing in the context of the priesthood.²⁷ It is also important to note that although a rite of proselyte baptism for those converting to Judaism became standard sometime during the Second Temple period,²⁸ there was no anointing with oil associated with this rite.

²⁴ 1 Samuel 24:6, 26:11; 2 Samuel 1:14.

²⁵ The name of the king was invoked along with that of God in Samuel’s declaration of innocence (1 Samuel 12:3, 5). The penalty for cursing the king was the same as for cursing God (2 Samuel 19:21; Leviticus 24:15).

²⁶ 1 Samuel 12:12.

²⁷ Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973-1986), vol. 2, 244-245.

²⁸ Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. 2, 173. For a good introduction to Jewish proselyte baptism vis-à-vis early Christian baptism, see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early*

Nevertheless, Jewish religious literature from this time period may illuminate some of the more popular religious meanings attached to anointing with oil that would have added to the development of Christian anointing. In addition to the expected references to anointing in the context of priestly ordination²⁹ and to the use of perfumed ointments to care for a dead body,³⁰ oil also served as a symbolic vehicle of God's glory and power which brings transformation and healing. In the first-century *Life of Adam and Eve*, Adam on his deathbed sends Eve and Seth to the earthly paradise to seek out the oil of life that flows from the tree of mercy. His hope is that when they anoint him with this oil, he will have rest from his pain. Thus oil is portrayed as providing God's healing and mercy from the heart of paradise. Unfortunately Eve and Seth are told by Michael the archangel that this oil will not be available until the eschaton.³¹ The *Gospel of Nicodemus* from the fifth or sixth century A.D. retells this story with Christian modifications. Only Seth is portrayed as Adam's emissary and in this version the "oil that raises up the sick" is available, not at the end of the ages, but through the incarnation of the Son of God.³² There are two other sources

Christianity, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 513-515.

²⁹ See "Testament of Levi" in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Sons of Jacob the Patriarch*, 8, trans. H. C. Kee, in James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1983-1985), vol. 1, 791; and *Pseudo-Philo*, 13, trans. D. J. Harrington, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 321.

³⁰ *Testament of Abraham*, 20, trans. E. P. Sanders, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 895.

³¹ *Life of Adam and Eve*, trans. M. D. Johnson, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 272-275. (This translation contains two parallel versions of the document, one marked Vita and the other Apocalypse. This story is in chapters 36-42 of the former and 9-13 of the latter.)

³² *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 19, in J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 186-187.

which are of interest, but of ambiguous value as representatives of Jewish belief because they may have been written in whole or in part by a Christian. *The Testament of Our Father Adam*, a Jewish work that bears the marks of heavy Christian editing,³³ portrays oil mixed with the waters of heaven as bearing healing to the afflicted.³⁴ In *2 Enoch*, an expansion of the story of Enoch and his descendents contained in Genesis 5:21-32, Michael the archangel removes Enoch's earthly clothing, anoints him with "delightful oil," and then dresses him with the clothes of God's glory. This oil, which represents God's transforming power and glory, is described in the story as "greater than the greatest light, and its ointment is like dew, and its fragrance myrrh; and it is like the rays of the glittering sun."³⁵ Unfortunately, the provenance of this document is very dubious; it may be from the late first century and it could be either Jewish or Christian in origin.³⁶ Nonetheless, these sources may indicate that a range of popular associations between oil and the power of God, which as we shall see were certainly included in the early Christian understanding of anointing, could have come from the Jewish context that helped inform early Christian thought. But at the same time, there was no Jewish practice or understanding of anointing that corresponded directly to what would become the rite of confirmation.

³³ S. E. Robinson, Introduction to *The Testament of Our Father Adam*, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 990-991.

³⁴ *The Testament of Our Father Adam*, 1, trans. S. E. Robinson, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 993.

³⁵ *2 Enoch*, 22, trans. F. I. Andersen, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 138.

Anointing in Early Christianity

The practice of anointing with oil in early Christianity was built on the symbolic foundation of anointing in the Hebrew Scriptures and on the vocabulary of the LXX, but with some new wrinkles—the documents of the New Testament placed a greater emphasis on anointing in the context of divine healing and personal salvation. Moreover, sacred anointing was no longer limited to a select few within the religious community, instead it was applied equally to all Christians (including women!). In other words, the meanings listed above that were associated with anointing in the Hebrew scriptures were present among the early Christians, but now anointing was much more widely utilized.

On the mundane level, anointing was still used for personal grooming and had connotations of celebration and honor.³⁷ In spite of this, and in contradistinction to Jewish custom, Jesus urged his followers to continue their daily grooming practices, including anointing with oil, during periods of fasting, “so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret.”³⁸ The continued association of anointing with eroticism may perhaps be seen in the Lukan account of a “sinful” woman who disrupted a dinner party by anointing Jesus’ feet with perfumed ointment (*myron*).³⁹ Along with anointing

³⁶ Andersen, Introduction to *2 Enoch*, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 94-97.

³⁷ For instance, guests in one’s home were honored by the anointing of their head (Luke 7:46). People were honored after death by the anointing of their corpse (Matthew 26:12; Luke 23:55-56).

³⁸ Matthew 6:17-18 (NRSV).

³⁹ Luke 7:36-39.

Jesus' feet, the woman had wiped them with her hair and was kissing them—all aspects of intimate sensual behavior. Although the author's clear intent was to de-sexualize the account, casting the woman's activity in terms of love and gratitude, the Pharisee host in this story was convinced that, as a purported holy man and a prophet, Jesus should have known what sort of woman was touching him in this way and he should never have allowed it.

Turning to religious practice more specifically, in the documents of the New Testament anointing seems to have carried a mix of meanings that included but was not limited to those found in Judaism. For instance, the central Jewish symbol of priestly and royal anointing was present in the minds of these early Christians as they gave meaning to the new notion that divine anointing was for all Christians. 1 Peter 2:9 adopted and combined the symbol of both consecrated classes, declaring members of the Christian community to be a "royal priesthood." However, early Christian anointing carried even greater complexity. One sees an intermingling of various meanings—spiritual salvation, forgiveness of sin, the power of God, spiritual healing, and (perhaps) medicinal healing—in the two New Testament passages where anointing with oil was specifically mentioned as part of religious practice:

They [the twelve] cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. (Mark 6:13 NRSV)⁴⁰

⁴⁰ In the New Testament Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles there are many stories of Jesus and his apostles performing supernatural healing, but Mark 6:13 is the only instance where it was reported that they utilized anointing for healing. In view of the great variety of healing practices mentioned in the New Testament (including Jesus' 'anointing' of blind eyes with mud in John 9:6) I concur with Jeffrey John that there is no good reason to see the use of oil as an insertion into the text from later anointing practices. See Jeffrey John, "Anointing in the New Testament,"

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. (James 5:14-16 NRSV)

Although the context of both passages includes physical healing, the medicinal quality of the oil does not appear to have been the primary association. Granted, a medicinal, or even magical, understanding of the curative powers of oil was certainly present in the Jewish background of these Christians, as well as in the entire Mediterranean world at that time,⁴¹ and it certainly must have been one element present in the minds of those receiving the anointing, but in these texts medical care does not seem to have been the primary intended meaning. In Mark 6:13 the context is clearly one of supernatural healing. Jesus had previously empowered the twelve who performed these healings with “authority over the unclean spirits”⁴² and the healings took place alongside, or perhaps in conjunction with, exorcism. Likewise, in the passage from James, medical care was not the dominant theme. The oil was applied with prayer and “in the name of the Lord,” that is, with an understanding that it was the power of God that made it effective.⁴³ One is reminded here of the Jewish association

in *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell (London: SPCK, 1993), 50.

⁴¹ See Martin Dibelius, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, rev. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Michael A. Williams (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 252, n. 63; and Angus Bowie, “Oil in Ancient Greece and Rome,” in *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell (London: SPCK, 1993), 26-31.

⁴² Mark 6:7 (NRSV).

⁴³ Dibelius, *James*, 252. See also Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 27 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 384.

of anointing with God's glory and healing power from the *Life of Adam and Eve*.⁴⁴ In both these passages the oil conveys more than human touch and a therapeutic balm.⁴⁵

What about exorcism? Was anointing with oil thought by these early Christians to be efficacious because it drove out demonic spirits which were the cause of illness? Interestingly, neither passage explicitly affirms this. The writer of Mark 6:13 appears to have drawn a distinction between those troubled by demons and the sick—the former were exorcised while the latter were anointed and healed. The passage from James would indicate that unconfessed sin, not demonic attack, was in mind as the cause of sickness.⁴⁶ Still, given what we know of the culture, it is unlikely that most Christians made a very sharp distinction between healing and exorcism. This was a world where demonic activity was commonly understood to be a normal part of the spiritual environment and demons were regularly credited with causing physical illness. Furthermore, it is clear from other sources that an association of anointing and exorcism was not uncommon. For instance the *Testament of Solomon*, a Jewish/Christian document dated from the second to the fourth centuries,⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See above, p. 19.

⁴⁵ This conclusion is slightly at odds with that of Luke Timothy Johnson who says the oil “gains its real power from the touch of human hands that apply it, that reach across pain and loneliness to reestablish communion” (*The Letter of James*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 343). I suspect that early Christians would have credited any healing associated with the oil to the power of God, rather than to the power of human touch.

⁴⁶ Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 37 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1964), 59. 1 Corinthians 11:30 makes a similar assertion regarding the illness and death of some of those who sinfully participated in the Lord's Supper.

⁴⁷ Chester Charlton McCown, ed., *The Testament of Solomon* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1922). Also

provides long lists of demons' names, the problems they cause (mostly physical ailments), and instructions for exorcism. Among the many demons recorded, two were exorcised by means of oil.

The twenty-ninth [demon] said, "I am called Hru \bar{x} Anost \bar{e} r. I send uterine mania (hysteria) and cause pain in the bladder. If someone grind three laurel seeds into pure oil [and] anoint saying, "I exorcise you by the authority of Marmara \bar{o} th," immediately, I go away."

The thirtieth [demon] said, "I am called Hru \bar{x} Physikoreth. I cause lingering sickness. If someone throws salt into oil and anoints the sick person saying, "Cherubim, Seraphim, help," immediately I go away."⁴⁸

Oil was one of many apotropaic items (e.g. wine, coriander, laurel, writing on all sorts of different materials), used in conjunction with formulaic expressions that often involved naming the demon and invoking the name of an angelic being against it.⁴⁹ Thus it is not at all unlikely that anointing with oil, in conjunction with prayer, was thought to drive out demons.⁵⁰ Commenting on James 5:14, in light of Mark 6:13, Martin Dibelius states flatly, "The whole

see F. C. Conybeare, trans., "The Testament of Solomon," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 11 (1899): 1-45. Both Conybeare and McCown indicate their belief that the Testament of Solomon was a Jewish document adapted by Christians c. 100 (Conybeare, 12) or in the third century (McCown, 105-108). McCown concludes that the Christian elements are relatively few and do not reveal much about the beliefs of the Christian editors (*The Testament of Solomon*, 50-51).

⁴⁸ McCown, *The Testament of Solomon*, 18.33-34, p. 57-58 (translation mine).

⁴⁹ For example, see *The Testament of Solomon*, 18 (according to McCown's numbering and 73-106 according to Conybeare's). See also Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1957). Tertullian believed that unclean spirits "brooded" over various waters—"shady fountains," "unfrequented streams," baths, cisterns, wells—in imitation of God's brooding over the waters as recorded in the Genesis account of creation. He mentions this in support of his contention that, at baptism, a holy angel was present in the baptismal waters making them efficacious for cleansing from sin. Clearly the blessing of the baptismal waters contained in early liturgies had, at least for many, more than just symbolic significance. For a discussion of this and other Jewish ideas about demons residing in water, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 3-4.

⁵⁰ See Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, "ἀλειψάω" (vol. 1, 230-232) and Brown, *New International Dictionary*, "anoint," (vol. 1, 120-121).

procedure is an exorcism,”⁵¹ and Heinrich Schlier concludes, “In the New Testament anointing with oil is used on the sick for purposes of both medicine and exorcism.”⁵² Moreover, we will see that early in the West and later in Syria prebaptismal anointing would definitely have such an apotropaic function.

New Testament Vocabulary

Still, exorcism was not the only, nor the primary, meaning these early Christians associated with anointing. Jesus’ status as the Christ, the Anointed One, built on the Jewish tradition that anointing with oil symbolized the power of God and consecration for religious service was paramount in minds of the earliest Christian writers. Adopting a vocabulary of anointing from the LXX, they followed the pattern of using *aleiphō* as the general term and *chriō* as the specialized term for sacred anointing by God.⁵³ However, in the New Testament there is no mention of anointing sacred objects, and the anointing of humans is not limited to a royal or priestly class. Instead, all Christians were believed to have been spiritually anointed by God.⁵⁴ However, it is important to note that, first and foremost, it was Jesus who was perceived by these early Christians as having been divinely anointed. There are only five instances of the verb *chriō* in the New Testament documents (apart from its adjectival form *christos* used as a proper noun—‘Christ’) and four of them (three from Luke/Acts and one from

⁵¹ Dibelius, *James*, 252.

⁵² Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, “*ἄλειψω*,” (vol. 1, 231)

⁵³ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, “*ἄλειψω*,” (vol. 1, 229).

⁵⁴ 2 Corinthians 1:21.

Hebrews) refer to Jesus.⁵⁵ In each case, these texts portray Jesus as being anointed directly by God, making him the Anointed One, the *Christos*. The divine anointing of his followers made them *christianos*—Christians, ‘little anointed ones.’⁵⁶ This notion of divine anointing would become even more important with the development of Trinitarian theology and the belief that baptismal anointing combined with handlaying represents an impartation of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore it begs the question of whether anointing may have been part of baptismal ceremonies with the first generations of Christians. In other words, should the words of 2 Corinthians, “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment,”⁵⁷ be taken as an indication that Christians in the Pauline tradition practiced rites of baptism which included an anointing with oil that was linked to the impartation of the Holy Spirit, or is this statement of divine anointing simply metaphorical?

Anointing and Handlaying at Baptism Among the Earliest Christians?

The physical act most clearly associated with the reception of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament was the laying on of hands. Handlaying, like anointing, was

⁵⁵ Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27, 10:38; Hebrews 1:9. The fifth, which refers to all Christians, is 2 Corinthians 1:21.

⁵⁶ The term ‘Christian’ is used in Acts 11:26, 26:28, and in I Peter 4:16. Presumably it was originally intended as a derogatory appellation, ‘little Christs.’ Rather than rejecting the term, the early followers of Jesus adopted it and applied it to themselves, perhaps because of its unwitting theological astuteness.

⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 (NRSV). Also note the word “seal” (*sphragis*, σφραγις), another important term that came to be associated with the theology of confirmation. *Sphragis* is used three times in connection with the application of the Holy Spirit to the Christian, all in a baptism/initiation context (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13, 4:30).

used in a variety of contexts in Jewish and early Christian culture. At its root, handlaying was an act that represented the transference of power—for healing of the sick,⁵⁸ for blessing, for imparting a spiritual gift or office, and for the impartation of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹ Exorcism also occurred in conjunction with handlaying.⁶⁰ Given this range of meanings, we might expect handlaying to be part of the earliest baptismal rituals, and indeed, on two occasions in Luke/Acts handlaying for the impartation of the Holy Spirit was performed as a follow-up to baptism.⁶¹ This is not without some difficulty, however. The writer of Luke/Acts had polemics in mind when relating these accounts, not the presentation or promotion of a specific liturgical practice. Indeed, it is very likely that there was no single baptismal liturgy among the various Christian groups of the first and second centuries, nor, as we will see, would there ever be one. So although it would not be surprising to learn that handlaying as an act of empowering with the Holy Spirit was typically a part of early Christian baptism, the evidence is not conclusive.

⁵⁸ Handlaying for healing is not found in the Old Testament, but it does occur in *The Genesis Apocryphon* of Qumran Cave 1, 20.28-29 (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Anchor Bible, 2 vols., 28A and 28B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1985), vol. 1, 553).

⁵⁹ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 70-71; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 31 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1998), 351.

⁶⁰ See for example, Luke 4:40-41.

⁶¹ Acts 8:14-17, 19:6.

Regarding anointing, there is no indication from the baptismal accounts found in Luke/Acts or in the first or early second-century *Didache*⁶² of either a pre- or a postbaptismal anointing with oil. However, there is a passage in 1 John that hints at the possibility of a ritual anointing during baptism.

As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. . . . They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us. But you have been anointed [literally: you have an anointing (*chrisma*)] by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge. . . . As for you, the anointing (*chrisma*) that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing (*chrisma*) teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him.⁶³

This passage was written to encourage one group of Christians which was faced with a second secessionist faction, referred to as antichrists. The subject of anointing within this context, combined with the strong appositive that begins verse twenty, *kai hymeis* (translated “but you”), repeated with even more grammatical emphasis at verse twenty-seven (translated “as for you”), indicates that the secessionist group may have been claiming some sort of special anointing that imparted exclusive spiritual knowledge.⁶⁴ The writer of the epistle was reminding his readers that they *too* had an anointing, direct from God, and thereby had sufficient knowledge. This passage suggests the sort of

⁶² *Didache*, 7, in E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 2nd ed., Alcuin Club Collections, no. 42 (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 1; and in Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: West and East Syria*, Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 5 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 36.

⁶³ 1 John 2:18-27 (NRSV).

⁶⁴ C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), 60.

conflict that Irenaeus of Lyon would encounter, a century or so later, with schismatic groups also laying claim to a special anointing.⁶⁵ By the time of Irenaeus (d. 202), we are obviously dealing with the practice of anointing with oil as an element in baptismal rites. Tertullian, during that same period, provides the earliest reference to anointing at baptism among the proto-orthodox group.⁶⁶ However, scholars are divided over whether at the time of 1 John the anointing referred to by the writer was a physical act or simply figurative.⁶⁷ In either case, metaphorical or physical, the readers would probably have perceived this anointing as initiatory in nature, given the “conversion/initiation/baptismal background” of the epistle.⁶⁸ The strongest evidence that this was indeed a physical anointing, even at this early date, is that the writer of the epistle did not deny that the secessionist group had been anointed. Given his conclusion that, because they left, they never actually belonged to his group, it is unlikely that he would have credited them with a true spiritual anointing from God. That he did not deny some sort of anointing on their part indicates that it must have been physical.⁶⁹ Thus there is some

⁶⁵ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.3-5.

⁶⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 7.

⁶⁷ Raymond Brown provides an excellent short discussion of this question. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 30 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1982), 343-345.

⁶⁸ Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 343.

⁶⁹ Brown is inclined to accept a physical anointing. On the other hand, Ignace de la Potterie concludes that 1 John 2:20-27 and 2 Corinthians 1:21 both refer to a “spiritual anointing through faith.” See Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 348; and Ignace de la Potterie, “Anointing of the Christian by Faith,” in *The Christian Lives by the Spirit*, ed. Ignace de la Potterie and Stanislaus Lyonnet, trans. John Morriss (Staten Island, NY: Society of St Paul, 1971), 116.

indication that early Christian initiation may have included an anointing with oil.

Conclusion

Anointing and handlaying in Judaism and early Christianity have been examined in order to understand the possible meanings and functions early Christians might have attached to them. These traditions infused into these acts a rich background of meanings, including consecration as a royal vassal or priestly servant of Yahweh,⁷⁰ healing by the power of God, the impartation of the Holy Spirit during Christian conversion/initiation, and the casting out of demons. Whether these acts were regularly part of early baptismal ceremonies is still an open question, though it is certainly possible. But in either case, these traditions provided an important background for anointing and handlaying in later rites of initiation, a background with a rich variety of significations.

⁷⁰ Tertullian picks up this meaning in *De Baptismo*, 7.

Chapter 2: Early Christian Baptismal Liturgy

To describe a ‘typical’ early Christian baptism liturgy is misleading because there was, in fact, no standard liturgy against which others should or could be measured. The more deeply scholars have studied the extant liturgies from the first eight centuries, the more apparent this has become. Christian rites of baptism, like all rituals, were not simply ‘top down’ affairs in which one class of participants, the priests who led the ceremonies, were able unilaterally to impose their interpretation of the symbolic meaning and intention of the ritual actions on all the other participants. Rather, ritual behavior is the product of a negotiation of power relationships between all participants in the rite and, as a result, one should expect to find that, in various times and places, some parts of the baptism liturgy would receive different emphases and interpretations.¹ Thus the ‘traditional approach’ to liturgical studies, comparing divergent liturgies in the hopes of establishing a direct line of descent, is problematic.

¹ This understanding of the nature of ritual behavior relies on the theoretical work of Catherine Bell. See *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Arnold van Gennep, a French anthropologist working in the early twentieth century, did the groundbreaking study on rites of passage in his seminal work by that title: *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). Victor Turner built on the work of van Gennep, focusing on the aspect of liminality in rites of passage and its efficacy for the creation of community, in *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969). For a brief summary of many of Turner’s ideas, see Appendix A of Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

The Inadequacy of the Traditional Approach to Studying Liturgies

There are two approaches, really two sides of a single presumption, to the study of early baptismal liturgies that have actually detracted from the field. That presumption is to insist that all baptism liturgies were related and share an essential unity.² Of course, on some level, this is certainly the case—they shared the common purpose of Christian initiation and they shared a common heritage of practice that included, at minimum, immersion in water while a baptizer spoke the words of an initiatory formula. However, the traditional presumption has been to assume that when liturgies differ from one another, one of them must represent a deviation from some supposed standard. From this presumption, two scholarly approaches to liturgical studies have followed. One is to assume that there was, during the early Christian era, an archetypal

² See Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 1st ed., 144-146. Bradshaw characterizes this as the approach that dominated liturgical studies prior to the late 1950s. Even since then, many if not most scholars studying early Christian liturgy are in some way connected to the church. This is noted not to discount the validity of such research but to point out that often it is motivated by a desire to apply the insights of historical study to present day liturgical practice. Two examples of this are Gerard Austin, *Anointing With the Spirit: the Rite of Confirmation: the Use of Oil and Chrism* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1985); and Thomas A. Marsh, "The History and Significance of the Post-Baptismal Rites," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 29 (1962): 175-206. Because of this there can be a tendency to assume direct connections between modern and ancient practice. For example, see Gregory Dix, *Confirmation, or the Laying on of Hands?* (London: S.P.C.K., 1936). This is a marvelous little work in which Dix suggests that the original apostolic practice was to anoint with oil prior to baptism as a symbol of the impartation of the Holy Spirit (note the assumption of a unified apostolic standard). What is also noteworthy is the freedom with which Dix refers to this supposed prebaptismal anointing as "confirmation," thereby assuming that an apostolic prebaptismal anointing (if there ever was one) would denote the same thing as a modern, or medieval, postbaptismal anointing. There can also be a tendency to evaluate actions in the past by the standards of modern theological or pastoral understanding. Thus, Nathan Mitchell reflects a common perspective and a common set of assumptions when he states that, by the Middle Ages, the process of Christian initiation, which had begun as a unified rite involving baptism and reception of the eucharist following a brief period of catechesis, "disintegrated and finally collapsed into three separate and dislocated moments of water-baptism, confirmation, and [first] eucharist" (Mitchell, "Dissolution," 50). Mitchell's choice of the terms "disintegrated" and especially of "collapsed" is a reflection of this tendency.

baptism ceremony from which all subsequent ceremonies came and to which they all correspond to greater or lesser degrees. The alternate approach is to assume an archetypal theology of baptism that provides a liturgical *telos* toward which all ceremonies are assumed to have been headed and by which they can be evaluated. Often, some combination of both approaches is involved. For instance, we have seen that there is no conclusive evidence of a standard baptismal liturgy in the earliest Christian documents. Still, often on the basis of theological beliefs, this ideal ceremony is presumed.³ At best, this approach has resulted in missed opportunities to study the Christian communities behind various baptismal liturgies because of the preoccupation with comparing one liturgy to another looking for evidence of the original ideal.⁴ At worst, it has led to historical misinterpretation resulting from the imposition of an understanding of the ritual behavior from one liturgy onto the liturgical practice of a different time and place.⁵ In either case, the study of baptismal anointing/handlaying, and by association the sacrament of confirmation, has been especially prone to these difficulties.⁶ Georg Kretschmar provides an example of this by contrasting the work of Gregory Dix and L.S. Thornton with

³ Georg Kretschmar, "Recent Research on Christian Initiation," *Studia Liturgica* 12 (1977): 87-89, 93, concludes that the "quest for a primitive structure," often based in "dogmatic considerations," is misguided because it does not reflect the reality of the evidence. Instead, based on the extant church orders and on the evidence from catechetical works, even in terms of the "essential rites at the core of the action," there is an undeniable degree of diversity.

⁴ See, for example, Geoffrey Grimshaw Willis, *A History of Early Roman Liturgy to the Death of Pope Gregory the Great* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1994), which represents a fairly mechanical attempt to harmonize different liturgical sources associated with Rome.

⁵ For example, see below, p. 90-91, for my discussion of Cyprian's alleged misunderstanding of the Roman practice of receiving penitents with the laying on of hands.

⁶ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 2nd ed., 145-146.

that of G.W.H. Lampe.⁷ According to Kretschmar, Dix and Thornton assert that baptism originally included immersion, imposition of hands for the impartation of the Holy Spirit, and eucharist in one unified rite,⁸ while Lampe contends that the imposition of hands was not an essential part of baptism in the New Testament. For him, baptism consisted simply of an immersion in water which included the reception of the Spirit.⁹ However, in both cases, one finds the underlying expectation that there was an original and normative baptism ritual, an expectation that is not borne out by the early liturgical sources. Indeed, what one finds instead is a great deal of regional variation.

Differences in Early Anointing Practice, East and West

In this study we are primarily interested in western practice, because as noted earlier, it was only in the West that the postbaptismal anointing broke from the baptism ceremony into a separate rite. However, it is useful to look at early sources, east and west, in order to see the range of practice and the meanings attached to baptismal anointing and to affirm that chronological and regional differences can be observed. Sources for liturgical practice are found in

⁷ Kretschmar, "Recent Research," 87-88. Kretschmar, like Bradshaw, notes the "distinctively English flavor" of the scholarly interest in confirmation. See also Steinberg, "The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism," chapters 2-5.

⁸ See Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (London: Dacre Press, 1946); and Lionel Spencer Thornton, *Confirmation: Its Place in the Baptismal Mystery* (London: Dacre Press, 1954).

⁹ G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers*, 2nd ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1967).

commentaries, sermons, baptismal instructions (catecheses), and church orders.¹⁰

The most striking differences between the eastern and western liturgies are the absence of a postbaptismal anointing in the East and the different meanings assigned to prebaptismal anointings. In the third-century West, both post- and prebaptismal anointings could be found in rites of baptism, as witnessed by, among other sources, the *Apostolic Tradition* and Tertullian's *De Baptismo*.¹¹ In Syria during this era, it appears that there was only a prebaptismal anointing,¹² and the meaning that these eastern Christians attached to it differed significantly from that in the West.¹³ In the West, prebaptismal anointing was

¹⁰ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 2nd ed., 73-97. Paul Bradshaw provides an excellent short introduction to the earliest church orders. He notes that in spite of regional differences, there was a literary interrelationship between the church orders, even between those from different areas. For instance, the late fourth-century Syrian *Apostolic Constitutions* shows some dependence on the *Apostolic Tradition*, which itself evolved over time and was drawn from the liturgical practices of many different places (Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 2nd ed., 82-83, 84).

¹¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 7; The *Apostolic Tradition* knows of two postbaptismal anointings. See *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), 37-39.

¹² For example, the third-century *Didascalia Apostolorum* has a prebaptismal but no postbaptismal anointing. See *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 9, 16, in R. Hugh Connolly, ed., *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 93-94, 146-147; also in Whitaker, *Documents*, 12-13; and in Finn, *West and East Syria*, 40-41. The *Acts of Thomas*, estimated to be from the third century, describes five baptisms, four of which include a prebaptismal anointing. There is no mention of a postbaptismal anointing. See *Acts of Thomas*, 26-27, 49-50, 121, 132-133, 156-158, in A. F. Klijn, ed., *The Acts of Thomas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), 77, 90-91, 130, 135-136, 148-149. The first or early second-century *Didache* mentions only immersion after a period of fasting. See *Didache*, 7, in Whitaker, *Documents*, 1; and in Finn, *West and East Syria*, 36.

¹³ For an extensive study of the Syrian rites, see Gabriele Winkler, *Das armenische Initiationsrituale: Entwicklungsgeschichtliche und liturgievergleichende Untersuchung der Quellen des 3. bis 10. Jahrhunderts*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, no. 217 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1982). Her results regarding baptismal anointings are summarized in Winkler, "The Original Meaning," 24-45.

for purification and exorcism. For example, the *Apostolic Tradition* gives these instructions for the moments just prior to baptism: “And when he [the one being baptized] has said this [statement renouncing Satan] let him [the presbyter] anoint him with the Oil of Exorcism saying: Let all evil spirits depart from thee.”¹⁴ In the East, however, the prebaptismal anointing was symbolically founded on the Old Testament anointing of kings and priests and on the gospel account of the baptism of Jesus which climaxed, not with his immersion in water, but with the descent of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ According to Gabriele Winkler, “The East, in its earliest ritualization at least, followed closely the events at the Jordan, forming the rites of initiation basically as a birth into the eschatological reality.”¹⁶ In support of this conclusion Winkler discusses the early third-century *Didascalia Apostolorum*, in which, prior to baptism, the bishop would both lay a hand on the *baptizandus* and pour oil on his head prior to baptism, saying the words of Psalm 2:7, “You are my son; today I have begotten you” (NRSV).¹⁷ In this scenario, the prebaptismal anointing had a symbolic

¹⁴ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.10, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 34.

¹⁵ Winkler, “The Original Meaning,” 33-35.

¹⁶ Winkler, “The Original Meaning,” 43. An alternative, although complimentary, explanation was offered by T. W. Manson, “Entry into the Early Church,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1947): 25-33. He suggested that Syrian prebaptismal anointing may have been a reflection of the writings (Romans 5:5; Galatians 3:2, 4:6) and the account of the conversion (Acts 9:17-18) of the Apostle Paul, which lead one to believe that reception of the Holy Spirit precedes baptism, it being the work of the Spirit that brings the Christian to baptism. Manson suggests that the early Syrian initiatory order—anointing, baptism, communion—reflects early Jewish Christian practice, while the western order was influenced by Hellenistic mystery cults which placed ritual purification first in the initiatory process (31). See also Jeffrey John, “Anointing in the New Testament,” 63-64.

¹⁷ Winkler, “The Original Meaning,” 35-36. This understanding of the bishop’s prebaptismal activity is drawn from both chapter nine of the *Didascalia*, which mentions the laying on of hands and recitation of Psalm 2:7, and chapter sixteen, which mentions the pouring on of oil. See *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 9 and 16, in Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 93, 146-147.

significance equal to, if not greater than, the immersion itself. Thus Winkler masterfully demonstrates that early eastern and western initiation processes differed not only in practice, but also in the theological meanings they ascribed to prebaptismal anointing.

Interestingly, when it comes to the question of why this difference existed, the tendency is to assume that one of the two approaches, either the eastern or western, must reflect an older tradition. Winkler does not directly address the question, but from her statement, “Whether the West never shaped the baptismal liturgy as a birth ritual but rather developed the cathartic elements right from the beginning remains to be seen [from further research],”¹⁸ coupled with the title of the article, “The *Original Meaning* of the Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications,”¹⁹ one can conclude that she suspects the eastern approach using Jesus’ experience at the Jordan as the paradigm is probably the older tradition from which the West deviated. Thomas Finn provides a long list of scholars who conclude just the opposite, that the western cathartic prebaptismal anointing was original and that the early Syrian rites reflect a “transposition” of the symbol of the giving of the Holy Spirit from a postbaptismal anointing (as in the *Apostolic Tradition*) to a prebaptismal anointing (as in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*).²⁰ In either case, the traditional

¹⁸ Winkler, “The Original Meaning,” 43.

¹⁹ Emphasis mine.

²⁰ Thomas M. Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of St John Chrysostom*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity, no. 15 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 142.

assumption that there was a single apostolic model is still present.²¹ On the basis of available evidence, however, the attempt to determine an original rite is bound to fail. Furthermore, given the breadth of both initiatory practice and of the theological significance attached to that practice seen in the early liturgies and in the earliest Christian texts, some of which date to the time of the apostles, one suspects that Georg Kretschmar is correct in saying, “The plurality of possibilities is itself apostolic.”²²

In the fourth century, changes would occur in eastern practice making it more like that in the West. The length of catechesis increased and baptism was symbolically recast from a step into the Jordan River and a sharing in Christ’s reception of the Spirit to an entry into the tomb to partake in Christ’s death and resurrection. By the later fourth century, the prebaptismal anointing had clearly become purificatory and exorcistic and a postbaptismal anointing, associated with the impartation of the Holy Spirit, was performed.²³ The

²¹ It is important to note that Winkler only suggests this as a possibility. She does not base her work on the attempt to identify an ideal apostolic rite. In fact, Winkler’s work is a very good example of studying the liturgies on their own terms and allowing the differences found to lead us to a better understanding of the chronological and regional variation present in early Christianity. Another work to note in this regard is Ignace de la Potterie, “Anointing of the Christian by Faith,” especially pages 122-135. He recognizes that the Syrian rites were theologically different from those in the West. However, his tendency to see all Syrian rites, regardless of their time period, in a unified manner leads him to deny that the prebaptismal anointing in the early rites was for the impartation of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, he links prebaptismal anointing with gnosis, both in what he calls an “Alexandrian” meaning of the term from Didymus the Blind and in relation to Gnostic sources. He concludes that “the prebaptismal anointing in the ancient Syrian rite was not an exorcism as in other Churches nor the rite of the gift of the Spirit as this is understood in the Acts, but a symbol of truth, of the Christian mystery, of the faith—supernatural realities to which the catechumen acceded” (135).

²² Kretschmar, “Recent Research,” 103.

²³ This was exemplified in the liturgical writings of Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia, as well as in the late fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*. Relevant portions of all three sources are available in Finn, *West and East Syria*, and in Whitaker, *Documents*. Portions

question of why these changes took place is not central to this study, but are worth noting. Finn suggests that they “testify to a theology of the Holy Spirit emerging as a result of the fourth-century Trinitarian controversies.”²⁴ Winkler rejects theories based on the presumed influence of the Jerusalem church and its rites over the region of west Syria and Palestine, or on the practice of restoring heretics to the church through the process of episcopal handlaying. Her own tendency is to maintain that theology, or more precisely, a change in the perception of the meaning of Christian initiation in relation to the overall spiritual climate, caused the change in practice. Thus,

the reason for this alteration lies, beyond any doubt, in the considerable change in the concept of baptism as a whole: the entire ritual assumed more and more a predominantly purificatory character. From the fourth century onward the cathartic and apotropaic elements grew to such a proportion that one can, to some extent at least, speak of an estrangement of the original concept of baptism. Nearly every part of the ritual was reshaped with mainly exorcistic elements.²⁵

of Cyril’s *Catecheses* and Theodore’s *Baptismal Homilies* are also translated in Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century* (Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1971). Cyril and Theodore both specifically link the postbaptismal anointing with the impartation of the Holy Spirit; the *Apostolic Constitution* does not (See Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, 3; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Baptismal Homilies*, 3.27; *Apostolic Constitutions*, 7.44-45).

The one exception to this, in the late fourth or early fifth century, was the baptismal liturgy used by John Chrysostom (*Baptismal Instructions*, 2.22-24, trans. Paul W. Harkins, *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 31 (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1963), 51-52). Chrysostom lived in the same era and in the same geographical region as Cyril and Theodore, but his practice appears to represent something of a theological, if not chronological, middle ground in the process of change that occurred in the fourth century (See Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism*; and especially Winkler, “The Original Meaning,” 37-38).

Interestingly, in the four prebaptismal anointings mentioned in the *Acts of Thomas*, two (chapters 27 and 132) carry the older meaning, linking the anointing to the work of the messiah, while the other two (chapters 121 and 157) carry this newer meaning of preparatory purification. For this reason, Winkler contends that the *Acts of Thomas* must contain multiple layers that were added at different times (Winkler, “The Original Meaning,” 29-31).

²⁴ Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism*, 180.

²⁵ Winkler, “The Original Meaning,” 42.

Ritual is so complex that, in the final summation, the fourth-century rite may have been the result of all these elements, plus others of which we are unaware. Still it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that rituals are designed and carried out by people and people are motivated by more than ideas. A change in spiritual worldview or in beliefs about the Holy Spirit could play a part, but so could an interest in how things were done in an important city like Jerusalem, or even in another part of the Empire. It may be more than coincidental that baptismal anointing in the east came to follow more closely that in the west.

This brief excursus into eastern baptismal practice, compared with western, serves as a case study in the variety of applications and symbolic meanings that could be ascribed to baptismal anointing. It demonstrates how the same rite, anointing with oil, can mean different things in different regions and can even come to change meanings over time. It further reminds us that eastern and western practice cannot necessarily be used to interpret one another. As we turn to look exclusively at western practice, it is clear on the basis of the material covered so far that any attempt to understand the sacrament of confirmation as a synthesis of, or an inevitable development from, previous liturgical practices simply will not do. As Georg Kretschmar asserts:

The question of the unity of baptism in the multiplicity of traditions cannot be answered, in the case of the fourth century, either with any assertion of the faithful preservation of an ancient arrangement or by any theory of a confused decline from an apostolic truth long since lost in darkness. The theology of the fourth century fathers seems to me a good example of a

determined reaffirmation of the Gospel of Christ in the midst of a totally altered situation, with new questions demanding solution.²⁶

As we will see, episcopal confirmation came about in the same way—as the solution to questions posed by an altered situation.

The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus

Mindful of these concerns, it is nevertheless useful to begin with an example as a starting point for discussing the great variety of anointing practice one finds in the early liturgies. Mention has already been made of the *Apostolic Tradition*, an early third-century church order attributed to Hippolytus, a leading churchman who broke with and became a rival to Callistus, the Bishop of Rome, over the latter's decision to legitimize relationships between freeborn women and "slaveborn" men (a common practice but not technically recognized as "marriage" by Rome).²⁷ Many church orders are difficult to date precisely because they had more than one stage of composition and lack internal evidence that might help locate them in time. This is the case with the *Apostolic Tradition*; Paul Bradshaw insists that the evidence that it was produced by Hippolytus is far from conclusive. This is problematic because it is only on Hippolytus's authorship that the provenance of early third-century Rome is based.²⁸ In a recent commentary on the *Apostolic Tradition*, Bradshaw, Maxwell E Johnson and L. Edward Phillips hypothesize that the document evolved in at

²⁶ Kretschmar, "Recent Research," 94.

²⁷ Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, xvii-xviii.

²⁸ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 2nd ed., 80-83.

least four stages over as long as two centuries, beginning with a basic core of material from the mid-second century.²⁹ Bradshaw concludes that

this church order therefore deserves to be treated with greater circumspection than has generally been the case, and one ought not automatically assume that it provides reliable information about the life and liturgical activity of the church in Rome in the early third century.³⁰

Unfortunately, the section that contains the episcopal postbaptismal anointing³¹ is not part of the earliest core of material. Still, the *Apostolic Tradition* does appear to be the earliest church order to describe such a rite and it corresponds in large measure to the North African rites of baptism described by Tertullian c. 200 and Cyprian c. 250.³² Moreover, this liturgical practice came, early on, to be associated with Rome and would become the norm in western Europe during the 8th and 9th centuries, and thus, for our purposes, it is worth describing in detail.³³

²⁹ Bradshaw, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 13-16. Alistair Stewart-Sykes, in another recent commentary, concurs that the document was redacted at least twice, but concludes that it was done in a much shorter period of time and that one of the redactors was Hippolytus. See Hippolytus, *On The Apostolic Tradition: An English Version With Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 22-32 and 49-50.

³⁰ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 2nd ed., 83.

³¹ Chapter 22 in the numbering used by Dix, chapter 21 in that of Bernard Botte which is used by Bradshaw, Johnson and Phillips.

³² Tertullian, *De Baptismo*; Cyprian of Carthage *Epistles (The Letters of St Cyprian of Carthage)*, 69-74, trans. G. W. Clarke, *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 43, 44, 46, 47 (New York: Newman Press, 1984-1989). At this point, many important scholars, including Gregory Dix, Bernard Botte, Johannes Quasten, Thomas Finn, and Aiden Kavanagh, have confidently asserted, and based their interpretation of the *Apostolic Tradition* on, an early third-century dating.

³³ The rite of baptism is described in a section entitled, "Of the Laity" (*Apostolic Tradition*, 16-23, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 23-43). For convenience I have used this edition by Gregory Dix and revised by Henry Chadwick, which is the most widely circulated English translation, but the commentary by Bradshaw, Johnson and Phillips provides a very good translation of the four earliest manuscript traditions, arranged in parallel columns.

*Rites of Separation*³⁴

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 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.

Rites of Transition

Provided that these initial hurdles were cleared, the candidate began instruction in the Christian faith; three years of such instruction 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.”³⁵ During this time of liminality catechumens heard teaching along with the whole church, 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

³⁴ Arnold van Gennep, in *The Rites of Passage*, noted three stages in rites of passage: the first stage which he called preliminal (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.

³⁵ *Apostolic Tradition*, 17.2, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 28.

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 opportunity 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.”³⁶ After further examination of piety and service the catechumen took on the rank of one who was 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.”³⁷ 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].”³⁸ They spent Saturday night in vigil receiving instruction and 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. After renouncing Satan and all his works they were anointed by the priest with the “Oil of Exorcism”³⁹ and were

³⁶ *Apostolic Tradition*, 19.2, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 30.

³⁷ *Apostolic Tradition*, 20.3, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 31.

³⁸ *Apostolic Tradition*, 20.8, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 32.

³⁹ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.10, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 34.

exorcised one final time. Then the candidate, naked and glistening from the Oil of Exorcism, was led to the water:

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:

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.⁴⁰

Rites of Incorporation

Immediately after baptism the neophyte received from the priest a second anointing with the "Oil of Thanksgiving," after which he dried with a towel and dressed.⁴¹ 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,

⁴⁰ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.12-18, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 36-37.

⁴¹ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.19-20, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 37-38.

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.⁴²

Then he anointed the neophyte with oil, made the sign of the cross on his forehead and gave him a kiss and a blessing.⁴³ At last the newly baptized Christian was allowed into the Paschal eucharist celebration,⁴⁴ 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.

Early Western Liturgical Development

The Multiplication of Symbols

Perhaps the first thing one notes upon reading the *Apostolic Tradition* is the many symbols and symbolic acts that were utilized in the baptism ceremony. Symbols are “the basic building blocks, the ‘molecules’ of ritual.”⁴⁵ Over the first few centuries, Christians added many different symbols to the baptismal rite. In

⁴² *Apostolic Tradition*, 22.1, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 38.

⁴³ *Apostolic Tradition*, 22.2-3, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 39.

⁴⁴ *Apostolic Tradition*, 23, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*.

⁴⁵ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 14.

addition, to anointing with oil or chrism⁴⁶ and the laying on of hands, which as we have seen go back to the earliest Christian practice, other symbols in the *Apostolic Tradition* included stripping prior to baptism,⁴⁷ exsufflation as a symbol of exorcism, receiving a kiss,⁴⁸ and the giving of milk, honey, and water from the baptismal font in addition to the normal eucharist elements. Other symbols that developed in the first five centuries included salt,⁴⁹ placing saliva

⁴⁶ Chrism is the name given to the perfumed (usually with balsam) oil often used in baptismal anointings. It corresponds to the Greek *myron* (μύρον). Traditionally chrism was used for the postbaptismal anointing performed by the bishop. The *Apostolic Tradition* does not specifically mention chrism (22.1-3) but it does have instructions for the blessing of oil (5.1-2). However, the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* which has elements that date perhaps as early as the fifth and sixth centuries, is an example of a rite that does specify chrism (1.44), and also gives instructions for the consecration of chrism on Holy Thursday (1.40). See *Sacramentarium Gelasianum; Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Aeclesiae Ordinis Anni Circuli*, *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta*, ed. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, Series Maior, Fontes 4 (Rome: Casa Editrice Herder, 1960), 74, 60. Relevant parts are translated in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 92-107.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith argues that Christians adopted the practice not from the naked baptisms of the mystery religions but from Jewish proselyte baptism. He writes, “The early church shared Judaism’s horror of nakedness (Rev. 3:18; 16:15) but held that in baptism it was necessary.” Jonathan Z. Smith, “Garments of Shame” in *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, *Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity*, vol. 23 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 4. It could go back as far as a pre-Pauline baptismal tradition that was reflected in Galatians 3:26-28. In this passage, which appears to be a baptismal formula, there is a reference to clothing; specifically to putting on, or clothing oneself, with Christ which implies a prior taking off of all that is not Christ. There is also in this passage a strong statement of sexual egalitarianism, “There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” that is in keeping with Victor Turner’s ideas about the creation of community (“*communitas*”) out of the liminality associated with baptism. See Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *There Is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism*, *Harvard Dissertations in Religion*, ed. Margaret R. Miles and Bernadette J. Brooten, no. 20 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 5-9; and Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96. For a recent article questioning whether nakedness in baptism was actually widely practiced or whether the language of nakedness was used as a rhetorical device, see Laurie Guy, “‘Naked’ Baptism in the Early Church: The Rhetoric and the Reality,” *Journal of Religious History* 27, no. 2 (2003): 133-42.

⁴⁸ In the *Apostolic Tradition*, the kiss is given by the bishop. John Chrysostom knows of a ceremony in which all the bystanders give a kiss of congratulations to the neophyte. See John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, 2.27.

⁴⁹ Placing consecrated salt in the mouth of the baptizandus would become a regular part of medieval liturgies. In an early sixth-century letter, the otherwise unknown John the Deacon explained that salt was a symbol of preserving and soothing the mind from confusion and evil. See *The Letter of John the Deacon to Senarius*, 3, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 86. For a full text of the letter, see John the Deacon, *Epistola ad Senarium*, in *Analecta Reginensia: Extraits des Manuscrits Latins de la Reine Christine Conservés au Vatican*, ed. André Wilmart, *Studi e Testi*, vol. 59 (Vatican City: Polyglott Press, 1933), 170-179.

in the nostrils and ears,⁵⁰ clothing neophytes in white robes as they came out of the baptismal waters, linen head coverings over where the chrism had been placed,⁵¹ and carrying a lighted candle.⁵² In late fourth-century Milan the enrollment of a catechumen included “smearing the eyes with mud to signify the ‘eye-opening’ work to come in the Lenten catechumenate.”⁵³ In Milan the priest would also wash the neophyte’s feet immediately after he or she came up from the font. Ambrose defended this deviation from Roman practice by suggesting that perhaps Rome had once practiced this foot washing as well, but had to cease because of the large number of people it had to baptize every Easter.⁵⁴ This sort of creative multiplication of the symbols associated with baptism had a purpose. It would have enhanced the identity and prestige of the community. John the Deacon, in the early sixth century, insisted that the many symbols added to the baptism ceremony were legitimate because they represented a long standing tradition that had been established on the authority and wisdom of the church. “Although,” he writes, “the old books show no traces of these customs, the church has required [them to be done] over the years with watchful care.”⁵⁵ Over a century earlier, Ambrose hinted that the

⁵⁰ See for example, the *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, 1.42; translated in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 103.

⁵¹ For examples of the white garment and the linen head cloth, see *The Letter of John the Deacon to Senarius*, 6, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 87, 88.

⁵² For a brief but thorough compilation and explanation of the many different parts of the baptism ceremony that were included at different times and places, see Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 3-36.

⁵³ Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 59. The practice probably derived the account in John 9:6 of Jesus applying mud, made from his saliva, to the eyes of a blind man.

⁵⁴ Ambrose, *On the Sacraments*, 3.5, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 74.

⁵⁵ *The Letter of John the Deacon to Senarius*, 6, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 87.

motive for so generously augmenting the baptism ceremony may have been the anxious suspicion on the part of those taking part that the simple act of baptism was not impressive enough to sustain God's honor in the eyes of new converts. A bit defensively, he wrote:

You entered; you saw the water; you saw the priest; you saw the Levite [deacon]. Lest, perchance, someone say: "Is this all?"—yes, this is all, truly all, where there is all piety, all grace, all sanctification.⁵⁶

As Ramsay MacMullen points out in an article entitled "Two Types of Conversion to Early Christianity," only a small percentage of the population who converted to Christianity did so as a result of engaging the ideas presented in Christian writings and accepting the world view presented by them. The great majority, whose story is much more difficult to hear, did not have intellectual access to the world of Christian ideas. Nor did they have physical access to Christian preaching and worship services because the church tended not to allow unbaptized individuals to take part in them. Instead they would have converted because of something more tangible; perhaps they were impressed with the courage of Christians in the face of persecution, or they had directed some prayer to the Christian God and that prayer had been answered, or they were frightened by the Christian promise of hell to nonbelievers.⁵⁷ This is not to say that the educated and the elite did not value symbolism as well, but one motive for the multiplication of symbols in baptism was to communicate God's

⁵⁶ Ambrose, *On the Sacraments*, 1.10, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 64.

⁵⁷ See Ramsay MacMullen, "Two Types of Conversion to Early Christianity," in *Conversion, Catechuminate, and Baptism in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, *Studies in Early*

glory to ordinary people such as these. Rituals “are not just ‘doing things,’ they are also ways of saying things. Like a natural language, these practices ‘make sense’ within a particular social setting.”⁵⁸ In other words, symbolism provided a more profound and enduring way of communicating truths than could be provided through catechesis or, if one was able, by theological study.

The Shift from Adult to Infant Baptism

Another significant change in baptismal practice, in both the East and the West, was a transition to the regular baptism of the infant children of Christian parents. As was noted in the introduction, much of the research into early Christian liturgy has been done by scholars with ecclesiastical ties who are equally interested in modern practice. Nowhere is this more true than regarding infant baptism, and the disputation has often been fierce. As Robert Grant wryly observed:

The debate between Joachim Jeremias and Kurt Aland has lasted . . . long enough. . . . The view of Jeremias put schematically is that New Testament Christians baptized infants and therefore we should baptize infants. Aland’s view is that New Testament Christians did not baptize infants but we should nonetheless baptize infants. Then one should mention the position of Karl Barth: New Testament Christians did not baptize infants consequently we should not baptize infants. The only logical possibility remaining is that New Testament Christians baptized infants and therefore we should not baptize infants.⁵⁹

Christianity, no. 11 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 26-44.

⁵⁸ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 110.

⁵⁹ Robert M. Grant, “Development of the Christian Catechumenate,” in *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, ed. Murphy Center for Liturgical Research (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 32-33.

It seems very unlikely that there was any sort of regular baptism of infants before the second century. The New Testament documents are virtually silent on the subject. Justin Martyr, writing c. 148, made no mention of it, implying rather that some level of intellectual assent was required because, unlike physical birth which is out of one's control, baptism creates "children of choice and knowledge."⁶⁰ A turning point may have come around the year 200. The *Apostolic Tradition* mentioned baptizing children who were so young they could not speak for themselves,⁶¹ and about that same time Tertullian wrote in North Africa that with children it is best to defer baptism until after they have reached an age when they are able to be instructed: "Let them become Christians when they have the capacity to know Christ."⁶² Tertullian, in this passage, is clearly not writing hypothetically. Children were being baptized and he was unhappy about it, because it was absolutely contrary to his primary inclination which was to delay baptism. However, in both Tertullian and the *Apostolic Tradition* it is not at all clear that we are dealing with the baptism of infants. It may only have been young children that were being baptized.

Although one may not know with certainty exactly when infant baptism began there is no doubting that it was practiced routinely at least by the end of the fifth century and probably by the end of the fourth. In the mid-third century, Cyprian enjoined that infants should be baptized without even waiting the

⁶⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 61, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1957), 183.

⁶¹ *Apostolic Tradition*. 21.4, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 33.

customary eight days.⁶³ Around 400 A.D. Augustine wrote, “For whether it be a newborn infant or a decrepit old man . . . no one should be barred from baptism.”⁶⁴ Part of the rationale for supposing that the shift had occurred by the end of the fourth century (and that it might not have gotten a good start before the end of the third) is based simply on the great amount of significant change in many areas of church life that occurred in the immediate post-Constantine era.

From where did Christians get the idea of baptizing infants? The birth of a child is a crisis for all involved; this would especially have been the case in an era when a high percentage of babies and mothers did not survive it. So it is not surprising that the church devised some sort of ritual associated with childbirth. Secular Roman society had a rite that symbolized the legitimacy of the child and its acceptance into the family:

The newborn child, once pronounced fit to live, probably by the midwife, would then be placed on the ground for the *paterfamilias* to raise up ritually as his indication that he accepted his paternity of the child and wished to rear it.⁶⁵

Without this rite the child was exposed, often in a public place, and left either to die or to be claimed by whomever wanted it. Then, on the eighth day of life for girls, and the ninth for boys, the parents held a party that included the giving of gifts. Despite some superficial similarities the Christian baptism of

⁶² Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 18, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 678.

⁶³ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 64.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 8:43, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 152.

⁶⁵ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992),

infants was very different from Roman practice. First, the Roman ritual was inconsistent with Christian morality. A rite establishing paternity would likely have seemed unnecessary on account of the Christian emphasis on sexual morality for both men and women. And, regardless of circumstances, Christians followed Jews in their opposition to exposing children.⁶⁶ Second, Christian baptism was not, primarily, a symbol of patrilineal kinship and it was not limited to children. Baptism marked acceptance into the larger religious community and into a patronage relationship with God. Given this, it is much more likely that infant baptism was adapted from the Jewish practice of circumcising boys on the eighth day of life as a sign of membership within the religious group and admission into a covenant relationship with God. This is seen in the previously mentioned admonition of Cyprian. His statement that the standard time for baptizing infants had been on the eighth day is a strong indication of the Jewish roots of infant baptism. In fact, consistently from the first century on, in discussions of baptism a theological link was made to circumcision.⁶⁷

101.

⁶⁶ On exposure of children, see John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe From Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 24-25, 53-137; and Paul Veyne, ed., *A History of Private Life*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 9-11.

⁶⁷ See for example, Colossians 2:11; *Odes of Solomon*, 11.3, in James Hamilton Charlesworth, ed., *The Odes of Solomon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 52 (reprinted in Finn, *West and East Syria*, 117); and Origin, *Homilies on Luke*, 14, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, *The Fathers of the Church*, 94 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 56-61 (also in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 202-203).

This is not to say, however, that infant baptism was motivated strictly by theology. The theological parallel between baptism and circumcision was true regardless of the age at which it was administered. Indeed, in the fourth century Christians took two seemingly conflicting approaches to baptism simultaneously: some practiced infant baptism, while others were delaying baptism until late in life. Is it possible that the same values inspired both practices? Regarding delayed baptism, Margaret Miles attributes the tendency to postpone the rite until old age or just prior to death to the “strenuousness and seriousness of the life change involved in baptism.”⁶⁸ The desire to remain in the ambiguous state of a catechumen for such a long time reflects the system of patronage practiced within the culture. To be baptized was not only to join the Christian community but to enter into a patronage relationship with God. The value of group orientation coupled with a strong concern for God’s honor demanded that, once baptism was received, high standards of conduct must consistently be maintained. Thus baptism was delayed until the fear of not attaining salvation in the face of impending death outweighed the fear of dishonoring God and the Christian community by not living up to the baptismal commitment.

There is very good evidence that these same issues were involved in the practice of infant baptism. In a study of burial inscriptions from the third and fourth century, Everett Ferguson found that “all of the inscriptions which mention a

⁶⁸ Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 32.

time of baptism place this near the time of death.”⁶⁹ In other words, these were emergency baptisms as seen in the poignant example of one inscription that read:

Florentius made this monument for his well-deserving son Appronianus, who lived one year, nine months, and five days. Since he was dearly loved by his grandmother, and she saw that he was going to die, she asked from the church *that he might depart from the world a believer*.⁷⁰

The importance that Christians placed on membership in the community of faith, stressing that salvation was assured only within that group, coupled with the firm belief that baptism was the only door into that community, led parents to fear for the souls of their children. Given the high incidence of death in infancy, it is very likely that what began as emergency measures eventually became a standard precautionary practice in order to calm the anxiety of loving parents.

Historians have often tied the practice of infant baptism to a concurrent theological development of the doctrine of original sin and the belief that infants bore the guilt of that sin. However, the opposite interpretation, that theological reflection followed practice, is equally as likely.⁷¹ This would also explain an interesting theological anomaly from that era, Pelagius’s support of infant

⁶⁹ Everett Ferguson, “Inscriptions and the Origin of Infant Baptism,” in *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, Studies in Early Christianity, no. 11 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 398.

⁷⁰ Ferguson, “Inscriptions,” 398 (emphasis mine).

⁷¹ Everett Ferguson supports the contention of Jeremias that it was the rise in infant baptism that led to a more widespread belief in original sin; see Ferguson, “Inscriptions,” 392. See also Jeremias, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, 73-74.

baptism, the inconsistency of which Augustine was only too happy to point out. In spite of his rejection of the idea of the imputation of original sin and guilt, and his contention that “infants at their birth are in the same condition that Adam was before the transgression,”⁷² Pelagius nevertheless affirmed infant baptism. Augustine quoted him as saying, “Who is so impious as to wish to exclude infants from the kingdom of heaven, by forbidding them to be baptized and to be born again in Christ?”⁷³ Robert Evans observes that, “Nowhere does Pelagius show that he was able to adjust or to refine his theological language in such a way as to offer an intelligible rationalization for speaking of redemption and the remission of sins as applied to infants.”⁷⁴ It seems very likely that this was the result of Pelagius’ compassion for the fears and concerns of parents coupled with a preference for church unity over logical consistency.

One fascinating element in the rise of infant baptism is the way an adult ceremony of initiation was adapted to children with very minimal change. For a sponsor to “renounce Satan and all his works” or to recite the creed on behalf of a tiny newborn baby; or for a deacon to proclaim to a group of infants who have just “heard” a lengthy catechetical lecture on the Lord’s prayer, “You have heard, dearly beloved, the holy mysteries of the Lord’s Prayer. As you go out

⁷² Augustine, *On Original Sin*, 14, in *St. Augustine’s anti-Pelagian works*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 5 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 242.

⁷³ Augustine, *On Original Sin*, 20, in *St. Augustine’s anti-Pelagian works*, 244.

⁷⁴ Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), 118-119.

now keep them ever new in your hearts,”⁷⁵ is, on the surface, unreasonable. Yet John the Deacon affirmed the practice: “I must clearly and quickly say that all these things are done even to infants who by reason of their age understand nothing.”⁷⁶ And he defended it theologically on the basis that just as these infants received damnation from others it was appropriate for sponsors to make a profession of faith for them. Peter Cramer observes that, in terms of the depth of the ritual and the strength of community identity, it was

no hindrance, but rather a stimulus, to the religious imagination that a child should be led through the forms of an adult experience. The child along with the water, palm-branches, salt and oil, was himself a symbol—perhaps the principal symbol—in which the action of the sacrament took place.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, 1.36; translated in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 100

⁷⁶ *Letter of John the Deacon to Senarius*, 7, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 88.

⁷⁷ Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, 178.

Chapter 3: The Creation of Confirmation

Another significant development in western practice was the creation of confirmation as a rite apart from baptism. The starting point for confirmation as a separate sacrament is found in the episcopal handlaying, prayer, and consignation that took place at the end of the baptismal ceremony. The church came to believe two things about this final prayer: first, that it was the time for the full reception of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and second, that it could be performed only by a bishop.¹ Neither of these beliefs was universal. In the eastern church the final prayer and consignation, called chrismation, was not restricted to the bishop; if none was present it could be given by the priest who performed the baptism. As a result it never became chronologically (or theologically) separated from the rest of the baptismal rite and, although the anointing was seen as symbolic of the work of the Holy Spirit, it functioned more specifically as a seal or sign of the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism.² In the western church, by contrast, when the bishop was not present the final blessing was withheld until some later time when he was available; thus the separate rite of confirmation was born.

¹ As seen in the quote from Innocent I that begins chapter 1.

²Finn, *West and East Syria*, 21-22.

The Term *Confirmare*

The use of the word confirmation (*confirmare/confirmatio*) for this episcopal postbaptismal handlaying and anointing is an even later development. It was not until the fifth century, in Gaul, that church leaders came to use the term *confirmare* to refer to episcopal postbaptismal rites, but it became an important word in the West and by the ninth and tenth centuries would be the name of the rite. This was due, at least in part, to its use in a late fifth-century homily for Pentecost, falsely attributed to Eusebius of Emesa, but now thought to be by Faustus, Bishop of Riez.³ In the fifth century, *confirmare* joined a number of words that were already used to describe the postbaptismal anointing. Seal (*consignare*) had a New Testament background (the Greek word *sphragis*) and a long history of use, not only in referring to the postbaptismal anointing, but at other times, to the baptism itself. Both *perficere* and *consummare* also had longstanding usage and carried the meaning of ‘to complete’ or ‘to perfect.’⁴ It is important to note that all these terms—*perficere*, *consummare*, and *confirmare*—referred not to the rite itself, but to the work of the bishop in the rite. They point to the fact that the bishop personally inserted himself into the initiation process as a key participant.⁵

³ See L. A. van Buchem, *L'Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne de Pentécôte* (Nijmegen: Drukkerij, 1967), 45-82.

⁴ Frank C. Quinn, “Confirmation Reconsidered: Rite and Meaning,” *Worship* 59 (1985): 355.

⁵ Quinn, “Confirmation Reconsidered,” 361.

One part of the scholarly discussion on this topic is whether, in the fifth century, Christians used *confirmare* as a synonym for *perficere* and *consummare* with the meaning of ‘to complete’ (a meaning definitely *not* well attested in either the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* or the *Latin Dictionary* by Lewis and Short). Both J. D. C. Fisher and, more recently, Frank C. Quinn, assert that they were synonyms.⁶ Perhaps in part for theological reasons, they are inclined to understand this fifth-century liturgical meaning of episcopal *confirmatio* not as an additional ‘strengthening’ (the usual meaning of *confirmare*) of the recently baptized Christian, but as the ‘completion’—an integral part—of the baptism ceremony itself.

A great deal of this discussion has revolved around the use of the term *confirmare* at the fifth-century Gallican synods at Riez (439), Arles (449-461), and Orange (441).⁷ At all three, *confirmare* and *confirmatio* were used to describe episcopal postbaptismal activities. The second canon of the Council of Orange (441)⁸ stands out on the basis of its insistence that there should be only one postbaptismal anointing (unlike the *Apostolic Tradition* which had two, the second by a bishop). The general rule at the Council of Orange was that

⁶ Quinn, “Confirmation Reconsidered,” 355; J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 141-148.

⁷ The Council of Riez (*Concilium Regense*) contains the expression “*neophytos confirmare*” (canon 3, CCSL, vol. 148, 67-68). A Council of Arles (*Concilium Arelatense*) between 449 and 461 said, “*neophyti si fuerint ab ipso [episcopo] confirmentur*” (CCSL, vol. 148, 133). The Council of Orange (*Concilium Arausicanum*), speaks of activities relating to the bishop “*in confirmatione*” (canon 2, CCSL, vol. 148, 78).

⁸ See van Buchem, *L’Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 95-110; Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 143; Winkler, “Confirmation or Chrismation?” 9-12; and Quinn, “Confirmation Reconsidered,” 361.

postbaptismal chrismation should occur only once (“*quia inter nos placuit semel chrismari*”), and that immediately after baptism by the priest.⁹ Thus, according to the Council of Orange, episcopal *confirmatio* did not regularly include anointing. If, however, the neophyte had not been anointed by the priest after baptism, because for some reason the priest had not obtained chrism from the bishop, then the bishop was to be informed of this so he could accomplish the anointing during the confirmation (“*in confirmatione*”).

‘Completion’ is certainly a possible meaning for *confirmatio/confirmare* in all three councils. However, especially in canon two of Council of Orange, it seems that *confirmatio* was used as a technical term for the bishop’s postbaptismal involvement. Thus it is equally, if not more, likely that ‘strengthening’ was the intended meaning. Fisher argues against this technical use of the term because “if it had been [a technical term], it would have been used in the preceding canon also, where, however, the expression ‘to be sealed with chrism and a blessing’ (*cum chrismate et benedictione consignari*) is used instead.”¹⁰ Fisher’s argument is a bit misleading, however, because canon one, which describes the readmission of heretics, specifically describes a ceremony performed by a priest because the bishop was not present.¹¹ If *confirmatio* was a technical term referring to a rite performed by bishops it is to be expected that it would not be used in canon one, which dealt only with a ceremony performed by priests in

⁹ Council of Orange, canon 2, CCSL, vol. 148, 78.

¹⁰ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 143.

¹¹ Council of Orange, canon 1, CCSL, vol. 148, 78.

the absence of a bishop. This notion that *confirmatio* was a technical term with the meaning of ‘strengthening’ is supported in the homily of Faustus of Riez where *confirmare* is placed directly parallel to *roborare* (to make strong, to strengthen): “In baptism we are born to new life, after baptism we are strengthened (*confirmamur*) for battle. In baptism we are cleansed, after baptism we are strengthened (*roboramur*).”¹² A technical use of the term also appears to be used in *De Spiritu Sancto*, another work attributed to Faustus.¹³ Commenting on the account in Acts 19 of the Apostle Paul laying hands on the newly baptized believers in Ephesus, Faustus wrote, “Behold, how great is the power of the Holy Spirit. In baptism remission from sins is given, at the coming of the Holy Spirit gifts of strength are imparted, and at confirmations wondrous signs are celebrated.”¹⁴ What makes this compelling evidence for a technical usage of the term *confirmare* is that Faustus’s comments do not precisely parallel the actions of Paul in Acts 19. What they do parallel is the traditional

¹² (Pseudo)Eusebius of Emesa, *Homilia De Pentecosten*, 2, in Eusebius ‘Gallicanus,’ *Collectio Homiliarum*, ed. F. Glorie, CCSL, vol. 101, 1970, 338: “In baptismo regeneramur ad vitam, post baptismum confirmamur ad pugnam; in baptismo abluimur post baptismum roboramur.” Another edition of this sermon can be found in van Buchem, *L’Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 40-44.

¹³ See Gustave Weigel, *Faustus of Riez: An Historical Introduction* (Philadelphia: Dolphin Press, 1938), 158. See chapter 7 for a larger discussion of these documents and their significance.

¹⁴ Faustus of Riez, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 2.4, in *Fausti Reiensis Praeter Sermones Pseudo-Eusebianos Opera*, ed. Augustus Engelbrecht, CSEL, vol. 21 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1891), 143: “Vide quantae potentiae sit spiritus sancti. In baptismo peccatorum abremissa donantur, in aduentu spiritus sancti uirtutum munera conferuntur et a confirmatis signorum miracula celebrantur.”

Roman practice of two baptismal anointings. If so, he is calling the second baptismal anointing the ‘confirmation.’¹⁵

Another part of the scholarly discussion is whether, when the term was first used in southeast Gaul, it referred specifically to an episcopal anointing or to the episcopal handlaying.¹⁶ Again, this is a question driven by concern for modern practice and based on the assumption of a single apostolic model that should take precedence. Although these sorts of questions are interesting, for this study attempting to make fine theological and geographical distinctions of terminology is less important than the act itself. Our question has to do with any and all postbaptismal activity on the part of bishops. It does appear that in fifth-century Gaul, councils and preachers began to use *confirmare/confirmatio* as a technical term to describe an episcopal rite that both completed the initiation of baptism and was subsequent to it, either by moments or by a longer period of time depending on the circumstances. But such an episcopal rite—part of baptism, yet potentially separable—had been an important aspect of initiatory practice in the West since at least the early third century. Where did this fragile liturgical circumstance come from in the first place, and why did it become a fixed and non-negotiable pattern?

¹⁵ For another discussion of this, see Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 160-161. Finnegan supports the notion that *confirmare* was used as a technical term.

¹⁶ For a good synopsis of the issues and dissenting conclusions, compare Winkler, “Confirmation or Chrismation?” with Quinn, “Confirmation Reconsidered.”

The Episcopal Postbaptismal Anointing in the *Apostolic Tradition*

The puzzle for scholars presented by the *Apostolic Tradition* has especially to do with the occurrence of the second postbaptismal anointing and its meaning. By way of reminder, after baptism the neophyte was first anointed with the “Oil of Thanksgiving” by the priest. Upon dressing, he presented himself to the bishop who laid hands on him and prayed,

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.

Then the bishop anointed him a second time on the head and placed his hand on his head saying, “I anoint thee with holy oil in God the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and the Holy Ghost.” Finally the bishop put the sign of the cross on the neophyte’s forehead and gave him a kiss.¹⁷ Traditionally this second postbaptismal anointing, performed by a bishop, has been understood to be the earliest liturgical example of the sacrament of confirmation. In other words, the usual interpretation has been to see in the *Apostolic Tradition* an initiatory process with three parts: catechesis for the purpose of exorcism and spiritual preparation, baptism with a Christic focus on cleansing and regeneration, and ‘confirmation’ by the bishop who thereby imparts the Holy Spirit to the neophyte. Gregory Dix went so far as to insert “Confirmation” into his edition of the text as the title for the section containing the bishop’s postbaptismal activities, even though, as he notes, no extant manuscripts supply a separate

¹⁷ *Apostolic Tradition*, 22, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 38-39.

title for this section.¹⁸ Most who perceive a nascent sacrament of confirmation in this rite understand the episcopal anointing to be the significant pneumatic act in the process of initiation; otherwise why would the second anointing have been added in the first place? This view, however, is not without its critics.

Theories as to the Source of the Episcopal Anointing

Thomas Marsh contends that the archetypal rite of Christian initiation consisted of baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins followed by the laying on of hands for the impartation of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ In his view, anointing as a pneumatic symbol came subsequent to the *Apostolic Tradition*. In the *Apostolic Tradition* and prior to it (in the liturgy known by Tertullian for example), anointing was a symbol of Christ (the anointed one) and thus, theologically and liturgically, it was tied more closely to the baptism than to the subsequent laying on of hands.²⁰ Marsh postulates that the second postbaptismal anointing in the *Apostolic Tradition* was an administrative innovation peculiar to Rome because of the large number of baptisms that must have taken place there, an early attempt at liturgical time management. He writes,

It is easy to imagine that in these circumstances it would prove very inconvenient for the bishop, and for the smooth running of the ceremony, if he was personally involved in the anointing of each candidate after baptism. Yet, it would be felt desirable to maintain the act and role of the bishop here. An obvious solution to this practical, and in no way doctrinal, problem would be to

¹⁸ Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 38 (notes).

¹⁹ See Thomas A. Marsh, *Gift of Community: Baptism and Confirmation* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 63-67; and idem, "A Study of Confirmation," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39 (1972): 149-63.

²⁰ Thomas A. Marsh, "A Study of Confirmation II," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39 (1972): 319-36.

combine this signing of the forehead with oil with the individual imposition of hand after the prayer for the Spirit, that is, in effect to perform this imposition by way of signing the forehead with oil.²¹

This understanding of the bishop's postbaptismal anointing is attractive, although there is no direct evidence to commend it and it depends on a Roman provenance for the *Apostolic Tradition*. Nor does it explain why the church at Rome would have thought it desirable for the bishop to have had a part in the postbaptismal anointing if handlaying was in fact the symbolically more important act. There are no other instances where absent bishops were expected to repeat part of the baptism ceremony itself. For instance, Tertullian had great respect for bishops and claimed for them the primary right to baptize and to oversee baptisms, but at the same time he assured his readers that priests and deacons, or even laypersons in an emergency, had complete power to baptize so long as they were submitted to the authority of the bishop.²² Similarly the Council of Elvira, c. 306, declared that those who were baptized in emergency circumstances by a layperson, or those baptized by a deacon where no priest or bishop was available, should be brought to a bishop to complete (*perficere*) their initiation by the laying on of hands.²³ There is no indication in either case that they felt a need for the bishop to repeat the postbaptismal

²¹ Marsh, *Gift of Community*, 126.

²² Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 17.

²³ Council of Elvira (*Concilium Eliberritanum*), canons 38 and 77, in Gonzalo Martinez Diez and Felix Rodriguez, eds., *La Coleccion Canonica Hispana, Vol. 4: Concilios Galos, Concilios Hispanos: Primera Parte*, Monumenta Hispaniae Sacra, Serie Canónica, vol. 4 (Madrid: Instituto Enrique Florez, 1984), 254, 267. An older edition of the canons of the Council of Elvira, translated into English, is available in Samuel Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: the Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), 126-135. Canons relating to baptism are also translated in Whitaker, *Documents*, 222.

anointing. Furthermore, Marsh's theory does not explain the staying power of the episcopal anointing. In his letter to Decentius in the early fifth century, it was the "anointing of neophytes," not just the handlaying, that Innocent I specifically reserved for the bishop.²⁴ One suspects that Innocent saw the stakes as higher than the preservation of an act that was merely an administrative solution to a problem of numbers.²⁵

Recently a second explanation for the introduction of an episcopal postbaptismal anointing in the *Apostolic Tradition* was presented in a dissertation by John Bolderson.²⁶ He contends that the basis for this anointing was in "the recovery of a venerable pre-rabbinic and pre-christian [Jewish] tradition that celebrated the Divine Presence among an elect people."²⁷ Specifically, he draws a connection between the Christian imposition of episcopal hands for the impartation of the Holy Spirit and the Jewish "imposition of the Shekhina during the Aaronic Blessing in the synagogue service."²⁸ According to the Mishnah, the pronouncement of this blessing from Numbers 6 was one of five elements that made up the liturgy of the synagogue

²⁴ See above, p. 10.

²⁵ Frank Quinn, who is very much an admirer of Marsh's conclusion that handlaying, not anointing, was the means for the impartation of the Holy Spirit, suggests a related theory that since the first postbaptismal anointing was done in private (the neophytes were still nude at that point), the second anointing was given for the sake of the congregation, as a chance for them to glimpse and be reminded of what went on in the baptism ceremony. See Quinn, "Confirmation Reconsidered." This theory of Quinn's is subject to many of the same objections offered for Marsh's.

²⁶ See John Daniel Bolderson, "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Saint Hippolytus of Rome" (Ph.D. dissertation, St Louis University, 1993).

²⁷ Bolderson, "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing," 9.

²⁸ Bolderson, "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing," 11, see also 65-82.

and was part of the daily sacrificial rite in the Temple prior to A.D. 70.²⁹ However, an increasing number of scholars are coming to doubt whether any regular liturgy was practiced in the synagogue before the third century;³⁰ if this is the case, Bolderson's argument stumbles right out of the starting gate. Moreover, his argument suffers from its dependence on a rigidly deterministic understanding of ritual development and on the premise that Hippolytus did, in fact, write the *Apostolic Tradition*.

Concerning the ritualistic connection between Christianity and Judaism, Bolderson rejects Paul Bradshaw's assertion that significant Jewish influence on Christian worship was confined to the first century.³¹ Instead, he suggests that late second and early third-century Judaism and Christianity represent two "different expressions of a largely shared original experience," making "each movement a point of reference for the other."³² He presses this theoretical stance very hard saying, "In scientific terms, one became a 'control' for the other."³³ Thus he postulates the possibility of a parallel development of Jewish and Christian liturgical practice, without direct borrowing, in which the connections would still be so strong that "to understand one rite is to

²⁹ Bolderson, "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing," 74-76. See also Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 1st ed., 21.

³⁰ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 2nd ed., 36.

³¹ Bolderson, "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing," 52, referring to the first edition (1992) of Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 13. In the second edition (2002), this reference can be found on p. 33.

³² Bolderson, "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing," 53.

³³ Bolderson, "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing," 53.

understand what its parallel was and was not.”³⁴ This is an intriguing theory, but given Catherine Bell’s understanding of ritual as situational (it occurs within and can only be understood within a specific context) and strategic (involving “the production of expedient schemes that structure an environment in such a way that the environment appears to be the source of the schemes and their values”)³⁵ there would have needed to have been an extremely high degree of shared circumstances and values between Jewish and Christian communities well into the second and third centuries. Whether this was the case is open to debate. For some time, scholars have believed that Christians and Jews went their separate ways in the early to mid-second century, after which the relationship was primarily antagonistic.³⁶ More recently, a higher level of interaction and interrelationship between Christians and Jews has been postulated,³⁷ which could bolster Bolderson’s theory. Still, one wonders whether Bradshaw is not correct when he asserts that “after the close of the first century, liturgical influence from Judaism to a now predominantly Gentile Church is likely to have been relatively marginal.”³⁸ It is difficult to imagine that late second-century Jews and Christians had so much in common that each would have independently developed the same ritual.

³⁴ Bolderson, “The Second Postbaptismal Anointing,” 120.

³⁵ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 140.

³⁶ Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 229-266.

³⁷ See Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 49-71; and Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 13-36.

³⁸ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 2nd ed., 33.

Bolderson's second building block is the belief that Hippolytus of Rome authored the rite. Hippolytan authorship is important to Bolderson because of the general familiarity with and positive attitude toward Jewish practice found in other writings of Hippolytus.³⁹ Unfortunately, as discussed earlier, there appears to be only a slim possibility that Hippolytus was the author of the *Apostolic Tradition*.⁴⁰ But, even if some other anonymous Christian did have a knowledge of and positive regard toward Jewish liturgical practice such that he borrowed the idea of the episcopal postbaptismal anointing from it, this connection does not answer the larger questions of why this extra rite for the impartation of the Holy Spirit was introduced and why it was reserved for the bishop. We know from Tertullian that the practice of a postbaptismal anointing followed by handlaying for the impartation of the Holy Spirit was commonly practiced.⁴¹ Religious leaders developed or adopted a new ritual when it had meaning to its participants and served a purpose.⁴² Bolderson seems to imply that the rite was borrowed from Judaism because of an underlying deeply rooted quality of Christianity that resonated compellingly with contemporary Jewish practice. It could be so, but the case has not yet been made.

A more influential theory over the last two decades is one propounded by Aidan Kavanagh. He postulates that the episcopal handlaying, prayer, and

³⁹ Bolderson, "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing," 102-107.

⁴⁰ See Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, 2nd ed., 90-92.

⁴¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 7-8.

⁴² Doubtless, at one time or another, people in power have introduced rituals for trivial reasons—because they 'liked' them or to fill a specific amount of time—but rituals with staying power

consignation in the *Apostolic Tradition* was a *missa*—a liturgical dismissal. Indeed, Paul Turner goes so far as to describe Kavanagh’s *Confirmation: Origins and Reform* as possibly the most consequential book on the subject of confirmation since Martin Luther’s *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* in which Luther rejected confirmation’s place as one of the sacraments.⁴³ Turner’s verdict is striking, not least because in Kavanagh’s hands, confirmation loses much of its putative liturgical significance. According to Kavanagh, the episcopal anointing was merely a liturgical formula without any pneumatological significance intended to end the baptism service and create a transition to the Easter Sunday celebration of communion. In that case, the baptism ceremony itself, ending with the first anointing by the priest, was a unified initiatory whole and the importance given to the rite of confirmation that developed out of the bishop’s postbaptismal activities was, from the perspective of the modern practice of confirmation, a mistake. Kavanagh describes his ‘discovery’ as something of an epiphany:

Scales fell from my eyes, so to speak, and I began to see for the first time how numerous and important were the instances of dismissal during the growth of the liturgy in both east and west for at least the first six centuries. The dismissals were a central part of liturgical protocol, the formal way by which whole services, and parts of services ended. . . . Their effect was to cause the members of the liturgical assembly either in whole or in part to redeploy themselves inside the building or to leave it altogether.⁴⁴

have had more substantial motivations.

⁴³ Paul Turner, “The Origins of Confirmation: An Analysis of Aidan Kavanagh’s Hypothesis,” *Worship* 65 (1991): 320. Turner ultimately rejects Kavanagh’s hypothesis (see pages 333-336), but for theological and liturgical reasons he is sympathetic with its modern ramifications.

⁴⁴ Kavanagh, “The Origins and Reform of Confirmation,” 9. For a full examination of his understanding of dismissals, see chapter one, “The Place and Function of Liturgical

According to Kavanagh, this *missa* was performed by a bishop because of the solemnity of the occasion and because, as the climactic act of incorporation within the baptismal liturgy, it was fitting that a bishop should be the one to welcome the neophyte into the fellowship of the church. Kavanagh's interpretation makes good sense of the bishop's role in the ceremony—a *missa* was the business of a bishop and there are a number of examples of prohibitions against anyone else performing them⁴⁵—plus it provides a sound explanation for the earliest variant of the episcopal prayer. In the Verona version of the *Apostolic Tradition*, a translation from the original Greek into Latin made around A.D. 350, the episcopal prayer does not contain an invocation of the Holy Spirit (called an epiclesis).⁴⁶ It reads:

Lord God, who made these [neophytes] worthy of deserving the forgiveness of sins by the laver of regeneration of the Holy Spirit; send upon them your grace that they may serve you according to your will.

Note the significant difference in meaning between this and Dix's final translation:

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.⁴⁷

Dismissals," in Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, 3-32.

⁴⁵ Kavanagh, "Confirmation: A Suggestion From Structure," 391; idem, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, 15-16.

⁴⁶ Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, 47-48, 59.

⁴⁷ *Apostolic Tradition*, 22.1, in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, 38 (emphasis added to highlight differences). See also the discussion of these textual variations in Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, 139-142.

The former is a prayer that affirms the activity of the Holy Spirit in baptism; the latter shifts the emphasis on the Spirit to a separate part of the ritual after the baptism. Kavanagh assumes that the epiclesis was inserted sometime between the translation into Latin c. 350 and 416 when Innocent sent his letter to Decentius.⁴⁸ As to the original form of the *Apostolic Tradition*, he concludes, “confirmation [meaning a special rite for the impartation of the Holy Spirit] is not there.”⁴⁹

The difficulty with Kavanagh’s position is that it does not take into account non-liturgical evidence that is contrary to his conclusion. Tertullian and Cyprian, two sources roughly contemporary with the early third-century *Apostolic Tradition*, clearly describe postbaptismal activities accompanied by prayer for the impartation of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ Tertullian, in defending the value of the physical body, describes the baptism ceremony in this way:

The flesh, indeed, is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated, the flesh is signed (with the cross), that the soul too may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands, that the soul also may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may fatten on its God.⁵¹

According to a letter from Cyprian,

Those who are baptized in the Church are presented to the appointed leaders of the Church, and by our prayer and the

⁴⁸ Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, 59. Regarding Innocent’s letter, see above, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, 51.

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 8; idem, *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1957), 545-595; Cyprian, *Epistles*, 73.

⁵¹ Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 551.

imposition of our hands they receive the Holy Spirit and are made perfect with the Lord's seal.⁵²

These post baptismal activities are not examples of *missae*; rather they are an integral part of the baptism ceremony. Moreover, Cyprian specifies that neophytes were brought to a bishop for this prayer. In spite of this, in his most complete work, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, Kavanagh dismisses out of hand the data from Tertullian and Cyprian because they are not "liturgical texts."⁵³ In his response to an article by Paul Turner which raised this concern, Kavanagh again did not address this material. Instead he wrote,

The *origins* of confirmation cannot dependably be determined by theological reflection, biblical exegesis (even of Acts 8), or catechetics. Its origins can only be discerned through structural and comparative analysis of the rite itself, after which these other approaches may or may not be helpful. As in any other research procedure, there come times when the evidence runs out and one must risk well-informed hypotheses that plausibly bridge the gaps.⁵⁴

Surely Kavanagh is correct that biblical exegesis, theological reflection and catechetics do not hold the answer to the origins of catechism. However, neither can liturgies alone supply the whole answer, even for liturgical questions. First of all, as he points out, there are gaps in the evidence. Secondly, liturgy is much more than the sum of its ritual behavior. Liturgy is developed in an

⁵² Cyprian, *Epistles*, 73.9, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 47, 59.

⁵³ He also dismisses later references to such an invocation of the Spirit from Augustine and Ambrose of Milan. See Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, 53.

⁵⁴ Aidan Kavanagh, "Response" to Paul Turner, "The Origins of Confirmation: An Analysis of Aidan Kavanagh's Hypothesis," *Worship* 65 (1991): 337. Turner raises this question on pages 334-335. Bolderson also offers a critique of Kavanagh, see "The Second Postbaptismal Anointing," 115-135.

historical context, the study of which can enrich and at times must shape one's understanding of the meaning of liturgical acts.

In the final analysis, Kavanagh may be both right and wrong. The postbaptismal anointing in the *Apostolic Tradition* may have been a *missa*. However, in his response to Paul Turner's criticism that not enough is known about *missae* to determine whether the *Apostolic Tradition* fits a pattern or not, Kavanagh defines a *missa* quite broadly:

I remain convinced that the formal *missa* structure of prayer and handlaying during the first five or six centuries is definite no matter whether it was called *missa* or *impositio manuum* or inclination prayer or the blessing of penance; so definite indeed that mere allusion to it was enough for contemporaries to know what was meant.⁵⁵

As we will see, in reference to Cyprian and the rebaptism controversy, this is very likely, but by placing the *missa* in this larger context Kavanagh undermines his conclusion that the episcopal handlaying and anointing in the *Apostolic Tradition* was not originally understood to be a rite for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Cyprian clearly saw a continuity of meaning between both episcopal functions—postbaptismal handlaying and the reconciliation of penitents—and understood them both as acts that imparted the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, to interpret the *missa* in the *Apostolic Tradition* (if it was a *missa*) as a relatively insignificant rite, rather than a key part of the initiatory process, leaves unanswered the question of why it came to be reserved for the bishop

⁵⁵ Kavanagh, "Response," 338. The question of *missae* takes up the bulk of Turner's article, "Analysis of Aidan Kavanagh's Hypothesis."

alone and why the practice was maintained as the church grew and increasingly fewer Christians had access to a bishop. From a theological and liturgical perspective, insisting on a second episcopal anointing did not make sense. It detracted from the initiatory centrality of baptism and thereby shifted the focus from Christ (in baptism) to the Holy Spirit (in the separate act of handlaying and anointing). This, at least, is the complaint of many modern practitioners of confirmation⁵⁶ who therefore try to argue that the episcopal postbaptismal anointing was not originally intended to have a level of importance that would allow it to compete liturgically with baptism. Nevertheless, this was the case. The episcopal postbaptismal anointing and handlaying had great significance to those who practiced it in the early church, a significance that the study of the liturgies alone does not explain. To understand the origins of confirmation one must also take into account the serious tensions and conflicts found within early Christianity and the important role of the bishop at the center of it all.

The Influence of Heterodox Sacramental Practices

One likely motivator of liturgical change was the practice of groups that would have been perceived as schismatic and heretical by the larger 'mainstream' wing of the Christian church. Nomenclature becomes a tricky issue when it comes to the many Christian groups present at the turn of the third century. There was a majority church that practiced a moderate sectarianism, attempted to maintain

⁵⁶ Kavanagh, Quinn, and Turner, for example, are all deeply concerned by this problem.

theological continuity with the Old Testament roots of Christianity, and resisted the eclectic and demiurgical approaches to religion that characterized the many Christian congregations commonly referred to as Gnostic.⁵⁷ This majority group has traditionally been referred to as ‘orthodox’ or ‘proto-orthodox’ and its rivals as ‘heterodox’ and ‘schismatic’—terminology that Irenaeus or Tertullian⁵⁸ would certainly have approved of at the time and that, despite its potentially prejudicial implications, makes sense in light of this larger movement’s eventual conversion of Constantine and its position as both definer and defender of orthodoxy in the fourth century and beyond. It is very important to bear in mind, however, that the situation was much more nuanced than the black-and-white picture portrayed by ‘orthodox’/‘heterodox’ terminology. The proto-orthodox movement was far from a unified whole. Over time and from place to place it experienced significant theological and liturgical variations and conflicts. Furthermore, heresiologists such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Epiphanius listed literally scores of schismatic groups *by name*. It would not be inaccurate to characterize the circumstances in which the practices contained in the *Apostolic Tradition* arose as something of a spiritual free enterprise zone, a relatively free-wheeling marketplace in which various

⁵⁷ The complexities and even contradictions seen within groups that are all termed “Gnostic” has led Michael A. 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 *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: an Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

⁵⁸ Although later, c. 208, Tertullian did in fact convert to one such schismatic group, the Montanists.

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 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 rival assembly led by a "viper of the Cainite heresy"⁵⁹ who disparaged water baptism. In this case, he does not provide any details as to its alternative practices, if any. What he does say is that they intended to "destroy the sacrament of water"⁶⁰ by means of their teaching that baptism is not necessary for salvation.⁶¹ Irenaeus, in his *Adversus Haereses*, describes a number of different movements with a variety of initiatory and salvific practices.⁶² Among them was a group or groups which completely rejected baptism by immersion.⁶³ Their practice was to anoint the initiate with a mixture of oil and water while reciting a formula similar to that used by the proto-orthodox Christians. Hippolytus, the purported author of the *Apostolic Tradition*, wrote of the Naassenes, a faction characterized as Gnostic which

⁵⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 1.

⁶⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 12

⁶¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 11-14.

⁶² Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1956), 307-567.

⁶³ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.4.

allegedly laid claim to a special spiritual status on the basis of a superior anointing. He quotes its members 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."⁶⁴ 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 evidence so far has come from proto-orthodox sources which are thus liable to exaggeration or misrepresentation in their description of schismatic groups. There is, however, corroborating evidence directly from a heterodox source, the *Gospel of Philip*, of which the only known copy was found in the Nag Hammadi collection.⁶⁵ *Philip* is a collection of sayings thought to have been gathered by an adherent to Valentinianism sometime around the year 200.⁶⁶ This anonymous

⁶⁴ Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, ed. Miroslav Marcovich, Patristische Texte Und Studien, vol. 25 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 5.9.22.

⁶⁵ The *Gospel of Philip* was found in codex 2, pages 51-86.

⁶⁶ 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.

editor drew widely from many sources, both heterodox and orthodox, leaving scholars to wonder whether *Philip* can be in any way interpreted as a coherent whole. Martha Lee Turner concludes that *Philip* was composed from several different sources with very little editorial attempt to make it into a coherent whole. For this reason, she warns that “only passages deriving from the same source should be used in conjunction with each other.”⁶⁷ Louis Painchaud, on the other hand, while conceding the difficulty of categorizing the work, argues for a greater degree of coherence and concludes that the editor had an overriding pedagogical intention.⁶⁸ In either case, the *Gospel of Philip* is useful here as direct evidence of schismatic groups who consciously reconfigured baptismal practices in favor of anointing. Clearly the editor was a Christian⁶⁹ and the rituals practiced by his heterodox sources were structurally close to orthodox rites.⁷⁰

In spite of these apparent similarities of practice, however, significant differences were present in the theological meanings and values that they attributed to baptism and chrism. In the *Apostolic Tradition*, for example,

⁶⁷ Turner, *The Gospel According to Philip*, 2. For a summary of her research on this question, see Martha Lee Turner, “On the Coherence of the *Gospel According to Philip*,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire, 223-50, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, no. 44 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997).

⁶⁸ Louis Painchaud, “La composition de l’Évangile selon Philippe (NH II,3): une analyse rhétorique,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers*, Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers, no. 35 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press), 35-66.

⁶⁹ The *Gospel of Philip* contains one of only two instances of the term “Christian” in the entire Nag Hammadi corpus. The other is in the *Testimony of Truth*.

⁷⁰ Elaine Pagels, “Ritual in the *Gospel of Philip*,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. John D. Turner and

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.”⁷¹ Other rituals were added so that some groups may have had as many as five initiatory sacraments—baptism, chrism, eucharist, redemption, and the bridal chamber.⁷² Furthermore, some of these other sacraments appear to have overshadowed baptism in terms of the importance given to them. 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.⁷³

It is necessary to baptize with two things—light and water. And light means chrism.⁷⁴

From the olive tree comes chrism; and from [chrism] comes resurrection.⁷⁵

Chrism has more authority than baptism.⁷⁶

Why this valuation of anointing over baptism? On the surface, baptism certainly had the longer pedigree—Jesus himself was baptized! The difficulty

Anne McGuire, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, no. 44 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 282.

⁷¹ *Gospel of Philip*, 64.22-24, in 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*, ed. Robert Pierce Casey (London: Christophers, 1934), 83.

⁷² See Pagels, “Ritual in the *Gospel of Philip*,” Eric Segelberg, “The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel According to Philip and Its Sacramental System,” *Numen* 7 (1960): 189-200; and John D. Turner, “Ritual in Gnosticism,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers*, Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers, no. 33 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press), 136-81.

⁷³ *Gospel of Philip*, 57.22-27, in Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* [emphasis mine].

⁷⁴ *Gospel of Philip*, 69.12-13.

⁷⁵ *Gospel of Philip*, 73.18, in Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*.

⁷⁶ *Gospel of Philip*, 74.12, in Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*.

here is our paucity of sources and inability to place them firmly in context. In the case of the *Gospel of Philip*, for example, we simply do not know the location, size, or exact time period of any group(s) to which the editor belonged. The same is true for the sources of most of the document. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that hints at three possible reasons why the author(s) gave anointing priority over baptism. First, it could be that the rejection of baptism was intended as a correction, or perhaps even a direct ideological assault, on the practices and, by extension, the authority of the larger orthodox movement.⁷⁷ The proto-orthodox church was closely identified with water baptism, so to attack baptism was undermine its foundational rite. Irenaeus surely saw it this way. He asserted that “this class of men have been instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God, and thus to a renunciation of the whole faith.”⁷⁸ However, one would expect Irenaeus and other mainstream heresiologists to have felt attacked, whether that was the actual intent or not. Passages from the *Gospel of Philip* suggest that the motives for rejecting baptism may have been more subtle and less directly hostile. One passage hints that it was the association of baptism with death, a motif that goes all the way back to the Apostle Paul,⁷⁹ that caused them to de-emphasize

⁷⁷ My thinking along this line was helped along greatly by Michael Philip Penn, “Praxis As Polemic: The Valentinian Chrism Ritual” (Unpublished paper, Duke University, 1995).

⁷⁸ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 345.

⁷⁹ 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 raised him from the dead” (NRSV).

baptism. Note the concern to disassociate baptism from death in the following passage:

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.⁸⁰

There is finally 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 a rival church. We have already looked at a passage that states flatly, "Chrism has more authority than baptism," but note in a fuller reading of the passage 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).⁸¹

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, made a strong positive claim for those who practiced it. In the same way that Hippolytus's Naassenes could claim spiritual superiority because they practiced an anointing like David's and not like

⁸⁰ *Gospel of Philip*, 77.7-12

⁸¹ *Gospel of Philip*, 74.12-22, in Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*.

Saul's,⁸² 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.⁸³ Rather than establishing an identity separate from the larger mainstream church by denying the importance of apostolic succession, the rival movement represented in this portion of the *Gospel of Philip* asserted its preeminence with 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 situation in which “every [heretic] hands it [tradition regarding salvation] down just as his own inclination prompts”⁸⁴ 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.”⁸⁵ 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

⁸² Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, 5.9.22.

⁸³ See Turner, *The Gospel According to Philip*, 219-221.

⁸⁴ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.1.

⁸⁵ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.21.5.

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.⁸⁶

Given these circumstances it is very possible that the episcopal postbaptismal anointing came about as part of the mainline church’s response to what it perceived as heretical threat.⁸⁷ 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 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

⁸⁶ I am indebted to MacMullen, “Two Types of Conversion,” for this notion that different classes of people would have been attracted to Christianity for different reasons.

⁸⁷ 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 denied this possibility (Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, xxxix). Both men had serious theological concerns that colored their views. Lampe believed 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 believed 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

ritual sphere of the bishop and thereby bringing episcopal authority to bear over the contested liturgical matter. Whether, in the minds of those who designed the rite, this was done by adding an anointing with oil and a prayer for the reception of the Holy Spirit to the episcopal *missa*, as Kavanagh's hypothesis would suggest, or whether it was done by insisting that a bishop should have a hand in the final anointing of the baptism ceremony, the result was the same. Through the placement of the anointing in the ceremony, through the spoken words that accompanied it, and through the status of the person who performed 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.⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹ Therefore, the decision to make

their sacramental repertoire.

⁸⁸ 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 schismatic movement (in his case, the Montanists), is that they were numerically significant and potentially influential. Unfortunately hard data is not available.

⁸⁹ For a very helpful discussion of the relationship of power and ritual, see Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 83-85; 197-223.

a second postbaptismal anointing the exclusive prerogative of the bishop—and the remarkable perdurability of the practice thereafter—indicates the degree to which all the participants—not just the bishops but also the priests who performed the bulk of the ceremony and the people who were baptized—valued the bishops’ continued involvement in the baptism ceremony.

The difficulty of this thesis—that the postbaptismal episcopal anointing and handlaying received much of its impetus from schismatic challenge—is that it is difficult to prove conclusively. It is a supposition based on an understanding of the general circumstances under which the practice arose, an awareness of the specific threat that Gnostic Christianity represented to the proto-orthodox movement, and some basic assumptions about how ritual develops. Support for the notion that this sort of thing was occurring at the time—that the thinking and practice of the proto-orthodox church was sometimes shaped by Gnostic teaching—can be found in recent research by Judith Kovacs, in which she argues that the exegesis of the followers of Valentinus influenced both Clement of Alexandria’s and Origen’s interpretation of certain Pauline passages.⁹⁰ Additional support may be found in a different, though certainly not unrelated, controversy which can help illuminate the important role of the bishop in baptism and the impartation of the Holy Spirit.

⁹⁰ Judith Kovacs, “Echoes of Valentinian Exegesis in Clement of Alexandria and Origen: The Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3,” in *Origeniana octava*, ed. Lorenzo Perrone (Leeven, Holland: Peeters, (forthcoming)).

Cyprian of Carthage and the Rebaptism Controversy

The important role of the bishop in the early church as spiritual and administrative leader, as gatekeeper, and as conveyer of the Holy Spirit is seen clearly in the 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 257.⁹¹ In the wake of the Decian persecution, the church in the West was left with a set of complicated circumstances having to do, on the one hand, with policies concerning the readmittance of the lapsed and, on the other, with the rigorist schism begun by Novatian. However, because of the different social and religious circumstances faced by Rome and Carthage, Stephen and Cyprian chose different approaches to resolve these issues. Eventually this led to conflict between Cyprian and Stephen, and the (mostly regional) factions who supported them, over, among other things, the question of whether those who had received baptism by 'heretics' needed to be rebaptized in order to join the larger catholic church.⁹² Stephen, arguing for tradition, was willing to accept the validity of heretical baptism, if it was performed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He wrote, "And so, in the case of those who may come to you from any heresy whatsoever, let there be no innovation beyond

⁹¹ 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 Journal* 19 (1978): 123-44; S. G. Hall, "Stephen I of Rome and the One Baptism," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 17 pt. 2 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 796-98; and Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 471.

⁹² For a full explanation of the conflict that takes all the various circumstantial factors into account, see Burns, "On Rebaptism," 369-379.

what has been handed down: hands are to be laid on them in penitence.”⁹³ Cyprian, following an African tradition that officially went back to a council only twenty years earlier under Bishop Agrippinus, ⁹⁴ was appalled at this approach and insisted that they needed to be rebaptized.⁹⁵ He 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.⁹⁶ 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?⁹⁷

On this point Cyprian has been characterized as not recognizing the difference between the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands for the reconciliation of penitents. Maurice Bévenot accuses him of being “confused,”⁹⁸ while J. Patout Burns says that “he did not clearly understand Stephen’s reception of schismatic converts as penitents rather than

⁹³ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 74.1, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 47, 70. This is a quote of Stephen by Cyprian. No actual writings by Stephen are available.

⁹⁴ See Cyprian, *Epistles*, 71.4, 73.3. In 256 Cyprian called a council of his own that reaffirmed the stance in favor of rebaptism.

⁹⁵ 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.

⁹⁶ 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.

⁹⁷ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 69.11, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 47, 40. See also *Epistles*, 72.1, 73.6, 73.9, 74.5.

⁹⁸ Bévenot, “Cyprian’s Platform in the Rebaptism Controversy,” 126.

inadequately baptized converts.”⁹⁹ This conclusion, that Cyprian was confused, is not fully satisfying. First of all, as a general rule it seems wise not to conclude, without very compelling evidence, that we understand a particular historical circumstance better than someone like Cyprian who was actually there. Secondly, Cyprian did recognize differences between these acts. In the case of baptized individuals who left the catholic church to join a schismatic group, and then repented and sought readmission, Cyprian said, “it is sufficient to lay hands on them in penitence.”¹⁰⁰ Finally, Cyprian did understand that what Stephen intended was for “hands . . . to be laid on them in penitence.”¹⁰¹

So what is the source of Cyprian’s repeated contention that Stephen’s handlaying was for the reception of the Holy Spirit? There are two possibilities. The first is that, theologically, Cyprian simply could not accept the notion that these heretics were ‘penitents’ rather than ‘converts.’ His belief that these heretical groups did not have the Holy Spirit left him with no other way to understand, and therefore to speak of, Stephen’s handlaying except as an impartation of the Spirit. The weakness here is that Stephen and his supporters could simply have responded, “But that is not what we intend by our handlaying.” In the end, this interpretation, which is completely circumstantial

⁹⁹ Burns, “On Rebaptism,” 392-393, see also 398. Burns does not cite Bévenot. Apparently they came to the same conclusion separately.

¹⁰⁰ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 71.2, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 47, 50. Burns does note this (“On Rebaptism,” 393, n. 176), but still concludes that Cyprian was confused.

¹⁰¹ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 74.1, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 47, 70.

in nature, portrays Cyprian as incredibly stubborn rather than confused.¹⁰² A second and more likely possibility is that some from Stephen's own camp thought of this episcopal handlaying on repentant heretics as an instance of the impartation of the Holy Spirit. Evidence for this possibility is found in an anonymous treatise entitled *De Rebaptismate* which Quasten attributes to an African prelate writing after Cyprian's council in 256 and before his death.¹⁰³ The writer of this treatise, just as Cyprian did, framed the question in a manner that made a clear distinction between water baptism and an episcopal laying on of hands for the impartation of the Holy Spirit:

The point is whether, according to the most ancient custom and ecclesiastical tradition, it would suffice, after that baptism which they have received outside the Church indeed, but still in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, that only hands should be laid upon them by the bishop *for the reception of the Holy Spirit*, and this imposition of hands would afford them the renewed and perfected seal of faith; or whether, indeed, a repetition of baptism would be necessary for them.¹⁰⁴

The Council of Arles, which finally decided the matter in 314, sided with Stephen by ruling that converts from heresies who had been baptized according to a Trinitarian formula only needed the laying on of hands. Interestingly, in its ruling, the council used the same terminology found in *De Rebaptismate*, saying that hands should be placed on them "in order that they might receive the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁵ This sounds exactly like Cyprian's understanding of what Stephen's

¹⁰² One wonders if he would have seen this as an improvement.

¹⁰³ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1953-1962), vol. 2, 368.

¹⁰⁴ *De Rebaptismate*, 1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, 667 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁵ *First Council of Arles (Concilium Arelatense I)*, canon 8, in Martinez Diez, *Concilios Galos, Concilios Hispanos: Primera Parte*, 19: "Ut accipiant Spiritum Sanctum."

handlaying signified. Thus, Cyprian was not confused; there were those even among his opposition who believed that laying hands on repentant heretics was for the impartation of the Holy Spirit.

What light does this material shed on the development of confirmation? First, 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.¹⁰⁶ 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. Origen complained that some bishops, especially those in large cities, abused their power “like tyrants, imitating officials and terrorizing the poor.”¹⁰⁷ The power of all bishops would only increase in the fourth century after the conversion of Constantine, and this even more so in the West after the capital of the empire moved to Constantinople.¹⁰⁸ The rebaptism controversy focused attention on the role of the bishop as gatekeeper, not only defining the ideological borders of his flock, but also determining on an individual basis who could enter and who could not. Cyprian was head of a very troubled and divided African church. Still *Epistle*

¹⁰⁶ See Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 403-405.

¹⁰⁷ Origen, *Matthew*, 8.8, cited in Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 405.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, the broad role and impact of a bishop like Ambrose of Milan in the late fourth century or Caesarius of Arles in the sixth, in Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), ch. 3-7; and William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: the Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 88-110.

72, sent to Stephen from a council called by Cyprian, demonstrates that under these circumstances the clergy who were in his camp were quick to support his theological position and to bolster his authority. They concluded their letter by subtly reserving the right for Cyprian to insist on the African practice of rebaptism without necessarily “rupturing the bonds of peace and harmony” with Stephen. They insisted that “every appointed leader has in his government of the Church the freedom to exercise his own will and judgment, while having one day to render an account of his conduct to the Lord.”¹⁰⁹ This great concern to maintain the honor and power of bishops is repeatedly seen during this time period. Even a cursory glance through the records of early church councils reveals that the focus on preserving the authority of bishops, by reserving for them alone activities like ordination, ‘perfecting’ baptism, reconciling penitents, making chrism, etc. was a constantly reoccurring theme. For example, the net effect of the Council of Elvira (traditionally dated c. 306), one of the earliest large church councils, strengthened episcopal authority by insisting that bishops maintain high standards of morality,¹¹⁰ by insuring that bishops had the final hand in initiation,¹¹¹ and by demanding that all bishops respect the

¹⁰⁹ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 72.3, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 47, 54.

¹¹⁰ Council of Elvira, canons 18, 19, 27, 28, 33, in Martinez Diez, *Concilios Galos, Concilios Hispanos: Primera Parte*.

¹¹¹ Council of Elvira, canons 38, 77, in Martinez Diez, *Concilios Galos, Concilios Hispanos: Primera Parte*.

disciplinary decisions of others by never readmitting someone to communion who had been denied communion by another bishop.¹¹²

Second, and even more specifically, the rebaptism controversy highlights the commonly perceived role of the bishop as a conduit of the Holy Spirit. Just as in the *Apostolic Tradition* and in canons previously discussed from western church councils in Elvira, Riez, Arles, and Orange, 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 that bishops had a unique ability to impart the Holy Spirit. This belief was so strong that the Council of Elvira was faced with the need to reassure Christians as to the fate of those 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.¹¹³

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 widespread infant baptism made it impossible for a bishop to be consistently present to perform the postbaptismal rite. The problem was

¹¹² Council of Elvira, canon 53, in Martinez Diez, *Concilios Galos, Concilios Hispanos: Primera Parte*.

¹¹³ Council of Elvira, canon 77, translated in Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: the Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira*, 135.

addressed in an early sixth century letter when 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.¹¹⁴ 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 involvement in baptism as something extra and not completely necessary. But for Cyprian and his third-century supporters 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.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, during the discussion at an African council led by Cyprian in 256, one participant described baptism and episcopal handlaying as separate rites, saying that repentant heretics “need to be born again into the catholic church by both sacraments.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *Letter of John the Deacon*, 14, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 89.

¹¹⁵ Cyprian, *Epistles*, 73.9, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, no. 47, 59.

¹¹⁶ *Sententiae episcoporum numero lxxxvii*, 5, CSEL, vol. 3.1, 439: “Cum manifestum sit utroque sacramento debere eos renasci in ecclesia catholica.”

Chapter 4: Summary of the Beginnings of Confirmation

Confirmation, as a rite separate from baptism, was developed out of the important role of the bishop in the early church, a circumstance that, especially in the West, 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. The evidence also indicates that there was some degree of fluidity in the thinking of second and early third-century Christians as to when, i.e. during which particular rite, the impartation of the Spirit took place. We have seen postbaptismal handlaying, *missae*, and ceremonies for the reconciliation of penitents all portrayed as involving the reception of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the sharp liturgical line that some like Aidan Kavanagh wish to draw between these various rites—the many types of episcopal blessing on the one hand, and the episcopal postbaptismal anointing and handlaying that became confirmation on the other—was not present in the minds of these early practitioners. With respect to the baptismal liturgy in particular, there was not complete consistency in how the notion of bishop as imparter of the Holy Spirit was understood; the liturgical evidence reveals a fair degree of variation of practice both regionally and over time. In most of the West—Gaul, Spain and North Africa—it usually took the form of handlaying alone. In Rome, as reflected in the *Apostolic Tradition*, a second postbaptismal anointing was added. This practice is often hailed as the beginning of the sacrament of confirmation

because, as we will see in part two, it is the Roman liturgy that was picked up by the Franks and eventually became the norm throughout Europe. However, I have tried to show that, rather than anointing, handlaying, or any specific ritual activity, it was the centrality of bishops in the early church, coupled with a desire to enhance episcopal power in the face of a variety of competing groups, that was the dominating factor in the creation of confirmation.

This is not to say that the choice of ritual activities, anointing in particular, was unimportant. Anointing had a rich vocabulary of liturgical meaning in both the Jewish and Christian traditions and it came to be used for a variety of functions in early Christian liturgy. Although this positive background may have disposed the church toward an episcopal anointing, the question as to why the second postbaptismal anointing was added in the *Apostolic Tradition* is still open. Clearly it was not an inevitable liturgical development. Nor is the argument that it was drawn from contemporary Jewish practice convincing. Rather, it appears 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 second anointing in its 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 bolster its position symbolically 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. In the following centuries, as we will see, the circumstances that created confirmation changed, as circumstances are wont to do. Still, in the midst of that change confirmation held its value as an important and legitimate sacrament. It is the 'unnecessary' quality of confirmation that enabled Christians to give it continued meaning by creatively adapting it, liturgically and theologically, to a new set of circumstances.

PART TWO

**“Surely This Can Only Be Done by Bishops”:
Confirmation in the Early Middle Ages**

Part one began with an excerpt from Innocent I, an early fifth-century Bishop of Rome who wrote: “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.”¹ Two assertions are apparent in this statement: first, Innocent was saying that in some special way beyond what occurs in baptism itself, the Holy Spirit is given to newly baptized Christians through a postbaptismal rite of anointing; and second, that this rite can only be performed by a bishop. These two claims serve well to introduce the early medieval practice of the sacrament of confirmation, as the rite would come to be called. Although there was significant regional variation throughout the Frankish realm as to how they performed the rite, it is evident that bishops took their initiatory responsibilities seriously. Or more accurately, it is evident that those Frankish bishops who took their spiritual responsibilities seriously did so with their initiatory role of imparting the Holy Spirit as well.² As we will see, it is also evident that the rite was taken seriously by its recipients, though not always in the way or for the reasons that serious-minded bishops might have

¹ Innocent I, *Epistles*, 25.6, in PL, vol. 20, 551; translation from Ellard, “How Fifth-Century Rome Administered Sacraments,” 7, also available in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 78.

² Not all Frankish bishops demonstrated a serious interest in fulfilling the spiritual aspects of their office. For a good description of the combination of politics, power, and piety that went into the election and reign of a Merovingian bishop, see I. N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London: Longman, 1994), 71-87.

wished. Common folk valued confirmation for more than its presumed spiritual benefit. It served as a way to associate oneself with the prestige and honor of a bishop, on the one hand, and to create important kinship ties through sponsorship, on the other. One of the primary accoutrements of confirmation, holy chrism, was also valued for its putative magical power.

Chapter 5: Episcopal Confirmation Among the Carolingians

Carolingian Liturgical Reform and the Imposition of the Roman Rite

First and foremost, confirmation was an exercise of the authority and an aspect of the pastoral care of a Frankish bishop in the eighth and ninth centuries, and the exclusivity of episcopal confirmation heightened the honor of bishops and of the Roman church just as it had in the fifth century when Innocent I insisted on it. Thus both topics, proper attention to the rite of confirmation and the proper fulfillment of the episcopal office, arose repeatedly in the church reform efforts begun by the Carolingians. In 742, St Boniface (c. 675-754), a very well connected Anglo-Saxon missionary to the continent, wrote to Pope Zacharias informing him that Carloman, sub-king of the Franks in the eastern parts of the kingdom (741-747), wanted to restore ecclesiastical discipline in the regions under his control. Boniface saw this as an extremely positive and necessary turn of events, since according to his testimony, the Frankish church was in a severe state of disarray; it had no archbishop, was characterized by immoral clergy at all levels, and had not held a synod for over eighty years.¹ Of course, laxity on the level of leadership was just one of Boniface's concerns, he had also been long troubled by the many liturgical irregularities he found among the Franks. A decade earlier, in the early 730s, Pope Gregory III (731-741) had

¹ MGH Epist III, 299-300. Although this was not completely accurate—there had been a synod within eighty years—the letter demonstrates Boniface's own bleak assessment of the Frankish church. See J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 107.

responded to Boniface's concerns with the command, "that those who are uncertain whether they have been baptized or not and those who were baptized by a priest who also sacrificed to Jupiter and who ate of sacrificial food are to be baptized [again]."² In 739, however, Gregory found himself writing again on the same subject, this time to constrain Boniface's zeal for ritualistic correctness. This letter from Gregory indicated that improper pronunciation of the baptismal formula was not sufficient grounds to call for rebaptism. He ordered that so long as the Trinity had been invoked at baptism, neophytes "should be confirmed with the sacred chrism and the laying on of hands."³ Apparently Boniface was not completely convinced by Gregory's letter, because in 746 Pope Zacharias (741-752) chastised him for rebaptizing Christians who had been baptized with the incorrect formula "*Baptizo te in nomine patria et filia et spiritus sancti.*"⁴

Given his temperament and concern for propriety, it must have been with great satisfaction on the part of Boniface that in April 742 a long awaited reform synod was held. A surviving capitulary from Carloman promulgated the results, which included a reorganization of the church under the authority of regional bishops. Among other things, it named Boniface as archbishop,⁵ asserted the need for all Christians to be confirmed, and affirmed the exclusive authority of

² MGH Epist III, 279; translation from Ephraim Emerton, trans., *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 58.

³ MGH Epist III, 294; translation from Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, 73.

⁴ MGH Epist III, 336; translation from Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, 122-123 (emphasis mine).

bishops to administer that rite of confirmation, saying, “Whenever, according to canon law, the bishop shall travel around a parish in order to confirm the people, the priest shall always be prepared to support the bishop by gathering and assisting the people there who need to be confirmed.”⁶

Two years later Carloman’s brother, Pepin III the Short (741-768), held a similar synod over his territories in the west. Those present declared their adherence to the Catholic faith according to the Council of Nicea, established bishops, and named two archbishops.⁷ Both these synods affirmed the authority of a bishop within his diocese and established lines of accountability down to the parish level. For instance, the synod under Carloman stated:

We also decree, according to the canons, that every priest dwelling in a parish be subject [Pepin’s synod added “obedient”] to the bishop in whose parish he may be living. And always in Lent he shall return and offer an account and report of his ministry concerning baptism, the catholic faith, and the prayers and order of masses.⁸

Thus by 751, when Pepin staged his coup d’état and was anointed king by Boniface himself, liturgical reform in terms of liturgical uniformity and utilization of the Roman rites was well underway. This process would continue

⁵ MGH Capit I, 24.

⁶ MGH Capit I, 25: “Et quandocumque iure canonico episcopus circumeat parrochiam populos ad confirmandos, presbiter semper paratus sit ad suscipiendum episcopum cum collectione et adiutorio populi qui ibi confirmari debet.”

⁷ MGH Capit I, 28f.

⁸ MGH Capit I, 25: “Decrevimus quoque secundum canones, ut unusquisque presbiter in parrochia habitans episcopo subiectus sit illi in cuius parrochia habitet, et semper in quadragesima rationem et ordinem ministerii sui, sive de baptismo sive de fide catholica sive de precibus et ordine missarum, episcopo reddat et ostendat.” The parallel statement under Pepin III is MGH Capit I, 29.

throughout the reign of Pepin and his son Charlemagne, and would come to be identified as a distinctive program of the new Carolingian dynasty. In 789, when Charlemagne issued a sweeping *Admonitio generalis* on church reform, one can sense his desire to persist in a reform effort that was integrally tied to his dynastic identity—and once again, proper liturgy consistent with Roman practice and episcopal authority were two of the primary concerns. Regarding the performance of the liturgy, Charlemagne wrote:

To all clerics: That they should learn the Roman chant thoroughly, and employ it in the proper manner at the night Office and the day Office [which included the Mass], just as our royal father, King Pepin, decreed when he suppressed the Frankish chant, out of unanimity with the Holy See and peaceful concord in the Church of God.⁹

The *Admonitio generalis* also contained eighty-two chapters that affirmed the power of archbishops and bishops and detailed their role in ordination, excommunication, ecclesiastical legislation, and the establishment of churches.¹⁰ Still, although stabilizing an effective episcopal hierarchy was a critical element of these reforms,¹¹ it would be misleading to speak only of authority, for these documents also placed a strong emphasis on episcopal responsibility.

⁹ MGH Capit I, 61; translation by Gerald Ellard, *Master Alcuin, Liturgist* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956), 19. Because of this, Gerald Ellard calls 789, “Year One of Complete Liturgical Uniformity” (Ellard, *Master Alcuin*, 72), but as we will see, this designation is overly optimistic given the distinct lack of uniformity that would still be present two decades later in the response of Charlemagne’s archbishops to his Circular Letter.

¹⁰ MGH Capit I, 52f. The first sixty articles of the *Admonitio Generalis*, having to do with the behavior of clergy and the responsibility of bishops, were drawn from the *Dionysio-Hadriana*, a canonical collection made by Dionysius Exiguus in the early sixth century. Pope Hadrian I sent a copy to Charlemagne in 774 (Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 259).

¹¹ See Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, ch. 14, “Reform and Its Application.”

High among the responsibilities ascribed to these bishops was the performance of confirmation. Contemporary biographies indicate that faithfulness in fulfilling this duty was one of the critical features of a pious bishop; it was an act of loving pastoral care, and a sacrament that only he could perform. Willibald's biography of Boniface relates that soon after being consecrated bishop in 722 by Pope Gregory, Boniface returned to Hesse in order to confirm the many he had earlier converted.¹² Indeed, just over thirty years later in Frisia, having called a "holiday of confirmation of the neophytes and of the laying of hands upon the newly baptized,"¹³ Boniface was martyred while preparing to perform the rite of confirmation. Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*, the late seventh-century Bishop of Lindisfarne, includes among his many pious deeds the performance of confirmation. One pericope describes Cuthbert gathering a large number of people in a mountainous region to live in tents or makeshift shelters for two days of preaching and confirming—the medieval equivalent of a camp meeting. Bede wrote, "There the man of God had been preaching the word for two days to the crowds who flocked to hear him, and by the laying on of hands, had ministered the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who had lately been regenerated in Christ."¹⁴

¹² Willibald, *The Life of Saint Boniface*, trans. George W. Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), 62.

¹³ Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, in *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini*, ed. Wilhelm Levison (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1905), 49: "festum confirmationis neobitorum diem et nuper baptizatorum ab episcopo manus inpositionis et confirmationis;" translation adapted from Willibald, *Life of Saint Boniface*, 82.

¹⁴ Bede, *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, ch. 32, in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 259. An additional instance of confirmation

Like these saints, pious Frankish bishops were expected to travel throughout their regions preaching and confirming. But few bishops were as dedicated as Cuthbert or Boniface, as evidenced by the need for councils and synods to urge bishops repeatedly to make an annual trip around their diocese to oversee their priests and to perform confirmations.¹⁵ Additional regulations provided safeguards so that when the bishop did travel, he would not overburden the local priest with the need to provide hospitality for his large entourage.¹⁶ The latter reminds us of the great cost—in terms of time, money, and labor—that fell to everyone involved with the visitation of a powerful bishop and his retinue.

Charlemagne's Circular Letter and the Question of 'Disintegration'

Primo paganus and the Circular Letter

Near the end of his reign, the emperor Charlemagne sent a questionnaire, often called his Circular Letter (811/812), to each of his metropolitan bishops demanding a report on the initiatory practices in his archdiocese.¹⁷ This

can be found in ch. 29.

¹⁵ MGH Capit I, 25, 29, 45, 170, 209; MGH Capit II, 83, 405-6; MGH Conc II pt. 1, 47. This problem was not exclusive to the continent. In 743 Boniface wrote Cuthbert, the Archbishop of Canterbury, a letter commanding that all bishops make annual visitations to their dioceses (MGH Epist III, 351). Councils in Clonfert (747) and Chelsea (787) made similar commands (Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 80-81; also see Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 516).

¹⁶ MGH Capit I, 278; MGH Capit II, 83.

¹⁷ Three manuscripts survive. See "Epistola Caroli imperatoris ad Amalarium prior," in Amalarius of Metz, *Amalarii episcopi opera liturgica omnia*, ed. Jean Michel Hanssens, *Studi e Testi*, vol. 138 (Vatican City: Vatican Apostolic Library, 1948), 235-236; J. M. Heer, ed., *Ein karolingischer Missions-Katechismus: Ratio de catechizandis rudibus und die Tauf-Katecheses des Maxentius von Aquileia und eines Anonymus im Kodex Emmeram. XXXIII saec. IX*, *Biblische und Patristische Forschungen*, vol. 1 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1911), 89-90; and Friedrich

medieval equivalent of a form letter was characteristic of Charlemagne's desire to have full awareness and control of the affairs in his kingdom, and of his special interest in the institution of proper liturgical practices through the education of the clergy.¹⁸ It may also have been sent to set the stage for five major reform councils to be held in Arles, Chalon, Mainz, Reims and Tours in 813.¹⁹ For historians of confirmation it is of great interest, because it may be one of the earliest formal indications that at least some church leaders were beginning to perceive confirmation as a separate sacrament apart from baptism. At the heart of the Circular Letter is a document entitled *Primo paganus*, a point by point description of the various elements of the baptismal ceremony. The Carolingians attributed the authorship of *Primo paganus* to Alcuin (c. 740-804), the Archbishop of York who in 781 accepted the invitation to lead the scholarly activities taking place in Charlemagne's court, and on that basis it was widely copied and adapted.²⁰ It first appeared in two letters sent by Alcuin, one written to an otherwise unknown priest, Oduin, on the occasion of his ordination into

Wiegand, *Erzbischof Odilbert von Mailand über die Taufe*, Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche, vol. 4, no. 1 (Leipzig: NP, 1899. Reprinted Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1972), 23-25. For a side by side comparison of these, see Glenn C. J. Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism: A Study of Responses to the Circular Letter of 811/812* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999), 165-168. For the factors leading to the conclusion regarding the date of this letter, see Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism*, 2-3.

¹⁸ Susan A. Keefe concludes that Charlemagne's reform was not primarily motivated by a desire for conformity so much as for clerical education. See *Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), vol. 1, 5 and 154.

¹⁹ Susan A. Keefe, "Carolingian Baptismal Expositions: A Handlist of Tracts and Manuscripts," in *Carolingian Essays*, ed. Uta-Renate Blumenthal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 174. See also Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789-895* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 12; and Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 262-263.

²⁰ Keefe, "Carolingian Baptismal Expositions," 185, n. 1.

the priesthood,²¹ and the other written to a group of monks in Septimania whose bishop was Leidrad of Lyons.²² It is certainly not impossible that Alcuin was the author of *Primo paganus*, even though there is textual evidence that it existed first as a separate document that was inserted into these two letters, perhaps at a later time.²³ *Primo paganus* drew much of its material from John the Deacon's early sixth-century *Letter to Senarius* which is a fairly detailed explanation of Roman baptismal practice.²⁴ The apparent purpose for placing *Primo paganus* in these letters was to promote proper (Roman) liturgical practice. One finds this concern, intertwined with Alcuin's keen pastoral interest, at the beginning of his letter to Oduin (c. 798):

Because by the gift of divine grace I led you to it [the priesthood] with great labor so that worthily you might have the priestly honor, and [because] I desire that you elegantly minister that office [of baptism] in the house of the Lord, so I, through the gift of God, have diligently taken care to instruct you to a reasonable and full understanding of the order of the sacrament of baptism. I have wished to write briefly to you concerning the mysteries of the entire office so that you may know how necessary it is to neglect nothing, because each part was put in that service by the holy fathers.²⁵

²¹ Alcuin, "Epistle 134," in MGH Epist IV, 202-203. It is also translated in Ellard, *Master Alcuin*, 76-78.

²² Alcuin, "Epistle 137," in MGH Epist IV, 210-216.

²³ Keefe, "Carolingian Baptismal Expositions," 186, n. 9.

²⁴ Ellard, *Master Alcuin*, 75. For the letter, see John the Deacon, *Epistola ad Senarium*, 170-179; parts are translated in *The Letter of John the Deacon to Senarius*, in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 85-89.

²⁵ Alcuin, "Epistle 134," in MGH Epist IV, 202: "Et quia divina donante gratia ad id diutino te perduxit labore, ut sacerdotalis honoris dignus habearis, et utinam tam eliganter illud ministeres in domo Domini officium, quam te diligenter per donum Dei erudire curavi ad cognoscendum rationabilem sacri baptismatis ordinem, de mysteriis totius officii tibi breviter scribere volui, ut cognoscas, quam necessarium sit nihil pretermittere, quod a sanctis patribus institutum est in illo officio."

The remainder of the letter is the text of *Primo paganus*, which lists in order the various elements contained in the rite of baptism and provides a rationale for each. For example, the concluding statement which deals with the episcopal handlaying reads:

Finally, through the laying on of the hand by the high priest, he [the neophyte] receives the Spirit of the sevenfold grace so that he, who through grace was given eternal life in baptism, may be strengthened through the Holy Spirit to preach to others.²⁶

Alcuin clearly implies that this episcopal handlaying is done to impart the Holy Spirit, which in turn strengthens (*roborare*) the neophyte to “preach” to others, yet one wonders how Alcuin expected this preaching to work out in real life. Few priests, and virtually no laymen, had the authority or the skill to preach. Still, there were many parts of early ninth-century Germany where pagans and Christians lived side by side, and scholars have observed that Alcuin related being a good Christian example with preaching.²⁷ Perhaps, under these circumstances, Alcuin believed the impartation of the Holy Spirit would serve to empower all Christians to live the sort of pious life that would influence others toward this new religion.

Of course, bishops were often not present at baptisms, and confirmation, if it took place at all, would have occurred some time later. Nevertheless even when this was the case, the bishop’s authority was evident in the baptismal liturgy in

²⁶ Alcuin, “Epistle 134,” in MGH Epist IV, 203: “Novissime per inpositionem manus a summo sacerdote septiformis gratiae spiritum accipit, ut roboretur per Spiritum sanctum ad praedicandum aliis, qui fuit in baptismo per gratiam vitae donatus aeternae.”

²⁷ Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 524. Finnegan refers to H. B. Meyer, “Alcuin zwischen Antike und Mittelalter. Ein Kapitel frühmittelalterliche Frömmigkeitsgeschichte,” *Zeitschrift für*

the use of chrism (which only a bishop could consecrate) in the first postbaptismal anointing which was performed by the priest. Alcuin writes that the neophyte's "head is anointed with sacred chrism, and it is covered with a sacred cloth so that he will recognize himself, like an apostle, to carry the diadem of kingship and the dignity of priesthood."²⁸ Indeed, this vivid imagery of the neophyte as king and priest is not unrelated to the power of preaching that Alcuin linked to the impartation of the Spirit at the episcopal handlaying. Thus, even when absent, the bishop imparted an essential element into the baptismal ceremony and "maintained an indirect presence through the physical object of the blessed chrism."²⁹

The Absence of Confirmation in the Circular Letter

Charlemagne's Circular Letter adapted the sixteen points contained in *Primo paganus* into as many as 18 questions, depending on how one interprets the text.³⁰ Surprisingly, two significant elements in *Primo paganus* were not included in the Circular Letter: there was no question concerning the episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit, and there was no question about the actual act of immersion. The latter was probably due to the fact that baptismal protocol,

Katholische Theologie 81 (1959): 417.

²⁸ Alcuin, "Epistle 134," in MGH Epist IV, 202-203: "Tunc sacro chrismate caput perungitur et mystico tegitur velamine, ut intellegat se diadema regni et sacerdotii dignitatem portare iuxta apostolum: 'Vos estis genus regale et sacerdotale, offerentes vosmet Deo vivo hostiam sanctam ed Deo placentem.'"

²⁹ Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 260.

³⁰ It is possible to interpret the document to contain as few as 13 questions. For a discussion, see Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism*, 48. Byer also provides a side-by-side comparison of the two documents in appendix 2, 169-171.

specifically the inclusion of a three-fold immersion corresponding to a Trinitarian formula, was already firmly established among the Carolingians. This came about as the indirect result of a controversy over adoptionism. In the late sixth century, Catholic church leaders in Visigothic Spain had begun practicing single immersion baptism as a matter of principle, because the Arians had made the triple immersion a point of official dogma.³¹ Later in the eighth century, many Visigothic churchmen came to espouse an adoptionist Christology in response to local theological conflicts between Catholics.³² When Charlemagne and his court learned of this adoptionist heresy in 792/3 through a letter from a number of Spanish bishops,³³ they naturally associated adoptionism with the Spanish practice of single immersion baptism, even though they were actually unrelated. At the Council of Frankfurt in 794 and again at a Roman synod in 798 adoptionism was thoroughly repudiated. Alcuin in particular devoted a great deal of energy to writing against adoptionism³⁴ and to establishing the threefold immersion as proper baptismal practice.³⁵ Thus in 811/812 when the Circular Letter was composed, Charlemagne and his court

³¹ Ellard, *Master Alcuin*, 69.

³² See Gary B. Blumenshine, ed., *Liber Alcuini contra haeresim Felicis*, *Studi e Testi*, vol. 285. (Vatican City: Vatican Apostolic Library, 1980), 9-24. A full account of this controversy can be found in John C. Cavadini, *The Last Christology of the West: Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul, 785-820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

³³ See “Epistola Episcoporum Hispaniae ad Episcopos Franciae” and “Epistola Episcoporum Hispaniae ad Karolum Magnum” in MGH Conc II pt. 1, 111-121. The Carolingian bishops would have been at least aware of the controversy as early as about 785 when Pope Hadrian I sent a letter condemning the adoptionism being espoused in Spain. See Blumenshine, *Liber Alcuini*, 14; and Cavadini, *The Last Christology of the West*, 73.

³⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 210.

³⁵ Ellard, *Master Alcuin*, 69.

theologians were not likely to invite new input on what was considered a settled, yet still potentially volatile, subject.

Why the Circular Letter contained no question corresponding to the final point in *Primo paganus*, that of episcopal handlaying and the impartation of the Holy Spirit, is much more difficult to explain. There are four possible reasons. First, as with the threefold immersion, it is conceivable that episcopal handlaying was already a firmly established element in the initiation process and therefore needed no further discussion. This is not likely, however, because episcopal confirmation had simply not received the same sort of high profile ecclesiastical attention as had the immersion question. Nor is there evidence that the episcopal handlaying had any measure of controversy attached to it. Two other possible answers, that bishops close to the royal court were no longer laying hands on neophytes, or that it was being officially discouraged for some reason, are equally unlikely. The widespread use of *Primo paganus* and the many church councils that were commanding bishops to fulfill their duties in this regard³⁶ preclude that possibility. It is more likely that the episcopal activities were left out of the Circular Letter by mistake. After all, its author was part of a church that had included an episcopal handlaying as part of the baptismal liturgy for at least half a century. Two of the most influential theologians in the Carolingian court, Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus, included an episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit in their description of the initiation process, albeit

³⁶ See below, p. 205.

after a seven day delay. And as we shall see in the extant responses to the Circular Letter, many of Charlemagne's bishops indicated their conviction that the episcopal handlaying should be considered part of the baptism by including a discussion it, even though the Circular Letter had not asked such a question. Nonetheless, it is difficult to imagine that this whole problem was caused by a simple error on the part of a ninth-century member of Charlemagne's court. Like all arguments from silence, it is impossible to prove and therefore perilous to assert.

A final and perhaps more attractive possibility is that the writer of the Circular Letter perceived episcopal handlaying to be a fully contained rite separate from baptism. This is the conclusion drawn by J.D.C. Fisher and it provides some of the key evidence for his thesis that the early unified baptism ceremony "disintegrated" during the early Middle Ages into three rites: baptism, first communion, and confirmation.³⁷ The most specific evidence that this was the time when confirmation broke from baptism centers on writings from Alcuin and his star pupil Rabanus Maurus, later Abbot of Fulda (824-842) and Archbishop of Mainz (847-856), which indicate that a time period of seven days should pass between the ceremony of baptism and first communion and that of episcopal handlaying.³⁸ Indeed, in a letter to Charlemagne (A.D. 798) having to

³⁷ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, xi. Finnegan concurs with this conclusion; see "The Origins of Confirmation," 339.

³⁸ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 65.

do with the importance of symbolic numbers, Alcuin describes this delay as charged with spiritual meaning. He wrote:

For the number seven is known to correspond to the Holy Spirit in many places in the holy scripture. For instance, after seven weeks the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven in fiery tongues on the 120 believers. And we read of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in the prophet. And then finally, while the white garments are raised from those having been baptized, it is suitable for those who received the remission of all sins in baptism and are wont to stand as holy sacrifices through seven days in an angelic condition of purity and in the lights of heavenly brightness to receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the hand by the pontiff.³⁹

This passage in no way diminishes the importance of the episcopal handlaying; rather it clearly links it with the reception of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, something has changed, and it is very possible that churchmen now perceived the episcopal handlaying as a separate rite. Moreover, this ordering of events is consistent with *Primo paganus* which places the clause describing the episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit at the very end, even after the reception of first communion, and introduces it with the term “*novissime*” which in the case of a list of events means “lastly” or “finally.”⁴⁰

This apparent separation of the rites comes as a surprise because of a general tendency toward conformity to Roman practice on the part of both the

³⁹ Alcuin, “Epistle 143,” in MGH Epist IV, 226: “Nam septenarius [numerus] Spiritui sancto convenire multis in locis sacrae scripturae noscitur. Unde et post septem ebdomadas Spiritus sanctus missus est de caelo in igneis linguis in centum viginti nomina credentium. Et septem dona sancti Spiritus legimus in propheta. Et tunc maxime, dum alba tolluntur a baptizatis vestimenta, [eos] per manus inpositionem a pontifice Spiritum sanctum accipere conveniens est, qui in baptismo omnium receperunt remissionem peccatorum et per septem dies in angelico castitatis habitu et luminibus caelestis claritatis sanctis adsistere sacrificiis solent.” For a reference to the seven day delay in Rabanus Maurus, see *De Institutione Clericorum*, ed. Aloisius Knoepfler (Munich: J. J. Lentner’schen Buchhandlung, 1900), 2.39.

⁴⁰ Alcuin, “Epistle 134,” in MGH Epist IV, 203.

Carolingians and Alcuin. Indeed, Alcuin hailed from England, where the church typically had a more direct connection to Roman practice than had Gaul, so one would expect any baptismal rite that he favored would closely follow Rome.⁴¹ And we also know that the Carolingians had access to Roman liturgy in the form of the *Gregorian Sacramentary* (called the *Hadrianum*) and the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary*. The *Hadrianum* was sent by Pope Hadrian I (772-795) to Charlemagne sometime between 784 and 791. Like the *Apostolic Tradition*, it places the prayer for the impartation of the Holy Spirit before first communion, portraying it as the culmination of the baptismal rite.⁴² The *Hadrianum* is of special interest because of the circumstances of its development and what it reveals about Frankish practice. As part of his strategy for unification and Romanization of the Frankish liturgy, Charlemagne had requested an authoritative copy of the *Gregorian Sacramentary* from Hadrian. Unfortunately, when it arrived court scholars must have been greatly disappointed. Either Hadrian did not have a complete and up to date *Gregorian Sacramentary* available, or else he did not understand the liturgical earnestness of the Franks. He sent a de luxe copy of some inferior sacramentary. Not only did it leave out important liturgical details, it simply did not contain many of the rites

⁴¹ For a good discussion of Alcuin's teaching on confirmation, see Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 515-529.

⁴² Jean Deshusses, ed., *Le sacramentaire grégorien*, Spicilegium Friburgense, vol. 16 (Fribourg: University of Fribourg, 1992), 189. This edition of the *Hadrianum* by Deshusses now replaces H. A. Wilson, ed., *The Gregorian Sacramentary Under Charles the Great* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1915) as the standard; see Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, rev. and trans. William G. Storey and Niels Krogh Rasmussen (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1986), 90. On pages 80-82, Vogel gives a brief description of the circumstances surrounding the *Hadrianum* as Deshusses does more broadly on pages 61-70. Deshusses discusses the date on page 61.

necessary for the Franks. The sparseness of the section on baptism was characteristic of the entire document—after the baptismal formula and a description of an anointing by the priest with chrism, a brief section entitled “Prayer at the Sealing of Neophytes” provides the words of a prayer for the impartation of the Holy Spirit, without specifically mentioning who performs it. Given what we know of Roman practice, it was no doubt the case that this prayer was intended for the bishop. Nevertheless, a supplement of the *Hadrianum* was in order if it was to be of any meaningful use to the Carolingian church. It was once thought that Alcuin was the author of that supplement—a large and liturgically sophisticated addition often called the ‘*Hucusque*’ because it begins with an explanatory prologue starting with that word.⁴³ If Alcuin had been the author and, as Ellard and others believed, it was completed at the time of the *Admonitio generalis* in 789, it would greatly strengthen our impression of a well coordinated push toward liturgical uniformity in the late eighth century. It appears however, this was not the case. Jean Desshuses has made a strong case that Benedict of Aniane authored the *Hucusque*, perhaps as late as 815, well after Charlemagne’s Circular Letter.⁴⁴ Still, Alcuin would have been familiar with the *Hadrianum* as well as with what Cyrille Vogel calls the

⁴³ Gerald Ellard, writing in 1956 accepted Alcuin’s authorship. See *Master Alcuin*, 139-143. Although dated, Ellard’s work remains useful. Its popular style, however, tends to smooth over problematic issues and portray questions as settled that, even in the 1950s, were still very much open to debate. See Christopher Hohler, “Review of Gerald Ellard, *Master Alcuin, Liturgist*,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 8 (1957): 222-26.

⁴⁴ Jean Deshusses, “Le supplément au sacramentaire grégorien: Alcuin ou S. Benoît d’Aniane?” *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 9 (1965): 48-71. See also Deshusses, “Le sacramentaire grégorien préhadrianique,” *Revue bénédictine* 80 (1970): 213-237; and an endorsing review by A.G. Martimort in *Bulletin de Littérature ecclésiastique* 73 (1972): 273. Cyrille Vogel is convinced by Deshusses’ argument (*Medieval Liturgy*, 86). Wallace-Hadrill accepts Benedict of Aniane’s

Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary, a very popular mid-eighth century fusion of the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* (*Gelasianum*) with other Roman elements.⁴⁵ The *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary* also placed the episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit as a part and culmination of the baptism ceremony.⁴⁶ In spite of all this, Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus clearly set forth the episcopal handlaying as an act separate from the main part of the baptism ceremony.

Why Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus would include this seven day time period between the baptism and the episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit is not clear. Fisher suggests that it was because the episcopal handlaying had only recently been added to Frankish initiation practice with the reintroduction of the Roman rite under Charlemagne.⁴⁷ However, it has already been shown that this was not the case; to the contrary, there is good evidence to conclude that by Alcuin's time, Frankish bishops had been actively practicing a postbaptismal

authorship, but places the date between 801 and 804 (*The Frankish Church*, 212-213).

⁴⁵ Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 73-76. See also Bernard Moreton, *The Eighth-Century Gelasian Sacramentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 168-174.

⁴⁶ See for example, *The Sacramentary of Gellone* in *Liber Sacramentorum Gellonensis*, ed. A. Dumas, CCSL, vol. 159, 100-101. Many other manuscripts of the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary* have been published; see Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 71-73.

⁴⁷ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 61. Fisher is also careful to note that, although in *Primo paganus* and in Alcuin's letters there is no specific mention of anointing along with the bishop's laying on of hands, anointing is clearly present in the closely related writings of Rabanus Maurus (Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 61; and Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 523. Regarding Rabanus Maurus, see *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30.). Anointing was also present in the liturgies of both the *Gregorian Sacramentary* and the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary*. From a modern liturgical point of view an absence of anointing by the bishop is potentially troubling because this would indicate a lack of liturgical and perhaps theological continuity between the early Roman practice and that of the present day. For purposes of this study, however, this is not such a concern. Whether they simply laid hands on the neophyte without an anointing does not undermine the consistent evidence that bishops took an important initiatory role of actively imparting the Holy Spirit.

confirmation for at least a half century. Why then was the episcopal confirmation in *Primo paganus* attached like an appendage rather than being integrated into the rite? It is possible that this shift in the placement of confirmation is simply a reflection of what had become normal practice—bishops in the eighth and ninth centuries were unable, and often unwilling, to be present at the majority of baptisms, so the episcopal handlaying took place after baptism and first communion, if at all. Over a hundred years ago, Arthur Mason, commenting on Rabanus Maurus’s use of *Primo paganus*, observed that with this placement of the episcopal handlaying clause, Rabanus (and by extension Alcuin) “speaks as if it had become the normal thing for persons to be baptized without the bishop’s presence.”⁴⁸ So it is possible that since bishops were not present at most baptisms anyway, Alcuin and Rabanus were making a virtue of necessity by positing a positive theological significance to the delay. Of course this explanation is weakened because of the specificity of the delay: if bishops could not be present at the baptism, it was not any more likely that they could be present exactly seven days later. The best conclusion is simply this: at least some Frankish Christians, including Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus, found it meaningful to highlight the episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit by setting it apart from the other two primary elements of Christian initiation, baptism and first communion. The circumstances that brought this about are murky at best. However, in doing so, they apparently began to conceive of the

⁴⁸ Arthur James Mason, *The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1891), 226-227.

episcopal handlaying as a separate rite altogether—an understanding of confirmation that would increase over the following centuries.

*Two Impartations of the Holy Spirit? The Theological Tension
Caused by Delayed Confirmation*

The high value they accorded to this episcopal rite is underscored by the fact that bishops were unwilling to give up their role of imparting the Holy Spirit, in spite of the theological tension created by the fact that many Christians would never come in contact with a bishop and thus would never receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through confirmation. Indeed, Rabanus was very aware of this tension and crafted his theology of baptism to resolve it. In his treatise, *De Institutione Clericorum*, Rabanus comments on the *novissime* clause in *Primo paganus* in this way:

“For the baptized are sealed with chrism by the priest on the top of the head; [however, they are also] truly [sealed with chrism] by the bishop on the forehead. The result is that the first anointing signifies the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him to create a dwelling consecrated for God. Moreover, in the second [anointing] the sevenfold grace of that same Holy Spirit may be shown to come on a man with all the fullness of holiness, knowledge and virtue. ‘For then after the body and soul have been cleansed and blessed, the Holy Spirit himself willingly descends from the Father’ so that he might purify and sanctify his vessel with his visitation. And now [in the episcopal anointing] the Holy Spirit comes on a man for this reason, that the seal of faith which he received on the forehead might make him replete with heavenly gifts, and strengthened by this grace that he might courageously and boldly endure before the kings and magistrates of this world and preach the name of Christ with an unrestrained voice.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30: “Signatur enim baptizatus cum chrismate per sacerdotem in capitis summitate; per pontificem vero in fronte, ut in priore unctione significetur spiritus sancti super ipsum descensio ad habitationem deo consecrandam; in secunda quoque, ut eiusdem spiritus sancti septiformis gratia cum omni plenitudine sanctitatis

Rabanus thus follows Isidore of Seville in affirming two receptions of the Holy Spirit. For the complete fullness of the Spirit the participation of a bishop was necessary, but Christians who never received this impartation from a bishop could rest assured that they did in fact have the Holy Spirit in some measure. Again, the conclusion is reinforced that episcopal confirmation was coming to be perceived as a separable rite. However, there was not unanimity on this point; the responses to Charlemagne's Circular Letter indicate that, unlike Alcuin and Rabanus, most bishops still perceived of their activities having to do with the impartation of the Holy Spirit as one part of a larger unified rite of Christian initiation.

The Archbishops' Response to the Circular Letter

Among the most important sources for the actual Carolingian practice of confirmation are the responses made by Charlemagne's bishops to the Circular Letter.⁵⁰ An analysis of these responses⁵¹ indicates the diversity of baptismal

et scientiae et virtutis venire in hominem delectetur. 'Tunc enim ipse spiritus sanctus post mundata et benedicta corpora atque animas libens a patre descendit,' ut vas suum sua visitatione sanctificet et inlustret. Et nunc in hominem ad hoc venit, ut signaculum fidei, quod in fronte suscepti, faciat eum donis caelestibus repletum et sua gratia confortatum, intrepide et audacter coram regibus et potestatibus huius saeculi portare, ac nomen Christi libera voce praedicare." Quotation from Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae (Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri xx)*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 6.19.54.

⁵⁰ The very best resource for these responses is Susan A. Keefe's, *Water and the Word*, an impressive two-volume work which analyzes sixty-one Carolingian baptismal tracts (including the episcopal responses to the Circular Letter) in volume one, and publishes all of those tracts in volume two. In 1983 Keefe published a preliminary analysis of these tracts in "Carolingian Baptismal Expositions." See also Glenn C. J. Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism*. Byer presents a very interesting analysis of seventeen of Keefe's texts which he believes to have been written directly in response to the Circular Letter. Byer numbered his texts according to their order in Dr. Keefe's "Carolingian Baptismal Expositions" (e.g. the response by Odilbert of Milan is numbered K01 because it was the first text in Keefe's list).

practice still present after 812. That much of this variation had to do with the role of the bishop provides further evidence that the practice of episcopal confirmation was not something new to these Carolingian churchmen. If confirmation had been recently introduced via the *Hadrianum* one would expect a much higher degree of uniformity as to its practice. The discovery of diversity rather than uniformity is consistent with recent findings in many areas of Carolingian studies that undermine an older approach that perhaps overemphasized the unifying work of the Carolingians.⁵² The picture appears more diverse than many scholars had imagined, so much so that Richard Sullivan concludes, “one must envisage a world in which the liturgy differed in every church.”⁵³

Indeed, one finds strong evidence of local differences in liturgical practice surfacing through the bishops’ responses, both in the variation in the answers that were given to Charlemagne’s questions and in the fact that, in some cases, the bishops answered the questions in a different order than they had been asked. Moreover, one wonders if the structure of the Circular Letter itself does not indicate the recognition and perhaps a valuation of this diversity. If Charlemagne’s only interest had been blind uniformity, he could have sent a treatise. His choice of a questionnaire demonstrates an awareness on his part of

⁵¹ For a summary overview, see Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism*, Table 4, “Comparison of Individual Responses,” 102-109.

⁵² Richard E. Sullivan, “The Carolingian Age: Reflections on Its Place in the History of the Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 64, no. 2 (1989): 293-294. See p. 276, n. 19, citing the many works assuming the success of a Carolingian universalizing tendency.

⁵³ Sullivan, “The Carolingian Age,” 294.

the reality of liturgical variation and implies a recognition that something of worth could be drawn from it. At least one respondent, Magnus the Archbishop of Sens (801-818), took this further and actually consulted with the bishops in his diocese before responding on behalf of them all.⁵⁴

In addition, the responses to the Circular Letter provide valuable evidence for the importance the respondents placed on confirmation and whether they viewed it as a separate rite. Twelve of the seventeen texts included information regarding an episcopal handlaying for the impartation of the Holy Spirit⁵⁵—a remarkable number when one bears in mind that the Circular Letter had not asked about it. Should this be taken as a refutation of the notion that the episcopal handlaying was understood to be a rite separate from baptism? Not completely, since nine of the twelve follow *Primo paganus* in placing the discussion of the bishop's activity after that of first communion. These nine could be reflecting the practice previously discussed of waiting seven days before a separate rite for the impartation of the Spirit. Nevertheless, that such a high percentage of respondents added episcopal handlaying to a discussion of baptism indicates that in their minds there was no fundamental break between baptism and confirmation. Furthermore, three of the responses integrated an episcopal handlaying more fully into the rite of baptism by placing it before the reception of first communion. The reply of Magnus of Sens is interesting in this

⁵⁴ Magnus of Sens, *Libellus de Mysterio Baptismatis*, in PL, vol. 102, 981.

⁵⁵ Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism*, 107. Three responses also mentioned anointing as part of this episcopal activity.

regard as it further muddies the waters. Magnus placed confirmation before first communion, but he introduced it saying, “With all the sacraments of baptism finished, finally by the laying on of the hand by the high priest . . .,”⁵⁶ which seems to indicate that he did in fact perceive it to be a separate rite.⁵⁷

Clearly the evidence is mixed as to whether confirmation was considered by these churchmen to be a rite separate from baptism, but even those who saw baptism and confirmation as separate did not see them as unconnected. In other words, for many the episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit was still an essential element of the initiatory process, even if it was accomplished by a distinct and separate rite. This is all the more significant because, by leaving out confirmation, the Circular Letter seemingly had provided the bishops an opportunity to curtail what, if done conscientiously, must have been a burdensome pastoral responsibility. According to the extant responses, however, the majority of bishops took just the opposite tack, and used this as an opportunity to affirm their personal involvement in the baptismal process. There appears to be two possible motives for their insistence on shouldering this load and keeping themselves firmly involved—in theory at least—in the initiatory process of all Christians. The first is theological, having to do with the need for neophytes to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The recipients of the Circular Letter could rightly have perceived that, given their beliefs about

⁵⁶ Magnus of Sens, *Libellus de Mystero Baptismatis*, in PL, vol. 102, 983-984: “Peractis autem omnibus baptismatis sacramentis, novissime per manus impositionem a summo sacerdote . . .”

⁵⁷ Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism*, 120.

episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit, any initiatory process that did not include an episcopal handlaying was woefully inadequate. The second motive has to do with the prestige and power of bishops who were reluctant to relinquish a key pastoral role in the lives of all the people in their diocese.

These two motives were not unrelated. Jesse, Bishop of Amiens (799-814), made this very important link in his *Epistola de Baptisma*, saying:

Concerning the confirmation of the bishop: After these things the bishop confirms him [the newly baptized] on the forehead with chrism. And to that end the laying of the hand is done so that through the blessing the Advocate [who is] the Holy Spirit may descend upon them as with the example of the apostles. . . . It is known that Philip who evangelized Samaria was one of the seven [original deacons]. If he indeed was an apostle, he himself would have been able to lay the hand so that they would receive the Holy Spirit, for surely this can only be done by bishops. For when priests baptize it is permitted for them to anoint with chrism, but even if the chrism has been consecrated by a bishop, they are not allowed to seal the forehead with the same oil, because this belongs solely to bishops, by which they give the Spirit, the Paraclete, to the baptized.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Jesse of Amiens, *Epistola de baptismo*, in PL, vol. 105, 790-791: “De confirmatione episcopi. Post haec confirmet eum episcopus in fronte de chrismate. Ideoque manus impositio fit, ut per benedictionem advocatus invitetur Spiritus sanctus super eos descendat, juxta exemplum apostolorum. . . . [The excerpted portion is a quote from Acts of the Apostles 8 telling how the apostles Peter and John went to Samaria, which had been evangelized by Philip, in order to lay hands on the Samaritans so they could receive the Holy Spirit.] Sciendum est quod Philippus, qui Samariae evangelizabat, unus de septem fuerit: si enim apostolus esset, ipse manum imponere potuisset, ut acciperent Spiritum sanctum: hoc enim solum pontificibus debetur. Nam presbyteri cum baptizant, chrismate baptizatos ungere licet; sed si ab episcopo fuerit consecratum, non tamen frontem ex eodem oleo signare, quod solis episcopis debetur, quo tradant Spiritum paraclitum baptizatis.” Technically Jesse’s letter was not a response to the Circular Letter. Jesse was a suffragan Bishop of Reims at the time, so he did not receive the Circular Letter. Nevertheless, Byer includes it as a response because the document was evidently born out of the discussion surrounding the Circular Letter, it is the only response we have from Reims, and it very possibly had its basis in the reply of his Archbishop Vulfarius. Throughout this time period Jesse was an important part of the imperial court (Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism*, 69).

The giving of the Holy Spirit was an act that connected a bishop to the honor and power of the apostles themselves.

Chapter 6: Traditional Frankish Practice or Carolingian Innovation?

How Carolingian confirmation practice developed is one of the most intriguing historiographical questions in this area of research. J.D.C. Fisher, whose work on this topic has been accepted by many subsequent scholars, concluded that the Merovingians did not follow Roman practice on this point and that episcopal confirmation was not the Frankish practice until around 789, when Charlemagne called for liturgical uniformity after having received the *Gregorian Sacramentary* from Hadrian I.¹ In support of this, he takes the letter from Boniface to Pope Zacharias describing the disarray of the Frankish episcopacy as evidence that bishops were not at that time involved in confirmation.² His strongest pieces of evidence, however, are the three extant liturgies that come from Frankish territories during this time period, all of which, following the example of a Milanese rite, contain only a single final anointing by a priest and make no mention of an episcopal anointing as part of the baptism ceremony.³

In concluding that the Franks did not practice episcopal confirmation prior to 789, Fisher is simply incorrect. As we have seen from the capitularies, the Roman practice of episcopal confirmation was the expectation at least from the time when Charlemagne's father Pepin III the Short and his uncle Carloman

¹ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 52-57.

² Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 52.

³ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 57.

came to power. Still, the larger question remains, how incorrect was he? Was episcopal confirmation an innovation introduced during the ascendancy of the Carolingian dynasty, say from the time of Boniface, so that Fisher is just off by a generation or so? Or was episcopal confirmation always a part of Frankish practice, subject perhaps to some regional variation? Indeed, this is not an insignificant question, for not only does it affect our perception of the Carolingian church, it also greatly shapes our understanding of the Merovingians and the role that their bishops played in the pastoral life of the church. Based on evidence from non-liturgical sources, parallels between British and Frankish practice, and Merovingian ties to Rome, I will argue that the Merovingians did practice episcopal confirmation, and that despite the significant attention paid to confirmation by Carolingian reformers, their confirmation procedures were actually in continuity with traditional Frankish episcopal values and practices. Before turning to the evidence for this conclusion, however, it is worthwhile to review the material that has lent the opposite view its greatest support, the Gallican liturgies.

The Liturgical Evidence from Merovingian Gaul

In his interesting, albeit brief (only four pages), overview of rites of initiation from the sixth to the ninth century, Robert Cabié notes two especially significant changes.⁴ The first was a shift from adult to mostly infant baptisms.

⁴ Robert Cabié, "Christian Initiation," in *The Sacraments*, ed. Aimé Georges Martimort, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, *The Church at Prayer*, vol. 3 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 65ff.

One should note that, while this was no doubt the case, it is possible that this statistical swing could lead to underestimating the number of potential adult converts during this time period. Gregory of Tours tells the story of a man who sailed from Gaul to Italy sometime in the 580s and found that he was the only Christian on the ship.⁵ Henry Beck asserts that “a not inconsiderable number of pagans continued to live in the rural areas of sixth-century Gaul.”⁶ This would also have been the case later during the Carolingian expansions into Saxony. So despite the reality that infant baptisms were the norm in most places, some of the traditional activities associated with baptism could have been maintained with adults in mind. Nonetheless, Cabié’s observation on the liturgy is still notable—even when infants were the predominant subjects for baptism there was no decrease in the number of scrutinies. This prebaptismal activity, combining elements of catechesis and exorcism, actually increased even though infants were unable to benefit from it. Cabié suggests this was an attempt “to make up for the passivity of the subjects by a more intense activity of the Church in showing forth the unmerited character of God’s gift.”⁷

The second significant change asserted by Cabié, like Fisher before him, is one that has become commonplace—episcopal handlaying ceased to be part of the

⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, 17, 5, in MGH SRM, 1, pt. 2.

⁶ Henry G. J. Beck, *The Pastoral Care of Souls in South-East France During the Sixth Century*, *Analecta Gregoriana*, vol. 51, Series Facultatis Historiae Ecclesiasticae, sectio B, n. 8 (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1950), 184.

⁷ Cabié, “Christian Initiation,” 65.

initiatory rite.⁸ The argument against episcopal confirmation in Merovingian Gaul is based on the contents of three Gallican sacramentaries: the *Gothic Missal*, the *Old Gallican Missal*, and the *Bobbio Missal*.⁹ The manuscripts of all three missals are eighth-century copies of rites composed in Gaul that date back to the seventh or even sixth centuries.¹⁰ All three missals are also distinctively non-Roman, in the sense that there is no reference to direct episcopal involvement in these rites. Instead, each has only one postbaptismal anointing which was performed by the baptizing priest, and all three rites follow that single postbaptismal anointing by washing the feet of the neophytes.¹¹ The challenge here is to explain the differences between these Gallican rites and the Roman rites. Fisher's approach is to portray Roman practice as the standard, and these rites as defective offshoots—defective because of their lack of a straightforward postbaptismal impartation of the Holy Spirit. He concludes that “in the seventh and eighth centuries . . . all episcopal participation had been removed from the Gallican initiation.”¹² This alleged removal leaves him

⁸ Cabié, “Christian Initiation,” 67.

⁹ *Missale Gothicum*, ed. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta*, Series Maior, Fontes 5 (Rome: Casa Editrice Herder, 1961); *Missale Gallicanum vetus*, ed. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta*, Series Maior, Fontes 3 (Rome: Casa Editrice Herder, 1958); *The Bobbio Missal: A Gallican Mass-Book (Ms. Paris. Lat. 13246)*, ed. E. A. Lowe, Henry Bradshaw Society, vols. 58, 61 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1991). For a brief introduction to these rites, see Yitzak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481-751* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 45-47. For good succinct descriptions of their contents regarding questions of confirmation, see Winkler, “Confirmation or Chrismation?” 3-5; and especially Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 47-51.

¹⁰ The *Bobbio Missal* is probably the oldest. It and the *Old Gallican Missal* date to the sixth century.

¹¹ A single postbaptismal unction accompanied by a footwashing is also characteristic of rites from Milan. See Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 31-46; and Whitaker, *Documents*, 127-152.

¹² Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 55 (emphasis mine).

troubled by the question of when the Holy Spirit is conferred in these rites. Remember, in the Roman tradition the Holy Spirit was imparted in the second episcopal anointing. If these Gallican rites are essentially Roman rites without that second anointing, one is left to wonder when they supposed that the neophyte received the Holy Spirit. Fisher's solution to this puzzle is that the presbyterial anointing must impart the Holy Spirit "despite the silence of the formulae on this point."¹³

Gabriele Winkler brings a completely different set of assumptions to these rites. Rather than seeing them as deriving from Roman practice, she argues that these Gallican rites bear witness to an earlier non-Roman tradition from Syria, a tradition not based on the Acts of the Apostles and Pauline theology which emphasize the giving of the Holy Spirit after baptism by the laying on of hands, but instead drawing on the Gospel of John (especially 3:5) where the Holy Spirit is portrayed as part and parcel of the entire baptismal event.¹⁴ To attempt to find the impartation of the Holy Spirit in the final anointing is, therefore, to miss the more important point that these rites reveal an alternative tradition present in the western church in which the entire baptismal rite was pneumatological. For instance, the *Bobbio Missal* contains a prebaptismal insufflation where the priest blows three times into the mouth of the catechumen while saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit, may you hold [him] in [your]

¹³ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 57.

¹⁴ Winkler, "Confirmation or Chrismation?" 5-8.

heart.”¹⁵ And it contains a prebaptismal anointing that alludes to the Old Testament anointing of the future King David by the prophet Samuel, again an image of Holy Spirit impartation.¹⁶

Winkler’s conclusion is more consistent with other evidence already considered that a variety of baptismal practices were used simultaneously among the Franks. The difficulty with Fisher’s approach is that it presupposes a linear development from the Roman to the Gallican rites and broad uniformity of practice within Gaul itself. Furthermore, it does not take into account two additional liturgical texts that were indeed used in Merovingian Gaul, the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* and the *Frankish (or Eighth Century) Gelasian Sacramentary*.¹⁷ These two sacramentaries are important to our study because, unlike the Gallican missals, they reflect Roman practice—two postbaptismal anointings, the second by a bishop for the impartation of the Holy Spirit—and in both cases there is evidence that they were used not only in Carolingian but also in Merovingian Gaul. Regarding the rites themselves, in the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* the first postbaptismal prayer was performed by the baptizing priest. After anointing the neophyte on the head with chrism he prayed:

The omnipotent God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ himself,
who has regenerated you by water and the Holy Spirit and has

¹⁵ *The Bobbio Missal*, 233, p. 72: “Accipe spiritum sanctum in cor retenias.” My translation is based on the alternative reading of the last phrase, “in corde teneas.”

¹⁶ *The Bobbio Missal*, 242, p. 74.

¹⁷ One of the best examples of the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* is *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, edited by Leo Cunibert Mohlberg; for the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary*, see *Liber Sacramentorum Gellonensis*, edited by A. Dumas; for Cyrille Vogel’s introduction to these documents, see *Medieval Liturgy*, 64-70 and 70-78, respectively.

given you remission of all sin, anoints you with the chrism of salvation unto eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.¹⁸

After this the neophyte is anointed a second time by the bishop who then lays a hand on him and prays:

Omnipotent God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has regenerated your servants by water and the Holy Spirit and who has given them forgiveness of all sins, send, O Lord, on them your Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, and give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and fill them with the spirit of the fear of God, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ with whom and with the Holy Spirit you live and reign always God, forever and ever. Amen.¹⁹

After this prayer is the following exchange:

Then [the bishop shall] sign them on the forehead with chrism saying: 'The seal of Christ unto eternal life.'

Response: 'Amen.'

[and then the bishop]: 'Peace be with you.'

Response: 'And also with you.'²⁰

In these postbaptismal activities, the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary* and the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* are virtually identical.²¹

¹⁸ *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, 450, p. 74: "Deus omnipotens, pater domini nostri Iesu Christi, qui te regeneravit ex aqua et spiritu sancto quique dedit tibi remissionem omnium peccatorum, ipsi te linit chrisma salutis in Christo Iesu domino nostro in uitam aeternam." A translation is also available in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 106.

¹⁹ *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, 451, p. 74: "Deus omnipotens, pater domini nostri Iesu Christi, qui regenerasti famulos tuos ex aqua et spiritu sancto quique dedisti eis remissionem omnium peccatorum: tu domine, inmitte in eos spiritum sanctum tuum paraclytum et da eis spiritum sapientiae et intellectus, spiritum consilii et fortitudinis, spiritum scientiae et pietatis, adimple eos spiritum timoris dei: in nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi, cum co uiuis et regnas deus semper cum spiritu sancto per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen." A translation is also available in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 106.

²⁰ *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, 451, p. 74: "Postea signat eos in fronte de crismate dicens: 'Signum Christi in uitam eternam.' Respondet: 'Amen.' Pax tecum.' Respondet: 'Et cum spiritu tuo.'" A translation is also available in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 106.

²¹ See *Liber Sacramentorum Gellonensis*, 710-712, p. 100-101

Regarding provenance, the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* is a mid-eighth century copy of a text that dates from between 628 and 715.²² Many scholars still argue that parts of the sacramentary actually do date back to its namesake, Pope Gelasius I (492-496).²³ More importantly for our study, Vogel concludes this liturgy was being used in both Rome and Gaul by the late seventh century.²⁴ Yitzhak Hen, on the other hand, doubts it was ever a Roman sacramentary at all. He concludes instead that it was entirely

composed in Merovingian Gaul . . . in response to immediate and local needs. . . . [Furthermore, although] the compiler did indeed use one or more Roman exemplars, the compilation itself is genuinely Frankish, and it was executed neither under Roman auspices, nor in compliance with Roman rules and regulations. The Old Gelasian, and as a consequence Merovingian liturgy as a whole, are nothing but a careful fusion of Roman and indigenous Frankish elements, for the use of the Merovingian Church.²⁵

Especially if Hen is correct, but even if Vogel is correct and this was a Roman liturgy used in Gaul, its presence there provides evidence that Merovingian baptismal practice was not a monolith structured along the lines seen in the three Gallican missals.

This conclusion is further supported by the compilation of the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary*, which is thought to have occurred in the mid-eighth century during the reign of Pepin III the Short at the Monastery of Flavigny. Pepin's ties to Rome were strong; he was greatly indebted to Pope Zacharias for

²² Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 65 and 69.

²³ Vogel, however, demurs; see *Medieval Liturgy*, 68-69.

²⁴ Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 70.

²⁵ Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, 58-59.

supporting his deposition of the Merovingian King Childeric. Later, Pope Stephen II personally traveled to Châlons to enlist Pepin's aid against the Lombards, and was escorted into his presence by none other than the Carolingian king's twelve year old son Charles, the future Charlemagne.²⁶ Thus, long before Charlemagne came to power, his father's court was disposed toward honoring and strengthening ties with Rome, a circumstance that may have set the stage for the formation of the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary*. Cyrille Vogel concludes:

It is clear what the monastic compilers of the Sacramentary of Flavigny were about. They wanted an authentic and eminently usable sacramentary *which would incorporate as much as was feasible of the old Roman books still circulating in the Frankish kingdom* and whatever else was needed by bishops and abbots for their peculiar ministries. Whether or not the Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary was officially inspired by the Frankish court, it certainly corresponded to the felt needs of Frankish churches and monasteries and was a genuine and well-ordered amalgam of traditional materials.²⁷

Thus decades before the *Gregorian Sacramentary* was sent by Pope Hadrian to the court of Charlemagne, there were a sufficient number of Roman style sacramentaries available for Frankish churchmen to compile a large and useful sacramentary. As noted above concerning the postbaptismal rites, much of the Frankish Gelasian was in fact taken from the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary*, further evidence that the Old Gelasian had long endured during the Merovingian era.

²⁶ See Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 166-168.

²⁷ Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 75 (emphasis mine).

Fisher is aware of the use of the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* in Gaul and of how it shows signs of significant Frankish adaptation, what he calls “non-Roman additions;”²⁸ he also briefly mentions the *Sacramentary of Gellone*, one of the best manuscripts of the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary*.²⁹ Still, he does not allow the presence of these two sacramentaries to alter his thinking on Merovingian practice.³⁰ In his work, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, the Old Gelasian is discussed in chapter one, “Christian Initiation in Rome,” while chapter two, “Christian Initiation in Gaul and Germany,” focuses exclusively on the Gallican missals as the only evidence of Merovingian practice. This rigid division of categories is not warranted. Clearly, the development of these two sacramentaries in Gaul, coupled with evidence that all three Gallican missals borrowed from the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary*,³¹ leads to the conclusion that the Merovingian church must have experienced greater diversity in its initiatory practices than has been previously thought—with different rites being used simultaneously in different parts of Gaul and some degree of liturgical cross-pollination taking place. Indeed, Bede provides evidence that this sort of regional diversity carried no stigma. The Bishop of Rome himself, Gregory I the Great (590-604), wrote to Augustine of Canterbury saying:

²⁸ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 1.

²⁹ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 58.

³⁰ Nor does Fisher recognize that the formation of the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary*, with its desire to promote Frankish conformity to Roman practice, undermines his contention that the Carolingians did not begin to purposefully incorporate Roman practice until the *Hadrianum* was sent to Charlemagne some three decades later. See discussion above, p. 118.

³¹ Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 70.

It is my wish that if you have found any customs in the Roman or the Gaulish Church or any other Church which may be more pleasing to almighty God, you should make a careful selection of them and sedulously teach the Church of the English, which is still new in the faith, what you have been able to gather from other Churches.³²

What, however, of the places where the Gallican rites were practiced? Can we take the lack of episcopal participation in these three missals as proof that there was indeed no episcopal involvement in the initiation process in the areas where those missals were used? After all, from all that has been seen thus far, for any bishops in Gaul to completely withdraw from the initiatory process for any reason other than laxity in fulfilling their episcopal role seems out of step with centuries of episcopal sentiment and values in the west. The factors that motivated bishops to be a part of the initiation process—reinforcement of episcopal power and honor, pastoral care, creating a meaningful connection between the laity and the authority of the bishop—would not have disappeared in these parts of Gaul. Thus it is of great interest to note that the fifth-century church synods in Gaul discussed in part one, the Councils of Riez (439), Arles (449-461), and Orange (441), which appear to presuppose a rite like the ones described in the three Gallican missals, all portray a circumstance where bishops were quite involved in ‘confirming’ (*confirmare* and *confirmatio*) baptismal rites that had been performed by a priest.³³ Thus, even in the areas where the so-called Gallican rites were used, rites which apparently reflect a

³² Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1.27.2. See Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, 59.

³³ For a fuller explanation, see above, p. 61-62. See also Winkler, “Confirmation or Chrismation?”

very different approach to baptism than do the Roman rites, church councils attempted to insure that bishops still exercised direct oversight and involvement in the initiation of all Christians baptized within their sphere of authority. Furthermore, as will be shown in the following section, there is abundant evidence from other non-liturgical sources that the lack of episcopal confirmation in the three Gallican rites does not reflect actual Frankish practice in much of Merovingian Gaul.

Therefore, while the sort of synthesis that Fisher, Cabié and many others have tried to produce has its uses, it is vital to bear in mind that liturgical activity was diverse. What Cabié himself noted in regards to the third through sixth centuries also applies to the later Merovingian and Carolingian periods: “It must be kept in mind that each document provides information only for the place and time of its origin.”³⁴ Given the paucity of evidence available from this time, it is very possible that the absence of any reference to episcopal confirmation in the three extant Merovingian liturgies is the result of unhappy coincidence rather than proof that it was not occurring. This is especially the case given the evidence from other sources that it was in fact commonly practiced.

Non-Liturgical Evidence for Merovingian Confirmation

Part of the difficulty associated with developing a clear understanding of Merovingian postbaptismal episcopal practice is that scholars of confirmation

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have consistently given priority to liturgical sources. As we have seen, liturgies are subject to regional variation and are not simple to interpret. It is especially difficult to know how to understand the silences in such sources, such as the absence of episcopal confirmation from the Gallican missals. Furthermore, this privileging of the liturgies can cause scholars to discount or ignore contrary evidence from other sources. It turns out that there are a variety of non-liturgical sources that can be brought to bear on this subject: capitularies, letters, records of church councils, penitentials, and saints' lives. Furthermore, the Merovingians did not exist in isolation; they continuously interacted and came under the influence of other peoples, especially those in Britain and Spain. So the practice of neighboring peoples has bearing on and should influence our understanding of the Merovingians as well.

Evidence From Outside Gaul

Regarding the British Isles, reference has already been made to biographical evidence from Bede's *Life of St Cuthbert*, the seventh-century Bishop of Lindisfarne.³⁵ The lives of both Cuthbert and Wilfrid, a Bishop of York who actually received his consecration in Gaul in 654, provide evidence for episcopal confirmation in Britain.³⁶ Of course, one would likely expect English bishops to practice confirmation because of the direct connection between the Anglo-Saxons and Rome via St Augustine, but these biographies also show a fairly

³⁴ Cabié, "Christian Initiation," 17, n. 1.

³⁵ See above, p. 106.

³⁶ See Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 18, p. 39.

high level of interaction between the British and the Merovingian Franks. Moreover, going back even further, there is evidence of episcopal confirmation among the Romano-British Christians. St Patrick refers to his episcopal work of ordination and confirmation in his *Confession* and in his *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*.³⁷ The life of St Darerca also mentions the confirming work of Patrick.³⁸ The Rule of Patrick relates natural calamity with the failure to seek diligently for baptism and confirmation. It further states that the fullness of the Holy Spirit is only possible through confirmation by a bishop.³⁹

The liturgical evidence from Britain and Ireland, like that of Gaul, is mixed. When Augustine of Canterbury arrived in Britain (597) he found fault with British baptismal practice and urged them to “complete” the ritual in conformity with the Roman rite.⁴⁰ There are different possibilities for what Augustine found lacking, but perhaps the most likely suggestion is that the missing element was confirmation.⁴¹ In support of this conclusion is the eighth-century *Stowe*

³⁷ Patrick, *Confession*, in Ludwig Bieler, ed., *The Works of St. Patrick* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1953), 32, 37; and idem, *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*, in Bieler, *The Works of St. Patrick*, 41.

³⁸ Richard Sharpe, “Churches and Communities in Early Medieval Ireland: Towards a Pastoral Model,” in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 81-2.

³⁹ Thomas Charles-Edwards, “The Pastoral Role of the Church in the Early Irish Laws,” in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, 69-70.

⁴⁰ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 2.2. Augustine’s experience provides an excellent example of the sort of interaction that was taking place between the Britain and Gaul. While in Gaul on the journey to Kent, Augustine found Franks who spoke the language of the Anglo-Saxons and were willing to join him to serve as his interpreters. He arrived to find that Ethelbert, the king of Kent, had a Frankish wife, Bertha, who was a Christian and had a Frankish bishop as part of her royal entourage (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.25).

⁴¹ Sarah Foot, “‘By water in the spirit’: the Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, 174; Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 78. In this regard, both Foot and Lynch (*Christianizing Kinship*, 42-43) mention

Missal, the oldest surviving Irish mass book, which like the three Gallican rites, does not contain a final episcopal anointing.⁴² Furthermore, one finds evidence of British liturgical diversity in the fact that there was a need for the Anglo-Saxon Council of Clofesho in 747⁴³ to call for liturgical uniformity according to the Roman practice in much the same way that the Franks were doing under the careful leadership of Boniface.⁴⁴ Indeed, Boniface also gave direction to the Anglo-Saxon council by sending the records of the continental reform councils, the direct influence of which can be seen in a number of Clofesho's canons.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in spite of the liturgical evidence we have briefly outlined here, we know from Patrick and Darerca that episcopal confirmation was practiced in Ireland, and from Cuthbert and Wilfrid that it was practiced among the Anglo-Saxons prior to 747. This is not to discount the possibility that episcopal confirmation may not have been practiced at various places or during certain time periods, but if one were simply to rely on liturgical evidence it would be easy to believe that episcopal confirmation was not the norm in Britain and Ireland until the mid-eighth century. It is much more likely that, just as in Gaul, there was some degree of regional variation.

the work of Margaret Pepperdine, "Baptism in the Early British and Irish Churches," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 22 (1955): 110-123.

⁴² Foot, "By water in the spirit': the Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England," 178; Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 84; Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship*, 43. A translation of the *Stowe Missal* is available in Whitaker, *Documents*, 203-211.

⁴³ Foot, "By water in the spirit': the Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England," 174; Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 80. See also Catherine Cubitt, "Pastoral Care and Conciliar Canons: the Provisions of the 747 Council of Clofesho," in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, 193-211.

⁴⁴ See above, p. 102-104.

⁴⁵ Ellard, *Master Alcuin*, 6.

From Visigothic Spain the evidence is also mixed. The records of the Second Council of Seville (619) indicate that at least some parts of Spain followed the Roman practice of having bishops play an active role in postbaptismal activities. For example, it forbids any except the bishop to perform the postbaptismal anointing with chrism and the handlaying for the impartation of the Holy Spirit. It also highlights a serious desire to safeguard the prestige and authority of bishops by creating pastoral and liturgical space in which only they could function:

[Priests must not] consecrate priests or deacons or virgins, or establish altars by blessing them or anointing them. Indeed they are not allowed to consecrate a church or an altar, nor to impart the Holy Spirit by laying a hand on the newly baptized faithful or on converts from heresies, nor should they make chrism or anoint with chrism the forehead of the baptized. Nor is it permitted for them in a public mass to reconcile a penitent . . . Nor is it permitted in the presence of a bishop or when a bishop stands present to anoint or seal neophytes, nor to reconcile penitents without the command of the bishop himself, nor with him present to perform the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, nor in his presence to teach or bless or greet the people, nor by any means to preach to the people.⁴⁶

As we will see when considering the theological influences on the Carolingians, the work of Isidore of Seville provides additional evidence of Roman style confirmation in Spain. However, with Spain, as with Gaul, there is liturgical

⁴⁶ "Second Council of Seville (619)," in José Vives, ed., *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos* (Barcelona: Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1963), 168: ". . . sicut presbyterorum et diaconorum ac virginum consecratio, sicut constitutio altaris, benedictio vel unctio, siquidem nec licere eis ecclesiam vel altarium consecrare nec per inpositionem manus fidelibus baptizatis vel conversis ex haeresibus Paraclitum Spiritum tradere, nec chrisma conficere nec chrismate baptizatorum frontem signare, [sed] nec publice quidem in missa quemquam poenitentem reconciliare . . . Sed neque coram episcopo licere presbyteris in baptisterium introire neque praesente antestite infantes tingere / aut signare, nec poenitentes sine praecepto episcopi sui reconciliare, nec eo praesente sacramentum corporis et sanguinis Christi conficere nec eo coram posito populam docere vel benedicere aut salutare nec plebem atique exhortare."

evidence to show that there was not uniformity of practice. In the seventh-century *Liber ordinum*, described by the editor as “*en usage dans l’église wisigothique et mozarabe d’Espagne du cinquième au onzième siècle*,” all the postbaptismal activities—a single anointing followed by a handlaying and extended prayer which included much regarding the work of the Holy Spirit—appear to have been performed by the priest who performed the baptism itself.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Susan Keefe has found a Spanish text containing baptismal instructions from the early ninth century that provide further evidence for the ongoing practice of a variety of rites, or of what she calls “the persistence of indigenous rites.”⁴⁸ She concludes that “Roman practice had in no way completely replaced distinctive Spanish practices at the turn of the ninth century.”⁴⁹

Two observations can be made from the British and Spanish evidence. First, if one considers only the liturgical evidence from these regions, one could be misled as to the diversity of postbaptismal practice that really was present. Second, episcopal honor and prestige was a chief concern for the church in these regions and the ideal of a good bishop included active involvement in pastoral care. There is every reason to believe that bishops in Gaul would have had these same concerns.

⁴⁷ *Liber ordinum*, ed. D. Marius Férotin, *Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica*, vol. 5 (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1904), 33-34. The longer prayer used for baptisms on Easter is found in columns 36-37.

⁴⁸ This is the title of chapter 7 in Keefe, *Water and the Word*, vol. 1, 100.

⁴⁹ Keefe, *Water and the Word*, vol. 1, 107.

Evidence From Within Merovingian Gaul

In addition to what we can learn from neighboring cultures, the strongest evidence that Merovingian bishops did practice confirmation comes from non-liturgical Gallican sources. Interestingly, those who have argued against Merovingian confirmation have been aware of most of them. For instance, Fisher was forced to explain away contradictory evidence from the eleventh-century historian Flodoard, who wrote that Bishop Remigius of Reims confirmed a newly baptized Frankish tribe around the year 500.⁵⁰ He concludes that either Flodoard's account was mistaken, having been influenced by his eleventh-century experience of baptism, or if Flodoard was correct and Remigius did confirm, it had to have been a carry over from an older practice that was soon discontinued. Likewise, he discounts the possibility that Gregory of Tours' well known description of Remigius's postbaptismal anointing at the baptism of Clovis (A.D. 496) was an act of confirmation. In his account, Gregory of Tours portrays a scene in which Remigius was the churchman most instrumental in Clovis's conversion, having been asked by Queen Clotild to consult privately with the king and urge him to forsake paganism.⁵¹ It was natural therefore that Remigius, not only because of his stature but also because of this relationship with Clovis, would be the one to perform the king's baptism. Gregory writes, "The king confessed belief in God almighty in three persons, was baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy

⁵⁰ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 53.

⁵¹ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, II, 31, in MGH SRM, 1, pt. 1.

Spirit, and was anointed with the sign of the cross of Christ with holy chrism.”⁵² Rather than referring to the postbaptismal anointing usually performed by the baptizing priest which covered much of the body, this reference to anointing sounds like confirmation—an episcopal anointing that would have been accompanied by a handlaying and prayer for the impartation of the Holy Spirit. The reason we cannot tell for certain is that a bishop performed the entire ceremony. Some evidence, though not absolutely compelling, that this did refer to confirmation is found in the relation in the text between Clovis’s anointing and that of his sister Lanthechild, who had converted from Arianism rather than from paganism. Because she had been baptized in the Arian church she only needed to be received into the church by an anointing and the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit.⁵³ According to church law this reception of a penitent was only to be done by a bishop. From the connection drawn between these two acts, and the specific reference to chrism in both cases, one might conclude that Gregory of Tours is indicating that both received essentially the same rite—the impartation of the Holy Spirit by a bishop. It is worth noting that Fisher, in light of this and other evidence from fifth-century Gaul, does acknowledge the possibility that episcopal handlaying and anointing with chrism was practiced in Gaul in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵⁴ If so, he insists that it “dropped out of use, . . . [so that by] the seventh and eighth

⁵² Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, II, 31, in MGH SRM, 1, pt. 1: “Igitur rex omnipotentem Deum in Trinitate confessus, baptizatus in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti delibutusque [sic, alternative reading is delibutusque] sacro crismate cum signaculo crucis Christi.”

⁵³ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, II, 31, in MGH SRM, 1, pt. 1.

centuries . . . all episcopal participation had been removed from the Gallican initiation.”⁵⁵ Again, he arrives at this conclusion by giving priority to the Gallican rites. Nevertheless, the following evidence from the sixth to the eighth centuries, that Merovingian bishops took their pastoral duties fairly seriously and did indeed perform confirmation, undermines this conclusion.

Regarding the question of episcopal diligence, Henry Beck asserts in *The Pastoral Care of Souls in South-East France During the Sixth Century* that

when the evidence has been weighed, and fitting allowance made for the scandals which have not come down to us, it is still true that the evil-living bishops were as unusual and extraordinary in their own way as were the saints in theirs. Thus in the last analysis, neither a *chronizue scandaleuse* nor a panegyric of sainted bishops gives us a fair picture of the prelates of Provence.⁵⁶

It is safe to assume that the experience of Provence was not unique from the remainder of Gaul, and that the majority of Merovingian bishops were reasonably skilled and conscientious in fulfilling their duties. Given this, we might also presume that the majority of bishops were involved in at least some minimally acceptable number of acts of pastoral care, because the evidence from the biographies of saintly bishops is that pastoral care in general, and confirmation in particular, was expected behavior from a good bishop. For instance, according to a *vita* completed just seven years after the death of

⁵⁴ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 53-55.

⁵⁵ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 55.

⁵⁶ Beck, *The Pastoral Care of Souls*, 39.

Caesarius, Bishop of Arles from 502-542, part of his regular ministry was the anointing of neophytes:

Now when he came each year to bless the oil for the catechumens in the baptistery, and [later] when he sat down in the small apse to bless the newly baptized, little boys and girls sent by their parents with small vessels of water and oil for him to bless were always running around eagerly. And when those carrying vessels and flasks ran into one another in front of the congregation, the sound of objects striking [the ground] was heard and seen, and yet the glass in which the oil consecrated by Christ's servant had been poured was never broken.⁵⁷

This translation by Klingshirn accepts the substitution of *conchulam* (small apse) for *cocumula* which could be translated small 'vessel.'⁵⁸ Based on that editorial choice he translates *ad consignandos* as "to bless." This may not be the best choice as *consignare* usually has the meaning of "to seal" in the sense of verifying the authenticity of something. Without these changes, Caesarius's vita would be translated: "Now when he came each year to bless the oil for the catechumens in the baptistery, he sat down with a little vessel to seal the newly baptized . . ."⁵⁹ This translation, based on Morin's edition, sounds very much like a rite of confirmation—an anointing with oil by a bishop to fully complete

⁵⁷ This translation is from William E. Klingshirn, trans., *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 52. The best edition of the original reads: "Nam cum ad oleum benedicendum competentibus in baptisterio annis singulis veniebat, ingrediens cocumula cum ad consignandos infantes sederet, parvuli illic pueri vel puellae a parentibus missi certatim currebant, exhibentes vascula cum aqua, alii cum oleo, ut eis benediceret. Cumque hii qui deferebant contra se urceolos et ampullas prae multitudine populi comploderent, sonus audiebatur percutientium et videbatur; et tamen vitrum, in quo benedictio servi Christi effusa fuerat, numquam confractum est" (Germain Morin, ed., *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis Opera Varia* (Bruges: Maredsous, 1942), 332). Klingshirn's translation substitutes *conchulam* for *cocumula*.

⁵⁸ See Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, 52, n. 106.

⁵⁹ Morin, *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis Opera Varia*, 332: "Nam cum ad oleum benedicendum competentibus in baptisterio annis singulis veniebat, ingrediens cocumula cum ad consignandos infantes sederet . . ."

one's baptism—although it does not mention the impartation of the Holy Spirit. Even with Klingshirn's translation, this text portrays a godly bishop who ministers to his flock in an atmosphere of sanctity and joy and is purposefully and regularly involved in some valued postbaptismal activity.

In the same way, two saints' lives' of bishops from the early eighth century indicate a practice of postbaptismal episcopal activity involving the laying of hands and the impartation of the Holy Spirit. The *vita* of St Hubert, Bishop of Maastricht (d. 727), mentions that part of his pastoral care involved imparting the Holy Spirit to neophytes:

He removed many from the error of the pagans and caused them to convert, and they were hurrying to him from distant lands, and he was strengthening those having been cleansed by the waters of baptism with the sevenfold gift [of the Spirit].⁶⁰

The *vita* of St Eucherius, Bishop of Orleans (d. 738) relates a similar event involving the laying on of hands and the impartation of the sevenfold Spirit.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Vita Hugberti, Episcopus Traiectensis*, 3, in MGH SRM VI, 484: "Et multos eradicabat ab errore gentilium et cessare fecit et de longinquis regionibus ad eum festinantes et baptismi unda ablutos septiformi gracia corroborat."

⁶¹ *Vita Eucherii Episcopi Aurelianensis*, 2, in MGH SRM VII, 47. Bernard Beck, in a 1939 study of Merovingian liturgical and hagiographic text, concluded regarding Hubert and Eucherius that "The conferring of the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit is joined with baptism and nevertheless it is distinct from it. In both cases the minister is a bishop. Therefore, though the text does not explicitly say so, we are able to conclude that this refers to confirmation which was conferred by the act of anointing with holy oil." (Bernard Beck, *Annotationes Ad Textus Quosdam Liturgicos e Vitis Sanctorum Aevi Merovingici Selectos* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Academicum Sancti Anselmi de Urbe, 1939), 25: "Collatio gratiae Spiritus Sancti septiformis cum baptisate conjungitur, et tamen ab eo distinguitur. In utroque minister est episcopus. Ideo licet concludere textus non loqui de alia re sed de confirmatione quae per unctionem oleo sancto factam collata est.") The difficulty of Beck's conclusion is that the texts do not specifically mention anointing, only handlaying. Again, one must bear in mind the variety of practices in Merovingian Gaul. Clearly, bishops were involved in the impartation of the Holy Spirit at the conclusion of the initiation process. Still, it is as wrong to conclude that

Further evidence that the Merovingians practiced episcopal confirmation comes from a capitulary issued by Pepin III soon after he became king of the Franks. Chapter one forbade incestuous marriages which included marriage to one's "godmother from baptism or from confirmation by the bishop."⁶² The capitulary is dated 754-755, making it the earliest Carolingian reference to sponsorship at confirmation, a subject we will discuss fully in chapter eight.⁶³ Although this council occurred after the end of the Merovingian dynasty, it is impossible to believe that by this early date the Carolingians had introduced the Roman

Merovingian bishops uniformly followed Roman practice (handlaying and anointing with chrism) as it is to conclude that confirmation was not taking place at all.

⁶² MGH Capit I, 31: "aut commatre sua, aut cum matrigna sua spiritali de fonte et confirmatione episcopi"

⁶³ The very earliest apparent reference to sponsorship at confirmation is from an Anglo-Saxon source, a letter by Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne (705-709), to Aldfrith, the illegitimate son of King Oswiu who would come to succeed his brother as king of the Northumbrians (685-705). Early in Aldfrith's reign Aldhelm, then Abbot of Malmesbury, sent him a letter, primarily a spiritual treatise on the number seven, which began: To the most excellent Lord . . . joined to me for some time by the bonds of spiritual clientship. . . . I do not doubt, most reverent son, but trust, giving rein to deep belief, that the provident heart of your Wisdom may recall that twice-two revolutions of the *lustra* ago [i.e. nearly twenty years ago] we made the unbreakable pledge of a binding agreement, and through the bond of spiritual association we established a comradeship of devoted charity. For a long time ago, in the era of our young manhood, when your talented Sagacity was equipped with the septiform munificence of spiritual gifts by the hand of a venerable bishop, I recall that I acquired the name of 'father' and that you received the appellations of your adoptive station together with the privilege of heavenly grace" (Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, 1, in MGH AA XV, 61-62; translation from Aldhelm, *The Prose Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), 34). Joseph Lynch introduces a pair of reasons that make it likely that confirmation, rather than baptism, was the rite that established the relationship of "spiritual clientship" by which Aldhelm became Aldfrith's "father" (*paternum*) (Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship*, 112-115). First, Aldhelm's description of the rite as a reception of the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit at the handlaying of a bishop sounds very much like confirmation. Second, Aldfrith was born to Christian parents of high social standing making it improbable that his baptism was delayed until "the era of . . . young manhood" (*tempore pubertatis*). However, since Aldfrith's mother was an Irish princess and his father Oswiu followed the traditions of the Celtic church until 664 when he switched to Roman practice at the Synod of Whitby, it is very possible that Aldfrith was baptized with a Celtic rite which, like the extant Gallican rites, did not include any postbaptismal episcopal activity. It was Aldfrith's older brother, Alhfrith king of Deira, who had allied with bishop Wilfrid and the Roman party and influenced Oswiu to call the Synod of Whitby (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 3.25). Therefore, it follows that at sometime in his "young manhood" Aldfrith came under the influence of the Roman party and received episcopal confirmation, at which time Aldhelm stood as his sponsor. Note the quality of the bond Aldhelm

practice of episcopal confirmation, that it had achieved such widespread use that problems had arisen from marriage between those who had stood as sponsors, and that a church council had convened to rule on this issue. This ruling must reflect the presence of episcopal confirmation during the Merovingian era.

By far the strongest evidence that Merovingian bishops did practice confirmation comes from the Council of Paris in 573.⁶⁴ A letter sent by this council to Bishop Egidius of Reims notified him that a certain Promotus had been removed as Bishop of Châteaudun. Promotus had the misfortune of being caught in the middle of an ongoing conflict between Kings Sigibert and Guntram; he had been given his see by Sigibert, but was unable to hold it when the Council of Paris, called by King Guntram, removed him.⁶⁵ The purpose of the council's letter was to elicit Egidius's support if Promotus should attempt to reassert his authority and undertake episcopal activities. Along with its extremely unflattering portrayal of Promotus as a person and a churchman, the Council of Paris listed specific duties Promotus was forbidden to perform now that he was a simply a priest and no longer a bishop:

Therefore, if the previously mentioned priest [Promotus], either through his characteristic arrogance, or through the use of flattery, or on the basis of honor, claims that he has regained power in the previously mentioned church of Châteaudun, or going further [if he should take it upon himself] to sit again [on his episcopal throne], or if he usurps even more affairs of the church

assumes was created through this sponsorship.

⁶⁴ "Concilium Parisiense (573)," CCSL, vol. 148A, 211-217.

⁶⁵ See Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, IV, 47 and VII, 17, in MGH SRM, 1, pt. 1.

itself, such as blessing altars, confirming neophytes (*infantes confirmare*), or performing ordinations in some parishes, or [if] he should take it upon himself, on the basis of his depraved intentions, to offer resistance to his bishop and your brother the lord Pappolo, let him be excommunicated and anathematized.⁶⁶

This is very clear evidence from the chronological and geographical heart of Merovingian Gaul that confirmation was practiced and, like consecrating churches and ordaining priests, that it was considered an exclusively episcopal function.

In the face of this material from Caesarius of Arles, Hubert of Maastricht, and the Council of Paris, the long held belief that the Merovingians did not practice episcopal confirmation must be discarded. It also lends new credence to Flodoard's life of St Remigius and enhances the likelihood that Clovis was indeed confirmed as part of his baptism. Perhaps we should not be surprised that Merovingian practice was to some degree consistent with that of Rome. It must be remembered that not only the Carolingians, but the Merovingians before them, cultivated close ties to Rome, at least as close as circumstances and geography allowed. Wallace-Hadrill states, "The first Frankish settlers saw themselves as heirs to the last Gallo-Roman rulers and so to the relationship of those rulers with the Church, itself a Roman institution."⁶⁷ From the sixth

⁶⁶ "Concilium Parisiense (573)," CCSL, vol. 148A, 213: "ut, si memoratus presbyter aut propria contumacia aut cuiuscumque potestates adsentatione in praedicta Dunensi ecclesia praesumpserit sub huius subrepti honoris argumentatione ulterius resedere vel res ecclesiae ipsius amplius usurpare aut altaria benedicere, infantes confirmare vel ordinationes per quascumque parrochias facere aut episcopo suo fratri vestro domno Pappolo resistere prava intentione praesumpserit, ab omni coetu episcoporum vel a communionibus consortio perpetua anathemate feriatur . . ."

⁶⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 112.

century on, popes had contact with Merovingian kings and Frankish clergy were making pilgrimages to Rome.⁶⁸ In addition, we have seen that the church councils most closely associated with the Gallican rites—the Councils of Riez (439), Arles (449-461), and Orange (441)—specifically called for an episcopal confirmation of baptism, even though it was not mentioned in the rites themselves. If Frankish bishops had ever learned from Rome, and it is likely they had, that the impartation of the Holy Spirit through confirmation was their exclusive prerogative, it seems unlikely that they would have given up this prestige-enhancing practice. The activities of the early medieval church, including that in Merovingian Gaul, reveal a strong inclination to protect and enlarge the authority and exclusivity of the episcopal office and to extend its influence and honor.

Evidence From the Exclusive Honors Given to Bishops

If one takes into account other aspects of episcopal life, specifically the attitudes revealed by other activities that were reserved exclusively for bishops, this conclusion should not come as a surprise. For instance, in addition to confirming baptisms, there were other activities of ministry that were reserved exclusively for bishops, including reconciling heretics and making chrism. As we have seen, the former had been an item of interest since the third century. This was also the case with the Merovingians at the Council of Epaone in 517. The council met under the auspices of the recently elevated Burgundian king,

⁶⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 113.

Sigismund, who himself had converted from Arian to Catholic Christianity. Canon sixteen reflects a clear knowledge of the longstanding principle that only a bishop can reconcile heretics. In this case, however, it deals with the thornier problem of a death bed conversion, in which case there is a grave possibility that the repentant heretic will die before a bishop can reach him. It states:

For the welfare of the souls of all seriously ill heretics who seek to convert at the last minute, we desire and permit priests to aid them with anointing. Nevertheless, all such converts who are healthy should learn [that this anointing is] to be sought from a bishop.⁶⁹

Given the date and location of this council, this provision was probably written with Arians in mind. Nevertheless, this council had some tradition to guide it, for this sort of provision for emergency reconciliation was first mentioned at the First Council of Orange (441)⁷⁰ and the Second Council of Arles (442-506).⁷¹ The point is clear: except in the case where a penitent sinner might die outside the church, only a bishop may give the Holy Spirit to a repentant heretic through an act of anointing.

The early sixth-century letter of John the Deacon to Senarius both reflected and informed this understanding that bishops had of themselves and their role as the apostolic center of the life of the church. The topic of episcopal authority comes through most clearly in John's discussion of the bishop's exclusive right

⁶⁹ *Concilium Epaonense*, canon 16, CCSL, vol. 148A, 28: Presbyteros propter salutem animarum, quam in cunctis optamus, desperatis et decumbentibus hereticis, si conversionem subitam petant, crismate permittimus subvenire. Quod omnis conversuri, si sani sunt, ab episcopo noverint expetendum.

⁷⁰ *Concilium Arausicanum*, canon 1, CCSL, vol. 148, 78.

⁷¹ *Concilium Arletense Secundum*, canons 9, 16, 17, or 26, CCSL, vol. 148, 115-119.

to consecrate chrism. He defends the tenet that only a bishop could consecrate chrism in three ways. First, he affirms that there are grades of priests and that, “a bishop possesses the rank of the highest priest, [while] a presbyter is known to hold the place of a subordinate priest.”⁷² Then he reminds his readers that in the Old Testament only the high priest had the right or privilege to enter into the most holy place. Finally he asserts that upholding the blessing of chrism as the exclusive work of bishops is a proper reflection and protection of their apostolic authority, because “the apostolic power is preserved by this tradition of blessing and anointing in a certain manner.”⁷³ This business of episcopal prerogative and honor is very important to John as seen a bit later when he writes, “For if nothing special had been reserved to the bishop, it would seem to be a rank of no honor.”⁷⁴ There is no evidence that this concern for maintaining a clear distinction between an ordinary priest and his bishop ever diminished. See for instance, the “Letter to Leudefredus,” spuriously attributed to Isidore of Seville but probably written in the eighth or ninth century,⁷⁵ where once again the differences between a bishop and a priest were highlighted on the basis of exclusive episcopal activities. The letter affirms that

to the bishop belong the consecration of churches, the anointing of the altar, the [making of chrism]. He establishes the aforesaid

⁷² John the Deacon, *Epistola ad Senarium*, ch. 7: “Quia episcopus summi pontificis gradum optinet, presbiter vero secundi sacerdotii locum retinere cognoscitur.”

⁷³ John the Deacon, *Epistola ad Senarium*, ch. 7: “Recte igitur benedictionis et unctionis quodam modo potestas apoltolica huic traditioni servatur.”

⁷⁴ John the Deacon, *Epistola ad Senarium*, ch. 8: “Nam, si nihil speciale reseruatum esset episcopo, gradus indefferns esse videbatur.”

⁷⁵ See M. C. Diaz Y Diaz, *Index Scriptorum Latinorum Medii Aevi Hispanorum* (Madrid: University of Salamanca, 1959), 134, 453.

duties and ecclesiastical order; he blesses the sacred virgins; and whereas each one is present in individual duties, he is present in all of them.⁷⁶

Thus, as Christianity expanded into northern Europe under Germanic kings, bishops were no less important and the desire to safeguard their honor by giving them the exclusive authority to perform certain rites was no less intense than when the rite of confirmation arose in the third and fourth centuries. Given the direct evidence we have seen, coupled with this ongoing desire to enlarge and enhance episcopal authority, it seems clear that Merovingian bishops never withdrew from involvement in the initiatory process. In some places bishops may not have confirmed baptisms, but this would not have been the norm as some have thought.

It appears, therefore, that there was greater continuity from Merovingian to Carolingian practice than has often been assumed. At the same time, it would be incorrect to say that nothing changed under the Carolingians. Certainly there was an increased desire for liturgical uniformity according to Roman practice. Although invigorated in the 780s under Charlemagne, this drive for uniformity actually began decades earlier under his father Pepin III. Evidence for this can be found in the fact that none of the Merovingian liturgical

⁷⁶ "Letter 1, Isidore to Bishop Leudefredus," 10, in Isidore of Seville, *Epistolae (The Letters of St. Isidore of Seville)*, trans. Gordon B. Ford, Jr. (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1970), 13: "Ad episcopum pertinet basilicarum consecratio, unctio altaris, confectio chrismatis, ipse praedicta officia et ordines ecclesiasticos constituit, ipse sacras virgines benedicit; et dum praesit unusquisque in singulis, hic tamen est in cunctis." The bracketed words are my change to Ford's translation. The phrase, "*confectio chrismatis*," which Ford translated "the performance of anointing," is virtually the same as was used in 850 at the Synod of Pavia (*Papiensis*) for the making of chrism—"chrismatis confectio" (ch. 7, in MGH, Capit II, 118). It was not anointing, or even anointing with chrism, that was limited to medieval bishops, it was the making of chrism.

manuscripts we have discussed is older than the late eighth century. Yitzak Hen may be correct when he says that Charlemagne “abolished altogether the liturgical authority of the Neustrian-Burgundian centers and the texts they produced. The Merovingian liturgical texts, which up to this point were in constant use, were presumably no longer valid, and therefore ceased to be copied.”⁷⁷ However, Hen also notes that the “liturgical production in the Carolingian period by no means witnessed a total abandonment of Merovingian Frankish rites or prayers.”⁷⁸ This, no doubt, is at least partly responsible for significant, ongoing liturgical diversity among the Carolingians themselves which we have seen.

⁷⁷ Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, 60.

⁷⁸ Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, 60.

Chapter 7: Sources for Carolingian Theological Beliefs About Confirmation

To this point, we have devoted a great deal of attention to questions related to confirmation practice in the early Middle Ages, but now we turn to topics more interior and personal—What did early medieval Christians believe occurred as a result of the rite of confirmation? What meanings did it have for them spiritually and for their sense of self in relation to the church and community? What theological significance did they attach to it? Perhaps the best starting place to answer these questions is a survey of the theological sources that informed and gave shape to the thinking of church leaders on these subjects. As we will see, because it was the practice of medieval scholars to consciously ground their thinking in authoritative works from the past, these sources would come to have a lasting and significant influence up to and beyond the Reformations of the sixteenth century. They, along with the theological interpretation given to them by early medieval theologians such as Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus, would give shape to confirmation thought throughout the Middle Ages and, to a large extent, to this very day.

Documents Used in the Bishops' Responses to the Circular Letter

The bulk of the responses to Charlemagne's Circular Letter were drawn from four sources: The Letter of John the Deacon to Senarius, two works by Isidore

of Seville (*Concerning Ecclesiastical Offices and the Etymologies*), an anonymous document on the symbolism of baptism, and *Primo paganus*.¹ To characterize these as the sources ‘used’ by the bishops is an understatement. The practice of the Carolingians in these circumstances was to find an appropriate authoritative document and copy directly from it. Therefore these documents actually made up a very large part of the content of the replies sent to the royal court. The previous analysis of *Primo paganus*² coupled with the following analysis of the other three works indicate that the consistent theological message received by Carolingian churchmen was that an episcopal handlaying and anointing was the expected and proper culmination of the initiatory process. Furthermore they would conclude that the power to perform this act, which imparted the Holy Spirit, was both predicated on and indicative of a unique episcopal standing passed down from the apostles.

The Letter of John the Deacon to Senarius

Repeated mention has been made of the early sixth-century letter of John the Deacon to Senarius. Both author and recipient are unknown, but the Carolingians believed this to be the John the Deacon who later became Pope John I (523-526), thus enhancing the document’s authority.³ What John the

¹ See Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism*, 5-8.

² See above, p. 107.

³ There are references to Pope John I when he was John the Deacon in the works of his friend Boethius (c. 480-c. 524). Three of Boethius’s tractates are dedicated to him: *Whether Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Are Substantially Predicated of the Divinity*; *How Substances Are Good in Virtue of Their Existence Without Being Substantial Goods*; and *Against Eutyches and Nestorius*. See Boethius, *The Theological Tractates*, in *Boethius*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester, 2nd ed., The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 74 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

Deacon wrote about baptism was liberally and frequently used in the episcopal responses to the Circular Letter. As we have seen, this letter provided a detailed description of the elaborate sixth-century Roman baptismal practices as well as a vigorous assertion of episcopal preeminence and control over both the priesthood and the making of the chrism used by all priests as part of the baptism ceremony. Ironically, given this emphasis and the many details the letter includes, it does not specifically mention a second anointing by a bishop as part of the baptism liturgy. The letter does, however, devote the final chapter to the question of a baptized Christian who dies without having received “the anointing with chrism and the blessing of the bishop,”⁴ so there can be no doubt that the author envisioned an initiatory process that included an episcopal confirmation. As we have seen, the responses of the Carolingian bishops reflected these same concerns for episcopal primacy and meaningful initiatory involvement.

Isidore of Seville

Isidore, the Bishop of Seville from 600 to 636, was one of the most influential theologians of the era. His material concerning baptism, especially that found in *Concerning Ecclesiastical Offices* and in his large signature work, the *Etymologies*, was regularly and broadly lifted by the Carolingian bishops in their

1973), 33, 39, 73.

⁴ John the Deacon, *Epistola ad Senarium*, ch. 14: “Si baptizatus sine chrismatis unctione ac benedictione pontificis ex hac vita migrauerit.”

replies to Charlemagne's Circular Letter.⁵ Indeed, there is much overlap between what the two works present on the subject. Isidore's writings reflect the Roman practice of two postbaptismal anointings. He attached three important symbolic meanings to the first anointing. First, paralleling the Old Testament practice of anointing priests and kings, the church's practice of universally anointing all its members after baptism creates a new "priestly and royal class of people."⁶ Second, anointing creates a symbolic link to Christ himself: "We are anointed so that we may be marked by the name of Christ (*christus* means 'anointed one')."⁷ The third, and final, meaning goes beyond symbolism; Isidore also understood the first postbaptismal anointing to confer holiness. The following passage intertwines both the second and third meanings:

The Greek *chrisma* is called *unctio* in Latin. From this word Christ was named and man is sanctified after the [baptismal] bath. For just as in baptism the remission of sins is given, so through anointing the sanctification of the Spirit is applied."⁸

According to Isidore, the second postbaptismal anointing, and especially the episcopal handlaying associated with it, is founded on the apostolic power to impart the Holy Spirit. In this context, episcopal authority and prestige is

⁵ See especially Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, ed. Christopher M. Lawson, CCSL, vol. 113 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1989), 2.25-27; and idem, *Etymologiae*, 6.19, 7.2, and 7.12. See Lawson's introduction to *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, p. 13, for a good explanation of how Isidore's works can be dated. Based on the presupposition that Braulio, Bishop of Caesaraugusta (631-651) and one of Isidore's pupils, listed Isidore's works in his *Renotatio* (PL, vol. 81, 15-17) in chronological order, it is possible to date *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* between 598 and 615, and to date *Etymologiae* c. 620.

⁶ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, 2.26: "genus sacerdotale et regale sumus."

⁷ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, 2.26: "unguimur ut Christi nomine censeamur." See also *Etymologiae*, 7.2

⁸ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 6.19.50-51: "Chrisma Graece, Latine unctio nominatur; ex cuius nomine et Christus dicitur, et homo post lavacrum sanctificatur. Nam sicut in baptismo peccatorum remissio datur, ita per unctionem sanctificatio spiritus adhibetur."

paramount. Isidore affirms the position, which by the early seventh century had become quite standard, that heretics should be restored, not by rebaptism if they had already been baptized with a Trinitarian formula, but by the bishop's reconciling handlaying which gives the Holy Spirit.⁹ This was a very important stance, because it reinforced the church's belief in apostolic succession, portraying the bishop as the single most important public representative and spiritual gatekeeper of the church as a whole. In both works under discussion, Isidore devoted significant energy to the notion that this culminating initiatory act was solely the work of bishops because bishops stand in the place of the apostles. Consider what he wrote in *Concerning Ecclesiastical Offices*:

Now then, after baptism the Holy Spirit is given through bishops with the laying on of hands, as we remember the apostles did in the Acts of the Apostles. . . . We are able to receive the Holy Spirit; however, we are not able to give [him]. Rather we call upon the Lord so that [the Spirit] might be given. By whom is this most important thing done? I will show below, just as the holy father [*papa*] Innocent wrote. For he declares, "This is not permitted to be done by anyone other than a bishop. For even if presbyters are priests, they still do not have the highest church office. That sealing [baptisms] and giving the Paraclete, the [Holy] Spirit, is only allowed to bishops is taught not only by the custom of the church, but even more so by that passage in the Acts of the Apostles [8:14-18] which asserts that Peter and John were sent to bestow the Holy Spirit on those already baptized. It is permitted priests, when they baptize either apart from the bishop or in his presence, to anoint the newly-baptized with chrism (provided this has been consecrated by the bishop), but priests are not allowed to anoint the forehead with the same holy oil, this being the exclusive prerogative of the bishop in imparting the Holy Spirit."¹⁰

⁹ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, 2.25.

¹⁰ Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, 2.27: "Sed quoniam post baptismum per episcopos datur spiritus sanctus cum manuum inpositione, in Actibus Apostolorum apostolos fecisse meminimus. Sic enim dicit: [quote from Acts 19:1-6]. Item alio loco: [quote from Acts 8:14-17]. Spiritum autem sanctum accipere possumus, dare non possumus, sed ut detur dominum invocamus. Hoc autem a quo potissimum fiat, quemadmodum sanctus papa Innocentius

Clearly at issue here is episcopal prestige and authority. Priests do not hold the “highest church office,” which is indicated by the fact that they are prohibited the final anointing and handlaying. Isidore calls on the authority of Pope Innocent I (401-417) to make this point. But even more important to Isidore is the impartation of the Holy Spirit. He asserts that humans cannot actually give the Holy Spirit, we only receive him. It is God who gives the Holy Spirit, and just as God once made the holy apostles Peter and John his instruments of impartation, he now utilizes bishops. The somewhat circular conclusion one infers from Isidore is that being this instrument of God for the impartation of the Spirit is what establishes a bishop as the highest office in the church, while at the same time, holding the office of bishop is what enables one to be the instrument of God.

The Florilegium on the Symbolism of Baptism

Another important document, regularly drawn from in the responses to the Circular Letter, is an anonymous ninth-century text designated by its editor

scripserit, subiciam. Dicit enim non ab alio quam ab episcopo fieri licere. ‘Nam presbiteri, licet sint sacerdotes, pontificatus tamen apicem non habent. Hoc autem solis pontificibus deberi ut uel consignent vel paraclitum spiritum tradant; quod non solum consuetudo ecclesiastica demonstrat, uerum et superior illa lectio Actuum Apostolorum, quae asserit Petrum et Iohannem esse directos qui iam baptizatis traderent spiritum sanctum. Nam presbiteris seu extra episcopum uiue praesente episcopo, cum baptizant, crismate baptizatos unguere licet sed quod ab episcopo fuerit consecratum; non tamen frontem ex eodem oleo signare, quod solis debetur episcopis cum tradunt spiritum paraclitum.’” The quotation is from Innocent I, *Epistles*, 25.6, in PL, vol. 20, 551. Both the Latin and an English translation are available in Gerald Ellard, “How Fifth-Century Rome Administered Sacraments,” 7. Here I’ve modified Ellard’s translation because of some changes in the wording between Innocent and Isidore, and also because of Ellard’s willingness to employ, anachronistically I believe, terms like ‘confirmation’ in his translation. Ellard’s translation is also available in Finn, *Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, 78. Similar content is found in Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 7.12.

André Wilmart as a florilegium on the symbolism of baptism.¹¹ It is a relatively brief collection of excerpts, mostly from John the Deacon and Isidore of Seville. One section, however, having to do with confirmation and entitled *De inpositione manus pontificis*, is made up of brief quotations from Isidore and three letters of Cyprian of Carthage.¹² It asserts the value of baptism as the necessary first step in salvation by juxtaposing two aspects of baptism. The portion from Cyprian emphasizes the spiritual rebirth by which a new person is created. The passage from Isidore portrays baptism more as a cleansing of the body, enabling it to receive the Holy Spirit. By combining these themes, the emphasis of the section as a whole is that baptism is only the first step which must necessarily be completed by the gift of the Holy Spirit from a bishop. It concludes with a quote from the Gospel of John 3:5, “Unless one is born by water and the Holy Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God.”¹³

The (Pseudo)Eusebian Pentecost Homily

Content and Gallican Provenance

This is a good place to consider one of the most important documents on confirmation in the entire Middle Ages, a late fifth-century Pentecost sermon, number twenty-nine in a collection of sermons from southern Gaul long but

¹¹ See “Un florilège carolingien sur le symbolisme des cérémonies du baptême,” in *Analecta Reginensia: Extraits des Manuscrits Latins de la Reine Christine Conservés au Vatican*, ed. André Wilmart, Studi e Testi, vol. 59 (Vatican City: Vatican Apostolic Library, 1933), 153-70. The title at the head of the document itself was, *De baptismi officio ac mysticis sensibus eorumque auctoribus nominatim designatis et de ordine venientium ad fidem eiusdemque mysterii*.

¹² “Un florilège carolingien,” 3.12, in Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, 163.

¹³ “Un florilège carolingien,” 3.12, in Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, 163.

falsely attributed to Eusebius, Bishop of Emesa in Syria (d. c. 359).¹⁴ This sermon would come to have great theological influence among the scholastics because of its inclusion in the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*, which was compiled in Frankia c. 850.¹⁵ In these False Decretals it gained even more prestige because of its mistaken designation as a letter by Miltiades, Bishop of Rome from 311 to 314. As such, it was in turn incorporated by Gratian into his authoritative *Decretum*.¹⁶ What made it influential, however, goes beyond its dissemination or its presumed authorship to its content. This sermon represents something of a turning point, the earliest known portrayal of confirmation as a rite logically separate from baptism and having a positive theological meaning in its own right. The sermon is not preoccupied with some of the episcopal themes which thus far we have seen associated with confirmation: ideological battles between rival Christian groups and the use of episcopal prestige to define the boundaries of orthodoxy, or bishops as apostolic surrogates having the power to confer the Holy Spirit. Nor does it discuss the mechanics of confirmation except to say that it was the same experience the apostles had on the day of Pentecost, performed by the laying on of the hand. Instead, this sermon focuses on confirmation as a vital aspect of pastoral care that equipped the Christian for a life of devotion. Its positive and distinctive

¹⁴ For this sermon, see (Pseudo)Eusebius, *Homilia De Pentecosten*, CCSL, vol. 101, 337-341; and van Buchem, *L'Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 40-44. An English translation of the sermon is available in Austin P. Milner, *The Theology of Confirmation* (Cork, England: Mercier Press, 1971), 44-47.

¹⁵ See below, p. 262, n. 3.

¹⁶ See Appendix 1, "Le sort de l'homélie dans l'histoire postérieure," in van Buchem, *L'Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 206-217.

message was this: Baptism prepares one to die, while confirmation prepares one to live.¹⁷

The sermon was structured around two parallel comparisons: baptism is to confirmation as Christ is to the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes the distinctiveness of confirmation as a rite separate but related to baptism, just as the Holy Spirit is separate but related to the person of Christ. The preacher begins by giving voice to the issues raised regarding confirmation by the objections of an anonymous interrogator who might ask, “Of what benefit is the ministry of confirmation to me after the mystery of baptism?” The interrogator might even conclude, “I see it is not so special that we were raised from the font, if after the font we still require the addition of something new.”¹⁸ The preacher answers by drawing on the analogy of Roman military practice wherein the emperor would both mark a soldier with a tattoo, designating membership in the army, and would also provide the soldier with the equipment necessary for battle. Confirmation, he concludes, is the avenue for spiritual armament:

Therefore the Holy Spirit, who descends upon the waters of baptism with a healing flow, imparts [his] fullness in the font to [give] innocence; in confirmation he gives growth toward grace, because in this world [grace] is needed to be put forth on those compelled to live for a lifetime amid invisible enemies and trials. In baptism we are born anew unto life; after baptism we are fortified (*confirmamur*) for battle. In baptism we are purified; after baptism we are strengthened (*roboramur*). And thus I continue, for those

¹⁷ Good analyses of this sermon can be found in van Buchem, *L'Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 144-168; and, more briefly, in Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 503-508; and in Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship*, 108-109.

¹⁸ (Pseudo)Eusebius, *Homilia De Pentecosten*, 2, CCSL, vol. 101, 337: “Quid mihi prodest, post mysterium baptismatis, ministerium confirmantis?; aut: ‘Quantum video: non tantum de fonte suscepimus, si post fontem adiectione voui generis indigemus.’”

ready to pass over [unto death] the benefits of regeneration are sufficient; however, for those who go on living the help of confirmation is needful. Regeneration in itself saves those who receive it [and go] immediately into the peace of the blessed age. Confirmation equips and instructs those who stay behind for the contests and battles of this world.¹⁹

Thus this sermon presented a very positive message regarding episcopal confirmation as a necessary means for strengthening and equipping the Christian for lifelong spiritual battle, a theme that would attract a great deal of attention in the high and late Middle Ages.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of this important sermon to the theology of confirmation in the high and late Middle Ages. However, the influence it had among the Carolingians prior to c. 850, when it was incorporated into the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*, is more open to debate since there is no direct reference to it in any of the documents we have seen. Part of the answer to this question must have to do with the authorship of the sermon itself. Scholars have long known that the Gallican provenance of the sermon collection precluded Eusebius of Emesa from being its author, and since the sixteenth century different editions of the collection have offered various attributions.²⁰ The collection is published in the *Corpus Christianorum Series*

¹⁹ (Pseudo)Eusebius, *Homilia De Pentecosten*, 2, CCSL, vol. 101, 337: “Ergo spiritus sanctus, qui super aquas baptismi salutifero descendit illapsu; in fonte plenitudinem tribuit ad innocentiam; in confirmatione augmentum praestat ad gratiam, quia in hoc mundo tota aetate uicturis inter inuisibiles hostes et pericula gradiendum est. In baptismo regeneramur ad uitam, post baptismum confirmamur ad pugnam; in baptismo abliumur, post baptismum roboramur. Ac sic continuo transitoris sufficiunt regenerationis beneficia, uicturis autem necessaria sunt confirmationis auxilia. Regeneratio per se saluat mox in pace beati saeculi recipiendos, confirmatio armat et instruit ad agones mundi huius et proelia reseruandos.”

²⁰ See CCSL, vol. 101, xliii-xliv; and van Buchem, *L'Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 25-28.

Latina under the authorship of Eusebius ‘Gallicanus.’²¹ In the past, some have argued, not altogether persuasively, that the entire pseudo-Eusebian collection should be attributed to Faustus of Riez,²² who was Abbot of the Abby of Lérins and, after c. 460, Bishop of Riez in southern Gaul until he was exiled in 477 along with many other Catholic bishops by Euric, an invading Visigothic king. More recently L.A. van Buchem devoted much effort to prove Faustus’s authorship of this one homily for Pentecost presently under consideration.²³ So far in this work, although the argument does not hinge on it, Faustian authorship has been accepted because it is very likely that van Buchem is correct. As discussed in part one,²⁴ the message of the sermon is consistent, albeit more strongly developed, with the content of *De Spiritu Sancto*, a work confidently attributed to Faustus.²⁵ Furthermore, there is the work of Gennadius, Bishop of Marseilles, a contemporary of Faustus. In *De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis* Gennadius listed the works of Faustus he had read, including *De Spiritu sancto*.²⁶ In his *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum*, Gennadius used the same ideas Faustus had used regarding episcopal confirmation and applied them to the episcopal reception of heretics:

²¹ CCSL, vols. 101, 101A, and 101B.

²² Weigel, *Faustus of Riez*, 162

²³ van Buchem, *L’Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 45-82.

²⁴ See above, p. 63.

²⁵ *De Spiritu Sancto* was often attributed to Paschasius, a deacon at Rome (d. 512). See, for example, PL, vol. 62, 11. However, at the end of the nineteenth century Augustus Engelbrecht convincingly argued for Faustus’s authorship, something many scholars had already believed (See Augustus Engelbrecht, ed., *Fausti Reiensis Praeter Sermones Pseudo-Eusebianos Opera*, CSEL, vol. 21 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1891), xxxix-xlvi). For a good discussion of the critical issues surrounding the works of Faustus, see Weigel, *Faustus of Riez*, 153-165.

²⁶ Gennadius of Marseilles, *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, 85, in PL, vol. 58, 1109-1110.

And if they [repentant heretics] agree to believe and are content to confess, having already been cleansed [on the basis of their previous baptism], they are strengthened (*confirmentur*) in the completeness of faith by the laying on of the hand. If they are young or dull witted, unable to understand doctrine, let those who present them respond for them just as is done for those being baptized. And thus, having been strengthened (*communiti*) by the laying on of the hand and anointing, let them be admitted to the sacrament of the eucharist.²⁷

Gabriele Winkler, however, is not convinced that Faustus was the author of this important sermon. Her concern is that its radical separation of confirmation from baptism represents a level of theological reflection too well developed for the middle of the fifth century.²⁸ It must also be noted, however, that Winkler apparently does not like the theological direction of the sermon. As we have seen, she devoted her article to presenting a unified picture of Gallican baptismal practice as thoroughly pneumatic without the inclusion of an episcopal postbaptismal anointing or handlaying.²⁹ Winkler clearly prefers this integrative pneumatological approach, which has its antecedents in rites from Syria, more than the Roman approach of episcopal impartation of the Holy Spirit as a separate and final initiatory act. A sermon from fifth-century Gaul that not only focuses on episcopal confirmation but lauds its importance in contrast to baptism would tend to undermine her contention that there was a uniform approach to baptism in Gaul that did not follow Roman practice. It

²⁷ Gennadius of Marseilles, *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum*, 21, in C.H. Turner, ed., *The Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1906): 93-94: “et si consentiunt credere uel adquiescunt confiteri, purgati iam fidei integritate confirmentur manus inpositione: si uero paruuli sunt uel habetes qui doctrinam non capiant, respondeant pro illis qui eos offerunt iuxta morem baptizandi, et sic manus inpositione et chrismate communiti eucharistiae mysteriis admittantur.”

²⁸ Winkler, “Confirmation or Chrismation?” 13-14.

must be noted, however, that even if Winkler is correct on the small question of Faustian authorship, she still accepts the Gallican provenance of the sermon and concedes that it could have been the work of someone who was personally acquainted with Faustus. Given these concessions the significance of this sermon as evidence for a longstanding tradition of episcopal confirmation in Merovingian Gaul is hardly diminished even if Faustus himself was not the author.

Carolingian Use of the Homily's Terminology?

In chapter three we discussed Faustus of Riez's use of the term *confirmare* in association with the involvement of bishops in initiation.³⁰ In this regard, there is no indication that Faustus's sermon became a model for any sort of unified postbaptismal terminology. For instance, the Circular Letter based on Alcuin's *Primo paganus* spoke of the baptized as being 'confirmed' by the reception of first communion. Rabanus Maurus quotes Alcuin at this point, making use of the term *confirmare* in his commentary on the postbaptismal communion.³¹ This has caused some to conclude that, "neither Alcuin nor his disciple Rabanus Maurus used the word *confirmation* to describe the episcopal conclusion to initiation."³² However, this is not the case; Rabanus Maurus also used *confirmare*, in another liturgical context, to refer to the episcopal

²⁹ See above p. 131.

³⁰ See above, p. 63.

³¹ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30 (italics in the original).

³² Quinn, "Confirmation Reconsidered," 362.

postbaptismal rite of imparting the Holy Spirit through handlaying and anointing. In *De Institutione Clericorum* Rabanus augments a quote from Isidore of Seville to say, “*Chorepiscopi* [assistant bishops without right of succession] are ordained for the care of the rural poor who dwell in the country, lest they be denied the solace of confirmation.”³³ Clearly in this instance Rabanus has in mind the postbaptismal handlaying which only a bishop or, in his view, a *chorepiscopus* could perform. Thus, although not exclusively, the term ‘confirmation’ was used by the Carolingians of the early ninth century in the same way that Faustus used it. There is also another possible link between Faustus and Alcuin’s circle: Faustus, Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus all describe the episcopal handlaying as a strengthening (*roborare*). As we have seen, comparing the effect of baptism to the postbaptismal handlaying, Faustus said, “In baptism we are purified, after baptism we are *strengthened (roboramur)*.”³⁴ Alcuin uses this same terminology in *Primo paganus*, saying that the episcopal hand was laid on the neophyte so that he “may be strengthened (*roboretur*) through the Holy Spirit to preach to others.”³⁵ Likewise, in *De Institutione Clericorum*, Rabanus Maurus begins the section on episcopal handlaying by adapting that same statement from *Primo paganus*.³⁶

³³ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1, 5: “Ordinati sunt autem chorepiscopi propter pauperum curam, qui in agris et villis consistunt, ne eis solatium confirmationis deesset.”

³⁴ (Pseudo)Eusebius, *Homilia De Pentecosten*, 2, CCSL, vol. 101, 338: “In baptismo abluimur, post baptismum roboramur” (emphasis mine).

³⁵ Alcuin, “Epistle 134,” in MGH Epist IV, 203: “Ut roboretur per Spiritum sanctum ad praedicandum aliis.”

³⁶ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1, 30. van Buchem is aware of Rabanus’s similar use of the term *roborare*, but he does not seem to be aware that Rabanus was quoting Alcuin.

These parallel uses of terminology are so tenuous that it seems much more likely that Faustus and the Carolingians came to them independently. This is especially likely in light of the fact that Alcuin died (804) and Rabanus wrote *De Institutione Clericorum* (819) long before the False Decretals were compiled around 850. Van Buchem suggests that all three writers bear witness to an independent theological tradition that described the episcopal handlaying as a strengthening.³⁷ This was probably also the case regarding use of the term ‘confirmation.’³⁸ Thus it is likely that even if this sermon did not directly influence Carolingian thinking, it either began or reflects in Gaul the presence of a tradition of thought which contained a positive approach to confirmation as a relatively independent rite that served an important function of pastoral care. We have seen this tradition reflected in Carolingian terminology, in ideas of ‘strengthening’ associated with confirmation, and in the Carolingian tendency to separate confirmation from baptism by a period of time.

Further hints of this independent tradition for the use of the terms *confirmatio* or *confirmare* are also found in the early medieval rites themselves.³⁹ It was first

See van Buchem, *L’Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 217, for a discussion of whether Rabanus (or more properly Alcuin) was aware of Faustus of Riez’s sermon.

³⁷ van Buchem, *L’Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, 217.

³⁸ For instance, the Epistle to the Romans says, “For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you” (1:11 NRSV): “Desidero enim videre vos ut aliquid in partem gratiae vobis spiritualis ad confirmandos vos” (Vulgate). Similarly, the Second Epistle to the Corinthians says, “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment” (1:21-22 NRSV): “Qui autem confirmat nos vobis cum in Christum et qui unxit nos Deus et qui signavit nos et dedit pignus Spiritus in cordibus nostris” (Vulgate).

³⁹ Quinn, “Confirmation Reconsidered,” 363.

used in the instructions, but not spoken by the bishop, in *Ordo Romanus XI*,⁴⁰ a Roman order book developed in the late seventh century.⁴¹ In the mid-eighth century *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary*,⁴² *confirmare* was used in at least three places to describe the bishop's postbaptismal activities. The first instance is in the sacramentary's primary baptismal rite where, after the episcopal prayer for the impartation of the Holy Spirit, it says, "Moreover, they should be careful not to neglect this [part of the rite] because at that time every proper baptism is strengthened (*confirmatur*) with the power (*nomine*) of Christianity."⁴³ There is a second rite in this same sacramentary where very similar instructions using the term *confirmare* are also present.⁴⁴ Finally, a baptismal rite for the infirm recognizes the likelihood that a bishop would not be available at the time of baptism. Still it contains the following instruction after the neophyte is garbed in white: "If a bishop is present, it is necessary to confirm with chrism immediately, after that to receive communion."⁴⁵ As noted earlier, this material in the *Frankish Gelasian Sacramentary* provides evidence for a great variety of ritual activities among the Carolingians, and it also demonstrates the presence in Gaul of a Roman-style tradition of placing great

⁴⁰ *Ordo Romanus XI*, 100, in Michel Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani du haut moyen âge*, 5 vols., Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense Études Et Documents, vols. 11, 23, 24, 28, 29 (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense Administration, 1956-1961), vol. 2, 446: "Dat orationem pontifex super eos, confirmans eos cum invocatione septiformis gratiae spiritus sancti."

⁴¹ Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 164-165.

⁴² See above, p. 118.

⁴³ *Liber Sacramentorum Gellonensis*, 712, p. 101: "Hoc autem precauentes ut hoc non neglegantur, quia tunc omnem baptismum legitimum christianitatis nomine confirmatur."

⁴⁴ See *Liber Sacramentorum Gellonensis*, 2327, p. 337.

⁴⁵ *Liber Sacramentorum Gellonensis*, 2383, p. 347: "Et episcopus adest, statim confirmare cum crisma oportit, postea communicare."

value on the inclusion of episcopal postbaptismal activity as the culmination of the baptismal rite, and of associating that activity with the word *confirmare*.

Ordo Romanus L, another very influential rite from the end of the Carolingian period, is important as the first example of a rite that actually puts the word *confirmo* in the mouth of the bishop: “I confirm [*confirmo*] and seal you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶ This usage was very significant because *Ordo L* served as one of the key rites in the *Romano-Germanic Pontifical*,⁴⁷ a very important liturgical compilation (c. 950) that functioned in the history of liturgy like the narrow part of an hour glass. It brought together many strands of liturgical practice from the early Middle Ages and then, because it was developed under the patronage of no less a personage than William, Archbishop of Mainz and son of Otto the Great, it gained very wide distribution, becoming one of the foundational liturgical books in Rome, throughout the empire, and in England.⁴⁸ *Ordo L* also appears to demonstrate

⁴⁶ *Ordo Romanus L*, 29.74, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 5, 290: “Confirmo <et consigno> te in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti.” A contemporary Anglo-Saxon source, the *Pontifical of Egbert*, also had the bishop say the word ‘*confirmare*.’ However, in this case the bishop announced that God confirmed the neophyte: “Confirmet te deus pater, et filius et spiritus sanctus ut habeas vitam aeternam et vives in secula seculorum” (*The Egbert Pontifical*, in *Two Anglo-Saxon Pontificals (the Egbert and Sidney Sussex Pontificals)*, ed. H. M. J. Banting (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1989), 14). Yet another Anglo-Saxon pontifical from that era, the *Sidney Sussex Pontifical*, also uses the term in a similar way to *Ordo L*, “consigno et confirmo te signo sancte crucis in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti” (*The Sidney Sussex Pontifical*, in Banting, 168). Both of these Anglo-Saxon pontificals were created during the tenth century, a time of church reform after the Danish invasions, and show reliance on Gregorian sacramentaries from the continent (see the editor’s introduction, xxxiii-xxxiv, xliii-xliv).

⁴⁷ See Cyrille Vogel and Reinhard Elze, eds., *Le Pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle*, vol. 2, *Studi e Testi*, vol. 227 (Vatican City: Vatican Apostolic Library, 1963), 1-141. For the rite of confirmation, see p. 109. Vogel notes (in *Medieval Liturgy*, 232) that there are no manuscripts of *Ordo L* except in the *Romano-Germanic Pontifical*.

⁴⁸ Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 230-239.

that the Carolingian church must have increasingly used the term ‘confirmation’ for the episcopal postbaptismal rite. It is possible that Faustus of Riez’s sermon had some part in this. The *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* was increasingly used in the late ninth century,⁴⁹ and Faustus’s sermon was actually quoted in *Ordo L* as part of a sermon on the topic of the postbaptismal episcopal anointing.⁵⁰ Moreover, these instances of the Carolingian use of the term “confirmation” by Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, *Ordo XI*, and *Ordo L*, led later scholastics to adopt the term as the title for the ritual.⁵¹

⁴⁹ For instance, the records of synods in Worms (868), Cologne (887), Metz (893) and Tribur (895) contain *Pseudo-Isidorian* material. See Horst Fuhrmann, “False Decretals,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5 (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1967), 823.

⁵⁰ *Ordo Romanus L*, 25, 145, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 5, 243.

⁵¹ Quinn, “Confirmation Reconsidered,” 359f.

Chapter 8: The Meaning of Early Medieval Confirmation

To those who actually took part in the rite, confirmation could have many meanings. On one hand, the theological meaning of confirmation as an impartation of the Holy Spirit was rather straightforward, though not without problems, such as the question of why there were two anointings after baptism (Is the Holy Spirit given twice?), or the question of the spiritual status of one who died without having been confirmed (Did they die without receiving the Holy Spirit? Could they still go to heaven?). On the other hand, because of its association with episcopal power and prestige and because of the opportunity the rite afforded for kinship development, confirmation carried a rich complex of meanings beyond the narrowly liturgical or theological.

Theological Meaning: Reception of the Holy Spirit

The Carolingian bishops' responses to Charlemagne's Circular Letter consistently indicated that the primary work of the postbaptismal episcopal handlaying and anointing was the impartation of the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, this conclusion on their part was consistent with the content of the rites of initiation they practiced and with the theological sources they utilized to provide a framework of understanding for their activities. Rabanus Maurus, in *De Institutione Clericorum*, provides what may be the clearest Carolingian

theological exposition concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism.¹ The two works one would expect by Isidore of Seville, the *Etymologies* and *Concerning Ecclesiastical Offices*, along with Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* provided the theological background for this treatise, but Rabanus was not motivated simply by abstract theological interests; his concerns were also practical. As Wallace-Hadrill notes, "Germany was still in the ninth century a world of mass-conversion and mass-baptism."² Many priests found themselves in frontline missionary settings amid large pagan populations, while others ministered in remote rural parishes having little contact with the church hierarchy. It was with these in mind that Rabanus wrote "the first (or at any rate the first extant) teaching manual compiled for German clergy and monks."³ In a section entitled "Concerning the Episcopal Handlaying and the Sacrament of Anointing,"⁴ Rabanus uses *Primo paganus* as his starting place, but provides a bit more explanation as to the content of the preaching for which confirmation strengthens the Christian:

Finally, however, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, is given to him through the laying on of the hand by the high priest so that he may be strengthened through the Holy Spirit who was given through the grace of eternal life to preach to others *the same gift which he himself attained in baptism.*⁵

¹ See Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.26-30, 2.39. For an analysis of these passages, see Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 62-66. For an interesting analysis of *De Institutione Clericorum* as a whole, see Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 318-322.

² Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 319.

³ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 318.

⁴ "De Impositione Manus Episcopalis et Chrismatis Sacramento."

⁵ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30, p. 53: "Novissime autem a summo sacerdote per impositionem manus, paracletus traditur illi, spiritus sanctus, ut roboretur per spiritum

Rabanus's larger theological purpose in this chapter, however, was to resolve the theological predicament created by two postbaptismal anointings, a predicament summarized in the following questions: How can (or why would) the Holy Spirit be given more than once? and Are those who never receive episcopal confirmation left without the Holy Spirit? Neither of these questions is specifically articulated by Rabanus, but they clearly create the subtext behind all that he says. The key to his answer can be found in the following:

For the baptized are sealed with chrism by the priest (*per sacerdotem*) on the top of the head; [however, they are also] truly [sealed with chrism] by the bishop on the forehead. The result is that the first anointing signifies the descent of the Holy Spirit upon a man to create a dwelling consecrated for God (*ad habitationem Deo consecrandam*). Moreover, in the second [anointing] the sevenfold grace of that same Holy Spirit may be shown to come in him (*venire in hominem declaretur*) with all the fullness of holiness, knowledge and virtue. 'For then after the body and soul have been cleansed and blessed, the Holy Spirit himself willingly descends from the Father' so that he might purify and sanctify his vessel with his visitation. And now [in the episcopal anointing] he comes on a man for this reason, that the seal of faith which he received on the forehead may make him replete with heavenly gifts and strengthened by his grace to courageously and boldly endure before the kings and magistrates of this world and to preach the name of Christ with an unrestrained voice.⁶

sanctum ad praedicandum aliis idem donum, quod ipse in baptisate consecutus est, per gratiam vitae donatus aeternae" (emphasis mine).

⁶ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30, p. 53-54: "Signatur enim baptizatus cum chrismate per sacerdotem in capitis summitate; per pontificem vero in fronte, ut in priore unctione significetur spiritus sancti super ipsum descensio ad habitationem deo consecrandam; in secunda quoque, ut eiusdem spiritus sancti septiformis gratia cum omni plenitudine sanctitatis et scientiae et virtutis venire in hominem declaretur. 'Tunc enim ipse spiritus sanctus post mundata et benedicta corpora atque animas libens a patre descendit,' ut vas suum sua visitatione sanctificet et inlustret. Et nunc in hominem ad hoc venit, ut signaculum fidei, quod in fronte suscepti, faciat eum donis caelestibus repletum et sua gratia confortatum, intrepide et audacter coram regibus et potestatibus huius saeculi portare, ac nomen Christi libera voce praedicare." Quotation from Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 6.19.54.

In this way, Rabanus followed Isidore of Seville in asserting two works of the Holy Spirit symbolized by two anointings. The first is a work of consecration or cleansing, the second a work of indwelling and empowering. He supports this dual function of the Holy Spirit by citing New Testament precedent:

Nor is it a strange thing that a man is anointed in two ways with the same chrism to receive the Holy Spirit when the same Spirit was given in two ways to the Apostles themselves—Once on earth sometime after his resurrection the Lord breathed on them and said, ‘receive the Holy Spirit; Whosever sins you forgive are forgiven them and whosever you retain are retained.’ And once from heaven sometime after the ascension of the Lord on the day of Pentecost he came upon the apostles in tongues of fire and he enabled them to speak in the languages of all the people.⁷

Thus Rabanus solves the problem by asserting that the Holy Spirit is given twice, in order to accomplish two different spiritual tasks in the Christian. Moreover, it would not be catastrophic if a Christian did not receive episcopal confirmation, because he did fully receive the Holy Spirit at the first postbaptismal presbyterial anointing. So the church’s policy reserving confirmation for bishops did not put anyone in danger of spiritual peril.⁸

⁷ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30, p. 54: “Nec mirum, si homo bis eodem chrismate ad accipiendum spiritum sanctum unguatur cum idem spiritus bis sit ipsis apostolis datus, id est in terra semel, quando post resurrectionem suam dominus insufflavit in eos et dixit: ‘Accipite spiritum sanctum: quorum remisistis peccata, remittuntur eis, et quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt;’ et de caelis semel, quando post ascensionem domini in die pentecostes in linguis igneis super apostolos venit et omnium gentium linguis eis loqui concessit.” Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 65, asserts that “Rabanus was the first [Christian theologian], having this scriptural precedent in mind, to say clearly that the Holy Spirit was given twice to the candidates in the course of their initiation.” This is perhaps technically true, but the excerpt from the *Etymologies* in the previous quote would tend to blunt the point of this conclusion. Isidore’s statement that the Holy Spirit “willingly descends from the father,” sounds very much like a second ‘giving’ of the Spirit.

⁸ Wallace-Hadrill misstates that this restriction was made because “only bishops could apply chrism” (*The Frankish Church*, 319). Although only bishops could consecrate chrism, it was regularly used by all priests. The previous quote, for example, specifically says that chrism was used for both the presbyterial and episcopal anointings.

Two other observations concerning Rabanus's understanding of the Holy Spirit arise from a close reading of this chapter. First, Rabanus had a distinctly Trinitarian approach to his theology of the Holy Spirit, portraying the Spirit as intimately involved with the person and work of both the Father and the Son. For example, alluding to Bede's designation of the Spirit as the "finger of God,"⁹ Rabanus wrote, "Therefore he is called the finger of God so that his creative virtue might be made known together with the Father and the Son."¹⁰ Second, in spite of the fact that Rabanus envisioned a process in which the ceremony of episcopal handlaying took place one week after baptism,¹¹ he nevertheless portrays handlaying as an integral part of the entire initiation process. This can be detected in the middle of the chapter from the way he shifts his point of view back and forth between both postbaptismal anointings without actually changing the subject.

Amalarius of Metz, Bishop of Trier from c. 809-813 and one of Alcuin's former students, dealt even more forcefully with the question of whether episcopal confirmation was necessary in his *Liber officialis*, a work dedicated to Louis the Pious c. 820. He stated that anyone who does not receive the imposition of the bishop's hand because of negligence, as opposed to one who does not have access to a bishop, puts himself in a dangerously compromised position.¹² He

⁹ Bede, *In Marcum*, 7, 33, in CCSL, vol. 120, 525.

¹⁰ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30, p. 54: Ideo autem digitus dei dicitur, ut eius operatoria virtus simul cum patre et filio significetur."

¹¹ See Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 2.39.

¹² Amalarius of Metz, *Liber officialis*, 1.27.7-15, in *Studi e Testi*, vol. 139, 140-144.

concluded that it would not imperil such a person's soul, but it would significantly limit his standing in God's kingdom:

Is it not a fearful thing, the difference between the one who does without the laying on of the hand and the one who receives it? The difference is as bright as the stars. That is, although on account of their other good works they are not kept out of the kingdom of God, still, they will not have the place they would have had if they had received it. I do not deny that it is possible for a man to receive the Holy Spirit without the laying on of the hand, if the Lord wills to give [it] to him, but [both] the apostolic observance, which was exercised by the laying of the hand, and the present-day practice of the church greatly limits anyone who through neglect tosses aside the laying on of the hand.¹³

Spiritual Meaning: Power from On High

The spiritual meaning of episcopal confirmation—what significance it held in terms of emotional satisfaction, devotional enrichment, and personal identity for those in the early Middle Ages who received it—is much more difficult to determine than the questions of liturgical practice and theological signification that have been discussed thus far. This is the case because it involves trying to understand the perspective of the literal ‘silent majority’ of medieval people who left no written account of their experiences and whose voices and concerns are very hard to pick out of the extant records. Part of the solution has been to explore capitularies, letters, records of church councils, penitentials, and

¹³ Amalarius of Metz, *Liber officialis*, 1.27.15, in *Studi e Testi*, vol. 139, 144: “Timendum est ne illa differentia sit inter illum qui sine impositione manus moritur, et inter illum qui eam accipit, quae est inter stellarum claritudinem, hoc est, quamvis non excludantur a regno Dei propter cetera bona opera, tamen non habeant illum locum quem haberant, si illam acciperant. Non nego posse hominem accipere Spiritum Sanctum sine impositione manus, si eum Dominus dare voluerit, sed eum oppido constringit apostolica observatio, quam exercuerunt per manus impositionem, et cura praesens ecclesiastica, qui per neglegentiam perdit manus impositionem.”

saint's lives—primary sources that provide some insight into the less formal behaviors associated with confirmation and into the ways that kinship relationships were established by means of the rite.

Chrism as a Means to Understanding the Power of Confirmation

Another fruitful historiographical device has been to take special note of the many instructions one finds regulating the use and misuse of chrism and sacred oil one finds in these sources, especially the capitularies. This is the case not only because bishops used chrism in the rite of confirmation,¹⁴ but also because, in certain ways, the use of chrism paralleled the practice of confirmation in that it was an extension of episcopal prestige and power. Just as only a bishop could confirm, so only a bishop could consecrate chrism.¹⁵ Therefore, it is likely that both clergy and laity attached some of the same ideas, feelings and motives to confirmation as to chrism, and thus we can take the notions of spiritual power that were commonly attached to chrism, and which are more accessible in the sources, and apply them to our understanding of confirmation. Moreover chrism, since it was put in the hands of priests to use in baptism and other rites, was often out of the bishop's direct control, leaving it more available for non-sanctioned uses.

The Frankish church was very concerned with regulating the production, distribution, and use of chrism. For instance, churchmen feared that priests

¹⁴ MGH Capit I, 133.

¹⁵ MGH Capit II, 118; *The Penitential of Theodore*, 2.3.8, in John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer,

from outlying areas might use the need for chrism as an excuse to abandon their pastoral responsibilities at home and travel to the cities to collect it. So, an ecclesiastical capitulary issued by Louis the Pious around 818 declared that priests who lived within four or five miles of the cities could individually get chrism whenever they wished, except during Lent. But for those further away, out of every eight or ten priests, the bishop appointed only one who should make the journey to receive chrism for himself and his colleagues.¹⁶ Better still, whenever a bishop might pass through and perform a mass, the local priest was to obtain freshly consecrated, 'new,' chrism.¹⁷ After receiving new chrism, the priest carefully stored it in a sealed container¹⁸ and was forbidden to save the old, or to use it in ceremonies; rather he was to immediately destroy it by burning it in the lamps of the church.¹⁹ Such careful regulation of chrism was motivated by the serious concern that holy chrism not be misused. Unfortunately, it is the nature of capitularies to list prohibitions without always providing details concerning their purpose, application, and the mitigating factors that might have been taken into consideration when punishing offenses. Often that information was communicated orally by envoys of the king (*missi dominici*) who circulated the capitularies.²⁰ Nevertheless it is possible to piece

eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 201.

¹⁶ MGH Capit I, 278.

¹⁷ MGH Capit I, 25, 29, 45.

¹⁸ MGH Capit I, 174; MGH Conc II pt. 1, 252, 268.

¹⁹ MGH Capit I, 45.

²⁰ See Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe*, trans. Michael Idomir Allen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 127f; and H.R. Loyn and John Percival, *The Reign of Charlemagne: Documents on Carolingian Government and Administration* (London:

together an accurate picture of why chrism was regulated, what acts were forbidden, the penalties incurred, and what might have motivated those activities.

The longstanding honor reserved for chrism is indicated by the work of a synod in Auxerre (c. 600) which accorded chrism the spiritual status of a holy relic. It commanded that when chrism was transported from the bishop it must be carried reverently and in its own special cask (*crismario*) “just as the relics of the saints are wont to be carried.”²¹ Similarly, a record from a council in Arles in 813 linked the protection of chrism to its sacramental nature: “Priests should guard chrism under their seal . . . *for it is a kind of sacrament* and should not be touched by anyone except priests.”²² This supports the contention that we can perceive how the Franks viewed confirmation, which was a sacrament conferred by the bishop, by understanding how they regulated chrism, which was “a kind of sacrament” created by the bishop. Chrism was protected because as “a kind of sacrament” it bore the spiritual power of the church and the honor of the bishop who had consecrated it. Therefore it was forbidden both to distribute *and receive* chrism for illicit use, either as a gift or for money. As seen

Edward Arnold, 1975), 8. At times capitularies were nothing more than lists intended to remind the *missi* of what they were to say. For example, see the first capitulary sent with *missi* to Aquitaine in 809, in MGH Capit I, 150.

²¹ “Synodus Dioecesis Autissiodorensis (561-605),” 6, in CCSL, vol. 148A, 266: “Ut ad media quadragensima [sic] presbyteri crisma petant et, si quis infirmitate detentus venire non potuerit, ad archidiacono suum archisubdiaconum transmittat, sed cum crismario et lenteo, sicut reliquiae deportari solent.”

²² MGH Conc II, pt. 1, 252, (emphasis mine): “Ut presbyteri sub sigillo custodiant crisma et nulli sub praetextu medicinae vel cuiuslibet rei donare praesumant. *Genus enim sacramenti est et non ab aliis nisi a sacerdotibus contingi debet.*”

in the following passage, punishments for doing so ranged from loss of position to loss of a hand:

If any priest or deacon should presume to give or receive chrism let him lose his position; other clerics and nuns should undergo physical punishment and confinement in jail; laity who have received or have given chrism to someone should lose a hand.²³

In this capitulary the priest got off fairly lightly, but these penalties varied from document to document. In some, the priest also lost a hand: “If a priest should give chrism, let him be degraded by the bishop and afterwards let him lose a hand to the judge.”²⁴

What was the illicit use that incurred such severe penalties? Two answers are provided in the capitularies. A number forbid using chrism as a magical source of power, either to heal or to harm (*sub praetextu medicinae et maleficii*).²⁵ It is not difficult to imagine situations where an individual might want to appropriate the near sacramental power of chrism to bring about healing, or perhaps to do ill or to deceive. The latter was the case in a pair of sources from 809 which forbade using chrism “to subvert judgment” or perhaps, “to subvert the judgment of God.”²⁶ The reference here is to trial by ordeal, a practice which

²³ MGH Capit I, 142: “Si quis presbyter aut diaconus dare aut accipere praesumpserit, gradum amittat; ceteri clerici et nonnanes disciplinam corporalem et carceris custodiam sustineant; laici qui acceperint aut alicui dederint manum perdant.”

²⁴ MGH Capit I, 150: “Si presbiter crisma dederit, ab episcopo degradetur et postmodum ad iudicem manu perdat.” See also MGH Capit I, 149, 174.

²⁵ MGH Capit I, 174; MGH Conc II pt. 1, 252, 268, 296, 299.

²⁶ MGH Capit I, 149, a capitulary to Aquitaine, chapter 12, forbids giving chrism “to subvert judgment” (“ad iudicium subvertendum”) without saying whose judgment was being subverted. In MGH Capit I, 150, another capitulary to Aquitaine, a list for *missi*, chapter 21 forbids the misuse of chrism but does not describe how it was misused. However, chapter 20 expresses the need that “everyone would believe the judgment of God without doubting.” The close

the Carolingians were eager to extend in legal procedures.²⁷ Apparently behind this command was the understandable, but nonetheless prohibited, attempt by participants in ordeals to gain supernatural protection from hot water or a hot iron by the use of chrism. In fact, the earliest known description of a medieval ordeal included an attempt by one of the participants to gain an advantage by similar means. The account is from Gregory of Tours' *Liber in Gloria Martyrum* in which a Catholic deacon in an ordeal against an Arian anointed his arm with oil before plunging it into a cauldron of hot water.²⁸ He was immediately accused of *maleficium*, the same term used later in the Carolingian capitularies.²⁹ Gregory does not say that the oil was holy chrism that had been blessed by a bishop, but one can certainly imagine that if such chrism had been available the anxious Catholic would have used it. Nevertheless, from this earliest account through the Carolingian capitularies, Franks were forbidden to use anything, especially sacred chrism, in an attempt to change the outcome of an ordeal. Indeed to divert chrism to any except its intended use was a serious crime.

relationship in the context between "judgment" and "judgment of God" caused the editor, Alfred Boretius, to conclude that chapter 21 was meant to forbid the use of chrism to "subvert the judgment of God" (MGH Capit I, 142, n. 1).

²⁷ Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 9-12. Bartlett provides a number of other sources that prohibit the use of chrism to attempt to subvert the outcome of an ordeal (71, n. 2.).

²⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, 80, in MGH SRM I, pt. 2, 92-93. This incident is discussed in Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 4-5, 71 and in Valerie I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 140. In Flint, see also 283-286 for a discussion of magic and ordeals.

²⁹ For the use of the term *maleficium* in the early Middle Ages, see Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 147-163.

This concern for the chrism itself was born out in later saints' lives which indicate that, with the passage of time in the ninth and tenth centuries, the Carolingians increasingly emphasized the power of the impartation of the Holy Spirit through the bishop's act of confirmation and the use of chrism in that act without necessarily maintaining a close theological connection to baptism. Compared to Rabanus Maurus who crafted a nuanced understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit at confirmation that was closely tied to the sacrament of baptism,³⁰ the image contained in later documents was more crude and straightforward, centered on the power of the bishop to impart the Holy Spirit through the use of chrism. The late tenth-century vita of Ulrich of Augsburg (d. 973), written by Gerhard the Provost of Augsburg, is an example of such an account. By all accounts, Ulrich was an exemplary and devoted bishop, and according to his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, "the first person known to be formally canonized by a pope." Gerhard repeatedly stressed Ulrich's devotion to pastoral care. For example, he describes how in one region Ulrich held a council on Easter Monday in which

the people were called before him and he questioned knowledgeable and truthful men regarding the sacrament, because in that parish error had been dignified and sins against the laws of Christianity had been committed.³¹

Gerhard repeatedly notes this same devotion to duty in regard to confirmation. Earlier on Easter Monday, prior to the council and after the morning mass,

³⁰ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30. See discussion above, p. 120-121.

³¹ Gerhard, *Vita Sancti Oudalrici Episcopi*, 6, in MGH SS IV, 394: "Populum ante se vocari fecit, prudentioresque et veraciores sacramento interrogare praecepit, quae in illa parrochia emendatione digna fuissent, et contra iura christianitatis perpetrata peccata."

Ulrich “was confirming with holy chrism a multitude of people who were gathered there.”³² Ulrich was one who “did not neglect to pass on the Holy Spirit where it was needed, by the strengthening [*confirmacione*] of chrism.”³³ Rather, “following the rule of his office, that man was diligent to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to the people gathered at that place [by giving them] the strengthening [*confirmationem*] of holy anointing.”³⁴ Note that in all these instances, Gerhard specifically links the gift of the Holy Spirit to Ulrich’s anointing with chrism, rather than to baptism, the laying on of hands, or some other activity.

A miracle story from the late ninth-century *vita* of Faro, Bishop of Meaux, shows this same emphasis on chrism. Faro was actually a Merovingian bishop from the late seventh century, but this *vita*, with its stress on the importance of chrism, is more a reflection of Carolingian concerns than of Merovingian.³⁵ The biographer’s colorful description of the events portrays Faro as a very holy bishop as demonstrated by his commitment to confirmation and verified by the miraculous healing that took place at his hand:

In a special way, when they had gone half way through the eight days of the Easter Feast, the bishop Faro, chosen of God, most *devotedly bound himself to the ministry of confirmation* in which the souls of the baptized bodies receive the gift of the Holy Spirit *by the mark of holy chrism*. And amidst an immeasurable tumultuous crowd from the reasonable sex [i.e. men] coming to be

³² Gerhard, 4, in MGH SS IV, 393: “Multitudinem populi illuc congregati sacro chrismate confirmaret.”

³³ Gerhard, 5, in MGH SS IV, 394: “Dona etiam sancti Spiritus tradere, ubi necessitas fuit, cum confirmatione chrismatis non omisit.”

³⁴ Gerhard, 6, in MGH SS IV, 394: “Ille autem sequens regulam sui ministerii, Spiritus sancti donum, populo ad hoc illuc congregato, sacrae unctionis confirmationem studuit imponere.”

³⁵ Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 337.

filled [with the Holy Spirit], [a crowd so huge that] the floor of the church had withdrawn from the eyes, and before he had begun to confirm [the crowd] that was following him in his presence, a kind of light arose from a [blind] boy who had been deprived from the light of the eyes. While the boy received the gift of the Holy Spirit *through the anointing with chrism* by the blessed Faro, he [also] clearly saw everything at his touch.³⁶

Again, the privileging of chrism is apparent.

One Anglo-Saxon text, Wulfstan of Winchester's life of St Ethelwold, the Bishop of Winchester (963-984), should also be noted in this context for it contains an account of the miraculous discovery and replenishing of lost chrism.³⁷ As with the Carolingian bishops, Ethelwold's sanctity is marked by his faithful diligence in confirming. In one particular outing, however, the cleric who had responsibility for the chrism had failed to bring an adequate supply, and had then lost even that. After an anxious search, the cleric "found the flask of chrism [*ampullam crismatis*] lying in the road full of oil, though shortly before it had not even been half full of liquid."³⁸ Wulfstan concludes that this miracle took place so that Ethelwold, "who was flooded with the grace of the Holy Spirit

³⁶ *Vita Faronis Episcopi Meldensis*, 103 (emphasis mine), in MGH SRM V, 195: "Cum quodam tempore festa paschalia per octonarium dierum numerum mediassent, electus Dei Faro pontifex in ministerio confirmationis, in quo animae corporum baptizatorum donum sancti Spiritus accipiunt, per liniamentum chrismae sanctificationis se devotissime obligavit. Cumque innumerabilis turba mixta ex sexu rationabili pavementum ecclesiae ab oculis subtraxisset replendo, et ordo sese sequentem ad confirmandum turmas eior praesentiam ante applicuisset, orta est lux quodam puero, qui lumine oculorum fuerat orbat. Dum per chrisam unctionis a beato farone donum sancti Spiritus percipit, cuiusque tactu clare videt omnia."

³⁷ Wulfstan of Winchester, *The Life of St Æthelwold*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 32, p. 48-49.

³⁸ Translation adapted from Wulfstan of Winchester, *The Life of St Æthelwold*, 32, p. 49.

and brought happiness to the hearts and faces of man *by his unction* should himself be rewarded both within and without by the oil of joy from above.”³⁹

Confirmation and Royal Anointing

In addition to their spiritual function, bishops and anointing also had an important role in the construction of royal power. The historian Janet L. Nelson concludes that there is a direct connection between episcopal confirmation and the episcopal anointing of kings.⁴⁰ She asserts that in four critical instances in the early Middle Ages, royal anointing was introduced during periods of increasing synodal activity.⁴¹ Germanic kings recognized their need of episcopal support to rule successfully and establish a dynasty. At the same time, bishops recognized the benefit of an authoritative and active king, not only for the protection of property, but also to add a necessary endorsement to the work of episcopal synods. It was in this context that royal anointing was established,⁴² after which “anointing almost immediately came to be regarded, not only by

³⁹ Translation adapted from Wulfstan of Winchester, *The Life of St Æthelwold*, ed. Lapidge and Winterbottom, 32, p. 49 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁰ Janet L. Nelson, “National Synods, Kingship As Office, and Royal Anointing: an Early Medieval Syndrome,” in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1986), 239-257. See also Paul A. Jacobson, “*Sicut Samuhel unxit David*: Early Carolingian Royal Anointings Reconsidered,” in *Medieval Liturgy: a Book of Essays*, ed. Lizette Larson-Miller (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 267-303.

⁴¹ Spain in 672, West Francia in 848, East Francia in 911, and England in 973. See Nelson, “National Synods,” 243-247.

⁴² Nelson contends that the famous anointing of Pepin was an exception that proved the rule (256). Instituted by the pope, the Frankish bishops did not continue the practice because circumstances were not such that either party yet saw a mutual benefit to the inclusion of an episcopal anointing in the process of king-making.

clerics, but also by the candidates themselves, as indispensable to king-making.”⁴³

Thus, royal anointing was not simply a Christianized means of creating a Germanic sacral king,⁴⁴ nor was it intended to invest the king with some sort of episcopal status,⁴⁵ nor was it directly reflective of the Old Testament anointing of kings.⁴⁶ Rather, Nelson contends that this anointing was symbolically based on the postbaptismal episcopal anointing.⁴⁷ By utilizing this symbol of personal regeneration and divine impartation of power, bishops made the point that there was nothing intrinsic in the man himself that made him king; rather he was made worthy by God on the basis of an episcopal touch to undertake the work (*ministerium*) of a Christian ruler.⁴⁸ Furthermore, by symbolically connecting king-making to an anointing that was solely within their prerogative, bishops liturgically asserted a unique role in the establishment of royal power. Conversely, the practice of royal anointing could not help but to enhance the

⁴³ Nelson, “National Synods,” 248.

⁴⁴ Nelson, “National Synods,” 248.

⁴⁵ Nelson, “National Synods,” 249. Anointing was not yet a regular part of ordination ceremonies.

⁴⁶ Nelson, “National Synods,” 249-250.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, the story arose in the late ninth century that when chrism for Clovis’s postbaptismal anointing was late arriving, the lack was supplied by a dove that descended from heaven with an ampoule of holy oil. This same miraculous ampoule, which never ran out, became the source of oil for royal coronation anointings in France throughout the Middle Ages. For an overview of the legend of the Holy Phial, see Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 130-133.

⁴⁸ This ‘making’ of a king by anointing was distinctly western. In Byzantium anointing was also used, but with different meaning. See Janet L. Nelson, “Symbols in Context: Rulers’ Inauguration Rituals in Byzantium and the West in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1986), 259-81.

significance of the postbaptismal anointing in the eyes of its recipients. Such close association with the king increased the social status of the bishop. Moreover, the rite of confirmation created a point of common experience between the king and his subjects⁴⁹—both had been strengthened in their Christian calling by receiving an anointing from the hand of the bishop—heady stuff indeed.

The Experience of the Confirmand

It would be wonderful to know for certain just what was going on in the minds of those who received confirmation. Were they making these sorts of lofty associations? Doubtless it depended to some degree on the circumstances. According to Asser's biography of the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred the Great, when he was only five years old the young Alfred was sent by his father to Rome to be confirmed by Pope Leo IV.⁵⁰ The account says that Pope Leo also became Alfred's adoptive father. This could have been accomplished by the pope having stood as sponsor to Alfred's confirmation, in addition to actually performing the ceremony. Thus, Alfred's lavish experience of confirmation must have been impressive indeed. However, the circumstances in which most medieval Christians were confirmed were not elegant, personal, or liturgically rich. The

⁴⁹ Janet L. Nelson, "The Lord's Anointed and the People's Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual," in *The Frankish World 750-900* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996), 118. Nelson draws this connection between the king and his subjects to make the point that royal anointing was not designed to "separate off the king from other laymen" (108).

⁵⁰ Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 8. This account by Asser is not without difficulties, because he also asserts that, in addition to confirmation, Alfred was also anointed king by Leo IV. Regarding the issues posed by this assertion of royal anointing in Rome, see Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, trans., *Alfred the Great* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 232, n. 19.

Penitential of Theodore, associated with the late seventh-century Archbishop of Canterbury, stated, “A bishop may confirm in a field if it is necessary.”⁵¹ This small concession vividly portrays the actual situation the church faced throughout Europe north of Italy. In many places a bishop was seldom if ever seen. When word came that a bishop was passing through, an attentive priest was expected to gather all those willing and needing to be confirmed.⁵² The experience of a group of poor villagers, perhaps in the rain, standing in a muddy field before the bishop and his impressive entourage, as he hastily said the appropriate prayer and quickly worked his way down the row anointing adults, young people, and babes in arms, intoning the words, *Signum Christi in vitam aeternam*⁵³ before he hurried on to the next village, must have been very different from that of the child of a wealthy family, surrounded by godparents, in an incense filled cathedral with the bishop wearing his finest robes.

In the formal setting there may have been some sort of catechetical training, depending on the age of the confirmand and whether his parents and his godparents from baptism had obeyed the exhortations from various church councils to “instruct their spiritual sons in the catholic faith.”⁵⁴ If not, perhaps the additional godparents he received at confirmation would fulfill this responsibility.

⁵¹ *The Penitential of Theodore*, 2.2.1, in McNeill, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 200.

⁵² MGH Capit I, 25.

⁵³ *Liber Sacramentorum Gellonensis*, 712, CCSL, vol. 159, 101.

In both settings, confirmands or their sponsors probably expected some sort of spiritual benefit from the rite. However, the nature of this expectation must have varied greatly. Those with a theological bent may have anticipated a spiritual strengthening through the reception of the Holy Spirit from the hand of the bishop. Others, probably most, as we have seen with chrism, must have expected something more along the lines of *medicina et maleficium* related to the power of the bishop. In the reference to confirmation in the biography of Wilfrid, the seventh-century Bishop of York, one can find an example of this sort of ‘magical’ expectation.

St Wilfrid was out riding on a certain day, going to fulfill the various duties of his bishopric, baptizing and also confirming the people with the laying on of hands; among these there was a certain woman . . . sad at heart, moaning with grief and wearied with her load. For she held in her bosom the body of her first-born child, wrapped in rags and hidden from sight; she uncovered the face of the corpse for the bishop to confirm it amongst the rest, hoping thus to be able to bring it back to life.⁵⁵

Surely a small percentage came to confirmation with such a specific and desperate hope as this woman. It is impossible to know where she got the notion that such a dramatic healing could be achieved in this way. Perhaps it was simply an act of heartsick desperation. Nevertheless, the story indicates that Wilfrid’s reputation as a godly and powerful bishop must have been widespread. Clearly this story, along with all that has been said about chrism, reveals a widespread understanding of confirmation as linked closely to the

⁵⁴ MGH Capit I, 174: “De fide: unusquisque compater vel parentes vel proximi filios suos spiritales catholice instruant.” The responsibilities for parents, godparents and other family members to provide spiritual training for children is discussed more fully below.

⁵⁵ Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 18, p. 39. Noted by Foot, “By water in the spirit’:

power of the bishop along with an anticipation that sacramental power could be used to gain a spiritual benefit different from, or in addition to, the one that the church taught its followers to expect.

Moreover, in both settings most participants must have felt that, in some way, their status was enhanced through association with the bishop and, through him, with the larger Catholic Church. Earlier we discussed the anthropological studies of rites of passage by Arnold van Gennep and others.⁵⁶ They divide rites of passage into three parts—separation, transition, and incorporation. No single act could more thoroughly incorporate a medieval Christian into the church than confirmation by a bishop, for on this earth, the bishop held the power of the keys: excommunication and reconciliation. Episcopal confirmation, more so than priestly baptism, fully acknowledged an individual's good standing in the community of the church at large. This was never more the case than when a subject for confirmation had been baptized under unusual or inordinate circumstances. For instance, much of Boniface's ministry was on the 'wild frontier' where it was not unlikely to encounter Christians who had been baptized by priests of doubtful spiritual pedigree. Pope Gregory, in a letter to Boniface, ruled that, despite uncertainty about their baptism, "nevertheless because they were baptized in the name of the Trinity, it is necessary to confirm

the Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England," 190.

⁵⁶ See above, p. 32, n. 1; and 44, n. 34.

them with the laying on of hands and holy chrism.”⁵⁷ In 757, a council in Compiègne, made a similar ruling:

If anyone is baptized by an unbaptized priest, and the holy Trinity has been invoked in that baptism, he is baptized [the baptism is valid] just as Pope Sergius said. Nevertheless, he stands in need of the application of the hands of the bishop.⁵⁸

In addition Frankish bishops were usually armed men from powerful families, with, as we have seen, very important political and military connections to the king.⁵⁹ Even in a small village, without the robes, incense, and other paraphernalia, a well dressed bishop traveling with a large and imposing entourage must have been an extremely impressive sight. To receive confirmation from such a bishop, under any circumstances, allowed the confirmand and his family, in some way, to partake of the honor, prestige and power of the bishop, the kingdom, and the Roman church.

Social Meaning: Kinship Development

It would be interesting to know whether confirmands or their families in the more impromptu circumstances mentioned above had the time or the inclination to secure godparents. They certainly did in the more formal settings. Both baptism, when one “received someone from the font,” and confirmation,

⁵⁷ MGH Epist III, 294: “tamen, quod in nomine trinitatis baptizati sunt, oportet eos per manus impositionis et sacri crismatis confirmari.”

⁵⁸ MGH Capit I, 38: “Si quis baptizatus est a presbytero non baptizato, et sancta trinitas in ipso baptismo invocata fuerit, baptizatus est, sicut Sergius papa dixit. Impositione tamen manuum episcopi indiget.”

⁵⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 178.

when one “held someone before the bishop,”⁶⁰ created a complex web of spiritual/familial relationships, for which there was special terminology.⁶¹ These relationship included godfather (*patrinus*), godmother (*matrina*) and godchildren (*filiolus* or *filiola*). Godparents entered into a relationship of coparenthood (*compaternitas*) with the child’s natural parents—men were *compatres* and women were *commatres* to one another. Relationships like these were extremely valuable to medieval families trying to construct the sorts of alliances that led to social stability and power. Janet L. Nelson notes that “the focus of spiritual kinship in the earlier Middle Ages was on coparenthood rather than filiation, on the interests of parents, rather than those of children.”⁶² Furthermore, it must be born in mind that these relationships were all considered genuine family ties to which incest prohibitions were applied just as strictly as to blood relations. Reference has already been made to a capitulary from Pepin III, dated 754-755,⁶³ which decreed penalties for incest, including incest “with the mother of his godchild [commatre]” and “with his godmother from baptism or from confirmation by the bishop.”⁶⁴ That this was found in a royal capitulary and that the fine was paid to the king dispels any belief that these forms of incest were solely ecclesiastical concerns, although the impetus for these regulations

⁶⁰ Lynch, *Godparents*, 211-212.

⁶¹ See Lynch, *Godparents*, 4-6; and idem, *Christianizing Kinship*, 111-112.

⁶² Janet L. Nelson, “Parents, Children, and the Church in the Earlier Middle Ages,” in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 105. See also pp. 99-105 for a good discussion of godparentage and other aspects of Anglo-Saxon society that were impacted by the adoption of Christian rites such as baptism and confirmation.

⁶³ See above, p. 149.

⁶⁴ MGH Capit I, 31: “aut commatre sua, aut cum matrina sua spiritali de fonte et confirmatione episcopi.”

did come from the church. The Penitential of St Hubert, c. 850, stated, “If anyone takes in marriage one who is his daughter or sister from the sacred font or the anointing, they shall be separated and shall do penance for five years.”⁶⁵

These relationships formed by sponsorship raised one even stickier question: what to do with a parent who sponsored his or her own child, because in doing so husbands or wives entered into a relationship of *compaternitas* with their own spouse, making their marriage incestuous. Gratian’s *Decretum* contains a letter, attributed to Pope Deusdedit from the early seventh century, that affirmed the decision of previous popes that such couples were to separate.⁶⁶ This prohibition applied to sponsoring one’s stepchild as well as one’s natural child. A synod at Compiègne (757) under Pepin decreed,

If anyone should hold a stepdaughter or a stepson before the bishop for confirmation, he should be separated from his wife and not receive another. Similarly, the woman should not receive another man.⁶⁷

These separations were not divorce per se, because the principals were not allowed to remarry, but as Walafrid Strabo wrote in 840, “They who have taken the bond of coparenthood in their common child will not henceforth have the sharing of carnal intercourse.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *St. Hubert Penitential*, 51, in McNeill, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 293.

⁶⁶ Lynch, *Godparents*, 252.

⁶⁷ MGH Capit I, 38: “Si quis filiastram aut filiastrum ante episcopum ad confirmationem tenuerit, separetur ab uxore sua et alteram non accipiat. Similiter et femina alterum non accipiat.”

⁶⁸ Walafrid Strabo, *Libellus de exordiis et incrementis quarundam in observationibus ecclesiasticis rerum*, in MGH Capit II, 512: “non habebunt carnalis copulae deinceps ad invicem consortium, qui in communi filio compaternitatis spiritale vinculum susceperunt;” translation by Lynch,

It is difficult to know how scrupulously these sorts of incest prohibitions were honored. According to the previously mentioned synod at Compiègne (757), they applied to all marriages separated by less than four generations.⁶⁹ In that case, they must have often disrupted Frankish marriage practices, especially in villages. Joseph Lynch suggests that, because Charlemagne's extant capitularies make no mention of incest prohibitions for spiritual kin, he was backing away from his father's pioneering efforts in this area. However, ecclesiastical synods and penitentials continued to stress the prohibitions and the need to separate when they were violated, perhaps an indication that noncompliance was fairly widespread.⁷⁰ In 813, a council in Mainz decreed:

Therefore no one should raise his own son or daughter from the font of baptism or marry either his goddaughter or comother nor [should he marry] a woman whose son or daughter he has led to confirmation. Moreover, where this has been done, they should be separated.⁷¹

On the other hand, some were quite happy to comply. Apparently a few parents tried to take advantage of these prohibitions by purposely sponsoring their own child in order to get out of an undesirable marriage. This led a council in Chalons, which met in the same year as the council in Mainz, to make the opposite ruling that sponsoring one's own child should not result in separation.

Godparents, 279.

⁶⁹ MGH Capit I, 37: "1. Si in Quarta progenie reperti fuerint coniuncti, non separamus. 2. In tercia vero si reperti fuerint, separentur."

⁷⁰ Lynch, *Godparents*, 253.

⁷¹ MGH Conc II pt. 1, 273: "Nullus igitur proprium filium vel filiam de fonte baptismatis suscipiat nec filiolum nec commatrem ducat uxorem nec illam, cuius filium aut filiam ad confirmationem duxerit. Ubi autem factum fuerit, separentur."

Word has come to us that some women by negligence, others truly by fraud, are being separated from their own husbands by holding their own children before bishops to be confirmed. In such a case we consider it appropriate that . . . she shall perform penance on account of her deceit and furthermore shall not be separated from her husband.⁷²

In spite of its inconveniences and potential pitfalls, sponsorship at both baptism and confirmation was an honored and valued social practice. There is no evidence of attempts to mitigate the possible difficulties by reducing the number of godparents. *The Penitential of Theodore* expected that two different people would serve as godfather at baptism and at confirmation.⁷³ Clearly the benefits of extensive kinship development were highly sought after and outweighed the liabilities. Godparents provided valuable patrons for the godchild. For example, the writer of an early tenth-century letter to King Edward the Elder (r. 899-924), son and successor to King Alfred, explains that he became involved with an estate whose ownership was under dispute when one of the litigants “came to me and begged me to intercede for him, because I had stood sponsor to him at his confirmation.”⁷⁴ Moreover, the Franks prized the coparent relationship even more than godparentage because it placed the coparents on roughly equal footing, creating a relationship that provided mutual respect, cooperation and protection; an obligation to honor requests;

⁷² MGH Conc II pt. 1, 279: “Dictum etiam nobis est quasdam feminas desidiose, quasdam vero fraudulentè, ut a viris suis separentur, proprios filios coram episcopis ad confirmandum tenuisse. Unde nos dignum duximus, ut . . . propter fallatiam suam paenitentiam agat, a viro tamen suo non separetur.

⁷³ *The Penitential of Theodore*, 2.3.8, in McNeill, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 201.

⁷⁴ Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents, Vol. 1, C. 500-1042*, 2nd ed. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), 544.

and a social safeguard against aggression.⁷⁵ For these reasons, the Franks worked to extend, and church councils worked to limit, the number of sponsors as well as the number of ceremonies in which kinship bonds could be created.⁷⁶ The special benefit of confirmation, in this regard, was that because it was not mandatory for salvation, “a family could keep an unconfirmed child in reserve, so to speak, for important opportunities to expand the circle of spiritual kin.”⁷⁷

The church, however, stressed not the benefits but the responsibilities of spiritual kinship. Those who served as godparents were required themselves to have been both baptized and confirmed.⁷⁸ They were also to be prepared to assist, or take the place of, the parents in the instruction of their godchild in the catholic faith.⁷⁹ Godparents had this responsibility because they functioned as “sureties” for their godchildren’s spiritual welfare,⁸⁰ but close relatives were also to be ready to take on this responsibility.⁸¹ All were urged to remember that someday they would give an account before God for the manner in which they fulfilled this duty.⁸² Two items may be noted in this context. First, in their attempt to get someone to take responsibility for the spiritual nurture of

⁷⁵ For a full discussion of the benefits associated with godparent and coparent relationships, see Lynch, *Godparents*, 163-204.

⁷⁶ Lynch, *Godparents*, 205-218.

⁷⁷ Lynch, *Godparents*, 212.

⁷⁸ *The Penitential of Theodore*, 2.4.9, in McNeill, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 202.

⁷⁹ MGH Capit I, 174, 312; MGH Conc II pt. 1, 272, 296.

⁸⁰ MGH Capit I, 313: “fideiussores.”

⁸¹ MGH Capit I, 174, 312.

⁸² MGH Capit I, 174; MGH Conc II pt. 1, 296: “ita ut coram Deo ratiocinare debeat.”

children, early ninth-century churchmen were casting a wide net. This effort to involve parents, relatives, and godparents suggests that no one group could be counted on to oversee diligently the religious training of children. One suspects that, in many cases, very little training occurred at all. Second, while these admonitions surely applied to godparents from both baptism and confirmation, in these examples regarding spiritual nurture when a specific type of ceremony is mentioned, the reference is to baptism. This is not surprising since baptism was a rite of childhood and one would naturally expect catechesis to follow, while confirmation could be administered at any age.

Laxity in Practice

Based only on the bishops' responses to the Circular Letter, one might conclude that Carolingian bishops were united in their zeal to faithfully fulfill their pastoral obligation to confirm the newly baptized. These official responses, however, set forth an ideal that was not often achieved. A number of factors combined to make widespread confirmation extremely difficult for even the most willing bishops. Traditionally baptisms took place on Easter Sunday in the presence of a bishop. North of the Alps, however, the relatively small number of bishops, geographical isolation, and the difficulties of travel combined to make this impossible. In 734, Bede wrote a long letter to Egbert, Archbishop of York, calling for many church reforms, including the appointment of more bishops so the pastoral needs of the laity could be satisfied. Bede complained bitterly about both the unfairness of expecting parishioners to give tithes to support a

bishop whom they never saw, and the resultant spiritual disadvantage to those who never received episcopal confirmation:

For we have heard, and it is rumored, that many villages and hamlets of our people are situated in inaccessible mountains and dense woodlands, where there is never seen for many years at a time a bishop to exhibit any ministry or celestial grace; not one man of which, however, is immune from rendering dues to the bishop. Nor is it only a bishop who is lacking in such places to confirm the baptized by the laying on of hands; there is not even a teacher to teach the truth of the faith and the difference between good and evil conduct. . . . If we believe and confess that any advantage is conferred on the faithful by the laying on of hands, by which the Holy Spirit is received, it follows, on the contrary, that this same advantage is absent from those who have lacked the laying on of hands. On whom does this privation of good reflect more than on those bishops who promise to be the “protectors” of those for whom they either neglect to perform the office of spiritual “protection,” or else are unable to do so? . . . For when a bishop, at the dictates of love of money, undertakes in the name of his office the charge of a greater portion of the people than he can by any means reach by his preaching and visit in the whole space of a year, it clearly results in deadly peril both for himself and for those over whom he is preferred by the false name of “protector.”⁸³

Boniface had this experience in mind when he urged the Frankish church to create new dioceses and appoint *chorepiscopi*.⁸⁴

This problem of geography was exacerbated by the shift over the previous few centuries in the preponderance of baptisms from adults to infants. This shift had the unfortunate effect of scattering baptisms chronologically throughout the year because of the realistic fear that a newborn might not live until

⁸³ Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 802-803.

⁸⁴ Arnold Angenendt, “Bonifatius und das Sacramentum initiationis,” *Romische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 72 (1977): 155-158.

Easter.⁸⁵ Evidence for these difficulties is seen in various legislative attempts to restrict baptisms to Easter. As early as 585 a church council in Mâcon announced,

We have learned from the report of some of our fellow bishops that Christians do not respect the prescribed day for baptism but baptize their sons on almost any day or martyr's feast, with the result that scarcely two or three children who are to be reborn through water and the Holy Spirit can be found on Easter. Therefore, we command that henceforth no one be allowed to do that, except for those people whom a serious illness or impending death compels to seek baptism for their sons.⁸⁶

This is just one early example of a theme that will echo through church councils, especially in the ninth century. Carolingian churchmen were concerned that failure to observe the fixed seasons for baptism (Easter and Pentecost) would reduce the chances for proper prebaptismal training or approval of sponsors and would diminish the unique honor due to the sacrament of baptism.⁸⁷

Given all that we have established about the role confirmation had in enhancing the authority of the bishop, bringing spiritual vitality and honor to the Christian, and creating important kinship ties, one would expect that the difficulties and expense of travel would not have been enough to keep confirmations from taking place. Perhaps there were other factors at work. For

⁸⁵ This set of problematic circumstances was not limited to northern Europe. Correspondence from Gregory I indicates that in large Italian and Sicilian dioceses bishops were unable to be present at all baptisms (Gregory I, *Epistle 13*, 22, in MGH Epist II, 388). See Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 27-28.

⁸⁶ "Concilium Matisconense (585)," CCSL, vol. 148A, 240; translation in Lynch, *Godparents*, 147.

⁸⁷ Fisher, *Confirmation*, 69-71. On these pages Fisher lists a number of synodal decrees that commanded baptisms to take place at the proper times of the year. See especially p. 70, n. 1.

one, confirmation was actually seen as unnecessary to salvation. It is indeed an irony that one, no doubt unexpected, outcome of assigning confirmation to the bishop was to lessen its ultimate importance. Yet, for very practical reasons, the church simply could not make a sacrament that was commonly inaccessible into a necessary part of salvation. The sources we have examined were certainly aware of this difficulty. The late fifth-century homily attributed to Faustus of Riez clearly made the point that although confirmation greatly enhanced the Christian's life, only baptism was necessary to fully prepare the Christian for death.⁸⁸ John the Deacon's letter to Senarius written a few decades later dealt with this issue even more directly. To the straightforward question of what happens to the baptized Christian who dies without receiving episcopal confirmation, John answered that just as birth creates a person fully equipped for physical life, so baptism is fully able to equip the Christian for supernatural life.⁸⁹ The sense of ambiguity this created is reflected in this statement from the *Penitential of Theodore* which simultaneously emphasized and denigrated the importance of confirmation: "We believe no one is complete in baptism without the confirmation of a bishop; yet we do not despair."⁹⁰ Thus one unintended result of restricting confirmation to bishops was that if there was no compelling social or other reason to be confirmed, many people simply did not bother.

⁸⁸ See above, p. 165-166.

⁸⁹ John the Deacon, *Epistola ad Senarium*, ch. 14.

⁹⁰ *The Penitential of Theodore*, 2.4.5, in McNeill, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 202.

The evidence also suggests that any laxity on the part of those needing to be confirmed was more than equally matched by laxity on the part of those doing the confirming. In spite of the theoretical importance of confirmation, for many bishops the burden may have been more than they were willing to bear. It brought them into contact with folks from a much lower station in life and, if they were to perform their duties diligently, it demanded extensive regular travel. It must also be remembered that in the early Middle Ages bishops assumed their high office for a variety of reasons; genuine Christian devotion was not always one of them. Thus, if the one week delay between baptism and confirmation by a bishop mentioned by Alcuin was the beginning of the process of detaching confirmation from baptism,⁹¹ the inability or unwillingness of bishops to provide the rite for all the baptized was the fundamental factor that completed it.⁹² That this problem was widespread is clear from the many councils that castigated bishops for their failures in this matter.⁹³ Furthermore, some of the rites themselves assume the lack of a bishop and include instructions that the neophyte should be confirmed with chrism as soon as he can be in the presence of one.⁹⁴ For instance, *Ordo Romanus XV*, a rite said by Cyrille Vogel to be the work of a late eighth-century Frankish monk,⁹⁵ assumes the bishop will not make it to the ceremony:

⁹¹ See above, p. 114-115.

⁹² J.D.C. Fisher covers the issues related to this problem at length and with considerable skill; see Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 71-77.

⁹³ MGH Capit I, 25, 29, 45, 170; MGH Capit II, 83; MGH Conc II, 47.

⁹⁴ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 71.

⁹⁵ Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 152-154.

If they are able to have a bishop present, baptized neophytes should be confirmed with chrism. But if on the day itself they are unable to find a bishop, as soon as they are able to find one, they should do this without delay.⁹⁶

As to why this problem developed, J.D.C. Fisher provides a detailed explanation of two key factors. First was the ongoing multiplication of baptismal churches, dating back to the seventh century, within the dioceses of individual bishops which made it impossible for a bishop to be present at all baptisms, even those that did take place on Easter or Pentecost.⁹⁷ Second was an ongoing conflict over whether *chorepiscopi* could be employed to help carry the load.⁹⁸ For instance, the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* indicate the presence of a tradition that restricted certain duties such as ordination, consecration of chrism and postbaptismal chrismation, not only from presbyters, but from *chorepiscopi* as well.⁹⁹ In the long run, *Pseudo-Isidore* would outweigh the views of those like Rabanus Maurus who saw *chorepiscopi* as a legitimate way of bringing confirmation to the rural poor,¹⁰⁰ and the chorepiscopate did not thrive.¹⁰¹ Thus it was likely the case that a very small percentage of Christians actually

⁹⁶ *Ordo Romanus XV*, 119, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 3, 120: “Baptazati autem infantes, si ad praesens possunt episcopum habere, confirmari cum crisma debent. Quid si ipsa die minime episcopum invenire potuerint, in quantum celerius possunt invenire, hoc sine dilatione ficiant.”

⁹⁷ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 72-74.

⁹⁸ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 74-76. Also see mention of *chorepiscopi* above, p. 170, 202.

⁹⁹ Pseudo-Isidorus, *Decretales Pseudo-Isidorianae et capitula Angilramni*, ed. Paul Hinschius (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1863), 439. In this passage the anonymous editor inserted the words “or *chorepiscopi*” into a decree from the Second Council of Seville (619), 7, originally having to do only with presbyters.

¹⁰⁰ Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1, 5.

¹⁰¹ Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 75.

received confirmation from a bishop. Given the repeated charges in the sources to confirm more diligently, it appears that most bishops were much more inclined to enjoy the relative safety and comfort of their home than to travel throughout their dioceses fulfilling their ecclesiastical and pastoral responsibilities. For example, a synod in Meaux in 845 declared:

The bishops themselves should turn their leisure not to enjoyment but to godly work and official business . . . being eager to preach and correct and confirm, which to this point has been neglected through the parishes.¹⁰²

Apparently the shepherds even more than the sheep saw confirmation as something of a sacramental stepchild, powerful in theory, useful when it served a purpose, but at other times worthy only of neglect.

¹⁰² MGH Capit II, 405-6: "Ipsi autem episcopi concessum sibi otium non in suas voluptates, sed in divinum et officiosum convertant negotium, quatenus studentes praedicationi et correctioni atque confirmationi, quod hactenus per parrochias fuit neglectum."

Chapter 9: Summary of Confirmation in the Early Middle Ages

The Carolingian era represents a time of flux for the postbaptismal episcopal activities that during this time were coming to be called 'confirmation.' On one hand this was a time when church leaders strove for increasing theological and liturgical uniformity. On the other hand, as has been seen in a number of ways, most notably in the bishops' reply to Charlemagne's Circular Letter (811/812) , there was still a great deal of regional variation in the liturgies used for baptism, even at the end of Charlemagne's long reign. The evidence has shown that it is a mistake to assume this diversity of practice was due simply to a Carolingian imposition of Roman episcopal confirmation into Frankish churches that had previously followed Gallican liturgies. Indeed, a great deal of regional variation in baptismal practice had existed in Gaul for centuries. Furthermore, although in some regions or at some times Merovingian bishops may not have been expected to have any postbaptismal involvement that served to complete the initiation process by fully incorporating the neophyte into the community of Christ and by imparting the Holy Spirit, evidence from sources other than the liturgies would indicate that this was probably rare. It is a mistake to assume, on the basis of the Gallican liturgies, that the Merovingians as a whole did not practice some form of episcopal confirmation. Therefore, it appears the variety of liturgical practices found in the bishops' response to the Circular Letter reflected longstanding regional differences.

For understanding how confirmation functioned in Carolingian society and the attempts by Carolingian churchmen to safeguard its importance and bring about conformity of practice, the reform Council of Paris (829) called under Louis the Pious serves as a useful point of conclusion, for it included legislation that touched on many of the topics we have discussed.¹ Chapter 33 states:

It is decided that only bishops who are fasting should give the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. It has been announced to us that in certain provinces most bishops are regularly accustomed to give the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands after partaking of food and drink. It is clear to us that this is not appropriate for so surpassing an office, and it is certainly not acceptable for anyone to continue to do this. . . . For certainly it is appropriate that pontiffs of Christ first prepare a dwelling place in their hearts for the Holy Spirit by fasting and praying, and thus by prayer through the laying of hands they pass on that [Spirit] to rest of the faithful. Moreover, just as it is permitted to baptize during two times—Easter and Pentecost—certainly in the same manner the gift of the Holy Spirit by the imposition of hands should be given to the faithful [at Easter and Pentecost]. As was said, exceptions are permitted for the sick and those in danger of death, in whose case just as the grace of baptism is to be given, so the gift of the Holy Spirit is to be given without delay.²

Thus the council affirmed that giving the Holy Spirit was the effect and primary purpose of confirmation. One can also note the attempt to insure that confirmation was performed only at the proper times in order to make it more

¹ See analysis by Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 340-341.

² *Concilium Parisiense* (829), 33, in MGH Conc I pt 2, 633-634: “Quod episcopis conveniat, ut ieiuni per impositionem manuum tradant Spiritum sanctum. Perlatum est ad nos, quod in quibusdam provinciis plerique episcopi post perceptionem cibi et potus sollempniter soleant per impositionem manuum tradere Spiritum sanctum, quod tam excellenti ministerio prorsus non convenire et ita deinceps fieri non debere omnibus nobis visum est . . . Dignum quippe est, ut pontifices Christi primum ieiunando et orando in cordibus suis domum praeparent Spiritui sancto et sic per impositionem manuum ceteris fidelibus eum tradant orando. Sicut autem duobus temporibus, Pascha videlicet et Pentecosten, baptismum, ita etiam traditio sancti Spiritus per impositionem manuum fidelibus tradatur, exceptis videlicet, ut dictum est, infirmis et morte periclitantibus, quibus sicut baptismatis gratia succurrendum, ita incunctanter donum sancti Spiritus est tradendum.”

likely that a bishop could be present, but the exception clause for the sick and those dying demonstrates the ongoing difficulty of enforcing this regulation. Moreover, it affirmed a very high sense of the authority and spiritual importance of the bishop in this role and urged bishops to honor that by preparing themselves spiritually through prayer and fasting before administering the sacrament. The council underscored this emphasis on the unique role and significance of a bishop by ruling that *chorepiscopi* should not administer confirmation.³ It stated that chorepiscopi are like the seventy disciples sent out by Christ, but only bishops stand in the place of the original twelve apostles who were able to impart the Holy Spirit. Finally, the council acknowledged the important social role of confirmation by placing restrictions on who was eligible to serve as a sponsor. It ruled that “those who are sentenced to public penance should not appear as godparents for anyone, either in baptism or in the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁴ Thus by the early ninth century, in theory if not fully in practice, the medieval use, shape, and theological understanding of confirmation had been established.

The dominant interpretative motif of J.D.C. Fisher and the many who have followed in his steps in the study of confirmation in the Middle Ages is the notion of disintegration. The subtitle to Fisher’s *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* is “A Study in the Disintegration of the Primitive Rite of

³ *Concilium Parisiense* (829), 27, in MGH Conc I pt 2, 629-630.

⁴ *Concilium Parisiense* (829), 54, in MGH Conc I pt 2, 648: “Ut hi, qui poenitentia publica sunt multati, neque in baptisate neque in percipiendo sancti Spiritus dono patroni existant pro aliis.”

Initiation.” The thrust of this metaphor is that by the early Middle Ages a unified rite of Christian initiation had “disintegrated and finally collapsed into three separate and dislocated moments of water-baptism, confirmation, and [first] eucharist.”⁵ The implication of this interpretation is that something went wrong, and as a result the baptism ceremony alone no longer fully expressed the full symbolic and theological richness of Christian initiation—specifically, the impartation of the Holy Spirit now occurred in a rite of confirmation which was “sheared off”⁶ from baptism, and baptism was now oriented exclusively toward conversion and did not symbolically prepare the neophyte for the ongoing Christian life.⁷ The difficulty with this approach is its privileging of a certain theological position and present day interpretation of what these activities ought to have symbolized. People in the past, like people in the present, did not generally choose to make changes they believed would undermine the significance of their own religious rites. It is true that a number of circumstances combined in the early Middle Ages to make the sacrament of confirmation optional, but we must not infer from this that it was thus rendered less meaningful. Indeed, for purposes of kinship development it was much more meaningful as a separate rite. Furthermore, as we saw in chapter three, the choice to detach confirmation from baptism and attach it to the person of the bishop was motivated by a desire to enhance the significance of the rite. This

⁵ Mitchell, “Dissolution of the Rite of Christian Initiation,” 50.

⁶ Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, 179.

⁷ This is the case made by Peter Cramer in his chapter entitled “The Diminishing of Baptism” (*Baptism and Change*, 179-220). See also Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 260-261.

practice was not continued in the Middle Ages out of a mindless desire to follow Roman tradition. The rich variety of liturgical activity reflected in the bishops' response to Charlemagne's circular letter provides clear evidence of that. Rather it was continued because, for their many and various reasons, both churchmen and the laity saw the linking of the social prestige and power of the bishop to the spiritual act of empowering by the Holy Spirit as a meaningful and legitimate expression of the Christian life. Moreover, this important connection was not abandoned by the Merovingians and reestablished by the Carolingians, as some have thought: to some degree it was present throughout the entire time.

PART THREE

“To Stand Ogaynes the Fend, and Dedely Syn”: Confirmation in the High and Late Middle Ages

In Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the sacrament of confirmation exerted its influence on two distinct, but not disconnected, levels. On one level, it was inextricably intertwined with the office and influence of the bishop as the only person who could administer it. As such, if only for a brief moment, it associated lay persons from even the humblest backgrounds with the unique spiritual and social prestige of the late antique and early medieval bishop. On a second more individual level, through the enactment of a theologically meaningful liturgy and the involvement of godparents, confirmation helped shape both the spiritual and social identity of its recipients. In the high and late Middle Ages these spheres of meaning would come to intersect more thoroughly as the church, spurred on by the concerns and values represented in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), took a more active interest in the content of lay devotion and as bishops, or at least the conscientious ones, dedicated more of their effort toward bringing greater oversight, meaningful content, and positive change to the religious lives of their flock.

Thus the story of confirmation in the high and late Middle Ages is one of both change and continuity. On the one hand, there were many very significant social and religious changes that provided the impetus to attach new meanings and new behaviors to confirmation. On the other hand, there was much about

confirmation in this time period that was consonant with, and built directly on, the beliefs and practices of the early Middle Ages. The important roles of bishops and godparents would both continue and be enhanced as they were adapted to new conditions and as concerns multiplied over the large number of Christians who never received confirmation.

Chapter 10: Adapting Confirmation to New Circumstances

The characteristics that made confirmation unique among the sacraments—it was an initiatory rite of passage that occurred later in life, it could be received in almost any location as long as a bishop was present, and it was in some measure optional—made it particularly amenable to changes in the meaning and expectations attached to it. The most dramatic example of this would occur very late in the Middle Ages, as a result of the Reformations of the sixteenth century, when both the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches would reconfigure confirmation from what was essentially a passive reception of the Holy Spirit which could occur at any age, to an active affirmation of Christian commitment which required the confirmand to have reached an age of discretion. But equally significant, if perhaps less dramatic, changes took place as a result of the substantial religious and social transformations occurring in the high and late Middle Ages.

The Liturgical Separation of Confirmation From Baptism

We ended part two with a short discussion of the issue of disintegration, one of the dominant themes for the present-day understanding of Christian initiation in the Middle Ages. Historians and theologians have regularly noted that what started in the second or third century as a unified ceremony of initiation involving baptism, anointing by the bishop, and first communion, had fragmented by the early Middle Ages into three separate rites. In chapter nine I

tried to point out that terms like ‘disintegrate’ or ‘fragment’ carry certain negative denotations which the actual medieval participants in these rites might not have acknowledged. Nonetheless, regardless of whether one interprets it as a step forward or as a step backward, there is no denying that the liturgical division of the originally unified rite was complete by the high and late Middle Ages.¹ Baptism was taking place shortly after birth with fewer and fewer expectations that parents would wait for Easter or Pentecost to have their children baptized. Infants were no longer being communicated shortly after baptism; instead, with theologians providing increasingly detailed definition of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the Fourth Lateran Council and later the Council of Trent began to assert that first communion should take place at the age of discretion.² And finally, confirmation was clearly a separate rite, though still logically and theologically linked to the initiatory work of baptism. Regarding the shift to baptizing children soon after birth, an anonymous twelfth-century writer justified this practice, in spite of its incongruence with the many ancient statutes demanding baptism at Easter, by saying,

The canons order that baptism be celebrated only on Holy Saturday or on Pentecost, except in case of necessity. But this precept has adults in view. In the early Church adults who were sick could say so, and then they were baptized. Moreover, the fact that many were baptized at the same time augmented the glory of

¹ See Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 116-117; and Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 399-411.

² This was probably the result of an increased awareness of age as a factor in spiritual development (see below, p. 247ff.), coupled with a fear that the real body of Christ might be desecrated by a drooling infant. During this same time, the cup was increasingly being withheld from the laity. See Kathryn Ann Taglia, “The Cultural Construction of Childhood: Baptism, Communion, and Confirmation,” in *Women, Marriage, and Family in Medieval Christendom*, ed. Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, vol. 37 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), 272-275.

the Christian name. But all this does not apply to little children, for who is more ill than an infant who cannot make it known that it is ill? The baptism of children should therefore not be put off, for they may die of the least ailment.³

John Myrc, writing to priests in the early fifteenth century, acknowledged the ancient ideal by suggesting that if a child is born within eight days of Easter and there is no fear of death, the baptism should take place on Easter,⁴ but this was a far cry from what the ancients had in mind. Regarding confirmation, its separate identity is apparent from a look at the liturgies.

This liturgical separation of confirmation from baptism can be seen as early as the tenth century when the rite of confirmation was making its way into pontificals, which were liturgical books containing the prayers and ceremonies used exclusively by a bishop.⁵ Eugene Finnegan, in his summary of late medieval pontificals, points out that there was some degree of variety as regards the ritual of confirmation—different titles for the rite, different introductions and conclusions, different forms (words of impartation), etc.—as liturgists worked out their understanding of the meaning and significance of confirmation as a rite separate from baptism.⁶ By the sixteenth century, however, a relative degree of standardization had been achieved both in England and on the

³ Fragment 359, “Nouveaux fragments théologiques de l’école d’Anselme de Laon,” ed. O. Lottin, *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale*, vol. 13 (1946), 271; translation by Cabié, “Christian Initiation,” 71.

⁴ John Myrc, *John Mirk’s Instructions for Parish Priests*, lines 140-149, ed. Gillis Kristensson, *Lund Studies in English*, no. 49 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1974), 75.

⁵ See, for example, Banting, *Two Anglo-Saxon Pontificals*.

⁶ Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 388. For his summary of later medieval pontificals, see p. 384-398. Still the heart of the confirmation liturgy, the prayers, handlaying, anointing and words of impartation bore a high level of continuity from the earlier periods.

continent. In England the liturgical book of Salisbury, called the *Sarum Manual* or the *Sarum Use*, was widely accepted by 1457. Initially developed by Bishop Richard Poore (d. 1237) and revised during the fourteenth century, it was officially imposed on the Anglican church in 1543 and became the basis for the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*.⁷ On the continent, the three volume *Pontifical* by William Durandus (1230-1296), Bishop of Mende in southern France, would have far-reaching influence, firstly, because in the midst of liturgical rivalries during the papal schism (1378-1417) it came to dominate the liturgical life of the late fourteenth century, and secondly, because it served as the model for the first printed pontifical in 1485.⁸

It is important to note that, unlike the liturgical books developed in the early Middle Ages where the episcopal anointing was part of the baptismal rite, in

⁷ *Sarum Manual* or *Sarum Use* (*Manuale ad usum percelebris ecclesie Sarisburiensis*), ed. A. Jefferies Collins (Chichester: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1960), vii-x.

⁸ Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 253-256; Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 425-442. William Durandus's *Pontifical* is available in Michel Andrieu, *Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand*, vol. 3 of *Le Pontifical romain au moyen âge*, Studi e Testi, vol. 88 (Vatican City: Vatican Apostolic Library, 1940). By way of background, the eleventh-century papal reform initiated, and the First Lateran Council (1123) gave momentum to, a liturgical movement centered on Rome which produced a family of liturgies called by Michel Andrieu, *The Roman Pontifical of the XII Century* (see Michel Andrieu, *Le Pontifical romain du XIIIe siècle*, vol. 1 of *Le Pontifical romain au moyen âge* (Studi e Testi, 86). A glance through Andrieu's edition quickly demonstrates the heavy dependence of these liturgies on the tenth-century *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* (Vogel, *Le Pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle*, vol. 2, 1-141). Although "all the surviving copies diverge to such a degree that there could not have been a common Roman archetype" (Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 249), they nevertheless clearly represent a family of manuscripts distinct from the *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* which was widely copied north of the Alps (see Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 249-251). In the thirteenth century there arose a related family of pontificals which was more clearly unified. This *Pontifical of the Thirteenth Century Roman Curia* (Andrieu, *Le Pontifical de la Curie romaine au XIIIe siècle*, vol. 2 of *Le Pontifical romain au moyen âge* (Studi e Testi, 87) was aggressively propagated in all areas under Roman control from as early as the time of Innocent III (Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, 252). It was this Roman pontifical that provided the greatest competition to the work of Bishop Durandus, if it can rightly be called 'competition' when the twelfth and thirteenth-century Roman pontificals were two of the three main sources for Durandus's work as well (the third was his own independent use of the *Romano-Germanic*

both these liturgies, which formed the basis for their respective Anglican and Catholic traditions up to the present time, the rite of confirmation was distinct from the rite of baptism. In the *Sarum Use* it is contained under the heading *Confirmatio puerorum* in a larger section entitled *Benedictiones episcoporum et suffraganeorum*.⁹ In Durandus's *Pontifical*, confirmation is the very first rite—book one, part one. As with the *Sarum Manual*, it is not part of the baptism rite, although there is a notation in the order for Holy Saturday regarding the fact that baptizing and confirming are both part of the Easter Vigil. It simply says that after the baptism “the bishop confirms the baptized with holy chrism on the forehead,” and the reader is sent to book one, part one for the actual ceremony.¹⁰

Durandus's confirmation ceremony is filled with fascinating details and, as one would expect now that confirmation was a discreet entity separate from baptism, it is more fully fleshed out than those we saw in the *Apostolic Tradition* and early medieval liturgies. The prayers and pronouncements were drawn from the Roman pontificals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries¹¹ and are the same as in the *Sarum Manual*, but the instructions are original with Durandus. Chapter one of the rite begins with a description of what the bishop should wear—amice, stole, cope and miter. Clearly he was dressed to impress. It then

Pontifical).

⁹ *Sarum Manual*, 167.

¹⁰ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.4.19, p. 591.

¹¹ See above, n. 8.

instructs the bishop to warn the people concerning the expectations associated with confirmation: only the bishop can perform the rite of confirmation and only Christians of good character and in right standing with the church and the community should be confirmed or serve as sponsors (sponsors must themselves have been confirmed, as well); sponsorship at confirmation (as at baptism) creates a serious spiritual kinship that is subject to the incest regulations of canon law, therefore it would preclude certain marriages and cause the dissolution of certain betrothals; there should be just one sponsor for each confirmand; confirmation should not be repeated and adults being confirmed should come to confirmation out of the integrity of their character, having fasted and received the sacrament of confession beforehand.¹² With the instructions completed, the actual ceremony began:

Then, with the thumb of the right hand washed and wiped clean, and with those who are to be confirmed on bent knees with their hands clasped in front of their chest, the bishop, having taken off his miter, stands with his hands similarly clasped before his chest and says, “May the Holy Spirit come upon you and the power of the most high protect you from sin.” Resp. “Amen.”

(ch 2) Then he says, “Our help is in the name of the Lord. O Lord, hear my prayer. The Lord be with you.” [Resp.] “And with [your spirit]”. [Then he says,] “Let us pray.” And then, raising and extending his hands over the confirmands, he says, “Omnipotent and eternal god, who is worthy to regenerate these your servants by water and the Holy Spirit, and who has given them forgiveness of all sins, impart on them the sevenfold Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, from heaven. Amen. The Spirit of wisdom and understanding. Amen. The spirit of knowledge and godliness. Amen. The Spirit of

¹² The liturgy (Durandus, *Pontifical*, 1.1.1, p. 333) tells the bishop to admonish the people. The regulations themselves are contained in Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.12.8, p. 624-625. Commands regarding the need for adults to fast and be shriven before confirmation were ubiquitous in the later Middle Ages. Some sources extend the need to fast even to small children, and some include the requirement that the bishop fast as well. For instance, see *Council of Arles*, in Mansi, vol. 23, 1004-1005.

counsel and strength. Amen. And fill them with the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. Amen. And having propitiated them, seal them with the sign of the holy cross and strengthen (*confirma*) them with the chrism of salvation unto eternal life.” Resp. “Amen.”

ch 3) Then sitting upon a faldstool in front of the altar (or elsewhere) in order to ask the name of each one coming to be sealed as he is presented on bent knees by the godfather or godmother, and dipping the tip of his right thumb in chrism, the bishop makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the confirmand saying, “John (or “Mary,” or whatever the others are named), I seal you with the sign of the cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, so that you might be filled with the same Holy Spirit and have eternal life.” Resp. “Amen” And saying, “In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” make the sign of the cross before his face.

(ch 4) And then give him a light slap on the cheek, saying, “Peace be with you.”

(ch 5) When everyone has been sealed in this way, he wipes his thumb with breadcrumbs or a piece of cloth and washes it with water from a tin cup or some other basin, or with water from a font or basin poured on a piece of cloth or bread. And meanwhile the antiphon *Confirma hoc* is sung (“Strengthen us, O God, that you might make us into your holy temple, like that in Jerusalem”), then *Gloria patri*, then *Sicut erat*. And then repeat the antiphon *Confirma hoc*.

(ch 6) Then the bishop, rising and standing with his miter still set aside, says, “Reach out to us. Hear us O Lord. The Lord be with you.” And with hands clasped before his chest, while all the confirmed are on bent knees, the bishop says, “God who gave the Holy Spirit to your apostles, and who willed that the Spirit should be passed on through them to their successors and to the rest of the faithful, look with favor upon us, a humble servant, and be manifest in the hearts of these whom we have anointed with most holy chrism and sealed with the sign of the holy cross, so that the same Holy Spirit, graciously coming, might perfect a temple to be filled with his own glory.” Resp. “Amen.”

(ch 7) Then he says, Behold, blessed is the man who fears the Lord.” And making the sign of the cross over them, he says “The Lord bless you from Zion, so that you may see the good things of

Jerusalem all the days of your life and so you may have eternal life.” Resp. “Amen.”

(ch 8) And so, with the confirmation completed, the bishop announces to the confirmed concerning the chrism, that in honor of the holy Trinity they should wear the chrism-cloth for three days. Then on the third day the priest will wash their foreheads and burn the chrism-cloths above the font, or they can be burned like candles on the altar. Then he should announce to the godfathers and as well to the godmothers that they should instruct and educate their godchildren concerning proper conduct and good works—that they should flee evil and do good—and that [godparents] should teach [their godchildren] the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary. [The bishop should remind them that] they bound themselves to this, just as it is fully preserved in our *Constitutionibus synodalibus*.¹³

¹³ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 1.1.1-8, p. 333-335:

1. “Deinde, loto prius et terso pollice dextre manus, confirmandis genua flectentibus, et iunctis ante pectus minibus, stans, mitra deposita, iunctis similiter ante pectus minibus, dicit: *Spiritus sanctus superveniat in vos et virtus altissimi custodiat a peccatis*. Resp.: *Amen*.”

2. Deinde dicit: *Adiutorium nostrum in nomine domini. Domine exaudi orationem meam dominus vobiscum. Et cum. Oremus*. Et tunc, elavatis et super confirmandos extensis minibus, dicit: *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, qui regenerare dignatus es hos famulos . . . propiciatus eternam*. Per. Resp.: *Amen*.

3. Tunc sedens super faldistorium coram altari vel alibi paratum, inquisitor sigillatim nomine cuiuslibet consagnandi sibe per patrinum vel matrinam flexis genibus presentati, et summitate pollicis dextre manus crismate intincta, pontifex facit crucem in Fronte illius dicens: *Iohannes, vel Maria, vel quovis alio nomine, Signo te signo cruces et confirmate crismate salutis. In nomine* ☩ *patris et* ☩ *fili et* ☩ *spiritus sancti, ut replearis codem spiritu sancto et habeas vitam eternam*. Resp.: *Amen*. Et dicendo: *In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti*, producit signum cruces ante faciem illius.

4. Et deinde dat sibi leviter alapam super genam, dicens: *Pax tecum*.

5. Omnibus taliter consignatis, tergit cum mica panis vel pecia linea et lavat cum aqua pollicem super aliquem calicem stagneum vel super aliquam pelvim et aqua locionis cum pecia linea vel pane funditur in frontibus vel piscine. Et interim cantatur antiphona. Ant. *Confirma hoc, Deus quod operatus es in nobis a templo sancto tuo quod est in Ierusalem*. V. Gloria patri. Sicut erat. Et tunc repetitur antiphona *Confirma*.

6. Deinde pontifex surgens, stans mitra deposita, dicit: V. *Ostende nobis. Domine exaudivit Dominus vobiscum*. Oratio quam dicit iunctis ante pectus minibus et omnibus confirmatis devote genua flectentibus. Oratio. *Deus qui apostolis tuis sanctum dedisti spiritum . . . perficiat. Qui cum*. Resp.: *Amen*.

7. Deinde dicit: *Ecce sic benedicetur homo qui timet dominum*. Et faciens signum cruces super eos dicit: *Benedicat* ☩ *vos dominus ex Sion et videatis bona Ierusalem omnibus diebus vite vestre et habeatis vitam eternam*. Resp.: *Amen*.

8. Expedita itaque confirmatione, pontifex annuntiat confirmatis sive crismatis quod in honore

The confirmation rite could also serve as the occasion to confer a new name on the confirmand. A council in Paris (c. 1203) declared that at confirmation, parents could choose to change the name of their child, “if they wished.”¹⁴ Eugene Finnegan mistakenly believed the first northern European instance of this practice was from a council of Valencia in 1255,¹⁵ so he suggested that it was a Spanish practice.¹⁶ Instead, it was probably associated with a relatively widespread change in naming practices in which baptism came to be seen as the appropriate rite for naming.¹⁷ During the thirteenth century it became the norm for a child to be given his name by the godparent as he was raised from the font. This, coupled with the longstanding practice of marking significant religious moments (e.g. ordination) with a change of name, probably created the circumstances in which it made sense that a change of name could take place at confirmation. There is no evidence that such a name change was widely practiced, or that confirmation names were ever widely used, nevertheless it

sancta trinitatis triduo crismalia in frontibus portent et die tertia sacerdos lavabit eorum frontes et comburet crismalia super fonts, vel ex crismalibus fiant candelae ad usum altaris. Patrinis vero seu martinis annuntiet quod instruant et informant filiolum suos bonis moribus et operibus, quod fugiant mala et faciant bona et quod doceant eos *Credo in Deum, Pater noster, Ave Maria*, quoniam se ad hoc obligaverunt, prout hoc in nostris *Constitutionibus synodalibus* plenius continetur.

For brevity's sake, this edition excerpted portions of the prayers that had been drawn without change from earlier sources, but in this translation, in order to present the rite in its entirety, I included the material from those sources.

¹⁴ *Statutes of Paris* (c. 1203), 13, in Odette Pontal and Joseph Avril, eds., *Les statuts synodaux français du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Comité des Travaux historiques et scientifiques, 1971-1995), vol. 1, 56: “et quod possint nomina mutari pueris, si velint, in confirmationem.”

¹⁵ *Synodal Constitutions of the Diocese of Valencia* (1255), in Mansi, vol. 23, 887.

¹⁶ Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 414.

¹⁷ See John Bossy, *Christianity in the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 17-18; David A. Postles, “The Baptismal Name in Thirteenth-Century England: Processes and Patterns,” *Medieval Prosopography* 13, no. 2 (1992): 1-52; and Michael Bennett, “Spiritual Kinship and the Baptismal Name in Traditional European Society,” in L. O. Frappell, ed., *Principalities*,

was not unheard of. The Fifth Council of Milan (1579) declared that whenever someone coming before the bishop had an “unseemly or absurd name” which was “clearly not suitable for a Christian” he should take up the more edifying name of some holy person at confirmation.¹⁸ There is also the case of Henry III, King of France (1574-1589), who received that name at confirmation.

The Scholastic Transformation of Popular Piety

In addition to these liturgical developments, in the thirteenth century the sacrament of confirmation was caught up in a transformation of lay piety that would eventually affect all levels of society. During the century before, from c. 1070-c. 1170, leading thinkers had achieved important progress in bringing institutional definition to the church, as well as in defining the Christian life in terms of expected beliefs and behaviors. At first, these new ideas were felt most keenly on the upper layers of society, but after c. 1170 churchmen aggressively propagated them on a broader scale through the legislation of regional and international church councils (especially the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215) as well as through the writing of pastoral manuals, devotional works and theological treatises. Some of the most visible changes came in the form of new expectations in the expression of personal devotion. Lay people were now carrying candles, demonstrably venerating the host at the moment of

Power and Estates (Adelaide, S.A., Australia: Adelaide University Union Press, 1979), 1-13.

¹⁸ *Fifth Council of Milan* (1579), 8, in Mansi, vol. 34, 364: “Curet etiam episcopus, ac parochus, ut qui turpe, ridiculumne nomen habet, neque plane conveniens Christiano homini, illud mutet, sumatque in confirmationis sacramento nomen alicujus, qui verae pietatis, sanctaeque religionis laude floruit.”

consecration in the Mass, and practicing more regular confession. R. W. Southern notes that

these things have become so much a part of what everyone understands by Catholicism that it is hard to realize how new most of the adjuncts to religious life were to the greater part of the population in the thirteenth century. . . . They were the outward and visible signs that the schools, which had begun by creating a universal system of doctrine and institutions, had now turned to the task of bringing the results of their work to the people.¹⁹

The sacrament of confirmation was caught up this process of religious transformation in two ways. First, it was during this time that the schoolmen, in general, and Thomas Aquinas, in particular, gave confirmation its ultimate doctrinal delineation, one which would survive in the Roman Catholic world up to the present time. Second, church leaders utilized confirmation as part of a larger movement intended to more thoroughly indoctrinate believers and to demand greater levels of pastoral care and catechization from parish priests.

Scholastic Solidification of Confirmation Doctrine

Surprisingly, the Fourth Lateran Council, called by Innocent III, made no specific mention of confirmation. The closest thing to an official theological statement on confirmation from the Middle Ages is found in the *Bull of Union with the Armenians* (1439), a document produced by the Council of Florence.²⁰

¹⁹ R. W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 238.

²⁰ The Council of Ferrara and Florence (1438-1443) was largely dedicated to reunion with Eastern churches. In 1439 it also produced a short-lived Document of Union with the Greek Church.

It contains a summary of beliefs on the sacraments drawn primarily from Thomas Aquinas, *De articulis fidei et ecclesiae sacramentis*.²¹ It reads:

The second sacrament is confirmation. Its matter is chrism made from oil and balsam blessed by a bishop, the oil symbolizing the gleaming brightness of conscience and balsam symbolizing the odor of a good reputation. The form is: I sign you with the sign of the cross and I confirm you with the chrism of salvation in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy Spirit. The ordinary minister is a bishop . . . because it is said only of the apostles whose place is held by bishops, that they gave the holy Spirit by the imposition of hands. . . . The effect of this sacrament is that a Christian should boldly confess the name of Christ, since the holy Spirit is given in this sacrament for strengthening just as he was given to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Therefore the candidate is [anointed] on the forehead, which is the seat of shame, not to shrink from confessing the name of Christ.²²

This document is official in the sense that it is the only medieval statement on confirmation that was approved by an ecumenical council.²³ It also served as the basis for the condemnations of error regarding confirmation promulgated by the Council of Trent in 1547.²⁴ (Theologically, the Council of Trent was quite circumscribed in its purposes, only condemning error without asserting positive doctrine.)

Kilian Lynch's work on confirmation during the scholastic era, the most extensive on the subject, was never completely finished. He authored a collection of texts, *The Sacrament of Confirmation in the Early-Middle Scholastic*

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *De articulis fidei et ecclesiae sacramentis*, in *Opuscula Theologica* (Turin: Marietti, 1954), vol. 1, 141-151.

²² *Bull of Union with the Armenians*, in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), vol. 1, 544.

²³ O'Doherty, *The Scholastic Teaching*, 72.

²⁴ Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Ernest Graf (London: Thomas Nelson and

Period, but the anticipated second volume, presumably aimed at a theological analysis of these texts, was never completed. Much of what surely would have comprised that second volume, a detailed analysis of how scholastic theologians understood the nature of grace in confirmation, was published as an extensive journal article of almost 300 pages entitled “The Sacramental Grace of Confirmation in Thirteenth-Century Theology.” Although there was not absolute uniformity of thought among the many theologians he surveyed, Lynch found a very high level of agreement among three influential works that clearly shaped the views of succeeding generations—the *Sentences* of the Franciscan, St Bonaventure (d. 1274); the anonymous author of Paris Bibl. Nat. Lat. 10640 (c. 1240)²⁵ upon which St Bonaventure depended heavily; and the *Sentences* of the Dominican, St Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274).²⁶

The thorniest theological question regarding the grace of confirmation had to do with how it related to the grace of baptism.²⁷ These theologians concluded that confirmation did not confer any new grace that in some way augmented the grace of baptism;²⁸ rather it imparted to its recipient an orientation and inclination to use the baptismal grace already present toward a new aim beyond

Sons Ltd, 1957-1961), vol. 2, 390-391.

²⁵ See Lynch, *The Sacrament of Confirmation*, XXXIII-XLI and 73-80.

²⁶ Lynch, “The Sacramental Grace of Confirmation,” 291.

²⁷ For Lynch’s conclusions, summarized here, see “The Sacramental Grace of Confirmation,” 290-300.

²⁸ For a slightly alternative view, see O’Doherty, *The Scholastic Teaching*, 61-67 and 74. O’Doherty’s earlier work, a good summary of scholastic teaching on confirmation, is consonant with Lynch’s, for the most part. O’Doherty does contend, however, that the scholastics believed that confirmation imparted its own sanctifying grace in addition to the grace of baptism.

salvation. That new aim was to confess Christ. To that end, confirmation brought on a state of spiritual maturity in which the lay person was armed and strengthened to fulfill the spiritual priesthood begun at baptism by confessing Christ even to the point of martyrdom. Thus it made especially good sense to these theologians that the confirmand was anointed by the bishop on the forehead, because the forehead was very close to the dwelling place of faith in the crown of the head. Scholastic theologians spoke of this anointing in two ways. On the one hand, they related it to the experience of the church on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. The tongues of fire upon the heads of those first Christians prefigured the chrism of confirmation and empowered them to be bold witnesses. On the other hand, these theologians compared it to the anointing of athletes, only in the case of confirmation the anointing is in preparation for a spiritual contest against the enemies of faith. One can see in this language of battle, of strengthening, and of preaching, the influence of Faustus of Riez and Alcuin.²⁹ The magnitude of all this battle imagery raised the question of whether confirmation was necessary for the ordinary Christian who was unlikely to find much actual opportunity to proclaim his faith in the face of possible martyrdom. Nevertheless, theologians agreed that the character imparted by confirmation was a boon to all Christians and that the strengthening given toward confessing one's faith was a necessary help regardless of the degree of opposition one might encounter.

²⁹ See below, p. 242, for a discussion of the continuing influence of these sources.

The *Bull of Union with the Armenians*, coupled with the summary from Lynch, paints a relatively complete picture of Thomas Aquinas's teaching on confirmation.³⁰ However, it should be noted that Thomas's actual work on the subject was more detailed and he weighed in on most of the questions debated by his scholastic colleagues.³¹ For instance, in his very influential *Sentences*, Peter Lombard had included confirmation as one of seven sacraments.³² This raised the question of whether confirmation had actually been instituted by Christ—both Alexander of Hales and St Bonaventure concluded that it had not. They asserted that confirmation was instituted by the church, at the Council of Meaux in 845.³³ Thomas, by contrast, believed that confirmation was instituted by Christ, though his understanding of just how Christ did this apparently changed over time. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Thomas had

³⁰ For an interesting interpretation of Thomas's material on confirmation and its application to present day confirmation practice, see Christopher O'Donnell, "The Ecclesial Dimension of Confirmation: A Study in Saint Thomas and in the Revised Rite" (Ph.D. dissertation, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana (Vatican), 1987). O'Donnell provides a good explanation of the present day theological and pastoral questions posed in the Roman Catholic Church by the status of confirmation as a sacrament.

³¹ Still his perspective was limited. For instance, Thomas wrote with little apparent awareness of the variety of practices associated with confirmation prior to his time. He appears to believe that his practice stretched all the way back to the apostles. Furthermore, he relied heavily on the material from Faustus that had made its way into Gratian's *Decretum* and Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and therefore did not explore all the questions that contemporary theologians might wish he had (Gerard Austin, "Appendix 5," in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (London: Blackfriars, 1964-1981), vol. 57, 245-246, 248). For the bulk of the material on confirmation in the *Summa*, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.65 and 3.72, vol. 56, 138-157 and vol. 57, 186-227. Confirmation is dealt with in the third part of the *Summa*—the part Thomas never finished due to a life-changing experience he underwent in 1273 which left him unwilling or unable to complete the work beyond Question 90, article 3 (see *Summa theologiae*, n. a, vol. 60, 2). Fortunately for us, he had already completed the sections on confirmation before this occurred.

³² Peter Lombard, *Sentences (Sententiarum libri quatuor)*, 4.7, in PL, vol. 192, 855-856. This work by Peter Lombard was among the first to delineate the list of seven sacraments that has now become standard.

³³ Austin, "Appendix 5," in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 57, 248.

concluded that Jesus instituted confirmation when he laid hands on the children in the Gospel of Matthew 19. In the *Summa*, Thomas argued that Christ instituted confirmation indirectly, by promising to send the Paraclete after he was gone, not directly by either receiving or conferring it.³⁴ Christ himself was not confirmed, because he had no need for a sacrament to fill him with the Holy Spirit. He was innately “full of grace and truth.”³⁵ Other questions addressed by Thomas will surface throughout the rest of this work as they pertain to the topics under discussion.

Confirmation and Lay Catechization

As mentioned earlier, the Fourth Lateran Council did not specifically address confirmation, nor did it prescribe the content of lay catechization. These details would be fleshed out by reforming leaders like Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln (1235-1253), and John Pecham, Archbishop of Canterbury (1279-1292), who exemplified in England an integration of confirmation into the process of lay catechization that was taking place on the continent as well. Still, although Lateran IV was short on specifics, the desire for lay people to be more religiously engaged and for local clergy to be better qualified to lead them is evident throughout its decrees. For instance, because episcopal dioceses were very large and bishops often too busy (or ill equipped) to fulfill their preaching responsibilities, canon 10 calls for the appointment of “suitable men to carry

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.1, vol. 57, 189.

³⁵ Quotation is from the Gospel of John 1:14. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.1, vol. 57, 191.

out with profit this duty of sacred preaching, men who are powerful in word and deed and who will visit with care the peoples entrusted to them . . . and will build them up by word and example.”³⁶ Many of the church councils following on the heels of the Fourth Lateran Council resonated with the desire to bring the laity into greater conformity to the ideal of the Christian life. The sacrament of confirmation, with its theological association with strengthening and preparation for spiritual battle, lent itself well to this movement.

In a later section we will look at the expectations placed on priests to induce compliance with the directive that all Christians be confirmed,³⁷ but it is worth noting here that these reforming church councils wanted priests to do more than enforce expectations: they envisioned priests who were active in educating the members of their parish in proper Christian beliefs and behaviors. A synod in Angers (c. 1219) emphasized the indoctrinating work of the local priest by declaring that before he brings parishioners before the bishop, the priest was to have taught his people what confirmation accomplished—the impartation of the Holy Spirit, strengthening (*confirmans*) in good works, and strengthening (*roborans*) against sin and the devil.³⁸ The Council of Worcester (1240) specified that priests were expected to fulfill this teaching role as a regular part of their

³⁶ *Fourth Lateran Council*, 10, in Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 1, 239-240. Lateran IV was the most significant component in a reform movement that included other councils as well. See for example the work of a synod in Paris, dated 1203, that came about as the result of the same reforming impulse (Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, lxxv).

³⁷ See below, p. 302.

³⁸ *The Statutes of Angers*, 5, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 142.

Sunday activities, and would be punished if they failed to do so.³⁹ The Council of Lambeth, (1281) under the reforming bishop John Pecham, bitinglly expressed its alarm over the general ignorance of both priests and laity and called for a regimented program of Christian education to be presented in an easily comprehensible fashion:

The priests with their lack of knowledge are casting the people into a pit of error. And the folly and ignorance of these clerics, who are supposed to instruct the faithful concerning the catholic faith, lead the people more often into error than into proper belief. . . . [To remedy this situation we declare that] four times a year, that is once every quarter of the year, on one established day, or on many days, every priest caring for the people should, either himself or through a representative, explain the following to the people, using common language and without weaving an imaginary web of every [theological] subtlety: The Fourteen Articles of Faith, the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue, the Two Evangelical Precepts (that is the twin commandments of love), the Seven Deeds of Mercy, the Seven Deadly Sins (along with their offspring), the Seven Principle Virtues, and the Seven Sacraments of Grace.⁴⁰

³⁹ *The Council of Worcester* (1240), 12, in F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, eds., *Councils and Synods, With Other Documents Relating to the English Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964-1981), vol. 2, pt. 1, 299.

⁴⁰ *Council of Lambeth* (1291), 9, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 900-901: "Ignorantia sacerdotum populum precipitat in foveam erroris; et clericorum stultitia vel ruditas, qui de fide catholica fides (alternative reading) fidelium instruere iubentur, magis aliquando ad errorem proficit quam doctrinam. . . . quilibet sacerdos plebi presidens, quarter in anno, hoc est, semel in qualibet quarta anni, die una sollempni vel pluribus, per se vel per alium exponat populo vulgariter, absque cuiuslibet subtilitatis textura fantastica, quatuordecim fidei articulos, decem mandata decalogi, duo precepta evangelii, scilicet, gemine caritatis, septem etiam opera misericordie, septem peccata capitalia, cum sua progenie, septem virtutes principales, ac septem gratie sacramenta."

The Council of Lambeth provided the canonical basis for later popular works such as Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* and the *Lay Folks' Catechism* (see Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Idelle Sullens, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, vol. 14 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983), xv; and *The Lay Folks' Catechism, or the English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People*, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth (London: Early English Text Society, 1901). *The Lay Folks' Catechism* is the name given the text by scholars. It was an English version of Archbishop Thoresby's Latin *Instructions for the People* (1357), translated and expanded by the monk John de Taystek.).

The *Statutes of Lincoln* promulgated earlier (1239?) by Robert Grosseteste expressed this same

The degree to which these efforts were successful is open to debate. Historians of the Protestant Reformation, especially, tend to depict late medieval religious education in very dark tones, contending that children and adults might have memorized religious texts, but they did not understand them. Philippa Tudor, for example, notes the lack of catechisms written specifically for children before the sixteenth century and cites, as unique, the case of Bishop Grandisson of Exeter who commanded that schoolboys should not merely recite, but should also be taught to understand the Lord's Prayer, Ave Maria, Creed, etc.⁴¹ Certainly the reformers themselves, especially Martin Luther, portrayed late medieval religious education as woefully insufficient.⁴² Whether or not later medieval Christians had adequate doctrinal training must remain an open question here,⁴³ but there can be no doubt that these reforming councils expressed a strong desire for individual Christian understanding and helped create the religious climate that gave rise to the Protestant Reformers' unfulfilled expectations.

sort of concern, demanding that priests fulfill their responsibility to train and instruct the laity, both children and adults (*Statutes of Lincoln*, 1 and 8, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 268, 269).

⁴¹ Philippa Tudor, "Religious Instruction for Children and Adolescents in the Early English Reformation," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35, no. 3 (1984): 392-393.

⁴² Gerald Strauss, "Success and Failure in the German Reformation," *Past & Present* 67 (1975): 33. See also idem, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

⁴³ For more positive evaluations of late medieval spirituality, see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); and Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

The Ethos of Chivalry

During this time of increasingly specific expectations of lay piety, confirmation also acquired an association with chivalric values and ideals. This connection between chivalry and confirmation was created through the insertion of a ritual blow into the traditional confirmation liturgy. The first example of this blow as part of the confirmation ceremony is found in William Durandus's *Pontifical*.⁴⁴ In it the final act the bishop performs on each confirmand was to "give him a light slap on the cheek, saying, 'Peace be with you.'"⁴⁵ Ramon Llull (c. 1233-c.1315), who was a contemporary of Durandus (c. 1230-1296), mentions this practice as well in his *Doctrine d'enfant*, a spiritual and doctrinal manual intended for young boys. In describing the mechanics of confirmation he includes a blow to the face (*bufe*) given by the bishop.⁴⁶

Given that Llull was also aware of the practice, it is certainly possible that it was not original with Durandus, but that he learned it from other French bishops. In any case, either he or they apparently got the idea from the ceremony of knighting, which can be documented to include such a blow in the early thirteenth-century poem entitled *Ordene de chevalerie*.⁴⁷ The poem tells of

⁴⁴ See above, p. 221. Regarding this as the first instance, see Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 429, 436; and Adolf Adam, *Firmung und Seelsorge* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1959), 218.

⁴⁵ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 1.1.4, p. 334: "Et deinde dat sibi leviter alapam super genam, dicens: Pax tecum."

⁴⁶ Ramon Llull, *Doctrine d'enfant*, 24, ed. Armand Llinarès (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1969), 70.

⁴⁷ *Ordene de chevalerie*, in Raoul e Hondenc: "Le roman des eles" and The Anonymous "Ordene de chevalerie", ed. Keith Busby (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1983), 103-119, 170-

the crusader Hugh, Count of Tiberias, who is taken captive by Saladin. According to this story, Saladin is very respectful of Hugh and arranged his release after the payment of a ransom. But before Hugh departs, Saladin begs him to demonstrate the making of a knight. Hugh is naturally reluctant to initiate an infidel into the “holy order of knighthood,”⁴⁸ but as Saladin’s prisoner, he has no choice. So he takes him through the process of becoming a knight, except for the slap (*collée*),⁴⁹ which he absolutely refuses to administer because, as Saladin’s prisoner, it would be wrong to strike him. He does, however, explain the purpose of the slap as a “reminder to the knight of him who dubbed him and ordained him.”⁵⁰ Ramon Llull also included the slap in his description of the knighting ceremony, and he too depicted it as an aid to memory:

The knyght ought to kysse the squyer and to gyue to hym a palme [slap] by cause that he be remembryng of that whiche he receyuth and promytteth and of the grete charge jn whiche he is obliged & boūden & of the grete honoure that he receyueth by thordre of chyualry.⁵¹

175. The knighting of Geoffery of Anjou, just before he married Matilda in 1128, does not include a slap (Louis Halphen and René Poupardin, *Chroniques Des Comtes D’Anjou Et Des Seigneurs D’Amboise* (Paris: Auguste Picard, 1913), 179-180). See Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 64-65.

⁴⁸ *Ordene de chevalerie*, line 83, p. 107; translation on p. 170.

⁴⁹ In French the blow or slap is called a “collée” or “paumée.” The English word ‘dub,’ which refers generally to the making of a knight, comes specifically from this blow with a hand or a sword. This blow was eventually “regarded as the one essential act in the ceremony of making a knight” (Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, rev. ed. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1995), 31).

⁵⁰ *Ordene de chevalerie*, line 248-250, p. 112; translation on p. 172.

⁵¹ Ramon Llull, *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry*, trans. William Caxton and ed. Alfred T. P. Byles (London: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1926), 74. Richard Barber (*The Knight and Chivalry*, 31) mistakenly writes that Llull’s *Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry* makes no mention of a slap. Caxton’s translation uses the word “palme,” a direct

Maurice Keen notes that these knighting rituals combined two ceremonial traditions—one secular and the other ecclesiastical. The ecclesiastical strand originated in a rite for the blessing of swords in the tenth-century *Mainz Pontifical* which itself demonstrates many similarities to royal coronation rites. The secular strand went back to the Germanic custom of ceremonially delivering arms to a knight. In spite of its attempts, the church never gained the same monopoly over the making of knights that it did over the making of kings. Keen describes these liturgical rites as “tangential to the history of dubbing,” because even though many knighting ceremonies took place in a church, it was almost always conferred by a layman. Still, according to Keen, it would be wrong to attempt to assert that knighthood was not a Christian institution that was initiated by a pointedly religious ceremony.⁵² Take for example a knighting ceremony described by Ramon Llull. The squire is made a knight, not by a member of the clergy, but by another knight, yet the ceremony took place kneeling in front of an altar with the squire’s hands lifted to God in heaven.⁵³ In the knighting ceremony in Durandus’s *Pontifical*, after a blessing of the new knight’s equipment, he is girded with his sword, given the kiss of peace, and then slapped lightly with the words, “Awaken from wicked sleep and attend to the faith of Christ and a praiseworthy reputation.”⁵⁴ Then the nobles place

translation of “paumée” which was used in the French original (Ramon Llull, *Livre de l’Ordre de Chevalerie*, ed. Vincenzo Minervini (Bari, Italy: Adriatica Editrice, 1972), 142).

⁵² For this discussion, see Keen, *Chivalry*, 64-76; the quotation is from p. 74.

⁵³ Ramon Llull, *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry*, 74.

⁵⁴ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 1.28.11, p. 450: “Exciteris a sompno malitie et vigila in fide Christi et fama laudabili. Amen.”

spurs on him and he is given a banner. Each step of the process is followed by a prayer or blessing, creating a tone in which the romance of knighthood is intermingled with a clearly Christian duty to serve God and fight “in defense of churches, widows, orphans, and all the servants of God.”⁵⁵ A related rite commands, “Arise and go to be a good knight of Christ and the blessed Peter, king and keeper of the keys of heaven,”⁵⁶ language that is reminiscent of Gregory VII⁵⁷ and clearly calls to mind the ideals of crusading.

What meaning did this interesting gesture, a slap on the cheek borrowed from the world of knighthood and chivalry, have in the confirmation ceremony and why was it inserted? As to the meaning, William Durandus in his *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, an extended explication of the rites contained in his *Pontifical*, actually provided four different reasons for the slap.⁵⁸ First, according to Durandus, the slap helps create a clear memory of the rite, so Christians will remember that they have been confirmed and will not repeat it. Interestingly, we have seen this same explanation given by Ramon Llull and in the *Ordene de chevalerie* for the slap in the knighting ceremony: the slap would help the recipient to remember the ceremony. Clearly, the belief that a slap on the face

⁵⁵ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 1.28.2, p. 447: “defensio ecclesiarum, viduarum, orphanorum, omniumque Deo servientium.” This is part of a blessing of the sword that goes back to the tenth-century *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* (Vogel, *Le Pontifical romano-germanique*, 244.1, vol. 2, 379).

⁵⁶ Andrieu, *Le Pontifical de la Curie romaine au XIIIe siècle*, appendix 4.11, vol. 2 of *Le Pontifical romain au moyen âge*, 581: “Vade et age ut bonus miles Christi beatique Petri celestis regni clavigeri.”

⁵⁷ Keen, *Chivalry*, 74.

⁵⁸ William Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.6-8, ed. A. Davril and T. M. Thibodeau, CCCM, vol. 140 A, 433. See also Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 436-438.

served as an effective mnemonic was widely held. It is also clear that this business of non-repetition was no small concern to church leaders, as it was widely agreed that both baptism and confirmation could not be repeated. According to a council in Valencia (1255), even in the case of a baptized and confirmed person who converted to Judaism or Islam, if they returned to Christianity the initiation rites should not be repeated.⁵⁹ Yet, this was also a world where supernatural power was attributed to the actual elements of the sacraments or to the touch of a godly bishop, and it is not unlikely that, given the opportunity, some would have repeatedly received confirmation.⁶⁰ It is perhaps for this reason that commands forbidding the practice were ubiquitous,⁶¹ and serious punishments were threatened for disobedience.⁶² Since the expected age of confirmation was infancy and the confirmand would have no memory of it, all the adults associated with the rite were given the responsibility to prevent repetition. Parents were instructed to insure that their children, when they got older, knew they had already been confirmed by

⁵⁹ *The Synodal Constitutions of the Diocese of Valencia*, in Mansi, vol. 23, 887.

⁶⁰ Gratian's *Decretum* includes material from the Second Council of Chalon (813) (mistakenly indicated to be from the Council of Tarragona (516)) which said, "It has been told us that certain people are being confirmed by the same bishop two, three, or more times, while the bishops do not know it" (Gratian, *Decretum (Concordia discordantium canonum)*, 3.5.8, ed. Emil Friedberg, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1879), 1414; translation from Paul Turner, *Sources of Confirmation: From the Fathers Through the Reformers* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 50). Keith Thomas cites the nineteenth-century case of a woman in Norfolk who had "been 'bishopped' seven times, because she found it helped her rheumatism" (R. Forby, *The Vocabulary of East Anglia* (1830), vol. 2, 406-407, cited in Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 38).

⁶¹ See for example, Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.12.8, p. 624; *The Council of Worcester* (1240), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 299; Gregory IX, *Decretales*, 1.16.1, ed. Emil Friedberg, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1879), 134; and Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 4.7.2, in PL, vol. 192, 855-856.

⁶² *Synod in Cambrai* (1287-1288), 17, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 115.

frequently recalling the details of their confirmation to them⁶³ and bishops were to insist that infants came for confirmation in the custody of someone who could testify that they were unconfirmed.⁶⁴ When there was doubt, however, the tendency was to err on the side of leniency. The *Statutes of Canterbury* deal with this question in the context of provisional baptism—the practice of rebaptizing a child when it was feared that the original baptism had been improperly administered, perhaps by a midwife. It says, “Similarly concerning confirmation, if it is in doubt, let it be conferred, because although it is said that it should not be repeated, in this case it is not known [for certain] to have been conferred.”⁶⁵ It is no wonder, given this high level of concern for repetition, that Durandus hoped the slap might help the confirmand remember his confirmation.

Two other reasons Durandus gave for the slap, that it substitutes for the apostolic laying of hands and that it drives away evil spirits, stand up less well under liturgical scrutiny. Regarding the slap taking the place of handlaying, Finnegan notes that earlier Durandus had said that it was the anointing which was equivalent to the apostolic handlaying. Finnegan also notes that the slap occurs in the place where other rites have the kiss of peace, and the priest

⁶³ *Council of Exeter* (1287), 3, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 989; and *Statutes Cambrai under Guiard of Laon* (c. 1240), 24, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 33.

⁶⁴ *Statutes Cambrai under Guiard of Laon* (c. 1240), 21, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 32.

⁶⁵ *Statutes of Canterbury* (1213-1214), 33, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 31: “Similiter de confirmatione, si dubitetur, conferatur quia dici non debet ineratum quod nescitur fuisse collatum.” See also the *Statutes of Chichester* (c. 1250), 11, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 453.

accompanies it by saying, “pax tecum.” In light of this, it is more likely that the slap replaced the kiss, but if so, it represents the substitution of an essentially different symbol with a wholly other meaning—a kiss and a slap are two very different symbolic acts.⁶⁶ As for the idea that the slap was to drive away evil spirits, this explanation is very odd, because if taken to its logical conclusion, it would cast doubt on the efficacy of the rite of baptism which contained a significant component of exorcism. It is no doubt for this reason that even though the slap has remained a part of the Catholic confirmation rite to this day,⁶⁷ the notion that it is related to exorcism has not gained any theological momentum.

A final reason Durandus gives for the slap is especially interesting, because it creates a direct thematic link to the knighting ceremony and provides a likely explanation for its adoption into the confirmation rite. Durandus proposes that the slap is given to make the confirmand strong in faith and unashamed to confess his allegiance to Christ, “for those who have been slapped in the face are accustomed to shame. Indeed the same thing is done with new knights, for the same reason.”⁶⁸ This suggests that the slap was introduced to lessen the dissonance between the meaning theologians had been giving to the rite and the actions of the ceremony itself. As we have seen, since the days of Alcuin, theologians had placed increasing emphasis on the notion that confirmation

⁶⁶ Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 437.

⁶⁷ This was due to the wide dissemination of Durandus’s *Pontifical*. See above, p. 218.

⁶⁸ Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.8, vol. 140 A, 433: “percussi enim in facie

imparts the Holy Spirit in order to prepare the recipient for spiritual battle—to boldly affirm faith in the face of persecution and to preach the gospel. However, the symbolic actions of the rite itself had not changed significantly since the third century when the meaning of the rite focused more narrowly on impartation of the Spirit. With the addition of the slap, the confirmation ceremony more clearly integrated the notion of courage in the face of persecution into the rite itself.

Regardless of how it came about, the inclusion of the slap created a fascinating swirl of symbolic imagery with significant and rather wide social, class, and gender implications. It associated the ordinary Christian of any class with the noble and romantic ideas of crusade, knighthood, and chivalry, suggesting that no matter one's background, the faithful Christian who had been anointed by the bishop, and thus filled with the Holy Spirit, was a true soldier of Christ. This imagery of the confirmand as a soldier of Christ also brought to mind the spiritual prestige of a monk, the traditional *miles Christi*. (The making of a monk with his first tonsure was another rite that only a bishop could perform.) The slap also applied to women and girls a symbolic gesture that, as part of the knighting ceremony, had been exclusively male. All in all, the slap added a significant new element to the meaning of the ritual. It emphasized the theme of confirmation as preparation for spiritual warfare and through it people of both sexes and all classes symbolically partook of a type of prestige that was

erubescere solent. Similiter etiam fit alicubi propter eandem causam militibus nouis.”

generally limited to the small segment of society made up of upper class male warriors and monks. If ritual behavior is the product of a negotiation of power relationships between all participants in the rite,⁶⁹ it should not be surprising at all that this slap gained widespread acceptance. By associating confirmation with Christian knighthood it added to the honor of the bishop who imparted it and brought a sense of enhanced status to the ordinary Christian who received it.

Spiritual Warfare and Witchcraft

This tradition of confirmation as strengthening for spiritual battle took on a new and fearsome significance in the later Middle Ages as beliefs about the presence and work of the devil both expanded and became more specific. As we have seen, the notion that confirmation prepares one for some sort of spiritual conflict goes back to the fifth-century Pentecost homily ascribed to Faustus of Riez, which taught that “in confirmation [God] gives growth toward grace, because in this world one is compelled to live one’s entire life among invisible enemies and perils.”⁷⁰ He described the episcopal handlaying as the provision of military supplies (*adiumenta militae*) to a soldier heading into battle.⁷¹ In the ninth century, Alcuin, followed by Rabanus Maurus, delineated the nature of this strengthening more specifically and moved it out of the invisible world by

⁶⁹ See above, p. 32.

⁷⁰ (Pseudo)Eusebius, *Homilia De Pentecosten*, 2, CCSL, vol. 101, 337: “in confirmatione augmentum praestat ad gratiam, quia in hoc mundo tota aetate uicturis inter inuisibiles hostes et pericula gradiendum est.” See above, 167ff.

contending that confirmation strengthened one to preach—to proclaim the name of Christ.⁷² The intended audience for this proclamation was not specified; presumably they had in mind both pagans and Christians who needed encouragement toward greater piety. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas expanded this in his answer to the question of whether confirmation imprints a character. Thomas said the answer was “yes,” based on his definition of character as a “spiritual power ordered to certain sacred actions.”⁷³ The spiritual power of baptism is “for performing those things which pertain to one’s own salvation in so far as one lives for himself,” however, “in confirmation a person receives power for engaging in the spiritual battle against the enemies of the faith.”⁷⁴ Specifically, confirmation enables its recipient to achieve a stage of spiritual adulthood, equipped to “battle against visible enemies, that is, against persecutors of the faith,” by “publicly . . . profess[ing] faith in Christ in his speech.”⁷⁵ His vocabulary indicates that Thomas took this notion of battle seriously. He asserted that confirmation prepares the Christian for “combat (*pugna*)”⁷⁶ in a “Christian war (*militia christiana*)”⁷⁷ under the leadership of “the bishop, who is like the general of an army (*dux exercitus*).”⁷⁸ Moreover, Thomas

⁷¹ Pseudo)Eusebius, *Homilia De Pentecosten*, 2, CCSL, vol. 101, 337-338.

⁷² See above, p. 110 and 120.

⁷³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.5, vol. 57, 205. See also *Summa theologiae*, 3.63.2, vol. 56, 81-85, where Thomas answers the question, “Is character a spiritual power?”

⁷⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.5, vol. 57, 205.

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.5, vol. 57, 205.

⁷⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.10, vol. 57, 219.

⁷⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.10, vol. 57, 221.

⁷⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.10, vol. 57, 219. See also *The Council of Worcester*

would have had no trouble numbering many visible “enemies” and “persecutors of the faith” against whom Christians were at war. Thirteenth-century Christians believed themselves to live in dangerous times, surrounded by articulate and educated Jews and Muslims on the outside and infiltrated by heretics on the inside.

Christians were no less certain that confirmation prepared one for warfare on the spiritual plane where Satan and his allies were actively and inexorably at work against them. Durandus noted that the Holy Spirit received at confirmation acts as a guard and tutor to the Christian, in contradistinction to the works of the devil.⁷⁹ More popular works like *The Lay Folks’ Catechism* gave prominence to this theme:

“The secund sacrement is confermyng
That the bisshop gives to tham that er baptized,
That giffes thurgh [sic] his power to tham that tas it
The grace and the giftes of the haligast
To make tham mare stalworth than thai ware before
To stand ogaynes the fend, and dedely syn.⁸⁰

Robert Mannyng’s *Handlyng Synne* gives even greater attention to the concept that the Christian directly and regularly encounters and battles the Devil:

And ꝛe shul alle weyl vndyrstand
When chyl dren are blessed of bysshop hand:
þat blyssyng ys confyrmacoun

(1240), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 298-299, which refers to the confirmand as a Christian soldier; and *The Synodal Constitutions of the Diocese of Valencia*, in Mansi, vol. 23, 887, which states that confirmation “imparts strength (*robur*) and grace (*gratia*) “so that the enemy deep within might be weakened (*ut debilitetur penitus inimicus*).”

⁷⁹ Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.2, vol. 140 A, 430. See also *Statutes of the Synod of Le Mans*, in Mansi, vol. 23, 736-737; *The Statutes of Angers*, 5, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 142.

⁸⁰ *The Lay Folks’ Catechism*, lines 299-304, 64 (emphasis mine).

Aȝens þe fendes temptacoun,
 And makþ vs stalworth yn batayle
 Whan þe fend wyl vu asayle.
 þan are we made goddes champyons
 Aȝens þe fendes, goddes felons.
 þan haue we receyued fully myght
 Aȝens þe fend for to fyght.
 And ȝyf we be yn beleue stedefast,
 We haue powere down hym to kast.⁸¹

This imagery of the confirmand as one of “goddes champyons” would be carried on in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* which refers to the confirmed Christian as having added his name to the “gladiatorial lists.”⁸²

This later medieval emphasis on direct conflict with the devil as a regular aspect of spiritual warfare took on darker hues in the century leading up to the Protestant Reformation. John Bossy notes that between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries there was a shift away from the Seven Deadly (or Capital) Sins⁸³ toward the Ten Commandments as the proper tool for taking a moral inventory in preparation for confession.⁸⁴ The Ten Commandments directed greater attention to sins against God and made idolatry the chief of sins. One consequence of this was a transformation in the perception of the Devil from the “anti-type of Christ”—spreading hatred in opposition to Christ’s message of

⁸¹ Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 9837-9848, p. 245. According to Mannyng, one of Satan’s ploys is to get the Christian to delay confirmation, thereby preventing him from gaining the power necessary to do spiritual battle (see lines 9849-9860, p. 245-246).

⁸² *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 2.3.14, trans. J. Donovan (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., 1908), 164.

⁸³ Pride, Envy, Anger, Greed, Gluttony, Sloth, Lust

⁸⁴ John Bossy, “Moral Arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments,” in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 217-226.

love—to the “anti-type of the Father”—initiating idolatry and false worship.⁸⁵ Thus by the fifteenth century, “the Devil acquired in the popular mind a grandeur and formidable character which he had not hitherto possessed.”⁸⁶ Writing from slightly different perspectives, both Karen Jolly and Edward Peters trace the evolution of beliefs about occult behaviors⁸⁷ and find that by about 1400 there was a growing association of superstition and magical beliefs with sorcery and witchcraft.⁸⁸ The result was that separate sins of magic, necromancy, sorcery, divination, and witchcraft had all come to be “considered in some places by some theologians and magistrates, both ecclesiastical and civil, as a single type of crime whose essence was defined as a conspiratorial alliance with the devil whose purpose was to ruin human society.”⁸⁹ A cursory look at the table of contents of a work like the late fifteenth-century *Malleus Maleficarum* indicates how seriously and fearfully many late medieval Christians approached issues of witchcraft and possible interactions with the devil. This was a world where people considered sexual intercourse with or rape by the devil or his demons a very real possibility, where witches who had entered into a pact with the devil might murder newborn children or present them as an offering to the devil, where witches caused disease and natural

⁸⁵ Bossy, “Moral Arithmetic,” 229-230.

⁸⁶ Bossy, “Moral Arithmetic,” 230. See also Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 232 ff.

⁸⁷ Karen Jolly, “Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 20-26; and Edward Peters, “The Medieval Church and State on Superstition, Magic and Witchcraft: From Augustine to the Sixteenth Century,” in Ankarloo, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, 207-217 and 223-237.

⁸⁸ Jolly, “Medieval Magic,” 23-24; Peters, “The Medieval Church and State,” 228-229.

⁸⁹ Peters, “The Medieval Church and State,” 231.

disaster, and where witches magically transformed men into animals or made men believe their penises had been removed.⁹⁰ More than a century earlier, Bernard Gui's *Manual for Inquisitors* was much more restrained than the *Malleus Malifacarum*, but still gave the impression that inquisitors were on the trail of a devilish conspiracy as they sought out sorcerers, diviners, and invocers of demons, who profaned the sacraments through alternative baptismal practices, who misused the host, chrism or other holy oils, and who enchanted children.⁹¹ Thus, at the same time that theologians and church leaders were more pointedly indicating the importance of confirmation as preparation for spiritual warfare, this warfare was taking on more menacing dimensions with the growing belief that Satan himself was directly involved in the fight. Those who took part in the sacrament could not have avoided an awareness of these overtones.

New Conceptions of Age and Consent

There is one final, but significant, cultural change in the high and late Middle Ages that affected confirmation to some degree in some regions, though perhaps not as much as a few scholars have believed; it has to do with the question of

⁹⁰ Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1928), vii-x. I am no great proponent of psycho-history, but if ever a document begged for a Freudian interpretation, this is it. For a good introduction to the *Malleus*, which makes the point that not all people, lay or clerical, in the late Middle Ages shared its authors' preoccupation with female sexuality as the basis of witchcraft accusations, see Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

⁹¹ Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'inquisiteur*, ed. G. Mollat (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1927), vol. 2, p. 21 and 52.

whether there was a shift toward delaying confirmation until the age of seven or later. Some scholars, perhaps unduly influenced by the imposition of a later age for confirmation by both Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth century and not having delved broadly enough into the medieval sources, have projected that change back onto the Middle Ages. One historian, for example, states that in the high Middle Ages “it was required that the child attain the age of reason, that is, seven years, before being confirmed.”⁹² The evidence does not warrant so sweeping a conclusion.

Indeed the evidence is mixed,⁹³ but taken as a whole, the best indication is that, in most regions of northern Europe throughout the high and late Middle Ages,

⁹² Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Didier Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jody Gladding (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1999), 29. In another example, Richard DeMolen mistakenly says that “after the fifth century, confirmation was delayed generally for three or four years after christening” (Richard L. DeMolen, “Childhood and the Sacraments in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Archive for Reformation History*, vol. 66 (Germany: Gütersloher, 1975), 54). No doubt it is correct that most people in the Middle Ages were confirmed some time after baptism, if at all, but this was a constant source of consternation to church councils. DeMolen is not taking into account the difference between prescriptive and descriptive sources. DeMolen’s article is still an interesting one, having to do with the shift in the order of sacraments in the Council of Trent from the medieval order of baptism, confirmation and eucharist to baptism, eucharist and confirmation. However, he relies too heavily on the work of Philippe Aries (*Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962) in attributing this to a shift in the perception of childhood (DeMolen, 50). He also attributes to the Council of Trent changes in the perception of age and spiritual development that had actually been taking place for centuries (DeMolen, 57).

⁹³ Shulamith Shahar captures the complexity of the situation by saying, “As regards confirmation, canonists were divided as to whether or not it should be administered to a child before the age of 7. Some held that it should be conferred within a year of birth. Raymond Lull, on the other hand, claimed that this sacrament should be administered only when a child attained an age when he was capable of understanding the significance of the commitment undertaken by his godparents on his behalf at his baptism. Others believed that it should not be administered to a child under the age of twelve. Many only received it at this age or even later (and others not at all), but it was sometimes administered to children under seven” (*Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990), 23). The last two sentences are a bit problematic, however. Regarding the age of twelve, I have only found one interesting, but unique, source that advocated waiting this long (see below, n. 97), and to say that confirmation was “sometimes administered to children under seven” may be technically true, but also misleading. The majority of people believed confirmation ought to be received much earlier.

the expectation remained for early confirmation—at the time of baptism or as soon after as possible. Given all we have seen about the difficulty of gaining access to a bishop and the optional nature of confirmation there were, of course, many people who were confirmed at an older age and church leaders took this into account in their legislative documents. A synod at Bordeaux (1234) states that children who have reached an age of understanding (*Pueri vero qui etiam intelligere possunt*) should take the initiative to seek out confirmation if they have not yet been confirmed, or if they are not certain whether they have been or not.⁹⁴ A synod at Arras (1291) stated that boys over fourteen and girls over twelve should go to confession before being confirmed.⁹⁵ This evidence is not groundbreaking, as it was common practice to expect adults to go to confession before confirmation. It simply indicates the age at which this sort of adult expectation was being imposed and demonstrates that it was relatively common for children to have missed being confirmed at a younger age. Gerald of Wales (c. 1146-1223) wrote with an awareness of people who had not been confirmed in childhood.⁹⁶ There is also the unique instance of Otto of Bamberg, a bishop writing c. 1124 who advocated delaying confirmation

⁹⁴ Synod of Bordeaux (1234), 6-7, Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 2, 48.

⁹⁵ *Synod of Arras* (1291), 3, Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 214-215. See also Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.8, vol. 140 A, 434; and *Synod of Cambrai under Guiard of Laon*, 22, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 33.

⁹⁶ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, 1.13, ed. J. S. Brewer, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores*, 21/2 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862), 46.

until early adolescence when it would really be needed, “Because that is a time of great danger on account of temptations.”⁹⁷

Nonetheless, the majority of prescriptive sources from the high and late Middle Ages call for early confirmation. Thomas Aquinas is an interesting example. He definitely related confirmation to issues of age and maturity, stating that “in confirmation a man receives maturity in the life of the spirit”⁹⁸ as well as sanctifying grace “for growth and strengthening in righteousness.”⁹⁹ Yet despite this, Thomas did not weigh in on the side of delaying confirmation to a certain age. He joined the majority of scholastic theologians in calling for confirmation at an early age,¹⁰⁰ reasoning that

the soul which is the subject of . . . spiritual birth and spiritual coming of age, is immortal: it is capable of spiritual birth in old age and maturity during the years of youth and childhood because the vicissitudes of bodily age do not affect the soul. Therefore, confirmation should be given to all.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Otto of Bamberg, *Sermo ad Pomeranos*, in PL, vol. 173, 1358: “Quia illa aetas magis obnoxia est tentationibus.” Also cited in O’Doherty, *The Scholastic Teaching*, 57.

⁹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.1, vol. 57, 189.

⁹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.8, vol. 57, 211.

¹⁰⁰ O’Doherty, *The Scholastic Teaching*, 59.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.8, vol. 57, 213. Does Thomas’s inclusion of this topic indicate that age was an issue at the time? Perhaps, but Thomas had a thoroughness of mind that demanded that he examine every permutation of a question. For instance, this same article discusses whether women and the dying should receive confirmation, though there is no evidence that anyone at the time was seriously suggesting that they should not. Nevertheless, the age question is different. We know that questions of how spiritual development and maturity related to age were on peoples’ minds. And, in this case, Thomas actually seems to back away from his earlier declarations that confirmation is for maturity and the ability to speak out against the enemies of Christ. His argument that spiritual maturity can be achieved “during the years of youth and childhood” (*tempore juventutis et pueritiae*) may hold up, but he does not specifically mention infancy (*tempore infantis*), nor does he explain how a young child can wage verbal battle against the enemies of the church. Thus it is possible that, on this point, Thomas was addressing an ongoing debate within the ecclesiastical world and was purposefully defending the status quo as to practice while simultaneously promoting a theological

Durandus, although aware that confirmation was often given at a later age,¹⁰² said the ideal time is seven days after baptism, one day for each of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰³ Except for the important exceptions discussed in the next paragraph, most church councils called for confirmation as early as possible and began imposing sanctions if this was not fulfilled within a certain period of time, usually one year but sometimes as much as five or seven years.¹⁰⁴ *Quattuor Sermones*, a popular work printed by William Caxton in 1483, summed up the mainstream position in this way: “To this [confirmation] is euery cristen man and woman bound to bryng theyr children as sone as they may, namely or they be a yere of age for they shal haue the more grace of lyf and the more blisse in deed [death].”¹⁰⁵

understanding of confirmation that would undermine it. Robert Christian concludes that “Thomas’ contention [was] that the subject of confirmation should usually be a mature individual” (“Midway Between Baptism and Holy Orders: Saint Thomas’ Contribution to a Contemporary Understanding of Confirmation,” *Angelicum* 69, no. 2 (1992): 164).

¹⁰² Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.8, vol. 140 A, 434.

¹⁰³ Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.1, vol. 140 A, 429.

¹⁰⁴ Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 422, provides a comparison table of church councils and the age they expected confirmation. It is a bit out of date, because it takes into account material only from Mansi, yet it shows that in spite of some significant variation, the majority of church councils called for early confirmation. Among the councils Finnegan does not include in table are Canterbury (1213-1214), Worcester (1240), and Chichester (c. 1250), which all set one year of age as the upper limit before imposing some sort of discipline on the parents. Councils in Paris (c. 1203) and Valencia (1255) called for confirmation as soon as possible. (See *Statutes of Canterbury* (1213-1214), 37, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 32; *Council of Worcester* (1240), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 298; *Statutes of Chichester* (c. 1250), 11, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 453; *Statutes of Paris* (c. 1203), 12, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 56; and *Synodal Constitutions of the Diocese of Valencia* (1255), in Mansi, vol. 23, 887.)

Myrc’s *Instructions for Parish Priests* (c. 1400) set the age at five for sanctions to begin (John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, lines 157-160, p. 76).

¹⁰⁵ *Quattuor sermones*, printed by William Caxton, ed. N. F. Blake (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1975), 38. This work is an amalgamation of many texts dating back to Archbishop of York John Thoresby’s instruction manual, *The Lay Folks’ Catechism* (1357). It is not really four sermons. Rather, it is structured like many other catechetical manuals, with

Yet it appears that at the same time most church councils were calling for early confirmation, in the region of Cambrai and later in Cologne there was a movement toward delaying confirmation until the age of seven. The earliest apparent instance of this is from a synod in Cambrai held under bishop Guiard of Laon (1238-1248). After the usual admonition for priests to warn parents to take their children to the bishop for confirmation because only a bishop is authorized to perform it, the canon specifies that these parents “should bring children, seven years or older.”¹⁰⁶ A later synod in Cambrai (1287-1288) contained the same command,¹⁰⁷ as did other councils of that period in Cologne (1280) and Arras (1291).¹⁰⁸

What are we to make of this dramatic and interesting (albeit regionally limited) change in attitude toward confirmation? It appears that the sacrament of confirmation was getting caught up in a cultural sea change regarding issues of spiritual maturity and the age of discretion.¹⁰⁹ This movement in northeastern

instruction on the Lord’s Prayer, the Ave Maria, the Apostle’s Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Sacraments, etc. It is a prose work, unlike many similar popular manuals which were written in verse (see *Quattuor sermones*, 12, 14-17).

¹⁰⁶ *Synod of Cambrai under Guiard of Laon*, 20, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 32: “Adducant autem septennes pueros vel majoris etatis . . .”

¹⁰⁷ *Synod of Cambrai* (1287-1288), 17, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 115.

¹⁰⁸ See *Synod of Cologne* (1280), in Mansi, vol. 24, 349; and *Synod of Arras* (1291), 3, Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 214-215. Interestingly, the *Synodal Statutes of John of Liege* (1287), in Mansi, vol. 24, 889-890, says exactly the opposite. Liege was part of the archdiocese of Cologne and these statutes show clear dependence on the statutes of Cambrai, except they say just the opposite regarding age, “Adducant septennes pueros vel minoris aetatis.” Given that the canon also calls for confirmands to be educated in preparation for confirmation, Adolf Adam is surely correct in saying this must have been written in error (*Firmung und Seelsorge*, 95-96).

¹⁰⁹ J.D.C. Fisher suggests that Cologne was an especially large diocese and bishops could not work their way through it until children got older. This answer does not satisfy at all, since it begs the question of why, once the bishop did get to a particular area, he would not want to confirm *all* the children of *any* age, in order to give himself more time until he needed to return

France and in the diocese of Cologne towards delaying confirmation was consistent with, and perhaps an example of, a more general contemporaneous trend toward personal involvement and individual responsibility in matters of piety and religious commitment. This trend is most clearly seen in a growing suspicion of child oblation. Since as early as the time of Basil the Great, churchmen and church councils had declared that child oblation was not irrevocable; oblates had to reach an age of discretion and offer their own consent to the monastic life before they should be professed. However, this policy was breached much more often than observed during the early Middle Ages.¹¹⁰ In reality, once a child had been admitted to a monastery, all the various rites and vows were unavoidable, “since neither law nor custom recognized any right to leave the house.”¹¹¹ In the twelfth century there was a shift to ‘vocation’ as the essential element in making a monk, as churchmen began to take this notion of individual consent to the monastic life more seriously. Ivo of Chartres and Gratian were among the first to indicate that intent was the key element in monastic commitment, but many church leaders apparently arrived at this conclusion independently, indicating that this was just one element in a more sweeping modification of societal values and

(Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West*, 123; see also Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 416). It should be noted that both Finnegan and Fisher were working at something of a disadvantage because they apparently did not have access to the material from Cambrai and thought Cologne was the first and only instance of a council, prior to the Reformation, to call for a minimum age of seven.

¹¹⁰ John Doran, “Oblation or Obligation? A Canonical Ambiguity,” in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 127-132.

¹¹¹ John van Engen, “Professing Religion: From Liturgy to Law,” *Viator* 29 (1998): 324-325. See also John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 232-234.

expectations.¹¹² The Cistercians reinstated the long ignored one year novitiate which had been imposed in the Rule of St Benedict, and in 1134 they set fifteen (later raised to eighteen) as the minimum age for novices.¹¹³ In houses that still practiced child oblation, it was finally settled by papal decree, between 1150 and 1234, that fourteen was the age of “free will” and at that time child oblates must have the opportunity to affirm or disavow their monastic vocation.¹¹⁴ This rejection of child oblation was not the only example of a swing toward individual awareness and choice. A similarly dramatic change in marriage law was also taking place as binding parental control gave way to a belief in the need for the consent of the parties getting married. Not surprisingly, the same ages of consent were applied to both monastic profession and marriage.¹¹⁵

It is likely that many factors were at work in these church councils around Cambrai and in Cologne. They could very well have been influenced by relatively recent concerns (within the previous two centuries) for personal consent in matters of religious commitment and for individual understanding through catechesis. In addition, these councils may simply have been the first to legislate what many were coming to believe about confirmation, that receiving confirmation at an older age is more consistent with the theological emphasis on confirmation as a strengthening for spiritual battle that had been growing

¹¹² van Engen, “Professing Religion,” 329-332.

¹¹³ C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 2001), 179.

¹¹⁴ van Engen, “Professing Religion,” 330, 333.

¹¹⁵ van Engen, “Professing Religion,” 324, 332.

since the ninth century.¹¹⁶ We have already noted the tension in Thomas Aquinas's theology—he endorsed early confirmation while simultaneously associating it with spiritual maturity and sanctification.¹¹⁷ Ramon Llull wrote of confirmation as if the recipient were old enough to understand and give personal assent to the promises made on his behalf at baptism and to make a commitment to serve God and defend the faith. According to Llull, confirmation marks a transition in which responsibility for one's spiritual health shifted from parents or godparents to the confirmand.¹¹⁸ Clearly, the broader cultural shift toward personal responsibility in matters of religion was having implications for confirmation. A fully transformed understanding of confirmation was expressed legislatively in the late fifteenth century by councils in Arras and Tournai, which, in addition to a minimum age, required candidates for confirmation to know the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ave Maria.¹¹⁹ Eventually, this same mindset was expressed in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* which suggested that while twelve was the best age for confirmation, it should at least be delayed

¹¹⁶ In addition, it would insure that the confirmand would always remember that he had been confirmed, thus avoiding the often mentioned danger of repeating the sacrament. Adolf Adam (*Firmung und Seelsorge*, 95) suggests both of these as reasons for this innovation of a minimum age. See also Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 419-420.

¹¹⁷ See above, p. 250.

¹¹⁸ Ramon Llull, *Doctrine d'enfant*, 24, p. 70.

¹¹⁹ Taglia, "The Cultural Construction of Childhood," 280-287. In this article Taglia makes a very interesting argument about the significance of confirmation as an act of submission to the bishop. Her conclusions are valid, but perhaps overstated, because of an apparent unawareness that these regions around Cambrai and Cologne were somewhat anomalous in the thirteenth century and do not represent confirmation practice all over Europe.

until age seven so that the confirmand will understand its meaning as a preparation to fight the battle of faith.¹²⁰

Two conclusions are evident from this section on the question of age. The first is that the Catholic Reformers responsible for the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, by forgoing infant confirmation and suggesting a minimum age of seven, were not simply reacting to and borrowing from the recently developed Protestant adaptation of confirmation as an adolescent rite of passage.¹²¹ Even Martin Bucer, when he first introduced this reconstituted rite in the context of church discipline, was responding to an impetus that went beyond his immediate context of Anabaptist challenge. Both Protestant and Catholic Reformers lived in a world where the felt need to ritualize the taking of personal responsibility and accountability in matters of faith had been developing for centuries. The second conclusion is that given the transformed context of religious individualism and personal responsibility present in the later Middle Ages, plus the prevalent ideas having to do with spiritual warfare and the almost ubiquitous presence of satanic temptation, confirmation simply did not carry the same overall meaning that it had in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Participants in confirmation in the later Middle Ages had a slightly different set of expectations. The longstanding aspects of reception of the Holy

¹²⁰ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 2.3.14, p. 164.

¹²¹ See Amy Nelson Burnett, "Martin Bucer and the Anabaptist Context of Evangelical Confirmation" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 6 (1994): 95-122; and idem., *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline*, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, vol. 26 (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994).

Spirit, involvement in a spiritually and symbolically meaningful ritual, association with episcopal authority, and kinship development were still there, but now they were placed in a context of personal religious responsibility and charged with the energy that came from notions of spiritual battle and the war against evil.

Addendum Regarding the Age of Seven

An ancillary benefit to this discussion is that the commands to confirm after age seven may provide some insight into how people in the Middle Ages perceived childhood. Barbara Hanawalt, in an overview of recent work on medieval childhood, finds evidence for a clear life-stage shift at about age seven and again at about twelve. At twelve children became adolescents and entered adult life through work or apprenticeship, although they were not fully recognized as adults until marriage. But the time period from seven to twelve was also a distinctive one. Many sources indicate that children after age seven devoted much more time to chores and household labor and played much less.¹²² Hanawalt's own analysis of coroners' inquests also point to this shift in childhood responsibilities around age seven. Children below seven were usually hurt while playing—more than twice as often as children from seven to twelve.¹²³ The latter were more often involved in useful tasks such as “doing

¹²² Barbara A. Hanawalt, “Medievalists and the Study of Childhood,” *Speculum* 77, no. 2 (2002): 447-450.

¹²³ Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 273.

errands, tending animals, and the like.”¹²⁴ Didier Lett comes at the question from a completely different angle, by analyzing the vocabulary used to refer to children in miracle stories. He concludes that vocabulary words were used with a high degree of precision to refer to children of different ages (which undermines Phillipe Aries’ contention that stages of childhood were not recognized in the Middle Ages)¹²⁵ and his evidence points to a clear demarcation at age seven.¹²⁶

That some church leaders chose seven as an age of demarcation for confirmation helps illuminate our understanding of how they perceived seven to be the inauguration of a new stage of life. In the same way that seven year old children were given more work and responsibility around the home, confirmation at that age may indicate that it was thought to be an age of increased accountability and greater spiritual awareness. It may also reflect the

¹²⁴ Hanawalt, “Medievalists and the Study of Childhood,” 450. For children under seven, 60% of fatal accidents happened while playing. This dropped to 24% for children ages seven to twelve, probably because although they had not yet fully entered into the realm of adult labor, they had tasks for which were responsible and spent much less time playing (449-450).

For accounts of these sorts of play-related accidents, drawn from hagiographic sources, see R. C. Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents: Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 115-121. Finucane does not break down his statistical analysis by age in the same way that Hanawalt does, but the statistics he provides correlate closely to Hanawalt’s (see 141-142).

¹²⁵ See Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, 18-32 and 411.

¹²⁶ Didier Lett, *L’enfant des miracles: Enfance et société au Moyen Âge (XIIe-XIIIe siècle)* (Paris: Aubier, 1997), tables 3 and 4, p. 362-363. In the case of boys, Lett’s analysis indicates that the Latin *puer* was used for boys of all ages (birth through 16), but *puerulus* was used for boys up through age 7. The French *enfant* and *gars* were used for boys 3-7 (although the low number of instances may put the statistical reliability of this in doubt), while *prénom* and *enfant* were used for boys of all ages. With girls a shift at age seven was even more statistically pronounced. The French *enfant*, *enfant*, and *pucelet* were consistently used for girls 0-7. The Latin *virgo* applied to girls 8-16.

idea that prior to seven a child is essentially innocent and does not need the spiritual strengthening that confirmation affords.

The topic of age and rites of passage naturally brings to mind the question of whether conceptions of age in Jewish initiation had any influence on shifts in Christian confirmation practice. As it turns out, it is more likely that the influence went the other way, from Christians to Jews. Ivan Marcus, in a study of a twelfth and thirteenth-century Jewish school initiation ceremony which marked the beginning of formal schooling at age five or six, says this rite developed in direct reaction to the growing Christian emphasis on personal responsibility and consent that led the Fourth Lateran Council to assert that infants should not receive communion until they reached an age of discernment.¹²⁷ Interestingly, the Jewish school initiation rite was making the opposite point, that children do not need to understand a ritual for it to be effective.¹²⁸ Over time, however, the Jewish community came to concur with the Christian concern for consent and adopted the age of thirteen as the time for a Jewish boy to take on adult religious practices and responsibility.¹²⁹ This

¹²⁷ Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 107. See also the *Fourth Lateran Council*, 21, in Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 1, 245. Marcus mistakenly links this delay of communion to the phenomenon of deferred confirmation. Although he softens this assertion by saying that confirmation was “administered close to the age of seven, at least in parts of the West,” his implication is still too strong. Even if deferred confirmation had become a widespread practice, it would have occurred in the thirteenth century, long after the development of the Jewish school initiation ceremony and the Christian practice of delaying first communion. Nevertheless his basic point still stands: in the twelfth century there was a significant shift in the Christian approach to religious consent and awareness.

¹²⁸ Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 113. Among other things, the rite involved eating sweetened cakes marked with the verses from the Torah. For a full description, see p. 1.

¹²⁹ Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 117-12. They also came to reject the school initiation ceremony

eventually gave rise to the rite of Bar Mitzvah which was formalized in the sixteenth century.

because of its implied polemic against the eucharist. In an age of host desecration accusations, Jews grew increasingly reluctant to perform a rite that ritually portrayed an attack on the eucharist by implying that feeding on the Torah is superior to feeding on the body of Christ (113-116).

Chapter 11: Significant Continuity With the Past

The previous chapter focused on the ways later medieval Christians adapted confirmation to changes in their society and culture. However, no picture of confirmation practice in the high and late Middle Ages would be complete without noting the many significant areas of continuity with the past. Indeed some aspects of continuity—the role of confirmation in shaping and maintaining episcopal identity, the special role of godparents, and problems with noncompliance—are as significant to an understanding of later medieval confirmation as are the changes we have just discussed. These we will discuss in subsequent chapters. This chapter, however, will more briefly survey other less critical aspects of continuity that must still be born in mind for a full understanding of the sacrament of confirmation in the later Middle Ages.

The Theological Understanding of the Effects of Confirmation

In comparing the theological understanding of confirmation in the high and late Middle Ages with that of earlier periods, one is struck by the high degree of congruity. This is not to deny that scholastic theologians and canon lawyers creatively adapted confirmation practice to the needs of their time—as we have seen, they surely did. But even as this was going on, many of the same themes as to the meaning and effect of confirmation carried across the centuries. This was largely due to the influence of a handful of thinkers—the fifth-century bishop Faustus of Riez and the ninth-century bishops Alcuin and Rabanus

Maurus, for instance—who have already come up repeatedly in this study and whose theological legacy has continued to the present time. Faustus’s Pentecost homily¹ and Rabanus Maurus’s *De Institutione Clericorum*² (which is very reliant on Rabanus’s association with Alcuin) made their way into all the major canon law collections, including most importantly Gratian’s *Decretum* (mid-twelfth century), the most authoritative and widely disseminated collection of canon law in the Middle Ages.³ They were also included in Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*,⁴ a document which gave impetus to the work of the important scholastic theologians.⁵

Thus, over the centuries there was a great deal of continuity when it came to the expected effects of confirmation. We have already discussed one important

¹ (Pseudo)Eusebius, *Homilia De Pentecosten*, 2, CCSL, vol. 101, 337. Also note, L. A. van Buchem provides a quick overview of the later uses of Faustus’s sermon; see *L’Homélie pseudo-Eusébiennne*, appendix 1, 206-217.

² Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, 1.30, p. 53-54.

³ See Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 580-585, for a brief overview of the course of the canon law having to do with confirmation. It can be summarized in this way: Faustus’s sermon was included in the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*, which became the dominant source for a number of important collections of canon law, such as: 1) the *Collectio Anselmo dedicata*, compiled in late ninth century and dedicated to Anselm, Archbishop of Milan (*Collectio Anselmo dedicata (Histoire des textes du droit de l’Église au Moyen-Age: de Denys à Gratien: collectio Anselmo dedicata: étude et texte: extraits)*, ed. Jean-Claude Besse (Paris: Librairies techniques, 1960), 882-896); 2) Regino of Prüm’s (Regino was Abbot of Prüm 892-915) *De Ecclesiasticis Disciplinis et Religione Christiana Libri Duo* (PL, vol. 132); and 3) The *Decretorum Libri Viginti*, book 4, “De Sacramento Baptismatis et Confirmationis” (PL, vol. 140), by Burchard of Worms (c. 965-1025), which included much from the *Collectio Anselmo dedicata* and from *Regino of Prüm*. In the late eleventh century, Ivo of Chartres drew heavily on Burchard of Worms in his *Decretum* and in *Panormia* (PL, vol. 161), but he also included important material from Rabanus Maurus’s *De Clericorum Institutione*. All of this was compiled by Gratian into his *Decretum*.

⁴ Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 4.7.2, in PL, vol. 192, 855-856.

⁵ For instance, Thomas Aquinas’s reliance on these texts has already been noted. See above, p. 229, n. 31. For an analysis of scholastic thinking, see Lynch, “The Sacramental Grace of Confirmation;” and O’Donnell, “The Ecclesial Dimension of Confirmatione.”

such effect: the belief that confirmation prepares the confirmand for spiritual warfare which was a theme that went back to the military language of Faustus in the fifth century.⁶ As we saw, the notion of spiritual warfare changed significantly in the later Middle Ages, but other expected effects of confirmation—a second, postbaptismal impartation of the Holy Spirit, the creation of a “complete” Christian, and spiritual strengthening—remained relatively steady because of the heavy reliance on material from earlier times.⁷

The Ongoing Importance of Chrism

The anointing with chrism and the chrism itself remained a very important aspect of confirmation in the later Middle Ages. Indeed, although by now the rite was usually called “confirmation,” it was still also referred to as a “sealing” or “signing.”⁸ William Caxton’s *Quattuor Sermones* (1483) declared:

⁶ See above, p. 165.

⁷ See the following citations from the later Middle Ages. Regarding confirmation as a second impartation of the Holy Spirit, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.1 and 3.72.5, vol. 57, 189 and 205; Gregory IX, *Decretales*, 1.15.7, p. 133; Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.4, vol. 140 A, 431-432; Gregory IX, *Decretales*, 1.15.7, p. 133; *The Lay Folks’ Catechism*, lines 301-302, p. 64; and Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 9895-9898, p. 247.

Regarding the creation of a complete Christian, see Gratian, *Decretum*, 3.5.1 and 3.5.4, p. 1413-1414; Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 4.7.1, in PL, vol. 192, 855; and Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.4, vol. 140 A, 431-432.

Regarding confirmation as spiritual strengthening, see Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 4.7.1, in PL, vol. 192, 855; *The Synodal Statutes of Richard Poore*, 31, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 71; *The Statutes of Angers*, 5, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 142; Gregory IX, *Decretales*, 1.15.7, p. 133; *Statutes of Chichester* (c. 1250), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 453; Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.4, vol. 140 A, 431-432; *The Lay Folks’ Catechism*, line 303, p. 64; John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, line 657, p. 102; and *Bull of Union with the Armenians*, in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 544.

⁸ See Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 25, ed. and trans. R. W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 101.

The second sacrament is confirmacion of the byssshop. This is a maner of anoyntyng in the forhede by the handys of the byssshop wherby the Holy Ghoost yeuyth strengthe ayenst the febylnes of the synne of our forn fader with a marke ympressyd to the soule, wherby thou shalt knowledge the feyth and loue of Criste.⁹

The second of two sermons on confirmation in *Ordo Romanus L*, a very influential tenth-century rite,¹⁰ provides a brief theological explanation of the significance of anointing with chrism. It says that beginning in the Old Testament with Aaron at the time of the Exodus, anointing with chrism was reserved for priests and kings. But now, however, because Christ the true priest and king has arrived on the scene, the entire congregation is consecrated by anointing with chrism and through the laying on of hands.¹¹ A large part of this special reverence for chrism, as in the early Middle Ages, had to do with its association with the episcopal office and the fact that only a bishop could make chrism.¹² Gregory IX made this connection clear:

The imposition of the hand is represented by the chrismation of the forehead. It is called “confirmation” by another name, because through it the Holy Spirit is given for growth and strength. For this reason, although a simple priest or presbyter may produce other oils, only the high priest, that is the bishop, ought to confirm this one, because it is told concerning the apostles alone, whose successors are the bishops, that they gave the holy Spirit through the imposition of the hand, as a reading of the Acts of the Apostles shows.¹³

⁹ *Quattuor sermones*, 38.

¹⁰ See above, p. 173.

¹¹ “Item sermo de chrismate,” in *Ordo Romanus L*, 25.145, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 5, 241-244. For Finnegan’s summary of the sermon, see “The Origins of Confirmation,” 374-375.

¹² Thomas Aquinas affirms the use of chrism that has been blessed by a bishop as the proper matter for the sacrament of confirmation in *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.2-3, vol. 57, 191-198.

¹³ Gregory IX, *Decretales*, 1.15.7, p. 133; translation by Turner, *Sources of Confirmation*, 81. As we will see in the next chapter the influence of bishops will further increase in the later Middle Ages.

Gregory's *Decretales* also indicate that some commentators put such high value on the chrism that they believed a confirmation rite that was correct in every other way ought to be repeated if oil was substituted for chrism.¹⁴

Many sources contained commands for the proper handling of this holy and precious substance. The *Sarum Manual*, developed under Richard Poore (d. 1237), contains many of the commands from the early Middle Ages—chrism should be renewed every year with a fresh supply acquired from the bishop during Holy Week, old chrism should be disposed of by burning, etc.¹⁵ The Fourth Lateran Council related the honor of chrism to that of the eucharist when it decreed that both should be kept under lock and key, “so that no audacious hand can reach them to do anything horrible or impious.”¹⁶ Gratian's *Decretum*, in addition to this sort of material, added that priests were to acquire and manage chrism in a manner that demonstrated an attitude of submission and deference to their own bishop, or risk divine judgment.¹⁷

One way that the “due reverence for the chrism”¹⁸ was clearly displayed was in the widespread practice, after the episcopal anointing, of covering the chrism

¹⁴ Gregory IX, *Decretales*, 1.16.1, p. 134.

¹⁵ *Sarum Manual*, 43. It contains something new regarding confirmation as well: during a time of general interdict (something England was by now familiar with), both baptism and confirmation were allowed to be conferred, but in a soft voice and without the ringing of bells.

¹⁶ *Fourth Lateran Council*, 20, in Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 1, 244. The Council of Trent would later pronounce anathema on anyone who asserted that the Holy Spirit was denigrated by the belief that the chrism used in confirmation has special power (*Council of Trent*, session 7, in Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 2, 686).

¹⁷ Gratian, *Decretum*, 3.4.119-126, p. 1398-1400.

¹⁸ *Sarum Manual*, 43: “propter chrismatis reuerentiam.”

with a clean linen headband that had been provided by the parents and leaving it on for a period of time (usually three days, some sources say seven), during which “neyther they shal not wasshe hed ne forheed . . . for reuerence of that holy oyle.”¹⁹ The ritual from Durandus’s *Pontifical*²⁰ is filled with interesting details regarding this headband: it should be worn three days in honor of the Holy Trinity and then, when ritually removed by the priest, the confirmand’s forehead should be washed (some sources specify in the baptistery) and the cloth should be burned.²¹ Many sources also commanded that before coming for confirmation the candidate’s forehead must be washed and the hair hanging over it be cut short so as to not interfere with the chrism.²² Keith Thomas is no doubt correct in asserting that the headband came to be seen as a critical element in the rite’s ability to “strengthen [the confirmand] against the assaults of the fiend and [that] the notion became current that it was extremely bad luck to untie the band under any circumstances.”²³

¹⁹ *Quattuor sermones*, 38.

²⁰ See above, p. 222.

²¹ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 1.1.8, p. 335. Interestingly, Durandus’s *Rationale* says that the cloth should be worn for seven days and cites a conciliar decision from Gratian’s *Decretum* that permits the reuse of chrism-cloths (Durandus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 6.84.9, vol. 140 A, 434; Gratian, *Decretum*, 3.4.121, p. 1399). For other references to these headcloths, see *The Statutes of Angers*, 126, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 230; *The Council of Worcester* (1240), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 299; *Statutes of the Synod of Le Mans*, in Mansi, vol. 23, 736-737; *Council of Exeter* (1287), 3, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 989; John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, lines 661-670, p. 103; and *Synod of Arras* (1291), 3, Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 214.

²² The synod at Cambrai specified this as the local priest’s responsibility. See *Statutes Cambrai under Guiard of Laon* (c. 1240), 20, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 32.

²³ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 38.

Chapter 12: Increasing Association with Bishops

Since its inception in the West, the postbaptismal anointing that came to be called confirmation had been tightly associated with the power and prestige of the office of bishop. This only increased during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a period of time in which the conception of the episcopal office was increasingly juridical and the church was actively extending its authority into the lives of people at all levels of society.¹ As one would expect, it ultimately fell to the bishop to instigate and implement the many conciliar decrees intended to increase devotion in the church. Thus, in addition to their heavy oversight, administrative, and political involvements, exemplary bishops committed themselves to investigating and improving the spiritual climate throughout their diocese and, following the example of the Fourth Lateran Council, to promulgating ecclesiastical legislation that defined proper lay devotion with increasing specificity. For instance, Lateran IV created a clear connection between lay piety and the sacramental authority of the church by demanding annual observance of the sacraments of penance and the eucharist.² Moreover, when it came to utilizing the sacrament of confirmation to help accomplish the goal of widespread devotion, the willing leadership of the bishop, as the only person allowed to administer confirmation, was crucial.

¹ van Engen, "Professing Religion," 323.

² *Fourth Lateran Council*, 21, in Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 1, 245.

Model Bishops and Confirmation

In a letter to the pope, Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln (1235-1253), described his own ambitious efforts in this regard—an attempt in 1238/9 to make an episcopal visitation to every rural deanery in his diocese:

After my election as a bishop, I considered my episcopal role to include not only the pastoral care of souls, but that I, just as the scripture sets forth and teaches, must necessarily have all diligence, in visiting the sheep entrusted to me, lest the blood of the sheep in the area of my jurisdiction be required from my hand.³

R. W. Southern notes that visiting all his deaneries would likely have taken Grosseteste an entire year. Given the many other responsibilities he could not completely lay aside, it is likely that he actually accomplished it over a period of several years. Such an arduous undertaking demonstrates Grosseteste's intense commitment to carrying out every aspect of his episcopal charge—an intensity of commitment that was unique for his own time and in the future as well.⁴

To have such an impressive and important personage as the bishop arrive for a visit was, for the majority of Christians, at most a once in a lifetime event, demanding and receiving a great deal of popular attention. In his letter, Grosseteste describes a lively scene that was part camp meeting and part

³ Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 265: "Ego post meam in episcopum creationem consideravi me episcopum esse et pastorem animarum, et necesse habere ne sanguis ovium in districto iudicio de manu mea requiratur omni diligentia sicut disponit et precipit scriptura oves michi commissas visitare." The letter was actually written c. 1250, a decade or so after the events it describes.

⁴ R. W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, 259.

inquisition, in which large numbers of people from the surrounding areas came to confess, to be confirmed, and to hear the bishop preach—an aspect of episcopal pastoral care that was increasingly emphasized after Lateran IV.⁵ Indeed, one often gets the impression that, among bishop’s duties, confirming was frequently more incidental than planned. Synodal statutes from Le Mans (1247) indicate that a bishop might be in the vicinity for the purpose of dedicating a church or cemetery, in which case nearby priests were to admonish their parishioners to seek out the bishop, hear a sermon, and be confirmed.⁶ Later in the century, William Durandus (d. 1296) gave detailed instructions for episcopal parish visitations, listing the bishop’s many responsibilities which included praying in the church and performing mass; inspecting the church’s buildings, services and supplies; inquiring into the moral and spiritual life of the parish and seeing that sinners were corrected; addressing the people and instructing them on matters of faith, proper behavior and a proper understanding of the sacraments; and pronouncing absolution for sin and giving indulgences.⁷ Statutes from Angers (c. 1219), which also describe this type of episcopal ideal that Grosseteste was actually living out, specified the distance as two or three miles; whenever a bishop came this close all the unconfirmed should go or be taken to see him, not just for confirmation but,

⁵ For instance, the *Fourth Lateran Council*, canon 10, calls for the appointment of preachers (“men who are powerful in word and deed and who will visit with care the peoples entrusted to them”) to assist bishops in their responsibility to provide “the nourishment of God’s word,” because dioceses were too large, and bishops were too busy and often ill equipped to fulfill their preaching responsibilities; see Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 1, 239-240.

⁶ *Statutes of the Synod of Le Mans*, in Mansi, vol. 23, 736-737.

⁷ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.4.19, p. 623-625.

again, also to hear him preach. Moreover, going to see a bishop was not to be a casual affair; these Angers statutes commanded that the local priest should lead his parishoners to the bishop in procession “with the cross leading the way” (*cruce precedente*).⁸

Whether the people arrived in such an impressive procession or more haphazardly, Grosseteste depicts an exciting event with crowds too large to be cared for by a single person:

With the people and the clergy together, I myself frequently preached the word of God to the clergy while some Dominican or Franciscan [*frater predicator aut minor*] also preached to the people. And four other friars supported this by hearing confessions and imposing penances. After the children were confirmed on that same day and the following, my clerics and I devoted our attention to interrogations, corrections and reforms.⁹

In this scene two important forces that helped shape the spiritual life of the thirteenth-century church intersected: a conscientious bishop motivated to fulfill the ideal of ecclesiastical life as set forth in the Fourth Lateran Council, and members of the mendicant orders. Grosseteste was a great supporter of both the Franciscans and the Dominicans, and promoted their usefulness in helping to supply the never-ending need for pastoral care and lay education by preaching and hearing confessions.¹⁰ And, as the account describes, he devoted

⁸ *The Statutes of Angers*, 5, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 142.

⁹ Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 265: “Congretatis autem clero et populo, egomet ut pluries proponebam verbum dei clero, et aliquis frater predicator aut minor populo. Et iiii fratres consequenter audiebant confessiones et iniungebant penitentias. Et confirmatis pueris eodem die et sequente continue ego cum clericis meis intendebamus inquisitionibus, correctionibus, et reformationibus.”

¹⁰ Later John Pecham, Archbishop of Canterbury (1279-1292) and a Franciscan himself, would further champion both the cause of lay education and the utilization of monks in this regard

a great deal of his own time and energy to the pastoral care of the people through confirmation.

Robert Grosseteste was not alone in his zeal. He stood in a tradition of dedicated English bishops that included Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109), Wulfstan of Worcester (c. 1009-1095), and Hugh of Lincoln (c. 1140-1200). Certainly not all bishops were of the caliber of these, but a faithful bishop stood at the center of the spiritual life of his diocese, and carried the burden of the many ecclesiastical duties that only he could perform. In addition to performing the sacrament of confirmation, only a bishop could consecrate virgins; dedicate churches; ordain clerics; bless crosses, vestments, chalices, and corporal cloths (upon which the eucharist was placed during the mass); give letters of ordination; and provide indulgences.¹¹

Anselm's biographer, Eadmer (c. 1060-c. 1128) a monk and member of his household while he was Archbishop of Canterbury, relates one incident when Anselm failed to fulfill his obligation to confirm and the terrible guilt he suffered afterwards.¹² It occurred when he arrived in Wissant, after having crossed the English Channel on his way to Rome (where he arrived in April 1098). Performing confirmations was not Anselm's primary objective, but while consecrating an altar in St Omer, he was compelled by the area's leading

through his activities at the Council of Lambeth (1281).

¹¹ *Synodal Constitutions of the Diocese of Valencia* (1255), in Mansi, vol. 23, 887. See also *Statutes of Paris* (c. 1203), 14, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 58.

¹² Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm*, 100-102.

figures to take the time to confirm their children. As word spread of what Anselm was doing, a huge crowd of people of all ages flocked to him to receive confirmation, “for at that time, many years had passed among these people during which no bishop had been allowed to perform this office among them.”¹³ On the sixth day, as they were preparing to leave, a girl arrived and “with tearful and pious devotion she begged to be confirmed.”¹⁴ Anselm’s companions persuaded him to deny the request, saying that they needed to depart in order to reach their next stop before nightfall, and that to confirm one person would start another flood of people desiring the same thing. Anselm acquiesced, but regretted his decision for the rest of his life. Eadmer relates how later “he accused himself of great heartlessness, and conceived thereby such sorrow of heart, that—as he often used to say—his penitence for that action would never leave his mind as long as he lived.”¹⁵

Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester (1062-1095) was portrayed by his biographer, William of Malmesbury (c. 1090-c. 1143) as a very godly bishop of boundless energy and good will, who took his responsibility to confirm very seriously:

He never permitted himself to eat in the day until he had signed with the cross however many children were brought in to him from all over. This he carried out from sunrise to sunset, not only in the days of winter but also in the summer sun. It is testified by good witnesses that he would often confirm two thousand—often three or more—in a single day. And this was not only when he was young . . . but even when grey hairs began to sprinkle his head like sparkling snow, and his frail and infirm body could scarcely

¹³ Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm*, 25, p. 101.

¹⁴ Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm*, 25, p. 102.

¹⁵ Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm*, 25, p. 102.

keep up with the vigor of his spirit. Everyone was amazed when the eight or more clerics who carried the chrism in turns all succumbed to fatigue, while he carried on indefatigable. It is undoubtedly the love of God that made him oblivious to such labors.”¹⁶

The expectation that bishops should fast before confirming has been seen before at the ninth-century Council of Paris.¹⁷ Recognizing the large numbers that might come to be confirmed at a single time, the Council of Arles (1260) affirmed that both the bishop and the recipient should be fasting unless the frequency with which the bishop had to administer confirmation made this untenable, or unless the confirmand was a breastfeeding infant.¹⁸ William of Malmesbury, however, portrays Wulfstan as a saintly man who would make no such allowance for the weakness of the flesh, a bishop whose endurance could outlast eight assistants, one after the other. William describes an incident in Gloucester where crowds of people with children to be confirmed were lined up in rows in the cemetery outside a monastery waiting for Wulfstan to appear, when

one young man among them, prompted by the slippery impudence of his age, began to swank as follows: “Why wait for a bishop who is filling his belly with the monks? No, look, if anyone wants his child christened, let him come to me.” And taking mud, he promptly anointed the forehead of the nearest child, murmuring obscene words. The insanity went on spreading, following up on his foolish act with such cries as: “Bind up that one’s forehead, he’s done.”¹⁹

¹⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Vita Wulfstani*, 14, in *Three Lives of the Last Englishmen*, trans. Michael Swanton (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 120.

¹⁷ See above, 209. Gratian’s *Decretum* (3.5.6-7, p. 1414) cites similar sources stating that both the confirmand and the bishop should be fasting.

¹⁸ *Council of Arles*, in Mansi, vol. 23, 1004-1005.

¹⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Vita Wulfstani*, 14, in *Three Lives of the Last Englishmen*, 121.

According to the account, God immediately punished the disrespectful young man with insanity; he began to behave crazily, pluck out his hair, beat his head on a wall, and the people drove him away. Although when he learned of his plight Wulfstan had mercy on him and healed his mind, William wants the reader to take heed never to disrespect a bishop or his office, for despite Wulfstan's healing touch, the young man still died a few days later as a result of his self-inflicted injuries.

Robert Grosseteste's predecessor in the diocese of Lincoln, Hugh of Avalon (c. 1140-1200), was one of the most revered saints in England. Hugh's *Vita* portrays the approach to confirmation that characterized a particularly godly bishop, while simultaneously providing a glimpse into what may have been the more common experience:

Frequently when he was traveling about, people flocked to him to ask him to confirm them (*per manus sue impositionem confirmare expeterent*), or brought their children (*paruulos*) to be confirmed. As soon as he reached a suitable place he dismounted, and did his part with earnest devotion in whatever diocese it was. Neither fatigue nor sickness, nor the need for hastening on his journey, nor the roughness of the road, nor the bad weather could persuade him to administer the sacrament on horseback. . . . Although already advanced in years, and subject to all the inconveniences which often afflict travelers, he used to dismount and gently summon the children and their godparents to him one after another. If by chance his attendants laid their hands on them, his anger was terrible and sometimes he even restrained them by blows. Having given the bystanders the blessing they hoped for, he prayed to God for any sick persons who were there, thus arousing the hope of recovering their health, and went on his way accompanied by the blessings of the crowd. I know for certain

that many people often made the recovery they had hoped for as a result of his blessing and prayers.²⁰

A few aspects of this account are worth highlighting. First, it describes the hardships that accompanied travel in the Middle Ages, hardships that might easily dissuade both a bishop from fulfilling his pastoral responsibility to confirm and the people from troubling themselves to receive it. Second, it portrays the pastoral ideal to which Grosseteste himself aspired. According to the account, Hugh gave personal attention to each confirmand, “gently summon[ing] the children and their godparents to him one after another.” This concern for confirmation to include a strong element of individual pastoral care was reflected in the confirmation liturgy of the *Sarum Manual* in which the bishop asks the name of each confirmand so that he can personalize the words of rite by saying, “I seal you *Name* with the sign of the cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation.”²¹ The *Pontifical* by William Durandus portrays this same sort of warmth as it directs the bishop to remove his miter and sit on a stool in order to hear the name of the confirmands who knelt before him.²² It is no wonder, then, that a romantic like Ramon Llull would idealistically refer to the bishop as the “spiritual father” (*pere esperitable*) of the confirmand.²³ Finally, this account tells of Hugh’s sometimes violent attacks on members of his own retinue who mistreated those coming for confirmation. If children and

²⁰ Adam of Eynsham, *The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln* (Magna vita Sancti Hugonis), 3.13, ed. Decima L. Douie and Hugh Farmer (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962-1963), vol. 1, 127-128.

²¹ *Sarum Manual* or *Sarum Use* (Manuale ad usum percelebris ecclesie Sarisburiensis), ed. A. Jefferies Collins (Chichester: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1960), 167.

²² Durandus, *Pontifical*, 1.1.1-3, p. 333-334.

²³ Ramon Llull, *Doctrine d'enfant*, 24, p. 70.

their families were handled roughly by the attendants of so saintly a bishop as Hugh, one can imagine how they fared the majority of the time. But the author of the *Vita* does not leave this up to the imagination; he provides an egregious example of episcopal disregard in contrast to Hugh's tireless devotion and determined respect for his flock. In this case, a young and healthy bishop pressed the longstanding synodal accommodation that a bishop could confirm in a field²⁴ so far that he did not bother to get off his horse:

To my shame and sorrow, I afterwards saw a certain young bishop, of exceptional strength, when the spot and the weather were both admirable and he had no reason to be in a hurry, sprinkle children with the sacred chrism whilst on horseback. The children howled and were terror-stricken, and in actual danger amongst the fiery and kicking horses. The ruffianly retainers cuffed and struck these innocents, but the bishop took no notice of their danger and panic.²⁵

Surely most bishops were not so cavalier in the performance of their pastoral duties, but stories like this would stick in people's memories and it would only take a few incidents of this sort to fuel the sentiments of anticlerical sectarian movements.

²⁴ This concession to necessity and human frailty went back to *The Penitential of Theodore* (2.2.1, in McNeill, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 200). William Durandus (d. 1296) included it in his *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.8, vol. 140 A, 433. Durandus cited Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, 4.68, in PL, vol. 140, 740, where the chapter heading reads, "That bishops are allowed to confirm in a field, if necessary, but better in a church or in the narthex (*atrium*) of a church." ("Ut episcopis in campo, si necesse sit, liceat confirmare: melius est autem in ecclesia aut in atrio ecclesiae.") Burchard then cites the Council of Reims, 10, as saying, "Episcopo liceat in campo, si necesse sit, confirmare."

²⁵ Adam of Eynsham, *The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, 3.13, vol. 1, 128.

Confirmation and Episcopal Authority

Bishops could get away with this sort of unprincipled behavior because the majority of Christians believed that they represented the one true church, which alone controlled the keys to salvation. Furthermore, as we have seen, since late antiquity it was the virtually unanimous teaching of the church—liturgists, theologians and canon lawyers—that only bishops had the power to confer the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of confirmation, and there was no backing away from this position in the high and late Middle Ages. Learned and weighty sources like Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* and Gratian’s *Decretum*, as well as popular works such as the *Lay Folks’ Catechism* all affirmed the exclusive right of the bishop to administer confirmation and linked the power of the sacrament to the bishop’s authoritative status—an understanding of confirmation that would carry over to the Council of Trent²⁶ and to the present time in the Roman and Anglo-Catholic traditions. An exception to this general rule is found in the second sermon on confirmation in *Ordo Romanus L*,²⁷ which quotes from a biography of Pope Silvester compiled in the sixth-century *Liber Pontificalis*, where it says that an ordinary priest may anoint the newly baptized with chrism if there is a danger of imminent death.²⁸

²⁶ *Council of Trent*, session 7, in Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 2, 686.

²⁷ “Item sermo de chrismate,” in *Ordo Romanus L*, 25.145, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 5, 241-244.

²⁸ “Item sermo de chrismate,” in *Ordo Romanus L*, 25.145, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 5, 242. The original is found in *Liber pontificalis*, 34, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1886-1892), vol. 1, 171; a translation is available in *Liber pontificalis (The Book of Pontiffs: The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715)*, ed. Raymond Davis, rev. ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 15.

The writer of the sermon expanded on the quote adding, “so that the neophyte might not depart without the laying on of the hand on account of the absence of a bishop or the difficulty of reaching him, because if anyone goes without it, he is taking a dangerous path.”²⁹ Despite the influence of *Ordo L*, there is no evidence whatsoever that any significant number of priests heeded this admonition and administered this postbaptismal anointing. On the contrary, in actual practice the fear of dying unconfirmed did not outweigh the universal affirmation that only the bishop could perform the sacrament.

When they provided a rationale for this belief that only a bishop could confirm, most sources based it on his status as a direct heir of the apostles. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), for instance, stated that

only the high priest, that is the bishop, ought to confer [the sacrament of confirmation], because it is told concerning the apostles alone, whose successors are the bishops, that they gave the Holy Spirit through the imposition of the hand, as a reading of the Acts of the Apostles shows.³⁰

Other sources make the same point. The final prayer of the confirmation rite in the *Sarum Manual* began,

God who gave the Holy Spirit to your apostles, and who willed that the Spirit should be passed on through them to their successors and to the rest of the faithful, look with favor upon us, a humble servant, and be manifest in the hearts of these whom we have

²⁹ “Item sermo de chrismate,” in *Ordo Romanus L*, 25.145, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 5, 242: “ne, propter absentiam episcopi et difficultatem eum consequendi, sine manus impositione baptizati migrarent, quia, si quis sine ea obierit, periculosum iter arripit.”

³⁰ Gregory IX, *Decretales*, 1.15.7, p. 133; translation by Turner, *Sources of Confirmation*, 81 (the bracketed insertion is mine).

anointed with most holy chrism and sealed with the sign of the holy cross.³¹

Durandus's *Pontifical* roots the exclusive right of bishops to confirm in the assertion that Christ confirmed his apostles and then commanded that all people should be confirmed by them and their successors.³² Archbishop Thoresby's *Lay Folks' Catechism* taught its more popular audience that confirmation was a rite

That nane has power to do bot bisshop allane
That has the state and the stede of cristes apostels.³³

Thomas Aquinas explained this regulation using the metaphor of the bishop as a skilled artisan. He asserted that "in every work the finishing touches are reserved for the highest art or power," in other words, "the preparation of the material belongs to the lower craftsmen while a higher artist gives the material its form." In this same way, Thomas claimed, "the sacrament of confirmation is like the final perfecting of the sacrament of baptism" and, as such, ought to be reserved for the bishops because they stand in the highest positions of ecclesial power and function in the role of the apostles.³⁴

Some pushed this notion of the bishop as heir to the apostles a bit harder, which resulted in an even greater emphasis on the unsurpassed authority of

³¹ *Sarum Manual*, 167: "Deus qui apostolis tuis sanctum dedisti spiritum quique per eos eorum successoribus ceterisque fidelibus tradendum esse voluisti: respice propitius ad nostre humilitatis famulatum: et presta/vt horum corda quorum frontes sacrosancto chrismate deliniuimus et signo sancte crucis consignauimus."

³² Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.12.8, p. 624.

³³ *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, lines 305-306, p. 64.

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.11, vol. 57, 223.

the bishop and the importance of confirmation. Hugh of Amiens, Bishop of Rouen (1130-1174), not only acknowledged that bishops gain their primary authority on the basis of their apostolic role and appointment by Christ,³⁵ but he asserted that “the bishop is the foundation of the church *because* through the bishop the church has the Holy Spirit.”³⁶ Thus according to Hugh, it is not simply the case that a bishop can impart the Holy Spirit because he holds the preeminent role in the church; rather, he holds the preeminent role in the church because he imparts the Holy Spirit—the controlling image of the bishop is as a conduit of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ Likewise, Ramon Llull, in a sermon on confirmation, depicted the bishop, not merely in the stead of an apostle, but as the instrument, almost the embodiment, of Christ himself who really performs the sacrament. This is why the spiritual state of the bishop is of special concern for Llull, for “if the bishop is in mortal sin, it brings great shame to God, because it is unseemly for an evil man to be the instrument of the one who does only good.”³⁸

³⁵ Jan Michael Joncas, “A Skein of Sacred Sevens: Hugh of Amiens on Orders and Ordination,” in *Medieval Liturgy: a Book of Essays*, ed. Lizette Larson-Miller (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 92-94.

³⁶ Hugh of Amiens, *Three Books on the Church and Its Ministers*, in PL, vol. 192, 1275; translation by Joncas, “A Skein of Sacred Sevens,” 92 (emphasis mine).

³⁷ Joncas, “A Skein of Sacred Sevens,” 94.

³⁸ Ramon Llull, *Liber de septem sacramentis sanctae ecclesiae*, in *Raimundi Lulli Opera Latina*, ed. Fernando Domínguez Reboiras and Abraham Soria Flores, vol. 15, CCCM, vol. 76, 41: “Et si episcopus est in peccato mortali, Deo magnum impendit dedecus, quia non decet hominem jalum esse instrumentum boni factori.”

Greater Than Baptism, But Unnecessary

Given this aggrandizing of the bishop, coupled with Aquinas's notion that confirmation by a bishop completes baptism in the sense of bringing it to perfection, one might naturally conclude that confirmation is actually superior to baptism. Many in the high Middle Ages assented to this conclusion, having been exposed to it in, among other places, Gratian's *Decretum*. In a section drawn largely from the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* and falsely attributed to Miltiades, Bishop of Rome from 311 to 314, the question is directly tackled, "Which is the greatest sacrament, the handlaying of the bishops or baptism?"³⁹ The clear answer was that, although both sacraments are great and inextricably bound to each other, confirmation is greater, "because lesser [priests] are not allowed to perform it. And thus [confirmation] is to be respected and held in the greater reverence."⁴⁰

The writer of this material in the *Decretum* was not unaware of the difficulties inherent in taking the position that confirmation is superior to baptism. First, baptism is the more foundational and essential of the two sacraments and second, although the writer is loath to conceive of it happening for any reason

³⁹ Gratian, *Decretum*, 3.5.3, p. 1413: "Utrum maius sit sacramentum manus inpositionis episcoporum, aut baptismus?" As noted earlier, this section was also included in the important canon law collections of Ivo of Chartres and Burchard of Worms. See the diagram in Finnegan, "The Origins of Confirmation," 585.

⁴⁰ Gratian, *Decretum*, 3.5.3, p. 1413: "Quod a minoribus perfici non potest, ita et maiori ueneratione uenerandum et tenendum est." In his discussion of confirmation, Gratian also draws on two sources we have seen before: Rabanus Maurus's *De Institutione Clericorum* and the (Pseudo)Eusebian Pentecost homily that was probably written by Faustus of Riez (see above, p. 120 and 163). Peter Lombard included the same sources in his *Sentences*, 4.7.2, in PL, vol. 192, 855-856.

other than death, he cannot deny that baptism functions efficaciously without confirmation, but not vice versa. The parallel passage in the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* concludes by saying that baptism “is able to save without [episcopal handlaying] when death prevents [it from being performed], something the latter cannot do.”⁴¹ This admission leads to the final difficulty: the practical reality that a great number of Christians, perhaps the majority, never had access to a bishop demanded that it not be considered imperative. Scholastic theologians might say that confirmation was greater than baptism, but in saying that, they could not mean that it was more necessary. Thomas Aquinas, for example, denoted confirmation as one of three sacraments necessary to salvation—“baptism, which is spiritual birth, and confirmation, which is spiritual growth, and the eucharist, which is spiritual food.”⁴² However, for Thomas some necessary sacraments are more necessary than others. Baptism is necessary because it is “indispensable,” while confirmation is necessary because it “contribute[s] to the perfecting of salvation.” In the end, Aquinas concedes that “salvation is possible without it, provided it is not omitted out of contempt for the sacrament.”⁴³ Indeed, this conclusion that confirmation is not essential was widespread among scholastic theologians⁴⁴ and Christians were consoled by statements like the following from John Myrc’s *Instructions for Parish Priests*:

⁴¹ Pseudo-Isidorus, *Decretales pseudo-Isidorianae*, 245: “Nam unum praeveniente morte salvare sine altero potest, aliud autem non potest.”

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.84.6, vol. 60, 27.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.1, vol. 57, 191.

⁴⁴ See O’Doherty, *The Scholastic Teaching*, 55-60.

And þagh a chyld confermet nere,
 So þat he folowed [was baptized] by-fore were,
 To dyspuyte þer-of hyt ys no nede,
 He schale be saf wythowte drede.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, in spite of these troubling realities, in theological circles a belief in the superiority of confirmation over baptism prevailed. Many writers asserted the superiority of confirmation in the strongest terms. When Ivo of Chartres included this material in *Panormia*, the heading read, “Assuredly the sacrament of handlaying is greater than baptism.”⁴⁶ This high valuation of confirmation was built on a foundation of two stones. The first was the notion, begun by Faustus, that confirmation is the sacrament that prepares one for life, rather than for death—the sacrament that bestows Christian perfection. However, the second, and equally critical, foundation stone was the high status of the bishop who performed confirmation. Thus the result was circular: confirmation’s status as the higher sacrament was established by the fact that only a bishop could administer it, and the bishop’s status was enhanced because of his exclusive power to confirm.

Given these ties to the person of the bishop, it should not be surprising that during a time period when the machinery of ecclesiastical administration was multiplying and extending the prestige and jurisdiction of bishops was a priority, the church in the high and late Middle Ages did all it could to portray

⁴⁵ John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, lines 671-674, p. 103.

⁴⁶ Ivo of Chartres, *Panormia*, 1.114, in PL, vol. 161, 1069: “Manus vero impositionis sacramentum majus est quam baptismus.”

confirmation as necessary. As Amalarius of Metz had done in the ninth century,⁴⁷ church leaders warned of the spiritual danger associated with forgoing confirmation. The material we have seen from Pope Silvester in the sermon on confirmation in *Ordo L* cautioned that anyone who went without confirmation was taking a “dangerous path.”⁴⁸ In the tenth century, Archbishop Ruotger of Trier wrote that confirmation provides the fullness of grace and makes one a complete Christian. Indeed without confirmation, “it is extremely dangerous to depart from this life.”⁴⁹ The ubiquitous synodal commands to have children confirmed and the punishments attached to noncompliance attest to this concern as well.⁵⁰ A synod in Cambrai (c. 1240) indicated its high valuation of confirmation by requiring novice monks to receive it prior to first tonsure and ordination.⁵¹ This would have been an easy command to comply with since the latter were also performed by a bishop and he could take care of the confirmation at that time, but the fact that there were individuals intent on the religious life who had not yet been confirmed is another reminder of the likelihood that a high percentage of Christians in the Middle Ages were never confirmed.

⁴⁷ See above, p. 179.

⁴⁸ “Item sermo de chrismate,” in *Ordo Romanus L*, 25.145, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 5, 242.

⁴⁹ Ruotger of Trier, *Epistola Rotgeri*, 23, in MGH Capit Ep I, 69.

⁵⁰ See below, chapter 14.

⁵¹ *Statutes Cambrai under Guiard of Laon* (c. 1240), 25, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 33.

Denying Episcopal Authority by Rejecting Confirmation

Given the link between confirmation and the bishop, it should also not be surprising that groups intent on rejecting episcopal authority would also reject the sacrament of confirmation. In an interesting article on the role of baptism, first communion, and confirmation in constructing identity in response to increasing anxiety over who is in and who is outside the Christian community, Kathryn Ann Taglia argues that by the late Middle Ages confirmation involved both indoctrination and “an individual choosing independently and freely to submit to the bishop’s authority.”⁵² On this point, as was seen above in a discussion of the relationship of age to confirmation,⁵³ Taglia is reading too much from limited evidence—the majority of sources still called for confirmation to take place as young as possible, before meaningful indoctrination or a choice to submit was a realistic possibility. Nevertheless, her suggestion that noncompliance with confirmation was the result of “a certain skepticism toward this sacrament, and perhaps toward the ecclesiastical hierarchy in general”⁵⁴ could certainly be the case in at least some instances. This connection between rejecting the sacrament and rejecting the bishops who performed it is evident in movements such as the Arnoldists, the Lollards, and (later) the Protestants. The Arnoldists were an anti-clerical reform movement begun by Arnold of Brescia (d. 1155), which as an organized group probably did not outlive its founder, but

⁵² Taglia, “The Cultural Construction of Childhood,” 282.

⁵³ See above, p. 255, n. 119.

⁵⁴ Taglia, “The Cultural Construction of Childhood: Baptism,” 283.

whose ideas lasted longer.⁵⁵ The teaching attributed to the Arnoldists was that any good man is able to impart the Holy Spirit through handlaying, “just like the *consolamentum* [the initiation ritual of the Cathars].”⁵⁶ Durandus included a strong refutation of the Arnoldists in his *Rationale*, defending the exclusive right and ability of a bishop to impart the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷

Lollard sources often made a similar connection between rejecting confirmation and denying episcopal authority. Based on an analysis of the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, Wycliffe himself denied that bishops have the power to impart the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ The fifteenth-century Lollard heresy trials contained in Norman P. Tanner’s *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31* are filled with denunciations, often repetitive and formulaic, of confirmation. Forty-five of the sixty trials mention the specific beliefs of the defendants; twenty-three of these mention a rejection of confirmation. Many other topics received greater attention and often the sacraments as a whole (rather than just confirmation) were rejected,⁵⁹ but whenever Lollards expressed their specific denial of confirmation the account always notes the bishop’s role. A typical

⁵⁵ See Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements From the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 59-61.

⁵⁶ Durandus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 6.84.1, vol. 140 A, 430: “Arnaldiste tamen perfidi heretici dicentes manuum impositionem, siue consolamentum, fieri posse a quolibet bono homine . . .” Regarding the Cathars, see Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 106-111.

⁵⁷ Durandus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 6.84.1, vol. 140 A, 430. This refutation was originally from Otto of Freising (d. 1158), *Gesta Friderici I imperatoris*, 2.23, in MGH SRGNS, vol. 46, 133.

⁵⁸ John Wycliffe, *Triologus*, 5.14, ed. Gotthard Lechler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869), 292-295.

⁵⁹ Confession and images were mentioned 37 times, the eucharist—35 times, pilgrimages—34 times. Of the sacraments, confirmation was mentioned more often than Orders and Extreme Unction. See Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31* (London:

example comes from the interrogation of Hawisia Moone, the wife of Thomas Moone of Loddon:

The sacrament of Confirmation doon be a bisshop is of noon availe ne necessarie to be had for as mucche as whan a child hath discrecion and can and wile understande the word of God it is sufficiently confermed be the Holy Gost and nedeth noon other confirmacion.⁶⁰

Some Lollard statements were more brief: “The sacrament of Confirmation doon be a byssshop is unvailable and not profitable to mannys sowle ne to hys lyve.”⁶¹ But the fuller statements demonstrate that it was not a belief in the impartation of the Holy Spirit that the Lollards were rejecting, rather it was the church’s claim to convey the Holy Spirit through the bishop and the notion that it could be done automatically to infants and small children without their understanding and involvement.⁶²

Looking ahead to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, one initially finds the same rejection of confirmation, especially with its episcopal associations. Reformers in England referred to confirmation as

plain sorcery, devilry, witchcraft, juggling, legerdemain, and all that naught is. The bishop mumbleth a few Latin words over the child, charmeth him, crosseth him, smeareth him with stinking popish oil, and tieth a linen band about the child’s neck and sendeth him home.⁶³

Royal Historical Society, 1977), table 2, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, 140.

⁶¹ Tanner, *Heresy Trials*, 121.

⁶² See also John A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards, 1414-1520* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 127; and R. N. Swanson, *Catholic England: Faith, Religion, and Observance Before the Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 271.

⁶³ T. Becon, *Prayers and other pieces*, ed. J. Ayre (Cambridge, P.S., 1844), 234; cited in Thomas,

Martin Luther rejected confirmation on the grounds that it did not meet the definition of a sacrament—a divine promise of grace, instituted by Christ, with a sign attached to it.⁶⁴ He asserted that while Christ did lay his hands on many people, there was no biblical record of a corresponding promise. Moreover, with biting sarcasm he contended that confirmation had been preserved only so bishops would have something to occupy themselves:

But there is nothing left of it [confirmation] now but what we ourselves have invented to adorn the office of bishops, that they may not be entirely without work in the church. For after they relinquished to their inferiors those arduous sacraments [baptism and Eucharist] together with the Word as being beneath their attention . . . it was no more than right that we should discover something easy and not too burdensome for such delicate and great heroes to do.⁶⁵

The Catholic response to all of this, at the Council of Trent, indicates that they too understood that the rejection of confirmation carried with it an implicit denial of episcopal authority; the “Canons on the Sacrament of Confirmation” anathematize those who deny the sacramental nature or efficacy of confirmation or who say that it can be administered by any priest.⁶⁶

Religion and the Decline of Magic, 56.

⁶⁴Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz, Luther's Works, vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 91, 92, 118.

⁶⁵ Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 91, 92. Yet Luther was not as inimical toward confirmation as it might appear if one only had access to *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In a sermon in 1523 he said, “Confirmation should not be observed as the bishops desire it. Nevertheless we do not find fault if every pastor examines the faith of the children to see whether it is good and sincere, lays hands on them, and confirms them” (J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period*, Alcuin Club Collections, no. 51 (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 173).

⁶⁶ Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. 2, 686.

The clear indication of this chapter is that during the high and late Middle Ages there was no movement whatsoever to separate the sacrament of confirmation from the bishop. Rather, performing the rite was both a justification and a fulfillment of the bishop's apostolic role and the church was not in the least interested in changing that, regardless of the numbers of people who were thereby left unconfirmed because they never got near a bishop or their bishop was not inclined to fulfill his duties with the diligence ascribed to men like Anselm, Wulfstan, Hugh, and Robert Grosseteste. Instead, churchmen resolved this tension by embracing somewhat contradictory beliefs about confirmation—it is greater than baptism because of the status of the bishop who performs it, but it is not essential to salvation. Finally, because of confirmation's direct association with the power structures of the church through the person of the bishop, dissenting and/or heterodox groups were likely to express their rejection of the authority of the church by also disallowing the sacrament of confirmation; conversely, a disparagement of confirmation was likely to be interpreted as an attack on the official leadership of the church. Is it any surprise, then, that the young wag in the biography of Wulfstan, who dared to criticize the bishop and mock the rite of confirmation, ended up dead despite the merciful bishop's attempts to heal him?

Chapter 13: The Ongoing Importance of Sponsors

In chapter eight we discussed the important social purposes and meanings attached to sponsorship at confirmation (and baptism) in the early Middle Ages. There is no evidence whatsoever that the important role of godparents decreased over time. There is abundant evidence, however, that in the later Middle Ages, laypeople and clergy assigned very different meanings to sponsorship, which often put them at cross purposes and created tension. The laity valued sponsorship for its social benefits: it created meaningful, lifelong relationships, it resulted in gifts to the godchild,¹ and perhaps most importantly, it created webs of kinship relationships that helped families to survive. On the other hand, the church leadership, at least in its official statements, most clearly valued the spiritual support and religious instruction associated with sponsorship, and it attempted to limit the number and choice of sponsors in order to conform to this ideal.

Robert Dinn illuminates the popular importance of spiritual kinship relationships in a very interesting study of wills and, by extension, funeral arrangements in Suffolk between 1439 and 1530.² He found that an increasing number of wills during this period (eventually as high as 20%) mentioned godchildren and that the expectations inherent in the relationship created by sponsorship were

¹ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, 1.13, p. 46.

² See Robert Dinn, "Baptism, Spiritual Kinship, and Popular Religion in Late Medieval Bury St. Edmunds," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 72, no. 3 (1990): 97-103.

bidirectional. Godparents were obligated to provide certain gifts and, perhaps as a result, there is some indication of a desire to choose a wealthy godparent for the material, as well as for the social benefit, he or she might bring. Godchildren were to pray for the souls of their godparents in purgatory and might be asked to carry the godparent's bier at the funeral, expectations that hint at a genuine spiritual, as well as social, relationship and an ongoing closeness throughout life. Most godparents (91%) appear to have been chosen from outside the family, which indicates the high priority medieval families placed on creating and extending formal relationships with members of other families. The non-religious importance of these networks of kinship is indicated by the fact that, after the Reformation, parents crossed confessional boundaries in procuring godparents for their children—for example, Lutherans regularly asked Catholics and Calvinists to serve as sponsors. Not surprisingly, this was something which the authorities did not like a bit.³

Indeed, John Bossy argues that religious education was the “least significant” function of spiritual kinship; much more important was the “creation of a formal state of friendship between the spiritual kin and the natural kin.”⁴ He sees behind this medieval desire for extended networks of formal friendship a backdrop of potential conflict, hostility, and the ongoing practice of private

³ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London: Routledge, 1997), 65.

⁴ John Bossy, “Blood and Baptism: Kinship, Community and Christianity in Western Europe From the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Sanctity and Secularity: the Church and the World*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: The Ecclesiastical History Society, 1973), 133.

vengeance. Spiritual kinship was one tool among others (e.g., the important role of parish priests in settling conflict, and the adaptation of liturgy such as literally passing the *pax*, an object symbolizing peace which was passed from person to person and kissed during the mass) developed to help induce harmonious relationships.⁵ In contradistinction to the preponderance of cases noted by Dinn, where sponsorship was used to extend family ties, Bossy highlights the possibility that sponsorship was also sometimes used to intensify kinship relationships that already existed. He cites the 1403 Council of Soissons, where children were permitted to serve as godparents if they were close kin, as evidence for such a practice. The choice of a child as godparent also suggests that parents did not establish these kinship networks exclusively for their own benefit. They may also have been attempting to create a supportive network of relationships for their child that would last him through adulthood.⁶ Bossy also suspects that, “like fraternity, godparenthood was a more important institution at the popular level than among the nobility, who might expect adequate support from their natural kinsmen.”⁷

One can understand why laypeople devoted their effort to creating large interconnected kinship groups, but why were church councils and canon lawyers apparently equally dedicated to limiting the choice of potential godparents? It does not appear that church leaders were opposed to the

⁵ Bossy, “Blood and Baptism,” 138-142.

⁶ Bossy, “Blood and Baptism,” 133-134.

⁷ Bossy, “Blood and Baptism,” 134.

economic and social benefit derived from the practice of sponsorship, but they were insistent that was a secondary aspect of godparenthood which should only occur when the primary purpose—religious training and moral encouragement in a context of proper Christian relationships—was properly fulfilled. To that end, there was unanimous agreement from ecclesiastical sources that sponsors must be chosen carefully, and that some sponsors must be disqualified in order to avoid creating incestuous marriages, either at that moment or at some time in the future. Much of the basis for these regulations having to do with incest dates back to the early Middle Ages and was brought forward in Gratian's *Decretum*, which carried on the tradition that confirmation, like baptism, was an important avenue for creating kinship through patronage. In a part of the *Decretum* having to do with issues of marriage, Gratian gathered examples of canon law that demonstrated the seriousness with which medieval thinkers took these kinship relationships, as reflected in the thorny question of whether divorce should take place in cases where parents or stepparents served as patrons to their own children or stepchildren. As we have already seen from the records of the ninth-century councils of Mainz and Chalons, churchmen had come to contradictory conclusions on whether separation was the necessary course on these occasions.⁸ Gratian concluded that a marriage should not be

⁸ See above, p. 198. A specific reference to Chalons can be found at Gratian, *Decretum*, 2.30.1.4, p. 1097.

dissolved on this basis, but that such a couple should no longer have sexual relations.⁹

Thus according to Gratian, the kinship created by patronage was real and it also served as a barrier to future marriages.¹⁰ Based on this tradition, churchmen were in virtually unanimous agreement that sponsoring created genuine kinship, that marriages between people related in this way were forbidden, and if such a betrothal was contracted, it must be dissolved.¹¹

Robert Mannyng declared

þou man or womman be nat so wylde
To holde to þe byssshop þyn owne chylde.
For ȝyf þou do, þou art commare (godparent)
To hym þat hyt gat or bare.¹²

William Caxton's *Quattuor Sermones* (1483) described nine different relationships that could be created at confirmation which "lettyn [are an

⁹ Gratian, *Decretum*, 2.30.1.10, p. 1099. Gratian framed the topic in this way: "That one ought not to pay the conjugal debt to a spouse who has transformed herself into the godmother of one's own son is attested by both reason and authority. For it is not permitted by any authority for anyone to be carnally joined to his own godmother. Here, however, he has caused his own wife to become his godmother: therefore he may no longer be joined with her carnally" (Gratian, *Decretum*, 2.30.1.1, p. 1095-1096: "Quod autem proprium filium in spiritualem sibi transferens suae uxori debitum reddere non ualeat, ratione et auctoritate. Nulla enim auctoritate permittitur, ut quis conmatri suae carnaliter copuletur. Hic autem uxorem suam sibi conmatrem effecit: non ergo illi ulterius carnaliter copulari poterit.").

¹⁰ Gratian, *Decretum*, 2.30.2-4, p. 1099-1104.

¹¹ See for example, Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.12.8, p. 624; and *Synodal Statutes of John of Liege* (1287), in Mansi, vol. 24, 890. Finnegan ("The Origins of Confirmation," 408) says that the first church council to specifically mention the sacrament of confirmation as creating a kinship relationship that would serve as "an impediment to marriage" was a council at Exeter in 1287 (*Council of Exeter* (1287), 3, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 989). But Exeter was following a council of Wells on this point (*Council of Wells* (1258) in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 591).

¹² Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 9871-9874, p. 246. See also *Synod in Cambrai* (14th Century), 19, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 154; *The Council of Worcester* (1240), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 299; *Quattuor sermones*, 37. Durandus (*Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 6.84.9, vol. 140 A, 434) stated that no blood relative should

impediment to] spoushood not made and fordoth [destroy] spousehood made.”¹³ Essentially, the message was that the confirmand along with his parents and wife, the bishop, and the godparents all entered into a web of relationship that carried the incest taboo. As John Myrc declared:

These schule neuer on wedde oþer,
But cosynes beth, as suster & broþer.¹⁴

Martin Luther would later credit these ideas about spiritual kinship to the inventiveness of superstitious men and claim that all such “nonsense about compaternities, commaternities, confraternities, consororities, and confilieties must be completely abolished in the contracting of marriage,”¹⁵ but the Catechism of Trent would resolutely affirm the traditional sanctions.¹⁶

In addition to this concern for incest, church leaders were also very keen that the primary purpose for sponsorship must be the proper religious upbringing of the godchild. To that end, church councils often gave contradictory rulings. Some said there should only be one godparent and threatened a punishment for any more.¹⁷ Gerald of Wales allowed three—two men and one woman for boys, two women and one man for girls—but Gerald was also aware that, because of the potential social benefit, many families would want to exceed this limit. He

serve as godparent.

¹³ *Quattuor sermones*, 38.

¹⁴ John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, lines 186-187, p. 78. See also Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 9875-9890, p. 246; and Giraldus Cambrensis, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, 1.13, p. 46.

¹⁵ Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 99-100.

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 2.3.14, p. 164.

¹⁷ *Synod in Cambrai* (1287-1288), 17, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 115.

pragmatically stated that any additional participants were not ‘godparents,’ but ‘witnesses’ who were “not giving the hand but the spirit,” i.e., whose role was social, but not liturgical.¹⁸ The *Sarum Manual* allowed two sponsors. How expectations differed from region to region is exemplified by the following contradictory regulations which are all found in at least one source, but no source contains all of them: no one should sponsor more than two confirmands,¹⁹ godparents must have themselves been confirmed,²⁰ godparents must be the same sex as the confirmand,²¹ godparents may be the opposite sex of the confirmand,²² godparents should not be excommunicated or guilty of a serious crime,²³ godparents should themselves have been instructed in the faith and be able to teach,²⁴ and finally the same person cannot serve as patron at both baptism and confirmation.²⁵ One can understand how all these commands, except perhaps the latter, could have been construed to serve the end of Christian nurture and training. If the same person served as godparent to more than one child, the task of religious nurture might become too burdensome, and thus subject to neglect. Same-sex sponsorship could perhaps lend itself to instruction on a more personal level. If there were too many

¹⁸ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, 1.13, p. 46: “nec manus apponant sed animum.”

¹⁹ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.12.8, p. 625.

²⁰ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.12.8, p. 624; Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 6.84.9, vol. 140 A, 434; “Appendix 7,” to *Ordo Romanus L*, 25.145, in Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani*, vol. 5, 402.

²¹ *The Council of Worcester* (1240), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 299.

²² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3.72.10, vol. 57, 221.

²³ Durandus, *Pontifical*, 3.12.8, p. 624.

²⁴ *Sarum Manual*, 42.

²⁵ *Sarum Manual*, 42; John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, before line 165, p. 76; *Quattuor*

godparents, each might trust the others to fulfill the role of Christian training, with the result that no one actually did it. It is difficult to determine a rationale for the command that the same person should not serve as godparent at both baptism and confirmation, but perhaps this was a case of the opposite logic—perhaps these councils thought that if more godparents were involved surely at least one would take responsibility for the moral and religious education of the godchild. It may also simply have been a matter of tradition; Gratian cites Pope Eugenius I (654-657) to the effect that the same godparent will suffice, but for each ritual to have its own godparent was a Roman custom.²⁶

There can be no doubt that the promotion of moral and religious training was the motive behind most of these commands; as we have seen, this had been a high priority for church leaders since the time of the Fourth Lateran Council. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suppose that Christians in the Middle Ages were concerned with dividing the social from the spiritual, as moderns are so apt to do. For instance, John Myrc's *Instructions for Parish Priests* (c. 1400), which was written in English in rhyming couplets, introduces confirmation in the context of training in the faith under the Latin heading, "Quid et quomodo predicare debet parochianos suos" ("What and how he [the priest] ought to preach to his parishioners").²⁷ The section includes material on the requirement that godparents teach the Creed and the *Pater Noster*, on the necessity of

sermones, 37.

²⁶ Gratian, *Decretum*, 3.4.100, p. 1394.

²⁷ John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, before line 69, p. 71.

confirmation, and on the significance of the kinship ties created by both confirmation and baptism.²⁸ In other words, the larger context of patronage was Christian education, but Myrc was equally aware that such education, properly understood, included not just religious content (the creed), but also social content (the implications of spiritual kinship). It was clearly understood by all that godparenthood was a multifaceted relationship which entailed the taking on of many different types of responsibility. The following charge from a fifteenth-century English baptism service calls for the godmother and godfather to watch over the physical, emotional, and spiritual well being of their godchild:

Godfaderis and godmoderis, I charge ȝow, and þe fader and þe moder, that þis child be kept þis seuen ȝer fro water, fro feer, fro hors fot, fro hondes toth; and þat he ligge not be þe fader and be þe moder vn-to tyme he conne sey “ligge outter,” and þat he be confermyd of a byschop that next cometh to contr be seuen myle behalue, and þat [he] be tauȝt his beleue, þat is for to sey, Pater noster, Aue maria, and Credo.²⁹

In a world where violence and disease made orphans of so many, one who had a godparent who took this role to heart was a fortunate child indeed. But Robert Dinn’s evidence from late medieval Suffolk indicates that a fair number of patronage relationships were of this quality.

²⁸ John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, lines 151-187, p 76-78. The rite in Durandus’s *Pontifical* (see above, p. 220) says much the same (Durandus, *Pontifical*, 1.1.8, p. 335). See also *Quattuor sermones*, 37; and *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 2.3.14, p. 164.

²⁹ Henry Littlehales, ed., *English Fragments From Latin Medieval Service-Books* (London: Early English Text Society, 1903), 5. For more discussion of the breadth of expectations placed on godparents, see William Coster, “From Fire and Water’: The Responsibilities of Godparents in Early Modern England,” in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 301-302.

Chapter 14: The Problem of Noncompliance and the Meaning of Later Medieval Confirmation

Laxity in the observance of confirmation is as much a problem for present day historians as it was for medieval church leaders, although for vastly different reasons. For historians, it raises the question of whether confirmation had a meaningful role in the lives of ordinary Christians, a matter we will consider later in this chapter. For ecclesiastics in the Middle Ages—as we have seen in our study to this point—the idea of a majority or even a significant minority of Christians living and dying without one of the universal sacraments represented failure in one, or possibly a number, of ways. At minimum it represented a large number of Christians who had not received the grace of confirmation and thus were not properly equipped for spiritual battle with the sevenfold gift of the Spirit. Moreover, given the desire of reforming bishops in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to boost the standards of individual devotion and religious knowledge, it also represented the failure of one of the chief tools for achieving their goals. It could also represent a failure of bishops to fulfill the responsibilities of their office, or their failure to lead the church in such a way that common people wanted to be symbolically associated with them.

Many of the same circumstances that contributed to laxity in confirmation practice in the early Middle Ages¹ were still present in this later era. No doubt there were still bishops who were reluctant to discharge their obligation to provide pastoral care throughout their diocese. Confirmation was still perceived as somewhat optional; granted that to purposefully neglect it was spiritually dangerous, but it was not considered essential for salvation.² Travel was still extremely difficult, something that, according to the biographer of St Hugh, could discourage both bishops and the people from troubling themselves to make sure that all children received the sacrament.³ Nevertheless, circumstances had changed in this regard. The later Middle Ages was, generally speaking, a time of increasing wealth with an emergent merchant class and growing urbanization. Literacy was growing and more people had access to devotional literature than in previous eras. There is a very good chance, then, that Christians in the later Middle Ages had a better understanding of confirmation than their forbears did. They learned about it not only from observing the ritual itself or from what their priest said, but also from works like the *Lay Folks' Catechism*, Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*, and Ramon Llull's *Doctrine d'enfant*. Urbanization meant that a higher percentage of the population lived within close proximity to the bishop. Wealth and urbanization fostered travel; great numbers of people traveled for trade, pilgrimage, and crusade. Margery Kempe is an example of a woman with no connection

¹ See above, p. 201ff.

² O'Doherty, *The Scholastic Teaching*, 59-60.

³ Adam of Eynsham, *The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, 3.13, vol. 1, 127-128.

whatsoever to nobility, either by birth or by marriage, who was able to visit the Holy Land from her home in England and who met with powerful church leaders including the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁴ It is impossible to imagine a Margery Kempe in the early Middle Ages.

These changed circumstances were no doubt responsible for a perceptible and significant shifting of responsibility for laxity in confirmation. In the early Middle Ages the tendency was for church councils to castigate unfaithful bishops as the primary cause of the problem, but now much more attention was given to the unconfirmed themselves, their parents and their local priests. The Council of Lambeth (1281) under the reforming Archbishop John Pecham was a clear example of this new focus in which the issue was not mere laxity, but clear noncompliance by “damnable persons”:

It appears that there is a majority, indeed an uncountable number, who have grown up in these evil days and have not yet received the grace of confirmation. Regarding these damnable persons who negligently resist confirmation, we decree that none should be admitted to the sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord, except at the point of death, unless they have been confirmed, or unless there has been a reasonable impediment to receiving confirmation.⁵

⁴ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 15, 16, 26, trans. B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 69, 72, 96.

⁵ *Council of Lambeth* (1291), 4, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 897: “adeo ut plures immo innumeri sunt inveterati dierum malorum qui nondum confirmationis gratiam receperunt. Cui negligentie dampnabili obviantes, statuimus ut nullus ad sacramentum corporis et sanguinis domini admittatur, extra mortis articulum, nisi fuerit confirmatus, vel nisi a receptione confirmationis fuerit rationabiliter impeditus.”

In *Handlyng Synne*, delaying confirmation was portrayed as a sinful misdeed which resulted from the direct work of Satan.⁶

The first order of responsibility to enforce compliance fell to the local priest who was point man for the reforming efforts of the time. In 1240 a council at Worcester stated that, because bishops were encumbered by busy schedules, local priests should be the ones both to teach concerning the meaning, significance, and practice of confirmation, and to frequently warn and admonish parents not to be slack about having their children confirmed.⁷ Other synods called for the priest to use the confessional as a means to check up on compliance⁸ and to take the initiative to lead those needing confirmation to the bishop whenever he was within two or three miles.⁹ Moreover, these priests should be punished if they fail to do this. The Synodal Statutes of Richard Poore said that if a child reached age five without being confirmed both his parents *and his priest* should be barred from the church.¹⁰ Perhaps part of the reason that priests might, indeed, have been lax in promoting confirmation was that, unlike with baptism, no offering went to a priest or friar for making certain

⁶ Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 9849-9860, p. 245-246.

⁷ *The Council of Worcester* (1240), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 298-299. See also *Sarum Manual*, 43; *Council of Exeter* (1287), 3, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 989; John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, before line 69, p. 71; *Statutes of Paris* (c. 1203), 14, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 58.

⁸ *The Synodal Statutes of Richard Poore*, 31, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 71; *Statutes of Chichester* (c. 1250), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 453.

⁹ *The Statutes of Angers*, 5, in Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 1, 142; *Synod of Arras* (1291), 3, Pontal, *Les statuts synodaux*, vol. 4, 215.

¹⁰ *The Synodal Statutes of Richard Poore*, 31, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 71. A council in Durham said exactly the same, only changing the age to seven. See *Statutes of Durham* (1249), 24, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 441.

that a child got confirmed.¹¹ Be that as it may, the focus of priestly admonition was primarily the parents of small unconfirmed children (rather than the unconfirmed themselves) and church councils listed a range of ages, from one to seven, by which children must be confirmed along with penalties for noncompliance.¹² Generally parents were punished with suspension from the church, but the Council of Exeter (1287) declared that “parents must fast on bread and water every Friday as long as it takes until their children are confirmed.”¹³ Once they got older (*pubes*)¹⁴, however, the onus fell on the children themselves. Some councils called for those who remained unconfirmed to be suspended from church,¹⁵ or more specifically (as in the quote above from Lambeth), to be deprived of the sacraments.¹⁶ Indeed, the provision in the *Sarum Manual* that “no one should be admitted to the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ Jesus (except at the time of death) unless he has been confirmed or has been kept from the sacrament of confirmation by a reasonable

¹¹ Bernard Manning, *The People's Faith in the Time of Wyclif* (Cambridge: University Press, 1919), 60.

¹² *The Synodal Statutes of Richard Poore*, 31, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 71; *The Council of Worcester* (1240), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 298; *Council of Exeter* (1287), 3, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 989; *Statutes of Canterbury* (1213-1214), 37, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 32; *Statutes of Chichester* (c. 1250), 12, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 453; John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, before line 157, p. 76.

¹³ *Council of Exeter* (1287), 3, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 989: “alioquin parentes extunc qualibet sexta feria in pane et aqua ieiunent donec pueri confirmentur.”

¹⁴ This term is used in the *Statutes of Canterbury* (1213-1214), 38, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 32. Other synods specified ages, usually twelve to fourteen.

¹⁵ *Statutes of Canterbury* (1213-1214), 38, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 32.

¹⁶ *Council of Lambeth* (1291), 4, in Powicke, *Councils and Synods*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 897. See also *Quattuor sermones*, 38.

impediment,”¹⁷ would have an important and long lasting influence on the Anglican church because of its eventual inclusion in the *Book of Common Prayer*.¹⁸ The underlying assumption, sometimes explicitly stated, behind all these measures against priests, parents, and individuals was that of negligent resistance, as the Council of Lambeth put it. This notion that willful neglect is the critical issue can be found as early as a letter attributed to Clement in the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals*: “A Christian could never be perfected, nor have a seat among the perfect, especially if he remains (without episcopal consignation) not out of necessity but through negligence or by choice.”¹⁹ These statutes were not implying that confirmation was necessary for salvation or that people who never had reasonable access to a bishop ought to be denied full participation in the eucharist; rather, their goal was to encourage conformity to a minimum standard of lay piety.

It would be wonderful if we had precise statistics on how many people received confirmation. Since it was an “optional” sacrament, an accurate knowledge of how many people put forth the effort to seek out a bishop, or go to him when he was in the area, would greatly illuminate our understanding of the nature of medieval piety and would help a great deal to shape our interpretation of the

¹⁷ *Sarum Manual*, 43: “Nullus debet admitti ad sacramentum corporis et sanguinis christi iesu extra mortis articulum/nisi fuerit confirmatus vel a receptione sacramenti confirmationis fuerit rationabiliter impeditus.”

¹⁸ Finnegan, “The Origins of Confirmation,” 392-393.

¹⁹ Pseudo-Isidorus, *Decretales pseudo-Isidorianae*, 63-64: “quia aliter perfectus esse christianus nequaquam poterit, nec sedem habere inter perfectos si non necessitate, sed incuria aut voluntate manserit . . .”

role of confirmation in society and in the lives of individual people. Sadly, such records simply do not exist. As with so many questions about the Middle Ages, the historian must draw inferences wherever possible, and in this case the evidence is mixed. There is much to indicate that confirmation educed an indifference that was uncharacteristic of other sacraments. The quote above from the Council of Lambeth, if taken at face value, indicates that the majority of lay people were uninterested in confirmation. Note that Lambeth did not blame circumstances or inattentive bishops; it placed the responsibility on the “damnable persons” of the laity who “negligently resist confirmation.” This came at a time when the Feast of Corpus Christi, a celebration of the eucharist that involved community wide processions, was quickly becoming one of the most popular holy days of the church calendar. Unlike baptism, confirmation did not show up regularly in saints’ lives or in miracle stories.²⁰ Nor are there accounts of elaborate and expensive celebrations after confirmation ceremonies, as was often the case with baptisms.²¹ Of course this may be an unfair comparison since baptism lent itself to scheduling and planning; parents had nine months to anticipate a birth and make plans for sponsors, festivities, etc. Moreover, a baptism celebration commemorated more than a sacrament, it was a celebration of birth, of life, and of the continuation of a family line. Confirmation, on the other hand, for all except the wealthy and powerful,

²⁰ Joseph H. Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (London: Longman, 1992), 280.

²¹ For an excellent description of the extended celebration that accompanied baptisms in late medieval Germany, and the efforts of Protestant Reformers to limit it, see Michael James Halvorson, “Theology, Ritual and Confessionalization: The Making and Meaning of Lutheran Baptism in Reformation Germany, 1520-1618” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2001), ch. 5.

appears to have been more of a catch-as-catch-can affair—when a bishop happened into the region, the people were to drop what they were doing and seek confirmation. Even among theologians, who could not at all be accused of disinterest in confirmation, other sacraments got much more attention than did confirmation. For instance, in the PL edition of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, the discussion of baptism takes up thirteen columns, confirmation only one.²²

This sort of evidence has led many to conclude that medieval confirmation had little real meaning whatsoever. In the early twentieth century, Bernard Manning began a discussion of confirmation by saying, “The sacrament of confirmation had an insignificant part in the ordinary man’s religion.”²³ A much more recent work on medieval childhood concluded that confirmation “was doubtlessly seldom performed. The majority of Christians, out of negligence or lack of interest, did not take their children to be confirmed.”²⁴ Joseph H. Lynch suggests that it “was a theologians’ sacrament which failed to take deep root in the religious consciousness of Christendom.”²⁵ Susan Karant-Nunn goes further, declaring medieval confirmation essentially meaningless—“a vestigial remain of the personal episcopal cure of souls”—and she expresses surprise that it achieved sacramental status.²⁶ Nevertheless, it was included as one of the seven sacraments, and the fact that this list was being developed at the very

²² See Lombard, *Sentences*, 4, in PL, vol. 192, 842-856.

²³ Manning, *The People’s Faith in the Time of Wyclif*, 59.

²⁴ Alexandre-Bidon and Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages*, 29.

²⁵ Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 280.

²⁶ Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, 66.

time when people allegedly viewed confirmation as insignificant and meaningless may point to the incompleteness of these conventional conclusions.

Indeed, we have seen other bits of evidence that when taken together indicate that for at least some medieval Christians, confirmation was a meaningful and relevant rite. The many commands prohibiting the repetition of confirmation²⁷ could have been boiler plate that applied to any sacrament, but if they were based in response to a genuine problem, then they indicate that for some who received it, confirmation had enough value that once was not enough. Indeed what we have seen of the willingness of medieval folk to attribute supernatural power to things like chrism and the touch of a bishop makes this a distinct possibility. Of greater significance is the late thirteenth-century addition of the slap into the confirmation ritual,²⁸ because it indicates that a certain liveliness and liturgical responsiveness was still present in the rite. It signifies that confirmation was not a meaningless and perfunctory reiteration of behaviors that had lost their meaning centuries before; it was a developing and elastic ritual that spoke to contemporary concerns and related lay people's everyday lives as Christians to important social institutions like chivalry and the crusade. Furthermore, if the episcopal biographies can be trusted on this point, great numbers of people were anxious to have themselves and their children confirmed whenever the opportunity arose to receive the sacrament from a

²⁷ See above, 238.

godly bishop they revered. Huge crowds flocked to be confirmed by bishops like St Anselm and St Hugh.²⁹ It is also telling that, in spite of Luther's rejection of confirmation, Lutheran pastors were quick to revitalize it. It was a ceremony whose core—a rite of passage marked by anointing and handlaying—still resonated with Protestants and when adapted by them “formed an essential part of the foundation upon which confessionalization and social discipline reposed.”³⁰

The evidence on the degree to which lay people participated in confirmation and, perhaps more importantly, whether it had a meaningful role in their spiritual, emotional, and social lives is mixed. Surely many were indifferent toward confirmation, either out of lack of concern toward Christian practice as a whole or because their spiritual needs were met locally through baptism and the mass and they felt no need to put forth the effort and possible expense to seek out confirmation. Some, no doubt fewer, completely eschewed confirmation, seeing it as a symbol of an ecclesial or episcopal authority which they rejected. There must have been many others, perhaps a plurality, who were positively predisposed toward confirmation, but were never confirmed because of practical realities having to do with poverty, health, the difficulty of travel, and the bad fortune of never having a bishop venture nearby. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that there was one final group who fulfilled

²⁸ See above, 234ff.

²⁹ Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm*, 25, p. 101; Adam of Eynsham, *The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, 3.13, vol. 1, 127-128.

the ideal of confirmation and received its putative benefits: a feeling of having been empowered by the Holy Spirit in an era when most people had a sensitized belief in the imminence and fearfulness of spiritual battle; an enlarged sense of Christian identity and personal devotion in a society that was increasingly emphasizing individual commitment and belief as a major component in proper religion; a bond with the holy catholic church through the person and prestige of a bishop; a ritualistic point of identification with the crusaders and the romantic notions of Christian warfare and chivalry they represented; an extended kinship network through sponsorship that would help smooth the way toward greater social and financial security; and perhaps even a focus of motivation toward catechetical instruction from a godparent or local priest.

³⁰ Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, 70.

CONCLUSION

At its core, this study has been about the ability of a ritual, the sacrament of confirmation, to establish continuity and a sense of tradition while simultaneously adapting to changing culture and circumstances. It is also a demonstration of the fact that rituals are not singular in meaning, and that the power to shape the sense of and bring about change to a ritual is not only in the hands of those officially empowered to perform it.

The starting points for the rite, handlaying and anointing with sacred oils, were venerable practices that were infused with spiritual, social and religious meaning in the classical Mediterranean world. Furthermore, although they were used differently and carried a range of symbolic meanings in the various baptism ceremonies practiced in second to fourth-century Christianity, it is likely that these acts had long been included as part of Christian initiatory activity. In chapter three the suggestion was made that these activities began to have an independent identity in the context of a polemic against Valentinian Gnostic Christians who were stressing the superiority of anointing over traditional baptism in their rites of initiation. In response, the proto-orthodox church placed one of the anointings that was already part of the baptism ceremony exclusively in the hands of the bishop, infusing it with a separate meaning and creating what would eventually be the separate rite of confirmation. They could argue, of course, that this was in keeping with the

very ancient Christian practice of apostolic handlaying for the impartation of the Holy Spirit, but it is telling that the decision to restrict the final anointing and prayer exclusively to the bishop was made only in the west. Clearly this decision was not simply the result of a traditional meaning inherent in the symbolic acts themselves; it was the innovative construction of a ritual within a certain set of cultural circumstances in order to achieve a desired end. Furthermore, it associated the newly baptized Christian with the power and status of the bishop while simultaneously reinforcing those same aspects of the bishop's office. This mutually enhancing relationship between episcopal authority and confirmation became one of its distinctive features. Indeed, one of the important arguments of this dissertation is that this rite was such a valuable tool for pastoral care and strengthening the episcopal office, that western bishops never laid it aside. This is in contradistinction to the generally held belief, based on the evidence of extant liturgies, that confirmation was not practiced by the bishops of Merovingian Gaul. Chapter six demonstrates that in fact they did.

In a manner of speaking, confirmation entered the early Middle Ages as a rite in search of a theology to justify it. It was at this time that theologians like Faustus of Riez and Isidore of Seville, followed later by Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, and a number of Charlemagne's bishops gave confirmation the distinctive theological and liturgical identity as a sacrament that it would carry up to the present day. This was also a time when Christians began to attach additional meanings to the rite: chrism, the blessed oil used in confirmation,

was perceived as effective for a variety of non-liturgical purposes, and most importantly, through the institution of godparenthood, families used confirmation to help in the critical process of creating kinship networks.

In the high and late Middle Ages, Christians once again demonstrated their ability to adapt confirmation to changing circumstances. Alarm at the perceived increase in the number of heretics and witches gave entirely new implications to confirmation's primary initiatory function of imparting the Holy Spirit for the purpose of spiritual warfare. The novel inclusion of a light slap on the face into the rite itself created a symbolic association between confirmation and such important social movements as crusading, chivalry, and monasticism. Furthermore, confirmation gained renewed attention from bishops and church councils as it was incorporated into the movement for higher standards of individual responsibility and Christian indoctrination that characterized the work of the Fourth Lateran Council.

Throughout this time, one essential and defining characteristic of the sacrament remained intact—confirmation was consistently linked to the person, power, and prestige of the bishop. It was not dependent on any characteristic or qualification of its recipient, except that he or she must have been baptized. Looking ahead to the sixteenth century, this would change dramatically as confirmation was once again significantly modified by both Protestant and Catholic reformers to fit a new set of values and concerns. Among the Protestants, after Martin Luther's initial rejection of confirmation in *The*

Babylonian Captivity of the Church,¹ Martin Bucer, a pastor from Strasbourg, led a movement to reconstitute it as an adult or adolescent rite that affirmed one's personal faith and willingness to submit to the discipline of the church—leaving out any necessary link between confirmation and the bishop.² The Catholic Reformers at the Council of Trent responded by reasserting the priority of the bishop, but they too reoriented confirmation toward older children who were able to understand its meaning.³ Of course this notion that confirmation ought to be administered to older children was not new; an emphasis on personal understanding and responsibility as key aspects of Christian piety had been present since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴ Nevertheless, the Tridentine requirement of a minimum age for confirmation represented, once again, something new for confirmation, a fundamental shift of focus from the bishop's power as the performer of sacrament to the qualification and character of the recipient. Thus in this one important aspect, the sixteenth-century Reformations marked the decisive end of the medieval sacrament of confirmation, while at the same time underscoring the remarkable and ongoing ability of this rite to change in response to the needs and values of the time.

¹ See above, p. 288.

² Amy Nelson Burnett, "Confirmation and Christian Fellowship: Martin Bucer on Commitment to the Church," *Church History* 64 (1995): 202-17.

³ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 2.3.14, p. 164.

⁴ See above, p. 247ff.

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VITA

After growing up and graduating from high school in Aurora, Colorado, James Heugel moved to Kirkland, Washington, a small community across Lake Washington from Seattle. In 1979 he earned a B.A. in Religion and Philosophy at Northwest College, having taken time out along the way to get married and work a stint in Dutch Harbor, Alaska as a carpenter. He then studied at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, completing an M.A. in Theology in 1984.

In 1981, James founded University Christian Fellowship, a student ministry at the University of Washington which he directed for ten years. From 1991 to 1996, he served as Senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel Seattle.

James began doctoral studies in the History Department at the University of Washington in 1995, focusing on both medieval Europe and the history of Christianity from Late Antiquity through the Protestant and Catholic Reformations of the sixteenth century. In 1999, he joined the faculty of the Northwest College History Department as an assistant professor, teaching courses in European history and the history of Christianity.

James and his wife Cherie live in Bothell, Washington. Cherie is a Registered Nurse at Swedish Hospital in Seattle, working in the Infant Special Care Unit. Together they have raised two children; Judson is training as a physician, and Callie is studying elementary education.