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Martin F. Connell

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, [mconnell@csbsju.edu](mailto:mconnell@csbsju.edu)

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## MAKING CHRIST OF THE MAN BORN BLIND (JOHN 9:1-41): A HYPOTHESIS

MARTIN F. CONNELL

In the earliest years of Christianity, one might suppose, those initiated into the body of Christ<sup>1</sup>, the “Anointed”, would themselves have been anointed, but biblical scholars and liturgical historians have roundly found baptism with water, not anointing with oil, as the ritual medium of entering into community life from the faith’s fledgling start. In general, New Testament texts referring to anointing have been interpreted either as symbolic of baptism or as ritual appendages to unmentioned baptisms, though no baptism-anointing or anointing-baptism sequence appears anywhere in Christianity until the end of the second century, in Tertullian’s *On Baptism* (ca. 198-200)<sup>2</sup>. In the New Testament one finds either baptism or anointing, not the two together. Yet in a few places of the New Testament there might be remnants of anointing as initiation, making a person a member of the social “Christ”, and this essay moves toward demonstrating such a possibility in a ritual palimpsest of the community of the Gospel of John.

The essay takes up a number of issues from the work of others about the Gospel, about the community from which it emerged, and about aspects of its ritual life and social, ecclesial tensions, within the community itself or in relation to other early Christian communities. The hypothesis draws from earlier, established work on the gospel, its language, rhetoric, and redaction, most of which are generally accepted. The article builds upon the following data, gleaned from previous scholarship regarding the fourth gospel, its author (and redactor), and the community in which the gospel was proclaimed:

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M. F. Connell is Associate Professor of Theology at Saint John’s School of Theology-Seminary, Collegeville Minnesota. He has a Ph.D. in Liturgical Studies from the University of Notre Dame.

<sup>1</sup> The phrase «body of Christ» appears at Romans 7:4, 12:5; 1 Corinthians 6:15, 10:16, 12:27; Ephesians 4:12, 5:30 (with a pronoun rather than «Christ»); Colossians 1:24, 2:17. In the gospels the phrase «body of Jesus» appears, but never «body of Christ».

<sup>2</sup> TERTULLIAN, *De baptismo*, ed. R.F. Refoulé, trans. M. Drouzy (Sources chrétiennes 35), Cerf, Paris 1952, 64-96; on *De baptismo* in the history of Western rites of initiation, see MAXWELL E. JOHNSON, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, Pueblo, Collegeville MN 1999, 61-66.

1. The Gospel of John was written in its canonical form near the end of the first century, combining memories about Jesus of Nazareth and experiences of a worshiping community's understanding of the risen Christ; the canonical form of the Gospel shows that early narratives had been redacted significantly at least once; the redaction qualified ritual practices of the earlier recension and the meaning or theology these held for the writer and the community for which he wrote<sup>3</sup>;
2. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called "synoptic" not only because they share a common outline of the life of Jesus and of the faith of their communities, but because they are markedly distinct from the Gospel of John, the canonical "other" against which the first three "see [Jesus] together"; among the traditions and qualities that distinguish the fourth gospel from the other three are its rites and their theology;
3. Regarding initiation, and unlike the portrayal of Jesus in the first three gospels, Jesus is not baptized — by John the Baptist or anyone — in the Fourth Gospel<sup>4</sup>. It has no narrative of Jesus' baptism, and even manifests a contention about whether or not Jesus himself baptized others. At the start of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, the Gospel asserts that "the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John" (4:1), but the assertion is immediately recast, qualified with the parenthetical addendum, "although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples" (4:2)<sup>5</sup>. So John 4:1-2 reveals tension about rites of initiation, with pro-baptism and anti-baptism camps tugging in different directions over whether or not Jesus had been a baptizer;
4. Also regarding rites of initiation, the narrative of the foot-washing (John 13:1-20), unique in the New Testament, at first depicted the washing by Jesus as initiatory. When Peter questions Jesus, "Lord,

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<sup>3</sup> See RAYMOND E. BROWN, «The Johannine Sacramentary Reconsidered», *Theological Studies* 23 (1962) 183-206; and MARTIN CONNELL, «*Nisi Pedes*, "Except for the Feet": Footwashing in the Community of John's Gospel», *Worship* 70 (1996) 517-530.

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-22.

<sup>5</sup> The withdrawal was not a redaction of later manuscripts of the New Testament but quite early, which demonstrates that this contention — Jesus the baptizer vs. Jesus who did not baptize — was also early. The two are so incompatible that most translations render the reversal, that not Jesus but his disciples baptized, in parentheses.

do you wash my feet?” (13:6b) and later objects, “You shall never wash my feet!” (13:8a), Jesus responds, “If I do not wash you, you do not belong to me” (13:8b).

The first part of the narrative (13:1-11) is consonant with foot-washing as initiation, as “belonging”, but the redaction (13:12-20) recasts the foot-washing Jesus as no longer a medium of “belonging”, but as a ritual of service: “As I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master” (13:14, 16)<sup>6</sup>.

From these one supposes that in the community there were allegiances to various ritual media to membership, such as pro-baptism vs. anti-baptism, and to various meanings attached to ritual actions, such as foot-washing as initiation vs. foot-washing as service. Although such factions are apparent in the text, criticism as a whole has accorded little consideration to these as reflecting the ritual customs and contentions of communities of the Johannine tradition in the late first and early second centuries.

The following hypothesis on anointing as initiation complicates still further the standard of baptism as the only rite of initiation in the first century as the Christian faith gained adherents and came into being; unlike baptism and foot-washing, however, remnants of anointing as initiation are spare. Yet anointing might have been occluded by the hegemony of baptism among the communities whose gospels and letters were received into the canon, especially in the communities of Paul’s correspondence and of the synoptic gospels. That possibility is the foundation on which this study depends in spite of the paucity of evidence about anointing with chrism, at least relative to texts on baptism.

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<sup>6</sup> That 13:12-20 is an insertion into an earlier narrative is evident if 13:11 and 13:21 are juxtaposed, as they would have been before the insertion, for 12:11 says: «For he [Jesus] knew who was to betray him; that was why he had said, “You are not all clean”». and 13:21 continues the rhetoric seamlessly, as it describes, «When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me”». See CONNELL, «*Nisi Pedes*» (as in note 3 above).

## Part 1: Anointing before and after the Gospel of John: 2 Corinthians and 1 John

The divine title “Christ” — applied over five hundred times to Jesus in the New Testament — is rooted in the verb *χρίειν*, which in pre-Christian antiquity meant to “rub”, “massage”, or “stroke”, and by the first century to “smear” or “anoint”<sup>7</sup>. The verb is the root of the adjective *χριστός*, “anointed”, substantiated as the noun and divine title “Christ”, predicated by Christians on the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. The verb *χρίειν*’s later and enduring significance, “to anoint”, was originally the result of facility or utility, as most massaging would have been done with oil<sup>8</sup>, so in Christian parlance the lubricating medium became the meaning.

In the New Testament, the verb *χρίειν* is rare relative to the omnipresence of *χριστός*; the verb appears without augment only five times (less than 1% of the uses of *χριστός*), three more times with a prefix<sup>9</sup>. Each of *χρίειν*’s few appearances is telling about the liturgical foundations of early communities in whose texts the verb was used. Of the few appearances, we turn to two to put the consideration of the narrative of the man born blind into historical and liturgical contexts; the first, 2 Corinthians 1:12-22, antedates the Gospel of John, and the second, 1 John 2:18-27, postdates the Gospel.

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<sup>7</sup> «Χρῖσις, Χρῖσμα, Χριστός, Χρίω», in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, rev. ed. Frederick William Danker, University of Chicago, Chicago<sup>3</sup>2000, 1090-1091; «Χρῖσις, Χρῖσμα, Χριστός, Χρίω», in *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G.W.H. Lampe, Clarendon, Oxford 1968, 1528-1533; «Χρῖσις, Χρῖσμα, Χριστός, Χρίω», in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, revised, Clarendon, Oxford 1996, 2007; WALTER GRUNDMANN, «Χρίω, χριστός, αντίχριστος, χρῖσμα, χριστιανός», in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* 9, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI 1974, 493-496, here 495.

<sup>8</sup> GRUNDMANN, «Χρίω», 495

<sup>9</sup> The sparer *χρίειν* appears at 2 Corinthians 1:21, Luke 4:18, Acts 4:26-27, Acts 10:38, and Hebrews 1:9; the prefixed *□πιχρίειν* at John 9:6 and 9:11, and *□γγχρίειν* at Revelation 3:18. In the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translation, all of these uses of the verb are translated as «anoint» except at 2 Corinthians 1:21. There, enigmatically, it is translated as «commissioned». Perhaps the aversion to «anoint» remained from those early scribes of the narrative of the man born blind until the translators of the RSV. *Χρίειν* also supplied the eventual name for the ointment used in the action of rubbing or anointing, *χρῖσμα*, «chrism», which is used only thrice, once at 1 John 2:20 and twice at 2:27.

*Pre-Text: 2 Corinthians 1:15-22*

The earliest manifestation of anointing as initiatory is in the letters of Paul; 2 Corinthians 1:15-22 is a rhetorically complex passage in which the apostle explains his decision to not visit the Corinthians again when he had earlier communicated that he would. As he constructs an argument to vanquish doubts about his word and dependability, Paul asks the community, “Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make plans like a worldly man, ready to say ‘Yes and No’ at the same time?” (1:17). To re-establish his ministry and solidarity with them, he turns to shared liturgical experience: “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and who *anointed* us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (1:21-22).

In the same letter he established his authority against others influencing the community, and Paul warns the Corinthians of “someone [who] comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached”, and he calls this comer and others “super-apostles” (11:4). He defends his authority by adding that he was “not inferior” to these super-apostles, and that, “even if unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge” (11:5-6). He distinguishes himself from these apostles, whom he calls the “wise”, as he wrote that “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise” (1:27). His appeal to the Corinthians against the wise was founded on the power of the cross, highlighting Jesus known by his crucifixion<sup>10</sup>. Among other purposes, Paul insists on the verity of the incarnation and the cross against super-apostles, who opposed a tradition of Jesus in the flesh, and who sought to portray him as “wisdom”.

For our hypothesis about 1 John and its chrism, two things can be carried from this passage from 2 Corinthians; first, there was a tradition of anointing from the earliest stratum of Christian worship, and Paul himself was among those anointed; second, in the mix of the communities in Corinth there was antagonism between a faction of the community that believed in an incarnate Jesus and a faction that did not<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> In Paul’s own words from 2 Corinthians, «Since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God» (1:21-24).

<sup>11</sup> See WALTER SCHMITHALS, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, trans. John E. Steely, Abingdon, Nashville 1971.

*Post-Text: John 2:18-27*

On the temporal other side of the Gospel of John, the author of 1 John also wrote of anointing. By then, however, the vocabulary of anointing had changed, for the author did not use the verb χρίειν, but the noun χρῖσμα, “chrism”. In the portion of the letter to follow, one senses the gravity of anointing with chrism in the author’s argument, mentioned three times in the passage, once at 1 John 2:20 and twice at 2:27:

Children, it is the last hour. You heard that [the] antichrist is coming<sup>12</sup>, and by now many antichrists have appeared. By this we know it is the last hour. They went away from us, but in reality they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us<sup>13</sup>. But they went away, which reveals that they all are not of us (2:18-19)<sup>14</sup>.

The divorce of the community is the occasion for the letter as a whole and for the apocalyptic furor of the author’s rhetoric, revealing the vulnerability of him in the company of those who “remained”.

“Antichrist” is traditionally interpreted as having theological weight, as “against Christ”, but I am suggesting that “Antichrist” might have carried liturgical significance, if those who were not longer part of the community were, by his reckoning, those who had betrayed the anointing given them by the Holy One, an oil that had made them one society. If so, the enemy, the “Antichrist”, and his society, the “many antichrists”, were they who were “against the anointing”, or “Anti-christs” (2:18).

Against these opponents — whom the author associates with chrism and with a Jesus not of the flesh — the author had opened the letter depicting the word of life as “what we have heard, seen with our eyes, looked upon, and touched with our hands” (1:1), a Jesus perceptible to the senses. So here, reflecting further on the efficacy of anointing with chrism, he continues to emphasize the corporal and sensory, “what you heard from the beginning”. The passage closes:

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<sup>12</sup> The word «antichrist» here does not have the definite article as it does in other places.

<sup>13</sup> The author of 1 John uses the word μένειν, to «remain», twenty times in the letter, with a concentration of them in the very section in which he writes of «chrism», that is, at 2:14, 2:17, 2:19, three times in 2:24, twice in 2:27, and 2:28.

<sup>14</sup> My translation, for most translators use the generic «ointment» instead of «chrism», and, as I have argued elsewhere, the three oils mentioned in the New Testament - olive oil, myrrh, and chrism - had different ritual uses and theological significance.

And the chrism you received from him remains in you. You have no need of anyone teaching you, for his chrism teaches you about all things, is true, and is not a lie, so — just as it taught you — remain in him.

The author's (and perhaps his community's) anxiety about the efficacy of anointing with chrism for those who remain occasions the author's concern here, because the chrism was God's gift and the source of the "knowing" and "teaching", and he reveals that the link between chrism and knowing is a great tension for the community's identity once its membership had been cleaved. With a context for anointing established, if tentatively, by studying 2 Corinthians and 1 John, we turn to the story of the man born blind for its contribution to the hypothesis regarding anointing as initiation in the earliest period of evidence of Christian worship.

## Part 2: "I am" Sayings in the Gospel of John

The literary element of the fourth gospel that helps appreciate the significance of anointing in the community for which it was written is the Gospel's "I am" sayings<sup>15</sup>. The most memorable uses are those by which the author had Jesus identify himself with a metaphor, such as "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 6:48), "I am the light of the world" (8:12), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 10:14), "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6), and "I am the vine, you are the branches" (15:5). These are "*predicate* I-am sayings" for the consequential pronoun-verb enunciation in each is followed by a metaphor, the "predicate", which is the bread, light, good shepherd, and so on.

Different from the predicate I-am sayings are the "*absolute* I-am sayings", which refer to places where the phrase Ἐγώ εἰμι is spoken without a predicate metaphor, in an *absolute* way, without a qualifying predicate image. Absolute I-am sayings are highlighted further where characters other than Jesus speak them, but as negative iterations, "I am not", rather than positive, absolute iterations, Ἐγώ εἰμι, "I am". The

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<sup>15</sup> Since anointing appears in only one place in the gospel, the verse may be a remnant of the community at an earlier stage of its history, or only part of the gospel of another community from which it was scooped by the author or redactor of the Gospel of John. Yet the anointing element is secure in the narrative as it was incorporated into the fourth gospel.



three characters on whose lips “I am not” sayings appear are John the Baptist, Peter (when in the passion someone identifies him with Jesus, and he responds “I am not”), and Pilate <sup>16</sup>. These highlight the gravity of Jesus’ “I am” sayings in the literary work of the evangelist.

There are twenty-four absolute I-am sayings in the Gospel of John, and in most instances they are stark revelations of power in Jesus’ ministry, as, for example, when Jesus and the disciples are in a boat when the sea rose and a strong wind was blowing (6:18); Jesus responds, “I am; do not be afraid” (6:20). Or when Jesus says, “You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am” (8:24). The gravest absolute Ἐγὼ εἰμι saying is the final one from the lips of Jesus. As “a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees” (18:3) came upon Jesus to arrest and execute him, Jesus asks them, “Whom do you seek?”; they reply, “Jesus of Nazareth” (18:4-5). Jesus answers, “I am” (18:6a), after which those arresting him “drew back and fell to the ground” (18:6b). The evangelist’s choreography of Jesus’ enemies bowing down before him after he pronounces Ἐγὼ εἰμι highlights the importance of the phrase in the theology of the author and the community.

*“I Am” and the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)*

Important for appreciating the meaning of anointing with chrism in the story of the man born blind is that twenty-three of the twenty-four times when Ἐγὼ εἰμι is used in an absolute way, it comes from the mouth of Jesus, as in the three examples above. The one person in the whole of the Gospel besides Jesus himself who utters Ἐγὼ εἰμι in an absolute way is the man born blind. The evangelist fashioned the appearance of the formerly blind man’s Ἐγὼ εἰμι toward highlighting its significance, so appreciating his rhetoric calls for seeing five “I am” statements that precede the iteration, that is, from the end of Chapter 8 and beginning of Chapter 9. Because of the close nuances of the story, the five verses are in English followed by the author’s Greek words (in parentheses) in their original order:

1. John 8:12: “I am the light of the world”: I (Ἐγὼ) am (εἰμι) the light (τὸ Φῶς) of the world (τοῦ κόσμου).
2. John 8:58b: “Before Abraham was, I am”: Before (πρὶν) Abraham (Ἀβραάμ) was born (γενέσθαι) I (ἐγὼ) am (εἰμι).

<sup>16</sup> These are the verses with the «I am not» sayings: John the Baptist: 1:20, 1:21, 1:27, 3:28 (twice); Peter (18:17, 18:25); Pilate (18:35).

3. John 9:5b: “[I] am the light of the world”: Light (Φῶς) am (εἰμι) of the world (τοῦ κόσμου).

In the following verse, the man’s neighbors discuss whether or not he is the blind man who used to sit and beg; they use two forms of the verb “to be” that contribute to the narrative efficacy.

4. John 9:9a: “Some said, ‘It is he,’” (οὗτός [this one (m.)] ἐστίν [is]), “and others said, ‘No, but he is like him,’” (ὅμοιος [like] αὐτῷ [to him] ἐστίν [he is]).

This play on variants of the simple word “to be” is followed by the formerly blind man’s response to the neighbors’ query, which is the only one of the twenty-four absolute uses of “I am” in the Gospel not from Jesus:

5. John 9:9b: “I am”; I (Ἐγώ) am (εἰμι)<sup>17</sup>.

Leading up to John 9, Ἐγώ εἰμι had been used eight times, with the last of them, “I am the light of the world” (8:12), anticipating the drama of the narrative of the man born blind with its polarities of light and darkness, blindness and sight. For the sake of comprehension, most translations of 9:5b use the same wording of 8:12 when Jesus says of himself, “I am the light of the world” (9:5b). In reality, however, as can be see by scrutinizing #1 and #3 above, there are two significant differences between 8:12 and 9:5b in the evangelist’s writing, for at 9:5b the evangelist did not use the pronoun “I”, so instead of “I am the light of the world”, Jesus says merely, “am the light of the world”, leaving the reader sensing an interruption of the by-now familiar formula Ἐγώ εἰμι. Hearers are thereby poised to wonder why the words from Jesus’ mouth are clipped after the exact words and phrase had just been used.

Second, unlike John 8:12, where the verb phrase Ἐγώ εἰμι preceded and was separate from the noun-phrase “light of the world”, in John 9:5b the word order has been changed so that the verb is embraced

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<sup>17</sup> English translations usually supply «the man» for comprehension. The *Eight Translation New Testament*, Iversen-Norman, New York 1974, 722-732, offers these: «I am he» (King James Version), «I am the same man!» (Living Bible), «I’m the man all right!» (Phillips Modern English), «I am the man» (Revised Standard Version, Today’s English Version, New International Version, Jerusalem Bible, New English Bible). The argument to follow depends on recognizing the spare «I am» response for its same wording as are those from the lips of Jesus.

within the metaphor “light of the world”. What had earlier been “I am / the light of the world” (at 8:12) is — mimicking exactly the evangelist’s word order in Greek — now “light / am / of the world”, with the clipped verb-phrase highlighted in the embrace of the metaphor. The embrace highlights the absence of the pronoun “I” (ἐγώ) and the evangelist’s indication of significant change and exchange in the characters.

Piqued at 9:5b by the missing pronoun and the metaphor’s embrace of the verb (εἶμι) hearers continue and hear that the full phrase Ἐγώ εἶμι, with its pronoun, *does* soon appear, not from the lips of Jesus, but from the formerly blind man. Neighbors of the blind man are bantering about whether or not this is “the man who used to sit and beg”, and (as in #4 above) the evangelist toys with alternate forms of the verb “be”, perhaps as a way of egging on those who had recognized the merely partial form used by Jesus at 9:5b.

The Ἐγώ εἶμι phrase had appeared in the previous chapter (8:12 and 58), was imperiled or weakened at 9:5b, leaving hearers familiar with the style wondering, “What happened to the man between Jesus’ partial expression ‘am’ (at 9:5b) and the formerly blind man’s full expression, ‘I am’ (9:9b), to make the man able to speak what is elsewhere spoken by Jesus alone?”<sup>18</sup> The answer is that Jesus had anointed (ἐπέχρισεν) the man, restoring his sight and bringing him into the healing power of Christ, the “Anointed”, by putting “chrism” (-χρισεν) “on” (ἐπέ-) him.

In the progress of the gospel’s rhetoric of Ἐγώ εἶμι sayings, the evangelist’s fashioning of the narrative highlights the significance of Jesus putting chrism on the blind man, apparent by the concomitant gravity and, perhaps, humor of the tale. By the anointing, Jesus makes the man able to do what had previously been done only by himself, thus making a “Christ”, an “Anointed”, of the formerly blind man, empowering him to speak as only Jesus himself speaks elsewhere. The ritual gesture, even if a remnant of an earlier community’s tradition that had not yet been completely erased, is initiatory, a medium of becoming part of Christ. With the action and the theologically weighted phrase Ἐγώ εἶμι,

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<sup>18</sup> Even a commentator as attentive to the sacramental traditions that informed the Gospel of John as Raymond Brown dismissed the formerly blind man’s enunciation, calling it «an instance of a purely secular use of the phrase», though with no support for why this only «I am» utterance from someone other than Jesus is «purely secular» while all those from Jesus himself are theological. I disagree with Brown squarely, in part based on the tradition of Johannine theology supplied in his august commentary.

the evangelist has Jesus pass on the messianic tradition to the man who “was blind but now I see”.

In this example of anointing — set here between the vestiges of anointing as initiation in 2 Corinthians and 1 John — the rhetoric of the story of the man born blind is less obvious, less direct than in those earlier and later writings. There the authors addressed directly those who had been anointed — “God anointed us”, in Paul’s 2 Corinthians, and “you have chrism from the Holy One”, in 1 John — but here the narrative is about a physical, social, ritual exchange between Jesus and the blind man. Therefore we lean on the earlier foundation, that the author is “combining memories of the historical Jesus of Nazareth and experiences of a worshipping community” to suggest that in the story of Jesus and the man born blind is a remnant of anointing as initiation, predicated on the empowerment of the blind man by anointing with chrism so that he, as only Jesus had before, is empowered to speak the absolute *Ἐγώ εἶμι*.

### **Part 3: “Christ” and “Son” as Titles for Jesus in the New Testament**

In spite of the strength that the character of the man born blind and Jesus anointing him with chrism receive in the narrative of the Gospel of John, one is sobered by the realization that, whatever the quality of the anointing in John 9:6, the fact remains that it is the only appearance of anointing in the Gospel of John, which evokes a consideration of why the anointing, if consequential in a few communities, was not more manifest and did not survive in the tradition as did baptism or even foot-washing.

My hypothesis regarding the paucity of evidence and eventual disappearance of anointing is drawn from two coincidences in all three of the texts considered here — 2 Corinthians, 1 John, and (at length) the Gospel of John. They share more than remnants of anointing as initiation; they share a common enemy, for all three authors write in opposition to others who did not believe in a Jesus in the flesh, whom I call “Non-Incarnationalists”<sup>19</sup>. Paul’s Non-Incarnational opponents

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<sup>19</sup> The word used formerly for these early Christian communities that did not believe in salvation by flesh is «Gnostics», which is no longer a viable term; for an engaging study of contemporary scholarship on Gnostics and Gnosticism, including criticism of

were the “wise”; 1 John’s Non-Incarnational opponents were those who “knew”, who “taught”, the “anti-christs”; and against his opponents the author of the Gospel of John highlighted the incarnation — “the word was made flesh and dwelled among us” (1:14) — against those who did not believe in the flesh, or, as their side is captured in the words of the doubting Thomas in the Gospel: “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe” (20:25). That there was a growing opposition to Non-Incarnational theology in the course of the first century is clear from the writings of early fathers, particularly from Irenaeus of Lyons and his *Against the Heresies*<sup>20</sup>. Coincident with opposition to Non-Incarnational theology was a decline in the use of the divine title “Christ”, the “Anointed”, for Jesus.

Appreciating the decline in the use of “Christ” for Jesus through the course in time of the writing of the books of the New Testament is not a simple task, complicated by the varying lengths of the books themselves, which is great, with the longest work, the two-part Luke-Acts (at 21,333 Greek words), one hundred times larger than the shortest, 3 John (at just 219 words). For this reason, the evolution cannot be ascertained by considering only how many times a title was used by individual authors or in individual books; rather, the use of “Christ” is more accurately assessed in relation to the lengths of the books.

In the list of New Testament books to follow, the first column marks the percentage of the New Testament that the book occupies, and the second column indicates the percentage of the 500+ uses of “Christ” in that book. Noteworthy are the books in which the two percentages are significantly different:

	<b>% of N.T.</b>	<b>% of Uses of “Christ”</b>
Matthew	<b>13.3%</b>	3.0%
Mark	<b>8.2%</b>	1.3%
Luke	<b>14%</b>	2.2%
John	<b>11.3%</b>	3.6%
Acts	<b>13.4%</b>	4.7%

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the elasticity of the term «Gnostic», see KAREN L. KING, *What is Gnosticism?*, Belknap Press, New York 2003.

<sup>20</sup> See IRENAEUS, *Against the Heresies* 78.3-5.

Romans	5%	12%
1 Corinthians	5%	12%
2 Corinthians	3.25%	9%
Galatians	1.6%	7%
Ephesians	1.8%	7%
Philippians	1.2%	7%
Colossians	1.1%	5%
1 Thessalonians	1.1%	2%
2 Thessalonians	0.6%	2%
1 Timothy	1%	3%
2 Timothy	1%	2.5%
Titus	0.5%	0.7%
Philemon	0.2%	1.5%
Hebrews	3.6%	2.3%
James	1.3%	0.4%
1 Peter	1.2%	4%
2 Peter	0.8%	1.5%
1 John	1.5%	1.3%
2 John	0.3%	0.5%
3 John	0.2%	0%
Jude	0.3%	1.1%
Revelation	7%	1.3%

In eight books the percentage of the use of “Christ” is *low* relative to the size of the book: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, James, 3 John, and Revelation.

In four books the use of “Christ” is relatively *equal*: Titus, Hebrews, 1 John, and 2 John.

In six books the use of “Christ” is *high*: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Jude.

Finally, in nine books, the use of “Christ” is *significantly high*, more than three times higher than the size of book: 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Philemon, and 1 Peter.

Two qualities are striking: first, nearly all books with “high” or “significantly high” use of “Christ” are by or attributed to Paul, whose letters

are the earliest writings<sup>21</sup>. Second, the use of the title “Christ” for Jesus decreases during the course of the period when the books were written, with the earliest books, at mid-century, showing the greatest concentration, and the latest books, at the end of the first and beginning of the second centuries, manifesting no or little use.

If, as I am suggesting, the divine title “Christ” decreased because of anointing with chrism’s association with Non-Incarnationalist faith (which may have been only one of a complexity of reasons), what title was associated with baptism, the rite of initiation that did survive? The title is immediately apparent from the narrative of the baptism of Jesus in any of the synoptic gospels (here as in Mark):

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “Thou art my beloved *Son*; with thee I am well pleased” (Mark 1:9-11 // Matthew 3:13-17 // Luke 3:21-22).

Baptism was associated with a theology of Jesus as God’s Son, indeed, as God’s *only* Son, God’s *beloved* Son, which is supported by the distribution of “Son” for Jesus in the New Testament by the same proportional taxonomy. The first column again marks the percentage of the New Testament that the book occupies, and the second column indicates the percentage of the 249 uses of “Son” for Jesus in that book. As before, noteworthy are the books in which the two percentages are significantly different:

	% of N.T.	% of Uses of “Christ”
Matthew	<b>13.3%</b>	15%
Mark	<b>8.2%</b>	13%
Luke	<b>14%</b>	26%
John	<b>11.3%</b>	20%
Acts	<b>13.4%</b>	1.2%
Romans	<b>5%</b>	3%
1 Corinthians	<b>5%</b>	1%

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<sup>21</sup> Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon are by Paul; Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are Pauline, attributed to Paul, if not from his hand. (In the list, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude are exceptions to Pauline authorship, yet the count is significantly high in only one, 1 Peter).

2 Corinthians	<b>3.25%</b>	0.4%
Galatians	<b>1.6%</b>	2.5%
Ephesians	<b>1.8%</b>	0.4%
Philippians	<b>1.2%</b>	0%
Colossians	<b>1.1%</b>	0.4%
1 Thessalonians	<b>1.1%</b>	0.4%
2 Thessalonians	<b>0.6%</b>	0%
1 Timothy	<b>1%</b>	0%
2 Timothy	<b>1%</b>	0%
Titus	<b>0.5%</b>	0%
Philemon	<b>0.2%</b>	0%
Hebrews	<b>3.6%</b>	5%
James	<b>1.3%</b>	0%
1 Peter	<b>1.2%</b>	0%
2 Peter	<b>0.8%</b>	0.4%
1 John	<b>1.5%</b>	8.5%
2 John	<b>0.3%</b>	0.8%
3 John	<b>0.2%</b>	0%
Jude	<b>0.3%</b>	0%
Revelation	<b>7%</b>	2%

In eighteen of the twenty-seven books, the percentage of the uses of “Son” for Jesus is *zero* or *low*: Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation.

Four books use “Son” in a proportion relatively *equal*: Matthew, Galatians, Hebrews, and 3 John.

Three books use for “Son” for Jesus in a *high* proportion: Mark, Luke, John.

Finally, in two books the use of “Son” for Jesus is *significantly high*, five times greater in 1 John than the size of the book, and two-to-three times higher in 2 John.

Three qualities of the comparison are striking: first, three of the four Johannine books - including 1 John and the Gospel of John, under scrutiny in this essay - have a high or significantly high proportion of the distribution of the title “Son” for Jesus in the New Testa-



ment. Second, with the exception of the Letter to the Galatians, the letters of Paul manifest an absence or low use of the title “Son”; and third, over the course of the writing of the books of the New Testament, the use of “Son” for Jesus increased at nearly the same rate that the title “Christ” was decreasing.

#### **Part 4: Earlier Copies and Contemporary Commentaries**

##### *Erasing Anointing from Early Manuscripts*

Linking the loss of a tradition of anointing as initiation with Non-Incarnational Christologies is piquing not only because both appear together, but because both anointing with chrism and Non-Incarnational Christologies wane and eventually disappear in the tradition. Opposition to Non-Incarnational Christologies is established explicitly in 2 Corinthians, the Gospel of John, and 1 John, but opposition to anointing is more difficult to establish, but apparent if one considers how scribes of the New Testament, who copied sacred texts for their own communities, gradually erased evidence of anointing. One cannot blithely predicate Non-Incarnational and anti-anointing intentions on the scribes - for only the manuscripts survive, not the scribes’ thoughts about the work - but toying with texts that mention anointing is common in the manuscript stemmas of two of the three texts of this study, the Gospel of John and 1 John, texts in which incarnate Christology is explicit.

In our age, a half-millennium after the invention of the printing press, the presumption of a static, fixed text of any book of the Bible (or any work) is common. But in the centuries when and after the books of the Bible were written, they were transmitted from one community to another by handwriting, not print, and writing from place to place resulted in a variety in received inspired texts. Because of this, texts were living, fluid, even when considered sacred by the scribes copying them. In retrospect, it is difficult to ascertain motives for variants in the scriptures, but in general we assume that changes could have been (1) accidental; (2) benign or ignorant; or (3) intentional <sup>22</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding the first, some changes resulted from scribes misreading or misunderstanding the original or losing their place in the text they copied as they looked back and forth from original to copy. Regarding the second, some changes were intentional, but inadvertent, a result of ignorance, as, for example, if scribes had been unfamiliar with a tradition, such as anointing, and therefore changed it as a result of their unfa-

Perhaps because ritual issues are not often considered in the critical study of the New Testament, intentional manuscript variants are usually attributed to theological differences, so that the simultaneous decrease in the use of the title “Christ” for Jesus and the increase of the use of “Son” for him would have been attributed to changes of belief or theology as the tenets of the faith evolved rather than to changes in the behavior and rituals. Yet this hypothesis proposes that rites and Christologies were not independent of one another in the first century, for, then as now, behavior and beliefs interact with one another in human life.

Concerning *anointing* in the story of the man born blind (9:6), a split in the manuscript tradition is apparent. The majority of the scribes copied the passage as it appears above, that is, Jesus “spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and *anointed* the man’s eyes” (9:6), using the word described above,  $\square\pi\acute{\epsilon}\chi\rho\iota\sigma\epsilon\nu$ , “anointed”, the combination of the verb (or the noun “chrism”) and the directional preposition “on”. Yet one of the earliest, most important manuscripts of the Bible, the Codex Vaticanus of the fourth century, bears an alternate reading, with the verb for Jesus’ action to the formerly blind man as “put on” ( $\square\pi\acute{\epsilon}\theta\eta\kappa\epsilon\nu$ ) rather than “anointed”. The Vaticanus is the primary witness to the alternate verb, with a few later manuscripts following<sup>23</sup>.

Moreover, concerning 1 John (2:27), various alternate readings appear where the earliest tradition had “chrism”. The same Codex Vaticanus, which, as above, supplied the alternate “put on” for “anointed” in John 9:6, also displaces anointing at 1 John 2:27, and the scribe inadvertently (or cleverly) slipped in the similarly spelled  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$ , “charism” or “gift”, for the ointment  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$ , “chrism”. Other scribes, such as the one who copied the Codex Sinaiticus - of the fourth century, like the Vaticanus - were not as clever linguistically but sharp theologically, for the Sinaiticus substituted  $\pi\nu\epsilon\tilde{\nu}\mu\alpha$ , “spirit”, where “chrism” had been, giving the reading as “his *Spirit* teaches you about all things”<sup>24</sup>. As orthodox

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miliarity with it, as they assumed that the previous copier had miswritten the sacred text. Regarding the third, intentional changes, these would have resulted from scribes seeking to cover up another community’s tradition that had been judged as errant or heretical.

<sup>23</sup> The critical edition used for the manuscript traditions of John 9:6 and 1 John 2:27 is *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. E. Nestle-K. Aland, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart<sup>27</sup>1999, 278.

<sup>24</sup> *NT Graece*, ed. Nestle-Aland, 618.

traditions for theology and worship were decided and promulgated, the variety of beliefs and rites were straitened, and anointing with chrism was one that was excised from the ritual canon and virtually erased from the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.

*Erasing Anointing from Translations and from Commentary on the Gospel of John*

Translators have generally not rendered what Jesus did to the man born blind as “anoint”, even though it is the meaning of the original verb and fits the grammar without impediment. As a result, the liturgical carriage in the passage is lost; most translators take up the minority reading from the manuscripts rather than the liturgically more poignant reading.

The august Raymond Brown’s early, two-volume study of John translated  $\epsilon\pi\chi\rho\iota\epsilon\upsilon\nu$  as “smeared”, closer to ritual action than “put”. Explaining why he did not use “smeared” for the translation, Brown wrote that

“anointed” (*epichrein*)... is the best attested Greek reading and is supported by both Bodmer papyri. Some scholars, e.g., Barrett, suspect that it was borrowed from vs. 11, and they prefer the reading of Codex Vaticanus: “he *put* mud on the man’s eyes” (*epitithenai*). However, this reading could have been borrowed from vs. 15<sup>25</sup>.

Most translations use words other than “anoint” for 9:6, often simply “put on”<sup>26</sup>.

In his long article on the verb  $\chi\rho\iota\epsilon\upsilon\nu$  in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Walter Grundmann overlooked (or ignored) the initiatory implications of the anointing, for John 9:6 is not mentioned even though he considered the noun  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  at great length<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> RAYMOND E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John* (i-xii) (The Anchor Bible series), Doubleday, Garden City NJ 1966, 369-382, here at 372.

<sup>26</sup> The *Eight Translation New Testament*, 720-721, offers these: «He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay» (King James Version), «[He] smoothed mud over the blind man’s eyes» (Living Bible), «He applied this to the man’s eyes» (Phillips Modern English), «[He] anointed the man’s eyes with clay» (RSV), «He rubbed the mud on the man’s eyes» (Today’s English Version), «[He] put it on the man’s eyes» (New International Version), «[He] put this over the eyes of the blind man» (Jerusalem Bible), and «He spread it on the man’s eyes» (New English Bible).

<sup>27</sup> WALTER GRUNDMANN, «The Christ-Statements of the New Testament», *TDNT* 9, 527-580, here at 566-570.

Even some of the multi-volume, protracted studies of the fourth gospel - such as the three-volume *The Gospel according to St John* by Rudolf Schnackenburg - do not even note the link between the verb and noun *χριστός* as both derived from the verb *χρίειν* meaning “anoint”<sup>28</sup>. There is even a whole volume dedicated to the topic of *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition*, and its Chapter 4 is dedicated to “The Spirit and the Sacraments”, but not a word is accorded *π**χρίειν* of the narrative of the man born blind.

A lot of commentary on the Gospel, perhaps all of it drawing from the vastly influential Rudolf Bultmann, mentions that the use of mud here in John as possibly drawn from the mud used in the narratives of the healings of blind men in Mark (8:22-26 and 10:46-52), but these redactional interpretations did not venture to explain why the fourth evangelist would have inserted into the narrative such a liturgically consequential verb, “anoint”, when the narratives of Mark had not<sup>29</sup>.

Commenting on the healing of John 9, Francis Moloney highlighted pre-Christian texts of antiquity in which spittle was the medium for the healing of blindness, such as Pliny’s *Natural History* (28.7), Tacitus, *History* (4.81), and Suetonius’s *Life of Caesar* (8.7.2-3). Though the parallels Moloney introduces are important and helpful as literary precedents, the possibility of a liturgical action related to the narratives is not taken up with the ancient witness to anointing<sup>30</sup>.

## Conclusions

### *Churches and Rites in First-Century Christianity*

In my study of foot-washing in the community of the Gospel of John, I suggested that baptism was the dominant rite of initiation for synoptic communities as foot-washing had been for the Johannine community before the two traditions (and the communities proclaiming the gospels) merged in Christian faith. In that study, I suggested that the narratives of conflicts between Peter and the Beloved Disciple

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<sup>28</sup> RUDOLF SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel according to St John 2*, Seabury, New York 1980, 238-258, 242 and 246 in particular.

<sup>29</sup> RUDOLF BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray - R.W.N. Hoare - J.K. Riches, Westminster, Philadelphia 1971, 329-342, especially 332-333.

<sup>30</sup> FRANCIS J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John (Sacra Pagina)*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN 1998, 289-299.

in the Gospel of John (13:21-26, 20:1-10, 21:20-24) manifested conflicts of two communities coming together and seeking to reconcile the traditions that each brought to the gradually uniting church.

In this essay on anointing with chrism, I hypothesize that there are other remnants about conflicts concerning rites in the communities of the Gospel of John and, widening the lens, in the communities of the New Testament as a whole. Because anointing as initiation is manifest in only a few verses of the New Testament, the conflict regarding initiation with chrism was likely passing away even as the earliest books were written, particularly in churches under the influence of Paul, who was a baptizer (1 Corinthians 1:10-17). Baptism was on the ascent as was the theology of Jesus as God's only Son. But, as with foot-washing, this palimpsest of anointing with chrism as initiation, asserted by the congress of 1 John 2:18-27 with 2 Corinthians 12:22 and John 9:1-41, nudges historians to revise the hegemonic assumption that baptism was the only rite of initiation among the early communities after the death of Jesus.

#### *Translating Ointments*

Because many churches do not consider any rite of anointing a sacrament, Bible translations have generally rendered any oil by a generic word, like "anointing", "ointment", or "oil". For churches who don't appraise anointing as sacramental, an oil is an oil is an oil. So in these passages:

- In the Gospel of John, one hears Judas Iscariot's question to Jesus, "Why was this *ointment* not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (12:5).
- From the Letter of James, "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with *oil* in the name of the Lord" (5:14).
- From 1 John, one hears that "the *anointing* you received abides in you" (2:27).

The three English words highlighted in these verses lead hearers to assume that they might refer to the same ritual action, for they do not convey that the particular material element of each passage is unique, different from the other two; the ointment in John 12:5 is myrrh (μύρρον), in James 5:14 olive oil (έλαιον), and in 1 John, as in the man born blind, chrism (χρῖσμα). The three oils had distinct uses in pre-Christian antiquity and in very early Christianity. Myrrh smelled strongly, and was used

to prepare bodies for burial or to anoint dead bodies, which informs historians and believers about the action of the woman (in John 12:1-8), who, just before the passion, aptly prepared Jesus' body for death and burial. Olive oil was used in massaging, which enhances how one appreciates the "oil" in the Letter of James for ministry to the sick. Chrism might have been used for making "Christ" of someone, like the man born blind, or bringing them into Christ.

Translators have not distinguished the three particular oils, perhaps because in their communities no anointing or ointment is sacramental. But in Orthodox and Roman Catholic communities, a variety of oils are employed, such as, for Catholics, the Oils of the Catechumens, of Chrism, and of the Sick. Literarily, the generic words of translations serve a good end, for the words "oil", "ointment", and "anointing" are more accessible than "myrrh", "olive oil", and "chrism". But liturgically, the generic words disengage the church from the wealth and complexity of its ritual heritage.

### *The Number of Sacraments*

Scholars of worship in the community of the Gospel and Letters of John have generally fallen into three groups, "Anti-Sacramentalists", "Ultra-Sacramentalists", and the group somewhere between these extremes, simply "Moderates". The Anti-Sacramentalists, following Bultmann, see no sacraments in the original text, and hypothesize that the importance accorded the matters of sacraments as additions by one whom Rudolf Bultmann labeled the "Ecclesiastical Redactor"<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> RUDOLF BULTMANN, *Theology of the New Testament 2*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, Scribner's, New York 1955, 3-14, and *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, Blackwells, Oxford 1971, 138-140, 325-328. For an assessment of Bultmann's hypothesis, see DAVID E. AUNE, «The Phenomenon of Early Christian "Anti-Sacramentalism"», in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, ed. D.E. Aune, Brill, Leiden 1972, 194-214, and FRANCIS J. MOLONEY, "A Hard Saying": *The Gospel and Culture*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN 2001, 109-130.

Two significant articles by Roman Catholic scholars of the Gospel of John began to remedy the state of criticism; BRUCE VAWTER wrote pointedly that «the fact remains that men for whom the religion of the early Church can be summed up as "the two sacraments of primitive Christianity" will not find all that John has put into his Gospel». See «The Johannine Sacramentary», *Theological Studies* 17 (1956) 151-166, here 155. But a few years later, RAYMOND E. BROWN, also Catholic, took up the same issue, but in the end, listing the possible «sacraments» of the community of John's Gospel, he orders them under the headings «Matrimony», «Extreme Unction», «Penance», «Baptism», «Eucharist», and «Baptism and Eucharist». See «The Johannine Sacramentary Reconsi-

Though this essay hypothesizes about anointing with chrism as initiation in the community of the Gospel of John, research has helped me to appreciate that the methods and arguments of the Ultra-Sacramentalists are less dependable than those of the Anti-Sacramentalists. For biblical scholars, Protestant and Catholic, even when explicitly professing that they use sound methods, generally interpret the rites revealed in sacred texts through the lens of the sacraments of their own ecclesial affiliations. Protestants come to the texts with the lens for seeing only Baptism and the Lord's Supper or the relation of "word and sacrament"<sup>32</sup>. Unabashedly, Catholics counter by looking for traces of the seven sacraments of their ecclesial tradition.

Sixteenth-century definitions of sacraments and their number - in the vociferous writings of Martin Luther, which numbered the sacraments as either three or two; in the letter of King Henry VIII, *defensor fidei*, to Luther defending the Roman count of seven sacraments<sup>33</sup>; the soberer *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of John Calvin, catechizing two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; or the excoriating decrees of the Council of Trent, reiterating the seven of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa* - are a bad starting place for a twenty-first-century reading of a first-century narrative. To enable texts to speak in their time, it is incumbent upon scholars to move criticism away from the Protestant-Catholic polemics about the number of sacraments, and perhaps critical study of liturgy in the New Testament should avoid the word "sacrament" and instead read the texts with less contentious words, such as "rites" and "worship".

#### *Liturgical Criticism*

Until recently, the general stance regarding the origins of Christian worship is that the New Testament records what Jesus and his followers did, and that early churches carried on those behaviors in worship. In fact, for the most part the New Testament did not inform worship in the early days, but the other way around: The New Testament was

dereed», *Theological Studies* 23 (1962) 183-206. The methodological criticism of Brown's article is keen, as is his commentary on the texts. But the final taxonomy narrowed the scope to Roman Catholic sacramental theology.

<sup>32</sup> See EDUARD LOHSE, «Wort und Sakrament im Johannesevangelium», *New Testament Studies* 7 (1960) 110-125, and BARNABAS LINDARS, «Word and Sacrament in the Fourth Gospel», *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1976) 49-63.

<sup>33</sup> KING HENRY VIII, "Assertio Septem Sacramentorum", in *English History in the Making* 1, ed. William L. Sachse, John Wiley and Sons, New York 1967, 182-183.

shaped by worshiping communities among whose members were authors whose works were eventually canonized. Early churches worshipped not because stories are in the New Testament, but the stories and symbols are there, at least in part, as fruits of social, ritual experiences of early worshipers.

Though the positive contribution of biblical scholarship to liturgical studies over the past century is enormous, at times the disciplines of biblical studies have, as with anointing in 1 John, interpreted something apart from what the text says, based on no dependable criteria or method. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that “the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took *bread*, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body”” (11:23-24). Or, in the Gospel of Mark, “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was *baptized* by John in the Jordan” (1:9). Biblical scholarship has generally found “bread” and “baptized” in these verses historically reliable. Yet why “bread” of 1 Corinthians and “baptized” of Mark is real and “anointed” of John 9:6 and “chrism” of 1 John are metaphorical is not clarified by the methods of the interpreters who consistently make the assertions; for “bread” and “baptism”, “anointed” and “chrism” might have been physical aspects of communal rites in various places in the first century. If bread and baptism vs. anointing and chrism are to be so distinguished, a method needs clarity and foundation stronger than the ecclesial affiliations, personal experience, or preferences of critics and translators.

A discipline of Liturgical Criticism - which would see the texts of the Bible as sometimes manifesting elements of ritual lives of authors and their worshiping communities for which they were written - has not been employed much in biblical scholarship except regarding rites of mainline Protestant churches, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Many other passages would reveal ritual practices of the early centuries, and there is no critical reason to predicate the tag “metaphor” on “anointed” and “chrism” and “history” on “bread” and “baptized”. Like baptism and foot-washing, “anointed” of John 9:6 might simply have reflected another medium of membership into first-century churches.



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